

Université de Montréal

**Sign, Meaning and Violence in Laurell K. Hamilton's
Novels: a Postmodernist approach**

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Résumé de Synthèse

La nature iconoclaste de l'ère postmoderne se manifeste dans une révolution contre les normes littéraires préétablies. Cet iconoclasme est plus flagrant dans la fantaisie urbaine. Dans un environnement désordonné, fragmenté et très stéréotypé, la fantaisie urbaine est considérée comme un événement qui défie tout jugement, et toute stratification sociale. Bien qu'elle ait été bien accueillie par les lecteurs et qu'elle a obtenue de fortes ventes, c'est seulement depuis deux décennies que ces genres ont commencé à attirer l'attention académique.

Ce travail peut être considéré comme une tentative pour comprendre la fantaisie urbaine à travers la série d'une de ses écrivains les plus éminents, Laurell K. Hamilton. En conséquence, j'ai choisi trois romans de sa série Anita Blake: *Guilty Pleasures* (1993), *Circus of the Damned* (1995) et *Blue Moon* (1998). Les paramètres stylistiques et thématiques dans ses romans créent une philosophie postmoderne de subversion, qui valide et invalide les discussions sur la structure du signe, la violence, et la réaction du lecteur.

Le premier chapitre étudie la construction du sens à travers la structure de la langue de la fantaisie urbaine. Il traite la signification que le résultat de l'interaction entre les différents signes linguistiques. Il suit également l'évolution de ce que Derrida appelle «inflated signs», qui sont au cœur de la régénération du sens à travers les romans. La saturation dans ces signes implique une «absence» qui s'affiche à travers la désintégration du système de la langue et les ruptures récurrentes de sa structure globale.

Le deuxième chapitre se concentre sur les tendances de la violence dans les romans de la fantaisie urbaine qui rendent les jeux de pouvoir des personnages truculents et leurs réactions apparaissent inadmissibles. Il examine la violence par rapport à ses causes et sa

logique. Grâce aux concepts de Derrida de l'‘arché-violence’, de ‘décision’ et de ‘sacrifice,’ je démontre que la violence est inévitable dans le monde créé de Hamilton et dans le monde qu'elle simule.

Le troisième chapitre examine la réaction du lecteur sur les événements exotiques et la caractérisation paranormale des romans de Hamilton. Il révèle comment la fantaisie urbaine conteste la conception de Wolfgang Iser de réaction du lecteur et le concept d'‘apparence’ de Jean Baudrillard. J'insiste sur le fait que les lecteurs de la fantaisie urbaine ne sont plus des interprètes ou des réceptifs passifs d'images paranormaux. En effet, l'interaction entre l'auteur et le lecteur, que ces romans entraînent, défie ces conceptions réductrices de la réaction du lecteur.

Mots-clés : fantaisie urbaine, vampires, caractérisation, paranormal, postmodernisme, sens, violence, réaction, lecteur, philosophie.

Abstract

The iconoclastic nature of the postmodern era manifested itself in a revolution against the pre-established literary norms. And this iconoclasm is all the more blatant in urban fantasy fiction. In a disorderly, fragmented and highly stereotypical environment, urban fantasy came as an event that defies value judgment, and social stratification. Although it was well received by readers and achieved high bestseller records, it is only since two decades that these genres started to gain academic attention.

This work is a step into understanding the urban fantasy genre through the series of one of its most prominent writers, Laurell K. Hamilton. Accordingly, I chose three of her *Anita Blake* series: *Guilty Pleasures* (1993), *Circus of the Damned* (1995), and *Blue Moon* (1998). The stylistic and thematic parameters in her novels create a postmodern philosophy of its own, validating and invalidating discussions about sign-structure, violence, and reader-response.

The first chapter investigates the construction of meaning through the structure of the urban fantasy language. It deals with meaning as the outcome of the interaction between different linguistic signs. It also tracks the evolution of what Derrida refers to as “inflated signs,” which are at the heart of the regeneration of meaning through the novels. The saturation in these signs implies an ‘absence’ that is displayed through the disintegration of the language system and the recurrent ruptures of its overall structure.

The second chapter focuses on the patterns of violence in urban fantasy novels that make the characters’ power games and their truculent reactions appear unconscionable. It

scrutinizes violence in relation to its causes and its logic. Through Derrida's concepts of arché-violence, decision, and sacrifice, I demonstrate that violence is inevitable in Hamilton's created world and in the world it simulates.

The third chapter examines the reader's response to the exotic events and paranormal characterization of Hamilton's novels. It reveals how urban fantasy challenges Wolfgang Iser's conception of reader-response and Jean Baudrillard's concept of 'appearance.' I stress the fact that urban fantasy readers are more than interpreters or passive receptive of paranormal images. Indeed, the reader/author interaction, that these novels enact, defies these reductive conceptions of reader-response.

Keywords : urban fantasy, postmodernism, vampire, characterization, paranormal, violence, meaning, response, philosophy.

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To my mother, my father, my sister Ilef, my brother Ghazi

My angel Ons

With love...

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Introduction

Literature and theory have been inescapably interrelated, and the claim of “the death of theory” can be refuted by literature itself. Indeed, many critics have argued for literary works as being not only the test case of theory but the very ground in which theory can be reshaped by authors. The emergence of a postmodern moment in the history of theory is what best epitomizes the role of literature in shaping and being shaped by postmodern thought. In my master’s thesis, I will be looking at the major premises of twentieth-century Vampirism. The iconoclastic nature of the postmodern era manifested itself in a revolution against pre-established literary norms. This iconoclasm is particularly obvious in urban fantasy fiction. The stylistic and thematic parameters in Laurell K. Hamilton’s *Guilty Pleasures*, for instance, highlight the postmodern aspect of urban fantasy narratives. In addition, the role that fiction writers assign to the reader has become of paramount importance in that the reader’s reaction and construction of meaning have become central. To this effect, I will scrutinize Hamilton’s *Guilty pleasures*, *Circus of the Damned*, and *Blue Moon* (respectively the first, third, and eighth volume in Hamilton’s “Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter” series, now counting twenty-three volumes, with another one scheduled for publication in the summer of 2015).

Let us first begin with the beginning. Defining urban fantasy genre and introducing Hamilton’s series would be essential to my approach. The contemporary urban fantasy genre is the basis of some controversies in academia. Since the 1980’s when the taxonomy was introduced, some have related urban fantasy genre to the historical evolution of vampire literature, which, in turn, is a subgenre of gothic literature; others have related it to the

progress of fantasy genre. In his introduction to the *Urban Fantasy Anthology*, Peter S. Beagle defines urban fantasy as a “genre that counts on familiarity with mythology, fairy tales, and the earliest horror tropes like vampires, werewolves, and warlocks ... as shorthand to pull the reader through familiar territory quickly without wasting precious time” (3). Moreover, in the 1997 *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, John Clute and John Grant, characterize urban fantasies as “texts where fantasy and the mundane world intersect and interweave throughout a tale which is significantly about a real city.” (qtd. in Benefiel n. p.) Alexander C. Irvine offers another definition in his article “urban fantasy” when he states that this kind of writing as hybrid one; for it “dialogizes the rhetoric of both fantasy and the literature of the Urban, occasionally as pure bricolage, but more interestingly as a form of artistic resistance to what recent writers have seen as the exhaustion of traditional modes of the fantastic” (202). In this article, Irvine not only elucidates the genre’s origin, but also analyzes its aesthetic patterns, its sublime character, as well as its reconstruction of space. However, all these definitions highlight the confusion in drawing a structure for the urban fantasy, as well as the emergent styles in writing the vampire figures.

In his book *Rise of the Vampire*, Erik Butler engages with the emergence of the vampire myth in 1725, and its progression to its contemporary cultural construct. He analyses the position of vampire art and journalism since its first appearance and until its present form. This historical approach has been very popular with many scholars who trace the current form of vampire literature to its first appearance in European mythology. In the *Fantastic and European Gothic*, Mathew Gipson studies the fantastic under the umbrella of the European Gothic. He compares Bram Stoker and Ann Radcliffe to other European writers of the gothic genre. However, ever since the fantastic has become inclusive of every genre containing the

supernatural element, it has been difficult to study vampire literature in parallel with other genres of fantasy. The diversity in the vampire subgenre itself furthered more classification and more subgenres in the vampire fantasy: urban fantasy, paranormal fantasy, detective fiction, etc. In her book *Reading Laurell K. Hamilton*, Candace R. Benefiel contends that “although the portrayal of the vampire had been shifting over the past few decades before *Guilty Pleasures*, there was still a sense that vampires, for the most part, were dangerous predators to be destroyed” (n. p.). In Hamilton’s series, however, the vampire is more or less socializing, trying to fit into a society that is divided between welcoming this integration and resisting it. Since the publication of the “Anita Blake” series, the genre has been rapidly changing and morphing into new traditions and directions. Actually, according to Benefiel, Hamilton is “largely responsible for a good deal of the change, with her introduction of a strong female character relating to vampires and other supernatural creatures not as a victim” (n. p.). Hamilton does breach many conventions of the fantasy genre and of the more general vampire Gothic genre, while working within the conventions of many genres at the same time. This is not entirely surprising as many critics identify fantasy as the literature of subversion. For instance, in her *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion*, Rosemary Jackson stresses, as the title of her book suggests, the exceptionally subversive nature of Fantasy. Although she argues that the genre developed as a “reaction to historical events, particularly to the spread of industrialism and urbanization” (96), it has been extremely marginalized until it was finally recognized in modern literature as the “culture’s unseen”. Throughout her analysis, Jackson underlines the genre’s persistent attempt at the destabilization of order, therefore creating “a subtle invitation to transgression”, to borrow Helene Cixous’s phraseology. While Jackson based her study on acts of subversion and transgression, Sandor Klapcsik’s *Liminality in*

Fantastic Fiction: A Poststructuralist Approach centers on the postmodern notion of “liminality” that the writer tries to apply on detective fiction, fantasy, and science fiction. As her title indicates, Klapcsik’s approach is mainly poststructuralist: Yet, although there have been several works that studied fantasy in a postmodern context, very few centered on relating postmodern philosophy to fantasy’s generic specificities. And less has been done on one of its popular subgenres nowadays, i.e. urban fantasy. It is in this sense that my thesis attempts to overcome such a lacuna by unveiling the underlying connections between postmodern theories and the genre of Urban Fantasy.

Feminist theories have also been pertinent in initiating a sustained debate on representations of gender and sexuality in Fantastic literature. In this context, Katherine J. Weese contends in her *Feminist Narrative and the Supernatural: the Function of Fantastic Devices in Seven Recent Novels* that the fantastic can be studied in relation to the incorporation of supernatural elements and use of magic occurrences in feminist narratives such as Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and *Paradise*, which are acknowledged in her work as “magic realist novels”. In the same vein, Kathryn James engages in an analysis of the position of gender-politics in her book *Death, Gender, and Sexuality in Contemporary Adolescent Literature*. While such a book might be usefully significant if we consider that urban fantasy books are young adult literature, it is nonetheless reductive and not necessarily relevant to Hamilton’s literary texts, for her fandom has challenged such a limitation by attracting different generations. As a reaction to a critical analysis discourse centering mainly on the figure of the vampire, Coleman Kimberly, and Roslyn Weaver address the issue of scholarly attention that has remained largely fixed on the “undead” in their *Werewolves and Other Shapeshifters in Popular Culture*. They choose to concentrate on the shape-shifter trope in relation to the questions of

gender, identity and sexuality. Their work carefully scrutinizes shape-shifter figures as represented in the popular cultures of different countries. Hamilton's series comes in this general orientation to defy the figure of "the vampire who charms all", starting from the other characters in the novel and reaching the readership outside the novel. In her novels, her protagonist Anita Blake is equally interested in shape-shifters of all kinds. They are as charming and appealing as vampires, and they prove to be more humane in terms of loyalty and unity. Since she defies all the generic prescription of her times, Hamilton's novels were shelved among many popular genres. These include detective stories¹ although "you will rarely find her works shelved with mysteries" (qtd. in Benefiel n. p.). Others classify them in horror books for the high degree of terror it manifests. Another description— and the most frequently used one— is paranormal romance; for it is loaded with love and flirt stories.²

In his book *The Twilight of the Gothic*, Joseph Crawford aims at mapping out the generic history of the paranormal romance and retracing the history of its development through its most popular manifestations in the *Twilight* books and movies. While delineating the parameters of literary genres, Crawford claims that the genre "is not composed of a checklist of generic requirements, against which any given work of fiction can be compared in order to discover whether it belongs to that genre or not; instead, it is defined by a constellation of associated tropes" (8-9). He observes, in this context, that Hamilton's "Anita Blake" series functions as a transitional franchise that initiated the subsequent development of this genre. Yet, he insists that

¹ Bernard Benstock's *Essays on Detective Fiction* studies in-depth the characteristics of different detective stories.

² Actually, one of her latest novels is entitled *Flirt*.

it would be extremely inappropriate to simply consider the series as being a paranormal romance novel, for the traditional paranormal romance is necessarily based on a love relationship between two protagonists, while Hamilton's series portrays a tritulative relationship that gets complicated as the character engages in new kinds of relationships in order to feed the "ardeur" of her tritulative. Thus, one might easily argue that Hamilton's series has established a new conception of genre itself by creating an opposition canon: that which rejects canonization. That is why, in my thesis, my aim is not setting a generic structure for Hamilton's literature. Instead, I will scrutinize the stylistic and thematic parameters in her novels that highlight the postmodern aspect of her urban fantasy narratives.

The first chapter is devoted to lay bare the stylistic novelties in urban fantasy novels. The conflation of genres in urban fantasies is a direct consequence of twentieth-century postmodern intent to free literary genres from clear-cut distinctions. Indeed, heterogeneity, a predominant feature in these narratives, constitutes what is likely to be a "patch-work" of such genres such as Romance, Gothic, and Detective fiction. As a result, the concern is no longer "form" and what it prescribes on the literary work, but rather the construction of meaning through Derrida's "deconstruction". In Derrida's view, meaning and form are inextricably bound-up; in that there is no single meaning that can be obtained, and the complexity of form necessarily reflects the labyrinthine nature of meaning. In this respect, in an interview with Aimee Levitt, entitled "Mistress of Horror: Nobody writes vampire novels the way St. Louis' Laurel K. Hamilton does – and yes, there's lots of sex", the interviewer asks Hamilton about the classification of her series, to which she replies: "I know some shelve them in horror, and some in science fiction. I go by what's on the spine, which is 'New York Times bestseller'" (n. p.). Indeed, in Hamilton's novels, there merge tangible

components of Horror, Paranormal Romance, and Detective Fiction. Although the story is about paranormal beings living in human/paranormal context, it seems to mirror real life in the USA with all its diversity and complexity through the merging of the genres it incorporates. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the worlds created in urban fantasy novels are characterized by total havoc. Disorder and fragmentation are easily detected stylistically and thematically. With urban fantasy novels, the priorities of writing have been rearranged. In that way, the strong emphasis on readers' response throughout the text will lead me to investigate how the existing violent scenes in urban fantasy novels affect readers.

In the second part of my work, I focus on the patterns of violence in urban fantasy novels from a theoretical point of view. For Emmanuel Levinas, "Violence can be found in whatever narcissistic strategy the self adopts to capture, reduce, contain, repress the other's perspective, the other's testimony, and thus whenever the narcissistic self attempts to annul or annihilate the victim's tale" (qtd. in De Vries 16). In the same vein, Hans Toch recognizes two mechanisms of violent reactions: "Self-Preserving Strategies with violence used to bolster and enhance the person's ego in the eyes of himself and of others" and "Approaches that Dehumanize Others [and that] are used by persons who see themselves (and their own needs) as being the only fact of social relevance" (133). Though these patterns may seem different from one character to another depending on the reader's alliance, their motives seem to be identical. All these patterns stem from their fear of being marginalized. In *Guilty Pleasures*, both the protagonist and her enemy Nicholaos undergo the same pattern of violence: they both react violently when they are humiliated by one of the characters, and they both attempt to annul their victim counterpart. "... Violence in short takes place wherever discourse attempts to surface itself from the realm of interlocution... Indeed,

wherever the self relates the other to the sameness of its own horizons, the other's singularity will be effaced" (133). The different mechanisms of violence trap the characters in a state of psychological exhaustion that makes their "power games" and their truculent reactions appear unconscionable. For instance, in *The Circus of the Damned*, Marguerite (the human servant of a master vampire Yasmeen) displays a great deal of unjustifiable brutality. While Anita was trying to convince her that she was not trying to steal away her beloved master, Marguerite engaged in a hysterical attack that led the protagonist to react violently but carefully enough not to harm her. This aggressive behavior and its consequent traumas elicit protean responses from the reader.

In my third chapter, I examine the reader's response to the exotic events and paranormal characterization found in Hamilton's novels. The tension existing between the characters regularly culminates in scenes of killing and blood sucking. The reader thus becomes involved in the course of the events and his/her emotional reaction needs a deeper analysis whether s/he sympathizes or remains neutral. In these violent literary episodes, the reader/listener becomes absorbed in, if not part of, the traumatic experience of the "actants."³ I will therefore question the different interpretative mechanisms that usually underlie the process of meaning-making. In this context, my point of departure is Wolfgang Iser's prominent Reader-Response theory. Using his concept of the "indeterminacy gaps" as well as his differentiation between the 'imaginative', the 'fictive' and the 'real', I will

³ See Irena Rima Makaryk's *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms* 505.

examine the reader's dynamic, uncertain, and highly personal reaction to Hamilton's literary texts. I will also reveal how the very nature of urban fantasy challenges Iser's conception of the literary object and puts into question its somehow reductive implications. In the second part of the chapter, I will turn to Jean Baudrillard's perception of 'reality' as a 'simulacrum' being constructed by an 'act of simulation'. I will particularly draw on his philosophical analyses of acts of substitution, simulation, and representation that would further clarify the mediums of interaction between the reader and the literary text. According to him, this interaction *seduces* an emotional engagement that is enacted by the appearance of the text, and not between its lines. Moreover, as Hamilton's series evolves, she introduces a new perception of vampirism in what is likely to be an egalitarian drive in the genre itself. In this perception paranormal creatures can have feelings, and at times, they seem more righteous than humans themselves. In an interview, Hamilton explains: "Once you look at these creatures and realize that they aren't monsters, they become people to you. That means if you love someone who is a lycanthrope, do you really love them or do you only love one of them" (qtd. in Gilpin 10-11). This would make vampires seem more humane and credible on some levels that I shall scrutinize in this chapter.

Chapter 1

‘The Free Play of Signs’: Reading Hamilton’s Urban Fantasy

Through Derridean Deconstruction

The emergence of a postmodern moment in the history of theory is what best highlights the role of literature in influencing and in turn to be influenced by the postmodern thought. In this respect, Jonathan Culler’s claim that “a postmodern condition is indeed what should be inferred from the operations of literature” (42) seems of paramount importance. Laurell K. Hamilton’s series “Anita Blake” represents a fertile ground for the many theories of the postmodern moment. The stylistic novelties in Hamilton’s series and its very context of publication mold what is likely to be a postmodern literary prerequisite that contains and uncontains life outside the urban fantasy world. The question here is how the form and structure of the urban fantasy text participate in the making of meaning inside and outside the text. Should we relate Hamilton’s novels to historical and theoretical grounds? Or should we deal with it as a corpus of alien structures and alien signs? In this chapter, I will reveal how the very context of Hamilton’s urban fantasy functions as a *sign* inside the text. Thus, instead of approaching the text contextually, my point of departure is reading history/context through the Derridean paradigm of the free play of signs. I will also uncover the “permutation of signs” that creates unfixed and undecidable meanings in the novels. The last part of my chapter is an attempt at rethinking religion as a sign that participates, like history, in the very construction of meaning.

In her afterword to the *Laughing Corpse* Hamilton states:

In many ways Jean Claude's seduction of Anita is my own seduction, not by another man, but by who I am. Who I truly am. Not some sanitized version of what other people wanted me to be. But who I truly was meant to be. No, not meant to be, who I was. This was the beginning of me understanding my own sexuality, my own religious path, and what it meant to truly harm none. Not even yourself. (qtd. in Gilpin 9-10)

In this claim, Hamilton seems to distance herself, as an artist, from any contextual framing of her work. Although her declaration suggests that she deals with her writing as a personal experience, highly subjective but at the same time highly unbiased, she cannot claim that she could extricate herself from the historical and theoretical context of the postmodern era. Actually, her claim that she writes 'for herself' lacks logic and credibility especially that she lives in a historically hybrid period. Indeed, the world Hamilton creates for her story is not very different of the one she lives in, despite the prevailing fantasy elements that may displace the plot to another imaginary gothic world, very remote and very unreal. Not only is it a reflection of what happens in our world, but also, it is a direct commentary on what happens in many American cities. Hamilton's choice of the setting is anything but arbitrary, and cannot be explained just by the fact that she lives there. St Louis, an independent city situated in the eastern border of Missouri, has a long history of population change. By the end of the 20th century, the city was recovering from the depopulation that took place during the 1990's because of renewal and gentrification projects. Old small stores were turned into profitable businesses, warehouses into casinos, clubs, and residences. As a result, the poor

had to leave the transformed districts to the wealthy middle class inhabitants. The focus in these revitalizations was downtown St. Louis, and urban renewal was taking place in Washington Avenue Historic District on the Riverfront. Hamilton seems to condemn these projects. That is why the new “District” in her first novel *Guilty Pleasures* is devoid of life, full of constant threat and danger, an emblem for criminality. All the horrifying events occur in the “District” in two main settings: a strip club named “Guilty Pleasures,” and the former warehouse “The Circus of the Damned.” Indeed, when Anita, Catherine, and Monica arrive at their place of destination for Catherine’s bachelorette party, the place is described as follows: “We were at what the vampires called ‘the District’. Humans called it the Riverfront or Blood Square, depending on if they were rude or not” (*Guilty Pleasures* 12). On another occasion, the protagonist visits “the District” to get clues from Dead Dave in daylight. Despite its professional purposes, the visit foreshadows Anita’s nostalgia to a past “when the Riverfront used to be human owned businesses” (*Guilty Pleasures* 131), and when “there was any parking on a weekend, day or night” (*Guilty Pleasures* 131). Furthermore, the “hotel” she goes to with Jean Claude to meet Nicholaos for the first time is displayed as “tall and thin, and made of real bricks”, a deserted place “just vacancy” (*Guilty Pleasures* 44). Cursed creatures that transformed its underground into a horror corner now inhabit the place: dungeons, tunnels, long shadowy stairs; a perfect place for the city’s most powerful vampires to sleep in. The protagonist discovers the new function of the building later in the same night while she flees with Zachary to the relatively safe “upstairs” zone. The place is now called “The circus of the Damned” (*Guilty Pleasures* 84). Through the narrator’s voice, Hamilton denounces the defacement of the old warehouses through the description of the newly transformed setting:

The Circus of the Damned is housed in an old warehouse. Its name is emblazoned across the roof in colored lights. Giant clown figurines dance around the words in frozen pantomime. If you look very closely at the clowns, you notice they have fangs. But only if you look very closely. (*Guilty Pleasures* 231)

She also expresses a strong aversion to the industrialization of nature in her novel *Circus of the Damned*:

An expanse of grass spread out to the right of the parking lot. A small, ramshackle shed and what looked like the remains of some large industrial barbecue. A fringe of woods edged the grass, rising higher into a wooded hill. The Meramec River edged the left side of the lake. It seemed funny to have free-flowing water so close to the man-made lake. (*Circus of the Damned* 183)

All the descriptions of the architecture of the buildings and the landscape can but highlight the writer's discontent and even disgust at the then innovations, and what the government calls "revitalization" is exposed by Hamilton as real murder of taste and authenticity.

Through her paranormal world, she points out the other facet of change that mars and questions the flawless picturesque advertising of a historical event. Moreover, Hamilton's series is a mere reflection of her world, a world of loss, disintegration and constant fear mirrored in the behavior of highly paranoid, excessively angry, increasingly and

unreasonably suspicious characters. The protagonist, her friends, and her enemies are in a constant struggle with themselves, with others, and with the world that tries to subvert and enslave them. Paranoid, questioning the reliability, fidelity, and transparency of the world around them, they suspect the truthfulness of their existence fearing even to be there.

Through her characters Hamilton not only creates a fantasy world with imaginary persona, but she also takes part in the process of making a postmodern ideation. Her writing works as an interactive medium of presentation between the factual world and the complex worlds she creates for her protagonist's spiritual adventures. This does not imply that all the events in the plot are based on true stories. It rather presents history as a primordial signifier in Hamilton's work.

Although it came long after Jacques Derrida's extensive writings, the series lends itself to the theorist's conception of art in general and of literature in particular. In his lecture "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Derrida explains his notion of the "floating signifier" (7) that is, according to him, "the finite thought" — which contradicts with Hamilton's claim that she writes for herself. This finite thought does not take the position of the center in the 'free play' of signification. It rather comes as a supplementary sign that compensates for the absence of the center. In view of that, if Hamilton wants to free herself from history and context and leave the center of signification, she cannot erase this supplement (historical or other) from her "writing." Following Derridean thinking, her role as a "signifier," is now allocated to a "sign marking the necessity of a symbolic content supplementary to that with which the signified is already loaded, but which can take on any value required, provided only that this value still remains part of the available reserve and is not (...) a group term" (Lévi-Strauss, "Introduction to the

work of Marcel Mauss,” qtd. in Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play” 7). The historical allusions that she makes in her novels represent a covert testimony, which works as a sign with a symbolic content. This content is never fixed; for it is a supplement that evolves with the different combination of signs in the language of urban fantasy text. Consequently, the idea of literature as relational to a thread of thought is grounded in this vision of the literary writing’s form as critical language with a de-centered structure.

Derrida’s de-centered structure and his claim that “even a partial grammar or an outline of a grammar represents valuable acquisitions in the case of unknown languages” (Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play” 6) have a good ground in Hamilton’s series “Anita Blake”. Indeed, the characters’ sentences are sometimes ungrammatical phrases and aimless internal speeches. However, this non-structure and its free-play mode of signification convey a ‘generative’ meaning for, as Derrida explains, this field of free play is “the field of infinite substitutions” (Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play” 7). This meaning is conveyed not through a totalitarian structure, but rather through a fragmented one where pauses between the chapters float with language in the free-play of permutation and regeneration of meaning. As a matter of fact, the transitions from a chapter to the next are very significant. And these pauses are not related to the length of the chapters but rather to the protagonist’s incommunicable feelings of fear, love or danger. Moreover, the chapters are longer whenever there is a description of the protagonist’s endured traumas or horror scenes. And they end with the heroine’s praying, gasping for air, or compensatory sarcasm. In *Circus of the Damned*, Anita would pause after a prayer “God help me. I’d been wrong” (Hamilton 133) or a sardonic comment “She’d help me. We’d find something. It sounded sort of ominous. Pre-date jitters. Who me?” (Hamilton 97) The protagonist heavily uses likewise, “non-structures,”

when her feelings are overwhelming. These bits of language participate actively in the construction of meaning, in that they mirror Anita's emotional upheavals in her struggle against a world of monsters that tries to subvert her:

A scream ripped through the hallway. A man's scream. Phillip's scream.
"No!" I half felt to my knees; only winter's hand kept me from falling to the floor. I pretended to faint sagging in his grip. He released me (...)
Someone kept whispering, "Oh, God, oh, God," over and over, and it was me (...)
I couldn't take my eyes from him. Couldn't look away. Couldn't breathe. Couldn't cry. (*Guilty Pleasures* 244-5)

The characters' utterances, especially those of the predominant narrator, convey meaning that emanates from the free play of different signifiers. Being the only possible human medium of communication, the language used reflects the isolation of the characters and displays a pessimistic atmosphere that seems to enclose the whole paranormal world. Life, as displayed in *Guilty Pleasures*, *Blue Moon* and *Circus of the Damned*, is shattered in the protagonist's insecure speech and the utterances of her enemies and friends. In this world, the pauses and the recurrent instances of non-structure take over the role that has been restricted to a structurally consistent language in the transmission of meaning. The gaps, or what Derrida refers to as 'absence', become more communicable than language itself. According to Simon Glendinning, "what Derrida aims to show is that there never was nor could be such an order of pure intelligibility, no 'logos' or meaning that would be an ideal presence, a pre-

existing occult (that is hidden) spiritual realm beyond what is denounced as (worldly) writing” (6). In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida asserts:

The rationality (...) which governs a writing thus enlarged and vocalized, no longer issues from a logos. Further it inaugurates the deconstruction, not the demolition but the de-sedimentation, the deconstruction of all the significations that have their source in that of the logos. Particularly the signification of truth. (10)

This analysis comports with the language used in the series: though it appears inexpressive and incommunicable at times, it conveys not only the psychological disorders that the characters suffer from, but it also takes a crucial role in the act of narration itself. The pressure put on Anita as an “animator,” “an executioner” and a member of “a charmed triumvirate,” turns her into a paranoid person fearful even of her closest friends— a pressure that is communicated through the saturation in signs and the fragmentation of language and structure. Actually, Hamilton’s world is a lawless world as Anita asserts “Truth, justice and the American way certainly didn’t work within the legal system. Money, power, and luck were what worked” (*Blue Moon* 3). Consequently, in a world where the law of the jungle prevails, nothing much of humanity is left. Insecurity, ambiguity, and constant threat are felt in the protagonist’s suffocated words.

In addition, Glendinning notes that “it will no longer be possible to regard writing as a secondary ‘fallen’ signifier. Indeed, we will no longer be compelled to regard what we call ‘linguistic signs’ in general ... as sensible signifiers that represent ideal thought contents

or ‘meanings’” (8). Derrida does talk about the inflation of the sign or what he describes as ‘crisis’:

This crisis is also a symptom. It indicates as if in spite of itself, that a historico- metaphysical epoch must finally determine as language the totality of its problematic horizon. It must be do so not only because all that desire had wished to wrest from the slay of language find itself recaptured within that play but also because, for the same reason, language itself is menaced in its very life, helpless, adrift in the threat of limitlessness, brought back to its own finitude at the very moment when its limits seem to disappear, when it ceases to be self-assured, contained and guaranteed by the infinite signified which seemed to exceed it. (*Of Grammatology* 6)

This implies that meaning can no longer be fixed; for even words— which are perceived as fixed linguistic signs— are no longer considered as sites for meaningfulness. As a result, infinite sign substitutions take place in a non-locus trend to extend the domain of signification (which is writing) only by ‘more writing’. This non-structure is perfectly consistent with the language used in the three novels, and meaning floats in this writing in different directions. The fantasies are not intent to mean something specific. And different combinations of the signs at hand would give endless interpretation of meaning; an image consonant with Derrida’s borrowed notion of “bricolage.” In his lecture “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” Derrida scrutinizes Levis Strauss’ notion of “bricolage” which is the discourse of the empirical method that the latter employs in his investigation of Mythology. The main principle in this method is “to preserve as an

instrument that whose truth-value he criticizes” (Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play” 4). A “bricoleur” is “someone who uses the instruments he finds at his disposition around him (...) not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary or to try several of them at once” (Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play” 4). In this respect, Hamilton can be regarded as a “bricoleur” par excellence. “Bricolage” is seen at two different levels: the “generic level” and “semantic level”. Hamilton’s inclusion of different genres under the umbrella genre of Urban Fantasy is what marked her writing and started a new kind of the so-called commercial/popular literature. The combination of Alternate History, Paranormal Romance, Horror and Detective fiction is an instance of the “bricolage” of different signifiers in such a way as to generate an infinite signification. In her novels, the protagonist Anita engages in scenes of killing, blood sucking, and unjustified truculence, falls in love with master vampires, lycanthropes and human servants. And she also takes the lead in crime investigation teams. The generic variety contributes to the abundance of meaning in these novels and creates what is likely to be a patchwork of signifiers. It is noteworthy, however, that fiction in general is a “cannibalistic” genre since it has borrowed from the other genres of poetry and drama throughout the history of literariness. In this respect, Urban Fantasy can be considered as a step further in genre as a whole for it encapsulates a variety of subgenres of fantasy fiction. Nevertheless, what makes this genre special is the bountiful and disorderly accumulation of its literary eclecticism. Moreover, probing into the structure of the text we infer an abundance of meaning and an “absence” of meaning at the same time. While abundance lies in the different interpretations we might get from making different combinations of linguistic signs and the permeating interruption of speech, absence lies in an atypical use of some linguistic signs. One of the most atypical of these is the notion of

“childhood” or “child” which denotes, in its typical semantic use, innocence and purity. In Hamilton’s novels, the devil is disguised in the most saintly forms. In *Guilty Pleasures*, for instance, the master of the city is a twelve or thirteen-year-old child named Nicholaos with innocent looks, but evil dark intentions. Nicholaos epitomizes the end, the “rupture”, and the “absence” of innocence. In her first meeting with the master of the city, Anita describes her as follows: “She looked so human, eyes sparkling with humor, face rounded and pleasant. See how harmless I am, just a pretty child. Right” (*Guilty Pleasures* 66). Later, she gets molested and tortured by the same child who manifests super-natural powers and perverted manners. As a matter of fact, in Hamilton’s *Guilty Pleasures*, innocence no longer persists or even exists: the most dangerous monster is a disguised child, clowns have fangs, and the circus is damned and hellish. Her description of the ceiling of the Circus of the Damned and its clown figurines is very significant: “Giant clown figurines dance around the words in frozen pantomime. If you look very closely at the clowns, you notice they have fangs. But only if you look very closely” (231). If you look really closely to the supposedly fun clown, you will see the truth. Innocence has disappeared from our world and the clown has become another mask hiding fangs, promising torture instead of beautiful smiles. In such a world people would line up to see Count Alcourt’s execution. However, this absence does not take the position of the center as the text signifies more than an absence or a presence. And meaning is only governed by “by the situation of pure dispersion” (Gaston 17).

Sean Gaston suggests that Derrida attempts to “extricate being from the determinations of presence, from the assumption of a self evident access to conditions of subjectivity and objectivity” (17). For this reason, Gaston holds, Derrida conceives of

absence as “a containment that also transgresses” or “a containment that uncontains itself.” Interestingly, we sense a lot of ‘absence’ in the connotative workings of the signs in Hamilton’s novels. For instance in *Circus of the Damned*, Anita risks her life to protect a child she saw on the street. Though she had a very bad previous experience with children, her belief in the persistence of ‘good’ makes put her life at risk to save the ‘innocent’: “I didn’t think Human First had enough imagination to have a child in reserve as bait. If it was a trap it was a good one, because I couldn’t leave the tiny figure crumpled by the road.” (*Circus of the Damned* 149) When she approached the child, “tiny little fangs” showed between his “baby lips” (150). Although Anita seems confined in a world of absence, where all human values seem too extinct, her use of the connotative meaning contravenes the absence she created with the displaced use of connotation. In other words, by referring back to what childhood means to her, she transgresses the confines of this absence and eventually frees herself from it by accepting that a child can be more than a helpless creature to be saved. Like all her adult counterparts, children can be good or evil; though Anita’s conception of the “good” seems to be evolving through the series. For this reason, she did not show much surprise or shock when the vampire child in *Circus of the Damned* attacked her. Her previous experience with Nicholaos had prepared her to expect the worst from small “figures.”

One of the most manipulated notions is that of religion and its institutions. Anita visits the Church of Eternal Life for the first time in *Guilty Pleasures*. This church, as its name indicates, promises eternal life instead of heaven in the afterlife. It flouts the law of nature and -in Anita’s view- of God, and exchanges human soul for eternity. Hamilton informs her readers that “the Catholic Church sees voluntary vampirism as a kind of suicide” (213). Nonetheless, religious and natural dictates seem to fade away in the face of a possible

immortality, and people join this church. The price that “converts” pay is their turning into blood-sucking beasts: vampires, which seems quite a foolish idea for Anita the vampire slayer who knows that “vampires could die” (105). Normally, the mission of the church as a religious institution is to procure peace of mind and spiritual comfort. Shocked by the perversion of that mission, Anita flees what turns out to be another horror corner for her:

The tune was *Bringing in the Sheaves*. I caught one phrase: “we will live forever, never more to die.” I hurried to my car and tried not to listen to the song. There was something frightening about all those voices raised skyward, worshipping... What? Themselves? Eternal youth? Blood? What? Another question that I didn’t have an answer to. (*Guilty Pleasures* 227)

The great fear that Anita shares with the reader is triggered off by the warped lyrics of a religious protestant hymn. She becomes suddenly aware of the implied disruption and distortion of the church as religious institution. Her expectations of “what a church is” and “what a church is for” are met with a shocking deviation that she tries to deny. This manipulation of the supposedly fixed meaning of these signs is at the heart of Derridean thought and his notion of the ‘inflated’ sign. The absence of constancy in meaning uncontains itself by this very enlargement of the scope of connotation. This connotative displacement is conspicuous in the three Hamilton’s novels under study. Actually, the notions of friendship and love are the most manipulated notions throughout the series. Anita’s relationship with her lovers Jean Claude and Richard is as absurd as her relationship with her “friend” Edward whom she calls Death. In *Blue Moon*, Anita confesses that she loves both

Jean Claude and Richard. As a result, readers feel puzzled on many occasions by this triangular love relationship as duality seems to be a conventionally fixed criterion of this inflated sign. Like love, the concept of friendship gains other connotative prospect. Edward can be regarded as Anita's best friend through the series for he saves her life several times and he even fights with her against the "bad" beasts. She describes her relationship with Edward as follows:

We were friends of a sort, good friends, but I would never really understand him. There was too much of Edward that you couldn't touch, or even see. I used to believe that if it came to it, he'd kill me, if it were necessary. Now I wasn't sure. How could you be friends with someone who you suspected might kill you? Another mystery of life. (*Circus of the Damned* 253)

The Executioner is afraid even of her closest friend, which appears understandable in her case. Indeed, Anita is used to instability in a life where she needs to be more than vigilant, gun raised, before she can enter her house. This instability does not lie only in the nature of her work, but also in the ever-changing conception of human values around her. Her contentment with a world of inflation, disintegration, and insecurity emanates from a growing sense of faith, and a progressive shaping of her individuality. Her religiosity emerges as one of the most important facets of her personality. Through the series her understanding of it grows only by means of the contradictions she feels in her religious convictions as well as her involvement in the 'alien' world of paranormal creatures, a world

that resembles the multi-cultural United States. This would inevitably lead me to investigate this growth via Derrida's view of religion.

In his article "Derrida on Religion: Glimpses of interculturality," Wim Van Binsbergen investigates Derrida's essay "Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of 'Religion' at the face of Reason Alone". Binsbergen states:

He [Derrida] highly stresses the parochialism of the Universalist claim of a particular type of spirituality as 'religion'; particularly when this claim is broadcast by Christian missions and colonial states, and when it is reinforced, as Derrida very rightly points out by the alliances, between Christianity, Capitalism, and the scientific technological complex of today. (136)

Indeed, in his essay "Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Face of Reason alone", Derrida argues that one cannot isolate the political from the religious, because for him, the "fundamental concepts that often permit this isolation remain religious or in any case theologico-political." (63) The interrelation between Religion and the politics of acculturation makes it almost impossible to delimit one or draw a dividing line between the two. In this respect, his thinking is strictly Kantian; in that he scrutinizes religion in polarities that can but highlight the provincialism of the attempts at universalizing religion. He clearly states:

This is not easy, there are at least two families, two strata or sources that overlap, mingle, contaminate each other without ever merging; and just in

case things are still too simple, one of the two is precisely the drive to remain unscathed on the part of that which is allergic to contamination, save by itself, auto-immunely (...) One would have to dissociate the essential traits of the religious as such from those that establish for example, the concepts of ethics, of the juridical, of the political or the economic. And yet, nothing is more problematic than such dissociation. (63)

Derrida's thought is echoed in Hamilton's three novels. In *Guilty Pleasures*, Religion is presented by the protagonist as "the" religion, which rather refers to the notion of 'the cult religion'. Anita's paranoiac behavior whenever she faces a 'difference' in rituality is at the heart of her containment in the "universal" model of Christianity. Indeed, her violent reaction to Zachary's practicing of some kind of gris-gris is not only due to the latter's alliance with vampires, but also to her disdain of magic practice. Gradually, she breaks free from the shackles of her conservatism and becomes more open to the alien 'other'. In *Circus of the Damned*, she discovers that other religions might work against vampirism, and that what matters is the "essence" of religion which turns up to be faith not in the "cult religion" but in a "moral religion".⁴

After being saved by two miniature Torah books, she explains to Larry: "They are tiny Jewish Holy Books (...) The Torah contains the Old testament, so yeah, it's like

⁴ These terms ('cult religion' and the 'moral religion') are used by Kant to denote two types of religion. Derrida's thinking seems to stem from this categorization of religiosity.

miniature Bibles” (165-166). At this level, her conception of religion is still exclusive of many ‘other’ religions, but changes in the three novels occur only after she is dealt hard blows. And for Anita these happen to be extremely violent ones. Though she does not explicitly confess the vicissitude she feels in her personality, the latter can be inferred from her statements as well as her actions through the series. Her speech in *Guilty Pleasures* is permeated with incertitude, and constant questioning of the very constants in her beliefs. In the beginning of the novel, she shows a great deal of ardent faith, through her humane prayers to God for help and salvation on her own account and that of her friends, as illustrated by her repeated “god help me” (32, 239, 259). Her meditations on religious issues are depicted only when she feels threat. Furthermore, she confesses in a rather sarcastic way that she became Episcopalian when the Pope excommunicated all the animators: “The Catholic Church sees voluntary vampirism as a kind of suicide. I tend to agree. Though the Pope also excommunicated all animators, unless we ceased raising the dead. Fine; I became Episcopalian” (213). One might claim that what Hamilton tries to publicize in her novels is rather a religion of convenience; for she is quite vague about her protagonist’s fundamental principles. Nevertheless, Anita’s spiritual growth goes hand in hand with the enlargement of the ‘scope’ of her religiosity. The diversity in her multicultural world and its trendy humanistic drives make her first accept, second tolerate, and eventually bond with the “extraneous”. “Religion” ceases to be a dividing line between her and the rest of the world. For instance, in *Guilty Pleasures*, she shows great deal of fear, disgust and suspicion whenever confronted by paranormal creatures that belong to the Church of Eternal Life. In *Circus of the Damned*, she starts to accept and forgive Jean Claude for what he is. She also decides to date a lycanthrope. In *Blue Moon*, she is in a triangular love relationship with Jean

Claude the master vampire and Richard the lycanthrope, a relationship that is supposedly cursed by her religion.

Even the guilt she feels after her many “sins” is extenuated when her religiosity saves her again: “I faced a demon with my faith and prayer. Does that mean God has forgiven me my sins? I don’t know. If He has forgiven me, He’s more generous than I am” (418).

Hamilton seems to intentionally manipulate the supposedly fixed value of “religion.” God punishes, but also forgives; the church is a sacred place, but it can also be turned into a profitable business in a world like Hamilton’s. Moreover, her protagonist Anita succeeds to integrate in her society without dictating her spiritual– or other– convictions, which coincides with Derrida’s view on universalizing religion. WimVan Binsbegen explains the latter’s argument on cultural assimilation as follows:

Genealogies, etymologies, histories –the very constitutive elements of a religious continental tradition with which Derrida is familiar and which he stresses greatly can only bring out historical, unalterable generic relationships since that is the idiom in which they happen to be expressed; they cannot reveal formal structural similarities which may have historical roots now lost to consciousness let alone [‘kinship by deliberate choice’]between people initially pursuing historically totally unrelated cultures, religions, and languages. (137)

This view is quite prominent in the novels under examination. Actually, Anita identifies with the paranormal world when she realizes in *Circus of the Damned* that, despite being a

Christian executioner and an animator, she has more in common with her paranormal counterparts. At this point, she starts to be more considerate and at times compassionate with them:

Look, I've spent a lot of time around shapeshifters, [she says]. I just know what to look for okay?" Why did I want to reassure him? Because I knew what it was like to be the outsider. Raising the dead makes a lot of people class me with the monsters. There are even days when I agree with them. (32)

In addition, Binsbergen holds that Derrida's conception of Religion is not conclusively about interculturalism but about the interplay between what he calls the 'two sources' of Religion. Derrida attaches different labels to these two sources. In effect, his thinking can be described as dialectical; in that he presents oppositions of the same antithetical powers, each time with a new terminology, but that elucidate, in his view, his conception of an Abstract (Religion). These two sources are called among many other labels 'faith' and 'knowledge', or what Binsbergen refers to as:

The contradiction between the constitutive transparent force of rationality which informs science, technology, theology, on the one hand, soundness and efficacy of such rationality which cannot be based on rational grounds itself and therefore involves an act of irrationality, absurdity and hope formally equivalent to religious attitudes. (qtd. in Binsbergen 140)

Hamilton's novels are loaded with contrariety especially in her portrayal of Anita Blake. Although Hamilton centers on making her protagonist look as "normal" as possible, and as credible as possible, many contradictions are discerned in Anita's character especially when she meditates on her religiosity. In *Circus of the Damned*, she almost confesses that religion is something abstract for her that becomes even more absurd when she is faced with the supernatural powers of paranormal creatures. When she first sees the intimidating giant cobra, she compares her to a goddess "with a little 'g.'" But then even that "wasn't accurate [enough for her]" (33) since the more she is confronted by supernatural evil the more her religiosity is abstracted. In spite of that, she shows her gratitude for the crosses that prove to be effective at most times in saving her life and soul from the jeopardy of evil. In her confrontation with Jean Claude and Yasmeen, the cross saves her from their lust for blood and power. When Yasmeen tried to drain her "A tongue of blue-white flame curled up between [them] And she fell away (...) Blue-white flame crawled over her shirt" (46). In the same confrontation, Jean Claude shrieked and hid when Anita waved the cross that "glowed a white-hot light" at his face (46). "Put it away *ma petite*. No one else will harm you tonight, I promise you that [he said]" (46). Anita emerges triumphant of this fight thanks to her belief. And her "strong faith" saves not only her life, but also her soul from the dreadful fate of becoming a human servant of the master vampire. That's why when Anita and the rest of Regional Preternatural investigation Team went to St. Louis city hospital to stake a newly risen dead, she admits that she would never imagine that the cross would betray the innocent believers: "They hadn't bargained on the crosses not working. Neither had I. The bit about not feeling pain had been a small footnote to one article. No one had theorized that would mean crosses didn't protect you (...) Crosses melting into flesh wowee" (124). This is

actually the first instance of failure of the Cross. This event does not seem to shake her faith especially when she is praying for protection and help, but she shows on many occasions that Religion is not the only referent in her conduct. In a world where good will is becoming extinct, life and experience are as instructive as religion. In a most pessimistic mood Anita meditates: “But we were all young once. It passes like innocence and a sense of fair play. The only thing left in the end is a good instinct for survival” (*Circus of the Damned* 228). This statement is rather reminiscent of the Law of the Jungle, of the ‘Death of God’.

Consequently, Anita’s understanding of religion can be assimilated to Derrida’s opposition between his two sources of religion: ‘faith’ and ‘knowledge’– the dictates of historical religions in their more basic humanitarian values and the ordainment of Reason. From this perspective one might easily claim the “Death of God” in Hamilton’s novels, though it is a ‘gradual’ death that goes hand in hand with the protagonist’s mental and spiritual development. In Hamilton’s world, the richness in diversity of kinds and beliefs creates a plural environment where all sorts of beings have the choice between respecting the ‘Other’ and fighting against her/his differences. Indeed, many acts of resistance are aimed at this diversity. “Humans First” and “Human Against Vampires” are two radical movements who best epitomize religious fundamentalism in Hamilton’s novel. Actually, in *Circus of the Damned*, members of Humans First for being an animator attack Anita, and then the same group saves her when they know that she kills vampires. These groups, like many fundamentalist groups in our real world, display such absolute devotion to their so-called “cause” that they are prepared to harm even their own people if they dare express support for the ‘Other’ groups. Derrida invokes the “wars of religion” issue to investigate the roots of religious fundamentalism in postmodern times. He assumes that “like others

before, the new “wars of religion” are unleashed over the human earth (which is not the world) and struggle even today to control the sky with finger and eye.” (61) These wars can take many forms, and Derrida claims that although the advertised reasons may differ throughout history– for they occur under the name of international law, democracy, the sovereignty of people...– the religious element has never been secularized from them. To use Derrida’s words, “to determine a war as such [not only secular but pure of all religiosity], one would have to be certain that one can delimit the religious,” (“Faith and Knowledge”63). He also states:

One must in any case take into account, if possible in an a religious, or even irreligious manner, what religion at present might be, as well as what is said and done, what is happening at this very moment, in the world, in history, in its name. Whether religion can no longer reflect or at times assume or bear its name. (61)

These wars, being oppressive of a certain belief or denomination, would necessarily lead to fundamentalism which seems a natural reaction to persecution, but at the same time a better pretext to wage a war. Derrida also stresses the major role of technology that proves to be primordial in religion wars:

The cyber-specialized or cyber-spaced wars of religion have no stakes other than this determination of the ‘world’, of ‘history’, of the ‘day’, of the ‘present’. The stakes certainly can remain implicit, insufficiently

schematized, poorly articulated. By repressing them, on the other hand, many others can also be assimilated or displaced. (62)

Accordingly, in every study of religion we must take into account all the accumulations of histories, politics, and technological development starting from the past of a nation to its present. The monopoly of all these 'actants' by a political or other kind of authority would unavoidably generate fundamentalist movements. In Hamilton's novels, Anita Blake and her entourage eventually choose to take this position of middle ground and fight against radical movements on both sides of the religio-political divide as the protagonist seems to mature through the novel. In the beginning of *Guilty Pleasures*, she almost allies in with hate groups who think that vampires are beasts to be killed. When Willie, the vampire, accuses her of being indifferent to the deaths of vampires, she does not deny it. Instead, his comment makes her think over the new laws that made vampirism legal, which actually highlights her repugnance:

Maybe, but the cops feel like you do, Anita. What's one more dead vampire? New laws don't change that. (...) The court case gave us a revised version of what life was, and what death wasn't. Vampirism was legal in the good ol' U. S of A (...) All sorts of questions were being fought in the court. Did heirs have to give back their inheritance? Were you widowed if your spouse became undead? Was it murder to slay a vampire? There was even a movement to give them vote. Times were a-changing. (3)

As innocent as it may look, this meditation reveals that even existential questions to which religions have found many answers are to a large extent manipulated by politics. And in Anita's world this interpretation of religion is driven by the humanitarian drive of 'egalitarianism' and 'justice'. However, Anita's enemy changes when she discovers that she cannot dissociate from the paranormal world, especially that she falls in love with a vampire, a lycanthrope, and becomes the protector of "wereleopards."

Moreover, against this process of acculturation, there arose many opposition groups or "hate groups" that actually feared what they saw as not only a cultural invasion, but also and more dangerously a political one. This is exactly the point where Derrida's view of Religion's wars is concretized in Hamilton's miniature world. Two antithetical forces crave power and domination and, in their long struggle, sacrifice many innocent lives. Anita and her clan's mission becomes saving the city from this new kind of radicalism. Indeed, In *Circus of the Damned*, Anita engages in a combat with both sides of extremism; she first fights with a group from Human First organization who shot her and her new colleague Larry after the two of them raised a zombie. Those were "members of Human First, a right-wing fanatic group that hates anything to do with the supernatural" (148). The novel closes with a fight against a paranormal invader who wants to kill Jean Claude and take control of the city's humans and monsters. These power games end with the death of members from both sides. And Anita emerges victorious from the battle as she "finishes" her enemies and saves the city from a dreadful fate, in that she saves both kinds from a third party that attempted to use the conflict between the two kinds in order to preside over both.

One might argue that studying religion in juxtapositions and intersections of meaning ironically undermine the calls for 'coming back to religion' at the time. However, such a

proposition would imply that religion has nothing to do with knowledge or thought, or what Derrida describes as 'source of religion'. The latter's concept of religion shares many similarities with his view of meaning generally. In other words, we are left with a disintegrated image of 'a signifier (religion) with an ever-evolving, ever-changing, and infinite meaning; or what he describes as "an unproducible absent in place" (65). In Derrida as well as in Hamilton's world, different signifiers/participants contribute to the construction of meaning that is never fixed upon determinable denotation, a meaning that communicates the incommunicable through indefinite mode of signification and a disintegrated structure. This infinity of signification is more blatant in the concept of religion, but also in the overall structure of these texts.

Derrida has been decidedly described as "textual" in his view of literature for he treats the literary work as a kind of language with dispersed meaning. Actually, he sees literary criticism as a deductive process that starts from the form of the text and unfolds life outside the text. However, He admits that there is no single literary method, and even his "deconstruction" cannot function as a theory that works with all kinds of literary texts. In his article "Deconstruction and the Other" he asserts:

I am not sure that deconstruction can function as a literary method as such. I am wary of the idea of methods of reading. The laws of reading are determined by that particular text that is being read. This does not mean that we should simply abandon ourselves to the text, or represent or repeat it in a purely passive manner. It means that we must remain faithful, even if it implies a certain violence, to the injunctions of the text. These injunctions will

differ from one text to the next so that one cannot prescribe one general method of reading. In this sense deconstruction is not a method. (qtd. in Wolfreys 50)

In a similar vein, Derrida conceives of deconstruction as an act of resistance of the “institutionalized critical methods which generally govern our reading of a text” (qtd. in Wolfreys 51). In his “Letter to a Japanese Friend,” he defines the role of deconstruction as “an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject” (qtd. in Wolfreys 52). Indeed, Derrida’s concept of deconstruction cannot be projected on any type of literary text. It rather came to describe an age of absurdity of disconnection, and instability. It also succeeded in depicting the major specificities of Postmodernity. Interestingly enough, Hamilton’s urban fantasies seem to thrive in Derrida’s deconstructive analysis. The free-play mode of sign reproduction engenders variation and variety of meaning, which is built by bits of structures, built in their turns by ‘inflated’ signs. The form of Hamilton’s urban fantasy escapes the determinism of genre, which allows a consequent flexibility in the themes it addresses. Stylistic and thematic indices authenticate an evident link between urban fantasy genre and one of the most prominent theories of Postmodernism.

Chapter 2

“I don’t date vampires, I *kill* them”:

The Mechanisms of Violence in Hamilton’s Novels

Violence, its working and mechanisms became a major concern for postmodern philosophy during the twentieth century. And the role of art in general and more specifically literature became prominent as well. In fact, literature in the last hundred years has unveiled what escaped the eye of the philosopher and presented striking images that reflect the anxiety, fear, and truculence of human kind. Many voices rose to alleviate the pain and work against what appeared to be a disintegration of the ethical system as a whole. While all these different approaches tried to escape, to deconstruct, and destroy the very notion of violence, violence proved to be inescapable. Urban fantasy, as a genre, manifests a great fear of the other. It evinces that the origins of any violent act lies in the inter-subjective relationship between highly paranoid counterparts.

In order to decipher this human phenomenon many theorists studied the mechanisms of violence at the very moment of truculence. In their article “Mirror, Mirror, On the Wall, Most and most aggressive of them all? Narcissism, Self-Esteem, and Aggression” Sander Thomaes and Brad J. Bushman explain:

Baumeister and his colleagues (1996) proposed that aggression most commonly stems from threatened egotism. In other words, people with big egos become aggressive when others threaten their inflated egos. Thus 'grandiose' and 'inflated' self-views, rather than simply 'positive' self-views, were predicted to lead to aggressive and violent behaviors. Such forms of exaggerated self love are characteristic of narcissism. (207)

Moreover, they assert that "many studies (...) challenged the notion that low self-esteem causes aggression" (207). We can thus conclude that people with pretentious self-esteem react violently whenever they sense a possible threat to their ego. Their self-centered thinking makes them solitary outcasts who fantasize about a world of their own making. Any attempt at marring this fanatic integrity posits them in a defensive position. Hans Toch recognizes two mechanisms of violent reactions: "Self-Preserving Strategies with violence used to bolster and enhance the person's ego in the eyes of himself and of others" (133) and "Approaches that Dehumanize Others [and that] are used by persons who see themselves (and their own needs) as being the only fact of social relevance" (133). According to Toch, each of these two general approaches includes different categories. The most frequent in "Self Preserving Strategies" are "Self-Image Compensating", "Rep-Defending", and "Pressure-Removing" categories; while the most prevalent in the "Approaches that Dehumanize Others" are "Exploitation", "Self-

Indulging”, and “Catharting categories”.⁵ “Self –Image Compensating” mechanisms involve individuals who try to compensate for a psychological lack either by promoting their image as fearless invincible beings, or by taking a defensive attitude whenever they are threatened.

The next manifestation of violence is “Rep- Defending” where brutality is legitimized as a form of loyalty to a certain thought or to a certain group. In addition to this form, Pressure-Removing is another strategy that the narcissistic self adopts to repress one’s inability to communicate. On the other hand, one of the most important approaches of violence that dehumanize one’s counterpart is Exploitation; in that, the violence prone manipulates others into being mere objects that are at the service of his/her desires and wishes without “reciprocation”(Toch 154). In this case, aggression emerges as the outcome of unattained satisfaction. Moreover, "Catharting" is an approach that dehumanizes the “Other”. But at the same time, it releases the aggressive self from emotional pressure. To illuminate the matter further Emmanuel Levinas’ definition of violence mechanism seems of great significance: “The violent man does not move out of himself. He takes, he possesses. Possession denies independent existence. To have is to refuse to be. Violence is sovereignty, but also solitude. To endure violence in enthusiasm and ecstasy and delirium is to be possessed.” (Levinas: 1990, 9) In fact, Levinas perceives violence as an event that happens outside the inter-subjective relation to the other. That is why, according to him, it resides beyond and outside discourse. “The Other, the Exteriority, do not necessarily signify tyranny and violence. An

⁵ Toch provides what he calls “The Typology” where he illustrates typical violent behaviors and characterizes different mechanisms of violence in detail.

exteriority without violence is the exteriority of discourse.” (qtd. in De Vries, 15) In this view, violence occurs whenever discourse surfaces itself from the realm of interlocution or interpellation; or whenever the counterparts of interlocution are exposed to each other not as total others but as alter egos, thus effacing the other’s singularity (De Vries 15).

Though these patterns may seem different from one character to another in the urban fantasies under study, their motives seem to be identical, or at least comparable. All these patterns stem from their fear of being marginalized. In Hamilton’s *Guilty Pleasures*, both the protagonist and her enemy Nicholaos undergo the same pattern of violence: they both react violently when they are threatened— in a way or another— by one of the characters, and they both attempt to annul their victim counterpart. The first meeting between the two characters is a tense one— to say the least. It marks the first power game between the two that is triggered by Anita who manifests a great deal of courage and sarcasm in her answers to the scariest creature at town. Nicholaos uses her vampire mind games to preponderate this human rebel who dared to humiliate her in front of her pack. Anita’s ‘inflated ego’ forbids her from showing her fear when confronting the city’s master vampire. Instead, she makes fun of her voice: “You really need at least one dimple to go with the voice” (66). This insolence was answered by a cruel punishment. Anita was “on her knees and [she] didn’t remember falling” (68). Nicholaos penetrated her mind and played with her thoughts and feelings, brought her to her knees, and made her crawl towards her. Anita’s inflated ego resisted Nicholaos’s power but only to harm herself further:

The force tumbled me backward, sharp pain, no air. For the second time that night, I couldn’t breathe. I lay flat on my stomach, gasping, swallowing past the

pain. I hadn't heard anything break. Something should have broken. The voice thudded over me, hot enough to scald. "Get her out of here before I kill her myself." The pain faded to a sharp ache. Air burned going down. My chest was tight, like I'd swallowed lead. (71)

In their first encounter, both characters are thus exposed to each other as alter egos to use Levinas's words. While Anita opts for sarcasm as a self-preserving strategy, especially after an incident she had with the ratmen sent by Nicholaos herself to break her high self-esteem, Nicholas chooses to bypass Anita's verbal power by a physical one. From that moment and until the end of the novel they engage in what Toch refers to as self-image compensating. All their bellicosity comes from their attempts at promoting their image as invincible fearless personalities. Another image that comports well with both Levinas and Toch's typology is that of Phillip, a character that has been sexually abused by vampires and vampire freaks since his childhood. Phillip is a victim of exploitation who is dehumanized, aggressed, and treated as an object to the sick desires of violence prone vampires and humans. Although he is pictured as someone who tries to overcome his addiction to the paranormal world, one might argue that he "does violence to himself" by yielding to the lifestyle of the latter. Anita and Phillip become friends in the novel because they have one thing in common: they have no choice.

Coincidence or maybe fate drove them unwillingly to the "darkness." Anita's description of Phillip's behavior when sexually harassed by the vampire aficionados in the freak party illustrates his vulnerability against paranormal creatures and their freaks on the one hand and his addiction to the position of the "exploited" on the other hand: "'I don't think I can do it', he whispered. I touched his arm. He was trembling, a constant shaking that I didn't

like at all. I hadn't realized what it would cost him to come tonight, but I was beginning to find out." (160) At this moment Phillip is tired of being exploited, he is trying to recover from the sexual abuse he has been enduring since his childhood. The pain and fear in his behavior tell of the terror brought about by the abuser. Working as a stripper for the paranormal creatures has literally stripped him of his humanity. Though we know of his suffering through the testimony of the protagonist and other characters, Phillip does not speak to us. All the characters silence his voice intentionally or unintentionally. This weakness in his personality is what incites the characters around him to vindicate his story, to talk on his behalf, or – in most of his 'encounters' with paranormal creatures– to torture him. For Levinas, violence is found in an encounter where the self seeks the weakness of the other– a weakness that betrays his personhood. In this context, He contends:

Violence is not to be found only in the collision of one billiard ball with another or the storm that destroys a harvest, or the master that mistreats his slave, or a totalitarian State that vilifies its citizens, or the conquest and subjection of men in war. Violence is to be found in any action in which one acts as if one were alone to act; as if the rest of the universe were there only to receive the action; violence is consequently also any action which we endure without at every point collaborating in it. (6)

Indeed, Phillip is aggressed when he is faced by highly narcissistic characters that deny him his existence and exert their actions upon his body and soul without allowing him to take part in what he 'receives'. When he finally decides to speak, he is tortured and slaughtered in the

presence of his friend Anita. The punishment he receives for defending Anita costs him his life: “Phillip sagged in the chains. Blood poured in a bright red flood down his chest. It splattered onto the floor, like rain. Torchlight glittered on the wet bone of his spine. Someone had ripped his throat out.” (245) Phillip’s death is a turning point in the plot but also a revealing moment. The events that follow demonstrate that violence in *Guilty Pleasures* emanates from the power games between Anita and Nicholaos, or Nicholaos and Jean Claude. This is most striking in the characters’ screams and threats at the very moment of confrontation. Nicholaos provokes Anita not only by killing her friend, but also by what appears to be a power show:

If I prove [Jean Claude] weak, powerless, they [followers of Jean Clause] just fall away or follow me... I will destroy something Jean Claude has given protection to. ... I am master of all. ... Jean Claude has given Phillip his protection; thus he must die. (244)

When Anita sees Phillip’s body, she wants to take revenge, but she cannot. Nicholaos uses her power games to subvert her, and eventually bites her in an attempt to make Anita her next human servant. The cruelty of this confrontation is reported in Anita’s description of Nicholaos: “The lips have receded exposing the fangs and teeth. The skeletal head hissed, “You will learn obedience to me!”” (246) Nicholaos is convinced that if she scares Anita, the latter will obey. However, the protagonist’s high self-esteem prevents her from being subjected to a child master. After her victimization, Anita becomes stronger and more willing to finish her enemy: “I spend most of my waking hours confronting and destroying things that

I fear. A thousand-year-master was a tall order, but a girl's got to have a goal" (250). Eventually, she kills Nicholaos and her followers. And although she calls Nicholaos an "egocentric bitch," (244) she displays a great deal of egocentrism, pride, and a sense of self-achievement when she wins the last battle. Her rage and wildness are finally tamed by spilled blood, but she is changed. In the last pages we see a different Anita: fearless, confident, and satisfied: "I know who and what I am. I am the Executioner, and I don't date vampires, I kill them" (306).

In Hamilton's novels, violence, all the terror it perpetuates, and its strategies, are allotted to insurgence, wildness, and vampirism. One might even propound that all the characters' actions and reactions are driven by an alien impulse— alien because slippery and incomprehensible by humankind. Hatred is depicted in these novels as something unreasonable and contingent as if to expiate criminality. Levinas refers to this state of soul as an unreasonable, spiritual, and unconscious state. In his book *Difficult Freedom*, he posits that violence can also be found in "the poetic delirium and enthusiasm displayed when we merely offer our mouths to the muse who speaks through us; in our fear and trembling when the Sacred wrenches us of ourselves" (7). In Hamilton's *Blue Moon*, Anita is possessed by a "munin", an evil soul that uses her "memory" to sneak into her present. Anita's brain and body are controlled by the munin whenever the protagonist is in a state of unjustifiable anger:

Raina's munin was like a warm pulse behind my eyes. I leaned into the man, as if I'd kiss him. He backed away but bumped into the good doctor. My mouth hovered over the man's, but it wasn't a kiss I wanted. I stayed there, hovering

over his mouth, frozen, fighting not to lower my mouth to his neck. Fighting not to draw first blood and let the pack feed. (238)

In this scene, violence is attuned to our expectations of what or who is a human in an attempt to disavow the worst forms of truculence as a human trait. Bellicosity is pictured as a muse that might invade us, speak through us, but can never be part of our reason or discourse. In this context, Levinas argues that “Reason and language are external to violence. They are the spiritual order. If morality must truly exclude violence, a profound link must join reason, language, and morality” (Levinas: 1990, 7). Putting it differently, if we combine reason, language and morality we get a violence-free society, an equation that is highly ethical, optimistic, and idealistic.

But if it is the case, how can we explain that every violent prone person or being finds a justification to her/his actions? How can we speak of violence mechanisms if there is no logic in that? Should we not look for a “reasonable” explanation of the brutality that has proven to be more human than anything in our lives? How can we understand the concept of relationship between the ‘face’ and the ‘other,’ or should we call it an encounter? In his attempt to answer these questions Derrida argues in his essay “Violence and Metaphysics: An essay on the Thoughts of Emmanuel Levinas:”

The ego and the other do not permit themselves to be dominated or made into totalities by a concept of relationship. And first of all because the concept, which is always given to the other, cannot encompass the other, cannot include the other. The dative and vocative dimension, which opens the original

direction of language, cannot lend itself to inclusion in and modification by the accusative or attributive dimension of the object without violence. (117-8)

Derrida maintains that when encountering the face of the other, one cognizes that face “as other, that is, as that which does not reveal itself, as that which cannot be made thematic” (qtd. in Parrish 1). This inter-subjectivity – that reveals itself as Parrish as the reciprocal recognition and acknowledgment of each other’s faces– is considered by Parrish as a political achievement. The latter contends that “unless the face maintains its discursive distance from other faces, the face ceases to exist; unless a person or a people continually enforces its freedom of speech, its right to independent personhood, it devolves into mere visage, mere animal phenomenality” (2) As a result, the face becomes an easy target on which violence is inflicted. In Hamilton’s *Blue Moon*, we find this profile in Verne’s character. The latter accepts Anita’s punishment and gives her his neck to be bitten at as a form of obedience and loyalty. In this act, he gives up his right to independent personhood and retrogrades to mere phenomenality. His submissive behavior encourages Anita to exert a truculent punishment that further humiliates the leader of the werewolves’ pack.

Derrida argues that before any common ethical violence there is “an original transcendental violence, previous to every ethical choice” (qtd in Parrish 5) that is called arché-violence.

This arché-violence is discursive because both speech and position among faces are discursive. And it has three implications: first, it is the first form of violence and governs subsequent forms; second, it presupposes a sovereign that has the power to legislate; third, it is both conservative and foundational. Moreover, he asserts that “the articulation of specific positions by persons to others is the very essence of discourse” (qtd in Parrish 6). In the same

vein, Parrish asserts that “self-assertion, identity, language, and violence [...] arise simultaneously as facets of a single event” (7). Derrida states that language itself is inhabited with violence that is most conspicuous in dative and vocative cases. In addition, we cannot speak of reason and morality without exercising a certain amount of violence. In other words, any conscious or unconscious choice we make, whether expressed through language or not, implies a certain degree of violence to other choices. The process of decision-making itself is a violent one, especially for the person making it. In his essay “Violence and Metaphysics: An essay on the Thoughts Emmanuel Levinas”, Derrida postulates:

A Being without violence would be a Being which would occur outside the existent: nothing; nonhistory; nonoccurrence; nonphenomenality. A speech produced without the least violence would determine nothing, would say nothing, would offer nothing to the other; it would not be *history*, and it would *show* nothing: in every sense of the word, and first of all the Greek sense, it would be speech without *phrase*. (184)

In Hamilton’s *Blue Moon* Anita evinces that language not only encompasses violence, but also moderates its horrible effects on the individual. It is noteworthy to mention that her statement about language comes after she sees Damian’s body leaking and rotting gradually before her eyes. The latter is poisoned when he tries to save Nathaniel from the same substance that is injected into his body. Although Anita saves Damian’s life eventually, the horror of the event is still unbearable:

Sometimes it's too horrible you have to distance yourself from it. Language is a good way to do that. Victims become an "it" very quickly, because sometimes it's too horrible even to say "he" or "she." When you're scraping pieces of someone's loved one of your hands, it has to be an "it". Has to be, or you run screaming. (133)

One might say that Derrida's definition of violence is scary. It is, indeed, scary when we think of violence as something inescapable, existing everywhere in and outside our minds and bodies. In his essay, Derrida states "every philosophy of nonviolence can only choose the lesser violence within an *economy of violence*" (340). Nevertheless, Derrida explains that our actions and reactions are based on what he calls an economy of violence. For him, since 'finite silence' is also a medium of violence, language can tend to justice only by acknowledging violence and negotiating it within an economy of violence. As a consequence, the individual is raised to the highest degree of responsibility. S/he practices and determines violence economically depending on her personal judgment. According to Derrida, the philosopher's duty here is central:

Violence against violence. *Economy of violence*. An economy irreducible to what Levinas envisions in the word. If light is the element of violence, one must combat light with a certain other light, in order to avoid the worst violence, the violence of the night which precedes or represses discourse. This *vigilance* is a violence chosen as the least violence by a philosophy which takes history, that is, finitude, seriously; a philosophy aware of itself as *historical* in each of its

aspects (in a sense which tolerates neither finite totality, nor positive infinity), and aware of itself. ... But again, an economy which in being history, can be *at home* neither in the finite totality which Levinas calls the Same nor in the positive presence of the Infinite. Speech is doubtless the first defeat of violence, but paradoxically, violence did not exist before the possibility of speech. (146)

Denying discourse its violence risks the worst violence of all— violence directed to the self and/ or to the other, that might mar the moderation aimed by an “economy of violence.” The question here becomes how we can be economical, how we assess the degree of violence in our actions, and more importantly how we can decide the “right thing to do” or the “just thing to do?”

In his essay “Violence and Testimony: On sacrificing Sacrifice,” De Vries claims that “Sacrifice is read by Derrida as the very paradigm of every genuine decision. ... According to Derrida, this sacrifice ... becomes also a sacrifice of any self-sacrifice that is transformed into a norm, an ideology, or a religious demand” (27) Indeed, In his book *The Gift of death*, Derrida reads Abraham’s sacrifice as an epitomizer of a genuine decision that can work as a model for any “ethico-political decision.” According to Derrida, responsibility is a “singular act.” In other words, making the decision of being responsible should be individual and more importantly discrete especially when it comes to sacrifice. Derrida maintains that the generality of ethics and their universal dimension juxtapose with the individual choice of making a sacrifice:

What does Abraham teach us in his approach to sacrifice? That far from ensuring responsibility, the generality of ethics incites to irresponsibility. It impels me to speak, to reply, to account for something and thus to dissolve my singularity in the medium of the concept. Such is the aporia of responsibility: one always risks not managing to accede to the concept of responsibility in the process of forming it. (61)

As a consequence, Derrida contends that the ethical is a temptation and must, therefore, be resisted. In his deconstruction of Abraham's sacrifice story, he explains Abraham's silence by the latter's attempt to "avoid the moral temptation which, under the pretext of calling him to responsibility, to self-justification, would make him lose his unjustifiable, secret, and absolute responsibility before God." (61)

Hamilton's *Blue Moon* presents a version of the act of sacrifice that complies perfectly with the sacrifice of Abraham. Actually, in this novel, Anita can be considered as Hamilton's Abraham. Every time she is asked – by her sense of duty and her devotion to her pack – to make a sacrifice, truculence follows as an inescapable outcome. Before every sacrifice, Anita speaks only to herself. She opts for secrecy to alleviate the psychological distress that the whole pack goes through, but also to make the right choice. Being responsible for more than a species, Anita opts for following her own instincts and thinks most of all about her 'absolute' responsibility before God. For instance, she decides to sacrifice two master vampires to save Nathaniel, and, with him, the trust of her lycanthropes:

“Do you want to save him?” Damian asked again. Nathaniel’s fast, gasping breath was the only sound in the sudden silence. They all looked at me. Waited for me to decide. And I couldn’t decide. I felt my head nod, almost as if I wasn’t doing it. I nodded. The vampires began to feed. (124)

In this decision, Anita sides by the weakest of her pack. Later in the novel she sacrifices one of her ethical convictions to save Nathaniel’s life. She refused to get “intimate” with the shape-shifters in her pack or accept their need for being touched and cuddled. However, when she knows that her sexuality can save lives, she lays naked against his skin, kiss him and thrust the energy of the munin into his body to heal his wounds (411-13). In both events Anita’s internal speech follows Derrida’s account for Abraham’s conception of sacrifice and duty:

I am responsible to anyone (that is to say to any other) only by failing my responsibilities to all the others, to the ethical or political generality. And I can never justify this sacrifice; I must always hold my peace about it. Whether I want or not, I can never justify the fact that I prefer or sacrifice any one (any other) to the other. I will always be secretive, held to secrecy in respect of this, for I have nothing to say about it. What binds me to singularities, to this one or that one, male or female, rather than that one or this one, remains finally unjustifiable (this is Abraham’s hyper-ethical sacrifice), as unjustifiable as the infinite sacrifice I make each moment. (70-71)

It is following this “logic” that Anita makes her sacrifices. At many instances she offers what Derrida refers to as the “gift of death” – a gift that remains “irreducible to presence or to presentation, it demands a temporality of the instant without ever constituting a present” (65). In both sacrifices Anita offers a life to death for a “higher” cause. Her decision can be described as “madness” since, apparently, there is no outspoken logic in the instant of decision.

In Derridean thought, this instant is decisive, discrete, and atemporal. In Hamilton’s novels, Anita makes all her decision by herself. She decides who will live and who will die, and chooses her enemies and friends. Her decisions impinge the lives of her surroundings. In all three novels, she plays the role of a judge not only for herself, but also for “her” people. And she is also the one who makes laws. Being at the center of events raises a concern about her responsibility, especially when violence emerges as the outcome of almost every decision she makes. One of Anita’s goals is achieving justice, though she occasionally admits that she makes “mistakes”. In his essay “Force of Law: the Mystical foundation of authority,” Derrida posits that “one cannot speak directly about justice, thematize or objectivize justice, say “this is just;” and even less “I am just;” without immediately betraying justice, if not law” (237). He distinguishes between justice “in itself”, as a discursive sign and justice as law. And he argues that:

The operation that amounts to founding, inaugurating, justifying law, to making law, would consist of a coup de force, of a performative and therefore interpretative violence that in itself is neither just nor unjust and that no justice

and no earlier and previously founding law, no preexisting foundation, could, by definition, guarantee or contradict or invalidate. (241)

Indeed, Derrida ascertains that the structure of law or of “justice as law” is deconstructible, unlike justice that surpasses the workings of law. According to him, justice is incalculable and thus, it demands an aporetic experience for “the decision between just and unjust can never be ensured by a rule” (244). Thus, Derrida stresses the importance of the idiom in which law operates. Any deficiency in the mastery of the idiom could lead to a violent situation— that is the direct consequence of an injustice that had begun when the members of a community do not share the same idiom. Urban fantasy, as a genre, juxtaposes two idioms: human and paranormal. These two idioms do not live in harmony with each other, but at the same time, they have a lot in common. Both worlds are characterized by emptiness, disillusionment and disenchantment. Each instance of intersection between the two worlds results in a fierce clash. Ironically, the very creatures that are supposed to abide by “a just rule” endanger humanity that makes laws for itself. In all novels, Anita transgresses the law when the rule is no longer compatible with the dictates of a new axiom. In *Guilty Pleasures*, Anita decides to kill Nicholaos and her pack without a court order despite the fact that she is breaking the law: “I wiped my sweating palms on my jeans and felt for a pulse in his wrist. Nothing. His skin was cool to the touch. He was dead. It wasn’t murder, no matter what the new laws said. You can’t kill a corpse” (288).

Moreover, defining an act as just or unjust has to rely on an “aporetic” thinking rather than a dialectical one because. The first reason for this is that “this justice always addresses itself to singularity, to the singularity of the other, despite or even because it pretends to

universality,” and thus, one has to maintain “a questioning of the origin, grounds and limits of our conceptual, theoretical or normative apparatus surrounding justice”. The second is that the tight connection between justice and concepts like responsibility, freedom, conscience, decision, and so forth makes no room for justice. Derrida rather calls it a “moment of suspense this period of ‘epokhe,’ without which there is, in fact, no possible deconstruction.” (248)

Derrida provides three examples of Aporia. In his view, the most common axiom of those who make a just decision, if such a thing exists, must be freedom and responsibility for their actions. As a consequence, this decision has to go beyond the calculations of the law or the rule:

In short, for a decision to be just and responsible, it must [il faut], in its proper moment, If there is one, be both regulated and without regulation, it must preserve the law [loi] and also destroy or suspend it enough to have [pour devoir] to reinvent it in each case, re-justify it, reinvent it at least in the reaffirmation and the new and free confirmation of its principle. Each case is other, each decision is different and requires an absolutely unique interpretation, which no existing, coded rule can or ought to guarantee absolutely. (251)

The second axiom is called The Hunting of the undecidable. According to Derrida, every claim and every position must go through an Ordeal of the undecidable. Indeed, for him “a decision that didn’t go through the ordeal of the undecidable would not be a free decision” (qtd in Parrish 9). Consequently, it can be considered as an inhuman mechanistic calculation.

Derrida identifies a person who did violence to himself as a person who does not recognize himself as a source of meaning, instead opting for a position of non-positionality. In his book *Violence Inevitable: The Play of Force and Respect in Derrida, Nietzsche, Hobbes and Berlin*, Parrish explains the ordeal of the undecidable as

The paradox inherent in any claim or counter claim: an iteration of any previous position is both foundational in itself, redecided anew from scratch in an act of meaning-creation, and therefore includes its own new claim to universal iteration, and is also conservative in that it is an iteration of a previous claim.

This paradox is also applied to a new discursive position, which as a foundation constitutes a new claim against the universal iteration of some opposing claim.

(9)

In this ever-evolving process of decision-making, we cannot speak of justice. We can only speak of “an idea of justice,” that resuscitates itself as an undecidable experience. Moreover, this experience must be impossible, in that it has to be “heterogeneous” to universal law, but simultaneously, it must take account of laws and rules. It is like an oscillating movement between the calculable order and the incalculable one without ever inhabiting a single position. Once a choice is validated in a certain idiom it deconstructs itself, and along with that, all the certainty and determination of the calculable. In other words, becoming a rule means that it is no longer just, and must therefore be regenerated. In his essay “Force of Law: The mystical Foundation of Authority,” Derrida explains this second aporia as follows:

This second aporia-this second form of the same aporia-already confirms this: if there is a deconstruction of all presumption to a determining certainty of a present justice, it itself operates on the basis of an "idea of justice" that is infinite, infinite because irreducible, irreducible because owed to the other-owed to the other, before any contract, because it has come, it is a coming [parce qu'elle est venue], the coming of the other as always other singularity.
(254)

The third aporia is called "The Urgency That Obstructs the Horizon of Knowledge". In this aporia, Derrida depicts justice as a decision that is urgent and incalculable. This does not imply a total absence of knowledge or rules, but rather a brusque "reinstitution" of rules enforced by a decisive moment. In this brisk moment, decision must erode time and defy dialectics of right and wrong, lawful and unlawful. And even if time was available for the adequate justification of knowledge that might be provided by conventional rules, the instant of decision must be "madness." By madness Derrida means precipitation, resolution, and hyperactivity. This instant of madness, of non-knowledge and unconsciousness is what produces, Derrida asserts, a structurally finite decision. The urgency obstructs knowledge and divests the individual choice from the limits of the calculable. However, Derrida admits that his idea for justice can be threatened by its own logic. The incalculable, when completely obliterated or amplified, can lead to injustice; that is to the opposite of what it seeks. Derrida elucidates the working of the incalculable in justice in what follows:

Abandoned to itself, the incalculable and giving [donatrice] idea of justice is always very close to the bad, even to the worst for it can always be reappropriated by the most perverse calculation. It is always possible, and this is part of the madness of which we were speaking. An absolute assurance against this risk can only saturate or suture the opening of the call to justice, a call that is always wounded. But incalculable justice commands calculation. And first of all, closest to what one associates with justice, namely, law, the juridical field that one cannot isolate within sure frontiers, but also in all the fields from which one cannot separate it, which intervene in it and are no longer simply fields: the ethical, the political, the economical, the psycho-sociological, the philosophical, the literary, etc. (257)

In Hamilton's *Blue Moon*, the protagonist is the one who makes the decisions. She takes manifold positions, and with every new position and every new idiom comes a different judgment. Actually, we cannot describe Anita as someone with unshaken principles. Her principles or the rules she constructs for herself are not static, and can be subject to change at any time. This pendulum of positionality bewilders Anita and affects her choices. All the decision she makes are free, discrete, brusque, and they all go through the ordeal of the undecidable. Before every act, Anita infringes a rule, and creates another that she mutates or cancels later. For instance, when Colin asks Anita to let him kill Asher and torture Jason as a ransom for passing safely through his lands, Anita instantly answers him "No", and the battle starts between the two packs. Anita's pack is outnumbered and they are losing when she gets a glimpse of hope:

I knew as I lay in the bones that I could bring the circle to life. But what would happen when the wards flared to life? This pack worshipped Odin. If I set the circle of power would it count as a holy place? Would it suddenly be like standing inside a church? It had possibilities if I could warn Asher and Damian. (177)

In this internal speech, Anita goes through the ordeal of the undecidable. Her thinking can be described as quick speculation rather than calculation. She decides eventually to take the risk, and her choice comes as a brusque and abrupt reaction: “I screamed, “Fly!” Asher grabbed Damian’s wrist, and I had to turn before I could see them safe. I had moments to try and make this work.” (178) Since vampires get killed when they are in a holy place, Anita decides to make the battle field a holy place. All she had is a mad instant to warn her friend vampires and save them from being burnt with the rest. What happens afterwards is something like annihilation: a whole pack of vampires is turned into ashes. Following Derrida’s definition of justice, we can say that Anita’s decision is a just one, and that the brutality that comes with is a necessity to enforce Anita’s position as a legislator and a judge. However, Anita’s absolute freedom turns her into a tyrannical ruler. Indeed, the individuality of choice, its freedom, urgency and secrecy can easily be abused, consciously or unconsciously. Justice must come with violence only to enforce a new rule or a punishment for a crime. But what happens when the judge is the only ruler? What happens when revenge is the idiom in which the idea of justice operates? How can we guarantee that the urgency of the decision does not induce indiscretion?

In Hamilton's novels we notice a growing degree of violence. Each novel begins with what we might refer to as "minor" cases of violence, and ends with extreme violence. It is true that the idiom for making the decision is different with every choice the protagonist makes, but it is also all meddled with the other impulses of anger, hatred, and revenge. When Colin's pack kidnapped two of her friends who happen to be Charlotte the mother of her ex-boyfriend and her younger son Daniel, jaded Anita decided to get her answers from the messengers. When she sees Charlotte's finger in the box, she kills the vampire although she knows that he is just the driver. Then, she starts torturing Thompson:

I stared into his eyes when I said the next, "Did you rape Charlotte Zeeman?" I saw the fear in his eyes. That flash that said he'd done it. It was enough. I could do it. God forgive me. I got the little finger and the tip of the next one, because he moved. But they got better at holding him down, and I got better at cutting.
(391)

In this scene, Anita is possessed by the idea of taking revenge more than achieving justice. Eventually, she abuses her position as the pack leader, and she turns into one of the monsters. When Patrick, the pack's doctor, intervenes to stop her tyrannical rule, she gives him a sardonic answer:

You are not the law, he said. "Oh yes I am" [, she answers]. ... Look Patrick, I don't have the time to explain it all, so here's the *Reader's Digest* version.

Niley and crew raped and tortured Richard's mother and brother. We are going to kill them for that. All of them. (395)

Anita does not describe the torture of Thompson or how many parts she chopped before he confesses. After torturing him she kills him because "Thompson was screaming, high and piteously, like a wounded rabbit [, so she] shot him in the head" (392). Later, she confesses to her friend Jason that she is very confused because she does not regret what she did. And this is only because it makes her one of the monsters. Revealingly, Hamilton ties all the atrocity in her novels with the paranormal world. Simultaneously, her protagonist— a frantic but a strong woman— gets more and more pugnacious as she gets more involved in this paranormal world. Probably, Hamilton's intention is to evince that humans cannot do that to each other. She uses paranormal world to expound upon the sickness of the real world. Actually, all Hamilton's novels are an emblem for all different kinds of mechanisms of violence. Whether intentional or not, all of them inspire and are inspired by many postmodern theories about violence. The image that Hamilton provides through the vampire world is not alien to humanity. In fact, after the Second World War, violence has become banal. Criminology rates all over the world are increasing, and crimes against humanity are nowadays watched with an empty eye. If we live in an "economy" of violence, to use Derrida's words, it must be a cannibalistic one that regenerates itself and appears every time with a new unconquerable trait. Indeed, violence is everywhere, inevitable, and persistent. Hamilton alludes to this banality of violence with extremely truculent human characters that are, at many instances, creatively evil. Take for example Niely, a man obsessed with power, a serial killer who tortures and kills whoever stands in his way to be the most powerful. This image of the paranormal can be regarded in

this respect as a metaphorical deconstruction of reality. Hamilton exposes the evil aspect of humanity in a call back to a humanistic aspect, which is according to her, faith. In all her novels, Anita wins all her battles thanks to her strong faith not only in God, but also in herself as a human being who makes mistakes and seeks forgiveness. These novels demonstrate that what matters in violence is not the ‘instant’ of violence or the moment that precedes it. What matters for humanity is how to live with the impact of its atrocities, learn from its mistakes, and more importantly how to fight evil with compassion with the other and achieve justice

Chapter 3

Rethinking the Construction of Meaning: Urban Fantasy and Reader-Response Theory

While the first two chapters of this thesis center on the form and content of the urban fantasy texts under examination, this chapter will concentrate on the reading experience that the genre elicits. Hamilton's novels are loaded with violence, sexuality, and prejudice. This tension conjures protean reactions from the reader. And this chapter will try to answer the following questions: How does an urban fantasy reader react while and after delving in Hamilton's fantastic world? Can we define a uniform reading experience? How does the heterogeneous nature of the genre affect the reader? And, finally, how does the commercialization of the vampire figure influence the reader's response?

In his essay, "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction", Wolfgang Iser states:

Meanings in literary texts are generated in the act of reading; they are the product of a complex interaction between text and reader, and not qualities that are hidden in the text ... If the individual reader generates the meaning of a text, then it follows that these meanings will always appear individualistic. (5)

Although, his approach to reader response mechanism seems to be individualistic, he prescribes a uniform response for the reader. This uniformity is more blatant in his notion of

indeterminacy. Indeed, Iser asserts that the indeterminacy of the literary text is at the heart of reader's reaction. Accordingly, he analyses the latter within the scope of this indeterminacy that is, in itself, directed by the text's intention. Iser asserts:

The more texts lose their determinacy, the more the reader is shifted into the full operation of their possible intentions. If indeterminacy exceeds the reader's limit of tolerance, he will feel overburdened. He can in that case reveal attitudes that might lead to a rather surprising insight into what usually determines his reactions. (6)

For Iser, it is quintessential to scrutinize the nature of the literary text in order to decipher the connections established, by the text's intention, between the reader and the literary form. That's why he ascertains that the literary text is not expository of a "factual" object that exists outside itself like other kinds of texts, although it produces its objects out of the elements to be found in the external world. "At this point there arises a certain amount of indeterminacy which is peculiar to all literary texts, for they permit no referral to any identical real-life situations." (7) According to Iser, this formal indeterminacy elicits three kinds of reactions in the reader to fill what he refers to as "indeterminacy gaps." As a primary reaction, the reader resists this indeterminacy through referring the text to the external and considering it as a reflection of this world. If the identification with the fictional world is impossible, the gap is rather filled with comparison and criticism. And finally, the reader may react by reducing the text to the level of his own experience (7-8). "Whenever this happens, indeterminacy tends to disappear, because communication has occurred." (8) Moreover, Iser argues that the literary

object occurs through the “schematized views” that “give a concrete form for the reader to contemplate” (8). These views constitute a formal “condition” to indeterminacy— although all of them are determined by the intention of the text— since they are interspersed by recurrent gaps. These gaps not only invoke a free-play in the interpretation of the connections between the schematized views, but also constitute a fundamental element for the reader’s response. Iser contends that texts with minimal indeterminacy tend to be “tedious” for they do not allow enough participation on the part of the reader, “for it is only when the reader is given the chance to participate actively that he will regard the text, whose intention he himself has helped to compose as real” (10). Furthermore, Iser asserts that there is a whole repertoire of structures and elementary narrative techniques that the reader is not aware of. And these structures create indeterminacy gaps at manifold levels including the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic levels. In addition, he argues that: “Whatever the distribution of gaps on each of these respective levels, they will have different consequences for the process of steering the reader, the direction of which is to a large extent dependent on the specific textual level at which the gaps predominate” (15). Iser propounds that one of the most important techniques that accentuate the indeterminacy of the literary text is the cutting technique, which is manifested through serialized novels. This interruption or prolongation that comes at a moment of suspense further facilitates the reader’s participation in the making of meaning.

While Iser observes the effects of this technique from a text to another in serial fiction, urban fantasy demonstrates that this cutting technique is even more efficient in each and every new chapter of the text. For instance, Hamilton’s novels display breathtaking pauses within the text itself. All these pauses come at moments of great tension, and crave another chapter with answers and revelations. In *Circus of the Damned*, one chapter ends with “It was time to

go armed to the teeth, ready for bear, or dragon, or vampire” (184). Another chapter ends in confession and supplication: “If I said a body was safe, they believed me. And I’d been wrong. God help me, I’d been wrong” (113). The same novel ends with:

Jean-Claude hasn’t given up. He keeps sending me gifts. I keep refusing them. I have to keep saying no until he gives up, or until hell freezes over, whichever comes first. Most women complain that there are no single, straight men left. I’d just like to meet someone who’s human. (303)

This abrupt stoppage of the story at tense instances of the plot and its open ending incite further participation from the reader, who tries to schematize views and meaning in his attempt to fill these gaps— although more participation is expected when gaps are larger. The novel ends with an opening of new scenarios. The reader is left with an untold story, cited as a detail, but also a story that cannot escape her attention; and thus, her interpretation and evaluation. Her response is, indeed, indeterminate only because of the free play of the signs in the fantastic field of the urban fantasy object. Moreover, urban fantasy genre defies Iser’s conception of the literary object; for the fictionalizing act in this genre does expose objects that exist outside the literary object while, at the same time, performing other intentionally or unintentionally concealed actions. The literary object is not identical with a “real” object, but in its simulacrum, it exposes itself and “factual” objects as interrelated entities. For instance, if we consider Hamilton’s characters as literary objects, we will find that the reader’s identification with these characters and the “affect” she develops towards them can but highlight some degree of referentiality in their characterization. Simultaneously, their

paranormal force is to allow the flexibility of their presentation, which stresses indeterminacy in the act of signification. Iser also posits that “being regarded as real” or “believing in the literary text” is the ultimate intention of both reader and the text. Actually, our identification with a text is proven to be, as in urban fantasy, far beyond our emotional attachment to reality and its dictates. Indeed, despite the prevalence of fantastic “unreal” elements in the text, urban vampire literature continues to fascinate a large fandom of the genre. However, this fantastic presence enforces further indeterminacy, and thus, further participation from the reader. Iser explains the role of indeterminate elements in what follows:

We can say that the indeterminate elements of literary prose— perhaps even of all literature— represent a vital link between text and reader. They are the switch that activates the reader into using his own ideas in order to fulfill the intention of the text. This means that they are the basis for a textual structure in which the reader’s art is already incorporated. (28)

It follows that the meaning constructed by the reader is conditioned by the text itself “but only in a form that allows the reader himself to bring it out” (29). The question here becomes: if the text has an intention and the reader is guided in the meaning construction, then how is this intention fulfilled in the reading process— or should we say the interpretation process? The answer is, to use Iser’s words, that the texts intention is accomplished by the guided projections of the reader’s imagination: “Even though the literary text has its reality not in the world of objects but in the imagination of its reader, it wins a certain precedence over texts that seek to make a statement concerning meaning or truth; in short, over those that claim or

have an apophantic character” (29). Here Iser differentiates between the imagination of the reader and the imaginary of the text. Indeed, any text, whether literary or not, has its own truth “value” that can be deciphered only in the readers imagination. The reader’s task is to use what is there in order to make his own truth within the scope of the text’s intention since “the reality of a literary text comes to life within the reader’s imagination” (29). As a result, we might argue that this burst in urban fantasy of what has become a culture within the culture, is due to a richness in the vampire cult— as displayed in the reality of the text— that endows the reader with the freedom of awakening his deepest fantasies without risking his serenity. Iser argues that:

People have always tended to enjoy taking part in the fictitious dangers of the literary world; they like to leave their own security and enter into realms of thought and behavior which are by no means always elevating. Literature simulates life, not in order to portray it, but in order to allow the reader to share in it. He can step out of his pleasure and pain without being involved in any consequences whatsoever. (29)

Hamilton’s urban fantasy is a mixture of the fantastic and the gothic, of the unattained and the unruly. Her paranormal world takes us in a journey to our inner self, to our repressed world, a world that questions our taboos, while simultaneously brings them to the surface. This interplay between the fantastic, the real, and the fictive on the one hand and between what constitutes an urban fantasy text and the reader on the other hand, renders a further exploration of the workings of this triad crucial. In this respect, Iser always relates the reader’s response to

the structure of the text and its components. In his book *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*, he explains: "... The real, the fictive, and what we shall henceforth call the imaginary. It is out of this triad that the text arises: just as the text cannot be confined to those of its elements which are taken from referential reality, so it cannot be pinned down to its fictional features" (2). This triad functions in what is likely to be a free play that is quite manipulated by the text's intention, and more specifically, by the text's genre. In other words, the role of each component and its operation within the literary text is set by the genre's specificities and its dictates. However, the mechanism behind this interplay is the same:

Just as the fictionalizing act outstrips the determinacy of the real, so it provides the imaginary with the determinacy that it would not otherwise possess. In so doing, it enables the imaginary to take an essential quality of the real, for determinacy is a minimal definition of reality. This is not, of course, to say that the imaginary is real, although it certainly assumes an appearance of reality in the way it intrudes into and acts upon the given world. (3)

Put differently, Iser perceives the interdependency of these three components (the imaginative, the fictive, and the real) in the fictive text as "a crossing of boundaries," in that the fictionalizing act crosses the boundaries of what it determines and delimits on the one hand, and of what it diffuses in arbitrariness on the other hand. According to him, the fictionalizing act transforms "realities" into indeterminacy, and thus amounts to an act of transgression. Simultaneously, it provides the imaginative with the determinacy it lacks. That is probably

why Iser identifies fantasy as an imaginative fiction with a strong potential for interactive arbitrariness— interactive because it allows an unprecedented liberty in the imagination of the reader. For him fantasy literature and science fiction are “extreme instances of a cognitive coagulation of the imaginary” (238). In these genres, the modification of the imaginary directs the reader’s consciousness towards the mere act of modification. As a result, “reality is completely nullified, and fantasy parades in the “garments” of that nullified reality” (239). A description that makes the negating factor clear is that of Irwin:

Fantasy re-combines and inverts the real, but it does not escape it: it exists in a parasitical or symbiotic relation to the real. The fantastic cannot exist independently of that ‘real world’ which it seems to find so frustratingly finite... The actual world is constantly present in fantasy, by negation... fantasy is what could not have happened ...what cannot exist... the negative subjunctivity, the cannot or could not, constitutes in fact the chief pleasure of fantasy. (qtd in Iser 239)

According to Iser, the countless images in fantasy literature not only shed light on the helplessness of cognition, but also give precedence to the imaginary and relegate “reality” to a secondary position. At this point, the reader’s focused consciousness is suspended and overwhelmed by the fantasy’s imaginary that is turned into a tangible object consisting in the factual existence of the non-real. This creates a mental state of hesitation in the readers who are confronted with an illusionary literary object out of their reach. Readers are torn between their awareness of the unreality of the story and the reality quality that the latter adopts.

Indeed, Iser ascertains that “fantasy negates reality only in order to give real clothing to the unreal. In this way, readers are induced to accept things that go against all expectations and credibility, although, of course, these unrealities must always retain adequate degree of plausibility.” (245) Nevertheless, in the urban fantasy texts under study, the fantastic does not suppress reality. It rather amplifies it in an unusual atmosphere to alleviate the potency of “appalling” realities. We are not alienated when we read fantasy; we are rather thrown into our own fears, lacks, flaws, and deepest needs. Hamilton’s paranormal creatures need to be touched and cuddled like all the rest of us. Their need is magnified, and with it, the fear that comes with that hunger for affection. For instance, in *Blue Moon*, Marianne explains to Anita what the latter considers as the uncontrollable sexuality of the werewolf pack:

It means that every time one of the lycanthropes disrobes, you are embarrassed. Every time one of them touches you, you take it sexually. That isn’t always what they mean. A healthy pack or pard is built up of a thousand gentle touches. A million small comforts... True parenthood is built over years of interdependency. The bond between the pack is built much the same way. (341)

In this passage, readers see their own need of the touch and the sincere affection that comes with it. Hamilton’s world of monsters highlights the readers’ flaws and magnifies their needs. The way lycanthropes crave Anita’s attention, touch, and love alludes to a deep human need. While humans in the factual world are losing their unity to the monotony of feeling, Hamilton sends — through her monsters— calls to what has been a humane character of human relationships. The images of lycanthropes “dying” for a hug or a kiss, or someone to brush

their hair (such as Nathaniel on page 342 for instance), reflects a purely human hunger for affection. As a result, the reader's consciousness is rather enacted as if s/he is watching a human phenomenon through a microscope: the reality is there, shocking, a little bit distorted, but all patent.

In his book *the Fictive and the Imaginary*, Iser defines two kinds of fantasy literature according to the reader's response. One uses rhetoric and psychology to familiarize the reader with its fantastic elements so that the split in the reader's consciousness is sustained, and the other integrates this break in the acknowledged order so that the reader is left in a state of doubt. In the first kind the split is to be concealed, and in the second it is to be played out. Actually, Hamilton's urban fantasy manifests both kinds of fantasy literature. On the one hand, the urbanization of the vampire story and the humanistic presentation of the paranormal as a whole familiarize the reader with the fantasy it presents. On the other hand, the intriguing occurrences in the plot defy the conventional and give the reader a certain degree of liberty in contemplation. Iser asserts that:

The popularity of fantasy literature suggests that the slitting of consciousness corresponds to some basic human requirement. Being something else with one's consciousness without giving up what one thinks oneself to be— this turns out to be a human need that literature uncovers by meeting it in a striking variety of ways, including the extreme form of fantasy literature. (246)

Indeed, one might argue that urban fantasy genre endows its readers with a chance for affirming themselves through sharing in the characters' experiences. Here, the act of reading

turns into a quest for potential identities. If this is the case, Iser's model of the reading experience and its mechanism becomes unpersuasive. Urban fantasy defies Iser's uniformist approach to the reader's response by its heterogeneous nature and the profusion of its images. During the act of reading, readers are captured by this world that "teaches" them about themselves while changing their conception of the real and the imaginary. Meanwhile, the reader is not a passive recipient of this influx of imagery— or unrealities to use Iser's words. S/he is rather an active participant in the making of the plot. Thus, her role is not only to interpret as Iser suggests, but she rather makes her own story out of "the" story. The question here becomes how does she do this? And according to which reality? Is it the reality of the text or a reality that exists outside the text? Baudrillard's notion of simulacrum can answer this question to a certain extent.

In "The Precession of Simulacra," Baudrillard contends that there is no such a thing called reality. In this view, what we refer to as reality is a simulacrum of reality constructed by an act of simulation. This act is "operational" rather than "rational," in that it provides signs in constant operational substitution (343). Actually, for him, reality lies in the act of simulation itself, and all referentiality comes from simulation models:

No more mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept. No more imaginary co-extensivity: rather genetic miniaturization is the dimension of simulation. The real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks, and command models— and with these it can be reproduced an infinite number of times. It no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer

measured against some ideal or negative instance. It is nothing more than operational. (343)

Reality for Baudrillard cannot be dictated by a set of entities. It can only exist when “enveloped by an imaginary”: since reality production has become only functional and operational, the real is no longer real. It is “a hyperreal, the product of an irradiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere” (343).

In her novels, Hamilton uses vampirism as an imaginary medium to blur the difference between humanity and inhumanity. On the surface, this medium tends to exonerate humanity from all its evils. But, actually, this medium only magnifies what appears to be evil human nature. With every encounter between the two kinds Hamilton’s vampires develop into humans, humans into savages. This binary (human/inhuman) is deterred by an operational process of simulation that creates a specter of signification characterized by substitution and indeterminacy. Hamilton’s world is, therefore, “a hyperreal henceforth sheltered from the imaginary and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and the simulated generation of difference” (344). Baudrillard distinguishes between simulation and representation: for him while representation “starts from the principle that the sign and the real are equivalent,” simulation starts from “the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as reversion and death sentence of every reference” (346). He argues that the mechanics of simulation expose representation as a masked simulacrum. Indeed, he asserts that image-creation goes through these discursive phases:

- It is the reflection of a basic reality.
- It masks and perverts a basic reality.
- It masks the absence of a basic reality.
- It bears no relation to any reality whatever: It is its own pure simulacrum. (346-7)

Accordingly, one might argue that the paranormal world that Hamilton creates in her novels is presented as imaginary to conceal the fact that the “Other” world is no longer real and, thus, save the reality principle. Actually, we can say of Hamilton’s created world what Baudrillard says of Disneyland: Hamilton’s world is “neither true nor false; it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate in reverse the fiction of the real” (352). Baudrillard contends that the act of the so-called representation is not only a nostalgic resurrection of what is expected to be real, but also a paranoiac production of referential models that coincides with material production. Hamilton’s novels are an apotheosis of this complicity. Her paranormal world comes with “accessories:” a whole code of clothing for vampires, humans, and other creatures, not to forget the attitudes that go with them. And it also prompts an endorsement of a new highly stereotyped culture and reproduces models that exist in factual world. In fact, the characters’ outfits seem of great importance for the narrator Anita Blake. The detailed description of the dressing code of each of the paranormal creatures is followed by the protagonist’s own comments and interpretations. It constitutes an essential part of her narration and, in many instances, a basis for a decision to be made. Hamilton’s vampire look is that of punk- rock figures: “He’d threaded a red cord through the belt loops of his black jeans. The cord fell in knots down one side of his hip. The black boots came almost to the tops of his legs, encasing his long, slender legs in leather from toe to nearly groin.” (8) This description

of Jean Claude the master vampire of the city and his presentation as a sexually appealing figure draw attention to the general stereotype that engulfed punk- rock stars and their fans in the late twentieth century. This fandom started to reproduce the same attitudes and the same dressing code. A new fashion emerged and with it many reactions, judgments and stereotypes. Anita's reaction to Jean Claude's outfit is very different from her reaction to Cherry's outfit though the latter follows the same trend: "when I was with him, my stomach dropped to my feet and I had to fight very hard not to say things like golly. I settled for "you look spectacular"" (8). Surprisingly, the same character judges Cherry who has the same style:

The eye shadow was gray, the eyeliner so black it looked like crayon. The lipstick was black. The makeup wasn't the colors I'd chosen for her, but it did match her clothes. Black fishnet stockings, vinyl miniskirt, black go-go boots, and a black lace bra underneath a fishnet shirt (23)

Cherry's look resonates well with the punk fashion that came with a determination to deter all that is considered to be "normal" and "conventional" representation of personhood. It also resonates with paranormal creatures' fans that find themselves in the alternative identities⁶ that the genre offers. The alienation of the characters echoes the alienation of their fandom. Their

⁶ Erik Butler classifies Hamilton's Literature as "vampire books written by woman for woman" (142) since the woman protagonist takes the lead and plays with gender roles. For him, these books are "escapist fantasy"— another classification for Hamilton's writing— because "their heroines' deviation from convention underscores the general validity of the rules governing the readers' world. They provide an imaginary release, not a real one" (142).

portrayal as monsters grants their fandom the freedom of pushing the limits of the factual representation of the unusual and gives them the chance to explore their identity and pronounce their difference. In his book, *The Lure of the Vampire: Gender, Fiction and Fandom from Bram Stoker to Buffy*, Milly Williamson interviews vampire fans who “rather than struggling to internalize the impossible, instead experience themselves as not fitting in:”

Cheryl: At school I found it difficult to make friends and wear trendy clothes. I didn't fit in, I didn't like the way I looked— or the way I was supposed to look and I started getting into the Goth book.

Dee: I went Goth at the age of 16... I guess I have always been a little bit different. (146)

Indeed, these two women, like many other fans, identify with paranormal creatures first because “they (paranormal creatures) do not fit” in a predominantly human world, and second because they do not choose to be “what they are”. The melodramatic presentation of vampires and shape shifters creates a feeling of sympathy towards them despite the threat they present for other species of the paranormal world. This duality of repulsion and attraction, to use Williamson's words, has generated a growing fascination in teenagers and young adults who are forced— in a way or another— into expiating the monsters' violent behaviors, but also into fantasizing about their own identity with them. However, in Hamilton's novels there are many instances where their paranormal (in the sense: not normal) identity is brought to the surface. Her monsters hate their existence and wish they could fit in. Many of them try to hold on “what was left of their humanity.” In *Blue Moon*, Jean Claude, the most feared master

vampire, is described as a desperate lover who tries to win his human girlfriend's full loyalty and devotion. He and Richard the werewolf chose Anita Blake as girlfriend to make them feel less like monsters. And they both "huddle around her humanity like it is the last candle flame in a world of darkness" (274). It seems that Hamilton is intentionally constructing a vibrant characterization of her characters in a way that the reader can experience feelings of attraction and repulsion, and hence a better reflection on the characters and their ever-developing identities. Anita's comment on Cherry's look also illustrates this view, with a tone that is both sarcastic and sympathetic:

She was bitter about it and had turned herself into the slut bride from planet X, as if even in human form, she wanted people to know what she was now: different, other. Trouble was she looked like a thousand other teens and early twenties who also wanted to be different and stand out. (24)

Hamilton's urban fantasies demonstrate that when people started reproducing this attitude— whether in clothing or in other aspects of identity— it ceased to be rebellious. It became another simulacrum that deters itself gradually. In her novels, Hamilton creates a simulacrum of what is there in the factual world only to expose and defy it through her paranormal world. The genre offers her more than one medium: the fantastic, the gothic, and what is said to be real. This easiness in passing judgments or stereotypes— like, for example, "someone who dresses like a punk-rock star is someone who is emotionally unstable", or "being a lawyer means you can't have a sense of humor" (*Circus of the Damned* 138) — raises doubts about the ideology behind using vampirism or other supernatural existence as an

umbrella for passing judgment and creating social phobias. In his definition of ideology, Baudrillard differentiates between ideology and simulation:

Ideology corresponds to a betrayal of reality by sign; simulation corresponds to a short circuit of reality and its reduplication by signs. It is always the aim of ideological analysis to restore the objective process; it is always a false problem to want to restore the truth beneath the simulacrum. (349)

Consequently, if we say that what we find in these novels are operational reproductions of simulacra, we cannot map out any ideological or other framework. The abundance of meaning that simulation accentuates in these narratives imposes a consequent abundance of reactions in readers. Faced with this free play of sign reduplication, reader response becomes irretrievable. In his essay “Transaesthetics,” Baudrillard contends that art disappeared as a “symbolic pact;” in that there are no fixed rules or criteria for aesthetic judgment. The proliferation of signs and their reproduction and recurrent recycling of present and past forms have made art comparable to all the rest of production models. Accordingly, art ceased to be a “pure” production of aesthetic value and entered the machinery of commodity resurrection giving rise to a rather “general aestheticization.” Baudrillard states:

What we are witnessing, beyond the materialist rule of the commodity, is a semio-urgy of everything by means of advertising, the media, or images. No matter how marginal, or banal, or even obscene it may be, everything is subject to aestheticization, culturalization, museumification. Everything is said,

everything is exposed, everything acquires the force, or the manner, of a sign. The system runs less on the surplus-value of the commodity than on the aesthetic surplus-value of the sign. (16)

It is not a surprise, then, finding many references to commodity and its privileged position in a commercial genre like urban fantasy. Hamilton publicizes not only different fashions in dressing codes, but also specific brands of clothing and, more interestingly, of weapons. For instance, In *Blue Moon*, Anita's "Nikes" facilitate her missions in the jungle, police stations, and motels. Her vampire executioner outfit includes black "Nikes" and a browning "Hi-Power" (25). And she expresses the efficiency of her snickers: "I followed in my Nikes, not doing too bad a job. I'm okay in the woods;" (295) she also uses a sawed-off shotgun to finish her enemies in *Guilty Pleasures* (94). This precision cannot be spontaneous, but at the same time it does not necessarily have direct consequences. It rather rejuvenates the images that we might find anywhere and everywhere.

In Baudrillard's trans-aesthetic world of simulation, we are freed from reality, the realer than real is produced, and the process of simulation has escalated to reach every aspect of our lives without discrimination. Everything is subject to aestheticization, culturization, and museumification. And anything can acquire the meaning of a sign. "The system runs less on the surplus-value of the commodity than on the aesthetic surplus-value of the sign." (16) Within this world of surrealism there thwart two kinds of markets according to Baudrillard: one that is conducted by a speculative hierarchy of values, and one that is uncontrollable and fluctuating in the financial market with no objective other than defying the law of value. Nevertheless, Baudrillard propounds that this must not horrify us: "there is nothing immoral

here. Just as present-day art is beyond beautiful and ugly, the market for its part is beyond good and evil.” (19) So how are we supposed to react to art? Can we be neutral (or indifferent) while reading a work of literature? Of course we cannot. What Baudrillard is suggesting is rather stop perceiving the artwork as a subject of interpretation. In other words, instead of looking for “what the text says not,” we should start looking at what the text says; that is, we should keep to the surface. In his article “On Seduction,” Baudrillard stresses the seductive aspect of what he calls the appearance of literature or other art forms. Seduction, for Baudrillard, is “that which extracts meaning from discourse and detracts it from its truth” (152). In his view, appearances are not devoid of seriousness or sense. In this surface, the signs at play are seduced, and this very process of seduction necessitates further exploration. It is, thus, more important than the emergence of any truth. Interpretative discourse annuls this aspect of appearance in its search for hidden truth. In this context Baudrillard argues:

Discourse must struggle not so much against the secrets of the unconscious as against the superficial abyss of its own appearance. And if it must overcome something, it is not fantasies and hallucinations, which are full of meaning and counter-meaning, but rather the brilliant surface of nonsense and all the play that it makes possible. (153)

Baudrillard also posits that interpretation, as a strategy, can be a very fragile model of simulation that structures discourse in order to hide its seductive potential that has begun to threaten interpretative discourse. He disparages literary criticism that is based on the conviction that art is there to be interpreted and analyzed as a codified system. For him, the

world is clear, and even truth itself aims to uncover things. “Seduction still retains, from truth itself, the most sibylline answer, which is that “perhaps we only wish to uncover truth because it is so difficult to imagine it naked.”” (169) According to this view, one might argue that the reader response occurs rather through the interaction between the reader and the surface of the text. In this view, the reader is not supposed to interpret the text and search for meaning between its lines. The act of reading is lured by the translucent surface of the text and the world created in its lines exists only within the imagination of its reader.

Iser’s ideation of reader response can be listed as an uniformistic approach to reader response theory. Not only does it regard interpretation as the sole reaction that a reading experience impels, but it also overlooks the affect of the text—or to use Baudrillard’s words the “pleasure” of the sign. Indeed, it is the appearance of the text that enacts an emotional engagement with the reader. However, one must not discriminate this surface by diminishing the value of its effect. For instance, in Hamilton’s urban fantasy, romance, erotica and the sexual scenes cannot pass unobserved. The process of aestheticization of everything cannot underestimate the saturation of sexual images, violence, and prejudice in these novels, or their inescapable effect. The reader must appreciate these images with interest and not with indifference as Baudrillard suggests. And with the images the reader is seduced by the implication of these images on the plot. Hamilton’s urban fantasies are loaded with perverted erotic scenes that can include sexual abuse. The child master vampire Nickolaos sexually harasses the narrator in *Guilty Pleasures*. The latter seems to be more conservative when weak and vulnerable. In *Blue Moon*, sexuality escalates as the protagonist becomes stronger. Being the strongest in a paranormal triumvirate—a power circle of three that feeds on sex— Anita is liberated from her former taboos. She cheats on her boyfriend Jean Claude with her Ex-

boyfriend Richard without any feelings of regret. The description of their sexual affair is detailed, and the presence of Raina's "munin" within Anita's body and the paranormal passion of Richard are there to make the affair more legitimate and the description of it more sublime. On another occasion, sexuality is used to threaten an enemy. Anita, who is a victim of sexual abuse in *Guilty Pleasures* and in *Circus of the Damned*, now uses sex to frighten out answers, to torture in order to get her answers:

Jason moved to my stomach, licking along the top of my jeans. They were soaked in blood... Zane curved around to my back, licking along my spine... "Who sent you Terry?" I made it as a whisper, intimate, for his ears only. I reached out to him, and when I trailed my finger down his cheek, he whimpered. I leaned forward and licked a quick line the length of his face. "You taste like food Terry." (236-7)

In this passage, Anita uses the "munin", which is a devil soul that entered her body and that feeds on sex and violence, to terrorize a man and to heal her wounded friend. Sexuality here can heal but also can destroy and terrorize. It can abuse the disdained and save the dearest.

Obviously, neither the urban fantasy genre nor Hamilton created this dichotomy of sexual presentation. It is only an aspect of the aesthetization of this domain. Actually, it is not Hamilton's novels that are saturated with these images. Her world is a simulation of what she perceives as "factual" or "real." Her works divert these realities by distorting their stereotypical presentation. No one can deny that sexuality has become another commodity, used to sell, to buy, to destroy, and to save. It has developed into another form of production

that reduplicates itself in a simulative process. Hamilton's model of sexuality is another simulacrum of sexuality and erotica that have invaded the media, the arts, and all aspects of social life. In her fantasy, an angel-face child is a master vampire who abuses older people, the protagonist included. Nicholaos, the little master vampire, has a human male servant who is served blood and power in front of the protagonist who cannot look at this scene. "I looked away, staring at anything but them," she says, but still she can describe it: "I could not see Burchard's face as he leaned forward. His face buried between her breasts. She tensed, back arching. Soft, sucking sounds filled the room's stillness." After this ghastly description of the perverted relationship between a child and an adult, Anita describes the reaction of Nicholaos when the scene ends: "Nicholaos sat very still, head back, eyes closed. Perhaps sex wasn't such a bad analogy after all" (243). These images tackle issues that are present in factual life. Adultery, child abuse, sex slavery had become the most important subjects in media or other mediums of communication in the American society during the twentieth century. Hamilton presents these matters in an atypical way— a way that thrills and reconstitutes— in order to highlight the flaws of their stereotypical presentation in real life, but also to provoke further reflection from the reader.

The growth in Anita's personality is accompanied by discoveries she makes about her sexuality, religion, and values. Being dazzling and unexpected, the images she presents through her narration not only deconstruct the system of presentation outside urban fantasy, but it also provide simulative models of how things "can be seen" by a strong woman. In an interview published in SF Site, the interviewer Alisa McCune asked Hamilton: "Many fans have lamented the change in the *Anita Blake* series with the introduction of sexuality. The difference in sexual content from *Guilty Pleasures* to *Cerulean Sins* is dramatic. Why did the

sexuality evolve and what impact has it had on the story line arc?” Hamilton’s answer was: “Chiefly because people told me I couldn’t. That I couldn’t write strong sexuality from a woman’s point of view. The series simply evolved as it has.” The writer admits in her answer that she is passing the borders of presentation that are established in the real world through using urban fantasy as a tool for an alternative simulacrum. *Anita Blake* series has proven to draw too much attention from the media, but also from ordinary readers. Its large fandom interacts directly with the writer herself. They blame her for killing characters, or for the burst of sexuality and its importance in the plot. In an interview published in Locus Online, Hamilton seems to be very proud of the response she is getting from her fans, and their variety:

I love my fans, because they are such wide demographics. They go from everything from teens to 50+. I have a wide romance following, and a wide following among people - especially men - who have a violent background, military or police or whatever. A lot of the men say they don’t read horror or fantasy, but they read my books... It has been a diverse fan group for me. With the new series starting up, it will be interesting to see what the fans think. (1)

Nevertheless, in her blog, she answers what she called “negative readers” after they insulted her for the “quality” of her writing:

I’m sure there are other books out there that will make you happier than mine. There are books with less sex in them, God knows. There are books that don’t

make you think that hard. Books that don't push you past that comfortable envelope of the mundane. If you want to be comforted, don't read my books.

They aren't comfortable books. (1)

The interaction between the writer and her readers here suggests another kind of reader response: the kind in which readers may participate in the series' plot development, feel the loss when one of the characters dies, publish feedbacks and interact with other readers through blogs or other websites. Other "fans" as Hamilton calls them may write parodies where they can criticize the series, or bring a character back to life. The audience of this literature proves that the reader's reaction— and my use of the word "reaction" makes more sense now— has passed the expectations of reader response theories. Indeed, the reader is not a passive "consumer" of this literature, and s/he is definitely not exclusively an interpreter. The reader does not need interpretation to fetch some hidden secret meaning, and cannot be indifferent to the appearance of the artwork that keeps luring and/or distracting her/him. The reading experience of urban fantasy genre in general and Hamilton's series in particular evinces that reading is a highly individual/personal experience, but also a highly interactive one. Readers' reading is not an automatic process. It is, as urban fantasy pronounces, an "affectionate encounter".

Conclusion

Although Laurell K. Hamilton seems to distance herself from any philosophical or generic framing of her work in all her interviews, it seems that she was totally aware of the philosophical revolution of the late twentieth century. Indeed, she reproduces the same of politics of subversion that postmodernist literature manifested, especially at the stylistic and thematic levels.

In my master thesis, I investigated the construction of meaning through the structure of the urban fantasy language. I dealt with meaning as the outcome of the interaction at the level of linguistic signs. I also tracked the evolution of what appeared to be “inflated signs—” to use Derrida’s terminology— that were at the heart of the construction of meaning through the novels. My concern was not “form” and what it may prescribe on the literary work, but rather the construction of meaning through the permutation of these signs with their never fixed, ever evolving, and inflated content. The semantic and linguistic operations of the signs are what make a vampire Hamilton’s vampire. These operations are also what make the word “religion” more than a linguistic sign and its connotation more than a single static definition. Through the interplay of signs and their contents, Hamilton challenges the stagnation of meaning in the factual world. Her “child” is more than an angelic face with hope and innocence. She is not stigmatized even by divinity. In Hamilton’s writing, every sign is given new possibilities of signification and mediums of presentation. Historical context is brought into this interplay as a sign that participates in the creation of meaning, rather than a factor affecting her writing from the outside. Moreover, the saturation in these signs implies an “absence” that is displayed not only through the absence of the

conventional connotations of a sign, but also the disintegration of the language system and the recurrent ruptures of its overall structure.

Disorder and fragmentation were depicted not only stylistically, but also thematically. Themes in these novels are, actually, as composite as their structure. The meaning of the sign “violence” is the most regenerating one. Directly stated or inherent in the occurrences of the plot, violence is everywhere in and outside the stories. That is why, violence mechanisms and its workings have been major concerns in the postmodern thought. While describing these mechanisms in Hamilton’s urban fantasies, I tried to explain what happens in the instant preceding the act of truculence and at the time of its execution. Indeed, violence is a ‘mad’ decision that has mad consequences. To further scrutinize violence as portrayed in the novels, it was quintessential to study it in relation to its causes and its logic. These novels demonstrate that violence is part of human nature. It is part of our language, our juridical system, and our social order. We live, like Hamilton’s characters, in what Derrida refers to as an “economy of violence”. Urban fantasy as a genre manifests a great fear of the other. It evinces that the origins of any violent act lies in the inter-subjective relationship between highly paranoid counterparts. In her novels, Hamilton associates atrocity with the paranormal, the evil, and the supernatural. Her protagonist Anita fights evil, sometimes by endorsing some of its attitudes, its hatred, and its brutality. In her decision, she goes through Derrida’s “ordeal of the undecidable” to make a decision about the action to be taken next. Through telling us the story of a violent complex society, Hamilton makes a statement about violence: it is inescapable, and even necessary to achieve justice and protect the weak. What matters in her novels is not the means that her protagonist uses to achieve these ultimate goals, what matters is winning the battle against criminality even if

that means losing or changing some of oneself “principles”. Whether intentional or not, violence apparatus in these urban fantasies inspires and are inspired by many postmodern theories about violence. The image that Hamilton provides through the paranormal world is a familiar one. And my second chapter elucidated this familiarity. Hamilton not only ponders on postmodern conception of violence through her novel, but also provides answers through the resolutions made by her characters to live within a “moderate” economy of violence.

My third chapter elicited the reader’s response to Hamilton’s urban fantasies. The linguistically and semantically heterogeneous nature of the genre affects the reader’s response, and the commercialization of the vampire figure influence the reader’s reception. My point of departure was Iser’s prominent reader-response theory to illustrate how urban fantasy subverts any kind of prescription or expectation of reader’s response. I discussed Hamilton’s created world through Baudrillard’s concept of “simulation”, but also his notions of “seduction” and “appearance”. My aim was proving that the world created by Hamilton has become very popular because of its familiarizing effect, because it simulates reality without being faithful to the latter’s dictates. Although, everything is clear as Baudrillard claims, we cannot completely rely on the text’s clarity or its appearance to communicate meaning. In my third chapter, I also discussed the fact that we cannot deal with an urban fantasy-reader as an interpreter. Meaning in these novels does not lie in the text’s surface or between its lines. This genre has proven that the reading experience is highly personal and defiant of stigmatization. Indeed, this Hamilton’s paranormal world has provided its fandom not only with mediums to explore new identities and new possibilities of being, but also with the opportunity of participating in the making of the series.

Although I concluded my third chapter with refusing interpretation as the sole reader-response, all that I did in my thesis can be described as “interpretation”. I prefer to call my reading experience a “critical reading”. However, I have to admit that my first experience with the genre as “a normal reader”— not as a critic— was a lot more fun.

Many critics recognize Hamilton’s work as a turning point in both fantasy and gothic genre. However, it seems that Hamilton’s urban fantasy conjured polemic readings rather than analytic ones. Many critics describe her writings as “commercial” or “popular” literature, only in the negative connotations of such classifications. This literature is dealt with as second-degree literature— or more frequently as “literature for adolescents, or women for women literature—” and thus, a light literature devoid of depth, calling nothing but fear that it might damage the future generations. The large fandom of the “Anita Blake” series hurls defiance at such claims. My findings show that “a commercial genre” like urban fantasy is the more worthy of academic attention. The fact that these novels are bestsellers announces not only the depth of the text but also the emergence of a new generation of readership. People’s tastes are, indeed, changing, and literature continue to execute a crucial role in this rather natural cultural progression. Literature is challenging critical analysis that has to adapt to its evasiveness. It is as if with every new literary creation, literature is making it all clear that art interacts with its theorization but is never limited by the latter’s constraints.

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