Specters of the Post-postmodern Vampire: The shift from postmodern to post-postmodern literature through the vampire and hauntology

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Introduction

Human beings make sense of the world through the stories they tell. As a species, humans connect with each other and the society they are part of through narratives, "by articulating experiences through forms and frameworks of accepted narrative structure" as argued by Keith Scott (Scott 18). Literature, thus, arguably plays a significant role in constructing individual and social identities (19). Hence, as societies change, the stories that are told change as well, and with them the meanings that are interwoven with them, narratives change with society. Therefore, as Slavoj Žižek argues in *Looking Awry*, changes in narrative patterns can be seen as symptomatic of larger shifts presented in societies (Žižek 44). One can closely analyze societal changes, so illustrates Žižek, by paying close attention to the shifts in the medium of literature. As theoreticians and writers such as Slavoj Žižek, Sunyoung Ahn, John Doyle and David Foster Wallace have suggested, it seems as if our society is currently undergoing a paradigmatic shift. The postmodernist paradigm may still be predominant, but there are early signs that it is shifting towards a new, 'post-postmodern' one. While this new paradigm is not as dominant as postmodernism in contemporary society, changes are nonetheless visible. This new post-postmodern paradigm, which I will discuss in greater detail in chapter two, attempts a more sincere approach towards the world, opposed to the more ironic stance of postmodernism.[1] In this thesis I will analyze this shift by focusing on one common topos that is found within different paradigms. The vampire has been an ever-present figure in high culture as well as popular culture. This creature of the night seems to be deeply woven into the very fabric of contemporary Western society, thriving on its blood for nearly two centuries (Nick Groom, "Conclusion"). Despite certain reoccurring elements of the vampire, this figure and its stories have changed through the centuries. From a Gothic-horror monster in *Dracula*, to an ironic pastiche in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to a

sparkling heartthrob in *Twilight*. The vampire seems to transform with societies, continuously embodying the *zeitgeist* of contemporary society.

In my BA thesis I analyzed the transformation of the vampire stories of the late 2010s in literature by situating it within the paradigm shift from postmodernism to post-postmodernism.[2] This thesis will be built on my earlier work and aims to understand recent vampire stories in the new decade of the 2020s, in light of the emergence of the so-called post-postmodern paradigm. The works I will concentrate on within this thesis are a collection of short-stories by the title *Vampires Never Get Old*, the novel *Dracula's Child* and the comic book titled *Fangs*. Before further introducing my case-studies, I will give a brief overview of the history of the figure of the vampire and its literary birth.

Roots of the vampire, its lore. The myth of the vampire finds its origin in folktales of medieval Eastern Europe. Tales of horror and folktales about blood-drinking monsters or malevolent spirits returning from the dead to haunt the living, have been present all throughout the history of humankind (Groom, "Foreword"). And yet, the vampire can be seen as a completely unique monster in comparison with its ancient predecessors. It was not until the folktales of Eastern Europe came in contact with Western European thinkers, during the eighteenth century, that the vampire *as* vampire was born. Or, as Nick Groom illustrates in his book *The Vampire: A New History*:

> [T]hey only become 'vampires' *qua* vampires when they enter the European bloodstream *as vampires*, rather than as part of the general pantheon of the undead, many of whom – ghosts, ghouls, revenants – have displayed their taste for blood for centuries. But they are not vampires. ("Foreword")

In the eighteenth century, the Age of Enlightenment had started to flourish, bringing a new and more rational, or scientific if you will, framework to Western thought (ch.4). When

folktales about the blood-sucking monster of East Europe made their way into the West, they formed an unprecedented challenge to the rational explanation of other specters and monsters that the Enlightenment had slain, as the vampire is a true hybrid, not only between human and monster, but also between myth and science. Because, unlike ghosts, demons, and other specters, this creature could be examined in an empirical way, the vampire had a body that could be closely examined and scrutinized. It therefore did not take long before these creatures became a 'hot topic' within the media, and soon it found its name; the *vampire* (ch.1). This creature of the night had made its way to Britain soon after its entrance within the West of Europe and became a common imaginary within this influential country (ch.1). In a country that "had weathered civil war and regicide, restoration and rebellion to lead the global economy through free enterprise and colonial exploitation," the vampire became a highly politicized creature. Not long after, the enigmatic vampire came to represent cultural, social, political, scientific or psychological fears that could take the shape of this creature, solidifying the vampire in the Age of Enlightenment and rationality (ch1). The figure of the vampire was the embodiment of both the empirical and rational body, as well as a metaphor and supernatural monster. Ever since its birth, the creature of the vampire has been an ambiguous figure, walking the line of the in-between. This very ambiguity of the vampire, making it both metaphor and reality, alive and dead, as well as both corporal and spectral, had inspired humankind for generations, whilst managing to escape all explanation (ch.4). Always in transformation, this shape-shifter can take every form and is often argued to be "good to think with" ("Foreword").

The figure of the vampire has captivated generations of writers with its cryptic mystery of being. Exactly this ambiguous space and metaphorical power of the vampire made this creature so interesting for literary use. Writers considered vampires to be fictitious creatures and made them once again part of the realm of stories within the nineteenth century

(ch.5). The first (known) case of the literary vampire had been written by Heinrich August Ossenfelder (ch.5). He had written the poem "Der Vampir" for a German scientific journal called *Der Naturforscher* (James B. Twitchell 34,35). While within the Enlightenment the corporality of the vampire was mostly highlighted, within its literary birth this figure had seized the full potential of its metaphorical use. Having conquered the common imagery, the vampire would champion the medium of literature, in particular, the genre of the Gothic (Groom ch.5). In the medium of literature, the figure of the vampire would flourish, and two works can be credited to the still prevalent success of the vampire, John Polidori's novella *The Vampyre*, published in 1819 and Bram Stokers *Dracula*, which was published in 1897 (ch.5).

If one wants to consider the contemporary iterations of the vampire, it is essential to look back at the figure of Bram Stokers' Count Dracula. Published in 1897, the book *Dracula* has been present in perhaps all subsequent iterations of the vampire, as it "is no exaggeration to suggest that vampirology 'After *Dracula*' will never fully escape the clutches of Stoker's iconic text" (ch.8). The figure of Dracula has invited many different readings, simultaneously universalizing and pluralizing the figure of the vampire ("Conclusion"). Not only has *Dracula* generated countless of different iterations of vampires, it has also "provided material for an endless series of homages, pastiches, ripoffs and reboots" (Scott 22). One of these is the book *Dracula's Child* by J.S. Barnes, which will be discussed in chapter three. When Bram Stoker published his book, it did not only take the medium of literature by storm, but also the medium of film, making the vampire Dracula tremendously popular (Groom, "Conclusion"). With the film *Dracula* in 1931, the director Tod Browning started a golden age of horror within the cinematic industry, as the book had done with literature ("Conclusion"). The success of *Dracula* solidified the figure of the vampire within modern media, and the blossoming industry of new media and popular mass culture. Dracula

functioned as an example for the vampires to come, as he became to epitomize that what was deemed interesting about the vampire within media, namely that "they represent a world in which the human no longer has dominion, or reliable understanding, and so offer a sublime glimpse of a wider, if unknowable, world" (ch.6). Through the era of Romanticism and Gothic horror, the vampire became a more complex and active villain. Attention had shifted more towards the enigma of the vampire than the outwards monstrosity of the creature. It is not with much surprise, then, that the iterations of the vampire after *Dracula* have come to represent a new symbolic. No longer symbolizing only the fears and anxieties of society burdened by its monstrosity, but also the complexity of societal desires and ideals. The figure of the vampire is able to embody both ends of the spectrum of what is feared and desired simultaneously. Due to the vampire shedding its creepy skin, we are now able to see ourselves "reflected" in the vampire (Deborah Mutch 8). However, with this 'humanization' of the figure of the vampire, critical voices have been raised to lament the end of the vampire as monster, and with this the end of the vampire as a productive figure for thought experiments (Groom, "Conclusion"; Twitchell 140). Much can be said, however, to contest these claims.

The revival of the contemporary vampire. While within the prime of postmodernism the vampire had seemed to have vanished, the immortal has once again taken its place in the spotlight. Within this thesis I will discuss this new entrance on stage by the post-postmodern vampire. As the postmodern paradigm leaves its irony behind, shifting to a more sincere approach in the post-postmodern paradigm, the figure of the vampire will inherit these qualities. Analyzing the figure of the vampire in contemporary literature, could add to the academic debate about the paradigm shift in contemporary Western society. This claim I will substantiate in the upcoming four chapters. Firstly, by giving a short introduction of society

within the postmodern paradigm and literary theory of the postmodern. In this chapter I will give a brief example of the postmodern vampire, exemplified by the vampire figure in *Twilight*. Secondly, in chapter two I will discuss the anthology *Vampires Never Get Old*, published in 2020 and edited by Zoraida Córdova and Natalie C. Parker. I have selected this specific anthology for its diverse and autobiographical approach towards the figure of the vampire by upcoming writers. Through the analyses of three works from *Vampires Never Get Old*, I will illustrate the transformation of the post-postmodernist paradigm through the figure of the vampire. In the third chapter, I will take a look at the concept of hauntology and the close relation it bears with the figure of the vampire. This will be made clear through an analysis of the book *Dracula's Child*. Written by J.S. Barnes, *Dracula's Child* is one of many attempts at a sequel to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. I have selected this work specifically due to the unique usage of the child Quincey and J.S. Barnes imitation of Stoker's writing-style.[3] Lastly, I will introduce the concept of the hauntological dominant as a theoretical strategy of the post-postmodernist paradigm. The concept of the hauntological dominant questions the hauntological context within a text, questioning the sense of truth and historical awareness. I propose that the concept of the 'hauntological dominant' is currently replacing the earlier postmodern 'ontological dominant'. This concept I will further illustrate by analyzing passages from the comic book *Fangs*, which I have selected due to its, I would argue, post-postmodern vampire figure. Through the analysis of the contemporary iterations of the figure of the vampire I will investigate the following questions in this thesis: Through what literary strategy is the figure of the vampire within literature able to express the paradigm shift in our contemporary Western society from postmodernism to post-postmodernism and how this post-postmodern paradigm is reflected in contemporary literature.

Chapter 1. A brief introduction: the dominant and postmodern vampire

The figure of the vampire has been an ambiguous being right from the start. It walks a fine line between the dead and living, being 'good' or 'bad' and the self and Other. Flickering between modes of dualism, the vampire seems to simultaneously embody both and neither. It is because of this enigmatic power that the figure of the vampire has stayed relevant and intriguing in popular media for so long (Groom, "Foreword"). In the introduction I have argued that the figure of the vampire seems to have disappeared into postmodern society, becoming part of its very fabric. In this chapter, I will further elaborate on the claim that the vampire has become a part of the postmodern society. Before I will focus on the figure of the vampire, however, I will make a brief outline of the postmodern paradigm within the medium of literature. Throughout the subsequent chapters I will highlight the post-postmodern paradigm in literature through different close-readings. Both postmodernism and post-postmodernism cannot be reduced to one theory or set of tokens, as both paradigms endorse a plurality of different theories and perspectives (Mal Leicester 73). However, postmodernism and post-postmodernism can be seen as umbrella-terms and will be treated as such within this thesis. It would be an impossible endeavor to cover all theories that these paradigms embody. Therefor this thesis will focus on one position within the academic debate surrounding postmodernism and post-postmodernism. In this chapter I will first illustrate the postmodern paradigm in literary theory by consulting Brian McHale's influential book *Postmodernist Fiction*. Specifically, I want to highlight McHale's concept of the 'dominant'. In the subsequent chapters I will consider how the figure of the vampire can be used to construct a notion of a 'post-postmodern dominant', which I will introduce in chapter four. To end this chapter, I will give a brief example of the postmodern vampire to which the post-postmodern iteration of the vampire can be contrasted.

Postmodern strategies of literature. Within the postmodern paradigm, there is not a single "systematic theory or unified movement", however, there are certain key-factors that make the postmodern recognizable as such (Leicester 73). There is quite the difference in how these factors are identified, but there is nonetheless a general consensus as to what makes postmodernism uniquely postmodern (Cary Aylesworth, "Postmodern"). An important aspect of postmodern literature are techniques of subversion, such as deconstruction and irony (John Doyle 261). According to McHale these techniques could be laid bare within a text by using one helpful tool, the 'dominant' (McHale 6). The dominant, which finds its origin as a Russian formalist concept, can be seen as a 'focusing component' within a work of art (6). The dominant emphasizes the questions that a text will foreground and, so argues McHale, within each paradigm a certain set of questions will be more prominently highlighted within a text (6,7). This focusing component, the dominant, can thus be used to illuminate the shift from one paradigm to another. This is done by emphasizing the *shift* within the prominent dominant which can be found within literature (7). A text, however, encompasses not one, but multiple dominants (6,7). Each paradigm foregrounds one specific dominant within the texts that are produced within that particular time (9). To demonstrate the shift within paradigms it can be effective to analyze the shift of the dominant over a period of time, or as McHale argues: "With the help of this conceptual tool, we can both elicit the systems underlying these heterogeneous catalogues, and begin to account for historical change. For to describe change of the dominant is in effect to describe the process of literary-historical change" (7). Within the literary discourse, the dominant specifies which questions a text foregrounds at first, it specifies the order in which questions are asked (11). McHale introduces the specific concepts of the modern and postmodern dominant.

The postmodern dominant and ontological reality. In his book *Postmodernist Fiction*, McHale argues that in the modernist paradigm, the dominant in literature was predominantly epistemological (9). In other words, strategies are deployed in modernist texts to center questions such as: “How can I interpret the world of which I am part?”; “What is there to be known?”; or “How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to the other?” (9). However, when the modernist paradigm shifted to the postmodern paradigm, so did the dominant. In postmodern literary texts the dominant is ontological (10). Strategies in postmodern literature are deployed to foreground questions such as: “Which world is this?”; “What is a world?”; “Which of my selves is to do something with the world?”’ or “What is the mode of existence in a text?” (10). Through the foregrounding of the ontological questions within a text, postmodern literature is closely linked to the genre of the fantastical. In this genre there is a need for suspense of disbelief in order to believe the reality of the fictional world, this same suspense of disbelief is needed to actively engage with the ontological world of a literary text (33,74). The actual world is abandoned by the reader as the new perspective of the literary work is adopted (33).

According to McHale a text is part of the fantastical if it represents a hesitation between the natural of the real world and the unnatural of the fantastical, the uncanny and the marvelous (74). Yet, this specific genre of the fantastical disappears within the literature of the postmodern paradigm (74). Postmodern literature is governed by a “modality of possibilities” in its ontological worlds, as these worlds aspire to make impossible worlds a possibility that exists next to the reality of the reader (34). The empirical reality outside literature seems to dissolve within postmodern literature and the fantastical world seems to become a part of reality (74). Through this hesitation between the fantastical and the real in postmodern literature, these texts bear a close resemblance to the genre of the Gothic (76).

The Gothic and postmodern society. McHale introduces the concept of "gothic enclosure", which illustrates how the ontological structure of the literary world in postmodern texts become a dual ontology through the hesitation between the real and fantastical (76). This entails that within the gothic enclosure both the real world and the supernatural/gothic world exist parallel to each other and that the boundaries between these worlds can be crossed (76). Postmodern literature focusses more on the moments of transgression of the borders between the natural and supernatural world (75). Another theme that is a common factor in both the postmodern and Gothic, is the concept of the "Other", which is brought into focus due to the fantastical transgression into the real (Keir Sothcott 434). Within the Gothic, the Other is often represented by the monstrous that must be defeated at all costs, an example of which would be the figure of the vampire, predominantly in its earlier iterations. The monster that trespasses from the fantastical to the real should be defeated, as it brings a sense of ambiguity into the real through its transgression. The presence of the monster is uncanny, as it undoubtedly *is*, yet is not supposed to be (434). This ambiguity of transgression, however, is taken even further in postmodern literature. The distinction between the real world and supernatural or fantastical world is broken down in postmodern texts, emulating the ambiguity of the presence of the Other by a constant 'flickering' of transgression from one world to the other. This flickering between the real and the fantastical is not only a factor of postmodern literature, so argues McHale, but also of postmodern society as a whole (McHale 129). According to McHale, in the postmodern and "TV-oriented" culture of that time, the overwhelming access to media engulfed reality, which lead to a culture that hovers between reality and fiction (128).

In short, in postmodern literature the ontological dominant is foregrounded. Through strategies such as irony, parody and a playful approach to language, the ambiguity between fiction and reality is explored and the ontological dominant is foregrounded (Sunyoung Ahn

238; McHale 100). Through this, values such as truth and meaning are presented as illusions (Doyle 261). Reality becomes a construct in the postmodern, produced through the structure of language and discourse. The ontological foregrounding through strategies as irony and parody, breaks the 'illusion' of the existence of a unified world in postmodern literature (McHale 167). Irony and the subsequent blurring of foundations is both cause and effect within postmodern fiction, a constant loop of ambiguity between the real and fantastical, as well as between an ironic stance and suspense of disbelief. And this, so argues McHale, has shifted to postmodern society as a whole (128). Through television and other forms of media, the real seems to become overwhelmed. People are urged to believe in the fantastical and simultaneously to be skeptical of both fiction and of the existence of an objective reality. Through this, the real and fantastical flow into each other. Real life, for instance, seems to be as much of a construct as the narrative of a film (129).

The postmodern vampire. Modern and postmodern media have made it possible for the fantastical to cross over to real life (129). One of the creatures passing over from the supernatural into the vein of postmodern society, is the figure of the vampire. In this the creature became a real undead amongst the living, through the postmodern form of pastiche. Embodied, for instance, by figures such as Count von Count, a vampire puppet is *Sesame Street* or Anne Rice's *Interview with The Vampire* (1976), which repackages a "pastiche of genres that reached their peak in the 1790s and then the 1890s to have their currency subsequently renewed through the appeal of popular cinema" (Fred Botting 17). The ambiguity of the vampire blended with the ambiguous reality of postmodernism, which made it possible for the figure of the vampire to merge in with real life. Through this the figure of the vampire became a token of the postmodern, vampires were everywhere, they became one with society (Michelle J. Smith 196). The postmodern vampire has been 'domesticated',

becoming an ordinary figure of postmodern society, forming a unique segment in society itself (196). Due to this oversaturation the postmodern vampire loses its metaphorical power (Twitchell 140). Postmodern vampires are represented as pastiches or rip-offs of earlier iterations, copying certain characteristics or only repackaging the vampire aesthetic. Through media such as music, fashion, film, and later blogs, fanfiction and creepypasta, the vampire aesthetic became a solid part of Western society.[4] An example of the postmodern vampire, I propose, is the figure of the vampire in the *Twilight Saga*. The sparkling vampires consciously break with the horror-stereotypes of earlier vampire iterations, becoming instead an idealized being (Joana Passos 233).

However, the figure still remains an Other and instead of representing a monster, now takes on the mantle of prince charming waiting to be loved (Antonia Sanna 72). The Other is not something to be feared but embodies the unreachable ideal of eternal life and vampiric 'beauty'. The figure of the vampire breaks with the "utterly normal" and "with his promise of eternal youth and beauty he has become a liberating figure with which popular culture identifies, thus embodying the pagan, secular, individualist, postmodern times" (Passos 233). The postmodern vampire is more humanized than its predecessors, but is still decidedly non-human. Other examples illustrate this as well, within series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) or *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017), wherein the figure of the vampire is either something to love and idealize or something to be scared of, but a human could never see themselves reflected in this figure. The postmodern vampire is part of the postmodern society as Gothic figure in transgression, but not as embodiment of the human experience (230).

However, the literary techniques that encourages this ambiguity within the postmodern paradigm are increasingly under attack and a new light is cast upon the figure of the vampire. The vampire transformed from a monstrous Other to a more humanized figure that can be idealized in the postmodern paradigm (Sothcott 437). Yet, with the boundaries

between the fantastical and real stabilizing, the vampire returns to its literary roots. In the post-postmodern paradigm human experience is emphasized (Leicester 80). Instead of the fantastical bleeding into real life, the post-postmodern now harbors an open space for human experiences in the fantastical (Sothcott 437). The figure of the vampire, upon its literary return, seems to be more ambiguous than ever, as it both embodies the role of monster and hero, haunting not only the border between one world or another, but becoming a specter of past and future. In the next chapter I will further discuss the paradigm shift from postmodern to post-postmodern and the subsequent transformation of the vampire.

Chapter 2. *Vampires Never Get Old,* the post-postmodernist vampire

In the last chapter I have laid out a brief introduction of the postmodern paradigm in literature through McHale's use of the dominant and how the relation between the fantastical, the Gothic and postmodern society and media is highlighted. In this chapter I will undertake a similar endeavor, through the analyses of the figure of the vampire in the anthology *Vampires Never Get Old*. I will discuss the transformations the figure of the vampire underwent by situating it in de paradigm of post-postmodern, followed by an analysis of three stories from *Vampires Never Get Old*, edited by Zoraida Córdova and Natalie C. Parker. The book was published in 2020 which makes it a very contemporary work within the discourse of the vampire. The anthology includes eleven stories in total, contributed by different young and upcoming writers. The book has quite a diverse cast of characters, representing the vampire in many different iterations, casting a new light upon the figure of the vampire. *Vampires Never Get Old* brings some new blood to the vein of the vampire, showcasing how in its versatility, and connection with its historical roots, the figure of the vampire truly never gets

old. One of the reasons why I have selected this anthology, is due to the autobiographical themes within the short stories. Each writer included personal experiences in their figure of the vampire. This autobiographical element brings vulnerability and sincerity to the text. These writers, predominantly from minorities, bring a whole new iteration of the vampire. The postmodern vampire implied a distinction between human and vampire. While humanized, the figure of the vampire was decidedly Other. *Vampires Never Get Old* introduces an all-new vampire that is neither pastiche nor an Other, reflecting back the human experience within its vampire figure. Before I will start the analyses of the three stories, I will briefly highlight two key-themes of post-postmodernism and how this debate makes way for the figure of the vampire to the spotlight. The key-themes I will discuss in this chapter are time, specifically the historical awareness of the past, and sincerity.

Specters of past and future. The twenty-first century seems to be haunted with the idea that there is no possibility left for a future beyond capitalism. Time is approached differently in the post-postmodern paradigm, not only in consideration to the past, but also the future. Historical awareness is important to realize the present of the post-postmodern paradigm. Without this historical awareness, post-postmodernist future is decidedly dystopian or apocalyptic. The specter of the future haunts the present, if society does not change, the future might never be (Katy Shaw 7). Contemporary literature becomes more and more haunted by this sense of crisis as well. The article by Jenny Bavidge in The Conversation, for instance, highlights how contemporary stories are haunted by a sense of climate crisis (Bavidge, “A sense of climate crisis”).

> We’re entering a phase where a sense of ecological and climate crisis haunts stories which are not consciously environmental narratives at all. The crisis must be part of the backdrop of any story set in this and future worlds and an inescapable part of our

> readerly mindsets when we look back at the literature of the past. (Bavidge, "A sense of climate crisis")

The contemporary, and predominantly Western, view on the idea of the future is not one of utopian dreams and hopes, "all our narratives – whether they're horror films, love stories, allotment poetry or children's books – are Anthropocene stories now" (Bavidge, "A sense of climate crisis"). It seems that contemporary society is plagued by the specter of an impossible future. The genre of the apocalyptic world has exponentially grown in the early twenty-first century, in which the future would only bring forward the negative aspects of contemporary society (Shaw 27). But how did the future become a spectral haunting, bringing anxieties of the future to the present? The answer, I propose, might be found in the past. In her article "New Sincerity, New Worldliness", Sunyoung Ahn illustrates how postmodern society changed after 9/11 (Ahn 237). After the turn of the century, it became clear that the world struggled to deal with the violence and trauma of the twentieth century (Shaw 27). After 9/11 the belief that those violent traumas could be left in the twentieth century, vanished. The whole world was, and still is, healing from those wounds. And this, I will argue, can only be done with a collective critical analysis of the past, as the specter of the past keeps returning to the present. More on the specter will follow in chapter three.

A new sense of sincerity. The postmodern paradigm appeared to lack the tools to deal with the traumas that needed healing. In postmodernism attention is turned towards subjective worlds, obscuring the sense of an objective reality (Ahn 237). This, in turn, inspired a culture of inaction and self-absorption (237). As I argued in chapter one, within the postmodern paradigm the line between reality and the fantastical began to blur. The postmodern logic of late-capitalist society encourages an escapist relation with fantasy, wherein the "vanguard spirit" of postmodernism became a normalcy (243). In the vampire this manifested itself in

the many pastiche iterations of the vampire, as I have illustrated in chapter one. There has been much critique upon this lack of space for the concept of an objective reality and subsequently a form of 'sincerity' in the thought of the postmodern paradigm. One thinker who criticized this aspect of the postmodern thought was David Foster Wallace. With his influential text "E Unibus Pluram" he criticized postmodern society and proposed an alternative way of thinking. This alternative would later become an important component of the post-postmodern paradigm, as "E Unibus Pluram" is often seen to be a key-text within the shift from the postmodern- to the post-postmodern paradigm.

Sincerity and irony, a double-edged sword. In "E Unibus Pluram" Wallace criticized the loop of desire and fantasy. According to Wallace television produces only what people want to see, showing its audience how they want to be reflected (Wallace 152). Television projects this desire, but through this overrepresentation, the represented desire becomes normalized (152). Wallace compared this to sugar. Desire is like sugar that is added to food, just to make it more addictive. The more sugar one gets, the more one craves as a result. People know it is not good for them, yet they still crave it (152). Another important concept which keeps this cycle of desire going, is the concept of irony (161). Irony is an important concept in postmodernism. While it started out as a tool for critical resistance against modernist society, it did not take long for irony to become a societal cliché (Doyle 261). With this, the critical edge of postmodernism disappeared, as media, such as television, absorbed this ironic stance and thus neutralized critique that was aimed at society and its media, through its very media (Wallace 171,173).

Irony, then, started out as a difficult and productive tool in order to critically evaluate cultural and societal products, but became the dominant mode of expression within the society it tried to criticize, making the power of irony as a critical tool dilute (183). Wallace

argued that irony only works as an "emergency use" (183). In other words, irony only works as an exclusively negative function. It can deconstruct, but not built up anything new (183). Within postmodern media, then, the use of irony encourages "an air of apathy and pretentious worldliness by claiming to be intimate and, at the same time, outsmart all the innuendos, ironies, and sarcasm" (Ahn 243). In his text, Wallace came with a solution for the over-ironic loop of postmodern society, namely the "anti-rebel" (Wallace 192). These "anti-rebels" are not critiquing *against* something, but want to bring a new sense of human connection and empathy (193). According to Wallace, sincerity is needed to move beyond the self-conscious ironic cycle of Western postmodern society (193). A sincerity in which troubles of humanity and emotions are treated in earnest and with conviction and not filtered through an ironic stance.

In other words, sincerity is needed to bring back a sense of human connectedness, which is in opposition to the subjective worlds that are held in the thought of the postmodern paradigm (Theophilus Savvas and Christopher K. Coffman 195). This concept of the "anti-rebel" serves as an inspiration for post-postmodern thinkers. However, the post-postmodern thought has been divided under many different names, making it difficult to coin a coherent concept of what the "anti-rebel" exactly means and does. "New Sincerity", for instance, is also heavily inspired by Wallace's text. Ahn includes the New Sincerity movement in the post-postmodern paradigm, illustrating how sincerity is an important factor of the paradigm shift from postmodern to post-postmodern (Ahn 237). Within the post-postmodern paradigm, as I have argued above, a new focus on "worldliness" and "political agility" is embodied, which only can be attained by the rejection of the postmodern view in which the world is fragmented (238). Within media, then, social engagement becomes an important factor (Madhu Dubey 364). It seems that Wallace's claims might be "on the mark", as there has been a rise in literature embracing more "naïve" qualities, such as "a return to mimetic

verisimilitude, a display of historical awareness, and a preoccupation with the physical nature of the textual artifact as keys to revitalization of a constructive textual authenticity" (Savvas and Coffman 196). However, this overly-positive and somewhat naïve stance of the New Sincerity and "anti-rebel" movement have faced quite some criticism in recent years (Doyle 267). Wallace wrote his "E Unibus Pluram" in the early 90s, which was a considerably more optimistic and opportunistic time (264). The danger with a completely open approach of sincerity and a total lack of irony, so argues Doyle in his article "The Changing Face of Post-postmodern Fiction", is that it might become fertile ground for the emergence of populism and radicalism (259). Radical populism tries to fill in the vacuum of belief in the Western postmodern society, as politicians are aware of the "Wallacean desire for post-ironic belief" and use sincerity to control their narrative and to build their following. An example of this would be Trump's campaign for presidency (267). An all-encompassing sincerity can be seen as a sword sharpened at both sides, as this post-ironic approach gives way to harmful views and naïve beliefs as well as much needed relief from a fragmented world (260). Doyle thus argues that irony, skepticism and critical analyses are important tools that could prevent this overly naïve approach towards a sense of human connection (259). The challenge of post-postmodernism is to find a balance between irony and sincerity. Contemporary media shows multiple attempts to combine sincerity and irony in a new style, attempting to wield this double-edged sword of post-postmodernism.

In the post-postmodern paradigm historical awareness has become an important tool next to sincerity, a concept entirely neglected in the postmodern according to Savvas and Coffman (200). Critical engagement with the past, privileges human connection, nonetheless it remains important to be critical in the approach towards history. By combining irony and sincerity, history can be critically assessed and provide new ways of thinking.

The Gothic and post-postmodernism. In their article Savvas and Coffman argue how the genre of the Gothic might give access to social engagement with the past (202). Through the genre of the Gothic the post-postmodern can reach social engagement whilst encompassing a critical lens, as Doyle argues that within the post-postmodern the past offers a way to the future as an alternative to the "still-postmodern contemporary society" (Doyle 264). Keir Sothcott also comments on the popularity of the Gothic in contemporary Western society in his article "Late Modern Ambiguity and Gothic Narratives of Justice" (Sothcott 432). Not only in literary narratives, but across all sorts of media the Gothic can be found, such as in fashion, music or even advertising (432). Sothcott argues that the Gothic has begun to "increasingly frame our narrative comprehension of Late Modern Reality" (432). The magnetic appeal of the Gothic comes through the effects of reputation and haunting, escape is not an apparent option (433). The Gothic reflects anxieties and fears that are deeply interwoven within the culture of which it is a product (433). The genre of the Gothic, then, can be a way to lay bare and address anxieties and fears that underly society. Figures of the contemporary Gothic have a long history, being a product of both the contemporary and the past. Here I would like to intersect with the figure of the vampire, a Gothic monster in every way, as it embodies the ambiguous specter of this genre. This figure has haunted the genre of the Gothic ever since its start and, just as much as a ghost or specter, stayed rooted in the past. Through the postmodern, the Gothic, and thus the vampire, has made its way into the reality of our contemporary postmodern society.

Just as much as the figure of the vampire, the genre of the Gothic is heavily laced with ambiguity (434). The Gothic is not simply reduced to a form of "Othering" in which the monster of the story is the representation of horrors and fears (434). The monstrous Other not only has an estranging effect, but it simultaneously seduces (435). Gothic narratives produce both terror, unease and anxiety and at the same time they "arouse passion, mystery and

oppose the mundane strictures of everyday modern life" (442). Through this ambiguity, the Gothic is able to confront new motifs and themes within a changing society (435). The monster of the Gothic does not just take on one form, and through its transformations the Gothic can always reflect the contemporary (435). Yet, there is something that differs profoundly between the contemporary Gothic and earlier iterations of this genre. In the past, the Gothic often disrupted the boundaries that were enforced through cultural anxieties, thus laying bare how fragile these boundaries were. However, besides disrupting boundaries through the monstrous, the monster now becomes a figure people want to identify *with* and not *against* (436). Monsters of the Gothic, such as vampires, cease to be monsters that should be destroyed by society, and instead embody a moral ambiguity encompassing both "right" and "wrong". The monster often comes to represent the hero in a way, embodying the moral virtues embedded in the story (437). Sothcott argues that this expresses the "trauma" of contemporary Western society, in which there is a societal search for identity and ontological security (437). As a genre, the Gothic then represents a cultural fear about the unfinishable aspect of modern society (441). A loss of a future, if you will. A theme that will be discussed in chapter two within the concept of hauntology. The figure of the vampire, through the genre of the Gothic, can bridge the gap between media and society once more. Embodying the ambiguity of the Gothic monster and holding a strong connection with past iterations, the figure of the vampire seems a perfect avatar of the post-postmodern thought.

The genre of the Gothic represents this ambiguity inherently, yet its values, desires and fears shift with each new iteration. I would propose that with the newest iteration the figure of the vampire has come to represent the post-postmodern paradigm. Where the postmodern vampire became a part of society, the post-postmodern vampire once again takes its place in the literary spotlight, being both monster and hero. The book which I will analyze in this chapter hosts different iterations of the post-postmodern vampire. Vampires and

humans have always carried a close connection, not only because the vampire has been a human, but also because of the search for identity inherent in the Gothic. It questions the meaning of what it means to be human and as "[t]he distance between 'us' as humans and 'them' as vampires is closing" its answer might be the same when we question what it means to be a vampire (Mutch 8). Within the postmodern vampire the single locus of the vampire fragmented and since then the figure of the vampires has known many different iterations, yet mostly pastiches as illustrated in chapter one. With its return towards media, such as literature, the post-postmodern vampire is a "tamed" monster, which can be used to "work through our fears surrounding liberalized attitudes to gender relations, sexuality, class, race and multiculturalism" (17). Especially in the medium of literature the figure of the post-postmodernist vampire has made its entrance, as is apparent through the more inclusive cast of *Vampires Never Get Old*.

"The Boys from Blood River" and human connection. The first story I will discuss from the anthology *Vampires Never Get Old*, is "The Boys from Blood River" written by Rebecca Roanhorse. The main protagonist in the story is Lukas, an Indigenous American. The story is told from Lukas' perspective. He is sixteen years old, describes himself as rather tall, clumsy, skinny and he is gay, which makes him a target of bulling in the little town in which he lives. His mother is very sick and because she was adopted he is all alone, since no father figure is involved. The story takes place in a small town in the South of Northern America named Blood River. It is described by Lukas as a dying town, it has a diner and high school and some tourists, but not enough to keep it afloat for long. What the town is most famous for, however, is a massacre which led to the name Blood River. It is never highlighted what the massacre exactly entailed; this is left to the imagination of the reader. However, one can guess the river was red with blood, hence the name Blood River. However, this is not the

only mystery of the little town. There is also the urban myth about the Blood River Boys that can be summoned through a song.[5] Lukas feels strangely attracted to this myth and somehow summons the song through a jukebox. After this the Blood River Boys appear and offer Lukas a place amongst them, if he shares one meal with them. Lukas agrees to this exchange when his mother passes away. Yet, the meal Lukas has to share is the only person in the whole town that has been nice to him. Ultimately, Lukas decides that he will not be paying this price in order to become one of the boys, a vampire. He sends the Boys away, and he is promised that one day they will come back to collect his debt.

Right from the start, a more inclusive vampire story is presented to us, as an Indigenous American is the main protagonist of the story. Usually, the protagonist of vampire stories is predominantly white. The story comments on Lukas' position in society as he is marginalized not only through his race, but also his sexuality. Lukas, desperate to be accepted, summons the Boys in the hope that he can become part of their group. He is indeed offered to become a part of the Boys. He is promised an immortal life in a whole new and more inclusive community. Yet, the price he has to pay is to kill those who tie him to his mortal life. Lukas believes Silas unconditionally and is ready to accept his offer, he is willing to kill in order to feel a sense of connection:

"I don't want to be alone," I whisper.

"You won't be," Silas says.

And then the jukebox kick on and the fiddle is playing and that man is singing: "*He'd the face of an angel but the heart of a demon . . .*"

"Take what's yours, Lukas," he says, "and become one of us."

I take a step forward.

> "No!" Suddenly, Dru's there, between us. He swings his baseball bat right at Silas, almost too fast for my eyes to follow. The bat connects with the side of Silas's head, shattering into shards. Silas goes down. (Roanhorse 46)

Lukas does not have any family nor friends, yet he still will not resort to killing people to become part of a group. Lukas, with help from one of the Boys, refuses to change his morals and values, even when that means he could be welcomed to a community. Dru, the newest member of the Boys, regrets his decision at the time, realizing that cutting of completely from society was not the answer to heal his pain. By preventing Lukas from feeding, he gives Lukas a chance to realize his potential within society and not to repeat the mistakes of the Boys, who will always remain trapped in their painful past. After Silas falls down, Lukas helps the girl to escape and tells Silas that he and the Boys need to go, because he is declining their offer.

The plot is decidedly intertwined with the message of sincerity and subsequently with a deep awareness of the past. The focus lies of Lukas' experience of himself and his place in society. Due to the sincere and vulnerable revelation by Dru and his acknowledgment of his traumatic past, Dru has the agency to help Lukas. This message, I would argue, is deeply interwoven with the post-postmodern vampire. Toeing the line between sincerity and irony, the living and the dead, the figure of the vampire represents both a relationship with the past, as well as with the present. The Blood River Boys represent a figure of cast-out males all throughout history. Silas, the leader, is implied to be have been around since the nineteenth century, as he wears historical cowboy attire (33). He is implied to be a gay man, as he tells Lukas they are more alike than they think and he would like to spend eternity with him (45). The members of the group all felt cast out at one point in their lives, feeling desperate enough to cut-off all ties with the living world, just to belong (42,43). The figure of the vampire represents the connection throughout history of people "cast-out" by society.

After the events of that night, Lukas decides to bring change into his own life. He improves his grades to go to college and moves to a different city by selling the house. Through Dru's actions he realizes his own agency within society and that the fear of the "Other" that made him an outcast, had internalized within his own self-image. Through the naïve belief of an alternative past, Lukas almost permanently cut himself off from life and all possibility to change his image of himself. Eventually he learns that the world, as it has always done, will change and that he has the same possibility as well. That what made him feel like an outcast was not his race, nor his sexuality, but his own perception of self. The figure of the vampire in this story represents an ambiguous transgression between past and presence. Dru, a newly made vampire realizes the contemporary bonds of Lukas and gives him an option to realize that his naïve beliefs might be dangerous. Lukas learns how to think for himself and to take upon his own agency. The figure of the vampire brings post-postmodern thought to the story by showcasing not only the dangers of uncritical belief in narrative, but also that one holds agency over their own beliefs and actions.

"Senior Year Sucks" and what it means to be human. The second story that I will discuss from the anthology is "Senior Year Sucks". The narrative in this story is told through the perspective of the high school senior Jolene Crandall, who lives in a town named Sweetwater in Texas. Jolene is a happy-go-lucky cheerleader and captain of her team. She tries her best to manage her teenage-life with school, friends, cheerleading and hunting vampires. Jolene is the newest vampire slayer, following in the footsteps of all women in her family, working together and passing on knowledge to protect their small town. Sweetwater is the location that hosts a "vampire rehab" in which vampires learn how to become part of vampire society and live secretly and in peace with humans.

In the plot of the story, Jolene travels back with the spirit bus of her high school team as the cheerleaders had to cheer for a game the next town over. On their way back, one of the spirit busses was stranded, which sets off her vampire slayer sense. When all people enter her bus, a new girl is placed next to her, Alma, a vampire. The young vampire slayer is the only person who sees Alma for who she is, as all vampires are protected by a glamour. Jolene cannot attack Alma on the bus, and thus they have to patiently get along during the trip, as Alma also knows that Jolene is the slayer and what danger that poses to her. It does not take long however before the two girls strike up a conversation and discover they are not that different after all. They both, most of all, just crave a normal life. Alma never chose to be a vampire and wants nothing more than the dull pleasures of senior year, exams and all. Whilst Jolene would love to just hang out for once outside of the city and not risk the lives of her friends due to the many vampires in the town. At the end of the trip Jolene and Alma have come to an understanding, if Alma would go to the vampire rehab, Jolene would not kill her. But this agreement does not stand for long. The two meet again, Alma begging Jolene for one chance at senior year, in exchange for Alma only getting blood from donors. However, in the end they find that their connection might go further than merely knowing the supernatural and as they kiss Jolene discovers "kissing a vampire can feel just as good as slaying one" (Murphy 66).

Right from the start "Senior Year Sucks" shows its awareness of the canon within media. More than once a reference is made to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as Jolene remarks: "I might have to give the rest of my life to the cause, but nothing in my pledge said I couldn't join the cheerleading team. Watch out, Buffy" (52). The main protagonist is also described as fat and that it "[t]urns out vampire slayers don't need to be fat or skinny or any particular thing at all as long as they kick ass", commenting on the popular representation of vampire slayers of very muscular men or super fit women. Whilst the plotline of a slayer falling for a

vampire is nothing new, making both characters female is. Take *Buffy* for instance, herein Buffy as a slayer falls in love with a male vampire twice. But these vampires represent the stereotype of the "bad-boy" breaking her heart or forcing Buffy in rather "toxic" situations. Instead "Senior Year Sucks" hints at a tender romance between two young girls, who not only explore their unchosen destiny as vampire or slayer, but also their sexuality and place in the world. Julie Murphy, the writer of the story, is more than aware of the previous canon of vampire media and purposefully breaks this normalized narrative. Alma is not a vampire tortured for hundreds of years, but actually has been a vampire for little over a year, and still feels very connected with her human side. This young vampire has been a human far longer than a vampire, yet nonetheless she is unmistakably treated as an undead monster by those in the know. This begs the question whether Alma is more vampire than human, as she still *feels* human. Her body might have been changed, but her mind has not. The same question can be asked for Jolene, as the supernatural counterpart of the vampire, destined to fight them, she might not be fully human either. It reflects the questions of what it means to be human and what human connection entails. The figure of the vampire here is decidedly post-postmodern as it is deeply intertwined within the contemporary Gothic, the vampire both seduces and scares, yet lives through human experiences. For Alma her biggest fear was to lose her human future, her senior year. Both Jolene and Alma get over their differences as they recognize they are both, in some way, human and capable of love and understanding. Murphy gives the reader a fragment of a more inclusive world in which human connection has not so much to do with appearance, but with the belief in one another and empathy.

"In Kind" and embodying humanness. The last story within the anthology that I will discuss is "In Kind" by Kayla Whaley. The story once again is told through the perspective of the main protagonist, but this time with a little twist. A few newspaper articles are included. "In

Kind" tells the story of the newly turned vampire Grace Williams, a seventeen-year-old wheelchair-bound girl. Grace is killed by her father, as he does not want to care for his sick child anymore. The story opens with a newspaper article in which it is explained that Grant, Grace's father, confessed to the police that he had "administered lethal quantities of morphine" to his daughter because he deemed her suffering to be unbearable (Whaley 100). Grace was saved from death by Seanan, a girl that mysteriously appeared in town a few years prior. They first met in church and Seanan kept a close eye on Grace from then on. When Grace eventually ended up in a coma because of her illness, Grant could not take the care alone anymore and decided to kill his own daughter, considering it to be a mercy killing. Grace is overcome with hate and wants to take revenge on her father, this is only accelerated when he does not get convicted for murder, and people praise him for his 'brave' action. Seanan and Grace plan to confront Grant one last time, however, Grace decides that she will not murder her father, but instead posts a video claiming to have survived her father's attempt at murder, as in way, she did. The story ends with the discussion how every life is worth living and there is no such thing as a mercy killing.

There is a lot to unpack within the story written by Whaley. An important topic within the story is the worth of life. Throughout the story Grant describes his daughter's life as not worth living, she cannot be independent and will never live life as an able-bodied individual. The discussion revolves around what is deemed to be a 'livable' life and adds to the debate whether vampirism can be seen as a cure for human illnesses. Until this story I had not come across a story about a vampire with a disability, as vampirism would cure the body from all ailments, however, this would imply that living with a disability is unlivable. Prejudices like these are harmful, as is illustrated in the story "In Kind". Believing life only has worth with an abled-body or healthy body is a harmful preconception. In a newspaper article at the very

end of the story, Grace's response to her father is highlighted, stating the importance of humanizing the lives of people with chronic illnesses and disabilities:

> "There was nothing merciful about my father's actions," Ms. Williams says toward the end of the five-minute video. "I hope everyone who called them such will think about why they could ever believe murder to be a kindness instead of a monstrosity. Why were you so easily convinced that my life meant nothing? Why did no one ask what my life meant to *me*?" (116)

The monster of the story is not the supernatural "Other", the vampire, but the father Grant, a human. The true evil within the story is not the supernatural, but human prejudices and beliefs that threaten people's life on the daily. Grace as a vampire, I would argue, is a perfect example of the post-postmodern vampire. Through the canon of the figure of the vampire, Grace questions underlying prejudices within contemporary society. It questions the reader to think about their beliefs and realize the long history on which such beliefs are built. The figure of the vampire here embodies a desire for a more inclusive world, as the vampire is not a part of contemporary society it can move separate from ingrained prejudices. This makes it possible for Grace to live her life separate from the role as 'disabled child' and instead be a person with full agency. The figure of the post-postmodern vampire, here, reverses the role of hero and monster. It holds up the mirror to humanity, and to quote Keir Scott: "Our monsters are defined by our culture – show me what you fear and I will show you what you are" (21).

The post-postmodern vampire. While the anthology *Vampires Never Get Old* offers more than the three stories discussed in this chapter, I have selected these due to their autobiographical elements. With this I, naturally, do not mean that the writers are vampires themselves. However, the figure of the vampire is highly influenced by the experiences of the writers themselves. The first story "The Boys from Blood River" is written by Roanhorse an

Indigenous American writer. Her focus is mostly on fantasy novels grounded in Indigenous history ("About"). In "The Boys from Blood River" themes about Indigenous communities as well as Roanhorse's own story are intertwined with the narrative. Roanhorse has been adopted herself and knows the difficulty of finding a community when one is estranged from their ethnic history (Lila Shapiro, "The Sci-Fi Author Reimagining Native History"). Roanhorse's experiences have shaped the figure of the vampire, making the vampire a personal figure in her story.

Julie Murphy also intertwined her personal experiences within her iteration of the vampire and vampire slayer. Murphy's bibliography focuses mostly on body-positivity and she predominantly writes books in which female protagonists do not follow the standardized Hollywood beauty standard ("Bio"). In her story "Senior Year Sucks" the vibrant vampire slayer Jolene is also described as breaking the mold as she is a popular cheerleader and slayer, whilst being plus-sized. Murphy highlights how prejudices about people ripple through to media such as literature, and subsequently vampire lore. Illustrating how it is absurd that supernatural creatures, such as vampires or slayers, can only look a certain way.

Lastly, the story "In Kind" is written by Kayla Whaley. Whaley, as a writer, is interested in disability, sexuality and the body, as she is a disabled writer herself (*Kaylawhaley*). She has spent four years as a senior editor for a site called Disability in Kidlit, dedicated to highlighting portrayals of disability in young adult fiction. Like the other stories, "In Kind" also comes from a more personal understanding of the subject within the story. As I already mentioned within my analyses, Whaley showcases the ableist canon of the vampire, highlighting how the monsters in our stories mirror the image of society.

Through the personal iterations of the figure of the vampire within *Vampires Never Get Old*, I would argue that the post-postmodern iteration of the vampire is strongly interwoven within the book. These vampires bring to light unconscious prejudices and beliefs

deeply ingrained within society, holding up the mirror to the society which produces the canon of the vampire. The vampires in this anthology break with stereotypes of this monstrous figure, illustrating the limited usage of the fantastical within the vampire narratives. The vampire here works as a thought experiment, taking the road least travelled, laying bare prejudices, anxieties and desires hidden deeply within society. The figure of the vampire showcases, in these stories, how a balance between sincerity and irony, intertwined with an historical awareness, might open the way to a new assessment of the future. The belief in the figure of the vampire and opposing this figure against its long history through human history, highlights dead-ends within human thought. In the next chapter I will illustrate the connection between hauntology and the post-postmodern through the analysis of *Dracula's Child* by J.S. Barnes. As the vampire returns from its grave, it opens its casket to newer possibilities in the human realm.

Chapter 3. The Haunt of Dracula in *Dracula's Child*

In the previous chapter I have discussed the figure of the vampire in the post-postmodern paradigm. An important aspect of which is the historical awareness within the figure of the vampire. Through their strong connection with the past, the figure of the vampire can embody both past and present, disrupting the linearity of time. In this chapter I will introduce the concept of hauntology to further explore the functions of the vampire as a figure of both the past and present within the post-postmodern paradigm. To do this I will further elaborate on the concept of hauntology, followed by an analysis of the book *Dracula's Child* by J.S. Barnes. The book *Dracula* was written by Bram Stoker in 1897 and has made a lasting impact on popular culture. Its influence is still felt within the twenty-first century, which is

exemplified by Barnes' sequel inspired by *Dracula*. Stoker only once returned to the figure of his vampire after publishing *Dracula*, in a short-story called "Dracula's Guest" which was written in 1912. This was merely a short-story and functioned as a prequel to the book. To Bram Stoker, Dracula was dead and over with, the terrifying monster had been slain. However, for centuries his vampire has still haunted the minds of people which could not help but wonder, what if Dracula had survived? What if the Count did come back? In the years after *Dracula*, countless sequels have been written by other authors, trying to once more face the vampire Dracula. Within this chapter I will also discuss one such sequel. The book *Dracula's Child* written by J.S. Barnes and published in May 2020. In an interview with BookPage, Barnes talked about his love for the book *Dracula* and how he saw "clear seeds planted in plain sight" within the book for a sequel (Noah Fram, "Dracula's Child"). Barnes is no stranger to writing adaptations of classic Victorian novels, including *The Invisible Man* and *Dracula*, according to the publisher TitanBooks, which also published the book *Dracula's Child* ("J.S. Barnes"). It is not with much surprise, then, that the book *Dracula's Child* almost seems to be written by Bram Stoker himself, were he to be alive in 2020. I say *almost* here, because later within this chapter I will argue that *Dracula's Child* thematically fits perfectly within the twenty-first century. While the style of the book emulates Stoker's style uncannily well, the hidden anxieties, fears and desires that are represented by the fanged fiends, can be interpreted as products of our contemporary Western society. In the haunting of Dracula, different ghosts have taken the stage as well, the specters of the twenty-first century.

The haunting of hauntology. To consider the specters that haunt the narrative within *Dracula's Child*, as well as its characters, I will introduce the concept of hauntology. The term hauntology was first introduced by Jacques Derrida in his book *Specters of Marx*, which

was published in 1993. Far from being the main theme within the book, hauntology still has made an impression and inspired other thinkers to further develop this concept. Right from the start hauntology has haunted its own ontology, drawing attention to the "ephemeral nature of the present" (Shaw 2). And, as fleeting as the specters that concern it, there is no consensus about what the concept of hauntology precisely entails. One thing is clear however, hauntology makes visible the specter of the past which finds its way into the present (2).

First, I will return to the start of the concept, which finds its origin in the book *Specters of Marx* by Derrida. In *Specters of Marx,* Derrida illustrates how the dominant narrative within the era of the post-Cold War, was one of "the death of an alternative to capitalism as a global system" and that the fall of the Berlin Wall signaled a change in 'fixed' boundaries (Shaw 5). Derrida highlights the difficulty to address the specters of the past, if one succeeds to speak with a specter, the specter becomes stabilized, losing its ambiguity and subsequently its spectral position between the present and past. In other words, if the specter becomes actualized, it ceases to be a specter and becomes enclosed within the statis of time (Derrida ch.1). Ontology is incapable of representing the specter as it is both alive and dead, present and absent, being and non-being. Therefore, Derrida coins the term hauntology as a concept to articulate the specter as both encompassing presence and absence. The specter functions in "the between-spaces that separate recognized boundaries" and draws attention to limits of ontological boundaries (Shaw 6). Both the present and past exist in the figure of the specter, the past becomes a part of the present through the haunting of the specter and thus the figure of the specter is 'out of time', calling the linearity of history in question (6). I would propose that the concept of hauntology not only questions the linearity of history, but also the linearity of progress. Within the Age of Enlightenment, the belief that all progress was linear began to blossom and has been a prominent idea ever since (Margaret M Lange, "Progress"). While there has been enough critique on this notion, especially after the horrible

and socially traumatic events within the twentieth and twenty-first century, the idea of progress still lingers in this Enlightenment form. However, the determinism that was long inherent within the idea of progress, such as the ideal end of history, has been hard to maintain.[6] From within this empty space of belief, the concept hauntology could emerge. In a world that has more than once been portrayed as making a beeline towards the end of the planet, the concept of hauntology calls back the attention to a whole other realm of possibilities (Shaw 7,8).

Voice of the past. The concept of hauntology and its specters are founded and accepted on a sense of instability, defying both fixed form and meaning and in defiance of binary oppositions (8). The opposition between past and present is ultimately called into question, "suggesting that these two apparently exclusive states can never be neatly separated" (8). By opening the eyes again upon the past, the spectral haunt might give a voice to "the hard-to-hear" and "represent the formerly unrepresentable, and make visible that which was previously ignored" (8). What is most interesting within the concept of hauntology is not the figure of the specter an-sich, but the possibilities that they represent. "Hauntology offers the specter as a metaphorical trope through which to disrupt the certainty of temporality and open up meanings" (9). One important aspect, however, comes with Derrida's consideration of the difficulty to converse with the specter. In order to open up a relationship with the specter that haunts, hospitality should be extended (10). The new possibilities in the present that the specter represents, can only be acknowledged if a dialogue with the specter is initiated (9). According to Derrida, those that are haunted have the responsibility to unconditionally welcome the specter (9). This is not without any danger however, since the specter cannot be controlled. In order for the present to enact a relationship with the spectral haunt of the past, the present should invite the specter with unconditional hospitality and thus give the past the

agency to influence the present and future (9-11). Highlighting the formerly unheard, or perhaps a path not taken in history, hauntology conjures a past that seems to never have been (14). Ultimately, hauntology resists any finite end to the past and calls for an awareness of the role the past plays within the present and contemporary society (13). The medium of literature also enjoys its own hauntology, so argues Katy Shaw:

> [B]oth in the multi-faceted capacity of language to carry a multitude of meanings, the power of intertextuality to communicate from beyond the confines of the immediate text and in the power of literary testimony to communicate unheard voices and unheard perspectives. (15)

Within the media of the twenty-first century the postmodern blurring of the real and fantastical is still very prevalent. The specters from hauntology, then, have come to visibly haunt the living (105). Yet, the recognition and interaction with the specters are, now perhaps more than ever, an important aspect of hauntology as they represent a new sense of possibilities for the future. So, in other words, not only is it difficult to converse with the specter, but, due to an oversaturation of the specter, it becomes ever more difficult to recognize it. The danger of the spectral, however, is that this ambiguous figure is not recognized, which makes it impossible to extend hospitality towards it. Without the dialogue between the present and past within the specter, new possibilities of the future might be lost.

Contemporary thinkers like Mark Fisher and Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi suggest that without a renewed idea of the future, by reviewing the past, there might be no future at all. Within his book *Ghost of my Life*, Fisher argues that there is a “slow cancelation of the future” and that the present will be on loop till the end of time, which will be accelerated due the environmental crisis (Fisher 1-7). He uses the concept of hauntology to illustrate how the present is haunted by the past, not being able to go forward, nor go back. According to Fisher it is not possible to engage with the specters, and thus a hope for a future should be

abandoned. Berardi as well argues that contemporary society has lost its potency for a change (Geert Lovink "Conversation"). These readings are rather pessimistic and I propose a more positive reading, as there is a specter with which interaction is possible. I would argue that one of these ambiguous specters of the past can be seen in the figure of the vampire. As a figure that is both present in the past and present, the figure of the vampire might offer us tools to strike up a conversation with the spectral past. This given, I will argue, can be seen in the figure of the vampire within *Dracula's Child*.

Specters and the story of Dracula's Child. As mentioned above, the book *Dracula's Child* simulates the style of *Dracula* perfectly. Written through diary entries, clippings from news articles, letters and telegrams, the form of the novel stays close to the original. Even the use of language seems to be a perfect simulation. Sometimes it is easy to forget that the book is written in the twenty-first century, opposed to the early twentieth-century gothic style it emulates. The book itself stays close to the original framework of *Dracula*, but more contemporary elements are sprinkled within the narrative here and there. The group consisting of Van Helsing, Quincey, Arthur, Dr. Seward and Jonathan, the vampire hunters, for instance, refer to themselves as "The Crew of Light", which was how Christopher Craft called the group in an article in 1984.[7] There are also new characters introduced, with most importantly Quincey Harker (named after the deceased Quincey Morris from *Dracula*). Quincey is the only child of Mina and Jonathan Harker, and was born one year after the unfortunate events with Count Dracula. The events within *Dracula's Child* start on the 6th of November 1903 with a journal entry by Mina Harker, and until 6 February 1904 almost every day is accounted for in the story of the book. Only within the epilogue some time skips are made. However, the book is opened by an editor's introduction, by Quincey himself, as years

after the events he has collected all the papers which recollect a certain event from his youth. It was signed Lieutenant Quiney Harker, 13 October 1914. I will come back to this later.

The story starts with Mina Harker writing in her diary about the events of Quincey twelfth birthday. The people that fought Dracula all those years ago, and survived, all gathered together to celebrate this special event and even though years have gone by, they all have maintained a close relationship with one another. Not much has changed, Van Helsing has gotten older, but never lost his charm; Dr. Seward is described greying at the temples, but nonetheless quite the same as all those many years ago, back in the last century. Arthur Godalming remarried and his wife, Caroline is now pregnant with their first child. Mina, Jonathan and Quincey all do well too, but right from the very start, it is hinted that all is not as well as it may seem. Jonathan is secretly drinking and all members of the friend group try their best to ignore the events of the last century deep within the Transylvanian Forest. Yet, the past lingers on and soon the old specters come back to haunt the "Crew of Light". The hero of the book *Dracula*, Van Helsing, is the first to be pulled into the shadows. On Quincey's birthday party he suddenly collapses and does not wake up again. This event sets the tone for the rest of the story, as Van Helsing brings one last ominous message to Quincey: "You are to be the vessel, my boy. But you must fight. You must… do battle for your soul" (Barnes 25). And thus, the old cast, young Quincey, and a whole slew of new characters, must once again face the Count Dracula. However, this time the conflict takes place within England, where Dracula manages to take over a host-body, transforming himself into a fusion between host and himself. The only thing that stands in his way to take over England, after he hypnotized people in all the right places, is the boy Quincey, who had inherited an essence of Dracula through his mother, Mina.

During the narrative of the book the uncanny behavior of Quincey is recorded, how he often seems to act like two different people or comments how he has two fathers. However,

except for the foreword and postscript, there is no instant in the story that is told from Quincey's perspective. The ambiguity of both Dracula and Quincey keeps evading the light, as the characters keep denying the possibilities of Dracula returning or the supernatural being real. The Crew of Light tried their best to suppress the memories surrounding the events in Transylvania. Events that are suspicious or ambiguous are often denied and explained as mere superstition, shock from trauma, or an old ghost stirring within the thought of the past century. Every logical explanation is used, all in order to dismiss the horrible reality of Dracula, to deny the presence of that horrible past. In one specific passage out of Mina Harkers' journal, she writes:

> For many years, the events of a certain terrible time in my life have seemed very hazy and far away. I have thrust aside all thoughts of our ordeals, pushed them to the very back of my minds, until every awesome and impossible sight I had witnessed – from the ruination of poor Lucy and the horrid interventions of the Transylvanian to the nosferatu women who surrounded me as I stood in the ring of fire – became faded memories, as if from a book which had been left for days out in the sun. Such a wilful act of neglect on my part, urging those violent recollections to sink into abeyance, has allowed me both to retain my sanity and to have grasped a littler real happiness. (Barnes 331)

Yet, time is not linear and the past comes back again and again. "[T]hose old memories have been returning to me more colourfully and more vividly than they have for more than a decade" (331).

In realizing the part of Dracula that is hidden within himself, Quincey realizes his potential and stops the worst from happening, Dracula taking over the present and harboring a new feudal system. Quincey has yet to face Dracula and because he is not trying to suppress any past trauma, he opens the dialogue with the past hidden within himself, Dracula. Due to

his unconditional hospitality to the specter of the past, Quincey comes to represent future potentiality. He is not afraid of the past and this is a miscalculation in Dracula's plan. In the end of the book, Quincey is the key-character that makes the happy ending, the second slaying of Dracula, possible. The book *Dracula's Child* is full of the specters of a past that keep haunting those who refuse to consider their past trauma and the possibility of a time out of joint and in facing these specters of the past, a future is possible for the characters in which they will not be slain by the Count.

Haunting in Dracula's Child. The opening page of *Dracula's Child* is a quote from the book *Dracula*. "My revenge is just begun. I spread it over centuries, and time is on my side" (Barnes 8). This, coincidentally, is the main premise of the book, the slow revenge of Dracula. Or, the slow cancellation of the future for the Crew of Light, if you will. The characters that confronted Dracula within the book *Dracula*, only recognize a sense of future through their surviving Dracula. The very memory of the past keeps them trapped in the traumas of the past and unable to move forward. After Van Helsing has collapsed, Dr. Seward and Lord Godalming discuss their lives over dinner, in a fragment from Dr. Seward's diary:

> 'I suppose that his life has been a full and rich on. He can have few regrets. He has wrought much good in the world and done more than most to stamp out evil.'
>
> At this, he gave me a level, meaningful look – for we both knew full well to what he was referring. For an instant it was as though our surroundings had dropped away and we were back in the thick of our battle against the Transylvanian, both of us young once more. Then the effect vanished and we were in the twentieth century and again sober, sensible, methodical gentlemen of middle years. (80,81)

Right from the very start *Dracula's Child* is haunted by the specter of Dracula, but also by the context and public canon of Bram Stoker's book. As Dracula succeeds to conquer more and more power within England, it is easy to read this in the metaphor that is deeply associated with *Dracula*. The metaphor of reverse-colonialism and how the East of Europe would conquer the once so powerful West of Europe (Stephen D. Arata 623). However, I would argue that the story is much more influenced by contemporary fears, anxieties and desires than it might seem. The heroes, originally from Bram Stoker's book, are plagued by their traumatic past within the narrative of *Dracula's Child*, each character deals with the past in a different way. However, no one faces their past and trauma head on, they try to suppress their trauma and fears, pushing it away as a distant past, buried in the last century. Jonathan, for instance, drinks a lot, and more than once Mina Harker argues how his bad drinking habits are accelerated by his suppression of the past (Barnes 44, 47). Yet, the new characters introduced within the narrative are just as much plagued by the past of the previous century. Maurice Hallam is a retired English actor, travelling all over Europe to find a place in which he can be himself, since he is a queer man. Within his journal he argues how he believes that he lives his life full of sin and can never find his happiness again as in the past, torn between the role he played (on and off staged) and following his sexuality in hopes of experiencing true love. Another character, Arnold Slater, is a retired journalist and after the passing of his wife, he wants to commit suicide. Just as he is about to jump of a bridge, a powerful Lord convinces Slater to help him with his journalistic knowledge, literally pulling him from death. Dissatisfied with the course the new century is taking, Slater joins a group that wants to gain power in England and bring a more conservative influence back.

In short, every character is haunted by their past and their traumas and as the story begins to unfold, it is the acceptance of the spectral that might lead to a happier ending and a refusal that might accelerate an untimely end. One example being Jonathan, who finally

realizes that Dracula has returned. In his acknowledgment that the past "were in some fashion first impinging upon and then colonizing the present", Jonathan is able to open himself up for the specter of the past in the form of Van Helsing:

> The voice was real and not the product of my imagination. Of that, I am quite sure. I have seen many peculiar things in my life and I have long ago learned how to distinguish dream from reality . . . The voice was one which I had not heard for months. It was Professor Abraham Van Helsing.
>
> He spoke just one word to me. No, rather a name than a word. A proper noun. 'Wildfold.' (460)

Jonathan listen to the specter of Van Helsing and travels to the place Wildfold. Here he finds his friends, Dr. Seward and Lord Godalming, and his son Quincey. They all have been led by specters of the past into the small village of Wildfold, where they find a nest of vampires. After killing the nest, all back in vampire-hunting-shape, they realize Dracula is indeed back and they decide to undertake action. However, it is through the character of Quincey, a vampire-human hybrid, simultaneously past and present, Other and self, that succeeds in endings Dracula's revenge. Through his realization of Dracula's presence within himself, and England, Quincey keeps his agency within the narrative.

When the narrative is unfolding every character comes in touch with the specters of the past and in some way with Count Dracula. Dr. Seward finds a journal by Mr. Renfield, who was a minion of Dracula's. Dr. Seward becomes intrigued by the journal as it is written in cypher. Soon he is taken over by his curiosity and abandons all of his present life, following this string to the past, shedding a new light on a part that was always hidden in the shadows. This new light upon the past is a common theme within *Dracula's Child*. Arthur's wife, Caroline, also carries a strange connection to Lucy, the former fiancé of Arthur, who had to be killed after turning into a vampire. Caroline had a past of mental illness and, just

like Dr. Seward, becomes almost possessed by the past, which leads her to protecting the Crew of Light, as she does understand the haunting of the past. Caroline is the first to engage in dialogue with the specters of the past, taken over by a past she does not understand. The character of Caroline embodies the unconditional hospitality towards the specters of the past as introduced earlier within the chapter. The specters of the past cannot be controlled and one risks being overcome by them. This is exactly what happens to Caroline, as she becomes part of a history she never took part in: "'The shadow,' said Caroline. 'The shadow has fallen. The shadow which means to claim us all'" (219). When the Crew of Light is lured into a bombing attack, she is able to connect with those under the lure of Dracula and then takes away the bomb. Caroline saves everyone in the building, paying with her life. Her understanding and open hospitality towards the specter made her able to understand the present haunting of Dracula's specter, thus making her able to change the future that he had planned. Caroline represents both the need and danger for the unconditional hospitality of the specter. She saves her loved ones, yet pays with her life. Mina Harker goes through this process as well. She is visited by Lucy in her dreams, and thus quite literally haunted by a specter. Lucy warns her that the past will repeat itself, that the pattern is already visible and within this recognition the future can be changed:

> 'You need to wake up, Mina, my dear,' she said. 'You need to open your eyes and see what is unfolding around you.'
>
> 'Lucy,' I said. 'It is so wonderful to see you again.'
>
> 'I cannot,' she said, as implacably as before, 'talk with you for long. It is not. . . permitted.'
>
> 'I don't understand.'

> ‘See the pattern, Mina,’ she said, and the effort of speaking the words seemed to cost her. ‘See the pattern of events which surrounds you and draw the only conclusion you can.’ (225)

Mina offers hospitality to the specter of Lucy and starts to see how events begin to unfold like earlier, yet, so much in denial of the returning of the past, her friends do not believe her. Eventually Mina decides that she alone will try to stop the events and protect her future, her son. Unfortunately, she is also faced with the danger of speaking with the specter, caught by Dracula, she is turned into a vampire. Yet, Mina, having faced her trauma and past, is not taken over by her vampire nature, and cannot become one of Dracula’s minions.

Through the new characters introduced within *Dracula’s Child*, the Count is able to return into the narrative. Illeana, the Counts right-hand, lures and transforms two English men into a vampire and a ‘vessel’ for what later will become Dracula again. The three of them then return to England, bringing the specter of Dracula with them. The man turned vampire holds a place in an old council, the council of Athelstan. Dracula uses, through this council member, the council to get more power. The council of Athelstan can gain full power over London in a situation of crisis and the council conspires to plan multiple bombings on London in order to gain this power. Through this they radicalize people in order to gain support. One of these character being Salter. Within a column that he writes, he calls for people to support the council, as London needs once again a ‘clear truth’. Especially within this part of the books storyline, contemporary fears and anxieties of the late capitalist society shimmer through. One example is a fragment of “Salter Says”, Arnold Salter’s column in the paper in which he expresses conservative ideals and laments how the youth is nothing but an “indolent lot” (305). Through these negative worldviews Salter decided to join the council trying to overthrow the government and take back control. The figure of the vampire now forms an Other that invades and corrupts, bringing the monstrous over to the self, as Salter

gets radicalized through his dissatisfaction with his life. Here, I would argue, the vampire symbolizes the danger of radicalization, especially in a time where Trump could become president and there is an ongoing fear for terrorist threats, sharpened after 9/11, the danger of objective truth claims and lack of critical analysis are becoming more and more prevalent. Within the post-postmodern this danger is an important topic, making the figure of the vampire stand out in post-postmodern literature, as I have discussed in chapter two.

Dracula's Child highlights, through the figure of the vampire, different contemporary fears and anxieties. The fear of radicalization and populism through the characters of Arnold Salter or the dangers of past trauma as characters such as Mina, Caroline and Jonathan are under threat of their own traumatic past. First by highlighting the important and ambiguous relationship between past and present. The characters within the narrative of the book start out their journey with suppressing the past and its traumas, which not only makes them blind to history repeating itself, but also to alternative future possibilities, in which this repetition will not happen. Yet, through the narrative the characters do learn how to face the past and their traumas, which ultimately leads to their victory in once again slaying Dracula. Through their unconditional hospitality towards the specter, in the form of past and trauma, they learn how to deal with said trauma and change the course of the present. Quincey plays the biggest role in this 'defeat', as he embodies some kind of essence of Dracula, which the Count needs in order to regain full form. Dracula survived in spirit, but not in body, through Quincey's hybrid vampire-human form he can rip this essence away and become whole again. Quincey, however, realizes his power, being both vampire and human, specter of the past and child of the future, darkness and light, he embodies the ambiguity to walk the line in between these dualities. Quincey realizes he wields a power that Dracula might never have, a hybridity that Dracula might never have, as Quincey is both past and future, while Dracula will always be from the past, which he tries to bring to the future.

> ‘Well. . . he [Dracula] is profoundly lonely. He is consumed by it. He hungers, I think, for a kind of connection, although his mode of expression is curious indeed. Some of us – he would contend, I think, the best of us – he wants to make into something like him. In point of fact, he did just do that to a most spirited young lady of my acquaintance. Others – the least of us – he sees only as subjects or food. The Count is a feudal creature at heart. He seeks now, I suspect, to return to some simpler time.’
>
> ‘To a time, you think, when he was fully human?’
>
> ‘It is possible.’ (507,508)

In the passage above Dr. Seward and an American detective are talking about Dracula and his motivations while coming up with a plan to defeat him. What is significant here, is that the figure of Dracula is transformed from an Other that is nothing but a threat, to a figure, once human, that became lost in its own trauma. Dracula is no longer a monstrous Other, representing a terrifying force that wants nothing but revenge and destruction, but a more humanized vampire, who can never quite find a connection with the present. Through this Dracula wants to force a future to happen, by heralding in a repetition of his own past of conquest and loss of humanity.

Hauntology and the post-postmodern vampire. The figure of the vampire, embodied by Dracula, Mina and Quincey is markedly contemporary within *Dracula’s Child*. Dracula, Mina and Quincey embody three different iterations of the vampire, Dracula presents the vampire as stuck in its historical roots, haunting the present, yet he represents just one reading of the past, casting a shadow on all different possibilities of the future. The figure of Dracula embodies the specter that is uncontrollable, that takes over the present, he embodies the fears and traumas intertwined with the past. Here, Dracula can be seen to represent the contemporary fear of the slow cancellation of the future. The past gets repeated again and

again, until the end of the world comes rushing in. As long as the trauma of the past is not confronted, invited in and healed, a way to the future is not possible. Mina is able to realize the specters of a history unheard and by accepting the hauntings, engaging in an unconditional hospitality and conversation, she is ultimately transformed. Her transformation as a vampire represents a future, as she lives happily with Jonathan and Quincey as a vampire. Lastly, Quincey, who is half human and half vampire. Within the finale of the book, Quincey takes in Dracula's spirit, confining him within his body. Due to his hybridity, he is able to have agency over both past and present. The figure of Quincey, as hybrid between vampire and human, embodies the desire not only to accept the specters of the past, but to engage with both past and future. Within the contemporary iteration the concept of hauntology is interwoven with the ambiguous figure of the vampire. Encompassing both agency is the past and present, the figure of the vampire can be used as a tool to highlight contemporary fears and desires, as I have illustrated in this chapter. However, the book *Dracula's Child* ends on an open note. The past of Dracula is not done with its hauntings. Within the editor's postscript, written ten years after the ending of the narrative in 1914, Quincey, now a lieutenant, writes how he is about to go to France, as he volunteered to fight in the war. He states how the war stirs Dracula awake in him and he fears that Dracula's spirit might awaken soon in him and with this the book ends. "Put simply and in the plainest language: Count Dracula is hungry again" (566). The reader might fill in for themselves what this might mean, but given the traumatic events that found place within the twentieth century of real-life history, these ideas might not differ too much. *Dracula's Child* seems to end with a warning, a warning for the twenty-first century, and this is given through the figure of Count Dracula. The past will keep haunting the present and until the past and trauma is confronted, the future might be in danger. It is with this fear, closely connected to historical awareness within post-postmodernism, that contemporary anxieties are underlined in

Dracula's Child. In the next chapter I will focus on the relation between hauntology and post-postmodernism within the medium of literature. Hauntology opens the possibility to interact with the past, within the post-postmodern paradigm this interaction of historical awareness might open up new futures. And maybe, at long last, the specter of Dracula might be slain.

Chapter 4. The hauntological dominant and *Fangs*

The present is haunted through the specters of the past. Invisible to the naked eye, these specters are always lingering, until they show their faces in a confrontation between past and present. One of the faces these specters take on, I will argue, is the face of the vampire. The specter, as illustrated through the concept of hauntology, is an ambiguous figure, connecting both past and present and in this opening a new reading of the past. Those unheard voices within history can speak through the figure of the specter, but only if hospitality is extended towards them. A new light is shining upon the shadows of the past, through which new thoughts of the future are possible. Derrida argues within *Specters of Marx* that there comes great difficulty with the act of engaging with the specters (Shaw 9,10). One way to interact with the specter, I propose, is through reading the specter through the figure of the vampire. The figure of the vampire has been present within the common imaginary of the West for nearly two centuries (Groom ch.1). Through its permanent presence within society, as well as the ambiguous qualities of the specter, the figure of the vampire functions perfectly to be used for thought experiments ("Foreword").

As I have illustrated in an earlier chapter, uncritical sincerity can be dangerous, as it makes possible radicalization and a rise in populism. A trend that has been proven within the political Western landscape within the '10s and '20s of the twenty-first century. Within the

post-postmodern paradigm, therefore, a balance between irony and sincerity is valued. Another important aspect of the post-postmodern paradigm is historical awareness, as it is within the past that new futures can be found. Here, I would propose that through hauntology a critical approach towards historical awareness is possible. And, subsequently that the figure of the vampire can function as a representation of the hauntological specter, encompassing the balance between irony and sincerity. In this chapter I will argue that this technique can be analyzed with contemporary texts through the tool of the dominant which I have discussed in the first chapter. The figure of the vampire can be analyzed to highlight this post-postmodern dominant in the medium of literature, illustrating the paradigm shift from postmodern irony and ontological dominant, to a post-postmodern balance between irony and sincerity and hauntological dominant. It is, then, through the figure of the vampire that glimpses of a new sense of futurability can be found.

In this chapter I will shortly delve into the concept of the post-postmodern dominant. Afterwards I will illustrate this concept through an analysis of the comic book *Fangs* by Sarah Andersen.

Hauntological dominant. In chapter one I have briefly discussed the concept of the dominant that McHale introduced within his book *Postmodernist Fiction*. In texts, so argued McHale, there is a plurality of dominants. A dominant can be described as a set of questions that are intertwined within texts. According to McHale within different paradigms, a different dominant is more prominent. The dominant of a text, then, is a mechanism which focuses on the questions that are asked first in the text (McHale 6). Describing the change in dominant can be used to "describe the process of literary-historical change" (7). In *Postmodernist Fiction* McHale proposes that the dominant of postmodernism is an ontological dominant (10). Postmodern texts, then, foreground questions that ask about the ontology of the textual

world and its characters (10). McHale illustrates different strategies in his book to how these ontological questions are foregrounded. In this thesis it is not my intention to undertake a similar endeavor, however, I propose that the figure of the vampire, as avatar for the specter, is one of post-postmodernist strategies to foreground the post-postmodernist dominant, the hauntological dominant. Within the post-postmodern paradigm in which balance between irony and sincerity is foregrounded, I would argue that the dominant is an hauntological one. McHale argues that "typical" postmodern questions are about either the ontology of the (textual) world or the ontology of the text itself (10). Questions such as, "Which world is this?"; "What is to be done with it?"; and "What is the mode of existence in a text?" are foregrounded within the postmodern text (10). This does not mean, however, that the postmodern text does not embody other non-ontological questions, but that these are less important in the narrative of the text. The post-postmodernist text, I propose, foregrounds not ontological, but hauntological questions. Questions such as: "How is the present world placed within time?"; "From what past has this world emerged?" and "How is the self, connected with the world's past and present?". These hauntological questions come from a historical, yet critical awareness, questioning the sense of real truth within the world, as well as arguing which version of the past makes this present possible. Within the post-postmodern there is a shift against the idea of a fragmented reality, in which no connection is possible (Doyle 261). This results in a more optimistic view of the possibility of interconnectedness and an increasing focus on "ethics of responsibility" and morality (261). In other words, in the post-postmodern paradigm there is new awareness for the individual position within society and what place one takes within the historical narrative forming contemporary society. The answers to these hauntological questions, I propose, are found through the figure of the specter. The specter can be one strategy to lay bare the hauntological dominant in post-postmodern texts. However, referencing back to Derrida, it is not an easy task to recognize

the specter, as the specter has no body, no empirical reality to interact with. This is where I will introduce, once again, the ambiguous figure of the vampire, as the vampire can both embody the spectral qualities of the specter, as well as the corporeal reality that the specter lacks. The vampire, I propose, can be used as an avatar for the specter, making it possible to interact with the past, and the hauntological dominant. Precisely because the space between the "Other" and self has been closing in between the vampire and human (Mutch 7). The vampire, a figure embodying both societies anxieties and desires, an ever-lasting contemporary as its shapeshifts with the changes within society, has taken on a post-postmodern shape. Through an analysis of the vampire within the comic book *Fangs* I will illustrate how the figure of the vampire foregrounds hauntological questions in the text. Toeing the line between what it means to be a human in the present, whilst being haunted by the specters of the past.

Fangs and the horror of modern romance. Sarah Andersen has acclimated quite a following through 'slice-of-life' comics that embody semi-autobiographical struggles of everyday life in the twenty-first century (*SarahAndersen*). In interviews Andersen has expressed that her goal for her comics is to rework her personal feelings in a way that her readers "can recognize themselves, taking the painfully personal to the light, open a field of a universal experience" (Bea Caicova, "Sarah Andersen's Fangs"). Andersen has published multiple books of these four-panel comics under the name of "Sarah Scribbles". The newest work by Andersen, *Fangs*, is a love-story between Gothic monsters, told through small comics and pictures, jumping through different moments of their relationship. The book was published in 2020 and recently has been nominated for the 2021 Eisner Award in the category of 'Best Humor Publication' ("2021 Eisner Awards Nominations").[8] The story starts when the two characters meet and this is one of the few multiple-panel stories within the book. Within the

rest of *Fangs,* the story follows how these two twenty-somethings (in spirit at least) navigate their lives, and their relationship together, and with themselves. The two characters are Elsie, a three-hundred-year-old vampire, and Jimmy who is a werewolf. They meet in a bar, where both humans and monsters mix and mingle, as the bar has a sign saying "monsters welcome" (Andersen 1). Through little snippets of Elsie's and Jimmy's lives, the reader gets to puzzle together the overall love-story between the two characters. Elsie is a hundreds of years old vampire, but bodily still twenty-six, who still tries to come to terms with her vampirism, while Jimmy is a werewolf trying to navigate the two sides of his personality. Through the comic segments the readers follow how the two characters overcome their own insecurities and learn how to trust one another, navigating the polarities within their personalities. *Fangs* ends when Elsie and Jimmy have moved in together and Elsie tells Jimmy: "I love you forever. And me. . . I know 'forever'" (100). The tone of the comic is light-hearted with lots of tongue-in-cheek jokes about vampires and werewolves. This, subsequently, is why Andersen's *Fangs* has received high remarks, as it is intended to bring a smile, a chuckle and the occasional moment of sweetness while reading. As Andersen "takes monster tropes and creates beautiful parallels with real-world relationship issues" (Caicova, "Sarah Andersen's Fangs"). This light-hearted tone is one of the reasons why I have selected this work as a representation of the post-postmodern vampire. In the spirit of Wallace's "anti-rebel", Andersen's *Fangs* is not meant to be taken too seriously. It is made to entertain and bring a smile, yet it does touch on contemporary issues of individuality, feelings of connection and what it means to be human in the twenty-first century.

The empty space in the vampire's mirror. Right from the start *Fangs* is heavily laced with nods to earlier iterations of the vampire and it is mainly the role of the vampire within the comic that I will focus on within this chapter. On the first panel the bar is shown to establish

the place where the first meeting takes place. On the side of the bar there is a drawing of the character of Dracula, looking like a cartoon version of Bela Lugosi's version of the Count, in the 1931 film of Dracula (Andersen 1). Another example is when Jimmy comments that Elsie's hands are extremely cold, which is a common property of the figure of the vampire, their skin being ice cold due to their being undead (5). Elsie seems to be a vampire embodying both the more contemporary, as well as classic properties of the figure of the vampire. Elsie burns in sunlight, which is seen as a vampire fact for decades, yet she can protect herself by wearing a parasol outside, which is a more modern variant wherein the vampire is not limited to only moving at night. Another example is Elsie not having a reflection, neither in the mirror, nor does she show up on pictures. When Jimmy tries to take a selfie with his girlfriend, she does not show up, nor can she see any reflection of herself. This makes it difficult for the vampire to have a perception of self, not only in the literal sense, but also on a more personal level. Elsie refers to herself more than once as a monster, arguing that she "can't eat real food" and feels like she is "scary" and "pale". Calling herself "quite literally a monster" (72). The vulnerability of Elsie represents a common human fear, it is difficult for people to relate themselves within society and find their place in it. Whilst Elsie is a vampire and referring to herself as a monster is a tongue-in-cheek reference to her Gothic predecessors, she does embody very human and common insecurities. Elsie is both in shape and form a 'humanized vampire'. A trend that started in the twentieth century with figures such as Anne Rice's vampires in *Interview with the Vampire* in which her vampires regret their monstrosity and monstrous being (Mutch 7). As Mutch argued in the introduction of *The Modern Vampire and Human Identity*, contemporary society sees itself reflected back within the figure of the vampire (8). Elsie, then, can be read as a reflection of people that feel like they do not belong within society, feeling like they are different. A fear that has been prevalent more and more within late capitalism, as people struggle to find a form of human

connection (Ahn 243). Because Elsie is a vampire, it might be easier for the reader to relate to this "Otherness" that is reflected within Elsie, more so than if Elsie were a human being, reflecting a more specific context of perhaps a job or friends among other things. Through the context of the figure of the vampire, Elsie's fears are understood and accepted and the focus is shifted to the emotion within the character opposed to the context within the world. This projection of personal feelings onto a fictional character can work cathartic, so argues Keir Sothcott, this gives both a moment of escapism as space for understanding and facing these emotions and traumas, making healing possible through the projecting onto the Gothic (Sothcott 436). Elsie, then, is not just a humorous character used for vampire jokes and references, but forms a cathartic character both bringing pleasure and offering a space of healing through the figure of the vampire. Perhaps most for those who have ever felt like a monster in their own skin.

Besides these moments of human catharsis, the comic book *Fangs* gives plenty of nods and jokes towards its context within the literary vampire discourse. One three-panel comic shows Elsie and Jimmy reading books together. On the first panel Elsie and Jimmy are reading *Dracula* and Elsie is shown blushing while reading. The second panel Elsie is even more interested as Jimmy is reading *Interview with the Vampire*. In the third and final panel Elsie is drawn laughing with tears rolling down her face and she pushes Jimmy away, as he holds a copy of *Twilight* (Andersen 77). Elsie, as a vampire, represents more the characteristics of both the vampires in *Dracula* and *Interview with the Vampire* as she burns in the sun, cannot stand silver, crucifixes start to burn when she walks past them and she gets sick because of garlic. While the vampires in *Interview with the Vampire* also shed some of these symptoms as they can perfectly well stand crucifixes and garlic, I would assume that the more humanized portrayal of the vampires attracts the attention of Elsie. *Twilight* has become quite a controversial piece of vampire media, mostly because the vampires within

that narrative bear little resemblance to their literary predecessors, turning the Gothic monster of nightmares into a sparkling heartthrob. Yet, Elsie herself is far from the monsters of previous vampire literature, through this the contemporary awareness of the vampire discourse shines through *Fangs*. Andersen is aware that her vampire is far from the creature of nightmares of past literature, becoming even more humanized than Rice's vampires, however, she shows this awareness, something that *Twilight* lacked. This makes *Fangs* a piece of media that is aware of its historical lineage and consciously breaks with this at times in order to address the contemporary reader. Through these self-conscious yet sincere references to the contemporary context in which *Fangs* is published, as well as the historical awareness of the vampire discourse, foregrounds the hauntological dominant within the text. Through the references towards past vampire media, the reader becomes aware of the historical context in which *Fangs* is produced. Questions of the historicity of the literary world of *Fangs* are simultaneously asked and questioned through the figure of the vampire, as Elsie is aware of the vampire discourse within literature, whilst herself being part of the fictional reality of the figure of the vampire. What makes *Fangs* historical awareness decidedly post-postmodern is the sincere approach to the material. Elsie is a sincere character, not a pastiche or caricature of earlier iterations. Due to the vampire's ambiguous place between reality and the fantastical, blurring these lines, Elsie can shift between acknowledging the vampire discourse of the fantastical while simultaneously being part of this same discourse.

Another example of this ambiguous position is a five-paneled comic about Elsie's past. On the first panel she introduces the reader to the many names she has had through the three-hundred years of her life. A dark figure in a long black dress is illustrated in a dark street with buildings which represent an historical village, here the speech-bubble reads: "In the 1700s they called me 'The Night Witch'" (98). On the second panel a newspaper is drawn

which is called ‘North Carolina Gazette’, a nod to the ‘Westminster Gazette’ from *Dracula*, the speech-bubble here says: “In the 1800s the papers dubbed me ‘The Black Huntress’” (98). The third panel shows Elsie who faces a mirror, no reflection is seen besides her dress and the pearls she is putting around her neck, with the text: “In 1920 I declared myself ‘Queen of Darkness’” (98). The fourth panel takes place in Elsie’s room from the contemporary time in which the story takes place. Jimmy is shown to open the casket where she sleeps. The fifth panel is showing Elsie with one eye open, looking rather undone by her being woken up. A speech-bubble on the panel indicates that Jimmy calls Elsie ‘Creampuff’ as a pet name (98). This small passage is full of references towards vampire works over the centuries, yet it also shows Elsie’s personal development through her life. Within the first panel she says she was called a witch. The vampire first became a popular topic during the 1700s when folktales out of Eastern Europe made their way to the West of Europe (Groom ch.1). This was moreover during the time where the witch-trails in Western Europe reached a new peak (Lu Qihong 151). This one panel is thus deeply aware of the history of the vampire and the context in which the figure of the vampire was produced. The world vampire was only introduced after the Eastern European folktales came into contact with the West (Groom ch.1). It would make sense, then, for a vampire like Elsie to be called a witch opposed to a vampire. The second panel refers to *Dracula* through the name of the newspaper, as I mentioned earlier. The name ‘The Black Huntress’ simulates the names given to vampires in newspaper in *Dracula*. Around the 1920s the suffrage was won, giving more agency to women (Erin Holliday-Karre 323). The 1920s also embodied a brief period in which women fought for sexual agency (327). The figure of the female vampire has long been portrayed as dangerous, showcasing the dangers of female agency within sexual discourse, as female vampires became beautiful femme fatales out to kill all men and innocent women they would come across (Groom ch.7). Here as well, Andersen shows a great awareness of the historical context of the figure of the

vampire. The third panel shows Elsie with more skin opposed to the first two panels. She declared herself the 'Queen of Darkness' in the beginning of the twentieth century. Andersen subtly gives Elsie more agency over her own identity as here, she declares her name for herself. The last two panels show the shift from the vampire as dangerous "Other", a witch, huntress or queen of darkness, to a humanized representation of the self. Elsie is awoken, looking not polished or as a femme fatale, and is called Creampuff as a term of adoration for her. Elsie herself grows through the story of the comic too, where she once believed herself a monster, she learns how to accept that someone can love her. The five-panel comic about her name can then be read as a metaphor for how she sees herself, and the difficulty to accept love, and self-love. In the first instances she is called a monster and she starts to believe this, seeing and calling herself a monster too. Yet, through learning to trust someone else, a Gothic monster just like her, she is able to recognize her own 'humanity' and comes to love herself as something other than a horrendous monster. Elsie forms the specter of her own past, her previous personas haunt her present self, as she learns how to confront her own growth.

According to Mark Fisher, as described in his book *Ghost of my Life*, the twenty-first century is characterized by a fragmented sense of reality, in which the past sense of connection is repeated on loop, making a new sense of future impossible (6-9). According to Fisher the specter of the past takes away the possibility of the future, making the present both haunted by the specters of an ever-repeating past and a future that never will be (19). Fisher saw no way out of capitalist realism, arguing that the specter within hauntology keeps society from experiencing the new (22). However, I would argue that precisely through the communication with the hauntological specter a new sense of future can be produced. As seen in the past examples of *Fangs*, in which Elsie 'revamps' herself with every change in society. Her open communication with her past selves makes it possible for her to work towards a more open connection with herself and her partner. The specter of the past opens

up alternative voices outside of the logic of late-capitalism and highlights the previously unheard, provided that someone will listen. Through a spectral reading of the present, hidden and indirect ways of the past that lingers and manifests in the present can be found (Shaw 39). Through the specter of the past, it highlights its direct effect on present and future, a historical awareness. In order to understand conflicts in contemporary society, it is a necessary endeavor to understand past traumas and what cultural anxieties have manifested from those unhealed wounds (37).

The hauntological dominant, as I introduced within this chapter, questions the spectral relationship that a text has with its past, and thus of the society in which it is produced. This notion can also be seen in the figure of the vampire character in *Fangs*. Elsie, as a vampire figure, represents this vulnerability of late-capitalist society towards the past and confronting traumas. One image in particular shows the vulnerability of the spectral figure. This image is just a single illustration with no speech- or text-bubbles. A large mirror is propped up against a wall and nothing else of the room is shown (Andersen 8). Elsie's figure is turned with her back towards the reader, showing her slightly bent silhouette as she is trying to get dressed. This image symbolizes a very vulnerable and private moment as Elsie is unaware of the reader watching her in a moment of nakedness. She had turned her back to the one watching. She is dressed in only her underwear, stockings, long gloves and trying to put on a long, black skirt (8). Her outfit emulates a blend of different styles from different era's, yet emulates a more gothic-style, a fashion style that mixes Victorian fashion, with more contemporary styles. Elsie embodies the specter here, present in both past and present time, yet unaware as spectral being that she is watched. Most strikingly is her image in the mirror, or rather, lack thereof. Elsie, as a vampire, has no reflection and thus no reflection of self. As the hauntological specter, Elsie's self-reflection is dependent on the acknowledgment of another. The presence of the vampire's body leaves an empty reflection, an open space for

interpretation. Through the historical awareness within the post-postmodern paradigm, emulated by the hauntological specter, the empty space in the mirror might get a reflection. In the emptiness the figure of the vampire leaves, there is a space in which the reader can see their own reflection. Through the empty space of the specter in the present, contemporary society can see itself reflected in connection to past and future, bringing critical engagement towards the present.

Fangs, can be read as a light-hearted comic with a sole purpose of making the reader smile. Yet, this is what makes *Fangs* a product of post-postmodern literature, in particular the figure of the vampire. Elsie is deeply intertwined with her historical past, yet encompasses the vulnerability of both specter and contemporary society within her ambiguous figure. Elsie, I would argue, is a post-postmodern vampire, a thought experiment bringing historical awareness and much needed sense of light-hearted sincerity within contemporary society.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have attempted to highlight the journey of the figure of the vampire from its birth to the most contemporary post-postmodern iteration of the creature. The vampire, so I have argued, can be used as a thought experiment and strategy to highlight literary changes and lay bare cultural anxieties and desires. Within the first chapter I have highlighted the impossibility of reducing the postmodern and post-postmodern paradigm to one theory, as both paradigms embody a plurality of perspectives, they do, however, employ certain key-factors that define the paradigms as such. For the postmodern paradigm, a determining key-factor is strategies of subversion, while in the post-postmodern paradigm strategies are employed for more sincerity. In chapter one I briefly outlined McHale's use of the dominant.

He argued that the postmodern dominant is ontological. Through the prominence of ontological questions in the postmodern text, the boundaries between the real world and the fantastical began to blur. Through this there was a constant flickering within postmodern media between the natural or real and supernatural or fantastical world. This ushered in a time of an ambiguous relationship between the real world and the fantastical world to which one could escape. In chapter two I have illustrated that this notion of escapism is what Wallace criticized within his text “E Unibus Pluram”. According to Wallace, the subversive techniques in the postmodern paradigm, such as irony, only could deconstruct meaning. This means that boundaries between real and fantastical could become blurred, but no unified sense of the world could be produced within postmodernism. Wallace proposes the use of a more sincere approach towards media, making possible the belief in a unified world. However, Wallace’s notion of unconditional sincerity has since been heavily criticized as it forms fertile soil for radicalization and populism without a critical and deconstructive acclaim. What is needed, then, is a balance between subversive techniques, such as irony, and the possibility for sincerity and vulnerability. I have illustrated in chapter two, how these qualities are embodied within the figure of the post-postmodern vampire in different stories of the anthology *Vampires Never Get Old*. In chapter three I subsequently introduced the concept of hauntology that was introduced by Derrida in his book *Specters of Marx*. Hauntology highlights the importance of historical awareness, in order to fully address the past and the traumas that still affect the present. Through my analysis of *Dracula’s Child*, I have illustrated how the figure of the vampire can become an avatar of the specter, representing the contemporary anxieties and traumas of late-capitalist society that find their sources in the past. Lastly, in chapter four I have introduced the hauntological dominant as the post-postmodern dominant. McHale showed how the postmodern dominant was ontological, foregrounding questions about the ontology of a text. Blurring the lines between

the fantastical and real-world ontology, opening up the world for the fantastical to make their entrance in the real world. Within the hauntological dominant, I propose, questions are foregrounded about the specters of the past and future that haunt the text. Through these questions, historical awareness is produced, making the reader aware of the context of the present and shedding a new light on the past. Through the reevaluation of the past, through interacting with the specter that is present through the text, voices previously unheard get to take their place in the spotlight. With a new shift in historical awareness, alternative futures become possible, as they recontextualize the possibilities of the present. Through my analysis of the comic book *Fangs*, I have argued that the figure of the vampire can be read, and written as, an avatar of the hauntological specter. I would therefore conclude that the figure of the vampire is able to fucntion as an avatar that expresses paradigm shifts in its transformations, through the literary strategy of the dominant as introduced by McHale in his book *Postmodernist Fiction*. I would subsequently argue that the dominant of the post-postmodernist paradigm, as presented in my analyses, is a hauntological paradigm, foregrounding questions to bring historical awareness and vulnerability within the sincerity of the post-postmodern paradigm. By taking a closer look at the figure of the post-postmodern vampire, I would argue that the post-postmodern paradigm is reflected within contemporary society through an awareness of the traumas inherited by the past and a vulnerability to critically access this past and through healing to make new futures possible. In the empty reflection of the vampire in the mirror, it might be our place to recognize ourselves. Contemporary Western society and its mirror world of the past become one within the figure of the vampire. The vampire is a creature of ambiguity representing both the desire and anxieties of the contemporary, that can be used as a thought experiment. By acknowledging the traumas of the past and alternative possibilities that the vampire, as specter, represents, a new sense of the future might be possible. Possibilities as undying as the vampire itself.

Notes

1. The postmodern paradigm I will discuss in more detail in chapter one. For a more in-depth discussion of the postmodern paradigm, take a closer look at theoreticians and writers Jean Baudrillard, Gillez Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard and Roland Barthes.

2. The title of the BA thesis is “The Post-postmodern revival of the Vampire”, written for the bachelor Film- and Literature Studies in 2020.

3. Quincey is the son of Mina and Jonathan Harker and was first introduced within the Endnote of *Dracula*.

4. Creepypasta is a form of digital horror fiction. These stories are often circulated online under a penname or by an anonymous user of a platform. The purpose of creepypasta is to get circulated online as if representing a true story, blurring the line between reality and fiction. In some instances, creepypasta’s about vampires have been posted online as well. For a more in-depth analysis of creepypasta I would suggest the article “*Spectres des Monstres*: Post-postmodernims, hauntology and creepypasta narratives as digital fiction” by Joe Ondrak.

5. Urban Myth, or Urban Legend is a name for contemporary myths and legends. These are mostly stories that circle around on the internet. It can be argued to me a more contemporary form of the historical folktale.

6. In G.W.F. Hegel’s account of progress he justified war, as it would inspire people to better society. Through his consideration of history through theses, antitheses and syntheses, he elaborated that in between moments of theses and antitheses or antitheses and syntheses there will be conflict, which would invigorate and inspire society to improve (Lange). Another example is Marx theory of the end of history, as it will

always end with communism. For a more in-depth reading: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/progress/#EnlViePro.

7. Within the article ""Kiss Me with Those Red Lips": Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1984), Christopher Craft refers to the vampire hunters within *Dracula* as "The Crew of Light". The name has been used for this crew within the Dracula-discourse after the publication of this article.

8. The Eisner Awards, or Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards, are seen as the "Oscars" of the comic world. "Named for the pioneering comics creator and graphic novelist Will Eisner, the awards are given out in more than two dozen categories during a ceremony each year at Comic-Con International: San Diego." (https://www.comic-con.org/awards/faq)

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