

Television, Vampires and the Body: Somatic Pathos

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Introduction

(1) One of the most striking of mysterious bodies in American television drama belongs to the vampire. Once considered to provoke fear, the body of the television vampire has stirred sympathy with its pathos-ridden recognition of its own (often glamorously depicted) monstrosity. Many consider this sympathetic depiction of the vampire on television to be a relatively new phenomenon, pointing to the recent success of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and its spin-off series, *Angel*. However, the sympathetic vampire on US television has a much longer history, spanning much of its existence (see Note 1).

(2) If American television has long been fascinated by the figure of the vampire, it has also been particularly drawn to the figure of the sympathetic vampire who suffers a troubled reluctance at its vampiric urges. The sympathetic vampire, so popular on American television, is a creature troubled by its ontology; it is a being at odds with its vampiric body and the urges that this body generates. This chapter will examine why it is that such a figure has been so popular. What is it about a being that is in such conflict with its own body that has fascinated viewers for 50 years? I want to explore this question through an examination of the 1960s daytime Gothic serial *Dark Shadows*. This show was immensely popular with viewers at the time primarily because of its sympathetically portrayed vampire, Barnabas Collins, who, like his small screen relations, is tormented by his vampiric body and appetites.

(3) *Dark Shadows* was a daytime Gothic soap opera that originally ran to a staggering 1225 episodes, which aired on ABC between 1966 – 1971. Created by Dan Curtis, the show begins with the story of Victoria Winters, a young governess in search of her past, who travels to Collinsport to take up a post at the Collinwood mansion. Victoria finds herself in a typically Gothic domestic landscape, a large and labyrinthine house shrouded in secret and mystery. Here, Victoria is employed by Elizabeth Stoddard Collins, a recluse who has been tricked into believing that she has killed her husband. Initially, *Dark Shadows* had no supernatural elements, but six months into production, elements of the supernatural began to be added. For instance, when Victoria is kidnapped, she is saved by the ghost of Josette Collins. Later we discover that David Collins, Victoria's young and troubled charge, has an immortal phoenix for a mother who tries to reclaim him before being consumed by flames.

(4) Broadcast at 4:00pm weekdays, *Dark Shadows* struck a cord with an audience made up primarily of housewives and the young. Initially, *Dark Shadows* was not popular enough with audiences to secure its future with the network and the show was due to be cancelled. But when the vampire Barnabas Collins first appeared in the two-hundred-and-eleventh episode, such was his appeal to viewers that the fortunes of the failing show were instantly reversed. William Patrick Day

comments that 'Barnabas's popularity was extraordinary' (2002: 36) and the actor who played him, Jonathan Frid, found himself at the centre of a growing fan following, with the show receiving 5,000 cards and letters a week from fans. Because of Barnabas, *Dark Shadows* became as popular as its better known contemporary, *Star Trek*, and by 1970 was attracting an audience of over 15 million views per episode, five days a week (Muir 2001: 293).

(5) Cult followings and fandoms for television shows are often considered to be a recent phenomenon; however *Dark Shadows* became the first highly popular Gothic series, the first daytime soap to go into syndication (1975) and perhaps one of the first cult television shows. *Dark Shadows* generated one of the earliest television fan cultures – a fandom which persists today. As Harry Benshoff notes, there continues to be a large and active fan culture surrounding this show, which started during the initial run and 'continued to grow in strength throughout the following decades' (1998: 201). There are at least twelve *Dark Shadows* internet websites in operation today, offering the vast array of activities and information associated with fandom; MPI Video have sold more than 600,000 copies of *Dark Shadows* video tapes and DVDs; and the cable station, the Sci-Fi Channel still airs re-runs of the show in the US.

(6) This enduring popularity is widely attributed to the vampire Barnabas, who is sympathetically depicted as one who is caught in circumstances beyond his control. Such a construction of Barnabas renders him a pathos-ridden creature, not unlike the Gothic heroines who surround him in the series. In her analysis of Gothic television, Helen Wheatley actually includes Barnabas in a list of the show's melodramatic protagonists: 'the orphaned young woman on the verge of self-discovery (Victoria Winters), the struggling matriarch (Elizabeth Collins Stoddard), the confused teenager (Carolyn Collins), even the reluctant vampire (Barnabas). Each of these characters can be read as a melodramatic figure with whom we are encouraged to identify ... and their stories are constructed to elicit viewer sympathy and engagement' (2006: 155). Wheatley connects the melodramatic construction of the key female characters to the domestic sphere, in particular the Collinwood house, and argues convincingly that *Dark Shadows* is aligned with the female Gothic in this regard. Barnabas too is tied to the Collinwood estate. His father imprisoned him in his coffin on the Collinwood estate, where he languished for two centuries. When he is finally freed from this incarceration, he does not flee the place of his imprisonment but he takes up residence of the Old House. Furthermore, a recurring theme in the narrative is his detailed knowledge of the house and its history. This knowledge hints both at his uncanny relationship with the house and at his long internment there. Barnabas is destined to haunt the corridors of this house eternally, and is thus as imprisoned by the domestic space and its familial concerns, as any Gothic heroine. However, Barnabas also threatens the domestic space (at least initially) when he attacks two of the show's young female protagonists; he is the source of fear and anxiety associated to the domestic space, because his attacks occur in the bedrooms of the young women, rendering this most private of spaces unsafe. In this he differs from the melodramatic heroine,

suggesting that the root of his (eventually revealed) pathos is located elsewhere.

(7) This chapter will examine the source of Barnabas' pathos to suggest that it originates, not just in his domestic status, but also in his ontological status; it will argue that Barnabas' suffering and misery as a vampire is attached to his *embodiment* as a vampire. The embodied character of this pathos constructs the sympathetic vampire as a specific type of unwilling victim whose appeal to the audience is at once similar to and different from the appeal of the traditional melodramatic heroine, whose pathos, as Helen Wheatley argues, stems from 'the heroine's removal from a place of safety to the threatening location of her husband's or employer's familial mansion...[a] dangerous domestic space' (2005: 156).

Pathos and Barnabas

(8) Barnabas Collins is a reluctant vampire, and it is this construction that lies at the heart of his attraction. However, Barnabas was not originally written to be a sympathetic vampire. As one critic points out, 'Barnabas was originally intended to be a traditional evil vampire who would be staked after a few months of thrills and peril for the human characters' (Day 2002: 38).

(9) In early appearances, Barnabas is characterized as a cruel and violent. Barnabas is accidentally released from his incarceration in the Collins family crypt after the drifter, Willie Loomis, hears that the family jewels are buried with Barnabas in his coffin. Willie opens the coffin to steal the jewels, but instead sets Barnabas free only to become his first victim and his servant. Barnabas introduces himself to Elizabeth Stoddard Collins as a long lost relative from England and she allows Barnabas to move into and restore the Old House on the estate. One of his earliest acts is to kidnap the innocent and hard working waitress, Maggie Evans. Having already fed off of and enslaved Willie Loomis, Barnabas attacks Maggie in her room one night, causing her to suffer from an illness in the morning that the local doctor discovers is caused by an inexplicable loss of blood. Later that night, Maggie is discovered to be missing. Barnabas has secreted her in the Old House and has brainwashed her into believing she is his lost love, Josette. When Maggie escapes, he catches her and locks her in a coffin – a vicious enactment of her earlier recurring nightmare, which began concurrently with Barnabas' appearance at Collinwood. However, while *Dark Shadows* formally constructs Maggie Evans as the melodramatic heroine, a victim of a force of evil (Barnabas) who seeks to misrepresent her, silence and imprison her, and even bury her alive (see Note 2), it is Barnabas who elicits audience sympathy because it is he who is interpreted as the melodramatic protagonist; it is he who is considered to be wrongly damned.

(10) Once the show's producer, Dan Curtis, realised that Barnabas was becoming the central character, rather than killing him off, we find that Barnabas' character begins to slowly change. Barnabas' torment at having lost his past love Josette is highlighted and this complicates his actions towards Maggie Evans, as does the discovery that he too was

incarcerated in a coffin. Then, several months after his initial appearance, Barnabas begs Willie to prevent him from attacking Victoria Winters. Two episodes later, he enters Victoria's room at night only to discover that he has, for the moment, won his struggle with himself, for he cannot attack her. This change in Barnabas' character is a result of the overwhelming viewer response to him. As William Patrick Day comments, '[w]hat changed him was the response of the audience to his appearance in the drama' (2002: 38) and so, just as the fortunes of the show were bound up with Barnabas' popularity, the development of his character was also.

(11) Barnabas' treatment at the hands of the production team is reproduced over three decades later in relation to the vampire Spike in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (see Note 3) It is now a well known fact of *BtVS* fandom that the series creator, Joss Whedon, originally wrote Spike's character to be killed off. But Spike was saved due to his popularity with the viewers and, like Barnabas before him, became central to the show (see Note 4) Spike's 'unexpected' appeal may have been carefully planned, however, in an effort to reproduce the same intense viewer involvement with a show and a character, which his predecessor, Barnabas Collins, had created. In any case, it is significant that each of these vampires popularity with audiences led to the development, not of the initially depicted malevolence, but to a more overt expression of submerged and/or intertextually coded sympathetic qualities, that even early television audiences knew how to interpret (for an account of the sympathetic vampire's intertextuality and for fans' intertextual reading of the vampire, see Williamson 2005).

(12) Barnabas is soon provided with a sympathetic back-story that explains his predicament and which contributes enormously to his sympathetic appeal. In episode 365 Victoria Winters is transported back to the year 1795 by means of a séance. In this and subsequent episodes Victoria meets the Collins ancestors, including the still-human Barnabas. The following 95 episodes take place in 1795 where we learn that Barnabas was transformed into a vampire against his will. Sarah Gwenllian-Jones and Roberta Pearson have commented on the flexibility of non-realist serial dramas which are not constrained by a linear narrative. They suggest that such a series is able, 'over a period of time to establish multiple back stories, parallel histories that may be periodically revisited, characters and peoples who appear for the duration of an episode or two and disappear again into other "lives" and possible futures' (2004: xii). *Dark Shadows*, a Gothic soap opera, provides us with an early televisual example of such narrative complexity. The serial contains convoluted and overlapping plotlines, unexplained events and insinuations about Barnabas and his past. In episodes 980 – 1060 Barnabas is even able to enter a parallel time through one of the rooms in the Collinwood east wing. In this parallel history, Barnabas is not a vampire, but a human who was married and who dies quietly in his sleep as an old man. These episodes bring Barnabas face to face with his own abjection by presenting him with a non-abject version of himself, a human who is not marked with a guilty (vampiric) body. Audiences perhaps understood the pathos embedded in Barnabas' unfolding character construction, because the figure of

the vampire has long inhabited serialised fiction, and in this incarnation, the vampire is traditionally a figure of pathos (see Note 5). From the time of 'Varney the Vampire', our sympathy with the vampire develops out of its unfolding story of suffering. That the sympathetic vampire finds its way onto television then, is perhaps not surprising, because of the serialised nature of television itself. As many commentators have noted, television drama's primary appeal is not action or spectacle, 'but on the viewers' relationship with the characters...its structure is in effect all middle' (Day 2002: 39). Furthermore, Barnabas Collins' back-story can be best understood through feminist accounts of the role of the flashback in melodrama. Feminist film scholars have noted the predominant use of the flashback in melodrama (and film noir) (Cook 1980; Hayward 2000; Turmin 1989, Wheatley, 2005). Flashbacks are seen to provide 'an explanation of the present through the past' (Hayward 2000: 136) and function by 'answering an enigma' (134). But the flashback is considered to be highly gendered because it is not the female protagonists who tend to explore their own psyche, but male 'expert' characters (such as analyst, doctor or detective). However, Helen Wheatley demonstrates a reversal of the gendering of the flashback in Gothic adaptations made for television through the use of a female narrational voice, rather than a male one. For Wheatley, the flashback from this perspective can be read as a 'sign of strength or resistance' (2005: 162) because 'mediation of memory or imagination is almost always associated solely with the female heroine' (162) whose "will to view" 'aligns the female Gothic heroine with the (female) television viewer'. (162) The use of a flashback to reveal the present day incarnation of Barnabas Collins similarly aligns his plight to that of the viewer, but with significant differences. Importantly, the viewer travels back in time, not with Barnabas himself, but with Victoria Winters. Thus, while it is a female protagonist who drives the narrative, Barnabas, unlike the heroine of Gothic television adaptations, does not mediate his own story. This structuring lends a certain credulity to a narrative form that is considered to be highly subjective (Hayward: 135), suggesting that the purpose of this flashback is less about understanding Barnabas' psyche and more about understanding (or even establishing) his innocence. As Hayward has noted, the flashback of melodrama has a 'redemptive quality' missing from other genres and forms (138). Barnabas' lack of agency in the flashback establishes him as a victim of circumstances outside of his control both in the events themselves and in their retelling, for the function of this flashback is not to empower Barnabas, but to demonstrate to the viewer that which he does not understand himself - his innocence.

(13) When the series travels back to 1795, it is revealed that Barnabas is the victim of a curse, which is inflicted on him by a witch, Angelique, who is madly jealous of his romance with Josette DuPres. Although he tries to tell Angelique of his engagement to Josette in a gentlemanly manner (a sign that he is a 'decent' man), Angelique's passion so uncontrolled that she curses him and brings about his vampiric transformation. It is Angelique who becomes the source of evil rather than Barnabas, in line perhaps with gendered social assumptions about the links between the scorned woman and

monstrosity (although, interestingly, this serialised melodrama, like others, is unable to sustain categories of good and evil, and Angelique eventually has her own moment of sympathy). When Barnabas discovers that he is a vampire, he is appalled by what he has become and struggles (unsuccessfully) with his vampiric urges. To Barnabas' horror, his beloved Josette leaps to her death from Widow's Hill after having a vision of herself as a vampire, the memory of which torments Barnabas throughout the centuries. This drawn out flashback functions to explain what Barnabas is, not to Barnabas himself, who is condemned to misunderstand himself as evil, but to the viewers, who now have more knowledge about the innocence of this vampire than he does of himself. Christine Gledhill notes that, '[s]uch signs, though not part of the characters' consciousness, are available to the audience who is thereby possessed of more knowledge than the melodrama's struggling victim' (1991: 226). When the story returns to the present, Barnabas is shown to be a troubled creature trying to find a cure for his curse with the help of Doctor Julia Hoffman who (like members of the audience) has fallen in love with him. Barnabas' transformation into a figure of sympathy is simultaneous with his depiction as a figure of pathos. He is a vampire against his will, and for vampire fans, the attraction of the sympathetic vampire rests on this initial non-complicity in his vampiric transformation. Barnabas' struggle against his vampiric urges compounds the pathos of his predicament, as does his eventual search for a cure. Barnabas is also feminised by his predicament because of its close resonance with the Gothic heroine.

(14) The Gothic heroine's predicament is also often that of one whose innocence is misrecognised by those around her or the world at large. In a landmark account of melodrama, Peter Brookes comments that both melodrama and the Gothic are concerned with 'innocence buried alive and unable to voice its claim to recognition' (1995: 20). Barnabas, like the melodramatic heroine, is secretly innocent, but in Barnabas' case, his innocence is borne out of the way that he has had the circumstances of his vampirism thrust upon him, even as society misrecognises that innocence for guilt (because the vampire body is a sign of villainy). Christine Gledhill argues that melodrama is a, 'drama of misrecognition', in which the protagonists true identity or character is misrepresented or unknown. For Gledhill, the climax of melodrama is the eventual recognition of true identities, 'till then thwarted by deliberate deceptions, hidden secrets, binding vows and loyalties' (1991: 211). Barnabas' situation here differs somewhat from the melodramatic heroine in that he can never voice his claim to innocence because he inhabits an 'evil' body and thus he believes himself to be guilty. So, whereas the heroine of melodrama is often the victim of physical or sexual abuse, Barnabas sees himself as (and indeed is - although unwillingly) its cause. In one of the early flashback episodes, Barnabas is so appalled by his vampiric urge for human blood that he decides to end his existence. He asks his devoted servant Ben, to stake him through the heart, but this action is prevented by a magic spell. Barnabas thus does not even control the circumstances of his existence and is condemned to an unwanted immortality.

(15) Concealed innocence that is misrecognised as evil is the melodramatic core of the reluctant vampire, and none more so than

Barnabas Collins. Barnabas Collins is doomed to haunt his estate in the agony of what he has become; he suffers terribly while he tries to find a cure for his curse; he is at odds with his vampiric embodiment and struggles against his urge to feed on human blood, yet, at the same time, he is an outcast, a figure beyond the pale, and his vampirism is a terrible secret that he must endure. This sympathetic vampire, then, is not only melodramatic because he is pathos-filled, but because this pathos is performed through the body. Barnabas is, by accident, guilty; the pathos of this situation stems from the fact that he is caught in the grip of something beyond his control – his own vampirised and vampiric body.

Barnabas and Body Genres

(16) It is widely accepted that the vampire's meanings are body meanings, indeed horror is understood as a 'body genre' because of the way that it is considered to provoke a bodily response in the audience – most notably, the reaction of trembling with terror (Carroll 1990; Clover 1992; Williams 1984, 1991). Linda Williams suggests that in the case of body genres, principally horror and pornography, there is 'the perception that the body of the spectator is caught up in an almost involuntary mimicry of the emotion or sensation on the screen' (Williams 1991: 4); shuddering with orgasm, or shuddering with fear. The vampire is actually considered to provoke both of these responses; it therefore fuses the meanings of these body genres. For this reason, the vampire (including the sympathetically depicted one) has meanings alongside of the connotations of pathos, (but which continue to be connected to it). For instance, the vampire has often been seen as a figure of fear and this fear is often understood as symbolic of the fear of the embodied otherness of the female, the homosexual, the foreigner, or the person of colour (Clover 1992; Creed 1993; Dijkstra 1986; Doerksen 1997; Dyer 1988; Gelder 1994; Moretti 1988; Weiss 1992; Wood 1984). However, it has been noted more recently that this embodied otherness provokes empathy more often than it produces fear of the abject body (Creed 1993; Dyer 1988; Senf 1987; Williamson 2005). The vampire has also been seen as a sexual symbol, for while it is not pornographic as such, the sexual orgasm of pornography is inherent in the vampire's act of biting. Richard Dyer argues that although one does not have to read the vampire's bite as a sexual image, 'an awful lot suggests that you should' (1988: 55). For Dyer, the bite is part of the repertoire of sexual acts, and one that is analogous 'to other forms of oral sex, all of which (fellatio, cunnilingus, rimming) importantly involve contact not only with orifices but with bodily fluids as well' (1988: 55). Because the vampire acquires meaning from both of these body genres, the vampire is a figure saturated with ontological meanings and these are linked overtly to issues of otherness, sexuality and sexual identity. This becomes important when considering the nature of the empathy or audience involvement that the sympathetic vampire Barnabas elicits.

(17) Barnabas certainly provoked a sexual response amongst a number of his fans. Henry Benshoff comments that some *Dark Shadows* fans sent 'nude photographs of themselves to vampire star Jonathan Frid

(Barnabas Collins)' (1998: 206), at least one of which had "'Bite me, Barnabas'" written on it (Day 2002: 36). Dyer has noted that although the vampire has been used to articulate a number of cultural concerns, 'the sexual symbolism of the vampire does seem the most obvious' (1988: 54). It is perhaps for this reason that film and cultural critics have most frequently discussed the sexual imagery of the vampire (Astle 1980; Bentley 1972; Craft 1990; Cranny-Francis 1988; Frayling 1991; Fry 1988; Griffin 1988; Jones 1929; Pirie 1977; Richardson 1959; Roth 1988; Senf 1987; Twitchell 1985; Zimmerman 1984).

(18) However, while the vampire has been seen as a symbol of fear and of sex, the sympathetic vampire is, as I have argued above, a melodramatic symbol, that is – a symbol of pathos. As a melodramatic symbol the sympathetic vampire is also a body symbol. This is significantly tied to the form of melodrama because, like horror and pornography, it is also a body genre. Linda Williams has argued persuasively that melodrama is as much a body genre as horror or pornography, because it too features 'bodily excess' (4). For Williams, these three body genres share certain elements to do with the structure and function of excess and fantasy that may seem gratuitous in comparison to classical narratives. However, rather than seeing excess as gratuitous, Williams suggest that we consider 'excess' to be organised as a system which addresses 'persistent problems in our culture' (9). Whereas pornography and horror display spectacles of bodily excess, 'in pornography's portrayal of orgasm, in horror's portrayal of violence and terror' (4); melodrama portrays its bodily excess as overwhelming pathos, most notably in the display of weeping; the pathos is said to be shared by the viewer who is expected to respond as physically as audiences for the other body genres, but in this instance, by dissolving into tears

(19) I would like to suggest however, that the sympathetic vampire does not only provoke the overwhelming pathos of melodrama, but also the vampire *embodies* it. According to Christine Gledhill, it is primarily through the body that melodrama produces meaning. She suggests that it is the physical embodiment of characters within melodrama that reveals that which words cannot (1991: 210). It is for this reason that melodramatic identities involve excess (of expression, emotion, and gesture). We shall see below how vampirism is the excess to which Barnabas' body is subjected.

Barnabas and Somatic Meaning

(20) It is not only Linda Williams who finds similarities between horror and melodrama. Peter Brookes comments upon the relationship between melodrama and the Gothic, not only in terms of 'the subjects that were traded back and forth between the two genres' (1995: 19) but crucially, in a shared concern with 'the violation and spoliation of the space of innocence' (30). Gothic melodrama has the ability to force to the surface what are often submerged injustices, through the portrayal of a misunderstood and wrongly damned protagonist articulated through the persecution of the protagonist and the eventual recognition of innocence.

(21) For Brooks, the body is an important aspect of melodrama because the possession of a flawed body can come to overtly suggest persecuted innocence. It is because melodrama strives to articulate incomprehensible wrongs, and to depict innocence misrecognised as wickedness, that it deploys 'somatic meaning – meaning enacted on the body itself' (1995: xi). In commenting upon why melodrama has a tendency to deploy non-verbal signs, Brooks suggest that 'whoever is denied the capacity to talk will convert affect into somatic form, speak by way of the expressionist body' (1995: xi). Melodrama thus has a tendency to use extreme physical conditions ("muteness", "blindness", "paralysis") to 'represent extreme moral and emotional conditions' (56). Words, on the other hand:

appear to be not wholly adequate to the representation of meanings, and the melodramatic message must be formulated through other registers of the sign (56).

Therefore, the body becomes a central site of signification in melodrama, where the possession of a physical flaw can evoke misrecognised innocence and victim-hood. It is Barnabas' *vampirism* that is his bodily 'flaw' so that it is his body itself that comes to stand for misrecognised innocence (which the world sees as wickedness). His entire unwanted ontological status is an excessive somatic condition that has meanings beyond the surface ones that connect the vampiric body to evil. Through Barnabas' unwanted vampiric body then, submerged injustices and anxieties are expressed, and brought to the surface. This implies the opposite of sanctioned meanings about the body and the self; for what is formally a sign of evil is revealed in fact to be a sign of virtue. This is hidden from the vampire himself who loathes what he has become and thus is unable to recognise his own guiltlessness. Brooks comments that 'guiltlessness, in its purist melodramatic form [is] unable to assert its nature as innocence' (1995: 50). Instead, it is the viewer who reads the coded signs of innocence in the vampire's unwanted ontology, thus understanding more about the meaning of his struggle than he does himself, and potentially identifying with his plight.

(22) According to Brooks, virtue and innocence in melodrama are often construed as 'apparently fallen' (31) so that they cannot fully articulate themselves. It is impossible for the vampire to articulate its innocence because its body is seen not just as 'fallen' but as evil. For Brooks innocence is:

[e]xpulsed from its natural terrain, its identity put into question through deceiving signs, it must wander afflicted until it can find and establish the true signs in proof of its nature (30).

The reluctant vampire embodies this melodramatic impulse as fully as any fictional figure. It's unwanted vampirism is the violation it has suffered, it is expelled from humanity, is misrecognised as evil by a world to which it does not belong and its innocence and virtue are obfuscated by its very ontology, until we the viewers come to understand the vampire's predicament (and therefore innocence), even if the world at large does not. Sympathetically constructed vampirism,

paradoxically, has become an extreme physical sign of one of melodrama's core impulses – the struggle for innocence to be acknowledged and virtue to be recognised.

(23) The question remains about why it is that the depiction of misrecognised innocence, enacted through the body of a reluctant vampire, has such an enormous appeal to the audiences of Gothic melodramas such as *Dark Shadows*. Most theorists of the Gothic and of melodrama suggest that they articulate social contradictions and dilemmas (Gledhill 1991; Williams 1991). Linda Williams reminds us however, that while such forms do address cultural problems, they do not really have the ability to "solve" them (10). This may partly explain why it is that audiences and fans of the sympathetic vampire are regularly disappointed if the vampire protagonist is 'cured' of his or her affliction (for a discussion of vampire fans comments about their desire for vampires to remain victims of their ontology, Williamson, 2005). William Patrick Day comments that Barnabas lost his appeal after he was returned to his human form, for 'the audience's real secret was that they could never really want Barnabas to be cured, for then he would be merely an ordinary man' (2002: 39). What is of interest to fans of sympathetic vampires such as Barnabas is their ability to give expression to socially unacknowledged dilemmas and injustices rather than an attempt to offer a classical narrative resolution; it is the ability to 'speak the unspeakable' (Punter 1980: 417) that gives Gothic melodrama its force. For his audience, it is Barnabas' ability to suffer because of his ontological predicament – being misrecognised as a symbol of evil – that provides the point of empathy and thus his appeal, and the viewing pleasure is constructed around what only the audience is fully allowed to see, that he is not really guilty.

Barnabas and Troubling Bodies

(24) Scholars do not agree on what it is that is the 'unspeakable' hidden dilemma that Barnabas gives expression to. For William Patrick Day, the audience want what Barnabas wants, 'to be free, to be loved, to be part of a family' (200: 39). However, one must consider how the specifically somatic depictions of self-loathing and suffering, of otherness and outsiderdom, connected with audiences in the mid to late 1960s and indeed today. Jonathan Frid, (the actor who played Barnabas) comments thus on the popularity of Barnabas, '[h]e hates what he is and he is in terrible agony. Just like the kids today, he's confused, lost, screwed up and searching for something' (Quoted in Muir 2001: 294; originally Anon 1970: 107). How this resonates with different members of the audience will clearly vary in a number of (socially constructed) ways. However, Wheatley has argued persuasively that Gothic television addresses a female audience and she suggests that 'certain viewing positions are *recorded into Dark Shadows*' (2006: 151). So while Barnabas' 'agony' about his embodied status can undoubtedly have a variety of different meanings, I want to consider viewing positions generated by the melodramatically constructed *body* at the centre of the dilemmas posed by Barnabas; to consider the particular somatic force of this representation. I want to

argue that through the reluctant vampire, *Dark Shadows* constructs gay and lesbian viewing positions alongside the heterosexual female ones. It has been suggested that the secret of Barnabas' vampirism is a metaphor for secret sexuality, in particular homosexuality (Benshoff, 1997). If this is so, then it is worth considering the ambiguities that structure this embodied metaphor; a bodily self loathing exists simultaneously with an enormous glamour and attractiveness, and acting on unwanted urges produces, not disgust, but sympathy. Of course, there are many ways that one might read this troubling embodiment for there are many ways that bodies can be troubling, both culturally and to the self. However, I want to pursue the question of sexuality here because the ambiguities and ambivalences which structure the vampire as a body metaphor do seem, in the case of *Dark Shadows*, to have particular resonance for gay and lesbian identities, including the ambivalences between culturally constructed notions of lesbian and gay identities and ones constructed by and for the self.

(25) *Dark Shadows* is, on the surface, a show lacking in sexual content, but its hidden presence is continually hinted at through the romantic entanglements of Barnabas. Angelique loves him with a palpable savagery, while Julia Hoffman's feelings are also powerfully intense, but Barnabas is unable to love either of these women in return. Alternatively, while Barnabas has loved and lost Josette, he loves Maggie Evans in an inappropriate manner, and has developed deep unrequited feelings for Victoria. It seems then, that nobody loves the right person in *Dark Shadows*, and at this centre of this confusion is Barnabas Collins. There is much here to suggest that the 'unspeakable' at the heart of Barnabas' entanglements and at his feelings about his bodily urges is the 'secret' of homosexuality. Barnabas, and the characters around him, (as is often the experience for lesbians and gays outside of the gay scene), desire people that they cannot have (for a fuller discussion of the pleasures of the vampire's sexual omnipotence for lesbian/gay readers, see Dyer, 1988); they have unrequited passions either because they cannot risk exposure or because the one who is loved will not reciprocate. This is just one of the many ways that Barnabas' vampirism can be read as a metaphor for homosexuality.

(26) Richard Dyer reads the vampire in general as a metaphor for homosexuality, commenting on the particular similarities between the vampire image, social images of the lesbian/gay, and lesbian/gay identities. For Dyer, vampirism is, like homosexuality, a secret. He argues that this 'analogy' with homosexuality works in two contradictory ways:

[on] the one hand, the point about sexual orientation is that it doesn't show, you can't tell who is and who isn't just by looking; but on the other hand, there is also a widespread discourse that there *are* tell-tale signs about who 'is'. The vampire myth reproduces this double view in its very structures of suspense (1988: 58).

This double structure operates in relation to Barnabas Collins. None of the human protagonists initially know for certain that he is a vampire, but some suspect that he is because of certain signs (he is never seen

in daylight, he has the inexplicable devotion of Willie Loomis). But vampirism is also seen as something beyond one's control; '[v]ampirism is private and secret, and may therefore be the terrible reality of the inner self, but in another sense it is beyond the self because it is beyond the individual's will and control' (1988: 61). Dyer suggests that this is doubled edged because much of the apology for homosexuality, whether by gays, lesbians, or others, is a 'mix of distaste for homosexuality with a recognition that it cannot be resisted - "I don't know why I do these disgusting things, but I can't stop myself" (1988: 62). And equally, the victim is so mesmerised by the vampire that 's/he has no responsibility for surrendering to her/his kiss' (1988: 61). Barnabas from this perspective is an enactment of what Harry M. Benshoff calls the 'monstrous queer' (1997: 274), a demonization of lesbian and gay identities. Dyer, however, explores both the 'positive and the negative way in which thinking and feeling about being gay/lesbian has been expressed, by writers and readers, in vampiric imagery' (1988: 53). For Dyer, the structure of suspense in the vampire tale offers special lesbian/gay reading pleasures because it is constructed around the gradual discovery of the secret of vampirism - will or won't the other characters find out that s/he is a vampire?

(27) Dyer argues that:

[m]uch of the suspense of a life lived in the closet is, precisely, will they find out? An obvious way to read the vampire is self-oppressively... But there are other ways. One is to identify with the vampire, despite the narrative position, and enjoy the ignorance of the main character(s). What fools these mortals be. The structure whereby we the reader know more than the protagonist...is delicious, and turns what is perilous in a closeted lesbian/gay life (knowing something dreadful about us they don't) into something flattering, for it makes one superior (1988: 59).

In the case of Barnabas Collins, the 'secret' of vampirism is constructed sympathetically in the text as well as in the viewer's readings of it. The first human protagonist who comes to know the 'truth' of Barnabas' vampirism is Dr. Julia Hoffman. Yet rather than being 'disgusted' or 'frightened' by Barnabas' vampirism, Dr. Hoffman instead feels sympathy for him and falls in love with him. She agrees to cure Barnabas of his vampirism, and this might be understood as a heterosexist reading of the monstrous queer. However, this reading is complicated in a number of ways. Importantly, Dr. Hoffman does not 'cure' Barnabas, and the audience is left with the question of whether she ever really thought she was able to cure him. Certainly Barnabas himself questions whether or not Dr. Hoffman ever intended to cure him and is enraged when the 'cure' backfires. Furthermore, there is the question of the unstable gender categories inhabited by these two protagonists, which complicates the reading of Hoffman's feelings for Barnabas as simply that of a straight woman's heterosexual desire for a man. Barnabas' own feminisation has been discussed in relation to his melodramatic status and this feminisation permits a degree of gender sliding. Indeed, some critics have argued that the vampire is

always at least partially coded as feminine (Case, 1991; Moretti, 1988)). Thus Hoffman's feelings for Barnabas could be interpreted as a symbolic expression of lesbian desire. In addition, Dr. Julia Hoffman's gender is not fixed to socially constructed ideas of femininity. The fact that she has (what was certainly in the mid 60s considered to be) a male occupation as a doctor marks her out from the other female protagonists in the show who occupy more traditional female roles. Also, the actress who plays Hoffman is Grayson Hall. She is older than Barnabas' other love interests (looking of a similar age to Barnabas) and does not share their typically pretty, youthful feminine looks, instead she is strong and rather striking looking. Hoffman might be considered to be a man in drag, in which case her/his desire for Barnabas is an expression of gay male desire.

(28) Both readings are possible, and this means that Barnabas' 'secret' and Hoffman's love for him might have a particular resonance for gay and lesbian viewers. Indeed, Harry M. Benshoff has argued that Barnabas Collins has had a deep resonance for gays and lesbians because they read his secrecy about his vampirism and his 'troubled romantic entanglements' in 'explicitly homosexual terms' (1997: 209). He comments that Hoffman's unrequited love for Barnabas can be read as an expression of the homosexual experience and suggests that Grayson Hall's 'mannish manner' made her character 'ripe for much camp reappropriation, including the impersonation of her by gay male *Dark Shadows* fans' (1998: 210). Benshoff's research into *Dark Shadows* and its fandom demonstrates that there was a large gay following for the show when it was originally aired and the show continues to be 'tied to the gay community in many suggestive ways', (209). Benshoff argues that:

Barnabas Collins's vampirism becomes an apt metaphor for homosexuality. Barnabas is plagued by his unnatural appetites and much of his characterization comes from his reluctance, but concomitant burning need, to indulge himself' (209).

In Benshoff's writings on *Dark Shadow's* fandom (1993, 1998), he reads fan engagement with this figure in a positive manner because the show encouraged an active gay and lesbian subculture. But in *Monsters in the Closet* (1997) Benshoff reads Barnabas Collins more oppressively, for he argues that 'monster drag is still but another form of the closet's oppressive function...the monster movie is a "safe" but demonizing place in which queerness hides' (1997: 273). For Benshoff, the social construct of the monster queer, 'has been and continues to be the monsterization of homosexuality in mainstream US culture' (274).

(29) There are certainly ambivalences in the vampire as homosexual; in particular, Barnabas' attempts to resist vampirising others can be read as an attempt to eradicate the overt sexual markers of vampirism as homosexuality, representing the notion that homosexuality is only acceptable if it is not publicly acted out, or acted upon at all; so long as one is resisting one's 'urges', the vampire/homosexual is deemed acceptable. However, I am suggesting that the sympathy with

Barnabas only stems partially (or rather initially) from his 'reluctance'. A deeper sympathy with Barnabas stems from the way that his vampirism is also, as I have argued, a metaphor for his innocence misrecognised and it is worth remembering that viewers lost interest in Barnabas once he was 'cured' of vampirism. Barnabas is not 'guilty' of vampirism, he simply is a vampire, and the pathos of his situation is not that he is a vampire, but that he so woefully misrecognises its meaning in the world, and tragically loathes himself as a consequence, (and why shouldn't he, for he is internalising society's view of him, a view that the viewers know have misrecognised him as guilty). This suggests another way of interpreting audiences' reluctance for Barnabas to be 'cured'. Viewers did not want Julia Hoffman to find a cure for Barnabas because the point of identification and sympathy is precisely his vampirism. Once Barnabas has been returned to his human state he no longer inhabits a self in which we can find echoes of ourselves. Barnabas as a vampire however, acts out our own inability to be heard, our own inability to put forward the case of our innocence, our inability to articulate our own experiences of the injustices that we cannot fully name.

Conclusion

(30) Anglo-American culture does not like to admit vampires because they suggest an improper body, and they symbolise sexuality that is considered to be deviant; voracious female sexuality, homosexuality, male masochism and other culturally repressed forms of sexuality inhere in the figure of the vampire. And yet the vampire exists in abundant images in popular culture, and in doing so poses a threat to the stability of the notion of a 'proper' body, however temporarily. Our pleasures as viewers stem from a recognition that there is a momentary dismantling of these body discourses, which are ultimately discourses of power.

(31) Gothic theorist David Punter reminds us of why it is that monsters have such longevity in the imagination, for it is because they enact:

'those complicated, often confused moments in which the rhetoric and practice of power seem for a moment to shimmer before our eyes, when the uncanny seeps in and boundaries which had once seemed stable appear permeable. Through these mists, we see shapes of the terrifying; but these shapes are also reassuring, because they promise us that prison is not forever; the monster comes to rescue us, even if that rescue implies our death' (1998).

The television vampire, as a melodramatic symbol, is a somatic symbol. It is also an ambiguous symbol of the 'improper' body and its 'improper' desires; it is ambiguous because it acts out the existence of the 'improper' body in a sympathetic manner, and at the same time reminds us that it is beyond the pale, outcast and self-loathing. Our sympathy with the vampire is bound up with pathos for the self, and so it must be tinged with a recognition of inhabiting a body (and

embodying desires) that are also beyond the pale, a body that cultural discourses attempt to evict across the ontological border. But borders are notoriously difficult to patrol, and the vampire keeps confounding those border by turning up in most unexpected places, including daytime TV.

Note 1: In 1954 a glamorous female vampire, Vampira, became the very first television horror host, introducing KABC TV's showing of late night horror movies. Vampira (Maila Nurmi) delighted late night viewers with her sense of macabre humour, delivering lines such as "I hope you were lucky enough to have had a horrible week". She also went on to appear in the film, *Plan Nine from Outer Space*, which generated a cult fan following. (for a fuller account of Vampira's appeal, see Watson, 1991).

The first television adaptation of *Dracula* followed in 1956 with The Matinee Theatre's version of *Dracula* (NBC) in which John Carradine brings to his performance of the vampire some of the pathos of his earlier film rendition (*House of Dracula*, Universal, 1945). Since then, the vampire has been the monster with the most frequent appearances on American horror television (see Muir, 2001), appearing in every horror series since *One Step Beyond* (ABC, 1958-61). Two examples are the series *Boris Karloff's Thriller* (NBC 1960-1962), which aired an episode in 1960 that once again featured John Carradine as the vampire, and *The Night Gallery* (NBC 1970-1973), hosted by horror denizen of the small screen, Rod Serling, which had at least six episodes featuring vampires.

The sympathetic and reluctant vampire first appeared in serialised drama on American television in the 1960s with the Gothic soap opera, *Dark Shadows* (1966 - 71; 1991) Barnabas Collins was introduced into this Gothic soap opera as the mysterious distant relation to the Collins family who turns out to be a vampire, searching for a cure. The cult success of the show, and of Barnabas in particular, was such that *Dark Shadows* spawned two movies, *House of Dark Shadows* (MGM 1970) and *The Night of Dark Shadows* (MGM 1971), and its producer, Dan Curtis was persuaded to resurrect *Dark Shadows* in 1991.

In 1970 *The Curse of Dracula* was shown on the anthology series, *Cliffhangers* (1979). Dracula in this narrative has been transformed into a professor of East European history teaching night school in San Francisco. The Professor vampire is played with considerable sorrow, and he tells one of his would-be hunters that "there are many addictions...but the most potent is the addiction to life".

A sympathetic Dracula returns to the small screen in 1974, (played by Jack Palance in a film produced and directed by Dan Curtis) whose pathos-ridden depiction draws the comment from critics at the time, Gary Gerani and Paul Schulmanand, that Dracula is 'coming across more like a love-starved Barnabas Collins... than Bram Stoker's classic vampire' (1977: 180). However, it is precisely this appeal that renders the vampire an enduring character on the small screen.

An overtly sympathetic vampire returns to the small screen in 1992 in the television series *Forever Knight* (1992 - 96). Nick Knight is the consummate vampire in search of forgiveness and redemption, and is clearly the direct ancestor of the vampire Angel in *Buffy the Vampire*

Slayer and *Angel*. Knight is a 760 year old vampire detective who is trying to become human again. He is tortured by his past and by his bodily vampiric urges to the extent that he refuses to drink human blood, instead surviving on cow's blood which he keeps in the fridge.

The short lived television serial *Kindred: The Embraced* (1996) also presents a sympathetic vampire. This serial blends the soap opera and gangster genres and features vampires who are members of different clans, one of whom, the vampire prince, Julian Luna, is on an epic search for redemption.

Note 2: The writers of *Dark Shadows* even provide her with the support of a child ghost who helps her escape Barnabas' clutches. According to Peter Brooks a child is often introduced to the heroine 'as the bearer of the sign of innocence' *The Melodramatic Imagination* (1995), Yale University Press, pp. 34.

Note 3: In fact, it can be argued that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is greatly indebted to *Dark Shadows* in its hybrid Gothic form, its plundering of themes from Gothic literature, and the manner in which the diegetic world parallels the present day non-diegetic world of the times in which the shows are set. *BtVS* also shares *Dark Shadows* absolute acceptance of the supernatural events that occur in the ordinary world. For a further discussion of these parallels see Wheatley, H. (2006) *Gothic Television*, pp. 147 – 160.

Note 4: For a full account of this see Havens, (2003). Havens suggest that 'Joss liked what he saw enough to make last-minute changes that saved ... [one] of the show's most popular characters' (Havens, 2003: 43).

Note 5: The most popular vampire of the 19th century was not Dracula, but the ambiguous and torn 'Varney the Vampire', a tale that ran to 108 instalments before being published as a book in 1847.

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