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Joan Gordon, Veronica Hollinger, eds. *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997. xi + 264 pp. $22.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8122-1628-8; $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8122-3419-0.

Reviewed by Philip L. Simpson (Brevard Community College)
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Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger's collection of essays, entitled *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture*, examines the late twentieth-century domestication or "taming" of the literary vampire. The editors and most of the collection's authors accept as a foundational premise that vampires have transformed from their late nineteenth-century signification as monstrous Other to become largely sympathetic characters. For example, Lestat and Louis of Anne Rice's popular *Vampire Chronicles* novels invite audience identification. This literary domestication has progressed to the point where now, at the end of the century, the vampire serves "not as the literal horror in some 'night of the living dead' reconstruction, but as a metaphor for various aspects of contemporary life" (p. 5), such as sexuality, power, alienation, illness, secularized evil, and the persistence of the fantastic in the a supposedly rationalist age. The collection, in terms of its eclectic coverage and range of writing styles, makes a worthwhile addition to the scholarly canon of vampire studies, such as James B. Twitchell's *The Living Dead: A Study of the Vampire in Romantic Literature* (1981), Margaret L. Carter's *Dracula: The Vampire and the Critics* (1988), Ken Gelder's *Reading the Vampire* (1994), and Nina Auerbach's *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (1995).

The book is divided into four parts: "Reading History," "Reading the Writers," "Reading Consumption," and "Reading the Other." The first section, "Reading History," includes essays by Nina Auerbach, Jules Zanger, Margaret L. Carter, and Joan Gordon. Each of these essays treats some aspect of the vampire's metaphoric transformation from the nineteenth century into the twentieth. One of the strongest and most concise contributions, Nina Auerbach's essay (excerpted from her book), notes how "the coming of the impersonal, imperial Dracula in 1897" (p. 11) supplanted J. Sheridan Le Fanu's much "friendlier" prototypical vampire Carmilla and has problematically affected adaptations of *Carmilla* ever since. Jules Zanger writes of the demystification process that has turned the Anti- Christ vampire into a much more mundane "social deviant … eroding in that process of transformation many of the qualities that generated its original appeal" (p. 17). Margaret Carter maintains that American vampire novels and stories since 1970 often assume in sympathetic fashion the vampire's point of view-a shift that suggests the alien outsider in the late twentieth century is no longer to be feared but desired. Joan Gordon sees many vampire tales, such as Le Fanu's *Carmilla* at one end of the historical spectrum and Poppy Z. Brite's *Lost Souls* at the other, as metaphoric searches for an all-powerful mother figure and family.

Part Two, "Reading the Writers," is in some ways the most interesting section of the book, in that it allows writers in the contemporary vampire genre to speak directly to the question of the vampire's domestication. Suzy McKee Charnas, author of *The Vampire Tapestry*, explains that in her book she set out to avoid romanticization of evil and instead depict "a simple and ruthless predator … without the softening effects of sentimentalism and snobbery" (p. 60). Her fictional predator, Dr. Weyland, is male because "the most successful predatory identity in human society is male" (p. 62). Brian Stableford, author of the vampire novels *The Empire of Fear* (1988) and *Young Blood* (1992), writes of his attempt to give vampirism a biological (as opposed to a supernatural) basis. Jewelle Gomez, author of *The Gilda Stories* (1991), concludes the section by outlining her literary project: to explore a traditional, patriarchal form through the character of a black lesbian vampire in order "to contribute to a new, more feminist-grounded mythology" (p. 92). This section, original as it is, does sit somewhat uneasily with the other parts of the book; it would seem to deserve its own book-length treatment with a range of other fiction writers included.

Part Three, "Reading Consumption," returns to conventional academic analyses of recent vampire tales, such as Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* and the films *The*

Hunger (1983) and *The Lost Boys* (1987). Certainly the most intriguing of the three essays in this section is Sandra Tomc's "Dieting and Damnation," wherein she argues that Rice's 1975 novel *Interview with the Vampire* recasts "one of the most powerful narratives of gender metamorphosis available to 1970s culture: the story of successful dieting" (p. 97). Nicola Nixon analyzes representative American vampire films of the 1980s as evidence for her conclusion that *Near Dark* and *The Lost Boys* "vaunt American ideals of normalized family values, offering placatory parables of the essential permanence and inviolability of such values in the face of the 'bad' families who represent the potential decay of these ideals" (p. 127). Rob Latham adopts a multi-disciplinary and more diffuse approach. He devotes half of his essay to a theoretical discussion of "mall culture" and contemporary capitalism before moving to an analysis of *The Lost Boys* as "an ambivalent dialectic of empowerment and exploitation, in which teens are both consumers and consumed, vampires and victims" (p. 147).

Part Four, "Reading the Other," contains some of the collection's strongest essays, primarily because of the expansion of the range of texts analyzed. Miriam Jones undertakes a lengthy examination of Jewelle Gomez's *Gilda Stories* and concludes that the text's central vampire character, "a black working-class lesbian, [is] opposed by implication to the white, European, aristocratic, male vampire-norm of Count Dracula, Barnabas Collins, and Lestat de Lioncourt" (p. 154) and thus usefully serves to invert literary convention. In her discussion, Jones touches briefly upon the subject of vampire fanzines, which leads nicely into the next essay: Trevor Holmes's wide- ranging and insightful discussion of Gothic-punk/gay appropriation of the vampire image in various media. As Holmes says, "There is a peculiar mix at work in end-of-the-millennium reanimations of the vampire figure, a mix that includes embodied decadence, cynical neo-Romanticism, HIV, savvy camp, and, I would add, a post-punk aesthetic" (p. 174). Continuing this welcome expansion of coverage, Mari Kotani then explores how the Western vampire metaphor, once it entered Japanese popular culture during the 1930s, has come to represent a certain "binary opposition between [Japanese] national culture and foreign culture" (p. 190). Finally, Veronica Hollinger discusses the vampire metaphor from the perspective of postmodern theory. Particularly, she focuses on postmodernism's subversion of "inside/outside oppositional structures" as key to understanding the vampire, "since it is itself an inherently deconstructive figure: it is the monster that used to be human; it is the undead that used to be alive; it is the monster that *looks like us*" (p. 201).

Ultimately, most of these essays stand up fairly well. The collection adequately covers the breadth of easily recognizable vampire texts but is most useful in its exploration of some lesser-known works. For the scholar interested in literary vampires, Gordon and Hollinger's book will retrace familiar ground, to be sure, but it will also suggest some startling new directions of inquiry.

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