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COMING OUT OF THE COFFIN AS THE POSTHUMAN: POSTHUMAN RHETORIC AND HARRIS' SOOKIE STACKHOUSE SERIES

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COMING OUT OF THE COFFIN AS THE POSTHUMAN:
POSTHUMAN RHETORIC AND HARRIS' SOOKIE STACKHOUSE SERIES

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition:
English Composition/Literature

by
Rebecca Ann Garcia
June 2016

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POSTHUMAN RHETORIC AND HARRIS' SOOKIE STACKHOUSE SERIES

A Thesis
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Rebecca Garcia

June 2016

Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I argue that the vampires in Charlaine Harris' Sookie Stackhouse novels illustrate clearly the posthuman self in its connection beyond itself to other vampires, humans, and non-humans. Learning to co-exist becomes problematic in Harris' series, where we encounter a "new" representation of vampire. These vampires have come out of the coffin, and their revelation allows us to explore how they can be viewed in connection to the human world and how their transcendence can be seen as a move toward *posthumanism*, as its particular blend of body and community help demonstrate what the self expanded could be. As a species that differs from us "typical" humans and yet must co-exist with us and other non-humans, the posthuman provides a theoretical framework for how we can approach this new representation as a disembodied non-unitary subject. Through their transcendence from the world of the living to the life of the undead, these vampires let us see humanity as a distinct moment in evolution that is a continuous process, not a resolution.

There are six areas where we see these common characteristics between posthumanism and Harris' vampires. The first is the vampire being represented as an *other*. Like the posthuman, Harris' vampires are juxtaposed against the human population and because vampires are marked as *other* this creates tension where they must co-exist with humans and yet still be examined from an anthropocentric perspective. Another way the posthuman allows us to interpret this fear of vampires is from the position of the *de-centered human*. Because

humans prior to the “great revelation” in Harris’ fictional world, believed themselves to be what defined humanism versus their non-human others; they must shift in where they are located on the species podium due to vampires and that creates a fear. Another correlation is that of *immortality*, which is what vampires inherit when they become a member of the undead, but for the posthuman it is encoding and dematerialization that allows us to transcend these mortal bodies. This notion of disembodiment demonstrates the *body being a rhetorical strategy* to create an effect, such as manipulation. Since the body for the posthuman is seen as materiality and therefore they are not embedded to only exist within it, the vampire likewise is able to exploit the body in order to accomplish its purpose. Next for the posthuman, transcendence is the way they not only become immortal, but also how they move from identifying as individuals to *identifying as part of a larger community*. For the vampires in the Stackhouse series, their consciousness lies in their information and not in their material bodies, thus they are able to situate themselves within the larger network with other vampires, humans, and non-humans. And lastly *the connection through the exchange of blood*, which for the vampire is a literal connection, but for the posthuman is instead an ideal network which removes individuality.

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To my amazing husband, David, and our two beautiful children, Sophia and Desmond

Words will always fail to express just how much I love and cherish each of you. I know this has been a long journey, but I wouldn't have made it had it not been for your support, your encouragement, and your unconditional love. Thank you for believing in me and for being the reason I went into the Master's program to begin with. Sophia and Desmond never forget Jeremiah 29:11, and the plans He has for you.

To Jesus,

I am so happy You make all things possible.

DEDICATION

To the woman who suggested I change career paths. Or in her words, “Why don’t you major in English? You like reading a lot.” If not for her words of wisdom, my life would look very different today. She’s my number one fan, my best friend, my sister—Patty.

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THESIS PAPER

I know you're out there. I can feel you now. I know that you're afraid. You're afraid of us. You're afraid of change. I don't know the future. I didn't come here to tell you how this is going to end. I came here to tell you how it's going to begin...I'm going to show these people what you don't want them to see. I'm going to show them a world without you. A world without rules and controls, without borders or boundaries. A world where anything is possible. Where we go from there is a choice I leave to you.

- *The Matrix*

Introduction

The vampire is an ambiguous being that has preoccupied Western literary culture for almost two centuries. During that time the vampire's image has shifted greatly from when he first appeared in John Polidori's "The Vampyre," to his more current roles in *Twilight* or the hit HBO series *True Blood*. Many scholars have argued what the vampire represents; Deborah Mutch claims that the vampires in both the Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series and Charlaine Harris' Sookie Stackhouse novels highlight "the trope of the vampire as a site of national anxiety to a globalised [sic], post 9/11 context where national identity is renegotiated and transformed" (75). For Mutch, the vampire represents fear of globalization as the vampires in these novels are not foreigners as Dracula was—but instead are "born" or reside within our country and therefore they force us to renegotiate what an American is and who is allowed to be considered "one of us." By applying this concept to a post-9/11 world, where our search for the outsider or alien causes us to look inside our own borders for those to fear, the boundaries of integration

and acceptance become prominent in who or what the vampire is supposed to be for us.

In addition to the vampire's representation as globalization or transnationalism, the vampire has also been presented as capitalism. As such, Franco Moretti dichotomizes Karl Marx's description in *Capital* as "Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks" to Dracula as a metaphor for the capitalist which preys on and kills the lives of the people (qtd. in Moretti 91). In the same way the vampire reproduces—as Dracula transformed Lucy—more are preyed upon for their blood to keep the vampires alive. Likewise, as a capitalist society grows and the corporations keep getting richer, more is drained from the economy and the workers in turn become commodities. Indeed some scholars have tried to illustrate the correlation between Marx's theory and multiple vampire characters, and yet others have considered the vampire to represent homosexuality and a breakdown to our patriarchal society. For example, Linda Heidenreich's article "Vampires among Us" suggests that the vampire illustrates the threat immigrants and homosexuals are considered to pose to the dominant culture in America. Heidenreich, therefore, considers the recent political rhetoric as the cause in the rise of vampire fiction today, because it calls for changes to the conservative ideal family. What these scholars have in common is that the vampire is easily adhered to as the *Other* or what is alien to us. However, few scholars go beyond

that initial approach to recognize that the vampire also illustrates a breakdown of the demarcation of us vs. them.

For these scholars, the vampire represents our cultural fears. Yet because each textual vampire is different, it provides us the opportunity to explore how the vampire renegotiates boundaries between humans and non-humans in order to be one community. Learning to co-exist becomes problematic in Harris' Sookie Stackhouse series, where we encounter a new vampire whose existence is no longer a secret. They have come out—out of the coffin, that is, and their revelation allows us to explore how they can be viewed in connection to the human world and how their transcendence can be seen as a move toward *posthumanism*, as its particular blend of body and community help demonstrate what the self expanded could be. As a species that differs from “typical” humans and yet must co-exist with us and non-humans, the posthuman provides a theoretical framework for how we can approach this new representation of a disembodied non-unitary subject. Therefore, posthumanism complicates how we situate ourselves in a world of *otherness* by exposing the dichotomized identities we prescribe ourselves. In a sense, then, bodies and identities become rhetorical in that they perform/are performed differently in different situations. In this article, I will argue that the vampires in Harris' novels illustrate clearly the posthuman self in its connection beyond itself to other vampires, humans, and non-humans. There are six areas where we see these common characteristics between posthumanism and Harris' vampires: the first is the vampire being represented as

an *other*; another is the fear of the *de-centered human*; the third is *immortality*; the fourth is the *body being a rhetorical strategy* to create an effect, such as manipulation; next is moving from individualism to *identifying as part of a larger community*; and lastly *the connection through the exchange of blood*. Through their transcendence from the world of the living to the life of the undead, these vampires let us see humanity as a distinct moment in evolution that is a continuous process, not a resolution.

Literature Review

The rhetoric of posthumanism explores how we define humanism and materiality and how information can be both immanent and exteriorized from the body in order to create a larger network between humans and the non-human. Posthumanism derives from cybernetics, which wanted to remove “the human and *Homo sapiens* from any particularly privileged position in related to matters of meaning, information, and cognition” in order to demonstrate that thought does not only reside within mankind (Wolfe xii). However, by decentering humans as that which creates meaning, posthumanism produces an anxiety which calls for a new way of thinking of how we define and separate the human from the non-human and what these new possibilities can mean. Therefore with the discussion of a liberal being, an aberration that is not human, or no longer human, in conjunction with technology that transcends the body- the cyborg (or transhumanism) was born.

As part of this movement, Donna Haraway sought to explain the cyborg and how it complicates our dichotomized world in “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century.” According to Haraway, the cyborg is “a hybrid of machine and organism” and therefore poses a breakdown of boundaries between “us” vs. them (149). As a cyborg we no longer can be defined by what we are not; I am not male therefore I must be female, or I am human because I am not animal. The identities we construct for ourselves are grounded in these binaries and because “the cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world” it allows us the opportunity to imagine “a world without gender [and] perhaps a world without genesis, but maybe also a world without end” (Haraway 150). With this transformation we become what Haraway deems “fractured identities.” These fractured identities allow each of us to question the ethnocentric roles that have been placed on us. And although Haraway uses this term to discuss individuality within gender, class, and race—her theory can easily be applied to humanity and non-human others. If the boundaries which separate humans from animals and machines allow for fluidity and integration, then transhumanism is the next step in the process in joining others apart from our physical bodies.

Since Haraway, the cyborg and its representation have evolved once again to include the human who is able to expand the self to larger rhetorical spheres as a form of transcendence, and whose body and the technological self are indistinguishable. The two have integrated so greatly that the cyborg is no

longer part human/part machine and so therefore we now have the posthuman. In defining the posthuman, theories often overlap but there are still some areas where they differ. Cary Wolfe explains in his book *What is Posthumanism?*, that for him the posthuman isn't post entirely—in the sense that it has to only come after the human has evolved. Instead, for him we do not have to transcend our embodiment in order to complicate how we define humanism. That is because in order for humans to consider and question what our identities are in relation to the non-human, for Wolfe it must begin on a cognitive level rather than just a physical one. Wolfe therefore views posthumanism as:

com[ing] both before and after humanism: before in the sense that it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world....but it comes after in the sense that posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatics, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore, a historical development that points toward the necessity of new theoretical paradigms. (xv-xvi)

What we can take away from Wolfe's argument is that for him the posthuman provides a framework for how we view the human in relation to the non-human and global networks. The term "posthuman," is already problematic according to Wolfe, because it has to define itself based on an evolution of what we believe humanism to be. Furthermore, the various networks that the posthuman makes

possible is not because it has transcended its materiality, but rather it has redefined what a human is, and how the non-human is responsible for the influence and creation of the human (xxv). These new theoretical paradigms—that Wolfe refers to—allow the human to examine how it has co-evolved with the non-human and the ethical questions that raises for how we begin to define the posthuman by differing what we are not.

N. Katherine Hayles, on the other hand, believes that posthumanism is about the self transcended, since it is only through disembodiment that we can be conscious of the myriad networks that we are always a part of. Hayles views the posthuman as being made up of four parts:

First, the posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life. Second, the posthuman view considers consciousness...as an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow. Third, the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born. Fourth, and most important,...the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. [Therefore] in the posthuman, there are

no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot technology and human goals. (2-3)

As a result, Hayles' purpose is not to dichotomize the human and all other forms of technology or expansion, but rather to illustrate that our consciousness of what a human being has been up to this point is limited as an autonomous subject.

The cause of this confusion comes from viewing consciousness, and information, as dependent on materiality. Instead human thought restricts how communication as information can be exchanged both without the mind, and therefore without the human. So the body becomes a prosthetic because it is not a necessity for the posthuman to be. Therefore, without a dependence on materiality, the posthuman allows us to view ourselves in connection with other (humans, non-humans, machines, and objects) in a way we have never considered before. Or, as Morpheus from *The Matrix* puts it, "Throughout human history, we have been dependent on machines to survive. Fate, it seems, is not without a sense of irony."

So where is the middle ground between Wolfe's purpose to demonstrate our connection with our non-human others and Hayles information as existence? The midpoint, it would seem, comes from Rosi Braidotti and her clarification of the posthuman in correlation with anti-humanism in her book *The Posthuman*. Her purpose in defining the human is to signify how the "human norm stands for normality, normalcy, and normativity. It functions by transposing a specific mode

of being human into a generalized standard, which acquires transcendent values as *the* human; from male to masculine and onto human as the universalized format of humanity” (Braidotti 26). For Braidotti, the human is a unitary ideal of what constitutes the normal or *other*. If we are not the standard human with all of its hegemonic principles then we are outside of the system which recognizes each other as a part of humanity. Although we like to pride ourselves in believing we are individuals with subjectivity, individualism is an illusion that would have us believe we are active agents in the power relations of our community. Therefore, as Braidotti would argue, “Posthumanism is the historical moment that marks the end of the opposition between Humanism and anti-humanism and traces a different discursive framework, looking more affirmatively towards new alternatives” (37). Enter the vampire!

The Breakdown

Recognizing the vampire as *other* is something not new to the literary conversation about vampires. In fact, it becomes almost impossible to discuss co-existence between humans and vampires without highlighting the differences between them. However, what posthuman rhetoric allows us to examine is the way in which vampires can be seen as something more than just beings that deviate from societal norms. For instance, in Harris’ series, one of the shortcomings of humanity that can be seen as transferring over to the humans in Sookie Stackhouse’s world is that their understanding of the supernatural is very limited. They live in a world where humans are able to be differentiated by

whether they fit into the patriarchal standard or not. As Hayles states when discussing humanity and this notion of possibility, “we do not see a world ‘out there’ that exists apart from us. Rather, we see only what our systemic organization allows us to see. The environment merely *triggers* changes determined by the system’s own structural properties” (11). Ironically Harris’ series begins by highlighting this exact depiction, as the heroine (Sookie) begins by stating; “I’d been waiting for the vampire for years when he walked into the bar. Ever since vampires came out of the coffin (as they laughingly put it) two years ago, I’d hoped one would come to Bon Temps. We had all the other minorities in our little town—why not the newest, the legally recognized undead?” (*Dead until Dark* 1). What is to be noted from Sookie’s innocuous statement is the way vampires are grouped together and juxtaposed to “all the other minorities” in her town. The correlation between the two is that the minorities are already an *other* in Bon Temps; however the vampire gets added to that list by entering a predominately “human” society. As an outsider of the human race, it marks Bill (the vampire Sookie is referring to) and other vampires who come into her town as aberrations that are treated with similar experiences to that of racism.

Instead, rather than acknowledging and accepting a new mystical creature that is outside the banal binaries we have come to accept with finality, the vampire is easily lumped into a category we have come to be familiar with and which doesn’t require much consideration. This division once again reinforces the

hegemonic principles of our patriarchal society, and yet the dominant “white male” is forced to require yet one more necessary factor—to be human. Bill, a white male—who also served his country during the civil war, is rebuked from being able to align himself with the dominant culture due to him being a vampire. What Sookie, and the other humans in the novels, ultimately fail to recognize is how the vampire disrupts these binaries and how they cannot simply be added to “all the other *human* minorities” because they are neither human, and possibly not the minority either. Therefore Bill, who for all other reasons would be the dominant figure, his existence forces us to question what makes a human *human*, and is there a way being “more human” allows us to create another separation between “us” and “them?”

As such, it would seem that Hayles is right, that existence to us comes in particular forms and doesn't deviate from what we already know. Because these vampires have been inducted (per se) into a human dominant society, they are forced into the society already established. Therefore, they do not have the privilege of not conforming to humans' hierarchies within that society. However, the vampires complicate this once more because regardless of their ethnicity or gender, they are still evaluated based on humans' ethnocentric ideals. Humans' limited definition of humanism forces our views to consider:

subjectivity [as] equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behaviour [sic], whereas Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart. [Therefore,] as

difference spells inferiority, it acquires both essentialist and lethal connotations for people who get branded as 'others'. These are the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies. (Braidotti 15)

And although a strong argument can be made that vampires are in fact the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others to humans, our definition of humanity is based on a consciousness that would deem some worthy and others not, solely based on our own subjective views. Although our rationality would have us believe we are better than *others* who do not conform to societal standards in terms of ethical behavior, Eric highlights for Sookie just how warped this way of thinking is when he argues that unlike vampires who needed to feed on humans (prior to the development of True Blood) in order to live, "humans [on the other hand] kill other humans all the time. And they don't even need to eat them or drink their blood" (*Dead to the World* 53). Therefore, as Wolfe would argue, our understanding of humanism must shift if we are to include *others* who may have not been deemed worthy enough before.

Perhaps it is our own subjectivity which must shift and Braidotti offers this renewal as "the posthuman subjectivity [which] expresses an embodied and embedded and hence partial form of accountability, based on a strong sense of collectivity, relationality, and hence community building" which is something the vampires demonstrate—but will be discussed later (49). Instead what is to be taken away from this new form of consciousness is that we cannot begin to

define the human as rational, ethical, and conscious of others if we chose to exclude all those who do not fit our description of worthy of importance. So how do we go about allowing for more fluidity within our fractured identities in order for it to be more collective and communal with all *others*? Vampires offer us this chance of breaking down the boundaries we established long ago by removing the human from the equation.

In Harris' fourth installment to the series, *Dead to the World*, Eric tries to explain the complicated relationship vampires have with humans, and he claims that the "comforting theory being that we look almost exactly like you. And we used to be you," which establishes both an alignment with humans and its deviation. By signifying the vampires as this evolutionalized being, who doesn't have to fit into the dichotomy of "us" and "them," it complicates how humans view them, because they are neither and yet the same all at once (53). But the process Eric refers to is this dying to self that allows the vampire, or the posthuman in this case, to begin the breakdown of binaries from its moment of conception or transformation if you will. For example, as Hayles recently pointed out, we humans like to conceptualize life/death as if these mundane adversaries don't allow for any gray areas other than what they are. And that is because we cannot conceptualize of anything else other than what we already know. Therefore, you are either living or dead, and to speak of rising from the dead is to complicate the matter. So what then are vampires supposed to be for us when it comes to the boundary which marks our existence? If we humans can only be

living or dead, vampires are easily portrayed as an *other* because they refuse to be forced to fit into a simple dichotomy as that of living/dead. Our process of thinking of the vampire and the posthuman will always be faulty, because we cannot understand the process of *being* outside the boundaries we have constructed for ourselves. Therefore, these two autonomous beings complicate how we see our world and our own mortality.

Immortality, as we all know, is what vampires inherit when they become a member of the undead; but for the posthuman it is encoding and dematerialization that allows us to transcend our mortal bodies. Each posthuman theorist views this topic of information as immortality differently. For instance, for Hayles, dematerialization comes as “ an epistemic shift toward pattern/randomness and away from presence/absence, [which] affects human and textual bodies on two levels at once, as a change in the body (the material substrate) and as a change in the message (the codes of representation)” (29). These changes call for a mutation of the body which allows the self to be free from our physical bodies as we are no longer made up of just flesh and bone, but rather information which is part technology. The pattern/randomness that Hayles refers to is how these codes allow us to open up to further possibilities rather than the material substrate, which would bind us back to this problem of presence and consciousness. And with these changes from materiality to disembodiment, our *being* will force us to reconsider humanity and our identities within that faction, once again allowing the collapse of boundaries that Haraway

called for. Therefore as we move toward posthumanism, Hayles considers, “the great dream and promise of information is that it can be free from the material constraints that govern our mortal world...the clear implication is that if we can become the information we have constructed, we can achieve effective immortality” (13).

For the posthuman, transcendence is the way to not only become immortal, but also how it moves from identifying itself in individualistic terms to that of a larger community or network. Although Hayles calls for dematerialization as necessary to both undo our reliance on the body and to demonstrate where our subject lies, Braidotti and Wolfe do not believe that it is only through transcendence that we begin to un-identify the self in individualistic terms. Instead for Braidotti, the “posthuman ethics for a non-unitary subject proposes an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or ‘earth’ others, by removing the obstacle of self-centred individualism” which has, up till now, encouraged self identity based on solely bodily markers (49-50). The vampires in the Stackhouse series do not divide themselves based on ethnicities or gender. In fact it is only Sookie (the human) who ever mentions race or physical appearances when referring to vampires. In one particular scene in *Living Dead in Dallas*, Sookie is trapped in the basement of a vampire-hating radical group (The Fellowship of the Sun) along with Hugo who was the lover of a vampire, but who has now joined the fellowship. The way he explains to Sookie his developed hatred is by arguing that “Vampires aren’t American. They aren’t

even black or Asian or Indian. They aren't Rotarians or Baptists. They're all just plain vampires. That's their color and their religion and their nationality" (144). Although Hugo was using their comparison to highlight the difference between humans and vampires once again, his synecdochical statement illustrates how vampires are viewed not as individuals but as the overall community in general. Vampires as well view themselves as an all-encompassing race that doesn't segregate some vampires from others. Therefore, these bodily markers that Hugo mentions, that humans would use to distinguish themselves from one another, are exactly the individualistic terms that vampires do not use. Indeed, as the posthuman allows for dematerialization, the vampire as well is able to transcend these marked identities "because the body is not identified with the self [and so therefore] possible to claim for the liberal subject its notorious universality, a claim that depends on erasing markers of bodily difference, including sex, race, and ethnicity" (Hayles 4-5). Therefore, since vampires are the undead and their consciousness lies in their information and not in their material bodies, they can situate themselves within the larger network with other vampires, humans, and non-humans.

Furthermore, with this notion of disembodiment, the posthuman demonstrates the *body being a rhetorical strategy* in order to create an effect, such as manipulation. Hayles, as noted before, defined the posthuman body "as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate"; however, for the vampire this manipulation comes as their bodies die and they then continue to move, or

manipulate the physical body. Since the body for the posthuman is seen as materiality and therefore they are not embedded to only exist within it, the vampire likewise is able to exploit the body in order to accomplish its purpose. In fact for the vampire, their bodies become like the posthuman prosthesis that enables them to walk about, rise from the dead, even fly. And yet their consciousness does not only adhere to the body, as “when vampires don’t have anything in particular to do, they sort of go blank; retreat inside themselves, sitting or standing utterly immobile, eyes open but vacant. [As if] to refresh them” (*Club Dead* 35). In this particular example, Sookie explains the process vampires go through when they are able to escape from their materiality in order to just exist without the body. The particular term she uses, “retreat,” can be interpreted two ways: (1) that the consciousness of the vampire actually leaves the body to exist beyond materiality, and (2) that the escape from the body is therapeutic, as if enacting the body is a tiresome task. These experiences for the vampires, demonstrate how the body, as a prosthesis requires one to enable it, in order to create a rhetorical affect. Therefore, by leaving the body itself and extracting their consciousness to exist without the body, they are able to move beyond materiality and reconstruct the borders of existence itself.

For Hayles, the prosthetic is not just replacing the body itself, but rather “extending ...the body with other prostheses [to] become... a continuation of a process” (3). This continuation is not possible for the normal human body, which has an expiration date—eventually. The vampire body, on the other hand, is

remarkable in how it is able to preserve itself from what was once materiality, and yet is still able to manipulate its frozen form. The process of fangs being extracted is one example, as is the way with most representations of vampires—Harris' included—the “fangs are only fully extended when... in the mood for the sexy kind of lust, or the feeding-and-killing kind of lust” but then retract back to normal canines (*Club Dead 2*). Therefore, this manipulation of the fangs enacts as a prosthetic which allows the vampire to become nourished and continue on. In fact, Harris offers her own explanation as to what animates the vampires' bodies in *Dead to the World*. As a different heroine than Isabella Swan and Mina Harker, Sookie is a telepath which allows her to read other humans' minds, but not vampires' minds. Although she cannot explain the reasoning for this, her theory, or lack thereof, provides her with the inability to explain vampires manipulated bodies other than this: magic. She claims that because she has learned that it is neurons in the brain which make the connections for us, and therefore enables consciousness, “it's magic that animates vampires, not normal life force, [since] their brains don't fire” (*Dead to the World 59*). This theory, however flawed, demonstrates that for the characters in most vampire novels, the concept of how a vampire is able to embody and manipulate a dead being is inexplicable. Therefore they revert back to ignorance, or in Sookie's case a mystical explanation, but it is only when viewed in the posthuman framework that we can begin to understand how this misunderstanding happens. In fact, it is only with the support of Hayles' argument, as consciousness being able to rely

outside the body and the body viewed as just materiality, which may and may not be embodied, which allows vampires to be viewed as “the continuation of a process,” instead of its inevitable end.

Although vampires may be seen as being feared because they are *othered*, another way posthuman rhetoric allows us to interpret this anxiety is from the position of the de-centered human. Because humans prior to the “great revelation” in Harris’ fictional world believed themselves to be what defined humanism versus their non-human others; they must shift in where they are located on the species podium due to vampires and this creates a fear. But the fear is not necessarily just of the *other* but rather the “human [gets on the] endangered species [list, and is therefore] bound by fear of extinction” (Braidotti 96). Humans then become vulnerable to a higher species and this once again makes us confront our mortality. Likewise we come face-to-face with Ray Kurzweil’s notion of the singularity, in which technology (or in this case the posthuman vampire) evolves beyond us. Therefore if we lose whatever control we believe to have over our non-human animals then where does this place us in relation to the vampire? Bill tries to communicate this to Sookie when he tells her he has claimed her as his in order to protect her and tells her “it means you are my human” (*Dead until Dark* 102). Although he claims her as his in order to prevent other vampires from feeding on her, in reality he is taking his stance as the higher species and she in turn becomes his human *other*.

It is not just fear of extinction, as Braidotti would suggest, that develops this anxiety. Rather, it is knowing the possibilities of what a human may one day become, and yet still only mortal and therefore fragile. With almost indestructible bodies, more lives than cats, and various superman powers, vampires are something the human can only envy while they are still dependent on their mortal bodies. In fact as humans observe vampires, they are constantly presented with autonomous subjects that look just like them, and yet are better versions of themselves. Therefore the de-centered human, and all their ethnocentric roles, become last season's colors—still there but a boring version. Eric reminds Sookie of this similarity when he states “we look almost exactly like you. And we used to be you” which serves to reiterate how vampires' evolution is something which the humans can only hope to gain (*Dead to the World* 53). As they are no longer the higher species, nor the more desirable one, humans have been replaced with a more permanent, dependable model.

Finally, an additional way to view the Harris' vampires as the posthuman is through the connection and exchange of blood. This connection becomes the case when Sookie accidentally drinks some of Eric's blood. In the Stackhouse series, when a vampire drinks from a human and in return that human drinks from the vampire, a connection or bond is created that allows the vampire to then sense the emotions of that human.

“He will know some things about you, now.”

“What like my dress size?”

Bill smiled, not always a relaxing sight. “No, like how you are feeling. Angry, horny, loving.” (*Living Dead in Dallas* 233).

The blood itself then becomes a form of information that transcends consciousness from one to another and in return creates “posthuman knowledge—and the knowing subjects that sustain it—enacts a fundamental aspiration to principles of community bonding” (Braidotti 11). It becomes rhetorical in that it allows the performance of this new posthuman being, based on blood “identity,” to be tied to a network of exchange. The connection or bond transcends the being and creates an information network with another or multiple beings. In fact, as Sookie shares her blood with more than one vampire, and receives their blood in return, she is able to make multiple connections, and their blood in turn has a visible effect on her. “Healed, healthy, stronger...sexier,” are just some of ways Sookie internally transforms while those around her see whiter teeth, lighter hair, and brighter eyes (*Dead Until Dark* 225). Sookie admits to feeling like a “changed human,” even “an enhanced human” and the blood which created these visible changes allows her to move beyond her own consciousness and connect with other autonomous subjects (*Dead Until Dark* 225, 226). Likewise, as the blood itself could be said to temporarily move her toward the posthuman vampire—with her enhanced appearance—the blood also moves her beyond just physical connections as she is now able to connect with other beings, including a different species—the vampire!

Conclusion

For the posthuman, viewing ourselves not as individuals but rather as part of a community, “proposes an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or ‘earth’ others, by removing the obstacle of self-centred individualism” (Braidotti 49-50). Therefore, posthumanism complicates how we situate ourselves in a world of *otherness*. It also demands for us to look more closely at how we define humanism and its successor. Sookie, herself being an *other*, is trying to make this connection for herself. Although she is examining vampires through her own subjectivity, the world in which she constructs her ideals appears to constrain her views on those around her. In the end scholars might be right when they state the vampire represents capitalism, homosexuality, fear of the “Other” or globalization. I am not trying to disprove them, but rather extend their theory of what the vampire portrays and explore how the rhetoric of posthumanism complicates Harris’ vampires and calls for a “vigilance, responsibility, and humility that accompany living in a world so newly, and differently, inhabited” (Wolfe 47).

“It was just that they looked so human; it was so very easy to attribute normal human reactions and feelings to them” (*Dead to the World* 58).

CONFERENCE PAPER

Exordium

I love vampires! And I am fascinated by their ambiguity and how scholars have spent almost two centuries exploring what they are, who they are, and what they represent. Yet because each textual vampire is different, it provides us the opportunity to explore how the vampire renegotiates boundaries between humans and non-humans in order to be one community. In Charlaine Harris' Sookie Stackhouse series we encounter a new vampire whose existence is no longer a secret to society. They have come out! Out of the coffin that is, and their revelation allows us to explore how they can be viewed in connection to the human world and how their transcendence can be seen as a move toward *posthumanism* as its particular blend of body and community help demonstrate what the self expanded could be.

Narratio

What is posthumanism you might wonder? And I apologize if I don't do it justice in this small description. Let me begin by saying that the posthuman is more than just small wonder meets the matrix. Which is what I originally thought when I first heard the word. Instead, what posthumanism allows us to explore is the way in which we define humanism and materiality and how information can be both immanent and exteriorized from the body in order to create a larger network between us humans and the non-human. Posthumanism derives from cybernetics which wanted to remove "the human and *Homo sapiens* from any

particularly privileged position in related to matters of meaning, information, and cognition” (Wolfe xii). Which is how we can see the fear of the de-centered human as being a part of the posthumanities today. Therefore with the discussion of a liberal being, an aberration that is not human, or no longer human, in conjunction with technology that transcends the body- the cyborg (or transhumanism) was born. As part of this movement, Donna Haraway sought to explain the cyborg and how it complicates our dichotomized world in “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century.” According to Haraway the cyborg is “a hybrid of machine and organism” and therefore poses a breakdown of boundaries between “us” vs. them (149). As a cyborg we no longer can be defined by what we are not, and we can no longer place our ethnocentric roles on it.

Since Haraway, the cyborg and its representation have evolved once again to include the human who is able to expand the self to larger rhetorical spheres as a form of transcendence, and the technological self are indistinguishable. The two have integrated so greatly that it is no longer part human- part machine and so therefore we now have the posthuman. In defining the posthuman, theories often overlap but there are still some areas where they differ. Cary Wolfe explains in his book *What is Posthumanism?*, that for him the posthuman isn't post entirely—in the sense that it has to only come after the human has evolved. Instead, for him we do not have to transcend our embodiment in order to complicate how we define humanism. Wolfe therefore, views posthumanism as:

com[ing] both before and after humanism: before in the sense that it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world....but it comes after in the sense that posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatics, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore, a historical development that points toward the necessity of new theoretical paradigms. (xv-xvi)

What we can take away from Wolfe's argument is that for him the posthuman provides a framework for how we view the human in relation to the non-human and global networks. Katherine Hayles, on the other hand, believes that posthumanism is about the self transcended as it is only through disembodiment that we can be conscious of the myriad networks that we are always a part of. Hayles views the posthuman as being made up of four parts:

First, the posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life. Second, the posthuman view considers consciousness,...as an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow. Third, the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other

prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born. Fourth, and most important, by these and other means, the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. [Therefore] in the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot technology and human goals. (Hayles 2-3).

As a result, Hayles' purpose is not to dichotomize the human and all other forms of technology or expansion, but rather to illustrate that our consciousness of what a human being has been up to this point is limited as an autonomous subject. Instead the posthuman allows us to view ourselves in connection with other (humans, non-humans, machines, and objects) in a way we have never considered before. Or, as Morpheus from *The Matrix* puts it, "Throughout human history, we have been dependent on machines to survive. Fate, it seems, is not without a sense of irony."

So where is the middle ground between Wolfe's purpose to demonstrate our connection with our non-human others and Hayles information as existence? The midpoint, it would seem, comes from Rosi Braidotti and her clarification of the posthuman in correlation with anti-humanism in her book *The Posthuman*. Her purpose in defining the human is to signify how the "human norm stands for normality, normalcy, and normativity. It functions by transposing a specific mode

of being human into a generalized standard, which acquires transcendent values as *the* human; from male to masculine and onto human as the universalized format of humanity” (Braidotti 26). For Braidotti, the human is a unitary ideal of what constitutes the normal or *other*. If we are not the standard human with all of its hegemonic principles then we are outside of the system which recognizes each other as a part of humanity. Although we like to pride ourselves in believing we are individuals with subjectivity; individualism is an illusion that would have us believe we are active agents in the power relations of our community. Therefore, as Braidotti would argue, “Posthumanism is the historical moment that marks the end of the opposition between Humanism and anti-humanism and traces a different discursive framework, looking more affirmatively towards new alternatives” (37). Enter the vampire!

Harris’ novels bring forth a new kind of vampire we have yet to experience. This vampire has “come out of the coffin” to be recognized in a world of *otherness*. As a species that differs from us “typical” humans and yet must co-exist with us and other non-humans; the posthuman provides a theoretical framework for how we can approach this new representation as a disembodied non-unitary subject .

Divisio

Due to time constraints for this presentation I will focus solely on the first three books of the Stackhouse series and analyze the vampire community as the posthuman in five distinct areas which are; the vampire as *other*, information as

immortality, fear of the de-centered human, identifying as part of a larger community, and lastly the connection through the exchange of blood.

Confirmatio

Recognizing the vampire as *other* is something not new to the literary conversation about vampires. However, the posthuman allows us to examine the ways in which vampires can be seen as something more than just deviating from societal norms. One of the shortcomings of humanity that can be seen as transferring over to the humans in Sookie's world is that their understanding of the supernatural is very limited. They live in a world where humans are able to be differentiated by whether they fit into the patriarchal standard or not. As Hayles states when discussing humanity and this notion of possibility, she claims "we do not see a world 'out there' that exists apart from us. Rather, we see only what our systemic organization allows us to see. The environment merely *triggers* changes determined by the system's own structural properties" (11). Ironically the Stackhouse series begins by highlighting this exact depiction; "I'd been waiting for the vampire for years when he walked into the bar. Ever since vampires came out of the coffin (as they laughingly put it) two years ago, I'd hoped one would come to Bon Temps. We had all the other minorities in our little town—why not the newest, the legally recognized undead?" (*Dead until Dark* 1). What is to be noted from Sookie's innocuous statement is the way vampires are grouped together and juxtaposed to "all the other minorities" in her town. The correlation between the two is that the minorities are already an *other* in Bon

Temps; however the vampire gets added to that list by entering a predominately “human” society. This marks Bill (the vampire Sookie is referring to) and other vampires who come into her town as aberrations that are treated with similar experiences to that of racism. Likewise for the human with their anthropocentric perspectives, vampires are easily portrayed as an *other* because they refuse to be forced to fit into a simple dichotomy as that of living/dead. Vampires instead are the “undead,” and that complicates how we see our world and our own mortality.

Which brings me to my next point of immortality being a form of the posthuman. Immortality as we all know is what vampires inherit when they become a member of the undead; but for the posthuman it is encoding and dematerialization that allows us to transcend our mortal bodies. As Hayles puts it, “the great dream and promise of information is that it can be free from the material constraints that govern our mortal world...the clear implication is that if we can become the information we have constructed, we can achieve effective immortality” (13). But what type of information would this require? The information is a form of consciousness in the way we understand ourselves as part of a larger network. Therefore because information is exteriorized, the body itself can be seen as arbitrary and not necessary for information to exist. The vampire illustrates this example in the way their bodies are simply materiality and they are able to transcend them through their consciousness.

Although vampires may be seen as being feared because they are *othered*, another way the posthuman rhetoric allows us to interpret this anxiety is from the position of the de-centered human. Because humans prior to the “great revelation” in Harris’ fictional world, believed themselves to be what defined humanism versus their non-human others; they must shift in where they are located on the species podium due to vampires and that creates a different type of fear. This fear is not necessarily just of the *other* but rather the “human [gets on the] endangered species [list, and is therefore] bound by fear of extinction [which also] forces a new unity among the human and other species, in the form of compensatory extension of humanist values and rights to the non-human others” (Braidotti 96). Humans then become vulnerable to a higher species and this once again makes us confront our mortality. Likewise we come face-to-face with Ray Kurzweil’s notion of the singularity; in which technology (or in this case the posthuman vampire) evolves beyond us. Therefore if we lose whatever control we believe to have over our non-human animals then where does this place us in relation to the vampire? Bill tries to communicate this to Sookie when he tells her he has claimed her as his in order to protect her and states “it means you are my human” (*Dead until Dark* 102). Although he claims her as his in order to prevent other vampires from feeding on her, in reality he is taking his stance as the higher species and she in turn becomes his human *other*.

For the posthuman, transcendence is the way to not only become immortal, but also how it moves from identifying itself in individualistic terms to

that of a larger community or network. For the vampires in the Stackhouse series they do not divide themselves based on ethnicities or gender, in fact it is only Sookie (the human) who ever mentions race or physical appearances when referring to vampires. In one particular scene in *Living Dead in Dallas*, Hugo (a former lover to a vampire) makes this evident to Sookie as he claims “Vampires aren’t American. They aren’t even black or Asian or Indian. They aren’t Rotarians or Baptists. They’re all just plain vampires. That’s their color and their religion and their nationality” (144). Although Hugo was using their comparison to highlight the difference between humans and vampires once again, his synecdochical statement though illustrates how vampires are viewed not as individuals but as the overall community in general. Hayles explains that “only because the body is not identified with the self is it possible to claim for the liberal subject its notorious universality, a claim that depends on erasing markers of bodily difference, including sex, race, and ethnicity” (4-5). Therefore since vampires are the undead and their consciousness lies in their information and not in their material bodies, they are able to situate themselves within the larger network with other vampires, humans, and non-humans.

Finally, an additional way to view the Harris’ vampires as the posthuman is through the connection and exchange of blood. This connection becomes the case when Sookie accidentally drinks some of Eric’s blood. In the Stackhouse series, when a vampire drinks from a human and in return that human drinks from the vampire, a connection or bond is created that allows the vampire to then

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Peroratio

For the posthuman, viewing ourselves not as individuals but rather as part of a community, “proposes an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or ‘earth’ others, by removing the obstacle of self-centred individualism” (Braidotti 49-50). Therefore, posthumanism complicates how we situate ourselves in a world of *otherness*. Sookie, herself being an *other*, is trying to make this connection for herself. In the end scholars might be right- when they state the vampire represents capitalism, homosexuality, fear of the “Other” or globalization. I am not trying to disprove them, but rather extend their theory of what the vampire portrays and explore how posthumanism complicates Harris’ vampires and calls for a “vigilance, responsibility, and humility that accompany living in a world so newly, and differently, inhabited” (Wolfe 47).

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