

**Spike Is Forgiven:
The Sympathetic Vampire's Resonance
with Rape Culture**

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Then she screamed — Heaven granted her then power to scream. Shriek followed shriek in rapid succession. She was dragged by her long silken hair completely on to [the bed] again. Her beautifully rounded limbs quivered with the agony of her soul. The glassy, horrible eyes of the figure ran over that angelic form with a hideous satisfaction — horrible profanation. He drags her head to the bed's edge. He forces it back by the long hair still entwined in his grasp. With a plunge he seizes her neck in his fang-like teeth—a gush of blood, and a hideous sucking noise follows.

— James Malcolm Rymer, *Varney the Vampire*, 1845

More than 150 years have passed since the composition of the epigraph above, in which a sympathetic vampire penetrates the body of the heroine of the story. Alarming, a woman is terrified, isolated, trapped, and screaming where no one can hear her. This moment is the first time in English-language vampire narrative that the fanged attack is also explicitly a rape scene, and it establishes a pattern which would become a recurring feature of vampire lore. Given the repetition of this

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trope since the successful 1845-7 serial run of James Malcolm Rymer's *Varney the Vampire, or Feast of the Blood*, it is important to consider Varney's departures from his vampire forebears in order to better understand how he became such a compelling figure for cultural reproduction. Varney's construction holds the key to understanding the pathological behavior of beloved modern sympathetic vampires, not least of all Spike in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). When modern sympathetic vampires slip into problematic sexual violence, their stories recycle the rhetoric of Varney's narrative: the attacker is framed sympathetically while the victim is silenced, and the story emphasizes the attacker's good deeds. The constant recycling of these Victorian tropes has contributed to the formation of the modern vampire, and may also help to reinforce contemporary rape culture.

Rymer's Principal Invention: Making the Vampire a Sexual Predator

Contrary to popular belief, vampires were not always sympathetic, sexually enthralling creatures: these are among James Malcolm Rymer's many modifications of the vampire mythos which were adopted in future incarnations. Vampires first appeared in English fiction as a result of the famous meeting of writers at Villa Diodati in 1816 (Gelder 26). At the Villa, George Gordon, Lord Byron composed a fragment of a vampire story, which was later adapted and expanded by his companion John Polidori in his short story "The Vampyre" (1819). Ruthven, the vampire character in Polidori's tale, is not violent or lascivious towards women. A vampire for the august Romantic notions of the Georgian period, Ruthven reflects Polidori's fascination with Byron, and is therefore obsessed with the formation of homosocial friendships and the maintenance of his elite social connections. Most of Ruthven's attention is consumed by his struggle to control and manipulate his wealthy young male travelling companion, Aubrey. Ruthven captures Aubrey's devotion by revealing his resurrection and swearing Aubrey to secrecy (Polidori 55). To control Aubrey and maintain his loyalty, all Ruthven must do is enjoin him to "remember your oath" (Polidori 60). When he is reminded

of his oath, Aubrey is also reminded of Ruthven's immortality; he becomes increasingly overwhelmed by the notion of Ruthven's power, eventually succumbing to a torpor beyond his own control.

Women are only casual passing interests for Ruthven, and "The Vampyre" does not present lascivious rape scenes or sensational vampire attacks. At one point during their travels, it is clear that Aubrey knows Ruthven and his social circumstances so intimately that he has the power to prevent his friend from conducting inappropriate dalliances. When Aubrey questions Ruthven's intentions in courting a naïve young woman,

upon being pressed whether he intended to marry her, [Ruthven] merely laughed. Aubrey retired; and, immediately writing a note, to say, that from that moment he must decline accompanying his Lordship in the remainder of their proposed tour, he ordered his servant to seek other apartments, and calling upon the mother of the lady, informed her of all he knew, not only with regard to her daughter, but also concerning the character of his Lordship. The assignation was prevented. (Polidori 38-39)

Here Aubrey is able to use his friendship and some social maneuvering (rather than violence) to prevent the vampire from accosting a young woman. After Aubrey's intervention, Ruthven's response is dispassionate: "Lord Ruthven next day merely sent his servant to notify his complete assent to a separation; but did not hint any suspicion of his plans having been foiled by Aubrey's interposition" (Polidori 39). From this incident, it is clear that the vampire's craving for blood does not compel him to bite. He can exercise reason and self-control and possesses the necessary self-determination to choose *not* to pursue an intended victim. Ruthven's urges can be governed by his need to operate within society. While Ruthven does eventually gain access to a young woman, he does so by securing her hand in marriage, which is another way of operating within the bounds of human propriety. Further, the vampire's feeding is conducted in subtext; Polidori does not entertain his audience with any description of the event, sufficing to say: "The guardians hastened to protect Miss Aubrey; but when they arrived, it was too late. Lord Ruthven had disappeared, and Aubrey's sister had glutted

the thirst of a VAMPYRE!” (Polidori 72). The cold restraint with which Ruthven controls his passions and protects his social interests distinguishes him from other vampires to follow.

Varney the Vampire’s opening installment immediately departs from the cool characterization of Polidori’s vampire. The serial opens with Varney’s attack on Flora Bannerworth, during which he is demonstrably not governed by social rules as Ruthven was. The entire attack is rendered in thick, erotic, violent detail. There are no social maneuvers; in fact, Varney advances from Flora’s window to her bed without a single word:

A hissing sound comes from the throat of the hideous being, and he raises his long, gaunt arms—the lips move. He advances. The girl places one small foot from the bed on to the floor. She is unconsciously dragging the clothing with her. The door of the room is in that direction—can she reach it? Has she power to walk? — can she withdraw her eyes from the face of the intruder, and so break the hideous charm? (Rymer 37)

This vampire has none of Ruthven’s human affectations during the attack. On the contrary, Varney is characterized here as a feral snake-like creature, making hissing sounds and mesmerizing Flora with his eyes. This is not an isolated incident; Varney is always depicted as animalistic when the moon has triggered his feeding frenzy. His bloodsucking is like that of a wolf after a fresh kill; people who overhear it describe it as “some animal eating, or sucking some liquid” or “as if some animal was drinking with labour and difficulty” (Rymer 38, 727). Varney also makes wolf-like howling noises. As he is about to bite Flora he emits “a strange howling cry that was enough to awaken terror in every breast,” and as he is affecting his escape from Flora’s would-be avengers,

A strange howling noise came from the throat of this monstrous figure, and it seemed upon the point of rushing upon Mr. Marchdale. Suddenly, then, as if some impulse had seized upon it, it uttered a wild and terrible shrieking kind of laugh. (Rymer 37)

This is not the last time we will hear Varney's strange, animal shrieking. It haunts his human speech on occasion; he is described as having "a voice like the growl of an enraged hyena" when he is arguing with some of his innumerable pursuers (Rymer 672). Other characters in the story reinforce the narrator's observations of Varney's animal qualities, describing him as "old fox," "the bird," and "fly" in one instance (345-9), and later "a long-legged shark" (378), and "famished tiger" (389). Clearly, Rymer invites readers to understand Varney in animal, biological terms. In other parts of the plot, however, Varney is demonstrably human, capable of the self-reflection necessary to experience guilt and seek expiation. Varney's animal characteristics, then, might be viewed as clashing with his human ones in a way that blurs the boundary between man and animal, a duality that is one of Rymer's most important contributions to vampire lore.

Rymer composed *Varney* more than a decade before Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. His readers' view of the relationship between humans and animals was, therefore, very different from our own. In recent years Giorgio Agamben has worked extensively on historic conceptions of the human and animal, and has termed the process of seeking the dividing line between them as the "anthropological machine." According to Agamben, the anthropological machine creates a "zone of indifference" in which the relationship between human and animal, human and non-human is articulated (37). Agamben sees evidence of this machine at work in the writing of eighteenth-century French scientist Marie François Xavier Bichat, who drew a distinction between relational life and vegetative life, conceiving the human as an animal whose separation from other animals is evinced by our exterior interactions with other living things (14-15). Essentially, Bichat suggested humans are all animals underneath our civilized appearances. This logic can easily be misapplied and used to question a person's humanity if they evince less-than-civilized behavior. By presenting Varney in animal terms, Rymer taps into his readers' anxieties about the threat of dehumanization at a time when the term "uncivilized" could so easily be applied to the poor, the uneducated, the lawbreaker, the drinker, the gambler, and the foreigner alike (Altick 165-190). As Michel Foucault has observed, by the beginning of the nineteenth century the close connection between

animals and humans was used to justify the State's responsibility for the regulation and control of humans, or "biopower," as Foucault termed it (139). By animalizing the human, suddenly the government was in the business of counting and categorizing citizens: gathering birth rates, calculating life expectancy, and tracking illnesses, deaths, and infant mortality. This transformed people into a new kind of subject-object, whose lives were reducible to statistics, a dehumanizing effect which was compounded by the depersonalized nature of industrialization (Altick 245).

By tapping into the penny dreadful serial reader's horror at being reduced to animal status by the elites, Rymer generates sympathy for Varney by making him a superhero for the common man. He defies categorization as either human or animal, and can therefore overcome authority and scientific control. Varney's double nature (as sometimes humanistic and sometimes animalistic) allows him to externalize the quest to overcome dehumanizing forces for the reader. This duality is a source of conflict for Varney, though, and Rymer's tale emphasizes that he is cursed by this condition. Regardless, his efforts to balance his animal and human qualities made Varney a figure of sympathy who was so beloved in popular culture that Rymer's contemporaries read their copies "literally into dust" (Twitchell 122).

Varney's struggle between the pull of his animal nature and his humanity is complicated by the fact that he preys only on young women; his animal instincts are not governed by something so innocuous as hunger. Underscoring Rymer's purple prose are the troublesome sexual overtones of Varney's predation; he explains that after his first time sucking the blood of a young girl, "I felt [her blood] dart through my veins like fire, and I was restored. From that moment I found out what was to be my sustenance; it was the blood of the young and the beautiful" (Rymer 753). Varney, then, is not just monstrous because of his animal urge for blood, but he is also monstrous in human terms, because he achieves all of his wealth, power, and status by ravishing thousands of young women. Worse, Varney's attack on Flora combines vampiric thirst with sexual lust in appalling ways, as his hypnotic stare causes Flora to stand transfixed, bosom heaving and limbs trembling, until Varney culminates the act by dragging her onto the bed by her hair, sweeping his

horrific eyes over her body in “horrible profanation” and plunging his fangs into her neck (Rymer 38). Varney himself describes his feeding as “midnight orgies,” which places them firmly in the category of sexual violence (Rymer 627). Here, the vampire’s defining qualities are forever changed, as the imagery of feeding and sex are brought together, and the vampire transcends the simple leech to also become a ravisher. Once the vampire’s connection between sexual lust and bloodlust is forged, it is enormously influential for future vampire stories, and proves very difficult for even the most inventive writers to escape. In her 2005 novel *Fledgling*, for example, Octavia E. Butler’s Ina do not like to be called vampires, but they do combine sex with blood-drinking and sometimes assault (Butler 24), and wield hypnotic powers that create problems around the concept of consent (Butler 51). Even as she invents a completely new type of vampire society, Butler is unable to detach their feeding from their sexuality. Twisted up in the fearful notion of the sexual predator, the vampire-as-rapist has been reproduced as a metaphor or in the literal sense countless times in vampire stories since *Varney*, becoming a sensational part of the vampire’s often hypersexualized nature in popular culture.

Hush: Narrative Strategies from *Varney* in Spike’s Story

Buffy the Vampire Slayer initially resists Varney’s model successfully, to some degree. Buffy’s first sexual relationship is with a vampire named Angel. He is the first vampire Buffy knows well, and she quickly forms sympathetic and romantic feelings for him. He is designed so sympathetically, in fact, that his animal and human sides are presented as two completely different creatures. His soul allows him to behave as a human, but when he loses his soul, his vampire side takes over. The mechanism for a vampire to become inhuman, as explained by Buffy herself, is that “You die, and a demon sets up shop in your old house, and it walks, and it talks, and it remembers your life, but it’s not you” (“Lie to Me” 2.7, 00:36:00-08). Angel’s brief sexual relationship with Buffy is short because he loses his soul as a result of it, and it is consensual to the degree that a minor can give consent to have sex with

a centuries-old adult (“Surprise” 2.13). It is immediately clear when Buffy next sees Angel that he has become the inhuman vampire, which is the reason Buffy can eventually slay him while preserving her affections for his more human aspects. While he is evil, he does not sexually attack Buffy, satisfying himself to torture her psychologically and to harm her friends (“Passion” 2.17). The vampire side of Angel only emerges for a short time, however, before his soul is magically returned, and with it his more sympathetic humanity (“Becoming, Part 2” 2.22). After this point, and continuing in the spin-off series *Angel*, Angel represents the show’s model of a sympathetic vampire who can control his sexual urges, demonstrating a way that a modern vampire could operate against the pattern established in *Varney*.

Angel is a useful paradigm against which Spike, who is Buffy’s love interest later in the series, can be compared, because after Angel, Buffy is prepared to judge vampires by their behavior, rather than by their fangs. Spike is the second sympathetic vampire in the show, although in his first few episodes it is clear that he tries to be evil and do terrible things (“School Hard” 2.3). Before long, however, he is too human to dislike. He feels love, exhibits loyalty for his friends, has an infectious sense of humor, and appreciates art, poetry, and music. His name, William the Bloody, is not an allusion to his violent past, but instead a cruel joke held over from the critics of his “bloody awful poetry” (“Fool for Love” 5.7 00:13:43-46). While Angel has the brooding Byronic vampire angst in spades, Spike’s aspirations to Byron end at his awful attempts at poetry; he simply does not have the moodiness to be truly Byronic. Spike has a sense of justice, and is willing to join the underdogs in a fight. When, for example, it is finally time for Buffy to kill Angel, it is Spike who helps her do it (“Becoming, Part Two”). It is the very sympathetic Spike, however, who incites the series’ most controversial moment in the climactic Season Six episode “Seeing Red” (6.19). In this episode, after a hard day’s slaying, Buffy is at home nursing an injury. As she is drawing a hot bath, Spike traps her in her small bathroom and begs her to love him, conflating love and sex in confusing ways:

Spike: Let yourself feel it... (He is becoming more forceful.)
Buffy: Stop it... (It has quickly escalated into a very real, very ugly struggle.)
Spike: You love me...
Buffy: Don't – (She stumbles back. She grabs onto the shower curtain, falling. The shower curtain rings pop off like gunfire as she goes down, WHACK! She gasps in pain as her back cracks against the edge of the tub, then her head. She stumbles more, dazed. Spike is on her, pinning her against the back of the tub, oblivious to her pain. His kisses are desperate, forceful.)
Spike: (kissing her) Let it go... Let yourself love me...
Buffy: Spike, no... Stop (He doesn't listen.) (“Seeing Red” 00:24:13-38)

In this scene, Spike uses his vampire strength and speed to attempt to rape Buffy. Spike's assault on Buffy updates Varney's type of vampirism for a 21st century milieu; he is a sympathetic vampire whose violence has become sexual. His situation is complicated by his human face; Spike's fangs are not in play, and his forehead is not bumpy in this scene, which emphasizes that his sexual lust is not bloodlust. Still, his body is super-powered, and he is able to harm and frighten Buffy, who is more vulnerable than usual due to injury. If this scene were taken by itself, it could be seen to resist Varney's trope of the vampire who conflates sex and bloodlust, because Spike does not bite Buffy in it. The more problematic nature of this attack, however, is in what happens next, when the show adopts similar narrative schemes to Rymer's to reinforce sympathy for Spike after his attempted sexual assault.

In addition to creating vampires' connection between sex and blood, Rymer's contribution to vampire lore included a three-part strategy which encouraged readers to overlook Varney's sexual violence, and thereby increased their sympathy for him. First, Rymer's narrative is designed in such a way that it is difficult for readers to remember specifics of Varney's predation. Many of his actions are repetitive, easily blending together in memory, and to make matters worse, the narrator's

recollections become hazy over the course of the book. For example, each time it is mentioned, Varney's attack on Flora becomes more benign: in future installments Varney claims Flora was unharmed in the attack (false, she almost died) and later he claims never to have bitten Flora at all (he definitely did) (Herr 37). The revisions Rymer makes to the reader's memory of this attack are all designed to bring Varney's character into a more favorable light. This strategy exploits the serialization of the novel, since many months passed between the release of these installments.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer uses a similar strategy, exploiting the nature of television serialization to direct viewers' memories away from Spike's attempted rape of Buffy. There were only three episodes remaining in Season Six after "Seeing Red" aired in 2002, during which Spike leaves Sunnydale to fight an ordeal to regain control of his vampirism in Africa, and the season ends when his (human) soul is returned to him instead ("Villains" 6.20, "Two to Go" 6.21, and "Grave" 6.22). By returning Spike's soul, the show reinforces his comparison to Angel, the ultimate sympathetic vampire, and therefore positions him more positively for viewers. The show's creators do not, however, indicate ways in which Buffy is working through her trauma. Instead, Buffy and Spike are kept apart until the next season, which aired four months later, providing viewers with time to overlook this violence. When he returns to Sunnydale, Spike is still kept at a distance from Buffy because he is in a dissociative state in the school basement, and then is taken in by Buffy and her friends, who pity him because he is so clearly psychologically damaged ("Beneath You" 7.2).

The second strategy Rymer created for convincing readers to sympathize with Varney is to silence the victim. Rymer does not allow Flora, for example, to act as a fully developed character, but instead casts her as a prop to create reactions and motivations for the men around her. Flora's male relatives' reactions to Varney's attack are part of Rymer's strategy for silencing her; the narrative focuses more on their emotions about the vampire than on Flora's victimization. Henry Bannerworth, for example, is afraid he will go mad, and admits that in his fear of the vampire, he has forgotten all about his sister Flora (Rymer 46). By the time a few chapters have passed, Flora's family has so forgotten about

her violation that they allow Sir Francis Varney to become their next-door neighbor (Rymer 87). Varney, for his part, thinks so little of his attack on Flora that he shows up at her apartment one afternoon, knocks like a gentleman, and enlists her to aid him in convincing her brothers to sell him her house, which he admits he covets (Rymer 117). This shift, however, does not indicate remorse on Varney's part; it rather emphasizes Flora's position as the victim without a voice. Flora is the only person who remembers her terror beneath Varney's fangs, and she is powerless to communicate it to anyone. Her silence helps him become a sympathetic character.

Buffy's silence after Spike attempts to rape her is difficult to understand because her friends are there, and they offer to listen. In "Seeing Red," she is able to throw Spike across the room to stop his assault on her before it is successful, and she immediately regains a little of her power, saying "I stopped you. Something I should have done a long time ago" ("Seeing Red" 6.19, 00:25:13-22). The show immediately cuts away to another location, then returns to Buffy alone in the bathroom, where Xander finds her, and is concerned. When he asks, "Did he hurt you?" Buffy replies with "He tried. He didn't," then acts skittish and startled to hear footsteps on the stairs ("Seeing Red" 6.19, 00:28:40-45). When Willow arrives, Buffy is still clearly traumatized and afraid, so Willow asks what happened; but Buffy only says "Nothing" ("Seeing Red" 6.19, 00:29:00-02). The show's writers seem unwilling to allow the characters to have further discussion on the topic; Buffy never tells anyone the full story, and after this scene, she rarely mentions it again. In "Beneath You," when she is working with Spike again to try to track down a monster, she says, "You tried to rape me. I don't have the words." By saying "I don't have the words," Buffy seems to sum up what the show's creators might have been thinking; they had access to a strong female character and the opportunity to address her experience of trauma, but they opt not to pursue it.

They also opt not to address the situation through meaningful conversations among the other characters. After the four-month season break, Xander mentions Spike's attempted rape of Buffy twice, but like the Bannerworth men, he seems to be more concerned with his own social maneuvers against Spike than with Buffy's experience. He

mentions it to remind Buffy that Spike is not always trustworthy in “Beneath You” (7.2) and to break Dawn’s hero worship of Spike in “Grave” (6.22). In both of these cases, the discussion is dropped quickly, and Buffy’s story and trauma go unspoken. Despite Xander’s warnings, however, Spike is quickly brought back into the fold, and Buffy does not speak against him, keeping her silence for the remainder of the series.

Rymer’s third strategy for generating sympathy is to emphasize portions of the narrative which highlight the assailant’s goodness. Varney is a polite, benevolent aristocrat who occasionally helps the poor (Herr 22). He also has a conscience, and by the end of the serial’s run is ready to throw himself into Mount Vesuvius to escape his guilt. Immediately before his death, Varney confesses the most major escapades he can remember to the clergyman, Mr. Bevan, mostly describing his large-scale financial malfeasance. In keeping with the retroactive continuity that de-emphasizes his predation, however, Varney confesses only to one incident of attacking a young woman (out of thousands), and reframes the story as a facet of his own victimization:

I could see, when I entered the house where I had made my temporary home, that notwithstanding that I considered my appearance wonderfully improved, that feeling was not shared in by others, for the whole family shrunk from me as though there had been a most frightful contamination in my touch, and as though the very air I had breathed was hateful and deleterious. I felt convinced that there had been some conversation concerning me, and that I was rather more than suspected. I certainly could then have left the place easily and quietly, but I had a feeling of defiance, which did not enable me to do so. I felt as if I were an injured being, and ought to resist a something that looked like oppression. (Rymer 755)

Here Varney is describing his first kill; an unnamed sixteen-year-old daughter of a widow from whom he rents a room. When he returns to the house after having gruesomely savaged the girl, he is upset because he is shunned. Like the men in the Bannerworth family, Varney focuses on his own experience of the situation, not on the feelings of the woman

he has terrorized and murdered. For this reason, Varney is not particularly penitent for any of his violations against women; he is sorry about the way he remembers being treated after he has violated them. In this way, Rymer successfully uses even Varney's confession of his most heinous deeds to make him more sympathetic.

Like Varney, Spike can be a penitent figure, who feels guilt for his misdeeds, and like Rymer, the creators of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* emphasize the redemption arc which develops the vampire's credibility as a hero. After some time has passed following his assault on Buffy, Spike is back to being helpful and useful in the fight against evil. For her part, Buffy is up against some terrible odds and needs allies; she seems to be as willing to overlook the assault as she is Spike's less harmful misdeeds, like his gambling for kittens ("Life Serial" 6.5). By the end of the series, Spike's resume lists so many heroic deeds that he is one of the strongest members of Buffy's team. She trusts Spike so much that she chooses him to wield her most powerful weapon against the undead horde in the show's climactic final battle ("Touched" 7.20 and "Chosen" 7.22). His sexual attack on her is erased in light of his heroism in much the same way Varney's is erased by his being a good soldier in the Indian army (Rymer Ch. 127-142) or by helping out the unfortunate (Rymer Ch. 143-156). In this way, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* adopts a narrative strategy that redirects attention away from sexual violence by emphasizing the assailant's positive contributions, just as *Varney* did.¹ Further, Spike has extended his life beyond the show's finale, moving to *Angel* before joining the cast of the canonical comic book "seasons" which continue the Buffyverse, where he continues to rack up good deeds, minimizing the impact of his sexual assault on Buffy. By Season 11, the two are a couple.

In Every Generation...

To understand this repetition of patterns from *Varney the Vampire* in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, it is helpful to consider the nature of the vampire as a shifting literary figure. Nina Auerbach's book *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (1995) advanced the revolutionary claim that every generation

creates its own version of the vampire, which is the vampire that generation deserves. As Auerbach describes it, “The alacrity with which vampires shape themselves to personal and national moods is an adaptive trait” (5). The vampire is capable of rapid transformation, and Auerbach asserts that each vampire changes to blend into the culture it inhabits. The strength of Auerbach’s theory is that it complements many other theoretical approaches. It works equally well for a psychoanalytic reading (vampires change in response to psychology) or a historical one (vampires change in response to historical pressures).

Building upon Auerbach’s idea, we can consider Varney the Vampire as both a product and producer of culture; he clearly reflects the anxieties of his times by blurring the distinction between the animal and the human. He also repeated and reinforced those anxieties for decades due to the popularity of the serial and its numerous editions and adaptations. A dramatic adaptation called *Varney the Vampyre* by H. Young was produced in London beginning in 1846, featuring T.P. Cooke, the famous actor who had so sympathetically originated the role of Frankenstein’s monster on the stage (“The Late T.P. Cooke”). Lloyd’s continued to reprint *Varney* in penny serials, at least through the British Library’s copy, which is dated 1854, and through the dates of complaints in the newspaper in 1867 (Forst 281). A reporter for *The Athenaeum* in 1870 claimed that “the little Family Herald absolutely extinguished ‘Varney the Vampire,’ and other monsters of the sort,” suggesting that at that time the penny serials were losing popularity (“Literature of the People” 12). After having been thus “extinguished” for a time, Varney’s influences on Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* are difficult to miss; *Dracula*’s fangs, complexion, and cloak are all Rymer’s inventions that were transferred to the vampire in Stoker’s masterpiece. *Varney* returned to print in 1970 and 1972 paperback books, was spoofed by playwright Tim Kelly in 1990, was published in eBook form in 1998, partially posted on Project Gutenberg in 2005, and printed in full by Amazon, Floating Press, and Zittaw Press between 2007 and 2012. Although the serial may not have been the focus of much literary criticism, *Varney* has been read and recycled and adapted countless times over the course of many generations. His struggle between the animal and human, his conflation of bloodlust and sexuality, and Rymer’s ways of creating sympathy for

Varney have all been embedded and inherited in our culture along with the anxieties that created him.

According to Auerbach's theory, though, each generation gets the vampire it deserves. What does it say about the current generation, then, that we have not been able to disentangle vampires from their Victorian ravishing roots, and the ways they covered up their crimes? Although Anne Rice, Octavia Butler, and others have attempted to move vampires way from their metaphoric role as rapists, it seems that they are not able to avoid the problem completely. Angel gives us an example of a vampire in control of his sexual urges, but he also had sex with an underage girl. Butler's Ina are problematic because their venom acts as an intoxicant; their hypnotic powers remove their victims' free will, and a person who is intoxicated or coerced is not able to give consent. Anne Rice tries to move away from this problem by making her vampires sexless, but the moment one of them (Lestat) is in a human body, he almost immediately becomes a rapist (Rice 189). It is possible that the vampire character type has been forever altered by the metaphor that mixes their lust for sex with their bloodlust, and it might not be possible to write a recognizable vampire without sexual violence while anxieties over rape endure, because vampires always mirror a culture's dark anxieties. Rape culture can be defined as "a society that contains within it practices and ideologies that minimize the negative impacts of victimization, while condoning and perpetuating the perpetration of acts of sexual violence" (Kelner 29). The narrative strategies in *Varney* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* certainly function to minimize the negative impact of victimization, and therefore very clearly reflect that particular aspect of cultural anxiety.

It is understandable that those who love Spike in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* want to defend him; he is only a fictional monster, and he only attempts to sexually assault Buffy once in our long acquaintance with him. He is complicated because he does not have a soul, then he has a behavior-modifying chip, then he gets his soul back. What is truly disturbing, however, is not Spike himself, but the application of the same logic system to living human beings when families, the popular media, the authorities, and academic institutions address real-life rapists the same way Rymer treated Varney, or the same way *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

treated Spike. Invoking elements of Varney's struggle between animal urges and human conscience, sympathizers excuse sexual violence as a result of "uncontrollable male sexuality," as if rape were a biological imperative (Waterhouse-Watson 186). Victims are silenced; according to the Department of Justice National Crime Victimization Survey, two out of three sexual assaults are never reported (Truman & Langton). Although the reasons for their silence are likely complex, research suggests that victims fear they will experience the trauma of shaming and blaming while in the process of reporting an assault (Santovec 7). The vampire narrative's memory-altering strategies are also deployed to reinforce rape culture, mostly in the cases of assailants who have sufficient financial power to reframe their own narratives to emphasize their better deeds, their prowess at sports, or their power in the film industry. There is hope, however: research suggests that exposure to news stories which promote the rape myths mentioned above (animalistic uncontrollable urges, the good-guy rapist) makes readers more likely to believe an assailant's innocence, but reading an article that challenges rape myths can sway them in the other direction (Franiuk 8-9). This might be the tipping point, and if our culture can shift away from these anxieties around sexual violence, Auerbach suggests a new type of vampire could emerge: the vampire we all hope to deserve.

Notes

ⁱ Diane DeKelb-Rittenhouse's 2002 essay "Sex and the Single Vampire: The Evolution of the Vampire Lothario and Its Representations in Buffy" explores Spike's remorsefulness in the context of sexualizing the vampire and references both Polidori (143) and *Varney the Vampire* (149).

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