

Vamps and Camp: Sci-Fi Television Mocks the Monstrous Texan

Sarah R. Wakefield

[1] Since John Polidori wrote his short story “The Vampyre” in 1819, the vampire has proved amazingly flexible in its ability to capture the cultural zeitgeist. In 1897, Bram Stoker’s Count Dracula, cultured, calm, and capable of walking around London without anyone suspecting his dark powers, plans to transform the nation into his own slave race. Conversely, in the twenty-first century, rather than embodying fears, America’s pop culture vampires offer up ideals. From the teen angst of Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* saga and the CW’s *The Vampire Diaries* to Charlaine Harris’s Sookie Stackhouse series and its HBO adaptation *True Blood*, undead gentlemen and their wide-eyed, virginal sweethearts are everywhere.¹ These romantic vampires, who renounce human blood, are symbols of restraint in a culture of excess. As Nina Auerbach observes in her 1995 book *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, “The alacrity with which vampires shape themselves to personal and national moods is an adaptive trait their apparent uniformity masks” (5).

[2] The undead’s recent pop culture popularity, coupled with *True Blood*’s Season Two Dallas contingent of vampires and a Season Five Texan Chancellor, brought me back to something I noticed in 1998. Two shows I watched religiously, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *The X-Files*, both aired comic episodes featuring vampires from my new home state of Texas. Coincidentally (or not), the humor comes in great measure from the monster-of-the-week’s Texas connections. But why Texas? For decades, television tradition gave us Texans as honorable lawmen like the Lone Ranger (1949-57), the faded Rangers of *Lonesome Dove* (1989), and more recently, the over-the-top *Walker, Texas Ranger* (1993-2001). Then the 1980s brought the world to *Dallas* (1978-1991), with its deliciously conniving oil tycoons, and a real-life millionaire oil man, George H.W. Bush, became President of the United States, pushing Texas further into the media spotlight. Moral, irrelevant, canny—given

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the contradictions inherent in Texas stereotypes, the better question might be what other state better embodies the tension of the liminal vampire? Combining cowboy charm with white-trash, law-unto-oneself attitude and a low IQ, a (stereo)typical television Texas man likes to joke that he always has the Holy Bible and a gun in hand and boots on his feet. So colorful is the characterization, in fact, that it easily slides into the realm of camp. Defined most notably by Susan Sontag as “the love of the exaggerated, the ‘off,’ of things-being-what-they-are-not . . . a relish for the exaggeration of sexual characteristics and personality mannerisms” (279), camp sensibilities tinge the Texas vampires introduced to us by *Buffy* and *The X-Files*.

[3] In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*’s “Bad Eggs” (2.12), first aired January 12, 1998, no one really takes vampires Lyle and Tector Gorch (Jeremy Ratchford and James Parks) seriously, even though both characters step straight out of Sam Peckinpah’s bloody film *The Wild Bunch* (Warren Oates and Ben Johnson). Once transplanted into Buffy’s grrl-power world, however, the brothers’ Texas braggadocio proves impotent. “Bad Blood” (5.12), an episode of *The X-Files* that aired February 22, 1998, follows the conflicting accounts that agents Mulder (David Duchovny) and Scully (Gillian Anderson) give about events near an R.V. park in Chaney, Texas. Between the two of them, the viewers receive a rich picture of Lucius Hartwell (Luke Wilson), a vampire sheriff whose name echoes a major player in the 1993 siege of the Branch Davidian compound outside of Waco. Despite the sober inspirations behind the three Texans, these vampire guys clearly are funny; they may enjoy a brawl, but when the going gets tough, rather than going for the jugular, they tip their cowboy hats and head for the hills. This self-protective cowardice would seem to be at odds with the traditional television formulae for Texas men, which I will survey shortly, and here is where attention to camp becomes crucial. In his work on queer media, José Esteban Muñoz explains, “Camp is a practice of suturing different lives, of reanimating, through repetition with a difference, a lost country or moment that is relished and loved” (128). Quite literally reanimated as the undead, the Texas vampires of “Bad Eggs” and “Bad Blood” repeat tropes of the cowboy and the lawman with a key difference: they are marked as uneducated, dim-witted rednecks. In the end, these well-

known episodes of sci-fi television suggest that nostalgia for frontier masculinity is stupidly laughable . . . but its practitioners refuse to die.

Sources of Television's Texas Vampires

[4] Texas and vampires actually go back over one hundred years—to Stoker's *Dracula* and its gallant Texan, Quincey P. Morris. We first encounter him courting Lucy Westenra in full-blown slang: "Miss Lucy, I know I ain't good enough to regulate the fixin's of your little shoes. . . . Won't you just hitch up alongside of me and let us go down the long road together, driving in double harness?" (59). Even though she turns him down, he readily offers his blood for one of the girl's transfusions, patrols her house all night "like a moral Viking" (156), takes charge of the hunting party for Count Dracula, and insists that everyone carry a Winchester rifle. Dr. Van Helsing approves succinctly, "Brave boy. Quincey is all man. God bless him for it" (285). While dying, Morris delivers a bowie knife (named for Colonel James Bowie, who perished defending the Alamo) to Dracula's heart, and to honor his sacrifice, Mina and Jonathan Harker call their son Quincey. This literary antecedent clearly places the Texan on the side of the vampire slayers, with the heroes, and anything but laughable.

[5] Franco Moretti would have us believe, however, that Quincey Morris is in fact a vampire. No one knows or asks where he has been, where his wealth comes from, and "nobody suspects even when Lucy dies, and then turns into a vampire, immediately after receiving a blood transfusion from Morris" (435). The dashing Texan, Moretti says, assists Count Dracula by failing to shoot the vampire in bat form and later urging others to cease their pursuit, all because, as a financier, he wants a powerful capitalist ally. Critic Michael Valdez Moses comes to an identical conclusion, that Quincey is helping Dracula, but gives a different reason: Morris represents Irish and American resentment of British imperialism, which the Count also opposes. And indeed, Dr. Seward writes admiringly of his friend Quincey, "If America can go on breeding men like that, she will be a power in the world indeed" (Stoker 156). Taken together, the critics read Morris as a specific type, as the courageous, cagey, capitalist cowboy.

[6] Quincey Morris's heroism carries over into the popular figure of the Texan-as-lawman, which rose to prominence with the Lone Ranger, the sole survivor of an outlaw ambush. Riding his white horse, he uses only silver bullets (from his own silver mine), not to hunt werewolves but to remind himself not to use his gun power lightly against mankind. He lives by a detailed creed, believing "that God put the firewood there but that every man must gather and light it himself" and "we must settle with the world and make payment for what we have taken" (Siegel). The hero's eponymous children's show evolved from radio format in the 1930s to a television program that aired on ABC from 1949 to 1957. Bruce Jackson observes, "The Lone Ranger came to birth at the nadir of the depression, a time when all the institutions seemed in the process of betraying ordinary folks, and he matured in an America full of bad guys" (11). Here, the vigilante Texan may work outside of traditional justice, but he remains a courageous, upstanding role model to be applauded rather than ridiculed.

[7] Retired Texas Rangers, one a leisurely player and the other an obsessive worker, later graced television screens in the Emmy-winning miniseries *Lonesome Dove* (1989), based on Larry McMurtry's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel. The two friends ride out for a final adventure, a cattle drive to Montana. While these impassive men fire pistols and handle horses, their personal relationships leave them floundering. Augustus "Gus" McCrae (Robert Duvall) can't persuade his true love, Clara (Anjelica Huston), to marry him, while Woodrow Call (Tommy Lee Jones) cannot claim his grown son, Newt (Ricky Schroder). The series proved incredibly popular, with over 26 million households watching ("Lonesome"), and its many follow-ups revived the Western as a genre. Steve Davis, assistant curator of the *Lonesome Dove* collection at Texas State University-San Marcos, states, "certainly people from Texas and the West feel that finally a Western told what it was really like. The film has struck a real chord in the American psyche" (Wilmes). Where the Lone Ranger seeks justice and fights villains, *Lonesome Dove's* Rangers are relics, living by a fading frontier code and battling their personal demons. We start to see Texas cowboy masculinity as anachronistic, its adherents more pitiable than laudable, but still not risible.

[8] Even more than they liked the moral Ranger or the pair from *Lonesome Dove*, audiences lapped up the nighttime soap opera *Dallas* (1978-1991). In particular, J.R. Ewing, the ruthless, cigar-chewing patriarch, introduced the world to Texans as big business moguls and big lovers. Fabulously dressed American aristocrats suck the life out of each other, whether through double-crossing deals, intoxication, car accidents, paternity questions, or attempted murders. In their villainy, the characters of *Dallas* resemble classic literary vampires from Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) to Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) to Anne Rice's *Lestat* (1976): evil, amoral, corrupt, and highly sexualized. Although they hunger for money rather than blood, they will do anything to get what they want.

[9] There is nothing particularly humorous about any of these roles, but that shifted with *Walker, Texas Ranger* (1993-2001). Set in Dallas, Texas, the series starred Chuck Norris as by-the-book lawman Cordell Walker, who shuns drugs and guns in favor of martial arts. While that seems relatively straightforward, the show is packed with camp. When a Mexican criminal complains that Walker "got no right" to arrest him, the ranger promptly punches the man in the face and deadpans, "I think that was a pretty good right." The series solidified Chuck Norris as a pop culture icon, the ultimate macho man for a new generation of fans, and also perpetuated the idea of the Lone Star State as a remaining American frontier. We laugh, but we also cheer for this television Texan to deploy his fists and one-liners to save the day.

[10] Texan as protector. Texan as anachronistic cowboy. Texan as dishonest CEO. Texan as ass-kicker. It is an impressively diverse resume, and nowhere on the list do we see "intellectually challenged" or "dim-witted." While concern for Texans' mental defects admittedly has a long history – "Popular wit for years liked to call the phrase 'Texas culture' an oxymoron, with emphasis on the 'moron' " (Busby and Heaberlin)—idiocy is not a typical characteristic for television's Rangers and tycoons. And yet this is exactly the trait played up in both *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *The X-Files*.ⁱⁱ In both "Bad Eggs" and "Bad Blood," the Texas male vampire is mocked, especially by other men. His IQ constantly in question, he speaks primarily in slang, looks confused, and cedes decision-making to other, smarter men. Women notice him, but as

the plots unfold, the admiring ladies lose interest. The cowboy masculinity that was new-world in Quincey Morris becomes old hat, appropriate for camp reappropriation.

“Bad Eggs”: *The Wild Bunch* Gets Scrambled

[11] Often praised for its empowering messages, snappy dialogue, and insight into teenage woes, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* also has strong camp elements. Patricia Pender, for example, reads *Buffy* as feminist camp and singles out Xander Harris as a prime example (39). The lovable bumbler stands in contrast to the series’ two regular vampire characters, both white men from Great Britain. Angel, cursed by gypsies to regain his soul, suffers remorse for his centuries of slaughter and tries to atone. By contrast, his former hunting buddy Spike kills people for fun. Together, they represent what Lorna Jowett argues about the series: “Masculinity in *Buffy* struggles with a binary construction: it is either old or new. In simple terms the old masculinity is macho, violent, strong, and monstrous, while new masculinity is ‘feminized,’ passive, emotional, weak and human” (94). “Bad Eggs” brings in representatives of this “old masculinity,” Lyle and Tector Gorch.

[12] A typical episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* follows a basic plot: an evil force comes to town, Buffy and her gang research it, and Buffy defeats it. This time, she encounters her nemesis at the Sunnydale Mall, an almost sacred place for the heroine. Buffy glances at a couple riding the escalator opposite her and realizes that the man, dressed in jeans, cowboy hat, and boots, casts no reflection in the mirrored wall. She follows them to a video arcade, where the young woman is engrossed in a pinball game. When Lyle growls, “Turn around, baby, I have somethin’ to show ya,” his companion keeps her eyes on the machine, complaining, “Wait a sec. This is my high score” (2.12). Here we see the limitations of the famous vampire allure. While in *Dracula* “vampirism imparts beauty and sensuality to those it transforms” (DeKelb-Rittenhouse 145), Lyle Gorch is not so fortunate. Flirtatious on the escalator, the girl now is more interested in scoring in pinball than scoring with the stranger. Buffy, likewise unmoved by his charms, exchanges physical and verbal blows with Lyle. Even the vampire’s comments, like “all right, sugarlips. Giddyup,” and later “you’re a rough

one, ain't ya? I like that," read more sexual predator than Casanova (2.12). To top it off, when Buffy prepares to ram a stake through his heart, he somersaults across the room, catches his cowboy hat smoothly with one hand, and then runs off. Who is this surprising vampire?

[13] Lyle is one of two brothers, in fact, around one hundred years old and known for widespread violence:

Giles: That's, um, Lyle Gorch, and that one's his brother, Tector. They're from Abilene. They, uh, they made their reputation by massacring an entire Mexican village in 1886.

Buffy: Friendly little demons.

Giles: That was before they became vampires. But, but, um, the good news is that they're not amongst the great thinkers of our times. I doubt if they're up to much. (2.12)

The brothers, who are nearly as old as Spike, come with an impressively violent pre-undead resume. When Giles emphasizes that they lack brains, however, he undermines his later admonishment to Buffy, "I don't think you should underestimate them" (2.12). He's not wrong, in theory. Modeled on eponymous characters from one of the bloodiest Hollywood westerns, Sam Peckinpah's 1969 film *The Wild Bunch*, Lyle and Tector ought to be ruthless Texas outlaws looking to retire off the proceeds of one last robbery. According to the first description of the characters in the revised 1968 script, "Lyle and Tector are big, tough, hot tempered and sudden. They work together, eat together, and sometimes sleep together with the same whore. Brutal, vicious in a fight, illiterate, they are always pressing for an advantage and once they get it—they never let go. They are without loyalty or honor, to anyone except each other and that is limited" (Green and Peckinpah 1-2). In *The Wild Bunch*, the brothers complain about not getting a bigger share of the gang's plunder and mock the other men, reflecting what Devin McKinney sees as "the infantile abandon of the Gorch brothers...unrelievedly asinine" (187). The brothers also have softer moments, however, especially when sated by women and liquor. They pity fellow gang member Angel when he learns his sweetheart, Teresa, is with another man, and Tector tearfully announces the impromptu engagement of a drunken Lyle to a

local prostitute. Both brothers also try to learn the children's game of cat's cradle, "sober, entranced, and completely dominated" (Green and Peckinpah 45) by the thirteen-year-old Mexican girl teaching them.

[14] What do the film's namesakes carry over into "Bad Eggs"? Sean MaCaulay writes, "There is no place for Peckinpah's violent heroes in this modern world except as mercenaries, which means that there is no place for their souls either." In his study of Western frontier myths in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Rod Romesburg observes of the Gorches, "because they measure up to the frontier mold—because they are 'authentic' Westerners—they clearly do not belong in Buffy's world" (par. 6). Yet Romesburg identifies the brothers as living up to "our expectations of cowboy Westerners," eliding (or ignoring) their Texas heritage under a generic label, and "authentic" often translates to "ridiculous" for the Gorches, out of step in a postmodern world. The script for "Bad Eggs" retains several character traits from *The Wild Bunch*, especially with Tector, who complains about the lack of good prostitutes in Sunnydale. The brothers threaten to take out Buffy, but, to return to camp theory, it is all style over content, and no one takes them seriously. One insult from *The Wild Bunch*, that the brothers are "yellow-livered trash" (Green and Peckinpah 27), seems to have become their modus operandi. Consider the following exchange from a moonlit cemetery, where the Gorch duo plot their next move while watching Buffy and the vampire Angel, her boyfriend, make out:

Lyle: I say we leave it. Wait 'til she's alone.
Tector: Why? You scared?
Lyle: Nope. I could whip 'em both right now if I wanted to.
Tector: Then why don't ya?
Lyle: 'Cause I got me a plan. I'm the one that does the thinkin', 'member?
Tector: Yeah. You do the thinkin', Lyle. That is definitely your department. So why don't you tell me again why we can't kill 'em now? (2.12)

In *The Wild Bunch*, the Gorches believe in living, not scheduling, and they very much live in the now. By contrast, in "Bad Eggs," Tector isn't

allowed to do the thinkin', and Lyle never commits to a plan, both stuck in the role of comic relief.

[15] Humorous effect also comes from the characters' stereotypical Texas dialect. Lyle's lines are full of "ain't," "giddy-up," even a rousing "yippee-ki-yay" most closely linked today with Bruce Willis's flippant cop in *Die Hard*—very different from both "the foreign language of adulthood" (Wilcox 22) and the inventive teenspeak characteristic of the series. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* consistently privileges verbal play, and those who are proficient with puns outrank those who use their fists. Some critics even have argued that "Buffy is able to survive longer than the other Slayers because she is embedded in language and because she embodies language" (Overby and Preston-Matto 83). Tellingly, the first comment Buffy ever makes to Lyle in the episode is "Boy, you guys really never come up with any new lines" (2.12). The brothers continue their unoriginal repartee even when it is just the two of them in the sewers. Fed up with Tector's stupid questions and taunts, Lyle offers up the cliché, "I'm gonna beat you like a redheaded stepchild" (2.12). They end up biting rats and punching each other to pass the time until their final showdown with the Slayer.

[16] Time is limited for Tector Gorch, who finds himself distracted from the fight by a monstrous parasite buried in Sunnydale High School's basement. Like Stoker's Dracula, this creature, called a bezoar, plan to colonize humans. She lays hundreds of eggs, and her psychically-connected hatchlings attach to the spine and take control of a victim, who helps infect more people and dig Mother out of the ground. Curious, Tector happily leans over the hole where the bezoar is trapped, greeting her as if she is some kind of supernatural pet: "Well, looky there! . . . Well, hello!" (2.12). Her response? With a single tentacle and a satisfied belch, she yanks Tector into her mouth. No longer in "this old movie world where men are men and woman are receptacles or at best . . . the deus ex machine to trip a man's righteous trigger" (McKinney 187), the brothers are out-evilled not by the Slayer but by a pre-pre-historic mother beast, mostly encased in concrete. Fertile beyond belief, without any male partner, she contrasts sharply with vampire men. In this episode, when Buffy mentions having children someday, for the first time Angel reveals his inability to procreate. But

even the mama monster is no match for the Slayer, who kills the beast in about twenty seconds. After seeing Buffy emerge, silent, grim, and splattered in black blood, from the bezoar's tomb, Lyle tips his cowboy hat. "It's over," he announces politely (2.12).

[17] Far from the Wild Bunch, who keep shooting even when mortally wounded, the remaining brother hightails it out of town, impotent on several levels. The characters' geographic origin is crucial to their inadequacy as vampires, reversing the trend in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, where the American Quincey Morris shows more courage than his British friends. In their mortal lives, *Buffy's* Angel was a whoring, drunken Irish ne'er-do-well and Spike a timid English toff; once vampirized, they are dangerous, sexy studs with long black coats and sharp wits, forces to be reckoned with. The Gorch brothers hail from Abilene, markedly less exotic unless one considers Texas a foreign country. More to the point, in becoming undead, they do not seem to have transformed, remaining the same vicious, stupid men they were a century earlier, but now without a Bunch to give their violence more meaningful scope. Because they haven't changed, they lack what Ananya Mukherjea describes as "the protean quality of vampire masculinity—old-fashioned and rigid in some [contemporary] behavioral respects but endlessly evolving in the essential principles" (5). Forever a backwards Texan seems to be the fate for the vampire brothers in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, but does the same rule apply when the special agents of *The X-Files* take a trip to the Lone Star state?

"Bad Blood": Not Another Waco (Now with Vampires)

[18] In "Bad Blood," an episode written by Vince Gilligan, six dead cows and one deceased vacationer catch the interest of Agent Fox Mulder of *The X-Files*. As he explains to his partner, Agent Dana Scully, the town of Cheney, Texas, located some 50 miles south of Dallas, is "by all accounts, very rustic and charming, but as of late, ground zero, the locus for a series of mysterious nocturnal exsanguinations" (5.12). Some fans have suggested that the name pays homage to Lon Chaney Sr., a character actor known for playing silent-film horror roles, and his son Lon Jr., who starred in *The Wolf Man* (1941). But there is a real Chaney, over 100 miles west of Dallas and closer to Abilene, home of the Gorch

brothers. Located in Eastland County, 950 square miles that include the rural towns of Nimrod, Okra, and Kokomo, from 1940 to 2000, the small town boasted a population of just 35, according to *The Handbook of Texas Online* (Hunt). Each of the 254 counties in Texas elects a sheriff to serve a four-year term, and one such law officer greets the FBI agents when they come to the fictionalized Cheney.

[19] Played by Luke Wilson, Sheriff Lucius Hartwell is introduced to the viewer with a slow, deliberate shot starting at the feet. We see cowboy boots, then blue jeans and a belt with a large, silver buckle, and finally a ten-gallon hat. Yup, it's definitely a cowboy, presented for our visual pleasure. Agent Scully, breathless and smiling at the sight, mutters "hooboy," a display of sexual attraction atypical for her character. On the other hand, Mulder, who personifies "an interesting and conflicted masculinity" (Malin 124), recalls Hartwell with big buckteeth and a speech impediment. His version of events, whether colored by insecurity or jealousy, paints the sheriff as slow, prone to a heavy accent ("Y'all must be the gov'mint people" 2.12) and uncomfortable under Scully's lovesick gaze. Similar to the nameless girl romanced by Lyle Gorch in "Bad Eggs," Scully strikes Mulder as having questionable taste in men—how can she like such a backwoods buffoon? Later in the episode, when Hartwell and Scully (now friendly rather than swoony) stake out the local cemetery, he asks her what she thinks about vampires. She replies, after explaining that she doesn't believe in them, "Well, they're supposed to be extremely charming. Seductive. No, I mean . . . even if they did really exist, who's to say they'd actually be like that?" (2.12). Would the sheriff be as attractive to Scully if he were not a vampire, or if he were not a rangy Texas cowboy?

[20] Mulder sees much less to admire about the sheriff. When the two men head out to the cemetery, he remembers Hartwell making boneheaded observations, especially compared to the five-dollar words of the Oxford-educated FBI agent. With a musical score lighter than most for *The X-Files*—a single oboe accompanied by plucked strings—viewers know they are in the realm of Gilligan's campy humor:

Hartwell: We used to have swamps only the EPA made us take to callin' them wetlands.

- Mulder: Yeah. So, we're out here looking for any signs of vampiric activity.
- Hartwell: Which would be like, uh . . . ?
- Mulder: Broken or shifted tombstones. The absence of birds singing.
- Hartwell: There you go. 'Cause I ain't hearing any birds singing. Right? Course, it's winter, and we ain't got no birds, but . . . is there anything else?
- Mulder: A faint groaning coming from under the earth. The sound of manducation, of the creature eating its own death shroud.
- Hartwell: Nope. No manuh . . . ma-ma . . .
- Mulder: Manducation.
- Hartwell: Manducation. No.
- Mulder: Now, Sheriff, I know my methods may seem a little odd to you, but . . .
- Hartwell: Hey, look, y'all work for the federal gov'mint and that's all I need to know. I mean, CIA, Secret Service—y'all run the show, so— (5.12)

For those familiar with Waco and the 1993 events at the Branch Davidian compound, the character's name and his attitude towards federal agents carry further resonance. Sheriff Jack Harwell of McClennan County was a member of Texas law enforcement for thirty years and knew many residents of the Mount Carmel community, including David Koresh. Portrayed in interviews as a good ol' boy, he explained in a *Frontline* documentary, "I'm not a negotiator or skilled person. All I know to do is sit down and talk some horse sense" ("Waco"). During the 51-day siege, Harwell urged both ATF agents and the FBI Hostage Rescue Team to back off, and on March 15, he personally met with two key members of the group, Steve Schneider and lawyer Wayne Martin, to try to resolve the standoff (Galloway). This new Sheriff Har(t)well, understanding that the government may well be held blameless for any FBI actions, seems determined to avoid the large-scale deaths associated with a previous Texas "cult" and to appear as cooperative as possible when agents enter his domain.

[21] Lucius Hartwell's domain includes the Rolling Acres R.V. Park, home to a community of vampires trying to blend in, with one exception. Ronnie Strickland, an unassuming pizza delivery guy "who has seen one too many Bela Lugosi movies," wants to be a predator, so he wears fake vampire teeth that enable him to bite and drain other creatures (5.12). Before he can do so, however, he subdues both cows and humans with the sedative chloral hydrate. Things go from disturbing to pathetic. When he tries to target Mulder, the agent, who is well versed in vampiric obsessive-compulsive disorder, delays the attack by flinging a bag of sunflower seeds at Strickland. Thanks to this humorous quirk, Scully arrives in time to stop her partner's blood loss (and to hear him sing the theme song from "Shaft"), and he promptly chases down his assailant to drive a broken chair leg through his heart. At Strickland's autopsy, once the coroner removes the stake, Ronnie revives, and, impotent without his sharp fake teeth and knockout drops, he can only leave the coroner's neck "sort of gnawed on" (5.12). This laughable Texas vampire, luckiest with doped cows, clearly represents the "failed seriousness" associated with camp.

[22] Even Sheriff Hartwell acknowledges that Ronnie is something of an embarrassment—a bad egg—telling Scully, "I really need to apologize to you about Ronnie. He makes us all look bad. *He's just not who we are anymore.* I mean, we pay taxes, we're good neighbors. Old Ronnie, he just . . . he can't quite seem to grasp the concept of . . . low profile" (emphasis added 2.12). First of all, his lucid, matter-of-fact delivery calls Mulder's picture of his stupidity into doubt. Perhaps Hartwell even played dumb to impede the agents' investigation, counting on the stereotype of the moronic Texan to keep the investigators on the wrong track. As Michelle Callendar notes, "In both *Dracula* and *Buffy*, vampires seek to conceal . . . foreignness behind a mask of the local, the familiar." Second, Hartwell directly references the need for vampires to evolve, to leave behind old, human-biting ways to become tax-paying citizens.

[23] And his community takes a distinctly non-violent approach to being discovered as vampires. Whereas the Branch Davidians fought the ATF and FBI for weeks near Waco, refusing to surrender, the Chaney coven takes a different approach with their federal visitors. Hartwell

gives Scully coffee laced with chloral hydrate, and while the shot shows him moving towards her menacingly, eyes glowing fluorescent green, he just leaves her sleeping in the cemetery, thoughtfully buttoned up in his coat. Similarly, we see over a dozen intense vampires close in on Mulder at the R.V. park, where he has gone to arrest Ronnie, but he wakes up in his rental car with no damage except untied shoelaces. While the agents are knocked out, the Texas vampires drive their R.V.s to an unknown location. The Branch Davidians who survived the fires of Waco faced criminal charges and unsuccessfully tried to sue the government for damages—hardly the publicity desired by the undead. The Texas vampires modeled on them favor “low profile” self-preservation.

Laughing It Up and Running Away

[24] The Texas vampire, with his big hat and big talk, embodies a campy mindset to be recognized, ridiculed, and, in the case of Tector Gorch, extinguished outright by powerful female forces. In the end, what’s so funny about these bloodsuckers, most of whom never suck blood on screen? Many of the Texas vampires who take on the human protagonists of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *The X-Files* are foolhardy. Because they don’t think through their plans, they are better off staying out of the spotlight, which is reserved for the “real” problems. Buffy Summers must avert the apocalypse (again); the FBI agents of *The X-Files* want to unravel governmental conspiracies involving extraterrestrials. Texas vampires are humorous, mildly irritating blips on much greater radars. But does Texas specifically influence the humor, or is the real joke based on stereotyping and the low social status often signified by a heavy Southern accent, scuffed cowboy boots, and R.V.s? In other words, what exactly are we laughing at?

[25] In both television series, social class conveys privilege. According to Elyce Rae Helford, female power in Joss Whedon’s series comes largely from middle-class whiteness (“My Emotions” 23). In both *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *The X-Files*, the protagonists “provide idealized fictional representations of the late twentieth-century American yuppie” and in the “series also position themselves against what might be the most obvious ‘Others’ of yuppiness: redneck hillbillies, on the one hand; Big Government, Big Science and Big Business, on the other”

(Milner 113). The Gorches and residents of Chaney, Texas, are not coded as middle class, but rather as the redneck hillbillies, rural white trash, “the out-of-style, the tasteless, the rejects of mainstream society” (Sweeney 250), that hover over the vampires’ characterization. Lyle and Tector in “Bad Eggs” squat in Sunnydale’s sewers, living on rats rather than seeking out an available crypt, as the more cultured Spike and Angel do. In “Bad Blood,” Sheriff Hartwell’s people live in a rundown R.V. lot, the transient trailer park associated with white-trash living. These vampires are “the people with ‘no breeding’ or unknown breeding: the root-less, the property-less, the race-less” (Sweeney 253).

[26] The vampires could have been from any place in the rural South if writers wanted hillbilly stereotypes, but selecting the Lone Star state resonates with a long television tradition of Rangers and immoral business men. White, working-class, country characters, visually marked with cowboy hats and heavy belt buckles, signal their Texas affiliation before they ever open their mouths. When they finally talk and drawl something ridiculous about wetlands, we chuckle, perhaps able to elide our enjoyment of class stereotypes and white-trash hyperbole by telling ourselves that it is the Texas angle that provokes our laughter.

[27] We can mock, but Lyle Gorch and Sheriff Lucius Hartwell actually get the last laugh. Michael Kimmel, noted scholar of masculinity studies, declares, “Violence is often the single most evident marker of manhood. Rather it is the willingness to fight, the desire to fight” (36). A typical vampire’s aggression reflects this marker: he fights and feeds. Our Texas vampires, however, break with tradition(s) by refusing to fight. Of characters like the Gorches, “their function as knockdown villains contributes to the viewer’s pleasure in Buffy (or the others) defeating them” (Jowett 96), but while Lyle is defeated and runs away, he is not dusted. He even reappears in Season Three’s “Homecoming,” with his vampire bride Candy, only to run away again. Similarly, rather than have a last-stand showdown with the F.B.I., the Chaney residents flee the R.V. park for parts unknown. Despite the fact that a murderer, Ronnie Strickland, is part of the fugitive group, and despite being drugged in the line of duty, neither Mulder nor Scully appears all that keen to pursue the case any further.

[28] “Camp is a form of artificial respiration; it breathes new life into old situations” (Muñoz 128), and on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *The X-Files*, the old figures of the outlaw cowboy and the Texas Ranger get a few more breaths in. By choosing flight over fight, Lyle Gorch and Hartwell’s group survive. It may be in sewers and trailer parks, under the human radar, relegated to the margins, but the Texas vampire of sci-fi television just won’t die.

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¹ See Ananya Mukherjea's "My Vampire Boyfriend: Postfeminism, 'Perfect' Masculinity, and the Contemporary Appeal of Paranormal Romance."

² Editor's note: In the *Buffy* episode "The Zeppo" (3.13), laughable but menacing zombie-like antagonists emerge from the grave with a request to see recordings of all recent episodes of *Walker, Texas Ranger*. The request is clearly not meant as a marker of intelligence.