

Reading Supernatural Fiction as Regional Fiction: Of "Vamps," "Supes" and Places that "Suck"

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Introduction

A look around any large bookstore reveals it all: in both the young adult as well as the adult sections, vampire fiction has become its own category, in line with crime fiction and romance, for example. Although "[v]ampire tales have been told for centuries,"¹ in recent years, it seems that the number of vampire tales that are told has exploded.² Nowadays, everybody seems to agree, vampires are everywhere.

Yet, in their fictionalization, vampires are not everywhere, they inhabit very concrete places. The settings in which vampires are set deserve academic attention they have not received, yet. In the realm of recent critical discus-

¹ <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2010/0622/Twilight-Saga-True-Blood-New-twist-on-old-vampire-love-tale> (09.04.2011).

² This is not only evident in bookstores, but also on the screen, with the success of the movie-adaptations of the *Twilight*-series, as well as the popular TV-shows, *The Vampire Diaries* and *True Blood*.

sions of the literary and cultural figure of the vampire in contemporary Western (popular) culture, vampires are predominantly analyzed in terms of gender and sexuality, as Gothic romances and tales of horror. Increasing is the number of critics working on class, race and ethnicity in vampire narratives, yet place and setting have been largely ignored. If it is our general aim to locate contemporary vampires, we also need to take a look at the places where they reside. In doing so, it appears that regional settings are recurring motifs in today's vampire fiction. This article reads three popular vampire novels against a regional background aiming to shed light on how these settings and the 'vampire' are interrelated.

Traditionally, the vampire has been represented as a deterritorialized, even transnational character that is not subject to borders, but rather constantly on the move looking for prey and only occasionally retreating to a former homeland.³ In contrast, numerous recent works of vampire fiction published by American authors root the vampire in specific American regions. What is the effect of such a regional rootedness, what does it 'do' to the cultural figure 'vampire' and vice versa? These are the guiding questions of the following analysis.

The Homes of Vampires

In the following, I will discuss Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* (2005), P.C. and Kristin Cast's first *House of Night*-novel *Marked* (2007), and *Dead Until Dark* (2001), Charlaine Harris's earliest publication of the Sookie Stackhouse-series (2001 to present). In their books, these writers narrate their supernatural and human characters in very specific, regional places, such as Forks/Washington, Tulsa/Oklahoma, and Bon Temps/Louisiana. Forks, a small town in the northwest of Washington State is the place where the human teenager Bella Swan meets and loves vampire Edward Cullen in Meyer's *Twilight*-series. In reality, due to its centrality in Meyer's fiction, Forks

³ Visano, Livy: Dracula as Contemporary Ethnography: A Critique of Mediated Moralities and Mysterious Mythologies, in: Carol Margaret Davison (ed.): *Bram Stoker's Dracula: Sucking Through the Century, 1897 – 1997*. Toronto 1997, p. 331-350.

has become a popular vampire-tourist site that annually attracts *Twilight*-fans from all over the world.⁴

In their vampire series for young adult readers, the Casts have created a world in which young teenagers are unexpectedly marked as fledglings who then have to attend the “House of Night” boarding schools that educate and accompany the fledglings on their way to becoming vampyrs.⁵ One of these boarding schools is located in Tulsa/Oklahoma, the second-largest city of the state of Oklahoma, located in the Southwest United States. The protagonist Zoey Redbird, an Oklahoma native, has to attend the “House of Night”-school after she is marked. Her transformation to vampyr is adventurous, because Zoey is the only fledgling and future vampyr to have an affinity for all elements (air, fire, water, earth and spirit). She is therefore very close to vampyr goddess Nyx and subject to people trying to rob her of her special powers.

In contrast to the Casts and to Meyer, Charlaine Harris has created a fictional setting for her novels: Bon Temps/Louisiana.⁶ Although fictional, Bon Temps and its inhabitants certainly represent the prototypical rural Southern town. There, waitress Sookie Stackhouse tries to juggle with vampires, shapeshifters, witches and werewolves who enter her life when she falls in love with vampire Bill Compton. As different as the stories and the supernatural worlds might be in these works, what they all have in common are their regional settings that are not coincidentally the places of supernatural and ‘vampire action.’⁷

⁴ As is shown in documentaries such as *Twilight in Forks – Saga of the Real Town* (2010) and *Destination Forks: Real World of Twilight* (2010).

⁵ In Cast’s novels, the existence of vampyrs (the Casts use ‘vampyr’ instead of ‘vampire’) is known to humans. Yet, they mask the extent of their power in order to appear harmless.

⁶ Bon Temps is the only fictional town in Harris’s works; she often refers to Shreveport/Louisiana and to New Orleans, as well as places in the neighboring states of Texas (*Living Dead in Dallas*, 2002) and Mississippi (*Club Dead*, 2003).

⁷ Other works with similar regional settings: Mary Janice Davidson’s *Queen Betsy*-series is set in Minneapolis/Minnesota (2004), Richelle Mead’s *Vampire Academy*-novels (2007) in rural Montana and L.J. Smith’s *Vampire Diaries* is set in Fell’s Church/Virginia (2007).

Location of Otherness

Forks

These regional settings, the places vampires call their homes, stand out as remote, often rural and 'off the map' – in the margins of American landscape and thus also of culture. In order to get to Forks/Washington for instance, you need to get on a "four-hour flight from Phoenix to Seattle, another hour in a small plane up to Port Angeles, and then an hour drive back down to Forks."⁸ The geographical remoteness of this town is supported by its peculiar weather that transforms it into an invisible non-place hidden in clouds:

"In the Olympic Peninsula of northwest Washington State, a small town named Forks exists under a near-constant cover of clouds. It rains on this inconsequential town more than any other place in the United States of America. It was from this town and its gloomy, omnipresent shade that my mother escaped with me when I was only a few months old. [...] It was to Forks that I now exiled myself – an action that I took with great horror. I detested Forks. I loved Phoenix."⁹

In the beginning of *Twilight*, Forks 'sucks' (although in this case only figuratively); Meyer draws the town as a miserable place, contrasted to sunny, seemingly friendlier Phoenix/Arizona. Even before the story begins, in the preface, when Meyer anticipates the climax of the novel by quoting the key scene in which Bella thinks she is going to die, Forks is introduced as a horrific place, a place of death even: "I knew that if I'd never gone to Forks, I wouldn't be facing death now."¹⁰

Not only does Forks bring death, it is a prison – "I could feel the claustrophobia creeping up on me [...] it was like a cage"¹¹ – from which Bella once escaped with her mother, and to which she has now returned. As Bella

⁸ Meyer, Stephenie: *Twilight*. London 2005, p. 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3-4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

claims, she has returned to Forks and to her father Charlie, because her mother has married a man with whom she will have to travel much. Yet, the fact that she seeks exile is rooted in her personality that is from the beginning on represented as different from other teenagers: "I didn't relate well to people my age. Maybe the truth was that I didn't relate well to people, period."¹²

She does relate to Forks though. Not only because she does not look tanned and sporty like somebody from Phoenix should, but rather "ivory-skinned,"¹³ she also relates to Forks, because it is where she falls in love with vampire Edward Cullen. Although he understands that Forks must be a "difficult place"¹⁴ for Bella to live in, the characteristics she detests in the beginning of the novel eventually develop into characteristics that are essential for the survival of Edward, his family and their relationship. He and his family can only pass as humans under the "cover of clouds," that is why they have chosen to make Forks their home, instead of wandering around like nomads. The Cullens live differently than other vampire clans: first of all, they are so-called vegetarians who only feed of animals instead off humans, and, as Edward tells Bella: "[M]ost [vampires] won't settle in one place. Only those like us, who've given up hunting you people [...] can live together with humans for any length of time."¹⁵ He tells her that nomad life has become "tedious"¹⁶ for them, which is why they wish to settle down.

Up to this point, Meyer has established the Otherness of Bella, who is not an ordinary teenager and the Otherness of Edward and his family, who are vampire vegetarians who wish to settle down by means of the regional specificity of Forks, a place that seems to invite difference. This is also supported by the representation of Indian American characters and legends that Meyer utilizes in order to tell her supernatural story that is based on the

¹² Ibid., p. 9.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 254.

¹⁶ Ibid.

romantic rivalry between vampire Edward and werewolf Jacob Black who both fight for Bella's love. The characters of Jacob, his father Billy Black, and the Quileute people serve to create a legend that supposedly explains the origin of vampire-werewolf rivalry in western Washington. As Jacob tells Bella:

“Another legend claims that we descended from wolves – and that the wolves are our brothers still. [...] There are stories of the cold ones as old as the wolf legends, and some much more recent. [...] You see, the cold ones are the natural enemies of the wolf – well, not the wolf, really, but the wolves that turn into men, like our ancestors. [...] So you see, [...] the cold ones are traditionally our enemies. But this pack that came to our territory during my great-grandfather's time was different. They didn't hunt the way others of their kind did – they weren't supposed to be dangerous to the tribe. So my great-grandfather made a truce with them. If they would promise to stay off our lands, we wouldn't expose them to the pale-faces [...].”¹⁷

This legend that is entirely fictional, roots the supernatural elements of *Twilight* into the region, in specific regional legends that will keep the plot going throughout the four novels, with more and more legends of the Quileutes emerging.¹⁸

Yet, Meyer's regionalism has to be read critically, because it introduces issues of race and ethnicity that are questionable. As Natalie Wilson argues “the saga upholds dominant ideas about race that associate whiteness with civility, beauty, and intellect on the one hand, and indigenous people with animality and primitivism on the other.”¹⁹ She reads the rivalry between the Quileutes and the Cullens, not as a romantic rivalry, nor as an attempt to keep the “pale-faces” safe; she reads the whole series as a tale of “conquest

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 107-8.

¹⁸ Especially in *New Moon* when Jacob slowly turns into a werewolf and in *Eclipse* when Bella joins a meeting of the Quileute elders who tell each other their legends. In *Eclipse and Breaking Dawn*, both antagonist groups even have to cooperate in order to save Bella other vampires who want to kill her.

¹⁹ Wilson, Natalie: *Civilized Vampires Versus Savage Werewolves: Race and Ethnicity in the Twilight Series*, in: Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Steven Aubrey, Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz (eds.): *Bitten By Twilight: Youth Culture, Media & the Vampire Franchise*. New York 2010, p. 55.

and imperialism”²⁰ that fails to refer to any realities American Indians have to face.

Tulsa

Similar to Stephenie Meyer’s saga, P.C. and Kristin Cast’s young adult series also represents their supernatural world by referring to American Indian legends that regionally root their narrative in the Southwest, in Oklahoma. She is an extraordinary fledgling, because – in comparison to other fledglings’ marks – the crescent moon tattooed her forehead (the sign of being marked) is filled right from the beginning. Zoey’s extraordinary status that will culminate in her becoming the youngest high priestess in history is partly due to her Cherokee ancestry. As she claims after being marked: “I stared at the exotic-looking tattoo. Mixed with my strong Cherokee features it seemed to brand me with a mark of wilderness ... as if I belonged to ancient times when the world was bigger ... more barbaric.”²¹

Again, American indigenusness is clearly represented as animalistic and primitive. Yet, Zoey’s ancestral ties with the Cherokee are also a tool of power and become crucial in Zoey’s fight against everything that is evil. Her Cherokee ancestry, although represented as wild and barbaric, is not contrasted to a privileged heteronormative whiteness, as is the case in *Twilight*. Zoey is privileged and special, because she is “a unique mixture of the Old Ways and the New World – of ancient tribal blood and the heartbeat of outsiders.”²² Zoey’s power is a result of her regional identity, being a Cherokee and an Oklahoma native.

Yet, it is not only Zoey’s ancestry that marks regionalism in the *House of Night*-series; her roommate Stevie Rae Johnson is illustrated as a picture-perfect “Okie”: she is from Henrietta Oklahoma, has a thick “Okie” accent, loves country-music and wears cowboy hats:

²⁰ Ibid., p. 55.

²¹ Cast, P.C., Kristin Cast: *Marked*. New York 2007, p. 8.

²² Ibid., p. 39.

“‘Come on in!’ called a perky voice with an Okie accent. [...] ‘Hi y’all! Ohmy-gosh, come on in.’ [...] I looked around and blinked. Several times. The first thing I saw was the life-sized Kenny Chesney²³ poster that hung over one of the two beds and the cowboy (cowgirl?) hat that rested on one of the bedside tables – the one that also had the old-fashioned-looking gas lamp with the base shaped like a cowboy boot. Oh, nu uh. Stevie Rae was a total Okie!”²⁴

Stevie Rae Johnson, although often ridiculed because of her clichéd performance of “Okie” becomes the high priestess of a new breed of fledglings and soon-to-become vampyrs. She takes a position that is as powerful as that of Zoey. This is explained by the fact that as an “Okie.” Instead of being corrupted by evil forces who want her to join them in destroying and enslaving humans, Stevie Rae is down to earth, pragmatic and in the end, innocent.²⁵ In their series, the Casts fuse clichéd Southwest identities (indigenous, “Okie”) with the supernatural, thus telling a regional vampire story in which regional specificities are not merely utilized to complicate the plot. Regional identities are rather depicted as empowering in the realm of the supernatural world of vampyrs.

Bon Temps

From Oklahoma to Louisiana, the setting of Charlaine Harris’s novels – ironically named *Bon Temps* – is also the setting of a gothic version of the archetypical plantation story: Set on a wealthy plantation, a Southern Belle looks for a gentleman to fall in love with her. The Southern Belle is beautiful, graceful, virtuous and loyal to her family. She is flirtatious, impulsive and although she is in need of male protection, she is brave when necessary. The Belle’s counterpart is the gentleman who is also known as the Southern Cavalier. He stands for “fortitude, temperance, prudence, justice, liberality,

²³ American country musician from Tennessee.

²⁴ *Cast, Marked*, p. 70-1.

²⁵ Zoey and Stevie Rae’s innocence can also be read as a symbol of their youth; they are not as corrupted and evil as adults. This is a characteristic of much young adult fiction and initiation stories.

and courtesy”²⁶; always fighting for what is good (i.e. the old world order and the Belle/Lady). In *Dead Until Dark*, the Southern Belle resides in an old, decaying house and has mind-reading, supernatural abilities. Her gentleman is a vampire.

The major difference to other contemporary representations of vampires is that in Harris’s world, vampires live among humans and not in disguise or hidden in boarding schools. They have ‘outed’ themselves as a new race that wishes to live with humans, yet, not in a boring, mediocre town like Bon Temps. Boring is how Sookie Stackhouse perceives her hometown in the beginning of *Dead Until Dark*:

“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? But rural Louisiana wasn’t too tempting to vampires, apparently; on the other hand, New Orleans was a real center for them – the whole Anne Rice thing, right?”²⁷

In this humorous, self-reflective hint to the legacy of Anne Rice’s novels, New Orleans is established the obvious center for vampire mysteries, but not Bon Temps. The same is the case for Forks and also for Tulsa: they are established as unlikely settings for vampire adventures while they reveal themselves as true ‘meccas’ of such during the course of the plotline.

Yet, the American South, with its complex history of slavery, prejudice and discrimination, is the perfect setting for discussing the integration or segregation of the new race “vampire” into American society. It seems that Sookie Stackhouse could not live anywhere else than in “sultry and otherworldly Louisiana.”²⁸ Charlaine Harris’s writing brings together elements of the Southern Gothic, a regional form of the Gothic that avails itself of myths of

²⁶ Watson, Ritchie D.: Gentleman, in: Joseph M. Flora, Lucinda H. Mackethan (eds.): *The Companion to Southern Culture*. Baton Rouge 2001, p. 292.

²⁷ Harris, Charlaine: *Dead Until Dark*. New York 2001, p. 1.

²⁸ http://www.macleans.ca/culture/entertainment/article.jsp?content=20080827_42265_42265 (10.04.2011).

Southern society, displaying “an inbred, patriarchal plantation aristocracy” and “an inbred lower class living in extreme isolation in closed communities, which are plagued by economic impoverishment, educational ignorance, religious fundamentalism, racial intolerance, genetic deformities, perverted sexuality, and unrequited violence.”²⁹

Harris fuses Southern Gothic writing with elements known from one of the most persistent American narratives: the Old South. Vampire Bill Compton and Sookie Stackhouse are a twisted and at times subversive version of the Southern Belle and her gentleman. Sookie oscillates between being a ‘Buffy-esque’ character with a lot of courage and strength, saving her vampire and supernatural friends while at the same time seeking constant male protection and companionship. Similar to Bella Swan, Sookie Stackhouse is also different from other women. While she describes herself as an attractive woman, she does not “get out much,”³⁰ because of her “disability”³¹ as she calls it. Sookie is an outsider of her community, because she can read people’s minds. Even the ultimate Other – vampire Bill Compton – realizes she is different from the start. When they first meet, he asks her “[w]hat are you?”³², assuming she is a different type of human being.³³

More explicitly, Sookie’s first boyfriend, vampire Bill literally ties in the Old South with the present. Turned into a vampire shortly after the Civil War, he actually lived in antebellum times and fought as a confederate soldier. Similar to the Cullens in *Twilight*, he wishes to become a proper member of human society and thus returns to his hometown of Bon Temps. As he tells Sookie: “I plan on living there, as long as I can. I’m tired of drifting from city to city. I grew up in the country. [...] I’ve been roaming for decades.”³⁴

²⁹ Boyd, Molly: Gothicism, in: Joseph M. Flora, Lucinda H. Mackethan (eds.): *The Companion to Southern Culture*. Baton Rouge 2001, p. 311.

³⁰ Harris, *Dead Until Dark*, p. 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³³ In the course of the series, his assumption is proved right; Sookie Stackhouse is related to fairies by ancestry.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

Instead of “roaming,” Bill seeks his roots and therefore returns to his former home.

The fusion of different forms of regional writing like Southern Gothic and Old South narratives transforms Harris’s writing into a work of regional vampire fiction that addresses the Otherness of the American South by means of the Otherness of its inhabitants. This is also the case in the writing of Meyer and the Casts. The region is represented as home of the Other and thus, these representations reaffirm the ostracized, ‘othered’ position the South is traditionally assigned.

Regional Vampires

In *Monster Theory* (1996), Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues that the “monster exists only to be read,” because it is “an embodiment of a certain cultural moment – of a time, a feeling, and a place.”³⁵ The regionalism of recent vampire fiction thus embodies a cultural moment in which the supernatural is tied into regional settings. What are the effects of such a union: to regionalize the monster or to represent regionalism as monstrous? In order to answer these questions, I will, in the following, discuss the concept of the ‘new’ vampire and relate this figure to the concept of regionalism.

In *Metaphor into Metonymy: The Vampire Next Door*, Jules Zanger traces back the metamorphosis from the vampire as she/he/it is known from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) to what he calls the ‘new’ vampire of our times. This ‘new’ vampire does not have the “metaphysical, anti-Christian dimension”³⁶ attributed to Dracula – he is not an earthly representative of Satan. He is also said to have less “folkloric attributes,”³⁷ exemplified by the loss of his mutability and the introduction of new parameters, new ‘rules’ that define vampires. For example – classic vampire characteristics such as being

³⁵ Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome: *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)*, in: *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Minneapolis 1996, p. 4.

³⁶ Zanger, Jules: *Metaphor into Metonymy: The Vampire Next Door*, in: Joan Gordon, Veronica Hollinger (eds.): *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture*. Philadelphia 1997, p. 18.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

burned by daylight, the fear of crosses and garlic, the threshold barrier or the missing reflection in the mirror, have been partially modified, if not ridiculed in contemporary vampire fiction, as is shown in the following conversation between Bella Swan and Edward Cullen in *Twilight*: “Don’t laugh – but how can you come out during the daytime?’ He laughed anyway. ‘Myth.’ ‘Burned by the sun?’ ‘Myth.’ ‘Sleeping in coffins?’ ‘Myth.’”³⁸

The most important characteristic of the ‘new’ vampire is certainly that he is represented as less Other and more as Self. He is less aristocratic, more democratic and therefore communal. In the words of John L. Flynn: “One characteristic that immediately distinguishes the new vampire from the old is that the new one tends to be communal, rather than solitary as was Dracula.”³⁹ Within the context of American cultural production, the monster has been domesticated and transformed into an American citizen. As vampire Louis already had to admit in *Interview with the Vampire*: “We had met the European vampire, the creature of the Old World. He was dead.”⁴⁰

The traditional vampire is a nomad, an uprooted figure: uprooted from both life and home. He does not only have the power to trespass life and death, humanity and divinity, he is also not restricted by boundaries of nationality and the nation-state. Therefore, the regionalism in the novels I briefly introduced here can be understood in terms of the domestication of the monster. Bill Compton’s and the Cullens’ desire to settle down, for instance, underlines the notion of a ‘new’ vampire who is more the ‘neighbor next door’ than an exotic, foreign predator. Regional writing is a technique that supports the transformation from Dracula-like vampires to the so-called new vampires that are rooted in specific regions.

³⁸ Meyer, *Twilight*, p. 162-3.

³⁹ Flynn, John L.: *Cinematic Vampires: The Living Dead on Film and Television, from the Devil’s Castle (1896) to Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1992)*. Jefferson 1992, p. 18.

⁴⁰ Rice, Anne: *Interview with the Vampire*. New York 1976, p. 190-1.

Regional Writing

Regional tales are counter-narratives to rootlessness, because they are “born of a sense of identity and belonging that is shared by a region’s inhabitants.”⁴¹ A region and its inhabitants are defined by specific characteristics, such as language, food, traditions, cultural and moral values that explicitly distinguish ‘region’ and its people from others. As Timothy R. Mahoney and Wendy J. Katz have argued, the region is a “concept of an observable uniformity of certain cultural attitudes, behaviors, and artifacts in a socially and naturally defined place and time.”⁴² Following their arguments in *Regionalism and the Humanities* (2008), regional places and their conceptualization are not ‘off-the-map’ at all, but rather central to current discussions of space, place and identity.⁴³ Yet, defining the region is a complex matter: it is a multi-layered, dynamic space that is not subject to strict borders, but rather subject to interpretation and integration, “embracing economic, cultural, political and social aspects.”⁴⁴ As described by Edward L. Ayers and Peter S. Onuf: “The region *is* climate and land; it *is* a particular set of relations between various ethnic groups; it *is* a relation to the federal government and economy; it *is* a set of shared cultural styles.”⁴⁵

In terms of its “relation to the federal government,” as a geographical concept, regionalism has to be understood as a response to globalization. In contrast to the supposed uniformity of the globalized world and the authoritatively governed and confusingly vast territory of the nation-state, regions are spaces of potential contestation and resistance to the unifying pressures of global (and state) economy. Regionalism, thus, has to be read as:

⁴¹ Jordan, David: Introduction, in: *Regionalism Reconsidered*. New York 1994, p. xv.

⁴² Mahoney, Timothy R., Wendy J. Katz: *Regionalism and the Humanities*. Lincoln 2008, p. xi.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

⁴⁴ Farrell, Mary: The Global Politics of Regionalism: An Introduction, in: Farrell Mary, Björn Hettne, Luk Van Langenhove (eds.): *Global Politics of Regionalism: Theory and Practice*. London 2005, p. 8.

⁴⁵ Ayers, Edward L., Peter S. Onuf: Introduction, in: *All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions*. Baltimore 1996, p. 5.

“a form of dependence on already-existing national norms, in which a place is recognized as a region precisely because of its deviance from standards that are themselves created elsewhere – usually in eastern urban milieus that control the national market for publishing, capital, art – and so can and do equate their own region with the nation.”⁴⁶

Regional places, following this argument made by Mahoney and Katz, are always the Other of the nation-state, places of deviance and resistance to the all-encompassing tendencies of the nation-state and also globalization, which, each to a different extent, are perceived as master-narratives that organize the modern world. Mahoney and Katz’s argument has to be contextualized within discourses of US-American regionalism that define the East as the home of the “Establishment,”⁴⁷ the dominant region against which the West/Southwest, the South and the Midwest are represented as deviant, if not exotic.

This assumed and obviously constructed deviance is where the geographical and social meanings of regionalism coincide with its cultural meaning. Since the mid-nineteenth century, literary regionalism⁴⁸ has been a popular genre of American literature. David Jordan even argues for a recent rise of regional writing in the United States as a reaction to a perceived decline of the nation-state in the shadow of globalization. He traces back the origins of American regional writing in the “collective cultural crisis”⁴⁹ caused by the need to create a “unique American identity”⁵⁰ that is set apart from European influences.

⁴⁶ Mahoney, Katz, *Regionalism and the Humanities*, p. xv.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xix.

⁴⁸ For the differences or similarities of literary regionalism and local color fiction, see Marjorie Pryse: *Reading Regionalism: The ‘Difference’ It Makes*, in: David M. Jordan, William Cain (eds.): *Regionalism Reconsidered: New Approaches to the Field*. New York 1994, p. 47-64.

⁴⁹ Jordan, *Regionalism Reconsidered*, p. ix.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

By means of writing about the details of a specific, mostly rural region, its dialect and customs, regional writers⁵¹ “chronicled the daily lives of common citizens.”⁵² The concentration the lives of people living outside the centers of the young nation, created a unique, American way of writing that was “crucial to nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century nation-building.”⁵³ A paradox emerges when considering these arguments. It seems that regional writing, in its beginnings, was not opposed to the nation-state, but rather in support of it. This is due to the overwhelming cultural influence ‘big brother’-Europe, specifically England, still had on the young American nation of the nineteenth-century. David Jordan even argues that regionalism was never again as popular and important as in the late nineteenth century when it was a “nation-building” practice.

Yet, even after the nineteenth-century, (literary) regionalism certainly has to be understood as “nation-building,” only in a reversed manner. In order to construct and propagate a homogenous, normative American identity, regional identities, as represented by regional writing, are constructed as the Other, the deviant to what is considered to be ‘American’ and thus ‘normal.’ Literary regionalism is represented as a regressive, ‘backward’ narrative that promotes counter-narratives to ideas of modernity and postmodernity. It has therefore been pushed to the margins and declared as a minor genre of American literature, or even merely a subgenre of realism.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, as Mahoney and Katz suggest, regional writing has never lost its popularity in American culture and literature and is still much alive, especially because it is time and again declared as lost and dead.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Regional writing displays a “particular view of American culture, a view from the perspective of marginalized persons, as well as consciousness of difference,” in contrast to regionalist writing that includes “few middle-class white male protagonists; rather, poor, elderly, unmarried, and sometimes ‘dark’ women take center stage.” (Pryse 48).

⁵² Jordan, *Regionalism Reconsidered*, p. x.

⁵³ Joseph, Philip: Introduction, in: *American Literary Regionalism in a Global Age*. Baton Rouge 2007, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Fetterley and Pryse claim that regional writing is not necessarily realist writing, because it often resists ideologies represented by realism (cf. 4).

⁵⁵ Mahoney, Katz, *Regionalism and the Humanities*, p. ix.

As I cannot do justice to all characteristics and crucial discourses of literary and geographical regionalism within this frame, I will at this point summarize the features that are of importance when thinking the rise to regionalism in recent vampire fiction. Literary regionalism is understood as a genre that challenges and questions the so-called master narrative of the nation-state. It is a form of writing that aims at the representation of pluralism by decentralizing “eastern urban milieus.”⁵⁶ Yet, “in creating the folk as specimen marked by their folkways, their accents, and their reliance on older notions of community, regional writing also creates the folk as doubles of foreigners, or immigrants,”⁵⁷ it creates the “folk” as the deviant Other to identities and places that are constructed as normative and American. Thus, as Stephanie Foote argues, regional writing is a “form *about* the representation of difference.”⁵⁸

Conclusion

Following Foote’s definition of the “folk,” or regional characters, vampires have traditionally been read as the ultimate Other, as metaphors for immigrants and certainly as foreigners who penetrate and threaten supposedly safe and private spheres, such as home and the nation-state. The vampire has ever since been a ‘projection screen’ for everything that is considered to be different from heteronormative notions of gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity: “The monsters are here, as elsewhere, expedient representations of other cultures, generalized and demonized to enforce a strict notion of group sameness.”⁵⁹

Indeed, the regional embedding of the works I have presented in this paper can be read as a technique that highlights the vampires’ Otherness. Situating vampires in regional settings further supports this Otherness that is both

⁵⁶ Cf. footnote 47.

⁵⁷ Foote, Stephanie: Introduction, in: *Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Madison 2001, p. 6.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁵⁹ Cohen, *Monster Culture*, p. 15.

feared as desired. Stephenie Meyer for instance embeds the peculiar landscape of the Pacific Northwest and American Indian groups indigenous to this region only superficially into her narrative. Through the peculiarity of the region, a peculiarity she consciously constructs, she creates an otherworldly setting that is ruled by supernatural forces that stand above any worldly (read: American) forces, such as police or parents, for example.⁶⁰ Werewolves and vampires rule over the region. Similarly, in the *House of Night* series, even when evil supernatural forces attack humans, it is in Zoey's hands to stop them. The only outside help she seeks, next to the spirits of her ancestors, is of sacral nature, she and her friends team up with nuns of the local cloister.

Thus, regionalism highlights and marginalizes regional communities as different and deviant. While the 'American' is defined through coherence and heteronormativity, the 'regional' is contested and deviant. This deviance is enhanced and elaborated on through the presence of supernatural and monstrous characters that further exoticize and marginalize regions as different. For instance, Charlaine Harris's vampires are an embodiment, a projection of the supposed monstrosity of the American South. The South is 'othered' and represented as both fearsome and desirable – a spectacle that invites for cultural slumming.

Yet, regionalism in vampire fiction can also be read differently, as a technique of domestication. With this reading, I respond to the novel discourses of the 'new' vampire who is more Self than Other. In contrast to Dracula, who, "[b]esides being 'the stranger in a strange land,' the outsider [...] is a constant reminder of the many Old World traditions that never quite made the transition to contemporary society,"⁶¹ the 'new' vampire has made the transition and seeks this integration. This is very explicitly shown in *Twilight*, which domesticates the monster by creating intersections between the popu-

⁶⁰ The police cannot be of any help to victims of vampires and Bella only pretends her father has authority. She and Edward spend nights in her father's house and she frequently runs away from home in order to follow on some dangerous, vampire 'business' without letting him know.

⁶¹ Flynn, *Cinematic Vampires*, p. 5.

lar cultural figure 'vampire,' and distinct American cultural narratives, such as American baseball and high school proms.⁶² The ways in which the Quileute people are contrasted with the Cullens supports the reinforcement of normativity that again de-centers the region and puts the all-American (vampire) family in the center of her narrative. In *Twilight*, the regionalization of vampires serves to Americanize and thus tame them.

Dead Until Dark and *Marked* rather stress difference and hold on to the dichotomy of Self (American) and Other (regional, vampiric). Yet, the writing of both Harris and the Casts questions the domestication of vampires and at times certainly subverts the supposed marginalization of regionalism. In the *House of Night*-series, being of Indian-American ancestry is represented as empowering and the clichéd backwardness of Oklahoma is transformed into the center of a new vampyr society that is more inclusive than before. Charlaine Harris portrays Bon Temps as a place of plurality, a community in which vampires and humans of all races and sexualities live together. Although this 'living together' is not always peaceful and often contested, Harris nevertheless imagines the effects of an all-inclusive community, or, as vampire Bill Compton tells his girlfriend Sookie Stackhouse: "I want to stay here. At least see if it's possible."⁶³

Bill's wish to stay exemplifies where the 'new' vampire and the traditional vampire, as embodied by Dracula, diverge. Although Dracula also resides in a place 'off the map,' "in the extreme east of [Transylvania], just on the borders of three states, Transylvania, Moldavia, and Bukovina, in the midst of the Carpathian mountains, one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe,"⁶⁴ regionalism in Stoker's novel serves a different purpose, it does not tame the monster. The regional setting is rather constructed as a home base from which the characters spread out 'transnationally' across Europe. Although in recent vampire fiction, the vampire also occasionally has to

⁶² See *Twilight*, pages 303 and 421.

⁶³ Harris, *Dead Until Dark*, p. 54.

⁶⁴ Stoker, Bram: *Dracula*. 1847. New York 2003, p. 6.

leave the home base in order to conduct international vampire 'business,' home is where most of the supernatural action takes place: regionalism roots the vampire in concrete places and cultures.⁶⁵ While in both traditional and contemporary vampire fiction, the vampire is narrated and placed in the margins of society, in contemporary fiction, the (regional) Other is represented as being much closer to Self and 'home' than assumed. These works contribute to a discourse of plurality by questioning dominant narratives that set regional identities apart from national identities.

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⁶⁵ For instance, in *New Moon* (2006), the second book of the *Twilight*-saga, Meyer introduces the Volturi, the vampire royal family, who reside in Italy. In the course of *New Moon*, both Bella and Edward travel to Italy to face them.

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