

THE HAUNTING OF BISEXUAL VAMPIRES IN NEW YORK CITY AS A CAPITALIST ECOSYSTEM: A COMPARISON OF WHITLEY STRIEBER'S *THE HUNGER* AND ITS 1983 FILMIC ADAPTATION

A CAÇA DOS VAMPIROS BISSEXUAIS EM NEW YORK COMO UM ECOSISTEMA CAPITALISTA: UMA COMPARAÇÃO ENTRE *THE HUNGER*, DE WHITLEY STRIEBER, E A SUA ADAPTAÇÃO CINEMATOGRAFICA DE 1983

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ABSTRACT

This article compares Whitley Strieber's *The Hunger* and its 1983 filmic adaptation directed by Tony Scott, in order to examine the dynamic of the metaphoric significance of the vampire and illuminate the use of space where the complex politics of class and sexuality intersect. This study attempts to answer the following questions: (1) how does New York City as a setting function in the novel? and (2) what does happen when the strong sense of place is removed in the filmic adaptation? The novel, with the help of the realistic setting of New York, presents the vampire as an avid metaphor of capitalism, and it also succeeds in queering the heteronormative space. However, the film, due to the low budget, had to be shot mostly indoors, thus creating an insular space. Minus the queering effect of the public and heterosexual space in the novel, the expression of the queer desire between Miriam and Sarah is limited within Miriam's "closet." Miriam's class status is also used only to glamorize her and help her seduce Sarah. The significance of different endings—Sarah is destined to suffer the everlasting life-in-death but happy to be reconciled with her heterosexuality in the novel while Sarah usurps Miriam's place and becomes a bisexual vampire in the film—will be also discussed in terms of Miriam's sequential bisexuality versus Sarah's concurrent bisexuality.

Keywords: queering space; bisexuality; New York City; *The Hunger*

RESUMO

Este artigo compara *The Hunger* [A Fome] de Whitley Strieber, e a sua adaptação cinematográfica de 1983, dirigida por Tony Scott, para examinar a dinâmica do significado metafórico do vampiro e ilustrar o uso do espaço onde se cruzam as políticas complexas de classe e de sexualidade. Este estudo tenta responder às seguintes questões: (1) como se configura a cidade de New York enquanto local onde ocorre a ação no romance? e (2) o que acontece quando o forte senso de lugar é removido na adaptação cinematográfica? O romance, com a ajuda do cenário realista de New York, apresenta o vampiro como uma ávida metáfora do capitalismo, e também consegue o estranhamento do espaço heteronormativo. Contudo, o filme, devido ao baixo orçamento, teve que ser filmado na sua totalidade em ambientes fechados, criando assim um espaço insular. Sem o efeito de estranhamento do espaço público e heterossexual no romance, a expressão do desejo "queer" entre Miriam e Sarah é limitada ao "roupeiro" de Miriam. O estatuto social de Miriam também é usado apenas para dar-lhe glamour e ajudá-la a seduzir Sarah. O significado dos diferentes finais - Sara está destinada a sofrer a eterna vida na morte, mas feliz por se reconciliar com a sua heterossexualidade no romance, enquanto Sarah usurpa o lugar de Miriam e torna-se uma vampira bissexual no filme - será também discutido em termos de bissexualidade sequencial de Miriam versus bissexualidade concomitante de Sarah.

Palavras-chave: espaço de estranhamento; bissexualidade; Cidade de New York; *The Hunger*

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Tony Scott's *The Hunger*, a "slick, glossy, upmarket vampire film" (Nixon 115) adapted from Whitley Strieber's 1981 novel, was neither commercially successful nor critically acclaimed, but has become an important film worth investigating in the genre film history as the first "lesbian" vampire film that distinguishes itself from "the proliferation of 'fake lesbianism' in straight male pornography" (Hanson 183) in the 1970s.²

Without Miriam's long life history, the plot of the film is much simpler than that of the novel. Miriam (Catherine Deneuve), a beautiful, young, "married" woman in the leisure class who lives in a townhouse with a well-tended rose garden in Sutton Place, is also a bisexual "vampire" (neither the novel nor the film uses the term, but she subsists on human blood). Her life on the surface is close to the ideal of the heteronormative society. The inside of her house, however, is fully equipped for her double life: a furnace in the basement to burn the evidence of her "crime" and a catacomb for her everlastingly (un)dead ex-lovers in the attic. Presumably the "last" of her species, Miriam transfuses her blood to turn a human into a semi-vampire, who can defy aging and death only "temporarily," to keep her company. After "burying" her last partner John (David Bowie), Miriam seduces Sarah (Susan Sarandon), a doctor who considers death a curable disease and tries to find a cure for it. Despite a successful transfusion, however, Sarah refuses to live as a "vampire" and attempts to kill herself. Unlike the original ending in the novel, Sarah miraculously survives and continues to live as a bisexual vampire while Miriam, all shrunken after her ex-lovers' "mutiny"—their escape from the coffins--becomes the relic of Sarah's ex-lover, stowed away in a coffin. The movie ends with a scene in which Sarah, now with a man and a girl, is looking down the city from a high-rise apartment in London. On the contrary, in the novel, it is Sarah who suffers the everlasting hunger in a coffin, and it is Miriam who makes a fresh new start in San Francisco, with a new male companion.

Despite its distinctive status from other earlier "pornographic" lesbian vampire films, the film (and the novel) has been controversial among feminist critics. Some critics criticized the film's celebration of consumerism and glamourizing "a culture based in the body" (Auerbach 57) that renders eating disorders "chic" (Pharr 99). Ellis Hanson, on the other hand, states that the film represents "disruptive queer pleasure that is neither homophobic nor misogynistic" due to its "adventurous demand for sexual pleasure, its promiscuity, its funky sense of style, its disregard for neoconservative 'family values' and

² Miriam has been often categorized as a "lesbian" vampire, but as Nicole Richter rightfully points out, she is bisexual, alternating her human companion's gender. For convenience's sake, I occasionally call her "lesbian," but always in quotation marks to indicate it is wrong to repress her bisexuality.

conventional feminism, and conventional femininity, and its celebration of its own physical and intellectual power, then this film is infinitely more entertaining” (212). Feminist critics’ different responses to the film in relation with Strieber’s novel complicates further the understanding of the film as the radical text insisted upon by Hanson. According to her, unlike the film, Strieber’s novel is “antifeminist,” in which “lesbianism is mined purely for shock values and Sarah’s dedication to her career is presented as aggressive and unwomanly” (211). However, Auerbach criticizes the movie in that it reduces Miriam by “subordinating to her props,” making her an “icon of glamorous discontinuity” while Miriam in the book is a “dominant, superior consciousness who has survived centuries of arrogant imperial persecution” (57).

The contrasting views of *The Hunger*, both the novel and the film, are due to a wide range of the metaphorical significance of vampires that “oscillate between aristocracy and democracy, at times taking command with elitist aplomb, at times embodying the predatory desires of the populace at large” (Auerbach 7). In other words, vampires often represent the exploitative group of people in leisure class, but at the same time, they also represent the social others such as illegal immigrants, foreign workers, or people on welfare. “Not all monsters are equal” (11), David McNally observes, in his warning against a postmodern celebration of the monstrous that “flattens out a field in which different social accents and values contest one another” (10). For him, it is important to see the monstrous as a site of contestation. Marx himself used vampirism as a metaphor of capitalism as he claims in *Capital*, “capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (qtd. in Neocleus 669). With some exceptions of modern vampires, most vampires sleep during daytime when other people work and wakes up at dusk only to feed. Most of them hardly work, but mysteriously they can maintain their luxurious lifestyle. But the blood-sucking images are often used against the unprivileged social others as seen from a senator’s hate-speech toward foreigners in *Machete* (2010): “The aliens, the infiltrators, the outsiders, they come right across by day or night. They’ll bleed us, they’re parasites. They’ll bleed us until we as a city, a county, a nation are all bled out.”

In this spectrum, sexually “deviant” vampires often stand in between the two categories: “aristocratic” they are in their lifestyle as their “difference” is radical and threatening as in the case of Miriam in *The Hunger*. “Lesbian” vampires are more threatening than heterosexual male vampires because she “threaten[s] to undermine the formal and highly symbolic relations of men and women essential to the continuation of

patriarchal society” and “disrupts identity and order” (Creed 61). According to Barbara Creed, she is the “monstrous-feminine” (3), the “sexual predator” (67) that sexually awakens women by releasing their blood and causes the fear of castration in men (62-66). However, from various version of Carmilla from Le Fanu’s novel to the Hammer Studio films, to Miriam in *The Hunger*, to Nadja in *Nadja* (1994), they are not always subversive others but also represent the exploiters who belong to the leisure class.

In this essay, I will attempt to examine the dynamic of the metaphoric significance of the vampire in *The Hunger*, the novel and the film vis-à-vis, through their different uses of space. The novel and the film are quite different in many ways, but to name the most important difference, New York as a setting, with all references to specific places, plays a key role in defining the symbolic meaning of vampires in the novel while in the film, the strong sense of location is almost completely removed. Except for a few street scenes from New York, the film was shot mostly in London, especially limited to the interior of Miriam’s house. In the film, we cannot find the novel’s stark contrast between Miriam’s affluent neighborhood—its “innocent brightness” that is nothing but “a repulsive falseness” (Strieber 87)—and the dark streets near Port Authority where John haunts to find easy victims among prostitutes. Miriam’s house in the film is insular and labyrinthine, reflecting Miriam’s psychology, and everything happens within the “closet”; the film lacks the effect of queering heteronormative spaces such as a medical research center and a bedroom of a heterosexual couple in the novel.

The novel portrays New York City as a capitalist ecosystem, in which seemingly segregated neighborhoods are in fact closely tied to each other. Despite the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the residents of New York City are still separated from each other along the racial, ethnic, and class lines. Especially the “invisible hand of the market” has become the legitimate means to control the “border” between neighborhoods. Although everyone is free to roam anywhere in the city, the movement of people tends to be limited within the boundaries of their workplaces and neighborhoods; interpersonal communication is rare between different groups of people, and people hardly move to different neighborhoods. New York, however, has always been a “jungle,” a place for the survival of the fittest, where the rich and the poor coexist back to back, and the rich get richer and the poor get poorer; the veins of the poorest streets, the smallest shops, and the cheapest housing converge to form a great artery to feed the real estate moguls and the Wall Street.³ A

³ The history of New York City has always been the history of real estate since the Dutch paid twenty-four dollars in shells to the Indians for the Manhattan (Blackmar 1). Elizabeth Blackmar explains how a tiered system of tenures emerged in New York and rents “flowed upward through this chain from the tenants or
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vampire that travels across different neighborhoods to feed her greed, thirst, and hunger is an apt metaphor for the capital that subsists on living labor.⁴

Miriam and John, at the top of the “food chain,” are the symbols of a capitalism that preys on the lower classes, and New York City and its suburbs become their hunting grounds. New York metropolitan area in the 1970s is a perfect habitat for them, due to its large population, the high rate of population turnover, high crime rates, and individualistic lifestyle. Hiding their true identities, living as a heterosexual couple in a wealthy neighborhood, Miriam and John haunt other neighborhoods at night to find their victims whose disappearance can be easily ignored or forgotten. Their trajectory “connects” disparate groups of people as the same preys and draws a giant map of the food chain of capitalism. A troublesome adolescent from an “angry house,” the “misery” (2) of a dysfunctional family in a small Long Island town will disappear a night, but she would become just “another statistic, one of thousands of teenagers who walk out on their families every year” (1). John picks up a prostitute with an acid-burn on the face at Mayflower Pancake House, the “hub of the neighborhood” (83), near Port Authority, pays her pimp in advance for ten minutes, and drinks the “purple and rich” (84) life out of her. On his way home, back on the Forty-third street, as “Manhattan began to come alive” (85), he sees the “night people,” the male and female, young and old prostitutes, creeping away with sighs (84) in contrast with “people pouring out of the Seventh Avenue subway” on their way to the office towers (86). Miriam visits a couple living in an apartment on the West seventy-sixth street, in the slum districts until the 1970s, where she made a visit a few years ago, thinking that the last disappearance must be forgotten and that it is about “time for another couple of tenants to jump their lease” (289). Dysfunctional families in the suburbs, the ebb and tide of different crowds around the clock in downtown area, high rate of population turn-over, and the increase of crime rates in NYC in the 1960s and 70s seem

subtenants who paid house rents for the space they occupied to landlords, who paid building rents to a leaseholder, who paid ground rent to a rentier” (10). Blackmar also explains how the housing market divided between the tenements for the working class and the “modern-style” middle-class houses functioned to maximize the profit of the property owners (not only rentiers but also leaseholders who considered themselves as property owners because they “they held a negotiable interest in land and improvements they added to it” (10).)

⁴ “In capitalist production, then, ‘living labour appears merely as a means to realize objectified, dead labour, to penetrate it with an animating soul while losing its own soul to it.’ The appropriation by the capitalist of the worker’s productive powers is a means by which ‘living labour makes instrument and material in the production process into the body of its soul and thereby resurrects them from the dead” (Marx, qtd. in Neocleous 680).

to be separate social issues; however, they are all interconnected as the byproducts of the geographical arrangement of population for the best interest of capitalism.

Miriam and John migrated from England to America, presumably sometime before 1845,⁵ “seeking a less organized community” (103), meaning a society in which they can indulge their hunger without being prosecuted. New York in the early 19th century, with the opening of Erie Canal in 1825 and an economic transition from apprenticeship to wage-labor system, must be what she sought after: the city was growing rapidly due to the growth of manufacturing and trade, and new flux of immigrant wage-laborers, the shortage of housing for the working class brought a higher rent and the decline of the living standard, the crime rate was rising, but the legal system could not control crime.

Sutton Place has been an ideal location for Miriam’s “fortress”: its private dock, before its removal due to the construction of FDR Drive, made it easy for her to run away from the house in emergency and to go hunting at night to the Blackwell Island (Roosevelt Island at present).⁶ Sutton Place, once called Avenue A until 1875, was an area for factories, meat-packing plants and tenement houses (Johnston), but became a wealthy neighborhood later, starting with Anne Vanderbilt and Anne Morgan’s residences. Miriam’s house on “the cul-de-sac, across to Sutton Place,” the “small but elegant structure” (21) with a garden in the backyard looking down the East River must be modeled after the house that Anne Vanderbilt bought from Effingham B. Sutton, rebuilt, and moved in the early 1920s. However, it is almost absurd—ironic at best—to say that Miriam is modeled after Anne Vanderbilt because Anne was a well-known, decorated philanthropist, who devoted her life to help the less privileged and the powerless. She financed the construction of a 400-unit apartment housing on York Avenue for tuberculosis patients. (But, then, where did all her money come from? Wasn’t she the one of the few people at the top tier of the food chain?)

While Miriam and John moves all around their vast hunting grounds, Sarah and Tom’s movements are limited to the Riverside Medical Center (NYC Health and Hospital on 97th Street) and their co-op apartment in Yorkville. It is noteworthy that Strieber specifically designates the building they live in, Excelsior Towers, but describes it as if it were located in Yorkville instead of Sutton Place (not Sutton Place “proper,” but close

⁵ The earliest history about Miriam’s house recorded in the novel is about 1845, when she built an escape tunnel to the dock, fearing of the newly formed New York City Police Department. John was born in late 18th century, so it must be in the early 19th century when Miriam and John migrated to America.

⁶ Blackwell Island was owned by the city as a site for a prison, an almshouse, a workhouse, and three hospitals including a mental asylum, but because of its bad reputation for violence and drug trafficking, the city renamed it Welfare Island in 1921.

enough to be included to the neighborhood at present. It is on the same 57th street, just two blocks away to the west from Anne Vanderbilt's house). Considering Strieber's detailed description of the city in general, it is unlikely to be a simple mistake. The building had to be Excelsior Towers, not other towers, but it had to be somewhere else than Sutton Place. The Excelsior Towers, a 47-story co-op was the city's tallest residential tower when it was built in 1967. Considering how most houses like Miriam's that "had lined both sides of the street [57th street]" (47) were replaced by cooperative apartments by the 1970s, the contrast between two housing types of major characters cannot be just a whimsical choice. It suggests the radical differences between Miriam and Sarah (In the film, it is to show that Sarah is the next generation of vampire, modern and upgraded). Miriam is not up-to-date, remaining in her old house while all the neighboring buildings have turned to high-rise co-ops. She is not only tall and strong but also "un-feminine" in her predatory manners; Sarah is modern, scientific, ambitious, and boyish, but she is not a threatening presence to men. Tom is protective of her and attracted to her "smallness" and "vulnerability" (113). It is possible that Strieber relocated the towers in Yorkville just because its original location is too close to Miriam's, but it is more plausible that he wanted Sarah to belong to different class from Miriam's. Representing Sarah as a young professional who lives in a less fashionable and less expensive neighborhood, Strieber imposes an unequal relationship between Miriam and Sarah from the beginning.

A queer space is a place of contestation, where heteronormativity is "frequently riven with internal tensions and conflicts" (Massey, qtd. in Duncan 150), and it must not be understood as a place with a certain identity. In the novel, heteronormative space is challenged by Miriam's bisexual presence.⁷ Miriam steals into the bedroom of Sarah and Tom to initiate a "touch," a psychological connection, between them. In her effort to "touch" Sarah, Miriam is queering the space that cannot be more heterosexual than that.

As she reached the bedroom door she could smell the powerful musks of human sex. Their lovemaking had been intense, full of passion. She cursed it. Sarah was needed for *other loves*; the presence of Haver [Tom] was a distinct inconvenience. (123, emphasis added).

⁷ Here, I have to point out the major difference between Miriam and Sarah in terms of their sexuality: Miriam is sequentially bisexual, and thus her bisexuality is invisible to those who do not know her history; Sarah is rendered concurrently bisexual as this scene suggests. In fact, "bisexual triangle" is almost always included in the formula of lesbian vampire narratives, though such a narrative almost always ends with the man's success, the punishment of the lesbian vampire (by beheading or staking her), and the restoration of heterosexual love as suggested by Andrea Weiss.

A bedroom for a heterosexual couple is the most private and at the same time the most heteronormative space, to which Miriam introduces “*other loves*.” Right next to Tom in the same bed, Miriam kisses and caresses Sarah till she reaches orgasm while asleep. Although Miriam’s “rape” of Sarah, as later the blood transfusion was also involuntary, and the unnecessarily pornographic description can be criticized for objectifying Sarah’s body, this scene clearly brings “tensions and conflicts” within the exclusively heterosexual space. Tom feels there is a “barrier” between him and Sarah, even after passionate sex (116), but Miriam touches not only Sarah’s body but also her mind by entering her dream and forcing “images of soft female flesh, smooth flesh, into Sarah’s mind, making her writhe with longing” (126). Miriam awakens Sarah’s “inner self,” the “hunger, raw and unfulfilled, for a truly passionate lover,” and that “hunger would grow and expand, as beautiful in her heart as a flower, as relentless as a cancer, until her present life would seem like a desert” (126). It suggests that the hunger has been always there within Sarah, “raw and unfulfilled,” and what Miriam does is simply to awaken the hunger for love, hunger for life, which is led to hunger for blood.

Queering space also happens in a more public setting in the novel. In their second and fourth encounters, the sanitized, impersonal, and public space of the clinic is charged with the sexual tension between Miriam and Sarah. Miriam visits Sarah as a “patient” to further her seduction, and in the examining room, a benign act of taking blood for a test is eroticized: “Something made her own flesh crawl when she began stroking Miriam’s skin. . . . She inserted the needle. Miriam made another noise, one that was familiar to Sarah. It was her own little chortle, the one she always made when she was penetrated” (157). This little act of “penetration” will be reciprocated when Miriam transfuses her own blood to Sarah. Admiring Miriam’s beauty, Sarah keeps telling herself that she is a doctor and “women held no sexual attraction for her” (158); however, she is “stunned” by Miriam’s beauty in the end, and guided by Miriam’s hands, “her lips touched the nipple” that gives her “the shock of pleasure” (159). All the while, her mind “scream[s] at her—Doctor, Doctor, DOCTOR! For the love of God, this is not *you!*” (159). That “*you*” she believes as herself, not only a doctor and but also a heterosexual, is challenged with “other love” that makes her heart “soaring” but fills her mind with “shame” (160).

Unlike Sarah in the film, who is eagerly responding to Miriam’s seduction and does not have any problem with her sexual identity, Sarah in the novel feels tormented by the newly dawning desire because it is not “her” as known to her. Sarah is both attracted to and repelled by Miriam. She finds Miriam “frightening and dangerously seductive,” with her

“power to call up desires best left sleeping,” and wants “no part of her” (198). After the transfusion while she was asleep at Miriam’s—another “rape” in a sense—she thinks Miriam is very beautiful, “almost magical” (217); she knows that Miriam’s actions “are directed at” her and she feels “like a kind of tentacle just reached out and touched” her (219). After the transfusion, Sarah’s mysterious hunger leads her to places she has never seen in her normal life. The city shows different crowds to her when she ventures out to a McDonald’s on the 86th street, where “everybody in the place was gay except her” (244). However, it is very unlikely that transvestites and leather boys, “men in all variations of straight and drag dress,” dance among the tables at McDonald’s (244). In her night stroll toward Carl Schurz park, she finds the buildings “acquired something that they did not possess during daylight hours” (246), feels “a lust for all things beautiful, reflected that there was no such thing as an ugly human being” (247), and soon the “lust” turns into “anger,” an urge to “kill innocent human beings, to crack them open” (248). She feels “somebody else was living in her body” (248). The illegitimate lust for woman and the hunger for blood, as commonly found in lesbian vampire literature and films, are awakening at the same time, as something alien. Sarah is straddled between heteronormativity and queerness and between humanity and extreme otherness, which is shown through her uncanny walk in her own neighborhood.

The bisexual triangle of Miriam, Sarah, and Tom produces tensions and conflicts within the sanitized, public space of the clinic. Sarah’s “frightened” state excites Tom, making his “primitive male juices flowing” (221). Despite Sarah’s objection—“not here in the office,” a public place where “anybody could walk in”—Tom has sex with her because they “need it” (221); in fact it is a need to reclaim the heteronormativity of ALL space. Tom’s insistence, Sarah’s acquiescence, and the colleagues’ pretension of noticing nothing suggest the heteronormativity of the place despite its being a functional space that is supposed to have nothing to do with any sexual behaviors.

In their fourth encounter, again in the clinic, the intimacy between Miriam and Sarah is so obvious that not only Tom but also their colleagues can see it. Sarah, despite her knowledge of their being watched by all her colleagues including Tom, cannot stop her from making an intimate gesture to Miriam:

As she drew near he saw Miriam gaze fiercely at her. The look was deep and personal. Intimate. Much too intimate. Sarah assumed a posture Tom was familiar with. She put her hands behind her back and bowed her head, almost as if to say “do with me as you will.” Tom had seen it in their bedroom. (280)

Having Miriam's blood tested and her x-ray taken, the colleagues now call her a "parasite"(286), "it," a sexless creature, a colleague says, "She [Sarah] was seduced! *It* wants her" (294, emphasis added). However, it is not only her strange blood and bone structure that makes her "it." It is a threat that she brings to a clinical space where any "abnormality" becomes the object of scrutiny and suspicion that makes her "it," a monstrous being. (A clinic is never a neutral ground where one's sexuality does not matter. The novel was published before the epidemic of "gay plague" hit New York, but what happened to gay community in New York after AIDS epidemic proves that clinical space has never been "neutral.") Miriam has to be sexless "it." Denying Miriam's sexuality is necessary to erase Sarah's bisexuality because a bisexual's sexual identity depends on the sex of the person who she/he is with: "Visibility is inherently problematic for bisexuals because they are generally read through visual codes of being gay or straight depending on the sex of the person they are in a relationship with at a given time" (Lannutti, qtd. in Richter 276). The easiest way to cancel out the bisexual triangle between Miriam, Sarah, and Tom is to turn Miriam into "it."

After the blood transfusion, all sexual energy charged between Sarah and Miriam disappears, and with Sarah's suicide attempt, any radical otherness the novel has established through the liaison between Sarah and Miriam evaporates. The novel, in terms of vampire's exploitative aristocratic existence, poses an important question about the seemingly disconnected neighborhoods, portraying them as a hunting ground in the food chain (the tiered system) of capitalism. On the other hand, it is reactionary in terms of sexual otherness. Sarah's bisexuality, and furthermore, Miriam's sexuality (and thus humanity itself) are summoned as the monstrous but soon "exorcised" to restore heteronormativity.

As Auerbach points out, the ending of Miriam's praise of Sarah's heterosexual virtue—"the truth of love" (Strieber 356)—reinforces the heteronormative values that have been mocked throughout the novel (59). Such self-contradiction is due to a limit already embedded within the lesbian vampire genre. The telos of each story is to exorcise otherness and contain the fear of otherness in the end. The ending of *The Hunger*, the novel, is interesting in that Miriam escapes all entanglements, goes unpunished, and has a fresh start with a new male companion in San Francisco.

What is exorcised in the novel is Sarah's concurrent bisexual existence, contaminated by Miriam's blood, her innate "hunger" awakened by her. No doubt the novel ends with an endorsement of heterosexual love. After her suicide attempt, now neither

dead nor alive, kept away in one of Miriam's chests, "At least she [Sarah] could count herself a human being still. . . . She found she could look within herself and even in this hell find riches of peace and love she had never known were there. She was full of grand memories, and she possessed a great love as well. Tom was with her in spirit" (355). Neither in heaven nor in hell but in her coffin, in her eternal hunger, does she find her bliss in the reconciliation with Tom's spirit.

Nicola Nixon identifies the "contemporary appeal" and its "trend-conscious currency" (115) of Scott's film as the most distinctive characteristic from other lesbian vampire films of the late 1960s and early 70s and argues that the contemporaneity of the film makes a "historically contextualized reading" possible (127). But his attempt to contextualize the film as an "extended AIDS allegory" (118) is futile—as he himself well recognizes it—because the public heard little of AIDS when the film was released in 1983. In fact, the film is in a timeless and nameless space, with Miriam's personal history and the sense of place almost completely removed from the novel. Tony Scott shot most scenes in London except for a few street scenes in New York. There's only one verbal reference to New York, a casual conversation between Miriam and a detective. No wonder why Nixon feels so disoriented when he calls a mansion in Long Island the couple used to feed on another couple—the shooting location is unknown but the film shows a road sign "Bay Shore Exit 52" on their way back to Manhattan to suggest where they have spent the night—"their [Miriam and John's] chic Manhattan house" (115) and the Cromwell Tower in London in the ending scene "a brand-new Manhattan highrise" (116).

We see only a few cuts of the street scene of New York, most of which are not significant but just show that the film is set in New York and Miriam's house might be close to Sutton Place. In fact, everything important happens inside Miriam's house. The elevator in the house has three levels, but it seems the house has more: the furnace in the basement and the "catacomb" in the attic, but maybe more. When a "guest" (a male victim Miriam invites in to the house for Sarah) explores the house in the elevator, he stops at each floor, but he sees neither Sarah who is ill in bed on the second floor nor Miriam waiting to attack him. It is a house with no exterior (actually the exterior of the house makes its appearance in the film, but it can be anywhere as the real shooting location was 6 Chesterfield Garden in London), expanding and stretching inside. The insular, labyrinthine, and claustrophobic use of space in the film makes it hard to contextualize the film.

The lack of the sense of place makes it hard to see Miriam as a metaphor of capitalism as she does in the novel. Her class status is used only to add glamour to her and help seduce Sarah. Miriam's ancient art collection, her European origin, and most of all her class status become the objects of Sarah's admiration.

(While Miriam is playing piano. Before the seduction scene).

Miriam: You would think me mostly idle I'm afraid. My time is my own.

Sarah: That's great. Plenty of time for your friends, lots of lunches and dinners, cocktail parties at the Museum of Modern Art.

(That evening, having dinner with Tom).

Tom: You just met her and she gives you a present?

Sarah: She's that kind of a woman. She's European.

What Miriam says she owns is ironically not money but time. Vampire as a metaphor for dead labor thriving on living labor, thus having time as her own, is about to surface, but Sarah's response suggests Miriam's status is not a target of criticism but an object of envy. The illogical answer to Tom's question about Miriam's giving an expensive gift to someone she just met—that it is because she is European—suggests Miriam's European heritage is also a symbolic capital in their relationship. Miriam is “alien,” but not alien enough to be considered threatening like illegal aliens or immigrant laborers because she is a wealthy “European” with high taste for arts and most of all rich enough to own them. In the following conversation, it is Sarah who starts flirting with Miriam.

Sarah: Is it a love song?

Miriam: I told you. It was sung by two women.

Sarah: Sounds like a love song.

Miriam: Then I suppose that's what it is.

Sarah: Are you making a pass at me, Mrs. Blaylock?

Miriam: Miriam

Sarah: Miriam

Miriam: Not that I'm aware of, Sarah.

(Sarah smiles).

Miriam chose a song sung by two women, but it is Sarah who interprets it as a love song and asks Miriam if she is “making a pass” at her. Sarah in the film, in contrast with Sarah's troubled bisexuality in the novel, voluntarily has sex with Miriam.

From the famous sex scene between them, Hanson finds “a disruptive queer pleasure” (212). However, according to Andrea Weiss, lesbian vampire's sexual

escapades, including this scene in *The Hunger*, “invariably cater to male heterosexual fantasy” (92). Sarah, lying on the side in her briefs and kinky black high heels, and as Miriam approaches in her black slip, the camera pans to have the mirror behind Sarah reflect both of them, to double the image of the two women. The scene seems to correspond to what Weiss identifies as cultural myth that lesbian vampire films subscribe to: (1) “sexuality and violence are visually coupled” (Miriam and Sarah exchange their blood); (2) “lesbians are narcissistic” (the mirror doubles the two beautiful women look at each other); (3) “lesbian sexuality is infantile” (a close-up scene shows Miriam kissing Sarah’s breasts) (94). However, the scene does not seem to be violent at all despite their exchange of blood. Some may argue that they look alike, both of them being beautiful white women, but Sarah and Miriam have their own distinctive styles. And the portrayal of Sarah’s breasts is nothing close to the “breast fetishism” in the Hammer Studio lesbian vampire movies where women often expose breasts for no special reason. Hanson also does not think the mirror image as a sign of narcissism in a negative sense. Rather, vampires are the allegory of those who are invisible but rendered visible: otherness gains visibility through vampires. Furthermore, she defines the vampire as the “creature of mirrors and photographs”: “pure otherness, pure image, pure fantasy rendered visible and palpable through the peculiar postmodern erotics of technology” (215). The progressivity of Sarah and Miriam’s sexual otherness that Hanson finds appealing, however, depends on the repression of the other aspect of vampires as an apt metaphor for the exploitative predators in the capitalist society. Having lost the materiality of her presence, being merely a “pure image,” Miriam inhabits a social vacuum, a timeless and surreal domestic space. The house becomes Miriam herself, with her losses, memories, and sadness stored in the attic and with any excess burnt in the furnace in the basement. Sarah’s “suicide” stirs up the memories of all her losses. All her ex-lovers’ walking toward her shakes the house as she also violently shakes her head in denial.

Unlike the novel, it is Miriam who is punished, living in death, endlessly calling Sarah from a coffin somewhere in a storage. Sarah’s new “trio”—a cello, a piano, and a violin sit in the room while a girl kisses a man in the sofa and Sarah in the terrace--in the ending scene shows that Sarah’s concurrent bisexuality has formed a new household with a man AND a woman companions (Miriam and John also had a “trio” with Alice from the neighborhood, to whom they taught music, but it was only to help them pass as a “normal” couple, as Mr. and Mrs. Blaylock). Miriam who alternated her companions from male to female, and whose bisexuality was never visible to those who do not know her history,

moves between heterosexual and lesbian identities. On the other hand, Sarah's bisexuality with living with two partners at once is more potent than Miriam's because bisexual desire "blurs the boundaries between heterosexual, gay, and lesbian desire and blurs the separation of heterosexual, gay, and lesbian communities" (Hemmings 151).

It is not a random choice to shoot the last scene in the Cromwell Tower in the Barbican Estates, a modern high-rise apartment. Sarah represents the next generation of the vampires whose otherness will not be hidden in a claustrophobic house that other people cannot look into but those who are inside also cannot look out either. Sarah, located now in a place fit to those who are on the top tier of food chain, now looks down the whole city of London. Her apartment, however, is still protected from the surrounding city. The brutalist design of the Barbican Estates reflects a "utopian vision of the future" to "cocoon its residents from the surrounding city" by containing all necessary facilities like car parking, a cinema, a concert hall, and exhibition hall, gardens, and courtyards (Treggiden).

In the film, we cannot find the trace of the vampire's metaphorical significance as capitalists any more, but its reference to sexual otherness through Sarah's concurrent bisexuality makes the film not only more radical than its novel but also distinctive from other lesbian vampire films. In the novel, the invisible veins of capitalism are mapped by the vampires' movements throughout the city, but by exorcising bisexuality, the novel restores the heterosexual love as the only true love in the end.

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