

Sex, Race and Romanticism: The Meta-Vampire in Emo Fandom.

Abstract:

The genealogy stretching from Romanticism to the tortured poets of the emotional hardcore music scene is by now well-established. Emotional hardcore, or emo, is invested in the construction of the usually-White male artist, a sensitive and creative being subject to a great deal of suffering - both as a result of his artistic nature, and of the external forces aligned against him. The European Romantics invented the concept of artist as cultural icon - Lord Byron is often considered Britain's first celebrity. He was also, not coincidentally, Britain's first literary vampire. This article utilizes a discursive analysis based in open coding to consider emo fandom's obsession with the figure of the vampire, especially what emo fans - who are mostly girls - have done with it in fanfic. Considering the gendered genealogy of the vampire, and the problematic gender politics of the emo scene, I explore how the constraints and opportunities of these discursive structures influence the ways emo fans imagine vampires, who appear so often in their writing. Picking out key themes of sex, race, and the ethics of the vampire inherited from both emo fandom and vampire literature generally, I argue that the selected sample demonstrates a transformative impulse towards race and sex which is ultimately still contained by the overarching discursive structures within which artists operate.

Keywords: fanfiction; emo; Archive of Our Own; vampires; Romanticism; race; gender

The genealogy stretching from Romanticism to the tortured poets of the emotional hardcore music scene is by now well-established (Schuftan 2012; de Boise 2014; [this author] 2020). Sometimes identified with what Sam de Boise called 'beta-male misogyny' (2014), emotional hardcore, or emo, is highly invested in the construction of the usually-White male artist, a uniquely sensitive and creative being subject to a great deal of suffering - both as a result of his artistic nature, and of the external forces aligned against him. One of the said forces is usually a woman or girl, who, when not serving as muse, conspires to destroy the artist via her sexual infidelity and generally treacherous nature. If this all sounds very familiar, it should do: the Romantic period didn't invent the cruel mistress as muse/inspiration/torturer (for that we'd have to go back to Sir Gawain, or possibly to, well, Genesis), but it elevated her to a cultural icon. It did the same for the Man of Feeling, or Creative Genius, the Outsider, and the Total Artist. Indeed, in a very real way, the Romantics invented the whole concept of a cultural icon - Lord Byron is often cited as Europe's first modern celebrity (MacCarthy 2014). He was also, not at all co-incidentally, the thinly disguised inspiration for Britain's first literary vampire (Polidori, 1819). This article utilizes a discursive analysis based in open coding to consider emo fandom's

obsession with the figure of the vampire, especially what emo fans - who are mostly girls - have done with it in fanfic. Considering the gendered genealogy of the vampire, and the problematic gender politics of the emo scene, I wanted to explore how the constraints and opportunities of these discursive structures influence ways emo fans imagine vampires, who appear so often in their writing.

Given the vast literary heritage at play in vampire fanfic, I am following Maria Lindgren Leavenworth and Malin Isaksson in their approach to 'fan fictions as literary artifacts' (2013) first and foremost, rather than ethnographic evidence. Of course, these works take shape within a particular discursive context involving norms of transformation, adaption and mutual influence common to fan culture generally and emo fandom specifically, but they also share in the genealogy of vampire fiction. Whilst I certainly would not attempt something like an 'overview' of that massive genre within the scope of an article, we will first pick out some of its key themes which will be important later, especially as they relate to the vampire in emo texts, then proceed to the coding of the stories.

In 1995, Nina Auerbach concluded that it was unfortunate **the** how name of Dracula has become synonymous with vampires in popular culture, because Bram Stoker's solitary nobleman represents a break with the tradition that came before him more than an embodiment of it (1995, 64). The vampires who came before him are more social than solitary, more clannish than cloistered - and it is these vampires, **whose** predecessor is the companionable though threatening Byron-figure Lord Ruthven, in Polidori's 1819 novella *The Vampyre*, who have made the strongest impression on the trends of vampire fiction in the 20th century. Lord Ruthven is a nobleman who embarks upon a familiar journey across Europe with the author's stand-in, gradually revealing himself as a blood-drinking monster who is nevertheless alluring, charming, sexual and social. Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) is often thought of as the genesis of the 'sympathetic vampire', the vampire with a soul, but Auerbach considers this figure to have been present from the genre's inception in English. Nonetheless, Rice's brooding Louis, an unwilling, introspective vampire weighed down by knowledge and conscience, has certainly cast a long shadow over the modern genre. The sympathetic vampire is now so ubiquitous, Milly Williamson writes, that vampire fans read a sympathetic meta-vampire figure even into vampire texts where the reading 'does not quite 'fit'' (2005, 66): **where** the vampire is not particularly sympathetic in thought or actions. The sympathetic vampire thus a meta-star (after Gwenwillian-Jones 2000) that exceeds the text he is featured in (Williamson 2005, 75).

The sympathetic vampire, literal or metaphoric, is certainly a stock figure in emo fandom. Partly because emo is thoroughly Romantic, centering the unique feeling self, the artist, outsiderdom and high emotion; and partly because popular emo bands write the vampire figure into their music and videos. To speak in broad strokes, emo is a development of and reaction against more traditional hardcore rock, which combines harsh instrumentation and discordance with softer

melodies and poetic lyricism. Emo as a subculture is distinct from but related to goth – it is younger, more ironic, more self-reflexive and more openly humorous, and the style of dress tends to incorporate touches of bright colour and ironic-cute aesthetic against a template of black. (I am not suggesting that goth subcultures cannot be ironic, self-reflexive or humorous, just that these traits are more ubiquitous and more obvious in emo). For the purposes of this article, we'll be concentrating on the intense fan production around the three bands known as the contemporary 'Emo Holy Trinity' (for the invention of this term, and the active work of emo fandom in defining the genre as a whole, see [this author] 2020): My Chemical Romance (MCR); Fall Out Boy (FOB) and Panic! At the Disco (Panic). MCR's first single was literally called 'Vampires Will Never Hurt You' (2002): a lyric plea from a sympathetic vampire that his beloved stake him before an unspecified 'they' can do so. Presumably, 'they' are the unfeeling human mob that often provides the crude, senseless counterpoint to the sympathetic vampire in 20th century texts: Fred Saberhagen's *The Dracula Tape* (1975), which retells Stoker's novel from the point of view of the vampire as misunderstood foreigner, is the foundational work in this tradition. The vampires in the MCR music video are traditionally black clad and pale-faced, but Fall Out Boy offer a characteristically tongue-in-cheek take on the urban vampire text, with a camp and colourful comic-book style video to their single 'A Little Less Sixteen Candles, A Little More 'Touch Me'' (2006, known as '16 Candles'). In this video, the band are vampire hunters, and the de facto frontman/alt-girl heartthrob lyricist Pete Wentz is an unwilling vampire who sides with them. Vampires in the city are organized into gangs, notably the Hoods, Punks and Dandies. The video contains a narrative interlude in which it is explained that Wentz was 'turned' by the leader of the Dandies - a camp villain played by William Beckett, the frontman of The Academy Is....., another emo band on the same label. Panic's frontman Brendon Urie also appears as a Dandy under Beckett's control - Wentz's character has a vendetta against all other vampires, but especially those who turned him. The video ends with the band taken prisoner by crooked cops who are either vampires themselves or in league with the vampire gangs, and a tantalising 'To be continued...' caption. It never was; and according to Pete Wentz and FOB singer Patrick Stump in a 2017 interview, probably never will be, primarily because it was incredibly expensive (BuzzFeed 2017). Of course, this is the exact sort of industrially mandated gap in a text fans love to address in fanfic - and unsurprisingly, reams and reams of fanfiction in the '16 Candles Verse' has been produced.

Some of the stock themes in vampire fiction, which I studied in order to observe 'how the trope is used to subvert [or support] norms established in the source texts' (Lindgren Leavenworth and Isaksson 2013), centered around sex and sexuality; race and otherness; and gender. We noted above that *Dracula* in some ways marks the end of an earlier tradition of (homo)social vampires. The novel is frequently read as a sort of corrective; a putting-back in the box of the ambiguously sexual, ambiguously gendered subject, with Dracula slain and the unnervingly active female Lucy staked in a scene reminiscent of corrective gang rape. Christopher Craft wrote the canonical essay on the subject, observing how vampire attacks confuse the 'gender-based

categories of the penetrating and the receptive' (1998, 261), focused on the penetrative/receptive mouth as opposed to the genitals. Auerbach reads the trial imprisonment of Oscar Wilde as providing the politicised backdrop to the novel: the fluidity of closeness and affection between men was regulated, legislated and ordered by the creation and banishment of 'the homosexual'. Whereas 'before the Wilde trials, vampires felt free to languish in overtly homoerotic adoration of their mortal prey', they were afterwards 'imprisoned in a fixed nature, re-created as a man alone, like Dracula, and, like Dracula, one hunted and immobilized by the "stalwart manliness" of normal citizens' (1995, 84). As we would expect, twentieth century vampires typically restore at least some of this flexibility - Rice's vampires are more-or-less pansexual, and the lines between homosociality and homosexuality are nonexistent. Emo has a reputation for homoerotic play with gender performativity - dubbed 'stage-gay' by its fans. Some might claim that on-stage displays of male/male sociosexual affection by primarily straight(ish) White(ish) men is a form of queerbaiting: but, as I have argued, this rather limits and constrains the meaning of queerness, which properly denotes sexual fluidity and the dissolution of gendered boundaries rather than a binary opposition to heterosexuality ([this author] 2021). Intriguingly, recent popular vampire fiction tends to restore sex and sexuality to a degree of domestication: in the article 'Safe Sex with Defanged Vampires: New Vampire Heroes in *Twilight* and the *Southern Vampire Mysteries*', Chiho Nakagawa writes:

In sharp contrast to earlier, more transgressive vampire narratives—sexual intercourse and blood-sharing lead to the building of the familial bond [...] Sex is a way to create a family or create a substitute for a family. In other words, these new vampire romance novels uphold the traditional fantasy of emotional bonding and merging of self through sexual intercourse. What were once transgressive acts of sex with (or penetration by) vampires are now safe and morally and socially legitimate. In keeping with the other ways that the vampire narrative has been Americanized, these series present sex with vampires as an expression of what conservative discourse in the United States commonly refers to as "family values" (2011).

As we will see below, emo vampire fic certainly negotiates with structures of domestication, particularly at the conclusion of narrative arcs. Often, it adheres to these structures more than it subverts them - emo, after all, is a firmly middle-class genre. But not necessarily: there are moments of tension and fracture and sometimes even narrative dissolution, which tends to be received uneasily by readers.

Most contemporary vampires are male; certainly emo vampires are male, because subjectivity in emo is largely reserved to men and boys. Problematically, complicatedly male, certainly: I would not go as far as Barbara Creed (1993), in thinking that all vampires are symbolically female by virtue of the leaky, abject vampire body - but rather agree than Williamson (2005), who claims that this symbolism and investment in the male vampire is ambiguous. On one hand, we could read it as indicative of the un-representability of female subjectivity - at the extreme, this perspective would hold that 'fans' identification with the linecrossing of the vampire is a deeply conservative fantasy' to mask the abjection of the feminine (158). The parallel here is how emo girls identify with lyrics that continuously center male subjectivity and personhood, even in their

flexible performances of gender and sexuality. But Williams goes on to note that this identification may also represent a desire for something different, some queer possibility beyond the masculine/feminine binary that cannot yet be articulated (158-63). This is an important lens through which to read the fanfiction below.

Further, there is a parallel history of female and lesbian vampire subjects, pre-dating Stoker, typically traced to Sheridan Le Fanu's 1872 Gothic novella *Carmilla*. Carmilla is a friendly, social, sexual predator who seeks above all intimacy with her victim. Conversely, the twentieth century saw a spate of lesbian vampire films designed primarily for male titillation, and/or to redefine and regulate the amorphous homosocial/sexual female bonds of earlier vampire fiction under the male gaze (Auerbach 1995, 53-60). The lasciviously camp female vampires native to Hammer House of Horror are a prime example. Given that fanfic writers are primarily women and girls (Busse 2013) and many identify as queer in some way (Lothian et. al 2007; Ng and Russo 2017), we might expect that this tangle of problematic representation around sex, sexuality and gender receive some transformative treatment in fanwork. Indeed, fan studies in general is frequently concerned with these kinds of transformation. But of course - fans and fanfiction, including the present writer, are as entangled in contemporary sexist ideological structures as anyone else, and as I have found in previous work, transformation is typically partial, paradoxical and reformist rather than radical ([this author] 2017).

Emo's history of racial politics is if anything problematic for its absence. Emo developed out of the punk and hardcore scenes of the 1980s, a scene notorious for its infiltration by racist skinheads who usurped its politics. Rebelling against this as it rebelled against the hegemonic masculinities on display at hardcore shows, emo as a genre does not tolerate explicit racism. But it shares in the liberal tendency to elide questions of race, to pretend that race is not a problem anymore: its subject-narrators appear either White or White-proximate, race is not discussed, and issues of racial equality and access are quietly substituted for those of personal politics ([this author] 2021). Fall Out Boy's Pete Wentz and Andy Hurley actually experimented with an explicitly antiracist hardcore band, Racetrator, before forming FOB: this was short-lived and ultimately unsuccessful. There is a parallel argument here with class - again, emo is a *very* middle-class genre - but as that is rather less pertinent to the vampire mythology we are discussing, there is no space to explore it here. The 'exoticism' of the vampire figure has been frequently conflated with racial difference and the fear of racial mixing: Dracula is an ethnic outsider, but one who can disguise himself well enough to go amongst Englishmen in London: an 'incipient "Occidental" scholar' (Arata 1990, 634), he possesses a library of dangerous knowledge that threatens to turn colonial myths of superiority and classification on their heads. Rice's vampires are ultimately European aristocrats, but comfortably domesticated one who make their homes in American cities. A string of 20th century Blaxploitation films literalized the vampire as a wronged racial outsider, both victim and villain, somewhere between uncivilized savage and agent of social justice. Conversely, consider the fetishized value of

whiteness and paleness in much vampire fiction: the coolness and paleness of the Cullen clan in the *Twilight* saga. More up-to-date work on the vampire as racial outsider considers a range of vampires and vampire-hybrids who navigate the tropes of racial difference (Anyiwo 2015a), sometimes in ways that ultimately revert to essentializing narratives about the fundamental primitivism of the Other (Anyiwo 2015b); sometimes in new, more progressive formulations of hybrid identities (Candelario 2015). MCR's video for 'Vampires' of focuses on unnaturally whitened skin, albeit more sickly than sparkling, but '16 Candles' does not: Pete Wentz and Brendon Urie are both biracial, a fact rarely discussed in fandom, though Urie is more or less White-passing.

These were the broad themes from vampire mythology I found most consistently in the fanfic. For the study sample, I coded the ten highest rated stories from the Archive of our Own fanfiction website that were tagged with at least one of the band names, plus the tag 'vampires'. Some were overlaps, by which I mean that searching by 'band name x' + 'vampires' and 'band name y' + 'vampires' produced a few of the same results in the top ten, attesting to the popularity of those stories. This means that the total number of stories coded was 25 rather than 30, ranging from short single-chapter works to 200 000 word+ novels. Summary metadata for the top ten stories for each band (as of December 2020) is as follows:

My Chemical Romance

Ranking	Title	Author	Other bands tagged:	Number of kudos:	Number of comments:
1	<i>Black Market Blood</i>	autoschediastic		1634	46
2	<i>Veins are Red, Veins are Blue</i>	dear_monday		1241	40
3	<i>A Room Full Of Mirrors</i>	dear_monday		889	13
4	<i>burning up in the sun</i>	akamine_chan		778	40
5	<i>All the Wicked Shadows</i>	samanthahirr		703	36
6	<i>Don't Even Take this bet</i>	orphan_account	Fall Out Boy	651	388

7	<i>Let The Darkness Lead You Home</i>	rivers_bend		639	96
8	<i>Love Song for a Vampire</i>	tuesdaysgone		618	27
9	<i>Don't Leave Me Hanging (Peterick Fanfic)</i>	bandoms_are_fandoms	Fall Out Boy, Panic! At The Disco, Paramore, Twenty-one Pilots, Cobra Starship	573	278
10	<i>A Kiss on Bloody Lips</i>	Leah_Red		547	28

Fall Out Boy

Rank:	Title:	Author:	Other bands tagged:	Number of kudos:	Number of comments:
1	<i>Don't Even Take This bet</i>	orphan_account	My Chemical Romance	651	388
2	<i>Don't Leave Me Hanging (Peterick Fanfic)</i>	bandomsarefandoms	My Chemical Romance, Panic! At The Disco, Paramore, Twenty-one Pilots, Cobra Starship	573	278
3	<i>Just to Know You're Alive</i>	seimasin		480	10
4	<i>Human Enough</i>	oh_ms_omegalomani ca	My Chemical Romance	474	17
5	<i>Cross My Heart, Cross My Fingers</i>	melusina	My Chemical Romance	380	26

6	<i>The High Way To Hell (Infinity on High)</i>	acareeroutofrobbingbanks		322	281
7	<i>Something Worth Losing</i>	Momji_neyuki, ObliviousFran	Panic! At the Disco, My Chemical Romance, The Used	291	202
8	<i>Slave</i>	Donna	My Chemical Romance, Adam Lambert	290	1139
9	<i>Carpe-Fucking-Diem</i>	chimney_thunder	My Chemical Romance	277	8
10	<i>The High Way to Hell (Season One)</i>	acareeroutofrobbingbanks		274	177

Panic! At the Disco

Rank:	Title:	Author:	Other bands tagged:	Number of kudos:	Number of comments:
1	<i>Don't Leave Me Hanging (Peterick Fanfic)</i>	bandomsarefans	My Chemical Romance, Fall Out Boy, Paramore, Twenty-one Pilots, Cobra Starship	573	278
2	<i>Something Worth Losing</i>	Momji_neyuki, ObliviousFran	Fall Out Boy, My Chemical Romance, The Used	291	202
3	<i>Life as a Process</i>	ViciousVenin	My Chemical Romance, Pency Prep, The Used, Mindless Self-Indulgence, Midtown	284	97

4	<i>Carpe-Fucking-Diem</i>	chimney_thunder	My Chemical Romance	277	8
5	<i>Am I More Than You Bargained For, Yet?</i>	orphan_account	Fall Out Boy	212	7
6	<i>Altered Boys, We're the Things that Love Destroys</i>	Uma_Thurman	My Chemical Romance, Fall Out Boy	205	13
7	<i>Don't Be Afraid (You're Already Dead)</i>	littlesnowpea	Fall Out Boy	197	23
8	<i>Leaving Without Moving</i>	Northern		183	28
9	<i>The Fear of Falling Apart</i>	littlesnowpea	Fall Out Boy	174	10
10	<i>Blood and Roses</i>	nothingdlioucourt	My Chemical Romance, Fall Out Boy, Cobra Starship, The Academy Is...	164	42

The 'kudos' button on A03 functions as a way for readers to register their approval for a story without commenting. Kudos tends to accumulate over time, so stories with a high number of kudos typically indicates longevity: the story been read consistently over years. A high number of comments typically denotes popularity, with or without longevity. As noted above, the themes of race, sex and sexuality were prominent across the sample, as was the influence of Romanticism, vampire literature and the broader norms of fanfiction. Figure 1 illustrates the discursive formation which open-coding these stories revealed:

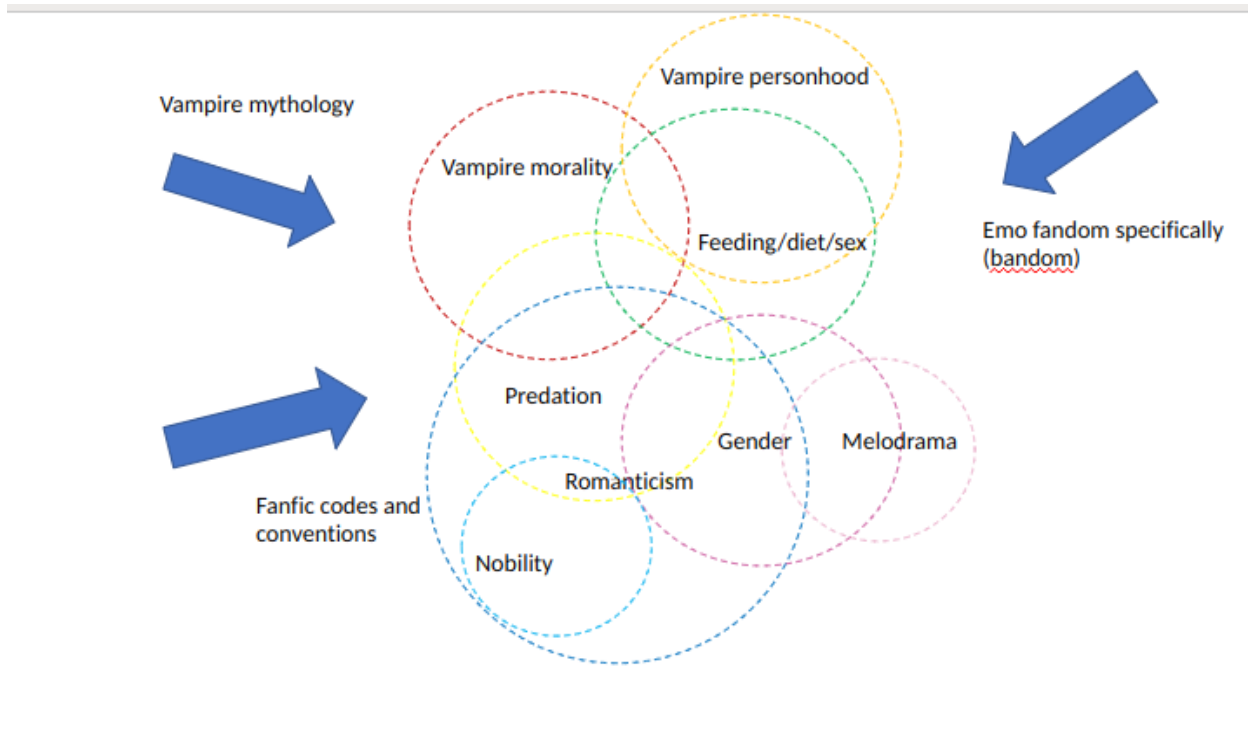


Fig 1: The meta-vampire discursive construction

Each circle represents a coded theme (coloured with the same hue I used in the coding process). The arrows represent exterior influences on the discursive formation, demonstrating the naturally intertextual state of both fanfic and the vampire genre. I have deliberately made the circles overlapping and permeable, to reflect how the categories influence and feed into each other, particularly in artistic works. Whilst keeping this organization of themes in mind, I have attempted to structure the discussion below as a flowing narrative rather than distinct set of subheadings, because the themes were interconnected and mutually allusive enough that I felt the latter would be artificial.

Before we turn to the analysis of these categories and their consolidation and subversion of the gendered vampire mythos as articulated in emo fanfic, a note on research ethics is required. In previous work, I have argued that fan-authors should be contacted for permission before their work is represented in academic texts ([this author] 2017). At that time, I was sourcing fanfiction from personal LiveJournals and other sites where the line between author and diarist/person was more blurred. In 2020-21, I believe the landscape has changed, and no longer feel this is necessary for fanfic quoted from A03, a public-facing stable archive where most authors do not include contact information in any case. Further, the stories quoted here are in no danger of contravening copyright, because they are based on the mediated representation of real people rather than fictional characters. That in mind, we turn to the analysis.

Vampire morality, and the personhood of the vampire was the key theme of the top three stories in the MCR category, which as the table shows is also the most popular category overall. It was also an influential theme throughout the formation, so I will begin the analysis there. These narrative arcs typically follow this structure: one main character is a vampire, one is human; human character discovers vampirism; vampire is morally opposed to feeding from human, despite human's offer; circumstances force vampire to feed from consenting human in an act of sexualized bonding. *Black Market Blood*, *Veins are Red* and *Cross My Heart* all provide examples. *Cross my Heart* is particularly explicit on the blurred borderline between blood-drinking and sex, as it relates to consent. Unusually, singer Patrick Stump is cast as the vampire in this story, and Pete Wentz as the human who accidentally discovers his secret. Tortured by the knowledge that he needs blood to survive, the vampire's usual habit is to mesmerize anonymous young men and women looking for a one-night stand, then feed from them whilst he satisfies them sexually. When Pete asks why he does not seek his own sexual gratification, he replies:

"I know everything I do is technically wrong. You know, morally. I'm coercing people to come with me and give me their blood without their permission. So, I do everything I can to make it ... well, less wrong, I guess? I only pick people who are looking to get laid, and I make sure they ... you know, enjoy themselves for their trouble."

[....]

"I guess it just feels like ... more of a violation, if I make them give me blood and get me off. Like I'm taking more than I'm giving." Patrick looked away. "It really feels like I'm being creepy and horrible most of the time. I'd feel even more creepy and horrible if I took more pleasure in it. If that makes any sense" (melusina 2013)

The story concludes with the usual pattern, and a mutually satisfying monogamous relationship is formed. We might notice here the influence of the defanged vampire trope - blood-drinking is absorbed into a narrative that is ultimately domestic - granted, the union is homosexual, the slash trope and the popularity of the pairing both inherited from broader an culture - but still modelled on a normative story of exclusive coupledom and the relation of sex to emotional closeness. Some writers refer to this as 'homonormativity' (Duggan 2003; Halperin 2012): the idea that gay lives and relationships are pretty much the same as traditional straight ones, and pose no challenge to the broader structures of capitalism, domesticity and economy, thus creating a sort of ideological hierarchy of queer lives with monogamous, White, cissexual gay couples at the top. That said, the vampire-as-predator trope does infiltrate even these narratives of the moral vampire, complicating these narratives of domestication. *Black Market Blood*, the singular most popular fic in this formation, casts MCR frontman Gerard Way as the unwilling vampire and rhythm guitarist Frank Iero as the human who discovers him - though Frank is willing to feed Gerard, the inherent danger of the vampire, and the extent to which a relatively powerless human can *really* consent, is an underlying theme throughout the story:

Frankie," Gerard says. In a daze, Frank watches Gerard's hand come out, fingers catching on the hem of his shirt. "Come downstairs, Frankie."

Said the fucking spider to the fly. Frank goes (autoschediastic 2011)

It seems to be this perpetual ambiguity that makes this story so popular - commenters are quick to praise the sinister undertones whilst appreciating the happy ending. Other variations on the moral vampire theme contrast the vampire's state-of-being with the chosen behaviour of humans. In *burning up in the sun*, an unspecified 'rift' has opened between the known world and a world containing supernatural beings, and the human Frank is a mistreated worker far more at risk from his abusive boss, who hates all supernaturals, than the vampire band 'Alchemical Romance' who end up rescuing him.

"I'm not human," Gerard said, like he was reading Frank's mind. Maybe he was. "I haven't been human since the Rift opened. I'm a monster, a nightmare."

"No." Frank was certain about this. "Larry, Larry was a monster. He was totally human and what he did, to other humans, to the Rift-touched, to the helpless and the lost—what he did was monstrous. You?" Frank shrugged. "You're just a vampire" (akamine_chan 2012).

Monstrosity is explicitly a result of actions rather than ontology, a theme repeated in *Human Enough* (oh_ms_omegalomaniac 2015), when the vampire Pete risks his life to save human Patrick, to the surprise of MCR, who are cast as vampire hunters. In the tradition of the *Dracula Tapes*, the humans surprised by the vampire's morality is a common motif. Notably, however, 'human' still stands in for a moral state here, as the members of MCR, who are cast as vampire hunters, conclude that their former enemy's actions were a 'human' thing to do.

The intersection of the moral vampire, the human vampire and feeding ethics come to point in acareeroutofrobbingbanks' epic *High Way to Hell* series, of which two installments appeared in the sample. In fact, these themes inform the quotation the author selects to post above the story's summary as a teaser:

"Andy?" He stared between Joe and Pete in disbelief. "Andy is, what? A vampire?"

"So it would seem." Pete said. Patrick still stared.

"He's vegan!" Patrick insisted, blinking rather rapidly.

"The rest of the time, yeah." Andy muttered, half concealed by shadows.

Joe the werewolf, Pete the fairy, Andy the vampire, and Patrick is more than a little confused. This band is starting to be more than he bargained for, as they are hunters of the supernatural variation (acareeroutofrobbingbanks 2015).

This story casts FOB's drummer Andy Hurley as a half-vampire who needs to drink blood to survive, but can function in the daylight and is almost immune to silver. In real life, Hurley is indeed a committed straight-edge vegan with far-left political leanings, and in fanfic, is frequently cast as the most conscientiously moralistic band member. The *High Way to Hell* verse, which alternates narrative focalizers, opens with his perspective as he fruitlessly attempts to resist drinking from Patrick and revealing his secret identity - the reader's sympathy is thus engaged with vampire first, and developed as we learn he had no choice over his circumstances,

his mother having been bitten when she was pregnant (the intertextual reference to the *Blade* franchise is acknowledged within the story). When not compelled to drink blood, Andy acts as the conscience of the band throughout the epic, urging them to refrain from violence whenever possible, and not to ‘kill the innocent in anticipation of it being guilty’ (acareeroutofrobbingbanks 2017). This is certainly not the case for all vampires or half-vampires in the verse: indeed, the main plot of the first installment centers on an elaborate plan by the half-vampire Andrea, an original character of the author’s and the only significant female actor in the broader narrative. Andrea and Andy begin a relationship, and she tricks him into impregnating her by pretending to be human. This act of deception might seem to fit neatly with the sexually-treacherous female figure who appears so often in emo lyrics; but Andrea has loftier aims. She sets up a grand conference for representatives of the major vampire clans, persuading them to follow her in overthrowing humans - but it is only to Andy, whom she has trapped by taking his friends hostage, that she reveals her ultimate goal. She means for their little family to found a superior race of human-vampire hybrids, better than both species, to govern and shepherd the earth into a new era. As commenters discuss, the author creates a degree of sympathy for Andrea, who professes that despite the necessary deception, she genuinely loves Andy, and more importantly, truly believes she is doing good for the world. She points out that humans ‘destroy the earth, the ozone, the oceans, [and] consume all the food in the world’ (acareeroutofrobbingbanks 2015), and that she does not intend to kill needlessly, merely to control and limit their numbers, for example through sterilization. Whilst Andy accuses her of planning ‘genocide’, she contends her vision is of a ‘better world’ - but defines this world in giveaway Fascist style as a ‘world of people like us’. Eventually, Andy is eventually forced by circumstances to kill Andrea, and raise their daughter himself - a plot point we’ll return to below.

With the exception of Andrea, the vampires we have discussed so far have been relatively de-fanged in the sense of domestication, but this was not always the case. It was rare within the sample to cast the vampire as purely an otherworldly monster, probably due to the competing influence of the broader fandom discourse in which the characters have defined human personas. *All The Wicked Shadows* is an exception. In this story, there is nothing human or humane about the vampire Gerard whom Frank discovers is kept locked away by his brother in an abandoned warehouse, though the non-consensual feeding is certainly sexualized:

Gerard smirks, and his hand slides around to the back of Frank's neck. "Do you want to run?" Gerard whispers, squeezing Frank's neck tight. "Want me to chase you? Hunt you down, catch you...."

Frank whimpers, his hips jerking helplessly at the images, adrenaline fizzing in his blood. A hard press of Gerard's thumb tilts Frank's head to the side, and Frank flashes to how crazy-fast Gerard moved before, his glowing eyes, the walls crawling with nightmares and spatters of blood, footsteps following him through the halls, and teeth ripping his throat out—

"I just need a taste," Gerard says, and ducks down and bites (samanthahirr 2012).

Note, though, the high number of kudos on this story, which is testament to its enduring impact in the fandom. Commenters were appreciative of it as a horror short, though it is perhaps significant that it is a one-shot, written for a specific kink challenge, rather than an extended verse with developed characterization. More common were longer stories in which humans are taken captive by predatory vampires but come to fall in love with them via a kind of stockholm syndrome, before the plot resolves in an ultimately domesticated pseudo-familial arrangement. Indeed, the phrase ‘stockholm syndrome’ is explicitly used in *Don't Leave Me Hanging* (bandomsarefandoms 2016), which the reader should note is popular enough to appear twice in the sample. In this story, Pete Wentz and Brendon Urie are cast as vampires and Patrick Stump and Panic! guitarist Ryan Ross as the humans they abduct and hold captive, yet also protect and claim to love. The longest fic in the sample, *Slave* (2018) by Donna, is also of this sort: an absolutely self-conscious melodrama, which the author refers to with a ‘LOL’ as a ‘soap opera’, it spans over 200,000 words and features an enormous cast of emo band members and other musicians, utilizing melodramatic tropes from fan culture and Gothic literature alike. Taken as a whole, the story includes torture, rape and sexual torture, kidnapping, vast clans and dynastical issues, marriage, births, deaths, funerals, male pregnancy, potentially demonic children, dreamstates and alternate realms, possession, and characters shifting between good and evil. Given the absolute excess of literary tropes that are culturally gendered feminine being transposed onto male characters, we might wonder if Williams’ point applies here, on identification with the mutable vampire as masking the abjection of the feminine. Yet on the other hand, the story provides a space in the huge comment section for female-identifying commenters to bond and discuss issues of abuse and gendered power relevant to their own lives.

The theme of vampires as predators is prominent in *A Kiss on Bloody Lips* and *Let The Darkness Lead You Home*, but both of these stories complicate the construct with a meditation on the predatory nature of humanity. *A Kiss on Bloody Lips* is shorter and more explicit on the theme: in this story, suspected serial killer Gerard Way is in fact a hunting vampire, but human teenager Frank Iero is as enamoured with the prospect of killing as he is (Leah_Red 2014). *Let The Darkness Lead You Home* (rivers_bend 2012) is more allusive. In this complex story, the vampire genre incorporates elements from science fiction. At some unspecified future time, vampires are the dominant race, eating most humans but maintaining and to some degree caring for the humans who are useful to them. A human Frank Iero is again the main character: as a technical engineer, he is useful to the vampire compound maintained by Gerard Way, creating and installing a series of sophisticated ‘mods’ to improve the vampires’ physical abilities. Human Pete Wentz also features, as a cheerful sex slave more or less content with his lot, though other human characters briefly voice their disdain and anger at the vampire master race. Frank has adapted to his situation, understanding that humans he does not know personally are to be seen as food, and providing entertainment ‘kill vids’ to a ready market: these are short films recorded by the vampire’s infrared vision modifications as they go about their human hunts.

Notably, 92% of the market for kill vids is composed of other humans. Frank is as indifferent: as any vampire: he has ‘made hundreds of snuff vids in the years since [he came to live at the compound], seen hundreds more kills than that on the live feeds. He was thirteen the last time a kill made him vomit’ (rivers_bend 2012). The implicit comparison is to our own apparently never-ending appetites: for violent media, or indeed, mediated real violence.

The vampires in this story take differing perspectives on the morality of diet. Gerard prefers open ‘hunts’, in which the humans have a fair chance to get away, and is disgusted by the habit of an elder vampire to keep them terrified in cages. Commenters discuss the parallels to so-called free range and industrial farming of animals, all of whom are killed in the end. The ethics of vampire feeding are such a common theme in vampire fiction that it’s notable how rare this obvious extension of the discussion is, both in fanfic and professional fiction. Moreover, the true monstrosity of the elder vampire is only unleashed when Frank installs on him a set of mods that he himself designed: he is forced to watch as ‘the monster he’s created’ savagely kills his own sex slave. He feels guilt for what he has done:

"No, seriously, Gerard, what the fuck? What the fuck did I do to him? He just fucking ate his pet! Like chewed him up and swallowed him! Who does that?"

"You didn't do anything," Gerard says, his voice all calm and reasonable and making Frank even angrier. "Sometimes the ancients—"

"Fuck the ancients. Fuck that. Last night that guy was sucking his cock and tonight he got his throat ripped out. Right after I installed the alts. Don't fucking try to tell me there's no connection" (rivers_bend 2012).

Monstrosity, in this story, is primarily property of agency and action - Frank knows Gerard is a predator, appearing even his sleep as though ‘he’s killed a thousand men and women and just happens to be wearing the skin of a twenty-five-year-old’, yet he trusts him on a personal level - and indeed, returning to the moral vampire trope, Gerard refuses to feed from Frank until Frank insists during a moment of peril. Some vampires in this story are monstrous; some are less so; some humans are ‘kill-vid junkies’, some are just trying to get by. Commenters are highly appreciative of the author’s skill, even as they admit to not precisely enjoying the story:

At first I didn't understand how Frank could be so accepting of the circumstances; that it wouldn't build up hate in him seeing how the vampires treat humans as prey. And he's even making those videos! Even if the gerents [a kind of military office] of the Eastern Zone let humans live their lives - until they are being hunted. (That reminded me of how we treat animals and try to give them a good animal life - until we slaughter them to make them our food. Presumed that animals don't know about that, I was thinking a lot about how humans, who know about their fate, would cope with this. And even if this is still an unsettling thought, I like how this challenges my brain (winterlover 2012).

Perhaps it is the influence of the sci-fi tropes that renders this story a more conscious reflection on human morality and the ethics of diet and technology. It is fairly unique within the sample, but as the statistics show, rated very highly. It should be noted at this point that MCR-centric fics rate higher on average overall - so we might speculate that the featuring of these characters, in conjunction with the author's undoubted skill, has brought the question of dietary ethics to greater prominence in the sample than it would be otherwise. This is an illustration of how fandom norms and patterns influence the discourse formation.

The stories in which race and prejudice are the primary theme are also explicit in their comparisons to human morality. Many stories contained brief reflections or asides on vampire-human relations and a greater or lesser degree of prejudice between them, but only two took race and prejudice as the main theme, and they belong to the same verse. These were *Don't Be Afraid* (2014a) and its prequel *The Fear of Falling Apart* (2014b) by author littlesnowpea. They are Fall Out Boy and Panic!-centric - notably the bands whose most prominent members are in reality non-White - and the author uses the tag 'genocide'. S/he warns that the verse 'contains racism and hatred in the form of violence', for 'The genocide in this fic has been going on in this universe for a long time' and 'humans aren't very nice' (2014a). In the stories, however, the prejudice of magical creatures against each other takes central stage, especially between born-vampires and those who have been turned, considered a lesser species by many. Brendon Urie, a turned vampire, is the narrative focalizer of *Don't Be Afraid*, understanding that he is 'below human to born vampires', with the exception of Pete Wentz, who turned him in the prequel and adopted him into his clan. This causes a clan schism, as most of the others look down on Brendon and object to his presence. This experience causes Brendon to disbelieve in the popular stereotypes about other creatures: that 'werewolves were all savages, all dangerous, all heartless', or that 'magics' were all sly, manipulative and cunning (2014a). The story series enacts a learning process wherein individual members of differing species come to understand each other better through familiarity, though the overarching structures of persecution remain in place. Our sympathies are definitely with the vampire as a wronged racial outsider here, though the criticism is of prejudiced structures in general rather than the persecution of one solitary individual. Thus, the influence of Romanticism is reduced by what, to judge by the tags, is a particular decision on behalf of the author.

Romanticism is certainly a more prominent theme when the vampire character is a loner, an outsider amongst humans, but it is not confined to them. Several stories draw attention to the relationship between art and magic or the supernatural. In *burning up in the sun*, the MCR's lead guitarist has his musical abilities enhanced by his exposure to the mysterious 'rift':

A lot of mechanical things had stopped functioning when the Rift had opened, spilling all kinds of non-Newtonian magics through the tear in reality, but anything that played music was ridiculously easy to magic back into working.

At the heart of it, music was magic, so it made a twisted sort of sense (akamine_chan 2012).

Similarly, in *The High Way to Hell (Infinity on High)*, Fall Out Boy reflect on why musicians such as themselves seem to get constantly tangled up with the supernatural:

“I’ve thought about that, actually,” Joe said. “I mean, when you think about it, I think it’s maybe just the whole entertainment industry, maybe all the arts. I mean, that’s what mythical creatures are always known for, aren’t they? Their relationship with arts. Maybe that’s why it’s so prevalent in the industry, and why most humans don’t know that magical creatures exist.”

“Because, what, all the magical creatures are famous?” Patrick said, and Joe took one hand off the steering wheel, snapping his fingers and pointing at Patrick.

“Exactly,” he said. “It’s not like everyone is surrounded by magic all the time and just oblivious to it. It’s just that magic attracts music and vice versa, so all the musicians...”

“Get stuck with all the magic,” Patrick agreed, leaning back in his seat (acareeroutofrobbingbanks 2017).

The Romantic theme is probably most prominent in *Life as a Process* (ViciousVenin 2019a), wherein a human Frank Iero, upon going to college, meets a collection of characters from across the fandom bands but most importantly his secret-vampire roommate Way, Gerard. The very title, and longer epigraph, are quotations from Hegel on the process of life-as-art, a thoroughly Romantic conception: life being the ‘universal medium’ through which all living beings create (‘Hegel was def a vampire nerd’, the author addends in the comments (2019b)). A visual artist who has designed his own college major, which he calls ‘Night Mediums’, Gerard in this story in a secretive and misunderstood loner who first catches Frank’s attention with his artistic depiction of a sea monster before a little girl. She is not afraid of the monster, he explains, because she has not been taught to fear it. Frank is soon accompanying Gerard on his nightly photography expeditions, coming to understand his identification with the nocturnal creatures amongst whom, he feels, he can be himself. The plot takes a turn for the Romantic melodramatic - as it turns out, Gerard is vampire nobility, suspect to his family for his refusal to hunt humans, and Frank is the son of a renowned vampire specialist - not a hunter, precisely, but a government agent charged with tracking down and monitoring vampires to ensure they break no laws. In the end, the two families are reconciled and Gerard and Frank settle down together: a partial invocation of the domestication trope, though vampires remain a source of potential threat overall. In keeping with its grittier themes, *Let The Darkness Guide You Home* subverts this trope: when Gerard became a vampire, he lost his talent for drawing, and he is reluctant to turn Frank partly because “What [he] do[es] is art. And art is part of what dies” (rivers_bend 2012). In its forcible focus on the ethics of food and killing, *Darkness* engages only uneasily with the glamour of the vampire, critical of Romantic-ization. When Frank is finally turned, he experiences a wild night of bloodlust, the desire to kill his friend Pete, and the story closes with a scene at an anarchic dance club where valueless humans are freely available for feeding. These vampires are most certainly not de-fanged.

The melodramatic device of dynastical conflict provides an inroad into the final major theme, that of gender. We already noted the explicitly melodramatic style of the novel-length fic *Slave* (Donna 2018). That fic also contains a fascinating device, wherein male characters can be referred to by female familial categories, such as ‘mother’ or ‘aunt’, depending on the function they are serving within the family. All the characters within the universe accept this as a normal part of their social structure - it is never questioned, or even particularly highlighted by the author. It seems that the melodramatic plot devices simply allow for different gender categorizations - unless, of course, we take Williams’ reading, that the gender-bending male vampire indicates the unrepresentability of women. The same device appears in the equally melodramatic *Blood and Roses* (nothingdioncourt 2015), which also groups vampires according to whether they are ‘fertiles’ or ‘dominants’ rather than ‘male’ or ‘female’. It is notable that the author has adapted the surname of the vampire Lestat from Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles* as a username. We can infer that the *Chronicles*, a Gothic/melodramatic work focusing on gender-bending male characters, provide strong influence on the story. The *Vampire Chronicles* is one of those works Williamson was discussing with regard to the erasure of feminine representation, and/or the dream of an identity beyond gender. Now, a variation on the fertile/dominant trope appears in most fandoms, and has given rise to a deal of debate over whether it is progressive by virtue of its inherent queerness, or simply conservatism in a thin disguise, in that biological functions are used to define character traits. In a neat illustration of this tension, ‘fertiles’ in this particular story can be either male or female, splitting the burden of childbearing - but the ‘worst’ thing that can happen to a fertile is losing a child, either before or after birth, and fetal destruction is considered equivalent to murder. Two strands of discursive influence - from fanfic culture more broadly, and from vampire fiction - are combining here to create a kind of queer gender (re)construction that can be read as malleable, performative, progressive, and/or punitively conservative - much like Craft’s famous reading of the queerness of Stoker’s *Dracula*.

There was a tendency across the sample to posit gender as irrelevant, especially when it came to sex and sexuality. *Leaving Without Moving* is explicit about this. In this Panic-focused story, the vampire Brendon enters a mutually agreed-upon relationship involving sex and feeding with a human Ryan Ross. Soon, they discover by accident that Ryan’s best friend, also human, is a ‘blood doll’: a human who finds the sensation of being fed upon both erotic and addictive. When Ryan protests that his friend is entirely straight, Brendon returns,

"It'll be fine [...] He'll get over it, learn to adapt." [...]

"What do you mean?"

"He's a doll. He'll have to." Brendon sounded dismissive, and Ryan was suddenly angry.

"He's not a thing, you know," he snapped.

"Yes yes, I know, he's your very best friend in the world and rainbows come out when he shits and all that. I'm just saying that vampires will keep hitting on him now, and he'd better get over that thing he has about gender" (northern 2009).

Rather than gender being irrelevant, what I tended to find was a structure of masculinism inherited from emo has a broader subculture: i.e., a performance of gender equality that silently privileges the male and masculine perspective. Again, this aligns with Williamsons' insights on the gender-bending vampire as eliding women. For example, feminized vampire texts are self-consciously denigrated both by characters in the sample stories and by the commenters - the exception to this is in the comment section of *Slave*, where both author and commenters explicitly discuss their affection for *Twilight*. More usually though, *Twilight* is the butt of a recurring joke: 'You're pathetic, Iero,' Frank 'muttered to himself' in *Life as a Process*: 'You're three shades off changing your name to Bella and writing angst-ridden poetry in a spiral-bound notebook' (ViciousVenin 2019). In *Leaving Without Moving*, Ryan reprimands himself for returning to Brendon 'like some kind of demented vampire romance heroine' (northern 2009). Preferring himself to read philosophy and satire, he mocks Brendon for his literary taste, which he guesses will be either "the literary genius of Danielle Steele [...] or maybe some of those wonderfully classic Harlequins, even" (ibid.) Again, like emo as a genre, bandom fics omits female perspective, and utilizes women largely as props. I did it myself, before I began this project. Writing as a fan, enmeshed in vampire lore and emo fan culture, I opened my own vampire verse with the narrative device known as 'fridging': i.e., killing a female character off to motivate a male protagonist. It was only upon re-reading the work that I realized what I had done, demonstrating again how academics are in no way exempt from the discursive structures or the multiple cultural contexts in which they operate. In later stories I made an explicit effort to introduce a major female character. I also made multiple *Twilight* jokes - probably because, conditioned as I am by the same masculinist culture as everyone else, I really do find *Twilight* comically bad - and because I was performing to my reputation as a fanfic writer who is good at humour.

It could be argued that the *High Way to Hell* verse utilizes the fridging trope when Andy is forced to stake Andrea - but it also introduces their daughter, who is named 'Carmilla' by her father and given the middle name 'Lucy' by her mother, after two of the most prominent vampire women in fiction. Lucy Westenra is of course the disobedient, excessively desirous female victim of Dracula, punitively staked and 'put back in her box' quite literally by the avenging 'Crew of Light.' Carmilla, as we noted above, was originally a seductive shape-shifter, who forms an intimate friendship/relationship/feeding arrangement with the virginal young heroine of Sheridan Le Fanu's novella. Unlike Dracula, she is warm, social and seductive as well as dangerous. As of this writing, the infant Carmilla in the *High Way* verse has only reached toddlerhood - but is a popular character, highly social, friendly to human and vampire alike - through of course with a penchant for drinking blood, her first act at birth being to bite the doctor's finger (acareeroutofrobbingbanks 2015). Moreover, later in the verse, the band

encounters a formidable group of mostly-lesbian vampire hunters known as the ‘Salem Bitches’ (2017). The Bitches are vampires themselves, and also hunters who keep their city safe from renegade vampires. They were founded by a woman who was burned at the stake during the Salem Witch Trials. Though they generally dislike men, several members having been killed by them as humans, they tolerate the Fall Out Boy characters for their help in particular hunting episode: “You did it! I told them boys could fight too!” former rock groupie Maria tells the others afterwards. When Patrick grows uneasy with her tales of the 1960s rock scene, asking if it isn’t ‘sort of degrading for a woman to be seen as just a sex object’, she tells him not to lecture her on feminism, having been ‘burning her bra since before [he] was born’ (ibid.). Andy, who still thinks of Andrea in the story set several years later in the verse, reflects that she would have loved the Bitches, and wonders if she would have come to raise Carmilla among them, and ‘teach her to be strong and take no shit’. But it must be said that this explicit intervention in the gender politics of both music and vampirism was the exception, not the rule. By and large, despite the utilization of melodramatic and romantic narrative structures, the sample fic reinforces a condition that both emo and vampire fiction have in common: a suggestion of gender rebellion and queerness, still caught in and restrained by the dominant masculinism of popular culture at large.

I have argued in previous work that fanfiction operates by a ‘paradox of legitimation’ ([this author] 2017): an appeal to literary/cultural legitimacy via that which is already legitimate. I was writing then of fanfic that transforms televisual and literary texts, having parallels in postcolonial and feminist re-writings. Of course, representations of real people are used in professional fiction, and always have been - but nonetheless, Real Person Fic has less obvious ‘authorized’ parallels and less clear appeals to cultural legitimation. Nonetheless, in this discourse formation, we observe a variation on the paradox: an inheritance of the problematic, beloved legacies of emo culture and vampire fic, with their parallels in Romanticism - a transformative impulse that alters the structures of gender, race, and sexuality - but that ultimately, is reformist rather than revolutionary in their thematics. Which is not to say that certain stories - such as *Let the Darkness Guide You Home* - might not provide a more structural challenge to our conceptions of author-ized literature, given their sheer ingeniousness and literary skill.

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