I

Introduction

Evil—wherever belief in it is held—tends to be thought of in one of two ways. It is either a force equal to or slightly inferior to an opposing force or, as in Orthodox Christianity, the absence, withdrawal, perversion, or deflection of a universal inclination called "good." Cosmological narratives usually give it both a body and a name and situate it in a separate dark, turbulent, or alien realm. In the so-called natural world, evil may become manifest through the agency of demons or spirits. Whether such demons take on the imaginal form of beasts or humans (even when their form is not always humanly visible), the consequences of their actions are always encountered in the human sphere; that is, even when evil directs itself against animals or vegetation, it is always with an eye toward disrupting the social order (e.g., husbandry, agriculture) and the dependencies of humankind on these areas of human ecology and economy. At its base, evil is a pernicious threat to human survival above all else, and it is essentially different from death itself. Whereas death is universal, evil is selective.

There are countless representations and personifications of evil across history and religious and cultural systems, just as there are many images of the good and the heroic. These various images are depicted

in the narratives of both official and folk religions, mythology and folklore, as well as, even quite recently, in the secular metaphors of political and ideological discourse. In virtually all these narratives, at some point the physical representatives of good and evil become direct, often violent, antagonists. The outcome of their struggle for domination over the moral direction of the community holds a central place in its value system.

Perhaps the most dangerous form that evil takes is the visibly human, since when it is ambulatory and mimetic of the individual, it is difficult to distinguish the evil being from a fellow member of the community. This is especially true if there are no obvious markers, such as a tail and horns, to call attention to its difference. When the average person cannot definitely identify another individual as evil, yet some inexplicable adversity suggests malevolence that has gone beyond mere temper, it is critical that the threatened individual or collective immediately locate evil's nexus—even if it is found to be the heart of a neighbor and there is no confirming evidence aside from belief. Once evil is found, it must be destroyed or, at the very least, banished far beyond the possibility of return.

In contemporary Western European and North American popular culture, the vampire has become one of the most pervasive and recognizable symbols of insidious evil. Though, according to some notions, the vampire can shift his shape into that of a wolf or bat or other animal and perhaps possesses other supernatural powers, he[1] is different from monstrous beasts or even from Satan in that he possesses a single human body. Furthermore, in both folklore and literature/cinema, in his humanlike, untransformed state, he is not easily recognized as a different order of being. The vampire, as we shall see in chapter 7, thus has very much in common with the European witch, with one critically important difference: whereas witches are alive at the time they are tortured or ritually executed, vampires are by definition dead or at least undead (whatever that means). But both witches and vampires are held to be evil, for reasons that have much in common.

A great deal, naturally, has been written about vampires, and though I hope to add to that discourse, I do not intend here to place the vampire at the exact center of my discussion. Like evil, the vampire is a force that must be struggled with and overcome, and he thus rep-

resents only a single pole in a moral dyad. Whether or not we choose to label the vampire's antagonist "good," there is not much of a story if the violence and destruction wrought by the vampire goes unchecked. While it is rare that a vampire tale or a treatment of the vampire legend does not include an episode in which the vampire is destroyed or banished by some agency, little attention has been paid to the history and character of the vampire's personal nemesis, now popularly known as the vampire slayer.

In the elaborate heroic tales found in epics, the central theme is ordinarily the hero's transformation in the struggle against evil (in the form, say, of a dragon) or oppression. In most vampire motifs, however, the ostensible forces of good who would identify, oppose, and destroy vampires tend to be nameless and often incidental to the narrative. In fact, it is only fairly recently that the vampire slayer has had anything like a leading role: Abraham van Helsing, in *Dracula* (1897), is arguably the first significant self-professed vampire slayer in a tradition that culminates in the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003).

Ever since the publication of *Dracula,* or at least since movies adapted that novel's central characters and narrative points in 1922 (*Nosferatu*) and 1931 (*Dracula*), the nature, origin, and meaning of the vampire have been frequent subjects of inquiry by European and American scholars. Historical, literary, cultural, political, and even psychoanalytic discussions of the nature and role of the vampire have abounded since the vampire became widely known in Western Europe in the early eighteenth century. But the tradition of the vampire and, indeed, of the word *vampire* itself, which also had a prefolkloric meaning, goes back several centuries before Europeans living north and west of the Danube had ever heard of such things. As we ought to expect, the meaning of the Slavic term *vampir* changed considerably over a millennium, yet most writers on the subject have ignored both the cultural context in which the term arose and the possible changes in the nature of the thing designated by the word across time.

Among the more significant causes of this inattention to the broader development of the vampire motif is the understandable, if Orientalistic, cultural ignorance on the part of Europeans living far from those areas of Europe—in particular, the Balkans and the Carpathians—that were dominated for so long by the Ottoman Turks. Toward the end of

the seventeenth century, as the power of the Ottoman Empire began to wane in southeastern Europe, scientists and journalists who were curious about rumors of strange vampire phenomena ventured more intrepidly into such places as Serbia, Croatia, and other areas around the borders of the Habsburg Empire.[2] Their noble intention was first to record and then explain the exotic and perhaps supernatural goings-on at the boundaries of the civilized world. This they did with a vengeance, writing reports and learned treatises to explain away the very possibility of the ambulatory dead. To prevent a resurgence of the extreme and irrational religious persecution that characterized the Inquisition, these journalists and scientists drew on the scientific methods that were emerging during the Enlightenment.

Thus, the conception of the vampire on which virtually all subsequent vampire literature (and, by technological extension, cinema) was based derived from a handful of notorious episodes. These "epidemics" occurred over the span of only a couple of decades at the fringes of Western Europe, where Balkan folklore had come into direct contact with and had thus been contaminated by contemporary ideas about witches and witchcraft. Though a few reports by seventeenth-century travelers accurately described the Greek vampire, or revenant, known by the borrowed Slavic name *broukolakos,*[3] there was no understanding at the time of the vampire's role within a much broader demonological or lower mythological system. The phenomenology of the vampire was appropriated in its entirety into a new, Enlightenment worldview, while the semantics and cultural history of the Old Slavic term *vampir* were almost completely ignored.

Perhaps the most profound consequence of this appropriation was that important, structural aspects of the vampire motif went unrecognized. The significance of the vampire hunter, for example, was for a long while overshadowed by a natural fascination—which preoccupied early Western writers on the subject—with the vampire's appearance, powers, and behavior. Until quite recently, even scholarly discussions of famous outbreaks of vampirism, such as those involving Arnod Paole and others near Belgrade between 1727 and 1732, were often blind to the folkloric patterning beneath the reports and thus tended to take the basic events of the reportage as fact.[4] This may occur because the structure of a certain type of Balkan vampire tale is

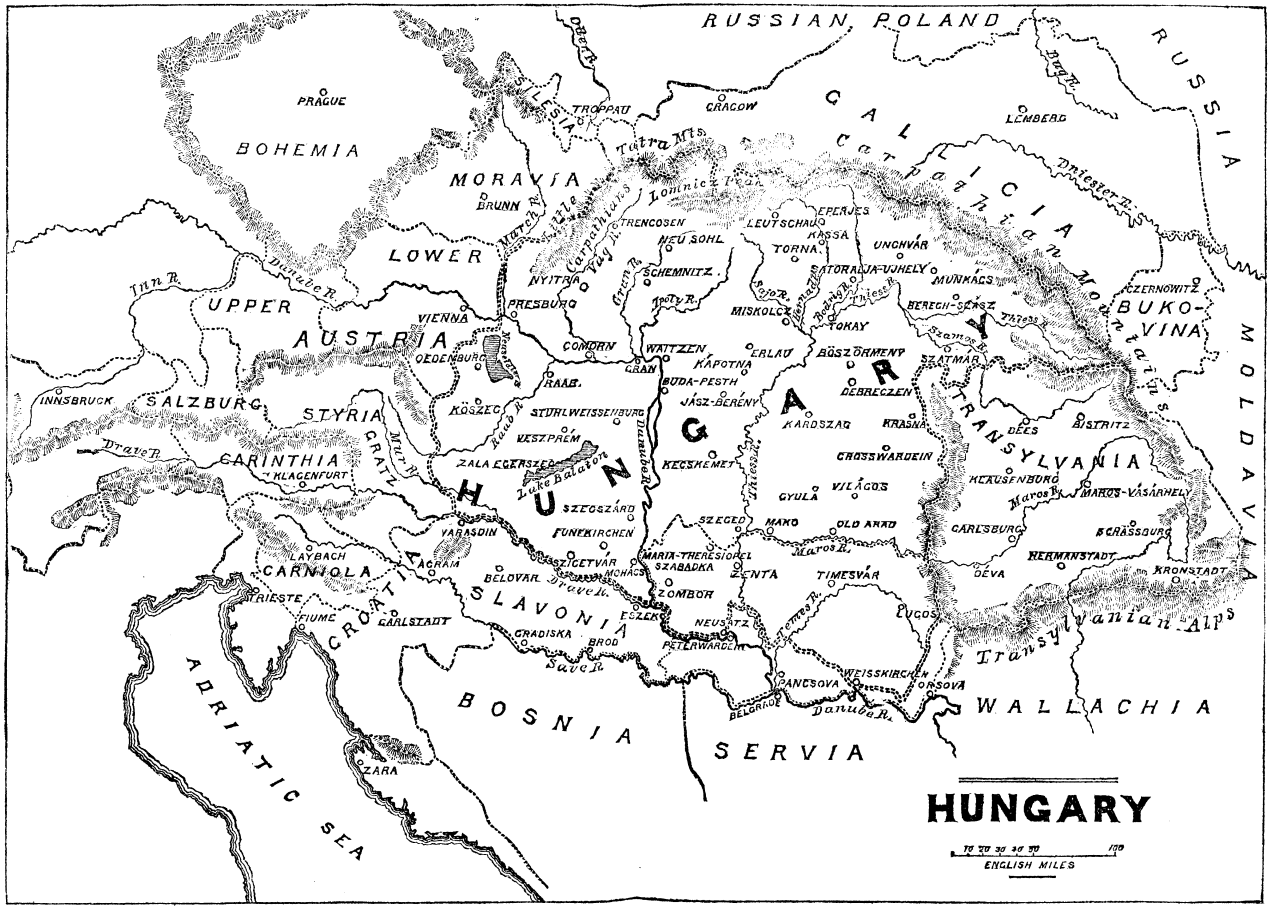

Fig. 1. Austro-Hungary/Habsburg Empire, 1887. (From Arminius Vambery, *Hungary in Ancient, Mediaeval, and Modern Times* [London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887].)

not recognizable to anyone who has not previously encountered a large number of oral tales (not always about vampires per se) with similar structures. The dynamic of the vampire report, in which the real focus is on the methods used to identify and thereby dispatch the evil vampire, is missed as a consequence. What remains misunderstood is how the appearance of evil always seems to require counteraction or expiation at the hands of someone possessing both the necessary insight to recognize a vampire and the knowledge of the necessary rituals to destroy one. The meaning of the symbols in the original folkloric system is not carried over into the new, literary adaptation of the vampire theme.

The present work, then, attempts to restore the balance—between the vampire and his heroic adversary—that was disturbed with the transfer of the vampire from his home within Slavic lands, especially the South Slavic cultures of the Balkans. In particular, it is important to recognize first that the vampire hunter or slayer is not at all a modern phenomenon, dreamed up by Gothic writers for dramatic or literary purposes. More likely, this character is a reflex of an ancient shamanic figure possessing the healing power to peer into the world of the dead. As a matter of speculation, I would even propose that as the spiritual power of shamans was denigrated with the ascendancy of Christianity and its priestly classes,[5] the role of shamans as healers was eventually suppressed. This left the residual incarnation of evil in the form of the reanimated dead as the more complex and interesting figure. Indeed, we might view the vampiric figure of the empty ambulatory corpse as merely the derelict spiritual housing abandoned by a disempowered religious healer who is no longer able to move freely in both directions across the boundary between life and death.

In addition to trying to understand the deep history of the vampire seer (seeing, not slaying, was the primary objective), it is also important to understand how the vampire cannot exist without some sort of prescription for identifying or eliminating him. While a seer is not always required—there are times when the identity of the vampire is obvious to everyone in the community—there nevertheless must be a prescribed pattern for handling the vampire so that his destructive actions cease and he never returns. In such cases, a specially designated individual or group must take the heroic action of killing a corpse. In the

earliest folklore about vampires, that person or group was the equivalent of the spiritual hero, since his or their actions were undertaken on behalf of the entire community.[6]

The heroic nature of the vampire slayer is predicated on his ability to identify the force that saps the energy from the life of the community. Something unnatural, unholy, invades and disturbs the natural order of things, and through this puncture in the tissue of everyday existence, something—is it a certain trust in the impermeability of that which separates us from the dead?—drains out. Yet because this intruder is invisible or, at the very least, unnoticeable—he is one of us, after all—only those with a special understanding of his nature are able to intervene and stop the hemorrhage. Like the vampire, the slayer must be marked—externally, by some sign of birth or accident; internally, by his symbolic connection to the world of the dead.

The nature of this bipolar relationship between the vampire and his adversary, the hunter or slayer, and the ways in which this connection becomes manifest and changes over several hundred years have not been adequately investigated. An examination of early Balkan folklore reveals that the vampire slayer, whose perceptive powers transcend those permitted ordinary Christian villagers, is the vampire's true mirror image. The slayer is the heroic and opposing reflection that is curiously, but necessarily, generated by the presence of evil, and he is as closely bound to evil as a reflection is to its original. If the vampire is a dangerous and antihuman replica of the human, the seer or slayer is the rejector or suppressor of the replica, who restores order by allowing the community to differentiate the authentic from the false.[7] This critical difficulty in distinguishing the true from the false, the beneficent from the treacherous, is, as we shall see, also the basis of the conflict between early Christianity and paganism and heresy. Historically, it was out of that conflict as it was played out in the Balkans that the folkloric meaning of the vampire arose.

Contemporary culture-based interpretations of the vampire "myth" have great value in explaining our apparent need to continually retell the vampire story, with all its attendant variations. Clearly, some limits must be placed around the definitions of vampires (and, I suppose, slayers) and the sorts of events and problems that are encountered in vampire narratives—whether folklore, literature, or film—so that the

vampire motif is identifiable as such. Much scholarship has been devoted to identifying the essence of this motif, in order to get at its meaning. Hence, for example, much popularity accompanies such monographs as Nina Auerbach's *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (1995) and the various essays—in such compendia as *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture* (1997)—that take on not only the vampires of nineteenth-century European literature but also the popular cultural images of the vampire in everything from cartoons to movies to cereal boxes to video games to long-running television shows. But, again, to survey and analyze these cultural phenomena without reference to the context from which they were originally drawn is to run the risk of missing something that is persistent in this myth but that escapes our notice if we are aware only of the modern phenomenology of the vampire. (With respect to the development of the vampire theme, "modern" here means after around 1732, that is, toward the beginning of the Enlightenment.) In particular, since, in modern times, the public significance of abjection that is symbolized by excommunication has been greatly reduced, the fact that the first vampires were excommunicates tends to be ignored or to lie outside the bounds of interpretation. Yet apostasy was once a status of serious consequence for life in an Orthodox community, ambiguously defining the excommunicate as both a physical member of the community and a spiritual persona non grata. This ecclesiastical designation is a prerequisite for the emergence of vampire folklore, for it defines the consequences after life for one who is ejected from the Church and prevented from undergoing funerary rituals to ensure the proper path of the soul into the otherworld after death. It also implicitly defines the qualifications of those who would prevent the return of the banished after their death.

There have certainly been attempts to understand the significance of the vampire with reference to historical events and social movements. Franco Moretti, for example, has pointed to the influence of Marx's famous analogy between capitalism and vampirism upon the uptake of this theme in Europe prior to Stoker.[8] More recently, vampires have been linked to the contemporary "culture of consumption."[9] However, cultural metaphors that involve the vampire motif, which are an entirely Western phenomenon,[10] tend not to extend to the methods

of perceiving them or slaying them. (If they did, we might have expected Marx to point out that capitalism can only be destroyed by someone who either has been a capitalist or else has had close contact with capitalists.) The linkage between the literary vampire and the folkloric one is a topic beginning to receive a great deal of attention. However, most scholars in this area take the modern vampire, especially as it has been configured since *Dracula* and its immediate precursors, as their starting point. They then go back into the folklore only as far as the literature itself allows, glossing over the significance of the enormous lacunae in the knowledge of vampire folklore drawn on by those earliest investigators into the subject.

The current study differs in two ways from others that attempt to draw a line between the modern vampire tale and various hypothetical points of origin. First, I take the "original" vampire—who I believe was neither folkloric nor supernatural—as the primary manifestation of a deep religious and social conflict. From this point of view, the modern (and even postmodern) tale, in whatever medium, is a culturally informed derivative, capable of adaptation as the role of religious belief in society has risen and fallen. I presume and will attempt to prove that despite the changes in the "manifest content" of the vampire narrative as it is used in various social metaphors, the fundamental role of the vampire within the societies and periods that have adopted him remains invariant. Second, as I have already implied, I propose that the vampire only became a protagonist with the demise of his natural antagonist at the hands of proselytizing Christian polemicists. This individual would have been a magician or healer or, in other words, a holy person from a pre-Christian religion with a much different idea about the afterlife.[11]

It is understandable that the vampire might acquire a certain narrative status due to his identification with a formerly living member of the community, which would tend to provide him with something of a personality. But since the vampire must be identified and destroyed ritually, we are obliged to conclude that his original adversary must have possessed the power to perform such rituals in a manner that would be efficacious. His adversary, whose contemporary manifestation is Van Helsing or Buffy, might once have been a hero able to cure magic-induced illness. Eventually, as such heroes were either incorporated into Christian hagiography or reduced to fools, they lost their

proper place in the narrative. This left the evil, excommunicate vampire at the center of speculation concerning the eschatological consequences of unnatural death or burial. At some point, the vampire seer, which is the shaman's healing aspect,[12] had to reemerge, in the heroic role of restorer of order.

One of the more obvious advantages of dealing with the modern vampire is that many of one's assertions can be tested against extant documentation, since the Western European vampire is by definition a literary phenomenon. Alas, in the following pages, where we must consider as well the premodern vampire, the *terra* on which the investigation must trek from ancient Bulgaria all the way to twenty-first-century southern California is not always quite so *firma.* The reasons for this are both manifold and widely known, often having to do with the slow spread of vernacular literacy and, therefore, secular literature in the Slavic Balkans. More significant, we are attempting to deal in large part with what has been for many centuries an oral tradition. This tradition survived and spread in a region that was located at the crossroads between the East and the West, where, over the centuries, commerce brought into close contact ethnic groups ranging geographically from Iran and Central Asia to northern Europe.[13] Meanwhile, the names of both the vampire and the vampire slayer in this region are numerous and even quite dissimilar. As Jan Perkowski reminds us, it is imperative to make sure, when comparing putative vampires from different areas, that we are talking about the same fundamental phenomenon.[14] So despite the lack of unambiguous evidence to support various assertions along the way, I would like to encourage the reader to occasionally be willing to join me in leaps of argumentation that are founded more on surmise and likelihood than certainty and that are open to challenge by any new testimony that was not available to me previously.

Likewise, the reader who stays with this project will be subjected to ideas and information from a number of disciplines and areas of specialization, not all of which have been mastered equally. I suspect it would take more lives than I expect to live to control all of the necessary data in such diverse areas as early church history, Slavic and Indo-European comparative linguistics, Central European and Bulgarian prehistory and history, Old Bulgarian literature, Balkan ethnography, Slavic mythology and folklore, the geopolitics of the Habsburg Empire and the principles

of the Enlightenment and its philosophical aftermath, nineteenth-century European literature and social movements, twentieth-century cinema, and twenty-first-century television—among, most likely, several others. Yet that is what the topic at hand demands: we shall cross at least a thousand years and several thousand miles in the attempt to determine how the earliest known vampire, a defrocked priest who condemned himself for having been so weak as to allow himself to be initiated into a pagan ritual, reemerges eight hundred years later in monstrous form under the suburban California streets patrolled by Buffy and her Scooby Gang (named after the group of teenaged ghost hunters in the long-running animated television series *Scooby-Doo*).

It might appear, on the basis of the foregoing discussion, that we are about to embark on a history of the belief system surrounding the vampire and the vampire seer. Although chronology is loosely used here as an organizing principle, the task of covering in a single volume the millennium or so that the Slavic word *vampir* has been in existence prohibits the sort of narrow (and logical) sequencing that would constitute a true history of the vampire. Instead, this study begins closer to the end of the process, by examining and elaborating on a claim made by Perkowski—and further amplified in my doctoral dissertation[15]—that the folkloric vampire serves primarily as a kind of scapegoat. In addition to outlining the scapegoat process (following René Girard), this study describes at the very outset the mimetic nature of the threat posed by the vampire at its most abstract level. I contend that we must both differentiate vampire tales from other tales of horror or the demonic and trace how this essential characteristic leads to the emergence of a seer to counteract the evil that is embodied in the vampire.

Chapters 3 and 4 do indeed go back to the Slavic period when the term *vampir* likely arose—namely, the period of Christianization of the Balkans by the Byzantine Orthodox Church. During this time, the proselytizers encountered a resistant indigenous agrarian population—a mix of Slavs, their Bulgar overlords, and ethnic Thracians—whose willingness to abandon their non-Christian beliefs and rituals was not by any means universal. Complicating the picture, as the last vestiges of paganism died out and went underground, the missionaries had to contend with another political force, a growing sect of dualist heretics known as Bogomils. The first vampires were connected, it appears, with a refusal

to abandon beliefs and practices that were considered anathema by the Eastern Church. Sections of chapters 3 and 4 may be difficult going for the reader with no background in Slavic languages, but the view of the vampire as a target of the wrath of the church from the very beginning is established there. The patient reader will be rewarded later on, when I show how this historical aspect of the vampire is still present, albeit not explicit, in contemporary conceptions. Chapter 5 continues with the development of the Slavic vampire up into the early eighteenth century, when Balkan culture was finally directly encountered by travelers from the nonoccupied countries of Western Europe.

Before this study moves on to discuss how the vampire narrative became a topic of great interest in Western Europe in the mid-eighteenth century, chapters 6 and 7 introduce the various manifestations of the Balkan vampire slayer, known by such strange names as *vampirdžia, glog, dhampir,* or *sâbotnik,* among others. These chapters show how folkloric seers and slayers may have been connected with similar seers in Hungary and northeastern Italy who represented survivals of Central European shamanism. Here, I show that the earliest vampire hunters were most likely healers who were believed to possess the power to identify vampires because they were able to enter the world of the dead and to transfer the knowledge they gained there back into the world of the living. In terms of social power, identifying a vampire was akin to determining the cause of an epidemic.

The original interest shown in various episodes of vampire hysteria that began to occur in the second quarter of the eighteenth century was due in large part to the growth, in Western Europe, of the rationalist philosophy of the Enlightenment. Though there were several investigators that attempted to explain vampires from either a purely scientific (i.e., Protestant) or purely Catholic perspective, chapter 8 is devoted to one investigator in particular (for reasons that will become clear in chapter 9), the erudite Dutch physician, librarian, and medical historian Gerard van Swieten. Dr. Van Swieten was sent by the empress of Hungary, Maria Theresa, in 1755 to document supernatural events occurring in Silesia and to debunk in scientific (i.e., medical) terms the very possibility of a vampire. His treatise, here quoted in English translation for the first time, is a literary touchstone for the origin of the vampire hunter in non-Orthodox Europe.

Fig. 2. Hugh Jackman as the new Van Helsing. (© 2004 Universal Studios. Courtesy of Universal Studios Licensing LLLP.)

Jumping straight from the Enlightenment to the end of the Victorian period and the Industrial Revolution, chapters 9 and 10 are devoted to the two most famous representatives of the motif of vampire and vampire slayer, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.* Both of these extended narratives have received their share of attention from scholars of literature and contemporary culture. Not only would it be redundant to attempt here a discussion of the reasons for their appeal or their cultural significance, but it would also lie beyond the boundaries of my topic, which specifically concerns the link between the vampire and the vampire seer with regard to their shared connection to the world of the dead. Instead, I shall confine my readings of both *Buffy* and *Dracula* to those areas in the texts where this ancient underlying link is manifest. In both stories, the scapegoat aspect of the vampire is still present, but, I will argue, it has been obscured by the dynamics of the scapegoat process itself. One important aspect of this process is that those who would designate an innocent member of the community as a scapegoat must remain blind to the injustice they are carrying out.[16]

While folklore about vampires seems to be dying out in the Balkans as a result of the inexorable processes of westernization and urbanization, it is not clear whether the literary and cinematic vampire theme is likewise cooling down. More precisely, it is not yet clear, as of this writing, whether we are witnessing a return of the hero within the popular vampire narrative. Certainly, the success of *Buffy,* which makes of the slayer a complicated superhero in a fantastic suburban universe, would seem to indicate that we are becoming more interested in making the heroic primary and vampiric evil secondary. (In *Buffy,* for example, almost all of the vampires and demons that are killed are more or less nameless and unsympathetic.) But the low U.S. attendance figures for Universal's high-budget *Van Helsing* (Universal Pictures, 2004) suggest that stories of monolithic, violent vanquishers of one-dimensional monsters cannot sustain interest and in fact miss the central point of the dual nature of the vampire-slayer pair. These days, the evil that walks among us unrecognized is more often played by the sociopathic serial or mass killer, while the hero who is intuitively connected to that disturbed orientation takes the form of a forensic psychologist, or profiler. It may be that solving the problem of real evil with real (human) agents in today's world has surpassed any need to dally with the purely imaginary.