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**The Root of All Evil?
Legacies of the “Old South” in *True Blood***

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The HBO series *True Blood* created and produced by Alan Ball of *Six Feet Under* fame and presently on the eve of beginning its seventh and final season (June through September 2014) represents a complex and sophisticated mélange of literary, cultural and cinematographic traditions which allow for multiple viewer interpretations and analytical “readings.” This is doubly true since Ball not only chooses the “Old South” but focuses attention specifically on Louisiana, a highly symbolic choice linked to the ideological aspects of the show. The complex multicultural and multiracial heritage of Louisiana itself—its ties to the European empires of France and Spain, its *métis*, non-Anglo and non-Protestant populations which made the case of its integration into the union a controversial issue, its history of resistance to Reconstruction in the post-Civil War era—provide the perfect space for the encounters and conflicts between the living, the undead and various other spectral figures of the past which literally haunt the spaces, the characters and the story arc of the show. Southern spaces ‘punctuate’ the episodes, serving as a form of interpretive grid to possible levels of understanding. Connected to the actual geographic spaces at play, I will discuss Southern “spaces,” notably how the burden of Southern history (to use the title of C. Vann Woodward’s book on the subject) permeates the series, insisting thus on the inescapable weight of certain past events; these events are first hinted at in the credit sequence and later serve as a *leitmotiv* which is developed across the six seasons to date. What this article attempts to show

is that “southern-ness” is what makes the series special and particularly meaningful culturally speaking for the American viewer, for reasons I will demonstrate.

Last but not least I will explore the relationships between characterization and ideology, focusing more specifically on the vampires.¹ Bill Compton embodies the connection between the South of the present and its “dark” legacy of the Confederacy: in season 1 for example, his appearance at a meeting of the Descendants of the Glorious Dead and his (false?) testimony concerning the heroism of the audience’s ancestors in the Civil War confirms the enduring power of the Lost Cause myth in southern culture. Along with the other “Southern” vampires Russell Edgington, King of Mississippi and Sophie-Anne Leclercq, Queen of Louisiana, Bill represents the former slavocracy, and its return to “mainstream” society; the vampires returning to the world of the living thanks to the Great Revelation² can be received by the viewer as a modern form of the Redemption of the old power structure similar to the one in the South of the late 19th century. Bill is also central to revealing the profound paradoxes of Southern society: behind the veneer of the Southern gentleman lies the culture of violence and the vendetta, and the continuing adherence to the politics of enslavement (he does, after all, plot to make Sookie “his”). The activities and power struggles of the Southern vampires contrast with the attitudes and strategies of Eric Northman and Nan Flanagan (the spokeswoman for the American Vampire League), which we will analyze as a re-interpretation of persistent cultural biases between the North and the South which resonate through history and in our case, through the story of *True Blood*.

A brief look at Southern distinctiveness

I have already noted in my introductory remarks that Louisiana is a complex space, an exception in many ways to the rest of the American territories which were to become states in the 19th century. Jefferson’s purchase of the Louisiana territory from France in 1803 was part of his master plan to create an “empire of liberty,” “[an] empire that would not be a mirror of the Old World’s despotic monarchic empires with their exploitive mercantilist policies.”³ This contrasts with Jefferson’s ambiguous attitudes towards the Native American and Creole populations of the territory and with Louisiana’s exclusion from participation in the 1804 presidential

election; it also contrasts with the fact that the first territorial government set up by Jefferson attempted to impose English and Anglo-Saxon American ways on this very non-Anglo culture⁴:

The new territories of the Louisiana Purchase presented a significant challenge to the primarily Anglo-Protestant [...] United States of America. The southernmost part of the Louisiana Purchase was in effect a foreign country. Many of its inhabitants were Mediterranean, Caribbean, and African in origin. Most were Catholic, spoke different languages, and had a different view of government, law, and race. Louisiana was a richly multi-cultural frontier in which different ethnic groups jostled for power and primacy. Creoles of French and Spanish descent, Germans upriver from New Orleans, English settlers in what would become the Florida parishes, Acadians to the west of the metropolis, free people of color, slaves, and Native Americans would interact with the new waves of Americans from states such as Tennessee and Kentucky.⁵

These factors made Louisiana the space of a major encounter of the young American republic with diversity, and as such represented a challenge to the concept of assimilation which had predominated in the British American colonies; and the extent of this diversity led to both conflicts and compromise in the politics of Louisiana's integration into the United States:

Louisiana's history as a colony, territory, and state in the fifteen years from 1800 to 1815 was characterized not only by diplomatic, political, legal, and cultural friction but also by compromise among the various elements of its diverse population. Included during the period were: the Louisiana Purchase (1803); the creation of the Territory of Orleans (1804); massive immigration of French, African slaves, and free people of color from Saint Domingue (Haiti) to New Orleans (1809); the West Florida Rebellion (1810); the largest slave revolt in U.S. history in St. Charles and St. John parishes (1811); statehood (1812); and the Battle of New Orleans (1815).⁶

One might say that in addition to such factors as cultural and racial divisions which were conceptually different from those of "mainstream" values of other southern slave states, Louisiana also had a reputation for faction-ridden, corrupt and occasionally violent politics.⁷ Its other particularity, which is of interest to us here, is

the fact that Louisiana was the first state to undergo “presidential” Reconstruction⁸ in 1865; and the unfolding of Reconstruction policies there led critics of the period to point to Louisiana as representing “the dangers posed by excessive federal interference in local affairs.”⁹ We will see how this idea is transposed—albeit metaphorically—into the scenario of *True Blood*, through the character of Nan Flanagan and the mysterious “authorities” of the American Vampire League.

Because the series takes place not only in Louisiana but in other Southern spaces (both real and imaginary) such as Mississippi and Texas, it is also possible to note in what ways more general aspects of Southern distinctiveness influence analytical readings. Southern historian C. Vann Woodward, in his work *The Burden of Southern History*, points out that because Southern history is one of military defeat followed by decades of economic, social and political failure, “the Southern preoccupation was with guilt not with innocence, with the reality of evil, not with the dream of perfection. Its experience [...] was on the whole a thoroughly un-American one.”¹⁰ A major challenge of the post Civil War era for the South was the imperious need to come to terms with the Confederacy’s defeat in what was nonetheless perceived to be a “just” rebellion of the South (at least in southern eyes) against the North’s blatant breach of states’ rights as guaranteed by the Constitution.¹¹ One of the ways in which this was done was through the emergence of the Lost Cause, “a cult of archaism, a nostalgic vision of the past”¹²:

The central institutions of the Lost Cause were the postwar Confederate organizations: the memorial associations, the Southern Historical Society, the United Confederate Veterans, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and others. These groups sponsored much of the writing and oratory that helped shape southern perceptions of defeat. Most southerners formed an understanding of their past through the ceremonial activities or rituals conducted by these groups than through anything else.¹³

The Lost Cause is more generally situated within the concept of the “Old South,” paradoxically a by-product of the “New South” which supposedly rose from the ashes of defeat and destruction of the Civil War, starting in the 1880s.¹⁴ The Old South had its own value system and code of honor which “made personal bravery and oath-taking central to a male’s status, [since] the war and its aftermath

challenged southern males' self-image"; the code of honor served as a kind of interpretive grid of male social validation through community consensus.¹⁵ And finally, as Woodward has so forcefully argued in his other work *Origins of the New South*, the "Old South" was in direct reaction to the New South: the New South represented in fact a fundamentally Yankee concept, in which it was believed (by people outside of the South and as promoted by the likes of Henry Grady) that the South itself "mainstreamed" by accepting the Northern values of urbanization, industrialization and enlightened racial politics.¹⁶ This produced a uniquely paradoxical stance of the Lost Cause, in which, as Woodward puts it, "the deeper the involvements in commitments to the New Order, the louder the protests of loyalty to the Old."¹⁷

These are just a few of the major historical elements which can help us to better appreciate the cultural complexity of the South and shed light on specific levels of meaning in *True Blood*.

The topos of "southern-ness"

From the very first instants of *True Blood*, the viewer is literally projected into the environment and atmosphere of the South. In the opening shot of episode 1 season 1, we see the road filmed at night from the perspective of the driver's seat of what will turn out to be an SUV. It contains a young couple who will stop at a small roadside liquor store advertizing "TruBlood."¹⁸ The low-hanging branches draped with Spanish moss framing the road lit up by the vehicle's headlights clearly place the scene in a southern space, underlined if need be by a country and western song which we assume is coming from the car radio. The camera then moves into the GrabbitKwik market, with a slow pan shot of a wall where a television is on, in the middle of the show *Real Time With Bill Maher*¹⁹ in progress; the viewer sees a blond middle-aged woman, identified by a banner at the bottom of the screen as Nan Flanagan, spokesperson for the American Vampire League, as she explains the AVL's position on vampire rights, and Bill Maher's response. This "window" onto the national political scene is contrasted with a long pan shot of the male cashier behind the counter (sitting in a lounging position with his feet propped on the counter) who appears to be a vampire: gothic-style clothing including skull and crossbones ring,

tattoos, long black hair... and who addresses the young couple with a Bela Lugosi accent.²⁰ This may be interpreted as a playful reference to the Southern Gothic tradition (and to audience expectations of the vampire stereotype), another visual clue of southern-ness in these first moments of the series. But things are not what they seem: the cashier is *not* a vampire; the real vampire in the scene is a “redneck,” the stereotypical figure of Southern backwardness recognizable here by his battle fatigues and a baseball cap with Confederate flag on it, and who closes the pre-credit scene with the purchase of a six-pack of TruBlood.

The pre-credit scene is then followed immediately by the credit sequence in which various geographical, historical and cultural spaces are presented in a series of flashes, travelling shots and semi-subliminal images. We are first shown the emblematic space of Louisiana, the bayou, from different viewpoints: underwater with the (dead) catfish in the foreground; along the surface of the water with the partially emerged alligator, then from a boat, looking into the swamp or passing by stilted fishing houses. There is then a movement to shots of the land and to what I would call generic spaces of the South: the trailer park, the rows of small low-income houses, the run-down Victorian-style house, and the seedy liquor store (an echo of the store in the pre-credit scene); the low-income housing, a stereotypical reminder of Southern poverty usually associated with the black population, can also be seen here as a probable reference to post-Katrina New Orleans (a traumatic moment shared by all residents of Louisiana but affecting most heavily the poorest areas), perhaps even an intertextual reference to Robert Polidori’s photography of certain devastated neighborhoods in his collection entitled *After the Flood*.²¹ These ideas are “echoed” in the series with places such as Sam Merlotte’s trailer (stereotypical habitat of the proverbial white or trailer trash) or at the other end of the spectrum the palatial ante-Bellum “Southern gentry” homes of Bill Compton and Russell Edgington.

From these tangible places, the credit sequence moves on to more abstract spaces of southern distinctiveness: the multiple intermittent scenes of evangelical Christians immediately evoke the South as the “Bible belt,” with the final shot of an adult woman being baptized in a river, calling to mind the image of the born-again Christian (not to mention the Southern Baptist tradition of baptism by total immersion), a theme to be developed in season 2 through the character of Jason

Stackhouse and his conversion/indoctrination into the anti-vampire-cum-evangelical church called The Fellowship of the Sun; at the same time, because this baptism scene takes place in the dark, it is possible to associate the metaphorical rising from the dead of the born-again Christian with the vampire who returns to the world of the living at night. The credit sequence gives a central place to the South's history, what I think can be more accurately understood as the burden of Southern history. Two furtive images relating directly to the Ku Klux Klan, the burning cross and the child in KKK attire, point to the South's culture of violence, more particularly to race relations in the periods of Reconstruction and the Redemption in the 19th century, and the entire period from the emergence of Jim Crow laws in the early 20th century up to the Civil Rights era of the late 1950s. The KKK is also linked directly to the Lost Cause, as the dressing-up of its members as "ghosts" originally symbolized the Confederate dead of the battle of Gettysburg.²² In the same way that the burning cross was used to intimidate blacks, in *True Blood* anti-vampire rednecks use it to intimidate Bill Compton and his young protégée Jessica. Again, the South's history of violence and racial hatred appears in two other fleeting images of the credit sequence: the abandoned car in the swamp (reminiscent of the one containing the bodies of three young Civil Rights workers murdered by the KKK in Mississippi in 1964 and immortalized in Alan Parker's *Mississippi Burning*, 1988); and two short pieces of newsreel footage of black protestors being molested by the white police, most likely in Alabama during the voter registration sit-ins of the late 1950s. The contrast between black-and-white and color shots underlines the distance which separates the past from the present, while suggesting a continued existence of such practices in the temporal framework of the story arc of *True Blood*.²³ So although the religious imagery somehow holds the promise of an eventual redemption (with the double meaning of "redemption" not lost on those who know the history of the South²⁴), the cycle of cultural violence is portrayed as inescapable, highlighted by the refrain of the theme song which proclaims "I wanna do bad things with you."

Characterization and ideology

Apart from the focus on spaces of the South, *True Blood* characterization focuses on two particular vampires, Bill Compton and Eric Northman, who serve the

purpose of political mouthpieces of a cultural subtext connected to social and economic divisions between the North and the South in the historical sense of the term. Bill's link to the burden of Southern history is established from the outset of season 1, when we learn that he has come to Bon Temps to reclaim his family heritage; we are also told—and shown—how he became a vampire in 1864, when he was a Confederate soldier making his way home after his regiment's surrender and disbanding. This is one reason for Adele Stackhouse's interest in Bill, since she heads a local chapter of the memorial association called the Descendants of the Glorious Dead. In season 1 episode 5 ("Sparks Fly Out" first broadcast on October 5 2008), Bill, who has accepted to speak at the monthly meeting, is presented to the Bon Temps crowd assembled in the town church by Adele Stackhouse, in the following terms:

Our guest tonight is a gentleman who, despite what you might have heard, is one of us. His family was among the first to settle in Bon Temps and he bravely fought for Louisiana in the war for southern independence. Let us welcome one of the original sons of Bon Temps back to the town he helped build. I give you First Lieutenant William Thomas Compton.

Vampire Bill then makes an entrance into the room, but before taking place behind the pulpit to give his talk, he first dramatically removes the American flag that has been draped over the silver cross on the altar and puts it back on its pole, declaring to the crowd "As a patriot of this great nation, I wouldn't dream of putting myself before Old Glory." The scene presents a distinctly southern perspective of the Civil War, notably the construction and reverence of the Lost Cause myth: we can note that Adele Stackhouse refers to it as "the war for southern independence" linking it not to treacherous division of the Union but to the original war of independence, the American Revolution; Bill's choice of the term "Old Glory" (rather than the Star Spangled Banner) demonstrates his attachment to the tradition of the ante-bellum era, while linking him directly to the Glorious Dead venerated by the Bon Temps population. Bill's historical connections to the founding of Bon Temps ("original son") and his participation in the war ("bravely fought for Louisiana") make him the perfect southern hero; and the 'staging' of Bill's discourse in a church lends a sacred dimension to his testimony about his battlefield experience, connecting his account of

Louisiana soldiers' deaths to the concept of the ultimate sacrifice for the southern cause,²⁵ echoed in the visible texts between which Bill is placed ("This do in Remembrance of Me"/"In Remembrance of Me"):



Of course this may also be interpreted as playfully – albeit blasphemously – establishing a connection between Bill the Vampire and Jesus Christ, a theme developed later in the series through the confrontations between the community of the undead and the Fellowship of the Sun.²⁶ Ironically enough, while the whole purpose of the Lost Cause was to make culture heroes out of the dead specifically because they had died for a cause and had not surrendered, the viewer learns through flashbacks to Bill's past that he in fact died (rather, was made vampire) *after* his regiment had surrendered; ultimately, then, he more clearly represents a relic of the South's shame, not a monument to its supposedly glorious past.

The other most important vampire is Eric Northman, who can in fact act as a foil to Bill Compton. Eric's story arc informs us that he is a powerful vampire in the world of the undead: over a thousand years old (we are shown that he was made vampire when he was a Viking), he is the owner of the Shreveport vampire bar Fangtasia as well as the "sheriff" of District Five, a district in which Bon Temps falls, meaning that Eric is Bill's authoritative superior.²⁷ More importantly, Eric's very name underlines his adherence to the culture of the North, and his rocky relationship with Bill (mainly because he is also competing to make Sookie "his") calls to mind the antagonistic relationship during the period of Reconstruction during which the

defeated Southern states were forced to undergo military occupation by Northern troops and to accept the Yankee attitudes of progress through industrialization and urbanization. The contrast between the genteel manners of Bill and the cold humorless posture of Eric are particularly striking in a 'double' scene in the episode "She's Not There" (season 4 episode 1): after Vampire Russell Edgington has ripped out the heart of a TV anchorman during a live broadcast, both Bill and Eric implement public relation 'damage control' techniques in an effort to save the AVL's campaign for the Vampire Rights Amendment. Eric is being filmed for a TV ad in Fangtasia, whereas Bill is attending a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a new community center named after his wife Caroline:



[Eric]: I'm a tax-paying American and small-business owner in the great state of Louisiana. I also happen to be a vampire.

[Bill]: You know, as the oldest member of this community I would have been eligible to take up residence here 110 years ago. But it warms my heart to see the most beloved folks of our town taken care of in a way they deserve.

[Eric]: Now the past year there has been a lot of inflammatory talk from politicians warning their constituents not to trust vampires. But think about it for a second: who would you rather trust, a vampire or a politician?

[Bill]: I must offer my gratitude for the generosity and the open-mindedness of the Bon Temps Chamber of Commerce led by the redoubtable Miss Portia Bellefleur.

[Eric]: The truth is vampires are as different from each other as humans are because we *were* humans... and we ask you only to be treated as such.

[Bill]: I'm also grateful to be able to honor my wife, Caroline, who was a treasure of this community for over 60 years. And many of the trees on this street were planted by her and all the other members of the Arbor Society, and it is my wish that this center will grace this town for as long as these trees have stood around us.

[Eric]: We welcome you into our world as well. We are always more than happy to serve humans here at Fangtasia. And I don't mean for dinner.

[Bill]: Now then. We can't have a ribbon-cutting without the giant scissors. Mr. Mayor?

[Mayor]: Thank you Mr. Compton. It's kinda nice not being the oldest person here for a change.

Bill brandishes the giant scissors; Eric makes a cutting gesture with his fingers

[Nan Flanagan, who has supervised Eric's performance]: Cut! There you go!

The scene underlines the ideological gap which separates the two characters, highlighting the fundamental cultural differences between them. Eric is addressing an invisible audience through the mediating eye of the television screen; his discourse is being monitored by Nan Flanagan, spokeswoman for the American Vampire League, a federal-level organization campaigning to obtain a political victory for the vampire minority. His arguments are those of a political debate being waged nationally, with the use of terms such as *tax-paying American*, *small-business owner*, *constituents* and the demand that vampires should be treated as the equals of human beings and the typically campaign-like punch line *who would you rather trust...?* which connects Eric's ad implicitly to a long tradition of political advertising in the American political landscape. Eric is the Yankee entrepreneur who brings the modern world into Louisiana, and is seemingly the promoter of mainstream values. Bill, in contrast, is addressing a local population directly, in a reiteration of the southern values of community and the intimate connection to southern history and to nature: terms such as *beloved folk*, referring to himself as *the oldest member of the community*; deference to local structures of authority (*Mr. Mayor*, *the Bon Temps Chamber of Commerce*) in stark opposition to Eric's use of the 'generic' terms *politicians* and *constituents*; the evocation of Bill's status as a bridge between past and present both through his own longevity (*I would have been eligible to take up residence here 110 years ago*) and through his wife Caroline for whom the community center is being named; and finally the connection to nature is made through mention of the Arbor Society whose members planted the trees which *grace this town*.

Behind this veneer of southern gentility, however, lies a power-grabbing agenda revealed in Season 4, which will add to the complexity that creator Alan Ball

develops in the ideological dimensions of the vampire characters. In fact Bill Compton, rather than defending the southern heritage that he claims is so dear to him, actually collaborates with Nan Flanagan and the mysterious “authorities” of the American Vampire League to remove Queen Sophie-Anne Leclercq from power (by staking her), thus becoming the King of Louisiana. But unlike the southern “Redeemers” of the post-Reconstruction era who succeeded in reinstating the old power structure of the slave-owners’ South, Bill can be seen rather as a “scalawag,” a Southern sympathizer and facilitator of the Northern incursion into the former Confederacy. This would place his foil, Eric, in the role of the “carpetbagger,” the Northerner transplanted specifically to do business in the depressed economy of the South as a means to implant Northern values of modernization. Sookie’s emotional attachment first to Bill, then to Eric, is significant in the reading of the vampires’ evolving roles and their rivalry to control her, perhaps a metaphor of divisive forces fighting over Louisiana itself and the resistance of its population to federal regulation.

To conclude, “southern-ness” and the distinctiveness of the South with its culture of the peculiar institution and its inescapable past of violence and defeat lend a particularly rich background to the development of *True Blood*. The historical and political dimensions studied here are all the more telling as they are totally absent from the Charlaine Harris novels from which the series derives,²⁸ pointing to Alan Ball’s creative injection of diverse cultural subtexts dealing not only with the South but also with minority rights, racial relations and the question of homosexuality. Beyond its entertainment value, then, *True Blood* invites the viewer to take a closer look at contemporary social issues through the distancing prism of the surreal.

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NOTES

¹ For those unfamiliar with *True Blood*, the main vampire characters are Bill Compton (who returns to Bon Temps Louisiana to occupy his family's plantation home); Eric Northman, the owner of Fangtasia, the vampire bar; his assistant, Pam; Nan Flanagan, the spokeswoman for the American Vampire League; Russell Edgington, the "king" of Mississippi; Sophie-Anne Leclercq, the "queen" of Louisiana; and Godric, the oldest vampire and Eric Northman's maker.

² As explained in the "mockumentary" *In Focus: Vampires in America* (bonus feature, DVD season 1) the Great Revelation is the expression to describe the "coming out" of vampires all over the world, simultaneously and on television; the purpose of the Great Revelation is to allow vampires to integrate mainstream society. One of the story arcs in *True Blood* concerns the battle between the American Vampire League, created to promote the Vampire Rights Amendment to the U. S. Constitution and a neo-Conservative political group called The Fellowship of the Sun seeking to block the initiative.

³Kaplan, Lawrence S., *Thomas Jefferson: Westward the Course of Empire*, Scholarly Resources Inc., Wilmington, Delaware, 1999, p. 150.

⁴ Fleming, Thomas, *The Louisiana Purchase*, John Wiley and Sons Inc., New Jersey, 2003, p. 175.

⁵Source: <http://www.lib.lsu.edu/special/purchase/history.html#outline5>, accessed 18/05/12. This website is a collaborative online history project concerning the Louisiana Purchase, run and maintained by LSU.

⁶ Idem.

⁷ Foner, Eric, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution 1863-1877*, Perennial Classics, New York, 1988, p. 45.

⁸ "Presidential Reconstruction" refers to the first period of Reconstruction under Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson; it was followed by "Radical Reconstruction" under the ægis of the Republican Congress, starting in 1867. For distinctions between different periods and types of Reconstruction see Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction 1865-1877*, Vintage Books, New York, 1965.

⁹ Foner, p. 554.

¹⁰ Woodward, C. Vann, *The Burden of Southern History*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1968, pp. 27-28.

¹¹ "When, finally, eleven states did adopt formal ordinances of secession, the northern Unionists and southern secessionists engaged in fascinating but essentially irrelevant constitutional debate. The Constitution does not say that individual states may secede at their pleasure; neither does it say that they may not. Indeed, it says nothing one way or the other on the subject; and the secessionist argument, therefore, was based upon the inference. Lincoln [...] maintained that the Union was older than the states; that once in the Union, no state had the reserved power to get out [...]" (Stampp, pp. 24-25). Stampp also points out that because of his position, Lincoln would refer to the Civil War as "The War of Rebellion" and to Southerners as "disloyal citizens, rebels or insurgents" (27).

¹² Woodward, C. Vann, *Origins of the New South*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1971, p.154.

¹³ Foster, Gaines M., *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause and the Emergence of the New South*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1987, pp.4-5.

¹⁴ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, p.155.

¹⁵ Foster, pp.24-25.

¹⁶ Rabinowitz, Howard, *The First New South 1865-1920*, Harlan Davidson Inc., Illinois, 1992, p.2. The use of "mainstreaming" here is important as it is a word the vampires use in *True Blood* to describe vampires' desire to integrate human society and become full-fledged citizens, *infra* page.....

¹⁷ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, p.155.

¹⁸ TruBlood (written as one word and without the "e") is the commercial name given to synthetic blood which vampires drink in lieu of feeding from live humans. The genesis of TruBlood is explained in a "mockumentary" entitled *In Focus: Vampires in America* which is a bonus feature on the DVD of Season 1.

¹⁹ One can note here the mise-en-abyme effect of an HBO program within an HBO series: *Real Time with Bill Maher* is a weekly talk show on HBO, hosted by Maher who is a comedian and political satirist (<http://www.hbo.com/real-time-with-bill-maher/index.html>). Maher of course appears in this sequence, thus "anchoring" the fictional Vampire League character Nan Flanagan in televisual 'reality'.

²⁰ Bela Lugosi is the first actor to have portrayed Dracula in a « talkie » in 1931. (<http://www.imdb.com>)

²¹ Examples of this photography can be viewed at the following site (last accessed 6/30/12): <http://www.picsearch.com/pictures/celebrities/artists%20and%20painters/artists%203/robert%20polidori.html>

²² Foster, p.48.

²³ The "race" theme and its displacement from standard racial conflicts to the battle between humans and vampires in the series will be the subject of a forthcoming paper on *True Blood* and so will not be developed further here.

²⁴ I am referring here to the term Redemption as coined by C. Vann Woodward and meaning the return of the white Southern gentry a.k.a. the Bourbons (and politically, the Democratic Party) to power in the reconstructed states after the presidential election of 1876 and the Compromise of 1877, in which in return for the victory of Republican Rutherford B. Hayes all federal troops were removed from the South.

²⁵ This is underlined further by Bill's declaration during his testimony that "[...] going to war was not a choice for us; we believed, to a man, that we had a calling to fulfill, a destiny handed down to us from above."

²⁶ Elsewhere in the series, especially in season 2, characters discuss whether or not the Bible "proves" that Jesus was the original vampire (having risen from the dead) and was the "maker" of Lazarus whom he brings back to life. We can also note in the context of the church scene that Holy

Communion entails the drinking of (Christ's) blood, another characteristic shared by Christians and vampires.

²⁷ The vampire hierarchy is revealed progressively throughout the series: in fact each state has a reigning monarch (Sophie-Anne Leclercq is the queen of Louisiana, Russell Edgington is the king of Mississippi); the states are divided into districts or areas administrated by sheriffs who swear fealty to the monarch.

²⁸ Originally called the *Southern Vampire series*, these novels are now commercialized as the *Sookie Stackhouse series* because of the success of *True Blood*. Charlaine Harris has written thirteen Sookie Stackhouse novels and announced that the thirteenth would be the last.

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