

## People are Strange: Re-Viewing *The Lost Boys*

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“Sleep all day. Party all night. Never grow old. Never die.  
It’s fun to be a vampire.”<sup>1</sup>

“Why can't you fly now, mother? ”

“Because I am grown up, dearest. When people grow up they forget the way. ”

“Why do they forget the way? ”

“Because they are no longer gay and innocent and heartless. It is only the gay and  
innocent and heartless who can fly.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Introduction**

*The Lost Boys* is like all seminal films – you may love or you may hate it but you cannot overlook it. Though largely regarded as a touchstone of 1980's films and successful both now and on its release, theorists have given it a

<sup>1</sup> Joel Schumacher, *The Lost Boys*, Warner Brothers, 1987.

<sup>2</sup> Barrie, J.M.: *Peter Pan, (Peter and Wendy)*. London 1911, Available at <http://www.gutenberg.org>, 129. (03.06.2011).

rough ride. Nina Auerbach sees it as a “domestication” of the once virile vampire, and the alternatives it offers as being “fragile as a drug trip.”<sup>3</sup> The ‘lost boys’ themselves become nothing more than “branded creatures”<sup>4</sup> which Laurence Rickels emphasizes by labelling them the “Californian syndication of Peter Pan.”<sup>5</sup> Erik Butler’s recent *Metamorphosis of the Vampire* sees them as a “Reagan era complaint about the broken American family,”<sup>6</sup> and Mary Hallab, in *Vampire God*, finds them both “annoying” and “bratty.”<sup>7</sup> This article will not constitute an apology or a defence for the film but rather, by placing in context both in its time and the wider vampire film genre, show that whether you adore or abhor it you cannot and should not ignore it.

To do this I shall first consider the film in relation to the veritable explosion of vampire films that happened in the late 70’s and early 90’s, and in particular with regard to what can be called the “teen-vamp” films from 1985-1989. The study of the film itself within this comparison will then highlight particular themes which I shall then consider in further depth showing how they have been utilised in more recent vampire representations. This will focus on the way that *The Lost Boys*, encapsulated, and/or developed the motifs of youth, family, consumption/consumerism, sexuality/gender, and the reflexivity of the snappy one-liner that form the basis of all current ‘vampy-goodness’ from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to *True Blood* and from *The Vampire Diaries* to *The Twilight Saga*.

<sup>3</sup> Auerbach, Nina: *Our Vampires, Ourselves*. Chicago 1995, p. 168.

<sup>4</sup> Auerbach, Nina: “The Bloodtide Documentary,” *Blade*, DVD, prod. Susan Ricketts, New Line Home Video, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Rickels, Laurence A.: *The Vampire Lectures*. Minneapolis 1995, p. 211.

<sup>6</sup> Butler, Erik: *Metamorphosis of the Vampire in Literature and Film: Cultural Transformations in Europe, 1732-1933*: Rochester 2010, p. 182.

<sup>7</sup> Hallab, Mary Y.: *Vampire God: The Allure of the Undead in Western Culture*. Albany 2009, 133 & 5 respectively.

### Lost and Found

"One thing about living in Santa Carla  
I never could stomach ... all the damn vampires".<sup>8</sup>

Before discussing *The Lost Boys* (1987) itself, it is worthwhile noting the films that preceded it to see how they might have framed the creation of Joel Schumacher's 'boys that never grew up.' Stacey Abbott cites the seventies as the "vampire decade," consequently observing "this period of radical change removed the vampire from its mythic representation, reinvented it as a modern vampire, and relocated it to America."<sup>9</sup> This is partially true, as, indeed, this period did see *Rabid* (1977) by David Cronenberg and *Martin* (1977) by George Romero which utilise a very non-mythical reading of the vampire, with the medicalised body going out of control in Cronenberg (possibly the only case of a *vagina dentata* in someone's armpit) and a psychological coming of age story, or the real-life trials and tribulations of being a vampire, in Romero's offering. What they both do, though, is place the vampire in the here and now of the modern world and specifically North America. However, the decade ended with the Vampire King most definitely "biting back" and appearing in three films, all released in 1979. Two of these were effectively remakes of the original classics of the genre: with Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu: The Vampyre* reprising F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (1922), and John Badham's *Dracula* utilising the Balderston-Dean stage play that inspired Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931). Whilst adding a certain sense of increasing "sympathy for the devil" the revenant is still an evil from the Old World – a theme reproduced in television adaptation of Stephen Kings *Salem's Lot* which came out the same year, – and is largely a supernatural being from the past. It is only Stan Dragoti's *Love at First Bite* comedy that saw the Count firmly in the here and now. Using the kind of

<sup>8</sup> This is the final line from Grandpa in *The Lost Boys*, spoken after seemingly spending the entire film oblivious to all the vampires around him.

<sup>9</sup> Abbott, Stacey: *Celluloid Vampires: Life After Death in the Modern World*. Austin 2007, p. 75.

inter-textual knowledge that informs Schumacher's later film, we find Dracula (George Hamilton) in his Transylvanian castle but under Communist rule. Unable to cope with being forced to share his living quarters with his fellow "comrades", he decides to move with his trusty aide Renfield to New York, where he falls in love with an American city-girl (Susan St. James).<sup>10</sup> The three films seem to provide an appropriate swan song marking the change from the Old World to the New, for none of the aristocratic vampires can happily exist within the new worlds that they find themselves in: Klaus Kinski's Orlok from *Nosferatu* disappears into the ether, and both Draculas, Frank Langella from Badham's version and Hamilton from Dragoti's, fly off to other climes.

In the 1980's it was not enough for the undead to just live forever, they also had to be forever young. Before launching into the "re-finding" of the Neverland of eternal youth in the explosion of teen-vamp movies of the mid to late 80's there is one earlier film of particular note that provides a bridge between all that went before, whilst intimating many of the concerns of the all-consuming adolescence that was to follow. Tony Scott's 1983 achingly stylish *The Hunger*, based on Whitley Strieber's 1981 novel of the same name, from its opening shots of glam Goth group Bauhaus singing "Bela Lugosi's dead", and it quickly establishes both Scott's credentials as a pop video director as well as the up-to-the-minute fashion sense of the contemporary vampire. The undead leads, played by Catherine Deneuve as Miriam, and David Bowie as John Blaylock, exude an effortless style as well as a dangerous and alluring sexuality. Though often cited as a warning against AIDS and sexual promiscuity it is more about the continuing medicalisation and humanisation of the vampire, as Miriam is shown not as a creature of the night but as a separate evolutionary species whose blood may unlock the secrets of life and death, which is part of attraction to the brilliant young

<sup>10</sup> There is of course some fairly clumsy digs at Cold War Communism within the film but curiously equally balanced with pithy comments on the self-obsessed nature of capitalism, too.

scientist, Sarah, played by Susan Sarandon.<sup>11</sup> Miriam is the species that has lived since the times of Ancient Egypt, imparting her “dark gift” upon a succession of lovers, who fulfil the Renfield role but with benefits; who become her companions through her journey through eternity. However, Sarah, whilst initially rejecting this, unlike in the novel, ultimately ends up taking Miriam’s place, signalling that a new order has indeed gained the ascendancy. Sarah might not be a teenager but she is a sign of things to come where the old order is no longer desired or required, and it’s cool to be undead.

### **Finding Neverland**

“But of course he cared very much; and he was so full of wrath against grown-ups, who, as usual, were spoiling everything, that as soon as he got inside his tree he breathed intentionally quick short breaths at the rate of about five to a second. He did this because there is a saying in the Neverland that, every time you breathe, a grown-up dies; and Peter was killing them off vindictively as fast as possible.”<sup>12</sup>

From 1985 to 1989 there were six major teen-vamp films released in America, an unprecedented amount either before or since: *Fright Night* (Holland, 1985), *Once Bitten* (Storm, 1985), *Vamp* (Wenk, 1986), *The Lost Boys* (Schumacher, 1987), *Near Dark* (Bigelow, 1987), *My Best Friend is a Vampire* (Huston, 1987), and *Fright Night II* (Wallace, 1989). In all the varying twists and turns of plots in the 80’s teen-vamp films they are all about self-absorbed adults and, consequently, teenagers doing it for themselves. As Pat Gill remarks:

“The result in these films is a world emptied of the family as a resource for coping with growing up. The self-absorbed parents of these films, whether divorced or together, provide no useful knowledge, no understanding of their

<sup>11</sup> This theme of the medicalisation of the vampire, or as being a different species is also seen in the novel by McKee Charnas, Suzy: *The Vampire Tapestries*. London 1980, and in the films *Lifeforce*, directed by Tobe Hooper (1985), and *Red Blooded American Girl*, directed by David Blyth (1990).

<sup>12</sup> Barrie, *Peter Pan*, p. 85.

children's needs or fears, no viable models for negotiating the world, and certainly no protection from that world."<sup>13</sup>

As such the films are predominantly seen as a Reagan era attempt to re-establish the values of the "All American Family" with the newly emergent youth being encouraged to hold the conservative banner high to redress the failures of 60's liberalism. *The Lost Boys* makes this explicit, a point which Sorcha Ni Fhlinn describes:

"The breakdown of the Emerson family in *The Lost Boys* can be largely blamed on the hippie generation, of which the mother, Lucy, is a proud member. In the opening credits of the film, she is crooning to songs such as 'Groovin' on a Sunday Afternoon' and when we first meet her hippie father, we notice he is growing marijuana on his windowsill."<sup>14</sup>

In fact Schumacher's film encapsulates all the concerns of the other films, and so it is time to go to Santa Carla "the murder capital of the world."<sup>15</sup>

The idea for the story came from scriptwriter, James Jeremias, who thought of Peter Pan, from J.M Barrie's novel, as being like a vampire who could fly, and visited people at night, and, as a result, the film was originally going to be about "a bunch of Goonies-type 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade kid vampires", with the Frog Brothers as "chubby 8-year-old Cub Scouts."<sup>16</sup> This was also partially due to the earlier success of Richard Donner's 1985 movie, *The Goonies*, story by Steven Spielberg, as Donner was originally to direct *The Lost Boys*.<sup>17</sup> It was only when Joel Schumacher took charge that the "lost boys" became teenagers. The story itself involves the newly divorced mother, Lucy Emerson,

<sup>13</sup> Gill, Pat: "The Monstrous Years: Teens, Slasher Films, and the Family," in: *Journal of Film and Video*, Vol. 54 No. 4 (Winter 2002), p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Ni Fhlinn, Sorcha: "It's Morning in America,": The Rhetoric of Religion in the Music of *The Lost Boys* and the Deserved Death of the 1980s Vampire', in: Niall Scott (ed.): *The Role of the Monster: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*. Oxford 2009, pp. 147-156, see p. 149.

<sup>15</sup> Graffiti written on the back town sign which we see as the Emerson family enter Santa Carla.

<sup>16</sup> Simon, Alex: "Joel Schumacher: Safe In The Dark" (<http://thehollywoodinterview.blogspot.com/2008/02/joel-schumacher-hollywood-interview.html>). Venice Magazine. (09.05.2010).

<sup>17</sup> Corey Feldman also appeared in both films as Clark "Mouth" Devereaux in *The Goonies* and Edgar Frog in *The Lost Boys*.

taking her two boys, Michael (Jason Patric) and Sam (Corey Hiam) to stay with her father in Santa Carla. Here Michael gets involved with David (Kiefer Sutherland) and the local biker gang, whilst Sam meets the Frog brothers, and self-styled vampire slayers, Edgar (Corey Feldman) and Alan (Jamison Newlander). From here the various threads and themes of the film unravel, and it is to these that I now turn.

As mentioned above one of the main themes that backgrounds *The Lost Boys*, and, indeed, all the other films in this series is the *mise-en-scene* of the absent parents. As Ken Gelder notes, “Youth is now asked to be, or shown to be, capable of managing its own problems. Indeed, in *The Lost Boys*, muddled adolescence is helped from below – by younger kids who know their own minds (precisely because they are not adolescent).”<sup>18</sup> *The Lost Boys*, along with *Fright Night*, *Near Dark*, and *Fright Night II*, all feature single-parent families with the eldest male child being asked in some shape or form to complete or re-make what was once broken, usually in relation to the mother.<sup>19</sup> Michael has to save his mother, Lucy, from the head vampire, Max, and Charley Brewster, from *Fright Night*, has to rescue his mother from the beguiling Jerry Dandrige, whilst Caleb, from *Near Dark*, has to find a replacement maternal figure in the ex-vampire, Mae. This constitutes two intertwined motifs within these films which see the vampire as rite-of-passage but also the family constructed beyond the bounds of blood. The first of these shows the vampire as being an outward manifestation of the adolescent boys’ pent up frustrations and/or sublimated sexuality; the monstrosity of his burgeoning manhood that he cannot contain and so projects it outside of himself into the outside world.<sup>20</sup> This is often shown by the vampire first appearing at the zenith of the boys anguish, such as in *Fright Night*,

<sup>18</sup> Gelder, Ken: *Reading the Vampire*. London 1994, p. 103.

<sup>19</sup> Similar concerns regarding “troubled youth” are also seen in the “Brat Pack” films that were highly popular at this time. Movies such as *The Breakfast Club*, directed by John Hughes (1985), *St. Elmo’s Fire*, directed by Joel Schumacher, and *Pretty in Pink*, directed by Howard Deutch (1986), all featured teenagers struggling with the complications of life, largely through the help of their peers rather than through parental guidance.

<sup>20</sup> This idea is also used in the recent “coming of age” cinematic adaptations of John Ajvide Lindqvist’s novel, *Let the Right One In*, London: Quercus, 2007, *Let the Right One In* directed by Tomas Alfredson (2008) and *Let Me In* directed by Matt Reeves (2010).

*Near Dark*, and *Once Bitten*, or the fact that only the boy, or teenagers involved, can see the vampire, as in *Vamp*, *Once Bitten*, and *My Best Friend is a Vampire*, and to a large extent in *The Lost Boys*. As the boy is responsible for the release of the vampire he can only gain adulthood, and, subsequently, control of himself, through killing it as well, leading to many and varied examples of Oedipal patricide. Rather more interesting is the changing nature of the family shown within this framework.

### **Neverland Family Values**

“Don’t have a mother,’ he said. Not only had he no mother, but he had not the slightest desire to have one. He thought them very over-rated persons.”<sup>21</sup>

Although the majority of the teen-vamps films under discussion can be viewed as the quest for, what Auerbach calls, “the purified family”, *The Lost Boys* actually offers points of subversion within this construction.<sup>22</sup> Whilst the driving imperative of the film seems to be the restoration of the family, which can be seen with Michael becoming the “man of the household” and his adoption of Star, the female love interest, and Laddie, a truly lost little boy, it also offers another version of the family, and not necessarily one that sees the importance of its own continuation, that is between Max and the “lost boys”. Max, played by Edward Herrmann, is the “father” of David and the rest of the gang, and sees Lucy Emerson as the perfect mother to complete his family.<sup>23</sup> As such this posits the family unit as the ideal whether one is human or undead, a point made in *Near Dark* where the family consists entirely of vampires. Here it begins to indicate that family ties are not completely predicated by blood, in terms of shared biology or genetic make-up, but rather in blood, a common ideology or lifestyle. This is seen in the most perfect of family role-models, the Cullens in Stephenie Meyers *The Twilight*

<sup>21</sup> Barrie, *Peter Pan*, p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, p. 168.

<sup>23</sup> It is never made clear whether the rest of the “lost boys” were created by Max or by David.



*Saga*.<sup>24</sup> In the twenty-first century it is the vampire family that shows the way to be to all the dysfunctional human families around them. Curiously, in *The Lost Boys* and in *Near Dark* it is the undead relatives that offer more interesting and even passionate versions of marital bliss and/or domesticity: in Bigelow's film there is true love between the father, Jesse, played by Lance Henriksen, and the mother, Diamondback, played by Jenette Goldstein, and the fact that they have been together for many, many years; whereas all the human relationships have long since failed. Similarly, David and his gang form their own compact unit and have no need for adult intervention either from their "master", Max, or from a surrogate mother such as Lucy. Rob Latham observes:

"The precise relationship between David's gang and Max is never fully made clear: while Max is identified as the 'head' vampire who ostensibly uses David as his pawn to enslave other teens, the few scenes of them together suggest that Max is genuinely afraid of David and not entirely certain of his loyalty."<sup>25</sup>

The "lost boys" signal a very different unit of dependence to the traditional family, denying the authority of adults as well as the need for conventional sexual relationships, even David's "girlfriend", Star, acts more as a lure for Michael than a meaningful partner.<sup>26</sup> The ultimately conservative nature of the films never allow the undead family to flourish but it is interesting to note that the original ending of *The Lost Boys* was to have had Max and the gang re-group in the cave which acted as their lair, here we were to see them beneath a photo from 1900 which, as homage to Stanley Kubrick's *The*

<sup>24</sup> The saga consists of four books *Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse*, and *Breaking Dawn*, published 2005-2008 by Lane, Brown and Company. Each is to be made into a film, and at the time of writing three have been released: *Twilight*, dir. by Catherine Hardwicke (Summit, 2008), *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, dir. by Chris Weitz (Summit, 2009), and *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*, dir. by David Slade (Summit, 2010). *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn, Parts 1&2*, dir. by Bill Condon are to be released in Nov. 2011 and Nov. 2012 respectively.

<sup>25</sup> Latham, Rob: *Consuming Youth: Vampires, Cyborgs, and the Culture of Consumption*. Chicago 2002, p. 145.

<sup>26</sup> A similar sense of the independence of young vampire groups is seen in *The Hamiltons* (The Butcher Brothers: 2006) where, unusually, the vampire brothers and sister are related but require no adult assistance to make their way in the world.

*Shining* (1980), was to picture them in appropriate period costume as an indication that the vampire family never really dies.<sup>27</sup>

As intimated above, the spectre of same sex relations looms large with vampire texts in general, and in *The Lost Boys* in particular. In a re-enactment of J.M. Barrie's earlier narrative, David, like Peter Pan, only has to go off and "collect" new members of his family, as seen in Star and Laddie, rather than undergo the responsibilities of true parenthood and meaningful relationships with the opposite sex. Indeed, within the film itself females are seen as largely ineffectual or worse, as Nina Auerbach describes in regard to Lucy, Sam and Michael's mother, "this silly woman not only loses her sons: the only male authority she provides [Max] turns out to be the head vampire."<sup>28</sup> The result of this is the primacy of relationships between males and, in particular, between that of Michael and David. Christopher Craft in his seminal essay *Kiss Me with those Red Lips* on the latent homosexuality of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* discusses how the homoerotic relationship between Jonathan Harker and Count Dracula becomes sublimated in to the figures of the women within the narrative, here the female figures are dispensed with leaving the obvious and continual sexual tension between the two males.<sup>29</sup> Although we are to believe that David picked Michael as Star's first kill, marking her rite-of-passage to full vampire-hood, it is obvious from their first encounter that David wants to sink his teeth in Michael himself. Whilst the film is configured as symbolic of a coming of age for Michael it plays out more as a continual taunt for him to accept his latent homosexuality. Ken Gelder observes this undercurrent from their first encounter which consists of a series of dares where "David's question, 'How far are you willing to go, Michael?' carries this homosexual subtext. He calls for Michael to 'be one of us' far more insistently than the family of vampires do for Caleb in *Near*

<sup>27</sup> Kubrick's film ended with a photograph of Jack Nicholson's character in period dress from 80 years earlier showing that he is inevitably destined to be reborn over and over again.

<sup>28</sup> Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, p. 168.

<sup>29</sup> Craft, Christopher: "'Kiss Me with Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," in: *Representations*, Fall 1988, 8, pp. 107-133.

*Dark*.<sup>30</sup> Of course, the “us” of the “lost boys” live in a cave that was created by the “quake” in San Francisco, and where all the boys can “hang out together.” It is also the drinking of David’s “fluid” that begins to “turn” Michael, and the resolution of the sexual tension between them only comes when Michael has “staked” David, and the vampire expires with a beatific glow to his face.

Their positioning as gay within the film is further reinforced by the overt heterosexuality of the other “lost boys” in the story, the Frog brothers. Gelder further notes: “the Frog brothers are also juvenile versions of the right-wing vigilante, with their army gear and their manic paranoia (or homophobia).”<sup>31</sup> Their over-determined masculinity is itself configured upon the über-macho stance of film idol Sylvester Stallone who had just appeared to great success in *First Blood* (Kotchoff: 1982) and *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (Cosmatos: 1985), that were largely configured as a reaction to the feminisation of the American male due to the Vietnam War. This is explained by Jacob Smith: “the bodies of male stars take on important semiotic meaning; films from the Reagan years offer the image of a ‘hard body’ in direct contrast to the ‘soft bodies’ of the Carter years.”<sup>32</sup> As such, for all their bumbling, Edgar and Alan Frog come to embody the masculinity and heterosexuality of the “hard body” of the Reagan era; whilst the vampires are the effeminate result of the earlier age of liberalism.<sup>33</sup> This is seen in the decorations of the vampire lair which Latham sees as strangely “retro” and indicative of earlier times: “David and his black-clad gang of heavy-metal punks, are living their own ersatz fantasy of 1960s Dionysiac revels in a music video-style cavern decked out

<sup>30</sup> Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, p. 106.

<sup>31</sup> Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, p.107.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, Jacob: “Seeing Double: Stunt Performance and Masculinity,” in: *Journal of Film and Video*, Vol. 56 No. 3 (Fall 2004), pp. 35-53, see p. 40. See also Jeffords, Susan: *Hard Bodies*. New Brunswick 1994.

<sup>33</sup> The Frog brothers are not the first boy vampire slayers. 12 year old Mark Petrie appeared in Stephen King’s *Salem’s Lot* (1975) as part of the “crew of light” that fought against Kurt Barlow, the vampire king and his hoards. Mark too had to fight his own “lost boy” in the figure of Danny Glick, another teenage boy “turned” by Barlow, and who specifically targets Mark. A similar scenario is seen at the end of Somtow’s, S.P.: *Vampire Junction*. New York 1984, where the main protagonist, the vampire boy, Timmy Valentine, is hunted by two boys, Kyle Gallagher and P.J. Zottoli.

with a giant poster of Jim Morrison.”<sup>34</sup> The vampires make manifest the “soft body” of liberalism and its resultant transgressive or abnormal sexualities, which resultantly tries to corrupt or “turn” others. The “softness” of their body, and the porosity of their sexuality, is also shown in how easy it is to “stake” them, as they have no firm borders or edges (hence also why they explode and disintegrate so readily). The transgressive nature of the vampire in the movie is not confined to just family and sexuality but also to the wider ideological framework of American capitalism; I now turn to the “eat or be eaten” world of consumerism.

### Consuming Neverland

“Pan, who and what art thou?’ he cried huskily.  
‘I’m youth, I’m joy,’ Peter answered at a venture, ‘I’m a little bird that has broken  
out of the egg.’”<sup>35</sup>  
“Edgar Frog: ‘All right, here’s what you do: get yourself a good sharp stake and  
drive it right through his heart.’  
Sam Emerson: ‘I can’t do that; he’s my brother.’  
Alan Frog: ‘OK, we’ll come over and do it for you.’  
Sam Emerson: ‘No!’  
Edgar Frog: ‘You’d better get yourself a garlic T-shirt, buddy, or it’s your fune-  
ral.’”<sup>36</sup>

Possibly more than any of the other films in the teen-vamp series *The Lost Boys* is created around the world of youth to the total exclusion of adults. Like Barrie’s vision of Neverland eighty years earlier, Michael and David inhabit a world where adult intrusion is not only to be actively avoided but summarily dispatched. Max is a figure not dissimilar to Captain Hook who is equally pursued by the gaping jaws of time. As such the *mise-en-scene* of the film can be seen to pulsate simultaneously with the lure of youth but also be alluring to youth. Rob Latham views this with a particularly post-Marxist and Frankfurt School perspective but his categories give a good indication of the concerns that come to light within the film:

<sup>34</sup> Latham, *Consuming Youth*, p. 62.

<sup>35</sup> Barrie, *Peter Pan*, p. 113.

<sup>36</sup> *The Lost Boys*.

“It refers to (1) an empirical youth culture of consumption, literal young people and their consumerist values and practices; (2) an appetitive impulse to (metaphorically) consume youth, through images and other commodities; and (3) a general cultural obsession, bespeaking an ideological project (as in capitalist society is ‘consumed by youth’).”<sup>37</sup>

*The Lost Boys* sites this ongoing three-part dialectic of consumption, of the various levels of consuming and being consumed, specifically within the body of the teenage vampire, as Catherine Spooner further explains, “the vampire as metaphor for youth consumption is always inherently double, simultaneously offering exploitation and empowerment.”<sup>38</sup> Though predominantly seen in the interaction between the “lost boys” and the boardwalk, which Latham extends to include the notion of the shopping mall, it is also tied into the fabric of the movie itself, even into the soundtrack of the opening credits. Beginning with Echo and the Bunnymen covering “People are Strange”, written by the Doors, it establishes the soundtrack as essential, not only to the overarching meaning of the film but also to, according to Ni Fhlinn, “its absolute success in capturing the zeitgeist.”<sup>39</sup> As such, it ties it into its vampiric predecessor, *The Hunger*, which makes constant use of music to create atmosphere and a rock-video ambiance, but also into its youth cinema peers, *The Breakfast Club* and *St. Elmo’s Fire*, all of which featured memorable and distinctive soundtracks.<sup>40</sup> This establishes not only equivalence to youth culture in general but to David’s vampire gang in particular, since their appearance is often announced or accompanied by other rock leitmotifs, such as “Cry Little Sister”, performed by Gerard McMann, and whose vampire lair is adorned by a large poster of the Doors’ front man,

<sup>37</sup> Latham, *Consuming Youth*, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Spooner, Catherine: “Review: [untitled],” in: *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 99 No. 2 (Apr., 2004), pp. 481-482, see p. 482.

<sup>39</sup> Ni Fhlinn, “Morning America,” p. 147.

<sup>40</sup> This is in marked contrast to the first American cinematic vampire *Dracula* (1931) by Tod Browning which is the first main stream sound horror film and is renowned for its very restrained use of large periods of silence. There is an interesting discussion of this in Robert Spadoni’s, *Uncanny Bodies: The Coming of Sound Film and the Origins of the Horror Genre*. Berkeley 2007.

Jim Morrison. This creates a form of consumable youth within the movie soundtrack, not only in terms of its production of desirability through up-to-the-minute coolness of recognisable music – “People are Strange” by the Doors, for *The Lost Boys*, “Don’t You Forget About Me”, by Simple Minds, for *The Breakfast Club*, and “St Elmo’s Fire” by John Parr, for *St. Elmo’s Fire* – but also in the ability to then buy the soundtrack. This is a feature that is even more prominent in teen film production now, particularly in terms of the teen-vamp saga, *Twilight*, where not only has the author dedicated the books to the band Muse, which has revitalised their career, but also in the fact the soundtrack is released before the film itself to increase anticipation for the subsequent movie premiere.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps, then, the subtitle of Murnau’s 1922 adaption of Stoker’s novel is even more prescient in the use of the word “symphony” highlighting even then the undead connection between the vampire and music?

If the music of the children of the night were not enough example, there is the “mall-world” itself. Rob Latham describes it thus:

“In *The Lost Boys*, the central site of this militant assertion of empowered independence is the Santa Carla boardwalk, a combination open air mall, gaming arcade, and amusement park. Always aswarm with throngs of teens, this venue provides several carnivalesque montages throughout the film, snapshots of sun-drenched festive abandon, with kids leisurely browsing (and shoplifting), playing videogames, riding roller coasters, cruising for dates or for trouble, and otherwise acting as if they owned the world.”<sup>42</sup>

Whilst Latham sites the boardwalk in Santa Carla as at the battlefront of the consumerist assault upon youth culture, the vampire gang themselves partake very little, or not at all, in the act of actually buying or consuming goods. Apart from trinkets left over from the collapsed hotel within which they live, the only things they own are their clothes and their motorbikes. Of course,

<sup>41</sup> The dedication at the front of *Breaking Dawn*, New York 2008, the last book in Stephenie Meyer’s saga reads “And thanks to my favourite band, the very aptly named Muse, for providing a saga’s worth of inspiration.”

<sup>42</sup> Latham, *Consuming Youth*, pp. 66-67.

one assumes, like Count Dracula before them, they come across their possessions through appropriation rather than acquisition. The “lost boys” become an example of resistance that the rest of the youth of Santa Carla seem unable to refuse. This is seen most pertinently in their visits to the video store which is run by the head vampire, Max. Both Latham and Laurence Rickels see this as the prime focus, or “videocentric” eye of capitalist intervention and potential domination within the film; and whilst the majority of Santa Carla are taken in by Max’s consumerist proclamation that “we have it all, “David and his compatriots staunchly, and provocatively, resist”.<sup>43</sup> On entering Max’s store, David’s gang wander in and intimidate other customers, whilst idly fingering merchandise causing Max to shout “I told you not to come in here anymore”.<sup>44</sup> In response they smirk at their “leader” and slowly leave the store. Their contradictory nature makes the positioning of the “lost boys” difficult to resolve, for whilst being agents of Max’s in his attempt to consume Santa Carla, they also resist him, and although offering a point of opposition against needless consumption they exemplify, in their outsider fashion, the coolness and style mark them out as role models to be copied. They then become consumed and consumable, and yet offer no true consummation beyond the pleasure of the moment. Consequently, their enactment of consumption locks them in a here and now that can never be resolved.<sup>45</sup> However, another example of consumption within the film shows one that is inextricably linked to the notion of evolving time that continually refers to the past in the present – that of the Frog brothers.

### **Now and Neverland**

“Of course. You have to invite them inside. He knew that from his monster magazines, the ones his mother was afraid might damage or warp him in some way.”<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Rickels, *The Vampire Lectures*, p. 209.

<sup>44</sup> *The Lost Boys*.

<sup>45</sup> This notion of immortality through being “caught” in time is explained by Ludwig Wittgenstein: “If by eternity is understood not endless temporal duration but timelessness, then he lives eternally who lives in the present”, in: Wittgenstein, Ludwig: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London 1922, §6.4311.

<sup>46</sup> King, Stephen: *Salems Lot*. London 1984, p. 250.

Edgar Frog: 'You think you really know what's happening here, don't you? Well, I'll tell you something, you don't know shit, buddy.'  
Alan Frog: 'Yeah? You think we just work at a comic book store for our folks, huh?'  
Sam Emerson: 'Actually, I thought it was a bakery.'  
Edgar Frog: 'This is just a cover; we're dedicated to a higher purpose. We're fighters for truth, justice, and the American way.'<sup>47</sup>

The sort of consumption embodied by Edgar and Alan Frog is seemingly not as explicit as that of the head vampire, and yet their comic shop is also part of the boardwalk. Their act of resistance is markedly different to that of David and his gang, where they actively "not buy" goods as a form of vampiric *flaneur*-ism, the Frog brothers embody the discerning shopper, specifically seen in their range of "collectable" items. Unlike Max they do not offer everything, but they offer the "right" thing.<sup>48</sup> As Stacey Abbott observes:

"Films like *The Lost Boys* and *Fright Night* feature a horror film fan as the supreme vampire-killer. In *The Lost Boys*, while the adults are blind to the strange and fatal occurrences around them, the teenage comic book aficionados Edgar and Alan Frog act as commando vampire-killers, they instruct Sam and Michael about how to protect themselves from the vampires, what weapons can be used, and how to save Michael from his transformation into a vampire."<sup>49</sup>

The kind of reflexive knowledge in terms of both cinema history and actual vampire lore, examples the kind of post-modern narrative that structures most of the teen-vamp films at this time, and one that predominately sites the teenager as the only source of this knowledge.<sup>50</sup> The twelve-year-old Mark Petrie from Stephen King's *Salem's Lot* only survives through knowledge accrued from comic books, and, as a consequence, causes the adult characters around him to name him "Van Helsing."<sup>51</sup> Such inter-textual

<sup>47</sup> Conversation when Sam first meets the Frog brothers in *The Lost Boys*.

<sup>48</sup> Their "collectable" comic's include "Vampires Everywhere" and "Destroy All Vampires", titles that could save a boys life.

<sup>49</sup> Abbott, *Celluloid Vampires*, p. 183.

<sup>50</sup> The *Scream* franchise of horror films is explicitly based on this kind of knowledge.

<sup>51</sup> King, *Salem's Lot*, p. 334.



knowledge harks back to the comedy *Love at First Bite*, and to some extent Polanski's earlier *The Fearless Vampire Killers* (1966), where it is not just enough to have knowledge of earlier texts but of wider popular culture. Resultantly, in Dragoti's film we see Dracula feeling tipsy after drinking the blood of a drunken bum on the streets of New York, and being psychoanalysed by a distant relative of Van Helsing.<sup>52</sup>

A similar knowingness is seen in the dialogue of Edgar and Alan who are equally aware of the culture around them. When attacked by the young boy, Laddie, who has turned into a vampire, Alan Frog says "Holy shit! It's the attack of Eddie Munster!"<sup>53</sup> Edgar also later describes Max's intention on creating a vampire family "Great! The Bloodsucking Brady Bunch!"<sup>54</sup>

Also indicative of this reflexivity is a certain amount of self-referencing, not just to the vampire genre but also in regard to their own positioning as being representatives of youth, which consequently produces exchanges such as this one:

"Edgar Frog: 'You did the right thing by calling us. Does your brother sleep a lot?'

Sam Emerson: 'Yeah, all day.'

Alan Frog: 'Does the sunlight freak him out?'

Sam Emerson: 'Uh, he wears sunglasses in the house.'

Edgar Frog: 'Bad breath, long fingernails?'

Sam Emerson: 'Yeah, his fingernails are a little bit longer, um, he always had bad breath, though.'

Alan Frog: 'He's a vampire all right.'"<sup>55</sup>

This kind of snappy dialogue, of course, informed subsequent narratives in the genre, particularly Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), and even to some extent the HBO series created by Alan Ball, *True*

<sup>52</sup> Here he is called Dr. Jeffrey Rosenberg as his ancestor, Fritz van Helsing, changed the family name for professional reasons.

<sup>53</sup> *The Lost Boys*.

<sup>54</sup> *The Lost Boys*.

<sup>55</sup> *The Lost Boys*.

*Blood* (2008-Present).<sup>56</sup> This is not to say that the vampires do not possess such witty reflexivity themselves, but in terms of *The Lost Boys* it is possibly the Frog brothers who ultimately find their place in the land of consumerism more easily than the undead teenager, possibly because they are doomed to one day grow up and so naturally pass out of the Neverland of youth whereas the adolescent undead, doomed to remain forever young, can never leave.<sup>57</sup>

#### **Conclusion: Forever Neverland**

These are just some of the themes and influences that have flowed into, through, and out of the vampiric lens that *The Lost Boys* is; there are many, many more. It is slickly produced, and the unique blend of vampire and youth still makes it an object of desire and nostalgia, appealing both to “lost boys” that have left Neverland, and also to those who are still negotiating their way through its uncertain terrain. More than anything it is a significant milestone on the journey that began with Louis in Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* where our dawning “sympathy for the devil” has seen the vampire become a figure that we admire rather than abho. The new breed of “lost boys” as embodied by Edward Cullen in *The Twilight Saga* and Stefan Salvatore in *The Vampire Diaries* no longer want our blood or our souls but, through their special vampiric embrace, want to show us that no matter how old we get we never really have to grow old.

<sup>56</sup> *True Blood* is adapted from characters created in Charlene Harris’s *Southern Vampire Mysteries* series of novels that began in 2001.

<sup>57</sup> The prescience of this is possibly seen in the sequels to *The Lost Boys*, *Lost Boys: The Tribe* (2007), and *Lost Boys: The Thirst* (2010) both of which starred Corey Feldman, proving that vampire-slayers do indeed age and although he may be “lost” he is certainly no longer a “boy.”

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**Biographical note**

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