

How odd to meet a vampire with such strong ties to the living, to family, to the woman she loves. Gilda speaks of turning the brothel into a college for women. With eyes to the future, Gilda prepares for her own death and eventually lets The Girl walk in her steps, with Bird, into their shared darkness as lovers.

One of my favorites in this collection is Kathleen Forrest's *O Captain, My Captain*. This futuristic story takes our heroine, Lieutenant T. M. Harper on a four month voyage with the reclusive Captain Drake. The prose is unhurried, provocative. When we first meet Drake we feel her power. "The tall pale figure in the doorway--dark-haired, clad in black trousers and a high collared gray shirt--possessed a dramatic beauty so androgynous that Harper could not have guessed her sex unless she had known beforehand."

While their space craft spins through the galaxy, Harper is drawn into intimate conversations with Drake, who prods her with countless questions about herself. This leads to wonderful, erotic sexual encounters as well. It is the androgynous quality, the boyish woman, or feminine young man that Harper is lost in. Drake is the most confident of any of these "bad" women. Her skill as lover is revealed in Harper's constant cravings and desire. In Drake we find a vampire who nourishes herself on something other than blood.

The space voyage becomes for Harper as equally dreamlike in her inner explorations with Drake. Eventually she catches a glimpse of Drake in her vampire state. This creates a tension, a loathing for what has passed between them. It also forces Drake into revealing her secrets, her life story. Harper is aghast that for Drake she is food, that their sex is a form of nourishment. Drake responds, "Your body is not my food. Your pleasure is my food."

There are eight stories in this collection. Most are written by contemporary lesbian writers, familiar to us. *Dracula Retold*, a funny feminist twist, starts off the collection. Pat Califa's *The Vampires*, is set in a S&M bar, Purgatory. The introduction by editor Pam Keesey, delivers a nice mix of personal exploration of lesbian vampire lore and historical information on the origins of such creatures. "Although Stoker's vampire bears the name *Dracula*, there is reason to believe that the activities that take place in the novel are actually based on the life of Elizabeth Bathory, a Hungarian countess of the sixteenth century, brought to trial for the torture and murder of between 150 and 650 young women and girls...Trial records confirm that the countess and her accomplices killed an extraordinary number of young women after having tortured them, and it was said that these murderess gave her a certain erotic pleasure. the victims were often stripped

naked, and most were bled. There were also rumors that she bathed in the blood of her victims."

The introduction is filled with chilling information, adding to our lesbian vampire mystique. Keesey writes, "the frequent references to Bathory's sexual preference and her associations with cross-dressing are particularly interesting, especially in the light of the use of her character in the later development of the lesbian vampire image." As noted by Keesey, these stories are not included in other anthologies because they are not of mainstream appeal. This collection is an attempt to present both the old myths and the renewed versions. Sometimes frightening, even horrifying, and sometimes erotically stimulating, these stories add to our image of ourselves and our sisters.

Whatever your reading preference is, include this on your summer list. Keesey ends the introduction with an invitation. "Superstition has it that you must invite a vampire to cross the threshold before the vampire can enter. I'd like to invite you to cross this threshold and meet the vampires that await you within." ▼

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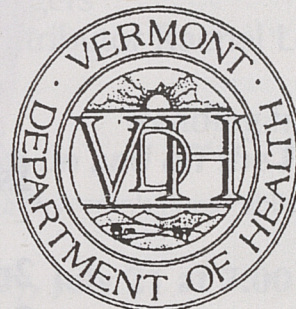
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