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Self and Society in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*,
A Pagan Place, and *Amongst Women*
by Erin Lott, '96

Since James Joyce published *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in 1914-1915, Irish fiction has been overshadowed by his dominant voice. Yet themes found in *Portrait* remain the themes in the 1970 *Pagan Place* and the 1990 *Amongst Women*. Something in Irish fiction calls for these themes to be renewed again and again. Characters within these novels attempt to define their own selves in an oppressive society. Through the rejection of both inner and outer forces and the use of language and perception, these characters are either actively devising their own sense of self or passively allowing the outside reality and society determine such a self for them.

For Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait* the struggle to find the sense of self is an active one. The idea of the self is distinct from the social and sensual and religious forces that are surrounding him at all times. Eventually he concludes that the self is formed through artistic endeavors. Although Stephen has not completely solidified his sense of self by the end of the novel, he has come quite far from the original ideas of self that were forming in his mind at the grown-up fight at Christmas dinner. From the beginning of the novel, Stephen understands that he is in search of something; he is just unsure of where or how he will find it:

He wanted to meet in the real world the insubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld. He did not know where to seek it or how: but a premonition which led him on told him that this image would, without any overt act of his, encounter him (67).

Reality and identity formation is dichotomized as inner versus the outer throughout the novel. The first chapter focuses on the outer social forces that are working on the formation of identity: through both the fight at Christmas where Stephen begins to glimpse the difficulties and inadequacies of politics and through the appeal to Father Conmee. Through both experiences he learns that he can and will be in control of his own social influences. The second chapter focuses on the inner force of sexuality. In his attempts to gain his own inner peace through his sexuality, Stephen instead comes to find turmoil in attempts to gain a sense of self through someone else. He then turns to religion. Religion as well fails him. Religion burdens him with guilt and inadequacies so that he cannot move forward in his own quest for self. It is not until he watches the girl wading on the beach that he can decisively move towards

becoming himself and an artist. Watching her is an almost sexual experience, but is removed from the earlier sexuality that Stephen has already rejected. Instead this act of sensuality is his own:

Her image had passed into his soul forever and no word had broken the holy silence of his ecstasy. Her eyes had called him and his soul had leaped at the call. To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life! (186).

Through his rejection of sensuality, social influences, language, and religion, Stephen has formed his own self, a self that observes and then recreates from such observations--an artist:

The soul is born, he said vaguely, first in those moments I told you of. It has a slow and dark birth, more mysterious than the birth of the body. When the soul of a man is born in their country where there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets (220).

Stephen comes to understand that the self is a fusion of both the inner and the outer. Stephen becomes the master of his own self through language and through perception. Joyce, using Stephen as his own agent and artist, uses the language and perceptions of "stream of consciousness" to define Stephen. Stephen by virtue of this type of language and perception becomes the artist that Joyce is. The book is seen only through the eyes of Joyce/Stephen. We know only as much as they know. Our perception is their perception of the world. Stephen himself is a product of the language that surrounds him, be that the language of sensuality, religion, society. Stephen wants to push past this language, to break down their barriers by becoming an observer--precisely why it is so important that there was only silence to greet the moment he comes to understand his calling as an artist. Yet most importantly through the rejection of social influences, sensuality, language, and religion, Stephen is able to become an active agent in his own self-creation.

On the other end of the spectrum in Edna O'Brien's novel *A Pagan Place*. The book, like *Portrait*, returns to the Irish childhood. The book is split into three parts: 1) the child world dealing with authority, 2) the pregnancy and punishment of Emma, and 3) the priest who takes advantage of the protagonist and her subsequent retreat to the convent. I would like to focus on the last part of the book in the most detail, but it should be understood that the denial of self (the mother's sense of self as well as the two daughters' senses of self) by the protagonist's father throughout the first two sections of the book only leads up to the end.

The title of the book *A Pagan Place* is a direct reference to a fort from the protagonist's childhood:

It was a pagan place and circular. Druids had their rites there long before your mother and father or his mother and father or her mother and father or anyone would heard tell of. But Mr. Wattle said that was not all, said he had seen a lady ungirdled there one night on his way home from physicking the donkey. The ground inside was shifty, a swamp where lilies bloomed. They were called bog lilies. The donkey went there to die and no wonder because the shelter was ample. No one would go in to bury it. It decomposed. The smell grew worse and worse and more and more widespread. The dogs carried the members around, the bits, big bones and little bones and they were scattered everywhere and in the end were as brown and as odourless as twigs (15).

There comes a connection between paganism, sexuality, and death. Purity is Christianity, ordered and known. Thus, sexuality itself must become dark, mysterious, unknown. These connections are what the protagonist fights against and eventually falls a passive victim to in the end.

In the third section of the book, the protagonist has her first sexual encounter. Unlike her sister's first sexual experience, the protagonist's is somewhat perverted. It is with a priest. Unlike Stephen Dedalus who is able to use religion as a sort of ordering device of his universe that he can eventually reject because of how it inhibits his sense of self, the protagonist sees religion as an absolute. The priest ruins this moral absolute, this order of the universe. Sadly, the protagonist becomes immobilized by the dilemma of her own sexuality and cannot reach the mythology of pure morality. The protagonist cannot settle for anything less than the absolute. Thus she joins the convent in order to assuage her own feelings of guilt. Within the walls of the convent the protagonist can reorganize the society that had failed her. She becomes a passive victim to the chaotic society that surrounds her. She has no hopes of transcending such a society because the society has become so far removed from her life. Society becomes buffered by the walls of the convent, and the protagonist never has to deal within its realms again.

Like Joyce, O'Brien uses the stream of consciousness. However, this does not liberate this protagonist. Instead, she is locked within her own consciousness and cannot reach out to others or allow them within. In addition, she uses other people's language throughout the novel. For example:

You tried to whistle. Only men should whistle [parent's voice]. The Blessed Virgin blushed when women whistled and likewise when women crossed their legs [voice from the church]. It intrigued you thinking of the Blessed Virgin having to blush so frequently [protagonist's own voice]. The bird that had the most lifelike whistle was the curlew [teacher's voice]. The curlew was a grallatorial bird, indigenous to sedge and damp places, more partial to wading than flying [a book] (99).

The outside influence is relevant in her own thought processes. Not even her thoughts can become her

own.

In McGahern's *Amongst Women* there is the same sense of outside versus inside as there is in *Portrait* as well as the passive victim (*A Pagan Place*) versus the active creator of society and self (*Portrait*). In post-colonial Ireland, there remains a sense of abuse, of rejection and failure of society that is projected onto the family via Moran. Like Stephen, the members of the family, Moran included, find liberation and a sense of their own identity. However, unlike Stephen, they find it not through observation and eventual love of oneself, but through pain and suffering. Pain leads them to who they really are and thus to liberation.

Moran has a deep sense of hatred, but he is not exactly sure what he hates. Nationalism remains a deeply problematic aspect for Moran. During the civil war, there was a joyous struggle, something worth fighting for. Yet instead of liberation after colonization, simply a reflected power-structure emerges. The structure set about by the British remains the same, only with Irish in control. Nothing has changed at the fundamental level, only on the surface. Within the power structure, there are two evil forces for Moran, the priests and the doctors. Moran's views on this new emergence of the bourgeoisie class are that at least the priests have to pay for their power with celibacy.

As in the other novels, sexuality itself becomes a way of suppressing the self. Michael's sexual experiences with Nell at the beach are completely one-sided experiences.

He pulled down his clothes over his thighs and entered her as she had shown them on their first night, very gently and a little timidly, in spite of the terrible urging of his need. Above them the wind whipped only at the highest tussocks and the ocean sounded far away. When he entered her for a third time she was ready to search for her own pleasure and he was now able to wait. Such was her strength that he was frightened. She shouted, seized him roughly at the hips, and forced him to move; and when it was over she opened her eyes and with her hands held his face for a quick, grateful kiss that he couldn't comprehend (105).

During the sexual experience, the natural world is far away. The wind is only at the highest tussocks and the ocean, although right beside them feels miles away. The experience is a singular one for the two of them, and yet they are removed from each other. Her force scares him and he does not comprehend her gratitude. After the experience McGahern goes on to describe the surroundings:

The weak sun stood high above them. Feeling damp and cold, they dressed, shook the sand out of their shoes and raincoats and climbed back down to the shore. There was not even a dog chasing a stick along the whole empty strand, only several birds walking sedately along the tideline which had now come much further up on the beach. As if

they had set out on a journey they felt morally bound to complete, they walked the whole way back past the cannon as far as the ruined church on the opposite point (105).

The experience ends with the image of the ruined church. Religion figures its way into sexuality again. Yet religion is ruined by this selfish form of sexuality that goes nowhere in the identification of self. They seek to find sexual freedom, but even that fails them. There is this imaginative quality in the book that somehow sex will set them all free. But meaning is not found within sex.

Self is formed, for Moran's children, through the rejection of the society that Moran has set up for them within the walls of his home. They reject his sense of religiousness, his sexual repression, and his desire to never leave the home or to leave Ireland. For Moran, if he could not have gained liberation through the civil war, then he chose to create his own little nation walled within the home. Yet, this separate nation idea suffocates the family. Constantly, McGahern shows the contrast of the private versus the public: the public (in terms of shared with all the members of the family) haymaking and Christmas dinner contrasted with the private desires of each of the family members. It is not until the end of the novel that the public realm and the private realm can fuse for the children.

Moran's dying words are "Shut up." These are whispered as the family circles around his bed in their public (within the family) utterance of the Rosary. Perhaps Moran understands that the rosary is not being said on his terms with him in the lead, and this disturbs him. Perhaps he knows that this is all for his benefit and as the new generation of Irish they will not continue the Rosary after he is dead, and he does not want them to even bother this one last time for him. Perhaps Moran realized that ultimately the religion has failed him. That it has not kept a sense of order that he (like the protagonist in *A Pagan Place*) wanted it to keep. Nonetheless the family continues their recitation. Once Moran is dead, and the funeral has finished, there is a joy in the family. The public of the family domain has become part of their past. They can move within the new public domains of Dublin and London and all the various places in between and allow their private lives to become fused with their new independent public ones. No longer will the children be inhibited from merging the two for the sake of Moran, who wanted to keep the private thoughts and desires of each child distinct from the public domain of the family and the public domain of Dublin or London or even the small town they live in. It isn't until his death that they can become active agents of their own sense of self. Everything leading up to his death had been either the passive acceptance of the public and private realms that Moran had defined or it was an active refusal and the eventual alienation from the family as it was with Luke.

Unlike *A Pagan Place* and *Portrait*, *Amongst Women* is not written in a stream of consciousness.

In the other two novels we know only as much as the protagonists know. However, in *Amongst Women* we know much more with the omniscient narrator. Yet there is still a sense of limited perception, for the point of view remains within the house. We never see the lives of the children in Dublin or London. Even the point of view makes a distinction between the public world of Dublin and London that cannot be dealt with and the more private (although remaining public in terms of the family) world of the home.

Sexuality, religion and outside forces play strong roles in the sense of self in all three of these modern Irish novels. It is through the active rejection of those three forces that the protagonists can become complete within their own ideas of self. Yet only some of the characters are able to reject those outside forces. Some fail. It is through active reordering of society and self that individuals emerge in these forms of Irish literature. Without such reordering, there is only the retreat into what has already been established, and progress towards a more complete and individualized self cannot continue. However, it is only Stephen who is able to walk away at the end of novel with all of his flaws knowing that he created himself. The others, although the ones in *Amongst Women* have a sense of self, had their identities formed for them.

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Lesbian Vampires, Goddess Traditions, and the
Reclamation of Lesbian Herstory
by Anne Heath, '98

Lesbian vampire lore is closely associated with Goddess-based religious traditions. As Pam Keesey explains in the introduction to *Dark Angels*, her anthology of lesbian vampire stories: "The roots of the vampire can be found in early images of the Goddess. Vampires, like the Goddess, are associated with blood, life, death, and rebirth" (11-12). The three representations of the Goddess, "the young woman, the life-giving mother, and the aging wisewoman" (12) are all evident in lesbian vampire lore. To facilitate the examination of the appearances of Goddess traditions in lesbian vampire stories, it will first help to explain the Goddess traditions and how they have been repressed and misrepresented. Second, the use of vampire imagery as a metaphor for lesbianism will be explored. Once these explanations have laid the groundwork, then the appearances of the three aspects of the Goddess in lesbian vampire lore will be examined. Finally, I will discuss how the legends of lesbian vampires and Goddess-based concepts have been reappropriated by a feminist and/or lesbian audience.

With the rise of Judeo-Christian beliefs Goddess traditions and all that they espoused were repressed and misrepresented. The importance of women, their sexuality, and the lunar-based cycles of life and death were replaced with a very male-centric perspective of the world. Everything previously associated with Goddess traditions was demonized. In the introduction of another anthology of lesbian vampire stories, *Daughters of Darkness*, Pam Keesey explains this phenomenon: "Goddesses embody all that is evil in Judeo-Christian philosophy: they are female, sexual, pagan, and embrace death as a part of the cycle of life. These women are not holy; these women are monsters" (8).

Also repressed and misrepresented in the contemporary world are lesbian women. Their sexual autonomy directly threatens supposed male prerogatives. Lesbian women threaten to subvert all that the patriarchal society holds dear--male dominance based on the possession and subjugation of female sexuality for the purpose of ensuring proper lineage. Lesbian women have often been presented as either masculine-looking mutants or (possibly to the titillation of heterosexual men) as excessively sexual, lustful creatures who prey on innocent, naive young women.

This latter image of lesbian women is that which can be associated with female vampires. In *Vampires and Violets*, her book about lesbians in film, Andrea Weiss explains some of the cultural attitudes surrounding the equating of female vampires with lesbians:

Merging two kinds of sexual outlaws, the lesbian vampire is more than simply a negative stereotype. She is a complex and ambiguous figure, at once an image of death and an object of desire, drawing on profound subconscious fears that the living have toward the dead, that men have toward women [and that mainstream society has toward homosexuals], while serving as a focus for repressed fantasies (84).

In light of this cultural baggage, lesbian vampires have a particularly interesting history. Female vampires have traditionally been presented as lustful, destructive, wanton women obsessed with blood, lust, and sexuality. It is with this negative image of the female vampire that lesbian women have been conveniently demonized. The vampire metaphor makes it clear that sexual relations between women are inherently destructive. Lesbian vampire stories depict "a consensual relationship between two women as inherently pathological, with the self-preservation of the one appealing to the self-destructiveness of the other. One woman's survival is always at the other's expense" (Weiss 104).

Pam Keesey clearly explains how the female vampire came to represent popular beliefs about lesbian women: the female vampire "is so closely associated with women's sexual and social improprieties, it's no wonder that the female vampire came to be equated with the lesbian in the sexually repressive atmosphere of nineteenth century Europe" (*Daughters of Darkness* 8-9). Weiss extends this statement when she explains a theory forwarded by Lillian Faderman in *Surpassing the Love of Men*. As Weiss explains it, Faderman connects the emergence of the female vampire as a metaphor for lesbianism with the pathologizing of women's romantic friendships in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. "The vampire metaphor, Faderman asserts, served to enforce the transition from socially accepted close female friendships to the redefinition of such relationships as deviant" (87).

The use of female vampires as a convenient tool to demonize lesbian women reveals a deep social fear--that of women's ability to penetrate. The female vampire *penetrates* her victims with her teeth, thus confusing the gender-based boundaries of inserter and receptor.

Medical case histories in the early twentieth century reveal deep anxieties about the possibility of female penetration. In the lesbian vampire story, this anxiety has been displaced and refocused on the mouth, another "feminine" sexual orifice which combines the "masculine" ability to penetrate, via the teeth. Thus the vampire embodies age-old popular fears of women which have been expressed through the image of the "vagina dentata," the vagina with teeth, the penetrating woman (Weiss 91).

The association of female vampires with lesbian women clearly demonstrates deep cultural anxieties concerning women's sexuality. Women who possess sexual desire or aggressiveness are perceived as

threatening to the patriarchal, heterosexist paradigm. Lesbian women not only offend deep-rooted anxieties regarding the sexual appetites of women, but they also offend deep-rooted social fears of same-sex relations. As a result of such fears, the dominant culture has found it useful to demonize lesbian women and cast them as abnormal and outside of usual and acceptable human experience. Therefore it is fitting that female vampirism acts as a metaphor for lesbianism.

As has been established, lesbian vampire lore is closely associated with Goddess traditions. Both Goddess-based religions and lesbian vampires are concerned with the cycles of life and death. An important element in the cycles of life and death is blood. "Blood, of course, is the very essence of life. Along with water and oxygen, it is one of the most important fluids that make life on this planet possible. Blood always had an important symbolic power" (Keesey, *Dark Angels* 11). Blood embodies very important symbolic, as well as literal, powers for both the Goddess and lesbian vampire. For the Goddess, blood, especially menstrual blood, represents life. As Pam Keesey explains:

Menstrual blood, also known as lunar blood, was considered to be especially powerful because it gave life, not only by coursing through the veins of the living, but also through the miracle of birth. Many believed that blood contained the life-essence: the soul. That women could shed blood without injury contributed to this mysterious and sacred essence (*Dark Angels* 11).

Blood for the vampire also represents life--the vampire must rely on the blood of the living in order to remain in their realm. "Vampires are most often thought of as revenants--those who come back from the dead--and therefore need the blood of the living to maintain their undead state" (Keesey, *Dark Angels* 10).

The Goddess has been honored in her three countenances: the young woman whose sexuality was held sacred and for whom sex was a form of divine union; the life-giving, middle-aged woman who took the dead into her womb and prepared them for rebirth; and the aging wisewoman who was seen as a devouring mother (Keesey, *Dark Angels* 12). Accordingly, many of the representations of lesbian vampires included in both of Pam Keesey's anthologies fall into one of these three categories. The stories that fall into the first category, that of the young virgin, are the most non-traditional of all. They present the lesbian-oriented vampire as a gentle, caring woman who participates in sex and blood-letting only as an act of love and reciprocity. The stories which can be grouped into the second category honor women's regenerative power; these women help each other become healthy and revitalized through blood-letting and blood-sharing (*Dark Angels* 17). Their blood-sharing is a covenant offering "protection, purification, and salvation" (*Dark Angels* 11). The third and final image of the Goddess is

the easiest to cast as the lustful, destructive lesbian vampire. She is a woman obsessed with blood, lust, and sexuality. She is a "wanton woman whose sexuality brings destruction, the cruel and terrifying woman as death personified, the woman whose need leads to a wasting away of those around her" (*Dark Angels* 15).

"Lilith," written by Robbi Sommers and included in *Daughters of Darkness* is a lesbian vampire story which represents this third aspect of the Goddess. It is a story of the traditional evil vampire. "Set in the dark streets and mythic underside of New Orleans," (Keesey 16) "Lilith" is the story of a happy lesbian couple torn apart by a demonical and destructive vampire. Lovers Kay and Francine happen upon a tarot-card reader named Miss Mattie while wandering Burton Street, on which they had been accidentally delivered by the taxi-driver who misunderstood Francine's pronunciation of Bourbon Street. Miss Mattie warns them of impending doom--their relationship is soon to be destroyed when Francine is lured away by an incredibly captivating woman. Miss Mattie tells Kay that when Francine returns she will be an altered woman and warns her not to look into her former lover's eyes. To prevent this catastrophe altogether Miss Mattie advises them to leave New Orleans at once.

Dismissing Miss Mattie's advice as merely tourist-baiting mysticism, Kay and Francine successfully make their way to Bourbon Street where they enjoy a fun night of music, dancing, and drinking. Later that night they end up relaxing in the lounge of their hotel. Francine soon finds herself mesmerized by an auburn-haired, creamy-skinned woman clad in a black silk dress.

Francine felt hypnotized. It was almost as if the woman had been waiting--waiting for Francine's eyes to finally find her--patiently sitting alone and waiting for that very moment. And although Francine could vaguely see her eyes through the net, it seemed as if they were imploring Francine to meet her gaze. Francine felt somewhat dizzy. She could hear a faint humming somewhere, perhaps in the very heart of her soul. A tingling, a warmth, an excitement overcame her. Without turning away, the woman carefully lifted the veil--exposing first the full lips, then the chiseled nose, and finally, those burning, deep eyes (140).

Kay, unable to see what had Francine so captivated, angrily goes up to bed while leaving her lover in the lounge alone. Immediately after Kay's departure, the mysterious woman approaches Francine and introduces herself as Lilith. Francine unsuccessfully tries to break Lilith's hypnotizing gaze. Although she feels a strange nagging that she is forgetting something, someone who is waiting for her, Francine accepts the enchantress's invitation to leave the lounge. Up in a strange hotel room, Francine is seduced by Lilith's intense sexuality. Francine is drawn into passionate lovemaking. At the point of her climax, Francine feels Lilith's sharp teeth pierce her neck. Although initially terrified, as the pain in her neck

begins to ebb, Francine experiences a sense of bliss and gratification. She is "starting to embrace oneness with Lilith" (145).

The newly pale and languid Francine then goes to get her lover--to have Kay join her in this deathless journey. Kay soon understands that the woman standing opposite her is no longer the same woman she had loved. While Francine tries to get Kay to look her in the eyes, Kay knows that she must send the woman she loves away.

The story ends on a vague note with Kay trying to send her lover away--knowing that Francine has been somehow changed--while Francine tries to make Kay meet her captivating gaze. While the reader is left unsure of Kay's fate, it is clearly understood that the evil, destructive Lilith is the cause of all of this pain. It was the forceful, captivating lesbian vampire who seduced the innocent and weak woman. Lilith is, indeed, the death-giver, the creator of Francine's undead state. Her vampirism is not presented to be in any way healthy or rejuvenating. Her destructive activities are only perpetuated because her victim is sent to find someone else to convert. Lilith is a woman obsessed with blood, lust, and sexuality. She is a "wanton woman whose sexuality brings destruction, the cruel and terrifying woman as death personified, the woman whose need leads to a wasting away of those around her" (*Dark Angels* 15).

Representative of the second aspect of the Goddess--the generous and caring middle-aged mother who, through bloodsharing, regenerates other women, is the story entitled "Medea," written by Carol Leonard and found in *Dark Angels*. This story is quite non-traditional in that the vampire Medea is by no means interested in bringing about death. Rather, she is concerned with revitalizing women's bodies and souls.

It is a story of a woman named Hannah who is joining her old college friends for their annual vacation at an island retreat. While taking a rest from her activities with her friends, Hannah meets a woman, a "vampira" (58), about whom she has literally dreamed since she was a small girl. As they begin to converse they get to know much about each other.

The middle-aged woman, the "vampira," is named Medea. She is a midwife who has spent her life honoring the life-giving powers of women's blood. She is approaching menopause, but she knows that Hannah is in her "fullness right now" (62). Medea explains her knowledge of Hannah's fertility by saying:

I could smell you as soon as you entered the building. I was a midwife for many, many years. Somehow I was always drenched in the blood from births and I loved it. I loved everything about birth: the smells, the sounds, the great mystery of life coming back in.

I had tremendous respect and awe for the process and for women's power in the moment. Birth blood to me was joyous and sacred (62).

Medea then informs Hannah that, since her own fertile years are coming to an end, she wants and needs to initiate a younger woman into vampirism. As Medea is aging, she knows that the time has come to pass the torch onto someone younger and more able to continue the tradition of blood-drinking and blood-sharing. At the same time, Hannah knows that the wise-woman is hungry and in need of her blood. With their blood-sharing, Hannah will be "born anew into the mysteries and wisdom of the Mother" (Keesey, *Dark Angels* 17), and Medea's hunger will be sated and her body and soul refreshed.

The blood-sharing takes place during passionate lovemaking when Medea reaches deep inside Hannah and makes her bleed. As Medea reaches deep within her, "Hannah [feels] an indescribable power surge through her and [feels] as though Medea [is] searching, grasping for her very soul" (66). This is, indeed, a life-giving exercise, for each is helping to regenerate the other.

The next morning, after the blood-drinking, Medea appears radiant and glowing, fully healthy again. Although Hannah appears rather pale and tired, her young body will certainly return her to normal in a matter of days. As Medea leaves, vowing to return during Hannah's next "moon cycle" (68), each woman is eternally grateful to the other for enriching her with the blood-born gift of renewed life.

"Louisiana: 1850," written by Jewelle Gomez and included in *Daughters of Darkness*, is a lesbian vampire story which represents the first aspect of the Goddess. It is definitely one of the least traditional of all the lesbian vampire stories included in Keesey's two anthologies. It is an incredibly calm, gentle, and relaxing story.

The story begins when a young slave girl, simply called "the Girl," is rescued by a kind, older woman known as Gilda. Gilda runs a brothel with her lesbian vampire partner, Bird, employing eight girls. The Girl is brought under Gilda's care not to work as a prostitute but rather to perform regular household chores. Although a little uneasy about Gilda's and Bird's mysterious behavior--they never eat and always move around in shadows or at night--the Girl knows that these two women love her and are providing her with a home and a sense of place.

Gilda and Bird are, indeed, not typical women. Nor are they typical vampires. When they take blood they do not take life. They believe that there is no need for such destructiveness. Gilda explains:

There are those of our kind who kill every time they go out into the night. They say they need this exhilaration in order to live this life. They are simply murderers. They have no special need; they are rabid children. In our life, we who live by sharing the life blood of others have no need to kill. It is through our connections with life, not death, that we

live. There is a joy in the exchange we make. We draw life into ourselves, yet we give life as well (130).

Gilda has been alive for three hundred years. Bird has lived as Gilda's partner for a good portion of a normal human lifetime. But now Gilda is tired. She loves Bird with all her heart and is afraid to leave her, but she is tired of this life. She is tired of trying to understand people's destructiveness--she knows a great war is coming and she believes that she simply cannot endure anymore. Gilda wants to be free from this life and finally rest.

Gilda decides to initiate the Girl as a new partner for Bird. This initiation consists of reciprocal blood-taking. After sharing blood with Gilda, the Girl, feeling sick and tired, sleeps, only to awake to find Gilda gone and Bird standing over her. Gilda has left--she has gone out into the ocean, into the sun that will strip her body of its flesh and its life--but she will finally be able to rest, for she has lived a long and full life. Although hurt and scared, Bird must be strong and accept Gilda's departure. Now that Gilda is gone, Bird is left with the Girl as her partner in life. Everything occurs in cycles--Gilda had lived her long cycle of life and now she finds freedom in death. Bird and the Girl (now known as Gilda) are finding freedom in their new life together.

The young Gilda is a virgin girl, newly initiated into the life of blood-sharing. She is gentle and caring and views sex and blood-letting as an act of love and reciprocity. She is anything but destructive and never takes more than she gives. Lesbian vampires such as Gilda are very far from the traditional notion of the lustful, destructive female vampire.

The lesbian vampire stories described here are associated with the three aspects of the Goddess. Such a chronicling of lesbian vampire stories (from the most traditional to the most non-traditional) traces the progression of lesbian vampire lore that has allowed for the reappropriation of lesbian herstory. Stories of female vampires, intricately woven with images of the Goddess and lesbianism, have traditionally demonized both lesbians and the Goddess. In recent years, with raised feminist and lesbian consciousnesses, lesbians have begun to reclaim and reinvent these stories. With the reclamation of lesbian vampire stories, women, lesbians, and the Goddess are glorified. Pam Keesey describes this reclamation of lesbian herstory well:

We revision the dark angel, embrace the aspects of sexuality, blood, death--all that we are taught to deny and fear. We look death in the eye, we see not the horrific figure of death that we are taught to expect, but the beauty of death when it comes to us in its natural form (*Dark Angels* 15).

With such redefinition we are able to create a world around us that does not fear, hate, or repress the

aspects of sexuality, life, and death that are intrinsic parts of our lives. We create a community that is dedicated to our lives, our empowerment, and our regeneration.

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