

Journal of Dracula Studies

Volume 1 No. 1

Article 3

1999

Overlooked Pearls: The Blue Oyster Cult and the Vampire in Modern Music

David F. Hallett
University of Ottawa

J. Robin Martin
Transylvanian Society of Dracula

Follow this and additional works at: <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/dracula-studies>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), and the [Film and Media Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hallett, David F. and Martin, J. Robin (1999) "Overlooked Pearls: The Blue Oyster Cult and the Vampire in Modern Music," *Journal of Dracula Studies*: Vol. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/dracula-studies/vol1/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Research Commons at Kutztown University. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Dracula Studies* by an authorized editor of Research Commons at Kutztown University. For more information, please contact czerny@kutztown.edu.

Overlooked Pearls: The Blue Öyster Cult and the Vampire in Popular Music

David F Hallett and J Robin Martin

[David F Hallett is currently a Doctoral candidate in English at the University of Ottawa. J Robin Martin, a Canadian TSD member, writes regularly about film. Both took undergraduate degrees at Memorial University of Newfoundland.]

“Errors, like straws, upon the surface flow;
He who would search for pearls must dive below.”
— John Dryden, *All for Love* (prologue)

Perhaps the most dominant gothic literary motif is that of the vampire. Emerging in the 19th century, the vampire, or the Undead, has survived to saturate all media of popular culture in the 20th century. The Undead, in an evolving mythology, continue to stalk the pages of contemporary fiction and the screens of our cinemas, even materializing like Stoker’s *Dracula* as “specks floating in the rays” (90) on the pixels of our televisions. Rock music too, as much a creation of the 20th century as the literary vampire was of the 19th, has been bitten by the lure and lore of the Undead, not only adding its own variations to the mythos but also reflecting the perception of the vampire in other forms of mass media, both critiquing and drawing inspiration from it.

The Blue Öyster Cult is conspicuous by its absence from the existing surveys of images of the vampire in rock music. Amongst its large oeuvre, the Blue Öyster Cult has a number of vampire-related songs -- some explicit, many more oblique. The band has, over a career nearing thirty years, consistently explored in their lyrics what comparative literature specialist Roger Shattuck calls forbidden knowledge. Their songs of the Undead form part of a larger canvas that demonstrates humanity’s capacity for darkness. Their literary antecedents include the foundations of the Gothic, with direct allusions to Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, and contemporary speculative fiction, including actual collaboration with writers such as Michael Moorcock, Eric Von Lustbader, John Shirley and Jim Carroll. Songs from the band’s canon have found their way to the screen in such horror films as *Halloween* (1978), *Heavy Metal* (1981), *Stephen King’s The Stand* (1994), *The Frighteners* (1995) and the 1992 feature *Bad Channels*—for which the band wrote the original score. In addition to writing *for* the movies, the band has also frequently written about them, displaying a fascination with pop culture and the way in which human attitudes are affected and reflected by our chosen entertainment.

The Blue Öyster Cult exists within an American cultural tradition of ‘nay-saying,’ a tradition rooted in the impulse which led the Puritan founders to first board the *Mayflower*. However, the band’s contribution to the panorama of American cautionary creativity is rarely recognized for three reasons. Firstly, they are a rock group. Despite the existence of forums such as *The Journal of Popular Culture*, scholarship frequently assumes “the popular” is not a subject for academic analysis. Secondly, they are not a one-issue group. Because their principal concern is the human propensity for darkness, they resist easy classification -- a ‘shortcoming’ as far as many critical perspectives are concerned. In harmony with forebears such as Edgar Allan Poe and Franz Kafka, the Blue Öyster Cult delights in ambiguity. Songs are open to interpretation and debate, resisting discourses that pretend definitive readings to be possible (or even desirable). Their oeuvre, like that of Franz Kafka, “validates a thousand keys and authorizes none” (Lynch & Rampton 494). Finally, their preferred subject matter *is* “forbidden.” Various bodies of “forbidden knowledge” are proscribed because of the discomfort they evoke: their very existence inspires denial. The bulk of the Blue Öyster Cult’s catalogue suggests to the listener willing to confront the message that all the bizarre, terrifying, despicable, or merely inconsistent things that we see “out there” are a mirror reflection. There is no ‘them,’ just us. As the title of one of the band’s later songs suggests,

“I Am the One You Warned Me Of.” That monster, mad scientist, addict, mutation, vampire -- it is not outside but inside: “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

II

“...there are things that you know not, but that you shall know, and bless me for knowing, though they are not pleasant things.” — Van Helsing (*Dracula* 250)

Extant criticism of “forbidden knowledge” as it is manifest in rock music tends to lump together artists and interests which should be distinguished from one another. This criticism often assumes that the presentation of an idea equals embracing and promoting that idea. Nowhere more than in discourses of “Satanism,” such criticism usually seems to believe that rock musicians and writers are incapable of writing in character voices or of examining subjects in an ironic or even a detached tone. As rock critic Jonathan Cott wrote in a profile of Randy Newman (himself frequently on the receiving end of astigmatic criticism), “listeners often imagine that the person impersonating a character in a song is equal to the person singing it” (488). “The whole idea of a song is a real situation,” says Newman himself (Cott 490), but the voice of the song is not necessarily the voice of the singer. Similarly, the observation and recording of perceived reality is not automatically promotion of it. Were Shakespeare subjected to similar “analysis,” he would be seen to promote witchcraft, murder, suicide, deception, and British intervention in Scottish politics -- all that only in *Macbeth*.

Regrettably, the presentation of a character, perspective, or emotion in a rock song is often unquestioningly accepted as confessional. The speaker of the words in any song is understood to be the singer/songwriter in his own persona. When the Blue Öyster Cult released their song “ME262” (*Secret Treaties*), sung from the perspective of a Luftwaffe pilot “in April of ’45,” they were soon rumored to be Nazis, despite the fact that two of the three songwriters are Jewish.

In most treatments of rock music which examine ‘darker’ aspects of the human imagination, the presence and promotion of ‘demonic’ values is assumed. Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds, for example, in her article “The Devil Sings the *Blues*: Heavy Metal, Gothic *Fiction* and ‘Postmodern’ Discourse,” makes two such undefended assumptions. She joins in her title two reasonably distinct genres and, further muddying the mix, proposes the devil as “vocalist,” suggesting a Satanic component that is not, unless one reads male sexual posturing as inherently Satanic, found in the album she chooses as exemplar of the rise of “Heavy Metal” -- *Led Zeppelin I*. Equally odd is Hinds’ categorization of the Blue Öyster Cult’s “Don’t Fear the Reaper” as part of the “overtly Satanic” subdivision of “Metal music” (156). The assertion apparently equates death with the devil; not to fear death is to worship Satan.

From a literalist reading of selected Scriptures, perhaps first filtered through Milton, it might be possible to construct the argument that humanity was born sinless, disobeyed explicit instructions designed for its own protection and, in consequence of its sin (the sin of acquiring forbidden knowledge, one might recall), must now suffer death. Therefore anyone who accepts death accepts the cause of it -- Satan and temptation. But this argument is not attempted by Hinds. She merely asserts that a song about facing the inevitability of one’s own death with equanimity instead of fear is a satanic song. Even Saint Paul does not equate death with devil-worship: the wages of sin may well be death (cf. Romans 6:23), but facing the inevitability of one’s impending death cannot be read as Satanism. If it were so, the conclusion Christ reaches at Gethsemane would also be devil-worship (cf. Mark 14:34-36; Luke 22:41-42). Part of the difficulty in any argument concerning spiritual matters is the importance of faith to belief. When one begins to debate the role and nature of the devil, one is examining territory that does not yield to empiricism. The devil can cite Scripture, or Shakespeare, for his purpose. Faith notwithstanding, however, to call “Don’t Fear the Reaper” Satanic is at the least a misunderstanding of the song.

Misunderstanding and/or misrepresentation is one weakness of extant criticism. Complete omission of significant information is another. In Susan Kagan’s entry on the vampire in popular music (*The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Undead*), some ‘fringe’ groups are catalogued in detail. While

these artists are undeniably part of the spectrum of “vampire rock” and certainly worth knowing about, other artists, more “mainstream,” are either mentioned with obvious material elided or not mentioned at all. Alice Cooper, for example, is cited for “Fresh Blood” but not for his much earlier song concerning the actor whose “portrayal” of Renfield in the 1931 *Dracula* was uncomfortably close to not being acting at all, “The Ballad of Dwight Fry” [sic]. The Blue Öyster Cult, with three explicit vampire songs and a host of oblique vampiric allusions, is not mentioned at all.

While Kagan moves toward workable classification of vampire songs within the rock canon, several of her five categories are either too broad or simply unnecessary. The first and second -- those with obvious reference to vampires, and those with oblique references (417) -- are useful. However, categorizing songs with “allegedly vampiric” (417) references is redundant. An alleged connection with a vampire theme must be provoked by at least an oblique reference. This definition is made no clearer by her scant illustrations. The final two categories -- music that mentions vampires and music from vampire movie soundtracks -- are also poorly conceived. The former may be an indicator of the latitude of the term and concept “vampire” in our popular culture, and, with the whimsy of Hollywood’s marketing practices, the latter might include any musical genre from George Jones to the Bee Gees, from Bach’s oratorios to the hymns of John Wesley. If a song does not already fit into one of the initial two categories, it is of little use for scholarship. Accordingly, we have limited our categorization of Blue Öyster Cult vampire music to the “obvious” and the “oblique.”

III

“Dear, beauteous death! The jewel of the just,
Shining nowhere but in the dark;
What mysteries do lie beyond thy dust,
Could man outlook that mark!”
— Henry Vaughan, *The World*

Blue Öyster Cult songs dealing with the vampire mythos tend to be the work of either Donald “Buck Dharma” Roeser or Joe Bouchard, though both Eric Bloom and Albert Bouchard, together with regular co-writing partners of the band, have contributed some significant material. Bolle Gregmar, chief officer of the B.Ö.C. fan club, keeper of The Museum of Cult, and acknowledged by the band members themselves to be the principal authority on all B.Ö.C. matters, suggests that the frequency with which Roeser and Joe Bouchard return to the vampire theme is, at least in part, attributable to the fact that both men were born in early November and have a fascination with images connected to Hallowe’en. Bouchard and Roeser share their time of entry into the “real world” with Bram Stoker, and with the denouement of his *Dracula*.

Reminiscent of Jonathan Harker’s slow progression from comfort and confidence, making memoranda about getting recipes for Mina (28, 30), through the unease he feels at the moment his coach is overtaken by the calèche in the Borgo Pass (41), to the sheer terror of finding himself alone at midnight, surrounded by silent wolves (45), Blue Öyster Cult songs frequently begin with the mundane and build through a gradual progression of dark imagery toward the revelation of “the skull beneath the skin.” Donald Roeser’s vampire songs tend to exploit audience expectations by suggestion, often invoking images associated with vampirism but leaving sufficient ambiguity to allow other interpretations. Joe Bouchard’s songs are, as Gregmar suggests, both about and *for* vampires, thus they tend to embed even more veiled references to the practices and needs of the vampire within lyrics that do not, at first listening, overtly evoke the Undead. Each writer has produced one undisputable “vampire song” (the pair of tracks which close the 1977 album *Spectres*) and Bouchard has buried in virtually everything he has written at least a line or two which admit interpretation as being relevant to the vampire mythos.

The transforming capacity of the vampire has been interpreted as symbolic of human desire to transcend our physical restrictions, as part of the quest for forbidden knowledge. From the earliest record of the Judeo-Christian myth, humanity's problems are traced to our inability to resist the temptation of forbidden knowledge, or to accept our limits until we have attempted to transcend them. The consequences of this relentless transgression are also ambiguous. Many of the Romantic poets wrote positively of the knowledge to be gained through going beyond society's collective and individual boundaries. However, despite William Blake's assertion that "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom" (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "Proverbs of Hell" l.3) many have discovered what was "enough" by pushing to the point of "too much" only to be unable to use that knowledge. Sometimes, the wisdom discovered is that it would have been better not to have taken the road of excess. In Byron's words: "Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most / Must mourn the deepest over the fatal truth, / The tree of Knowledge is not that of Life" (*Manfred* l.i.10-12). Blue Öyster Cult songs habitually build on that paradox: we relentlessly seek to know more yet we are frequently disturbed, perhaps even destroyed, by the knowledge we gain.

Joe Bouchard's songs, individually- or co-written, are more likely than any other B.Ö.C. songs to evoke images of the vampire. Bouchard's "Screams" (*Blue Öyster Cult*) has a night setting and a voice seeking a safe point for seclusion. The second person, the addressed "you" of the song, is understood to be on the same quest for a "hole" (or "home") in which to grow. Yet the seclusion and shelter sought are not those of conventional safety. The speaker is clearly not seeking protection in the usual sense -- not, at least, if the "Satan's bred trash" of the city will provide adequate cover. The idea of turning to "big city madness" as shelter suggests a need for anonymity, or immersion in the mass of humanity. As Jonathan Harker realizes during his 'education' in the ways and motivations of the Count, the city has its "teeming millions" (100); it is good not merely for anonymity, but also for proximity to fresh supplies. If the speaker is read as one whose needs for shelter are unconventional, a voice from darkness addressing one of its peers, it is not difficult to imagine the voice of the song to be that of a vampire seeking both shelter by day and sustenance by night -- needing anonymity for the simple reason that, traditionally, a vampire known is a vampire hunted. As Whitley Streiber suggested in his novel, *The Hunger*, the Undead survive through secrecy. Communication is coded and minimal. A vampire exposed is a vampire at risk, a possible explanation for the ambiguity found in so many of Bouchard's lyrics. If we understand the voice of many of Bouchard's songs to *be* that of a vampire, we immediately have a reason for Bouchard's characteristic suggestive abstraction. The vampire proceeds as survival dictates: through riddles, connotation, symbols, ritual -- just as humanity has always dealt with its spirituality.

"Wings Wetted Down" (*Tyranny and Mutation*) employs lyrics suggesting the transmogrification of the vampire; as van Helsing's lengthy discussion of "the kind of enemy with which we have to deal" (332-38) suggests, the vampire is able to "appear at will when, and where, and in any of the forms that are to him" (333), the forms of "nocturnal predators or nocturnal invaders of our sheltering homes" (Stade v). "Wings wetted down, [stumble] on the ground," the song states, but "it all turns around in the air." The human body is earthbound, and when the human tracks the earthbound vampire (in *Dracula*, the vampire sleeps in consecrated earth), the human is ascendant. Provided he can conquer his own desire (cf. Van Helsing's memorandum, 499-503), the human can destroy the Undead. Everything reverses when the vampire is airborne. The song juxtaposes images, linking the mundane to the 'magical': "Flights of black horsemen / soar over churches / pursued by an army / of birds in the rain." The unease created by the resultant picture is sustained by a musical arrangement employing a minor key, distortion and dissonance, and chromatic intervals.

"Morning Final" (*Agents of Fortune*) presents a figure who "cast a burning shadow on the busy street" and "said he was a junkie." A "motiveless murder" is associated with this meandering figure, though it is unclear whether he is the victim or the perpetrator. The phrase "morning final" is drawn from journalism, and the song clearly operates on one level as the aural equivalent of the newspaper, including in the fade-out the voice of a street vendor hawking papers. But "morning" can also be "final" to the vampire, and the pursuit into the subway may suggest the tracking of a vampire to its lair. The voice of the song, which laments in the chorus "After what I read / I can hardly feel my heart... /my heartbeat"

may be understood as the voice of an ordinary New Yorker reacting to the ubiquity of violence in the media, but may as easily be heard as the voice of a vampire seeing another of his kind hunted and destroyed. One also recalls Mina's reaction to her first reading of Jonathan's journal (266) as well as the general importance of text to the comprehension of the vampire in Stoker's *Dracula* -- a narrative composed almost entirely of secret knowledge: the contents of individual diaries. Those passages which are not private observations are frequently drawn from newspapers. As well, just as the subway underlies the city, the idea of the vampire as symbolic of human sexual desire, suppressed and defined as evil, runs beneath the surface of the song.

Bouchard's later songs employ equally oblique imagery, admitting the possibility of a vampire theme while refusing to name it explicitly. "Moon Crazy" (*Mirrors*) hints at secret rituals and transformation under darkness. Although largely eschewed by Stoker, the moon plays a significant role in Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), in which Lord Ruthven is revived from death by the moon's rays (Melton 409). No doubt following Polidori's lead, James Malcolm Rymer employs a similar device in his serial *Varney The Vampyre* in the 1840s. Though in the greater canon of vampire fiction the moon is more frequently associated with the werewolf than with the vampire, one recalls that the local word Jonathan Harker hears as he boards the diligence bound for Bukovina he translates as "something that is either were-wolf or vampire" (36); the two may be considered "blood brothers."

"Light Years of Love" (*The Revolution by Night*) evokes a relationship which seems to be a conventional romance, but if one reads "light years" as a literal transcending of human limitations, the presence of the Undead is possible. A line such as "in your arms I can be anything" continues Bouchard's habit of allowing for multiple interpretation; while the rhetoric is common to pop love songs, the line allows interpretation as a reference to transmogrification assisted by the power of love (cf. "Tam Lin" for a similar legend). Similarly, the apocalyptic rhetoric of "When the War Comes" (*Club Ninja*) is typical of many pseudo-military splinter groups of the current era, yet simultaneously reminiscent of Renfield's habitual phrasing in talking of his Master. As the listener hears in the final stanza "the virgins come to set you free / on their lips the life of two," the echoes of the first quarter of Stoker's *Dracula* are quite clear. "In the Presence of Another World" (*Imaginos*) directly evokes the reality of "forbidden knowledge": "in the promise of another world / a dreadful knowledge comes / how even space will modulate / and earthly things be done." The Promethean effort is never without consequence and the "Master" who lurks in the background of the song is aware of "the curse of life eternal" as lived in this decidedly temporal world. "Your Master is a monster" (cp. Renfield's use of "Master" (168) and Mina's use of "monster" (275) to describe Count Dracula) repeats throughout the song.

Imaginos traces the historical, economic, and social forces behind the outbreak of World War I. Its movement towards cataclysm is, as Harker says of the "ladies'" wing of Dracula's castle, "nineteenth century up-to-date with a vengeance" (77), yet is also informed by the knowledge that "the war to end all wars" in truth was merely the foundation for holocaust. We are reminded by this later trio of Bouchard's songs of the way in which our supernatural imaginings are figurative renderings of our natural traumas. What we have achieved in the "real world" is far more terrifying and damaging than anything our fictions imagine. As Harker puts it, "the old centuries had, and have, powers of their own which mere 'modernity' cannot kill" (77). The vampire is a human creation, even if we often deny what we see of ourselves reflected in it.

IV

"Ah, it is the fault of our science that it wants to explain all; and if it explain not, then it says there is nothing to explain."

— Van Helsing (*Dracula* 279)

There is a trio of songs in the lengthy catalogue of the Cult which deal explicitly with the vampire, and a further pair which evokes a menacing revenant that could be -- given other imagery in each song --

a vampire. The latter pair are linked by the suggestion of a character who exists over a passage of time beyond the normal human life span.

The first of these oblique but strongly suggestive songs treats a recurring, unidentified evil. Donald “Buck Dharma” Roeser's “Harvest Moon” (*Heaven Forbid*) is a masterpiece of slow accumulation. Threatening imagery builds until what at first seems dismissible as natural “bad luck” becomes decidedly unnatural; the “harvest” becomes more than merely unearthing vegetables. In “Harvest Moon,” an unnamed “Evil” is tied to both specific geography and season. The land, settled historically by “the Spaniards,” who inexplicably “burned the town and fields” before abandoning the area, is host to a cyclic evil presence. As history (measured presumably in centuries) unwinds and “When the wind turns/ and blows the leaves from the trees” under the harvest moon, unnatural death befalls livestock and humans alike. The killing of “sheep and goats” echoes references in both the literary and historic record of vampirism (Melton xxxv). The song’s narrator brings the story to the present when he comments:

I sense the darkness clearer
I feel a presence near...
I feel some Evil here
I hear some frightful noises
I don’t go out at night
since Bobrow’s youngest daughter
disappeared from sight

Vampirism is certainly one of several possible interpretations. The eternal, ageless nature of the “Evil,” the human and animal victims, and the fear of night and its “harvest moon” follow traditional literary conventions, even if other aspects of the lyric do not. But the mythology of the literary vampire has always been malleable, ultimately governed by the author’s pen.

Also significant is that the narrative voice is implicated in the continuation of the problem. Just as the Spaniards burned everything and the Cobys went south, exchanging farming for fishing, so the narrator repeats “what the people say” as he sells his farm to a new owner: “long time since there’s been trouble.” The obvious clash between what is said to the new tenant and what is said to the listener reminds us, as Blue Öyster Cult songs so often do, that we *are* what we are warned against. The “Evil” continues because human response to it, through centuries, has been to flee, to leave it to someone else, and without warning.

The band’s other oblique vampire song strongly suggests the career of an individual who has slipped the bonds of mortality and time and who is perpetually engaged in “a harvest of life, a harvest of death.” “Mistress of the Salmon Salt (Quicklime Girl),” written by Albert Bouchard and Sandy Pearlman, concludes *Tyranny and Mutation* with both a clear suggestion of a career of harvesting which transcends human norms and, possibly, allusions to *Dracula*. The listener is introduced to “a girl” who “lurks” in “the garden district” and helps “the plants grow strong and tall.” The “villagers” call her “quicklime girl.” She sees that what is “ripe and ready to the eye” is also “rotten somehow to the core.” One infers that the “quicklime girl” is at the very least facilitating the harvest, and that the vegetation flourishes in her district for much the same reason that the trees in old urban cemeteries seem to turn colour later in the fall than do other city trees.

The song continues with menacing ambiguity. “A harvest of life, a harvest of death / One body of life, one body of death” suggests an embrace at once carnal and carnivorous. The bridge concludes with a 1st-person voice addressing an unidentified other in tones reminiscent of the First Clown and gravedigger in *Hamlet*: “I’ll prepare the quicklime, friend / for your ripe and ready grave,” for “when you’ve gone and choked to death” (recalling the “strange and horrible gurgling” of Mrs Westenra in death (151)). The final stanza suggests both the longevity of the “quicklime girl” and other possible echoes of Stoker’s novel:

It’s springtime now and cares subside,
The planting’s almost done,

And fertile graves, it seems, exist
Within a mile of that juke-joint
Where coastguard crews still take their leave,
Lying listless in the sun,
And the quicklime girl still plies her trade:
Reduction of the many from the one.

The repetition of “still” juxtaposed with the image of the “coastguard crews” on leave and the “juke-joint” suggests an era well after that evoked earlier by the use of “villagers.” The “coastguard crews” also echo Mina meeting with the coast guard on duty in Whitby as the *Demeter* founders (78-9), a meeting which takes place in a cemetery. Similarly, the quicklime girl’s habit of lurking “behind the bush” (as repeated in the chorus of the song) recalls the description of Lucy’s first harvests as “the bloofer lady” (185-7, 208-9).

Of course the quicklime girl could be interpreted as being nothing more “supernatural” than a prostitute. But if her actions are interpreted solely in carnal terms, why is the image of “fertile graves” in close proximity to her ‘workplace’ of importance? What about the listlessness of the crews who “take their leave”? And how do we understand “reduction of the many from the one”? The quicklime girl “plies her trade” but that trade may not be the first one that leaps to many minds. The bridge repeats before the song moves to its conclusion, introducing subtle changes to the lyric: “A harvest of life, a harvest of death /Resumes its course each day /As if by schedule ...” Meanwhile, small creeping and flying creatures turn “as if inclined” to where the quicklime girl continues her harvest. Again, there is no overt, direct mention of the vampire, but the song’s rich suggestiveness seems to beg the interpretation.

Finally, we turn from the oblique to the obvious. “After Dark” (*Fire of Unknown Origin*), “I Love the Night” (*Spectres*), and “Nosferatu” (*Spectres*) allow no ambiguity of interpretation and need no exegetical acrobatics to make their subject clear. This trio of songs stakes an undeniable claim for the inclusion of the Blue Öyster Cult in any examination of “vampire music.”

“After Dark” (*Fire of Unknown Origin*) is the most recent of the band’s explicit vampire songs, and the only major excursion by songwriter Eric Bloom into vampire territory. “After Dark” shares with “I Love the Night” the framing device of a narrator initiated into vampirism by a supposed lover who then, together Undead, will share eternity with him. As the title implies, the classic motif of restriction to nocturnal activity is invoked: “After dark -- I see you / After dark-- I feel you /After dark -- I want you.” The loss of free agency once under the spell of the vampire is evident in “Long ago and far away I heard your voice / And once I heard you sing your song I had no choice.” Here again is exemplified the traditional literary and cinematic characteristic of a vampire’s ability to control a victim’s will over time and space. The second verse clearly illustrates the vampiric nature of the piece and further reinforces classical traits attributed to the Undead: “Of Age there is no question. /Death’s shadow is undone. / We only need each other /And shelter from the sun.” In the song’s final verse, the narrator tastes “true salvation” through a “fate ... traced in blood,” both reiterating his earlier acquisition of eternal life and the means by which he must insure it.

Possessing a poetic lyric and an appropriately atmospheric melody, Roeser’s “I Love The Night” begins in the ruins of a relationship: “That night her kiss told me it was over.” The narrator then “walked out late into the dark,” where, in “misty gloom,” he is suddenly confronted with a “lovely lady in white” who remarks: “Like me I see you’re walking alone/Won’t you please stay?” The narrator falls under her spell, unable to “look away.” The intercourse that follows outlines the inception and character of their relationship.

She said “I love the night.
The day is OK and the sun can be fun
But I live to see those rays slip away...
There’s so much that I can show and give to you
If you will welcome me tonight.”

No mortal was meant to know such wonder
One look in the mirror told me so.
Come darkness I'll see her again

As with Stoker's *Dracula*, the ability to exist in daylight is implied, but the vampire's powers are amplified at night. Also developed from the traditional mythology are immortality, the importance of the victim's will in giving welcome to the vampire, and the absence of any mirror reflection. Like "After Dark," "I Love the Night" is reminiscent of the mythical Roman *Lamia* and echoes both Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and "Lamia."

At the centre of both the Blue Öyster Cult's studio oeuvre and of Joe Bouchard's contributions to the band is the song that most overtly deals with the vampire. "Nosferatu" recapitulates the *Dracula* story in lyrics employing, in some cases verbatim, the title cards used in the early 1970s English re-issue of F.W. Murnau's 1922 film, *Nosferatu*. The words are set against a characteristic B.Ö.C. musical arrangement, redolent with menacing minor chords articulated in arpeggio, chromatic intervals, and accidentals.

The lyrics of "Nosferatu" are worth reproducing in their entirety. They show how directly Bouchard (and co-writer Helen Wheels) were influenced by Murnau's film. The song pares the plot to its essence, each verse concentrating on a major plot point of the film.

Deep in the heart of Germany
Lucy clutched her breast in fear
She heard the beat of her lover's heart
For weeks she raved, in dreams he appeared
From far off Transylvania

Only a woman can break the spell
Pure in heart, who will offer herself to Nosferatu

The ship pulled in without a sound
The faithful captain long since cold
He kept his log till the bloody end
Last entry read "Rats in the hold.
My crew is dead. I fear the plague."

Only a woman can break the spell
Pure in heart, who will offer herself ...

Mortal terror reigned
Sickness now then horrible death
Only Lucy knew the truth
And at her window
Nosferatu

So chaste, so calm she gave herself
To the pleasure of her dreaded master
He sucked the precious drops of life
Throughout the long and cold dark night

One last goodbye, he was blinded by light
One last goodbye, he was blinded by love
Blinded by love

He screamed with fear, he'd stayed too long in her room
The morning sun had come too soon
The spell was broken with a kiss of doom
He vanished into dust and left her all alone

Only a woman can break the spell
Pure in heart, who will offer herself to Nosferatu

There is really no argument here to make. There is no ambiguity about either intent or interpretation. "Nosferatu" is at once the most overt of the Blue Öyster Cult's vampire songs and one of the best examples of the manner in which the various writers in the band habitually turn to other genres of popular culture -- especially cinema -- for songwriting inspiration.

V

"He will discredit our mystery."
— Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure* III.ii.29

"Nosferatu" is most significant to our purposes in that it predates most of what Susan Kagan lists in her survey of vampire music. Omitting the Blue Öyster Cult from treatment of the vampire as developed in rock music is rather like discussing Murnau's film without reference to Stoker's novel, or like crediting Stoker himself with the invention of the vampire. The Blue Öyster Cult were making "gothic" rock music long before many of the bands now famous for the genre began to form. Like Black Sabbath on the opposite side of the Atlantic, the B.Ö.C. were writing songs in the early 1970s that were neither lyrically nor musically quite like what anyone else was doing. While we would not wish to claim the band as the only fountainhead from which gothic rock derived, nor to suggest that our brief survey of their vampire-related lyrics is definitive, we do insist that they deserve a more prominent place than that which has so far been given them -- typified by Hinds' casual misinterpretation of their best-known song as representing Satanism in heavy metal.

Blue Öyster Cult songs discuss forbidden knowledge openly. Their music employs myth and mystery to challenge the pervasive complacency of human life, to show human obsessions through our popular culture. David Hume wrote in the mid-eighteenth century that, as civilization advances, it is soon found "that there is nothing mysterious or supernatural ... but that all proceeds from the usual Propensity of Mankind towards the Marvellous" (897). We believe what we choose, and call what we fear or don't understand "supernatural." Hume further suggested that "this Inclination," though it may periodically "receive a Check from Sense and Learning," will "never be thoroughly extirpated from human Nature" (897). Blue Öyster Cult songs usually exist in that paradoxical human space between rationality and superstition, delighting in demonstrating humanity's "usual Propensity ... toward the Marvellous" -- as often as not with a critical eye.

Donald Roeser's most recent song (as of this writing) provides us with an ending that is also a beginning. Amongst the principal writers in the band, Roeser is the most persistent and perceptive observer of the macabre in 20th century popular culture (and, arguably, the most successful)—a chronicler of the postmodern "dreadful." With "Godzilla" (*Spectres*) and "X-Ray Eyes" (*Heaven Forbid*), he lightly satirizes the B-Movie packaging we often demand in the presentation of our fears and foibles without denigrating the all too real horrors they illustrate: the post-atomic angst and anguish visited upon Japanese culture in the shadow of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that spawned the immortal *Gojira* and the Promethean hubris of Ray Milland's surgeon in Roger Corman's *X (The Man With X-Ray Eyes)* (1963). "Extraterrestrial Intelligence" (*Agents of Fortune*) addresses the UFO and alien abduction phenomena. But perhaps most important of all Roeser's songs, both for this brief analysis and for a more

comprehensive understanding of the Blue Öyster Cult's oeuvre, is "Real World," from the band's most recent album *Heaven Forbid*. In "Real World," Roeser summarizes his 30 years of musically observing our mediated culture. Opening with two verses full of events taken from the front pages of the tabloids, "Real World" evokes "rains of fish and rains of frogs" to "arias sung by mongrel dogs" and covers familiar territory with "disks that stretch into cigars" and its chorus: "something beyond is reaching out to you." But as if to punctuate his career in this genre, Roeser turns in the final verse to the "legitimate" press whose stories reflect our "empty lives/TV replacing kids and wife/Lives consumed with soapy talk/Lives lived in fear of taking a walk." His conclusion is both the starting and finishing line for the career of the Blue Öyster Cult, condensed into one emphatic statement: "the real world is bizarre enough for me." The song reminds us that all our fears begin with ourselves. "Real World" stands at the end of the 20th century in close thematic harmony with where Stoker's *Dracula* stood at the end of the 19th: naming the unnameable and reminding the audience of its own role and responsibility in the creation of all our myths.

Works Cited:

- Blake, William. "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell." In E Talbot Donaldson et al, eds. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: Sixth Edition, The Major Authors*. New York: Norton, 1996. 1312-23.
- Byron, George Gordon, Lord. "Manfred: a Dramatic Poem." In David Perkins, ed. *English Romantic Writers*. New York: HBJ, 1967. 810-28.
- Cott, Jonathan. "Randy Newman: His Only Hero Was Roy Campanella." 12 November 1970. In Ben Fong-Torres, ed. *The Rolling Stone Rock'n'Roll Reader*. New York: Bantam, 1974. 487-90.
- Hinds, Elizabeth Jane Wall. "The Devil Sings the Blues: Heavy Metal, Gothic Fiction and 'Postmodern' Discourse." *Journal of Popular Culture*. 26.3 (Winter 1992): 151-64.
- Hume, David. "Section X. Of Miracles." *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Nature*. 1748. In Geoffrey Tillotson, et al, eds. *Eighteenth-Century English Literature*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969. 892-903.
- Kagan, Susan. "Music, Vampire." Melton 417-26.
- Keats, John. *John Keats: a selection of his poetry*. J.E. Morpurgo, ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953.
- Lynch, Gerald and David Rampton. "Franz Kafka (1883- 1924)." *Short Fiction*. 2nd ed. Toronto: HBJ, 1992. 494.
- Melton, J. Gordon, ed. *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Undead*. Detroit: Visible Ink P, 1994.
- Shattuck, Roger. *Forbidden Knowledge: From Prometheus to Pornography*. New York: St. Martin's, 1996.
- Stade, George. "Introduction." *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker. New York: Bantam Classics, 1981. v-xiv.
- Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. 1897. Clive Leatherdale, ed. *Bram Stoker's Dracula Unearthed*. Westcliff-on-sea: Desert Island Books, 1998.

Selected Discography

- Blue Oyster Cult. *Blue Oyster Cult*. Columbia Records, KC31063, 1972. LP.
- . *Tyranny and Mutation*. Columbia Records, KC32017, 1973. LP.
- . *Secret Treaties*. Columbia Records, KC32858, 1974. LP.
- . *On Your Feet Or On Your Knees*. Live recording. Columbia Records, PG33371, 1975. LP.
- . *Agents of Fortune*. Columbia Records, KC34164, 1976. LP.
- . *Spectres*. Columbia Records, JC35019, 1977. LP.
- . *Some Enchanted Evening*. Live recording. Columbia Records, JX35563, 1978. LP.
- . *Mirrors*. Columbia Records, JC36009, 1979. LP.
- . *Cultosaurus Erectus*. Columbia Records, JC36550, 1980. LP.
- . *Fire of Unknown Origin*. Columbia Records, EC37389, 1981. LP.
- . *Extraterrestrial Live*. Live recording. Columbia Records, KG37946, 1982. LP.
- . *Revolution By Night*. Columbia Records, FC38947, 1983. LP.
- . *Club Ninja*. Columbia Records, FC39979, 1986. LP.
- . *Imaginos*. Columbia Records, CK-40618, 1988.
- . *Heaven Forbid*. CMC International Records, 0607686241-2, 1998.
- "The Ballad of Dwight Fry." Alice Cooper. *Love it to Death*. Warner Bros. Records, WS 1883, 1971. LP.
- "Tam Lin." Fairport Convention, *Liege and Lief*. A&M Records, SP 4257, 1969. LP.

