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Latham, Rob. *Consuming Youth: Vampires, Cyborgs, & the Culture of Consumption*. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2002. 321 pp. Hardcover. ISBN: 0226468917. \$50.00.

Rob Latham is no stranger to readers of *JFA*. In addition to serving as co-editor of *Science-Fiction Studies* and, with Robert Collins, of *Modes of the Fantastic: Selected Essays from the Twelfth Annual International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts* (Greenwood Press, 1995), Latham, who is Associate Professor of English and American Studies at the University of Iowa, is on the editorial board of *JFA* and was guest editor of the 1997 special issue on "Theories of/and Fantastic Literature."

Latham's newest book project, *Consuming Youth: Vampires, Cyborgs, & the Culture of Consumption*, is an original and impressive contribution to the fields of literary and cultural studies. Taking as its starting point the prominence of representations of vampires and cyborgs at present, the book articulates its central question clearly at the start: "What are the implications for contemporary youth, especially for their practices of consumption, of this unprecedented pop-cultural and critical mobilization of vampires and cyborgs?" (1).

The stroke of brilliance in Latham's approach to this question is to consider modern representations of vampires and cyborgs as historically and dialectically linked. According to Latham, it is not coincidental that both vampires and cyborgs have emerged as "privileged metaphors" of our cultural moment "possessing an uncanny ability to evoke the psychological and social experience ... characteristic of postmodern culture" (1). Rather, Latham makes the case that vampires and cyborgs need to be thought together as "vampire-cyborg," as two sides of the same coin, ambivalently expressing the "dialectic of exploitation and empowerment rooted in youth's practices of consumption" (4).

In order to make this argument, Latham turns in his introduction, "The Cybernetic Vampire of Consumer Youth Culture," to Karl Marx's *Capital*. "For Marx," writes Latham, "the capitalist factory system is a regime of avid vampirism whose victims are transformed into undead extensions of its own vast, insensate, endlessly feeding body.... The worker essentially becomes a cybernetic organism—a cyborg—prosthetically linked to a despotic, ravening apparatus" (3). Latham's analysis proposes that the vampire-cyborg combination is presented in Marx as "a perfect *dialectical* image in which unprecedented technological progress and primitive, inhuman exploitation coexist in a structure of profound contradiction" (4). The invidious economic logic of vampirism foregrounds the inherently exploitative structure of capitalism whereas, Latham argues, for Marx there is "a progressive potential latent in cyborgization, if this aspect of the worker-machine relation can be detached from its subordination to an economic logic of vampirism" (4). Having made the case for the dialectical relationship of vampires and cyborgs in Marx, Latham's next move is to con-

tend that contemporary youth-culture texts featuring vampires and cyborgs can be interpreted in terms of the cultural contradictions of youth consumption (5).

Latham is careful to point out in the introduction that his title, *Consuming Youth*, is intended to signify in three different ways: as "(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" (5). The analysis that follows attends to all three intertwined interpretations of the title.

Following the introduction, the text is divided into two sections of three chapters each. Chapters 1-3 focus on literary, cinematic, and cultural texts in which representations of vampires are read as metaphors for youth consumption (with the various significations of this latter term in mind). Latham makes the case in these chapters that the metaphor of the vampire "operates in a dual register, figuring consumption both as predatory, involving the profitably capture of youthful desire via technological systems ... and prosthetic, since these systems enable fresh skills and self-sufficiencies in teenage consumers" (138).

Chapter One, "Youth Fetishism: The Lost Boys Cruise Mallworld," begins by providing a historical overview of the Fordist construction of youth as a privileged site of consumption, as well as summarizing critiques of this construction. Latham then turns his attention to a variety of youth-culture texts that utilize metaphors of vampiric consumption, including Somtow Sucharitkul's *Mallworld* (1984) and *Vampire Junction* (1984) and the 1987 film *The Lost Boys*. *Mallworld* is read as presenting a dialectical critique of vampiric consumption that is linked to youth and youth culture. *Vampire Junction*, which features a pop-star vampire protagonist, is interpreted as enacting "a dialectic in which youthful desire and pleasure are conscripted by an apparatus of consumption that both prosthetically empowers young people and preys upon them financially and spiritually" (60). *The Lost Boys*, similarly, is read in terms of the ways in which "contemporary capitalism's fetishization of youth" results in "an ambivalent dialectic of empowerment and exploitation, in which teens are both consumers and consumed, vampires and victims" (67).

Chapter two, "Dreams of Social Flying: The Yuppie-Slacker Dialectic," examines how the Fordist ideal of youth has been impacted by the socioeconomic realities of post-Fordism (21). The key texts in this chapter are George Romero's *Martin* (1977) and Anne Rice's novel *Interview With the Vampire* (1976), which together, according to Latham, mark an "epochal moment in the history of the vampire archetype in popular culture" (71) because the previously monstrous vampire is redefined as "a figure of empathetic, if ambivalent, identification" for the reader/viewer (71). Latham reads *Martin* as "a meditation on deindustrialization and the social marginalization of working-class youth" (81), and, in fact, as pioneering a new breed of vampire—the slacker vampire—whose vampirism results from the "enslavement of youth to a consumerist ethos" (74). In contrast, Rice's *Interview* represents a countervailing trend in post-Fordist vampiric representation: "an emphatic, almost hysterical

cal reendorsement of the values and practices of consumption" (85). Whereas *Martin* is described as the progenitor of a vampire line that depicts "disillusioned slackers shut out of the yuppie dream" (86), *Interview* generates a youth-vampire tradition emphasizing "the growing enfranchisement of the new consumption classes" (86).

As with all Latham's chapters, chapter three, "Voracious Androgynes: The Vampire Lestat on MTV," ranges widely and incorporates commentary on a dizzying array of social texts. The emphasis in this chapter is on how the class issues foregrounded in the "yuppie and slacker" vampire traditions are "inflected by gender concerns" (22). Despite the emphasis on Rice's *Vampire Lestat* in the title, the privileged text for the chapter's discussion is Tony Scott's film, *The Hunger* (1983), which Latham decodes as encapsulating "both the positive and negative metaphors of consumer vampirism" (118). The power of the master vampire, Miriam, within the film is shown to be derived from "the self-objectifying (un)dead labor of the mass of consumers she seduces and betrays" (117).

Chapters 4-6 shift the ground of the conversation from an emphasis on youth-culture texts that feature vampires to those that introduce and interrogate cyborg subjectivities. Chapter 4, "Microserfing the Third Wave: The Dark Side of the Sunrise Industries," ingeniously focuses on the apparent enfranchisement of youth brought about by the emergence of Silicon Valley "sunrise start-up" companies in the 1980s. These companies which, according to Latham, seemed "to instantiate ... the fusion of youth and technology heralded by postindustrial theory," and which presented themselves as "transcend[ing] the vampiric exploitation that had deformed industrial production, [and] overcoming workers' alienation in their open and nonhierarchical structure" (153), are demonstrated, despite their advances, to remain "bound to a vampiric socioeconomic regime that drains [their] liberatory energy" (139). Latham's key literary text here is Douglas Coupland's *Microserfs* (1995), which is interpreted as offering "a shrewd commentary on the contradictions inherent in the postindustrial conflation of youth and high technology" (175).

In Latham's fifth chapter, "Fast Sofas and Cyborg Couch Potatoes: Generation X on the Infobahn," Latham scrutinizes the various cultural discourses surrounding the much-heralded "Information Superhighway." Intriguingly, Latham postulates in this chapter the development of a new literary subgenre in the early 1990s, the "information road narrative": "ironic postmodern texts in which the literal horizons open to contemporary youth ramify into the dystopian datascares of a cynically simulated America" (196). Among the texts surveyed in this chapter are Bruce Craven's *Fast Sofa* (1993), which "conflates freeway driving with TV spectatorship to evoke a GenX consciousness of diminished, but nonetheless amphetamized, expectations" (196); Stephen Wright's *Going Native* (1994), in which the dissolution of identity along the Information Superhighway is represented as an experience of "rootless floating" (207); and Ernest Hebert's *Mad Boys* (1993), in which "road-bound travel and TV spectatorship are literally collapsed together" (212) and prosthetic enhance-

ment of youth as consuming subjects “bears with it an inescapable exploitation, a vampiric shadow that leeches their youthful substance and energy” (215).

“Teenage Mutant Cyborg Vampires: Consumption as Prosthetics,” Latham’s sixth and final chapter, focuses on computer hacking and the cyberpunk subcultures of the 1980s and 90s (22). Among the texts central to this chapter are Iain Softley’s film *Hackers* (1995), Poppy Z. Brite’s novel *Drawing Blood* (1993), Pat Cadigan’s *Tea from an Empty Cup* (1998), and British author Richard Calder’s *Dead Trilogy* (*Dead Girls*, *Dead Boys*, and *Dead Things*, [1992-97]) and *Cythera* (1998). Latham’s analysis in this chapter explores the ways in which teen hacking has “come to figure as a liberatory cultural practice, emblemizing a mode of consumption that deploys the cyborg empowerments of computer technology against the vampiric system in which they are presently immured” (222). However, Latham reveals these “fantasies of technological empowerment” to be colored by a “profound sense of generational alienation” (230). What ultimately is revealed by these hacker texts is “the dialectical logic in which every prosthetic empowerment of consumers both enmeshes them further in a predatory system and promises amplification of their collective desire and will” (261).

Latham’s *Consuming Youth* is innovative, well-researched, and challenging. (Indeed, as N. Katherine Hayles observes on the back-jacket, the work is “near-encyclopedic.”) It clearly realizes its goal of exploring the implications for contemporary youth of the prominence of contemporary representations of vampires and cyborgs and presents a forceful case for viewing these two fantastic entities as related through a dialectic of exploitation and empowerment.

My only regret concerning the text is the absence of any concluding chapter. The work covers so much material that some synthesis and reflection at the end would have been a boon to this reader. Regardless, *Consuming Youth* certainly will be of interest to those fascinated by vampires, cyborgs, and youth cultures more generally. Beyond this, however, the book is also a model example of Marxist-inflected cultural studies, and I easily can see it serving as a fascinating addition to any graduate-level (or very advanced undergraduate) course on cultural studies, popular culture, or critical theory.