Blood as Affinity and Transformation: The Menstrual Monster Vampire and Young Women’s Paternally Inflicted Suicide in The Moth Diaries

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In the crucial scene of Canadian director Mary Harron’s 2011 film The Moth Diaries, vampire Ernessa, a ghostly adolescent suicide awoken to embodiment by the pain of a boarding-school girl, tempts Rebecca, likewise bereaved by her own father’s suicide, with death. Ambushing Rebecca in the school library, and instructing “It’s time to free yourself,” Ernessa cuts her own wrist – and blood starts raining down on the two characters. Material culture scholars recognise that objects may invoke affinity or transformation for those who use them. We see these two bloody locations – evidence embodied on the arm, and out of place preternaturally pouring – as feminist explorations of different aspects of affinity and transformation relating to suicidal contagion but also to the refusal to repeat.

Harron’s drama about adolescent girls’ friendships and suicide examines conflicts between Ernessa and Rebecca, both infected with suicidal contagion through their artist fathers. Though exposure to suicide through one’s family or peer-group, or in the media, may lead to imitation, that possibility is particularly high in children mourning parental suicide. Normative and (nec)romantic representation by the (hetero)male gaze of childhood trauma, too often gendered female and labelled juvenile in twentieth and twenty-first-century Anglo-American suicide cinema, is undermined in Harron’s feminist interpretation. Moth achieves this turn by using blood to visually and thematically destabilise conventional filmic representations, exploring the passionate qualities of the young women’s friendships and suicidal intentions, without rendering their relationship as primarily sexual.

But Moth also offers a possibility of recovery, refusal to simply repeat the act of self-destruction. Thus it uses the willed rain of blood as the material marker of transition from the oedipal childhood relationships that other films too often render passive and vulnerable. Ernessa as sometimes immaterial ghost, but never conventionally voracious blood-sucker, invokes a lesbian/female vampire, but also film theorist Barbara Creed’s ”menstrual monster.” Thus, neither uncomplicatedly affinity nor simply transformation, Harron’s uses of blood re-visions of modes of sensory engagement with suicidality.

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