

the Vampire. Rice's 1976 novel framed its story around a young reporter listening to Louis relate his more than a century as one of the undead, a story that introduced the reader to a larger community of vampires and a secret vampiric history of the world. Rice told this tale of hunger and eternal life as one rich with pathos, passion, and exquisite suffering (so much so that at the end of the novel the reporter, who clearly stands in for the reader, begs to be made one of the undead). Rice followed up the best-selling *Interview* with a cycle of vampire tales centered on Lestat who, like Louis, is a tortured, glamorous, undead soul. The sexy sadistic monster had become the sexy sympathetic monster.⁵

The mythologies and cultural meanings of these two creatures, zombies and vampires, are very distinct. At the same time, they have certain similarities that have led to their current joint reign as the undead monarchs of American popular culture. Both the zombie and the vampire draw on themes embedded in the history and theology of American Christianity and its struggles in the late twentieth century. Both are, in fact, heavily redacted versions of the American Christian millennialism's hopes for immortality. They each articulate meanings theologically important to Americans since the Puritan era and are the walking, flying, roaming, and shambling embodiments of the "resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come."⁶

The vampire and the zombie are monstrous keys to American experience over the last three decades. These creatures, flesh eating or blood drinking, decomposing or forever young, appeared as pop culture phenomena at a historical moment when the body had become of central concern in American culture as the vehicle of pleasure, of theological meaning, or of personal happiness (or all three at once). Anxiety over threats to the body became a paramount concern as evidenced by the popularity of dieting and exercise regimens, public health campaigns, and the growing acceptance of plastic surgery as an aesthetic renovation of the aging or unsightly physical self.⁷

Vampires and zombies are further linked with one another in their origins and popular mythologies. Unlike almost every other creature examined in this book, the vampire and the zombie as currently imagined have no analogue in American folklore and/or urban legend. The voracious living corpses are almost pure creations of American popular culture, their titles and motifs lifted from European and Caribbean legend and transformed into horrific celebrities. Perhaps more than any other monster, they are "made in America" as commodities for sale and distribution. This makes them important representations of what