



**Departamento de Filoloxía Inglesa e Alemá**

**FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA**

# **Crisis and Liminality in Irish and North American Vampire Stories: “Interviewing Contemporary Vampires”**

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<p><b>Resumo</b> [na lingua en que se vai redactar o TFG; entre 1000 e 2000 caracteres]:</p> <p>Over the course of time, the figure of the vampire has been associated to moments of individual, social, cultural and political crisis in the history of humanity. Sheridan LeFanu's <i>Carmilla</i> (1872) and Bram Stoker's <i>Dracula</i> (1897) are early examples which gothicized fin-de-siècle cultural, social and political threats, such as the disintegration of the British Empire fears of the industrial middle class or the progressive visibility of women in the public sphere. The vampire myth has to be understood as part of <i>fin-de-siècle</i> "monstrous" narratives which address such cultural, social and political fears in terms of what Stephen Arata has called "reverse colonization" (1990), a response to cultural guilt which also entails powerful critiques of dominant ideologies. From this moment onwards, the figure of the vampire has been recurrently used to represent the most diverse fears and crises in especially troubled and liminal times and circumstances. Taking as referents the classic Irish tales by Sheridan Le Fanu and by Bram Stoker, the aim of this dissertation is to examine twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary and cinematographic instances of the uses and functions of the trope of the vampire.</p>

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## Introduction

Over the course of time, the figure of the vampire has been associated to moments of individual, social, cultural and political crisis in the history of humanity. Sheridan Le Fanu's "Carmilla" (1872) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) are early examples which Gothicised fin-de-siècle cultural, social and political threats and fears, such as the disintegration of the British Empire, the reluctance towards the increasingly influential industrial middle class or the preoccupation with the progressive visibility of women in the public sphere. According to Olivares Merino, "la inhumanidad del vampiro es el espejo de la inhumanidad de las sociedades actuales [...] El vampiro es foco de nuestras fantasías y anhelos vitales, profundamente reprimidos o anulados por rígidos modos de conciencia y nuestras propias limitaciones" (2001: 30-31).

The vampire myth has to be understood as integral to *fin-de-siècle* "monstrous" narratives which address such cultural, social and political fears in terms of what Stephen Arata has called "reverse colonization", a response to cultural guilt which also entails powerful critiques of dominant ideologies (622). In the case of *Dracula*, the context where the novel takes place shares time and space with the decline of the British Empire as the major power in the world at that time. As a matter of fact, late Victorian fiction very often deals with the emerging feeling that the entire nation was suffering an unstoppable decline.

As characters, *Dracula* and *Carmilla* serve as metaphors for the decadence and the internal conflicts that the nation was undergoing at the time. In Stephen Arata's own words "the fear is that what has been represented as the 'civilized' world is on the point of being colonized by 'primitive' forces" (1990: 623). In the case of *Dracula*, the aristocratic origins of the character places him in the position of an obsolete, old landlord that lives apart

from any cultural and social advancements. In Coppola's version of the Stoker's narrative, a severe contrast is appreciated in visual terms between a renovated, civilized England as, most notably, perceived by Jonathan Harker and the more primitive world of Count Dracula, where he acts as a predator with his victims, and crawls over the impressive castle's walls just like an animal, bringing to mind issues pertaining to de-evolution. Nevertheless, Dracula's strong capacity of learning makes him able to adapt himself to the technological advances and recent social tendencies in London, although this is actually for him part of his plan to invade the city and, by extension, the whole nation by contaminating English citizens by spreading, like a disease, his declining race, which brings to mind issues related to contamination and degeneration, at the time part of a larger social and cultural debate, as shown in, for example, Max Nordeau's *Degeneration* (1892).

Sheridan LeFanu's "Carmilla", published in 1872 in the collection *In a Glass Darkly*, already contains such anxieties, which will be later reassessed by Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in Le Fanu's wake. In fact, Stoker had been rather appealed by his countryman's vampiric narrative, whose influence is most notable in his short story "Dracula's Guest" (published posthumously in 1914 and commonly regarded as Stoker's first discarded chapter for *Dracula*), also featuring a female vampire in a foreign country, and already introducing Jonathan Harker as a narrator. However, and probably due to the too obvious similarities with LeFanu's narrative, Stoker radically altered protagonists and locations in his longer work on vampires, *Dracula*.

Significantly, LeFanu's "Carmilla" already brings to the fore issues relating to colonialism and Empire. The setting of the story in Austrian Styria, signals how, at the time the Austrian Empire was a great central European power from 1804 to 1867. The story's first-person narrator, Laura, explains how her father is a wealthy widower retired from service, whose income allows the family to live in Austria in cheaper conditions than in

England, their homeland. As is the case in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, this narrative is also set against the backdrop of the undeniable luxuries of an aristocratic class, whose decline is, however, hinted at in both narratives, since they both live isolated from the rest of humankind. Laura has no friends or companions, other than her governess or her father. example. In fact, both Dracula and Laura crave for contact with the exterior world and, in the case of Laura, this exchange comes with the figure of Carmilla.

In both stories, an "invasion" of the personal and private territory occurs. In *Dracula*, this is reflected through the count's relationship with Mina and Lucy, whereas in *Carmilla*, such an invasion is signalled in the relationship between the two women characters. In both cases, the invasion of privacy implies the transgression of the limits of friendship, which overtly acquires sexual overtones. In the case of *Carmilla*, the relationship between Laura and the Countess has homoerotic undertones, emphasised not only by the close intimacy between the two women, but also by the powerful imagery relating to death and penetration which permeates the story, and which characterises the relationship between the two.

This might explain why Carmilla and Dracula are presented in the narratives as the "Other", the ones that corrupt the beautiful, naïve and innocent characters that surround them turning them into decadent and sinful monsters. Dracula and Carmilla's invasion progressively circle the protagonists of both narratives: Carmilla first feeds on nearby victims before eventually preying on Laura, whereas Dracula also kills Lucy before attacking Mina at the end of the narrative. In any case, both LeFanu and Stoker's vampires are the personification of the eternal human fear of being invaded and annihilated. Furthermore, being both LeFanu and Stoker Irish Protestants, their texts can be interpreted in relation to the socio-cultural dilemmas of their time and to the liminal position of many

Irish people debating themselves between Catholicism and Protestantism, Ireland and England.

Ever since their first incursions in the literary world, the figure of the vampire has been recurrently used to represent the most diverse fears and cultural crises in especially troubled times and liminal circumstances. In the late-twentieth century and the early twenty-first century, various popular literary references such as *The Vampire Diaries* (2009) by Lisa Jane Smith or the *Twilight Saga* (2008) by Stephenie Meyer projected a more sophisticated version on the late nineteenth-century vampire—already begun with Bela Lugosi's dandification of the vampire in his Broadway plays and films — onto the big screen, with a noticeable emphasis on the relationship of the existential crisis that teenagers suffered in this extremely complex period of their lives.

Adolescent as a prospective target audience for both literature and film narratives in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century is, of course, no coincidence. Teenagers are, by definition, in a liminal position between the world of adults, to which they do not fully belong yet, and the childhood period they have barely abandoned. In this sense, the figure of the vampire also relates to liminality between life and death and interstitial social and cultural positions. They both have to struggle with bodily changes, uncertainties, and incomprehensible desires and fears. In Meyer's *Twilight*, the protagonist, Bella, sees herself as an outcast, confronting a difficult time in her life because of her parents' divorce and moving to an alien place and culture: in that sense, the family house placed outside the village also mirrors their liminal position in social terms. Likewise, in *The Vampire Diaries* Elena is forced to come to terms with her parents' death. In both cases the figure of the vampire is summoned as a commentary on their present situation. Vampires represent eternal life (as opposed to death), immutability (as opposed to divorce, perhaps) and an uncontrollable power and rebellious attitude.

One of the major characteristics of the vampire trope relates to its mutability and protean nature, which varies through time: this is at stake in the popular movie *Interview with the Vampire* (1994) by the Irish director Neil Jordan. In the movie, the figure of the vampire, Lestat (Tom Cruise), appears when the protagonist, Louis (Brad Pitt), is consumed by a moral breakdown after having lost his wife and infant child by a plague. Lestat offers him the ‘gift’ of eternal life and power if he only does one thing: drinking blood to survive.

The figure of the vampire, has been chosen by many artists at different historical times when dealing with complex situations, painful experiences, and critical moments. The vampire’s blood thirst has been even related to the appeal of drugs as a source of power and strength, as well as a way of experiencing intense emotions, and even as a means of evasion. By doing so, the figure of the vampire is commonly used as a way of escaping from reality and mortal problems, such as the compulsive ways in which drugs are consumed in order to avoid facing an unpleasant reality. Read in a more negative light, the vampire stands for our most basic fears, and thus, its trope has been used by many artists to represent the fear of contamination, illnesses, invasions or colonisation, among others.

Taking as referents and antecedents the classic Irish vampiric narratives by Sheridan LeFanu and by Bram Stoker, the aim of this dissertation is to examine twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary and cinematographic instances of the uses and functions of the trope of the vampire and to produce a critical analysis of the enduring influence and appeal of this trope, as well as a study of its artistic and cultural uses and the varied interpretations of the vampire trope.

In order to do so, I will be using as departing referents Sheridan LeFanu’s *Camilla* and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. Furthermore, in order to make a comparison between both novels and twenty-first century versions of the trope, I will mainly focus on the TV series *The Vampire Diaries* (2009) and the *Twilight Saga* (2008), due to their popularity, since

this offers an interesting insight to illustrate how many of the features already present in *Carmilla* and *Dracula* are reinterpreted in twenty-first-century popular culture. With this intention in mind, my work is structured as follows: the first section provides a brief overview of the representation and function of vampires in folklore, literature and cinema. First, I will revise some representative examples of vampires in literature and cinema arranged from their earliest expressions to most recent renderings of the trope. The section also offers a brief survey of the most influential critical approaches to the figure of the vampire summarising the most recurrent interpretations of its uses in artistic manifestations.

The second section of this dissertation focuses on the twenty-first-century vampire series *The Twilight* (2008) saga and *The Vampire Diaries* (2009), two popular and influential renderings of the figure of the vampire that I interpret from the perspective of individual and social crises. Finally, in the conclusions to this work I refer to the continuing interest of the trope, its usefulness for reflecting on contemporary social and individual crises and its aesthetic appeal and potential.

# 1. An Overview of the Representation and Function of Vampires in Folklore, Literature and Cinema

## 1.1 The Vampire: Origins and Some Explanations

Since its appearance with the popularization of Gothic literature and its reformulation during the Victorian fin-de-siècle, the figure of the *vampyre* has been used in diverse artistic manifestations in order to represent most of the fears that a particular society was struggling with. Stephen Arata describes the process that Count Dracula triggers when he tries to invade England and to expand his race all over the country as the realization of one of the greatest fears of the human nature: that of being invaded. In order to commit his bidding, Dracula invades the country by impregnating women with his blood—“Your girls that you all love are mine already” (*Dracula*, 5)— and, by doing so, Dracula expands his diabolic race.

The trope of the vampire as an artistic motif, being continuously re-examined through different times and in various cultural expressions, deems it as a universal concept that reflects human concerns and anxieties existent in several periods of time. Feelings such as fear of the other, hate, rejection and even love are emotional responses that the vampire as a trope entails.

The vampire’s protean and flexible nature is, revealingly, mirrored in the critical debate relating to the word itself, subject to debate and critical speculation:

Like the legend of the living dead, so the origin of the word vampire is clouded in mystery. For most readers and authors alike, the vampire is a

dark and ominous creature of the woods of Hungary or Transylvania. His name is often believed to be of the same national origin. However, both linguistic studies concerning the etymology of the term vampire and the first recorded occurrences of the word in major European languages indicate that the word is neither Hungarian nor Romanian. (Wilson 1998: 3).

An excellent account of the origin and evolution of the word vampire has been provided by Olivares Merino:

Etimológicamente, y según corriente abanderada por raymond McNally (1974:10) así como la escuela de eruditos americanos e ingleses, la palabra <<vampire>> -también vampyre - proviene del término magiar vampir, de origen eslavo, que tiene la misma forma en ruso - con variantes que presentan la alternancia entre upir, upyr u opir-, polaco -upier o upuier-, checo y serbio, entroncada, asimismo, con las formas del búlgaro vapir, vepir, paralelas, a su vez, según el upirólogo húngaro Lajos Gyula (1969:45), a la lituana wempti, <<beber>>. Entre las fuentes derivativas del término magiar, Franz Miklosich, lingüista austriaco de finales del siglo XIX, sugirió la forma turca uber - u obour-, <<bruja>>, mientras que Montague Summers apuntó a una menos probable, la de la raíz griega Πζ - << beber >>-, con el prefijo u , que pasaría a va o av. Aparentemente la palabra, la palabra vampir, vampyr no se conoce en Grecia, donde el término moderno utilizado es vrykolakas - en plural vrykolakes - o variantes como brykilakas, barabarlakos, borbolakos, o bourdoulakos, relacionadas, sin lugar a dudas, con un término que es común a todo el grupo de lenguas eslavas, volkodlak, vukodlak, vulkodlak, compuesto por un lado de una forma que viene a

significar <<lobo>>, mientras que la segunda parte ha sido asociada con blaka, que en antiguo y moderno eslavo y serbio sirve para nombrar el pelo de la cabellera de un caballo. así, su significado se puede considerar sinónimo al de la palabra inglesa <<werewolf>> (2001: 33-34)

In fact, as Olivares Merino himself also notes, the people in Slavic villages used to believe that those who had become werewolves in life turned into vampires after death, which explains why both legendary monsters come together in various oral and written traditions, generally as a reflection of the close relationship between man and beast.

Nevertheless, the correspondent term of the word, the one known and used nowadays, became part of the English language after 1732, when two British magazines, the *London Journal* and the *Gentleman's Magazine*, published the history of Arnold Paole, who was, allegedly, a vampire from Serbia, blamed for the hysteria suffered in Western Europe. This breakdown was caused because locals were suffering from terrible pains accompanied by an insatiable thirst (some sources ensure that it was a thirst for blood).

Nowadays, the term vampire is widely spread, and can be found in any dictionary over the world. As an example, the *Oxford English Language Dictionary* proposes the following definitions for the word:

A corpse supposed to leave its grave at night to drink the blood of the living by biting their necks with long pointed canine teeth” or “a preternatural being of malignant nature (in the unusual form of the belief an animated Corpse), supposed to seek nourishment and do harm by sucking the blood of sleeping persons.

Significantly, what all definitions of the trope share relate to two unchangeable aspects: the fact that the vampire is an undead person and that it drinks blood in order to survive. Vampires live in an immutable stage of being and supposedly enjoy the gift of eternal life: “The vampire is a reanimated corpse that perpetuates its unnatural existence by feeding on blood, an act of parasitism that drains the victim’s life force and can transform the victim into a vampire; it is also an ordinary human being who is characterized as a vampire and who is clearly modelled in vampires with whom writer and reader are familiar.” (Senf 1998: 14).

This mythological figure has existed over the course of time in the folklore of many different cultures, but it experienced a certain revival with the publication of *Dracula* by Bram Stoker in 1897. Unlike some of his predecessors, Stoker firmly rooted his own reassessment of the vampire in accordance with the historical figure of prince Vlad Tepes, distinguished for his bloody campaigns against the Saxons and the Turkish. In a sense, Stoker also followed LeFanu’s inspiration for *Carmilla* in the historical figure of the Hungarian countess Erzsébet Báthory, a descendant of Vlad Tepes and, like him, also known for her thirst for blood. Following LeFanu and Stoker’s emphasis on historical background as inspiration for the vampire trope, film director Francis Ford Coppola also establishes a clear connection between the historical prince Vlad Tepes and *Dracula*, not only to emphasize the constant need for human blood in both figures, but also to bring to the fore a postcolonial context of war and political confrontation.

From the Indian figure of *Baital* —a vampire half human, half bat that satisfies its thirst by drinking the blood of humans and animals— to the Irish figure of *Dearg-Dee*, whose name means “Red Blood Sucker” (a woman who attracts her victims to her tomb in order to kill them and suck their blood), the existence of the vampire is predominant all

over the world. However, the particular troubles and anxieties invested on this figure vary across time and place.

According to Arata (1990: 636), the first reason for choosing this bloodthirsty figure is the fear of being invaded or, as pointed out above, the fear of “reverse colonization”. This invasion of the territory brings forth the figure of the Other and the fear of the unknown. However, there is something particularly British about the use of the vampire in literature at the fin-de-siècle, precisely a time when Britain was one the greatest hegemonic powers in the world. Anolick, Ruth Bienstock and Howard Douglas L. capture it eloquently:

Many scholars have noted that Dracula represents a fear of the unknown, or of many unknowns, including that of the social or racial Other. His origin in the East reflects fears of primitive cultures who might enter England and corrupt the social order. His aristocratic pedigree and his immortality make him Other not only in nationality, but also in class and generation. This overdetermined Other comes to represent many of the fears of nineteenth-century England, embodying the multi-faceted anxiety of a nation that is beginning to lose its imperial hold. Much writing about the novel focuses on how the Other, as represented by Dracula, stands in for many of the anxieties of an emerging modern age, including reverse colonization, changing gender roles, and the fear of atavism stemming in part from growing technology. (2004: 291)

Such atavistic fears are closely related to the notion of degeneration and *purity of blood*, as Arta explains. At the height of Imperial domination at the turn of the twentieth century, blood purity became a fetish which justified the hegemony and predominance of the white, British race, and fears of blood contamination and, hence, loss of hegemony are

dramatized in both “Carmilla” and *Dracula*, in which the foreigner makes massive attempts to contaminate the white, middle-class British with his spurious foreign blood. Such contamination is metaphorically read in both works as a fear of invasion of the Western civilization (epitomised by the British culture) by an outsider, which embodies not only fear of the other, but also fear of the foreigner.

In Stoker’s *Dracula*, dying Lucy receives blood transfusions from different characters in a very significant and symbolic order: the aristocratic Holmwood goes first, followed by the English Dr. Seward and after them, the two foreigners: Van Helsing, a Dutch scientist and, finally, Quincy, an American. This order could be interpreted as representing the cultural and racial anxieties present in fin-de-siècle England, in which racial purity is clearly fetishized, as Ruth Bienstock has argued:

Dracula’s emergence from an obscure, technologically and culturally unadvanced area indicates anxieties in late-nineteenth-century England about reverse colonization and racial purity. According to Stephen Arata, Dracula’s penetration into England signals cultural and racial decline. He posits that to historicize Dracula reveals “how the perception [of Britain’s non-dominance in the world] is transformed into narrative, into stories which the culture tells itself not only to articulate and account for its troubles, but also to defend against and even to assuage the anxiety attendant upon cultural decay. (Bienstock and Douglas, 291)

Finally, the reappearance of the figure of the vampire in late nineteenth-century England can be also related to the cultural fears which the emergence of women’s vindications and suffragism entailed for some conservative factions of Victorian society. As such, vampires endanger the established order by challenging rules and social

conventionalisms: likewise, women who rebel against social norms and conventions might have also been seen as similarly suspicious for endangering the comfortable fin-de-siècle *status quo*. As Piñeiro Santorum aptly notes, vampirism, feminism and homosexuality have all been repressed aspects of society: vampires are not usually deemed as something material, but as the shadow of real human beings and that these shadowy and liminal figures not only stand for our own taboos and fears, but they are also a metaphor for those people whom society has marginalized by not accepting them, as it has been the case of rebellions and vindicating women and homosexuals (2007:55).

In this sense, a large number of artists and writers have condensed in the figure of the vampire the ambivalent attitude of humans towards change, mutability and the unknown, as Olivares Merino states:

Así, entre otros muchos sargazos de escisión y zozobra, hallamos en Drácula pasajes mímicos de lo incestuosos, implícitas murmuraciones de la represión y el abismado placer <<voyeurista>>, recelo de la homosexualidad -como eco despuntado de una deflagrante lid entre género dentro una historia de ambigüedad y desviación en la que el intercambio de fluidos contamina y la penetración metafórica del empalamiento sosiega-, concienciación acerca de la aterradora colonización de la <<New Woman>> -de presupuestos devastadores y amenazadores por el código masculino-, retablo abigarrado del desasosiego que bien pudiera reflejar, a su vez, el padecimiento del propio Abraham Stoker, aquejado de esa enfermedad venérea, la sífilis, que finalmente acabó con su vida en 1912. (2001: 46-47)

As the twentieth century drew on, the figure of the vampire condensed other cultural fears, such as sexual contagion, especially in the context of AIDS, metaphorically represented by means of this trope.

Taking all these considerations into account, it is easy to see how vampires have been recurrently used to project and embody a large number of taboos, fears and unspeakable concerns which a particular society had to confront, which becomes the more conspicuous at times of crisis, as was the case of the late nineteenth-century, when a leap into an advanced technological future was being implemented. In a sense, the trope of the vampire may also signal the existence of brutal and primeval creatures from a dark past, in ominous contrast with a progressively technologized present.

Largely speaking, vampires represent difference, the Other, the one that will never fit in, but also the one that threatens the *status quo*, thus connecting, ideologically speaking, with other primeval monsters, such as werewolves or witches. As a matter of fact, the figure of the werewolf is strongly connected to the vampire since both of them were conceived of as abominations of human nature, created by the devil in order to corrupt human mankind. In this sense, the vampire emerges as “el más fascinante de los engendros de tiniebla, flota en el ambiente como un referente sombrío y desconocido. Perfecta simbiosis lúgubre entre la pasión y el escalofrío, amor febril y letal, es como un tenebroso recuerdo que siempre se proyecta presente, un espantoso futuro que pretende prevalecer y estilizarse cíclico, un monstruo proteico que avanza incansablemente -sin corromperse su insepulta silueta - a la vera del errático tiempo y el devenir de las épocas” (Olivares Merino 2001: 20)

## 1.2 Recurrence and Uses of the Figure of the Vampire

Although probably not the first literary articulation of the vampire myth, John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) is one of the earliest expressions of the trope, serving the purpose of establishing a literary beginning in the popularisation of the trope. As is well known, Polidori's story was the literary outcome of a competition among Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley and himself: significantly, both Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) and *The Vampyre* entail a powerful social critique relating to class and male ambition.

Polidori's *The Vampyre* is a short piece which already brings to the fore some of the most popular characteristics attached to the vampire myth. In Polidori's version, the vampire is associated to a high class and possesses sophisticated manners and abilities of seduction: "His character was dreadfully vicious, for that the possession of irresistible powers of seduction, rendered his licentious habits more dangerous to society." (Polidori, 37)

The protagonist of the story, Lord Ruthven, is an aristocratic vampire who uses his seduction powers over his victims. In *The Vampyre* Ruthven is noticed by Aubrey, a young Englishman who, as many other mortals in vampire stories, feels attracted to the mystery that surrounds the vampire. The story has often been read as a critique of both the figure of Lord Byron, for whom Polidori worked for several years, and of the figure of the vicious aristocrat in general.

In Polidori's version of the trope, the vampire is overtly used to convey political intentions, namely, to criticise the habits and of the vicious lifestyle of the aristocracy in nineteenth-century England. As such, Lord Ruthven is depicted as cruel, manipulative and selfish, a murderer who preys on women without considering the emotional

consequences of his actions, and who enjoys the powers of immortality and the luxuries and privileges of his class, showing no emotional empathy for others.

Only twenty years after the publication of Polidori's *The Vampyre*, Edgar Allan Poe published *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839), also considered as an example of the vampire in the Romantic literary tradition. Although the figures of *Berenice* (1835) or *Ligeia* (1838) are more obvious renderings of the vampire trope in Poe's literary work, *The Fall of the House of Usher* also offers interesting reflections on the literary possibilities of the myth.

Unlike Polidori, Poe largely draws on ambivalence in his depiction of Madeline Usher as a vampire. Although Madeline Usher is never clearly described as a vampire, her brother Roderick significantly affirms that vampirism is "a constitutional and family evil, and one for which he despaired to find a remedy" (Poe 767).

In this Poe's story, however, Madeline's vampiric attributes largely deviate from Polidori's version. Madeline Usher possesses a sensitive hearing and sight that confine her inside the house. She, like her brother at the end of the narrative, cannot be exposed to sunlight and sleeps during the day, wandering at nights along the house. Madeline hardly ever speaks, lives a solitary life and seems to be extremely sick by the tone and coldness of her skin. As the narrative unfolds, Roderick begins to share with his twin sister some symptoms related to vampirism, already suggesting its nature as a contagious disease, suggested by the song in the story: "But evil things, in robes of sorrow,/Assailed the monarch's high estate;/(Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow/ Shall dawn upon him, desolate!)/And, round about his home, the glory/That blushed and bloomed/Is but a dim-remembered story/Of the old time entombed" (Poe 770). Issues relating to contagion, degeneration and disease are here brought to the fore, which, in turn, connect to inheritance and class.

In Polidori and Poe's wake, Irish writer Sheridan LeFanu published in 1872 the collection of short stories *In a Glass Darkly*, in which "Carmilla" was included. However, and unlike Poe and Polidori's versions of the vampire, "Carmilla" addresses additional issues, such as the hidden or repressed sexuality between its two protagonists, Countess Carmilla and Laura, the first-person narrator of the story. By doing so, LeFanu introduces an additional element in the vampire trope which will subsequently reappear in many other cultural reassessments of the myth. In LeFanu's narrative, the intimacy in the relationship between the two female protagonists certainly goes beyond mere friendship by suggesting the existence of a homoerotic tension, quite unusual in late nineteenth-century literature. By depicting such a homoerotic relationship against the backdrop of fantasy, LeFanu downplays the narrative's realism, while simultaneously addressing the topic in an overt manner:

Regarded as erotic, the vampire functions as a vehicle through which criticism may advance with equal ease either psychoanalytical or cultural assertions. The sexualised vampire is thus read alternately as the embodiment of authorial neuroses and as the coded expression of more general cultural fears of which the author is, consciously or unconsciously, an observer [...] The vampire represents, in this sense, the liberation of those sexual activities or desires that have been allegedly proscribed or censored in society or repressed within the self. (Punter, 145)

In this version of the vampire, LeFanu provides an interesting example of how the vampire is, as myth, prone to address issues relating to sexuality, a taboo topic which certainly threatened to undermine the consistence of a perfectly stable British Empire.

Like LeFanu's "Carmilla", Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) also represented a landmark in the history of vampiric literature. As suggested above, Stoker not only drew from previous reassessments of the vampire myth, but also from historical sources by relating Dracula to the Rumanian prince Vlad Tepes, famous for his brave yet violent ways to fight back the enemies of the Empire, most notably the Turks, with extreme cruelty.

As such, *Dracula* has become an icon which has inspired many other artistic renderings and versions of the vampire in the most diverse literary expressions, such as painting, and, from the twentieth century onwards, cinema. Bram Stoker's novel articulates fears relating to manifestations of sexual desire, blood contamination, women's vindications, and the disintegration of the Empire.

Some of these anxieties would be reinterpreted a century later by film director Francis Ford Coppola in his film *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1993). The fact that Coppola was producing a narrative in Stoker's wake is evident in the film's title. However, Stoker also introduced relevant additions which were absent in Stoker's novel, such as the romantic relationship between count Dracula and Mina, or the depiction of Dracula as a character: rather than following Stoker's presentation of the count as a monstrous figure, Coppola also relies on early twentieth-century reassessments of the myth, most notably those entailed by Bela Lugosi's plays and films, which first present a dandification process of the vampire figure as the elegant and glamorous aristocrat.

However, Coppola also preserved some of the most distinguishing features of Stoker's novel, such as the importance of religion, sex and corruption, along with Stoker's gothic elements, which are also present in the film to give the production an aura of phantasmagoria, which has left an indelible imprint in the history of the cultural representations of vampirism: "It appears seemingly impossible, therefore, to talk about

the vampire without making at least tacit reference to [Coppola's] *Dracula* as a pivotal text" (Punter 2000: 144).

The film industry certainly contributed to the popularization of the figure of the vampire in the twentieth century and used it, as many of its literary predecessors, to muse on crises and states of liminality. Notwithstanding, twentieth-century writers continued to reinvent the trope—as was the case, among others, of Angela Carter and Anne Rice—to demonstrate how the figure of the vampire continued to appeal writers for the most diverse purposes. As a case in point, Carter and Rice's vampiric narratives aim to question the breach between popular culture and high-brow literature. Thus, Angela Carter's "The Lady of the House of Love", compiled in the writer's landmark collection *The Bloody Chamber and Other Short Stories* (1979) is a most interesting rendering of the figure of a female vampire which served the author to reflect on the complex condition of women in the twentieth century as well as to deal with topics such as sexuality, mother-daughter relationships, dysfunctional families, etc. Likewise, Anne Rice has also written many stories about vampires for a more general audience with great success. Despite her popular treatment of the topic, Rice's vampires can be also interpreted as a reflection on twentieth century crises and fears.

One of such fears, which connects with late nineteenth-century anxieties relating to contagion and blood contamination, relates to the appearance of the HIV virus and its consequences. The entire world was shocked by this new disease that affected those who maintained sexual relationships without any protection, by this disease also implied contagion by blood transfusions. Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), which was adapted for the big screen in 1994, addresses one of the greatest anxieties in the history of humanity: death and the afterlife. The protagonist, Louis de Pointe du Lac (played by Brad Pitt) longs for death as a result of the painful loss of both his wife and daughter. In

this moment of deep desperation, Louis meets Lestat de Lioncourt (played by Tom Cruise), a vampire that offers him a new alternative to his grief: becoming a vampire. Both Rice's novel and Neil Jordan's film portray an alternative to illness, death and loss, but these narratives also address issues which pertain to corruption, degeneration and class, as evident in Louis and Lestat's corruption of little Claudia (Kristen Dunst) by transforming the child into a vampire. As will be subsequently argued, Ann Rice paved the way for twenty-first interpretations of the vampire trope, as is the case of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* (2005) saga.

## 2. Twenty-First-Century Vampire Series: *The Twilight Saga* and *The Vampire Diaries*.

This section examines the pervading influence of vampire myth in twenty-first century cinema and television. As will be argued, the vampire trope retains many of the original features of the Irish classics by LeFanu and Stoker, to the extent of being considered as interesting examples of reverse cultural colonization. Although original archetypes such as Carmilla or Dracula have evolved, the vampire trope continues to be a useful instrument to reflect on contemporary crises and anxieties, as Jenks explains in relation to the *Twilight* phenomenon:

Think about it: is there ANYTHING that happens in *Twilight* that could not have happened just as easily 50 years ago? You could turn *Twilight* into a 1950's period piece and basically NOTHING about the major plot points, dialogue, personalities, relationships, or motivations — of either the vampires OR humans in this saga — would need to change. (Jenks)

In both *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries*, the two female protagonists face difficult times in their lives, while also, and more significantly, engaging with larger social concerns, such as sexual insecurities, family disintegration and gender violence, which may help to explain the popularity of the TV series:

The films have been incredibly lucrative for the three young stars: Kristen Stewart, Robert Pattinson and Taylor Lautner. We estimate that between May

2011 and May 2012, the three earned a combined \$87 million. That's a far cry from the first movie when each star earned less than \$1 million apiece.

The franchise has made almost everyone who touches it very rich. We estimate that in the last year alone, when there were no new *Twilight* books on the market, author Stephenie Meyer earned \$14 million. In 2010, at the height of the *Twilight* book and movie madness, the author ranked 59th on our annual Celebrity 100 with \$40 million in earnings. (Pomerantz)

Similarly, *The Vampire Diaries* was an absolute success and attracted the largest audience for the CW of any series premiere since the network began in 2006, receiving numerous award nominations. New forms of marketing procedures and consumerist habits have probably played an important role in the dissemination of these products, but the universal appeal of the vampire tripe must not be underrated.

## **2.1 *The Twilight Saga and The Vampire Diaries***

### **2.1.1 *The Twilight Saga***

The *Twilight Saga* is a group of five films inspired by the four novels written by the American author Stephenie Meyer. The films *Twilight* (2008), *New Moon* (2009), *Eclipse* (2010), *Breaking Dawn* part I (2011) and *Breaking Dawn* part II (2012), are named after the books, which were launched, respectively, in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008.

Despite Meyer's difficulties in finding a publisher for her novels, the series would eventually become a success, to the point that Meyer sold 29 million copies of her books in 2008 and 26,5 million in 2009. According to the author, the source of inspiration for the novel came from a dream about a young girl falling in love with a vampire, which she transformed into her first novel within only three months, as Meyer herself explained:

I can see a young woman in the embrace of a very handsome young man, in a beautiful meadow surrounded by forest, and somehow, I know that he is a vampire. In the dream there is a powerful attraction between the two. When I started to write this, I had no idea where it was going; I had no idea at all in the beginning that I was writing a book. I started writing out the scene from my dream, and when I got done I was so interested in the characters that I wanted to see what would happen to them next. And so, I just wrote and let whatever happened happen. (631)

Meyer's saga features Bella Swan as a protagonist, a teenager who moves to an alien town after her parents' divorce. Bella's feelings of discomfort are overcome when she meets Edward Cullen. Bella's initial happiness turns into disappointment when she learns that the Cullen family are vampires, which endangers her own safety. At the end of the saga, and in an ultimate act of love, Bella is turned into a vampire to share Edward's destiny as such. Despite the apparent simplicity of this Beauty-and-the-Beast narrative, the saga addresses some of the most pressing concerns, anxieties, and fears of our contemporary society.

### ***2.1.2 The Vampire Diaries***

*The Vampire Diaries* is a TV show that ran for eight seasons and included 171 episodes directed by Kevin Williamson and Julie Plec, based on the book series of the same name written by L. J. Smith. The original series is formed by 13 books being books 1 to 7 written by L.J. Smith, 8 to 10 by an unknown ghost-writer and 11 to 13 by Aubrey Clark. The first 7 books were published in between 1991 and 1992, the next three were published in between 2011 and 2012 and the last ones in 2013 and 2014. All of the books revolve

around Elena Gilbert, a teenager who has recently lost her parents in a car accident and who has to adapt herself to new circumstances in the fictional city of Mystic Falls. While Elena is facing new responsibilities, two young men, Stefan and Damon Salvatore, appear in her life. The two brothers reveal themselves as vampires and as the TV show unfolds, the audience witnesses

The TV shows recreates not only the vampire trope, but also some related fantastic figures which entail similar connotations, such as witches (as exemplified by the character of Bonnie) and werewolves, in the case of Tyler. As is the case of Meyer's series, Elena eventually chooses to abandon her mortal existence to join the group of magic creatures

As was the case of *Twilight*, the success of the TV show could relate to the fact of complying with the expectations of a target audience, teenagers who identified with certain Elena's life experiences and, generally speaking, with the possibilities which the vampire trope entails against the backdrop of adolescence.

As expected, once *The Vampire Diaries* was over, several debates were on the social media trying to explain relating to its popularity: one of the most recurrent debates was, and still is, whether Elena should end up with Damon or not, since during the entire series we see that he is characterised as a bad boy who refuses to follow the rules and behaves without thinking about the consequences of his actions. However, as his affection for Elena develops, Damon seems to progressively change in order to be worthy of his beloved. Nevertheless, the audience was not entirely satisfied with Elena's decision, since they thought Elena was making the wrong choice by choosing Damon instead of kind and gentle Stefan. On the one hand, Stefan gathers the characteristics of the traditional male figure who behaves as the knight in shining armour which women "need", according to the patriarchal society. On the other hand, Damon is a troublemaker who (apparently) only seeks his own good. In the end, the directors seemed to agree that Elena did not need

someone to “save” her from trouble but someone able to make her feel alive, in this case, Damon Salvatore.

Another interesting debate relates whether Katherine, Elena’s best friend, is the true heroine of the saga. While Elena’s difficult situation in life is undeniable, Katherine has to face both her mother and her husband’s death. In general, Katherine seems a more developed character than Elena and a more representative example of female empowerment. When still human, Katherine seems to gather the characteristics of a female protagonist subdued to the controlling power of men, showing no signs of self-esteem. However, once the character turns accidentally into a vampire, she starts developing a self-sufficient attitude, typical of a strong woman.

## **2.2 Critical Interpretation: Individual and Social Crises**

### **2.2.1 Social and Community Crises**

Family dynamics and interpersonal relationships have always been central to American society and culture. As part of the American dream, an idealised vision of family order and coherence was often projected in several cultural products, an image especially vindicated after the Second World War.

However, discordant voices have often signalled the artificiality of such a construction, as is the case of Betty Friedan in her influential *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Friedan denounced how women were suffering a sort of malady which had no name, in reference to the frustration and unhappiness of many mothers and wives who were not that satisfied with the ideal promoted in relation to the American patriarchal family.

Despite the many substantial changes which the end of the twentieth century brought about, a comforting ideal of the traditional family is often present in many American cultural products. In this sense, prestigious novelists such as Jonathan Franzen have deployed the complexity of the American family in novels such as *Freedom* (2010) or *Purity* (2015), and popular films such as Sam Mendes's *American Beauty* (1999) have been interpreted as sound reflections on the troublesome issue of the contemporary American family.

While in the early 1960s babies typically arrived within a marriage, today four out of ten births take place in outside wedlock. At the same time that family structures have been transformed, so has the role of mothers in the workplace. As a result of these changes, there is no longer one dominant family form in the United States. Parents today are raising their children against a backdrop of increasing diversity and, for many, against constantly evolving family forms. By contrast, in 1960, and at the height of the post-World War II baby boom, there was one dominant family form. At that time 73% of all children were living in a family with two married parents in their first marriage. By 1980, 61% of children were living in this type of family, and today less than half (46%) are in that situation. The declining share of children living in what is often deemed a "traditional" family has been largely supplanted by the rising shares of children living with single or cohabiting parents, according to the Pew Research Centre

Both *The Twilight Saga* and *The Vampire Diaries* are examples of non-canonical types of family structures compared with the idealized stereotype of the 1960s. In *Twilight*, Bella has recently experienced her parents' divorce and she has to move into a single parent family with her father, Charlie. Although her mother is constantly calling her by the phone and she seems to worry about Bella's welfare, her absence in Bella's daily life makes the character wish to escape and meet Edward, since she feels

uncomfortable in her own house: “It was impossible, being in this house, not to realize that Charlie had never gotten over my mom” (*Twilight*, 20).

In contrast with Bella’s family, Edward lives in a traditional household with two parents and in the company of brothers and sisters. They are all vampires and although they are not strictly speaking blood-related, their bonds are as strong. Significantly, Bella seems to find comfort in this familial environment where everyone seems to worry about the others in their clan. In her numerous visits to the Cullens, Bella thinks about her old life and her initial family, and in Edward’s own words: “‘You miss your mother,’ he whispered. ‘You worry about her. And when it rains, the sounds make you restless. You used to talk about home a lot, but it’s less often now. Once you said, ‘It’s too green.’” (*Twilight*, 130).

Although Bella misses her mother, she progressively gives up to the idea of being with her mortal family in order to be forever with Edward’s. She aspires to become one of them and share the family bonds and affections they demonstrate through the entire saga.

In *Twilight*’s depiction of the American contemporary world, the contrast between the world of vampires and werewolves is central to the development of the saga. While the community of werewolves resemble the most traditional and naturalistic concept related to the land in native, lost America, the Cullens and the vampire world in general portray the renovated and transformed visualization of present-day America. In this sense, the Quileute tribe to which Jacob belongs lives close contact with a natural environment in cabins in the woods. They supply themselves with what nature gives them and they do not look forward to the fancies the modern world offers, feeling satisfied with the security and protection of their group. This is clearly opposed to the Cullen’s technologized environment, enjoying all the facilities of the modern world. The Cullen house is quite

significant in this sense, for it is described as a modern piece of architecture with high walls and ceilings made out of glass.

In this sense, the series mirrors, at least, three different models of family in contemporary America: the dysfunctional family of the female protagonist, the modern family represented by the Cullens (which retains a traditional structure while also adapting to modern times) and the pre-modern family unit in contact with nature.

In contrast with the family models that *Twilight* portrays, in *The Vampire Diaries* there are not examples of traditional family life. While Elena has recently lost her parents in a car accident and neither her aunt nor her uncle is able to play the role of the parental figures Elena and her brother might need, they are not the only ones who show examples of new concepts of family. Apart from Elena's case, Caroline Forbes lives in a single parent household with her mother because her father has recently discovered his homosexuality. In the series, Caroline maintains a strong relationship with her mother, who tries to act as both a mother and father figure for Caroline. Another example of the representation of alternative twenty-first century family models is the one Bonnie Bennet offers. She was abandoned by her mother when she was a little girl and, although in the middle of the saga she finds her and discovers the motif of her disappearance, she is mainly with her father, who, as in the case of Caroline's mother, tries to play both the mother's and father's roles. The regular appearance of single parent households emphasizes the modern idea of non-traditional family structures.

As already argued, both *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries* offer a reflection on one of the most delicate aspects of contemporary societies in general, and of the United States in particular. The debate about family structures is an on-going one at the level of education in the press and among politicians and sociologists in which artistic manifestations also engage. Although no ideal model is actually put forward in these

debates, the trope of the vampire is certainly used to represent many of the anxieties and crises that affect contemporary societies. In fact, the loneliness and lack of protection of twenty-first century women characters in these cultural products is not so different from Laura's situation in "Carmilla". And, certainly, the alternative offered to them as represented by the vampire community is as appealing as threatening and suffocating for them.

As was the case of "Carmilla" and *Dracula*, both *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries* have managed to deploy not only social crisis that affect contemporary societies as a whole but also to illustrate individual and personal crisis and liminal states such as the ones suffered by adolescents in their delicate transition from childhood to maturity.

### **2.2.2 Individual Crises Related to the Liminal Condition of Adolescents**

As mentioned before, the figure of the vampire represents a state of liminality between life and death, light and darkness, good and evil, physical and spiritual worlds. Liminality as an essential feature has been appropriated by many artists in order to represent circumstances, situations and states which also convey the idea of transition and interstices.

All the protagonists of both *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries* are teenagers who are placed in a decisive moment in their lives, experiencing the transition from childhood to maturity. To the crises previously mentioned in their families and in their communities, the individual critical stage of adolescence should be also taken into account. This liminal condition implies that they are anxious and fearful as well as attracted and appealed by

the new world opened up to them by the vampire community which implies freedom, sexuality and the encounter with the other.

Thus, in *Twilight* Bella abandons sunny and dry Phoenix, Arizona, in order to move to wet and rainy Forks, Washington D.C. In this way, Bella encounters a new environment, although she feels an outsider. This feeling of solitude and incomprehension is put to an end when the figure of the vampire, Edward Cullen, appears in the scene. The vampire appears as an alternative to escape her parents' strict rules and her dysfunctional family.

The contrast between the desire of freedom and the fear of being unprotected is core to the whole *Twilight* saga. The table below, retrieved from *The Journal of Effective Teaching*, an online journal devoted to teaching excellence, puts forward the ways in which *Twilight* unfolds many topics related to adolescent development:

Movie	Scene/Theme	Adolescent Development Topic(s)	Additional Reading Topics
<i>I, II, III</i>	<i>Interactions with parents Talks with parents about love and sex</i>	<i>Families Sexuality</i>	<i>Single Parent Homes</i>
<i>I, II, III</i>	<i>School—cafeteria, gym, bio class, prom, around town, graduation</i>	<i>Schools Peer Groups</i>	<i>Popularity Peer Influences</i>
<i>I, II, III</i>	<i>Town of Forks</i>	<i>Culture</i>	<i>Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory</i>
<i>I</i>	<i>Bella's questioning and observing of Edward's behavior Exploring Quileute legend and learning about vampires</i>	<i>Cognition</i>	<i>Piaget's Stages of Development Brain Development</i>

<i>I, II, III</i>	<i>Social system of vampires</i>	<i>Family Peer Groups Culture</i>	<i>Bandura's theory of reciprocal determinism</i>
<i>I, II, III</i>	<i>Edward &amp; Bella relationship</i>	<i>Sexuality Identity Puberty</i>	<i>Romance relationships Sexual desire</i>
<i>I, III</i>	<i>Jacob/Quileute tribe and reservation Tribal meeting/history Tribal legends</i>	<i>Identity Cognition Culture</i>	<i>Native American adolescent development Racial/Ethnic Identity of Native Americans</i>
<i>I, II, III</i>	<i>Activities with the Cullen Family Cullen Family's protection of Bella</i>	<i>Peer Groups Family</i>	<i>Blended families Non-traditional families,</i>
<i>I, III</i>	<i>Fighting with other vampires Vampire gang</i>	<i>Peer Groups Psychosocial Problems</i>	<i>Adolescent Aggression Gangs</i>
<i>II</i>	<i>Bella's isolation and nightmares</i>	<i>Psychosocial Problems</i>	<i>Attention-Seeking Behavior Suicidal Behavior</i>
<i>II</i>	<i>Bella's riding with biker Bella's riding motorcycles with Jacob Bella's jumping in water off the cliff</i>	<i>Psychosocial Problems</i>	<i>Attention-Seeking Behavior Suicidal Behavior</i>
<i>II, III</i>	<i>Visit to Volturi Bella's deciding to become a vampire Friends' reactions to Bella's decision to become a vampire</i>	<i>Identity Peer Groups</i>	<i>Erikson's Stages of Man Marcia's Identity Statuses</i>
<i>II, III</i>	<i>Women Vampires Men Vampires Werewolves Bella Bella's girl friends</i>	<i>Gender Identity</i>	<i>Sex roles and stereotypes</i>

If *Twilight* renders the complex and troublesome time of adolescence, *The Vampire Diaries* represents characters who similarly debate between family protection and dangerous freedom, or the attraction and fear of sexuality. On the one hand, Elena's lack of parental control is solved by the figure of her aunt, Jenna, who tries to assume the role of the responsible adult in Elena and her brother's family environment. On the other hand, her aunt's inability to control her nephews and Elena's constant interaction with the world of the vampires make Elena distance herself from any sort of parental control.

Throughout the show, Elena's character complies with the characteristics of the outsider, also present in Bella's character in *Twilight*. Before her parents died in a car accident, Elena seemed to represent the prototypical teenager who was part of her high school cheerleader's group and who dated the handsome quarterback, Matt Donovan. However, and after her parents' death, Elena changes utterly and quits every activity that used to be the centre of her life in order to mourn her parents. In spite of having some friends, Elena finds comfort in the figure of the two Salvatore brothers: Damon and Stefan. Both of them also try to influence Elena into their own ways but she appears to be reluctant to be influenced by anyone.

While Elena's life changes, so does the parental figure that occupies her parents' place at her house. After her aunt Jenna dies, her uncle John takes up that role and prohibitions and rules come with him. John is constantly forbidding Elena to be with the Salvatore brothers, whom he considers dangerous for her. This constant argument Elena and her uncle have is resolved once it is discovered that John is actually Elena's biological father and that all his worries about her are strongly grounded. Elena, posed in a liminal position as to her biological father's prescriptions and the protection offered by the vampires, eventually joins the supernatural order, even at the risk of endangering herself.

Family relationships and interpersonal bonds emerge as key issues in both *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries*, which, in turn, relate to sexuality and desire:

Like American culture itself, *Twilight* is both lascivious and chaste. Meyer, a practicing Mormon, has said she draws a line at premarital sex for her characters. But, as *Times* columnist Gail Collins noted last month, boyfriend Edward holds the line, not heroine and narrator Bella. Bella, after all, is so hot for Edward she tells him she's going to "spontaneously combust" and frequently forgets to breathe when he kisses her. (Seltzer)

Although sexuality and desire are present in vampiric cultural products since their inception, the particular treatment of sexuality in *Twilight* has been subject to critical debate and controversy, as Wilson explains:

Rather than relating vampirism to aberrant sexuality, as has been the tradition, *Twilight* offers as a clan of abstinent vampires who do not bite necks let alone feed on human blood. Rather than attacking the female body in order to subdue it, *Twilight* focuses on one potent female - a female who attracts all males in her vicinity- and turns her into a married, monogamous vampire - a patriarchal set piece in the Cullen family drama. In so doing, the saga renders Bella 's sexuality both safe and pure - once married her virginity does not threaten to destroy Edward' soul; once a vampire her irresistible beauty "belongs" to Edward for all eternity. (Wilson)

This feature certainly implies a departure from the traditional rendering of the vampire in classic literature, usually employed to indirectly represent the attraction as well as the fear of sexuality, and even sexual anarchy. According to Wilson, Stephenie Meyer has established a connection between the fear of having sex and the fear of

defrauding one's God or, in other words, the fear of violating the purity of the soul, which certainly connects to Meyer's personal religious convictions as a practising Mormon. In *Twilight*, Edward fears the consequences sex might have and does not accept to it until he and Bella are finally married: "I have human instincts – they may be buried deep, but they're there" (*Twilight*).

Edward and Bella's relationship is defined as a masochist one by being compared to a lion and a lamb, respectively. Edward's potent masculinity would be represented by the lion's strength, whereas Bella's submissiveness would correspond with a lamb's:

"And so the lion fell in love with the lamb..." he murmured. I

looked away, hiding my eyes as I thrilled to the word.

"What a stupid lamb," I sighed.

"What a sick, masochistic lion." (*Twilight*, 274)

However, such comparisons also entail the idea of male supremacy over the weaker sex, women, which is problematic. Such a patriarchal conception of their union is, furthermore, connected to Edward's decision as to how and when have sex, whereas Bella's opinion is given little consideration.

*The Vampire Diaries* is also concerned with adolescent sexuality and, surprisingly, is rendered in similar terms:

Vampire narratives seem to mutate slightly when aimed at young adult consumers. When comparing the *Twilight* saga to other print texts, such as *Dracula*, *The Vampire Chronicles*, and *The Vampire Diaries*, an obvious difference is the way they depict sexuality. The young adult novels tend to portray primarily heteronormative relationships reinforced by "traditional" family values. All the couples in the novels are heterosexual and quickly enter into lifelong commitments. The print vampire narratives aimed at a more general readership do not limit their relationships in this

way; they often include non-traditional family structures, focus on homosocial relationships, and include characters that could be classified as asexual or bisexual rather than heterosexual. (Ames, 88)

Taking into consideration Ames's words, the world of the vampires and the strong connection their strong connection with sex is core to *The Vampire Diaries*. Elena Gilbert's love triangle with the two brothers (who seem to be a modern version of Cain and Abel) is just one of the few examples of sexual attraction in Mystic Falls. While we have to make a distinction between sex among vampires and sex that involves vampires with humans, the way the female characters develop sexually when they are turned into vampires must be also considered. Caroline Forbes's example is significant in this sense: Caroline has been abused by men's controlling behaviour. Caroline is a rape victim, yet silently complies with offence. Nevertheless, after being turned into a vampire by mistake, this weak, permissive character changes into a strong woman who controls her personal situations in life, especially when having sex.

As the saga unfolds, Caroline constantly changes her sexual partners, both with humans and werewolves, eventually able to express herself freely and spontaneously. As both of them are magical creatures with very strong sexual impulses, sexual intercourse is presented as a passionate encounter where the entire environment is destroyed. In opposition to Bella Swan in *Twilight* and her inability to choose when and how she has sex, Caroline stands out as fearless and sexually active when turned into a vampire, as will also be the case of Elena.

## Conclusions

This dissertation has aimed to examine the critical repercussions of the articulation of the myth of the vampire as one of the most recognizable and popular tropes in different cultures across the world. As such, the vampire continues to be an inexhaustible source of inspiration for a large number of artists, most notably because of its ability to convey various cultural anxieties, which have been projected on to the vampire to the extent of becoming a protean cultural icon.

This dissertation has looked into some of the most popular examples of the literary vampire, ranging from Lord Byron and Polidori to Edgar Allan Poe, Sheridan LeFanu's "Carmilla" and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the latter firmly rooted in Victorian *fin-de-siècle* politics and aesthetics. As such, and as Stephen Arata has argued both LeFanu and Stoker reflected in their works Britain's fear of "reverse colonization" (1990: 623), or the anxiety of being colonized by primitive, ancestral forces that threatened to destroy the civilized world and the values it represented, such as social integrity or hegemony of the white race by means of blood contamination. Whereas LeFanu set the vampiric threat in Austrian Styria, Stoker placed the vampire at the heart of British civilization, which not only made such cultural fears more prominent, but also, and more significantly, showed a growing awareness of the dangers that the disintegration of the empire would entail. These two authors have been taken as referents since they opted for using the figure of the vampire in an Ireland in times of crisis with England and experiencing themselves a liminal position due to the conflicts between Catholics and Protestants. Notwithstanding, his seminal texts have been also interpreted as commentaries on other conflicts and invasions that were taking place in Europe at that time. Significantly, both writers also addressed the fears derived from the progressive visibility of women in the social sphere in similar terms: LeFanu and Stoker's women characters embody male fears concerning women's

claims for independence and freedom, a fact which was regarded by some conservative factions of society as an intolerable threat to the comfortable *status quo* of Victorian society. The publication of these novels chronologically coincided with women's suffragist movements, which may have provoked a feeling of social unrest, projected on to some characters in these novels, such as Carmilla or Lucy Snowe.

As the twentieth century drew to an end, the myth of the vampire gained new relevance and consistence by adjusting some of its major characteristics to new concerns and anxieties, as articulated by Ann Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), Stephenie Meyer to name just a few, which were accompanied by popular film versions of the books. Significantly, these writers targeted, whether intentionally or not, a young adult readership, a fact which unveils growing societal concerns for the education and welfare of adolescents. In fact, this is done by exploring the connections between some major traits attached to the vampire myth and adolescence itself as a prominent stage towards full adult assumption of social norms and conventions which first requires maturation, bodily changes and other transformations. As such, both the adolescent and the vampire share an uncomfortable interstitial position which categorises them as uncomfortable outsiders. However, Meyer articulates in her vampiric saga a didactic caveat against the dangers of sexuality which is absent in Rice or Smith, who rather tend to focus on the vampire's liminality as placed in an interstitial position, at a crossroads in sexual, cultural and social terms which comes to no resolution.

Both the novels and film narratives here examined testify to the prevalence of the vampire myth and to its ability to articulate different cultural anxieties, which may vary depending on the particular fears that characterise different societies in various cultural moments in time. Due to the formal restrictions of a dissertation of this sort, many topics related to the significance of the vampire have been left here unaddressed, such as some

interesting postmodern reassessments of the vampire myth as entailed, among others, by writers such as Elizabeth Kostova in her bestselling novel *The Historian* (2005). Revealingly, Kostova articulates in her novel a catalogue of several literary genres, such as detective fiction, travelogue, epistolary epic or the postmodern historical novel, among others, all of which, interestingly, reach back to Stoker's landmark late nineteenth-century novel in terms of form more than a hundred years after the publication of *Dracula*. In so doing, Kostova both draws and deviates from Stoker by putting forward a similar amalgamation of narrative genres yet questioning the male's hegemonic point of view by focusing on a woman's social and historical perspective.

As this dissertation has shown, the vampire myth remains appealing to a large number of audiences across times and cultures due to its protean quality to embody different, and often conflicting, cultural fears, while also powerfully articulating inspiring visions of rebelliousness and resistance which continue to permeate our imagination to this date.

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