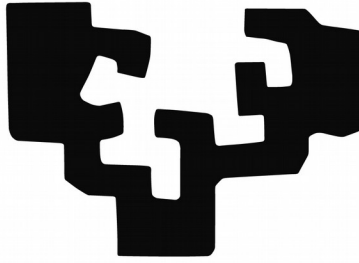


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THE BLOODY ROAD TO EQUALITY: THE PORTRAYAL
AND EVOLUTION OF FEMALES IN 20th AND 21st
CENTURY US MAINSTREAM VAMPIRE NOVELS

Alba Picado Vallejo

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A mi madre,
que no ha dejado de cuidarme y apoyarme con este trabajo ni un minuto.
Ni siquiera cuando el cáncer quiso interponerse entre nosotras.

A mi tutor, Martin Simonson,
que ha tenido una paciencia infinita con mis dudas y errores y ha sido un gran guía.
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por todo su apoyo y por mantener, tras muchas lecturas, que esta tesis es interesante.

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A quienes consiguieron documentos desde sus bibliotecas y fondos que yo no tenía disponibles
(Paula, Alba, Javi) y conferencias de mi interés (Ana). A quienes me han “obligado” a dar una
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The Bloody Road to Equality – The Portrayal and Evolution of Females in 20th and 21st century US Mainstream Vampire Novels

1 Introduction

Vampires have accompanied humankind ever since its origins as there has always been some kind of vampire which fed on the living in all folklore traditions around Europe and beyond (Nußbaumer 10; Auerbach 8; Höglund and Khair 1). For example, in Guiley's *Encyclopedia of Vampires, Werewolves, and Other Monsters*, we find abundant entries which refer to vampire-like beings found in African (2, 17, 31) and Indian traditions (17, 19, 32, 68, 203), as well as in the popular imaginary of China (158, 170, 329) and Japan (116, 152, 167, 261, 275, 335), among others.

Vampires first started to appear in literature in the 19th century (Lucendo 115) when John William Polidori published his short story *The Vampyre* in 1819 and, to create Lord Ruthven—its protagonist—he got his inspiration from observing Lord Byron (del Toro and Hogan). Polidori gave this vampire a handsome appearance and a lust for life and pleasure and, by providing him with these attributes, he both achieved his book to be instantly acclaimed by the public (Williamson 51), and turned this traditionally dull and horrifying being from folklore and spoken tradition into a literary character as well as one of the most fashionable creatures ever (51). By the middle of the same century, between the years 1845 and 1847, the stories of another very

influential vampire, *Varney the Vampire*, were published in cheap magazines called “penny press” in London by Thomas Preskett Prest (Hirschmann 9).

Women have, of course, also been included in vampire literature. However, their parts were usually unimportant as they tend to work as accessories for the vampire protagonists, who have traditionally been males who generally used both their mental and physical power to attract young female victims. Similarly, the heroes who tried to rescue these damsels in distress were also men. The most remarkable exception to this statement in classical vampire literature is *Carmilla*, written in 1872 by Sheridan Le Fanu, and whose eponymous protagonist is not only a female vampire, but also a lesbian. Nevertheless, Carmilla’s sexual preferences and strength are portrayed as evil while the woman she loves, Laura, is a passive (Smart 24) and innocent virgin (11). Laura does not conceive the idea of liking a woman and once and again tries to find excuses for the attraction she feels for Carmilla (21). Men such as Laura’s doctor and her father are, in contrast with her, active and brave and, although she never joins a man in the romantic or sexual sphere (Auerbach 47), it is because of their intelligence and strength that Carmilla is found and killed and she does not end Laura’s life.

Although modern sophisticated vampires, like the ones we are used to nowadays, originated in Europe, after *Dracula* was published they rapidly became famous in the United States (Auerbach 101) and they seemed to have found a perfect new home in this country since literature—and other forms of

culture, especially cinema, and comics—having to do with vampires has flourished in this country since the 19th century and most works about them from the 20th and 21st century have been created there.

Vampires did never completely disappear from art. They first appeared in films during the 1920s and 1930s (Laycock 41) and in 1954 Richard Matheson wrote his well-known novel *I Am Legend* which also features vampires. However, in the second part of the 20th century, a renewed interest in vampires was generated which was especially strong and lasts until today. Some scholars state that this last boom started in the 1960s with the appearance of the vampire Barnabas Collins in the soap opera *Dark Shadow* (Laycock 42-43, Belanger 260), while others argue that the decade of the 1970s was the most important for vampires because of the interest that many filmmakers showed in them (Abbott 75).

Theatre plays, opera songs and other forms of art have also been imbued with vampires (Williamson 51) which have—since they became part of literature—represented eternal life, fame and beauty as well as society's most hidden desires such as knowledge, sex and homosexual desire, new and different experiences, etc. (Grassbaugh 391-392; Greene 25 "A New Lease of Life for the Undead"; Greene 43 "The Badness of Undeath"; Nelson 231; Preston 266). These ideals embodied by vampires are far from having disappeared from their representation nowadays and novels, TV series, advertisements and films in which they appear prove that they have been very

successful in the last few decades too (Robinson 423; Kérchy and Antoni 99; Nelson 229; Smith 263).

Readers are able to relate to stories about vampires because these very adaptable creatures (del Toro and Hogan; Smith 263; Hirschmann 45) reflect the current interests, changes, and problems of society (Lindgren and Isaksson 19; Kérchy and Antoni 105; Williamson 29-30). There have been countless examples of lucrative vampire works in literature. For instance, Anne Rice published her very well-known novel *Interview with the Vampire* in 1976 and it became an instant best-seller (M. J. Wood 60, Hirschmann 28), up to the point that Rice was paid 17 million dollars in advance for her three next novels about vampires (Campbell et al. 3rd ed., 363). Her numerous fans also created societies dedicated to her books and characters (Williamson 57) and some of her books became blockbuster films. Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga has sold forty million copies, has been adapted into very successful films (Hirschmann 62-63), and has even inspired other writers for new collections of books such as the *Fifty Shades* trilogy by E. L. James (Lindgren and Isaksson 6). The more recent TV show *True Blood*, based on Charlaine Harris' *The Southern Vampire Mysteries*, a series of novels analysed in this dissertation, is also very successful, (Nakagawa; Hirschmann 72) as is *The Vampire Diaries*, another TV series based on the homonymous books by L. J. Smith (Hirschmann 72).

Vampire-related media and paraphernalia from the late 20th century until now tend to target the young public (Hirschmann 48; Campbell et al. 4th

ed., 177), with plots which are a mixture of fantastic elements such as magic, violence, and topics specifically related to teenage and youngsters' lifestyles such as studies at university or high school and work, sex and friendship, etc. (Campbell et al. 3rd ed., 144; Kérchy and Antoni 102-103; Hirschmann 56). For example, the protagonists of the vampire featured TV shows *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and its sequel *Angel*—aired between the 1990s and the first decades of the current century—, which earned millions of viewers in the last decades (Campbell et al. 3rd ed., 177; Nelson 254) and of dollars in the box office (“Buffy the Vampire Slayer”; “Angel”), were teenagers and young adults. These two series were incredibly popular (Schlozman 49; Williamson 57; Nakagawa).

1.1 Women in Vampire Literature

Women have not traditionally been the protagonists of many renowned vampire books in the past but as time has gone by, more and more¹ have included more females among their characters, both human and vampires, and some of them have been portrayed as extraordinarily strong and intelligent.

Carmilla, as a character, did not set a strong precedent as the plots in subsequent renowned vampire books from that time revolve, again, around active males and passive females and, although some critics consider that

1

For example, Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*' third book: *The Queen of the Damned* and, more recently, some of the above-mentioned sagas such as *Twilight*, *The Vampire Chronicles* and the *Southern Vampire Mysteries*.

Gothic literature² is mostly read, written and dominated by women, there are plenty of examples which prove this statement is too far-fetched (Nystrom 63). One of the many examples of vampire books in which women occupy a second and passive place is the very well-known *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker, published only a couple of decades after *Carmilla* in 1897. This literary work and its also eponymous protagonist, the evil Count, are probably the most famous book and vampire in the history of, not only literature, but also general culture, as it has been adapted to different media on countless occasions (Botting *Aftergothic*, 287; Grassbaugh 392; Barrows 134; Hirschmann 68).

Nystrom argues that a thorough analysis of this novel may reveal a positive portrayal of the female characters, although she also admits that most of its plot has to do with men (63). This critic maintains that powerful women are “portrayed as acutely terrifying and treacherous” (63) and those who possess too much autonomy and independence stand out as “immoral” (68, 71), whereas female vampires in the book can be also understood as a warning against feminists (66, 70) and against sexually active women in general (Höglund and Khair 30). Men, on the contrary, act violently in order to restore patriarchy, understood as the natural order in Victorian societies (Nystrom 72; Botting, *Gothic* 98), and the fact that the Count seems to generally choose female victims to feed on has also been pointed out as a sign of misogyny (Joshi 301).

2

From which vampire literature can be considered a sub-genre.

However, it can be argued that women in vampire fiction fall into two very traditional categories: the good ones, who submit to men and their rules (Antoni) and need them to be fulfilled and even die for them, and the monstrous, who cannot handle their own power and, in their quest for success, lose their ability to feel and create chaos and death (Antoni). In recent times, although vampires have often been used to represent LGBTQAI+ communities (Kane 104-105)—specially during the 1970s until the 1990s—female vampires who are not straight have been scarce and even more during the last few decades (Seifer 13).

Although I have argued that there has been an interesting reversion of the stereotyped gender roles and what has traditionally been understood as “masculine” and “feminine” in certain alternative films, such as the Swedish *Let the Right One In* from 2008, and the American-Iranian *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* from 2014 (Picado “He was the Man”), this evolution has not been mirrored in most vampire fiction created the United States. Even if during the last two decades, when the genre has, once again, undergone certain transformations in this country and women have, in the great majority of cases, been made protagonists and first-person narrators of the stories³, this kind of fiction still tends to present strong masculine vampires interacting with feeble heterosexual human females. Independent and resolute female characters are still rare as most protagonists are exclusively focused on pursuing a male

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This is, again, the case in all the series of books mentioned in the previous footnote.

companion and not on their personal development and learning. Even Buffy, the vampire hunter who starred the TV show with the same name, who is often mentioned in research about vampires and feminism as a positive role model (Nakagawa 12), embodies certain misogynistic stereotypes having to do, for instance, with virginity and (Mayhew 43) the objectification of the female body (Jowett 22).

In the last twenty years, most of these vampire products, especially books with romantic plots, have been written and aimed at young women particularly (Hirschmann 39), so they contain elements typical from romances (Lindgren and Isaksson 18-20). They fall in a literary subgenre which has been called “paranormal romance”, which include both some kind of magical creature or event and plot twists and characters which may remind readers of the classical Victorian readings, aimed to entertain—and teach—young women from the 19th century. Some other ideals such as beauty, masculinity, and femininity, show the predominant Western mindset at the moment the books were written (Grassbaugh 392; Nelson 230, Lee 54-55) but reinforce traditional values at the same time (Grassbaugh 398; Chromik-Krzykawska 73). Romance, Lee points out, is the most popular genre in literature nowadays (52), and women of all social classes, including those with high education, read it (52). One of its most successful subgenres nowadays is paranormal romance, which has grown rapidly in the last decades (55; Luscombe).

1.2 General aims

Vampire romance is a subcategory of literature which has not attracted much scholarly attention. However, many vampire books and sagas have been written since the end of the 20th century,—especially in the United State—a fact that proves that this type of novels is very popular among readers. This kind of literature is specially successful among teenage girls and that is why I want to analyse whether the message they send to young female readers is a progressive or a regressive one taking into account the different American historical backgrounds in which they were written as well as a feminist perspective.

Even though vampires have always occupied an important place in culture and more specifically in literature in the last centuries and, on the other hand, romance in general has lately been the focus of a number of scholars, this exact category of “paranormal romance” has not been paid enough attention in the academic world (Lee 53) and its readers have often been “criticized, marginalized, and mocked” (Lee 52, Lindgren and Isaksson 18). Quite apart from this, however, there are two other very important reasons why I have decided to make this type of novels the focus of my dissertation.

Like many scholars, such as the above-mentioned, have emphasised, vampires embody some of our most common wishes such as eternal life and youth, wisdom, liberty, the ability to explore the world and sexual drive. But also their personalities, behaviours and appearance change to reflect the tastes of the contemporary readers and the predominant social structures and clichés.

Therefore, the vampire books which I will be analysing are likely to show American society the way it was perceived by the writers and readers—or is—at the time they were written. Changes in their plots and the way characters interact or develop can also be better understood within their socio-historical context. By being analysed and compared to the history and evolution of society and mindsets in the United States, these very successful vampire books can be given a more relevant scholarly treatment.

On the other hand, looking specifically at these novels from a feminist point of view will also show whether changes having to do specifically with gender in the American society during the last decades are reflected in their pages or not. This critical lense will enable us to see if vampire fiction reflects the fact that while feminism has been gaining ground in the United States, harmful gender roles have also been perpetuated in literature.

Another reason why vampire romance is worth an analysis of its own is the fact that it is a phenomenon with thousands of fans from all over the world—especially from Western countries. According to the Collins English Dictionary, a fan is “an ardent admirer of a pop star, film actor, football team, etc”. From the last decades of the last century until now, fans and their preferences when consuming have come into focus and they have been targeted as subjects of study since the 1990s (Lindgren and Isaksson 7-8, 44; Williamson 55). Furthermore, the fans of recent vampire novels are often very young. Although vampire books were first conceived as a form of entertainment for

adults, they are nowadays aimed at teenagers. Because young readers are a susceptible public target, any messages they are subjected to should be analysed in detail.

The focus of this dissertation will be on the subgenre of vampire romance which, among teenagers, is aimed specifically at females. The fact that most of these many aficionados are young women makes it important to give these novels a feminist reading. Like Rebecca Housel concernedly expresses in her essay “The Real Danger: Fact Vs. Fiction for the Girl Audience”, the power media has over their targeted public has been repeatedly proven (186) and exposing girls to vampire romantic novels may be “irresponsible” and even “dangerous” (178) since they will probably believe these stories reflect reality (187).

Furthermore, vampire romance still reinforces sexist clichés and tends to focus on romantic heterosexual plots where men are the main reason for any actions females take. Although there is, of course, a difference between fiction works and reality, scholars point out to the fact that young readers cannot always separate one from the other and they sometimes add messages they acquire from media to their mindsets (Hayes-Smith 79, Altenburger et al. 456), which is concerning when these include negative ideas about for example abuse (Gomez-Galisteo, “The Twilight of Vampires” 169) or if it normalises inequality (Altenburger et al. 456).

The way female characters are conformed—what kind of activities they perform and where, what fields are still restricted for them, how they react to problems and challenges, etc.—may also highlight the areas of life and work in which discrimination is common or in which women still encounter difficulties to reach total parity and it must also be taken into account if these women fight patriarchal structures—and even if they consider themselves feminists per se—or if they submit to the traditionally established roles they are expected to fulfil. If looked at through a gendered lens, the messages that young generations of female fans are getting from the characters they may admire and identify themselves with, and the consequences of their acts, will be put into question and the characters themselves will be judged to see whether they present good role models to be imitated or not.

1.3 Specific Aims

In more specific terms, the following are the aims I have established for the present dissertation:

- To analyse the structure and plot of each book to see if it is an objectively accurate representation of the situation women were experiencing in American society of the moment it was written.

- To pay attention to female protagonists—or main female characters—and decide whether they are role models that reflect a positive and egalitarian

representation of women and desirable to be imitated by female readers that vampire romance usually tries to engage, or not and why.

- To analyse, to a lesser extent, other secondary characters which may be representative of a certain feature important for this dissertation, such as alternative sexual orientations or transgressive behaviours, which more prominent females in that book may not present.

- To examine the differences between females in these books—as well as their attitudes, discourse and actions, economic status, education level, physical strength, etc.—and the general situation of women in the United States in that period in order to understand if these differences may be a reflection of feminist goals for the future—in the case females are portrayed as more progressive than reality—or if they represent fear of changing the traditional status quo and patriarchal order—in case females in the novels are more conservative.

- To see if a general progressive evolution in females in vampire romance can be traced through time which parallels the differences between them and the subsequent feminist achievements in gender equality in areas such as education, sexual freedom, work, etc.

1.4 The Novels Under Study

In this dissertation, two vampire romance books as well as two sagas will be analysed. They were all written—or are being written, in the case of *Chicagoland Vampires*—in different decades since the 1970s until today. These years cover the new vampire boom which I have previously mentioned. Besides that, and because trying to cover this kind of literature from all around the world would produce an excessively extensive result, the books presented here will all be from the United States. The reason for having chosen to focus on this country is that, as I have also explained before, the vampire tradition in fiction is especially significant there.

Although some women play important or extensive roles in the plot of the books from the end of the 20th century, their protagonists tend to be males. In contrast, in the two sagas which will illustrate the first two decades of our century, the main characters are women.

Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*, the first novel of her well-known *Vampire Chronicles* will illustrate the 1970s. Poppy Z. Brite's⁴ *Lost Souls* will be the exemplifying book for the 1990s. The first decade of the 21st Century will be illustrated by Charlaine Harris' series of novels the *Southern*

4

Although when Martin has referred to his own gender he has sometimes been intentionally ambiguous—for example when he stated “I don't know what the hell I am anymore” (Brite, “Enough Rope”)—he has commonly expressed his transexuality openly. In 2010 he started receiving treatment for gender reassignment (Schillings 2) and currently prefers to be addressed as “he” and nowadays goes by the name Billy Martin. Because of this reason I will refer to this author by using his new name and pronouns which coincide with the gender he identifies himself with although I will quote him as “Brite” in order to make bibliographical references clear.

Vampire Mysteries, also known as the *Sookie Stackhouse* or *True Blood* saga. Finally, the second decade or the 21st Century will be exemplified by Chloe Neill's *Chicagoland Vampires* saga, which is still being written at the moment. The reasons for having chosen these specific books as the sample for this research are listed in the "State of the Art" section.

Some of the books from the two authors that I have decided to be the examples of the first and second decades of the present century—Charlaine Harris' *Southern Vampire Mysteries* and Chloe Neill's *Chicagoland Vampires*—overlap chronologically, but since this only happens for the years 2010-2013, I considered it more important for the final conclusion of this dissertation to use all the books from the first saga, in order to see the development of the characters, than leaving the last ones out just because they coincided in time with one another. Because of this, the female protagonist in Neill's books and the changes in her behaviour and personality will sometimes be compared to those in Harris'.

All the exemplifying books have been written by female authors⁵. However, this fact has not been taken into account in this dissertation, as its focus is on the message that the text, per se, contains. Furthermore, unequivocally assuming that there is a direct relation between the author of a text and the ideas that the narrator in that story or its characters may hold, could

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The fact that at the time he wrote *Lost Souls* Billy Martin had not publicly acknowledged his transsexuality yet has been taken into account.

lead to speculation without sufficient grounds.

1.5 State of the Art

Many scholars have paid attention to classical vampire literary works such as *Dracula* and *Carmilla*. Academic research on more modern well-known books featuring vampires, such as *Interview with the Vampire*, has been written too, such as Tomc's "Dieting and Damnation: *Anne Rice's Interview with the Vampire*", M. J. Wood's "New Life for an Old Tradition: Anne Rice and Vampire Literature", or Nußbaumer's *The Vampire in Literature: A Comparison of Bram Stoker's Dracula and Anne Rice's Interview with the Vampire*. Some of these scholars have also looked at certain books from a feminist perspective, as gender is being introduced in all areas of knowledge, for instance Nystrom's "Blood, Lust, and the Fe/Male Narrative in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) and the Novel (1897)", Antoni's "A Vampiric Relation to Feminism: The Monstrous-Feminine in Whitley Strieber's and Anne Rice's Gothic Fiction", Haggerty's "Anne Rice and the Queering of Society", or King's "Contemporary Women Writers and the 'New Evil': The Vampires of Anne Rice and Suzy McKee Charnas".

Other scholars have focused on other vampire books. Some examples are Silver's essay "Twilight is not Good for Maidens: Gender, Sexuality, and the Family in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Series*" or Craton and Jonell's "'I Am

Sookie, Hear Me Roar!": Sookie Stackhouse and Feminist Ambivalence" about the *Southern Vampire Mysteries*, among many others⁶. However, the present dissertation is still necessary because the previously mentioned scholars have all focused on the same books or even in the same aspects of these novels while others that I have chosen for this dissertation have not been taken into account by specialists in gender studies. Moreover, certain specific gender issues which I analyse—such as lesbian visibility—have almost or completely been ignored even by those previously mentioned scholars who have focused both on vampire romance and gender before. Furthermore, there is no deep research on vampire romance in general and no scholar has analysed the misogynist or feminist discourse in this subgenre through time and this is important, as it shows an evolution which mirrors changes in society or the general mindsets of a society—the American one, in this case.

Although, as I have mentioned before, *Interview with the Vampire* has been subject to abundant academic study before—and some of this research has also been conducted through a feminist perspective—, it is important to take it into account for this study as it is arguably one of the most famous vampire novels in the 20th Century (Hirschmann 28, M. J. Wood 59), and also because it presents a new type of sensitive and art-loving vampire, tortured for his/her

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Other best-selling vampire romances—which, however will not be mentioned in this dissertation—have also been subjected to an analysis with a gendered perspective, see for example Nicol's scholarly paper "You Were Such a Good Girl When You Were Human: Gender and Subversion in *The Vampire Diaries*" about the homonymous saga.

blood thirst and able to feel love and pity for humans, which has been present in this type of literature since then (Mutch 7, Chambers and Chaplin 141, M. J. Wood 60, Bunson 223). Rice was an important author who largely contributed to unleash the last vampire-love fashion in Western Countries—which started in the 1970s, became even more noticeable during the 1980s and 1990s (Bunson ix) and has not disappeared, and has even intensified at times, during the present century.

Lost Souls, by Billy Martin, the book which illustrates the 1990s, has not received much specialised attention as most scholars who have studied this author have focused on other works of his⁷ such as his novel *Exquisite Corpse*⁸. Among the pages of *Lost Souls*, readers often find drug use and rape, as well as other crimes such as robbing and even murder. In many of these violent scenes female characters are abused and/or harmed, and these actions go unpunished or are even described as desirable, positive or sexually appealing. These two facts make the book specially interesting from a feminist point of view. However, there is almost no research material that relates the book to violence against women, nor feminism or any other matter specifically related to women. Although this kind of gory content could be acceptable for adult readers, *Lost*

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See for example Schillings' "The Father, the Sovereign and the Ghost: Constructions of Representative Agency in Poppy Z. Brite's novel *Drawing Blood*".

8

See for example Cook's "Subversion Without Limits: From Secretary's Transgressive S/M to *Exquisite Corpse*'s Subversive Sadomasochism", Gardiner's "'Fantasies of Viscera': Aesthetics of Ambivalence and Unruly Flesh in Poppy Z. Brite's *Exquisite Corpse*" or Richard's "Crawfish, Clubland, and Cannibalism: Poppy Z. Brite's Queering of the Asian-American Body".

Souls is, surprisingly enough, considered a young readers' classic, and it was published under this label by, for example, the well-known publisher *Penguin Books* in 1994 mostly to great acclaim ever since it was first published in 1992, like Wisker explains in the entry dedicated to this author in her book *Horror Fiction* (106).

Since *Dead Until Dark*, the first book of Charlaine Harris' *Southern Vampire Mysteries* saga, was first published in 2001, all the volumes have been translated into 35 languages and are sold all around the world (Mutch "Coming Out of the Coffin" 77). This series gained enormous popularity fast by its own merits, but it became even more famous after a TV show named *True Blood*, based on its characters and plots, was first aired on HBO in 2008. Although both these books and other media inspired by them rapidly became popular, they have not attracted as much attention from scholars as other vampire books such as *Interview with the Vampire* or TV series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Miller 1, 3). However, this collection of books adds to this dissertation and deserves some attention because, as some of the scholars who have decided to analyse it have pointed out, it contains elements which transgress traditional ideas about gender and take into account LGBTQAI+ issues, race and class (Amador 171-176; Fitch 609; Lindgren and Isaksson 121).

Although it could be argued that the most successful vampire saga of the 21st century has, until now, been Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*, there is

already enough material about it which covers all types of philosophical and social topics it contains. Gender issues and feminism—or the lack of it—in these novels have been repeatedly analysed by many scholars. Although some claim its protagonist—Bella Swan—is a feminist heroine (Zack 122, 123, 128), most agree that she is too passive (Mangan; Lindgren and Isaksson 24) or more similar to Victorian models (Eddo-Lodge; Muñoz) or to women born in the beginning of the 20th Century (Mann 132, 134, 137) than to females of our time.

It has also been claimed that these books perpetuate traditional gender roles and misogynistic clichés (Myers 157-159) and that Edward Cullen—the vampire hero—presents abusive and controlling behaviours towards Bella (Housel 179; McClimand and Wisnewski 164-167; Lindgren and Isaksson 6; Mangan). Because *Twilight* and the *Southern Vampires Mysteries* were being written and published at the same time, and the latter saga has attracted less scholarly attention, it may be a better choice to focus on Harris' books as it would have not only been redundant to research a subject which has already been so largely discussed, but also, as I argued in my conference presentation “Female Characters’ Evolution in late Vampire Literature” at the University of Essex, Sookie Stackhouse, the protagonist in Harris' books, is a closer example of what the general public would expect from a 21st Century heroine (Vallejo⁹

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The oldest references to my own work are quoted under the surname “Vallejo“ and the latest ones are quoted under the surname “Picado“ as, in December 2016 I inverted their order.

“Female Characters’ Evolution in Late Vampire Literature”).

Although vampires are still fashionable creatures portrayed not only in literature, but also in cinema and other media, there are not as many book sagas for teenagers about vampires being written at the moment as in previous decades. However, Chloe Neill’s *Chicagoland Vampires*, the last saga to be analysed in this dissertation, is a remarkable exception and worth being taken as an example not only because it features vampires, but also because it presents a different kind of protagonist—a highly-educated woman in her late twenties—, which may actually represent a certain evolution in the way females are portrayed in vampire romance.

Chicagoland Vampires has not been the subject of any academic research yet. This may be due to the fact that the saga is still being written, or maybe because, although most of the volumes are best-selling books and has been reviewed and praised by influential best-selling romance authors¹⁰ and fans have even launched cooperative web pages to share information and opinions about each book and their characters, they have just not become as well-known as other vampire sagas. Because this may be the first in-depth research to be done about this saga, it is to be hoped that future studies having to do with vampires and gender may benefit from it.

¹⁰

Examples can be found on the back of some of the printed editions of these books. For instance, on the back of *Biting Cold*, Romantic Tate Hallaway is quoted saying “A fun cast of quirky characters and smokin’-hot sexual tension...a stunning combination” and, on the back of *Friday Night Bites*, Julie Kenner states “I love Merit”!.

Even if *Twilight* will not have a chapter of its own in this dissertation for the above-mentioned reasons, academic research on this saga and *Fifty Shades of Grey*—which was inspired by Meyer’s books (Bertrand; Purcell; Delvecchio; Lindgren and Isaksson 5-6)—will serve as a comparative basis around which the analysis of *Chicagoland Vampires* will be done articulated to the lack of scholarly papers on Chloe Neil’s books and also because the lot of these three sagas follows a similar scheme and their main protagonists—both males and females—have many features in common.

1.6 Methodology and Structure

Cultural studies, as described in *The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies*, are “an interdisciplinary or post-disciplinary field of inquiry that explores the production and inculcation of culture or maps of meaning” (Barker 42) although it is also stated, in this same work, that it is difficult to define the exact limits of this discipline (42) as it includes messages, ideas and images, but even the discourse and the way research about all these subjects is conducted (42).

The origins of Cultural Studies can be traced back to the 1950s and they became a differentiated discipline and were institutionalised in the 1960s (McNeill, Barker 42), when the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) was founded at the University of Birmingham, in the UK (Barker 21).

Their main object of research at that time “was on ‘lived’ culture” (21), while they also took very much into account differences between social classes (21). These concepts are contained in texts by Hoggart (21), the first director of the CCCS.

During the following decades, different Cultural Studies schools emerged in other parts of the world. For instance, McNeill explains that French cultural studies were mainly developed during the 1980s and 1990s. Scholars following the latter trend focused on cultural texts and other cultural expressions, such as films, created as a consequence of advances having to do with certain factors, such as globalisation, consumerism or technological progress, they were interested in. For example, McNeill mentions that Certeau—an important French cultural theorist—stated that regular people can create alternative cultures instead of just accepting the ones imposed by those in power (Certeau xii). The Australian school, which also flourished during the 20th century, was more concerned with politics and social problems of and/or between particular minorities and cultural groups in Australia than with forms of culture in general (Frow and Morris xii) and it has never been as focused on theorising about the meaning of culture as other schools have (Frow and Morris xvi).

The perspective from which this dissertation will be written, however, is Cultural Studies as established by the British School of Cultural Studies developed by Simon During and his followers from the 1990s onwards.

During's emphasis on the cultural processes at work behind literary expressions of a given period, the interaction of this process with other cultural forces operating at the same time, and the way the literary works are spontaneously fed back into the social force field from which they emerged to begin with, in order to produce new expressions.

My research tries to prove that by studying the given books, social changes and contemporary problems can be traced. I have taken into account not only a certain type of literature—vampire romance—exemplified by the given books, but also romance in general. Additionally, I have looked at some cultural changes taking place in general in each decade in the United States and at feminism in particular. This is why During's approach to Cultural Studies, which focuses both on literature and the social movements that shaped it, is specially appropriate to my object of study.

However, because my emphasis in this dissertation is put on feminism, Cultural Studies as a general tool would be insufficient for the deep analysis of the novels which it requires. For this reason, I need to also refer to feminist scholars in order to configure a consistent and complete research method, which specifically applies to this thesis and covers all the areas contained in it.

Feminism is usually chronologically divided in three movements, the so called "waves". The First wave of feminism took place between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. First Wave feminists gathered in groups in many different countries all around the world. They did not actually

fight for total equality but to achieve certain basic legal rights—such as being able to inherit or own property, access education or vote (Freedman *No Turning Back* 23)—while they highlighted differences between men and women and advocated women’s chastity and rejected divorce as well as contraceptive methods (Echols 13).

The Second Wave started specifically in the United States in the 1960s and lasted until the 1980s. Although these feminists were quite focused on certain aspects of women’s general reality, such as fighting gendered violence and achieving more reproductive rights (Spain 5-7; Echols 3-4), they also brought up topics that had been considered taboo until then, for instance pornography and sex work (Freedman *No Turning Back* 364). Their goals were more varied than those of their precursors and they gave great importance to other issues which had been ignored by previous feminists, highlighting the particularities of each woman and their particular situation such as race, class, education, disability, etc. (Echols 12, 15; Freedman *No Turning Back* 111).

Most scholars agree that the Third Wave of feminism started in the 1990s and it focused more on female empowerment than in simple equality (Freedman *No Turning Back* 26). Some scholars have recently stated that we are now experiencing a Fourth Wave of feminism whose main distinctive characteristic—and what distinguishes it from the Third wave—is the use of new technologies (Munro). However, it has not yet been decided whether this sole component is enough to consider that feminism has evolved as to become a

completely new and distinctive movement nor has it been decided when the Third Wave ended, if it has effectively done so.

The second chapter of this dissertation, an overview of the situation of women and feminism in the United States in different decades which cover the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, will articulate this whole work and serve as a comparative reference for the following chapters, which focus on an analysis of the literary works. I have chosen a variety of scholars to exemplify the changes that were taking place in society in each period.

I have focused on works from Dr. Estelle B. Freedman and Dr. Marilyn French—who have both witnessed Second and Third waves of feminism as Freedman is still alive and French died not many years ago, just in 2009—and referred to them more often than to others. Both scholars defend that there has been a pattern of abuse against women along history and in all countries around the world (Freedman *No Turning Back* 37-38; French *From Eve to Dawn* Vol. 1, 10, 19; French *The War Against Women* 1) and that even societies in which women in general, or mothers in particular, were very important, males have always been privileged (French *From Eve to Dawn* Vol. 1, 7, 12). This idea is not new; other well-known scholars such as Simone de Beauvoir have insisted on the idea that patriarchy was imposed on women since the beginning of civilisation (Beauvoir 53, 55). However, the fact that Freedman and French are contemporary and American makes them very appropriate to analyse the books in this dissertation given the fact that they were all written by the end of the 20th

century and the beginning of the 21st, their authors were all American, and the action takes place in the United States. In other words, the circumstances which surrounded the scholars and their perspective of the world and society may have been similar to those of the authors of the novels, making them more pertinent than other scholars from other times.

Dr. Estelle B. Freedman is a renowned historian from Stanford University and a specialist in women's history and feminist studies. Freedman's almost encyclopaedic and extensive book *No Turning Back*, offers an overview of the history of women and women's movements around the globe, and more specifically in Western countries, through the ages and from a social, economical and legal perspective. For this reason, this specific book is appropriate to construct the main framework for that historical section. On the other hand, some of Freedman's other scholarly papers and books which put emphasis on more specific topics—such as *Redefining Rape*, which focuses on rape, or *Feminism, Sexuality, & Politics*, in which she approaches LGBTQAI+ issues or abortion among other sexual matters—will be useful to pay attention to these matters more deeply when necessary.

Dr. Marilyn French earned a Ph.D at Harvard University in 1972 and was a teacher for 8 years. However, she is better known for having written some novels as well as many books of non-fiction, about feminism. Her work *From Eve to Dawn, a History of Women*, which is nowadays published in four volumes, offers a complete and extensive record of the way women have been

deprived of liberty and rights and always lived under the rule of men throughout history. Because of its exhaustiveness, this collection serves to corroborates Fredman's opinion in some cases and to fill in gaps wherever this scholar may have not made any research and more and/or deeper information is needed. On the other hand, her book *The War Against Women*, has a similar approach but is more detailed. For example, in its second part, entitled "Institutional Wars against Women", French pays attention to different areas—such as education, science or health—and gives specific examples which show what exact forms of discrimination against women have existed or exist in each area

Another reason to have chosen these two scholars is that in their exhaustive chronological accounts on feminism—Freedman's *No Turning Back* and French's *From Eve to Dawn, a History of Women*—they do not only outline the unfair treatment women have received but both also include final chapters which, in a more optimistic tone, refer to feminist movements which arose in the United States and the accomplishments women have achieved or are achieving through their struggle. While in some cases the two scholars focus on the same aspects concerning women's reality and some of their research may have been structured in similar ways, they do not just repeat the same ideas, but add new perspectives, as well as different data and sources thus making their works complementary to each other.

Finally, in some cases in which personal opinions of either professionals of certain areas or experts in a specific subject, as well as personal testimonies about matters concerning feminism or misogyny may add to academic research, I will use other sources such as articles from the press and feminist magazines, or interviews. I will also use some statistic and legal data to justify my statements.

This chapter on the historical background will be useful to analyse vampire books and sagas in chapters 3 to 6, as it will list real facts about the situation women were living in each decade in the United States and serves to establish a comparison between those facts and the alternative realities which women in these works present. Women may, on the one hand, be loyal representations of the general situation of most women in this given society at the times the books they appear in were being written or, on the other hand, they may not—and this will lead to questioning whether their actions, feelings and words are due to traditional gender expectations or whether they embody certain feminist ideals about equality which have not or had not yet been achieved. These considerations will be formulated and grouped into thematic sections throughout the analysis in chapters 3-6, and my general contentions derived from the comparison of the works, which will have a brought a wider perspective on how women are portrayed in vampire romances written in the United States over the past four decades, will be presented in the conclusions.

I have used MLA guidelines for quotations and for the in-text citations as well as for the works cited pages. Although the source medium (eg. print, Web, etc) is not required and I have, in effect, not indicated it in most cases, I have, however, made it clear in the case of ePub editions, as the page numbers usually notoriously differ from other formats such as pdf files.

2 Historical Background

2.1 The 1960s and 1970s

During the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, women began to achieve some basic rights in most countries around the world. In the United States, already around the 1950s, married women could own and control their property through different Married Women's Property Acts that were passed in the various states. They also gained access to higher education and university and, in 1920, they acquired the right to vote.

This did not mean, however, that they had gained the same rights as men and, by the end of the 1970s, when *Interview with the Vampire* was written, a new revival of feminist movements which was to be called the "Second-Wave-Feminism" was taking place in the United States (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 124). Women were, by the end of the 1960s and specially during the 1970s, bringing traditionally-considered private matters—such as family, birth control or domestic violence—into the public focus, as well as gaining some public space of their own. In other words, they were attaining visibility, political choices and representation (Spain 5-7).

2.1.1 Patriarchal Structures

In spite of such progress, Western societies had been built around patriarchal stereotypes about gender differences that were, still, deeply rooted in people's

minds, and substituting them with new balanced models in which women had both the same legal and social status as men meant a big challenge. Therefore, there was still a pervasive idea of separate and different spheres for men and women, even in the 20th century, because it had paradoxically been reinforced even by the fathers of science, such as Bacon (Brannon 33), or others like Rousseau during the Enlightenment (French “From Eve to Dawn” Vol. 2, 131; Sánchez 21), at a time when scholars were, ironically, using reasoning and logical thinking to fight against dogmas and stereotypes in all areas of knowledge (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 78) and theorising about equality of all human beings (Sánchez 19).

Social biology is a good example of how during the last decades of the 20th century and the first of the 21st, some scholars still tried to explain the existent inequality of rights and power between women and men with very simplistic ideas, derived from Darwinian evolutionary theory, that link human behaviour to certain species of animals (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 65; French *From Eve to Dawn* Vol. 3, 168). According to these theories, which ignore other creatures in whose societies females are stronger or socially dominant (French *From Eve to Dawn* Vol. 3, 130; Drea and Wallen 41), men and women are naturally designed to be aggressive and passive respectively (Drea and Wallen 30; French *The War Against Women* 121-122). They do not take into account important aspects of human life such as life-long learning, our capability to adapt to new situations and environments and the mindset that we are raised

with, depending on the part of the world where we are born (Maquieira D'Angelo 131-132).

Subsequently, the role of the ideal Victorian woman had not completely disappeared either: a pure and passionless woman (Traub 6) who does not work outside her house and does not receive any kind of salary for her home duties—other than “love and respect from her family”—, and is expected to fill the family home with love, care, pity, beauty and cleanliness (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 180). These women are, according to Cavallaro, childish, “feeble-minded” dependent on men and “invalid” by their own means (144).

During the Victorian era, scholars such as Lewis and Clarke agreed that women were not as intelligent as men and should strictly devote themselves to becoming mothers and taking care of their offspring (French *From Eve to Dawn* Vol. 3, 168). This also means they were often discouraged from obtaining high education diplomas, entering college or trying to get a position in areas that had traditionally been held by men (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 66). These ideas made them unable to vote or to take part in discussions or debates about politics, economics or civil rights.

2.1.2 Power Imbalance between Men and Women

Even if many women did not have a wage-earning job, more and more were joining the working force. Most of them were employed in typical female areas, but a few held positions in typically male fields (Phillips and Taylor 54).

Although their wages were usually lower, there was a fierce fight to get the same salary as male workers. However, this did not mean they were expected to have less obligations as mothers or wives than they previously did (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 186). Society may have started to accept that they could work outside their homes, but even in the 1960s and 1970s, women were still in charge of raising children as well as doing most—or all—the housework.

For all these reasons, females were thought to be—and in many cases actually were—dependent on men in areas such as the economical, not only in the 1970s, but also in the subsequent decades (French *The War Against Women* 187). Married women were encouraged to look after their husbands, by doing the housework and taking care of the children, and to forgive them if they were not faithful or did not pay attention to them. Those who were left by their male partners did not only have to struggle with social prejudice and bad reputations but also saw their living standards drastically reduced (Llewelyn and Osborne 60) and even lived in poverty, especially if they were left with children in their charge (French *The War Against Women* 127, 185-186; Llewelyn and Osborne 206).

During this period and afterwards, the feminist struggle became even more radical and focused on achieving specific objectives, such as women's right to decide when and how to have children—or not having them at all—, communal rearing and education and having no more duties than men at home (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 127).

Achieving these goals would make it easier for women to choose whether they wanted to work or not and whether they were willing to become mothers or not—and when—, as well as give them the ability to make decisions about their salaries and at home, not having to rely on their fathers, brothers or husbands or having to be their servants.

2.1.3 Love and Sexuality

From the 1960s on, homosexuals started to openly fight for their rights and visibility too, especially in the United States of America (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 129). In this area, just like in many others, men were more easily accepted than women. Sodomy and man-to-man desire had been cited in historical writings and literature since ancient times, but lesbianism has very rarely been mentioned and was frequently ambiguous or disguised under the appearance of friendship (Traub 2). Gay men have had their own social spaces to meet and engage in relationships since the 18th century. Women attracted to individuals of the same sex could not relate to each other because traditionally they were economically dependent (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 351) and confined in domestic spaces because of their gender (Mujika Flores 60). While, as Haggerty states, gay men had become an erotic symbol at the end of the 20th century (10), lesbians were, at that same time, trying to become a visible part of society and, in order to draw public attention, they were constantly demonstrating and claiming that theirs was a possible choice for love too

(Freedman, *No Turning Back* 129). A big number of organisations, magazines, etc. was founded in the 1950s and 1960s in the United States to defend their rights (Freedman, “The Historical Construction of Homosexuality in the US” 117); this fight, however, has not yet ended as homosexual women are still pushed into the background and generally ignored.

Additionally, patriarchal gender roles taught women that they should remain pure and chaste and that sexual desire was intrinsic only to men (Traub 6). These theories, often supported by poor biological research, (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 103), established that men were naturally programmed to spread their genes and needed to have sex often and occupy positions in the public sphere while women were not supposed to enjoy sex and should find pleasure in other tasks they could carry out inside their homes such as looking after others (Mujika Flores 60). Assumptions like these also established that at least one man is always necessary for intercourse, belittling lesbian sexual relationships, as if they were not real sex, and giving them no importance or visibility at all (Llewelyn and Osborne 83; Mujika Flores 61).

These are the reasons why Western societies of the 1960s and 1970s started to accept and understand male homosexuality faster (Maquieira 183) because men in general were more visible and because their sexual drive was widely understood as an essential feature of their nature. Since then, “gay”—meaning “gay man”—has gradually become synonym of good taste, fashion and modern values (Maquieira 183; Mujika Flores 78), while lesbians have

been ignored in most public areas (Mujika Flores 113). This problem leads to most lesbians keeping their sexual orientation secret (Llewelyn and Osborne 86) and this is so widely extended that even queer scholars and their studies have generally focused in male-to-male desire topics and subtopics (Forshyt 2), subsequently reinforcing lesbian “invisibility” in academic areas as well (Traub 4, 11; Maquieira 184).

The lack of attention gay women had still in the 1960s and 1970s—compared to their male counterparts—is not a distinctive sign of this time, but a legacy from the treatment they have historically received in Western countries. Already in 19th century Europe homosexual men were founding meeting points where they could enjoy the company of other men and have sex while women needed a few more decades to be able to do the same due to their lack of independence and their family duties (Freedman, “The Historical Construction of Homosexuality in the US” 111-115; Freedman, *No Turning Back* 351). On the contrary, also in the 19th century, psychologists considered lesbians to be monsters acting against natural laws and even to have neurological problems, while society did not see celibacy either as a healthy or normal choice for a young woman (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 351) and, when they finally started having some places to gather, the police often closed them down (Freedman, “The Historical Construction of Homosexuality in the US” 111-115; Freedman, *No Turning Back* 351).

2.2 The 1980s and 1990s

The 1990s, when Martin wrote and published his vampire novel *Lost Souls*, were an interesting decade from a feminist point of view. The fight for equality was not a new topic anymore and changes were being asked for or taking place in law and society so that women could enjoy the same freedom, safety and rights men had enjoyed for centuries (Palazzani 218; Chrisler and McHugh 153).

However, in many cases, old standards still applied in the treatment of women and the result was that they were, in many cases, asked to embody both the new modern women ideals and the old-fashioned clichés at the same time. Although changes were slowly taking place for women, society in general posed a lot of resistance to them (Dobash and Dobash 13), especially in certain powerful conservative spheres in the United States whose members wanted women to maintain their traditional roles and positions (Dobash and Dobash 28).

2.2.1 Violence against Women

Despite this resistance, the 1990s were a time for new feminist approaches and actions, as well as evolution of their ideas (Dobash and Dobash 1). “Gender” became an important category in political speeches all around the world (Palazzani 216) and many new laws were passed to protect women of all ages against sexual, verbal and physical abuse (Doak 5; Finn and Colson 42, 44;

Dobash and Dobash 163; Freedman, *No Turning Back* 397-398). Help telephone lines and support groups for those who had suffered from them were also established, as well as shelters for women, (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 398) and research about all these topics became common (Chrisler and McHugh 154).

People in general started to change their minds about these matters. While different sorts of abuse of women had traditionally been considered as “family issues” more than real crimes (Finn and Colson 1; Dobash and Dobash 4), and a cause of shame that should thus remain unspoken, they were now taken more seriously. Women were now urged to report the aggressive behaviour they found in their family and workplace environments, and those who had been abused were also encouraged to talk about their experiences as a way to overcome them.

Rape and other types of violence against women have been closely related to power¹¹ and possession¹² in almost all societies since the beginning of

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During war, torturing and raping females from the opposing side was usually as accepted as killing men in the battlefield (Groth and Birnbaum 105; Freedman, *No Turning Back* 372), but also in revolutions (French *From Eve to Dawn* Vol. 4, 81) and during dictatorships (French *From Eve to Dawn* Vol. 3, 182). Only in the 1990s important organizations such as the United Nations started paying specific attention to these crimes (“Background Information on Sexual Violence used as a Tool of War”; Freedman, *No Turning Back* 372). These inhuman practices, which have been committed for thousands of years, were still present in more recent conflicts which took place during the last years of the 20th century, like those in Kosovo, Sierra Leone or Rwanda (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 371; “Background Information on Sexual Violence used as a Tool of War”).

¹² Husbands and other male authority figures or family members frequently beat and/or punished women around them for disobeying them or for showing behaviours they did not like, as well as in order to show their power in many societies (Dobash and Dobash 4). Murder, even

times.

Until the middle of the 20th century, women's status as independent individuals in society was still precarious, which is shown by the fact that a woman is given her father's—not her mother's— surname when she is born, and once she gets married she will have to change it and use her husband's. Already in the 1990s, women were allowed to keep their family names after marriage in countries such as the United Kingdom—but it was still seen as a sign of lack of commitment—and married women were also expected to wear a ring to show their link to their husbands, who could more freely choose if they wanted to wear one or not and were never in history expected to change their surnames after getting married (Llewelyn and Osborne 203). It is, however, important to point out that married females had, in some areas, less legal protection than single ones in matters such as rape in the domestic sphere since it is more difficult to prove that rape happened inside marriage and in the 1990s if a man sexually abused his wife, he was not acting against the law in most Western countries (Llewelyn and Osborne 205).

In summary, until a few decades ago, men had some rights over their wives that were similar to those they had over their material goods. For example, rape and violence against a female was considered as a “crime against property” (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 376) if it was committed by someone

when perpetrated by relatives, has also traditionally been tolerated if it had to do with honour (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 373). Such practices were legal even in some Western countries such as Italy during the 20th century (French *From Eve to Dawn* Vol. 4, 143).

who was not part of her family, and it was simply not taken into account if committed by a male relative or within the marriage (Cowan 807; Freedman, *No Turning Back* 376-377). In the United States of America, marital rape was not considered a crime until 1975. This change in the law, first introduced in South Dakota, was an example for the other states, most of which had changed their legislation by the end of the 1990s. However, distinctions between rape inside and outside marriage, as well as between rapists who knew or did not know the victim, were still made; strangers were more heavily punished and blamed more severely for those crimes than husbands or acquaintances (Ferraro 156; Cowan 808; Freedman, *Redefining Rape* 282). For this reason, many women who were forced by parents, brothers, partners, etc. decided not to report their situation and, even after these new laws were passed, marital rape was still the most common type of rape and very difficult to detect (Groth and Birnbaum 179). If a woman was, in fact, raped on a date, the probabilities of her voicing it are inversely proportional to the length and closeness of their relationship (Bridges 294). These females knew that the impossibility of rape happening within a family or a relationship was an idea that society had accepted as true for such a long time that their declarations were probably not going to be taken seriously or would not be named as “rape” (White and Post 386; Groth and Birnbaum 174), and this would bring them more shame, prejudice and guilt than relief.

Another misconception that led to thinking about rape as an almost unavoidable part of life was the widespread notion—still deeply rooted in people’s minds—that had to do with the matter of the separated social spheres for the different genders that I have explained in the previous section: women have traditionally been portrayed as submissive, ready to satisfy their mates and naturally not lascivious (Drea and Wallen 29). Accordingly, heterosexuality was articulated exclusively around male needs and desires (Freedman, *Redefining Rape* 285) and, while females were supposedly passive and did not have strong sexual feelings, men were thought of as “oversexed”, and they were said to be easily excited by any woman (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 377). According to this Darwinian idea, women’s only function in sex matters was to attract a possible partner without showing real interest in the intercourse (Drea and Wallen 30). Since the Sexual Revolution took place in the 1960s, however, women have gradually engaged in more sexual relationships than they did the past (Sanday “Rape Free Vs. Rape Prone” 357). If women were, at the end of the last century, having more sex than before, although they were well-informed about the risks it entailed—unwanted pregnancy, diseases, etc.—, this can only mean that they really obtained pleasure and enjoyment from it (Drea and Wallen 43).

Other theories claim that men are biologically programmed to spread their seed and procreate, so in consequence rape can be considered as an almost natural reaction to their impulses and instincts to have progeny. These are

remnants of ideas from the 19th century, a fact that may lead readers to think that they did not have a powerful influence in society or academia in the 1990s, but they did. In her book *The War Against Women*, published in 1992, French points out that research which supports these ideas about aggressive men versus passive women was generally accepted even if it was based on easy conclusions and not proven facts (121). The same is stated by Brannon in *Gender Psychological Perspectives* (1). In fact, books from the 1990s still defined rape as a response to men's willingness to find a fertile woman and make her unable to mate with others (Drea and Wallen 33)¹³.

In order to understand the status of rape in the US in the 1990s, it is necessary to look at some historical antecedents. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, sex became an important matter in psychology and sociology and new theories about it were developed. However, women did not yet reach the same status in these matters as men did. For example, both Ellis and Freud understood that women had sexual desire too, but Ellis stated that females had to play the role of the prey while men had to act as hunters, and Freud claimed that any type of active feminine desire had to be turned into passive (Sanday "Rape Free Vs. Rape Prone" 349).

¹³ Even though according to all the above-mentioned stereotypes women did not in theory take an active part in courtship or approach men, at the same time they had traditionally embodied vice and temptation and men's deviation from the "straight path" since the beginning of times (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 62). The idea that their sexual desire was naturally wild and chaotic and needed to be controlled by men and hidden became very powerful during the Enlightenment (Sánchez 23). This current of thought, favoured by the previously cited idea of women trying to gain male affection and attention, made it easier to justify sexual attacks on them even centuries after (Groth and Birnbaum 2).

Turning to animals again—especially certain types of apes—in order to explain human behaviour and the misogynistic way in which society, labour, politics, etc. were disposed became fashionable again among scientists during the 1950s and specially the 1960s and 1970s (French *The War Against Women* 121). Once more, though, they decided to leave out of their books any species which did not fit in their schemes and they focused their studies on mammals—and more specifically on some monkeys—whose societies were articulated around male rulers who impose their will by means of violence (Maquieira 134).

These old mindsets had such an enormous impact in modern society that most of the laws against sexual harassment and rape, both in developed countries—such as Spain and the United States—or developing ones—such as India—are not even 30 years old (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 392). Additionally, in some states in the United States the definition of “rape” refers solely to vagina-penis penetrations, which leaves out many other types of abuses, while the FBI refuses to record the motive for certain crimes, which means that sexual murders will be, for the statistics, just murders (White and Post 383).

During the 1980s and the 1990s, a time when sexual freedom and the right to wear any type of clothes were supposed to be inherent to all humans, many women who reported having been raped were suspiciously asked about their sentimental life in trials while their speech and garments could be cited as

“relevant sexual provocation” (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 391). Any previous sexual experience the victim might have had and other facts, such as if she had not consented to the intercourse by using only words or if her aggressor was not violent—or not extremely violent—could make her accusation less credible, leading to no penalties, or lesser ones, for the defendant (Willis 213; Freedman, *Redefining Rape* 284). If the assaulter knew the victim it was very unlikely that he would be convicted, or his penalty could be lighter (Willis 215; White and Post 387).

Another consequence of all these aforementioned misogynistic mindsets is that, unfortunately, in the 1990s, rape was still common and so were misconceptions about it and a high level of tolerance. In the United States, a rape-prone society (Sanday “Rape Free Vs. Rape Prone” 346; Sanday “Fraternity Gang Rape” 9), a woman was raped every five or six minutes during this decade and one in five had been the subject of “rape or attempted rape at some point in her life” (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 383) with an annual mean frequency of more than 300,000 (Sanday “Fraternity Gang Rape” 9). Studies from the end of the 1980s, which take into account that rape is the least reported crime, suggest that the real rate of rape victims could easily be somewhere between fifty and ninety percent of all women in the United States (White and Post 387).

As a consequence of the great amount of rape which takes place in a year in the United States, some specific types of sexual abuse have been created

and have become an almost socially-accepted part of certain contexts. Although these crimes happen in other parts of the world too, the incidence rate in this country is higher than in any other. A very well-known example—due to its impact in the media, specially in recent years (Sanday “Fraternity Gang Rape” 5)—is forced sex in university campuses. As I will now explain, sexual violence from male students towards their female counterparts has been not only committed but also known for decades and is still common nowadays (Sanday “Fraternity Gang Rape” 2), which means that it was an important social issue in the 1990s too. The main reason to having included this issue in the section of this chapter concerning the 1990s specifically is that, while all books analysed in the present dissertation contain some form of sexual violence against women, gang rape is much more clearly represented and addressed in *Lost Souls*.

Although rapes performed by individuals are not scarce, the most notorious and usual type of sexual assault in American universities is group rape—or gang bangs. They are habitually performed by males who belong to the same athletic team or fraternity (Sanday “Fraternity Gang Rape” 7).

Even if this problem is not new, at the time I am writing this dissertation—in 2016—specific laws to prevent or punish rape in universities are being presented in the Congress, and only two states—California and New York—and nine universities have yet passed laws and policies about affirmative consent (“Yes means Yes” & Affirmative Consent). Prevention courses and information are also very recent too. Both individual and gang rapes have

usually been covered up by university organs (Forer 28) and, in many cases, ignored by security forces. Perpetrators were rarely prosecuted (Forer 23) and, if taken to court, they were usually found not guilty. Victims, such as Liz Seccuro (Seccuro “I was Gang Raped at a U-VA Frat 30 Years Ago, and No One Did Anything”; Seccuro “Dear Rapist”), Brenda Tracy (Tracy) and Jackie Reilly (Booth), state that police officers, hospital staff and most university representatives lied to them about legal procedures, ignored them or claimed they had wanted or had been seeking to have sex. The aforementioned cases took place in the 1980s, 1990s and 2010s, which proves that gang rape has been a constant—including during the 1990s—in the United States for a long time and it still persists nowadays.

Besides universities, this kind of sexual assault also happens in high schools and among street gangs (Sanday “Fraternity Gang Rape” 4) although prosecution and punishment are much more common in those cases (Forer 23). Both Groth and Birnbaum (113, 115), and Sanday (“Fraternity Gang Rape” 5, 7) highlight group rapes as being an extreme example of creating male-to-male friendships and camaraderie bonds, and/or as an initiation to become part of a group. These authors also explain how male strength and dominance is highlighted in these practices and, by being forced, women are dehumanised (Sanday “Fraternity Gang Rape” 5, 7; Groth and Birnbaum 113-114).

Research conducted in the United States of America at the end of the 1980s showed that, in general, young men thought that forcing women was a

normal sexual behaviour that females really desired because they said “no” when they meant “yes” in order to look chaste (Sanday “Rape Free Vs. Rape Prone” 347; Bridges 293). Other data from the same period confirm these ideas and show as well that both females and males easily accepted coercing a woman to obtain sex if a man had spent money on her or if he was sexually aroused at that moment (Bridges 292-293).

Another very dangerous but equally accepted misconception that many authors highlighted in the 1990s was that sexual pleasure and pain were linked for women (Llewelyn and Osborne 77). This idea is strongly reinforced in the media in general (French *The War Against Women* 178-179; Llewelyn and Osborne 78) and specifically in porn (French *The War Against Women* 168, 170). This leads to thinking that it is right, or expected, for men to use force to obtain sex or during sexual intercourse (Llewelyn and Osborne 78), and that women forced by their partners or dates do actually get pleasure from being raped (Bridges 293).

What is more, even if women had gained many rights during the previous decades, their newly acquired freedom in certain areas such as sex, smoking and drinking, or deciding what clothes to wear and how to speak, made them on the other hand, dehumanised in the eyes of many men too: they were objectified not only by marketing and advertisement (Brannon 16) and media in general in the 1990s (French *The War Against Women* 165), but also by their very right to openly express their sexual desire, which seemed to

support the stereotype of females as temptation for men.

While sexual liberation literally meant what was stated in its name for men, women went from having to be pure and passive to having to be sexually available whenever men around them wanted and, in a way, lost their right to say “no” (Sanday “Rape Free Vs. Rape Prone” 350). By the 1990s, the line between rape and regular sexual relations had become so blurred that, when a woman started flirting with a man or confessed she felt attracted to him, he was believed to have the right to have sex with her (Freedman *No Turning Back* 387).

Additionally, even in the 20th century, many raped women still felt guilty for having been attacked and/or may have decided not to talk about what happened to them for months, years, or their whole lives because they found the experience too traumatic (Llewelyn and Osborne 34). This can be because traditionally, women abused in any way have been blamed, rejected or punished by society and even their own families (Dobash and Dobash 4; Freedman, *No Turning Back* 371-372, 383-384). This way of thinking was precisely starting to change during the 1990s and many centres were opened to help these women break the silence, to stop thinking it was “their own fault” (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 383-384) and to change how rape was perceived by society.

Children also suffer from sexual abuse. Studies from the 1990s revealed that these crimes were not actually exceptional but quite common at the time. Since rape inside the family was a matter of shame and fear, many

children blocked their memories or consciously decided to remain silent (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 403), so the following known figures could be even higher: in *No Turning Back*, Freedman highlights data from 1995 from the UN which informs about how in the United States one out of three women reported having been abused when she was underage while other sources from the late 1980s referring to women in general show up to a 38 percent of incidences (Llewelyn and Osborne 79). Also in this country, women who were in jail showed a higher percentage of both physical and sexual abuse during their childhood (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 401). In up to 90 percent of the cases, the victim was a girl, although this figure may not be accurate due to the fact that boys and men who were abused are usually even more reticent to report it (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 402). A big percentage of mothers of minors who were abused by their fathers were themselves beaten by these same males (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 404).

The offender is not normally a stranger—contrary to what is usually believed (Willis 214)—but a close male relative (Llewelyn and Osborne 33), commonly the father. These crimes, which are usually understood to happen within homes, can also occur in schools or churches (Doak 13; Freedman, *No Turning Back* 402). This fact has to do with how male figures have ruled their homes and their offspring for centuries as if they were their owners. Very dominant fathers are actually more prone to abuse their daughters (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 404).

In the beginning of the 20th century, Sigmund Freud—and later on traditional psychoanalysts—noticed that the total number of women going to his consulting room alleging they had been raped by male relatives was enormous and he believed that they could be inventing these stories because they craved their fathers’ sexual attentions (Llewelyn and Osborne 79; Palazzani 62). This unfair way of treating women who decided to speak out about their traumatic experiences to a psychoanalyst made it more difficult for the following generations of abused women to admit what was happening to them or to report it. On top of that, when they did so, they were often diagnosed as “promiscuous” or “hypersexual” as a consequence of this current of thought (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 402). Furthermore, girls forced to have sex with their fathers did not describe the experience as desirable, like Freud suggested, but as unpleasant and violent (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 403).

These ideas, along with the previously mentioned patriarchal models of property from the past—which included family members—, made it difficult for children to report that they were abused by members of their family. In the 1970s, 1980s and even the 1990s, they were still usually believed to be inventing stories (Freedman, *Redefining Rape* 282) or were seen as “seducers” to those who they claimed had abused them (Llewelyn and Osborne 79). Just like battered women, many of those who had been sexually abused when they were young ended up feeling so guilty and miserable that their personal relationships in their adulthood would repeat a similar pattern and also be

abusive (Llewelyn and Osborne 79-80).

Only as late as the end of the 1980s were some psychoanalysts starting to believe that their female patients were not making up their stories of abuse (Llewelyn and Osborne 34, 79). In fact, in the last decades of the 20th century, abundant programs to prevent assault and help minors to talk about their experiences were created and what Florence Rush had called “The Best Kept Secret” in her famous homonymous book about incest and rape of children within the family started to be voiced (Freedman, *Redefining Rape* 283).

Furthermore, as I pointed out before, while in previous decades violence against women inside their own family was seen as a common and not very serious issue, in the 1990s the awareness of any kind of abuse against women, and specially regarding domestic matters, was rising too. Some countries—and approximately half of the American states by 1994—started sentencing husbands and mates who did not respect their female partners (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 397-398). More than 1,250 shelters for victims of these abuses had been opened the United States and in Canada by 1990 and research on the number of abused women—and those who ended up being killed—was carried out (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 398). Just two years before the decade of the 1990s started, domestic violence had been declared the most dangerous threat to women’s health in the United States (Doak 3) and by 1989 1,200 help programmes that focused on battered women were being carried out and 300,000 women and children had been housed (Ferraro 161).

All the above-mentioned actions had positive consequences and, between 1993 and 2001, the number of cases of women abused by their partners was reduced by almost a half and the number of females killed by their partners started decreasing in 1993, after having been stable for twenty years (Rennison). However, this does not mean that physical violence had totally disappeared from homes. Research showed that, at the end of last century in the United States, a woman was hit every fifteen seconds, domestic violence being the cause in most cases; that between ten and twenty percent of women in North America experienced it; that between twenty five to fifty percent would suffer it, at least, once in life; and that, as a result, four women died every day (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 395). The vast majority of victims killed by someone they knew were women (Rennison; Dobash and Dobash 6-7; Greenfeld et al. 5, “Study Finds Half of Victims Know Attackers”; Commission of Human Rights) and females between 16 and 24 experienced more violence from their partners than anybody else (Greenfeld et al. 5).

In many cases as well, women who decided to end an abusive relationship did not find the necessary support from their families or the state—in the shape of psychotherapy, shelter, etc. (VanNatta 416; Llewelyn and Osborne 53; Ferraro 155; Commission of Human Rights). Since sceptical or badly-informed police officers or other personnel involved in their case may encourage women not to report being battered or require them to get other unnecessary official documents first—such as divorce petitions (Finn and Colen

27)—and since most of these females had assumed the stereotypical “feminine” role of passivity and submission for a long time, they were very likely to go back to their abusive partners or repeat the same behavioural pattern and find themselves dating another man who battered them too (Llewelyn and Osborne 53).

A different but equally important result of violence against women inside their own homes was that, in many cases, children were forced to see it (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 394) and this had terrible consequences in their later life (VanNatta 420). Sometimes, aggressive partners and fathers abused not only the women, but the youngest people in the house too and, in patriarchal societies, this has also been seen as the right way for male members of the family to punish and educate (Dobash and Dobash 4; Freedman, *No Turning Back* 373). In some cases, women hit their daughters and sons as an enraged response to being beaten by their partners (Commission of Human Rights; Freedman, *No Turning Back* 399). For all these reasons, children’s protection against both being the subjects or the witnesses of violent abuse also gained importance during the 1990s (Finn and Colson 43).

2.2.2 Fashion

As I have mentioned before, towards the end of the 20th century women in Western countries had gained their right to wear any type of clothes—except in certain already mentioned situations, such as trying to prove they had been the

victims of rape or rape attempt. Subsequently, in the 1990s, females could express themselves in ways which included wearing provocative garments, as well as putting make-up on their faces in a visible way or dyeing their hair in eye-catching colours.

Previously, following fashion tendencies was seen positively by some feminist groups which wanted to emphasise the differentiation between women and men regardless of equality. However, some other feminists argued that these trends were the result of male wishes (French *The War Against Women* 165) and dehumanised women who followed them (Freedman *No Turning Back* 302).

In the 1990s these two opposed stances towards fashion were somehow brought together by a third new wave of feminists who wore both very feminine garments, such as short skirts or bikinis, and more radical “unladylike” clothes, such as military boots and jackets. With their choice of clothes, as well as shocking hair-dos and make-up colours, they expressed that, on the one hand, a woman could be feminine and proud of her body as well as combative and a real equality fighter and that, on the other, no woman should be badly treated, regardless of what she could be wearing (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 302).

2.2.3 Women in the Domestic Sphere

Even though throughout this section I have highlighted how some laws and attitudes towards women were changing in the 1990s and how the fight for gender equality was common in public and work spaces, it had not yet become a reality and women had not yet gained it within their homes either. In the great majority of cases, they were expected to do all or most of the housework and take care of children. Gender was, as Scott S. South and Glenna Spitze show in their article from 1994, “Housework in Marital and Nonmarital Household”, still, the most important variable to take into account when studying how housework was divided since women of all types of marital statuses—single, married, cohabiting, divorced, widowed or living with their parents—always did more than men in the same situation. Men who worked the most within their homes were widowed or divorced, because they did not have a partner who could clean or cook for them anymore, but they also tended to ask or pay for help more often than women whose partners had died or who were divorced (332). The tasks performed within a house are, in general, a clear reflection of power and gender relations (327; Bianchi et al. 193-194).

In the United States no law that allowed unpaid time off for the father or mother of a newborn baby was passed until 1993 (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 264). Women tended to raise their sons and daughters almost alone since the idea that they were naturally specialised in this task was still very rooted in people’s minds (Bianchi et al. 194) and because men were expected to work

long hours outside their homes. Even if having a baby increased the number of hours of housework for both partners in a couple, the quantity of work the woman had to add to her everyday life was always much higher (Bianchi et al. 98). South and Spitze also highlight how women had bigger housework loads than their male partners both when they got married and had children. However, a survey conducted in this country at the end of the last century showed that almost half of the men who were asked would accept a reduction in their salaries or would even stop working to be able to have a bigger role in their children's growth (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 266), which shows how mentalities were starting to change.

Although, as I have just mentioned, the way housework was divided between men and women was slowly becoming a bit more egalitarian, children were still raised in a gender-based environment both in monoparental families and in those with two parents (South and Spitze 331). Research shows that little boys cause the parents more work than girls and teenage girls tend to help at home, while boys do less or nothing (Bianchi et al. 204; South and Spitze 327, 331). Also, the tasks girls perform tend to be the boring and repetitive ones, which are usually considered feminine, while boys help with outdoor and car-related matters. (South and Spitze 344). These different ways of treating daughters and sons produce ideologies that determine their behaviours as adults (Bianchi et al. 194).

More comparative data from the 1990s also shows that, in American couples whose members earned a similar amount of money by working outside the house, husbands performed only between eighteen and twenty seven percent of housework (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 185) although, step by step, these men added an hour of house labour to their daily chores from the 1970s to the 1990s (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 185). Also, as women gradually spent more time working for a wage outside their homes, they reduced the amount of time invested in cleaning and cooking, but their partners did not perform these tasks for them, which resulted in lower house maintenance standards. This is shown by a constant decline in women's household labours during the last forty years while men's remained the same or increased just a little (Bianchi et al. 195).

Furthermore, during this period, unemployed men did not perform more tasks within their homes than those who had a job (Bianchi et al. 196) and some studies even show a tendency in unemployed men to do no housework at all, or very little, probably as a way to compensate for their lack of wages and show their masculinity (Bianchi et al. 194). Also, South and Spitze point out that while being more educated or working more hours than their partners means less housework for men, women with degrees or who earn more tend to spend more time on these duties in order not to hurt their partner's self-esteem. In other words, while women in ancient societies were supposed to do the housework because they were economically dependent on their husbands, independent and educated women from the 1990s still performed most of the

home-related tasks, although for different reasons.

2.2.4 Confusing Contradictions Inherent to the 1990s

Generally, women in the 1990s had to deal with a lot of incoherent and contradictory messages about the way they should behave, wear their clothes and express their sexuality. Through the advertising industry, they had been transformed into objects used daily to attract males' attention towards certain goods, and sex had long since ceased to be a major taboo. However, because women had traditionally been labeled as sexually passive, they had also always been considered responsible for keeping chaste in spite of aggressive males around them, that is, avoiding having sexual relations (Llewelyn and Osborne 82). Subsequently, they were still considered to have to play a "gatekeeper" role (Willis 213; Bridges 304) and control sexual activity (Bridges 292) in more recent times.

As a study of TV series targeting teenagers in the United States, written in 2000¹⁴, shows, females were, still at the end of the 1990s and the very beginning of the 21st century, also expected to be passive while men were constantly asked to be active (Stevens 8). On these programmes, when sex has negative consequences, women are more likely to have to endure them (Stevens

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Sex and Punishment: An Examination of Sexual Consequences and the Sexual Double Standard in Teen Programming examines not only some shows which were premiered in 2000 but also a number of them which had been on air for years. Most of the research data cited is also from the 1990s.

6). This is a message they also receive in real life (Llewelyn and Osborne 34, Mujika 61). Apart from that, Stevens shows that when sexual behaviour is initiated by females—notably fewer cases—these possible bad effects multiply (8). Women who decide to have a healthy sexual life and make their own choices are portrayed as a bad example for girls and boys, who are warned that getting involved with them may imply suffering harm themselves (Stevens 8).

Likewise, teenage girls were given contradictory messages from their families and society about how to become adult women. Llewelyn and Osborne point out how boys were encouraged to explore sexuality but girls were advised not to or risk losing people's respect, and even their freedom—they could be held in care if their behaviour was considered immoral—, if they did so (34). They were expected to have some experience in these matters, but not as much as to make a possible male partner feel inferior (86). Similarly, in life they were asked to become independent and autonomous but also—with even more insistence—to be nurturing, pleasing and caring. All these goals often clashed and, in those situations, young females were expected to focus on the latter and those who did not were considered too masculine or immature since they were not following the expected patterns (26). This led to many adult women thinking of other people's needs before their own and feeling guilty when expressing them (50).

There were double standards present in marriage too. Like I mentioned before, wives were expected to wear a ring and use their husband's surname.

They were equally expected to be faithful and loyal. These standards were not applied to men, who were often encouraged to have affairs, but women who became involved in extra-marital affairs were not easily accepted by society (Llewelyn and Osborne 60).

In the 1990s, in many Western countries such as the United States, women had the right to decide if they wanted to be mothers or not. However, they were, still, usually expected to instinctively want to become mothers when they reached maturity. Their wish to produce offspring was supposed to be inherent to their nature as women and those who decided otherwise were perceived as cold and selfish (Llewelyn and Osborne 128). This natural motherhood theory was, like the idea of separated spheres and differences in sexual behaviour, supported by biological determinists (130). Once a heterosexual couple was married, the woman would get pressured and asked to produce offspring both from family and friends, as well as society in general (129). Although many women wanted to have children, some of them may have thought that they chose this path freely while, on the contrary, they were very influenced by standards and expectations from people surrounding them. In fact, in other societies where overpopulation presents a problem, like the Chinese, women are responsible for giving birth to only one child and rewarded or punished according to this completely different way of thinking (128). Other women belonging to cultural or ethnical minorities were sterilised against their will, without their consent or under compulsion during—or until—the 1990s in

different parts of the world such as Sweden (AFP) or Peru (Puertas; Reuters; Freedman, *No Turning Back* 315). One of the main debates about motherhood arisen in the Unites States in the 1990s was whether mothers should benefit from the existing welfare programs or they were harmful for them and should be eliminated. This discussion was, however, led by complaints from men who stated that women were receiving preferential treatment. In 1997 it was decided that women could retain welfare but should obligatorily work in positions offered to them by localities (French *From Eve to Dawn* 4: 375).

On the other hand, in the majority of cases, if a heterosexual couple could not have babies, the woman alone would be subjected to different tests and procedures to achieve pregnancy without taking into account that males can be the cause of this problem too (Llewelyn and Osborne 133). Apart from that, women in their fertile years were not allowed to work with certain substances—even if they expressed their desire not to become mothers—because it could compromise their ability to procreate or the health of their eventual offspring. Men were allowed to work in these same positions even if them being exposed to these materials was proven to be equally damaging for their eventual sons and daughters and it reduced their capacity to become fathers (French *The War Against Women* 134-135). In summary, unfortunately, women did not really have complete control over their choice of becoming mothers, or at least not at this time.

2.2.5 Sexuality

Sexuality was still also very focused on men-women intimacy. Although already in the 1990s other types of families which differed from the ideal heterosexual monogamous family with children were becoming more accepted in Western societies (Dobash and Dobash 53) and even if gay men had, as I have mentioned in the previous chapter, gained some visibility in the public sphere, homophobia and homosexual exclusion were, still, a big problem (Dobash and Dobash 53) and lesbians specifically were often not taken into account.

In their book from 1990, Llewellyn and Osborne highlight how teenage girls usually create close relationships with other girls, and it is not uncommon for them to have some first sexual experiences among themselves (31). However, society pushes young girls away from bisexuality and into heterosexuality since a male partner represents values such as strength and maturity (32). Basing her conclusions on data from the last two decades of the 20th century and the first years of the 21st, Mujika highlights some ideas about female sexuality and pleasure which are deeply-rooted in Western societies. For instance, she mentions that “real sexuality” for women was not understood without men (Mujika 62) and that having sexual or romantic relationships with other women—specially if one or both of them ever showed interest in men as well—was very often considered as a temporary phase of mental confusion or resentment against men and a sign of immaturity (183). Some of these women

were even taken to a psychologist to be “cured” while gay men found, in general, a more forthcoming acceptance from their families (Mujika 181).

One last important fact, that could be used as a conclusion to this section, is that although rape, domestic violence, incest, abuse of female children and equality for women both in their workplaces and at home were recurrent topics in the debates in the 1990s, and laws were being adjusted, that did not mean that people’s mindsets or actual prosecution were changing at the same time.

For example, more women who had been abused reported it, but the conviction rates were not higher than in past decades. Furthermore, if the victim and the rapist had a close relationship or were members of the same family, this could lead to lesser or no punishment at all (Freedman, *Redefining Rape* 285). The various misogynistic thoughts derived from traditional patriarchal societies that I have mentioned throughout this section were still present in the late 20th century and their traces were difficult to erase. Women were also expected to prove their chastity in court—like in medieval times—, and their previous relationships (Willis 213) or other matters having nothing to do with sexuality—such as their choice of clothes or manner of speech—were taken into account and could lead to similar results.

The fight for sexual and reproductive rights had started long before the 1990s in the United States—some contraceptive methods were available in the 1920s (French *From Eve to Dawn* Vol. 3, 236) but until then, most unwanted

pregnancies ended in abortion (238)—and, at that time, condoms and contraceptive pills were easily accessible. However, the right to have an abortion was not a uniform one, and the fact that by the end of the 1980s certain laws were passed in states where it was legal in order to constrict the range of women who could access it—by, for example requiring parental authorisation or having to wait for long before having an abortion performed—(Fredman “When Historical Interpretation Meets Legal Advocacy: Abortion, Sodomy, and Same-Sex Marriage” 177), and the series of attacks to planned parenthood centers and abortion clinics performed by anti-abortists during the 1980s, but specially during the 1990s, which Hewitt lists in *Political Violence and Terrorism in Modern America*, show that this was still a controversial topic.

One last interesting idea about women’s lives and lifestyles in the 1990s is that, although people generally married at an older age than before, and more females took university degrees and had better professional positions, the pressure—from families and society—to find a partner and have children was still very present.

Men being single was seen as something positive and this period of their lives was understood as a time for experience and amusement. However, women who did not have a partner rapidly became the subject of pity or avoidance (Llewelyn and Osborne 196). Divorced women were also perceived as more dangerous and in bigger need of a partner than divorced men, and

females who were single out of choice were not easily accepted in society (196).

2.3 The 2000s

The advances in all fields achieved by women's struggle during the past decades were clearly visible in the first decade of the 21st century, which has been labelled by some as the "Century of the Woman" (Sjoberg & Gentry 2). Gender issues played a central role in the agendas of all important international institutions such as the UN (Sjoberg & Gentry 2).

The gap in illiteracy between boys and girls and between women and men in the workforce was narrowing all around the world and, in rich countries, more women than men had higher education ("A man's world?"). Sjoberg & Gentry point out how during the last decades the number of females who take part in politics and military matters had increased (8, 14). This fact points towards the end of discrimination in these fields. However, changes had not taken place uniformly all over the world and, in general, positions of power were mostly occupied by men (8).

Although some issues and problems may require specific research about women from a single country or community, others which shed light on broader matters—for example the situation of women at the workplace, in politics or in social media—currently tend to be based on international data or on information from Western countries in general. That is the reason why in this

chapter I will, on occasion, refer exclusively to the situation in the United States, but will deal with scholarly papers and books concerning broader visions.

2.3.1 Women in the Workforce

The gender of the workforce in the United States was also changing. According to Rosin, in 2009, for the first time in the history of this country, more women than men were working for a wage (117). However, Sjoberg & Gentry maintain that biological determinism still existed (14) and was applied to many areas, including work even in Western countries. They point out how, for example, the tag “female” was often added before some professions such as soldier or engineer while it was not before others such as ballerina or flight attendant. In these authors’ opinion, this fact proves how although in most countries it was already accepted that women could choose any career, in the dominant current of thinking there was still a general expectation for them to work in certain fields, making it surprising for them to choose otherwise, so it was highlighted, hence making integration more difficult (9).

Furthermore, in jobs traditionally carried out by men, women had to behave in masculine ways as well as prove their value more than their male counterparts, to whom certain skills were presumed by default (Sjoberg & Gentry 10). While women were in majority in specific areas—for instance, almost 60 percent of pharmacists today are women (Rosin 118)—and were

entering others in big numbers and with success—such as business and medicine (Rosin 117)—men were not able to take on the roles women could not fulfil anymore or share their tasks as mothers or housewives (Rosin 76).

To access a well-paid and/or important position, a good-quality high education is a key factor. The wide gap between the men and women who accessed college in the United States—in which males outnumbered females—had totally disappeared by the 1980s and by the beginning of the 21st century this trend had even been reversed (N. Anderson; “The Reverse Gender Gap”). By this time, the presence of female university students and graduates had increased. However, the number of female applicants had increased even faster and, when asked about possible gender biases in university admissions, many sector professionals agreed that men who are less qualified can access high education more easily than brilliant female students—specially in private institutions (Rosin 147)—due to the emphasis most colleges put on a 50:50 ratio between genders (“Does Gender Bias Exist”). In other words, if only academic merits were taken into account, there would be many more female students than men admitted to universities every year.

2.3.2 Violence against Women

As equality in other areas spread, women found it easier to express their disconformity with different matters through violence (Sjoberg & Gentry3; Rosin 10)—just like men have for centuries—and in many societies the amount

of female serial killers and those who get involved in terrorism, genocide and torture had grown too (Sjoberg & Gentry 8). In other words, while aggressiveness against them was in general lessening, women, on the contrary, seemed to have become more violent. Sjoberg & Gentry also highlight that the world of academia was increasingly paying more attention to these matters, even more than to male violence (2), but it generally contained a gendered discourse (7) according to which women are naturally pacifiers (6) and those females who commit violence are presented as sexually vengeful or mentally disturbed (4-5, 7, 12).

2.3.2.1 Rape Culture

Regarding rape, even with more women than ever speaking out about their cases¹⁵—the number of victims, as well as their family members and friends, who reported this crime had been incrementing for three decades by then (L. L. Taylor)—, data from 1995 to 2005 show a steady decline in the number of sexually assaulted women in the United States (Planty et al. 1). This figure stayed considerably stable in the following five years and remained much lower than those from previous decades (Planty et al. 3). The decrease was even more noticeable in cases in which the victim knew the assailant (Rosin 20). Other types of violence against women were following this tendency also from the

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In spite of a decline in 2009, the number of rape victims who decided to report it to the police increased by 59 percent (Planty et al. 6) during these years.

1990s (Catalano 3). However, still millions of women every year suffered from all kinds of violence from their partners in the United States (Doak vii) and sexual violence was suffered almost solely by women (Planty et al. 3).

Even if real-life rape figures had declined, there seemed to be a peak in tolerance of certain ideas and behaviours related to this crime and in victim-blaming rhetorics and attitudes in mass media that has lasted until the present. This behaviour, which normalises sexual abuse and condones or presents it as sexy and desirable, came into focus in the United States decades earlier—at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s (Suran 277)—under the label of “rape culture” and has often been used in feminist studies ever since. According to *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Sociology*, the first well-known definition of the term, given by Herman in 1984, described it as the “image of heterosexual sex [...] based on a model of aggressive male and passive female” (3791).

It is important to pay attention to the way a specific topic is portrayed in press, television, literature, etc., since mass media is a reflection of social change (Cuklanz 1). For this reason, a wide variety of research has been conducted on the topic of “rape culture” in relation to all these media.

For example, in the introductory chapter to her book *Rape on Prime Time*, Cuklanz explains how TV programmes often incorporated controversial subjects—including rape—in their plots (1) and she states that, until the 1990s, although scenes of sexual coercion were being redefined according to changes

in society and feminist fight against rape, they focused on masculine power (2) and they were accepted either by the majority of viewers or, at least, by some of them (2). Cuklanz, who published this book in 2000, explains that after 1990, she did not perceive drastic changes in the way forced sex was presented on TV and highlights how “remnants of earlier representations remained visible” even in the most modern programmes she used as a sample (4).

In her book from 2006, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Writing Erotic Romance*, novelist Alison Kent, states that forced seduction was not a very common subject in books anymore and that most readers would not have bought a book with such content (223). Lee shares this opinion as she states that this type of sex scenes was not in fashion after the mid-1980s and that it had totally been replaced by the 1990s by much more positive ones in which the female protagonist enjoyed actively exploring her sexuality (55).

It could be debated whether or not showing condoning attitudes towards rape in the media has an impact on real-life abuse cases, but it certainly influences people's mentalities to some degree. For instance, recent research on young college students exposed to music videos in which women were highly dehumanised and sexualised showed that both male and female viewers indicating their feelings of empathy towards the victim, and of the guilt of the man of a rape case, were less frequent than those from another group of subjects who had watched videos which did not contain strong gender role stereotyping (Burgess and Burpo 754). The difference in the opinion of females

from both groups did not differ much when they were asked about the perpetrator's guilt and about their empathy towards the abused woman, but those from the first group blamed her for the rape much more (Burgess and Burpo 754).

Even if in the opinion of some of the authors quoted above positive perceptions of rape have almost completely disappeared from mass media, others agree that "rape culture" is actually a big problem (Suran 278) and that it has not disappeared with the turn of the century.

Although research from the end of the 1990s pointed out how men enjoying either telling or listening to misogynistic jokes reinforced men's sexist beliefs about forced sex and violence against women (Ryan and Kanjorski 750-751), another study from 2015 shows multiple examples of how rape is still commonly used in humorous shows and TV programmes (Strain et al. 86). Even if the latter study acknowledges certain uses of the topic in subversive humour which challenges the way society perceives and tackles this problem, it mostly highlights how this type of abuse is used just as a shocking or funny element to keep the audience entertained but ignoring how its inclusion helps normalise and treat the subject as a minor problem and is offensive for survivors (88).

One of the most characteristic features of the 21st century is the widespread use of new technologies and the huge amounts of information that can be rapidly accessed through them. In relation to rape, they have helped

survivors find each other, narrate their stories and form support groups, and they have also provided channels to articulate activism of anti-rape movements (Suran 299-304). Digital data has also been used in court as proof in rape cases (Zaleki et al. 922; Boux and Daum 166, 168).

However, most scholars agree that on many occasions the easy access to the Internet, available to almost every person in Western countries, has a counter-productive effect in the fight against “rape culture”. For example, electronic devices have been repeatedly used to share photos of teenagers being abused (Boux and Daum 150-151) and articles and conversation threads that reinforce false rape myths are common in social networks (Boux and Daum 149). For instance, when a study about readers’ commentaries on 52 pieces of news about rape in online newspapers was recently conducted, researchers found that only one of the articles did not contain remarks from users which either blamed the victim or questioned the label of rape attached to the reported case (Zaleki et al. 924).

Cuklanz remarks how controversial issues that are shown on prime time television are treated in “mild and non-threatening” ways in order not to offend viewers (1). As I explained in a conference entitled “Bite Me, Rape Me: Non-Consensual and Forced Sex in Contemporary Vampire Novels in America” in October 2016 (Picado), what I generally perceive is that rape in fantasy books for teenagers has not disappeared. I agree with the authors quoted above that all types of entertainment still contained misogynistic elements at this time

and, after having analysed rape and forced seduction scenes found in *Lost Souls*, the *Southern Vampire Mysteries* and *Chicagoland Vampires* for this conference, I coincide with Cucklanz that rape, as well as certain indulgent or even positive attitudes towards it, have been reshaped over time to adapt to the ruling fashions and general mindsets in order not to be perceived as harmful and to be accepted by the majority of the readers.

2.3.3 Sexuality

Rosin quotes a questionnaire answered by college students at New York University which showed how both males and females expected to get married in their late twenties or early thirties (25). However, this scholar—who extrapolates the data to the whole country—thinks that until then, most women will enjoy sporadic relationships (26). At this time, women in the United States were more in control of their sexuality and less questioned for the way they decided to express it than previous generations just a few decades before (Rosin 19) and research shows that about three quarters of college students from both sexes will often have casual sex (Rosin 25). In contrast, Crossen notes, one of the most important trends in sexual education in the United States was abstinence (253). In this scholar’s opinion, attention should be drawn to this phenomenon since an important number of schools chose to teach “abstinence only sex education” as part of their curriculum (253).

Rosin defends that the flexibility women of the time showed, such as their capacity to engage in traditionally men-dominated jobs, was present in other aspects of their lives too, such as sexuality, while men seemed to—again—be more static and resistant to change and experimentation (42). In her book, *The End of Men*, this author dedicates a whole chapter, entitled “Hearts of Steel: Single Girls Master the Hook-Up” (17-46), to show how, in this decade, young women in college engage more normally in non-committal love affairs or purely sexual ones than in serious relationships.

2.3.3.1 Homosexuality

By the beginning of the present century, lesbians were gaining more visibility in media and pop culture. Gay men had been positively portrayed in magazines, advertisements, films, etc. for a number of decades but gay women were only becoming part of mass-media by this time (Glock). Until then, non-straight female readers and viewers could only identify themselves with a few women whose sexuality was not mentioned or was somehow ambiguous (Glock). The American TV show *The L Word* is a good example of how lesbians were gaining importance in the media. The series, set in Los Angeles, portrays a group of lesbians and focuses on both their good and bad relationships with their relatives and friends. It was aired between 2004 and 2009 and instantly became very popular and was praised by the critics (Glock).

Images of women loving other women spread fast. Very successful shows—such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Gray's Anatomy*—and films featuring famous actresses or directed by well-known film-makers—such as *Monster* or *Mulholland Drive*—started to include bisexual and gay females among their characters and mostly portraying them as unique individuals, as opposed to the typical “rude and/or boyish lesbian” stereotype.

However, although many mainstream books, films and other media introduced gay and lesbian characters, in most cases the main love stories and protagonists were, still, heterosexual. Furthermore, the balance between these scarce female and male homosexuals was also uneven. A close look at the timeline “Gays in Pop Culture 1934-2010” compiled by J. Wood for the cultural website *Infoplease*, or the one edited by Matthew Jackobs for *The Huffington Post* (“LGBT Milestones In Pop Culture”), show that, also during the 2000s, more gay men than gay women appeared in cinema and on television, and programmes where non-straight men had leading roles were aired earlier than those with lesbian protagonists. Ilene Chaiken, the creator of *The L Word*, explains how just by the end of the 1990s, it would not have been possible to produce a show like hers (Glock).

2.3.3.2 Bisexuality

Bisexuality was, on its part, not always as easily accepted as homosexuality. Most scholars agree that it was not often taken into account in academia in

general and even in queer studies (Angelides “Historicizing (Bi)Sexuality” 126; Angelides “A History of Bisexuality” 7; Gammon and Isgro 160; Callis 213) and it has been mostly erased from history (Angelides “Historicizing (Bi)Sexuality” 128). Furthermore, bisexuality was not presented as a real choice in media until the first decade of the current century, when some female celebrities, such as Angelina Jolie and Gery Halliwell revealed that they were bisexual. Their choice of partners was described as a “trend” (Radice), and they were portrayed as “curious” (Radice) heterosexual women who were only temporarily exploring their sexuality during their youth. The review about this topic by Radice in *The Observer*, entitled “When hello really means bi for now” presents a good example of these views.

Still in the 2000s, there was not much information about bisexuality and these individuals were often made to choose a side in the predominant strict heterosexual vs. homosexual dichotomy (Angelides “Historicizing (Bi)Sexuality” 128; London-Terry 105). On the one hand, being portrayed as only transitorily interested in their same-sex partners in mainstream media, bisexuals—specially women—became invisible—like lesbians and, thus, were misunderstood for adventurous heterosexuals and their sexual orientation was incorrectly considered as vice or experimentation. Consequently, same-sex relationships in which one of the members, or both, were bisexuals, were considered unmistakably short-lived and bisexuals were perceived as unfaithful and only able to engage in a monogamous serious relationship when their

partners were of the opposite sex. Research from 2000 and 2004 shows that straight college students—specially males—held more negative feelings and incomprehension towards bisexuals than towards lesbians and gays (London-Terry 103). Furthermore, bisexuals were not always openly accepted among lesbians and gays either. Quoting an academic paper from 2002 by T. Brown, London-Terry remarks that they were sometimes forced to label themselves homosexuals in order to be accepted in LG communities (103).

2.3.4 Fashion

As I have pointed out in the previous chapters, women in the United States had already decades earlier gained almost total freedom to choose their clothing and hairstyles. When Rosin uses a specific woman in her thirties she interviewed as an example, she highlights how, by the beginning of the present century, an increasing number of women were confident with their appearance and personality, and chose to wear informal and comfortable clothes over elegant but ill-fitting ones and/or not to wear any make up (34). However, a lot of importance was still given to physical appearance and the fashion market continued to be ruled by some unhealthy and dangerous clichés about the way bodies should look to be appealing—such as extreme thinness (Wardrop).

These judgements and standards related to physical appearance were gradually becoming as compromising for men as they had traditionally been for women. However, different studies conducted at the end of this decade revealed

that, in the United States, the latter were still most affected by fashion trends—which appeared on catwalks but were reproduced in all types of media such as fashion magazines and cinema—as they were generally not happy with their appearance (Grabe 460). Furthermore, they started worrying and feeling bad about weight and their looks as early as ages 3 to 7 (Hayes and Tantleff-Dunn 422; Bingham; Grabe 460). According to some scholars, the self-esteem of girls in Western countries alarmingly declines during their adolescence (Clay et al. 452) partly as a direct result of continuous exposure to images of extreme thinness (469). Research from 2007 concluded that more women than men suffered from eating disorders—such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa—in the United States (Hudson et. al. 352-353) although it also acknowledged the existence of men suffering from these diseases.

Furthermore, one of the most widely spread myths which sustains the previously analysed “rape culture” is that women who were wearing provocative clothes when forced to have sex were partly guilty of what happened to them (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 627; Toit 92; Forell and Matthews 229; Boux and Daum 158). This idea has repeatedly been proven false—for example by pointing out cases in which the victim was not wearing seductive clothes (Groth and Birnbaum 62)—but it is so deeply rooted in most societies that it is often debated even nowadays, as well as it was in the first decade of the 21st century.

2.3.5 Feminism

Although all sections above—and the present dissertation as a whole—is focused on feminism and situation and/or problems women face in different areas, and there have been important women's movements in all the different decades I am referring to, feminism on its own has only been addressed to in the 2000s and the 2010s because only female characters in the books written in those decades—the *Southern Vampire Mysteries* and *Chicagoland Vampires*—refer to feminism or to issues having to do with gender inequality. Females who appear in the books written before—*Interview with the Vampire* and *Lost Souls*—present certain rebellious attitudes and try to tackle patriarchal structures, their behaviours—although feminist—cannot be unequivocally understood as an effort to fight inequality, but more as a response to their personal difficult situations.

Feminism has been severely criticised since its origins not only by those who opposed its main principles, but also by many women who felt that these ideals did not represent them (French *From Eve to Dawn* Vol. 4, 488). Like many other subversive movements, it was founded by an upper-class minority of Caucasians who—not always intentionally—ignored the perspectives of thousands of females from races and backgrounds which were different from their own. In her book from 2002 *No Turning Back*, Freedman points out how other voices within the feminist movement were being raised asking for points of views and perspectives to be widened and more inclusive (28) and how both

the term “feminism” and even “woman” and “man” have to be constantly questioned and updated due to constant changes in society (28-29).

For this reason, feminism has, since then been understood to be too broad to be considered a single reality and for the last decades it has not been treated as a unified movement anymore. When it is approached, it goes hand-in-hand with the term in vogue “intersectionality” (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 27), which consists of overlapping some of the variants—such as race, class or sexual orientation—for which people have traditionally been discriminated, to study social issues. By doing this, minority groups, which have often been excluded from academia because their members did not commonly access the highest levels of education in the past, come into focus.

By including these other alternative readings in contemporary feminist studies, scholars allow specific realities that had previously not been taken into account—such as those of lesbians or bisexuals, black women, etc.—to be understood (Lillian and Jonell 121). At the same time, those women, who mainly felt feminism did not represent them and looked at it warily because they thought it was a movement created only by and for wealthy educated white females, started to regard it as a tool to improve their specific situation within their communities and to achieve their particular goals.

In this way, in the last decades feminism has become a huge mosaic of different ways of thinking that have to do with diverse realities (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 29). Although at a first glance this may sound too complicated and give an

idea of separation, it helps on the contrary to find connections and common points of view across nations and, inside each country, across class, race, educative levels, sexual orientations, etc.

2.4 The 2010s

In the second decade of the 21st century, times have certainly changed for women. In 2014, Janet Yellen became the first female head of the Federal Reserve System. That same year, she was considered the 6th most powerful person and the 4th most powerful woman in the world by *Forbes* magazine (Dill). Although at the time I am writing this dissertation, the first person on that list is Vladimir Putin, the second person is a woman: Angela Merkel. In 2016 Hillary Clinton became the first woman to run for president of the United States, and the CEO of Facebook, probably the most popular social network in the world, is also a woman—Sheryl Sandberg—who is furthermore known for her activism in favour of women’s empowerment (Bercovici; C. Taylor), especially at work.

2.4.1 Love and Sexuality

In Western countries, such as the United States, it is generally accepted that women can have sex with whom they want and that they do not compulsorily have to be in love with their sex partners or want to continue a relationship with them. (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 466-467; Allen, Walker, and McCan 382) It

is common to find women in their late twenties and thirties who are not yet married or do not even have a partner (Rosin 91).

However, women are still being more criticised than men for their behaviour when they openly flirt with a man or when they have casual sexual encounters. They seem to be compared to old clichés more than men too and they need to worry about keeping a good name and reputation (Rosin 22; Allen, Walker, and McCan 382). Similarly, still in 2009, feminist scholar Jessica Valenti maintains that female virginity is idolized in the United States as the easiest and fastest way to prove whether a woman is good or not (The Purity Myth 24).

Women who, by contrast, decide not to have sexual or romantic relationships are often criticised too not only by men, but among their own female friends and relatives (Llewelyn and Osborne 196, 200). It seems that, while men's sexual behaviours are not often questioned, women always have to explain their choices and have to bear their intimacy being always in the eye of the storm whether because it is too explicit or notorious or too little (Llewelyn and Osborne 203-204).

2.4.1.1 Family Structures

Other family structures, such as gay and lesbian couples with children or unmarried heterosexual couples who cohabit, are becoming more normal and socially accepted in the United States (Helms 596; Rose-Greenland and Smock

652-653; Allen, Walker, and McCan 353) and gay marriage became legal in all states—except American Samoa and some Indian territories—in June 2015.

Being a single mother is also not as strongly stigmatised as before. In fact, many women have babies but do not marry the fathers or even date them or live with them. Although many single mothers had not planned to have children, more and more women are actively deciding to start a family without a man even if that means a heavy workload (Rosin 15) or rely on other people such as family or friends to be able to sustain and take care of their offspring while remaining unmarried (Nelson 782-783).

Although these other forms of families are becoming more accepted, heterosexual marriage and children are still considered two of the most important goals to be achieved in life (Merten and Williams 843; Rose-Greenland and Smock 653; Rosin 67; Helms 596). What is more, in the introduction to her book from 2012 *One Marriage Under God*, Heath explains that, although they have been promoting a “renaissance” of heterosexual marriage since the end of the 1990s, certain conservative Christian sectors have become more radicalized in their defense of traditional values inside the family since 2004 in the United States, as they feel that since the fight for same-sex marriage became even more apparent their status quo was being threatened (2). Some authors argue that because the American society has religious and clear conservative origins, other questions related to family issues have been

subjected to discussion for so long that they have somehow become part of the tradition.

A good example of debate concerning family matters is abortion which, Upstone remarks, is a recurrent hot topic and has been part of the feminist agenda since the 20th century (143). Another reason why abortion is, more than ever, a hot topic today may be due to the fact that it has always been part of political programs too. The shift towards conservatism in politics which happened in the United States when the Republicans won the general elections in 2016 after 8 years of Democrat rule, means a change in the way this topic will be treated since Obama's administration had integrated pro-choice measures—such as funding clinics which performed abortions—while Republicans, as Silver remarks, have always positioned themselves on the pro-life side of the debate (129). Effectively, as soon as president Trump took office as President of the United States in January 2017, he introduced the Mexico City policy, which denies funds to any international non-governmental organisation which promotes or offers abortion services.

Similarly to getting married and even starting committed relationships, becoming a mother has been generally delayed too (Kincaid; Kincaid and Friedman). That is, because nowadays women seem to be able to focus more on their careers or just to enjoy being free, like men have traditionally been, most of them choose not to devote their whole lives or their youth to exclusively forming a family. However, women feel more social pressure than men towards

marriage and children since they are still better considered when they are mothers and wives than when they are fully devoted to their professions. As Sheryl Sandberg also notes, many women cut their working hours or quit their jobs when they think of starting a family or have a baby while men do not (Auletta; C. Taylor) and, although the number of women who devote all their time to staying at home with their offspring is decreasing in Western countries, there are not and have never been almost any men who do so (Doughty; Allen, Walker, and McCan 372).

A good example of these mentalities and tendencies is that, although marriage has been generally delayed, more men marry at an older age (Wang, and Parker; Allen, Walker, and McCan 382) or do not marry at all (Wang, and Parker) while all women are expected to become mothers and wives at some point in their lives. The social pressure received by those who decide not to do so is high (Krupka; Llewelyn and Osborne 128) and those who want to focus on their careers and have children at a later age are also urged to change their plans in life to fit motherhood before they reach their thirties. For instance, in 2010 the well-known business magazine *Forbes* published an article aimed at professional women who wanted to become mothers in which it is said that they should do so while they are in their twenties (Goudreau, “When Should You Become a Mum?”). There is a long list of biological support based on how women become more infertile as time goes by. The aforementioned *Forbes* article also states that superstars who had children in their forties are creating

false expectations for normal women. Facts having to do with male fertility such as how the quality of sperm also decreases when they grow older (French *The War Against Women* 155; Brannon 350) are scarcely mentioned in media. Also, these ideals of self-fulfilment, all centred on forming a very specific type of family, leave non-heterosexual women out.

The expression “to have it all”—meaning being successful in a professional career while being a good young mother and wife—has become more and more popular since the 1970s, as most women have joined the workforce. Females have been daily exposed to advertisement, images and texts about women who seem to easily manage all these roles while staying happy and pretty. This emphasis on beauty and elegance in a professional environment is, again, exclusively addressed to women (Slaughter). Many feminists have criticised this ideal by arguing that it is impossible -or nearly impossible- to achieve all these goals at the same time (Hochschild and Machung 1-2; Slaughter; Zack 129) and it makes most women feel they are not hard-working or efficient enough. Others have fought or keep on fighting to transform the law as well as working-places into more flexible and family-friendly environments in order to combine being a mother and a professional woman more easily (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 466). But the reality is that, like Slaughter—a former director of policy planning at the State Department and the first woman to occupy this position—states in an article for *The Atlantic*, the way the world of work is nowadays articulated in the United States does not yet allow to bring

family and a highly-demanding position together. In “The Double Shift”, a book she wrote in the 1970s, Hochschild goes as far as to claiming that, to be able to reconcile all these areas of life, the way cities are planned and built should change too (Hochschild and Machung 281).

The United States is nowadays one of the 9 countries in the OECD which do not have any kind of paid paternity leave (“Still a man’s world”; Hochschild and Machung 280) and one of the few in the whole world which do not have paid maternity leave (*The Huffington Post Canada*). In May 2012 *The Huffington Post* published a list based on data about maternity leave from 2011 in 43 developed countries around the world and the United States was the country with the shortest period and the only one which does not offer any kind of paid leave¹⁶ (*The Huffington Post Canada*), and a study from 2009 which compares maternal and paternal leave in 21 rich countries shows how the United States was number 20 for protected job leave, being the only one, along with Switzerland, which offers less than six months for a new-born child (Ray, Gornick and Schmitt 6). Such policies not only reinforce gender inequality—almost no men stay at home to take care of children in the United States (Allen, Walker, and McCan 372; Rosin 55)—, but also make women’s access to stable good quality jobs more difficult and burden them with most child-bearing responsibilities and tasks (Ray, Gornick and Schmitt 9-10).

¹⁶There is no data on paid maternity leave in Macedonia.

At home, even in couples where women earn the highest wage or work longer hours, men have not changed their behaviour much either. While many of them are not the main economical providers of their families anymore, their wives continue to do most of the house chores, sometimes even while having two jobs at the same time (Rosin 53). In the best cases, these chores are divided equally, but men—even if unemployed—do not take care of all the duties to be done at home and having to do with raising children (Rosin 53-54; Allen, Walker, and McCan 376). The number of hours women devote to paid work has more than doubled since the middle of the 1960s, but the number of hours per week they spend on child care has increased to 13.9 per week and is still much higher than men's—only 7—, while the number of hours men do housework has decreased by more than two hours every week (Rosin 54).

2.4.2 Women in the Workforce

Just a few decades ago, by the time Ann Rice was writing her best-seller *Interview with the Vampire*, women in the United States contributed to only 2-6 percent of their families' income. Nowadays, this figure has grown to more than 40 percent and a third of working mothers have become the main breadwinners in their house both because they are not married or because their salaries are higher than their husbands' (Rosin 48).

The 21st Century is also a time when most women in the United States can choose to be educated or to have any type of career. In recent years, there

has been a visible turning point in certain areas. Nowadays, for the first time, there are more female students than male students in universities (Rosin 146, 149; Mann 138) and more women between the ages of thirty and forty have college degrees than their male counterparts (Rosin 91). More than half of managerial and professional positions were, according to studies from 2011, occupied by women (Rosin 117). Some traditionally considered masculine work areas such as law, insurance and banking, are being paired in gender now (Rosin 117) and women have taken—or are taking—over certain others such as veterinary science, medicine, accounting and pharmacy among many others (Rosin 141, 117, 118).

In contrast, the number of women in the workforce and of those who choose studies or a career in other areas, such as science and engineering, has not increased in the last years (Allen, Walker, and McCan 381-382) and preference for male students is still present in the academia to a certain degree.

Authors like Rosin, who are optimistic about most of the figures I have just listed, admit that “glass ceilings”—a series of invisible barriers which prevent women from accessing positions of power—and lower salaries are, still, a reality for females (282; Freedman, *No Turning Back* 466). At the end of 2015, *The Guardian* published an article¹⁷ about the barriers women encounter in their workplace and the differences in wages and number of workers from

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This article focuses mainly on the United Kingdom but mentions many examples in the United States too.

each sex in important positions that exist to a greater or lesser degree. This piece of news shows how even nowadays men occupy the majority of high-rank jobs in areas such as law, media, politics, technology, etc. (“Women of 2015: where are the cracks in the glass ceiling?”). Rosin agrees with this point and argues that, furthermore, and although working conditions are very rapidly changing for women, they still work less paid hours than their male counterparts (Rosin 60).

Women still have to face discriminatory treatment at their workplaces. In an interview for *Inc Magazine*, Sheryl Sandberg highlights how we think it is normal for little boys to take action and have ideas but when a girl does so, she is called “bossy”. She thinks this reflects how society in the United States does not accept women as leaders (Bercovici). In 2013 she launched “Lean In”, a non-profit organization for women empowerment at the workplace. One of their campaigns, “Ban Bossy”, is supported by famous females from such different backgrounds as Jane Lynch, Beyoncé, Condoleezza Rice and Jennifer Garner. They try to raise awareness on this difference in treatment and warn that, because of the use of adjectives such as “bossy”, “know it all” and “pushy”, girls lose more self-confidence than boys in their adolescence (Ban Bossy).

Furthermore, men have not moved into traditionally female areas of work. For example, the great majority of primary school teachers and nurses are still women (Allen, Walker, and McCan 381). Studies from 2013 show that in the United States most women choose, still, a career in nurturing and caring

areas, in which salaries are lower (“Still a man’s world”). This same piece of research shows that, also in the United States, although some important firms have three or more women on their board, companies in general still have less female CEOs and chief financial officers (“Still a man’s world”).

2.4.3 Violence against Women

Violence against women by their partners has been in focus during the last decades and different measures have been taken to fight it (Merten and Williams 845). Women have generally become less tolerant both against violence which put their lives at risk or which may hurt them physically. Also, they have started to stand against some other forms of violence which is considered part of the daily routine of a woman and which they want to equally end, such as street harassment¹⁸. However, old bad tendencies have not completely changed. As, for example, young men seem to tolerate or understand its use in a relationship more than women (Merten and Williams 848).

2.4.3.1 Rape

A very dangerous and common misconception is, still—and although rape in

¹⁸ See for example the webpage <http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/>, this piece of news containing a video recorded in New York <http://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-29823870/video-exposes-street-harassment-in-new-york>, or this other piece of news about a girl from Amsterdam who takes photos with men who harassed her in the street <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/woman-selfies-street-harrassers-harrassment-catcalls-men-instagram-noa-jansma-a7983991.html>.

general terms has descended (182)—, for example, the idea that women do not want to clearly express their desire and men have to insist and even use force against them in order to achieve a sexual intercourse that they both really want. This leads to many problems such as rape happening in dates or with partners. These crimes are, as I already mentioned in previous chapters, not always properly identified—even by the victim—, reported or prosecuted.

Even if a woman's right to say no is usually respected when they establish it from the beginning (Freedman, *No Turning Back* 467), society has in many cases misunderstood their freedom of choice and action and, in others, they are still being judged according to old-fashioned mindsets. For example, in 2014, in an article for the feminist magazine *Pikara*, Lucas Arranz and Lozano analysed articles about love and sex published on well-known contemporary web pages and in magazines aimed at teenage girls and women, such as *Cosmopolitan*, and found contradictory messages and advice about beauty, manners and behaviour which are not different from the ones females received more than fifty years ago.

Some friendly signs are still incorrectly considered as an invitation to sex by men and rape is still difficult to be delimited since some males think modern women are prone to want sex and women themselves feel that it is wrong to have doubts or to stop sexual activities once they have started. Arranz and Lozano point out some examples which make it difficult to eradicate these currents of thought. Girls and women are, for instance, recommended to smile

to men they love and their friends or relatives in order to make a good impression on them while in magazines for males, a woman who smiles at them is said to be willing to have sex. Also, in the periodicals aimed at women, women are advised about sexual behaviours and practises that men like without taking their own pleasure into account, and they are also told that once they have started flirting or have initiated sexual intercourse, they cannot change their mind and back out (Arranz and Lozano).

2.4.3.2 Stalking

Another problem women face nowadays is the so-called “stalking”, meaning receiving unwanted attention from and being unwillingly invigilated by a male suitor. Although this issue is not new—it was already known in the 1980s (Morewitz v) and then labelled as “the crime of the 1990s” (Boon xxi)—it was thought to exclusively affect celebrities and only recently have media, academia and law acknowledged how normal women suffer these crimes constantly (Boon xxi). Now it is also commonly accepted that stalking can precede, be part of or follow other abusive behaviours such as battering, sexual assault or house trespassing (Baldry 88; Pathé and Mullen 3).

Stalking has however been difficult to define precisely because it covers a broad range of behaviours, such as phone calls or following the victims (Boon xxii). The internet and the widely spread use of other technologies such as mobile phones makes it easier than ever before for stalkers to gain access to

their victims and their data (Burgess and Baker 201), as Nagarajan in her opinion article for *The Guardian* proves with data showing the fast increasing number of misogynist offenses to women in different countries.

Even if men can also be subjected to stalking, in the great majority of cases the victim is a female (Pathé and Mullen 2) and the perpetrator is an older male. In most cases, they know each other which, as with date rape, makes reporting less likely to happen (Baldry 87).

Another reason why women who are stalked do not seek help is because, due to gender role expectations, women tend to associate love and passion coming from male suitors with violence (J. Dunn 124) and because the insistence of a man after rejection is considered an expression of true love in most Western countries and continuously shown in romantic movies and novels (Angyal; J. Dunn 123). It can be difficult for the victims to identify certain behaviours as dangerous in the beginning and “falsely perceived as love” (Logan et al. 13; McClimans and Wisnewski 168), especially if this forced interaction is combined with romantic items or gestures such as flowers or presents (J. Dunn 130-131).

Other people may also misinterpret stalkers’ behaviours and the victim may feel she is not believed or understood. Some women are told that these unwanted attentions were normal by family members and friends (Logan et al. 15) while others declare having been told they should be “flattered” or accused of being flirty or provoking by policemen or doctors to whom they turned

seeking help (Pathé and Mullen 10). Prosecution is still rare in stalking cases (Baldry 87).

2.4.4 Violent Women

On the other hand, women have increasingly become more violent, especially in the last decades. (Rosin 176) All around the world, they are now involved in war and other conflicts (Ness xi). They have been traditionally been considered victims and able to kill or beat others only in self-defense or in some other specific—always domestic—contexts (Rosin 178). Even if it is true that in most cases gender violence is inflicted by men on women (VanNatta 430; Dobash and Dobash 42; Doak 2) and that most females who kill their partners actually do it in order not to be killed themselves, (Dobash and Dobash 6), the opposite situation is also possible (Doak 2) and there is, in fact, a tendency of females becoming more aggressive towards their male partners (Merten and Williams 488). There is also a rising number of teenage girls who beat others simply because they obtain satisfaction or pleasure from inflicting pain (Ness 52, Rosin 181) or because of the social status and respect they gain after winning a fight (Ness 8).

Society does not seem ready to accept the idea of females being capable of killing and hurting just as naturally as men. Most people are of the opinion that a woman hitting a man is a less important event than a man hitting a woman (Merten and Williams 845) and, after centuries of being mostly

victims, violent actions perpetrated by females are often justified by trauma or abuse they may have suffered in their lives (Rosin 180). However, nowadays these explanations do not, in all cases, correspond to reality. A growing number of women actually enjoy or benefit from battering and killing (Ness xi; Rosin 172).

2.4.5 Feminism

As I have proven with data and opinions from different experts throughout this dissertation, conscience about feminism has risen in most governments and important international organisations, such as the UN, and evolution towards total equality is taking place in most societies.

Awareness has been raised in all sectors of the population in most countries not only among women, but also among men. Feminism is nowadays one of the most popular words in all media (Nagarajan) as many famous singers, TV presenters, actresses and actors estate that they are feminists and use their images to fight inequality. The Internet has equally helped people from all over the world to understand what feminism means and to find information about it (Nagarajan) and searches in different dictionaries and engines show that the word “feminism” is one of the most popular ones, not only in English, but also in other languages¹⁹.

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For example, one of the most popular terms people looked up in the online version of the “Diccionario de la Real Academia Española”—the most authoritative dictionary of the Spanish language—during March 2016 was “feminism”. See Sainz Borgo, Karina. “El DRAE gana casi 30

There has been an important revival of feminism in the last years. Because of this reason, some scholars, such as Munro, believe that we are experiencing a Fourth Wave of Feminism, which would have started around the middle of the first decade of the 21st century. Munro argues that some of the most defining characteristics of this new movement are its emphasis on intersectionality—which I have already mentioned in the part of this chapter corresponding to the previous decade—and its strong presence in social media, as she states that one of the main pillars on which feminism stands nowadays is “its reliance on the internet”.

2.4.6 Old Gender Stereotypes and Expectations

Still in the second decade of the 21st century, there are old gender stereotypes which persist in people’s minds, as well as burdens and obligations—especially within homes—that mostly devolve solely upon women.

Moreover, reaching gender equality in certain areas in most Western countries has had some countereffects as it seems to have also triggered a retrogressive change in mentalities (Purcell), which exalts chauvinistic gender roles as romantic and in harmony and balance with nature (Doughty; Allen, Walker, and McCan 381).

millones de visitas: ‘feminismo’ está entre las palabras más buscadas.” Voz Populi, 11 Apr. 2016, www.vozpopuli.com/cultura/Culturas-RAE-DRAE-Cultra-Internet-femeinismo_0_906809341.html, Accessed 16 Dec. 2016.

These facts add to the old stereotypes that I have mentioned in the previous sections of this chapter concerning the historical background and which have not yet completely disappeared from many people's mindsets (Allen, Walker, and McCan 381). They are also still very common in media and in advertisements (Nußbaumer 4).

In her opinion column in *The Guardian*, Valenti explains that, as a consequence of its rapid spread through the Internet, the new wave of feminism has encountered a counter-discourse, called "antifeminism" and which consists mainly of messages of disagreement towards this movement from women all over the world ("Punching Gloria Steinem"). In 2014, this kind of statements came into focus as many of them were labelled under the same phrase—"women against feminism"—which encouraged all females to express their reasons to oppose this movement and which was quite successful, specially among youngsters in Western countries.

Women, such as Cathy Young in her essay for *Time*, have echoed this new generation of females in different media and supported their testimonies by claiming that the world is nowadays a fair place where there is no inequality ("Stop Fem-Splaining"; K. J. Anderson 109) and that pay gaps (Valenti "Punching Gloria Steinem"), rape-culture and patriarchy, among other issues (Elliott), are an exaggeration which put men in a bad place (C. Young "Stop Fem-Splaining"; Valenti "Punching Gloria Steinem"). In an opinion article for *The Boston Globe* Cathy Young even implies that feminism is nowadays

synonym of violence and anger towards men (“Women Against Feminism”; K. J. Anderson 109).

However, most female journalists writing about the topic seem to agree that women claiming not to need feminism—who are young, white and Western, and belong to the middle-class—are, on the one hand, not conscious of their privilege (Valenti “Feminism makes women ‘victims’?”; Valenti “Punching Gloria Steinem”) and have, on the other hand, misunderstood the main goals of this movement.

Elliot states that certain sectors related to evangelism—and similar to those Christians who became more radical in their defense of the traditional family which I have previously mentioned—feel threatened by new models. In this same article Elliot also maintains that these women believe that feminism is synonymous with uncontrolled sexuality (Valenti “Punching Gloria Steinem”) and that if equality is achieved, females will not have a specific role or place in society anymore (K. J. Anderson 200-201).

On the other hand, some adult and teenage women have published books and manage webpages and blogs in which they defend that women should be valued as far as they play the roles related to housework, career choices and child-rearing which have traditionally been assigned to them. These women also state that this is the only way to express their femininity and obey God’s will.²⁰

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See for example www.girldefined.com or www.ladiesagainstfeminism.com.

3 *Interview with the Vampire*

Given that the main protagonists of this book—written in 1973—are two males called Louis and Lestat, most of the action has to do exclusively with their needs, wishes and ideas. Moreover, the whole story is narrated by Louis, so the readers only get to know about what happens from his male perspective.

Both Badley and Tomc remark that powerful or wise female characters are almost non-existent in the novel (135; 97), as all women have childish and static behaviours (Badley 130; Tomc 98). There are, still, a few female characters in the book. One of them, Claudia, a little child who is turned into a vampire by the protagonists, becomes a central character, but most of the others are not important for the plot.

Two other females who do not play important roles but are nevertheless interesting for our analysis are Babette Freniere—a woman that Louis befriends and platonically loves—and Madeleine, chosen by Claudia to be her new companion by the end of the book.

3.1 Patriarchal Structures

As Linda Badley establishes in her book, *Film, Horror and the Body Fantastic*, feminine issues are never the focus in Rice's books (135). The author has been widely recognised for introducing a few transgressive elements in her novels,

such as her notorious “male-to-male desire” (Nakagawa 3, Haggerty 5). However, critics are divided about how to label the ideas and discourse underlying the texts and Rice has been both accused of supporting and continuing the typical “conservative” discourse (Williamson 54-55, Haggerty 5) and said to be fighting for gender equality (M. J. Wood 61; Tomc 105).

Interview with the Vampire, which follows a “patrilineal line” (Badley 132), is in fact focused on the two main protagonists, Louis and Lestat, whom Auerbach calls “patriarchs” (155), and whose sexual desire and love for both male and female partners (Nußbaumer 22, 23, 25) is repeatedly shown in this novel in a passionate and erotic way (Badley 124).

Martin J. Wood is not totally accurate when he states that gender is an unimportant issue in Rice’s books (75) because there is “absolute sexual equality” in them (61). Like Tomc, I am more of the opinion that, although Rice’s characters and their behaviours may contain some “potentially revolutionary” claims (97) having to do with feminism and sexual freedom (96), it is difficult to understand why she chooses precisely to not include any grown-up female leading characters to illustrate equality in *Interview with the Vampire* (97).

The difference both in the amount of space and focus given to females and males in the book and how the whole plot of this book revolves around the latter is truly remarkable and Auerbach is therefore right when she designates them as “patriarchs” (155). Tomc fails to make one more appreciation when

criticising Rice's treatment of female characters as she points out how all vampire protagonists, no matter what their gender is, seem to be self-destructive, but gives no importance to the fact that the only one who actually dies by the end is Claudia.

I would not go as far as to state, as Badley does, that they are all static (131). For instance, even if Claudia's most notorious feature is just her beauty (Badley 120), she will rapidly learn to take advantage of it (Badley 131; Nußbaumer 25), while her strength of character and persistence are also remarkable. In fact, Claudia causes the main male protagonists to undergo some changes, and thus, she is one of the most important characters that propel the plot.

Haggerty (5) and those scholars mentioned in Williamson's *The Lure of the Vampire* who affirm that *Interview with the Vampire* contains "conservative messages" (54), may equally have gone a step too far since, although it may not be a subversive book throughout, it does attempt to break certain stereotypes having to do with traditional family values and sexuality, and Claudia's unfruitful fight for independence reflects a feminist struggle.

3.1.1 Female Dependence

As adult males and vampires, Lestat and Louis have the physical power and flexibility (Hirschmann 45; Badley 130) to act as they wish, even against the laws of their time or against nature. In contrast, Claudia—the only

important female character—is a vampire baby girl. It is thus clear that she cannot evolve as much as male characters do (Tomc 107) due to her childish body (Nußbaumer 23; Cavallaro 145; Kérchy and Antoni 103).

Claudia plays the role of a child (Nußbaumer 23) who is controlled by her parents' will (Auerbach 154). Her only real power is her beauty and she has to use it and play “helpless” roles in front of the others in order to achieve any goals in her life (Badley 131; Nußbaumer 25). Her beauty is also Louis' main reason to live (Badley 120) and this emphasis on how beautiful she is, along with the fact that the others consider her valuable just because of it and makes them treat her as a baby when she is more than forty years old, are a reflection of the Victorian “child-bride” stereotype (Badley 131): a woman who is young, pretty and innocent but who does not have enough knowledge about the world or strength and, subsequently, depends completely on her father or husband for protection and sustenance.

In fact, Claudia's birth to the vampire world has to do only with the needs of the men around her, as she is the result of a crisis in the relationship between the male protagonists (Benefiel 267). To start with, she is not asked about, nor able to consent to, her transformation or protest against it, given her age. Claudia's inability to grow up and develop her physical strength and her body makes her incapable of exploring matters such as sexuality or femininity (Tomc 107) and, although she depends on her vampiric parents for everything, both Lestat and Louis will prove themselves unable to take care of or

understand their “daughter” and her unfulfilled dreams (Cavallaro 186).

Even Louis, who loves Claudia profoundly, seems either unable or unwilling to understand or help her. He eludes any kind of responsibility to be either Claudia’s father or partner, and he behaves like an irresponsible child on many occasions, leading to Claudia having to make the most important decisions all alone and having to act like she were his mother instead of his daughter. In addition, he only helps her and lets her do as she wants when it means not too much trouble or inconvenience for him. After Claudia is killed, Louis’s personality changes and he becomes a silent and sulky being, not interested in anyone’s life anymore, be they vampires or humans. However, and although he seems to miss Claudia, here he does not take specific action—such as looking for revenge or even committing suicide.

On the contrary, instead of providing Claudia with tools to survive on her own, Louis tries to help her develop skills which were taught to women in the 19th century in order to make them appealing and agreeable such as music, language and artistic skills—again, all very suitable for becoming a perfect daughter or wife who can keep the house full of harmony and love. He also tries to make her happy by buying her flowers and beautiful clothes, accessories and toys, as if these were all women would need to have a satisfactory life.

Claudia tries to gain control over her life and become independent and strong, but that is impossible due to her small body and feeble constitution—a result of Lestat’s and Louis’s masculine love for vulnerable beings—, which

makes her helpless against male desires all through her short life. There are no important changes she can achieve, no steps she can take without a man's consent and/or help: her life is always in their hands—even from males unknown to her, such as Armand.

Madeleine is, however, dependent on Claudia as she also fits in the “eternal-child” role. Although she is an adult and has even given birth once, she does not seem to realise the danger around her because she is fascinated with Claudia's childish charms such as her beauty, her displays of affection and her laughter. Moreover, it seems she has not really thought about the implications of becoming a vampire. It is hard to picture this naïve character behaving like a monster who will kill people and animals in order to survive. She is probably not ready to handle all the power she is soon going to be given and she seems to need to be taken care of, just like women in traditional patriarchal societies, who were not expected to be able to face the outside world and its dangers. She also accepts Claudia's commands without complaining or asking any questions. For example, when the small vampire wants to talk to Louis in private, she puts Madeleine to sleep and gives her a doll, which is what a mother would do for her babies and not the other way around (Rice 263-264).

When analysing Claudia, the main female character in *Interview with the Vampire*, some critics focus on how she was created to serve as a source of enjoyment for the two male protagonists (Benefiel 267; Badley 120), her inability to grow up, and how this makes her more feeble and unable to have

certain experiences such as sex (M. King 78) or creating vampires of her own. Many emphasise her constant frustration and lack of understanding of her own nature, as well as the rage she feels as a consequence (Cavallaro 186; Badley 131; Forry 403; Auerbach 154). I agree that these are Claudia's most outstanding features and that, even if her creation is probably one of the biggest turning points in the book, it responds only to male desire.

Louis is unable to stand up for Claudia's and Madeleine's interests in front of Lestat or Armand and is such a passive character that Claudia—regardless of the fact that she is younger and he is bigger and stronger than her—has to think and act for them both on many occasions and make the most important and risky decisions in their lives, such as leaving Lestat and planning his death. I believe that by the end of the book Claudia, even though she is trapped in her small body, is more mature than Louis and has mentally developed to the full. Although Benefiel mentions how their relationship rapidly shifts from father-daughter to lover-lover (269), and Tomc points out how Louis fulfils different roles at times—as father, mother or lover— (99), no author pays much attention to Claudia shifting from being taken care of by Louis to having to take care of and often comfort him. I would say that their relationship is re-shaped and becomes a son-mother one and that, even if she is physically impaired due her size, Louis becomes, in many aspects, dependant on her.

3.1.2 Patriarchal Family Structures

Lestat is a very active, pleasure-loving and egocentric vampire and, since he was responsible for both Louis's and Claudia's transformations, he usually dominates their lives—and hence also the actions that take place throughout the story—in quite a despotic way, similar to the way fathers, brothers and husbands behave in patriarchal societies.

When Louis is confused by Lestat's evil nature and wants to leave him (Nußbaumer 25), Lestat realizes the fascination and the almost pederast feelings that Claudia arises in the former, and uses the five-year-old girl to make him stay (Benefiel 267; Badley 108) by turning her into a vampire. Lestat is here playing with the lives and decisions of both Louis and Claudia, and using her as a tool. Furthermore, he finds the situation amusing and, even if the girl is too young to understand what has happened and keeps on talking about her dead mother, he calls her “daughter” from the very first moment. Louis is overwhelmed by the events and insults Lestat for what he has done, but he does not want to leave once the pretty child, whose beauty captivated him so deeply that he wanted to feed on her, can stay with them forever (Rice 94-95).

Because of Claudia, they all become a “family”. This has a lot to do with the concept of the ideal families and the role women played in them that was widely spread in the 19th century—the temporal setting of the novel. This is a very powerful image of that time, very present in Victorian literature, such as

Dickens's novels, and whose influence has—as I have stated in the section referring to *Interview with the Vampire* in the chapter concerning the historical background—lasted until our times: Claudia is, in the beginning, a uniting element that brings happiness to the couple. Although she enjoys killing humans to drink their blood and she can be as cruel as Lestat when hunting, for the first few decades she behaves like the perfect and loving daughter the two vampires wished.

The girl is considered a toy most of the time: a cute little girl dressed up, educated, and so on, following the wishes of these two male vampires to provide them with happiness, entertainment and stability. Her candid female beauty and presence, and her games and cuddles, make the three of them forget about any problems and resemble a joyful and quite normal family more than a group of vampires.

When Claudia and Louis escape to Paris and she convinces him to transform Madeleine for her to be her companion, another family is created. This one is not totally exempt of old-fashioned stereotypes either.

On her part, Madeleine embodies all the skills and behaviours a good mother of the 19th century should have as she is loving and nurturing and willing to play with Claudia and brush her hair. Since she has recently lost her own baby and desperately wants to take care of this new one, and she even accepts to become a vampire—although this involves pain and death—in order to be able to stay with her forever.

Babette—the human woman Louis was in love with at the beginning of the book—is described as an exceptionally brilliant woman (Rice 43). She is also strong and determined. However, she and her four single sisters live with their brother, who runs a plantation, and are all economically dependent on him, as he is the only man in their family. Babette knows that her brother, because of his gender, is the only guarantee for her and her sisters' well-being. Moreover, all these women are said to love their brother so much that they believe that any kind of affection they might find outside their home would be nothing compared to this feeling.

To sum up, these two secondary characters, Madeleine and Babette, are too conditioned by their own misogynistic misconceptions of the world which ruled society in the 18th and 19th centuries and which they have acquired during their lives. On the one hand, I concur with Badley that Madeleine is obsessed with motherhood and with her lost child, and cannot be anything but a mother (131), an attitude that matches the traditional idea that women are innately programmed to become mothers. On the other hand, I believe that Babette, a character that most scholars do not pay attention to in articles or books about *Interview with the Vampire*, is worth mentioning. Even after she alone makes her family's business flourish—but only because Louis convinces her that she will be able to do so (Rice 48)—she keeps on thinking that women who want to be successful in life have to get married. Because of these old-fashioned ideas,

all her efforts are put into securing good husbands for all her younger sisters and for herself, and all of them get married shortly after she is in charge of the plantation (Rice 48). In addition, the way she behaves and reacts is always powerfully influenced both by religion and the reprovings of other people on her supposedly “mannish” attitude. It is remarkable that being a strong-willed and intelligent woman, as well as owning a plantation, do not save her from a fatal destiny. Although in the beginning she could have been considered a good example of an empowered and revolutionary woman, in the end her behaviour reinforces traditional family values.

3.1.3 Other Patriarchal Structures

Claudia is effectively used as a pretty possession to entertain men from her first day as a vampire and until her very last, when another man—Armand²¹, who embodies patriarchy and misogynist human moralities (Badley 131)—decides she must die. Her end comes when Lestat finds out that his two “children” have moved to Paris. Following the rules of Armand’s coven of vampires, she is left to die in the sun because she has tried to poison Lestat (Forry 405; Badley 131; Cavallaro 145), along with Madeleine, who is killed for no specific reason. However, Louis does not get any kind of punishment for helping her or for keeping the whole attempt to murder Lestat a secret, and from that moment he

²¹ A point to be highlighted about this group is how Armand commands some female vampires to kiss him in front of Louis. Although it is not clear if he has the power to obtain sex from his vampires at will, the scene is quite misogynist and shows the power and influence he exercises over females.

is actually free to have a romantic relationship with Armand.

Although Tomc says that all the important characters in *Interview with the Vampire* are self-destructive (104), Claudia is the only protagonist whose life is actually terminated. This happens exactly when she is finally evolving and becoming less dependant on Louis, fulfilling some of her desires and creating a new family which may be more adequate for her (104).

Madeleine can be understood to be the other side of the same coin. Although her body is mature, she is childish, does not seem especially intelligent and cannot tell evil from good. Because of this portrayal, it even seems logical that she gets killed not long after she has acquired the special powers of a vampire—strength, independence, sexual liberty, hunting skills, etc.—which are traditionally associated with men and do not fit a feeble and innocent woman like her. In other words, this ending can be construed as logical for her. If she had survived, she would have had to put up with a life of crime and murder in which she would not have enjoyed killing or drinking blood. Even Louis, sometimes overwhelmed by these same issues, feels sorry for her (Rice 263).

According to Badley, this female-female couple, the only one in the book, “must” die. In fact, she says that they are “born-dead” (131). Tomc points out how Claudia is too full of rage and too brilliant to survive in a society lead by patriarchal regulations (112) and Madeleine, in Badley’s words, “replicates

the idea of female anatomy as social destiny” and, subsequently, “is already in effect dead” (131).

While male vampires in general evolve or die in elegant ways, females are usually killed or humiliated (Forry 393). These powerful women represent problems (Tomc 99) or a threat for the ruling patriarchal system and any evil actions of theirs must be severely punished (Forry 404). The defiant Claudia, who tried to kill her male creator, is, precisely, a superb example to illustrate this male vs. female dichotomy (Forry 405). As Tomc explains when quoting Doane and Hodges, she is an angry woman who fails to battle the unfairness of men around her, subsequently showing how patriarchy still ruled the world in the time the book was written (105) and as an allegory of her time (Auerbach 154). Badley (131) and Tomc (105) are therefore right to point out how Claudia—and Madeleine—being later killed for this reason illustrates the power men have had over women for centuries.

Effectively, in *Interview with the Vampire* there is always a man—or several men—that struggle to hamper women’s freedom; somebody who wants to keep them trapped in their female roles as daughters, mothers and/or wives, who must obey and behave according to these “labels”, always within their home which, as Badley claims, are close to the Victorian stereotypes (131) which I have described in the chapter concerning the historical background (see section 2.1.1). Sadly enough, all of them are finally defeated by their own fears having to do with the patriarchal regulations that ruled the world—such as

Babette, who due to her deeply-held religious beliefs, is not strong enough to accept Louis' nature and dies insane and ruined (Rice 130)—, or by males around them who do not like their power or find it threatening—such as Armand's coven of vampires, that kills Claudia and Madeleine (Rice 303-304).

In this novel, all vampire women are not only killed, but even created for and by men, as well as sexually and/or romantically involved with them—like Claudia and the females in Armand's coven—, and not crucial to the plot.

The world both at the time when these women supposedly lived and when the book was actually written was still full of old clichés from ancient times (see sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 in the historical background chapter), not ready for the behaviour displayed by the female characters. Because of this, I agree with Badley when she says that Rice's female characters are “born-dead” (131) and with Tomc, who feels they only mean trouble (99). I coincide with Auerbach that Claudia is an allegory of fight against patriarchy (154), and with Tomc that her death is even more symbolic due to the fact that she is killed right after she has finally achieved her goals in life: to have a mother and a mature body through Madeleine (104).

3.2 Power Imbalance between Men and Women

Following the above-described patriarchal structures, women in *Interview with the Vampire* are, according to gender patterns from Victorian times, expected to behave gracefully and be kind and peaceful. They are also supposed to conform

to—and like—performing feminine roles as mothers, wives and obedient daughters, and those who do not fit in these standards are sooner or later eliminated. However, there are other issues, specific to the novel—for instance, Claudia being turned into a vampire when she is much younger than other characters and Lestat having a tyrannical attitude—, which create great imbalance between the power men have and women do not. Although this difference does not directly happen because of the patriarchal structures portrayed in the book, its reasons are always, to a greater or a lesser degree, a consequence of the wishes and actions of men and in some cases reflect certain old-fashioned ideas about women being less strong and/or intelligent than men that have later been proven wrong. Because unlike men females do not have the means to pursue their dreams and wishes, they have to use other strategies and ways in order to convince men to help them.

One of the main ideas scholars seem to agree on is that, just because Louis and Lestat thought Claudia would bring them happiness, she will have to suffer for the rest of her existence as “a woman trapped in a childish body” (Badley 130), a “doll” (Cavallaro 145), and an “adult mind [...] confined to a five-year-old’s body” (Kérchy and Antoni 103; Nußbaumer 23) as she is, in Rice’s own words, “robbed of power” (M. King 78).

Bruhm thinks that it is important to notice that those who are turned into blood drinkers during their adulthood, like Louis and Lestat, keep their memories intact while Claudia, who is transformed when she is a toddler,

cannot remember her life before vampirism nor the process that turned her into a vampire (269). This is why she is obsessed with obtaining information about her past or about vampires in general. In Bruhm's opinion, because she has been deprived of her "very psychic structures," she is "traumatized" and cannot "access her own experiences" (269). Because she is the only vampire child in the book, this fact proves that she is disadvantaged when compared to all the other vampires in the novel.

All men in the novel evolve (Tomc 107) as they try to understand their own sexual desires and lust for blood and live according only to their own needs, beliefs and rules. Louis is probably the best example to illustrate this, since he constantly thinks about good and evil (Draeger 217; Yuen 231), and whose relationship with and feelings for Lestat, Claudia and Armand—as well as for his own immortal life and power—change as time goes by (Tomc 99). Also, male actions are in general the ones that create the biggest twists in the plot (Tomc 97). Although they may seem trivial, even Lestat has some aims in life, such as finding new sources of entertainment and constant pleasure (Arp 257).

Claudia, on the other hand, knows that she will never grow up and become a real woman on the outside and will forever remain the same, but teenage-like changes start taking place in her mind. She constantly shouts when she is frustrated and she seeks her own space by asking for a coffin of her own where she does not have to sleep with her father Louis, like a child would want

to, but alone (Benefiel 269). The little girl does not want to stay at home and make her fathers happy by filling it with peace, grace and harmony and, for this reason, Lestat does not like this new Claudia who has opinions of her own and wants to know about her powers as a vampire.

Here we find another important misogynistic cliché that I have also mentioned above: women are considered to be more feminine and agreeable when they are quiet and unable to understand important topics, and they should not ask about them. They must not intervene in male conversations or have access to information, either because they cannot understand such difficult matters or because in that way they will not be able to know about what happens around them, make decisions or change reality.

The scholars I have quoted in the chapter concerning the historical background underline that the Victorian tradition—and subsequent literary movements such as the Gothic—had been permeated with certain Darwinian conceptions about women being inferior to men (see section 2.1.1 in the historical background chapter). They are portrayed as inferior to males, just as if they were disabled or eternal children, like Claudia.

This is exactly what Lestat wants from Claudia: to be a lovely figurine that gives him no problems at all. He asks Louis to make sure that she stops complaining (Rice 110) and, since he dislikes the new person Claudia has become, but still thinks she is somehow his property, he tells her cruel things about her physical appearance and mocks her for being a child forever. For

example, he refers to females and remarks that “she will never possess” their “endowments” (Rice 132).

It is true that, like Tomc says, in *Interview with the Vampire* males evolve more than females (107). Like Draeger (217) and Yuen (231) claim, the development of Louis, a character that continuously reflects on his nature, life, etc., and who narrates the story in first person, is definitely the best example to illustrate this male focus. But, although I agree with Arp that most of Lestat’s achievements and interests in life have to do only with his own physical pleasure (257), changes in his behaviour and feelings throughout the novel can be noticed, and the most interesting and remarkable ones have to do, in fact, with Claudia. The first one is the moment when he decides to turn her into a vampire, a passage in the book in which he is clearly full of energy and hope, which lasts for about 65 years (Rice 118). Another noticeable change in Lestat’s behaviour comes after Claudia’s death. He is not an attractive Byronic hero anymore since he has been weakened and has lost his beauty because of the poisoning, and he deeply regrets having found Louis and Claudia in Paris (Rice 303), since her attempt to murder him was used as an excuse by Armand’s coven to kill her. In general terms, his beauty—or the lack of it—reflects on his state of mind which depends, at least in some measure, on Claudia.

I think that to fully understand Claudia as the only main female character, she needs to be compared to the many male vampires in the book. Her static and less developed body and the impossibility to consent to be turned

into a vampire because she is only a child at that moment are, as well as living under the rule of two men (Auerbach 154), clear disadvantages. She is pictured as opposed to the dynamic characters of Lestat and Louis who continuously exercise their free will. Bruhm's reference to Claudia's lack of human memories (269) is, in my opinion, important, because even if I do not think that she is traumatised by it—I would say her troubled mental state mostly derives from being trapped in her underdeveloped body—the information about her human origins she may use to counteract her ignorance would have to be given to her by her very creators and rulers. Louis and Lestat are more powerful than Claudia not only because they remember their own previous lives—so they can think and reflect about their past experiences while she cannot—, but also because they are the only ones who know how she was changed.

3.2.1 Women's Empowerment

Although women in *Interview with the Vampire* are not the protagonists and most of them are very secondary to the plot, there are certain behaviours of theirs that can be considered empowering. Most scholars agree that Claudia becomes very disobedient and tries to fight patriarchy and its impositions. She also employs her time in reading, learning, asking questions and travelling in order to become wiser and educated. For her part, Babette becomes the central axis of her family once her brother dies, and some of her attitudes also show that she does not conform to social expectations.

3.2.1.1 Rebelliousness

Claudia happily accepts her doll-like role in the beginning because she is actually a child. However, once she understands that she will never grow up, she becomes impatient and is not as submissive and obedient as before. In Louis's words, "*the peace of the house was destroyed*" (Rice 110). As decades go by, she gradually feels angrier and more frustrated (Badley 131; Forry 403; Auerbach 154) and, although she is created and forced to live by the rules of two males, her rage will finally lead her to an act that many scholars point out as a turning point in the plot: her attempt to kill one of her fathers, Lestat (Cavallaro 145), which symbolizes her desire to stop being just a pretty child (Badley 110).

Even if the novel does not contain strong feminist ideas per se, this scene, as well as a few others in which Claudia leads the action, show how, in a way, she rebels against the established patriarchal and tyrannical order, like Auerbach (154), Maureen King (78), and Tomc—quoting Doane and Hodges—(108) remark, by making it clear that she does not want to pretend to be a doll any more and by setting herself and Louis free (Ballesteros 224). Claudia wants to control and change reality around her, a typical feminist ideal, and her attempt to reach liberty by murdering her creator can also be considered a metaphor of women fighting patriarchy.

There is an evolution in Claudia as she goes from being a real infant

both mentally and physically to having the mind and reason of a fully-grown woman. This is shown in teenage-like problems and actions that different authors consider a sign of Claudia's maturity, such as her desire to get to know the world by travelling around it, mentioned by Badley (110) and Ballesteros (224), and the many arguments she has with both her creators (Rice 111-116, 208-209, 261-262) and other males (247), highlighted by Benefiel (269) and Tomc (105).

There are other behaviours of Claudia that also highlight her wish to become an adult, such as using womanly clothes and accessories (Rice 102) and the questions she constantly asks Lestat about the origin of vampires (109-110, 120-121). Her efforts to gain some independence bear fruit in little achievements such as Louis accepting her wish to have a coffin of her own (103). This fact shows a typical phase in human development: finding space for oneself.

Louis is conscious of the changes Claudia is undergoing and tries to describe them by saying that it could be seen in her eyes that she is not a patient and innocent child anymore. He also explains that being around her is, at times, shocking, because she enjoys wearing provocative clothes and behaving in a seductive way (102).

In one of her anger rushes, Claudia insistently asks which of the two vampires made her "what she is" (108) and learns that Louis almost killed her by feeding on her and then Lestat gave her his blood. This means that Lestat is

her real maker and the vampire who did not think about her future before transforming her into a never-changing creature just because she was beautiful. Shortly afterwards, led by rage and anxiety, Claudia poisons Lestat.

It is solely Claudia who plans and carries out Lestat's murder. Louis does not seem to be happy but scared about this course of action—even if Lestat had previously threatened them both with death (110)—and he tries to convince the girl to forget about it. In the end, when they are free and sailing to Europe on a ship, he is still afraid of Lestat's rage, in case he may have survived, and Claudia has to comfort him constantly by assuring him that they are safe (162).

Babette is, for her part, also rebellious for the 19th century, as she does not conform to social norms. When Lestat kills her brother, Louis convinces her that she should “take the reins of her own life”, and occupy the position of ruler of the plantation, no matter what people say about a woman living and working on her own. She does so and, for a few years, she manages it more efficiently than her brother used to do. She gathers enough money for two of her sisters to get married and she finds a good husband too.

However, although Babette is very self-confident, she cannot avoid feeling lonely because all her neighbours and people in the nearby area do not approve of a woman who has decided to behave like a man. That is, she is independent and courageous, but still, cannot ignore other people's thoughts and gossip. Louis tries to make her find peace in her own purity and religion

and use them as weapons against those who judge her.

In other words, the pieces of advice that Louis gives Babette about her career are quite modern and revolutionary for their time, but in the end he recommends her to behave in a pious way, like any respectable woman of the time, in order to deserve the affection of others. Later in the book, she goes mad and becomes obsessed with trying to find Louis in order to kill him, because she thinks he is the devil. Her strong religious beliefs make her blind to the fact that the vampire has helped her.

3.2.1.2 The Quest for Knowledge

Claudia becomes obsessed with cultivating her learning as much as she can—languages, art, literature—and travelling in order to know the world. As she cannot grow up, she develops other skills and her mind in general in an attempt to improve her quality of life. She decides to counteract her lack of physical maturity by expanding her inner views and wisdom (Ballesteros 224) in what Tomc calls an “over-development of the inner-self” (108).

Claudia equally becomes curious about her vampiric nature after learning that Lestat is her “father”. Although at that point she has lost any interest in him as a relative, friend or lover, she wants to know more about how vampires are created and whether there are others like them or not. However, Lestat shouts at her and Louis that they should be grateful to him for turning them into vampires. If they are not, he threatens, he can easily kill them (Rice

110). That is to say, when he gets tired of answering all her questions and listening to her complaints he treats them as if they were material possessions that belonged to him and that he could get rid of.

By questioning Lestat, Claudia is, on the one hand, standing up for her right to know in general and, on the other, trying to learn the way vampires are created. If she had been able to transform humans into vampires, she would be less dependent on the only two she knows.

Her need of exploring women and their world leads her to accidentally murder a mother and her teenage daughter whom she wanted to turn into vampires and who clearly represent the two wishes she will never fulfil: owning a developed body and creating vampires of her own. This is one of Claudia's many attempts to change reality, although, in this case, she ends up killing two people because of her lack of knowledge. At this point, it is said that she cannot create vampires on her own, probably due to her physical immaturity.

After poisoning Lestat, Claudia—accompanied by Louis—, embarks on a tour of Europe to find other vampires and learn about their lifestyles, an action which Badley compares to a self-discovery trip (110).

There are other examples which show how knowledge is important for personal development. For instance, when Louis gives Babette advice about business and life, he is sharing his wisdom with her. By following his guidance, she goes from poverty to actually becoming a successful businesswoman and, thus, is empowered.

3.2.1.3 Ferocity

As I have explained in the chapter concerning the historical background, according to Darwinian theories women are naturally peaceful and passive as opposed to males, who present violent behaviour (see section 2.1.1 in the historical background chapter). Cavallaro notes that Darwinian ideas permeated Victorian and Gothic novels, which present both females and children as vulnerable and helpless (144). This scholar points out how Claudia in *Interview with the Vampire* is an example of the durability of these stereotypes in the literature of the 20th century (145).

Because of her size, Claudia is unquestionably the weakest of all the vampires in the novel. However, the “purity and intensity of her child hunger” (Badley 108) soon turn her into a merciless killing machine (Forry 403) and is, therefore, a much more “voracious, efficient killer” than Louis (Badley 108), who has always been overwhelmed by his moral doubts about having to drink blood (M. King 77; Greene, “The Badness of Undeath” 33).

Although Badley believes Claudia is a flat character, she remarks that one of the most symbolic features of her character is how she soon becomes the most merciless killer of all the vampires which appear in the book (108). She is frustrated about her own life and existence, but she does not hesitate or feel any pity or sorrow when killing humans, rather enjoying it. When she feeds on them she feels powerful and not like a feeble child (Ballesteros 222), as the passages

which portray her hunting actually display her power (Rice 98, 101). This differentiation between Claudia and Louis directly contradicts Darwin's ideas about the innate drives that move men and women.

Another important difference between the vampire child and her "father" which highlights her ferocity is that, while the latter is unable to confront Lestat's tyrannical and whimsical attitude, the former not only faces and questions her father, but even poisons him (Benefiel 269).

3.2.1.4 Manipulation

Claudia is aware of how happy it would make both Louis and Lestat to have a united family whose members lived side by side in a peaceful home again (Rice 132-133). Because of this, she seems to develop two very different personalities: on the one hand, she can be—as I have already mentioned before—very sensual, seductive and mature and, on the other hand, she sometimes acts as if she were a little girl.

That is, depending on who she wants to achieve attention or favours from, she will play one role or the other. This behaviour has a lot to do with the patriarchal models I have mentioned in the chapter concerning the historical background, as she is pretending to be a little maid in danger, a weak or idiotic female who needs a powerful and/or intelligent man to take control over a situation she cannot face (see section 2.1.1). We can clearly see it in a few different passages in which she, for example, allows Louis to repeatedly call her

“doll”, brush her hair or fasten the buttons in her dress in exchange for seeing him kill and learn about it (102).

Because of this, Louis has mixed feelings about her and Claudia knows that, even though he treats her like a partner sometimes, most of the time he just wishes she could act as if she was a “beautiful child” or “his daughter” forever (208).

Although this behaviour of Claudia’s may seem quite anti-feminist at first sight, because she is acting against her personal aspirations when she behaves as an eternal child, what she is doing is to use her only powers as a perpetual baby: her childish beauty and fake innocence. Since she is completely dependant on her “fathers” and almost completely lacks “female charms”, she has to make up for it by using her cute and innocent appearance and soft voice in some cases. Moreover, in exchange for being apparently submissive, she acquires information about hunting techniques which she would use to survive if she was left alone at some point.

This interconnected dependence and need to resort to manipulation can be seen, for instance, in her eagerness to continue the relationship with Louis and how she panics when she realises that he is shifting his attention towards Armand (Rice 249) and also in the way she, with sweet words, tricks Lestat into drinking poisoned blood (Rice 132-134).

Because of her feeble-looking body, the vampire child also has a big influence over other people, such as the victims she finds in the street and she

attracts with pity, or Madeleine. This woman does whatever she is told by the girl. She is even sent to bed with a doll when Claudia wants to hold a private conversation with Louis, as if she, and not the infant vampire—who is, in fact, much older and more experienced in life—, were a little girl (263).

All these facts have to do with another widely spread stereotype about women: the idea that they can be easily manipulated and controlled when their feelings and/or their maternal instinct come into play because they are naturally designed to be mothers and wives. In fact, when at some point that same night Madeleine thinks Louis can be dangerous, she steps between the two vampires to protect Claudia, embracing her in a hard hug (262)—a nonsensical gesture, given the fact that either of them would be able to tear her into pieces in just a few seconds.

In other words, Claudia gains access to the men's world, achieving their knowledge and favours, by making use of all the tools at her disposal, even if these perpetuate negative female stereotypes. However, because she lacks other means to meet her goals and she has even been deprived of an adult body, her behaviour can at the same time be seen as subversive, as she uses it in order to confront the males who have made her live by their patriarchal rules and the wishes they have projected on her.

3.3 Love, Friendship and Sexuality

Love, friendship and sex between men often appear in *Interview with the*

Vampire. They are presented as a natural reaction to coexisting. However, women in this novel never have sex and Claudia, the only female who appears to be in love, does only partly enjoy her sexuality, as she is often frustrated about her inability to consummate this love physically.

3.3.1 Love and Friendship

Both Louis and Lestat are, at different points, interested in other people outside their own relationship. Although in some cases the protagonists have platonic love stories, most of these relationships have, at least, certain sexual connotations.

For example, Louis deeply loves Babette and helps her become successful, but never even gets close to her in order not to scare her. Similarly, when he meets Armand, and although they feel a powerful attraction towards each other, their relationship is not properly physical while Claudia is alive. Lestat is also said to enjoy the company of a young musician with whom he likes spending his time and money (128) and whom he wants to turn into a blood drinker to enlarge their family (131).

Benefiel argues that when Claudia reaches maturity, her relationship with Louis, which this scholar considers was always quite incestuous, rapidly shifts into a real lover-lover one (269). However, they can never physically consummate their love due to the immaturity of Claudia's body.

While, as I have just shown above with examples, the male

protagonists have different lovers, all women portrayed in this novel mainly relate to one of the powerful male vampires in it—for instance to Louis or Armand—. Badley remarks that females rarely interact with each other and no love story between them is shown in the book (135), nor friendship or kindship. I agree with this scholar and, in my opinion, Claudia illustrates the truth in her statement. Although Badley points to this fact to illustrate the lack of lesbianism in the book, from my point of view this can be extended to other types of non-erotic or love-related bonds.

Even if the vampire child is also one of the protagonists of the book, she, for the most part, does not have other relationships than the ones with her “fathers”. The only other person she ever relates to is Madeleine and their relationship, which is based on the motherly love the woman feels for Claudia, is remarkably shallow and brief. This is, moreover, the only female-female one of any kind mentioned in the novel which occupies more than just one or two lines. The possibility of developing it any further is denied to these women as they are both killed so soon after they meet that, although Madeleine seems to truly love Claudia, they lack the time to become intimate or to even get to know each other deeply.

3.3.2 Sexuality

Wood admits that sex in Rice’s books is a central topic (72), but he also points out that it takes place mostly between males (73). However, he insists that the

gender of a vampire and their partners, victims or lovers is not an important issue in this writer's novels by arguing that it is not taken into account when couples are formed (74) and that male vampires in Rice's universe present characteristics traditionally "associated to female sexuality" (75). Tomc agrees with Martin J. Wood that with her vampires Rice is trying to create an androgynous model of society which mirrors the ideas of "gender mutability" (96) which, as I have mentioned in the chapter concerning the historical background (see section 2.1.3) prevailed in egalitarian and liberal environments in the 1970s (Tomc 97).

However, taking into account that only males show gender fluidity by having different types of relationships with characters from both genders, and that, in contrast, female sexuality does not occupy any lines in the novel, while the only love relationship present in the book is between a man and a woman trapped in a childish body—which makes it impossible to consummate—I am more of the opinion of Tomc, who also points out how Rice fails to show real alternatives to gender roles and expectations (105).

Like many authors highlight, sex and eroticism play an important role in *Interview with the Vampire*, especially homoeroticism (Nußbaumer 22, 23, 25; Badley 124; Martin J. Wood 73). Even if in the 1970s having as many rights as straight people was just a dream for the whole gay community in many countries—including some European ones and a few states in the USA—the situation was even worse for women, just like I mentioned in the chapter

concerning the historical background (see section 2.1.3) but, as Lindgren and Isaksson (134, 139) and Forry (400) rightly point out, Rice gives the opportunity to Louis and Lestat to form a male-male marriage with children through fiction. Claudia is denied the possibility of a female companion, and this difference shows how female sexuality and its different possible variations were not as visible and openly accepted as men's.

There is, effectively, a notorious contrast between the freedom men have to do whatever they wish with their bodies and to choose companionship, and Claudia's impossibilities. The two male protagonists in Rice's novel are bisexual and there are other secondary gay characters too, such as Armand. Lestat and Louis have been lovers for years before they even go one step forward when they transform Claudia and create a same-sex-parents family (Lindgren and Isaksson 134, 139; Forry 400). At some point, Louis becomes romantically attached to and interested in Babette and he is later interested, again, in another male vampire: Armand. For his part, Lestat also openly expresses his interest in enjoying female bodies at times.

As opposed to this acceptance of male-to-male relationships, Badley concludes that in Rice's texts, "positive female bonds, lesbian relationships [...] are exceptions" (135). All the female characters seem to not be interested in sex at all or to feel only attracted to men. Homosexual relationships are denied to them and not even mentioned, which reinforces the idea of female sexuality as secondary or only possible if subjugated to men's desire (M. King, 5).

The female body is seen as something unknown and difficult to understand: a “Dark [...] Continent” (Badley 137) and Claudia’s main and only love story is—like many other “paranormal romances”—a heterosexual one (Lindgren and Isaksson 118). This contrast between the desire of the two oversexed male protagonists—notorious and omnipresent all through the novel (Badley 132)—and the lack of interest or inability female characters show for these same matters is a reflection of how, even in the 1970s, female desire was still not as seriously taken into account as male sexual drives and that female sexuality was considered difficult to understand or unimportant.

Effectively, Claudia seems to be only interested in Louis and does not feel sexually attracted to anyone else. Although she often kills humans with Louis and this experience is supposed to be better than sex for vampires—Louis himself uses it as an allegorical image to describe sex for Claudia when she asks about how it feels (209)—if she ever wants to try the experience of having a sexual partner, she will not be able to do so.

Claudia is clearly frustrated about this aspect of her life too, as she sometimes starts very bad arguments with Louis which have to do with sex. At some point, she insinuates that he is not a real man as she accuses him of never having made love to her and maybe being unable to have sex with any woman. Louis finds these statements so disturbing that he even thinks of raping her to prove her wrong (268).

However, because of how all the male vampires behave and relate to

each other—and to humans—and how interested in sex they are, it would be logical if Claudia had chosen a woman who could behave both as a mother and a lover at the same time, as they are going to spend decades together and because after years of sharing her life with Louis she has proven that she can love.

In fact, while Claudia is convincing Louis to turn Madeleine, she cannot avoid looking at her shape: her figure and her breasts, and exclaiming that that is the way she would have looked like if Lestat and Louis had waited for a few more years before transforming her (261). So, given the fact that she likes the woman's body and is curious about it, and that they are going to live together for a long period of time, it would be quite more natural if she were interested in somehow experiencing sex with her too: Madeleine, knowing her own grown-up body, might have been able to give Claudia pleasure in ways men—especially at that time—might ignore. Also, having relations with a female she would probably not be as badly hurt as if she decided to be penetrated by Louis in order to fulfil sexual intercourse as an adult straight woman. However, the possibility of Claudia being bisexual or curious about other sexual options is not even mentioned.

As I have explained in the chapter concerning the historical background, homosexual women in the 1970s were also at a disadvantage when compared to their male counterparts (see section 2.1.3). There were differences in acceptance degrees, as men who preferred same-sex partners were, in the

most liberal countries, present in the majority of social and working areas and they sometimes had more probabilities of getting a job than straight men in some fields—for instance in sales, beauty, fashion, design, acting and modeling, public relations assistance, etc.—because they were considered to be especially sensitive or have a better taste and more developed skills for arts. Being a lesbian was, contrarily, not especially fashionable but usually related to negative adjectives such as rude, ugly or masculine—in the worst possible way —, so it did not help anybody to improve their work life.

Furthermore gay men had already been the main subject of films and literature in the 1970s, and, as I have explained in the chapter concerning the historical background, they had usually been portrayed in a positive light, while not many lesbians had had a big impact in society (see section 2.1.3). As I have also mentioned, these distinctions in acceptance and visibility between male and female homosexuals—still prevailing by the end of the 20th century—came as a consequence of gay men having had more access to the public sphere already in the 18th and 19th centuries (see section 2.1.3). Thus, *Interview with the Vampire*, with its prominent gay male protagonists, can be read as a reflection of both the era when it was written and of its fictitious temporal setting.

Madeleine's transformation is also good proof of the invisibility lesbians suffered in the 1970s (see section 2.1.3). She is the only character, whose origins we get to know, who is turned into a vampire because of a reason

other than romantic love or lust: she becomes Claudia's new mother. Otherwise, Lestat's motive for transforming other people he finds interesting into vampires is to have new romantic partners (Rice 128) and, like Benefiel (269), I consider that even Claudia—trapped as she is in a childish body—somehow becomes Louis's lover. However, as Badley highlights, I think that Madeleine is so absorbed by her role as a mother that, when she becomes a vampire to spend eternity with Claudia, being more than mother and daughter—that is, a lesbian choice—is not even considered (131).

3.4 Final Remarks

Some female characters in Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*, are—at least partly—strong and rebellious, and their behaviours are actually more attuned to the social conditions of the time it was written in than to the end of the 18th or the beginning of the 19th century, the temporal setting. They show how women can defy the established rules and be as able as men are in any areas of society and knowledge. Rice's females want to—and know that they have the right to—explore the world outside the walls of their homes. In my opinion, even if this might not be historically accurate for the period when the action is set, it implies that although some changes had taken place in the United States at the moment when the book was written and women had already gained some rights, they were still fighting to be treated fairly at home and at their workplaces too, and, Haggerty notes, their struggle was often

fruitless and society was not yet equal (5).

I also concur with Benefiel that Claudia has a strong resolution to face problems and learn about her nature as a vampire (269), and with Forry that she is a very efficient and merciless killer (403), which, as Ballesteros mentions, empowers her (222) even if only temporarily. Because of all this it is right to conclude that Claudia is a reflection of how women in the 1970s kept on fighting for their rights and self-fulfilment (see section 2.1 in the historical background chapter) with whatever available tools they had, even if they did not yet compete against men on equal terms in all areas of life (Tomc 105).

No scholar makes any reference to how, like I have highlighted, Louis sometimes hates Claudia when she gets uncontrollably angry. He is only happy when she behaves as a daughter or a lover, roles which do not threaten the calm and peace of their home. In my opinion this is a reflection of the way many men could feel about feminism in the 1970s. As I have explained in the chapter concerning the historical background which refers to this period and, more specifically, to power imbalance (see section 2.1.2), by this time women were fighting to reach gender equality in their homes and workplaces and many men may have preferred them all to remain static in their nurturing roles of mothers and housewives.

I would say this situation could easily be a reflection of the double standards women had faced until they achieved some important basic rights—such as voting, working in all areas or inheriting—just a few decades before the

1970s (see section 2.1 in the historical background chapter). For centuries, housework such as cooking, cleaning or raising children was considered to be easier than paid jobs outside the house, traditionally carried out by men. Helping to perform these chores was seen as a sign of weakness or effeminacy in a man as women were thought to naturally have to perform most of these duties—if not all—no matter if they also worked outside their homes (see section 2.1.2 in the historical background chapter). While men were naturally thought as strong and intelligent, it was taken for granted that these qualities were lacking in women (see section 2.1.1 in the historical background chapter). That is, they had to give the impression of being pure and naïve housewives who obeyed their father's and husband's commands, but at the same time had to perform hard and heavy work in the house and some supposedly manly tasks, such as deciding how to spend and save money, which require intelligence.

4 *Lost Souls*

Compared to other vampire fiction authors such as Ann Rice or Stephenie Meyer, not much academic research on Billy Martin²² (d'Hont 3) has been carried out and he has never been the subject of any feminist analysis (Ahmad 439). Moreover, I have noticed that other works of his, such as *Exquisite Corpse*, have attracted the attention of most scholars who have written about him²³ (d'Hont 3).

Maybe due to the fact that *Lost Souls* was written in the contradictory social milieu of the 1990s, those scholars who have analysed it have highlighted different possibilities of interpretation of certain elements in it and, although some mention women and the passages having to do with them in their papers, they have mainly focused on other topics related to males, probably because these characters and their actions occupy the vast majority of the pages in the novel.

There is only one single female character who, although secondary, has relative weight in the plot of the novel: Ann Bransby-Smith. She is not a vampire, but a 21-year-old human and she used to date one of the male protagonists. Two secondary characters who are not crucial for the storyline but

²² Previously known as Poppy Z. Brite. See footnote number 3.

²³ See, for example Monika Mueller's "'A Wet Festival of Scarlet': Poppy Z. Brite's (Un)Aesthetics of Murder" in *The Abject of Desire: The Aestheticization of the Unaesthetic in Contemporary Literature and Culture* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007) or "Death and Dying as Literary Devices in Brite's *Exquisite Corpse* and Palahniuk's *Damned*" in *The Final Crossing: Death and Dying in Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015).

are worth some analysis are Richelle, a deceased strong female vampire briefly mentioned by the end, and Jessy, a teenage girl who only appears in the prologue and is then mentioned a few times throughout the book who is obsessed with vampires and dies giving birth to one of them called Nobody. I will also refer to some very secondary characters whose brief appearances add to the general analysis of the portrayal of women in *Lost Souls*.

4.1 Violence against Women

Ann and Jessy, two of the few female characters in the book, have very despotic fathers who behave according to misogynistic patterns. These two males try to possess and control their daughters as well as sabotage their attempts of getting to know the world and their liberty (146). Both also psychologically abuse their children and are so attached to them that Cavallaro suggests incest is also implied though in a more veiled way (146).

When Martin himself answers questions about these passages, he explains he is interested in and sexually attracted to both torture and death (Young; Brite, "Interview by Alex S. Johnson") and he has also stated how he appreciates when his readers state that his violence is sexy (Brite, "Interview with Poppy Z. Brite"). When talking about children-related issues he has admitted to not caring much about their welfare (Brite, "Interview with Poppy Z. Brite"). Thus, it seems unlikely that these scenes content an underlying message against incest and they probably have the purpose of being

entertaining and pleasurable for readers.

Some scholars highlight the fact that in *Lost Souls*, all vampire women who get pregnant, and females impregnated with vampire semen, inevitably die in childbirth and that women in general are not treated as human beings but as objects whose main purpose is to entertain and satisfy men (Holmes 182; Lindgren and Isaksson 209). Effectively, all women except for a few very secondary characters—who do not take up more than a few lines—meet their end at the hands of a male or because of them. Some reasons why women die in this novel are murder, childbirth and both voluntary as well as forced abortion. All these characters also endure other kinds of abusive treatment from men such as psychological and sexual abuse, rape and beating. Moreover, Ann and Jessy, the only relevant females for the plot, do not stand for themselves, but always act as supporting components which, like all the other less important women, adorn or unleash the action in the main stories, in which men are protagonists.

4.1.1 Physical Violence

One of the most striking facts about *Lost Souls* is the great amount of violent scenes—mostly against women and children, and all somehow related to sex—the readers are presented with. Without taking into account the gender of the victims in these bloody passages, Ahmad defends the writer's taste for gore and the way he describes it in great detail as a sign of feminism since at that time he

was a pioneer, for he was a female author²⁴ writing gory scenes within the Gothic literary genre, while previous Gothic female writers had all generally had a more conventional and less violent style (439) and in which female characters were victimised in order to give male readers voyeuristic pleasure (441).

For example, as I will explain below, rape constantly appears in *Lost Souls*. On other occasions, sex may not be violent per se, but it may be preceded by some kind of violence. For instance Jessy, who is obsessed with vampires, goes to the city centre every night and drinks in a bar where she has been told blood drinkers go, and when they finally arrive one night and she tries to join them, a vampire named Molochai hits her. Instead of immediately leaving, Jessy decides to ignore how she has just been put to shame and stays because Zillah asks her to do so (8) and in order to have sex with him.

In *The Gothic Vision*, Cavallaro defends that these passages are not a true exaltation of brutal acts against women but a metaphor to illustrate how American society is sustained by a series of “exploitative power relations” (57). Holmes also concedes that the real world is full of similar examples (182). In his *Historical Dictionary of Gothic Literature*, William Hughes includes Martin in a list of authors which, he thinks, discuss matters of sex, race and individuality through fiction (21). However, I do not see how Martin could be using the examples in his novels as a way to show a problem in society which

²⁴ At that time Martin identified himself, at least publicly, as a woman.

should be tackled. If he is making a statement, it is not clear why instead of using condemnatory terms, he chooses to use sensual language and graphic images, and why his main female characters willingly put up with all types of abuse and forget about it so rapidly.

4.1.2 Rape

The fathers of Ann and Jessy constantly abuse their daughters psychologically as they try to control what they do and who they meet. As I mentioned before, Cavallaro suggests these relationships have an incestuous nature although this is not explicitly stated in the book (146). As I have mentioned before, Martin himself has explained he enjoys writing about torture, death and sex (Young; Brite, “Interview by Alex S. Johnson”) and he has also stated he appreciates it when his readers realise how his most violent texts are close to pornography (Brite, “Interview with Poppy Z. Brite”).

Although all the authors I have referred to in this section analyse, or at least point out, the incestuous relationship between Nothing and Zillah (Lindgren and Isaksson 134, 140; Holmes 182; Bosky 220, 224; Cavallaro 146), only Cavallaro pays attention—albeit only in a few lines—to the sexual abuse of women perpetrated by men as he understands that there are sexual implications in the way Simon physically punishes Ann (146). However, this scholar seems to have forgotten about a very explicit sex scene which takes place between Jessy and her father Wallace, and which he never mentions, as

well as all the other rapes which take place along the pages of *Lost Souls*, and which are not mentioned by any other scholar either. In *Bram Stoker's Dracula: A Reader's Guide*, Hughes explains that incestuous relationships often appear in modern Gothic fiction and lists Jessie seducing her father in *Lost Souls*—among other examples—to illustrate his statement (45). In his *Historical Dictionary of Gothic Literature* Hughes states that this very explicit scene is one of the most notable examples which illustrate the revival of sex between parents and their offspring that, according to him, took place in the late 20th century (145). However, Hughes fails to reach any conclusion or articulate any criticism about this passage.

Given the comparatively scarce number of scholarly works that analyse women in this novel, and in order to compare my own opinion with those of real readers, I have decided to include here some opinions from female readers in the Amazon-owned social cataloging website Goodreads.com, who reviewed this novel.

While most women who expressed their opinion about *Lost Souls* on Goodreads.com were disgusted by the violence against women, there was one who seemed to share Martin's self-declared indifference and lack of empathy towards women and the writer's fascination for men, no matter how cruel they are. This reviewer—Crystal—, who writes her review after having read the book several times, uses words such as “perfect” and “irresistible” to describe Zillah and confesses she “fell as much in love with him as Nothing did”. Crystal, who

describes Zillah—especially his eyes—in a few poetic lines, also says she loves Christian—a secondary male vampire—but does not like Ann, as she highlights “her desperation to find something beautiful to leech onto”, and she explains she could not relate to her pain and understands why Zillah “tossed her aside, having no use for her once her body had indulged his hedonistic pleasures”.

Most women who reviewed this novel in Goodreads.com, such as Kristin *extols death with luminescent brilliance*, expressed their disgust and concern about its most violent or gory parts, which this particular reviewer considers “annoying”. Kristin *extols death with luminescent brilliance* thinks the scene between Jessy and her father is too explicit and so does another reviewer called Coralie, who draws attention to the violent sexual scenes—which she thinks do not add to the plot—in the following words: “there are some unnecessary scenes in it in my opinion, or unnecessarily revolting ones (for instance, without really spoiling anything, the novel could have done without that scene between Jessy and her father)”. Another user called Darlene, who listened to an audio book version of *Lost Souls*, labels it “disturbing” and lists some of its content she did not like such as “teenage prostitution, incest, sex with minors (statutory rape), and there was even an incident of rape”²⁵.

While scholars have for the most part decided to ignore sexual violence in *Lost Souls* and there are no specific questions about it in the interviews with Martin, these reviewers do not fail to mention forced sex, sex

²⁵ When she mentions “an incident of rape” she is probably referring to the part of the book in which Steve sexually abuses Ann but Darlene has ignored another two which happen later in the book.

with adolescents and sex within the family that women are victims of in this book. I think it is probably a natural reaction to the lack of condemnatory language, the mostly happy endings and the lack of punishment of the perpetrators of the crimes which I have just mentioned. In my opinion, these crimes should have been addressed in serious research since most chapters include at least one example of such behaviour.

Although most readers in Goodreads.com identify dangerous stereotypes and violence against women as harmful, the reviewer named Crystal has a completely opposite opinion about *Lost Souls*. She likes the novel so much that she has repeatedly read it and she feels powerfully attracted to Zillah, for whose description she chooses to use the adjective “perfect” and she also loves other male characters. Her review hints that it is difficult to relate to females in the book, such as Ann, whose behaviour she finds incomprehensible. Because of this reason, she excuses the way Zillah scorns her. In another review, Heather *live on coffee and flowers* seems to note Ann’s counter-evolutionary process when she says that she does not understand the sudden change in her personality as she goes from an interesting character—which she initially liked—to a nonsensical person. When comparing the differences in her feelings and views on *Lost Souls* between the time when she read it as a teenager and as an adult, another reviewer called Bark’s Book Nonsense seems to have realised that Ann is actually an abused woman when she explains how she has become aware that “the only female character in the story was a

victimized, bewitched, weak-willed 20-something with horrible taste in men. Ann's character and all of her mooning bugged me.”

These opinions seem to indicate that, although most women can see Martin's misogynistic characters as bad models and the many occasions on which females are mistreated as unnecessary and deliberately too gory—and would even label them as abuse—most cannot properly relate to female characters at all. Moreover, Crystal's words show how certain readers can be less sensible and, as I have explained in the introduction to this dissertation (see section 1.2), they may be influenced by what they are shown in books.

One of the rawest scenes of the book concerning rape is the one in which Ann is abused by Steve. Her former partner has learnt that she is dating another man and this fact hurts his feelings. Instead of talking to her, he enters her house and shouts at her, hits her, calls her names and, finally, pushes her to bed and abuses her (108-109). Steve's words “You cunt, [...] I know how to make sure you won't do any more fucking around for a while” (108) show that he is not looking for sexual pleasure but is completely convinced that treating Ann that way is a right inherent to him just because they were a couple at one point. Furthermore, Steve abuses her not only sexually, but also physically and verbally as he hits her and insults her. Steve's behaviour goes back to the chauvinist idea that women could be raped as a punishment and a lesson by males, because the latter owned them and had to somehow educate them and have them under control. As we have seen in the previous section, rape is

probably the most powerful way to humiliate them.

One of the most misogynistic details of this part is, in my opinion, the fact that Ann says she does not want to have sex with her former boyfriend and fights him back but, in the end, she cannot avoid enjoying being raped and she even reaches a climax (109). This is unreal and lacks credibility. Furthermore, it supports, on the one hand, the stereotypes from the Enlightenment about women's wild sexuality and, on the other, the Freudian idea of women being secretly obsessed with relatives or any men of their surroundings (see section 2.2.1). In the novel, Steve seems to be doing something Ann wanted to happen but did not want to say aloud which results in pleasure for her. If that was the case, he would be doing her a favour. This whole passage from the book also reinforces the idea that women say "no" to sex when they mean "yes" (see section 2.2.1).

Another contradictory fact is that, although Ann is both mentally and physically in pain after what happened and wants to erase any memories from that day—she tries not to think about it and she dyes the sheets on her bed black (104)—, she misses Steve and wishes they were together. She also seems to be eager to forgive him and tries to act as if nothing had happened and is nice to him when they meet in a bar after a concert (206).

Like many women who are raped, she does not want to talk about what has happened to her with anybody. She does not mention anything to her new boyfriend and she just tells her father that Steve slapped her in the face because

she is afraid that her father might want to get a revenge for her: that is, she is concerned about Steve possibly getting hurt. The information Ann decides to give her father also highlights some facts about Martin's portrayal of women and the way their male relatives try to control their sexuality: she is positive that her father will not seek vengeance or worry too much if she only mentions she was hit by Steve. But she knows that he would do it if he learnt about the rape (113). The language Ann's father uses is, in fact, possessive and it denotes an old-fashioned mindset as he uses the word "dishonour" when Ann tells him Steve hit her (261). This may be a reflection of how difficult it was for a woman who had been abused to seek help due to the tendency at the time to blame them or doubt them (see section 2.2.1).

When Ghost, who is the only person who knows about the rape, goes to her house to be nice to her and find out how she is feeling, she behaves in a very unfriendly way with him and pretends she is not suffering for what happened. In a way, this might be understood as a show of her strength, but later in the book she finds Steve in a bar and, instead of facing the problem, she decides to act as if the rape had never taken place until they start fighting and she cannot deny it anymore (207). That is why I feel that what she is really doing when she rejects to speak about the matter with any friends or relatives is just to ignore the whole episode so that she can find an excuse for Steve's actions, forgive him and relaunch the relationship.

Ghost asks Ann why she did not call the police when Steve raped her. She answers, bitterly mocking her own difficult situation, that if she had phoned the station, the policemen would have made jokes about her boyfriend forcing her. She thinks that they would not have understood that having dated him for four years does not imply that she has to go to bed with him whenever he wants (113).

Her words reflect that—as I have explained in the chapter concerning the historical background (see section 2.2.1)—women in the United States who declared having been abused by their partners or spouses were not always granted the attention they deserved by policemen and social workers, and that they could not always prove their stories in court as they had to give proof of their testimony with physical evidence or witnesses.

Ann is about to be raped by Steve one more time by the end of the book as she is lying on a bed and is only half-conscious. She is pregnant from Zillah and, although she wants to give birth to the baby, her former boyfriend has forced her to drink some poison in order to kill the foetus. Because she has been drugged—and is actually dying—, she cannot move freely or think clearly. Steve thinks of having sex with her and is actually aroused (316). He knows it is unfair and that the idea is evil, but he finds reasons to justify the illicit desire, such as not having had sex with a woman in two months or that putting his penis inside Ann would make him feel at home (316). The only reason why he does not actually do it is, indeed, his fear of the vampire baby in Ann's womb.

He is afraid of his member being bitten by the embryo (316-317).

There are other cases of rape in *Lost Souls*. On the one hand, Jessie is, as I have already mentioned, sexually abused by her father—Wallace—as she once decides to have sex with him. Although this incestuous relation is conscious and consenting—she seems to think it was natural and right (79)—, it is her father’s responsibility to stop her. However, Wallace likes her body and enjoys the intercourse (79). He afterwards tries to find excuses for what happened. For instance, he mentions being very aroused and responding to his daughter’s actions because he had always done everything she wanted—and, therefore, could not say no—and because he had not had sex with a woman since Jessie’s mother committed suicide (79). He explains that he had to ask her to cover her body from him as a desperate attempt to inhibit his desire (79) which he blames on her having a provocative attitude towards him and deliberately exposing her naked body to him (78). Because Jessie actively seduces her father, Martin seems to, again, reinforce Freudian theories of women being attracted to their parents and willing to have sex with them (see section 2.2.1) while, as I mentioned before, these experiences have been proved to be unpleasant and traumatic. In the novel, Jessie leads the action and derives pleasure from what she is doing.

On the other hand, there is Richelle, a deceased character we learn about only through the description of a male named Arkady. He explains that she ended up dying because of a pregnancy, just like Ann and Jessie, because a

young boy in his teens raped her. In other words, even if she deprived herself of sex and kept this habit for so long,—no matter what interesting men she found—in the end a male spoilt her whole life and brought her death. It is shocking to read how a vampire who was more than two hundred years old and said to be “very strong” was overcome by a teenager (277) and Arkady tries to explain it by saying that she had been unaccompanied by him that night, that “she had drunk too much vodka” and/or that the boy had become too aroused by her beauty (277). In the end, she commits suicide—although it is not clear if it is fully intentional or not—since she bleeds herself to death when trying to kill the foetus inside her womb (277-278).

There is also an Indian girl who is attacked by Zillah, Molochai and Twig when she is cleaning the family restaurant where she works (85). Although her name or any other personal details are not mentioned, there are vivid descriptions of how she smells and tastes and of the way she is killed by the vampires (85). Readers can reach the conclusion that she is sexually abused since they choose to feed on her blood by biting her between her legs and on her neck (85). After having ended her life, the three vampires also rob things from the restaurant they will eat and drink when they feel hungry later: cake and some vodka they mix with wine and the girl’s blood to preserve it (86). She is being treated like other food in her restaurant, like an object.

Bosky rightly notes that male vampires strengthen their friendship by killing together (229), but she ignores the fact that one of the main pillars of

their small community consists of dehumanizing women as, before they kill them, they also degrade and rape them together. For example, they kill the Indian girl together and drink from her. As well as that, Zillah has sex with women (Jessy, Ann) while his friends are either in the same room or close by. These actions are very similar to gang rapes. Ann's rape presents another good example because although Steve rapes her alone, Ghost knows about this aggression and though he tries to talk to Ann about what happened and encourages her to report it to the police, he never intercedes or openly speaks about it with Steve. Moreover, and although he thinks that what his friend did was wrong, he stands by his side until the end. Steve and Ghost become even closer to each other when they decide to follow Ann, drug and kidnap her and take her to a voodoo shop for an abortion she does not want. Both males think they have to make decisions and act for her as if she belonged to them or she were unable to think. As a result, both Ann and her foetus die, even as she wanted to give birth to the baby. The way sex involving women is presented in *Lost Souls*, which mostly includes more than two males and violence, may be a reflection of the fact that in the 1990s in the United States, not only rape was a common problem, but more specifically gang rape was a frequent crime (see section 2.2.1).

Even if some male characters are also killed for fun and blood lust by the vampires—who are bisexual—the only ones who are sexually abused by them are women. The tone of the book is not condemning and these rape scenes

are especially cruel and descriptive. For this reason, I disagree with Ahmad, who thinks Martin breaks with the stereotypical image of women as innocent prey in horror fiction and Gothic novels (439). In Ahmed's opinion, Martin is far from previous writers in this genre who gave a humiliating treatment to women for the voyeuristic pleasure of male readers (441). It could be, however, stated that all females in this novel are actually victims as they suffer all kinds of violence and end up dying. These scenes contain cruel and gory details, but it is difficult to confirm that these lines are a sign of feminism, as they are exactly what gives voyeuristic pleasure to those who look for sadistic pleasure. Even if it is true that other female horror writers are more romantic and most are not as grim, it should also be remembered that, on the one hand, male authors can equally articulate feminist attitudes and ideas in their writings and, on the other hand, Martin did not consider himself a woman even at the time he was writing under this feminine pseudonym (see footnote 22).

The very detailed descriptions and the language used in these passages, like in the sex scene between Jessy and her father, or Ann's climax while being raped, played out to be sexy, or the positive and tender language of passages—such as the one in which Steve thinks of having sex with Ann while she is unconscious—gives the impression that, contrary to Ahmad's opinion, Martin was deliberately promoting and encouraging voyeuristic pleasure through female pain and humiliation. My ideas are also supported by Holmes, who notes how this writer does not seem to write for female readers (184). Martin

has himself corroborated this thought with his own words in one of his biographical works (Brite, “Enough Rope”).

Although it would be fair to admit that the deaths of male characters are also very descriptive and macabre, I think females bear the brunt here too, since some are sexually abused—or about to be abused—while being killed. Even if, like Holmes (182), I would concede that situations of extreme abuse and violence against women are, unfortunately, not uncommon in the real world, I would say that Martin’s language seems sadistic.

The inclusion of rape and incest in Martin’s novels could be understood as a way to denounce that these crimes were part of the reality in the United States and make them visible when they had traditionally been considered private matters—especially incest (see section 2.2.1). This statement could, however, only be justified by the presence of irony and a wish to bring these matters to focus and speak out against them as an underlying message, which is not the case in *Lost Souls*. Nonetheless, Martin has himself stated he did not mean anything subversive with his gory scenes and he wrote them because he finds this kind of scenario sexually attractive and enjoyable (Young; Brite, “Interview by Alex S. Johnson”). Thus, the author’s words are conclusive evidence against Ahmad’s previously mentioned statements and Martin could also be using this provocative way of writing as a marketing strategy to differentiate himself from other authors or to get people to talk about him.

Moreover, some excuses and/or justifications are given to rape in the novel. First, Ann reaching an orgasm indicates she enjoys what is being done to her. This may mean that rape did not really take place, since it became pleasurable. It is also difficult to understand how fast she seems to have forgiven Steve, as soon after the rape she misses him and is about to resume their relationship, as if what happened were an unimportant issue. After, when thinking of the time she started dating Eliot, she insults herself in a language similar to that which Steve uses against her when he breaks into her house to hit and abuse her (Brite, *Lost Souls* 107, 108). These insults and the constant blame for having begun a new relationship with another man can give readers the idea that Ann actually deserved to be raped, as a way of punishment for what both Steve and she consider a bad behaviour.

When Arkady explains how Richelle was raped by a boy, he lists a series of factors—such as her having drunk too much alcohol, being alone and her supernatural beauty being too appealing to the offender (276)—as the main causes why she may have been raped. Wallace—Jessy’s father—uses similar sentences to justify having abused his own daughter (79). Some of these excuses are often used to blame victims of not being careful enough or to diminish rapists’ fault.

From the sexy and indulgent tone of the novel and for the way the story unfolds, impressionable readers—such as teenagers—may assume that some of the crimes committed throughout the novel—such as rape or incest—

should be considered minor misconducts which lack importance. Furthermore, the writer's conscious choice of not giving female characters almost any depth or background, and their limited influence on the action, in contrast to the many lines dedicated to explain the way males feel and what their opinions are, may make it difficult for readers to feel empathy towards women in *Lost Souls* while it is easier to put themselves in the position of males and try to understand the way they behave. Thus, it is difficult to relate to Jessy and Ann and their irrational actions as all the bad decisions they make are based on their obsessions with the men and vampires they love and, thus, their deaths do not inspire feelings of pity. The many sections in *Lost Souls* which contain rape may be a reflection of the fact that, at that time, this was a crime perpetrated in the United States regularly (see section 2.2.1). The fact that rapists do not receive any kind of punishment echoes the fact that it went unreported or was not as seriously considered as other offenses against the law (see section 2.2.1) while the sexy tone used in these scenes, added to the fact that women are sometimes blamed for what happens to them and seem to end up enjoying it in other occasions, shows how in real life women were actually accused of having provoked these situations themselves (see section 2.2.1).

4.2 Patriarchal Structures

Several authors, like Holmes in his essay "Coming Out of the Coffin: Gay Males and Queer Goths in Contemporary Vampire Fiction," argue that the

fantastic universe Martin has created is misogynist because there are almost no female characters in his works (184). He seems to imply that this author writes having only male readers in mind too (184). The statement could be even more specific, as Martin has in fact declared the only readers whose opinion about his texts he cares about are gay male readers (Brite, “Enough Rope”).

Furthermore, when analysing Martin’s texts, scholars such as Joshi, in the chapter he dedicates to this author in his book *The Evolution of the Weird Tale*, also tend to focus on males: Joshi only mentions Ann’s name for useful purposes when the action of the book is summarised (612). No women are analysed by any scholars or critics whose studies on Martin I have accessed.

Since all women impregnated by a vampire and pregnant female vampires die, and due to the absence of female blood drinkers in the book—the only one readers know about one dies also because of matters related to pregnancy—, Martin creates a new, and more patriarchal, model of family: one where Benefiel argues (265) mothers cannot exist. Furthermore, while women get pregnant—as a consequence of rape in Richelle’s case or after the only one night stands Jessy and Ann are said to enjoy in the novel—and then die for pregnancy-related reasons, men in the book continuously have unprotected sex and have to face no consequences at all.

Although Ahmad points out the fact pregnancy is addressed in *Lost Souls* as proof to labelling Martin as a feminist (442), I fail to see how the scenes dealing with this topic can send a positive message to or about women

since every one of them lead the women involved to terrible endings. Ahmad also highlights abortion as another subversive gender issue addressed in the novel (442) but since Ann does not choose to kill the embryo in her womb voluntarily and both she and Richelle die as a consequence of ending their pregnancy, it could be said that these parts of the book do not contain any underlying feminist message per se either. The only feminist reading that could apply to these bloody scenes could be that safe abortion was not granted to all women in the United States in the 1990s (see section 2.2.5), but it would be quite difficult to prove this statement as the message is confusing because all these females have different circumstances but their stories equally lead to a similar ending: Ann does not want to undergo an abortion and Jessy, who is happy about giving birth, also dies anyway.

In an interview for *The Independent* in 1994 Martin explains that he, actually, finds it easy to create and relate to his male characters, while writing about women is something he does not like much. He adds that, although there are some females in history he admires, females as a whole do not “fascinate” him the way males do (E. Young). He has also said he has never created a very strong female character in any of his works of fiction and implies that they have no place in them (Brite, “Interview with Poppy Z. Brite”).

Effectively, women are underrepresented in *Lost Souls* and its plot would not be very different if all of them were taken out of the story. Ann is, on her part, related to the central storyline of the novel—although she is not an

important character. Richelle, whose surname we do not know, is the only female vampire mentioned in the book and her presence is reduced to just three pages, in which her extraordinary psyche is described but the emphasis is put mainly on her attractive and elegant physical appearance (275-278).

There are other women in this novel but they are just mentioned, not described in depth, and their presence is, again, not important for the plot. It seems that most of them are just accessories which make the male-centered storylines a little more interesting or make them move forward. That is, also among the secondary characters, females take up less space and lack importance and are portrayed in a rather misogynistic way since only their physical appearance is highlighted. Only in very few cases readers are also given their names or a description of some of their actions—usually sexual activities of some kind. Their ideas and feelings are never mentioned, which makes them seem even more plain, especially if compared to secondary male characters, whose inner worlds occupy long paragraphs.

For example, Nothing has a small group of teenage friends of both sexes at school. Readers learn very little about girls from this gang such as Veronica Aston and Lily Hartung, who are not even physically described and about whom there is literally no more information than their names and the fact that they are bisexual (32), or Julie—no surname given—, whose brief description and only two actions—kissing her boyfriend Laine and giving Nothing a cassette tape—take up no more than 5 lines (31-32).

Schillings remarks that Martin's first two novels—*Lost Souls* and *Drawing Blood*—he challenges some stereotypical ideas of manliness (2). Because this writer has often declared he identified himself as a gay man in a female body (E. Young; Brite, "Interview by Alex S. Johnson"; Brite, "Enough Rope"²⁶), Schillings does not think he intends to help eradicate masculinity from society, but to separate it from the idea of heterosexuality (3).

In this way, while men in this story do not totally lose their traditionally perceived "masculine" features—they fight, curse, drink, etc.—, they are allowed to be "feminine" in some ways—for example by showing their feelings to each other or having different lovers from both sexes—like Holmes suggests (182). Hence they, on the one hand, show that "masculinity" and "homosexuality" or "bisexuality" are not antonyms (Schillings 3) and, on the other, widen the meaning of the words "sexuality" and "gender" (Brookes 19). Brookes is right when he calls these characters "sexual rebels" (17). But I do not see how women transgress gender or sexual boundaries, or are "masculine" in any way since they show no strength, are worried about their physical appearance—as well as clothing and make up—, act only in response to male wishes and needs, and are victims of gendered violence and abuse.

It is true that in *Lost Souls* some classical ideas of what it means "to be a man" are challenged and that homosexual and bisexual men are in focus in

²⁶ Although I have used an online version of this biographical short story which is available on Martin's official webpage, "Enough Rope" was originally published on paper in a collection of short stories having to do with transgenderism. "Enough Rope." *Crossing the Border: Tales of Erotic Ambiguity*.

this novel while they are not in real life or other media (Schillings 2). But female characters, in contrast, do not receive the same treatment as they are flat and do not break any stereotypes about “femininity” or face terrible consequences when they act in any slightly rebellious ways—such as being in control of their sexuality. Their main actions, which usually respond to their need of satisfying men around them or being accompanied by them, are not important by themselves, but because they make males react and, subsequently, trigger the most remarkable events in the plot. For example, Jessy escapes her house and has sex with Zillah, which leads to her death but only after having given birth to Nothing. Ann cheats on Steve with another man and has sex with Zillah later, and these are the reasons why the former rapes her and the latter uses her as a tool to hurt Steve, which in turn leads to the vampire hunt, staged exclusively by males, that ends the novel.

On a separate note, the fact that not many scholars comment on the overwhelming lack of representation of women in the novel and how shallow their personalities are may be an indicator that in the 1990s it was still normal for men to occupy more public space and visible power positions than women, and that females were expected to take more responsibilities in the domestic sphere and to remain at home more often than males (see section 2.2.3 in the historical background chapter). That the fathers in the book impose their wishes and rules on their daughters and that scholars have equally ignored this fact shows that within American homes, patriarchal structures were also commonly

accepted (see sections 2.2, 2.2.1 and 2.2.4 in the historical background chapter).

4.2.1 Patriarchal Family Structures

Although, as I have mentioned before, some scholars highlight the incestuous relationship between Nobody and his father, Zillah (Lindgren and Isaksson 134, 140; Holmes 182; Bosky 220, 224; Cavallaro 146), no one pays attention to the other fathers in the story—those whose offspring are females—even when they are clearly abusive, and only Cavallaro briefly mentions that the fathers of Ann and Jessy are despotic with their daughters and behave according to misogynistic patterns (146). He also states that they try to possess and control their daughters as well as sabotage their attempts of getting to know the world and their liberty (146). Although these facts are true, the way females are generally treated at home by their fathers deserves deeper attention.

For instance, Ann's father—Simon—, who is retired, does not do any household chores and his sole occupation is to make very cruel—and partly secret—experiments with animals at home (110, 261) and read the newspaper or books he checks out from the library. On the contrary Ann, who has a job, is in charge of cleaning and cooking (259). Furthermore, when his wife left him, Simon became lazier and stopped caring about his house or his personal appearance. Similarly, after Jessy has sex with Zillah, she starts living in the same bar where she met him with its owner—the vampire called Christian—and, in exchange for giving her a place to live, she cleans the place (19).

Furthermore, Ann admits that an important reason to stay at home instead of going to university was her concern for her father being left alone. She had “postponed her life” (258) in order to ensure his well-being. This reflects how she conforms to society’s preconceived notion that the woman’s role is that of a nurturer and carer, and that she should always be ready to put her family ahead of her own wishes and expectations.

The routines these two women have and seem to take for granted and consider fair—as they never complain about them or question the men who decided that they were female duties—reflect how women in the 1990s still had to deal with the great majority of house chores (see sections 2.2.3 and 2.2.4).

Family is generally not represented in a traditional way in Martin’s fiction. He transgresses the boundaries in which society tends to confine these matters (Holmes 182) and his characters and gloomy settings represent “an assault on stifling social conformity” (Brookes 149). It is true that these scenes relate to the general message of decay of the American society and traditional family values that Martin has allegedly given his texts, as all these types of relationships are transgressive and the strong bonds that link the group of vampires, as well as those between Steve and Ghost, are not based on heterosexuality nor monogamy which rule society in the United States. However, even if they may seem transgressive, these alternative models of family and the apparent freedom of choice are, again, not true, since, as Benefit points out, they do not apply to women (265). Just like Lestat, Louis and

Claudia in *Interview with the Vampire*, the way vampires tie together challenges the usual idea of family, but Martin goes one step beyond by taking females totally out of the equation. Women in this novel cannot relate to most characters by blood since they—both female vampires and humans impregnated by vampires—die in childbirth. But also, no male is interested in them as friends either and there is no place in this novel for friendship—and much less for love—among themselves. Martin himself has expressed that, by constantly writing about male-male sex and alternative relationships he is not standing for LGBTQAI+ rights but merely presenting sexual scenes which involve only men because he finds them sexually appealing and thinks that they fit better in the plot (Brite, “Introduction. Love in Vein: Tales of Vampire Erotica” x). Similarly, Martin’s preference for depressing locations and outlawed characters may as well be just a literary resource since he has confessed being inspired by modern horror writers as well as Romantic and Gothic classics (Young).

Zillah and Nothing are the most interesting example of transgressions within the family because they are both father and son and lovers, but also because they have sexual relations as well as romantic feelings towards other people around them. Because of this, most scholars, have decided to highlight their affair either as proof of Martin’s subversive underlying messages—like all the ones I have already mentioned—or to illustrate abuse.

Men are also privileged in other aspects having to do with family structures. Ann and Jessy are not only repressed and abused by their fathers, as

Cavallaro rightly points out (146), but they also delimit their daughters' capacities and freedom outside the house and in matters concerning their social life. For example, the word "dishonored", which Simon uses to describe Anna for having been slapped by Steve (Brite, *Lost Souls* 261), is strongly symbolic because it shows he is not concerned with her general security and well-being or her physical integrity but just with a part of it, which has to do with morality and purity of women, as well as a sense of women being the property of men (see section 2.2.1 in the historical background chapter). Cavallaro could, however go further in his statement if he compared the lack of liberties of these two characters to males, since it becomes even more apparent as the latter have less or no family responsibilities—or ignore them completely—, and spend their time in their hobbies—playing rock music, making scientific experiments—or travelling around the country.

Even if Martin did not allegedly articulate a critique of patriarchal structures in *Lost Souls* on purpose and although he does not take a stance about the topic—he even admits not caring much about minors' welfare (Brite, "Interview with Poppy Z. Brite")—, he unintentionally portrays some real differences between men and women in the 1990s through his fantastic characters. Males in *Lost Souls* show that men lead easier lives and are freer, but the story also highlights that if they make mistakes, they will have the opportunity to correct them. On the contrary, women are controlled by their male relatives—be they their fathers or partners— and those who leave the

“straight path” pay it with their lives. This may mirror the reality that females at the time needed to be more careful when making their choices and remember that there would be more consequences to be faced by them than by men if they committed a mistake such as getting pregnant (see section 2.2.4 in the historical background chapter).

For the reasons listed at the beginning of this section, it can be stated that Ann’s former boyfriend is not the first abusive figure in her life since she is also a victim of domestic inequality but also violence. Her father, Simon—who paradoxically tells her how much he worries about her repeatedly—, is abusive with her too. When Ann’s mother left him—readers are not told if it was a voluntary decision or if she died—, he was shocked and it seems he did not know how to do the housework or how to bring up a little girl on his own, and he decided that being rough and controlling was the best way to educate her. He also turned into a less “sensitive” (Brite, *Lost Souls* 261) person, just like Steve, and started drinking, frequently resorting to violence towards his daughter when he did so.

We learn that Simon imposed many strict rules on Ann (260) and that he punished her for little teenager mistakes—like trying cigarettes or alcohol—in terrible ways such as tying her to her bed for hours until, after crying and shouting like an animal, she urinated on herself and begged him to forgive her (261-262). Being forced to lie on a bed for so long has some sexual implications too. It seems like her father was somehow making her see that he

is able to do whatever he wants with her and wants her to be submissive.

In addition, after Ann lets her father know that Steve had hit her in the face, he does not allow him to reach her by phone and threatens him to even kill him if he tries to contact her again. He does not let her know Steve phoned her either. Later in the book, when Simon thinks Ann will go out to meet her former boyfriend, he advises her not to do so and then insinuates she is not allowed to go out that night and excuses himself for being hard on her because he has her “best interests in mind” (261).

Simon tries to control her life until his very last day. Although Ann seems to tell him quite a lot about her life events, he always wants to know more about who she is dating, when she comes home at night. He seems to be willing to choose her friends for her too, since he does not like any of her friends, including Ghost—who is a good person and worries about Ann’s problems—and she cannot do anything he does not agree with. By forbidding her to go out and behaving like he has to defend Ann, Simon is, again, treating her like she was just a thing he owns, or an irrational being—like a child—who cannot make her own decisions and needs to be under surveillance. Ann is, thus, not free to act the way she wants.

A close reading, however, reveals that Simon is not truly worried about his daughter’s well-being. He does not try to talk to her about the whole situation with Steve and does not ask her about how she is feeling. The fact that he is unaware of Ghost’s sincerely good intentions demonstrates that he does

not know her life in depth. Furthermore, my reading also holds that Ann does not love him either but feels a mixture of pity and fear for him as on the one hand she worries about him having been left alone without a woman and adopts a role of mother for him and on the other hand she is afraid of his violent reactions and has to keep her most important secrets—having been raped, getting pregnant, etc.—to herself because she feels that if she shared them with him she would have to endure very bad consequences (258), which is also the reason why she often comes in and out of her own house secretly (112). If he truly loved her, he would not let her take care of all the housework alone, nor would he be violent with her when she disobeys his orders. In the same way, if Ann truly loved her father, she would not be so afraid of his reactions as to keep most of her daily life secret and would, on the contrary, be able to share her problems and feelings with him and ask for his advice or help.

Similarly, although Wallace desperately tries to find out what happened to Jessy after he last saw her before she left home for good, and even if he had tried to control her actions—there is a tone of frustration as he admits she should have had lovers whom he did not know (77)—and was very attached to her and tried to fulfil all her wishes (77), he has not been a good father, since he did not realise that her daughter drank strong liquors when she went out at night (4)—even if she had told him that she frequented bars—, that her interest in vampires was becoming obsessive or that she was hurting and cutting herself in order to make her fantasies about vampires more real (77-78). Also, having

thought about having sex with his daughter and doing it afterwards are abusive behaviours too.

The relationship between Ann and Jessy and their fathers exemplifies old-fashioned patriarchal stereotypes about males having full control over women within their families, and living in separated spheres that had not completely disappeared from the American society in the 1990s (see sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.3 in the historical background chapter). When Simon finds out that Steve hit Ann he seems to be annoyed because he feels attacked by another man, as if his family property had been harmed or something valuable had been stolen from him. The way daughter and fathers in *Lost Souls* behave with each other also reflects the main idea of social biology: that men are aggressive beings naturally prone to vice, sex, violence and negligence (see section 2.2.1 in the historical background chapter) while women, who are nurturing, tend to pacify and take care of them and their homes (see section 2.2.3 in the historical background chapter).

Although Ann gets angry and defiant when her father tells her she cannot do something she wishes, she usually does not achieve anything with that attitude, so she then plays the role of a submissive daughter who follows her father's will in order to get what she wants from him, to stop being the focus of his attention in order to make him less suspicious and, in that way, increase her autonomy. That is to say, just like Claudia in *Interview with the Vampire*, the main heroine in this book can stop being rebellious and behave the

way men around her want her to when it is convenient for her plans. This idea of women being treacherous and given to lies and false pretense is very chauvinistic too.

When Ann is about to run to New Orleans to find Zillah, her father forbids her to go out and she deliberately pretends to be docile and chooses sweet words and some childish terms such as “Daddy” (Brite, *Lost Souls* 262), and stands still while he kisses her forehead although she feels repulsed. She gives Simon a cup of coffee with Valium (263). She does not think of the consequences of her acts and proceeds methodically. Before she leaves the house, she realizes that Simon is not breathing regularly and she seems to suspect the dose of tranquilizers may have been too high, but she decides to go anyway and promises herself that she will pray for him. As a result of a Valium overdose, Simon dies that night, but Ann escapes and is finally free. However, she soon regrets having abandoned her old life and thinks that if she can find a good excuse, her father and Steve might want her back (163). In other words, she has been abused by these two men for a long time and, still, she wants them back, feels guilty for having left them and thinks she might have to beg them to let her back into their lives.

4.3 Power Imbalance between Men and Women

4.3.1 Dependence

Ann has a job as a waitress which gives her some financial autonomy, the possibility of developing certain hobbies and diverse partners. However, she finds the restaurant depressing and rustic and imagines that its cheap decoration is what people think is elegant only in a small town like hers (257). When she finished high school she was seriously considering going to university, which would provide her with a higher education, that would certainly help her achieve a better job and quality of life. Although all these features may have made Ann free in the long term, she also presents signs of psychological dependence and fear. First of all, after school she was too scared to leave Missing Mile and she kept on telling herself she would start a degree after she spent a year concentrating on painting, although she never did so. Instead of trying college herself, she decided she would wait until Steve and Ghost—who had started going to a university nearby—came back for the holidays to tell her if it was worthwhile (257-258). They both told her it was not and never went back themselves.

Their experience, especially if we take into account that these two characters do little more than smoke, drink and talk about their childish dream of becoming rock stars, might have been different from Ann's if she had started studying. Since she is really passionate about her art and does not like what she

does at home, she probably would have made the most out of her student years and improved her painting skills. However, her choice of following her partner's steps and advice makes her look dependent and childish, as if she were incapable of making her own decisions. In a bigger city she may have met new people and widened her horizons, while her future as a waitress in Missing Mile is not bright.

Furthermore, Ann sometimes confesses she is afraid of solitude. When Ghost asks her about the reasons for having chosen Eliot as a new partner, she describes her fears in the following words: "Night is the hardest time to be alive. For me, anyway. It lasts so long, and four A.M. knows all my secrets. [...] well, I went looking for something to get me through the night a little bit better" (114).

Ann does not seem to be resolute enough to achieve a better life or understand that there are better men than Steve she can go out with on the long term—such as Eliot. Even if she leaves her abusive partner—who embodies macho stereotypes most of the time—when she feels she cannot stand the situation anymore she rapidly becomes bored of the man who treats her properly and goes back to Steve, both in her mind and in real life, once and again.

Ann's preferences for violent and abusive male partners are a reflection of the widespread but wrong ideas that women like or deserve being badly treated and/or that they are naturally attracted to aggressive men. Female

characters like Ann, who retain their interest in problematic men whom they think will change because of their love, have been portrayed in media in the United States for decades and the main storyline of certain movies that became extremely popular in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s was precisely that²⁷. In those stories, women do, just like Ann, suffer considerably in order to keep the men they love by their side, and put up with their abusive behaviours. Furthermore, the fact that, with the exception of Elliot, all partners she dates mistreat her also reflects that these stereotypes which were commonly found in films, books and other media still in the 1990s, and which society had accepted, made it difficult for women who had been abused to break their acquired behavioural patterns (see section 2.2.1).

When Ann finally leaves her old life behind, her motive for escaping is to follow Zillah to New Orleans. In other words, the wish to be with a man is leading her actions again. Since the moment Ann meets this vampire and falls under his spell, her life revolves only around him and she becomes a dull character, up to the point that, to follow his steps, she has to lie to her father and even poison him. In the beginning Ann has some goals in life although she is not sure about how to achieve them, but at this point she totally abandons all of them. For example, when she is packing a few belongings to bring with her, she just chooses some sexy lingerie as well as tobacco and marijuana and consciously chooses to leave her precious paintings behind (259). Also, she

²⁷Some very well-known examples could be *Grease* from 1978, *Dirty Dancing* from 1987, and *Cruel Intentions* from 1999.

does not care about her salary anymore and she departs without getting paid: she leaves a note at the restaurant with her bank account details, but does not expect to actually receive any money (257). She used to be proud to sustain herself but, ignoring that she has a vampire in her womb and will die in childbirth—if not before—, she is now happy with the thought that Zillah will provide for her and her baby (257), which is a very traditional idea about families.

Ann's life does not improve throughout the book and she is constantly moving backwards. Her life—controlled by men from the beginning of the book until the end—goes from bad to worse and, while plots in turbulent romantic stories traditionally lead to a happy ending, Ann finds a sad death in a dirty bed without anyone but Steve and Ghost knowing what happened to her (351).

Although Jessy is quite authoritarian with her father and leaves their house at an early age, when she starts living with Christian she behaves according to more traditional gender roles. This male vampire offers her shelter, protection, food and sex, and looks after her. In exchange, she helps him clean his bar (9). She appears to be really happy just by having a vampire by her side, which seems to be the only goal she has in life now. She spends the last months of her life waiting for her baby to be born while she does some of the housework for a man who finds her pathetic, feeble and fragile. In other words, they both behave like women and men in strongly patriarchal societies do.

4.3.1.1 Women's Empowerment

Even if, as I have just pointed out, relationships between women and men in *Lost Souls* are not balanced and the former largely depend on the latter, they do not always conform to patriarchal structures and norms and sometimes stand for their rights in different ways.

4.3.1.1.1 Rebelliousness

In the beginning, Ann, Jessy and Richelle do not conform to patriarchal rules in some aspects. For example, these three women smoke, drink and go out at night. Furthermore, Richelle is said to be extraordinarily intelligent and well-travelled and mannered (276) and both Jessy and Ann possess artistic abilities.

Jessy's father explains that she liked watching films and that she had always loved reading and owned a big amount of books (77) and she may have liked studying or creating art since there was a sign on her bedroom's door that said "GENIOUS AT WORK" (78), while Ann is repeatedly said to have some talent for painting. Jessy is also quite self-confident and even has an arrogant attitude towards her father. Furthermore, she does not seem to be afraid of anything since she confesses to be looking for vampires (4) and she often goes to voodoo shops at the French Quartier (78).

However, Ann seems to be delaying any important actions in her life in order to wait for Steve to become a rock star or just discarding her dreams to be

able to be by his side. Once she falls in love with Zillah, her obsessive and unhealthy love changes its object, but not its form, and she leaves everything she has and knows behind in order to follow him.

Jessy's talent for reading and her interest in studying are equally wasted. Her radical behaviours, which could have been the starting point for interesting actions such as discovering the outside world or becoming a more cultivated, intelligent or strong person, are all directed to pursuing the same goal: meeting vampires to have sex with and trying to become a blood drinker. In short, she does not hold any other ambitions or evolve even a bit, which makes her a flat and dull character.

Jessy is an even simpler character than Ann because, while the latter acts foolishly under Zillah's spell, the former has not even met any vampires before deciding her main purpose in life is to see one and to have sex with him. In fact, she does not care if she is with one blood drinker or another, since she is also happy being with Christian after Zillah leaves. She is not worried about her baby's or her own health and her feelings about being pregnant are never mentioned, as if she were completely oblivious of her situation and she dies before she has even reached maturity. Richelle, the only specially wise and cultivated woman, never becomes a dull character, but she is soon out of the picture, as she is already dead when Arkady briefly talks about her.

4.3.1.1.2 Fashion

An interesting detail about Ann is that she considers and calls herself an “artist” and she does not shave her armpits because she thinks a female painter should not follow such imposed fashions (203). When she explains this idea to Steve she is both proud of herself and sure about what she is talking about. The boy is shocked, but does not mention it because she does not seem to be willing to change at all.

The fact that Ann is quite self-confident about her physical appearance is also shown by her choice of clothes. Her style is close to punk and Gothic urban tribes and she wears very feminine corsets, mini-skirts, sexy lingerie, and laced garments in which she feels attractive, as well as deep-coloured make up such as silver eye-shadow and red lipstick. Just like the feminists at the end of the 20th century (see section 2.2.2), she combines these with non-feminine sportive apparel creating a shocking effect as she does not shave her armpits. She sometimes uses widow accessories such as a dark hat with a veil. In this way Ann expresses some kind of rebelliousness too, because such outfits are quite different from what regular people usually put on.

4.3.1.1.3 Sexual Liberation

Although sexuality will be dealt with more deeply in a section of its own, it is interesting to mention it within the part of this chapter concerning rebelliousness, as the free and even wild sexual life some of the female

characters have definitely denotes liberation.

Ann does not hesitate to change partners or freely sleep with whomever she wants. She does not either ask for, nor follow, anybody's advice in love matters. While her choices lead to difficult situations—the ultimate outcome being her own death—because she does not choose wisely who she wants to have relationships with, it is important to point out that they are made by her alone.

During the time Ann was dating Steve she was taking contraceptive pills and she stopped taking them when she began her relationship with Eliot because he had been sterilized—which she says came as a relief mostly because she very often forgot to take them (106). That is, she is not interested in becoming a mother yet and, by taking the appropriate measures to avoid getting pregnant, she is in control of her body in this aspect.

Richelle and Jessy—who are not described as deeply as Ann is and the parts in the book dedicated to describing their personalities, appearance and actions are also shorter—likewise show a certain degree of rebelliousness by being in control of their sexuality.

4.3.1.1.4 Manipulation

Although she lives with her controlling father, Ann is not totally dependent on him because she earns some money from her work at the restaurant. Moreover, when she wants to act against his will—he does not want her to go out with

Steve and some other times he does not want her to leave the house at all or wishes she came back earlier—she finds a way to act behind his back.

Ann, like Claudia in *Interview with the Vampire*, can behave submissively and pleasantly at times in order to gain her father's trust and, maybe because this is the only way in which she can achieve a certain degree of freedom, she almost never feels remorse after lying to him. She does not even regret drugging him in order to leave the house and only thinks about her father for a second when her bus is leaving the house and never gets to know the fatal consequences of her action.

4.4 Love, Friendship and Sexuality

4.4.1 Love and Friendship

Bosky concludes that the main topic of the novel is the search for companionship and how individuals long for a group or a family they feel they belong to (220), very much represented by Nothing, his quest for his own identity and his place in the world and how he finds it in the group of vampires and, more specifically, in Zillah (224). However, real reciprocated love takes place exclusively between men. As time goes by many of the male characters learn how to express their feelings and the sentence "I love you" is only said in man-to-man conversations. Although Nothing and Zillah do not have a perfect relationship, they repeatedly say it to each other (Brite, *Lost Souls* 141, 287, 288), Ghost and Steve also declare their reciprocated love by the end of the

book (354) and Nothing sends them a postcard to grant them protection and to show that he also loves them (353-354). In contrast, Steve and Ann, who are said to have loved and wanted each other (113), have already finished their relationship by the time they are first mentioned and their love story is described as “stormy” (112).

For Richelle and Jessy, although they are not loved or even respected in return, sex and relationships with men—no matter whether they are healthy or abusive—are the main reasons for them to act. Like Ann, they mainly do it in irrational ways that affect them negatively.

Females seem to step backwards in love matters just like they do in other areas of life such as independence. A good example of this is how Ann changes a destructive relationship with a despicable man for one with an educated and respectful partner but, incomprehensibly for me, she soon misses the first while, about the latter, it is said that “he was so good to her that she grew impatient with him, then completely sick of him” (109). By the end of the book, Ann has apparently lost her interest in Steve, but only because she has found a new person she can focus her love on: Zillah, who is a monster and either despises or ignores her completely and even calls her “bitch” (219). As I explained before, Martin says that women do not fit in his texts (Brite, “Interview with Poppy Z. Brite”). These statements explain the imbalance between the great prominence and interesting development of males and the counter-evolutionary female characters in *Lost Souls*.

A clear distinction between male and female characters in *Lost Souls* is that, like the aforementioned scholars point out, the former have or develop strong love, friendships and camaraderie between each other while the latter are isolated: they relate to men but these objectify and abuse them and the nature of these relations is mostly sexual. Moreover, although Bosky is right in most points she makes about *Lost Souls*, when she says that the main issue in this novel is the search of companions and the creation of meaningful connections (220), she does not seem to realise that only males succeed in this quest—with the reunion of Zillah and Nothing which she highlights (229) as probably the most significant point of union.

When Ann realises Steve is never going to quit his harmful habits, she leaves him and starts dating Elliot, who is educated, older and more and works as a university teacher. She does not openly tell Steve that they are not together anymore and it seems that she is having two relationships at the same time (Brite, *Lost Souls* 107). Elliot treats Ann politely and respectfully, but she is soon bored of him and misses Steve, up to the point of calling herself “the lowest kind of lying, betraying bitch” (107). She wants them to resume their relationship but, after they have an argument, she has sex with Zillah in order to hurt him. After only sleeping with Zillah once, Ann gets pregnant and starts trying to find him because she wants to create a family together.

As I stated before, Ann does not seem to like to be on her own and, instead of using the time between her affairs to learn about herself and become

more mature, she keeps on overlapping her love stories without paying much attention to the kind of man she is dating in each case, like she had no or little value when she is single (see section 2.2.5).

4.4.2 Sexuality

Different scholars highlight how Martin focuses on gender and sexual fluidity (Ahmad 440; Bosky 228) and ambiguity (Chaplin “From Blood Bonds to Brand Loyalties”, 42). Holmes admits Martin makes the line between “masculine” and “feminine” blurred (182) and Brookes seems to agree on this point when he interprets the androgyny in most of the protagonists—which he labels as “sexual rebels” (17)—as proof of the difficulties to be faced when trying to define what “sexuality” or “gender” mean (19). Schilling highlights that Martin gives voice to other kinds of men—primarily homosexuals and bisexuals—by making them the protagonists in his stories (2) and other scholars also highlight the large amount of homosexual characters (Ahmad 5; Young; Lindgren and Isaksson 140).

However, the way Martin tackles LGBTQAI+ issues and alternative sexual orientations in *Lost Souls* is—just like in *Interview with the Vampire*—not egalitarian since only men are actually free to explore their feelings and sexuality. Holmes’ opinions may be more accurate as he acknowledges how Martin actually transgresses the boundaries between masculine and feminine, but also remarks how sex in his novels is “mostly male-male” (182). For

instance, Nothing has, as Holmes also highlights, the opportunity to experiment both homosexuality, heterosexuality and group sex with his friends from high school (182). Similarly, all the other male vampires in the book seem to enjoy sex no matter what the gender of the other people involved in it and Steve, who shows a violent stereotypical “macho” behaviour with Ann—who has been his partner for years—seems to be, however, able to love Ghost—who loves him in return—tenderly by the end of the book.

In his *Historical Dictionary of Gothic Literature*, Hughes quotes Martin’s works as illustrative examples of the decadence of the society and economy in the United States—more precisely in the South—at the end of the 20th century and “fear for the future” (14). In her interview with Martin in 1994, Young makes similar statements but the writer, who admits his books are indeed written in a decadent tone, attributes it to just observing how people behaved around him and writing it down with no specific purposes in mind, as well as to being inspired himself both by classical dark authors such as Poe and Baudelaire (Young), and more modern writers of mystery and horror such as Stephen King or Truman Capote (Brite, “Interview with Poppy Z. Brite”). Martin thinks of this decadence as a literary technique to introduce eroticism in his novels (Brite, “Introduction. *Love in Vein: Tales of Vampire Erotica*” ix).

Because Ann is strictly heterosexual, her sexuality is exclusively linked to her subsequent male partners. At first she is presented as a healthy normal woman in her twenties who knows about and uses contraceptive

methods and does not want to become a mother yet. She takes contraceptive pills while she is dating Steve and her following partner, Eliot, has had a vasectomy, which she finds very convenient. However, when Ann meets Zillah she behaves in an irresponsible and immature way and has sex with him right after they meet without any protection. Soon after, she realises that she is pregnant and becomes unexpectedly enthusiastic about having a child with Zillah.

Steve knows that Ann—just like all women pregnant from vampire sperm—will die in childbirth and tries to make her get rid of the baby in order to save her—without even asking her what she wants. For this purpose, he sedates her and forces her to drink a powerful poison, which kills both the baby and her. Ann is the only one who has to face the consequences—disastrous in the end—of having had sex with her partners: having to endure pain in bed while in a relationship with Steve and being raped by him afterwards, as well as becoming pregnant by Zillah and ultimately dying. She is not a virgin and she has different sexual partners throughout the book but she alone has to put up with both social and physical consequences while her male companions do not.

Jessy and Richelle are somewhat independent sexually. The former does not follow any patriarchal rules having to do with female sexuality since she decides when, where and with whom she wants to have sex. By doing so, she even breaks natural and social rules—she has sex with her father, with members of another species and while she is pregnant. Richelle had decided to

be celibate because she was afraid of dying if she became pregnant and “insisted that no precautions were reliable enough” (276). That is, she had absolute control over her sexual life and she was respected when she said no once and again for more than two centuries. However, in the end she was raped by a young man and died anyway.

Both Ann and Jessy on the one hand and Richelle on the other, represent different but similar problems of female sexuality in the 1990s. The former are sexually active and free, but they get pregnant the only time they have unprotected consented sex and die as a consequence. The latter is celibate, but as a consequence of a rape, a man equally impregnates her and, for this reason, she also dies. Although these three women show different forms of being in control of one’s sexuality, Ann and Jessy are punished for taking risks—although Zillah, their partner, does not take any responsibility in either occasion—, which in my opinion reflects how—as I have mentioned in the chapter concerning the historical background—in the 1990s usually women alone bore negative consequences derived from sex (see section 2.2.4). Richelle being abused shows that her rights over her body could be violated by a random man, and I find this may equally be a reflection of how at that time rape was a common crime in the United States (see section 2.2.1). Furthermore, Ann becoming very enthusiastic about having a baby as soon as she discovers that she is pregnant, may also be a representation of how even if women were able to access contraception and family planning, the stereotype about them

naturally wishing to become mothers at some point in their lives was still prevailing (see section 2.2.4).

4.4.2.1 Portrayal of Homosexuality

Holmes (81) highlights the fact that before finding Zillah, Nothing's friends in high school were a group of bisexual Gothic boys and girls with whom he has had some erotic experiences. Since women are mostly secondary characters in the novel their sexuality is not explored in depth and, when mentioned, Holmes argues, it mostly leads to their destruction or to more important homosexual action between masculine characters. For example, the only lesbian reference is a single line dedicated to two girls in this gang who are said to be kissing and masturbating each other. The focus in this short passage rapidly goes to a long scene of male-male sex between Nothing and his friend Laine (Brite, *Lost Souls* 32-34) while the girls disappear and are never mentioned again.

Most scholars fail to point out that there are no lesbians in this book and bisexual women have a very small and unimportant role in the novel. The subversive message that could be inferred from the fact that some very irrelevant female characters are sexually ambivalent is eclipsed since the book mainly revolves around men's sexual desire and most of the male characters—all the protagonists and even some secondary characters such as Arkady—show signs of not being straight either. With the other secondary female characters—

Ann, Jessy and Richelle—readers get the idea that they are straight because their actions are all aimed at pursuing sexual or romantic relationships with males, but the reality is that their sexual orientation is never really mentioned.

All these facts may be reflecting the social reality of non-straight women in the 1990s, in the United States, when their sexuality was ignored and belittled (see section 2.2.5) even in the LGBTQAI+ communities, in which gay men had been attracting the attention of media since previous decades, as I have already indicated in previous sections of the chapter concerning the historical background (see section 2.1.3).

4.5 Feminism

There are, effectively, no direct references to feminism or to issues related to women in *Lost Souls* (Ahmad 443-444). However, Ahmad maintains that Martin could be called a feminist (439-440) because issues such as reproduction and abortion are addressed in his texts (442). Contraceptive pills are indeed mentioned in *Lost Souls* and abortion is clearly addressed too. However, they cannot be used to unequivocally support that Martin's text has any underlying feminist message because they are not presented in a positive light. Ann says that she forgets to take the pill half the time (Brite, *Lost Souls* 106), which is a rather irresponsible behaviour and she ends up getting pregnant by a male she does not know. Zillah is terribly irresponsible since he impregnates at least two women in his life even if he knows that unsafe sex with a vampire always leads

to pregnancy and women being killed by their embryos.

Moreover, the two abortions that are described in the book end up with both the mothers and babies dying and Ann, who wanted to give birth to her child, is actually forced into having an abortion. I think that contraception, a right women have been demanding for decades and which is still a controversial topic nowadays, should have been addressed in a completely different way if Martin wanted to promote a feminist message, with women being able to make their own decisions and surviving.

Pregnancy, usually seen as a positive and nurturing aspect of womanhood, is equally transformed into something negative in Martin's fantastic universe by all mothers of vampires suffering a gory end when they are eaten by their newborn babies on their way out of their womb. There are no caring or loving mother figures in the book. Both Jessy and Ann have been raised by their fathers alone and Nothing's parents seem to be too busy enjoying their social meetings and luxury high middle-class life to really care about him, talk with him about his feelings, etc. which makes this teenager feel he is alone in the world and he does not belong where he lives.

Ahmad also tries to sustain her statement that Martin can be considered a feminist because he presents his mischievous male characters as inherently evil as a consequence of their gender (442). This theory is difficult to prove, however, since there are plenty of good-hearted male characters in the novel: although men repeatedly break the law and hurt other people in different

ways in the course of the book, they learn from their actions and they are treated as mistakes made only as a consequence of immaturity. Thus, male characters who are still alive by the end of the novel seem to have become better persons. Steve and Ghost, for example, stop robbing and getting in trouble and want to focus on their music career, while Nothing has become the fair leader of his little group of vampires, and is the lead singer of their rock band (358). Therefore, Ahmad's statement of males in Martin's fiction being inherently evil because of their gender is difficult to be sustained.

Furthermore, it is difficult to ignore the fact that there are many male characters in Martin's universe while it almost completely lacks female ones, a comparison that Holmes uses to prove that texts by this writer are, in fact, misogynistic (184). Not only because of its lack of females, but because of the way the few women which appear in this novel are cruelly treated and then disposed of, and Martin's non-critical approach to these dreadful actions, it can be generally stated that Holmes is right to assert that *Lost Souls* is a book which contains a chauvinist discourse (184). No scholars have analysed Ann, the female character with the most presence in the book. However, and although she almost always acts moved by an imperative urge to please and satisfy men around her, she could be considered interesting—or at least complex—from a feminist point of view. On the one hand, she is a positive model of a modern and brave 20th century heroine because she tries to remain economically independent and behaves in rebellious ways by making her own choices on

matters such as clothing and sexual partners. On the other hand, Ann also presents some inconsistency in her behaviour which may just be a representation of the double standards and contradictions about sexuality and morality, stereotypes about femininity and problems in general that women still had to confront in the 1990s in the United States of America—and in most Western countries—which I have listed in the chapter concerning the historical background (see section 2.2.4).

4.6 Final Remarks

One of the most notorious features of *Lost Souls* is that women are almost absent from the book and the action is exclusively lead by men. There is one secondary female character, Ann, and some other women who have very little significance for the plot and, on some occasions readers do not even learn their names. These characters are accessory for male plots and are, subsequently flat, as readers learn only few details about their personalities, lives or physical appearance.

Although Ann is in the beginning portrayed as an independent woman with dreams and goals in life, and a certain economic independence, and who could be even considered to be a reflection of certain forms in which women were struggling against gender inequality or had empowered them during the 1990s. However, soon after the book starts, she becomes as dull as other more secondary female characters as all her actions are triggered for the love and

lusts she feels towards different male characters throughout the novel thus, embodying misogynistic clichés and female dependence.

Violence against women is present in many forms all throughout the book and treated as a natural and unavoidable part of female life. The tone used to describe all these acts is not condemnatory and certain kinds of physical violence such as rape or physical punishment are, on the contrary, described as sexy and pleasurable. Men are rarely treated in these ways and, on the contrary, create strong live and friendship bonds among them while females are isolated and lack female company of any kind.

The book contains an underlying misogynistic message which is difficult to understand as a criticism to patriarchy not only because of its sensual tone, but also because, while all female characters die because of men, most males reach a happy ending and never seem to regret the pain inflicted to women around them or suffer any kind of punishment or bad consequences derived from them.

5 *Southern Vampire Mysteries*

The *Southern Vampire Mysteries* by Charlaine Harris, also known as *The Sookie Stackhouse Novels* and *The True Blood Novels*, is one of the most famous vampire sagas nowadays. Part of this fame is due to a television series, also entitled *True Blood*, which was broadcast on HBO between 2008 and 2014, and which was inspired by the characters and some of the main plots in these novels. Due to its popularity, several interesting articles and academic papers have been written about the philosophical and social messages underlying both the thirteen books and the television show, and more specifically about their female protagonist: Sookie Stackhouse.

All the volumes of this series contain a big amount of different female characters which are, in some cases, significant for the storyline of that specific book, or even for the whole saga. These female characters belong to different races and ethnic groups, as well as social backgrounds and classes. Although the fictitious town of Bon Temps and other smaller settlements around it—where most of the action from these books take place—present a rural picture of the United States, this author has, interestingly enough, decided to portray a society which is even more equal than reality.

I have decided to mention some of the females who appear on many occasions and whose plots are the most relevant as examples to illustrate certain ideas that relate to feminism. However, I will mainly focus on Sookie because

she is the character around whom the main plot revolves and who is the one that sees the most development.

Sookie is the main protagonist as well as the narrator. And she is also a very special character in many ways. To begin with, she has the ability to read people's minds, and even if she works full-time shifts at a bar, she often accepts assignments as a telepath and is paid large amounts of money for this job. Furthermore, she is still young—25 years old in the first book and 28 in the last one—but already considerably older than other heroines I have previously analysed in this dissertation. Moreover, Sookie is, in general, more independent than them.

5.1 Women in the Workforce

When Sookie describes herself in the first pages of *Dead Until Dark* and she talks about her ability to read people's minds, she calls it a "disability" (2). It is clear that, although Sookie's telepathy does not fit within the current definitions of "disability" (Miller 4), compared to other people, she considers herself to be disadvantaged. Until that moment, this special power has only brought problems to her. In Miller's opinion, it has affected every important aspect of Sookie's life, since it has prevented her from accessing high education and has limited her career choices and her love life (11). Effectively, in *Dead Until Dark* Sookie explains that she was not able to concentrate and had problems with other teenagers in school (58) and she decided not to go to university since

concentrating for exams was too difficult (28). She also has to deal with information and images she does not want to know about (*Dead Until Dark* 67; *Living Dead in Dallas* 55).

At the beginning of the first book, Sookie's main source of income is her job as a waitress at a bar and grill called *Merlotte's* that she has had for some years, which she admits is a "low-paying job" (*Living Dead in Dallas* 83). Her boss, Sam, trusts her both with financial issues and with choosing the new staff.

However, not long after Sookie meets Bill, he introduces her to other vampires from whom she starts receiving offers and demands to read minds. She gradually stops referring to her special skill as a "disability" and starts calling it a "gift" more often (*Dead Until Dark* 59, 217) and, apart from becoming more confident about this aspect of her life, she also improves her abilities to negotiate (Miller 12). Although doing business with supernatural beings often involves violence, Sookie receives big amounts of money and special treatment and protection in exchange. Little by little, she learns to bargain and achieve bigger sums for her work, and sometimes she makes those who demand her services promise that blood will not be shed because of the information she reveals to them (*Living Dead in Dallas* 83).

5.1.1 Contradictions regarding Work and Class Issues

Craton and Jonell note how Sookie deals with class issues related to work as she sometimes thinks people will not respect her because she is just a waitress (119) and highlight the mixed feelings she has towards her two professions. The protagonist is not sure if she should change her lifestyle and become a full-time telepath because, although working as a mind reader is very profitable and makes her feel as a proper professional (119), it means being involved with evil people or being exposed to violence—or both—most of the time, which clashes with her moral values (120).

Culver goes one step further when she notes that, even in a position of power, when confronted with supernatural beings, Sookie is always at a disadvantage because she is weaker. This fact translates into her having to act in ways she finds unfair or humiliating (27; Craton and Jonell 117) in her working environment. Even if she often has to fake a smile while working at the bar because she needs the money from the tips (Culver 28), when she thinks about the bloody implications that the mind-reading occupation entails, she seems to find her waitress job less mundane and quite nurturing (Craton and Jonell 120).

In his essay “Sookie, Sigmund, and the Edible Complex,” Hirschbein notes that the protagonist seems to be unable to make a decision about her career path because she sometimes tells people she is just a waitress but, on other occasions, she introduces herself as a telepath (123). Other authors see an evolution of this character and the way she accepts her supernatural side, noting

that—like I have also highlighted before—she calls it a “disability” in the beginning (Nakagawa) but then she thinks of it as a “gift” (Lindgren and Isaksson 28; Craton and Jonell 110). Sookie’s internal struggle about her career reflects the difficulties real-life women had to face in the first decade of the current century when choosing between working in a competitive area or having a care-oriented job (Craton and Jonell 120).

Sookie’s mixed feelings are clearly shown in her inability to decide whether she should make a full-time job out of her telepathic powers and become a more competitive and cold professional or stay out of dealings with vampires and other aggressive beings. However, by the end of the last book Sookie seems to have made a firm decision not to be dragged into vampire trouble. Although her job as a waitress will never allow her to reach a much better social position—even when she becomes the co-owner of *Merlotte’s*, her duties remain the same—or procure her big profit, it is relatively easy and not dangerous, which is more suitable for the peaceful family life she seems to be longing for when she decides to start dating Sam who is, in Chaplin’s opinions, the best—and one of the very few—example of a human “successful entrepreneur” (“Nothing is Real” 69).

In contrast with Sookie, who feels guilty because her most profitable profession involves having to behave in immoral ways, male vampires are not troubled by mixed feelings. For example, Eric and Bill handle their power better than most female characters (Craton and Jonell 118) and the latter is a

specifically good example of righteousness and self-control even if he is a vampire (Nakagawa). Moreover, even if as time goes by she seems to be getting more comfortable in a position of power, Sookie will never be as influential in business as the vampires she deals with. This is shown by the fact that they are the ones who decide her working conditions, which she has to accept even if they are not ideal most of the time (Craton and Jonell 117), and she sometimes has to put up with degrading treatments from influential vampires to remain on good terms with them (Culver 27). Moreover, when she is surrounded by rich elegant vampires, she often feels that part of her job is to pretend to be as wealthy as them, even if she is not (Chaplin - "Nothing is real" 68).

I agree with Hirschbein that Sookie's ambiguous relationship to her two professions is a representation of how class, still in this century, presents problems, and that this can be supported through the feeling of inferiority she sometimes feels in front of people from richer backgrounds (119) and through the necessity to be nice to people who do not respect her at the bar (Culver 28). It is also easy to see that, like Craton and Jonell highlight, when she works as a telepath she feels, in contrast, as an important expert (119) and I agree that exploring this aspect of her life and using it for her benefit improves her self-esteem (Lindgren and Isaksson 28; Craton and Jonell 110).

In my opinion, when Sookie decides to start a relationship with Sam, she is making not only a decision having to do with her romantic life but also with her work. Even if she has some special abilities, when Sookie is among

supernatural beings she is always at a disadvantage (Culver 27; Craton and Jonell 117). By having compared these two careers she has started to think of her job at the bar as more interesting and sees it as care-oriented (Craton and Jonell 120). It, therefore, becomes clear that Sookie's indecision in matters having to do with her job is a reflection of how women at the time when this saga was written still had difficulties to decide whether to occupy themselves in competitive and aggressive areas or in others which have traditionally been considered feminine (Craton and Jonell 120).

Culver is right when she highlights that these features do not make her as strong as supernatural beings around her and she is repeatedly forced to do and say things she does not wish to (27). Chaplin is equally right to note that Sookie has to hide her social class in some of these cases ("Nothing is real" 68). However, readers can clearly see how Sookie gradually improves her abilities to bargain with vampires and other magical beings and how she becomes wiser and obtains wider knowledge of other societies and worlds unknown to most regular humans. However, unlike other female characters who become more powerful by the end of the series—such as Amelia, who learns and masters white magic, or Pam, who occupies an important position within vampire politics—Sookie does not acquire better fighting skills or is any stronger, and she is always badly hurt when she accepts to work for non-humans. Because of this fact, I would state that her decision to become a full-time waitress may not be a completely free choice since having developed into a better-trained

character or having achieved better connections and status she may have been able to work as a mind-reader without constantly risking her life.

I think that Sookie, on the contrary, represents some of the difficulties working women still had to face at the beginning of the present century and the widespread stereotypes about females in the workforce which had not disappeared yet. On the one hand, I think that when she feels ashamed of not being educated or considers her job unimportant, she is unconsciously comparing herself to the many educated women who access university and college in the United States nowadays. Harris may have chosen to use Sookie, the interesting protagonist of her books to whom many women may relate, to show that for various reasons—like the ones I have highlighted in the chapter concerning the historical background—, many women in the United States still could not access university even in the 21st century (see section 2.3.1).

On the other hand, Sookie's low-paid job as a bartender may be a representation of how many more women than men are employed for tasks having to do with facing the public and with care-taking, up to the point that tags such as “female” and “male” are put in front of the job title to specify the worker's gender and avoid confusion.

Although no scholar I have quoted notes it, for me it is clear that Sookie's union to Sam means finally deciding on one of these two careers. She is rejecting all kinds of danger and choosing stability both in love and in her job, which is a mature choice and a good ending to a long evolution in both

areas. Also, although Sookie puts an end to her profitable businesses with vampires, she owns half of the bar later in the series which, I agree with Chaplin, is one of the very few lucrative human-owned businesses mentioned in the books (“Nothing is Real” 69). That is why, from my point of view, Harris has given the topic of career a logical ending which suits Sookie’s general evolution and sheds a positive light on the matter. Even if Sookie will remain in her bartender position, she has evolved and become better skilled and occupies, by the end of the book, a managerial position. Thus, although still in disadvantage if compared with educated women or those from richer backgrounds, she has achieved improvement by working hard.

5.1.2 Power Relationships at Work

Even if it is true that Sookie usually has trouble because of men—specially vampires—whenever they require her services as a telepath or if they need her to take part in their plans, she gradually learns to make some profit out of these situations and asks them for large amounts of money or big favours—such as immunity. In other words, when she realises she will constantly be bothered by all kinds of creatures because of her abilities or for having influential friends, Sookie decides to take advantage of it. By doing so, she challenges the Victorian stereotype that women naturally want to give love, help and care in exchange for nothing which I have mentioned in the chapter concerning the historical background (see section 1.1.1). However, as I will later explain,

having much power in her hands does not make her feel comfortable all the time.

In the beginning Sookie can be understood as a typical woman who does not deal with a great amount of problems because she has a job traditionally considered feminine. However, she feels that she is not using all her potential and, as she decides to step into a new and more profitable area, she is confronted with violence and this fact may be a reflection of the way women who decide to take up jobs traditionally occupied by men may feel as they have to show they have the same value as men and break glass ceilings.

5.1.3 Other Working Women

Chaplin argues that the fictional Southern little town of Bon Temps shows especially adverse circumstances of the working class (“Nothing is Real” 68). Effectively, most female characters in this book belong to the lowest classes of society and struggle to make ends meet. Additionally, females in high rank positions—either at their companies or in politics—are usually very secondary and not described in depth and, although they may be important for the plot, their roles and appearances are brief. Because of this and because many of them are killed not long after being mentioned for the first time, it may be difficult for readers to identify themselves with these characters.

However, some of them have interesting evolutions. For example Tara—Sookie’s best friend from high school—is a woman from a very humble and

broken home who makes risky and harmful choices in life in the earlier books, but evolves throughout the saga to become a successful businesswoman and a good mother. Amelia, another good friend of Sookie's, is presented as a talented but untrained and clumsy witch in her first appearances but ends up being totally in control of her skills and considerable power, which she uses in creative as well as effective ways.

In the *Southern Vampire Mysteries*, most women work outside their homes and remain economically independent. A few of them occupy positions of power and some earn higher salaries or hold better positions than their male partners. For instance, Tara gets much more income from the clothing shop she runs than her husband, who works as a road builder and has to take up a second job as a stripper in order to make some extra money. Pam, a female vampire, obtains the title of "sheriff" of her area by the end of the last book and Kenya, a black female police officer is also a recurring secondary character.

Although it could be argued that Sookie's decision to exclusively employ herself in her more nurturing profession of bartender as a result of not wanting to be involved in violence is somewhat conservative, the other successful women in positions of power that I have mentioned—such as Pam the vampire, Amelia the witch or Kenya the police officer—are good examples of the opposite. These strong-willed females reflect how women were, at the time these novels were written, starting to occupy positions in areas which had traditionally been considered masculine, and even outnumbering their male

counterparts in some of them (see section 2.3.1).

5.2 Feminism

5.2.1 Feminist Discourse

The *Southern Vampire Mysteries* introduce a big difference compared to other books previously analysed in this dissertation: the protagonist represents gender issues not only through the experiences she undergoes, but also directly with her words and opinions. Although Sookie does never literally refer to herself as a “feminist”, she is often concerned with matters such as gender inequality or women’s economical independence or education.

Miller argues that in *Dead Until Dark* Sookie is presented as an image of “female freedom” and “gender equality” (3). Similarly, Craton and Jonell state that she embodies many feminist ideals (109) and that she is “truly a woman of her times” (110). In *Living Dead in Dallas*, Sookie becomes angry when Bill pays for her shopping and tries to draw a clear line between being his girlfriend and him having to maintain her (27). The fact that she does not want her partners to pay for her things or their economic help because she is afraid of becoming a “kept woman” is pointed out as a true display of feminist values (Craton and Jonell 116; Culver 25).

However, Sookie shows certain conflicting feelings towards receiving help from men she has romantic relationships with. For example, she often

complains about not having enough money to pay her bills and, in *Club Dead*, she resents Bill—who is a wealthy vampire—for helping some relatives he finds in the town instead of her (246). Sookie feels Bill is being unfair to her because she has trouble paying her bills every month and keeping her old house on her own without his help, which some scholars state contradicts her previously highlighted feminist values (Craton and Jonell 116; Nakagawa).

In Culver's opinion, Sookie is non-judgemental both about the species of beings around her and about their ulterior motives (29) and she builds strong relationships of love and friendship with vampires, shifters and humans at work and in other places (Lindgren and Isaksson 31) which, Mutch points out, is a sign of her ability to support groups suffering discrimination ("Coming Out of the Coffin" 84). To justify the same ideas Craton and Jonell mention that Sookie believes in equal rights for everyone (110) and that in her daily life she always makes an effort to actually treat people that way (121).

According to Craton and Jonell, she can be called a "feminist" (109). To prove this statement, they point out that on different occasions she openly verbalises her disagreement when women are not being treated fairly (110) and that she worries about sexual minority groups (111). These scholars exemplify Sookie's feelings with a passage in *From Dead to Worse*: Sookie asks Alcide,—a werewolf who has recently become the master of his pack—about the uncertain future of the children of the previous leader. He answers that they are being supported by the whole community and that the son will be sent to

college when he is older. Sookie is surprised to learn that only the education of the male descendant will be sponsored and protests (330).

However, Craton and Jonell also highlight that although Sookie strongly disagrees in situations in which women are being discriminated, she often rethinks the reasons why they are being treated in such manner and comes up with a reason to justify it or is convinced by the explanations given by others (119). They illustrate this remark with the way Sookie, after being given a promise that the girl, although a bastard—unlike the son—will be educated too if the money allows it, gives the whole matter a second thought and seems quite satisfied with the answer (119).

Like Craton and Jonell show, Sookie's opinion is contradictory and volatile regarding economic issues (116), her choice of career (117) and prejudices about sexuality (115). I believe that Sookie's ambiguous attitude towards women's rights is a good reflection of how many feminists, and society in general, may have felt at that time about these questions. Her behaviour also highlights that there was a broad mosaic of opinions and ways of thinking all grouped under the label of "feminism" (121, Fitch 609) and its many different approaches, which have to do with other realities such as race and class (119). I would add that her mixed feelings about women themselves and their different behaviours are a consequence of this reality as well as the social pressures women still had to face and which were in many cases incongruous.

I agree with Fitch that feminism in the United States was indeed a complex subject (609) which could be looked at from many different perspectives (Craton and Jonell 121). It has to do with other variables such as the ones I have repeatedly mentioned throughout this chapter and which Sookie often deals with—race, class and sexual orientation (Craton and Jonell 119)—and actions to be taken aiming at equality between the sexes did not always succeed because they did not have the interaction among these factors into account.

I admit that the protagonist of the *Southern Vampire Mysteries* is more independent and thoughtful, as well as less of a fragile damsel in distress, than women who appear in the previous books I have analysed. It is also true that at certain points she criticises the way women are being unfairly treated and that she is generally open-minded and tolerant about differences of all types, which gives readers the impression that the whole saga sends a positive message concerning different social issues, including feminism.

However, I think that it is contradictory that Craton and Jonell, who repeatedly emphasise Sookie's inability to take a position regarding most issues having to do with gender, call her a "woman of her time"(110) and state she is a feminist (109). In my opinion, she is one step behind feminism since she seems to effectively worry when women she knows suffer unfair situations (110) and when minorities are being discriminated (111), but, like Craton and Jonell also point out, when she poses questions against misogyny, she is always easily convinced—by males—not to speak out for the victims with arguments which

are not always very convincing (119).

Although the example of a pack of werewolves saving up to support financially the education of one of their male members but not his sister that these scholars use to justify their opinion is quite interesting (119), there are many others in the books which no critics have paid attention to and that I think are worth mentioning. For instance, there is another remarkably misogynistic passage in *Dead as a Doornail* which makes Sookie feel uneasy: a ritual for werewolves to choose a new master. She has to witness it because she is asked to use her telepathic abilities to ensure contestants are not cheating. During this ceremony two males compete in a duel to the death and the winner becomes the leader of the pack and shows his commitment to ensuring the perpetuation of their genes by mating with a teenage girl—that his wife brings to him—in front of everyone. Sookie is horrified by these barbaric actions, but she does not openly complain and stays in the room where it is happening until the very end. However, when she is told that the teenager volunteered and that this barbaric act is an important tradition for the werewolves, she manages to remain composed (281).

This very graphic part of the book not only promotes violence as a manly attribute to be desired in a leader, but also reinforces the vision that women can be treated and used as objects of desire, and the questionable idea that very young women are more valuable than older ones because they may be more fertile, while men never lose their capacity to produce offspring. This is

an idea that I have mentioned in the historical background section concerning the second decade of the 21st century (see section 2.4.1.1) but that equally applies here. Furthermore, instead of raising her voice against a situation she finds degrading for women, Sookie ends up turning to her reactionary values in order to convince herself that this part of the ritual is morally acceptable.

It would have been less ambiguous and would have made Sookie's discourse about these topics more conclusive if Harris had presented a main heroine who is stronger and actively gets involved in pursuing gender equality. If this character had been less focused on pursuing a life-lasting love and addressing her efforts and special abilities towards, for example, granting herself economical safety, she would have been a much stronger embodiment of feminist ideals. However, her duality may represent the reality that many women at the time experienced, as feminist ideals were widespread and relatively well-known, but it was not easy to embrace them and completely forget about all the old stereotypes about females that had been operating in society during the previous century.

5.2.2 Traditional Values and Contradictions

Sookie has her own moral values. She tries to act according to them and often feels remorse when she does not. One of the pillars on which she supports her beliefs is Christianity. This character not only believes in God, but often goes to church (*Dead to the World* 225; *From Dead to Worse* 38; *Dead in the Family*

38) and puts her own ideas and feelings in question by contrasting them with the Bible and the customs she follows because of her faith (*Club Dead* 113).

The conventional education Sookie received at home is very present in her daily life too as she often tries to guess what her grandmother would have done or thought in a given situation (*Definitely Dead* 49). Her own experiences and opinions have also marked the way she relates to people and makes decisions in life although she knows that in some cases her personal perceptions clash against typical Christian values (*From Dead to Worse* 296).

In an article for the online version of the American feminist magazine *Bitch*, Kacelnik analyses Sookie as an icon. In her opinion, the protagonist of the *Southern Vampire Mysteries* is an especially interesting character due to the fact that she is a Christian but that this does not make her less of a “down to earth”, “practical” and “intelligent” woman. However, I think that in many cases, her values concerning different aspects of her life could be labelled as “reactionary” and sometimes they clash with the feminist agenda. For example, Sookie sometimes feels remorse after having sexual relationships if they are not framed in a context of a committed and stable love story. I will, however, analyse this idea in depth in the section of this chapter concerning sexuality.

In her opinions and judgements about others, Sookie is not exempt of inconsistency either. On the one hand, she has both gay and bisexual friends whom she naturally accepts and never disregards for their sexual orientation. Also, in *Deadlocked*, she goes to a strip-club with some female friends to enjoy

their “Ladies Only night” and, although she admits that this type of entertainment is frivolous (23), she also thinks there is nothing wrong about enjoying it (21). Even when she learns that her grandmother had an adventure with a fairy for years, from which both her children were born, she tries to understand her point of view more than just criticise her acts (*From Dead to Worse* 72).

On the other hand, some of Sookie’s straight friends and acquaintances—such as Sam, Alcide, Arlene and other waitresses who temporarily work at her bar—repeatedly change partners and, even if sometimes she strongly disagrees with their choices for companions, she does not think of her male friends as “loose” while she often makes derogatory—or, at least, judgemental—comments about females who have had multiple husbands (*Dead Until Dark* 98; *Living Dead in Dallas* 240) or partners (*Deadlocked* 18). She has similar thoughts—but, again, exclusively about women—when they, for example, wear revealing clothes (*Living Dead in Dallas* 20-21).

Sookie does not always use the same moral standards to evaluate men and women: while she almost never makes moral judgements about the way men look, she often criticises women when they wear revealing clothes or make-up she considers excessive. Her ideals of beauty can also be considered traditional (Miller 14), as on the first page of *Dead Until Dark* she states that she considers herself beautiful due to her youth, slimness, blue eyes, big breasts, long legs and blond hair. These features are the ones which, as I have

explained in the chapter concerning the historical background, prevailed in the media in the first decade of the current century (see section 2.3.4).

Moreover, the number of either sporadic affairs or serious partners or husbands women around her may have had is, in Sookie's view, directly related to their personal worth—an old-fashioned way of thinking that, as I have explained before, she applies to herself too. Although no critics stress this point, I consider that Sookie's frivolous thoughts are a reflection of stereotypes about beauty and ageing, which women had to stand but men suffered to a lesser degree, and about purity, which was not highly valued in men.

Even if Sookie is probably closer to being a heroine and a woman of the 21st century—independent, open-minded, etc.—than other women previously analysed in this dissertation, the way this character sometimes behaves is still very influenced both by old gender roles and expectations, as well as by Christian religion. Foy highlights how Harris' saga reflects contemporary problems and tensions which still arise in American society because of the differences between minorities—or those who often suffer discrimination, such as women—and those in power (53). Harris may have chosen to highlight Sookie's strong mixed-feelings in gender issues regarding many aspects of life—the workforce, traditional roles, sexuality, fashion, etc.—because, as I have highlighted in the chapter concerning the historical background, in all these matters women were, on the one hand, enjoying more freedom and rights but, on the other hand, facing—still—prejudices having to

do with their gender and old stereotypes (see sections 2.3.1, 2.3.2 and 2.3.4).

5.2.3 Relationships between Women

Sookie often compares herself to other women and feels jealous because they have a better economical situation or because she considers she is less attractive or intelligent than they are (Craton and Jonell 112). Other females seem to have the same feelings towards her too. Her relationship with Debbie Pelt, Alcide's ex-girlfriend, is a good example to illustrate the twisted nature of these prejudices. In *Club Dead* Sookie and Alcide pretend to have a relationship and, from then on, Debbie decides to cause as much pain as she can to Sookie.

In an article about female characters in fiction posted on her blog, science fiction writer Vega states that women who appear in contemporary novels should be friendly and helpful to each other in order to start presenting different alternative feminist models which may be more positive while Craton and Jonell argue that in order to create an "ideal feminist world" Sookie and women around her should behave this way (111) while in fact she is often in open opposition to other women and, in some cases, even kills them (111)—although always in regular battles or in self-defence. Ironically, the reason for her female-female quarrels is always a man, another chauvinistic cliché still present in modern fantasy (Vega).

The fact that Sookie has many more male than female close friends is a characteristic feature of her personality which can also be related to gender

issues. A person she has always trusted is Sam. Early in the saga she meets Bill, Eric and Alcide and she almost instantly likes all of them even when the vampires often tell her that they are evil and unpredictable and not trustworthy (*Dead Until Dark* 14; *Living Dead in Dallas* 239). On the contrary, when Sookie is first introduced to a woman, she rapidly judges her clothing and make-up and she bases her first impression about them on these very superficial aspects of their appearance as well as on gossip about their personal life—for instance past love relationships—she may have heard or picked from their brains unintentionally because of her telepathic skills (*Living Dead in Dallas* 242).

It is true that Sookie also has a few female friends, such as Arlene, Tara, Pam or Amelia and the relationships with all these people, no matter their gender, are complicated and not exempt from betrayals and misunderstandings. However, when women hurt or betray Sookie, she does not easily forgive them and it takes her a long time to restore a normal relationship with them while she, on the contrary, tends to forgive males faster and readers often find that she is talking to or meeting them—like nothing had happened—not long after she has decided to never speak to them again.

For example, in the last page of *Club Dead*, Sookie turns down Bill's and Eric's invitations and forces them to leave her house (274) but, already on the second page of *Dead to the World*—the following book—, she allows Bill to visit her in her home again only one week after she had decided to put an end

to their friendship.

There is another example of how easily Sookie forgives men even when they are extremely unfair to her in *From Dead to Worse*. After Crystal has been discovered being unfaithful to Sookie's brother Jason, she must be, according to were-panther laws, physically punished in public by her husband. Jason not only tricks Sookie—and the man who stood for Crystal at the ceremony—into being the witness of her infidelity, but also leaves the application of a physical punishment—which the other witness will endure in Crystal's place because she is pregnant—in his sister's hands. As a result, Sookie has to break the man's fingers as part of a were-panther ceremony, which is a very traumatic experience (303) because of the violence of the act itself and because this man and she are good friends. The whole situation torments Sookie for days (305) and she repeatedly expresses how much she resents her brother for having put her on that position (296, 304) although she eventually forgives him, and by the end of the saga they have a close relationship.

Even if Sookie is constantly in danger all through the series, none of her male friends are the direct perpetrators of any physical harm to her while Arlene, her best friend in the first books, turns her back to her and goes from loving her to hating her fast and so deeply that she ends up plotting to murder her. Similarly, by the end of *Dead to the World*, Debbie hides in Sookie's house and tries to shoot her but fails and Sookie is forced to kill her in self-defense by

firing her brother's gun at her.

Lindgren and Isaksson are right when they point out that Sookie meets a wide variety of both males and females and becomes good friends with a few of them along the saga (31). Although this fact may give readers the impression that she does not treat people differently because of their sex, Craton and Jonell affirm that, even if Sookie is sometimes transgressive and quite tolerant towards everybody, Harris' universe is still far from being properly feminist (111) since it, for instance, repeats patterns of rivalry between women that often appear in fantasy and science fiction (Vega).

Sookie feels envy towards them while she seems to have more positive feelings for males she does not know, and is eager to befriend them even when they are clearly dangerous or violent, like vampires. Although Sookie has a big amount of both male and female friends, the former also outnumber the latter, and they are also of more importance to the main plots since the protagonist is closer to them—most of them are her suitors, lovers or former lovers and, therefore, she spends more time in their company. Problems arise at some point in her relationships with people from both genders when she is pushed into saying and doing things which directly clash with her highest moral values, like in the extreme case of Jason's manoeuvre with his unfaithful wife which I have referred to before, but she does more easily forgive men.

5.2.4 Independence

Crossen points out how modern vampire literature is centred on male characters who are, in general, sexually active and potent (251; Lindgren and Isaksson 150). Some, like Zillah in *Lost Souls*, are portrayed as very masculine (Crossen 251) and willing to force others to have intercourse, but others, such as Bill, are presented as “romantic” and struggling “to be good” (Nelson 231). The latter, still, tend to control their partners’ lives and sexuality, usually arguing that they want to protect them (Crossen 255) and are able to do so because they are rich and have lived for centuries while their female companions have not (Lindgren and Isaksson 32-34).

Sookie lives alone after her grandmother dies in chapter 5 of the first book (*Dead Until Dark* 127). Although her house is big and old and she struggles to maintain it, she is happy and proud to do so. Partners, friends and relatives go to her home often and some of them stay for some time, but Sookie never thinks of sharing her place for the long term or moving with any of her lovers. She admits she feels lonely at points (*Dead as a Doornail* 103), but she keeps a balanced social life and rapidly learns how to enjoy solitude: she often watches TV, listens to her MP3 player, reads, surfs the Internet, has coffee on her porch or sunbathes in her garden.

Once she starts socialising with vampires, Sookie often gets involved in conversations having to do with her free will and independence. Already in *Dead Until Dark*, at the beginning of her relationship with Bill, she tries to

make him understand that she does not need constant help to perform every movement or action in her daily life (214) and admits she feels uneasy every time he claims that she is “his” (216). However, when she feels the tension between the two of them is rising, she apologises for her behaviour (214) or decides not to say a word about Bill’s possessiveness (216).

In *Living Dead in Dallas*, Sookie has a heated argument with Bill because she does not want him to pay for her shopping and/or let others know that he does so (27). She uses the exact expression “kept woman” to express the way she feels about this matter. In *Club Dead* she confesses to Eric that she is jealous that Bill is financially helping some distant relatives while she has a lot of economic problems although right at the end of her explanation she admits that even if she was offered some of his money she would not accept it because that would make her “a kept woman” or—in harder terms—“his whore” (246). Sookie’s contradictory feelings about whether to be maintained by men around her or not, do not end here since Eric pays for repairs to be done on her porch after this conversation and she is happy about it and wishes “the man who had been so thoughtful had been Bill” (260).

Sookie does not want to become a vampire because she loves sunlight and getting tanned, and she wants to become a mother one day and experience ageing. Whenever Bill or Eric bring up the subject, she expresses her opinion clearly. Not wanting to be turned into a vampire is, in a way, a rebellious act: being Bill’s or Eric’s girlfriend makes her annoyed on many occasions because

they both consider her unable to take care of herself and want to impose all kinds of rules to her. Letting a vampire transform her would also mean becoming their child and losing her freedom.

However, Sookie's free will and opinions are not always respected. For instance, Bill tries to convince her that dating is not a good idea because he fears social reactions towards their relationship may be harmful for her (Lindgren and Isaksson 38). Even if Eric may seem different from Bill, he shows some similar behavioural patterns since the beginning as he wants to control Sookie's actions and he is protective in old-fashioned ways (Culver 25). For instance, the protagonist often receives expensive presents—clothes, repairs made in her house, etc.—from him. Like her previous partner, he also lies to her and makes decisions that concern her without asking for her opinion. Already in the second book of the saga, Eric lies to Sookie and forces her to drink some of his blood by pretending he will die otherwise (*Living Dead in Dallas* 203) in order to create a magical link between them.

Two facts which clearly illustrate Eric's controlling behaviour may be, on the one hand that in *Dead and Gone* he manipulates Sookie into marrying him—by handing him a dagger which symbolises their union in front of powerful vampires—without her knowing what she is doing (41) and, on the other, that in *Dead Ever After*—during their last conversation as a couple—Sookie learns that he is considering transforming her into a vampire without her consent (122) even after he has agreed to marrying a vampire queen (123).

Lindgren and Isaksson highlight that, even if Sookie would arguably become stronger if turned into a vampire, she repeatedly expresses her objection to becoming one (197) and, as many scholars have emphasised, clear consent should be always given by the human both to be bitten and have their blood drunk (Yuen 245; Preston 272), or to be fully transformed in a night creature (Robichaud 8) even if the vampire—in this case Eric—, might think he is improving the person’s condition or life (Robichaud 15). If Eric had finally transformed Sookie, her free will and her right to choose would have been nullified as she would have not only unwillingly become a type of creature she does not want to be, but would have also had to live under her creator’s commands forever. Another problematic man in Sookie’s life is her brother Jason. He—who is, according to Miller, self-absorbed and selfish (11)—takes advantage of her often and she gets little or no help at all from him. Lindgren and Isaksson use the term “erratic” to describe his efforts to protect her (31) and Culver also points out how Eric expresses his concern about Jason not being a good brother, which this scholar considers an old-fashioned thought (25).

In their effort to “watch over her”, Sookie’s suitors, partners and family members are, in Lindgren and Isaksson’s words, not only draining her “of [...] blood but [...] of choices outside of the relationship” (165). The aforementioned examples show that men around Sookie often seem to feel they are entitled to act and choose for her (Kacelnik) because they know better. Although she often becomes angry when vampires treat her as a simple

possession (Blayde and Dunn 43-44), Sookie puts an end to her relationships with abusive men—although just temporarily—or says no to their demands only in extreme cases—for example when she discovers that she has secretly been used as a tool in order to fulfil their plans or when she is physically harmed—, while in many other cases she makes decisions or uses her spare time according to the needs and wishes of men around her—not only her partners, but also her brother or men she works with. Nakagawa is right when she states that this heroine tries to keep certain boundaries with her partners (8, 12) but, as Nakagawa also notes, she is only partly successful (12).

Crossen correctly highlights that a new type of protective male hero has been created in contemporary vampire literature (255) who is in contrast with the typical over-sexualised (Lindgren and Isaksson) and masculine ones from previous decades such as Zillah (Crossen 251). Bill is accurately described by Nelson as loving, caring and trying to do the right thing always (231). However, like Crossen also comments, these new heroes' interest in taking good care of their beloved partners tends to go too far (255). As I have already pointed out in the previous section, it seems difficult for Sookie to decide whether she wants to remain totally or only partly economically independent. Furthermore, Lindgren and Isaksson believe that men Sookie chooses to go out with are too possessive and try to isolate her from her friends and family members (165). These critics decide to point out that sometimes Bill's behaviour towards Sookie (32-34) exemplifies this by, for instance, arguing that

at the beginning of their relationship he tries to convince her that dating him is not a good choice, no matter what she desires (38) so that he is, like Kacelnik points out, not allowing her to decide for herself and trying to impose his opinion on her.

In contrast, after they break up, Bill respects Sookie's refusal of his romantic approaches and accepts her decision of not going out with him again. In fact, he proves to be a good friend who helps and supports her afterwards. This shows an evolution in both characters. Bill ends up understanding that Sookie needs to make her own decisions and that he cannot be controlling with her while she accepts his friendship, but only after having realised about these changes in his behaviour and she stays firm in her decision of being only friends, even when she often feels lonely and she knows Bill still loves her.

I believe that Eric, who tricks Sookie into marrying him, is a much more controlling character. Long before Sookie and he become a couple, while she is dating Bill, he expresses his interest in her—and even touches her without her consent—although he knows that his feelings are not reciprocated. Eric, without being asked, also gives Sookie his opinion about the way she acts with Bill and with her brother Jason. The protagonist feels that these topics belong to her private life and are none of Eric's concern, and is annoyed when he interferes with them. I would also add that Eric thinking that Jason should be more protective with his sister is an old-fashioned cliché about how men should be in charge of the security and well-being of women in their families, as

Culver seems to imply (25).

In my opinion, these examples show that Eric is convinced that his choices concerning Sookie's well-being are always more intelligent than her own as well as the fact that he always puts his wishes ahead of hers. But the most extreme example of Eric's chauvinism is probably that he has secretly decided to turn her into a vampire. I agree with the many scholars who consider that consent is a key point in relationships vampires create with humans both when it comes to drinking their blood (Yuen 245; Preston 272) and when depriving them of their human lives and transforming them (Robichaud 8). Although, as Lindgren and Isaksson highlight, this change would improve Sookie's life in some aspects—she would not be feeble anymore nor grow old or die—(197) and, according to Robichaud's theories about vampires, Eric is probably truly convinced of this (15), he would be acting against her will and coercing her.

Another special characteristic that Sookie's telepathy confers to her is that it makes her immune to the hypnotic influence vampires can use to control other humans. Because of this, Nakagawa states that she is a good example of a modern female protagonist—a “hardened heroine”—and Robichaud highlights the fact that it makes her special (14) while, because of it, Miller considers her properly “independent” (11). I agree that because Sookie has special powers and is immune to some vampire magic, she is—as these scholars point out—, a new type of stronger heroine. Some other features of her personality are her

strong will, her determination and her ability to establish limits with others when she needs to (Culver 23). Furthermore, both Nakagawa and Culver seem convinced that this woman can keep certain boundaries with people whenever she needs or wants to (27). Also, following a trait of classical vampires, the blood drinkers in this saga need to be invited by the owner of a house in order to be able to enter. Sookie rapidly learns about this and Culver notes that, although the power to decide whether vampires are allowed to access her house or not is not unique to her, she uses it often both to protect herself or just to enjoy some time alone while other humans in these books seem afraid to do so, which Culver considers a sign of Sookie's strong self-determination (23).

I agree that Sookie's different psychic powers and abilities make her an interesting and active heroine, compared to others from books previously analysed in this dissertation, and also more capable and skilled than regular humans in the *Southern Vampire Mysteries*. However, Sookie is often at a disadvantage with the many supernatural beings around her when strength, physical resistance or battle skills come into play (Culver 27). For instance, in the final big battles at the end of each book, she usually needs special protection against all kinds of fantastic creatures and, on many occasions, she even has to be rescued and cured with vampire blood from her lovers or with magical remedies. However, Harris has decided not to completely portray Sookie as a traditional damsel in distress even on these occasions, as she always tries to defend herself. When she or someone she loves is in danger, she gets very

aggressive and does not hesitate to use stakes or guns to kill in self-defence even if she normally gets badly injured anyway.

Sookie often complains to vampires when she feels they treat her as one of their belongings (Blayde and Dunn 43-44). However, on some occasions she decides not to speak out when Bill states that she is “his” either because she feels this assertion may be a measure of protection or just in order not to make him angry. Some other times, specially when sex is involved, she is very acquiescent to men she does not feel attracted to and allows them to engage in highly sexual activities with her which she frequently regrets or feels ashamed of afterwards. For example, before becoming her boyfriend, Eric kisses and touches her although she never gives him her consent. Men other than her partners also take advantage of Sookie. Her brother Jason—who Lindgren and Isaksson accurately describe as unhelpful and unreliable (31)—is in fact very selfish and he also puts his personal satisfaction and profit ahead of Sookie’s well-being. Furthermore, and even if she is stronger and more resilient than regular humans, Sookie is obviously much weaker than any vampire and when she works for them, she often has to act against her will to please them (Culver 27).

Miller considers that vampires accept Sookie’s psychic powers more easily than humans because they are themselves outcasts (2). They are also better lovers, and she cannot read their minds—which is relaxing to her. However, these advantages do not make up for the fact that they all tend not to

respect her free will and usually act behind her back. Because of this reason, her deciding not to choose another vampire for a partner again and having limited her relationships with them in general can be understood as a sign of self-determination. Nevertheless, she is in my opinion too permissive with males to be considered a feminist, as she often allows partners, suitors and other men to meddle in her private affairs and to decide for her, and I believe she forbids them to do so on not enough occasions. She would demonstrate not only more independence but also greater determination and strength of character by making her boundaries clear and asking men to respect them.

5.3 Violence against Women

5.3.1 Harassment

Sookie is often involved in strange and unpleasant situations having to do with sex. Unfortunately, many women around the world have to deal with similar problems at some point in their lives. However, like Megan E. King points out in her blog article “The Rape of Sookie Stackhouse (Redux)”, Sookie seems to have this kind of problems too often to be a realistic character.

The amount of sex scenes between other people that Sookie witnesses along the saga is disproportionate. In *Dead Until Dark*, a detective who is asking Sookie questions about a crime realises the rumour about her being able to read people’s minds is true and thinks of getting her naked on purpose to see

her reaction (88). As King points out in her article, he later goes to her bar and, while she is serving him a drink, he deliberately thinks of different provocative things to get an answer from her. Since she keeps on ignoring him, he imagines Sookie having sex with her brother and this vision makes her cry (*Dead Until Dark* 117).

Apart from the thoughts and feelings she perceives from other people's minds, Sookie is often made to see sex while it is taking place. King also mentions that, in *Dead Until Dark*, she has to witness a vampire-human orgy held by two of these creatures and two people—a woman and a man—, at Bill's house when she turns up to visit him unexpectedly. In an attempt to protect Sookie, Bill expresses in a commanding voice that she literally belongs to him (*Dead Until Dark* 74, 76), but these vampires ignore him and make fun of her when she is too scared to run away. She is also forced to watch while they kiss and rub against each other—including Bill—and one of them masturbates another (75-76). Sookie states that she feels "sick" to have to watch such "private stuff" (75) and to be in danger because Bill seems unable to take any action and she confesses not being sure whether he will defend her or not (74).

In *From Dead to Worse*, Jason tricks her into going to his house when he knows Crystal is cheating on him (293). Sookie catches her sister-in-law in the act and the sight of her makes her feel very uneasy and ashamed (296). In *Deadlocked*, one of the last books of the saga, Sookie witnesses a sexy scene among a few vampires and humans at her vampire partner's house one more

time. She is not dating Bill anymore, but Eric, and she feels repulsed when she enters his home and finds some couples inside making love, dancing in a suggestive way or feeding on each other (117, 120). When she steps into Eric's bedroom she finds him drinking from a woman who is masturbating and this really hurts her feelings (121). However, and although what she wants the most is to be left alone, Eric's allies do not allow her to leave because some other vampires in the house are his enemies and they think that Eric will be considered feeble if anybody sees how affected Sookie is because of a love matter (121). She is forced to endure this situation for a long time in front of both friends and strangers. Yet another example shows how in *Dead as a Doornail* Sookie is asked to attend a werewolf contest held to choose the new leader of a pack. She is invited to assist as a telepath to read the minds of the two participants to ensure they are not breaking the rules. The winner has to mate with a young lady in front of everyone "to ensure the survival of the pack" (263). Sookie wishes the last part of this event is somehow figurative, but once the contest finishes, a nude young beautiful girl is led to the winner, who is also naked, and they have sex in front of the audience (281). Sookie feels very uneasy even if one of her cousins stands in front of her and covers her ears with her hands so she does not have to really witness it. She thinks it is terrible that the winner is having sex with this woman specially because he is a married man (263).

In *Dead Reckoning*, Alcide, whom Sookie used to think highly of, decides to woo Sookie in a very direct way (233). To do so, he enters her house without notice while she is outside, gets undressed and waits for her inside her own bed (232). Alcide chooses this precise moment to take action because Amelia has let him know that she has helped Sookie break a magic bond that linked her to Eric and because Amelia, her boyfriend and a cousin of Sookie's, who are all living under her roof at the time, have encouraged him to do it (234-235). Even if Alcide does not obtain a positive reaction from Sookie, but sarcastic comments, he insists she should go to bed with him anyway (234). Although she is very shocked and feels uneasy about the strange situation, she chooses polite—and even praising—words to reject Alcide's offer in order not to hurt him (234). However, she has to express her annoyance in more cruel words for him to finally leave her house (236).

I think that Megan E. King is right to allude to the great amount of uncomfortable sexual situations that Sookie unintentionally gets involved in and to say that the same woman having to witness and be the victim of so many of them is quite unrealistic. King points out two specific scenes contained in the first book to illustrate her ideas, but there are many others in the subsequent volumes, as I have proved by listing many examples.

However, Sookie constantly being the centre of unwanted attention from men and annoyed by them may be an exaggeration to highlight all these bad treatments of the great variety of forms of harassment that women in

general had to stand in the 2000s in real life. By choosing to make Sookie the target of this kind of attacks on so many occasions, Harris may actually be drawing attention to the fact that they can happen anytime and anywhere, either at the workplace or school, as well as in public spaces and even in people's homes.

Although in all the above-mentioned examples Sookie is either directly harassed by people she does not have a close relationship with or has to witness sex between other people, she is also directly harassed by her partners at times. For example, during one of their first dates in *Dead Until Dark* Sookie passionately kisses Bill and he groans and urges her to stop because otherwise—he says—he will “have” her either with or without her consent (112). Since she does not believe his words, he leads her hands to his penis to show his erection as proof (112). King highlights this scene as she thinks that Bill's behaviour is alarming since he is assuring Sookie that he would rape her. King calls this “forced seduction”. I agree that Bill's attitude in this scene is intimidating and alarming and that it can be labelled “forced seduction” because although readers learn that Sookie is actually willing to have sex with him, and that she is flattered to see that she is able to make a man feel sexually aroused, there is no way he can actually know this because the protagonist does not put her thoughts in words. He finally waits until Sookie is ready and they only have sex a few chapters later, when she expresses she is willing to do so. In spite of this fact and even if the scene is written to seem sexy, I think it is also tense

and, even if they do not have sex on that occasion, Bill's behaviour shows that he is not the perfect and patient gentleman he looked like.

5.3.2 Rape

Even if all these above-mentioned sex-related situations Sookie is forced to witness are very uncomfortable for her, they are closer to harassment than to rape since she is rarely or very slightly involved in them. However, she is also raped or close to being raped on some occasions.

To begin with, in *Dead Until Dark* it is implied that, as a kid, Sookie was sexually abused by her great-uncle, an old man called Bartlett who molested her for two years when she was five (178). The protagonist told her mother she was being sexually forced, but her mother thought she "was dirty minded" (178) and did not believe her. Her grandmother found out what was going on and she kept this relative away from them forever, although she had previously decided to ignore how he was also molesting her sister when she was a child (179). It is clear that both crimes were treated as a family issue and kept secret when other people around the protagonist ask her about her great-uncle's absence at her grandmother's funeral (154). Sookie tells Bill about these events in her life and he kills this relative of hers in revenge (185). When she feels relieved that her great-uncle has been punished, even if he knows what he had done to her in the past, her brother Jason scolds Sookie for being brutal to an old feeble man who had "never bothered anyone but" her (183) and for not

having been able to cope with her trauma (184). Later, Sookie is very confused because she feels reassured that Bartlett has died (183) but remorse torments her too for having told Bill about what happened and having unintentionally provoked him to murder the old man (185). Although no scholars pay attention to the fact that Sookie was abused inside her own home by an older male in her family, this must have been a critical moment for her that shaped the rest of her life. Her grandmother decided not to report to the police or tell anybody what had happened and just keep their distance with this relative, while her brother does not support her either. In other words, the first time Sookie very prematurely had to deal with unwanted sex she found support only in one member of her family who, instead of reporting the case to the police, hid it even from other relatives.

Even if I have not mentioned incest in the chapter concerning the historical background which specifically refers to the first decade of the 21st century, I have made it clear in the previous one concerning the 1990s that it was a big taboo and that, although an increasing number of victims were reporting their cases, mindsets were changing slowly (see section 2.2.1). Although already in the 21st century Sookie is finally talking about what happened to her, the crime took place in the 1980s and when, as a child, she brought up the subject to her mother and grandmother, she was accused of being a pervert by the former while the latter helped her but kept the problem a family secret. Thus, I think that here Harris may be criticising the way people

used to deal with incest: a crime which was rarely notified to authorities and which people thought of as a stigma in previous decades, but which was—like other forms of sexual violence—being reported more often at the time these novels were written (see section 2.3.2.1).

Two books later, in *Club Dead*, Sookie is raped by Bill while they are still dating. They are locked together in a car trunk after Bill has been kidnapped, tortured and deprived of blood for a long time. The whole scene is very dramatic and asphyxiating and Bill is close to killing Sookie when, trying to prevent her from shouting, he pushes his hand against her mouth and she cannot breathe (209). Much has been discussed about this eternal lust for blood that vampires experience. In his essay “The Bloody Connection Between Vampires and Humans,” Yuen points out how most modern vampires seem to be aware of their acts even when they urgently need blood and he compares them to drug addicts (233). Contradicting this idea of Yuen’s, in the beginning Bill seems not to understand Sookie when, right before he starts raping her, she advises him to drink some bottled blood that is also in the trunk. Bill’s thirst for blood is used as an excuse for raping Sookie and Lindgen and Isaksson notice that his crime is treated too indulgently due to his alleged inability to recognise her (192) but is, in fact, able to answer to her by grunting, as well as pull down her sweatpants, penetrate her, bite her and hold his hand pressed against her mouth when she starts shouting. Moreover, as soon as he drinks just a bit of her blood, he regains total consciousness (*Club Dead* 210).

Although Sookie is completely sure that Bill was unable to control himself because he had been deprived of blood, I am more of the opinion that he, like Yuen also suggests, may be comparable to a drug or alcohol addict with an urgent need for these substances who partly lose their capacities but are still rational (233, 246) or to paedophiles who, according to Arp, can live a normal life as long as they do not succumb to their sexual deviations (163), and should therefore be held responsible of his acts²⁸.

I support my opinion with the previously mentioned fact that Bill is able to react to Sookie's words and perform a series of different actions. He can even make himself be understood by grunting and nodding before he attacks her. Furthermore, once he drinks just a little bit of blood from her he regains total consciousness and speaks normally. All these indicators point out to him being partly conscious so it is difficult for me to understand why he did not fight back the impulses to hurt the woman he loves or why he does not only drink from her if he's repeatedly said to crave blood but sexual arousal or needs are not mentioned. Furthermore, and because the main storyline of the book—much less the whole saga—would also not have changed if the rape had not taken place, I also do not understand why Harris decided to include this scene.

²⁸ This can be compared with, for example, how Carmilla in Le Fanu's eponymous novella pretends to be Laura's friend and very rarely—and only briefly—shows her real nature to her. Similarly, Stoker's Count Dracula can keep his desire for blood perfectly under control if he needs to and he goes unnoticed as he walks among pedestrians in a big city like London, a fact that Buzwell highlights in his essay "*Dracula: Vampires, Perversity, and Victorian Anxieties.*"

The rape has some bad consequences for Sookie's physical and—specially—psychological well-being. For instance, Sookie does not want to admit that Bill has abused her and she does not mention the exact word “rape” until two books after (*Dead as a Doornail* 67) and, even at that point, she is not completely convinced she should use that term to describe what happened. She is understanding and accepts Bill's nature and his urgent need to drink to the extreme point of being able to hurt and sexually force her (*Dead as a Doornail* 68). She focuses on the fact that, when he fed on her blood and had sex with her against her will, he was too thirsty. She does not mention the incident to him again nor talks about it. In *Club Dead* Sookie even feels guilty about letting him know that she has suffered from what he has done to her (210). However, Sookie's feelings are not totally clear and when she goes to bed with Bill later that same night and is sexually aroused by his presence, she says she both loves and hates him (223).

After Bill abuses Sookie, she is shocked and unable to think clearly, struggling between negative feelings but also love towards her rapist (Lindgren and Isaksson 192) which I think are easy to understand given the fact that he is also her boyfriend—thus, a person she cares about and who is not supposed to mean any harm to her. Both of them avoid talking or thinking about the incident. In my opinion, Sookie seems to blame herself for some of the consequences of the rape at first when, as Lindgren and Isaksson note, she feels guilty for not being able to calm Bill down by assuring him that she is not in

pain (192).

For several reasons related to Sookie's reactions, in King's opinion, rape is not adequately addressed in Harris' books. King highlights that, instead of being condemned, Bill's crime is presented but not confronted and points out several facts as proof. Both King and Lindgren and Isaksson (192) highlight that the actual word "rape" is avoided by Sookie to refer to what Bill has done to her. I think it is important to note that although the term finally appears two books later in the saga, Sookie never actually pronounces it herself. It should also be taken into consideration that she never completely admits having been forced since, like Lindgren and Isaksson also note, every time the subject is addressed, she covers it up with excuses about Bill's vampiric nature and his supernatural thirst (192-193; Nakagawa).

King thinks that Sookie is being unfairly blamed for not reacting properly to what happened when Eric accuses her of being a coward as, because of a series of different misunderstandings and problems, by the end of *Club Dead* she has distanced herself from Bill. For this reason, Eric scolds her and accuses her of running away from her problems instead of facing them (229). Sookie excuses herself from these mistakes by explaining that this is the first love relationship she has ever had and by stating she is not brave (230). In King's opinion, not wanting to spend time with the man who has abused her is, on the contrary, a logical reaction, as well as a good protection measure.

Like King, I believe that Sookie is unfairly accused by Eric of being the sole reason of the problems in her relationship with Bill. I also agree that, with these comments, Eric is making Sookie feel remorseful for distancing herself from a man who has actually attacked her and I would go one step further and state that Eric himself is proving to be harmful with his reproofing words and by taking Bill's side and not being supportive or empathic with Sookie, who is a victim.

I agree with King's general opinions on the matter because the rape scene does not add to the plot—which would have remained similar if suppressed or if Bill had only drunk blood from Sookie but not sexually abused her—, and because rape is very often mentioned in the saga but not punished or confronted in any legal way. As time goes by, she seems to have forgotten what happened or, at least, to have forgiven Bill, but he suffers no consequences for his action, and this could give readers the impression that rape is a minor incident.

Instead of finding support among her friends and being encouraged to speak about what happened, either to other people who were not present at the moment the rape took place or to the police—which would be the appropriate next step to take in a situation like this—, Sookie is scolded for not wanting to meet and talk to her assaulter on her own, which could put her in danger. What is more, the lack of understanding and help from people around Sookie after having been raped is, sadly enough, not new to her because, as I

have explained before, she did not find much support from her family when she was molested as a child or later and they dealt with the matter in secret. In this situation, although the protagonist should ideally seek professional help from a psychologist or report the rape to the police, she remains silent. This may be due to the fact that she does not have any support: she is unable to express her feelings to the only two people who know about the rape—Bill, her boyfriend and the perpetrator towards whom she has mixed feelings of guilt and rejection, and Eric, who does not approve of the evasive behaviour she has with Bill. Harris decided to totally isolate the protagonist with her problem. This may be because the author wants to show how difficult it could be for a woman to speak out in these situations in real life.

In *Living Dead in Dallas*, the following book of the saga, Sookie is about to be raped again. Because she resists and fights the man back, he hits her and calls her names repeatedly (150-151). Since she can read his mind, Sookie knows that he wants to beat her until she is unconscious not only so that he can abuse her more easily but also because that is what he likes most (151). He becomes furious that his victim is resisting him and changes his mind about the rape and starts focusing on just hurting and killing Sookie. One of the first thoughts that crosses her mind when the man starts insinuating he is going to force her to have sex is how much she wished either Bill or Jason would be by her side to defend her (150). In the end, an ancient male vampire saves her right when she was about to lose the fight and be knocked out by a hard punch (152).

In *Dead and Gone* Sookie is tortured by a couple of evil fairies—male and female. It is a very sadistic and descriptive part of the book which lasts for a whole chapter (271-280). Although it is not clearly stated if the protagonist was raped or not, the couple is said to have sex at times in the room where they are keeping her (278) and they are also said to specially enjoy cutting pieces of the most tender parts of their victims' body and eating them (290). Sookie is finally saved by Eric and Bill, but only after she has been in the hands of these fairies for hours. Although Eric makes Sookie drink his blood regularly afterwards, her whole body is covered in cuts, scars and wounds (*Dead in the Family* 10) and her rehabilitation is slow and painful. Another hint that may imply that sexual abuse actually happened during her torture is how not only her body and mental health but also her sexual life is badly damaged as well (*Dead in the Family* 4). Sookie describes this part of her recovery as the most difficult and she says that, although she is doing her best to try to think of relationships as pleasurable and insists on having regular sex with Eric as a way to get used to it again, she is not enjoying it yet (*Dead in the Family* 4).

It is equally interesting to point out how all the other rape attempts that Sookie faces during the series seem not to have any negative effect on her psyche since they are, again, never mentioned once they have happened. This could be the reason why while her being abused by Bill is analysed and commented by many scholars, the few other scenes in which rape is just about to happen are, on the contrary, not mentioned by any of them. I consider all

these scenes equally important because their main element, a woman being forced into intercourse, is the same, no matter if the crime is finally committed or not and I think that an analysis of violent sexual actions in this saga—which is, moreover, a recurrent subject which takes up much space in it—should not leave out any scenes dealing with this topic.

5.4 Love and Sexuality

Love is, just like in the previously analysed books, a central topic in the *Southern Vampire Mysteries*. Although other matters such as other types of relationships, crime and politics occupy many lines in the books composing this saga, all of them revolve mainly around Sookie's romantic life. Sookie has four partners throughout the series, but she often has other suitors and, even when she is single, she thinks of her former boyfriends or fantasizes about other men she likes.

5.4.1 Love

In some aspects regarding her love life, Sookie could arguably be considered a simple traditional romance heroine. Many authors support this view by highlighting some of her main moral values such as her faith in God (Barkman 181) or her having marriage as a main goal in life (Nakagawa; Culver 25). While she is dating Bill, she seems to believe in unrealistic ideas such as love at first sight, destiny (Lindgren and Isaksson 23) and true love (Nakagawa).

The way Bill and Sookie frequently talk and negotiate some aspects of their relationship shows a certain degree of equality between them (Lindgren and Isaksson 32; Nakagawa). However there is, still, an obvious inequality concerning not only their age, but also their knowledge of the world and their economical status and class: Sookie is younger, inexperienced and of quite humble origins (Lindgren and Isaksson 32). The relationship between Sookie and Bill is interrupted at some points and during the time they stay together as a couple, the vampire repeatedly lies to her and, as time goes by, he is less attentive and communicative with her, a behaviour which Sookie resents (*Club Dead* 1-2). Nevertheless, Bill always comes back to her with excuses for his behaviour or with romantic gestures and she forgives him. However, when Sookie finds out that her first love's real attraction for her was only a matter of vampire political interests in *Club Dead* (183) she decides to put an end to their relationship altogether.

Even if Sookie considers herself a woman of her time, she thinks that Bill should propose to her even when weddings between vampires and humans have no legal value. Because of this, her vampire boyfriend not mentioning marriage worries her as this fact clashes with her classical romantic ideas (Culver 25). In some authors' opinion, these ideas of Sookie's denote immaturity and this is shown in her complicated relationship with marriage, which they consider ironical given the fact that the protagonist's first love story does not lead to the typically expected happy ending in fairy tales she longed

for (Lindgren and Isaksson 24; Nakagawa).

According to Lindgren and Isaksson, Sookie's attitude towards men shows, however, a clear evolution and, as time goes by, she seems to be getting a better idea of what she is looking for in a partner and, in a way, she becomes more cautious, as she does not hold unrealistic romantic expectations (28). The bonds that derive from having been with Bill and having shared her first sexual experiences with him do not stop her from ending the relationship when she finds out that he had some hidden reasons to date her. Sookie forgives him after some time but, although she misses him and he repeatedly tries to regain her love, she keeps her decision and never resumes their romantic relationship which, Lindgren and Isaksson state, is a sign of determination (29).

I coincide with these scholars that, although Sookie's expectations during the time she dates Bill are in fact a consequence of her inexperience, by the time they split she seems to have learnt from the mistakes she has made during their time as a couple. Sookie and Bill keep in contact until the end of the saga and they help each other on several occasions, but because it was difficult for her to overcome the pain of the final break-up and Bill's betrayal, Sookie decides not to forgive him one more time, like she had done many times in the past. Sookie is effectively showing she has become more mature in love matters not only because she is able to say no to a man she loves even when she does not like solitude, but also because she gradually transforms the love she feels for him into friendliness and cultivates a healthy relationship of a different

kind with him.

Not long after splitting up with Bill, Sookie starts a very brief romance with Quinn and then a more stable one with Eric, another vampire. Although she has become more prudent in the way she handles her feelings and hopes, it is clear that she is not looking for protection in a partner (Lindgren and Isaksson 29) as she had done with Bill, but for new experiences. These two relationships are risky in some aspects compared to her previous one because the men she is getting involved with are more dangerous and have more difficult personalities (Nakagawa). Another fact Lindgren and Isaksson highlight to illustrate how Sookie is not interested in being protected any more is that, although she has always felt powerfully attracted to Eric and he often expresses his interest in her and has romantic gestures with her, she decides to get romantically involved with him only in *Dead as a Doornail*, because he has lost his memory and is then vulnerable. Lindgren and Isaksson point out that she is the one who is taking care of him and, in these authors' opinion, she enjoys it (39). Furthermore, Sookie is then able to see Eric's—otherwise hidden—feelings (Culver 29) and, because he behaves like a naïve boy, she thinks that he is not going to hurt hers.

Although Sookie is in control of the situation with Eric in the beginning, when he regains his memory, he constantly shows selfish behaviours and does not take Sookie's opinion into account. Their relationship is, thus, not egalitarian and he, as I have mentioned before, goes as far as to marry her

without her consent in *Dead and Gone* (41). In Nakagawa's opinion, this "wedding" is ironic because it does not meet Sookie's romantic expectations and their union never evolves into a real and committed relationship (12). Eric marries Sookie because he thinks it is a good measure for Sookie's protection but the fact that she is not asked for consent evidences her lack of control over her own romantic life, as Craton and Jonell point out (117). Sookie is, however, very sad and disappointed when Eric breaks their marriage in *Dead Ever After*, the last book of the saga, to join a powerful female vampire through another wedding because this would benefit him better both politically and economically. In Nakagawa's opinion, this incident highlights that power and political status—not Sookie—are Eric's priorities.

Later, Sookie and Sam realise they have always been in love and decide to start a relationship. This choice, which is not risky any more, illustrates how the protagonist has become more mature. On the one hand, it is Sookie alone who decides how fast and serious this relationship is going to be (*Dead Ever After* 283). On the other, Sam and Sookie are quite similar: they are both religious and of the same age, they have maintained a strong friendship for years and have common interests in the business they co-own. Furthermore, in previous books Sookie has repeatedly expressed her wish to become a mother and while dating Bill and Eric she sadly realises that this dream will never be fulfilled if she stays with a vampire for the rest of her life (*Dead Until Dark* 181). By going out with Sam Sookie will not be turned into a vampire and she

can fulfil her recurrent dream of marriage with children.

Although Sookie is not married by the end of the saga, the fact that she is happily coupled with Sam would fit in a traditional romance or fairy tale ending supporting a traditional “existing order” (Lee 61). In interviews in different media Harris herself has often defended that Sam and Sookie starting a relationship was the only possible ending she had decided for the protagonist from the beginning (Alter, Tyley). Harris states that this character could never be turned into a vampire because that change would go against all her wishes (Tyley). The writer also points out that the closure of the series shows how Sookie has learned from past mistakes, evolved during her quest for love, and realised what kind of man is better to fulfil her main goal in life, namely that of forming a family (Tyley).

In a review of *Dead Ever After* for The Houston Press, Jef Rouner notes how, because of reasons similar to the ones given by Harris, Sookie would have never been able to live “happily ever after” next to a vampire partner. Furthermore, in this critic’s opinion, when Sookie is attracted to vampires in the first place she is not moved by real love but by the fact that they accept her although she is a telepath—while, in contrast, humans had always been cruel to her and treated her with superiority. Miller similarly suggests that both vampires and Sookie have been “othered” by people around them (2).

Both because Sookie’s two main love stories are long and committed and because when they come to an end she tries to cope with pain in a mature

way—she gives herself some time alone to put her feelings in order, meets her friends often, keeps on working dutifully, etc.—, and because both Sam and her seem to have learnt from past experiences and are willing to work on a proper adult relationship, I believe that most scholars are right to point out that she has become more mature and has a better idea of what she is looking for in a partner.

While Sookie is dating Bill, marriage is always in the back of her mind and she constantly talks about it as a main goal to be fulfilled in her life. As Culver notes, she soon gets worried because Bill does not propose to her since she thinks that, even when marriage between vampires and humans is not legal, it would be the ideal romantic gesture (25). This obsession is a clear reflection of her Christian values.

Both Lindgren and Isaksson (32) and Nakagawa agree that Sookie and Bill often communicate and reach agreements about their romantic affair during the time it lasts. These scholars think this fact indicates they have a somewhat egalitarian relationship. However, Lindgren and Isaksson also concede that Bill is always in a position of power with respect to Sookie due to his older age and his fortune (32). I would add here that Bill has had secret interests in Sookie and information about her personal life and her paranormal skills from the beginning while he was a complete stranger for her and she never doubted his good intentions.

I agree, however, that the time Sookie spends with Bill makes her become more mature and cautious in love matters (Lindgren and Isaksson 28). In fact, she no longer holds so many fantasies about being magically destined to be with her following partners (Lindgren and Isaksson 23; Nakagawa) and when she decides to start a relationship with Eric, she is the one who is in a position of power in opposition to the strong vampire, who, having lost his memory, is vulnerable (Culver 29).

However, and although Sookie's ensuing relationships with Quinn and Eric are, in fact, more dangerous (Nakagawa) and maybe exciting, I do not see this as another unquestionable sign of evolution in her ideas about love. It is true that, as Lindgren and Isaksson state, she is not trying to be protected by her new partners—since Eric has lost his memory, he is unable to look after himself and Sookie is actually the one who is the strongest at that moment (Lindgren and Isaksson 39)—and being less afraid of being hurt may, in fact, be perceived as having become more autonomous (29). However, if the main problem that working as a telepath posed to this heroine was the violence she was confronted with and her ideal future includes forming a family, I do not understand why Nakagawa points out risk, danger or difficult personalities as desirable features for her suitors to present.

I disagree with Lindgren and Isaksson, who say that after breaking up with Bill Sookie chooses a different type of man as partner (28), first of all because she does not even try to get to know Quinn before they start dating—

which makes it impossible to have rationally decided that he is a man next to whom she can have good prospects for the future—and also because Eric has much in common with Bill: both are old, powerful and rich vampires, have secrets they are not willing to share and occupy important positions in vampire politics and businesses.

I think that Eric's much older age presents another crack in Lindgren and Isaksson's theories since he was turned centuries before Bill was created, and, as I have mentioned above, these two scholars mark the difference between Sookie's and Bill's age as a power factor to her disadvantage (32) and this imbalance is undoubtedly more acute when she dates Eric. Furthermore, and even if Sookie's and Eric's differences in power are not an important factor of their relationship in the beginning because he is not aware of his power and abilities as well as being unable to hide his feelings or lie (Culver 29), he soon becomes as protective and controlling as Bill was (Culver 25).

In my opinion, both Bill and Eric are not good choices for Sookie. On the one hand, both Lindgren and Isaksson (24) and Nakagawa correctly notice how the former, of whom the protagonist had high hopes while they dated, does not match her expectations in the end. On the other hand, by tricking Sookie into marrying him without knowing what she is doing, the latter shows that he is, indeed, not a suitable partner either since her opinion is not important to him (Craton and Jonell 117). I think that Nakagawa is also right to present the facts that Eric's relationship with Sookie never becomes stable and that they seem

unable to make further plans as signs that point towards failure, as well as when this scholar remarks that Eric nullifying their union because of political and economical reasons proves that her feelings are equally not significant to him (12).

I agree with Harris that Sookie choosing Sam as a long-term partner in *Dead Ever After* shows a healthy evolution in her love path (qdt. in Tyley). She goes from dating dangerous vampires, who cannot marry or have children with her—which means that they would subsequently never make her happy in the long term (Rouner)—to a man the writer finds more suitable since he covers these needs (Harris qdt. in Tyley). This is a current close to the idea that Sookie finds vampires likeable and easy to be approached in the first place just because they accept her telepathy while humans do not (Rouner) or because she identifies herself with them because human—and therefore “normal”—members of society do often exclude her and vampires are somehow outcast too (Miller 2). This seems true if we observe that, as the saga continues and the protagonist learns about the existence of other non-human beings—like werewolves, witches and shape shifters—who do not judge her for her telepathy either, she feels related to some of them, such as her good friend Amelia, and even starts committed relationships with others such as Quinn and Sam. Her interest in blood drinkers seems to decrease when she is accepted by members of these other species. Furthermore, as time goes by she gradually distances herself from them because they have proved to be dangerous and treacherous.

By the end of the series, Sookie's social circle has widened much, but it is mainly formed by non-vampires—with the exception of Bill.

It is also true that the plot would be incongruous if the protagonist accepted to be turned into a vampire by either Bill or Eric, since she is convinced that she wants to stay human and grow old, which means that her changing her mind and forgetting her goals in life so drastically would be incomprehensible (Tyley) and even regressive.

Furthermore, Sam and Sookie start dating very soon after Eric has ended the relationship with her and it is not very realistic to think that she has had enough time to reach any conclusions about her past experiences or feelings. From my point of view, Lindgren and Isaksson's opinion that she has learnt about what she is looking for in a man (28-29) may not be completely accurate because being a truly mature person, she would have remained single for some time in order to recover from their bad break-up and to analyse her most recent past and figure her future out. I also think that Sookie having many steady relationships—which she starts one after another—in the estimated period of four years that these books cover, shows that she is not as independent as most of the scholars I have quoted repeatedly emphasise and that she does not consider herself a whole person unless she has a man next to her. Sookie's faith in God, highlighted by Barkman (181) and her fixation on marriage as the most desirable ending for all her relationships (Nakagawa; Culver 25) make her seem just like another stereotypical heroine from a romance, but I would go one

step further and highlight how her strict heterosexuality as well as her fragility and the inability to stay alone for long periods of time—which I have just mentioned—add to this perception too.

Even if I concur with most scholars and with Harris that Sam is a better choice for Sookie than her previous partners for the long term, the ending of this saga is due some criticism. Like Lee, I consider that the closure, which she finds comparable to those in fairy tales, is presented as the only possible happy ending (61)—a view that Harris herself (Alter, Tyler) has supported too. However, Sookie seems to adjust to certain existing ideas about love in the United States which I have mentioned in the chapter concerning the historical background, such as wanting to be married and have started a family in her late twenties or early thirties (see section 2.3.3), which could be labelled as traditional, but she does not follow other more liberal general tendencies such as having short and/or uncommitted relationships between important partners (see section 2.3.3). In fact, her obsession to convince all her partners—including Sam, the last one—of taking their affair seriously from the same day it starts shows, in my opinion, that she has not completely abandoned her romantic expectations. I think that Sookie would be a better reflection of the 2010s if she was able to start new relationships more calmly, without making herself or her partner promise that it will last for a long time or that it will always be serious.

Furthermore, and although no scholars have paid attention to the fact that Sookie concatenates one relationship immediately after another, I would like to raise the question of whether she may not have presented a more balanced example for female readers if she had found a way to evolve healthily by taking time to know and love herself, gain self-confidence and find happiness on her own. I think that even if the *Southern Vampire Mysteries* fall under the category of romance, and love must thus be an important part of the plot, Sookie could at least have had longer intervals between her relationships.

5.4.2 Sexuality

Even if Sookie is the victim of a shockingly high number of unpleasant experiences having to do with sex—aggressions, harassment, etc.—, she manages to cope with them and leads a relatively satisfactory sex life which she mostly controls. There is a clear evolution in her ideas and actions having to do with this matter.

At the beginning of the saga, the protagonist has never had a partner although she is curious about sex. She is still a virgin only because she can listen to all of her partners' thoughts about her body and this makes her embarrassed and angry (*Dead until Dark* 28-182). Not long after she starts dating Bill, she decides to have her first sexual experience with him. Miller notes that having her first sexual experience with Bill empowers Sookie, as this author—directly quoting Sookie's choice of words on page 164 in *Dead Until*

Dark—highlights how the protagonist feels “powerful” and “smug” (Miller 12). Although Sookie is not very confident in the beginning (182), and Miller is, in my opinion, right, since her encounters in bed with Bill are positive and she repeatedly states being satisfied since her partner is a well-versed and passionate lover. As time goes by, she becomes more self-reliant about her body and love-making abilities. She never feels guilty about sleeping with Bill because they have a serious relationship which, according to Sookie’s standards, is the only context—along with other types of committed relationships such as marriage—in which sex is morally acceptable.

After Bill and Sookie break up, Sookie has learnt to be cautious but also that his old-fashioned manners were not a synonym of honesty or truth and that they did not guarantee a happy ending. By the time she starts a new relationship with Eric, she has also become more uninhibited in bed as she constantly remarks how skilled her new lover is and how much she enjoys sex with him.

In general, Craton and Jonell explain, just like in matters concerning her career, Sookie also shows duality towards having sex and some of her ideas about this issue could be labelled “traditional” (115). As proof of her mixed feelings these scholars point out that on the one hand Sookie shows “self-respect” and appears to be cautious because she expects serious commitment from her partners (116) and she thinks it is not a good idea to have casual sex but, at the same time, she often confesses she feels a strong sexual attraction to

men around her which she has trouble controlling (115).

Nakagawa points out how the clear distinction between sex and lust Sookie wants to make—along with her virginity, kept until she is twenty-five years old—shows old-fashioned clichés and ideals about women and their “integrity”. Nakagawa also mentions another traditional vision of sex in these books: it means not only physical union, but the creation of strong bonds, a family. This is represented by Sookie’s grandmother being killed not long after her first intercourse with Bill. In other words, she loses part of her old family but she is, at the same time, creating a new one. I would add that it is because she has sex with Bill, that Sookie may think that they must be united by eternal vows in a religious ceremony, as she always tries to act as a good Christian. I think that Nakagawa’s idea about sex in Harris’ books being a synonym of creating a new family but having to end the relationship with the previous one (10) also supports this idea.

In effect, Sookie’s sexual life is not exempt of incongruities. Her moral values are somehow flexible: they depend on the situation and evolve. Furthermore, she frequently contradicts herself and often regrets her actions once she has performed them. For example, when in *Living Dead in Dallas* she attends the sex party with Eric, she constantly feels repulsion about the other guests and what they are doing. However, she is proud to see Eric has an erection when they kiss before joining the orgy (241) and when he takes her out of the house because she allegedly cannot stand other people’s behaviour any

more, he licks her ear and she hastily admits to herself that she could as well enjoy sex without further commitment (247).

In *Definitely Dead*, although Quinn and Sookie do not have a full intercourse, they have some partial sex once (255-256), but because they have not been together for long Sookie has mixed feelings about it later. And, although the love story Sookie and Sam start in *Dead Ever After* comes after a long relationship based on trust and friendship and it ends up becoming stable and committed, the way it begins is not precisely chaste: right after Eric and Sookie break up, she and Sam passionately make love in his trailer twice (281) and she suggests they can keep on enjoying regular sex but she prefers not to get involved in a romantic affair yet (283). Once again Sookie has contradictory thoughts and feelings about her actions as later that day she stops Sam's sexual approaches (285) and she mentally reprimands herself for having had an affair with someone else no long after splitting up with her previous partner (284). However, at the same time, she confesses she has physically enjoyed the experience (285).

I think that Sookie's inability to clarify her mind in matters related to sex is more of a reflection of different social pressures women had to face at this time. On the one hand, Sookie shows that she understands she is free to enjoy her sexuality and does so, up to a certain degree—when she is in a stable relationship—but, on the other, having been raised up as a Christian, she has some prejudices, which her comments about other women show in a clear way

but which are also reflected by her own remorse towards having had sex with her partners when their affairs end. I think Sookie shows how the new generations in America have not totally disassociated themselves from traditional ideas about virginity and marriage, which I have mentioned in the chapter concerning the historical background (see section 2.4.1).

Craton and Jonell think that Sookie's habit of asking her partners whether they are willing to commit to her before they have sex is traditional (116). However, in these scholars' opinion, this is also a sign of dignity (116). The fact that Sookie sometimes openly explains she is barely in control of her sexual drive is one of the examples these scholars present to illustrate how she sometimes shows a more up-to-date way of thinking (115). However, a heroine of the 21st century we could call "a woman of her times", like Craton and Jonell label Sookie (110), would either be in control of her impulses or would think of them as a natural need and not feel remorseful after having sex with any of her partners even if their relationship does not lead to marriage. As I have indicated in the chapter concerning the historical background, at the beginning of the current century, women were more in control of their sexuality than they had been in the previous one (see section 2.3.3). Moreover, women having casual relationships or purely sexual affairs was commonly accepted in the United States (see section 2.3.3). A woman with progressive ideas would not consider her sexual life as directly related to her personal-worth as Sookie does and I hence agree with Nakagawa, who understands that Sookie's long-kept virginity

and the difference she tries to establish between acceptable and non-acceptable sex are connected to stereotypes and preconceived ideas about what it means to be a good and respectable woman, which may be more in tune with older times or with more traditional societies and literary styles (7).

Even if some secondary male characters in the *Southern Vampire Mysteries* present the typical traits of macho stereotypes and are portrayed as womanizers, most females also have an active sexual life. For instance, many of Sookie's female friends have different romantic or sexual relationships, with different males, which not always involve the same degree of commitment. In other words, Harris has successfully included some sexually liberated women in the saga, although they are not of much importance to the plot and the main protagonist of the saga presents certain reactionary values.

5.4.2.1 Portrayal of Homosexuality

In Charlaine Harris' books, vampires have made themselves visible to the world, an act that is often described as having come "out of the coffin" (*Dead Until Dark* 1). Different scholars have noted that this expression is very close to "coming out of the closet", an idiom commonly used to indicate that a person has acknowledged their homosexuality or bisexuality (Brace and Arp 93; Craton and Jonell 111). There are, in fact, a few bisexual and gay characters in Harris' novels (Brace and Arp 94; Lindgren and Isaksson 121, Nakagawa; Fitch 609).

Gay men, lesbians and bisexuals are made visible by being included in the plot in a natural and mainstream way. By showing vampires' fight for equality (Craton and Jonell 110) as well as other characters' acceptance—or lack of it—towards them, Harris seems to be sending a message of tolerance for all kinds of collectives (Lindgren and Isaksson 121; Mutch "Matt Haigh's *The Radleys*" 178; Mutch "Coming Out of the Coffin" 85). The feminist blogger Megan E. King also echoes these ideas in her article.

There is a wide range of female vampires, humans, werewolves, fairies, etc. in the books who are not straight. Amelia is probably the most interesting character to be highlighted here because of her fluidity between sexual orientations: she is first understood to be straight but surprises Sookie by casually dating a vampire woman with whom she wants to have some new sexual experiences for some time but then starts a new and more committed relationship with a male werewolf.

However, a deeper analysis of LGBTQAI+ characters and plots in the *Southern Vampire Mysteries* reveals that these books are not as inclusive as they may seem at first sight (Picado, "Out of the Coffin"). Although Harris' novels contain certain elements which have to do with queer sexual orientations—as well as race and class—(Fitch 609), this is certainly not the main topic of the saga (Amador 171-176) since the main love stories in it—between Sookie and a male character at all times—are very similar to those in traditional vampire romances: always heterosexual (Lindgren and Isaksson; Fitch 609) and between

a lady and a very manly hero (115; Nakagawa) who are both white (Amador 171; Łuksza). Even Sookie's suitors, such as Alcide, fall into the same masculine stereotypes.

I agree with the scholars who, in their opinions about LGBTQAI+ visibility in the *Southern Vampire Mysteries*, highlight the abundance of homosexuals and bisexuals in her novels (Brace and Arp 94; Lindgren and Isaksson 121, Nakagawa; Fitch 609). I think that the idiom "to come out of the coffin" Harris has come up with to describe how vampires acknowledged their existence to humans is indeed a clear reference to the expression "coming out of the closet" (Brace and Arp 93; Craton and Jonell 111) because of the evident similarities between them. Harris has clearly made an attempt to normalise homosexuality up to a certain point by often mentioning it in this series. This is not a tendency exclusive to Harris' books as, like I have explained in the chapter concerning the historical background (see section 2.3.3.1), homosexuals started to appear in all forms of media and pop culture at this time. However, non-straight people have very brief and unimportant roles and never lead the action, while protagonists and recurrent secondary characters are, in a vast majority of cases, straight. Furthermore, throughout the saga, many of Sookie's straight friends and family members find steady partners and most of them get married and even start families, while no gay characters are said to even live together. I think that Harris may have wanted to show that non-straight sexual orientations are perfectly valid. However, her effort proves insufficient as she

decides not to concede almost any focus or give smaller importance to her gay and bisexual characters whose personalities are flat and whose love stories come through as superfluous and, subsequently, these can give readers the impression that homosexual love is less committed and cannot last (Picado, “Out of the Coffin”).

I also agree that there is a parallelism between the fight for equality for vampires, which Sookie herself often defends and Craton and Jonell emphasise (110), and the fight for equal rights—such as marriage and adoption—which same-sex partners were putting up at the time in the United States. There is a clear distinction in these novels between characters who treat vampires and other creatures the same way they behave with humans and believe they should be treated fairly, and those who are not tolerant to differences. Since Sookie, who is the main protagonist and is always portrayed in an appealing light, belongs to the former group, I would concede that these books contain a message of respect towards minorities, like many authors argue (Lindgren and Isaksson 121; Mutch “Matt Haigh’s *The Radleys*” 178; Mutch “Coming Out of the Coffin” 85, M. E. King). However, I would not dare to say that Harris is unequivocally and specifically referring to LGBTQAI+ communities because, although queer sexual orientation is a topic which is clearly addressed in these novels, other subjects such as race, feminism or social class are also present in it and the inclusive discourse may be a reference of any of them (Fitch 609).

In relation to sexual orientation of women specifically, it must be highlighted that, although a few female characters are bisexual, there is none who is exclusively interested in women as opposed to the many gay males present in the saga. The most interesting lesbian relationship—due to the fact that it occupies a few paragraphs while other female-female relationships are just very briefly mentioned and happen between unimportant characters—is, as I have mentioned before, the one between Amelia and Pam. However, I think that they do not represent lesbians as their most important relationships develop or have developed with men, and the idea that they give of bisexuals is not positive. On the one hand, the only same-sex relationship Amelia has—the one with Pam—is very brief and casual and she admits that, by having an affair with the vampire she is just looking for some temporary sexual adventure. In this way, Harris is reinforcing typical clichés about bisexuality not being real and bisexual men and women being either homosexuals or heterosexuals who are momentarily “curious” or confused about their sexuality. Other bad stereotypes are also strengthened, such as the idea that bisexuals never or rarely have feelings towards their same-sex partners as well as them not being able to commit to them. These are negative ideas that bisexuals were fighting at the time the saga was published, as I have explained in the chapter concerning the historical background (see section 2.3.3.2).

Although Pam confesses she is more interested in females than males, all her mentioned lesbian affairs are of scarce importance or irrelevant for the

plot while her heterosexual relationship—of love, romanticism and even ownership—with Eric is deeper and evolutive. Thus, this character belittles lesbianism and lesbian pleasure and reinforces the cliché that heterosexual love and sex are always desirable for all women, even if they are lesbians.

5.5 Final Remarks

Łuksza observes that modern vampire romance has changed its main character and now this genre mostly shows female protagonists. It is true, like Crossen correctly notices, that previous vampire literature tended to focus on males (251). When comparing this saga to previous books analysed in my dissertation it is also true that, for the first time, the protagonist is a woman: not only a book, but a whole saga revolves around her, whereas female characters were treated as simple objects or complements to males in the novels from other decades that I have concentrated on in previous chapters. From my point of view, this increase of the importance of women's roles may be a reflection of how in the real world leading positions in certain areas were slowly being occupied by females. However, Łuksza also realises that women being the main protagonists of vampire books does not always mean that they lead the action, as many times they are presented as just a passive subject which makes the male hero evolve. Although Sookie certainly undergoes a certain evolution through the books and can sometimes make her own decisions, she is, as I have explained before, very much influenced by the actions and commands of men

around her and, in many cases, she just reacts to these but does not really lead the action. Similarly, in some areas in the real world, such as politics or the army, women's presence was becoming increasingly notorious, but equality was not yet real since the most important positions were still occupied by men who, ultimately, made the choices and decisions.

6. *Chicagoland Vampires*

Because *Chicagoland Vampires* saga is very recent and still being written, no specific deeper research about it has been conducted yet. However, general research on contemporary best-selling vampire novels and romances, and reviews of female characters in action novels, are useful for its analysis. To justify my ideas I will specifically refer to studies about *Twilight*, written in the first decade of the 21st century, and to the *Fifty Shades* trilogy by E. L. James which does not include vampires but which is equally relevant since, as I mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, it is a tribute to *Twilight* (Bertrand; Purcell; Delvecchio; Lindgren and Isaksson 5-6). This second saga was written at the same time as *Chicagoland Vampires*, and just like this series—but unlike *Twilight*—, it includes explicit and descriptive sexual scenes in which the man is in control of the action. These books are aimed at young women and narrated from the point of view of the female protagonist. I effectively found many similarities both in terms of their main characters—Bella Swan in *Twilight*, Anastasia Steel in *Fifty Shades*, Caroline Merit in *Chicagoland Vampires* and their male counterparts Edward Cullen, Christian Gray and Ethan Sullivan, respectively—, and the way their plots evolve.

Caroline Merit, usually just referred to as Merit, is the main protagonist and also the first-person narrator of the whole saga. She is a powerful, highly-educated and independent woman who believes in herself and

in her abilities. Therefore, at least in the beginning, she embodies many of the features which successful women of our time share. Being almost 28 years old at the beginning of the first book, she is the oldest of the female characters I have analysed in my dissertation but, although she is close to her thirties, she never thinks that she is too old for any activities or tasks. Quite on the contrary, she is happy with her physical appearance and feels just as confident when she has to wear elegant clothes for social occasions as when she wears leather for a battle.

Apart from Merit, there are not many female characters in the series and most of these are very secondary to the plot and not fully developed. There are two, however, which are worth mentioning because they often interact with the protagonist and embody a few interesting stereotypes about women: her best friend Mallory and her archenemy Céline.

6.1 Academic and Professional Career

Merit is a PhD candidate at the English department of the University of Chicago. She is writing the fourth chapter of her dissertation about romantic medieval literature and the money she receives from working as a researcher at her university is enough for her to pay for her expenses without anybody's help. She comes from a rich family, but tries hard not to be treated in a special way or get special attention just because of this fact. Merit's love for books and her dissertation are very important to her. However, one of the first things she is

informed about when she becomes a vampire is that her House—a kind of vampire association—has let her university know about her new situation in order to withdraw her from their lists. As a result, she feels that she is leaving behind everything she has ever fought for (*Some Girls Bite* 120), and later she often admits she is disappointed that she was never able to finish her dissertation (*Hard Bitten* 122).

Later on, in *Hard Bitten* Merit realises that “graduate school was possible for a vampire” (121) when she goes to one of her male friend’s dormitory and learns that he holds many university degrees—including four PhDs—under fake names (121). He even achieved money from scholarships (122) to pay for his studies. However, in spite of the fact that Merit feels frustrated and sad to leave her scholarly life behind, she does not try to go back to university when she discovers this. Silver highlights that every step Bella takes towards self-fulfilment and development has to do with her desire to be with Edward and that she never attempts to achieve any individual goals, such as going to college (133), even when she performs well in high-school. Although Merit and the protagonist of *Twilight* may initially seem very different in regards to their professional lives because the former holds university studies, as soon as Ethan enters her life, she abandons her career—which was the most important part of her life to her—and all decisions regarding her professional path are organised by him from that moment. Thus, although at the beginning of their respective stories their starting points are different, the way

they both end up devoting all their time to activities having to do with their partners is similar.

It is furthermore interesting to note that while this male friend of Merit's is over-educated in many subjects, there are no female characters in the saga who hold more than a Bachelor's Degree. There are not many males who have university studies either, and this particular one represents one of the few exceptions in the saga. Most men the protagonist interacts with—including her partners, some members of her family and fellow vampires— never mention having completed any high education. In contrast, Merit is a remarkably cultivated woman who has spent most of her life on campus. Her best friend and room-mate Mallory also holds a degree in some subject related to advertisement and is said to have performed brilliantly in college. In my opinion, this is a good representation of the reality in the United States nowadays as, since the 2000s, more women than men enter universities and whose curricula and careers are, in many cases, more impressive than male students who obtained a place in the same class (see section 2.3.1).

I think that the fact that Merit's dissertation has to do with literature is not as frivolous as it may seem at first. She is part of the English department of her university and studies related to teaching have always been popular among women. This way, she follows a tendency which some scholars that I have quoted in the chapter concerning the historical background highlight: that

women who go to college either study degrees which have traditionally been considered feminine or enrol either in courses in which approximately half of the students are females, or in some which were traditionally seen as masculine but have now become more popular among women than men (see section 2.4.2).

In many ways, Merit's situation with respect to her professional development is not only similar to that of Bella, but also to that of Anastasia in *Fifty Shades*. As Agdern remarks, Anastasia holds a part-time job while in college, then graduates and gets a full-time job in a publishing company for her own merits, which prove her to be prepared for work and could be understood as signs of independence (228). However, soon after she meets Christian, she finishes her student job and, when she gets her new position, Christian buys the whole company for her: an action which scholars consider one of the best examples of Christian's extremely controlling behaviour (Purcel; Armintrout 81). Although Anastasia becomes the boss of a company, she does not achieve this by her own means. Furthermore, she does not feel she is ready for such an important responsibility yet and Christian has to convince her. In other words, even if Agdern is right to indicate that Anastasia is indeed a good example of a relatively independent woman by the beginning of the first book, her whole career is soon under Christian's control. Similarly, not a long time after Ethan turns Merit into a vampire, he decides to appoint her Sentinel of the House, a job of special importance and which implies much responsibility. Merit is an

outstanding warrior and, already in the first lines of *Some Girls Bite* she describes herself as “one of the best” vampires ever created (1). It is actually due to her strength and her innate battle skills that she gets her new job. However, she is never completely confident about her fighting abilities and feels she might not be strong or wise enough in dangerous situations. Merit has to quit her previous job as a researcher, which she loved and had achieved by her own means, and start working for Ethan, having to stand his constant surveillance and commands thus, not only as a romantic partner, but also as her superior.

In her essay, “Edward Cullen and Bella Swan: Byronic and Feminist Heroes... or Not”, Myers explains that new female heroines are expected to be active and even present violent personalities (152). Indeed, Merit’s new job as a Sentinel makes her much more active and fierce, and she starts enjoying battling soon. But even if she is a naturally good fighter, she needs men to instruct and direct her progress. In fact, the training which her new job requires will be led by men who tend to ignore her opinions and needs. Her first trainer makes her wear almost no clothes during their workout sessions, which she finds uncomfortable (*Friday Night Bites* 154, 207). He often thinks she is not using her potential to the full—even when she really tries hard and gets exhausted—, and he often gets angry with her and lets her know he is disappointed (*Some Girls Bite* 297; *Friday Night Bites* 162). This trainer reports the results of each session to Ethan, and Merit gets some kind of punishment

from him too, in the form of tension or reprimands (*Friday Night Bites* 165). As a result, she frequently seems to be more pleased about her male trainers and superiors praising her after a battle than about being able to actually survive the fight or beat her enemies (*Dark Debt* 196). Later, Ethan himself becomes Merit's trainer because he thinks he is better qualified for the task than her previous one (*Friday Night Bites* 342). At times, other male vampires are in charge of keeping her exercising and practising (*Hard Bitten* 304; *Dark Debt* 67). There are female warriors in the house who are much older than Merit, but they never train with her or give her any kind of advice on the topic. Whenever she wants to learn how to use a new weapon, she is referred to a man (*Dark Debt* 196) and she is also taught how to use her special vampiric skills, such as jumping from very high places, by males (*Drink Deep* 19-23). Moreover, she is often scolded or laughed at when Ethan—and the many other men in charge of her training and learning—thinks she has made mistakes or she has not given her best. Her opinion or impressions about her physical performance are not taken into account as she is never given the freedom or room to express them and even the clothes she has to wear to train are chosen for her.

Merit is thus presented as a naturally born fighter and she is strong, fast and agile. However, all her skills are presented as not worthy unless they are all properly trained by a man. The protagonist is like a rough diamond which a man—Ethan—has discovered and which, in addition, only men can polish. In my opinion, the evolution in this aspect of Merit's life may be a

reflection of how women who are qualified and have proved to be good at their work find glass ceilings which prevent them from reaching the highest positions in their companies or how they may be doing the hardest tasks while men take the credit for their achievements.

The feelings that Ethan and Merit have for each other constantly interfere with their job because on the one hand, he is overprotective with her and, on the other, she does not want to overshadow him. When Merit gets involved in battles alone she manages the situation well but often makes silly or clumsy mistakes when Ethan is with her. Additionally, he constantly interferes with her job and is afraid to let her fulfil her tasks as a sentinel if they are risky (*Blood Games* 136-137). For instance, Ethan slaps another male vampire for involving Merit in a mission (*Dark Debt* 271). She sometimes complains that he does not let her do her job (*Biting Cold* 212), but although she is supposed to be in charge of Ethan's safety, it is often he who saves her life in an old-fashioned knight style (*Biting Bad* 143; *Hard Bitten* 335). As time goes by, Merit becomes a better, stronger and more powerful warrior. For instance, in *House Rules* she boasts of having beaten Ethan during their training sessions (8) and she is about to best him in a marathon in *Blood Games* (22). However, Merit's improved abilities in these areas do not always make her proud since she is afraid that, by surpassing him, she will hurt his feelings. For example, she could have easily won the race, but she pretends she has reached her limit and lets him finish first (23). It is interesting to note that Merit specifically says that

the best price for her is to have Ethan show his love for her in front of a crowd (23) and it is worthy to sacrifice her chance to win if it is “a boost for his ego” (23).

At the beginning of the saga Merit is, in aspects regarding her career, a very good example of an independent woman of the 21st century: she is focused on her career and gives it importance and time as she professionally fulfils her tasks and, as a researcher, takes credit for her work. Since she is very disappointed when she has to leave university, it seems difficult to picture her letting a man make decisions about her dissertation or leaving her work at the university behind for a romantic partner. However, as a sentinel, she has to allow Ethan to determine her job conditions and because he is both her lover and her boss, he gives her a special protective treatment which interferes with her actions, so she cannot fully develop her potential as a warrior either. Additionally, I think that the way her character and personality evolve, make her closer to a traditional Victorian romance heroine from the past. For example, even if she is better than Ethan in certain ways, she prefers to allow him to win and attract the attention of the media because she thinks love requires this kind of sacrifice. Ethan’s happiness comes from his personal success but, since the moment Merit falls in love with him, hers comes from playing an active role in his partner’s career success while staying in the shadow and waiting for his displays of love in return.

A similar pattern of counter-evolution in her career can be seen in Mallory. Ethan reaches the conclusion that she is a witch when they meet for the second time (66-67); this fact comes as a big shock for her and makes her believe that everything she has—for example, her successful career—has come to her because of her special power and not as a result of her own value and effort (140). Mallory's partner, a man with special magical abilities called Catcher that she has just met, is also a controlling man. Since Mallory is a witch like him, he decides he will teach her all he knows about her powers even if she is, in the beginning, not willing to learn about these matters. Once she gets more involved with the topic, she is discovered to be a very strong sorceress. Catcher mentions it to everyone in a way that shows a certain degree of possessiveness and pride (*Twice Bitten* 99), as if all her achievements were somehow a result of his actions when, in fact, he was expelled from the Order—a magicians' secret association—and Mallory is able to become an exceptional witch not so much because of his supervision, but because her innate magic is very strong.

In other words, even if Mallory's special powers are outstanding, she has never felt different from regular people and her magic has to be discovered and developed by men. While she is first introduced as a successful professional who is confident that her career achievements are due to her charisma and knowledge, even these are later discovered to be a result of her magic. Furthermore, Mallory, like Merit, also goes from being economically

independent and having a job she loves to being transformed by men into a totally different kind of person, although she gets used to her new status as time goes by and likes her new lifestyle. To achieve this, however, she has to leave behind her old dreams on which she has put effort and spent time and energy. Because of these reasons, I would say that these two characters do not evolve, but undergo a regression.

I think that, although the aforementioned changes that these two female characters experience once they start their relationships may seem difficult to understand on their own, if we put them in context, it can be argued that both Merit and Mallory are, in a way, trying to find a balance between having a love partner and a successful career. As I have explained in the chapter concerning the historical background, women were better considered if they were spouses or mothers—or, ideally, both (see section 2.4.1.1). Although Merit and Mallory are neither yet, they are in committed relationships and by putting their previous careers aside in order to follow their partners' advice and follow their steps in a different area, they may be trying to “have it all” too.

As I also remarked in the chapter concerning the historical background, women who did not have partners or lovers at a certain age, felt social pressure to find one (see section 2.4.1). That is the reason why I think that Merit choosing Ethan's public displays of love over showing the world her full potential also shows that women should, if necessary, sacrifice their careers for love. I have argued that many stereotypical ideas about women which have

been part of general mindsets since the Victorian era, have not completely disappeared nowadays and Merit proves me right since her main aim in life is to keep Ethan's "love and respect"²⁹ at any cost.

The female protagonists in the exemplifying sagas are either created or evolve according to what men expect from them or by following their advice. Different scholars note how Bella develops only through her union to Edward (Silver 133; Gomez-Galisteo "The Twilight of Vampires" 166) and it is he who makes her a vampire. In the same way, Anastasia starts having a more organised routine and gets a better job only, like I have explained before, after Christian has interfered with these aspects of her life. Merit is equally created by Ethan, who likes to remind her of this fact (*Some Girls Bite* 110) and to take pride in her success, as if it were a consequence of his actions (*Hard Bitten* 228).

Contrarily, all women in *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades* who present a dominant character and handle power on their own seem, on the one hand, unable to keep it under control and, on the other hand, are cold and dehumanised. In *Twilight*, Victoria, the only female who, according to Eddo-Lodge, "embraces her power" and uses it "to its full advantage" finds a bloody end for being too violent (Silver 131) while Jane, a cruel chief of a clan called the Volturis, is portrayed as masculine (134), giving readers the impression that it is unnatural for women to be tough leaders. Upstone maintains that Elena, the only dominant woman in *Fifty Shades* is presented in such a negative light that

²⁹ See section 1.1.1 of the chapter concerning the historical background, where the ideal Victorian woman is described.

it is impossible for the public to perceive any good feature in her (147). Thus, all of them are presented as bad women who cannot feel love for anyone but themselves and they all receive some kind of punishment as a consequence for their behaviour.

Céline is another good example to illustrate these facts in *Chicagoland Vampires*. She is probably the most remarkable powerful woman in the books since when she is described, her important position in politics and her ties to high vampire echelons are always mentioned. Some important decisions which concern all the vampires in the *Chicagoland Vampires* universe were taken by her. For example, when blood drinkers made themselves visible to the world, it was Céline's idea and she planned it (*Some Girls Bite* 3). However, every time conflict with beings from other species arises, it is repeated that this was probably a bad decision which made the existence of all magical beings too complicated (*Wild Things* 157), the negative consequences of which are fully blamed on her (237). Later on she turns evil due to her inability to deal with power and, while as a master of a house she is expected to protect and provide for those who work and live under her roof, she becomes such a corrupted character that precisely those vampires must face her bad choices and selfishness. She gets her house into debt to buy art and keep a luxurious lifestyle (*Dark Debt* 116) up to the point of owing money to mafias (120), who keep on threatening and killing the vampires of her house even after she dies (117).

Similarly, when Catcher is finally convinced that Mallory is a valid magician and he stops paying constant attention to her, she is soon overwhelmed by her own power, which goes out of control as she becomes evil and is about to end the world. As a punishment, Gabriel—a powerful werewolf—takes her under his wing (*Biting Cold* 97-98). He forbids her to use her magic and puts her under the surveillance of his pack members, who make her live in a small room on the back of a bar they run (139) and wash dishes at all times (135). After this “training”, Mallory recovers and goes back to her house with Catcher but she is never alone since her partner uses a baby monitor to be able to hear her (*Wild Things* 249). Mallory is able to recover and return to the straight path. However, her change is conceived and carried out by a man and she loses all her privacy as she is first under the werewolves’ surveillance and then—this time for good—under her boyfriend’s.

Being an excellent politician and a specially skilled magician respectively, Céline and Mallory could have been good examples of self-sufficient and empowered females. However, the power in their hands is too much for them to deal with and all the decisions that they make on their own have catastrophic and long-lasting consequences, and they put many people in danger. In fact, some of the problems Céline creates come from not separating her personal love for luxury, designer clothes and art—she is presented as a shopping addict—from the funds and connections that she has due to being in an important position. In contrast to them, male protagonists and secondary

characters in positions of power in *Chicagoland Vampires* make almost no mistakes or rectify by themselves. Although there are some evil male characters in these books who hold high posts, their roles are unimportant for the plot and their appearances are short.

According to different sources that I have quoted in the chapter concerning the historical background, women in positions of power are nowadays still thought of as unfeminine and too authoritarian while men do not have to face similar preconceived ideas (see section 2.3.1). The above-mentioned female characters are good proof of this way of thinking. Céline, who is an important and influencing public figure and a kind of politician, is effectively so cold-hearted that her rage ultimately leads her to death. Following the same pattern, men in these books, are innate and trust-worthy leaders who do not become corrupted and whose good intentions are rarely altered. Thus Mallory, the most powerful sorcerer in the book, only goes back to the straight path and learns how to handle her skills and control her power to use it virtuously, after a proper alpha male has punished her for her bad actions and trained her. He seems to have decided to be the right person for these tasks—and other characters such as Merit never call his ability for them into question—just because he is a strong man, as he is not a sorcerer and is unable to produce any kind of magic. The fact that she will always and forever be under her partner's surveillance is equally accepted by everyone including her with no objection.

6.2 Love and Sexuality

6.1.2.1 Love

In her essay “Edward Cullen and Bella Swan: Byronic and Feminist Heroes... or Not” Myers explains that Victorian novels aimed at young women meant to learn about love follow a specific pattern: first, the main heroine and hero are presented as incompatible but inevitably attracted to each other—like matched by destiny. The male protagonist gives and withdraws his love from his beloved one repeatedly. She changes her character and helps the male hero evolve too, so that in the end they find a happy ending together through marriage. Myers notes that the plot in *Twilight* follows a similar order. Because it is inspired by *Twilight*, the *Fifty Shades* trilogy has a similar storyline. I think the same thing is true in *Chicagoland Vampires*.

6.2.1.1 Initial Difficulties

Merit and Ethan’s pride and inability to express their feelings prevent them from admitting their attraction for each other during the first few months. Moreover, because Ethan has a dark past in which he committed mistakes and hurt people, he is afraid to be close to others. Merit and him kiss and have sex a few times before they actually start a relationship and also date other people because Ethan withdraws from her after each display of love (*Friday Night Bites* 150). Even after Merit and Ethan start dating, he ends their relationship

twice because he doubts he can do any good to Merit (*Twice Bitten* 179; *Biting Cold* 157), like Myers states old-fashioned heroes do in Victorian novels and *Twilight*, because they think that being with their loved ones will cause them pain (155).

What is more, Ethan commands Merit to have a relationship with a powerful vampire called Morgan who expresses his interest in the protagonist in front of a big audience. Ethan orders her to accept his proposal to bridge the gap between their clans (*Some Girls Bite* 314-315). Merit recalls feeling like crying as she is, in her own words, being “used” as a tool “to meet a political goal” and “offered” and “passed” to another man (316), who furthermore is only interested in her as a means of marking his territory (322). Merit is right when she states that Ethan is using her as an object. By the end of the following book, however, Merit will be pushed into leaving him after Ethan kisses her again (*Friday Night Bites* 318). She has to adapt to his erratic behaviour and follow his confusing orders and wishes even when they interfere with her personal affairs.

Although nowadays women in the United States have the freedom to choose their partners, since Merit is turned into a vampire by Ethan, she does not have this right any more because he commands her to either date or stop dating whoever he thinks is appropriate for his political interests.

Just like Edward changes because of the influence of Bella in *Twilight* (McClimans and Wisnewski 171) and Christian changes due to Anastasia in

Fifty Shades (Lowry; DelVecchio), Ethan gradually changes thanks to Merit. This cliché of “bad boys” having to be changed by “good girls”, which appears both in *Twilight* and the *Fifty Shades* Trilogy (Delvecchio), is also a reminiscence of Victorian novels (Myers 151). It has been repeatedly attacked by feminists because it may make women stay in unhealthy relationships in the hope that things will magically change or magically become perfect by the effect of love (Delvecchio). Sanzo feels that, by unconsciously teaching her partner how to love, Anastasia is giving him the most important lesson in his life (62). In Boyle’s opinion, these ideas give women the unrealistic message that if their partners are abusive, they should try better or harder to change them. Purcell also draws attention to the risks these romantic ideals would entail in real life if they are believed.

Lory states that, because Bella is full of unconditional love, she can operate a change in Edward’s behaviour (195). Merit—often defined as “too human” (*Friday Night Bites* 219)—is equally kind and full of noble feelings. When other vampires notice that she is “different”, she is asked to change Ethan’s personality as it is suggested that, like the other female protagonists in the exemplifying series, she can reshape her partner for the better (*Friday Night Bites* 64). These comments encourage her to maintain her relationship with Ethan. His behaviour is erratic and Merit suffers under his bouts of rage and perpetual moodiness and although he is often unsympathetic and looks down on Merit, her love is so genuine that she forgives him, including forcing her to date

another man and having made her feel humiliated and used. Because Merit is the trigger of all those good feelings which are operating a change in Ethan, he later tells her he needs her in order to feel love and be able to laugh (*Twice Bitten* 118-119).

Although the stereotype of good girls changing bad boys for the better, which has traditionally appeared in romance novels in the past, is present in other books analysed in this dissertation such as *Lost Souls*, it had commonly been replaced for more healthy alternatives such as heroines becoming more mature and empowered and leaving abusive partners or finding more suitable and balanced ones. Sookie Stackhouse, from the *Southern Vampires Mysteries*, is a clear example of this tendency. However, in *Chicagoland Vampires* there are some elements which again resemble the plots in old-fashioned books containing clichés which elevate women's self-sacrifice. This may be due to the general regression in mindsets that, in relation to topics such as family and love relationships, is taking place in the United States at the moment and to which I am constantly referring to throughout this chapter (see section 2.4.6).

Furthermore, violence against women has been in focus in the last decades and the government of the United States has made different efforts to tackle and eradicate this problem (see section 2.4.3). Although gender violence has decreased, it has not disappeared and is still accepted and normalised by a large amount of people, specially men (see section 2.4.3). Although romantic novels must be read bearing in mind that they are fantasy, many scholars who

analysed the exemplifying sagas state that, if exposed to constant messages praising consent of abusive relationships, the youngest readers may include it in their social mindsets and perceive it as non-important or even romantic (Gomez-Galisteo, “The Twilight of Vampires” 169; Hayes-Smith 79; Altenburger et al. 461). Given the evidence of his violent actions and moodiness, Ethan is a man who may very possibly also be abusive with Merit in other ways in the future. It is not realistic to think that a problematic person like him would drastically change only by being influenced by a kind-hearted woman and, even if this pattern has been repeated in romantic fiction for centuries, a contemporary saga could explore other alternatives in harmony with gender equality and the current times. This way, Merit would be a better example for female readers if she had refused to follow Ethan’s orders as soon as he showed his controlling and cruel side and deprived her from her most basic rights—such as who to date—instead of staying next to him in the hope that he will change, and the plot would also have been more logical in the context of the 21st century if she had distanced herself from him.

6.2.1.2 Subsequent Relationship

The male protagonists in the exemplifying sagas argue that they want to protect and take good care of their partners. However their behaviours are not healthy or romantic, but too controlling. In *Twilight*, Edward sneaks into Bella’s bedroom to watch her sleep (303) when they are not even a couple yet, and

Christian creates Anastasia's e-mail account, and decides her food, hairdo and clothes for her (*Fifty Shades of Grey* 286, 298; *Fifty Shades Darker* 140-141). All these behaviours were listed by Dobash and Dobash as main reasons why men batter women (4) and, according to some critics, fall under the label of stalking (Bonomy; Bonomi et al. 721; Lowry; Housel 179).

I agree with the quoted scholars above that these actions should not occur in healthy relationships, and contend that Ethan should equally be considered a stalker since he checks Merit's phone (*Dark Debt* 146), tells her what to wear (*Friday Night Bites* 142) and when to clean her car (*Biting Bad* 241). He even secretly talks to one of her friends in her name (*Dark Debt* 276-277) and confronts her father in front of her, first by calling her "my Sentinel" (87) and later by saying he will not allow him to talk to her unless he does it in a respectful tone (298). Although he never hits Merit, the above-mentioned behaviours point out in that direction.

Many authors are startled to read that Bella and Anastasia consider these actions—a direct result of men's jealousy and possessiveness—to be a sign of their love (Housel 184; McClimans and Wisnewski 168). However others, like Sanzo, explain that Christian is only protecting Anastasia and argues that he understands women's wishes and needs which, in her opinion, include "undivided attention, and being desired beyond our wildest dreams" (61). Merit is, like Anastasia and Bella, flattered by these behaviours and thinks Ethan is proving his love for her in this way. She is also happy to discover the

unexpected presents that Morgan leaves inside her new room in Cadogan house while she is outside. In *Blood Games* she explains that Ethan's reactions are a consequence of Ethan being "alpha enough" (50). She uses this adjective when he is overprotective too (*Dark Debt* 235). However, she sometimes admits feeling afraid of Ethan when he shows his jealousy (*House Rules* 274) or briefly protests about being treated like an object he owns (*House Rules* 277).

Additionally, while Ethan is free to talk and interact with whomever he wants, sometimes Merit phones or meets her friends in secret because she fears his reaction. When she is with other men, he is cold and shows distrust towards them. When she meets any friends, he advises her not to get physically close to them (*House Rules* 274-275) and sometimes threatens these men either joking or in a serious tone (*Hard Bitten* 273).

Ethan is also free to keep certain information only for himself (*Blood Games* 65), and Merit understands she has to wait until he decides to share his issues with her and she gives him space and time even when the lack of communication hurts her (*Blood Games* 67). On the contrary, she is not supposed to keep any secrets from him. For example, in *House Rules* she is forced to confess to him that she belongs to the Red Guard (197). By doing so, she is breaking the main rule of this organisation, which has been kept secret for centuries.

Purcell notes that even the language Christian uses to talk to Anastasia denotes possessiveness and control, especially in sex scenes (Purcell). Ethan

often tells Merit that she belongs to him (*Dark Debt* 352) and that she is his (*Hard Bitten* 274; *House Rules* 275; *Dark Debt* 237). Although Merit does not like to hear such statements, she rarely expresses her discomfort about his words and takes them as compliments. The way Ethan refers to Merit should not be understood as romantic, but as another sign of his unhealthy obsession of controlling his partner.

Another sign that Bella and Anastasia are afraid of their partners is that they choose to hide information from them in order to avoid confrontation and possible reprisals (Bonomi; Bonomi et al. 721; Boyle; McMclimans and Wisnewski 168). Similarly, Merit sometimes phones or meets her male friends without letting him know about it in case he could be jealous. Although she never explicitly says that she fears Ethan's reactions, she prefers to lie to the man she loves and pretend she never meets other males alone. This proves that she knows that his possessive behaviours are excessive and he could either forbid her to see these men or somehow punish her if she does.

Although stalking is not an exclusive problem of the second decade of the 21st century and does not only affect females, it has become more common nowadays because of the widespread of new technologies (see section 2.4.3.2). Ethan tries to control Merit in many different ways, but he also pays close attention to her mobile telephone and asks her questions when it beeps or when she is called. This lack of privacy forces Merit to hide when she wants her conversation not to be heard by her partner.

The fact that, following a trait in contemporary romances, stalking is portrayed in a positive light in the *Chicagoland Vampires* saga is alarming from a feminist point of view as it is a problem that more women than men suffer from, and whose perpetrators are mostly males (see section 2.4.3.2). Merit is, unlike Bella and Anastasia, a strong character and, although she becomes gradually dependent on Ethan, she can make some decisions of her own. However, she accepts stalking as a normal, and even beautiful, part of a healthy love story. Although it is true that a balanced relationship requires that both members of the couple pay attention to the way the other feels and acts, Sanzo is, in my opinion, taking this idea too far and treating women as a homogeneous group instead of individuals by stating that all females want their lovers to constantly care for them (61).

Furthermore, Ethan has often proved that he can be violent. When he approaches his partner in sexual contexts he is aggressive, and before they become a couple, even when Merit expresses she is unwilling to sleep with him, he does not stop insisting. Furthermore, if he is unhappy, he is sometimes verbally abusive with her and, more than once, he hits men because he thinks they endanger or are romantically interested in her. Having Ethan's previous reactions into account, it is not illogical to think that he may also become physically abusive with the protagonist.

For all these reasons, the relationship between Merit and Ethan is unhealthy and abusive. As some scholars argue, not leaving a partner who

presents violent behaviours can lead to terrible consequences (Lowry, Muñoz). Merit's self-esteem resents from her problematic relationship with Ethan as she is less confident as time goes by, which is a consequence of resigning herself to his jealousy and adapting her lifestyle to his.

6.2.1.3 Marriage and Parenting

Different scholars point out that Anastasia and Bella agree to get married not because they think it is a romantic idea but because their partners want to protect and/or possess them. Mann highlights how Edward unfairly pushes Bella into marriage by refusing to have sexual relationships with her, or transforming her into a vampire, until they are husband and wife (140), and Purcell points out that Christian's insecurity and jealousy are very bad reasons for marriage.

Ethan, on his part, constantly talks about getting married since the very beginning of his relationship with Merit. Both seem convinced that they will be together forever, but he brings up the subject very often and even refers to his partner as his "future wife" (*Dark Debt* 166). However, he does not always treat the matter seriously, as he constantly pretends to ask her for marriage (*Biting Bad* 171-172; *Wild Things* 208), which makes Merit very nervous and excited (*Biting Bad* 172) but just to be lead to disappointment when she finds out that he is just joking again (*Wild Things* 209).

Not long after Mallory is allowed to move back into her house and believed to have recovered from her problems handling magic, she marries Catcher. Their wedding is romantic and they admit they are in love with each other, but he wants to marry her mainly to be able to look after her (*Dark Debt* 346) and, to a lesser degree, because their union will make them powerful as witches (142). Catcher's intention of guarding Mallory through marriage is, on its own, quite alarming, and denotes wanting to control her and he has also been monitoring her even when she is alone in their house. In other words, Mallory has completely lost her freedom and her privacy.

It seems that marriage is what Ethan and Catcher consider the best choice for their future, but it is difficult to understand if their wives-to-be are actually happy about it or are just saying yes because, like Bella and Anastasia, they are being led by what their partner expects from them. As I have explained in the chapter concerning the historical background, although other sexual orientations and choices are becoming more accepted in the United States and gay marriage has become legal, real love is very often associated with the idea of marriage between a woman and a man exclusively (see section 2.4.1.1). In my opinion, *Chicagoland Vampires* saga reflects how some of the most reactionary segments of American society, such as conservative Christians, feel threatened by other choices. There is not even a single character throughout the whole series who is not straight and its main protagonist, as well as her best friend—who is probably the most important secondary character—and their

partners start thinking of marriage right at the beginning of their relationships. Moreover, these two females do not actively take any decisions having to do with the matter themselves as they are not completely sure if they want to take the step. Merit is waiting for Ethan to decide when will they become officially engaged while he just jokes about the topic but maintains that it will happen in the near future. Mallory just follows Catcher's wishes and becomes his wife when he decides it is the right time to do so.

I think that all the above-mentioned facts also point in the direction of conservative discourse. For example, like I have explained in the chapter concerning the historical background, reactionary women such as evangelists are nowadays fighting equality between sexes since it threatens their status quo (see section 2.4.6). By allowing Ethan and Catcher to lead their relationships, both Merit and Mallory would be occupying a passive and obeying role—and thus feminine—in a couple based on an unhealthy power relationship like Silver adequately points out Bella does (125).

Although Merit has never thought of forming a family before, being with Ethan seems to have changed her priorities in life and her ideas about the future as she seems to be willing to get married and the idea of starting a family sometimes crosses her mind. For instance, in *Biting Bad* she starts crying while holding her niece on her lap because the realisation that she will never have children suddenly comes to her mind (183). In *Twice Bitten*, a friend of hers who can predict the future tells her that, although vampires are unable to

produce natural offspring, she will give birth to a baby with green eyes like Ethan's (259-260).

Many scholars have pointed to the fact that both Bella and Anastasia get pregnant unexpectedly and too early in their relationships to be ready for it (Zack 129; Upstone 142, 150-151). Merit is, like Purcel notes about Anastasia, not ready to have a baby yet and she becomes nervous every time she thinks about this fact once she has been told she will become a mother. However, it can be deduced that she is eager to "have it all" like Bella (Zack 128) from the fact that she is first devastated by the idea that, because of her vampiric status she will never become a mother, and it makes her happy to learn that she will give birth. Both Bella and Anastasia seem to be magically connected to their foetus as soon as they discover that they are pregnant and personify their embryos even when they are in the first stages of their pregnancies (Silver 158; Upstone 142). Furthermore, they rapidly come to embody the image of a perfect Victorian mother (Silver 134), in their persistence of sacrificing anything in order to protect the baby which is forming in their wombs (Silver 130-131; Upstone 140), a change which Worley finds too extreme to be believable (117). Merit's happiness and protective reactions towards her prospective baby—which mirrors those of Bella and Anastasia—effectively supports a stereotypical idea which, as I have mentioned in the chapter concerning the historical background, still prevails nowadays in American society: that all women naturally desire to become mothers at some point in

their lives (see section 2.4.1.1) and which, in Upstone's opinion, presents a problem for a feminist approach, as it leaves out other possible discourses and ambivalence about the topic (140).

For various reasons, male protagonists in the two sagas I am using as examples do not like the idea of becoming parents while their wives disagree. Bella's half-vampiric child is draining her while in her womb and Edward fears she may die and repeatedly asks her to have an abortion, which Housel finds abusive (178), while Purcell states that Anastasia deciding to take her pregnancy to term, while her husband is so angry at the idea that he feels rage and vanishes for days after receiving these news, is an alarming fact. In contrast with Merit, Ethan is never mentioned to want to become a father before Merit shares the good news with him. Him not having thought about parenthood before in his very long immortal life may be a reflection of the fact that men are not regarded as better or worse when they start a family but women are seen in a more positive light when they become mothers (see section 2.4.1.1), an idea that different scholars who have analysed the exemplifying sagas also corroborate (Silver 132; Upstone 139).

Unlike Christian and Edward, Ethan does not object to becoming a father, but when Merit informs him about their future child, he speaks about how being the first vampires to become parents would be an appropriate political move. She becomes resentful and thinks of Ethan as cold-hearted and inhuman (*Wild Things* 208), just like Bella and Anastasia resent their partners

for not being as instantly joyful about their babies as they are.

Merit's future motherhood puts her under pressure—like Bella is (Zack 129)—as Ethan wants to use their baby as a political tool. Him wanting to control their future offspring before it has even been born is, in my opinion, not very different from Edward pushing Bella to get rid of theirs through an abortion—since Ethan is objectifying Merit and their prospective son or daughter—which I coincide with Housel, is an abusive behaviour (178). While Bella and Anastasia have to battle with their partners for them to respect their reproductive rights, Merit also has to make her partner comply with the way she understands motherhood.

A shallow examination of the three sagas may lead to thinking that standing for their right to choose whether or not to become mothers is a rebellious or even feminist act, as McClimans and Wisnewski point out about Bella (171). However, these women are not exactly fighting for their reproductive rights and to be able to make decisions about their bodies and health in general, but are categorically taking one side in the matter. For example, although Anastasia knows that her partner is not likely to be a good father because he has a troubled mind and her fears are proved to be justified as Christian angrily over-reacts to her telling him that she is pregnant, she never considers abortion (Upstone 143).

Furthermore, Bella's life is very much threatened by her vampire baby but Silver notes that when she talks about giving birth to the foetus she uses

typical anti-abortionist mottos to describe her feelings towards saving her embryo—“not a choice—a necessity” (*Breaking Down* 132)—(130). Merit’s case is not exempt of difficulties either, but she acts following the same Victorian ideal patterns of maternity which Silver finds in Bella (134). For instance, although her pregnancy will take place in the future, she does not know when and how it will happen so it will be unplanned too. Furthermore, given Ethan’s power-hungry reaction to the news about their future parenthood, it would be more logical that she at least considered other options—such as using contraceptive methods until she feels ready to have a baby or even never becoming a mother—, more than rapidly be willing to do so without thinking of its consequences as if the image of the green-eyed baby was strong enough to have instantly aroused mother instincts and a link to that prospective child too. This is why I think that those scholars who state that *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades* contain a clear anti-abortion and pro-natalist discourse (Silver 130-132; Upstone 143; Eddo-Lodge) and that it reflects how, as I have mentioned in the chapter concerning the historical background, the old debate about abortion is still a hot topic of discussion in the United States nowadays (see section 2.4.1.1) and that these arguments apply to *Chicagoland Vampires* too.

Both Bella and Anastasia give birth not long after their weddings. In Zack’s words, Bella has “it all” (128) although she gets it all only under pressure (129) and Purcell notes that Anastasia does not feel ready to become a mother even if she decides to take her pregnancy to term. Merit will have it all

too, and she seems to be partly happy at the idea, but she is allegedly not completely sure about her feelings. Since she has not dated often, her being so suddenly interested in being permanently attached to her new partner, as well as becoming a mother, is another unrealistic extreme change—just like the transformation that Merit operates in Ethan’s ill-tempered character—and, like Bella and Anastasia, she also feels that these events are taking place much sooner than she wishes.

This unrealistic happy ending to the romance plot in *Chicagoland Vampires* supports a trend in contemporary vampire literature that Kane notes about *Twilight*: that while vampires have traditionally been used to represent “otherness”—be it race, erotic desire, sexual orientation, gender, etc.—, they now seem to be bolstering traditional family values (103) and the “predominant social order” (104). This tendency goes hand in hand with the current radicalisation of certain conservative sectors of society as they feel threatened by the gradual normalisation of other models which is taking place in the United States at present (see section 2.4.6).

6.2.2 Sexuality

Delvecchio puts precise emphasis on the importance given in some modern romances to women remaining virgins until they find real love. In her book *Virginity in Young Adult Literature after Twilight*, Seifert goes one step further by arguing the whole plot in this saga revolves around the idea of when and

how Edward and Bella will have sex (10). Both Bella and Anastasia had never tried sex until they had it with their partners and Bella has it only once she is married. Shaw considers this specific fact conservative (233) and other authors, such as Chaplin, consider that the treatment given to all sex-related matters in *Twilight* is, as a whole, reactionary (“Nothing is Real” 67). Although according to Lingred and Isaksson, vampire romance has evolved in the last decades to become more egalitarian and less sexual (32), these two protagonists perfectly illustrate Nakagawa’s statement that in modern romance female sex is, still, considered possible only within the frame of marriage or real love (12) because, Seifert argues, females are expected to consent to having sex if they are sure that their partners love them and are committed to them (15) and only after having said no multiple times (15). The way Ethan and Merit relate in sex issues is, like love, complicated and she repeats these patterns: she feels a powerful sexual attraction towards him which she denies and which is corresponded, but not consummated in the beginning because she only wants to have meaningful, romantic sex.

Another old-fashioned idea about women that *Twilight* puts emphasis on is female virginity. Seifer claims that this saga is a good example to prove that the lack of sexual experience in women is generally understood as a synonym with “good girl” (10, 12, 14). Although Bella has to fight back her libido often and it could be argued that she is obsessed with sex (Seifer 11), it is not specially illogical to believe that a girl of 17 may be a virgin. However,

some critics remark how highly unlikely it is, in our time, to find a young woman like Anastasia, who, at the age of 21, has never had any sexual experience yet (Hyde 159-160) and has not even masturbated (Muñoz; Love 194). Purcell emphasises how “she seems to have no sexual identity until Christian Grey enters her life”. Merit, who is much older than Bella or Anastasia, is not clearly stated to be a virgin—although it is neither denied—but admits that she has been more interested in her studies than in dating. She has only had one steady boyfriend and, because she has not gone out with men often, her experience in sex-related matters is scarce. Ethan is, on the contrary, presented as a fantastic kisser (*Some Girls Bite* 112) and well-versed and potent in bed (247).

There is a large gap between Ethan’s and Merit’s sexual past because he has had more experiences over the years which proves that Lindgren and Isaksson are not completely right when they state that vampire romance is now more egalitarian and less focused on sex (32) since the love relationship between the main protagonists in *Chicagoland* starts precisely with sex and while he has a lot of knowledge of the matter, she—like Bella and Anastasia—has either none or almost no previous experience.

I agree with Shaw that the way sex is presented in *Twilight* is conservative (233) and I think the *Chicagoland* saga proves Nakagawa right as, although it could be argued that Merit and Ethan are more progressive than Bella and Edward because they have sex before marriage, and even more

modern than Anastasia and Christian—who have sex before they say “I do”, but become husband and wife just a few months after—, Ethan often refers to their wedding as a fixed plan for the future. Merit’s sexual life has been either short or non-existent; this is quite unlikely for a woman in her twenties, as Muñoz, Hyde (159-160) and Love (194) state about Anastasia. Furthermore, Merit does not reflect contemporary common behavioural patterns from women nowadays and, instead of being able to freely enjoy sex—as, like I mentioned in the chapter concerning the historical background, most women in the United States do nowadays (see section 2.4.1)—she follows Victorian ideals about sex as she denies her desire (see section 1.1.1) and rejects her feelings until Ethan declares his love for her because she only conceives sex if it is part of a committed relationship³⁰, proving Nakagawa and Seifert (12, 15) right. With her behaviour, Merit supports stereotypes about female sexuality being linked to what is romantically considered true love, as the argument in *Chicagoland Vampires* follows the same traditional structure as *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades*, in which a woman falls in love with only one man in her whole life and she remains loyal to him forever.

Purcell emphasises that sex in the *Fifty Shades* trilogy is rough and focused only on the man’s desire, a point which other scholars also highlight (Hutcherson 100; Hyde 160). Because Christian decides how and when sex will

³⁰ Although it could be argued that Sookie, the main female character analysed in the previous section presents a similar mindset in the beginning of the *Southern Vampire Mysteries* and she is equally inexperienced, she soon evolves and changes partners a few times throughout the series while Merit never has sex or shows interest in any other man other than Ethan.

take place and forbids Anastasia to masturbate, Hutcherson goes as far as to label him “abusive” in this respect (99). Although Ethan may not be as clearly abusive as Christian, he sometimes harasses and forces Merit when she does not want his attentions or is not sure of whether she is ready or willing to accept them.

For instance, in *Friday Night Bites*, Ethan hugs and touches Merit against her will and accuses her of secretly wanting him in an irritated tone (269). Merit finally consents and, although they do not have sex, they kiss twice (271-272). It is important to note that Merit uses the noun “hunter” to describe Ethan and his expression at that right moment, and the words “prize” and “prey” to talk about herself (271). Later, when Ethan orders a romantic dinner for Merit in his room in *Twice Bitten*, she decides to succumb to his insistence.

However, this is not an idyllic situation because when she seems to doubt and tries to escape, he starts touching and kissing her and violently pushes her against a closed door and holds her wrists (123). She calls him a “predator” and says she sees “victory in his expression” once she is trapped (123). When he roughly tells her that she is “caught” (123) and establishes that “there is no going back” (125), she denies not being completely sure about what she wants (123). Ethan is too insistent and pushy in his sexual approaches. Merit clearly expresses she is not interested in him but he repeatedly makes advances towards her and kisses and touches her without her consent, making Merit feel confused and scared. The language she uses to describe the action—

having to do with fighting and hunting—denotes aggressiveness and violence. Because during these passages Ethan ignores Merit’s constant and clear negatives, they could arguably be described as showing abuse. Since the protagonist has enjoyed a date with this man and they have flirted previously, her right to say no seems to have disappeared. This fact could be a reflection of how men are encouraged by media to ignore women’s refusals, specially if they have been friendly to them (see section 2.4.3.1). However, it seems clear that these sections do not contain any condemnatory message as they are written to be perceived as highly sexy and to be enjoyed by readers by using sensual language and because the plot gradually leads to a happy ending for the couple.

Another similarity between sex scenes in *Fifty Shades* and *Chicagoland Vampires* is that from the beginning of the saga, Merit’s sexual life is exclusively related to Ethan, and after their first sexual encounter the erotic scenes are not especially different from each other as Ethan is always the one who starts and leads the action and the passages finish when he reaches the climax. Most of these lines are about him penetrating her, and Ethan’s big penis (*Friday Night Bites* 272; *Hard Bitten* 271; *Biting Cold* 275; *Biting Bad* 79; *Wild Things* 210; *Blood Games* 245) and strong muscles (*House Rules* 56; *Biting Bad* 80) are often referred to.

Armintrout points out that the language used in sex scenes in *Fifty Shades* is full of negative terms such as “hit” or “beat” (80). In *Chicagoland Vampires*, violence-related terms, such as “attack” and “torture” (*Biting Bad*

80), are also often used to describe sexual encounters between Merit and Ethan. Different scholars and critics complain about the very unrealistic fact that Anastasia reaches multiple orgasms every time she has sex with Christian although he never asks her about her preferences or actively ignores them (Hutcherson 100) and that he even controls this part of their intercourses, telling her when to reach her climaxes (Sanzo 63). Very similarly, even if Merit seems to be fully satisfied and also reaches a climax every time they have sex, Ethan is rarely mentioned to be paying any attention to her body or reactions. He is often said to growl (*Twice Bitten* 121) or to speak using a voice tone close to the growl of an animal (*Hard Bitten* 271) and sometimes becomes aggressive and ties or bites Merit, hurting her as a result and as a necessary step to reach pleasure (*Biting Cold* 276; *Biting Bad* 80).

Although Ethan's language, like Christian's, becomes even more possessive during intercourse and denotes aggressiveness, it cannot be stated that he is abusive with Merit in bed because their practises are consented by her and, unlike Christian, he does not seek pleasure through beating his partner. However, Ethan's behaviour is quite violent and, as a result, Merit sometimes feels pain before she can achieve pleasure. Moreover, it cannot be said that these two characters have an egalitarian sexual relationship, as scenes of this type are too focussed on Ethan's body and pleasure, while what Merit feels is summarised in a few words or lines.

In her article for *Forbes*, Goudreau notes that there has always been literary erotica for women but that the *Fifty Shades* trilogy has reached women faster and become more famous than other similar books before (“Will Fifty Shades”). Hiller maintains that the main reason for their success is that these books contain a “timeless erotic situation” which portrays a man making a woman surpass her limits in sex matters and become submissive to him (217). This logic—which could be right, due to the millions of copies of the trilogy sold all around Western countries—may be applied to *Chicagoland Vampires* series, as both the way the sexual relationship between Ethan and Merit develops as well as the violent language and short and male-centred narrative chosen to describe their encounters is similar to those in E. L. James’ bestsellers. This assumption, however, implies that most women, even in the 21st century, would desire to be controlled—at least in bed—by their partners, although feminists and women in general have been fighting for their sexual freedom and right to choose for decades.

In contrast, feminist journalist Alibhai-Brown believes that the great fame achieved by *Fifty Shades* could be a consequence of its moral about femininity and gender roles being somehow rooted in our society as, in her opinion, the saga follows the pattern of and works as a modern cautionary tale which serves the most reactionary sectors of society, who may fear the traditional order being changed by the wider freedom women enjoy nowadays. This point of view—which I concur with—would again be another consequence

of the general regression in the mindsets in the United States which is happening nowadays (see section 2.4.6) and to which I have recurrently referred throughout this chapter.

6.2.2.1 Heteronormativity

Another important point related to love and sex to be noted in these series of books, is how heteronormative they are. It seems to be another retrogressive singularity in vampire romance these days as *Twilight* books are strictly heterosexual and, what is more, no gays are ever mentioned, as if they did not exist (Eddo-Lodge, Manderstedt and Annbritt 151). Manderstedt and Annbritt state that, judging from abundant online gay and lesbian fiction produced by *Twilight* fans, it can be deduced that many readers would have liked this saga not to be so heteronormative (150). Since Meyers, the author of the *Twilight* saga, has not publicly expressed her opinion about matters such as same-sex relationships, it cannot be stated that her books contain homophobic ideas per se, although it is clear that there is no room for members of LGBTQAI+ communities (150-151) nor any homoerotic element (Kathryn 104) in her universe. The same can be said about *Fifty Shades* if we take it as an example of non-vampiric romance because this saga became well-known for its explicit sexual content and the constant mention of bondage and sadomasochistic practices, but these always happen between a man and a woman (Boyle).

Kane highlights how vampires had, until recently, been often used to represent “queer” movements (104-105) and Seifer notes that, while gay, lesbian and bisexual characters were becoming more common to be found among the pages of all kinds of romance novels addressed to young readers, in the last decade they have disappeared from them (13). Effectively, all the novels and sagas analysed in previous chapters tend to be gay-friendly and, even if the main couple was in most cases a heterosexual one and lesbians did not have much visibility or importance, a certain variety of non-straight secondary characters—especially gay and bisexual men—were, at least, present. In contrast, alternative sexual orientations are not taken into account in *Chicagoland Vampires* as no character—either a protagonist or a minor one, male or female—is non-straight. Like Christian and Anastasia, Merit and Ethan are very sexually active, but never show the slightest interest in anyone from their own gender. Moreover, Ethan is very much portrayed as a typical macho as his manly attributes and libido are constantly mentioned, as well as his “alpha” behaviour, which Merit is quite fond of.

This tendency of having erased any characters who are not strictly heterosexual from the lines of vampire romance—a media which has traditionally been used to express alternative sexualities even at times when they were a taboo—also goes hand in hand with the retrogressive social movements that are now again gaining ground in the United States that I have mentioned in the chapter concerning the historical background (see section

2.4.6).

6.4 Feminism

Feminism in the exemplifying sagas may be the most widely debated issue that scholars have discussed when analysing them. Like I have already shown in the previous sections of this chapter, although most critics do not find the content of these books especially subversive from a feminist perspective or find them even misogynistic—Eddo-Lodge constantly calls Bella an “anti-feminist” character while both Silver (130) and Gomez-Galisteo (“Vampire Meets Girl” 3) state that she is in no way a good example for young readers—, some others argue that both Bella and Anastasia are good examples of liberated women who pursue their happiness—for example, Gresh argues that the *Fifty Shades* saga “is a by-product of feminism and women’s equality” (102), and Zack defends that Bella, as a character, has a lot to teach today’s feminists (128).

For instance, Bella’s decision to take her pregnancy to term, even against Edward’s will, has sometimes been pointed out as proof of her being a feminist (McClimans and Wisnewski 171). But her resolution does not seem specially rebellious taking into account that she will sacrifice everything she has—including her own life—for that baby. Thus, although she lives in the United States in the 21st century, her attitude of constant endurance of pain, which portrays her as a perfect mother (Silver 131), is again closer to that expected from females in the Victorian era (Silver 134).

Also, because the *Fifty Shades* books contain very graphic sexual scenes and are oriented to female readers, some authors conclude that they are fruit of feminism (Perkins 12-13; Greth 102). Many critics agree that Anastasia is a proper subversive heroine for exploring her sexuality and engaging in “kinky” activities (Fire 111, 113). Similarly, Merit happily engages in sex with Ethan often and, either because her previous love life was non-existent, or due to Ethan’s often-mentioned fantastic skills, she continuously states to reach levels of pleasure she has never dreamt of. However, other critics consider that Anastasia is only agreeing to sadomasochistic practises that she is not sure about wanting to try, and that often humiliate and hurt her, only to please her partner (Love 193; Purcell; Boyle).

Because, as I mentioned before, both Anastasia’s and Merit’s sex lives are always subjugated to their partner’s wishes and needs, sex in these sagas cannot be seen as an unequivocal sign of feminism. Furthermore, it is contrary to women’s basic reproductive rights that Christian makes Anastasia agree to use the contraceptive method he prefers and to undergo a medical check-up to prove that she does not have any sexually transmitted diseases while he just verbally assures her he does not have any. Edward and Bella never consider having safe sex because they erroneously take for granted that vampires are infertile and Merit and Ethan go one step further as they never use contraceptive methods either even when they have been predicted to become parents in the future and although the protagonist states that she is not ready to

take such a big step in her life. Although neither Edward nor Ethan push their partners into having unprotected sex, they are also acting irresponsibly by just assuming they cannot procreate when the fact that they can is proved soon afterwards.

Furthermore, all these female protagonists are sending a possibly dangerous message to readers and also being irresponsible themselves by leaving the decisions regarding contraceptive methods in the hands of their lovers as they all become pregnant—or will become in the future, in Merit's case—when they had not planned to do so. Furthermore, they expose themselves to contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Although vampires having diseases is never mentioned in the *Twilight* nor *Chicagoland Vampires* series, it is important to highlight the fact that Edward and Ethan—and all the people they know—do not know that vampires can become parents, which means that there may be other things they ignore about the risks of having unprotected sex.

Some authors argue that Bella is interested specifically in feminism by, for example, pointing out a paper she writes for her literature class in which she states that she does not like the misogyny and different standards for men and women she finds in Shakespeare's texts (Mann 141), or because she wants to be turned into a vampire partly to be able to have an equal marriage with Edward and be able to save and help him like he has been protecting her (Shea 83). Silver goes as far as to state that Bella's development and transformation into a

vampire, who can protect her family, echoes certain feminist views from the 1980's (134).

Although, because of the many reasons I am pointing out all throughout this chapter I do not think that Bella can be unquestionably labelled a feminist, it is true that her reflecting on these issues—even if only briefly and in very specific occasions—is positive. On the contrary, Anastasia never thinks about feminism and neither does Merit. Although the protagonist of *Chicagoland Vampires* defends her right to make her own decisions and she finds it difficult to follow Ethan's rules in the beginning, she, unlike Bella, never makes clear statements having to do with topics related to feminism, such as double standards or sexism. In the same way, she never speaks out for other women, nor questions whether any female is being treated badly or differently for her gender and each book contains many bad stereotypes.

6.4.1 Gender Stereotypes

Merit often divides how people behave or spend their free time into two categories: “girly” and “boyish”—or “manly”—according to old-fashioned conventions. Although Bella and Anastasia do not use those labels so often, men and women in *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades* trilogies have differentiated hobbies and attitudes. For example, Myers points out that Bella thinks that only men can enjoy motorcycles to show that she is, indeed, an anti-feminist character (158) while Mann similarly points out that when she needs any kind

of mechanical repair done, she looks for a boy to do it while she watches him work (133). Bella does not have many hobbies (133), but some activities she seems to truly enjoy are reading (Myers 157) and doing the house chores for her father (Eddo-Lodge; Mann 133), which are much more passive actions—actually, in Hayes-Smith’s opinion, women all through the saga are presented as inherently passive (78). On the contrary, Edward often shows traditionally considered masculine interests such as driving his sports car incredibly fast (133) while Bella’s childhood friend Jacob having a taste for mechanical work is, in her eyes, something only men could understand (Myers 158).

Although in *Hard Bitten* Merit states that crying—even without a reason—is a common female behaviour of “importance” (66) and she thinks that women need to spend time together and be able to express their feelings (*Dark Debt* 231), when she offers herself to listen to Luc, a male vampire, talking about his love life, she considers the question “girly”, and the cold look she gets for an answer “all boy” (*Twice Bitten* 308). In *Friday Night Bites*, Merit tries to get extra time to get dressed by reminding Ethan that she is a girl (98). Before they go to an elegant party, she hands her purse to him, and his bad reaction—giving it the same look “he might have given bad fish” (*Dark Debt* 80)—, the jokes another male vampire makes when he sees him holding the bag, and his refusal to do it again (81) do not surprise Merit.

On a few rare occasions, men in these books perform tasks traditionally considered feminine, or have “girly” pastimes. Catcher watches

soap operas and dramas on TV (*Friday Night Bites* 90) and, in *Blood Games*, wears an apron to bake cookies (177-178). In *Wild Things*, a shifter called Damien names and takes care of an abandoned cat in a very nurturing way (99-100). Merit does not consider these actions masculine (*Friday Night Bites* 91) and she describes them in a very humorous tone.

Many authors have highlighted that men and women in *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades* seem to be differentiated also for their behaviours as the former are naturally presented as athletic and strong as opposed to the latter, who are weaker and less intelligent (Hayes-Smith 79; Altenburger et al. 456). This leads to violent and excessive jealous actions being seen as a natural tendency of males. For instance, Edward and Jacob constantly fight over Bella's love, a fact that Hayes-Smith considers a sign of old-fashioned masculinity and which equals women to "prizes" men can achieve (79). Christian constantly tries to avoid Anastasia interacting with other men (Purcell; Armintrout 81, 84) because he feels that they are his rivals (Armintrout 81).

When Merit visits Mallory and sees Catcher drink directly from a carton of milk, she considers it a normal behaviour for a man (*Friday Night Bites* 84) and, as she realises that the house is quite untidy, she assumes this is a direct consequence of living with males (84; *Twice Bitten* 193). She also considers it "manly" when men greet just by nodding (*Friday Night Bites* 174) or patting each others' backs (*Biting Bad* 141).

In *Chicagoland Vampires* there are examples of violent masculine behaviours which are not as innocuous as the ones quoted at the beginning of this section. For example, In *House Rules*, a good friend of Merit's called Jonah and Ethan decide to fight each other (250) to "clear the air" about her (251). She does not like this course of action but she seems to understand that they need to fight for her, and steps out of the matter. She seems to agree that being men and "testosterone" are good reasons to excuse their violent behaviour (252).

Merit also seems to understand the fact that Catcher always interferes with Mallory's personal issues and is often jealous. In *Friday Night Bites* Catcher wants Merit to talk and be comprehensive with Mallory after the two women have an argument, and he uses a threatening and disrespectful tone with her (212) and shows a violent and intimidating behaviour: he corners Merit (212) and, as he leans forward towards her, she becomes fearful and anxious (213). In *Twice Bitten*, Catcher tries to convince Merit of phoning Mallory after another argument (99), but he is not violent.

Different scholars who analyse and/or review *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades* agree that Bella and Anastasia are not good models to be followed by female readers and some highlight the importance of encouraging writers to create other types of heroines and stories which break up with traditional gender roles (Alternburger et al. 462). Being so strong and eager to fight, Merit had the potential to become a great example for girls reading *Chicagoland Vampires*

books. However, she takes for granted that many bad stereotypes about women's and men's differentiated behaviours and tastes are true as shown in the previous examples. In fact, if some of those ideas about men are mainstreamed, they may be dangerous. For example, thinking that they are innately aggressive or jealous and that these are signs of masculinity, or that a certain amount of violence coming from a male partner is tolerable if you are in love with him—as Hayes-Smith states about *Twilight* (79)—helps normalising violence against women (Altenburger et al. 456). Moreover, the short passages in which men are portrayed as nurturing or enjoying certain house chores could have been used to show how old mind-sets are changing, but the shock they produce in Merit and the funny tone she uses to describe them make them sound odd and unattractive. These stereotypes contribute to the still existent inequality among genders in certain areas such as housework (see section 2.4.1.1).

Vega underlines that many female heroines try to stand out by differentiating themselves from the rest of women. But by arguing that because of their intelligence, strength or traditionally believed to be mannish interests they are unique and somehow superior, they reinforce old gender roles. By presenting themselves as exceptions to the rule, these characters admit that women are not made for whatever they, as individuals, happen to be good at: fighting, practising certain sports, plotting and planning, etc. They treat other females as a homogeneous group, not as one formed by people with different personalities and lifestyles and, by implying they are better, all other women are

scorned.

Bella does not like stereotypical “girly” attitudes or pastimes. While she puts up with many abusive behaviours both from Edward and her friend Jacob and she is happy being around them, she does not put any effort in developing a relationship with her classmate Jessica—who wanted to befriend her—because she thinks that she is too jealous and talks too much (Hayes-Smith 78-79), G. Dunn also notes that being so fascinated by Edward, Bella cannot relate to the excitement her female friends feel about the school prom (16). Furthermore, Bella sometimes accepts doing some “traditionally feminine activities” such as buying clothes and trying new hairdos with Alice, Edward’s sister (Lindgren and Isaksson 135), but she does not normally enjoy it and agrees to it only in order to please her (Lucas 179). Merit’s feelings towards “girly” hobbies are mixed since she sometimes uses that label to describe activities she enjoys but, like Bella, she often tries to show that she is also different from other women and does not find their pastimes amusing.

Sometimes, especially in the beginning, she considers other female vampires—or their tastes or aims in life—rather dull or too simple, and it is deduced from her condescending words and thoughts towards them (*Friday Night Bites* 93-94) that she believes she is doing them a favour when she spends time with them or talks to them. Sometimes, when she meets females who do not have either a life as luxurious as hers or as much cultural knowledge, she describes them in derogatory terms (*Biting Bad* 127). Like Vega suggests, Merit

feels, like Bella, not only different, but also superior when she is around new females since, while she seems to find their activities too simple or senseless, she often refers to herself as educated and “nerdy”. Also, Merit finds it difficult to engage in what she considers “girly” conversations or to behave in a “girly” way at times. For instance, she does not know how to walk on high heels. She needs another woman to train her to do it for a party (*Dark Debt* 317) and asks this woman to buy her clothes—including her underwear—and have her hair and make-up arranged because she wants to look sexy and is not able to do these things on her own (*Dark Debt* 325-327). She is impressed with the results she sees on the mirror and does not believe she has ever been so beautiful or that she could have arranged her look by herself (*Dark Debt* 327) as if she did not believe that she can be strong and/or intelligent and feminine at the same time.

Because Merit feels she is more educated and cultured than most women around her, she is not able to forge deep friendships with them or get involved in their activities although she has, in contrast, meaningful relationships and common interests with men. She, for example, keeps in touch with her grandfather often and most people she interacts with on a daily basis—her romantic partner, her partner in the Red Guard and her multiple trainers—are all males. Contrarily, most of her female relatives and friends—with the exception of Mallory—are rarely mentioned. This reinforces the most clear stereotype about women-to-women relationships that Vega finds in fiction: that

females are too complicated and naturally compete against each other and that while the relationships they forge with men make are enriching, they, on the contrary, cannot learn anything important from each other.

Another typical cliché Vega finds in modern fiction is that women who have any interest in matters usually not considered feminine—such as science or sports—, who can resist physical exercise, or are not sensitive to dirty jokes or violence, have very often been influenced by men in their families or circle of friends, as if females lacked innate curiosity or talent for these subjects. Anastasia may be the most plain among the exemplifying characters to this respect, as she does never take up any new hobbies after having met Christian. However, Bella actually discovers that she likes motorcycles but only after her male friend Jacob introduces her to them (Myers 158). Furthermore, and even if she had first considered Edward's Volvo an unnecessary display of economic power (Lucas 171), she later enjoys driving the luxurious car the Cullens buy for her (171). She also becomes a very powerful vampire by the end of the saga and, for once, she feels comfortable in a position of power (Silver 133; Lucas 174) but, although this could be taken for a clear sign of feminism, it is important to remember that it is Edward who turns her into a night creature and to do so, she first has to adopt the position of prey (Mann 142-1433).

There are a few examples that prove Vega would also be right about this if we compare her ideas with Merit. For example, she perfects her most remarkable skill—how to fight—only with the help of men. Also, she learns

about most of her hobbies which, according to her own standards could be considered “manly”, from males. For instance, in *Dark Debt* she saves herself and Morgan by escaping from an island on a boat. He is first dubious and then impressed about her abilities with ships. Later, she explains to him that when she was younger her grandfather taught her how to sail (264).

Moreover, Merit would have never tried some of the things that she discovers that she enjoys doing if it were not because of men. She is, for example, not specially interested in cars at the beginning of the saga and owns a twenty-year-old ugly Volvo (*Drink Deep* 150) because that is what she can afford (*Some Girls Bite* 16). However a male friend lends her an antique and expensive model and, although she still considers vehicles boys’ “toys” (*Biting Bad* 63), she soon starts enjoying showing it off and driving fast (*Biting Bad* 60). Ethan ends up buying it for her (*Wild Things* 20) and gives her a parking space at the house against the opposition of some members (*Wild Things* 238).

Merit is also a very fond fan of baseball. She frequently engages in sports conversations—specially with men—and quickly divides people in groups depending on their answers about teams and games. She also owns a great amount of memorabilia from the Cubs, her favourite team. Merit never mentions any man introducing her to this sport. However, she tells Ethan that when she was a child, she managed to get all the Cubs players to sign a baseball for her but she lost it after. Ethan gets her a replacement (*Twice Bitten* 354) which becomes one of her most valuable goods along with very expensive

things such as her family jewels.

From a traditional point of view, most activities Merit enjoys doing would be considered “manly”. However, just like Bella acquires her new hobbies—which could be considered “manly”—from Jacob and Edward (Myers 158; Lucas 171), she learns how to sail from her grandfather and, although she drove a car and was a fan of baseball before she met Ethan, by buying her a new expensive car and a signed baseball, he becomes an important factor in the way she spends her free time. Like Bella, Merit discovers her talent for fighting once she has been turned into a vampire, which confers her a power she enjoys (Silver 133; Lucas 174) but, also like the protagonist in *Twilight*, Merit’s transformation and empowerment does not come from any personal discovery or development but is operated by her lover (Mann 142-143). Again, these facts in *Chicagoland Vampires* reinforce the idea that women are naturally interested in unimportant or uninteresting activities and that they may enjoy “manly” hobbies and actions, such as sports or fighting, only if they are first introduced to them by a man or if a male provides them with the adequate techniques and/or necessary tools to practise them, like Myers accurately points out when explaining how Jacob teaches Bella about motorcycles (158).

I agree that women receiving the message that men and women are inherently different and that the former are aggressive and violent while the latter must calm and pacify them is dangerous as female readers can, in fact, understand that derogatory treatment towards them should be tolerated if it

comes from an intimate partner of the opposite gender and does not help promote equality (Altenburger et al. 456). However, as Febos points out about *Fifty Shades*, it is important to note that, dangerous or not, this very misogynistic product has been created and become so popular because it matches the regressive changes in mentality that are taking place at this time in the United States (309) mentioned in section 2.4.6 of the chapter concerning the historical background.

6.4.2 Misogynistic and Derogatory Treatments

Another aspect of females in fiction on which Vega focuses is that heroines are often praised for their good abilities but only after their gender has been highlighted and pointed out as a disadvantage for whatever action they are performing. This author states that the value of these females is, thus, only accepted at the expense of their value as women. Furthermore, Vega explains, villains often address disqualifying or sexist comments towards female heroines. This author insists that, although misogynistic behaviours are still present in society and make most women upset, there is no need to show them in fiction as a way for readers to sympathise with heroines. She adds that, in worlds of fantasy in which vampires, elves, and werewolves coexist, this part of reality could be suppressed in order to show how society and mentalities are evolving.

Examples of this fact cannot be found in *Twilight* or *Fifty Shades*. Anastasia and Bella are often attacked by mischievous characters—mainly males—but, as many authors point out, never fight back but passively wait to be rescued by their chivalrous partners, which is a more traditional and stereotyped feminine way of reacting to situations of danger (Hayes-Smith 79; Silver 125; Gomez-Galisteo, “Vampire Meets Girl” 5; Eddo-Lodge; Altenburger et al. 456). Even when Bella is transformed into a vampire and she is said to become stronger than Edward, the main superpower acquired due to her new nature is more of a protective than an attacking ability—she can create a barrier around her and her loved ones. Many scholars regard Bella’s shield as a symbol of motherhood and sacrifice (Silver 134) more than a real sign of strength because even as a vampire she is not more proactive, but just reactive and protective (Terjesen and Terjesen 51).

Merit is, in contrast, a natural-born fighter. However, like Vega notes about much contemporary fiction, she has to constantly stand comments from males around her which put her battle abilities into question because of her gender. For example, Gabriel Keene gives Merit the nickname “kitten” because he doubts she can be a good fighter (*House Rules* 183). Later, he admits that she is a good fighter but keeps on calling her “kitten” and some other times addresses her as “kid”, although their ages are similar. Also, Merit’s grandfather often refers to her as “baby girl” (*Some Girls Bite* 76; *Blood Games* 137; *House Rules* 71; *Dark Debt* 195). This can be understood as proof of his love, but it is

shocking that he uses that particular phrase to show his affection since they often meet in crime scenes and they solve them together. Moreover, Merit's grandfather is old and not strong any more while she is a very fit and well trained immortal being. In *Biting Bad*, Merit even saves his life (263).

Even some very secondary characters such as shop assistants or criminals who have no importance for the plot call Merit childish pet names. For example, the owner of a pizza restaurant where she often goes calls her "kid" (*Biting Bad* 26) and, in *Hard Bitten*, a malefactor who has never seen her before, repeatedly calls her "kid" (230-232; 234) and "doll" (234). However, most villains tend to be chauvinistic in a more derogatory and clear way since they insult Merit by addressing her gender or by calling her degrading names used only against women such as "bitch" (*Biting Bad* 122; *Blood Games* 129; *Dark Debt* 187, 260) while some others make obscene gestures to her (*Dark Debt* 305) or laugh at the idea of battling against her (*Blood Games* 127-128; *Dark Debt* 256). Because Merit is an outstanding fighter, she usually performs well in those fights and most of these characters end up regretting having taken for granted that she is feeble and unable. Even Merit's companions and vampire friends feel they are entitled to make jokes or laugh at her whenever she commits a mistake in a battle (*Biting Bad* 130).

Merit is perceived as feeble by every man in the series as she is given cute names which infantilise her by those she knows, as well as being insulted by strangers. Males around her are also sceptical about her ability to fight and

any mistakes she commits while in a battle are the object of criticism. Men in this series have friends and enemies of both sexes, but contrarily to Merit, they are not called any affectionate nicknames by anybody and their gender is not addressed if they are verbally attacked in a confrontation either. On the contrary, they are always thought of as worthy opponents. Thus, although the main protagonist in *Chicagoland Vampires* is a female fighter, these books fail to initially picture her as an equal to males in this respect too.

All these facts seemingly prove Vega right when she points out that most contemporary fiction works show females having to prove their value in front of men while their male counterparts are thought of as valid just because of their gender. However, I do not consider this as negative as Vega does since the fact that Merit has to prove her value once and again and fight stereotypes about women being feeble or less competent in general may well be a reflection of the glass-ceilings that still exist for females in many professional areas and which I have referred to in the chapter concerning the historical background (see section 2.4.2).

By making males re-think the preconceived ideas they may have had about her, Merit is taking a step towards equality, but she would, from a feminist point of view, have been a much better heroine if she had made some statement about the validity of women in general to those males who doubted her in the first place. By just feeling proud of having gained their recognition after showing them her talent, she is, again, differentiating herself from other

females and, thus, giving readers the impression that she is an exceptional case: a somehow different woman who can step into male territory while regular ones cannot. This comes to reinforce some problematic stereotypes and subsequent behaviours that still persist in our society nowadays and that I have quoted in the chapter concerning the historical background: that because women are perceived as naturally-born pacifiers (see sections 2.3.2 and 2.4.4), those who present violent behaviours are regarded as unnatural and deviated exceptions while those who make a career in matters such as politics or the army, have to act in exaggeratedly manly ways in order to differentiate themselves from other women and gain the respect of their male colleagues (see sections 2.3.1).

6.4.3 Rape and Harassment

Both Bella and Anastasia constantly attract unwanted attention from men around them and, since they seem unable to protect themselves against uncomfortable approaches, Edward and Christian spy on them in order to save them in these occasions and are presented in an old fashioned way as typical knights “in shiny armour” (Armintrout 78) who defend something they own. Only their intervention prevents their female counterparts from being hurt or raped (78; Silverman 102; Gomez-Galisteo, “Vampire Meets Girl” 5; Gomez-Galisteo “The Twilight of Vampires” 166). Merit’s case is more complicated as she similarly undergoes one rape attempt from a stranger, but has to also stand an awkward situation by witnessing sex between Ethan and another woman

while Bella and Anastasia are never confronted with a similar situation involving their partners.

The first time Merit sees Ethan naked, he is in his bedroom having sex with his concubine. He realises that Merit is watching them and makes eye contact with her as he displays his sexual power (*Some Girls Bite* 249). He has declared his physical interest in her, ignored her negatives and forced her to kiss him, but he goes one step further by making her watch while he is in bed with another woman. Hayes-Smith condemns the tone used in *Twilight* to describe how Bella is forced into a kiss by her friend Jacob and she ends up enjoying it because, in this critic's opinion, the message the author is sending to readers is that, on the one hand, women cannot fight back in situations of sexual harassment or violence and, on the other, that they say "no" when they mean "yes" or that they actually do not know what they really want and thus men should decide for them (78). This scene between Merit and Ethan is difficult to understand because the protagonist, instead of feeling that she is being harassed, after the first shock she is aroused (248) and fights her desire to walk away and decides to stay and keep on looking. I think this is somehow comparable to the forced kiss in *Twilight* because, while most women would feel embarrassed and even violated, both Bella and Merit end up enjoying what they are being forced to do or witness. In Harris' books, the way in which Sookie reacts to having to witness sex among other people and/or between her partners and other women—with repulsion, sadness and even fear—, which I

have highlighted in the previous chapter (see section 5.1.3.1), is much more realistic. Merit, in contrast, does not feel uncomfortable or harassed in any way.

In *Dark Debt*, Merit is attacked by Balthasar, a vampire who wants to cause pain to Ethan through her. She is dragged towards him with magic and kissed against her will in front of many people (39). Later on, this vampire enters Merit's dreams—another ability of his—, bruises her arm and tries to rape her (151). When Merit is first kissed by Balthasar she feels that her right to say no has been ignored and that she has been violated (38). She also feels guilty for having succumbed to the vampire's magic because she feels she has been unfaithful to Ethan (43). When Balthasar enters her dreams and pushes her against a bed, she feels panic and worries about the “sanctity” of her body (151) and she is badly traumatised after the incident up to the point that she finds physical contact of any type unbearable (*Dark Debt* 170, 235).

The protagonist is being treated like an object belonging to Ethan when an enemy of his decides to hurt him through her. The consequences of the attempted rape are, at least partly, correctly tackled, because it is realistic to think that a woman in this situation would need some time to recover. However her guilt for having kissed another man is difficult to understand because it is a clear unwilling act and the character who forces her is known to be evil. Furthermore, all throughout the book Ethan seeks vengeance, which is a similar attitude to those of Edward and Christian which Armintrout (78), Galisteo (“Vampire Meets Girl” 5; “The Twilight of Vampires” 166) and Silverman

(102) highlight. However, later in the book Merit fights and beats this mischievous vampire herself—see section 6.1.5— which is, from a feminist point of view, a better way to close this part of the plot, as the main heroine takes control of the action and does not allow her lover to act in her name after she is attacked.

6.4.4 Relationships between Women

In her blog article, Vega states that they do not have meaningful lasting relationships of any kind with other women and that they often fight each other for the love of a man. Vega remarks how difficult it is to find female-female friendships in fiction in which one of the characters or both fully respect and support each other and do not take advantage of the other's weaknesses in the difficult moments. Hayes-Smith corroborates Vega's ideas in her review of the *Twilight* series, as she points out that the few relationships Bella has with other women are "fragile" (78) and that she never attempts to befriend girls who actually show interest in her and, quite on the contrary, complains about their behaviours (79). In this scholar's opinion, the way Bella behaves towards other women reinforces the idea that it is easier to befriend men while women can only base their relationships with each other in competition (79). Other scholars have remarked that the relationship she has with her absent mother—who they perceive as stupid (Hayes-Smith 78), selfish when making decisions (Hayes-Smith 78; Housel 184; Silver 124), and "flaky" (Myers 157)—is almost

exploitive, as Bella sacrifices herself for her (McClimans and Wisnewski 167) and takes care of her and not vice versa (Hayes-Smith 78).

Although Anastasia does not object to relating to females, however, readers get the impression that those who interact with her are more damaging than helpful to her. For instance, when listing the reasons why this protagonist is too much of a stereotyped woman in need of a man, Purcell highlights that she has only one female friend who in fact abuses her, while Upstone remarks that Anastasia's mother—the only other woman she has a connection with—is presented as “imperfect” and full of “flaws” (140).

Similarly, most people Merit relates to are men and, as I mentioned before, when she is introduced to other females she rapidly judges them and compares herself to them, creating rivalry as a consequence. Women are portrayed as treacherous and complicated and they do not know how to handle power. Men are, in contrast, generally seen in a positive light, as simple and sincere, and Merit has easy—although not always egalitarian—relationships with them. Merit's interactions with women are or become problematic and, in most cases, they are based on—or conditioned by—negative sentiments such as envy.

Mallory is the only important woman in Merit's life and they live happily together. However, when the former meets Catcher, she rushes into having a relationship with him and soon after they first see each other, the man's presence in the house and their sexual encounters are so overwhelming

that Merit decides to move to Cadogan house (*Friday Night Bites* 8).

Another turning point in Merit's relationship with her best friend is when Mallory succumbs to the power of her own magic and becomes evil. Afterwards, the protagonist feels she cannot trust her anymore. Although Merit often forgives men around her relatively fast, it takes her a long time to feel comfortable in Mallory's presence again (*House Rules* 10; *Biting Bad* 17) and to speak to her normally (*House Rules* 219; *Dark Debt* 160). While living with their best friend and supporting each other was important and meaningful, once men enter the scene the long-lasting, strong friendship between Merit and Mallory seems to vanish. They distance from each other so much that Mallory becomes an evil witch and is about to end the world without Merit noticing any changes in her personality. While Merit forgets betrayals and humiliating behaviours from Ethan and her father easily, the process of trusting Mallory again is slow and difficult.

Bella and Anastasia have repeatedly been said to have a low self-esteem (Eddo-Lodge; Purcell) and to need validation from their partners (McMahon 200; Purcell). They constantly ask themselves how such attractive men like Edward and Christian can find them beautiful (*New Moon* 65), and they feel insecure when they compare themselves to other women in their partners' lives, including their family members (*Twilight* 304). Although Merit does not have personality problems and is content with her general appearance, when she compares herself to women in Ethan's past or attractive females he

interacts with, she feels she is not as good as them (*Friday Night Bites* 63, *Twice Bitten* 213-214). Although at times she remains silent about her feelings and suppresses them (*Twice Bitten* 143), she, like Bella, often turns to her partner for approval (McMahon 200; Purcell) and confesses her jealousy to him (*Biting Cold* 26; *House Rules* 257). All women benefit from forging relationships with each other but those who find it difficult to believe in their self-worth may need close female friends even more. However, in *Chicagoland Vampires*, women are generally portrayed in such a bad light—presented, like in *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades* as too jealous and nosy (Hayes Smith 79) or lacking intelligence (78), as abusive and selfish (Housel 184; Purcell) or as failed distant mothers (McClimans and Wisnewski 167; Hayes-Smith 78; Silver 124; Upstone 140)—that it seems logical that Merit, like Bella and Anastasia, usually prefers the company of men and that only these occupy important positions in her life. Also like the exemplifying heroines, most female-female relationships Merit has are either based on competition and enmity (Vega; Hayes-Smith)—see for example her interactions with Céline—or are “fragile” (Hayes-Smith 78)—like her friendship with Mallory.

6.5 Independence

Boyle argues that Anastasia constantly puts herself in danger because she is unable to understand the clear mischievous intentions of men around her and, thus, it could be said that she puts herself at risk. Some authors similarly argue

that Bella's choices—such as walking alone at night— put her in danger (Gomez-Galisteo, “Vampire Meets Girl” 5; Hayes-Smith 79). Christian and Edward constantly control and stalk their loved ones and, because they save them on these occasions, their obsessive paternalist behaviour is excused and perceived as necessary (Gomez-Galisteo, “The Twilight of Vampires” 166) in a way that Hayes-Smith calls “Romanticisation of victimhood” (78).

For similar reasons, Merit is not in control of many important events and changes in her life. For example, although she thinks that she has become a vampire by accident, her transformation is not as incidental as she believes since by the end of *Hard Bitten*, she learns that many men were involved in it. Her father offered money to Ethan in order to transform her (333-334) and, although Ethan did not accept this deal, Céline felt insulted because she thought that she should have been asked too and hired a vampire to kill Merit in revenge. Ethan found her when she was about to die and saved her life by transforming her but only because he had been following all her movements since he got to know about her through her father. Ethan also drugged her during the process of becoming a vampire so that the pain was not as unpleasant for her as for everyone else. Giving her this special treatment makes her feel different to other vampires and she finds it impossible to relate to them (*Friday Night Bites* 339). Although Merit suspects that she was sedated during her transformation (*Some Girls Bite* 326), Ethan does not admit the fact until she has figured it out by herself and faces him with her conclusions (*Friday Night*

Bites 338).

Merit feels very resentful towards her father for having interfered with her freedom and is angry with Ethan because he made too many decisions and her life was totally in his hands (*Friday Night Bites* 337). She rapidly forgives her lover because she thinks that he was driven by pity and considers it a waste of time to start an argument about the past (339). For his part, Mr. Merit explains that he was also moved by love: having lost another daughter before, he wanted this one to be immortal (*Hard Bitten* 347). Merit considers this strange display of affection too intrusive and does not understand it since she says that her idea of love involves help and support and not deprivation of liberty (348) and feels resentful towards her father for some time (*Drink Deep* 116).

Although some scholars are critical of the fact that both Anastasia and Bella need to be rescued by their partners, by choosing to highlight that Anastasia is not able to perceive the bad intentions of men around them (Boyle) because she is too naïve, and that Bella walks alone at night (Seifert 16; Gomez-Galisteo, “Vampire Meets Girl” 5; Hayes-Smith 79) as a bad choice, they actually end up blaming these females—at least partly—for almost being raped. Merit is equally attacked by a vampire when she is alone at night and, because Ethan is able to save her in that precise moment, the fact that he has been spying on her is considered a convenient and lucky coincidence and drugging her is perceived as romantic because he does so in order to ease her

pain. This way of thinking is not far from seeing Christian and Edward as necessary saviours for the clumsy female heroines in their sagas (Gomez-Galisteo, “The Twilight of Vampires” 166). However, what Ethan does is not only illegal, but would be considered very alarming in any other context outside of romantic fiction.

It is interesting to note that, although Merit is angry both with her father and with Ethan because of the same reason—acting behind her back and making decisions for her—, and neither apologises to her, she rapidly forgives Ethan because she thinks that what he did proves his love for her.

Bella, as Eddo-Lodge highlights, is passed from one man to another to be protected and, even she—usually a submissive good girl—realises how this treatment infantilises her. In *Dark Debt*, Merit is equally passed from her father to Ethan when the former officially asks the latter to take care of her and he accepts (303). Although she is, unlike Bella and Anastasia, specially strong and even exceeds her partner at times, both him and her father are consciously ignoring these skills of hers when they make these agreements and decisions on her behalf. By remaining silent instead of standing for herself and expressing her opinion both in this case and about the way she became a vampire, Merit—who used to be independent and self-sufficient—shows obedience and humility towards both her father and partner. Furthermore, Merit never completely loses contact with her father and both she and Ethan cooperate with him often. Since Ethan wants to use Merit’s father’s power and friendships, he convinces her to

attend social events which she loathes (*Friday Night Bites* 42; 110) even when she has refused to be part of her father's plans by arguing she is "not for rent" in *Some Girls Bite* (275). Merit's father helps Ethan in exchange of them repaying his favours—such as meeting people her father is making deals with (*Dark Debt* 57-58)—, which leaves Merit indebted to him, a situation which she has successfully avoided during her whole adult life.

Another important man in Merit's life is her grandfather, with whom she has a close loving relationship. He, a retired policeman and the supernatural Ombudsman in Chicago (*Some Girls Bite* 82), grants Merit priority treatment and a number of illegal favours, such as sharing confidential information with her or investigating matters related only to her house (*Hard Bitten* 60; *House Rules* 29, 67). He also allows other members of his team—specialised in different areas such as informatics—to help her with her personal issues (*House Rules* 77). Merit considers calling his grandfather and his colleagues to obtain favours normal, and does not believe that there is anything wrong about the extraordinary treatment she receives from them. However, by accepting this special—and even illegal—help, she is using her family connections, a behaviour that she often reproves her father for.

Most remarkable events and changes in the lives of Anastasia and Bella have to do with their partners. Anastasia is considered to be "incomplete" without Christian (Altenburger et al. 461) and Bella has been described as orbiting around Edward (Man 134-135) as well as not being able to "function

without a man in her life” (Gomez-Galisteo, “Vampire Meets Girl” 168), while Edward has been argued to become all that matters to her (Myers 158). Seifer—quoting Silver (122)—goes as far as to state that she only acquires an identity once her relationship with Edward starts (16). Both protagonists are psychologically dependent on their loved ones, as they have no hobbies or goals in life which do not have to do with them (Gomez-Galisteo, “The Twilight of Vampires” 165). Furthermore, they do not spend time apart from them to meet any friends or relatives (Gomez-Galisteo “Vampire Meets Girl” 3, 4). In an interview for “LoveVampires”, a webpage aimed at vampires’ fans, Chloe Neill herself refers to Merit by using similar adjectives as she states that she goes “from book-obsessed grad student to obsession of a Master vampire”. This is not a positive change since Merit’s previous goals in life had to do with self-improvement and learning but, according to the writer, now she is only interested in a man. Neill also states that “Merit is still trying to find her feet, in spite of her accomplishments”. However, she already had an interesting plan for her life and, at the moment she becomes a vampire and is about to finish her PhD, a plan in which she has invested many years and which made her feel fulfilled.

Similarly, Mallory, who was in the beginning even more independent than Merit because of her successful career, changes because of Catcher’s presence. She seems to gradually lose her confidence and focus on him more than on herself as, according to the protagonist, he becomes the centre of

Mallory's universe (*Friday Night Bites* 10).

Critics agree that Bella and Anastasia become isolated gradually but fast (Housel; Bonomi; Bonomi et al. 721). To prove that these women are losing contact with the world, scholars point to certain changes in their way of living. For instance, the only person they meet on a daily basis are their partners, to whom they become rapidly attached as they lose contact with almost everybody they know: Myers highlights that Bella's few friends, with the exception of Jacob—a friend from her childhood—are never mentioned again after she marries Edward (158; Gomez-Galisteo "Vampire Meets Girl" 4) and goes to live with his family in a mansion in the very outskirts of an already isolated town (Eddo-Lodge). Anastasia is arguably also isolated from everyone she knew by Christian (Bonomi 721).

Although Merit does not leave the city of Chicago, she moves to a somehow remote place like Bella not long after being turned into a vampire. She has to live under Ethan's roof, in a small and very simple bedroom resembling those in a students' dormitory and seems to feel uncomfortable because she believes that she is too mature for a place like that (*Friday Night Bites* 23). Moreover, she cannot bring all her belongings with her and has to leave many of her books and meaningful memorabilia behind (*Friday Night Bites* 11). Furthermore Merit, like Bella and Anastasia, is also gradually separated from the people she knows when she becomes a vampire. She does not see Mallory every day anymore and misses her. Although she sometimes

interacts with some of her fellow vampires in their rooms and public spaces such as the canteen, things change when she becomes Ethan's partner, as she starts living in his big suite and spending all her free time with him and rarely meets anybody else alone. All these facts prove that Ethan isolates Merit and demands all her attention, like Edward and Christian do.

Some scholars argue that Anastasia and Bella also need to adapt their personalities and habits to please their lovers and live up to their expectations (Purcell; Housel 181). The former signs a contract that Purcell considers abusive since she can negotiate it only up to a certain point, has Christian's desires into account exclusively and does not include any points of her own. By signing these papers, Purcell argues, Anastasia is losing her freedom since it regulates all aspects of her life—the number of hours she must sleep, what she must eat, what kind of contraceptive methods she must use, and when to be available for Christian. Bonomi goes as far as to stating that she is disempowered and trapped because her routine and daily actions are marked by a third person (721). In order to be with Edward, Bella will have to change her plans of entering a college and shift her human state for undead through a painful transformation described in detail in the third section of *Breaking Dawn*.

Ethan buys dresses for Merit to wear in public appearances since he does not like her casual taste (*Some Girls Bite* 190; *Friday Night Bites* 99). Every once in a while the protagonist is allowed to choose what to have for dinner but Ethan mocks her preferences by pairing them to the fine ones he has

(*Twice Bitten* 106). Although in the beginning Merit, like Anastasia, finds Ethan's attentions and insistence in changing her habits disturbing she, also similarly to the protagonist in the *Fifty Shades* trilogy, gradually gives in and finally gets used to his luxurious way of living—with food and snacks constantly served to his door by the house's chef, expensive linen, etc. (*Biting Bad* 28)—up to the point that she even asks him to keep on choosing her garments (*Dark Debt* 58). By agreeing to hide her real taste and style, Merit has given in to change her habits to please her lover, just like Bella and Anastasia. She, like them, starts allowing Ethan to choose personal things such as food and clothing too often and is equally losing her personality in the process. Furthermore, when Merit shows Ethan's room to Mallory and her friend is impressed and comments on its magnificence, she naturally answers that she deserves it because she sleeps with the master (*Dark Debt* 224). By accepting special treatment and luxury de facto because she is the boss' girlfriend, Merit somehow becomes the “concubine” that she had stated that she did not want to be in *Some Girls Bite*.

Mallory also gets used to her new partner's negative behaviours such as his lack of cleanliness in the house (84) and thinks it is part of men's attitude, and lets him interfere in all the aspects of her life to extreme points. For example, Catcher uses his contacts and influence in the Order to get especial treatment for Mallory (85) and—as I have mentioned before—whenever Merit disagrees with her best friend, he tries to force her to talk to Mallory and even

gets violent.

Since, just like in Bella's and Anastasia's cases, every aspect of Merit's life has to do with or is controlled by her partner and she has, to a greater or lesser extent, been isolated from her friends and family, the protagonist of *Chicagoland Vampires* depends on Ethan just as much as the heroines from the other exemplifying sagas depend on their partners. Because of all these above-listed facts, as well as the differences of age and experience between Merit and Ethan, it would be difficult for her to start a new life of her own again given the case that she decided to leave him or if he left her. Mallory's case is very similar as, even if the age gap between her and her partner is not so wide, she is equally weaker than him and needs him to teach her in matters related to magic because he is more experienced than her in using it.

The power imbalance between males and females, which I have remarked in previous chapters of this dissertation and is common in vampire romance, makes an importance difference in their relationships (Leavenworth and Isaksson 32). Exquisite meals, trips and clothing being the most commonly mentioned presents that Christian and Edward give to their lovers, they are also given very expensive cars. Love highlights that Anastasia feels uncomfortable about receiving big presents—such as the mentioned car and a laptop—and finds her insistence on calling them loans and repeating that she will soon repay Christian for them absurd and ridiculous, since she never actually does (192). Similarly, in “The “Real” Danger”, Housel argues that Bella is completely

dependent on Edward and proves this fact by pointing out some examples such as him constantly giving her expensive valuables and trips and being eager to pay for her studies at a top university. In this scholar's opinion, these gestures should not be taken as romantic displays of love, but as attempts to isolate Bella even more (181) and Chaplin seems to imply that those very costly presents are the only way Edward knows to show his love and acceptance to Bella ("Nothing is Real" 64).

This applies to Merit too, because while she had borne her expenses before she started dating Ethan, she never again pays for anything after they become a couple and they bear a luxurious way of living. Also like Bella and Anastasia, Merit has mixed feelings towards receiving these attentions and presents. On the one hand, she accepts and likes them but, on the other hand, she does not completely feel the suite which she shares with Ethan is her home, even after two months living together (*Biting Bad* 16) and sometimes she calls it "our apartment" (*Blood Games* 64) but she uses its official name—"the Master's suite"—in other occasions (*Biting Bad* 241). It would be normal that a woman used to be on her own and sustain herself did not get accustomed fast to living in her partner's house and being constantly given expensive food and goods. However, she does not try to remain independent economically and, just like she does with other aspects of her life—such as her privacy, or living alone with her best friend—, she rapidly allows Ethan to be in control. It is not credible that a woman who had precisely renounced her family and their fortune

in order to avoid attending high society events and having to obey her father's orders, would so easily accept the commands from a man she barely knows and whose behaviour she finds arrogant. She also gets used to luxury and to wearing expensive clothes to attend the kind of parties she so deeply loathed too fast.

Some authors maintain that the heroines from the sagas compared in this chapter do not evolve at an individual level at all—like Eddo-Lodge states about Bella. Others observe certain changes in their personalities and thus state that they become, at least partly, stronger or wiser (Zack 122; McMahon 204; Myers 157). Although Eddo-Lodge's opinion that Bella does not evolve at all may be far-fetched, I would only partly agree with those scholars who think that Bella is a much better character by the end of the saga. The fact that she gains some special skills when she becomes a vampire is what happens to every person who is turned into one in the *Twilight* universe. Bella being specially good at something could be considered an element of interest which adds to the plot as part of the classical ending expected in romances. Mann also remarks that Bella only becomes a powerful vampire at a high cost: losing her individuality (143). Similarly Merit, who by the beginning of the saga is about to become a doctor and has some meaningful relationships—such as her friendship with Mallory and the love she feels for her grandfather—, plans for the future, an old car, and a few hobbies she is fond of, is an interesting character but soon enough loses all these elements which conformed her life.

Not all aspects in Merit's and Ethan's affair are so imbalanced or always deprive her of independence. There are a few details which show a certain evolution in the way they relate and which point to equality. For instance, in *Dark Debt*, when Balthasar shows up at their house again, Ethan starts fighting this evil character himself but asks Merit to finish the battle against him since she was the victim of his attack (338-339). At that same moment, Ethan also admits that Merit is a good fighter—even better than him (338). Later that night Merit surprises both Ethan and herself by taking control of their sexual encounter (351) and they both seem to be enjoying having exchanged their roles in bed. However, these more positive actions and reactions of Ethan are brief and unimportant in comparison with his generally possessive and controlling behaviour, which he maintains all throughout the saga. For instance, just a few lines after Merit initiates their sexual foreplay, he says she belongs to him and directs the rest of the action (352).

6.6 Final Remarks

Chicagoland Vampires is, chronologically, the last saga of the ones analysed in this dissertation. This is generally reflected in the portrayal of women among its pages, who are stronger and more intelligent, as well as more educated and economically independent than those who appeared in previously mentioned books from other decades. This may be due to the fact that nowadays more women than ever before access university, as well as managerial positions in

enterprises and organisations of all kinds, and they are not usually considered to be less able to develop any tasks than men. However, the retrogressive pattern that both the main protagonists of the saga, as well as her best friend's, specially in matters having to do with romantic relationships and family matters, which may seem incoherent at first sight, may also show that in the United States, along with a general feeling of content towards evolution, there is also a certain feeling of uncertainty in some reactionary sectors because women reaching parity means that gender roles, which had been clear and strict for men and women in previous decades, are becoming more flexible.

7 Conclusions

As the present dissertation has shown, there is an unarguable change in certain aspects concerning female characters between the vampire books from the 20th century and those from the 21st I have studied. On the one hand, the weight they have in the main plot has been enlarged as they have gone from secondary characters—such as Claudia from *Interview with the Vampire* or Ann from *Lost Souls*—to protagonists—such as Sookie from the *Southern Vampire Mysteries* or Merit from *Chicagoland Vampires*. On the other hand, they also become first-person narrators, which also gives them greater importance, as this allows readers to understand their feelings, thoughts and personalities more deeply.

The following sections list those subjects which repeatedly appear in most books and are of greater importance, grouped in different categories according to whether they present certain evolution, do not present evolution, or are counter-evolutive.

7.1 Areas Which Present Evolution

There is certain evolution in the characters, personalities and acquisition of power and strength of female characters in vampire romance. As time has gone by, women in these books have become more transgressive in some of these areas and the others have also evolved and are more egalitarian.

7.1.1 Education

Although Claudia, from *Interview with the Vampire*, makes an effort to cultivate herself by reading books, asking questions or travelling, she cannot access any kind of formal education such as school and all her sources of information are either Lestat and Louis themselves, or those means they provide her with.

As decades go by, females who appear in the vampire romances I have studied have higher education, a reflection of the increasing number of women who have achieved school diplomas and university degrees in the United States every year (see section 2.4.2). In *Lost Souls* Ann is said to have a high school diploma and a past ambition of going to college. However, because her partner and his friend tell her that university is a waste of time, she starts thinking that it may not be a good idea for her either. Additionally, her economic situation is precarious, which forces her to work, and she is also afraid of abandoning her father—who does not seem to be able to perform basic tasks such as cooking or cleaning the house—whom she takes care of. Because of these reasons, Ann's project of saving some money and then enrolling in an arts programme at university is postponed and finally abandoned. In contrast with Claudia, Ann possesses some formal education and her decision of achieving a higher degree seems to be in her hands. However, she is too influenced by the opinion of males around her to make a conscious decision and her father, who is retired, does not help her to gain independence and autonomy, but tries to keep her at home.

Sookie from the *Southern Vampire Mysteries* may seem very similar to Ann at first sight, as she has the same kind of job which does not require education and she also abandoned her studies after high school. However, Sookie is not responsible for any members of her family. Sookie's case is also different from Ann's because she was never influenced by anyone in order not to enter university: it was a conscious decision she made taking into account that it was very difficult for her to concentrate due to her telepathic abilities and that during her school years she had found it difficult to pass her exams.

Unlike females in previous books, Merit from *Chicagoland Vampires* has not only entered university, but reached its highest level, as she has achieved a scholarship and is finishing her PhD dissertation by the time the saga starts. Furthermore, she has been able to study by thanks to her own economic means and intelligence. However, a few pages after the first books starts, she has to abandon her position at her university because she is transformed by a male vampire. Mallory also holds university studies and has, in fact, a job in an area having to do with it. However, as I will explain in section 7.1.2 her career is cut short by her partner, which means that all the accomplishments derived from having finished her degree vanish.

While Merit may have been presented as having taken one more step than previous female characters such as Sookie, she rapidly goes from the perfect heroine who could have exemplified evolution in this area by showing that women can be successful scholars, to being stopped by men when she is

just about to reach this important goal in her life, which seems even more counter-evolutionary than if she had just never gone to university.

7.1.2 Professional Careers and Economic Independence

In *Interview with the Vampire*, Claudia does not have any sources of income: all her possessions come from Louis and Lestat as they have more money than she does and because, since she looks like a young girl, she cannot go to shops and buy them herself. A good example which shows her total economic dependence on her two “fathers” is her little coffin, which I have pointed out as a sign of her struggle to gain certain independence and a place of her own. She needs to be very insistent in order to convince Louis of buying it, after he has initially rejected her request.

Ann’s situation, in *Lost Souls*, is slightly better as she has a job as a waitress. However, readers are led to understand that her salary is not high because by the end of the book she realises that someone will have to provide for her and the baby in her womb. Even if she does not like her work, at least it provides her with some money which makes her partially independent—to the extent of being able to purchase certain products or services such as bus or concert tickets. By the end of the book, however, she has abandoned her job and only source of income in order to follow the man she thinks she loves; a man with whom she has only spent one night and who has continuously treated her with disdain, which means that she has become completely dependent on him

economically.

In the *Southern Vampire Mysteries* most women work outside their homes. There are some who occupy important positions, such as a policewoman and some entrepreneurs, but they are all secondary characters while most women around Sookie—and Sookie herself—have jobs traditionally considered feminine. However, although Sookie has the same kind of job as Ann, her situation is not exactly the same. To start with, Sookie likes her job and takes it seriously. She behaves professionally at the bar where she works and, because of this, her boss trusts her and, by the end of the saga, she becomes the co-owner of the place. Furthermore, she sometimes uses her telepathic abilities in exchange for big sums of money and, even if she finally decides to stop doing this kind of work because she is hired by people whose moral is questionable, the money she is paid on these occasions helps her improve her quality of life and pay her debts. However, although Sookie is in the beginning very clear that she wants to remain economically independent, she does not always stick to her own rules, not only because she resents Bill for not helping her economically in the beginning of their relationship, but also because she never gives a second thought to accepting expensive clothes and other presents from Eric both before and while they are dating.

Merit from *Chicagoland Vampires* is again the heroine which presents, at least in the beginning, the best example from a feminist perspective for young female readers as, although she belongs to a very rich and influential

family, she has remained completely independent in the economic field because she has a scholarship from her university which pays her to do research for the English Literature department. Like Sookie, she lives independently—with her best friend—and she also likes and enjoys her job but, unlike the former, she has no choice but to leave it because of a man who will, moreover, become her employer and the owner of the palace where she moves. Similarly, her best friend Mallory leaves her well-paid job in a marketing company soon after she meets the man who will become her partner because he makes her realise that all she has ever achieved in life was not a result of her hard work, but a consequence of her magical abilities, which she was not aware of before.

Although Mallory and Merit are the most empowered women in this area, both soon become as dependent on men as Claudia—whose character was created some fifty years earlier—is on Louis and Lestat. Although there are women in these books who reflect the reality in the United States—a country in which many women are occupying more and more important positions (see section 2.4.2)—, all those female characters who are in positions of power in these novels are inherently mischievous—like Céline in *Chicagoland Vampires*—or become evil or mad because they cannot handle it—like Babette in *Interview with the Vampire* or Mallory—they lose their jobs and become completely subordinated to men as soon as the story begins. Pam, Sookie's only female vampire friend, occupies an important political position by the end of the saga, but she has been put there by her creator—a male—and she often

behaves unethically and in malevolent ways, so it is not possible to say that she is a virtuous character.

Furthermore, all non-wicked women in the exemplifying books work in fields traditionally considered feminine: Ann and Sookie are waitresses, Merit studies her PhD in literature, and Mallory's important job is related to marketing. For these reasons, it may seem reasonable to say that all these books fail to show that women and men can have equal jobs as they once and again send readers the message that those females who are in positions which involve responsibility fail to handle their power and/or need the help of men to succeed in life even if some had achieved a good quality of life by their own means before they met those males.

Sookie is the only exception to this rule as she keeps her job as a bartender until the end of the saga and even her situation at the restaurant improves as she becomes its co-owner. However, her profession is a traditionally considered feminine one and, soon after she starts combining her job as a waitress with a better-paid one which involves risks, she decides to cease the latter as she thinks that it will make her lose her humanity—just like the evil females in important positions which I have just mentioned. Similarly, her friend Tara, who is a successful entrepreneur, sells female clothes and accessories, which is an industry unequivocally associated to women. This may be a reflection of the fact that women still find difficulties to stand out in areas traditionally considered masculine (see section 2.4.2).

7.1.3 Signs of Feminism

Certain forms of rebelliousness appear in *Interview with the Vampire* and *Lost Souls*. Claudia, Babette and Ann act defiantly against their parents at points and break the rules imposed on them. They also express their discomfort with their realities through their clothes, as Claudia decides to dress up like a woman even if she looks like a very young girl, and Ann does not shave her armpits, follows the Gothic aesthetics, and even dyes her bed linen black. However, it is not clear whether these actions are a form of rebellion against patriarchy per se, or a way to express their personalities and face their own specific problems. For example, although feminists have often expressed their nonconformity with traditional feminine beauty standards (see section 2.2.2), Ann never states that she is not shaving her armpits in order to express this idea and, quite on the contrary, she explains to Steve that this is a way to identifying herself as an artist. Similarly, Babette does not take the reins of her plantation in order to establish a new female role model that others can follow or to show that women are equally able to negotiate and coordinate work, but just in order to sustain herself and her sisters, for whom—following traditional notions—she arranges marriages as soon as she makes enough money. The word “feminism” is never used in these books and all the attempts of these three females to support themselves, remain independent and not be badly treated are unsuccessful: Claudia and Ann die because at the hands of men, and Babette dies having lost her estate and her mind due to her obsession with Louis.

The 21st century introduces a change, as Sookie uses the word “feminist” to refer to herself and she states that she believes in equality of men and women. However, she has mixed feelings towards certain gender issues. For example, she is not sure whether she wants to remain completely independent economically or if she should be sometimes helped by her rich partners; she is a Christian, and she has certain prejudices towards sexuality motivated by her religion. Furthermore, even if she often speaks out in situations she thinks of as misogynist, she sometimes stops her complaints as soon as she is given a reason for things to be that way—no matter if that really explains the imbalance and/or solves it. However, it is interesting to note that she uses the specific term “feminist” to describe herself. In other words, she positions herself clearly, while many women do not like to use this word because they consider that it is related to negative ideas. Because Sookie is trying to stand for herself but at the same time learns and matures along the saga, it is normal that she needs to clarify what kind of a feminist she is. Her decision of labelling herself a “feminist” even if not all her ideals and behaviours may adequately fit under this adjective, proves that feminism is a complex subject that can—and should—be adapted to suit each woman’s reality by using intersectionality (see section 2.4.5).

Merit never says she is a feminist *per se*, but she frequently fights certain gendered violence such as insults, as well as other forms of misogyny that feminists have recently started to raise awareness of, such as street

harassment (see section 2.4.3). She also protests about the fact that men do not believe her capable of being good at traditionally considered male activities, for instance when her battle skills are put in doubt because of her sex. Merit, like Sookie, reflects on the difficulties women encounter when positioning themselves for and against feminism as well and for and against tradition. She embodies on the one hand certain universal feminist struggles such as occupying the same positions at work and in other activities such as sports, and not being attacked physically, verbally and otherwise; and on the other seems oblivious to other more subtle forms of inequality or conforms to them in order not to anger the men she loves or hurt their masculinity. Furthermore, although she does not consent to being harassed and mocked because of her gender by evil men in the street, she does not have any problems with being called pet-names which are either humiliating or infantilising by men she loves.

Heroines from the 21st century seem to be able to call themselves feminists, without caring whether this label will bring them any unwanted consequences, or to align their trouble within contemporary feminist struggles. However, they also reflect the growing hesitation of other women to abandon or oppose all gender stereotypes, as they consider that if they do not accept certain more subtle misogynist or courteous behaviours from men they may be losing some rights or putting themselves at a disadvantage while if they never behave according to what is traditionally expected from women, they may lose their place in the world (see section 2.4.5).

7.2 Areas Which Do Not Present Evolution

In some other areas, women have remained static—or have almost not evolved—and, in others, evolution does not mean reaching parity, but moving from an unfair state to a different but equally unfair new one.

7.2.1 The Division of House Chores

House chores are not an important part of the analysed books; however, when present, they are exclusively performed by women while men such as Ann's father in *Lost Souls* or Catcher—Merit's best friend's partner in *Chicagoland Vampires*—are portrayed as naturally untidy and unable to do them. The only exception to this statement is the section in which Catcher is baking some pastries and wearing an apron. However, because this scene is described in a very humorous tone and Merit tries to humiliate him for what he is doing and wearing, it does not suggest equality.

Some of the female characters are liberated from their share of housework because they live with a rich man. That is Claudia's case and also Merit's, once she starts living under Ethan's roof. This cannot be taken as a sign pointing in the direction of feminism as other women—cleaners, cooks, etc.—are handed the work these women do not have to deal with anymore but it is not an egalitarian measure as men do not acquire any responsibilities on the matter and just delegate them to a third person which, as I have just mentioned, is also always a female.

On the contrary, Ann and Sookie, who belong to a mid-low class, are often portrayed doing some house chores. Sookie is often found cleaning the floor, washing the dishes, dusting the shelves, or clearing her attic from old furniture, as well as cooking. Similarly Ann is said to be in charge of cleaning her home and cooking. There is, however, a difference between these two women: while Sookie lives alone, Ann lives with her father who, she fears, cannot take care of himself. This difference is important and it also explains why house chores have not been given importance when analysing the *Southern Vampire Mysteries* in this dissertation. Sookie's wish to share her home only with her friends and family—and always for short periods of time—has previously been pointed out as a sign of independence and her attitude makes it impossible to share her housework as she lives alone. That is, it is a decision that, like most of her resolutions, she has made consciously while Ann, who has been assigned to clean and cook by her father, thinks that he would not be able to live by his own means if she ever left the house and feels remorse by just thinking about freedom outside it.

7.2.2 Power Structures

All the books present differences in power between men and women which mirror patriarchy because the former are always the most powerful in all cases, even if the way their power is shown is not always the same. In a great majority of cases, and in all the main love stories, friendships and labour relations, men

are older and more experienced. On the other hand, females whose economic situation is known are from a humble and/or working-class background—Claudia, Ann and Sookie. Merit's case is slightly different. She has left a rich family behind in order to live a more independent life without their help even if that means having less money too. However, this is only an illusion since her father has always been making arrangements and decisions concerning her life behind her back.

In *Interview with the Vampire* Claudia is so helpless that males around her including Lestat, Louis and Armand, represent strength, money, freedom, and the ability to make their own decisions and even create life while she is feeble, does not have any possessions which were not given to her by her “fathers”, and is unable to live or travel freely or to make other vampires. All the women in more recent books have some more freedom. However, men in their lives are also more powerful.

In *Lost Souls*, Ann is living under her father's roof. Although he does not have a job and she does, she cannot afford to live on her own. In relation to her former boyfriend, she is younger and definitely more feeble, given the fact that he is able to both hit and rape her, even when she fights back. Elliot, her new partner, is not only older than she—and even than Steve—, but also more educated, richer and the owner of a house where she also spends some nights. Finally, Zillah, the male vampire she falls in love with, is much older and stronger than her because of his vampiric nature.

Since both Claudia and Ann depend economically on their fathers and live with them, they have developed a series of treacherous strategies to cope with their patriarchal behaviours which consist of being submissive and sweet to them in order to either achieve what they want from them once they have already been told that it is not possible (in the case of Claudia) or to make them believe that they have changed their mind about the subject and accepted their negatives and act behind their backs when they lower their guard—Ann. Although this is the only way these women can reach most of their objectives—by plotting and planning secretly after having acted kindly—they are also acting according to classical gender roles which support patriarchal structures their fathers benefit from.

Sookie is often involved—romantically and otherwise—with all kinds of supernatural males. All her partners and most of her male friends, such as Alcide, are vampires and shifters, which makes them much stronger than her, and she often needs her protection. Bill and Eric are some centuries old, which makes them more experienced in matters such as sex, less sensitive to violence, and wiser in general. By the end of the book Sookie is tired of having to deal with the unfair situations which come out of the imbalance—such as men making decisions for her because they think they know better or her not being taken seriously—, but even the partner she chooses by the end of the book, Sam, is not an equal to her: although they are even at a professional level because they co-own the restaurant where they both work, and Sam is not richer

than her, he is a shifter and, hence, stronger and more powerful than her.

Sookie lives with her grandmother in a situation of equality—they share the house chores, have some free time and hobbies, talk to each other to solve conflicts, etc.—until she dies early in the first book of the saga. Since then, her only known close relative is her elder brother, Jason, who often visits her and expects her to cook for him and then wash the dishes because this was what their grandmother used to do. Jason always asks Sookie for help, or forces her to help him even if she is not willing to do so, or when matters are very personal, such as being involved in his complicated marriage. He does not take into account that interceding for him in certain cases may have bad psychological consequences for her. Jason does not care about Sookie's well-being and never helps her when she is in need. In other words, Jason expects his sister to behave according to traditional gender roles in aspects regarding their relationship such as solving family issues, performing house chores or being submissive to males in the family, and seems annoyed whenever she does not. However, he does not act in accordance with the old-fashioned standards which apply to men, such as protecting women or giving them economical support.

The relationships Merit establishes with men are also ruled by them. There are two important male figures in her family: her father and her grandfather. The former was too controlling and strict with her and she decided to live on her own and limit their communication in order to live more freely. However, soon after she becomes a vampire, she discovers that he has been

spying on her and making decisions concerning her future and her well-being behind her back. Her grandfather, on the contrary, overtly protects her and, being the supernatural ombudsman, gives her privileged treatment which other people do not receive.

The most remarkable couples in the exemplifying books are all formed either by a male vampire and a human woman or by both a male and a female vampire who has been transformed by her partner. In the first case women are, as I have just explained, in disadvantage in the relationship due to their lesser strength and age; but in the second case, the relationship is even more imbalanced as male vampires are not only stronger and older, but also become the “fathers” of those women they transform, or, in other words, they possess and control them—as they can order them how to act and behave. All women, to a greater or a lesser extent, have to behave in ways they normally would not, and have to act against their will to please their partners and always put their partners’ needs before their own. For example, Claudia behaves like a child to please Louis, while Merit does not best Ethan in a marathon in order not to hurt his feelings, and resumes her relationship with her father because it is better for Ethan’s socio-political interests.

The only couple which occupies an important place in a book which does not fit in this description is the one composed by Catcher and Mallory in *Chicagoland Vampires*, who are both human. However, this fact does not make it egalitarian as they both possess magical abilities but while Catcher has been

fully aware of his power for some years, Mallory has never suspected she has any special skills; he makes her realise it and then trains her, putting himself in a position of power with respect to her.

Furthermore, establishing relationships with vampires is—at least partially—harmful for women, in all cases. All these males are always surrounded by dangerous people who act against the law and women who relate to them end up being involved in these crimes. But women are endangered even by those vampires they date because they cannot always control—or they do not care, like hedonistic Zillah—their blood-thirst, their unnaturally immense strength, or other behaviours which can hurt humans. Thus, both Claudia and her newly transformed friend and “step-mother”, Madeleine, die because Armand, a male vampire who has just got to know Louis, decides this is what should be done. Even if Ann dies because of other reasons, she is inevitably going to pass away in giving birth to the baby which is growing inside of her as a consequence of having had sex with the vampire she loves. Sookie is often harmed by her vampire lovers or other vampires who are their enemies and Merit is attacked in the first place because of jealousy among vampires and turned into one of them by a male—who will then become her partner—, without having given her consent for it.

As the world becomes more egalitarian, love affairs and relationships within the family are also following the same tendency. However, in these vampire romances, women who have fathers—biological ones like Ann’s and

Merit's, or vampire "fathers" like Claudia's—are subjugated to them. The women who appear in the oldest exemplifying books humble themselves in front of their fathers and have to resort to lying in order to pretend to follow their strict rules. When these females are strong enough or have a reason to finally break these relationships and leave their fathers behind, they are killed by other men. Although Merit seems more independent in the beginning, she soon discovers that her father has been the author of important changes in her life—such as becoming a vampire—and has to resume her relationship with him when Ethan needs her to do so. Merit also accepts her grandfather giving her special privileges. Even Sookie, who lacks a father, has an imbalanced relationship with her brother, who seems to understand that his younger sister has to please him while he has no responsibilities towards her.

All the protagonists have male partners and/or suitors, who are always older and more powerful than they and, in general, have a better economic position and, because of this reason, they think that they are entitled to make decisions for them. In other words, these books confirm that the typical plot starred by a "maiden in distress" who is too feeble or lacks the power to stand for herself and needs a manly hero—not only in his physical appearance and strength, but also in economical and political power and wisdom—by her side, is still appreciated by fans of this genre.

7.2.3 Different Forms of Abuse

Abuse of women on behalf of men is also a constant throughout these books and it does not happen the other way round. As time has gone by, some forms of abuse which appear in vampire romance have remained similar, others have changed the form under which they are presented, and some have evolved into different expressions of the same kind of abuse.

In *Interview with the Vampire* Claudia is often verbally abused by Lestat, who both threatens and insults her and also mocks her appearance. Louis, who narrates the story, thinks of himself as good and always ready to fulfil Claudia's wishes and to protect her. However, he does not intercede or stand up for her in front of Lestat. In fact, Louis tries to ignore the attacks she is subjected to, and attempts to make her behave submissively in order to avoid confrontation. By trying to silence Claudia and rewarding her when she does not demand information or freedom, Louis is also abusing her, although psychologically and in a more passive way.

Many women are abused in *Lost Souls*. To start with, Ann—the only female who actually plays a part in the story and occupies more than a few lines—has been abused by her drunken father since she was a child. Ann is not treated well at home, as she alone is in charge of cleaning the house and cooking, and when she misbehaves in any way, her father punishes her in horrible ways—which also contain sexual symbolism—such as tying her up to her bed for hours. Similarly, Jessy's father is so attached to her and has such a

controlling behaviour that, like Ann's, his actions denote abuse.

Although many women are abused in different ways in *Lost Souls*, the most recurring crime perpetrated against them is rape. Although in Ann's father's case it is difficult to establish whether he has an incestuous relationship with his daughter or feels attracted to her, Jessy's father is aroused by her presence and they actually have sex once—which she starts. Wallace excuses this episode by alleging that he cannot say no to his beloved daughter but he should have never agreed to any sexual activity with her because he is an adult and she is not and also because incest is a crime.

Ann is, however, raped by Steve and he is about to sexually abuse her one more time while she is unconscious in a bed, dying. On the first occasion, Steve is seeking revenge because he knows that Ann has started a relationship with another man. Although she is both physically and psychologically hurt, she reaches a climax while being raped. Afterwards, she decides not to report the incident to the police nor tell anyone but a friend of Steve's—Ghost—about it because she thinks that nobody would have believed her since Steve has been her partner before. Moreover, she sometimes doubts whether she may have deserved being raped for having started dating a different man and not long after having been abused, she seems to have forgiven Steve as she misses his presence up to the point of wanting to resume their relationship. It seems that for Ann routine and being used to a person are enough reason to put up with being badly treated.

Steve seems to think that Ann belongs to him, since the first time he rapes her he believes that he is entitled to punish her because she has left him for another man and the second time he is about to do it, he is only following his impulses and desires and not taking into account the fact that she is unconscious and, therefore, cannot give her consent to him.

Apart from Ann, other secondary female characters are also raped. An Indian girl who works in a restaurant is treated like she were food by the group of vampires who rob, kill and presumably rape her together. Richelle, the only female vampire readers learn about, is sexually attacked by a young man. Her rape is narrated by a man who knew her and who justifies it through her beauty—which, in his opinion, could have aroused the boy—or by her having no male companions with her that night or having drunk too much.

The *Southern Vampire Mysteries* saga is not exempt of rape either. When she is a little girl, Sookie is molested by an old uncle. Even if her grandmother forbids the man from visiting them, she advises Sookie to remain silent about what happened and does not report the facts to the police. This situation traumatises Sookie and she cannot find peace of mind until her uncle dies. The protagonist is also raped by Bill, her first partner. After the episode, she tries to justify him by alleging he had been deprived of drinking blood and sleep for days and he was not aware of his acts. In addition, on another occasion, she is about to be raped by an evil character and, later on, she is tortured and, presumably sexually abused by a couple of her enemies. Although

Sookie does not blame herself for any of these episodes, she mostly keeps it to herself and never reports any of these abuses to the police.

In *Chicagoland Vampires*, Merit is also about to be raped by one of Ethan's enemies as a form of revenge against him. Although the scene is quite rough and Merit suffers some minor physical harm during the episode, the rape never takes place and Merit is later able to fight the man who attempted to force her. It seems clear that an unknown man assaulting a woman is a cruel and evil act which is punished by the heroine herself later on in that same book.

Ethan's behaviour towards Merit clearly points in the direction of obsession and stalking, which is a major problem that women have had to face during the last decades, but which has become even more common in Western countries with the widespread use of new technologies (see section 2.4.3.2).

Incest appears in three out of four exemplifying books or sagas. This fact reflects that this is actually a very common crime, although it is not usually reported (see section 2.2.1). Rape, which is at the very least about to happen in all the novels or series, is only treated as a crime when perpetrated by evil men who are unknown to the victim. When it happens between a woman and her partner, or a man she has declared her interest in, or that she has dated in the past, both harassment and rape receive a softer treatment, as they are shown as inevitable. Even one incest case—Jessy's—is also described in these terms. Portraying incest, abuse, harassment and rape in a sexy way minimises its importance and reinforces the idea that women say “no” when they mean “yes”

(see section 2.2.1 in the historical background chapter), or that once they have declared their interest in a man, they lose their right to change their minds and say no (see section 2.4.3.1 in the historical background chapter).

Victims do not report sexual violence in any case. As I have explained in the chapter concerning the historical background, rape victims may actually not find support and be questioned by the forces of law and order (see section 2.2.1 in the historical background chapter). Furthermore, in some cases, such as Richelle's, rape is justified by stating that women's behaviour or appearance may have led to being raped. Blaming victims is something which, effectively, also happens in reality (see section 2.2.1 in the historical background chapter).

Abuse and mistreatment of all kinds are still present, but have changed over the decades and, in the most recent books, they are only obvious in the case of villains—insulting, beating, etc—while they have become more subtle—stalking, harassing, underestimating, infantilising, etc—when they are perpetrated within the family or in a couple. The latter are not presented as crimes or unhealthy behaviours, but as normal occurrences, to be allowed in a relationship, and even romantic. This shows that violence against women has not been eradicated (see section 2.4.3), other new forms of it have been created (see section 2.4.3.2) and other forms which had not traditionally been considered abuse or violence have come into focus (see section 2.4.3) as time has gone by. Furthermore, all the females in the books are psychologically abused, hit, insulted, ignored, sexually harassed and/or forced into sex, or raped

by men they are dating, and seem to find it difficult to identify these crimes and/or admit that they have taken place and do not end their relationships—Claudia, Sookie, Merit—or find other partners who also abuse them—Ann. This mirrors reality, as women who have suffered abuse, and especially those who have stood it for long periods of time, find it difficult not to repeat the same patterns when they choose new partners (see section 2.2.1).

It may be dangerous to show either rape or coercion to young readers in terms of romanticism or sensuality and to think that women having the right to say no to an ex partner or to a partner is somehow treacherous or that to say no in a date is unromantic. These females would be much better examples for teenagers if, instead of trying to justify rape and other types of abuse, they confronted them by reporting their cases, trying to seek legal advice, psychological counselling, etc. and by leaving their abusive relationship when they become unhealthy, instead of staying or going back to their abusers because they miss them or finding similar partners afterwards.

7.3 Areas Which Present Counter-Evolution

Finally, certain other aspects regarding these female characters evolved for some decades but have then suffered a regression.

7.3.1 Love, Friendship, Sexuality and Other Relationships

7.3.1.1 Romantic and Love Relationships

All the questions listed in this chapter are common to all the books I have studied and appear throughout their pages in a greater or a lesser extent. However, these vampire books all fall under the category of romance and love is thus, the main subject around which all their plots articulate. This matter may also be one of the most controversial ones as romantic relationships in all these books are, in general, unhealthy because men do not take women's feelings into account and continuously abuse them verbally. These men are cold to their partners who, in contrast, are benevolent and helpful with them. Furthermore, women are physically hurt by their partners in some cases. The fact that these affairs are specially damaging is even more clear in the books from the 20th century, as females end up being murdered either by their partners or by people related to them.

While public institutions in Western Countries—and increasingly in more non-Western countries too—and feminists put emphasis on encouraging women to end relationships which are unhealthy, and to be able to identify the slightest forms of non-physical abuse and report their cases when necessary, the exemplifying books in this dissertation are sending readers the opposite message and can lead young females into thinking that it is their duty to remain with a problematic or potentially dangerous partner even if the relationship is

imbalanced or they do not feel happy in it. It is assumed that men are easily provoked by women or their actions, and that males punishing them or not avoiding them to be punished, are normal reactions that some women may deserve.

The *Chicagoland Vampires* saga goes one step further by implying that female self-sacrifice and dedication to a difficult and aggressive partner results in him becoming loving and sensitive, which is not realistic. There is a certain evolution in the *Southern Vampire Mysteries*, as Sookie puts up with some bizarre and bad behaviours from her earlier partners because she lacked any love experience, but then becomes more aware of her aspirations and is able to establish limits and step out of unhealthy relationships. However, and even if the *Chicagoland Vampires* books are more recent, they repeat the same old clichés that previous books showed.

Women have traditionally been perceived as inherently good in contrast with men, who have often been presented as naturally prone to violence. In the chapter concerning the historical background I have shown that people have repeatedly attempted to prove these ideas throughout time by, for example, turning to biology (see sections 1.1.1 and 2.2.1), and that they have not disappeared from our mindsets yet (see sections 2.2.4 and 2.3.2.1). Effectively, *Chicagoland Vampires*, along with older books analysed in this dissertation and other more up-to-date ones too—such as the *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades* trilogies—, confirm that these old-fashioned stereotypes are deeply

rooted in our mindsets and that they are still perceived as romantic, since they are recurring. In other words, the vampire romances I have studied fail to present positive role models to be admired and/or imitated once again, with the exception of the mature Sookie Stackhouse found in the last books of the *Southern Vampire Mysteries*. These books follow old-fashioned traditional tales, as the idea that bad women can bring out the very worst of a man and that, on the contrary, good-hearted women can turn an evil and problematic men into vulnerable and good-hearted partners by trusting and loving them—even if they are disrespectful or abusive—is repeated along their pages once and again.

7.3.1.2 Friendship and Other Relationships

Male-to-male friendship, understanding and partnership are often found in all the analysed books. However, there are no male-to-female close relationships which do not involve romantic feelings at least from one side, and female-to-female friendships are quite scarce and fragile. It is difficult to compare Claudia and Ann to other heroines in these aspects, as they almost never interact with people other than their partners—and some of their partners' friends such as *Ghost in Lost Souls*—and no friendships are forged among them.

However, in the *Southern Vampire Mysteries* and *Chicagoland Vampires*, female protagonists relate to other women either because they work with them or because they establish friendships. In many cases, the women who interact both with Sookie and Merit but are not close friends of theirs end up

betraying them and/or hurting them on purpose. Moreover, female-female friendships—and other kinds of relationships—are presented as much more complicated than male-male ones, as jealousy and resentment are often involved in them and problems derived from these feelings have very bad, and sometimes lasting, consequences for the protagonists.

Although plots in vampire romance are articulated around one or more love stories, the female protagonists in them would present better examples for young readers if they did not forget to cultivate other equally important relationships in their lives, such as friendship and/or relationships at work or within their families. A more feminist text would reflect that, although having a partner may be an important part of life, women do not have to exclusively focus on their lovers, but keep a balanced social life. The type of romantic relationships that females in the analysed books forge are not healthy, as their partners isolate them from other people and control them through their phones, by unexpectedly entering their houses, etc. Similarly, in order to reflect gender equality, plots should include new kinds of female-to-female friendship which are not shown as more problematic or difficult than relationships among males, as well as the possibility of women and men being only interested in each other as friends. These elements would adjust better to readers' real society and the wide range of existing non-romantic relationships every person creates throughout their lives.

7.3.1.3 Sexuality

Although some media such as television and cinema have successfully shown non-heterosexual characters over the last decades, all female protagonists in the exemplifying books are strictly heterosexual. On the contrary, males—especially in *Interview with the Vampire* and *Lost Souls*—tend to have lovers of both sexes. Additionally, men are more prone to flirting and having one-night-stands, maintaining polyamorous or open relationships, cheating on their steady partners and exploring their bodies and sexuality.

Women's sexuality is much more restricted. For example, no men in these books lacks experience in sexual matters while women are either virgins or very inexperienced. When females in the exemplifying books meet their partners, they discover sex in its fullness and repeatedly state that it is because of their well-versed and experienced partners that sex is so enjoyable and pleasurable and, when relationships end or they have to be apart from their partners, these women constantly long not for sex in general, but for sex with those males specifically. Furthermore, women's sexuality is associated with the idea of true love or steady relationships exclusively while men sometimes have interest in—and even sexual encounters with—more than one person in the same period of time.

Although none of the heroines in these books is in full control of her sexuality, and pleasure is male-centred, some characters in *Lost Souls* seem to be more empowered in this area than female protagonists in subsequent books,

even if it is true that the book does not send a completely positive message about female sexuality—women alone bear the consequences of having unprotected sex and those who have sex involving penetration with a vampire end up dying as a consequence.

Nowadays most American women admit enjoying or having sometimes enjoyed uncommitted sex (see section 2.3.3) and it is commonly accepted that a relationship becomes steady only after the two people involved have got to know each other through a number of less formal dates. Also, sexual liberation and access to education on the matter have been some of the pillars of women's movements since the 1980s (see sections 2.2.5 and 2.2.1). However, the latest vampire romances I have studied do not represent these facts and, on the contrary, present old-fashioned differentiated standards for men and women: while women's virginity and/or lack of previous experience or even interest in sex are considered a sign of purity—which seems to add value to women—, men are regarded as more masculine and preferable when they have had multiple partners. Thus, female sexuality is only considered decent within very specific limits which have to do with the number of partners a woman has and how serious and long their relationships are.

The idea that once a woman has had sex with a man they have to stay together for the rest of their lives is not only far from accurate, but also dangerous as women who strictly believe this may remain with men they do not love or who abuse them because if they leave them they may be considered

loose or to have less value as women after losing their virginity. These books would probably present better feminist examples for contemporary readers if they did not reinforce stereotypes about men and women having different sexual needs and if heroines were not constrained to traditional ways of thinking nor judged or labelled according to their sexual experience and preferences. These novels would reflect the reality of contemporary young readers better and contain a more egalitarian message about sexuality if they showed relationships in which both males and females are either experienced in sexual matters or learned together, if women were not negatively portrayed when they have non-committed sex, and if the use of contraceptive methods occupied some space.

7.3.1.3.1 Portrayal of Homosexuality

As I have explained in the introduction to this dissertation (see section 1), vampires have often been used in literature to represent, in a veiled way, topics such as sexuality, politics or the wish to be free or to know the world, which have been taboo at different times. Non-heterosexual desire is also a recurrent matter in these books. Effectively, there are many non-straight characters in *Interview with the Vampire*, *Lost Souls* and the *Southern Vampire Mysteries*. Moreover, while gay men seem to be able to love each other both in the most romantic, sexual and even filial ways, there are no lesbians in these books and bisexual women do not receive a serious treatment, as they seem to be straight

women who are just experiencing lesbianism like a game or a way to experiment with their sexuality, but are only interested in men in the long term or would only develop a serious relationship with males.

There is, for example, no female-female love in *Interview with the Vampire*, while the many gay characters play central roles in the main plot and sub-plots, with the two protagonists—Louis and Lestat—being the best example to illustrate this statement. Similarly, in *Lost Souls*, most males have a preference for men and while heterosexual relationships are abusive and destructive, real love seems possible only between men. Although bisexuality is also presented as a possibility for women, it is also stated that, unlike male homosexuality, this choice is not a serious one, but more of a game or a fashion, and bisexual women are not given any importance within the story while the only remarkable female character, Ann, is strictly heterosexual. In general, all types of minorities are included in the *Southern Vampire Mysteries*. However they are never made the centre of the plot and groups which suffer from more discrimination, such as lesbians and bisexuals within the LGBTQAI+ movement, receive a worse treatment. Following the tendency in previous books, this saga also lacks women who are exclusively interested in other women, and, although bisexual women specifically are given some visibility in these novels, they are not portrayed in a positive or realistic way, as they tend to only settle down with males. In the last decade, there is even a regression which has ended the very slow progression LGBTQAI+ visibility was experiencing

since in *Chicagoland Vampires* there are no non-straight characters of any kind, as if the only possibility for men was to love women and vice versa..

The fact that men can be homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual in most books while women are never only interested in other women exclusively and when they are involved with a female the nature of their relationship is temporary and non-committed, creates the illusion that lesbianism is not a real sexual orientation. Moreover, the fact that bisexual women end up having more serious affairs exclusively with men gives the impression that women cannot be sexually satisfied by other women and have to turn to males in the end, as if a penis was always necessary for sexual intercourse to be complete and/or considered real. In other words, these texts—either consciously or unconsciously—contain the underlying message that lesbianism is somehow a secondary sexual orientation while heterosexuality and male homosexuality are primary ones because men—and their genitalia—play a part in them.

Vampire romances have not followed the tendency of other media such as TV shows which, as I mentioned in the chapter concerning the historical background, are trying to include lesbians and bisexual women in their plots naturally, or those exclusively protagonised by lesbians (see section 2.3.3.1 and 2.3.3.2). It seems that readers of this genre probably expect the main love stories to be conformed following a more traditional pattern of heterosexuality which adjusts to more conservative standards which have recently re-emerged in the United states (see section 2.4.1.1). Young female readers who identify

themselves with non-straight sexual orientations may not find any important reference to their reality in these books and, in a worse scenario, may get the idea that they are not normal or that they should have a preference for men, or choose them for steady partners, even when they may like women. The lack of deep and/or romantic love relationships between women may also give non-straight female readers the impression that female-female affairs can only have a purely sexual nature, and make them feel, again, isolated in their quest for meaningful lesbian love.

7.3.1.4 Motherhood

All female heroines in the exemplifying books have certain expectations and wishes—fulfilled or not—which have to do with becoming mothers to a greater or a lesser extent. However, this desire is stronger or more present throughout the whole plot in the novels from the 21st century.

On the contrary, no man is interested in having children and only Ethan is happy about the idea although his joy comes from the fact that he thinks of the baby as an important tool to be used in politics. The behaviour of both females from the 21st century novels analysed in this dissertation and men which appear in books both from the 20th and 21st centuries prove that, while men are always thought as valid, women are still better-considered when they have children than when they do not (see section 2.4.1.1); that, even nowadays, they are expected to desire to become mothers more than anything else in their

lives, as if maternal instinct were innate to all females (see section 2.4.1.1) while males do not have that need and can achieve happiness and self-fulfilment by other means such as their careers; and that abortion is still a controversial topic (see section 2.4.1.1).

The fact that mothers of female protagonists are absent in all books and they not only have no place in *Lost Souls* but even receive a monstrous treatment does not respond to any social changes or women's specific situation as women in all societies have always been praised for their role as mothers (see section 2.4.6). However, being an orphan, having a passive and almost invisible mother, or lacking a motherly figure of any kind—only Sookie has a female relative to relate to and follow as an example, and loses her in the first book of the saga—, may have been details added to the background of heroines to make their wish to become mothers themselves more credible.

While motherhood is a secondary subject in the analysed vampire romances from the 20th century, in the books from the 21st century, it is understood as a mandatory part of life that every woman has to go through and that both gives sense to their existence and makes them more valued as human beings. A more enlightened heroine would send young female readers the message that becoming a mother is not an obligation but a possibility, and that achieving self-fulfilment and a happy life through other means does not make women selfish or narcissistic.

7.3.3 Fashion

While the books written in the 20th century may be more old-fashioned in other aspects, it is remarkable that clothes are one of the forms of expression that both Claudia and Ann use as a means to express their discomfort with their specific situation or as a sign to somehow break the rules of what society expects from them in this area since, according to beauty and/or fashion standards, as a mature young woman Ann should shave her armpits and probably not wear a widow hat and, because Claudia looks like a child, she should wear doll-like clothes forever. However, in the books written in the 21st century, clothes are treated in a different way. Because of the way she judges women for the way they dress, Sookie can be considered conservative, and Merit seems to think that she has to please Ethan by wearing the dresses, shoes and other accessories he likes for her even if she would have never chosen those ones herself. In other words, in these books we see how female characters have become less autonomous in this area, more prone to think badly of others for their appearance as well as more concerned about what others may think of them for their clothes. Instead of feeling comfortable or express their personality through their style, they want others to like them or think well of them for what they wear, which is a kind of objectification, as they are accepted or accept others for their looks, while their personality or the personalities of those around them are sidelined.

As I have explained in the chapter concerning the historical background, women have been understood to have the right to wear whatever clothes they choose since the 1980s-1990s (see section 2.2.2). This may be the reason why later heroines do not give much importance to their garments or do not consider them an effective way to send any subversive message. However, their liberation has never been complete, as even in the 2000s, women still bear much more pressure about their physical appearance than men (see section 2.3.4). *Chicagoland Vampires* books show that stereotypical slim and/or fit women wearing tight or tiny pieces of clothing, high heels, or revealing elegant dresses are still considered beauty ideals and that the objectification that females have suffered in all kinds of media was not a problem from the 1990s (see section 2.2.4), as it is common in many numerous forms of art and the mass media, as well as in vampire romance. Taking into account that many young women do not like their bodies and that a large number of young females suffer from eating disorders (see section 2.3.4), such a portrayal is probably troubling for many young female readers who don't meet these unrealistic standards.

7.4 General Contentions

As I have shown with data from different decades throughout the chapter concerning the historical background, women have reached or are reaching equality—and have even surpassed men—in some fields such as education (see

section 2.4.2). Although females still have to bear certain discrimination in some areas, such as work, and male presence is still predominant in certain areas, such as politics or the security forces, nowadays there are more strong females in the public sphere—such as politicians, big entrepreneurs or economists—than ever. Furthermore, although violence against women within their families, and in other contexts, is still a widespread problem in the United States, it has decreased, and rape is also slightly less common. Moreover, feminism is one of the most powerful social movements and gender perspectives are taken into account for the creation of new laws, educational methodology, etc., and women are more aware than ever of their power and are, thus, more likely to identify more veiled forms of violence such as stalking or date rapes.

For these reasons, it seems justified to state that the research presented in the present dissertation indicates that the protagonists of the novel under analysis have not evolved in accordance with the general evolution of society in this respect and that the heroines of the most recent novels do not reflect the current situation of women in most areas, not only because their jobs are still some of the traditionally considered feminine ones and most of them are low-paid ones, but also because those who are not dependent on men at the beginning of the books or sagas rapidly become so, and because those who are presented as having healthy relationships with their friends, family members, partners and workmates, abandon them in order to pursue the love of men who

continuously harass them, abuse them or hurtfully ignore them. These books do not promote or sufficiently reflect the improvements in the field of gender equality and may even be dangerous if read by young readers who may idealise them or imitate them in real life.

Some aspects regarding gender equality even experience a regression in these books. For example, although motherhood and family values are not a main subject in books from the 20th century, these topics become central in novels from the 21st century as heroines articulate their lives around their partners—and their needs—and the possibility of having offspring together. Also, female heroines still present many old-fashioned clichés about women, and romanticise toxic and abusive love relationships in which men are always in a position of power with respect to their female partners, which reflect the revival of the most conservative sector that has taken place in recent years in the United States—as explained in section 2.4.6 in the chapter concerning the social context—and which has repeatedly been referred to in the chapter dedicated to *Chicagoland Vampires*.

The overall treatment of gender equality in these books shows that, while female characters—and even female vampires specifically—in other media such as comics or cinema have been empowered (see section 1.1), vampire romance maintains certain stereotypical structures and plots as a marketing strategy because readers expect to find these formulas in this kind of novel. This theory can be supported by the fact that all the vampire romances

analysed or used as comparative examples in this dissertation—as well as many others which are only mentioned such as *The Vampire Diaries*— became best-sellers soon after they were launched. This brings us to some final considerations concerning the genre of vampire novels, and vampire romance in particular.

The Vampire tradition has, except on scarce occasions, been articulated around male protagonists. Furthermore, the specific subgenre of Vampire Romance has reinforced misogynistic clichés and differentiated gender roles for women and men as, while men had traditionally been the vampires, women they wooed or related to were, on the contrary, human. This differentiation becomes more marked by the fact that male vampires are supernaturally strong and hundreds of years old, and having acquired wide knowledge and experience on all subjects as well as enormous wealth and important social and/or political status. They are, thus, fascinating in comparison with their—always young—female counterparts who, due to their human nature, are feeble in comparison and have not had the time to become so wise or rich. Even if, in the novels of the 21st century I have analysed, we find some heroines who have reached considerable economic independence, have completed some formal education, and can fight, and some of them have even been turned into vampires, the male vampires around them are still much older, stronger and possess better battle skills and experience of all kinds—political, cultural, sexual and otherwise—, and assume a superior position—as trainers, protectors, teachers, etc.—within

the relationship from the beginning, which the female characters do not put in question.

Most females who appear in the vampire romances analysed in this dissertation cannot be considered good role models to be followed by young female readers in order to reach gender equality. However, Sookie from the *Southern Vampire Mysteries* can, in general, be considered a balanced heroine as, even if she embodies certain stereotypes, she repeatedly fights for gender equality throughout the saga, becomes more mature herself as time goes by, and finds a more suitable partner with whom she can have a better relationship. However, even these books feature superficial and harmful portrayals of rape and of non-heterosexual female characters that do not accurately reflect contemporary attitudes and standards.

This male-female imbalance is not only found in love relationships, as it also common to find that female characters have male friends who are vampires—and other magical beings such as werewolves or shifters—who best them in strength, wisdom and power.

It is interesting to note that the imbalance between males and females in vampire films is less pronounced and there are examples in which women are the vampires while their partners are not, and/or in which females are noticeably more powerful than males regardless of who is a vampire and who is a human or another type of being such as werewolves, fairies or shifters. Even some films whose central topics are love and/or sex differ in these matters from

vampire romance in literature (see section 1.1). The question of why cinema is evolving towards feminism as time goes by while this type of literature is either partially or totally anchored in traditional gender expectations would be a relevant topic for analysis in subsequent research. Another interesting topic of research could be whether or not other male characters in vampire romance support traditional stereotypes and follow gender roles or if they, on the contrary, present new alternative models of masculinity which may provide readers with more egalitarian examples to imitate.

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