

Monstrous Victims: The Representation of Female Vampires in Ryan Murphy's *American Horror Story: Hotel*

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Department of English and German Philology and Translation &
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Author: Alicia Martínez Andrés

Tutor: Dr. Amaya Fernández Menicucci

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Abstract

Gender representation in cinema has been an object of debate for years. More recently, television series have been incorporated to this debate as these productions also offer gender representations which may even evolve from season to season. The present paper aims to analyze the gendered representation of the female characters in *American Horror Story: Hotel* (2015/16). Focusing, in particular, on the portrayal of the Countess, Ramona, Iris, and Alex, I intend to discuss the fundamental ambivalence of these four characters: their being portrayed both as conventional Gothic victims and as predatory female vampires. To that end, I will first look at the evolution of the male vampire and compare it to the representation of female vampires in some of the most influential texts in English and U.S. literature and cinema. I will also contextualize the conception of the first female vampires within the socio-cultural framework that saw the birth of the 'New Woman'. As the analysis will revolve around the psychological evolution of the female vampires in this television series, I will compare Cesare Lombroso's Late Victorian treatise *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*, Kernberg's exploration of the Malignant Narcissist Personality Disorder, and Christine Ann Lawson's four archetypes of Borderline Personality Disorder. By applying the psychological traits described in these texts to the TV series at hand, I will attempt to demonstrate that its female characters descend into the irrational and grow in Otherness in an attempt to alienate their consciousness from their victimized selves, and that, by doing so, they actually prove themselves utterly incapable of challenging their status as victims of a patriarchal socio-cultural system.

Keywords: gender; *American Horror Story*; female vampire; Borderline Personality Disorder; victimization.

Abstract

La representación de género en el cine ha sido objeto de debate durante años. Más recientemente, se han incorporado series de televisión a este debate, ya que estas producciones también ofrecen representaciones de género que incluso pueden evolucionar de una temporada a otra. El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo analizar la representación de género de los personajes femeninos en la serie de televisión *American Horror Story: Hotel* (2015/16). Al centrarme en la representación de la Condesa, Ramona, Iris y Alex, en particular, pretendo revelar la ambivalencia de estos cuatro personajes, que no son solo retratadas como víctimas góticas convencionales, sino también como vampiresas y predatoras. Con este fin, analizaré la evolución de la representación de los vampiros varones y la compararé con la representación de vampiresas en algunos de los textos más influyentes de la literatura y el cine en lengua inglesa. También contextualizaré la concepción de las primeras vampiresas dentro del marco sociocultural que vio nacer a la 'Nueva Mujer'. Como el análisis se centrará en la evolución psicológica de las vampiresas en la serie de televisión, también compararé *La Mujer criminal, la prostituta y la mujer normal* de Cesare Lombroso, el Trastorno del Narcisista Maligno de Kernberg y los cuatro arquetipos del Trastorno Límite de la Personalidad de Christine Ann Lawson. Analizando las características psicológicas descritas en estos textos a la serie de televisión, intentaré demostrar que sus personajes femeninos se precipitan hacia lo irracional y lo monstruoso en un intento de alejarse de su papel como víctimas y cómo, al hacerlo, demuestran ser completamente incapaces de desafiar su condición de víctimas de un sistema sociocultural patriarcal.

Palabras clave: género; *American Horror Story*; vampiresa; Trastorno Límite de la Personalidad; victimización.

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1. Introduction

The present paper aims to analyze the representation of the female vampire in *American Horror Story: Hotel* (2015/16). I will concentrate my analysis on the characters of the Countess, Ramona, Iris, and Alex in order to explore the way in which their representation as Others undergoes a psychological evolution which takes them from being feeble victims to becoming transgressive and monstrous beings. Indeed, I contend that such Otherness is articulated across the psychological, social and moral dimensions that are superimposed on their process of self-construction. More specifically, I argue that these women resort to a descent into dehumanization via neurosis or vampirism, as they increase in Otherness in an attempt to alienate their selves from their identity as victims.

American Horror Story (henceforth, *AHS*) is an American horror television series originally broadcast on the cable network FX and created by two American screenwriters, directors, and producers: Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk. It consists of nine seasons (2011-present), each one independent from the other and conceived as self-contained. Each season presents a different setting, storyline, and set of characters. What makes this TV show such a successful one is, perhaps, the fact that most of the plot elements in each of the seasons are inspired by true events. For example, in 2015, Ryan Murphy was inspired to create the eponymous Hotel Cortez in the fifth season of the show by the real Hotel Cecil in downtown Los Angeles. Hotel Cecil is believed to be haunted and has acquired notoriety since the Night Stalker—one of the most popular serial killers in America—was rumored to have stayed there for a while.

Throughout the 12 episodes of the fifth season (titled *American Horror Story: Hotel*), Murphy and his team of screenwriters present Elizabeth Johnson's character—played by Lady Gaga and better known as the Countess—as a mysterious and glamorous vampire who owns the hotel and lives in it alienated from the external world in an attempt to escape from her tempestuous past. Other female vampires with relevant roles in the plotline are Iris (Kathy Bates), a short and broad woman of about sixty who works as a receptionist at the hotel; Ramona (Angela Bassett), an ambitious African American former film star; and Alex (Chloë Sevigny), mother, doctor, and wife of a detective.

According to Graeme Donald, the screenwriters of *AHS: Hotel* might have been inspired by the historical figure of the Countess Elizabeth Bathory, a Hungarian noblewoman whose life spanned from 1560 to 1614. This powerful woman of legendary fame was “believed ... to have bathed in the blood of virgins to retain her great beauty, and to have... been a vampire” (14). Even though her alleged crimes could have been the invention of men who were after her money, Elizabeth Bathory has inspired “a veritable industry of books, plays, films, and even ... video games” (17). What is more, Donald also suggests that this woman could have also inspired the first-ever female vampire novel, *Carmilla* (1872) by Sheridan Le Fanu, “which went on to inspire *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker” (17).

Before proceeding with the analysis, it is, therefore, necessary that I should provide a historical overview of the construction of the myth of the vampire as a Gothic convention and of the representation of the figure of the male vampire in English and U.S. literature and cinema. Since I have chosen to approach the series from a gender perspective, it is also necessary to define some of the most fundamental notions in gender studies, such as the process of reification and even victimization of the female subaltern subject, as well as to explain briefly the evolution of the social role of women from the Victorian Era to the 21st century and the extent to which this change is reflected in the figure of the female vampire. Finally, as the analysis centers on the psychological evolution of the female characters, I will make use of Cesare Lombroso’s Late Victorian exploration of the *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*, Kernberg’s Malignant Narcissist Personality Disorder (henceforth, MNPD), and Christine Ann Lawson’s four archetypes of the Borderline Personality Disorder (henceforth, BPD) so as to explain these women’s overemotional and seemingly irrational behavior that will make them hyperbolic versions of disordered individuals (BPDs). I shall then apply the concepts presented in the theoretical framework to the analysis of the series with the intention of confirming my initial hypothesis that female vampires in *AHS: Hotel* evolve from being a victim to becoming transgressive in an attempt to refuse victimization, and also that this attempt will be a failure and will prevent them from ridding themselves of their identity as victims.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. The myth of the vampire as a Gothic convention and the representation of the male vampire

Between the 17th and the 18th centuries, the Slavic tribes considered vampires a threat and they used stories about these supernatural creatures “to explain untimely deaths and disease” (Halldórsson 3). Likewise, a “very similar belief circulated in Romania” (8), where vampires were believed to have really existed and were thought to have the ability to “shape-shift into a mammal that could fly, or a bat” (8). The vampire, believed to be a demonic creature who fed off of human blood, was a construct born of the socio-cultural fears tormenting the inhabitants of rural eastern Europe. The same can be said of Gothic fiction. The latter emerged as a fully developed genre at the end of the 18th century as a consequence of both collective irrational fears and repressed desires, and of the anxiety experienced by the quickly growing middle-classes terrified at the idea of a resurrection of feudalism, aristocratic despotism, or a return to the hegemony of Catholic doctrine and religious conflicts (Botting 2-3). This “writing of excess” (1) usually included the uncanny figure of the vampire, who was born in the darkness of the past and revives in the present in order to provoke fear, disruption, and horror in the readership. Furthermore, as the vampire is a supernatural creature whose existence cannot be explained scientifically, the myth posed a threat to such values of the Enlightenment as rationality.

Thanks to British Gothic fiction, the vampire evolved from being just a repulsive demonic and beastlike creature to becoming a double-sided coin. He—for the vampire is definitely male, at this stage—began being portrayed as a Romantic or Byronic Hero characterized by his seductiveness and attractive appearance, as well as by his repulsiveness and violence. This can be seen in John William Polidori’s *The Vampyre*, written in the summer of 1816 and later on published under the name of Lord Byron in 1819. In it, Lord Ruhvenm is depicted as a good-looking aristocrat who feeds off of young women’s blood. The same can be said of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), in which the Count’s Otherness is progressively evolving from the vaguely uncanny looks of an old man to a horror-inducing, demanding, destructive predator, thus combining the ancient Slavic myth with Romantic polarizations of monstrosity.

The ambivalent characterization of this notorious monster is not only found in literature but also in cinema, in over 130 cinematic productions since the publication of Stoker's novel (Shepherd 6). Among the most relevant film adaptations, we found Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931), in which the Count (Béla Lugosi) wears a signature, "black suit with a crisp white shirt and a high-collared black cape" (6) and is endowed with "long fingernails, piercing eyes . . . , and elongated canines" (6); 1970's *Count Dracula*, in which Christopher Lee "adopt[s] the gentleman Dracula's charm, elegance, sleek hair" together with his "ferocity" (6); and Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), in which, even though the Count is initially portrayed as an elegant, albeit eccentric gentleman, he is progressively dehumanized to the point of being depicted as a repulsive mix of an old man, a bat, and a ghoul.

The myth of Dracula inspired other cinematic productions which might be divided into three different groups. On the one hand, in the 1980s and the early 1990s, film productions such as *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), in which Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt play the leading roles, and *The Hunger* (1983), in which David Bowie embodies the vampire's male sexuality and extraordinary attractiveness, emphasized the desirability of the vampire. On the other hand, the second half of the 1990s saw a revival of the horrific side of the vampire's Otherness by means of cinematic productions such as Robert Rodriguez's *From Dusk Till Dawn* (1996) and John Carpenter's *Vampires* (1998), which focus on the physical deformation of the vampire in its most repulsive and grotesque representation. However, in the 2000s and, in particular, the 2010s, the vampire's glamour seems to have come back in both its most elegant version, as demonstrated by Robert Pattinson in *The Twilight Saga* (2008-2012), and its most sexually-charged rendition, as in Stephen Moyer's performance in *True Blood* (2008-2014).

Beyond the literary and the cinematic tradition, the myth of the vampire has now become "an icon of popular [Western] culture" (Bohn 3). It has been so influential that it has even shaped the Goth subculture, "one of the most arresting, distinctive and enduring subcultures of recent times" (Hodkinson 1) which has strongly influenced fashion, music, literature, and cinema, thereby demonstrating that humanity is still fascinated by the myth of the vampire and intrigued by the unknown and the afterlife.

2.2. The female vampire: subverting the Woman's position as victim

Since this paper deals with the gendered representation of the female vampires, it is necessary to define two concepts: 'female' and 'feminine'. While 'female' is related to sex, 'feminine' is associated with gender, which, unlike sex, "is not a property of bodies or something originally existent in human beings" (De Lauretis 3), but an artificial construct. Hence, being 'female' does not necessarily imply being 'feminine'. For instance, even if all the characters that will be analyzed in this paper are biologically female, they do not always behave in a feminine way; on the contrary, some of them will play masculine roles and will behave aggressively and thus, unfemininely. Just as gender is an artificial construct, Teresa De Lauretis defines the sex-gender system as a sociocultural construct and as a "system of representation which assigns meaning to individuals within the society" (5), which has contributed to the creation of dichotomies such as Woman/Man and White/Non-White. According to De Lauretis, the arts can be defined as technologies of gender and tools deployed to reproduce and represent artificial constructs such as gender. It follows that cinema and literature have the ability to reproduce pre-existing ideas and add new nuances to them. Accordingly, many cinematic productions and literary works have contributed to representing and reproducing "the female body as the primary site of sexuality and visual pleasure" (5) and to dehumanizing Woman up to the point of defining her as Man's object, possession, and even victim. The process of victimization of the female subaltern took place whenever a member of the patriarchal system went so far as to break the already rather abusive rules of the system in order to further reify and even destroy the female Other. An example of objectification might be found in Gothic writing in which female vampires are portrayed as sexually attractive counterparts of male characters and often play the roles of damsels in distress, sexual predators or hungry monsters due to their very limited emotional range. The seductiveness of the physically attractive vampire seems to have won over the other representations and, in *AHS: Hotel*, the physical appearance of female vampires takes after that of their most appealing male counterparts.

Even if not all the female vampires in *AHS: Hotel* stand out for their sexually attractiveness, they are all presented as victims. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a 'victim' is "someone that has been hurt, damaged, or has suffered, either because of the actions of someone or something else". The female characters presented in the show are victims due to the oppression they suffered living in the patriarchal system, "a social

organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family” (Ademiluka 340). The patriarchal system contains a set of rules that makes women legally, socially, and financially powerless, and thus, the perfect victims of individuals set to bend those very few boundaries which the system had imposed on the males’ absolute dominion of females. Women have been deliberately and systematically educated to acquire a submissive role to men in family dynamics, which was combined with an insistence on meekness, passivity, obedience as being “naturally innate” to women. The female characters of this analysis will be a reflection not only of this but also of learned helplessness, “a state in which the agent, because of lack of exploration, fails to take advantage of regained control” (Teodorescu and Erev 1), which clearly contributes to making women much more susceptible to becoming victims of illegal and violent practices, which even patriarchal society itself would condemn (sexual trafficking, enslavement, extreme domestic violence).

Throughout history, women have resorted to different strategies to face female subalternity, which “inevitably arises from legal and social arrangements that assume women will be taken care of by men” (Meyers 31). While some stayed submissive and accepted marrying a man in order to survive economically, other women attempted to avoid submitting to the system and preferred independence. These two opposite positions might be found in *Jane Eyre* (1847), since, on the one hand, the female protagonist rejects getting married to a man she does not love (St. John Rivers) so as to avoid submitting to the patriarchal system and, on the other hand, she ends up yielding to it and marrying the violently-tempered Rochester, whose treatment of his first wife certainly does not recommend him as a husband. Apart from rejecting marriage, some women went a step further and began exploring “sexual pleasure in the form of extramarital affairs” (103). Consequently, these women were socially excluded as Maria is in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814), who is ostracized by society after having been rejected by her estranged husband Mr. Rushford when she deliberately and defiantly committed adultery with a man she loves. As many examples in literature illustrate, whenever a woman did not follow the established rules, she was more easily punished than a man. For instance, in *Dracula*, Lucy’s promiscuous flirting is clearly frowned upon and she is last presented as a monster hungry for children in order to depict open female sexuality as monstrous and even mortal.

In recent decades, violence against women has become a matter of public concern in western society. This is because there are still men who exceed the boundaries of their privileged position to the point of victimizing women. Over the past 200 years, various political and socio-cultural movements have attempted to question and disavow patriarchy, thus improving the situation. Many historical events have contributed to this improvement. By the end of the 18th century, proto-feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft started vindicating their rights as women (Gray and Boddy 2) and women started viewing themselves as valuable members of society and individuals capable of equaling men. As a result, the Woman Suffrage Movement emerged in 1848 and, after this, at the end of the 19th century, the ‘New Woman’—a term firstly used by Sarah Grand in 1894—emerged. As the ‘New Woman’ was thought to be “sexually transgressive” (Ledger 6), it replaced “The Angel in the House” proposed by Coventry Patmore in 1854 as the ideal of womanhood. Likewise, the female vampire, who “refus[es] to submit to male authority” (Boyles 39), appeared in Gothic fiction for the first time during this period, embodying a direct threat against [M]asculinity.

As an example of the budding exploration of women’s sexuality, in Le Fanu’s *Carmilla*, Carmilla and Laura have a close relationship that, even if it not explicit in the novel, might be interpreted as sexual. Keeping this ambiguous interpretation in mind, Carmilla would embody “primitive regression” and sexual freedom (Botting 145) opposing ‘femininity’, which Julia Kristeva defines as a patriarchal construct that marginalizes women (qtd. in Moi 126). Furthermore, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* depicts the three brides living with the Count as “unfeminine and unnatural” women (123) who are “hungry for blood and physical pleasures” (Al Ibrahim 166). They are construed as monstrous *alter ego* of the ‘New Woman’ and are, in fact, still under male’s authority, the Count’s. The influence of the more radical political views of the second wave of Feminism of the 60s-70s is reflected in Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), in which Claudia is presented not as “the woman who must be protected from the monster” but as “the monster” itself (qtd. in Magnúsdóttir 19). Another example of the empowered female vampire can be found in *The Hunger* (1983), in which Miriam Blylock (Catherine Deneuve) is a feminine, elegant, and glamorous vampire who, taking the anti-patriarchal sentiment to the extreme, establishes a ‘matriarchy’, yet another artificial construct which according to the Cambridge Dictionary might be defined as “a type of society in which women have most of the authority and power”. It

is in this sense that Miriam can be said to be the foremother of the Countess in *AHS: Hotel*. From the 1980s onwards, thanks to the third and fourth waves of Feminism, the representation of the emancipated woman will become even more prominent in cinema, literature and music and will heighten the awareness of female objectification and even victimization, which will contribute to the emergence of powerful global movements to fight against sexual harassment, assault, and violence against women such as the #MeToo Movement (2017).

2.3. The Criminal Woman, the Malignant Narcissist, and BPD

Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), Italian doctor and criminologist, would have strongly disapproved of this new portrayal of women in literature and cinema as he stated that the arising ‘New Woman’ of the 19th century was a threat to the Victorian society. In *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman* (1893), he claimed that the main characteristic of these ‘New Women’ was their innate “strong sexual drive” (qtd. in Klüsener 1) and he regarded them as “unstable..., very suggestible, vain, ... not very intelligent” (4) women who were “easily ... turned into evil beings by their [male] environment” (4), being maternity “the only feature that prevent[ed] them from turning evil” (4).

During the Victorian Era, when psychological investigation was more relevant than ever before, it was believed that the free-spirited and independent women who were uninterested in marriage and children suffered from a personality disorder, which made them behave unconventionally. This reflects how hysteria and madness were commonly associated with women. As Elaine Showalter contends, women were traditionally positioned “on the side of irrationality, silence, nature and the body, while men [were] situated on the side of reason, discourse, culture, and mind.” (qtd. in Shaw and Proctor 485). ‘Witchcraft’ was the primary discourse applied to women’s deviance in previous centuries; the concept of ‘hysteria’ replaced it in the 19th century. Showalter defines ‘hysteria’ as a “response to powerlessness, a reaction to expectations of passivity and an attempt to establish self-identity” (485). According to Showalter, the ‘hysteria’ from which women were believed to suffer at the end of the 19th century might be regarded as a reaction against patriarchal oppression and as a way to survive in such a society.

However, some of the women diagnosed as “hysterical” might have also suffered from a psychological condition that was not defined until recently. Specifically, these women might have suffered a personality disorder known as Borderline Personality Disorganization (BPD). Like hysteria, BPD—also known as a cluster B personality disorder—is more commonly diagnosed in women than in men (Fishman 3), but, unlike hysteria, it is not a condition of the body, but a set of dysfunctional coping mechanisms born out of trauma and, primarily, out of abandonment (Goldner-Vukov and Moore 395). If we follow Showalter and read “hysteria” as the set of dysfunctional coping mechanism fostered by the oppressive social context of Victorian Britain, it is possible to establish a link between the two conditions. According to Wirth-Cauchon, “the term ‘borderline’ was first used by analyst Adolf Stern in 1938 to describe patients who he believed were more disturbed than ‘neurotic’ patients but who were not ‘psychotic’” (qtd. in Shaw and Proctor 483). Kernberg suggested that individuals with Malignant Narcissist Personality Disorder (MNPD)—first introduced to psychoanalytic literature by Kernberg in 1984—were generally comorbid with BPD. In fact, BPD patients may reach a malignance characterized by the absolute absence of empathy (henceforth, psychopathy), narcissism, and Machiavellianism—known together as the ‘dark triad’ (Langley 1). According to Erich Fromm, a person “who scores high all aspects of the dark triad” might embody absolute evil (qtd. in Langley 1). While Malignant Narcissists are commonly characterized by possessing a grandiose sense of self-importance, needing excessive admiration, being materialistic and promiscuous, exploiting people surrounding them, and lacking empathy (Goldner-Vukov and Moore 393), in Roth and Fonagy’s opinion, “[t]he essential feature of a [BPD] is a pervasive pattern of instability of self-image, interpersonal relationships and mood” (qtd. in Shaw and Proctor 484). Indeed, the identity of BPDs is tremendously uncertain and they suffer abandonment anxiety, which drives them to make great efforts “to avoid real or imagined abandonment” (484) and to have “marked shifts from baseline mood to depression and anxiety” together with suicidal impulses (484). Three out of the four characters I discuss will, at some point, attempt suicide, as we shall see later on.

The female vampires in *AHS: Hotel* certainly seem to embody BPD. Yet, and although they all share features such as abandonment anxiety, there are differences among them that seem to correspond to the four subtypes of BPD recorded in the literature on this disorder. BPD is believed to be divided into four different levels ordered on a scale

from the least malignant to the most malignant, as described by clinician Christine Ann Lawson in her book *Understanding the Borderline Mother: Helping Her Children Transcend the Intense, Unpredictable, and Volatile Relationship* (2000). The Waif, the least malignant archetype could be defined as the eternal victim, who is not responsible for what happens in her life and who is constantly in need for external help; she resembles the female protagonist of “Cinderella”, as she “feels unworthy despite her accomplishments” (qtd. in Albrecht 5) and is incapable of improving her lot in life unless she is saved via external intervention. The second archetype is the Hermit, “who has let few people into her world for fear of being hurt” and whose message is “life is too dangerous” (6), thereby living in isolation and constant fear. Rather than fearful, the Queen—the third archetype—is selfish, greedy, and exploitative of others. She enjoys being in the spotlight and having everybody under her strict control. Yet, even if she looks powerful and unbeatable, she is internally empty and vulnerable (6). Finally, the Witch, the most malignant BPD of all, believes that life is a war, she is “full of self-hatred and projects that as rage onto her children” (6). She could even be defined as the sadist who enjoys inflicting pain on those surrounding her, lacking empathy and remorse. This last archetype resembles the evil stepmother in “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs”. By inverting her position in the patriarchal system and replacing the father figure, the Witch becomes the main victimizer in this fairy tale.

3. Analysis

3.1. The origin of female victimization: learning to be the perfect victim

The female characters in *AHS: Hotel* are a reflection of learned helplessness. As we shall see in the following pages, after having been socially educated by their different social contexts to accept their submissive roles, these women will avoid doing anything to change their situation. As I have already anticipated, the focus of the following analysis is going to be a comparison between the psychological condition of BPDs and the transformation of these women into vampires, for both are mainly consequences of having been forsaken, neglected, or of bereavement. In order to cope with the resulting emotional void, the female characters in *AHS: Hotel* rely on codependent romantic or filial love to survive.

The past of the first female character of the analysis, Elizabeth Johnson or the Countess, is disclosed through a series of flashbacks. These reveal that, before becoming

a female vampire, the Countess was a young single woman who dreamt of becoming a Hollywood actress during the Roaring Twenties. The entertainment business has been traditionally seen as the perfect environment for women who were ready to subvert the moral rules and, in particular, the sexual conduct codes. During the 1920s, both the aesthetic and the moral rebellion of women together with the myth of the ‘flapper girl’ defined Hollywood actresses as free and licentious women. During a recording on a set, Elizabeth is dressed as a harem concubine—foreshadowing her becoming a victim as she is playing the role of a stereotypical sexual object of male power—and she meets Rudolph Valentino, with whom she becomes immediately infatuated. Just as Count Dracula receives Jonathan Harker in his sublime castle, Valentino invites Elizabeth to his mansion, where she meets his wife Natacha, a successful actress. It is implied that Natacha has become a successful actress thanks to her marriage to Valentino. Since Elizabeth is ambitious and also wants to become a Hollywood star, she chooses to stay in a polygamous relationship with the couple. Unfortunately, the actor travels to Transylvania in order to play a role in *Nosferatu* and disappears without trace, which makes Elizabeth believe that he is dead. This makes her feel exposed and unprotected, which discloses that what Elizabeth really needs in her life to feel worthy is male protection. As a consequence of losing Valentino, Elizabeth is driven to seek another male protector: James Patrick March, a wealthy man who is secretly a serial killer.

Elizabeth will find no protection in her new partner; indeed, she claims that the only reason why she married this monstrous man is that she felt “alone in the world” without Valentino (“Flicker” 00:19:17-00:19:20), and not because she was in love with him. She thought that if she “was to live in grief, [she] might as well be surrounded by beautiful things. Even if it was with a man for whom [she] felt nothing” (00:19:20-00:19:30). In this sense, Elizabeth’s character behaves according to the patriarchal ideal that construes men as providers of material wealth. By submitting to this ideal, Elizabeth proclaims her state of dependence and learned helplessness. Elizabeth is a woman who, rather than changing her situation and continue living her life as an emancipated adult, decides to stay with a man, thus accepting her subalternity and even taking advantage of it. In fact, she will benefit from March’s wealth, economic support, and power in order to become a powerful woman herself, the Countess, as we shall see later on. Her submission is so complete that Elizabeth even agrees to become part of the stereotypical sadomasochistic couple which resembles the one found in the Marquis de Sade’s *Justine*,

or *The Misfortunes of Virtue* (1791). De Sade's text is part of the abusive social discourse in which the female is defined as "the object of male sadistic violence" (Meyers 85). Thus, Elizabeth will turn into March's victim and will be drawn to darkness; she will experience a descent into hell, which climaxes in her attempted suicide. Instead of rebelling or trying to escape, the only course of action that the helpless perfect victim can conceive is self-destruction.

The situation improves when Elizabeth discovers that Valentino is still alive. Nevertheless, the actor is no longer the same man when he returns home as he has been infected with a virus which has turned him into a vampire. As she desperately wants to escape from his male tormentor March, but her learned helplessness prevents her from acting upon her desire, Elizabeth lets Valentino infect her with the virus, in hope that becoming a female vampire might put her under his protection and rid her of March. The latter, driven by anger and feeling betrayed by Elizabeth, traps both Valentino and Natacha "within the palace [he] built for [his] queen" ("Flicker" 00:41:06-00:41:12): Hotel Cortez. This place is deliberately designed to become a murder house and to resemble Hell, as clearly suggested by the Eagles' song *Hotel California* that can be heard at the end of the first chapter of the season—the song being itself an extended metaphor for Hell. After March imprisons Valentino and Natacha inside the hotel, the police discovers March's murder house and he commits suicide in order to avoid being arrested. Elizabeth continues living at Hotel Cortez convinced that Valentino has definitely abandoned her and feeling hopeless and desperate, which contributes to the decline of her psychological health. Thus, it might be claimed that March does not only abuse Elizabeth physically, but also psychologically, defining her as a victim. Even if she starts constructing a new identity and life inside the hotel in a futile attempt to refuse her victim self, she will have to take care of her abhuman baby, Bartholomew, the product of her abusive and monstrous relationship with March. Bartholomew, himself monstrous, is a constant reminder of her past and will eventually reveal her most vulnerable side.

Just as Elizabeth turns into the Countess, a glamorous and powerful diva, Ramona Royale is also portrayed as a diva and a Hollywood actress living in Los Angeles in 1970. At first glance, Elizabeth and Ramona seem to be quite similar. They both are depicted as ambitious women whose dream is to ascend to the Hollywood Olympus. Yet, there is something that differentiates one from another: the color of their skin. The western patriarchal society portrayed in the show does not only marginalize women, but it also

defines non-white races as the Other: “whites are just people whereas other colors are something else” (Dyer 10). Consequently, as Elizabeth is a blonde woman with green eyes and pale skin, she is more accepted by the hegemonic cultural discourse than Ramona, a black woman with curly black hair and dark brown eyes. This becomes patent in the scene in which Ramona asks a film producer to have the leading role in his new cinematic production and he immediately rejects her unconvincingly claiming that he needs a more “serious actress” (“Mommy” 00:40:11-00:40:14). Ramona herself feels inferior to Elizabeth. In fact, when Ramona meets the blonde diva in Los Angeles directly after having being rejected by the film producer, she feels intimidated by her, even mesmerized by her sex appeal, and describes her as a “rarified, timeless creature” who, unlike her, knows “everything about art, literature, fashion” (00:42:58-00:43:08). On the contrary, Ramona feels incomplete and, in order to fill the incomplete parts of her identity, feels the need to engage in a romantic relationship with the blonde diva. Elizabeth turns Ramona into a vampire like herself, thus initiating her into a codependent relationship that is reminiscent of her own with Valentino—as well as of the iconic lesbian relationship between the characters played by Susan Sarandon and Catherine Deneuve in *The Hunger*. Indeed, the spectator is led to believe that Ramona and Elizabeth will establish an unbreakable bond which will make them inseparable. Yet, as soon as Ramona meets Mo, a black artist, she suddenly feels that he is the real love of her life, hence abandoning Elizabeth. As the blonde diva cannot tolerate being abandoned once again by her lover, she murders Mo in a deliberate attempt to make Ramona suffer, thus branding the latter as victim and casting herself in the role of the abuser.

Another of the female victims found in this story is Iris, an old woman who works as a receptionist in Hotel Cortez under the Countess’s control and seems desperate to be visible and useful. The latter trait, in particular, could indicate a tendency towards codependency and, in fact, this character too has experienced a devastating abandonment. She became a single mother after her husband left her and their son Donovan, and has ever since struggled with an inferiority complex. She also suffers from depression, and lives in terror of abandonment. She claims that “[she has] lived alone all [her] life. Every single person [she’d] ever loved has abandoned [her]” (“She Gets Revenge” 00:42:40-00:42:47). It is in this sense that Iris could be defined as a constant victim who is not responsible for what happens in her life and is constantly in need of external help. Nevertheless, rather than receiving support or help by the characters surrounding her, she

is despised, hated and treated as a servant. She does not even receive affection from her vampire son Donovan, who explicitly claims to always have preferred his father: “My father was the best thing in my life” (“Mommy” 00:23:14-00:23:17). Unsurprisingly, Iris feels alone, empty, without an identity. She even flatly states that she would be nobody if she were not Donovan’s mother (00:25:24-00:25:28). Thus, when she hears that her son does not love her but hates her, she feels the most vulnerable woman in the world.

The last ‘perfect victim’ in *AHS: Hotel* is Alex, a pediatrician, wife, and mother, who does not only experience abandonment but also loss and bereavement. Alex’s life was quite perfect until her son Holden mysteriously disappeared. Alex declares that Holden was the most precious person in her life; she never had the same feelings for her husband Detective John Lowe, nor for her daughter Scarlett. When her son Holden was born, she goes so far as to declare that she finally “fell in love for real. All the cracks and missing places came together” (“Mommy” 00:06:42-00:06:50). After losing him, Alex felt no affection for anyone anymore and she even attempted to commit suicide. To add an even more tragic aura to this character, Alex also suffers cruelly as she witnesses the psychological change that her husband Detective Lowe is undergoing after visiting Hotel Cortez several times when he was solving a case. Detective Lowe takes a journey into Otherness every time that he visits the hotel. On the one hand, James Patrick March appears to him in the shape of a ghost, and Lowe becomes his disciple, thereby completing the work that the murderer had left unfinished. On the other hand, he is unfaithful to Alex and starts an affair with Sally, a drug-addict who lives inside the hotel. As a consequence of this, Lowe forgets that he has a family who loves him, forgets about his lost son and abandons Alex and Scarlett.

So far, all the female characters presented in this analysis have experienced loss, abandonment, or neglect and yet, instead of fighting their abusers or, at least, trying to find help from a social system when its laws are being violated, they either attempt to commit suicide or try harder than ever to please their victimizers. What is more, Ramona, Iris, and Alex will be doubly objectified as they will become the victims of the system artificially created by the Countess inside the hotel, which will be the symmetrical reflection of the patriarchal system, as we shall see in the next section.

3.2. Attempting to refuse victimization: the female vampire and BPD

According to the Countess, “we have two selves: one the world needs us to be—compliant—and the shadow. Ignore it, and life is forever suffering” (“Room Service” 00:36:42-00:36:01). Claiming that she “will not be ruled” and “will not be managed” anymore (“She Wants Revenge” 00:01:24-00:01:30), Elizabeth decides to rely on her “shadow” in order to refuse victimization, thereby becoming the Countess and morphing into what seems to be a rather striking depiction of the ‘queen’ type of BPD: she becomes a demanding, selfish, greedy, and exploitative woman, who enjoys having everybody under her control. Elizabeth, who had always desired to become a successful Hollywood film star, becomes the monstrous queen of a decaying hotel. One of the first signs which makes Elizabeth resemble a Queen BPD might be pointed out when she begins using her sexuality as a weapon to dominate individuals. Ironically, she makes use of the tools offered by the patriarchal system to turn herself into an abuser, victimizing Ramona and, after gaining more power, victimizing sexually attractive men. In other words, rather than rebelling against the system that had victimized her, Elizabeth inverts her position in it, thus artificially recreating the social space of hierarchized dominion based on gender to which she has been subjected. Instead of a patriarchy, the Countess establishes a matriarchy in order to avoid becoming a victim or being abandoned again, as well as to escape from the world, which she describes as “a dangerous place” (“Devil’s Night” 00:17:42-00:17:47). In order to achieve this, she will surround herself with different people, whom she will need to construct her new identity; they will serve as extensions of her new *persona*. Another feature typical of BPD which the Countess clearly possesses is promiscuity and a consequent incapability to form stable relationships. She seeks sexually attractive men in order to have sexual intercourse with them, which symbolically recreates her ideal past with her lost lover Valentino. She also surrounds herself with servants, who fulfill all her orders and who witness her emotional instability. In order to regulate emotionally, she has these servants provide her with the fresh blood of the children whom she kidnaps. Thanks to these children’s blood, not only does she manage to regulate her emotions, but she also acquires supernatural beauty, youth, and vitality. Furthermore, the Countess suffers from abandonment anxiety, perhaps the quintessential trait of BPD and therefore, she will need all the different people surrounding her in order to avoid feeling abandoned again. However, like a true queen, the Countess also surrounds herself with money, glamour, and constantly craves power.

Even if, at first, the Countess might be regarded as a Queen BPD, as soon as she starts murdering not for revenge but for enjoyment, she can be said to have moved further along the scale of Malignant BPD towards the figure of the Witch. Once she establishes her matriarchy to compensate for the abuse suffered in the past and becomes practically almighty, the Countess turns into a monstrous sadist that is uncannily similar to her own former abuser, James Patrick March. For instance, in the episode titled “Checking In”, she and her male lover Donovan, Iris’s son, seduce a couple in order to have sex with them and later on, murder them. This scene, in which the Countess and Donovan inevitably remind the viewer of Miriam and John Blaylock in *The Hunger*, portrays the Countess as a manipulative woman who lacks empathy and is impulsively seeking emotions. As these features have been associated with psychopathy in the psychological studies carried out by Jones & Paulhus (qtd. in González 258), it might be even claimed that the Countess does no longer behave only as a Witch BPD, but also plunged into the space known as the ‘dark triad’, the most extreme form of malignancy, as defined in scientific terms. The first trait in this triad is a psychopathic level of lack of empathy, which the Countess’s disregard for others’ needs seems to confirm. Her obsession for beauty, glamour and a pathological need to be worship seem to confirm her as a Narcissist, as well, narcissism being the second trait in the triad. The third and last trait is Machiavellianism: when the Countess discovers that Valentino is still alive inside the hotel, she concocts what can only be defined as a ‘Machiavellian’ plan: marrying and then murdering Will Drake, one of her lovers, in order to become a rich widow and create her new life with her lost love. When the Countess is reunited with Valentino, she feels more powerful than ever before and feels capable not only of recreating her past, but also of recovering it. In order to recover it, Elizabeth is ready to get rid of everything which hinders her love relationship with Valentino and thus murders his wife Natacha. This defines Elizabeth as the most ambitious as well as manipulative person in the hotel. Sally, the drug-addict who lives in the hotel, even calls the Hotel Cortez a personification of its owner: “The Cortez is a selfish mistress... Jealous. Possessive.” (“Ten Commandments Killer” 00:34:47-00:34:55).

Just like NPDs (henceforth, narcissists) need human bodies or objects in order to project their fake egos onto others, Elizabeth hides the different parts of her fake *persona* inside the children whom she kidnaps. Even if she sometimes seems to possess a maternal instinct as she cares for ‘her’ children and is incapable of inflicting pain on them, what

really worries her is her own safety. The Countess makes sure that *her* children or ‘containers’ of the various parts of her own identity are not harmed by others in order to guarantee her own integrity. Moreover, when she looks at her monstrous son Bartholomew, she literally sees her own suffering, her traumatic past. Accordingly, rather than maternal instinct, Elizabeth shows a very Narcissistic obsession with her own self.

Contrary to the Countess, Alex seems to possess a true maternal instinct, which according to Lombroso, keeps women away from evil-doing (Klüsener 4). Nevertheless, maternity is also, ironically, what drives Alex to transgress. Among the children that the Countess has kidnapped is Holden, Alex’s son. When Alex discovers that the Countess is the new mother of her son, she rushes to the hotel and confronts her. The Countess justifies her actions by claiming that she “brought [him] [t]here to keep [him] safe. The world can be such a dangerous place” (“Devil’s Night” 00:17:42-00:17:47). This turns out to be nothing but a ploy, yet another ‘Machiavellian’ scheme to target Alex as her next victim. The Countess explains her that Holden will not be the same again as he has contracted an “ancient virus” with “no cure”, whose effects are “health, vitality, and everlasting life” (00:17:58-00:18:12). She also convinces Alex that the only way to be reunited with her son is contracting the same virus. At first, the spectator might have compassion and understanding for Alex, who, like the Biblical Eve, eats of the forbidden fruit of vampirism tempted by a cunning Countess. However, after accepting the Countess’s offer of eternal life by her son’s side, Alex makes immoral choices that cannot be justified: she distances herself emotionally and, eventually, physically from her husband and daughter just to be reunited with Holden in the eternal life. As Alex accepts to abandon her family and becomes the Countess’s servant, she self-alienates from the external world for fear of losing her son a second time, she proves herself to be in a rather unhealthy, codependent relationship with him and, in this, she might resemble the Hermit BPD who lives in constant fear and “let[s] few people into her world for fear of being hurt“ (qtd. in Albrecht 6).

Ramona also ends up diving into transgression. Like Alex, she, too, suffers from abandonment anxiety, and, like the Countess, she also acquires narcissistic features after losing Mo. As a result of feeling lonely in the world and of her rapidly disappearing career in Hollywood, Ramona becomes obsessed with the idea of defeating the Countess, the woman who has snatched everything and everyone she ever loved. Her goal is to become

the Countess, to take all her power, glory and beauty, rather than to simply destroy her. In this, Ramona's obsession with defeating her victimizer makes her resemble a Narcissist, who rather than seeking revenge, is seeking recognition, adoration, and to take center stage.

Finally, Iris's initial psychological state could be compared to that of the Waif BPD as she becomes a vampire in order to escape from her sad life and alleviate her silent suffering. As she does not receive help by anyone, she feels the need to transform herself, to become a new person since the "world holds nothing for women like [her]" ("Room Service" 00:10:50-00:10:54). Iris morphs into a transgressive, murderous character after being infected by her vampire son Donovan and kills hotel guests to become more visible, to feel alive for the first time in her life. The very fact that Donovan has infected her with the virus in order to bring her to life and to help her become a stronger woman, brings her hope and makes her think that her son still loves her. Even if she is still bossed around by those around her, Iris, as a female vampire, feels more powerful than ever before and she even sees the chance of defeating her main victimizer, the Countess. In her new state, Iris feels that she has finally something to fight for. What is even more, since her son Donovan shares the same desire of defeating the Countess, she feels closer to him than ever before. Ironically, Iris "never knew how to live until [she] died" (00:44:21-00:44:26).

3.3. Embracing victimhood

The Countess promised Donovan that the new life she was constructing inside the hotel was for the two of them. However, he soon discovers that it was only meant for the Countess and Valentino. Furious, he murders the precious lover of the Countess. When she discovers the dead body of Valentino, Elizabeth plummets, once again, into a bottomless pit of abandonment anxiety. She suddenly realizes that all had been in vain: her machinations, all her 'Machiavellian' schemes, her having sex with men who resembled Valentino, and her murdering people in order to pave her way to success. When the Countess confronts Donovan, she admits that her dead lover "made [her]. He made [her] everything [she] [is]" ("She Gets Revenge" 00:47:30-00:47:38), which suggests that she was nobody before meeting the wealthy actor and is nobody now that she has no hope to have him back. Elizabeth without a man is an empty, resourceless shell of a woman; a man shaped her identity, a man has taken it away. Even more than the blood of her children, the memory of her lost lover and the idea of getting reunited with him one day

was the reason why the Countess felt alive and powerful. Her relationship with Valentino can thus be defined as a co-dependent one. In *AHS: Hotel*, even quintessentially evil and powerful ‘witches’ need a man beside them.

Weak and depressed after having suffered abandonment, which acknowledges her BPD resemblance, the Countess feels even more vulnerable than the young aspiring starlet that she once used to be. In her new state, the Countess needs more than ever narcissistic emotional supply—the blood of *her* children—in order to fill the emptiness within her. As soon as she recovers some of her strength, the Countess’s Narcissistic ambitions resurrect in all their fearsomeness. Resolute to be once again the Queen, she challenges Ramona: she might be “weak, but [she] [is] still the champ” (“Battle Royale” 00:35:14-00:35:18). Yet, defeated, depleted of energy and power and already dead inside as a decompensated BPD/Narcissist, the Countess capitulates and begs Ramona to end her life. Nevertheless, the Countess does not die at the hands of a woman. Instead, and rather predictably in a show that seems to constantly highlight men’s dominion over women’s “weakness”, she is murdered by Detective John Lowe, who, following March’s ghost’s orders, sentences her to stay inside Hotel Cortez as a ghost for all eternity and to be reunited with the ghost of her male tormentor, James Patrick March.

In an unsuccessful previous attempt to murder the Countess, Iris accidentally murders her son Donovan. This defines her as a victim of her own self, as without her son, she sentences herself to endless emptiness. Hopeless, depressed, Iris chooses the path of self-destruction and attempts suicide. Once the Countess, her main victimizer, is gone forever, Iris should feel free for the first time in her life. However, the memory of her lost son and her feeling of guilty torment her to the point she cannot experience any other feelings. If the Countess dies physically, Iris dies spiritually, confirming the extreme codependence that chained the mother to the son.

Motherhood understood as absolute self-sacrifice and self-less devotion to the child is also epitomized in Alex’s character. Yet, instead of being consumed by her motherhood, as the beginning of the season seemed to suggest, Alex recreates a monstrous version of the traditional patriarchal family, thus highlighting the fact that she needs both men in her life equally. Even though John Lowe has become ‘a fallen angel’ and has betrayed Alex while he was living in the hotel, his wife eventually forgives him

in order to re-establish the institution of heterosexual marriage and family life. It is, however, remarkable that Alex's and Lowe's daughter Scarlett, the only member of the family who has never committed a transgression, is left behind in the 'normal world', while Alex, Lowe, and Holden move into the hotel in order to live there as a family, albeit an abhuman one. The excuse they offer is that they believe Scarlett deserves a better life in the world beyond the hellish confines of the hotel; yet, it is undeniable that they do not give her a choice and seem perfectly content to recreate a family in which only the male descendant has a role. It is also interesting to note that the ending of Alex's story resembles the traditional Gothic plot's restoration to a 'happy' ending, in which everything is "resolved by joining the heroine to a family and a male lover" (Meyers 40). Yet, before the restoration of social normalcy could take place, the Gothic plot takes the heroine away from 'normal' family life, marriage and heterosexual romance, understood as "the key to female identity and security" (23), and into the hands of a villain that represents a monstrous version of a father or husband and subverts the domestic sphere into a space of female victimization. In this sense, Alex's ending is far from happy and does not constitute a restoration of the social values presented at the beginning of the narrative—family life in the 'normal' world. Alex is, therefore, defined as a victim since she is forever reunited with her male tormentor, her neglectful, cheating, cruel husband. This subversion of family values is reflected in the physical dimension of the hotel, which, like so many domestic spaces in Gothic fiction, becomes a prison for Alex.

Ramona also embraces victimhood at the end of the season. She had been dreaming of murdering the Countess all her vampire life. Nevertheless, when she has the chance to do so, she lets herself be seduced again by the blonde diva and kisses her. This can only be explained by the fact that seeing her rival so vulnerable, Ramona realizes that, after all, they mirror each other. The two divas are empty, weak, powerless, and unsuccessful, despite their glamour and ambitions. Ramona feels "sisterly" (Meyers 126) towards the Countess and learns about her own vulnerability through her. Once she realizes that she will be incapable of hurting the Countess in her weak state, Ramona has no goals or dreams anymore. Unable to live a life of her own, she is also unable to leave. In a last-ditch attempt to glean some of the Narcissist supply on which, rather than blood, she seems to live, Ramona becomes a catwalk model for the fashion shows which are organized in the hotel. However, rather than being admired or loved for her personality or identity, she is just admired as a thing of beauty, and is thus objectified for all eternity.

4. Conclusion

Despite their differences, the four characters analyzed seemed adamant that they need a male figure in their lives to achieve their goals. Reluctant to fight against abuse, loss, abandonment, and neglect, they seem to accept the dichotomy which defines Man as the dominant figure and Woman as submissive with fatalistic resignation. Furthermore, while the male vampire has been commonly represented as a psychopath, in this television series the female vampire's representation is shaped by the features that are commonly associated with BPDs. These new female vampires are portrayed not only as powerful, as is the case of the male vampire, but also as overemotional to the point of hysteria and as extremely vulnerable. While the male vampire's Achilles's heel was to be exposed to daylight, the weakness of these female vampires is related to their incapability of fulfilling their dreams and to establish stable interpersonal relationships. Thus, rather than being portrayed as supernatural creatures, these female vampires are presented as victims of abuse, abandonment, and neglect, as pawns in a game they are destined to lose. Even though it may seem that these originally feeble women turn into vampires and develop a transgressive behavior as a means to empower themselves against male abuse, the series quickly shows that theirs is not the monstrosity of the vicious predator, but that of unstable BPDs. While it is true that some acquire 'Machiavellian' and Narcissistic characteristics that place them in the 'dark triad' used by psychologists to define the maximum expression of human malignancy, they all revert back to their original condition of victim. Rather than substituting a powerful monster for their victim selves, vampirism makes them re-live their victimization in a new way. We can go so far as to say that vampirism resurrects their victim selves from the grave of their traumatic past.

Elizabeth, Ramona, Alex, and Iris never really cease to be portrayed as victims: of their own fears, anxieties and learned helplessness, as well as of a system that facilitates the victimization of females by males. Rather than constituting a narrative of female empowerment, *AHS: Hotel*, portrays on the one hand, the victory of the patriarchal system, which seems to resurrect again and again in mainstream media, much in the same way in which a vampire emerges from its tomb. On the other hand, it reveals the detrimental consequences of the system on its subalterns: women are only cast into two roles: 'normal' victims and 'monstrous' victims, but always victims of excess and abuse in a system that already objectifies and exploits said subalterns. The only temporary escape from these role is inverting women's position in the system to become themselves

victimizers. Far from defeating patriarchy, this further reproduces men's abuse of power and grooms new victims.

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The Twilight Saga. Directed by Catherine Hardwicke et al., performances by Robert Pattinson, Kristen Stewart, and Taylor Lautner, Summit Entertainment, 2008-2012.

True Blood. Performances by Stephen Moyer, Anna Paquin, and Sam Trammell, HBO, 2008-2014.

Vampires. Directed by John Carpenter, performances by James Woods, Sheryl Lee, Daniel Baldwin, and Thomas Ian Griffith, Columbia Pictures, 1998.

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