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# Myriad mirrors: Doppelgangers and doubling in The Vampire Diaries

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# Myriad mirrors: Doppelgängers and doubling in *The Vampire Diaries*

## **Abstract**

As Samantha George notes in Chapter 4 above, mirroring is of fundamental importance in Gothic literature and film. It is also a prevalent trope in the CW network teen drama, *The Vampire Diaries*. The television series is itself a 'doubling' in that it is an adaptation of a series of novels by L. J. Smith, creating a situation wherein the same central characters inhabit the parallel townships of the novels' Fells Church and television's Mystic Falls, and consequently have histories which are, at times, contradictory.<sup>2</sup> The television version also explicitly explores the concept of the doppelgänger, and thus the idea of reflection, even as it manipulates the historical and cultural contexts of the characters. Nuclear families are noticeably absent in the television series, yet significant emphasis is placed on the twin themes of brothers as foils to each other, and an ongoing focus on matrilineal power. The series focuses on the new, humanised vampire (as examined elsewhere in this book), but also explicitly attempts to reflect 'real' contemporary teenage society and adolescent relationships, albeit it through the lens of the supernatural.

## **Keywords**

era2015, doppelg, mirrors, myriad, vampire, ngers, diaries, doubling

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**Kimberley McMahon-Coleman**

**Myriad Mirrors: *Doppelgängers* and Doubling in *The Vampire Diaries***

Elena: Crucifixes?

Stefan: Decorative.

Elena: Holy water?

Stefan: Drinkable.

Elena: Mirrors?

Stefan: Myth.<sup>1</sup>

As Samantha George notes in Chapter 4 above, mirroring is of fundamental importance in Gothic literature and film. It is also a prevalent trope in the CW network teen drama, *The Vampire Diaries*. The television series is itself a ‘doubling’ in that it is an adaptation of a series of novels by L. J. Smith, creating a situation wherein the same central characters inhabit the parallel townships of the novels’ Fells Church and television’s Mystic Falls, and consequently have histories which are, at times, contradictory.<sup>2</sup> The television version also explicitly explores the concept of the *doppelgänger*, and thus the idea of reflection, even as it manipulates the historical and cultural contexts of the characters. Nuclear families are noticeably absent in the television series, yet significant emphasis is placed on the twin themes of brothers as foils to each other, and an ongoing focus on matrilineal power. The series focuses on the new, humanised vampire (as examined elsewhere in this book), but also explicitly attempts to reflect ‘real’ contemporary teenage society and adolescent relationships, albeit it through the lens of the supernatural.<sup>3</sup>

The narrative centres on a love triangle involving two vampire brothers and their mortal love interest, Elena Gilbert. The brothers, Stefan and Damon Salvatore, are themselves

configured as foils to each other. Stefan is constructed as a 'good' vampire, who seeks to retain his humanity and make choices that are moral and compassionate. He hunts animals rather than humans to satisfy his blood cravings, and his desire for human blood is configured as an addiction; he insists that he is not a monster when he is 'clean'. He establishes and maintains a monogamous and loving relationship with Elena. Stefan's older brother, Damon, however, is constructed as the shade to Stefan's light; usually dressed entirely in black, he is impetuous, promiscuous, self-serving and pragmatic. In short, he embraces the darkness and its associated powers. Indeed, it has been argued that of all the contemporary iterations of the vampire, Damon is - at least initially - the most like Lord Ruthven, a 'celebration of self-absorbed, self-mocking, arrogant, charming, cruel, noble romanticism'.<sup>4</sup> Even their names denote the good/evil binary, with Damon, whose name evokes the demonic, making sarcastic comments about 'Saint Stefan', the martyr, in the books.<sup>5</sup> Melissa Ames even goes so far as to compare the brothers to Cain and Abel.<sup>6</sup>

In the TV series, the rivalry between the brothers dates back to 1864, when they were concurrently romantically involved with the vampire Katherine Pierce. Their enmity only increased when she began to turn them both into vampires but was captured and apparently entombed by the Founding Families of Mystic Falls before the process was completed. As in the seminal 1980s young adult vampire text *The Lost Boys*, the world of *The Vampire Diaries* utilises the concept of the half-vampire, so that an act of will is required in order to effect the transition. According to the narrative of the television show (which differs markedly from L. J. Smith's novels, both in terms of characterisation and the need for such a conscious decision), Damon had no intention of completing the transition if he could not spend eternity with Katherine, but was lured into completing the transformation by the machinations of his younger brother.<sup>7</sup>

### **The demon next door: regionalism and the modern vampire**

Zach: I know that you can't change what you are. But you don't belong here anymore.

Stefan: Where do I belong?<sup>8</sup>

Like Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, HBO's *True Blood* and Charlaine Harris' Sookie Stackhouse novels (on which *True Blood* was based), *The Vampire Diaries* seeks to embed itself in a recognisably Southern US setting. It has been argued that the South is 'Othered' and represented as fearsome, monstrous and desirable in Southern Gothic narratives, evoking memories of the South's bloody history.<sup>9</sup> Damon, like *True Blood*'s Bill Compton, had been a Confederate soldier, making explicit textual links to the area's Civil War history. In a self-reflexive moment, Elena's brother Jeremy earnestly explains away his ancestor's journal account of the rise of vampires in Mystic Falls during the Civil War as being 'a metaphor for the demons of the day ... The Union soldiers. I read the stories myself, they talk about the demons that attack at night ... Allegorical vampires, which is what it is: creative expression during a very volatile time. A country at war doesn't want realism, they want fantasy, thus: vampire fiction'.<sup>10</sup>

It has been argued elsewhere that the regionalism expressed in these texts can be read as a contemporary domestication of the monster, but equally, it suggests an engagement with a blood-soaked regional history of Othering particular social groups, and the ongoing tension between this problematic history and the apparent normality of contemporary small town life.<sup>11</sup> Rituals of small town normalcy like high-school dances and football matches are given significant airtime, suggesting that despite the supernatural focus, the events depicted reflect aspects of contemporary society to which its primarily teenage audience can relate.

As Kindinger argues, drawing heavily on the work of David Jordan, stories with a strong focus on a particular region are effectively a counter-narrative to rootlessness, because

they are imbued with the sense of belonging and identity that is created by the shared history of a region's inhabitants.<sup>12</sup> When adapting *The Vampire Diaries* for the screen, Kevin Williamson and Julie Plec eschewed the characters' European provenance in the novels, instead making them founding members of the antebellum township, thus creating a remarkably long relationship between the brothers and the region. *The Vampire Diaries* also argues strongly about the pull of 'home' to an uprooted individual, privileging the idea of the Salvatore brothers belonging in Mystic Falls from the opening voiceover in the Pilot episode, when Stefan declares: 'I shouldn't have come home. I know the risk. But I have to know her'.<sup>13</sup>

Stefan is inexorably drawn 'home' to Mystic Falls and to one of its inhabitants, Elena Gilbert. His need to be 'at home,' articulated in the Pilot episode, is mirrored by Damon's comments in the second episode: 'It's good to be home. Think I'm gonna stay a while.' This is immediately undercut, however, with the more ominous remark, 'This town could use a bit of a wakeup call, I think.'<sup>14</sup> In these early episodes, Damon is constructed as the binary opposite of 'new vampire' Stefan. Yet these initial depictions are simplistic and, as the series progresses, viewers are shown more nuanced representations of the characters which strongly imply that the brothers are each capable of behaving like the other. Sarah Rees Brennan explains the allure of the Salvatore brothers thus: 'it is always a question of Damon, as well as Stefan ... Stefan is the good vampire boyfriend, and Damon is the bad one. By separating out the two sides we can see even more clearly how very alluring, but also how very disturbing, a vampire boyfriend can be'.<sup>15</sup>

The brothers are often depicted throughout the series almost as two halves of one whole; the 'traditional', monstrous bloodthirsty vampire and the domesticated loving vampire who is passing as human, with their subject-positions at times shifting from one to the other as the programme's narrative arc develops.<sup>16</sup> The traditional vampire, as exemplified by

Damon in the early episodes, is a ‘deterritorialised, even transnational character that is not subject to borders, but rather constantly on the move looking for prey’.<sup>17</sup> Stefan, on the other hand, is the monster who has been ‘domesticated and transformed into an American citizen’.<sup>18</sup> Like his counterpart Bill Compton in *True Blood*, Stefan has returned to a place which held meaning for himself and his family during his mortal life. The programme explores the dangers inherent in returning home—namely that the vampire’s true nature will be discovered, and that locals will be injured or killed. Indeed, it is after a chance meeting with an old man who notes that Stefan ‘hasn’t aged a day’ since 1953 that Elena learns of Stefan’s status as vampire.<sup>19</sup> Stefan and Damon, like their literary and filmic predecessors, have been forced into lonely and nomadic lives because of their monstrous natures, yet the lure of home is as strong for many of the vampires in *The Vampire Diaries* as it is for any diasporan. In Season 1, twenty-six entombed vampires are released thanks to Damon’s stubborn desire to free Katherine (whom he incorrectly believes was interred along with the others), and the imperfect magic of a novice witch, Bonnie Bennett. When Damon asks Pearl, the leader of the tomb vampires what she hopes to achieve by remaining in town, her motives are shown to be all-too-human: ‘Mystic Falls is our home, Damon. They took that away from us. Our land, our home. It’s time we rebuild’.<sup>20</sup>

Mid-way through the first season, however, we start to see another side of Damon; that there is potentially more to him than his previous configurations as ‘dangerous’ and ‘the bad guy’.<sup>21</sup> Rather unexpectedly, it is Damon who rescues Elena from her smoking wreck of a car after an accident, and he then takes her with him on a road trip to Atlanta, Georgia, telling her that his motivations for doing so were no more complex than her ‘not being the worst company in the world’ and knowing that it would annoy Stefan.<sup>22</sup> Elena, for her part, is uncharacteristically relaxed during this sojourn. Damon later confesses that he refrained from compelling her because ‘we were having fun. I wanted it to be real’, demonstrating a level of

vulnerability not previously seen.<sup>23</sup> Stefan also demonstrates an unexpected vulnerability when he is tempted into drinking human blood late in Season 1, and again at the end of Season 2.

It is noteworthy that Stefan's own episodes of 'monstrosity' and bloodlust are configured as an addiction and therefore beyond the realms of free choice or personal control, given that a number of *The Vampire Diaries*' storylines focus on the notion of choice. Indeed, Stefan tells his brother that despite their closeness when they were mortal, 'all I can remember is hating you. Your choices have erased anything good about you'.<sup>24</sup> The mythology of the series suggests that vampires have even more choice than mortals, in that that they can 'switch off' their human emotions. When Elena's brother Jeremy asks Damon whether life - or more accurately, undeath - is better as a vampire, the ever-pragmatic Damon tells him: 'Life sucks either way, Jeremy. At least if you're a vampire you don't have to feel bad about it if you don't want to'.<sup>25</sup> In this, the final episode of Season 1, Damon admits to Jeremy that he did 'switch off' his emotions for a long time, and it was easier; but these admissions are noticeably and adamantly in the past tense, reflecting the changes in Damon's behaviour over the season as he begins to transform from the alluring but dangerous Byronic vampire towards a yet more sympathetic model.

Landers argues that current incarnations of the vampire are notable for making conscious choices rather than being driven by innate and inhuman bloodlust, and thus

[m]odern vampire representations dissolve the boundary between humans and monsters, demonstrating that monsters have a level of 'humanity' somewhere inside of them and have the capacity to act on that humanity and live in a morally acceptable manner. As a result of the blurring between monsters and humans, modern vampires also imply that humans might have a level of 'monstrosity' inside them.<sup>26</sup>



When Stefan's bloodlust is out of control on 'the human stuff' and he becomes unreliable, it is Damon who steps in to take his place, escorting Elena to the Miss Mystic Falls pageant, dancing with her, and offering advice about Stefan's condition.<sup>27</sup> During this part of the story's development, the viewer learns that Stefan's bloodlust is greater than Damon's, and that Damon was once not only averse to drinking human blood, but also played the role of self-sacrificing romantic hero. The complete reversal of their roles, demonstrated through the televisual technique of the flashback, shows that they are each 'truly half of one whole and a divided self that is capable of oscillation between two extremes'.<sup>28</sup> The notion of the brothers as a divided self is sometimes depicted visually through closely aligned costuming and body language, as in the still below (figure 13.1).

[Figure 13.1 here]

As Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle point out, the uncanny as understood by Freud and others is more than just a sense of mystery or eeriness: '[m]ore particularly, it concerns a sense of unfamiliarity which appears at the very heart of the familiar, or else a sense of familiarity which appears at the very heart of the unfamiliar'.<sup>29</sup> This is certainly true of the Salvatore brothers, who live in a town which was once very familiar; who were once close, then rivals and mortal enemies, and now have forged an uneasy alliance against both the descendants of the Founding Families (who would once again force them out of Mystic Falls), and the supernatural forces which threaten Elena. Much is made of the motif of brotherhood, and it is suggested that brothers' bonds cannot be severed; indeed, Stefan at one point admits to his fellow vampire, Elijah: 'I've wanted to kill my brother a million times but could never do it'.<sup>30</sup>

Elijah and Klaus are also once-close, warring brothers who are pivotal to the plot in Season 2. Klaus is depicted as the traditionally monstrous vampire. He is nomadic, bloodthirsty, and demonstrates no familial loyalty. Elijah works with Elena and the Salvatore brothers to bring about Klaus' downfall but wavers when Klaus offers to reveal where their staked siblings are kept. Elijah allows Klaus to escape, only to be double-crossed and staked. The pair operate as foils or mirrors to the Salvatore brothers, demonstrating just how badly a rivalry between two vampire brothers can end, particularly if one brother eschews domestication and continues to operate out of self-interest.

The notion of brotherhood is thus examined in multiple ways throughout the series. Although Damon's drawled 'brother' is almost always used sarcastically and pejoratively when addressing Stefan, the notion of family ties surviving above all else is regularly implied through the actions of the sympathetic, regionalised characters.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, in the Season 2 finale Stefan sacrifices everything, including his freedom and his relationship with Elena, to procure a cure for the fatally-ill Damon.<sup>32</sup> A sense of strong family allegiance is also implied in the adoption of Elena by her biological father's older brother, and by the ways in which Elena and Jeremy continue to refer to each other as brother and sister even after the revelation that they are actually cousins.

As Jennifer Lynn Barnes summarises,

*The Vampire Diaries* is a show in which family matters: the entire premise revolves around Damon and Stefan being brothers; Elena's connection first to Katherine and later to Isobel propelled season one's dominant story arcs; Bonnie's character went through a witchy (and sometimes bitchy) metamorphosis almost entirely because of her grandmother's death; and even minor characters, like Tyler and Matt, struggled with abusive and absent parents, respectively.<sup>33</sup>

Other postmodern Gothic narratives (such as Poppy Z. Brite's novel *Lost Souls* or the Canadian *Ginger Snaps* werewolf movies) replicate nuclear family units located within their 'normal, contemporary ... setting[s] ... to expose the dysfunction beneath this veneer of stability'. In contrast, *The Vampire Diaries* rejects the nuclear family as a social unit completely, while still focussing on the importance of constructed brotherly and maternal relationships.<sup>34</sup> Mystic Falls may be a 'normal, contemporary' southern US setting, but the nuclear family unit of 'two heterosexual parents and a few children' as the 'fundamental unit for transference of ideology' is remarkable by its absence.<sup>35</sup> Rather, *The Vampire Diaries* constructs a plethora of family types and structures, including orphaned children and sole parent families; absent, irresponsible, or workaholic parents; and even a gay parent. Some characters even demonstrate or declare sibling-like relationships with characters to whom they are not related; Bonnie declares in Season 1 that Elena is like a sister and she would therefore die for her; and the initial antipathy between vampire Damon and slayer Alaric is attenuated into a sibling-like relationship by the end of Season 2.<sup>36</sup> All of the adolescents - and some of the adults - within the narrative identify with or articulate isolation and dislocation even before they enter into the complexities of supernatural politics. The allegiances they consciously create *in lieu* of biological families, however, ultimately afford some protection from the supernatural risks inherent in the bloodlines of many of the characters.

Any discussion of family must inevitably turn back to the figures of Katherine and Elena, two characters for whose romantic attention the Salvatore brothers vie. The brotherly vampiric relationship is itself reflected in complex ideas about identity and matrilineal heritage.

**The *doppelgänger* next door: mitochondrial DNA and the modern vampire**

The antagonism between the brothers, as viewers soon learn, is a direct result of a previous love triangle in which they were involved, with a vampire named Katherine Pierce. Elena Gilbert is Katherine's *doppelgänger*, and - at least in the world of the television series - her descendant. Both roles are played by the same actress, visually suggesting that the good girl and *femme fatale* roles are mirror images of each other that may exist in the one individual, just as the calculating and monstrous side of the vampire is twinned with the capacity for love and compassion.

The suggestion that the Other and the Self are interchangeable is an uncanny one, as is the idea of the nomadic and monstrous vampire being 'at home' in the small community from which he or she was previously ostracised. The majority of dualities in Mystic Falls involve the supernatural. As Thurber points out,

Elena appears to be a human at first, but the series eventually reveals that ... she is also Katherine's ancestor and her mythical *doppelgänger* - making her part of an ancient *doppelgänger* curse involving Katherine's (and therefore, Elena's) family. Bonnie (Katerina Graham) is a witch and shares a double (although not a lookalike) in the form of her ancestor who was a witch working for Katherine during the Civil War. Tyler ... is both a wolf and a teenage boy - the new werewolf representing a similar fantasy and gender crisis to the new vampire.<sup>37</sup>

Arguably the Salvatores are blood brothers twice over; their status as biological siblings is mirrored in their lives as vampires, because they share the same 'Maker' or vampire parent in Katherine.

As the close relationships between Elena and her friends, among others, demonstrate, the series implies that family is not something which is easily quantified using the metaphor of blood. As with a number of vampire narratives, however (including *Twilight* and *True*

*Blood*), the sharing of blood by vampires in a more literal sense comes with obligations.

Damon is shown to be negligent in his mentoring duties with Vicki Donovan during her brief life as a vampire; in contrast, he is more supportive of Stefan's efforts to nurture Caroline Forbes following her transition. Despite his strong mistrust of them, Damon remains apparently incapable of ignoring either Katherine, who turned him, or Isobel, whom he turned, throughout the first two seasons.

The complex rivalry between the brothers seems to be the key to understanding the worst excesses of Damon's behaviour: their rivalry over Katherine's affections and transformation into vampires because of her were the impetuses for his vow to make Stefan's life an eternal misery. When Katherine returns to Mystic Falls, her actions again maximise the friction between the two brothers. In an inversion of usual gender stereotypes regarding love and lust, a seductive Katherine refuses to tell Damon what he wants to hear: that she loves him. The usually confident elder brother debases himself before her, declaring that he will forgive a century and a half of neglect and thoughtlessness if they can begin an eternity together. Katherine is dismissive and needlessly cruel, telling him, 'It was always Stefan'.<sup>38</sup> As Melissa Ames notes, the depiction of women as more sexually aggressive is a trend within the vampire sub-genre, citing the *Twilight* saga, *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*, and *The Vampire Diaries* as examples.<sup>39</sup> Arguably, the long history of love triangles in teen narratives is also at play here, hearkening back to the John Hughes films of the 1980s, and even making an appearance in the 1985 supernatural comedy *Teen Wolf*.<sup>40</sup>

Just as Katherine incites rivalry between the Salvatore brothers, so too does she cause significant friction within Elena Gilbert's family. In flashback, viewers see the 1864 version of Katherine, coquettishly playing matchmaker between Elena's ancestor Johnathan Gilbert and the soon-to-be-entombed Pearl. Johnathan Gilbert was a vampire hater and, along with Giuseppe Salvatore (the brothers' father), had been integral in rounding up the vampires who

had taken up residence in Mystic Falls. Johnathan's journals and artefacts are used to again round up the same vampires in 2010, and the unusual spelling of his name<sup>41</sup> links him explicitly to Elena's 'Uncle John', hailed as the town's prodigal son and saviour in the face of a renewed vampire threat.

Late in Season 1 it is revealed that Elena had been adopted, and Damon's suspicions about her parentage are later confirmed through investigations conducted by Aunt Jenna and Elena herself which reveal that John Gilbert is not Elena's paternal uncle, but her biological father. Her mother was Isobel Fleming Saltzman, a descendant of Katherine and student of the paranormal who asked to be made vampire. This raises questions for Elena about her identity, and which of her mothers was 'real'. The influence of Miranda Gilbert on Elena is clearly significant; it was she, viewers are told, who gave Elena her first journal, from which *The Vampire Diaries* takes its name.<sup>42</sup> Elena's first conversation with Stefan takes place when she is journaling at her adoptive parents' grave.<sup>43</sup> It was also Miranda who suggested that Elena enter the Miss Mystic Falls pageant, so that they could share the campaign experience; Elena's lack of interest in completing the competition without her mother is palpable, and provides the opportunity for Aunt Jenna to once again note that she is failing in her role as *ersatz* mother.<sup>44</sup>

When John Gilbert gives Elena a bracelet which he tells her belonged to her mother, he answers for her the question of who is her 'real' mother. Elena assumes that John - who has had an ongoing allegiance with Isobel even after her mortal death - means that it belonged to her birth mother. John corrects her, saying, 'It belonged to your mother. Miranda'.<sup>45</sup> John affirms that Miranda and Grayson were the ones who undertook the parenting roles with Elena, with their love for her even extending to giving up their lives for her. Stefan reveals to Elena that he had previously met her on the night of her parents' fatal car accident, but that Grayson had insisted that he help Elena first, meaning that ultimately she was the sole

survivor. John Gilbert later echoes this act of self-sacrifice, forgoing his own life in order to save Elena's by binding their life forces through a magical spell cast by Bonnie.<sup>46</sup>

Elena is also biologically linked to Katherine. Like her descendant, Isobel, Katherine has the ignominy of an unwanted teen pregnancy as part of her back story. Originally known as Katerina Petrova, Katherine is a Petrova *doppelgänger*, with the supernatural ability to break a curse which allegedly affects both vampires and werewolves. Elena, as the next Petrova *doppelgänger*, holds similar power and is therefore the target of the vampires and werewolves who wish to access it. Thus Elena's circumstances are very much linked to her maternal heritage, as her biological links to Katherine and Isobel have effectively driven the narrative arc to date. Katherine is more than a matriarch, however; she is the undead mirror to Elena. They are not just lookalikes (as in Smith's novels), but are identical. Indeed, in the Season 1 episode 'Masquerade', injuries intended to punish Katherine also appear on Elena's body.<sup>47</sup>

The complex *doppelgänger* storyline is brought to the screen through having lead actress Nina Dobrev play both roles. Visual cues such as jewellery are used to alert keen viewers as to whether Katherine or Elena is involved in any given interaction. Elena's trademark is her uber-straight hair, whereas Katherine prefers to wear hers curled. In another visual mirroring, when the Salvatore brothers are shown in their pre-vampire lives, the main cue that this is the Civil War era, other than costuming and rosy cheeks, is that they both have wavy hair. This signifies their closer allegiance to Katherine at that time. A photo double is also used in some scenes, creating a layered doubling. As Ann Thurber points out in her recent thesis, the photo double is effectively doubling for the *doppelgänger*, herself a double.<sup>48</sup> Dobrev has acknowledged that at some point she may be required to play a third character, since Katherine's status as Petrova *doppelgänger* implies that she is herself a copy of an earlier incarnation.<sup>49</sup> Katherine is, at the time of writing, a copy without an original;<sup>50</sup>

Elena, in turn, is a copy of the copy, but has become more meaningful or 'real' to the Salvatore brothers, both of whom have ultimately transferred their affections to her, rather than Katherine.

In deciding how best to play Katherine, however, Dobrev has consciously enacted another form of mirroring, noting that 'Damon gets a lot of who he is from Katherine, because he's basically learned everything that he knows about being a vampire from her. So I actually adopted Ian's performance ... so that the transition would make sense.'<sup>51</sup> When playing Katherine, Dobrev uses what she calls 'quirks' of Ian Somerhalder's portrayal of the character, including swaggering, his use of his eyes to convey meaning, and a drawled delivery. Of course, Stefan had also learned how to be a vampire under the influence of Katherine, but viewers learn that his early bloodlust and 'ripper' status were mediated under the maternal influence of his friend and vampire mentor, Lexi.<sup>52</sup>

Given the prevalence of 'good' maternal and quasi-maternal influences, including Aunt Jenna, Miranda Gilbert, Lexi and even Elena herself (in the way that she 'mothers' and protects Jeremy and Stefan in the face of their addictions, for example), it is difficult to see the Katherine/Elena doubling as anything other than a Madonna/whore dichotomy. As Landers argues, the programme suggests that a woman who is both Madonna and whore is effectively a divided self and must kill one half or the other.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the first two seasons centre on Elena's role in breaking The Curse of the Sun and the Moon. Elena comes to see her death as inevitable, and her attempts to have agency over when and where it happens becomes as much a part of the story as the brothers' efforts to live up to their surname and protect her from that fate.

### **What do the myriad mirrors reflect?**



A number of critics have noted that vampire fiction enjoys popularity at times of economic or social change. Vampire narratives reflect both the positive and negative aspects of contemporary realities. Nina Auerbach, for example, notes that the popularity of vampires in the 1950s ‘personified the fears within the supposed national bliss of those years - fears of communism, of McCarthyism, of nuclear war, and not being certified sexually normal by paternalistic Freudian authorities - fears that field the ghostly compulsion to be liked’.<sup>54</sup> More recently, the *Twilight* saga has been viewed through feminist and post-feminist lenses, with critics questioning its conservative return to heteronormative morals and its rejection of the vampire’s traditionally queer role (although such readings are, of course, problematised by other critics, such as Artt and Wasson in Chapter 11 of this volume).<sup>55</sup> Elsewhere I have argued that this conservative trend is particularly noticeable in Young Adult, as opposed to mainstream adult, iterations of contemporary Gothic narratives<sup>56</sup>, although of course this observation may depend upon the texts selected. What is clear is that the vampire narrative is becoming more nuanced and sophisticated than merely fearing the monstrous other. Televisual vampires post-*Buffy* are often reflected in mirrors and can be photographed (see Sam George’s chapter in this volume). This suggests an increased closeness between the monstrous and the human in that they are no longer easily identified by visual markers, reflecting the trends of domestication and normalisation of the vampire.

Punter and Byron have argued that the ‘Gothic always remains the symbolic site of a culture’s discursive struggle to define and claim possession of the civilised, and to abject, or throw off, what is seen as other to the civilised self’; or, as actor Ian Somerhalder argues: ‘Vampires used to be ugly, ... now they’re more aesthetically appealing, but they’re still there to answer one question: What’s it like to be an outsider?’ The Gothic is at its core about the role of the outsider.<sup>57</sup> The figure of the revenant is intrinsically an outsider because of his or her undead status. Those

vampires who choose to engage with their human emotions are further Othered by eschewing their monstrous sides and choosing to establish a (semi) permanent home within a region or community; they are uncannily situated as outsiders who also belong within the local community. In the case of the Salvatore brothers, who operate in a world where most of the population do not know of the existence of vampires and other supernatural creatures, this brings with it inherent risks: the risk that someone will recognise them and query why they haven't aged; as well as the risk that a slip in control could mean harming or killing community members with whom they have bonded. Like *True Blood's* Bill Compton they illustrate a further uncanniness in that there is the potential for them to have had unusually long connections with the local community and unique insights into the town's history, as witnesses to it.

Even though the nomadic traditional vampire remains a figure to be feared, the queer or Othered position of the regionalised and domesticated vampires within society is seen as acceptable and - particularly in Young Adult vampire narratives such as *The Vampire Diaries* - even desirable.<sup>58</sup> It is perhaps this reflection of the uncanny - that which is slightly unfamiliar - which is appealing to an adolescent audience, caught in the interstices between childhood and adulthood, where the familiar typically becomes less so. The evil and good *doppelgängers* and the two fluid representations of the vampire simultaneously draw on the popular fascination with supernatural romances, while reflecting that adolescence is fundamentally a period of change and personality development.

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## Notes

1 'There Goes the Neighbourhood', *The Vampire Diaries*, 1.16.

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2 L. J. Smith, *The Awakening* (1991); *The Struggle* (1991); *The Fury & Dark Reunion* (1991); *Nightfall* (2009).

3 For the development of sympathetic vampires in film and literature, see Lindsey Scott's Chapter 7 above.

4 Skovron, 'Ladies of the night, Unite!', in Cordova (ed.), *A Visitor's Guide to Mystic Falls*, p. 59.

5 L. J. Smith has Stefan explain the he was named after Saint Stephen, the first Christian martyr, and that 'Salvatore' means 'salvation' in Italian, in her first book, *The Awakening* (p. 229).

6 Ames, 'Twilight follows tradition', in Click, Aubrey and Behm-Morawitz (eds), *Bitten by Twilight*, p. 47.

7 'Blood Brothers', 1.20.

8 'The Pilot', 1.1.

9 Kindinger, 'Reading supernatural fiction as regional fiction', p. 17.

10 'Bloodlines', 1.11. This scene is also ironic, in that his girlfriend, to whom he is making this argument, is (unbeknownst to him) herself a vampire and had seen the recounted events first-hand.

11 See Kindinger, p. 12. Many have commented on the links between the history of how both people of colour and LGBT people have been treated in the conservative Southern states, and the contemporary Southern vampire narratives. See, for example, Hudders, among others; and a number of *True Blood* panels at the 2011 ACA/PCA.

12 Kindinger, p. 13; Jordan, *Regionalism Reconsidered*.

13 'The Pilot'.

14 'The Night of the Comet', 1.2.

15 Brennan, 'Women who love', in Cordova (ed), p. 6.

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16 'Traditional' here should be qualified; Damon is not the bestial vampire of East European folklore but is far closer to the ambivalent, amoral, bloodthirsty but often seductive vampire that may be characterised as 'Byronic'; see Conrad Aquilina in Chapter 2 above. For further analysis of other representations of vampires which can vacillate between valued human traits and monstrous behaviours, see Michele Smith on *True Blood* in Chapter 12 of this volume; the Southern US context is important here, too, of course.

17 Kindinger, p. 2.

18 Kindinger, p. 12.

19 'You're Undead to me', 1.5.

20 'There Goes the Neighborhood'.

21 'You're Undead to me'.

22 'Bloodlines'.

23 'Fool Me Once', 1.14.

24 'Fool Me Once'.

25 'Founder's Day', 1.22.

26 'The modern vampire phenomenon', p. 36.

27 'Miss Mystic Falls', 1.19.

28 Thurber, 'Bite me', p. 66

29 *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, p. 35.

30 'The Sun Also Rises', 2.21.

31 This trait of Damon's is also present in the books (see, for example, *The Awakening*, p. 137).

32 'As I Lay Dying', 2.22.

33 Barnes, 'Sweet Caroline', in Cordova (ed.), pp. 150-1

34 Greenburg, 'Sins of the blood', p. 166.

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- 35 Greenburg, p. 166.
- 36 'Unpleasantville', 1.12; 'As I Lay Dying', 2.22.
- 37 Thurber, p. 74.
- 38 'The Return', 2.1.
- 39 Ames, p. 50.
- 40 For a more detailed discussion of this trend in 1980s YA film, see Shary, 'Buying me love'.
- 41 As shown in the credits and on the journals themselves.
- 42 'The Pilot'.
- 43 'The Pilot'.
- 44 'Miss Mystic Falls'.
- 45 'Daddy Issues', 2.13.
- 46 'The Sun Also Rises'.
- 47 'Masquerade', 2.7.
- 48 Thurber, p. 67.
- 49 Quoted in MacKenzie.
- 50 Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', in *Selected Writings*, p. 12.
- 51 Nina Dobrev, quoted in MacKenzie, 'Vampire Diaries' star Nina Dobrev'.
- 52 'The Dinner Party', 2.15.
- 53 Landers, p. 66.
- 54 *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, p. 4.
- 55 See Kane, 'A Very Queer Refusal', in Click, Aubrey and Behm-Morawitz (eds.), pp. 103-18, among others.
- 56 McMahon-Coleman and Weaver, pp 20-21; 91. See also Platt, 'Cullen Family Values', in Click, Aubrey and Behm-Morawitz (eds.), pp 71-86, among others.

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57 *The Gothic*, p. 15.

58 See the vampires Liam and Dianne in *True Blood*; Victoria and Laurent in *Twilight*; and Klaus, Ben, and Logan in *The Vampire Diaries*.