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Myss Mystic 2.0. *The Vampire Diaries'* Caroline Forbes and the American Dream: With and Without Fangs

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RESUMEN:

El vampirismo, un elemento recurrente en la literatura y en producciones audiovisuales, parece haberse instalado en las series de televisión. En este traslado se han difuminado las características más monstruosas de estos seres, dando paso a criaturas jóvenes y hermosas que no desentonarían en ningún vecindario de alto nivel. En el caso de la serie americana *Crónicas Vampíricas*, una adaptación de la serie de novelas empezada por L. J. Smith en los años noventa, los vampiros aun beben sangre. Aunque ahora vacían en vasos las bolsas de sangre que han robado en el hospital local. Este hecho se lleva al extremo en el personaje de Caroline Forbes, la rubia capitana de las animadoras y estudiante modelo que empieza la serie como humana, pero se convierte en vampiro al principio de la segunda temporada. A través de este personaje, el artículo estudiará cómo los vampiros pueden representar el sueño americano, demostrando que algunas personas pueden llegar a ser mucho más humanas una vez que mueren.

Palabras clave: sueño americano, vampiros, *Crónicas Vampíricas*, Estudios Culturales, Estados Unidos

ABSTRACT:

Vampirism seems to be a recurring element in literature and audiovisual material, and lately these fanged creatures have moved on to TV series. In doing so, they have partially shed their most obvious monster-like characteristics, turning into apparently young, beautiful and civilised non-human creatures which could well fit in any modern suburb. In the case of the American TV series *The Vampire Diaries*, an adaptation a series of novels started by L. J. Smith in the 1990s, vampires still drink blood. Only now they pour their blood bags into glasses after stealing them from their local hospital. This issue is taken to the extreme in the character of Caroline Forbes, blonde cheerleader captain and A student who starts season one as human but becomes a vampire early in season two. Through her, the article will argue that vampires can function as the embodiment of the American Dream, showing that some people can be much more human once they are actually dead.

Keywords: american dream, vampires, *Vampire Diaries*, Cultural Studies, United States

1. VAMPIRES ARE ALIVE-ISH

Vampires are not dead. Not when it comes to fiction, if the vast amount of novels, films and television series in which they star is any indication. More than forty years after it was originally broadcasted, Tim Burton brought back *Dark Shadows* in 2012. By then Barnabas Collins was not the only vampire in our cinemas: all around the world thousands of teenagers, mostly female, were queuing to admire Edward Cullen in the last *Twilight* film, *Breaking Dawn part 2*. The previous years had not only seen the first four *Twilight* films (2008-2011) but also the *Underworld* series (2003-2012), *Van Helsing* in 2004 and the *Blade* trilogy (1998-2004), all of them considered blockbusters. Something similar was happening in television: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* had finished in 2003, and its spin-off, *Angel*, the following year, yet there were constant re-runs. *True Blood* premiered in September 2008 and just one year later *The Vampire Diaries* made its debut. Both are still shooting new episodes and by October 2013 *The Originals*, *The Vampire Diaries'* spin-off, became a reality. Another revision of *Dracula* has been the latest addition.

In many ways vampires are now closer to us than they have ever been. Red-eyed violent vampires such as Christopher Lee's *Dracula* seem to have disappeared from our screens, only to be replaced by, in most cases, incredibly attractive young adults who also happen to have a set of fangs. Long black cloaks and dusty old castles have been replaced by designer underwear and high school corridors, and their first choice of communication is now mobile phones. Of course they no longer fly; they prefer to drive their flashy cars, and some of them are even known to have used public transport at some point¹. Their Gothic aura has evaporated; the 'sublime' has been lost. They might not share common people's worries, but they are not that different. Therefore, I cannot help but wonder: When did they become human-like again, while still being dead? When did they stop being the enemy? When did they become one of us? And what does this transformation imply?

The present article tries to answer these questions by focusing on just on Caroline Forbes, a secondary character in *The Vampire Diaries*. Her character can be used to explain the process by which vampires acquire human-like traits through her transition from human to vampire between the first and second seasons of *The Vampire Diaries*². It will be argued

that, by actually losing her humanity and turning into a vampire, she becomes a more positive role model, adhering to the values generally accepted as positive by today's globalized society, namely hard-work and solidarity. The decision to make her the centre of this analysis is two-fold: it springs from the analysis of *Gilmore Girls* as the epitome of Americanness (Calvin 2008), taking a very similar idea –a mother-daughter relationship in a small community–, to the next level by adding vampirism, and it is articulated through the concept of the American Dream, which will be considered a key element in order to explain the aforementioned process of normalization of vampires in today's American films and television series³.

Gilmore Girls and *The Vampire Diaries* now belong to the CW, a network known for targeting "young women interpolating them as young, female, feminine, middle-class, white, and heterosexual" (Bridgeman, 2014: 8). *Gilmore Girls* was broadcast between 2000 and 2007 and *The Vampire Diaries*, which started as a literary saga in 1991, is now in its sixth season. Both shows have several elements in common, most notably their use of hyper-reality and the irony in dialogues. In some cases these two concepts converge, thus creating comic situations which also work at strengthening the connections between characters and viewers, who can see similarities between their real lives and the fictional lives of those characters they admire or even despise. A striking example of this connection is when Damon Salvatore, *The Vampire Diaries'* antihero, is lying in bed reading a *Twilight* novel while Caroline Forbes is getting ready for a party they will be attending together:

Damon: What's so special about this Bella girl? Edward's so whipped.

Caroline: You have to read the first book first. It won't make sense if you don't.

Damon: Ah, I miss Ann Rice. She was so on it.

Caroline: How come you don't sparkle?

Damon: Because I live in the real world where vampires burn in the sun.

Caroline: How do you go in the sun?

Damon: I have a ring. It protects me. Long story. (..) This book, by the way, has it all wrong. (1.04 "Family Ties")

Hyper-reality is undeniable, since most viewers will probably have a copy of the

same book at home, thus establishing a stronger connection between them and Caroline. Others who might be watching this show will actually agree with Damon on his criticism of Stephenie Meyer's saga, so all tastes seem to be catered for. In fact it is not surprising to find references to *Twilight* in *The Vampire Diaries*, since they coexisted in time, so it can be read as a way of highlighting the differences between the two products so as to establish one as superior to the other. However, screenwriters in the CW show manage to go further back in time by drawing a connection between this television series and classic horror movies of the 20th century, again through Damon's words when questioning the existence of werewolves:

Damon: If this Wolf Man thing is true, I've seen enough movies to know it's not good. It means Mason Lockwood is a real life Lon Chaney and that little Tyler punk may just very well be Lon Chaney Jr., which means Bela Lugosi, meaning me, is totally screwed. (2.03 "Bad Moon Rising")

Although the reference may be lost on the younger generations of viewers, the cultural element is still present and the information which is being transmitting is again connected to a specific hegemonic culture. The irony of the situation is having a fictional vampire explaining his problems with werewolves through the use of horror films comparisons, thus helping blur the barriers between real and fictional and reducing the distance between viewers and characters.

Back to the American Dream, it is important to remark that for the purpose of this essay this concept will not be considered a fixed set of objectives or ideals shared by a group of people, as it has been suggested by Cullen's classification (2004), but rather as and a process (Kouwenhoven, 1996: 50) by which individuals are given the opportunity to improve their lives providing they respect the rules established by the society they live in, in other words, a system which allows for a certain degree of flexibility and whose final goal is personal development. Although it could be argued that it cannot be applied at universal scale, precisely because it is American (understanding America as a synonym of United States), globalization has made it possible. Already in 1999 the US were behind 68% global TV sales, and although Britain came second at around 9%, by 2006 out the six most watched programs

in the country, five were American: two films and the CSI franchise (Miller, 2010: 74). Jonathan Bignell defines "structure of feeling" as the function of television products as vehicles for an ideology: they transmit, both implicitly and explicitly, a set of assumptions, attitudes and ideas which are prevalent in a specific society (2004: 28). Audiences are then supposed to negotiate that content and to contrast it with or aggregate it to their own values so the degree to which viewers can decode and even enjoy the Americanness of any given product will obviously vary depending on how globalized they are –a good example could be Damon's words on werewolves. This globalitarian position, or "the world [...] becoming America" (Bigsby, 2006: 18) seems to contradict Joyrich's perception of television as a feminizing entity, reducing spectators to a passive role (1996: 10). However, Joyrich's theories are based on the study of 1980s television series and she clearly distinguishes between melodrama as a female product and action and crime television series as male. *The Vampire Diaries* fits none of these categories, so it cannot be considered either a female or male show, in the same way that it is not a purely melodramatic or action-packed show. A more suitable term could be "contemporary teen drama", a subgenre included within the "teen series".

Some contemporary teen drama, though sometimes introducing and resolving a plotline in a single forty-five to sixty-minute episode, can be understood in relation to the long-running serial form in their emphasis on repetition and deferral of resolution, and in this respect are close to soap opera in narrative organisation. At the imaginative centre of the teen drama, as in soap, are place, character and relationships, and emotional drama is often heightened through the use of close-up and (generally romantic pop) scoring (for example, *My So-Called Life* and *Dawson's Creek*), further pointing to the melodramatic nature of the genre. (Moseley, 2008: 54)⁴

The Vampire Diaries meets all the criteria proposed by this definition, yet some of its most representative traits seem to be missing: there is no mention to supernatural elements and, as much as the protagonists try to act as human-like as possible, be it out of fear of being exposed to the community or just because their true nature is not evil, this is the key concept in the whole series. Also, no references are made to humour,

either through actions or through dialogue. Further reading provides an answer as for the presence of supernatural elements in "contemporary teen dramas":

Many of these shows deal with questions of difference, otherness, increased power and the impact of these on personal and community relationships: a significant number of them draw on other cult television forms, using supernatural power as a motif through which to explore these concerns. Many shows give the sense that to be a teenager is to be not quite human. (54)

This corollary obviously applies to the series under discussion, in which the presence of vampires, werewolves, witches, doppelgangers and even hybrids – a combination of vampires and werewolves – outnumbers that of human beings. Even though some of these supernatural beings are thousand year olds, as in the case of the Mikaelson family, their appearance corresponds to teenagers or young adults and their problems and interests can also be classified as timeless: love, friendship, revenge or power are not exclusively teenage motifs. In fact, almost all narratives can be explained according to these ideals. Although this definition is now much more accurate, the notion of humour has yet to be included. All details considered, the most exact term to describe *The Vampire Diaries* would be "dramedy" (Moseley, 2004: 56). The term, created by merging "drama" and "comedy", is more appropriate since it includes all elements of drama, teenage or not, plus the comic element which the previous definitions lacked and which is one of the series' most relevant characteristics.

2. FROM STARS HOLLOW TO MYSTIC FALLS

The little town of Mystic Falls, Virginia, is at first sight a utopian community where one can attend fundraisers, beauty pageants, bachelors raffles or any other possible type of smart social gatherings on almost daily basis. The Grill is the favoured meeting place where all members of the community, regardless of age or socio-economic status, can enjoy a healthy looking meal. Mystic Fall High School probably holds a record for decade dances and it obviously offers students the possibility of joining their football team or attending cheerleading practice. This is the community presented to viewers, and the context where the series' human protagonists have been born and raised.

Elena Gilbert, the protagonist, is introduced as a smart and sensible teenager trying to get over her parents' tragic death in a car crash which she miraculously survived. It is the first day of a new school year and she just wants life to back to normal after what happened, while trying to keep an eye on her younger brother, Jeremy, who is taking drugs to cope with his parents' loss. However, she did not expect to fall in love with a new student, Stefan Salvatore, and then find herself in the middle of a love triangle with said new student and his older brother, Damon. Elena's physical aspect also fosters the audience's identification with her, or even an empathetic attitude towards her: she is "the girl next door", with long brown hair, simple make-up and usually dressed in jeans, plain cotton shirts and Converse trainers. Elena's best friends, Bonnie Bennet and Caroline Forbes, are radically different between them but also from Elena. Bonnie, who was abandoned by her mum and lives with an absentee dad, is presented as a quiet and thoughtful person who, in a way, represents an alternative space: not only is she discussing witchcraft running in her family already in the first episode, but she is also the only African-American regular character. Caroline, on the other hand, is everything Elena and Bonnie are not. Blonde hair and blue eyes included, she appears to be a real-life Barbie doll, choosing to dress in a less conservative way and showing more social skills, and she involved in as many committees as she can find. The other two characters that complete the main group, Matt Donovan and Tyler Lockwood, also represent normalcy. They both play in the football team yet they represent two different sectors of society. Matt works in the Grill after school hours to pay the bills, whereas Tyler comes from a wealthy family and his position as the Mayor's son grants him a certain degree of immunity in front of the law.

Appearances do matter in Mystic Falls and Elena's "girl next door" aspect is not coincidental. In the novel she is described as "cool and blond and slender, the fashion trendsetter, the high school senior, the girl every boy wanted and every girl wanted to be" (Smith, 1991: 6), whereas on-screen Elena is pretty but somewhat plain. It is a practical move on part of the producers since Nina Dobrev, the actress playing Elena's role, is also playing Katherine Pierce, Elena's evil doppelganger. Having a plain Elena and then a darker, edgier Katherine contributes to the illusion of them as two different people. By contrast, the "cool and blond and slender" part is then transferred to Caroline who in the novel is "like a Vogue

model" (Smith, 1991: 8) with "auburn hair rich and glossy, her skin tanned to a perfect bronze" (27), thus making her fall into the dumb blonde stereotype. Characterization and stereotyping are not limited to Elena and Caroline, though. Witches in the first two seasons of *The Vampire Diaries* are always of African-American origins, starting with Bonnie, who in Smith's novel was red-haired and descended from a Scottish lineage of psychics (8). Vampires are also foreign to this new Mystic Falls: the Salvatore brothers have Italian ancestors, original vampires come from an Eastern European family who came to the new world with the Vikings and Katherine Pierce is Bulgarian. It seems that all that is evil has been imported and it is non-American.

Both Stars Hollow, the ideal community depicted in *Gilmore Girls*, and Mystic Falls coincide in using abundance as a motif. They all have their needs covered, and not only the basic ones but also mobile phones, cars, computer games or just pocket money to pay for drinks at the Grill. What represents a step further from Stars Hollow is the fact that Mystic Falls hides a poignant secret: the existence of vampires within that same community. The town's oldest families form the Founders' Council, a secret organisation that protects the human population from the danger posed by supernatural beings. It is an elitist society which can only be accessed by members of the Founding families, which incidentally include all the protagonists except for Matt. It can be read as the embodiment of tradition and conservative values, understanding conservative as a synonym of patriarchal. Women in the council are an oddity and only two female characters are part of it: Liz and Carol, Caroline's and Tyler's mothers. Liz's status as the sheriff places her in a powerful position. Carol's role as the Mayor's wife also grants her access to power.

Traditional families, which used to be considered as the mechanism by which customs and values are transmitted, have now lost their function. Indeed, in Mystic Falls traditional families have been pulverized:

The family in *The Vampire Diaries* is both nuclear and ancestral. It is populated with dysfunctional parents. Fathers tend to be domineering and violent (..) Mothers tend to be absent, selfish or ineffective (..) The inadequacy of the older generation is highlighted in their approach to the monstrous. The only hope for them is

in the learning experience they may be afforded through their children or the sacrifices they may be allowed to make for them. (Bridgeman, 2014: 12, qtd. in Douglas 2003)

Elena and Jeremy are not only orphans; they also lose their aunt and uncle before the end of season two when they sacrifice their lives trying to protect them. Moreover Elena learns she was adopted (1.11 "Bloodlines") and she finds her biological mother (1.21 "Isobel"), who then kills herself (2.17 "Know Thy Enemy"). As for her biological father, it happened to be her deceased uncle. Bonnie, whose parents are completely absent during the first two seasons, also loses her grandmother, the only family member she actually interacts with, in season one (1.14 "Fool Me Once"). Caroline's parents are divorced and while her mother is always working, her father is living with his boyfriend in a different state (1.04 "Family Ties"). Matt also has an absentee mother who prefers to spend time with their multiple boyfriends than with him. The few times she is in town the situation does not improve, since he finds her in a compromising position twice, first with Damon (1.16 "There Goes the Neighbourhood") and then with Tyler (1.18 "Under Control"). Eventually her son asks her to leave town. Also, his sister Vicky, presented as a wild teenager with drug problems already in the first episode, is turned into a vampire and then killed (1.06 "Lost Girls" and 1.07 "Haunted"). Matt and Vicky's father has yet to be mentioned. Tyler's parents seem to be happily married yet their happiness is nothing more than a façade and Carol Lockwood openly flirts with Damon in the Grill (1.06 "Lost Girls"), plus Tyler's father is accidentally killed during an attack on vampires (1.22 "Founders' Day").

Being a vampire is also problematic in terms of family. Stefan and Damon's feud started in 1864, when they were turned into vampires thanks to the blood of Katerina Petrova, a 500 year old vampire and Elena's distant relative and doppelganger, who now goes by the name of Katherine Pierce, pun intended. Their father was the one who killed them (as humans) and the circle was completed when Stefan killed him while in transition (1.13 "Children of the Damned"). In the pilot episode viewers learn they had not seen each other for fifteen years before returning to Mystic Falls. Later on in the series it is revealed that their mother died before their transformation. (5.04 "For Whom the Bell Tolls"). As for Katherine, who is the embodiment of selfishness and survival instinct, she has no intention

of bonding with Elena; she would rather kill her to win Stefan back. But if there is a family where issues are evident, it is the Mikaelsons, the original vampires. These powerful vampires are introduced gradually, from season two onwards and they are no strangers to daggering each other (which leaves originals in a coma-like state) and then storing their bodies in coffins for indefinite periods of time, depending on how betrayed they feel.⁵

The disappearance of the traditional family can be interpreted as a liberating process for teenagers for whom parental authority and control are no longer essential. In Mystic Falls they are not exposed to dangers from which parents can protect them, such as muggers or inappropriate friends. They face worse dangers without their families' help and under the supervision of a Founders' Council which loses its effectiveness once it is infiltrated by Damon Salvatore, who has gained Sheriff Forbes' trust after killing a vampire in public (1.08 "162 Candles"). As for vampires, who cannot reproduce, families are also established by blood. Vampires in this universe are created through a two-step process. Humans have to drink vampire blood first. As it has healing properties for humans, this is a common occurrence. After they die or are killed, they resuscitate and face the dilemma of either feeding on a human and successfully complete the transition to vampire, or simply die. Therefore their bloodlines comprise those who have been turned using the same vampire's blood, and all of them go back to the original vampires. If an original is killed, their whole lineage dies with them, yet this implies neither loyalty nor trust. Not even friendship.

However, not everything is as gloomy as one would think. If one of the defining characteristics of the American Dream is that it encourages personal growth (Kouwenhoven 1996), then *The Vampire Diaries* is 100% American. Considering the complex starting point these human teenagers are at, their growth will necessarily be articulated through the reconstruction of a family, thus showing that families in contemporary television series are indeed a social construct (Tous 2012). Caroline Forbes can be used as an example because her family is the only one that does not lose any members during the first two seasons, so it has more potential than those which have already been dismembered. A second reason is that in the process she slowly loses the negative traits associated to her Barbie image and replaces them with more positive attitudes

and behavior, thus turning into her best version, which is the idea proposed by the American Dream: effort. The fact that she is turned into a vampire between seasons one and two only makes it more interesting.

3. SEASON ONE: HUMAN CAROLINE

Rejection is the word which best describes human Caroline all throughout season one. She is desperate to attract Stefan's attention on the first day of school and the fact that Stefan openly refuses her advances and only has eyes for Elena makes things worse. An inebriated Caroline acknowledges the truth:

Caroline: Why didn't he go for me? You know, how come the guys I want never want me?

Bonnie: I'm not touching that.

Caroline: I'm inappropriate; I always say the wrong thing. And... Elena always says the right thing. She doesn't even try! And he just picks her. And she's always the one that everyone picks, for everything. And I try so hard, and...I'm never the one.

Bonnie: It's not a competition, Caroline.

Caroline: Yeah, it is. (1.01 "Pilot")

Bonnie is right when she says Caroline and Elena should not be competing, yet this is one of the multiple faces of the American dream. Hochschild defines it as "amorphous" (1995: 15) and moves on to explain that success can be absolute, achieving general well-being; relative, by comparison; or competitive, always trying to beat someone else (16-17). Obviously its competitive variant is not working for Caroline, who seems to be frustrated and decides to settle for the second option: Damon. By trying to do better than Elena - "I got the other brother, hope you don't mind" (1.03 "Friday Night Bites"), Caroline becomes Damon's toy. He uses her and when she fails to do what he asked her to, his insults send her back to alcohol and frustration:

Matt: Bad night huh?

Caroline: Baddest. Am I shallow?

Matt: Is that a trick question?

Caroline: I don't mean to be. I want to be deep. I want to be, like... the abyss deep.

Matt: No offense, Care, but deep's really not our scene.

Caroline: That's true. I'm shallow, I'm worst than shallow, I'm a kiddy pool! (1.08 "162 Candles")

Nobody can convince her that she is not a bad person, so she eventually interiorises that feeling and even when she is sober, she does not like who she is: "I'm a terrible, awful person, but I'm working on it" (1.12 "Unpleasantville"). It does not help that, after the Damon fiasco and once she starts dating Matt, his mother does not consider her good enough for him, favouring Matt's ex-girlfriend, Elena. Kelly Donovan, whose behavior is controversial to say the least, calls Caroline "the new flavour of the month" and "rebound girl", but the last blow comes when she Caroline is trying to be nice to her after Matt's mother won a man at the bachelor's raffle:

Caroline: Congratulations, Mrs. Donovan.
 Kelly: Ok, just stop. Stop trying so hard. This thing you're doing, this nice thing, it's fake. Like you. Like your mom. And for some reason, Matt fell for it, but that doesn't mean that I will. I don't like you, ok? So tell plumber boy I'll be at the bar.
 Caroline: Ok. (1.15 "A Few Good Men")

Caroline social skills are not getting her anywhere, just because she is not Elena, and the mother-daughter relationship between Liz and Caroline also seems to be stuck, although competition is not an issue here. Caroline is an only child. One of their first interactions takes place at a party at the Lockwood mansion and Caroline, who is bringing Damon as her date, immediately finds an excuse to attack her mother, who is there in her Sheriff uniform:

Caroline: Really, you couldn't change out of the badge for this?
 Liz: I'm working, honey. Who's the date you just tried to sneak past me?
 Caroline: Just some guy.
 Liz: He's a little old for you, don't you think?
 Caroline: Oh, cause otherwise you'd approve. Yeah, I doubt that. (...)
 Liz: Where's your dad?
 Caroline: Memphis.
 Liz: Good.
 Caroline: With Steven. (1.04 "Family Ties")

The Forbes family is clearly fragmented and Liz, despite being the authority in town, cannot impose her opinions on her daughter. Caroline does not seem to have a bad relationship with his father, but he is not present for the first two seasons so Liz is supposed to be mother and father at the same time. Even though Caroline does not make things easy for her, Liz keeps

trying, checking on her when she sees her sad: "Honey, are you Ok? Anything you want to talk about? Is it a boy thing?" Caroline's answer is quite blunt: "Mom, if I want to talk boys I'll call dad. At least he's successfully dating one", thus ending the conversation (1.05 "You're Undead to Me").

Caroline is, in most cases, responsible for the lack of communication between her and Liz, but not always. Liz also fails to support her daughter when she finally shows interest in something other than boys and dances during the career fair held at Mystic Falls High School:

Liz: What are you doing?
 Caroline: Following my future. There it is (pointing to a banner).
 Liz: Broadcast journalism?
 Caroline: Yes, broadcast journalism. (Liz looks surprised). Why are you looking at me like that?
 Liz: You don't even read the paper. (1.10 "The Turning Point")

Again Caroline does not know how to deal with her mother's rejection and trying to prove she can do it brings her negative consequences: she is kidnapped by vampire and news presenter Logan Fell, although her rescue is almost immediate. The scene closes with Liz caressing a sleeping Caroline's face, thus showing the affection her daughter does not want or is not prepared to accept when she is awake.

The final issue which influences viewers' negative perception of Caroline as compared to Elena is her passivity when it comes to serious matters: she is not even playing the role of damsel in distress, she is just not present. She will go to great lengths to attract a man's attention or choose the perfect dress for a party. Actually she is crowned as Miss Mystic and beating Elena in the process (1.19 "Miss Mystic Falls"), but while Elena and Bonnie are fighting alongside vampires, Caroline is lying in bed watching "Dancing with the Stars" (1.10 "The Turning Point"). If agency is a key element in pursuing your dreams, then Caroline is not getting hers. She might get a boyfriend but she will still be perceived as "shallow". It is time for Caroline to forget competitiveness and focus on what she wants, not on what Elena has. Her involvement in a car crash at the end of season one may give her an opportunity to change.

4. SEASON TWO: VAMPIRE CAROLINE

The second season opens with Caroline in critical condition because of the injuries

suffered in the car crash. It is decided to use Damon's blood to cure her and so before the first episode finishes she is awake and watching *Jersey Shore* in her hospital bed. When it looks like she is going back to season one Caroline, Katherine Pierce smooths her with a pillow as a message to the Salvatore brothers: "Game on" (2.01 "The Return"). Luckily for Caroline, Damon's blood is still in her system so she comes back as a vampire in episode two, whose title, "Brave New World", might well be a reference to Caroline's new attitude to life. Waking up alone in a hospital room, she realises something is wrong with her when she checks her reflection in a mirror and discovers she now has fangs. None of her friends decided to let her know vampires existed so she does not know what to do. As a complete reversal of her passivity in season one, now she is going through a very difficult moment, her friends are enjoying High School Carnival and even Matt, who is currently dating her, thinks she is "neurotic", believing she just wants to be released so as to check that the Carnival runs smoothly. Although after the initial shock she feels thrilled about it, she soon discovers she cannot control her urges and kills a man. Then she breaks down and begs Damon, of all people, for help. However, Damon seems set on killing her because she is a "liability". Upon realizing that she is now a "murderer" and a "monster", she has a panic attack and only Stefan is there to help her. He teaches her how to be a "good" vampire and they start a friendship that will last all throughout the series.

All this leaves Caroline at a crossroads. She is not who she was, but she does not know who she is supposed to be, with the added problem of Katherine forcing her to spy on her friends. Flashes of the old Caroline are still present, for instance when Bonnie spells a ring that will protect Caroline from sunlight without checking with her first: "So, I don't get to choose the ring I have to wear for the rest of my life?" (2.03 "Bad Moon Rising"). Stefan's friendship helps her accept her new reality. He tries to teach her how to feed from animals but Caroline seems reluctant:

Caroline: Isn't killing cute defenseless animals the first step in becoming a serial killer?

Stefan: Well, you sort of skipped the serial killer and went straight to vampire. (..)

Caroline: (..) I'm kind of freaking out, ok? (Stefan laughs) And now you're laughing at me. (..)

Stefan: When someone becomes

a vampire, all of their natural behaviours get sort of amplified (..)

Caroline: So you're saying that now I'm basically an insecure, neurotic, control freak... on crack?

Stefan: Well, I wasn't going to say it like that but... (2.03 "Bad Moon Rising")

Caroline's future does not look great at this point but there has been a significant change in her attitude. She now knows some aspects of her personality have to change: "I might as well have stayed dead. My entire personality is killing me" (2.03 "Bad Moon Rissing"). There are two important events that mark Caroline's improvement: first she finds the courage to fight Katherine together with Damon and Stefan and is so proud of herself: "I did it. I really didn't think that I'd be able to fool you but I did it" (2.07 "Masquerade"); and most importantly, she is able to help Tyler when he turns into a werewolf for the first time. This is really significant because nobody was there for her when she became a vampire, and now she can help others in a way nobody helped her:

Tyler: Why are you helping me? (..)

Caroline: I don't know. You just seem like you kind of need it.(..) I was alone when I turned. I had no control over my body or my urges. And I killed somebody. I don't want that to happen to you. I don't want you to be alone. (2.10 "The Sacrifice")

Trying to help Tyler has a negative effect on Caroline and Matt's already strained relationship. Matt is completely unaware of the presence of supernatural beings and he has had a hard time dealing with Caroline's sudden mood changes after the accident, so he just assumes Caroline has moved on with Tyler, which proves that Caroline's priorities have already shifted, placing friendship over romance. But once again, Caroline's choice of men leads to her being tortured by a pack of werewolves. Neither Matt nor Tyler comes to the rescue, and again it is Stefan who saves her. As she tells him, "[she's] ok, [she's] not girly little Caroline anymore" (2.13 "Daddy Issues").

Family life is also lacking, with mother-daughter interactions reduced to a minimum for the first episodes of the second season. Even so, they seem to be more civil to each other than they were before:

Liz: I'm going to spend the whole day with my daughter.

Caroline: You're going to pretend to be a mother?

Liz: I'll bring my gun if it gets rough. Come on, give me one day. I've been buried in work mode, I've barely seen you.

Caroline: Well, be warned, I'm a mood.

Liz: Goodly for me. (..) Is everything ok with you?

Caroline: I'm fine.

Liz: It's just lately you seem different.

Caroline: I'm not different, I'm fine.

Liz: I know you think I don't notice these things but I do. What's going on with you?

Caroline: You know, there's pretending to be a mother and then there's reality. Let's not push our luck, ok? (2.05 "Killed or Be Killed")

This temporary truce is broken when Caroline's new status as a vampire is revealed to her mother. Surely, it is related to how Liz finds out, by seeing her daughter bite some deputies to death. Both women are sitting apart, both in shock, and Caroline tries to make sure their status will not be compromised before Damon tries to kill Liz:

Caroline: You won't tell anyone, will you? Mom? Mom? Please, look, I know that we don't get along and that you hate me but I'm your daughter and you'll do this for me, right? Mom, please. He will kill you.

Liz: Then kill me. I can't take this. Kill me now. (2.05 "Killed or Be Killed")

Even Damon tries to intercede and make Liz reconsider her position by reminding her that Caroline is her daughter, but Liz seems inflexible: "Not anymore. My daughter is gone" (2.05 "Killed or Be Killed"). Caroline, showing more persistence than she seemed to have in the first season, tries to talk her into accepting this new Caroline and again Liz does not seem to react. It is not until Caroline mentions she actually died that Liz reacts: "How is it possible?" (2.06 "Plan B"). It can be interpreted as "How is it possible that vampires exist?" but also as "How is it possible that only my daughter died and I did not know about it?", which brings into question Liz's deficiencies in her role as a mother.

As it happened before, Caroline needs to be the active agent if she wants things to change and this is what happens when she tries to tell her mother about her part in finding a magic stone which her

friends need. Liz interrupts her to say she has become a "strong" and "confident person", and promises to keep their secret. Caroline, for whom this conversation means "so much", chooses to be selfless and she puts her friends' safety before her relationship with her mother by making Liz forget everything she has recently learned about them: "Your selfish little daughter, who loves you no matter what, went right back to ignoring you and all is right in the world" (2.06 "Plan B").

Liz's total unawareness of her daughter's new habits does not last long. Caroline is forced to tell the truth to Matt, who goes straight to the Sheriff. This time, however, Liz's reaction is not so negative: "She's my daughter. She's my baby. I just, I just need some time" (2.18 "The Last Dance"). Caroline, dressed as Jackie Onassis for the decade dance, is completely clueless. Liz seems unable to decide what to do with Caroline: "She's not the same, she's a vampire. (..) And in spite of everything I just said, I still look at her and I, I see my daughter" (2.20 "The Last Day"). It is as they had come to a standstill and neither knows how to continue. Later on, and after discovering that her mother knows she is a vampire Caroline expresses her fears to Matt:

Caroline: Do you think my mom wants to kill me?

Matt: I don't think your mom knows what to do with you.

Caroline: Yeah, well, I don't really know what to do with me, either. (2.21 "The Sun Also Rises")

It is precisely at the end of the second of season, during an open air screening of *Gone With the Wind*, when Caroline comes to terms with her new situation: "We made it through the war. I know you guys went through hell, and my mom knows I am a vampire, so basically it's like Atlanta has burned. And yet, in spite of everything, we persevere." (2.22 "As I lay dying"). In the same episode she discusses the situation with her mother, in what can be considered their most sincere conversation for the first two seasons:

Liz: I don't understand.

Caroline: I explained it to you once. I... I had to make you forget because I was so scared of what you might do. But now... I don't want to lie. I'm not going to be afraid of you anymore. I don't want you to be afraid of me anymore. I'm still your little girl. It's me. It's me, mom.

The scene ends with the two women embracing and crying, a huge step from the physical and emotional distance we had witnessed in the first season.

Besides getting closer to her mother, Caroline has also strengthened her bonds with her friends, especially with Stefan, Matt and Tyler. Elena is no longer a threat as they are facing different problems thus leaving no room for competitiveness. Therefore, Caroline has moved from a competitive version of the American Dream to what Hochschild considers a relative approach to the same concept (1995: 16-17). This shift means that Caroline is no longer comparing herself to another person, but to a previous version of herself, to human Caroline.

5. AND NOW?

The last step Caroline could take, according to Hochschild's classification (1995) is to focus on achieving absolute success. At the time of writing this article, with half the sixth season already out, there is no arguing that Caroline is working on it. She has tried attending college and has improved her relationship with her mother. Also, the links between her and her group of friends, which are her new family, are much stronger. What remains to be seen, though, is how well she will fare once she faces serious obstacles, such as losing people she loves, and how it will affect her humanity. Chances are she will go through a dark period which will eventually be reverted, making her even more human and even realistically imperfect. After all, she is the tangible proof of the current trend for human-like vampires which have invaded our screens. Producers and audiences have managed to dig deep into the humanity of the characters and, to a certain extent, "kill" the vampire in them. Killing them used to mean piercing their hearts with stake, whereas now it has come to discovering and accepting that they do have a heart. They care for their family and community and at the same time they focus on practical and positive issues such as attending college. They are no longer a threat. They are us. Or we are them. Or we are all the same: a globalised version of the American Dream.

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ENDNOTES

1. In *The Vampire Diaries* Silas, a 2000 year old warlock, takes a bus and discusses its reliability as opposed to love. He also comments on the price of petrol and how it concerns people. (5.07 "Death and the Maiden").

2. The choice of limiting this analysis to the first and second season responds to a need for balance between human and vampire Caroline, and also to the complexity of the interactions between her and one of the series' worst villains, Klaus Mikaelson.

3. Both Auerbach (1995) and Kane (2006) have explored the normalization or domestication of vampires in popular culture, claiming that it is related to the new times in which they live. Besides, it could be interesting to compare *The Vampire Diaries* and the American adaptation of *Being Human*, a British TV series based on a similar idea.

4. It is interesting to notice that *Dawson's Creek*, one of the most successful contemporary teen dramas was produced by Kevin Williamson who, together with Julie Plec, is now producing *The Vampire Diaries*. Moreover Williamson's career includes iconic horror films of the late 1990s, such as the *Scream* saga or *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, all of them featuring teenagers and young adults.

5. The original family's trust issues are the central idea around which the third season of *The Vampire Diaries* revolves. It continues in season four and by season five these characters have been given their own series, *The Originals*. Their family motto, 'always and forever', is their driving force and it also is their philosophy when it comes to family dynamics.

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Title: Myss Mystic 2.0. Caroline Forbes en *Crónicas Vampíricas* y el sueño americano, con y sin colmillos.