



**This electronic thesis or dissertation has been
downloaded from Explore Bristol Research,
<http://research-information.bristol.ac.uk>**

Author:

Parker, Stella J F

Title:

**Melodramatic emotion and excess in Gossip Girl and The Vampire Diaries
*appealing to the Gen Z viewer***

General rights

Access to the thesis is subject to the Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International Public License. A copy of this may be found at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>. This license sets out your rights and the restrictions that apply to your access to the thesis so it is important you read this before proceeding.

Take down policy

Some pages of this thesis may have been removed for copyright restrictions prior to having it been deposited in Explore Bristol Research. However, if you have discovered material within the thesis that you consider to be unlawful e.g. breaches of copyright (either yours or that of a third party) or any other law, including but not limited to those relating to patent, trademark, confidentiality, data protection, obscenity, defamation, libel, then please contact collections-metadata@bristol.ac.uk and include the following information in your message:

- Your contact details
- Bibliographic details for the item, including a URL
- An outline nature of the complaint

Your claim will be investigated and, where appropriate, the item in question will be removed from public view as soon as possible.

**Melodramatic Emotion and Excess in *Gossip Girl*
and *The Vampire Diaries*: Appealing to the Gen Z Viewer**

Stella Parker

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of Theatre and Performance (MPhil) in the Faculty of Arts.

School of Arts

March 2023

Word count: 24,960

Abstract

This thesis examines the stylistic and structural similarities between nineteenth-century stage melodrama and twenty-first century television dramas *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012) and *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017). In my Overview, I provide close readings of exemplary scenes from both, focusing on their dynamics of emotional excess, melodramatic music, stylised dream sequences, and themes of feminine doubling. In Chapter One, I argue the heightening and restricting of emotion in these shows engages the emotionally overwhelmed ‘Generation Z’ girl, raising questions about the link between humanity and feeling. In Chapter Two, I consider the significance of musicality in my case studies, analysing the emotional roles of their instrumental and lyrical soundtracks. In Chapter Three, I explore stylised dream sequences and their melodramatic potentials both within the narrative and among Gen Z girls. In Chapter Four, I examine representations of feminine doubling and the Gen Z girls who double their favourite characters on social media. Ultimately, in this thesis I argue *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* demonstrate the transhistorical potentials for emotional validation and identity exploration afforded to Gen Z girls and feminine adolescents by melodrama.

Acknowledgements

Above all, I would like to express my endless gratitude to my supervisors Professor Catherine Hindson and Dr Helen Piper for their continuous support and guidance over the course of this project. I thank you both sincerely for your dedication, time, and invaluable advice throughout the development and writing process. I also wish to thank my family for their unrelenting encouragement and love.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: Stella Parker DATE: 23/03/23

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Author's Declaration	4
List of Illustrations	7
Introduction	9
Overview	24
Chapter One: Emotional Excess	39
Emotional Dialogue	40
Flipping the Switch	44
“Feeling is the real hero”	46
Chapter Two: Musicality	52
Instrumental Scores	54
Lyrical Soundtracks	57
“Channelling my inner Blair Waldorf”	60
Chapter Three: Dreams	63
Self-Conscious Dreaming in <i>Gossip Girl</i>	64

Prophetic Justice in <i>The Vampire Diaries</i>	67
Dreaming of Damon: Girl Fans and Fantasies	70
Chapter Four: Doubling	77
The CW's Dual Beings	78
Why is Blair more popular than Serena?	86
Animated Portraits and Real-World Doubling	91
Conclusion	98
Bibliography	101

List of Illustrations

Fig. 1 *Chuck and Blair in Gossip Girl: S4E07 'War at the Roses'* (2010) [Screenshot]. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/p09qs7tl/gossip-girl-200712> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).

Fig. 2 *Elena Gilbert in The Vampire Diaries: S4E16 'Bring It On'* (2013) [Screenshot]. Available at: <https://www.netflix.com/gb/title/70143860> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).

Fig. 3 *My Fair Lady: before and after* (2016) Available at: <https://thedisneyodyssey.wordpress.com/2016/08/14/classic-no-30-beauty-and-the-beast-1991/my-fair-lady-before-and-after-1453994162-large-article-0/> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).

Fig. 4 *Blair Waldorf as Eliza Doolittle in Gossip Girl: S2E06 'New Haven Can Wait'* (2008) [Screenshot]. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/p09qs7tl/gossip-girl-200712> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).

Fig. 5 *Serena Van der Woodsen as Eliza Doolittle in Gossip Girl: S2E06 'New Haven Can Wait'* (2008) [Screenshot]. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/p09qs7tl/gossip-girl-200712> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).

Fig. 6 *Katherine, Elena, and Rebekah in The Vampire Diaries: S4E18 'American Gothic'* (2013) [Screenshot]. Available at: <https://www.netflix.com/gb/title/70143860> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).

Fig. 7 *Chuck and Blair in Gossip Girl: S4E07 'War at the Roses'* (2010) [Screenshot]. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/p09qs7tl/gossip-girl-200712> (Accessed: 27 February 2023) (as Fig.1).

Fig. 8 *Elena Gilbert in The Vampire Diaries: S4E16 'Bring It On'* (2013) [Screenshot]. Available at: <https://www.netflix.com/gb/title/70143860> (Accessed: 27 February 2023) (as Fig.2).

Fig. 9 *Katherine, Elena, and Rebekah in The Vampire Diaries: S4E18 'American Gothic'* (2013) [Screenshot]. Available at: <https://www.netflix.com/gb/title/70143860> (Accessed: 27 February 2023) (as Fig. 6).

Fig. 10 *Serena Van der Woodsen as Eliza Doolittle in Gossip Girl: S2E06 'New Haven Can Wait'* (2008) [Screenshot]. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/p09qs7tl/gossip-girl-200712> (Accessed: 27 February 2023) (as Fig. 5).

Fig. 11 *Blair Waldorf as Eliza Doolittle in Gossip Girl: S2E06 'New Haven Can Wait'* (2008) [Screenshot]. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/p09qs7tl/gossip-girl-200712> (Accessed: 27 February 2023) (as Fig. 4).

Fig. 12 *The Gossip Girl Guide to Surviving Wedding Season* (2022) [Screenshot]. Available at: <https://www.tiktok.com/music/The-Gossip-Girl-Guide-to-Surviving-Wedding-Season-7001233642508815109?lang=en> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).

Introduction

There comes a moment in the CW's *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017) where teenage protagonist Elena Gilbert reaches a breaking point. Elena's younger brother has just been killed by her evil doppelganger – he is the last in her family to have met a grisly supernatural end, following the untimely deaths of her mother, father, aunt, and uncle. In this moment, the heightened emotions Elena has been experiencing as a newly christened vampire start to overflow. She lights a match and declares there is “nothing here for me anymore [...] Every inch of this house is filled with memories of the people that I love that have died [...] So, what am I supposed to... I mean, how am I gonna...? I can't even... There's nothing left for me!” (S4E15). Elena sinks to the ground, sobbing in the arms of her vampire boyfriend. “I can help you. I want you to let me help you.”, he tells her. “Turn it off [...] Just turn it off, and everything will go away. That's what you have to do. It's what I want you to do. Turn it off.”. Elena's expression turns blank. She has activated the ‘humanity switch’ in her brain, a supernatural device that enables vampires to turn off their emotions and become numb to the world. Elena stares into the distance. With no tears left in her eyes, she is emotionless.

The humanity switch Elena turns off in this scene speaks to something particularly resonant in our current cultural climate. In order to feel nothing, Elena must first have felt everything. Susanna Schrobsdorff describes the emotionally overwhelming lives of Generation Z, those born between the late 1990s and the early 2010s, in her 2016 *Time* article ‘Teen Depression and Anxiety: Why the Kids Are Not Alright’. She argues Generation Z (henceforth Gen Z) represent “the post-9/11 generation, raised in an era of economic and national insecurity. They've never known a time when terrorism and school shootings weren't the norm. They grew up watching their parents weather a

severe recession, and, perhaps most important, they hit puberty at a time when technology and social media were transforming society.” (Time, 2016). The effects of “[g]rowing up in a hyper-connected world” often resemble “intense feelings of isolation and loneliness” in this generation (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021). The Internet provides “a steady drumbeat of negative news stories, a fear of missing out, and shame in falling short of a social media-worthy standard.” (ibid). For many, coming of age in such an emotionally overwhelming environment evokes a shutting-down response comparable to Elena’s: Gen Z have been dubbed the “Crisis Numb Generation” (Joy, 2019).

In the event programme for Jeremy O’Harris’ 2022 London production of *Daddy: A Melodrama*, American author Brandon Taylor shares a short essay titled ‘Moral Melodrama’. In this piece, Taylor draws connections between his life experiences and the emotional structures of nineteenth-century theatrical melodrama, reflecting on the melodramatic experience of coming of age in an increasingly technological world.

So much of contemporary life itself feels melodramatic in its customs, excesses, pleasures, and increasingly macabre horrors. How else to describe opening a social media app and seeing within the span of a few seconds: a series of posts about anti-trans legislation, a video of a Ukrainian pianist playing in the ruins of her bombed apartment, a clip of a senior member of congress reciting a poem by Irish rock musician Bono, and an ad for anti-constipation medicine. If we were to put this into a short story, people might say it’s melodramatic. It’s *too much*. (2022:4).

Taylor argues the emotionally excessive dynamics found on social media mimic those that came to define stage melodrama throughout the nineteenth century. Having been created at the beginning of the rise of social media, serial teen television dramas *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012) and *The Vampire Diaries* similarly embody these dynamics of emotional excess. It is therefore unsurprising that, over a decade since they first aired on the CW, both shows have started to resurface in mainstream girl culture. They are reaching a new audience of Gen Z girls among whom this mode of excess resonates. In this thesis, I identify the melodramatic themes and structures that characterise *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*. I analyse the emotional and empowering effects these shows offer Gen Z girls, arguing they evidence the historical transcendence of nineteenth-century melodramatic conventions.

Melodrama took its first steps on the Parisian stage on September 2nd, 1800, with René-Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt's adaptation of François Guillaume Ducray-Duminil's 1798 novel *Cœlina, ou l'Enfant du Mystère* (Celina, or the Mystery Child). This interdisciplinary theatrical form combined music with drama to create a hybrid style that would come to dominate the nineteenth-century English stage. Melodrama would also go on to find success in the U.S. and around the world during the latter part of this century. At the beginning of the movement toward nineteenth-century melodrama's cultural reclamation in the 1960s, Frank Rahill defined its traditional conventions:

A form of dramatic composition in prose partaking of the nature of a tragedy, comedy, pantomime, and spectacle, and intended for a popular audience. Primarily concerned with situation and plot, it calls upon mimed action extensively and employs a more or less fixed complement of stock characters, the most important of which are a suffering heroine or

hero, a persecuting villain, and a benevolent comic. It is conventionally moral and humanitarian in point of view and sentimental and optimistic in temper, concluding its fable happily with virtue rewarded after many trials and vice punished. Characteristically it offers elaborate scenic accessories and miscellaneous divertissements and introduces music freely, typically to underscore dramatic effect. (1967:14).

A series of identifiable sub-genres emerged throughout the nineteenth century, advertising melodramas as gothic, nautical, domestic, or sensational in style. Particularly popular across these sub-genres were melodramas centred around women protagonists. Katherine Newey discusses the significance of actresses on the nineteenth-century stage in 'Melodrama and Gender', arguing "[t]he invention of the melodramatic heroine, as individuated feeling person, is one of the enduring legacies of melodrama's cultural work" (2018:149). These characters were far from static, evolving from the late eighteenth-century victims of Gothic literature into domestic melodrama's 1830s-40s "working-class heroines", and eventually, "the heroine-villains" of 1860s sensation melodrama (150). Varying representations of femininity onstage offered commentary on women's position in society, albeit mixed, and enabled women audiences to see aspects of their own lives reflected in theatre. "While the creation of female characters who experience suffering and extreme feeling is not always an unalloyed good," Newey muses, melodrama gave "female characters agency and voice, and a dominant physical presence on the stage throughout the century" (ibid). In my writing, I consider *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*' protagonists Blair, Serena, Katherine, and Elena as twenty-first century melodramatic heroines and villainesses. I analyse their agency as girls, considering the aspects of femininity they embody and how these might impact and inspire the Gen Z viewer.

Although this project is centred around transhistorical connections between the nineteenth-century stage and the twenty-first century screen, it is important to recognise melodrama's impact on media between these two periods. Embracing the development of new technologies in the early twentieth century, cinema adapted melodrama to suit new contexts and audiences. So popular was screen melodrama among women in the 1930s and 1940s that, during this period, it became known as the 'women's picture'. Though these films presented a formula markedly different to stage melodrama, Kirstin Drotner's research demonstrates that women protagonists remained popular: audiences still "preferred female stars over male" and favoured plots focused on "human interest" (1991:73). Melodrama would reappear again in the medium of 1930s radio soap operas and later in 1950s television. These programmes were characterised by their ensembles of stock characters, serial plotlines, and excessively emotional sentiment. They foregrounded feminine-coded interior spaces and were scheduled to adhere to a woman's housework demands, meaning during this period "adolescent females watch(ed) more television than boys [...] where soap operas form(ed) part of the programme" (78). Melodrama's screen forms are not to be conflated with its nineteenth-century theatrical origins. Rather, the structures, tropes, and instincts that defined stage melodrama enabled contingent expression in different cultural contexts through new and developing technological means. Throughout this thesis, I draw comparisons between *Gossip Girl*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and a range of melodramas spanning 1802-1895. While I refer to past screen forms through intertextual references, my writing is primarily concerned with the resurfacing of nineteenth-century melodramatic instincts in my twenty-first century case studies.

An Interdisciplinary Approach

Having addressed the origins of melodrama, I turn to those of my case studies. In 2006, youth television broadcasters The WB and UPN formed a merger network called the CW. This network remained “focused on youth, but this time narrowed the target audience even further to the eighteen to thirty-four demographic” (Bindig, 2014:18). Both *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* were created for the CW by marketing company Alloy Entertainment through their acquisition of 17th Street Productions. Lori Bindig’s ‘From Page to Screen: The Political Economy of Gossip Girl’ in *Gossip Girl: A Critical Understanding* (2014) provides a detailed account of the network’s formation and establishment as a girl-centric brand. Capitalising on the dedication of their fanbases, the CW successfully adapted two young adult novel series for television: Cecily von Ziegesar’s *Gossip Girl* (2002) and L.J. Smith’s *The Vampire Diaries* (1991). In this case, Bindig argues, novels “provided an effortless transition to primetime serial drama because of their open-ended storylines and familiar tropes of personal and social issues along with melodramatic romance.” (2014:32). Serial, emotionally heightened plotlines produced seasons of popular content, and melodrama seemed to emerge as a successful mode through which to communicate with the CW’s demographic. Thus, the network began to cultivate a unique girl-centric form of branding, priding itself on being “the only network targeting women aged 18–34” and using feminine-coded language to attract this audience (Bridgeman, 2013:6). *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* eventually set the standard for the network whose “ten hours of primetime consisted largely of one-hour, glossy dramas featuring large ensemble casts of attractive actors in stylized, expensive settings” (Lausch, 2013:75). In *The Niche Network: Gender, Genre, and the CW Brand*, Kayti Adaire Lausch examines how the network used stylistic elements to target girls,

arguing “[t]he CW’s brand is so specific that it functions like a genre, with certain expectations and limitations attached to it” (76). I reject this statement, arguing instead that the stylistic and structural elements of the CW’s *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* are indicative of a wider cultural and historical movement. Their seriality, emotionality, and musicality do not represent a new genre, as Lausch suggests, but rather the resurfacing of pre-existing nineteenth-century melodramatic conventions.

At this point, it is important for me to consider how I fit into this equation and my subjective position as the author of this thesis. Seeing as I was born in the year 2000, I fit into the aforementioned Gen Z age bracket. According to Debashish Sengupta’s 2020 study *The Life of Z: Understanding the Digital Pre-Teen and Adolescent Generation*, Gen Z “make up 32 per cent of the world population”, making them “the biggest chunk of the population pie chart.” (Miller & Lu, 2018, cited Sengupta, 2020:249). As digital natives, this unique generation “have been exposed to global ubiquitous media, World Wide Web and social media from an early age, which has made them aware and empowered”, although such technologies also “pose serious health hazards, loneliness, depression and susceptibility to online bullying if used for a long time and in an unrestricted manner”, Sengupta reports (232). The effects of growing up in a society so influenced by social media has also resulted in a higher vulnerability to mental health issues among Gen Z. With “pressures mounting and the world becoming more predatory; they find themselves prey to anxiety and depression and vulnerable to poor mental health. Their susceptibility is often disproved by many terming it as jitters of growing up, but such people fail to count the transformed environment that actually magnifies their challenges” (233-234). While issues like these are undoubtedly widespread, my argument focuses specifically on Gen Z girls, considering how

melodramatic conventions particularly appeal to this unique audience. Nancy Jo Sales' 2016 book *American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Lives of Teenagers* focuses on the everyday experiences and issues encountered by a group of girls living in the U.S. during the mid-2010s. The girls who took part in this study were aged between thirteen and nineteen at the time, meaning many of them would now be recognised as being part of Gen Z. On the rise of social media, Sales writes, "[i]t's an extraordinary new reality, and it's happened so fast; for the first time, most American girls are engaged in the same activity most of the time." (2016:10). She argues "this seismic shift in how girls spend their time is having a profound effect" on their daily lives and interactions with others (ibid). Sales discusses this cultural shift taking place in the U.S., however her words echo my experiences coming of age in the UK. As a girl born in 2000, I was slightly too young to have watched *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* when they first began airing in the late 2000s. However, as they continued airing until 2012 and 2017, respectively, they became more culturally and socially relevant in my teenage years. With global streaming sites like Netflix unavailable to me during this period, it has taken me until now to watch these programmes in their entirety. As I write this, *Gossip Girl* is available on BBC iPlayer and *The Vampire Diaries* on Netflix UK. Their availability on streaming sites means I am not the only Gen Z girl rediscovering these shows: their recent resurgence in popularity on social media has resulted in a new generation of viewers. I never truly experienced my teenage years alongside the protagonists of these shows, yet through them I can reconnect with the early-to-mid-2010s world I came of age in: BlackBerry phones, skinny jeans, ombré highlights, and all. As someone on the older side of Gen Z, I am in the unique position of having witnessed both the original and revived popularity of *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*. That both are still attracting such a strong viewership demonstrates how, over a decade on, a new generation of girls are seeking out this specific style of serial melodrama.

When discussing this new generation of girls, it is crucial to consider contemporary discourses surrounding issues of identity and girlhood. In the opening chapter of Catherine Driscoll's 2002 book *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory*, she defines girls as "female children, or young women" (2). However, a more contemporary understanding of the term 'girl' must be framed within contemporary discussions of representation – in particular, queer, trans, and non-binary identities. In December 2022, Dictionary.com selected 'woman' as their word of the year, a decision that, according to the website, "reflects how the intersection of gender, identity, and language dominates the current cultural conversation" (2022). Online searches for the term increased by over 1,400% following a U.S. Supreme Court hearing in which Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson refused to provide a definition for 'woman' when asked by Senator Marsha Blackburn (ibid). As per the statement made by the popular dictionary site, this moment of public discourse goes to show that "[m]ore than ever, we are all faced with questions about who gets to identify as a woman (or a man, or neither)" (ibid). It is also valuable to understand that the case studies I analyse in this thesis may appeal to Gen Z youth, particularly queer youth, who do not identify as women, but who might identify with experiences of girlhood. Indeed, as Driscoll argues, "the adolescence attributed to boys is intricately bound up with these new discourses on girlhood" and "the specification of behaviours and experiences as feminine or adolescent is not reliant on any biological definition" (2002:7). Therefore, in her writing, Driscoll uses the term "feminine adolescence" to describe girlhood independently from specifics of age and identity (6). She argues "adolescence is not a clear denotation of any age, body, behaviour, or identity, because it has always meant the process of developing a self [...] rather than any definition of that self." (ibid). I embrace Driscoll's use and definition of this term in my own writing. When I refer to Gen

Z girls and feminine adolescents throughout this thesis, my argument is not restricted to just the girls of Driscoll's initial definition, but rather any Gen Z youth who identifies with these terms.

With critical theorists divided over specific terms and definitions, approaches to the field of Melodrama are often personal. Jason Mittel, for example, argues "melodrama is more of a mode than a genre, an approach to storytelling, and morality that cuts across numerous genres and media forms" (2015:233). In my writing, I resist the recent cultural generalisation of melodrama, including Linda Williams' argument for its redefinition away from any twentieth-century associations with excess. She states "melodrama has become so basic to all forms of popular moving-picture entertainment that it is futile to continue to define it as 'excess', since these apparent excesses are not necessary for melodrama to do its work nor are they of the essence of the form." (Williams, 2012:526). I argue Williams' stance lessens the value of examining how melodrama addresses girls using emotional excess. Therefore, when I refer to the melodramatic mode in my writing, I am describing the specific stylistic and structural elements of nineteenth-century stage melodrama. My writing focuses on what the term means within this context: a set of formulaic conventions that targets girls through excess. At this point, important attribution must be given to Katie Kapurch, author of *Victorian Melodrama in the Twenty-First Century: Jane Eyre, Twilight, and the Mode of Excess in Popular Girl Culture*. In this 2016 book, Kapurch examines the melodramatic conventions found in Charlotte Brontë's 1847 novel *Jane Eyre* and Stephenie Meyer's 2005-2008 *Twilight* Saga, using their popularity among girls to demonstrate how "melodrama is a pervasive mode of discourse in twenty-first century girl culture" (ix). Kapurch's theory of melodrama's prevalence in girl culture has played a fundamental role in my approaches to this thesis, both thematic and structural. Key conventions I explore, such as

musicality, nightmares, and the melodramatic villainess, are foundational to this theory. In particular, Kapurch's chapter 'Melodrama's Gothic Remnants: Nightmares and Vampire-Girl Doubles' helped shape my understanding of melodramatic dreaming in Chapter Three and feminine doubling in Chapter Four. However, where Kapurch focuses primarily on novels alongside their cinematic adaptations, I examine how this theory can be applied to serial television dramas, drawing comparisons from nineteenth-century playtexts. Furthermore, the way in which the media landscape has shifted in recent years offers new interpretations and opportunities for the research and study of melodrama in contemporary girl culture. I am therefore building on Kapurch's foundational study of Millennial girl culture in the 2010s by applying her theory to Gen Z girls and girl culture in the 2020s.

Kapurch's research into online girl fandom, including sourcing girls' opinions via fan sites, also became influential to my own research techniques. Her appendix 'Methodology: Girls' Online Fandom' lays out these methods, focusing on three online communities: TwilightTEENS, TheTwilightReader, and the Bella Cullen Project. In my own writing, I inform my argument using discussion websites Reddit and FanPop, both of which encourage the creation of fandom-specific forums and threads within communities. My research process abides by the methodology laid out in Holtz, Kronberger, and Wagner's 2012 research article 'Analyzing Internet Forums: A Practical Guide'. This process begins with "[s]electing appropriate forums" and "selecting appropriate sections and threads" on those forums, then "refining the material" and "choosing methods of analysis" (Holtz et al, 2012:7-10). In order to understand how Gen Z girls engage with *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*, I analyse specific threads and comments found on these websites. Holtz et al point out the issues of anonymity and identity associated with this type of research: "[w]hereas

the relative anonymity of the internet is an advantage as it reduces social constraints, it also complicates analysis insofar as there is normally only little sociodemographic information available about the users.” (4). Indeed, on Reddit and FanPop many “users participate under a fictitious nickname. Even though the age and sex of the posters is often shown as part of their profile, there seems to be no way to verify this information.” (4-5). It goes without saying that when I refer to sources from these sites in my writing, I cannot be certain every post has been made by a Gen Z girl. While recent research has shown “Gen Z makes up 26% of redditors” and FanPop’s sign-up process requires users to tick a box stating they are aged 16+, I cannot presume information based on these factors alone (Reddit For Business, 2019). As Holtz et al add, when “there is relatively little information on the individual users, it is possible to characterize the social group organizing and using the forum by taking into account background information” (2012:5). As such, factors I assess when sourcing the opinions of Gen Z girls often include a user’s post history alongside any indicators of feminine adolescence implied by their account. Some usernames feature the user’s own name or feminine honorifics, while others use profile pictures (or style their cartoon icons) with feminine-coded hairstyles and clothing. Many FanPop users also list their name, gender, and location as introductory information in their profile descriptions, alongside their favourite fandoms. I must also emphasise that my research has not been limited to just Reddit and FanPop. Over the course of this research process, I have monitored a range of similar websites and the views cited in my work are indicative of extensive discourses around these programmes. Another site I source evidence from in Chapter Four is TikTok, a popular short-form video sharing app that gained popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a 2023 report, “60% of TikTok users are Gen Zers” (Doyle). Of the app’s total U.S. statistics, 32.5% (the highest percentage of users) were aged between ten and nineteen, and 60% of all U.S. users

identified as female (ibid). These statistics mean TikTok has become relevant to my research into contemporary girl culture and the way Gen Z girls interact with my case studies. In ‘Researching TikTok: Themes, Methods, and Future Directions’, a chapter in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods* (2022), Alex Miltsov argues the app’s unique blend of sound and video features means “TikTok should be treated as a substantially different digital environment compared to the dominant social media platforms of the 2010s” (668). Miltsov also notes a considerable lack of scholarship on TikTok’s opportunities for research. He proposes three effective research strategies as part of a wider methodology: case studies, content analysis, and mixed-methods studies (ibid). As Miltsov emphasises, while “these traditions are only at the early stages of their formation [...] it is clear that the platform is quickly becoming an important site for scientific research.” (672). Miltsov’s methods have been influential to my analysis of two recent TikTok trends popularised by Gen Z girls in Chapter Four.

Through exemplary scenes pulled from *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*, I show how transhistorical aspects of the melodramatic mode are functioning in the contemporary landscape of the early twenty-first century. I take an interdisciplinary approach, my writing encompassing live performance and screen media while calling upon intertextual references to illuminate my ideas. The melodramatic mode has always been intertextual in its immediate influences and cultural contexts, with nineteenth-century stage melodrama originally acting as a subset between visual and aural cultures. Christine Gledhill discusses the collage-like formula of stories used in Victorian melodramas, explaining that they drew material from “[l]iterary and dramatic classics – including Shakespearean tragedies, popular fiction, Romantic poetry and operatic libretti, newspapers and topical events, police journals and penny dreadfuls, paintings and etchings,

popular songs and street ballads” (1987:18). Both a response to and a result of Victorian popular culture, melodrama was unafraid to reference and mirror its contemporary surroundings in its stories. With this historical context in mind, the intertextual references that became a stylistic staple of my case studies should also be recognised as melodramatic. Each *Gossip Girl* episode puns on a different film title relevant to its themes, such as ‘Petty in Pink’ and ‘The Blair Bitch Project’. *The Vampire Diaries* also adopts this approach, naming some episodes after films (‘Before Sunset’, ‘Gone Girl’) and others after songs (‘Fade Into You’, ‘Smells Like Teen Spirit’). Dialogue in both shows weaves a web of self-aware cultural and textural references that speak the language of their girl viewers. My writing therefore embraces, and reflects, the interdisciplinary nature of the melodramatic mode, applying intertextual and transmedial approaches throughout.

This thesis is structured around the exploration of four scenes from *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* that exemplify key themes and structures of the melodramatic mode. In ‘Overview’, I provide a close reading of these moments that appear throughout my writing. In ‘Chapter One: Emotional Excess’, I examine depictions of heightened emotion in my case studies, arguing these can be considered manifestations of melodrama’s excess. Thinking about melodrama’s associations of humanity with feeling, I examine how dynamics of emotional excess appeal to the crisis-numb Gen Z girl. In ‘Chapter Two: Musicality’, I investigate the emotional significance of instrumental and lyrical soundtracks in my case studies. I identify the effects of melodramatic music and consider how Gen Z girls replicate these patterns in their inspired online playlists. In ‘Chapter Three: Dreams’, I look closely at how dream states are used to convey meaning and emotion in the melodramatic mode. I analyse the symbolic meaning of anxiety-induced and prophetic dreams in my case studies, considering how these may resonate with, and inspire similar

dreams among, Gen Z girls. In ‘Chapter Four: Doubling’, I turn to melodrama’s preoccupation with the figure of the feminine double, arguing variations on this archetype can be found in the relationships between Katherine and Elena, as well as Blair and Serena. I explain how this doubling can extend into the online behaviours of the typically white Gen Z girl who performs the physical appearance of her favourite character on social media. I would like to clarify here that in these chapters I focus on *how* my case studies, as serial melodrama, appeal to girls, rather than *why* this might be, psychologically and/or scientifically.

Overview

In total, there are 121 episodes of *Gossip Girl* and 171 episodes of *The Vampire Diaries*. The key examples I analyse in this chapter have been selected from across their numerous seasons, with a time frame spanning 2008-2013. These scenes embody the specific melodramatic structures and themes that will resurface throughout the main body of this thesis; namely, emotional excess, musicality, dreams, and feminine doubling. For the uninitiated, I will first provide a short overview of my case studies, looking briefly into their individual conceptions, settings, protagonists, and receptions.

Gossip Girl is an American teen drama series based on Cecily von Ziegesar's series of novels, first published in 2002. The franchise was adapted for television by teen auteurs Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage and ran on the CW for six seasons, from 2007 until 2012. Set in a contemporary New York City, *Gossip Girl* follows a group of wealthy seventeen-year-olds who attend a prestigious private school on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Protagonists Serena Van der Woodsen, Blair Waldorf, Nate Archibald, Chuck Bass, and Dan Humphrey lead extravagantly dramatic lives publicised by an anonymous and omniscient blogger called Gossip Girl. Serena, described in the show's pilot script as "an eerily beautiful blonde", is the it-girl of the Upper East Side, and her brunette best friend Blair is her biggest rival (2006:1). Bad-boy Chuck is a "[f]uture Senator or cautionary tale" who is often accompanied by the charming Nate or scholarship student Dan (3). The show's six seasons follow these characters through their glamorous yet messy lives, from school to university, and later into the world of work. Over it all, "we hear the voice of God. Or God to the teenagers of the Upper East Side. The voice of Gossip Girl", whose narration shares their secrets with the viewer (1). The show was revolutionary for the CW in becoming

“consistently the No.1 most-downloaded show on iTunes” and building an online following the likes of which had not been seen before (Bricker, 2021). In 2021, a *Gossip Girl* reboot starring an all-new group of Gen Z teenagers began on HBO, with a second season airing from 2022-2023.

Two years after *Gossip Girl* first aired, the CW had successfully found its niche in book-to-tv adaptations aimed at girls. Thus, capitalising on the 2008 *Twilight*-induced vampire craze taking girl world by storm, *The Vampire Diaries* was born. Airing from 2009-2017, this supernatural teen drama developed by Kevin Williamson and Julie Plec is based on L.J. Smith’s 1991 book series of the same name. The show centres on girl-next-door Elena Gilbert who lives in the small town of Mystic Falls, Virginia. Joined by best friends Bonnie Bennett and Caroline Forbes, Elena must choose between her two romantic interests, the vampire brothers Stefan and Damon Salvatore. Stefan is “elegant and ageless” (2009:15) in his looks and manner, whereas his brother Damon is more of a “darkly handsome” bad-boy type (51). Like the protagonists of *Gossip Girl*, Elena and her friends begin the first series aged seventeen (with the obvious exception of her 160-year-old vampire boyfriends). Unlike other supernatural teen dramas of its kind, such as *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* or *Supernatural*, the show does not operate on a monster-of-the-week system, opting instead for continuous serial storylines spanning across seasons. While Elena struggles to decide which Salvatore brother to date, her group face supernatural threats like witch curses and vampire hunters, as well as equally important small-town human problems like high-school dances and beauty pageants. *The Vampire Diaries* enjoyed a long run, winning 30 Teen Choice Awards and producing two spin-off shows.

Emotional Excess

Both my case studies present diegetic worlds where a dynamic of melodramatic emotional excess is the norm. From the vampiric affliction of heightened emotion in *The Vampire Diaries* to the overly dramatic Upper-East-Side attitudes in *Gossip Girl*, this excess is often exhibited in passion-fuelled arguments that capture the emotional extremities of the adolescent experience.

‘War at the Roses’, season 4 episode 7 of *Gossip Girl*, finds Blair Waldorf and Chuck Bass in a state of disarray. The lovers have been entangled in an on-again-off-again relationship for the past few seasons, culminating in a dramatic breakup in the show’s season 3 finale. At the start of season 4 they declare war on one-another, then begrudgingly sign a peace treaty at the request of their friends. In ‘War at the Roses’, Chuck crashes Blair’s birthday party and they argue over a recent scandal. Then, in retaliation, he returns at the end of the night to destroy their peace treaty. Under this scene plays the electro-pop backing track of Robyn’s 2010 hit ‘Dancing On My Own’. The track aligns with the episode’s narrative, as earlier Robyn performed as a guest star at Blair’s party. Opening the scene, an establishing aerial shot of New York City at night blends into a wide shot of Blair turning out lights after her party. She is still wearing her party dress, a full-length ball gown paired with high heels. As Blair walks to the left of the frame and turns out the final light, the camera pans across the room to reveal Chuck reading their peace treaty in a POV shot. The lyrics of ‘Dancing On My Own’ thematically fit this moment: “[s]o far away, but still so near / The lights go on, the music dies / But you don't see me standing here / I just came to say goodbye” (Carlsson, 2010). The viewer watches from Chuck’s optical perspective as Blair blows out candles on her staircase, then turns to discover him, stony-faced and lurking in the shadows. The transition from a medium full shot to a medium close-up on Blair increases the intimacy between them.

Chuck tells Blair their treaty is over and that “[b]eing amicable isn’t in our blood” (S4E07). The following shot-reverse-shot exchange amplifies the intensity between them, the camera moving in toward Chuck and Blair with each of their following retorts.

CHUCK After what happened tonight, I could never like you.

BLAIR I could never like you either. In fact, I hate you.

CHUCK I've never hated anyone more.

BLAIR Every nerve ending in my body is electrified by hatred.

CHUCK There is a fiery pit of hate burning inside me, ready to explode.

The camera tilts down to show Chuck’s hands ripping their peace treaty in two and throwing it to the ground. Here, Robyn’s instrumental track goes silent and a close-up captures Blair’s exasperated sigh. It appears their argument is over, until Chuck makes a shocking move, described colourfully in the episode’s script below.

[But instead of leaving, he grabs her. And she lets him. It looks for a second like he might kill her, but instead... he KISSES HER. She kisses him back. And all that tension that's been brewing between them explodes in angry, amazing HATE SEX on the dining room table]. (Spoiler TV, 2010).

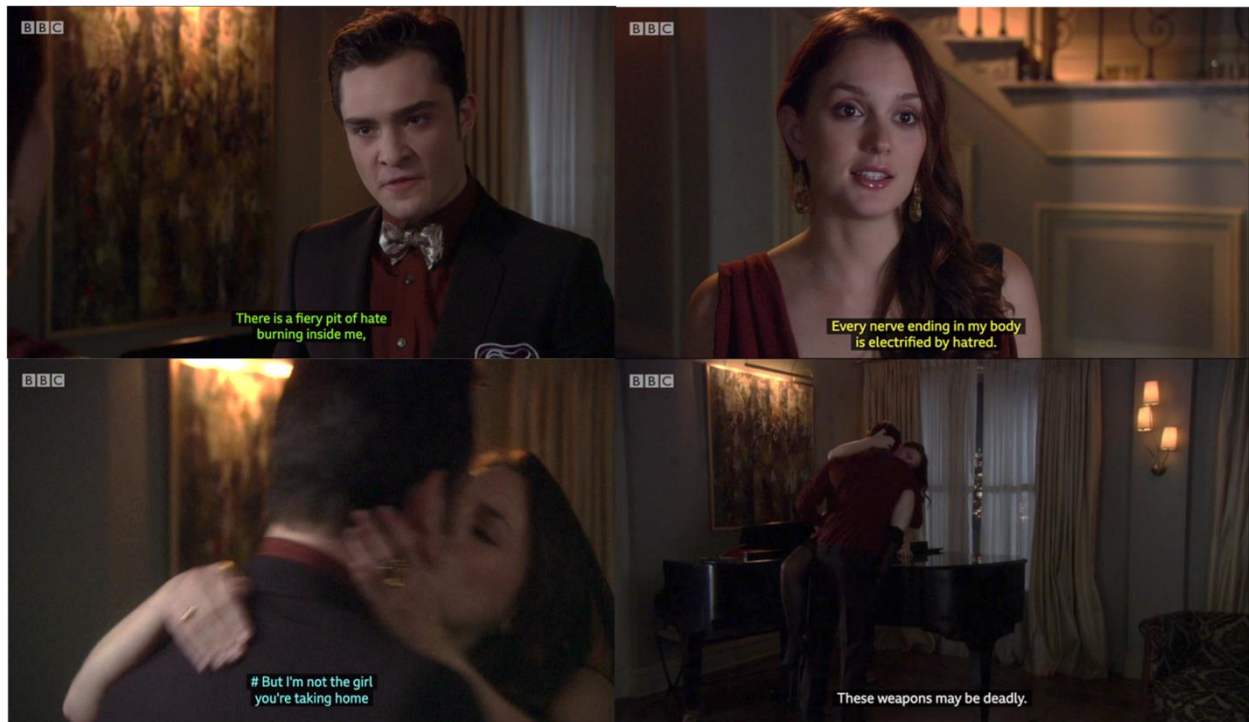


Fig. 1 Chuck and Blair argue, then abandon their morals in ‘War at the Roses’.

Working in tandem with Chuck and Blair’s hyperbolic language, the editing in this scene rejects realism in favour of an excessive emotional experience – one that demands its viewers become involved. This involvement is particularly effective in the moment where Chuck grabs Blair’s face. His action holds the viewer in suspense and invites them to question what he will do next. Suddenly, a shot-reverse shot of the couple is amplified by a rapid fast-cutting technique that switches in time with the song’s sixteen snare hits. All the built-up excess and tension is broken by a contrasting slow-motion, soft-focus kiss, as the pair move over to the piano and start removing their clothes. The remainder of the scene plays out in this slow-motion effect while the final chorus of ‘Dancing On My Own’ serves as its soundtrack. As the voice of Gossip Girl signs off – “[t]hese weapons may be deadly. XOXO, Gossip Girl” – the scene and episode conclude with the twinkling final notes of Robyn’s piano refrain.

Musicality

Soundtracks play a significant role in *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*. Instrumental and lyrical songs are used to communicate meaning and emotion in the tradition of nineteenth-century melodrama, where “music was as crucial [...] as gesture and speech” (Hibberd and Nielsen, 2002:38). In ‘Bring It On’, season 4 episode 16 of *The Vampire Diaries*, Stefan and Elena are upstairs in the Salvatore house. Stefan is desperately trying to warn her about the dangers of the humanity switch, but despite his best efforts, Elena bluntly ignores him and sends texts on her phone. At this point in the series, she has already flipped this switch, meaning she currently feels zero emotion. After a while, Stefan notices the sound of a beat playing from the floor below. A tracking shot follows him downstairs, where it becomes evident the song playing is ‘I Love It’, a 2012 synthpop breakup anthem by Icona Pop featuring Charli XCX. As the camera pans across to reveal the Salvatore house filling with teenagers, Stefan realises Elena has invited the whole school over for a party. She walks nonchalantly through the crowd, wearing a maroon vest top and adjusting her hair as ‘I Love It’ continues. The lyrics of this song play under and through Stefan and Elena’s following conversation, often overlapping with their dialogue, as signalled below through italics.

STEFAN So, that’s what all this texting was about?

“I threw your shit into a bag and pushed it down the stairs.”

STEFAN You invited all these people over here?

“I crashed my car into the bridge.”

ELENA You were trying to keep me from joining the party, so I brought the party here.

“I don’t care, I love it. I don’t care, I love it.”

(S4E16).



Fig. 2 Elena throws an impromptu party in ‘Bring It On’.

The song’s chorus, a recurring refrain of the phrase ‘I don’t care’, plays on repeat as Elena shrugs her shoulders in false innocence. These lyrics allude explicitly to Elena’s emotional state: with her emotions turned off, she does not care about anything or anyone. They act as a continuation of her dialogue, almost forming a character of their own. Elsewhere in the song, the lyrics “[w]e gotta kill this switch”, referring to the metaphorical on/off switch of a relationship, take on new meaning. In the context of this scene, the mention of a switch can be understood as a reference to the humanity switch Elena has turned off. The final line of the pre-chorus that describes crashing a car into a bridge also can also be read as a reference to the premise of *The Vampire Diaries’* pilot episode. Here, we learn Elena is the sole survivor of a car accident that took place on Wickery

Bridge, an incident that plagues her with severe guilt throughout the show. In 'Bring It On', the lyrical dismissal of this car crash playing over Elena's dialogue demonstrates the extent to which she no longer feels guilt, or any emotion, offering insight into her interior world. *The Vampire Diaries'* incorporation of a soundtrack that fits lyrically with the action onscreen lends a sense of thematic fluency to this scene, inviting the viewer to access an additional layer of narrative and emotional storytelling.

Dreams

Dream states feature heavily in *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*, most often used to communicate a character's fears and foreshadow the future. In *Gossip Girl*, Blair Waldorf's stylised cinematic dreams emerge as a recurring motif. When Blair dreams, she becomes the protagonist of one of her favourite Classic Hollywood films, typically one starring her idol, Audrey Hepburn. These intertextual dream sequences merge Blair's life with the characters and themes of each film and become representative of her waking anxieties.

'New Haven Can Wait', season 2 episode 6 of *Gossip Girl*, features a particularly foreshadowing dream told from Blair's perspective. This sequence references the 1964 film *My Fair Lady*, an American musical drama based on George Bernard Shaw's 1913 play *Pygmalion* (itself inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's 1770 sentimental drama of the same name). *My Fair Lady* follows Eliza Doolittle (Audrey Hepburn), a young Cockney flower seller. She is taken under the wing of phonetics professor Henry Higgins (Rex Harrison), who intends to present her to Edwardian high society. During the musical number 'The Rain in Spain', Doolittle finally masters Received Pronunciation and is soon presented at Ascot Racecourse, where she accidentally slips into

Cockney slang. Although Doolittle later impresses at the embassy ball, it is Higgins who receives the public's recognition rather than her. Upset at this dismissal of her hard work, Doolittle throws Higgins' slippers at his head, but she eventually returns to him by the film's end.



Fig. 3 Eliza Doolittle's rags-to-riches transformation in *My Fair Lady*.

Back in *Gossip Girl*, the ambitious Blair has always dreamed of attending Yale University. Therefore, when head of admissions Dean Berube invites not her, but her best friend Serena, to his prestigious private reception for prospective students, Blair is enraged. The girls fight outside the reception and call off their friendship. Just like Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*, Blair throws her shoe at Serena, but by the end of the episode the pair have found their way back to one-another and made amends. Prior to all this, Blair experiences a dream that foreshadows these events and reveals her waking anxieties. Used as the cold open of 'New Haven Can Wait', an intertextual play on the 1943 film *Heaven Can Wait*, this dream sequence opens on an establishing close-up of an extravagant flower arrangement. The camera gradually pulls out to reveal the rest of the lavishly

decorated room, designed to resemble Higgins' office in *My Fair Lady*, while an instrumental version of 'The Rain in Spain' from the film's soundtrack plays. This instrumental underscores the entire sequence, lending a vintage atmosphere and making explicit its cinematic inspiration. The camera, still panning out, reveals Blair sitting nervously on a sofa while Dean Berube paces behind her, acting the role of Higgins. His academic reputation and position of authority over Blair help replicate the dynamic between their cinematic counterparts. The Dean is dressed formally as he lectures his student:

DEAN BERUBE [*exaggerated elocution*] The rain. In Spain. Stays mainly in the plain.
Again?

BLAIR [*slightly Cockney*] The rain... in Spain... stays mainly in the plain?



Fig. 4 Blair as street urchin Eliza Doolittle in 'New Haven Can Wait'.

A medium close-up shows Blair continuing to butcher her pronunciation. She is dressed as an imitation of Doolittle, wearing a shawl, long skirt, and hat – or “drab street urchin garb”, as the

episode's script bluntly puts it (2008:1). As his pupil struggles with her line, Berube sighs and folds his arms. Here, the camera switches back to Blair who, in frustration, cries out, "I'm a straight-A student, I am!". Blair's desperate declaration points glaringly toward her waking anxieties. Just as Doolittle messes up her lines at Ascot and loses the public's respect, Blair's dream reveals her fear of messing up in her Yale interview. Even worse, there is only one spot remaining, and competing against Blair is her endlessly charming and laid-back best friend:

[SERENA glides in, in an elegant white dress, and perfectly:]

SERENA The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain.

[She smiles her 1000 watt smile at the Dean, who is enchanted.]

(2008:1).



Fig. 5 Serena as high-society Eliza Doolittle in 'New Haven Can Wait'.

Serena is dressed as Doolittle, too, but the more refined, high-society iteration of the character. She wears a glamorous white gown and hat that together echo Doolittle's costume at Ascot. Here,

it becomes clear Blair and Serena both represent this character at different points in *My Fair Lady* – rather appropriately, for like Doolittle they, too, must enter and impress a new milieu of society. After Serena’s impressive line delivery, the camera cuts to a medium shot of her standing next to Berube, who utters one of the film’s most notable lines: “[b]y George, I think she’s got it!” (S2E06). Blair excitedly asks, “I do?”, to which the Dean responds, “[n]o, *she* does.”. Berube’s final statement in this scene confirms one of Blair’s worst fears: that Serena might be perceived as more intelligent and therefore more impressive than her. As Serena’s laugh starts to echo, Blair’s following screech is simultaneously comedic and chilling. The music builds to a crescendo and the camera pans into her face as she sobs, a parody of a childish tantrum. At last, Blair’s nightmare comes to a quite literally screeching halt as she wakes in her own bed, voices from her dream still echoing around her.

Doubling

Melodrama’s fixation on the figure of the double is another theme that resurfaces throughout my case studies. Originally found in early folk tales, the double, or doppelganger (meaning double-walker) is a mythological symbol of evil that became prominent in nineteenth-century gothic melodrama. While *Gossip Girl*’s Blair and Serena are presented more metaphorically as each-others’ inverses, in *The Vampire Diaries*, Elena discovers she has a supernatural doppelganger. Appearing for the first time in the show’s season 1 finale, Elena’s doppelganger Katherine is a vampire Stefan and Damon fell in love with in the nineteenth century. The doppelgangers look exactly alike, but where Elena is compassionate, sensible, and loyal, Katherine is ruthless, rebellious, and cunning, with an uncontrollable temper. Both roles are portrayed by actress Nina

Dobrev, but viewers can generally tell Katherine and Elena apart by their opposing hair, makeup, and fashion.

In 'American Gothic', season 4 episode 18, Elena must disguise herself as Katherine to procure information from her doppelganger's boyfriend. She has flipped her humanity switch prior to this scene, meaning she is emotionless, and therefore uncharacteristically scheming. Exiting a diner bathroom, Elena folds down a compact mirror and the camera follows her across the room to the booth she shares with her vampire friend Rebekah. Elena, smiling, sits down after recreating her doppelganger's curly hair and dark eye makeup.

ELENA: What do you think?

REBEKAH: Hmm, it's close. Not quite slutty enough. I think you need more eyeliner.

ELENA: I'm gonna need your clothes.

KATHERINE: *[sarcastically]* Yeah, that's gonna happen.



Fig. 6 Katherine removes her leather jacket for Elena in ‘American Gothic’.

When Rebekah resorts to light torture to persuade Katherine to hand over her jewellery and leather jacket, Elena’s doppelganger begrudgingly warns her “[t]his will never work, you know. The bad haircut, the doe eyes? You’ll never pass for me” (S4E18). Elena responds by parroting Katherine’s words back to her, copying her precise vocal inflections and deepening her voice. In response, Rebekah tells Elena she has mastered “[j]ust the right level of contempt and hidden insecurity”. A close-up shows a worn-down Katherine hiding behind her hair. Her timid body language recalls Elena’s in the show’s first season. Meanwhile, the current emotionless Elena is once again inspecting herself in her mirror.

ELENA: Almost there...something’s missing. *[looking under the table]* Your shoes. I want your shoes.

[KATHERINE looks at her, indignant].

(S4E18).

In this scene, Elena is not her usual self. Her typical morals would usually prevent her from pulling off such a convincing Katherine disguise, but with her emotions switched off, Elena is cold and uncaring. She becomes more like Katherine, though noticeably less passionate and bitchy. Therefore, in this scene between the two doppelgangers, not only is Elena visually transforming into Katherine, but her personality beyond the disguise is also shifting in the same direction. Katherine's agential attitude is comprised of more than just her distinguishing jewellery, eyeliner, and leather jacket, but as soon as she loses these visual signifiers, the lines start to blur between the two doppelgangers. Their interactions in 'American Gothic' therefore pose all sorts of questions surrounding feminine doubling in melodrama, conflating villainy with a lack of human emotion. Visually, it is fascinating to watch the role reversal as these two characters transform into one – at least from above the table.

Chapter One: Emotional Excess

Described by Erin Hurley as “a feeling-producing machine, formally engineered to elicit emotional response”, melodrama has traditionally been characterised by its connection to emotion (2010:44). I argue these emotive powers exist as a result of, and in conjunction with, its mode of excess. This phrase was first popularised by Peter Brooks in 1976 and later adopted by Kapurch to frame her 2016 study of melodramatic discourses in girl culture, a model I borrow from in my own writing. Traditionally, nineteenth-century stage melodrama conveyed emotion using larger-than-life gestures and facial expressions designed to communicate visual stories to noisy audiences. This style of exaggerated physical storytelling came about partly in response to the 1737 Licensing Act which banned the spoken word in non-patent theatres, meaning performers had to rely on non-verbal body language to communicate meaning. Thus, the “interpretation of emotion by means of gesture, bodily attitude and facial expression, long essential to tragic acting, became extended and habitual in melodrama, at first by legal necessity and then by custom” (Booth, 1991:151). While the spoken word eventually found its way back into melodrama, encouraging feelings to be expressed through extravagant dialogue, an excessive bodily presentation of emotion has remained something firmly embedded within the melodramatic mode to this day. Brooks explains the emotionally unrestricted and embodied nature of melodrama in *The Melodramatic Imagination*.

The desire to express all seems a fundamental characteristic of the melodramatic mode. Nothing is spared because nothing is left unsaid; the characters stand on stage and utter the unspeakable, give voice to their deepest feelings, dramatize through their heightened and polarized words and gestures the whole lesson of their relationship (1976:4).

Although Brooks refers to the stage here, in this chapter, I show that melodramatic dynamics of emotional excess are integral to *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*. Displayed through exaggerated dialogue and body language, these heightened expressions of feeling work to elicit an affective viewer response, in this case encouraging the emotionally shut-down Gen Z girl to cathartically explore her own feelings.

Emotional Dialogue

In *Gossip Girl*, excess rules. For the show's Upper East Side teenagers, this excess is evident not just in their material wealth, but also in the emotional dynamics of their personal relationships. These dynamics become particularly apparent in the scene between Chuck and Blair in 'War at the Roses' that I previously introduced. In this scene, the teenage couple confess their mutual loathing for one-other through increasingly hyperbolic insults until they finally give into their feelings of lust. Below are stills from this scene, reproduced a second time for the reader's convenience.

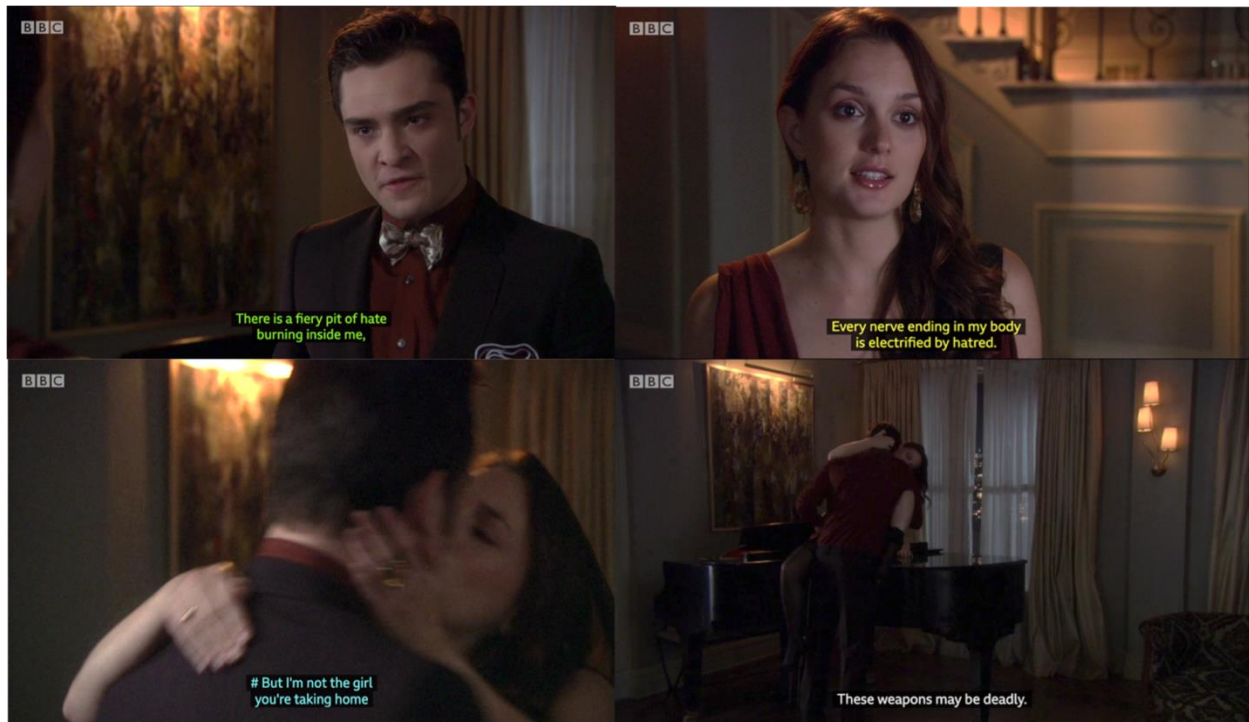


Fig. 7 Chuck and Blair argue, then abandon their morals in ‘War at the Roses’.

The exaggerated dialogue Chuck and Blair exchange in this scene is thoroughly consistent with the melodramatic mode; it takes the everyday and expands this into something sensational. Christine Gledhill argues the term ‘sensation’ in the nineteenth century encompassed “the bodily thrills” provided by melodrama’s stage trickery and special effects, as well as emotionally “extreme states of personal being” (2018:63). In ‘War at the Roses’, Chuck and Blair’s dialogue is reminiscent of the “emotionally explosive, even hyperbolic, use of language” in Douglas Jerrold’s 1829 nautical melodrama *Black Eyed Susan* that Hurley argues represents “another technology of feeling”:

Listen to William when he thinks Susan is not at the port to meet him upon his return from sea: ‘I’m afraid to throw out a signal – my heart knocks against my timbers, like a jolly-

boat in a breeze, alongside a seventy-four. Damn it, I feel as if one half of me were in the Baltic, and the other half stationed in Jamaica' (117). Not only is the audience made to understand the details of William's confused emotional life in this moment, but that life is articulated in an overstated version of sea-faring language. (2010:47).

In this extract, William's exaggerated language is designed to appeal to the emotions of a nineteenth-century audience who would likely have been familiar with these sea-faring terms. In the twenty-first century, this pattern persists in *Gossip Girl* through Chuck and Blair's exaggerated dialogue that targets girls. Throughout their exchange, the couple use hyperbole in an attempt to mask their desire. Passionate declarations like "I've never hated anyone more" work to emphasise the intensity of their feelings. There is also a sense of emotional disconnect here: Chuck and Blair are afraid to confess their romantic intentions, instead resorting to words that contradict what they truly mean. The hyperbolic dialogue in this scene might appear to the average viewer as over-the-top. Eric Bentley notes that, historically, "[m]elodramatic dialogue has been the object of more mockery, perhaps, than even the plots and the characters and the acting." (1964:206). Indeed, Blair's confession "[e]very nerve ending in my body is electrified by hatred", and Chuck's reply, "[t]here is a fiery pit of hate burning inside me, ready to explode" invite parody and mockery through their lack of emotional subtlety. However, as Bentley importantly adds, "[a]n elevated rhetoric is a legitimate and indeed inexorable demand of melodrama. Ordinary conversation would be incongruous and anti-climactic" (207). Indeed, it is the life-and-death stakes of Chuck and Blair's declarations that make this scene so viscerally affective. Their embellished dialogue demonstrates the re-emergence of nineteenth-century emotional excess, this time speaking to different social and historical contexts. These characters take the hyperbolic language of their

teenage demographic and elevate it to new heights, capturing the emotional intensity of adolescence and thereby appealing to girls.

Discussing romantic melodrama, Kirsten Drotner identifies that its emphasis on feminine desire “allows adolescent recipients an unusual opportunity to imaginatively explore emotional and sexual scenarios at a safe distance from the demands made in real sexual encounters” (1991:81). Through this lens, Chuck and Blair’s tumultuous relationship in ‘War at the Roses’ becomes a vehicle for catharsis in girls. Melodramatic expressions of emotion invite the feminine adolescent to feel as though taken seriously; they “legitimize heartbreak by elevating it to life-and-death extremes, validating the struggle it takes to overcome the loss of a relationship” (Kapurch, 2016:152). This dynamic is something *Gossip Girl* embraces and repeats throughout its run. The scene between Chuck and Blair in ‘War at the Roses’ therefore becomes a microcosmic representation of the show as a whole and is indicative of a wider pattern within its emotional fabric. Through the catharsis provided by these moments, Gen Z girls are permitted to explore their emotions and sexuality without facing any real-life repercussions. Emotional excess thereby validates her personal romantic experiences. This effect might represent part of the reason melodrama has long appealed to the disempowered girl, offering fantasies of agency that transcend cultural and historical bounds. By embodying the hormonal highs and lows of teenagehood, *Gossip Girl*’s teenage protagonists invite Gen Z girls to connect with the intensity of adolescence, where emotions are heightened to the polarised extremities of a melodrama.

Flipping the Switch

In *The Vampire Diaries*, the heightening and restricting of emotion is the subject of countless plotlines. As the show makes clear, characters who transition into vampires must undergo a change of mindset in which their feelings become magnified and heightened. This excessively emotional state is something every vampire must learn to live with: “[e]verything is intensified when you’re a vampire. When we hurt, we really hurt. But when we love...” (S2E15). Fundamentally, *The Vampire Diaries* presents a creature that embodies melodrama’s mode of emotional excess as part of its base existence, thus marking the vampire as inherently melodramatic. The figure of the vampire can be traced back to a range of nineteenth century gothic melodramas, such as James Robinson Planché’s *The Vampire; or, The Bride of the Isles*. Inspired by John Polidori’s 1819 short story *The Vampyre*, this melodrama was first performed in 1820 and would become incredibly influential in its depiction of vampirism on the nineteenth-century stage.

In *The Vampire Diaries*, the vampiric urge to feed on human blood is often a trigger for emotional excess, manifesting in intense feelings of guilt for characters like Stefan Salvatore. Stefan’s characterisation, and the sympathy his emotions evoke in the viewer, associate him with the Gothic archetype of the sympathetic vampire. Born from 1840s penny dreadfuls like *Varney the Vampire* and later re-popularised for twentieth-century readers by Anne Rice’s 1976 *Interview with the Vampire*, this term refers to a “new generation of morally ambiguous, sympathetic vampires who lure audiences with the pathos of their predicament and their painful awareness of outsiderdom” (Williamson, 2005:29). Milly Williamson recognises that the sympathetic vampire often forms “ties of family and friendship” with humans and supernaturals; ties that often locate the vampire

“problematically in the realms of the emotions” (31). In *The Vampire Diaries*, the intense feelings of remorse and guilt that plague vampires like Stefan have dangerous physical consequences. However, the show presents a convenient solution to this problem in the existence of the humanity switch. Interchangeable with ‘turning off your emotions’, or ‘turning off your humanity’, the phrase ‘flipping the switch’ refers to an ability that enables vampires to feel no emotion. This state is not something to be taken lightly – a vampire will only resort to it when they are experiencing extreme emotional distress. Caroline, for instance, turns off her emotions after her mother dies to avoid the pain of living without her. As I have previously mentioned, Elena reacts in the same way in the wake of her brother Jeremy’s death. Like the heroines of nineteenth-century domestic melodrama who “weep or faint not because they are weak or feeble but because they are sites of extremity – of anger, terror, pain.”, Caroline and Elena embody the physical consequences of vampiric, and melodramatic, emotional excess (Gledhill, 2018:71). When they turn off their emotions, their personalities are transformed. Both girls abandon their morals and begin killing humans with no remorse to drink their blood. Notably, a vampire with their humanity switch turned off will often alter their physical appearance. Elena, for example, dyes a red streak in her hair, while Caroline starts wearing black outfits instead of her signature pastel tones. These changes in appearance evoke the emergence of the anti-hero, or villainess, in 1860s melodrama, something I expand upon in Chapter Four. Significantly, the show’s notion of an on/off switch proposes complete disconnect as a solution to emotional excess, recalling the crisis-numb response of Gen Z. As I explore further below through analysis of online discourses, this aspect of vampirism appears to speak particularly to this generation of girls by encouraging them to confront their own feelings. In the diegetic world of *The Vampire Diaries*, the dichotomy of the humanity switch builds a black-and-white landscape of melodramatic emotion. Here, melodrama’s archetypes

become unpredictable and hidden dark sides are unearthed, hinting at ideas of the double. Ultimately, “the switch produces the dualisms that define *The Vampire Diaries* as melodrama.” (Lidström Brock, 2014:6). It is emblematic of melodrama’s fascination with morality and emotional excess, permitting characters to shift, and toe the line between, melodramatic heroism and villainy.

“Feeling is the real hero”

On discussion website Reddit, users submit their own questions, polls, videos, and more to subreddits (forums dedicated to specific topics, such as *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*). The site’s predominantly young userbase allows unique insight into the dialogues of these shows’ Gen Z viewers. Surveying the official subreddit for *The Vampire Diaries*, many posts seem to support my argument about the show’s emotive potentials and the meanings these offer girls. A search using the keyword ‘emotion’ pulls up numerous posts from users often sharing their favourite emotional scenes or speculating about the logistics of the humanity switch. As one user ponders, “[i]f your severely depressed and are turned into a vampire would u be mega depressed forever? Since vampirism heightens your emotions and stuff” (2022). While this question, and others like it, offer intriguing commentary on emotional excess in the show, I have chosen to focus on a 2019 post by user Nhaz, who asks, ‘[h]ave you ever wish you have the emotions switch like the vampires?’. Beneath this question, Nhaz shares her longing for a humanity switch in her own life.

I’ve been dealing with a lot of things right now and i feel like my emotions are hightened (sic) and theyre (sic) overwhelming. I could only wish i was a vampire or like have the on

and off switch for our emotions to stop feeling the internal and emotional pain. Lol. Just a random thought. (2019).

Nhaz's confession demonstrates the appeal of melodramatic emotional dualisms and vampiric figures to Gen Z girls. In order to cope with her own heightened emotions, Nhaz looks toward *The Vampire Diaries*' fictional representations of the humanity switch. Her self-described 'wish' alludes to the melodramatic viewer's penchant for a resolution – the notion of a switch here providing a convenient and satisfactory solution to her complex situation. Nhaz's words also hint at a desire to alter her identity somehow, to evade her own life and its human problems. The fictional ability to construct a new identity is something the online space in which this user posted her confession might be able to provide. Websites like Reddit offer girls anonymity and the chance to build an emotional personality entirely different to their own, with which they might interact with other users.

Furthermore, the emotional connection and sense of empathy many girls feel toward the figure of the vampire is something Kapurch notes in her study of the *Twilight* Saga. In her reflection on the similarities between the two groups, Kapurch reaffirms Williamson's argument that "many women identify with the vampire due to his (or her) conflicted and outsider status" (2016:10). Other identifying factors here include the vampire's complicated relationship with food (i.e. blood) and eating, something Kapurch argues might appeal to girls struggling with eating disorders. She claims "[t]he vampire's insatiable and unsatisfiable hunger [...] is a point of empathy for female fans living in a culture obsessed with the maintenance of their bodies." (71). Kapurch's argument speaks to issues of feminine adolescence that remain relevant in the 2020s, however, there also

exist more contemporary factors that might draw Gen Z girls to this figure. As previously established, Gen Z are a generation largely defined by their feelings of loneliness and high number of mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression. For this reason, the feelings of vampiric outsider-dom that appealed to previous generations may resonate among Gen Z girls in new and poignant ways. Growing up as the first generation of digital natives also means Gen Z are equipped with skills – or powers – outsiders to their generation may not possess, much like the supernatural vampires in *The Vampire Diaries*. Most significant, however, remains the existence of the humanity switch, understood as a metaphor for the crisis-numb mindset adopted by many in this generation. The sympathetic vampires of *The Vampire Diaries* can thus be understood as a reimagining of the melodramatic vampire that has historically appealed to girls, encouraging Gen Z's ongoing identification with this figure.

In response to Nhaz's question regarding the humanity switch, some users share they have often longed for such an ability, while others recognise the potential drawbacks. Jennnsim3 admits, "I never would actually want it because i feel my humanity is a vital part of who i am. It's literally everything" (2019). Her comment echoes nineteenth-century melodrama's emphasis on the relationship between emotional response and the human condition. As Hurley argues, emotion in nineteenth-century melodrama was often used as an indicator of humanity both in characters and their audiences.

Understood to include an expansive range of emotional and affective responses, feeling is the real hero of much nineteenth-century melodrama. To feel – that is, to be physiologically responsive to your environment (affect), to experience ambient mood, and to interpret your

body's physiological signals as emotions – is to be human in the most flattering sense of the term. (2010:48).

In *The Vampire Diaries*, the title of the humanity switch quite explicitly poses the implication that humanity is equivalent with emotion, and that once this switch is turned off, vampires lose this aspect of their being. Without empathy, vampires become driven by their violent, yet natural, urge to kill, meaning they can often lose the viewer's sympathy. They become associated with the traditional melodramatic villain, while heroic characters like Elena – those “driven by love, by compassion” – are defined positively by their excess of human emotion (S4E04). Historically, this effect can be seen in *Black Eyed Susan*, where the heroic “William's tears are another sign of his virtue. The fact that he is a man of feeling betokens his naturalness and full humanity” (Hurley, 2010:47). Emotional excess thus produces melodramatic heroes and heroines through evoking pathos in its audiences. The recognition of our own human response to emotion is self-affirming. As Jenks's admission illustrates, the human condition is seemingly tied to experiencing emotion – it is a ‘vital’ part of who we are, and a means through which melodrama might connect with audiences. Deidre Pribram observes that “[m]elodramatic modes of storytelling, grounded in emotions and felt recognition—involving us in perceptions of how we do, might, or ought to feel things—enable us to connect with and understand the narrative and social worlds we occupy.” (2018:251). The emphasis placed on emotion in *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* therefore speaks to the Gen Z girl who is overwhelmed and lacking emotional clarity in her own life. Watching melodramatic heroines and villainesses explicitly discuss and navigate their emotional lives onscreen can bring a sense of catharsis. Writing about Boucicault's 1860 sensation melodrama *The Colleen Bawn*, Patricia Smyth situates the Victorian sensation scene as a vehicle

for emotional response (2022:2). Here, she recalls Jacques Rancière's argument that all spectatorship is "inherently active as each individual brings to the spectacle their own dreams, desires, and experiences." (10). Through this lens, the agential allure of emotional excess in my case studies becomes evident. While the melodramatic mode can be understood as a feeling machine, a vehicle for inciting emotional reactions, the weight and meaning of this personal response is unique to the individual. Indeed, "[c]ritical scholarship [...] cannot provide an exhaustive account of the emotional expressions and experiences that are performed via narrative media, but we can do better in acknowledging emotionality's pervasive, vital presence in our stories and in our lives." (Pribram, 2018:251). As evidenced through the responses to Nhaz's Reddit question regarding the humanity switch, *The Vampire Diaries*' melodramatic expressions of emotion help to shape online discussions among girls that merge narrative feeling with personal significance. Ultimately, by employing affective dynamics of emotional excess, this show affords the crisis-numb Gen Z girl the agency to think critically about her personal emotional experiences.

In summary, both *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* engage Gen Z girls through the affective responses evoked by their dynamics of emotional excess. In the tradition of nineteenth-century melodrama, *Gossip Girl*'s Chuck and Blair use embellished language and hyperbole in conversation. These characters embody the extreme emotional states of adolescence and validate many girls' emotional experiences. In *The Vampire Diaries*, heightened emotions are at the core of the vampiric being, however, this state is contrasted by the emotional disconnect the humanity switch provides, a factor that resonates particularly with Gen Z girls. The polarised extremities of this switch reflect the Manichean moral values of the melodramatic mode, producing heroes and villains accordingly. More widely, as evidenced through viewer responses, emotional excess in

melodrama provides “a much-needed locus of identity exploration” in the lives of Gen Z girls (Drotner, 1991:82). Additionally, the cultural and generational circumstances that define this group can be understood as factors that encourage their self-identification with the melodramatic vampire. Empowering girls to explore ideas that “in other areas of their lives have to be tackled as serious demands”, *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* encourage Gen Z to examine their own emotional lives through the lens of the melodramatic mode (ibid).

Chapter Two: Musicality

The origins of melodrama are integrally and inherently musical: ‘melodrame’ stems from the Greek ‘melos’, meaning melody, and ‘drame’, meaning drama. Historically, the illegitimate theatre movement from which melodrama grew saw theatres rely on non-verbal entertainment traditions, such as dumb-show, musical accompaniment, and song, to evade the restrictive 1737 Licensing Act. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the English Patent Houses could no longer compete with the popularity of these illegitimate shows, so they began programming the most popular ones. The compound ‘melodrame’, first used to advertise Thomas Holcroft’s *A Tale of Mystery* in 1802, thus came to describe performances that relied heavily on musical elements. Other popular melodramas, such as the aforementioned *Black Eyed Susan*, were even inspired by pre-existing songs or ballads. In this instance, Jerrold’s nautical melodrama successfully reproduced the familiar characters and story of John Gay’s eighteenth-century sea shanty for the stage. Michael Pisani explains that the orchestra’s main role in melodrama was “to assist the actors by establishing mood, communicating aspects of characterization, and invigorating the action” (2014:xv). Music was “calculated to appeal to the emotions of its audiences” and contributed significantly to a melodrama’s dynamic of emotional excess (xii). Describing how this music would have sounded in the early nineteenth century, Hibberd and Nielsen detail,

The size of the orchestra would vary with the size of the theatre, but generally strings and horns would have been essential, with – if finances allowed – woodwind (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon), brass (trumpets), perhaps a harp, a piano and percussion. A larger orchestra would be more capable of creating striking timbral effects, but strings were

nevertheless extremely versatile, capable of singing lyricism, percussive chords and sinister tremolo effects. (2002:30).

Examining promptbooks for the first production of George R. Sims' 1881 melodrama *The Lights o' London*, Pisani identifies eight specific uses of music among the show's forty-three cues. These combine nineteenth-century theatrical devices with practical functions: "1) act or scene opener, 2) character entrance music, 3) character exit music, 4) accompaniment to a song or dance, 5) dialogue underscore (or music for actors to speak through), 6) action music, 7) a combination of dialogue and action, and 8) scene-bridging music." (Pisani, 2018:106). In the twenty-first century, screen equivalents of these cues can be identified throughout *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*. In both shows, almost every scene features some form of music, commonly used to open episodes and underscore dialogue. The opening scene of 'Pilot', season 1 episode 1 of *Gossip Girl*, serves as an example here. Establishing shots of New York City rapidly flash in time to the opening beat of 'Young Folks', a lively 2006 indie-pop song by Peter Bjorn and John. Looking longingly out of a train window, the viewer is introduced to Serena for the first time through *Gossip Girl*'s narration. "Spotted at Grand Central, bags in hand: Serena van der Woodsen. Was it only a year ago our It-Girl mysteriously disappeared for quote 'boarding school'? And just as suddenly she's back. Don't believe me? See for yourselves" (S1E01). Playing under and through *Gossip Girl*'s dialogue are the lyrics of 'Young Folks': "[i]f I told you things I did before / Told you how I used to be / Would you go along with someone like me? / If you knew my story word for word / Had all of my history / Would you go along with someone like me?" (2006). The song's lyrics portray a subject with a secretive past and tie thematically into *Gossip Girl*'s description of Serena's mysterious disappearance. Music therefore establishes the emotional and narrative dynamics at

play in this episode within its first minute. It should be noted that while my case studies demonstrate a resurfacing of the musical cues Pisani describes, their music serves a dramatic, rather than a functional, purpose. This shift is the result of developing technologies and the switch from the nineteenth-century stage to the twenty-first century screen. In this chapter, I focus on two main variants of music used in *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*: their emotionally supportive instrumental scores and their descriptive lyrical soundtracks. I examine how musicality contributes to their melodramatic dynamics of excess, guiding Gen Z girls toward emotional cues and inspiring personalised playlists.

Instrumental Scores

Instrumental scores in *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* significantly shape the emotional and thematic landscapes of their diegetic worlds. Created by composer collective Transcenders, *Gossip Girl*'s original score switches between electronic beats, used to generate the show's fast pace, and a plaintive mix of guitar, piano, and violin in sentimental scenes. This combination of musical identities reflects the show's dualisms. While dramatic and luxurious string instruments align with themes of wealth and mystery – who is Gossip Girl? – electronic elements capture the story's emphasis on technology. Comparatively, Michael Suby's musical arrangements for *The Vampire Diaries* are much darker and more haunting, unmistakably situating the show within the field of the Gothic. Dramatic string compositions, often played in a foreboding minor key, reflect the deep emotional depths of vampirism and the dangers of this supernatural life. In the show's main theme, a steady drum resembles a beating heart. This sound does not at all resemble the peppy electronic drumbeat used in *Gossip Girl*'s theme – it is a lot slower, pulsing with dramatic tension. Both instrumental themes can be accessed on video sharing site YouTube.

Writing about the Hollywood family melodrama in 1950s cinema, Thomas Elsaesser notes the emotional role music has historically played in the melodramatic mode.

In its dictionary sense, melodrama is a dramatic narrative in which musical accompaniment marks the emotional effects. This is still perhaps the most useful definition, because it allows melodramatic elements to be seen as constituents of a system of punctuation, giving expressive colour and chromatic contrast to the storyline, by orchestrating the emotional ups and downs of the intrigue. (1991:74).

The instrumentals used in *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* work to provide melodramatic excess as well as non-verbal emotional cues through this punctuative system Elsaesser describes. The emotional connotations of certain instruments encourage specific feelings in the Gen Z viewer; playful beats, for example, enhance a scene's comedic timing, while sombre piano inspires feelings of sadness. Although this link between music and emotion can be identified in '50s screen melodrama, it originated on the nineteenth-century stage. Here, the term "appropriate music" was often used to indicate melodramatic music "consistent with the emotional contours of a scene or speech and with the way audiences were expected to react" (Pisani, 2014:xv). These instrumentals "could shift the mood of a scene abruptly. For example, a lighthearted tune might begin in the major key then suddenly switch to the minor, or stop on a diminished chord." (Hibberd and Nielsen, 2002:31). A perfectly innocent interaction holds dramatic potential when accompanied by an ominous instrumental, as evidenced in 'I Know What You Did Last Summer', season 5 episode 1 of *The Vampire Diaries*. Here, Katherine is seen taking a bath in the Salvatore house

when the powerful witch Silas, disguised as Stefan, enters the room and starts to flirt with her. What appears to Katherine as a harmless conversation is made sinister to the viewer by the grating sound of screeching violins. This sound gradually increases in volume as they speak, establishing a distinct sense of dramatic irony. The viewer's fears, encouraged by this instrumental, are confirmed when Silas pushes Katherine's body underwater in an attempt to drown her. This shrill string music thus serves as a verbal signifier that provokes an emotional investment in the narrative. This scene is one of many instances in *The Vampire Diaries* where the emotive potentials of instrumental music are used for melodramatic punctuation.

Notably, instrumental music in *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* is so continually present that oftentimes, and in my own experience, the viewer can forget it is there. In this case, we become more subconsciously guided by their emotional punctuation. Notes and beats blend quite effortlessly into dialogue and only once a scene is silent do we notice their absence (although such scenes are few and far between). Notably, while critics are quick to praise these shows for their trailblazing lyrical soundtracks, there remains a gap in the conversation when it comes to their instrumental scores. Comparably, Pisani notes that in nineteenth-century reviews of melodramas "the occasional offhand acknowledgment, whether praise or criticism, serves to demonstrate that music was involved far more than it was usually noticed. The best melodramatic music, so it would seem, worked quietly but essentially in the background, providing mood, characterization, and reinforcing dramatic structure" (2018:101). The often-overlooked instrumental scores in my case studies fulfil the same purpose as the melodramatic music Pisani describes here. They do not call attention to themselves or distract from the plot at hand, but rather enhance a scene's action or dialogue. Instrumentals provide light and shade, guiding Gen Z toward emotional cues and

supporting the themes of the text through crucial punctuation. This emotive use of music, both in nineteenth-century melodrama and my twenty-first century case studies, becomes integral to the narrative, as much a part of the drama as spoken word and action. Perhaps the all-too-forgotten importance of melodramatic instrumentals here goes to show quite how successful they truly are.

Lyrical Soundtracks

Now, I turn to the second type of music used throughout *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*: lyrical soundtracks. Like the “characteristic music” of nineteenth-century melodrama that “attempted a literal embodiment of an actor’s physical demeanor [...] or ethos”, these songs stand out with their descriptive lyrics that relate to specific narratives or characters (Pisani, 2014:xv). As so many songs feature in these soundtracks, it can be hard to be sure how each one was selected. Speaking about this process, *Gossip Girl*’s music supervisor Alexandra Patsavas states “[e]very situation is different. Sometimes a song was scripted and lived in the cut, sometimes one of the picture editors selected a track from the compilations we sent down, and sometimes I pitched one or 100 songs until the right song emerged.” (Neumann, 2017). The process of scripting a song and allowing its lyrics and meanings to inform the text can be likened to those nineteenth-century melodramas inspired by popular songs or ballads. In my case studies, narrative meaning is drawn from a similar pool of musical inspiration, albeit a more contemporary one. Instead of leaving gaps for characters to speak through, as per the tradition of Classic Hollywood films, lyrical music in these shows is given just as much importance as dialogue. Scenes where dialogue and lyrics are woven together produce an effect similar to the “speaking through the music” technique Pisani describes in nineteenth-century melodrama (2018:99). This stage direction implies “the actor finds and situates his or her voice within the musical sounds, and that the music might be arranged or

orchestrated in such a way to allow space for the range or colours of the actor's voice to predominate." (ibid). In my case studies, this technique manifests in the way lyrical portions of songs are edited in post-production. While these lyrics play through a character's dialogue, they tend to increase or decrease in volume to enable the actor to be heard. This approach to musicality demonstrates how nineteenth-century melodramatic stage techniques can be technologically updated and repurposed for twenty-first century television. Chris Mollere, music supervisor for *The Vampire Diaries*, credits Josh Schwartz's teen drama series *The O.C.* (2003-2007) as the catalyst for lyrical soundtracks being used in this way. Mollere argues *The O.C.* changed the "format on television and showed that you could do things like have a song with lyrics play during a scene with dialogue. Before *The O.C.*, that was not an accepted thing." (Entertainment Weekly, 2013). The technique of weaving thematic lyrics through dialogue soon became a staple feature of the CW show, likely due to Schwartz's creative involvement in *Gossip Girl*. However, it is an aspect of my case studies that has often been criticised. In a 150-minute YouTube video essay titled 'THE Vampire Diaries video' with over ten million views, Jenny Nicholson describes her bemused response to the use of lyrical music in *The Vampire Diaries*.

Sometimes you're just watching a scene and you're like, "is someone listening to Imagine Dragons' 'Radioactive' in the next room? Oh, no, it's just playing at a weirdly loud volume in the scene". That's a very wordy song to play over your expository dialogue. But the best thing about the music in the show is that a lot of the time, the lyrics are comically on the nose about what's happening on screen. I can't tell if the editors have a sense of humour about this or if they genuinely think this enhances the experience. (2021, 31:40).

Firstly, Nicholson's commentary on the volume and wordiness of songs playing through dialogue is consistent with critical responses to music in Victorian melodrama. Pisani notes that by the 1860s there were "many reports of audiences being frustrated at not being able to hear or understand dialogue, which sometimes led to musical passages being stricken out or played so softly that they might as well not have been played at all." (2014:163-164). Secondly, while Nicholson ponders if *The Vampire Diaries* uses hyper-specific lyrics innocently or ironically, I argue that either way, these undoubtedly *do* enhance the viewer's experience. In general, the excesses of the melodramatic mode do not call for musical subtlety. In fact, "[a] full understanding of the genre demands an appreciation that the music is not supposed to be complex in itself, that its simplicity is an essential aspect of melodrama" (Hibberd and Nielsen, 2002:33). My earlier reading of the scene in 'Bring It On' where an emotionless Elena throws a party illustrates this point. Here, the soundtrack's recurring refrain of the phrase 'I don't care' does not allude to Elena's lack of emotion with nuance, but rather directly spells out that her humanity switch is turned off. This example is representative of many similar moments in *The Vampire Diaries* that layer "simple visual and aural effects to create more complex or intensely dramatic moments", something Hibberd and Nielsen argue is "at the heart of the aesthetic of melodrama" (ibid). Paired with the image of an emotionless Elena, as reproduced below, the music in this scene employs emotional excess over musical subtlety. Through thematic emphasis and lyrical repetition, the show's soundtrack enables Gen Z girls to read Elena's mind and connect her emotions, or lack thereof, with their own.



Fig. 8 Elena throws an impromptu party in ‘Bring It On’.

“Channelling my inner Blair Waldorf”

Music used to soundtrack *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* holds not only narrative significance, but also personal significance in the lives of girls. By featuring popular or up-and-coming artists of the late 2000s to mid-2010s, these soundtracks originally helped inform the music taste of a generation. In the comments section of a 2019 Reddit post titled ‘Gossip Girl had such good music every single season!’, numerous users share their favourite musical moments from the show. Sabrxna554, for example, enthusiastically writes, “I literally have a playlist with every song that was played, and I discovered so much more through the show!” (2019). Over time, certain songs have become synonymous with *Gossip Girl*, such as ‘Whatcha Say’ by Jason Derulo, used to soundtrack “the most dramatic Thanksgiving meal in history” in the season 3 episode ‘The Treasure of Serena Madre’ (TV Fanatic, 2017). In the tradition of popular nineteenth-century

melodramas whose sheet music “was sometimes even published”, in 2010 a soundtrack album compiling sixteen tracks from the first season of *The Vampire Diaries* was released on Virgin Records (Pisani, 2018:95). Additionally, from 2014-2017, *The Vampire Diaries*’ music supervisor used social media platform Twitter to share his musical selections with fans. Mollere would regularly tweet lists of song titles and artists with each episode that aired, making this music accessible to the show’s audience of girls whose fandom existed significantly online.

Although the soundtracks of *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* might now appear relatively dated to younger Gen Z girls, impulses toward melodramatic music persist in their playlists inspired by these shows. Online streaming services like Spotify and Apple Music enable girls to search for, compile, and follow, such playlists. Typing keywords related to my case studies into the Spotify search bar brings up pages of similar-looking results: most feature cover art as a visual reminder of the creator’s favourite character or romantic pairing (notably often Chuck and Blair or Damon and Elena). Here, musical selections from these shows’ lyrical soundtracks are combined with more recent songs personally selected by the individual. Some songs appear to have been chosen for their appropriate lyrics, like many pre-existing soundtrack choices, while others seem to fit sonically with their individual aesthetics. These playlists can be mood-evoking (see ‘Gossip Girl party vibes’ and ‘Sad Vampire Diaries songs’), or aspirational (‘Channelling my inner Blair Waldorf’ and ‘Wishing I was Elena Gilbert’). The latter suggests a merging of fictional narrative with the viewer’s personal life and can be understood as an attempt to soundtrack her own experiences with melodramatic music. The ability to curate and personalise such playlists offers Gen Z girls a sense of creative agency over these characters and their diegetic worlds. This process is reminiscent of Henry Jenkins’ theory of transmedia storytelling, where “elements of a

fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience.” (2007). The reinterpretation of melodrama’s narratives and aesthetics in girls’ playlists illustrates a contemporary resurfacing of melodramatic music in online spaces. Here, the soundtracks of *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* are updated for a new generation of girls through contemporary musical selections. Through technological means, melodramatic music becomes significant offscreen as well as onscreen, translating its emotive power into something personal, even downloadable, for Gen Z.

Musicality in *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* plays an instrumental role in building melodramatic emotional excess. Woven throughout these shows, instrumental scores call on nineteenth-century melodramatic techniques to establish dramatic tone and guide Gen Z girls toward important emotional cues. Prominent and appropriate lyrical soundtracks are layered underneath dialogue, echoing the effects of ‘speaking through the music’, a nineteenth-century melodramatic technique. In both my case studies, lyricism serves as a key component of their emotional excess. Lyrics offer a clear repetition of each show’s themes and provide insight into a character’s interior world. Gen Z girls are implicitly involved in their interpretation of these themes and characters through the process of transmedia storytelling demonstrated by their inspired playlists. Thus, the melodramatic fusion of musicality, dialogue, and image that characterises *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* is dispersed across different online platforms, informing the emotional lives of their Gen Z viewers.

Chapter Three: Dreams

Essentially, melodrama is a dream world inhabited by dream people and dream justice, offering audiences the fulfilment and satisfaction found only in dreams. (Booth, 1965:14).

In the nineteenth century, the publication of new works by dream theorists Voltaire, Eduard Von Hartmann, and Arthur Schopenhauer sparked a wave of literature, music, art, and theatre inspired by the creative potentials of dreaming. The publication of dream books, most often aimed at women, made symbolic dream interpretation more accessible to the general public. “Understood as a source of instructive entertainment and useful knowledge, [...] the books validated dreams as significant” and, by focusing on gendered issues such as marriage and children, “encouraged the popular opinion that dreams were oracles of future events, and that women, because of their empathy, could understand the implicit meaning best.” (Love, 2019:23). Twentieth-century psychoanalytical approaches to dreaming pioneered by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung popularised the idea that dream states might represent the unconscious mind. In ‘Psychoanalysis and Melodrama’, Peter Brooks notes “Freud called dream ‘*ein anderer Schauplatz*’, another stage, an alternative theatre where enactments happen free of waking censorship.” (2018:278). Brooks expands on Freud’s idea, suggesting “[s]tage melodrama [...] offers something very similar: a theatre in which repression can be lifted for the duration of the performance, where emotion can be spoken and acted out in its primal fullness. If that is the case, psychoanalysis does not merely appear melodramatic: psychoanalysis and melodrama share the same aesthetic and moral goals” (ibid). In this chapter, I investigate the historical and contemporary functions of dreaming in melodrama, considering the different ways dreams are used to communicate meaning in *Gossip*

Girl and *The Vampire Diaries*. Analysing Gen Z girls' dreams inspired by these shows, I investigate the gendered connection between feminine adolescence and dreaming, arguing its significance as an agent for identity exploration.

Self-Conscious Dreaming in *Gossip Girl*

In *Gossip Girl*, the viewer is invited into Blair's Classic Hollywood-inspired dreams that appear as a recurring motif. As I explore in my earlier analysis of Blair's *My Fair Lady* dream, these sequences mirror the intertextuality of Victorian melodrama, merging recognisable images from twentieth-century cinema with twenty-first century television. As Blair moves through her dreamscapes, the characters and themes of these films become representative of her waking anxieties, building layers of cleverly selected "self-conscious intertextual references" (Stein, 2020:342). Those familiar with these cinematic reference points are invited to apply their pre-existing knowledge to Blair's narrative, thus enhancing its personal emotional resonance. *Gossip Girl* uses specific visual codes and editing techniques to mimic the aesthetics of Classic Hollywood films. By layering cinematic effects and sepia filters in post-production, these sequences stand out from the rest of the episode and indicate to the viewer that Blair is dreaming. A broken film reel effect, for example, is used to visually communicate Blair's sudden awakening from her *All About Eve*-inspired dream in 'Enough About Eve', season 3 episode 6. Comparably, both this dream and Blair's *My Fair Lady* dream in 'New Haven Can Wait' feature a noticeably narrower aspect ratio than is standard for the show. In *Gossip Girl: Transmedia Technologies*, Louisa Stein analyses *Gossip Girl*'s use of digital media and new technologies as a mode of audience engagement. Discussing the show's visual intertextuality, she argues,

This playful visual imagery layers various indicators of ‘pastness’ in media, collapsing them into a collective aesthetic of nostalgia and emotion conveyed through form. At the same time, the aesthetic play interrupts the series’ realism (such as it is) with highly reflexive mediation; that is, the moment calls attention to *Gossip Girl*’s status as television by layering its contemporary televisual brand of melodramatic realism with codes of previous media forms. (Stein, 2020:341).

Through their intertextuality and transmediality, Blair’s dream sequences become emblematic of *Gossip Girl*’s melodrama. They embrace the potentials of television as a visual medium through which multiple media forms can be combined. While it would be presumptuous to assume the show’s Gen Z viewership lack the cultural capital to appreciate the cinematic references within these sequences, it is also worth acknowledging that this source material is not universal. I argue that, although a certain amount of prior familiarity might enhance the emotional impact of these references, Blair’s dreams are still able to communicate a lot to those lacking this knowledge. Viewers are invited to appreciate their excessive stylisation, including lavish set design and detailed costuming. Even structurally, these sequences come as a welcome change to the often-predictable routine of a *Gossip Girl* episode. Therefore, even without recognising that Blair’s dream in ‘New Haven Can Wait’ parodies *My Fair Lady*, this sequence still enriches the episode’s plot and communicates the competitive dynamic at play between Serena and Blair.

Returning to my previous analysis of this scene, Blair’s *My Fair Lady* dream offers multiple interpretations. In this sequence, Blair must compete against her best friend Serena as doubled depictions of Eliza Doolittle in the 1964 musical film. As well as foreshadowing themes of

academic rivalry in the episode ahead, Blair's dream can be construed as a representation of her struggles with self-identity and social status. Rachael Love notes "[d]reams are an internal response to external stimuli, and often they are a response to conflict: conflict with another person or within oneself" (2019:26). *Gossip Girl* communicates both forms of conflict through visual emblems and cinematic intertextual references. On the surface, themes of competition in Blair's dream seem prompted by external stimuli in her waking life, namely, her feud with Serena. But, as she comes to reveal after hitting her frenemy with a shoe, Blair's real problem is with herself: she feels "sick of always looking like Darth Vader next to Sunshine Barbie" (S2E06). Blair's verbal confession and her visually drab appearance as the poor version of Doolittle work to illustrate the depth of her own insecurities. Her dream therefore reveals more about her self-perception than it does her rivalry with Serena. Blair believes her intelligence deems her deserving of attending Yale, a place where access remains, in theory, limited, even to the most affluent. While Serena is sought after by Yale for her it-girl status and the media attention her attendance would bring, Blair's place is dependent on how well she performs in her interview with Berube. This is something Blair is unaccustomed to, as her influence and social position mean she has never had to truly compete for what she wants in life.

Extending beyond the fictional limitations of Blair's narrative, her dream effectively communicates the anxieties Gen Z girls might face in applying to university and attending interviews. This process is an intimidating one, however Blair's open exploration of such concerns invites the feminine adolescent to connect with, and feel understood by, this character and her fears. Having a shared experience with an onscreen protagonist played by an influential actress can be emotionally validating for many girls. In her analysis of Bella's anxiety dreams in the

Twilight Saga, Kapurch explains how melodramatic dreaming holds this potential for identification and validation. She argues the dreams, or nightmares, of melodramatic protagonists often “validate the gravity of [...] coming-of-age female experiences” for girls (Kapurch, 2016:140). Furthermore, “[c]onsidering dreams as a melodramatic convention, then, encourages a reading that takes seriously the emotional angst associated with such issues of adolescence.” (124). While Bella’s nightmares communicate the feminine adolescent’s fear of aging, Blair’s nightmares concerned with university admission speak to specific contemporary pressures faced by many Gen Z girls. Representations of anxieties pertaining to school, friendship, and social status are realistic worries for these girls, and can often lead to feelings of isolation or depression. In *Gossip Girl*, Blair’s melodramatic dreaming creates an opportunity for the emotional life of the generally powerless feminine adolescent to be validated, cultivating a sense of empathy and demanding her fears be taken seriously.

Prophetic Justice in *The Vampire Diaries*

In *The Vampire Diaries*, prophetic dreams are often used to warn characters of potential danger and foreshadow the future. ‘Original Sin’, season 5 episode 3, begins with one of these dreams. The episode opens on Stefan, who has been missing all summer, breaking into a bar on Route 29 and feeding on a human bartender. This behaviour is extremely concerning, as he is known for his strict diet of animal blood and refusal to feed on humans. After telling his victim to run, Stefan steps outside where the sun is rising, but, being a vampire, this sunlight causes his body to burn. His screams of pain wake Elena, signalling to the viewer that the previous sequence was her dream. She confides in Damon that she senses his brother is in grave danger. Then, overhearing this conversation, Elena’s doppelganger Katherine enters the bedroom and declares, “Route 29, Jo’s

bar. I think I had the exact same dream.” (S5E03). The phenomenon of synchronised dreaming was something that intrigued dream researchers in the nineteenth century. “Psychologists speculated that thoughts had a basis in invisible vibrations or waves that acted upon the brain; if these waves did not respect the boundaries of the individual skull, they might communicate from one mind to another”, shares Dr Alicia Puglionesi (2017). In *The Vampire Diaries*, perhaps it is the doppelgangers’ supernatural connection that sparks their shared psychic vision. Katherine and Elena’s dreams encourage them to track down Jo, Stefan’s victim, who provides information leading them to him. Sure enough, Stefan was in danger: he had been captured by a powerful witch and was being tortured with sunlight. As Kapurch explains, “[n]ightmares and vampires are Gothic remnants that often coexist in the same melodramatic narrative; they work hand in hand to unearth anxiety and that which is repressed by inspiring fear, awareness, and even action in the protagonist.” (2016:129). Katherine and Elena’s shared prophetic dream works to fulfil these purposes Kapurch describes, invoking fear for Stefan’s safety as well as awareness of the bar’s location and owner. It was the information received from this dream that sparked the episode’s action and meant they were able to eventually save Stefan, thereby driving the melodramatic narrative.

Supernaturally prophetic dreams play a similarly important role in the domestic melodrama *Maria Marten, or The Murder in the Red Barn*, staged from 1828 onwards. Various versions of *Maria Marten* were performed throughout the nineteenth century, but it is the anonymously published 1877 adaptation to which I refer here. In this melodrama, dreams are used to deliver information and foreshadow danger, or more specifically, death. Based on the true story of the Red Barn Murder in 1827, *Maria Marten* tells the tragic tale of a young unwed mother who plans to elope

with her lover, Squire Corder. Last sighted on her way to meet Corder at the Red Barn, Maria's parents hear nothing from their daughter for almost a year. Her mother, however, receives important information through a dream in Act Two. As the 1877 version describes, a "[s]cene opens and discovers visions, at the end of which Mrs Marten shrieks and starts up" (Kilgarrif, 1974:227). Although this stage direction does not provide specific detail about what occurs during these visions, Mrs Marten's words reveal what she saw. "Maria! My poor child is murdered!", she declares, "[y]es, foully murdered at the Red Barn!" (228). When asked how she received this information, Mrs Marten replies, "[m]y dream! My dream! [...] I saw the villain strike her down as plainly as I now see these anxious faces around me." (ibid). Upon searching the barn, Maria's body is found in the very spot her mother described. This prophetic dream therefore offers a convenient solution to the situation – one that Kilgarrif argues "represent[s] pure melodrama." (206). Speaking presumably of the news story rather than the melodrama, an 1889 article in the *Aberdeen Journal* is suspicious of the Red Barn Murder's supernatural element. "When a story like this is told, the multitude take hold of only a part of it, 'Here was a horrible murder,' they say, 'disclosed in a wonderful manner', a mother dreamt that her daughter had been made away with, and [...] the remains were found in the exact situation pointed out in the vision" (*Aberdeen Journal*, 1889:2). The article's author dismisses this narrative, arguing "to say that Corder was brought to punishment by supernatural means" would be incorrect, and, in reality, "the dream was nothing else than a repetition of the mother's waking fears" (ibid). Although it is hard to say whether the details of *Maria Marten* remain entirely accurate to the original news story, it is arguably this sense of exaggeration that transformed the tale into such a successful melodrama. To recall the words of Michael Booth quoted at the beginning of this chapter, melodrama presents a "dream world" that offers audiences "the fulfilment and satisfaction found only in dreams"

(1965:14). Realism, or accuracy, is not conducive to this dream world. What is important is that dream justice is served. At the end of *Maria Marten*, “Corder is convicted and condemned to death” and “[o]nly then could the curtain fall and would the melodrama[’s] audience let out steam and feel comfort and satisfaction.” (Hamadi, 2017:129). It is Mrs Marten’s supernaturally prophetic dream that leads to Corder’s condemnation and delivers the Manichean justice that prevails in nineteenth-century melodrama. Continuing this melodramatic narrative into the twenty-first century, the information disclosed in Katherine and Elena’s supernaturally prophetic dream in ‘Original Sin’ leads to the victory of the hero and punishment of the villain. Thus, Booth’s analogy transcends historical bounds in *The Vampire Diaries*, providing a satisfying and convenient solution to the dangers at hand. The show’s diegetic world therefore aligns with the “world of justice” Booth describes, representing a place “where after immense struggle and torment good triumphs over and punishes evil, and virtue receives tangible material rewards” (1965:14).

Dreaming of Damon: Girl Fans and Fantasies

Returning to Reddit to research viewer responses to dreaming in *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*, I came across various threads in which girls share personal dreams about these shows and their characters. The recurring nature of these dreams can often be linked to frequent viewing patterns. Replying to a 2021 Reddit thread titled ‘Has anyone ever dreamt about Gossip Girl?’, user Lil_miss_Sunshine08 briefly describes her recurring dreams about the series.

Yes yes when I first saw the og I was binging it like crazy, so naturally I dreamt of it quiet (sic) often back then I don't remember what the dreams were though. (2021).

Her use of ‘binging’ here refers to viewing multiple episodes of a TV show in one sitting. This recent phenomenon has been encouraged by streaming services like Netflix, where auto-play features set the standard viewing pattern for users. According to Deloitte’s Digital Democracy Survey from 2016, research showed that in the U.S. “87% of Gen Z (ages 14-19) have binge-watched video content” (Spangler, 2017). Lil_miss_Sunshine08’s comment implies her binging of ‘the OG’ (a term commonly used by fans to differentiate the original *Gossip Girl* from its 2021 revival) means it was ‘natural’ she often dreamed of the show. Sleep expert David Cohn confirms this suspicion, commenting “dream content includes aspects of recent past experiences, so it wouldn't be unusual for characters from recently watched shows to appear in dream form” (*Courier Post*, 2019). The recurrent aspect of Lil_miss_Sunshine08’s *Gossip Girl* dreams illustrates the significance of the show to her waking life. An emotional investment in its narrative world is therefore understandable, as adolescent psychiatrist Gayani DeSilva explains; “[w]hen watching a TV program, the areas of the brain that are activated are the same as when experiencing a live event. We get drawn into story lines, become attached to characters and truly care about outcomes of conflicts.” (NBC News, 2017). Dream accounts like Lil_miss_Sunshine08’s evidence the potential emotional impact of *Gossip Girl* on Gen Z girls, her inspired dreams highlighting an unconscious longing for further melodramatic narratives.

In *The Vampire Diaries*, vampire characters possess a supernatural ability that enables them to enter other people’s dreams and alter the outcome. This is referred to as dream manipulation, the functions of which can be likened to the actual state of lucid dreaming. Lucid dreaming occurs when the individual is aware they are dreaming and possesses the ability to control the narrative

of their dream. When studying the dream manipulation page of The Vampire Diaries Wiki, a website that recounts the show's supernatural lore in acute detail, I came across a comment section. Among fans discussing the page's information was a comment from User 93.186.31.98 who shares a personal encounter with dream manipulation.

Last night I had an erotic dream about making love with Damon in his bathtub :) and when I woke up I saw my windows open and the wind blowing. I think Damon manipulated my dreams!! ('Dream Manipulation', 2013).

The sexual nature of this user's encounter with Damon speaks to the visceral, bodily involvement the melodramatic mode offers girls. In Linda Williams' *Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess* the author draws a connection between the sensational body genres of pornography, horror, and melodrama. "Pornography is today more often deemed excessive for its violence than for its sex, while horror films are excessive in their displacement of sex onto violence", Williams writes, "[i]n contrast, melodramas are deemed excessive for their gender – and sex – linked pathos, for their naked displays of emotion" (1991:2-3). This excess is intrinsically linked to femininity, seeing as "[i]n each of these genres the bodies of women figured on the screen have functioned traditionally as the primary embodiments of pleasure, fear, and pain. (4). User 93.186.31.98's erotic dream about Damon combines these body genres, mixing the excess of melodrama with the horror of vampirism and a pornographic subject matter. While her inclusion of a smiling emoticon and multiple exclamation marks implies this dream manipulation experience was a positive one, it is difficult to gauge the sincerity of her final confession: 'I think Damon manipulated my dreams!!'. Whether User 93.186.31.98 truly believes in this vampiric method of dream intervention or is

simply remarking on a humorous connection between the show's diegetic world and her own life is unclear. Either way, her dream reaffirms an idea that Kapurch explores in her analysis of *Twilight*-inspired dreams shared by girls in online forums. The idea that "[g]irls' vampire-themed dreams and fantasies [...] illustrate how Gothic remnants are pleasurable and empowering forms of expression in the melodramatic mode" appears to remain true for Gen Z girls (2016:136). Indeed, User 93.186.31.98's description invokes a tangible sense of longing for the gothic melodramatic world of *The Vampire Diaries*. Feminine pleasure is evoked by the dreamer's excitement at the sight of Gothic imagery (open windows and blowing wind) and her explicit desire for Damon's body. Melodramatic dreaming therefore offers Gen Z girls the potential to explore sexual fantasies without consequence. Furthermore, online spaces empower these girls to divulge their emotional experiences and openly explore their sexuality as part of a community.

Gen Z girls' dreams inspired by *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* also indicate intriguing approaches to self-identity. Just as Blair's dreams combine her personal life with cinematic intertextual references, these girls layer their own lives with the experiences of melodramatic protagonists. This effect can be seen in the responses to a fan-written question on FanPop asking users '[h]ave your recent dreams included Damon Salvatore?' (2020). A still of Damon smirking is included below this question, prompting many enthusiastically affirmative responses. FanPop user RuhiSalvatore, whose username implies a love for the vampire brothers, offers a particularly detailed response.

It was kinda sweet. It's very rare that I have lucid dreams, but this one's for Damon. Damon had been quite a regular character in my dreams since I started watching the vampire

diaries, way back in 2017. But he always had played the 'bad guy' like he had, in the beginning of the series. It's quite recently, that I have been kind of romantically linked with him in my dreams. So, in this dream, which I had two days ago, I was dating Stefan. And we had like a plan of spending the weekend together at the Salvatores House. But he cheated on me and was with another girl and I was very hurt and ended up in the road, not knowing where to go. I got hit by a car and got badly injured (like lying in a pool of blood). And that's when Damon comes in. He picks me up in his arms and carries me away from the road. [...] Damon stayed the night with me in the hospital and looked after me. That's when I realised that I loved him more than Stefan. (Do I sound like Elena?). (FanPop, 2020).

In this account, RuhiSalvatore details the regularity of Damon's appearances in her dreams which coincide with her viewing of *The Vampire Diaries*. Her words evoke a sense of melodramatic performativity; Damon is described as a 'regular character' who 'played the bad guy' in these dreams, alluding explicitly to his fictional status. However, what is particularly revealing about this specific dream is the way Ruhi appears to take on the life of Elena. The dreamer describes a car accident from which she is rescued by Damon, a scenario echoed in 'Bloodlines', season 1 episode 11 of *The Vampire Diaries*. In this episode, Elena discovers a photo of Katherine in Stefan's belongings and, having never seen her doppelganger before, leaves in confused tears. While driving away, she accidentally crashes her car on Wickery Bridge where Damon appears to save her from the wreckage. He carries Elena to safety, just like the dreamed Damon of Ruhi's description. Although Ruhi's use of the personal pronoun 'I' indicates a sense of self-identity within her dream, it is hard to deny the narrative similarities here. The way the dreamer is

romantically involved with, and torn between, the Salvatore brothers also recalls Elena's journey; like Ruhi, she begins the series pining after Stefan but eventually finds herself falling for Damon. Ruhi's dreamlike merging of Elena's life – her love interests, her town, her experiences – with her own identity recalls the feminine doubling I explore further in Chapter Four. Significantly, her closing rhetorical question '[d]o I sound like Elena?' indicates a sense of self-awareness regarding these parallels and gestures toward Gen Z girls' identification with, or desire for, this character's melodramatic world.

RuhiSalvatore's dream can alternatively be understood as an attempt to rewrite Elena's story, and by association, her character's relative passivity. Here, the lucidity of Ruhi's dream becomes important – as an active figure in her own dream, she is able to take control of her, or Elena's, narrative. *The Vampire Diaries*' notion of dream manipulation becomes relevant again here as Ruhi is granted the same supernatural powers as her vampiric counterparts. Returning to Rancière's argument that the spectator is inherently active in bringing their own "desires, and experiences" to the spectacle, the dreamer, in combining her personal life with the experiences of fictional protagonists like Elena, becomes implicitly active (Smyth, 2022:10). Dream accounts from girls like Ruhi illustrate the fantastical possibilities offered by dreaming in teen melodrama. In these dream states, Gen Z girls are afforded the permission to explore, and identify with, different characters and scenarios without facing any repercussions in their waking lives. Fictional depictions of dreaming, such as dream manipulation, showcase girl protagonists who have agency over their dreamscapes, thereby offering Gen Z girls this emotional potential in their own lives.

Dreams depicted in *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* offer an array of interpretations pertaining to anxiety, prophecy, and self-identity. In *Gossip Girl*, cinematic dream sequences exhibit the inherent intertextuality of the melodramatic mode, using visual cues to evoke emotional responses from the viewer. The anxieties communicated through Blair's dreams act as a form of validation for the disempowered Gen Z girl whose fears are not taken seriously. In *The Vampire Diaries*, Katherine and Elena's prophetic dreams serve the same melodramatic purpose as Mrs Marten's in *Maria Marten*, inciting action within the narrative and delivering dream justice. Viewer responses obtained from online forums demonstrate that Gen Z girls, often encouraged by the effects of bingeing, report recurring dreams inspired by *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*. The fictional notion of dream manipulation presented by the latter adds supernatural implications to the act of lucid dreaming for these girls, resulting in pleasurable Gothic fantasies. Dreaming about teen melodrama affords Gen Z girls emotional agency. These dream states carve out safe spaces in which to explore matters of personal and sexual identity, ultimately allowing for emotional release under the melodramatic mode.

Chapter Four: Doubling

Born of ancient myths and legends, the figure of the double has long haunted melodrama across stage and screen. The double has traditionally been interpreted as an evil omen, most often taking the form of a paranormal apparition or a wicked twin. In the nineteenth century, popular culture's fascination with the supernatural was fed by depictions of the double in Gothic literature. Many novellas from this era, such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), were adapted for the stage, with their authors doubling as playwrights. As a sub-genre co-dependent with the Gothic novel (both "arise from the same 'early' Romantic moment and 'nourish one another'"), gothic melodrama bore a similar interest in doubling (Brooks, 1976:17 cited Kapurch, 2016:121). The figure of the double prevailed across nineteenth-century visual and literary cultures, with theatrical melodrama at the intersection of the two. During the mid-twentieth century, the theme of doubling reappeared in screen melodrama, a topic Lucy Fischer examines in 'Two-Faced Women: The 'Double' in Women's Melodrama of the 1940s'. In this text, Fischer uses feminist theory to analyse depictions of feminine doubles, particularly twins, in *Cobra Woman* (1944), *The Dark Mirror* (1946), and *A Stolen Life* (1946). She argues opposing qualities categorise these characters as either traditionally feminine or traditionally masculine coded. However, as the author importantly notes, these distinctions in fact "do not represent real poles of the female psyche but rather two opposing male views of woman" (Fischer, 1983:34). Fischer's research into feminine doubling in screen melodrama has informed much of my understanding in this field, and I refer to her work, particularly the good girl and bad girl archetypes, throughout this chapter.

The CW's Dual Beings

Woman is, in essence, a dual being. Can such an assertion be contested? [...] moreover, because of this essential duality she belongs, of her very nature to that world of ghosts and vampires and demons and monsters [...] that we call the realm of the fantastic. (Lenne, 1979:31, cited Fischer, 1983:25).

Gerard Lenne's words, however generalising, speak to the emphasis on doubling in girls' lives. Feminine duality can be interpreted through theories like the Madonna-whore complex, Fischer argues, a reductive dichotomy through which patriarchal society has traditionally forced women into doubling roles (1983:39). This Freudian theory has historically been used to box women into opposing categories of chastity or immorality, a concept that aligns with the depiction of the good girl and bad girl in 1940s screen melodrama. As Fischer notes, Lenne's comment on women's' duality can also be interpreted in a more physical sense – often the biological possibility to conceive a child can present another form of doubling in a girl's life (ibid). It is worth recognising that this doubling did not originate with the characters and audiences of '40s melodrama. In the nineteenth century, married women were expected to perform the role of 'Angel in the House', a phrase taken from the title of Coventry Patmore's 1854 poem. This role meant "she was expected to sacrifice all for the emotional, moral, and physical well-being of her husband and children." (Vicinus, 1981:133). It is therefore "little wonder that rebellion and self-sacrifice recur so frequently in popular melodrama; they speak to a recurrent underlying emotional tension in women's lives" (ibid). Reflecting on this long history, it makes sense that depictions of the feminine double in fiction, particularly melodrama, are often so appealing to girls; melodramatic

doubling is grounded in a sense of empathy or understanding among them. As “a reflection of the contradictions in their own lives”, melodrama presents girls with opportunities for self-identification (132). These doubling narratives also seem to produce a desire to act out the role of the preferred double, a phenomenon I will explore further towards the end of this chapter.

The essentially dual vampire of Lenne’s description recalls the feminine doubling represented in *The Vampire Diaries* by doppelgangers Katherine and Elena. Both characters are portrayed 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” (McMahon-Coleman, 2015:280). Nina Dobrev’s portrayal of Katherine and Elena is reminiscent of Charles Kean’s doubled performance in Boucicault’s *The Corsican Brothers*, a gothic melodrama first performed in 1852. Adapted from Dumas’ 1844 novella, this melodrama tells the story of Louis and Fabien, two identical twins who “share a psychic connection: they avow that ‘if one should ever be near death, he would appear in spirit to alert and summon the other’” (Pisani, 2012:30, cited Urban, 2019:24). Through clever use of individual storylines and meticulous stage trickery, both roles were played by Kean, who was recognised at the time as a celebrity actor. Body doubles and trapdoors were employed in carefully planned sequences to give the illusion of both twins appearing onstage together. Boucicault’s script “cleverly calls attention to the gimmick in the text”, Eliza Urban notes, and “his characters comment on the ‘extraordinary resemblance’ between the twins” (1852:100-101, cited 2019:24). In fact, “[a]t one point, Fabien even explains his connection to his sibling by stating, ‘Louis and myself are one’” (ibid). The production focused on “a visual (and, to some extent, aural and tactile) approach to encountering the spectral with the aid of technology.” (25). In *The Vampire Diaries*, nineteenth-century stage trickery gives way to twenty-first century camera technology that

effectively enables Dobrev to share scenes with herself. Using a similar method to Kean, Dobrev acted alongside a body double, a performer essentially doubling the role of the doppelganger. She studied two separate scripts and would shoot each scene twice: once as Katherine and a second time as Elena. In the editing process, split-screen technology was used to position the doppelgangers side by side and in conversation with one-another. The mirroring between Kean and Dobrev's doubled performances transcends their individual performance contexts in demonstrating that melodrama has always intersected with, and profited from, the development of new technologies.

Despite being portrayed by the same actress, Katherine and Elena could not be more different. Their opposing personalities symbolise the moral extremities of good and evil in *The Vampire Diaries* and embody the Manichean values of melodrama. The doppelgangers' relationship is reminiscent of nineteenth-century Gothic fiction, particularly the twins in Clemence Housman's *The Were-Wolf* (1896) who symbolise good and evil. Housman's titular werewolf can also be read as an allegory for feminine doubling, transforming from a woman into a wolf at the stroke of midnight. In the early seasons of *The Vampire Diaries*, Elena's compassionate nature, associated with her humanity, defines her as inherently good, while Katherine's unruliness, associated with her vampirism, defines her as inherently evil. In *The Literature of the Second Self*, C. F. Keppler argues this "oppositeness is the main link that unites" doubled figures, "for it is the complementary oppositeness of the two halves of the being whom they comprise, a being sometimes suggesting the total human personality" (1972:11-12). This oppositeness is expressed visually through Katherine and Elena's outward appearances; Katherine's big curls symbolise her larger-than-life attitude while Elena's pin-straight hair corresponds to her more strait-laced manner. As in

nineteenth-century melodrama, costuming is also used to distinguish between these characters. Historically, signifiers like colour and style of dress helped communicate the roles of the heroine and villainess to audiences. It was common for the Victorian heroine to wear popular fashions of the period in light colours, while the villainess was dressed much more extravagantly in darker shades, as black was seen as “the villain’s colour” (Booth, 1965:20). In *The Vampire Diaries*, Katherine’s darkly glamorous outfits echo Booth’s description of the “raven-haired villainess [...] dressed gorgeously” (ibid). Also popular in the 1860s was the red-haired villainess, whose image resurfaces in other twenty-first century teen vampire melodramas, such as the *Twilight* Saga. In this franchise, Bella’s natural brunette hair is starkly contrasted by Victoria’s fiery curls that paint her as a vampiric villainess. In ‘Melodrama’s Gothic Remnants: Nightmares and Vampire-Girl Doubles’, Kapurch argues Victoria can be read as “a paradoxical foil” to protagonist Bella, much like Katherine is to Elena in *The Vampire Diaries* (2016:132). Like Bella, Elena wears innocently earth-toned, girl-next-door style clothes that indicate her role as melodramatic heroine. Throughout *The Vampire Diaries*’ second and third seasons, the doppelgangers’ personalities remain oppositional. This means that when Elena is at her most demure, Katherine is wicked and untamed, continuing “the legacy of nineteenth-century female villainy as unpredictable and out of control” (129). However, in later seasons their relationship develops into a more complex affair. Katherine and Elena’s aesthetic and temperamental oppositeness does not remain a constant as their characters begin to merge, forming an arguably more vicious dynamic.

As previously established, in season 4 of *The Vampire Diaries*, Elena undergoes her physical transition into a vampire and eventually flips her humanity switch. Her physical appearance changes drastically to reflect this shift in emotional state. Notably, Elena swaps her conservative

t-shirts and jeans for an assortment of vest tops, lacy party dresses and leather jackets, all in darker shades than the viewer is used to seeing her wear. If Elena's new style feels familiar, these are the kind of outfits Katherine has been wearing for the past three seasons. In addition to her change of style, Elena also begins curling her hair to resemble Katherine's signature hairstyle. These changes are particularly visible during the diner scene in 'American Gothic' where Elena disguises herself as Katherine by mimicking her hair, makeup, outfit, and vocal inflections. In the reproduced image below, the doppelgangers can be seen swapping clothing.



Fig. 9 Katherine removes her leather jacket for Elena in 'American Gothic'.

Returning to my previous analysis of this scene, the element of disguise between Katherine and Elena introduces another form of doubling into their doppelganger dynamic. Elena's rejection of her only defining features as Katherine's inverse – her straight hair, sensible clothing, soft voice,

humanity and, therefore, emotions – means the once oppositional doppelgangers have become more similar than ever before. At the same time, Katherine is stripped of her visual markers as villainess. She becomes more passive, essentially swapping roles with Elena. Thus, in ‘American Gothic’, the doppelgangers’ physical and temperamental transformations disrupt the uniting oppositeness that Keppler claims suggests the total human personality. Having supernaturally transitioned into a vampire and turned off her human emotions, there is no humanity left in Elena. The doubling relationship between her and Katherine has shifted, blurring the lines between the melodramatic heroine and villainess.

While *The Vampire Diaries* presents canonically supernatural doppelgangers, themes of melodramatic doubling can be identified more symbolically in *Gossip Girl*. Frenemies Serena and Blair can be read as contemporary examples of the good girl and bad girl of 1940s screen melodrama that Fischer investigates. To paraphrase, the good girl is the double most often preferred by male characters. She is naturally passive, kind, and modest, embodying traditionally feminine traits (Fischer, 1983:32). She is contrasted by the more agential bad girl, who is competitive, intelligent, and boldly sexual, and whose traits are associated with traditional ideas of masculinity (ibid). For, as Fischer argues, “if man can only see in woman his opposite, then it is not surprising that a female who dares to share some of ‘his’ qualities (intelligence, strength, eroticism) might be viewed as suspect or unnatural.” (34). The bad girl in melodrama is villainised because “patriarchy rejects the allegedly ‘masculine’ woman – the woman who claims her total human range and refuses to be entirely ‘non-male’” (ibid).

In *Gossip Girl*, golden girl Serena conjures images of the good double while the scheming Blair lends herself more to her malicious counterpart. This dynamic becomes highly apparent in ‘New Haven Can Wait’, season 2 episode 6. Here, Serena and Blair portray two different dreamed versions of Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*. The duplication of this role – the splitting of Doolittle’s different personas into two characters – is already an act of doubling in itself, one that is extended further as the characters are taken on by these two girls. Visually, it is apparent that Serena wears a more traditionally feminine style. She is dressed in a white, figure-hugging gown adorned with bows, connoting ideas of purity and youth traditionally associated with the heroines of nineteenth-century melodrama. Beneath her decadent hat, Serena’s face of makeup is framed fashionably by long, blonde locks of hair. Her body language and facial expressions in this sequence align her with Fischer’s description of the good girl. When she delivers Blair’s line with perfect pronunciation and confidence, Dean Berube kisses Serena’s gloved hand. As seen in the image reproduced below, she responds by smiling and laughing, the picture of feminine elegance. As the good girl, Serena receives male validation as a reward for her femininity, unlike Blair, to whom Berube folds his arms and sighs. Serena’s presentation can be likened to the character of Ruth in the 1946 melodrama *The Dark Mirror*, who is “sweet” and “exudes a warmth that is lacking in her twin sister”, or in Serena’s case, her best friend (Fischer, 1983:29).



Fig. 10 Serena as high-society Eliza Doolittle in 'New Haven Can Wait'.

By contrast, Blair's characterisation in this dream sequence depicts her as the masculine-coded bad girl. Like the character of Pat in *A Stolen Life* (1946), Blair is shown to be "highly competitive, never an attractive property in a woman." (Fischer, 1983:29). This unrelenting competitiveness manifests in the fear Blair's dream represents: the potential of losing Yale to the less intelligent Serena. It is established in this episode that Blair believes Serena is not smart enough to attend the elite university, unlike herself. Intelligence is another characteristic typical of the bad girl double, represented in screen melodrama by Terry in *The Dark Mirror* who is referred to as "the smart one" of the two sisters (ibid). It is interesting to note Blair's name here, whose unisex associations mirror a pattern Fischer describes. She argues, "it seems no accident that the bad sisters' nicknames are frequently androgynous, and could be associated with men" (32). Contrasting ideas about femininity are also explored in this sequence through physicality. Blair's body language is traditionally unladylike, her frowns and screeches juxtaposing Serena's unwavering grace. Blair's hair, a feature often recognised as a symbol of traditional femininity, is shorn, and she wears minimal makeup, even appearing to have dirt smeared on her face like Doolittle in the film. Finally,

as seen in the still below, Blair's dowdy costume in dark colours visually associates her with Booth's description of the melodramatic villain. It is unsurprising that there is a history behind these opposing roles Serena and Blair fill; "[m]elodrama, after all, encourages us to view characters in moral terms" (Mayer, 2018:233). Expressed in 'New Haven Can Wait' through exaggerated physical appearance and body language, Serena and Blair represent modern embodiments of the feminine doubles Fischer identifies, themselves reproductions of nineteenth-century melodrama's heroines and villainesses.



Fig. 11 Blair as street urchin Eliza Doolittle in 'New Haven Can Wait'.

“Why is Blair more popular than Serena?”

Traditionally, melodrama's audiences have been encouraged to sympathise with the good girl, or heroine. This strategy is “entirely in keeping with the literature of the double, in which both author and reader tend to identify with the more naive of the two split selves” (Fischer, 1983:30). Therefore, according to Fischer's logic, it should be Serena and Elena whom the viewer favours. Despite this, recent activity in online fandom discussion threads suggests Gen Z girls widely prefer

Blair and Katherine. Browsing Reddit, I discovered a 2021 discussion thread titled ‘Why is Blair more popular than Serena???’ whose responses support this argument. In this thread, *Gossip Girl* fans explain why they prefer the scheming Blair to her sweet best friend. More detailed responses pay tribute to Blair’s “wit, her iconic lines, her confidence and ambition, her impeccable fashion sense and humor” (2021). However, it is Reddit user SadisticDance, active in the site’s *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* communities, who simplistically summarises this argument: “[s]he’s interesting. Serena is kind of objectively boring.” (ibid). Likewise, fans of *The Vampire Diaries* seem to prefer the villainous Katherine over Elena, according to a 2018 Reddit thread titled ‘Katherine or Elena, who do you like more and why?’. Tellingly, user Teenage_Runaway8 argues, “Elena is good but she can get really annoying at times whereas Kathrine is not really good but she knows what she wants and she goes for it” (2018). Both SadisticDance and Teenage_Runaway8’s statements suggest that Gen Z girls might dismiss their moral values to root for more agential and active characters. From the responses in these threads, it seems the exploits of the villainess provide a more cathartic and subversive viewing experience for these girls to indulge in. As heroines, Elena and Serena are somewhat passive creatures, making them ‘objectively boring’ to watch. Katherine and Elena, on the other hand, make for much more gripping television as active characters. The bad girl ‘knows what she wants and goes for it’, which in turn makes her more ‘interesting’ to Gen Z girls.

The dynamic presented by this set of viewer responses is reminiscent of the shift from hero to anti-hero in Victorian melodrama and the emergence of the villainess in the 1860s. Popular villainess roles included Lady Audley in Colin Henry Hazlewood’s 1863 melodrama *Lady Audley’s Secret*, an adaptation of Mary Elizabeth Bradden’s 1862 sensation novel of the same name. Often, the

emotional complexities of nineteenth-century literary villainesses got lost in the process of adapting these roles for the melodramatic stage. In ‘Unlicensed Adaptation: Agency and Subversion in Lady Audley's Secret’, Catherine Quirk explores this concept. She argues, “Hazlewood adhered strictly to established melodramatic conventions, especially in his rigid delineation of good and evil [...], depicting Lady Audley as the sole villain of the piece (2018). Exaggerated villainess roles such as these established subversive depictions of femininity onstage and offered nineteenth-century actresses the opportunity to display their full emotive abilities as performers. In fact, parallels can be drawn between Lady Audley and the twenty-first century villainesses of my case studies, in particular, *Gossip Girl*'s Blair Waldorf. Much like Audley, who notoriously pushes her first husband into a well at the end of Act One, Blair ends an argument with Serena by callously pushing her into a fountain in ‘Belles de Jour’, the first episode of season 4. Martha Vicinus notes early melodramas often included such a “figure, bordering on villainy, who embodied female rebellion. This permitted the author to leave the heroine an unsullied angel while still portraying women’s energy and anger.” (1981:133). In *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*, Blair and Katherine undoubtedly embody this feminine rebellion. The latter’s energy and anger manifests in her vampiric abilities, creating refreshing and even cathartic action for girl viewers.

In her 1998 book *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls’ Cultures*, Sherrie Inness argues most adolescent girls in the U.S. “have relatively little social power; they cannot vote; they are typically dependent on their parents; they form a culture where certain rules about what is acceptable behavior for girls are reinforced whether a girl is seven or seventeen.” (19-20). Although many strides have been taken in the fields of social justice and feminism since Inness was writing that should not go unrecognised, I argue that over two decades later, most of

these factors remain true, and are also applicable to girls living in the UK. Gen Z girls, particularly those under eighteen, still lack power and agency in contemporary society. “How can this be”, Sales asks, “when girls are graduating from college in higher numbers than ever before, when they’re becoming leaders in their chosen fields in greater numbers?” (2016:21). As I discussed previously, Sales’ 2016 study exposes the contemporary adolescent experience of Gen Z girls and the changing environment in which they are coming of age. She argues social media plays a larger role in these girls’ lives than other generations may realise. “The culture of social media churns away, seeming to pay very little attention, so far, to the protestations of feminists or anyone who objects to its troubling aspects”, Sales writes, “[a]nd girls suffer. On a daily, sometimes hourly, basis, on their phones, they encounter things which are offensive and potentially damaging to their well-being and sense of self-esteem” (20-21). Matters such as these often go unreported; according to one girl interviewed by Sales, “[s]exism has filtered into new arenas that adults don’t see or understand because they’re not using social media the same way” (22). Taking the social position of Gen Z girls in contemporary society into consideration, the appeal of the melodramatic villainess becomes clearer. For the disempowered Gen Z girl, agential characters like Blair and Katherine offer a fantasy of power and confidence lacking in her own life. In this instance, Katherine’s vampiric abilities might become additionally appealing to her. These offer a form of physical empowerment: the capacity for heightened strength, speed, senses, and durability, among other factors. Katherine’s powers play into intriguing depictions and fantasies of supernatural feminine adolescence that may entice Gen Z girls. Looking into vampire doubles in *Twilight*, Kapurch notes the validating effects of their supernatural powers and ability to evade coming-of-age pressures.

Female vampires [...] are freed from those fears; their powerful, immortal bodies are free to explore all sorts of emotions and experiences human girls cannot do without considerable social risk. It is no wonder, then, that girl readers take pleasure in dreaming about the female villain's perspective. (2016:140-141).

Although Kapurch refers to the act of reading here, the popular perspective of the bad girl double is something both *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* take advantage of in their television adaptations. Stylised screen techniques, such as Blair's dream sequences, communicate these alternate perspectives. They invite the viewer to see life through the lens of Blair's favourite films, hinting at an inner world we are not privy to with her good-girl counterpart. In *The Vampire Diaries*, the villainess' perspective is introduced through voiceover techniques. For a brief period in the show's fifth season, Katherine takes over Elena's body as a supernatural passenger. Instead of hearing Elena's usual narration as she writes in her titular diary, this time the viewer hears Katherine's thoughts. "Dear Diary, I love my life. Seriously, becoming Elena Gilbert is the best thing that has ever happened to me. I finally have everything I ever wanted. I'm young, healthy, gorgeous...everyone loves me!" (S5E13). Through this voiceover, Katherine takes control of, and subverts, the show's traditional structures of storytelling. She acknowledges Elena's good-girl qualities and performs them to the show's diegetic world, as well as the world of the spectator, for her own benefit. Like the melodramatic villainesses that came before her, Katherine engages the Gen Z viewer with her unique bad-girl perspective, offering girls a cathartic, alternative outlook on life. As such, an audio clip of this moment from *The Vampire Diaries* has recently inspired a trend among Gen Z girls on video sharing app TikTok. Using Katherine's verbal diary entry as their soundtrack, hundreds of thousands of girls share images and videos of the parts of their life

that they love (their school, friends, family, hobbies, etc.) with other users. In these videos, Gen Z embrace Katherine's confidence and lust for life. Whether or not they are aware of the original context and implications of this scene within *The Vampire Diaries*, these girls are claiming agency over their own emotions via Katherine's bad-girl voiceover and, thereby, her perspective as a melodramatic villainess. The allure of melodramatic doubling among Gen Z girls has become prevalent in online spaces, particularly TikTok, a phenomenon I will now look further into.

Animated Portraits and Real-World Doubling

Themes of doubling in *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* appear to encourage real-life effects among Gen Z girls. In this instance, the act of doubling fictional characters becomes a fantasy of embodiment, the effects of which can be identified in online spaces. In a 2021 interview looking back on her time playing Katherine and Elena, Dobrev shared what it was like to portray these dual roles.

I got to play two wildly different characters [...] and do and say things that I would, especially at the time, never dare think and say out loud. Because I was a self-proclaimed good girl when I got the show, and then slowly became more evil as I embodied Katherine. I learned a lot from her. (Entertainment Weekly, 2021).

Though Dobrev exaggerates a villainous shift in personality for comic effect, her words highlight the pleasure found in becoming someone new and the potentials for identity exploration offered by feminine doubling. The extent of this has certainly been heightened by Dobrev's position as an actress, however she is not alone in her fantasy of embodiment. Gen Z's physical mirroring of

characters from *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* on apps like TikTok has produced a popular doubling effect. Although users can create their own original content on this app, it is the videos recorded over pre-existing audio that become important here. Taking advantage of the potential for a viral trend, the official TikTok account for the American streaming service HBO Max uploads short clips from *Gossip Girl* for users to lip-synch to. In response to a clip from ‘Shattered Bass’, season 4 episode 21, in which Serena describes how to survive a wedding, Gen Z girls use character-inspired hair, makeup, and outfits to perform a doubling act of their own.

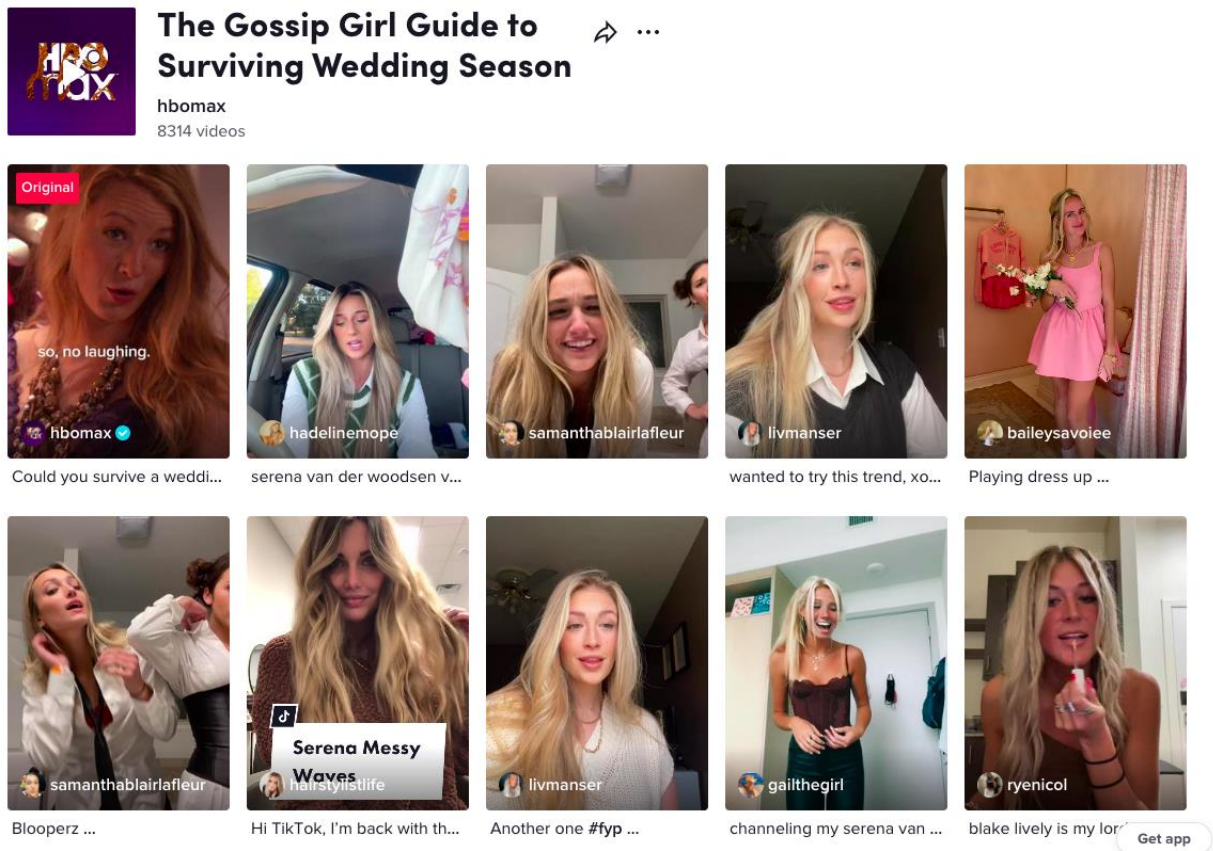


Fig. 12 Serena’s Gen Z doppelgangers.

Fischer's description of the double in Gothic fiction is pertinent here. She notes "[a]t times the doppelganger has shown itself as an ethereal being – a shadow, a reflection, or an animated portrait. At other points, it has taken the shape of an identical being – a person of kindred appearance, a relative, a twin" (Fischer, 1983:24). Searching for this *Gossip Girl* clip on TikTok produces pages upon pages of the identical beings Fischer describes – blonde, predominantly white, girls 'of kindred appearance' to Serena who collectively produce a haunting doubling effect. The thumbnails of these TikToks endlessly loop on a second-long clip from each video. What are these if not the animated portraits of Fischer's description? Increasingly developing technologies enable a specific group of Gen Z girls to double Serena in the online spaces in which they are consuming the show. As a cultural phenomenon among girls, *Gossip Girl's* emphasis on fashion means its protagonists have always been highly influential. It is therefore unsurprising that Gen Z girls who were too young to have participated in these trends when the show originally aired are reviving them today. However, technology has come a long way since the show began in 2007, making it now possible for Serena's words to leave the mouths of over one billion monthly TikTok users (Doyle, 2023). Apps and trends like these offer certain Gen Z girls agency over their identity and presentation, as well as ways to connect with other girls. In turn, nineteenth-century melodramatic doubling transcends its historical origins, encouraged by the Internet and new methods of media consumption in the twenty-first century.

Yet, while this doubling trend might appear accessible to anyone with a TikTok account, the ability to identify with *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries'* protagonists is not universal. As seen in the image above, the most popular videos using this audio clip serve as a stark reminder of just how white this show and its viewers are. The blonde doppelgangers in these videos are rewarded with

likes from other girls, as well as positive comments emphasising their likeness to Serena. Less popular, therefore, are the girls taking part in this trend who do not resemble this character, most often non-white girls or girls from marginalised communities. For girls who do not fit the standard set by these shows and their wider networks – the CW and Alloy Entertainment – these doubling trends are far less accessible. Characters like Serena have been designed to fit the CW’s “upper middle to upper class, white, girl mold”, or, as Caitlin Murray defines it, the ‘Alloy Mold’ (2013:59). *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* do feature women of colour in central roles, namely Vanessa Abrams and Bonnie Bennett. However, as Murray argues, both shows portray these characters in highly problematic ways. From her first introduction in *Gossip Girl*, Vanessa is framed as an antagonistic third party who interferes in the burgeoning relationship between Serena and Dan. Meanwhile, in *The Vampire Diaries*, Bonnie's race is inexplicably linked to her witchcraft. An overwhelming majority of witches that appear throughout the show are played by women of colour, a recurring issue that is never addressed. Bonnie’s identity as a witch is something that separates her from her human and vampire friends; as a result, she is misunderstood by her peers and often outcasted from the group. In the diegetic worlds of these shows, Vanessa and Bonnie both “exist as innate outsiders or antagonists”, Murray argues, implying that in order for women of colour “to assimilate into the worlds at hand, they must somehow mimic the normalized white characters against whom they are so often situated.” (58). As Murray theorises, this concept applies by extension to the girls watching these shows; the implication being “that all viewers should strive to fit within this mold – to become ideal consumers of Alloy products.” (4). A decade later, Murray’s argument can still be evidenced in patterns like this TikTok trend celebrating *Gossip Girl*’s it-girl Serena. In theory, online doubling enables many Gen Z girls to realise the fantasy of becoming someone else in appearance and personality, encouraging an

exploration of personal identity. Yet, in reality, this exploration seems to cater only to a certain type of girl. While online doubling can offer girls agency, an awareness of the issues bound up with this agency is important. It is vital to recognise the many Gen Z girls who do not fit the ‘Alloy Mold’ and are therefore excluded from this narrative.

Encouraging a more accessible type of doubling, Autumn 2021 saw the rise of ‘Elena Gilbert-core’ (the suffix here representing popular Internet slang that typically refers to a stylised aesthetic). This fashion trend, inspired by the signature clothing styles of protagonists Elena of *The Vampire Diaries* and Bella of the *Twilight* Saga, was recently popularised by younger Gen Z girls. According to Maeve Casey, “[w]hen *Twilight* returned to Netflix, it introduced a whole new generation to the favorite [style] of the late 2000s and early 2010s teen girls. Google saw a spike in searches for ‘Bella Swan outfits’ shortly after, which only continued to rise when fall arrived.” (2021). Coinciding with the twenty-year trend cycle and the current revival of 2000s fashion, Elena Gilbert-core was responsible for a resurgence of autumnal wardrobe essentials from the period. Popular items worn by its participants include lace camisoles, boot-cut jeans, converse shoes, empire-line tops and, most importantly, leather jackets: “[t]he silhouette is crucial here – it should look like you’ve borrowed it from your vampire boyfriend” (ModernGurlz, 2021). The style found success on visual social media networks TikTok, Pinterest, and Instagram, where a huge number of Gen Z girls continue to share style tutorials and second-hand clothing hauls. This phenomenon can be understood as a transhistorical extension of the fashion merchandising and fan culture that surrounded many Victorian melodramas, such as 1895’s *Trilby*. Based on George du Maurier’s 1894 Gothic novel, this sensation melodrama followed the eponymous heroine and her friends’ exploits as artists and bohemians in 1850s Paris. *Trilby*’s costumes, based on du Maurier’s original illustrations, soon became a point of obsession among girls. These costumes combined the

contemporary style of the 1890s with vintage fashions from the 1850s – a successful revival of past trends that mirrors the 2020s resurgence of Elena’s late-2000s style. As James D. Hart notes,

[Trilby was] much admired by young girls, who made [her] their role model ... Girls by the thousands yearned for feet as graceful as hers, spoke of their own as ‘Trilbies’, wore Trilby slippers, cultivated a so-called ‘Trilby-type’ of beauty, and dressed themselves in Trilby hats and coats. (1950:194).

The parallels between Trilby and Elena’s impersonators evidence the historical link between melodrama and fashion movements perpetuated by girls. Are the girls who “lifted their voices to sing ‘Ben Bolt,’ Trilby’s signature song” so far from those using TikTok to perform dialogue from *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*? (Jenkins, 1998:247). Arguably, this preoccupation with identity searching is a rite of passage typically associated with feminine adolescence. Add the recent social isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic to this equation, and it seems only natural that Gen Z girls have turned to the characters on their screens for style advice. Websites like Shop Your TV facilitate this doubling effect by listing items worn by characters in popular TV shows, including *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*. On the recent popularity of this site, co-founder Chloe Bell muses “[p]erhaps now we are spending so much time at home that we’ve become used to seeing our favourite TV show characters daily – that increases our influence to dress like them, paired with some boredom-fuelled online shopping” (Wasilak, 2020). Altogether, a combination of social conditions and new technologies encourages this continuation of nineteenth-century melodramatic doubling, wherein social media enables Gen Z girls to curate a doubled extension of themselves.

Doubles in *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* embody opposing depictions of femininity that enable Gen Z girls to explore their own identities. The characters of Elena, Katherine, Blair, and Serena draw from, and expand upon, a range of historical melodramatic archetypes. In *The Vampire Diaries*, Katherine and Elena begin as opposites, yet as their emotional personalities and physical appearances begin to blur, so do their roles as heroine and villainess. In *Gossip Girl*, melodrama's archetypal presentation of the 'good', feminine-coded Serena is contrasted by the 'bad', masculine-coded Blair. However, despite her malicious ways, it is often this agential double, likened to the villainess of 1860s melodrama, that Gen Z girls tend to favour. The popular perspective of the villainess invites girls to escape into fantasy without consequence and take ownership of their emotions. This fantasy becomes a reality in a meta form of doubling encouraged by the increasing presence of technology in the lives of Gen Z. Social media apps like TikTok perpetuate trends that encourage girls to perform melodramatic doubling in online spaces as well as in real life. These trends, however, problematically cater largely to white girls who fit the 'Alloy mold' promoted by these shows, excluding girls who do not. By dressing as characters like Elena, Gen Z girls are mirroring and updating the behaviour of *Trilby*'s nineteenth-century girl fans, and, in turn, redefining melodramatic doubling for the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

Once a vampire's humanity switch has been flipped, it takes something incredibly emotionally resonant or excessive to prompt their feelings to return. The act of reuniting with a long-lost mother, the death of a close friend, even a declaration of undying love from a partner, each hold the potential to cut through everything they have been blocking out, causing all repressed human emotion to flood back in. As Katherine admits, "[h]umanity is a vampire's greatest weakness. No matter how easy it is to turn it off, it just keeps trying to fight its way back in. Sometimes I let it." (S3E09). This switch can be understood as a metaphor for the emotional potentials *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* are able to offer Gen Z girls through melodramatic excess. Jim Davis argues 1860s sensation melodrama's audiences sought "experiences that drove them to tears or laughter, that thrilled and shocked them, that triggered physical sensations" (2021:154). By triggering similar emotional sensations within their new generation of viewers, these teen melodramas offer a release for the overwhelm and perhaps hold the potential to turn Gen Z's metaphorical humanity switch back on.

Gossip Girl and *The Vampire Diaries* were originally designed to target the CW's demographic of 18-34-year-old women in the late 2000s, yet both shows have attracted a strong Gen Z viewership more than a decade later. My writing examines the melodramatic dynamics of emotion and excess that inform their diegetic worlds. Here, it is the presence of humanity, linked with emotion, that helps viewers identify the melodramatic hero and villain. Their open discussion and exploration of emotion through excess encourages the Gen Z girl to examine her own feelings as part of an emotionally overwhelmed generation. Instrumental and lyrical music cues that mimic those of nineteenth-century melodrama guide her through narrative journeys, offering important

emotional emphasis and punctuation. She can take ownership of this music in her inspired online playlists, informing her own world with the melodrama of *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*. Stylised representations of dreaming onscreen validate her waking anxieties, assigning emotional weight and narrative significance to her fears that can be shared anonymously in online fandom spaces. New technologies and trends enable her to explore alternative variations on her self-identity informed by melodrama's representations of feminine doubling. Partly responsible for the revived popularity of these shows, streaming and social media culture both adapt melodrama's historical relationship with developing technologies and point toward new online movements encompassing Gen Z girls and the melodramatic mode.

As much as *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* have been previously studied as critical texts, much of this pre-existing research was published while these shows were still airing and focuses on their successes and responses among Millennial viewers. My research, however, considers the revived popularity of these shows among a new generation of girls. As a Gen Z girl writing about this unique demographic, my research offers current insight that gestures toward melodrama's ongoing contemporary cultural and social positions. I examine recent online responses from girls who might not typically impact critical conversation, but whose voices offer unique perspective. Evidenced in my exploration of Gen Z girls' online movements, aspects of the melodramatic mode are beginning to thrive in online spaces like TikTok. These developments display the potential future movements of melodrama's historical relationship with new technologies. As I mention in Chapter Three, recent television viewing habits like binge-watching and streaming only seem to be increasing in popularity. BARB's 2020 Viewing Report states in "2019, the proportion of homes that had a subscription to at least one of Netflix, Amazon Prime Video or Now TV was

50.5%, a majority of homes for the first time” (22). As I write this, *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* are both available to watch in the UK on streaming sites BBC iPlayer and Netflix UK. However, it is hard to know how much longer these shows might be available – streaming is, by nature, ephemeral, and access can vanish overnight.

If I were to develop this project further, I would turn my attention to the current cultural trend of reviving 2000s-2010s serial teen melodramas, such as *Pretty Little Liars: Original Sin* and *Gossip Girl* (2021), focusing on the politics of repackaging these franchises specifically for Gen Z girls. In the latter, *Gossip Girl* returns not as a blogger, but as an anonymous Instagram account, showcasing the period of significant technological and social change since the original series began in 2007. The show’s switch from the CW’s TV-14 rating to HBO’s TV-MA alludes to the impact of KGOY (Kids Getting Older Younger: a recent cultural development dictated by social media and influencers) on teen television and the contemporary experience of feminine adolescence. My reaffirmation that the CW’s *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries* are worthy of critical study echoes Lausch’s argument that “[a]s a devalued object, the case of the CW is not dissimilar to that of the soap operas studied and reclaimed by feminist scholars” (2013:105). Taking a simultaneously reflective and forward-thinking stance, I conclude that the emotional appeal of nineteenth-century melodrama continues to resurface and prevail in twenty-first century teen television. The melodramatic mode’s specific formula of emotional excess has come to resonate with a new generationally specific audience and their cultural landscape. This landscape is shaped by post-pandemic viewing habits, the effects of social isolation, and the boom of video sharing apps. It represents an innovative space in which Gen Z girls might further examine, and question the potentials of, what melodrama looks like and represents in the early twenty-first century.

Bibliography

- 'Dream Manipulation' (2013) *The Vampire Diaries Wiki*. Available at: https://vampirediaries.fandom.com/wiki/Dream_Manipulation (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Aberdeen Journal* (1889) 'After School', 19 June, p.2.
- Aitchison, C. (2012) *I Love It*. New York: Atlantic Records.
- Anonymous. (1840) Maria Martin (the Murder in the Red Barn), in Kilgarrif, M. (ed.) *The Golden Age of Melodrama*. London: Wolfe Publishing Limited, pp.213-235.
- BARB (2020) *The Viewing Report*. Available at: https://www.barb.co.uk/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Barb-Viewing-Report-2020_32pp_spreads_FINAL.pdf (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Bentley, E. (1964) *The Life of the Drama*. New York: Atheneum.
- Bindig, L. (2014) *Gossip Girl: A Critical Understanding*. Lanham: Lexington Books. Available from: ProQuest Ebook Central. (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Booth, M. (1965) *English Melodrama*. London: Herbert Jenkins.
- Booth, M. (1991) *Theatre in the Victorian Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bricker, T. (2021) *You Know You Still Love It: How Gossip Girl Defied Expectations to Define a Generation - E! Online*. [online] E! Online. Available at: <https://www.eonline.com/news/1057823/you-know-you-still-love-it-how-gossip-girl-defied-expectations-to-define-a-generation> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Bridgeman, M. (2013) 'Forged in Love and Death: Problematic Subjects in The Vampire Diaries', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 46(1), pp.3-19. doi:10.1111/jpcu.12013.
- Brooks, P. (1976) *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Brooks, P. (2018) 'Psychoanalysis and Melodrama', in Williams, C. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.277-288.
- Carlsson, R. (2010) *Dancing On My Own*. New York: Island Records Ltd.
- Casey, M. (2021) #ElenaGilbertCore Is Taking The Fashion World By Storm. Available at: <https://www.hercampus.com/style/elena-core-aesthetic-tiktok-fall-fashion-inspiration/> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Courier Post (2019) *To Netflix, perchance to dream? How binge-watching, social media can mess with your sleep*. Available at: <https://eu.courierpostonline.com/story/life/2019/02/06/perchance-dream-how-binge-watching-social-media-affect-your-dreams-sleep/2796568002/> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Davis, J. (2021) 'Experiencing Melodrama, Imagining Audiences: Perspectives on the Representation of the Melodrama Spectator', *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 48(2), pp. 143–161. doi:10.1177/17483727211053302.
- Dictionary.com (2022) *Dictionary.com's 2022 Word Of The Year Is...* Available at: <https://www.dictionary.com/e/word-of-the-year/> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Doyle, B. (2023) *TikTok Statistics – Updated Jan 2023*. Available at: <https://wallaroomedia.com/blog/social-media/tiktok-statistics/> (Accessed: 27 February 2022).
- Driscoll, C. (2002) *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Drotner, K. (1991) 'Intensities of Feeling: Modernity, Melodrama and Adolescence', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 8(1), pp.57–87. doi:10.1177/026327691008001004.
- Elsaesser, T. (1991) 'Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama', in Landy, M. (ed.) *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film & Television Melodrama*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, pp.68- 91.
- Entertainment Weekly (2013) *How 'The O.C.' started a trend that could save indie music*. Available at: <https://ew.com/article/2013/09/09/the-vampire-diaries-music-supervisor-the-oc-television-indie-music/> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).

Entertainment Weekly (2021) *Nina Dobrev & Paul Wesley Break Down 'Vampire Diaries' Season 2 | EW's Binge | Entertainment Weekly*. 6 August. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7fNXs2QyuY> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).

Eriksson, J., Morén, P. and Ytting, B. (2006) *Young Folks*. Hilversum: Universal Music.

FanPop (2020) *Have your recent dreams included Damon Salvatore?* Available at: <https://www.fanpop.com/clubs/damon-salvatore/answers/show/255411/recent-dreams-included-damon-salvatore> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).

Fischer, L. (1983) 'Two-Faced Women: The 'Double' in Women's Melodrama of the 1940s', *Cinema Journal*, 23(1), pp.24-43. doi:10.2307/1225070.

Gledhill, C. (1987) *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. London: British Film Institute.

Gledhill, C. (2018) 'Domestic Melodrama', in Williams, C. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.61-77.

Gossip Girl (2007-2012) Warner Bros Television Distribution. Available at: BBC iPlayer (Accessed: 27 February 2023).

Gossip Girl had such good music every single season! (2019) Available at: https://www.reddit.com/r/GossipGirl/comments/e9vkyn/gossip_girl_had_such_good_music_every_single/ (Accessed: 27 February 2023).

Hamadi, L. (2017) 'The Main Dramatic Features of Melodrama: A Dramatic Study of Maria Martin and Sweeney Todd And Their Traces In Modern Soap Operas', *European Scientific Journal*, 13(26), pp.122-135. doi:10.19044/esj.2017.v13n26p122.

Hart, J. D. (1950) *The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste*. Berkeley: California University Press.

Has anyone ever dreamt about Gossip Girl? (2021) Available at: https://www.reddit.com/r/GossipGirl/comments/p1gl8t/has_anyone_ever_dreamt_about_gossip_girl/ (Accessed: 27 February 2023).

- Have you ever wish you have the emotions switch like the vampires?* (2019) Available at: https://www.reddit.com/r/TheVampireDiaries/comments/b81fzm/have_you_ever_wish_you_have_the_emotions_switch/ (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Hibberd, S. and Nielsen, N. (2002) 'Music in Melodrama: 'The Burden of Ineffable Expression'?'. *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 29(2), pp.30-39. doi:10.7227/NCTF.29.2.4.
- Holtz, P., Kronberger, N. and Wagner, W. (2012) 'Analyzing Internet Forums: A Practical Guide', *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods, and Applications*, 24(2), pp.55-66. doi:10.1027/1864-1105/a000062.
- Hurley, E. (2010) *Theatre and Feeling*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- If your severely depressed and are turned into a vampire would u be mega depressed forever? Since vampirism heightens your emotions and stuff.* (2022) Available at: https://www.reddit.com/r/TheVampireDiaries/comments/x2rw6f/if_your_severely_depressed_and_are_turned_into_a/ (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Inness, S. A. (1998) *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Cultures*. New York: NYU Press.
- Jenkins, E. (1998) 'Trilby: Fads, Photographers, and 'Over-Perfect Feet.''' *Book History*, (1), pp.221–267. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30227289>.
- Jenkins, H. (2007) Transmedia Storytelling 101. Available at: http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html#:~:text=Transmedia%20storytelling%20represents%20a%20process,the%20unfolding%20of%20the%20story. (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Jenny Nicholson (2021) *THE Vampire Diaries Video*. 15 January. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4AdFD3E2ok&t=1981s> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Johnson, D. (2011) 'Devaluing and revaluing seriality: The gendered discourses of media franchising', *Media, Culture & Society*, 33(7), pp.1077–1093. doi:10.1177/0163443711415747.

- Joy, M. (2019) *Generation Z: The Crisis Numb Generation*. Available at: <https://medium.com/teaching-the-next-gen/generation-z-the-crisis-numb-generation-ff2c16f97387> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Kapurch, K. (2016) *Victorian Melodrama in the Twenty-First Century: Jane Eyre, Twilight, and the Mode of Excess in Popular Girl Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Katherine or Elena, who do you like more and why?* (2018) Available at: https://www.reddit.com/r/TheVampireDiaries/comments/9q07c0/katherine_or_elena_who_do_you_like_more_and_why/ (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Keppler, C. F. (1972) *The Literature of the Second Self*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Lausch, K. A. (2013) *The Niche Network: Gender, Genre, and the CW Brand*. Thesis. (Masters). The University of Texas at Austin. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/2152/22453> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Lidström Brock, M. (2014) 'Switching It On/Off: Emotional Performativity and Melodrama in The Vampire Diaries', *Americana: E-Journal of American Studies in Hungary*, 10(1), pp.1-11.
- Love, R. (2019) *Representations of the Dreaming Mind in Nineteenth-Century French Art*. Thesis. (Masters). University of Missouri-Kansas City. Available at: <https://mospace.umsystem.edu/xmlui/handle/10355/70900> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Mayer, D. (2018) 'Melodrama in Early Film', in Williams, C. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 224-244.
- McMahon-Coleman, K. (2015) 'Myriad Mirrors: Doppelgängers and Doubling in The Vampire Diaries', in George, S. and Hughes, B. (eds.) *Open Graves, Open Minds*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- McNally, A. and Safran, J. (2008) *GOSSIP GIRL New Haven Can Wait*. Alloy Entertainment, College Hill Pictures/Girl Philosopher Inc. Warner Bros. Television.
- Miltsov, A. (2022) 'Researching TikTok: Themes, Methods, and Future Directions', in Sloan, L. and Quan-Haase, A. (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 664-675. doi: 10.4135/9781529782943.

- Mittel, J. (2015) *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York: New York University Press.
- ModernGurlz (2021) *The Twilight Fashion Renaissance and Elena Gilbert Core (A Study of Style)*. 27 August. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IacN2azoVI (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Murray, C. (2013) *Do You Fit the Alloy Mold? The Homogenization of Structure and Audience in the Television Adaptations of 'Gossip Girl,' 'Pretty Little Liars,' and 'The Vampire Diaries'*. Thesis. (Masters). Virginia Commonwealth University. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.25772/YRAW-8902> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- NBC News (2017) *What happens to your brain when you binge-watch a TV series*. Available at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/better/health/what-happens-your-brain-when-you-binge-watch-tv-series-ncna816991> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Neumann, S. (2017) *How the Music Supervisor for 'The O.C.' and 'Gossip Girl' Changed the Game for Indie Rock*. Available at: <https://www.vice.com/en/article/ne3w38/music-supervisor-alexandra-patsavas-interview-2017-the-oc-gossip-girl-tvweek> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Newey, K. (2018) 'Melodrama and Gender', in Williams, C. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.149-162.
- Pisani, M. (2014) *Music for the Melodramatic Theatre in Nineteenth-Century London and New York*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- Pisani, M. (2018) 'Melodramatic Music', in Williams, C. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.95-111.
- Pribram, E. (2018) 'Melodrama and the Aesthetics of Emotion', in Gledhill, C. and Williams, L. (eds.) *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*. New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, pp.237-252. doi:10.7312/gled18066-017.
- Puglionesi, A. (2017) *Lofty Only in Sound: 19th-Century Attempts to Understand Dreaming*. Available at: <https://brewminate.com/lofty-only-in-sound-19th-century-attempts-to-understand-dreaming/> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).

- Quirk, C. (2018) 'Unlicensed Adaptation: Agency and Subversion in Lady Audley's Secret', *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* [online], 14(3). Available from: <http://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue143/quirk.html> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Rahill, F. (1967) *The World of Melodrama*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Rank, O. (1971) *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Reddit For Business (2019) *Gen Z on Reddit*. Available at: <https://www.redditinc.com/blog/gen-z-on-reddit/> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Sales, N. J. (2016) *American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Lives of Teenagers*. New York City: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.
- Schwartz, J. and Savage, S. (2006) *GOSSIP GIRL Pilot*. Alloy Entertainment, College Hill Pictures/Girl Philosopher Inc. Warner Bros. Television.
- Sengupta, D. (2020) *The Life of Z: Understanding the Digital Pre-Teen and Adolescent Generation*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications India. Available from: ProQuest Ebook Central. (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Smyth, P. (2022) 'The Colleen Bawn in Her Element: Sensation, Spectatorship, Meaning', *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 49(2), pp.144-164.
doi:10.1177/17483727221115932.
- Spangler, T. (2017) *Binge Boom: Young U.S. Viewers Gulp Down Average of Six TV Episodes per Sitting*. Available at: <https://variety.com/2017/digital/news/binge-viewing-tv-survey-millennials-1202013560/> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Spoiler TV (2010) *Gossip Girl - Episode 4.07 - War at the Roses - Script Leak? [RUMOUR]*. Available at: <https://www.spoilertv.com/2010/10/gossip-girl-episode-407-war-at-roses.html> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Stein, L. (2020) 'Gossip Girl: Transmedia Technologies' in: Thompson, E. and Mittell, J. (eds.) *How to Watch Television, Second Edition*. New York: New York University Press, pp. 337-345.

- Taylor, B. (2022) *Daddy: A Melodrama*. Almeida Theatre, London, 13 April [Event programme].
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2021) *Generation Z and Mental Health*. Available at: <https://www.aecf.org/blog/generation-z-and-mental-health> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017) Warner Bros Television Distribution. Available at: Netflix UK (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Time (2016) *Teen Depression and Anxiety: Why the Kids Are Not Alright*. Available at: <https://time.com/magazine/us/4547305/november-7th-2016-vol-188-no-19-u-s/> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- TV Fanatic (2017) *Gossip Girl's 13 Most Memorable Music Moments*. Available at: <https://www.tvfanatic.com/slideshows/gossip-girls-13-most-memorable-music-moments/> (Accessed: 27 February 2023).
- Urban, E. D. (2019) Spectral Spectacle: Traps, Disappearances, and Disembodiment in Nineteenth-Century British Melodrama. *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 46(1), pp.18-37. doi:10.1177/1748372718799081.
- Vicinus, M. (1981) “‘Helpless and Unfriended’”: Nineteenth-Century Domestic Melodrama’, *New Literary History*, 13(1), pp.127-143. doi:10.2307/468646.
- Wasilak, S. (2020) *Here's How (and Why) We Became Obsessed With Dressing Like Our Favourite TV Characters*. Available at: https://www.popsugar.co.uk/fashion/shop-your-tv-fashion-interview-47957142?utm_medium=redirect&utm_campaign=US:GB&utm_source=www.hercampus.com (Accessed: 27 February 2023).

Why is Blair more popular than Serena??? (2021) Available at:

https://www.reddit.com/r/GossipGirl/comments/nffhar/why_is_blair_more_popular_than_serena/ (Accessed: 27 February 2023).

Williams, L. (1991) 'Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess', *Film Quarterly*, 44(4), pp. 2-13.
doi:10.2307/1212758.

Williams, L. (2012) 'Mega-Melodrama! Vertical and Horizontal Suspensions of the "Classical"', *Modern Drama*, 55(4), pp.523-543. doi:10.3138/md.2012-S83.

Williamson, K. and Plec, J. (2009) *THE VAMPIRE DIARIES Pilot*. Alloy Entertainment, Outerbanks Entertainment.

Williamson, M. (2005) *The Lure of the Vampire: Gender, Fiction and Fandom from Bram Stoker to Buffy*. London and New York: Wallflower.