



**Universitat de les
Illes Balears**

Facultat de Filosofia i Lletres

Memòria del Treball de Fi de Grau

New Masculinities in *Tell Me a Story's* Nick Sullivan (2018–): The Toxic Geek Werewolf

Claudia Bartolomey García

Grau d'Estudis Anglesos

Any acadèmic 2018-19

DNI de l'alumne:46392689X

Treball tutelat per Rubén Jarazo Álvarez
Departament de Filologia Espanyola, Moderna i Clàssica

S'autoritza la Universitat a incloure aquest treball en el Repositori Institucional per a la seva consulta en accés obert i difusió en línia, amb finalitats exclusivament acadèmiques i d'investigació	Autor		Tutor	
	Sí	No	Sí	No
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Paraules clau del treball:
werewolf, toxic masculinity, geek masculinity, youth culture

Abstract:

In Gothic audiovisual productions, werewolves' masculinity has constantly been subjected to rigorous scrutiny within the field of Cultural and Gender Studies. Hence, on account of the recent release and the little attention paid to new Williamson's TV series *Tell Me a Story* (2018–), this paper will examine the representation and development of Nick Sullivan, the shapeshifting character in "Little Red Riding Hood", throughout the first season. Not only will Nick's performativity be analysed according to geek and toxic masculinity, but he will also be compared both physically and performatively to the most outstanding lycanthropes in popular culture. At last, the results will show that although Nick legitimises some stereotypical features of former werewolves such as the sexualisation of the male body, by depicting him as a blonde-haired and blue-eyed geek, the rejection of previous colonial stereotypes is reinforced. Moreover, Nick's evident toxic masculinity challenges the romanticised use of violence improperly defined as protection in youth culture, defining the audiovisual as a criticism against the normalisation of toxic performative acts that can conclude in criminal cases.

Keywords: werewolf, toxic masculinity, geek masculinity, youth culture

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....1

2. Physical Representation of Nick Sullivan.....3

3. Geek Masculinity.....6

4. Toxic Masculinity.....8

5. Conclusion.....12

6. Works Cited.....14

1. Introduction

With the recent legitimisation and audiovisual depictions of new masculinities, scholars have started to focus on the study of the male body in plentiful television series and films. Specifically, the most striking representations of this subjectivity are articulated through Gothic fictions, whose protagonists are usually portrayed as shapeshifters, being “[t]he wolf . . . the most common form of shapeshifters in popular culture” (McMahon-Coleman and Weaver 2012, 6). In contemporary history, *The Wolf Man* (Wagner, 1941) has been established as the starting point of specific werewolf’s traditions, such as the full moon as the activator of their animal nature (Curran 1998, 200). This has shaped many following audiovisual productions like the films *An American Werewolf in London* (Landis, 1981), its sequel *An American Werewolf in Paris* (Waller, 1998) and *Underworld* (Wiseman, 2003), or TV series like *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017). In contrast, *True Blood* (2008-2014) and *The Twilight Saga* (2008-2012) shift the traditional pattern by depicting lycanthropes with self-controlled transformations. The most remarkable exception due to his peaceful and sympathetic nature is embodied in *Teen Wolf* (Daniel, 1956), film that served as an inspiration for the twenty-first century TV series *Teen Wolf* (2011-2017). Lastly, under no circumstances should *Red Riding Hood* (Hardwicke, 2011) be forgotten as this children’s tale is one of the basis of this case study, the new Williamson’s television series *Tell Me a Story* (2018–), an American psychological thriller which compiles three traditional tales: “Little Red Riding Hood”, “The Three Little Pigs” and “Hansel and Gretel”.

Throughout history, an extensive literature has focused on the analysis of werewolves’ masculinity. Whereas several authors have focused on explaining the shapeshifting nature and the development of these narratives (Du Coudray, 2006, McMahon-Coleman and Weaver, 2012), Leonzini decided to complement their researches with the eroticisation of the werewolf (2018). Unlike Du Coudray (2006), who solely included classic films, the other two analysed recent audiovisual depictions of lycanthropes as well. Nonetheless, the most controversial filmic production par excellence is *The Twilight Saga* (2008-2012), which has been subject of study in terms of racial issues (Mohanty, 2018) or sexual violence (Leonzini, 2018). Against this pejorative representation of werewolves, Kendal and Kendal explored the egalitarian and consensual world in the MTV series *Teen Wolf* (2011-2017), rejecting the sexual stereotype of abusive werewolves (2015). Another perspective is provided by Schell, who compared the shapeshifter to an alpha male (2007, 110). Conversely, little has been discussed about the TV series *Tell Me a Story* (2018–) and, specifically, about the subordinated masculinities

legitimised by the werewolf Nick Sullivan. For this reason, to what extent does the TV series criticise the former representations of these shapeshifters? Does it reject their stereotypical depiction, or does it legitimise it? Therefore, the aim of this paper is to analyse Nick's physical portrayal in order to explore the implications of it in comparison to other audiovisuals, and to examine his performativity according to the geek and toxic subordinated masculinities. As a result, although the main character enacts the stereotypical sexualisation and eroticisation of previous shapeshifters, his geekiness breaks with the traditional stereotype of the lycanthrope's masculinity. Furthermore, the series encodes a critical discourse not only against the romanticised view of this supernatural figure, but also against the felonies committed in the patriarchal system, like murders for jealousy, kidnappings for revenge or gender violence to enforce obedience, which are, in this case, justified by werewolves' biological determinism.

This paper is based on the research of three main cultural terms and their application to the werewolf's representation: hegemonic masculinity, geek masculinity and toxic masculinity. To begin with, hegemonic masculinity "embodied the currently most honored way of being a man" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832), including both the "internal hegemony or dominance over other masculinities" and the "external hegemony . . . or the global dominance of men over women" (Demetriou 2001, 344). At the beginning of this case study, it is noteworthy the subordination of the werewolf to the female character, rejecting in this way the external hegemony. Neither does he express "a ceaseless interest in sex", nor does he display "aggressive behaviour and physical dominance" (Courtenay 2000, 1389). Hence, the legitimisation of the internal hegemony does not take place, concluding in the representation of a deviant discourse as a different form of masculinity (Demetriou 2001, 340). Geek masculinity is one of the subordinated masculinities which is characterised by the refusal of sport and physical activities (Taylor 2012, 111). This cultural association is mostly attached to isolated people who are keen on technology and videogames (Salter and Blodgett 2012, 412). Even though Nick Sullivan does not embody the latter, his interest in the academic world categorises him as a geek (Busse 2013, 77). Therefore, geekiness's most adequate definition for this analysis is a "label for those who demonstrate expertise in a certain field" (McArthur 2009, 61), in Nick's case in English literature. As it can be seen, "geek-experts have created their own criteria for labelling geeks. The *Geek Code* (Hayden, 1996) and the *Geek Quiz* (Innergeek, 2006) offer prospective geeks the opportunity to rate their own 'geekiness' in relation to others" (McArthur 2009, 62). Similarly, the concept of masculinity is not interpreted as a model of man, but as something more variable: "a way that men position themselves through discursive practices" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 841). For this reason, according to Nick's

“performative acts” (Butler 1990, 279), he can also legitimise another subordinated masculinity as the toxic one. As opposed to the mainstream werewolves, Nick’s toxicity is explicitly performed from the middle of the season onwards. Considering the lycanthrope’s later supremacy over Kayla as a damaging feature of the hegemonic masculinity and the foundation of the toxic masculinity (Parent, Gobble, and Rochlen 2019, 278), this performativity is perceived as “the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence” (Kupers 2005, 714). With this in mind, both toxic and geek masculinity will shape the main character in *Tell Me a Story*.

The first section of the essay will examine the physical appearance of the werewolf, Nick Sullivan. His distinguishable features will be compared to previous werewolves’ traits, emphasising their differences and similarities according to racial stereotypes and the implications of these characterisations. In addition, the significance of the muscular masculinity will be presented, together with its respective sexualisation. For this reason, eroticisation and horror will be combined, bearing in mind the Gothic tradition. Next, as opposed to former lycanthropes, Nick will be analysed in terms of geek masculinity. Not only will his geek performativity be considered, but his academic interests will be decisive in his characterisation as a nerd. Furthermore, the usage of his glasses will be thoroughly examined. This, together with some sexual contradictions, will lead to the uncovering of his toxic facet. Lastly, his toxicity will be studied regarding three variables: protection, obsession and violence. Again, this will be contrasted with other shapeshifters’ representation.

2. Physical Representation of Nick Sullivan

Nick Sullivan is a flawless example of the Aryan race, a blue-eyed and blonde-haired men with European features (Williamson 2018, 26:33). In contrast, some of the most famous werewolves, like Jacob Black from *The Twilight Saga* (Weitz 2009, 36:16), Scott McCall from *Teen Wolf* (Loeb and Weisman 2011, 7:51) or *True Blood*’s Alcide Herveaux (Woo 2010, 33:22), have recognisable Native American characteristics such as dark skin, brown eyes and dark hair. In Native American culture, there is a long-established tradition of lycanthropes on account of their belief in shapeshifting (Du Coudray 2006, 2). Nevertheless, this indigenisation also suggests some stereotypical colonial notions about Other, in which they are perceived as inferior and less human than the white-skin race (McMahon-Coleman and Weaver 2012, 105). This is clearly connected to the acclaimed work *Orientalism* (Said, 1978), in which the world is defined as a structure of binary oppositions: “the centre and the periphery, the mainstream

and the marginal, the intellect and the instinct, the mind and the body, the civilized and the wild” (Mohanty 2018, 26). In the werewolves’ case, the binary opposition between “this black/white, dark/light symbolism... echoes long-standing media associations of whiteness with goodness, heroism, and superiority” (Wilson 2016, 232). Therefore, by representing the lycanthrope as red-haired and pale such as *Buffy’s Oz* (Des Hotel and Batali 1998, 20:52), or blonde and blue-eyed as in Michael J. Fox’s *Teen Wolf* (Daniel 1985, 1:51) or in this case study (Williamson 2018, 23:59), the colonial discourse is rejected and reversed. Werewolves are, consequently, no longer solely associated with Indian culture; instead, they are becoming mainstream culture because of their gradually generalised portrayal. In other words, these audiovisual products challenge the stigmatised Native American stereotypes in favour of the Caucasian physical representation, ending with the pejorative depiction of racial issues encoded by Western hegemonic discourses.

Nick’s physical representation has other implications as well. This hidden subtext lies in the corruption of the current Western world, exemplified by the large amount of crimes. By portraying Nick as an unsympathetic Occidental Caucasian werewolf, the TV series is trying to emphasise that “in consequence of this primary mutual hostility of human beings, civilized society is perpetually threatened with disintegration” (Freud 1962, 59). For this reason, Nick embodies Freud’s definition of man as a *homo homini lupus* that is moved by the passions of instinct rather than reasoned interests (58-59). This will be later reinforced by his toxic masculinity. On the other hand, the critical presence of stereotypes is not always detected on screen. Considering both the Gothic classic films (Wagner 1941, 1:01:42; Landis 1981, 1:15:57; Waller 1998, 58:08) and modern audiovisual productions such as TV series (Williamson and Plec 2009, 6:2) and cinema (Hardwicke 2011, 1:25:37), neutrality and an unbiased tone are achieved by portraying the werewolves with white skin and dark hair. The combination of features of both racial representations is in some occasions symbolically presented in werewolves’ hybridity as in *The Vampire Diaries’s* Tyler Lockwood (Narducci 2011, 27:27) or *Underworld’s* Michael Corvin (Wiseman 2003, 1:55:02). Even though they are firstly illustrated as sole werewolves, their nature changes, becoming “half-vampire and half-Lycan, but stronger than both” (Wiseman 2003, 1:55:18). As a result, the introduction of this metaphoric racial hybridity seems to be the solution to racist white supremacy (Magill 2015, 82). Exceptionally, another perspective of werewolves’ representation is provided by Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* (1984), whose “special effects and narrative return us to the direction of John Landis” (Mercer 1993, 99), also director of *An American Werewolf in London* (Landis, 1981). The portrayal of Afro-American shapeshifters was not as usual as nowadays; thus, it proved to

be a milestone in shapeshifting culture, leading to the incorporation of Afro-American actors in filmic productions as in the *Underworld Saga* (Wiseman 2003, 1:42:32). All in all, the case study highlights Nick's physicality to send a critical message against the toxicity in Western society; moreover, literal and symbolic racial hybridity proves to be the most accurate form to depict non-stereotypical lycanthropes, adding to this category the exceptional and groundbreaking representation of Michael Jackson's African-American werewolf.

Regardless their racial appearance, werewolves' physicality is eroticised in most cases on account of their muscular masculinity, and Nick Sullivan is not an exception. Not only do muscles symbolise men's power (Ningrum 2015, 15), but "muscularity [also] offer[s] some men a compensatory means by which they can construct and validate a particular masculine identity" (Wieggers 1998, 148). Thus, these lupine shapeshifters living in the heteronormative world had to show explicitly their male attributes in order to reach a powerful status. Nonetheless, this has not always been the case. Neither is Larry's body in *The Wolf Man* (Wagner, 1941) revealed and eroticised, nor does this happen with Cesaire, the father of little red riding hood and the real Big Bad Wolf (Hardwicke, 2011). In comparison to other werewolves, both of them have reached full maturity. Provided that this type of audiovisuals is mainly addressed to youth culture, this might be the reason why they are not sexualised on screen as other young shapeshifters. Focusing on the case study, the young character's muscular body is often emphasised by the close-ups and some specific shots. Actually, this TV series, together with other cases (Weitz 2009, 56:17; Oliver 2011, 10:39), positions the werewolf "in publicity stills in ways akin to male underwear models in advertising, the objects of desire" (McMahon-Coleman and Weaver 2012, 63), reinforcing that "hypersexuality has often been associated with the werewolf concept" (Leoncini 2018, 270). For instance, in post-murder scenes, Sullivan is only dressed in underwear while cleaning Ethan's blood (Zuhlke 2018a, 24:30); after being his muscles highlighted by the camera and the lighting, the eroticisation culminates with his delicate and sexualised attempt to wipe the blood from his body (35:19). This combination of sexuality and horror is not surprising as "Gothic versions of mortality and the sexual body emphasise bloody corpses, ripped flesh and oozing wounds" (Botting 2008, 4). Actually, this association derives from the conservative discourse which defined "premarital sex . . . [as] *bad*" (Keisner 2008, 419), warning that "those who ignore the social mores of celibacy before marriage [will] suffer a brutal death" (418). In contrast, defining sexual objects as prohibited raises the attraction for them, leading to their transgression (Bataille 1993, 48). Thus, not only has "uncanny horror [offered] the spectator the possibility of an unconscious participation in guilty pleasures through the identification with the monster and its subjectivity",

but “it [has also offered] the spectator the super-egoical pleasure of control over and repression of the monster as the dark shadow double of the ego consciousness” (Connolly 2003, 419). Having said that, muscular masculinity is regarded as an essential aspect of young werewolves’ characterisation resulting in erotic and sexual images of their bodies.

3. Geek Masculinity

Nick’s geekiness is depicted as an innovative discursive practice among werewolves. At first glance, Nick is depicted as a serious intellectual character solely concerned about his temporary job as a substitute English literature teacher, which actually “allows [him] to write” (Overton 2018, 16:41). Writing as a hobby is not the most common way of spending werewolves’ free time. Apart from being engrossed in this pastime, he is also truly implicated in literature teaching emphasising in his lessons his passion for Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (Clements 2018, 12:40). On the contrary, some of the most outstanding shapeshifters are renown athletes, like the lacrosse player Scott McCall (Davis 2011, 31:19) and the American football player Tyler Lockwood (Plec and Dries 2011, 15:26), or characters keen on physical work as the amateur mechanic Jacob Black (Weitz 2009, 38:14). Thus, Nick’s interest in the academic world gives a clue of his apparently “geek masculinity” (Salter and Blodgett 2017, 5-6). Notwithstanding, this character is not presented as geeks are usually described (45); he is good-looking and attractive (Williamson 2018, 24:05). Again, the series modifies a cultural expectation by legitimising a different kind of masculinity, reinforced by her student, Kayla, when expressing how sexy is being a writer (Overton 2018, 16:46). Although Nick is not physically perceived as a geek, his introversion and awkwardness betray him (Salter and Blodgett 2017, 45). In the second episode, Kayla arrives at Nick’s flat with the purpose of having another sexual affair (Canto and Maldonado 2018, 41:01); instead of that, inwardly worrying about her “high” state (41:15), he offers her a cup of milk (41:21). The action of caring for one’s welfare is interpreted as a feminine trait (Courtenay 2000, 1389); although he does not explicitly express his concern about her, by performing this, his subordinated masculinity is enacted. After this scene, while Kayla is emotionally exposing herself, Nick adopts an indifferent attitude with the sole capability of expressing his laments (Canto and Maldonado 2018, 43:23). Being his introversion pushed to the limits, almost at the end of the series, she admits not knowing anything about him (Bolden 2018, 17:07). In addition, his discomfort and “limited social skills” (Salter and Blodgett 2017, 46) become evident when speaking with Kayla (Overton 2018, 15:39). After all, by depicting the werewolf as a geek, the series is rejecting the

previous stereotypes which represented the lycanthropes mainly interested in physical activity and women.

Sexually speaking, Nick also legitimises some geek stereotypes. Even though sexuality is not necessarily linked to gender, according to the nerd stereotype, the lack of sexual relationships with women is a common feature within this subordinated masculinity (Kendall 1999, 264). Hence, by refusing Kayla's sexual advances (Overton 2018, 41:21), Nick's geek masculinity is reinforced. This rejection, however, is contradicted by the first bed scene (Williamson 2018, 32:42), of which Nick later regrets admitting being "mad" at himself (Overton 2018, 44:11) because he only wanted to teach (44:25). In most werewolves' audiovisuals, the standard formula involves the self-control of the male monster, both in terms of sexuality and violence, to avoid hurting the weak and passive female human partner; however, these events are often eroticised and legitimised (Kendal and Kendal 2015, 27). This is the reason why "the suspension of sexuality in celibacy . . . of the werewolf's character is as unusual and therefore just as 'queer' as acts of homoeroticism in many respects" (Bernhardt-House 2008, 174). By stating that "it [was] not in [his] DNA to do [that] with [her]" (Overton 2018, 44:19), Nick initially rejects the sexual practice. But, in the end, he could not resist temptation as his animal instincts are stronger (Adamová 2015, 124). Indeed, "unlike the vampire, [the werewolf] is largely unable to resist the primal urges" (Bacon 2016, 74) since "the body is free from the mind-subject's control and the inner beast is released" (Marak 2014, 78). This is also linked to the biological determinism of masculine behaviour (Schell 2007, 119). By the same token, Oz's animal impulses were also consummated with the sexual intercourse with Veruca, destroying in this way his relationship with Willow (Noxon 1999, 26:07-29:10). Despite this, the leading role of Kayla, when undressing him (Overton 2018, 45:00) or kissing him (45:20), again strengthens the sexual stereotypes of geekiness. In the long run, the series falls into the legitimisation of the prototypical cultural assumption of nerds' inactive sexuality; something that is reversed afterwards by his genetically determined primal urges.

The use of horned-rimmed glasses also characterises Nick as a geek (Ward 2014, 714), but not in a radical fashion as other famous characters like Leonard from *The Big Bang's Theory* (Neterer 2018, 118) or *Family Matters'* Steve Urkel (Lane 2018, 9). However, Nick's irregular use of glasses makes the actual objective of the bifocals ambiguous and bewildering. At this stage, his symbolic shapeshifting provokes the troublesome decoding of whether he is transformed or not. With this in mind, his glasses represent a sign of his humanity. To begin with, Nick always wears them when performing the teacher's role and the geek masculinity,

coinciding with daytime occasions (Bolden 2018, 13:15; Clements 2018, 12:40; Overton 2018, 15:30). Exceptionally, there is one night at which he also has them on him because he is acting as a solitary regular person (Bolden, 29:33). On the contrary, his glasses disappear when he is involved with Kayla both sexually and amorously (Canto and Maldonado 2018, 45:22; Clements 2018, 1:05, 23:41; Williamson 2018, 26:27) or during his stay at home (Clements 2018, 28:05; Sutton 2018, 7:40). Therefore, soon thereafter Nick's arrival back from doing the shopping at his flat, where Kayla was waiting for him (Overton 2018, 40:38), the removal of his sunglasses takes place (41:20), reinforcing the former theories. All in all, Nick's geek masculinity, rather than a real identity, is perceived as a performance, articulated through his academic hobbies, his temporary celibacy, and his glasses, contrasting with his obscure and toxic supernatural nature.

4. Toxic Masculinity

Symbolically speaking, Nick Sullivan's transformation does not only imply the shapeshifting, but also the uncovering of his toxic masculinity. Werewolves have usually epitomised "a generally shared assumption that everyone could indeed easily combine contradictory and even opposite identity" (Alex 2010, 381). As shown above, Nick does not legitimise two antithetical identities, but a hidden one and its concealment. This revelation gradually emerges after the second sexual intercourse (Clements 2018, 2:10). Henceforth, Nick takes a more active role in the relationship; he starts showing his feelings for her by kissing her, hugging her, and expressing his desires for seeing her (2:21). In fact, he admits "[having] given up that fight" (2:25), implicitly referring to the inner fight against his lupine nature because "the male-identified . . . werewolf *cannot help himself* and some degree of physical or sexual violence is inevitable, as it is simply part of his nature" (Kendal and Kendal 2015, 27). Similarly, in *An American Werewolf in London*, the protagonist also starts to behave more affectionately with the female character after his shapeshifting (Landis 1981, 1:15:40). Nick's performative acts represent his attitudinal shift as well; a change that Kayla effortlessly notices and likes (Clements 2018, 24:40). At that moment, his toxic masculinity comes into play, finally revealed with Ethan's murder (Zuhlke 2018a, 26:50). Interestingly, Tyler Lockwood's activation of his family curse, which turned them into werewolves, was also executed through murder (Williamson and Plec 2010, 28:38-29:36). Even though in *Tell Me a Story* some details of Nick's lupine features are anticipated before the killing, the fact that these two TV series were directed by Kevin Williamson strengthens these similarities. Then, as a consequence of the total

uncovering of his toxicity triggered by Ethan's murder, Nick starts to reflect the corruption of the patriarchal system by taking an imposed protection, obsession, and violence as his main behavioural principles, which will indeed drive him to commit the crimes.

In youth popular culture, protection is generally translated as an expression of affection; however, the analysis of this cultural assumption usually associates this act with gender violence. In the case study, Nick imposes his protection on Kayla (Clements 2018, 23:55), who accepts it and justifies it as positive love responses (24:40). This imposition should define Nick as "abusive", "possessive" and "controlling"; instead, "as a non-human driven by instinct, his overwhelming need to control his mate is accepted as a consequence of his race" (Leonzini 2017, 277). This discourse is comparable to the inevitable 'imprinting' of the Quileute werewolves in *The Twilight Saga* (Slade 2010, 22:49-23:15), defined as "mating for eternity" (Dietz 2011, 102). As a consequence, male werewolves, genetically determined to protect their partners, symbolically express their patriarchal right to ownership, leading to the representation of women's stereotypical passivity. Even more, this protection is sometimes required for loving someone; this is Peter's case in *Red Riding Hood*, who, after being bitten by a werewolf, compels himself to leave the town "until [he] learn[s] how to protect [her] from [his animal nature]" (Hardwicke 2011, 1:32:32). Therefore, women's subordination to male characters is constantly legitimised and justified as a romantic event in mainstream youth audiovisuals, concluding in the misinterpretation of toxic masculinity as a positive performativity. Nonetheless, other TV series prefer portraying a more pessimistic, albeit more culturally accurate, picture as in *Buffy* (Noxon 1999, 37:55), where "Oz's inability to control himself and his potential danger to Willow is the catalyst for him to later break off their relationship and leave" (McMahon-Coleman and Weaver 2012, 59). In *Underworld's* case (Wiseman 2003, 1:20:09), despite the fact that it is the female vampire Selene who protects the shapeshifter Michael Corvin, this reversal does not take place due to gender, but to class, because she tries to fight against the vampires' attempt to eradicate the marginalised werewolves (Gal 2018, 86). Granted this, werewolves are normally labelled as toxic protectors because they refuse their victims' agency to decide whether they want to be taken care of or not.

Nick's obsession with Kayla denotes another toxic facet of the werewolf. To begin with, this concept is rendered explicit while he discusses during a lesson the representation of love in Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (Clements 2018, 12:42-13:35). Making a prolepsis of their future relationship, Kayla defines Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship as "abusive", "unhealthy", and "pathetic" (13:13), denying their being in love, but "obsessed" (13:18). As *Tell Me a Story* moves forward, the fixation becomes clearer. Apart from following her to have her under

control (23:53), he also makes her a path of roses to manipulate her to miss classes (Sutton 2018, 12:19, 13:06). At this stage, Nick's concerns about his role as teacher start to vanish because he is no longer obsessed with the academic world, but with Kayla (12:42). Nevertheless, this scene is disrupted when, after expressing his love for her without receiving a reciprocate answer (25:46), she leaves, to finally break up with him a few hours later (32:39). Henceforth, his toxic fixation reveals his stalking nature, evidenced by Nick's premeditated encounter with Kayla's father (37:00), and which leads to Kayla's estrangement from him (Bolden 2018, 12:52). On the contrary, he is not disposed to distance from her. This is illustrated by three obsessive behaviours: his "texting nonstop" (Zuhlke 2018b, 8:47), act which Laney advises Kayla to denounce to her father (8:56); his nocturnal appearance in Kayla's bedroom while she is sleeping (Stringer 2018, 42:37); and his final imposition in which he expressed that "[she] will learn to love [him]" (Williamson and Sutton 2019, 41:49). Although the TV series unsympathetically depicts the werewolf as toxic, this representation is not pejoratively conveyed in other audiovisuals as in *The Wolf Man* (Wagner 1941, 11:15-12:55) and *An American Werewolf in Paris* (Waller 1998, 17:31-17:43), where both lycanthropes, being refused by the female characters, repeatedly insist on their proposals until they accept them. Hence, the lack of the female characters' agency is a prevailing characteristic, since they are constantly manipulated by men's insistence to accept their suggestions. This aspect is sometimes performed by a sexual assault as the non-consensual kiss of Jacob to Bella (Slade 2010, 41:55). For this reason, not only does this case study voice a criticism against the normalisation of abusive acts as signs of love, but also against obsessed manipulators and abusers that take advantage of women, because of their stereotypical social inferiority, in order to fulfil their desires.

Nick's aggressiveness also starts to be presented as a frequent notion in the series. His suspicious and assailing greetings, akin to a kidnapping action (Clements 2018, 23:41; Sutton 2018, 12:30), expose his violent nature, proved in the end by Kayla's grandmother's kidnapping (Williamson and Sutton 2019, 3:24). By symbolising the attempt of crime and its later carried out, *Tell Me a Story* is raising awareness of the consequences that this kind of behaviour can truly have. Actually, this is also exemplified by Kayla's mother's murder as a consequence the latter's rejection of Nick's love proposal (Stringer 2018, 18:31). Since "all [he] wanted was to make [her] happy" (Stringer 2018, 31:58) and, in contrast, Abby tried to "get away from [him], [he] had to stop [her]" (Williamson and Sutton 2019, 26:09). Therefore, he justifies her murder as a proof of love (26:26). By the same token, he blames Kayla for "[leaving him] no choice" (Zuhlke 2018b, 18:20), expressing his obligation to kill her due to her refusal of his patriarchal

discourses. This response is similar to Cesaire's, who, after murdering the grandmother, also expressed that "[he had] had no choice" (Hardwicke 2011, 1:24:37). Even more, Nick also blames her for Ethan and Laney's murders by saying that "[they] are a team" (Williamson and Sutton 2019, 19:09). Nonetheless, in the case study, these violent scenes are mixed with romantic aspects as the kiss he gave to Abby before asphyxiating her (Stringer 2018, 32:23-32:53), or the conversation about their future planning in Paris while he was keeping her against her will (Zuhlke 2018b, 18:48-19:39). In former paranormal romances, "the blurring of the line between affection and violence [has been] a consequence of the hero's nonhuman nature", leading to the normalisation of this romanticised sexual violence (Leonzini 2018, 278), and to the legitimisation of "the cultural assumptions about unequal power relations in heterosexual relationships" (Modleski 2008, 34). Although this pattern is hidden in some audiovisual productions as it has been shown above, there are others which reverse this discourse introducing a "more sex-positivist approach by promoting enthusiastic consent and a more equal power dynamic" such as *Teen Wolf* (Kendal and Kendal 2015, 31). Therefore, by reacting against the patriarchal supremacy, *Tell Me a Story* provides a critical perspective of the stereotypical romantic love stories, projecting a visible unequal and possessive relationship that must be countered.

Generally speaking, werewolves unconsciously enact violent performances due to their uncontrollable nature; notwithstanding, Nick is most of the time fully conscious of his acts. Although most lycanthropes do not have self-control "under the moon's baleful influence" (Curran 1998, 198). Nick's loss of control is visualised only once, after their breakup (Sutton 2018, 33:16). Thereupon, he madly starts to punch himself in his face and to destroy his room, until he sees his reflection in the mirror (34:09-34:24). As if nothing has happened, he fixes his hair and his clothes, and suddenly, he violently smashes his face against the mirror, shattering it into pieces (34:26-34:36). The introduction of the mirror represents the opposition between his self-identity, his projected identity, and his perceived identity: Nick is a toxic and violent werewolf and, despite the fact that he tries to cover his real identity under the geek performativity, he is perceived as a mixture of both masculinities. This awareness is intrinsically connected to the nature of his crimes, being this the substantial distinction between him and the other animalised figures. Nick legitimises the association, encoded by modern werewolf fiction, between the werewolf side of lycanthropes and the purest form of evil (Stebbins 2017, 72) because he consciously kills for revenge and jealousy (Zuhlke 2018a, 26:50). Similarly, Cesaire's resentment drives him to murder a limitless number of people unless Valerie, the little riding hood, accepts to run away with him (Hardwicke 2011, 45:15-45:20). Contrariwise, the other

werewolves murder either unconsciously (Wagner 1941, 43:25; Landis 1981, 1:02:25) or to protect their beloved (Noxon 1999, 36:10). A notable exception is *Teen Wolf*'s Scott Howard (Daniel, 1985), whose nonviolent lycanthropic essence is not perceived as negative, but as a way “to actually gain popularity within the school” (Stebbins 2017, 61). In brief, Nick’s toxic nature is also demonstrated by his willingness to commit crimes.

Furthermore, Nick’s immoral essence is also reinforced when he asserts that the real fairy-tales are not “the Disney capitalist bullshit”, but “the dark, violent cautionary tales of the Brothers Grimm, . . . Hans Christian Andersen” (Clements 2018, 1:52-2:03); to what Kayla replies that “[they] are [their] own cautionary tale” (2:34). This answer provokes a prolepsis of their relationship’s end, in which Kayla kills Nick (Williamson and Sutton 2019, 42:02) just as little red riding hood killed the wolf (Hardwicke 2011, 1:28:51). Therefore, even though “crime films have reflected, refracted, and sometimes critiqued contemporary practices and assumptions about crime’s causes and societal responses to criminal transgression” (Greenhill and Kohm 2010, 79), “‘Little Red Riding Hood’ provides the narrative backbone for a variety of critical postmodern variations on the theme of predatory crime” (89). All things considered, by representing the werewolf as a hidden criminal, the TV series challenges the romanticised stereotypes spread by youth popular culture. Thus, it criticises the contemporary felonies perpetrated by the Occidental society such as murders for jealousy, kidnapping for revenge, and gender violence to reinforce men’s supremacy.

5. Conclusion

On the whole, *Tell Me a Story* is a formal denunciation of contemporary cultural assumptions. Firstly, it tries to reverse the stereotypical physical representation of werewolves as Native American by portraying Nick as a blonde, blue-eyed Caucasian man. As a result, the series is implying that all human races, including the “civilised” Occident, have their animal side, which drives them to commit specific crimes like gender violence, kidnapping, or murder. Nonetheless, there are other audiovisual productions that are keener on hybrid physicality in order to remain as racially partial as they are able. Exceptionally, Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* (1984) was interpreted as a large achievement for Afro-American culture, encouraging the subsequent introduction of African-American werewolves. Apart from racial representations, physicality is also relevant in the eroticisation and sexualisation of these supernatural creatures. As opposed to adult werewolves, muscular masculinity is required in young lycanthropes to be eroticised, often intertwined with horror images. Even though this sexual tradition of horror

fiction is perpetuated by the case study, Nick's geek masculinity is an innovative incorporation, albeit again prototypical. The articulation of his academic interests, the sexual abstinence and the use of glasses legitimise the nerd stereotype. However, on account of his impermanent celibacy and his ambiguous use of the bifocals, Nick's geekiness proves to be a performance, instead of his identity, being this enigma truly revealed after Ethan's murder. Henceforth, following his animal instincts, he starts to perform as an obsessed and violent protector. In former werewolves, these traits are mostly romanticised and justified by the biological determinism of these animalised human beings. In contrast, the case study criticises these toxic performative acts by portraying their real consequences such as murdering, kidnapping or gender violence. Therefore, it tries to make its young audience aware of the hegemonic discourses encoded by media that still romanticise this inequality and violence.

6. Works Cited

- Adamová, Diana. 2015. "True Blood and Taboo – What Would Freud Say?." Paper presented at the 4th International Conference of English and American Studies, Czech Republic, Opava, September 14-15.
- Alex, Serguei. 2010. Review of *The Sacred Book of the Werewolf*, by Pelevin, Viktor, and Andrew Bromfield. *Cultural Anthropology* 25 (2): 380-385.
- Bacon, Simon. 2016. "Dirty, Wild Beasts! Representations of the Homeless as Werewolves in Horror Films from *Werewolf of London* (1935) to *Underworld: Rise of the Lycans* (2009)." *Revenant: Critical and Creative Studies of the Supernatural* 1 (2): 73-90.
- Bataille, George. 1993. *The Accursed Share II and III: The History of Eroticism and Sovereignty*. Cambridge: Zone Books.
- Bernhardt-House, Phillip A. 2008. "The Werewolf as Queer, the Queer as Werewolf, and Queer Werewolves." In *Queering the Non/Human*, edited by Giffney, Noreen, and Myra J. Hird, 159-184. Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Bolden, Andrea Thornton. 2018. "Betrayal." *Tell Me a Story*, season 1, episode 7. Directed by Millicent Shelton, aired December 13. HBO, Television.
- Botting, Fred. 2008. *Limits of Horror: Technology, Bodies, Gothic*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Busse, Kristina. 2013. "Geek Hierarchies, Boundary Policing, and the Gendering of the Good Fan." *Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 10 (1): 73-91.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Canto, Eduardo Javier, and Ryan Maldonado. 2018. "Loss." *Tell Me a Story*, season 1, episode 2. Directed by Liz Friedlander, aired November 8. HBO, Television.
- Clements, Kim. 2018. "Rage." *Tell Me a Story*, season 1, episode 4. Directed by Mark Tonderai, aired November 22. HBO, Television.
- Connell, R. W., and James W. Messerschmidt. 2005. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender and Society* 19 (6): 829-859.
- Connolly, Angela. 2003. "Psychoanalytic Theory in Times of Terror." *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 48 (4): 407-431.
- Courtenay, Will H. 2000. "Constructions of Masculinity and their Influence on Men's Well-being: A Theory of Gender and Health." *Social Science and Medicine* 50 (10): 1385-1401.

- Curran, Bob. 2009. *Werewolves: A Field Guide to Shapeshifters, Lycanthropes, and Man-Beasts*. Franklin Lakes: The Career Press.
- Daniel, Rod. 1985. *Teen Wolf*. Written by Jeph Loeb and Mathew Weisman. USA: Atlantic Entertainment Group. DVD.
- Davis, Jeff. 2011. "Second Chance at First Line." *Teen Wolf*, season 1, episode 2. Directed by Russel Mulcahy, aired June 6. MTV, Television.
- Demetriou, Demetrakis Z. 2001. "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique." *Theory and Society* 30 (3): 337-361.
- Des Hotel, Rob, and Dean Batali. 1998. "Phases." *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, season 2, episode 15. Directed by Bruce Seth Green, aired January 27. Los Angeles, CA: 20th Television. DVD.
- Dietz, Tammy. 2011. "Wake Up, Bella! A Personal Essay on Twilight, Mormonism, Feminism, and Happiness." In *Bringing Light to Twilight: Perspectives on a Pop Culture Phenomenon*, edited by Giselle Liza Anatol, 99-112. New York: Palgrave Millan.
- Du Coudray, Chantal Bourgault. 2006. *The Curse of the Werewolf: Fantasy, Horror and the Beast within*. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1962. *Civilization and its Discontents*. Translated by James Strachey. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.
- Gal, Ana G. 2018. "Tough Women, Patriarchal Violence, and the Problem of Non-Intersectional Feminism in Les Wiseman's *Underworld Series*." In *Gender Warriors: Reading Contemporary Urban Fantasy*, edited by Anyiwo, Melissa U., and Amanda Hobson, 85-96. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Greenhill, Pauline, and Steven Kohm. 2010. "'Little red Riding Hood' Crime Films: Criminal Themes and Critical Variations." *The Annual Review of Interdisciplinary Justice Research* no. 1 (Winter): 77-93.
- Hardwicke, Catherine. 2011. *Red Riding Hood*. Written by David Leslie Johnson. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. DVD.
- Keisner, Jody. 2008. "Do You Want a Watch? A Study of the Visual Rhetoric of the Postmodern Horror Film." *Women's Studies* 37 (4): 411-427.
- Kendal, Evie, and Zachary Kendal. 2015. "Consent is Sexy: Gender, Sexual Identity and Sex Positivism in MTV's Young Adult Television Series *Teen Wolf* (2011-)." *Colloquy: Text Theory Critique* 30: 26-39.
- Kendall, Lori. 1999. "Nerd Nation: Images of Nerds in US Popular Culture." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2 (2): 260-283.

- Kupers, Terry A. 2005. "Toxic Masculinity as a Barrier to Mental Health Treatment in Prison." *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 61 (6): 713-724.
- Landis, John. 1981. *An American Werewolf in London*. Written by John Landis. New York, NY: Universal Studios. DVD.
- Lane, Kathryn E. 2018. "How Was the Nerd or Geek Born?." In *Age of the Geek: Depictions of Nerds and Geeks in Popular Media*, edited by Kathryn E. Lane, 1-20. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Leonzini, Alexandra. 2018. "'All the Better to Eat You With': The Eroticization of the Werewolf and the Rise of Monster Porn in the Digital Age." In *Exploring the Fantastic: Genre, Ideology, and Popular Culture*, edited by Batzke, Ina; Erbacher, Eric C.; Hess, Linda M.; and Corinna Lenhardt, 269-293. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.
- Loeb, Jeph, and Matthew Weisman. 2011. "Wolf Moon." *Teen Wolf*, season 1, episode 1. Directed by Russel Mulcahy, aired June 5. MTV, Television.
- Magill, David. 2015. "Racial Hybridity and the Reconstruction of White Masculinity in *Underworld*." In *Race in the Vampire Narrative*, edited by U. M. Anyiwo, 81-90. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Marak, Katarzyna. 2014. "The Werewolf and the Zombie: The Undead Body and the Misshapen Body in Horror." *Literatura i Kultura Popularna* 20: 65-82.
- McArthur, J. A. 2009. "Digital Subculture: A Geek Meaning of Style." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 33 (1): 58-70.
- McMahon-Coleman, Kimberley, and Roslyn Weaver. 2012. *Werewolves and Other Shapeshifters in Popular Culture*. North Carolina: McFarland and Company.
- Mercer, Kobena. 1993. "Monster Metaphors: Notes on Michael Jackson's *Thriller*." In *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader*, edited by Frith, Simon; Goodwin, Andrew; and Lawrence Grossberg, 93-108. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Michael Jackson. 2009 [1984]. "Thriller." YouTube Video, 13:42, October 2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOnqjkJTMAA>
- Modleski, Tania. 2008. *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-produced Fantasies for Women*. New York: Routledge.
- Mohanty, Sulagna. 2018. "Making and Breaking of Myth: Native Americans in *The Twilight Series*- A Postcolonial Study." *International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Science* 3 (8): 25-31.
- Narducci, Michael. 2011. "The Reckoning." *The Vampire Diaries*, season 3, episode 5. Directed by John Behring, aired October 13. Netflix, Television.

- Neterer, Jessica Stanley. 2018. "Ich Bin ein Nerd!: Geek Identity in Insider and Outsider Media." In *Age of the Geek: Depictions of Nerds and Geeks in Popular Media*, edited by Kathryn E. Lane, 113-128. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ningrum, Amila Sholehati. 2015. "The Concept of Masculinity Symbol within American Society's Perspective as Portrayed in 'The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones'." *Rainbow: Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Cultural Studies* 4 (1): 12-19.
- Noxon, Marti. 1999. "Wild at Heart." *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, season 4, episode 6. Directed by David Grossman, aired November 9. Los Angeles, CA: 20th Television. DVD.
- Oliver, Nancy. 2011. "I'm Alive and on Fire." *True Blood*, season 4, episode 4. Directed by Michael Lehmann, aired July 17. HBO, Television.
- Overton, Hollie. 2018. "Greed." *Tell Me a Story*, season 1, episode 3. Directed by Mark Tonderai, aired November 15. HBO, Television.
- Parent, Mike C.; Gobble, Theresa D.; and Aaron Rochlen. 2019. "Social Media Behaviour, Toxic Masculinity, and Depression." *Psychology of Men and Masculinity* 20 (3): 277-287.
- Plec, Julie, and Caroline Dries. 2011. "Smells like Teen Spirit." *The Vampire Diaries*, season 3, episode 6. Directed by Rob Hardy, aired October 20. Netflix, Television.
- Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Salter, Anastasia, and Bridget Blodgett. 2012. "Hypermasculinity and Dickwolves: The Contentious Role of Women in the New Gaming Public." *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 56 (3): 401-416.
- . 2017. *Toxic Geek Masculinity in Media: Sexism, Trolling, and Identity Policing*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Schell, Heather. 2007. "The Big Bad Wolf: Masculinity and Genetics in Popular Culture." *Literature and Medicine* 26 (1): 109-125.
- Slade, David. 2010. *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*. Written by Melissa Rosenberg. Santa Mónica, CA: Summit Entertainment. DVD.
- Stebbins, Maegan A. 2017. "The Werewolf: Past and Future." Thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
- Stringer, Steve. 2018. "Truth." *Tell Me a Story*, season 1, episode 8. Directed by John Stuart Scott, aired December 10. HBO, Television.
- Sutton, Mary Leah. 2018. "Guilt." *Tell Me a Story*, season 1, episode 6. Directed by Jeff T. Thomas, aired December 6. HBO, Television.

- Taylor, T. L. 2012. *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Wagner, George. 1941. *The Wolf Man*. Written by Curt Siodmak. New York, NY: Universal Studios. DVD.
- Waller, Anthony. 1998. *An American Werewolf in Paris*. Written by Tim Burns, Tom Stern and Anthony Waller. Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Pictures. DVD.
- Ward, Michael R. M. 2014. "'I'm a Geek I am': Academic Achievement and the Performance of a Studious Working-Class Masculinity." *Gender and Education* 26 (7): 709-725.
- Weitz, Chris. 2009. *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*. Written by Melissa Rosenberg. Santa Mónica, CA: Summit Entertainment. DVD.
- Wiegers, Yvonne. 1998. "Male Bodybuilding: The Social Construction of a Masculine Identity." *Journal of Popular Culture* 32 (2): 147-161.
- Williamson, Kevin. 2018. "Hope." *Tell Me a Story*, season 1, episode 1. Directed by Liz Friedlander, aired October 31. HBO, Television.
- Williamson, Kevin, and Julie Plec. 2009. "Pilot." *The Vampire Diaries*, season 1, episode 1. Directed by Marcos Siega, aired September 10. Netflix, Television.
- — —. 2010. "Masquerade." *The Vampire Diaries*, season 2, episode 7. Directed by Charles Beeson, aired October 28. Netflix, Television.
- Williamson, Kevin, and Mary Leah Sutton. 2019. "Forgiveness." *Tell Me a Story*, season 1, episode 10. Directed by Craig Zisk, aired January 3. HBO, Television.
- Wilson, Natalie. 2016. "Civilized Vampires Versus Savage Werewolves: Race and Ethnicity in *The Twilight Series*." In *The Mediated Youth Reader*, edited by Sharon R. Mazzarella, 231-239. New York: Peter Lang Inc.
- Wiseman, Len. 2003. *Underworld*. Written by Kevin Grevious, Len Wiseman and Danny McBride. Culver City, CA: Screen Gems. DVD.
- Woo, Alexander. 2010. "It Hurts Me Too." 2010. *True Blood*, season 3, episode 3. Directed by Michael Lehmann, aired June 27. HBO, Television.
- Zuhlke, Heather. 2018a. "Madness." *Tell Me a Story*, season 1, episode 5. Directed by Solvan Naim, aired November 29. HBO, Television.
- — —. 2018b. "Deception." *Tell Me a Story*, season 1, episode 9. Directed by Adam Davidson, aired December 27. HBO, Television.