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**TAMING THE PERFECT BEAST: THE MONSTER AS ROMANTIC HERO IN  
CONTEMPORARY FICTION**

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Bachelor of Arts in Communication, English Literature, and Film & Digital Media

Cleveland State University

December 2010

submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

at the

CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY

August 2014

**We hereby approve this thesis**

**For**

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Defended on August 7, 2014

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# TAMING THE PERFECT BEAST: THE MONSTER AS ROMANTIC HERO IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION

LARA KLABER

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the contemporary phenomenon of the paranormal romance, as exemplified by Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series. Although immensely popular, the series has drawn harsh criticism for its writing style and for the sexual politics portrayed in the novels. Readers of the series have been subjected to similar harsh criticism for enjoying these works in spite of the aforementioned issues. Careful examination of the books, however, reveals that the source of their popularity draws from several factors: the use of a narrative structure known as the Rebirth scenario, particularly popular in romance novels; an inverted form of the traditional *Beauty and the Beast* narrative, in which the Beast is princely on the outside and bestial within, and in which the heroine is the one who undergoes transformation; and a heroine who, through her apparent lack of empowerment, may actually empower her readers by functioning as an avatar with whom they are capable of fully identifying and sympathizing.

Further, this thesis traces the historical formation of the paranormal romance through the multiple genres that have contributed to its development, and examines the social forces that may have made the popularity of both a flawed heroine such as Bella Swan and a dangerous hero such as Edward Cullen inevitable. The segregation of the

romance novel away from other fiction, along with the customary way in which it is derogated as inferior to other genres, emerges as a crucial factor in how the novels have been interrogated by their detractors. As this derogatory treatment is often extended to the novels' fans, this thesis further suggests some ways in which those critics concerned about female empowerment may wish to re-evaluate the novels, the genres from which they draw, and the benefits that many readers may actually gain from reading them.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In 2005, an unassuming writer from Arizona published her first novel, the story of a shy teenage girl who discovers that her handsome classmate is an immortal vampire and falls in love with him. Arriving on bookstore shelves only two years after *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* aired its final episode, the premise of a mortal girl falling in love with an immortal, inhuman, and potentially dangerous man was not an unfamiliar one. Reader reaction, however, was unprecedented. *Twilight*, Stephenie Meyer's first novel in the series of the same name, swiftly climbed to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list, as did all of its sequels, becoming an international phenomenon, selling more than 100 million books worldwide, and grossing more than a billion dollars at box offices with its film adaptations. Mainstream fiction readers, many of whom had never been interested in gothic or supernatural fiction before, devoured the novels. Although a backlash swiftly developed against the books, characterizing them as poorly written and unworthy of literary consideration, the impact that they have had on both popular culture and the publishing industry remains significant.

## 1.1 Impact and Implications of the *Twilight* series

This impact is characterized by several unique developments in the world of fiction. Most significantly, the success of the series popularized an emergent genre, the paranormal romance, which has become a multi-million dollar business for publishing houses. A wide array of supernatural creatures has consequently moved off of the fantasy and horror shelves and into the romance section, and reader demand has been steady to date. Additionally, young adult fiction has seen a large renaissance of its own and an increase in serious analysis by literary scholars. Further, the saga led to a significant development regarding transformative works, more frequently known as fan fiction, when British writer E. L. James took her highly popular fan fiction series called “Masters of the Universe” and rewrote it to remove all references to *Twilight*, ultimately resulting in the *Fifty Shades* series that climbed to the top of bestseller lists in 2011. In the aftermath, publishers have been examining other ways to capitalize on fan fiction; even before then, education theorists had begun examining the fan bulletin boards for *Twilight*, seeking answers about what made the series so compelling to young readers and how it might be channeled into promoting higher levels of young adult literacy.

Detractors of the series, meanwhile, have objected to controversial narrative tropes throughout the books, particularly in terms of the way that the romantic male lead, Edward Cullen, allegedly controls and polices his relationship with heroine Bella Swan. One critic, in particular, catalogued how Edward’s behavior matched up with every single abusive partner warning sign listed on the National Domestic Violence Hotline’s checklist (McMillan), while school librarians have fretted over whether the books might potentially damage the psyches of their young patrons (Butler). *Guardian* journalist Kira

Cochrane, after interviewing Meyer in 2013, was troubled by the popularity of the relationship, and both its hero and heroine:

The most interesting question is not why [Meyer] wrote it as she did, but why girls responded so wildly. Is there something particularly powerful, in this cultural moment, about a dangerous, potentially violent romantic hero? . . . Do women still yearn for a dominant man? Do they identify, more than ever, with an awkward, unconfident female protagonist? Bubbling away in a generation's subconscious are some troubling answers. (Cochrane)

This thesis will address the cultural forces that make the popularity of a story like *Twilight* possible, especially in terms of one particular element: the traditional monster recast as the romantic hero, or the Monstrous Lover, and the source of his allure to female readers in the twenty-first century. At a time when women are arguably in a more empowered position than any previous generation has been able to attain, the allure of such a character seems counter-intuitive, and its continued prominence raises disturbing questions about how extensive that empowerment may or may not really be for young women. Although many iterations of this character exist within a wide range of fiction and literature, this thesis focuses primarily upon the most recent mode of his existence: the lover as the literal monster in the new wave of paranormal romance fiction characterized by the *Twilight* novels; how this Monstrous Lover is constructed and supported by contemporary culture; and what a comparison to preceding and concurrent series, which similarly depict vampires as suitable romantic partners for a heroine, reveals about reader preference.

## 1.2 The Purpose of This Analysis

To truly understand the phenomenon that *Twilight* represents, one must examine the traditions in literature and fiction that contributed to its creation. Although many detractors have focused upon such issues as the way that the series violates the folkloric traditions associated with vampires, this is a highly prescriptive criticism that relies upon the idea that there is one specific way to write such creatures, even though none of the previous popular depictions agreed, either. Ken Gelder, author of *Reading the Vampire*, points out that the depiction of vampirism is adaptive enough that it can “stand for a range of meanings and positions in culture” (Gelder 141). This thesis will detail reasons that the vampire is better suited than other supernatural monsters to the role of the Monstrous Lover; casting him in the role of the romantic hero, however, is neither new to *Twilight* nor in violation of the traditions associated with other popular texts within the genre. Where *Twilight*, along with other paranormal romances, diverges from these traditions is in relocating the center of the narrative away from the vampire himself or herself, over to the female love interest who begins the stories as an ordinary mortal woman. In addition, the plot shifts away from the high-conflict Hero’s Journey in which the protagonist must battle either literal or metaphorical demons; in its place, a feminine Heroine’s Journey, often a coming-of-age fable, plays out. The focus of such stories, covering a heroine’s quest to find her place within society and establish a family structure for herself, is most typically seen in romance novels and young adult novels aimed at teenage girls. While there are a number of elements of the *Twilight* series that may be worthy of rebuke, much of the backlash against the books takes on a particularly disturbing tone by simply targeting its connection to romance novel tropes and treating

that connection as conclusive proof of the novels' inferiority. Ironically, while one concern expressed by many critics about the books is that young, impressionable female readers might accept some of its more controversial relationship models without critiquing them, much of the ridicule aimed at the series also lacks solid critical thought.

This thesis will show that *Twilight*, along with other paranormal romances, draws its thematic roots from the *Beauty and the Beast* fairy tale, a story in which a heroine with a great deal of internal agency but very little worldly power falls under the thrall of a powerful beast-man who falls in love with her. During the nineteenth and twentieth century, the subject position in this tale began to shift away from the heroine over to the hero. A story that had begun as the tale of a heroine developing the ability to see, and thus invoke, the inner beauty of a monstrous-seeming hero, over time became the story of a tortured hero on a quest to reform his monstrous ways with the help of a simplified heroine who functions less as an agent of change than as a catalyst. The paranormal romances epitomized by *Twilight* actually represent a new evolutionary step in the narrative, as the dynamic character arc shifts back to the heroine even if what is categorized as monstrous and beautiful is almost completely inverted, and the arc concludes with her physical and spiritual transformation rather than the Beast's.

Additionally, because *Twilight* follows most of the traditional conventions of the romance novel genre, greater scrutiny of this genre must be constructed. A cross-genre narrative, *Twilight* straddles romance, gothic horror, and young adult fiction. While gothic horror and young adult fiction have received attention from literary theorists, literary gatekeepers have snubbed romance for decades, even though it is one of the most widely read genres in fiction. The paucity of critical theory specifically connected to the

romance genre means that few readers have been equipped with tools to interrogate the themes and messages in such stories, something that both gives credence to some detractors' fears about how the stories could negatively influence unwary readers and simultaneously impairs their abilities to effectively critique such works, themselves. In addition to all of the other debates that *Twilight* has prompted, a crucial point for readers on all levels to take away is the importance of engaging these works directly rather than continuing to process them peripherally or dismiss them altogether. Most of the theorists who have engaged the books have done so from sociological or educational perspectives, but since most of the objections to *Twilight* derive from the infiltration of romantic narratology into the mainstream bestseller list, it must be examined from a literary perspective as well. The prevailing system of dismissing romantic narratives as unworthy of critique has led, as many commentators have noted, to a commensurate dismissal of their readers that borders upon misogyny to the same degree that some detractors claim exists within the novels.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary works of fiction examined in this text are the *Twilight* novels by Stephenie Meyer, consisting of *Twilight* (2005), *New Moon* (2006), *Eclipse* (2007), and *Breaking Dawn* (2008). *Twilight* introduces 17-year-old Bella Swan, who has moved to Forks, Washington to live with her father so that her mother can travel with her stepfather. Although overtly in favor of the move, Bella is initially unhappy and isolated, but she is quickly hailed as the exotic new student at her school—in spite of her own view that she is relentlessly ordinary—and soon has many new friends and even potential boyfriends. One classmate who appears immune to her appeal, however, is the strange, reclusive Edward Cullen, who seems to detest her. After he saves her life, though, she realizes that his apparent dislike is a mask for the intense desire he actually feels, a desire that is potentially dangerous because he is a vampire and the scent of her blood provokes intense bloodlust within him. In spite of—or perhaps because of—this danger, Bella is fascinated and wants to know him better; the two soon fall in love. As it becomes clear that Edward can, indeed, control himself with her, their relationship strengthens and she is accepted by his vampire family, all of whom have sworn off of drinking human blood. The safety she feels among them is soon shattered when a trio of man-eating vampires



arrive and one, James, becomes obsessed with the idea of killing her. Although the Cullen family tries to help Bella elude him, he nearly succeeds in killing her before Edward and his siblings rescue her. The novel ends with Bella comfortably assimilated into both the Forks community and her vampire family, although she is still human.

*New Moon* picks up almost immediately after the first novel, as Bella turns eighteen and begins to fret over aging past Edward. Although she wants to become a vampire, too, he refuses to grant this wish unless she marries him first. Before she can decide whether or not to do so, an incident with a paper cut at her birthday party almost unleashes one of the Cullens' bloodlust, and Edward decides that it is too dangerous for any of his family to be around Bella. Abandoned by the family, Bella retreats into near catatonia for several months. Her recovery and re-actualization is assisted by Jacob Black, a member of the nearby Quileute tribe and the son of one of her father's friends. Jacob, it turns out, has a secret of his own: he and many of his friends are werewolves, ancient enemies of vampires, whose powers were activated by the proximity of the Cullens. Jacob hopes for a romantic relationship with Bella, and she begins to have feelings for him in return, but their blossoming romance is halted when a reckless stunt results in Edward believing that she has killed herself. She learns that he has never intended to outlive her and is now preparing to commit suicide, too. Traveling to Italy with the help of Edward's sister Alice, she prevents his suicide attempt and encounters the Volturi, a group of ancient vampires whose dictates must be obeyed by all of the undead. They only let her go free because Edward promises that she will be transformed into a vampire soon, although he still insists that they should be married first.

*Eclipse* begins soon after Bella's return to Forks, as she struggles to negotiate the

potentially lethal rivalry between Jacob and Edward. The Quileutes and the Cullens consider each other mortal enemies, and both young men are determined to prevent her from choosing the other. The rivalry distracts all involved from the vengeful return of Victoria, one of the trio of man-eaters from *Twilight* and James's mate, who intends to hunt down and murder Bella in retribution and has assembled an army of fledgling vampires to help her. To defeat them, Bella convinces the Cullens and the Quileutes to form an unheard-of alliance. Soon after the battle has been won, however, the Volturi arrive to pass judgment on all involved. As a show of power, they execute a young fledgling whom the Cullens had captured and had hoped to convert to abstaining from human blood. They do no worse only because they are deterred by the Quileutes, but they leave with the warning that Bella must be transformed soon.

*Breaking Dawn*, set immediately after, commences with Bella's graduation from high school and her marriage to Edward, over Jacob's strenuous objections. Bella's and Edward's honeymoon swiftly goes awry when Bella improbably conceives on her wedding night, and the pregnancy progresses at a dangerously accelerated rate. When Edward wants to try to abort the child, out of fear for her, she retreats into the protection of the Cullen sisters. The birth mortally wounds her, forcing Edward to transform her into a vampire to save her. In the aftermath, she discovers that she has been gifted with supernatural powers far exceeding most other vampires, and her rapidly-growing daughter, Renesmee, turns out to be a human-vampire hybrid with unique powers of her own. The Volturi, however, decree that Renesmee is an abomination that must be destroyed. The Cullens and Quileutes team up once more, allying themselves with other vampires who want to break the Volturi's power, for a deadly showdown that none of

them expect to survive. Peace is ultimately restored when Bella's newfound powers repel the Volturi long enough for Alice to locate another half-vampire like Renesmee, who can demonstrate that she is no threat. The story ends with peace restored on every level: the Volturi depart, the truce between werewolves and vampires is made permanent, and Jacob finds his own soul mate in Bella's swiftly-maturing daughter.

Because the books are so new, and the genres they straddle—gothic horror, young adult, and romance—are the subjects of less study than many other types of fiction and literature, assembling a body of critical works to examine them posed some unique challenges. Many of the best sources, in this case, came from sociological works and pedagogical studies, examining the social forces and educational utility of these genres. Several books specifically devoted to vampire fiction were consulted as well, including Nina Auerbach's seminal *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (1995), which explains much of the history of vampire fiction and film into the early 1990s; Ken Gelder's *Reading the Vampire* (1994), which also lays excellent historical groundwork and describes the meanings associated with many vampire tropes; Charlotte Montague's *Vampires: The Complete Guide to Vampire Mythology from Dracula to Twilight* (2010), which examines not only each era of vampire mythology but the cultural impact each one had on readers; David Pirie's *The Vampire Cinema* (1977), which traces the film adaptations that helped cement the genre's place in popular culture; and Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger's anthology *Blood Read: The vampire as metaphor in contemporary culture*, which is particularly celebratory of paranormal romances.

Notable educational theory books consulted for this paper were John and Kay Bushman's *Using Adult Literature in the Classroom* (1993), which studies the

developmental stages that adolescents experience and the types of literature that they best respond to in each stage; Pam B. Cole's *Young Adult Literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2009), which contains a particularly useful section on the appeal of romance novels, particularly to teens, and which argues in favor of using *Twilight* to encourage adolescents to read; and Kathy Latrobe's and Judith Drury's *Critical Approaches to Young Adult Literature* (2009), which elaborates further on the narrative structures that appeal most to young women and delineates one of the most popular plot structures used both in most romance novels and in *Twilight*.

Sociological and literary criticism is drawn from several books: Robin Morgan's *The Demon Lover: On the Sexuality of Terrorism* (1989) is a particularly useful source for critiques on the dominant heroic journey myths that romance novels actively resist; Susan Schweik's *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public* (2009) provides useful information about how beauty, deformity, and moral judgments about both are encoded in Western culture; Elaine Showalter's *A Jury of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx* (2009) elucidates many of the social forces that constrained female authors in prior decades and centuries, while her *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory* (1985) provides compelling examples, including Nina Baym's article "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors" and Lillian S. Robinson's "Treason Our Text: Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon."

Additional useful scholarly articles consulted in this paper include Thomas Byers' "Terminating the Postmodern: Masculinity and Pomophobia" (1995), which evaluates the post-feminist backlash that occurred in fiction and mass media in the late 1980s and early

1990s; Judith Johnson's "Women and Vampires: Nightmare or Utopia?" (1993), which examines the role of the mastering gaze (sometimes called the male gaze) in controlling both characters and the narrative in vampire fiction; Suzanne Juhasz's "Texts to Grow on: Reading Women's Romance Fiction," which studies the developmental arcs deployed in romance novels and the way that Freudian theory, in particular, has been employed to deprecate them; Sharon Ross's "Dangerous Demons: Fan Responses to Girls' Power, Girls' Bodies, Girls' Beauty in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" (2004), which examines many of the fan responses to the TV show that may have actually paved the way for *Twilight*; John Allen Stevenson's "A Vampire in the Mirror: The Sexuality of *Dracula*" (1988), which makes a compelling argument for reading *Dracula* in post-colonial terms rather than Freudian terms; and Beth Younger's "Pleasure, Pain, and the Power of Being Thin: Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature" (2003), which examines how contemporary fiction frequently engages in body-policing both of its characters and its readers.

Additional tertiary sources are consulted as well, particularly a number of active blogs, because the debate about the books is ongoing and is constantly shaping and reshaping itself. Although most of these sources are not scholarly, many participants within the debate have begun critiquing the works on a high level, their voices are compelling, and close attention should be paid to them.

### CHAPTER III

#### CRITICAL PROBLEMS WITH *TWILIGHT*

Although this paper seeks to address how many of the dominant mainstream attitudes toward romance and women's fiction have clouded a fair critical assessment of the *Twilight* novels, it must be noted that there are many legitimate complaints, particularly about the way the series handles sexual politics. Some critiques, such as those focused on Meyer's writing style and her handling of language, have fueled the less helpful ridicule aimed at the series. They include incidents in which she confused "motes" with "moats" (Holmes) when describing dust in the air, and used "mash" instead of "gnash" when Bella grinds her teeth (Dana). Most of these can actually be blamed on the recent trend in publishing houses to downsize editorial staffs and have writers either self-edit or pay for their own editors, so similar typos and stylistic errors have been steadily increasing in published works. The more serious issues are related to sexual politics.

A phrase commonly used by detractors of the *Twilight* series is "Abstinence Porn" (Bans; Seifert), referring to the way that the continually delayed sexual consummation of Bella and Edward's relationship is used as a source of titillation. Generally speaking, those who use the term have a dim view of the narrative device. Christine Seifert notes

that, although *Breaking Dawn* officially outsold the other three books in the series, it had the highest amount of disaffection from the fan base, much of which was apparently the result of Edward and Bella's wedding night. She quotes an entry from *Twilightmoms.com*, in which one reader complained that "The brilliantly innocent eroticism that took our breath away was . . . gone" (Seifert). More disturbing to Seifert was how readers were apparently more upset by the fact that Bella and Edward had sex at all than by its oblique depiction as an act of brutal violence. Although the act of consummation is left off of the page, its aftermath leaves the bed a wreck and Bella covered in bruises; possibly the only reason that her lack of reaction to her condition is at all plausible is because her disaster-prone characterization has given her far more severe injuries in the past:

I'd definitely had worse. There was a faint shadow across one of my cheekbones, and my lips were a little swollen, but other than that, my face was fine. The rest of me was decorated with patches of blue and purple. I concentrated on the bruises that would be the hardest to hide—my arms and my shoulders. They weren't so bad. My skin marked up easily. By the time a bruise showed I'd usually forgotten how I'd come by it. Of course, these were just developing. I'd look even worse tomorrow. That would not make things any easier. (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 95-96)

For Seifert and many other critics, the way that Bella prioritizes concealing her injuries from Edward so that he won't feel guilty is deeply disturbing, echoing a common pattern seen in numerous battered wives who rationalize domestic violence away in similar manners. At the same time, however, a repeated theme throughout the books is Bella's

clumsiness and the physical disasters that result, most of which leave her unfazed even if they also leave her alarmingly battered-looking. Still, the physical harm that Bella comes to, sometimes at Edward's hands, threatens to violate a key principle of the *Beauty and the Beast* arc: the Monstrous Lover may be dangerous to others, but not to the heroine. In a similar vein, many critics object to the way that Edward attempts to control Bella's social life, and the ways in which he appears to stalk her before they actually become a couple, even stealing into her bedroom while she sleeps.

Many detractors also point to Meyer's alleged "Mormon agenda" (Aleiss; Hyland), claiming that her books attempt to engage in social engineering by putting forth a model of behavior allegedly detrimental to teenage girls. Critics like Rachel Hyland, however, object to this notion. "Are we really suggesting," she asks, "that the supposed target market for these novels, the world's teenage girls, are so utterly helpless in the face of subtext that they will blindly switch faiths and reshape their values based on the described devotion of an impossible supernatural creature?" (Hyland). Communication theorists refer to this phenomenon as the Third Person Effect, in which people frequently assume that others are more susceptible to persuasion or false information than they are, and thus must be protected from such influences. Hyland echoes the sentiment of many of *Twilight's* defenders: the series' detractors are crediting readers with too little intelligence.

These are only a few of the sites of contestation that have created a fraught dialogue over the value of the series. Most such sites, however, are the culmination of traditions associated with gothic horror, young adult fiction, and romance, so an evaluation of their development may reveal where the real problems lie.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE EARLY EVOLUTION OF THE MONSTROUS LOVER

Tracing the roots of the *Twilight* novels' construction involves an examination of not only the history of supernatural horror literature, specifically the portion centered in vampires, but also the history of the romance novel and its predecessor, sentimental fiction, and the history of the young adult novel, genres that have often been discounted and neglected by many theorists in spite of frequently containing some of the most popular and influential works of an era. These are often the books that an entire generation has an opinion about, making them remarkably clear lenses into the thoughts and attitudes of that generation. If Edward Cullen embodies the qualities that a large percentage of contemporary readers identify with the romantic hero, then the depiction of his nature, and the reactions of the series' readership, can reveal a great deal about just how far Western society has really come in terms of gender equality, class consciousness, and inclusivity. He is not alone, either; his counterparts from similar series, many of whom were revived in his wake, also shed light on Western society and culture in this manner. The fact that the general reading public has remained hungry for more stories like theirs suggests that these heroes fulfill certain widespread desires, but how does one define those desires?

#### 4.1 The Nature of the Monstrous

Drawing from the concept of the *Beauty and the Beast* metaphor, in particular, requires an understanding of how the concept of the vilified and dangerous Monster, itself, transitioned into concepts of the redeemable Monster, the misunderstood Monster, and finally the loveable Monster. The nature of what is or is not encoded as monstrous is as changeable as all other narrative elements that have characterized not only fantasy and horror but also mainstream literature. Research into the nature of horror itself has revealed that two of the elements that produce the most consistent feelings of dread and menace for consumers of the genre are physical aberrations, such as deformity, and inexplicable or unnatural behavior. Early mythology and folklore used such visual and social cues to divide noble heroes, such as Perseus and Beowulf, from villainous monsters like Medusa and Grendel. Although intervening centuries encoded the word “monster” with implications of hugeness and savagery, its Latin root, *monere*, simply means “to warn.” In prior centuries, the jarring appearances and mannerisms of folkloric monsters warned of the inhuman savagery that they would engage in, which was in keeping with the belief that disfigurement was an outward sign of immorality.

This belief was common in both the Medieval period and the Renaissance; Shakespeare made use of it in *Richard III* when he portrayed the titular character’s conscious decision to become as depraved as everyone apparently expected him to be based on his appearance. Writing about the “ugly laws” of late nineteenth and early twentieth century America, Susan Schweik notes that while such laws were often specifically tied to conditions of poverty, the larger, anxiety-producing myth about disfigurement itself drove many lawmakers to try to hide those who did not fit the

physical norm (Schweik 19). Schweik also notes that those seeking to criminalize alterity often envisioned more lenient statutes for those beggars who most closely resembled those in power: minorities would be more likely to be punished than whites and women would be more likely to be punished than men (Schweik 31). In this way, the mainstream mindset already conflated the monstrous Other of myth and folklore with the mundane Others whom those in power strove to keep segregated away from themselves.

#### **4.2 A Prince Hidden in a Beast**

It is in this environment of suspicion against the Other that the first relevant tale of the Monstrous Lover appears, although not yet in the form of a vampire. It appears in the eighteenth century, almost a century before the first mainstream depictions of vampires as sympathetic creatures would appear, in the French fairy tale *La Belle et la Bête*, instantly recognizable to most English speakers as *Beauty and the Beast*. As it was first disseminated in 1740 by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve and abridged in 1756 by Jeanne Marie Le Prince de Beaumont, the story was a fable that cautioned against judging by appearances; when a traveler steals from a beast-like nobleman's garden—an offense that, at the time, was legally punishable by death—the Beast threatens him with death but shows mercy by commuting the sentence to indentured servitude, which the man's daughter volunteers to fulfill in his place. Her action has metaphorical roots in both the chivalric practice of the royal hostage and the tale of Hades and Persephone. If the Beast is monstrous, he is no more so than any other member of the nobility, aside from his appearance, and the Charles Perrault version has Belle admit this: “‘There are many men,’ said Beauty, ‘who make worse monsters than you, and I prefer you, notwithstanding your looks, to those who under the semblance of

men hide false, corrupt, and ungrateful hearts” (Perrault 128). Belle’s ultimate breakthrough in seeing the Beast’s inner humanity is what allows it to manifest outwardly.

Later editions of the tale would add more negative characterizations to the Beast, giving him character flaws intended to explain why he deserved to be punished with a monstrous appearance, something that ultimately undermined the original egalitarian message that outward appearance is not a reflection of the soul. The original “crime” committed by the Beast, which earned him his monstrous appearance, was nothing more than the accidental slighting of a powerful fairy. That plot device is common throughout European folklore and notably appears in *Sleeping Beauty* as well, when a powerful fairy is left off of the guest list for her christening. Yet another fairy had cursed Oberon, eventual king of the fairies, with dwarfism after she was not invited to his christening, later relenting and compensating for his short stature with a gift of unearthly beauty (Briggs, 227). The key element in these tales is that the victims of the curses were never being punished for serious crimes, and readers and listeners of the era would have interpreted them as hapless victims of the sorts of random injustice that might befall anyone. The rewriting of such tales, to make the crimes more severe and the punishments more deserved, is an example of the just-world hypothesis in action.

*La Belle et la Bête* survived the French Revolution and remained popular through all of its iterations, to the point of eventual adaptation into a Disney film. In the process, however, the Beast’s inward monstrosity only deepened. Other recent adaptations have similarly stressed the notion that the Beast character is punished for monstrous behavior with the loss of his beauty; his quest to find love ultimately restores it, but the perspective

of the story has shifted in the process. The tale is no longer about Belle learning to see, and thus invoke, a person's inner beauty and is instead about the flawed hero's quest to restore his outer beauty. The "love of a good woman" trope comes into play in these adaptations, since the Belle character is given narrative permission to spearhead a makeover of both his internal and external faces. While it may allow the Beast to have a more dynamic character arc than existed in the original fairy tale, it also has a detrimental aspect, advancing the notion that one's external appearance is a mirror of one's internal nature (the very idea that the original text decried) and promoting a false expectation still common among girls and women: if a woman's lover behaves abusively toward her, it is her responsibility to reform him rather than to reach a minimum safe distance from him until he reforms himself. Some of the contemporary adaptations laudably include the premise that his acceptance and respect of her feminine influence is what saves him and allows him to develop an altruistic side that helps him win the day; the idea that inner beauty is reflected on the outside, however, continues to predominate, exaggerated even further by Hollywood casting practices and the very nature of stage, film and television, in which the visual reality is the only reality.

At the time, however, the Beast represented something new and exciting to generations of readers: he was not merely a test for the heroine in terms of her ability to see past surfaces, as was the Brothers Grimm's *Frog King*; he was a site of contained peril. Belle was technically in his power and at his mercy, but this was a power that he had no inclination to abuse. Readers envisioning themselves in her place could vicariously experience not only the thrill of being held in the thrall of a dangerous creature, but also the comfort of discovering that what had seemed savage and beastly

was actually tame. As most young women of the period had little say in whom they might marry, metaphors such as this offered hope for their own uncertain futures. At this stage, the mythology surrounding the vampire made it an unsuitable metaphor for such a romantic depiction, but that was swiftly changing.

### **4.3 The Vampire of the Romantic Era**

The nature of early vampire folk tales was fluid, with exactly what qualified as a vampire varying widely from culture to culture. Some of the creatures classified as vampires in those tales are now segmented into different categories in modern monster pantheons, including werewolves, ghosts, ghouls, incubi, succubi, and particularly zombies. Many folkloric vampires did not even drink blood. Such vampires were depicted as almost uniformly foul in both physical and moral terms, depraved animals possessed by a metaphysical equivalent of rabies, and thus were unsuitable for sympathetic or romantic portrayals.

The vampire traditions that contribute most heavily to the paranormal romance formula share a narrow set of characteristics (physical beauty, social isolation, erotic power, and a dark, animalistic side that each vampire must struggle against) that this paper traces as beginning with the first literary vampires who left the traditional folkloric graveyards and crossroads for more interactive, social environments in the early nineteenth century. Particularly important works from this period are Lord Byron's *Fragment of a Novel* (1819), John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), James Malcolm Rymer's *Varney the Vampire; or, the Feast of Blood* (1845–1847), and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872).

All four Romantic-era and Victorian-era vampires—Darvell, Ruthven, Varney,

and Carmilla—are social outcasts of varying degrees, whose attempts to connect with humans are marred by their alien natures but who long nonetheless for human contact. *The Vampyre*, Charlotte Montague notes, is distinctive not only “because it met the public’s growing enthusiasm for gothic horror stories” but also because “it transformed the ugly, brutish vampire of Slavic folklore into the suave, charismatic, upper-class villain that we are so familiar with today” (2057). *Varney*, meanwhile, establishes many of the traditions that “have become staples of horror fiction up to the present day” (2080), including the possession of supernatural powers and the telltale double-puncture marks left behind on a victim. Montague contends that *Varney* also sets the ground rules for the monstrous romantic heroes of the future: “we are able to feel sympathy for him as an individual suffering from a horrible condition . . . *Varney* is a precursor of the contemporary ‘sympathetic’ vampire, which today excites so much interest in romantic horror fiction” (2095). *Carmilla*, by contrast, has the particular distinction of being “one of the few self-accepting homosexuals in Victorian or any literature” (Auerbach 696), although Nina Auerbach also notes the presence of homoerotic tension in both Byron’s and Polidori’s tales (333). Montague argues that this represents a turning point for the genre as a whole:

From this point on, the vampire becomes an iconic image of the sexually voracious individual, whether male or female, seeking to destroy the object of its passion by feasting on its flesh and drinking its blood. In this way, the myth begins to explore and express the controlling, destructive aspect of human sexuality. (Montague 2137)

Sympathy for such creatures, however, was curtailed by the arrival of the Victorian era,

which brought with it a reactionary repression of sexuality in response to the excesses associated with the reign of George IV. Although characters like Varney and Carmilla had the capacity to stimulate prurient thrills in readers, a new genre had emerged in America: the domestic, or sentimental novel.

#### **4.4 The Sentimental Heroine**

In the wake of the Romantic era, the Victorian era created its own unique fiction movement that approached issues of power, community, and predation from a different direction. Rather than focusing on the antics of wayward rebels or challenges to the status quo, these novels depicted the lives of ordinary women attempting to negotiate a world and society that unremittingly forced them into the equivalent of the narrative object position, often winning through their ordeals on the strength of their virtue rather than the power of their actions.

Although much of the body of work associated with the Sentimental Fiction movement, sometimes also referred to as domestic realism, has fallen into obscurity, many influential works have maintained a hold on public imagination or have undergone revivals. The most prominent and durable of these books is *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe; other bestsellers from the period include *The Wide Wide World* (1850) by Susan Warner, writing as Susan Weatherell, and *The Lamplighter* (1854) by Maria Susanna Cummins. Written during a period in which early suffragists were still politically aligned with abolitionists in America, the stories function both as romantic fables and social critiques of the ways that both women and non-whites were systematically denied agency by the powers of the time.

Notable contributions made by these books, and the genre as a whole, included



the articulation of a feminine narrative in which the powerlessness of the young heroine, relative to the adults around her and particularly compared to men, was assumed; her solutions were not achieved through particularly aggressive or independent behavior but instead through the social ties she forged, which could then exert force on her behalf. Reacting in part to the calls for self-reliance put forward by Transcendentalists, Sentimental Fiction authors frequently incorporated the concept of transcendence through traditional Christian faith instead, as when Warner's Ellen Montgomery struggles to develop and maintain a Christian identity in spite of the obstacles put in her way by her own kin.

Several parallels can actually be drawn between Ellen and Bella, in point of fact. Although Bella has living parents, she is portrayed as functionally an orphan, separated from her mother and struggling to overcome her years-long estrangement from her father. Both Ellen and Bella have been uprooted from the world they recognize and sent to an environment that they find dreary and difficult; both seek comfort and spiritual guidance from magnetic young men whom they will ultimately marry, adopting the men's families as their own. For Ellen, this man is John Humphreys, son of a minister, while Bella falls for Edward Cullen, adopted son of a vampire who is, essentially, engaging in his own form of ministry by promoting a way of life in which vampires do not prey on humans. In a particularly amusing coincidence, both young men have sisters named Alice, who become Ellen's and Bella's best friends.

While it may seem unlikely that a book with such strong Christian messages would have a connection to occult fiction written more than a century and a half later, one must bear in mind that a major objection raised to the *Twilight* novels is their alleged

Mormon agenda; some critics have claimed that, although there are actually no direct references within the *Twilight* series to faith, Christian doctrine, or Mormon doctrine, Meyer models the behavioral ideals set forth by the Mormon faith through the domestic arrangements and power balances shown in the Cullen household, the Swan household, and the Quileute reservation. Both stories are tied together by the theme of empowerment through submission to stronger social and spiritual forces, even if they name these forces somewhat differently. In 1850, when Warner's book became one of America's earliest examples of a runaway bestseller, women still could not vote or directly inherit and control property, so fantasies in which they had the ability to shape their destinies through social means, by attracting the love of men who could and would wield power on their behalf, were highly attractive. What troubles many critics is that this fantasy is still prevalent more than a century and a half later, when such assistance should theoretically no longer be needed.

*The Wide Wide World* and its contemporaries spawned countless imitators, which dominated book sales for much of the nineteenth century; this prominence led to many male authors feeling threatened by the works, as when Nathaniel Hawthorne infamously referred to the genre's authors as "a damned mob of scribbling women" (Frederick 231). Even before concerted steps were taken in the early twentieth century to bar such works from academic consideration, consigning many of them to obscurity for decades, new genres were moving into the fore.

**CHAPTER V**  
**TWENTIETH CENTURY REDEFINITIONS OF LOVE**  
**MONSTERS, AND GENRE**

Many of the new genres that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were connected to themes of exploration and conquest, and spurred by the uneasy awareness that the British Empire had passed its peak and begun to decay. Stories of adventure were already tinged with the fear that the conquerors might become the conquered when a new novel emerged and embodied these fears in the form of a new vampire: Count Dracula.

**5.1 The Reverse Colonizer**

*Dracula's* arrival on the literary scene in 1897 drastically revised the nature of the pop culture vampire. Although the bulk of literary analysis and interpretive adaptation of the *Dracula* story has employed Freudian theory to explain what the titular Count signifies, a more fruitful approach is suggested by John Allen Stevenson and Nina Auerbach, whose analyses employ a mixture of feminist theory and post-colonial theory. Stevenson points out that, in contrast to the incestuous tropes often deployed from Freudian theory, “the novel insistently—indeed, obsessively—defines the vampire not as a monstrous father but as a foreigner, as someone who threatens and terrifies precisely

because he is an outsider” (Stevenson 139). Dracula is also at his most threatening when he targets English women, mirroring racial anxieties of the period on top of the anxieties about hypersexualized women that critics frequently examine.

Several of the phobias of race and class associated with Dracula—for example, his ability to transform others into his own kind, as he does with Lucy—were first depicted with Varney. Auerbach notes that when Varney preys on Flora, “the good men who love her are terrified at the thought of a transformed Flora preying on her own children, but this Anti-Flora never emerges” (488). Lucy, however, embodies this anxiety when she becomes the “bloofer lady” (Stoker 135) who assaults young children playing near her grave, also metaphorically becoming the abused wife who begins beating her own children. Stoker adds a new type of menace to this narrative by recasting the vampire as a foreigner, where the previous major literary monsters (even, essentially, Frankenstein’s monster) were fellow countrymen or even members of their victims’ own families. Stevenson argues that Dracula’s “sexual union with women like Lucy and Mina physically deracinates them and re-creates them as members of his own kind” (Stevenson 144), a reverse-colonization fantasy that would embody the fears of the crumbling British Empire’s more privileged subjects.

*Dracula* injects a level of heterosexual energy missing from most of the previous tales, his “lonely rigidity repudiat[ing] the homoerotic intimacy with which earlier vampires had insinuated themselves into mortality” (Auerbach 158). The novel also deviates from the Romantic formula by its thorough and unsympathetic Othering of the vampire: he is a source of racial and venereal pollution who must not merely be driven back inside his original boundaries but destroyed. Readers are not intended to empathize

with him, and his arrival on the American big screen in Tod Browning's 1931 adaptation coincides with a period in which the American public was becoming increasingly isolationist. To this end, the cinematic pursuit and destruction of Dracula occurs in the crypt at Carfax Abbey, forgoing the novel's lengthy chase through Europe and back into the Carpathian mountains. The invader is destroyed at his beachhead, reflecting the American isolationist fantasy of the period: that peace would be maintained as long as all parties stayed within their respective borders.

*Dracula* was swiftly upstaged by Universal's production of *Frankenstein*, largely because the latter monster was more complex and relatable, as David Pirie explains: "The more successful Universal monsters were almost always sympathetic creatures trapped by their own destiny. The mummy, the werewolf, and especially Frankenstein have a noble quality that the vampire generally lacks" (Pirie 55), or more accurately, that Stoker had excised from vampire mythology. Later adaptations would attempt to compensate for that lack within *Dracula* by inserting humanizing elements that actually undermined the tale even more, something that will be examined later. On the whole, however, the early to mid-twentieth century would prove to be a barren time for gothic horror, largely due to the grand-scale horrors that the real world relentlessly provided. The Great Depression forced Universal Studios to abandon its serious use of horror in favor of films in which its comedy teams encountered and bested various traditional monsters, including Dracula. World War II, meanwhile, forced America back out of its comfortable isolationist stance and confronted its soldiers with the mass-scale depravities that modern humanity was capable of. Finally, the arrival of the nuclear age added even more terrifying scope to those potential depravities. Compared with these terrors, "the destructive capacity of a

dinner-suited east European aristocrat could only seem patently feeble” (62).

Early twentieth century America saw a great many changes in literature, some of them provoked by the development of new mass media such as film and later television, and others provoked by growing social unrest both at home and abroad. Even as the depravities perpetrated by charismatic leaders such as Hitler and Stalin redefined monstrosity in Western consciousness, the nature of what could qualify as heroic was being narrowed and at times even rewritten. The social unrest that initially made *Dracula* so alluring to the public also gave rise to the erasure of many female authors and feminine narratives from popular awareness, through the establishment of prescriptive literary canons in many universities and publishing houses.

## **5.2 Heroine, Interrupted**

Elaine Showalter notes that “in 1917, the four male editors of *The Cambridge History of American Literature* set out to ‘enlarge the spirit of American literary criticism and render it more energetic and masculine’” (Showalter xi), a trend that swiftly spread and resulted, within a short span of time, in bestselling and award-winning titles by most female authors vanishing from literary prominence. Nina Baym observes that many of the rules set in place to determine which works would be canonized were designed to exclude women, with critics requiring “a dense texture of classical allusion” (64) from literary works, which automatically excluded most female writers, along with many minorities, who had been denied access to classical educations on the University level. Baym also describes the specific narrative that was held up as the model of American literary fiction, which demands a masculine protagonist pitted against nature, society, or both; this particular structure doubly ensured that most popular women’s fiction, depicting a

heroine's quest to find her place within society, would be disqualified. Works like Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949) further codified this division, even though Campbell did not exclude women completely; Robin Morgan points out that his description of the heroic narrative, with its emphasis on conquest, served to rewrite most of the female heroines of the nineteenth and twentieth century as functioning outside of the heroic. "With one stroke the chthonic mystery of the cosmos dwindles to an object of conquest, and half the human souls longing for salvation and liberation are wiped invisible" (Morgan 59). She also notes that "the male hero and his quest are not representative of most men, either. But then it must be asked whether most men notice and realize *that*" (60).

Thus devalued and cut off from access to publication and reprints, thanks to their exclusion from what Lillian Robinson calls "the informal agglomeration of course syllabi, anthologies, and widely commented-upon 'standard authors' that constitutes the canon as it is generally understood" (106), most of the woman-authored books that had dominated sales in the nineteenth century, including works that had earned significant critical accolades such as Pulitzer prizes, soon vanished from book store shelves. Those shelves, however, did not remain empty for long. A variant of sentimental fiction was soon revived by the arrival in the 1930s of escapist books printed by British publishers Mills and Boon, which circulated in North America under Canada's Harlequin imprint. The popularity of these novels was undeniable and while most of them may be no more than lightweight escapist fiction, the post-World War II New Critical movement, which unintentionally ushered in an era of highly prescriptive literary gatekeeping, swiftly blocked the chances of any romance novels being taken seriously.

The New Critics had not actually set out to be literary gatekeepers. The post-World War II GI Bill, along with laws requiring that all minors remain in school until at least the age of 16, had created an environment in which a larger percentage of the population than ever was in need of educating, and a standardized system for evaluation was also needed. Developed initially as a descriptive system that could be used for identifying different literary techniques and narrative components in fiction and poetry, New Criticism soon fell into a common trap that can transform any descriptive system into a prescriptive one. First, the literary techniques and narrative components that were promoted under this system applied best to works already accepted by mainstream colleges as literary, reinforcing their positions within canon. New or revived works proposed as additions to canon had to readily work within this descriptive system in order to merit inclusion; students who needed to employ the system in order to pass classes, after all, could not afford to spend time on materials that challenged it. In some cases, the New Critical system's effect on literature was even reductive, as texts were reinterpreted, abridged, or even altered to meet the requirements of the critical theories that would be applied to them, instead of the reverse occurring. Thus, even when female literary figures were admitted into the canon, it was in a prescriptive and revisionist manner, as was the case when many of Emily Dickinson's poems were revised, redacted, or omitted altogether from her published body of work. Within a very short order, a system that had been intended to liberate and popularize critical thought had been transformed into a tool for containing it within a narrow scope. Feminine narratives were not the only victims of this system; it also consigned the gothic horror genre to a place of similarly low prestige, in favor of works containing classical themes and the more isolated heroes cast from



Campbell's mold.

### **5.3 The Cold War and the Heroic Rebel**

Both in printed fiction and on the screen, the mainstream consciousness of the Western world wanted to “play global thermonuclear war,” rather than “a nice game of chess” (Wargames). When the vampire appeared at all, either in its traditional form or, for example, as a blood-drinking alien in *The Thing From Another World* (1951), it appeared as a global threat to all of humanity rather than a more intimate incursion. Thus, Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954), now sometimes re-classified as “zombie apocalypse” fiction, centers upon the last rational man and the inhuman species that has come into existence around him and that, he is eventually forced to admit, has supplanted his kind forever. A generation later, Stephen King's *Salem's Lot* (1975) has its protagonist return to his home town in time for it to be overrun by a plague of vampires that he is not strong enough to defeat. Further anxieties about infiltration by a nebulous but reviled enemy, whose only differences lay in ideology, fueled new kinds of horror stories, such as the *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* films (1956, 1978). In such tales, the older traditions of monstrosity were largely inverted, with the monsters appearing normal or even alluring on the surface while being utterly inhuman underneath, a commentary upon both the defeated Nazi movement and the Red Scare of the Cold War period. As a result, while the isolation and longing associated with vampires could be made to suit the pessimistic darkness of the Cold War, other, more suitable metaphors were plentiful and the gothic form of the supernatural was frequently shunted to the side in favor of more tangible menaces, particularly those engendered by science run amok.

#### 5.4 Love and Sex Divorced

In addition to formally segregating genre fiction away from literary fiction, and placing romance novels in one of the lowest possible categories for low fiction, the New Critical movement inadvertently contributed to other disturbing divisions, including one that has arguably done a great deal of harm to American society: the literary separation of sex and love, with sex coded as masculine and valorized even as it was also suppressed and censored, while love was coded as feminine and deprecated. Further, as the masculine narrative described by Nina Baym required the protagonist to actively resist society, this isolated sexuality was frequently paired up with anti-social messages, resulting in what Robin Morgan refers to as “*L’homme fatal* . . . the sly trickster turned malevolent . . . he symbolizes an immortal passion for what he defines as freedom, a passion so fierce it can be consummated only in the grave” (112). It is not particularly surprising that such a narrative would occur during the Cold War; while patriotism may have been stressed to the point of transforming into jingoism at times, individuality was more highly prized than ever before, largely in response to commonly held perceptions about communism. Each literary hero who struggles against conformity and society in a mid-twentieth century novel, such as Richard Matheson’s *Last Human on Earth*, enacts broader social fears of being absorbed into an Orwellian collective, and ironically does so with institutional approval from the literary gatekeepers of the time.

## CHAPTER VI

### CHALLENGES TO THE GATEKEEPERS

While there may have been a notion among many gatekeepers that the Hero's Journey—along with its dominant, archetypal white male hero—could stand in for the whole of human experience, this was not the case. That notion may have, instead, contributed to the widening gap between critical and commercial success in Western narratology, which is still only rarely bridged. The need for other narratives is demonstrated by the development, and enormous commercial success, of two genres that ultimately contributed their popularity and resonance to *Twilight*'s success. The first genre is romance, which revived the principles of sentimental fiction and enjoyed the same popularity, if also receiving even less prestige. The second genre is the young adult novel, which serves a demographic that had not existed prior to the twentieth century: the adolescent.

## 6.1 The Heroine's Rebirth in the Romance Genre

In contrast to the over-privileged Hero's Journey, the narrative of the typical romance novel—as with nineteenth century sentimental fiction—centered not upon a female protagonist's resistance to society but instead upon her struggles to negotiate its demands and find her place within it, including her romantic and domestic partner. This quest was pejoratively coded, via Freudian theory, as an infantile pre-oedipal fixation (Juhasz 241); that encoding has allowed critics to construe the entire body of work as less mature and thus unworthy of consideration. Even second wave feminist theorists like Robin Morgan, while trying to break down the dominant masculine narratives and make room for marginalized feminine narratives, referred to romances as “trashy novels” (103), demonstrating how deeply internalized the prejudice against such fiction became even among its most logical advocates. This prejudice persists in spite of the fact that romance novels represent the largest market share of the American publishing industry, and approximately half of America's adult women read them (Romance Writers of America: Romance Reading Statistics). A solid barometer of any culture's values is which guilty pleasures its members refuse to surrender, even in the face of harsh criticism from within, so the facile dismissals that many give to the genre need to be re-examined, something that many educational theorists have already begun to do.

Romance novels, from the beginning, shared many characteristics of the previous sentimental fiction novels. The central heroine was pitted against nature, society, and even self throughout the novels, but had to use a completely different set of weapons to effectively battle these forces. While heroes were narratologically encouraged to engage in Transcendentalist self-reliance, the heroines of these stories found themselves on

quests to find those in their lives whom they could rely upon for help in achieving their aims. As with many of the heroines of sentimental fiction, the most important of these people would ultimately become their romantic partners. While the romance genre is perhaps best known and disparaged for its racy content, early entries were actually quite chaste, featuring little beyond passionate kisses. Many of the heroines of Mills and Boone novels functioned as spiritual heiresses to the likes of Ellen Montgomery, devoutly practicing traditional Christian values, or Jane Eyre, setting faith and moral rectitude ahead of the allure of her rakish suitor until he reformed.

Because these narratives often chronicled a young woman's journey from a position of powerlessness and deprivation to a position of inclusion and strength, they functioned as coming-of-age stories. While similar coming-of-age stories aimed at men generally featured variations upon Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey, the corresponding journey for young women is different. Kathy Latrobe and Judy Drury, drawing from Christopher Booker's Plot Patterns, describe the plot pattern known as "Rebirth," the coming-of-age narrative primarily aimed at female readers and customarily (although not always) starring a female protagonist. The plot moves through five key stages:

1. The protagonist falls under the shadow of a dark power;
2. The threat recedes;
3. The threat returns;
4. The dark power triumphs;
5. Miraculous redemption occurs, and the protagonist resumes life, as if reborn, transformed, or changed. (Latrobe and Drury 216)

This pattern is clearly visible in works such as *The Wide Wide World*, in which the dark

power is Ellen's lack of a home of her own, held at bay by her religious beliefs but almost triumphant when she must live with relatives who disapprove of both her faith and the man she loves. Her redemption occurs when, through her innate goodness and that of her beloved, she is able to win her relatives over. In *Twilight*, and many of the other paranormal romances, this pattern plays out with far more literal dark powers.

Bella Swan arrives in Forks, Washington, and finds herself the object of a local vampire's obsession, as he struggles to contain his desire to devour her by also appearing to detest her. The threat recedes when Edward grows protective of Bella and rescues her from several potentially fatal calamities, eventually admitting both his real nature and his love for her. Growing close both to him and to his vampire family, all of whom have sworn off feeding on humans, Bella is finally beginning to feel accepted and optimistic about her life in Forks when the threat returns, now in the form of a trio of vampires who *do* hunt humans. One of them, James, becomes fixated upon her. The Cullen family stages a showdown with them while spirited her out of town. The dark power triumphs, though, when James tricks Bella into believing that he has kidnapped her mother, luring her to an abandoned building where he intends to torture her to death as a way of taunting the Cullen family. Miraculous redemption then occurs when the Cullen family comes to Bella's rescue, killing James and preventing her from either dying or turning into a vampire. Although badly injured, Bella recovers in time to attend prom with Edward, and develops a new ambition: to become a vampire herself. While Stephenie Meyer is on record as saying that she does not read traditional romance because "it's too smutty" (Cochrane), her plotting structure precisely replicates the most compelling plot form that has dominated romance novel sales for decades.

Coming of age narratives, however, are often the hallmark of yet another genre, which was also born in the mid-twentieth century and which has gained significant literary credibility in recent years: the young adult novel, which also has a strong claim to the *Twilight* books.

## **6.2 The Adolescent Journey**

The mid-twentieth century saw the creation of an entirely new demographic: the teenager. The development of the concept of adolescence, a liminal period between childhood and adulthood that had not previously been part of the cultural paradigm, led to a wide range of new commercial and literary ventures, including a new genre of fiction differentiated from children's fiction of the past. Books and magazines focusing on adolescent issues grew in popularity during the 1940s and 1950s. John and Kay Bushman studied the effects of both adult literature, and adolescent-targeted young adult literature, in middle school and high school classrooms in their book, *Using Adult Literature in the Classroom*. Most of the young adult works produced prior to the 1960s only had as much depth or authenticity as the social engineering films that dominated classrooms during that period as they:

...centered around the 'all-American' family, with young people participating in a very sterile environment. The literature was phony; the language was pure and clean; the plots involved prom dates and similar activities; and the characters were WASPs. This unrealistic literature made no mention of pregnancy, drugs, sexual abuse, divorce, alcohol abuse, violence, prejudice, suicide, profanity, or other realistic concerns. (Bushman and Bushman 161)

Such works undoubtedly served a similar purpose to the social engineering films, indoctrinating readers with the prescriptive values of the time period while erasing discourse about social behaviors labeled transgressive or undesirable.

Ironically, many of the “classics” that would then be put in students’ hands, when they studied literature in classroom settings, would bring this discourse back in—at a safe distance. Pam Cole notes that while many of the Bushmans’ realistic concerns are mentioned in the literary classics – “Hester Prynne is an adulteress; Tess Durbeyfield is raped; Mrs. Haversham is jilted; and Susan Henchard is sold by her husband” (169) – both the grim fates and the separation of decades or centuries make these plotlines not merely depressing but alienating. “No wonder,” she observes, “girls long for literature portraying women in happier circumstances and ending on a happy, yet predictable note—as poorly written as some of that literature may be” (169). For teenage girls, this frequently led them to the romance novel shelves, as well, where the books enacted what Cole calls “a ritual of hope” (169).

The actual quality of young adult writing is of very little consequence to most adolescent readers. Referring to G. Robert Carlsen’s 1980 work, *Books and the Teenage Reader*, John and Kay Bushman note “that most young adults make reading selections based on the subject matter of the book rather than literary merits, language difficulty, or complexity of the story. A young person may choose a difficult book if the subject matter is of significant interest; simple books may be rejected if the subject matter is boring” (20). Identification with the protagonist, and an ability to relate to the circumstances that the protagonist finds himself or herself in, is more crucial than a good writing style or thematic content. However, they note that, as young adult literature has



gained marketability and literary credibility, it has also improved in terms of writing quality and literary content (190). Their 1993 prediction that the number of serial novels would increase has, in fact, been borne out by recent news reports that have claimed the genre is in the middle of a renaissance, citing such series as *Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games*, and *Twilight*.

Prior to the 1970s, however, adolescents may have been recognized as a strong consumer market worth courting, but they were also treated as essentially disposable, a niche market that might vanish with the arrival of the next fad, and most of the fiction and literature aimed at them was as lightweight and little-regarded as Harlequin novels, as John and Kay Bushman explain:

Generally, young adult novels of the 1940s and 1950s focused on traditional social behavior: family, jobs, sports, dating, etc. The themes of most of these novels were moralistic and superficial. However, realism began to creep into the writing of a few popular young adult writers and this became a significant milestone in the direction of young adult literature. (187)

This superficiality would change, as so much would, with the arrival of the civil rights movement and the broadening of cultural influences within the genre; in subsequent decades, young adult fiction and literature has been taken increasingly seriously. Fiction about adolescence is frequently fiction about alterity, or at least perceived alterity, so it was perhaps inevitable that the young adult genre would intersect with the horror genre, and a parallel between the teenage Other and the monstrous Other would emerge along with parallels between the monster and other truly marginalized groups.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY RETURN OF THE VAMPIRE

Post-Colonial scholars often study how literature of the colonial period, continuing through the decline of the British Empire, depicted foreign subjects as both sites of exoticism and threat. *Dracula*, in particular, had served as a powerful metaphor for the threat of the foreign, but early nineteenth century vampires, much like the heroines of sentimental fiction, had been on quests not to conquer the dominant social order but to assimilate into it. The rediscovery of the vampire, as a metaphor for groups denied this assimilation, was inevitable.

#### 7.1 From Monstrous Other to Monstrous Othered

The utility of the monster as Other may have been minimal during the mid-twentieth century and the height of the Cold War, but it is no coincidence that the return of the “Romantic” vampire, gothic fiction in general, and an even more sexualized version of *Dracula*, would emerge concurrently with the Civil Rights movement and Second Wave Feminism, which also brought sweeping changes to the romance and young adult genres. Before Count Dracula had embodied the post-colonial anxieties of empires, after all, the vampire had been a powerful metaphor for examining alterity as a sympathetic condition rather than simply a threat to be destroyed. For ethnic minorities in

particular, who had experienced similar patterns of real-life dehumanization and demonization based upon appearance or cultural heritage, the metaphor of the vampire was perfect for appropriating and recoding as not a mortal threat but a threat to established orders. Meanwhile, the disintegration of the Hays Code, and similar censorship systems around the world, created a period in which the more seductive side of the legends could be depicted onscreen.

Whether portrayed by Christopher Lee as a corrupting influence on the adolescents of a bygone era or played for both laughs and cultural relativism in *Blacula* and *Love at First Bite*, Dracula no longer represented the alien, but instead represented the unbridled carnal and sanguinary impulses of humanity itself. New works of fiction soon elaborated upon this trend, with, according to Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger, “an increasing number of cases in which the vampire, if not completely sympathetic – as in [Anne] Rice’s novels or those of Chelsea Quinn Yarbro – is, at the least, portrayed with an empathy that would have been unthinkable in earlier decades” (2). They theorize that this is due to adoption of the perspective of the “Other,” something they feel is made possible in part by *Frankenstein*; Auerbach, however, points out that *Frankenstein*’s literary contemporaries, *The Vampyre* and *Fragment of a Novel*, are more appropriate comparisons, taking a gentler approach in which “Intimacy and friendship are the lures of Romantic vampirism” (204).

Because gothic horror had been split between horror and romance, and the two were still segregated from each other by New Critical and formalist traditions, this trend also resulted in a period of sexual spectacle frequently bordering on pornography, and a reinterpretation of Dracula’s relationship with Mina Harker that was nothing short of rape

apologism.

## 7.2 The Rapist, Reinterpreted as the Romantic

Adaptations of *Dracula*, particularly in the case of the films produced by Hammer Studios, often involved the Count's seduction of disaffected young adults whom he then held in thrall. While this may have been intended as a depiction of how uncontrolled adolescent energies can be turned to evil, it was played for titillation and resulted in a reinterpretation of Dracula as a seductive intruder rather than as the invading, pillaging rapist whom Stoker had originally depicted.

In Stoker's actual novel, which bears little resemblance to most theatrical adaptations, Lucy Westenra is depicted as having no memory of Dracula's assaults upon her, functioning as an early metaphor for the drugged date rape, while Mina Harker actively loathes him and is his unwilling victim rather than his accomplice; he forces her to drink his blood by pinning her wrists while pressing her face into the wound on his chest, something that Stoker, via Dr. Seward's narration, compares to "a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink" (Stoker 200). In the aftermath, she helps spearhead the quest to find and destroy him while struggling with many of the same reactions that actual rape survivors experience. Yet in virtually every licensed adaptation from the latter half of the twentieth century onward, Mina is depicted as Dracula's willing lover and accomplice, with the two having a wild sexual encounter on a ship in the 1979 adaptation starring Frank Langella, and Mina employing black magic in a last-ditch attempt to defend Dracula from his hunters in Francis Ford Coppola's misleadingly-titled *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992). Inclusion of this fraught pairing undoubtedly occurred for two reasons: first, even with the relaxed and more permissive

standards of late-twentieth-century films, turning a metaphorical or actual rape into sexual spectacle was something that could still get a film classified as pornography and barred from mainstream theaters; second, marginalized by New Critics or not, the real economic power of romantic plots and subplots has always driven filmmaking.

Consequently, studios repeatedly and consistently chose to force romantic elements into the relationship between a rapist and his victim, eroticizing sexual menace and robbing the heroine of both her agency and her integrity: she is re-rendered as the stereotypical shallow, fickle woman who has jilted her good man for a Bad Boy, only to have the transgressive relationship crash down around her and force her to crawl back to her stalwart first love, in what TVTropes calls the “Wrong Guy First” trope (TVTropes.org). This narrative arc recharacterizes the physical and psychological abuse she has endured as a product of her own failed judgment. The narrative choice to make the heroine an accomplice to her own abuse is, however, very much in keeping with the time period; many of the sex scenes in the era’s James Bond films play out as assaults until the female love interest begins to rapturously coo his name, and the first major soap opera “supercouple,” *General Hospital*’s Luke and Laura, began their relationship when he drunkenly raped her on a deserted dance floor (Levine 208). Ravishment scenarios plagued a large segment of romance novels of the period, too, resulting in many books being nicknamed “bodice-rippers.” It is partly in reaction to these tropes that the first high-profile female authors of vampire fiction, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro and Anne Rice, constructed stories in which the sexual relationship between vampire and human was depicted as either fully consensual eroticism or nonexistent.

### 7.3 The First Women in the Undead Gentlemen's Club

Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger note that, for decades after its publication, Count Dracula had provided the template for virtually all vampire fiction and pop culture. “Since the mid-1970s, however, most particularly since the publication of the first and most influential of Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles*, *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), the figure of the vampire has undergone a variety of fascinating transformations in response, at least in part, to ongoing transformations in the broader cultural and political *mise-en-scène*” (Gordon and Hollinger 1). Yet while the gender of the primary author had become more inclusive, the most popular tales were still predominantly told from male perspectives. Key tropes that appeared during this period of literature included a more fluid sexuality: Rice’s fiction has frequently been described as homoerotic (Johnson 73) although her vampires were overtly depicted as asexual, and both her Lestat and Yarbro’s Comte de Saint-Germain were shown having equally intense emotional relationships with both men and women. The vampire’s bite, previously a metaphor for rape and venereal disease, completed its transformation into a metaphor for consensual sex (Johnson 77-78). Judith Johnson claims that “the most significant revision of all, however, is the change from narrative modes of alterity to modes of identification. The traditional vampire story is told by either the victim or the hunter of the vampires. The vampire is the horrific Other” (78) in older stories, but has become the sympathetic antihero or even hero, and qualities such as homosexuality that were once threatening attributes, and which had been erased from most fiction and adaptive works for more than a century, were revived and recoded as romantic.

With the arrival of the 1980s, Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles* had moved into literary

prominence and created a paradigm shift in how modern readers viewed vampires as a whole. The campy capes and predatory sexual spectacle of the previous generation of vampires gave way to something new, which Auerbach asserts reflected the era of their birth: “like so many pious fictions of the Reagan-Bush years, sympathetic vampires are dilutions of a once-potent reformist impulse: they originated as social scourges in the bolder 1970s” (3959). Rice’s vampires eschewed the previous conventions, discarding archaic aristocratic costumes altogether in favor of blending into, and conforming with, the world around them. They were rendered sexless by their transformation—although most of the eroticism that appeared in the books still tended to play out between male characters, similar to the repressed homoeroticism that Auerbach observed in Byron’s and Polidori’s respective works—and Lestat in particular took up the vigilante mantle that was so popular in the era, devouring evildoers as the supernatural cousin to pop culture icons like Dirty Harry and Mad Max. His foil, Louis, would provide the template for the next three-plus decades of tortured vampires who struggle against their predatory natures, including Edward Cullen.

Supplanted for decades by the straightforward horror of the alien in *Dracula*, the vampire as Byronic hero had made his comeback in a form more suitable for the erotic and romantic subtexts that its audience appeared to crave. The Romantic era’s tenets were rediscovered and reinvigorated as writers began exploring the notion of the vampire as a sympathetic, even romantic, hero or anti-hero whose relationships with humans weren’t limited to predator-and-prey. Jowett notes that “Previous vampire literature focused on the human characters as potential victims or vampire hunters, while the vampires themselves were alien, other, unknowable and voiceless. Many have claimed that Rice

was the first to present vampires as subject, not object, to let them tell their own story” (Jowett 59). That story, however, remained a man’s story, as Jowett also notes. As had happened in science fiction and fantasy, the first women admitted into the club were only allowed in as long as they used the standardized masculine narrative. Examining Rice’s stories, Jowett observes: “She valorizes homoeroticism while erasing female sexuality. The equality Rice sought is demonstrated between androgynous vampire partners, who just happen to be male” (62). This also harkens back to the Byronic vampires of the early nineteenth century who, Auerbach explains, “refuse to love their food” (276), feeding upon and exploiting women while reserving emotional intimacy for other men.

The women in Rice’s stories fell into the “mute and beautiful” role that Jowett critiques, pointing out that although Louis and Lestat have opportunities to tell their own stories, Claudia “has no voice. Her story is told by her father or her husband (Louis is both)” (61). Although sections of the third book in the series, *The Queen of the Damned*, are written from the perspective of female characters such as Pandora, Jesse, and the ill-fated Baby Jenks, that is the book in which Rice uses third-person voices to construct a patchwork narrative somewhat reminiscent of the narrative structure of *Dracula*, which is composed of a mixture of letters and diary entries written by various characters in the story. The result, whether intentional or not, is that these female voices never fully achieve subject status. While Louis and Lestat, in turn, speak in the first-person “I,” the women in their universe remain emphatically third-person, spoken of as “she” and seen from an outside, omniscient, objectifying perspective rather than from within the workings of their own minds. Even with female voices at least partly represented, the book’s titular character, Queen Akasha, negates their value by playing out the role of the



out-of-control radical feminist; her threat to the patriarchal social structure has been exaggerated to the point where she has called for the extermination of virtually every human male. Naturally, such a threat must be annihilated, and she is.

#### **7.4 1980s Backlash: Emasculation Anxieties and Punishment Fantasies**

Akasha's story line dovetails all too neatly with the post-feminist and post-postmodern anxieties and hostilities that Thomas Byers calls "Pomophobia." Many films from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, he notes while examining *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, require the ritualized subjugation of a woman who has exceeded her place in patriarchal society and must be driven back into it (Byers 20). Within the context of the mainstream and most popular vampire stories circulating in the 1970s and 1980s, the masculine voice and masculine narrative dominance was largely uncontested. Mainstream films of the period reflected both the dominance of the male voice and the formulaic crafting of stories in which women who exceeded their social standings were pushed back, often violently. A line of demarcation was frequently drawn between the good, virtuous, usually virginal heroine and the femme fatale, whose threat to the hero was primarily sexual. When the virginal heroine and the femme fatale came into conflict, the mandatory result was not merely a victory for the virgin, but the destruction of her rival.

Two films in particular, both overtly comedic, depicted this virgin-whore dichotomy in ceremonial battle. *Once Bitten* (1985) stars Jim Carrey as Mark, a sexually frustrated high school boy whose girlfriend does not want to lose her virginity. Seduced but not yet deflowered by a mysterious Countess, he narrowly escapes transformation into a vampire thanks to his girlfriend; she sacrifices her virginity to make his blood

useless to the Countess, who is consequently not merely vanquished but destroyed, doomed to rapidly age and die. *My Best Friend is a Vampire* (1987), meanwhile, stars Robert Sean Leonard as Jeremy, a high school boy whose sexual frustration derives from his desire to have a more emotional relationship, in spite of constant pressure from those around him to engage in casual sexual encounters. A final attempt at a one-night-stand goes disastrously wrong when he delivers groceries to a creepy mansion and meets Nora, a vampire who seduces and bites him, transforming him. Unfortunately, a pair of vampire hunters are on Nora's trail and burst in on them, murdering her—so brutally that she must come back from the dead later on in order to keep the murder from destroying the comedy—and then hunting Jeremy's best friend in the mistaken belief that he was Nora's guest that night. Jeremy must struggle with his transformation, protect his friend, and win the heart of the unlikely girl of his dreams, the frigid-seeming Darla.

The casual brutality meted out to sexually aggressive women in both of these scenarios undercuts the lighthearted comedic tone that both films attempt to establish. Beth Younger notes that female sexuality is often viewed and depicted in fiction “as a threatening force” (45), and the reprisals for the threats that strong women posed in these films are astonishing given that neither one was actually portrayed as homicidal, and yet both shared the fates normally reserved for vampires who kill. While other vampire films of the period, such as *Love at First Bite* (1979) and *The Lost Boys* (1987), had established the idea that in a contest for a woman's love, the man (human or vampire) who proved himself strongest would be the one to win, the inverse is true here: when women fight for a man's love, the more aggressive one must not merely lose but be annihilated. Both the Countess and Nora are depicted as intimidating to the point of unmanning their objects of

desire, and their seductions are never fully consummated. To drive the emasculation metaphor home, *Once Bitten*'s Countess bites Mark's inner thigh after leading him to believe that she is about to fellate him. *My Best Friend is a Vampire* is even more blatant, opening with a dream sequence in which Jeremy is lured by Nora into the girls' locker room at his school and then trapped and castrated by the other women.

Stevenson would suggest that, in such films, the anxiety about the corrupting foreigner persists from *Dracula*:

What if the problem is not that women like Lucy and Mina have become sexual but that their sexuality has been released in the wrong way, by a foreigner, a foreigner who has achieved what the men fear they may be unable to accomplish? That is, the anxiety of Van Helsing and his band may be partly a fear of aggressive or demanding women, but it may also be a fear of superior sexual potency in the competition. The boy next door may be no match for an extravagant stranger. (Stevenson 146)

Certainly, this is the approach taken in the film *Fright Night* (1985), in which nerdy teen Charley finds his comfortable relationship with his girlfriend Amy threatened by the hyper-masculine vampire who has moved next door. Her aborted transformation includes the acquisition of not only traditional vampire traits but also all of the hallmarks of a pin-up girl—long hair, large breasts, and a tiny waist—that she had not possessed before then, transforming her into the female version of the ultimate sexual threat. The climax of the film centers partly upon whether she can be restored to her prior state of innocence, or must instead be destroyed, apparently demonstrating little social progress since Lucy Westenra's fate of almost a century earlier. In a few cases, such as *The Lost Boys* and

*Near Dark* (1987), the virgin and the femme fatale are the same character, both luring the hero into the realm of the undead and needing to be rescued from it. As with Amy, their fates hang in the balance and they must either be transformed back into innocent humans or face annihilation. In *Near Dark*, virgin fatale Mae is also contrasted against the murderous femme fatale Diamondback, who burns to death in the film's climax.

While other vampire films from the 1980s—a fertile period for such films thanks to Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*—explored other approaches to the vampire dynamic, many of them still conformed, as these did, to the same balance of power within their relationships, and a narrative logic in which “the capacity for belligerence is regarded as an essential ingredient of manhood and the proclivity for conciliation is thought largely a quality of women” (Morgan 27). Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's novels fundamentally followed this pattern, with the Comte de Saint-Germain playing sexual gatekeeper for the heroines of the stories, many of whom either have no experience with sexual pleasure (Madalaine de Montalia in *Hotel Transylvania* (1978)) or have been sexually abused (Atta Olivia Clemens in *Blood Games* (1980)) prior to meeting him. One of his functions, then, is similar to the traditional romance novel hero of the period, presiding over a woman's discovery of her own body and pleasure, and even providing “sexual healing.” Even within the mainstream romance novel industry, however, this trope was under challenge, and an increasing percentage of the female readership was demanding more realistic and self-actualized heroines. It is not surprising that two of the earliest entries in the paranormal romance genre, Mercedes Lackey's *Children of the Night* and Tanya Huff's *Blood* books, openly refer to these conventions even as they overturn them.

## CHAPTER VIII

### FEMINIZED NARRATIVES TAKE HOLD

The arrival of the 1990s ushered in the next development in paranormal fiction, as more female authors entered the genre and the first romantic pairings of a mortal woman and a supernatural man occurred as a central element of the plot, without the predation that often accompanied it. The early 1990s, in particular, introduced plots that emphasized mutualism and reciprocity between female characters and their vampire lovers, while later stories of the decade tended to increase both the innate power of the heroine and the menace of both her world and her lover. The Monstrous Lover who initiated the stories, however, was not a vampire at all, but a re-envisioned version of the classical Beast from *La Belle et La Bête*.

#### **8.1 Inaugurating the Paranormal Romance**

Even as much of the fantasy genre of the late 1980s reinforced problematic gender roles, 1988 was the year that CBS debuted the television series *Beauty and the Beast*, starring Linda Hamilton and Ron Perlman in the titular roles. Half romance and half police procedural, the show chronicled the unconsummated romantic relationship between an assistant district attorney and the reclusive, lion-faced half-man, half-beast who saved her and nursed her back to health after she was attacked by mobsters.

Perhaps due to the obligatory third-person-omniscient nature of television narratives, the show never quite centered itself in the perspective of Catherine, the heroine, but it did model possibly the most critical aspect of the Monstrous Lover trope in her relationship with the bestial Vincent: although he was dangerous and violent, frequently mauling those who threatened her in a leonine fury, he was unfailingly tender toward her. That particular mixture of danger and security is noteworthy because it lies at the heart of most contemporary paranormal romances. The series had respectable if not spectacular ratings, but faltered and collapsed in its third season after Hamilton left to have a baby and producers unsuccessfully attempted to continue the show as a supernatural crime thriller without the romance. The character of Vincent may no longer have been accessible to his core, primarily female, viewership without Catherine's tempering influence, and neither the narrative structure nor the viewers' sensibilities would have permitted someone else replacing her in his heart.

This problem may actually explain some of the resiliency of the vampire in the romantic hero role, as opposed to other potential folkloric monsters. Within the natural lifespan of an ordinary human, or a supernaturally-enhanced human like Vincent, the narrative conventions of the romance novel will generally allow only one Great Love, with the possibility of a second after a suitably long (generally longer than contemporary psychologists might argue is healthy) mourning period. Usually, that second Great Love is only possible if the heroine of the tale is the woman who appears to heal the hero's grief, and the first love must either be far enough in the past, or turn out to be unworthy enough of the hero in some respect, that his moving on will not be viewed as an act of infidelity by readers. The much longer life span of the vampire makes this more feasible

in contemporary paranormal romances, with the added benefit of allowing the hero to remain at the height of his youth and physical prowess at the same time. While supernatural fiction on television shifted back to male protagonists for the next half-decade between *Beauty and the Beast*'s cancellation and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s arrival, the dynamic established by the show was swiftly answered and elaborated upon by early paranormal romance writers like Mercedes Lackey and Tanya Huff, who explored the same combination of romance and procedural in their works.

## **8.2 The Feminist Heroine and the Shadowy Lover**

With the arrival of the 1990s, countless books featuring vampire heroes and anti-heroes had emerged and even more female novelists had followed Rice's and Yarbro's leads, appropriating a subgenre in which, up until then, most of the writers were men and most of the vampire stories focused on male vampires, male hunters, and the women whom they battled one another to possess. These new books were distinctive for relocating the central narrative perspective to the female protagonist, something that most of their predecessors had been unable to do without making her a vampire. Three series from the early 1990s, in particular, continued the development of paranormal romance conventions: Mercedes Lackey's *Diana Tregarde Mysteries* (1989-1991), Tanya Huff's *Blood* books (1991-1997), and L. J. Smith's *Vampire Diaries* (1991-1992).

Mercedes Lackey first introduced Diana Tregarde, a powerful witch and metaphysical "Guardian" responsible for holding back the forces of darkness, in *Burning Water* (1989), the first of her *Diana Tregarde Mysteries*. The second book in the series, *Children of the Night* (1990), took passing references to Diana's on-again, off-again lover André from the first book and elaborated upon them: functioning as a prequel and set in

New York City during the Watergate scandal, the novel reveals how Diana and centuries-old French vampire André LeBrel first meet and join forces to defeat a group of psychic vampires, or “psivamps,” after their mutual friend is murdered. Although the least successful of all of the series examined here, and noteworthy for downplaying the romance in the other books, it merits inclusion because Diana and André represent the first pairing of their kind depicted from the heroine’s perspective rather than the hero’s, and their influence is visible in many of the series that follow.

Even as Lackey was setting Diana Tregarde aside in favor of other, more successful fantasy series, Tanya Huff had picked up the same themes and motifs and was developing them in a new way. The *Blood* books centered upon private investigator Vicki Nelson, a former Toronto police detective who was forced to resign after retinitis pigmentosa robbed her of her distance and night vision. Investigating a series of vampire-like killings, much as Diana was when she met André, Vicki encounters and ultimately teams up with a genuine vampire—Henry Fitzroy, bastard son of Henry VIII—who is also hunting the killer, ultimately revealed to be a demon controlled by a sociopathic college student. Their alliance works out so well that they team up on several more cases, tracking down a sniper killing members of a pacifistic werewolf clan in *Blood Trail* (1992), a resurrected mummy determined to transform Toronto into the seat of his new dynasty in *Blood Lines* (1992), a body thief experimenting with resurrection in *Blood Pact* (1993), and a team of organ-heisters whose victims keep reappearing as deadly ghosts in *Blood Debt* (1997). Not quite able to separate business from pleasure, their romantic chemistry complicates Vicki’s life and her relationship with her former partner and on-again, off-again lover, Mike Celluci. Eventually, Vicki is mortally wounded on a



case and can only survive by becoming a vampire, something that upends the professional and romantic dynamic yet again. Highly influential on numerous series, the books were the first to be adapted to the screen as the Lifetime Network's 2007 *Blood Ties* series.

While both Huff's Henry Fitzroy and Lackey's André LeBrel are dashing, centuries old European men cut from similar cloth to Yarbrow's Saint-Germain, they are teamed up with experienced, independent women who are in firm control over their own sexual pleasure and need no educating. Even as both writers evoke the traditions associated with Saint-Germain, they also invert many of them. As mentioned previously, both series are also unique in drawing attention to this challenge to romance novel tradition by having one of their main characters involved in the creation of such works. Lackey's Diana Tregarde, when not saving the world from supernatural threats, supports her mundane existence by writing romance novels that she subversively infuses with feminist twists, explaining that "I think maybe I can do a little something about the prevailing theme in them that 'anything He does to you is all right if He loves you'" (Lackey, *Children of the Night* 42). Huff's Henry Fitzroy inverts the status quo even further by being the romance novelist, writing under his long-dead sister's name. Perhaps coincidentally, both Diana and Henry are depicted struggling with Maiden and Pirate scenarios in which they wish their heroines could fight back (Huff 42; Lackey, *Children of the Night* 163), a further critique of the "bodice-rippers" that had come to represent romance novels to the general public.

The original *Vampire Diaries* novels (1991-1992), by L. J. Smith, appeared concurrently to Huff's *Blood* books and were the first to take the paranormal romance

scenario into the young adult marketplace. Set in the fictional town of Fell's Church, Virginia, the series follows high school queen bee Elena Gilbert as she becomes the object of desire for two warring vampires: the gentle, sensitive Stefan Salvatore and his murderous, vengeful older brother Damon. Both men are drawn to her because of her uncanny resemblance to the woman who made them vampires, Katherine Swartzchild, whom they believe committed suicide in response to their bitter rivalry over her; her eventual vengeful return forces Elena to sacrifice first her humanity and then her life to save her town. Although little regarded when originally released, the series models many of the narrative devices subsequently used by Stephenie Meyer, and its adaptation found new and vigorous life on television in the wake of *Twilight* and paved the way for a steady stream of print sequels.

These narratives, while they positioned the heroines as equals to the vampires in their lives, were relatively obscure at the time of their release, in part because Rice and Yarbro still dominated the genre. The concurrent television offerings, *Forever Knight* and *Dark Shadows*, continued to promote a masculocentric narrative for the genre as well. Perhaps this is what inspired a popular desire for even more independent and empowered heroines, and by the mid-1990s, they were beginning to appear.

### **8.3 Girl Power in the 1990s**

While Huff's Vicki Nelson tackled supernatural creatures on the streets of Toronto, Laurell K. Hamilton launched her *Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter* series (1993-present), in which her titular character is romanced by not one but several vampires (and many other supernatural creatures) over the course of the series, and which saw its 22<sup>nd</sup> book released in July 2013. As with Huff, Hamilton introduced her heroine to various

types of supernatural beings, many of which turned out to be as misunderstood and unthreatening as many vampires. Both series frequently explored the notion that human nature could be a source of far more monstrous behavior than the supernatural creatures the heroines encountered, an echo of Belle's sentiments from centuries earlier. "At this present postmodern moment," Gordon and Hollinger note, "it seems that even our monsters have become transformed, as the boundaries between 'human' and 'monstrous' become increasingly problematized in contemporary vampire narratives" (5). That present moment was 1997, just as this trend was about to be temporarily overtaken by a new dark horse on the track: Joss Whedon's modest show on what was then the WB network, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), which would encode influential new rules regarding the differences between good and evil vampires, and the hazards of falling in love with one.

Now well known for both successful television shows and blockbuster films, Whedon was a virtual unknown in the mid-1990s, best recognized inside Hollywood as a script doctor. Growing up in the era of more traditional monster movies and slasher films, he had begun to envision a cinematic scene in which a menacing figure pursued a waifish blonde girl into an alley, only to have her turn the tables and annihilate it. This vision led to a script in which a fashion-obsessed high school cheerleader would discover that she was the Chosen One, with the sacred duty of battling the forces of darkness. In this vision, the problematized narrative was initially erased; vampires were evil, irredeemable predators that had to be destroyed at any cost, including self-sacrifice. The alterity, instead, was seated in the unlikely heroine, whose powers were repeatedly curtailed by social forces. Directed and produced by Fran Rubel Kuzui, *Buffy* arrived on the big

screen in 1992, in a campy rendition that Whedon was never happy with. His combination of humor and horror, intended as an off-kilter coming-of-age story, had been played strictly for outrageous yuks. Four years later, he found himself in the position to remake the story on the small screen according to his original vision, and he seized the opportunity, creating an unexpected hit and a powerful force in the burgeoning Girl Power movement.

Although most of the vampires and many of the monsters depicted in *Buffy* are characterized as evil, Whedon felt compelled to nod to the developing romance plots with his own take on the Monstrous Lover: Angel, a vampire whose soul—and, thus, conscience—had been restored to punish him for his bloodthirsty misdeeds in yet another iteration of the Beast’s magical punishment. Tormented by his past crimes and determined to atone for them, Angel allies himself with Buffy only to fall in love with her. In a further twist, Whedon introduced the “Angelus” subplot in *Buffy*’s second season, in which it turns out that the curse that restored Angel’s soul to him can be broken if he experiences “one moment of perfect happiness” (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer: "Innocence"*), which occurs when he and Buffy sexually consummate their relationship. Reverting to his former demonic nature, he proceeds to terrorize Buffy and her friends, murdering one of them and almost unleashing Hell on Earth before his soul is eventually restored to him. The following season chronicles the torment that he and Buffy endure as they try to restrain themselves from doing anything that might provoke another disaster, before he finally leaves Sunnydale for Los Angeles and his own spin-off series, *Angel* (1999-2004).

The tormented self-denial subplot bears a remarkable resemblance to the

abstinence plot elements in the *Twilight* books, in which Edward claims that giving into desire could result in tragedy, and the plot arc in *New Moon* where Edward attempts to leave Bella for her own good. Over the next several seasons, neither Buffy nor Angel would manage to find true love with anyone else, something that made some fans uncomfortable while validating to other fans that they were still one another's soul mates and always would be.

#### **8.4 The Search for a Heroine's Happy Ending**

The ambiguity over whether or not Buffy Summers had a soul mate led to some noteworthy difficulties for fans of the show, many of whom developed a reactionary response to the romantic disasters that plagued the show's characters. In attempting to stress his heroine's independence, Whedon may have unintentionally overshot and sent her on Campbell's traditional Hero's Journey, with all of the isolation and alienation that entails. Ross points out that while many viewers were impressed by the idea in *Buffy* that a successful woman could be independent of men, other viewers were upset at "the lack of a successful long-term heterosexual affiliation for Buffy" because it "suggested that strong, independent women cannot be in a healthy relationship" (88). In fact, virtually every romantic relationship depicted on the show had unraveled by the time the series concluded: consummation turned Angel evil, Xander left Anya at the altar, and Tara was shot to death in front of Willow.

The prevailing message, whether intentional or not, was that for the woman of action, as for the man, emotional intimacy was far too dangerous to survive. This, Morgan explains, is at the heart of the twentieth century trope of literary love: "In the less popular but influential arenas of intellect and art, 'pure love' is linked with the *Liebestod*

(‘love-death’) theme, as the passion that blooms obsessively only in ill-fated lovers, flourishes briefly, and ends in betrayal, chaos, murder, or suicide” (103). That theme, unsatisfying to those actively seeking a wedding at the end of the stories they read and watch (something that Shakespeare himself took care to include when he was not explicitly scripting a tragedy), further delineates the schism between canonized “high” art and the “lower” forms that the majority of American women prefer to buy. *Buffy*, for all of its brilliance, is partially responsible for creating a vacuum that only a story like *Twilight* could fill. For many fans, the logic was that if the empowered woman of action could not find love, then the woman seeking love in a similar setting consequently had to eschew such qualities. In spite of the efforts of *Buffy*’s creative team to promote the notion that physical prowess was neither inherently masculine (and therefore it was not appropriate for a woman to possess it) nor a detraction from femininity (Ross 94), having such prowess paired up with the heroine’s chronic loneliness and unhappiness may have made those qualities less attractive to the young women who needed that message most of all.

### **8.5 Paranormal Romances of The 2000s**

Even before *Buffy* and *Angel* drew to their respective closes, a new class of stories emerged that emphasized the relationship many fans had wished for: the pairing of the heroine and the conflicted male vampire who struggled against his more bestial impulses, but with a happier outcome for the couple. The first to appear was Charlaine Harris’s *Southern Vampire Mysteries* series (2001-2013), followed by Ellen Schreiber’s *Vampire Kisses* series (2003-2012).

Harris’s *Southern Vampire Mysteries* series chronicles the adventures of small-

town waitress Sookie Stackhouse, a telepath with fairy blood running through her veins, whose surreal life abruptly begins to make sense—and become much more complicated—when vampires reveal that they have always lived among humans, and soon many more supernatural races also reveal their existence. Rescuing and falling in love with a vampire named Bill Compton, Sookie discovers that her unique abilities make her attractive, both as a political asset and a romantic partner, to several supernatural beings who vie for her attention. Sookie's adventures, as she solves supernatural crimes in various parts of the American South, also take her on a journey of serial monogamy as each of her prospective partners romances her only to prove unsuitable in some way. The series concludes with Sookie contemplating a deeper relationship with a long-time friend, suggesting the age-old trope that what she had been seeking from her more exotic romances had been hers all along. As sexually explicit as the *Anita Blake* books but also emphasizing the heroine's desire for a monogamous relationship (which is forever out of Blake's reach), the series is one of the most successful paranormal romances after *Twilight*. Its HBO adaptation, *True Blood* (2008-2014) has also been one of HBO's most successful series, running for seven seasons.

Shreiber's *Vampire Kisses* series, by contrast, returns the paranormal romance to the high school setting explored by L. J. Smith. It chronicles the exploits of Raven Madison, a teenage goth girl whose big dream in life is to become a vampire. When a strange family moves into the abandoned, allegedly haunted, mansion in her small town, she soon becomes convinced that the family's teenage son, Alexander, is a creature of the night. Their blossoming relationship is hampered by Trevor, a boorish classmate who has harbored a crush on Raven since they were little, and whom she despises. When Trevor

bullies Raven's best friend into revealing her fantasies about Alexander, Raven is publicly humiliated and thinks that she has lost her chance with him forever. Instead, she discovers that he really is a vampire and that he has fallen in love with her. The series follows the development of their relationship, as Raven learns more about what Alexander and other vampires are like, the risks many of them potentially pose to her friends and family, and what joining their ranks will really mean. Ultimately, after nine books, she gets her wish and rides off into the moonrise as Alexander's eternal bride. Aimed at younger teens than virtually any other series, the stories actually contain even less sexual content than the *Twilight* books.

The parameters of the paranormal romance are actually far wider, encompassing a wide range of supernatural creatures, but most series remained niche fiction and were predominantly sold by smaller presses and e-book publishers until the debut of *Twilight*, a series that swiftly proved capable of "attracting readers who ordinarily do not read gothic fiction that features vampires" (Latrobe and Drury 104). The popularity of the series consequently created a heightened demand for similar materials, leading to culture clashes between existing aficionados of gothic horror and these new readers whose tastes were often unsuited for the wider genre. *Twilight's* popularity also triggered bidding wars as film and television studios rushed to cash in on what appeared to be a new high-return investment.

### **8.6 Transitioning from the Page to the Screen**

Summit Entertainment acquired the rights to the *Twilight* series itself, releasing film versions of each book (and two films covering the events of the final book) between 2008 and 2012. Echoing a similar pattern from the early 1990s, in which *Forever Knight*



and *Dark Shadows* had benefited from the plans to adapt Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* to film, other studios optioned series for adaptation to television rather than directly challenge *Twilight* in theaters. The CW network, formerly the WB network that had aired *Buffy*'s first five seasons, optioned the rights to *The Vampire Diaries* in 2009, and the show has now run for five seasons. HBO, meanwhile, had optioned Charlaine Harris's *Southern Vampire Mysteries* and launched the series, renamed *True Blood*, in September 2008 with its seventh and final season airing in 2014. Lifetime, meanwhile, had jumped the gun with *Blood Ties*, based on Tanya Huff's *Blood* series, which ran in 2007 and which Lifetime declined to renew in 2008, shortly before interest in the series might have escalated. While there were periodic rumors that other series might be adapted as well, these shows effectively saturated the market.

## CHAPTER IX

### ANALYZING THE APPEAL OF *TWILIGHT*

The most successful adaptations shared many key traits: young women in positions of little tangible power, trapped in dreary small-town environments that stifle them, discover worlds of magic, mystery, romance, and empowerment when charismatic male vampires fall in love with them. These traits elucidate a great deal about the primary qualities that appeal to readers and viewers alike. The adaptations' respective venues were well-suited to each series: HBO allowed for the *Southern Vampire Mysteries*' explicit sexual content to play out in soft-core form, while the CW embellished upon *The Vampire Diaries*' tamer young adult content to expand the original narrative into something grander. By contrast, cinematic adaptation proved ideal for the *Twilight* series, condensing each weighty tome into two-hour features and, in the process, resolving the complaints of many detractors who said that very little happened at great length in the novels themselves (Holmes). The films' PG-13 ratings are equivalent to the TV-14 certifications most *Vampire Diaries* episodes have received, although the show addresses many edgier topics than *Twilight*, including substance abuse and premarital sex. Many *Twilight* detractors have specifically attacked the absence of such elements, but that absence may actually be created in part by the young adult genre itself.

## 9.1 Conservative in Values, Liberal in Appeal

As writers of young adult fiction, both Stephenie Meyer and L. J. Smith were limited in how they could handle sexual content in their books, in ways that Charlaine Harris never was. Some of what people derisively refer to as “abstinence porn” may simply relate to the constraints of the young adult fiction genre itself, particularly in the case of consensual sex. Although depictions of adolescent sexuality are no longer unacceptable in young adult literature the way they were several decades ago, depictions of teenagers engaging in healthy, satisfying sexual relationships are still rare, even when the characters are above the local ages of consent. Although even this is changing, the typical portrayal of adolescent sexual activity involves teens somehow being victims of either their out-of-control hormones or their partners’ manipulations. In part this is for good reason, because most adolescents have not yet acquired the self-awareness to embark upon genuinely empowered, consensual sexual relationships. As Pam Cole puts it, “the adolescent mind . . . isn’t fully developed and may be incapable of processing information in a way we would like” (1). At the same time, though, the omission of empowered sexuality from narratives can perpetuate the notion, especially for teenage girls, that they are not *supposed* to take charge of their sexuality, either in terms of engaging in sexual acts or avoiding them. This, again, is actually reflected in the passive structure of the female Rebirth coming-of-age narrative, which demonstrates that most of the plot elements many have criticized Meyer for are prevalent in the entire story-telling institution.

In spite of the criticism, Meyer’s conservative story arc is also a primary source of the novels’ broad appeal. Particularly when read in the uncritical manner that most

romance novels are intended to be read in, few elements are likely to give offense, either to young readers or their parents. The broad categories that readers might be warned away from—harsh language, graphic violence, explicit sex, and substance abuse—are all absent from the narrative, making it as technically wholesome as early Mills and Boone romance novels or older works of sentimental fiction. Although missing any overt references to God or religion, Meyer’s protagonists behave in ways that conform not only to the ideals of her Mormon faith but also to those of most conservative churches. Thus, there is nothing to alienate such groups, other than the supernatural narrative elements themselves, and the absence of transgressive behavior appears to have simply sparked the imaginations of readers who hoped to vicariously experience it. Many readers responded by writing fan fiction in which the scenes that they wished had been included could play out; some of these works were more explicit than anything written by Charlaine Harris or Laurel K. Hamilton, and one series in particular, “Masters of the Universe” by “Snowqueens Icedragon,” was reworked and re-released as original fiction under its author’s real name, E. L. James, becoming the bestselling *Fifty Shades* series.

Other elements of *Twilight*, although possibly as conservative as Meyer’s handling of sex, allowed a broad and diverse group of readers to identify with the characters and situations, applying both to their own lives. A telling example is the Volturi: the Italian cabal of Master Vampires, first seen in *New Moon* and battled to a truce in *Breaking Dawn*, who dictate the terms by which all vampires interact with the world and enforce their rules with brutal efficiency. Depicted at one point as typically using psychic forces to immobilize their targets while conducting trials in which the defendants are unable to speak on their own behalf, the Volturi are never precisely

aligned with any real-world organization, but readers have the opportunity to use them as a metaphor for almost any organization that they view in a similar light. The Volturi, then, become metaphors for Big Government for conservative readers, Big Business for members of the Occupy movement, college faculty for the underperforming student, and even unsympathetic parents for the thwarted adolescent. Although much derision has been aimed at Meyer for promoting what some claim is a covert Mormon agenda through her series, the majority of readers are able to author their own agendas and beliefs onto the narrative as they read. Virtually all of the less successful books have specific social and political agendas that they overtly espouse, one more aspect narrowing down the audience that can appreciate the stories—those with objections to neopaganism, for instance, will never pick up the *Diana Tregarde Mysteries* and may avoid the *Vampire Kisses* books for the same reason, while the explicit sexual content of the *Southern Vampire Mysteries* and the *Anita Blake* novels automatically estranges anyone who objects to premarital sex—so the ability to remain inoffensive to such a large cross-section of Western society is remarkable.

## **9.2 Bella Swan, Blank Slate**

This cross-section of readers is able to become immersed in the *Twilight* series for another crucial reason: its heroine functions as a blank slate upon which they can draw themselves. Meyer taps into the hopes and insecurities of her adolescent target audience with her characterization of Bella Swan (former ugly duckling) who is essentially given the license to reinvent herself in a new town that many girls dream of. Her physical description, while not making her unattractive, depicts her as one of the girls who will never be crowned as beauty queens, and in fact it is so sparsely worded that it is easy for

most readers to slip their own descriptions into the story in place of hers. While other characters are described in great detail, Bella's own physical description is offhand and indirect, generally only brought up at all when she is considering how it fails to meet social ideals (Meyer, *Twilight* 10). "During adolescence," John and Kay Bushman point out, "young people learn what their adult bodies will be—short, tall, wide, narrow. Not all bodies are shaped or function as desired by the owners" (9), something that Meyer uses in her depiction and characterization of Bella, who is as clumsy and dissatisfied with her body as many of the series' readers are with theirs. Meyer has said that she "left out a detailed description of Bella in the book so that the reader could more easily step into her shoes" (Meyer, *Twilight Series* | *Twilight* | FAQ).

For adolescent readers, particularly young women, this ability to identify so immersively with the heroine is a crucial element. Multiple authors of books on the use of young adult fiction in the modern classroom have put forth the same hypothesis that, for the average reader in general and the teenage reader in particular, identification with the protagonist and enthusiasm for the premise are the most important considerations in selecting a story and, as Pam Cole says, they "seldom choose books based on literary quality" (39). Either due to socialized preferences or natural inclination, female readers in particular are also more disposed to "forego the action and multiple characters for an intimate relationship with a single character" (40). Cole specifically examines the *Twilight* series in her book, suggesting that its popularity "has a lot to do with how easily young readers can identify with the characters, especially with the protagonist, Bella, whom the author puts into situations through which the reader can vicariously experience romance, excitement, and even danger" (602). A supporter of the series, she calls the

books a “mesmerizing and thrilling blend of fantastic mystery, vampire lore, and romance” (325) and suggesting that they are “excellent choices for advanced readers” (317). Part of her reasoning emerges as she examines the online interactions of Twilight fans whose exploration of identity “begins with discussing the characters and situations in the books but ends with the readers’ discovering truths about themselves. Writing pedagogists acknowledge this type of writing as high-level cognitive activity” (601). For her, the content of the novels themselves comes second to the thought and analysis it inspires in its readers.

Building upon this idea, there is another important aspect of Meyer’s narrative: Bella’s ineptitude puts the reader in a privileged position that allows her to feel good about herself. If she spots important clues that Bella misses—such as when Meyer foreshadows evil vampire Victoria’s campaign to murder Bella, in *Eclipse*, by having Bella notice that personal items have gone missing from her room without realizing that Victoria’s minions have stolen them—she is given the opportunity to feel intellectually superior to Bella, receiving subtle reinforcement that she is as worthy as—or even worthier than—Bella where the story’s ultimate rewards are concerned. She may even try her hand at penning a story in which her version of Bella, or an original character serving as her avatar, sweeps in to solve a particular crisis situation. Such characters may frequently be derided by other readers, but they serve a critical step in self-actualization for many young writers. By being plain, clumsy, socially backward, and a little clueless, Bella takes on all of the characteristics that adolescent girls fear they possess; by still winning the love of the hero, she subtly reassures readers that they, too, are good enough to compete for the same rewards and win.

### 9.3 Inclusion, Exclusion, and Anxiety

Bella's physical awkwardness and nebulous appearance are in high contrast to the heroines of most of the other paranormal romances, who may be more difficult for a broad range of readers to identify with. Although a character like *The Vampire Diaries'* Elena Gilbert can appeal to a teenage girl's desire for wish-fulfillment stories in which her authorial avatar is the beautiful, popular prom queen, it is not as successful an approach because such a character can be harder to identify with for the reader; most of these wish-fulfillment attributes were subsequently jettisoned when the series was adapted for television. Meyer sidesteps this problem by having Bella arrive in Forks feeling as awkward as most of her readers probably feel, only to discover that the change in location and her exoticism to a small town community have miraculously granted her the popularity and attractiveness that previously eluded her. She is still awkward and her self-esteem issues continue to plague her, but those around her shower her with unexpected admiration. This sort of reinvention of self in a new place is a common teenage fantasy that Meyer mines adroitly and that explains part of the series' wild success: even before Bella falls in love with a handsome vampire, she is already living her readers' dreams. Readers do not even have to completely wake up from the dream when they set the novel down, either; while they can briefly become a blue-eyed blonde prom queen by using Elena or Sookie as their avatars, they must still return to their more mundane forms when they are done, but they may actually feel *more* glamorous when they set aside their Bella avatar and come back to Earth, and their vicarious romantic adventures may, consequently, still feel possible in the real world.

The dreams have a dark side, though, because Bella, like many of her readers,



aspires to an unrealistic standard of human beauty that cannot be obtained through ordinary means. From the moment she sees the Cullen family, she wants to be as beautiful as they are, even though this beauty is emphatically inhuman and the cost of its acquisition is horrific pain and suffering. Meyer's vampires are peerless: "They were faces you never expected to see except perhaps on the airbrushed pages of a fashion magazine. Or painted by an old master as the face of an angel" (Meyer, *Twilight* 19). They also possess both inhuman grace and all of the material resources that girls are conditioned to covet:

The other dancers pressed to the sides of the room to give them space—no one wanted to stand in contrast with such radiance. Emmett and Jasper were intimidating and flawless in classic tuxedos. Alice was striking in a black satin dress with geometric cutouts that bared large triangles of her snowy white skin. And Rosalie was . . . well, Rosalie. She was beyond belief. Her vivid scarlet dress was backless, tight to the calves where it flared into a wide ruffled train, with a neckline that plunged to her waist. I pitied every girl in the room, myself included. (Meyer, *Twilight* 487)

This aspect of the story does accurately reflect the social pressures that girls and young women experience on a daily basis: the standard of beauty set before them is not humanly achievable, but they are relentlessly prodded to try for it anyway. Bella's determination to reach it, in spite of the terrible costs associated with it, serves as both a source of commiseration for readers who have experienced similar pressures in real life and a potential reinforcement of that unhealthy social message. Beauty is valorized above humanity, health, and even life. Bella ultimately achieves her goal in the final novel,

becoming the most graceful vampire of all, her newfound powers fully justifying the tortuous transformation she endured to acquire them. While her insecurities may reassure readers that they are not alone, they may simultaneously reinforce standards of beauty that those readers may then feel compelled to try to achieve in spite of their impossibility, something that worries body image theorists.

The second book in the series, *New Moon*, begins by adding anxieties about aging to the mix, as Bella has a nightmare in which she has grown into an elderly woman while Edward has stayed eternally youthful. The trigger for her anxieties is the “bleak date” that “had lurked in ambush, waiting to spring. And now that it had hit, it was even worse than I’d feared it would be. I could feel it—I was older. Every day I got older, but this was different, worse, quantifiable. I was eighteen” (Meyer, *New Moon* 6-7). Although overtly referring to the milestone of physically aging past Edward, who is frozen at seventeen, the passage also establishes a strong connection between adulthood and decline. Barely a legal adult and still in high school, Bella already feels that she is decaying into decrepitude and she immediately begins searching her face for signs of wrinkles. Her desire for youth and beauty both typifies and reinforces the desires of the book’s readers, placing a spotlight on a significant problem within western culture: even in the twenty-first century, when single women over the age of thirty are no longer called “old maids,” girls and women are still being made to feel that their attractiveness and value has little shelf life past that point.

A similar critique, however, must be leveled at virtually all of the paranormal romances. Either the heroine already possesses great beauty, or she aspires to it. It even applies to stories from the Girl Power era, such as *Buffy*. Fans of the show critiqued it for

“working within the dominant standards of beauty in our society,” creating a universe in which no protagonist was overweight or physically irregular (Ross 95) and all of the women were pleasing to the generic male gaze. This is part of why Ross asked, at one point, “Did the overarching message of *Girl Power*’s potential to change the world matter more, or did the show’s motifs of beauty and the female body overshadow and undercut its more feminist tendencies?” (87). Within the visual medium of television, such scopophilia may have been unavoidable and may have accidentally resulted in it being even more deeply embedded in the texts that followed *Buffy*. This problem, however, is equally common in young adult literature.

Although Beth Younger’s focus is specifically about the role of weightism and body policing in young adult romantic literature, she points a strong lens on how these practices are rooted specifically in the goal of pleasing what Laura Mulvey and other such critics often refer to as the male gaze; in the context of novels written by, for, and about women, however, it is important to note that the same rules are reinforced by other women when men are absent. While the romance novel industry has, in recent years, expanded its definitions of female beauty to provide more positive feedback to women in its readership who don’t meet the standardized (and difficult to achieve) mainstream ideals, and while young adult fiction has diversified in a similar manner, the stories still frequently focus on how the heroine incites desire in the hero, and what the hero does about it, shifting the agency away from the heroine in the process. Even within books that show female sexual power, Younger notes that “these protagonists derive their power from their looks” (46) and are contrasted against women whose lack of conventional beauty leaves them lacking control over their love lives, as well. Yet even when women

supposedly have power, they are often forced to stand naked before the judgmental gaze of scopophilia. “In many Young Adult texts, readers are encouraged, even directed, to examine characters from the perspective of judgmental voyeur. Characters (and readers) internalize the gaze that reinforces female objectification, and these social constructions of young women’s bodies become accepted norms . . . Young Adult fiction encourages young women’s self-surveillance of their bodies” (47). The problem, then, is endemic to the larger romance and young adult genres, and not unique to paranormal romances like *Twilight*.

In many respects, in fact, it appears that Meyer attempts to subvert this surveillance. Younger notes that young adult romances are often characterized by the way that “the authors rarely describe male bodies, but female bodies are continually looked at in what becomes a powerful reenactment of the male gaze” (47). While Edward’s physical appearance is described at extravagant and sometimes-contradictory length, Bella is barely described at all in physical terms, theoretically allowing readers with a wider range of body types to envision themselves in her place. Younger notes, however, that for un-described characters, a set of default standards is generally assumed by readers: “when the race of a character is not specifically delineated, white is assumed. In these Young Adult literature texts, an unacknowledged weightism functions similarly: unless the weight of the character is specifically mentioned, the reader will most likely assume the character is thin” (47). Even without an explicit description attached to Bella, most readers may make assumptions about her appearance that place her in the mainstream, many of which have been solidified by Kristen Stewart’s portrayal of Bella in the feature films.

Still, the assumptions that are paired to this nebulous construction probably remain an improvement for readers over the more highly-defined descriptions in most of the other series. When Sookie Stackhouse describes herself as “blond blue-eyed and twenty-five, and my legs are strong and my bosom is substantial, and I have a waspy waistline” (Harris 1) and Elena Gilbert is described as “cool and blond and slender, the fashion trendsetter, the high school senior, the girl every boy wanted and every girl wanted to be” (Smith 6), readers are confronted with an idealized, prescriptive definition of female beauty. As noted earlier, they may feel that they are capable of competing with Bella on her own ground, but women like Sookie and Elena may be too much for them to handle. Readers can vicariously enter their worlds through them, but will have difficulty imagining themselves—as *themselves*—navigating those worlds or reaping the same rewards. Identification with even more empowered heroines like Diana Tregarde—who is described as ballerina-sized, has a black belt in Karate, and effortlessly wields a massive broadsword in her introductory appearance (Lackey, *Burning Water* 30)—is even more difficult for readers, undermining the fantasy that these lives, in similar circumstances, could be their own.

#### **9.4 The Allure of the Inverted Beast**

The heroes of the most successful paranormal romances are much more straightforward in their allure. As with the Beast from the original fairy tale, wealth and power appear to come naturally to most Monstrous Lovers and help to ensnare their respective Belles, along with the imagination of readers. The opulence of the life that vampires are often portrayed as leading is so commonplace that it merits its own TV Trope: “Vampires are Rich” (TVTropes.org). Beginning with the wealthy, aristocratic

undead of the early nineteenth century, vampires have represented not merely sexual power and freedom, but freedom from material deprivation. Centuries old themselves, they represent Old Money on a multitude of levels and command both the material comfort and the political power that it represents. This tends to be more pronounced in the young adult fiction under analysis, in which the Cullen family is so fabulously wealthy that its head, Carlisle, is listed at number three in the *Forbes* “Fictional 15” list, behind only Scrooge McDuck and Smaug (Noer and Ewalt) and the Salvatores are Italian noblemen. This sort of vampire “passes from one historical epoch to another, always in consummate taste. The hungry reader envies not only his vampiric powers and his erotic tenderness, but his perfect clothes and elegant villas” (Auerbach 3890). In the *Twilight* series in particular, the vampires of the Cullen family are depicted as wealthy fashion plates with the best clothes, cars, and homes money can buy, and a sense of style that transcends fads and puts their classmates to shame.

With such extravagant surface civility, one might be inclined to ask where, exactly, the monster is. The original structure of *Beauty and the Beast* has been almost fully inverted here, with the outward glamour hiding intense, dangerous darkness within. This characterization also sharply increases the power differential between the hero and heroine, something which may also increase the scenario’s plausibility for many teenage girls.

Ross points out that “many young women in high school are trapped in a double bind where they must succeed in a ‘man’s world’ on the two fronts of appearance *and* school activities” (92). Younger, meanwhile, notes that many young adult works reveal both that “young female bodies are important sites of cultural contestation” (45) and that

“powerful cultural pressure still exists for young women to uphold an unrealistic standard of beauty” (54). A disturbing element is revealed by Judith Johnson’s exploration of the sources of terror for men and women in pre-feminist vampire stories, and how their real-life bases haven’t actually been eliminated. For many women, the vampire story was “a metaphor for how things actually are, more often than not, or for how society constructs them. The seductive lover and the beloved husband may indeed wind up controlling, immobilizing, and finally draining the object of his desire” (Johnson 77). While it seems that such anxieties should not persist in the post-Girl Power era of the *Twilight* novels, a quick check of headlines demonstrates that the same fears are palpable for modern teenage girls. For them, the vampire bite remains a powerful metaphor for the worst things that a lover might do to them.

### **9.5 The Bite of the Beast**

While other paranormal romances primarily targeted at older audiences used the bite as a metaphor for—or even an element of—the consensual sexual act, *Twilight* in particular recasts the bite as a site of sexual violence. *Twilight* vampires are lethal to their prey, usually killing their victims in the act of feeding. They are deadly threats to the lives and ways of life of the humans around them. As the Monstrous Lover, Edward differs from the norm in his level of socialization. He has renounced the killing of humans, and instead, he and his family choose to feed on the blood of animals, a stance pioneered by Louis in the *Vampire Chronicles* and the ensouled Angel in *Buffy*. Vampires who make this choice, in both *Twilight* and the *Vampire Diaries* series, are portrayed as weakened in comparison to their homicidal brethren, but stronger in moral character. They are tested by their relationships with the heroines, whose proximity and

trust make it dangerously easy to give in to temptation. Blood exchanges come with greater risks and are driven by a more desperate sense of need. In essence, yet another retelling of the revised *Beauty and the Beast* unfolds, as the fairy tale prince struggles against the beast within, with the help of his love interest who both inspires him to rise above it and, through no fault of her own, tempts him to succumb to it. In *Twilight*, simply being bitten by a vampire can be enough to “doom” a person to become one, and the process is divorced of most of the connotations of either sexuality or mutuality. A particularly telling plot point that had occurred in *The Vampire Diaries* involved Elena being coerced into letting Damon Salvatore drink from her; later, that blood exchange allows her resurrection after she drowns, and Elena appears to view this outcome as excusing behavior that, had it been a sexual act, would have been rape. That plot element mirrors the problematized depictions of Dracula and Mina, and many semi-consensual sexual relationships depicted in the 1960s through the 1980s in particular.

Bearing this in mind, both Stefan Salvatore and Edward Cullen acquire a kind of exceptionalism for readers: they are coded as strong men who have risen above their lusts and maintain control over them, metaphors for gentlemanly suitors who make the conscious choice *not* to force their dates down onto the back-seats of their cars, while the majority of vampires stand in for the stereotype of the loutish frat boy who will engage in date-rape or worse as a matter of course. Their choices echo the choices made by other vampires in the same mold, from Louis in Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles*, to Angel in *Buffy*, to the vampires who voluntarily drink synthetic blood in the *Southern Vampire Mysteries*. These are vampires who have the capacity to be beasts but have chosen to be civilized, even if sometimes they are still tempted to give in to their bestial sides. In the



ritual of hope represented by the romance novel, this aspect is the embodiment of the hope that most women feel when the Monstrous Lover's gaze focuses upon the heroine: that it will be loving rather than rapacious, since either way it is inescapable.

### **9.6 Pyrrhic or Genuine Victory?**

Ultimately, the vampires of *Twilight* are depicted as beautiful on the outside and beasts at heart, inverting the *Beauty and the Beast* trope in every respect. Bella, in the end, is the one who is transformed rather than her Monstrous Lover, acquiring both an inhumanly beautiful exterior and the monstrous desires that the Cullen family, in particular, has spent the better part of their existence resisting. Readers are encouraged to view this as triumphant and empowering, as Bella is improbably transformed from a disaster-prone human into a vampire with more poise, grace, and strength than any other in what some critics view as a final bout of adolescent wish-fulfillment. It can, however, also be read as the final completion of the Rebirth scenario.

In spite of resistance from many of the other characters, including Edward himself, Bella successfully achieves her desire to be transformed and is empowered by the realization of that goal. As with Ellen in *The Wide Wide World*, she reaches this position by enduring a prolonged ordeal in which many would-be authority figures—whether Edward, his rival Jacob Black, her own father, or the Volturi—attempt to reshape her destiny according to their own ideals, discounting her expressed wishes in the process. This is the narrative of those without any tangible power, and it inevitably strikes a strong chord with teenage girls in particular: physically and legally, they have very little agency that is genuinely their own. Succeeding in spite of this completes Pam Cole's "ritual of hope" (169) in which the heroine successfully locates herself in the family and

home of her choosing. Whether this ending is considered happy lies in each reader's evaluation of the journey that brought her to it.

## CHAPTER X

### THE FUTURE OF THE GENRE

Detractors of the *Twilight* series frequently point to the way that Edward tries to dictate the pace and tenor of the relationship, but the rebuttal is that in the end, Bella's perseverance wins out over his attempts and he relents, giving her everything that she has hoped for and supporting her cause. For girls and women who have little or no sense of empowerment of their own, this may actually be a radical kind of encouragement: she wins by refusing to let go of her dreams until those around her decide to embrace them, too. Edward may hold—and withhold—the power to provide both sex and the bite, and this plays into some detractors' perceptions of paternalism, but he is the one who ultimately surrenders to her instead of the reverse. This concept of empowerment through perseverance should be immediately familiar to those who have studied the sentimental fiction movement, and it can actually prime readers to move forward to new stages of empowerment, at which point they may be able to embrace more empowered heroines as well. Many, in fact, have: new series featuring far stronger heroines have drawn much of their own fan bases from *Twilight* fans.

Particularly significant are works such as Richelle Mead's *Vampire Academy* series (2007-2010) and Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2010), both of

which hold strong appeal for *Twilight* fans even as they redirect some of the narrative focus away from romance and seat the narrative perspective in more empowered heroines. Mead's series, in particular, continues the use of vampires as metaphors for human power and human desire; Collins, by contrast, transplants the narrative into a post-Apocalyptic dystopia in which the monsters are all too human. Both stories place their teenage heroines, Rose Hathaway and Katniss Everdeen, in situations of political turmoil that they feel inadequate—but obligated—to overcome.

The reception of both books may function as a measurement of the emotional development of the *Twilight* fan base, because while *Vampire Academy* may have appeared to be the logical heir to *Twilight*, *The Hunger Games* actually claimed that crown. Although also set in the Pacific Northwest and featuring an elaborate back story of noble vampire lineages, the *Vampire Academy* series has been unable to penetrate the mainstream market in the same way that *Twilight* did, selling only 9 million books as of early 2014 compared to the 65 million *Hunger Games* series novels now in circulation. The gap between both films underscores this: the worldwide gross for the film version of *Vampire Academy* (2014) is slightly more than \$15 million, while the first two *Hunger Games* films have already grossed more than \$800 million. If the remaining two films in the latter series post similar earnings, they may even outperform the cinematic versions of *Twilight*, which have grossed more than \$1.3 billion to date. Theoretically, if simply invoking sexy vampires was all it took to get the attention of young women (as many detractors of the *Twilight* series try to claim), the numbers should have been reversed.

What may make Katniss Everdeen's story more compelling to young women, particularly *Twilight* fans, is the imbalance between her increased empowerment and the

circumstances in which she finds herself. Although both she and Rose Hathaway are thrown into settings of political turmoil, Rose operates from a position of greater safety and privilege: she is a half-vampire with superhuman powers and strong political connections, already dwelling within an environment of ease and privilege. Most of the skills and powers that she possesses, such as accelerated healing, night vision, and super-speed, are not ones that readers can hope to acquire, compromising her relatability even if she can still act as a fantasy avatar for readers.

Katniss, by comparison, may have prowess in archery and woodcraft, but it was hard-earned after the death of her father left her family on the verge of starvation. Living in one of the poorest defeated districts in a dystopian future America, these abilities are the only skills that allow her to survive, even as they potentially threaten her survival because using them is illegal. Although she has more innate power than Bella through her skills, the stakes have been raised commensurately. The result is that younger readers who identified with Bella's sense of helplessness can also relate to Katniss's as well. Her particular skills *are* ones that her readers can potentially acquire, and archery clubs have reported sharp increases in memberships since 2012, especially among girls and women seeking to emulate their heroine (Hood).

In place of Bella's physical awkwardness, Katniss must contend with her social awkwardness and the peril it places her in when she is recruited into the Hunger Games; to survive them, she must not merely be the strongest or cleverest person in the battlefield, but must make herself popular with viewers, and she has no idea how to do this. Readers who were able to relate to Bella's plainness and clumsiness are likely to identify with this flaw, too. Although it makes Katniss more suited to embark upon a

Hero's Journey, elements of the Heroine's Journey are still supplied via an unexpected source, as another character provides the social connections she personally lacks. Peeta Mellark uses his very real but initially unrequited love for Katniss to shape a sympathetic romantic narrative around her for the Games' viewers, winning her the allies that she cannot acquire on her own behalf. Suzanne Collins imbues him with many of the traditionally feminine qualities that Katniss's characterization has shed in favor of traditionally masculine ones. In this way, the two characters complete each other, and it should come as no surprise that they end the trilogy as a romantic couple. Many readers, however, had rooted for Gale Hawthorne, Katniss's best friend who was her mirror rather than her foil; after Stephenie Meyer expressed admiration for the series, many *Twilight* fans took it up and even created teams supporting each of Katniss's suitors, akin to the "Team Edward" and "Team Jacob" that they had created during *Twilight*'s heyday. As heteronormative and chaste as the *Twilight* novels themselves, *The Hunger Games* avoids the label of "abstinence porn" in large part because the romance plot is subordinate to the larger revolutionary plot. The trilogy still successfully enacts the ritual of hope for readers, as Katniss and Peeta survive the war, find a place for themselves in the resulting new society, and commit to sharing its peace together.

A notable element is that *Twilight*'s heir apparent, in this case, has shed the *Beauty and the Beast* elements of the story and given the heroine and her would-be lovers more equal footing, while still incorporating elements of peril, interdependence, and romantic ambivalence that readers had experienced with the first series. Those who criticized Edward for attempting to control the sexual aspects of his and Bella's relationships, however, might equally criticize Peeta for manipulating Katniss's public

image and forcing her to play along with the Doomed Lovers story he developed to gain audience sympathy for both of them, but much less backlash to that ploy has been forthcoming. Both scenarios serve equivalent narratological purposes, and many readers may be able to sense that even if they do not yet have the specialized vocabulary to articulate it. The female coming-of-age story, however, has swung in this direction, hybridizing the higher stakes of Girl Power era stories with the feelings of powerlessness and the quest for assimilation central to *Twilight*. At the same time, most of the supernatural elements may be disappearing from the formula for now. For much of the mainstream public, the romantic vampire may have played itself out.

As of early 2014, there are clear signs that the romantic vampire is receding from mainstream attention, just as Anne Rice's vampires waned in popularity in the 1990s. Since all of the previous shifts in the vampire genre in particular occurred as reactions to each prior shift's prevailing themes, it is likely that the next round of vampire fiction will feature higher levels of horror that de-emphasizes romantic plots, something already indicated by Guillermo del Toro's new FX series, *The Strain*. Although the *Twilight* books remain popular and still appear in Amazon's top-sellers lists, the franchise has concluded its run in movie theaters and has given way to other young adult and supernatural works. *Vampire Kisses* concluded with its ninth book in May 2012, and no further adaptations have been planned. *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* has also concluded its run, with its final book released in May 2013 with its final season airing on HBO in the Summer 2014 season. While *The Vampire Diaries* is still airing, its ratings are declining. The nature of the stories that audiences are seeking has clearly shifted and appears to have taken a feminist turn.

The CW commissioned a remake of the *Beauty and the Beast* television series, which completed its second season in the summer of 2014 and has been renewed for a third season. The reactivation of a stronger heroine, in the form of the series' Catherine Chandler, is further evidence that many of *Twilight*'s fans are now seeking stories about heroines who reflect their own growing empowerment; if so, this is precisely the emotional and intellectual development that many of *Twilight*'s critics have hoped for most of all. Other novels set within the paranormal milieu, such as *Vampire Academy*, *Beautiful Creatures*, and *Mortal Instruments*, have emphasized higher levels of personal feminine power and sisterhood while still containing romantic subplots. Although these series have been popular enough to encourage cinematic adaptations, all have done poorly in theaters, suggesting either that the general public has grown tired of this particular subgenre or that key ingredients needed by readers and viewers are missing from many of these stories.

Evidence of whether this means that audiences are demanding stronger heroines, or just insisting on less supernatural elements, may become clear with the release of the first *Fifty Shades of Grey* film, in which Anastasia Steele, the reworked and renamed Bella Swan, submits to Christian Grey, the sadomasochistic, mortal rewrite of Edward Cullen. The power differential between the two characters exaggerates the one between Bella and Edward; the *Beauty and the Beast* motif returns to a more conventional formation as Ana strives to cure Christian of his internal bestial nature, in this case expressed by his sexual appetites. Not due out in theaters until February of 2015, almost four years after it took over bestseller lists, the film's reception will reveal whether or not the popular culture pendulum has actually swung away from the narrative elements that



critics had particularly objected to in *Twilight*, or simply away from the paranormal. The series still remains on bestseller lists, however, and the paranormal romance genre itself now accounts for 30% of ebook romance sales and 21% of print romance sales (Romance Writers of America: Romance Industry Statistics), indicating that this upstart subgenre has carved a substantial niche for itself and will continue in a position of strength for a while to come.

If Thomas Byers' theories are correct, the economy may also have an impact on the next trends in popular, paranormal, and romantic fiction. He observed that in periods of financial instability, there tends to be a backlash against empowered women, minorities, and other marginalized groups, who are reinterpreted as robbing power from men and members of the dominant majority. The punishment fantasies encoded in 1980s films would appear to corroborate this, as would the emergence of the Girl Power movement during the most prosperous part of the 1990s. *Twilight* itself emerged during the growing post-9/11 instabilities that ultimately led to the Great Recession, suggesting that the heavily normative and conservative elements within the story, and the emphasis on marriage and tradition, may have been reactions to growing senses of insecurity that women experienced on both social and personal fronts. Economic recovery, then, may play an important role in granting space to future, more empowered heroines; conversely, further economic woes could compromise the allure of such narratives.

## CHAPTER XI

### CONCLUSION: OPENING THE GATES FOR WOMEN'S FICTION

Several crucial lessons emerge from this analysis, which have the potential to reshape many of the ways that literary theorists handle fiction and its criticism. Further study of the traditions and narrative mechanisms used in the romance genre is needed, the development of analytical approaches for dissecting such fiction must be created, and new tools and approaches must be incorporated to achieve these aims. To do this, three crucial steps need to be taken:

First, just as the boundaries between genres have begun to break down, boundaries between currently segregated critical theories must become more porous. Literary theory already incorporates elements of philosophical and psychological approaches, and Freudian psychoanalytic theory is all too frequently deployed even where not necessarily appropriate, as with *Dracula*; historical and sociological criticism, however, are still frequently segregated away from literary theory in a way that has often made little sense. Regardless of any story's setting or supposedly universal themes, after all, it is a product of the era and the society in which it is constructed, as the changing face of the vampire has demonstrated. Even authors of fiction labeled classical literature have been subject to this mercurial, socially-motivated effect: Charles Dickens, for

example, had been dismissed as a writer of pulp novels until his class-conscious works became resonant for children of the Civil Rights era, and his influence is waning even now. To treat any work of literature as timeless and universal is to turn a blind eye to the sociological factors that have aligned to make it appear that way, the very act of peripheral processing that critical theory is intended to prevent. For this reason, literary theorists need to avail themselves of every salient critical tool and rhetorical lens available for examining a work, and should avoid over-reliance on any one of them.

Second, the examination of fiction written by, for, and about women needs further reform, because the “ritual of hope” delineated within romance novels still remains largely absent from works offered to literature students. Students who are offered Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* or Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” still find themselves reading not about female empowerment but female degradation: Chopin’s Edna Pontellier may experience a sexual renaissance, but she ultimately drowns herself, while Gilman’s Jane goes mad rather than escaping her imprisonment. While reviving these stories is a step toward inclusivity for female authors and their heroines, it still only represents one half of narratology, and stories that always end in metaphorical or literal funerals only express the dark half of human experience. This is an excellent opportunity for scholars and theorists to apply critical techniques to stories that end with metaphorical or literal weddings, and seek out examples with enough textual layers to merit promotion into the classroom.

Third, and finally, to achieve that aim, several lingering misogynistic attitudes present among both the general public and feminist theorists themselves must be challenged and overcome, particularly the kneejerk response to romance novels that often

seems to distill itself into derision against things labeled feminine. *Jezebel* blogger Zokajo, writing in the wake of the premiere of the first trailer for the upcoming film version of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, points out that much of the mockery aimed at both series “is not all coming from the real, legitimate problems . . . but gets boiled down to the whole concept of the novel being silly and ridiculous (and by extension, all of the women who love it being silly and ridiculous)” (Zokajo). That response is, in fact, the same sort of peripheral processing that *Twilight*’s detractors worry its readers are engaging in, and ironically contradicts the fundamental feminist principle that women should be free to choose the life—or the fiction—they enjoy most. Many readers of romance novels are not merely avid but voracious readers who consume a book a day, but who are also made to feel ashamed of this enthusiasm. If descriptive literary scholars wish to avoid becoming prescriptive literary gatekeepers, the way the New Critics once did, a crucial step will be to eliminate the sense of shame that many of America’s most avid readers are made to feel about their preferences. Pleasure reading is the gateway to higher cognitive skills, so readers should never be forced to think of the works they love most as *guilty* pleasures. Many young readers who began with *Twilight* have participated in debates about its merits and failings, absorbing key aspects of critical theory in the process and graduating to more demanding works of fiction, which is exactly what everyone engaged in the debate should hope for. Those readers should never, ever, be made to feel ashamed of the spark that ignited their love of reading.

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