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### Cover Page Footnote

Alexis Catanzarite is currently working on her Masters in Composition and Rhetoric and certificate in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Kansas, where she works as a Graduate Teaching Assistant. She has a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and Political Science from High Point University.

## **From *Dracula* to *Twilight*: The Threat of the Romantic Vampire**

*Alexis Cantanzarite*

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One of the most interesting developments in literature and pop culture in the past three decades has been the rise and near-improbable revolutionizing of the vampire. Although there have been books featuring this “modern” vampire that preceded it, Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* is credited as the catalyst of the oft-cited vampire “craze” among young women. Gone, it would seem, are the days of Bram Stoker’s terrifyingly evil title character Dracula; in the Count’s place, readers find themselves taken with the likes of Meyer’s timelessly romantic and physically perfect Edward Cullen. Edward and his vampire “family” resemble GQ model look-alikes who enjoy nothing but the finest things that immortality has to offer, save for the one thing that they are supposed to desire most of all: human blood. The Cullen clan adopt a “vegetarian” (181) lifestyle in which they abstain from drinking human blood because they think of it as morally reprehensible, choosing instead to prey on animals. Not only does Edward look like an Adonis in the flesh (299, 317), he operates under a thoughtfully constructed set of *morals*. Meyer appears to have created the perfect “man” in Edward, the “bad boy” that you actually *can* take home to your family. One

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would go so far as to say that, if Edward were human, he would be the ideal romantic partner. Edward is, however, a vampire, a fact that presents both conflicts in the fictional world of the novel and concern in reality for the target demographic.

Despite the fact that Meyer's *Twilight* targets a much younger reading demographic and seemingly removes the most horrific of vampire characteristics, the novel is potentially more sinister than *Dracula*. When girls "scream" in *Twilight*, it is *for* Edward, not *because* of him; when they can't take their eyes off of Edward, it is in *fascination*, not *horror* (20-22); when Edward renders girls speechless, it is not because he has said something *threatening*, but because he is "*dazzling*" (43, 167-68, 184, 209, 282) them. Meyer manages to retain the threat of danger that loomed in *Dracula* and merge it with a character akin to a Disney prince. The combination of a traditionally animalistic monster housed within a charming, handsome, immortal seventeen-year-old male presents the most terrifying character in vampire literature yet. Meyer's Edward Cullen exists as a more dangerous vampire than Stoker's *Dracula* due to the sympathetic narrative Meyer uses to build Edward's character upon; the sympathetic narrative simultaneously allows the reader to forget the monstrous actions that Edward is capable of and forgive him when he demonstrates those capabilities.

### **Entering the Conversation**

While this analysis contends that the most prominent issue in *Twilight* is Meyer's disturbing characterization of Edward's vampiric nature, the issue comes even further into relief when considering that the author tells the story from the perspective of Edward's love interest, Bella Swan. Lydia Kokkola, author of "Virtuous Vampires and Voluptuous Vamps: Romance

Conventions Reconsidered in Stephenie Meyer's 'Twilight' Series," states that "the use of the first-person narrator, especially one who speaks so intimately, encourages the readers to forgive...and condone...behavior" (5). With that observation, Kokkola highlights a concern that plagues the novel as a whole: as the author tells the story entirely from Bella's first-person perspective, it is an almost automatic assumption that she is the character driving the action of the novel. In reality, however, Bella fails to control even the minutest of elements in the story, including her reaction to Edward. Through Bella's point of view, Edward's monstrous nature is desirable and attractive rather than something that incites feelings of terror and revulsion. In fact, the threat that Edward could snap and kill Bella at any moment cultivates the novel's theme of forbidden love even further, making the relationship between the two main characters more thrilling, considering that one misstep could result in tragedy.

Since it skyrocketed to popularity after its 2005 publication, *Twilight* has been subject to a wealth of scholarly conversation given its controversial plot. There have been numerous articles and anthologies devoted to analyzing the novel through various critical lenses. One such example is *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, & the Vampire Franchise*, a collection of essays devoted to understanding "the reasons that so many have connected with the powerful messages the books and films deliver" (Click et al x), published just five years following the novel's initial publication. The collective works are divided into three separate categories, which consist of "Biting into the Twilight Narrative," "Biting into the Twilight Fandom," and "Biting into the Twilight Franchise." The articles analyze *Twilight* through a range of lenses, from religion to gender and sexuality to commodification.

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Another anthology of critical essays on the novel, *Bringing Light to Twilight: Perspectives on a Pop Culture Phenomenon* (2011), is similarly organized around the thematic issues of “Literary Contexts: Past and Present,” “Gender and Sexuality,” and “Class, Race, and Green Space.” Out of the 31 articles between the two anthologies, however, none considers how the vampire has evolved from its original characteristics and what the implications of that evolution are. Although one included selection, Melissa Ames’ “Analyzing ‘Biting’ Critiques of Vampire Narratives for Their Portrayals of Gender and Sexuality,” puts *Twilight* in dialogue with popular vampire tales such as *Dracula* and Anne Rice’s *The Vampire Chronicles*, its goal is to analyze how the narratives characterize and treat females in their universes, only discussing vampires in relation to their female counterparts.

Most of the conversation, in fact, surrounding *Twilight* revolves around establishing its problematic anti-feminist message and troubling characterization of healthy relationships for young adults; if the vampire aspect of *Twilight* is subject to conversation at all, it is generally to assert that it has made a mockery of the vampire archetype by turning it into a romantic hero. In “*Twilight* is Not Good for the Maidens: Gender, Sexuality, and the Family,” Anna Silver states that, “Edward is exaggeratedly more active and confident than the generally passive, insecure Bella” in *Twilight* (125); Bella’s repeated concessions to Edward open her up to the charge of being an anti-feminist role model for young readers. Abigail Nathan, an editor at *Bothersome Words*, takes Silver’s observations about Edward and Bella’s dynamic to a new level by asserting that “adults are frequently disturbed by the nature of Edward and Bella’s relationship, describing Edward as a stalker and Bella as a victim” (quoted in Lay). Danielle Borgia

agrees with Nathan's observations, contending that Edward "lures her with money, cars, clothing—all of which she claims she does not want—to isolate her from connection with others" (157) in her article "*Twilight*: The Glamorization of Abuse, Codependency, and White Privilege." While these are challenging issues deserving of critical discourse, there seems to be an inherent disregard for taking into account the fact that Edward is an entirely different *species* than Bella, instead choosing to analyze the relationship between the two characters simply as a problematic teenage romance.

It is this disregard for discussing the challenging power dynamic in Edward and Bella's relationship in terms of vampire/human rather than male/female that allows the reader to perceive Edward as a good, if somewhat controlling and misguided, "guy" in the context of the *Twilight* universe. The popular opinion of Edward as a vampire is that he represents a watered-down, laughable version of the once prevalent vampire archetype established by Dracula, given that he sparkles in the sunlight and drinks animal blood in lieu of harming humans. Even Anne Rice, author of the massively popular *The Vampire Chronicles*, weighs in on the nature of Edward's characterization on her Facebook, saying that the vampires in her novels "feel sorry for vampires that sparkle in the sun." Instead of trivializing his sinister nature and making how Edward sparkles in the sun a defining trait of his vampirism, more focus should be afforded to interrogating the acts that he has the *potential* to commit; just because Edward *chooses* not to do something, does not mean that he is not *capable* of it.

### Considering the Vampires

Although teenagers by nature have raging hormones, vampires are famous for their overt tendency

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towards the sexual. The inherently sexual nature of vampires is what makes *Twilight* such a unique case in vampire literature, however, especially in comparison to Stoker's *Dracula*; in Meyer's effort to reinvent the mythical vampires, she strives, almost painfully so, to avoid the sexual aspect so frequently associated with vampirism. Regardless of her best efforts, however, she simply cannot avoid the connection between sexuality and vampires altogether, as demonstrated by this admission from Edward: "When we hunt, we give ourselves over to our senses... govern less with our minds... If you were anywhere near me when I lost control that way..." (225). By implying that Bella should not be "near" Edward when he "loses control that way," Meyer is alluding to the fact that Bella would be a *victim* of Edward's sexual desires despite the fact that the rest of the novel positions her as a more than willing participant. These slip-ups aside, Meyer does an adequate job painting the portrait of a vampire that is almost completely devoid of any carnality, unknowingly lending merit to Edward's potential for sinister acts. That Edward is presented as a vampire that has no apparent sexual tendencies is meant to remove one of the major threats typically associated with the creatures, making Edward appear to be "safe" or "tame" in comparison to the traditional Dracula, when he is equally capable of being as threatening as the Count.

Unlike his popular vampire successor, Dracula operates under neither a specific moral nor an ethical code, nor does he seem to retain any traces of humanity. Save for when Stoker introduces readers to the Count at the beginning of the novel, he never attempts to appear as anything less than a horrific monster. Despite claiming that he "can love" (Stoker 36), Dracula repeatedly demonstrates that his only motivation is to prey upon and destroy the innocent, with a particular

focus on virginal women. The act of predation and the conquering of women appear to be the character's only true purposes in the novel, purposes that he fulfills quite well. He has a trio of hyper-sexualized female vampires that answer to his every whim and command. He makes a sport out of turning Lucy Westenra, a previously pure if promiscuous young woman, into a wanton vampire (198) that preys upon young children (165-66) and literally tries to seduce her fiancé to death (198-99). Dracula's cruelty to Mina Harker is perhaps even greater, feeding on her multiple times and forcing her to drink his blood in turn (265-66). Dracula's menacing acts of manipulation and subjugation define the vampire archetype for readers, establishing that the creatures are capable of committing heinous acts with no remorse. As Dracula is the embodiment of the traditional gothic vampire, it is difficult to imagine how the vampire is so thoroughly re-imagined into a "reluctant hero" that not only obtains sympathy from readers but also stirs feelings of romance and desire.

Glennis Byron, author of "As one Dead": *Romeo and Juliet* in the 'Twilight' zone," discusses seminal works of literature in relation to the modern vampire's appeal and how it replaces the traditional heroic male, relying heavily on Meyer's *Twilight* to further the direction of the analysis:

The human is emptied out to create a space into which is poured a consumer fantasy, a celebrity, a teen icon, a hero of popular romance. Edward in *Twilight* is not just a simulation of the human; he is a simulation of what is already a simulation, a reproduction of something found only on "the air-brushed faces of a fashion magazine;" the vampires even feel like reproductions; they are hard like stone, and just as cold. The characteristics of the hero of

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popular romance are here literalized in the vampire's form. (178)

Byron asserts that the vampires featured in novels today are *enhanced* versions of humans; the lead vampire male, while somewhat resembling the typical male hero, is actually much more. That Meyer has successfully taken physical characteristics of the traditional vampire – “without a single speck of color” and “cold as ice” (Stoker 14) – and added both physical and personality traits consistent with a generic “consumer fantasy” speaks to the sinister brilliance of Edward's characterization. In an instance where Meyer almost transcends the world of the novel to comment on the vampire-to-fantasy phenomenon, Edward acknowledges that he is a “superhero” (92) in Bella's eyes, but quickly counters with the most provocative question of the novel that he answers with emphatic agreement: “What if I'm the bad guy?” (92). This is something that he was “born” to be as a vampire.

Although Bella is adamant that Edward is one of the “good guys,” Meyer unknowingly uses Bella to alert readers to some of Edward's rather substantial flaws. For example, the book focuses on Edward's careful control of his instincts to kill Bella, but his behavior in the novel is erratic at best. No less than seven times does Bella describe Edward's eyes, face, and voice as being “cold” (64, 82, 86, 174, 184, 186, 381) towards her following civilized or encouraging gestures on Edward's part; she even goes so far as to note that his mood changes are “unpredictable” (211). This kind of inconsistency reminds readers that Edward is truly a dangerous character, especially in comparison to Dracula. Edward is the antithesis to Dracula, the ultimate “wolf in sheep's clothing.” Dracula neither seeks nor desires to deny his vampiric impulses, making the threat of his existence known from the onset of every scene, whereas Edward

constantly struggles to conceal his nature. When Bella notes that he is unable to control the most basic of emotions, readers are reminded that Edward could also lose control and act on his monstrous impulses at any moment, ending the war with himself and fulfilling his nature by killing her—his prey.

**...and their victims**

While we will find out that *Twilight* fails to view women as autonomous beings, *Dracula* certainly is not the greatest friend to the characterization of females either. One of the most troubling observations of Stoker's *Dracula* is the way in which it negotiates Lucy's sexual liberation as a vampire and Mina's idealness as the proper English woman—essentially speaking, the way in which women are “othered” in the novel. Critic Charles Bressler defines “the other” as “an object whose existence is defined and interpreted by the dominant male” (173). In a clear exercise of the patriarchy's power, Lucy is the only female that attempts to subvert male dominance with her sexual prowess as a vampire. The men who once sought to help Lucy prior to her transformation subsequently murder her. The men in the novel all seek to restore order to society by not only destroying Dracula, but also by reaffirming the woman's role as that of “the other,” one who is subservient to a man. Perhaps that is one of the more brilliant parts of Dracula's villainy; what the men of the novel seek to contain and destroy, Dracula seeks to nurture and unleash. In other words, Dracula derives a kind of satisfaction in releasing women from the bonds of English propriety, all the while knowing that it will end in their demise. While Dracula ultimately contributes to their “othered” state by victimizing them, he also gives them some semblance of liberation that

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men in the Victorian era were unwilling to offer. More unwilling still is Edward Cullen in comparison.

One would assume that, due to both the modern era in which it is set and the stark avoidance of the issue of sex altogether in *Twilight*, the days of “othering” women have passed; of course, this assumption is faulty. In Meyer’s calculated efforts to remove the threat of sexuality from the vampire to transform it into an appealing hero, she forces the “sexless” vampire to restrain his female love interest’s own sexuality as well. Edward does resist killing Bella despite how much his vampiric nature demands that he do so, but he substitutes her literal death for a series of metaphorical ones. Edward is both denying Bella the opportunity to grow and forcing her to put his needs ahead of her desires, all while Bella is convinced that she could never be good enough for *him* in all of his “perfection.”<sup>1</sup> Despite Meyer’s attempts to convince the reader that Bella is in control of the relationship’s destiny, Edward is clearly the one deciding what will and will not happen in their “relationship.”

As Byron shrewdly observes, there is the “continual excess, the thrilling suggestion that boundaries will be overstepped, followed by the emphatic reassertion that they will not be. . . . But as the prolonged eroticism of such encounters between Edward and Bella shows, he disturbs, as well as defines, moral boundaries” in *Twilight* (182). In order to arrive at the discussion of boundaries, however, one must analyze the root of Bella’s attraction to Edward as a partner. It is clearly demonstrated in the novel that Bella is most attracted to Edward at the times when he is at his most monstrous,

<sup>1</sup> See pages 19, 20, 50, 54, 74, 79, 81, 168, 210, 219, 227, 256-57, 260-61, 277, 282, 322, 345, 453, 481 510, 513, 521, and 525.

indicating that she is seduced by the danger he presents without saying it outright. Edward overwhelms Bella with his mysteriousness, making it impossible for her to want anything or anyone but him. In a sense, Edward liberates Bella in the way that Dracula liberates Lucy; through Edward, Bella discovers her sexual awakening. Even though he is the one to “liberate” her, Edward victimizes Bella by controlling her and forcing her to repress her desires.

At no point in the novel is Bella able to control her reactions to the way Edward makes her feel. Bella's embarrassment over these reactions suggests that she lacks the inherent ability to resist him, or rather, that she lacks the control to resist something that she wants. Meyer writes that Bella was “stunned by the unexpected electricity that flowed through me...a crazy impulse to reach over and touch him... nearly overwhelmed me...” (218) and that a “shock ran through my [Bella's] body at his casual touch” (273 brackets added). In great part, the “electricity” Bella describes plays two crucial roles in her relationship with Edward. In one sense, she continually gives herself over to the effect it has on her and she allows this to rule her. Bella cannot maintain the effect Edward has on her, for a multitude of reasons, the least of which being that Edward can hear her heart and blood race or smell a change in her chemistry. Edward's “electricity” makes Bella more than foolish in his presence, as demonstrated in her fainting following one of their chaste kisses: “And then I collapsed” (319). She also states that she “would rather die than stay away from you [Edward]” (274 brackets added), a declaration that defines what party is in control of the relationship as sharply as Edward and Bella's actions do.

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Edward also sets the moral boundaries of their relationship, as Byron previously asserted. Although many critical articles characterize Bella<sup>2</sup> as a passive character, she is quite pro-active where one issue is concerned: sex. In what is perhaps the only instance of female progression from *Dracula* to *Twilight*, conservative-minded Bella is the pursuer of a physical relationship without the catalyst of a transformation as literal as Lucy's, while Edward is both the *object* of the pursuit and the *arbitrator* over the pursuit itself. Meyers casts no allusions or double meanings where Bella is concerned; she makes it quite clear that she yearns to have a sexual relationship with Edward. Kokkola concurs, observing that Bella is the character in the novel that is "constantly filled with carnal desire" (4). In *Twilight*, Edward can either be found rebuffing Bella's physical advances or unfairly admonishing her for having those desires for him at all, even though he is the one that observes that "everything about me invites you in – my voice, my face, even my *smell*" (Meyer 263-64). In many ways, Edward seeks to contain Bella's sexual desires in much the same way that the human males in *Dracula* all seek to contain the hypersexual Lucy through her death. While Bella does protest at the beginning of every rejection, she also concedes every time, allowing Edward to control not only the situation, but her as well.

Recalling Kokkola's observation about the implications of having a first-person narrator, readers forgive Edward's controlling behavior and classify it as romantic because that is how *Bella* chooses to see it. Unlike Meyer's first-person narrative, Stoker's epistolary novel<sup>1</sup> allows for no observation of Dracula

<sup>2</sup> See Ames, Clarke, Lay, and Siering.

outside of the horrific. Edward is a new, more dangerous breed of vampire that “dazzles” his victims, convincing them he is doing them an *honor* by associating with them. As Bella internally admits to herself that “...there was no way around it; I could refuse him nothing” (Meyer 284), there is little to do but agree with her. Meyer clearly defines Bella as “the other” in *Twilight*, since her existence is quite plainly “defined and interpreted by the dominant male” (Bressler 173), just as Lucy and Mina are in *Dracula*. Edward defines her very character to the very core; without Edward, there is no Bella. Although Edward describes himself as being “alien” (Meyer 275) because he is a vampire, he has turned Bella into the true “alien” character in her very own narrative. The appeal of Edward in Meyer’s story outweighs the danger that he should pose, making him far more deadly and opportunistic than Stoker’s *Dracula* could ever hope to be.

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