LOVE BITES: AN EXPLORATION OF STEPHENIE MEYER’S TWILIGHT AS A GOTHIC RETELLING OF “BEAUTY AND THE BEAST”

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................. iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ............................................................................................................... iv

INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................................... 1

THE GOTHIC AND ROMANCE TRADITION: SETTING THE STAGE ........................................... 3

“BEAUTY AND THE BEAST” AND THE GOTHIC TRADITION ....................................................... 15

TWILIGHT, THE GOTHIC, AND THE FAIRY TALE ....................................................................... 20

Bella, The Gothic Heroine ......................................................................................................... 21

Edward, The Gothic Hero ......................................................................................................... 29

Forks, Washington, The Gothic Setting ...................................................................................... 35

CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................................. 44

WORKS CITED ........................................................................................................................... 47
ABSTRACT

Published in 2005, *Twilight*, revisits a perennially fascinating subject of young adult literature, the vampire, and tells the love story of Bella Swan and Edward Cullen. Within this thesis I examine *Twilight’s* connection to Gothic conventions, as well as its connection to Jeanne-Marie LePrince de Beaumont’s classic fairy tale “Beauty and the Beast.” Examining Meyer’s novel as a modern retelling of “Beauty and the Beast,” I conclude that Meyer offers her readers a conservative take on masculinity and femininity using Gothic conventions. Drawing on scholarship of the Gothic, romance, and fairy tales, I establish that *Twilight* is an adaptation of a classic tale with a Gothic twist that has spoken to readers across the globe.
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INTRODUCTION

The extraordinary, unprecedented publishing and marketing success of the love story of Bella Swan and Edward Cullen has been a phenomenon in recent literary history. Published in 2005, *Twilight* revisits a perennially fascinating subject of young adult literature, the vampire.¹ Not since J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series saw print in the late 1990s, had so many young (and older) adults flocked to bookstores. After all of the books in the *Twilight* series (*Twilight, New Moon, Eclipse, and Breaking Dawn*) had been published by 2008, loyal readers were drawn to other vampire series such as Melissa De La Cruz’s *Blue Bloods* and Richelle Reed’s *Vampire Academy*. These books offered readers additional opportunities to venture into the world of the modern vampire that exists within a young adult novel. However, the *Twilight* phenomenon is still alive and well five years after the first book’s appearance thanks to fan sites, message boards, film adaptations, blogs and the promise of a version of the novel written from Edward’s perspective.² In his book *Bedazzled*, George Beahm describes the fanfare surrounding the series by pointing out the many conventions, paraphernalia, and merchandise, including a make-up and clothing line, that are based on the series. The series is also currently being adapted for film: the first two movies, *Twilight* and *New Moon*, were released in November 2008 and November 2009 respectively. The film adaptations for *Eclipse* and *Breaking Dawn* are slated for release in 2010 and 2011. The series was also adapted for graphic novel publication; the first in the series was released in March 2010. Whether Meyer realized it or not, when she

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¹ See Deborah Overstreet’s study, *Not Your Mother’s Vampire: Vampires in Young Adult Fiction*, for an extensive review of vampires in young adult literature.
² On her website (http://www.stepheniemeyer.com/midnightsun.html), Meyer describes the illegal distribution of *Midnight Sun*, which is the *Twilight* story told from Edward’s perspective. The manuscript can also be located at this address.
began writing she was constructing a transformative novel for young adult and adult readers and giving her audience a new, yet in some ways familiar and comforting, fairy tale to enjoy, and in many cases, obsess over. Within the following pages I will examine *Twilight’s* connection to Gothic conventions, as well as its connection to Jeanne-Marie LePrince de Beaumont’s classic fairy tale “Beauty and the Beast.” By examining Meyer’s novel as a modern retelling of “Beauty and the Beast,” I hope to show how Meyer’s novel is also a tale that can be used, as de Beaumont’s was, to “establish what it means to be a woman or a man in our own era” and “a convenient way to work out cultural issues” (Griswold 23-24). Drawing on scholarship of the Gothic, romance, fairy tales and modern fairy tale adaptations, I will show that *Twilight* is an adaptation of a classic tale with a Gothic twist containing a surprisingly conservative message in spite of recent attempts to challenge its presence on library shelves.3

*Twilight* tells the tale of the romance between Isabella “Bella” Swan and Edward Cullen. Within the novel, Bella plays the role of the traditional Gothic heroine and Edward plays the role of the traditional Gothic Hero. As a child, Bella leaves the place of her birth, Forks, Washington, with her mother and moves to Phoenix, Arizona in search of a sunnier life. While in Arizona, Bella takes care of her mother, who is more of a friend to her than a parent. After her mother, Renee’s new marriage, Bella decides to move back to Forks to live with her father, Police Chief Charlie Swan, so that her mother can start a new life without her. When she arrives in Forks, her past comes back to her and she is prepared to finish out high school in cloudy, depressing and haunted Forks. Little does she know, that on her first day at Forks High School

she will meet Edward, a member of Forks’ most mysterious family, and a gorgeous vampire who will change her life forever. The characters, setting and romance between Bella and Edward make Meyer’s first novel in the Twilight series a nod to the classic “Beauty and the Beast” tale type through the outlining of the beginning of Bella and Edward’s relationship.

THE GOTHIC AND ROMANCE TRADITION: SETTING THE STAGE

To analyze Twilight as a Gothic text, I will build on the critical insights of Maggie Kilgour and Anne Williams, both of whom discuss the conventions of the Gothic. Within her study, The Rise of the Gothic Novel, Kilgour examines the reasons why the Gothic novel became so popular during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. According to Kilgour, defining Gothic literature is challenging because it combines literary components from multiple genres ranging from drama and poetry to the sentimental novel. In her study, The Art of Darkness, Anne Williams identifies two distinctive types of Gothic literature, which she labels as “the Female Gothic” and “the Male Gothic,” both of which Meyer draws upon to create the story of Bella and Edward. According to Williams, the Female Gothic tale is traditionally told from the heroine’s point of view and contains a happy ending for the heroine, whereas the Male Gothic is told from multiple points of view and contains a tragic ending for both the hero and the heroine. In addition, Williams claims that the myth of Psyche is an example of the Female Gothic and explains that “Beauty and the Beast” is based on this myth—so, de Beaumont’s story, too is Gothic. Williams also provides a brief history of vampire literature in her edited volume Three Vampire Tales. Her study includes the text of three common vampire tales as well

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4 Williams capitalizes both Male and Female Gothic in her study and the capitalization of Gothic will be followed throughout this paper.

5 For full explanation of the Psyche myth and its connections to the “animal bridegroom” tale type as well as “Beauty and the Beast,” see pages 146-148 in Williams’ The Art of Darkness.
as an introduction to vampire literature that helps to situate *Twilight* among other vampire literature. Drawing on Kilgour and Williams’ studies of the Gothic, I will show how *Twilight* too is a Gothic text, looking particularly closely at the roles of the heroine, hero, setting, and its position among other Gothic vampire novels.

According to Kilgour, “the Gothic [was] part of the reaction against the political, social, scientific, industrial, and epistemological revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which enable[d] the rise of the middle class” (11). The Gothic novel served as a form of protest against past power structures and contrasted those structures with individuals who did not identify themselves through connections with family or community. Gothic novels offered one vision of what would occur if people were left to their own devices rather than having their behavior closely controlled by some sort of external force. Kilgour explains that the typical Gothic villain embodied a “modern materialistic individual taken to an extreme, at which he becomes an egotistical and willful threat to social unity and order” (12). Thus, Kilgour contends that the Gothic is a “nightmare vision of a modern world” full of individuals who are incapable of relating to each other, but instead have “predatory and demonic relations” that cannot be accepted in normal society (12). In its elicitation of suspense and horror, Gothic novels were especially attractive to many female readers whose lives paled comparatively. However, “with its extreme characters, unnatural settings and perverse plots, the Gothic [also] played a significant part in the late eighteenth-century debates over the moral dangers of reading”; in particular Kilgour notes that some of the critics of the genre were convinced that the novels could leave impressionable women readers with unrealistic expectations of life, and romantic relationships (6).
Kilgour describes the Gothic as a type of “Frankenstein’s monster, assembled out of the bits and pieces of the past” (4). She states that Gothic literature, especially the novel, draws from and combines a:

- wide range of literary sources out of which it emerges and from which is never fully disentangles itself: British folklore, ballads, romance, Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy (especially Shakespeare), Spenser, Milton, Renaissance ideas of melancholy, the graveyard poets, Ossian, the sublime, sentimental novelists (notably Prevost, Richardson and Rousseau), and German traditions. (4)

This unusual combination of literary influences makes the genre hard to define, leading scholars to describe properties of the Gothic rather than to define its “essence” (4). Kilgour explains that the properties of the Gothic are “characters and devices that are simply recycled from one text to the next” (4). These properties include typical settings, such as castles, mountains, and haunted rooms, and characters such as a “passive, persecuted heroine, a sensitive and rather ineffectual hero, [and] a dynamic and tyrannical villain” (4). Kilgour goes further to state that a Gothic tale is constructed around a controversial sexual relationship between the hero and the heroine creating a “battle between antithetical sexes, in which an aggressive sexual male, who wants to indulge his own will, is set against a passive spiritual female, who is identified with the restrictions of social norms,” similar to the relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* and the relationship between Ambrosio and Antonia in Matthew Lewis’ sensational Gothic novel, *The Monk* (12).

Anne Williams complicates Kilgour’s insights by suggesting there are actually two kinds of Gothic literature, “the Male Gothic” and “the Female Gothic.” According to Williams, Male
and Female Gothic differ in “narrative technique, in [their] assumptions about the supernatural, and in plot” (102). Williams explains that the Female Gothic “generates suspense through the limitations imposed by the chosen point-of-view,” where “we share both the heroine’s often mistaken perceptions and her ignorance” (102). Williams also states that the Male Gothic “derives its most powerful effects from the dramatic irony created by multiple points of view” (102). Williams contends that within the Female Gothic tradition supernatural phenomena are revealed as sleight of hand magic tricks whereas, the Male Gothic asserts that supernatural forces really exist. Finally, Williams states that the Male Gothic must have a “tragic plot” and the Female Gothic requires a happy ending. She describes the Male Gothic protagonist as one that fails and dies and is soon punished for “his violation of the Law” (103). In contrast, the Female Gothic heroine “experiences a rebirth” in which she is introduced to a world in which “love is not only possible, but available,” and this love provides her with a new name and consequently a new identity that allows her to escape her previous life (103).

Based on the descriptions provided by Williams, Meyer’s Twilight fits both the Male and Female Gothic, a hybrid of the two. Meyer’s novel follows the Female Gothic in that it has a limited point of view, told from the point of view of Bella, and a happy ending in which the heroine is able to identify herself more clearly. Yet, Meyer’s novel also follows the Male Gothic in its portrayal of vampires, by expecting readers to accept the presence of the supernatural without explanation. Although the basic storyline of Twilight follows the conventions of the Gothic tradition, Meyer does take some liberties with the characterization of Edward and in her choice of settings. In her characterization of Edward, Meyer challenges the traditional definition of a Gothic hero by allowing him to hold a mysterious reputation that stands out within the
Forks community. For the setting, Meyer uses a typically innocent setting, Forks High School, as a place of potential danger as well as a place of learning, and the place where Bella and Edward’s playful intellectual sparring takes place.

Williams’ study, *Three Vampire Tales*, also provides insight into the history of Gothic novels that contain supernatural forces, especially vampires. She explains,

> At the beginning of the twenty-first century, vampires are omnipresent in popular culture, appearing in endless series of horror movies, on television shows from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to *Sesame Street*, on breakfast cereal boxes, and in mass-market fiction. And yet this particular monster began to assume its present familiarity only at the end of the nineteenth century, with the publication of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (3).

Williams’ acknowledgment of the presence of vampires in the twenty-first century demonstrates that vampires are still just as popular today. Before the publication of *Dracula*, English literature’s first encounter with the vampire stemmed from the work of Lord Byron, specifically the poem *The Giaour*. Williams comments that with the publishing of this poem “the vampire enters English literature in the distinguished company of a Byronic hero: indeed, as his dark double,” especially with regard to the idea of a Byronic hero being doomed to kill the thing he loves most (6). The next encounter with vampire literature would become the first English vampire novel. Written by Dr. John Polidori, Byron’s personal physician, *The Vampyre* was translated into multiple languages, and vampires officially became part of English culture. Following Polidori’s novel, “male and female, young and old, foreign and local” vampires began to appear in popular culture (8). As vampire literature became more popular, so did the idea
that “the relation between [the] victim and [the] vampire is erotic” (3). Williams specifically notes the publication of Sheridan Le Fanu’s novella *Carmilla* as one of the most important vampire tales because it links early Victorian vampire literature with late Victorian tales like *Dracula* (8). Stoker’s novel set up expectations for vampire behavior, such as what they fear and where they sleep, that were not updated until Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles*, involving the seductive and irresistible vampire Lestat, started being published in the 1970s. Recently, Charlaine Harris’ *Sookie Stackhouse* series, which tells the story of Sookie’s relationship and sexual encounters with a vampire named Bill Compton, has captivated readers with the seductive nature of the vampires in her novels. Based on Williams’ exploration of vampire literature, *Twilight* is situated among popular vampire literature of the late nineteenth century as well as modern vampire literature in the characterization of Edward as a vampire and the potentially erotic nature of the relationship between Bella and Edward.

Looking more closely at vampires in young adult literature, Deborah Wilson Overstreet, in her study, *Not Your Mother’s Vampire: Vampires in Young Adult Fiction*, provides further insight into the history and trends of vampire literature within the young adult genre. Building on the commentary of Anne Williams, Overstreet explains,

> “Throughout Victorian time, vampires became more outwardly human and could usually pass unnoticed in human society. They also became more urbane and were able to attract humans to them. Twentieth- and twenty-first-century vampires have also changed, easily making the vampire the most versatile and malleable horror figure in popular culture” (3).
She goes on to provide examples of modern vampires, appearing in both television and literature, that focus on physical perfection, especially with the inclusion of vampires “who are now beautiful, erotic, hedonistic, powerful and young” (4). She mentions characters like Lestat, from Anne Rice’s series as well as Spike and Angel, from Buffy the Vampire Slayer, as characters, that like Edward, are hundreds of years old, but are presented as modern and possibly deadly men (4). Finally, she draws a direct connection to Brontë’s Heathcliff, who she describes as a “dark, brooding sexual fantasy” among Gothic heroes (4).

Overstreet also draws on the work of Norine Dresser and Joseph DeMarco who both pointedly examined the role of vampire novels in the lives of young adults as well as what the vampire has to offer the reader (12-13). Taking the studies of Dresser and DeMarco into consideration, Overstreet discovers the conclusions about the role of young adult vampire literature that her predecessors discovered. What she finds is that the novels fit into three main categories. The first category focuses on the “changing bodies and personal identity” of both the vampire, who may transform into a vampire, and the adolescent, who is dealing with bodily and emotional changes due to puberty, or Bella who has moved to a new home (14). Next, Overstreet explains that vampire novels can help adolescents deal with the “renegotiation of relationships and power dynamics” involving parents, teachers and peers (15). This category can be seen in the relationships Bella has with the male figures in her life, especially with her father and Edward. Finally, she states the novels help with an adolescent’s “budding sexuality and interest in pursuing romantic relationships,” specifically when it comes to determining who to fall in love with and when and with whom will I have sex with; both issues that Edward and Bella struggle with as their relationship intensifies (15). By looking at both Williams’ and
Overstreet’s work, *Twilight’s* place among other vampire novels becomes clear and allows for an even stronger connection to the Gothic tradition of vampire literature.

Along with *Twilight’s* debt to the Gothic, the story of Bella and Edward owes a great deal to Gothic romance and the romance novel tradition as outlined by Tania Modleski and Janice Radway. Both Modleski, within her study *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women*, and Radway, in her study *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, analyze the effects that romance novels have on women and what role reading the romance plays in women’s lives. Modleski specifically outlines the characteristics of Gothic romance novels and explains why these novels play such an important role in the lives of their readers. Radway takes the argument further by offering a more extensive analysis of women who read romance novels.

Modleski devotes a chapter of her analysis to exploring Gothic romance novels, which share similar traits with *Twilight*, with regard to the relationship between Bella and Edward and the roles they play in the novel. Modleski observes that there are two characteristics of Gothic novels. The first is the need for the heroine to find out who her “enemy” is, and the second is the heroine’s desire to prove that her “enemy” is not her father or lover (66). Modleski states that the father, or the lover who may take the place of the father, and the subsequent relationship with this figure are central elements to the narrative of a Gothic romance novel. Also, the lack of a biological mother figure and the female child’s experience with Oedipal conflicts, which causes her to struggle with attachment to the father character, create the basis for the narrative within the novel. Within Meyer’s novel, the relationship between Bella and Edward drives the narrative. For Bella, Edward plays the role of what Modleski describes as the
lover who takes the place of the father in the heroine’s life. Edward’s role in Bella’s life is that of a fatherly figure that protects her from outside danger, yet also puts her in danger because he desires her both sexually and as a food source. Also, the absence of Bella’s biological mother when she moves to Forks, and the struggle created by the distance between Bella and her father due to her parent’s divorce functions as a central theme in the novel, just as it does in a Gothic romance novel. Modleski also observes that “Gothics are often written in the first person, allowing for a more direct identification with the heroine” and often include “complex mechanisms such as externalization, projection, doubling and splitting” (74). The inclusion of these concepts allows women to experience vicariously a set of emotions through the heroine of the novel without having the emotions, which may be hostile or dangerous, directed towards themselves or people they love, especially when readers consider that Edward’s overprotective nature and constantly treating Bella as a child could be seen as a type of abuse (74). Applying Modleski’s observations, the story of Bella and Edward’s relationship is told from the first person perspective of Bella, allowing readers to experience and understand only her thoughts and actions, and helping to label the novel as a Gothic romance. Finally, Modleski describes the heroine in a Gothic romance novel as one who is almost always persecuted and “feels helpless, confused, frightened, and despised” as well as fearful that the past of her mother, that caused her not to be present in the narrative, is repeating itself through her (56). Twilight’s heroine, Bella, experiences these same feelings, especially when she enters Forks High School for the first time and when she struggles with the idea of a marriage commitment to Edward after she finishes high school. When she first arrives in town she is scared that no will like her and, like in Phoenix, she will not “fit” in with the other students, especially in this small community. When
it comes to the discussion of Edward wanting to marry her, Bella consistently refuses his proposals because she is afraid her marriage will end up like her parents marriage. Building on her insights, Modleski contends that the Gothic romance novel thus not only provides women readers a way to escape, but a way to experience emotions indirectly and “to work through profound psychic conflicts, especially ambivalence toward the significant people in their lives—mothers, fathers, [and] lovers” (75). Through the reading of Gothic romance novels, women are able to experience a variety of emotions, whether they are anger, sadness, or happiness, which they may not experience in a real life environment, and Modleski asserts, this vicarious reading experience fosters their personal and social growth.

Radway reveals similar findings in her study, which examines the reactions of a specific group of women to popular romance novels. In her study, Radway finds that readers of romance fiction like the novels because they allow women to escape the real world and enter a fantasy where obligations to family, home, and work do not exist, and relationships deemed unacceptable by society can flourish. Radway explains that in “real life” the women of her study were expected to be the caregivers of the household and family, forcing them to give more of themselves to others than tending to themselves, just as Bella does for her father. According to Radway, women use reading as a way to express their feelings, feel good about their lives, and “experience the kind of care and attention they commonly give to others” (100). In Twilight’s case, readers are able to experience Bella’s feelings for Edward as well as the frustration that comes from Edward’s controlling and patriarchal nature.

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6 Bella and Edward’s marriage takes place in Breaking Dawn, the final book of the series. When Bella first considers the discussion of marrying Edward at the end of New Moon and throughout Eclipse she denies his request because of the failure of her parents marriage.
Radway also suggests that the constant giving of oneself and receiving no support in return “is the primary motivation behind the desire to lose the self in a book,” as Bella is able to lose herself in her favorite books (94). Through conversations with the women she studied, she concludes that “women believe romance reading enables them to relieve tensions, to diffuse resentment, and to indulge in a fantasy that provides them with good feelings that seem to endure after they return to their roles as wives and mothers” (95). Although for *Twilight* readers, the feelings they experience may be both negative and positive. The relationship between Edward and Bella is questionable, especially when discussing the control Edward appears to have over Bella. Radway defines this sort of reading as “compensatory literature,” which allows its audience to escape from everyday life and spend some quasi-guiltless time focusing on themselves rather than on their loved ones. Some women also view their reading pastime as a gift that they give themselves both when they indulge in reading the novels, enjoying the romance between the hero and heroine, and the pleasure when they meet other women to discuss the novels they have just read.

Yet most of the women Radway interviewed also felt some sort of guilt over indulging in reading a romance novel. Radway suggests the three main reasons why women felt guilty about their reading experience: they first feel guilty about the amount of time that they spend reading books (103). Radway explains that the women “are aware that this activity demands the attention that would be otherwise devoted to children, house or husband” (103). The women Radway interviewed also feel guilty about the amount of money that they spent on their books (103). Radway explains that the readers are often confronted by their husbands about the amount of money they repeatedly spend on these books and frequently defend themselves by
pointing out the money that their spouses spend or the money spent on their children’s toys and gadgets. Even though the women believe they are entitled to spend money for their entertainment, they still feel a sense of guilt about the money they believe could be better spent (104). The final reason for the guilt concerns the subject matter of the books and the negative publicity the books receive from the press (104). Although the women are not offended by sex or the discussion of the topic, they worry about the reputation they will be given when friends and family realize what they are reading, afraid the novels may be labeled as inappropriate or pornographic, words that tend to have negative connotations within their communities. *Twilight* readers, due to the conservative nature of Meyer’s novel, are not able to fully experience sexual desire and acts, but instead vicariously experience the romance, both negative and positive aspects, of it between Bella and Edward. Radway finishes her discussion of the guilt factor by determining that the guilt comes from “the readers’ own uneasiness about indulging in such an obviously pleasurable experience” (105). Radway also takes issue with the fact that American culture still “remains uneasy about the free expression of female sexuality,” as *Twilight* exemplifies in its lack of sexual expression of its heroine. However, most commercial advertisements sexualize women in order to market their products to both a male and female audience, leading women to have conflicting beliefs about their sexuality and desire (105).

The romance of Bella and Edward drives *Twilight*. Their relationship, which is never physically consummated, allows for female readers of all ages to experience what both Modleski and Radway describe. Through Meyer’s description of Bella and Edward's romance readers are able to experience the pleasure and frustration of deferred erotic tension. Meyer’s novel allows readers to escape and experience the seemingly sexually innocent relationship of
Bella and Edward, as well as the passionate, potentially abusive and controlling nature of Edward, vicariously through the pages of a book. Particularly impressionable readers are able to put themselves in the position of Bella and imagine experiences such as falling in love with a vampire or enjoying a solely conversational intimacy with a partner, acts that are not likely to happen in their lives.

“BEAUTY AND THE BEAST” AND THE GOTHIC TRADITION

If Meyer owes a great deal to the romance tradition, she is also indebted to the fairy tale “Beauty and the Beast,” most memorably told by Jeanne-Marie LePrinces de Beaumont. The section within Maria Tatar’s study, The Classic Fairy Tales, devoted to “Beauty and the Beast” includes multiple versions of the tale that stay true to de Beaumont’s tale and some that vary such as Angela Carter’s “The Tiger’s Bride.” Multiple novels, television shows, and movies also present modern versions of the tale. Jerry Griswold states in his critical study, The Meanings of “Beauty and the Beast:” A Handbook, that within the last twenty years the fairy tale that has spoken the most to our society seems to be “Beauty and the Beast” (18). Within his study, he lists popular films and television shows, such as “Edward Scissorhands,” the 1987 to 1990 television series titled “Beauty and the Beast,” and the theatrical adaptation of George Bernard Shaw’s “Pygmalion,” “My Fair Lady,” that deliver the basic tale to viewers of various ages and are familiar because of their nod to Beaumont’s “Beauty and the Beast” (20-21).

The traditional tale describes Beauty, a beautiful, young girl who is unquestionably devoted to her father and stands apart from her sisters who are presented as vain, jealous, and upset about their recent loss of wealth. According to the tale, Beauty turns down multiple

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7 For a listing of novels, picture books and television shows based on “Beauty and the Beast,” see Sur La Lune’s Book Gallery for the tale at http://www.surlalunefairytale.com/beautybeast/books.html
marriage proposals because “she could not bear to bring herself to abandon her poor father” (Tatar 13). When their father goes off in search of riches, Beauty’s siblings ask for expensive gifts and Beauty simply asks for her father’s safe return and a rose. On his trip home, Beauty’s father loses his way and ends up at the castle of the Beast, who was turned into a monster because of his treatment of a witch based on her unattractiveness. Beauty’s father spends a night in the castle, and has his every need taken care of. The next morning, on leaving the castle, her father picks a rose for Beauty, an action the castle’s owner reads as stealing. This betrayal of trust angers the Beast who explains that he is “prepared to forgive [him] if one of [his] daughters consents to die in [his] place” (35). A devoted daughter, Beauty agrees to return to the castle and live with the Beast. While at the castle, she treats the Beast fairly and compassionately and they become friends. Soon Beauty learns her father is dying, and so returns home to tend to him. While she is gone, the Beast grows almost fatally ill. On Beauty’s return to the castle, her true love for the Beast saves his life and turns him back into a human. After he regains his human form, Beauty and Beast take their rightful place as king and queen, living happily ever after while her jealous sisters “will be turned into two statues” to live outside of her palace “being a witness to [their sister’s] happiness” (42). 

Many scholars such as Tatar, Griswold, and Marina Warner have critically analyzed de Beaumont’s tale, bringing to light cultural psychological concerns that surround the themes of dedication to one’s parents, bad parenting, entrapment, and compassion for the “other.” Beaumont wrote the most recognized version of the tale in 1757 for her collection of tales, *Magasin des Enfants*, which were meant to teach children how to behave appropriately.

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8 For the full text of Jeanne Marie LePrince de Beaumont’s “Beauty and the Beast,” see Maria Tatar’s *Classic Fairy Tales*. 
According to Tatar, “Beauty and the Beast” was one of many written as “vehicles for indoctrinating and enlightening children about the virtues of good manners, good breeding, and good behavior” (26). In this tale, the message focuses specifically on the young heroine, Beauty, and the way she should behave in order to retain her innocence and men’s devotion to her. Tatar argues that Beauty’s virtues, “stem from a willingness to sacrifice herself” for her father and the Beast (26). Beauty is portrayed as a virtuous, young woman because she continually sacrifices herself for the male figures in her life, consistently giving up her desires for the desires of the men around her. Tatar also notes the tale’s support of the “reinscription of patriarchal norms, the subordination of female desire to male desire and a glorification of filial duty and self-sacrifice” (27). For example, Beauty willingly sacrifices herself to repay her father’s debt of stealing the Beast’s rose, and again sacrifices her desire for romantic love when she agrees to marry the Beast out of respect and compassion for his beastly state rather than out of love for him. Beauty explains that “it is neither good looks nor great wit that makes a woman happy with her husband, but character, virtue, and kindness, and Beast has all those good qualities. I may not be in love with him, but I feel respect, friendship and gratitude toward him” (Warner 40). With this attitude, Beauty sacrifices her needs to make sure she treats Beast fairly and marries a virtuous husband despite her not being in love with him.

Warner shares a similar view on the “Beauty and the Beast” tale, focusing specifically on the Disney adaptation of the tale. In her scholarly work, From the Beast to the Blonde, she states:

While the Disney version ostensibly tells the story of the feisty, strong-willed heroine, and carries the audience along on the wave of her dash, her impatient
ambitions, her bravery, her self-awareness, and her integrity, the principle version of the film’s message concerns maleness and masks, and in the spirit of romance, it offers hope of regeneration within the unregenerate male. (314)

Although the animated version presents Beauty as a strong character, she is still the obedient, young woman described by Tatar who sacrifices herself to make the Beast a better person, specifically by helping him to become human again by expressing her unbiased love and affection for him. In this regard, she also helps to rectify the wrong of her father by agreeing to go live with the Beast to save his life.

Viewing the tale in a more positive light, Griswold describes a loss of wildness as a major theme in “Beauty and the Beast.” He states, “in a hyper-civilized society like our own, this theme of Missing Wildness is omnipresent and being a beast is not such a bad thing” (23). Griswold’s argument acknowledges that the more civilized society becomes, the more we miss the innate wildness that is present in everyone (23). In the classic tale type, Beauty represents the civilized culture with its patriarchal rules, norms, and laws, whereas the Beast represents the wildness that Griswold says society is secretly lusting after. Warner echoes a similar idea when she discusses the changes in the tale from the seventeenth century to present day focusing on the changing definition of wildness and male sexuality from negative to positive. She states:

the Beast is identified with male sexuality which must be controlled or changed or domesticated through civilité, a code chiefly established by women, but later the beast is perceived as a principle of nature within every human being, male
and female, young and old and the stories affirm the beast’s intrinsic goodness and necessity to holistic survival. (280)

Warner goes further to acknowledge the “attraction of the wild,” the nature of the Beast, and the shift in modern tales where Beauty actually needs the Beast, rather than the Beast needing her (307). In modern retellings of the tale, such as Angela Carter’s “The Tiger’s Bride,” “the Beast’s beastliness will teach her something...her need of him may be reprehensible, a moral flaw, a part of her carnal and materialistic nature; or, it can represent her understanding of love, her redemption” (307). Since the publication of de Beaumont’s tale in 1757, Warner observes the critical view on wildness and the Other, within a civilized society, has become more positive and accepting (307).

In regards to the Other, Tatar discusses the more positive notion of the “transformative power of love, more specifically the importance of valuing essences over appearances,” especially when referring to Beauty’s love for the Beast (27). Beauty is described in most tales in a way that matches her name: she is beautiful, intelligent, and loving. Her ability to see past the Beast’s exterior and find a love for him based on his generosity and respect towards her is what causes the Beast to change form. Warner also argues that the “story is a classic fairy tale of transformation, which, when told by a woman, places the male lover, the Beast, in the position of the mysterious, threatening, possibly fatal unknown, and Beauty, the heroine, as the questor who discovers his true nature” (275). According to Warner, Beauty is the savior of the Beast, despite the danger that may be lurking while being in the presence of her mysterious captor.
Critical studies of “Beauty and the Beast” have found that this tale type, according to Karen Rowe in her article “Feminism and Fairy Tales,” “glori[ifies] passivity, dependency, and self sacrifice as a heroine’s cardinal virtues” (Rowe 210). Yet the story can also be read as a tale, which acknowledges and supports the importance of wildness, Otherness, and acceptance of the beauty within over the beauty on the outside. “Beauty and the Beast,” as with other fairy tales “fuse[s] morality with romantic fantasy in order to portray cultural ideals for human relationships” and many times the accepted morality of the tale aligns with female sacrifice rather than the female enjoyment of a romantic love (209).

**TWILIGHT, THE GOTHIC AND THE FAIRY TALE**

*Twilight* shares many traits with Beaumont’s version of “Beauty and the Beast.” Bella’s name itself recalls the fairy tale, but her relationship with an “other,” the ability of her love to make Edward more human, and Edward’s role as a Beast-like character point to de Beaumont’s original work. In addition, Tatar, Griswold, and Warner help to clarify some of the connections between the texts. Tatar comments on the sacrificial nature of Beauty, who puts the male figures in her life before herself, just as Bella does with the male figures in her life, specifically her domestic interactions with her father and her relationship with Edward, in which she is willing to sacrifice her safety to be with him. Griswold and Warner’s insights provide a more positive outlook on the tale, focusing on Beauty as a powerful figure who despite the danger of befriending a Beast is still able to transform him back to his human form, just as Bella’s love for Edward is able to make him feel human once again.

*Twilight* tells the story of the romance between Bella and Edward in which Bella plays the role of Beauty and the traditional Gothic heroine and Edward plays a Beast-like figure and
the somewhat reworked role of the Gothic hero. Within the following sections, I will examine Meyer’s novel more closely by looking at three important components of a Gothic text. I will examine Bella as a Gothic heroine, Edward as a Gothic hero, and how Twilight’s setting is Gothic in nature. Through my analysis of these Gothic components, I will further demonstrate that Meyer’s text is unmistakably Gothic in nature, and closely related to the “Beauty and the Beast” tale.

Bella, the Gothic Heroine

The Female Gothic style of first person narration tells the tale of Twilight’s heroine, Bella Swan. In her essay “Vampire Love: The Second Sex Negotiates the Twenty-first Century,” Bonnie Mann gives a description of Bella that highlights the characteristics that make her a Gothic and Beauty-like heroine. Mann states,

Bella loves Phoenix, and hates Forks, but self-sacrifice is her speciality. In fact, other than her penchant for self-sacrifice and the capacity to attract the attention of boys, Bella really isn’t anyone special. She has no identifiable interests or talents; she is the locus of exaggerated stereotypically feminine capacities and self-loathing. She has no sense of direction or balance. She is prone to get bruises and scrapes just in the process of moving from one place to another and doesn’t even trust herself to explore a tide pool without falling in. When she needs something done, especially something mechanical, she finds a boy to do it for her and watches him. Her only areas of skill are cooking and doing laundry, which she does without complaint for her father, who is incompetent in the kitchen, in spite of years living alone... (133)
Mann describes Bella as a self-sacrificing and self-destructive teenage girl who wants her mother to be happy, so she moves to Forks, Washington from Phoenix, Arizona to live with her father.

In addition to drawing on Mann, I will follow the scholarly work of Anne B. Tracy in my analysis of Bella. Both Tracy and Mann focus on the essential characteristics of a Gothic heroine including her plain, child-like nature, her relationships with her parents, and inability to see herself as valuable except through the eyes of a male. Much of gothic literature, as well as the various versions of “Beauty and the Beast,” revolve around a family that lacks a mother figure; the motherless heroine is devoted to her father or a father figure within her life. According to Tracy, in gothic literature the heroine usually has “a child-like quality” (54). She also “stand[s] in a quasi-incestuous relationship” with her lover who plays a patriarchal role in the heroine’s life (54). Although Bella is not actually an orphan, like Beauty, for most of the novel her mother is absent. And, like many heroines in Gothic literature, including Beauty, Bella is devoted to her father who is also charmed by her. When Bella first arrives in Forks, Charlie buys her a truck to make sure she is happy in her new home (7). By purchasing a sturdy truck for Bella, Charlie not only shows his affection for his daughter and concern for her safety, but also his respect for her independence as a young adult. Charlie’s gift shows he recognizes Bella’s need to have more responsibility and find her place within the town of Forks along with her unfortunate habit of injuring herself. From then on Charlie fades into the background of the novel and Bella’s life—showing his parental concern by asking limited questions about Bella’s social life and boyfriends.
At the same time, Bella takes on similar duties in her father’s house as she did in her mother’s house, acting like Charlie’s wife as well as his daughter, just as Beauty does for her father. Bella states, “last night I discovered that Charlie couldn’t cook much besides fried eggs and bacon. So I requested that I be assigned kitchen duty for the duration of my stay. He was willing enough to hand over the keys to the banquet hall,” putting her in charge of the household (Meyer 32). Not only does Bella do the cooking, but she also completes other domestic duties around the house such as the grocery shopping, the laundry, and cleaning up the dishes after she prepares the meals. She is patient and competent, an able maid in the service of patriarchy. Charlie is a remote father, comfortable with this particular parent-child dynamic and relationship. Essentially, he continues to live his life as a bachelor while watching nightly baseball and basketball games, working long hours, and spending the weekend fishing with friends. He all but leaves his defenseless daughter to care for him and fend for herself.

Given the lack of attention given to her, it might not be surprising that in typical Gothic heroine fashion, Bella underestimates her own looks and describes herself as a boring and plain looking girl. She describes herself within the first ten pages as “ivory-skinned, without even the excuse of blue eyes or red hair, despite the constant sunshine [of Arizona]” (Meyer 10). Bella paints herself as a remarkably clumsy, dark haired, slender girl. She looks unhealthy, especially once she has moved to Forks because her dark hair and the cloudy weather of Forks makes her skin appear even more pale than it did in her previous home. Within the novel, Bella consistently comments on how plain she believes she is in comparison to the other girls she will meet. In turn, what she sees as her plain looks catalyze her self-deprecation and her self-image, physically and psychologically.
Yet, Bella being new to a small town causes her to be noticed by everyone, including boys, whom she claims had never paid attention to her before. Mike Newton is the first boy in the town to pay attention to her “taking on the qualities of a golden retriever” and walking her to and from class on her first few days of school (Meyer 30). After finally noticing the unwanted attention she was getting from Mike, Bella decides she has to do something about him, which will be problematic because she is not tactful and “had no practice dealing with overly friendly boys” (31). She also questions the way she sees things in life wondering “if [she] was seeing the same things through [her] eyes that the rest of the world was seeing through theirs” (11).

Similarly, Bella confesses she “didn’t relate to people [her] age” or people in general (10). All of the traits that Bella uses to describe herself underscore that she has feelings of being destined to be at odds with her new home. In being out of place, Bella fills the role of a gothic heroine as described by Tracy’s essay. Tracy explains that gothic heroines after Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre describe themselves as plain and “complain that their mouths are too wide, their hair too unruly and their eyes too far apart or bold” and “their possibilities are underdeveloped until their heroes arrive” (106).

Bella’s intellectual achievements belie her poor self-image. She attends an Advanced Biology class, where she talks to Edward for the first time, and as a senior in high school she has already read Brontë, Shakespeare, Chaucer, and Faulkner (Meyer 15). Bella, a self perceived ugly duckling who becomes a swan in Edward’s eyes, finds solace for her loneliness in nineteenth-century novels including Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice and Sense and Sensibility, and Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights (Meyer 148). Bella’s affinity for nineteenth-century novels transcends into her everyday life and creates the backdrop for her new life in
Forks along with influencing the type of sexual relationship she has with Edward. In Biology class, Bella completes the cell division lab with little complication because she has already completed it in her previous school, underscoring the lack of educational opportunities available in Forks and Bella’s own intelligence. But if the reader recognizes that Bella is smart, she herself does not, furthering her poor self-image.

Bella turns her perceptive eye not towards her books or herself, but towards the strange young man who does not seem to belong in Forks either. Bella notices Edward’s “impossible speed and strength, [his] eye color shifting from black to gold and black again, [his] inhuman beauty, [and] the pale, frigid skin” (Meyer 137). Our bookish heroine, also likens his voice to the “unfamiliar cadences and phrases that better fit the style of a turn-of-the-century novel,” like the ones she enjoys reading (137-138). Like Bella, Edward does not “fit” in Forks. But, if Bella is mainly an uncomfortable teenager, and therefore, a classic Gothic heroine, Edward is in another league entirely with regards to his inability to “fit” in Forks and the discomfort he feels as a vampire trying to hide in a human community.

Bella’s attraction to Edward also points to her sense of adventure. Just as Beauty does, Bella seems to find adventure, but also ends up in danger when she sets out on her own. In spite of her own penchant for excitement, Bella admits that she is not graceful and actually clumsy, which attracts the boys to her. If Bella’s lack of grace is a surprising physical trait in a Gothic heroine, her need to be saved is not. Early in the novel, Mike saves her in gym class from injury and embarrassment by taking on the opposing badminton team singlehandedly. However, Bella’s accidents are not only the result of clumsiness; her unusual sensitivity causes her to faint at the sight of blood in Biology class, causing Edward to carry her to the nurse.
Bella’s fainting reveals her sensitivity to blood, which is what draws Edward to her. He is specifically attracted to the scent of her blood, which indicates that their relationship is fated. Edward is attracted first to the scent of her source of existence, rather than her looks. In Edward’s eyes Bella is irresistible on a fundamental level and his attraction to her looks is an afterthought.

Charlie’s lack of fatherly attention toward Bella allows her to set out on her own and find someone else who ends up acting as a lover, a father, and a protector. Mann observes that an “adolescent girl’s fantasies of love include a dimension of retreat to the safety of parental protection,” explaining, “Bella is facing all of the simple cultural markers for adult womanhood: her eighteenth birthday, graduation from high school, first sex, marriage and motherhood. Yet through most of the story, Bella’s vampire is father and mother as much as lover” (135). Edward not only serves as the one she desires in a romantic light, but also as a guide for life since he is after all, more than a hundred years old.

Bella’s first encounter with Edward is in the Forks High School parking lot where she admires his shiny, silver Volvo parked among otherwise plain cars. She describes Edward as “devastatingly, inhumanly beautiful” (Meyer 19) and “looking more like a Greek god than anyone had a right to” (206). Bella is immediately overcome by Edward’s beauty, partially because of his supernatural irresistibility, and partially because of his singularity; like Bella, he stands out in Forks. As the novel continues, Bella becomes more wrapped up in his beauty commenting on his eyes, musculature, smile, and scent, which is what first creates the tension between the two of them. For both Edward and Bella, scent becomes a main point of attraction; she is seduced by his unusual scent and he finds her scent revolting yet irresistible.
because it is the cause of his struggle to control himself around her. Bella is attracted to Edward with all the intensity and angst of a teenage thwarted in love, and Edward’s very position as a vampire allows him to serve as more than the object of a crush for Bella. His strength and speed save her more than once, underscoring both his power, her own incompetence and placing the power within the relationship in Edward’s hands.

Perhaps the most important rescue scene in the novel occurs when Bella is by herself in Port Angeles, the next town over. With the encouragement of her father, Bella decides to go shopping with her friends for dresses to wear to a school dance, even though, afraid of being embarrassed, she is not planning on attending. After the dresses are picked, Bella sets out on her own to find a bookstore because her friends “didn’t know how preoccupied [she] could get when surrounded by books; it was something [she] preferred to do alone” (Meyer 156). As she searches for the bookstore, she gets hopelessly lost, and group of dangerous looking men ominously approach her. Soon Bella realizes that her attempts to lose the men are failing, her pepper spray was still at home and “[she] was being herded” (160). As she prepares to confront her attackers, “headlights suddenly flew around the corner…skidding to a stop with the passenger door open just a few feet from [her]”; her hero Edward demands that she get in the car (162). Edward saves Bella from her own sense of adventure and lack of ability to protect herself. Bella then begins to realize that all she wants is “to be alone with [her] perpetual savior” (166). For Bella, being rescued by Edward becomes a common practice. She is saved by a vampire, who could kill her in an instant, from other dangerous situations that she creates for herself. The fragile nature of a Gothic heroine requires her to be protected, usually by someone
who potentially endangers her life, like Edward does for Bella. Bella’s desire for Edward could be her potential undoing. An adolescent in the throes of love for the first time, she meticulously details throughout the novel how she lusts after Edward. He desires her as well of course—as a sexual object and as a food source—but since Bella narrates the novel, we get her perspective on desire, and on a desire that is particularly dangerous. For there is always the threat that Edward could kill Bella in a mistaken act of love.

Bella claims that when they first kiss, “blood boiled under my skin, burned in my lips. My breath came in a wild gasp. My fingers knotted in his hair, clutching him to me. My lips parted as I breathed in his heady scent” (Meyer 282). Meyer’s description of Bella’s reaction to Edward’s kiss is erotic in nature, mimicking a sexual encounter between the couple and is painted as uncontrolled, full of desire and yearning for more. She then describes Edward’s reaction to the kiss stating, “Immediately I felt him turn to unresponsive stone beneath my lips. His hands gently, but with irresistible force, pushed my face back. I opened my eyes and saw his guarded expression” (282). When their lips meet, Edward is forced to exercise caution and care so as not to kill her. Meyer allows Bella to feel sexual—allows the character to describe her sexuality, albeit in veiled terms, because Edward, the suffering and good Gothic hero, shows his restraint. So within the novel, Meyer allows her readers to experience vicariously all the erotic tension of desire deferred, but also to offer a conservative reading experience because Bella and Edward do not have sex until after they are married. Meyer’s Twilight thus offers a more conservative reading experience than traditional Gothic novels, one that more accurately follows “Beauty and the Beast” in its portrayal of a young woman who is saved from her own

9 Examples of Gothic heroines and their protectors would also include Mr. Rochester and Jane Eyre in Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre as well as Heathcliff and Cathy in Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights.
desires by a fatherly/lover figure who knows best. Bella’s behavior on the other hand is forgiven by Edward because she is “only human, after all” (283).

Edward, The Gothic Hero

By telling the story strictly from Bella’s point of view, Meyer gives her readers a limited view of Edward and his history, a typical move in gothic novels. To help readers understand Edward’s side of the story Meyer attempts to provide an alternative take on Edward in Midnight Sun, a retelling of Twilight from Edward’s perspective. In her article “Vampire Love: The Second Sex Negotiates the Twenty-first Century,” Mann describes Edward as a gothic hero:

Edward, in contrast to Bella, is masculine grandiosity, writ large. Beautiful beyond compare, the rock-hard seventeen-year-old-body Bella comes to worship belongs to a hundred-year-old vampire (frozen in time after a bout with the Spanish flu). He knows everything, having had a hundred years to learn it. He’s been everywhere and speaks multiple languages. He reads most people’s minds and is strong enough to break a mature tree in two like a matchstick. He runs as fast as most cars drive, and rescues the accident-prone Bella over and over…He is smug and confident and tortured by his desire to drink Bella’s blood. (133)

If Edward appears young, his actual age and worldly experience align him with other gothic heroes. Within this section, I will examine Edward as both a typical and atypical Gothic hero by drawing on the work of Helen Stoddart, Abigail Meyers, Leah Mc Climans, and J. Jeremy Winsnewski, who all provide insight into what it means to be a Gothic hero.

Helen Stoddart, in her essay “Hero-Villain,” describes the classic Gothic hero-villain in the following terms: “physically he is dark and powerful of physique, and is frequently in
possession of piercing eyes and an expression which indicates a mixture of contempt...and
gloom...his behavior is unpredictable; he is moodily taciturn and violently explosive by turns”
(112). Stoddart’s description presents the Gothic hero-villain as a man that is strong and
powerful with an emotional state that changes quickly and usually ends in a violent act.
Stoddart also explains that there is a long literary tradition of Gothic and romantic hero-villains,
who are frequently referred to as handsome, attractive and gentlemanly in nature (113). We
might, for example, think of Heathcliff Earnshaw in Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights or
Maximilian de Winter in Daphne du Maurier’s Rebecca. Pointedly examining Twilight, Abigail E.
Meyers suggests Edward is a modern day Byronic hero using the descriptors “tall,” “pale,”
“handsome,” and “mysterious” (148). Meyers goes further to state that a Byronic hero is
“intelligent, passionate, and usually above-average in almost every way (including good looks),
but also tormented, mysterious, unpredictable and scornful of authority” (148). An analysis of
Twilight firmly establishes Edward as the latest incarnation of an extensive literary lineage.

Like the Beast living in his mysterious castle, Edward Cullen is a man of mystery. He and
his siblings appear to lead the lives of the outcast students in a typical high school setting.
Edward and his family spend most of their time together and are brought to Bella’s attention
because “they [have] 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 19). Before
Bella realizes that Edward is a vampire, she views him as a heavenly figure; eventually he
becomes her savior on more than one occasion. The Cullen family members all drive expensive
cars that stand out in the small town of Forks: Edward a Volvo and his sister, Rosalie, a red
BMW convertible. Edward’s choice of car exemplifies his status as a Gothic hero. His silver
Volvo not only stands out in town, forcing people to take notice of his strength, wealth, and beauty, but also his speed and stealth. The car embodies the hero. The patriarch of the family, Carlisle Cullen, is the most respected doctor working at the town hospital and Edward’s mother, Esme, is respected for the love she shows for what the Forks community believes to be her foster children. The first information Bella learns about the Edward and his family revolves around their wealth, beauty, and reputation in the town.

When Bella first encounters Edward in Biology class, he immediately shies away from her. Bella explains,

As I walked down the aisle to introduce myself to the teacher and get my slip signed, I was watching him surreptitiously. Just as I passed, he suddenly went rigid in his seat. He stared at me again, meeting my eyes with the strangest expression on his face—it was hostile, furious. (Meyer 23)

Edward’s immediate reaction to Bella is one of hatred and disgust causing his eyes to turn black. Their interaction continues and he is described as stiff with a clenched fist that showed off his “surprisingly hard and muscular” forearm (24). Even though Edward is obviously showing hostility towards her, Bella is still attracted to him mirroring the tension of the classic Gothic romance novel when the heroine realizes she is attracted to the man whom she believes is her enemy. After their first interaction, Edward disappears from school and Bella blames herself for his absence. The next time Bella and Edward interact, the tone of the conversation changes. They meet again in Biology class, where both prove their high level of intelligence by successfully completing the cell phase identification lab with ease and friendly competition. Showing his interest in her, Edward turns his chair to face Bella’s. When Bella sees him this time
she describes him as having a “dazzling face [which] was friendly, open and a slight smile on his flawless lips. But his eyes were careful” (43). In the following days, Bella pays attention to his eyes and states, “Today, his eyes were a completely different color: a strange ocher, darker than butterscotch, but with the same golden tone,” proving that he is becoming more accepting of her (46). As the story continues, Bella and Edward begin to form a romantic relationship and in the midst of learning about each other, Bella discovers Edward’s secret that makes him different from the rest of the citizens in Forks. Once the secret is known, Edward confesses his life story to Bella without worry or persecution.

Chapter thirteen in Twilight, opens with the sentence, “Edward in the sunlight was shocking” (260). Edward shows Bella his strength and beauty and reveals his background during the intimate moments they spend together in a clearing in the woods. To demonstrate his strength he rips a branch off a tree and throws it against another tree, which shatters. He shows Bella his speed when they are leaving the clearing by putting her on his back and running through the forest. Bella explains, “He streaked through the dark, thick underbrush of the forest like a bullet, like a ghost. There was no sound, no evidence that his feet touched the earth. His breathing never changed, never indicated any effort. But the trees flew by at deadly speeds, always missing us by inches” (280). His high speed traveling scares Bella, but also draws her closer to him and closer to discovering the full secret of his existence. One of Edward’s other demonstrations of his speed and reflexes comes after he confesses how dangerous it is for Bella to be around him. During an intimate moment where he is testing his ability to be himself around her, Bella begins to trace “over the perfect muscles of his arm” and follow “the faint pattern of bluish veins inside the crease at his elbow,” and he begins to feel more
comfortable around her (261). As she reaches to turn his hand over, “Realizing what I wished, he flipped his palm up in one of those blindingly fast, disconcerting movements of his” (262). At first, this movement scares Bella and she is afraid he is rejecting her attempts at affection. Soon after, Edward explains to her that he finds it hard not to be himself around her and not hide himself as he is forced to do with other humans, like the Beast chooses to hide himself away from human view. This revelation, instead of scaring Bella, again, draws her closer to him and makes their bond even stronger. Edward’s confession of vulnerability represents a side of the Gothic hero that is only accessible by those closest to him. To those select few, his family and Bella, he is able to show what Stoddart and Meyers identify as the gentlemanly and passionate side of his character.

Inside the clearing, Edward also reveals his true physical form. Bella states,

His skin, white despite the faint flush from yesterday’s hunting trip, literally sparkled, like thousands of tiny diamonds were embedded in the surface. He lay perfectly still in the grass, his shirt open over his sculpted, incandescent chest, his scintillating arms bare. His glistening, pale lavender lids were shut, though of course he didn’t sleep. A perfect statue, carved in some unknown stone, smooth like marble, glittering like crystal. (Meyer 260)

Bella is clearly drawn in by his amazing beauty that is like nothing she has seen before. The passage that reveals Edward’s physical traits according to Bella is full of description and repetition, which leaves the reader with a sense of Edward’s importance, newness, and another example of her veiled expression of the sexual tension she experiences when around him. Bella uses several different words and phrases to describe how he shines and glitters in the sun,
which makes him seem magical and definitely more attractive than she believes herself to be.

The glittering description also denotes that he is something that is new in her life and worthy of his attention. Finally, she describes him as being made of some type of unknown stone, but that stone is also familiar to her like marble or crystal. This description may speak to the inward confusion she experiences while she is with Edward since he is unknown to her because he is vampire and not human, but he is also familiar to her because his human feeling of affection for Bella is starting to show. Also while in the clearing, she pays close attention to his eyes. She is frequently drawn to his eyes, whether they are black in anger or golden in contentment. Bella’s description of Edward draws directly on the traits of what Stoddart and Meyers describe as a typical Gothic hero figure, a man who is attractive, strong, passionate and surrounded by mystery, but also who represents danger for the heroine.

To fully explain his ambivalence towards Bella, Edwards describes himself as “the world’s best predator” because he is strong and seductive to human ears (Meyer 264). Yet, Edward also explains to Bella that although overwhelmingly strong and attractive to others he feels weak in relation to her. Edward describes his desire for Bella as the craving for a fix by a drug addict stating, “Yes, you are exactly my brand of heroin,” reemphasizing the strength of the attraction he feels towards her (267-268).

Finally, Leah McClimans and J. Jeremy Winsnewski discuss the problems associated with Edward and his need to control and protect Bella from harm in their essay, “Undead Patriarchy and the Possibility of Love.” The discussion suggests that because Edward is not able to read Bella’s mind, he thinks it necessary to control her every move and decision. His need to control Bella also speaks to Edward’s role as a gothic hero. For example, Edward reveals to Bella that
unbeknownst to her, he has been spending nights in her room watching her sleep. He recounts
the first night to her by stating, “I wrestled all night, while watching you sleep, with the chasm
between what I knew was right, moral, ethical, and what I wanted” (Meyer 303). At this
moment he admits that his watching her sleep may be seen as inappropriate and amoral
because of his uninvited invasion of her private space, but he believed his desire to protect her
was more important than conventional morality, another typical behavior of a Gothic hero. We
might also compare Edward’s invasion of Bella’s room to Ambrosio’s invasion of Antonia’s room
in Matthew Lewis’ The Monk. Later that night he offers to sing her to sleep and holds her as
they talk and get to know each other, rather than acting on sexual desires, which makes Edward
appear more human than vampire-like, and mirroring the humanlike interactions the Beast has
with Beauty. All of these traits help to reveal the secret that he has been keeping from the rest
of the world. His secrets, his intense beauty, and strength help build his case as a gothic hero.
Forks, Washington, The Gothic Setting

Drawing on the scholarship of Elizabeth MacAndrew in her study The Gothic Tradition in
Fiction, and Rose Lovell-Smith’s essay “On the Gothic Beach,” I will examine the role of the
setting, specifically Forks, as well as Edward’s and Bella’s houses. In particular I’d like to
propose that the houses function as characters that serve to enhance and explain the
protagonists. In addition, I will explore the liberties that Meyer has taken with the traditional
definition of gothic setting in her novel by using structures that are associated with innocence,
such as Forks High School where Bella and Edward first meet, as sites of potential danger.
According to MacAndrew, “settings turn out to be part of characterization” and “convey [the]
mood, tone and emotions” of the characters in the narrative (109). She goes on to explain that
“the elements [of setting] become bearers of anger, or fear or tranquility and, as a result, these emotions become general and ‘the whole world’ is filled with them” (109). In this way, “both characters and reader may experience these emotions...” and “the reader [becomes] imaginatively involved” in what the characters may be feeling or experiencing (109-110). Through the use of imagery, the author is able to create “unusual weather along with the rugged mountains, tranquil plains, seas alternately calm and stormy and buildings that are prisons or fortresses or havens, all of them of expressive character. They necessitate a structure that makes a closed off region within an outer world” (110). Through her descriptions of Forks, the natural and the manmade settings in the novel, Meyer constructs a gothic setting that illuminates both Bella and Edward individually and their relationship.

Meyer sets Bella’s story in Forks, Washington, a cold, dark, and ominous place. Meyer underscores the gothic backdrop of the story by noting that Bella and her mother previously once had to escape from Forks. Bella establishes her new home as a prison by stating, “it was from this town and its gloomy, omnipresent shade that my mother escaped with me when I was only a few months old,” but Bella has finally returned to finish out her high school days (3-4). To help the reader understand the sacrifice Bella is making, Meyer contrasts Forks with Phoenix, Arizona, where Bella grew up with her mother. Bella explains that Forks, “exists under a near-constant cover of clouds...[and] It rains on this inconsequential town more than any other place in the United States of America” (3-4). Bella describes herself as being exiled to Forks and wishing for the sun, the heat, and the city that she had while living in Phoenix (4). By using the words “escape” and “exile,” Bella emphasizes how she is sacrificing her happiness for her mother’s new life, just as Beauty sacrifices her freedom to save her father’s live. However
Bella’s understanding of Forks comes solely from her mother’s viewpoint, rather than her own experiences with the town. It is made clear that Bella’s mother left Forks in search of sunnier weather and a life without Charlie, for herself and Bella. As an infant, Bella leaves Forks and as a young adult she makes the decision to return to Forks, allowing her mother to travel with her new husband, but also putting herself back into a gloomy town she dislikes until she meets Edward.

In addition to the gloominess of Forks, one of the most important components of gothic literature according to Rose Lovell-Smith is the “classic Gothic house,” which by definition is both hard to get into and out of (100). Lovell-Smith continues her analysis by suggesting traits of these houses, which make them distinctively Gothic. She describes a gothic house as one that is vast in size, representing a type of “domestic confinement,” remote in location, and allowing for the movement of both characters and elements both into and out of the house, but that also purposefully creates a feeling of impenetrability when first viewed (101-104). Lovell-Smith goes further to explain that in her view,

this traditional isolation of the Gothic house, apart from plot, functions in removing persecuted heroines from human assistance, mainly offers an interpretation to the reader of wider society as wilderness. An isolated house implies the primacy of family origins, but also, that only within the family can the subject hope to find or make meaning of their (her) life...Within the family, says the Gothic house, problems must be resolved, terrors faced, tyrants overcome, one’s inheritance claimed, and one’s true identity established; the outer world offers only a wilderness of non-meaning. (104)
Here Lovell-Smith suggests that the traditional gothic house is more than just a place of entrapment for the heroine; it also becomes a place where relationships and family become a key component in establishing oneself as well as overcoming whatever obstacles may be created by the outside world.

Although Bella finds herself in the remote and rainy world of Forks, her new home initially seems hardly Gothic. Charlie’s home is a “small, two-bedroom house that he’d bought with [her] mother in the early days of their marriage” (Meyer 8). As she enters her room, which is on the second floor along with the bathroom she explains,

I got the west bedroom that faced over the front yard. The room was familiar; it had belonged to me since I was born. The wooden floor, the light blue walls, the peaked ceiling, the yellowed lace curtains around the window—these were all part of my childhood. The only changes Charlie had ever made were switching the crib for a bed and adding a desk as I grew. The desk now held a secondhand computer, with the phone line for the modem stapled along the floor to the nearest phone jack…The rocking chair from my baby days was still in the corner. (9)

Based on Bella’s description of her home, she is not very pleased with her surroundings, but her surroundings mimic her personality and mood. The items in her room represent the past and also a sense of being used. Bella explains that none of the items in the room are new; they have only been switched out as she has gotten older and serve as a hauntingly constant reminder of her past visits with Charlie as well as the past marriage shared between her mother and father.

It is also in her room that Edward invades her personal space when he watches her sleep, both with and without her permission. Once she’s aware of him, Bella welcomes
Edward’s presence in her room, but Charlie, performing the role of the patriarchal guardian watching his daughter’s virginity, wants Bella’s bed and chamber reserved for her alone. Edward resorts to sneaking in and out of Bella’s window. Edward’s presence in her personal space, a very childlike and innocent space, without her consent or knowledge mirrors a sexual violation similar to the rape of Antonia committed by Ambrosio in Lewis’ *The Monk*. It is also interesting to consider that despite their age and typical adolescent pressures, Edward and Bella never commit a sexual act of any kind in her room; their interactions are intimate on a strictly conversational level, which helps to maintain Bella’s innocence and naïveté and are similar to the interactions that take place between Beauty and Beast, in particular, the lack of physical intimacy and the conversational intimacy shared between Beauty and the Beast. Although a sexual act is never committed, the sexual tension between Bella and Edward is obvious allowing for readers to vicariously indulge in tension of illicit and unfilled passion, as readers of Gothic romances do.

The first morning Bella spends in her new home she describes the kitchen, which will soon become a place with which she is very familiar. She states,

> I sat at the old square oak table in one of the three unmatching chairs and examined his small kitchen, with its dark paneled walls, bright yellow cabinets, and white linoleum floor. Nothing was changed. My mother had painted the cabinets eighteen years ago in an attempt to being some sunshine into the house. (Meyer 11)

For Bella, the kitchen becomes a reminder of her mother, who is moving on with a new life rather than returning to the home she once left. The kitchen is dark and small with very little
color except for the brightness created by the white floors and the bright yellow cabinets.

Bella’s mother repainted the cabinets in an attempt to bring sunshine into the house and possibly back into her marriage to Charlie, but the paint did not work and most of Bella’s childhood was spent in a town that was full of bright sunshine, Phoenix, away from her father. However Bella’s viewpoint of the kitchen changes considerably after the first night Edward spends in her room. Bella changes her description stating, “the kitchen was bright, happy, seeming to absorb my mood” which allows Bella’s view of the kitchen, and the rest of the house, to change simply because Edward confessed his love for her making the kitchen a setting that changes depending on the mood of Bella (315).

Bella also describes the small family room that contains some pictures from the past. She states,

First a wedding picture of Charlie and my mom in Las Vegas, the one of the three of us in the hospital after I was born, taken by a helpful nurse, followed by a procession of my school pictures up to last year’s. Those were embarrassing to look at--I would have to see what I could do to get Charlie to put them somewhere else, at least while I was living here. (Meyer 11-12)

The pictures in the living room again remind Bella of the past, just like the furniture in her room and the cabinets in the kitchen. The pictures of herself remind her of happier and sunnier times with her mother and help to enforce the negative view she has of herself, allowing Bella to stay true to her Gothic heroine status. She describes the pictures of her as embarrassing and she immediately considers hiding them. What she does not seem to consider is the idea that although her father’s house may be plain, he still has pictures of the people that are important
to him. The presence of both the wedding picture and the pictures of Bella reveal that despite his physical absence in her life up until now, Charlie cares for Bella and wants her to be happy, even if that is in Phoenix away from him. The pictures on the wall also represent the past that is haunted by the failed marriage of her parents, which along with objects from her past, haunt Bella. Overall, Bella’s house represents her struggle to move forward in life because the past haunts her. Bella sees herself as a burden to her mother’s progress, so she moves back to a place that represents the past in hopes of finding herself and allowing her mother to build a better life.

In contrast, Bella describes Edward’s house in a way that mirrors how she views him. When Edward finally convinces Bella to go home with him to meet her family, she is concerned about what his family will think of her and not for her safety. Bella describes the trip to Edward’s house, which is outside of town in a remote location, by stating,

> We passed over the bridge at the Calawah River, the road winding northward, the houses flashing past us growing farther apart, getting bigger. And then we were past the other houses altogether, driving through misty forest. I was trying to decide whether to ask or be patient, when he turned abruptly onto an unpaved road. It was unmarked, barely visible among the ferns. The forest encroached on both sides, leaving the road ahead only discernible a few meters as it twisted, serpentlike, around the ancient trees. (Meyer 320-321)

The road to Edward’s house is conventionally Gothic as it is “winding” and dangerous like the family she will soon encounter. The road should create a sense of alarm for Bella, but it does not. The road is flanked on both sides by trees and as they approach the house, there are no
other houses in sight and they are outside of the community, just like Edward and his family. The misty forest that Bella and Edward drive through is also conventionally Gothic as well as a representation of the danger that Bella is going to encounter.\(^{10}\) According to the fairy tale tradition, the forest, generally associated with the femininity, specifically represents Bella’s inability to understand the risk that she is taking traveling to Edward’s house. Like the trees blocking the sunlight, Bella’s love for Edward is preventing inhibiting her ability to fully understand that the person and love she desires may lead to her death.

When she reaches the house she notices there is a wraparound porch as well as huge trees that seem to overshadow and protect the house from whatever intruders may appear. Bella describes the house itself as “timeless, graceful and probably a hundred years old” and on the outside “it was painted a soft, faded white, three stories tall, rectangular and well proportioned...[and] the windows and doors were either part of the original structure or a perfect restoration” (Meyer 320-321). Her description of the house mirrors the way she describes Edward; like Edward the house is old and pale, but strong and well built similar to Wuthering Heights in Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*.\(^{11}\) The inside of the house is even more impressive to Bella; she states,

> The inside was even more surprising, less predictable, than the exterior. It was very bright, very open, and very large. This must have been several rooms, but the walls had been removed from most of the first floor to create one wide space. The back, south-facing wall had been entirely replaced with glass, and,

\(^{10}\) See [http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/hanselgretel/notes.html#ONE](http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/hanselgretel/notes.html#ONE) for more information on forests within the fairy tale “Hansel and Gretel.”

\(^{11}\) See chapter one of *Wuthering Heights* for a detailed description of Heathcliff’s home, Wuthering Heights.
beyond the shade of the cedars, the lawn stretched bare to the wide river. A massive curving staircase dominated the west side of the room. The walls, the high-beamed ceiling, the wooden floors, and the thick carpets were all varying shades of white. (322)

Unlike Bella’s house, Edward’s house is large and open. It does not need paint on the cabinets to make it brighter because windows have replaced one wall, which opens the main room to the forest behind the house. Bella’s view of Edward’s house may be slightly skewed because of the love she has for him. In her eyes, Edward and his home are perfect and she and her house are constantly in need of repair.

Through the various settings in the novel, Meyer highlights Bella, Edward and their relationship. By using damp and dark Forks, Washington as the backdrop of Twilight, she establishes a Gothic feel to the text, which carries throughout the novel and grounds it within the Gothic tradition of an ominous natural setting for the hero and heroine. Both Bella and Edward’s houses mirror their personalities and viewpoints about the world. Bella’s home is smaller, older and full of objects that remind her of her past and prevent her from changing her self-image and moving forward was a typical young adult. Edward’s home is much larger, full of new construction and open to the world because of its windows. The same characterization applies to their relationship where Bella believes Edward, despite his true age, is modern and she herself is plain and not worthy of attention, just like the objects in her house. As Bella’s interactions with Edward increase in number, her home, as well as her mood, brightens and she begins to see herself in a different light despite her surroundings.
CONCLUSION

_Twilight_ clearly draws on traditional literary conventions. These include the conventions of Gothic and romance literature as well as the fairy tale tradition. _Twilight’s_ connection to these novels show Meyer’s recognition of the importance of the tropes, their power over cultural imagination, and the novel’s own position as part of an authentic literary tradition. Yet, the novel also speaks to our cultural moment today. Drawing on the insights of Jerry Griswold, I’d like to suggest that _Twilight_ also tries to “establish what it means to be a woman or a man in our own era” and provides “a convenient way to work out cultural issues” (23-24). Meyer’s commentary through her novel suggests that the role of women has really not changed much in the past two hundred years. Bella, the Gothic heroine, is intelligent, adventurous, and brave in her choice of love interest, but like Beauty, she is still devoted to the patriarchal figures in her life. She is brave enough to abandon the life she has known as a child, but rather than a new start, Bella returns to a place that brings memories of sadness in order to allow her mother to start a new life. Bella’s journey into adulthood must wait. Bella’s concerns about her outward beauty, her self-worth, intelligence and independence all speak to deep seated and conventional feminine insecurities outlined within Gothic literature as well as cultural outlets today. As for Edward, who clearly plays the role of the Gothic hero, as well a patriarchal figure in Bella’s life, the idea of what it means to be a man in society has not changed much. He, like the Beast, still plays the role of the protector and provider, and lover and parent for the woman who sacrifices herself for him.

Like “Beauty and the Beast,” _Twilight_ is a story that can help readers, both young and old, deal with, and possibly perpetuate, current cultural issues, despite its placement on the
challenged book list. By challenging the series, parents and educators are vocalizing the fear of threat that comes from young adult readers, and some adult readers, becoming more literate. By becoming more literate they may recognize and act upon their ability to question the conservative nature of our society. However, when readers look closely at Twilight, it becomes apparent that the novel represents the conservative mores that parents and educators are trying to preserve. Specifically, the Twilight, and the Twilight series, has been challenged because of its explicit sexual content and religious viewpoint. Taking a closer look at Meyer’s text allows readers to uncover her commentary on several issues, including sexual relationships among young adults and the treatment and acceptance of the “other.” To counter the challenge made regarding explicit sexual content, it is imperative to consider that despite the sexual temptation between Bella and Edward, they refrained from physically consummating their relationship, even though they are given multiple opportunities to act on their desires. However it is also important to consider that sexualized content is included within the novel, just not in the typical physical manifestation that most people associate with sexual content.12 The sexual contact between Bella and Edward, at least in this volume of the series, never reaches further than a kiss or an intimate conversation. However, based on Meyer’s description of Bella’s reaction to her and Edward’s first kiss, it is clear that she is sexually attracted to him. With this language, Meyer takes a conservative view on sex, like Beaumont’s tale, which provides readers with an example of a young couple whose desires are not fully acted upon

12 Although Bella and Edward never physically consummate their relationship in Twilight, physical desire is achieved in other ways, especially with the erotic relationship that a vampire can hold with its victim. Looking specifically at the vampire-victim relationship, the exchange of fluid and closeness between attacker and victim make the attack appear sexual. Taking this into consideration, Twilight becomes a prurient novel with a veneer of abstinence.
until they are married. It is also worth noting that the relationship between Bella and Edward, although passionate and romantic on the outside, borders on an abusive relationship due to his need to control her life and his child-like treatment of her. By presenting this type of relationship, Meyer is upholding the patriarchal notion of a Gothic romance, but also providing her readers with a sense of acceptance when it comes to this type of male-female relationship.

The novel’s commentary on the acceptance of and compassion for those unlike you also takes on a traditional viewpoint. Since Edward and his family are clearly outsiders in the Forks community, Bella’s love for Edward may encourage readers to be accepting of those who are outsiders in their communities, be they beasts or vampires. However, Meyer takes a very conservative look at outsiders by portraying the “other” in her novel as a pale, sparkly, gorgeous vampire who is well read and intelligent. She neglects to address the “others” in society who are not supernatural and sexualized in literature; those of a different race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Keeping this in mind, Meyer’s novel does partially perpetuate the ideas of patriarchy and female inferiority as well as uphold conservative ideas of sexual purity and defining the “other.” Despite these ideals, Twilight has been accepted and marketed as an edgy novel for young adults, yet it fits into the long-standing lineage of Gothic literature that has been challenging, thrilling and horrifying readers since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
Works Cited


