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Twilight and it's place in the vampire genre.

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1. Introduction

People have always been fascinated by mythical beings and monsters, stories containing these creatures which haunt the night can be found all throughout history. Many of these stories are used to explain why it is dangerous to venture out into the night alone or to give a reason for why misfortune such as disease is spread. One monster which is quite popular in later years is the blood-drinking vampire. Many have tried their hand at stories revolving around this being and this essay shall be focusing primarily on Stephenie Meyer's iteration of the monster in her bestseller, *Twilight* (2005). *Twilight* is the first instalment in a series of four books called *The Twilight Saga* which follows the seventeen-year-old Bella Swan as she falls in love with a vampire named Edward Cullen and falls into a darkly fantastical side of the world that she never knew existed. This series contains tropes which can be seen in many other works of vampire fiction however it also breaks away from what one might expect in a novel which contains this bloodsucking creature. Therefore, I shall be using Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* as well as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to look at how *Twilight* mirrors and breaks away from typical vampire fiction through the use of romance, religion, isolation and wealth.

2. The vampire genre

To start it is necessary to investigate how vampire fiction functions as a genre and how it came to be. Creatures with vampiric powers and qualities can be traced back to multiple cultures however, Eastern Europe is one of the most central ones (Beresford 19). This is as Vučković and Ljiljana discusses because the region and its myths are the background for the later form of the literary vampire. This origin is why many modern vampires are written to be created or "born" again in the region (2). Examples of vampires from Eastern Europe is *Carmilla* and *Dracula* who are both the titular character of their respective novels. *Carmilla* is

a vampire who was created in Austria, and Dracula is famously Transylvanian. These earlier works, especially *Carmilla* as the entire plot takes place in Austria, uses orientalism to further distance the readers from the vampire. Placing the action away from what would be a familiar environment such as London into an Austrian schloss or castle as done in sets up the stage so that the introduction of a creature such as the vampire is not the only unfamiliar variable to the reader. The setting is vaguely similar to what is considered normal so that one can suspend their disbelief of whether a blood drinking creature can exist. When in a familiar environment anything out of the ordinary will be scrutinized more harshly than it would be in any other location. Therefore, the faraway setting of novels such as in *Carmilla* can be used to symbolize that vampires are not native to the reality of which readers subscribe to, as how Laura the main character of *Carmilla* is not native to Austria. However, Meyer does away with this orientalism in *Twilight*. All the vampires which make up the Cullen family were once humans from around The United States of America as well as England. The patriarch of the family Carlisle Cullen is the first of the Cullen vampires to be created. He was bitten in London and made his way to the U.S where he later turned Edward and the rest of the family. Therefore, the existence of the vampire and how it works is what needs to be scrutinized as it is the only surreal element of the story. Polidori is credited to have introduced the vampire which most other literary vampires are based on with his creation of Lord Ruthven in *The Vampyre*. Ruthven is as Beresford describes; “a villain who is suave and aristocratic yet dangerous and alluring” (119), which are the traits which are commonly thought of when imagining a vampire. The use of villain to describe how the creature acted is quite interesting as it is a word which brings forth a negative and cunning image. Cunning is all about deceit and reaching one’s own goals by arguably unfair means, and a vampire is all about satisfying their own desires on the cost of human life. Vampires are the villain in their early years as the novels they were a part of often marketed themselves as horror stories, however while

Twilight does make use of the vampire it is first and foremost a romance. Particularly a romance written and marketed to a younger teen audience. Novels which market themselves to this demographic is commonly called young adult fiction and is often shortened to just YA. This genre is often female lead novels with a fantasy plot and romance as a big part of what moves the story forward, however that is not a requirement for a novel to be classified as YA. As *Twilight* was made to be consumed by teens, primarily girls, the main role of the vampire was shifted away from horror which was trying to scare the readers into trying to ensnare them instead.

2.1 Chosen works

Twilight is a prominent piece of vampire fiction from the twenty-first century and has inspired multiple works such as for example *Twenty shades of Grey* (2011). The series created an interesting world of forbidden romance which attracted a large audience of primarily teen girls. The inclusion of the fantastical using vampires and werewolves gave the series a unique twist compared to other YA novels on the market. Meyer stuck close to the known figure of the vampire however she warped some of the known characteristic that the creature is known for. The vulnerability to the sun was reimaged as glittering diamond skin, and the substitution of animal blood is enough to quench their bloodlust though not to the extent which human blood would. These changes in tandem with the conformity to standard vampire traits makes *Twilight* interesting to place within the vampire genre. The choice of using *The Vampyre* (1819) for this thesis was based on the fact that it is what set the basis for how an early vampire was constructed. The ways in which it was utilised as a literary device and as metaphors in addition to why certain tropes connected to vampires came to be. There is also an interest in how these tropes have evolved from *The Vampyre*' release. Both *Carmilla* (1872) and *Dracula* (1897) were chosen as they together with *The Vampyre* are

some of the most well-known works of vampire fiction which has shaped the genre in the earlier years of its introduction into the literary scene. They both build upon the base set by *The Vampyre* and bring in new elements that furthers the vampire as a literary tool. Dracula is in addition a strongly connected feature to what modern audiences recognize as a vampire with the location of Transylvania as the home of vampires and the connection to the bat motif with his ability to shapeshift into the animal.

3. Isolation and the Other

One of the tropes which appears again and again in vampire fiction is isolation. There are multiple ways that this concept is utilized such as geographical isolation, social isolation and by being “the Other”. The Other is a term which denotes the subject as it is distinct from what is known even though it might share similarities with something else to a degree. Therefore, by referring to vampires as the Other, we are looking past their human appearance and denoting them as something that is not human, and therefore not a part of the collective that is humanity. *Twilight* mainly utilizes the act of social isolation, where the Cullen vampires have created strict boundaries between themselves and the humans which surround them. Bella notes on her first day of Forks High school how “They were sitting in the corner of the cafeteria, as far away from where I sat as possible in the long room.” (Meyer 16). From this quote we can in ways interpret that the Cullens are not just distant from Bella in a physical sense but additionally as them being separated from humans and humanity. They are confined in the same physical location, the cafeteria, however they are not the same as the others which take up the same space. In ways the cafeteria can be used as a metaphor for the world and how vampires inhabit the same locations as humans. As Edward is what could be classified as a revenant which is “a human who returns to the world of the living after death.” (Beresford 22), he has experienced how it is to live as a normal human being. He was turned

when he was a dying seventeen-year-old orphan by Carlisle as the first addition to the growing Cullen family. The change of going from being a normal teenager to a supernatural entity must have been a hard adjustment to make. This abrupt departure from normal life and socialization makes it understandable how he and the rest of the Cullen siblings lack any effort in trying to re-socialize themselves, as they know that the relationships they build will eventually be severed by the nature of their inhuman nature. This isolation makes the vampires more sympathetic to readers as it invokes feelings of loss and mourning for what once was and what could have been. This sense of loss is integral to the vampire genre, however in earlier iterations the characters experiencing this loss in not the vampires but rather the humans which are being preyed upon. In *Carmilla* it is General Spielsdorf, a friend of Laura's father, who experiences this loss when his daughter is killed by Carmilla. Similarly, it is Aubrey, the protagonist in *The Vampyre*, who suffers the loss of his lover Ianthe at the hands of the vampire Lord Ruthven. In *Twilight* it is the vampires who mourn the loss of a loved one, however the person they are mourning is their former human self. The fleetingness of human life is at the centre of vampire fiction as it is upon human life they are surviving.

Being eternally connected to humanity while not being able to immerse yourself into it as you once did can be imagined as torturous. Having a "human" mind while still not being able to control the bloodthirsty urges which take over must be damning. When relaying the story of Carlisle's life Edward says that "He tried to destroy himself. But that's not easily done." (Meyer 294). The use of the words destroy in the place of kill is quite interesting here. Both Carlisle and Edward consider themselves as already dead and can therefore not see how ending their vampire life is dying as they are essentially "walking dead" (Lucey 401). To destroy something is to end the existence of it however it is usually a word used to describe inanimate objects not living creatures. When referring to animals or humans one does not use

the word destroy to mean ending their life so therefore it can be interpreted from this context that Edward and Carlisle see themselves as something other than a living organism. The quote additionally shows us how a vampire feels about its of exitance. Edward continues to explain that Carlisle “dreamed of finding others like himself. He was very lonely.” (Meyer 297). Carlisle in his early vampiric life shows the existential crisis which the vampire finds itself in the centre of. They cannot depart from this earthly plane through normal means and they have no way of finding safe haven. They are doomed to walk this earth with only the preservation of their own life as a purpose. This solitary goal of self-preservation is what the vampire has been all about in the genre’s early stages. *Twilight* is hinting to this through Carlisle, with him being part of an older generation of vampires within the universe, however *Twilight* breaks away from this with Edward and the newer generation of vampires. This shows the change which has happened in the genre where the vampire has become less of a self-centred creature and more of a sympathetic creature who has little agency of its own existence.

Further on the isolation of vampires also notes that “They were all looking away – away from each other, away from the other students, away from anything in particular as far as I could tell.” (Meyer 17). The implications with the vampires not even interacting with each other is nod to how vampires have been known to live separate from others of their own kind. This separation can be attributed to a number of things such as territorial disputes to for example not having had personal interactions for a number of years and therefore not actively wanting to seek them out. With the low number of vampires suspected to be alive at the same time and in the same area being low, it is also not farfetched that they might just not know about the whereabouts of others of their kind due to their nomadic lifestyle. This shows how the social isolation of vampires might be closely related to geographical isolation. Isolation based on geography is shown in *Twilight* through the location of the Cullen house. When driving to

meet Edwards family at their home Bella is surprised when “he turned abruptly onto an unpaved road. It was unmarked, barely visible among the ferns.” (Meyer 280). This road being barely visible to the average person but hidden in plain sight mirrors how vampires in this universe blend in with humans. However, the long distance shows how vampires cannot be themselves unless they separate themselves from humans. This separation is here illustrated through the remote location of the vampire home. This geographical separation is additionally shown through their nomadic lifestyle where they are moving from place to place to hide that they don’t age. They cannot “risk familiarity” (Meyer 298) as attachments to humans makes hiding their secret harder to do. This ritualistic moving is also exhibited in *Carmilla* however compared to the Cullen family Carmilla fully integrates herself into human families. These families are like Laura’s where they live in a somewhat isolated place and have young adult daughters. Her pace is accelerated though since contrary to the Cullens in *Twilight* Carmilla takes the life of the daughters which she befriends.

4. Wealth and status

The aristocratic tendencies of the Ruthven vampire formula is another trope which is commonly used in later vampiric works however it has experienced modernization. Vučković and Ljiljana touch on the fact that the vampires of old were noblemen and noblewomen who before their rebirth contributed to atrocious acts (4). The wealth available to vampires such as Ruthven and Dracula come from their status in society as Counts and Lords. However, in *Twilight* the Cullen family is shown to possess great amounts of wealth without having an aristocratic background. However, this accumulation of monetary assets might therefore be tied to the vampire as a creature. They do not require the funds to survive and can therefore use any money they come into possession of on unnecessary items to normal human survival. The wealth of the Cullen family is noted by Bella even before she knows who they are as she

takes in the parking lot at Forks high school; “I was glad to see that most of the cars were older like mine, nothing flashy. [...] The nicest car here was a shiny Volvo, and it stood out.” (Meyer 12-13). The choice of cars represents what each family can afford to own, the average human student at the school goes for an older model of car and its main job is to get the student from where they are to where they need to be. The appearance of the Cullen car shows that they have the funds to take maintain such a car and that the choice of transportation is not primarily based on the need to get to and from places. This sets them apart from the humans without even mentioning their superhuman capabilities. They are by design out of touch with the reality of humans who exist in the same space as them. This additional element of otherness further the distance which exist between humans and vampires. In addition to their expensive cars standing out among other cars the Cullen family also stands out from the crowd in terms of their looks. Earlier vampires were described as creatures with a “tall, gaunt figure”, this type of appearance is shown briefly with Dracula as he is said to be a thin man (Beresford 122). However, in the same way that Dracula is said to become younger and younger through the novel, the appearance of vampires in fiction has also changed. Bella’s first look at the Cullens leave her “mesmerized” by their physical appearance (Meyer 27). The vampire’s body is their weapon so the change in appearance to be more captivation is an evolutionary adaptation that makes sense when looking at their food source. Brodman and Doan explain this visual appearance and its benefits as this:

“If one looks at the typical vampire body, it is not difficult to discern why these creatures exemplify the desirable Other’s body. Whether beautiful or not, and strong ranging towards invincible, vampires retain enough humanity or human traits to be comparable to humans but never seem to suffer the many faults of human bodies.”

(111)

Twilight's portrayal of vampire bodies coincides with the portrayals of vampires in other works of vampire fiction. This is as mentioned because their appearance is what gives them the opportunity to approach humans in this newer age without alerting their prey to their impending doom. The ability for vampires to feed comfortably on their prey is integral to the survival of the creature so *Twilight* makes sure to align with this trend. The way the vampires carry themselves as well as dress themselves all work in tandem with their appearance to project an image which is as attractive to humans as possible. The Cullen vampires were all “dressed exceptionally well; simply, but in clothes that subtly hinted at designer origins.” (Meyer 27). In a similar vein to how their car was more expensive than simply necessary because it is not a necessity for them, the Cullen family also dress in a way that stands out among their peers. It is in a subtle way however it helps elevate their already good appearance as well as hint to the wealth they have available. By showing off in this way *Twilight* hints back to the earlier image that the vampire exudes wealth and status while also being a method to show the readers how vampires have lost touch with the reality of humans.

5. Divinity and religion

The vampire has been labelled as a creature strongly connected with the religion of Christianity. They are likened to demons and one of the methods to repel a vampire is with the help of a crucifix as well as holy water. These symbols are well integrated into the myth of the vampire which is found in popular culture today. In *Twilight* the Cullen family has a “large wooden cross” (288) as decoration which Edward remarks is ironic considering what the inhabitants of the house are. Vučković and Ljiljana argues that this link between vampire and religion is diminishing as there has been a rising popularity of realism and science since the introduction of the literary vampire. This theme of religion inside the vampire genre is

one which is heavily used in older works such as *Carmilla* while being less prevalent in the newer *Twilight*. *Carmilla* is seen to be leaning more towards a demonic explanation for vampirism, as Carmilla is seen to be hurt when exposed to funeral hymns and also refuses to participate in prayer. *Twilight* does not draw the same lines between religion and its vampires however religious imagery is frequently used. Bella is the one who primarily brings forth comparisons between Edward and the divine, which is a stark contrast to how Carmilla is being connected to more damned. Bella describes Edward as being a “destroying angel” (Meyer 59) as well as having an “angel’s face” (Meyer 152) to name some of her comments. His appearance is doing its job to seduce her for his purpose of being a vampire, to feast upon her blood, however in the act of fulfilling such a goal his appearance also shows the disconnect between appearance and what lurks underneath. Bella sees Edward as “something more” than just human which is interesting as usually one refers to creatures and demons as something “less” than human. Edward has likened himself to a monster so from the point of view of the vampire their existence is seen as lesser than the existence of a human. Having the vampires separate their current existence from their previous life is working together with divinity to further separate humans and vampires. This illudes to how the separation of these beings being at the centre of vampire fiction. It is the Otherness of the vampire which must be at the centre of the genre, whether this Otherness is brought forth through being likened to the divine or the damned.

6. Romance

The vampiric is no longer scary in the sense that it was before, it is not a part of the unknown shrouded in mystery. Vampires have been featured in popular fiction to such an extent that it, as Mercer describes it, “[...] no longer automatically signal[s] meanings antagonistic toward the church.” (266). When the vampire is no longer feared or connected to real life through for

example religious beliefs, it loses its original power as a fictional device made to instil fear in readers. Therefore, Meyer's choice of a vampire romantic interest is not rooted in the want for horror which older vampire novels often strived for. *Twilight* is in its essence a romance novel and does therefore not compare to previous vampire iterations as love is the main point of the story, not shock or horror. This focus on romance in connection to Beresford's indication that vampirism consist of two central stages.

“[T]he first, [...] the initial period where the vampire is in its prime, newly converted to vampirism and striving towards immortality. As the realization of what this means dawns on the vampire [...] it starts to despair and crave friendship or love. This leads to a second stage, where the vampire is in need of revivification, either through this love or through the quenching of its thirst for blood.” (Beresford 122-123).

After Edward was born again, he strayed from Carlisle and the rest of the Cullen family. He prayed upon the blood of criminals to satiate his hunger without further damning himself for taking an innocent person's life. This period he was reviving himself by quenching his bloodlust as Beresford describes. However, this escapade does not last long as he eventually returns to the Cullen family to be revived through friendship as well as familial love. Edward is the only Cullen who does not have a significant other within the family and is why he is the only person who is shown to show romantic feelings for a human. Seeing as how Edward is quickly enamoured with Bella indicated that he might have been searching for a romantic connection without being successful. Carmilla is also a vampire who seeks out love and relationships however her preferences are more queer and therefore not as easy to act upon. She forms a clearly romantic friendship with Laura however she contrary to Edward does not manage to abstain from attacking her human love interest. Carmilla is quite the sympathetic creature as she is a young lady compared to the older gentlemen vampires such as Ruthven and Dracula. She seemingly has not been a vampire for a long time and in her pursuit of

finding love and companionship end up losing herself to her vampiric desires. Having vampires seek love and companionship to deal with their existential crisis caused by their own inhumanness is something that makes vampires more sympathetic. They are a representation for “the suffering of the human soul burdened with mistakes and sins of the past and the present.” (Vučković and Ljiljana 2) and the one thing which can sooth this suffering is the love which is gained by another. However, love does not stop at just romance as evidenced by Carmilla biting Laura in the chest. This can be seen as a quite sexually charged action. In ways “the biting of the throat by the vampire is a metaphor for sexual intercourse, an act deemed too risqué actually to be depicted in the nineteenth century” (Beresford 122). Sexual intercourse is quite the interesting action to place into the discussion of vampires, as it is the act of creating life while vampires themselves are creatures who are not alive. Vampires are creatures who feast upon blood which is essentially “the life force of any living creature” (Beresford) so the act of intercourse as well as conception it quite the opposite from the existence of the vampire. However, this does not stop the inclusion of vampire feasting as symbolism for sexual intimacy in the earlier years of the genre. As mentioned by Beresford the nineteenth century was not a time period where sex was mentioned outright so the vampire was “a helpful trope for getting [female desire] onto the page or screen, as it was the irresistible vampire’s fault, and not the woman’s, for being seduced.” (Mercer 264). The vampire was a tool used to bring fort a topic seen as taboo in earlier years, and in Meyers *Twilight* it is used to represent the other end of desire, which is abstinence. Edward and Bella do not engage in sexual intimacy until after they are married later in the book series, as Edward is adamant that they cannot have intercourse till after Bella is a vampire. This is because Edward sees Bella’s human body as too frail to handle his inhuman strength. This use of the vampire in *Twilight* shows that the vampire is still a good

tool to use when approaching sensitive topics such as sex as vampires have been associated with this since quite early on.

7. Blood

Edward describes his family's diet as "vegetarian" as they feast on the blood of animals instead of humans. This is a departure from the stereotypical vampire as the need for specifically human blood is a driving factor for the plot of vampire fiction. "The understanding of the importance of blood to the life force of any living creature from a very early point in history is perhaps the key to the universal link between vampirism and blood." (Beresford 22). Blood is life force and as vampires are walking dead creatures, they need this life force to function. The need for specifically human blood can be speculated to be because vampires were once human beings themselves and only the blood which used to fuel them in life can keep them going after their passing. The use of creature in this quote from Beresford is quite interesting as it therefore by proxy includes the vampire as beings who need this life force in specifically blood form. Vampires have always been associated with the act of blood drinking so even though the *Twilight* vampires do not comply fully to this trope it still carries with it this fatal flaw which vampires possess and which they must fight against. However, by giving the *Twilight* vampires the opportunity to feed on animals creates the Cullen vampires into more sympathetic beings as they are shown to have higher morals than previous vampires such as Lord Ruthven. Establishing this sympathy is more common in later iterations of the mythical creature. Additionally, by being able to show agency but still struggling with their own primal instincts makes the readers feel for the vampire's situation. Edward being overtaken for a need for Bella's blood but still having the self-control to stop feeding on her to save her life makes this illusive Other seem more human. Seeing vampires as humans allows for us to further empathize with their challenges and follow their thought

process when put in difficult situations. Seeing Edward distance himself from Bella who is arguably an easy prey because he values her is marginally different to Carmilla who arguably has romantic feelings for Laura but does not have the power to resist her vampiric cravings for human blood, even though it would mean killing Laura. This uncontrollable bloodlust that Edward experiences also connects with how vampires cannot live completely freely together with humans as they are at risk for such unexpected encounters which awakens their instincts. However as discussed previously the existence of a vampire is inherently an isolated one due to knowing that familiarity and connections with humans is not feasible due to their unchanging appearance and their thirst for human blood.

8. Conclusion

The literary vampire has changed from its conception and has had many individual changes to its powers and instincts however, it has kept the same distinct feeling which readers connect to when imagining a vampire. It has morphed away from a monster which was used to instill fear into readers while creating a sense of mystery around what is considered abnormal or the Other. In the twenty-first century the vampire has come out of the shadows and made its home in popular fiction where the focus has moved away from the Otherness of the creature to instead highlight the humanness it possesses. *Twilight* makes use of preestablished tropes in the vampire genre such as the vampires being wealthy and living in isolation from humans. This furthers how the vampire is separated from normal human life even though they attend the same institutions as humans do. The vampires are the Other in society and this separation and isolation is integral for the vampire genre and in later fiction this leads to more of the exploration of a vampire's existential crisis. Immortality and being a solitary creature opens up an interesting conversation of how vampires used to be human and with that comes the need of human company and connections. To go from being a social

creature into something which is dependent on humans to live but can be a part of human life is an interesting transition which is explored in *Twilight* through the creation of the Cullen family. *Twilight* makes a good attempt at bringing the vampire into a new age while keeping the tropes which helped make the genre into what it is today.

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