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Twilight Follows Tradition: Analyzing "Biting" Critiques of Vampire Narratives for their Portrayals of Gender & Sexuality

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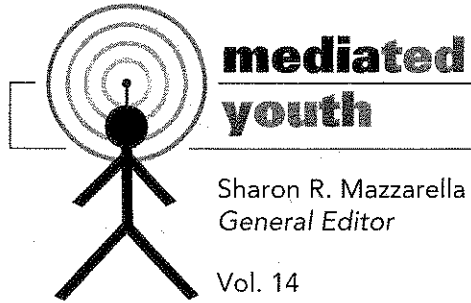
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BITTEN *by* twilight

Youth Culture, Media, & the Vampire Franchise

EDITED BY

Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, & Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz



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CHAPTER TWO

Twilight Follows Tradition: Analyzing “Biting” Critiques of Vampire Narratives for Their Portrayals of Gender and Sexuality

Melissa Ames

Vampires have dominated print literature since the 18th century, eventually becoming more visible as they crossed mediated boundaries and genre divides. Now flourishing in neo-gothic realms like science fiction and fantasy, in print genres like chick-lit and young adult, and in the visual realm (from Hollywood’s big screen to daytime television’s sudsy small screen),¹ vampire narratives are finding increased popularity. Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* series has shined a new spotlight on the all-encompassing umbrella genre that is “vamp lit,” and with it has come renewed attention to the so-called anti-feminist messages present in the narratives, such as the perceived negative characterization of the female protagonists (Anna, 2008; Jost, 2008; “New Moon,” 2009; Sax, 2008; Voynar, 2008) and the problematic representation of female sexuality. Concerning the latter, many scholars have issues with the supposed abstinence themes present in the *Twilight* series (Rafferty, 2008; Seifert, 2009; Siering & Spillar, 2009) and some claim that the main character, Isabella “Bella” Swan, is not in control of her own sexual awakening (Siering, 2009, p. 1). The widely publicized debate over whether Meyer’s books should be classified as friends or foes of feminism exists as a foundation for this chapter.

This chapter examines the *Twilight* series as part of the long-standing tradition of vampire narratives—many seeped with contradictory gender

portrayals and diverse depictions of sexuality. In this essay I analyze *Twilight* historically, as a product of its time and as a product of its textual predecessors. In doing so, I draw upon literary critiques of canonical texts like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and of best-selling books like Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles* (1976-2003), both of which have been made into Hollywood films. I also analyze *Twilight* in terms of its target audience by comparing it to a popular young adult vampire series that predated it, L.J. Smith's *The Vampire Diaries* (1991-1992), as well as to the television cult-phenomenon *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), both of which have also appeared in different mediated formats.²

The texts selected for analysis against the *Twilight* series target two different types of audiences: mainstream vampire narratives (intended to be read by a wide, and predominantly adult, readership), such as *Dracula* and *The Vampire Chronicles*, and young adult vampire narratives (marketed directly to a more narrow, usually female, teen demographic), such as *The Vampire Diaries* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Comparing these subsets of vampire literature allows one to see how vampire narratives shift based on their intended audience. This discussion also helps to explain how some of the problems critics find with the *Twilight* series may be linked to its adherence to the tropes of the young adult vampire tale. Although a great number of vampire narratives could have been selected to represent these two groupings, I have selected *Dracula*, *The Vampire Chronicles*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* based on their popular reception and the attention they received by scholars. As will be discussed in the next session, *Dracula*, a novel that has been read widely since its publication over two centuries ago, exists as an antecedent text for almost all vampire narratives that follow it. Anne Rice's series created a cult following and helped to revive popular interest in vampire narratives at the end of the 20th century ("Anne Rice," 2006). *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* spawned an active fan following which resulted in numerous academic studies not only on the program itself, but of the active audience it drew in. L. J. Smith's series, although popular, did not receive as much attention as the texts it is being read against. However, its revival in 2008 as a novel series and its 2009 transition onto the small screen make it a useful text to read alongside of *Twilight* (whose popularity likely inspired its resurrection).

These vampire narratives provide a useful space to analyze the fictionalized constructs of gender and sexuality, to see how these are presented to different audiences, and how they result in storylines and themes that may produce troubling gender analyses, as has *Twilight*. As a result of these comparisons, this essay explores how gender politics and sexuality are portrayed across a subset of vampire narratives—across time, audience, and mediated format—arguing that *Twilight* is simply one vampire narrative in a long line that has sparked controversial gender analyses and feminist criticism from scholars. Auerbach (1995) in her analysis of *Dracula* and Doane and Hodges (1990) in their criticism of Rice's series, for example, claim that vampire narratives are often a reflection of their contemporary time, the political landscape, and that they can even point to the progress and/or stumbling points of movements, such as feminism. This essay entertains their suggestion that vampire narratives are a product of their own time period and seeks to discover if, and how, Meyer's series represents the current time period and/or speaks to the present state of feminism.

Through the Feminist Looking Glass: Gender-Based Critiques of *Twilight*

A brief overview of the criticism, and defenses, Meyer's books have inspired is needed before delving into how the series differs from the vampire narratives that precede it. It would be an understatement to simply note that the series has received "mixed" reviews. Perhaps even more interesting are the contradictory feelings fans themselves have had for the books as the saga progressed. Cultural critic Jost (2008) summed up the love-hate relationship many readers have with *Twilight*, commenting that never before had he "found a series so compelling, while at the same time been so offended by a story's content and despicable cast of characters" (p. 1). When looking at the criticism the series has had at large, the criticism from self-proclaimed feminists has been the most regular, and often the most negative in terms of gender representations. For example, Jezebel.com calls Meyer's final book, *Breaking Dawn*, a "creepy anti-abortion allegory" that promotes teen motherhood and a fundamentally conservative ideology (Anna, 2008, p. 2). Others accuse *Twilight* of being "a how-to manual for an abusive relationship" (Voy- nar, 2008, p. 2). For some the problem lies within the characters Meyer

crafted, rather than in the plot of the novels themselves. Jost (2008), for instance, suggests that Meyer began with a storyline that had the potential to be “a provocative piece of gothic fantasy” (Jost, 2008, p. 1) but then marred it through the creation of unlikable, anti-feminist characters and an anachronistic setting which forces modern readers into the mindset of a previous time in which “women were property and only received validation from men’s opinions of them” (p. 1).

For some critics, the depiction of the main character, Bella Swan—a self-deprecating teenage girl who becomes fixated on Edward Cullen, the vampire who will remain her love interest and partner throughout the series—seems to be the common jumping off point for critical analyses. Sax (2008), the author of *Why Gender Matters*, points out the difference between the Twilight books and the blockbuster young adult collections that came before them. Harry Potter, a young adult series originally marketed for young adults and children, crossed over into mainstream culture and was eventually read by males and females of all age groups (Sax, 2008). He suggests that although Twilight experienced a similar crossover, its intended demographic was always much narrower, and more gendered; the books specifically target teenage girls and young women, and that is predominantly who reads them. Sax argues that the allure of Twilight for this smaller audience is exactly what critics have a problem with—its marriage of modern sensibility and traditional notions of gender. Sax points out that this combination of a modern setting with outdated gender norms is quite unusual in young adult literature today. But, yet, in Twilight, traditional gender stereotypes abound. The principal “male characters, Edward Cullen and Jacob Black, are muscular and unwaveringly brave, while Bella and the other girls bake cookies, make supper for the men and hold all-female slumber parties” (p. B7). To add to some already problematic characterizations, Bella is consistently depicted as the damsel in distress forever in need of rescue by a male.

Beyond the troubling gender portrayals present in the book, other critics have taken offense to the way the series deals with sexuality. Although teen sexual desire is a common motif of Meyer’s *Eclipse*, the underlying message present is that sex is sinful and off limits (Jost, 2008). This is seen repeatedly as Bella’s advances are cast aside by Edward, who wishes to preserve her virtue by waiting until they are married to first have sexual intercourse. More troubling than these moralistic scenes of

rejection, which some claim are present to advocate abstinence (Rafferty, 2008; Siering & Spillar, 2009), are the ones in *Breaking Dawn* where Bella and Edward finally, after marriage, have sex. As a result of this sought after union, Bella ends up physically hurt due to intimate contact with Edward’s hard, marble-like body, her body covered in bruises, and blames herself for the injuries Edward has accidentally caused. In this case, despite their marital status, sexual intercourse is *still* dangerous. Also, Bella’s self-blame for the injuries she obtained during consensual intercourse sounds all too similar to rape victims who blame themselves for being assaulted after the fact (McCaghy, 1975; Rose, 1977; Sutherland, 1950; Weis & Borges, 1973).

It should be noted, however, that not all critics have found the series to be a disturbing addition to young adult literature. Film critic Voynar (2008) responded to some of the more common feminist concerns with the book, one of which deals with purported anti-abortion rhetoric. In *Breaking Dawn*, Bella chooses to have the half-vampire child she is carrying, even though it almost kills her. Voynar, however, sees nothing troubling with the fact that Bella does not end the pregnancy. She writes:

For me, a big part of my feminist beliefs has to do with the concept of choice... feminism is about being pro-choice, which is not the same as being pro-abortion. The idea of pro-choice means supporting women in making the choice that’s right for them around a pregnancy – not proselytizing abortion as the only ‘right’ choice. (Voynar, 2008, p. 3)

She argues that Bella’s devotion to seeing the pregnancy through and protecting her unborn child is not as far-fetched as some readers believe. Voynar poses the question: “since when is motherhood and maternal impulse inherently anti-feminist?” (p. 4). Voynar is not the only scholar who has seen redeeming qualities in the series. Flanagan (2008), staff writer for *The Atlantic*, took a more negotiated stance on the series, reading it as a throwback to young adult literature of the past. While many read Edward and Bella’s relationship as dysfunctional, Flanagan depicts it in a more positive light:

Twilight centers on a boy who loves a girl so much that he refuses to defile her, and on a girl who loves him so dearly that she is desperate for him to do just that, even if the wages of the act are expulsion from her family and from everything she has ever known. (p. 3)

Although *Twilight* has received much criticism from feminist scholars, it is certainly not the first vampire narrative to have done so. In fact, *Twilight* is just one in a long line of vampire tales that have been loved, hated, studied, neglected, devoured, and/or demonized by readers and scholars alike. In order to trace this trajectory it seems best to start with the ultimate antecedent text for all vampire fiction: *Dracula*.

Mainstream (Adult) Vampire Narratives and Their Critiques That Span Centuries

Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) takes on the form of an epistolary novel composed of diary entries, letters, telegrams, and fictionalized newspaper columns chronicling the attacks of its primary antagonist, the vampire, Count Dracula. The novel focuses on the downfall of one female protagonist, Lucy Westerna, and the subsequent rescue of another female protagonist, Mina Harker, by her husband Jonathan Harker and his associates, Dr. John Seward, Arthur Holmwood, Quincey Morris, and Professor Abraham Van Helsing. Although *Dracula* is certainly not the first work to fall into the category of vampire literature, it is one of the earliest and remains the most influential (Auerbach, 1995). Stoker's vampire villain has resurfaced in countless films, literary renditions, graphic novels, television commercials, cartoons, and children's programming throughout the years. Stoker's vampire expert, Van Helsing, has also served as an archetype for subsequent fictionalizations of vampire hunters (on which the genre depends).

Many scholars have analyzed Stoker's infamous gothic fantasy through a feminist lens by attending to his gendered characterizations. Demetrakopoulos (1977) argues that *Dracula* "embodies a collective dream reflecting Victorian sex roles and repression" (p. 104). However, she believes that ultimately Stoker's own special brand of self-professed feminism seeped into the novel and helped to develop its telling "bipartite structure" (Demetrakopoulos, 1977, p. 104). Many literary scholars, such as Demetrakopoulos and Senf, have noted the way the novel can be viewed as having two separate halves, each focusing on "a different type of woman" (Demetrakopoulos, 1977, p. 105). Stoker's obvious demarcation between these types of women, not to mention his evident valuation of them, is quite noteworthy.

The first half of *Dracula* is full of villainous portrayals of women; the most striking of these are "the child-eating vampire women" who attempt to molest Jonathan Harker while he is lodging with the count in his Transylvania castle in order to oversee a real estate transaction (Demetrakopoulos, 1977, p. 104). Although Harker is saved from being devoured by the female vampires when Dracula scolds the women and provides them with a more youthful feast, the imprisonment he experiences following this interaction sparks his temporary mental breakdown and the rising action for the novel itself. This initial scene between Harker and the female vampires is interpreted in a variety of ways. Demetrakopoulos argues that the encounter suggests the Victorian male's desire to take on a passive role subordinate to an aggressive woman. She also suggests that these women's blatant rejection of motherhood may have been "thrillingly perverse" (p. 107) to the readers of Stoker's time. This deviation from the gendered norm is most demonically materialized when Lucy, the principal female character of the first half of the book, returns from the dead embarking on her anonymous nightly acts of child molestation.

The second half of the book paints quite a different picture of women. The female vampires all but disappear and the focus instead is on Mina Harker, arguably Stoker's main heroine. Most of the feminist analysis of this half of the text focuses around this character because she is a conundrum of sorts, provoking various readings that range from her being a typical damsel in distress (her virtue and life being protected by a core group of heroic men) to her being a feminist representative (a fictionalized depiction of the Victorian age's New Woman as she works side-by-side with the group of men who take down Dracula). Senf (1982), commenting on the latter reading, describes this New Woman of the 1890s as being more frank and open about sex, comfortable initiating sexual relationships, intellectual, independent, and open to exploring alternatives to the expected life choices of marriage and motherhood. Senf (1982) and Demetrakopoulos (1977) argue that Mina falls into this broad category to some degree. Demetrakopoulos points out that Mina is a contrast to Lucy's very feminized depiction and notes the many instances in the text where her "man's brain" (p. 109) comes in handy.

Whereas Demetrakopoulos stands firm with her assertion that *Dracula* is a text that can be embraced by feminists, other scholars disagree

vehemently. Roth (1977) has argued that the text is, in fact, hostile toward female sexuality, and Wasserman (1977) has asserted that despite Mina's large role in destroying Dracula, this quest to save her life is not really a fight against evil forces, but a fight to control women and keep them pure (Senf, 1982). Senf takes the middle road in this debate, studying Stoker's two different depictions of women. The first half of the novel focuses on "aggressive, inhuman, wildly erotic" (Senf, 1982, p. 34) vampires and then shifts its focus in the second half to Mina, "a woman who is the antithesis of these destructive creatures" (p. 34). Senf argues that these contrasting portrayals of women indicate Stoker's overall ambivalence to the New Woman. Senf's argument is the most convincing because although Mina does have some traits worthy of a feminist reading, there are many moments within the text that remain troubling. For example, consider this line taken from a letter Lucy writes to Mina about the three marriage proposals she received in one day: "My dear Mina, why are men so noble when we women are so little worthy of them?" (Stoker, 1994, p. 76). In this passage the patriarchal structure of Stoker's time period resonates as the female character reconfirms her lower cultural status in society and her belief that she only gains value in being possessed by a man.

But is a line like this, or the mindset it encapsulates, simply a product of its time period? Hammack (2008) suggests it is in her analysis of vampire narratives from the Victorian period. She notes that "The construction of sexualized animal-humans" was "a preoccupation of the late-Victorian period" and that women bore the brunt of it in fictional portrayals, in large part because "many antifeminist writers reacted to feminist criticisms" of the time "by vigorously promoting images of bestial women" (p. 886). In *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, Auerbach (1995) argues something quite similar, studying not only *Dracula* but vampire narratives across the ages. She suggests that the association of women with the demonic in vampire narratives suggests patriarchal fears about women's increasing social and sexual autonomy. The suggestion is quite interesting as we turn to look at more contemporary texts, some which were produced during pivotal moments in the women's movement in the United States and therefore would be expected to reflect its shifts. The fact that the same gender critiques appear in both *Dracula* and in more contemporary texts suggests that the vampire narrative is a pro-

ductive space to tease out problems of gender and sexuality, but that it is not a space that necessarily resolves such issues since they recycle decade after decade and text after text in similar fictional constructs.

Anne Rice's series, *The Vampire Chronicles*, arrived on the literary scene during the 1970s, a period of ferment for the women's movement in the United States which saw accomplishments like the passing of the 1972 Equal Rights Amendment and the 1973 ruling of *Roe v. Wade*. The first book in the series, *Interview with a Vampire*, was published in 1976 with nine subsequent books released between 1985 and 2003. Like *Twilight*, this series crossed over onto the big screen with *Interview with a Vampire* (1994); the second and third novels, *The Vampire Lestat* (1985) and *The Queen of the Damned* (1988), served as the foundation of the 2002 film bearing the latter's title. Due to its popularity and controversial portrayals of gender and sexuality, this series, like *Twilight* today, received its fair share of criticism. Scholars have embraced Rice's series for its gothic feminism (Lana, 1995). Many more have celebrated her focus on homoerotic bonds, claiming that her books transcend gender boundaries, question compulsory heterosexuality (Antoni, 2008), and revise normative depictions of sexual intercourse (Wood, 1996). But, to be fair, not all scholarly analyses of gender and sexuality of the series were positive.

Doane and Hodges (1990) argue that "Rice's novels have an almost vampiric relation to feminism" (p. 422). They compare *Interview with a Vampire* to *Dracula*, saying that "In place of the monstrous sexual appetites of Stoker's somewhat marginalized vampire women is the rage of a monstrous girl vampire against her infantilization and dependence in a world defined by the fathers" (p. 24). Unlike *Dracula*, *Interview with a Vampire* lacks a strong cast of females (vampire or human) to analyze. The only major female character in the novel is the child vampire Claudia, and she remains rather static throughout. The storyline central to her character is that of her unhappiness in her role as both an eternal child and a female inferior to her "fathers." The other female characters in this first novel do not fare much better. They are all underdeveloped and are mainly depicted as weak and/or crazy. Louis' first love interest, Babette, and Claudia's surrogate mother figure, Madeleine, would be two such examples. The former mentally deteriorates after her first encounter with a vampire and the latter slips into lunacy and willingly chooses life as an immortal vampire mother after the death of her human

daughter. As the series progresses, this lack of complex female characters is corrected with female characters rising to the forefront of the storyline.

Doane and Hodges analyze the traces of feminism present within this first installation and throughout the series, arguing that Rice's books progress more rapidly than the women's movement itself, producing a fictional environment that might best be described as problematically post-feminist. They analyze the world Rice creates at the end of the series, claiming that she "sees beyond such 'reductive' exaltations of women's difference to a new age in which androgynous beings coexist harmoniously" and "imbalances of power are effaced" (Doane & Hodges, 1990, p. 434). Like Doane and Hodges, King (1993) does not see the final fictional portrait Rice crafts as being productive from a feminist standpoint. King explains that:

Rice makes use of the fantastic as the space to transcend the way the patriarchal system has defined reality; she does not manage to transcend the gender ideology of the traditional vampire narrative(s) because "the masculine/feminine duality is, at times, reinforced rather than undermined, for some female vampires are far more alien than their male counterparts, maintaining rather than undermining the identification of woman as Other." (King, 1993, as cited in Antoni, 2008, p. 2)

King reaches this conclusion by focusing her analysis on Rice's character Akasha, the mother of all vampires who is awakened in the second volume. By the third novel she arises as the central character set on the quest of creating a utopian world of mostly women. Although Rice gives her female vampires more power than their Victorian predecessors, and utilizes them to raise questions concerning women's subordination, their depictions are still problematic in that they are demonized and dehumanized, and they denote the stereotype of the man-hating feminist (Antoni, 2008).

The erotic displays of violence in the series are also troubling. For example, in *Interview with a Vampire*, Louis and Claudia attend a theatrical performance. However, instead of watching a staged vampire attack, a fictional narrative about vampires, they sit witnessing a human woman actually being sexually molested, seduced, attacked, and slaughtered by a group of vampires. This group attack mirrors that of a gang rape. While these adult-targeted vampire narratives, such as Rice's series, do deliver diverse accounts of sexuality which can be celebrated, some of their

sexual diversity, such as this collapsing of sex and violence, is worthy of continued analysis and, perhaps, criticism.

In analyzing Rice's series from the 20th century against Stoker's text from the 19th century, it is clear that despite the hundred years that span between them, many of the same gender depictions slip into fictionalized narratives. Even when authors attempt to craft progressive female characters, the cultural fears associated with said depictions seem to seep into the pages and often reinforce the hierarchal divide between masculinity and femininity.

Twilight's Ancestors: 20th Century Young Adult Vampire Narratives

In order to see how the Twilight series falls into step with the young adult vampire narratives that precede it, it is necessary to compare it to another 20th century series. In 1991 L. J. Smith's trilogy, *The Vampire Diaries*, was published, with a fourth book released a year later due to fan demand. The series is set in the fictional town of Fell's Church, a center of paranormal activity. It follows the life (and death and rebirth) of Elena Gilbert and the romantic love triangle she enters into with two vampire brothers, Stefan and Damon Salvatore. The brothers are a modern-day version of Cain and Abel, and Elena is attracted to them both for their very different qualities (although she does consistently choose Stefan, the "good" brother, over Damon). Throughout the series, like Bella, Elena is regularly put in danger and is often saved by her male suitors. However, more often than not, she and her friends (of both sexes) work together to save each other (and the town) from a variety of evils. She is often cast as the hero, or more accurately, the martyr. The original trilogy ends with Elena sacrificing her life to save the men she loves and the fourth novel revives her role as savior as she saves the day once more (Smith, 2007b).

Although many parallels could be made between the narrative paths Bella and Elena travel down in these young adult vampire series, drawing similar parallels between their characterizations proves to be more difficult. For these two heroines, the similarities really do end with their escapades with vampire men. While Meyer creates the self-conscious, awkward Bella, Smith dishes out the opposite in her main character. Take, for example, this opening introduction to Elena: "She didn't even glance at the elaborate Victorian mirror above the cherrywood dresser; she knew what she'd see. Elena Gilbert, cool and blond and slender, the

fashion trendsetter, the high school senior, the girl every boy wanted and every girl wanted to be" (Smith, 2007a, p. 6). Elena is the ideal (although egotistical) teen girl that many young women long to be. While Bella constantly questions her right to be with Edward, Elena is steadfast in her chase to obtain Stefan. However, to be clear, the manipulative, sexually confident, social debutante of *The Vampire Diaries* is not necessarily the feminist antithesis to Bella; Elena's fixation on men along with her willingness to sacrifice her life for them in the end separates her from the likes of typical feminist heroines. On the other hand, she is proof that not all young adult vampire fantasies offer up a fragile female character perpetually in wait of love and/or saving by a dark and brooding vampire love interest. The reviews of the newly released television series *The Vampire Diaries*, however, have been rather ambivalent in terms of gender critique (Carlson, 2009; Hinckley, 2009).

Although *The Vampire Diaries* most certainly had a popular fan base, popular enough to urge the author into amending her trilogy with a fourth book in 1992 and loyal enough to return to the series yet again in 2008, the popularity and attention received by this young adult series pales in comparison to another popular vampire narrative of the 1990s—*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The television series ran for seven seasons between 1997 and 2003, creating an extremely active fan base and an extended "Buffyverse"—television spin-offs (*Angel*), graphic comic continuations of the show, as well as multiple gaming renditions of the Buffy storyline. This fan favorite, created by Joss Whedon, began with a 1992 film that bears the same name. The premise in each is basically the same: a California cheerleader is destined to fight and kill vampires.

While scholars have been quite vocal in expressing their distaste for *Twilight's* limited gender representations, this criticism has yet to spread to the elder series. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has been embraced by many scholars for over a decade (Kaveney, 2002; Wilcox & Lavery, 2001). Fredrick (2006) explains the feminist portrayals on the show: "Given *Buffy's* premise—a high school girl is given the power to fight (primarily adult male) monsters through her mystical connection to a line of women heroes—gender and feminist analyses constitute an important part of" the scholarship on this series (p. 239). For example, Jowett (2005) studies how the female characters work through their gendered identities, often oscillating between the supposed extremes of feminine and feminist and

having to face the corresponding societal judgments that accompany either performance (Fredrick, 2006). Another collection that has studied *Buffy* through a gender lens is Levine and Parks' *Undead TV: Essays on Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (2007). Levine (2007) studies the female characters against categories such as feminist, post-feminist, and third-wave feminist to argue that the series helps to disrupt the notion that there is only one way for a character, or a person, to be a "feminist."

Out of all the previously mentioned narratives, *Buffy's* plot falls closest to Smith's series. Like Smith's young adult series, *Buffy* finds herself living in a city prone to supernatural monstrosities. The setting of the television show is Sunnydale—a classic California town conveniently located on a Hellmouth. Like Elena, *Buffy* fights to save the town again and again from a variety of evils. The most frequent villains are, of course, vampires, but *Buffy* also battles against zombies, werewolves, witches, and other creatures as the years stretch on. Like Elena, *Buffy* falls for two male vampires, *Angel* and *Spike*, suggesting that there may be a basic plot recipe that makes a young adult vampire storyline successful.

In comparing the young adult vampire narratives to the adult mainstream narratives, a few obvious differences surface. The young adult novels discussed tend to portray primarily heteronormative relationships reinforced by "traditional" family values. Take, for example, the earlier discussion of the rejection of motherhood showcased in *Dracula* through Lucy's acts of child abuse versus Bella's refusal to terminate her pregnancy at any cost. Furthermore, all of the couples in the young adult novels are heterosexual and quickly enter into lifelong commitments. The print vampire narratives aimed at a more general readership do not limit their relationships in this way; they often include non-traditional family structures, focus on homosocial relationships, such as the implied romantic relationship between Louis and Lestat in *Interview with a Vampire* or the male camaraderie in *Dracula*, and include characters that could be classified as asexual or bisexual rather than heterosexual. Because of this, the mainstream vampire narratives often leave room for more fascinating analyses in terms of sexuality. Although, overall, these texts offer up a more diverse vision of sexuality, the texts (print and visual) directed at teen audiences most certainly foreground sexuality (albeit usually heterosexuality) more so than those of mainstream

culture. As expected, the young adult romance genre caters to storylines of teen angst and sexual stirrings, and therefore consumers receive a plethora of such storylines. Surprisingly, all of the young adult narratives in this sample focus predominately on the sexuality of the female characters to the extent that they are often depicted more often as the more sexually aggressive sex or, at the very least, the more persistent sexual pursuers—which is something that could be celebrated within these texts.

Conclusion

It has been the intent of this chapter to demonstrate that *Twilight* borrows from a long-standing tradition of narratives criticized for their portrayals of gender and sexuality and thus inherits similar critiques. In comparing vampire texts produced in different time periods, directed at different audiences, and even delivered through different media formats, it is clear that they all could be found problematic in one way or another. Despite being produced and consumed in different epochs, various vampire narratives have been accused of being hostile toward female sexuality (Doane & Hodges, 1990; Roth, 1977; Siering, 2009) and of being overly concerned with the purity of their female characters (Rafferty, 2008; Seifert, 2009; Siering & Spillar, 2009; Wasserman 1977). Critics analyzing representations of gender and sexuality in these texts have also been troubled by the coupling of sexuality and violence, the policing of heterosexuality and stereotypical gender roles, and the depiction of sexuality as punishable. Placing the criticism of these texts up against each other sheds light onto the criticism the *Twilight* series has received, revealing that it is not the first vampire narrative to be criticized for its portrayals of gender and sexuality.

Some scholars have suggested the vampire narratives discussed here reflect the cultural time periods in which they were crafted (Auerbach, 1995; Doane & Hodges, 1990). In particular, they argue that these tales saturated with gender and sexuality issues reveal societal shifts concerning feminism. In this vein it could be argued that *Twilight* is a product of an ideological swing to conservatism and a period of waning interest in women's rights within the youth of the United States. Although this may be true to some degree, I suggest that it does not fully explain *Twilight's* popularity nor does it explain the multitude of similarities between it

and the vampire narratives produced before it. The similar thematic messages present within these narratives, and the similar gender critiques they have received, suggest that perhaps the world consuming the *Twilight* saga is not all that changed from that which read Rice's series or Stoker's canonical text. Ultimately, the series did not rise to fame because of how well it articulates any shifting beliefs of the 21st century, but rather it capitalizes on the long-lived practice of merging the vampire narrative into the young adult romance genre, resulting in predictable patterns and familiar feminist critiques. Nonetheless, *Twilight* will surely remain in the spotlight as an easy target for feminist critique... until the next vampire narrative comes along to follow in the tradition.

Notes

1. Although not a regular staple of the soap opera, vampire storylines have penetrated daytime narratives since ABC's *Dark Shadows* (1966-1971). The intermingling of paranormal plots and melodrama returned to the small screen in the 21st century with NBC's *Passions* (1999-2008). This trend even affected a more traditional soap opera, ABC's *Port Charles* (1997-2003), a spin-off of *General Hospital*, when its final years took on a telenovela format and turned its focus primarily to supernatural storylines – the most popular revolving around the forbidden romances of vampire characters.
2. *The Vampire Diaries* has just launched as a television program on the CW network as of 2009, while *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has roots in a 1992 antecedent film of the same name.

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