

True Love Never Dies, But It Might Just Kill You: Why Audiences Love the Toxicity of *Twilight* Romances

*Prawdziwa miłość nigdy nie umiera, ale może cię zabić: dlaczego odbiorcy
kochają toksyczność romansów ze Zmierzchu*

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ABSTRACT

Twenty years after its publication it is time to revisit *Twilight*, taking a closer look at how this was marketed towards a specific audience. *Twilight* targets a teenage audience enthralled by a love story, yet, despite copious use of the word “love,” danger and lust lurk close to the surface. How did an audience of romance readers fall into the horror trap for *Twilight*? This paper highlights the targeted marketing of *Twilight* as a romance. The paper looks at the use of narrative archetypes to appeal to a specific readership and shows how *Twilight* utilises the history of Gothic novels and its heroines to revive a type of storytelling older than its vampires. The paper showcases a number of capitalist aspects contained in the narrative, arguing that these are deliberately placed.

Keywords: *Twilight*; vampires; romance; marketing archetypes; capitalism

ABSTRAKT

Dwadzieścia lat po publikacji *Zmierzchu* nadszedł czas, aby ponownie przyjrzeć się tej powieści, dokładniej analizując sposób, w jaki była ona promowana i kierowana do określonej grupy odbiorców. *Zmierzch* adresowany jest do nastoletnich czytelników zafascynowanych historią miłosną. Jednak mimo częstego używania słowa „miłość”, tuż pod powierzchnią narracji kryją się niebezpieczeństwo i pożądanie. Jak doszło do tego, że miłośnicy romansów dali się wciągnąć w pułapkę horroru, jaką okazał się *Zmierzch*? W artykule ukazano, w jaki sposób *Zmierzch* był celowo promowany jako romans. Zanalizowano wykorzystanie archetypów narracyjnych, mających przemawiać do konkretnej grupy czytelników, oraz pokazano,

jak powieść czerpie z tradycji gotyckiej i modelu gotyckich bohaterów, aby odnowić model opowiadania historii, który jest starszy od samych wampirów. Ponadto autor wskazuje na obecne w narracji elementy kapitalistyczne, argumentując, że zostały one umieszczone w tekście świadomie i z określonym zamysłem.

Słowa kluczowe: *Zmierzch*; wampiry; romansy; archetypy marketingowe; kapitalizm

2025 marked the twentieth anniversary of the publication of *Twilight*. Extensive research has analysed various narrative aspects, such as religious meaning, politics, vegetarianism, humanised vampires, as well as gender roles. Much of the scholarship focussed on the depiction of coercion and abusive relationships in *Twilight*. Scholars and non-academic readers alike took issue with *Twilight*'s content that is supposedly romantic but depicts coercive control and violence in its relationships. As Alison Happel and Jennifer Esposito put it, "*Twilight*'s main theme, Bella's love for a boy who wants to kill her, sexualizes violence."¹ The narrating heroine is frequently seen, by both scholars and critics, as the antithesis of feminism: "Bella has no interest, or life beyond Edward."²

Additionally, fangless vampires who consider themselves vegetarian and sparkle in the sunlight have caused controversy. Where "the historical vampire monster relates to fears of colonisation – a topic that fits into the discourse of power relations between the dominant and the suppressed – as well as to fears of female empowerment,"³ *Twilight*, to many, embodies "the monsters' disempowerment."⁴ Scholars, such as Ildikó Limpár, see "the feminisation of vampire literature"⁵ as the root cause of developments that gave audiences "subjective" and "articulated undead"⁶ as well as "the defanged, living dead idol of the Female Gothic romance."⁷

Readers see *Twilight*'s vampires through the eyes of a human woman. Rather than seeing the "vampire's search for fulfilment,"⁸ readers follow the heroine's

¹ Alison Happel and Jennifer Esposito, "Vampires, Vixens, and Feminists: An Analysis of *Twilight*," *Educational Studies* 46 no. 5 (2010): 529, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2010.510411>.

² Michele Tager and Lauren Nell, "A Vampire and a Damsel in Distress: A Postfeminist Analysis of Selected Female South African Viewers' Perceptions of the Romance Between Bella and Edward in the Film *Twilight* (2008)," *Communicare* 35 no. 1 (2016): 87, <https://doi.org/10.36615/jcsa.v35i1.1603>.

³ Ildikó Limpár, "Masculinity, Visibility, and the Vampire Literary Tradition in *What We Do in the Shadows*," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 29, no. 2 (2018): 268, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26627624>.

⁴ Limpár, "Masculinity, Visibility," 267.

⁵ Limpár, "Masculinity, Visibility," 271.

⁶ Sorcha Ní Fhlainn, *Postmodern Vampires* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 17.

⁷ Limpár, "Masculinity, Visibility," 271.

⁸ Ken Gelder, *Reading the Vampire* (Routledge, 1994), 109.

search for perfection. As Leisha Jones puts it, “the hopes and dreams of a girl drive the plot.”⁹

However, “Meyer’s novels are more nuanced [...] than some reviews suggest.”¹⁰ Thus, scholars, such as Natalie Wilson in *Seduced by Twilight*, find plenty to theorise that explains *Twilight*’s allure. *Twilight and Philosophy*, edited by Rebecca Housel and J. Jeremy Wisniewski, is another example of scholarship focussed on *Twilight*’s attraction, including the wisdom that “Death captivates.”¹¹ Jessica Taylor asserts that “the audience must be engaging with aspects of the texts and films that they find pleasurable, rather than threatening.”¹²

Audience perception is the key focus of this paper, which argues that the main issue in *Twilight* is not the content *per se*. Writing style, structure, characterisations and sparkling vampires all come down to personal taste. Even Anne Rice’s protagonist Lestat says his “highly reflective skin” would give him away as unnatural if not “powdered down.”¹³ The core of the perceived issue is that *Twilight* is “marketed, viewed and perceived as nothing other than a teenage romance.”¹⁴

A horror story centred around an abusive relationship may not be light reading but the content is not problematic because it shows the problem. Readers are meant to feel uncomfortable. In contrast, there seems to be an expectation for “love stories” to be realistic,¹⁵ showing romance with the right kind of partner as attainable, but in *Twilight* “Bella is obsessed with a boy who wants to literally kill her, and the audience is encouraged to romanticise this.”¹⁶

Twilight is far from the first problematic romance: Audiences familiar with film adaptations, who then read Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* or Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, are frequently surprised and even appalled to discover the nature of the narratives’ (anti)-heroes because the authors “position their Byronic heroes as threatening rather than appealing.”¹⁷ As Joseph Crawford puts it: “The

⁹ Leisha Jones, “Contemporary Bildungsromans and the Prosumer Girl.” *Criticism* 53, no. 3 (2011): 441.

¹⁰ Anna Silver, “*Twilight* Is Not Good for Maidens: Gender, Sexuality, and the Family in Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* Series.” *Studies in the Novel* 42, no. 1/2 (2010): 126.

¹¹ Rebecca Housel and J. Jeremy Wisniewski, eds., *Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians, and the Pursuit of Immortality* (Wiley, 2009), 1.

¹² Jessica Taylor, “Romance and the Female Gaze Obscuring Gendered Violence in the *Twilight* Saga,” *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no. 3 (2014): 394.

¹³ Anne Rice, *The Vampire Lestat* (Ballantine Books, 1993), 3.

¹⁴ Marko Lukić and Ljubica Matek, “Bella and the Beast: When Vampires Fall in Love, or the Twilight of a Genre.” *Supernatural Studies* 1, no. 1 (2013): 83.

¹⁵ Joseph Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic? Vampire Fiction and the Rise of the Paranormal Romance* (University of Wales Press, 2014), 13.

¹⁶ Happel and Esposito, *Vampires, Vixens, and Feminists*, 530.

¹⁷ Sara K. Day, “Rock Star Rochester and Heart-Throb Heathcliff: The Problematic Redemption of the Byronic Hero in Recent Young Adult Retellings of Brontë Novels, in *Young Adult Gothic*

notion that wicked individuals might still be attractive – that they might, indeed, be attractive because of their wickedness – is hardly a new one.”¹⁸

In both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* the “constructions of leading women force readers to attend to the dangerous nature of romance.”¹⁹ *Twilight* is one of many contemporary re-tellings that “minimised or erased the social criticism advanced by the original texts.”²⁰

Twilight also maintains its reputation as a romance. This paper’s focus will be the specific marketing approach to *Twilight* as a romance and the reasons for its success. This follows a similar approach as William Hughes, described in his 2014 *Open Graves, Open Minds* talk, where he argues that using “categories [...] created by marketing departments” “might [...] be valid” “since genre works by fulfilling and revising expectations.”²¹

While *Twilight* is “a story of lovers,”²² which is one possible definition of a “romance,”²³ it does not present as a Gothic Romance. Despite borrowing from earlier vampire narratives, *Twilight* carefully avoids associations with the cosy chill of a Gothic Novel. As Agnieszka Stasiewicz-Bieńkowska puts it: “In the new millennium, vampires appear more flexible than ever before.”²⁴ The vampires dwell in a house of glass, albeit in the middle of the forest, that is the very opposite of a dark Gothic mansion. Indeed, Marko Lukić and Ljubica Matek see the lack of a Gothic mansion as “suggesting in a way that her [Stephenie Meyer] vampire fiction is not a part of the Gothic tradition at all.”²⁵ The only anxiety the heroine feels is whether her vampire boyfriend’s family will like her and the only feature Bella shares with classic Gothic heroines are her “fainting spells”²⁶ that get worse by exposure to Edward: “‘You . . . made . . . me . . . faint,’ I accused him dizzily.”²⁷

All its brightness sets *Twilight* apart from Gothic narratives. It is its own representation of “the ordinary-made-extraordinary.”²⁸ Still, there are parallels

Fiction: Monstrous Selves/Monstrous Others, ed. Michelle J. Smith and Kristine Moruzi (University of Wales Press, 2021), 112.

¹⁸ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 23.

¹⁹ Day, “Rock Star Rochester,” 113.

²⁰ Day, “Rock Star Rochester,” 113.

²¹ William Hughes, “Demon Lovers: Embracing the Monster in Paranormal Romance,” OGOM 2014 talk. <https://www.opengravesopenminds.com/critical-thoughts/bill-hughes-demon-lovers-embracing-the-monster-in-paranormal-romance/> (accessed February 27, 2025).

²² Judith Wilt, *Women Writers and the Hero of Romance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 5.

²³ Wilt, *Women Writers*, 5.

²⁴ Agnieszka Stasiewicz-Bieńkowska, “Love, Violence, and Consent in Young Adult Vampire Fiction,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire*, ed. Simon Bacon (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 1283.

²⁵ Lukić and Matek, *Bella and the Beast*, 83.

²⁶ Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight* (Atom Books, 2005), 101.

²⁷ Meyer, *Twilight*, 317.

²⁸ Wilt, *Women Writers*, 131.

to Gothic narratives: “*Wuthering Heights* tells the story of the highly destructive love life of its protagonist”²⁹ and in *Jane Eyre* “Rochester is, throughout, a mix of good and bad qualities.”³⁰ Echoes of this are clearly visible throughout *Twilight*. The clearest parallel to its predecessors is the level of controversy caused by the narrative, focussed on the brooding man in the middle. Joseph Crawford accurately summarises: “In their own day, the Brontës were cultural outliers [] But for twentieth- and twenty-first-century romance fiction, they were foundational.”³¹

Twilight follows a classic horror structure whereby the monster is revealed half-way through the story and all the action is concentrated towards the end of the book. In contrast, a classic romance structure only applies when viewing the *Twilight* series as a whole where “love ultimately redeems and triumphs”³² in the form of a wedding, that is not the end of the narrative, and a vampiric happily-ever-after following much conflict and love-triangling. The “happy ending comes not when the hero rids himself of his vampirism, but when the heroine ascends into vampiric immortality”³³ but for large parts of the narrative, the romance plot is secondary to the mystery of monsters. Still, from the very start, this book does not try to appeal to a horror audience. Why?

Narrative Archetypes

Naturally, the book’s content cannot be ignored, neither in upfront marketing nor when it comes to audience reactions. Many readers do see Edward as a controlling boyfriend and Bella as a woman who is coerced. None of the relationships in *Twilight* can be described as healthy. Jessica Taylor observes: “violence within this series is not isolated to the main protagonists; rather, it is a normalized behavior.”³⁴

Both relationships and individual characters are intentionally similar. They are archetypes presenting the story readers expect. The archetypes referred to relate to basic story-telling structures commonly used as marketing tools. This paper will concentrate on archetypes recognisably used in *Twilight* for the characters of Edward and Bella. These are different concepts from the Gothic genre figures, such as the Byronic Hero, but certain facets overlap.

²⁹ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 34.

³⁰ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 33.

³¹ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 37.

³² Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 36.

³³ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 75.

³⁴ Taylor, “Romance and the Female Gaze,” 389.

For Edward, this paper will discuss *The Ruler* (exerting control) and *The Hero* (a loner who keeps going through obstacles).³⁵

For Bella, the archetypes discussed are *The Regular Guy/Gal* (trying to belong with a fear of standing out) and *The Innocent* (somebody who retains or renews faith). *The Explorer* (focussed on maintaining independence) will also be mentioned.³⁶

Archetypically Edward/Bella

Twilight presents readers with “[t]he roles of hero and worshipper [...] gendered male and female respectively,”³⁷ as readers would expect from a romance. Bella is ever adoring. Edward presents as Byronic Hero, the “‘ceaselessly brooding’ mysterious men, with a ‘tragedy in the past [...] embittering them forever.’”³⁸ Edward’s tragedy is his attraction to the one human girl he can barely resist killing. Like the Byronic Heroes before him, “he is prone to gloomy moods, bizarre and extravagant gestures, and sudden fits of rage.”³⁹

The Hero archetype in marketing is usually a courageous character, often used for its potential for positive change.⁴⁰ The Byronic Hero in literature embodies all the negative potential of this archetype. He is what happens when the hero “filters out useful criticism” and “just keeps going,”⁴¹ which is precisely what Edward does.

At the start of the story, he tries to ignore Bella, having decided his attraction to her will be fatal to one of them. Yet, he does not take any helpful action for change. He does not talk to his family. He does not permanently leave Forks. He does not hold his breath for any length of time. Crucially, readers only learn of his attempts for any of these examples in book five, *Midnight Sun*, published 15 years after *Twilight*, which reads like a reaction to readers’ feedback, such as pointing out the fact that Edward’s struggle to resist Bella’s scent could easily be resolved because vampires in *Twilight* do not need to breathe. If Edward wanted to avoid Bella’s apparently irresistible scent he could do so by holding his breath in her presence, but as Edward puts it, using patriarchal norms in his defence: “I may not be human, but I am a man.”⁴²

³⁵ Margaret Mark and Carol S. Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw* (McGraw-Hill, 2001), 13.

³⁶ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 13.

³⁷ Wilt, *Women Writers*, 6.

³⁸ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 24.

³⁹ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 33.

⁴⁰ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 110.

⁴¹ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 110/1.

⁴² Meyer, *Twilight*, 311.

Edward then ignores Rosalie's warnings about the danger his decisions could mean for the family. Finally, he keeps ignoring Bella's wishes, whether it is something she wants, like become a vampire, or something she does not want, like going to prom.

The same behaviour that marks Edward as a coercive controller also makes him a successful capitalist. Signs of the Cullens' material success are everywhere, which leads back to the marketing discussion, as organisations manifesting this problematic aspect of the hero archetype in marketing or work structure burn out their staff who are expected to keep going.⁴³ Edward works the same way, burning out Bella to the point where the human girl dies for the vampire she becomes. Edward as a character fits *The Hero*⁴⁴ archetype by embodying its negative aspects. While Edward is not a typical hero, a hero is what readers expect in a romance and *Twilight* delivers in a specific way.

Most characters fit more than one archetype and one that obviously fits Edward is *The Ruler*.⁴⁵ This archetype is about taking responsibility and putting procedures, policies and customs into place.⁴⁶ The more positive aspects of *The Ruler* archetype are embodied by Carlisle, the other *Ruler* in the Cullen clan. Edward's character once again embodies the negative aspects of the archetype. He always is or at least tries to be in control. His behaviour towards Bella is often controlling and Bella modifies her own behaviour to better suit Edward's needs. Yet, Edward does follow the societal model behaviour set by Carlisle, by living as "vegetarian vampire."

Again, there's a capitalist angle: "The Ruler as an archetype [...] helps individuals become wealthy, powerful, and established in [...] their communities,"⁴⁷ which readers see both in Carlisle and Edward. Carlisle is the head of the family, the only one who has created vampires before Bella, and a successful physician. Aside from his job, there are only hints that Alice's ability to see the future makes every investment a risk-free participation in capitalism, giving credit to Marx's assessment that capital ought to be regarded as a vampire.⁴⁸

This dichotomy demonstrates "how monstrosity is performative"⁴⁹ on multiple levels: Carlisle rules the Cullen clan but his behaviour consistently performs the "good vampire." In *Twilight*, as in other YA stories, "vampiric monstrosity is narrated as disconnected from vampirism itself."⁵⁰ Edward shows varying

⁴³ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 112.

⁴⁴ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 13.

⁴⁵ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 13.

⁴⁶ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 206.

⁴⁷ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 247.

⁴⁸ Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* (Kritik der politischen Ökonomie. Bd. 1, 1867).

⁴⁹ Eric Parisot, *Jane Austen and Vampires* (Palgrave Gothic, 2024), 17.

⁵⁰ Stasiewicz-Bieñkowska, "Love, Violence, and Consent," 1283.

performances by, on the one hand, following Carlisle's rules as a member of the family but, on the other hand, then setting his own rules for his relationship with Bella. This "blurring accentuates the flaws in vampiric existence."⁵¹

Edward's approach to performing monstrosity highlights another capitalist aspect of marketing theory visible in *Twilight*. A contemporary real-life *Ruler* brand is *Volvo*, which presents the car as both the responsible choice for passenger safety and a power-tool overcoming any obstacle.⁵² The brand is specifically mentioned as Edward's car of choice multiple times in the narrative. This is unlikely to be a coincidence. It functions as a material mirror of Edward's behaviour claiming to be chiefly concerned for Bella's safety, while controlling every aspect of her life.

The entire story shows capitalism's eternal growths principle: cars, fashion, even houses, are single-use items to the Cullens. Vampirism is the end-result of capitalism. Kelly Budruweit asserts: "the whole series could be read as a means of inducting women into consumer culture."⁵³

All actions by all characters are driven by loss aversion.⁵⁴ Bella's fear of losing Edward keeps her anxious at all times but with each developmental step she gets a reward that is accumulative in nature: relationship, marriage, motherhood, and, finally, her wish of becoming a vampire and, thus, literal eternity. Bella gains nothing short of perfection by following her own personal American dream.

Bella's daughter becomes the embodiment of the narrative's romance, as "we see less of the sublimity of horror and more of the gentleness of beauty in Renesmee."⁵⁵ Both, Bella and *Twilight* readers, can say in the end: "by closing our collective eyes against the blood and gore affiliated with the traditional vampire child and conveniently forgetting the pain of Bella's childbirth experience, [we] embrace a perfect, nearly-eternal child."⁵⁶

Despite its vampirism and the violence involved in creating it, the nuclear family model presented by Bella, Edward and Renesmee is the romance fiction anomaly that shows the "happily-ever-after part" before the narrative ends. The nuclear family is also the marker of proof that the story must be a romance, as

⁵¹ Sarah Olive, "'Vanguard Taste and Fashion Spirit': Feminist Responses to Twenty-First Century, Western Zeitgeist in Vampire Romeo and Juliet Texts," in *Young Adult Gothic Fiction: Monstrous Selves/Monstrous Others*, ed. Michelle J. Smith and Kristine Moruzi (University of Wales Press, 2021), 79.

⁵² Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 248.

⁵³ Kelly Budruweit, "Twilight's Heteronormative Reversal of the Monstrous: Utopia and the Gothic Design," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 27, no. 2 (2016): 284.

⁵⁴ Melina Palmer, *What Your Customer Wants and Can't Tell You: Unlocking Consumer Decisions With The Science Of Behavioral Economics* (Mango Publishing Group, 2021), Chapter 9.

⁵⁵ Lisa Nevárez, "What to Expect When You Are Expecting (a Vampire): Reading the Vampire Child," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 26 no. 1 (2015): 108.

⁵⁶ Nevárez, "What to Expect," 108.

the common romance goal of the “happy nuclear family” is achieved within the narrative.⁵⁷ As wife and mother, Bella meets “the traditional markers for female maturity,”⁵⁸ albeit as a vampire.

In terms of marketing archetype, Bella is both *The Innocent* and *The Regular Gal*.⁵⁹ This might sound very obvious and, as such, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that this is indeed the crux to the story’s appeal to a wide range of audiences. Bella as *The Innocent* lives entirely in the present and has absolute “faith in authority,”⁶⁰ often that authority is Edward but whenever Bella believes herself to be right nobody can tell her otherwise; not her friends, her parent and not even Edward.

Edward claims to want Bella to be *The Explorer*⁶¹ (“I want you to be human.”⁶²). He is nearly the only one pushing Bella towards a human life experience, encouraging her to go to college. Rosalie later supports Bella’s experiencing pregnancy and motherhood. These things combine to make the character an appealing idea to a surprising audience. Bella’s embodiment of *The Innocent* goes hand in hand with *The Regular Gal* she sees herself as.

Her worst fear is standing out, though that is precisely what she does compared to average teenagers, when she runs the single-parent household for either parent, has an after-school job, keeps up with her school-work and maintains a fairly standard teenage social circle. *Twilight* again shows readers the problematic side of the archetype in Bella. *The Regular Gal/Guy* can become “the victim who is willing to be abused rather than be alone.”⁶³ The archetype seems to attract stalker behaviour, as the desire to blend in becomes the very detail that enables *The Ruler* archetype to remain in control. That is what readers see in *Twilight* and it is underpinned by Edward’s violent fantasies about Bella described in *Midnight Sun*. The characters of Edward and Bella fit the potential perpetrator and victim behaviour in the marketing archetypes described, “advancing a regressive attitude towards gender norms and romantic relationships.”⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Candace R. Benefiel, “Blood Relations: The Gothic Perversion of the Nuclear Family in Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 38, no. 2 (2004): 263–64, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.2004.00111.x>.

⁵⁸ Jones, “Contemporary Bildungsromans,” 440.

⁵⁹ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 13.

⁶⁰ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 66.

⁶¹ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 13.

⁶² Meyer, *Twilight*, 495.

⁶³ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 169.

⁶⁴ Day, “Rock Star Rochester,” 112.

Why These Archetypes Work

Basic story-telling is key to understanding why these problematic characters appeal and why the book is labelled a romance: Stories showing “unfulfilled yearnings might lead people to respond on a deeper level to what’s missing”⁶⁵ in the readers’ own lives, be it romance, adventure or danger. *Twilight* appeals to a predominately female YA audience who see themselves as *The Regular Guy/Gal*. They may object to being considered *The Innocent* that is clearly part of the *Twilight* narrative but they often long to be *The Explorer*.

The adult readership is likely women looking for me-time escapism. This is a reader who already knows who she is. She is not looking for a reflection of herself. The story has to “speak to the person she wants to become.”⁶⁶ Women are likely to feel trivialized “when they encounter yet another portrayal of the overworked, frantic, wife-mother-career woman.”⁶⁷ In the words of William Hughes “there may be an element of wanting to preserve the gains of feminism – autonomy, confidence about sexuality, and so on – while, in fantasy, to relinquish some of the anxieties that autonomy can bring.”⁶⁸ This is embodied by Bella as a teenager who competently runs the household and keeps up with her school work, while emphasising her love-story above all.

When Bella falls pregnant, she becomes an uber-mother: from the first sign of her pregnancy to the final show-down with the Volturi she is the “good mother in Meyer’s novels [is] willing to sacrifice herself for her family.”⁶⁹ Bella is never a role model and rather than identifying with her, audiences tend to view Bella as a stand-in. Studies focussed on audience reception highlight that “Bella serves only as an avatar through which the audience can vicariously experience being the object of such intense desire.”⁷⁰ It seems audiences do not aspire to be Bella, they just want to escape into the fantasy of her world.

The romance label is applied to evoke associations of contemporary romance, namely “the story of the development of a love relationship between hero and heroine.”⁷¹ Readers choose books with expectations, based on their reading habits, which is what marketing utilises.⁷² The story then takes readers into a Gothic Novel type of romance. The marketing of the book simplifies choices into a targeted

⁶⁵ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 278.

⁶⁶ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 281.

⁶⁷ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 39.

⁶⁸ Hughes, “Demon Lovers.”

⁶⁹ Silver, “*Twilight* Is Not Good For Maidens,” 131.

⁷⁰ Tager and Nell, “A Vampire and a Damsel in Distress,” 87.

⁷¹ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 40.

⁷² Palmer, *What Your Customer Wants*, 180.

category.⁷³ Readers are not expected to be familiar with 600 years of literary history of Gothic Novels and romance stories.

The explanation of the toxic relationship is deemed too complex for readers to engage pre-purchase. If the potential readers' brains get overwhelmed⁷⁴ they will not pick up the book. Yet, the shorthand of "horror" would attract a different readership that is not the target audience. Marketing knows that people do not want to be judged and recognises safety in numbers as "Herding."⁷⁵ Teenagers are likely to read romance at some point. If one's peers read romance, not horror, one avoids standing out by not admitting to reading horror. A horror book branded as romance circumvents this, and the sub-genre of "paranormal romance" has lived in a liminal space since the 1980s.⁷⁶

Horror audiences, who might avoid romance, will happily read a controversial text, romance or not. The romance label in combination with the content means that *Twilight* does not have anything to lose in terms of attracting its primary as well as its secondary readership. Crawford states: "*Twilight* was controversial because of its success"⁷⁷ but it was also successful because it was and is controversial.

The narrative supports this as all romance markers are matched to a corresponding horror trope. For example, the nuclear family of Edward, Bella and Renesmee sits beside the Cullen clan overall, a vampire family that "isolated from human society by its extreme longevity and its essential otherness, becomes an intensely inwardly directed unit."⁷⁸ Bella's schoolmates point out that the Cullen kids do not mix with the rest of the school kids and that they are "together together," rather than siblings.

Horror readers who are not the target audience will come to the text because of the controversy. By choosing to market the book as romance, *Twilight* caters to "contemporary demands for conventional romantic narratives"⁷⁹ and, yet, its readers have been exposed to the potential of horror because *Twilight* does present a contemporary example of Gothic stories depicting problematic relationships with supernatural creatures.

Of course, readers as real people are more complex than simplified marketing categories. There is no "imaginary, wholly passive reader of *Twilight*."⁸⁰ Indeed, "fans are not the dribbling, insipid, Edward addicts they are often made out to be."⁸¹

⁷³ Palmer, *What Your Customer Wants*, 142.

⁷⁴ Palmer, *What Your Customer Wants*, 142.

⁷⁵ Palmer, *What Your Customer Wants*, 112.

⁷⁶ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 61.

⁷⁷ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 181.

⁷⁸ Benefiel, "Blood Relations," 263.

⁷⁹ Day, "Rock Star Rochester," 120.

⁸⁰ Silver, "*Twilight* Is Not Good For Maidens," 137.

⁸¹ Natalie Wilson, *Seduced by Twilight: The Allure and Contradictory Messages of the Popular Saga* (MacFarland, 2011), 2.

Thus, *Twilight* may, possibly by accident, have highlighted the toxicity of its narrative content and led readers away from romance towards horror and Gothic Novels where love “is just as likely to fail.”⁸² It is now both “a story of lovers”⁸³ and a “widely read Gothic fiction.”⁸⁴ For all that the narrative lacks “the transgressive [...] nature of the Gothic,” a romantic story that “upholds patriarchy”⁸⁵ is hardly unique across Gothic fiction.

The literary marriage of genres is more than “a twist which gives romance novels [...] a market advantage.”⁸⁶ It is only the beginning of the *Twilight* story in much the same way as the story of Edward and Bella’s relationship does not end with their wedding.⁸⁷ In the 21st century, “[t]he vampire, which used to indicate an alignment with the sub-cultural, after all, has conquered the mainstream.”⁸⁸ Stephenie Meyer does something not dissimilar to what Bram Stoker did with *Dracula*: the *Twilight* narrative utilises a multitude of details that evoke disgust “and keeps the reader engaged, attracted and repelled at the same time.”⁸⁹ As Mathias Clasen has observed with regard to *Dracula*: “As soon as disgust-elicitors are safely distanced, for example by being fictitious, they awaken curiosity as well as revolt.”⁹⁰

Thus, regardless of how many scholars or lay readers may complain about *Twilight*, it is and remains one of those stories that audiences love to hate.

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⁸² Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 36.

⁸³ Wilt, *Women Writers*, 5.

⁸⁴ Wilt, *Women Writers*, 22.

⁸⁵ Lukić and Matek, *Bella and the Beast*, 85.

⁸⁶ Lukić and Matek, *Bella and the Beast*, 89.

⁸⁷ Silver, “*Twilight* Is Not Good For Maidens,” 123.

⁸⁸ Limpár, *Masculinity, Visibility*, 282.

⁸⁹ Mathias Clasen, “Attention, Predation, Counterintuition: Why Dracula Won’t Die.” *Style* 46, no. 3–4 (2012): 389.

⁹⁰ Clasen, “Attention, Predation, Counterintuition,” 389.

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