

Subverting the Normal: A Reading of Stephenie Meyer's Twilight Series

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Vampire stories always remain a fascination down centuries getting its due share in various genres of literature. The word vampire is traditionally believed to be a reanimated body of a dead soul believed to return from the grave in the dark and suck the blood of persons asleep. There are numerous blood chilling stories about the dead coming to life and wreaking their vengeance and sucking blood of humans. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* says:

The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment – of time, a feeling and a place. The monsters' body quite literally incorporates, fear, desire, anxiety and fantasy, giving them life and an uncanny independence. (4)

The vampire literature comes under the genre of Gothic literature. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1765) is considered to be the first Gothic novel, which became enormously popular. This resulted an avalanche of such works and soon became a recognizable genre. Ann Radcliffe came out as the most popular writer of this genre. Her best works *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and *The Italian* (1797). She gave elaborate description of lonely landscapes, frightening atmosphere and scary villains. The main ingredients of the gothic novel are mystery, horror, and the supernatural. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* with the subtitle *The Modern Prometheus* became immensely popular. According to Karen F. Stein in *Monsters and Madwomen: Changing Female Gothic*:

Frankenstein's creation of the unnamed monster is a kind of birth; but it is an unholy, unnatural genesis, a creation of the body, but of mind of its maker. Scientist sins by divorcing his intellect from his feelings: he cuts himself off from all human society and even from the possibility of sympathy for his monstrous production."(123) Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horrors* says, "the abject has only one quality of the object- that of being opposed to I. (1)

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* published in 1897 exerted tremendous influence on fiction and films down ages. *Dracula* became the epitome of fear, a horrifying monster who enjoyed spreading fear and feeding on human blood. The vampires were represented as predatory and horrifying creatures. The traditional vampires were said to have hunted human prey at night to satisfy their blood thirst. The concept of vampires changed dramatically over centuries. The blood thirsty, emotionless vampire gave way to more sympathetic, more humane more good looking ones. This transformed vampires are more or less similar to human beings or they metaphorically represent the modern human beings who suppress evil instincts within themselves. There has been a process of humanization or domestication of the vampires in contemporary fiction

The new concept of vampires seems to owe its origin to Ann Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*. Stephenie Meyer's *The Twilight Series* is a tetralogy and can be considered as a postmodern work within the realm of fantastic literature. Meyer redefines the conventional concept of vampires. The vampires presented in the *Twilight Series* are entirely different from the conventional concept of the frightening bloodsucker. The *Series* present fair and handsome vampires who are more or less similar to human beings. Though they look like humans, they do possess some typical vampirish characteristics. They sparkle in sunlight due to crystalline properties and are immortal beings. They have flawless skin though with a strong and hard texture. These vampires do not evoke dread in readers like in the conventional vampire stories

Edward, the protagonist in the *Twilight Series* glitters in the sun much to the envy of his friends. The colour of his eye changes according to situations. For example, it changes to black when he is hungry. Bella the heroine identifies his eye color as black. She says, “I’d noticed that his eyes were black — coal black.” (*Eclipse* 61). These vampires are unaffected by any regular natural changes. Neither their nails nor their hair grow as ordinary human beings. More than the looks, the vampire family Cullens become the target of envy of others for their wealth and happiness. Rosalind who herself is a good looking vampire says, “I didn’t like Dr. Cullen or his wife and her brother as Edward pretended to be then. It had upset me that they were all more beautiful than I was, especially that the men were” (*Eclipse* 143). Cullen family had decided to suppress their vampire nature and spread human qualities.

The *Twilight Series* portrays the love of a teenager, Bella, a human towards a vampire, Edward who is more than hundred years elder than her. This comes out as an unnatural love story as Edward should consider Bella as his prey. There are occasions in which Edward has to deliberately control his urge to drink Bella’s blood. Hence in *the Series*, being good or evil is a decision an individual makes. The author tries to convey metaphorically that in every individual there is mixture of both good and evil traits the predominance of them depends upon the decision of the individual.

Edward, the vampire is apprehensive of the safety of his girl friend Bella from other evil vampires.. He is also scared of her safety from himself and his own family. He warns Bella of the consequences of their affair and asks her to keep away from him. Bella, being a human had other plans when she chose Edward, the vampire. More than being in love she wanted to earn immortality by being a vampire. She is not satisfied with her human existence. She is lured by the eternal life of the vampires. Bella is fascinated by the immortality of the vampires. She comments on the age of Edward, “Edward sometimes spoke with unfamiliar cadences and phrases that better fit the style of a turn of a century novel than of a twenty first century class room” (*Twilight* 50).

Stephenie Meyer in her *Twilight Series* makes an attempt to transgress archetypal images of vampire in people’s mind. The traditional myth of vampire is subverted throughout the series especially through the portrayal of Cullen family Besides, Edward Cullen comes across as an extremely caring and self- sacrificing noble vampire in his relationship with Bella. Here vampires are portrayed in such a way that they deserve public attention. He is more humane than Bella, the human.

The writer upholds the traditional family concept. Bella takes a dangerous decision to become a vampire by marrying Edward because she wanted to be a part of the happy Cullen family. She was so desolate and lonely in her life and she believed her life would become complete by marrying Edward. Bella seems to be in search of filling her emotional vacuum and a kind of paranoia she had in her life. She always had illusions of death which she wanted to overcome by becoming an immortal vampire. This can be seen as a mature woman’s ambition of achieving her goals. She manipulated her way to fulfill her ambition. Regarding her relation with Edward she says, “I love him. Not because he is beautiful or because he’s rich... I’d much rather he weren’t either one. I would even out the gap between us just a bit-because he’d still be the most loving and unselfish and brilliant and dissent person I ever met”(New Moon 113). Her ultimate aim to embrace vampirism is to attain immortality and wealth.

Apparently she is a loving, caring, sacrificing girl who yearns for love. She is a perfect embodiment of the traditional gendered role upholding traditional values, , dependent and submissive. On a deeper scrutiny her real intentions gets unraveled and she emerges as more devilish with her ulterior selfish motives. Bella, though human turns out to be the most vampirish of all the characters. She is extremely ambitious and manipulates others to achieve her goals. She was in search for the ideal and got it fulfilled when she met Edward Cullen, the Vampire. Bella is the product of a dysfunctional, broken home, and the strong family bonds of the Cullens, lures her to be its member. Bella finds that it is very significant and good luck to have strong family ties. She obviously lacks the innocence which the Vampires in the *Series* are bestowed with.

She was erotically engaged with Jacob before she finally decided on Edward. She does not have any scruples in having two lovers simultaneously. She basked in the love of both Jacob and Edward, not willing to leave either of them. Jacob had complete faith in her which was proved wrong later. She says, “He thought time and

patience would change me, and, though I knew he was dead wrong, I also knew that I would let him try” (*New Moon* 192). Racial concern too creeps in the choice between Jacob and Edward. Jacob is a native American with copper skin, black hair and black eyes. While Edward has white skin and is rich and fashionable from the upper strata of the society. The romantic choice between Edward and Jacob therefore hides implicit issues of class, race and colour.

The character aberration of Bella can be attributed to the circumstance she was brought up. She was made to believe that she is a damsel in distress and she wallowed in self pity. Her evil machinations reaches its zenith after her deceptive romantic liaison with Jacob. Instead of seeking Edwards’s forgiveness or feeling guilty for her actions, she hysterically pleads with Edward to make her forget Jacob by losing themselves in passion which would provide her with a distraction. She hoped to gain Edward’s forgiveness in return for her sexual favours. She scrambled into his lap, throwing her arms around him saying:

I don’t care it is cold here. I don’t care that I stink like a dog right now. Make me forget how awful I am. Make me forget him. Make me forget my own name. I didn’t wait for him to decide-or to have the chance to tell me he wasn’t interested in a cruel, faithless monster like me. I pulled myself against him and crushed my mouth to his snow- cold lips.” (*Eclipse* 475)

Later she makes the whole Cullen family risk their lives for her safety when another vampire attacks her. In her usual way she apologies for all the troubles caused due to her though deep in her heart she was enjoying the risks that others were taking for her.

She is ready to manipulate anyone to attain her goal. Power, beauty, pleasure are placed above any human values. Selfish to the core, she signifies the deterioration of humans values. Bella is the embodiment of monstrosity as monstrous thoughts rules her. At last Bella achieves what she strives even though she renounces her human life. Bella represents modern humans who are free of any conscience or principles in getting what they want.

In *Twilight Series*, Meyer dismantles the conventional treatment given to vampire characters and portrays them in a altogether different perspective. The abnormality is given a normal association, while normal is depicted as abnormal. Bella , though human, has more vampire qualities then the actual vampires in the *Series*. Meyer portrays vampires as ideal and humane. Meyer takes the reader back to a twilight world of vampires which they can enjoy a Vampire Opera. This subversion made it different from traditional narratives. Stephenie Meyer through her *Twilight Series* subverts and re-defines the conventional vampire images and portrays an all together new version of the vampire narrative.

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