

ABSTINENCE, SEXUALITY AND GOTHICISM: AN INSIGHT INTO STEPHENIE MEYER'S TWILIGHT SAGA.

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Abstract: Examining the *Twilight Saga* as a Gothic helps us to understand the behaviour of Edward and Bella better. This perspective is necessary because *Twilight*'s romantic plot is intertwined with several challenging features of a woman's position that are incompatible with the basic romantic plot. This paper interprets these traits through Gothic reading, producing new insights into *Twilight Saga* of how Gothicism and romance are in conflict. This paper tries to answer the question of why sexuality in *Twilight* is complex debateable by analysing female sexuality. The paper compares Edward and Bella's compatibility with the Gothic stereotypes and how each of them violates the traditional Gothic conventions.

Index Terms Twilight Saga, sexuality, Gothicism, romance.

Introduction

Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Saga* is a celebrated young-adult novel where the protagonists Bella and Edward are presented as a great manifestation of romantic love. As a series, *Twilight Saga* may affect young people's perceptions of relationships and gender roles. It's important that *Twilight Saga* is explored beyond its romance. Examining the *Twilight Saga* as a Gothic helps us to understand the behaviour of Edward and Bella better. This perspective is necessary because *Twilight*'s romantic plot is intertwined with several challenging features of a woman's position that are incompatible with the basic romantic plot. This paper interprets these traits through Gothic reading, producing new insights into *Twilight Saga* of how Gothicism and romance are in conflict. This paper tries to answer the question of why sexuality in *Twilight* is complex debateable by analysing female sexuality. The paper compares Edward and Bella's compatibility with the Gothic stereotypes and how each of them violates the traditional Gothic conventions.

Abstinence Vs Sexual Desires

The traditional conflict in contemporary romance is in the sexual struggle between the heroine and the hero. Edward's main job is to arouse the Bella's sexual desires. It is part of the plot that Edward is sometimes grumpy. He as a vampire is a natural seducer, in turn he rejects Bella. This is often due to his previous relationship with a vampire woman and the resulting vulnerability. This is brought to the fore at the beginning of the novel, and is later recalled with the intention of emphasizing that both Bella and Edward go through a difficult process as they mature before surrendering to love (Cohn 1988, 113–114). Edward has no previous human female experience, thus the internal conflict is all about Bella's vulnerability as a human and him being a vampire. Edward considers vampires soulless, which is why the burden he bears is all the heavier. Edward fears hurting Bella, but his repulsive behaviour is also explained by his Victorian upbringing. Focusing on the desire of the heroine and the fulfilment of her desires *Twilight Saga* follows the conventions of a romantic novel. *Twilight Saga* can be seen essentially as a narrative of sexual awakening and a longing for an intimate relationship placed in a magical realism coloured by supernatural beings where vampires are part of our world. *Twilight Saga* is erotic in nature and full of dangers. Until Bella and Edward's wedding night, the series plays with sexuality and desire. The greatest difficulty in their relationship stems from their sexual desires, which they both have to more or less suppress until the wedding night for the first three books of the series. Joyce Ann Mercer points out that *Twilight Saga* focus on graphic erotic descriptions, yet the first kiss is preceded by 281 pages. This is how the series focuses desire, expectation and its inevitable intensity (Mercer 2011, 272). Christine Seifert is calling *Twilight Saga* as abstinence porn, which he classifies as a surprising subtype of teen romance. *Twilight* actually convinces us that self-denial is hot. Fan reaction suggests that in the beginning, Edward and Bella's chaste but sexually charged relationship was steamy precisely because it was unconsummated. Problem with the *Saga*'s sexuality lies in how it leans on the eroticism of abstinence and expectation. The more its sexual charge builds, the more pages are consumed without fulfilment, the more the reader expects it. When Bella and Edward finally go all the way, there is nothing left to expect.

Breaking Dawn offers perhaps an end to the fairy-tale fantasy. Three books without sex, three largely romantic books creating a picture of a romantic couple, and suddenly the last part of a series that pours everything against the reader's face in its drama. Gothic raises its head. Bella's bruises after the wedding night, Bella's tough and nightmarish pregnancy and death on the maternity table are quite different from what the previous parts of the series have made the reader expect. Bella's rebirth as a vampire, a child, her own home and the role of a wife leave Bella in a still life that Seifert compares to 50s housewives - with the exception that Bella has gnashing teeth. Seifert submits that *Breaking Dawn* is unable to maintain the eroticism of the book series anymore, as its entire

sexual download has been based specifically on expectation (2009, 24). Bella is virgin bride and she can also be seen as representing an ideal according to the True Love Waits movement. Stephenie Meyer herself is not part of the True Love Waits movement, but her outlook on Mormon life comes close to its ideas. The principles of the movement include the promise of sexual abstinence, and also the promise of abstaining from all sexual activity, including sexual thoughts. Bella's thoughts in the *Saga* are, according to such an ideology is unclean. Bella is also unwilling to curb her sexual drive. On the contrary, Bella's aim is to realize her own desires, which represents a young person's sexuality within the framework of celibacy. Thus, the series is acceptable to non-supporters of ideologies such as the True Love Waits movement (Kokkola 2011, 169).

The series acknowledges female sexuality but keeps it in check. It also points out that Bella is open about her sexuality. Bella informs Edward directly of her demand for sex: 'Getting married is a stretch for me. I'm not giving in unless I get something in return' (E, 395). Even Edward's small gestures cause Bella's heart to pound. In *Twilight*, where Edward leans close and smells Bella's bare neck and exclaims 'Just because I'm resisting the wine doesn't mean I can't appreciate the bouquet. You have a very floral smell, like Lavender... or freesia. It's mouthwatering' (T, 267), he is referring to the desires aroused in him by the scent of Bella. The sexual attraction experienced by the Bella is described in the romantic novel as a frightening experience. Sexuality in a contemporaneous romantic novel is a powerful force and means for the heroine and the hero to come closer together (Cohn 1988, 119).

Gothic and Sexuality

Twilight Saga, alongside romantic literature, is often classified, at least in parts, as Gothic. The central themes of Gothicism, monetarism, body, metamorphosis, anxiety, sexuality, and romance reflect themes related to youth and adulthood and critical research in Gothic sees sexuality and gender at the heart of Gothic (James 2009, 117). Looking at the *Saga* with gothic features of love affairs the series' sexuality rises to be one of the most important things. Gothic basically reinforces dominant sexual ideologies. This is also repeated in the *Twilight Saga*, although typical sexual behaviour is modified. Bella's sexuality is tied to Edward. Edward decides when, where, how far, and on what terms Bella will be able to fulfil her sexual desires. In traditional Gothic, the heroine protects her integrity, however *Twilight Saga* their life is the opposite. Edward protects Bella's chastity and defines the limits of this sexuality. On closer inspection, the setup is almost the same. With the patriarchal system and being a woman prevents the heroine from giving in to her own sexuality. According to Angela Tengan, a woman's sexuality is in the hands of male power, and Bella's body is indeed comparable to property which is in control of Edward showcasing the preceding literary tradition of men's ownership over women (2011, 113).

Masculine desire manifests itself as a selfish frenzy and masculine right. Achieving equal encounter of desires is possible only through the power structures of masculine power and ownership (Mercer 2011, 275). Bella's awakening sexuality is visible and comes out as powerful eruptions. Bella's first kiss surprises her with her intensity: "What neither of us was prepared for was my response. Blood boiled under my skin, burned my lips. My breath came in a wild gasp. My fingers knotted in his hair, Clutching him to me. My lips parted as I breathed in his heady scent" (T, 247). Bella's reactions to Edward's touch are described as partly unintentional. When Edward gets to kiss Bella, it's hard to break away and remember the world around him or its people. Bella's strong sexuality violates the traditional Gothic and patriarchal still life, where the man is sexual and the heroine is passive and sensitive, and bound by the boundaries of social norms. With Edward's help, Bella's sexuality settles within the confines of patriarchal society, as Bella learns to restrain herself, knowing that when she gets too excited about kissing, Edward just retreats. Kokkola (2011, 166). Ashley Donnelly compares Bella's sexuality and Edward as its controller to masculine power as a curb for wild femininity. The man represents culture, the woman represents nature. It is the job of a man to civilize a woman. Mercer is on the same line and argues that the transfer of responsibility for safety and morality to Edward relieves Bella of responsibility. Bella can surrender to her own desires while Edward controls the situation (Mercer 2011, 272). To control Bella Edward e.g. holds this in place and orders Bella to stop attempting to take off her clothes (E, 399). Bella's search for her own identity and autonomy can be seen in two steps. The first stage involves awakening Bella's sexuality, leading Bella to choose the path to death. Bella's death and rebirth as a vampire provide the framework for Bella's ultimate autonomy. Death introduces Bella to a new kind of femininity and free sexuality. James argues that the role of death in the subspecies of fantasy blurs the line between reality and sleep and the supernatural, breaks family structures, and separates the child from the adult, order from disorder, etc. (James 2009, 113–114) This is exactly the case with Bella. She dies in childbirth, which is her last act before real adulthood and motherhood, into which she is reborn as a vampire. Bella gives birth to a child and herself at the same time.

Having sex with a vampire is already a bad thing, but neglecting contraception is negligence. Bella retains her innocence. In *Twilight*, the reason for neglecting contraception does not fall on Bella's shoulders. When dealing with teenage pregnancy *Twilight Saga* highlights not only the sexual awakening of a young woman, but also its consequences. *Breaking Dawn* wraps up the horror of pregnancy and detailed descriptions of Bella's deteriorating condition. *Breaking Dawn* is also a powerful thesis against abortion. Bella refuses to have an abortion, although the hybrid fetus in her womb is, according to all the information gathered by the Cullens, a certain death for Bella. Bella would rather choose her own death than hurt the fetus. However, Bella's instinct hits right, and the child is not a monster as expected. The end result justifies Bella's radical choice. In a traditional Burmese story, the story would end in Bella's death, as Groper (2011) suggests. This would serve as a moral teaching about the dangers of aggressive sexual behavior and choosing the wrong partner in a Gothic novel. However, Bella's life doesn't end in death, as Edward turns dying Bella into a vampire. For Bella, turning vampire is a prize and saves her from the fate of a fallen woman. While rescuing Bella, Edward also saves himself. The fate of the Byronian hero, whom Edward inevitably compares to as a vampire, is in the Gothic tradition of living with the pain caused by the death of a woman he loves. *Twilight Saga* breaks the tradition of the Byronian hero and fallen woman and ends with a happier ending more typical of a different kind of Gothic but also romantic novel. The heroine, who has chosen a man who is inappropriate in every way for herself in the first place, gets a fairy-tale like ending where order and balance are restored. In *Twilight* however, the theme of the same as in Gothic; purity and protection of virginity are still desirable. Men - or vampires - are dangerous and threatening, while women are still fragile and vulnerable, as Anna Silver (2010, 129) suggests.

The romantic interpretation of the series suggests that Bella finds her true mate and fulfilment in Edward. This emphasizes Edward as the right Choice under the convention of the Romantic Novel. Examination of sexuality *Twilight* reveals the gender roles that Edward controls Bella's intense sexuality. This is how Bella's sexuality settles into place according to the patriarchal worldview. Bella as a Hybrid in relation to Edward, who represents a different species, through sex, leads to Bella's death. Bella, on the other hand her transformation from a mortal being to an immortal vampire could be viewed through as a myth. The tension between the romantic and Gothic novels, could also be observed using Alastair Fowler's concept of mode / genre. In that case, gothic could be viewed as a genre in the romantic *Twilight*. Exploring *Saga* through different m perspective methods has proved that it has created a new, holistic study on the romantic plot and problematic sexuality.

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