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Ann Thurber Date

Bite Me: Desire and the Female Spectator in *Twilight*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *True Blood*

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An abstract of
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2011

Abstract

Bite Me: Desire and the Female Spectator in *Twilight*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *True Blood*

By Ann Thurber

In 2008 and 2009 the first *Twilight* film, the CW network television series *The Vampire Diaries,* and the cable HBO series *True Blood* debuted. With these debuts came a flood of obsessive interest—particularly heterosexual female interest—in vampire romance. What does it mean to consume vampire film and television and, in turn, be consumed by it? This thesis explores the connection between female desire and female spectatorship, arguing that the grouping represents a conflicted, yet decided, step toward female reclamation of Freud's infamous question, "What does a woman want?"

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Introduction

What Does a Woman Want?

Freud famously asked "What does a woman want?" and admitted that it was the one question he had not been able to answer. In Shoshana Felman's book, *What Does a Woman Want?: Reading and Sexual Difference*, Felman suggests a reclaiming of the question by the female reader.[1] In many ways, my work builds upon Shoshana Felman's investigation by asserting that a grouping of films and television programs—that were first novels and later adaptations of novels for a visual medium—allow for the possibility of reclaiming that very question.

This project focuses on the *Twilight* films, the CW network television series *The Vampire Diaries*, and the cable HBO series *True Blood*. The rationale behind this grouping stems primarily from three facts: (1) each began as a series of modern novels, (2) each exists within a visual medium, and (3) each debuted in their visual format within a year of one another (2008-2009). Additionally, while not always the case, there is a large crossover fandom that is equally passionate about each film or television program in my chosen grouping. But perhaps, most importantly, I propose that all three represent desires within the heterosexual female spectator that may offer new insight to "what a woman wants" and, more specifically "what a woman wants" at this precise moment in popular culture. By the heterosexual female spectator, I do not mean to suggest that all

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[1] [1] Shoshana Felman, What Does a Woman Want?: Reading and Sexual Difference, (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993)

spectators are the same, but merely to point to a particular brand of spectator who actively seeks out and enjoys the films and television programs this project is concerned with. The symbiotic relationship between these films/television programs and the female spectator suggests a possible shifting of not only the portrayal of female desire, but of the female's self definition, or even confusion, in regards to her desires.

The texts Shoshana Felman works with in her book feature a resistance to "male recognition, in unwittingly refusing to ground specularity as meaning, to serve as a narcissistic mirror for her [the female's] lover and thereby to reflect back simply and unproblematically man's value."[2] Keeping this in mind, I find *Twilight, The Vampire Diaries,* and quite often *True Blood* to be doing something beyond resistance. Female heroines, and through them, female spectators, move past resistance and, in many instances, turn the male vampire into an object that reflects back a woman's value. The mode of this reflection, unlike the female reflection of the male, is not simple or unproblematic, but it is perhaps a step toward exorcising the male mind[3] from literature, or in the case of my project, exorcising the male mind, from film and television. Yet, as will be discussed in the following chapters, the line between powerlessness and agency involved in this grouping of films and television programs is often fuzzy at best. This reclaiming is far from unproblematic and is indeed extremely complex. Felman suggests a level of madness in her chosen texts portrayed in the resistance to the male and I see a level of not only madness, but ambivalence and contradiction in the heroines of these visual vampire texts *and* in the female spectator.

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[2] Felman, 4
[3] Felman, 5

Through the years vampires have reigned over various historical cultural moments in folktales, literature, film, and television—representing spectatorial fears and spectatorial desires alike. The new wave of vampire literature, film, and television I am concerned with, flooded popular culture to the point that one could not walk into a bookstore or a movie theater without encountering some trace of the phenomenon. With this new wave came a new, yet familiar, archetype for the vampire itself. Romance and vampirism became inseparable and the fervor belonging to the fans of this vampire moment—particularly the heterosexual female fans—begs two questions in terms of the cultural significance of its popularity: (1) "why vampires?" and (2) "why now?" More precisely, if these visual texts do something specific towards a reclaiming of what a woman wants, why do vampires—and specifically these vampires who have similar characteristics to one another—hold such power over the female spectator in question? Vampires have existed long before the moment I am referring to, and it is possible to call it a genre cycle instead of a moment. But due to the mode in which the fan culture surrounding it has manifested itself and due to media treatment of the three as a group belonging to a phenomenon, I feel as if the term "moment" is most appropriate for the time being because the future of the phenomenon's course is not yet detrmined.

I first became aware of the approaching phenomenon in late 2007 while having dinner with family friends. During dinner, a nineteen-year-old girl recommended I read a novel about vampires called *Twilight*. I politely declined, informing her that I wasn't interested in horror or vampires for that matter. To which she argued that it was actually a romance about a vampire boy who loved a human girl. She added that I didn't need to worry about gore because the boy didn't drink human blood. I forgot about the book

until the spring of 2008 when I read an article (the source of which I cannot now remember) about *Twilight's* author, Stephenie Meyer, and it intrigued me enough to pick up the book and read it for myself.

What followed after my decision to buy a copy of the novel was a personal phenomenon that I still cannot fully explain. I devoured each book in the series rapidly, living in the world of Edward and Bella's love, while simultaneously ignoring nearly everything in my real life that might keep me from my reading time. Before then, my reading time had mostly consisted of obscure 18th Century authors with a heavy dose of English Romantic and Victorian literature. I awaited the release of the first *Twilight* film in eager anticipation and began seeking other forms of vampire romance such as the television series *True Blood* and the book series it was based on, the *Sookie Stackhouse* novels. As an educated, well read recent college graduate, I was slightly disturbed by my own interest in this growing phenomenon. I was employed as a temporary administrative coordinator in the Ball State University Women's Studies Program at the time and, to my surprise, I met several female professors in the program who were just as conflicted by their love of the series as I was. A particular professor felt that *Twilight* was setting back the feminist movement, yet she had every intention of buying a charm bracelet modeled after the one Bella wears in the third book, *Eclipse*.

As the films for *Twilight* were released and the phenomenon grew in popularity, I continued to feel unsettled by my strange attraction—and the strange attraction of so many well-educated women—to a series of novels, films, and television programs that were centered on over-the-top romance and vampires. It was here that my ideas for this project truly began to take root. Later, as I pursued my Master of Arts degree in Film

Studies at Emory University, I began working as an extra (or background actor) on the locally filmed television series, and newest addition to the vampire phenomenon, *The Vampire Diaries*. Through this unique part-time job, I was able to witness the phenomenon first-hand from within the phenomenon itself. I saw the throng of (mostly) female fans who lined the streets when we worked on location, snapping an overwhelming amount of pictures and blinding me with their flashes as they swooned over the male actors—often calling them by their vampire character names instead of their real names. They camped on the sidewalks with coolers, folding chairs, cameras, and binoculars—often staying out all night—for an opportunity to see something or someone connected to the series. Their dedication surpassed anything I had personally witnessed and it was unbelievable to me that they stayed to watch us for hours on end, hoping for a glimpse of one of the male leads who represented their ideal of vampire love. After hearing multiple stories from the actors and television crewmembers regarding fan encounters and fan dedication to the series, I knew that the current vampire phenomenon was something worth exploring academically.

The *Twilight* films alone prove that the phenomenon has staying power due to its continued growth. The website, *Box Office Mojo*, reported on the release of the third *Twilight* film, *Eclipse*, stating that the film, "ripped into the record books with its midnight launch, grossing over $30 million at more than 4,000 theaters. That surpassed The Twilight Saga: New Moon's previous benchmark of $26.3 million."[4] Furthermore, there is a level of mania surrounding the fandom that could be likened to that which is most often associated with the kind of fandom surrounding rock stars.

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[4] Brandon Gray, "Weekend Briefing: 'Eclipse' Rises with Record Release, Midnight Launch," Box Office Mojo, June 30, 2010, <http://boxofficemojo.com/news/?id=2843>

The fandom I refer to—largely comprised of females of varying ages—represents a demographic worth considering. They have latched onto this particular vampiric form of storytelling for a deeply felt reason or perhaps many deeply felt reasons. Actors from both *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries* have toured American malls, drawing large crowds of female fans. CNN.com reported that for *The Vampire Diaries* tour there was a "vibrating line of hysteria"[5] waiting to meet actors Paul Wesley and Ian Somerhalder who play the lead vampire heartthrobs in the series. CNN also notes that, "The girls at the mall were really into it. So were the two or three boys."[6] While this brand of vampirism isn't exclusively made up of female fans, the numbers certainly rest in the female majority. Although fan events are centered around the actors who portray the characters, these characters—specifically the males who portray vampires—often overshadow the actors who embody them. Robert Pattinson, the actor who portrays Edward Cullen in the *Twilight* films is frequently propositioned by females holding signs or wearing t-shirts that read, "bite me." *E! Online* reported that a seven year old girl asked Pattinson if he would bite her and Pattinson described the girl as being entirely serious.[7] A *Twilight* fan event at a mall (that was similar to *The Vampire Diaries* events) reached such levels of mania that many fans were left injured in an attempt to see the actors. MTV.com reported: "A scheduled event at the Stonestown Galleria in San Francisco with "Twilight" star Robert Pattinson was canceled Monday morning

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[5] Choire Sicha, "Inside the 'Vampire Diaries' Craze," CNN.com, Novemember 3, 2010, <http://articles.cnn.com/2010-11-03/entertainment/vampire.diaries.beast_1_miami-mall-vampire-diaries-dark-shadows/2?_s=PM:SHOWBIZ>

[6] Sicha

[7] Marc Malkin, "Robert Pattinson Talks Bare Bellies, Biting Strangers," E! Online, November 9, 2008 <http://www.eonline.com/uberblog/marc_malkin/b67923_robert_pattinson_talks_bare_bellies.html>

(November 10) when a crowd of roughly 3,000 fans quickly turned violent…"[8] But amidst all of the reports on the phenomenon of this fandom, my initial two questions still remain: why vampires and why now?

The aim of this project is to explore and uncover the complexities of this spectatorship—particularly examining it in terms of gender—in order to discover what this phenomenon says about female desires (what does a woman want?), the agency involved in those desires (do these films and television programs reclaim the question of what a woman wants?), and how those desires might be evolving (or not). I am purposely using websites and magazines in my research in conjunction with more traditional sources and critical texts in order to illustrate the popular culture significance surrounding my topic and in order to strengthen the evidence of my argument. Through close readings, psychoanalysis, and the use of academic and popular culture texts, I intend to tug at the threads of this phenomenon of the new vampire and unravel the mystery behind this reinvented mythological creature. By doing so, my intention is to offer new insight as to why the "new vampire" has captured the romantic imaginations and passions of a particular, yet widespread, group of heterosexual female spectators and to explore the tension represented in the very possibility of women reclaiming their desires.

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[8] Shawn Adler, "Twilight Even Turns Ugly When Thousands More Fans Show Up Than Expected," MTV.com, November 10, 2008, <http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1599052/twilight-event-canceled-after-becoming-chaotic.jhtml>

Chapter One

The New Vampire:
Byronic Heroes, Romantic Fantasies, and Female Spectators

Bella: *I know what you are.*
Edward: *Say it out loud. Say it.*
Bella: *Vampire.*

During the Hollywood studio era, the above dialogue might have led the spectator to believe they were watching a horror film. The very word "vampire" suggests an ancient, bloodsucking, and murderous mythological creature. However, underneath this cinematic and literary "monster," there has always been an element of seduction, sexuality, and romance. Even with the sexual/romantic subtext in the vampire's history as a literary and cinematic figure, though, it seems that something new happened in 2008. A vampire cultural zeitgeist burst forth, creating a moment in the film and literary canon of vampirism that is uniquely separate and worthy of categorization and exploration. In 2008 the first *Twilight* movie was released along with the HBO television series *True Blood.* This cultural moment expanded in 2009 when the first season of the television series *The Vampire Diaries* aired on The CW. Although a series of films, a network television series, and a cable television series are all aesthetically different mediums with different rules and methods of producing their content, all are within a visual medium and all have a similar affect on popular culture. The aim of this chapter is to explore this moment, from a macro point of view—delving into a closer exploration of the individual films/television series in the following chapters.

One might argue that previous vampire literature, television programs, and films are not entirely different from my selected grouping of *Twilight, The Vampire Diaries,* and *True Blood.* But aside from their relatively close release dates, perhaps the most important connector of this group is the fandom—a fandom with a large crossover in viewership and merchandise consumption. Store such as Hot Topic sell merchandise from all three, while merchandise from *Dracula* is a thing of the past. This fandom is unique and accordingly marketed to. The selected visual texts of my chosen grouping seem to reverse traditional vampire lore by deemphasizing the horror aspect and playing up the romantic aspect. Gothic horror is certainly considered—and nods are given to vampire films and novels that came before—but *Twilight, The Vampire Diaries,* and *True Blood* are extremely complex. The three utilize romance and romantic fantasy to an extreme that is most commonly associated with romantic literature and romantic melodrama. More specifically, there is a link to romantic literature's utilization of the Byronic hero archetype. This leads to the questions: (1) What is this phenomenon's connection to literature and the Byronic hero? (2) How does it fit with audience perceptions of romance and romantic fantasy?

All three film/television series are adaptations of novels and all three center on romantic relationships between humans and vampires. This focus on romance rather than horror pulls the phenomenon into another realm that is interested in youth and first love. The vampire has transitioned from gothic nightmares and fetishes to beautiful girlish daydreams. This new vampire is a dangerous, yet somewhat emasculated, object of female desire. The new vampire, though, is not in fact truly new so much as he is evolved. More specifically, the new vampire is an evolutionary result of the Byronic

hero—who has been present in literature, and then film, from the time of Lord Byron—the archetype's namesake. In an article for *The Wall Street Journal*, Lara Miller discusses this connection. The article is not an academic text, but it is culturally interesting for that very reason. Miller states:

> The fusion of the romance and vampire genres isn't as unlikely as it might seem. The archetypal romantic hero owes a lot to two characters from Victorian literature: Mr. Rochester in "Jane Eyre" and Heathcliff in "Wuthering Heights." The two sisters who wrote those novels, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, were, like most literary women of their time, great admirers of Lord Byron, whose stormy, passionate heroes (based on his own bad self) served as patterns for Rochester and Heathcliff.
>
> In turn, one of the earliest stories in which a vampire is depicted as a decadently attractive aristocrat is "The Vampyre" (1819), by John Polidori, Byron's physician, who achieved a minor literary notoriety by writing thinly veiled portraits of his former employer. Both the classic romance hero and the suave vampire are handsome yet dangerous, mysteriously worldly and a little cruel, but gifted in erotic persuasion.[9]

It is this popular culture linkage to Lord Byron and Romanticism that is perhaps an appealing draw to the new vampire. He is slightly tweaked and new in terms of vampirism, but he simultaneously becomes part of a romanticized version of the past and classic literature. He is the fictional Heathcliff or the long deceased romantic poet who drives a sports car and can be found in the "boring" modern world, adding intrigue to the local high school, or in the case of *True Blood*, drinking at the local bar.

But what is at the heart of the popularity of the Byronic hero and, more specifically, his descendent, the new vampire? In her book, *The Dangerous Lover*, Deborah Lutz explains one of the attractions of the Byronic hero by saying, "To love the dangerous lover is to feel the creepy uncanniness of finding the familiar at the heart of

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[9] Laura Miller, "Real Men Have Fangs," The Wall Street Journal, December 5, 2009 <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125540672952785957.html>

terrifying strangeness. It is to love the uneasiness, the restless uncertainty…"[10] A relationship with a vampire leaves a level of uncertainty due to the mercurial nature of his being. In the case of *Twilight's* Edward Cullen, *True Blood's* Bill Compton and Eric Northman, and *The Vampire Diaries'* Damon and Stefan Salvatore, they are constantly in search of the humanity inside them (some more consciously than others), but they are always fighting the temptation to feed on the women they love (some fighting more successfully than others). The level of danger implied in a romantic relationship with a vampire maintains instability and unsatisfied desire because the heroine can never truly be sure the object of her love will remain true and, essentially, refrain from killing her.

Along with the excitement that is implied in loving a dangerous man, Laura Miller posits that the vampire allows the spectator to indulge in a "Mr. Darcy" fantasy "without the constraints imposed upon a woman like Elizabeth Bennet."[11] Although the Bronte-created men are most frequently cited as examples of literary Byronic heroes, Jane Austen's Mr. Darcy is not outside the realm of the Byronic man. Yet, Jane Austen's novels are not concerned with the stormy passions of vampire love that is closely connected to Emily Bronte's Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* and Charlotte Bronte's Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre*. Although Mr. Darcy is intimidating and unpleasant initially, he is rational, well bred, and a very eligible match economically for Elizabeth. Jane Austen's novels are insightful anatomies of love, social class, and marriage in Regency era England. Under the surface of their romantic inclinations Austen's novels are not exactly what their current "re-branding" would suggest. Miller continues, "Here lies one of the unique pleasures that the vampire romance can provide for its female readers: the

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[10] Deborah Lutz, The Dangerous Lover, (Ohio State University Press, 2006), 32
[11] Miller

opportunity to enjoy an 18th or 19th century courtship while remaining a 21st century woman."[12] And I would argue that it is not an affinity for a man from another century as much as the allure of the Byronic archetype that appeals to the modern heterosexual female spectator—and this archetype is, in fact, not rooted in Austen at all. Lord Byron and his archetype came after Austen's writing of *Pride and Prejudice* and it is, perhaps, the 2005 film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* that provided the precursor for this modern re-branding of Austen as Byronic. In the film, passions are let loose and the aesthetics alone could lead the viewer to believe they were watching a Bronte adaptation. Austen's pre-Byron drawing room settings are replaced with open fields and pouring rain. The color scheme is pale and gloomy—much like the *Twilight* films.

It is clear through this adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* that this Byronic-influenced aesthetic was something that slowly infiltrated the imaginations of spectators. The allure of this aesthetic paved the way for the new vampire, but the new vampire has also influenced Austen. The *Twilight* novels make heavy mention of Austen, Shakespeare, and Emily Bronte. Due to this intertextuality and the popularity of the *Twilight* series, publisher, Harper Teen, has repackaged *Pride and Prejudice* with a cover that resembles the *Twilight* novels. The background is black while a blood red and crisp white flower are the only images that call the perspective buyer's attention. Placed next to any of the *Twilight* novels that also use this precise color and design scheme, it seems to be one of the series. But it is not only the cover art of *Pride and Prejudice* that has been re-imagined for the *Twilight* spectator, but also the story, and perhaps most

[12] Miller

importantly, Mr. Darcy himself. The website for Harper Teen describes *Pride and Prejudice* as follows:

> "Darcy had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her."
>
> With all the forces of the world conspiring to keep Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet apart, how will fate manage to bring them together? It certainly won't be easy if they're fighting it every step of the way. But theirs is a love that was meant to be, despite all the odds against them.
>
> One of the most captivating love stories of all time, Jane Austen's enduring masterpiece is beloved by generation after generation. Beautifully presented for a modern teen audience, this is the must-have edition of a timeless classic.[13]

Harper Teen cleverly utilizes a quote that describes Darcy's "bewitchment." Bewitchment implies magic and fantasy to the modern reader. Harper Teen also uses the word "fate" and says that "the forces of the world conspiring" to keep them apart. Immediately, this description takes *Pride and Prejudice* outside the realm of Austen's world that is grounded in the Regency era realities of marriage and social class. Instead, this edition of *Pride and Prejudice* imoves away from Austen entirely playing on the seductive, dangerous, and romantic reimagining of Austen that has taken place in recent years.

The more traditionally Byronic romance in Jane Eyre has also found an intertextuality with *Twilight* in its most recent filmic form. In his review of the 2011 *Jane Eyre* film, Roger Ebert cannot avoid making a connection between the two films, despite his distaste for *Twilight* by comparison. Reffering to the appeal of what he deems Gothic Romance, Ebert says:

> Its chaste heroines and dark brooding heroes prowl the gloomy shadows of crepuscular castles, and doomy secrets stir in the corners. Charlotte

[13] Harper Teen, March 18, 2011, <http://www.harperteen.com/books/Pride-Prejudice-Jane-Austen/?isbn=9780061964367>

> Bronte's *Jane Eyre* is among the greatest of gothic novels, a page turner of such startling power, it leaves its pale latter-day imitators like *Twilight* flopping for air like a stranded fish. To be sure, the dark hero of the story, Rochester, is not a vampire, but that's only a technicality. [14]

One wonders if this vampiric quality in the most recent adaptation of *Jane Eyre* is a result of the Byron influenced Charlotte Bronte, or the possibly *Twilight* director who is consciously or unconsciously responding to the recent vampire phenomenon. Regardless of intent, the intertextuality from *Twilight* to current renditions of classic literature is everywhere. It seems that women (or those marketing to what they think a woman wants) are intent on satisfying a need for this Byronic archetype in the fictional stories they consume.

Atara Stein describes the archetype in *The Byronic Hero in Film, Fiction, and Television*:

> The Byronic hero is an outlaw and an outsider who defines his own moral code, often defying oppressive institutional authority, and is able to do so because of his superhuman or supernatural powers, his self-sufficiency and independence, and egotistical sense of his own superiority. He essentially defines and creates himself…He is a loner who often displays a quick temper or a brooding angst, or both, and he lacks the ability to relate to others.[15]

The inability to relate to others is one of his appealing romantic traits. The Byronic new vampire is unable to relate to his classmates and/or his community, yet he finds a special connection with a female heroine and is at least somewhat transformed by his feelings for her, thus giving her a sense of importance and the romantic feeling that she is the only one who can possibly understand him. The heroine is normally an

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[14] Roger Ebert, "Jane Eyre," Rogert Ebert.com, March 16, 2011 <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20110316/REVIEWS/110319990>

[15] Atara Stein, The Byronic Hero in Film, Fiction, and Television, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004) 8

outsider, also, which further bonds the two. The individualistic outcast nature of the vampire Byronic hero is also in line with the American Western archetype of the cowboy. This is of particular note since the Western has long been a genre associated with masculinity and male fantasy. The key difference between the Western and this new vampire moment is that the women in Westerns traditionally represent the community and domestic home space, while the women in *Twilight, The Vampire Diaries,* and *True Blood* are outsiders to the communities they live in, as mentioned above. Stein's book was written in 2004 before the most recent vampire phenomenon described here, she goes on to mention the relationship between the archetype and the vampire.

> It is not surprising that, in popular fiction, vampires embody Byronic desire. They undergo a bodily death, emerging as creatures that, though not bodiless, have achieved immortality, along with a superhuman strength and enhanced perceptions. Vampires also embody the perpetual questioning and despair of the Byronic hero.[16]

Stein also notes that the Byronic hero, rooted in the romantic literary movement, is strongly connected with desire and perfection.

> A Romantic desires what is unattainable. Should that desire become attained, it becomes, by definition, no longer desirable. This situation provides the Romantic with an infinite capacity for self-pity, lamenting both the unattainability of his or her goals, once attained.[17]

I will discuss this desire more fully in the second chapter, but while Stein is referring to the Byronic hero in the above, her observations are perhaps most in line with the spectators who perpetuate this modern "vampire fever." And the new vampire provides just such a ritualistic experience of unattainable love for the modern

[16] Stein, 78
[17] Stein, 75

Romantic—the ritualistic experience being an expectation that the spectator expects to have fulfilled through the ritual of seeing a particular type of story.

Lord Byron, the man, inspired a mania of fantasy that was not entirely different from that inspired by the men of *Twilight*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *True Blood.* The introduction to *Byromania* states:

> Not only has Byron been hard to place in the canon of English literature because he became so quickly the stuff of myth. He also presents difficulties because for many readers Byron appeals to the unconscious and to the pleasures of fantasy life before he is read for literary merit. Byron was a figure of identification and desire in the public imagination…and in this sense he became what is now called a celebrity or 'star,' and Byromania can be seen as an early example of fanaticism. The poet, Longfellow, noted how Byron invited his impressionable readers to fantasise that they *were* him, and Longfellow's analysis of Byromania in America could just as easily be applied to the impact on their public of James Dean or Mick Jagger, the Byronic heroes of the 1950's and 60's.[18]

This assessment of Lord Byron fits closely with an assessment of the new vampire. Yet, there is one major difference. *Byromania* implies that Byron is a figure to be imitated by males. He is a Mick Jagger or A James Dean. Edward Cullen and, perhaps to a lesser extent, the men in *The Vampire Diaries* and *True Blood* enjoy fame and popular culture iconic fanaticism status, but they are the objects of female desire and, normally, heterosexual male scorn. In an article for CNN online titled, "Why Women Love Vampires and Men Don't," John DeVore editorializes a popular culture account of the male perspective on vampires:

> To most guys, vampires are the monster movie equivalent of that sensitive man-sponge in college who plays acoustic guitar in order to seduce chicks…

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[18] Francis Wilson, "Introduction: Byron, Byronism and Byromaniacs," Byromania: Portraits of the Artist in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Culture, ed. Francis Wilson (St. Martin's Press, 1999),

> A vampire is a monster, who looks, acts, and talks like a man. Who is passionate, romantic, and tortured. To surrender to this character is to play with fire. The vampire, in many ways, is the prototype of the bad boy.
>
> Women love bad boys – they're exciting, and the chance to change him, to break him like a horse, must be an irresistible challenge. If self-destruction weren't seductive on some superficial level, then no one would ever need rehab.[19]

DeVore's informal critique of the phenomenon showcases the threat felt by certain heterosexual male spectators. This new Byronic hero is superhuman and does not possess the male admiration of the James Dean or Mick Jagger stereotype that Lord Byron was associated with. The new vampire presents a standard of romance that is all but impossible for the average male to live up to. Another one of the many popular culture examples comes from Guidespot.com. The feature on the website is titled "Why Your Girlfriend Shouldn't Read/See *Twilight*."

> Some of the reasons given include. She will fall hopelessly in love with him. Call it what you want, but girls everywhere are getting tangled up in Edward's perfect web…Edward is stealing your girlfriend's heart. He is charming, mysterious, devoted and sexy. What more could a girl want in a vampire? More importantly, what more will she want from YOU?[20]

Yet another popular culture article in *Nylon Magazines* titled "Heart of Darkness," highlights the old versus the new vampire as masculinized versus feminized:

> These new vampires are a different breed. Before, they had manly, respectable names like "Vlad the imapaler" and "Nosferatu." Now are heroes are called "Edward" and "Bill." Vampires of the past would rip the bodices off the women they seduced, then drain their blood. Today, they walk them home from school, cuddle them, and then make them a mixtape. When they were hungry, they'd slash someone's artery and slurp away until they were full, not put a bottle of fake blood in the microwave

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[19] John DeVore, "Why Women Love Vampires and Men Don't," CNN.com, October 27, 2009 <http://articles.cnn.com/2009-10-27/living/tf.women.love.vampires_1_vampires-true-blood-zombies?_s=PM:LIVING>

[20] "Why Your Girlfriend Shouldn't Read/See *Twilight*," Guidspot.com, December 11. 2008 <http://www.guidespot.com/guides/twilight_1>

> for two minutes. If they wanted to get somewhere, they'd turn into a bat and fly—they most certainly would not drive there in an Audi.[21]

Returning to the notion of the Byronic hero and fantasy, it is perhaps useful to examine in greater detail exactly why this Byronic new vampire is particularly appealing to his heterosexual female fanbase. Aside from fulfilling the "dangerous bad boy" fantasy, the new vampire also fulfills the older man/father figure fantasy. All of the vampires this project is concerned with are over one hundred years old, yet they maintain a youthful appearance in the seventeen to thirty-something age range. And, to add to their youthful appearance, all of the vampires concerned are easily categorized as possessing male model good looks. The new vampire joins fatherly wisdom with the sex appeal of youth and a perfect body. It is this "perfection" that takes these vampire men out of the realm of personhood, or even creaturehood, and into the realm of thinghood. I use the term thinghood here to illustrate that these vampires aren't merely objectified, but literal things or others outside the realm of the person or even the object. It is this very thingliness that is quite possibly at the root of heterosexual male distress. Just as male fantasy driven pornography has made many women feel as if they cannot live up to the male standard of beauty and worthiness, the Byronic new vampire pushes an ideal of masculinity that many men feel threatened by.

While it is true that this fantasy man, and certainly this Byron inspired hero, has existed in the fictional realm for centuries, there is something to his most recent wide-spread level of popular culture mania that differs from the romance novel or romantic film hero that has always seemed to exist in popular culture. In 2008 and 2009, one could not enter a mall containing a Hot Topic store without encountering a packaged

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[21] Luke Crisell, "Heart of Darkness," Nylon Magazine, September, 2009, 196

version of vampire love. The store sold, and continues to sell, such thingified representations of vampire romance as t-shirts, bags, and cardboard cutouts of the actors who portray the vampires in question. For a minimal price, one can actually buy Edward Cullen et al. and take him home to perpetuate the fantasy. As for *True Blood*, a show with a slightly older audience demographic, women can buy waitress costumes that resemble the heroine's uniform. A beverage called "Tru Blood" is also available for sale. It is an orange flavored version of the show's invented drink that is described as "synthetic blood" for those vampires not inclined to drink human blood from the source. The companion-piece merchandise for sale at stores such as Hot Topic are only the beginning. Spectators are so enthralled by Edward Cullen and his contemporaries, that a parody of a popular self-help dating guide (*He's Just Not That Into You*) has recently been published called *The Vampire is Just Not That Into You*.[22] The book promises to help women navigate the difficult world of dating vampires. While intended as humor, such intertextuality of media further serves the fantasy function of the new vampire for the spectator.

Although *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries* target a younger audience than *True Blood*, none of the series or films are necessarily appropriate for children. Yet, *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries* have inspired the creation of dolls—perhaps the most striking examples being the detailed "designer dolls" created by Robert Tonner. The consumer may purchase a detailed Edward Cullen doll for $139.99 and a Damon Salvatore doll for $159.99. Currently, Damon's brother Stefan—the central love interest for the heroine of

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[22] John A. Sellers, "On the Radar: The Vampire Is Just Not That Into You," Publisher's Weekly, December 5, 2009 < http://www.publishersweekly.com/article/CA6646557.html>

The Vampire Diaries—is not for sale. The offering of these dolls raises questions on multiple levels. If the series and films are targeted to teenagers and women under forty, who is intended to "play" with the dolls? If these dolls *are* intended to be played with by children, how will the new vampire and the ideas of romance he brings with him affect a generation of children? What type of consumer pays over one hundred dollars for a toy and why? Why is *The Vampire Diaries* Damon doll is more expensive than *Twilight's* Edward Cullen and why is Damon is produced for purchase, but not Stefan? Most of the questions posed are unanswerable as of now, yet nonetheless intriguing to consider. It is of note that Damon in *The Vampire Diaries* is the more dangerous, and therefore seemingly more popular character in the series over his more humanistic "good" brother. Damon, along with *True Blood's* Eric, represent the ultimate Byronic heroes with their "tortured soul/bad boy" personas.

Dolls made to look like and represent characters belonging to this breed of new vampire create a thingification of a person who has already been thingified by female spectators. It is a bizarre, yet fitting, addition to the merchandise that aids the fantasy component phenomenon of Byronic vampire love. In his essay, "The Uncanny," Freud makes an observation about dolls that connects to this fantasy:

> Now, dolls are of course closely connected with childhood life. We remember that in their early games, children do not distinguish at all sharply between living and inanimate objects, and they are especially fond of treating their dolls like live people. In fact, I have occasionally heard a woman patient declare that even at the age of eight she had still been convinced that her dolls would be certain to come to life if she were to look at them in a particular, extremely concentrated, way…But, curiously enough, while the Sand-Man story deals with the arousing of an early childhood fear, the idea of a 'living doll' excites no fear at all; children have no fear of their dolls coming to life, they may even desire it. The

> source of the uncanny feelings would not, therefore, be an infantile fear in this case, but rather an infantile wish or merely even an infantile belief.[23]

It is perhaps rare that a teenager or adult fan of *The Vampire Diaries* or *Twilight* buys one of the dolls for the purpose of playing with it, but the dolls represent a harkening back to the "infantile wish" that the fantasy world of playing with a "thing" could be transformed into the reality of a person—or perhaps we should say a thingified person. Because in order for the Byronic new vampire to fulfill the spectator's wish, he must remain in the realm of fantasy—and remain as a person who is without a personhood of his own. As described earlier in the quotation by Deborah Lutz from *The Dangerous Lover,* the vampire lover is, by definition, a being that belongs to the uncanny. He is familiar in his nearly human resemblance, yet disturbingly foreign and "other." But as with Freud's example of the doll, the new vampire does not quite hold the traditional uncanny power. Mark Chapman says in his article "Reconceptualizing the Uncanny Vampire" for *Bright Lights Film Journal*, "These recent films share a sophisticated self-awareness that borders on parody and entirely negates the uncanny. The vampire is simply not scary anymore."[24] To which I argue that the new vampire's uncanny value functions as the prosopopeia of the romantic spectator's fantasy, similarly to how a doll functions for a child in Freud's observation. Thus, in this way, the various actors who embody these new vampires are living dolls that have inspired the creation of non-living versions of their own thingliness.

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[23] Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" Writings on Art and Literature, (Stanford University Press, 1997) 208-209

[24] Mark Chapman, "Reconceptualizing the Uncanny Vampire," Bright Lights Film Journal, May 2010, February 4, 2011 <http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/68/68vampire.php>

In her essay in *Persons and Things* titled, "Real Dolls," Barbara Johnson quotes Freud, adding her own observations on the subject of dolls. But her observations are mostly concerned with the relationship of dolls such as Barbie to a woman's image and to a man's degradation of women in terms of inflatable female dolls designed for men.[25] It is interesting that in the case of the new vampire dolls, women are not necessarily looking to a feminine ideal (ie: Barbie), but instead they are collecting their own, less sexualized version of the inflatable woman in the form of an artistically designed and highly detailed, Robert Tonner doll who is created in the likeness of their vampire fantasy figure.

The vampire as object seems counterintuitive to traditional mythology. After all, it is the male vampire who normally turns the female into his next meal. In John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (which as mentioned previously, was written by Lord Byron's physician and inspired by Byron himself) the vampire or "vampyre" is a seductive and murderous creature. In the evolutionary track from the folkloric monster to the new vampire, Polidori's Lord Ruthven changed the face of the vampire to a handsome sophisticated aristocrat that influenced many literary and cinematic vampires to follow. In the opening paragraph of the novella, Lord Ruthven is described as such:

> It happened that in the midst of the dissipations attendant upon a London winter, there appeared at the various parties of the leaders of the ton a nobleman, more remarkable for his singularities, than his rank. He gazed upon the mirth around him, as if he could not participate therein. Apparently, the light laughter of the fair only attracted his attention, that he might by a look quell it, and throw fear into those breasts where thoughtlessness reigned. Those who felt this sensation of awe, could not explain whence it arose…His peculiarities caused him to be invited to every house; all wished to see him…In spite of the deadly hue of his face,

[25] Barbara Johnson, "Real Dolls," Persons and Things, (Harvard University Press, 2008), 163-167

> which never gained a warmer tint…though its form and outline were beautiful, many of the female hunters after notoriety attempted to win his attentions, and gain, at least, some marks of what they might term affection…[26]

In the above description, Lord Ruthven—as with his Byronic vampire descendants—holds the power of intrigue and mystery over everyone he encounters. His "singularity" is in line with the vampire as outsider or other and it is his otherness that attracts attention and desire. However, in Polidori's novella Lord Ruthven's ruthless devouring of women is clear, although the descriptions are not graphic by modern standards. First, Lord Ruthven's human friend, Aubrey, discovers a murdered woman, but he does not connect his friend to the murder initially, although the townspeople are quick to suspect a "vampyre."

> At the desire of Aubrey they searched for her who had attracted him by her cries; he was again left in darkness; but what was his horror, when the light of the torches once more burst upon him, to perceive the airy form of his fair conductress brought in a lifeless corpse. He shut his eyes, hoping that it was but a vision arising from his disturbed imagination; but he again saw the same form, when he unclosed them, stretched by his side. There was no colour upon her cheek, not even upon her lip; yet there was a stillness about her face that seemed almost as attaching as the life that once dwelt there:—upon her neck and breast was blood, and upon her throat were the marks of teeth having opened the vein:—to this the men pointed, crying, simultaneously struck with horror, "A Vampyre! a Vampyre!"[27]

In the end, it is Aubrey's sister who Lord Ruthven takes as his prey. Lord Ruthven marries Miss Aubrey and kills her on their wedding night. Aubrey writes a letter of warning before his own death and Miss Aubrey's guardians are summoned: "The guardians hastened to protect Miss Aubrey; but when they arrived, it was too late. Lord

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[26] John William Polidori, "The Vampyre; A Tale," The Project Guetenberg, October 21, 2009, February 12, 2011 <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/6087/6087-h/6087-h.htm>
[27] Polidori

Ruthven had disappeared, and Aubrey's sister had glutted the thirst of a VAMPYRE!" It is this foundation of the murderous vampire that perhaps makes the new vampire as dangerous so desirable to female spectators. Polidori's "vampyre" was not tamable, but the idea that a dangerous vampire descended from Lord Ruthven could control himself for the sake of the woman he loved makes the new vampire particularly appealing--especially when coupled with the power of thingification granted to the female spectator.

While the threat of literal consumption by her lover remains, all of the heroines discussed in this project are perhaps more capable of thingifying their vampire love interests through a female gaze than the vampire love interest is capable of thingifying them. The death threat to the heroine is there, but the new vampire is always capable of stopping himself from killing the woman he loves. The restraint shown by the new vampire adds to the feeling that the heroine, and vicariously speaking the female spectator, is special enough to win the love of the most dangerous creature in existence.

In addition to the heroine, the female spectator who is meant to identify with her is the one who literally consumes the merchandise, novels, and films—becoming vampiric in her own right. It is as if the female desire here is not only to be literally consumed by vampire love, but to also consume products that symbiotically produce a feeling in the spectator that vampire love (total consumption by a lover) is an attainable fantasy. It is interesting to note that while *Twilight*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *True Blood* are all based upon book series it wasn't until the release of the films or television shows that the books reached the height of their popularity. These novels, in partnership with the films and television series create a dual world of fantasy where the spectator may indulge in the written word and then further glut themselves, as a vampire might,

with cinematic and televised imagery or vice versa. The combination of books and adaptations gives the spectator, a multitude of possibilities for escape and fantasy life. While much is often lost in adaptations, the intertextuality from page to screen helps explain the particular brand of thingification that coincides with all three. In the novel, *Twilight*, Bella describes Edward as such:

> Edward in the sunlight was shocking. I couldn't get used to it, though I'd been staring at him all afternoon. His skin, white despite the faint flush from yesterday's hunting trip, literally sparkled, like thousands of tiny diamonds were embedded in the surface. He lay perfectly still in the grass, his shirt open over his sculpted incandescent chest, his scintillating arms bare. His glistening pale lavender lids were shut, though of course he didn't sleep. A perfect statue, carved in some unknown stone, smooth like marble, glittering like crystal.[28]

Here, Bella compares Edward's appearance to that of a "perfect statue," using a myriad of other descriptions that give him additional thing-like qualities. Edward's relationship to a statue is akin to that of a doll. He is the fantasy figure, or thing, which has come to life for her enjoyment—a reversed version of *Pygmalion*. While there is more to Edward than his beauty, everything about his personality is geared toward Bella and his love for her—thus relating back to Freud's analysis of wish fulfillment through dolls coming to life. When Edward describes his reasons for resisting his instinctual vampire urge to kill Bella, his Byronic roots are clear and it is this tortured-soul love that is also strongly grounded in the Romanticism of Byron and his contemporaries that feeds the passionate fantasy of the new vampire as object of desire.

> "Isabella." He pronounced my full name carefully, then playfully ruffled my hair with his free hand. A shock ran through my body at his casual touch. "Bella, I couldn't live with myself if I ever hurt you. You don't know how it's tortured me." He looked down, ashamed again. "the thought of you still, white, cold…to never see you blush scarlet again, to

[28] Stephenie Meyer, Twilight, (Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 260

> never see that flash of intuition in your eyes when you see through my pretenses…it would be unendurable." He lifted his glorious agonized eyes to mine. "You are the most important thing to me now. The most important thing to me ever."[29]

As with the Byronic heroes of literature before him, Edward is tortured by his love for Bella. She is his reason for existence. This aspect of the new vampire is much more in line with the Bronte version of the Byronic hero. As mentioned previously, the Bronte sisters were key literary figures in the Byronic hero trajectory. The third *Twilight* novel, *Eclipse*, refers heavily to Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights.* At the end of chapter eleven, Bella notices that Edward has looked through her copy of *Wuthering Heights* and that the book is open on the following passage:

> "And there you see the distinctions between our feelings: had he been in my place, and I in his, though I hated him with a hatred that turned my life to gall, I never would have raised a hand against him. You may look incredulous, if you please! I never would have banished him from her society as long as she desired his. The moment her regard ceased, I would have torn his heart out, and drunk his blood! But, till then—if you don't believe me, you don't know me—till then, I would have died by inches before I touched a single hair of his head!"[30]

The stormy passions of Heathcliff match those of Edward. Although Lord Byron inspired Heathcliff just as he inspired Lord Ruthven, Heathcliff is human and not a literal vampire. Heathcliff is also from a gypsy background, despite being more intelligent and often more sophisticated in a roundabout way than the characters in the novel who are deemed "higher class." Yet, the kinship between vampirism and Heathcliff, couldn't be more apparent in this passage when he says, "I would have torn his heart out, and drunk his blood!" It is no wonder *Twilight* author, Stephenie Meyer, incorporated this passage into *Eclipse*. If Heathcliff is a more feeling descendent of Lord Ruthven, then Edward

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[29] Meyer, 273
[30] Emily Bronte, Wuthering Heights, (Washington Square Press, 1997), 142-143

Cullen and the other new vampires are most certainly descendents of Heathcliff. Lord Ruthven is hardly a romantic ideal, but Heathcliff shares the ability to dote on only on one woman and love no one else but her. This type of extreme love from an otherwise unpleasant and often cruel character is part of his desirability for the spectator interested in romance.

In L.J. Smith's first book in *The Vampire Diaries* series titled *The Awakening*, Elena Gilbert, is intrigued by the mysterious vampire Byronic hero, Stefan Salvatore. While the Elena in the book series is very different from the Elena in the television series, there is a strong sense of thingification and possession in the novel that serves as the television series' foundation. *The Awakening* describes a similar encounter transferred to a modern high school setting:

> The dark curly hair framed features so fine that they might have been taken from an old Roman coin or medallion. High cheekbones, classical straight nose…and a mouth to keep you awake at night, Elena thought. The upper lip was beautifully sculpted, a little sensitive, a whole lot sensual. The chatter of the girls in the hallway had stopped as if someone had thrown a switch.
>
> Most of them were turning away from the boy now, looking anywhere but at him. Elena held her place by the window and gave a little toss to her head, pulling the ribbon out of her hair so that it fell loose around her shoulders.
>
> Without looking to either side, the boy moved on down the hallway. A chorus of sighs and whispers flared up the moment he was out of earshot.
>
> Elena didn't hear any of it.
>
> He'd walked right by, she thought dazed. Right by without a glance.[31]

Later, in the chapter Elena is determined to make Stefan hers:

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[31] L.J. Smith, The Vampire Diaries: The Awakening and The Struggle, (Harper Teen, 1991), 19

> Elena watched him as he went. He's deliberately turned away from her. He'd snubbed her on purpose…Tears burned in her eyes, but at that moment only one thought burned in her mind.
>
> She'd have him even if it killed her. If it killed both of them, she'd have him.[32]

Interestingly, this is very similar to a moment in John Polidori's *The Vampyre*:

> Lady Mercer, who had been the mockery of every monster shewn in drawing-rooms since her marriage, threw herself in his way, and did all but put on the dress of a mountebank, to attract his notice:—though in vain:—when she stood before him, though his eyes were apparently fixed upon her's, still it seemed as if they were unperceived;—even her unappalled impudence was baffled, and she left, the field. But though the common adultress could not influence even the guidance of his eyes, it was not that the female sex was indifferent to him: yet such was the apparent caution with which he spoke to the virtuous wife and innocent daughter, that few knew he ever addressed himself to females. He had, however, the reputation of a winning tongue; and whether it was that it even overcame the dread of his singular character, or that they were moved by his apparent hatred of vice, he was as often among those females who form the boast of their sex from their domestic virtues, as among those who sully it by their vices.[33]

Here, one can almost imagine Stefan as Lord Ruthven and Elena as the woman who "threw herself in his way, and did all but put on the dress of a mountebank, to attract his notice…" Lord Ruthven is particularly attractive to women who "attempted to win his attentions" just as the modern heroine attempts to win the attentions of the new vampires she encounters. Although it is the vampire who literally consumes the female, it seems as if the vampire brings out something in the female that makes her equally want to consume him with a passion and intensity not commonly portrayed between a human female and male character.

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[32] Smith, 30
[33] Polidori

While the Elena in the television series is much closer to Bella from *Twilight* (a point that will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter), the longing to possess Stefan is clear. As with Bella in *Twilight*, Elena compares Stefan's looks to things (statues, Roman coins, etc.) and her insistence on "having him" equates him to a possession. Her behavior in the novel is childish and the thought that she can obtain him once again directly corresponds with the theme of a fantasy doll come to life.

Finally, it is the *Sookie Stackhouse* novels that *True Blood* is based on that perhaps go furthest in their blatant objectification. But in the first pages of the first novel in the series, *Dead Until Dark*, Sookie (the heroine) describes Bill (one of two major vampire love interests in the series) in much the same way as Bella and Elena describe Edward and Stefan. Again, the vampire object of female desire is "sculpted" and likened to beautiful artistic "things."

> Anyway, his lips were lovely, sharply sculpted, and he had arched brows. His nose swooped down right out of that arch, like a prince's in a Byzantine mosaic. When he finally looked up, I saw his eyes were even darker than his hair, and the whites were incredibly white.[34]

In the fourth book in the series, *Dead to the World*, Sookie's description of her second vampire love interest, Eric Northman, is graphically detailed. Their sexual encounter turns toward fantasy—providing further evidence that the new vampire exists as a thing for female pleasure. After the encounter, Sookie considers what has happened, wondering if there is a difference between human and vampire lovers.

> I was exhausted when it was over, though I'd enjoyed myself immensely. I'd heard a lot about men who didn't care if the woman had her pleasure, or perhaps such men assumed that if they were happy, their partner was, too. But neither of the men I'd been with had been like that. I didn't

[34] Charlaine Harris, Dead Until Dark, (Ace Books, 2001), 2

> know if that was because they'd both been vampires, or because I'd been lucky, or both.[35]

Sookie is unsure as to whether or not her sexual fulfillment can be attributed to vampires, but it is apparent that both of the vampires she has been with have been focused on her enjoyment and have perhaps received their enjoyment through pleasing her. The sexual encounter with Eric in this chapter is from Sookie's point of view and lasts several pages. In these pages, there is no doubt that Eric's intent is to please Sookie as much as possible with his sexual prowess.

While the older Byronic heroes of literature are stormy, passionate, tortured, and normally insanely in love with the heroine, there is a progression in the trajectory of the archetype with the new vampire, and perhaps with the heroine of stories concerned with the new vampire. *Bitch Media* has seen both *Twilight*[36] and *True Blood*[37] as anti-feminist but, as I have argued above, there is much more complexity surrounding the issue than meets the eye. The very thingification of men for female pleasure suggests that there is much more of a power struggle between feminist and anti-feminist than might be originally thought. Regardless of feminist or anti-feminist interpretation, it is undeniable that the intertextuality of merchandise, books, films, and television series have come together to create a fantasy world targeted to women and what they supposedly want. The new vampire, like the dolls he inspires, is a commodity to be bought and consumed by female fans. The threat of being literally consumed by him heightens the excitement

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[35] Harris, Dead to the World, (Ace Books, 2004), 125
[36] Christine Seifert, "Bite Me! (Or Don't)," Bitch Media, 2008, February 6, 2011, <http://bitchmagazine.org/article/bite-me-or-don't>
[37] Kelsey Wallace, "Newsflash, Vampire Bill: Rape is Neither Romantic, Nor Charming," Bitch Media, August 26, 2009, February 6, 2011, <http://bitchmagazine.org/post/newsflash-vampire-bill-rape-is-neither-romantic-nor-gentlemanly>

of the new vampire as lover, but in the end, it is the female spectator who is most likely to devour every aspect of the new vampire as he enables them to indulge in a rich world of romantic fantasy.

Chapter Two

The Desire to Desire Vampires: *Twilight* as Neo-Woman's Film

As Mary Ann Doane points out in the very title of her book, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940's*, female desire is an inherent part of the woman's film.[38] But as her title also suggests, the woman's film saw its heyday during the Hollywood studio era, particularly in the 1940's. In later years, female oriented cinema often came wrapped in the package of romantic comedy, or its more derogatory title, "chick flick." This is not to say the traditional melodrama or the woman's film died completely, but only recently with the release of *Twilight* has a film adhered to the older staples of the romantic melodrama/woman's film and simultaneously moved the trajectory of this genre forward into the realm of something completely new.

The purpose of this chapter is to first examine *Twilight*, establishing its place in the canon of "the woman's film." Second, the purpose is to contribute to our understanding of female pleasure and desire by using Mary Ann Doane's model to construct a method of perceiving desire in *Twilight.*

Before delving into a genre analysis of *Twilight*, it is important to consider the merits of genre study and my reason for using this model here. In the introduction to the anthology, *Handbook of American Film Genres*, Wes Gehring quotes *Peter Pan* (1953):

[3838] Mary Ann Doane, The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940's, (Indiana University Press 1987)

"All this has happened before. And it will all happen again." He sees the quote as "a fitting description of genre film" and goes on to describe genre as "the division of movies into groups which have similar subjects and/or themes."[39] Gehring divides the purpose of genre study and analysis into seven categories. "The first and most compelling," he says, "is at the heart of all liberal arts education—to provide both a systematic overview of mankind's masterworks while providing personal insight for the individual. To what genre(s) do you most frequently return? Why? What primal messages, or assurances, are provided by your genre(s)?"[40]

While Wes Gehring provides six additional reasons for genre study and Steve Neale has gone as far as to devote an entire book to the understanding of the subject—often discussing its academic advantages and disadvantages[41]—Gehring's first and aforementioned reason seems particularly suited to the discussion of the romantic melodrama/woman's film and *Twilight.* For the sake of efficiency, it is helpful to systematically categorize *Twilight*, placing it on its proper shelf within the metaphorical library of all film art (or "mankind's masterworks"). For the sake of insight, genre analysis is relevant in terms of the woman's film because, as we will see, it is a deeply personal genre closely tied to "primal messages" that are intended to provide a ritualistic experience for the female spectator.

With a plethora of labels—all with related meanings—such as melodrama, romantic melodrama, the woman's film, and the love story it becomes confusing to understand exactly what is being examined, though. Steve Neale points out that

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[39] Wes D. Gehring, "Introduction," Handbook of American Film Genres, ed. Wes D. Gehring (Greenwood Press, 1988), 1
[40] Gehring, 2
[41] Steve Neale, Genre and Hollywood, (Rutledge 2000)

historically in Hollywood, "the term 'melodrama' is shown to have implied action and suspense, to have been used as a synonym for 'thriller,' rather than applied, as Film Studies has assumed, to the woman's film…It is noted that 'drama' rather than 'melodrama' was the term used to describe 'woman's films'…"[42] As Neale suggests, Film Studies has not only altered the meaning of melodrama, but has further confused the matter by placing the woman's film under the melodrama umbrella.

Nevertheless, in academia the meaning of melodrama *has* transitioned into something differing from the meaning of "thriller." Neale cites Thomas Elsaesser's article "Tales of Sound and Fury, Observations of the Family Melodrama," published in 1972, as a major influence on the new definition of melodrama in cinema.[43] Steven N. Lipkin in his article, "Melodrama," also cites Elsaesser, saying, "Elsasser traces the roots of film melodrama to the consistently portrayed opposition between external, social constraints, and the internal experience of characters…" [44] Elsasser, himself, refers back to "romantic drama which had its heyday after the French Revolution"[45] as one of the roots of melodrama.

"Internal experience of characters" and "romantic drama" are both phrases that are often linked with "feminine" qualities. Referring to the use of the term "romantic melodrama" by *Film Daily* in regard to *All That Heaven Allows,* Neale says, "What motivates the use of the term 'melodrama' here, then, may not be the element of romance itself but a particular—perhaps 'feminine'—version of the tension and thrills putatively

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[42] Neale, 3-4
[43] Neale, 181
[44] Steven N. Lipkin, "Melodrama," Handbook of American Film Genres, 287
[45] Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury," Monogram, vol. 4 (1972), 3

offered men by thrillers and action films."[46] This gendered separating of genre leads to Molly Haskell's frustration with the term "woman's film" in her book, *From Reverence to Rape*.

> What more damaging comment on the relations between men and women in America than the very notion of something called "the woman's film?" And what more telling sign of critical and sexual priorities than the low caste it has among the highbrows? Held at arm's length, it is, indeed, the untouchable of film genres. The concept of a "woman's film" and "women's fiction" as a separate category of art (and/or kitsch), implying a generically shared misery and masochism the individual work is designed to indulge, does not exist in Europe. There, the affairs of the heart are of importance to both men and women and are the stuff of literature.[47]

I will return later to Haskell's idea of "a separate category of art" for women. However, for now (and for good or evil), it is safe to say that, in American cinema, melodrama encompasses a wider genre of emotionality (even if it is somewhat "feminized") and the labels of "woman's film" and "romantic melodrama" represent a genre inherently associated with women and a brand of cinema that is made specifically for female spectators.

To additionally complicate matters, there seems to be a multitude of sub-categories in the melodrama sub-genre of woman's film. Since there is so much confusion surrounding this genre and for or the sake of clarity and simplicity I have chosen to categorize *Twilight* as a "neo-woman's film." I have chosen the prefix "neo" to convey the idea that *Twilight* represents a revival, or new wave, of the genre which simultaneously exists in what I have chosen to call a moment in film and television, rather than a cycle. However, for this discussion of *Twilight,* Mary Ann Doane's

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[46] Neale, 188
[47] Molly Haskell, From Reverence to Rape, (Reinhart and Winston, 1974), 153

woman's film sub-category of "the love story" seems to be the best fit and Doane's model of the love story is one I will refer to most frequently.

Doane's definition of the love story consists of several major components including: excessive emotionalism; an overemphasis on music; an emasculated/feminized male as object of female desire; the heroine in a near constant state of waiting (waiting by the window, waiting for phone calls, etc.); repetition of an object, saying, or song that acts as a signifier of love between the couple; a tendency for unhappy or compromised endings; an "all or nothing" attitude toward love on the part of the female; and a heroine who is imaginative and is prone to daydreams.[48]

How does a modern film about teenage vampires fit with a model used to identify and examine a group of films mainly released in the 1940's? An exploration of the individual components of Doane's love story leads to interesting comparisons with *Twilight*. The similarities, while not always immediately obvious, can be startling. This raises an even more interesting point that, despite Molly Haskell's frustration with a separate genre for women, despite the advent of feminism, and despite a nearly seventy year gap between the woman's film of the 1940's and the release of *Twilight*, there is something satisfyingly ritualistic for some women (and perhaps some men) about this particular brand of cinema.

A good starting point for examination is the overemphasis of music in Doane's love story model. She says, "Desire, emotion—the very content of the love story—are

[48] Doane, 96-122

not accessible to a visual discourse but demand the supplementary expenditure of a musical score."[49]

In the very first scene of *Twilight* we hear a voiceover spoken by the heroine, Bella Swan (Kristen Stewart), accompanied by glimpses of someone mysterious hunting a deer in the forest. But before this sequence takes place, before even a line of dialogue is spoken, we see the logo for the distributing studio, Summit Entertainment, and hear the initial haunting notes of Carter Burwell's score. Not only is the score a moody, foreboding signaling of the danger the heroine will face through the course of her love story, but specific parts of the score will repeat throughout the course of the film. The most glaring recurrence of the opening section happens the moment Bella discovers that her love interest, Edward Cullen (Robert Pattinson) is a vampire.

But perhaps the most intriguing portion of the score is "Bella's Lullaby," a love theme woven into various scenes that showcase Edward and Bella as a romantic couple. Doane touches on the notion of repetition and doubling in the love story and this particular musical repetition is especially apparent in "Bella's Lullaby." So much so, that it merges with another point Doane makes:

> Complicit with the excessive emotionalism associated with the love story, music no doubt contributes to its degeneration. This at least partially explains a very strong tendency within the genre of the love story to motivate an apparent overemphasis on music by situating its major male character –the object of female desire—in the role of a musician.[50]

Doane frequently cites, *Letters from an Unknown Woman*, as a prime example of the genre. In the film, the male lead plays piano and the heroine's rapture in response to his playing provides clear evidence that this skill is an essential component of his

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[49] Doane, 97
[50] Doane, 97

attractiveness. Not only does Edward Cullen play the piano, he plays specifically for Bella when he brings her to his home to meet his family. He also plays the very love theme in the score, "Bella's Lullaby," matching the finger placement required of the melody as the score swells during the sequence.

The musicality of the male lead in the love story brings the question of the male's masculinity to the forefront. As Doane suggests:

> [T]he specification of the male character as a musician has a surplus benefit. In the love story, the male undergoes a kind of feminization by contamination—in other words, he is to a certain degree emasculated by his very presence in a feminized genre.[51]

Edward Cullen's effeminate traits aren't merely noted by his musical abilities. His clothing style is noticeably different from the other male characters in the film. Wearing fitted tee-shirts, a gender neutral fitted pea coat, and noticeably slim fitting trousers, Edward stands out among the "human" males at Forks High School who mainly wear loose fitting clothes, plaid patterns, baggy sweatshirts, etc. Also, due to the vampiric state of his character, Edward has flawless clean-shaven porcelain skin, groomed eyebrows, and rose-colored lips.

Further feminization of appearance occurs when Edward demonstrates to Bella why his vampiric nature restrains him from showing himself in the sun. Unlike the traditional myth of vampires burning in sunlight, the vampires in *Twilight* sparkle and glitter "like diamonds." Bella's response affirms the feminization when she says, "You're beautiful"—a term traditionally used by men to compliment women.

Doane argues that the feminization of men in the love story gives women what they want and, what they want is someone more like themselves.

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[51] Doane, 97

> Men in the love story frequently do "act like women" insofar as they are attentive to detail, minute incidents, and the complexities of intersubjective relations. They often attempt to read the woman's face for its hidden meanings in the same way that women are consistently taught to read faces, to decipher motives.[52]

Perhaps Edward Cullen's most compelling "feminized" attribute is his ability to read minds (a trait that is given to the human heroine of *True Blood*). His "special power" could be related to the traditionally masculine super hero genre, but the very nature of his ability is anything if not feminine when placed in context with Doane's argument. Mind reading is associated with "a woman's intuition." Instead of reading faces, Edward can literally understand what someone is thinking, the moment they think it.

However, to further feminize Edward and place him in the traditionally female role of the relationship, Edward admits to Bella that he can read every mind in the room apart from hers. Mind reading could be interpreted as a feminine quality and his inability to read Bella's mind—and the time he spends trying to understand her and decipher her expressions—could be interpreted as another layer of femininity. Traditionally, female characters spend more time attempting to decipher the emotions and thoughts of their love interest than their male counterparts.

This emasculation carries over to the actors in the love story, who are rarely cast for their masculine qualities.[53] Robert Pattinson is particularly comparable to Louis Jourdan, the male lead in *Letters from an Unknown Woman*, not only due to both characters' shared piano talents, but also due to their similar physical "type" and

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[52] Doane, 116
[53] Doane, 116

European ethnicity. Similarly to Jourdan, Pattinson has softer and slightly feminine facial features in addition to a lanky, androgynous body.

As for the heroine, Bella, is shown as an "everywoman" and we are constantly reminded of her clumsiness and lack of coordination as she trips and falls on multiple occasions. Comparable to the unnamed heroine in *Rebecca*, Bella is nervous, uncomfortable with social attention, and prone to accidents. Also similar to the unnamed heroine in *Rebecca* and Charlotte Vale (Bette Davis) in *Now, Voyager*, Bella tends to wear clothing that is less inherently feminine or "sexy" than the glamour-puss leading lady style often found in other genres.

Bella doesn't receive a complete makeover in the mode of Charlotte Vale, but her clothes (baggy bowling alley shirts, plaid flannel, oversized coats) do become noticeably more fitted as the film and love story progresses. In the last scene of the film, despite wearing leggings and Converse style sneakers to prom, Bella wears a decidedly feminine and low cut dress provided by Edward's stylish sister, Alice (Ashley Greene).

While female heroines in the woman's film love story aren't always clumsy or destined for makeovers, they *are*, according to Doane's model, always filled with desire. Doane says, "Female desire is a necessary premise of the love story's structure."[54] "Waiting" is a plot device that frequently promotes desire. By "waiting," Doane means, "the passive activity of waiting—waiting at windows, waiting at train stations, in isolated apartments, or waiting for phone calls or letters."[55] Essentially, the heroine is waiting for an unfulfilled desire (usually the desire to be united in love with the male lead) and the very waiting for the fulfillment of this desire only serves to exacerbate it into a deeper

[54] Doane, 112
[55] Doane, 106

obsession. Thus, desire becomes something representational, unattainable, and fueled by imagination as will be discussed in a moment.

First however, it is important to examine the use of "waiting" in *Twilight.* It is surprising that a modern female heroine would be put in the position of waiting for the romantic lead. However, despite Bella's best efforts to be "proactive," she still frequently lands in the "waiting" position. After her first true encounter with Edward in biology class (where he is rude to her and leaves as quickly as possible), Bella arrives at school with the intention of confronting him. Bella's confrontation does not come to fruition when Edward isn't at school and, according to her voiceover, several days pass without any sign of him. The next time Bella does see Edward, he throws her off balance by acting sincerely nice. This first waiting period provides as much fuel for her burgeoning feelings as his charming behavior during the long-awaited second encounter. It is, in fact, the lengthy wait that provides an abundance of relief, and therefore pleasure, for the audience during the potential couple's second encounter.

In another scene later in the film, it is a sunny day and Bella's eyes search the outdoor seating area at school, the expression on her face is expectant. By then, one of her female schoolmates, Jessica (Anna Kendrick), has noticed Bella's interest in Edward and she informs her that Edward is not at school. Once again, Bella is forced to sit idly by and wait until he reappears in her life.

While this examination of *Twilight* is primarily concerned with the first film in the series as the commencement of the phenomenon, it is also worth noting that in the second installment, *New Moon*, Bella waits for Edward throughout most of the film. Once Edward leaves her "for her own good," Bella shuts down entirely. In fact, several

months pass. The camera circles her, noting the passage of time while she remains stagnant, unchanging, alone in her room, and, incidentally, by her window.

Moving back to the discussion of a mode of female desire that is concerned with something representational, Doane begins *The Desire to Desire* by describing the heroine in Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. *Cairo* is about a woman living in 1930's Depression era America. She is such a frequent moviegoer that the male lead in a movie she has watched in the town theater multiple times eventually notices her, steps out of the movie into the "real world," and falls in love with her—thus "fulfilling her spectatorial dreams."[56] As Doane notes, *Cairo* is a perfect example of female desire on two levels.

> [T]here is a certain naiveté assigned to women in relation to systems of signification—a tendency to deny the processes of representation, to collapse the opposition between the sign (the image) and the real. To "misplace" desire by attaching it too securely to a representation.[57]

Twilight works within this system both in terms of the heroine's desire for the unattainable representation and the film itself inspires a spectatorship that is comparable to that of the heroine's in *Cairo*. From the first instant Bella sees Edward, he is painted both as an object of female desire/subject of female gaze and as unattainable. Bella sits at a lunch table with two other girls as Edward walks in the room, music swelling in the background. Bella asks one of the girls at the table, Jessica, who the mysterious boy is and Jessica answers, "That's Edward Cullen. Totally gorgeous, obviously, but apparently nobody here is good enough for him. Like I care….Seriously, like, don't waste your time." Her tone is obviously that of someone who has vied for Edward's attention and

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[56] Doane, 1
[57] Doane, 1

not received it. As all three girls gaze at Edward, it becomes apparent that he represents the most unattainable, and therefore most desirable, boy at school.

Particularly interesting in the case of *Twilight* is the fact that Bella is the object of male gaze—seemingly every boy at school aside from Edward Cullen (initially) shows a romantic interest in her. She is accosted by a throng of potential suitors who go above and beyond traditional methods of courtship to display their interest (one boy goes as far as kissing her on the cheek in the lunchroom and then running away). Her complete lack of interest in their advances versus her interest in Edward not only proves her fidelity to "all-or-nothing true love" (another component of Doane's model), but it further proves Doane's point that the heroine is primarily desirous of an unsatisfied desire.[58] Furthermore, the very fact that Edward is a vampire, or mythical creature, serves the female fantasy of an unreal and unattainable representation.

Doane says, "Female desire is nourished by an overactive imagination."[59] She describes 1940's heroines who are prone to daydreams or are overly absorbed in fanciful fairytales.[60] In the film version of *Twilight* Bella doesn't appear to be overly invested in "fairytales," but in the novels the *Twilight* films are adapted from, Bella is an avid reader of love stories written by Jane Austen, Shakespeare, and Emily Bronte. In the second *Twilight* film, *New Moon,* Bella is shown with a copy of *Romeo and Juliet* and the story figures prominently in the plot of the film.

In *Twilight,* Bella has excessive dreams and daydreams. There are multiple instances of flashbacks where the point of view suggests that Bella is replaying moments

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[58] Doane, 12
[59] Doane, 114
[60] Doane, 114-115

with Edward in her mind. At one point we see Bella in her bed asleep, her bosom heaving. She wakes, startled, and sees a flash of Edward in her room. In a voiceover during this scene she says, “That was the first night I dreamt of Edward Cullen.”

Another dreamlike instance relies purely on Bella’s “overactive imagination” and it is the best example of the brand of overly imaginative or fanciful daydream Doane refers to. As Bella puts the pieces together and discovers precisely what Edward is, she researches mythology and reads various descriptions of vampires online. What, at first glance, appears to be a scene from an old Hollywood vampire film turns out to be a version of Bella and Edward that Bella has created in her mind. Bella sees herself stretched glamorously across a bed with Edward taking the place of the Hollywood horror film vampire dressed in a black cape. In the daydream, Edward appears to be kissing her neck as he lifts her from the bed, but as he moves away from her, his mouth is stained with blood, thus revealing his vampiric nature.

Although Edward is, in fact, a “good vampire” who abstains from human blood, this is the moment in the film where fantasy melds with the heroine’s reality. This mythical creature is “real” and after confronting him in regard to his vampirism, Bella learns that their love is also “real.” Yet, if we are to examine the series of events from a spectator’s point of view, the confirmation of Edward’s status as an imaginary creature is also a confirmation to the spectator that desire is linked with fantasy and imagination. Doane says, “In a patriarchal society, the myth of romantic love is always there to act as an outlet for any excess energy the woman may possess, to, somewhat paradoxically,

domesticate her."[61] Could the dolls discussed in the previous chapter be a similar outlet for fantasy and desire?

In terms of "real" versus "fantasy" in the patriarchal intentions of the 1940's love story Doane also says:

> If the female spectator is to invest energy in the love story, the films must also be able to count on her ability to differentiate between fiction and the real. They must insure that her desire is safely—and consciously—ensconced in the imaginary and that her knowledge of "real life" will compensate for the excess of the love story.[62]

The very mise en scene of *Twlight*, while set primarily in a small town, lends itself to fantasy. The misty forests of the Pacific Northwest, with their larger-than-life trees add to the atmosphere of the fantastical and suggest something that is removed from day-to-day reality. This follows Doane's observation on the fantasy nature of the love story and the way "it acts as travelogue taking the spectator to far away places."[63]

Two final key components in Doane's model consist of (1) the heroine's "all or nothing" attitude or complete devotion to the love and (2) the tendency of the love story to end somewhat unhappily or only allow for fulfillment of desire and love through death.

As previously mentioned, in *Twilight* Bella is disinterested in the "human," or "more suitable" boys at school. Again, this fits with Doane's model perfectly:

> The essentially fictive character of female desire is frequently demonstrated by the woman's demand for "all or nothing"…This rationalization is frequently produced in order to explain why the heroine cannot accept the marriage proposal of a marginal male character who is represented as a potentially good husband but with whom the heroine is not in love.

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[61] Doane, 118
[62] Doane, 118
[63] Doane, 118

In *New Moon*, a love triangle is set up where Bella must choose between Edward and her best friend (also a supernatural creature—a werewolf) Jacob (Taylor Lautner). In the third film, *Eclipse*, Bella is torn between her love for both as the story focuses almost entirely on the choice factor. This aspect dovetails with Molly Haskell's "choice" subcategory of the woman's film. "The third category, 'choice,' has the heroine pursued by at least two suitors who wait, with undivided attention, her decision; on it, their future happiness depends."[64] But ultimately in *Eclipse*, Bella chooses Edward, thus completing the idea that she is entirely devoted to the original love.

Bella is so entirely devoted to her love for Edward that, even from the beginning she is willing to die for it. When it is first revealed that Edward is a vampire, he warns her that he's dangerous, that he tried to stay away from her, that he could kill her—that he's thought about killing her. Bella's response includes such lines of dialogue as "I don't care," "I trust you," and "I'd rather die than stay away from you." With these responses in mind, it seems relatively safe to say that Bella takes her devotion to an extreme that is rarely matched by her 1940's female woman's film counterparts. The type of sadomasochism hinted at in these early examples of romantic melodrama has risen to an overt level in *Twilight.*

The component of death in the love story proves extremely interesting in *Twilight*. In the canon of films Doane concerns herself with, death is simply just that—death and a final end. She says, "A full union between the man and the woman—with no gap or distance—can only be represented at the costs of their deaths."[65] *Twilight* presents something that is both different and precisely in line with this model. With the

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[64] Haskell, 163
[65] Doane, 112

introduction of the supernatural—especially the vampire—Bella and Edward can be united in a form of death that is still very similar to (and some might argue superior to) life.

Vampires, by all mythological accounts including the mythology of *Twilight*, are technically dead. In *New Moon*, it is made clear that Edward doesn't believe vampires have souls. In *Eclipse*, Bella's death-by-vampire-transformation is one of Jacob's strongest arguments against Edward. He makes it known to Bella that he would rather see her truly dead than part of what he sees as an evil walking dead version of herself if she is transformed. Therefore, the ending of *Twilight* presents a dilemma and a compromise that hinders the couple from fully joining. Bella asks to be turned into a vampire and Edward refuses her. She is essentially choosing death and, since he is already "dead," she is choosing "a full union." Despite the fact that Edward shares Bella's "purity" by never having loved before and despite the fact that he, too, has held an "all or nothing" view of love, his resistance to turn her and permanently unite their love in death is reminiscent of the more traditional leading male who is usually less committed to the love.

The final exchange in *Twilight* is as follows:

> Edward Cullen: *Is it not enough just to have a long and happy life with me?*
>
> Bella Swan: *Yeah…for now.*

They kiss and the ending, as is, could be easily placed alongside the compromise ending in *Now, Voyager*. Only, in *Now, Voyager*, the heroine, Charlotte Vale is the one offering the compromise. She says, "Oh Jerry, don't let's ask for the moon. We have the stars." However, *Twilight* doesn't fade to black with the sentiment that Bella and Edward

will be together for the time they have until Bella grows old and eventually dies a very different kind of death that will, presumably separate them. As Bella's final voiceover suggests, she won't be passively content with "the stars." She says, "No one will surrender tonight, but I won't give in. I know what I want." Unlike Charlotte Vale, Bella will not be content until she has "the moon" and the two series installments that follow reinforce her stance.

This voiceover represents a major shift in *Twilight* from its predecessors and Doane's model of the love story. Instead of breaking with her model, though, it leads to a new wave of the love story and woman's film—the neo-woman's film. As an examination of *Twilight* in terms of Doane's model has shown, the film, in many ways, fits with her definition of films in the 1940's. However, as an examination of the differences between the two will also show, *Twilight* moves the trajectory of the genre in a new direction while maintaining many of its basic principles. The following exploration of these new elements can perhaps also take us toward the possibility of reclaiming "what a woman wants."

As with the evolution of most genres, many of the changes and additions simply build upon the established foundations. *Twilight*, as mentioned, includes the kind of exaggerated musical score inherent to the love story. But additionally, it also includes a soundtrack of songs that are placed in the foreground of many scenes. Not only is the music obvious, but also the lyrics are often "on-the-nose," attempting to add to the emotion being portrayed. From a spectator's point of view, the soundtrack topped the

music charts, debuting at the number one position on Billboard,[66] and it provides a mode of recreating the emotions of the story—giving audiences a new method of glutting themselves on the ritualistic experience of desire presented in the film.

This builds upon the traditional method of emotional connection through an instrumental score and close-up shots. Keeping with tradition, another attempt to create an emotional connection in *Twilight* is the use of close-ups, particularly during Bella and Edward's second encounter in biology class. This is the pivotal scene that establishes the attraction between the two. As they talk, extreme close-ups are used, alternating between Bella's face and Edward's, to create a sense of closeness developing between the potential couple.

As a heroine, Bella is given traits, actions, or dialogue that attempt to negate the traditional shrinking violet archetype often associated with the genre. While still shy and clumsy, she wrestles with her own assertiveness. Bella is both the passive heroine who fits with the tropes of the traditional woman's film *and* the more contemporary strong female. In a scene where Bella gives relationship advice to her friend, Angela (Christian Serratos), she says, "Take control. You're a strong, independent woman." In another scene where Bella is attacked by a group of men who try to rape her, she fights back instead of shrinking under the threat. But ultimately, it's Edward who shows up to save her from certain doom.

Bella's oscillation between damsel-in-distress and take-charge modern female speaks to a post-feminist era caught between the desire to be rescued by Prince Charming and the desire to stand strong as an independent woman. The heroine's ambivalence

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[66] Chris Harris, "Twilight Soundtrack Bites Into AC/DC's Billboard Reign," MTV.com, December 5, 2009, <http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1599170/20081112/acdc.jhtml>

further speaks to the modern female spectator who is perhaps, consciously or unconsciously, dealing with similar contradicting impulses. Jay Michaelson points out in an article for Huffington Post that, as Bella deals with these contradictions, she blurs gender roles and moves in an evolutionary direction from the traditional female role in the love story.

> Indeed, much more so than in *Twilight*, in *New Moon* it is Bella who comes of age in a masculine way, placing Edward in the feminine role. (I don't at all agree with those who claim this is the same old gender-stereotypical story.) In the first film, Edward rescues Bella from all sorts of danger; she is the damsel in distress. In New Moon, it is Bella who rescues Edward, first flying off to Italy to stop him from committing suicide (a la Romeo and Juliet), and then interceding on his behalf amongst the vampire baddies. Now it is Jacob who defends Bella - and it's not so clear she wants to be defended anymore. We could very well read the progression from *Twilight* to *New Moon* as the growth of Bella from a girl who needs defending to a woman who can make her own choices - even the wrong choice, if that's what she decides.[67]

Edward also blurs the lines of gender roles beyond that of the often-feminized leading male in the traditional love story. Even though Bella does most of the "waiting" throughout the course of the film, Edward makes it obvious that she represents the love he had been looking for, but never found when he says, "You don't know how long I've waited for you." Edward also displays a high level of commitment to the love that is rarely so overtly present in 1940's films, telling Bella "You are my life now."

Despite the presence of male gaze in *Twilight*, there is an overwhelming representation of female gaze, especially in *New Moon*. The number of scenes with shirtless male characters is staggering. In *Twilight*, Edward rips open his shirt to expose his sparkling skin and reveal his vampiric nature. In *New Moon*, the friend who becomes

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[67] Jay Michaelson, "Team Edward, Team Jacob: New Moon's Gender Revolution," The Huffington Post, December 5, 2009 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jay-michaelson/team-edward-team-jacob-ne_b_373598.html>

Bella's secondary love interest, Jacob, is shirtless throughout much of the film and the camera lingers on his musculature. After Edward's lengthy absence in *New Moon*, he is also revealed at the end without his shirt. The tradition of showing off the male body continues in *Eclipse*, and even becomes a joke when Edward asks Bella if Jacob ever wears a shirt.

Edward and Jacob become subject to female gaze and are, therefore, fetishized. Female stars have traditionally been well groomed and beautiful for the benefit of male gaze, but in *Twilight, New Moon*, and *Eclipse*, the heroine is down to earth in her appearance and the two men who attract her gaze are the ones subjected to grooming for the pure purpose of appealing to female audiences. Interestingly, Jacob's appearance is much more "average" in the first film and it is only when Edward leaves in *New Moon*, and Jacob attracts Bella's attention in a more romantic sense, that the female gaze is turned on his character. From the moment he has female attention in the form of Bella, Jacob's muscles are displayed for female viewing. This inverts the basis of the story in *Now, Voyager* where Charlotte Vale's self-worth is increased because her outward appearance changes to something "beautiful" and she is, therefore "looked at" and made more valuable through the male gaze.

In *Twilight, New Moon,* and *Eclipse* there is a duality of male and female gaze that certainly moves the genre in a new direction. Female gaze *is* present in the traditional love story, but in the *Twilight* films there is a heightened quality to the presence of female desire and it plays out in a much more traditionally male fashion, providing a visceral and particularly visual female pleasure that isn't as connected to emotionality. This element continues the thread of oscillation in Bella's character

between passive and assertive, feminine and masculine because Bella is both emotional and unemotional.

The most obvious, and perhaps most interesting, addition to the genre is the vampire. Startling in its very nature, the vampire's presence in the love story melds horror and romance—two genres traditionally kept separate. Thus, this element also adds to the blending, or oscillation between genders. Doane says:

> [T]he "love story" purportedly "speaks to" a female spectator. While the horror film, as Linda Williams points out, prompts the little girl (or grown woman) to cover her eyes, the sign of masculinity in the little boy, when confronted with the "love story," is the fact that he looks away.

But the vampire isn't a new phenomenon only connected with horror films. The new vampire, as discussed in the previous chapter, is an evolutionary result of the Byronic hero. The level of danger implied in a romantic relationship between Bella and Edward maintains instability and unsatisfied desire (which relates back to Doane's point) because Bella can never truly be sure the object of her love will remain true and, essentially, refrain from killing her.

In her article for The Atlantic, "What Girls Want," Caitlin Flanagan refers to the novel version of *Twilight*, but her observations are easily applicable to both the films and Doane's model of analysis for the love story.

> Reading the book, I sometimes experienced what I imagine long-married men must feel when they get an unexpected glimpse at pornography: slingshot back to a world of sensation that, through sheer force of will and dutiful acceptance of life's fortunes, I thought I had subdued. The Twilight series is not based on a true story, of course, but within it is *the* true story, the original one. *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…[68]

[68] Caitlin Flanagan, "What Girls Want," The Atlantic, December, 2008, December 5, 2009 < http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200812/twilight-vampires/2>

Flanagan continues on to say, "Edward puts the young girl into a state of emotional confusion and vulnerability that has been at the heart of female romantic awakening since the beginning of time."[69]

It is precisely this ritualistic experience of romance that continues to be a topic of discussion in "the woman's film" and "women's literature." As we have seen, this "desire to desire" is prevalent in the genre and the spectatorship, regardless of whether the male lead is a musician who lives next door (*Letters from an Unknown Woman*) or a vampire (*Twilight*). Returning to Molly Haskell's frustration with a separate genre of film and fiction for women, it is interesting to contemplate why "the woman's film" or romantic melodrama seems to be enjoying a revival—a revival strong enough to warrant articles in major magazines and newspapers across the nation.

Perhaps if we are to look at the new wave in a different light from Molly Haskell's observations, we can see a certain "reclaiming" and reshaping of the genre currently taking place. Despite criticism of the films, all three installments of *Twilight* have done phenomenally well at the box office. In an article for Entertainment Weekly, Owen Gleiberman notes this shift of gender control in film:

> The ascendance of the *Twilight* saga represents an essential paradigm shift in youth-gender control of the pop marketplace. For the better part of two decades, teenage boys, and *overgrown* teenage boys, have essentially held sway over Hollywood, dictating, to a gargantuan degree, the varieties of movies that get made. Explosive truck-smashing action and grisly machete-wielding horror, inflated superhero fantasy and knockabout road-trip comedy: It has been, at heart, a boys' pig-out, a playpen of testosterone at the megaplex. Sure, we have "chick flicks," but that (demeaning) term implies that they're an exception, a side course in the great popcorn smorgasboard. No more. With *New Moon*, the *Twilight* series is now officially as sweeping a juggernaut on the big screen as it

[69] Flanagan

> ever was between book covers. And that gives the core audience it represents — teenage girls — a new power and prevalence.[70]

In her closing paragraph of *The Desire to Desire*, Mary Ann Doane's comments are worthy of note in relation to the new form of the genre largely influenced by *Twilight.*

> The fascination which the women's film's still exert on us can be taken up and activated in the realm of film fantasy rather than melodrama—particularly if fantasy is perceived as a space for work on and against the familiar tropes of femininity because everything depends, of course, on how one sees oneself. And it is now possible to look *elsewhere*.[71]

While female desire in *Twilight* reaffirms the tropes of "the woman's film," often in what some may consider unhealthy ways, there is something to Doane's comment that "it is now possible to look elsewhere" that also particularly applies to *Twilight*.

While Edward Cullen and the vampire image creates another fantasy, another representation of female desire, there are, as mentioned, instances of something less "feminine" in the films and the method in which they are presented. The woman is perhaps looking at herself through the eyes of the unattainable man, but she is also looking elsewhere. The female gaze, noted previously, has reached a new level of forwardness, turning its eye on male leads in much the way a male gaze might turn its eye on a Marilyn Monroe-esque female figure. Through female desire of vampires, a duality is seeping into romantic melodrama or the "woman's film." A duality that at once embraces the long line of woman's films that came before it, yet at the same time pushes past the boundaries of the genre toward a new model that will potentially alter the course of female-oriented genre films to come.

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[70] Owen Gleiberman, "Why It's Girl-Driven Success Is Good For the Future of Movies," Entertainment Weekly, December 5, 2009 < http://movie-critics.ew.com/2009/11/26/new-moon-why-its-good-for-the-future-of-movies/>

[71] Doane, 183

Chapter Three

The Vampire and its Double: Doppelgangers, Meta Vampires, and Gender-Bending Byronic Love in *The Vampire Diaries*

The notion of duality, doubles, doppelgangers, the other self, etc. is an old one. But as with the vampire, it perhaps owes its English language popularity to the English Romantics—particularly those in Lord Byron's circle who borrowed the notion of vampires and doppelgangers from German traditions. It is not surprising, then, that Lord Byron (and the archetype he inspired) isn't the only late 18th and 19th century trend to resurface in the new vampire film or television series. Themes of duality, other selves, and the presence of a literal doppelganger heavily populate *The Vampire Diaries*, but not all of show's dualities are as literal as one might initially assume.

This chapter aims to explore both the literal and figurative doubles and dualities in *The Vampire Diaries*, shedding further light on the female spectator who is most interested in this recent vampire phenomenon. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there is an obvious oscillation between the assertive female who possesses the female gaze and the damsel in distress. These conflicting desires manifested in the character of Bella Swan (as well as Elena Gilbert of *The Vampire Diaries* and Sookie Stackhouse of *True Blood*) speak to the conflicting desires of the female spectator who consumes the fantasy world of the novels, films, and television series. There is a duality present in the mind of the spectator that relates to the dualities in the characters and narratives and it is perhaps the spectator's unconscious unwillingness to accept the coexistence of this

duality that causes the dualities to manifest themselves. That is, perhaps the spectator feels as if she must be one type of woman or another—a woman with agency consuming men or a romantic without agency who gives herself over to the love of a stronger man. By unearthing theses dualities in *The Vampire Diaries*, we are better able to peel back the layers of this complicated spectatorship.

John Herdman's *The Double in Nineteenth Century Literature* explains duality thus:

> The experience of duality can be described as the foundation stone of human consciousness. This consciousness, in what makes it distinctively human, rests upon our recognition of the distinction between the 'I' and the 'not-I.' Of one, nothing can be said or thought: 'One is one and all alone and ever more shall be so.' The existence of two, and the recognition of its existence, is necessary to the basic dialectic upon which the possibility of language rests. Consciousness develops in the child through a progressive acknowledgement of the other and its claims. The 'not-I,' however, is not always experienced as external to the individual; it can also be experienced as existing within the self. The experience of self-division, or at least the potential for it, is almost an inseparable condition of consciousness…
>
> In all its variations, the double arises out of and gives form to the tension between division and unity. It stands for contradiction within unity, and for unity in spite of division, the likeness expressing the unity of the individual, the doubleness or complementarity expressing division within the personality.[72]

The myriad doubles in *The Vampire Diaries* simply mirror, or double, the very doubleness which manifests itself within the spectator. The ritualistic experience desired by the spectator from a series or film that focuses on the new vampire is conflicted and therefore, such are the themes, characters, and even the genre formats created to satisfy the spectator.

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[72] John Herdman, The Double in Nineteenth Century Literature, (The MacMillan Press LTD, 1990), 1-2

As the latecomer to the new vampire trend, it is perhaps fitting that *The Vampire Diaries* often seems to be the most unabashedly self aware. In episode four of the first season ("Family Ties"), Damon Salvatore (Ian Somerhalder) lounges on a bed reading a book that turns out to be one of the novels in the *Twilight* series. His exchange with Caroline (Candice Accola), the girl he's seducing for his evil purposes, is as follows:

> Damon: *What's so special about this Bella girl? Edward's so whipped.*
>
> Caroline: *You have to read the first book first. It won't make sense if you don't.*
>
> Damon: *Ah I miss Anne Rice. She was so on it.*
>
> Caroline: *How come you don't sparkle?*
>
> Damon: *Because I live in the real world where vampires burn in the sun.*
>
> Caroline: *How do you go in the sun?*
>
> Damon: *I have a ring. It protects me. Long story…This book, by the way, has it all wrong.*[73]

In this instance, *The Vampire Diaries* presents a doubling from within the new vampire fandom—that is to say, it presents a fandom within in fandom and a meta genre. In this scene Caroline (similar to many teenage girls in 2009) is a fan of the *Twilight* novels. She lives in a world of "real" vampires who scoff at the new vampire (Edward Cullen) and, therefore the vampire's emasculation. Yet, *The Vampire Diaries* has its own fanbase that overlaps with that of *Twilight*. Caroline is a fan of vampires who exists in a series about vampires that has its own similar fans. Damon clearly sees himself as a stronger and more "manly" vampire, thus echoing the heterosexual male sentiment that the new vampire (ie: Edward Cullen and those similar to him) are "whipped" by the

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[73] "Family Ties," The Vampire Diaries: The Complete First Season, Writ. Andrew Kreisberg & Brian Young, Dir. Guy Ferland, (Warner Brothers 2010), DVD

women they love and suffering from a loss of masculinity. When Damon says that he lives in the real world and explains that he doesn't sparkle because real vampires burn in the sun, there's a sense that he is adamantly defending his masculinity as a "real" vampire while simultaneously negating Edward Cullen's masculinity due to the very fact that Edward sparkles—a trait that is associated with something beautiful and, therefore, feminized. Yet, this exchange becomes more complicated when considering that Damon, despite his obvious fight for masculinity, portrays himself as feminized in other ways. Throughout the scene, Damon both defends his own vampire-related masculinity and presents himself as the stereotypical "gay best friend." It is true that he is in Caroline's bed because they've had sex, but as he lounges, she tries on dresses in front of him and attempts to choose one for an event that evening while he comments on her fashion choices. On one hand, Damon is laughing at the new vampire while the female he controls is parading in her underwear in front of him—providing, one would assume, a visual pleasure grounded in the male gaze. However, on the other hand, Damon doesn't seem particularly interested in gazing at Caroline's nearly naked body. His greatest focus aside from Edward Cullen's feminization is Caroline's attire. He barely glances at her body, but instead sees the color of her dress and immediately gives fashion advice. Their conversation is as follows:

> Damon: *No Yellow. Jaundice. Go for the blue.*
>
> Caroline: *I don't like the blue.*
>
> Damon: Well, I do. And if I'm going to be your date…[74]

[74] "Family Ties," The Vampire Diaries: The Complete First Season

Damon maintains male authority in this scene—acting opposite from what he sees as Edward Cullen's subordinate behavior—but the manner in which he asserts his authority is interesting. To dole out fashion advice and tell the girl you are controlling, drinking blood from, and having sex with that her color choice is essentially not right for her skin tone is not exactly in line with the social constructions of masculinity. There is no reference to the dress in terms of the female body. Damon's comments are concerned with fashion alone and the manner in which the female body is clothed in this fashion—representing the stereotype of the gay man. The juxtaposition of heterosexual and homosexual goes against what Damon seems to be asserting about Edward Cullen, which unwittingly puts him in the same category of Edward Cullen who is caught between traditional masculinity and the often-feminized new vampire. Thus, *The Vampire Diaries* not only presents the viewer with a fandom within a fandom and a commentary on the new vampire phenomenon, but it also perpetuates the very phenomenon it critiques.

In the DVD features for season one of *The Vampire Diaries* the show's lead actress, Nina Dobrev, makes note of this self-referencing quality:

> Kevin [the creator of the series] definitely brings in a lot of pop culture references. He also has this great ability to have the characters make fun of themselves…Our show and our characters live in the now. They're very much aware of the vampire phenomenon that's out there.[75]

Producer and co-creator, Kevin Williamson says, "I thought we had to acknowledge it. Just to let our audience know our characters live in the real world. If you encountered a real life vampire, wouldn't the first thing you'd [say] is, 'this kind of

[75] "Into Mystic Falls" The Vampire Diaries: The Complete First Season, (Warner Brothers 2010), DVD

looks like Edward?'"[76] It is interesting that he constructs reality as what appears on *The Vampire Diaires*, while maintaining that Edward Cullen is a product of fiction that his characters are familiar with. Kevin Williamson, is also responsible for the *Scream* films, which frequently become genre referential as they simultaneously exist as horror films and reaffirmation parodies.

> There is a second type of spoof movie, the "parodies of reaffirmation" which are not so obvious. They are often confused with the genre being undercut. This is best exemplified by the series of "Scream" movies, which flip-flop between being scary and spoofing scary (horror). In a reaffirmation film, sometimes called "sophisticated parody," one is concerned about the plight of pivotal characters.[77]

In addition to the *Scream* films Kevin Williamson and *The Vampire Diaries* co-creator Julie Plec were responsible for the popular teen melodrama series *Dawson's Creek. The Vampire Diaries* melds Williamson's brand of horror and reaffirmation parody with the staples of the teen melodrama. Additionally, *The Vampire Diaries* relates closely to the melodrama's televised cousin, the soap opera, which is particularly known for storylines that make use of doubles for the sake of mistaken identity plot twists. It is interesting to note that the soap opera genre is familiar with vampires and gothic romance. A series titled *Dark Shadows* aired on ABC as part of its soap opera lineup from 1966 until 1971. This series is noted for its gothic themes—primarily in regards to vampires. As with *Twilight*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *True Blood*, the soap opera *Dark Shadows* developed a cult following of fans who remain passionate about the series and attend conventions or maintain fan websites. If *Twilight* is a neo-woman's film, *The Vampire Diaries* relates most closely to the daytime soap opera.

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[76] "Into Mystic Falls" The Vampire Diaries: The Complete First Season
[77] Wes Gehring, "On the 'Road' with Hope & Crosby - Bob Hope / Bing Crosby Comedies," USA Today, November 2000

But the true doubling within *The Vampire Diaries* moves beyond genre doubling and blending. Returning to the meta nature of *The Vampire Diaries* as exemplified through the scene between Damon and Caroline, it is the duality of the brothers, Damon and Stefan Salvatore (Paul Wesley), that creates the foundation for the series and provides interesting examples of the new vampire that this project is concerned with. If Damon exists as both a critic of the new vampire and a manifestation of the new vampire, his brother Stefan follows the rules of the new vampire without humor. Although different in minor ways, Stefan Salvatore and Edward Cullen are striking doubles of one another. Both of them fall deeply in love with the heroine, both fight the urge to feed on her, both abstain from human blood entirely (hunting animals instead), and both lack purpose in their lives before meeting and falling in love with the heroine.

But it is Stefan's relationship to his brother that provides the most interesting duality. Damon is Stefan's metaphorical double and other self. The brothers form a divided self that represents ideas of "good" and "evil" at war with one another. Stefan's struggle to be a "good" vampire is both internal and external. Damon is the externalization and mirror that reflects one half of Stefan's inner self. Not surprisingly, the audience learns as the series progresses that Damon is not a one-dimensional "evil" villain. He often boasts about his superhuman vampiric ability to "turn off" his emotions and, therefore, any trace of altruism. This "turning off" of goodness is internal, but externalized through Stefan. Damon's constant taunting and tormenting of Stefan and his fight to suppress Stefan's better intentions merely serves to reflect his struggle to suppress his own feelings. In turn, Stefan fights to suppress Damon because he represents his dangerous and murderous side. They are two halves of a whole, each half

struggling for dominance over the other in hopes of finding dominance over the inner self each seeks to suppress. The tortured soul complex that both Damon and Stefan suffer from holds all the appeal of the dangerous lover for the female spectator. Stefan offers the viewer the ritualistic experience of an Edward Cullen who fights to be good and Damon offers the ultimate "bad boy" Byronic who must be tamed.

In the first episode of season one, Damon doesn't appear until halfway through the episode after Stefan and Elena have met in high school and later gotten to know one another at a party. Stefan has all of the charm of the new vampire as he converses with Elena. The spectator is privy to all of their private moments as they connect on the soulmate level of Edward and Bella. But while Stefan uses all the tropes of the new vampire, Damon is more concerned with taking action in the spirit of the old and, one is to believe, more masculine vampire tropes. He attacks a girl, Vicki Donovan (Kayla Ewell), in the woods. After the attack, Damon appears in Stefan's bedroom. Stefan and Damon have the first of many verbal and physical fights. Here, we see Damon make his first push against the tropes of the new vampire. While he comments on his brother (and other self's) behavior, the character is also commenting on the vampire phenomenon and pushing back a threatened masculinity. Elena is a literal double, or lookalike, of a girl named Katherine who both brothers loved before they were turned into vampires during the American Civil War. The duality of women within the duality of the two brothers further exemplifies their struggle between two halves of their collective whole and it is of note that the Salvatore brothers see this duality as part of their struggle with one another. Damon's push to suppress his own better nature through suppressing his other self is apparent in this scene:

> Damon: *She took my breath away. Elena. She's a dead ringer for Katherine. Is it working Stefan? Being around her. Being in her world. Does it make you feel alive?*
>
> Stefan: *She's not Katherine.*
>
> Damon: *Well let's hope not. We both know how that ended. Tell me something. When is the last time you had something stronger than a squirrel?*
>
> Stefan: *I know what you're doing Damon. It's not going to work.*
>
> Damon: *Come on. Don't you crave a little? Let's do it. Together. I saw a couple of girls out there. Or let's just cut to the chase. Let's just go straight for Elena.*[78]

Here Stefan begins to lose control to Damon and his other self. Not only does he lash out toward Damon, but the signs of his bloodlust begin to show themselves. In the mythology of *The Vampire Diaries* a vampire's veins around his or her eyes begin to swell and the eyes turn color, thus exposing the vampire as another creature. Such is the case with Stefan at the moment of Damon's tormenting. Stefan angrily fights back and one senses that he is not only fighting Damon, but fighting himself when he shoves Damon out a second story window and comes crashing down to the ground with him. Damon appears relatively unscathed while Stefan looks as if he has suffered a bit from the fall. Damon jokes about Stefan's form, playing the role of an Olympic judge who is commenting on a high dive, and then the following exchange takes place:

> Stefan: *It's all fun and games Damon, huh? But wherever you go, people die.*
> Damon: *That's a given.*
> Stefan: *Not here. I won't allow it.*
> Damon: *I take that as an invitation.*
> Stefan: *Damon, please, after all these years, can't we just give it a rest.*
> Damon: *I promised you an eternity of misery so I'm just keeping my word.*

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[78] "Pilot," The Vampire Diaries: The Complete First Season, Writ. Kevin Williamson & Julie Plec, Dir. Marcos Siega, (Warner Brothers 2010), DVD

> Stefan: *Just stay away from Elena.*[79]

Here, Damon slams Stefan against a building, leaving Stefan out of breath. He towers over Stefan as he says, "You should know better than to think you're stronger than me. You lost that fight when you stopped feeding on people. I wouldn't try it again."[80] Damon's casual assertion that death is a given when he is around belongs to his fight for the more dangerous vampire. Harkening back to the Byronic hero in John Polidori's *The Vampyre* or Emily Bronte's *Heathcliff*, Damon is violent and stormy. He is disgusted by Stefan's weakness—this manifestation of an emasculated Byronic hero. Damon further makes his disgust clear in the second episode when he kidnaps the girl he attacked in the woods, Vicki. He takes her to a rooftop, threatening to push her off in an attempt to catch Stefan's attention. As Stefan jumps onto the roof, Damon sarcastically asks if he's been "eating bunnies" to improve his strength, once again pointing to Stefan's emasculation through Stefan's unwillingness to feed on humans. Damon also exposes Stefan's lesser strength from not embracing his true nature when he is able to compel Vicki to think Stefan was the vampire who attacked her while Stefan's attempts to use his vampire powers aren't up to Damon's level.

> Damon: *Your choice of lifestyle has made you weak. A couple of vampire parlor tricks is nothing compared to the power you could have, that you now need. You can change that. Human blood gives you that. You have two choices. You can feed and make her forget, or you can let her run screaming vampire through the town square.*
>
> Stefan: *That's what this is about? You want to expose me?*
>
> Damon: *No. I want you to remember who you are.*

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[79] "Pilot," The Vampire Diaries: The Complete First Season
[80] "Pilot," The Vampire Diaries: The Complete First Season

> Stefan: *Why? So what? So I'll feed? So I'll kill? So I'll remember what it's like to be brothers again? You know what? Let her go. Let her tell everyone vampires have returned to Mystic Falls. Let them chain me up and drive a stake through my heart because at least I'll be free of you.*[81]

As Stefan calls Damon's bluff, relishing the idea of being rid of his other self—as though being rid of Damon will rid him of his own personal demons—Damon quietly compels Vicki to believe that the entire incident was drug induced. When she leaves, Damon announces that he plans to stay in town.

In these scenes, Stefan appears to be entirely good while Damon appears to be purely evil. They are new vampire versus old vampire—feminized male versus highly masculine male. But as the series progresses, the viewer sees how truly similar the brothers actually are. Aside from loving the same women (first Katherine, and the Elena), Damon was once as adverse to drinking human blood as Stefan currently is and Stefan's blood lust is more powerful than even Damon's. In episodes seventeen ("Let the Right One In") and eighteen ("Under Control"), Stefan has a taste of human blood to save his life and it sets him on a downward spiral. By episode nineteen, "Miss Mystic Falls," Stefan is out of control. He lures a teenage girl away from a beauty pageant that Elena is a participant in and drinks the girl's blood. He is wracked with guilt by his own behavior, but as Damon had suggested many times, drinking human blood was part of his nature. While Stefan becomes Damon-like in this episode, Damon is forced to take Stefan's place in escorting and dancing with Elena at the pageant. Here, he exhibits his better behavior and actually helps Elena deal with Stefan's out of control bloodlust. In the next episode titled "Blood Brothers," Damon and Stefan's pre-vampire past is

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[81] "The Night of the Commet," The Vampire Diaries: The Complete First Season, Writ. Kevin Williamson & Julie Plec, Dir. Marcos Siega, (Warner Brothers 2010), DVD

revealed and the viewer learns that their roles were initially reversed. Damon was the altruistic brother, while Stefan was the blood-seeking one. Thus, they become truly one half of a whole and a divided self that is capable of oscillation between two extremes. In his book, *The Literature of the Second Self*, C.F. Keppler speaks about the duality of the twin brother, which is not far removed from Stefan and Damon:

> He is a product of the apparently age-old tendency of the human imagination to think of many of its subjects as a basic oneness divided into a simultaneous twoness, while still retaining the oneness and using it as a cohesive force to counterbalance the divisive force. He is unmistakably outside, but just as inescapably inside; his reality is always that of one in a pair.[82]

But if Stefan and Damon ultimately comment on the struggle to suppress one's other self and definitions of masculinity, it is the duality of doppelgangers, Elena and Katherine that forms a doppelganger for female spectators interested in the new vampire.

Although the female gaze is very much turned on Stefan and Damon Salvatore, *The Vampire Diaries* is as conflicted and as ambivalent in its oscillation between feminist agency and independence and what is often seen as anti-feminist romanticism of male dominance as *Twilight.* Elena is the literal doppelganger of Katherine, who is a centuries old ruthless, femme fatale vampire. Essentially, the characters of Elena and Katherine, represent a version of the Madonna/whore dichotomy which initially registers as a regressive and reductive female character portrayal. This duality in *The Vampire Diaires* seems to assert that a woman must be one or the other and cannot be both. If a woman is both, she is a divided self who must kill one half or the other. To solidify that Katherine is truly a second self, both Elena and Katherine are played by the same actress, Nina

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[82] C.F. Keppler, The Literature of the Second Self, (The University of Arizona Press, 1972), 18

Dobrev with the help of a photo double (which creates a literal doubling in the form of the actor and the photo double—who is, interestingly, doubling for a double, or doppelganger and thus the doubling itself is doubled or layered). This "good" and "evil" duality is similar to Stefan and Damon, but there is something unique about Katherine and Elena, yet at the same time, something age-old and nearly redundant. One must ask why this particular female oscillation is intriguing to spectators and, more specifically, why now?

In *A Psychoanalytic Study of the Double in Literature* Robert Rogers discusses the Madonna/whore dichotomy that he calls fair maid and femme fatale:

> …man's changing views of women of women offer a crude parallel to the developmental history of the male child's attitudes toward his mother and ultimately toward all women he can love. Initially the child does not even know who his mother is. Then she becomes identified as a source of food, comfort, and tenderness. In time she becomes the object of the phallic impulses. By the stage at which the child really begins to understand how he came into the world, he has repressed all awareness of his libidinal impulses toward his mother and set her up on a pedestal as a sexually pure creature. Then, as Freud says, "when he cannot any longer maintain the doubt that claims exception for his own parents from the ugly sexual behavior of the rest of the world, he says to himself with cynical logic that the difference between his mother and a whore is after all not so very great, since at the bottom, they both do the same thing." Normally he represses this idea, too. At this point he is likely to begin to entertain a dual view of all women as sexual saints or sinners, the one type representing the good, nourishing, sexually pure mother and the other the erotic mother. Ideally, he dissolves this dualism when he marries. But before then, and even after the marriage, some men are attracted to either one type or the other, or torn between the two. When this false dualism is entertained on a broad social scale, we have the sexual double standard, which means that a different code applies for men than for women but also means, as a corollary, that all women are either good girls, whom one marries, or bad girls, who provide the fun.[83]

[83] Robert Rogers, A Psychoanalytic Study of the Double in Literature, (Wayne State University Press, 1970), 130-131

These observations of the Madonna/whore duality do much to explain the male perspective, but, for the most part, the new vampire genre is targeted to the heterosexual female. What purpose does the duality between Elena and Katherine serve? One might initially believe that the doubles do indeed reinforce a sexual double standard. But as with all of the portrayed gender roles discussed in this project, there is something new happening. One senses an evolution in the portrayal of Elena and Katherine. While Stefan and Damon have loved both characters and tend to worship Elena's goodness while dismissing Katherine's badness, there is a sense that this duality is less about male desire than an emergence of female desire. The heterosexual female experiences the internal war between the two dichotomies and the duality becomes less about male perspective or acceptance than it becomes about personal choice. This moment in vampire literature, film and television speaks to the female spectator, particularly the teenage female spectator, as she grapples with the notions of a world filled with conflicting and shifting gender roles. The duality is no longer about male desire but perhaps it is about a female desire to finally reconcile good girl and bad girl into one being instead of killing off the other self. Damon and Stefan's struggle, on the other hand, is retrograde. Men have always been allowed to be both good and bad, but such vampiric representations of new and old vampire present a struggle that may or may not be recognized by the modern male. This struggle is an offset of the female struggle and becomes much more about what women desire in a man than what a man desires in himself. Bella in *Twilight* was the phoenix rising from the ash of the Woman's Film heroine and Elena, along with her Katherine double have taken the complex issue to

another level toward defining the new woman—particularly the framework of the acceptable new heroine.

As touched on in chapter one, Elena in the novels is calculating, the most popular girl in school, and shallow. She's also blonde. The Elena in the television series is a bit of a departure from the book character and she is much more down to earth and, as with her *Twilight* counterpart, a brunette. In the opening pages of the first novel in *The Vampire Diaries* series Elena describes herself thus:

> 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.[84]

While the Elena of the television series is perhaps popular, she doesn't present herself as someone who is aware of this fact. She's caring, mature, and concerned about her drug-taking younger brother—often playing the caregiver role with him in place of their dead parents. She has a group of friends, plenty of male admirers, and she is a cheerleader, but she's portrayed as "the girl next door" rather than beauty queen. This Elena exudes a quiet "good girl" confidence. Bella in the novels and the films has a level of assertiveness, but she suffers from a beauty complex that Elena doesn't seem concerned with. Elena in the television series finds a balance between the self-effacing "every-girl" Bella portrays herself as and the overly confident blond in the novels.

Regarding the changes made to Elena in the adaptation process, Julie Plec says, "Elena in the books was kind of a bitchy mean girl…If I had to characterize her like that from the beginning, I don't think anyone would have cared as much about the love

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[84] L.J. Smith, The Vampire Diaries: The Awakening and The Struggle, (Harper Teen, 1991), 6

story."[85] One might question why it is acceptable for the vampire to often appear as cruel or cold initially—particularly as arrogant—yet in terms of marketability, the female must be kind from the beginning? This relates back to Bella and her Woman's film ancestors in creating a story revolving around a caring "every woman" who desires to tame the unattainable vampire. It is most interesting that these changes were made from the novels—the first of which was written in 1991 long before the current vampire phenomenon. As the latecomer to the television and film cultural moment in vampirism, *The Vampire Diaries* is clearly conforming to an audience expectation—an expectation that is extremely and obviously conflicted to say the least.

Even with Elena's makeover, she is not entirely helpless and she is perhaps more capable and strong willed than the screen version of Bella. While Elena is frequently left waiting to be rescued, she is almost as frequently proactive in rescuing herself and taking action. She physically fights vampires, even the vampire she loves, while Bella most often resorts to the role of shrinking violet. When Stefan succumbs to his bloodlust and Elena realizes he needs help, she stages her own vampire intervention by stabbing Stefan with a serum that will weaken him and locking him away for her own version of rehab. While remaining grounded in the Bella image, Elena simultaneously becomes something else.

Actress, Nina Dobrev, was interviewed for the cover of a popular magazine targeted to teenage girls called *Teen Vogue*, and the magazine was quick to separate Dobrev's Elena character from Kristen Stewart's Bella. The article opens with the line,

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[85] "Into Mystic Falls" The Vampire Diaries: The Complete First Season

"Let's just get this comparison out of the way: Nina Dobrev is the anti-Bella."[86] It is of note that the article names the actress instead of Elena as if the two are interchangeable, then goes on to discuss Elena as a heroine after making a comparison between the actress and the characters she plays. The article describes a duality within an actress who plays two characters who represent a duality. There is a symbiosis from character to character to actress to spectator. The subtext of the article's message is clear. Nina Dobrev, as with the characters she plays, is divided between good girl teenager and slightly "naughty" adult woman. The apparent point of this angle is to relate the actress to the spectator in much the way the spectator relates to the characters in *The Vampire Diaries*. Teen Vogue describes Dobrev thus:

> Her trailer vibes of a teenager's bedroom: Fashion magazines, stuffed animals, and shoeboxes fill floor space and various corners. There's a half-drunk bottle of kombucha on the desk, a corkboard of photos of cast-mates and friends, and notes to herself scrawled on a chalkboard-painted wall ("pay bills," reads one).
> Then, suddenly: "Oh my god, I'm so embarrassed." Our eyes land on a cheesy male pinup calendar hanging near the door. She runs to it immediately, nervously tearing it from the wall. "For my twenty-first birthday! It was a joke gift! Please don't judge!"
>
> As in her day job playing dueling roles as responsible high-schooler Elena and centuries-old vampire Katherine, Nina, 22, hovers somewhere between distracted teenager and fully realized adult.[87]

The description's full meaning is vague. Is one to believe that Dobrev's male pinup calendar makes her a fully realized adult? The juxtaposition between stuffed animals and pinups calendars—regardless of the actress's own personal motivations for

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[86] Alyssa Giacobbe, "Beautiful Creature: Nina Dobrev," Teen Vogue.com, March 9, 2011 <http://www.teenvogue.com/industry/coverlook/2011/03/nina-dobrev-teen-vogue-april-2011#ixzz1G8v4gey3>

[87] Alyssa Giacobbe, "Beautiful Creature: Nina Dobrev"

keeping them in her dressing room—speaks to the ambivalence of the spectator. While the character of Elena does indeed have sex with her vampire boyfriend, Stefan, there is a purity in their love and sexual relationship that is in line with Bella and Edward's abstinence. Katherine, on the other hand, sees what she wants (sexually and otherwise) and takes it. As with the discussion of the new vampire as spectatorial doll in chapter one, Katherine sees men as her playthings. She pushes beyond the realm of femme fatale or whore and assumes a role that is as masculinized as the new vampire is feminized. In episode one of season two ("The Return"), Katherine sees Elena's ex-boyfriend, Matt (Zach Roerig), and lusts after him, commenting on his blue eyes. In episode seven of season two ("Masquerade"), Katherine sees Matt who mistakes her for Elena. She looks him up and down saying, "You really do look hot in a suit. I'd love to just…"[88] Her voice trails off in a breathy way as she tames her obvious lust and attempts to gain composure while pretending to be Elena. Katherine also plays with Damon as if he is her doll. He is still in love with her, even though Katherine admits to him that she's in love with Stefan. In episode one of season two, she tells Damon to "kiss her or kill her." The scene becomes passionate as they ravage each other and Katherine asserts her sexual dominance, pushing him to the ground and initiating the first kiss. Damon stops her, though, and asks for a brief pause. Once again, despite his character's tendency to uphold masculinity, he falls into the new vampire category by reversing the gender expectations since it is normally the female who is portrayed as the one asking for a pause during a heated sexual moment. Katherine appears frustrated as she pushes him away and waits to listen to his reasons. Playing the part of the male in this scene, she

[88] "The Masquerade," The Vampire Diaries, The CW, WUPA Atlanta, October 28, 2010, Television

appears to be sexually frustrated by his emotion as the following exchange takes place:

> Damon: *I have a question. Answer it, and it's back to fireworks and rockets red glare. Answer it right and I'll forget the last hundred and forty five years I've spent missing you. I'll forget how much I loved you I'll forget everything and we can start over. This can be our defining moment. We have the time. That's the beauty of eternity. I just need the truth. Just once.*
>
> Katherine: *Stop. I already know your question and its answer. The truth is, I've never loved you. It was always Stefan.*[89]

With those words, she walks away, leaving Damon on the broken hearted end of the equation because he was looking for love, and she was looking for sex. In the scene, Damon speaks to Katherine as if he is as tortured as Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*. Here, he no longer represents masculinity and the old vampire as much as he becomes a man so violently in love that his love has manifested into a bitterness that willfully covers up his true feelings. Perhaps Damon is not fighting his inner self and Stefan as a means of maintaining his masculinity so much as he is fighting his own conflicted emotions. Alternatively, later in the season Damon transfers his love to Elena, but puts her on a pedestal, returning to the masculinized version of the Madonna/whore dichotomy. When he confesses his love to Elena, he also compels her not to remember it because he feels he is not worthy of her.

> Damon: *I love you, Elena, and it's because I love you that I can't be selfish with you—why you can't know this. I don't deserve you. But my brother does. God I wish you didn't have to forget this, but you do.*[90]

And with those words, he has used his power to compel Elena not to remember

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[89] "The Return," The Vampire Diaries, The CW, WUPA Atlanta, September 9, 2010, Television

[90] "Rose," The Vampire Diaries, The CW, WUPA Atlanta, September 9, 2010, Television

anything he has just said. It is Damon's most sensitive new vampire moment, yet he uses old vampire tricks to make her forget. He is truly a Byronic hero, dangerous to love, self pitying, and tortured by his stormy feelings. The complexities of these dualities are multi-faceted. As with many instances in *Twilight*, gender roles are both reinforced and broken. Returning to the article for *Teen Vogue*, it is the very duality of each character in *The Vampire Diaries* that makes the series one of the CW network's most successful:

> …viewers also relate to *TVD*'s subtle commentary on the idea that life is more complicated than just good versus evil. Nearly every character—from the overextended cheerleader who turns vampire to the angry jock whose inner werewolf awakens his sensitive side—is both flawed and redeemable. As the good girl pursued by both protective, loving Stefan and spontaneous, passionate Damon, Elena tries to do the right thing. But even she has a dark side in the form of Katherine, her stiletto-wearing vampire twin hell-bent on manipulating Elena and everyone she loves to get what she wants.[91]

It is of note, that all of the dualities mentioned involve the supernatural. Elena appears to be a human at first, but the series eventually reveals that aside from being Katherine's doppelganger in terms of looks, she is also Katherine's ancestor and her mythical doppelganger—making her part of an ancient doppelganger curse involving the Katherine's (and therefore, Elena's) family. Bonnie (Katerina Graham) is a witch and shares a double (although not a lookalike) in the form of her ancestor who was a witch working for Katherine during the Civil War. Tyler, the werewolf mentioned in the article, is both a wolf and a teenage boy—the new werewolf representing a similar fantasy and gender crisis to the new vampire. But it is one of the only truly human characters, Matt (Elena's ex-boyfriend), who appears solid and one. He's a football player and "all-American" nice guy. The character is charming, yet antiquated, with his

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[91] Alyssa Giacobbe, "Beautiful Creature: Nina Dobrev"

small town, masculine, old-fashioned behavior.

Caroline, Matt's love interest, was an average cheerleader and the somewhat jealous "queen bee" at her high school. But then she became a pawn in Damon's manipulations, and was later turned into a vampire by Katherine, thus turning Caroline into her own supernatural duality consisting of her former human and present supernatural self. In season one, pre-vampire Caroline is easily controlled by a man (Damon) and incapable of protecting herself. She is also insecure in her love life. Post-vampire Caroline maintains some of her old personality traits, but she is no longer a helpless damsel in distress. Her transition to the supernatural makes her capable of overcoming adversity and taking care of herself. When she is kidnapped and tortured by werewolves, Stefan asks if she'll be okay. Caroline replies that she "isn't a little girl anymore" and assures him that she'll be fine.

Duality within characters and storylines is an age-old tradition. Yet, as with the latest representation of vampires, there is something new that speaks to this particular cultural moment with the use of this trope in *The Vampires Diaries*. Duality represents a before and after, a struggle between one kind of thing and another. C.F. Keppler states that:

> Faced with problems, each of us tends to commune with himself by playing a double role: the rash and the cautious, or the trusting and the cynical, or the seeker of advice and the experienced counselor. The process of thought is always at least silently Socratic, the self divided between the self that questions and the self that answers.[92]

It is this communing with oneself that seems to be taking place within the female spectator. This cultural moment in vampire film and television speaks to those very

[92] Keppler, 5

conflicts as those conflicts manifest themselves on screen. Damon and Stefan question masculinity while Katherine and Elena question what women want and what women should be. It is interesting to consider why these conflicts are necessary. Can we imagine a world where these conflicts are no longer important? Despite the uses of traditionally gendered tropes, *The Vampire Diaries* seeks to enmesh itself within female culture—particularly teenage female culture as evidenced by the article in *Teen Vogue.* The female spectator is "divided between the self that questions and the self the answers" while the dualities present in *The Vampire Diaries* mirror these complications and conflicts. In many ways, *The Vampire Diaries* is a show about teenagers coming of age. But the females coming of age within the era of the series are like phoenixes rising from the ashes of traditional gender roles and gender desires. *The Vampire Diaries* not only fulfills the ritualistic experience of a fantasy world. Instead, it also provides a means in which the modern female's own conflicting desires can be played out and mirrored back to her from the safety of a fantasy world that exists in a television screen. The divided self is an old conflict, but perhaps the doubleness in *The Vampire Diaries* also suggests that a woman can survive her dualities and that these dualities need not always be as divided as one might think. Perhaps the dualities are actually choices and perhaps Elena and Katherine in particular represent agency instead of a never ending conflicting battle. If women are to reclaim the question of "what a woman wants" (as I suggested in the introduction), then Elena and Katherine must represent choices and agency. It is possible that these conflicts are not conflicts at all, but merely a portrayal of women who can be both one way and another simultaneously.

Chapter Four

Coming Out of the Coffin: From *Sex and the City* to Sex and the Vampire

In the opening credits of HBO's *True Blood*, the viewer is assaulted with a bizarre blend of uniquely Southern American images—everything from road kill to gospel church ceremonies to strippers. But perhaps the most interesting image is that of a sign that is familiar, yet foreign. It is a sign typically associated with churches. A sign meant to grab attention and quote a biblical verse or offer Christian advise to a passerby. Perhaps it is meant to shock a "sinner" into repenting. This particular sign in the opening credits for *True Blood* simply states: "God Hates Fangs"—a takeoff on the now famous hate campaigns of the American Wesboro Baptist church, which has displayed the all-too-similar sentiment, "God Hates Fags." And, thus, the premise for this television series is set forth.

Within a world of deep-rooted Christian Southern culture exists a world of vampires who have "come out of the coffin" to live and work among humans. They fight for vampire rights, suffer persecution from intolerant humans, and are often ambiguous in their sexuality. *True Blood* is as youth obsessed as *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries*, but it exists far outside the realm of high school. The heroine, Sookie Stackhouse (Anna Paquin) is a twenty-something waitress who is not impoverished, but still struggling to make ends meet. Although *The Vampire Diaries* utilizes a Southern setting and Civil War

flashbacks, Southerness is not woven into the show's fabric in the same way Southerness is part of *True Blood's* genetic makeup.

In *The Vampire Diaries*, and even *Twilight* a sense of time and history is displaced. The past seems to be something that exists outside of literal history and the passing of time itself isn't always clear. Bella is concerned with growing older, so there is a sense of running out of time. But part of Bella's motive behind wanting to become a vampire is that she could become frozen in time and exist as a teenager, perpetually in love with Edward and perpetually by his side. In *The Vampire Diaries*, a sense of time is even less existent. The Civil War serves as a remote and romanticized backdrop and back-story. Even the present is only important in that it is present. The characters live in a perpetual "now." The seasons shift, but there seems to be no progression. The markers of advancement from one grade to the next, from high school to graduation, are unclear or nonexistent. Although *True Blood* exists in an alternate place and time where vampires are publically known to exist, there is a stronger sense of history and a heightened or hyper-reality. It is in these differences that *True Blood* seems to strengthen and exploit the appeal of *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries.*

This chapter examines what separates this gory, extremely sexualized, and uniquely Southern series from its vampire film and television siblings. *True Blood* has done as much for the phenomenon as *Twilight* or *The Vampire Diaries*, but despite the spectatorial appeal of Byronic romance in the series, *True Blood* exists both inside and outside of the 2008-2009 vampire zeitgeist—just as the vampires it represents are both inside and outside of the human world. *True Blood* is a complex web of romance, sexuality, and Southerness, or perhaps even Americaness. If "God hates fangs" (ie:

vampires), what precisely is the metaphorical dichotomy in question? Prejudice against vampires is obvious in the series, but the source of the prejudice is not explicitly clear. Do vampires represent homosexuality? Non-white humans? Or perhaps vampires simply represent a form of gender role confusion that traditional societies wish to repress? One could say that, in *True Blood*, they represent all of the above.

True Blood presents a world populated by those who both want to hold on to traditions and history and move on from it by creating something new. *True Blood* connects to *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries* in its essential drives. The televised text of the series has a gendered struggle at its core. This struggle, as with the struggles represented and discussed in previous chapters, is one that is ambivalent, representing the ambivalent struggles in the spectator's unconscious mind. And the spectator for *True Blood* is slightly different, although often overlapping with its vampiric cousins, *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries*. While young heterosexual women are targeted in *True Blood*, the content demands a more mature audience and, as with *Sex and the City* and other HBO series, *True Blood* also seems to target a gay male audience. The sexuality of the target audience is not as geared toward fulfilling hetero-normative expectations. And, with the heavy inclusion of nudity and the HBO trademark, one can assume that the heterosexual male audience will more likely be interested in the series since a nude beautiful blonde heroine, heavy gore/violence, and the HBO stamp of approval are all gender markers of "acceptable" masculine content. HBO as a network and a brand provides preconceived spectator expectations that, alone, slightly change the core audience in question.

But core audience aside, *True Blood* presents the viewer with the new vampire story at its center. Sookie is a virgin at the beginning of the series, disgusted by the normative heterosexual behavior of the average, highly masculinized modern man. Her romance with Bill is portrayed as something sacred and special—as is Bella and Edward's and Elena and Stefan's. Bill is the tender, yet stormily passionate Byronic hero that his contemporaries are. He is every bit the loving dangerous lover that forms the crux of the phenomenon and he is the antithesis to the modern man and the trials and tribulations of dating in the modern world.

In a reversal from *Twilight* it is the heroine who can read minds. Instead of this being a super power-like ability, she sees it as a disability. Sookie is not only bombarded with the mundane or perverse thoughts of others, she is also bombarded with the perverse thoughts of the human men she has attempted to date. In episode two of season one, Sookie tells her main vampire love interest, Bill (Stephen Moyer), that she's "been on a few dates." In a flashback, Sookie sees herself sitting at a table with a man as she hears his thoughts. He smiles as a voiceover let's the viewer in on what Sookie hears: "Man I can't wait to see her naked."[93] Next, she tells Bill that "not every guy was a pig" and then she sees a flashback where the man she's with is thinking: "The kind of girl I could marry and spend the rest of my life lovin'. Never have those thoughts of Matt Damon or Jake Gyllenhaal in *Jarhead.*" [94]

If these flashback scenes were set in New York City instead of the fictional small Southern town of Bon Temps, LA, one could nearly imagine them taking place within the

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[93] "The First Taste" True Blood: The Complete First Season, Writ. Alan Ball, Dir. Scott Winant, (HBO Home Entertainment, 2009), DVD
[94] "The First Taste" True Blood: The Complete First Season

framework of HBO's watershed success from years earlier, *Sex and the City*. While *Sex and the City* has nothing to do with vampires, it has much to do with women and their (supposed perceptions). The series followed four single women who dealt with the trials and tribulations of managing their careers, living in a big city, and navigating the world of dating and sex. Dealing with perverted men or men who turned out to be homosexual was all part of their day. The question of coexistence between feminism and *Sex in the City* has long been in debate (similarly to the question of coexistence between feminism and the vampire phenomenon). But in terms of shifting female attitudes toward romance and sex—particularly the ambivalence and oscillation between two extremes found in the vampire phenomenon—an examination of the differences and similarities between HBO's *Sex and the City* and *True Blood* is helpful to our understanding of the new vampire moment in female spectatorship.

As pointed out in an article for the UK newspaper, *The Guardian*, titled "Can a Feminist Really Love *Sex and the City?"* feminist critics of the series all have similar reasons for disliking it. She says:

> …for a show about women, it displays a singular obsession with men. As Miranda, the character most likely to consider herself a feminist, points out in one episode: "How does it happen that four such smart women have nothing to talk about but boyfriends?"
>
> …Janet McCabe, research fellow at Manchester Metropolitan University and co-editor, with her colleague Kim Akass, of Reading Sex and the City, a collection of essays about the programme, says, "The women are still caught in fairytale narratives. The 'right' couple were signalled in the first episode…and in some ways the entire show has just been about them getting together. [95]

True Blood could be similarly construed. Sookie and Bill are signaled as the

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[95] Alice Wignall, "Can a Feminist Really Love *Sex and the City?,"* The Guardian.co.uk, April 16, 2008, March 9, 2011 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2008/apr/16/women.film>

"right" couple from the first episode. Although there are plotlines heavy with supernatural dangers and concerns, love and sex seems to be the primary focus. Sookie risks her life for Bill on many occasions and she is intensely focused on him and other men in her life. However, the fact that Sookie's flashback is merely that—a look into her past—seems to point to a continuing on from the point where *Sex and the City* left off. It could be said that *True Blood* speaks to the unfulfilled desires of the real life Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker), of *Sex and the City.* By placing such an emphasis on Sookie's past dating encounters and contrasting them with Bill—a Southern gentleman from the Civil War who has literally rescued her from death—*True Blood* seems to fulfill a female desire or fantasy in line with those discussed previously regarding the new vampire. Bill represents the type of man Carrie Bradshaw never found in her romantic partner, Mr. Big. As the article in *The Guardian* points out:

> …this central relationship is clearly problematic. Mr Big is arrogant, egocentric and apparently unable to see a good thing when she is standing in front of him in four-inch heels. Carrie's own inability to wake up and realise what a terrible cliche she is dating renders her, at best, pretty dumb and, at worst, passive and weak.
>
> "It does make for quite uncomfortable viewing," says Professor Imelda Whelehan of De Montfort University, author of The Feminist Bestseller: From Sex and the Single Girl to Sex and the City. "How do we respect her? And Mr Big is such an interesting element. Even his name is masculine. He is like this phallus at the centre of it all."
>
> …"It does seem that, in the end, it had to come back to a traditional view," says Whelehan. "That the future for most women means marriage and children."[96]

Carrie Bradshaw and her friends in the series date countless men who turn out to be as unappealing as the two examples we see of Sookie's former dates. While Mr. Big

[96] Wignall, "Can a Feminist Really Love *Sex and the City?*"

might be the most appealing one in the horde, he is not of the same breed as the new vampire. Regardless of the feminist or anti-feminist message in *Sex and the City*, the series was its own phenomenon that female spectators responded to with fanaticism. The overwhelming popularity and identification with the characters sparks the notion that the spectator found something in common with Carrie and her female cohorts. If this is the case, then Sookie is speaking to the same spectators. The flashback scene relates to their struggles in the dating world. It shows the audience that just like Carrie Bradshaw, and therefore just like the spectator, she has been on her share of bad dates and found the usual amount of disappointing men. When we return to the present and see her profound connection with Bill after he has saved her life, Sookie speaks to the new female desire for something beyond the average human dating experience.

Sookie cannot read Bill's mind, but one has the impression that he is not thinking the same thoughts as the other men Sookie has experienced. And, if by chance, Bill is wondering what she looks like naked, then the audience is led to believe that Bill belongs to some sort of higher form of the male species where these thoughts belong to the purpose of worshipping and adoring her, rather than degrading her. While Bill is traditionally masculine in many ways—he is strong, an ex-soldier, protective of Sookie—he is still a slightly feminized man typical of the new vampire. Compared to other vampires in the series, Bill is tame, rarely drinks human blood and doting on Sookie in a manner that is rare in human/vampire relationships within the *True Blood* world. Bill has his vampiric side, but he places love before vampirism. Mr. Big, as pointed out in the article, as masculine and phallic by his very name.

Regardless of the love aspect, *Sex and the City* and *True Blood* also exploit a

desire and addiction to consumption. If *Sex and the City* exploited and encouraged the fantasy of shopping and making one's life better through the consumption of luxury items, *True Blood* encourages the consumption of another type of fantasy. The vampire as over consumer of blood mirrors the female spectator as consumer. Returning to the discussion of the uncanny in chapter one, it is possible to see the consumption of dolls, and other vampire related merchandise, as uncanny after all, but simultaneously lacking in uncanny value because the familiarity of over consumption of goods perpetuated by such a phenomenon as *Sex and the City* saturated culture to the point of anesthesia.

While the end of the *True Blood* series is yet to be determined, *Sex and the City* ends with a return to the idea that "the future for most women means marriage and children." If Sookie remains with Bill, or chooses another vampire, she most certainly won't be choosing a life of marriage or children—she won't even see her lover as often as anyone might in a human domestic partnership. First, legal marriage between a human and a vampire does not exist in much the way gay marriage does not exist in the United States. Second, children in the *True Blood* world are not possible with a vampire, unless through adoption—and considering the politics concerning the *True Blood* world, one would imagine even this would be illegal for a vampire/human couple. Lastly, vampires in *True Blood* must sleep in a dark place during the daylight hours, only leaving the night for business and social time. It is almost as if Sookie's relationship doesn't exist during the daylight hours and she is, once again, allowed to live a single woman's life (although Sookie chooses to remain a waitress with little career ambition outside of this realm). Not only is Sookie free from unwanted pregnancy with a vampire, she is also free from sexually transmitted diseases since they do not appear to exist between humans and

vampires.

Although the women in *Sex and the City* took full advantage of sexual liberation and Sookie is a virgin until she finds "true love" with Bill, Sookie is the more liberated one in terms of female power. In the world of vampires, women achieve equality sexually in that they are not limited by concerns of pregnancy. Although the controversial last novel in the *Twilight* series, *Breaking Dawn*, exists in a different world where vampire sex could kill you and most certainly get you pregnant, even Bella in her choice of domesticity eventually escapes the human worries of motherhood. Her child grows up quickly and her vampiric abilities make the normally exhausting tasks of motherhood simple. But in *True Blood's* mythology, motherhood for a woman in committed romantic relationship with a vampire would not be choosing the same path the *Sex and the City* women are accused of taking. It is as if, in the greater world of women and HBO's brand, *True Blood* is the fantasy of the Carrie Bradshaw enthusiast.

Regardless of Sookie's options in terms of domestic relationships, *True Blood* follows its contemporaries as it walks a fine line between female empowerment and female oppression. Although the same could be said for *Sex and the City*, it is difficult to imagine Carrie Bradshaw with an ex-Confederate soldier and southern gentleman with a strong need to protect her. As the *True Blood* seasons progress, Sookie becomes an object to protect from evil forces just as Bella and Elena become the object of protection in *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries*. Perhaps the key to understanding this theme is in the contrast with *Sex and the City*. Returning to the article feminism and *Sex and the City*, "Mr Big is arrogant, egocentric and apparently unable to see a good thing when she is standing in front of him in four-inch heels."

Bill and certainly his rival for Sookie's affections, Eric Northman (Alexander Skarsgard), are prone to arrogant and egocentric behavior, but the key difference in the new vampire as romantic lead versus Mr. Big is their absolute dedication to the heroine. Mr. Big represents the heterosexual woman's disillusionment with the modern man. He loves her, yes, but would he do anything for her? That point is debatable. The new vampire only leaves the object of his love when she requests it or when he thinks its in her best interest. He is construed as controlling, but perhaps this is a reaction to the man who doesn't seem to particularly care or "see a good thing standing in front of him." This Mr. Big standardized version of masculinity could do much to explain the oscillation within the new vampire between emasculation and male dominance. It is as if the female spectator is so frustrated by post-feminist courting behavior displayed in *Sex and the City* that she now opts for the frustrations of an overbearing man who does everything out of "pure love" rather than a man who fear fears entrapment by a successful independent woman.

In episode seven of season one, Bill hunts Sookie's uncle who had molested her as a child, and kills him so he can no longer remotely hurt her. Although Sookie is upset with him for this heavy-handed action, there is no denying the unconscious pleasure derived from the fantasy of Bill's actions. To have a lover who will stop at nothing, even murder, to protect the woman he loves is flattering to the female in question, no matter how disturbing the action may or may not be. It is here that *True Blood* seems to put pressure on the notion of romantic vampire love in *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries*. In the realities of life outside the fictional world, a man who goes to such extremes as the new vampire does for "the sake of love," would be considered emotionally unstable and a

stalker. There is very little in *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries* to suggest this. In fact, the two romanticize the stalker aspects, turning them into a fantasy involving flattery. It is only because the female first makes the vampire an object of her attention that this behavior does not appear to be unwelcome or unhealthy. In fact, one fan website for *The Vampire Diaries* that is run by a mother and her teenage daughter is titled "Vampire Stalkers."[97] The women follow every aspect of the series and the cast and crew involved in its creation, literally "stalking" the television set and providing tours by rental van for other fans of the series. The spectator mirrors the stalking element of the vampire, just as consumption is mirrored from vampire to spectator. *True Blood,* however, seems to be aware of the complexities of the vampire-as-stalker and utilize a more forceful portrayal that leaves an unsettling feeling that there is a level of madness involved in wanting this type of powerful and truly dangerous super-human as a lover.

But it is not Sookie Stackhouse's romantic life that is perhaps most interesting to the female spectator. It is the female vampire who is the most evolved in terms of gender roles. The female vampires in *True Blood* move beyond the realm of Katherine or Caroline in *The Vampire Diaries*. Unlike the sexually aggressive Samantha (Cynthia Nixon) in *Sex and the City*, the most prominent female vampires in *True Blood* completely blur gender lines and become the masculine figures in the situation.

Lorena (Mariana Klaveno) is Bill's vampire "maker." That is, she was the one who turned him into a vampire by a complicated process of blood exchange and death. Blood drinking is more sexualized to begin with in *True Blood* than in *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries.* However, when Bill flashes back to the night Lorena turned him in

[97] http://vampirestalkers.com/

episode five of season one ("Sparks Fly Out"), her behavior is extremely interesting. She quite literally reverses the gender roles of seduction and sex. Bill finds seeks food and shelter at the end of the Civil War and finds himself at her cabin. She takes him in and feeds him, throwing herself at him sexually, but he refuses her—telling Lorena he has a wife and children. Lorena attacks him, draining his blood and taking him to the bedroom. There, Bill sees the dead bodies of countless other soldiers who Lorena has killed by draining their blood. She tells Bill that the other men weren't as virtuous or as honorable as he was. Here, she plays the role of the psychopathic rapist/serial killer with a Madonna/whore complex. Bill is deemed "good" and virtuous, so she permits him to live by turning him into a vampire. During the process, she says, "Take me in you."[98] The obvious metaphor is penetration from male to female during sex. Although Lorena has slit her throat and is referring to the blood pouring out of her—wanting Bill to drink it—her apparent sexual pleasure when he does and the phrasing of the sentence makes the metaphor more than clear. Because Lorena is Bill's maker, she is able to hold him and physically overpower him in order to keep him from leaving to save Sookie in episode six of season two ("Hard-Hearted Hannah").

Yet, the gender role oscillation manifests itself in a particularly bizarre way in episode three of season three ("It Hurts Me, Too"). Bill snaps her neck, twisting it all the way around as they have sex in, what appears to be a violent rape scene. Yet, considering Lorena's power over Bill as his maker and her apparent pleasure in the act, it is clear that she desires this violence. It is perhaps the most startling and confusing portrayal of female ambivalence in the series. Bill's motives are clearly those of hatred since Lorena

[98] "Sparks Fly Out" True Blood: The Complete First Season, Writ. Alexander Woo, Dir. Daniel Minahan, (HBO Home Entertainment, 2009), DVD

has kidnapped him and forced him to stay with her. But Lorena's motives are not at all easy to distinguish. Is the rape her own perverted fantasy? Se has the physical power to stop him at any time, but she doesn't. The violence and the moment she tells Bill she loves him while he is raping her is almost too much to bear. It speaks loudly to a confused female audience, revealing a masochism that is anything but feminist. But, one must question, what it means in terms of depictions of female desire. Some might suggest that it glorifies rape and insinuates rape is desired. But, as with all issues concerning the new vampire, the issue is more complex than meets the eye. In this scene it is almost as if Lorena is both taking charge of her desires and succumbing to the most oppressive act that a woman can experience.

The female vampire, Jessica (Deborah Ann Woll), is less a representation of a conflicted female as much as she is the female version of the Byronic new vampire. As a human, she was a sheltered teenager living with religious fundamentalist parents. Vampirism gives her the opportunity to experience life as a free for all. But just as her maker, Bill, survives mostly on synthetic blood and doesn't kill for fun, Jessica is taught to do the same. Her romance with a human male named Hoyt (Jim Parrack) reverses the gender expectations and also puts Jessica in the same situation as Edward Cullen, the Salvatore brothers, and Bill. Jessica is placed in the male position when she makes out with Hoyt in episode three of season two ("Scratches"). The two kiss on the sofa and as things intensify, Jessica's fangs pop to the surface and the moment is embarrassing mimicking the traditional male depiction of an unintended erection. Here, Jessica takes on the role of a male teenager instead of a female teenager. But the true limitations of her gender are put in check when Jessica and Hoyt try to have sex, but she's unable to. Due

to her vampiric nature and the fact that she was a virgin before her transformation, Jessica's hymen, once penetrated, will always grown back—making sex eternally painful. Thus, proving again that women, despite their vampiric status and taking on of masculine traits, are still doomed to be women.

It is of note, here, that just as the "makers" of vampires in *True Blood* have power over their creations, the "makers" of the series hold the same power over the characters. Interestingly, the *Sookie Stackhouse* novels are created by female author Charlaine Harris, while *True Blood* was created by male producer Alan Ball. Ball was on *Out* magazine's list of 100 impressive gay men and women. While it is impossible to construct meaning based on the gender or sexual orientation of the author or series creator (and construction is not something this project is concerned with), one questions the unconscious nature of Jessica's curse of being a woman since Jessica, or a character remotely like her, doesn't exist in the novels. She is purely the male invention of Ball who might be consciously or unconsciously contributing to or commenting on the notion of the curse of womanhood.

Returning to the sign in the opening credits, "God Hates Fangs," one is left to question precisely what vampire discrimination stands for. While it is true that it could stand for a racial minority or the LGBT community, one must question if it is this very gender confusion—particularly the role of the female as vampire that is under the most scrutiny by. As evidenced by the character of Jessica in particular, *True Blood* both elevates women to equality and sinks them to a level of female-ness that suggests that women will never be free of the "curse" and the misery that can come with being a woman. Yet, *True Blood* also offers strange moments of hope and presents the audience

with a fantasy world that sees female equality, and even dominance, as part of every day life. Does *True Blood* offer spectators something evolved from *Sex and the City* and something positive? Or does it merely prove that women are only dominant in the fantasy realm, and even then they are limited by their very female-ness—bound to an obsession with men and consumption?

Conclusion

Reclaiming or Regressing?

In this project I have discussed female desire as it has manifested itself in what I have called a new vampire moment in film and television. Through this selected grouping that focuses primarily on the popular culture trend of *Twilight*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *True Blood*, I have established a somewhat intertextual brand that speaks to a large fan culture. This brand could expand into a cycle or collapse at any time, but nevertheless, it is a cultural moment that has taken place, and is still taking place at the time of this writing. It is a difficult task to examine vampirism due to the sheer number of all things vampire related that have existed and will, seemingly continue to exist. By intensely focusing on this particular moment, I have explored its meaning and complexity in terms of spectatorship.

> My goal has not been to construct a compact theory that precisely and mathematically answers my questions of "why vampires?" and "why now?" but rather to deconstruct the layers that might hold the key to better understanding the nature of the phenomenon, and therefore the key to better understanding the larger issues it comments on. Just as vampires have existed in the human imagination for centuries, the question of "what a woman wants" has long hung in the air.

Returning to Shoshana Felman's work, I believe the reclaiming of this

question by women along with the act of exorcizing the male mind from literature (or film, or television) is of significant importance. The tension and dualities presented in *Twilight*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *True Blood* reveal the complex tensions in the mind of the female spectator. As I have suggested, the representations of female regression are perhaps owing to the struggle of reclamation for women in terms of their desires. Although I will not say that these visual texts are directly feminist, nor will I say that the madness inherent in the fan culture associated with them thrusts the female spectator into a better realm, I will say that the texts are not merely anti-feminist or feminist. The tension between the two modes represented in the visual texts is not unlike the tension found in all forms of gendered representations. Yet, I maintain that there is a redemptive nature in these texts that pushes in the direction of something new in terms of gender relationships and representations. The films and television programs might not specifically reclaim the question of "what a woman wants," but they allow for the possibility of a reclaiming of female desires—however complicated and ambivalent those desires may be—as a woman's own.