

**The Twilight of Vampires:
Byronic Heroes and the Evolution of Vampire Fiction in *The
Vampire Diaries* and *Twilight***

**El crepúsculo de los vampiros:
héroes byronianos y la evolución de la narrativa de vampiros en
The Vampire Diaries y *Crepúsculo***

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Resumen

La narrativa adolescente de vampiros contemporánea ha contribuido a revitalizar el género al atraer a una nueva generación de lectores. En el proceso, la figura del vampiro ha sido sometida a una serie de cambios con el objeto de hacerla más atractiva para una audiencia adolescente predominantemente femenina. Coincidiendo con el décimo aniversario de la publicación de *Crepúsculo* de Stephenie Meyer, este artículo analiza cómo la saga *Crepúsculo* y *las Crónicas Vampíricas* de L. J. Smith modernizan al héroe byroniano que inspiró en gran medida a los vampiros. Este artículo también explora los posibles efectos de esta nueva caracterización del vampiro en las mentes de los lectores y la alarma que ha causado.

Palabras clave: Vampiros, literatura de vampiros, héroe byroniano, impacto literario, adolescentes.

Abstract

Contemporary teenage vampire fiction has helped revitalize the genre by attracting a new generation of readers. In so doing, some changes have been introduced so as to make the figure of the vampire more appealing to a largely female teenage readership. Coinciding with the tenth anniversary of the publication of *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer, this article analyzes how the *Twilight* series and the earlier *The Vampire Diaries* by L. J. Smith update

and modernize the Byronic hero on which vampires are largely modeled. It also explores the possible effects of this new characterization on readers' minds and the alarm it has created.

Keywords: Vampires, vampire literature, Byronic hero, literary impact, teenagers.

That danger causes an alluring and almost irresistible magnetism has for long been true both in real life and in literature. In the case of the latter, this danger is often embodied by the dark hero or the Byronic hero, a figure that inspires a combination of fascination, awe, fear, and desire, and that simultaneously attracts and repulses. Closely modeled on Lord Byron as well as on one of his most famous literary creations, Manfred, the Byronic hero is found in numerous works of highbrow literature (for instance, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë) as well as in lowbrow novels (such as the Harlequin romances).¹ Because of the abovementioned characteristics and the reaction the Byronic hero causes, vampire fiction has recast the Byronic hero as a vampire trying to win the heart (along with the blood) of the female protagonist at the expense of another, less dangerous suitor that appears dull by comparison.

In L. J. Smith's *The Vampire Diaries* novels² the appeal of the Byronic hero and the dangers he poses for the heroine translate into the three protagonists' relationship, as human Elena struggles over her love for the Salvatore vampire brothers, Stefan, the gentleman and conscientious citizen, and Damon, the bad guy and serial womanizer, who embodies the dark hero. A similar triangle takes place in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga³—Bella is torn between vampire Edward, a risk to her life, and werewolf Jacob, her friend and confidante. From this common starting point and because the recent popularity of *The Vampire Diaries* owes much to the vampire trend initiated by *Twilight*, this essay will explore both vampire sagas so as to examine the appeal of the Byronic/dark hero in vampire fiction and what they contribute to our understanding of gender roles.

Reissued on the tails of the popularity of Meyer's saga, *The Vampire Diaries* was originally a commission from L. J. Smith's editor at Alloy Entertainment in 1990, the resulting novels being written on a work-for-hire basis with the author sharing 50% of the copyright with

¹Harlequin is a popular (and critically despised) publisher of romantic novels characterized by their formulaic style, poor writing, happy endings, stereotypical characters, and, more often than not, fairly traditional roles. Their low price makes of Harlequin novels a popular women's reading, though.

²*The Awakening* (1991), *The Struggle* (1991), *The Fury* (1991), and *Dark Reunion* (1992). The latter was published in the United Kingdom as *The Reunion*.

³*Twilight* (2005), *Eclipse* (2006), *New Moon* (2007) and *Breaking Dawn* (2008).

the publisher. The books, despite enjoying moderate success, went out of print until, thanks to *Twilight*, Alloy re-issued them and commissioned Smith to write further installments in the series, *The Return* trilogy. Yet another trilogy, *The Hunters*, was soon conceived. However, Smith's disagreement with her publisher over the plotline of the first book in the new trilogy provoked that she was replaced by an anonymous ghost writer who has penned the next books. Subsequent installments are marketed as "created by L. J. Smith." The Vampire Diaries has also spanned a TV show, *The Vampire Diaries* (2009 -), which, in turn, has prompted the publication of the parallel series of novels Stefan's Diaries.

The release of the cinematographic adaptation of *New Moon* in 2009 evidenced that, as it was becoming apparent that the quasi-apocalyptic and extremely alarming reports of the swine flu's gravity had been greatly exaggerated, there was another virus to reckon with and which had lied dormant for a few years - "the vampire bug" (La Ferla, 2009). The fascination for vampires is far from being a new phenomenon, as the Assyrians already made reference to blood-sucking monsters and a third millennium B.C. document found in Babylon mentioned a female blood-sucking demon (Kristensen, 2010: 11). The Greek too had narrations recounting the resurrection of heroes after ingesting blood and a creature similar to vampires, Lamia, appeared in mythological stories (Kristensen, 2010: 12; Mutch, 2013: 3).

More recently, vampires' contemporary fame began with the publication of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), which sparked a number of vampire-themed books. In updating ancient myths about evil beings preying on human blood, Stoker used his vampires to reproduce the problems and worries of the Victorian mind. Stoker took into account contemporary national anxieties about threats to the British empire in describing the disruptive appearance of Eastern European Count Dracula (Borgia, 2011: 2), who "incarnates the fears of late Victorian patriarchy, as the certainties of male privilege, class hierarchy, rationality and the Bible were increasingly called into doubt" (Sellers, 2001: 80). Because "historically, the vampire has appeared in a culture's mythology predominately during time periods where social anxiety is on the rise" (Bohn, 2007: 36-37), nowadays, vampires, put into a twentieth-first century setting, reflect the current mental state of Western society and constitute a response to the new threats the world faces (Sellers, 2001: 80).

While vampires continue to stand in for our fears and voice our present-day worries, their characterization has greatly changed. Following Anne Rice's trend of presenting vampires

whose concerns (such as money matters, family relations, or aging) are very human and who are plagued by identity issues, religious or moral dilemmas and ethical concerns, vampires today seem to behave almost as humans. The vampire today is not an evil being of mythic proportions; rather, he has concerns very close to our own, especially when it comes to love relationships (Ng et al., n.d.). As vampires have changed, so have the reactions they cause. In modern vampire stories such as the Twilight saga, *The Vampire Diaries*, or *True Blood*, there is no angst, no terror for the monstrous vampire but pity, sympathy and even love for his plight. Vampires suffer too and are plagued by a sort of supernatural determinism since they cannot help being vampires, a circumstance which causes them pain and self-torture (Gomez-Galisteo, 2011-2012: 2). Yet, despite the inevitability of their condition, there is always a choice, or so does Meyer contend. Twilight is permeated by the notion of free will and the Mormon concept of it, which translates in that there is always a choice. For Edward and the Cullens, their choice is whether to attack humans or to be “vegetarians” and feed on animals instead. According to Meyer, “that’s the underlying metaphor of my vampires. ... It doesn’t matter where you’re stuck in life or what you think you have to do; you can always choose something else. There’s always a different path” (quoted in Grossman, 2011).

The (im)possibility of denying one’s condition also plays a role in *The Vampire Diaries*, since Damon and Stefan disagree about whether they have a choice or not. Damon and Stefan thus personify the dual nature of the vampire that has for long appeared in vampire fiction – “the evil vampire makes a deliberate choice to embrace his darker nature, while the vampire hero not only struggles against the temptation but will sacrifice himself rather than succumb to it” (Bailie, 2011). It is recurrent to present the dilemma among vampires concerning the position they adopt towards humans, and in particular, towards the use they give to humans. Some vampires see them as walking vessels of blood whereas others abstain from ingesting human blood (Bailie, 2011). In *The Vampire Diaries*, while Damon excuses his own feeding off humans by arguing that “my taste for blood isn’t just a whim, you know. It’s a necessity you’re interfering with here. I’m only doing what I have to” (Smith, 2009: 290), Stefan disagrees and finds that “there’s no excuse for giving up just because it looks like were going to lose. We have to try – because the other choice is to surrender” (Smith, 2009: 294). Stefan not only rejects taking people’s blood forcefully or deceitfully, but he even turns it down when willingly offered by Bonnie. After Elena’s death, he resolves that “I won’t take human blood as food, because that means *using* a

person, like livestock. And I won't exchange it with anyone, because that means love" (Smith, 2009: 333).

Meyer's merit has been found to be, rather than in inventing anything, in updating long-standing literary myths – vampires, impossible love stories fraught with obstacles and dangers, star-crossed lovers, extremely dangerous enemies... (Martínez Díaz, 2009). The same could be said about her characters, for Edward has been found reminiscent of a wide and diverse range of male protagonists in several Jane Austen novels such as Edward Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility*, Mr. Knightley in *Emma*, Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, but also of Mr. Rochester in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë, Rhett Butler in *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell, Dorian Gray in *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, or Maxim de Winter in *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier (Borgia, 2011: 3-4; Iacopelli, 2010: 12; Perry, 2010: 30; Silver, 2010: 135; Flanagan, 2008; Wilson, 2011: 36; Kokkola, 2011: 166-167; Pauli, 2010). Moreover, Edward and Bella's romance echoes the legend of Tristan and Iseult whereas Edward's making a habit of entering her bedroom, resounds of Ambrosio entering Antonia's room in *The Monk* by Matthew Lewis (Perry, 2010:35).

Yet, the main literary archetype Edward Cullen in particular and vampires in general relate to is, as mentioned above, the Byronic hero. The Byronic hero is a figure of mystery, a man burdened by guilt over a horrible crime but who, nevertheless, removed from society and not feeling bound to conventional rules or society's laws, chooses to pay only for those of his crimes that he deems necessary. Morality and social propriety do not restrict him – "the Byronic hero and the Gothic villain make the laws of their worlds themselves. They decide for which sin they will do penance and which acts are necessary to find peace" (Krüger, n.d.). Edward Cullen is a peculiar kind of Byronic hero, partly owing to the evolution of the Byronic hero itself since Lord Byron created it. Furthermore, his characterization is colored by Meyer's own Mormon values of premarital sexual abstinence, the concept of free will, dietary restrictions, the concepts of marriage and family, and many others (Arnaudin, 2008). Writing within her own religious tenets and principles, Meyer's hero could not defy her own faith and moral principles and, at the same time, she built on the previous literary tradition of the Byronic hero and the vampire. Damon, with his disregard for humans and his egotism, also embodies the Byronic hero. In a similar manner to vampires' choice of which of their crimes they will pay for, they also choose whether they are going to agonize over their victims or if they are going to pine

questioning the state of their soul. While Stefan and Edward suffer because of their nature as hunters/killers, Damon accepts it as an inevitable part of who he is.

Other traits of the Byronic hero are his aristocratic background, his self-centeredness, his pride, agility of movements, a sweeping self-confidence, leadership skills, his disregard for society, his lack of empathy, his ruthlessness (and even cruelty) and his lack of sympathy. Despite these traits and his vices, his good looks and his charisma make women feel irresistibly attracted to him. Beyond his transgressions, the Byronic hero has redeeming characteristics such as his ability for passionate love, which can bring about this redemption. Edward and the Salvatore brothers depart from conventional vampires in that they are able to experience love and for the most part successfully live in society. Even Damon, who is not remorseful, is not an actively evil vampire bent on annihilating humans. Just like they are soft-boiled vampires, they also make a softer version of the Byronic hero and their crimes are lesser. Damon and Stefan's crime of a duel over their common love interest, Katherine, that ended with both their lives, and Edward's crime of killing scum in his early vampire days pale in comparison to Manfred's incestuous relationship with his sister. As the crime has lessened, so has the subsequent penance the Byronic hero is to pay (Mendoza, 2009: 14). Because Edward's sins are minor, he can be redeemed into the ideal boyfriend and husband, "functioning as a virtual Christ, saving Bella from her human sins" (Wilson, 2011:138). This is only possible because he has atoned for his past crimes by protecting Bella. Damon and Stefan's crime is greater, and while Stefan is trying to atone for his sin and is plagued by remorse for having taken his brother's life, Damon's remorselessness means that his redemption is incomplete.

Edward and the Salvatore brothers are unmistakably twenty-first-century products as well. Stefan is very fashion-conscious (Smith, 2010: 23) and Edward is a representative of a new generation of designer vampires. Because "every age embraces the vampire it needs" (Auerbach quoted in Wilcox, 2002), now we have teenage-looking vampires who are rich, young, beautiful, and therefore incarnate many of the ambitions of present-day Western society. These vampires display characteristics which are extremely appealing to twenty-first-century readers such as eternal youth, beauty, money, and sensibility (Martínez Díaz, 2009). In a society where commercials, films, TV, music and literature bombard us with images of youth, in which "aging arouses anxiety not only because it is outside conscious control and yields diminished performance, but also because we idealize youth. ... the appeal of vampires lies not only in their immortality but also in their eternal youth" (McMahon quoted in Mukherjea, 2011: 6-7).

The beginnings of *The Vampire Diaries* or *Twilight* are hardly unique or original – “Elena’s story begins as one of alienation in the wake of grief, well-trod thematic ground for Gothic and adolescent literature” (Bridgeman, 2013: 11) and Bella works as a virtual orphan (absent mother and ineffectual father), another typical starting point. Very often, “the horror of becoming a vampire often correlates with the dread of becoming an adult” (Wilcox, 2001) and here Elena’s and Bella’s own sense of not belonging is reflected in Stefan and Edward, respectively, who stand apart – Stefan as the new kid in high school and Edward by literally sitting apart from the other students, preferring his family’s company during lunch breaks. These vampires’ marginalization from mainstream society (and within the vampire community due to Stefan’s and the Cullens’ diet choices) is analogous to the protagonists’ feelings of being an outcast, an isolation further stressed during adolescence. “Much of teenage angst comes from feeling alone and misunderstood by peers, teachers and parents” (Ng et al., n.d.), which correlate perfectly with vampires’ awkward place in the world. In *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries* we see how “the playful irony of the dramatic setting – a high school with vampires – explores the social and psychic horrors of American adolescent rites of passage” (Owen, 1999: 25).

Whereas Stoker’s and Rice’s vampires saw immortality as a problem in an ever-changing world that no longer resembled their own (Sellers, 2001: 80-81), this is not the case in *Twilight* or *The Vampire Diaries*, where vampires are extraordinarily well-adjusted. Not so the humans – returning home from her holidays in France, Elena finds she does not fit in although she had always before felt secure with her own role as the most popular girl in high school. Bella, who has just moved back to her native Forks, is trying to adjust to life with her father and her newly-found popularity stuns her. This is certainly different from Edward, who, at 17 going on 104, is very certain of his own identity. Edward “doesn’t behave anything like a real teenager. He talks and acts like an obsessively controlling adult male” (Hand quoted in Silver, 2010: 122), which has given cause for alarm, as will be explained below. Therefore, “Bella sees becoming a vampire as the answer: a form of escape” from the increasing pressures of becoming an adult (Hawes, 2010: 174).

While Elena and Bella can have their pick of good, regular boys (Matt or Jacob are, respectively, the most obvious choices), they choose vampires as the object of their affection. While eighteenth- or nineteenth-century heroines placed in a similar dilemma were urged to choose the right guy – or, else, heartbreak, social ruin and ostracism were in store for them, “the idea that the villain is even more attractive than the hero or that the villain *is* the attractive, yet ambivalent, hero seems to have come to fruition only in our

modern times” (Krüger, n.d.). The danger they pose and the potential threat to the female protagonist’s well-being is not perceived as a problem but as an alluring characteristic. In nineteenth-century fiction the female protagonist, despite her initial attraction for the dark hero, ended up happily marrying the proper hero, but this is not to be so in contemporary vampire fiction.

In the Romantic period, male protagonists fell into one out of two categories – the proper hero and the dark hero: “the proper hero is law-abiding, compassionate, kind, and monogamous. The dark hero is dominant, rebellious, frequently a criminal, and often promiscuous,” “typically a violent, rebellious outlaw” (Kruger, Fisher and Jobling, 2003: 306, 309). Different from traditional heroes, “the proper hero ... is in general a weak and passive character who does not commit heroic actions in the course of the narrative. ... Proper heroes do not possess the commanding and striking presence of the dark hero and are rarely the center of attention in a group” (Kruger, Fisher and Jobling, 2003: 310). There lies his initial lack of appeal in contrast to the dashing good looks and charismatic appeal on first sight of the dark hero. Edward is as a combination of the two, since, on the one hand, he is Meyer’s knight in shining armor, and, on the other, the perfect protector for her clumsy heroine and also a vampire, which could lead to fatal consequences should he lose control. Stefan and Damon represent the appeal of the exotic (despite their non-Italian, Anglo-Saxon first names) and the fascination of all things European but, at the same time, Damon is the dark hero to Stefan’s proper one. Moreover, while at the beginning of *The Reunion* after Elena’s death in *The Fury*, Damon is already carelessly exchanging blood with American students in Italy, Stefan is in mourning and knows that there will be no other love for him (Smith, 2009: 239-241). This marks Stefan as the hero of sensibility, “the hero who is distinguished not by daring exploits or superior intelligence, but quite simply by his capacities for feeling, mostly for the tender emotions” (Thorslev quoted in Iacopelli, 2010: 3). Nowadays we have watered-down Byronic heroes who also happen to be vampires, and are politically correct and good Christians, in deeds, if not in name. Damon, with his ruthlessness and apparently careless attitude towards those whose blood he needs to survive, is closer to the prototypical image of the vampire than Stefan or Edward, with their respect for human life and their reluctance to drink human blood, could possibly be.

Feminist voices have raised alarms when it comes to the suitability of these vampire boyfriends for teenage girls. Vampires’ physical superiority and their greater age makes their relationships with the female humans unequal in that vampires necessarily have the

upper hand – they are older, stronger, wiser and know best when it comes to the paranormal threats they might have to face. Despite their youthful looks, Edward is 104 at the start of *Twilight* whereas the Salvatores are pushing 500 years old, having been born in Renaissance Italy. Edward's role, moreover, is a paternal one to a Bella he regards as a child in extreme need of protection both from vampires (the Volturi, James, Victoria's coven or his "brother" Jasper) and from herself (due to her clumsiness) (Silver, 2010: 125). Elena, because she becomes the victim of Katherine's plots, needs to be rescued too. Thus, "saving the Damsel is the modern vampire version of the Byronic Hero's main agenda. It is a sort of penance for him. Since the heroine usually attracts all kinds of perilous conflicts, it becomes the hero's main job to save his heroine" (Iacopelli, 2010: 18-19). Vampires do not longer desperately want to seduce maidens but to love them. Even previous vampires have undergone the same revision and Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 cinematographic adaptation of *Dracula*, titled *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, recasts it as a love story (Iacopelli, 2010: 13).

While Byronic heroes and vampires have greatly changed from their nineteenth-century counterparts, the females they love (or lust after) have not undergone such a radical transformation. The female protagonists in vampire fiction fall in one out of two categories – either the temptress, a vamp trying to seduce innocent men or the naïve, innocent damsel in distress. For all of Meyer's modernization of vampires, when it comes to the women the vampires love, "she has not abandoned the role of the traditional voluptuous vamp: Bella is depicted as a seductress who constantly tempts Edward to lose control" (Kokkola, 2011: 174). In *The Vampire Diaries* both Elena and Katherine fill this role and Katherine deludes the brothers by playing the dying young woman.

Katherine's need to pretend to be helpless shows that the role of damsel in distress is another one in which female protagonists are alternatively cast into, as exemplified by Bella. In sharp contrast to the charm and extreme physical beauty of the Cullens, Bella certainly does not make for a positive role model – "a child of divorce, she is not wealthy, she lacks confidence, she is harassed by males, she is threatened with rape, she is assumed to be stupid, she is treated like a child, and she is positioned as pawn between competing males" (Wilson, 2011: 45). Bella does not have any strong personality traits, likes, hobbies, or interests that define her. She only exists in relation to Edward and her only pastime seems to be putting her life at risk to protect those who love her (Seltzer, 2008). Actually, for most of the time it is hard to ascribe to Bella a role beyond that of the romantic, passive heroine.

Because “the back stories of Esme, Rosalie, and Alice reveal, [that] female mortal existence is extremely dangerous, leading to abuse, rape, and confinement” (Wilson, 2011: 71), women are desperately in need of a savior. Katherine too plays the role of the damsel in distress even if she is only pretending to be one to mislead the brothers, taking advantage of their gullibility and their willingness to see her as an innocent girl, which make them easy preys to her schemes. Because Katherine refuses to be the hopeless, defenseless victim of the brothers and, moreover, she is the original vampire who turns the brothers, she turns out to actually be the wanton vampire or vamp tramp. Elena, although she resists to assume the role, is deluded by Katherine’s ploys too and literally driven to her death, confirming her helplessness, her human vulnerability and her need to be protected, all these being characteristics of the damsel in distress. Through the characters of Mina and Lucy, Stoker portrayed a new feminine paradigm emerging by then – “a ‘New Woman’ who was an independent and modern woman who challenged, and even rebelled against, the rules of womanhood set by men. This modern woman represented female emancipation and a newfound female sexuality” (Kristensen, 2010: 38), the vampire acting as a warning against this new understanding of women’s more active role. In contemporary vampire fiction, women return to the damsel in distress archetype.

Because the target audience of *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries* is teenagers (notwithstanding their cross-generational appeal), the message teenagers might be getting from these books, especially if they may try to emulate their protagonists’ relationship patterns, has generated a great deal of attention. Whereas Astarte committed suicide, appalled by Manfred’s incestuous designs on her, Bella accepts Edward’s condition as a vampire and even longs to become one herself. Elena is initially revolted by the sight of Stefan devouring a dove, but she soon gets over it (Smith, 2010: 162). Their prompt readiness to accept their boyfriend’s condition as vampires is but the first step of an acceptable process that could end up being far more dangerous. Bella never realizes Edward’s love could be abusive. One of the most defining and recognizable characteristics of Byronic heroes, their mysteriousness, can lead to danger, both in literature (vampire boyfriends) and in real life: “Byronic Heroes usually emerge as if from a void and reveal little. Mysteriousness and the possibility of past misdeeds is intended to arouse the curiosity of readers or viewers, who may be provided with brief flashbacks and cryptic references. ... The above descriptions parallel those of batterers” (Bogg and Ray, 2002: 220). With *Twilight*, girls are told that women are to be submissive to men’s desires and, even more dangerous, that abusive behavior from their boyfriend is to be excused,

justified as a display of love and affection and gladly tolerated (Borgia, 2011: 9; Robillard, 2009).

That the defining characteristics of Byronic heroes are also personality traits of batterers (Bogg and Ray, 2002: 203-204) has raised alarm. It might be argued that one thing is fiction and another very different one is real life, where readers do not necessarily look for the same things they expect to find in their readings; but this difference is not as straightforward as one might think. "Increasing evidence of sexual abuse in dating relationships ...suggests the possibility that the hero-centric Western culture of romance greatly complicates the mating process" (Bogg and Ray, 2002: 203) as the research premise that women looked for positive traits in their potential partners was proved wrong. This resemblance between literary Byronic heroes and real-life batterers "suggest[s] quite strongly that the messages of literary heroism are socially discordant and may have unintended mate-selection consequences" (Bogg and Ray, 2002: 205).

The dangers of falling for a literary lookalike in real life are manifold. Falling in love with a real-life version of a controlling, potentially dangerous vampire can have undesirable consequences and potentially dangerous results. Elena has Matt's love but she scorns the all-American boy-next-door that Matt is to actively chase Stefan even though he appears to hate her and have another romantic interest (Elena's former friend and now archenemy, Caroline). Her intense pursuit of Stefan leads her to a relationship with him first but then also with his brother. This makes her the target of Katherine's deathly threat and causes her to lose her life first and later to sacrifice her vampire existence to save them. Elena takes it to the extreme that she is killed when fighting against Katherine to protect Damon and Stefan. Damon's dark moods, if given the chance, are not a positive sign either, as it shows female teenagers' ready tolerance for behavior that should be at least questioned, when not downright condemned.

Some readers have, instead, rooted for Jacob as Bella's love interest but he is a rather shallow character, as his "main function ... is to act as a foil to Edward" (Kokkola, 2011: 168). Complicating matters further, Jacob is not much of an improvement, as "Bella's relationships with both Edward and Jacob can be considered 'abusive teenage relationships'" (Wilson, 2011: 94). Bella and Edward's relationship is unhealthy and Bella cannot function without a man in her life – be it Edward or Jacob. Elena, too, is kept ignorant of the brothers' past and she ends up sacrificing her life for their well-being, hardly a positive role model for girls to aspire to.

As already mentioned, this modern use of the Byronic hero in the shape of a vampire has not been thoroughly well received. Twilight's portrayal of teenage relationships has been denounced as conservative, male-centric and leading to abuse, "employing the haunted genre of the Gothic not only to promote conservative gender roles that demand women's submission to dominant male partners, but also to idealize and romanticize abusive relationships" (Borgia, 2011: 3). Because such gender dynamics in a present-day relationship would not be acceptable, by placing her story in a fantastic setting, Meyer got away with presenting a story that would otherwise have created an even bigger uproar due to its depiction of gender roles (Borgia, 2011: 3, 9; Wilson, 2011: 65). The portrayal of gender roles in *The Vampire Diaries* has not received so much attention (probably owing to *The Vampire Diaries*'s lack of critical attention in contrast to the multitude of academic books and scholarly articles *Twilight* has generated) but the female roles *The Vampire Diaries* portrays are not any better and call for the sacrifice of the female's life in securing the males' survival, fighting, interestingly enough, an evil female. Women fight each other and compete for the love of men.

Vampire fiction is but the latest literary expression to redefine and adapt the figure of the Byronic hero. Already in the nineteenth century, the Byronic hero was a pervasive figure and was used in a number of works. Vampire fiction, therefore, is but the last (for now) reinterpretation of the figure of the Byronic hero. Women writers in particular, ever since the nineteenth century, have been drawing attention to the dangers of being attracted to the Byronic hero, with *Jane Eyre* being a "benign alternative to the Byronic myth" (Moglen, 1976: 108) or Jane Austen playing down his appeal by ridiculing it (Gilbert and Gubar, 1984: 119).

Lord Byron was famously described by one of his lovers, Lady Caroline Lamb, in her diary as being "mad, bad, and dangerous to know" and the same could be said of Byronic heroes in general, but especially in real life, for "it's a damaging fantasy. ... It's the idea that she feels as if she is in a dangerous relationship and she doesn't know how to get out of it and that finally, however much in danger you feel, love has to conquer. ... No, when you feel yourself in danger, you have to go away, put yourself in another novel" (Barreca quoted in Megan, 2009). We should pay closer attention to the messages sent by popular literary texts to (female) teenagers, as studies indicate that "young unmarried women have had to withstand increased sexual pressure in recent decades" (Bogg and Ray, 2002: 207). In this context, having novels that describe controlling, domineering boyfriends in a positive manner such as *Twilight*, is far from being innocuous. While girls cannot find vampire

boyfriends in real life, their trying and finding their own Edward except for his supernatural qualities is potentially dangerous and should be taken cautiously.

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