

## Resuscitating the Undead Queer in Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* Saga

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Published online: July 2016

<http://www.jprstudies.org>

**Abstract:** Broadly, this is an article about queerness and its relationship to Stephanie Meyer's gothic romance series, *Twilight*—a narrative about a supposedly odd and out-of-place girl meeting and falling in love with a vampire (or, more appropriately, a rich, white (super)man living with vampirism). In this article, I engage with both common and uncommon representations of queerness. Following an elucidation of the various conceptualizations of the term 'queer' to make clear how the term will be deployed throughout the article, I trace a history of queerness within the vampire genre to locate Meyer's conceptualization of the vampire within this practice. Aligning vampirism with queerness, I explore the often homosocial and homoerotic histories of the vampire figure. Claiming that Meyer's heteronormative or, perhaps more appropriately, homonormative vampire largely deviates from a tradition of associating the vampire with the Queer (position), I demonstrate how the construction of Edward Cullen still feeds on the popularly imagined construction of queerness. I argue that Meyer's hetero-romantic *Twilight* series can be regarded as participating in the century-old tradition of associating the vampire figure with queer identities and *ways of being*.

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**Keywords:** Queer, *Twilight* series, Vampire

'...the vampire is a queer figure because it is disruptive; the vampire breaks down categories, transgresses boundaries, and upsets the very premises upon which systems of normality are structured. At least this is true of most vampires. In 2005, Stephanie Meyer

introduced the *Twilight* series, which valorized a family of vampires who clearly and firmly refuse the queerness typically associated with the figure.’—Kathryn Kane, *Bitten By Twilight*

In the last several years, much ink has been spilled in the creation of whole collections of essays exploring the social, sexual, political, and religious ideological foundations of Stephanie Meyer’s four book saga and Summit Entertainment’s five part screen adaptation of the series known as *Twilight* (*Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians and the Pursuit of Immortality* (Housel 2009); *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media and the Vampire Franchise* (Click 2010); *Bringing Light to Twilight* (Anatol 2011); *Seduced By Twilight* (Wilson 2011); *Fanpire: The Twilight Saga and the Women Who Love It* (Erzen 2012); *Genre, Reception and Adaptation in the Twilight Series* (Morey 2012)). Stephanie Meyer’s gothic romance series, aimed at teenagers, chronicles the teenage life of the dowdy and awkward Isabella ‘Bella’ Swan (Kristen Stewart) as she becomes intimately involved with two of the most celebrated monsters in Western literature and film: the icy and demure vampire Edward Cullen (Robert Pattinson), and the (hot)headed and bold werewolf Jacob Black (Taylor Lautner).

With box office numbers in the billions, the *Twilight* saga has undeniably sunk its teeth into a cultural vein and has seduced large audiences into craving more. The *Twilight* series primarily follows Bella as she moves to the small and gloomy town of Forks, where she develops a fascination with a particularly strange family of fostered teenagers known as the ‘Cullens’ who attend her school. Captivated and mesmerized by Edward Cullen (the only single and available Cullen), Bella pursues Edward in spite of his strange and suspicious behaviours and/or ways of being. Revealed to be ethical and decent vampires, Edward and the Cullens refer to themselves as ‘vegetarians,’ because they refrain from hunting humans, feeding on the blood of animals instead. Besides the central focus—developing a romantic intimacy and relationship between Bella and Edward—the *Twilight* saga also pivots around Jacob the werewolf and his competing longings for Bella. While *Twilight*’s romantic dynamic, unquestionably triangular and arguably queer (McFarland 2013), has the potential to disrupt conventional understandings of desire, romance, and relationships, my focus in this article lies in the queer potential of the romantic monster—the vampire.

Monsters offer some of the most egregious representations of race, gender, class, ability, and sexuality. Far from being apolitical creatures that simply fascinate and frighten, monsters embody constitutive difference or ‘otherness’. Put simply, representations of monsters matter because they are socially instructive. Judith Halberstam notes as much in *Skin Shows*, when she argues that representations of the modern monster and the horrific body bolster and sustain social and sexual hierarchies (Halberstam 1995). Depictions of vampires, for instance, are largely seductive, sexualized, and often indulge fears of forbidden or taboo sexuality (Skal 1993; Creed 1995; Benshoff 1997, 2006; Dyer 2002). The destructively predatory and hypnotically charming vampire, moreso than any of its supernatural contemporaries, is associated with sexuality. This has not so much been posited by a few as it has been established as a canon when both analyzing and understanding the vampire figure in both literature and film. A scholarly tradition of conflating the vampire with sexuality, especially deviant sexuality, suggests as much (Skal 1993; Weiss 1993; Creed 1995; Benshoff 1997, 2006; Dyer 2002; Williamson 2005).

With a predisposition to seducing, nibbling, biting, penetrating, and sucking, the vampire 'is perhaps the highest symbolic representation of eroticism' (Jackson 120). While Jackson's contention is typical of a generation of scholarship that conflates vampires with eroticism broadly, a more recent trend has materialized which focuses on the association between vampirism and homosexuality (Creed 1993; Auerbach 1995; 1997; Benshoff 1997, 2006; Dyer 2002; Williamson 2005). These scholars, drawing parallels between the lifestyle of the homosexual and the vampire, largely argue that what makes the vampire attractive yet frightening to the general public is its embodiment of sexual transgression and difference: queerness at large. More recently, however, cultural critics and scholars alike have been noting an even more odd and frightening tendency toward the normalization of blood(suckers) within vampire fiction. Referring to the contemporary vampire figure in visual fictions like *True Blood* (2008-2014), *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-) and the *Twilight* Saga (2007-2012), Stephen Marche illuminates this trend when he claims that 'our vampires are normal. They're not Goth, they're not scary, they're not even that weird' (March n.pag). Recalling familiar Antebellum chivalry and virtue, modern vampires—gentlemanly, handsome, and young—are, indeed, quite normative.

Stephanie Meyer's chaste and conservative *Twilight* saga especially demonstrates this tendency toward the normalization of the vampire figure. The *Twilight* books and films, which center on a morally righteous family of vampires referred to as 'the Cullens', construct an image of vampirism that is white (alabaster-white), moneyed, educated, patriarchal, monogamously coupled, appropriately reproductive, domestic, and, as Kathryn Kane poignantly notes, 'distinctly unqueer' (Kane 117). A (straight)forward embodiment of the American (neoliberal) dream, Meyer's conservative conceptualization of the vampire as a normal and compliant subject, Kane and I argue, strays from the canon's radical representation of the vampire as a strange and disruptive troublemaker.

Through an in-depth thematic analysis of the five filmic re-imaginings (*Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse*, *Breaking Dawn: Part 1*, *Breaking Dawn: Part 2*) of Meyer's four book *Twilight* saga, this article explores, develops, and challenges Kane's contention that the modern vampire as characterized by Meyer's Edward Cullen is distinctly un-queer.[1] While for the most part I agree with Kane's assertion that Stephanie Meyer's vampire—a figure that has often been championed as being both transgressive and sexually 'deviant'—is emptied of *some* queerness, I depart with Kane's argument when her definition of 'queer' stops at transgression. Following an elucidation of the various conceptualizations of the term 'queer' to make clear how the term will be deployed throughout the article, I trace a history of queerness within the vampire genre to locate Meyer's conceptualization of the vampire within this practice. Claiming that Meyer's representation of the vampire largely breaks with its traditionally queer (troubling) ancestors, I demonstrate how Edward Cullen, frighteningly less monstrous and more normal than his predecessors, is not wholly capable of parting from a well-established tradition of understanding the vampire as queer. While Kane briefly explores how the *Twilight* series restrains the radical possibilities of queerness, I wish to fully expand this analysis to include an exploration of the ways in which this text as a cultural artefact is in the business of producing meaning about normative queerness; and how this text, in spite of its normalizing tendency, is still very queer.

## Conceptualizing Queerness

Traditionally, vampires have often been thought of as being quite queer creatures. They are troubling (queering; verb) because they challenge and defy the rules and institutions of hetero-patriarchy, strange (queer; adjective) because their habits, appetites, and appearances are divergent, and homosexual (queer; noun) because they are often imagined engaging in same-sex relations. Vampires are simply 'queer'. As illustrated, the use of the term 'queer' here does not refer to a particular conceptualization, but to a multitude of meanings. The word 'queer,' initially utilized to describe something of a strange or unusual nature, has undergone significant transformations in both activism and scholarship. For example, while the 1980s' human rights activists' reclamation of the pejorative 'queer' indicated an identity for LGBT individuals and communities, the use of 'queer' in contemporary academia frequently refers not so much to an identity, but to a politic associated with anti-identity attitudes. Thus, 'queer' is both a 'catch-all' term for the panoply of LGBT identities (sexual orientation) and an attitude (positionality) that challenges hegemonic systems and institutions predicated on heteronormativity and the supposed stability of gender and sexuality. Queer as an organizing identity for both alternative sexuality and oppositional positionality make up the bulk of ways in which the vampire has traditionally been understood in relation to the Western construction of the queer.

Most often, these two divergent discourses arise in scholarship regarding the vampire figure in one of three ways. First, the vampire is associated with queerness because the vampire itself is depicted as explicitly engaging in same-sex sexual activity and is therefore assumed to be a gay, lesbian, or bisexual identified character. This association is arguably most commonly discussed (Weiss 1993; Creed 1993, Aurebach 1997; Dyer 2002; Williamson 2005). Although not limited to women, the vampire as an explicitly queer identified character is most often represented as a lesbian or a bisexual woman (Creed 2002). While few films revel in explicit same-sex male vampirism, *Gayracula* (Roger Earl 1983) being one of the few exceptions, the 1970s and 1980s most remarkably abounded in fetishistic images of lesbian vampirism. Commonly referred to as 'dykesploitation' films, films exploiting images of lesbian desire, such as *The Vampire Lovers* (Roy Ward Baker 1970), *Lust for a Vampire* (Jimmy Sangster 1971), *Daughters of Darkness* (Harry Kümel 1971), *Vampire Orgy*—originally titled 'Vampyres' (José Ramón Larraz 1975) and *The Hunger* (Tony Scott 1983), to name only a few, deal exclusively with representations of the vampire as a lesbian or bisexual. Many, most notably Bonnie Zimmerman, Andrea Weiss, and Barbara Creed, have noted the metaphorical possibilities linking vampirism and lesbianism. This union between predatory vampirism and licentious lesbianism, Creed notes, is a happy one, because both lesbians and vampires have been popularly imagined as seducing 'properly' disciplined and gendered subjects away from patriarchal order (Creed 59).

Secondly, the vampire is associated with a queer identity without explicitly engaging in same-sex behaviour. Put differently, the lifestyle, behaviour, performance, and gestures of the vampire are implicitly compared to those of the Western construction of the queer. In particular, Richard Dyer notes the similarities between vampires and Western understandings of lesbian- and gay-identified individuals in his article 'It's in His Kiss!:

Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism'. Dyer confirms as much when he claims, 'what has been imagined through the vampire image is of a piece with how people have thought and felt about homosexual women and men—how others have thought and felt about us, and how we have thought and felt about ourselves' (Dyer 73). Here, Dyer is, of course, alluding to the long history of the West perceiving LGBT identified individuals as sexual and physical predators capable of mass infection (Benshoff 1997; 2006). Amenable to queer readings, vampires, Dyer argues, are similar to the West's socially constructed 'homosexual' because they are both steeped in histories marked by secrecy and mystery, isolated from normative society, and sexually voracious, among other similarities. There is, of course, nothing inherently 'gay' or 'lesbian' about being private, alienated, or sexual; however, this is how the West has frequently constructed and thus understood LGBT identified individuals. This essentialist notion that queerness has certain innate sensibilities and behaviours makes possible the conflation of the vampire with Western constructions of the 'queer'.

This leads me to the third, and perhaps most significant, conceptualization of 'queer' in scholarship focusing on the vampire figure and its fictions. While the first two applications of 'queer' focus on the longstanding trend of exploring both the explicit and implicit connections between the vampire figure and gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, the third application centers on the more recent yet equally important trend of equating the vampire with an attitude or ethos that refuses to comply with the rules of hegemonic systems. Throughout my work, the capitalization of 'Queer' will refer to the latter understanding in order to provide distinction between the two. Accordingly, 'Queer', in this sense, refers less to the supposedly innate and stable identity often coupled with LGBT individuals, and more to the actions taken that are motivated by the intent to challenge, transgress, disrupt, and destabilize naturalized systems of oppression such as compulsory heterosexuality, monogamy, temporary able-bodiedness, white supremacy, and patriarchy, among others. Put differently, the first two applications rely on the usage of 'queer' as a noun to categorize a set of people with supposedly identifiable differences, while the third depends on 'Queer' as a verb to indicate a state or action. Aligned with a positionality, 'Queer' is, therefore, not necessarily contingent on one's sexual identity, but on one's lack of compliance with or mistrust in normalized systems of ordering.

As a positionality that is aligned with disruption (Muñoz 1999), loss (Love 2007), and failure (Halberstam 2011), 'Queer' has understandably been perceived by activists and scholars alike as a politic or ideology of gay culture. However, as mentioned previously, 'Queer' is less an identity-organizing construct and more a critique of identity (Jagose 1996). Assuming that a sexual orientation, then, like 'gay' even has a culture that possesses unique, fixed behaviours, gestures, and attitudes is antithetical to 'Queer' sensibilities. However, this is not to say that queerness, like heterosexuality, is not performative (Butler 1990, 1993, 1999). Refusing categorization and definition, Queer sensibilities reject essentialized notions of sexuality which rely on an acceptance of the supposed fixedness and stability of socially constructed binaries like homosexuality/heterosexuality. It is this disruptive potential of Queer, Kathryn Kane maintains, that aligns with the vampire (Kane 107). Regarding the vampire as a 'boundary threat', Kane argues that the vampire, like the Queer, has conventionally disrupted ordered ways of knowing, being, and relating: 'it undoes that which is taken to be fixed' (106). Kane is critical of Meyer's depiction of the 'defanged' (107) vampire which, she claims, is 'a radical revision' (107). Arguing that

Meyer's conservative and sympathetic vampire represents the pinnacle of heteronormative success and order, Kane contends that Meyer's conceptualization of the vampire is decidedly 'unqueer' (117).

Correspondingly, Meyer's conservative representation of the vampire is, indeed, quite queer (strange) in its un-Queer (un-troubling) tendencies. Although I agree with Kane's contention that Meyer's vampire has been emptied of much of its potential to trouble, challenge, disrupt, transgress and, hence, Queer systems and institutions of power, I disagree with her argument when she severs herself from a tradition of aligning the vampire with gay and lesbian (queer) identity. While Kane briefly acknowledges a scholarly tradition of conflating the vampire with LGBT identity, her line of argument is overwhelmingly and distinctly grounded 'in the way the vampire aligns with [Q]ueerness, not gay and lesbian identity' (Kane 105). Even as she suggests, without elaboration, that many compelling connections exist between Meyer's vampire and homosexuality, Kane divests Edward Cullen of his queerness and homoeroticism and instead contributes to a popular mainstream understanding of Edward as an unqueer vampire. I, on the other hand, discern a queer individual in Meyer's protagonist vampire. While there is nothing particularly revolutionary about the Cullens and none of them are imagined as being explicitly gay identified characters, I return to the metaphor to explore the vampire's relationship to queerness. Taking direction from Richard Dyer's conflation of the performances of both vampirism and Western constructions of queerness, I locate Meyer's conceptualization of the vampire within this tradition.

I have elucidated multiple conceptualizations of the term 'queer' to illustrate shifting notions of queerness while creating the parameters of how I will engage with 'queer'. While I occasionally refer to the vampire's Queer potential, my use of the term 'queer' in this article refers to the limited and limiting categorical understandings of sexual difference. Put simply, I employ 'queer' to indicate a perceived sexual orientation rather than a defiant positionality. Aligning vampirism with queerness, I will trace the often homosocial and homoerotic histories of the vampire figure to resuscitate the queer within Meyer's heteroromantic fiction.

## **Edward's Great Queer Ancestors: (Blood)suckers and Man Haters**

The vampire is popularly imagined as a caped, white-fanged aristocrat. He is of your Halloween variety—foreign, male, effete, unsympathetic, ghostly, lonely, old, white (very white), and most likely saying 'I want to suck your blood'. He is Dracula. Although the image of Dracula informs our popular understanding of the vampire, the vampire is a versatile monster that has been (vamp)ed and re(vamp)ed throughout the years. As Nina Auerbach begins in her influential text *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, '...there are many Draculas—and still more vampires who refuse to be Dracula or to play him' (Auerbach 1). In all its diversity, the vampire has been represented as being sympathetic, trans, female, lesbian, bisexual, white, black, Asian, evil, good, homosocial, and symbolic of psychosis (respectively *Interview With the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles* (Neil Jordan 1994), *Let the Right One In* (Tomas Alfredson 2008), *Vamp* (Richard Wenk 1986), *Dracula's Daughter* (Lambert Hillyer 1936), *The Hunger* (Tony Scott 1983), *White Skin "La peau blanche"* (Daniel Roby 2004),

*Blacula I* (William Crane 1972), *Thirst “Bakjwi”* (Chan-wook Park 2009), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Joss Whedon 1997-2003), *Twilight* (Harwicke 2008), *The Lost Boys* (Joel Schumacher 1987), *Martin* (George A. Romero 1976)).

These vampires, in all their various forms, have functioned throughout the decades as salient metaphors for a myriad of social and political epidemics afflicting the United States. Vampires have been useful stand-ins for everything from slavery (Lee 2002; Cain 2009), consumption (Marx and Engels 1967; Latham 2002), modernity (Abbott 2006; 2007), and immigration (Newland 2009) to polymorphous sexuality (Auerbach 1997; Zanger 1997), lawyers (Sutherland 2006), menstruation (Creed 1993), sexual disease (Skal 1993), and surveillance (Grandena 2013). Although the vampire figure has symbolized all such meanings, among others, it has most commonly haunted the popular cultural landscape during moments of sexual panic and crisis to symbolize an embodied threat to normative sexuality (Marche n.pag). Correspondingly, we see a rise in vampire fiction produced at the turn of the century when women were becoming more independent. Similarly, vampire fictions experienced a renaissance in both literature and film in the United States during the 1960s and 1980s when the sexual revolution and AIDS epidemic transformed the sociosexual terrain. Although vampire films are, of course, not restricted to these periods, the rise can perhaps be best explained by grasping the vampire’s fundamental relationship to sexuality.

The vampire’s characteristic bite or ‘kiss’, as it is often referred to—yet another indication of the vampire’s association with sexuality—situates both predator and prey in an intimate embrace that is at once both satisfying and painful. Although you do not have to read the vampire’s transformational bite as being sexual, Richard Dyer, among a number of other writers, says, ‘an awful lot suggests you should’ (Dyer 75). The vampire’s erotic bite, consequently, appropriates the place of sex—penetrative sexuality specifically. Archetypically, this erotic displacement commonly occurs between a predatory male vampire and an unsuspecting female victim; however, both male and female vampires are also regularly imagined freely preying on men and women. The vampire’s connection to deviant sexuality, then, or queerness—more appropriately—is but a single step in the logic when a vampire bites someone of the same sex. Consequently, the vampire as a character has been integral to the production of gay and lesbian fiction as its participation in same-sex relations has often been overlooked (Dyer 73). The vampire allows authors to explore sexual themes and imagery that may otherwise not be available to them. To illustrate a tradition of queerness, I turn to several of Edward Cullen’s queer predecessors who, more frequently than not, revel in same-sex biting—a preference that is markedly homoerotic (or (hemo)erotic), if not homosexual.

Often thought to be the inventor of the vampire, Bram Stoker—the creator of the notorious Count Dracula—is frequently credited, mistakenly, as being the first to imagine the vampire. Although Stoker’s Gothic novel *Dracula* (1897) largely defined our modern understandings of the vampire, Count Dracula is not the first vampire in Western literature. In fact, prior to the conception of the unpleasant Dracula, who singlemindedly pursues young women, vampires were considerably more homosocial, more homoerotic—more queer. Nina Auerbach notes as much when she argues that the infamous Dracula ‘is less the culmination of a tradition than the destroyer of one’ (Auerbach 64). Referring to a tradition in which vampires were considerably more friendly and intimate, Auerbach argues that the nineteenth century pre-Dracula vampire ‘offered an intimacy, a homoerotic sharing, that

threatened the hierarchal distance of sanctioned relationships' (60). For example, Samuel Coleridge's unfinished and ambiguous poem 'Christabel' (1797), written a century before *Dracula*, tells the story of a young but dead woman named Lady Geraldine who has inexplicably returned to charm and captivate the young maiden Christabel. Successfully captivated by Lady Geraldine's enchantment, Christabel is transfixed by the sight of a naked Lady Geraldine, her breast specifically. The erotic overtones of the prose are markedly Sapphic, for example:

So half-way from the bed she rose,  
And on her elbow did she recline  
To look at the lady Geraldine,  
Beneath the lamp the lady bowed,  
And slowly rolled her eyes around;  
Then drawing in her breathe aloud,  
Like one that shuddered, she unbound  
The cincture from beneath her breast:  
Her silken robe, and inner vest,  
Dropt to her feet, and full in view,  
Behold! Her bosom and half her side  
A sight to dream, not to tell?  
O shield her! shield sweet Christabel  
(qtd. in Urisini 32)

This imagery, in which Lady Geraldine, partially naked, holds the attentive gaze of Christabel, takes advantage of the naked female figure and lesbian desire. Employing her seductive wiles, Lady Geraldine's power, as Auerbach and others have noted, lies in Geraldine's focal breast (Auerbach 26). Correspondingly, Barbara Creed and others (Weiss 1993; Williamson 2005) have argued that 'the female vampire's seduction exploits images of lesbian desire' (Creed 59). The imagery of predatory and voracious female intimacy and sexuality is undeniably homoerotic in its vivid illustration of same-sex attraction between Lady Geraldine and Christabel.

Sheridan Le Fanu's supernatural novella *Carmilla* (1871) similarly focuses on a young girl named Laura who is haunted by dreams of a beautiful and mysterious woman named Carmilla and, later, Millarca—both anagrams of 'Mircalla'. Both Carmilla and Millarca are eventually revealed in the narrative to be the same person, Countess 'Mircalla' Karnstein, a female vampire who expresses a predilection for vampirizing young women—a preference that produces palpable homoerotic underpinnings. Following a suspicious carriage accident, Carmilla is unexpectedly placed under the supervision of Laura's father where she officially meets Laura. They quickly become close friends in spite of Carmilla's abrupt and disruptive mood swings which fluctuate between perplexing rage and unsettling 'passionate declarations of her liking for [Laura]' (Le Fanu 82). Distressed by 'a cruel love—strange love that would have taken [her] life' (82), Laura expresses confusion: 'I experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust. I had no distinct thoughts about her while such scenes lasted, but I was conscious of a love growing into adoration, and also of



abhorrence. This I know is paradox, but I can make no other attempt to explain the feeling' (87).

Correspondingly, Laura's contradictory feelings of both disgust and adoration resonate with popularly imagined representations of how gay and lesbian identified individuals have thought and felt about themselves as they experience dissenting attraction and desire. Also implied in her statement is the notion that Laura is attracted to and affected by Carmilla in spite of her best efforts to remain unyielding. Similarly, being bitten by a vampire constructs a biological connection that binds the victim to the prey in spite of reason. Thus, the narrative which ambiguously explores Carmilla's lust and/or hunger for Laura in many ways establishes a tradition in which vampirism is conflated with homosexuality. One possible implication of such imagery is that women who desire other women are predatory and, more worryingly for a heterosexist, patriarchal culture, capable of ensnaring heterosexual women, transforming them into deviants, sexual or otherwise. Although Christabel toys with lesbian desire, Carmilla effectively establishes the trope of the lesbian vampire, as it is this fiction which is re-appropriated time and again in twentieth century horror films.

After the creation of *Carmilla*, the lesbian vampire as a trope does not significantly return as a common depiction until the 1970s. No longer a thinly disguised metaphor for queer desire, the films of the 1970s portray many of their female vampires as explicitly lesbian- and bisexual- identified individuals. The Hammer productions especially boast lesbian vampires whose 'lust knows no boundaries'—a tagline from the so-called Karnstein Trilogy *Lust for a Vampire* (Sangster 1971). While the instances of lesbianism or queerness discussed in both Christabel and Carmilla are more incidental, the instances in the dykesploitation films of the 1970s—loosely adapted from Le Fanu's 'Carmilla'—are purposeful. The female vampires find identity politics and are clearly lesbian (Auerbach 56). Correspondingly, these films exploit imagery of softcore lesbianism that is at once both threatening and non-threatening. These films offer audiences—overwhelmingly heterosexual and male—the brief opportunity to revel in images of pornographic depictions of lesbianism before the narrative re-establishes order or 'proper' ways of relating within the heterosexist matrix. Even as these films narrowly present lesbian desire, they demonstrate a shift in patriarchal and heterosexist structures. These films arguably emerged during a time of burgeoning feminism and a greater awareness of lesbian relations. For Auerbach, films such as these can indeed celebrate alternative expressions of female desire as a result of the shifting attitudes of the 1970s (Auerbach 165). Where lesbian or, more appropriately, queer desire was suggested in the nineteenth-century female vampire, lesbianism is specifically addressed in the vampire films of the 1970s.

Although 'Carmilla' and 'Christabel'—fictions which solely focus on intimacy between women—largely establish the explicit queerness of the vampire figure, a comparable pattern of same-sex intimacy and attraction between men can similarly be traced throughout vampire fiction. Referring to Lord Byron's 'Fragment of a Tale' (1816) and John Polidori's 'The Vampyre' (1819), Nina Auerbach makes clear a connection between the male vampire figure and homosexual writing. Elaborating on this correlation, Richard Dyer's 'It's in His Kiss: Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism' provides a rich variety of examples to argue that the vampire figure and vampire fiction in general is a cultural phenomenon that has been both produced by and about men in the

category 'queer': 'From Manor and Har to Anne Rice's Louis, Armond and Lestat, or from *Vathek* to *Gaywick*, there is a line of vampire Gothic writing that is predominantly queer/gay produced, or which at any rate forms part of a queer/gay male reading tradition' (Dyer 71). Vampire fiction, like Gothic fiction, Dyer argues, is often in contention and divergence with hegemonic male culture and narratives (72). Apart from elucidating a tradition of queer produced vampire fiction, Dyer's most important intervention in the scholarship relies on the metaphorical connections between the construction of the vampire and the queer.

Ultimately arguing that the vampire's metaphorical possibilities account for its traditional and historical relationship to queerness, Dyer explicates how the construction of the vampire is dependent on modern discourses used to articulate the social construction of queerness. Dyer argues that there is a fit between vampire imagery and gay and lesbian identities. Referencing both explicitly queer and heterosexual vampire fictions to illustrate how the visual production of vampirism is homologous with the construction of queerness, Dyer underscores several features that the two identities share: privacy/secretcy, uncontrollable desires, and discourses of self-loathing. Although there is nothing inherently private, uncontrollable, or self-loathing about the popularly imagined queer, these features, Dyer argues, are integral to modern notions of hegemonic queerness.

I have focused on traditions of both visual and metaphoric queerness represented throughout Western vampire fiction. A history of textual and visual homoerotic vampires, both male and female, and a metaphoric compatibility begin to explicate my, among other scholars', reasons for extending the metaphor to contemporary vampire fictions such as *True Blood* (Brace and Arp 2010; Culver 2010; Curtis 2010) and, most importantly, the *Twilight* saga. Turning now to a more direct analysis of the *Twilight* saga, I will illustrate and reiterate Dyer's claim that 'much of the form of vampirism/sexuality is homologous with the social construction of queerness' (Dyer 77). Although the Cullen family and, more importantly, Edward, in many ways represent a major revision in the construction of the vampire as monster (Kane 117), Dyer's metaphoric understanding of the vampire largely remains the same. I return to Kane's claim that Edward and the Cullen family are 'distinctly unqueer' (Kane 117) to argue instead that Meyer's representation of vampirism continues to articulate and conflate popular discourses of the 'queer'—inflected by gender, race, class, and ability—with the vampire figure.

## The Undead Metaphor

Turning to a more direct analysis of the *Twilight* saga, I will demonstrate how Meyer's vampire, regarded as being atypical and revisionary (Kane 2010), represents an extension of the very tradition it is believed to disavow. Locating the self-hating outsider known as Edward Cullen within a tradition of equating the experience of the vampire with the imagined experience of the queer, I will illustrate how Meyer's film series reanimates this undead trend.

As a social construction, homosexuality or, more appropriately, queerness is often perceived to be a fixed and stable category that is thought to have inherent and identifiable characteristics and ways of being. While privacy has been integral to the definition of the

ideal sexual citizen (Rubin 1984; Warner 1999; Dyer 2002), which, according to the construction, does not include queers (Rubin 1984; Warner 1999; Puar 2007), privacy has also been integral to the construction and perception of the queer for other reasons. Popular culture often imagines queer individuals to be private individuals either out of necessity to avoid perceived—yet very real—physical and psychic violence (*Boys Don't Cry* (Kimberly Peirce 1999); *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee 2005)) and/or because the queer individual is ashamed of his/her same-sex attractions (*M. Butterfly* (David Cronenberg 1993); *J. Edgar* (Clint Eastwood 2011)). Correspondingly, it is under the conditions of a heterosexist matrix and often flagrantly homophobic culture that queer individuals are encouraged or, more appropriately, forced—both intuitively and physically—into lives of secrecy. Although there is nothing inherently private about queer folks, the idea of privacy is frequently perceived to be very important to the queer 'lifestyle'.

Similarly, secrecy and privacy are integral themes within traditional vampire fiction. Noting the similarities between the lifestyles of the queer and vampire, Dyer discusses the importance of the secret double life in which both vampire and queer must hide their true identities. Like the perceived-to-be or self-identified queer, the vampire must conceal its strange desires and acts to ensure its survival in a society that ruthlessly maintains normalcy because, as Dyer notes, there is a 'sense that being a queer is something one must keep to oneself [which] certainly accords with an idea of the authenticity of private sexuality, but it also is something that one better keep private if one is not to lose a job, family, friends and so on' (Dyer 78). As a result, the vampire's existence relies on its ability to be consistently regarded as belonging to a group that is not its own—essentially, the vampire is able to 'pass' as being human. The sociological phenomenon known as 'passing'—which not only includes sexual passing, but racial, gender, and class passing—is reliant on successful misrepresentation. The concept of passing requires a critical nod of acknowledgment to the constructedness or performance of identities—racial, gender, sexual, class, bodiedness, or otherwise. In the same ways that queer individuals have been understood as possessing an identifiable ethos, ways of being, and cultural practice (Dyer 1988; Halperin 2012)—or, as Dyer aptly observes, 'a widespread discourse that there are tell-tale signs that someone 'is'' (Dyer 78) —vampires, similarly, have ways of being which, if revealed, threaten their existence. Although Dyer made this comparison over ten years ago, this theme of what is essentially 'passing,' which fittingly resonates with the lives and stories of many LGBT identified individuals, still rings true for the vampire figure in Meyer's *Twilight* saga.

The characterization of Edward Cullen as an emotional teenage boy with pouty lips, beautifully coiffed hair, and, most notably, sparkling skin appeals, perhaps unintentionally, to camp's aesthetic and performance. Revealing his bare skin to the sun's magical rays and Bella's gaze, Edward bemoans, in a fashion reminiscent of 'coming out' narratives, 'This is what I am' (*Twilight* 0:52:12). Bella gasps, 'It's like diamonds. You're beautiful.' (*Twilight* 0:52:18)—cue swooning drag queens. The depiction of Edward as a strange (read as odd, different, queer), glittering adolescent—a condition that Pramod Nayar terms 'Supernatural masculinity in drag' (Nayar 62)—who is simultaneously repulsed by Bella's abject body (most notably, her scent) and attracted to her appearance reads as Liberace-excess, Rocky-Horror-Picture-Show-camp, RuPaul-drag: queer at the very least. Steven Marche similarly notes queer incongruities in the seemingly staunch hetero-romantic tale in his article 'What's Really Going on With All These Vampires?': '*Twilight's* fantasy is that

the gorgeous gay guy can be your boyfriend' (Marche n.pag). Despite Marche's hasty generalization that '[v]ampires have overwhelmed pop culture because young straight women want to have sex with gay men' (Marche n.pag.), I believe that the parallel that Marche draws between the representation of Edward Cullen and queerness is fitting and a subject worthy of greater attention.

Indeed, Meyer's 'beautiful' vampire breed renders statements like Dyer's—'the classic metaphoric statement of the idea of the gay male image of the gay man as a sparkling, agreeable surface masking a hidden depravity, brilliant charm concealing a corrupt and sordid sexuality' (Dyer 80)—quite fitting. My attention here is, of course, focused on Dyer's description of the vampire's body as being sparkling and agreeable because Meyer's vampires—in a break with traditional vampire convention—indeed, sparkle. Among being exceedingly beautiful, Meyer's vampires sparkle when their skin is exposed to the sun. The iconic scene in *Twilight* in which Edward not only reveals himself to be a vampire to Bella but also exposes his peculiar ability to sparkle has been only one of many sites of incredible amusement and disparagement for viewers of the *Twilight* series. This scene of discovery and Edward's fabulous 'coming out' is instigated by Bella cagily saying, 'I know what you are' (*Twilight* 0:50:36). In spite of this 'othering' language, which is strikingly similar to Dyer's 'tell-tale signs that someone 'is'' (78), Bella does, in fact, have grounds to suggest that Edward is different. After all, the first half of the *Twilight* film goes to great lengths to demonstrate how Edward's ways of being are different, strange, peculiar—queer, even. As Bella notes, Edward is 'impossibly fast and strong. [His] skin is pale white and ice cold. [His] eyes change colour and sometimes [he] speak[s] like [he is] from a different time. [He] never eat[s] or drink[s] anything. [He doesn't] go out into the sunlight.' (*Twilight* 0:49:43). Not only does Edward have 'give away aspects' (79) which align him with vampirism, reinforcing Dyer's comparison and argument that both the queer and vampire have 'tell-tell signs' (71), Edward has queer 'give away aspects' which more closely align him with queerness.

While Dyer argued that vampirism in all its expressions was easy to read as an image of queerness, I argue that Edward Cullen's revisionary signs more readily associate him with queerness. Besides possessing the 'othering' yet typical traits of conventional vampirism, Edward sparkles when *out* in sunlight, appears to be repulsed by the sight and smell of Bella, and, perhaps most importantly, will not and/or cannot bite—the figurative act of sexual penetration—or have sex with Bella. Surely, this is the type of concealed 'sordid sexuality' (80) Dyer was referring to previously. These particular additions to the vampire mythos are unquestionably queer behaviour for a vampire (Sommers 155). But, more importantly, are these additions not also queer behaviour for an adolescent male? If only stereotypically indicative of the ways of being 'gay', these features align Edward more readily with queerness. Stephen Marche suggests as much when he claims that Edward resembles the gay best friend construction:

Edward...is a sweet, screwed-up high school kid, and at the beginning of his relationship with Bella, she is attracted to him because he is strange, beautiful, and seemingly repulsed by her. This exact scenario happened several times in my high school between straight girls and gay guys who either hadn't figured out they were gay or were still in the closet. (March n.pag)

Although Marche's hasty claim is quite reductive and essentializing, it reinforces Dyer's comparison between the rhetoric and discourse of queer- and vampire-spotting and, more importantly, it locates queerness within the hetero- and abstinent *Twilight* saga.

Conventionally, monsters emerge to disrupt and challenge hegemonic ideas of the normal. Consequently, monsters, including vampires, evade rules, mores, and order. Renowned for especially evading sexual rules, decorum, and order, the vampire's appetite, in spite of its sexual orientation, 'always exceeds and defies cultural mores' (Weinstock 2012). At the whim of its appetite, the vampire has traditionally been depicted as indiscriminately feeding on both men and women. Consequently, the vampire, unable to control its hunger, has often been depicted in same-sex biting, penetrating, and sucking. This imagery, which imagines a man or woman invading the body of another of the same sex, has had limited visual homoerotic representation in popular culture. Thus, the vampire's voracious and irrepressible appetite has afforded it the opportunity to engage, even if only platonically or temporarily, in same-sex relations.

Recently, however, vampires have been depriving themselves of this natural yet evil instinct in an attempt to be civil and moral—HBO's *True Blood* and Meyer's *Twilight* series being the most blatant expressions of this trend. Although not the first to depict the vampire as attempting to control its appetite, Stephanie Meyer is the first to depict her vampire as being successful and content while doing so. Where Anne Rice's self-loathing and sympathetic Louis is ultimately unable to manage his natural inclination toward drinking human blood, Meyer's resolute and controlled Edward ultimately perfects repressing his bodily appetites. Although drinking the blood of humans is perhaps the most distinguishable and significant feature of the vampire as well as its greatest pleasure, Meyer's vampire, in a mark of disinterest with this convention, abstains from feeding on humans. Referred to as 'vegetarian' vampires, Edward Cullen explains, 'my family and I, we are different from the others of our kind. We only hunt animals. We learned how to control our thirst' (*Twilight* 0:54:20). In the interest of leading a moral life, Meyer's vampire rejects and denounces an inherent part of its self-identity because vampirism and morality are thought to be incompatible.

Correspondingly, if we are to understand the vampire's innate and pleasurable act of sucking the blood of humans as a thoroughly Victorian displacement of the traditional sex act, recognizing its refusal to feed on humans as an attempt to abstain from sexual intercourse—same-sex or otherwise—is but a step in the logic. Put simply and directly, Meyer's Byronic Edward not only controls the biological impulse to bite and suck human blood, but, more significantly, controls his voracious impulse to penetrate and suck the bodily fluids of his victims.

In a flashback which reveals a pre-vegetarian Edward, Edward describes himself as a monster. While the choice of language is interesting because it resonates with how LGBT identified individuals have often been represented and thus thought of (Benshoff 1997, 2006; Dyer 2002), the language also reveals a judgement. This fictional condemnation and repression of a super(natural) instinct eerily resembles an existent discourse which condemns natural feelings of same-sex attraction and desire. This existent discourse, informally referred to as 'Pray the Gay Away', endeavours to reconcile homosexuality with religious beliefs, specifically Christianity. The fundamentalist practice of attempting to convert people identified as 'homosexuals' into 'heterosexuals' resembles the Cullen family's practice of converting vampires into vegetarian vampires. In the same ways that

the Cullen family believe that the desire to and act of (suck)ing the blood of humans is incompatible with a moral life, many extremist Christians believe that same-sex desire is incompatible with a moral life. Given Meyer's religious standing and the text's overriding didactic messages of piety and restraint, connections emerge between Meyer's fictional family who abstain from the perverse bodily desire to consume blood and individuals like Alan Chambers, the longstanding president of Exodus International, the organization which has single-handedly become synonymous with the phrase 'Pray the gay away' (Crow n.pag). Both bodily desires, thirst for blood and attraction to the same sex, are similarly constructed as being purely biological and instinctual, and both pious groups, the Cullen family and organizations like Exodus International, champion similar ideologies that maintain that those very instincts can be overcome with just a little (neoliberal) effort and determination.

Gripping Edward's hand, Carlisle (Peter Facinelli) leans into Edward's dying and bed-bound body and tenderly whispers words, unbeknownst to the viewer, into Edward's ear. Following this, Carlisle bites into Edward's exposed neck, holding Edward's face still as his body writhes in agony. In the violent moment, Edward is pictured screaming, gasping for air as his eyes open wide in pain. A victim of circumstance, Carlisle is depicted as experiencing feelings of regret and possibly even abhorrence as he removes himself from Edward's penetrated and infected body. Carlisle is demonstrated as possessing immense focus and self-discipline: 'not many of us have the restraint to do that' (*Twilight*). Carlisle's decision to 'turn' a dying Edward is one based in compassion and reason instead of impulse and instinct, which distinguishes Meyer's brand of vampirism from her predecessors. Even as Carlisle is seen as producing a monster, Carlisle is sympathetically rendered as the morally righteous patriarch who is capable of controlling his desires.

Another feature of the vampire narrative that Dyer claims can be easily read metaphorically as an image of queer sexuality and experience is the discourse of self-loathing that surrounds the vampire. Discourses of self-loathing are particularly essential to the construction of the sympathetic vampire (Williamson 63). As many have noted, the sympathetic vampire is a vampire who loathes its condition or identity but is essentially and ultimately constrained by it (Williamson 2005; Dyer 2002). Unlike the unsympathetic vampire, the sympathetic vampire despises and feels contempt for its perceived and/or self-identified culture and personal identity. Unlike the traditional vampire, imagined as a predator and perpetrator, the sympathetic vampire is regarded as being a victim of circumstance (Williamson 63). Again, Dyer relates this imagery to the queer identity and experience. Dyer posits that queer readers of vampire fiction may very well identify with the 'curse' of vampirism because the framing language used to understand and empathize with the melancholic vampire reflects modern bio-medical discourses about the 'curse' of 'homosexuality'. With the medicalization and essentializing of 'homosexuality', individuals identified as queer were more frequently pitied than abhorred. Indeed, the twentieth century 'argument that "we/they can't help it"' (Dyer 81), which has often taken the form of 'a mix of distaste for homosexuality with a recognition that it cannot be resisted' (81), is similarly employed within the vampire narrative. Respectively, the sympathetic vampire innately 'can't help it' and its awareness of its biological disposition is often met with feelings of regret, disgust, and disappointment. This identity crisis, which, as Dyer contends, bears a striking resemblance to the consequences of internalized homophobia, rings true for forlorn queer folks across North America.

Throughout the series, Edward experiences several identity crises in which he struggles to accept his seemingly inherent queerness as a vampire. As a creature that has instinctively perverse desires—a voracious thirst for human blood—Edward is perhaps fittingly imagined as experiencing crises which are almost always surrounded by language of self-loathing: ‘All the men I killed were monsters. And so was I’ (*Breaking Dawn: Part I* 0:05:40). This language, as Dyer notes, has been informed by the modern queer. In *Breaking Dawn: Part I*, Edward recalls a time when he enjoyed killing humans. Interestingly, Edward is only ever visually imagined as haunting, biting, penetrating, and sucking male bodies, save Bella’s body, which is always out of necessity to save her life. Edward is demonstrated biting the neck of a man. When he explains this to Bella, he emphasizes that he only penetrated (my language)/punctured men. This scene is informed by language of regret and disgust—‘I was a monster’ (*Breaking Dawn: Part I* 0:5:56). Although Edward is meant to be read as regretting his decision to kill men, I argue that this scene can be alternatively read as an instance of Edward’s homoerotic panic, especially because this ‘coming out’ scene is in response to Bella jeeringly saying ‘What, you’re not a virgin?’ (0:05:12). The language of the forbidden, the impermissible, combined with Bella’s enquiry about Edward’s previous sexual exploits, contributes to the reading of Edward as an ashamed queer. In addition, these scenes in which Edward struggles with his identity often occur when Edward warns Bella of the dangers of his ‘condition’ to discourage her from its destruction—‘I’m the world’s most dangerous predator’ (*Twilight* 0:53:20). Thus, Edward’s continuous and purposeful distancing from his ‘condition’ renders his actions and attitudes self-loathing.

While Edward attempts to purge himself of any vampirehood by refusing to live like a vampire, as demonstrated by his choice to maintain a ‘vegetarian diet’, the villainous vampires—perhaps only villainous because they embrace their nature, which stands in direct opposition to the nature of humans—epitomize the self-identified, out and proud queer, because they embrace and revel in their desires. Whereas Edward denies himself the pleasures, desires, and experiences of the vampire, James, the most celebratory of his differences, embraces his supposed genetic nature and all that it entails. Thus, I draw a parallel between the frequently self-hating Edward and the construction of the ashamed homosexual, both of which are popularly imagined as being incapable of embracing their ‘true’ or ‘authentic’ self. The coded language of the ashamed homosexual, equated with the vampiric condition of Edward, is just another example of how Edward Cullen can be understood as participating in the constructed ways of being queer.

## Normalized Vampires/Queers

Many Queer scholars have voiced concern for/with the longstanding myopic focus of the LGBT agenda in North America. Repudiating the movement’s central focus on gays in the military and, most significantly, same-sex marriage equity, Michael Warner in particular discusses the agenda’s attempt to normalize and desexualize gays as being misguided and in the interest of only select identities. Rather than either devising a radical reimagining of sexuality, family, and relationality, and/or challenging institutions and

structures which disproportionately privilege the normative, the movement promotes the reappropriation of traditional and restrictive values and institutions.

This type of agenda, assimilationist in function, has been referred to as 'homonormative'. Homonormativity, as defined by Lisa Duggan in her article 'The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism', 'is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumerism' (23). Working to downplay homosexuality as a form of significant otherness, homonormative conventions mark individuals within lesbian and gay communities as indistinguishable from heterosexuals (Duggan 2002). In line with the gay assimilationist viewpoint(s), homonormative politics are quite different from radical Queer politics, which not only strive to deemphasize the importance of sexual identity politics, but address LGBT issues as they intersect with gender, race, class, ability, and capitalism. Conversely, homonormative politics prioritize issues that involve the mainstreaming and thus normalization of gay identities. Focus on the legislation of same-sex marriage, adoption, and military service as the primary concerns of most lesbian and gay activist groups exemplifies homonormative rhetoric and discourses. Thus, rather than questioning or challenging heteronormative structures and institutions like marriage and childrearing, homonormativity simply asks for inclusion in the existing structures.

Assimilationist ideology that strives to have queer individuals recognized as similar, if not normal, resonates with the discourses employed in Meyer's text. Although the *Twilight* series is not explicitly a text about queer sexuality, it is a text about queer creatures. A text about vampires, monsters, and individuals not unlike us, the *Twilight* saga implicitly explores themes of normality and abnormality. Consequently, the text carries several persistent and enduring yet embedded and invisible notions about normality. These notions are so pervasive and established in Western culture that they are rarely questioned or challenged. I argue that the *Twilight* series, in its production of normality and abnormality, is reproducing problematic discourses that reappropriate homonormative rhetoric. Much of the rhetoric and many of the discourses that surround the assimilationist approach in the struggle for gay rights, I contend, are reappropriated by *Twilight's* Cullen family: in particular, Edward. Like homonormative queers, vampires who endeavour to squelch their abnormal desires and who instead channel their energies into fostering incredibly committed monogamous relationships and raising children are sympathetically rendered as valuable individuals.

I argue that this type of un-radical politic, the assimilation of heteronormative ideals and constructs into queer culture and identity, is deployed in the *Twilight* saga, whether consciously or unconsciously, to mark 'normal' and 'healthy' queers as separate from 'abnormal' and 'unhealthy' queers. This is best exemplified by the Cullen family, Edward specifically, through their reappropriation of traditional American values, such as virtue, loyalty, and sacrifice, as well as institutions, such as marriage and family building. In fact, Meyer's films glorify heteronormative structures and institutions by upholding the importance of compulsory heteronormative coupling, monogamy, the practice of abstinence before marriage, matrimony, the nuclear family, and organic child rearing, which the film *Breaking Dawn: Part I* provides for Bella and Edward in spite of all supposed folkloric and supernatural odds. Although a queer character—if, at the very least, because



he represents something abnormal—Edward not only takes part in these institutions and structures, but cherishes and upholds them as markers of the good and healthy normal life. Although Edward will never be able to fully attain a normal life because we are told that vampires are—like queers are imagined to be—intrinsically abnormal folk, Edward can acquire most of the sociosexual markers of the valuable sexual citizen. Put simply, Edward cannot change his biological and disreputable impulses, but he can conduct himself in a manner deemed appropriate enough to afford him with the opportunity to border respectability and thus receive the social privileges and rewards listed above.

The Cullens and Edward, in a rejection of their ‘natures’, align themselves with normality by upholding and participating in both social and sexual (heteronormative) value systems and institutions assumed to be natural to humans. Accordingly, the Cullens are valued as respectable figures—in spite of their literal and figurative queerness—because their sexuality is ‘heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, and non-commercial’ and ‘coupled, relational, within the same generation and occur[ing] at home’ (Rubin 280). According to Rubin’s hierarchy of sexuality, their sexuality and ways of relating do not violate distinctions of ‘normal’ and ‘healthy’ sexuality, but bolster it by blindly accepting the supposed ‘normalness’ of it.

This message is nowhere more blatantly stated in the text than when Bella implores Edward to have sex with her. We are told that Edward refuses to have sexual intercourse with Bella because ‘Edward is old school’ (*Eclipse* 1:12:36) and, more importantly, her human scent is most potent and thus attractive to Edward’s vampiric senses when she is sexually aroused. But in desiring to have sex with Edward as a human being before being turned into a vampire, Bella pleads, ‘You said you wanted me to have every human experience’ (*Eclipse* 1:15:10). Although sex is but one of the ‘human experiences’ Edward hopes for Bella, this statement and scene alludes to the stakes in sexual conduct. A desire for human experience is relegated to a select few privileged experiences which are considered human and thus good. Edward *does* want Bella to have every human experience and he *does* want to have sexual relations with Bella, but for Edward, the human experience is conflated with ‘normal’ sexuality: ‘Believe me, I want to. I just want to be married to you first’ (*Eclipse* 1:17:10). More concerned for her ‘virtue’ (*Eclipse* 1:17:29) than the threat of vampirization, Edward conflates not desire, perverse or otherwise, with normality and/or ‘human experiences’, but proper sociosexual conduct—a feature that aligns him not only with religious morality, but with homonormative rhetoric and discourses.

Among the moral didacticism, the film’s fascination with marriage serves to normalize the vampires. Meyer’s text, I argue, draws from gay liberationist strategies that have situated the gay individual as being no different than their straight counterpart. Drawing a parallel to the rhetoric and discourses of the North American gay and lesbian movement, I argue that the *Twilight* series employs homonormative propaganda and strategies to articulate the normalness of the vampire. In an attempt to normalize the vampire, the series embraces an invisibilized politics of ‘the normal’ which requires the vampires to repudiate their perverse desire—a similar tactic that the North American gay movement took in the 1990s.

According to Michael Warner, the North American lesbian and gay movement experienced a drastic political shift in the early 1990s. Warner contends that a large faction of the gay movement stopped embracing a politics of sexual pride and instead embraced a politics of shame (Warner 42). Recognizing that ‘power lies almost exclusively on the

normal side' (44), the gay movement, he argues, underwent a desexualisation in hopes of garnering more support (legal and social) from the heterosexual majority. As a result, the movement's embrace of 'normal' began with 'divorcing homosexuality from sex and then from politics' (60). Similarly, the *Twilight* text, I argue, divorces desire from sex and politics. The Cullens are virtually 'just like' their human counterparts, save their strange desires and impulses. We are told that the only thing that distinguishes the vampires from humans is their desire and lust for blood; however, according to Meyer's text, if that desire is controlled and restrained, then, vampires—positioned as fundamentally different—can be 'just like' us. By controlling their desires and embracing institutions and values considered 'normal', the Cullen family move from being creatures of disgust to creatures of respectability. Accordingly, just as 'marriage, in short, would make for good gays—the kind who would not challenge the norms of straight culture, who would not flaunt sexuality, and who would not insist on living differently from ordinary folk' (Warner 113), marriage would, similarly, make for good vampires.

Meyer reveals that vampirism can be good—normal, even. If the unnatural desires of the vampire and queer cannot be squelched, the *Twilight* series reveals that the lifestyles that are assumed to belong to those desires can be. As a result, the queer lifestyle of Edward ultimately becomes indistinguishable from a normative human life. Duggan's homonormative politics provide a useful platform for addressing and discussing Edward's normalizing tendencies and his desire to be seen as the same. Accordingly, as gay and lesbian individuals acquire more social and legal equality in North America and social attitudes toward non-normative sexualities evolve, representations of queer individuals change as well. Situating the vampire—a figure that has been championed by queer folks for being queer—as a character that desires to embrace normality as opposed to rejecting it seems fitting to a decade that has begun to accept the emergent normative queer.

In 1995, Nina Auerbach argued that vampires, far from being simply fantastical monsters, were creatures that embodied the age in which they were created. What vampires are, she maintains, 'in any given generation is a part of what [she] is and what [her] times have become' (Auerbach 1). Referring to the years in between 1989 and 1993 (the years of George H.W. Bush's presidency), Auerbach draws compelling parallels and makes convincing comparisons between the representations of vampires and the moral panics and social fears of the period. Correspondingly, my intervention in vampire studies has explored the rather recent depiction of the 'normal monster' while discerning how its depiction similarly parallels contemporary Anglo-American politics and culture.

This scholarly work took shape during 2011 and 2013 when debates about sexuality took front stage in U.S. politics. It was during these years that Rick Santorum, one of the Republican primary candidates, was glitter bombed by protesters for his hateful and homophobic denunciations of same-sex marriage. It was during these years that President Obama was re-inaugurated, defeating Mitt Romney. It was during these years that Obama announced his support for same-sex marriage and his administration urged the Supreme Court to rule in favor of same-sex couples. It was during these years that landmark victories for gay rights were achieved, including the legal recognition of same-sex couples from the federal government in states where same-sex marriage is legal. It was also during these years that the final *Twilight* film, *Breaking Dawn: Part II* (Condon 2012), which grants the undead but no longer unwed couple Edward and Bella a happily-ever-after ending in spite of their supposed difference, was released.

These are queer times in which we live. Queer (stange), indeed, when our vampires look and act like what we imagine normative people to look and act like; however, it is not surprising that creatures that have traditionally embodied difference look and act like (some of) 'us' now. Returning to Auerbach's objective, vampires, far from being unimportant and nonsensical creatures, 'matter because when properly understood, they make us see that our lives are implicated in theirs and our times are inescapable' (9). Consequently, as North America witnesses a mainstreaming shift in attitudes toward (white, wealthy, able-bodied, male) gays, so, too does it experience a change in attitudes toward one of queer folks' figurative and metaphoric counterparts, the (white, wealthy, able-bodied, male) vampire. Thus, Meyer's hetero(normative) vampire reflects an emerging homo(normative) queer.

In this article, I have sought to recover the apparently absent queer of the *Twilight* series. A narrative about a supposedly odd and out-of-place girl meeting and falling in love with a vampire (or, more appropriately, a rich, white (super)man living with vampirism), the *Twilight* series is not a text about the abnormal, but instead, one about the normal. Normality is not something that has traditionally come easy to queer folks, and thus, drawing a parallel between Meyer's normal vampire and the queer identity, commonly understood in opposition to the 'normal', 'healthy' and 'good', has not been a common strategy among scholars theorizing around the *Twilight* series. I, however, maintain that the normalcy of Meyer's normative Edward Cullen can be attributed to recent changes in both American attitudes toward and representations of queer individuals. In a society where people once considered different and strange are more frequently understood as being 'normal', it only makes sense that the figures they influenced, embraced, and celebrated also evolve to accommodate the period's new attitudes and perceptions.

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[1] This work does take up both textual and visual vampire fictions as if they are identical mediums. While the article does not permit space to discuss the differences between textual and visual constructions of the vampire, it is worth noting that they do differ. Generally, vampires of film adaptations are emptied of much of the queerness of their literary counterparts.

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