Bite Me: Sadomasochistic Gender Relations in Contemporary Vampire Literature

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BITE ME: SADOMASOCHISTIC GENDER RELATIONS
IN CONTEMPORARY VAMPIRE LITERATURE

by

SHELBY NATHANSON

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the Honors in the Major Program in English
in the College of Arts and Humanities
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Thesis Director: Kathleen M. Oliver, Ph.D.
ABSTRACT

While the term sadomasochism might conjure cursory images of whips, chains, and leather-clad fetishists, this thesis delves deeper into sadomasochistic theory to analyze dynamics of power and powerlessness represented by a chosen sample of literary relationships. Using two contemporary works of vampire literature—Anne Rice’s novel Interview with the Vampire and Stephenie Meyer’s Twilight series—I examine how power is structured by and between male and female characters (and vampires and humans), and particularly emphasize the patriarchal messages these works’ regressive sexual politics engender. Psychoanalysis and feminist theory are employed to support my overarching argument following the gendered dynamics of male sadism and female masochism (and vampire sadism and human masochism), as this dyad reflects men’s and women’s “normalized” roles of power and powerlessness, respectively, in today’s society. Sadomasochistic relationships as depicted in this literature are created through mutual contracts or, what I refer to as, sociocultural sadomasochism to reflect the gendered power imbalances inherent in patriarchy. By concluding with readers’ responses to these franchises, this thesis further attempts to determine why such unequal and oppressive relationships are desirable. Since vampires as Gothic figures embody what specific cultures dread yet desire, this literature possesses frightening implications—gender roles are conservative and masculinity is privileged in fiction and, by extension, in twenty-first-century American culture.
DEDICATION

For Mom, who endured my stubbornness, laughed and cried with me, and held my hand during every step of the journey.

For Dad, who told me stories about the little girl with yellow hair and glasses until I fell asleep, and left a global trail for the little girl with yellow hair and glasses to follow.

Words cannot express how grateful I am for your endless support and limitless love. Both of you taught me the value of hard work and dedication, and I am forever indebted to such generous parents.
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**Introduction**

*I want to be one. I want to walk at night with you and fall in love and drink blood.\nKill me. Make me into a vampire too. Bite me. Take me with you.*

Poppy Z. Brite\n*Lost Souls*

Although referred to as the undead, vampires are very much alive and have been since their genesis in early nineteenth-century literature. Generic vampires—threatening, nocturnal, and (today) inhumanly attractive—are immortal insofar as they have never completely vanished from popular culture, yet their individual image and lore have been more ephemeral than eternal. From the earliest vampire literature to that of post-modernity, the vampire has mutated, “feed[ing] on his age distinctively because he embodies that age” (Auerbach 1). Indeed, Stephenie Meyer’s Edward Cullen of *Twilight* (2005) offers a stark, even comical, contrast to Lord Byron’s Augustus Darvell of “Fragment of a Novel” (1816), illustrating the widely disparate fears and desires of each generation and suggesting both the metaphorical defanging of the erotic Other by twenty-first-century American culture and the increasingly youthful (and female) audience of vampiric fiction.

Because vampires are Othered incarnations of an age, such canonical vampire literature from then and now offers an intriguing investigation into the social desires and fears of specific cultures at specific time periods. The first vampires’ interactions focused on the homosocial relationship between men within patriarchal Romantic European society, observed in the dealings between the unknown protagonist and the brooding, vampiric Augustus Darvell of Byron’s “Fragment of a Novel” (1816) and between Aubrey and Lord Ruthven in John Polidori’s “The Vampyre” (1819); women, victims or not, remained in the background. Eighty
years later, Bram Stoker projected the vampire’s highly eroticized bloodlust onto women. 

*Dracula* (1897) set the precedent for the most recognizable image—the suave and seductive vampiric man—of future representations of the vampire, as well as the most common image of his victims—chaste and innocent women.

Early vampire works can be seen as foreplay for what is and has always been an overwhelmingly sexual genre; relationships between humans and vampires enact a pleasurable cat-and-mouse seduction in which, generally, a powerful male vampire dominates a powerless female human, infatuated and submissive.1 These dichotomies of the dominator/dominated are engendered within sadomasochism, so the term aptly lends itself to an exploration of gender relations within the context of vampire fiction. Although not every vampire story contains sadomasochistic elements, the chosen sample of literature reveals such a theme is present and prevalent, particularly in some of the most enduring and popular works of vampire fiction. In my analysis of two contemporary vampire franchises—Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* of *The Vampire Chronicles* series and Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* series—my proposed thesis will demonstrate the role gender plays within sadomasochistic vampiric relationships, and, by extension, within same-sex and male-female relations in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century America.2

If our vampires facelessly mirror the age we inhabit, then what do sadistic vampires and masochistic humans evince about our culture? In sinking my teeth into this literature and

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1 Notable exceptions to this rule include J. Sheridan LeFanu’s *Carmilla* (1872) and Florence Marryat’s *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897).
2 Note both series are written by female authors; I have not excluded texts by male authors because of my own gender bias, but rather because the two franchises mentioned above have proven the most popular vampire fictions of the past forty years, and, thus, presumably articulate contemporary cultural attitudes, desires, and fears in ways other contemporary vampire fictions do not.
drinking its contents in terms of sadomasochism and gender, I question why such patriarchal themes of oppression recur, and what implications these conditions perpetuate as this literature is inscribed and reinscribed by its readers.

Theorizing Sadomasochism

Sadism demands a story.

Laura Mulvey
“Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”

De Sade and von Sacher-Masoch

Writing in late eighteenth-century France, the Marquis de Sade, infamous for his libertine writings that emphasized sexual perversity, ignited an erotic phenomenon whose terminology, i.e. sadism, is derived from his name. Acts of sodomy, rape, humiliation, and violent debauchery characterize de Sade’s writings, as reflected in his most popular works, and it is such graphically pornographic literature that gave rise to public awareness of violent sexual dominance. Sadism, then, is one’s exertion of power over and infliction of pain—physical, emotional, and/or psychological—on another for, more often than not, sexual gratification.

Justine, of de Sade’s The Misfortunes of Virtue (1791), is an unsuspecting and innocent young woman whose unshakable faith in God leads her to pursue a life of chastity and piety in a cruelly lascivious and atheistic society. Despite her intention to live morally and virtuously while desperately destitute, she repeatedly encounters debauched and depraved individuals who demean her in every sense of the word; Justine is brutally and incessantly violated—

---

3 It is Richard von Krafft-Ebing, in his 1886 study Psychopathia Sexualis, who is responsible for using the works of de Sade and von Sacher-Masoch to define specific types of behavior as sadistic or masochistic.
sexually, physically, and emotionally—and taunted about her continued religious faith by those who sadistically utilize their roles in society to exert power over and victimize innocents. All but one of her dominators are male and the vast majority of dominated characters are female, demonstrating the patriarchal authoritarian structure of de Sade’s Revolutionary France.

Similarly to de Sade, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch also wrote works whose sexually perverse content generated a term coined after him. Masochism, on the opposite pole of sadism, requires submission on the part of the victim; masochists derive pleasure from having pain inflicted upon them or, alternatively, by delaying the consummation of pleasure through pain.

Von Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus in Furs* chronicles the enactments of Severin von Kusiemski’s masochistic fantasies.4 Severin desperately desires to be his mistress Wanda von Dunajew’s sexual slave, victim to her most wicked whims. Although she initially does not wish to satisfy him in this way, she eventually becomes a subordinating sadist. Wanda must first be convinced by Severin to play the role of dominatrix: “I am afraid I won’t be able to, but I’ll try it for your sake, because I love you” (39). Cloaked in furs and addressed as Venus by Severin’s request, Wanda eventually drives Severin to the brink of suicide, finding another lover (Alexis Papadopolis) whose sadistic tendencies mold Wanda into a submissive masochist. Severin is appalled and terrified for his life when Wanda and Alexis torture him, so severs their sadomasochistic contract and leaves Wanda forever. Years later, Severin receives a note from Wanda in which she explains her assuming a sexually dominant persona only to cure him of his submissive affliction and to make him into a dominating and masculine man.

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4 In a bizarre case of life imitating art, von Sacher-Masoch’s novella *Venus in Furs* (1870) became replicated in reality when his wife Angelika Aurora Rümelin took on the name and persona of the fictional whip-wielding, fur-clad dominatrix Wanda, the eponymous Venus in furs.
There are interesting gender binaries at play within *Venus in Furs*, and I would argue males and masculinity are victorious by the denouement, namely, because Severin controls the masochistic play between Wanda and himself (until Alexis enters the picture), with Wanda the initially unwilling torturer and with Severin able to terminate the contract when it proves no longer to his liking. In addition, the dominant-submissive model von Sacher-Masoch so clearly articulates has most often been replicated in ways that “naturalize” or construct the dominator as male and the dominated as female. Well-known erotic dominator/dominated texts—such as Pauline Réage’s *The Story of O* (1954), Bernardo Bertolucci’s *Last Tango in Paris* (1972), and E. L. James’s *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011)—all gender the masochist as feminine, and, notably, many of these texts are authored by women.

*Sadism and Masochism*

Gilles Deleuze configures sadism and masochism as two distinctly different phenomena. According to Deleuze, with sadism, we are “in the presence of a torturer seizing upon a victim and enjoying her all the more because she is unconsenting and unpersuaded”; in contrast, with masochism, we are “dealing instead with a victim in search of a torturer who needs to educate, persuade and conclude an alliance with the torturer in order to realize the strangest of schemes” (20). In other words, the relationship between sadist and victim does not require any alliance between the two—and, from the sadist’s perspective, any cooperative relationship may prove detrimental to pleasure—whereas the relationship between masochist and torturer does require mutual consent. This suggests that two different types of sadism are potentially available for

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5 Pauline Réage is the pen name of Anne Desclos.
enactment: one in which the victim remains incidental; the other in which the victim is highly relevant, if only because the relationship between tortured and torturer is “contractual.” In the first instance, the victim may or may not be a masochist; in the latter instance, she/he most probably is. In either instance, the sadist holds the position of dominator, whose power is reinforced and confirmed by the helplessness (cooperative or otherwise) of the victim.

Sadism is what Freud termed the “instinct for mastery which easily passes over into cruelty” and “the instinct for mastery, or the will to power” (as qtd. in Massé 78),6 and a victim, willing or otherwise, satisfies these needs. For Gilles Deleuze, the “paternal and patriarchal theme undoubtedly predominates in sadism” (59), gendering it a predominantly masculine act (though women may also be sadists).

One might easily argue that two types of masochism also exist: contractual masochism, in which victim and torturer engage in fantasized “play” within agreed-upon parameters; and sociocultural masochism, in which oppressed individuals submit to pain at the hands of their dominators in order to avoid more egregious punishment, accrue rewards, or gain favor—a perverse form of “social contract.” Several questions arise: Are both types of masochism gendered, and, if so, what are the implications of such gendering? Are both forms of masochism pleasurable—that is, do both types of victims enjoy the infliction of pain, and, if so, to what end? And is contractual female masochism—that is, female masochism in the service of “play”—influenced by sociocultural female masochism?

On the surface, contractual masochism appears genderless—it is “play” or “fantasy” after all, in which two consenting adults agree to perform specific roles, and certainly the

6 Massé respectively quotes from Freud’s Introductory Lectures and “The Economic Problem of Masochism.”
sadomaschistic dyad may be played out between members of the same or opposite sex. Yet, on closer examination, gender permeates these contractual arrangements. Deleuze writes of the contractual arrangement between male masochist and female sadist (the only type of masochism Deleuze acknowledges): The “contract in masochism...involves a master-slave relationship, and one furthermore in which the woman is the master and torturer” (92); the maternal predominates in male masochism, creating a fantasy wherein the father is the beaten (66). Deleuze’s female torturer “enjoys hurting and torturing others, but it is significant that her actions are prompted by a man or otherwise performed in concert with a man, whose victim she is always liable to become” (48). Deleuze’s female sadism and male masochism thus imply male authority, which, however, replicates the dynamic involved in male sadism and female masochism, as male authority also dominates in contractual arrangements between male sadists and female masochists.

In Pauline Réage’s The Story of O (1954) and E. L. James’s Fifty Shades of Grey (2011)—both of which portray female masochists in contractual sadomasochistic relations—the male torturers retain control over the “play.” In other words, in the case of heterosexual contractual sadomasochism, the male tends to dominate the narrative, and it is his pleasure that predominates, regardless of who is playing victim and who is playing torturer.

In regard to homosexual male sadomasochistic relations, the results of a study conducted in 2001 show that those males with a “more heterosexual orientation were more

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7 When I say “contractual” agreement, I do not restrict myself to a written, signed contract, but include agreements that are oral and even unspoken, if the parameters of the agreement are clear to both parties, if the agreement can be terminated by either party, and if both parties view the arrangement as mutually beneficial.

8 Sadomasochism overwhelmingly tends to be discussed as a heterosexual practice involving a male sadist and a female masochist. Lynch believes the “heterosexuality of masochism and sadism” is caused by the fact “that our notions of heterosexuality have a sedimented association with the binary of the beater and the beaten” (34). E. R.
likely to have a masochistic preference while the more gay respondents were more likely to be sadistically oriented (Nordling et. al. 42); “gay male subjects were more likely to engage in a larger number of behaviors of the hypermasculinity region,” whereas “straight male subjects . . . were more likely to engage in a larger number of humiliation behaviors” (52). Male-male sadomasochism, then, follows either the Deleuzian model of male humiliation (with the masochistic male still retaining some measure of narrative control) or the heterosexual model of masculine sadism.

More so even than gay sadomasochism, lesbian sadomasochism remains under-theorized, perhaps because it occasions discomfort within feminist circles. On the one hand, “[b]oth heterosexual women and lesbian S/Mers had been accused of a similar state of bad faith: the belief was simply that both buy into a system that perpetuates sadism and masochism in its gendered alignment” (Lynch 41). On the other hand, “practitioners of lesbian S/M are in a unique position to free up the terms and collapse and/or re-interpret the binary by staging a theatrical and usually interchangeable play of roles which inverts the cultural pairing of sadomasochism with a static (and mythic) heterosexuality” (41). The problem remains, even if the roles of sadist and masochist are inverted and exchanged, they are based on the same old (heterosexual) gendered roles. Nonetheless, at least in terms of sadomasochistic relations within vampire fiction, greater parity exists between torturer and victim in homosexual vampiric relations than in heterosexual vampiric relations.

Although the female lacks agency relative to the male within heterosexual sadomasochistic contractual relations, this is not to say pleasure cannot accrue to her—it can

Chaline provides a historical overview of homosexual sadomasochism in terms of its theorization and its actual phases: “(a) leather subculture (1950s-1960s), (b) leather institutions (1970s-1980s), (c) commercialization of gay SM (1990s), and (d) pluralization of gay SM (late 1990s onward)” (344).
and it does. Jessica Benjamin notes: “Cultural myths and labels still do not explain how the ‘essence of trained femininity’ gets into women’s heads and is there converted into pleasurable fantasies of erotic submission” (81). It also appears to be the case that the temporality involved in masochism—the deferment of pleasure through pain—reinforces and amplifies desire, allowing the masochist “to shatter the boundaries of the self in order to reemerge with totality in a state of ecstatic non-identity” (Noble 73). According to Frida Beckman, “[p]leasure is a termination of desire that effects a reterritorialization, a closing down of desire by subjectification, but the masochist’s deferral of pleasure through suspension and indefinite waiting . . . effects a deterritorialization of the subject”; in other words, through pain, the masochist sustains desire (a form of pleasure in and of itself) and, paradoxically, “liberates the subject and the body” by removing those restraints that keep “the subject in place and desire in check” (103). However, considering many feminists believe women continue to be treated as something less than subjects within our culture, the so-called liberation of subjectivity on the part of the female masochist seems to contain inherent drawbacks, particularly due to the presence of widespread cultural misogyny, which insists women are inherently inferior to men and they are not subjects in the true sense of the word.

Thus, from a sociocultural standpoint, sadism and misogyny are highly gendered. Certainly, Freud believed it to be so when he wrote in 1932 that “sadism has a more intimate relation with masculinity and masochism with femininity, as though there were a secret kinship present” (as qtd. in Massé 78). Similarly, in 1955, “Rudolph M. Loewenstein argued

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9 Massé quotes from Freud’s “Anxiety and Instinctual Life.”
that...masochism is much more common in women than in men” (Beckman 99). But why is this so?

At its theoretical core, sadomasochism is founded upon unequal power relations—or, to put it another way, unequal sexual relations. The same can be said of patriarchy. Regardless of the scenario, the liaison between torturer (sadist) and unwilling or willing (masochist) victim produces relative positions of authority (that is, the sadist has power over the masochist; the masochist’s submission renders her powerless under the sadist’s dominance). Lynn Chancer, in *Sadomasochism in Everyday Life*, affirms and further explicates this relationship by creating three criteria. The first (and most relevant to my thesis) criterion requires “establishment of a hierarchical division between self and other that rests on the attribution of superiority to the sadist and of inferiority to the masochist. The sadist sets up an unequal relationship with the masochist in which the former is powerful and good, the latter powerless and bad” (55). Within patriarchal societies, an unequal relationship between men and women exists, with men predominantly posited as “powerful” and strong and women as “powerless” and weak. While unequal power relations between men and women do not necessarily equate to sadomasochistic relations, they do provide a foundation for such dominant-submissive sexual behavior.

This leads to another fundamental question: Can pleasure accrue from sociocultural female masochism? Apparently so. Focusing on the role of gender in sadomasochistic relationships, Michelle Massé’s *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism, and the Gothic* explores female masochism vis-à-vis the Gothic. Massé terms masochism “the learned behavior of the oppressed,” which can function “as the precarious center of a functioning and stable identity,” and she notes “masochism emphasizes the self as discrete from others through the distance
between masochist and sadist, a distance bridged only by pain” (45). Similarly, James Sacksteder writes, a “masochistic identity is a type of negative identity, which, however costly and pathological, nonetheless represents for some individuals their best possible effort at creating and maintaining a separate and autonomous sense of self, one that salvages for them a modicum of satisfaction, security, and self-esteem” (43). In other words, masochism may offer some victims a way to adapt and control previous (physical or psychological) trauma through repetition. Within the gendered binary of victimizer/victim, males act on the instinct for domination over their masochistic female counterparts, while females attempt to control and manage the conditions of their victimization. In addition, (pleasurable) benefits of a sort may be acquired through victimization: the pity and sympathy of others; the guilt of the torturer; and compensatory rewards (emotional, monetary, and more) for enduring pain and humiliation.

According to Massé, “even the figure whose position is most troublingly passive, the beaten, is recognized and perhaps even valued by dint of her very suffering” (47). She adds, while “[t]he sadist learns that he must get out there and demand his gratification; gender roles teach the masochist that her influence over others will continue to be through her helplessness” (49); for example, by “pleasing the beloved, she makes herself ‘indispensable’ and seeks to ‘bind the beloved to [her] through guilt’” (49-50).

The question of whether or not sociocultural misogyny and socially constructed female masochism influence or otherwise trespass upon the playfulness of contractual masochism can now be answered. Simply put, there is no way it cannot, as contractual agreements, “play,” fantasy, gender, and sexuality are all socially constructed and linked.
Both types of sadism—sadist/unwilling victim and sadist/willing victim—and both types of masochism—personally willing and societally compelled—can be found in vampire literature. All enact different aspects of gender relations within patriarchal society, and will be discussed within this thesis.

Motifs of Sadomasochism

Sadomasochistic scenarios involve certain specific motifs—childhood beating fantasies, repetition, and scopophilia/epistemophilia—that also occur in my chosen sample of vampire fiction. I will discuss each in the following section and employ them throughout this thesis.

Beating Fantasies

In attempting to reveal the underlying causes of sexual sadomasochism among adults, Freud theorizes its origins within a child’s first Oedipal experience. His essay “A Child is Being Beaten” dissects childhood beating fantasies and organizes them into three categories, which Chancer delineates as follows:

(1) a child, not the fantasizer, is being beaten by an unidentified party; (2) the fantasizing child, herself or himself, is now being beaten by a parent, usually the father (this stage is generally, though not always, unconscious and inserted through interpretation by Freud); and (3) a group of children are being beaten by an amorphous authority figure such as a teacher. Freud’s explanation is that the child initially wants exclusive love and attention from its parents, desires that in the Oedipal phase become sexualized. The child perceives that the possibility of these desires’ gratification is impeded by other children, such as siblings, who come to compete for the parents’ affection. (84)
Each of these categories highlights the sadomasochistic dynamic. Because a child considers her/his siblings and others as rivals for the parents’ or an authority’s love, this first category in which this child fantasizes about another child being beaten expresses a sadistic desire; the fantasizer wants another to be beaten because he/she is in competition for the attention of the figure who holds power. The second category, however, expresses a masochistic tendency; the fantasizer is, and wants to be, beaten by an authority figure. Although this authority is not always the father, this allusion to patriarchy further supports gendered sadism in which a male exerts power over the masochist. (The third category will be discussed under “The Spectator,” beginning on page 16).

Massé further interprets the beating fantasy strictly in terms of female masochism, positing that it can be “understood as not only the persistent representation of a subordination in which ‘a child is being beaten’ but also as part of an analytic strategy that situates ‘normal’ feminine passivity—a reluctance to look, know, or act aggressively—in a pre-Oedipal drama” (42). She restricts the categories aforementioned to “My father is beating a child,” “My father is beating me,” and “A child is being beaten” (60), respectively, fantasized by a girl. This female narration expresses the “need to create/recreate that ‘most momentous’ repressed [second] phase of masochistic feminine desire in which being beaten and being loved become one and the same” (67). It is this erotic violence interpreted as love which generates the daughter’s submission, inscribing gendered roles to beater and beaten, sadist and masochist, dominator and submissive, powerful and powerless.
Repetition of Trauma

Repetition is an integral component of masochism. Freud’s essay entitled “The ‘Uncanny’” discusses the phenomenon of uncanniness, the “class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us as once very familiar” (1-2). The uncanny, or the German unheimlich, describes that which is unhomely, “everything that ought to have remained...hidden and secret and has become visible” (4). Because it evokes the past, the uncanny requires repetition as a necessary constituent. Freud “postulate[s] the principle of a repetition-compulsion in the unconscious mind, based upon instinctual activity” (11), and “whatever reminds us of this inner repetition-compulsion is perceived as uncanny” (12). In the context of sadomasochism, what is compelled to be repeated is the province of violence and trauma. Repetition of trauma, then, is an essential aspect of masochism, as masochism requires submissive reenactment within the sadomasochistic dynamic.

The trauma may have been a specific incident in the masochist’s personal life or the early trauma of the Oedipal drama and beating fantasy. In any case, the submissive masochistic role can be reconstructed to exert power over another, repeating the trauma to recast the masochist into a position of authority. As Freud notes, “children repeat unpleasurable experiences for the additional reason that they can master a powerful impression far more thoroughly by being active than they could by merely experiencing it passively” (Beyond the Pleasure Principle 35). So too does the masochist/victim repeat a traumatic event in order to master it.

Repeating this trauma becomes a part of the female masochist’s identity, and “she seeks affirmation of her existence whether through taking up the cross of martyrdom and assuring
that others respond to her passivity and pain...or through reenactment of sadism” (Massé 51).

When the masochist attempts to assert power, she does so either through the agency of masochism or, alternatively, through the repetition of her endured trauma in the role of a sadist. By projecting her ingrained repetition-compulsion onto someone else, “the sadist emerges [from the female masochist] and the patient acts out the hated tyranny on another helpless victim” (50), becoming the opposite of Wanda as sadist-turned-masochist.

This inverted structure of the gendered sadomasochistic dynamic counters the permanence of male sadism and female masochism, but is also a component of the repetitive nature of trauma that must be acknowledged. It expresses the fluid nature of sadomasochistic relationships wherein anyone can assume either role, but female sadism in this context is implied as a result of inscribed male sadism and female masochism.

**Scopophilia and Epistemophilia**

Employing Freudian terminology, Massé further develops the position of male and female characters in the sadomasochistic beating drama in terms of the desire to see and the desire to perform: “As Freud emphasizes, the urges to look and to know — what he terms the scopophilic and epistemophilic instincts — are closely related to one another and to sadism. To look, then, can be to know, to be privy to the forbidden knowledge that means power” (41). Therefore, “[s]copophilia and exhibitionism are the strategies of the beater and the beaten, respectively. The first reinforces his identity through the aggressive gaze that assaults and appropriates the other, while the beaten’s main hope for recognition is that she will be pleasing in the eye of her beholder” (58). Within Freud’s beating fantasy, “in all three cases, it is the stare the beater trains upon the beaten. The subordinated cannot use it” (Massé 57). Scopophilia is
thus central to the beating fantasy as the beater is also the gazer, and, again, the female’s “reluctance to look, know, or act aggressively,” her “active drives, rechanneled through passive, inward-turning routes” in the beating fantasy “will pave the way for the masochistic, exhibitionist woman who is supposed to be blind to the forbidden knowledge that shapes her life” (42).

Freud’s essay “The ‘Uncanny’” also affirms males as the gazers, employing biology in the context of looking. The male’s emphasis on eyes, the organs by which one looks, is indirectly linked to power, and the lack thereof seen as castration: “a morbid anxiety connected with the eyes and with going blind is often enough a substitute for the dread of castration” (7). Thus, genitals and optics are aligned; there is a “substitutive relation between the eye and the male member” (7), which generates an analogous relationship between looking and gender: To have eyes is to see is to know is to be a male is to have a penis/the Lacanian phallus is to have power. Voyeuristic scopophilia, elaborated upon in the following pages, and epistemophilia are essentially assigned as characteristics of the male sex, relegating the female sex to other side of the binary—the looked-at and known. Laura Mulvey reiterates this conjecture within sadomasochism by acknowledging “circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at” (2184), dictated and assumed by gender.

*The Spectator*

While much energy is spent on theorizing power roles of the sadomasochistic couple, it is necessary to acknowledge an invisible third party in the arena of sadomasochistic literature
and film. In addition to the sadist and masochist, there is the audience; we, as readers of these texts, both observe instances of sadomasochism and imbibe their gendered dynamic. We are socialized by popular culture to behave a certain way; the culture itself is patriarchal and, one might argue, sadomasochistic. Massé argues “women are taught masochism through fiction and culture” (3), and it is in the Gothic, for example, where this submissive tendency is propagated and perpetuated. Within “sadomasochistic fantasies…we can discern the ‘pure culture’ of domination—a dynamic which organizes both domination and submission” (Benjamin 52), and these fantasies are enacted by and within the culture to which the spectator belongs.

Within the triangular Freudian beating fantasy, there is a distance between the narrator and the drama unfolding; the first and third categories in which another is being beaten position the fantasizer as a spectator: “The last [category], with its erasure of recognizable actors and its shift from active to passive voice, establishes the spectator as consciously related to neither beaten nor beater” (Massé 60), yet at other times, “the shifting identification of the spectator with the beaten or beater marks a further risk: those who are beaten may, in their turn, replicate oppression” (61). As a result, both literature and spectator feed off one another to construct, reconstruct, enact, and reenact the culture of sadomasochism and the gender binaries involved.

The spectator’s role in the sadomasochistic triad is pivotal to explaining the sadist’s “aggressive will-to-narrate and will-to-uncover” (Sedgwick 114). In terms of the audience or the reader as spectator, the active exploration of narratives and their components position the viewer/reader in a sadistic role. As readers, we are distanced from the story itself, yet, like the
sadist, exert power in uncovering events as they occur by looking, literally at the page and metaphorically as an invincible and remote gazer of the story, and knowing the constituents of the narrative itself. Like the sadistic spectator of the first beating fantasy, the scopophilic/epistemophilic utilizes vision/learning to gain sight/knowledge and control the spectacle.

Mulvey applies the spectator’s gaze to film in her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” She argues film exhibits the “unconscious of patriarchal society” (2182) through the convention of a “woman on-screen typically function[ing] as the primary erotic object for both screen characters and audience members, becoming the object of the dominant, male gaze” (2180). The audience identifies with the powerful male protagonist of the story, whose “scopophilia (pleasure in looking)” reflects our “taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze” (2184). Here, scopophilia is deconstructed into gendered binaries: active/male and passive/female, or active/passive and male/female. As Mulvey suggests, “[i]n their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness” (2186). Female exhibitionism, woman existing as the image to be viewed, then, implies a submission on her part, a staged masochism to the male’s and spectator’s sadistic gaze.

In explicating the masculine escape from anxiety caused by castration—the loss of the penis or phallus, thus male power—inflicted by females, Mulvey cites two tendencies of looking. One, “fetishistic scopophilia, builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself” (2188), though stripped of its threat. The other,
“voyeurism, on the contrary, has associations with sadism: pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control and subjugating the guilty person [the woman] through punishment or forgiveness,” and results from “preoccupation with the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object” (2188). While Mulvey delineates the two, I will use the term scopophilia in relation to the latter definition, or voyeurism, as it pertains most to sadomasochism and the gaze.

What does this say about females looking/reading, if we are the spectators of these patriarchal sadomasochistic dramas? Because we, who are women, are active gazers at exhibitionist erotic objects, what is the role of the female as spectator? Massé addresses this dilemma:

“The lack of authority in women’s looking is not, however, reason to conclude that we do not see, nor even that patriarchy does not allow or requires that we see….The looking that we do is a good place to seek out cracks in [masculinist] power […].” Thus, the gaze of the subordinated is a potential means to identify and reconstruct patterns of domination. (59)

Females as active witnesses to and learners of male sadism and female masochism may look at and know texts in order to restructure unequal power dynamics. They may identify with the male sadist, but they may also see themselves in the figure of the female masochist. Females may learn to act out the sadomasochistic narratives presented to them, or they may, through

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observation, learn these narratives are flawed, oppressive, debilitating. This thesis will be an attempt to widen these cracks for readers of gendered and sadomasochistic vampire literature.

The Gothic

_Though the machinery is invention, and the names of the actors imaginary, I cannot but believe that the ground-work of the story is founded on truth._

Horace Walpole
“Preface to the First Edition,” _The Castle of Otranto_

The Gothic as Cultural Expression

Gothic literature originated in the eighteenth century and is characterized by the transgressive, the uncanny, the uncomfortable, and the fear-inducing: “Gothic atmospheres—gloomy and mysterious—have repeatedly signaled the disturbing return of pasts upon presents and evoked emotions of terror and laughter” (Botting 1). Since the genre’s creation with Horace Walpole’s _The Castle of Otranto_ (1764), the Gothic narrative has appropriated “presentations of supernatural, sensational and terrifying incidents, imagined or not” (4) to express and transgress “cultural anxieties” (2) concerning the self and society. As Fred Botting notes, the Gothic’s “images of dark power and mystery evoked fear and anxiety” (9) about “criminal behavior, violent executions of selfish ambition and voracious passion and licentious enactments of carnal desire” (6), transgressing acceptable cultural behaviors and norms. In other words, the Gothic is the perfect literary genre in which to explore issues regarding gender and sexuality.

The Gothic as originally conceived and as it continues to exist owes much to the aesthetic theories of Edmund Burke, as articulated in his treatise _A Philosophical Enquiry into the_
Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757). Burke gendered the sublime as masculine and the beautiful as feminine, providing the parameters by which terror and horror are inspired. In 1826, Ann Radcliffe published an essay entitled “On the Supernatural in Poetry,” in which she further explicated the differences between terror and horror: “Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them” (6). Terror resides in “uncertainty and obscurity” (6)—by engendering mystery, positing secrets—and it “expands the soul” of the reader through curiosity, a desire to know more, to have the mysteries solved and the secrets revealed. In contrast, horror “freezes” the faculties through the explicit depiction of acts of violence, debauchery, cruelty; the soul contracts in horror. (Think of the difference between a Hitchcock movie and a slasher/splatter movie.) In the earliest stages of the Gothic, terror was the province of women writers; horror, the province of males.

Although both terror-based and horror-based Gothic novels (then and now) explore sadomasochistic gender relations, most often the terror-based Gothic results in a pleasing denouement, wherein the sadistic sublime villain is defeated (preferably killed), while the innocent and beautiful heroine receives her just reward. The horror-based Gothic generally results in unpleasant endings, but most particularly for the heroine, who may be raped or murdered, or who, as happens with the “final girl,” remains the sole survivor of a bloody massacre.

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11 Note the text used does not have pagination; however, as it is only eight pages in length, I have identified the page numbers for ease in citing.

12 The “final girl” is a term coined by Carol Clover in Men, Women and Chain Saws (35). The “final girl” is “the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril; who is chased, cornered, wounded; who we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again” (35). Above all, the “final girl” is a survivor.
Terror typically combines with horror in vampire fiction. Vampires are mysterious to humans; their secrets require revelation, but only with some teasing foreplay. However, part of the vampire’s allure is his (or her) transgressiveness, particularly in terms of sexuality, and the best way to demonstrate this is through horrific scenes that both shock and titillate. It might easily be argued the more explicitly sadomasochistic the gender relations depicted within the text, the closer the alliance to horror, as sadism and masochism, by their very natures, require illustration, as Deleuze suggests.

Through the genre of the Gothic, “[t]hreats are spiced with thrills, terrors with delights, horrors with pleasures” (Botting 9), evincing a sadomasochistic-esque structure in which “Gothic terrors and horrors emanate from readers’ identifications with heroes and heroines” (7). The spectator is again alluded to, as the Gothic provides “objects of terror and horror [that] not only provoke repugnance, disgust and recoil, but also engage readers’ interest, fascinating and attracting them” (9). Readers and Gothic literature thus symbiotically construct and enact one another, spectators vicariously existing through the protagonist (or antagonist) and transgressing societal rules through the text’s expression of cultural fears. Within the genre of the Gothic, whether it be a book, a play, or film, the reader or viewer becomes the third member of the sadomasochistic triangle—the spectator.

Gender and the Gothic

Clara Reeve’s The Old English Baron (1778) was the second Gothic novel to be penned, and it was written as a direct challenge of and corrective to Walpole’s The Castle of Otranto. Since that time, women authors have, if not dominated the Gothic genre, at least contributed to it on a
scale equal to or greater than their male counterparts. The attraction of the Gothic for women writers and for feminist scholars has largely been due to the ability of the Gothic to question and exaggerate cultural norms, as Botting notes: “A challenge to or interrogation of forms of fiction dominated by patriarchal assumptions, Gothic novels have been reassessed as part of a wider feminist critical movement that recovers suppressed or marginalised writing by women and addresses issues of female experience, sexual oppression and difference” (19).

Born in the same year *The Castle of Otranto* was published, Ann Radcliffe was one of the first female writers of Gothic fiction—and the most popular Gothic author of her lifetime. Exploiting elements of the Gothic pertaining to women’s victimization in a terrifying patriarchy, she was a/the progenitor of what Ellen Moers termed the Female Gothic, “the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic” (90). The Female Gothic is characterized by a female protagonist; by a happy ending; by terror rather than horror; and by mysteries caused by human, rather than supernatural, agency. In contrast, the Male Gothic most normally lays claim to a male protagonist, an unhappy ending, an emphasis on horror, and extensive use of the supernatural. Within both variations (and not all male authors write Male Gothics and not all female authors write Female Gothics), sadomasochistic gender relations are displayed. Yet, within the Male Gothic, sadomasochism is explicitly depicted in depraved sexual acts, whereas in the Female Gothic, sadomasochism is a fact of everyday life, with males dominating females and with rape an ever-present possibility, which the enterprising heroine nonetheless manages to avoid.

Within the Female Gothic, “female characters are depicted as constantly struggling against powerful forces that they think are real and that they believe are poised to destroy
them” (Hoeveler 8); members of a “male-created system of oppression and corruption...women [are] the innocent prey of a corrupt and evil patriarchal system” (9). Massé argues that, typical of Gothic narratives, “the silence, immobility, and enclosure of the heroines mark their internalization of repression as well as the power of the repressing force” (18), a thought seconded by Diane Hoeveler. Gothic literature (by both male and female authors) highlights this gendered binary of active victimizer/passive victim. Massé interprets this passive victimization as female masochism, engendered by societal forces: “When a woman is hurt, as she is throughout the Gothic, the damage is not originally self-imposed: we must acknowledge that someone else strikes the first blow...The Gothic, then is a pointed reminder of cultural amnesia in its insistent representation of the process through which a woman becomes a masochist and assigns subjectivity to another” (3).

Reiterating the centrality of the reader in literary reality, Massé contends the female reader/spectator identifies, at least in part, with the fictional female victim/protagonist, becoming the spectator who recognizes herself as potential victim: “[E]very female reader of the Gothic is such a spectator, whether or not she acknowledges her uncomfortable affinity with the victim and her own risk” (40). Because the Gothic is a projection of gender roles and societal anxieties, the spectator reflects the text. What does the Gothic teach its readers in this case, then? As Massé notes, “[g]irls who, seeking recognition and love, learn to forget or deny that they also wanted independence and agency, grow up to become women who are Gothic heroines” (3). Many female characters within the Gothic genre are structured by the patriarchal realm in which they inhabit, exhibiting in many cases passivity and powerlessness which are in turn imbibed by readers; this is most often the case, though it does not have to be the case.
Sadomasochism and the Gothic

Given the trope of the marginalized heroine in a patriarchal culture, the Gothic aptly embodies the sadomasochistic male/female binary. Mark Edmundson’s *Nightmare on Main Street: Angels, Sadomasochism, and the Culture of Gothic* defines the Gothic in terms of the “pleasures of the sadomasochistic encounter”: “For at the core of every Gothic plot is the S & M scenario: victim, victimizer, terrible place, torment” (133). The Gothic narrative provides a framework in which gendered power roles are cast, and “the self is defined through conflict, as a giver or receiver of pain in a sadomasochistic dynamic” (Massé 53). Additionally, the enamored female protagonist of the Gothic plot enters “the Gothic’s arena of loving cruelty [which] points to the ubiquitous strength of the social and psychological linkage of love and dominance” (Massé 231). Gothic heroines imbibe and enact female victimization in a dominating, patriarchal culture through the assumption of a masochistic role when confronted with a male figure.

Sadomasochism’s repeated trauma, scopophilia/epistemophilia, and the beating fantasy along gendered lines also characterize the Gothic: “The Gothic plot is…a repetition and exploration of the traumatic denial of identity found there” (Massé 18), and “the heroine of marital Gothic will always reawaken to the still-present actuality of her trauma, because the gender expectations that deny her identity are woven into the very fabric of her culture, which perpetuates her trauma while denying its existence” (15). Edmundson applies the spectator and scopophilia to the Gothic, although he suggests the projection of ourselves onto both the male sadist and the female masochist, rather than just the masochist: “[W]e take pleasure in identifying our pleasures with those of the Gothic hero-villain, the sadist; we take pleasure in
becoming, in fantasy, the Gothic victim, the heroine” (132). Although Edmundson’s analysis of the spectator complicates the gendered dichotomies proposed by Massé and Mulvey, his acknowledgment supports scopophilia’s presence in the Gothic. The masochistic female and her relived trauma inflicted by the male sadist, gazed at by a participating audience, are thus central to both the Gothic and sadomasochism.

*The Sadistic Vampire and the Masochistic Human*

*I suppose that you’ll get your way . . . whether it kills you or not.*

Stephenie Meyer

*Twilight*

Gothic terror and horror manifest respectively in the unknown and the supernatural. Fanged, nocturnal, and uncanny, vampires have become a staple of Gothic fiction. Familiar yet foreign, they have been lethal incarnations of popular culture’s most seductive nightmares since their first appearance in the early nineteenth century. Nina Auerbach’s *Our Vampires, Ourselves* analyzes vampire narratives, from Byron’s “Fragment” to Anne Rice’s *The Vampire Chronicles* series, highlighting societal implications of each vampiric figure. Masquerading as humans and, indeed, reflecting back an only slightly exaggerated depiction of human nature, “vampires blend into the changing cultures they inhabit” (6), immortal yet dynamic throughout their literary evolution. Just as the “Gothic became part of an internalised world of guilt, anxiety, despair, a world of individual [and collective] transgression interrogating the uncertain bounds of imaginative freedom and human knowledge” (Botting 10), vampires as Gothic products are “reconfigured in different cultural contexts to embody what is feared and desired, and feared just because it is desired” (Wisker 177).
Others yet ourselves, vampires violate social boundaries codifying sexuality and gender politics “by denying the constraints of our lives as they fulfill both the terrors (devouring and death) and the promises (undying love and life) of popular myths and fictions” (Wisker 175). Through miscegenation with virginal human women, for example, Victorian vampires dismantled the chastity of the angel in the house. John Allen Stevenson’s “A Vampire in the Mirror: The Sexuality of Dracula” observes a vampiric inversion of human sexuality, both transgressing and mirroring our own behaviors: “Although the vampire reproduces differently, the ironic thing about vampire sexuality is that, for all its overt peculiarity, it is in many ways very like human sexuality, but human sexuality in which the psychological or metaphoric becomes physical or literal” (142). As the Gothic mirrors through a glass darkened by cultural fears, the vampire’s visage defies reflection. However, “[w]hen we say that the vampire is absent from the mirror, perhaps what we are saying is that we are afraid to see a reflection—however uneasy and strange—of ourselves” (147), Stevenson notes.

This thesis will analyze relationships between vampires themselves and humans, using two contemporary popular series (by two female writers), investigating the significance of these relationships and their deeper meanings for the societally-situated spectator. While a “hating, needing companionship between men” (Auerbach 16) produced the Byronic or Romantic-era vampire, “the figure of the vampire in women’s writing by Rice, Brite and others actually alters the meanings and relationships of vampires, particularly vampire women, to radical and liberating effect” (Wisker 175). Examining these relationships will lend itself to analysis of the culture we currently inhabit, as “vampires have been our companions for so long that it is hard to imagine living without them” (Auerbach 9).
Vampires, Gender, and Sadomasochism, Oh My!: Review of Literature

The seminal book of vampire scholarship, written from the perspective that vampires really do exist, is Montague Summer’s *The Vampire: His Kith and Kin* (1928). Since then, and particularly within the last thirty years, intense interest in vampires has generated a plethora of scholarly studies of literary and filmic vampires—too much to cover reasonably within the scope of my thesis. My intention is to review only those works relevant to this project—that is, scholarship addressing vampires, gender, and/or sadomasochism in the primary texts selected for this thesis.

*Interview with the Vampire*

While most scholarship written on Rice’s series predates the twenty-first century, when the series was most popular, it remains applicable to my thesis. Janice Doane’s and Devon Hodges’s article “Undoing Feminism: From the Preoedipal to Postfeminism in Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles*” explores the series from a feminist perspective, viewing Rice as perpetuating patriarchal gender politics. Shakira Hoosain’s dissertation “In the Shadow of the Night: The Gendered Subtext of Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles*” also reads the *Vampire Chronicles* in the same vein, emphasizing the series’ conservative subtext despite its superficial sexual transgression. Additionally, James Keller’s book *Anne Rice and Sexual Politics* analyzes the vampire family’s Oedipal and Electra complexes, and reads the series as homophobic and heterosexist. Lorna Jowett’s article “‘Mute and Beautiful’: The Representation of the Female in Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*” particularly notes Claudia’s oppression throughout the novel.
This series’ popularity will be examined also through Keller’s reading, which addresses Rice’s vampires’ metaphorical embodiment of AIDS paranoia in the 1980s. With a more expansive audience than Twilight in terms of gender, Rice’s The Vampire Chronicles series is viewed comparatively with Meyer’s Twilight series regarding their respective classification as adult and young adult literature, in Melissa Ames’s article “Vamping up Sex: Audience, Age, & Portrayals of Sexuality in Vampire Narratives.”

Twilight Series

Meyer’s series has received much more critical investigation than Rice’s. Tison Pugh’s “Masochistic Abstinence, Bug Chasing, and the Erotic Death Drive in Stephenie Meyer’s Twilight Series” recognizes Bella’s masochism, yet also interprets Edward as a masochist rather than as “a cruel sadist [who] wields erotic authority” (143). Contrary to Pugh’s account, but advocating my position, Anthea Taylor and Frann Michel read Bella’s and Edward’s relationship as sadomasochistic. Employing psychoanalytic feminist theory, Taylor’s article “‘The urge towards love is an urge towards (un)death’: Romance, Masochistic Desire and Postfeminism in the Twilight novels” explores Bella’s submission to Edward in the same vein as Massé’s female masochism. Although she mentions Edward’s sadism as an aside, focusing predominately on Bella’s role, Taylor interrogates the series’ patriarchal codes and why “a masochistic relationship and an undead subjectivity for a teenage girl are seen as utopic sites of possibility in these narratives” (31). Such a utopia is the focus of Michel’s “How to Bring Your Kids Up Sadomasochist: Intimate-partner Violence and the Twilight Phenomenon,” examining
implications of the *Twilight* franchise’s popularity. Emphasizing the role of the spectator, in this case teenage girls, Michel acknowledges *Twilight*’s sadomasochistic relationships and discusses them as a “romanticized portrait of intimate-partner violence” (1). Her article supports my analysis of gendered sadomasochism, diving deeper, albeit briefly, into the significance of reading/watching and reenacting texts.

Coined by Maggie Parke and Natalie Wilson in *Theorizing Twilight: Critical Essays on What’s at Stake in a Post-Vampire World*, the term “post-Vampires” describe those “that re-work traditional conceptions of this supernatural figure” (3). Countering conventional vampiric transgression, *Twilight*’s vampires conform to culturally conservative mores—heterosexual married monogamy, sexual abstinence before marriage, and traditional male and female gender roles—adhering to social codes rather than upsetting them: “The vampire story is no longer a cautionary tale against seduction and evil; instead it is another romance with a few more obstacles to overcome…there is now a generation that views vampire characters not as terrifying and evil, but as romantic and compassionate” (Groper 145); Edward in sparkly shirtless-ness has become the new romantic hero.

For the conclusion of this thesis, essays on readers’ response to the series will be employed. Surveying a sample of *Twilight* fans, Ananya Mukherjea’s essay “Team Bella: Fans Navigating Desire, Security, and Feminism” analyzes readers’ responses to the series. Readers perceive Edward’s paternal protection as desirable, and employ scopophilia themselves to gaze at Bella’s love interests. Additionally, a study conducted by Melissa Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz similarly found Edward’s and Bella’s relationship as the most desirable of all Twilight relationships (versus Jasper-Alice, Carlisle-Esme, and Jacob-Bella
couplings) for both teen and adult readers, particularly because most respondents prefer their partner to be “protective, possessive, chivalrous, and intensely attracted to them” (151). Unfortunately, Bella’s and Edward’s damaging and dangerous sexual intercourse is also desired by fans, its sadomasochistic implications attractive for readers, as reflected in E. L. James’s erotic BDSM series.

**Methodology**

I will employ Freudian psychoanalysis and feminist theory in my analysis of gender and sadomasochistic relationships within the specified works of vampire literature. Both theoretical frameworks will structure my thesis around the implications of these texts’ popularity within the culture to which they belong. Feminism’s emphasis on a history of phallocentrism draws much from psychoanalysis, deconstructing and reconstructing Freud’s misogynist essentialism. Because Second Wave feminism often invokes the sexual difference and unconscious drives of psychoanalysis in its explication of patriarchy and female subordination, so the two will be paired in my dissection of sadomasochism.

Massé, Mulvey, and Hoeveler read or view texts through a feminist lens that critiques the structures of patriarchy, supporting my general positioning of males as powerful and females as powerless within a sadomasochistic dynamic (although, admittedly, some relationships subvert this gendered structure). Tying feminism to the Gothic, Massé also advocates that “[p]sychoanalysis helps us to understand the Gothic’s emphasis upon masochism as a key issue in feminine identity” (2). Freud’s particular concepts of scopophilia/epistemophilia and the beating fantasy will also frame my analyses of the literature
read vis-à-vis feminism and sadomasochism. Moers’s concept of the Female Gothic further lends haunted heroines and vampires, products of the Gothic, to a feminist interpretation. As Wisker writes, vampires “are our others, and ourselves, and in their contemporary feminist reincarnations they afford us a wealth of insights into what it means to be human” (177), subject to or exerting power, objects of or aroused by (erotic) desire.

**Chapter Outline**

*Chapter One: Interview with the Vampire*

Anne Rice resurrects the aristocratic vampire in twentieth-century America, reincarnating the myth through the popular series *The Vampire Chronicles*. Focusing on the series’ first installment, *Interview with the Vampire*, this chapter begins by looking at two minor characters who respectively enact the “classic” roles of unwilling sadistic victim and willing masochistic victim. Specifically, the nightly performances at the Théâtre des Vampires require sadistic vampires and an unwilling victim; in one explicit scene from the novel, an unknown woman victim is stripped naked, then “raped” and murdered by two powerful male vampires, much to the titillation of the audience. In addition, “contractual” or mutually consenting sadomasochism is enacted in the relationship between the vampire Armand and his willing male slave. I then read the pairings of Lestat/Louis and Armand/Louis in terms of the gendered sadomasochistic model, Louis the feminized masochist to the more masculine sadist—Lestat often acts in sadistic ways, emotionally torturing Louis by killing those humans whom Louis loves or wants to save, and Armand acts as puppeteer despite Louis’s love, precisely because he kills Claudia, Louis’s daughter/lover. I then explore the triangular
relations among Louis de Pointe du Lac, Lestat de Lioncourt, and the child vampire Claudia. The homo-/heteroerotic bond in the familial triad is confusingly Oedipal, blurring lines of gender and sexuality that either transgress or affirm patriarchal codes. However, homosocial relationships between men in Rice’s fiction are privileged over their female counterparts, continuing a patriarchal narrative. The chapter concludes with an examination of the child-woman and monstrous-feminine Claudia, who disturbingly literalizes the infantilization and unjust punishment of women within patriarchal culture.

Chapter Two: Twilight Series

Once dangerous, stealthy, bloodlusting, today’s vampires have incarnated into a sparkly, vegetarian, passive-aggressive manifestation of the masochistic female’s Prince Charming. Revamping the vampire myth for an adolescent audience, the Twilight series romanticizes the traditional relationship between humans and vampires, the revenant other falling in love with, rather than consuming, its prey. Stephenie Meyer’s four-volume series (Twilight, New Moon, Eclipse, and Breaking Dawn)\textsuperscript{13} is the most popular of twenty-first-century vampire literature, spawning a high-grossing film and merchandise franchise. In this chapter, I begin by examining the violent nature of love and romantic relationships, as articulated through Bella Swan’s amorous encounters with Edward Cullen, a vampire, and Jacob Black, a pseudo-werewolf. Although founded on a mutual love and generally devoid of sex, the relationship between helpless Gothic heroine Bella Swan and “good” vampire Edward Cullen is

\textsuperscript{13} My analysis is limited to these four novels because they are predominantly narrated by Bella. Other works in this saga include the unpublished manuscript Midnight Sun (2008)—narrated by Edward—and the novella The Short Second Life of Bree Tanner (2010)—narrated by a newborn vampire from Eclipse.
sadomasochistic. The series’ rigid binarisms insist on a repeated structure of vampiric power and human weakness, exacerbated by the gendered polarities of male dominance and female submission.

I argue Meyer’s novels promote rape culture and violence against women, as Bella is repeatedly hurt by or because of Edward and Jacob, and she also hurts herself because of Edward. Next, I examine Edward’s scopophilia/epistemophilia in relation to Bella’s exhibitionism. While Edward is absent, Bella inverts her masochism and utilizes sadism; Jacob, enemy of the Cullens, falls in love with sadistic Bella and triangulates the love story. However, this is only temporary as Bella’s naturalized role is that of masochist. Bella as a vampire finally achieves agency, yet it is problematic—she gains power as both wife and mother, and still her vampiric power is that of altruistic protection. The chapter concludes with an investigation into the series’ highly problematic infantilization of women and sexualization of female children. Bella’s helplessness renders her an emotional and physical infant; the quickly growing Renesmee—the half-vampire, half-human daughter of Bella and Edward—becomes the love object of Jacob Black at six months of age, with the text implying that she will marry him once she reaches physical maturation (and presumably sexual maturation) at age seven.

Afterword

In the conclusion of this thesis, I examine how these texts both articulate and inscribe certain types of cultural values, which, in turn, the reader resists or imbibes. While Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*, originally published in 1976, may be read as a plea for gender tolerance and as a metaphorical examination of the AIDS epidemic, it might also be read as
homophobic/heterosexist and misogynistic. Stephenie Meyer’s twenty-first-century *Twilight* series clearly argues for heteronormative, hyper-conservative, traditional gender roles and monogamous relationships, yet readers view Edward as doting and Bella as heroic.
Chapter One: A Good Woman is Hard to Find
Privileging Male Homosocial Relations in Interview with the Vampire

*Then are you the master of us all? You didn’t teach her that.*
*Was she supposed to imbibe it from my quiet subservience?*

Anne Rice
*Interview with the Vampire*

Harkening back to Polidori’s wealthy Lord Ruthven and Stoker’s noble Count Dracula, Anne Rice resurrects the aristocratic revenant in her *The Vampire Chronicles* series.\(^1\) Written in interview format and narrated by Louis Pointe du Lac, *Interview with the Vampire*—the first book in the series—humanizes the historically abject and Othered monster. Consequently, Rice “was possibly the first writer to narrate her stories in the first person from the vampire’s point of view” (Gelder 109), characterizing the melancholic hero Louis as a sympathetic vampire more aligned with James Malcolm Rymer’s Varney (1847). Indeed, Louis resents his forced vampirization by Lestat de Lioncourt and attempts to curb his appetite for human blood by subsisting on rats. In other words, Rice’s novel vampiric hero returns to older models of literary vampires, yet he also presages the twenty-first-century “vegetarian” vampires of Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* series.

Rice’s novel centers on a number of relationships—pairs and trios—between and among males and females, and Rice’s complicated erotics (homo-, hetero-, pedophilic, and incestuous)

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2. This thesis will focus solely on the first installment, entitled *Interview with the Vampire*, as it provides ample material for analyses of gendered sadomasochistic relationships.
attest to the vampiric figure’s cultural transgression. Despite these controversial and more progressive expressions of sexuality, however, Rice articulates—consciously or not—a story embedded within misogynist patriarchal power structures: “The abuse of power for which the vampire is a metaphor thus includes abuse of women both as property and as tools in men’s efforts to control and abuse other men” (Johnson 76). Lestat and Louis assume traditional male-female gender roles, their vampire child is simultaneously sexualized and infantilized as a woman-child, male characters are consistently privileged over females, and women exist as mere pawns in men’s chess game of homosocial and homoerotic relations.

This chapter opens with an analysis of the vampire/human sadist/masochist dyad, as depicted through two minor characters—both human—and their relationships with vampires; notably, the two human victims—one female, one male—present contrasting responses to their vampiric torturer: The female is (initially) unwilling, succumbing only when she realizes death is inevitable; the male, willing even unto death. Next, the homosocial/homosexual pairings of Lestat/Louis and Armand/Louis are examined via sadomasochistic theory. Although all three vampires are anatomically male, I argue Louis assumes a more feminine and masochistic role with his more masculine and sadistic lovers Lestat and Armand. When the screenplay for the filmic version of Interview with the Vampire was being written, Rice desired a woman to be cast for his character, essentially classifying Louis as a female and even identifying with him: “It’s all the same passivity, the same philosophical ideas, the same inability to fight Lestat’s domination. It’s fine for Louis to be a woman because he is a woman—he’s really me” (as qtd. in Ramsland 152, 269). I then read Louis as mother and Lestat as father when they vampirize the five-year-
old orphan Claudia, and I discuss how the triangulated relationship among Lestat, Louis, and Claudia enacts the beating fantasy and Oedipal and Electra complexes. The introduction of Claudia further relates a patriarchal narrative in which women are used by men and objectified by the male gaze, only to be killed by their oppressors for transgressing paternal law. Because female relationships are relegated to the periphery, this chapter concludes with the fatal futility of intercepting male homosocial bonds through monstrous femininity.

**Vampire Sadism/Human Masochism**

*Would you put it past them to have human slaves?*

Anne Rice  
*Interview with the Vampire*

Louis’s reluctance to kill humans for sustenance is a component of his characterization as a sympathetic vampire, and, consequently, he is the only undead predator in *Interview with the Vampire* who resists the explicated dichotomy of sadistic vampire/masochistic human. Indeed, Armand of the Parisian Théâtre des Vampires and Lestat de Lioncourt insist upon the enactment and enforcement of these dichotomous roles through the repeated cat-and-mouse victimization of female and male humans. In keeping with a patriarchal narrative, Rice dangles her helpless female prey in front a troupe of thespian vampires for a staged play, and such histrionics are exacerbated with the added scopophilic element of a sadistic, gluttonous, sexually stimulated audience. Armand, the group’s ancient leader, also keeps an adolescent male slave, though it is important to acknowledge that this boy is a willing victim and derives
sexual pleasure from his masochism. Equally important is the collective sadism enacted with these victims—both the girl and boy are feasted upon by the vampire troupe. Their victimization is individual yet their victimizers are communal. Perhaps this is indicative of sadomasochism as a sociocultural phenomenon, shared among a cannibalistic group of people. Other minor characters who assume the role of masochist are the interviewer recording Louis’s narrative and Lestat’s musician lover, though their masochism manifests itself in less disparate power parameters, and, as such, is not discussed in as great a depth.

The Sadean Female Victim

When Louis first encounters vampires—Santiago and Armand—in Paris, he and Claudia are invited to the opulent and secret Théâtre des Vampires. Clearly catering to the monied elite, the theater presents nightly plays in which vampires play the part of actors playing the part of vampires. Onto the stage each night, an unknowing and unwilling human victim is lured to her death. Here, the power play between bloodthirsty, seductive vampires and defenseless, succumbing humans is enacted/acted for a privileged, paying mortal public, which does not realize what it witnesses is more than an erotic staged display, but rather vampiric feeding. The play Louis and Claudia attend insidiously casts a male vampire—Santiago—in the role of grim reaper, with a beautiful young woman as his victim. This scene is perhaps the most overt expression of sadism (and, eventually, masochism) in Interview with the Vampire, and it begins in classic Sadean style, with Death (Santiago) as the torturer intent on sadistically toying with—and then killing—his unwilling victim.
Santiago is “Death standing before the audience, the scythe poised, Death at the edge of a dark wood” (215), whose victim is an anonymous “young woman…majestically tall and all but enshrined by a voluminous mane of golden blond hair” (217). Louis explicitly notes her mortality and naiveté, her helpless human difference:

And she was lost; and not a vampire. The soil on her mean blouse and skirt was not stage paint, and nothing had touched her perfect face, which gazed into the light now, as beautiful and finely chiseled as the face of a marble Virgin, that hair her haloed veil. She could not see in the light, though all could see her...she was very like a child, though clearly a full-grown woman. (217-8)

Like a deer in headlights, the child-woman is unaware of her surroundings and does not yet know her lethal fate, though the audience surely anticipates the expected outcome of this “play”—her vulnerable naked body and her ultimate staged “death.” (Remember the audience does not know—or is unwilling to admit it knows—the victim literally dies at the end). Dressed as and assuming the airs of a gentleman, Death courts the young woman:

Death showed a beaming white face to the audience, his hurried hands stroking his handsome black hair, straightening a waistcoat, brushing imaginary dust from his lapels. Death in love. And clapping rose for the luminous countenance, the gleaming cheekbones, the winking black eye, as if it were all masterful illusion when in fact it was merely and certainly the face of a vampire...that leering, grinning vampire. (217)

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3 For ease in quoting, I eliminate the novel’s interview structure by omitting the first quotes. Double quotes are used when citing dialogue.
While the vampire is depicted as a charming suitor, the woman is infantilized, further connoting their roles as vampire and human in terms of gender while alluding to the scene’s faux façade of erotic foreplay.

Foreshadowing the impending feeding as a representation of gang rape, Death is joined by six other vampires, notably an equal number of women and men. While Death was at first strictly male, it now becomes collective and bisexual: “‘We are death’” (219). However, though this gendered grouping is characteristic of Rice’s homoerotic vampires, it is also necessary to clarify that they are, in fact, first led by a “tall, malevolent leader vampire, that demon trickster” (219), Santiago, and, next, by Armand. After Armand has first fed upon the female victim, she then is given to the other vampires, both male and female, “as she was passed from one to another to another” (223). Although comprised of both male and female predators, the group’s obedience to male authority affirms the heterosexual male/female sadomasochistic dyad. In addition, the women vampires are merely auxiliary characters, both within the setting of the play and within scheme of the novel itself, while Santiago takes on a more active role in the play (as Death) and within the novel (as Louis’s tormentor), and Armand is an integral presence in the play itself (he truly is Death, as he gives the fatal bite), the novel (he is leader of the Parisian vampires and Louis’s love interest), and within the Vampire Chronicles as a series (with the entire sixth novel dedicated to his story).

One of the more interesting aspects of the staged scene at the Théâtre des Vampires is the young woman’s transformation from unwilling to willing victim, from victim of sadism to masochistic victim. Once the six other vampires join Santiago as Death, the young woman
knows she will soon die. “‘I don’t want to die...’ she whispered” (218), then, almost immediately after, she screams, “‘I don’t want to die. I don’t want to’” (219), refusing to submit to her fate. Instead, she desperately entreats the audience to save her, but, perceiving this as part of the staged drama, audience members watch silently. Santiago sadistically toys with her, attempting to gain her submission by engaging her in a debate about death’s inevitability, all the while undoing the strings that hold her blouse up. She becomes “baffled, outsmarted, helpless” (220). Her breasts now bared to the “titillated crowd” (220), the scared woman begins crying, knowing full well escape is impossible and she must suffer: Louis remarks, “her pain bathed her in a beauteous light, a light which made her irresistibly alluring. It was this that held the jaded audience, this terrible pain...She had no chance” (221). It should be noted, at this point, the pain is psychological and emotional, rather than physical. In response to Death’s romantic overtures and his proclamations wherein she should submit to death and become his “bride” (221), she begins to “d[ie] inside, weakening” (220), but nonetheless continues to remain hopeful, leaving him “frustrated” and “struggling” (221) to control the scripted play. Her fear, resignation, and submission are what Death in the form of sadistic Santiago requires.

The situation changes once Armand appears on the stage and offers her death with “‘No pain’” (221); she suddenly transforms into a willing victim, “yearning towards him...dying now, under this vampire’s power...and she was giving herself over” (222). She actually melts into Armand, throwing her arms around his neck like a lover, while Armand consummates his bloodlust for the audience in the play’s pornographic final act: “And now, turning her slowly to the side so that they could all see her serene face, he was lifting her, her back arching as her
naked breasts touched his buttons, her pale arms enfolded his neck. She stiffened, cried out as he sank his teeth, and her face was still as the dark theater reverberated with shared passion” (222). Both vampires offer death; both will strip her naked—Santiago of her blouse, Armand of her skirt—and exhibit her to the audience. However, her responses to both radically differ. Yet, how does Armand’s treatment of her differ from that of Santiago? What transforms her from a sadist’s victim into a masochistic victim?

One major difference is, like a true sadist, Santiago offers only pain. Masochism of any sort requires some sort of recompense, something to make the pain endured pleasurable, either through its cessation or through compensation. The woman’s entire experience with Santiago is experienced as pain, nothing more. Armand, however, offers her cessation of fear and a painless death—both of which would be experienced as pleasurable. Because “masochism [is] a portal to pleasure through death” (Pugh 155), the woman’s only escape—and subsequent source of pleasure—is her resignation to die. Additionally, “sexuality inherent in death—notably captured in the metaphor of orgasm as the ‘petit mort’—realizes the masochist’s ultimate desire to embrace suffering to the point when it truly can no longer be endured” (Pugh 156). The woman’s masochistic pleasure, then, culminates in her climactic release from life via exquisite death. Armand also praises the woman for her great beauty, and, by doing so, suggests that she brings something other than victimization to the sadomasochistic relationship: “‘Your beauty is a gift to us’” (221), he says. Her forced nudity is no longer humiliation, but a testament to her lovely appearance, yet also connotes objectification by the male gaze. In sum, Santiago is merely a sadist with an unwilling victim; Armand creates a sadomasochistic relationship which offers
some benefits to the victim, so it becomes more closely aligned with contractual
sadomasochism—though, this “contractual” masochism is the forced by-product of
sociocultural sadomasochism, wherein the rich dominate the poor and men dominate women.

Specifically, this scene explicitly engages with issues of class and gender. The woman’s
garment is made of “cheap fabric” (219); she wears “a mean blouse” (217); her skirt is “dusty”
(218). It is implied that the woman is poor, possibly living on the streets, so the theater might
sweep for its victims indiscriminately. In contrast, the audience members are rich, as “diamonds
sparkled on wrists, on throats, on fingers” (215). Consequently, this instance of sadomasochism
reflects gender and class inequity within patriarchal and privileged societies. Although the
woman ultimately submits to the vampires’ cravings, she does so because she has no real
choice, and her willingness as victim merely generates from picking the lesser evil. An
interesting subversion and affirmation of masochism, the woman both rejects suffering with
Santiago while desiring death at the hands of Armand—that is, escape from the vampires—and
finds painful vampiric penetration pleasurable because of it. Perhaps her vacillation from
refusal to submission illustrates women’s precarious position within imprisoning patriarchal
societies: Women must struggle to overcome the gross injustices of gender inequality, or else
exploit these injustices and reap rewards—though the reward in this case problematically
espouses death.

Given the narrative device of a play within a story, it is important to discuss the theater’s
attendees. Decorated with realistic sets and accompanied by orchestrated music, the theater is
successfully viewed as performing only an illusion. The audience perceives these elements as
stagecraft, the play’s erotic violence as merely staged. However, vampiric paleness is not face
paint, characters fulfill their cast roles, and dialogue is not scripted. Louis repeatedly
emphasizes this fantastical effect on the audience, describing the play’s dramatic components as
“magic” (215), a “spectacle” (218), a “spell” (223). That an audience of wealthy humans whose
ignorance of the very real events occurring onstage believes this is a play highlights the
sadomasochistic “fantasy experienced for its own sake, or the scene which is dreamed,
dramatized, ritualized” (Deleuze 75). This disturbing sadomasochistic spectacle evinces
fantasized pleasure in sexual and supernatural dominance and submission. While Massé
alludes to the spectator’s capability to live vicariously through both male sadist and female
masochist, the theater’s “all-too-human crowd” (214) more closely allies itself with Mulvey’s
sadistic viewer; they applaud when the curtain is drawn and closed, sympathize with
“Gentleman Death” (218), and sigh in arousal when the woman is stripped. Indeed, as
scopophilic spectators observing and participating in the play, they may be viewed as sadistic,
wanting the charming vampire to attain his beautiful love object. Conversely, they may also
desire the woman to accept Death as her lover so they themselves can experience the
pleasurable rapture of vampiric seduction. The audience’s failure to recognize the theater’s
reality further resonates with sociocultural sadomasochism and with historical public displays
of human sacrifice—such as executions via the guillotine, quartering, hanging, or stoning. The
privileged and powerful are able to indulge communally in orgiastic fantasies of power at the
expense of the victimized underclasses.
Also spectators of the play, Claudia and Louis recognize the scene as anything but artifice, as a display of undead debauchery. As the play progresses, Louis first sympathizes with the woman, but later yearns to join the other vampires and drink her blood. Overall, he reacts with ambivalence, though evincing the scene’s Gothic horror: “I felt my spirit contract in fear for her, and in longing.” (218). Louis desires to touch her, but is ashamed of his sadistic yearnings: “I could feel her skin, feel the small, pointed breasts, feel my arms caressing her. I shut my eyes against it” (221). Just as he wars with himself to resist the urge for human blood, Louis finds himself tempted and repulsed by the theater’s malevolent machinations:

I was sitting back in the chair, my mouth full of the taste of her, my veins in torment…I was aware that this ache in me, this confusion, this blinding passion which only let me go with a stubborn slowness would be obliterated if I were to…draw him [a lone human usher] up fast in the darkness and take him as that girl was taken. I wanted to do it, and I wanted nothing. (223-4)

Louis sides with the victim and the torturer. For Louis, the play “creates intense pleasurable feelings that involve both the promise of sadistic power and the abandon linked with passive victimization. Indeed, Louis’s identification with the victimizer, Armand, impels Louis toward a homoerotic relationship with him” (Doane and Hodges 427) that is pursued later in the novel, both activity and passivity representing Louis’s dual sadistic masculinity and masochistic femininity.

As a female spectator, it is unclear with whom—victim or torturer—Claudia identifies, if only because Louis only acknowledges her a few times during the play. Claudia is mentioned
three times: First, she sits “still, as if enrapt” (217) when Death courts the woman, then she laughs when the woman pleads for her life, and, finally, she once again sits “infinitely still, her gloved hands in her lap” (224) when the play ends. The second reaction is an active change compared to her first and third gestures of passivity; perhaps these responses to the play might depict her as identifying with the naturally powerless woman before and after her death, and then sadistically wanting the woman to die. Or perhaps, because it is never indicated what, exactly, Claudia laughs at, her laughter might not express amusement but rather a morbidly humorous recognition of women’s lack of agency and forced exhibitionism.

As a woman in a child’s body, Claudia all too well understands the grim reality of female oppression within patriarchy, like in her relationship with Lestat. Consequently, the blonde woman serves as a double of herself, “warn[ing] Claudia of the dangers of growing up female…[She is] a woman suffering the imposition of male power…In this instance, the woman is murdered, as Claudia will be later” (Doane and Hodg 427). Additionally, “Claudia sees herself on the stage, as both prey and an object for the entertainment of an audience…This further compounds the feminine stereotype; not only is the victim viewed in child-like terms, not only is she prey and an object of entertainment, but she is also unable to employ logic and rhetoric because she has beauty” (Hoosain 96). Incessantly referred to as a mute doll by Lestat and Louis throughout the book, Claudia is a defenseless object of the male gaze who must ultimately suffer death at the hands of men.

The Théâtre des Vampires’ play perversely stages sexual sadomasochism for a paying, eager audience. An infantilized, unnamed woman is subjected to an objectifying gaze,
sadistically taunted and ridiculed, and consumed directly by vampires and indirectly by spellbound spectators. The fact that the audience derives pleasure from particular scenes wherein erotic displays of power are emotionally and physically violent disturbingly speaks to patriarchal culture’s acceptance of (vampiric) rape and normalized roles of beaten/beater, sadist/masochist, and dominant/submissive, Rice perhaps romanticizing this fatal gender and class inequality or, conversely, revealing the iniquity of it.

The von Sacher-Masoch Male Masochists

Another instance of the vampire/human binarism that eventually results in a human’s death occurs with Armand’s slave boy Denis. (Notably, the slave boy, unlike the woman on stage, is given a name.) In stark contrast to the victimization of the woman in the theater, this pubescent male explicitly derives (sexual) pleasure from his sanguinary submission. Indeed, Louis is surprised by the mortal boy’s fearless desire to be dentally penetrated:

Never had I felt this, never had I experienced it, this yielding of a conscious mortal…I saw the bluish bruise on this tender neck. He was offering it to me. He was pressing the length of his body against me now, and I felt the hard strength of his sex beneath his clothes pressing against my leg…and I sank my teeth into his skin, my body rigid, that hard sex driving against me, and I lifted him in passion off the floor…I rocked with him, devouring him, his ecstasy, his conscious pleasure. (227-8)
Rice’s vampires do not have sex per se, yet this is perhaps the novel’s most blatant depiction of vampiric eroticism. The boy is clearly aroused by and finds pleasurable this painful fluid exchange.

Referring to himself as “‘slave’” of “[m]y master” (248) Armand, human Denis’s homoerotic relationship with this ancient vampire might then be viewed as contractual because roles are made clear. Although it is never clarified who begins this contract, both parties benefit—as compensation for donating his blood, (in addition to its accompanying sexual satiation) Denis receives lavish feasts of meats and wine provided by Armand, and Armand and his followers have a reliable source of sustenance and eventually kill him because “‘he is too young, his limbs not strong enough, his mortal cup barely tasted’” (250) to become a vampire. Armand is obviously the more powerful partner, the master to Denis’s slavery, deriving sadistic pleasure in the taking of Denis’s blood and murdering him, yet Denis apparently has his compensations.

In Anne Rice and Sexual Politics, James Keller reads their relationship as paralleling “the Greek pederastic tradition,” noting these “relations did not take place between members of the same social rank. The dominant male was of a higher status than his love object. Often the object of desire was a household slave” (24). While such a partnership does not necessarily connote sadomasochism, it does convey pedophilic and class power dynamics of dominance and submission. Indeed, “the pursuit of the adolescent boy by the older man was described by stereotypes that we associate with romantic heterosexual love (conquest, surrender…), with the passive part going to the boy” (Sedgwick 698). However, Greek pederasty “had a strongly
educational function...this was a bond of mentorship; the boys were apprentices” who inherited “privileges includ[ing] the power to command the labor of slaves of both sexes, and of women of any class including their own” (Sedgwick 698). In this sense, the homoerotic pairing of Armand and Denis resembles an ancient patriarchal sociocultural system of initiation and award, wherein Denis reaps benefits from his submission, though he never attains the “apprenticeship” status of vampire.

Two other minor human masochists are depicted in the characters of Louis’ s interviewer Daniel and the unnamed musician paramour of Lestat. In contrast to the unnamed woman and Denis, these characters expand Rice’ s sadomasochistic spectrum, representing a greater parity in terms of vampire/human power. While in New Orleans, Lestat forms a relationship with an anonymous young musician. Lestat’s “long erotic courtship that results in the boy’s conversion” (Keller 24) can be seen as a reminiscent repetition of his homosocial and homoerotic relationship with friend and fledgling violinist Nicholas (introduced in The Vampire Lestat). While Lestat is more sadistic in his relationship with Louis and Claudia, the musician boy’s status as a human lover who becomes Lestat’s fledgling indicates power is not an issue in their relationship. Additionally, the other minor masochist is the interviewer boy Daniel. After listening to Louis’ s irreverent revenant life, Daniel masochistically yearns to be transformed into a vampire; more than sexual satisfaction, Daniel desires the sadistic power derived from vampirism. Although Louis refuses to change him, Daniel eventually attains his desires by becoming the lover and fledgling of Armand in The Queen of the Damned. While Denis and the woman are killed, the musician and Daniel are vampirized, demonstrating a more equal relationship founded on love
rather than satiation, one that might allow the (human) masochist to transform into (vampiric) sadist. Ultimately, however, such a discrepancy given these male and female masochists might further represent women’s oppression, whereas males reap rewards of sexual gratification and powerful privilege—and women receive nothing but death.

**A Hard Man is Good to Find: Homoeroticism**

*But I can’t tell you exactly, any more than I could tell you exactly what is the experience of sex if you have never had it.*

Anne Rice  
*Interview with the Vampire*

As Eve Sedgwick writes, “in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power” (711). Relationships between Lestat and Louis and between Armand and Louis are the primary homosocial bonds in the novel, and both pairings exhibit sadomasochistic behaviors. Although Rice privileges and insists upon male homosocial and homosexual relationships throughout *Interview with the Vampire*, her characters also perform essentialist gender roles that replicate male-female sadomasochistic binaries, doubly reinforcing a patriarchal narrative.

**Lestat/Louis: The Arranged Marriage**

The interviewee of *Interview with the Vampire*, Louis Pointe du Lac narrates his vampiric vicissitudes—from a brief recollection of his human life to his existentialist angst since his
forced transformation. Twenty-five years old and a wealthy plantation owner in the antebellum American South, human Louis enjoys the authority of a privileged white patriarch, responsible for his family and the cultivation of his land in New Orleans. The inheritor of an estate, Louis as eldest male child is thus powerful as afforded by patrilineage, his bourgeois lifestyle “both luxurious and primitive…attractive…better there than we could have ever lived in France” (Rice 6). Louis and his family immigrate to America to escape Revolutionary France, and are subsequently endowed with opportunity, land, slaves, and money, all of which actually fail to dehumanize him. Though he possesses pecuniary power and socioeconomic status, Louis does not tyrannically exert this power; rather, it directly makes him victim of the vampire Lestat de Lioncourt.

Inconsolable over the sudden and mysterious loss of his younger brother after settling in New Orleans, Louis blames himself and broods, engaging in suicidal thoughts and behaviors: “I know I didn’t kill him…It’s that I cannot live now that he’s dead” (12); here demonstrating his self-sacrificial masochism through emotional suffering from the novel’s beginning, Louis as both human and vampire seeks out scenarios in which he is victim to emotional pain and suffering. Louis’s repetitive melancholy is akin to Massé’s classification of the “Heroine’s suffering” as “the principal action of the story because it is the only action she can perform” (19). Indeed, feminine Louis is emotionally dependent on his companions and wishes to die when he loses them.

Wandering drunk and alone one night, he is attacked by the vampire Lestat, who drains him to the point of death and then vampirizes him in an intimate homoerotic encounter. A
lecherous parasite after another man’s property, Lestat victimizes Louis precisely because he possesses money and power; therefore, Louis is positioned as a highly relevant victim in terms of socioeconomic status: “As I told you, this vampire Lestat wanted the plantation…he was not a very discriminating person…Living in New Orleans had become too difficult for him, considering his needs and the necessity to care for his father, and he wanted Pointe du Lac” (Rice 15-6). While wealth would normally translate to social power and privilege, it is perhaps more apt to view it, in Louis’s situation, as making him a desirable mate. In other words, the wealthy Louis is cast in the role of rich heiress, with the penniless Lestat as the handsome, charismatic, fortune-hunting male suitor. Like a romantic heroine, Louis resists, then capitulates to Lestat’s erotic advances: “I wanted to struggle, but [Lestat] pressed so hard with his fingers that he held my entire prone body in check; and as soon as I stopped my abortive attempt at rebellion, he sank his teeth into my neck…I remember that the movement of his lips raised the hair all over my body, sent a shock of sensation through my body that was not unlike the pleasure of passion” (19). Once “married,” Louis feels exploited, losing control over his financial resources in the same way eighteenth-century brides were forced to cede control over any property to their husbands; Louis’s possessions might further be viewed as his dowry:

Indeed, their lives together do initially resemble the arranged, aristocratic marriages of the eighteenth century, one in which the bond has been created to consolidate family wealth. The young, discontented, neglected wife remains at home while the dissolute husband goes out marauding every night, squandering the collective fortune. Later in the novel, Louis indicates that Lestat only remains with him because the elder vampire
is utterly incompetent in financial matters and requires Louis to handle the money.

(Keller 15-6)

Shakira Hoosain’s dissertation “In the Shadow of the Night: The Gendered Subtext of Anne Rice’s Vampire Chronicles” also analyzes Lestat’s usurpation of Louis’s economic power as his feminization, noting “Louis becomes a far more feminine character with the loss of his economic power” (46), assuming a passive and subservient role in relation to Lestat. Although Louis and Lestat are initially lovers, sharing a coffin (or “marriage bed”), their relationship is hierarchical. Lestat chooses Louis as his victim/mate, and their relationship is founded upon and conjugally contracted by socioeconomic power, with Lestat in control as powerful vampire and “husband.”

Gaining power from his conquest of Louis’s cash, now privileged and profligate Lestat is characterized at various times as a “bully” (22), “vicious” (36), “mocking” (37), a “killer” (45), “cold” (45) and “detached” (44), while Louis is conversely depicted as loving, “coward[ly]” (16), suicidal, and “squeamish” (16); engendering essentialist qualities, “Lestat possesses traditional male attributes, such as aggression, bluntness, insensitivity, and practicality. Louis is feminized, manifesting traits such as passivity, sensitivity, compunction, compassion, and resentment” (Keller 16). Given our model of gendered sadomasochism, Lestat exhibits traits of the sadistic male while Louis resembles the masochistic female. Disregarding Louis’s more delicate sensibilities and stronger sense of morality by denigrating his dietary qualms, Lestat’s “coldness…is present…in the apathy of the sadist” (Deleuze 117). Lestat’s killing is further represented as sadistic: “Lestat was masterfully clever and utterly vicious” (Rice 77). Plagued
with a human conscience though now a vampire, Louis refuses to kill humans for sustenance (to bite or not to bite, that is the question); he instead subsists on rats’ blood to the dismay of Lestat. Sensitive to others, Louis is more compassionate than Lestat, his weakness connoted as inferior and a feminine trait; conversely, the strong and masculine Lestat humiliates Louis, performing the role of sadist.

Although Lestat uses him for his own benefit, Louis initially finds him “extraordinary…a biblical angel…spellbound by the sheer beauty of his appearance” (17). Yet this also highlights Louis’s cognitive dissonance, his vacillation between masculinity/femininity and vampirism/humanity. However, Lestat delineates their roles from the onset, him as dominant and active male while Louis is submissive and passive (fe)male. Though their sexual/sleeping position in the coffin/“marriage bed” depicts Louis on top, metaphorically connotative of superiority and power, Lestat is actually the more powerful as sadistic partner who controls the relationship: “‘I’m getting into the coffin…and you will get on top of me if you know what’s good for you.’ And I did. I lay face-down on him, utterly confused by my absence of dread and filled with a distaste for being so close to him, handsome and intriguing though he was” (25).

In addition, Lestat is constantly portrayed as more powerful in terms of his epistemophilia or supposed knowledge of vampires. As Massé notes, “the urges to look and to know—what he [Freud] terms the scopophilic and epistemophilic instincts—are closely related to one another and to sadism. To look, then, can be to know, to be privy to the forbidden knowledge that means power” (41). As an older vampire, Lestat possesses pertinent knowledge
preventing Louis “from being his equal yet” (Rice 25), which generates Louis’s intense repugnance of Lestat despite his initial love for and attraction toward him; “I did not like Lestat at all” (25), he states after his first time sleeping with him. Although Lestat clearly embodies the sadistic knower, Louis does not completely assume the role of oblivious masochist; he instead desires Lestat’s knowledge so he can escape their relationship. While Louis resists categorization as the “masochistic, exhibitionist woman who is supposed to be blind to the forbidden knowledge that shapes her life” (Massé 42) due to his epistemophilic curiosity, Louis dependently cleaves to Lestat, enduring their contracted abuse to obtain knowledge. Upholding this relation of sadism to knowledge, Lestat mocks Louis for his lack thereof:

And all the time, he belittled me and attacked me for my love of the senses, my reluctance to kill, and the near swoon which killing could produce in me. He laughed uproariously when I discovered that I could see myself in a mirror and that crosses had no effect upon me, and would taunt me with sealed lips when I asked about God or the devil. (Rice 37)

Ever wont to “swoon” when encountering death, Louis is thus depicted as feminine in his ignorance, equating sensibility/sensitivity and naïveté with essentialist gender roles.

Replicating and repeating his traumatic suffering for his brother’s death and his cognitive dissonance to kill humans, Louis’s desired reward for his endurance of Lestat’s sadistic humiliation and emotional abuse is existential knowledge of his vampiric condition. Further, he even “manifests battered-wife syndrome. Despite domestic abuse, he still harbors deep affection for, and commitment to, Lestat” (Keller 18), willing to remain with his
inhumane/inhuman partner until Lestat capitulates to Louis’s epistemophilic yearnings. Even after Lestat teaches him the basics of vampiric survival and Louis realizes “I was his complete superior and I had been sadly cheated in having him for a teacher… I felt cold towards him… I saw that if I were to maximize every experience available to me, I must exert my own powers over my learning. Lestat was of no use” (Rice 31), Louis still professes that “he had me at a great disadvantage. He hinted there was much I didn’t know and must know and that he alone could tell me” (35). Ultimately, Louis is “hopelessly locked to him and jarred over and over by his viciousness” (36), relegated to an essentialist feminine position of obedience, ignorance, and inferiority. Lestat is constructed as powerful because of his knowledge—“‘You use knowledge for personal power’” (80)—and Louis can only break away once he realizes Lestat knows little more than himself.

Once Louis becomes unhappy with their partnership and determines Lestat lacks sufficient knowledge, he questions whether he should leave Lestat and suffer the pangs of loneliness—or kill himself: “I have to leave him or die, I thought. It would be sweet to die, I thought. Yes, die. I wanted to die before. Now I wish to die” (70). In choosing death, Louis assumes the role of masochist; he will find pleasure through death (as he repeatedly desires). Yet he is unable to escape Lestat’s power when “Lestat resorts to even more cunning means of maintaining his partner’s fidelity… A cliché and potentially destructive means of saving a doomed marriage is to strengthen the bond with a child, a mutual creation and a reason to remain together” (Keller 16-7). Resonating with the cultural practice of reviving a couple’s failing relationship through procreation, Lestat’s co-siring the child vampire Claudia is an
unsuccessful ploy to maintain his hold over Louis. However, this act only makes Louis despise Lestat even more, as Claudia then becomes Louis’s companion and lover. Their relationship is triangulated, and the sadistic father Lestat is eventually “killed” by Claudia twice, only to return to seek revenge or eventually waste away in New Orleans.

Initially exploiting Louis for his money and status, Lestat’s natural role as sadist is exhibited in his relationship with Louis. Lestat kills without regard to human life, often feeding in front of Louis to torture him. Because ethical and religious Louis resents his vampirization and desires information, Lestat takes advantage of their relationship in order to abuse Louis emotionally, sadistically exerting power by performing actions antithetical to Louis’s moral beliefs. From the beginning of the novel, Louis is depicted as melancholic and contemplative, in flux between binaries of masculinity/femininity, vampire/human, and religious/atheist. Although Louis eventually finds a less domineering companion in Armand, his relationship with Lestat is structured by Lestat’s sadistic pleasure in emotional torture and Louis’s own repetition-compulsion (and even enjoyment) of suffering and suicidal angst. In addition, despite their biological maleness, they perform conventional masculinity and femininity, troublingly enacting the male-female sadomasochistic dyad, reinscribing traditional notions of gender inequality, and reproducing patriarchal gender imbalance. Perhaps because Lestat and Louis are both male and thus equal in strength, their sadomasochism is psychological and emotional rather than physical.
**Armand/Louis: The Love Match**

In contrast to Louis’s first encounter with Lestat, wherein human Louis is unwittingly attacked, physically vampirized, and emotionally victimized by Lestat, Louis is instead initially allured by the mysterious and seductive “auburn-haired” (229) vampire at the theater. Armand is adolescent yet ancient, and his century-old composure and expansive understanding of vampiric existence depict him as emotionally detached. While such aloofness is neither cold nor cruel—not of the typical Deleuzian sadist—Armand’s introductory demeanor foreshadows his sadistic characterization later. Louis’s and Armand’s relationship is not nearly as unequal as that of Lestat and Louis, yet there still exist dynamics of dominance and submission, Louis again repeating his role as masochist.

Like Lestat, Armand exhibits more masculine attributes while Louis identifies as more feminine. As explicated above, Louis can be read as an effeminate male—perhaps even as female—in relation to Lestat, and, similarly, reprises this role once he meets Armand: “And it was as if the great feminine longing of my mind were being awakened again to be satisfied” (234). Louis once again embodies a paradox which affirms patriarchal power structures: Identifying as more feminine in relation to his two male lovers, Louis replicates the male/female sadomasochistic binary of masculine strength and feminine weakness. Yet, as a biological male, his homosocial and homoerotic relationships with Armand and Lestat are privileged within the text, while female homosocial relations are both relegated to the periphery and obliterated.

Armand’s superior knowledge—he is the eldest, wisest living vampire and the leader of the Parisian vampires—also characterizes him as the male epistemophilic in contrast to Louis’s
naïveté. Louis observes his daughter/lover Claudia and his love interest Armand engaged in silent conversation, highlighting Louis’s epistemophilic ineptitude: “And they were gazing at each other with a preternatural understanding from which I was simply excluded” (235). Though Louis misconstrues this scene as a telepathic conversation between the two, it is later revealed as Armand’s powerfully hypnotic captivity and silencing of Claudia. Louis and others are vulnerable to Armand’s epistemophilic mind reading, and he uses this ability to sadistically sway and exert power over his victims: “It seemed to me then that Armand, with his hypnotic power, aimed in some way for the maximum truth in presentation of himself: he had drawn out of me without words my state of mind” (239). However, Louis erroneously believes Armand as selfless and good, his epistemophilic power as benevolent.

Claudia warns Louis against pursuing Armand as his love object, professing such a relationship as detrimental to their own:

“He rendered me powerless!...He draws life out of me into himself...Life out of the boy who is his slave, life out of me whom he would make his slave. He loves you. He loves you. He would have you, and he would not have me stand in the way.”

“You don’t understand him!” I fought it, kissing her...

“No, I understand him only too well...it is you who don’t understand him. Love’s blinded you, your fascination with his knowledge, his power. If you knew how he drains death you’d hate him more than you ever hated Lestat. Louis, you must never return to him. I tell you, I’m in danger!” (247-8)
Claudia’s warning clearly articulates the unequal power dynamics between Armand and Louis (while simultaneously depicting females as impediments to male homosocial relations):

Armand as epistemophilic leader of the theater coven is positioned as powerful, and Louis might desire his knowledge but more importantly wants him as his male lover in order to acquire another (male) companion and perhaps power through association. Idealizing his love object and unable to discern Armand’s intentions, Louis dismisses Claudia’s claims. Armand literally sucks the life out of the woman on stage, feeds on and kills slave boy Denis, and saps Claudia of her power (and kills her later); Armand obviously assumes a sadistic role in these contexts, deriving pleasure from his vampiric victimizing. Even when Louis acknowledges the possibility of Armand’s wicked ways—“a vampire who was perhaps more evil than Lestat, for whom I became as evil as Lestat, but in whom I saw other only promise of good in evil of which I could conceive” (273)—Louis still yearns to consummate his desire for him and is willing to delay this pleasure until he has rid himself of Claudia. In his relationship with Armand, Louis is thus configured as Deleuze’s deferring masochist, his reward epistemophilic power, supposed equality, and love—all in a homoerotic and homosocial bond.

Although they share a mutual, passionate love, their relationship is tainted by these gendered sadomasochistic dynamics. Indeed, Hoosain analyzes Louis as continuing a passive, subservient role with Armand: “Louis becomes enraptured by Armand and, just as with Lestat, Louis takes on the mantel of Femininity in relation to Armand” (98). When Armand as sadistic scopophilic relentlessly “watch[es] [Louis] again like a painting” (Rice 234), Louis briefly admires Armand’s beauty yet ceases gazing. Akin to a demure woman ashamed of her
sexuality, Louis “dropped [his] eyes” when desire is reciprocated, when Louis “felt them [Armand’s eyes] pull me towards him” (249). Again referring to Armand’s scopophilia and epistemophilia, Louis states: “I was weak, too weak for his wonder, and again I looked away from him” (249). Acting as Mulvey’s masochistic exhibitionist, Louis acknowledges his powerlessness and diverts his gaze—and, in extension, his masculinity—to become voiceless object of Armand’s scopophilia.

Armand recognizes Louis’s easy conquest, all the while employing commanding diction: “‘Listen to me…You would yield to me now were I to question you. Look into my eyes’” (251). Rhetoric of dominance and submission continues throughout their interactions, as Armand uses his hypnotic power to coerce Louis to vampirize Madeleine, Claudia’s companion/mother. Their dialogue further depicts Armand as diabolically dominating and Louis as forgiving, passive puppet of Armand:

“That I did it to be free of Claudia, to be free to come to you . . . yes, I realize that. But the ultimate responsibility lies with me!” I said.

“No. I mean, directly. I made you do it!…I exerted my strongest power to persuade you to do it. Didn’t you know this?”

“No!” I bowed my head…For the moment, I couldn’t answer. I only nodded…“You must never force me to do something against my will! You must never exert such power…And you are satisfied…I don’t mean to be harsh. You have me. I love you.” (285-6)
Although Louis acts as though he demands equality and independence, and Armand feigns powerlessness—“My power stops somewhere inside you...There I am powerless” (286)—their relationship is founded upon dominance and submission, Louis finally physically succumbing to his desire for Armand once Claudia is removed from their triangle: “I felt my body turning to face him, drawing nearer to him, as though I were being moved not by myself but by him” (287). Indeed, Louis is wholly dependent upon Armand for his well-being, much as self-sacrificial and exhibitionist masochists are: “‘He alone can give me the strength to be what I am. I can’t continue to live divided and consumed with misery. Either I go with him, or I die’” (289), Louis tells Claudia. (This suicidal epithet is voiced in each of his relationships, demonstrating his recurring compulsion to suffer.) Even when Claudia is killed under Armand’s direction, Louis returns to Armand’s company, using language connotative of erotic submission: “And then finally I surrendered. I turned to Armand again and let my eyes penetrate his eyes, and let him draw close to me as if he meant to make me his victim, and I bowed my head and felt his firm arm around my shoulder” (313).

While the stifling and humiliating love of Lestat imprisoned Louis, the great romance of Louis and Armand is also complexly hierarchical. Lestat avers vampires cannot coexist, and partners are never equal: “They’re jealous of their secret and their territory; and if you find one or more of them together it will be for safety only, and one will be the slave of the other, the way you [Louis] are of me” (83). One is always superior and the other inferior, as in sadomasochistic relationships. There is greater parity in Armand’s and Louis’s relationship, yet there is still a power imbalance:
For vampires, physical love culminates and is satisfied in one thing, the kill. I speak of another kind of love which drew me to [Armand] completely as the teacher which Lestat had never been. Knowledge would never be withheld by Armand, I knew it. It would pass through him as through a pane of glass so that I might bask in it and absorb it and grow. (252)

Yet, like many masochists, Louis is capable of turning into a sadist. After Armand kills Claudia, Louis burns down the Théâtre des Vampires, torching members of the troupe and decapitating Santiago. And, while succumbing to Armand’s affections, Louis nonetheless keeps a part of himself emotionally distant from him. Ultimately, however, homosocial relations—sadomasochistic or not—provide the most powerful relations within the novel, as Louis “chooses not between [Claudia] and Armand, but between Lestat and Armand” (Jowett 7), and, even if the sadomasochism enacted within these homosocial dyads is gendered—masculinity as sadistic and femininity as masochistic—it nonetheless allows Louis as (fe)male masochist more agency than any woman—masochistic or not—is permitted within the world of Rice’s novel.

Growing Pains: Lestat/Louis/Claudia

Can you picture it, this splendid domesticity, dim lamps,
the vampire father singing to the vampire daughter?

Anne Rice
Interview with the Vampire

While Louis exhibits traditional gender traits that problematically equate femininity with weakness, perhaps Rice’s most disturbing representation of femininity and females is
engendered in the character of Claudia, whose physiological growth is stunted at age five when Lestat and Louis vampirize her. The introduction of Claudia to Lestat’s and Louis’s relationship triangulates desire, fragmenting the bonds between the two male lovers. Their vampiric family becomes an immortal perversion of the nuclear family, as the Oedipal/Electra complex and the beating fantasy are complexly realized in the trio’s incestuous dynamics. While Lestat co-creates Claudia to cement his failing relationship with Louis, she is ultimately destroyed—punished for her monstrous femininity—to secure the relationship between Louis and Armand. Exacerbated by Claudia’s inescapable role as woman-child, this relational inversion depicts the disposal of females as property to privilege the novel’s—and, by extension, patriarchal society’s—male homoerotic and homosocial bonds.

*Lestat/Louis/Claudia: The Nuclear Family*

Wandering the streets of New Orleans one night while battling the urge to feed on humans, Louis hears a child’s cry. Although he had abstained for four years from drinking human blood, Louis succumbs to his thirst in seeking the child. The girl is a poor starving orphan not older than five years, found crying over her mother’s death in a room where her mother’s corpse lies. While Louis does not kill the girl but instead “threw the child down,” causing her to “lay like a jointless doll” (74)—from her introduction characterizing her as a doll—the enterprising Lestat sadistically capitalizes on this incident to revive his failing relationship with Louis, notably referring to the girl Claudia as an object to be exploited: “Shall I go back and make her a vampire? We could use her, Louis, and think of all the pretty dresses
we could buy for her” (74). Louis finds Lestat’s opportunism disgusting, hating Lestat and desiring to kill him. The next day, however, they return to the little girl, Lestat inverting his masculine sadistic role and expressing maternal sentiments: “I want a child tonight. I am like a mother . . . I want a child!” (88). This inversion is only temporary, though, as he comes to assume the role of father in their family.

While Louis “suck[s] her dry” (90), Lestat vampirizes her; in this sense, they co-sire her in an erotic procreative union. Neither Claudia nor Louis have a choice in her vampirization, Louis coerced to drink her blood — “I obeyed him” (90) — and Lestat transforming her in her sleep, and they both must suffer as a result of Lestat’s sadistic impulses. Although Claudia asserts “I’m not your daughter…I’m my mamma’s daughter” (93), Lestat wields authority by claiming her as “our daughter, Louis’s daughter and my daughter, do you see?” (93-4). By siring Claudia despite Louis’s protestations, Lestat “reserves the power of creation for himself as the patriarch,” also “dancing with the corpse of her mother before removing the child from her home (thus the power of the mother, the female is destroyed)” (Jowett 5). Lestat ends the evening by giving Claudia the option of bunkmate, but ultimately choosing for her: “Now, whom should you sleep with? Louis or me?...Perhaps you should sleep with Louis. After all, when I’m tired . . . I’m not so kind” (Rice 94). Both Lestat’s actions and words foreshadow his familial role and Claudia’s choice of parent, Lestat depicted as an oppressive father and Louis as a nurturing mother.

Although Lestat initially expresses a maternal instinct to produce a child, he ultimately assumes the role of father figure to Claudia, providing her with the basic knowledge to survive,
while Louis shares his love for art and compassion for humanity; teaching Claudia to kill, Lestat’s role of hunter is clearly more aggressive than Louis’s aesthete admiration, as Louis notes, “Claudia and Lestat might hunt and seduce, stay long in the company of the doomed victim…But I still could not bear it” (97), and “I was educating Claudia, whispering…that our eternal life was useless to us if we did not see the beauty all around us” (99). While Lestat teaches Claudia survival skills, Louis instills in her an appreciation for culture and people. Although he views her as a doll and a scopophilic object, explicated below, he also teaches her to look, to desire knowledge from Lestat, as expressed in the phrase “vampire eyes”: “‘You taught me the words vampire eyes…You taught me to drink the world, to hunger for more,’” (112) Claudia says. In terms of gendered sadomasochism, Lestat’s humiliation of and epistemophilic sadism exerted over Louis can be translated into his role as father and as family patriarch, while Louis’s more feminine masochistic role is exhibited in his motherly affection for Claudia. Louis recognizes Lestat’s capability to sadistically manipulate or influence Claudia, so desires to guard her from the authoritarian father figure: “I thought only of protecting her from Lestat. I gathered her into my coffin every morning and would not let her out of my sight with him if possible…She was a child. She needed care” (96). Lestat planned to paint a picture of happy domesticity through offspring, but Louis’s and Lestat’s relationship is conversely fragmented because the former is wary of the latter, loves Claudia, and she is partial to him as mother.

Clearly proving ineffective, Lestat’s initial desire for a doll-like domicile goes awry when Claudia matures and begins to voice her discontent. Although Claudia is positioned as
helpless and naïve object of the male gaze, she begins to portray more sadistic tendencies, perhaps inherited from Lestat, over the years. Keller reads her as a “sadistic monster,” a masculinized byproduct of her even more sadistic father: “Many years after she would have been an adult, she still displays childlike personality features: intemperate anger, vindictiveness, pouting, tantrums, and sadism” (19). Learning how to hunt from Lestat, Claudia becomes a “fierce killer” when feeding alone, “now capable of the ruthless pursuit of blood with all a child’s demanding” (Rice 96); akin to Lestat, and which Louis finds monstrous, she manipulates and uses her victims: “They found death fast in those first years, before she learned to play with them, to lead them to the doll shop or the café where they gave her steaming cups of chocolate…waiting, as if feasting silently on their terrible kindness” (99). Additionally, she becomes curious about her origins as she matures psychologically, attempting to exhibit sadistic epistemophilic agency when she wishes to be regarded as more than just a doll: “Which of you did it? Which of you made me what I am?” (107). Increasingly cold to Lestat and “staring at him for hours” (104), Claudia’s sadism is directed toward her surrogate father. She realizes Lestat sired her and demands to know how to vampirize others, questioning his authority and wishing to possess his power:

“How did you do it?”

“And why should I tell you? It’s my power.”

“Why yours alone?” she asked, her voice ice, her eyes heartless…She glared up at him fearlessly…with total detachment. (108)
Because Claudia is otherwise helpless due to her imprisonment in a static child’s body, she “seeks affirmation of her existence...through implicit accusation of her victimizer...[and] through reenactment of sadism” (Massé 51). She cannot sire a vampire because she does not know how to and is not equipped with the required strength—she is impotent—so she intends to take revenge with the limited information she does possess. Thus depicted as the cold and cruel sadist as she matures, Claudia appropriates the sadistic skills acquired from her father to retaliate against this same oppressor.

Both Freud’s beating fantasy and Rice’s vampire family show “the father as their center” (Massé 65). However, Claudia as beaten (because of her forced vampirism and perpetual infantilization) despises her beater/father and instead loves her mother Louis. The family’s triangulated dynamics might represent an inverted rendition of the second stage of the beating drama, in which “My father is beating me.” Although this stage indicates “masochistic feminine desire in which being beaten and being loved become one and the same” (Massé 67), the beaten child Claudia does not equate pain received from the father with pleasure, but instead allies with the mother and her victimization. Able to recognize Lestat’s sadistic domination and Louis’s subservience, Claudia identifies with Louis as Lestat’s powerless prey: “And we’ve been his puppets, you and I; you remaining to take care of him, and I your saving companion. Now’s time to end it, Louis. Now’s time to leave him!” (117). Rice’s sadomasochistic model offers an interesting deviation from formulaic Freudian beater-beaten theory, and perhaps deserves further study of the implications of a father-daughter sadomasochistic rivalry.
Making plans to leave Lestat, Claudia actively conspires while Louis passively follows; as Claudia states, “And I shall free us both… I will kill him” (121). Claudia’s desire to kill Lestat stems from her own infantilized helplessness, for which Lestat mocks her, and murder is her exerted agency. Unable to glean information about other vampires’ existence from Lestat, she wishes to possess the power Lestat has to make another of her kind: “I want him dead and will have him dead. I shall enjoy it… Do you think I’ll possess his power and my own power when I take him?” (123). Here, Claudia orchestrates revenge as a lone assassin, Louis complicit and again a slave to another’s demands, perhaps even a love-sick masochist to Claudia’s commanding sadism: “Don’t interfere with me or seek to know the time I choose to do it, nor try to come between us. . . .” She raised her hand now to hush me and caught mine in an iron grasp, her tiny fingers biting into my tight, tortured flesh” (123). If Claudia assumes the role of sadist and Louis of masochist—and these roles are more fluid and equal than the roles played by him and Lestat—then Claudia is the one in control, their contract structured around their mutual desire to leave Lestat, to be free of his sadistic spouse and her sadistic father.

While the beating fantasy more closely explores the daughter’s role in a sadomasochistic dynamic, Keller reads Claudia’s role in the family as a confusing conflation of the Oedipal and Electra complexes. Claudia is cast as Electra in her “absence of the penis, a condition for which she blames her mother, who is also bereft of the male organ. As she develops, however, she comes to sympathize and identify with her mother and to long for her father, who possesses the penis that she desires for herself” (18). Thus, the Electra complex is confused because “Claudia resents the father in the same way that the oedipal daughter resents the mother. She blames
Lestat for the condition that she regards as inadequate” (18). While Freudian penis envy might characterize this triangle, I interpret Claudia as desiring the metaphoric penis established by epistemophilic theory: She desires power derived from knowledge, which is possessed by her father. She might not desire a penis per se, but her sadistic epistemophilia and rivalry with the father more aptly characterize her as the “oedipal male child. She develops a longing for the mother and a resentment for the father whom she fears and eventually tries to kill” (19). Keller reads Claudia’s “inability to mature” as the Lacanian phallic lack, and this “might signify her castration by a father who is unwilling to relinquish control over the mother” (19). Although my reading differs in the sense of Claudia’s and Louis’s penis envy as their masculine epistemophilia, both complexes are still conflated, perhaps instead suggesting “the oedipal moment uncover[ing] not the girl’s desire for the father so much as the father’s desire for the girl child, the infantilized woman who is a perfectly obedient and dependent object of desire” (Doane and Hodges 424). Claudia as a permanent doll, both as child and woman, is indeed transformed into a vampire to be used.

Claudia’s sadistic cunning culminates in her attempts to kill Lestat twice, both of which are unsuccessful. Because Claudia is never exactly instructed how to kill vampires, Claudia uses her knowledge of survival to end Lestat’s life. Erroneously believed effective, her first attempt employs the limited knowledge Lestat gives her, information pertaining to hunting and longevity—do not drink blood from a corpse. Drugging two orphan boys with absinthe and laudanum before killing them, Claudia gifts her dead but warm victims to Lestat. Enervated from the boys’ bad blood, Lestat is unable to return to his coffin to recuperate, seeking Louis’s
assistance. Instead, Claudia aggressively voices her opinion of Lestat’s role as patriarch: “‘I’ll put you in your coffin, Father…I’ll put you in it forever’” (134). She then sadistically slashes his throat with a kitchen knife, and “his entire body was shriveling, drying up” (135), emaciated from blood loss. As Janice Doane and Devon Hodges note in their article entitled “Undoing Feminism: From the Preoedipal to Postfeminism in Anne Rice’s Vampire Chronicles,” such an “erotic scene of violence depicts male homoerotic desire as…an obstacle to women’s desire for power” and, privileging males over females, “[m]en’s taste for boys leaves them too preoccupied to keep track of the machinations of women, with whom they are not comfortable or familiar anyway” (425). A man who exploits a female to consolidate a homosocial relationship with another man, Lestat always already epitomizes the male chauvinist in this scene, further enacting his misogyny later when he returns to deliver skewed revenge against his transgressive daughter.

Claudia and Louis then dispose of his pruned corpse in a lake. Seemingly free of the father, they continue their lives together, making plans to venture to Europe in their epistemophilic search for other vampires. However, their peace is disrupted when Lestat and his musician lover suddenly invade their home in New Orleans. Somehow resurrected from his watery grave, Lestat’s “skin was a mass of scars, a hideous covering of injured flesh, as though every wrinkle of his ‘death’ had left its mark upon him” (Rice 155). Claudia and Louis burn the house down and flee the scene, hoping Lestat and his fledgling die.

Although Claudia attempts to usurp Lestat’s power, she is ultimately unsuccessful. After Louis and Claudia attend the perverted play at the Théâtre des Vampires, Lestat
reappears to take vengeance on his twice-attempted murder. One of the only laws created and enforced by Armand and the theater criminalizes ending the life of another vampire: “‘It is the crime that means death to any vampire anywhere who commits it. It is to kill your own kind!’” (245). Claudia does not actually kill Lestat, yet she must suffer punishment. Lestat specifically desires his daughter’s death, notably excluding Louis despite his participation: “‘She did it to me, Louis. She did it to me. You didn’t! She has to die’” (294). Just as Claudia was sired and exploited to save Lestat’s relationship with Louis, so is she also discarded both when Lestat wishes to reclaim Louis for himself and when Armand and Louis desire each other. Thus, “the homoerotic relation between men supports homosocial bonds that make women into objects of exchange” (Doane and Hodges 425), as Lestat “ushered Claudia into vampirism for revenge” (Rice 95) on Louis for his desire to leave Lestat, and Claudia is killed for the same reason.

“I don’t know what it is. She’s a woman”: Woman-Child and the Monstrous-Feminine

Through her desire to rebel against the father, Claudia is characterized as the monstrous-feminine, what Barbara Creed defines as “what it is about a woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject” (1). Rebellious Claudia is oppressed as a woman-child during her life and horrifically murdered for her transgressions against the father.

In addition to the father-mother-daughter triad, Rice’s vampires are eroticized, blurring boundaries between fledgling and lover. Just as Lestat and Louis were lovers, “[i]ncest and pedophilia are overt in the Louis-Lestat-Claudia triangle” (Wasson 204). Vampirized in her sleep and thus without agency, Claudia is metaphorically raped, from the beginning
representing her heinous pedophilic and misogynist victimization by lustful men. She utters her first words after her transformation, and her voice is deemed by Louis as “equal to her physical beauty…It was sensual. She was sensual” (Rice 92). Although Louis has been identified as the mother in their sadomasochistic family, it is important to note his dual role as heterosexual male lover. As aforementioned, Lestat orders Claudia to bunk with Louis; while this might first allude to a child’s choice of parent to sleep alongside, it also represents Louis’s and Claudia’s added heteroerotic relationship. Claudia at five years old has “a woman’s eyes” and is “the most beautiful child” (93) Louis has ever seen, as Louis employs the male gaze to objectify Claudia. She is only a child here—both physically and psychologically—yet Louis as heterosexual male already sees her as both sexualized doll and infantilized seductress, motifs developed throughout Interview with the Vampire—and, by extension, realized in women’s paradoxical roles in patriarchy.

In the first years of their relationship together, Claudia is spoiled by both adoptive parents, given luxurious clothes and toys, “so that she was always a vision, not just of child beauty, with her curling lashes and glorious yellow hair, but of the taste of finely trimmed bonnets and tiny lace gloves, flaring velvet coats and capes, and sheer white puffed-sleeve gowns with gleaming blue sashes” (98). More than simply gifted these items, Claudia is dressed up as a plaything, adorned as a doll for both Lestat’s and Louis’s entertainment: “Lestat played with her as if she were a magnificent doll, and I played with her as if she were a magnificent

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4 I limit myself to reading Louis as mother and lover for the scope of this thesis. Others also read him as Lestat’s daughter, Claudia’s sister and/or brother, and Madeleine’s father.
doll” (98). Louis perceives her as silent and attractive, perhaps attractive because of her silence: “Mute and beautiful, she played with dolls, dressing, undressing them by the hour. Mute and beautiful, she killed” (97). No more than a face and without a voice at this point in her life, these attributes “seem to be her defining characteristics. As child and woman in one, she is seen (worth looking at) but not heard” (Jowett 4), even as Louis begins to acknowledge Claudia’s development. Claudia’s silence attests the sociocultural fact that, “[l]ike many women through history, she has no voice” (Jowett 4). Claudia is an important (albeit marginalized) aspect of the novel, yet *Interview with the Vampire* is ultimately dictated by Louis: “Rice’s vampires are compulsive storytellers, but Claudia, the ultimate [scopophilic] spectacle, is unable to break free of paternal narrative” (Auerbach 154-5). Endowing her with vampiric and narrative life, Louis must tell her story within his patriarchal tale and from his own perspective.5

Claudia is a part of their family for sixty-five years, a five-year-old even at seventy. Although Claudia enjoys her gifts during the brief period one might call her childhood, Louis’s depiction of her as a perpetual child problematizes her inevitable mental maturation; not just a flat character (as Rice’s other female figures in *Interview with the Vampire* are depicted),6 Claudia psychologically develops only to be forever imprisoned in the body of a toddler. Louis realizes Claudia begins to mature intellectually and sexually, as “more and more her doll-like face seemed to possess two totally aware adult eyes, and innocence seemed lost somewhere with

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5 Not included in this thesis, Claudia’s narrative—really a regurgitation of *Interview with the Vampire*—was published in 2012 as a graphic novel entitled *Interview with the Vampire: Claudia’s Story*, written and illustrated by Ashley Marie Witter.

6 There is only a handful of female characters in addition to Claudia: Louis’s sister “became an hysteric” (Rice 11), Louis’s female lover Babette goes insane and dies after being fed upon by Lestat, Lestat kills anonymous prostitutes, and the women vampires at the theater have little to no dialogue and follow their leader Armand.
neglected toys and the loss of a certain patience. There was something dreadfully sensual about her lounging on the settee in a tiny nightgown of lace and stitched pearls; she became an eerie seductress, her voice...womanish” (100-1). She is simultaneously regarded as woman and child, a woman-child who is the exhibitionist object of Louis’s masculine scopophilic gaze.

Claudia’s eventual resentment stems not only from her jealousy of Lestat’s knowledge, but also from her inability to mature physically. She desires the power attained via existential epistemophilia and, equally important, the body of a nubile, adult woman. As Hoosain notes, the “most significant feature of her anger is that she wants to be looked upon with desire. She no longer wants to feel like a freak of nature. Claudia wants to be gazed at and wants to be the product of The Gaze” (102). She condemns her makers and desires sexual freedom: “‘Snatching me from mortal hands like two grim monsters in a nightmare fairy tale, you idle, blind parents! Fathers!...Six more years, seven, eight... I might have had that shape!’ Her pointed finger flew at Madeleine [the woman who becomes her vampiric companion]. ‘To give immortality in this hopeless guise, this helpless form!’” (Rice 259). As a result, Hoosain reads Claudia’s exhibitionism as “Rice...pandering to the normative idea that the woman with infantilised desires seeks this gratuitous attention. Such a woman wants to be objectified; she wants to be the object of lust and will kill if necessary to achieve this sense of accomplishment” (102).

Although active in her desire to acquire a sexually mature form—through Madeleine “serv[ing] as an avatar of Claudia’s desires” (Hoosain 104)—Claudia is portrayed as the masochistic exhibitionist who relies on the male gaze to compensate for her unmet womanly sexual needs.
Claudia’s suppressed sexuality can be read as monstrous or horrific—pedophilic intercourse is desired but never attainable because she is victimized by permanent physical infantilization.

Additionally, Claudia’s entreaties to hunt with Louis can be read as soliciting sex when she says, “‘Kill with me tonight,’ she whispered as sensuously as a lover” (Rice 110). Indeed, Louis refers to their relationships in incestuous and erotic terms: “Father and Daughter. Lover and Lover” (100), and he also calls her his “bride” (109). They love each other desperately and their relationship is founded upon compassion and the desire for equality, united against Lestat in their mutual hatred of him. Their relationship does not last, though, once she notices the attraction between Louis and Armand; fearing being left alone and unable to fend for herself because of her child’s body, Claudia demands her own female companion.

The gendered sadomasochism between Claudia and Louis fluctuates, the roles of sadist and masochist often exchanged; however, their relationship clearly reinscribes sociocultural patriarchal power structures. Their pedophilic relationship is imbalanced due to age difference and experience acquired: Louis is an older male who has indulged in the carnal pleasures of (human) life while Claudia is forever ignorant of sexual satiation due to her imprisonment in a child’s form. She cannot act on her sexual impulses, lacking the agency of physical maturation and knowledge about womanhood. She is physically weaker than her vampiric parents, and must rely on her father for withheld information about her vampiric origins. Additionally, Louis as mother wishes to guard her from the wicked Lestat, assuming a both maternal and paternal protective role that suffocates Claudia. Lorna Jowett reads him in this light as another father:
Louis’ role as parent/lover implies protection and possession...“I loved her, must keep her” (Rice 127). Claudia, on the other hand, becomes in the later stages of their relationship much more aware of his importance as lover and companion than as father and begins to resent his fatherhood and all that it implies. “Did you think I’d be your daughter for ever?” (Rice 225). Claudia is all too aware of Louis’ shortcomings as a lover, even in his self-awarded role as her protector. (6)

Always objectified as a doll—“That’s what she was. A magic doll” (101)—Claudia thus resents this oppression, and so can only escape or retaliate against this role through killing her father Lestat, embarking on an epistemophilic journey with her mother/lover Louis, and then acquiring a maternal vampire companion of her choosing.

After visiting the theater and seeing Louis drawn to Armand as a lover, Claudia attempts to usurp paternal and patriarchal power in seeking her own companion, a woman named Madeleine. Rice repeats the image of dolls and women’s infantilization in her characterization of Madeleine as a doll maker, a woman driven insane by the loss of her daughter—yet another depiction of females as doomed or otherwise inferior. Madeleine’s sexually matured figure projects Claudia’s own yearning for physical adulthood, but Madeleine also represents Claudia’s desire for a maternal figure. Louis’s feminine compassion can be read as maternal, yet Claudia ultimately possesses two male parents. Mute and confined in the Lestat-Louis-Claudia family, her desperation for a female mother is expressed in her obsession with women and children; Claudia begins to hunt families “one by one” (103) and mother-daughter pairs when she plans revenge against Lestat. Claudia’s (as well as Madeleine’s) wish
for Madeleine’s vampirization thus fulfills the roles both desire and require: Claudia needs a mother and Madeleine needs a daughter.

Their relationship is the most beneficial for Claudia, as caring Madeleine enables her to live the womanhood she was deprived of by Lestat and Louis. Madeleine carves “out of a few sticks of wood, with her chisel and knife, a perfect rocking chair, so shaped and proportioned for Claudia that seated in it by the fire, she appeared a woman” (271). Madeleine creates a miniature paradise in which Claudia is endowed with agency, as the adult-sized “world crumbled and ceased to exist at the boundary of the small space which soon became the length and breadth of Claudia’s dressing room…the clumsy universe surrounding me [Louis], which was now marked off and nullified by someone who had suffered in it, someone who had suffered always, but who was not seeming to suffer now” (272). Finding equality in her own (female) homosocial relationship, Claudia is not victimized by Madeleine, their relationship not tainted by patriarchal gendered sadomasochistic dynamics. Indeed, Sedgwick delineates culture’s different perceptions of male and female homosociality, placing female homosocial ties on a more fluid continuum including “the bond of mother and daughter…the bond of sister and sister, women’s friendship…and the active struggles of feminism” (697), each of these exhibited in their relationship.

However, although this egalitarian gynocentric relationship might indicate Claudia’s satisfying liberation from a sadistic patriarchy, it is an illusory victory. Madeleine must be transformed by Louis because “‘I haven’t the size, I haven’t the strength! You saw to that when you made me!’” (258), Claudia supplicates. She must rely on a man’s power to accrue her
requested reward. More importantly, the happy mother-daughter duo is killed by Armand and Lestat as punishment for Claudia’s conceived crime—the attempted murder of Lestat—but really because Armand views her as a rival for Louis’s attention. Because Claudia as female “monster [is] in conflict with the family, the couple, and the institutions of patriarch[y]” (Creed 61), both women are punished.

A female in a male-dominated household, Claudia is automatically Other. This stifling scenario is one of many factors that characterize her as the monstrous-feminine. Claudia has the visage of a cherubic doll, yet she sadistically manipulates her prey, which Louis finds “chilling” (Rice 99) and “wicked” (205). She is simultaneously infantilized as a woman and sexualized as a child, and she is supposed to happily accept these roles for the benefit of her parents. For example, she desires her own child-sized coffin when she tires of sleeping with Louis, only to cede to his desires—“I don’t want it if it hurts you…I’ll stay with you always”—when she realizes this “wounded” (101) him. However, Claudia ultimately refuses to submit to these conditions of her domination, and so her sadistic and horrific tendencies are exhibited when she plans to destroy Lestat. “No longer is it the woman who must be protected from the monster; she is the monster” (Doane and Hodges 424), as Claudia disrupts the family’s “fragile domestic tranquility” (Rice 104). As a result, her foiled attempts at patricide, in turn her transgression of vampire law, are only rewarded with a cruel incendiary death. Her monstrous-femininity is punished by a patriarchal penal system—Armand and Lestat—and the “rage of a monstrous girl vampire against her infantilization and dependency in a world defined by the fathers” (Doane and Hodges 424) proves ineffective. Male retribution is permissible and even desirable
to consolidate homosocial relationships (Louis is forgiven for his murderous torching and beheading of the Parisian vampires), yet female vengeance (an attempted but not successful murder) is not.

**Conclusion**

As Auerbach notes, “[f]or the Claudia who will always look like a doll, vampirism is no release from patriarchy, but a perpetuation of it until the end of time” (154). While Hoosain reads Claudia’s masochistic exhibitionism as Rice’s perpetuation of female oppression, Claudia’s unjust entrapment as woman-child and her subsequent murder by Armand and Lestat might also evince Rice’s condemnation of such rigid and unequal power structures. Katherine Ramsland’s biography of Rice cites the creation of Claudia as a projection of her child Michele, who died at age five from leukemia. Claudia came to engender more complex meaning than an homage to her daughter, as Rice states: “The child vampire Claudia was physically inspired by Michele but she ultimately became something else—a woman trapped in a child’s body, robbed of power, never knowing what it’s like to really be a woman and make love. She became a metaphor for a raging mind trapped in a powerless body. That’s really how I see her” (21). Claudia’s curious disposition as a woman-child is thus a double-edged sword, tyrannical patriarchy tragically inescapable and ultimately fatal.

While Rice does offer a more complex spectrum of sadomasochism, she conversely seems to replicate essentialist gender traits which result in females’ powerlessness. Because the pairings of Lestat/Louis and Armand/Louis are the focus of the novel, whereas Madeleine and
Claudia are killed and there is no allusion to a homoerotic lesbian relationship between them, 

“the power relationships between men and women [or women and women] appear to be 

dependent on the power relationships between men and men” (Sedgwick 711), and women are 

objectified for men’s homosocial pleasure in fiction as in fact.
Chapter Two: Chastely Courting Pain
Reinscribing Patriarchal Values in Stephenie Meyer’s Twilight Series

When you loved the one who was killing you, it left you no options.
How could you run, how could you fight, when doing so would hurt that beloved one?
If your life was all you had to give to your beloved, how could you not give it?

Stephenie Meyer
Breaking Dawn

Despite the vampire’s historical role as the embodied transgression of cultural mores, Stephenie Meyer’s Twilight saga hosts creatures of the night (and now day) representing conservative rather than progressive gender politics: “In contradistinction to the representation of the vampire figure as a threat to whiteness, maleness, and heterosexuality…Twilight constructs a new breed of vampire that promotes and perpetuates, rather than undercuts, these norms” (Wilson 26). By falling in love with his (white lower-middle-class heterosexual female) human victim, Meyer’s (white upper-middle-class heterosexual male) vampire affirms, codes, constructs, and reinscribes a rigidly heteronormative society with its accompanying patriarchal power structures and prescribed gender roles. Although Meyer’s Edward Cullen provides “a stark, even comical, contrast to Lord Byron’s Augustus Darvell” (see page 1), it may be argued he is the more dangerous of the two, as his innocuous façade (sparkly, handsome, and celibate) makes cultural misogyny appear non-threatening and even welcome.

Narrated predominantly through the voice of teenager Isabella (Bella) Swan, the four novels that comprise the Twilight series—Twilight, Eclipse, New Moon, and Breaking Dawn—chronicle the human protagonist’s love for the vampire Edward Cullen and the subsequent dangers the couple face due to both Bella’s humanness, and, later in the series, her daughter’s presumed vampirism. Though Bella’s and Edmund’s love is mutual, their unequal roles—his...
physical superiority, economic wealth, and immortality—privilege Edward as dominant and Bella as submissive, which, in these texts, correlates to the respective roles of sadist and masochist. Throughout the four-volume recounting of their relationship, Edward exerts scopophilic and epistemophilic power over Bella, and he polices Bella’s sexuality in order to control his own carnivorous and carnal cravings. In turn, Bella expresses her undying (pun intended) devotion to Edward through a constricting cocktail of passivity, powerlessness, self-loathing, and self-abuse. Bella desires death, or, more precisely, she desires living death, as it seems the only means of liberation from her cumbersome female/human body, and it offers her a measure of agency—albeit via self-sacrifice, submission to Edward’s power, and, by the series’ denouement, conformity to traditional female roles of married monogamy and motherhood.

This chapter begins with an examination of the violence directed toward Bella by and because of her two lovers, Jacob and Edward, as well as her self-inflicted abuse. I argue that the direct linkage between violence and love is indicative of rape culture and cultural misogyny, and it promotes the cultural cliché that women really mean “yes” when they say “no.” Next, two sadomasochistic pairings—Bella and Edward, Bella and Jacob (the pseudo-werewolf)—are examined in terms of the Freudian beating fantasy, scopophilia and epistemophilia, and masochistic-sadistic inversion; my analysis explicates the series’ symbiotic sadomasochistic relationships as devices for structuring power. The chapter concludes with a discussion of child-women, analyzing Bella’s infantilization by Edward and, more particularly, the sexualization of the child Renesmee, the hybridized by-product of Edward and Bella’s miscegenation.
Violent Love: Hurting Bella and Bella Hurting

*If I couldn’t scream, how could I tell them to kill me? All I wanted was to die. To never have been born...Let me die, let me die, let me die.*

Stephenie Meyer  
*Breaking Dawn*

Each of the four *Twilight* novels conforms to the same plot: Bella is mortally endangered, and Edward rescues her moments before she succumbs to human death. Increasingly, over the course of each novel and the series in its entirety, mortal danger and its accompanying physical violence result *because* of her relationship with Edward, who, at the end of each novel, satisfyingly rescues her. Bella’s traumatic, masochistic repetition of enacted violence becomes productive of a sense of self that finds value through pain and pleasure in rescue and praise. As Massé notes, “gender roles teach the masochist that her influence over others will continue to be through her helplessness” (49); by “pleasing the beloved, she [the masochist] makes herself ‘indispensable’ and seeks to ‘bind the beloved to [her] through guilt’” (49-50). Bella’s need for a “perpetual savior” (*Twilight* 166) articulates a patriarchal narrative in which males (Edward and Jacob) function as the source of and protectors against overwhelming violence, normalizing female and male roles as victim and victimizer, respectively.

Additionally, Bella’s personal characteristics (her injurious clumsiness, her lack of self-worth outside her relationship with Edward, her eager willingness to endure subjugation to the “superior” Edward) disturbingly and repeatedly evoke violence against women as acceptable, even desirable. Problematically, love and violence become inseparable. Though the series is predominantly pro-abstinent, sexual violence is coded into Bella’s interactions with her romantic interests, perpetuating rape culture and women’s victimization. Yet, not only is
romantic love the original source of most of the external violence Bella experiences, but Bella deliberately and repeatedly injures herself when denied this love; through self-abuse, she hopes to force Edward’s return. Violence/abuse and love, depicted through repetitive incidents of pain and pleasure, are intimately linked in the Twilight series, confirming the sadomasochistic underpinnings of Meyer’s novels.

A Damsel in Distress: Saving Bella from Others

Much Twilight scholarship reads the series as a product and perpetuation of rape culture, and Bella’s relationships with Edward and Jacob (in addition to other female characters’ relationships with their male mates) both illustrate and promote abusive relationships as romantic, and, more disturbingly, encourage violence against women. As Frann Michel avers, “these male characters’ behavior toward the women they ostensibly love encompasses not only physical violence and threats of violence, but also stalking, insults, deception, economic manipulation, and other assertions of dominance and control” (3), all of which endanger Bella and even kill many of Twilight’s other female characters.

Bella’s choice of love object places her at excessive physical risk. Edward’s lust for Bella’s blood, his desire to kill her, and his supernatural strength are all unavoidable factors which expose her to potential or real harm. As Hila Shachar explicates in her article “A Post-Feminist Romance: Love, Gender, and Intertextuality in Stephenie Meyer’s Saga,” Twilight “naturalizes the use of masculine physical power and masculine brutality in various ways, such as the supernatural (it’s not his fault he hurts me, he’s just supernaturally strong)” (57). Here, sexual difference is coded in terms of power, males and Edward equated with brawn while
females and Bella are essentially weak, gender dynamics exacerbated by the couple’s added imbalance stemming from their respective vampirism and humanity. In addition, aside from Edward’s omnipresent predatory nature (most apparent when his eyes are black), Bella’s exposure to his vampire world creates new hazards not encountered in her human world, all of them notably violent in nature. However, Edward acts as protector against the very violence his relationship with Bella engenders, and, indeed, his role as protector depends upon this violence. Perversely, the violent underpinnings of the relationship become the source of the series’ romance, as Carrie Platt argues in “Cullen Family Values: Gender and Sexual Politics in the Twilight Series”: The “central tension that drives the plot forward—that of Edward as both predator and protector of Bella—relies upon and reinforces regressive ideologies of romantic relationships...[and] gender difference” (Platt 72). Women—so the story seems to go—interpret displays of masculine strength, either aggressive or protective, as expressions of romantic interest and loving affection.

On the surface, Edward Cullen seems a good choice as love object due to the fact that he comes from a family of “vegetarian” (Twilight 188) vampires. Because the Cullens subsist solely on animal blood, they are an anomaly among other vampires. Yet, as a result, the Cullens’ visitations by carnivorous vampires dispose Bella as prey. The driving action of Twilight revolves around Bella’s pursuit by James, a “sadistic vampire, intent on torturing to her death” (462), who violently breaks her bones, renders her unconscious by flinging her across a room, and bites her before Edward destroys him. Her encounter with James reads as metaphorical rape, his vampiric tracking (stalking) and brutal (dental) penetration evocative of the series’

1 Of course, real vegetarians do not drink blood from animals as the Cullens do.
vampiric/male physical and sexual violence. James follows conventional characterizations of the vampiric figure “where the vampire is coded as rapist” (Wilson 123). Almost twice raped figuratively and literally by lascivious males (one vampiric, the others human) in the first novel alone, Bella’s helplessness epitomizes the series’ victimization of women through violence, resulting in either death from or salvation by a male. Although Bella could have easily died in the encounter with James, Edward saves her, yet encourages her to inform family and friends that her astounding injuries are due to her lack of coordination: “‘You fell down two flights of stairs and through a window…You have to admit, it could happen’” (459). Disturbingly, this echoes real-life domestic violence, wherein the beaten often lies about the abuse, blaming it instead on an “accident.”

Bella is almost run over by a car, almost gang-raped, and then brutally beaten by a carnivorous and cruel vampire; *Twilight* is only the beginning of Bella’s violent adventures, as the series relies upon her placement in perilous predicaments, enduring physical and emotional pain, to propel the plot forward. In *New Moon*, a bloody paper cut renders Bella an enticing snack for the otherwise kind Cullens, who become “six suddenly ravenous vampires” (29); later, two angry vampires named Victoria and Laurent attempt to kill her in revenge for the death of their leader (James). Victoria continues her vendetta against Bella in *Eclipse*, siring an army of murderous vampires to track and attack the always already vulnerable Bella. And, in *Breaking Dawn*, the lives of Bella and her child are first threatened by pseudo-werewolves and then by Volturi vampires.

Although Gothic novels, from their inception, have always depicted the virtuous female as sexual prey and potential victim of violence, it is important to note, in the Female Gothic,
neither rape nor violence actually occurs (it is only threatened), while, in the Male Gothic, rape and torture are almost always singular events—that is, they occur once and are never repeated (unlike de Sade’s fictions and unlike sadomasochistic ritual). In contrast, within Meyer’s Twilight series, violence (both sexual and otherwise) is not just threatened, but is enacted repeatedly, securely linking Meyer’s novels to sadomasochism. A further distinction lies in the fact that, in the majority of Gothic novels, the male love interest is never violent or abusive; indeed, he is sympathetic, emotional, caring—and this is true in both the Male and Female Gothic. However, as we shall see, the two love interests in Meyer’s series—Edward Cullen and Jacob Black—frequently treat the heroine violently and aggressively; indeed, violence and aggression become synonymous with love.

Love that Hurts: Bella’s Romantic Relationships

As noted above, Twilight’s overwhelming violence toward women is not simply relegated to antagonistic outside forces, but it also plays an integral part in Bella’s intimate relationships with Edward and Jacob. Discussing violence in Twilight, Anne Torkelson summarizes rape culture as “support[ing] male-female power imbalances and even promot[ing] violence against women through a multitude of rape myths, such as that victims are responsible for what happens to them and that violence against women by men is acceptable because ‘boys will be boys’” (211). Equally problematic is the fact that Twilight depicts love as founded upon violence. As Wilson argues, Edward’s “romantic heroism certainly involves a violent type of love—a ‘bruised-lip syndrome’...—that is variously represented as restraining, containing, and
hurting Bella” (123), and Jacob’s wolf-man embraces and probing kisses equally demonstrate rough love.

Since Jacob’s relationship with Bella is never sexually consummated, it is perhaps best to begin with him. In Eclipse, Jacob kisses Bella against her will. While stolen kisses hardly constitute a crime, this is much more than the simple planting of a friendly kiss:

His lips crushed mine, stopping my protest. He kissed me angrily, roughly, his other hand gripping tight around the back of my neck, making escape impossible. I shoved against his chest with all my strength, but he didn’t even seem to notice…I grabbed at his face, trying to push it away, failing again. He seemed to notice this time, though, and it aggravated him. His lips forced mine open. (330-1)

At this point, Bella clearly does not wish to breach their platonic relationship, resisting Jacob’s aggression by unsuccessfully punching him. This results in her broken hand (another injury sustained in a so-called loving relationship). Despite her retaliation, however, she quickly forgives him, and, later in the same novel, when Jacob kisses Bella again, this time with her permission, she suddenly realizes she is in love with him.

This chain of events implies that a woman’s “no” really means “yes,” that Jacob must act the part of aggressor in order for Bella to realize her true feelings for him. Violence, then, is viewed as mere foreplay; it forces the recognition of love. Female unwillingness is construed by the male—and by the female—as mere response to the coy cultural display of feminine passive sexuality, which must be forcibly overcome by male assertiveness and aggression; as Wilson notes, this type of “loving” aggression by men is meant to counter what Rosalind Coward refers
to as ‘the ultimate expression of passive [female] sexuality’” (Wilson 123). In other words, Bella’s enactment of female sexual passivity is assumed to be a cultural gesture that requires a counter gesture (male aggression) so she may get what “she really wants.”

While Jacob’s love for Bella manifests itself in “forced kisses and vice-like hugs” (Wilson 123), Edward’s “loving violence” toward Bella ostensibly occurs in relation to his desire to protect her from himself. (Paradoxically, violence is used to prevent violence.) In their abstinent yet titillating encounters, Edward physically restrains Bella in order to curb his desire for her blood and to prevent his accidentally killing her. He essentially polices her sexuality, but his violent restraint is coded as erotic. The first time they kiss, Edward “pushed my face back” (Twilight 282), from the beginning evincing the couple’s violent sexuality. They refrain from sexual consummation until Breaking Dawn, but their three-novel prolonged foreplay relies on Edward’s violent control over himself and Bella. As Anthea Taylor theorizes, “Edward’s difficulty sublimating his own desire invokes an aggressive masculine sexuality, for which Bella is seen responsible; she routinely apologizes for her scent and promises to avoid doing anything to ‘provoke’ him, reinscribing the ideologically loaded notion that women should be responsible for (the effects of) men’s desire” (39).

The sexual act itself resembles rape and beating, once the virginal couple marries and consummates their love in Breaking Dawn. Violent, first-time sex on their honeymoon results in “large purplish bruises” (89) all over Bella’s body and Edward’s biting a pillow to prevent accidentally vampirizing her (yet another indication of the ever-present danger of their relationship). Though Bella makes light of and masochistically revels in her coital contusions, 

“we might read this encounter as leaving the tell-tale signs of domestic violence—signs that women often need to hide” (Wilson 128). Bella examines her bruised body and dismisses the severity of Edward’s physical violence, attributing the bumps and bruises to her fragility and predisposition to injury:

I’d definitely had worse. There was a faint shadow across one of my cheekbones, and my lips were a little swollen, but other than that, my face was fine. The rest of me was decorated with patches of blue and purple. I concentrated on the bruises that would be the hardest to hide—my arms and my shoulders. They weren’t so bad. My skin marked up easily…Of course, these were just developing. I’d look even worse tomorrow. That would not make things any easier. (95-6).

She refers to the experience as “amazing” (92) despite her bruises, seeking to hide the conspicuous marks of Edward’s sexual violence “so that she can get him to ‘decorate’ her some more” (Wilson 128). As McGeogh notes, Bella “could not discern between pleasure and pain during sex” (93) and “deemphasizes any pain caused by sex to keep Edward from feeling guilty for hurting her” (92-3), self-abnegating to please her controlling mate. During their honeymoon, a “second romp results in another scene that eroticizes abusive sex through violent images such as more bruises, shredded lingerie strewn across the sheets, and a destroyed headboard” (Torkelson 213). Bella’s dismissal of the pain relative to their intimate encounters, while emphasizing the pleasurable aspects, “perpetuates the rape myths that sexual violence is sexy and desired by women” (213). Predictably, the end result of unprotected honeymoon sex is pregnancy and childbirth. Once Bella becomes fatally pregnant, the fetus distends her stomach and rapidly saps her life. She is enervated to the point of death, her spine cracking and heart
barely beating. Her violent labors render her a “broken, bled-out, mangled corpse” (*New Moon* 355), requiring emergency vampirization before her heart stops beating.

Once Bella becomes a vampire, fragile, breakable human Bella is no more. However, her immortal transformation is more than simply a physical change in status—it is a metaphorical one as well, as Bella is now married and a mother. Wilson emphasizes the vampire/human and male/female binaries by noting “[t]he solution for sexualized violence is thus not changing the actions of males or the construction of masculinity, but changing females into vampires, who...follow the dictates of married monogamy—the true safety net for females according to the *Twilight* saga” (Wilson 127). Sexual violence, then, at least in terms of Meyer’s fictional world, halts once a woman becomes wife and mother. (Of course, in real life, this would not be the case.) Heterosexual normativity and conformity to culturally-constructed gender roles thus presumably act as safeguards against sexual violence and predation. Now endowed with the ability to mentally project a tangible shield, Bella’s new vampiric power is only a façade of agency as it affirms, rather than subverts, traditional femininity, as Shachar notes:

> While Bella is “victorious” from one perspective, from another, this is false victory that simply elevates her often morbid and suicidal willingness to destroy herself in the service of others throughout the novels into a mystical veneration of feminine self-sacrifice...One of the most important legacies of such ideas of femininity is of course that to this day, women are still defined in relation to, and in the service of, others; most commonly, their children and husbands. From this perspective, Bella is not simply a manifestation of traditional nineteenth-century ideologies of femininity, but also, a typical heroine of romance. (153-4)
Bella’s gained strength is both reward and result of the pain endured at Edward’s hands; Bella as Massé’s masochistic martyr does achieve her happily ever after, although her power paradoxically confirms her positioning in a subservient and powerless role. Only by conforming to heterosexual marriage and motherhood—females’ appropriate domestic role in patriarchy—does Bella free herself from further physical or emotional harm associated with “love.”

Although the series resolves happily with all enemies defeated and Bella indestructibly strong, her constant victimization derived from breakable human femininity and Edward’s vampirism enacts and enforces patriarchal gender roles. As a result, “the message that Meyer implies is that men must step in, dominate, and protect and women should capitulate, understanding that it is for their own good” (Donnelly 186) because helpless Bella exerts no agency until her vampirization, which is, in and of itself, problematic as it requires capitulation to prescribed essentialist feminine roles.

A Blade to Her Wrists: Bella and Self-Inflicted Pain

In New Moon, the second novel in the Twilight series, Edward attempts to break off his relationship with Bella, in order to protect her from him and others of his vampiric kind. He does so by telling her she is not “good enough” (70) for him. As a self-immolating character who needs Edward for survival, she immediately thinks, “How well I knew that I wasn’t good enough for him” (70). As Chancer notes, sadomasochism is based on “[t]he establishment of a hierarchical division between self and other that rests on the attribution of superiority to the sadist and of inferiority to the masochist. The sadist sets up an unequal relationship with the masochist in which the former is powerful and good, the latter powerless and bad” (55). This is certainly the
case with Edward and Bella, but it does not adequately explain Bella’s self-abuse in Edward’s absence.

Deprived of Edward’s company, Bella intentionally places herself in repeated danger, engaging in suicidal escapades—lying down in a remote section of the forest in cold rain, conversing with strange men, riding and crashing a motorcycle, jumping off a cliff—to cope with his loss and resurrect his memory. Pain is the only way to retain her relationship with Edward; she has no other mementos of his existence. Early on their relationship, Bella recognizes this correlation between her exposure to danger and his presence, so contemplates intentionally endangering herself: “If I had to, I supposed I could purposely put myself in danger to keep him close. . . .” (Twilight 211). After he leaves her, she follows him through the dark forest in pouring rain, telling herself, “If I stopped looking for him, it was over” (73). Shortly thereafter, unable to find him, she succumbs to despair, unwilling and unable to be rescued—though rescued she is, but not by Edward. This occurs in September, and for the next four months—October, November, December, and January—her life has no meaning whatsoever, indicated by the blank pages following each month’s title. Her psychological well-being and sense of self-identity thus rely on his presence, as her narrative ceases in a voiceless passing of time (85-92). Bella’s lack of self, or perception of her lack further attests to her “‘blankness’…that she has no concept of self-identity or belonging without Edward…Bella is a primary example of…traditional passive femininity as a ‘self-less’ being who cannot attain an identity or a place within the world of experience without being defined in relation to the masculine” (Shachar 152-3). Her life possesses meaning only when Edward is around. Without
Edward, Bella realizes “I wasn’t the heroine anymore, that my story was over” (106), and figuratively dies without her beloved.

Once she awakens—as the chapter entitled “Waking Up” (93) delineates—from her self-induced coma, she flocks to Port Angeles with her classmate Jess, where she encounters a group of menacing men reminiscent of those who attempted to rape her in *Twilight*. Repeating her trauma by approaching a stranger resembling one of her former attackers, Bella realizes “this was not the terrible man who had tried to hurt me almost a year ago,” causing her to “suffer a curious sensation of disappointment” (114). Jess asks, “Are you suicidal?” (110), but Bella’s masochistic nature justifies her action; she rationalizes: “It wasn’t like I was taking a blade to my wrists” (111). Her venture into promised pain is rewarded when she gains the pleasure of hearing Edward’s voice in her head: “It was *his* voice” (111). Although this voice cautions her against danger, it paradoxically rewards her at the same time, encouraging her pursuit of other life-threatening situations.

Bella accelerates her campaign of self-destruction when it becomes clear Edward has no intention of returning to Forks. She speaks of their agreement, wherein she promises to keep herself safe, yet desires to rebel at her own expense: “It made feel silly for ever worrying about keeping *my* promise. Where was the logic in sticking to an agreement that had already been violated by the other party? Who cared if I was reckless and stupid? There was no reason to avoid recklessness, no reason why I shouldn’t get to be stupid” (125). Soon, she finds “there are just all kinds of ways to be reckless, and I only now had my eyes open to them” (126). Opening Pandora’s Box, she acquires a motorcycle—“Reckless and stupid. Those were Charlie’s two very favorite words to apply to motorcycles” (127)—and is bent on crashing it. Of course, she hears
the “angry, honey-sweet voice” (187) of Edward ordering her to stop, but she does not, requiring seven stiches in her scalp after her resulting wreck. She compares the recklessness—the danger, the excitement of possible pain—to a previous experience with Edward: “. . . it reminded me of a past life, flying through the thick forest without a road, piggyback while he ran” (190). As always, when physically hurt, Bella attempts to minimize the damage: “‘Trust me. I’m an easy bleeder. It’s not nearly as dire as it looks’” (190).

Next, she deliberately wanders into the forest alone, encountering the vampire Laurent, one of James’s coven. She greets him with “surprised pleasure” (235); she notes, “fear would have made more sense, but all I felt was an overwhelming satisfaction,” as the presence of a vampire proves “he [Edward] did exist” (236). Throughout the encounter, she “hears” Edward speaking to her, coaching her response, until Jacob and his pseudo-werewolf pack can rescue her (again a damsel in distress rescued by a male). For the finale of her escapist endeavors, Bella attempts unaccompanied cliff-diving, though she is completely inexperienced: “I imagined the utter freedom of the fall. . . . I imagined the way Edward’s voice would have sounded in my head—furious, velvet, perfect. . . .” (356). She smugly notes, “I knew that this was the stupidest, most reckless thing I had done yet. The thought made me smile. The pain was already easing, as if my body knew that Edward’s voice was just seconds away” (358). Caught by the current, she hears Edward’s voice, which makes her “so happy” she determines to drown: “I ignored his words and concentrated on the sound of his voice. Why would I fight when I was so happy where I was? . . . I was content. I’d forgotten what real happiness felt like” (361). Again, Jacob saves her.
Bella’s self-inflicted violence serves several functions in terms of self-identity: It physically enacts her emotional pain at the loss of Edward. It replicates the pleasurable pain experienced in her relationship with Edward. It offers contact with him and connection to him. (Conversely, despite the fact that we have been told repeatedly Edward cannot “read” Bella’s mind, readers are led to believe Bella really hears his Edward’s voice—as Jane Eyre hears Mr. Rochester’s—he is somehow telecommunicating through space and time, cautioning her, listening to her thoughts. Whether Bella actually hears Edward is not the point; she thinks she hears him.) Her self-abuse also functions as an appeal for the producer of pain (Edward) to return: If I hurt myself, if I make him feel guilty, maybe he’ll return. New Moon depicts Bella as the masochist who “demand[s] that others recognize and love her precisely for her nonassertion. Her silent suffering becomes her claim to fame” (Massé 48). Bella Swan’s actions speak loudly.

Sadomasochism in the Twilight Series

Of course he wasn’t interested in me…I wasn’t interesting. And he was. Interesting…and brilliant…and mysterious…and perfect…and beautiful…

Stephenie Meyer
Twilight

In the Twilight series, Meyer paints a highly conservative social milieu, which—though not necessarily consistent with or representative of the views of the majority of twenty-first-century Americans—nonetheless articulates the views of a highly visible and vocal portion of the American population. Generally, those views sanction a glancing nod toward female equality (though certainly not toward gender equality), but ultimately seek to legitimize and
restore so-called family values, based on nostalgic views of gender roles, the family, and the community.

Thus, Bella Swan seems—at least on the surface—a reasonably independent and self-sufficient young woman, driving her pick-up truck, wearing jeans and a hoodie, acting the part of mother to her own flighty mother. Bella even voices a wish for equality with Edward, insisting “I can’t always be Lois Lane…I want to be Superman, too” (Twilight 474). However, in attempting to reconceive the Gothic “damsel in distress” in a contemporary setting, Meyer is forced to locate her heroine within twenty-first-century America—not eighteenth-century England—and therein lies, so I would argue, the underlying cause of Twilight’s violence and sadomasochism, for, unlike the eighteenth-century heroine who is severely constricted in terms of personal agency, Bella Swan has choices.

Bella can date nice boys (or nice girls)—like “the overly helpful, chess club type” (Twilight 16) Eric or the “cute, baby-faced boy” (25) Mike—or not-so-nice ones, like domineering Edward and aggressive Jacob. Bella can engage in premarital sex or wait until marriage. Bella can decide whether or not to attend college, or when and if she wants to marry. Bella’s choice is to let Edward decide, despite half-hearted protestations on her part. For instance, Bella argues against early marriage, claiming she does not follow traditional gender roles: “I’m not that girl, Edward. The one who gets married right out of high school like some small-town hick who got knocked up by her boyfriend!…People don’t just get married at eighteen! Not smart people, not responsible, mature people! I wasn’t going to be that girl! That’s not who I am. . . .” (Eclipse 275-76). Nonetheless, Bella allows Edward to decide for her, and she marries him at eighteen. While some part of her resists dominance—“So you can ask for any stupid, ridiculous thing you
want—like getting married—but I’m not allowed to even discuss what I—” (443) (note she is cut off mid-sentence) —she chooses to let Edward have the upper hand; her resentment becomes part of a satisfying display of martyrdom.

To a large extent, then, Bella and Edward (and Bella and Jacob) engage in contractual sadomasochism, as choice is involved; however, the choice also consists of reproducing stereotypical gender roles, which also aligns it with sociocultural sadomasochism. In essentially giving up her right to choose—or, rather, by ceding that right to Edward—she gains self-identity through martyrdom and through performance of traditional feminine attributes. In the following sections, I analyze the dyadic relationships between Edward/Bella and Jacob/Bella, arguing, in the former pairing, Bella acts the part of masochist, and, in the latter pairing, the part of sadist. As the violent nature of both sets of relations has already been established, I will look instead at the ways in which self-worth, control, scopophilia/epistemophilia, and exhibitionism solidify the sadomasochistic relationships in Meyer’s Twilight series.

Not “Good Enough”: Bella as Masochist

Bella Swan perceives her world in dichotomous terms—you/me, talented/average, vampire/human—which structure her self-evaluation and her relationship with Edward. Her identity is constructed around these binaries, as she describes herself an outsider among her peers, unattractive and jealous of beautiful women, and clumsy and weak. Her mantra is “I’d never fit in” (Twilight 10). Additionally, instead of appreciating her unique mental immunity against Edward’s telepathic powers, Bella is conversely disappointed in and critical of herself: “My mind doesn’t work right? I’m a freak?…I’d always suspected as much, and it embarrassed
me to have it confirmed” (Twilight 181). Her self-denigration forms the foundation of her relationship with Edward Cullen, the “beautiful boy” (20) whose “absurdly handsome” looks (27), superior physicality, wealth, and immortality, render him an object of Bella’s admiration. When Edward—initially attracted to her floral-smelling blood—exhibits an interest in Bella, it engenders both self-loathing (through comparison to him and his family) and self-worth (as this vampiric god has chosen her) on Bella’s part. The fact that she is female and he is male further creates a power binary. As Wilson notes, “the vampire/human dyad that the novel circulates around is revealed to represent not only immortal and strong/weak binaries, but also that of male/female” (75). Strikingly similar to Severin’s description of Venus, Bella constantly refers to Edward as a “perfect statue, carved in some unknown stone, smooth like marble” (Twilight 260); “cool as stone” (261) to the touch, he is her personal deity, the vampiric Adonis to Severin’s Venus. Also like Venus, Edward’s coldness renders him aloof, even cruel to Bella when he is physically evasive and emotionally distant.

Recognizing the violent impossibility of their relationship, Edward alludes to the presence of sadomasochistic elements, oddly depicting himself as a masochistic animal of prey. They profess their love for each other—“And so the lion fell in love with the lamb”—then Bella denigrates herself as “a stupid lamb” and Edward admits he is “a sick, masochistic lion” (Twilight 274). He views himself as masochist simply because he is a vampire who should kill Bella for her blood, but, instead, denies himself this pleasure; however, his choice of analogy (the lion and the lamb) and his domineering actions suggest rather the role of sadist. Although Bella consumes him with carnal desire, Edward does not “want to be a monster” (Twilight 187). Yet his words are incongruous with his actions, feigned masochism masking his various sadistic
powers exerted over Bella. He might say he does not want to hurt her—“Bella, I couldn’t live with myself if I ever hurt you. You don’t know how it’s tortured me’’ (Twilight 273)—yet he is the source of violence Bella experiences throughout the series, endangering her life while also paternally restricting her freedom and sexuality.

Tison Pugh reads Edward as initially assuming a sadistic guise, only to later reveal his true masochistic identity; for Pugh, Edward is von Sacher-Masoch’s masochistic initiator. My reading of Meyer’s novels suggests the opposite: Edward’s masochistic platitudes are just that—his actions belie his words; he assumes a masochistic façade only to conceal his true sadistic identity. Even if Edward does play the masochist at certain times, it is important to acknowledge that, within male-female sadomasochism, the male always retains dominance over the “play,” regardless of which role is taken. Thus, even when he leaves Bella for her own good, Edward is the one who makes the decision. In addition, I would argue Edward primarily exhibits sadistic, rather than masochistic, tendencies. Contrasting Pugh’s position, Michel sees Edward as a sadistic villain who, “in addition to reminding Bella verbally about his predatory danger…demonstrates his physical power by tearing up trees and sneaks into Bella’s bedroom to watch her sleep. He follows her on outings with her friends and has his siblings keep watch on her house. He forbids her to see Jacob and tampers with her car to prevent her from disobeying his wishes” (3). Classifying him as a “batterer” (or, in Freudian terms, a beater) who inflicts intimate partner violence, Miller argues these additional behaviors are also exhibited: “jealousy; controlling behavior; quickly involving oneself in a relationship; unrealistic expectations of one’s partner; blaming one’s partner for one’s own feelings; a ‘Jekyll/Hyde/ personality; and the use of any force during a conflict” (168-9). Pugh further explicates the pair’s
“mutually masochistic dynamics” (149), depicting Edward as the masochist who derives pleasure from deferral; he cannot consummate their love (and consume her) until she agrees to marry him in *Breaking Dawn*. Yet this further indicates or can be read as another example of Edward’s sadistic sway over Bella, his assertive abstinence critically curbing her voiced sexual desire.

Edward’s gendered scopophilia/epistemophilia, by dint of his being a male looking at a female, is amplified by his vampirism, and his vampiric strength and speed allow him to restrict (or protect) Bella. Indeed, their difference in strength is highlighted throughout the series, as one wrong move could easily result in Bella’s effortless death:

> Our relationship couldn’t continue to balance, as it did, on the point of a knife. We would fall off one edge or the other, depending entirely upon his decision, or his instincts. My decision was made…and I was committed to seeing it through. Because there was nothing more terrifying to me, more excruciating, than the thought of turning away from him. It was an impossibility. (*Twilight* 248)

Again, she is and perceives herself as passive in contrast with his activity; Edward makes the decisions while Bella must conform to or be inevitably influenced by them.

Perhaps their roles are essentially coded in terms of gender and reflect gendered power structures because he is a superior vampire and she is an inferior human, a binarism that replicates the cultural construct of superior male and inferior female; regardless, their characterization as vampire and human exacerbates sociocultural male sadism and female masochism. Wilson further deconstructs the vampire/human binary in terms of male and female: “Edward’s status as a vampire can be read as encapsulating the male privileges that
patriarchal society affords—he is the one…who has all the power. His word is law; hers is only request” (75). Illustrated in Bella’s attempt at seducing Edward, she is “not allowed to even discuss” (Eclipse 443) her desires, and his admonition silences her. Additionally, Edward’s injecting her with his venom for her vampirization reaffirms the necessity of Bella’s dependence on males (and Edward); she is not transformed by Alice, Rosalie, or Esme.³ Taylor also notes: The threat of (Bella’s) death looms large in every erotically charged encounter in each narrative, but she is not simply the vampire’s unwilling prey. In terms of the sire/sired dynamic, with siring as the ultimate sadomasochistic act, Bella actually willingly embraces transformation…While Edward articulates a fear of “losing control” in a physical sense, and thereby damaging Bella, she is the active masochist seeking to “safely” abandon herself (Benjamin, 1990: 64).⁴ Moreover, the “control, order, and boundary that the master provides are essential to the erotic experience of submission” (Benjamin, 1990: 64). (41)

Echoing the incestuous Electra complex (Edward is, after all, old enough to be her father—or, rather, great-grandfather), martyred masochism, and the predator/prey binary, Bella’s relationship with pedophilic Edward affirms Massé’s gendered sadomasochism.

Edward’s superiority also manifests itself in the form of epistemophilic power over Bella. When Bella is nearly gang-raped in Port Angeles, Edward finds her and conveniently rescues her. As a result of Bella’s own epistemophilic questioning, Edward admits he can read minds, though Bella’s thoughts are an impenetrable anomaly to his psychic abilities. However, 

³ Belonging to the Cullen coven, Alice and Rosalie are Edward’s “adopted” sister and Esme is his “adopted” mother.
overcoming this impediment, he reads the minds of others to detect Bella’s location or to steal bits of her conversations with them. Using his epistemophilia as a GPS device, Edward keeps tabs on her location throughout the entire series, implying that women require masculine supervision and protection, which, in turn, reiterates the male-female binarism. However, Edward’s masculine scopophilia proves the most disconcerting, as Bella responds to it with displays of feminine exhibitionism.

The *Twilight* series frames beauty—as seen and validated through the male gaze—as a hallmark of feminine achievement, and Bella’s envy of attractive women connotes her negative self-perception: She sees herself as less attractive and, thus, less sexually desirable to men in contrast to other females; she describes herself as “average, even for a human, almost shamefully plain” (*New Moon* 65). These defining personal attributes readily predispose her toward jealousy of other women and, paradoxically, toward masochistic exhibitionism. Interestingly, although Bella views herself as “plain,” it is clear she is mistaken, as she immediately attracts the attention of several male classmates, including Edward Cullen himself.

To some extent, this realistically reflects the discomfort many/most women feel about their faces and bodies when compared to the air-brushed images of women in magazines or the Botoxed, starved, and surgically-altered women on television or in film. However, it also enacts the old-fashioned clichéd view of feminine “modesty,” as well as the notion that female beauty, self-regard, and self-identity have no validity unless sanctioned by a male. Bella’s self-abnegation speaks to the prevalent cultural “fact that females are instructed that their role is to please men via their submission to male desire and…the fact that females are framed as objects of titillation for the male gaze” (Wilson 120). Edward proves the most powerful purveyor of the
approving male gaze—at least as far as Bella is concerned—because he possesses personal beauty in the extreme (granting him the authority to judge beauty in others), and because he finds the “plain” Bella an object of desire.

Bella’s introductory encounter with Edward occurs on her first day at Forks High School. Noticing a group of “chalky pale” (Twilight 18) students segregated from the rest of their peers, Bella examines in particular the youngest, the “beautiful boy” (20) who is not romantically coupled with another. Though she is the first to gaze at Edward, evaluating him as an object of desire, he catches her visual appraisal of him and thenceforth gazes at her. While Bella’s initial gaze is sexually coded and more aligned with Severin’s masochism, indicating interest in an unknown and attractive Other, Edward’s “hostile, furious…antagonistic stare” evinces a façade of frustrated condemnation toward her that veils his erotic arousal, “suddenly [going] rigid in his seat” (23) as he stares at her. Unlike Rice’s vampires’ more endearing gaze and “vampire eyes,” “the fact that he ‘suddenly went rigid’ serves as an under-coded message that her presence is an excruciating turn-on” (Wilson 118), Bella as the object and cause of his scopophilic erection.

After this initial phase of conversational scopophilia, however, Edward’s gaze dominates. In their biology class, Bella is assigned to sit next to Edward, who “was leaning away from [her], sitting on the extreme edge of his chair and averting his face like he smelled something bad” (23). In response to his obvious aversion, Bella smells her hair. This action mirrors Mulvey’s and Massé’s explication of the masochistic, exhibitionist woman as groomed to be visually pleasing; Bella thinks she is the cause of his dislike, so superficially examines the acceptance of her physical appearance. Despite—or perhaps because of—Edward’s angry,
reliant stare, Bella recognizes “his face was absurdly handsome— with piercing, hate-filled eyes”; she feels “a thrill of genuine fear” (27), which is nonetheless pleasurable.

Much to Bella’s satisfaction, Edward’s gaze lingers solely on her, ignoring others. Bella thus receives gratification from his exclusive attention. His gaze literally captivates her: “I looked down at my book as soon as his eyes released me…I couldn’t believe the rush of emotion pulsing through me— just because he’d happened to look at me for the first time in a half-dozen weeks” (73-4). Once the relation progresses, Edward watches Bella sleep— initially unbeknownst to her. Rather than finding his predatory stalking alarming, she is “flattered” (Twilight 292). His eyes as phallic organs may be interpreted as scopophilic penetration in their otherwise sexually abstinent relationship. His breaking and entering to watch her sleep becomes paternalistic as Twilight progresses, guarding Bella when she is in mortal danger and pursued by enemy vampires. His scopophilia in this context then takes “the controlling male gaze and render[s] it both protective and erotic— Edward’s watchful ways keep Bella safe” (Wilson 120) because she is both a damsel in constant distress and an object of desire.

“Every girl, and every Gothic heroine, learns that it is only in the mirror of his regard that she exists” (Massé 90), yet a problem occurs with Edward’s constant surveillance: Bella will age, while Edward will not, a fact she soon recognizes and learns to fear. Culturally, while men can age and still be viewed as sexy and vital, women cannot. As Wilson remarks, Twilight “upholds traditional notions about age, suggesting that younger females are best paired with older males” (119). Although a 100-year age gap exists between Bella and Edward, Edward remains a perpetually youthful seventeen in looks, and Bella fears turning eighteen and becoming too old for him, at least in terms of looks and beauty. At the beginning of New Moon,
Bella has a nightmare in which she has become her grandmother. Her “ancient, creased, and withered” (6) visage, a memento mori of her female aging, juxtaposes itself against Edward’s masculine agelessness. Bella’s fear of aging and dying—of outliving Edward—confirms our culture’s “obsession with youth…as entirely normal, as something every female should desire” (Wilson 51). Bella articulates a cultural fear (or reality)—as women age, the validating male gaze directs its attention elsewhere; it reaffirms the sociocultural obsession with feminine sexual attractiveness and, by extension, eternal youth. This issue is resolved only when Bella becomes an ageless vampire, forever eighteen.

An interesting portrayal of the vampire/human dichotomy is depicted when Bella observes herself in a mirror (ignoring the vampiric lore of non-reflection) after her transformation. Bella’s voice—her narration—is still human; she perceives her new self similarly to how she masochistically describes Edward and the Cullens—as “a carving of a goddess” (403); she becomes her own Venus. She does not realize the reflection is her own, and seeks to find her human attributes: “I stared at the beautiful woman with the terrifying eyes, looking for pieces of me…and turned my back on the strange and beautiful woman in the mirror” (405-6). For a moment, Bella simultaneously exists as sadist and masochist, as Venus and Severin. In addition, it seems Bella resolves the vampire/human binary in her ability to control her newborn impulses to kill, hybridizing vampire and human characteristics in herself and also in daughter Renesmee. If Bella’s vampiric transformation metaphorically translates to acceptance of the roles of wife and mother, then she becomes powerful in those roles, with her former (human) unmarried self in awe of her newfound strength, yet with the (vampiric) wife/mother sympathetic to former struggles. Vampire Bella is beautiful and strong, her human
shortcomings erased, and she no longer denigrates herself: “As a human, I’d never been best at anything...After eighteen years of mediocrity, I was pretty used to being average...never quite fitting into my world. I was amazing now...It was like I had been born to be a vampire...I had found my true place in the world, the place I fit” (Breaking Dawn 523-4). While “vampire” codes to “male” throughout most of the series, it also codes to “wife/mother” in Bella’s case.

Perhaps Bella’s humanity is grafted onto her vampirism, and, by extension, her sadomasochistic roles (sadism toward Jacob and masochism toward Edward) and even the series’ overarching gender inequality are also resolved through her vampirization. Bella is no longer a damsel in distress, her sexuality no longer policed by Edward nor her corporeal self in need of paternal protection. Edward no longer exerts a sadistic role over Bella and she sees herself as his vampiric equal—“‘it just seems logical . . . a man and woman have to be somewhat equal . . . as in, one of them can’t always be swooping in and saving the other one. They have to save each other equally” (Twilight 474). Though her vampiric agency is interpreted as problematic (she becomes a vampire through married monogamy and maternity, upholding traditional female roles), Bella’s masochism—her martyred submission to Edward’s sadism and dying for him—pleaserably results in her happily ever after, the contract fulfilled and roles of beater/biter and beaten/bitten dissolved.

“Within My Power”: Bella as Sadist

Massé cites the female masochist’s tendency to “appropriate the power of the sadist” (51) as an “overt expression of the masochist’s need to see her own existence confirmed through
her effects on others” (50); she adds, “[t]he most overt expression of the masochist’s need to see her own existence confirmed through her effects on others is when her masochism temporarily becomes its active twin instinct, sadism” (50). When Edward leaves her in New Moon, Bella becomes sadist, projecting her need for psychological wholeness onto Jacob.

Similar to Edward’s and Bella’s relevant sadomasochistic roles (both are symbiotic and highly relevant to both sadist and masochist), Bella’s and Jacob’s roles are mutually dependent; her sadism is only expressed in relation to Jacob as victim, when his otherwise alpha male/wolf status and independence is negated through submission to Bella. Rather than their relationship reflecting sociocultural sadomasochism in which Bella’s passivity reflects both traditional gender roles and ingrained female masochism, Bella’s and Jacob’s sadomasochism is explicitly contractual, with Bella as the initiator and Jacob illustrating Deleuzian masochism through his pleasurable postponement of winning Bella’s love. Notably, Bella takes on the role of cruel Venus, though this role, while granting her the power of the sadist, also raises the question of her ultimate sadistic agency, particularly as she models herself upon Edward’s sadistic eroticism.

After first meeting Edward and becoming curious about his inhuman abilities, Bella seeks information about him and the Cullens from Jacob. Though quickly maturing, Jacob is several years younger than Bella and culturally positioned as Native American Other, both of which allow Bella to assume a position of relative superiority. She deliberately exploits Jacob’s attraction to her by appropriating the erotic objectification of Edward’s gaze: “I hoped that young Jacob was as yet inexperienced around girls, so that he wouldn’t see through my sure-to-be-pitiful attempts at flirting…[I] tried to imitate that way Edward had of looking up from
underneath his eyelashes. It couldn’t have nearly the same effect, I was sure, but Jacob jumped up willingly enough” (Twilight 122). Bella effectively imbibes and reproduces Edward’s scopophilia/epistemophilia as a successful means of exerting power, and Jacob readily submits to her flirtatious attentions. After Bella acquires the knowledge she seeks concerning Edward, she is “extremely grateful to Jacob, and eager to make him as happy as possible,” feeling guilty “knowing that [she]’d used him” (127). However, this guilt diminishes as their relationship progresses throughout the series, both characters vacillating between love and hate for each other as Bella’s sadism informs Jacob’s masochism.

Once Edward leaves Bella in New Moon, she becomes best friends with Jacob, spending time with him to distract from the gaping emotional damage Edward’s flight has wrought in her. Despite the sentiment not being requited, Jacob perceives their relationship as more than platonic, constantly professing his love for Bella. She admits she cares for him, reveling in his physical warmth and unconditional friendship, which consequently increases his affection for her. Although she refuses to view Jacob as love object, she considers him her possession and encourages his attentions: “He was not my Jacob, but he could be…In so many real ways, I did love him…Right now, I could choose to have him belong to me” (411). She also revels in her power over him: “I could stake a claim. I had that much within my power” (375). Bella becomes accustomed to the emotional and physical intimacy between her and Jacob (i.e. he puts his arm around her), but denies him the sexual consummation he desires, just as Edward denies Bella’s desire to sexually consummate their relationship.

Eclipse opens with a strained letter from Jacob relating his pained pining for Bella. Just as Edward left Bella, resulting in her catatonic depression, so too does Bella leave Jacob. However,
despite her return to Edward’s cold but strong arms, she wants to keep Jacob around as well—and the latter agrees to the arrangement, forcing Bella to pronounce Jacob “a glutton for punishment” (Eclipse 329). Indeed, “a sadomasochistic relationship is comprehensible, if not desirable [to Jacob], and he contemplates further possibilities for Bella to inflict pain upon him so that their friendship will cohere to the sadomasochistic parameters he has come to expect” (Pugh 152).

Yet Bella, perhaps because she is female, does not possess full mastery over the role of sadist. Like Severin with Wanda/Venus, Jacob often appears to control the sadomasochistic “script.” When Jacob take liberties with his and Bella’s relationship, she reacts as cold Venus—but she also is not in control: “I let my hands drop to my side, and shut down. I opened my eyes and didn’t fight, didn’t feel…just waited for him to stop…he pressed his lips softly to mine again, once, twice…and a third time. I pretended I was a statue and waited” (331). In addition, she must constantly deploy the threat of Edward as a weapon in order to sustain the role of sadist, as when she retorts: “‘I can’t wait to see what Edward does to you! I hope he snaps your neck, you pushy, obnoxious, moronic DOG!...I hate you, Jacob Black’” (332). Finally, Bella’s realization she is actually in love with Jacob endangers her sadistic pleasures and undermines her sadistic control, as she masochistically “hope[s] [she] would really suffer” (528) for her previous cruelty toward Jacob. As Pugh writes, “Despite the sadomasochistic torment Bella inflicts upon him, Jacob realizes that Bella’s more natural role is masochistic rather than sadistic” (152). In sum, Bella is not much of a sadist—she really needs Edward to help her with that, especially because she does not possess the masculine strength required to effectively physically beat Jacob.
At the beginning of *Breaking Dawn*, Edward and Bella marry, allowing Jacob to reengage with the role of masochist. Once Jacob learns of Bella’s dangerous pregnancy, he rushes to see her, acknowledging, “As much as I knew it was a stupid thing to do, I couldn’t stop myself. I must be some kind of masochist” (291). Bella’s willing return to Edward—and to her role as masochist—inflicts (sadistic) pain on Jacob, as does her urging of Edward to hurt her former best friend. Whenever Jacob displeases her, Bella wants Edward to kill him; her desire to view her beater beating another (Jacob) further enacts her sadism—but only via the agency of the beater, who is not Bella. This rivalry correlates to the beating fantasy’s first stage—“My father is beating the child whom I hate” (Massé 67)—leaving Bella in the role of sadistic spectator. In addition, the competition Bella creates between Edward and Jacob reconstructs the traditional gender narrative of mating males as natural enemies (vampire versus wolf), vying to display their male prowess and strength for the observing female prize. Ultimately, with the *Twilight* series, all romantic relationships inevitably dissolve to prioritize the series’ patriarchal politics of male sadism and female masochism: Bella will return to Edward, and Jacob will learn to play the role of dominating male protector to Bella’s and Edward’s daughter Renesmee.

Whether as masochist or sadist, Bella always relies on a male for her construction and maintenance of self-identity: “It had not been Edward and Jacob that I’d been trying to force together, it was the two parts of myself, Edward’s Bella and Jacob’s Bella. But they could not exist together, and I never should have tried” (*Eclipse* 608). Bella is not independent, her identity bifurcated to be either possessed by Edward or to possess Jacob, to be beaten or beater. Ultimately adhering to the role of beaten/bitten, Bella is a “‘normal’ female [who] must find her
pleasure in pain, satisfy active strivings through passivity, and know her subjectivity only through an other” (Massé 77).

Given Bella’s wavering roles, with which does the audience, the third-party spectator of the beating triangle, identify—the beater or beaten? Bella’s “vicarious identification with power (‘My father is beating the child whom I hate’) and with subordination (‘My father is beating/loving me’) exists to satisfy her own needs” (Massé 72), namely, her need for psychological and emotional cohesion. As Deleuze writes, “the art of suspense always places us on the side of the victim and forces us to identify with him, whereas the gathering momentum of repetition tends to force us onto the side of the torturer and make us identify with the sadistic hero” (34). If this is the case, then both Jacob as Bella’s victim and Edward as Bella’s torturer should prove equally compelling to readers and moviegoers—and this is indeed the case. Perhaps the audience’s reception and identification are framed by their choice of Edward or Jacob as triumphant romantic hero, as “fans’ response to this triangulation of desire, including their Team Edward, Team Jacob…camps, frame readers as actively choosing their ‘hero’ rather than letting the narrative do it for them” (Wilson 58). In either case, with either love object, sadomasochistic behavior becomes the romantic norm in this young adult series.
**Child-Women: Infantilizing the Woman, Sexualizing the Child**

“You think you’ll be part of my family as my son-in-law!” I screeched…

“No!” Jacob was insisting at the same time.

“How can you even look at it that way? She’s just a baby, for crying out loud!”

“That’s my point!” I yelled.

Stephenie Meyer  
*Breaking Dawn*

As Platt writes, “[b]ecause YA [young adult] fiction often focuses on the transition from childhood to adulthood through significant life experiences, the figure of the teenage girl has come to symbolize both childhood and womanhood, allowing young female protagonists to be simultaneously infantilized and sexualized, reflecting a gender ideology that likens women to children while also viewing them as sexual objects” (74). In the *Twilight* series, Bella is often depicted in ways that infantilize her, despite the fact that she mothers her own mother and becomes a mother herself. This is seen most frequently in terms of her fragile physicality and in her inability to make adult choices without Edward’s help. However, the problematic depiction of the child-woman attains perverse and extreme articulation through the character of Renesmee. This vampire-human hybrid will achieve physical adulthood by the age of seven, at which time it is expected she will marry pseudo-werewolf Jacob Black. The Quileute (male) wolves—of whom Jacob is a member—imprint on female babies as their soul mates, which, in turn, exacerbates the series’ heteronormative monogamous themes by introducing pedophilia. Even at six months old (and large for her age), Renesmee, imprinted on by Jacob, becomes the object of Jacob’s scopophilic gaze and, as Bella puts it, he believes he holds “‘some moronic wolfy claim to her’” (449). In the character of Renesmee, Meyer rewrites Rice’s vampire child Claudia, yet, while each child-woman/woman-child has contrasting attributes, both represent
constructed and constricting roles associated with the feminine and the literal and metaphorical infantilization of women within patriarchal societies.

Bella as Child-Woman: The Infantilization of Women

In New Moon, after Edward deserts her in the middle of a forest and abandons Forks altogether, leaving her alone to self-destruct, Bella loses consciousness (recurring loss of consciousness also paralleling women’s stereotypical tendency to faint). Bella becomes emotionally debilitated as a result of Edward’s exodus, uttering these last lines before four months of narrative silence: “The waves of pain that had only lapped at me before now reared high up and washed over my head, pulling me under. I did not resurface” (84). So dependent on Edward for her emotional well-being, Bella-minus-E dward regresses to a state of infancy, miserable and unable to care for herself due to his abandonment: “Bella, because she is the weak and vulnerable one, is in constant need of care and protection...if she is to survive, they must be together” (Miller 167-8). Her comatose cataclysm further affirms both her role as damsel in distress and confirms her reliance on men, depicting females as victims and/or emotional babies. However, it is Bella’s physical vulnerability which most often suggests her infantilization within these novels.

In the opening pages of Twilight, Bella introduces herself as uncoordinated and unathletic: “I had always been slender, but somehow, obviously not an athlete; I didn’t have the necessary hand-eye coordination to play sports without humiliating myself—and harming both myself and anyone else who stood too close” (10). This negative self-prescription is emphasized in Edward’s characterization of her as “incredibly breakable” (Twilight 310), necessitating his
paternal protection as a result. Her fragility and dependence on others is most obvious in Edward’s “cradling her, carrying her…even strapping her into her car seat” (Wilson 96).

Although Bella’s gender is not acknowledged as the reason for her frailty, Twilight’s traditional male and female roles depict masculinity as powerful and femininity as powerless, as Miller explains:

. . . male characters have roles or occupations that establish and support their strength, rationality, and protector status (i.e., police chief, town doctor, or tribal elder). Meanwhile, female characters in Twilight are symbolically annihilated; they are largely trivialized and either “symbolized as child-like adornments who need to be protected or they are dismissed to the protective confines of the home.” (166)

Incapable of protecting herself from adverse situations caused by her own actions or by the actions of others, Bella as traditional female and damsel in distress thus must (fall victim to or) be taken care of by males. Therefore, the masochistic female functions, in many respects, as a child—a child who wishes to be both beaten and saved by the beater.

Renesmee as Woman-Child: The Sexualization of Children

Renesmee borrows from Anne Rice’s Claudia, inverting the latter’s age and development. Claudia’s vampiric life begins at age five, through the blood-sucking “birthing” by two fathers, Louis and Lestat; heinously stunted, she remains trapped in the body of a five-year-old, while her mental and emotional faculties reach full maturation. In contrast, Renesmee’s vampiric/human birth occurs naturally (or unnaturally given Bella’s violent

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labors), the product of heterosexual liaison, and her rapid physical growth (she will reach 
physical—and presumably sexual—maturation by age seven) belies the mental and emotional 
child within.

“Immortal children” (547), vampirized at a young age like Rice’s Claudia, are an 
abomination in Meyer’s world. The Volturi destroy these infantile vampires due to their 
inability to “be taught. They were frozen at whatever level of development they’d achieved 
before being bitten” (34). In contrast to Claudia, these children never grow but remain mentally 
and emotionally frozen at their stunted corporeal age. Unlike Claudia who desires to become 
more than a doll, Meyer’s child vampires only desire to feed “and no words of warning could 
restrain them” (34). These are children, physically and psychologically, and, thus, do not 
possess—or at least do not appear to possess—the problematic patriarchal and cultural 
implications of Claudia and Renesmee. As anti-Claudia, Renesmee possesses adult traits, 
though an infant:

At three months, Renesmee could have been a big one-year-old, or a small two-year-old. 
She wasn’t shaped exactly like a toddler; she was leaner and more graceful, her 
proportions were more even, like an adult’s…Renesmee could speak with flawless 
grammar and articulation, but she rarely bothered, preferring to simply show people 
what she wanted. She could not only walk but run and dance. She could even read. (529) 

Bella’s description of her child’s body as proportionally “like an adult’s” problematically 
emphasizes Renesmee’s paradoxical construction as a child in a woman’s body, and, despite the 
novel’s insistence on her psychological and intellectual growth equaling her physical growth, 
she remains a child in terms of experiential learning, emotional growth, and chronological age.
At age seven, Renesmee will remain a child though in a woman’s body. Although Renesmee’s mind will eventually catch up with her body (something that Claudia’s body could never do with her mind), it is undeniable that the future of Renesmee’s mind, body, and self-identity have already been secured at the age of six months—by Jacob.

In order to understand the full implications of Renesmee’s infant indoctrination into patriarchy, it is important to explore the patrilineal undertones of Bella’s pregnancy. To begin with, Edward’s ability to reproduce is Meyer’s unique addition to the otherwise sterile vampires of legend; prior to the Cullens, vampiric reproduction is only through blood-siring, not sex. Meyer’s vampires, however, combine married monogamy and human procreation with the male vampire’s phallic penetration (not just dental but also genital). Only male vampires are equipped with genital procreative abilities; *Twilight*’s female vampires are sterile because their cycles of menstruation and ovulation are lost in their vampiric transformation, while male vampires remain fertile due to Meyer’s (erroneous) belief that semen production does not undergo cyclical changes. (Apparently, cyclical rhythms of all kinds cease once one becomes a *Twilight* vampire, including sleeping and breathing.) Averill explicates:

So, unlike their female counterparts, their [male vampire] fertility continues…it is worth noting that the claim Meyer makes in regard to the male body not requiring ‘change’ to produce sperm is a false assertion. Like the cycles of menstruation, sperm require functioning and producing systems. It is equally interesting that Meyer disregards or elevates male reproduction above this need for change. (234)
Though Edward does not realize it is possible to impregnate a human when he consummates his marriage to Bella, male vampires are clearly constructed as the superior sex because Meyer’s vampires further promote patriarchal (reproductive) privilege.7

Inside the womb, Renesmee exhibits “remarkably developed faculties” (339). Renesmee’s rapid growth is complemented by her power to produce visions, her telepathic agency a reversal of Edward’s mind-reading epistemophilia. Before developing the ability to speak, Renesmee is able to communicate by conjuring images and projecting them into other’s minds: “She showed me that…” ‘It was the only memory she had of you’…It was obvious he’d seen what she was showing me as she thought of it” (Breaking Dawn 446). This interestingly illustrates and inverts our model of Edward’s scopophilia/epistemophilia, as Renesmee serves as both subject channeling the images she sees and as object being seen through. Others view her visions, positioning her as exhibitionist and upholding the male/female sadist/masochist dyad; however, these visions reproduce what she sees/ knows, thus fusing scopophilia/epistemophilia with exhibitionism. This power is her communicative agency as an infant, and through it she is able to speak with and understand others. Perhaps her hybridity as vampire-human deconstructs these binaries between viewer/viewed and knowing/known, similarly to how Bella’s sadomasochistic relationships are dissolved—or at least mitigated—by her vampirization.

7 In many respects, this fiction of the potency of the male vampiric “seed” is akin to the all-male birth fantasy, such as depicted in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein and Margaret Atwood’s MaddAddam trilogy. Notably, Renesmee is born sexually sterile (like a mule) because of the crossbreeding, and her vampire venom cannot transform humans, doubly depriving her of fertility. Similarly, Rice’s Claudia is unable to create a vampire, as she possesses the inferior strength of a child (and a female), and so must rely on a man’s (Louis) reproductive abilities. (However, Meyer’s only other vampire-human hybrid is male, who, despite his paralleled position, is curiously endowed with potent venom.)
Nonetheless, Renesmee is also subjected to Jacob’s imprinting as the object of his scopophilic gaze. Similar to animals imprinting on their mothers or mates, the Quileute wolves imprint on their female beloveds, further propagating the series’ overarching heteronormativity, older male/younger female pairings, and “soul mate” monogamous marriages. Though Jacob functions as masochist in his relationship with Bella, his unrequited love for Bella requires resolution, and so is projected onto/transferred to Renesmee when he first sees Bella’s child as an infant: “It was the baby girl in the blond vampire’s arms that held me here now. Renesmee” (360). There is no real choice involved for imprinted girls, yet, as Meyer would have it, they love their wolf patriarchs, as Donnelly notes:

There is no room for question and no way out for the chosen wolf...With imprinting, the female technically has a choice but it is assumed she would never want to decline the male wolf’s attentions...She is passive, chosen, and bound by his destiny. What’s even more disturbing is that this ‘imprinting’ can often occur with children, even infants. These young girls are bound to grown men before they even have a sense of self; destined to become wives and mothers with no real chance to date or explore themselves before making a lifetime commitment. (188)

The imprinting gaze is not overtly sexual in its inception, but, rather, protective, dominating, and possessive; however, it is implicitly sexual, as the female infant child has already been chosen as mate and love object. Meyer’s series implies that Renesmee will become Jacob’s wife/lover—akin to Claudia as Louis’s child bride—in six years’ time, once she reaches physical maturation. Bella reacts with violence (due to maternal protection, jealousy, sadism, or some combination thereof) once she interprets Jacob’s scopophilic imprinting of her daughter: “I
puzzled over it, watching him stare at my daughter. Staring at her like...like he was a blind man seeing the sun for the very first time...‘You stupid mutt! How could you? My baby!’” (448-9). Nonetheless, Breaking Dawn views Bella’s outrage as cute and even laughable, as it offers Jacob the compensatory prize of the infant girl child. Although Meyer clearly seeks to rewrite Claudia more positively through the character of Renesmee (as Renesmee is not killed and the Twilight series ends happily ever after), this pedophilic subtext between imprinted child and adult imprinter paradoxically parallels Rice’s vampires, with Louis simultaneously functioning as Claudia’s mother/father and lover. While Renesmee is not considered the monstrous-feminine, as she does not attempt to subvert patriarchy and so lives happily ever after, her characterization engenders similar implications as Claudia’s.

As both a physically mature baby and scopophilic object, Renesmee exhibits “what Durham calls the ‘pretty babies’ syndrome,” in which “the sexualization of young females allows for a ‘regressive and oppressive gender politics’ and ‘a version of sex that is disempowering and objectifying’ (55, 118)” (Wilson 120).⁸ As Durham writes, “[l]little girls fit more easily into a conventional mold of female sexuality: a perspective in which she lacks authority over her own body and is therefore less threatening than any adult woman today. Because of this, little girls epitomize a patriarchal society’s ideal of compliant, docile sexuality” (129). Claudia and Renesmee are thus child-women, one a woman in a child’s body and the other a child in a woman’s body, while Bella is an adult woman who acts the part of a child. Females, regardless of age, are thus regarded simultaneously as perpetual infants and sexual objects, easily controllable by their paternal patriarchs.

Conclusion

The indelible impression the *Twilight* series has left on the public imagination is impossible to ignore, as its literary incarnation “has sold more than 85 million copies worldwide and has been translated into 37 languages…Together the four books have spent 235 weeks on the *New York Times* best-seller list” (Click, Aubrey, and Behm-Morawitz 3). Additionally, it is one of the highest-grossing film series, *Twilight* alone breaking box-office records with $69.6 million its first weekend and a total of $351.5 million internationally, while “*New Moon* earned $709.8 million worldwide” (Parke 37). Reaching a fanbase predominantly composed of females (both young and old!), the *Twilight* series has generated much reception, both positive and negative, both fanatical and critical. The franchise has spawned innumerable websites devoted to self-named Twi-hard fan discussion (from *The Twilight Lexicon* to *Twilight Moms*); conventions (Twi-Con); tourism to Forks, Washington; and merchandising (Wilson 6-8, 191). The problem, of course, is the fact that the franchise reproduces and perpetuates gender inequality through male sadism and female masochism, and the popularity of the *Twilight* books and movies suggests a disturbing acceptance of both in twenty-first-century American culture, a point to be discussed more thoroughly in the conclusion of this thesis.
Afterward/Afterword: Readers’ Responses to the Franchises

While I have heretofore focused on sadomasochistic relationships present in *Interview with the Vampire* and the *Twilight* series, I have not yet considered the spectator’s participatory role in these beating fantasies. Readers witness the drama and its characters, and consequently interact with the text through identification and interpretation. If the “text is a fetish object” (Barthes 27) from which readers derive psychological and physiological pleasure or bliss, then what do readers gain or experience from reading these novels about vampires and humans who engage in gendered sadomasochism? Given both franchises’ indubitable impact on popular culture, I will examine readers’ responses to Anne Rice’s and Stephenie Meyer’s vampires, what their vampires represent, and their genre classification as adult and young adult literature.

*Homophobia?: The Vampire Chronicles and Readers*

*Women do not walk up to me on the street and say, “How could you write pornography?”*

*They're very supportive.*

Anne Rice
(as qtd. in Riley, *Conversations with Anne Rice*)

Spanning almost three decades and catapulting Anne Rice to international acclaim as one of the most famous (or infamous) contemporary writers of vampire literature, *The Vampire Chronicles* series has sold over 80 million copies (Husband). At the time of its publication, however, *Interview with the Vampire* was initially met without much success because Rice was unknown and previously unpublished, but the novel gained immense popularity the following year. Indeed, her subsequent novels were met with much greater reception, as Rice’s reputation
was established and *The Vampire Lestat* “became a best-seller the first week it was released. *The Queen of the Damned* (1988) went to the top of *The New York Times* best-seller lists during its first week of publication, and stayed in the lists for seventeen weeks, far outselling (at 400,000 copies) the previous novels in the series. None of these novels has since been out of print” (Gelder 108). The novels’ launches were publicized events with “an extensive tour, coffin-shaped book displays, T-shirts” (Gelder 108), all involving fans in the series’ publication—devotees even congregate at a yearly convention hosted by the Vampire Lestat Fan Club in New Orleans. *Interview with the Vampire* was also adapted into a film in 1994, as was *The Queen of the Damned* in 2002. Still alive in the public imagination, Rice’s vampires have seduced its varied audience—women and men of varied sexual and gender preferences—and an analysis of readers’ responses to the series highlights both the novels’ negative and positive interpretations.

Employing the vampiric figure to transgress cultural mores, *Interview with the Vampire* indeed portrays non-normative sexuality in its focus on male-male desire and the perverted triangular family; without actually detailing sexual intercourse, Rice’s Gothic erotics delve into taboos of late twentieth-century America (and of today) —homosexuality, incest, pedophilia, necrophilia. However subversive of heteronormativity, the series nonetheless reads as a problematic representation of traditional gender roles (as discussed in chapter one) and of homophobia/heterosexism.

George Haggerty reads Rice’s novels as queer; queer theory is defined by Auerbach as “an abstraction of a political surge toward self-definition and determination” (182), or that which defies social constructions and instead seeks to construct its own identity. As figures who
interrogate and usurp social mores, Rice’s vampires lie outside of mainstream culture, queerly inhabiting the shadows. However, while her glamorous gay vampires are attractive to readers and even invite identification with their hedonistic bourgeois lifestyle, Rice also “makes Lestat our culture’s prototypical gay predator, roving in the darkness with an insatiable appetite that is usually satisfied by the blood of a troubled but beautiful male” (Haggerty 5). As a result, “Rice’s vampires express our culture’s secret desire for and secret fear of the gay man; the need…to see him bleed and watch him succumb to death-in-life” (6). Immortal and alluring, the gay vampire is the conservative ideologue’s worst nightmare.

The gay vampire’s eternity-long nightlife of unpunished indulgence in his most illicit desires is enticing; yet there is also the fear of contracted disease, of being prey to the homosexual (vampire) and becoming one. While Dracula’s vampires expressed Victorian fears of the New Woman and racial miscegenation, Rice’s vampires instead speak to a different contagion—the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. Transmitted primarily through blood and (unprotected) sexual intercourse, AIDS is incurable and often fatal (while its preceding stages of HIV are controllable). Given the disease’s discovery in the 80s, its causes were generally unknown then, and gay men were fallaciously scapegoated for their presumed promiscuity and sexual orientation. Although homosexuals have always been discriminated against, AIDS paranoia exacerbated their persecution, and so Rice’s gay vampires came to “perpetuate the popular misconception that sexual deviancy causes HIV/AIDS” (Fink 417). Indeed, as Keller notes, “the vampires’ appearances are reminiscent of what is called ‘wasting’ in the final stages of AIDS. The vampires are pale, thin, and gaunt” (35). Lestat as predatory vampire who attacks
and vampirizes Louis and others thus fuels the homophobic belief of “the vindictive, unprincipled homosexual who consciously spreads the disease to his sexual partners out of resentment for his own condition” (36), particularly because “an erotic encounter with one of the vampires either kills immediately or produces another walking carcass” (35). Lestat’s gay vampirism is thus simultaneously attractive in his orgiastic abandon yet also horrific in his homoerotic conversions.

Continuing a heterosexist script, Interview with the Vampire depicts Lestat as a sadistic killer, utterly unsympathetic to Louis’s human plights. In so doing, Rice represents homosexual relationships—as opposed to heterosexual ones—as destructive and dissatisfying. Haggerty similarly comments:

For all the homoerotics of these volumes, Rice seems unable to create a bond between two men that is more than the symptom of a corrupt and corrupting culture. Even in creating moments of the most intense intimacy or of unbridled sexual attraction, Rice insists on the repulsion that homosexuality regularly breeds in the minds of fundamentalist politicians and other members of the extreme right. (14)

All of Louis’s relationships become strained, whether with Lestat, Claudia, or Armand; despite his initial love and passion, he ends up “‘[l]ocked together in hatred’” (Rice 115) with his companions.

Additionally, Rice’s queer vampire family collapses into an Oedipal tragedy. Reading Claudia as a gay adoption, Keller expresses the homophobic view hinted by this triangulated relationship: “She is the child of two men, and her growth has been stunted. The implications of
this portrayal are truly hostile to gay parental rights, perpetuating the myth that a child within a same-sex relationship cannot mature in a normative fashion” (19). Further, Rice’s depiction of Louis and Claudia as both parent/child and lovers might suggest the damaging “association of gays and lesbians with pedophilic” (23) and incestuous desire. Pedophilia is also represented by the homoerotic relationship between Armand and Denis (and Lestat’s love of boys), moreover indicative of the gay male as perverting children.

Nevertheless, Rice’s novels have produced a cult following. Rather than conforming to regressive sexual politics, Rice “views vampires as affording a gender-free perspective, or images of ‘lovers as equals’”—despite their relationships’ sadomasochistic underpinnings—and perceives them as “equally franchised human beings” (Ramsland 148). Rice’s resurrection of the revenant is manifest in sexual fantasy—especially exhibited in the Théâtre des Vampires—and decadent debauchery. Because the series alternates narrators in several of the novels, readers become enrapt in the undead universe of Rice’s creation, able to assume different characters’ exciting existences. Just as the theater offers a spectacle in which the audience lives vicariously, so too does Rice’s series provide “sadomasochistic pleasures, fantasies of power and surrender”; Doane and Hodges elaborate: “[T]he reader, like the vampire, has godlike powers to surrender safely. No virus contaminates the exchanges of blood in these vampire stories, nor the exchanges of pleasure between text and the reader. But the story at the same time encourages anxieties about being eaten up” (436), which is irresistibly coded as seductive and erotic. Indeed, readers “desire a voyeuristic participation in something they want to believe and
disbelieve at the same time. Their attraction to these creatures of the night is also a repulsion” (Haggerty 8), as indicated above, while conversely magnetic.

Different meanings are imbibed depending on the reader. A homophobic audience might condemn Rice’s vampires as depicting a gay world which impinges on the heteronormative order and is appropriately punished for its viral violations. A feminist reader might criticize Rice’s privileging of patriarchal homosocial relations. Keller also suggests that, through her transgressive revamping of the vampire, Rice might instead wish to use her “horror fiction to frighten...to spook...the heterosexist, middle-class people who regard homosexuality as an insidious threat to the family politics and as a danger to the normative sexual development of their children” (38). Her series offers controversial and contradictory messages, yet readers are clearly smitten with—and bitten by—her vampires.

Happily Ever After: Twilight’s Appeal to Readers

I never think about another audience besides myself while I’m writing.

Stephenie Meyer
Interview with Readers Read

Given Twilight’s pervasive popularity, a closer analysis of its numbers’ significance might bring to light—and sparkle—the reasons behind the audience’s attraction to the series. Its fans are predominantly female, but are not confined to a single age group, from tweens to mothers and even grandmothers! As gendered spectators of Twilight’s sadomasochistic beating drama, female readers’ captivation with the series has contentious implications given their identification with the heroine.
Essentially about the fulfillment of heterosexual love, *Twilight* follows the formulaic construction of romance novels wherein “traditional masculinity is good for women” (Wilson 84); the female is submissive to the male, whose dominating masculine power is also paired with doting tenderness. Conforming to this description, both Edward and Jacob are infinitely more physically powerful than human Bella, while also in love with and protective of her. However, these representations of desirable lovers are problematic in their portrayal of “domineering, condescending boyfriend (Edward) as irresistible and a violent, hypermasculine aggressor as best-friend material (Jacob). These two characters are what bring Bella the most happiness in the text” (Wilson 84), promoting these romantic heroes and their subsequent sadomasochistic roles as desirable to readers. Because spectators identify with Bella and adhere to these romantic tropes, then her consenting to forgo sex until marriage in obeisance to Edward’s demands “suggests passive female sexuality leads to a happy ending, and...that patriarchal relationship models are beneficial. Bella’s story also emphasizes the inevitability and endurance of ‘true love’” (Wilson 118), promoting messages of conjugal fidelity, maternal bliss, and quaint happily ever afters.

Rather than interpreted as a sadistic spouse, Edward is often read/seen by readers/viewers as a devoted lover. No longer Othered objects of abject horror, twenty-first-century vampires—the Cullens, somewhat akin to Louis—walk among us, blend into human surroundings through abstaining from human blood and their ability to appear during the day. The term “post-Vampires,” as coined by Maggie Parke and Natalie Wilson in *Theorizing Twilight*, describes those “that re-work traditional conceptions of this supernatural figure” (3).
Countering conventional vampiric transgression, *Twilight*’s vampires conform to culturally conservative mores—heterosexual married monogamy, sexual abstinence before marriage, and traditional male and female gender roles—rather than upsetting them. In contrast to previous canonical vampire literature, the “vampire story is no longer a cautionary tale against seduction and evil; instead it is another romance with a few more obstacles to overcome...there is now a generation that views vampire characters not as terrifying and evil, but as romantic and compassionate” (Groper 145); Edward is Bella’s vampire in sparkly shirtless-ness, rather than a malevolent monster to fear.

Edward’s allure, then, is in his romantic disavowal of his predatory urges, falling in love with instead of killing Bella. Readers see his scopophilic/epistemophilic stalking instead as concern for Bella’s well-being, his controlling her actions as protective, and his violent restraining as seductively erotic. Indeed, the “presentation of violence as a sign of love in romance fiction is attractive which normalizes and legitimizes masculine power over females for the reader” (Miller 169), also representing *Twilight*’s sadomasochistic relationships as desirable. In surveying a sample of *Twilight* fans aged eighteen to forty-one (one gay male and the rest straight females), Ananya Mukherjea’s essay “Team Bella: Fans Navigating Desire, Security, and Feminism” analyzes readers’ responses to the series. Readers perceive Edward’s paternal protection and “the safety that [he] offers Bella [as] a central aspect of why he is an ideal romantic partner in their eyes” (80). Identifying with Bella, one respondent even states: “I think it would be awesome if I had a boyfriend who could save me from anything and who could live through anything [like Edward]. I want safety. That’s seductive and hot for me”” (81).
Additionally, a study conducted by Melissa Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz similarly found Edward’s and Bella’s relationship (versus Jasper-Alice, Carlisle-Esme, and Jacob-Bella couplings) as the most desirable for both teen and adult readers, preferring their partner to be “protective, possessive, chivalrous, and intensely attracted to them” (151).

Unfortunately, Bella’s and Edward’s damaging and dangerous sexual intercourse is also desired by fans, its sadomasochistic implications attractive to readers. Edward’s abusive behaviors are perceived by readers as sexy and enviable, as one fan states: “‘If I was Bella and I woke up the next morning covered on [sic] feathers and bruises shaped like his hands, I’d be ecstatic!’ (IsabellCullen)” (Torkelson 213). Eroticized violence and violent erotics are normalized, reenacted in the extremely popular Twilight fanfiction and BDSM series Fifty Shades of Grey. Twilight’s troubling messages are further exhibited in the franchise’s merchandise, particularly shirts “proclaim[ing] ‘Bite me, Edward,’ ‘Mrs. Cullen,’ and ‘Edward can bust my headboard, bite my pillows, and bruise my body any day’” (Wilson 88) evince both sexual sadomasochism and readers’ vicarious identification with Bella.

Despite the series’ obvious heteronormative themes and violence against women, however, some feminist readers analyze Twilight and its audience’s responses as indicative of spectators widening the cracks in patriarchal power structures, similarly to Massé’s insistence “on the reality and importance of women’s looking” (59). Just as romances reinscribe traditional gender relations and sexual politics, they alternatively serve as cultural critiques of masculine power and feminine powerlessness: “Radway’s study of romance reading exemplifies that
females read romance not only to escape into a fantasy world of desire, but also to resist ‘their situation as women’ and ‘to cope with the features of the system that oppress them’ (12)” (Wilson 45). As a result, identifying with Bella provides a fictional space for female readers to understand their own desires and “can potentially empower girl readers to embrace their emerging sexuality while also navigating the often difficult terrain of claiming agency and voice to express what they want as they transition from adolescence to adulthood” (Anastasiu 50). Adult readers also consider the series as escapist wish-fulfillment, “[d]escribing the Twilight books as providing a ‘fountain of youth’” (Anastasiu 51) endowing them with another chance at first love in addition to the ability to look and be looked at by the series’ males.

Mukherjea also analyzes readers’ reaction to Bella’s scopophilia. While I read Edward’s gaze as sadistic and patriarchal, as displaying his aggressive “urges to look and to know” (Massé 41), Mukherjea claims scopophilia is a “central feature of the pleasure all the respondents took in Twilight. The joys of scopophilia, the love of looking, have historically been the privilege of men” (76), but Bella’s (masochistic, as I read her gaze) fixation on Edward enables readers to assume her narrative subjectivity and conversely be the scopophilic rather than the object: “Accepting Edward and Jacob as ready objects of desire, then, allowed these fans to be desiring subjects and to indulge some pleasurable actions of desire—the looking and fantasizing and talking about” (78). Similarly, the series’ filmic incarnation provides actual people who play these characters, actors who are reimagined onto the big screen, and celebrities

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with whom adoring fans become infatuated. As Wilson notes, “this type of ‘star crush’ is particularly appealing to young female fans as it makes no physical demands and also allows them to gaze rather than be gazed at” (190). Embodying the role of the spectator as sadist within the beating fantasy, the audience reappropriates the scopophilic male gaze; *Twilight* thus provides its audience with a safe forum wherein sexuality and desire are removed from the confines of an otherwise patriarchal reality, simultaneously allowing readers to identify with both sadist and masochist at their pleasure.

Because human Bella as damsel in distress is transformed into an indestructible vampire by the series’ end—though her agency is tainted by conforming to traditional female roles of marriage and maternity—most fans identify Bella as the story’s true hero, enabling readers to undergo her metamorphosis from helpless ugly duckling to powerful, beautiful swan (a literal translation of her name) and participate “in the hero’s journey of self-actualization which is psychically satisfying and potentially therapeutic” (Anastasiu 53). Moreover, “Bella provides the perfect conduit” (Wilson 42) for readers to achieve their desires. Particularly because “Bella’s lack of distinguishing features and her sense of her own ordinariness are part of what make her so available as a surrogate for the reader,” Bella is read as “‘Mary Sue,’ a transparent projection of the fan into the fiction and thus a cipher onto whom the reader is invited to project herself” (Michel 4). Bella’s otherwise nondescript appearance enables readers to easily identify with her, in effect allowing third-party spectators to receive the attention of the most attractive guy at school and to live eternally youthful and strong, happy and loved “[f]orever and forever and forever” (*Breaking Dawn* 754).
Just as *Interview with the Vampire* elicits ambivalent responses, Bella as heroine and Edward as hero are both lionized and criticized, so “the romance not only works to acculturate women into a male dominated society and make them desire their own submission, but also questions...the validity of patriarchy and the gender roles that patriarchal society perpetuates” (Wilson 55). Fans of various ages gloss over, or at least do not place much importance on, the series’ harmful sadomasochistic subtext (that is, until *Fifty Shades of Grey*’s publication), traditional gender roles, and heteronormative patriarchy, instead clinging to its overall message of enduring love. Vicarious identification with *Twilight*’s heroine Bella Swan provides readers with the opportunity to fall in love with and be loved by an attractive object of desire, to escape mortality, to shed female frailty, and to become eternally beautiful and powerful. Edward Cullen as contemporary post-vampire is a romantic hero and boyfriend rather than a grotesque villain.

*The Forbidden Fruit Tastes the Sweetest: Adult versus Young Adult Literature*

*I kept my eyes down on the reading list the teacher had given me.*  
*It was fairly basic: Brontë, Shakespeare, Chaucer, and Faulkner.*  
*I’d already read everything. That was comforting . . . and boring.*

Stephenie Meyer  
*Twilight*

Although both franchises have garnered critical condemnation as well as fanatical reception, they have undoubtedly seduced the public imagination. Both are written by women authors, yet their characters, plots, and implications are astoundingly different. While Rice’s
series questions religion (as illustrated in her leaving and returning to Catholicism) and counters heteronormative sexuality, Meyer’s series conversely adheres to conservative religious values like chastity (perhaps reflecting her Mormon beliefs). Perhaps such disparate topics stem from their categorization as adult and young adult genres.

Tailored to different audiences, these genres are distinguished by Melissa Ames in her essay “Vamping up Sex: Audience, Age, & Portrayals of Sexuality in Vampire Narratives”: “[A]dult vampire narratives frequently include non-normative sexuality and plots that question dominant cultural beliefs about gender” (19), and they “often include non-traditional family structures, focus on homosocial relationships, and include characters that could be classified as asexual or bisexual rather than heterosexual” (10). *Interview with the Vampire*’s homoerotic and homosocial bonds, in addition to the queer nuclear family, are indeed the focus of the novel; Louis’s relationships with other vampires propel his narrative. Conversely, YA literature2 “is well known for its attention to interpersonal relationships, self-exploration, budding romance, teen angst, and, of course, teen sex” (1); although Bella’s sexuality is policed, her narrative focuses on dangerous desire. Additionally, “young adult novels tend to portray primarily heteronormative relationships reinforced by ‘traditional’ family values. All the couples in the novels are heterosexual and quickly enter into lifelong commitments” (10), as evinced by my analysis of *Twilight*’s heterosexual monogamous pairings and conservative gender roles. Also demonstrated by their audiences, Meyer’s young adult romance appeals to an audience

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2 Other YA vampire narratives include L. J. Smith’s *The Vampire Diaries* (1991-2, also serialized on TV since 2009) and the movie-turned-TV show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1992, 1997-2003).
predominantly consisting of females, while Rice’s adult literature has a more expansive readership. Examining these separate genres has bolstered my analyses of sexual politics within these two franchises, yet neither allude to the use of sadomasochism.

Both Rice and Meyer have generated sadomasochistic trilogies, neither of which involve vampires. Taking the pseudonym A. N. Roquelaure, Anne Rice wrote an erotic BDSM (bondage, dominance/submission, sadomasochism) series employing the Sleeping Beauty fairytale: The Claiming of Sleeping Beauty (1983), Beauty’s Punishment (1984), and Beauty’s Release (1985) comprise The Sleeping Beauty Trilogy, about adolescent Beauty forced into masochistic slavery (“The Sleeping Beauty Trilogy”). Additionally, Twilight reader E. L. James wrote a sexually-explicit fanfiction about Bella’s and Edward’s relationship entitled Master of the Universe. Appropriating the tacit sadomasochistic elements present in Twilight (but altering the plot and characters’ names), this BDSM story was published in 2011 as Fifty Shades of Grey, followed by Fifty Shades Darker (2012) and Fifty Shades Freed (2012). The series has sold over 16 million copies in the US alone, was featured on The New York Times best-sellers list for 16 weeks, and is currently being produced into a movie (Acuna). It is difficult to ignore the fact that sadomasochistic romances (vampiric or not) of male dominance/sadism and female submission/masochism captivate readers.

Conclusion

If vampires are undead Others yet ourselves and reflect (both Rice’s and Meyer’s vampires share the ability to reflect in mirrors) our terrors and temptations, then what do these
novels’ sadomasochistic gender relations reveal about contemporary American society? Rice’s homoeroticism and Meyer’s heteronormative abstinence are superficially sexy to readers, yet this thesis has delved deeper into these franchises’ relationships to unveil their inherent power imbalances: Both feminine/female Louis’s (and the monstrous-feminine woman-child Claudia’s) and Bella’s masochism enslaves them to a sadistic vampiric patriarch, yet readers clearly find this seductive and pleasurable. After a rather lengthy discussion of both franchises’ sadomasochistic elements and their readers’ responses, is it important to ask why this is so present and prevalent in this sample of vampire literature.

Perhaps these novels’ sadomasochistic subtext, implicit or explicit, sociocultural or contractual, resonates with our cultural perception of sex as simultaneously repressed and gratuitously expressed, socially permissible yet also frowned upon. Just as the vampire paradoxically embodies our most subdued fears and secret desires, so too might sadomasochism’s power dynamics demonstrate contradictory fears and desires of assuming both roles of (male) dominance and (female) submission. While I do not yearn for (or condone) the perpetuation of traditional gender roles and female oppression via these relationships, readers are clearly enchanted. Through masochistic feminine/female characters, readers can experience objectification by an attractive lover, accrue their desired reward, and live in a fictional world of hedonism or happy endings—all without the very harmful repercussions patriarchal reality might engender. Readers might alternatively identify as the sadistic male, endowed with the ability to usurp their victimizer and assume their own supernatural powers. While sadomasochistic gender relations are represented as potentially damaging in this
literature, they also appear to endow readers with the agency they are deprived of in fact. If vampires “can be everything we are, while at the same time, they are fearful reminders of the infinite things we are not” (Auerbach 6), then these sadomasochistic vampires represent our dual faces: Female masochism is empowering and queer sexuality is pleasurable in the darkness of night, only to combust in the deadly daylight of patriarchal heteronormativity. Hopefully the next resurrected revenant will not have such a “vampiric relationship to feminism” (Doane and Hodges 422), and instead stake such regressive gender politics through the heart!
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