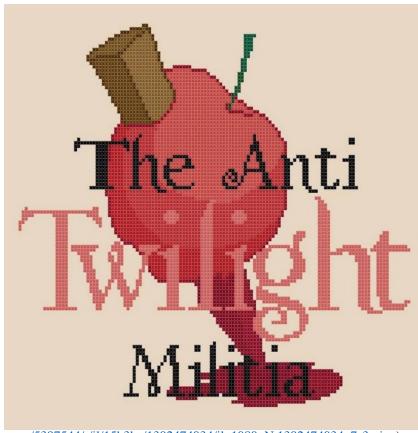# Misogyny, Homophobia, & Sexuality in Vampire Fiction
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Abstract: *While the use of the vampire, as a metaphor, for the other has created a strong reaction from LGBT+ youth and many young women, issues of homophobia and misogyny still remain prevalent both in the stories themselves and in the response to these stories.*

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Going online in the early 2010s, you were likely to stumble across plenty of memes created in response to the Twilight series. The popularity of the teen-romance series, coupled with the questionable content of the series, made it an easy target for internet comedians. It wasn't long, however, before the jokes started to take on a more nefarious subtext. Suddenly the jokes weren't about the series being a Mormon fantasy or how boring the main characters were; they were about how "rabid" and "hysterical" the fans were and how the male characters,

particularly Edward, were "gay" (Bode, 2010, 708-710; Kellner, 2011, 67). Though unfortunate, this pattern of behavior is not uncommon.

Vampires have been used as a tool to explore themes of gender and sexuality as far back as *Dracula* where the dichotomy between characters Mina and Lucy is on full display (Kellner, 2011, 63). Mina, fitting with the societal expectations of women at the time, survives the novel and avoids falling to the titular vampire's seduction while Lucy, who had demonstrated agency in her own sexuality, is corrupted and becomes monstrous (Ames, 2010, 42-44). Critics theorize that horror is often reflective of a society's greater concerns at the time. A monster from the old world stepping into one characterized by science and development, preying on women and influencing them to engage in sex and violence certainly mirrors the concerns many would have felt living in the Victorian era (Ames, 2010, 43-44). When examining other pieces of vampire media, the pattern continues. Examining vampire films released during the 1980s, for example, it's hard to miss the greater allegory at play. An unknowing, relatively innocent person crosses paths with an enchanting stranger for a night full of excitement, only to find themselves infected with a mysterious sickness associated with blood (Lavigne, 2004, 2-3 & 6; Tringali, 2016, 1). Often the stranger will try to get them to embrace the lifestyle, may even try to forge a deeper connection between them, only for the protagonist to push back, culminating in the eventual destruction of the stranger. In this case, while the fear of the unknown remains, that unknown has changed, morphed by confusion and misinformation spread during the early days of the AIDS crisis (Kellner, 2011, 56; Lavigne, 2004, 3 & 6).

Whether it is the hypnotic charm of the vampire, or the ease at which women and members of the LGBT+ community can identify with the concept of The Other, vampire fiction became a popular medium for writers exploring these concepts of identity. As the idea of the

vampire shifted to reflect the times, a new form of vampirism emerged; the teen vampire. Originating from the films released towards the end of the 1980s, teen vampires are perceived as being young, beautiful, rebellious, but, strangely, genuine in their desires. Even though teen vampires are just as powerful as their predecessors, they're capable of redemption and many go on to achieve it by the time their story ends. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s two main vampire characters, Angel and Spike, are stand-out examples of teen vampires. Despite each having a list of victims a mile long, they change and grow because of the love they feel towards the series' titular character and are viewed more sympathetically by both the audience and other characters in-universe because of this (Kellner, 2011, 59). So, what's the difference? Why were teen vampires like Spike & Angel viewed so differently from the vampires in the *Twilight* franchise? The answer may lie, perhaps, in the audience.

Whereas *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, despite having a female protagonist, has a general target audience, *Twilight* was written with a predominately female adolescent audience in mind (Bode, 2010, 707; Kellner, 2011, 55). It's a love story first and a paranormal adventure second (Kellner, 2011, 66). *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, on the other hand, is the opposite with action scenes and mystery dominating most of the run-time. That being said, it is far too easy to blame the negative reaction to *Twilight* on it being a romance novel. Questionable choices in the overall narrative, the rise of social media, lingering fears of female sexuality, and homophobia all contributed to the backlash generated by the *Twilight* craze (Bode, 2010, 712). With that in mind, the theory of horror representing society's greatest fears is reinforced but it is not the vampire that had people worrying when they logged onto the internet in the 2010s; it was sexuality.

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