

The Modernization of the Gothic Heroine:

From Ann Radcliffe to Stephenie Meyer, a Feminist Perspective

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With the publication of her ground breaking work, *Literary Women* (1976), Ellen Moers began a critical dialogue discussing the relevance of a gendered reading of Gothic literature. In this work she coins the term “Female Gothic,” to describe, “The work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic” (Moers 90). Moers explicitly links feminism and the (second- wave) feminist movement, with the Gothic genre. Moers asserts that the “Female Gothic” expresses the authors’ fears and dissatisfaction with their oppression in patriarchal society by depicting a heroine in peril and fearing for her life, powerless, and at the mercy of her oppressor (s). A heroine must endure hardship and suffering before being ultimately rewarded with a happy ending. In the process of doing so, the traditional Gothic heroine has also gained a moral superiority which is her only advantage over her oppressors, Eugenia DeLamotte refers to this as “the self-defense” of conscious worth” (DeLamotte 32). Moers’s theory works very well when applied to the narrative structure created by Ann Radcliffe, whose novels such as *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and *The Italian* (1797), follow the traditional Gothic convention she describes in *Literary Women*.

Literary Women infused feminist literary critics’ discussions with Moers’s view that in fact, the Female Gothic narrative is actually a positive and subversive response to a patriarchal

power structure. While Moers was, and still is, a tremendously influential voice in feminist literary criticism, her idea of the subversive and defiant heroine has been called into question in recent years. Although scholar Anne Williams agrees with Moers's theory on the Female Gothic, in which a heroine's suffering is ultimately viewed as necessary to her triumph over patriarchal power, the issue with Moers's model is that while it is still valuable, it was born out of the women's liberation movement of the late 1960's and 1970's, and reflects the values and circumstances of that period. As the times change, our methods of interpreting the Gothic heroine need to adapt to account for modern culture, which inevitably has some impact on the author and their heroine. I am choosing to limit the scope of my comparison of the late eighteenth century Gothic heroine, and her modern day counterpart by comparing Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* to Stephenie Meyer's recent *Twilight* series. Both of these novels attempt to accomplish the same purpose, to entertain their readers with suspense, romance, and the enduring lure of Gothic tropes.

The contemporary heroine breaks away from the mold used by Radcliffe, so Moers's model would not be useful when interpreting the work of a Gothic novelist such as Stephenie Meyer. I have chosen Meyer because of the reigning popularity of her Gothic novels, and her broad appeal across the age spectrum. Meyer's style of "terror" Gothic can be viewed as similar in many ways to Ann Radcliffe's. While Ann Radcliffe was also extremely popular in the late eighteenth century, the primary reason I have chosen to compare Radcliffe with Meyers, is that Moers (and many other scholars), tends to examine the "Female Gothic" by focusing exclusively on the novels of Ann Radcliffe as representative of the Gothic. This genre is characterized as containing elements such as: romance, suspense and mystery, the uncanny, unexplained or supernatural occurrences, a mansion, castle, or house that is dark, haunted (or just plain creepy),

a mother that is absent, a father that is devious, at least one male villain, threats of imminent danger, and a heroine in need of male assistance. Ann Radcliffe masterfully created scenes of suspense and found “natural” ways of explaining the supernatural occurrences in her works.

In contrast, Meyer’s *Twilight* series centers on a coven of ancient “vegetarian” vampires, who swear off eating human flesh. Meyer’s heroine falls in love with one of them and eventually marries him. Meyer spends little time working through Bella’s initial transition from normal high school teenager, to learning that her love interest is a blood thirsty vampire who preys on wild animals (he suppresses his desire for human blood). Nonetheless, the supernatural vampire is the dominate focus of her novels and her heroine ultimately gains power through her own transition into the supernatural. Meyer allows the human and the supernatural to coexist peacefully in the end. Meyer’s heroine is often depicted as trying to reconcile her traditional role of the domestic and maternal with that of her desire to attain paranormal powers as a vampire. Bella does not want to lose any part of her identity; she wants the best of both worlds. She is deeply concerned with caring for her parents, and manages the domestic and financial affairs of her hapless, absent mother, such as bill paying and housekeeping. After her mother marries, Bella makes a point of acknowledging that her mother’s new husband will look after the duties she previously handled. Once Bella moves to live with her father, she tends to him almost as though she were his wife or mother.

Bella is in danger throughout most of the series, but she is not presented from the standpoint of a victim, she believes herself empowered, but she is still suffering many of the same trials presented to Radcliffe’s heroines. So while in some instances in the series, she is in fact on the losing end of a battle with the uncanny villains trying to kill her, she is no more a victim than her vampire husband is a victim when he battles the villains trying to destroy him. It

is also worth pointing out that Bella is seriously injured as a result of her attempt to rescue her mother from a supernatural villain threatening to kill her. Bella ignores the request of her male protector and his family, and goes to meet the villain anyway, “I pushed the terror back as well as I could. My decision was made. It did no good to waste time agonizing over the outcome” (Meyer 430).

Part of Bella’s modern challenge is grappling with the repercussions of her own freedom. In the sense that her freedom on one hand enables her to make her own decisions, pursue her ambitions, and fulfill her desires. In this scene, we see Bella is depicted on one hand as thinking in a brave, masculine way, yet on the other hand, she behaves irrationally and knowingly puts her own life in danger to save her mothers. In making this decision, she exerts agency, as her actions prompt a chain of events which result in a significant plot development for the second novel in the series. Bella’s decision making moves the plot forward, and not the will of the villains she faces.

As author of the latest modern Gothic heroine, and one can not ignore the broad appeal of Stephenie Meyer’s novels as evidenced by their sales. For example, her *Twilight* book sales in the first quarter of 2009, accounted for 16% of all books sold [in the U.S.], or one in every seven. She sold 29 million *Twilight* books in 2008 and Forbes magazine awarded the author the ranking of number 26 on their “World’s Most Influential Celebrities” list (www.twilightersanonymous.com). The first book in the series, *Twilight*, debuted at number 5 on *The New York Times* bestseller list, while her second book in the series, *New Moon*, spent more than 25 weeks at the #1 position on *The New York Times* bestseller list. The fourth book in the series, *Breaking Dawn*, sold 1.3 million copies in its first 24 hours (www.stepheniemeyer.com). The series has a broad appeal to both young adults, and women of all ages; despite having only

been target marketed to the young adult crowd (as evidenced by its placement in the “Young Adult” section of bookstores).

The heroine, Bella Swan, gradually transitions from an insecure teenager to a confident young woman who Meyer presents as being in total control of her life by the end of the fourth book. Meyer uses gothic tropes such as the uncanny to present a danger to Bella’s life, and also to empower her physically, so she can conquer that threat. Bella’s transition becomes complete when she is re-born as a powerful vampire with a supernatural husband and half-human child.

As Bella anticipates her upcoming relocation to Forks, Washington to live with her father, we can see Meyer building suspense from the onset. In the first novel, her heroine confesses to her insecurities, “I would be the new girl from the big city, a curiosity, a freak. Maybe, if I looked like a girl from Phoenix should, I could work this to my advantage. But physically, I’d never fit in anywhere. I should be tan, sporty, blond—a volleyball player...” (Meyer 10). The text of book four reiterates Bella’s concerns presented in the first novel. Meyer appeals to a young adult by relating to the heroine’s social awkwardness, lack of athleticism, and teenage experiences with romance:

Obviously, I could be counted out of anything athletic. Not artistic or musical, no particular talents to brag of. Nobody ever gave away a trophy for reading books. After eighteen years of mediocrity, I was pretty used to being average. I realized now that I’d long ago given up any aspirations of shining at anything. I just did the best with what I had, never quite fitting into my world. (523).

These lines do more than resonate with a young reader; they also preemptively disassociate Bella with her new environment even before she arrives there, by creating an anxiety about her

new situation. The town of Forks is described as being perpetually rainy and having an “omnipresent” gloom, and the place from which Bella’s mother “escaped” when she was an infant (Meyer 3). By describing Forks using Gothic tropes, Meyer supplants the traditional Gothic castle, church, or house with an “ominous” town wherein the majority of the action of the novel takes place. These clues about Bella’s new home serve to entice the reader with trepidation about what’s to come. Bella is not trapped in a strictly domestic sphere because she has a means of mobility to the extent that she can come and go relatively freely within that town. She repeatedly chooses to enter dangerous Gothic spaces such as the dark forest areas around the town, as well as secluded hiking trails and the home of the Cullen family of vampires. In each instance, Bella knowingly and willingly places herself in precarious situations rather than allowing the plot to dictate her surroundings. She consistently rejects the sound advice of male characters such as her father, Edward, and her werewolf friend Jacob Black.

Perhaps the appeal of the novels to female readers in general, is due to the text’s presentation of Gothic tropes including suppressed scenes of horror, a vexed romance, werewolves, vampires, plenty of secrecy, ancient families, and a brief bout of what can arguably be considered “madness” suffered by our heroine in the second novel. Meyer adds to this list a strong empowered heroine who overcomes challenges that the average young woman can relate to, such as finding friends in a new town. The text presents Bella as someone who seems to achieve the ideals of independence and personal fulfillment. Over time, Bella is depicted gaining self-confidence and achieving success in her role as a maternal and domestic figure, while still pursuing her ambitions. The heroine gradually achieves a successful balance in all the roles required of her, without sacrificing her individuality. That being said, Meyer’s work follows in

Radcliffe's footsteps as it also contains a new twist on the trope of the "absent mother" by inverting the relationship between child and parent in the opening of the first book in the series:

How could I leave my loving, erratic, hare-brained mother to fend for herself? Of course she had Phil [her new husband] now, so the bills would probably get paid, there would be food in the refrigerator, gas in her car, and someone to call when she got lost, but still...

(4).

The heroine's parents are separated and living on different coasts, and we learn that she grows up occupying the role of parent to her own mother. In this way, she acts as the maternal figure early on in the novel and continues doing so when she moves to live with her single father, "So I had my shopping list and the cash from the jar in the cupboard labeled FOOD MONEY, and I was on my way to the Thriftway" (Meyer 32). Throughout the series, Bella is often found worrying about what to make for her father's dinner. At no time does she question her duty to her father, but seems to embrace it. Although Bella's mother is present throughout the novel, she remains on the periphery and is deemed by Bella to be child-like and needy. Bella also refers to her mother by her first name, breaking down the mother-daughter relationship further.

In comparison, Ellena Rosalba in *The Italian*, is finally reunited with her long lost and thought to be dead mother, Olivia, whom her suitor Vivaldi asks for permission to marry Ellena, "Vivaldi made a full acknowledgment to Olivia of his long attachment to her daughter, and supplicated for her consent to their marriage" (410). Radcliffe conveys a level of respect for tradition here, as well as a respect for the role of the maternal as an authority figure in the familial sphere. What is most interesting in this scene is that the text presents Olivia as a long suffering, morally superior figure, and then shows Olivia demanding the respect due to her

daughter by requiring Vivaldi's father to also seek her permission for the pair to marry. Olivia is empowered in the sense that she demands respect for her daughter, but she does so without transgressing prescribed social boundaries. She exerts the only power she has, that of a parent. As Moers's theory points out, she can only claim this respect because her daughter is finally revealed to be of respectable lineage, underscoring the inherent lack of value placed on women. Any power or respectability a woman obtains is due to her place in, or adherence to, the patriarchy's rules. Ellena's value in society has much more to do with her father's identity than with any action or inaction Ellena can control.

These are the aspects of the Gothic that lure the reader in and give us simultaneous feelings of repulsion and attraction, we become curious as to the heroine's next move. We want to know what unforeseen ensnarement will imperil her life, so we keep reading. Radcliffe gives us women like Ellena who do not physically challenge the status quo but more subtly show their personal strength through intellect, logic and dignity. Ellena has a strong presence of mind that would seem to contradict the frailty of her persona as a heroine in distress. When Ellena is threatened with the veil by the abbess of San Stefano, she declares, "The sanctuary is prophaned [sic]...it is become a prison. It is only when the Superior ceases to respect the precepts of that holy religion...that she herself is no longer respected" (Radcliffe 84). When Ellena is threatened physically by the men who abduct her, she attempts to use reason to calm the situation, "Her breath and courage were gone, yet she struggled to sustain herself, and endeavored to ask with calmness, what was their errand" (Radcliffe 61). Radcliffe's female protagonists are more passive in their interactions with men, but they tend to show strength of mind and emotional stability which cannot be said for Meyer's heroine, Bella. Moers is correct in interpreting *The Italian* (and other works) as being subversively clever, as Radcliffe's text appeals to masculine

traits such as reason and logic and employs impassive arguments to challenge the oppression of female characters.

However, in addition to Moers's model of literary criticism of the Female Gothic being potentially outmoded (based on the texts of today's Gothic novels), some scholars including Helene Meyers and Diane Long-Hoeweler, find it to be destabilizing to the progress that has been made in the women's movement since *Literary Women* was published. Over the course of the last twenty years, feminist literary critics have produced scholarship questioning Moers's model for interpreting female authored Gothic literature. Feminist scholars have argued it is no longer compatible with today's values because it promotes an unhealthy view of the female and her body. For example, Helene Meyers warns that modern culture is too accepting of "femicidal plots" which can be found embedded everywhere in our culture (Meyers 2). Meyers rails against an interpretation of women as victims, arguing this does nothing but promote the acceptance of violence against women. Similarly, Diane Long-Hoeweler argues that Moers's model which hails Radcliffe's heroines as being cleverly subversive is actually harmful to the cause of feminism. Hoeweler terms this passive-aggressive ideology as "victim feminism," which does more to undermine the feminist movement, than to help it (Hoeweler 3).

The feminist movement in the U.S. was well under way by the time Moers's published *Literary Women*, so perhaps it is not surprising that Moers's argument was well-received. As Benjamin Brabon and Stephanie Genz point out, "Reflecting the excitement and urgency of the early days of the women's liberation movement, the initial responses to the Female Gothic tended to emphasize its subversive elements and interpret it as a protest against patriarchal society and a confrontation with mothering/femininity" (Brabon 6). In part, her research was prompted by the belief that the Female Gothic was being dismissed in academic circles as

inconsequential to the Gothic genre. Of course this would be ironic because any attempt to dismiss female Gothic authors would also slight novelists such as Ann Radcliffe, who is responsible for popularizing the Gothic genre into mainstream literary discourse. Meanwhile, feminist scholars also saw a need to “rescue” the Female Gothic from the hands of masculine usurpers of the Gothic genre. In other words, Moers and others were concerned that past and present Gothic female authors, with the exception of Radcliffe, were being marginalized in favor of male novelists such as Horace Walpole, Matthew Lewis and their modern counterparts. Aside, from Radcliffe, little attention was being paid to female authors. The Female Gothic then became more than just a way of viewing the treatment of women in society; it was also a referendum on their standing in the academic community and reclamation of the Gothic genre.

Lauren Fitzgerald writes, “In naming Female Gothic, she [Moers] initiated women’s claim to the Gothic and reclaimed women’s lost legacy from masculinizing villains such as Fielder” (Fitzgerald 14). So this concern over the future of contemporary women writers began to emerge among feminist scholars who believed that female writers were not being taken seriously. The Female Gothic was therefore linked with feminist criticism of the 1960’s and 1970’s with every intention of defending the female scholar/author’s relevance to history and claim to current and future scholarship.

Today many critics question the necessity and relevance of the term “Female Gothic” as a separate literary genre, “Today, over 25 years later, the terms being offered—‘women’s Gothic’, ‘feminine Gothic’, ‘lesbian Gothic’, even ‘Gothic feminism’—appear to suggest that Moers’s definition is too much an umbrella term, and, possibly, too essentialising” (Smith 2). In the 30 years since Moers developed this term, the relationship between feminist criticism and the Female Gothic has been questioned and reexamined by many scholars trying to answer at each

interval in time, whether we still need to use the term “Female Gothic.” Brabon and Genz point out that Moers’s “conception of the category is very much a product of its time, emerging from the rise of feminist consciousness and feminist literary criticism in the late 1960’s and 1970’s” (Brabon 6).

For example, Moers has been criticized because her theory discusses heterosexual, middle class, white authors and narratives, but fails to account for homosexual, minority, or working class perspectives that deviate from the majority. Did she mean to infer by omission that a Gothic heroine’s plight penned by a homosexual or transgender author should be interpreted as categorically containing the same message as one penned by a female author? We do not know the answer to that question because Moers did not address the writings of those groups of authors, or the social conditions/treatment of those women in her work. Perhaps that was because *Literary Women* coincided with the “second wave” feminist movement which at the time was concerned primarily with the plight of the average heterosexual woman. Since that time, critical discussion on the “lesbian Gothic” has begun to claim its place in the academic community.

Nonetheless, as Fitzgerald points out, “The advantages of hitching the Gothic’s wagon to feminism’s star by way of Female Gothic were many. Maybe just as important, feminist literary criticism also rescued Gothic studies” (9). By doing so, the “Female Gothic” method of criticism and the Gothic genre itself gained credibility thanks to its links with the feminist movement. Fitzgerald’s aptly named essay which focuses on the “Institutionalization of Gothic Studies,” concludes that, “Feminism, in other words, was instrumental in institutionalizing Gothic Studies” (9). It makes sense that the social and political climate of the time can influence the school of critical thought that becomes favorable at any given moment in history. The progress and

changes in the feminist movement since that time is therefore going to influence how that same school of thought's relevance will be perceived and evaluated.

From a modern feminist perspective, one thing is certain, if we perpetuate the ideology of the disenfranchised female in a non-productive manner, we do nothing to improve or mitigate the socioeconomic imbalance women face today. By attributing a positive association to the portrayal of female heroines as victims, no resolution is found because no problem is being outwardly acknowledged. Moers's model promotes a view of the Gothic heroine as reaching empowerment through complacency and victimization which may have been relevant to the works of Radcliffe, but cannot be applied to modern novels without difficulty. A silent heroine can do nothing to change or prevent the misogyny women face in a patriarchal society. More to the point, I argue that Moers's model is not relevant because the Female Gothic novel of today generally doesn't present a text in which the heroine conducts herself in a passive-aggressive manner.

For example, while the novels of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series contain many of the same Gothic tropes found in Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis's novels, Meyer's heroine steps outside of the traditional heroine as victim role and oscillates between antagonist, victim, and protector. In addition, Meyer follows Radcliffe's tradition of "resisting an unhappy or ambiguous closure and explains the supernatural" (Smith 3). While we find her running for her life in Gothic spaces such as the dark, murky woods filled with werewolves and predatory vampires, the text informs us that this is because she chooses to actively confront those who threaten to take her life. The heroine outwardly acknowledges the danger presented by the supernatural villains, and responds to that threat differently than Ellena Rosalba, by taking an offensive and proactive approach to facing her enemies, she drives the plot. Meyer's heroine also breaks with late

eighteenth century heroines, is that while she has a male protector, he doesn't maintain his position as the male heroic figure by the end of the novel. Throughout the four novels, Edward does fulfill his traditional duty as the male protector of Bella, but at times, he is responsible for the danger she faces. We see this during Bella's unintended and near lethal, unplanned pregnancy with her daughter.

However, Meyer doesn't allow the novel to end with Edward still occupying the role of heroic male, at least not exclusively. In the fourth and final novel of the series, Meyer supplies what Anne Williams calls, "...a happy ending," in which Bella and Edward get married, and therefore Bella, "...acquires in marriage a new name and most important, a new identity" (Williams 103). Stephenie Meyer employs this Radcliffean Gothic trope as Williams describes, but she alters the trope by situating the heroine as the protector (male heroic figure) of her family and her male protector-turned- husband, whose life she saves by defeating the supernatural enemies which threaten to destroy herself and Edward. As Anne Braude points out, "... the contemporary gothic heroine forms a more equal alliance with the hero. Rather than depending upon him to rescue her, she often rescues him" (Braude 103). On one hand, the empowerment of a heroine cannot be denied when she ably rescues her husband and extended family from supernatural villains, however, with Meyer, there is another twist.

Instead of reducing his masculine power, Meyer raises her heroine's physical strength to match or exceed Edward's own. So in the same way that in *The Italian*, Ellena gets married to Vivaldi and starts a new life with a new identity, toward the end of the final novel of the series, Meyer takes this trope a step further by physically changing Bella so that she is literally transformed into a vampire (without losing her human sensibilities) by her boyfriend/husband. She gains a new identity through marriage in the traditional Gothic fashion, but with a modern

twist. This can be viewed as the ultimate sacrifice of a heroine who is weak and willing to relinquish anything, including her identity, to satisfy her insecurity and desire to be loved. If we look at Ellena, she is consistently stronger than Bella in the intellectual and emotional sense. (It cannot be overlooked that Bella does become nearly catatonic during a severe depression after being abandoned by Edward in the second novel.)

Radcliffe places Ellena within a realistic setting with realistic boundaries to contend with. Conversely, Bella's circumstances allow her to be more empowered in the contemporary sense, as she has the ability to navigate patriarchal society with significant freedom; while she is brave, it can be argued she is not as emotionally strong as Ellena, who repeatedly refuses to marry Vivaldi because his family does not accept her, she will not compromise her dignity for the man she loves. Bella, on the other hand, can be seen as either incredibly weak and codependent in sacrificing her identity and her human existence in exchange for being with Edward, or as making a decision that empowers her to live the life she desires. Bella gains uncanny powers, wealth, and immortality, but at the expense of living a normal life and being able to interact freely with her parents and former friends. She can still see them, but they will play an abridged role in her life, and not without elaborate planning beforehand can she visit with them. Nonetheless, the text presents Bella as profoundly blissful with her situation at the end of the series.

The text's conclusion allows us to believe that Bella Swan is no victim, but instead she is devoted to her traditional role of dutiful daughter, mother, and (ultimately) wife. Her character becomes not simply empowered, but evolves into a heroine capable of protecting herself and those around her from physical harm. In this way, Meyer creates a character that is dramatically different than Radcliffe's eighteenth century heroine who lacked physical (but not intellectual)

strength. As Maggie Kilgour points out, “Radcliffe’s characters are not individuals in any meaningful sense, for Radcliffe attacks the whole concept of individualism, which she, like Burke, sees as threatening to community” (Kilgour 114) This explains why Radcliffe’s heroines are typically portrayed as blameless victims made to suffer at the tyrannical hands of male oppressors. Although Bella often makes foolish decisions that place her in danger, through trials and personal defeats, Bella makes bold decisions, takes risks, and in due course, acquires physical and mental strength (via her foray into the world of the supernatural) on par with the male heroic characters in the novels. Bella is developed as a far more complex character than Ellena or any of Radcliffe’s heroines.

Even though Bella is a truly heroic figure in most of the novels, she falls to pieces emotionally and seems to behave masochistically. Edward abandons Bella at the start of the second novel because some members of his coven are not able resist the smell of her blood, thereby placing her in danger. She subsequently falls into a severe depression which calls into question her emotional stability and alarms those around her. Specifically, because Bella’s emotional meltdown is prolonged, and due to the absence of her Edward. Bella narrates, “Charlie stared at me during breakfast, and I tried to ignore him. I supposed I deserved it. I couldn’t expect him not to worry. It would be weeks before he stopped watching for the return of the zombie...After all, I would be watching for the return of the zombie, too. Two days was hardly long enough to call me cured” (Meyer 152). Once Edward leaves, she doesn’t hear from him for almost a year. We later discover that he believes Bella to be dead and consequently goes to Rome to effectually commit suicide, as he cannot bear to be parted from her. This scene emasculates the hero and calls into question his status as a heroic figure in the novel. He only ceases his attempts when he is stopped by Bella, who again occupies the heroic role.

Obviously, this is not healthy behavior in our male protector, or in our heroine. In this instance, the text is somewhat disturbing for the message it sends readers, particularly young adult readers who might be most influenced by such a plot line. In the same way that Hoeverler and Meyers do not approve of the acceptance of violence against women embedded in narratives, and the notion of women portrayed as victims, it is unlikely they would critique the self-destruction of Meyer's heroine positively. Nonetheless, I should point out that this is a predicament of the heroine's own foolish choosing, rather than something forced on her. This reveals her weakness of character which we see continuing until the third novel, when Bella seems to mature into a psychologically stronger character. Bella experiences several transformations and through these changes, her true depth of character can be seen.

For these reasons, I argue that a modern Gothic narrative such as the *Twilight* series, cannot be effectively critiqued using the aspect of Moers's model that heralds an interpretation of the Gothic heroine as a passive-aggressive victim. Instead, we should focus on a mode that fits the text more accurately, and promotes a more progressive notion of female empowerment such as Helene Meyers and Diane Long-Hoeverler's models explore.

Meyer portrays Bella as an emotional heroine who struggles at times to reign in her feelings for Edward, but what differentiates Bella from Radcliffe's heroines is her ability to occupy the role of the male heroic figure and the heroine, in the same novel. This again underscores the ways in which the modern Gothic can effectively blend the masculine with the feminine in one character, and then separate those traits out again. Bella is undeniably able to be characterized as having both male traits of mental and physical strength, as well as those traditional qualities of the feminine heroine who is emotional. That said, Bella is presented as

dangerously emotional in the second novel, and shows poor judgment as well as masochistic tendencies.

While Kilgour does not dismiss the suffering of women, she also acknowledges the Gothic narrative as exposing a broader discord within society. If we compare the Gothic novels of *Twilight*, with the Gothic novels of Radcliffe's day, Kilgour's model becomes even more relevant when evaluating the importance of the individual within the text of the modern Gothic. It is most useful perhaps when considered in juxtaposition with the criticism offered by Helene Meyers and Diane Long-Hoeverler. Radcliffe's heroines are not masochistic, but instead spend most of their time being victims and never seem to escape this role. Of course, it would seem obvious today that a "victim feminism" ideology does nothing to promote emotionally healthy heroines in Gothic fiction. Instead, these types of heroines show the reader that duplicity is the key to obtaining what you desire, "The heroines of Gothic novels, Hoeverler contended, masquerade as blameless victims of a corrupt and oppressive patriarchal society while utilizing passive-aggressive and masochistic strategies to triumph over that system" (Smith 2).

In addition, the Female Gothic ideology of promoting victim feminism works against women, in that rather than showing women advancing themselves via honesty and virtue, these heroines create the potential for animosity by using deceit to advance. This form of plot inherently weakens any Gothic heroine and sends the modern reader, very often young women, a message which is incongruent with modern values of equality and integrity. Meyer's novel is propelled forward through a four book series by the heroine's desire to fulfill her own will. By focusing on the will of the individual (heroine) as motive for their action, and tracing her actions through the novel, we can see a clear delineation from the novels written by Radcliffe, when compared with those of Meyer.

The personal growth of Meyer's heroine can be seen to progress along a timeline from novel to novel as the series goes on. During this process, her heroine employs her own agency to drive the plot to a far greater degree than the male villains exert their agency to act upon the plot externally. Radcliffe's heroine in *The Italian* is more acted upon, than acting out of a desire to exert her own will. In this sense, Ellena is depicted in the text as perpetually reactive, rather than proactive as Bella Swan is presented in the text of the *Twilight* series. Ellena's character never deviates nor develops from what is portrayed in the opening scene. Maggie Kilgour argues that this is intentional on Radcliffe's part, "This surface stasis is a result of Radcliffe's disinterest in character and character development, in favor of plot development" (Kilgour 123). She explains that Radcliffe uses "plot, not character, [a]s the agent of action...and the hero is the author who alone has the power to make things happen and instigate change" (Kilgour 114). This assessment by Kilgour seems to lend credibility to Moers's theory that Radcliffe's works act as a social commentary, critiquing the male oppressors whose actions impact the heroines who have no recourse.

Conversely, Meyer's modern heroine often places herself in a position of danger (albeit foolishly) in which she is the antagonist causing the male villains to pursue her. In *The Italian*, Ellena Rosalba is hunted down through much of the novel without direct provocation and without leaving the role of the oppressed victim. Kilgour presents a compelling argument, which reveals the crux of the difference between Ann Radcliffe's heroines, and those a modern heroine such as Stephenie Meyer creates. Kilgour's model contributes a contemporary understanding and relevant perspective to the critical discussion by focusing on the interpersonal communications and connections of the modern heroine and her male counterparts. She wants to know how these characters interact and how they respond to their external environment. In her view, tropes such

as castles, subterranean passages and etc, are coded text for the domestic sphere, symbolizing a prison which, of course, is similar to Moers (and countless other scholars). However, Kilgour focuses her attention in a more productive manner by interpreting the Gothic heroine and ubiquitous male villain of Radcliffe's novels, as representative of a "dehumanizing modern world" in which "healthy" normal relationships are "impossible" because of an insatiable appetite for materialism and power (Kilgour 12).

Kilgour attributes a late eighteenth century focus on the self, to the emergence of the bourgeois middle class whose way of life was transitioning away from a more feudal system in which individuals were linked together out of necessity. This factor not only unites the modern heroine with her predecessors, but it serves to separate them as well. She argues that much of the Gothic narrative centers on the conflict between the "individual desire" and "social duty" wherein, familial and social relationships are essentially forfeited (Kilgour 12). The present Gothic narrative reflects the ideals of wealth, materialism, and also the desire for self-improvement—through education and experience. For example, in Meyer's *Twilight* series, wealth and materialism are significant factors in the plot; however, education and individual experience are also valued heavily during discussions between the heroine and her supernatural husband, resulting at times in the advancement of the plot.

While Bella shows no interest in material possessions, the text spends considerable time discussing the benefits of wealth as reflected in the primary and supporting characters. Their luxurious cars and expensive clothes are evaluated extensively throughout the novel, perhaps to appeal to young readers. Edward continually insists that he use his financial resources to protect her from danger. Bella begins to feel that her male protector has gone to extremes when he insists she drive a new Mercedes Guardian, which draws a considerable amount of unwanted

attention to Bella in the days before their marriage. A stranger at the gas station comments to Bella, "...Can't imagine what you'd need missile-proof glass and four thousand pounds of body armor for around here..." (Meyer 7). The subject of wealth continues in the fourth book as Bella prepares to marry Edward, "The best parts about being a Cullen were not expensive cars and impressive credit cars" (Meyer 9). It is interesting to note that wealth and power in Radcliffe's works invariably were representative of tools for oppressing rather than empowering women.

The texts of the *Twilight* series also place an emphasis on the bourgeois ideal of a college education, as much time is spent discussing which college each of the supporting characters will attend after high school. Edward also insists that Bella enjoy the experience of going to college before she becomes a vampire. He mysteriously gets Bella accepted to not just any college, but an elite university which she claims she does not have the credentials to gain acceptance to. He argues that she won't have a chance to experience the rite of passage that is college, because as a young vampire she will be unable to master her desire to attack humans, and cannot therefore be in public. Bella's judgment must be questioned in this scene, wherein she seems all too willing to sacrifice her physical self and her education, in order to be with Edward. By going to Dartmouth, her physical transformation into a supernatural being must be delayed, which does not please Bella. For Edward, her transformation is something that he does out of necessity of saving her life, with a concern over her opportunity to enjoy human experiences. However, Bella has been vainly insisting he transform her immediately after she graduates high school, as a means of preserving her youth.

Meanwhile, Edward brings up a college education in discussion with Bella's father, as a rationale for the couples desire to get married so quickly, "We're going away to Dartmouth together in the fall, Charlie...I'd like to do that, well, the right way. It's how I was raised"

(Meyer 16). Edward places a significant value on a Bella's ability to experience college, and he truly desires this for Bella because it is such an enriching personal experience. Radcliffe's heroines rarely had anyone looking out for their personal enrichment opportunities. Perhaps this is because different times produce different social norms. Of course, college was not an option for late eighteenth century heroines. College was something that only males were permitted to benefit from in Radcliffe's day, with rare exception. Meyer may also be using Edward to give a literary nod to her Mormon faith here too.

If we look at the heroines found in Ann Radcliffe's works, we see women whose fates are dictated largely by the religious and patriarchal authorities that control their lives. These women are deprived of any notion of autonomy. Radcliffe's heroines do not have an opportunity to pursue their own passions without suffering severe repercussions and possibly death. To Moers's point, Radcliffe's heroines are portrayed as victims of the patriarchy; their only vehicle for achieving heroine status is through suffering and hardship. Through her suffering, the heroine is improved in her character, and elevated to a higher moral ground than her male oppressor. For example, in *The Italian*, Ellena is kidnapped and puts up no resistance but to act as a victim, "They gave no reply, but threw a veil over her face, and, seizing her arms, led her almost unresisting, but supplicating, towards the portico," and upon seeing her aunt bound by intruders, Ellena responds passively by fainting, "All consciousness had now forsaken her" (Radcliffe 61). The text could be implying a self-sacrificing martyrdom on behalf of the heroine who knows there is nothing she can do physically to alter her situation.

In comparison, the heroine of Meyer's novels exists within a patriarchal society, but in many ways, we find a much more outspoken and progressive version of a heroine. By making this progress, our heroine changes and in the process, she adopts violence to combat the villains

that threaten her. Ironically, this causes her to devolve into a heroine on par with her male oppressors as she employs violence to counter their aggression. When Bella is faced with an unwanted romantic advance in the third novel in the series, *New Moon*, she doesn't respond passively, "My arms were already around his neck, so I grabbed two fistfuls of his hair--- ignoring the stabbing pain in my right hand—and fought back, struggling to pull my face away from his" (Meyer 527). Radcliffe's heroines do not take on the masculine traits of violence as we see in the *Twilight* series. Meyers and Radcliffe do share a common desire to avoid overtly sexual behavior in their heroines. Radcliffe's works were unlike Matthew Lewis's, in that Lewis portrayed taboo subjects such as rape, incest, and etc., which Radcliffe felt were inappropriate topics for a novel. *The Italian* was written as a response to *The Monk*, which contains scenes that Radcliffe found offensive.

For example, "The friar returned the embrace, which had set his blood on fire. The luxurious and unbounded excesses of the former night were renewed, and they separated not till the bell for matins rang" (202). Lewis's monk was a hypocrite who broke his vows of chastity, murdered his mother and raped his sister, all of which offended Radcliffe. In contrast, Radcliffe's devious monk, Schedoni, is able to recognize Ellena as his long lost daughter and at the last minute avoids stabbing his daughter, "At length he yielded to the fullness of his heart, and Schedoni, the stern Schedoni, wept and sighed!" (Radcliffe 236).

Similarly, Meyer's heroine attempts to be the sexual aggressor in the novel, but she is rebuffed by Edward who insists they wait until they are married. Even then, Meyer glosses over the details of the event; in the fourth book of her series, *Breaking Dawn*, Bella and Edward are enjoying a romantic swim on the first night of their honeymoon, "Forever," he agreed, and then pulled us gently into deeper water" (Meyer 85). The next scene begins with the sun waking

Bella the next morning, “The sun, hot on the bare skin of my back, woke me in the morning” (Meyer 85). Meyer’s reasoning for this conservative take on the subject is that she is a Mormon and wishes to follow the tenets of her religion. This is actually an unusual take on the subject of sexuality for a modern Gothic writer. For example, Charlaine Harris has produced a series of modern Gothic novels called *Sookie Stackhouse: The Southern Vampire* which would easily fit into the mold of the “Male” horror Gothic. Her novels are popular and unlike Meyer’s works, they contain a great deal of sexuality and violence on the part of her heroine.

Meyer doesn’t gloss over the concept of sexuality in her heroine entirely; by taking such an unusual stance on the subject, she actually breaks with the Radcliffean Gothic. Meyer depicts her heroine as being the sexual aggressor in her relationship with Edward. For example, in *Breaking Dawn*, Bella narrates, “I locked my arms around his neck and melted against his cold chest. Too soon, as usual, he pulled away” (Meyer 315). The supernatural Edward is forced to rebuff the heroine’s sexual advances because of the explained potential harm to Bella. In this way, Meyer may be acknowledging the modern sensibility of her female audience who are now empowered to initiate sexual advances. Bella’s persistent sexual desires are more reminiscent of the antagonist Matilda (a devil) in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*, than Radcliffe’s work. Similarly, Matilda pursued the monk relentlessly and eventually succeeded in seducing him, which led to his eventual ruin. Perhaps Meyer is depicting female sexual aggression (typically a masculine trait) as a behavior that is unnatural and must be checked. Edward reluctantly agrees to sleep with Bella only after they are married, but before she is transformed into a supernatural being. Consequently, their daughter is conceived and Bella is very nearly killed by the child.

The idealized gothic narrative of *Twilight* presents us with a text in which the heroine must attempt to manage the tension between navigating the expectations placed on her by her

role as a modern woman, daughter, etc. She progresses from nervous young adult who doubts herself constantly, and makes poor judgments, to a confident, capable mother and wife. She is presented as the modern heroine who achieves balance in a society that places a premium on individualism and self-gratification while still valuing the maternal and the domestic realms. Meyer's text seems to be saying that the stakes have been raised; the modern heroine cannot passively navigate through the deep recesses of dark and foreboding castles while running for her life. She must be able to achieve balance within roles that include matriarch, wife, daughter, careerist, student, and free-thinking, self-aware individual—while confronting her enemies. Bella expects to conquer all obstacles in her way, and achieve her desires throughout the novels. She doesn't perceive limitations on her expectations in the way that Radcliffe's Ellena does.

For example, Bella learns that the most sacred rule of the ancient Volturi, who rule the supernatural world, requires all vampires to abstain from sharing knowledge of their existence with a human. However, Bella still fully expects to find some way to reconcile her new supernatural life with her previous human life. More than anything else, Bella desires to have her human parents meet their half-vampire granddaughter, who drinks blood and communicates telepathically. Bella does manage to achieve this seemingly impossible goal in the final pages of the fourth novel.

Meyer's Gothic narrative reveals a male power structure that allows women more freedom to explore additional roles, without reducing their expectations of the traditional gender roles in any significant way. Bella Swan represents a modern Gothic heroine who is empowered, flawed (her judgment is occasionally questionable), challenged in new ways, and still facing villains—mortal and supernatural. The primary difference between Radcliffe's prototypical Gothic heroine and her contemporary counterpart lies in her ability to make her own decisions

and drive the plot through her actions. Today's heroine has opportunities that Radcliffe's heroines did not have, which is reflective of the changes in our society since the late eighteenth century.

Another way in which late eighteenth century heroines differ from modern Gothic heroines, is that the former invariably found salvation in the arms of their male protectors; we see this with Radcliffe, but today the existence of a male protector in a Gothic narrative is not to be assumed. As Helene Meyers points out, "The Gothic plot traditionally has been resolved by joining the heroine to a family and a male lover" (Meyers 40). If we look at the *Twilight* series, Bella Swan goes through a maturation of character over the course of four books. The series ends with her as the female heroic (vampire) figure that is able to stand on her own and in fact, physically defends the life of her husband and extended family successfully, "Every minute of the day that I wasn't with Renesmee [her infant daughter] or learning to fight, I was in the backyard with Kate, trying to push my [supernatural] internal shield outside of my own brain to protect someone else" (Meyer 617).

As Helene Meyers points out, "Villains and protectors are often at least temporarily indistinguishable from one another, and thus these narratives explore the fear that men represent a threat and women victims-to-be" (Meyers 18). This observation aptly describes the narrative throughout the *Twilight* series. In the first novel of the *Twilight* series, Edward Cullen acts as Bella Swan's protector when he saves her life from a random accident. A male suitor of Bella's is driving a van in the school parking lot when he loses control of the vehicle and careens toward the unassuming Bella, who would probably have been killed were it not for Edward. Edward immediately comes to her rescue, almost before she knows she is even in danger, "Then his hands moved so fast they blurred. One was suddenly gripping under the body of the van, and

something was dragging me, swinging my legs around like a rag doll's" (Meyer 56). This is the first of many instances in which Edward saves Bella's life, with her ultimately repaying the favor by saving not only his life, but the life of their child and those of Edward's entire coven as well.

However, the notion of a male protector (Edward) as a threat becomes true for Bella after she has become pregnant with his child. Edward unknowingly sentences Bella to death as a result of impregnating her during their honeymoon. Because Meyer's heroine becomes pregnant while still a human, she finds out that she cannot physically carry a baby that is half-human and half-vampire. Consequently, her child is thirsty for blood and begins to attack Bella from inside her womb, which has become impenetrable due to the child's supernatural state, "Another shattering crack inside her body, the loudest yet, so loud that we both froze in shock waiting for her answering shriek. Nothing. Her legs, which had been curled up in agony, now went limp, sprawling out in an unnatural way" (Meyer 351). Bella almost dies because she will not allow Edward and his father Carlisle to remove (abort) the half-vampire child that is killing her slowly. In this way, Meyer presents a strong minded, suffering heroine very similar to Radcliffe's Ellena, who while she lacks Bella's mental toughness, does endure a great deal of hardship. Edward is forced to bite Bella in order to prevent her death due to the baby, "It was like he was kissing her, brushing his lips at her throat, at her wrists, into the crease at the inside of her arm. But I could hear the lush tearing of her skin as his teeth bit through, again and again..." (Meyer 355).

This scene relates well to Helene Meyers argument that portrays the destruction of the female body. Meyers argues, "Male villains and the young, attractive females whom they often cause to suffer are muted versions of sadists and masochists" (Meyers 60). Edward is never viewed by Bella as being anything but her protector, but Edward is viewed by Bella's male suitor Jacob Black, as having almost murdered her as a result of getting her pregnant. In this way,

Meyer and Radcliffe are using similar Gothic tropes, and this scene validates Helene Meyers' argument.

On the surface, Bella's supernatural powers appear to signify a significant break from anything we have seen in Radcliffe's works. However, it must be considered that not only can Bella not succeed in saving her family's life in her human form (the supernatural is required), but it is her husband whom reluctantly transforms her into a supernatural state in which she acquires the power to be his equal and ultimately, his protector. Her power derives from a male's willingness to allow her access to it, thus reminding the reader that Bella still lives within a patriarchal power structure which she can navigate differently than Radcliffe's heroines, but she cannot escape its power.

In addition, the text in the fourth novel seems to be subtly reminding the reader that Bella's weaker human state, is nothing compared to her supernatural (masculine) state in which all physical aspects of her body and senses are enhanced profoundly, "Through my sightless human eyes, the scars left from his[her brother in law's] former life with the newborn armies in the South has been mostly invisible...Now that I could see, the scars were Jasper's most dominant feature" (Meyer 402).

Immediately after Bella is transformed into a supernatural being, she is told that as a "newborn" it is expected she will have little control over her emotions, "Controlling your emotions, Bella...I've never seen a newborn do that—stop an emotion in its tracks that way" (Meyer 404). The text could be interpreted here as implying that the male members of her coven are expecting her to be weak emotionally because she is a female, despite being a supernatural one; or the text could be read as saying that because she is transitioning from a weaker (female)

human state, to that of the more (masculine) supernatural state, she is expected to retain remnants of her weaker self for a bit longer. Regardless, the text seems to be reminding us that the ideal state of being consists of the mastering of our emotions, and the strengthening of our body, “It had come on slowly, but I could feel it now—the raw, massive strength thrilling in my limbs” (410). Perhaps Meyer is subtly reminding us that our society still values highest the qualities which are typically associated with the masculine. Bella is described as extraordinarily beautiful and graceful, but still her dominant traits are her enhanced physical and mental powers.

Stephenie Meyer’s willingness to allow her heroine to circumvent the traditional patriarchal power restrictions that contained heroines of Radcliffe’s time reflects her desire to create a Gothic novel reflective of our modern way of life. This lack of victim feminism found in Meyer’s work is profoundly different from much of the eighteenth and nineteenth century gothic works, and would certainly be applauded by scholarly critics such as Helene Meyers. Bella’s desire to balance a successful family life with her “career” as a supernatural vampire protecting her community, leads her to a better understanding of her self and what she wants as a woman. The four books of the *Twilight* series are intended not just to relate to the young adult’s desire to find a sense of belonging and purpose, but transcend the boundaries of young adult fiction to relate well to the modern woman as well. Just as in Radcliffe’s day, contemporary society places a greater emphasis on familial duties than on professional (or supernatural, in Bella’s case) obligations.

No matter how powerful Bella becomes as a Gothic heroine, she is still first and foremost associated with the domestic. Perhaps Meyer is reminding us that we have made progress as a society in lessening some misogynist notions of a woman’s role in our society, but a contemporary heroine is still constrained by domesticity and patriarchal oppression still exists

even in the supernatural realm. Family obligations have remained primarily but not exclusively, the domain of women today. Balancing both the domestic and the professional arenas can result in a haunting fear of failure for many women. Therein lies the challenge that Radcliffe's heroines did not face; today's Gothic heroine can enjoy the independence of making her own decisions and being much more self-reliant. If Meyer's heroine fails in her dual duties on either point, she loses credibility with a modern audience whose expectations of womanhood have changed since Radcliffe's time. By the end of the series, Bella is able to grow into a fully realized, self-aware character in the form of a powerful vampire. She suffers as Radcliffe's heroines do, but she is able to protect her family as a male heroic character would and contributes to the safety of her combined human/supernatural community.

In the fourth novel, an epic battle takes place in which Meyer's heroine uses her supernatural power to save her family and everyone they know from being killed by the ancient supernatural male figures who rule in an aristocratic manner over their supernatural world. Bella saves everyone by conjuring a shield to repel the supernatural villains trying to harm her family. What should not be overlooked in this scene is Meyer's presentation of the aggressors. The Volturi, a coven of ancient, ruling vampires who live in Rome, are provoked to murder Bella's vampire family (and extended coven communities), because she and Edward transgress the Volturi's dictated patriarchal rules of reproduction by producing a half-human, half-vampire child. Perhaps this is our best example from Meyer of a patriarchal oppression that tries to force women to accept the status quo, which tends not to favor their interests as females. Meyer's aristocratic supernatural villains have lived in Rome since ancient times, and can be equated with Radcliffe's depiction of the Inquisition.

In one scene in *The Italian*, we see an Inquisitor depict an attitude similar to that of the Volturi, “Tremble, therefore, and revere. But understand, that, though we have sufficient proof of your guilt, we require you to confess” (Radcliffe 205). These figures are similar to the oppressive figures that Meyer depicts in that, neither group are truly interested in justice and have absolute authority over those they rule. Neither the Volturi nor the Inquisition are willing to listen to logical or rational explanations, even when backed up with evidence, as in the case of the fourth book of the *Twilight* series, “...but Alistair worried that no matter how decisively we can prove your innocence, the Volturi will not listen. He thinks they will find an excuse to achieve their goals here” (Meyer 657).

Nonetheless, after the battle is over, Edward narrates that, “So it was a combination of things there at the end, but what it really boiled down to was...Bella” (Meyer 742). Bella is found to be more powerful than any of the supernatural figures in the novel. In the end, Meyer’s Gothic heroine is rewarded for her suffering in the same way as Radcliffe’s character, and her focus shifts to her new family as a source of happiness, but not to the exclusion of her individual desires, “The life I’d fought for was safe again. My family was reunited” (Meyer 751). Meyer’s heroine does this while not relinquishing, but embracing her duties as mother and wife in the domestic sphere. Bella retains many of the trappings and relationships from her human life after transitioning into a vampire and establishing her own idealized nuclear family. Bella’s decisive actions ultimately enable her to succeed in getting what she wants and therefore, she is truly happy with her life. In this way, she becomes something of a superhero/Gothic heroine rather than the typical female victim we see in Radcliffe’s Gothic writing.

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