

THE BARD AND HIS LEGACY IN YOUNG ADULT
PARANORMAL TEEN ROMANCE

by

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The idea for this study of connections between Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and contemporary teen paranormal romance novels, such as Stephenie Meyer's *New Moon*, blossomed as a result of my teaching experience with my high school English students. For more than a decade, I have taught high school English to grades nine through twelve in Texas high schools, including at one inner-city school in East Austin and, currently, in a rural high school in Cedar Creek. It was one of my former students in her freshman year of college who first introduced the *Twilight* series to me, and shortly thereafter, I had students in AP classes trying to convince me that I should include the books on the syllabus. My interest in these, and similar, novels increased when I discovered an entire section in a Barnes & Noble store dedicated to "Paranormal Teen Romance." This was a growing area of popularity for my students, as well as a genre I personally find enjoyable. My first approach was to use the *Twilight* novels in the Advanced Placement Literature & Composition classroom as an extension of our studies of *Dracula*, as an exploration of the evolution of the vampire in popular literature, but after rereading the series while teaching a unit on Shakespeare to my ninth grade classes, the wheels began to turn. I enjoy Shakespeare's plays, though my students often have difficulty puzzling through the language to understand the plots. My usual classroom examples of "other" forms of *Romeo and Juliet*, such as *West Side Story*, *Grease*, and *Underworld*, gave way to discussions about contemporary young adult texts, with *New Moon* at the center of discussions. Students made multiple connections between the play and this paranormal YA romance, even recommending other similar genre texts to me to explore.

I entered the process of writing my thesis from the stances of literature student, literature and film lover, researcher, feminist- and symbolist-critic, and educator. My hope is to present new ideas for personal or professional consideration or for classroom application.

This thesis will examine the similarities between the contemporary teen paranormal romance novel, *New Moon*, of the *Twilight* saga by Stephenie Meyer, and the classic Shakespearean play, *Romeo & Juliet*; discuss comments the novel makes about various contemporary Western issues; provide an overview of the history and appeal of the vampire; consider the appeal of both *Romeo and Juliet* and *New Moon* for young adult audiences; and conclude with reflections on how each text responds to concerns of contemporary young adult audiences in the United States. A footnote is also included which will examine the texts through the critical lens of gender theory, and an appendix offers additional reading and/or viewing suggestions for other contemporary young adult paranormal romances which mirror *Romeo and Juliet*.

CHAPTER 2: SIMILARITIES AND SOCIAL ISSUES

“When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.” –John Muir

Romeo and Juliet is one of the most referenced love stories in literature. Despite its Elizabethan language and dated origins, the text continues to be studied by students in secondary and post-secondary classrooms in the twenty-first century, and it has resurfaced in new forms, informing a multitude of paranormal teen romance novels for contemporary young adult audiences. One such reinvention of the classic story is Stephenie Meyer’s novel, *New Moon*, which includes motifs of young love, challenges to authority and social norms, mortality, and easy-to-relate-to youthful protagonists—albeit many in the forms of paranormal characters such as vampires and werewolves.

New Moon, the novel, mirroring Romeo and Juliet

From the beginning of Meyer’s novel, readers are reminded of the undercurrents and influences of *Romeo and Juliet*. Meyer begins the novel with a selection from Shakespeare’s play: “These violent delights have violent ends / And in triumph die, like fire and powder, / Which, as they kiss, consume” and continues to directly reference the play throughout *New Moon*, noting specific characters, scenes, and even school assignments related to the study of the play (qtd Shakespeare II.vi). The intertextuality continues with parallels between characters and motifs, though the novel does not end with the traditional death scene, instead resembling melodrama and providing a reunion that does not end in death (Kapurch).

Bella Swan, Edward Cullen, and Jacob Black embody the characters of Romeo, Juliet, and Paris, respectively. Bella is a human living in Forks, Washington. She meets

Edward, a vampire-in-disguise, and each falls in love with the other. The two contend with the taboo concept of prey (human) and predator (vampire), being in love, and the danger of his family's secret being revealed to others in the human world. Following the incident in which Edward's brother, Jasper, lunges for Bella when she gets a paper cut, Edward sends himself and his family into exile, similar to Romeo's banishment from Verona. In her grief over his leaving, Bella commits a social suicide, distancing herself from her family and the company of her friends, much as Juliet does when feigning death. Jacob Black, a werewolf, steps in to help heal Bella's broken heart, yet he, too, like Paris, wants her love in ways that extend beyond friendship. Because both Jacob and Edward love Bella, as Paris and Romeo want Juliet, and because their species have a past marked with violence and distrust, Jacob and Edward also hover at the edge of a battle for Bella's heart.

In choosing Romeo, Juliet is choosing to turn her back on her family and her friends, giving up her name, because "what's in a name"—her family's name and all of the feuding associated with it—is not as strong as the love she feels for Romeo (Shakespeare 2.2.43). Jacob Black is like family to Bella; despite his flirtations and attempts to woo her, Bella comes to rely upon Jacob over the course of the novel, much as Juliet relies upon the Nurse, and Bella's choice to save Edward versus staying home, safe with him, nearly crushes Jacob. Here again are reminders of Paris, the other man linked romantically to Juliet, who ultimately does not end up with the female protagonist. In the Epilogue, Bella states, "abruptly, I remembered what had happened to Paris when Romeo came back. The stage directions were simple: *They fight. Paris falls*" (Meyer 552, emphasis in original). There is no "Jacob falls" death moment in *New Moon*, but this only

heightens young adult audiences' sense of the bittersweet at the close of the novel, as Bella is faced with being physically reunited with Edward but emotionally distanced from Jacob. This is quite similar to, though less tragic than, the bittersweet reconciliation of the Capulet and Montague families at the close of *Romeo and Juliet* after the death of their children.

New Moon also imitates *Romeo and Juliet* in some of its settings. The window scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, where the lovers have their secret tryst, is apparent in similar scenes of *New Moon*. The window into Bella's room, like Juliet's, is the entry point for Edward – and also Jacob – to secretly meet with Bella late at night. Like Romeo, who is not of Juliet's social world, the paranormal characters of Edward and Jacob both physically and emotionally cross into the world of humans when they pass over the threshold of Bella's window. Being an entry into the female protagonist's bedroom, any sharing of this space by the male characters deepens the reader's awareness of the intimacy between the characters and creates an often unspoken acknowledgment of the undercurrents of desire and sexuality between characters. This heightened awareness, without direct action to fulfill such desires (at least in *New Moon*), serves to add more layers of tension between the characters as well as within the reader.

Other familiar plot pieces and settings borrowed from *Romeo and Juliet* include Romeo's banishment and time in Mantua and Juliet's rash behaviors in her efforts to be reunited with him. While Romeo is banished by the Prince for the murder of Tybalt, Edward chooses to exile himself and the rest of the Cullens from Forks after his brother, Jasper, inadvertently attempts to kill Bella when smelling the blood from her paper cut. Romeo leaves Juliet the morning after their wedding with trepidation, but also hope, as he

looks forward to hearing from Juliet while the pair waits for the Friar to “find a time / To blaze [the] marriage, reconcile [their] friends, / Beg pardon of the Prince, and call [Romeo] back” (Shakespeare 3.3.150-152). Edward, on the other hand, though still in love with her, lies to Bella to keep her away and protect her from the nature of the creatures he and his family are, telling her “I don’t want you to come with me” and “I’ve let this go on much too long, and I’m sorry for that” (Meyer 69, 70). The distancing of the boys from their loves, whether sanctioned by law or personal sense of ethics, has the same affects on the girls: each one undergoes some form of depression and acts rashly in order to be reunited with her “true love.” Juliet sobs over the situation and impending separation from her new husband, and she looks upon him “as one in the bottom of a tomb” (Shakespeare 3.5.56). Her reaction to her parents’ arranged marriage is not to speak about her love but instead “to the friar to know his remedy. / If all else fail,” she plans to kill herself rather than endure separation and be forced into another relationship she does not want (3.5.243). Though she does not take her life in the Friar’s cell, Juliet is willing to chance faking her death and taking a potion which could end up killing her if not mixed properly, with the one goal of being reunited with her love.

Bella, too, experiences depression, though one that would be classified more as clinical depression versus a temporary depressive state like Juliet’s. After Edward’s departure, Bella says, “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,” and Meyer follows this with four pages that only note the names of months, indicating the passing of time for Bella and the emptiness of her life in Edward’s absence (84). After the empty months, Bella attempts to reinsert herself into her formal social circle of friends again,

though to prevent her father from sending her away from Forks. At the movies with Jessica, Bella realizes that she looks more like the zombies in the film than a normal teenage girl. In her depression, Bella suffers from nightmares, an aching in her chest, and eventually also hallucinations of Edward, triggered by placing herself into dangerous situations. Both Juliet and Bella are willing to place themselves into potentially life-threatening situations in order to have contact again – even if just hallucination-induced memories – with the men they love. And while Bella also has a suitor, Jacob, whose love she cannot return, Meyer uses this Paris-esque character as a balm for Bella instead of a trigger for ending her life.

Pressure is placed upon both female protagonists to choose the “right” male suitor; Juliet is told that Paris is the most respectable and appropriate choice for her, and Charlie would much prefer Jacob, Paris’ equivalent, to Edward based upon how depressed Bella becomes upon Edward’s leaving. When their families push them to move on, as with Bella, or to marry, in Juliet’s case, each girl teeters on behaviors ranging from rash to withdrawn as she can only seem to focus on the man she loves. Juliet is ready to kill herself in Friar Lawrence’s cell though she agrees to drink a dangerous potion to fake her own death instead. Bella first withdraws from the world, before finding that reckless behaviors such as riding motorcycles and cliff diving help her to hold on to Edward’s memory.

Each story emphasizes the dependence of the youthful protagonists on one another, which is especially obvious in the states of depression the girls fall into in the absence of their loves, but both Romeo and Edward also fall into brooding states when this separation occurs. Each still greatly cares for and thinks about his love while in exile,

and both experiences second-hand, unreliable news that their loves are dead; Romeo hears the news from Balthasar and Edward from Rosalee. Each acts hastily, seeking to end his life since life is no longer worth living if the one he loves is dead. Romeo yells, “I defy you, stars!” upon learning that Juliet has been placed in Capulet’s tomb, and he seeks a poison to commit suicide in order to join her in death (Shakespeare 5.1.24). As Edward pointed out to Bella months earlier when, ironically, watching a film version of *Romeo and Juliet*, poison only works on humans, and vampires would need to invoke the ire of the Volturi—vampire royalty who make and uphold laws, much like the Prince in the play—in order to receive death. Edward’s decision to die brings him – and eventually Bella and Alice – to the Italian city of Volterra, which is yet another nod, via setting, to *Romeo and Juliet*. When Edward is denied his initial request for death, he plans to expose his paranormal nature to humans, thus forcing the Volturi to step in and kill him.

The male protagonists seek to be reunited with their loves in death, but this is where the tales diverge: Romeo and Juliet eventually do commit suicide and are, theoretically, together again in death, but Edward is saved by Bella before the suicidal turn of events can take place. While love and devotion is apparent in each story, a happy twist has been made for contemporary, primarily American, young adult audiences to alter the impending tragic ending found in Shakespeare’s drama. In her article, “Young Adult Fiction for Teens,” Niranjana Iyer discusses what makes Western culture’s contemporary young adult fiction, in general, different from that of the past—namely, hope:

Besides the thrills of identification with similarly aged characters and of non-judgmental understanding, young adult novels offer hope. . . . It is no

accident that most young adult novels, if not neatly resolved, at least end with the probability that things will get better for the protagonists. Young adult novels can act as a lifeline for teens, providing stories where the world is in alliance with them rather than against them. It is therefore critical that teens have access to stories that open up possibilities for growth and change. (n.p.)

While the storyline and messages presented in *Romeo and Juliet* are still relevant for contemporary young adult audiences, reinventing the story with the opportunity for a happy ending has become more appealing for today's teens in Western culture. By placing the two texts side-by-side for them to contrast, young adults can see the shared characteristics as well as understand that some things in life, as in stories, are experienced by youth no matter what century they happen to live in.

Another such shared aspect of both play and film, in addition to those previously discussed, is the structure of family. The family hierarchy is male-centered for both of the female protagonists. While Juliet's mother is physically present in the play, Lady Capulet ultimately lacks real interest in what her daughter wants or needs, and she defers to her husband's decisions regarding Juliet's future. Lord Capulet wants his wishes to be carried out, regardless of the affects they will have upon Juliet, even resorting to threats of disownment if she will not obey him:

An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend—

An you be not, hang! Beg! Starve! Die in the streets!

For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee

Nor what is mine she never do thee good.

Trust to't. Bethink you. I'll not be forsworn. (Shakespeare 3.5.192-196)

Juliet's father has chosen Paris for her to wed, not knowing that she is already married to Romeo, and to break with the will of her father, according to Lord Capulet, will result in Juliet being tossed onto the streets and forgotten by her family.

In contrast, while Bella lives with her father, Charlie, and is expected to follow his rules, he does not want her to leave Forks unless it will help her to forget Edward. He wishes only for her happiness, saying, "no, not even that much. I just want you not to be miserable. I think you'll have a better chance if you get out of Forks" (Meyer 97).

Carlisle, too, is the patriarchal figure of the Cullen family, despite his youthful appearance. He works to repair the physical wounds of humans and the emotional wounds of both Edward and Bella. Much like Friar Lawrence in *Romeo and Juliet*, Carlisle, whose father was a clergyman, attempts to heal rifts between seemingly opposing sides. Bella recognizes the importance of having his support when she asks the Cullens to be turned into a vampire; she realizes that his "vote counted more than any majority" (534). Carlisle tells Edward "'You've chosen not to live without her, and that doesn't leave me a choice'" (534). The father figures of *New Moon* are much more willing to compromise and do what they can to support their children's happiness, reflecting a shift in societal expectations and familial roles from the Elizabethan era to present.

Though Romeo and Juliet initially have no personal distaste for one another's families, the same cannot be said for their kin as skirmishes occur frequently between the Montagues and Capulets in *Romeo and Juliet*, evidenced from the antagonistic words and

actions of family members leading to a brawl in the streets in the opening lines of Act 1.

The Prince, authority of Verona, castigates the families for their fights, saying:

Three civil brawls, bred of an airy word
By thee, old Capulet, and Montague,
Have thrice disturbed the quiet of our streets
And made Verona's ancient citizens
Cast by their grave, beseeming ornaments
To wield old partisans, in hands as old,
Cankered with peace, to part your cankered hate.
If ever you disturb our streets again
Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace. (Shakespeare 1.1.98-106)

An ancient distrust also exists in *New Moon*, though between the werewolves and the vampires, rather than humans, as they have a past history intertwined with bloodshed and violence. Bella recalls one of the first conversations she had with Jacob, before she understood what Edward is: “*You see, the cold ones are the natural enemy of the wolf—well, not the wolf really, but the wolves that turn into men, like our ancestors. You would call them werewolves*” (Meyer 293, emphasis in original). Jacob also tells Bella that “vampires don't count as people,” clearly conveying his feelings about the other species (310). Edward, too, hints that he could easily kill Jacob and not be overly concerned about his death, and he tells Bella that it is best that they stay away from Jacob, since “the enmity is rooted too deeply [and] it would most likely turn into a fight” (551).

Mirroring the Prince's warning of the punishment of death in *Romeo and Juliet*, the Volturi of *New Moon* clearly issues a threat of death for Bella and punishment for the

Cullens should Bella not be turned into a vampire soon, as she knows too much about the vampire world. Caius, one of the Volturi, warns them to ““be sure that you follow through on your side. Were I you, I would not delay too long. We do not offer second chances”” (481). In each text, secrecy and lies serve to both protect and threaten the lovers, but ultimately they result in a more unified social structure. Romeo and Juliet’s secret marriage does not prevent the slayings of Mercutio or Tybalt, the secret potion Juliet takes foils her plan because of delayed messages due to the plague, and Paris knows nothing of Romeo’s secret love prior to being slain. But it is also because of Romeo’s and Juliet’s secrets and lies about their love for one another that the Montagues and the Capulets finally set aside their feuding to honor that love of their dead children. In *New Moon*, Edward lies to Bella about not wanting her cause her to sink into depression before acting recklessly in order to manifest hallucinations of Edward, Jacob’s omission on the phone with Edward about whose death has occurred leads Edward to seek out the Volturi, and because the Volturi learn of Bella’s knowledge (albeit one she keeps secret) about vampires, she is faced with impending “death”/transformation to a vampire and separation from her family and friends. This also leads to a decision to “turn” Bella and have her join the Cullen coven, who stand united against Volturi threats to harm her, so while she must leave behind her human family, as Juliet would leave her father’s house, Bella also gains a new (paranormal) family, just as Juliet would have had if her “perfect love [had not been] disrupted by circumstance” (Garber *Shakespeare* 56).

There is also a shared “motif of counsel” in each text. As Jill Levenson notes in “Romeo and Juliet before Shakespeare,” Romeo and Juliet have the Friar and the Nurse who offer advice, and Romeo also has Benvolio and Mercutio who share their opinions

with him on everything from love to politics (346). Indeed, Juliet's parents often share their counsel with her on what she should or should not do in order to be happy and fulfill her role as an obedient daughter. Edward has his immediate and extended family with whom he can discuss his concerns, though primarily he looks to Carlisle for guidance. Bella, while having a set of friends at school, talks mostly with her father, Jacob, or her reader-audience in *New Moon* when trying to determine what she should do. Levenson writes that, "in recognizable fashion, counsel frequently halts rash action. More often, however, it accelerates disaster," as does the counsel to Juliet regarding how to approach her arranged marriage to Paris which leads her to take the potion, or the self-induced hallucinations of Edward's scolding and pleas which Bella has when in dangerous situations that continue to make her want to place her life at risk (346).

There is a warning in each text about acting rashly and a reminder that there are consequences for every action, but perhaps more importantly, ideas and situations are presented which validate the depth of feeling between young couples and, to some extent, between them and their communities. Both texts explore not only romance but also friendship, identity formation, religion, death, family, and freedom, which are relevant to young adult audiences in every time frame and setting. *New Moon*, however, specifically examines a number of issues to which contemporary young adult audiences in Western society are more directly exposed on a routine basis.

New Moon: Societal Expectations

Gender Roles

There is a current generation of young adult readers who have been raised on Disney "values" and augmented fairy tales which reflect primarily stereotypical

expectations of each gender. Female characters have a tendency to have thin waists and ample bosom, require the assistance of a man to save them in troubling situations, and often have uncanny domestic skills. For male characters, the stereotypes are just as daunting, with young men being strong, smart, handsome, and leadership material, while holding down a job or being independently wealthy. As Sara Buttsworth points out in “CinderBella: Twilight, Fairy Tales, and the Twenty-First-Century American Dream,” “it would be wrong to imply that Disney heroines have not changed over time, even though, ultimately, the end result of fulfillment through marriage has been maintained,” but despite more recent attempts by Disney to break with certain stereotypes in films such as *Frozen*, the vast majority of visual media aimed at young children includes lumping women and men into particular roles, and it is these roles which American young adult readers have to contend with when approaching contemporary paranormal fiction (63-64).

New Moon includes both traditional, or stereotypical, and non-traditional portrayals of gender. Bella is a child in a divorced, single-parent home, being raised by a father who is not only the head of the household but also the head of law enforcement in the town of Forks, Washington. Settled in to life as a bachelor prior to Bella’s arrival, he keeps the same routines of work, fishing, and watching sports on television, pausing to ask about his daughter’s day and eat meals – most often prepared by her – before settling in for the evening. While he does exhibit concern for Bella’s depression, his solution, aside from seeking professional help, is to have her move back to live with her mother, who is portrayed as scatter-brained, moving from one fad to another in rapid succession

without investing herself long-term in any one thing, and enjoying time traveling with her younger husband to watch him play in minor league baseball games (Meyer 36).

Bella is depicted as *needing* a strong male figure, Edward in particular, and she is strongly dependent upon him for her happiness. After he leaves, she ignores her friends until threatened with being sent back to her mother, but even then, the girl whom she chooses to see a movie with, Jessica, is presented as superficial and insensitive. Bella eventually reunites with Jacob Black, an attractive young man around her age who is also a skilled mechanic, and he becomes her stand-in Edward, her “sun” in her gloomy life, upon whom she also becomes dependent.

Predominantly, Bella’s behaviors suggest that the traditionally accepted roles of women are still a part of contemporary femininity: find a good, strong man, and make him your world; take care of him as best you can; do things he likes to do, and spend lots of time together (Gill). The characterization of the men in the novel also imply stereotypical expectations of males still exist. Men are often described as physically strong and fit, attractive, authoritative, skilled, and protective. Overall, while the format and characters of the novel may be exciting for contemporary youth, the context implies that antiquated expectations of each gender are still perpetuated, to some degree, in modern Western society.

Diversity

The unique cast of *New Moon* not only makes it appealing to young adult readers, but it also comments on the importance of accepting differences in today’s world. In “Vampire Gentlemen and Zombie Beasts: A Rendering of True Monstrosity,” Angela Tenga and Elizabeth Zimmerman write that “of the many cultural changes of the late

twentieth century, perhaps none has shaped the vampire evolution more than the growing belief in understanding and accepting difference. . . . Monsters, [*New Moon*] argues are not so different from us: they haven't chosen what they are and, sometimes, we can befriend them" (84). Bella accepts the nature of the vampires she cares for, understanding their thirst for blood but knowing their compassion and humanity outweighs the primal bloodlust they experience; additionally, after getting over her initial shock that werewolves also exist in her world, it is not the fact that Jacob is an otherworldly creature that bothers her but the actions she believes he is taking. Meyer focuses on embracing the uniqueness of the individual, searching for the good within each person, and judging intent and actions over appearance and first impressions.

Appearance: Youth and Beauty

Bella comments repeatedly on Edward's and the Cullens' beauty, often disparaging her own looks at the same time. Tenga and Zimmerman note that "today's vampires typically express everlasting youth, beauty, and vitality, denying the corruption of the grave," but

While such depictions obviously satisfy the marketing requirements of the entertainment industry, they also respond to a seeming epidemic of body dysmorphic disorder and an obsessive fear of ageing that have plagued Western culture in recent years, particularly among the young people who constitute the target audience for much vampire fiction. . . . Haunted by the contrast between her 'ordinary' face and the beauty of her vampire boyfriend, Edward Cullen, protagonist Bella Swan voices readers'

insecurities. . . . New-millennium vampires like Edward Cullen are consummate plastic surgeons whose work guarantees eternal youth. (79)

While diversity and acceptance are undercurrents in the novel, Meyer does not hesitate to point out the very real truth that appearances matter in contemporary society and are a focus of insecurity for most modern-day youth. Young adults today are bombarded with media images of size zero models, weight loss and acne cream commercials, and romantic comedy films and television programs with actors who are muscular and attractive.

Meyer points out that image, unfortunately, does matter in today's world. Rosalie is the Cullen Bella believes to be the most beautiful, yet Rosalie's beauty is also her weakness and downfall, as readers learn later in the *Twilight* series. Emily, who is kind-hearted and protective of her wolf pack, is scarred on half of her face, making individuals who first meet her blink in shock. Society has not risen above making immediate, automatic judgments about people based upon a surface image, but Meyer also tries to point out that the superficial layer of beauty and the obsession with staying young does not equal happiness or goodness. All of the beauty and youthful looks of an individual mean nothing without some substance of soul.

Money, Power, and Status

The novel insinuates that, while material goods and money should not be factors in happiness, America is still a country rooted in capitalism. The idea that security and happiness involve having enough money to pay all of the bills but also never worry about future expenses is represented by the Cullens' wealth. Though they try not to flaunt their above-average bank account holdings, Tenga and Zimmerman state that "from the

Cullens' flashy clothes and cars to their palatial home, it is evident that they are living the consumer dream promoted in Western capitalist society. . . . these vampires enjoy an opulent lifestyle, and perhaps more importantly, the accoutrements that represent their way of life can be purchased" (81). Buttsworth similarly notes that "while [the Cullens] live outside many human systems of operation, they do use them to their advantage" (53). The wealth of the Cullens is one factor elevating them in social status (in addition to their beauty), but it is also used to highlight the power and opportunities money brings and how those with less economic advantage can be stereotyped or even dismissed as not advantageous when selecting a lifelong partner. For Jacob, who lives on the reservation in a smaller house and with few socioeconomic advantages when compared with Edward or even Bella, there are no grand discussions of college and future goals but instead "these depictions seem to necessitate knowledge of a 'trade' rather than aspiration to a profession," as though his skills as a mechanic are commonplace and a reflection of a lack of ambition.

For Consideration

While *Romeo and Juliet* provides a tragic representation of youth, *New Moon* is more explicit and dramatic in its address of issues and concerns faced by young adults. As such, the paranormal romance novel helps to explain *Romeo and Juliet* to contemporary YA audiences, but *Romeo and Juliet* also sheds light on points which are increasingly important in our own time.

CHAPTER 3: BITING INTO VAMPIRE LORE

"The ability of writers to imagine what is not the self, to familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar, is the test of their power." -Toni Morrison

Following the success of the *Harry Potter* series at the end of the twentieth century, paranormal stories burgeoned, re-introducing the vampire and other folkloric legendary materials to a new audience of teen readers, opening the door for this new generation of readers to experience the wonders of the supernatural. In the past decade in young adult literature, romances have blossomed between humans, vampires, angels, and other folkloric creatures. There are many reasons the undead and/or immortal creatures appeal to young readers, some of which include that the characters act as vehicles to discuss difficult issues such as death and aging, ideals of love are presented which teen readers aspire to have in their own lives, and safe spaces are created to escape reality and explore a multitude of possibilities.

Perhaps one of the greatest appeals of these particular stories, though, is that the majority are rooted in hope. The melodrama format which many paranormal teen romances use provide opportunities for audiences to experience the thrill of a “dangerous” love, empathize (or at least sympathize) with protagonists who are ostracized by their social circles and communities, feel the heartbreak when lovers are pulled apart, and yet hold on to the hope that the characters *can*, somehow, some way, have a happy ending (Kapurch).

One of the most popular contemporary trends for paranormal characters is the vampire, a being with roots in folklore around the world. These paranormal creatures, because of their widespread popularity and recent trends in film and television dramas,

are familiar, at least in theory, to contemporary readers, and the age groups with which these creatures interact in such novels are approximately, at least in appearance, the same age as most young adult readers, making the paranormal accessible and almost “normal” for teen audiences.

Vampires: Folklore and History

As previously noted, vampire folklore has been present for thousands of years, providing storytellers with numerous variations of accounts of the undead and attacks on innocents with which to weave their tales. In *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Undead*, Melton writes that “the vampire figure in folklore emerged as an answer to otherwise unsolvable problems within culture. The vampire was seen as the cause of certain unexplainable evils, accounted for the appearance of some extraordinary occurrences within the society, and was often cited as the end product of immoral behavior” (504-05). While tales of vampire-like creatures can be found in cultures around the world, only four will be briefly discussed here: Greek, Mayan, Aztec, and Slavic.

Melton notes that “Greece is one of the oldest sources for the contemporary vampire legend. Ancient Greek writings record the existence of three vampirelike creatures—the *lamiai*, the *empusai*, and the *mormolykiai*”; however, while “known for the drinking of blood, [they] were not vampires in the same sense as those of eastern Europe” being spirits instead of reanimated corpses (304, 305, italics in original). The *vrykolakas*, though, “would develop into true vampires,” and these “revenants (beings that return from the grave)” appear in literature as early as the time of the Roman Emperor Hadrian and often returned because they had unfinished business with an individual they had been close to during life (305, parentheses in original).

In Mexico, both Mayan and Aztec cultures included vampire mythology. Mayans believed in “*Camazotz*, the fierce cave god . . . pictured as a manbat with a sharp nose and large teeth and claws,” who is represented in both artwork and the story of *Popol Vol*, the tale of “two brothers [who] entered the underworld to avenge the death of their father” (458, italics in original). The Aztecs had more than one vampire deity; in addition to a vampire-like god who ruled the underworld, several goddesses embodied vampire-like qualities. *Cihuacoatl* could transform her appearance to entice young men to have sex with her, and, when having finished the act, the men would die. She remains a popular folkloric belief in contemporary times, known “in this century both as the Virgin of Guadalupe in Roman Catholic lore and as La Llorona, the Weeping Woman, in popular folklore. . . . *Cihuacoatl* represented the hunger of the gods for human victims, and state prisoners were regularly sacrificed to satisfy her need for blood” (459, italics in original). The *cihuateteo*, having died along with their baby in childbirth, “attained the status of warrior” for having struggled and fought for survival before ultimately succumbing to death (459). This particular creature “wandered the night and attacked children, leaving them paralyzed or otherwise diseased”; they could be “killed by the sunlight” if they stayed out too long, and “they wear the costume of *Tlazolteotl*, the goddess of sorcery, lust, and evil” (459). With the conquest of Catholicism, the vampiric goddesses underwent a metamorphosis, moving from ranks of deities to those of witches, such as the *tlahuelpuchi*, who “drew elements from both the ancient Aztec goddesses and the witches of Spain, who had the power to transform themselves into animals and like to suck the blood of infants. . . . belief in the *tlahuelpuchi* has continued to the present day in rural Mexico” (460, 461, italics in original).

The Slavic vampire can be traced back to the ninth century, though “it was not the all-pervasive symbol of evil it would come to be in nineteenth-century western European literature. Within the prescientific world of village life, the role of the vampire was to explain various forms of unpredicted and undeserved evil that befell people,” such as violent deaths, suicides, or infant mortality (Melton 627).

Today, evidence of these beliefs can still be found in contemporary depictions of vampires: many are portrayed as seeking a purpose, having transformative qualities in their blood, and having alluring and sensual traits, demonstrating that the vampire, truly, is hard to kill – at least in the popular contemporary genre of teen paranormal romance.

Vampires: Purposes and Appeal

Tales of vampiric creatures have existed for thousands of years, though they were made famous in literature at the end of the 19th century in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, demonstrating a shift from a true belief in these undead beings to the acceptance of them as a literary trope which often is used to reflect the self-conscious, or reveal underlying concerns of a population. This cunning aristocratic vampire reflected the fears and anxieties of a population approaching the turn of the century at the close of the Victorian Age: the possible decline of the British Empire as the leading superpower, an aging monarchy, sexual repression in the face of expected propriety, and concerns regarding foreigners and the uprising of colonies (Bolton). As Matthew J. Bolton writes in “Critical Contexts: *Dracula* and Victorian Anxieties,”

Every age gets the monster it deserves. The Victorians were fascinated by *Dracula* because Stoker’s monster seemed to speak to so many of their collective anxieties at once. He is a figure of excess and of negation, a

stand-in for the sexual libertine, the disease-carrying foreigner, and the infidel. As such, he is a necessary corrective for a society that feared it was becoming too relativistic. (71)

Nearly a century later, in years surrounding the close of the 20th century, vampire media regained popularity in force in the forms of television shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*. Joss Whedon created the *Buffy* series in 1997 before co-creating *Angel* with David Greenwalt only two years later, with each running into the first few years of the new millennium. These series feature Angel, a vampire with a soul, as a reminder that humanity can change its evil ways and instead work to help others. Though a “monster” himself, Angel proves that it is a person’s choices that make a difference, and he chooses to use his enhanced abilities, such as strength, experience, and good looks, to solve crimes. After splitting off from *Buffy*, he also demonstrates in *Angel* that one person, though well-intentioned, has a greater ability to impact others and do good when working with a team. The show pokes fun at Angel’s age many times by pointing out his inability to deal with “modern” technology well, such as computers and the Internet, which is why his crime-fighting team is comprised of individuals who have their own strengths – research, organization skills, knowledge of spells and weapons – which prove valuable in fighting many of the actual demons who prey on innocent victims. These shows also point out that the real monsters aren’t always readily recognizable, multiculturalism and diversity should be embraced, those in power can be corrupt, and life and death coexist on a daily basis. It is relatively easy to trace the reasons for the shows’ popularity, as each reflects fears about rising crime rates across the country and concerns about battles being fought overseas, growing anxieties about the state of the

environment and global warming, and scares about the world ending (Y2K, Nostradamus prophecies, 9/11).

While many vampires were still depicted as “evil” in texts such as *Buffy*, the vast majority of the millennial vampire depictions moved away from fearing them and instead urged accepting them. Once the persecuted outsider, the vampire, or Other—perhaps recognized by humanity now as partially reflective of themselves—was judged on equal terms with humans: equally as capable of committing atrocities or fostering positive change in humanity.

The most recent rise in vampire and zombie addictions, though, is possibly not a reaction to the same sets of issues presented during turn-of-the-century time frames. Since many of the paranormal teen romances are melodrama as well, the stories move away from examining societal concerns to focusing more on overcoming personal obstacles in order to find love. The escapist element still exists, as does the idea that one must overcome extreme odds at times, but there is now an emphasis on building lasting relationships and extending boundaries to include those who are different versus secluding ourselves from the rest of the world to fight our own battles. A quirkier, more personal, writing style, often involving first person point of view and attention to detail, is evident in many contemporary author’s texts that successfully draw in teen readers by using the engaging youthful character who experiences many awkward moments already familiar to young adult audiences.

In *Vampire God: The Allure of the Undead in Western Culture*, Mary Hallab believes,

The vampire's most human quality—its infinite adaptability to people, place, and time—is a major reason for its persistence. This, along with its very un-human and ambiguous position between the flesh and the spirit, its mysterious comings and goings, and its variable forms and faces, allows it to be continually revived in different guises in our differing worlds. . . . one appeal of certain vampires lies in their breaking of various cultural taboos and their warnings about assorted dangers to the community. But we can and do have sensuality, brutality, arrogance, selfishness, intolerance, insidious evil, and even aristocratic bad manners. . . . to some critics, vampire literature offers a means to understand the world we live in and to formulate our own identities or sense of identity within this world. (4, 5)

A popular 21st century example of Hallab's comments can be found in the young adult series, *Vampire Academy*, by Michelle Read. The vampires of her novels are split into races which question traditional ideals of inhuman versus human: Strigoi (evil and undead), Moroi (good and mortal), and dhampir (half-vampire/half-human). The fact that there are multiple categories of vampires is a new appeal for many readers, but within those realms of vampires, there are additional taboos beyond those already subconsciously in place from the days of folklore (stay away from vampires as they are evil and will damn your soul if you let them). The series addresses much of what Hallab discusses, touching upon issues of race, duty, corruption, and friendship, while also focusing on how peers, education, societal and familial expectations, media, work, and love all have a hand in shaping the identities of the teenage characters. It is the

integration of the unknown and unfamiliar elements of the vampire and its world with the known and familiar of contemporary society (at whatever time frame contemporary may have been in the past as well) that sparks the interest of readers. The foreign elements combined with the quotidian provide an opportunity to question what is known and fantasize about what could be.

Hallab discusses four functions of vampires with relation to death that may also serve to point out some of the reasons why these creatures continue to fascinate readers. She writes of

four categories: scientific, social, psychological, and religious. . . .

[Regarding science,] the vampire's ability to overcome the virus or bullet or whatever, to prolong life—or life expectancy—has had great appeal for modern readers and writers. Vampires have inspired some scientific speculation for a kind of science fiction “what if” scenario of both wishful thinking and serious thought. (13)

Vampires challenge audiences to ask “what if,” to indulge in fantasy and possibly dreams of wish fulfillment, to engage in the imaginative process that both allows for escape from reality and also questions what might be possible beyond just theory. Socially, “as a living representative of history, the vampire tells us that we are not alone, that our past is not gone, our dead have not disappeared,” and that history, and all life, is intertwined (14). As for psychological functions, “vampires and the beliefs surrounding them provide a means of exploring and possibly dealing with personal loss and acceptance of death,” which leads into religious functions of vampires, who raise “questions about the meaning of the soul and the existence of an afterlife; about the nature and existence of a god and

the relation of this god to the created world; and about the nature of evil and the power of a devil or devils” (14). Religion in *Dracula* acts as a protection against the evil of the Otherness of the vampire, as it does in the *Buffy* and *Angel* series, with crosses and holy objects serving as physical lines of defense in what could be deemed a holy war with evil for one’s soul. Yet in more contemporary texts, religion is often integrated with vampire life, demonstrating that a vampire does not have to be forsaken by God and building upon the idea—as with *Angel*—that the choices of the vampire are what makes it a devil or not. In *The Mortal Instrument* series, by Cassandra Clare, Simon can no longer enter holy ground since he has been turned into a vampire, yet he still retains his faith in God and belief in Judaism; the Moroi and dhampir of *Vampire Academy*, because they are not evil and have not turned their backs on goodness, are able to pray and often attend regular church services; and in the *Twilight* series, readers learn that Carlisle Cullen’s father was a minister who led witch-hunts in his day, though Carlisle, through his compassion and dedication to preserving human life, demonstrates more Christian-like behavior than did his church-leader father. All of these examples of integrating vampires with positive depictions of religion imply that faith is for every being, and both divine mercy and acceptance by a deity are not restricted to a particular class or species. Rather, these portrayals embrace the Other, the darkness within, as that also coexists with goodness, or light. This idea is particularly uplifting in a time when religion is used as a dividing faction and excuse for war in many places around the world.

As Liz Rosenberg notes in “Where the Coolest Kids are, like, Undead,” the supernatural allows teenagers to grapple with ideas . . . [and] inclines toward the psychological and personal.” Vampires have the ability to address both cultural and

identity issues for young adult readers, and, especially for young adult audiences, vampire literature offers a “safe” way to explore the world and challenge the status quo. As Joseph DeMarco puts it in his article, “Vampire Literature: Something Young Adults Can Really Sink Their Teeth Into,”

The average teenager, rife with confusion and ambiguity, filled with fear of the future, possessed by the need to find stability, a role, a purpose, sees the vampire and knows that everything is possible, every goal can be reached. The vampire is suave, sophisticated, certain of himself, rooted in history, poised to take the future with neither fear nor reluctance, self-possessed, sexual, powerful, sometimes cruel and sometimes kind, not possessed by doubts, [traditionally] not burdened with conscience, cool and resourceful, supremely intelligent and, best of all, immortal. This is everything the young adult is not and everything they aspire to be. The vampire suffers no identity crisis, save for the fleeting moment when the undead personally commingles with the human. Even this crisis of the developing self is resolved in a most magnificent way thus appealing to the teen who is constantly trying out new roles and discarding identities like yesterday’s rock stars.

And so many of “today’s” vampires are also, conveniently, represented as teenage characters in familiar settings, making it easier for young adults to relate to them.

In *New Moon*, the uncanny strength, beauty, gracefulness, not to mention immortality, of Edward is secondary to the fact that he blends in as a seventeen-year-old boy, goes to school and does homework assignments, watches movies on the couch with

Bella, and generally disguises his vampire traits so well that Bella is the only human who knows of his paranormal nature. For young adult audiences, Meyer makes the unfamiliar familiar, integrating some of Edward's turn-of-the-century phrases into contemporary language, creating a family unit of vampires who do not actively prey on human blood, wrestle with conscience and morality, and celebrate the bonds of love – within family, among friends, and between Edward and Bella, all of which are traditionally seen as human traits versus those of paranormal beings.

The Attraction Continues

Teens continue to be attracted to contemporary vampire tales not only because vampires represent beauty, the forbidden, immortality, and danger, but also because they are still clearly associated with sex and desire. In a world where media focuses on images of ultra-thin female models and muscular men, endorses shows like HBO's *True Blood* (a vampire-filled series that borders on the pornographic) with titillating commercials and posters, and posts selections on social media from books like E. L. James' *Fifty Shades of Grey*, contemporary paranormal young adult romances are predominantly tame while also providing a space "to experience and explore sexual desire in the safety of a narrative imagination in which they personally are neither exploited/objectified nor asked to become party to normless, unfulfilling sexual expression" (Mercer 275). Young adults experience the thrill of the taboo human-vampire relationships, the dangers of the human getting hurt or killed or turned, and explore sexual awakening and the consequences of sex in the safe confines of the pages of a book. Additionally, these paranormal characters provide points of reference for talking about other pieces of literature, as well as create enough distance from reality that teens feel comfortable using them to engage in

conversations about topics such as societal expectations, mental illness, peer pressure, or first love, making it no surprise that vampires continue to enjoy such long literary lives.

**CHAPTER 4: THE APPEAL OF *ROMEO AND JULIET* AND *NEW MOON*
FOR CONTEMPORARY YOUNG ADULTS**

*“Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no
good thing ever dies.” –Stephen King*

The epic romance experience of Shakespeare, which Stephenie Meyer builds upon in *New Moon*, includes elements of danger, recklessness, choices, and consequences. Joni Richards Bodart writes, in *They Suck, They Bite, They Eat, They Kill: The Psychological Meaning of Supernatural Monsters in Young Adult Fiction*, that “reading about or seeing these [supernatural] monsters and the destruction they can create can make our own problems and our own lives seem not so overwhelming after all and give us a break from reality when it gets too hard to handle” (xxi). While Romeo and Juliet’s escape ultimately ends in their deaths, Bella and Edward are able to make choices which do not end in such unhappy circumstances, leaving young adult readers in a state of suspense and hope as to the possibilities the couple’s future holds. By addressing both openly familiar and intricately personal issues young adults are routinely faced with in society, Shakespeare and Meyer are able to establish a lasting connection with their readers.

The Longevity and Appeal of *Romeo and Juliet*

Romeo and Juliet has been a part of teaching canon for hundreds of years. Many argue that it is a classic based upon the popularity of the Bard, while others claim it is because the play embodies timeless motifs of love, power, and tragedy. For youthful audiences, many of whom struggle to understand the language of Shakespeare’s day and lack a firm understanding of the time frame in which the play was written, *Romeo and*

Juliet can seem daunting. Yet, despite the inability of some contemporary teens to comprehend the nuances of the play, it often remains the single major Shakespearean piece they remember beyond their secondary and/or post-secondary education.

In an interview with Alan Craven, a professor emeritus at UTSA, Cindy Tumiel asked “what is it about a long-dead poet and playwright that makes him such an important element of contemporary culture?” to which Craven responded: “The language is rich, the characters are complex and many of his basic themes – love, treachery, honor, bravery and political intrigue – still resonate today. . . . Humans still experience love, loss, be-trayal [*sic*], war, humor and tragedy, which gives Shakespeare a foothold in modern times.” Young adults empathize with the teenage protagonists who fall in love but face parents who are strict and controlling. Romeo and Juliet’s desires to be free from the confines of their houses mirrors the feelings of rebellion and confinement many teenagers experience when growing up, and the desire to fight against any force threatening to thwart one’s happiness – even fate – is an emotion young adults understand as they seek to forge their own paths and be free to make their decisions without the influence and intervention of others.

The characters of the play are familiar to readers because of their banter, loyalty, passion, and insecurities. Initially, according to Marjorie Garber, earlier audiences were focused on the more comedic characters of Mercutio and the Nurse, as their quick wits, use of double entendre, and ability to lift the spirits of those around them make them desirable friends to readers. It is then even more dramatic when Mercutio is killed, since, as Samuel Johnson noted, his ““wit, gaiety and courage, will always procure him friends that wish him a longer life”” (*Shakespeare* 39). Additionally, when the Nurse advises

Juliet to take the path of bigotry following Romeo's banishment, it can feel a personal affront to young adult audiences who have come to cherish her character's mother-like role and previous advice to Juliet. With both literal and emotional losses of their closest friends, the protagonists of the play continue into a downward spiral, switching the focus from secrets, comedy, and passion, into the ultimate path of tragedy and death. Every generation, from the age of Shakespeare through today, understands, even if they have not yet experienced, the loss of someone close to their hearts. Mercutio's death sticks with readers throughout time because he is both endearing and frustrating, fighting to defend a friend and family name – though with a hotheaded attitude – and dying with a joke and curse on his lips: “ask for me tomorrow, and / you shall find me a grave man. . . . A plague o' both your houses” (Shakespeare 3.1.93, 95).

Mercutio's death is a reminder of the fragility of life and of every person's mortality. As Marjorie Garber writes in her book, *Shakespeare and Modern Culture*, the play “continue[s] to demonstrate that now is never now for long,” and “the immediacy and fragility of today,” whenever the time period of “today” may be for readers (49). This reminder of mortality is partnered with the speed at which events unfold over the course of the play. In a matter of only a week's time, the young protagonists fall in love, defy their parents, are secretly married, face the death of friends and loved ones, commit suicide, and end their families' feuds.

Jill Levenson, in “Romeo and Juliet Before Shakespeare,” mentions the speed with which the story progresses as another reason why *Romeo and Juliet* appeals to youthful audiences, “suggesting in its urgency the intenseness of the passion it describes,” which also engages youthful readers by playing upon their hormones and

similar experiences of acting first and thinking later (329). Romeo is portrayed as “a young man so transformed by the singularity of his love that he prefers death with [Juliet] to life without her,” and Juliet demonstrates her commitment and “resolve to conquer [fears of death]” when she takes the Friar’s potion, because she, too, cannot imagine her life without Romeo being a part of it (Garber *Shakespeare* 34; *Coming of Age* 220). Audiences of the play are constantly being bombarded with plot twists, overwhelming feelings of despair, and the desire to hold on to a glimmer of hope that the two lovers will find a way to be together (preferably alive). Hope is a strong emotion; even when readers know that the deaths of the lovers are inevitable, they somehow hold out hope that the ending will change. In the contemporary world where many young adults grew up consuming Walt Disney tales and happy endings, tragedy is difficult to digest. Being faced with the harsh realities that love and good intentions will not always produce happy endings may not be the ideal ending young adult audiences hope for, but it is one which they can appreciate and learn from and which helps them to, according to Mark A. Pike, “consider human experience in other times” and places (359).

The applicability of lessons from the play is another of its appeals to both society and secondary teachers of young adult audiences: choices always have consequences, whether positive or negative; fighting will not solve everything; secrets can create problems; accepting information second-hand is risky; friends can be more of a family than blood relations; those who offer counsel out of kindness or concern deserve consideration; love can be fickle; and, love can lead to rash acts. In “The Canon in the Classroom: Students’ Experiences of Texts from Other Times,” Pike states:

My position is that, paradoxically, even the very *difference* (be it social, cultural, ethnic, religious, moral, or linguistic) between the world of the canonical texts and that of the reader can justify providing a canon of pre-20th-century works in the curriculum for ethnically and socially heterogeneous schools in the 21st century. . . . In their indeterminacy, literary texts are resistant to the course of time. . . . the indeterminacy of a text created in the past allows it to be experienced and recreated in the present. . . . A text's indeterminacy requires a reader to bring personal experience, cultural background, imagination, predisposition, and even idiosyncratic knowledge with him or her so that a co-construction of meaning with its author is achieved. (358, emphasis in original)

While scholars may argue these points, secondary teachers will most often concur with Pike; the ability of Shakespeare's play to be reinvented for contemporary audiences is evidenced through the number of film interpretations of plays such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*—two wildly popular adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* (plus one parody as *Gnomeo & Juliet*) since 1968, and three very successful retellings of *Hamlet* since 1990—not to mention modernized reinventions such as *Ten Things I Hate About You* (a twist on *The Taming of the Shrew*) and *O* (the high school *Othello*).

Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 release of *Romeo and Juliet* was so popular that, as he put it, it “resurrected Paramount [studio] from the ashes” (Tibbets 137). His film “is directed towards a youthful audience, sexy and violent, filled with the heat and passion conveyed by [Shakespeare's] text, incorporating a critique of the adult world with its fatal thread of masculine violence,” with a “vision of adolescent love [that] is one of

immediacy and immaturity” (Hamilton 19; Martin 41). The focus on connecting to young adults continued three decades later in what has become one of the most popular adaptations on film: Baz Luhrmann’s 1996 *Romeo + Juliet*. In this interpretation, which retains the language of the play but changes the setting, clothing, and weaponry to reflect a twentieth-century California coastal city. The film “opened No. 1 at the box office,” with “a majority of the audience appear[ing] to be teen-agers” (Weinraub). Contrary to Zeffirelli, Luhrmann “summons a hallucinogenic range of youth and popular culture details, attempting to translate the power of Shakespeare’s story to a visually-attuned generation. . . . his approach is frenetic and modern, rendering the play almost immediately accessible to [contemporary] youth and the conflict more recognizable” while still employing Shakespeare’s language (Hamilton 119, 120). The fact that young adults still respond so positively to film adaptations that retain Shakespeare’s language only supports the argument that *Romeo and Juliet* deserves to be kept as a canon piece since teenagers find common bonds with characters and themes which enrich their lives.

On a personal note, I have taught the play numerous times to predominantly reluctant young adults, and after tackling the initial scenes’ language and structure, students become engaged in the story. The language and actions by which they express themselves may have changed over time, but the youthful behaviors of young adults and their maturity levels, or lack thereof, have not altered in several hundred years since Shakespeare first introduced *Romeo and Juliet*. The play talks of love while also indirectly discussing sex. Through Shakespeare’s euphemisms and puns, such as Sampson’s lines “’Tis true, and therefore women, being the weaker / vessels, are ever thrust to the wall. Therefore I will push / Montague’s men from the wall and thrust his

maids to the / wall,” contemporary young adults get to flirt with a topic that is not often brought up in other classroom texts (Shakespeare 1.1.28-31). What was comical and appealing about sex in Shakespeare’s age has not changed for contemporary youth, who utter phrases like “that’s what she said” as an awkward way to bring up the topic of sex without directly mentioning it. In *Coming of Age in Shakespeare*, Marjorie Garber explains that during the sixteenth century, there existed “a concept of adolescence (or ‘youth’) as a separate stage of human development between sexual maturity in the teen years and marriage in the middle twenties,” with “youth” referring to males at this time (123). I argue that this definition is still relevant today to both genders of contemporary young adult audiences. There is an immaturity regarding sex and a curiosity about it during teenage years. This is not to say that modern young adult audiences are naïve regarding the subject; their inexperience, however, leads them to often seek out various texts that help them to explore sensuality, sexuality, and the consequences of sex. *Romeo and Juliet* is one such work, be it in its traditional print form or in a film adaptation, which allows young adult readers to safely and intellectually examine these issues on a more personal level, partly because the characters are near to them in age and may even remind readers of their friends or of themselves.

The characters of the play argue, even amongst friends, and tease one another about clothes, the opposite sex, and personal qualities, just as teens continue to do today. These things make the characters relatable and realistic for students, which in turn causes them to become invested in the lives of the protagonists. Students question the motives of characters, offer what they would have done if they were the protagonists, and they expand their discussions to include big-picture ideas regarding gender, authority, and

politics in their world which stem from understanding social commentary and historical background revealed through the words of the play. Teenagers may be hesitant to embrace Shakespeare, but *Romeo and Juliet* is a play that “works for them,” and, more often than not, ends up being the major high school reading to which they can most easily relate. While teenagers may not wish to embrace lessons introduced to them by teachers—or apply such lessons to their lives—they can understand, appreciate, and learn from them, which in turn makes the play relevant to their own lives.

Marjorie Garber posits that “the availability of *Romeo and Juliet* as a transposable love story, not tied to ancient myth or history,” along with the “erotics and pains of young love [plus] the generational conflict” of the story are main reasons why the play has retained its popularity over time (*Shakespeare* 46). It has become associated with youth culture, “a signifier of young love, obstructed passion, ‘star-crossed lovers’ . . . parents who just-don’t-understand, [and] peer groups who exert what we now so easily call ‘peer pressure’” (53). In an anonymous online survey and discussions polling approximately thirty current students and recent high school graduates, I found many of Garber’s claims to be supported; the participants noted that the love of Romeo and Juliet was the almost always the main thing they remembered from the play, as well as the suicide, Shakespeare’s use of language, the scene at the party where the lovers first meet, as well as the balcony scene, the secrets involved, and the fighting. One individual on the survey noted that the “rebelliousness” of the teens against their family and what society expected of them makes the individual characters more appealing for young adults, while another wrote that she liked “the way it mirrors real life in so many ways. Things have not changed that much...teens are still just as stupid” (anonymous). Multiple respondents

believed that the play's longevity is due to "timeless themes," particularly struggles with family and with love (romantic) relationships. One individual, however, presented unique insight that makes clear connections to contemporary teens. Still currently in high school, she wrote that the play continues to be appealing because it is about an assertive young girl and the boy who loves her, and both are willing "to save [their] love at any cost," but more importantly, "many teenagers are too afraid to do absolutely anything," so the couple not only represents dedication and romantic love "many teenagers want," but also determination and the ability to face and challenge their fears (Anonymous).

In an email correspondence, Dr. J. Dennis Huston, a Shakespeare scholar and professor at Rice University, notes some formal characteristics that may contribute to the appeal and longevity of the play, as well as reinforce the thematic relevance. Firstly, "The language of the play is not as difficult as the language of many of Shakespeare's later plays—like the tragedies; so the play is more accessible to [young adults] than the language of many of Shakespeare's other plays." The Prologue provides an overview for young adult audiences to "preview" the play's major points, and the inclusion of vivid imagery, puns, and hyperbole all help audiences to better understand the meaning of the language. Second, "The play deals with young love, a topic that almost every high school student of that age has experienced, so it speaks to them in very specific ways." This leads into the third point, another shared experience of many young adults: "The play also deals with conflict between an adolescent and her parents, which is another thing that students of high-school age have dealt with. Their tensions have not, hopefully, been as extreme as Juliet's, but virtually every high-school student has had conflicts with her/his parents," be they arguments over clothing, friends, school, chores, responsibilities,

dates, curfews, or choices. Lastly, Dr. Huston points out a connection for the male audiences, which is refreshing as much research focuses solely on the appeal of the play for young women. He states, “The play makes much of males hanging out together, of male bonding, which matters a good deal to most young men of that age, pulled between impulses of interest in some young woman and their male friendships, which has gone on for some time, often years if they have lived in the same place for a substantial length of time” (Huston 6 April 2015). The majority of the friendships demonstrated throughout the play are those of males; Romeo, Mercutio, Benvolio, and their “posse” are oftentimes at odds with Tybalt and his “crew,” but Romeo also feels stress from spending time away from his male peers and instead with Juliet, as well as keeping secrets from those with whom he is closest. While the romance may appeal to young women, the bonds between male friends may be what young men relate to the most. According to one of my recent male high school graduates, Russell Cole, the male characters “are seen as symbols of masculinity by way of their impulsiveness, aggression, lover’s nature, lack of fear of death, and drinking. They also resonate with the teenage mentality in their disregard for the elderly, rules, and night hours” (18 June 2015).

While it may not be the *ideal* love story, Garber accurately echoes my own beliefs when she states that “Shakespeare’s play has become the normative love story of our time. . . . fraught with dialogue between maturity and immaturity, experience and instinct, ‘we’ and ‘you,’ ‘now’ and then,” fully realized, and a classic allusion which continues inform a number of contemporary romances highly popular with young adult audiences (*Shakespeare* 34, 61).

The Appealing Nature of *New Moon* for Young Adult Audiences

There are many reasons *New Moon*, as a reinvention of *Romeo and Juliet*, appeals to young adult readers. These reasons both echo and differ from those that make *Romeo and Juliet* meaningful. Like *Romeo and Juliet*, the youthful protagonists are approximately the same age as many YA readers, the drama of being a teenager and all of the emotional ups and downs that accompany adolescence are things young adult audiences can relate to, and in the novel the settings in Forks, Washington of school and home and friends' houses are familiar. By including direct references and indirect parallels to the plays, Meyer assumes that *Romeo and Juliet* is a well-known text, and rightly so, as it is traditionally studied by secondary students and has been, and continues to be, reinvented for both stage and film. While *New Moon* in no way replaces or falls into the same literary category as *Romeo and Juliet*, it is an homage to the play which attracts contemporary youth.

In her article, “‘What Some Escape to, Some Escape’: Why Teenagers Read Genre Fiction,” Sharyn November writes that

when you read genre fiction [such as teen paranormal romance], you are both *in* and *out* of the world as we know it. You're *out* of our world for obvious reasons; you're *in* it because the book's characters are human [or resemble them], and human motivations and reactions are universal.

People want to have friends, do good things, be in relationships, learn why they are who they are, and have new experiences. (32, emphasis in original)

New Moon provides a way for young adults to take a step back from their lives to reflect and escape into an “alternate universe [that] is both like and unlike our own,” where teens can safely insert themselves into “what if?” scenarios which also help them work through their own personal quandaries (Reagin 2). Using paranormal creatures such as vampires allows teen readers to ponder ideas of sex and mortality as the vampire is traditionally associated with such concepts. Like *Romeo and Juliet*’s Elizabethan setting, the paranormal creatures of *New Moon* provide a distancing from the realities of contemporary society which allow safe ways for teens to discuss their concerns about their own lives, society, and the world.

As Angela Tenga and Elizabeth Zimmerman state in “Vampire Gentlemen and Zombie Beasts: A Rendering of True Monstrosity,” “the sympathetic vampire incites desire” (77). Stephenie Meyer describes both Edward and Jacob as pleasing to look at, and both carry with them elements of danger, of the “bad boy,” which many find alluring simply because that image carries with it a challenge to acceptable societal expectations. These male characters are not, however, the “traditional” monsters of lore to fear, hiding in shadows, waiting to destroy the innocent and wicked alike. Instead, these modern monsters are fully integrated into contemporary society; as Tenga and Zimmerman note, today’s ‘new’ vampire [and werewolf] obeys human laws, respects Western society’s norms, and shares its values. The Cullens of Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* series and vampires like them are heirs to a tradition of vampiric reform. Such vampires do not wish to destabilise, but to conserve (77).

Part of the thrill and appeal of the teen paranormal romance genre, and *New Moon* specifically, is the creation of unknown possibilities. The supernatural characters could be best friends, classmates, or neighbors without ever revealing their true identity.

Young adult audiences reading *New Moon* can sympathize, if not empathize, with the plight of young lovers who are experiencing the joys and pains of attraction, reciprocation, rebuttal, and separation. The hyperbolic words of Romeo that not even the prospect of death can move him from Juliet's side are echoed in Edward's words to Bella: "Last spring, when you were . . . nearly killed. . . well, I wasn't going to live without you" (Meyer 18, 21; 1st ellipsis in orig.). The passion presented by the couples of each text is amplified in the case of Edward and Bella, as Edward already is undead; thus, Edward's willingness, and even eagerness, to "die" for Bella—"or whatever it is [vampires] do"—should she no longer be in this world, implies that he is willing to cease to exist altogether, to fade into nothingness, a state beyond being absent from the world of the living (20). The fact that Edward must also fight his own vampiric nature to be with Bella continues to highlight the lengths to which he will go to be with the girl he loves, regardless of the physical pain it may cause him or the ways in which their relationship challenges the social and authoritative norms of vampire culture.

As with Romeo and Juliet, the romance between Bella and Edward is something that is taboo in their society. To continue to love one another, without Bella being a vampire, goes against the authority of the Volturi, the vampire royalty and law-enforcers, placing both humans and vampires she loves in danger (Meyer 19). This challenge to authority and societal norms and expectations stems from *Romeo and Juliet* when the two youths "cross" sides, falling in love with someone from a family their own is feuding

with (Shakespeare Prologue). In *New Moon*, while there is not a quarrel between Bella and Edward's families, a line exists between the worlds of humans and vampires based upon the one rule that vampires "have to keep [their] existence a secret" from humans (Meyer 230). By "crossing sides" and forming ties between humans and vampires, Bella and Edward work against the standard expectations of both species, putting themselves in positions to be ostracized socially as well as face punishment by the Volturi. Both play and novel express the risks some young adults will take to be with the ones they love.

Death is real, often violent, and not glossed over in these texts. The fragility of life is a constant reminder in *Romeo and Juliet*. The young lovers are not only faced with the deaths of distant relatives and servants who fight for family honor, but also immediate friends and family such as Mercutio and Tybalt. Death is ever-present, and when given the opportunity to seize moments of happiness in such a hectic world, Romeo and Juliet grab at them. In *New Moon*, Bella's obsessiveness with her age and Edward's immortality at the start of the book hint at the limited time humans have in life. Discussions regarding how many generations the members of the Cullens have lived and how many millennium the Volturi have been alive, as well as the reminders to Bella of how easy it is for a vampire to overtake and feed on humans, highlight how fleeting mortals' lives truly are and emphasize the need for the couple to cherish the time they have together. It is the "carpe diem" idea, though with an emphasis on doing so while one is young, as there exists an underlying concern that adulthood brings stagnation. In *New Moon*, Bella has seen Charlie go through his daily routines, from going to work to watching sports on television once home to fishing on the weekend with friends, with very little deviation. Even Bella's mother, Rene, despite changing her hobbies frequently,

is still consistent in her routine of trying new things without following through with them. Both Romeo and Juliet's parents are portrayed as having a lust for power, punishment, and obedience. With such dreary depictions of adult behaviors surrounding them, it is little wonder that young adult readers ally with the youthful protagonists to celebrate life—and the lack of such demoralizing “adult” preoccupations.

Stylistically, *Romeo and Juliet* is less challenging in its language than other of Shakespeare's plays, though it still presents obstacles in understanding for many contemporary young adults. As a tragedy, the play also does not usually bring to mind the picture of a light or leisurely read. It is dramatic and engaging, of high interest once teens understand details, but it progresses quickly without offering explicit and detailed descriptions of situations with which contemporary teens are more routinely faced. While both texts address problems such as pressure from family and society, *New Moon* provides insight into the thought processes of a female protagonist, creating a much more personalized connection between YA readers and Bella's character and providing an opening for lengthier investigations of contemporary teen concerns like depression, body image, and sex.

Kat Burkhart writes that “today, the teen or adolescent years are seen as a time of transition between dependence and independence” (248). In *Romeo and Juliet*, being a teenager does not necessarily appear to be burdensome at first glance: each youth seems to live off of their parent's wealth, they are not required to complete chores, and, if they are male, they are allowed to wander with friends without a set curfew. Today, in American society, most young adults are still living at home and dependent upon their families for basic necessities, but that does not mean that they do not juggle

responsibilities of their own as they continue to form their own identities and become more independent. In addition to school, many teenagers are involved in extracurricular activities such as clubs or sports, and many have part-time jobs. Some may also be relied upon by their family to shoulder responsibilities of child-care for siblings, transportation for parents to work, or even to be a person who brings in income to help pay for living expenses at home. In *New Moon*, characters have routines familiar to today's youth but very different sets of responsibilities as they become "adults," which is defined in Meyer's series "by legal age, by skills, and by the willingness to sacrifice oneself for others" (Burkhart 258). Contemporary young adults are able to exchange their real, and sometimes very challenging, experiences as teens for those of a fictional character's when stepping into *New Moon*; they are given the chance to escape their own responsibilities, worries, and fears, and exchange them for "histories and potentialities, transformations and choices; [the literature] is about conflicts between the claim of the individual and the claims of culture (Freud); it is about life's fantastic flux of being. It is about new beginnings and other directions" (Proukou 62).

Meyer's novel is realistic in its portrayal of concerns that teens deal with, but her decision to incorporate the realm of the supernatural both adds a layer of darkness to the novel as well as a lighter side. Evil vampires may be seeking revenge by trying to kill Bella, but her werewolf best friend can still make her laugh when they hang out or bring a smile to her face when he, very humanly, snores loudly when he naps (Meyer 369). Kat Burkhart, in her article "Getting Younger Every Decade: Being a Teen Vampire during the Twentieth Century," points out that another "part of the fun of the Twilight Saga is watching a nearly 110-year-old vampire - who has been masquerading as a teen for many

decades - actually *become* a modern teenager when he falls in love with Bella” (261, emphasis in original). *New Moon* draws in teen audiences partly because of its ability to present the darker aspects of loss with the lighter shades of friendship, love, and hope. Young adults can sympathize or even empathize with Bella while she undergoes a wide range of emotions, from passion to desire to uncertainty, and even depression

In her article, “Vampires, Desire, Girls and God: *Twilight* and the Spiritualities of Adolescent Girls,” Joyce Ann Mercer discusses how desire is key to pulling in (predominantly female) young audiences:

As fiction it offers [girls] a legitimated and safe place to experience those desires. It also provides a temporary escape, a respite from the stress of everyday life for girls, as turning its pages does not require much work yet gives back to girls a chance to simply be caught up in its fantasy story as they wonder what will happen next. (276)

Young adults who have not begun dating are able to sort out, along with Bella, the ups and downs of a relationship, picturing the “first love” relationship between Edward and Bella as the romantic experience by which to judge all others. And for those teenage readers who are familiar with the dating scene or have been jaded, the dedication of the couple and idea of “true love” is something in which to lose oneself, dreaming of the day in which the Edward-type of fellow will come along. It is not just the undying love the pair has for one another, but the physical descriptions and emphasis on sex—even when it is not being had—which incites readers, particularly young adult audiences who are dealing with developmental and hormonal changes. As a genre, “vampire literature allows teenagers to think about sex and violence without censorship. It appeals to young

men because vampires are dangerous, super-fast and super-strong. It appeals to the romantic in young women,” and it offers the chance for young adults “to grapple with ideas” that may seem daunting or even embarrassing to discuss with parents or peers, such as peer pressure, body image, sex, anxiety, or depression (Rosenberg). *Romeo and Juliet* is a socially “safe” canon piece for high school classrooms as it lacks explicit sexual references and has no steamier action included than kissing. However, in 2015, many young adults already have experiences with texts that include explicit, or sometimes even gratuitous, sexual references, pushing some critics to suggest that young adults should have more exposure to such texts in today’s classrooms.

New Moon offers a balance between those who would seek to censure all sexual references from young adult literature and others who promote exposure to it. The novel clearly lingers on the idea of sex at several points, providing a teenage protagonist’s thoughts and emotions towards sex:

His mouth lingered on mine, cold and smooth and gentle, until I wrapped my arms around his neck and threw myself into the kiss with a little too much enthusiasm. I could feel his lips curve upwards as he let go of my face and reached back to unlock my grip on him.

Edward had drawn many careful lines for our physical relationship, with the intent being to keep me alive. Though I respected the need for maintaining a safe distance between my skin and his razor-sharp, venom-coated teeth, I tended to forget about trivial things like that when he was kissing me.

“Be good, please,” he breathed against my cheek. He pressed his lips gently to mine one more time and then pulled away, folding my arms across my stomach. (Meyer 16)

Even though desire is apparent in such scenes, Meyer also still endorses the idea that sex should wait until marriage. Because of this, *New Moon* is more widely accepted into secondary classrooms, including those in more traditionally conservative school districts, as a primary or supplemental text for teens to explore attitudes toward relationships.

In addition to its ability to foster communication about sex and relationships, the novel provides way for young adults to examine some of the more sensitive and challenging aspects faced by teens. Though Bella creates her own form of self-imposed social exile following Edward’s departure, she does so out of a clinical depression, which many teenagers also experience. After Edward leaves, Bella’s world spirals downward. In the film adaptation, this is demonstrated by a literal spiraling of the camera from a birds’ eye view of Bella, curled up on the floor of the woods having been unable to chase down Edward after his departure. Again, the film emphasizes her descent into depression by playing up the multiple blank chapters of the novel, which are only a series of month titles, by circling a seated Bella in her bedroom and overlaying the name of a month after each revolution, with Lykke Li’s somber “Possibility” playing in the background. It takes a threat from her father to send her away from Forks to live with her mother before Bella alters her automatic-pilot routine that so worries her parents and has distanced her from many of her friends. She, like many young adults, shuns the idea of seeing a psychologist, but she does find solace in the friendship of Jacob Black and a return to her previous social group. Teens who are experiencing depression, either temporary or

clinical, identify with Bella's situation as well as appreciate Jacob's support as she battles to stay in control of her depression over Edward.

YA readers want to also have that special friend who brightens their day, eases their burdens, and wants to protect them. The fact that Jacob Black also happens to be muscular and handsome makes his character all the more appealing to young women, but his struggles to control his emotions and transformations as a werewolf makes him relatable for young men as well, who are also battling physical and emotional changes of their own during adolescence. Romeo and his male peers are challenged with the task of embodying masculinity, which, for them, primarily involves fighting out of loyalty to family or friends. Jacob is also tasked with the burden of his family as he has the werewolf gene which triggers transformation, requires obedience to the Alpha and secrecy about the pack, and necessitates that he fight vampires who feed on human blood. Jacob, like Romeo, is at odds with society and cultural expectations, and what he wants and believes. Appelbaum states that "our dominant fiction prevents us from acknowledging the fallibility of masculine subjectivity: it seduces us into identifying masculinity as that which, precisely, cannot fail us. Failure in itself is emasculating; or rather, failure *is* emasculation" (259, emphasis in original). Both *Romeo and Juliet* and *New Moon* express what contemporary young men are subject to—the same difficult-to-define and difficult-to-achieve standards of masculinity, caught between what they feel they are expected to do and what they feel they should, or want, to do.

In "Sparkling Vampires: Valorizing Self-Harming Behavior in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Series*," Lydia Kokkol states that young adults need literature which "acknowledge[s] that many adolescents are grappling with such difficult emotions" that

may lead to outburst of anger, self-harming, addictions, anxiety, depression, or attempted suicide (35). She adds that “Bella’s behavior resembles that of real life self-harmers” in many ways, particularly as she repeatedly places herself in harm’s way in *New Moon* in order to experience an adrenaline rush that helps her to remember Edward’s voice: “Bella’s personal manifestation of the endorphin rush – hearing Edward’s voice admonishing her – is first ritualized through motorbike accidents, but gradually she increases the degree of harm until it becomes life threatening (she jumps off a cliff)” (34, 40). This also leads to Edward’s attempted suicide, as he mistakenly believes that Bella really has ended her own life.

Jacob and other members of his pack, such as Paul, experience difficulties controlling their emotions, reverting to verbal or physical displays of anger towards others before they can slowly regain control and are able to calm down. While some may brush this off as being tied in to a pack mentality or attribute the behavior to the aggressive nature often associated with werewolves in folklore, it clearly reflects the fluctuating hormones and emotions of teenage boys. Additionally, Jacob is bound to secrecy by his pack leader though he attempts to subvert it, challenging an authority he feels is wrong. In doing so, he also places himself at odds with his other werewolf peers who pressure him to just follow orders and to forget about the leech-lover (Bella). He is also faced with the internal struggle that accompanies keeping secrets, especially since his secret is distancing him from his best friend. Peer pressure is a powerful and very real issue for young adults. Jacob’s refusal to give in to it, particularly to his male friends who feel that strength, power, leadership, and loyalty to the pack first are key, provides an

example to other young adults struggling with the difficulties of peer pressure from both without and within their close social circles.

Bella's low self-esteem and poor body image are other contemporary issues experienced by many young adults. Bella is so praising of the Cullens' beauty—and even of Jacob, telling him “you're sort of beautiful”—yet she constantly views herself as plain and clumsy, not “good enough” to be with Edward or part of his world (192, 70). Tenga and Zimmerman worry that depictions of vampires as having ideal bodies which “typically express everlasting youth, beauty, and vitality, denying the corruption of the grave” is leading to a heightened “epidemic of body dysmorphic disorder and an obsessive fear of ageing . . . particularly among the young people who constitute the target audience for much vampire fiction” (79). They provide staggering statistics about the number of teenagers who have had cosmetic surgery—219,000 in 2010 in the United States—and who would consider having it to improve their looks—“half of females” polled in “a 2009 British study” (79). Young adults are surrounded by media images of air-brushed models, muscled men, weight loss ads, and the idea that a size 12 is a “plus” size, and “protagonist Bella Swan voices [young adult] readers' insecurities” when she consistently focuses on her “plain” features compared to those of the Cullens (79). Ironically, in selecting an attractive actress to play the role of Bella in the film version of the novel, the idea of a “plain” Bella from the book is nullified, making her exaggerated concerns about her appearances heighten the focus on her low self-esteem issues. By becoming aware of how self-deprecating Bella's view is of her appearance when she has no need to worry about it, contemporary teen audiences hopefully begin to give

themselves permission to feel comfortable in their own skin while they silently encourage her to do the same.¹

In her introduction to *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resources of the Story*, Mary L. Warner writes that “particularly for young adults then, the emotional safety of seeing their real-life experiences mirrored in fiction or in someone else’s story gives books the power to reach [them] not only intellectually, but also emotionally” (xxiv). As with *Romeo and Juliet*, the extreme actions demonstrated by the characters of *New Moon* allow young adults who have not experienced or considered such extreme behaviors to have more compassion for their peers who may be suffering from such emotions, feeling trapped by their circumstances. Plus, for those who are experiencing such thoughts or feelings, *New Moon* creates an alternate world and Other by which teens can “work through” their emotions, hopefully finding some ideas about how they may go about tackling or coping with similar emotional situations.

As previously mentioned, in addition to providing an opportunity for teens to explore challenging psychological issues, *New Moon* also provides a chance for them to contemplate intimacy and sex through the lens of an uninitiated and unawakened young protagonist who represents their own curiosities about sex and the possible ramifications. These are not concepts adults would normally be concerned with, which reminds adult audiences that this is a novel written specifically for young adults to fill a need, that of permitting teens to have safe outlets to explore sexuality. The novel provides a means of agency for this; not only do young adults live vicariously through the characters as they

¹ See gender theory analysis which follows chapter 5

experience lust and love, but the popularity of the novel almost guarantees that at least one of the reader's peers is also familiar with the novel, creating an opportunity for discussion about sex (in the novel and in general) with other adolescents. Bella is on the same level of sexual experience as many young adult readers, inexperienced and awkward, but in the end, she gets what she wants, making *New Moon* much more of an ideal love story than that of *Romeo and Juliet*. Even if the couple in the latter text consummates their marriage by having sex, they also have an unhappy ending—a message some teens may decipher as blindly rushing to have sex can result in dire consequences. Joseph De Marco writes that “adolescents are balanced precariously on the sexual fence. Sex is something alluring yet dangerous. It is a force based in great need while at the same time causing great anxiety. The vampire helps with this force in a nonsexual yet very sensual way.” Bella feels sexual desire for Edward, and Jacob feels it for Bella. While no one actually has sex in *New Moon*, the tension is felt by readers. In “Virtuous Vampires and Voluptuous Vamps: Romance Conventions Reconsidered in Stephenie Meyer’s ‘Twilight’ Series,” Lydia Kokkola discusses how adult and teen romance traditions are linked in *New Moon*, “wherein the titillating possibilities of a triangular relationship are explored [as with Bella, Edward, and Jacob], but . . . carnal desire is repressed” (178). Carnal desire is something which is familiar to many young adult readers, as they are not only undergoing changes in hormones and experiencing physical attraction to others, but also because they are surrounded by media which routinely emphasizes sensuality and the allure of sex, yet they may have legal, parental, or religious reasons for abstaining. Meyer’s ability “to endorse celibacy” by “keeping with the philosophy that ‘true love waits’ . . . promotes the view that carnal desire,

outside marriage at least, is an obstacle that must be overcome if romantic love is to be preserved” (169). Juliet does not have to prolong her desire because she and Romeo completely skip contemporary customs of dating and move straight into an early marriage, not uncommon in Shakespeare’s time frame. Bella, however, refrains from moving beyond kissing before marriage only because Edward is not inclined to indulge in more intimate, sexual activity yet. It is refreshing for many young female readers who can relate to Bella’s desire, but who may feel pressured by (American) society to embody the timid and naive stereotype, to read that Bella is often the one to express her desires more freely to Edward: “in a sometimes-amusing reversal of what many woman and girls experience in dating, Edward must continually monitor his ability to handle physical contact with Bella,” and for young men who believe in abstaining from sex prior to marriage but who are constantly bombarded with pressure from peers or the media to just “give in” (Mercer 272).

Meyer heightens the palpable sexual tensions in the novel by using supernatural characters. *New Moon* includes “leading men who are strong, gorgeous, and available,” yet who can also easily overcome or hurt the object of their affection, thus mixing sex and danger which further excites young adult readers who enjoy and may relate to expressions of passion over rational thinking (Mercer 268). Mercer notes:

One of the primary effects of placing vampires into the story is that their particular attributes become a means of training attention onto bodies.

Passage after passage of Meyer’s narrative depicts the mixing of vampiric thirst for blood focused sensually on Bella’s body through descriptions of her heartbeat and pulse, her scent, her skin texture, with the thirst of sexual

passion and arousal similarly focused sensually on Edward's body through description of *his* physique, *his* temperature, *his* scent, *his* skin texture.

(269, emphasis in original)

According to Katie Kapurch, in her article “‘Unconditionally and Irrevocably’: Theorizing the Melodramatic Impulse in Young Adult Literature through the *Twilight* Saga and *Jane Eyre*,” tenets of melodrama, such as “exaggerated expression” and an offering of “morality, in which right and wrong are clearly delineated as recognizable options,” are reinforced by the focus on characters’ bodily descriptions (172, 173-174). Bella sees herself as plain, clumsy, and ordinary, but views Edward as unbearably gorgeous and too good for her, yet “Edward’s expressive revelations, full of sensational and exaggerated hyperbole, also reveal[s his] bodily attraction to and fascination with” Bella, something which she finds difficult to comprehend and accept (173). In Edward’s absence, Bella does not notice much of anything, functioning almost in a zombie-like status, until she begins to spend more time with Jacob Black. He, too, is described by Meyer as tall, muscular, with a bright smile and affectionate attitude, though his romantic love for Bella is unrequited.

The attention to the bodies of the paranormal characters is sexy; it both establishes a wish by YA readers to have similar bodies and the attention of others, and it offers material for daydreams about interacting with someone who is so attractive. This focus is both positive and negative. The details let teens experience the feelings of sexual attraction and consider the topic of sex and what they would do if in Bella’s (or other character’s) shoes, but the focus on the body, with all of the seeming perfections of the vampires and the beauty of Jacob’s physique, may also cause young adult readers to feel

inadequate with their own appearances, flawed by comparison. Young adults need to be reminded that this obsession with youth and beauty is a product of contemporary society. Romeo and Juliet are never described in such detail, or even as devastatingly beautiful and handsome as the Cullens are in *New Moon*, yet their story has lasted for hundreds of years. Teens living in today's world should feel comfortable appreciating beauty, in all of its forms, without also feeling required to emulate it.

People want to be wanted, and not just romantically and/or sexually. Juliet has the love of Romeo, the eye of Paris, the ear of her Nurse, and the protection of Tybalt. Bella, too, is fortunate enough to not only have the love of her family but also the love and loyalty of two young men. Though it is ultimately Edward whom Bella will always be *in* love with, Jacob does hold a place in Bella's heart, and she does feel love for him. While this creates something of a dramatic love triangle, it is also appealing as well as helpful to young adult audiences because it allows them to consider how they might deal with the situation of their best friend falling in love with them, what they might do if their significant other and best friend did not get along, and how to handle rejection.

Through the inclusion of melodramatic elements, such as the expressiveness of a first-person narrator who provides full disclosure regarding her thoughts and feelings, Meyer helps to create a more explicit bond between YA readers and the text. In "Narrative Intimacy and the Question of Control in the 'Twilight' Saga," Sara Day writes:

As Meyer traces the progression of this supernatural love triangle, she offers a construction of intimacy that focuses on the uncontrollable and often overwhelming nature of love and desire. . . . Because she believes

that love and desire are beyond her control, Bella's attempts to confront questions of intimacy require her to seek a relationship in which she has agency over these feelings. Bella therefore relies almost exclusively upon her disclosure to the reader in order to explore her feelings for Edward and Jacob. As she emphasizes Bella's dependence upon the reader, Meyer deploys a model of narration in which the narrator-reader relationship is . . . a model of intimate interpersonal relationships, established through the disclosure of information and the experience of the story as a space that the narrator shares with the reader. (65, 66)

Because of this relationship with Bella, young adults are provided with more insight into the nature of romantic and sexual feelings than they are through *Romeo and Juliet's* dramatic point of view. Those who are familiar with *New Moon* prior to experiencing *Romeo and Juliet* may understand the play on a different level, superimposing the emotions portrayed in *New Moon* onto Shakespeare's characters, but that does not support replacing the play with the novel; instead, asking young adults to examine the experiences and points of view in both texts enriches their understanding of various issues while also helping them form meaningful connections to their own lives.

As Jackie Horne notes in "Fantasy, Subjectivity, and Desire in *Twilight* and Its Sequels," it is not only the appeal of sexuality that lures young adult readers, but also the belief that a reciprocating, trusting, monogamous relationship is attainable (34). Mercer writes that "Bella and Edward do not merely want someone to be a sexual partner. As Meyer narrates it, what they each long to experience but fear the impossibility of, is the chance to be loved" (272). Romance abounds in the novel with palpable sexual tension,

powerful kisses, thoughtful gestures, and a dedication to a person that extends beyond the confines of traditional death and into eternity. Meyer creates a world that “upend[s] literary hierarchies in some ways, since vampires are not necessarily villains. Rather than the transgression, excess, and sexual deviance that have traditionally been keys to vampire stories, the Cullens and their friends represent chastity, morality, and restraint” (Buttsworth 52). Despite the novel’s clear foundations in *Romeo and Juliet*, this style of Meyer’s has been described by many scholars rather disparagingly as reminiscent of a fairy tale, versus a tragedy, which has been transplanted into the twenty-first century, including stereotypical elements of damsels in distress who rely on men to save them, and a focus on beauty and morality.

In her essay, “Cinderbella: Twilight, Fairy Tales, and the Twenty-First-Century American Dream,” Sara Buttsworth points out that Meyer’s

novels (and film adaptations) . . . operate in the dreamlike realm of the fairy tale, where horror and romance coexist. Bella’s quest for eternal youth and a literal happily-forever-after follows a tradition that has often governed the behavior of young women in different ways through the centuries. . . [yet] perhaps the most important fairy-tale factor Meyer has employed is the transformative power of “survival tale[s] with hope.” As characters within fairy tales survive the challenges they meet, they are transformed and attain their hearts’ desires. (48, 49)

While there are aspects of the article with which I agree, such as the critique of Meyer’s inclusion of “sexual politics” that “focus on ‘morality’ at the expense of education” or the absurdity of her implying that “technical skill is not required” of the beautiful Cullen

women but is of “Jacob, whose class and ethnic background in these depictions seem to necessitate knowledge of a ‘trade’ rather than aspiration to a profession,” I disagree that a fairy-tale like style necessitates negativity. Edward is not only Bella’s Romeo but also her Prince Charming.

The last chapter closes with the two kissing. Death has been avoided, and a bright future lies ahead for the couple. *New Moon* demonstrates that sacrifices do not always have to involve ultimate death or everlasting pain, good and evil are clearly outlined (everyone else vs. the Volturi and Victoria), lovers are reunited, and a true happily-ever-after option is established at the close of the novel. *Romeo and Juliet* fails to supply the happy ending reminiscent of a fairy tale, but *New Moon* gives the lovers another chance.

Meyer creates a realistic set of characters with rich backstories and a setting that exists in real life (Forks, Washington), but she also imbues her nonhuman characters with supernatural abilities and Byronic qualities and her human characters with traits and desires reflected in “classical” or “canonical” pieces. Kate Cochran states that, “for Meyer, as well as multitudes of Twilight fans, the fantasy of the perfect man is cobbled together from various Byronic heroes. Even though Edward was ‘born’ much later, and he would have come of age during the 1920s, his ‘true’ history can be found in nineteenth-century Victorian novels,” such as those found in many of Bella’s favorite texts and referenced throughout Meyer’s series, include “the writings of Shakespeare, Emily Brontë, and Jane Austen,” which harbor leading men who contain facets of Edward’s character (24; Buttsworth 49).

Though Meyer draws upon various literary inspirations and styles, *New Moon*, unlike the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*, most clearly reflects a melodrama, building

suspense, acknowledging the difficulties of a relationship, including obstacles and an ultimate climactic point – but closing instead with the happier ending. This again relates back to the idea that, while young adult audiences need texts they can relate to, they also want hope. With *New Moon*, a relationship is established between young adult readers and the novel through “occasions of exaggerated suffering prior to a joyful reunion,” “the intensity of characters’ expressive discourse,” the recognition of “the emotional lives and cultural preferences of youth,” and in “validating the seriousness of coming-of-age experiences” (Kapurch 164, 165, 166). This is not to imply that *Romeo and Juliet* is dismissive of youth and the problems encountered by teens; the young protagonists are timeless characters who continue to make an impact on the lives of young adults worldwide and continue to outlive the fading glory of the *Twilight* saga craze. The style in which the play was written, with its swiftness of events and intent to be performed in “two hours’ traffic of [the] stage,” also changes the reception of the text, perhaps lending itself to wider appeal among both sexes as well as non-YA audiences (Shakespeare Prologue). *New Moon*, however, with its simpler and more detailed text, paranormal characters, and elements of melodrama, make it a more appealing and successful text for many contemporary young adult audiences.

Elements exist in both texts which stand the test of time for reeling in teen readers: individuals get to fight expectations of parents and society while engaging in a unique romance and series of life-and-death adventures all from the safety of the pages of a book. As Katherine Kim Proukou writes in “Young Adult Literature: Rite of Passage or Rite of Its Own,” “YA literature presents the world of imagination as real not hallucinatory, feelings as reliable not deceitful, nature as essential not expendable, danger

as challenging not demoralizing, enemies as teachers as well as adversaries, and life as a surprising process neither exactly fair nor completely capricious” (68). *New Moon* presents these concepts to adolescents, helping them to explore their own identities while examining a number of sensitive subjects, and making the world of vampires and werewolves commonplace and comfortable.

CHAPTER 5:

MAKING CONNECTIONS: ACCESSIBILITY AND LASTING ISSUES

“I’m neither an optimist nor a pessimist. I am a dyed-in-the-wool possibilist! By this, I mean . . . we see that everything’s connected and change is the only constant.”

–Frances Moore Lappé

Both *Romeo and Juliet* and *New Moon* address concerns of the timeframe in which they were written, appealing to young adult audiences through different styles yet still drawing attention to issues such as identity, religion, gender, and relationships, timeless topics which teenagers still struggle with in today’s world, making both texts relevant for contemporary youth.

In his article, “Shakespeare’s Reflections on Love and Law in *Romeo and Juliet*,” D. Scott Broyles writes that “Shakespeare’s play about the power of love illuminates both its possibilities and its limitations” (115). In more than a decade of my teaching experience, I have found that young adults are looking for ways to navigate through feelings of attraction, combat social and familial pressures to form a sense of self-identity, and want to find ways to safely explore concepts such as mortality and death, sexual awakening, and the possible consequences of their choices. Understanding that other young adults have experienced this for hundreds of years (via exposure to *Romeo and Juliet*) is reassuring for teens experiencing the rollercoaster of adolescence, and venturing into the world of contemporary paranormal romances adds a level of excitement and danger youths often crave in their literature and lives.

Through interaction with the characters of *Romeo*, *Juliet*, *Bella*, *Edward*, and *Jacob*, young adults are able to explore these issues in meaningful and relevant ways, and

by partnering Shakespeare's play with contemporary paranormal romance, teens are not only better able to understand the context of both texts but also find literary companions with whom they can traverse through the tumultuous turmoil that is the life of a teenager.

Gender and Freedom: Then and Now

Some of the major issues addressed within *Romeo and Juliet* include gender roles and societal constraints, religion, the need to be recognized as an individual, and the difficulties of navigating familial, political, social, and romantic relationships. These are not altogether unfamiliar to contemporary young adult audiences; however, the time frame of the play creates additional barriers contemporary American teenagers may not have considered.

For Juliet, as for most girls of her time, her allegiance is to her family and her obedience to her father. She is a daughter, yet she is also an object to be used to strengthen family ties, increase wealth and holdings, and provide heirs to continue the family name. In *Coming of Age in Shakespeare*, Marjorie Garber writes that "women were almost universally thought to be inferior, unworthy of holding property, in law and theology alike subjugated to the will of their husbands, basically valuable for the dowries they brought with them and the children they produced" (125). While she is given the illusion by her family at the party of having a say in who she will marry, Juliet's parents, namely her father, later turn violent when she refuses to acquiesce to a marriage to Paris. Coppélia Kahn, in "Coming of Age in Verona," writes that, "after Tybalt's death, the marriage which before required [Juliet's] consent is now [her father's] 'decree,' and his anger at her opposition mounts steadily from an astonished testiness to brutal threats," including those of disowning her and throwing her out on the streets to fend for herself

(13). While it appears that daughters have very little choice, Clayton G. MacKenzie, in “Love, Sex and Death in *Romeo and Juliet*,” argues that, at least for Juliet, “her choices may be limited but she asserts, with repeated vigour, that she has a choice and that its consequences are less uncomfortable than a host of masculine voices would have us believe” (33). At this point in the play, Juliet already *is* married – to Romeo. She both preserves and scorns societal expectations by adhering to the idea that “loyalty to father must give way to loyalty to husband”; she chooses to keep her marriage a secret, but she also chooses to remain loyal to her husband over her father (Garber *Coming of Age* 43). And while secrecy is a larger problem within the play as a whole, it is still a choice Juliet has. Her freedoms may be limited compared with contemporary teenage girls, but she refuses to be used as an object by her father at his whim, going so far as to risk “her life for freedom, in order to avoid a direct, necessary conflict with her family” (Kottman 30).

Juliet’s dedication to pursuing her own dreams, versus those of her family or society, can be appreciated by young adults in any era. In my second or third year of teaching, one of my female sophomore students confided in me that she wanted to become a nurse, but her father told her that she wasn’t smart enough, and he expected her to finish high school, stay at home to learn to cook and keep house and help her mother and siblings, find a husband, and eventually have children of her own who would repeat the process if they were also girls. The dismissal of her intelligence and dreams, and the classification of her as useful only inasmuch as she contributed to a comfortable household for male family members, both shocked and angered me. This was not a page from *Romeo and Juliet* but a cultural expectation of one family in the early 21st century and a direct example of how settings may change, but sometimes cultural norms do not.

My student felt uneasy approaching her father with her intent to disobey his wishes, but she ultimately chose to follow her own path, going on to college to pursue a degree in nursing and breaking the cycle of expectations set forth by her family.

For contemporary young adult readers, Juliet is an example of hasty decisions but also of gumption; she may make some poor choices along the way—and with dire results—but she ultimately takes charge of her own life and refuses to be a pawn in a family feud or a puppet whose strings are manipulated by the expectations of society or of culture.

Juliet is often the one character from the play with whom contemporary young adult audiences, particularly young women, sympathize, saying things like, “oh, what an awful family – no wonder she was willing to do anything to escape them,” or onto whom they project their own desires based on statements such as “it would be wonderful to find someone like Romeo who loves you so much.” Romeo, on the other hand, along with Tybalt, Mercutio, and Benvolio, more often appeal to young men, though the most frequent reasons I hear for their affinity for these characters include “they fight a lot,” “Mercutio’s a smart ass,” “they joke about sex,” and “they argue with each other sometimes just like we do with our friends.” Romeo’s “code of manly honor,” however, is not normally included in their reasons, most likely as it is rarely overtly addressed in classrooms, yet it is a key point of pressure which male adolescents faced not only in Shakespeare’s time frame but also today (Kahn 8).

Romeo is free to roam Verona as he pleases. Unlike Juliet, who is kept inside her family’s home, teenagers see Romeo out with friends walking the streets, going to parties, and visiting with a priest. He is trying to establish his own identity while

balancing “filial loyalty, loyalty to friends, courage, and personal dignity,” in addition to loyalty to his love (Kahn 9). In Verona, to fight is to be a man, and to love (instead of feud) is to be less than a man (6). Masculinity in *Romeo and Juliet* seems to be represented by force and violence, despite the fact that what most citizens want and value is peace within their city walls. Even in Mercutio’s “playful way, his speech is as aggressive as fighting” (9). In “‘Standing to the Wall’: The Pressures of Masculinity in *Romeo and Juliet*,” Robert Appelbaum writes

What is crucial, it seems to me, is that against the norms represented by the prince and the citizens—the adequate masculine legality that determines Verona’s condition as a world at least temporarily apart from the depredations of history and sovereignty-challenging war—the play juxtaposes the inward experience of failed normativity and represents this failure as the structure of life among its tragic men. The men whom we come to know as men are under pressure, in effect, to *perform*. . . . Even the well-wishing Benvolio is caught in this trap. . . . Instead of exacting tribute to the law of peace, which he thinks he can represent, Benvolio ends up fighting like the others. (268, emphasis in original)

These fights are rooted in an unexplained “ancient grudge,” passed on to the youth by their parents, and, in essence, like many high school fights today, are “fight[s] for insignificant reasons” such as bravado, jealousy, or ignorance spurred on by the expectations that a “man” can and should resolve problems in a physical show of strength instead of, as Romeo tries to do with Tybalt, using words or walking away from a potentially volatile situation (Shakespeare Prologue; Broyles 79).

Today, women are the primary target audience to whom media and marketing panders, pushing cosmetics, diet plans, push-up bras, and plastic surgery in order to “enhance” their daily “performance” in society. As T. S. Eliot notes in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” there is a pressure in contemporary society “to prepare a face to meet the faces you will meet,” but this is not limited to the female gender alone (27). Young women may face the pressures of society to look a certain way, but young men are also under pressure to behave in “manly” ways. Romeo may be doomed because of his rash actions, but Broyles implies that, at least in the time frame of the play, Romeo is also destined for destruction because “[he] would have nothing other than love rule in his heart. In so doing, he becomes its slave and loses his sense of manhood” (115). Fortunately, foregoing love in favor of fighting has not remained a standard “requirement” for contemporary manhood; however, this perhaps complicates what it means to be a man even more for young adults, as they are bombarded with a multitude of expectations instead of a limited set of choices. Today, young men view images of manhood ranging from the chivalrous knights of old (gentle yet ready to fight for honor), to suave and daredevil (“the most interesting man in the world” Dos Equis beer commercials) to well-muscled and goofy (nearly any current teen movie). These media representations mix with the interior conflicts demonstrated by the youth of the play: loyalty to family, friends, significant others, (in some cases) God and the law, and self. The internal battles within young men to integrate so many exterior expectations with their own concept of self is ongoing. As Appelbaum states, “when men experience themselves—when they experience themselves in their masculinity—they find themselves in a condition of unresolvability. But they also find themselves under

compulsion, precisely, to resolve themselves, to struggle toward a condition of masculine fulfillment as if their masculinity were a single, stable, normative goal,” and “it is notable that none of the young men in the play ever really arrives at this condition of masculine integration” (255). This is an important lesson from *Romeo and Juliet* which still rings true for contemporary adolescents: defining oneself based upon societal or gender expectations alone will not result in a satisfactory sense of self. Young adults must be free to choose what aspects of familial, social, gender, religious, and cultural norms they will embrace or reject as they see fit based upon their forming individual thoughts and emotions.

It is imperative that young adults exposed to *Romeo and Juliet* receive guidance in attending not only to the love affair and plight of Juliet but also to the hurtles presented to the young men of the play. By pointing out such details, the play becomes more widely applicable and relevant to both genders instead of predominantly young women, and the stereotype that “young men only like the play for the fighting scenes” may cease to be perpetuated as the underlying turmoil regarding freedom and identity are more clearly understood by youthful audiences.

Identity, Influence, and Acceptance

Even more so than women, the men of the play are trapped by their family name. Their family name is equivalent to other contemporary labels or stereotypes, and just as for today’s youth, *Romeo and Juliet* must find a way to form a strong identity of self with which they are comfortable in order to rebuke (or accept) external labels by society of “who they are.”

In my experience as a teacher, I have found that young adults are often very open about their beliefs, sharing their thoughts about everything from food to politics. In class, when questioned as to why they hold a certain position about a topic, most teens give opinions that are rooted in emotional responses and/or which fall back upon the beliefs of their families and communities. Very few of my young adult students have specific justification for their thoughts based upon their own investigations and self-reflections on issues. This makes sense, however, as young adults learn from those closest to them, often mimicking their parents' beliefs until they are older (and even sometimes retaining the same beliefs later in life without questioning why). In "Twilight is Not Good for Maidens: Gender, Sexuality, and the Family in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Series," Anna Silver notes that identity is found through relationships with family, friends, and society; however, it is not enough to simply interact with others to discover self-identity (122). Young adults must also recognize what influences are being superimposed upon them in order to question those norms and then choose to accept or reject them as part of their unique self-identity, just as they must learn to accept others who may differ from them in their world views. As Garber states, "Juliet's choice [of Romeo versus his name and her parents] is a measure of her maturity and self-knowledge" (*Coming of Age* 39). She rejects the idea that a family name is equal to who a person is. Juliet accepts Romeo as an individual, independent of outside factors that would seek to influence her opinion of him. In "Defying the Stars: Tragic Love as the Struggle for Freedom in *Romeo and Juliet*," Paul A. Kottman writes that when they marry, the couple "underscore[s] that their mutual self-recognition means taking matters into their own hands, a further expression of their own self-determination" to not allow society to shape them into a mold of

Montague and of Capulet (24). They marry in secret, recognizing the power and influence their families have upon society, and Romeo even withholds information about his marriage from his closest friends, understanding that they may have a difficult time accepting his marriage to an “outsider.”

Acceptance, though, is very important for many young adults. They seek recognition as individuals, unique, capable, and independent of family names, race, gender, or personality traits. The desire for acceptance by their peers or community often drives teens’ choices and actions, perhaps leading them down paths they would not otherwise follow on their own, and the wish to be accepted and recognized by others, particularly before establishing self-identity and strong self-esteem, sometimes leads to more consequences than benefits. In an effort to “fit in,” many teens engage in activities such as underage drinking, drug use, or promiscuous sex, which can lead to any number of negative results from jail time to disease to death. In addition, those who are not comfortable in their own skin and feel they do not meet the status quo expectations of their peers may withdraw from social interaction, develop eating disorders, or suffer from depression. And even having a strong idea of self does not mean that the world has no influence: “we see our loves, aims, and desires as dialectically conditioned by, but never fully reconciled to, whatever our households, workplaces, and communal bonds demand of us” (Kottman 3). Identity is more than family, gender, appearance, abilities, economics, or education, yet contemporary teens continue to battle with stereotypes based upon everything from race to religion to lifestyle choices and grades in school, often contending with media images that present unrealistic views of “beauty” while simultaneously endorsing high-fat foods. In *New Moon*, Bella bases her identity so

wholly on Edward and the Cullen family that she slips into a deep depression, having lost an awareness of who she is apart from her boyfriend. Romeo and Juliet may seem to be blindly dependent as well, though they still have a sense of self-identity. Perhaps “the lovers assert their freedom . . . through deeds that can have no communal justification, no social explanation,” but “by treating them as on, we forget that they were not a united ‘pair’ but two separate individuals” (Kottman 36). Their suicides are not simply desperate acts of sorrow but also a refusal to return to a world where they are labeled instead of seen, objects instead of individuals. Contemporary young adults, just like Shakespeare’s couple, seek to be recognized and accepted as individuals, and this often involves breaking with establishments that they have heretofore identified with, such as family hierarchies or social or cultural norms.

Romeo and Juliet are secretly disobeying their families to be together, seeking “independence achieved through destruction of the other”—namely their family names which perpetuate the feuds that would divide them—in order to create new definitions of self together (Kottman 7). And here is the irony and part of the tragedy: Juliet states that Romeo’s name is not who Romeo is; yet, “Shakespeare suggests both that it is impossible for Romeo to separate himself from his public identity as a Montague, and that his public identity is nonetheless extraneous and accidental, no part of what he really is” (Kahn 10). In other words, individuals are not the labels placed upon them, yet they also cannot escape them.

Relationships

Family, friendship, and romance are various types of relationships represented in both texts, each bringing with it a different set of emotions and obstacles. In the play, the

predominant emotion associated with family is that of duty. The youth continue to fight in the name of their fathers out of a sense of duty and loyalty to their family's name. Garber writes that "the quest for the name and that name's meaning offers the dramatic ritual of initiation as yet another significant metaphor for the knowledge of self," yet for *Romeo and Juliet*, it is not their families' names which they wish to honor but a new one they create for themselves (*Coming of Age* 78). Family, for them, is the breaking away from the parents and communities which raised them in order to form a new identity which holds no connection to the limitations and expectations of a Montague or Capulet. Similarly, like the lovers of Shakespeare's play who wish to discard old families for a new one of their own making, Bella, in *New Moon*, also seeks a new family. She, however, does not seek to reject her biological parents out of fear, contempt, or boredom, but rather she finds in the Cullens what "feels" more like a family. Instead of her only-child, divorced-parents, loner-like experiences of family in the past, the Cullens represent stability and a more open form of affection than she has previously experienced:

The Cullens' non-human, monstrous, adoptive family is, ironically, more of a family than Bella's biological human family. Headed by the patriarchal but compassionate godlike father Carlisle[,] . . . balanced by the affectionate and protective mother Esme, and humanized by squabbling siblings, the Cullens are the family that Bella craves. (Silver 126)

Unlike in *Romeo and Juliet*, representations of contemporary families include a focus on love, acceptance, and the idea that family can be found or made and does not rely on being connected by birth or blood.

The only examples of familial bonds of this nature in *Romeo and Juliet* are those between Romeo and Mercutio and between Juliet and the Nurse. The latter relationship is based upon bonds of love, though it is also thwarted by the Nurse's duty to the Capulet name and Juliet's parents. Because of this, Juliet comes to realize that, once again, duty can undermine affection, as she experiences when the Nurse recommends that she forget Romeo, and marry Paris.

Romeo has a much larger social circle than Juliet, and his friends include Benvolio, Balthasar, and Mercutio. Benvolio is kin to Romeo, and Balthasar is a servant for the Montague family, which does not preclude that their loyalties to the family name outstrip their love and devotion to Romeo, but it does promote a group identity of "Montagues first." Mercutio, on the other hand, is not related to either feuding party, instead a relative of the Prince and is close friends with Romeo, willing to take up arms against any who insult his friend. Mercutio is an extension of Romeo's family; the two sport together, laugh, and do not judge one another on the basis of family. The pair are an example of what many young adults feel for their groups of friends: sometimes a friend is more like family than a blood relation. This is not to say that friends-as-family relationships are without conflicts. As young men with warring priorities and emotions, tempers flare, and Mercutio ends up dead. But it is Romeo's reaction, born not of a sense of duty to family name but out of hurt and rage over the death of one he loved as family, that demonstrates the powerful bonds of friendship, and "Romeo's hard choice [to seek vengeance or wait for the law] is also ours," as many young adults are quick to fight (verbally or physically) when a friend has been "wounded" (Kahn 8). In contemplating the consequences of Romeo's actions to pursue Tybalt, young adults can also "choose" a

path of vengeance, witnessing how Romeo's life begins to fall apart, and they can, hopefully, recognize the need for reflection before action lest they also be faced with harsh penalties for their hasty reactions to volatile situations.

Mercutio's death partially arises from Romeo's decision to keep his marriage to Juliet a secret. Their love affair is such a whirlwind that contemporary young adults often find it hard to accept that the relationship is rooted in more than just lust. Romeo seems fickle to so quickly forget Rosaline in favor of Juliet, and Juliet appears almost naïve to make plans to marry this flirtatious boy the day after they have met. But Garber notes that "the pattern of sexual maturation in Shakespeare is one of deliberate separation – a movement away from group identification either with peers or with a nuclear family unit, freeing the individual to contract new bonds" (*Coming of Age* 30). This indicates that the couple's love also gives them freedom to "pursue, or move toward, what it desires" instead of continuing to conform to the expectations forced upon them by their family names (Kottman 17). Though sexual relationships do create new bonds, for contemporary young adults, sex does not also equal a separation from family and friends but more often an extension of family and social networks. This may be why contemporary teens become frustrated with the lovers, believing that they may have lived had they shared their marriage, as the families of both parties often join together in supporting the newlyweds.

As Kahn states, "*Romeo and Juliet* is about a pair of adolescents trying to grow up. Growing up requires that they separate themselves from their parents by forming an intimate bond with one of the opposite sex which supersedes filial [and friendship] bonds" (5). Intimate love, in the play, is often tied to Cupid, but Cupid's love can be fatal.

MacKenzie notes that Juliet wants love to be announce by Love (Cupid), yet “Cupid’s blindness . . . was regularly associated with fatal peril in the literature and art of Shakespeare’s time,” unlike today, when young adults often picture Cupid as angelic and helping people fall in love (27). This concept of the destructive nature of love can be difficult for young adults to process; it is often easier to place blame on stubbornness, fighting, or a poor substitute for a guaranteed express mail delivery service, “yet, once Cupid enters the fray, the borders and orders of the feud are irrevocably breached. This may be simply because violence between enemies is so much easier to understand and address than love between enemies” (27). True for contemporary teens as it was for Shakespeare’s audiences, love—at least in the romantic sense—can be wonderful, it can be freeing, and it can also be blind.

Religion and Law

As they journey to be with one another, Romeo and Juliet also seeks the advice and help of a third party, one who is not supposed to be tied to any political faction and therefore should be unswayed by the names of Montague and Capulet: Friar Laurence. In *Texts and Traditions: Religion in Shakespeare 1592-1604*, Beatrice Groves notes that Shakespeare “uses Catholic tropes freely, not with reverence, but with the knowledge that they were relics of a discarded religion,” and as Protestantism was the recognized and growing religious practice of the time, the representation of the then-current Reformation movement and dissatisfaction with the Catholic Church is represented through the character of the Friar (30). Broyles writes that “justice receives but one reference in the play, and it is ultimately dismissed in the name of mercy. . . . For Friar Laurence, it is only when the higher law of Christian mercy transforms, or even supplants, the human law

that it truly serves justice” (81, 82). In the Friar’s attempt to end the feuds of Montague and Capulet, he subverts secular laws and demonstrates a corrupted view of the Catholic Church, one which allows a man to play God with a resurrection-like plan for Juliet and represents “a curious form of Christian doctrine that holds a successful outcome can dignify vice” (Broyles 89, 92). Broyles continues by adding that “Shakespeare appears to be illustrating the corrosive effect of the Church’s foray into ecclesiastical politics” and pushing for a distinct separation of church and state, while also commenting on both the fallibility of man and religion: “while Shakespeare presents Friar Laurence as meddling, imprudent, and cowardly, he does not present him as a vicious man in any way,” simply a *misrepresentative* of God and religion (92, 96).

Shakespeare’s portrayal of religion, though an effective critique, is disheartening for some teens. Contemporary young adult audiences with ties to Catholicism may feel off-put by his depiction of this representative of the Church, and those with other religious affiliations or beliefs could consider the general depictions of religion to be disappointing or even offensive. For young adults exploring religion or identifying themselves as belonging to a particular faith, the fact that audiences “never encounter Friar Laurence, or any character in the play, at prayer” or that the Friar “[strikes] at the core of the entire social system . . . in marrying [Romeo and Juliet] without their parents’ permission” may mar their understanding or impressions of religion if they do not understand that Shakespeare is representing a “perversion of Christian doctrines” (Broyles 88; Garber *Coming of Age* 120, Broyles 114). The religious mannerisms portrayed by the Friar, however, are not the only representations of Christianity in the play. Garber gives more credit to the female sex, stating that “time and again, they show

themselves wiser and more capable than their lovers and husbands” (127). Despite the apparent haste with which Juliet rushes to marry Romeo, her secret wedding, feigned death, and suicide, she still demonstrates a greater maturity than others by more quickly and fully cultivating a sense of self while also reflecting religious beliefs of the time frame. While audiences may question the Friar’s representation of religion due to his underlying agenda to “resolve the city’s factional problem,” Juliet serves as a reminder of some of the positive teachings of the Church, including “marital fidelity,” “embrac[ing] Christian love by choosing to love Romeo for who he truly is,” and the belief that “she receives more by giving more” (Broyles 111, 110). In a world of fighting and hatred, Juliet provides an example to young adults of trust, honor, love, acceptance, and gentility, demonstrating that one does not have to become a product of his/her environment or upbringing, but instead can choose to embrace something good (such as love).

While not specifically aligning themselves with a particular denomination or religion, the Cullens in *New Moon* also reflect positive aspects of Christianity, including living peacefully, adopting (to the greatest extent possible) a nonviolent way of life, and accepting every individual as unique and deserving of compassion. In her article, “Vampires and Werewolves: Rewriting Religious and Racial Stereotyping in Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* Series,” Georgina Ledvinka writes that the paranormal creatures of the contemporary novels depict the author’s Latter-Day Saints’ belief systems, as

the LDS Church places extreme importance on family devotion and its members are required to perform traditional gender roles. . . . [the Cullens] live a clean lifestyle involving no alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, and their recreation time is focused around wholesome activities. . . . The

Cullens also exemplify the Latter-Day Saints doctrine of agency, or free will, which requires members to consistently deny the baser aspects of their nature and make correct moral decisions in life. All of the Cullens resist the urge to kill people and drink human blood. . . . The association with death is also banished in favour of eternal life, because the Cullen family is loving, beautiful and immortal—they offer a kind of eternal existence. (204)

While *Romeo and Juliet* uses religion more as a prop, it also invites teens to consider what they personally believe: should a “holy” man be involved in politics? is it appropriate to subvert parental authority in the name of peace? do deities ever condone suicide? And with regards to *New Moon*: what happens to a soul after death? is mortality the end of life, or is something else possible beyond this life on earth? Despite what young adults choose to believe, both texts present opportunities to consider and discuss religion and death: two topics often overlooked in many secondary classrooms yet which many teens contemplate or worry about. While the texts may not provide solid or even satisfactory answers, they acknowledge that young adults do ponder such philosophical issues.

While Shakespeare’s depiction of religion is rather dismal, Stephenie Meyer’s portrayal remains mildly ambiguous. By not directly chastising or endorsing a particular religion in the novel, she invites young adults to be open to multiple belief systems, once again celebrating multiculturalism and individual choices and beliefs. Some of the best discussions in my classroom have surfaced based upon religious beliefs as they apply to, or can be interpreted in, literature. Tempers can flare, debates may ensue, but the mantra

always wins out at the end: just agree to disagree. After reflecting on the school year, most of my students comment that those are some of the most fun and memorable discussions from which they learned more about other people and themselves. The characters of *New Moon* are varied in their beliefs and actions, be they human or supernatural, but they are also adolescents. Through the characters and religion—or lack thereof—in the novel, young adults are pushed to see past race (or species), socioeconomic divisions, gender, family structure, and school drama to accept those with different belief systems – something which is so important for teenagers, as they seek recognition as well as validation.

So What? Or, How the Past Lingers (Being a Teen is Always Tough)

Both *Romeo and Juliet* and *New Moon* are coming-of-age tales where teenage protagonists experience love, rebellion, duty, and the search for individual identity. Some messages are clearly a product of the time frame in which each text was written, but contemporary young adults in the United States can examine how their situation or status as a teen may—or may not—have changed or even improved over time, promoting a critical interpretation of societal values and personal beliefs.

Romeo and Juliet needs to remain a canonical work in secondary classrooms. While Shakespeare may have written his play for general audiences, his young adult protagonists provide talking points for contemporary teens to discuss themselves, their lives and concerns, and their friends. The play presents messages regarding gender and family which challenge some of the societal expectations of Shakespeare's day, but which contemporary young adults accept as part of today's social norms, such as the ideas that young women have the right to feel and express desire as well as make life

decisions for themselves without the interference of men, young men should not be expected to conform to socially-defined concepts of masculinity, and children are not objects to be treated as pawns in a family's play for power. Additionally, Shakespeare's play comments on love, sex, authority, sacrifice, secrets, and identity, all of which are important to contemporary youth. As one of my recent graduates stated, "freedom, along with individualism with out [sic] a doubt" is what makes it most appealing to teenagers (Ringer). The struggles of young adults to figure out the "rules" of adulthood still exist today, and the desire to be recognized and accepted as individuals, free from the constraints of family, society, and self-doubt, has not changed since Shakespeare's day.

Exposing teens to *Romeo and Juliet* is a necessity; however, the play becomes more meaningful and relevant to their lives when partnering Shakespeare's text with a contemporary paranormal romance such as *New Moon*, which not only reinforces the messages found in *Romeo and Juliet* but also provides additional themes that are representative in particular of today's, the contemporary teen's, society. Both texts make literature relevant to young adult's lives by tackling issues such as fighting, being in love, and sex. Each warns against the consequences of acting hastily or jumping into a fray, both imply that love can involve sacrifice, and sex is presented as something into which young lovers should not rush without establishing a clear commitment (such as marriage). In addition to these shared messages, *New Moon* also asks young adults to consider the consequences of contemporary society placing such high value on youth and beauty, as well as how stress, depression, and poor self-image can affect teens.

Young adults can form strong bonds with fictional characters, talking about them as if they have choices and lives beyond those on paper, which may account for the

reason so many teenagers become upset by the death of Romeo and Juliet, despite knowing of their impending dooms from the start of the play. Walker states that “*Romeo and Juliet* is set apart from the other Shakespeare tragedies in that the action and characters begin in familiar comic patterns and are then transformed to compose the pattern of tragedy” (135). Building up to a romantic interlude and a marriage which could theoretically end family feuds, regardless of what the Prologue says, builds an emotional high, with youths hoping for a happy ending for the couple. When reality interferes, though, and the lovers are on suicidal paths, contemporary teenage students—knowing that the couple is going to die from the start of the play—often still hold out hope that the end of the play won’t really be “the end” for the couple. *New Moon*, on the other hand, inserts “tragedy” early in the novel before moving into a resolution and the more hopeful end contemporary young adult audiences seem to yearn for. Perhaps due to very real threats of violence, global warming, peer pressure, and social and familial expectations, young adults seek refuge in texts which provide examples of other teens who feel “stuck” but whose lives, as with characters in *New Moon*, have more positive resolutions. In discussing both texts within the classroom or peer groups, young adults have the chance to explore nuances and new ideas they may not have previously considered had they been reading in isolation, as well as to build stronger rapport with one another as a community of readers and critical thinkers.

Reflections and Conclusions

From a literature-lover standpoint, I find the reinvention of *Romeo and Juliet* into the young adult paranormal romance of *New Moon* fascinating. To someone who has already experienced the play, the parallels are obvious, even without Meyer’s direct

references to the plot and characters of *Romeo and Juliet* peppered throughout the novel. The language of Shakespeare can be challenging and unfamiliar, but it is also beautiful and rich with meaning. Every time I reread the play, I discover a new point I had not previously considered. In *New Moon*, the language is simple and straightforward and the details excessive, allowing me to more easily fall into the world of Bella, Edward, and Jacob. In both pieces, though, I continuously find myself caught up in the plight of the lovers. While frustrated with the (in)actions of the characters, I also empathize with them. I remember feeling overwhelmed as a teenager by the prospect of being an adult while at the same time wanting the freedom from the confines of adolescence, of trying to be “myself” in social settings that constantly passed judgment, having crushes on friends who did not feel the same way, and experiencing the rush of hormones when dating. If I can recall those experiences from nearly twenty years ago and appreciate their representations in both *Romeo and Juliet* and *New Moon*, it is no wonder that both texts are so popular with many contemporary youths who are currently experiencing emotions similar to those of the protagonists of these texts.

As an educator, I believe that *Romeo and Juliet* must remain in schools. However, I also believe that young adults need ways of making connections between classical texts and contemporary society. This is why pairing *New Moon* with *Romeo and Juliet*—not using it as a replacement for the play—can be so valuable. It is not enough to read the texts in isolation; they each need to be discussed in order to be fully appreciated for their commentary. Also, comparing characters from the play to paranormal creatures in the novel pushes teens to think critically and ask questions like: “why vampires and werewolves?” and “what is the author implying by making an undead father figure

(Carlisle) much more likeable than a powerful human father (Capulet)?” These discussions challenge young adult students to examine what is happening in society, in history, regarding gender, diversity, religion, politics, and family, to say the least. In turn, teens consider how these concepts impact their perception of themselves and others, and the possible implications of continuing to internalize such thought processes. Partnering the texts promotes not only enjoyment of the reading experience, but also critical thinking and metacognition.

Though *New Moon* is by no means canonical, it does not mean that it should be readily dismissed as an unimportant young adult text, and just because *Romeo and Juliet* is a classic does not mean that it has no place in contemporary young adults’ lives. The popularity of the *Twilight* books may be declining, but other paranormal romance (and realism) genre pieces continue to pay homage to the Bard’s work. The fact that so many young adult novels mirror *Romeo and Juliet* is not a fluke: it is because today’s youth need what Shakespeare’s did as well—agency to understand that they are not alone in navigating the challenges of transitioning from adolescent to adult, to recognize that life is a gamut of emotional highs and lows, to encounter feelings (versus facts) about sex and romance, to question the expectations of the communities of which they are a part, and to figure out who they are as individuals. This is not limited to the youth of Western cultures, which is why a further examination of the global treatment of Shakespeare’s play, as well as of contemporary YA texts with similar motifs, could be very enlightening for determining how and why other societies, in addition to our own, decide what is socially acceptable and valuable during certain time frames. Being a teen is tough, but partnering the two texts discussed over the course of this paper not only provides an

appreciation for two stylistically different stories with similar ideas, but it also reminds young adult audiences that they are not alone in their struggles and can combat any number of challenges, supernatural or otherwise, that come their way.

FOOTNOTE: LITERARY APPROACH - GENDER THEORY

The female and male protagonists of Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet* and Stephenie Meyer's *New Moon* involve couples who are so dedicated to each other that they are willing to sacrifice themselves for their love. Each person, in some fashion, reflects the gender norms of the time period in which s/he lives, however, particular points must be understood regarding the views of love which may influence the characters' decisions and actions in each text. All characters are "vividly aware of their own sexuality," but each text includes genders who are uncharacteristically more reserved and rasher in expressing (and withholding) their desires than gender expectations and stereotypes of their time frame (Garber *Coming of Age* 127). In addition, despite their popularity among young adults, both critics and fans have questioned whether any of the characters would serve as ideal significant others if the fictitious characters existed in real life, demonstrating the affinity readers have for these characters and their ability to place themselves within the constructed worlds of each text.

In *New Moon*, Bella is portrayed as an anti-hero, unable to move on following heartbreak, with the only cure being Edward's return. She withdraws from the world after he leaves, ignoring friends, music, television, and setting herself on an auto-pilot function around her father. In order to "see" Edward again in his absence, Bella repeatedly places herself in dangerous situations to obtain adrenaline highs and conjure hallucinations of Edward's voice. Holly L. Derr, in "Feminist Face-Off: Beautiful Creatures vs. Twilight," writes that "the story is told from Bella's perspective, but the narrative voice is that of a perennial victim—a woman whose own desire repeatedly puts her in the way of danger and violence." Even associating with her best friend, Jacob, has its risks once he has

become a werewolf, since losing his temper around her could end in Bella being mauled. Lydia Kokkola expands on Bella's choices to engage in "risky behaviors" in her article "Sparkling Vampires: Valorizing Self-harming Behavior in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Series":

we see her frequently needing stitches, covering up bruises, and, even more frequently, restricting her behavior to comply with demands placed on her by the men in her life. In many ways, Bella's behavior resembles that of real life self-harmers and battered wives. . . . her constant trips to the emergency room characterize her as brave in the face of pain as well as fragile and in need of constant care. (33, 39)

Her willingness to disregard her own safety may be associated with the depression she experiences following Edward's and the Cullens' departure from Forks, yet her father expresses his concerns that if she had had more of a life outside of Edward, her depression would not be as severe. In "Defying the Stars: Tragic Love as the Struggle for Freedom in *Romeo and Juliet*," Paul A. Kottman states "that we must actively claim our separateness if our life is to be our own," implying that an individual must also be independent to be codependent. Bella's complete dependence on Edward means that she loses herself almost completely after his departure, having had no clear individual identity separate from being in a relationship with him (38).

Her happiness is not based upon herself but upon others in her life, primarily men and primarily those who have a romantic interest in her. Ironically, she is not shy about sexual attraction and desire for Edward, and when they are alone together, it is he who must remind her to have some restraint, essentially giving him the power again in their

relationship and “glorify[ing] female submissiveness in heterosexual relationships” (Kokkol 45). Bella may also fit Rosalind Gill’s description of contemporary sexualization which she discusses in her article, “Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility”: “women are not straightforwardly objectified but are portrayed as active, desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner,” yet Bella contrastingly has multiple moments of self-consciousness (151).

This emphasis on frailty and low self-esteem does not promote a very positive female role model for contemporary young adults, though Bella does demonstrate fierce loyalty to friends and is “a strong character in that she is always willing to help others while not being afraid of taking on challenges alone” (KatieVann). Despite the overall appeal of the novel, many teenagers in my classroom have complained that Bella “is too whiny,” “needs to snap out of it,” “has no clue who she is without Edward, which is dumb,” and “is annoying”—a far cry from a person they would seek to imitate, and indicating that, while she may represent concerns and experiences of many teens, Bella is not representative of the idea of girlhood and womanhood in contemporary society.

In an ironic twist, however, Juliet—a character written several hundred years ago—embodies more of the contemporary traits and expectations associated with the female gender. That is not to say that she does not suffer from the restrictions of her gender in the seventeenth century, or that, like Bella, she does not feel overwhelmed with sadness when she and Romeo must part because of his banishment, but her attitude in the face of challenges demonstrates more spunk and assertiveness that is often associated with the modern woman.

Coppélia Kahn writes, in “Coming of Age in Verona,” that “unlike its sons, Verona’s daughters have, in effect, no adolescence, no sanctioned period of experiment with adult identities or activities,” moving from their father’s home to their husband’s and often marrying at a very young age (12). Despite the expectation that women be submissive to parental and male will, Juliet finds ways “to subvert her household’s authority, as well as the very source of that authority” in order to “claim her fate as her own” (Kottman 16, 15). While Juliet loves Romeo, she still has a clear sense of who she is as an individual and what she believes, including the belief that marriage comes before sex. This may reflect a more outdated attitude when compared to contemporary views regarding sex, but it also reveals that Juliet has convictions which she is not willing to sacrifice. She is definitely not portrayed as reserved or prudish when it comes to her desire. In fact, Kahn notes, in “Coming of Age in Verona,” that “against this conception of [17th century] femininity, in which women are married too young to understand their sexuality as anything but passive participation in a vast biological cycle through childbearing, Shakespeare places Juliet’s unconventional, fully conscious and willed giving of herself to Romeo” (15). She is also more like Edward, “passionate in her love, but her nature seems more grounded and less given to the erotic excesses,” able to keep her hormones in check lest she place herself in an undesirable situation such as unwed and pregnant or left by a fickle young man whose desires are purely carnal (Broyles 107).

Young adults have witnessed the fickle nature of Romeo early in the play, when he is distraught that Rosaline has refused his advances yet is able to quickly move on to adoring Juliet. Despite this, Romeo demonstrates the ability of men to be passionate about love and honorable in their promises. The male gender, for the most part, however,

is depicted throughout the play as violent, either gullible or battle-hungry by succumbing to the brainwashing by the heads of houses to perpetuate the feuds, rash, passionate, hasty, and hot-tempered. In ““Standing to the Wall’: The Pressures of Masculinity in *Romeo and Juliet*,” Robert Appelbaum writes that “Shakesperean tragedy is commonly the tragedy of men” who are “called on to take part, inadequately, in the perpetuation of an inadequate world” (271, 263). Perhaps it is a form of metaphorical impotence that drives the men of the play to actions which expedite death, but the stereotype presented of men in the play is that of fighters. To love a woman is to have a weakness, and women are often regarded as objects instead of people, as evidenced by opening comments in Act 1 by Sampson and Gregory about “tak[ing] women by force” or Mercutio’s later comments to Romeo to “be rough with love” (Kahn 7; Shakespeare 1.4.27). Romeo even questions if his love for Juliet stripped him of his masculinity, making him unwilling to fight Tybalt, therefore leading to Mercutio’s death. For young adults looking for male role models, *Romeo & Juliet* fails to present the best choices, as “masculinity [within the play] is the gender of destructive aggression on the one hand and of homosocial domination on the other” (Appelbaum 257).

Whereas Shakespeare depicts the males of *Romeo & Juliet* “not, as men, *in control of themselves*,” the male characters of *New Moon*, with few exceptions, exhibit super self-control (Appelbaum 256, emphasis in original). Edward refuses to allow Bella to seduce him into doing more than kissing and snuggling while at the same time her blood (and body) excite him. Jacob understands the dangers of phasing, shifting into wolf form, around others, and he is able to somehow suppress the change by concentration and sheer will of force despite only recently becoming a werewolf. Both characters, however,

have been criticized as not being the best sort of boyfriend material. In “*Twilight* is Not Good for Maidens: Gender, Sexuality, and the Family in Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* Series,” Anna Silver references “fan message boards” which “vigorously debate the degree to which Edward [and Jacob are] too controlling,” overprotective, or patriarchal, treating Bella as if she is a porcelain doll to be cared for.

While Jasper may be the weakest link of the Cullens where blood is concerned, representing a primal instinct to attack when Bella’s paper cut forms a drop of blood, Carlisle is the polar opposite. He is the male figure who most embodies not only self-control but other desirable traits such as compassion, patience, altruism, a love for his family, and the acceptance of others despite their differences.

My conclusions, in 2015, regarding gender in these two texts is not as pessimistic as it may seem from the paragraphs above. The depiction of each character offers a chance for audiences to ask why society perceives these fictional individuals as we do, what gender norms or stereotypes might we be applying to them, “how socially constructed, mass-mediated ideals of [gendered] beauty are internalized and made our own,” and what can we learn from these reflections (Gill 154)? Bella is not a female protagonist I want any of my students to emulate unless it is her dedication and love for those she cares for. Juliet is a much better female role model when it comes to assertiveness and disregarding societal expectations, yet she also has her faults. And as for the men of both texts, Carlisle is the male role model I hope my students appreciate the most, yet his character is often not aligned with contemporary or historical stereotypes of masculinity. One of the most important points to be made is that representatives of both genders have flaws, and both have strengths, but it also the same

with society: what models we provide for young adults—and why we provide these—
must be a part of the conversation we have with teens (and with one another).

APPENDIX SECTION:

Other Recommended Contemporary YA Paranormal Romance Texts

Mirroring Romeo & Juliet

***Warm Bodies* by Isaac Marion; Film directed by Jonathan Levine**

This is a truly quirky take on *Romeo and Juliet*. Sometime in the not-too-distant future, a zombie apocalypse has occurred, leaving remaining humans huddled together in barricaded stadiums under a militaristic law. Trained groups of young adults lead expeditions into the city to recover what medical supplies and food they can when supplies run low at the home base. It is during one of these scenes where the zombie, R, first encounters the human, Julie, and momentarily feels something. While most of her squad is slaughtered by the mass of hungry zombies, R saves her by wiping dead goo on her and leading her his private sanctuary inside of a plane on the grounds of the old airport where the zombies reside. The narration of R throughout the story is insightful and amusing, as are the facts that the book highlights the male perspective and that author selects zombies as the paranormal creatures involved as their repulsive nature contradicts the traditional idea of who a girl would choose for a first date.

The classic balcony scene is included, as well as a zombie makeover (a reversal of faking death is now faking life), and Julie's angry father, as well as her best friend who wants to become a nurse, echo many elements from *Romeo and Juliet*. One of the most fun aspects of this novel (and film), though, is that Shakespeare's classic is reinvented as a comedy. The feelings Julie has awakened in R also somehow impact the other zombies, who begin to think again as they start to have feelings; there is even a Mercutio-like character in R's best zombie friend who adds additional comic relief during stressful or

awkward moments. This is a book and film that draws in young adults because of the humor, the current fad with zombies, and the occasionally lewd language, but one which most enjoy because the characters get a “happy” ending.

***The Mortal Instruments* series by Cassandra Clare**

Nephilim, humans with the blood of angels in them, and Downworlders—such as warlocks, vampires, and werewolves—with the blood of demons and/or influence of the unholy, inhabit the same world but exist in a classist system with clear lines that and expectations that the two groups do not mingle. While focusing on issues of self-discovery and the difficulties of relationships via battles between good and evil (and the understanding of the grey blurring of lines in between the two), unlikely friendships are made, alliances formed, and taboo romances between Nephilim and Downworlders burgeon. The young adult protagonists must question their personal beliefs, social and familial expectations, and loyalty to the Clave law that rules them.

***Bloodlines* series by Richelle Mead**

A spinoff from her first young adult vampire series, *Vampire Academy*, the *Bloodlines* series explores the involvement of a “good” vampire, a ---, and an alchemist, a human infused with additional abilities through the injection of manipulated vampire blood. Alchemists have a natural revulsion for the vampires but serve to help take of humans affected by their presence and to rid evidence of “bad” vampire, strigoi, attacks. Sydney and Adrian ultimately fall for one another, but they also must escape from the Alchemists’ punishment and the ostracism of those who live at the Royal (vampire)

Court. And just to make things more interesting, some witchcraft and magic gets thrown into the series also.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer TV Series & Angel TV Series

In the former, Buffy ends up falling for a vampire with a soul, Angel, who eventually leaves her small town (which, coincidentally, is situated on top of a hellmouth, hence all of the vampires and demons she must fight). In the latter show, Angel falls in love again with another human while he, too, fights evil in various forms, from demons to the lawyers who represent them. Both shows promote diversity and encourage viewers to consider the whole “person” instead of making judgments based on appearances or gossip.

Underworld film, directed by Len Wiseman

This film introduces the idea that vampires and werewolves still live among us, and it presents the vampires as sexy, dangerous, well-armed with unique forms of firepower, and (naturally) deadly. One vampire forms an attachment to a human who is also of interest to the werewolves who wish to track down members of the original bloodline that spawned both species. If it wasn't enough to be interested in a human, he is bit by a werewolf, and the super-taboo mixing of species is considered vile and punishable by death. The only way to protect this human, who has now been violently introduced to a world he knew nothing about, is to see if her vampire bite can save him, mutating him into something both werewolf *and* vampire in nature.

***Beautiful Creatures* series by Kami Garcia & Margaret Stohl; Film directed by Richard LaGravenese**

The film barely skims the surface of all that the book series offer, but it still represents the allure of the supernatural to humans. In both the film and the first novel in the series, a girl moves in with her recluse uncle and begins attending high school in an ultra-conservative town. Her Otherness automatically makes her a source of gossip and ostracism by many of the students, though the boy, Ethan, is determined to get know her. Eventually Ethan, and the readers, learn that Lena, the female protagonist, has powers like a witch, but she must be claimed for either light or dark on her next birthday, given no say in the matter which will decide her future and affect the lives of others she cares for. The novel and film demonstrate that being an outsider isn't necessarily bad, accepting people who are different should be common practice, and that you can't just passively allow things to happen to you—you must make your own choices.

***Jupiter Ascending* film, directed by Andy and Lana Wachowski**

This film by the Wachowskis did not do well at the box offices despite the large number of adolescent girls who flocked to see the leading male protagonist, Channing Tatum, as he played the role of a genetically modified being, spliced with canine DNA. This familiar premise of “star-crossed lovers” takes a more literal definition, as the young human girl on Earth meets this being from across the galaxy. Though the physical gap is solved when he protects her from attacks on her life (she turns out to be the secret owner of the planet that other galactic royals want), there are still social expectations regarding

attachments between the two which they must learn to ignore in order to follow their hearts and find happiness.

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