

PART ONE

**Your Basic Human-Vampire-
Werewolf/Shape-shifter
Triangle**

Bella, Edward, and Jacob



“An Old-Fashioned Gentleman”?

Edward’s Imaginary History

Kate Cochran

Edward Cullen is the ideal man: “Interesting . . . and brilliant . . . and mysterious . . . and perfect . . . and beautiful . . . and possibly able to lift full-sized vans with one hand,” as Bella Swan notes. (*Twilight*, 79.) His barely restrained passion, the result of the war between his utter devotion to one woman and his animalistic desire to consume her, is reined in by his moral conscience and colored by the mystery of his aloofness; the fact that his century-old soul is housed in a physically superior seventeen-year-old body is only one aspect of his attractiveness. Both the key to the *Twilight* Saga’s appeal and arguably its most compelling figure, Edward’s character also reflects the imaginative way that history is invoked in the four books.

The known details of Edward’s personal history are few. He was turned in 1918 at the age of seventeen after being stricken during the Spanish flu epidemic and before shipping off to fight

in World War I. But instead of manifesting the mores of the Lost Generation that came of age during the 1920s or even of an indeterminate past, Edward instead embodies the old-fashioned qualities of the nineteenth-century Byronic heroes from Bella's favorite romantic novels. Edward is compared to *Pride and Prejudice*'s Darcy, *Jane Eyre*'s Rochester, and *Wuthering Heights*'s Heathcliff, becoming a general Victorian "gentleman" figure.¹ In an interview, Stephenie Meyer said, "Edward is the most popular [character], and I think it's because he's an old-fashioned gentleman in some ways, and in other ways he's a very modern, sort of tortured soul, although I guess, you know, you go back to Byron and it's all there."² An examination of Edward's literary ancestors shows that the *Twilight* Saga is informed by Meyer's sense of literary history more than by documented historical fact. The perfect man therefore represents Bella's (and Meyer's) fictional heroes, come to life.

Imaginary History: How Literature and History Play Together

"Imaginary history" refers to the different ways that history and literature borrow from each other. For historians, the term can refer to the creation of subjective history or to the use of fictional story to convey historical facts. Gavriel Rosenfeld's article "Why Do We Ask 'What If?': Reflections on the Function of Alternate History" examines how some historians use subjective history, specifically wondering how history would have been different if the "other side" had won World War II, the Civil War, and the American Revolution. Rosenfeld asserts that the value of "allohistorical speculation" lies in "its ability to shed light upon the evolution of historical memory"; that is, when we wonder about what could have happened, we are commenting on what we choose to remember.³ Other historians employ the phrase "imaginary history" to describe how they use literary devices and styles to communicate history. As Linda Orr explains, in "The Revenge of Literature: A History of History," before the mid-nineteenth century, historians frequently used fictional story to document history, although more recently

they have sought to distance the field of history from that of literature. Orr examines the basic concerns of historiography in issues such as realism, bias, source analysis, and linguistic "truth." She observes, however, that "the more history presses toward science, the more literature, or a has-been history, is produced,"⁴ showing that even when the two disciplines attempt to diverge, they remain inextricably linked.

"Imaginary history," however, can also indicate the construction of an imaginary past, as it does in the *Twilight Saga*. Meyer uses history as one means of setting her vampire characters apart, which jibes with George Garrett's definition of "imaginary history." In "Dreaming with Adam: Notes on Imaginary History," Garrett explains that novelists craft the impressionistic world of imaginary history by simply removing the details of the present day: "We therefore work backwards, stripping away the things we know well, to reach the past where they were neither known nor imagined," leaving the impression of an unspecified historical setting.⁵ Thus, instead of giving details from each vampire's actual historical background (for example, information about Carlisle Cullen's life in seventeenth-century England), Meyer more often merely indicates that they are not of the twenty-first century. For instance, when Bella remarks on Edward's speech—"I could never quite mimic the flow of his perfect, formal articulation. It was something that could only be picked up in an earlier century"—she does not specify which "earlier century" Edward sounds like. (*New Moon*, 9.)

Meyer's version of imaginary history is linked to feelings of nostalgia, particularly when her unidentified past is merely the present with its more unsavory aspects stripped away. We think of nostalgia as a fondness or yearning for aspects of the past now lost—aspects from both from the communal past and a personal past. For instance, one might feel nostalgic for one's childhood (personal) or for a historical era (communal). There is a sense of murkiness and unreality in these visions of the past; however, the most powerful feelings of nostalgia arise from the remembering or desire for what never really was, a "past" that seems both safe and easily understood due to its simplicity and reliance on shared values.

Bella envisions such a past for Edward as she muses about their engagement: “I saw the same odd vision of Edward and me on a porch swing, wearing clothes from another kind of world. A world where it would surprise no one if I wore his ring on my finger. A simpler place, where love was defined in simpler ways. One plus one equals two.” (*Eclipse*, 325.) She refers to her own nostalgia for Edward’s past as “*Anne of Green Gables* flashbacks,” showing that for Bella, Edward’s past is the same kind of imaginary history that Meyer employs: one based in literature. (*Eclipse*, 277.)

The Lost Generation: Edward’s Historical Moment

But how does Edward account for his own history? In the saga, little is disclosed about Edward’s past. The most revealing comment he offers comes during his attempt to persuade Bella to agree to marry him: “In my world, I was already a man. I wasn’t looking for love—no, I was far too eager to be a soldier for that; I thought of nothing but the idealized glory of the war that they were selling prospective draftees then.” (*Eclipse*, 276–277.) Edward identifies his desire to fight in World War I as the most defining characteristic of his past. However, his memory of the war raises some questions about historical inconsistencies.

Edward notes that “they were selling” an “idealized glory of the war”; certainly, wartime propaganda abounded during World War I: Sean Dennis Cashman explains that “American propaganda of 1917 [referred to World War I as] the Great Crusade.”⁶ Much of the American propaganda of the time depicted Germans as bloodthirsty brutes feasting on innocents and destroying democracy.⁷ Edward mentions that the propaganda was directed at “prospective draftees.” In fact, President Woodrow Wilson’s May 1917 draft bill mandated registration for all men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty years old; the draftees who were to serve were selected by lottery drawings. Cashman notes that “the three drafts altogether drew 23,908,576 men in the United States. However, only 6,373,414 went into service,” partly because of many draftees’ quickie marriages

and conscientious objections.⁸ Edward was turned in 1918, after the drafts had already taken place; therefore, he must have enlisted. In addition, he was only seventeen years old in 1918, so he must have misrepresented his age when he signed up, claiming to be older so that he'd be accepted.

More important than the misleading implication that Edward was a prospective draftee in 1918, however, is how out of step he was with the opinions popularly held by other members of his generation. World War I is generally acknowledged to have been profoundly disillusioning, breeding "irony, protest, and disgust" because of the horrors of war, the perversion of technology, the falsity of propaganda, and the alienation of civilian populations.⁹ The authors who came of age during this era came to be known as the Lost Generation, a term coined by Gertrude Stein and memorialized in Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast* (1964). Malcolm Cowley, himself identified as a member of the Lost Generation, examines John Dos Passos, William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Thomas Wolfe in "The Generation That Wasn't Lost," writing that these authors "had more experiences in common than any other generation of writers in American history. All of them were shaken loose from their moorings by the First World War, even if they were too young to serve in the Army . . . these writers had no home except in the past, no fixed standards, and, in many cases, no sense of direction."¹⁰ Since Stephenie Meyer employs imaginary history in the form of literary references to illustrate Edward's background, it would make sense for her to invoke this era and these authors and their characters, as the context that forms the backdrop for his human life.

Each of the five authors, with the exception of Wolfe, crafted novels that reflected the terrible effects of World War I. For instance, Dos Passos's *1919* (1932), part of his U.S.A. trilogy, contains the concluding tale "The Body of an American," which tells the story of a fallen soldier of World War I. Faulkner's *Soldier's Pay* (1925) recounts the return of a wounded soldier to his home in Georgia; Hemingway's expatriate Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*

(1926) tries to come to terms with his emasculating war wound. And Nick Carraway, the narrator of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), represents the postwar disillusionment of his generation as his already tenuous optimism is shaken by his experiences in West Egg, New York. As Cowley notes of the Lost Generation authors, "At first they rebelled against the hypocrisy of their elders and against the gentility of American letters. Next they rebelled against the noble phrases that justified the slaughter of millions in the First World War."¹¹ While Edward's enlistment in World War I mirrors those of Dos Passos, Faulkner, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald, and his bitter remembrance of his enthusiasm to fight is similar to their characters' disillusionment, his temperament is not truly reflective of the rebellion of the Lost Generation. Instead, Edward's "old-fashionedness" more closely recalls the qualities of a Victorian gentleman.

The Victorian Gentleman: A Secular Saint

Edward's most notable characteristics—emotional and physical restraint, a strong moral conscience, fierce family loyalty, and wide-ranging accomplishments—align with popular notions of the Victorian gentleman. James Eli Adams observes that the Victorian gentleman was often portrayed as a man whose "moral ideal" constituted a kind of "secular sainthood."¹² Although it may seem incongruous to liken a vampire to a saint, Edward's self-denial and determination to protect Bella, particularly from himself, justify the comparison. Edward's restraint is most obvious when it comes to his physical relationship with Bella: "He started to pull away—that was his automatic response whenever he decided things had gone too far, his reflex reaction whenever he most wanted to keep going. Edward had spent most of his life rejecting any kind of physical gratification." (*Breaking Dawn*, 25.) While Edward tells her he desires her, he takes great care not to allow their kisses to become erotic. When Bella's father, Charlie, confronts Bella about sex, she tells him, "Edward is very old-fashioned. You have nothing to worry about." (*Eclipse*, 59.) In fact, it is Bella

who has "nothing to worry about"; Edward is utterly in control of their sexual relationship.

Bella tries to convince Edward to have sex—"Do you get the feeling that everything is backward?" he laughed in my ear. "Traditionally, shouldn't you be arguing my side, and I yours?" (*Eclipse*, 451)—but he insists that their shared chastity is vital. He says, "My virtue is all I have left," since he has broken so many other moral laws and wants to ensure that even though Bella is determined to become a vampire, he will not be responsible for keeping her out of heaven. (*Eclipse*, 452.) Therefore, he insists on marriage before they consummate their relationship. When Edward asks Charlie for permission to marry Bella, he says, "We're going away to Dartmouth together in the fall, Charlie . . . I'd like to do that, well, the right way. It's how I was raised." (*Breaking Dawn*, 16).¹³ Ultimately, Bella overcomes her profound ambivalence about marrying Edward, at least in part because she so desperately wants to have sex with him, which emphasizes the difference in their moral beliefs.

Edward's diverse accomplishments are consistent with the pursuits of an idealized Victorian gentleman. He composes music and plays the piano, speaks several languages, is very well read, has attended medical school twice, and even makes a mean omelet. Edward attributes his skills to his lonely nights: "There's a reason why I'm the best musician in the family, why—besides Carlisle—I've read the most books, studied the most sciences, become fluent in the most languages . . . Emmett would have you believe that I'm such a know-it-all because of the mind reading, but the truth is that I've just had a *lot* of free time." (*Breaking Dawn*, 485.) Interestingly, then, Edward's chastity is largely responsible for both his sexual restraint and his numerous accomplishments.

In keeping with the Victorian gentleman's "steadfastness and virility," Edward tries to protect Bella from all forms of danger, including the danger that he might be overcome with bloodlust and bite her.¹⁴ His protectiveness leads him to warn her frequently: "It's not only your company I crave! Never forget *that*. Never forget I am more dangerous to you than I am to anyone else."

(*Twilight*, 266.) He is equally vigilant about other forms of danger—Bella’s preternatural clumsiness, the vengeance of the nomadic vampires James and Victoria, the threat of the Volturi, Tyler Crowley’s out-of-control van, the would-be rapists in Port Angeles—leading him to call Bella a “danger magnet,” although he blames himself for most of those perilous situations. Edward says, “I infuriate myself . . . The way I can’t seem to keep from putting you in danger. My very existence puts you at risk. Sometimes I truly hate myself. I should be stronger.” (*Twilight*, 365–366.) That self-hatred also places him squarely within the tradition of the Byronic hero.

The Byronic Hero: Darcy, Rochester, and Heathcliff

The Byronic hero, based on both the persona and the fictional characters of author George Gordon (Lord Byron), is a brooding, mysterious man who is intelligent, sophisticated, educated, magnetic, charismatic, socially and sexually dominant though detached from human society, moody, and prone to bouts of temper.¹⁵ He often has a troubled past and is riddled with self-destructive secrets. His lover Lady Caroline Lamb was famously quoted describing Byron as “mad, bad, and dangerous to know”; recent examples of this type include the cartoon hero Batman, Dr. Gregory House from television’s *House, M.D.*, the late actor James Dean, and rap artist 50 Cent. The Byronic hero is sometimes called an antihero because of his negative qualities; indeed, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar compare him to a bewitching monster like Milton’s Satan: “He is in most ways the incarnation of worldly male sexuality, fierce, powerful, experienced, simultaneously brutal and seductive, devilish enough to overwhelm the body and yet enough a fallen angel to charm the soul.”¹⁶ The Byronic hero’s mystery, moodiness, and sensuality call to mind Bella’s reaction to Edward in their meadow: “I sat without moving, more frightened of him than I had ever been. I’d never seen him so completely freed of that carefully cultivated façade. He’d never been less human . . . or

more beautiful. Face ashen, eyes wide, I sat like a bird locked in the eyes of a snake." (*Twilight*, 264.)

At several points in the saga, Bella notes that Edward's beauty is terrifying. In keeping with Gilbert and Gubar's comparison of the Byronic hero to Satan, Bella not only describes being captivated as if she were "locked in the eyes of a snake," but she also equates him with an angel, albeit a forbidding one. When she tries to get him to explain how he saved her from Tyler's van, Bella thinks, "I was in danger of being distracted by his livid, glorious face. It was like trying to stare down a destroying angel." (*Twilight*, 65.) Later, when Alice Cullen brings Nahuel to end the confrontation with the Volturi, Bella again compares Edward to a fearsome angel: "His face glowed with an expression of triumph that I didn't understand—it was the expression an angel of destruction might wear while the world burned. Beautiful and terrifying." (*Breaking Dawn*, 730.) Edward, then, manifests a kind of supernatural pull, both in his disquieting beauty and in his formidable power.

But the Byronic hero is not simply wildly seductive and strong, he is also tormented. He remains painfully aware of his own flaws even as he despises them in others; his introspection often leads him to black moods and self-destructive behavior. Edward's penchant for self-flagellation clearly identifies him with the Byronic hero's torment. Nowhere is this more evident than in his desperate attempt to commit suicide in *New Moon*, after he thinks Bella has killed herself out of despair over his leaving her. Upon their return to Forks, Bella confronts him about his misplaced guilt: "You can't let this . . . this *guilt* . . . rule your life. You can't take responsibility for the things that happen to me here. None of it is your fault, it's just part of how life *is* for me. I know it's your . . . your nature to shoulder the blame for everything, but you really can't let that make you go to such extremes!" (*New Moon*, 507.) While Edward never again attempts to die to compensate for his guilt, his tendency toward reflection and self-criticism remain constant.

Some of the most famous Byronic heroes in English literature are like Edward: Darcy, Rochester, and Heathcliff. Not only are *Pride and Prejudice* and *Wuthering Heights* explicitly mentioned

in the saga, but there are also overt and covert literary references made to these authors, texts, and characters. For instance, when Bella flips through her Austen compilation, she sees both “Edward Ferrars” from *Sense and Sensibility* and “Edmund Bertram” from *Mansfield Park*, leading her to wonder, “Weren’t there any other names available in the late eighteenth century?” (*Twilight*, 148.) Although not explicitly mentioned in the saga, it is noteworthy that two characters in *Wuthering Heights* are named Edgar and Isabella Linton. In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester’s first name is Edward, and his wife Bertha’s maiden name is Mason; Edward Cullen’s original name was Edward Masen. More significant than these references, however, are the Byronic parallels among Edward, Darcy, Rochester, and Heathcliff.

Darcy: First Impressions

Fitzwilliam Darcy of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) is moody, cold, superior, and judgmental. He is an object of fascination for the heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, because she feels an attraction to him despite his aloofness. Some of his appeal is revealed via his friendship with Mr. Bingley, whose naive enthusiasm bespeaks a kindness, tolerance, and love of fun on the part of Darcy. His actions when Lydia and Wickham elope, in addition to his past behavior in his relationship with Wickham, recommend him as honorable, caring, and thoughtful; he also seems entirely immune to the flattery and flirtation of Caroline Bingley. These characteristics may be even more attractive since they are at least initially masked by his strong reserve. Moreover, the fact that his positive qualities hide behind aloofness reveal his closely guarded passionate nature, a certain lure for Elizabeth.

The original title of *Pride and Prejudice* was *First Impressions*, which is quite fitting, considering that Darcy and Elizabeth’s misperceptions commence from their first meeting. When Darcy arrives at the ball in Hertfordshire, he is immediately admired: “Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien; and the report which was

in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year."¹⁷ He soon loses the good opinion of the locals, however, because of his coldness: "[H]e was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased; and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance."¹⁸ Like Darcy, Edward makes a strong first impression in the cafeteria. Bella is immediately astounded by the Cullens' beauty, but when she asks about Edward, Jessica Stanley says, "He's gorgeous, of course, but don't waste your time. He doesn't date. Apparently none of the girls here are good-looking enough for him." (*Twilight*, 22.) Both Darcy and Edward, then, are set apart by their emotional distance.

Darcy offends Elizabeth at the ball. When it is suggested that he ask her to dance, he says (and she overhears), "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men."¹⁹ His haughty rejection of her is reminiscent of Edward's expression when Bella is seated next to him in class: "I peeked up at him one more time, and regretted it. He was glaring down at me again, his black eyes full of revulsion. As I flinched away from him, shrinking against my chair, the phrase *if looks could kill* suddenly ran through my mind." (*Twilight*, 24.) Of course, Edward is reacting to the overwhelming scent of Bella's blood; similarly, Darcy finds himself attracted to Elizabeth: "But no sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that she had hardly a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying."²⁰ Like all good Byronic heroes, Edward and Darcy feel self-disgust, though it seems to manifest as disgust for their love objects.

Perhaps because of their seeming disgust, combined with the superiority of both Darcy and Edward in terms of social standing, physical attractiveness, and income, neither Bella nor Elizabeth can

believe that they are desired. For instance, Elizabeth is disquieted by “how frequently Mr. Darcy’s eyes were fixed on her. She hardly knew how to suppose that she could be an object of admiration to so great a man. . . . She could only imagine however at last, that she drew his notice because there was something about her more wrong and reprehensible, according to his ideas of right, than in any other person present.”²¹ In the meadow, Bella despairs: “He was too perfect. . . . There was no way this godlike creature could be meant for me.” (*Twilight*, 256.) When Edward and Darcy declare themselves, however, it is phrased like surrender, showing just how profoundly Elizabeth and Bella are desired. Darcy says, “In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.”²² Edward tells Bella, “I’m tired of trying to stay away from you,” and “You are the most important thing to me now. The most important thing to me ever.” (*Twilight*, 85, 273).

Rochester: Reader, I Married Him

Edward Rochester, the hero of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), feels no guilt for wooing Jane, even though he is already secretly married. Although, after Jane learns of the existence of Rochester’s first wife, the mad Bertha Mason, who is kept imprisoned in the attic at Thornfield Hall, Rochester says, “I am little better than a devil at this moment,” he still wants Jane to stay with him as his mistress.²³ At the end of the novel, however, when Jane returns to find Rochester blinded and maimed from the fire that consumed Bertha and the house, he finally expresses some sense of guilt that he is no longer physically worthy of Jane: “I am no better than the old lightning-struck chestnut-tree in Thornfield orchard. . . . And what right would that ruin have to bid a budding woodbine cover its decay with freshness?”²⁴ Those guilt feelings are remarkably short-lived, and he and Jane are married immediately. Rather than being tormented by guilt, then, like many Byronic heroes, Rochester primarily suffers from the effects of his dark secret, which renders him mysterious and frightening. At times Jane describes him as proud, sardonic,

moody, morose, imperious; indeed, Mrs. Fairfax says Rochester has "painful thoughts."²⁵ Just as Edward tends to brood, most often about how his vampirism endangers Bella, so, too, is Rochester melancholy, though he does not believe that he is to blame for his dark secret.

After Briggs interrupts Jane and Rochester's wedding, Rochester explains the circumstances of his marriage to Bertha Mason: that he was hoodwinked into marrying a half-mad, drunken woman five years his senior who soon disgraced him in their Caribbean home; that her continued existence kept him from finding love or companionship, despite the fact that he keeps her shut up in the attic; that he feels "hampered, burdened, cursed."²⁶ Certainly Rochester's isolation (though interrupted with a few mistresses) is reminiscent of Edward's ninety years without a mate: they both feel doomed to solitude. Alice tells Bella, "It's been almost a century that Edward's been alone. Now he's found you. You can't see the changes that we see, we who have been with him for so long. Do you think any of us want to look into his eyes for the next hundred years if he loses you?" (*Twilight*, 410–411.) More telling is the equation between the madwoman Bertha and Edward's vampirism: the Byronic heroes' dark secrets. When Jane tells Rochester about her vision of the woman with the "fiery eye," "lurid visage," and "gaunt head" who tears her wedding veil, she says it reminded her "of the foul German spectre—the Vampyre."²⁷ But Jane's descriptions of Rochester at their first, aborted wedding bear a strong resemblance to Edward's physicality. She notes his "flaming and flashing eyes," his "pale, firm, massive front" like "quarried marble," his face like "colourless rock," and "His eye, as I have often said, was a black eye: it had now a tawny, nay a bloody light in its gloom," all of which correspond to Edward's vampire physique.²⁸

Perhaps the most interesting way in which Rochester resembles Edward is in his attempt to control the woman he loves. Citing their advanced ages, both Edward and Rochester often take charge of Bella and Jane. While Edward has ninety years on Bella, and the advantage of mental telepathy and knowledge of the vampire world, Rochester says, "I claim only such superiority

as must result from twenty years' difference in age and a century's advance in experience."²⁹ Gilbert and Gubar refer to "Rochester's loving tyranny";³⁰ Edward himself invokes that word when he warns Bella, prior to the impending vampire nomad visit, "I'm going to be a little . . . overbearingly protective over the next few days—or weeks—and I wouldn't want you to think I'm naturally a tyrant." (*Twilight*, 328.) But some might argue that Edward *is* tyrannical: he asks Alice to kidnap Bella for the weekend in *Eclipse*; he wants to force Bella to have an abortion in *Breaking Dawn*; he removes himself from her life in *New Moon* for her own good. In addition, throughout the series Edward sometimes treats Bella as if she were a baby, carrying her in his arms, swaddling her in blankets, singing her to sleep with a lullaby. Rather than being seen as tyrannical, then, Edward can be viewed as paternalistic, acting as though he were her parent rather than her boyfriend. That will to dominate is surely one of the hallmarks of the Byronic hero, as well as of the Victorian gentleman.

Finally, Edward and Rochester are similar in their regard for their love objects as the panacea for the loneliness and torment that result from their dark secrets. For instance, both men are surprised by their compulsion to confide in the objects of their affection. Rochester says, "Strange that I should choose you for the confidant in all this . . . [but] you, with your gravity, considerateness, and caution, were made to be the recipient of secrets."³¹ And Edward states, "I was prepared to feel relieved. Having you know about everything, not needing to keep secrets from you. But I didn't expect to feel more than that. I *like* it. It makes me . . . happy." (*Twilight*, 344.) There is relief for the Byronic hero as he unburdens his soul of terrible secrets; the absolute honesty that he shares with his love forges their unbreakable connection.

Heathcliff: I Cannot Live without My Soul

In contrast to Darcy's overbearing ego and Rochester's moody paternalism, Heathcliff, from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), is not bound by the rules of "polite society" and is therefore

utterly free to acknowledge his naked devotion to Cathy. Identified from the beginning as exotic and savage, a foundling brought to the Heights by Mr. Earnshaw, Heathcliff embodies the ferocity and animalism of the Byronic hero. Mr. Linton calls him "a strange acquisition my late neighbour made in his journey to Liverpool—a little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway," while Nelly romanticizes his mysterious past: "You're fit for a prince in disguise. Who knows, but your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen."³² The exoticism that Mr. Linton and Nelly ascribe to Heathcliff is Victorian shorthand for savagery, since in their minds it would stand in contrast to the "civility" of Imperial Britain. And, though Heathcliff returns to the Heights as an adult, having acquired his fortune and eventually buying out Hindley Earnshaw, Nelly still notices: "A half-civilized ferocity lurked yet in the depressed brows and eyes full of black fire, but it was subdued; and his manner was even dignified, quite divested of roughness though too stern for grace."³³ Heathcliff, it seems, cannot overcome his innate wildness.

Heathcliff's wildness sometimes manifests as brutality. Abused by Hindley and abandoned by Cathy after Mr. Earnshaw's death, Heathcliff becomes cruel and even monstrous, as when he kills Isabella Linton's lapdog after Isabella elopes with him, or taunts Linton, Catherine, and Hareton. Edward's "monstrosity" is his vampirism, against which he battles daily. While Edward never displays the unrestrained cruelty of Heathcliff, he does admit to what he calls "a typical bout of rebellious adolescence" in which he hunts and kills humans who intend to commit evil acts, like murder. (*Twilight*, 342.) He says, however, that "as time went on, I began to see the monster in my eyes. I couldn't escape the debt of so much human life taken, no matter how justified," so he returned to Esme and Carlisle and life as a "vegetarian." (*Twilight*, 343.) And, regardless of how humane the vampire vegetarian lifestyle might be, Edward possesses the barbarous power required to kill James, Victoria, and anyone else who would seek to harm Bella.

The flip side of the Byronic hero's savagery, then, is his passionate attachment to his love. As children, Heathcliff and Cathy

are inseparable, seemingly sharing the same soul as they run wild over the moors. Their perfect happiness is ruined when Cathy convalesces at Thrushcross Grange and falls under the influence of the overcultured Lintons; she determines to marry Edgar Linton, although she still insists to Nelly: “I *am* Heathcliff—he’s always, always in my mind—not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself—but as my own being.”³⁴ It is when Cathy is dying that Heathcliff reveals the depth of his ardor; when he rushes to Cathy’s sickroom, Nelly reports that “he gnashed at me, and foamed like a mad dog, and gathered her to him with greedy jealousy,” braying, “Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad! Only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! oh, God! it is unutterable! I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul!”³⁵

Edward actually quotes that final line, after Bella quotes Cathy’s lament to him: “If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger.” (*Eclipse*, 611.) In fact, *Wuthering Heights* is the only one of Bella’s novels mentioned in each of the Twilight Saga’s four books, with the exception of *New Moon*: an odd omission, since one could argue that the plot-line of *New Moon* more closely mirrors *Wuthering Heights* than the other books do. Like *Wuthering Heights*, *New Moon* opens with Edward and Bella’s carefree happiness, though the English moors are replaced with the meadow outside Forks. When Edward abandons Bella, she is emotionally destroyed and recklessly acts out, riding motorcycles and cliff-diving. However, she still races to his version of a vampire’s deathbed, in Volterra, driven by their love. And when Edward returns to her, he exclaims, “As if there were any way that *I* could exist without needing *you*!” (*New Moon*, 510.) Bella, however, sees her situation in *Eclipse* as being similar to the plot of *Wuthering Heights*, since she is torn between Jacob and Edward, just as Cathy is between Edgar and Heathcliff.

In fact, Edward begins to identify with Heathcliff during *Eclipse*. Although at first he denigrates Heathcliff and Cathy as “ghastly people who ruin each other’s lives,” he later notes, “The more time I spend

with you, the more human emotions seem comprehensible to me. I'm discovering that I can sympathize with Heathcliff in ways I didn't think possible before." (*Eclipse*, 28, 265.) Indeed, Heathcliff is likened to a vampire by Nelly when he roams the moors alone at night, and when Edward rereads Bella's copy of *Wuthering Heights*, the book is left open to the page that shows Heathcliff describing his rival Edgar Linton in almost vampiric terms: "Had he been in my place, and I in his, though I hated him with a hatred that turned my life to gall, I never would have raised a hand against him. . . . I never would have banished him from her society, as long as she desired his. The moment her regard ceased, I would have torn his heart out, and drank his blood!"³⁶ Edward, however, says he sympathizes with Heathcliff because he is coming to understand human emotions; instead of Heathcliff's drive to become more civilized, Edward is overcoming his Byronic savagery by trying to become more human.³⁷

Imagining Edward's History through Literature

This chapter began with the observation that Stephenie Meyer incorporates imaginary history into her *Twilight* Saga as a way to describe her vampire characters. According to George Garrett, "to write imaginary history is to celebrate the human imagination," that is, "the possibility of imagining lives and spirits of other human beings, living or dead."³⁸ For Meyer, these imaginings come from her own sense of literary history, and her reading list is similar to Bella's: "I kept my eyes down on the reading list the teacher had given me. It was fairly basic: Brontë, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Faulkner. I'd already read everything. That was comforting . . . and boring." (*Twilight*, 15.) The classic literature that Meyer invokes—like *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Wuthering Heights*—would be at home on any high school syllabus.

Far from being boring, though, Meyer's imaginary history, created through literary references, fashions the perfect man. In an interview in *Newsweek*, Meyer was asked, "Edward is so perfect—you've ruined regular men for a lot of teens. Do you feel bad?"

to which she responded, “Oh, a little bit, I guess. I just wanted to write for myself, a fantasy. And that’s what Edward is.”³⁹ 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 would have come of age during the 1920s, his “true” history can be found in nineteenth-century Victorian novels.

Notes

1. Although the Victorian era is designated as 1837 to 1901, the span of Queen Victoria’s reign, and *Pride and Prejudice* was first published in 1813, this chapter examines the similarities between Austen’s work and the Brontës’ novels in terms of their male protagonists. It is arguable that Darcy exhibits as many traditional “Victorian” qualities as the more Romantic Rochester and Heathcliff, if not more. In fact, although *Wuthering Heights* was published in 1847 (as was *Jane Eyre*), it is set in the late 1700s to early 1800s.

2. “Conversation with Stephenie Meyer,” *Twilight: Three-Disc Deluxe Edition*, DVD (directed by Catherine Hardwicke, Summit Entertainment, 2008).

3. Gavriel Rosenfeld, “Why Do We Ask ‘What If?’ Reflections on the Function of Alternate History,” *History and Theory* 41, no. 4 (Dec. 2002): 91, 93.

4. Linda Orr, “The Revenge of Literature: A History of History,” *New Literary History* 18, no. 1 (Autumn 1986): 6.

5. George Garrett, “Dreaming with Adam: Notes on Imaginary History,” *New Literary History* 1, no. 3 (Spring 1970): 417–418. Garrett’s version of “imaginary history” resembles Mikhail Bakhtin’s “historical inversion,” which describes how the cultural ideals lacking in the present are attributed to the past, from *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), 147.

6. Sean Dennis Cashman, *America in the Age of the Titans: The Progressive Era and World War I* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1988), 460.

7. See, for instance, Joseph Carter’s *1918: Year of Crisis, Year of Change* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), which notes that World War I propaganda “had to appeal to the basic (and often basest) emotions of the masses—curiosity, preoccupation with violence and sex, greed, and finally, but not least, patriotism” (22). Some excellent examples of these posters can be found in Peter Paret, Beth Irwin Lewis, and Paul Paret, *Persuasive Images: Posters of War and Revolution from the Hoover Institution Archives* (Princeton; NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1992).

8. Cashman, *America in the Age of the Titans*, 488.

9. *Ibid.*, 425.

10. Malcolm Cowley, “The Generation That Wasn’t Lost,” *College English* 5, no. 5 (February 1944): 233.

11. *Ibid.*, 237.

12. James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995), 42.

13. Edward’s statement here causes Bella to reflect: “He wasn’t exaggerating; they’d been big on old-fashioned morals during World War I.” (*Breaking Dawn*, 16.) However, in

keeping with Garrett's observation about imaginary history, Bella doesn't indicate exactly what those "old-fashioned morals" are, aside from the reluctance to cohabit and/or have sex outside the bounds of matrimony. Perhaps the one way in which Bella is identified with the twenty-first century is her desire to engage in premarital sex; otherwise, she seems like a throwback to an earlier era, as well, with her domesticity, bookishness, shyness, kindness, and proclivity for self-sacrifice.

14. Daniela Garofalo, *Manly Leaders in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2008), 21.

15. Not coincidentally, Lord Byron's friend and physician John Polidori wrote one of the first narratives in English about vampires, "The Vampyre" (1819). Supposedly Polidori wrote the tale during a stormy country house weekend in 1816 when Percy Bysshe Shelley encouraged him, Byron, and Mary Shelley to compose scary stories. That weekend, Mary Shelley began what later became *Frankenstein, or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818).

16. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), 206.

17. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 7.

18. *Ibid.*, 8.

19. *Ibid.*, 9.

20. *Ibid.*, 19.

21. *Ibid.*, 44.

22. *Ibid.*, 168.

23. Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987), 256.

24. *Ibid.*, 391.

25. *Ibid.*, 112.

26. *Ibid.*, 120.

27. *Ibid.*, 250.

28. *Ibid.*, 253, 254, 255, 256.

29. *Ibid.*, 117.

30. Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic*, 357.

31. Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 126.

32. Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 62, 72.

33. *Ibid.*, 118.

34. *Ibid.*, 102.

35. *Ibid.*, 197, 204.

36. *Ibid.*, 181.

37. Edward says of vampires, "The others—the majority of our kind who are quite content with our lot—they, too, wonder at how we live. But you see, just because we've been . . . dealt a certain hand . . . it doesn't mean that we can't choose to rise above—to conquer the boundaries of a destiny that none of us wanted. To try to retain whatever essential humanity we can." (*Twilight*, 307.) It is true that the Cullens' vegetarianism and pretense at a normal life show their commitment to retain their humanity; Edward actively attempts to recover his humanity throughout the course of his relationship with the human Bella, in part by remembering small details like opening the car door for her.

38. Garrett, "Dreaming with Adam," 15.

39. Susan Elgin, "The Secret Life of Vampires," *Newsweek*, August 4, 2008, 63.