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# La expresión de romanticismo en la saga *twilight*

## THE EXPRESSION OF ROMANTICISM IN THE TWILIGHT SAGA

### Resumen

*La Saga Crepúsculo* se trata de una serie de películas de fantasía romántica basadas en las novelas *Twilight series* de la escritora norteamericana Stephenie Meyer. Las adaptaciones cinematográficas de *Crepúsculo* y *Luna Nueva* se estrenaron en 2008 y 2009, respectivamente, convirtiéndose en éxitos de taquilla y suscitando un renovado interés por el período del Romanticismo. El propósito de este artículo es analizar las expresiones características del Romanticismo encontradas en los filmes, especialmente en *Luna Nueva*. El estudio de las películas examina cómo la literatura juvenil está relacionada con los clásicos no sólo a través de la temática sino también a través de rasgos cinematográficos como son la localización o la representación de los personajes y su relación con la banda sonora. Para ello, el artículo profundiza en la presentación de los escenarios principales de la saga: Forks, La Push y Volterra y su vinculación con la naturaleza y el Romanticismo. De igual modo, se analiza la caracterización de los tres protagonistas: Edward, Jacob y Bella y su conexión con los personajes Románticos.

Palabras clave: Romanticismo, adaptación cinematográfica, música, representaciones de género.

### Abstract

*The Twilight Saga* is a series of romantic fantasy films based on the *Twilight series* of novels by the American author Stephenie Meyer. The film adaptations of *Twilight* and *New Moon* were released in 2008 and 2009, respectively, breaking box office records and stimulating a revival of interest in the Romantic period. The aim of this paper is to analyse the characteristic expressions of Romanticism found in the films, especially in *New Moon*. The study of the films will examine how young adult literature is connected with the classics not only through themes but also through film features such as the setting or the portrayal of the characters and their relationship with the soundtrack. The paper will concentrate on the depiction of the main settings of the saga: Forks, La Push and Volterra and their links with nature and Romanticism. Likewise, it will take into consideration the characterization of the three protagonists: Edward, Jacob and Bella and their connection with the Romantic characters.

Key words: Romanticism, film adaptation, music, representations of gender.

## 1. Introduction

Meyer's *Twilight Saga* has become a worldwide phenomenon of popular culture. The success of this romantic fantasy series about the romance between Bella, a normal girl, and Edward, a smart vampire

has meant a comeback and an increasing interest in vampires, in supernatural forces and a revival of Romanticism. This paper aims to analyse the film adaptations of *Twilight* and *New Moon* and their relationship with Romanticism through the portrayal of nature, the evocation of the classics and the representation of the Romantic hero through music and in connection with the other main characters: Jacob and Bella.

## 2. The expression of romanticism in the Twilight saga

### 1.1. Setting

The complex love story between the human Bella Swan and the vampire Edward Cullen told in *Twilight* and *New Moon* unfolds in the rural Forks, the Indian reserve of La Push and in the Italian town of Volterra. Throughout *Twilight*, the main setting is in Forks. Bella moves from Phoenix, Arizona, a desert area, to Forks, a small rural town in the state of Washington where it rains most of the time. The beginning of the film shows Bella on a plane flying over a scorched landscape, a rocky, dry desert extending for miles, which suddenly turns into deep, dark, misty, green forests covered by the snow. The vision of the snowy mountains echoes the recurrent Romantic motif of majestic mountains which depict "an incommensurateness which must baffle us into humility" (Oerlemans, 2004: 119) and reveals our dependence upon nature. Moreover, the Romantic Movement does not restrict the importance of Nature to the depiction of wild landscapes, but it can also be observed in the role of the wind whose importance is perceived for instance in Brönte's *Wuthering Heights*, where the term *wuthering* is a Yorkshire word that refers to turbulent weather, or in Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind", where the Wind's tameless, swift and proud nature, the outstanding image of the poem, is related to the poet's 'Wild Spirit'. In the Romantic "Ode to Autumn", Keats refers to the west wind as "both the specific wind that the speaker feels and the monolithic representation of all of nature's cyclic forces, seen here in the sweep of changes the speaker sees in the sky [...] The wind is the force 'on whose stream' all these changes are carried" (Oerlemans, 2004: 121). Wind performs the same function in *Twilight*. Wind is the force of nature that brings about two major changes. Firstly, it causes Edward to sense Bella's pervasive smell and become irresistibly attracted to her when she comes into the science laboratory and the fan carries her scent to him. Secondly, the wind triggers action when it conveys Bella's scent allowing James to detect her smell after the baseball game. This fact leads him to set off in relentless pursuit of his prey, Bella, and to his death in *Twilight*, and to Victoria's subsequent desire for revenge in *New Moon*.

#### 2.1.1. Forks

As mentioned before, a distinctive feature of the Romantic Movement is the emphasis on the beauty and purity of nature together with an interest in picturesque settings. In the case of the *Twilight Saga*, Forks provides the perfect Romantic natural setting. This provincial town is introduced by Bella at the beginning of *Twilight* in the following way: "In the State of Washington, under a constantly covered sky and rain there is a small town, Forks. Population 3120 people, this is where I am moving" (*Twilight* 00:02:10). Her emphasis on the local character of the town is accompanied by a shot of her in a police cruiser, crossing Lake Crescent and entering the small town full of stereotypical small town characters. This depiction reflects the same "seeming rejection of the city and the culture

it represents" shown by the Romantics (Oerlemans, 2004: 3). In this little town, three locations stand out for the development of the plot: the forest, the meadow and the Cullens' mansion.

The deep forest of Forks is depicted in a Romantic way as a place full of sinister shadows, which strengthen the monstrosity of the creatures that frequent it. There, in the middle of tortured tree trunks, Edward confesses what he is to Bella. The forest embodies the monster in Edward. According to him, he is the "world's most dangerous predator" and the forest is portrayed as his hunting ground. His predatory nature was firstly shown in the opening shots of *Twilight* where he gives chase to a deer in the forest. In *New Moon*, the forest becomes the location chosen by Edward for leaving Bella in order to protect her. It gets darker and she is devastated by a feeling of despair, similar to death, and remains unconscious on the ground. Thus, *New Moon* captures the relationship between Romantic heroes, night and death set by the Romantics and pointed out by Furst (2005: 510) who states that "death, prefigured in the darkness of night, is endorsed as a future release from the awareness of loss" and "night provokes in the Romantic hero a disturbing blend of melancholy and psychic turmoil as he takes stock of his life and contemplates his profound dissatisfaction with his situation" (Furst, 2005: 513).

The antithesis of the forest is represented by the meadow. While forests mean shade and the fears of the characters, the meadow represents light and their hopes. It is the quiet and peaceful place where Edward and Bella are safe. Once Bella tells Edward that she is not troubled by his true identity and the possible risks it entails, they are shown lying on the grass, surrounded by wildflowers and enjoying the intimate atmosphere created by the lack of secrets. The fact that the meadow is the only spotlight in Forks, has further connotations. It implies that the meadow is the only place where their forbidden and unfeasible relationship is possible and it is the only place where Edward can be himself. There, in the meadow, and exposed to the sunlight, Edward's skin glitters like diamonds stressing his beauty. While in the forest, his dark side arises, the meadow mirrors his good nature. Therefore, the film offers a romanticised vision of vampire with his faults and virtues and which breaks with the conventional portrayal of vampires as heartless night creatures found in Gothic works such as Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) or Rymer's *Varney the Vampire* (1847).

The last noteworthy location in Forks is the Cullens' mansion which plays a crucial role for a better understanding of the characters. As in Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), the house of the Romantic hero is located in the middle of the forest, creating a fusion with nature. The hero's wild nature, therefore, merges with the primitive environment providing a romantic atmosphere which contrasts with the one projected by the civilized town. The town constrains the individual since it attempts to civilize humanity "corrupting virtue and contributing to the moral decline of the human race" (Lokke, 2005: 138), while nature represents peace and harmony, as Edward tells Bella, referring to his home, "it's the one place we never have to hide" (*Twilight*). Cullen's residence is not a cottage, but a luxurious, light and open mansion full of art works tastefully placed throughout. Its walls of glass look out onto the river. The appearance of the river in the scenery is a similarity to another of Goethe's work, *Märchen* (1795). As Lokke (2005: 143) points out that tale

portrays a world divided into separate realms that must be united and brought into harmony in order to usher in a new golden age of peace, beauty, and eternal youth. [...] A river divides the universe of the tale in two; on the one bank of the river the mundane

lives of an old man and old woman proceed; the other side is home to a beautiful Lily, lonely and ideal, whose touch is fatal.

Likewise, in the *Twilight saga*, the river next to Cullen's home works as a bridge between Edward's immortal and fantasy world and Bella's real and perennial world.

### 2.1.2. La Push

The other major setting is La Push, whose natural beauty and the roughness of its ocean made it a popular place for surfing and whale watching, as Eric and Angela let Bella know in *Twilight*. The substitution of La Push for Forks as the main setting in *New Moon* is not casual and, as in the case of the Romantic writers, is related to the fact that "the representation of nature and the exploration of the human relationship to nature permeates all aspects of literary art from genre and form to plot and character" (McKusick, 2005: 413). Whereas the main location in *Twilight* is Forks and the main male character is Edward, *New Moon* concentrates on the depiction of Jacob and La Push. As happens in the former film, there is a close relationship between the portrayal of the character and the setting. The images of the unspoilt coastline and of Sam and his friends' reckless attitude diving from rugged cliffs reinforce the wilderness and bravery of Jacob and the rest of the pack. Jacob gets a prominent role in *New Moon* when he becomes a huge part of Bella's life once Edward leaves her and his real nature is unveiled. His story as werewolf is inextricably tied to the legend of the Quileute tribe, who dwells in La Push. In the same way as the Romantics did reviving ancient legends, Meyer resorts to the folk tale of the supernatural origins of the Quileute tribe which claims to descend from wolves, in order to connect the Indian character of Jacob to werewolves. Thus, *New Moon* encompasses the Romantic passion for wild landscapes and for the myths which provided a feeling of integration that "served to overcome the solitude people experienced as a consequence of enlightened reasoning" (Ebers 1985: 54). The inspiration from the myths may be observed in Goethe's *Faust*, based on a classic German legend, or in Keats' poems "Ode to Psyche", which deals with the Cupid and Psyche myth, and "Ode to Apollo", a tribute to a whole pantheon full of great poets.

### 2.1.3. Volterra and the evocation of the classics

The last important setting is the historical site of Volterra. The introduction of this real Italian town in *New Moon* as the home to the mysterious Volturi, a coven of powerful and ancient vampires, is not casual. Its choice is related to another Romantic motif: the evocation of the classics, which is achieved in two different ways. On the one hand, Volterra represents the classical antiquity and, on the other hand, it is a clear reference to Shakespeare.

First of all, Italy was regarded as one of the favourite destinations by the Romantics due to its majestic grandeur. An example of this is Ann Radcliffe's choice of this country for the scenic interludes in *The Italian* which

play on the uneasy relation between touristic description and a Gothic code for the exotic and mystery. Her set-piece accounts of Italian scenery borrow literally from travel writing a sense of the actuality of setting, which becomes a formulaic strategy for grounding the symbolic, supernatural, and psychological realities that are the primary subject of her novels. (Oerlemans 2004: 181)

Apart from this, Volterra is linked with Romanticism due to its connections with the Ancient Greece. The town is known for its funeral urns which date back to the Hellenistic period and the Romantic

focused interest in the Ancient World resulted in the phenomenon of Romantic Hellenism. This involved the recovery of classical models, for instance, in architecture "there was a Greek Revival that began by coexisting with other styles such as the Gothic" (Webb, 1995: 149). This can be observed in *New Moon* when the Volturi are introduced. The scene shows an 18<sup>th</sup> century oil painting in which the Volturi are depicted as Grecian figures in swirling robes writhing among pillars and balconies reminding of royalty. These enforcers dedicated to keep the secret of the existence of vampires are portrayed as the antagonists of the Cullens. Whereas the Cullens embody the ideals of Romanticism, the Volturi incarnate those of the Enlightenment. The Romantic Movement arose in response to its predecessor, the Enlightenment, attacking "Enlightened, classicizing, conformist rationalism in recognition of unstated emotions and unconscious instincts" (Brown, 1995: 26). The Volturi have a clear connection with the Enlightenment since they have the same deep respect for the Arts and the Science and for the law as the Enlightened. Thus, when Bella asks about them, Edward describes them as "very refined – Not respect for human life, of course, but respect for the Arts and for the Science, at least, and the law. Above all, the law" (*New Moon*, 00:10:55).

Greece is also present in the depiction of Edward, who according to Bella is like "a perfect statue, carved in some unknown stone, smooth like marble, glittering like crystal" (Meyer, 2005: 228). His classical beauty and his extremely pale look remind of the whiteness of Greek sculptures that so much impressed Romantics like Winckelmann and which induced him "to emphasize the purity and classical serenity of Greek art and it coincided with his desire to celebrate what he called "a noble simplicity and sedate grandeur in Gesture and Expression"" (Webb, 1995: 162).

The choice of Volterra is also associated with the inclination, shown by Romantic writers such as Scott or Coleridge, to use Shakespeare's scenes and motifs (Grundmann, 2005: 35). In this case, Meyer immortalises in *New Moon* the scene from the Shakespearean tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) where the Romantic and tormented hero, in a performance of excess, is determined to commit suicide after hearing his beloved was killed. However, Meyer avoids the tragic ending by the introduction of another feature typical from the Romanticism. When Bella flies to Italy to save Edward from killing himself, she shows certain autonomy leaving her father's house without permission and heading to another continent. In doing so, she conveys the romantic paradigm pointed out by Oerlemans (2004: 152), who comments on the Romantics interest in travelling by saying

Tourism and travel invoke a romantic paradigm in that moving into unfamiliar territory isolates the self, allows it to recognize and recreate its own autonomy, which is more or less the same thing as a sense of authenticity.

*New Moon*, nevertheless, conveys more parallels with *Romeo and Juliet*. At the beginning of *New Moon* (00:00:35), Bella reproduces the lines of Shakespeare's tragedy "These violent delights have violent ends And in their triumph die, like fire and powder, Which, as they kiss, consume" (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene VI). The intertextual reference is a prelude to the disastrous consequences in *New Moon* that will follow from the same story of forbidden relationships and sacrifices of love told in *Romeo and Juliet*. The impossibility of love between a mortal teenager and an immortal vampire reminds of the love sprang up between the young members of the two Italian rival families, the Capulets and Montagues. Likewise, the film *New Moon* adds another intertextual reference to this Shakespearean tragedy, when Edward, in class of English (*New Moon*, 00:10:00), recites the last lines of Romeo before committing suicide:

O here Will I set up my everlasting rest  
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars  
From this world-wearied flesh. Eyes, look your last.  
Arms, take your last embrace! And lips,  
O you The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss  
A dateless bargain to engrossing  
Death. (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act V, Scene III)

By means of this reference, the identification of Edward with Romeo is reinforced as well as their relation to death. In the same way as *Sturm und Drang* drama resorted to Shakespearean characters, *New Moon's* protagonists are idealistic young heroes whose "fight for freedom and love is usually frustrated, and a yearning for withdrawal into the idyllic can be discerned in many of the plays" (Grundmann, 2005: 36).

## 1.2. The portrayal of the characters

Furthermore, the characters of the *Twilight Saga* are based on binary oppositions in a parallel way to those presented in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and highlighted by Schlegel in his "On Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*" (1797). According to Grundmann (2005: 38) Schlegel points out the artistry of the composition of this play displayed in the setting of binary oppositions between characters. These oppositions are mirrored in the antagonism of Edward and Jacob and in the relationship of Edward and Bella.

### 2.2.1. Edward and Jacob

Edward is above all characterized by being a vampire. This horrifying figure from primitive folklore became a recurrent literary motif for the Romantics who looked for inspiration in the traditional tales. Vampires thus became characters in the works of Romantic writers such as in Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1799), in Emily Brönte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) or in Charlotte Brönte's *Jane Eyre* (1847). They were also central characters in Gothic works like in Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), who introduced the vampire as a modern aristocratic fiend. This image remains, according to Senf (1988: 15), as

one of the twentieth century's most powerful myths [...] and the sheer quantity of recent works that feature the vampire attests to our continued fascination with this powerful erotic being, the outsider and rebel.

In the *Twilight Saga*, Meyer recovers this figure, portraying Edward as an outsider and a handsome rebel. Although his beauty and his sensitiveness stand out among his counterparts, he is represented as a human. The process of the humanization of vampires was commented on by Eco (1995) who observes how vampires have been acquiring more and more human features and the marked tendency to portray vampires as smart teenage students whose appearance contrasts with the earlier ones which generally inspired fear and horror. Nevertheless, vampires in twentieth-century literature have other characteristics such as hypnotic eyes and extreme pallor, as Senf (1988: 9) points out. In *Twilight*, Edward's golden eyes capture Bella's attention and his pallid skin is typical of dead bodies.

Furthermore, Eco (1995: 56) describes the new vampire as "Elegante adversario, un antihéroe trágico, rebelde con causa y... ahora también "superhombre" de los públicos masivos del siglo XXI", highlighting the tragic nature of the character, the rebelliousness suggested by Senf (1988) and his popular appeal. All these characteristics are reflected in the portrayal of Meyer's character of Edward, who according to Martínez (2009) is a representation of the romantic hero. She highlights

his depiction as a seventeen year-old student, member of a chic vampire family who live in a mansion, and the fact that he is sensitive, smart and accursed as he does not have a soul. His torment is present in his relationship with Bella throughout *Twilight* and *New Moon*. In *Twilight*, Edward rebukes Bella for regarding him as a hero at the same time he tells her: "You're talking about superheroes. What if I'm not a hero? What if I'm a bad guy?". Similarly, he refers to himself as "the lion that fell for the lamb" and in *New Moon* he abandons her in order to protect her from himself. Instead, Bella does not renounce her love as she firmly believes in the natural goodness of man, a belief defended by the Romantics.

Edward's goodness is corroborated by his choice about vegetarianism. He and the rest of the members of the Cullen family are not evil as they do not feed off of human blood. This relationship between vegetarianism and good nature was already highlighted by the romantic writers who supported the idea that: "that characteristics associated with a type of food would, in one way or another, be passed on to those who consumed that food [...] and that eating meat made one sanguinary" (Oerlemans, 2004: 102). Thus, Edward's eating habits underline the gentleness, softness and mildness of the romantic hero.

Moreover, music plays a crucial role in the portrayal of the characters in the *Twilight saga*. It can be classified into two groups: A) the type of music that characterises Edward and B) the kind of music that describes the other male main character, Jacob. The first example within the first group is Verdi's "La Traviata: Libiamo ne' lieti calici", which sounds the first time Bella comes in Edward's house. The scene of the Cullens preparing elaborate platters of Italian pastas with background classical music displays the portrait of a refined family. This refinement associated with the romantic heroes is also observed in Edward's sophisticated musical taste. He confesses that his favourite song is Debussy's "Clair de Lune" ("Moonlight"), classical music from the eighteen-nineties whose solo piano version is part of the *Twilight's* soundtrack. In addition, the Romantic Movement establishes a relationship between music and the romantic hero, who "is freed and transcends time itself by giving himself up to the spirit of music and love" (Lokke, 2005: 147). Thus, the youthful Edward surrenders to music and shows his passion in his mastery playing his own lullaby on the piano and in his shelves full of vinyls, and CDs.

The character of Jacob is, in turn, identified with ethnic music, as can be seen in *New Moon*. Jacob, one of Bella's friends and member of the Quileute Indian tribe, replaces from Edward once he abandons her in *New Moon*. Jacob is portrayed as being complete opposite Edward in several different ways, including music. First of all, Jacob, as a werewolf is Edward's natural enemy. In European literature, the wolf was traditionally regarded as an embodiment of evil (McKusick 2005: 429), and in *New Moon*, Jacob becomes a menace to the romantic hero, as both compete for Bella's love. Their differences are also observed in the skin. The colour and the warmth of Jacob's skin contrast with Edward's extremely pale and chilled skin. Thirdly, Jacob's musical taste differs from Edward's, too. Jacob's preference for folk music is expressed when he is with Bella working on the motorbikes and Amadou&The Magic Number's song "All I Believe in" sounds. Then, Bella turns off the radio because she associates music with Edward and Jacob complains since he likes that kind of music. Apart from the use of ethnic music to strengthen differences between the two male main characters, it emphasises the presence of folkloric motifs representative of Romanticism.

### 2.2.2. Bella

Finally, the connections with Romanticism can also be observed in the portrayal of the normal human, Bella. The first thing that relates her to the Romantic Movement is her name: Isabella, a name with Italian roots that means "beautiful". Her name coincides with the name of the Romantic main character of Keats' "Isabella, or The Pot of Basil" and with the heroine of *Measure for Measure*, a tragi-comedy by Shakespeare whose works had a profound influence on the Romantics. On the one hand, the Romantics' interest in the Ancient World is transferred in the choice of an Italian name for the protagonist. In addition, the origin of her name together with the forbidden relationship shown in *Twilight* suggests an obvious link between Bella and the Italian character of Juliet from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

Bella is depicted as an innocent clumsy teenager, who is tripping over all the time and who is not good at dancing. Nevertheless, the Romantics believe that this simplicity was a virtue and a sign of purity rather than a fault. According to Mellor (1993: 26)

Since the object of romantic or erotic love is not the recognition and appreciation of the beloved woman as an independent other but rather the assimilation of the female into the male (or the annihilation of any Other that threatens masculine selfhood), the woman must finally be enslaved or destroyed, must disappear or die.

This is the case of Bella, who may be killed by a vampire and who is not able to defend herself. She depends on Edward, who assumes his responsibility for looking after her, as he tells Bella: "it's my job; to protect you" (*New Moon*, 00:12:40). In the same way, he asks her not to do anything stupid or reckless when he abandons her in order to protect her from himself. However, when Edward leaves Bella, she confesses

I am lost. When you left, and he left, you took everything with you. [...] It is like a huge hole that has been punched through my chest. But in a way, I am glad, the pain is my only remainder that he was real, that you all were. (*New Moon*, 00:28:55)

She only finds relief to her sadness and depression in Jacob, who becomes her new protector. The aspect of protection and power is crucial in the *Twilight Saga* as well as in Romanticism. Throughout Romanticism, in a society already patriarchal, women were seen "as the weak link in every class confronting a superior male-dominated class" (Kelly, 1995: 202). The *Twilight Saga* depicts a patriarchal family where Bella is in charge of all the household duties, whereas her father, Charlie never cooks or cleans. As aforementioned, Bella is fragile and needs to be protected, either by Edward or by Jacob. Furthermore, she is inexperienced and, consequently, she has to ask Jacob to help her to fix the motorbikes in *New Moon*. In exchange, she offers to help him with homework in order not to be a bad influence. Then, Jacob offended points out her lack of skills and the fact that he is the "influencer" and she is the "influence". Lastly, Bella comes from Phoenix, the city, and like women in Romanticism, represents the trappings of civilization to the romantic hero. An example of this is that her suicidal behavior on cliff-diving leads Edward to danger.

## Conclusions

Meyer's *Twilight Saga* keeps certain resemblance with the Romantic Movement as has been seen throughout this paper. This series has become a revival of vampires. Although vampires are mythological beings, they are not popularised until the early 18<sup>th</sup> century when the Romantic and Gothic literature recovered the interest in folklore and supernatural features and therefore, vampires became stock characters. At that time, vampire stories, which combined elements of horror and romance, were popularised through penny dreadful publications. These stories, based on Romantic and Gothic novels, were aimed at teenagers, like the *Twilight Saga*. Nowadays, the success of these films based on Meyer's fiction is having the same powerful impact reviving Romantic and Gothic literature. In spite of its popular character, the *Twilight Saga* evokes the Romantic spirit through the illustration of Romantic features such as the active role of nature, the like for the Ancient World, the rediscovery of Shakespeare and the portrayal of the Romantic hero through his relation to music and to the other characters.

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