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Vampire Fantasy: *Twilight's* Post-9/11 Neoqueer Vampires

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Abstract: Arguing that the decade following 9/11 was infused with a unique blend of neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities, this essay reads *Twilight's* vampires as fantasy screens that reflect this new worldview rather than challenge it. The *Twilight* vampires function as homonormative vampires displacing the more threatening figure of the queer terrorist vampire, but they also perform a neoconservative moral authoritarianism. The result is a new fantasy that resonates specifically in the traumatic aftermath of 9/11—the neoqueer vampire.

Keywords: Vampire, Gothic, Queer, Neoliberal, Neoconservative, Trauma, Terrorism, Fantasy

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How to cite this article: Laura E. Westengard, 'Vampire Fantasy: *Twilight's* Post-9/11 Neoqueer Vampires', *Assuming Gender*, 5:1 (2015), pp. 9-36.

Vampire Fantasy: *Twilight*'s Post-9/11 Neoqueer Vampires

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In March 2012 the headline 'Vampires Ever After: Bride, Groom in "Twilight" Wedding Change Names to Cullen' screamed across the screen at TODAY.com, the MSNBC site dedicated to the *Today Show*'s web content.¹ The article goes on to describe a wedding that is, undoubtedly, not alone in its emulation of the incredibly popular *Twilight* saga by Stephenie Meyer:

Abigail, 30, who has read the books about six times each and has watched all the films, knew at once that she wanted to incorporate elements from the movie wedding into her February wedding after she finally got to see 'Breaking Dawn: Part 1'. She and Weeks wound up doing just that — in big ways, in subtle ways and in one exceptionally long-lasting way.

In the course of planning their nuptials, the couple decided to change their last names legally to Cullen.²

This phenomenon points to the convergence of two fantasy spaces in the psyche of (predominately) young American women: the dream wedding; and the world of the Cullens, the wealthy, sparkling vampires that appear in *Twilight*.³ The *Twilight* saga began when Stephenie Meyer published the young adult novel, *Twilight*, in 2005 and continued with the subsequent publication of *New Moon* (2006), *Eclipse* (2007), and *Breaking Dawn* (2008). The series became

¹ Rachel Elbaum, 'Vampires Ever After: Bride, Groom in "Twilight" Wedding Change Names to Cullen', *Today Weddings*, TODAY.com, 28 March 28 2012 <<http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/46854371/ns/today-weddings/#.T5b8oo5Oluc>> [accessed 7 November 2014].

² Elbaum, par.5-6.

³ For demographic information see 'Vampire Fan Base Runs Thicker Than Blood Online', *nielsenwire*, 22 July 2009 <http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/vampire-fan-base-runs-thicker-than-blood-online/> [accessed 7 November 2014].

a film phenomenon in 2008 with the release of *Twilight*, directed by Catherine Hardwicke (Summit Entertainment), the first of five films based on the novels.⁴ *Twilight*, however, is not the only vampire narrative to appear in popular culture during these years. A 2009 Nielson report online attributes a marked uptick in vampire fascination to the *Twilight* phenomenon (along with its wildly popular contemporary, *True Blood*, based on Charlaine Harris' *Sookie Stackhouse* book series). The report states that there 'has been increasing mainstream interest in and gravitation towards all things vampire, most recently spurred by the *Twilight* books/movies and the HBO series, *True Blood*'.⁵ An entire vampire-related industry has since emerged—from games such as *Vampire Wars* on Facebook to derivative dramatic television series such as *The Vampire Diaries* on the CW network and *Being Human* on Syfy.

As theorist Nina Auerbach outlines in *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, the figure of the vampire has always served as a kind of cultural fantasy screen on which we project our anxieties and desires and against which we understand ourselves as human subjects.⁶ But what, exactly, has shifted in the recent years that has given birth to the contemporary outgrowth of vampire narratives in US popular culture? It is relevant that the *Twilight* phenomenon spans roughly from 2003, the year Stephenie Meyer began writing the first novel, to 2012, the year in which the final instalment appeared in movie theatres. This, too, is a span of years following one of the deepest cultural traumas that the United States has experienced—the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. In the wake of this disruptive trauma, the vampires of the *Twilight* saga

⁴ The films align closely with each published novel, *New Moon*, dir. by Chris Weitz (Summit Entertainment, 2009), *Eclipse* dir. by David Slade (Summit Entertainment, 2010), *Breaking Dawn Part 1* dir. by Bill Condon (Summit Entertainment, 2011) and *Breaking Dawn Part 2* dir. by Bill Condon (Summit Entertainment, 2012).

⁵ 'Vampire Fan Base', par.1.

⁶ Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

represent a shift in the trajectory of the vampire figure. Rather than subversive and dangerously erotic, these vampires instead function as idealized figures that elide the traumatic reality of 9/11 and its political and social aftermath by deploying neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies. The *Twilight* fantasy projects an idealized moral past and a future guided by neoliberal ethics in order to reestablish a space of imagined domestic and economic stability in the face of terror. My aim here is to examine the way *Twilight's* vampires serve to pacify a traumatized populace by displacing the queer and the terrorist implications of the vampire figure and offering, instead, a version of a 'proper' subject, surprisingly located at the intersection of opposing worldviews.

It is not uncommon to find a kind of post-traumatic cultural obsessiveness in which the details of an event are rehashed again and again in the wake of a disturbing incident. Trauma theorist, Roger Luckhurst, notes that '[i]n its shock impact trauma is anti-narrative, but it also generates the manic production of retrospective narratives that seek to explicate the trauma'.⁷ In other words, the traumatic experience defies effective communication, but paradoxically it also demands to be told. Countless cultural productions did this 'manic' work following 9/11—from the popular Jonathan Safran Foer novel, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, to photo essays by *Time Magazine*, to newspaper and magazine articles, to evening news programs that obsessively recounted the events and their impact. Perhaps less obvious, however, are the wide-ranging reverberations in cultural productions that do not explicitly attempt to narrativize 9/11 but are instead reacting to the traumatic shattering of that day and the shift in cultural perceptions that have followed in the years after. The *Twilight* phenomenon emerged in the

⁷ Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 79.

post-traumatic moment as part of the recent wave of 21st century vampire culture, and as such, I believe it serves as a powerful cultural index. *Twilight*'s vampires, as post-traumatic products, represent the broader cultural response to 9/11 as well as the attendant shift in the vampire figure during these years.

The vampire as traumatic cultural outgrowth functions alongside the post-9/11 turn toward terrorism paranoia. As Judith Butler articulates in *Precarious Life*, the United States could have chosen to react to the events on 9/11 by 'redefin[ing] itself as part of a global community'.⁸ Instead, the country 'heightened nationalist discourse, extended surveillance mechanisms, suspended constitutional rights, and developed forms of explicit and implicit censorship' (p. xi). During this moment, dialogue about the events was foreclosed in favor of the simple narrative that portrayed the United States as the unquestionable and blameless victim, for as many well remember, President Bush cast the conversation in terms of a very clear binary: 'Either you're with us or you're with the terrorists' (p. 2). In the period following the attacks, terrorism and alignment with (or against) the terrorists took center stage in the public consciousness. The official narrative was that the country became unified in response to the events—'[that] September day, we came together as a nation,' the *9/11 Commission Report* states in its preface.⁹ However, Butler counters this comforting narrative by noting that the binary created in the discourse following the 9/11 trauma made it 'untenable to hold a position in which one opposes both [of the positions offered by Bush] and queries the terms in which the opposition is framed' (p. 2). In other words, any citizen participating in thoughtful

⁸ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), p. xi. Further references to this book are given parenthetically in the text.

⁹ *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York: Norton & Company, 2004), p. xvi.

conversation that opposed or questioned the dominant discourse was in danger of being labeled a terrorist or terrorist sympathizer and effectively silenced.

The imposition of this binary created a synthesis of events in which citizens developed paranoia regarding the presence of terrorists 'hidden' in plain view, dissenting opinions became signs that signified a possible terrorist presence, and the War on Terror threatened any suspected terrorist—both within and outside of national borders—with violent repercussions. The national obsession with the terrorist threat hidden within our borders plays out in the *9/11 Commission Report* since it dedicates an entire section to the retrospective identification of the hijackers within the country before 9/11, noting their undetected presence in California and Florida and calling the chapter 'The Attack Looms'. The report also enlists the public to help identify and report terrorist threats, explaining in a section entitled 'Protect Against and Prepare for Terrorist Attacks' that 'the vigilance of ordinary Americans also make[s] a difference' in the move toward greater protection.¹⁰ In a post-traumatic environment infused with paranoia, repression, and responsibility, US citizens were suddenly concerned with learning and identifying the 'telltale' markers that might help one do their civic duty by spotting the hidden terrorist. This skill would also ensure that one did not inadvertently display any of those signs, staying clearly on the 'us' side of the us/them binary. The charge to identify hidden threats appears in the vampire fictions emerging in the post-9/11 years, for the vampires in the *Twilight* saga are also a threat lurking within the neighborhoods of mainstream America. Meyer's vampires display certain telltale, though often hidden, signs that mark them as 'other'. Because of their status as hidden other reflecting post-9/11 terrorism paranoia, *Twilight's*

¹⁰ *9/11 Report*, p. 383.

vampires function to both narrativize a massive cultural trauma and to process the complex demands and uncertainties that emerged in the decade's War on Terror.

Vampires have a long history of being both frightening and erotic, but the breed of vampires that populates the world of *Twilight* reflects a desirability that moves beyond the bedroom. One does not have to look far to find analyses of vampires as endlessly shifting metaphors. J. Jack Halberstam, for example, examines the 'Gothic monster' as a 'technology of subjectivity', producing monsters as 'deviant' subjects against which 'the normal, the healthy, and the pure can be known'.¹¹ The production of the 'deviant' in relation to 'the normal' is an endless process, and vampires often circulate as figures of this negotiation. Additionally, vampires reflect the anxieties and desires of their cultural moment, at times representing sexual anxiety and at other times representing anxieties of class, race, or gender.¹² Slavoj Žižek's exploration of the 'fantasy screen' offers some insight into the intersection of vampires, anxiety, and desire. He notes that the fantasy screen frequently makes an appearance in literature and popular cultural productions, serving to conceal the 'traumatic, real kernel' — traumatic because it defies symbolization while it structures our desire in relation to its fundamental lack. Further, Žižek notes that monsters in the form of the living dead, specifically, hold particular relevance in the context of cultural trauma. He argues that the 'return of the dead signifies that they cannot find their proper place in the text of tradition', and in a kind of reversal of the funereal burial, they return to remind the living of a 'disturbance in the symbolic

¹¹ J. Jack Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 2.

¹² There are numerous books and essay collections exploring the culturally contingent vampire metaphor. See, for example, *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture* (1997), *Reading the Vampire* (1994), and *Vampire God: The Allure of the Undead in Western Culture* (2009).

rite'.¹³ He illustrates this 'disturbance' with 'two great traumatic' historical events—the holocaust and the gulag—noting that the 'shadows of their victims will continue to chase us as "living dead" until we give them a decent burial, until we integrate the trauma of their death into our historical memory'.¹⁴ In other words, a national or global trauma such as the holocaust causes a disturbance in the symbolic rite of burial, gives the living a traumatic and unsymbolizable glimpse of the impossible real, and then continues to haunt the living with a demand that these traumatic deaths become narrativized, or integrated into the 'historical memory'. The drive to narrativize trauma, then, can materialize through the undead. Vampires serve as fantasy screens that reflect the desires and anxieties of their context as well as the fantasies that emerge in relation to trauma, changing shape in relation to the particular trauma from which they are born.

The fantastic undead in Meyer's novels become, not monstrous, but god-like in their exquisite beauty, superhuman strength, and specialized sixth senses—beings to be desired and emulated rather than repulsed and alienated. Beyond their physical perfection, however, the Cullen vampires embody the fantasy of the idealized conservative American values that were disrupted by the intrusion of the foreign terrorist other upon the national consciousness, creating the desire for a new vision of America based on a unique constellation of neoliberal economic ideals and neoconservative morality. While the vampires in this world are traditional in the sense that they are generally dangerous and nomadic, they thrive on human blood, and they murder in order to feed on this blood, the Cullen clan is held up as an

¹³ Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), p. 23.

¹⁴ Žižek, p. 23.

exception to the rule. Rather than wandering from place to place alone or in pairs, like most other vampires, the Cullens have chosen to create a family structure, settle down in a single area, and integrate into the human community. The saga offers readers and viewers a normative, nuclear family in place of a potential threat—a foundational instance of *Twilight's* conservative fantasy.

In their domestic normativity, the Cullens represent a shift in the vampire genre. While bloodthirsty and dangerous if caught off guard, they are pinnacles of control and denial rather than the erotically sadistic Dracula of Bram Stoker's novel. They mourn their lost humanity and deny their vampire urges rather than embracing their dark nature and indulging in a liberated approach to their appetites like Anne Rice's Louis and Lestat. They are something other than human yet highly moral and fairly socialized, nothing like those feral post-human vampires slayed by Buffy.¹⁵ Instead, the Cullens arise in this cultural moment as paternalistic, powerful, and concerned with the vestiges of capital.

In order to create the semblance of family, Carlisle Cullen created a partner for himself, Esme, who seems to be approximately his own age. He also created, or accepted into the family, pairs of younger looking vampires who pose as Carlisle and Esme's adopted children. Since the children are supposedly adopted (rather than biologically related), the community apparently accepts the fact that they are coupled into heterosexual romantic pairings, with the exception of Edward, who is single at the beginning of the series and who, eventually, falls in love with the human Isabella Swan (Bella). The Cullens live in a large house just outside of the town of Forks,

¹⁵ For an outline of the twentieth century vampire types I reference here, see William Patrick Day's *Vampire Legends in Contemporary American Culture: What Becomes a Legend Most* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002).

Washington—a town carefully selected for its lack of sunshine, allowing them to function normally during the day. The ‘children’ attend the local high school, the ‘father’ works as a physician, and the ‘mother’ has no stated profession (she is, apparently, a stay at home mom). This vampire clan is exceptional because they are the largest group of vampires living together consistently other than the Volturi, an ancient governing body of vampires that live in Italy. The Cullens are also exceptional because they have chosen to live on a diet of wild animal blood exclusively, calling themselves ‘vegetarian’ vampires. The text implies that this ethical move is the primary reason that they are able to form family units, since the only other ‘family’ that exists in America is also vegetarian.¹⁶ Finally, the Cullens are characterized predominately by their conspicuous wealth—their house is filled with opulent furniture, they drive extravagant cars, and they dress immaculately.

The *Twilight* vampires represent a fantasy projection that plays out the increasing intersection of neoliberalism and neoconservative values occurring in the decade following 9/11. Wendy Brown argues that neoliberal and neoconservative worldviews have paradoxically intersected in the post-9/11 decade, depending upon a ‘pacified and neutered citizenry’ in order to create a political atmosphere in which ‘a combination of religious and neoliberal discourses have supplanted liberal democratic ones’.¹⁷ Neoliberalism, she explains, ‘casts the political and social spheres both as appropriately dominated by market concerns and as themselves organized by market rationality’, and in this system, the moral autonomy of

¹⁶ As Edward explains to Bella in *Twilight*, “‘But most won’t settle in any one place. Only those like us, who’ve given up hunting you people”—a sly glance in my direction—“can live together with humans for any length of time. [. . .] Those of us who live . . . differently tend to band together””. Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight* (New York: Little, Brown, 2005), p. 290. Further references to this book are given parenthetically in the text.

¹⁷ Wendy Brown, ‘American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization’, *Political Theory* 34 (2006), 690-714 (p. 709). Further references to this article are given parenthetically in the text.

individuals is measured by their ability to 'provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions' (p. 694). If the demands of the market concentrate wealth and power among a specific group of people or governing authority, it is simply a normative outgrowth of the free market system. Brown notes that it is this aspect of neoliberalism that 'profoundly enable[s]' the encroachment of *neoconservative* values, even though at the core these two rationalities are deeply divergent (p. 702). Neoconservatism offers a 'theological model of the state' in response to neoliberalism's 'business model of the state' (p. 698). Both rationalities devalue equality, since both view concentrated power and capital as desirable—something to be wielded as a means of preserving/regaining morality (in the case of neoconservatism) or as a result of free market forces in which a clear system of winners and losers emerges (in the case of neoliberalism) (p. 701). The de-democratizing effect of neoliberalism allows for neoconservatism to take hold as a means of shaping a 'submissive, obedient citizen' and organizing 'a post-9/11 wounded and defensive national patriotism' (pp. 705-06). In the decade following 9/11, then, these conflicting rationalities have become increasingly intertwined as they are both posited as ideal forces with the potential to 'fix' a disrupted national stability. With this promise, the rationalities themselves function as fantasy screens, and elements of their complicated intersections emerge in the depiction of the fantasy vampires that promise, too, to offer a 'happily ever after' to a traumatized populace.

The Cullens seem to perfectly manifest the neoliberal vision of success. Carlisle Cullen, the patriarch of the family, became a vampire in the mid-seventeenth century and, once he decided that it was his moral duty to be a vegetarian, he also decided to become a doctor. This profession casts him as an unusual vampire who heals rather than kills, and it also apparently

allows him to amass a large amount of wealth even as the sole breadwinner of the Cullen family. During Bella's first few days at high school in Forks, Bella notices the Cullen family's conspicuous wealth. In the small-town economy, she notes that there were no new or fancy cars in her high school's lot except those driven by the Cullens—a Volvo S60R and a BMW M3 convertible.¹⁸ Carlisle, who works at the small local hospital, drives a luxurious Mercedes S55 AMG, and as the series continues, the cars become more and more flashy and conspicuous, including a yellow Porsche 911 Turbo, a fictional Mercedes Guardian ('one step up from' the Mercedes S600 Guard), and a Ferrari F430.¹⁹ Clearly, these are not cars that demonstrate an investment in blending in or rendering their wealth less apparent. Also, although the Cullens supposedly do their best to rectify their outsider status in the community, the 'children' do not attempt to dress in ways that adopt the general standards of Forks High School. 'It was obvious', Bella notes, 'that they were all dressed exceptionally well; simply, but in clothes that subtly hinted at designer origins. [. . .] It seemed excessive for them to have both good looks and money' (p. 32). Later in the series, we learn that Alice, the member of the Cullen clan perhaps most preoccupied with material wealth, does not allow any family member to wear an outfit more than once and makes Bella consistently uncomfortable by dressing her in impractical silk cocktail gowns, even for mundane daily activities. Additionally, Bella is shocked by her first visit to the Cullens' home, 'timeless, graceful, and probably a hundred years old' but with massive and extravagant renovations. She marvels at 'the high-beamed ceiling, the wooden floors, and

¹⁸ On Stephenie Meyer's official website, she devotes an entire page to 'The Cullen Cars'. The page includes each vehicle mentioned in the series, the exact make and model, and an image. Stephenie Meyer, 'The Cullen Cars,' *The Official Website of Stephenie Meyer*, August 2008 <http://www.stepheniemeyer.com/twilight_cullencars.html> [accessed 7 November 2014].

¹⁹ Meyer, 'Cullen Cars'.

the thick carpets' all in 'varying shades of white' and the 'spectacular grand piano' that stands in the centre of the room (p. 322). In the schema of the neoliberal universe, it becomes clear that the Cullens are financial 'winners' and, in spite of their emphasis on the ethics of denial in terms of gastronomic consumption, they are unashamed to display their excessive material consumption. Their massive amount of capital accumulation is a sign of their goodness, their success, and their desirability—signs marking them as idealized objects of desire but also an outgrowth of a society dominated by market forces.

In an uncanny reflection of the political intersections Brown describes, the family's acceptance of concentrated wealth and power intersects with a focus on regaining a more moral past. Vampirism, to the Cullens, is a hand that they are dealt, but as Edward explains to Bella, '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' (p. 307). This yearning for an idealized, human morality characterizes the 'civilized' vampires in the *Twilight* saga. Carlisle, for example, created his family only from humans who were already on the verge of death—he refuses to turn anyone into a vampire who still has the opportunity to continue living as a human. For Carlisle, and for his family of philosophical converts, the issues of vampire identity are cast in a clear moral binary of good and evil. When he first became a vampire, he tried to kill himself until he realized that 'he could exist without being a demon' by only drinking the blood of animals and by saving human lives as 'penance' (pp. 337, 339). He continues to impose his version of civility upon the people he meets, including each new member of his family as well as any other supernatural creature he encounters. Carlisle's drive to spread his version of morality plays out specifically in relation to the Quileute, the local

Native American tribe living in the region of Forks who have historically protected their land against ‘the cold ones’ by becoming werewolves and killing any vampires who come near the town. Generations ago, the texts explain, Carlisle moved his family into the Forks area, met with the Quileute leaders, and agreed upon a truce in which there would be no bloodshed as long as the Cullens refrain from feeding on human blood and stay outside of the reservation borders. The text gives Carlisle full credit for this truce. Critic Natalie Wilson argues that both Carlisle’s moral proselytizing and the Cullens’ relationship with the Quileutes stems from a colonizing impulse, noting that the texts present the ‘family as a noble clan of benevolent rulers who act as a civilizing force’.²⁰ This moral imposition is not limited to the Cullens’ relationship with the raced Native tribe, but it also extends towards all those they interact with.

This ‘civilizing’ impulse, transplanted to the twenty-first century setting of the novels, can be read as a kind of free floating moral authoritarianism that imposes a colonial moral burden, with its attendant notions of sexual propriety and restraint, upon the present. For example, Edward, as Carlisle’s devoted convert, refuses Bella’s repeated sexual advances until they are married, adamantly denies her requests to be turned into a vampire, and consistently asserts that she may not associate with her Quileute friend, Jacob, because he is too dangerous—a colonial position ‘akin to a white man talking about the dangerous men of color that violate and endanger white women’.²¹ Both Carlisle and Edward base their moral choices on the assumption that their vampire status makes them inherently evil, but through discipline and restraint they can be good in spite of the hand they were dealt. The implication, then, is

²⁰ Natalie Wilson, *Seduced by Twilight: The Allure and Contradictory Messages of the Popular Saga* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2011), p. 166.

²¹ Wilson, p. 166.

that a moral code can (and should be) enforced as a means of correcting a state of sin. In other words, moral goodness is a learned behaviour, and the imposition of that morality is the vampire's burden, as the literal and figurative white men of the texts. As soon as they are able to openly discuss their state with a human, Bella, they begin to impose their moral code upon her as well, suggesting that, although Bella is intelligent, nurturing, and non-materialistic, her tendency toward independent thought and acceptance of her own sexual desires places her in as 'evil' a category as vampires or the Quileutes and in need of containment.

Edward is infinitely stronger, smarter, and more beautiful than Bella, and he approaches their relationship as a superior moral authority working to impose his vision of morality upon an unequal and increasingly disempowered subject. He asserts this authority by acting in a highly paternalistic mode in relation to Bella, again echoing a past-oriented, colonial approach to moral authority that reflects a devotion to his turn-of-the-century human existence as much as it reflects his devotion to Carlisle's moral order. He is also as concerned with retaining Bella's morality as he is with regaining his own—teaching her about the Cullens' moral philosophy, forcing his will upon her by restricting her sexual expression, requiring that she participate in social rituals such as prom when she expressly states that she does not wish to participate, and forcing her into an extravagant wedding that she resists until the moment she walks down the aisle. The lack of equality in this relationship is apparent even to Bella, although she does not seem to have the strength to resist Edward's authoritarianism. At one point, Bella is bitten by a nomadic vampire and has the opportunity to become a vampire herself, something that she finds intensely appealing. Ignoring her desire and denying her the choice entirely, Edward 'saves' her by sucking out the vampire venom from her wound without her consent. When she

wakes in the hospital, she laments the fact that he denied her wishes, casting it in terms of a desire for equality: 'But it just seems logical', she argues, 'a man and woman have to be somewhat equal . . . as in, one of them can't always be swooping in and saving the other one. They have to save each other *equally*' (pp. 473-4). Edward's response to this reasoning is to discount Bella's logic, reigning in his initial anger at her desire for equality and simply telling her, '[y]ou don't know what you're asking' (p. 474). In this relationship, equality is not of primary concern to Edward. In fact, he deems it more appropriate to make Bella's choices for her, instruct her in terms of morality, and hopefully bring about her acquiescence to his notion of good versus evil behaviour. And this gradual acquiescence is precisely what happens in the course of the saga. After an extended series of conflicts between the couple, always cast in terms of Edward attempting to preserve either Bella's safety or her moral character when she is supposedly making the wrong choice, Bella eventually conforms to Edward's wishes. She agrees to marry him even though the thought makes her literally ill, she agrees to wait until marriage to have sex rather than honour her emerging desires, and she even becomes a vampire only when she is nearly dead as the result of a dangerous pregnancy (according to the rule created by Carlisle). Edward's moral philosophy is never compromised, and he stubbornly asserts his will until Bella accepts his worldview as her own—creating, in her, a proper subject of neoconservative moral authority.

The systematic imposition of the Cullens' morality also involves teaching Bella that the 'right' kind of indulgence happens in the sphere of capital rather than appetite. Bella's budding human sexuality and eventual transformation into a vampire makes her inherently evil according to the logic of the texts; however, the Cullen philosophy provides her with a path for

redemption that consists of conservative appetite restraint paired with a flamboyant fabulousness in the realm of consumer choice. Vampires are figures whose deviant eroticism and association with death have historically tied them to queerness, but as a young sexual woman and later as a newborn vampire, it is *Bella's* desires that are cast as deviant and in need of redirection.²² As I noted earlier, a central facet of the Cullen moral code involves their personal decision to contain their inherently monstrous instincts and desires. In the words of another contemporary gothic figure, Lady Gaga, the vampires are 'born this way'; however, their response to monstrosity differs greatly from the Gaga narrative of self-acceptance and empowerment. Instead, the Cullens offer the fantasy that they can (and should) overcome their inherently queer nature through a kind of Protestant restraint paired with an indulgence in consumer pleasure. Their threatening appetites are redirected into a more palatable version of vampirism—and by extension queerness—that is properly invested in normative cultural values. Because the text implies that the Cullens possess the moral authority to mentor Bella in this process, the *Twilight* vampires come into focus as something *other* than queer.

At first glance, the Cullens seem to be a hidden queer and potentially terrorist threat lurking in the neighbourhoods of America, but we soon learn that they are invested in containing queerness in favour of domestic normativity and conventional notions of morality. In her study on the discourses of queerness and terrorism in global politics, Jasbir Puar establishes

²² For foundational texts linking vampirism and queerness, see Richard Dyer's 'Children of the Night: Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism' in Susannah Radstone, ed., *Sweet Dreams: Sexuality, Gender, and Popular Fiction* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), pp. 47-72 and Sue Ellen Case's 'Tracking the Vampire', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 3(1991), pp.1-20.

that there have been many ‘historical convergences between queers and terror’.²³ In this signifying chain, the vampire collapses into the queer which collapses into the terrorist. However, in the years following 9/11, Puar argues, there was a shift in the construction of queerness in relation to the figure of the terrorist. The United States has inscribed a new ‘national homosexuality,’ or ‘homonationalism,’ that ‘operates as a regulatory script’ of normalized queerness through the ‘racial and national norms that reinforce these subjects’.²⁴ Where queerness was once coded as monstrous and cathected with death, homonationalism’s normalized queerness is being ushered into neoliberal national narratives through the production of the ‘queer terrorist of elsewhere’.²⁵ In other words, as ‘proper’ neoliberal queers are quickly becoming integrated into normative national culture, queerness is being deployed as a device that both produces the figure of the terrorist and casts the terrorist as ultimately ‘other’, a fate once reserved for homosexuals in the United States.

We can see this displacement happening in the vampire fantasy of *Twilight*. The Cullens represent the hidden threat of queer terrorist monsters, but we quickly learn that they are ‘proper’ queer subjects, invested in living out and reproducing national narratives of morality and capital. As they are ushered into the folds of US culture, they effectively distract the audience from the ‘true’ queerness of the threatening, racialized, terrorist, who exists elsewhere. While Puar’s equation describes the ‘very specific production of terrorist bodies against properly queer subjects’ within national discourse and on the global political stage, I would claim that the universe of the *Twilight* saga represents a soothing fantasy that toys with

²³ She does this, predominantly, by calling upon José Esteban Muñoz’s notion of ‘terrorist drag’. Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. xxiii.

²⁴ Puar, p. 2.

²⁵ Puar, p. xxv.

this structure.²⁶ *Twilight* introduces the anxiety of the queer and the terrorist through the figure of the vampire, but ultimately it masks the threat of truly queer terrorist bodies by offering, instead, a vision of queerness that operates at the intersection of neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities, or what I will term 'neoqueer'.²⁷ The neoqueer vampires of *Twilight* slip seamlessly into the global discourse outlined by Puar precisely because of their embodiment of the post-9/11 ideological intersection Brown describes. The *Twilight* vampires elide the threat of the queer terrorist, replacing it with the neoqueer vampire invested in conventional morality but perhaps even more deeply invested in neoliberal ideals of individualism and capitalism.

The primary fantasy of *Twilight* involves the queer integrating into US culture by investing in normative notions of monogamy, marriage, private sexuality, home ownership, and capitalism. As such, the vampires emerge in this world as both visually and morally palatable. Although they naturally sparkle in the sunlight like a sequined gown, the *Twilight* vampires must otherwise create their fabulousness through their consumer power, and they are well equipped to do so. In other words, the fantasy of this vampire is that they can use their economic power and their exquisite taste to enhance society rather than undermine it with their perversity, as long as they properly adopt normative, neoliberal values. In the context of queer theory, David Eng has named this phenomenon queer liberalism, an extension of Lisa Duggan's 'homonormativity', or a political position that promises the 'possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in

²⁶ Puar, p. xiii

²⁷ I would like to thank my colleague, Dr. Sean Scanlan, for helping me develop this term.

domesticity and consumption'.²⁸ Eng notes that the discourse of human emancipation through 'the globalization of capitalism and the proliferation of "free" markets' in the post-9/11 period has created a set of ideals that 'distinguish a "freedom-loving" and "civilized" US nation-state against its "freedom-hating" and "uncivilized" Muslim other'.²⁹ Like Puar's homonationalism, this historically specific notion has led to the development of queer liberalism, 'a confluence of political and economic conditions forming the basis of liberal enfranchisement and inclusion for certain gay and lesbian US citizen-subjects willing to comply with its normative mandates'.³⁰

The *Twilight* vampires, with their behaviour modification and neoliberal investment offer the fantasy of the queer subject who not only curtails the behaviour that might make heteronormative society uncomfortable but who also offers a sanitized, homonormative identity that straight society can exploit for economic and aesthetic gains. Additionally, their adoption of neoconservatism in addition to neoliberal ideology creates a unique fantasy figure of the neoqueer vampire. Like the 'gay canary' who moves into a struggling urban location, buys a house, fixes it up with unquestionable style, injects money into the economy, and thereby predicts (and facilitates) the coming gentrification of a neighbourhood, the sparkling vampires bring wealth and style into the backwater town of Forks.³¹ Notably, they also bring to

²⁸ Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), p. 50.

²⁹ David L. Eng, 'Freedom and Racialization of Intimacy: Lawrence v. Texas and the Emergence of Queer Liberalism' in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, ed. by George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 38-59 (p. 39).

³⁰ Eng, p. 39.

³¹ Richard Florida famously developed a 'Gay Index' to measure urban neighbourhoods in *Cities and the Creative Class* (New York: Routledge, 2005). According to Florida, gay 'canaries' serve 'as a strong signal of a diverse, progressive environment' (p. 131). Karen Tongson addresses this concept in the context of queer liberalism, queers of colour, and class gentrification in *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

Forks a conservative moral code involving the notion of inherent evil contained through appetite control, sexual abstinence, and family values.

As neoqueer vampires, the Cullens use their authoritarian mandate to not only impose morality upon others but also to impose their notion of a free market rationality. Edward functions as an arm of morality throughout the saga, but once Bella begins to accept his worldview she is also slowly ushered into the neoliberal capitalistic space of the Cullens' world. Accepting the vegetarian, abstinent vampire morality also entails accepting their investment in the neoliberal ethics of material consumption, conspicuous wealth, and the notion that their capital success is an outgrowth of their 'goodness', to be flaunted and relished rather than distributed to the struggling classes. Bella begins the novels as frugal and unconcerned with, even embarrassed by, fancy clothes and cars. When she arrives in Forks, her father gives her an old, rusty truck as a gift (a 1953 Chevrolet pickup).³² She is overwhelmed by the gesture and grows to love the truck that has no radio and cannot drive faster than 55 miles per hour. Since automobiles are such a central metaphor in the series, this truck becomes representative of Bella's autonomy, her class status, and her lack of investment in the pursuit and display of material wealth. This is a point of conflict throughout the four novels since Edward considers the truck too slow, too loud, and unsafe. When Bella attempts to visit her friend Jacob against Edward's wishes, the truck becomes her last symbol of autonomy since it is her only means of accessing the reservation on which Jacob lives. Edward enforces his restrictions by tampering with the truck's engine, arguing that it is for Bella's own good and patronizing her once again by claiming that she cannot fully understand his reasons. Later, the Cullens insist that Bella

³² Meyer, 'Cullen Cars'.

celebrate her birthday with them, even though she adamantly asserts that she does not enjoy parties and does not want the gifts or the attention. Instead of respecting her wishes, they create an elaborately decorated party at their home and give her lavish gifts—one of which is an expensive car stereo for her truck, something they think she needs but that she has no desire for—in an attempt to usher her into an appropriately capitalistic mode. Eventually, when Bella grudgingly agrees to marry Edward, he forces her to get rid of the truck entirely (he claims that it ‘passed on’), giving her a new car for the engagement and promising her yet another car after they are married.

The ‘before’ car, notably, is both ostentatious and couched in a paternalistic protective gesture, and Bella is intensely uncomfortable with the spectacle. *Breaking Dawn* begins by describing Bella’s new subject position as Edward’s fiancé. Her interior monologue reveals that she has curtailed her activities in order avoid being seen wearing her flashy engagement ring, and she works to talk herself out of her intense discomfort about her new car, her ‘mysterious acceptance into an Ivy League college’, and ‘the shiny black credit card that felt red-hot in [her] back pocket’.³³ While driving through town, she is gawked at by each person she passes, and two men at the gas station explain to her that the car, the fictional ‘Mercedes Guardian’, is not yet available in the United States and was designed ‘for Middle East diplomats, arms dealers, and drug lords’ with its ‘missile-proof glass and four thousand pounds of body armor’.³⁴ As in the neoliberal/neoconservative political intersection, Bella’s liberty has been set aside in order to ensure her safety and to advance Edward’s ‘moral project’ (Brown p. 704). She can no longer move freely about the town, and her desires and choices are ignored while Edward successfully

³³ Stephenie Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* (New York: Little, Brown, 2008), p. 5.

³⁴ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, p. 7.

gains a wife whose virtue is intact, who properly represents the family's wealth, and who allows him to occupy the normative role of dominant masculine protector. When Bella becomes a vampire—that is, when she is absorbed entirely into the Cullens' universe—she is given a red Ferrari, a car that no longer supports the narrative of paternal caretaking but that is, perhaps, the most ostentatious vehicle in the series. The progression of Bella's vehicles represent her gradual advance into a more appropriate space of capital, for if she is to become one of the family, Bella must not only adopt the Cullen morality but also their relationship to the market.

Neoconservative moral authoritarianism paired with neoliberal market rationality work together to create the 'undemocratic citizen', and this is precisely what becomes of Bella by the end of the text. According to Brown, this citizen 'loves and wants neither freedom nor equality', 'expects neither truth nor accountability', and 'is not distressed by exorbitant concentrations of political and economic power' (p. 692). Similarly, the 'after' moment for Bella coincides not only with her transition to wife, mother, and vampire but also with her gradual, if grudging, acceptance of the unequal power and wealth distribution between vampires and humans, the willingness to sacrifice truthfulness and lawfulness in order to save her family from external threats, and the abrogation of any concern for social or economic equity that such wealth and power might demand. In one telling instance, Bella's daughter is threatened, and as a mother and newly minted vampire Bella suddenly sacrifices the humble, anti-materialist, law abiding behaviours that she once held as a human. She secretly proceeds to meet with a shady lawyer, a 'purveyor of illegal documents', with whom the Cullen family has apparently done business for years in order to facilitate their comfortable integration into human society.³⁵ After donning

³⁵ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, p. 666.

an 'oyster satin cocktail dress' and 'calf-length ivory trench coat' that would have made 'before' Bella cringe, Bella is flattered, rather than horrified, when the restaurant maître d' 'stuttered half-formed compliments as he backed unsteadily from the room' after showing her to the table.³⁶ She then proceeds to obtain forged documents in order to ensure her daughter's escape in the event that she and Edward are killed in an upcoming confrontation. The Cullen family had used this lawyer over many years in order to obtain various illegal documents, apparently intimidating him and supplying him with large amounts of money for the service. At the meeting, Bella reflects on the Cullens' 'bloated accounts that existed all over the world with the Cullens' various names on them, there was enough cash stashed all over the house to keep a small country afloat for a decade'.³⁷ She uncharacteristically dips into the stash of money for this purpose, grabbing an unspecified number of stacks clipped into five thousand dollar increments, giving the lawyer his asking amount, and promising him the same amount again as a bonus for completing the job. Notably, Bella does not consider the possibility that this money may have been amassed via unethical, or even illegal, means nor does she reflect upon the nature of the lawyer's future disreputable transactions that her payment might indirectly support. It is unlikely that Carlisle's small-town doctor's salary is fully responsible for this concentration of wealth, and the text implies that the family uses Alice's ability to see the future in order to make advantageous investments (though the illegality of such transactions is never mentioned). Further, the ethics of banking money in foreign accounts and under different, possibly fictitious, names does not appear to cross Bella's mind. In order to achieve her ends, Bella is suddenly willing to sacrifice any critical thinking regarding the ethics of using this

³⁶ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, p. 667.

³⁷ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, p. 647.

exorbitant wealth to facilitate her personal goals. After the Cullens' long and gradual struggle to bring Bella into their family-centred morality and their conspicuous displays of capital wealth and power, Bella finally becomes the model of the neoliberal citizen—an individual consumer who accepts unequal concentrations of wealth and power and whose 'moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for "self-care"—their ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions' rather than by following an ethical code that values equity, truth, or accountability (Brown p. 694). While the instance of the vampire's bite is the mythical moment of transformation for any human, it is in this moment, long after she is bitten, that Bella is completely transformed into a post-9/11 neoqueer vampire.

The idealized concentration of power pedalled by the *Twilight* saga is located in the sphere of the private citizen who behaves in the manner of the newly minted neoliberal/neoconservative normativity—both as market liberals and as performers of secularized Christian values. The vampires in this world, while inherently evil, have worked to assimilate into contemporary American society, and their idealized status is marked by their very normativity rather than by any notion of the vampire as social renegade or erotic sadist. While the United States was wrapped up in the paranoid threat of terrorist infiltration, Stephenie Meyer offered this vision of the perfected subject, a fantasy to replace the anxiety of post-9/11 trauma. As vigilant citizens, Americans were charged with the responsibility of locating and reporting terrorist infiltrations, creating a public belief that there was 'evil' hidden amongst us. The Cullens function as a fantasy of perfection, rather than evil, hidden within the American population. Further, *Twilight's* neoqueer vampires are not Lee Edelman's *sinthomosexuals* of *No Future* that, through their emphasis on pleasure rather than biological

reproduction, point out the fantasy of ideology by reminding society of the traumatic real.³⁸ While Edelman's queers function to expose the knotted underbelly of the sequined fabric of ideology, *Twilight's* sparkling vampires *are* the sequined fabric. The *Twilight* fantasy 'fixes' the world fragmented by trauma by bringing back the unburied dead of 9/11 as neoliberal/neoconservative superheroes bent on reestablishing the morals of the past while moving into a spectacularly consumerist future. While *Twilight* seems to challenge the kind of clear good/evil binary established in earlier vampire narratives, there is a distinct implication that the 'good' of this world is a neoqueer good—located in the paradoxical intersection of two worldviews. In a society in which post-9/11 paranoia implies that the person sitting next to you could be a terrorist, these narratives reflect the muddiness of our fragmented post-traumatic culture while offering a vision of reality in which trauma's intrusions are masked by a new kind of ideological reality. Contrary to the assumptions of those screaming fans camped outside of the theatre for the release of each film in the *Twilight* saga, this vampire fantasy (and the desire that it engenders) does not simply 'offer us a point of escape from our reality'.³⁹ Instead, neoqueerness—as the ultimate fantasy projected upon these vampire screens—functions as does any other ideology, offering us a newly imagined 'social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel'.⁴⁰ In other words, look at *Twilight's* neoqueer vampires and you will find a reflection of our post-9/11 global reality. Look behind these vampires and you will glimpse the unspeakable trauma that shapes them.

³⁸ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004).

³⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 45.

⁴⁰ Žižek, p. 45.

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