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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

ENGLISH

**The Comfort of Horror and the Ambiguities of Youth:
Contemporary Gothic Fiction and Young Readers**

by

Sumei Karen Anne Tan

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2017

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

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THE COMFORT OF HORROR AND THE AMBIGUITIES OF YOUTH:

Contemporary Gothic Fiction and Young Readers

Sumei Karen Anne Tan

Contemporary young readers have not just derived comfort from their consumption of gothic texts, they have offered generative responses that indicate huge diversity in both content and format in their interrogation of the gothic. These generative responses, ranging from persuasive writing containing complex argument structures; parodies and satiric play, among other responses, indicate young readers' confidence and comfort critiquing gothic texts. This is in contrast to well-documented adult fears and moral panic, past and present, about gothic texts' perceived negative influence on young readers, such as having difficulty differentiating fact from fiction, or being easily misled by gothic's compelling narratives. Borrowing research from sociology and psychology, in addition to literary theories, and data from neurological studies, this thesis offers a systematic investigation on young readers consuming gothic texts which are targeted at them, as opposed to the implied young reader of the gothic, or gothic texts targeted at adults. Using a historical case study of young adult readers, this study also demonstrates that the phenomenon of young readers avidly and comfortably interrogating the gothic, with no signs of being confused, is in fact, not new. Instead, having identified and defined two separate genres of gothic texts – romance gothic focusing on romance with the monster; and horror gothic which has explicit violence, and grotesque and disgusting elements – this investigation presents original data from fieldwork conducted at two local schools of 23 students (age eleven to thirteen) reading and discussing Darren Shan's horror gothic text,

Lord Loss. Data on reader reception for romance gothic is from young adult readers (age 25 and below), who have comfortably and confidently posted their responses online based on Stephenie Meyer's romance gothic *Twilight* series of books and films. Evidence indicates that contemporary young readers are carving out their own unique (albeit transient) conceptual space, in which they have derived great comfort and enjoyment in consuming gothic texts of romance gothic or horror gothic. By sharing their opinions online, and in discussion groups, these young readers are discovering their own voice in passionately embracing or gleefully vanquishing the monster in the comfort of consuming horror.

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Sumei Karen Anne Tan

declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

The Comfort of Horror and the Ambiguities of Youth: Contemporary Gothic Fiction and Young Readers

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signed:

Date: 30 June 2017

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my parents Albert and Helen Tan, husband Peter Brugger, sisters Su Lin and Su See, and best friends Fion, Chris and Kim, for their encouragement, motivation and support. It goes without saying that this study is only possible with the invaluable guidance and expert help given by my supervisors, Prof E.J. Clery and Assoc. Prof Shelley Cobb.

Ethical guidelines prevent me from naming the wonderful faith-based organisation and volunteers, as well as the fantastic head teachers, heads of English department and teachers, and the twenty three students from Malory School and Towers School who gleefully demonstrated their ability to handle monsters. Without them, my section on horror gothic would have been very different.

Introduction: Gothic Genres and the Critical Concepts of Reader Response

A recent plea published by the *British Medical Journal* group in 2011 urges female readers to ‘put down books [such as the] current *strand du jour* [of romances with vampires] – and pick up reality’, because failure to do otherwise have resulted in visits to ‘our consulting rooms’.¹ More than 200 years earlier, an accusation (inside the preface of a poem) made in 1798, advocates persecution against a writer because his published book, *The Monk*, is ‘an object of moral and national reprehension’ and therefore deserving of sanction.² At first glance, these two reactions appear to represent isolated cases of moral panic, separated by a span of more than two centuries. The fact that both books come under the category of the gothic genre may be a coincidence.

A closer analysis, however, reveals a slightly different story, which is a far more complex case involving three interrelated issues: first, adult perception (or misconceptions) of gothic texts, both past and present; secondly, the perception or misconception held by adults of implied (young) readers of these texts; and thirdly, the response, or lack of documented responses, from actual young readers of the gothic texts themselves. Historically, the number of criticisms and objections against the gothic – once nearly amounting to a legal challenge for blasphemy, and proposals for its censorship – has even led to a separate entry for the ‘Anti-Gothic’ in E.J. Clery and Robert Miles’ invaluable compilation of contextual material which include critical writings and reviews in *Gothic Documents: A Source Book 1700-1890*.³ Recent criticisms levelled against the

¹ Susan Quilliam, “‘He Seized Her in His Manly Arms and Bent His Lips to Hers...’. The Surprising Impact That Romantic Novels Have on Our Work’, *Journal of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care*, 37 (2011), 179-81. (p. 181). The British Medical Journal (BMJ) publishes the journal on behalf of the Faculty of Sexual Reproductive Healthcare of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

² Thomas Mathias, ‘Preface to the Fourth Dialogue’ in *The Pursuit of Literature: A Satirical Poem in Four Dialogues*, 12th edn, London: T. Becket, Dialogue IV, pp. 244-50 in E. J. Clery, and Robert Miles, eds., *Gothic Documents: A Source Book 1700-1890* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000). pp. 189-191. According to Clery and Miles, Mathias also cited ‘numerous comparable instances in which authors or publishers had been successfully prosecuted for obscene and blasphemous books’ in his attack of *The Monk*. (p. 189).

³ E. J. Clery, and Robert Miles, eds., *Gothic Documents: A Source Book 1700-1890* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000). For more types of historical criticisms levelled

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modern series of gothic books aimed at young adults by Stephenie Meyer, featuring a teenage vampire, have also been documented in various scholarly articles and popular reviews. Gothic texts, clearly, have not often received widespread adult approval.

This study begins by making one assumption: gothic's centrality in popular culture. Moreover, and possibly as a result of its widespread popularity with young consumers or readers, the gothic genre has been the subject of adult scrutiny. There are many studies on the gothic, which have ranged from the political, socio-economic and historical to the psychoanalytic, but few studies on young readers who have been the subject of so much adult scrutiny over the years. Therefore, this study seeks to add new insights to the field of gothic studies, by investigating both young readers who are themselves the texts' target audience, and their response to modern gothic texts. An investigation which is all the more crucial given Fred Botting's assertion of a shift observed in modern gothic texts, in which the new refrain has become 'love all monsters, love your monster as yourself' where previously, the monster was the 'horrifying sight of that which was most unbearable'.⁴ This shift, signalled by the depiction of 'the monster who is given a voice and an interiority' in modern gothic texts, or what Catherine Spooner calls the 'sympathetic monster', is in fact present in both series of texts which I will be analysing: the *Twilight series* by Stephenie Meyer and *Demonata* series by Darren Shan.⁵

Given this shift in the depiction of the monstrous in gothic texts, investigations into modern young reader response may indicate similar shifts as well. Although the study of reader response is no longer new, no such sustained study on modern young readers of the Gothic has been carried out so far, particularly on two types of gothic genres – romance gothic and horror gothic – which I have delineated here. Borrowing not just from research on reception, but from literary and sociological studies, I investigate specifically the relationship between young audiences and their attraction to modern gothic texts; and how elements within

against Gothic texts, see Chapter 4 - Anti-Gothic (pp. 173-219) for its wide range of contextual material.

⁴ Fred Botting, 'Preface: The Gothic', in *The Gothic*, ed. by Fred Botting (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), pp. 1-6. (p. 3).

⁵ Catherine Spooner, 'Gothic Charm School, or, How Vampires Learned to Sparkle', in *Open Graves, Open Minds: Representations of Vampires and the Undead from the Enlightenment to the Present Day* ed. by Samantha George and Bill Hughes (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 146-64. (p. 148).

these two types of gothic texts continue to fascinate, repel, and/or be a source of comfort for young readers.

Louise M Rosenblatt reminds us, almost forty years ago, of the importance of young readers and their responses to the text. She writes that '(u)nderstanding the transactional nature of reading would correct the tendency of adults to look only at the text and the author's presumed intention, and to ignore as irrelevant what the child [or in the case of this thesis, the young adult reader] actually does make of it'.⁶ Over the past four decades, studies and developments in reader response have gained increasing importance, with theorists such as Hans Robert Jauss, Stanley Fish, Steven Mailloux and Robert Holub, offering their different theoretical accounts of reader perception.⁷

However, new developments in studies on reader response do not necessarily mean that young readers are now free from adult criticism or censure in their choice of reading material. Labelling certain directions taken by studies on text and ideology as an 'interesting' development, Lee Galda and Richard Beach note that 'many, but not all, [such studies] privilege the importance of text features over the reader in the literary transaction. That is, they assume that their own individual constructions of text are definitive, and allow little room for alternative constructions'.⁸ Understandably and almost inevitably, this has led some theorists down the same path: to hold the perception and assumption that some types of readings are dangerous, and therefore, young readers, who have not gained maturity or mastery in their reading strategies, will be negatively influenced by them, particularly when some texts are perceived as problematic. Inevitably, Gothic texts with their improbable, incredible plots fall into this category of dangerous reading.

In order to understand reception by young readers of the gothic, in particular what may have inspired young readers to pick up gothic texts, devour them and even share their responses with strangers, this study, first takes as a point of departure, arguably the earliest recorded responses by young readers on the proto-gothic text, *Clarissa* by Samuel Richardson, which was published in several

⁶ Louise M Rosenblatt, 'The Literary Transaction: Evocation and Response', *Theory into practice*, 21 (1982), pp. 268-77. (p. 272).

⁷ For a particularly succinct review on developments in reception theory, see James L. Machor, and Philip Goldstein's Introduction in *Reception Study: From Literary Theory to Cultural Studies* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001). pp. ix -xvii.

⁸ Lee Galda, and Richard Beach, 'Response to Literature as a Cultural Activity', *Reading research quarterly*, 36 (2001), pp. 64-73. (p. 65).

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volumes beginning in 1747. *Clarissa*, unsurprisingly, was also perceived to be unsuitable reading material, as adults then similarly feared its influence on young susceptible readers. This brief foray, into the eighteenth-century responses of young readers of a proto-gothic text, has the benefit of offering both a more nuanced view, and useful historical perspectives on modern young readers of gothic texts. From this case study based on responses by two young readers of *Clarissa*, this thesis investigates two markedly different series of gothic books and their reception by modern young readers which are taken from the Internet and from conducting fieldwork. In short, this study goes beyond the implied reader to investigate actual modern readers and their responses to the gothic.

For this investigation, direct evidence of the contemporary reception of the gothic genre by young adult readers is of paramount importance. However, to obtain this type of evidence, a few issues were identified, which need further clarification, if not further exploration. The first is the problem of identifying the types of gothic texts within the genre. Preliminary research, which I will mention more later, has already established two main types of adult criticisms levelled against markedly different types of texts which still come under the label of the gothic. Naturally, this opens up the necessity of defining and then grouping certain texts into the two different gothic genres of romance gothic and horror gothic. By doing this, the next issue soon made its appearance: the challenge in obtaining the unfiltered, actual responses from modern young readers in these two different gothic genres.

Although previous studies have been done on gothic texts, all such studies have either been theorised on the implied young reader, or if conducted on young readers themselves, have not distinguished between gothic texts aimed at young readers and texts targeted at adults.⁹ This lack of differentiation between gothic texts aimed at adults, and texts aimed at young readers, I would assert, has contributed to the negative perception of gothic texts in general, which is not unexpected, as some young readers have reported negative experiences when consuming horror gothic texts targeted at adults.¹⁰ Hence, the crucial need for purposive fieldwork in obtaining reception data of gothic texts targeted at young

⁹ For example, a study on horror texts conflated realist 'problem' Young Adult (YA) texts with (supernatural) horror texts for adults. See Meredith Rogers Cherland with Carole Edelsky, 'Girls and Reading: The Desire for Agency and the Horror of Helplessness in Fictional Encounters', in *Texts of Desire: Essays of Fiction, Femininity and Schooling*, ed. by Linda K. Christian-Smith (London: The Falmer Press, 1993), pp. 28-44.

¹⁰ For more details on the negative effects experienced by the young readers, see 'Part Three: Horror Gothic and Young Adult Readers – Evidence from Reading Groups', pp. 131-133.

readers, rather than just basing my investigation on previous studies. Given all these issues, my framework for this thesis – of three equally important parts – has been structured to form my main argument about the comfort which different groups of young (adult) readers have derived, by reading or consuming two different types of gothic genres, and how, their interrogation of the gothic should allay adult fears or concerns about their reading choice. The three parts in brief are:

Part One – Romance Gothic and Critical Concepts of the Reader;

Part Two – Romance Gothic and Young Adult Readers: Evidence from the Internet; and

Part Three – Horror Gothic and Young Readers: Evidence from Reading Groups

Rationale for Framework

Reasons for this three-part structure must begin with adult attitudes towards gothic texts. Besides the extreme case of moral panic mentioned earlier, adult attitudes towards gothic texts (not specifically written for young readers), have at times, both in the past and present, been disapproving, dismissive or have even been tantamount to ridicule. Putting aside the rhetoric and the sometimes exaggerated dangers in the criticisms, there is no denying the genuine concerns held by adults about gothic texts' undue influence on young minds, along with the sincere belief that gothic's negative impact or influence may be far-reaching and long-lasting on young readers.

This is not to say that there has been no positive adult reception of gothic texts; there are documented instances of articles showing approval, albeit to differing degrees on gothic texts. What is of particular interest for this study regarding adult criticisms levelled at gothic works, however, is the consistency in the objections to two different types of gothic genres that I have identified - romance gothic and horror gothic texts - which indicate different concerns and fears regarding young readers' consumption of the gothic. As such, to conflate the different strands of gothic genres into one single all-inclusive category would not do justice to the wealth of responses offered by young readers on these different gothic genres while data offered by the two different groups of young readers can reveal delineated reasons for modern consumption of both romance gothic and horror gothic texts. In other words, failure to investigate further into these two

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gothic genres may only yield a partial explanation of young readers' response or reception towards different gothic texts.

This becomes evident when we look at books which I have categorised as romance gothic (which emphasise the romantic relationship between a supernatural being and a mortal), where I offer a full definition in Part One, as well as a critical analysis of why romance gothic may have such appeal for female readers. For this category of books under romance gothic such as LJ Smith's *Vampire Diaries* and Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series, adult concerns have focused on young female readers where such fears and concerns have revolved around young females who are perceived to be easily duped, and to confuse fantasy with reality.¹¹ Even then, the reader's age has not always been the criterion, only gender as mentioned in the recent article by the British Medical Journal group. Of course, the focus is on females if gender is the main criterion, due to the fact that females are the targeted audience of romance gothic texts, who are still viewed as naïve readers, easily swayed by the compelling narratives in them. In one current scholarly article, fears have even been written about these (implied) young female readers and their perceived inability to differentiate between romance and abuse in relationships.¹²

Historical analyses also show that female readers were generally viewed as excitable, which became particularly problematic as they were seen to behave in inappropriate ways due to the influence of some books. In *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation*, Jacqueline Pearson writes that female reading was seen as dangerous because it could 'transgress the limits of a private sphere [just because] good women must show "self-denial" and resist the "pure pleasure" of reading to "take up the ...needle"'.¹³ Even worse, 'criticism of women's reading became highly sexualised [with] sexual transgression being

¹¹ See Ananya Mukherjea, 'My Vampire Boyfriend: Postfeminism, "Perfect" Masculinity, and the Contemporary Appeal of Paranormal Romance', *Studies in Popular Culture*, 3 (Spring) (2011), 1-19. (p. 14; p. 16).

¹² See Renae Franiuk and Samantha Scherr in "'The Lion Fell in Love with the Lamb": Gender, Violence, and Vampires', *Feminist Media Studies*, 13 (2013), 14-28. I offer a more detailed discussion in 'Part One: Romance Gothic and Critical Concepts of the Reader' on the variety of criticisms levelled against romance gothic texts for young readers, including the original study cited by Franiuk and Scherr, which led to their claims about the dangers of (young) females reading romance gothic texts. In Franiuk and Scherr's case, they failed to mention that the study they had largely based their claims on was focussed on a highly specific, narrow group of adult female respondents: women in troubled relationships who have never undergone counselling or sought external help but have chosen to remain with their abusive partners; not a group of respondents or study, one would hope, to make general inferences about the influence of reading.

¹³ Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). p. 5.

repeatedly figured by unwise reading'.¹⁴ The examples of what women's 'injudicious reading' have directly or indirectly caused include a whole list of any 'crime, sin or personal catastrophe' with examples such as 'murder, suicide, rape and violent revolution, through prostitution, adultery and divorce, to pride, vanity, and slapdash housewifery'.¹⁵ Modern criticisms, unfortunately, seem not to have changed with regard to young (and not so young) female readers consuming romance gothic texts. Clearly, discussions on modern romance gothic texts require its own investigation (which I offer in Part One), before a thorough analysis can be done on actual young adult response on these romance gothic texts.

Aside from the issue of criticisms focusing on one gender as its targeted audience, books within the romance gothic genre are also different from those belonging to horror gothic. Romance gothic's avoidance of the twin elements of the grotesque and gruesome details are, however, elements which are dominant features of books I have categorised as horror gothic (I offer a full definition in the third part of this study). In addition, criticisms levelled against horror gothic texts have focused on the gratuitous depiction of violence, and gruesome details of carnage and body parts. In point of fact, unlike romance gothic books, modern horror gothic books for young adults deliberately avoid mentions of romance plots or sex.¹⁶ Instead, what seems to dominate horror gothic texts for young adult readers are depictions of situations or events which are dangerous, trigger feelings of disgust, and at the narrative's end, a final resolution against the monster.

These differences between romance gothic and horror gothic thus require a separate section for horror gothic texts because responses may be different, particularly when the horror gothic genre is targeted at a different group of young readers (who are predominantly young male readers). Hence, part three has been devoted to responses by young readers on texts categorised as horror

¹⁴ Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation*, p. 8.

¹⁵ Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation*, p. 8.

¹⁶ Darren Shan himself has been documented as finding this no-sex requirement in his horror gothic books as 'ridiculous' because 'We should be more concerned about violence than exposing teenagers to sex. Teenagers making out is perfectly natural, but killing each other... (sic.)' in 'The Conversation: Author Darren Shan on racism, sex and a zombie apocalypse', *Independent*, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/the-conversation-author-darren-shan-on-racism-sex-and-a-zombie-apocalypse-8839140.html?origin=internalSearch>>, 27 September 2013, [accessed 5 September 2016].

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gothic where I also offer reasons why these young readers may seek comfort in consuming them.

The Comfort of Horror and Historical Reception of the Gothic

For the purpose of this study, the term 'comfort' includes both the adjective and noun which offers a clearly positive emotion associated with 'gladness', 'delight' and 'satisfaction', in addition to the feeling of 'support and encouragement'.¹⁷ Based on these positive associations, I have theorised that young readers, when consuming works of gothic, be it horror gothic or romance gothic, derive some form of comfort from reading them, which may either be directly or indirectly evident based on their response. Thus in investigating their response, I am also, in part looking at behaviours triggered by their consumption of the gothic, either through verbal responses or in written forms. As such, I have included a variety of ways – both direct and indirect - where comfort is shown to have resulted from consuming gothic texts.

One indirect way of exhibiting 'comfort', is when respondents offer their extended argument to defend their position: this form of response is taken to indicate being in a 'comfortable' position, such that readers are volunteering their objections or opposition to certain views held by other readers or what is in the text itself. Obviously, these young readers must be interested enough in the issues depicted within the gothic texts to make the effort and offer their response in the first place. Similarly, another type of response taken to provide young readers some form of comfort, is when they offer or share their response, some creative and innovative, to back and support their particular position or opinion of a gothic text. In this case, by taking delight and exhibiting confidence in their

¹⁷ The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) offers ten slightly differentiated definitions of 'comfort' with the first definition as 'strengthening; encouragement; support'; the second, as refreshing or invigorating and the third as 'pleasure, enjoyment, delight, gladness'; fourth as relief or aid in want, pain, sickness, etc.; fifth as 'relief or support in mental distress or affliction; consolation, solace, soothing' though in later use, the OED writes that sometimes 'expressing little more than the production of mental satisfaction and restfulness', and 'subjectively', it also includes the 'feeling of consolation or mental relief'. The sixth definition is a 'state of physical and material well-being'; seventh is 'a thing that produces or ministers to enjoyment and content; eighth is not related here and is used, more precisely as a 'comforter' in the U.S. to refer to 'a wadded and quilted counterpane'; ninth is used as an interjection such as 'take cheer/ take comfort' and finally, the tenth is with regards to phrases such as 'to be of comfort/ to be of good cheer' or to take comfort/ to accept consolation. As mentioned, these definitions have slightly differentiated meanings of what we generally accept as 'comfort' or 'comforting' in our use of the term. *Oxford English Dictionary* in 'OED', in <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/36890?isAdvanced=true&result=3&rskey=gVGa7t&>>, n.d., [accessed 24 April 2017].

attitude or stance by sharing or voicing their views, this also indicates comfort. After all, if these young readers were not comfortable in the first place, then they would not have the confidence and the willingness or have made the effort to share their views. In other words, my definition of comfort is based around the young readers themselves, rather than from a theoretical or critical tradition.

Specifically, when young readers upload their responses online, in which they clearly state their opinions, and invite comments to their posts, this can be seen as young readers being both comfortable and confident in their ideas as well as being willing to participate or engage further in discussions. Such invitations and willingness to participate can be interpreted as young readers deriving some form of comfort, if not pleasure, in the activities of responding to and defending their position on the gothic texts. Similarly, when discussing a gothic text, comfort becomes evident when young readers pursue a particular topic or when they offer their own version of why something happens or ought to have taken place in the narrative. The comfort of consuming these texts becomes evident when young readers re-interpret or dismiss certain actions described in the texts, or when they confidently share how they would have solved the problem, as discussed in Part Three. All these responses indicate comfort, if not confidence, shown by young readers when consuming, processing and interrogating gothic texts, be it through online posts or in reading groups.

It is also useful to note that while my investigation is focussed on young readers and young adult readers vis-à-vis comfort, the ability to derive comfort from consuming gothic texts is not confined to young readers and young adult readers. Certainly, members of other reading communities may derive comfort from reading gothic texts. The only difference, I would speculate, is how these different groups take or seek comfort in their consumption of gothic texts, or what they are responding to in the text which offers some form of comfort for them.

These associated meanings and positions on what 'comfort' is or offers to readers of gothic, it must be emphasised, have not been investigated before, either on young readers or on adult readers, although another positive emotion, 'pleasure' has been raised with regards to the gothic. Undoubtedly, a gothic text which offers comfort to readers in general, can similarly offer pleasure. However, my focus is not on pleasure, particularly on the well-established study of terror as a source of pleasure which has been theorised, among others, as being in a particular physiological state. One can take comfort while in a pleasurable state

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from reading gothic texts, but the well-established studies on terror as a source of pleasure has been theorised as dependent on 'reflective distance from danger', 'instincts of self-preservation', and/ or the accompanying idea of 'grandeur'.¹⁸

In fact, since the early eighteenth century, terror as the source of pleasure has been 'inextricably linked with that of the sublime'.¹⁹ Another reason I am not pursuing this direction of the terror (pleasure) in the sublime (besides my expressed intention in looking at the consumption of the gothic rather than the philosophy of it) is in part my interest in investigating the grotesque and what causes disgust in horror gothic. The origins of disgust or what causes disgust, and the notion of the sublime or grandeur are simply incompatible to be looked at together, and Noël Carroll has a succinct explanation why these two should not be linked together in his book *The Philosophy of Horror: or Paradoxes of the Heart*. Citing both Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke, Carroll writes that '(a)s Kant suggests, disgust stands in the way of the sublime' because being disgusted by something means being 'genuinely pained by it – and so it does not correlate to the kind of distance Burke maintains the sublime requires'.²⁰ I mention the early investigation of the paradoxical pleasure of terror because these early studies show that combining seemingly contradictory concepts (other than disgust and the sublime, of course) with reference to the gothic is not new, which I acknowledge here. However, to iterate, the link between comfort and horror, or seeking comfort from gothic texts, which I am making here has not been fully explored before in particular vis-à-vis young (adult) readers.

Reception on early gothic texts is also not new and theorists, such as David H. Richter, have briefly written about the response by well-known young eighteenth century readers such as Matthew Lewis, then twenty-one, who 'excitedly read [Ann] Radcliffe's [*The Mysteries of*] *Udolpho* and produced *The Monk*, or how

¹⁸ E.J. Clery, 'The Pleasure of Terror: Paradox in Edmund Burke's Theory of the Sublime', in *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Roy Porter and Marie Mulvey Roberts (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996), pp. 164-82.

¹⁹ According to Clery, the idea of terror as a source of pleasure was 'bolstered by classical authority, in *Peri Hupsous*', attributed to the 3rd century AD philosopher, Longinus, and 'translated as *Le Traité du Sublime* by Boileau in 1674' where the term 'sublime' was 'quickly taken up in England'. Together with the works of John Dennis published in 1704, Joseph Addison's writing about 'agreeable Horrour' in 1712 and more notably, Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* which was published in 1757, these studies formed the basis of discussions about the sublime with terror as a source of pleasure. For more details, see E.J. Clery in 'The Pleasure of Terror: Paradox in Edmund Burke's Theory of the Sublime', in *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Roy Porter and Marie Mulvey Roberts (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996), pp. 164-82. (p. 166).

²⁰ For a more detailed account why disgust and the sublime do not go together, including brief discussions on Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke's writing, see Noël Carroll in *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990). pp. 240 – 241.

Radcliffe read *The Monk*, was horrified in both senses of the word, and retorted with *The Italian*'.²¹ Lewis' response to (the much older) Radcliffe's gothic text clearly inspired him to produce a literary response, *The Monk*, mentioned earlier. Although less extreme in her reaction towards a gothic text, another young reader Elizabeth Gurney, then eighteen, notes her reaction by finally deciding to finish reading it, in spite of her belief that reading may be a waste of time. This leads to the implication that the book was enjoyable enough for her to continue reading given that she uses words such as 'fascinating' and 'more apt to be impressed' to describe it,

'This evening I have been reading a good deal in the "*Monk*". I don't know whether it hurts the mind or not, it certainly shows the passions in a very fascinating light. I think we are more apt to be impressed with that part than the morality of it. I think it loss of time and ... I should not go on reading it, but yet as I have begun it I think it better to go on'.²²

Similarly, another young reader who could not put down *The Monk* is 16-year-old Claire Clairmont who finishes the book within a day, even noting the time she spent reading it which we can infer must have been either late or early enough for her to take notice as she writes, 'Thursday Sept. 22nd. [...] Sit up till one reading the Monk.' 'Friday Sept. 23rd. Finish the Monk [...].'²³ It is seventeen-year-old Christopher Thompson, however, who describes how a scene in *The Monk* so stirred his imagination, that he records his sensory experience after reading it,

'It was a usual practice for me to sit up to read after the family had retired for the night. I remember it was on one of these occasions that I read Lewis's "*Monk*". On rising from my seat to go to bed, I was so impressed with dongeon horror, that I took the candle and stole up stairs, not daring to look either right or left, lest some Lady Angela should plunge a dagger into me!'²⁴

²¹ David H. Richter, 'The Reception of the Gothic Novel in the 1790s', in *The Idea of the Novel in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Robert W. Uphaus (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press Inc., 1988). p. 121.

²² Elizabeth Fry, *Journal*, British Library, Add Mss 47456, ff. 22, in 'UK RED (Reading Experience Database)' in <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=22266>, n.d. [accessed 31 January 2013].

²³ Clairmont, Claire, Marion Kingston Stocking (ed.), *The Journals of Claire Clairmont*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1968), p. 45, in 'UK RED (Reading Experience Database)' in <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=15184>, n.d., [accessed 31 January 2013]. Clairmont, Mary Shelley stepsister, who was then 18, was with her sister and Shelley in Geneva during the 'ghost story challenge' at the Villa Diodati in the summer of 1816.

²⁴ Christopher Thomson, *Autobiography of an artisan*, (London, 1847), p. 67, in 'UK RED (Reading Experience Database)' in <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/record_details.php?id=8170>, n.d., [accessed 31 January 2013].

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While Thompson may have got the name 'Lady Angela' wrong, he did get the dagger scene correct: Ambrosio, instigated by Matilda, plunges the dagger into Antonia so as to stop her screaming for help. These young reader responses of the eighteenth century to *The Monk* clearly show enjoyment, if not thrill and curiosity in reading Lewis' book. However, these responses are clearly not sufficient in length (except if the book, *The Monk* were to be taken as one such response) to comment on the nature and type of response these young readers have towards gothic texts. Therefore, for more insights into historical responses by young readers, we need to turn to Samuel Richardson's proto-gothic text *Clarissa* and its attendant responses by two young readers – Hester Mulso née Chapone and Helen Grainger - precisely because Richardson himself actively encouraged readers to comment and offer him feedback on his book by writing to him, which in turn has produced many pages of letters from Mulso and Grainger, that Richardson was only too happy to reply.²⁵

To iterate, by looking briefly at the case study of these young readers of *Clarissa*, insights from their response can offer us historical perspective for my primary focus which is on twenty-first century reader response towards the gothic. This is crucial because I am arguing for a re-evaluation of modern young readers based on their response towards the gothic; or at least an implied modern young reader who is not perceived as gullible and easily misled by what he or she reads. Thus to have historical insights which show young adult readers in the past who have actively interrogated Gothic texts, either by discussing or debating them, in their own terms, may not only suggest a re-consideration of young readers and implied young readers, but may also highlight the point that young (adult) readers who are not shy to share their opinions and thus are not easily misled, have always been around: just out of the sight and mind of some adults.

The Young Readers of *Clarissa* (1747): A Case Study

The ambiguity and open-endedness in Samuel Richardson's novel, *Clarissa*, offer invaluable source material to look at, vis-à-vis young readers who have appropriated the characters and seemingly given them a life of their own, as young readers, who had much to say, offered their own lengthy responses to Richardson's proto-gothic text. Compelling and complex, *Clarissa* was an immediate sensation upon its publication, with Richardson admitting at the

²⁵ See T. C. Duncan Eaves, and Ben D. Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

'outset that it is possible for people of "Judgement" to have different reactions to this work'.²⁶ Arguably, one of the longest novels in English literature, the first two volumes of *Clarissa* was published in December 1747 while the third to seventh volumes were published in the following year.²⁷ Written in epistolary style, and containing 537 letters in the then new form of the novel, *Clarissa* has, in the character of Robert Lovelace, one of the most 'sophisticated and compelling seducers in English literature'.²⁸

Embodying both heroic and monstrous characteristics, the male protagonist Robert Lovelace, is the prototypical gothic monster, who helps the young and virtuous Clarissa Harlowe to run away from an unwanted marriage to the wealthy Roger Solmes. Witty and debonair, Lovelace's charms are alluring, both to Clarissa and to the many (female) readers of the novel, even as he proves to be untrustworthy as a protector. By the seventh volume, in the first edition (or the eighth volume in the third edition, which was then extensively revised by Richardson) both Lovelace and Clarissa have been 'killed off' by Richardson; Lovelace's death is because of a duel while Clarissa's death is due to her illness which was brought on by intense suffering: among which must be her anguish at being cursed by her father, drugged and then raped by Lovelace, continually manipulated by Lovelace, and then increasingly isolated from friends and the few family members then in contact, through the unscrupulous Lovelace's machinations.

Unsurprisingly, *Clarissa* has been linked to or associated with the gothic genre. David Richter writes that *Clarissa* contributed as 'emotional sources for the Gothic' because of its 'imaginative play and escape' which called for 'an emphatic participation by the reader in the perils and plight of the protagonists'.²⁹ Even earlier, this link to the gothic was already noted: writing almost fifty years ago, Robert D. Hume asserts that, '(t)rue Gothic novels pick up and advance the sort

²⁶ Florian Stuber, and Margaret Anne Doody, 'The Clarissa Project and Clarissa's Reception', *Text*, 12 (1999), 123-41. (p. 123).

²⁷ According to Angus Ross, in 1749, the second edition of *Clarissa* was published with revisions in volumes one to four while in 1751, the third edition of *Clarissa* was published, this time in eight volumes together with additions in response to criticisms. For more details, see Angus Ross, 'Introduction', in *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady*, ed. by Angus Ross (London: Penguin Books, Ltd, 1985, 2004). pp. 12 - 13.

²⁸ Nicholas Hudson, 'Arts of Seduction and the Rhetoric of Clarissa', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 51 (1990), 25-43. (p. 25).

²⁹ Richter, David H., 'The Reception of the Gothic Novel in the 1790s', in *The Idea of the Novel in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Robert W. Uphaus (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press Inc., 1988). pp. 126-127.

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of psychologizing which Richardson began in *Clarissa*, and that it is 'the involvement of the reader's imagination' which 'is central to the Gothic endeavour'.³⁰ It is not hard to see why Hume made both this assertion and link to the gothic: 'contemporary evidence suggests that Richardson's early readers involved themselves in the mental, emotional, and psychological world of his complex characters and could not help but be "absorbed" by his fiction'.³¹ In fact, by 1746, feedback from early drafts of *Clarissa* which Richardson had circulated among his friends was coming in with Richardson extensively revising *Clarissa*, 'perplexed by conflicting advice'.³² In a letter to his friend Aaron Hill dated 1746, which seems to foreshadow his dislike of readers' empathy and liking for Lovelace, Richardson even writes,

'Lovelace's Character I *intend* to be unamiable, as I hinted: I once read to a young Lady Part of his Character, and then his End; and upon her pitying him, and wishing he had been rather made a Penitent, than to be killed, I made him still more and more odious, by his heighten'd Arogance and Triumph, as well as by vile Actions, leaving only some Qualities in him, laudable enough to justify her first Liking'.³³

Making *Clarissa*'s link or association with the gothic genre more definitive, Margot Gayle Backus even devotes an entire chapter on *Clarissa* in her book, *The Gothic Family Romance: Heterosexuality, Child Sacrifice, and the Anglo-Irish Colonial Order*, because of its 'primal scene that makes scandalously visible the uses to which children's, particularly daughters' sexuality was put as families constricted in response to a dramatically shifting economic and social order'.³⁴ Backus even compares *Clarissa*'s circumstances to that of 'an accused witch of the previous century' because she is 'cast out, incarcerated, interrogated,

³⁰ Robert D. Hume, 'Gothic Versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel', *PMLA*, 84 (1969), 282-90. (pp. 283-284).

³¹ Darryl P. Domingo, 'Lois E. Bueler (Ed.). *Clarissa: The Eighteenth-Century Response, 1747-1804*', *The Review of English Studies*, 63 (2012), 859-62. (p. 859).

³² Angus Ross, 'Introduction', in *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady*, ed. by Angus Ross (London: Penguin Books, Ltd, 1985, 2004). p. 12.

³³ John Carroll, in *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. by John Carroll (London: Oxford University Press, 1964). p. 75. By the third edition of *Clarissa* in 1751, Richardson includes an additional letter (L. 208) in which Lovelace, writing to his friend Belford, imagines a rape taking place in the Isle of Wight, of Mrs Howe, her daughter, Anna and their maid. NB: The Penguin edition, is from the first edition of *Clarissa* which does not include the many alterations and revisions (such as Letter 208) that Richardson has made, which Angus Ross, in his introduction to the Penguin edition, refers to these revisions as Richardson's 'increasingly crude, didacticism.' (p. 25).

³⁴ In making her case of why *Clarissa* belongs to the Gothic genre, Margot Gayle Backus cites Ian Watt, Terry Eagleton, Terry Castle and of course, David Richter's analysis of the reception of the gothic and an article by Leila May with the latter situating the novel *Clarissa* within a distinctive strand of gothic literature which includes *Frankenstein*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Mill on the Floss*, and "The Fall of the House of Usher". See Margot Gayle Backus in 'Chapter 2: "Does she not deserve to pay for all this?" in *The Gothic Family Romance: Heterosexuality, Child Sacrifice, and the Anglo-Irish Colonial Order* (Duke University Press, 1999). p. 50; p. 52.

stripped, sexually tortured, and eventually destroyed by the “diabolical” treatment she receives at the end of the novel’s proto-Byronic villain’.³⁵

Given its complex story and compelling gothic villain, *Clarissa* was not, unsurprisingly, without its share of criticism. Fears for young readers being susceptible to persuasive writing in this new form of the novel were on the rise, with the most well-known being Samuel Johnson’s *Rambler*, ‘No 4 the New Realistic Novel’. A good friend of Richardson himself, Johnson, most likely had Robert Lovelace in mind, when he writes in the *Rambler* about the dangers of attractive characters which ‘mingle good and bad qualities’ so that when young readers ‘accompany them through their adventures with delight’, the faults no longer repel.³⁶ Even worse, Johnson writes, by this mingling of qualities in these characters, young readers may ‘regard them with some kindness for being united with so much merit’. Clearly having morality and didacticism in mind, Johnson even claims that mixed characters are the ‘great corrupters of the world’ and their ‘resemblance ought no more to be preserved than the art of murdering without pain’. Asserting firmly that ‘Vice, should always disgust’, Johnson even urges that if vice does appear in these texts, it ‘should raise hatred by the malignity of its practices, and contempt by the meanness of its stratagems’.³⁷ Clearly, adult fears and concerns about young readers being misled and corrupted by what they read, were present very early on, as they seem to be now.

However, documented evidence from responses by young readers - Frances Grainger and Hester Mulso - suggest otherwise. Both were encouraged to ask questions and respond to parts of *Clarissa* by Richardson himself. Frances Grainger, who was at that time twenty three, indicated her interest in personal qualities exhibited by the heroine by writing to Richardson in 1749, that ‘for a young Lady to become a Clarissa the foundations of Goodness must be laid early’. Richardson’s reply, although clarifying Clarissa’s sterling qualities - ‘They

³⁵ It is not surprising that Backus labels Robert Lovelace a ‘proto-Byronic villain’: besides the more common literary trope of the Romantic anti-hero, Byron’s “Fragment” was the inspiration besides Byron himself for John Polidori’s *The Vampyre*, which together, are considered the first vampire stories. Source: James B. Twitchell in his book *The Living Dead: A Study of the Vampire in Romantic Literature* (Duke University Press, 1981). p. 6. (For the purpose of my research, I prefer the broader term ‘gothic monster’ as it easily allows for categorisation without further associations with other aesthetic movements or established fields of studies).

³⁶ Samuel Johnson, ‘The Rambler, No 4 ‘the New Realistic Novel’ (1750)’, in *Samuel Johnson: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. by Donald Greene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 175-79. (pp. 177).

³⁷ Samuel Johnson, ‘The Rambler, No 4 ‘the New Realistic Novel’ (1750)’, in *Samuel Johnson: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. by Donald Greene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 175-79. (pp. 178-179).

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were laid early with her' - makes the admission that possession of such qualities would indeed 'be very difficult for a young Lady, not so early begun with, and who has been accustomed to have her Will, to arrive at the Perfections of a Clarissa'.³⁸ Besides discussing such personal qualities, Grainger was also writing to Richardson about family and social matters, particularly on the issue of marriage, and family expectations. Richardson's reply in his letter is measured on 'the Subject of Parental Authority, the Principal Subject of Debate between us': he does not discount the duties to the family though he stresses both the obligation and duties of child and parent with his reminder that,

'Be pleased, Madam, always to remember this Great Rule, inculcated thro'out the History of Clarissa, That in all reciprocal Duties the Non-Performance of the Duty on one Part is not an excuse for the Failure of the Other'.³⁹

Slightly younger at twenty, Hester Mulso's response to *Clarissa*, particularly in her three letters to Richardson on parental authority, has been documented as over a hundred pages, with Mulso arguing 'strenuously against the authority of parents'.⁴⁰ In fact, Mulso's response has been to deliberately present herself as a dutiful, virtuous, living Clarissa in need of Richardson's correction and improvement, willing to accept instruction from her correspondent while still suggesting that women should have the right to refuse an unwanted marriage.⁴¹ According to Tom Keymer, when Richardson had 'evidently cited [Bishop] Hall's *Resolutions and Decisions* (1649), which deals with cases of both compulsion and prohibition' in which the child ought to obey the parent 'in all things', Mulso objected, to the good bishop's authority, who she writes,

'would reduce me to the condition of an Indian skreen, and allow my father to item me amongst his goods and chattels, and put me up to sale for the highest bidder'.⁴²

Mulso would also later write to Richardson, asking, 'Must [children] then pay the same obedience to cruel tyrants as they would to kind and indulgent parents?'⁴³ In

³⁸ *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. by John Carroll (London: Oxford University Press, 1964). p. 20.

³⁹ *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. by John Carroll (London: Oxford University Press, 1964). p. 144.

⁴⁰ T. C. Duncan Eaves, and Ben D. Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). p. 345.

⁴¹ For more on the strategy adopted by Hester Mulso in her correspondence with Richardson, see Laura Thomason in 'Hester Chapone as a Living Clarissa in *Letters on Filial Obedience and a Matrimonial Creed*', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 21 No. 3 (Spring 2009), 323-43.

⁴² 3 January 1750/1 *Posthumous Works of Mrs Chapone*, 11, 91. Quoted by Tom Keymer, *Richardson's 'Clarissa' and the Eighteenth-Century Reader*. Vol. 13 (Cambridge University Press, 2004). .p. 121.

fact, Richardson's correspondence with Hester Mulso on *Clarissa* may have influenced Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753, Richardson having circulated his debate with Mulso among his wide circle of friends.⁴⁴ Mulso's own brother, John is reported to have told Gilbert White that 'eminent men like the Bishop of London and the Speaker of the House of Commons, having been shown this debate, judged Richardson to have been "hard pressed" by his young antagonist'.⁴⁵ Among Richardson's circle, some of whom were influential men of their time, Mulso's style and close reasoning were much admired'.⁴⁶ In another instance, Mulso also objects to the impact of the father's curse in *Clarissa*: in her view, this can only be due to Clarissa giving in to superstition,

'Why is Clarissa, who is drawn as a woman of so good an understanding, and who reasons so justly on all other subjects, to be so superstitious and weak in her apprehension of parental authority?'⁴⁷

According to Peter Hynes, Richardson was much persuaded by Mulso's arguments which led him to 'carefully revise a number of references to the curse in the third edition of his novel'.⁴⁸ Clearly, Mulso and Grainger, although young, were not passive readers, merely accepting ideas presented in *Clarissa*, the proto-gothic text. As their writings show, they were equally keen to clarify their own opinions, sometimes to the point of challenging Richardson's views, albeit very politely.

Reception material to *Clarissa* by these two young readers, offers a different picture of young readers in the past. They clearly showed great delight, if not

⁴³ Tom Keymer, *Richardson's 'Clarissa' and the Eighteenth-Century Reader*. Vol. 13 (Cambridge University Press, 2004). . p. 121.

⁴⁴ Certainly, not what Mulso would have wished: E.J. Clery notes that Richardson, in his letter to Elizabeth Carter, joked that 'the force of Mulso's arguments against parental authority must have provoked this legislative backlash' which clamped down on runaway marriages in E. J. Clery, *The Feminization Debate in Eighteenth-Century England: Literature, Commerce and Luxury*. ed. by Anne K. Mellor and Clifford Siskin, *Palgrave Studies in the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Cultures of Print* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) p. 210n86.

⁴⁵ Susan Brown, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy, eds. **HESTER MULSO CHAPONE** entry: Writing screen within *Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Online, 2006., in <<http://orlando.cambridge.org/>>. [accessed 6 May 2017].

⁴⁶ E. J. Clery, *The Feminization Debate in Eighteenth-Century England: Literature, Commerce and Luxury*. ed. by Anne K. Mellor and Clifford Siskin, *Palgrave Studies in the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Cultures of Print* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). p. 153.

⁴⁷ Shirley Van Marter, 'Richardson's Debt to Hester Mulso Concerning the Curse in "Clarissa"', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 14 (1978), 22-31. (p. 23).

⁴⁸ Peter Hynes, 'Curses, Oaths, and Narrative in Richardson's *Clarissa*', *ELH*, 56 (1989), 311-26. (p. 319).

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evident comfort, in responding to the text. In demonstrating their willingness to engage in debate, they also showed confidence in their own interpretation and close reading of *Clarissa*. Certainly, both these young readers break the mould of the more commonly perceived implied young (female) reader, who upon reading a problematic text, may be easily influenced to behave inappropriately.

This brief historical case study offers useful insight into how young adult readers have interrogated a gothic text, and how they have comfortably and confidently responded and offered their own youthful opinions on it. By investigating what and how contemporary young readers are actually responding to when consuming gothic texts, this thesis shows that contemporary young readers also do not fit assumptions about impressionable and easily misled young people.

Thesis Outline

This thesis is in three parts where **Part One: Romance Gothic and Critical Concepts of Reader Response** sets the foundation for investigation into the romance gothic genre by offering critical analyses on contemporary romance gothic, and the key factors which have made this particular gothic genre appealing to young readers. The romance gothic texts which form the focus for this investigation are the novels of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series, comprising four books which have been adapted into five films. This section focuses on the implied reader of romance gothic and the variety of critical studies and concepts which have been applied to this romance gothic text which, I will argue in this section, is a hybrid of romance and horror genres. This section also documents some of the most sustained criticisms from academics, not just attacks by professional reviewers in the mass media.

Part Two: Romance Gothic and Young Adult Readers – Evidence from the Internet goes straight to the target audience of romance gothic. This section offers direct evidence based on responses by young readers who have been inspired and motivated to share their response to the *Twilight* series with a particular online community or with the internet at large. Offering a systematic analysis on what young adult readers have posted, this section also documents the variety of responses by young adults who have consumed the *Twilight* texts, taken comfort in declaring or defending their opinions, often as a form of performance, and have also made use of the texts as a springboard to publicly share or declare their stand on this romance gothic series of texts.

Part Three: Horror Gothic and Young Adult readers – Evidence from Reading Groups completes the study on the gothic by offering evidence from fieldwork conducted on young readers responding to the first book in a horror gothic series of ten books called the *Demonata* series by Darren Shan. The twenty three students who read the first book *Lord Loss*, are from two local secondary schools in the south of England. The adoption of purposive fieldwork through two discussion and reading groups was needed because suitable online reception material is not available for in-depth analysis into horror gothic. More details on the challenges in obtaining modern horror gothic reception is given in this section. Part Three, in generating and offering new evidence on young reception, also shows that what seems both dangerous and disgusting in the grotesque and violence inherent in horror gothic, may offer some form of comfort when monsters get vanquished at the end.

In short, this study is aimed at providing systematic data on modern young reception, in which young readers have responded, argued and interrogated two broad types of gothic texts: romance gothic and horror gothic. Through this three-part framework, this study hopes to demonstrate that gothic texts – particularly romance gothic and horror gothic texts – can indeed offer invaluable, comforting platforms for young readers to find their own voice, defend their ideas and even generate a variety of creative responses based on their consumption of the gothic.

Part One: Romance Gothic and Critical Concepts of Reader Response

Rarely has a gothic text or series been as successfully targeted at young female readers as the phenomenally successful *Twilight* series by Stephenie Meyer which was published in the new millennium. The first book in the series, *Twilight* was published in 2005, followed by *New Moon* (2006), then *Eclipse* (2007) and finally, *Breaking Dawn* in 2008. In the UK, the four books were in the list of the top five best-selling books for young adults from 2005 to 2010.¹ By June in 2011, the same books were on their 300th week on the New York bestseller lists.²

A quick glance at the available critiques and analyses on *Twilight* show an underlying fear or apprehension of the texts' negative influence on young readers. While not quite resembling the moral panic anticipated in Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796) when no less a personage than Coleridge declares it 'to be our opinion [that] if a parent saw [this novel] in the hands of a son or daughter, he might reasonably turn pale', *Twilight* has nonetheless raised concerns in some quarters about its effects on young readers given its huge cultural impact.³ There is also no denying its largely favourable reception by young, predominantly female audiences.⁴ This is in contrast to adult doubts and negative views.

According to Lisa Bode in her analyses of critical reception of *Twilight*, the negative reviews were largely North American with film critic blogs writing 'the

¹Data is calculated from point of sales, courtesy of Nielsen Bookscan (UK) which collected the data from 2005 to 2010 for the top UK best-selling books under the category for young adults. As of 31 Oct 2013, *Eclipse* (2008), the top selling book had sold 1.381 million in the UK followed by *New Moon* (2007) at 1.376 million and *Twilight* (2006) at 1.263 million followed by *Breaking Dawn* (2008) at 1.016 million and to round up the fifth place, the second edition of *Twilight* (2008) at 405, 000. The Harvard Library website writes that 'the only database with reasonably accurate information is Nielsen BookScan, which reports point-of-sale data, but even that claims to represent only 75% of all retail sales' <<http://asklib.hcl.harvard.edu/a.php?qid=50305>>, 30 January 2013, [accessed 29 August 2014].

² Maggie Parke, and Natalie Wilson, eds. in *Theorizing Twilight: Critical Essays on What's at Stake in a Post-Vampire World* (North Carolina: McFarland, 2011).

³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his review of *The Monk*, published in *Critical Review* (1797) in in E. J. Clery, and Robert Miles, eds. in *Gothic Documents: A Source Book 1700-1890* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000). p. 188.

⁴ Lisa Bode, 'Transitional Tastes: Teen girls and genre in the critical reception of *Twilight*' *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 24 (2010) pp. 707-719.

Part One: Critical Concepts of Reader Response

most condescendingly of the teen girl audience'.⁵ Positive reviews, which were in the minority, needed references to legitimate culture; however, Bode asserts, the references were made, not so much to 'elevate' *Twilight* but more as a 'talisman against a teen girl pop contamination' and the threat posed by the teens' 'pursuit of the facile and banal'.⁶ Established authors in the horror genre such as Stephen King and Anne Rice have also been reported as being less than impressed with the texts of *Twilight*.⁷ Stephen King, in fact, describes them as 'tweenager porn', both in his interviews and in his book, *Doctor Sleep*, which was published in 2013.⁸ In a similar vein, Rice writes that

'Lestat and Louie feel sorry for vampires that sparkle in the sun. They would never hurt immortals who choose to spend eternity going to high school over and over again in a small town ---- anymore than they would hurt the physically disabled or the mentally challenged. My vampires possess gravitas. They can afford to be merciful'.⁹

Various studies have looked at *Twilight* texts and fans, and the romantic messages derived from consumption of the films and book, fan fiction and their own 'revision' of the *Twilight* texts, and even at anti-fans and their positioning as superior to fans of *Twilight*. However, studies focussing only on young audiences and readers especially on what exactly they are responding to in *Twilight*, are too few in number given various concerns about the texts' impact on them. One example is Sara K. Day's analysis on adolescent *Twilight* fanfiction where her

⁵ Lisa Bode, 'Transitional Tastes: Teen girls and genre in the critical reception of *Twilight*' *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 24 (2010) pp. 707-719. (p. 709).

⁶ Lisa Bode, 'Transitional Tastes: Teen girls and genre in the critical reception of *Twilight*', p. 716.

⁷ It must be noted that while King has been widely acknowledged as a prolific and well-known writer of horror, his works are usually not considered to be part of the literary canon. King's criticism of Meyer has been recorded as early as February 2009 in an interview with *USA Weekend*, where he says that 'Stephenie Meyer can't write worth a darn (sic). She's not very good' in 'Stephen King says "Twilight" author "can't write" in "Today.com"', <<http://www.today.com/allday/topic/about-today>>, 3 February 2009, [accessed 29 August 2014].

⁸ In *Doctor Sleep*, which is a sequel to Stephen King's *The Shinning* (1977), there are two references made of the *Twilight* series. First, when the teen female protagonist Abra realises that a young boy has been killed, she asks if he had been killed by vampires 'like in *Twilight*?' only for the reply 'Not like them' (p. 219) and later, when, Abra, reviews her own situation and then realises that it is 'sort of like being in one of those love-and-horror supernatural novels, the kind Mrs. Robinson in the school library sniffily called "tweenager porn"'. In those books the girls dallied with werewolves, vampires – even zombies- but hardly ever *became* (sic.) those things' (p.236). These references are slightly ironic as King's in-text criticisms seem to elevate and indirectly acknowledge *Twilight* as a bona fide cultural phenomenon, given the implied assumption that his (presumably adult) general readers will understand the cultural reference. See Stephen King, *Doctor Sleep*. Paperback edn (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2014 and *Guardian*, 21 September 2013 in 'Stephen King slams *Twilight* franchise as "tweenage porn"').

⁹ Anne Rice wrote in her Facebook post on 28 October 2011 which was also reported in *The Guardian* (31 October 2011) and *The Daily Beast* (23 November 2011), among other media outlets.

focus is limited to fanfiction from the abstinence/ sexuality angle.¹⁰ Another is Ananya Mukherjea's scholarly essay, 'Team Bella: Fans navigating Desire, Security and Feminism', which does not differentiate responses from young and adult readers, but has conflated responses from self-described fans whose ages range from 18 to 41 years old.¹¹

There has been no previous study which has combined attention to Meyer's hybrid genre conventions of both the romance and gothic genres along with responses from young readers or respondents. For example, Lydia Kokkola's study on *Twilight* looks at both the romance genre and texts on teen romances but makes no mention of gothic's undeniable influence or the significance of a vampire hero in Meyer's series, nor on how young readers have responded to the series.¹² Similarly, Lori Branch's insightful analysis of gothic's impact on *Twilight* locates it as a post-secular gothic phenomenon, but her theoretical study does not consider the influence of the romance genre on *Twilight*.¹³ Many studies have, in fact, focused solely on analyses of the *Twilight* texts with theoretical implications on the implied teenage or young reader.

To narrow the gap between the implied and actual young audience, I offer first in this section - Part One - a textual analysis of the four *Twilight* texts which I will refer to as 'romance gothic', along with an analysis of critical concepts of the implied young reader from the various studies on *Twilight* and/ or the romance genre. For the purpose of this study, texts which I will refer to as romance gothic texts are texts which have the following features: a narrative that focuses on the romance between a supernatural being and a mortal, where the former is often male and the latter female, which includes plot devices that attempt to prevent both from being together, but the protagonists prevail and overcome most, if not all barriers, and in the process, create their own version of happily-ever-after.

This definition of romance gothic indicates a blend of both gothic and romance, and therefore, I also trace Meyer's use of the gothic especially the vampire trope

¹⁰ Sara K. Day, 'Pure Passion: The Twilight Saga," Abstinence Porn," and Adolescent Women's Fan Fiction', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 39, (2014), pp. 28-48 (p. 4).

¹¹ Ananya Mukherjea, 'Team Bella: Fans Navigating Desire, Security, and Feminism', in *Theorizing Twilight: Critical Essays on What's at Stake in a Post-Vampire World*, Jefferson, Nc & London: McFarland & Company, ed. by Maggie Parke and Natalie Wilson (North Carolina: McFarland, 2011), pp. 70-85.

¹² Lydia Kokkola, 'Virtuous Vampires and Voluptuous Vamps: Romance Conventions Reconsidered in Stephenie Meyer's "Twilight" Series', *Children's Literature in Education*, 42 (2011), 165-79.

¹³ Lori Branch, 'Carlisle's Cross: Locating the Post-Secular Gothic', *The Twilight Mystique: Critical Essays on the Novels and Films* (2010), pp. 60-79.

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and then investigate what she has appropriated from the romance genre into her blend of romance gothic.¹⁴ I will argue that Meyer's *Twilight* texts with their blend of both the gothic and romance have not just magnified aspects of both the gothic and romance but that such blending has widened the scope and breadth for teen response, encouraging debate and discussions. As such, in the next section - Part Two - the focus is on actual young readers and audiences, and specifically, how they have responded to the *Twilight* series which has been specially targeted or marketed at them.

The Gothic/ Romance Hybrid

Twilight's appeal has hardly been exhausted in research, especially on the question of genre. In this section, I look not just at key romance tropes but also at the use of both adult and teen romance conventions, in combination with gothic tropes, which have created a hybrid with particular appeal for young readers, even as critical opinion has been largely divided on Meyer's *Twilight*.

Some academics, such as Rebecca Housel have written about the dangers of *Twilight* misleading young, susceptible female fans into believing the narrative as 'something attainable, something real'.¹⁵ Or, as Angela Tenga asserts, because 'fiction can have a powerful influence on readers', 'the hyperreal existence' of Bella in *Twilight* 'sends a dubious message about the complex relationship of fiction and reality' and thus its (negative) impact 'on a young mind can be substantial'.¹⁶ Tenga's surprisingly cautionary conclusion that young female readers can be easily misled by *Twilight* is particularly reminiscent of Q.D. Leavis' oft-quoted argument that reading popular fiction will give rise to 'a habit of fantasizing (which) will lead to maladjustment in actual life'.¹⁷

¹⁴ In point of fact, the *Twilight* series was to include the fifth book, *Midnight Sun* but since a draft found its way online, Meyer abandoned the project, writing in 2008 that 'I feel too sad about what has happened to continue working on *Midnight Sun*, and so it is on hold indefinitely'. She also uploaded the draft for public consumption on her official website at <http://stepheniemeyer.com/midnightsun.html>. By mid 2017 however, Meyer's 're-jigged' website states that she is 'going to try to have [*Midnight Sun*] published as a complementary novel to *Twilight*'. One of the reasons Meyer cites is that 'when a story demands to be written, there's no way to resist' in 'Midnight Sun: Edward's Version of Twilight', in 'stepheniemeyer.com', <<https://stepheniemeyer.com/project/midnight-sun/>>, n.d., [accessed 20 August 2017].

¹⁵ Rebecca Housel, 'The "Real" Danger: Fact Vs. Fiction for the Girl Audience', in *Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians, and the Pursuit of Immortality* ed. by Rebecca Housel and J Jeremy Wisniewski (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), pp. 177-92. (pp. 186-7).

¹⁶ Angela Tenga, 'Read Only as Directed: Psychology, Intertextuality, and Feminism', in *Theorizing Twilight: Critical Essays on What's at Stake in a Post-Vampire World*, ed. by Maggie Parke and Natalie Wilson (North Carolina: McFarland, 2011), pp. 102-16. (p. 111; p.113).

¹⁷ The examples Leavis offers of the types of popular fiction from the romance genre are *The Way of the Eagle*, *The Sheik* and *The Blue Lagoon* in *Fiction and The Reading Public* (1965). p. 54.

Tenga and Housel are not the only ones to hold such views of the implied susceptible young female reader. Renae Franiuk and Samantha Scherr would agree with Tenga: they have, in fact, written that certain populations are more vulnerable to *Twilight*'s problematic messages such as 'adolescents who are the target audience of *Twilight*' and so are 'particularly susceptible to pressure to fulfil gender normative roles' while 'older audiences might be better equipped to reject these portrayals'.¹⁸ Besides concerns about young female readers' inability to differentiate between what is fictional and what is real, other academics have also viewed the depiction of masculinity in *Twilight* as problematic. Joyce Anne Mercer criticises Meyer's depiction of men in *Twilight* and calls them 'problematic constructions of masculinity' because such constructions privilege control and power in men while subjecting females to becoming the 'object[s] of ownership or the exercise of authority'.¹⁹ Although Mercer writes that some 'girls make multiple uses of [the *Twilight*] books' where young readers have 'read them critically', she remains unconvinced of *Twilight*'s worth as leisure reading, asserting that '*Twilight* is not *Jane Eyre*; it is not even *The Narnia Chronicles*. That is, Meyer's books are not especially good literature'.²⁰

Unsurprisingly, other academics such as Ananya Mukherjea share similar views about *Twilight*'s troubling depiction of masculinity. In one article for an edited book, Ananya Mukherjea criticises Meyer's narrow depiction of sexuality in *Twilight* because it has restricted female sexuality into 'a static object' and thus, has missed a chance to understand and develop (and presumably educate young readers on) this issue.²¹ In a different article for a journal, Mukherjea finds Meyer's depiction of perfection in vampire boyfriends problematic because 'they are more manly than mere men could be or, perhaps, than we would want real men to be'.²² More damning still, Mukherjea writes of 'the [implied unrealistic] expectations these texts nurture with respect to gender, sexuality, and

¹⁸ Renae Franiuk and Samantha Scherr, "'The Lion Fell in Love with the Lamb" Gender, Violence, and Vampires', *Feminist Media Studies*, 13 (2013), pp. 14-28. (p. 25).

¹⁹ Joyce Ann Mercer, 'Vampires, Desire, Girls and God: *Twilight* and the Spiritualities of Adolescent Girls', *Pastoral Psychology* 60 (2011), pp. 263-78. (p. 275).

²⁰ Joyce Ann Mercer, 'Vampires, Desire, Girls and God: *Twilight* and the Spiritualities of Adolescent Girls', p. 277.

²¹ Ananya Mukherjea, 'Team Bella: Fans Navigating Desire, Security, and Feminism', in *Theorizing Twilight: Critical Essays on What's at Stake in a Post-Vampire World*, Jefferson, Nc & London: McFarland & Company, ed. by Maggie Parke and Natalie Wilson (North Carolina: McFarland, 2011), pp. 70-85.

²² Ananya Mukherjea, 'My Vampire Boyfriend: Postfeminism, "Perfect" Masculinity, and the Contemporary Appeal of Paranormal Romance', *Studies in Popular Culture*, 3 (Spring) (2011), pp. 1-19. (p. 14).

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intimacy'.²³ Although acknowledging that 'many or most readers can interpret these texts with enough critical reflection to see them for what they are: fiction,' Mukherjea still fears its effects on readers, writing that these vampire stories 'primarily comprise fantasies for *female readers* (sic.)'.²⁴ Extending her argument of female readers' fantasy, and including societal changes such as changing gender roles (implied for both fiction and real life), Mukherjea spells out the disappointment that 'many women feel as they reach professional plateaus and find there is no fairy tale knight in shining armour to offset the difficulties of their daily work lives'.²⁵ In this case, Mukherjea views females, regardless of age, as falling into the trap of mistaking fiction for real life. Earlier, just as Mercer has compared *Twilight* unfavourably to well-known literary works, Mukherjea does the same: first contrasting it to books by 'Jane Austen and the Brontës' presumably to highlight how fictional men should be ideally portrayed, she then asserts that 'youth fiction has long been meant to be at least somewhat instructive (such as *Little Women*)'.²⁶ It would appear that books targeted at young readers, are expected to offer some benefit, if not minimally offer some form of didactic value.

On the other end of the spectrum, some academics see *Twilight* as allowing young readers a safe space in exploring their own desires or even as a safe release for psychological tension between desire and responsibility. By looking at the 'erotics of abstinence', Jackie C. Horne argues that *Twilight*'s depiction of chastity offers the freedom and space of discovering sexuality for young readers without the burden and repercussions of sex.²⁷ Arguing from a psychoanalytic perspective, Heather Anastasiu writes that *Twilight* offers readers a vicarious

²³ Ananya Mukherjea, 'My Vampire Boyfriend: Postfeminism, "Perfect" Masculinity, and the Contemporary Appeal of Paranormal Romance', p. 13.

²⁴ Ananya Mukherjea, 'My Vampire Boyfriend: Postfeminism, "Perfect" Masculinity, and the Contemporary Appeal of Paranormal Romance', p.13; p. 15.

²⁵ Ananya Mukherjea, 'My Vampire Boyfriend: Postfeminism, "Perfect" Masculinity, and the Contemporary Appeal of Paranormal Romance', p. 16.

²⁶ Mukherjea cites Jane Austen's Mr. Knightley in *Emma* as an example: she does not offer details of other texts by Austen or by the 'Brontës', whom she mentions non-specifically. See Ananya Mukherjea, 'My Vampire Boyfriend: Postfeminism, "Perfect" Masculinity, and the Contemporary Appeal of Paranormal Romance', p. 13.

²⁷ Jackie C. Horne, 'Fantasy, Subjectivity, and Desire and *Twilight* and Its Sequels', in *Genre, Reception and Adaptation in the "Twilight" Series*, ed. by Anne Morey (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), pp. 29-46.

experience in undergoing a 'hero's journey', thereby allowing the safe release of the psychological tension caused by the twin pulls of desire and responsibility.²⁸

Much of the disparity in the critical reception regarding *Twilight*'s implied effects or impact on readers can be attributed to a variety of assumptions regarding young females who are perceived to be *Twilight*'s readers/ audience. These assumptions range from the fear that young readers may learn to hold unrealistic expectations of gender roles and thus be deeply disappointed by reality, to worries that young readers may be sufficiently misguided to re-create or align their lives to simulate favourite parts of the romance gothic texts. There is no denying the pleasures that young readers have derived from consuming Meyer's *Twilight* texts, but whether this has encouraged young readers to 'blur the lines' between reality and fiction, given their enjoyment from reading these romance gothic texts, remains to be proven; nonetheless, this is a concern worth investigating. Therefore, it is critical to look closely at what young readers or teenagers are actually responding to in *Twilight*, which will be addressed in Part Two.

I would first like to point out that for some researchers, this period of development in teenagers and young readers is seen as '*sturm und drang*', a turbulent period which, while 'emotionally wearing', still offers 'enormous creative potential' and, although the term 'adolescence is a social construction', some researchers nonetheless take an interest in imaginative literature that offer helpful ways to negotiate the problems faced by teenagers.²⁹ Certainly, the idea that fiction can provide a 'helpful model for negotiating problems' in part explains the pressure of certain (adult) expectations for teen literature.

Twilight, which features vampires and werewolves, is not generally seen to provide any didactic value. The absence of a perceived 'helpful model' may have sparked adult criticism but I am reminded of gothic's 'generative power' by Donna Heiland who writes about Gothic's ability to retell the same stories over and over again because it 'resonates differently' for readers at different periods'

²⁸ Heather Anastasiu, 'The Hero and the Id: A Psychoanalytic Inquiry into the Popularity of *Twilight*', in *Theorizing Twilight: Critical Essays on What's at Stake in a Post-Vampire World*, ed. by Maggie Parke and Natalie Wilson (North Carolina: McFarland, 2011), pp. 41-55.

²⁹ Lydia Kokkola in *Fictions of Adolescent Carnality: Sexy Sinners and Delinquent Deviants* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2013). p. 2. According to Kokkola, in 1904, G. Stanley Hall, the founder of the American psychological association, published *Adolescence: Its Psychology* where he declared adolescence to be a 'separate state', and two decades later the period of adolescence came to be seen as 'a separate generation' (quoted by Kokkola, 2013, p. 4).

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and allows them to come 'to terms with the truths' salient to them.³⁰ Catherine Spooner claims that gothic 'can be relied on to fulfil whatever cultural or critical need arises at any given time' and even claims that gothic's component parts 'can be reordered in infinite combinations because they provide a lexicon that can be plundered for a hundred different purposes, a crypt of body parts that can be stitched together in myriad different permutations'.³¹ Due to gothic's 'flexibility which renders (it) applicable in one way or another to the changing fortunes of the social structure', modern gothic texts have appropriated whatever fits their purpose while providing pleasurable thrills to each successive generation of readers.³² I would also add that gothic's 'flexibility' and by extension, its accessibility, is helped by its merging of both realist and fantastic elements which I will show later.

Since the 'teenager proper was brought into being by post-war consumer culture', Spooner asserts that teen-oriented gothic texts such as the *Goosebumps* series have been targeting this group 'complete with all the anxieties and desires that twentieth- and twenty-first century Western culture imputes to adolescence'.³³ *Twilight*, as another example of modern gothic, is no different and Meyer has also offered a counter to certain adolescent anxieties in her use of both romance and gothic conventions. This blend, I will argue, is a new experience for young readers. In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that in creating a new hybrid of the two genres of romance and gothic, she has changed the 'horizon of expectation' for certain young readers.

Looking at data of the UK top 10 books for young adults from Nielsen BookScan, there was simply nothing like *Twilight* before its publication in 2005.³⁴ In the five years from 2000 to 2005, all top ten books categorised as 'young adult fiction', based on book sales, were either fantasy texts such as Philip Pullman's '*His Dark Materials*' (1998-2001) or J. K. Rowling's co-authored related texts from the

³⁰ Donna Heiland sees the gothic, in spite of its telling of the same stories over and over again, as possessing a 'generative force,' where 'everything has not been said' because it 'resonates differently' for readers at a specific time 'to come to terms with the truths of (their) time' in 'Gothic and the Generation of Ideas', *Literature Compass*, 4 (2007), pp. 48-65 (p. 57).

³¹ Catherine Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), pp. 155-156.

³² David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: The Modern Gothic Vol. 2*. Second edn (London and New York: Longman, 1996). p. 203.

³³ Catherine Spooner, p. 92. The *Goosebump* series is authored by R. L. Stine who has sometimes been referred to as 'the Stephen King of children's literature' in popular press. See 'Emily Osment stars in 'R.L. Stine's "The Haunting Hour"' in 'capecodonline.com', <<http://www.capecodonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071026/LIFE/710260303/1/NEWS>>, 26 October 2007, [accessed 4 September 2014].

³⁴ The data from Nielsen BookScan for UK sales only goes back to 1998 in the print book market.

Harry Potter series: *Comic Relief: Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them: Harry Potter's Series*, (2001) and *Comic Relief: Quidditch Through the Ages: Harry Potter's Schoolbooks Series* (2001) or, realist works such as Jacqueline Wilson's *Vicky Angel* (2000) and *The Story of Tracy Beaker* (1991).³⁵

In Wilson's *Vicky Angel* which is targeted at young readers, there is romance as the subtext when the protagonist finds out that her classmate Sam is interested in her.³⁶ In *The Story of Tracy Beaker*, even ten-year-old Tracy has an admirer whom she naughtily calls 'boring wimpy little Peter' but who gives her a treasured gold heart-shaped locket for Valentine's Day.³⁷ In short, there were young adult books featuring fantasy and gothic touches of romance in the lists of the top ten books for young adults; but none which deliberately combined romance and gothic prior to 2005. The lists in the fantasy, gothic and sci-fi categories prior to 2005 were also dominated by books with male protagonists with only 'realist' books from the young adult category featuring central female protagonists.³⁸ Meyer certainly broke new ground with her series which is narrated from the viewpoint of a female teenager who not only discovers the supernatural and falls in love with a vampire in modern-day society but whose every desire, thought, and emotion is immediately accessible, even intimately so, to readers.

In fact, before Meyer's text for young adults, no such blend of gothic and romance had ever hit the top ten list for young readers, going as far back as 1998 when such lists were first compiled. However, soon after *Twilight's* (2005) success became evident through its sales, earlier books which blended romance with vampires were republished, such as the *Vampire Diaries*, a series of four books (1991-1992; reprinted in 2009-2010) by L. J. Smith, and *The Silver Kiss* by

³⁵ The *Harry Potter* series itself was categorised under Science Fiction and Fantasy. The top ten sales for books in this category from 2000-2005 was *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003) followed by five of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* series and four of Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series (*The Truth*, *Fifth Elephant*, *Thief of Time* and *Night Watch*).

From 2005 to 2010 however, Rowling had two books as the top-selling and next top-selling books, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007) and *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince* (2005) respectively with Meyer's *The Host* (2009), about romance in an alien invasion, in third position. Fourth to ninth positions were Pratchett's *Discworld* series with the tenth by Tolkien called *The Children of Hurin* (a 2008 imprint).

³⁶ Jacqueline Wilson, *Vicky Angel* (London: Corgi Yearling, 2013).

³⁷ Jacqueline Wilson, *The Story of Tracy Beaker* (London: Corgi Yearling Books, 2009), pp. 175-178.

³⁸ Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series begins with Lyra Belacqua but in the second and third book, a male protagonist, Will Parry shares her adventures. Similarly, while Pratchett includes Susan (grand-daughter of Death) in *The Thief of Time*, much of the narration and mystery revolves around Lobsang Ludd, who is revealed as the son of Time and Wen the Eternally Surprised.

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Annette Curtis Klause (1992; reprinted in 2009).³⁹ Unlike the *Vampire Diaries* series which has continued in a further series of books after 2009, *The Silver Kiss*, a standalone, ends in death as a liberating choice by the vampire boyfriend after having successfully helped the heroine cope with her mother's death.⁴⁰ The *Vampire Diaries* has been filmed as a TV series since 2009, and is currently into its sixth season in 2014.⁴¹ Thus Meyer's combination of both the gothic and romance tropes has inspired more generic hybrids.

It must be noted that in depicting her vampire in a very positive light if not as a hero, Meyer follows the quite well-trodden path of writers such as Anne Rice (the first *Vampire Chronicles* series was published in 1976) and from television, Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* that was broadcast from 1997 to 2003, which I will discuss later. Meyer's romantic version of the vampire is not new in popular culture although evidence from *Twilight*'s teen reception suggests that for teens, Meyer's version is read as something exciting and new.⁴²

In effect, when Meyer's *Twilight* was published in 2005, there was a trend already in existence where vampires are depicted as 'increasingly sympathetic, even domesticated' if not portrayed with an empathy 'unthinkable in earlier decades'

³⁹ L. J. Smith's first book of the *Vampire Diaries* series, *The Awakening* (1991) was published by HarperPaperbacks, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers Inc.. The second book in the series, *The Struggle*, followed by the third book, *The Fury*, were also both published in 1991, and *Dark Reunion* was published in 1992. *The Silver Kiss* (1992) by Annette Curtis Klause was published by Dell Publishing. NB: the British edition of the *Vampire Diaries* published by Hodder Children's Books was only out in 2001. Another book, *Bloodsucking Fiends: A Love Story* by Christopher Moore which was published in 1995 by Simon and Schuster, (about a young woman who gets bitten by a vampire and turns into one), has its sequel in 2007 with *You Suck: A Love Story* and *Bite Me* in 2010, forming a trilogy.

⁴⁰ The *Vampire Diaries* series has expanded with the addition of a new trilogy called 'The Return': *The Vampire Diaries: The Return: Nightfall* in 2009, followed by *The Vampire Diaries: The Return Vol 2: Shadow Souls* (2010) and *The Vampire Diaries: The Return Vol 3: Midnight* in 2011.

⁴¹ In fact, since the television version of *Vampire Diaries* and its reprint in 2009, young readers have themselves noted the publication date prior to *Twilight*, sparking debate about *Twilight* and Meyer's originality. For more on this, see Part Two, *Teen Ink: Twilight* and Creative Space.

⁴² It is very likely that young readers of *Twilight* may have heard about the TV series, or books based on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, but can still remain ignorant (and/ or indifferent) about what the series is all about beyond the title which has a girl's name, who, herself is a killer of vampires. Although referring to allusions made in a series of books from another genre, David Buchbinder's observations about young readers are relevant here: he writes that young readers are 'attuned chiefly to the most recent and contemporary of cultural outputs', and therefore are unlikely to know or recognise intertextual allusions, and by implication, be aware of other less popular films or books published beforehand belonging to the same genre, or were referred to in the books. See David Buchbinder, 'The Orangutan in the Library: The Comfort of Strangeness in Terry Pratchett's Discworld Novels', *Youth Cultures: Texts, Images, and Identities* (2003), 169-82. (p. 174). NB: The title, or part of this thesis title, was inspired by Buchbinder's fascinating article at a time when I was doing preliminary research in Singapore in order to draft a PhD proposal.

as they '(give) themselves over to introspection'.⁴³ For these modern vampires, Miriam Jones writes, the dilemma of feeding on humans becomes blurred in the polarity between monster and human, as writers besides Anne Rice such as Chelsea Quinn Yabro in her *Saint-German Cycles* (the first in the series was published in 1978), Suzy McKee Charnas in her *The Vampire Tapestry* (1980) and Steven Brust in his *Agyar* (1993) depict their vampires as suffering some form of anguish for drinking human blood to survive or, being willing to offer something, such as fantastic sex, in return for that privilege.⁴⁴

And, if the vampires still admit to the joy of such feeding or kills e.g. Rice's Lestat in *The Tale of the Body Thief* (1992), the act is limited to the 'most inhuman of criminals, the serial killer'; in essence, such texts reframe the 'moral universe (which) is far removed from the nineteenth-century vampire's remorseless offstage visits to his or her slowly languishing prey'.⁴⁵ Deborah Wilson Overstreet sees Rice's vampires as possessing anxieties which chiefly lie in their love for humans, not as 'merely appetite but genuine love'.⁴⁶ Overstreet goes on to mention that the blurring of the lines of good and evil vampires is a 'clear result of postmodernism'.⁴⁷ In fact, the psychological make-up of post-modern vampires has made them both less threatening and intimidating and certainly, as Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon write, more 'fascinating' to readers.⁴⁸ This form of fascination that readers feel towards modern monsters, as suggested by Hollinger and Gordon, can be extended to include the feeling of comfort which some teens feel towards *Twilight*, which will be mentioned in Part Two.

This is in contrast to 'Bram Stoker's influential description of a Lombrosian sub-human criminal', whose traditional iterations show the vampire's existence in an adversarial relationship to a human society, a figure that is 'of relatively uncomplicated evil' and functions as the 'revelation of Evil in all its resplendent

⁴³ Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon, 'Introduction: The Shape of Vampires', in *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture*, ed. by Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), pp. 1-10 (p. 2); Candace R. Benefiel, 'Blood Relations: The Gothic Perversion of the Nuclear Family in Anne Rice's Interview with the Vampire', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 38 (2004), pp. 261-73 (p.262).

⁴⁴ Miriam Jones, 'The Gilda Stories: Revealing the Monsters at the Margins', in *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture*, ed. by Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), pp. 151-67.

⁴⁵ Miriam Jones, 'The Gilda Stories: Revealing the Monsters at the Margins', p. 164.

⁴⁶ Deborah Wilson Overstreet in *Not Your Mother's Vampires: Vampires in Young Adult Fiction* (Lanham, Md.; Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2006). p. 63.

⁴⁷ Deborah Wilson Overstreet in *Not Your Mother's Vampires: Vampires in Young Adult Fiction*, p. 5.

⁴⁸ Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon, 'Introduction: The Shape of Vampires', p. 2

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horror'.⁴⁹ Examples of these traditional iterations, which I call the horror 'archetype' are Stephen King's terrifying vampires in *'Salem's Lot* (1975) and more recently, the vampires from *The Strain* (2009) by Chuck Hogan and Guillermo Del Toro, to name a few. In 2009, in a recorded interview to promote *The Strain*, Del Toro even talks about his version which has nothing to do with romance and 'young men sucking the necks of beautiful people', but instead is focused on a story which will not only get readers to 'experience this sense of dread and horror' but to make the 'vampires as menacing and as real and as absolutely disgusting and alien as possible'.⁵⁰ In this instance, it is clear from the above that different, even strong views, exist on what vampires should be like and, by implication, what terrifying characteristics they should indeed possess.

However, each iteration of a cinematic (or literary vampire) as Ken Gelder notes in *Reading the Vampire*, 'engages in a process of familiarisation and defamiliarisation, both interpellating viewers who already "know" about vampires from the movies (and elsewhere) and providing enough points of difference (in the narrative, in the "look" of the vampire, and so on) for newness to maintain itself'.⁵¹ With regards to the dependency of vampires on blood and, unlike most vampires which only drink human blood to survive, Meyer's ethical vampires, represented by the Cullen family in the *Twilight* series, choose to confine themselves to animal blood. This is not from fear of exposure but due to their regard for humanity. The Cullens also live as a family in the small town of Forks rather than hiding as solitary figures in the anonymity of a crowded city. There are enough differences in Meyer's vampires to form a contrast to previous examples of vampires. What really provides the newness or novelty in Meyer's vampires is not so much how they 'sparkle in the sun' (a point of derision for some) but the way Meyer has created the figure of the teenage, marriage-fixated, hyper-protective, vampire boyfriend, something which had not been a feature of youth culture in the years prior to Meyer's first book *Twilight* in 2005.⁵² The

⁴⁹ Miriam Jones, p. 164; Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon, p. 2; Veronica Hollinger, 'Fantasies of Absence: The Postmodern Vampire', in *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture*, ed. by Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), pp. 199-212 (p. 203).

⁵⁰ *The Strain* (2009) is the first in the vampire trilogy and is followed by *The Fall* (2010) and ends with *The Night Eternal* (2011). Since June 2014, *The Strain* has been broadcast as a television series in the US. The interview was posted on 1st May 2009 and can be found at 'Guillermo Del Toro Talks About The Strain', in 'YouTube.com', <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0twxAbWAq9o>>, 1 May 2009, [Accessed 8 February 2015].

⁵¹ Ken Gelder in *Reading the Vampire* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994). p. 86.

⁵² I will use the term marriage-fixated because I would like to differentiate Edward's focus from that of Angel from the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* TV series. Before Buffy and Angel consummated their relationship in the second series, they have a chaste though charged relationship. Angel, as

depiction of a charming and handsome teen vampire who follows the rituals of courtship and insists on marriage is definitely new in contemporary young adult fiction as with the issue of 'eternal love' in modern times. This constancy of love, not to mention enduring for eternity, as depicted in *Twilight*, can be seen as a source of comfort for some.

To iterate, the figure of the vampire-as-boyfriend is not new; it was present in the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* television series. In the series, the old hunter/prey relationship is reformulated and instead, an emotional bond shares centre stage, between Buffy, the mortal teen and Angel, a vampire, with the slaying of other 'evil' monsters. There are many key differences between the *Buffy* series and *Twilight*. These range from the portrayal of Buffy as a teenage action heroine, the 'chosen one', who decimates monsters with whatever weaponry is available or what she can improvise in each fight, to her physicality and preternatural strength. Nonetheless, the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* television series is still first and foremost about death and monsters and, secondly about relationships, namely the love story of Angel, the vampire cursed with a soul, and Buffy (and later, when Angel is no longer around, Buffy's relationship with Spike, another vampire). The female heroine, Buffy, is more than a match for any vampire. Her physical strength presents a contrast to Bella, who gets terrorised by other vampires. It is only in the later part of the narrative, in the fourth book, *Breaking Dawn* that Bella becomes a vampire.

Meyer's treatment of Bella is poles apart from Buffy's earlier depiction in the TV series.⁵³ This contrast in the heroines, between Buffy, the heroic slayer of 'evil' vampires and monsters and the 'normal' Bella Swan, has partly been addressed by Meyer, who writes in her website that 'We can't all be slayers. Bella does pretty well I think, all things considered. She saves Edward, after all'.⁵⁴ Thus far, Meyer's foray into the young adult novel, which she claims was 'unintentional', has a vampire who is agonised because first, he fears that he will hurt the love of his life, Bella, and later, fears for her soul if and when he turns her into a vampire

a vampire, is considered unique because he possesses a soul which gives him a conscience. His soul appeared as a result of a curse by gypsies when he was a remorseless killer called Angelus.

⁵³ In fact, Buffy has to fight Angel when he loses his soul and reverts to his psychopathic self, Angelus in episode 14 of series two. The fights between Buffy and Angelus occur in several other episodes culminating in the climactic second series' finale where he briefly regains his soul before being killed by Buffy as a means to undo his earlier evil machinations. Source: *Internet Movie Database* < <http://www.imdb.com> > [accessed 29 November 2014].

⁵⁴ Stephenie Meyer, 'The story behind the writing of *New Moon*' in 'stepheniemeyer.com', <http://stepheniemeyer.com/nm_thestory.html> n.d., [accessed 30 September 2014].

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and, of course, he wants, or rather insists on marriage before sex.⁵⁵ This focus and insistence on marriage are, reminiscent if not typical, of an adult love story.⁵⁶ Even though *Twilight* was marketed for young readers, there are at least two elements – the love triangle with two eligible males and, the question of marriage – which are not typically found in modern young adult literature, though both can be found in adult romance novels. To state the obvious, the inclusion of the gothic cannot be ignored just because the love for and of a vampire (monster) hero is different from the yearning and longing for a mortal hero. This inclusion of the vampire lover magnifies any issues or problems faced, especially by the non-supernatural protagonist in the relationship. This certainly casts a spotlight on the excessive ‘gothic’ nature of romance tropes.

Besides the vampire figures that belong to the gothic genre, another crucial element from the gothic needs to be explored as a key to Meyer’s ‘gothicising’ of her teen romance: the torment or trauma whether psychological or physical. Beginning with the emotional and psychological threat from James, the tracker vampire in *Twilight*, to the physical manifestation of Bella’s psychological turmoil and anguish in *New Moon*, caused in part by Edward’s apparent rejection of her on ‘vampire grounds’ and, *Eclipse*’s supernatural love triangle and later, the horrendous fatal labour scene in *Breaking Dawn*, the books display extreme infliction of pain and anguish, both mental and physical, on Bella in a manner typical of Gothic.

There are only three times when we are not privy to Bella’s thoughts and thus not immediately immersed in her pain. The first is when Meyer deliberately leaves eight pages blank in *New Moon* except for only a word each of ‘October’, ‘November’, ‘December’ and ‘January’ in pages 75, 77, 79 and 81 respectively, a literal blank in her life.⁵⁷ For what happens in those four months, readers are later told that Bella was ‘lifeless’ and her father then chides her, ‘Moping would be better – that would be doing *something*’.⁵⁸ Curiously, her father also tells her, ‘I

⁵⁵ Stephenie Meyer, ‘The story behind the writing of *New Moon*’ in ‘stepheniemeyer.com’, <http://stepheniemeyer.com/nm_thestory.html> n.d., [accessed 30 September 2014].

⁵⁶ According to Pamela Regis, modern romance novels now increasingly include pairings of ‘emotional’ partnerships rather than just formal, institutionalised ones. See Pamela Regis in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

⁵⁷ The other two times are the shifts to that of Jacob Black’s point of view in *Eclipse*’s epilogue (pp. 551-559) and in *Breaking Dawn* (pp. 133-331). These two occasions reveal Jacob’s pain, anger and confusion as he grapples with his feelings for Bella, her willingness to become a vampire and, his adjustment as a werewolf belonging to a pack.

⁵⁸ *New Moon*, p. 85.

don't think I can live through seeing you try *harder*. I've never seen anyone try so hard. It hurts to watch'.⁵⁹ This note of parental admonition is rather interesting given the father's absentee role in the earlier book *Twilight*. The purpose, besides playing a 'normalising' realist note in the narrative, is to further establish Bella's torment and trauma when Bella notes that her father no longer rushes into her room when she screams during her nightmares. So regular are Bella's screams at night, her father accepts it as a new norm, 'he was used to it now'.⁶⁰

In *New Moon*, Meyer seems to be perpetuating the notion of a heroine in pain who only endures and suffers unlike another teen heroine, such as Buffy the Vampire slayer, who strikes and instils fear in monsters. Meyer's portrayal of a heroine suffering to what amounts to a mental illness, if deep emotional pain can be called that, and then singlehandedly clawing herself back to sanity, is definitely in the extreme and quite uncommon in a teen romance. The mention of the 'walking dead' by Meyer could not be a bigger contrast to the proverbial modern teenager leading a frenetic lifestyle. Included in Meyer's narrative is a detailed description where Bella goes to the movies with her classmate Jess, only to walk out when she realises the 'dead, emotionless face of the (zombie)' resembled her and that 'in the end (she) would wind up as a zombie'.⁶¹ However, Bella's emotional suffering only leaves her lifeless, not numbed to pain. By day, like a zombie or a 'grotesque, animated corpse' as she calls herself, at night Bella is resigned to her suffering as she waits for pain to return,

It was a crippling thing, this sensation that a huge hole had been punched through my chest, excising my most vital organs and leaving ragged, unhealed gashes around the edges that continued to throb and bleed despite the passage of time. Rationally, I knew my lungs must still be intact, yet I gasped for air and my head spun like my efforts yielded me nothing. My heart must have been beating, too, but I couldn't hear the sound of my pulse in my ears; my hands felt blue with cold. I curled inward, hugging my ribs to hold myself together. I scrambled for my numbness, my denial, but it evaded me...I could live through it. It didn't feel like the pain had weakened over time, rather that I'd grown strong enough to bear it.⁶²

⁵⁹ *New Moon*, p. 86.

⁶⁰ *New Moon*, p. 108. At this point in the narrative, Edward, together with his family has already left Forks, a decision made in the belief that he was protecting Bella. The decision was made by Edward due to two incidents: the attack by a rogue vampire James in *Twilight* and the near-attack by his own brother which was triggered by a single drop of blood from a paper cut. In both incidents, Bella did not escape unscathed.

⁶¹ *New Moon*, pp. 94-95.

⁶² *New Moon*, p. 95; p. 105.

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The detailed description of pain which exerts its excruciating toll on her body is certainly overwrought, if not extreme. To further emphasise the already harrowing experience that Bella undergoes, Meyer includes a touch of madness from Gothic conventions: Bella starts hearing Edward's voice,

I'd the most amazing hallucination today. My velvet-voiced delusion had yelled at me for almost five minutes before I'd hit the brake too abruptly and launched myself into the tree. I'd take whatever pain that would cause me tonight without complaint.⁶³

Bella's joy at what she thinks is Edward's voice plays very close to madness and her elation is almost palpable when she thinks she has found the key to induce more of such hallucinations where she can 'hear' him. She wants 'to test the theory as soon as possible' and cannot wait for the medical staff to finish suturing the wound on her head so that 'I could try again tonight'.⁶⁴

Overwrought and melodramatic, this extended treatment of romantic loss is Meyer deliberately 'gothicising' a standard teen scenario and borrowing from the gothic trope of madness, as Bella thinks of yet another dangerous activity: 'If I couldn't have the bikes, I was going to have to find some other avenue to the danger and the adrenaline, and that was going to take serious thought and creativity'.⁶⁵ I would like to point out here that while borrowing the idea of madness from the gothic, Meyer still imbues Bella with enough self-awareness to recognise that hearing Edward's voice is 'a hallucination', even if she calls it 'the most amazing hallucination'.⁶⁶ Bella is still able to reason that '(m)y subconscious mind was giving me what it thought I wanted. This was wish fulfilment'.⁶⁷

The style of writing in Bella's internal voice is affectedly emotional if not bathetic, compared to the typical gothic hero or heroine. Gothic heroines, in their highly introspective state, typically possess what Coral Ann Howells calls an 'exacerbated sensibility' in which there is an 'extraordinarily heightened sense of the inter-relatedness between physical and emotional responses': this 'affects them so physically that they fall ill or faint' from an 'overpowering feeling' albeit

⁶³ *New Moon*, p. 170.

⁶⁴ *New Moon*, p. 167.

⁶⁵ This scene is reminiscent of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), although in the short story, the female protagonist is firmly convinced that there are women behind the wallpaper and later, that she is one of them. In *New Moon*, Bella still retains some doubt if it is Edward's voice she hears or just her imagination. Quotes are taken from *New Moon*, p. 171.

⁶⁶ *New Moon*, p. 170.

⁶⁷ *New Moon*, p. 100.

because this is only due to imminent threat or real fear.⁶⁸ Bella's internal voice, instead, emphasises the excessive 'gothic' nature of romance tropes, as her yearning for Edward is manifested in a hallucination. This hybridization of the gothic and romance, elevates the other, and emphasises if not magnifies the 'gothic-ness' and romance in the texts.

It is significant though that Bella recognises Edward's voice in her head as a 'hallucination'. This self-awareness shows that she has not crossed the border into madness: she may veer dangerously close and enter it but the first person account indicates enough control or restraint to prevent her from plunging into the dark abyss. If allusions of madness, descriptions of screaming nightmares and comparisons to zombies are not enough, Meyer also includes guilt as part of Bella's personal repertoire of torment/ torture. Bella spends more time with Jacob whom she calls her 'personal sun' in spite of knowing of his desire and love for her.⁶⁹ She does this because he helps to keep pain at bay by being 'simply a perpetually happy person, (and carrying) that happiness with him like an aura, sharing it with whoever was near him'.⁷⁰ She continues to spend time with Jacob as she 'need(s) him like a drug'.⁷¹

This combination of madness, nightmares and guilt, serves a three-fold purpose: it continues with the gothic theme of Bella's mental torment while paradoxically reminding readers (just in case they forget) that Bella, in her struggle, is still seeking a 'light' out of her unrelenting pain which seems to stem from a variety of sources such as pain at Edward's absence, his memory and even the hallucination of his voice. Crucially, it also sets up the romantic triangle of Edward, Jacob and Bella.

After describing to what depths Bella has sunk in her suffering, to the point of indulging in masochistic activities (the more dangerous the better), and secure that readers are fully aware of Bella's suffering, Meyer then allows the combined gothic convention of madness, torment and pain to take a temporary backseat. It is then readers move from reading about Bella's methodical and even clinical

⁶⁸ Coral Ann Howells in *Love, Mystery and Misery: Feeling in Gothic Fiction* (London: Bloomsbury 2013). p. 9.

⁶⁹ *New Moon*, p. 174. The irony of Jacob's surname, 'Black' and the metaphor of 'personal sun' especially immediately after the sentence, 'The shadows didn't seem as dark as usual' will not be lost to sharp-eyed readers.

⁷⁰ *New Moon*, p. 128.

⁷¹ *New Moon*, p. 192. Some young readers have taken issue with this comparison to drug addiction which I will mention more in Part Two.

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moves to recover by 'using' Jacob as a solution (because of his healing presence and unconscious ability to keep pain at bay), and to wonder together with Bella what has been keeping the ever-faithful Jacob away from her side. In having established a binary of the supernatural, as represented by Edward, versus the natural, as embodied in Jacob, Meyer reveals the latter to be 'gothic' too. Jacob's absence is finally discovered by Bella: it is due to his teething problems and adjustments as a new werewolf. The surprise and shock from the discovery that Jacob is a werewolf, and in every way as dangerous and powerful as a vampire are almost diminished by the unrelenting torment and anguish, most evident in *New Moon*.

In *Eclipse*, the near physical pain suffered by Bella in *New Moon* is reduced but the guilt and psychological push-pull factor of feeling torn between her feelings for Jacob and her love (and desire) for Edward, is taken up several notches. I would suggest that in depicting Jacob as a viable suitor, Meyer is deliberately complicating the issues and choices for Bella: blurring the lines of what should and should not be; what could and could not be for Bella. Meyer includes a scene where they share a kiss or rather, in a bid to prevent Jacob from leaving, Bella invites him to kiss her and when he does, '(a)gainst all reason, my lips were moving with his in strange, confusing ways they'd never moved before'.⁷² Not surprisingly, Bella's dilemma intensifies as she thinks that maybe,

'Jacob was right. He'd been right all along. He was more than just my friend. That's why it was so impossible to tell him goodbye - because I was in love with him, too. I loved him, much more than I should...I was in love with him, but it was not enough to change anything'.⁷³

As if it needed to be confirmed that there is indeed a supernatural love triangle and a very close bond between Bella and Jacob, Meyer offers readers another glimpse of what Bella sees as a future she could have had with Jacob:

For one brief, never-ending second, an entirely different path expanded behind the lids of my tear-wet eyes. As if I were looking through the filter of Jacob's thoughts, I could see exactly what I was going to give up...I could see the enormous red-brown wolf that I loved, always standing as protector if I needed him. For the tiniest fragment of that second, I saw the bobbing heads of two small black-haired children, running away from me into the familiar forest. When they disappeared, they took the rest of the vision with them.⁷⁴

⁷² *Eclipse*, p. 468.

⁷³ *Eclipse*, pp. 468-469.

⁷⁴ *Eclipse*, p. 469.

These are potent images in the above description. There is this semblance of 'normality', condensed in the symbol of a traditional family, complete with protector for the children playing and running in the forest. However, and more crucially, Meyer is offering a gothic version of domesticity: the father-protector is not human but a gigantic werewolf. At this point in the narrative, readers are reminded again of what Bella would lose as a vampire: besides her humanity, she forsakes the chance to bear any children unless she chooses Jacob. This vision of gothic 'domesticity', of motherhood, is both unsettling and disconcerting. At first glance, the vision is an idyllic scene, meant to evoke echoes of loss and innocence but this extravagant exaggeration of what Bella stands to lose when she gives up her humanity, is in the extreme. I would see this as Meyer gothicising the love triangle by sensationalising Bella's dilemma.

Later, after the threat of new-born vampires is over where Jacob and his clan of werewolf brothers help to save her, Bella's emotional turmoil seems to increase. This time, she contemplates Jacob as 'soul mate' and the pain she feels she is inflicting on him,

And we would have been happy. He was my soul mate in that world – would have been my soul mate still if his claim had not been overshadowed by something stronger, something so strong that it could not exist in a rational world...Two futures, two soul mates...too much for any one person. And so unfair that I would not be the only one to pay for it. Jacob's pain seemed too high a price.⁷⁵

Meyer is not just intent on creating a supernatural love triangle, she is keen to emphasise Bella's own feelings towards Jacob. Bella might not be in love with Jacob but she definitely feels very strongly about him if visions of family life and words such as 'soul mate' and 'protector' are on her mind with regards to him.

While battling this psychological conundrum vis-à-vis Jacob, Bella is grappling with yet another dilemma. This second dilemma is the realisation that much as she yearns to be a vampire in order to be with Edward for eternity, she may not be emotionally ready to lose her humanity,

'How to say goodbye to Charlie and Renée ...to Jacob...to being human. I knew exactly what I wanted, but I was suddenly terrified of getting it...In theory, I was anxious, even eager to trade mortality for immortality. After all, it was the key to staying with Edward forever...In theory, that all made sense. In practice...being human

⁷⁵ *Eclipse*, p. 531.

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was all I knew. The future beyond that was a big, dark abyss that I couldn't know until I leaped into it'.⁷⁶

Earlier, Bella is reminded of the repercussions of becoming a vampire through Rosalie who tries to offer some perspective, 'Just think about it a little. Once it's done, it can't be undone...it's a lot to give up' although admittedly at this point, Bella's immediate counter thought is '*But more to get in return*'.⁷⁷

In choosing to 'psychologise' or problematize Bella's once seemingly fixed decisions, Meyer is offering a hyperbolic version of issues that young readers may encounter. Earlier in *New Moon*, Meyer juxtaposes Edward's absence with Jacob's presence, tantalising readers to ponder if Bella's feelings may have shifted to Jacob or at least include him in the mix. Then in *Breaking Dawn*, readers are suddenly privy to the turbulent emotions and thoughts of Jacob which include his confusion and anguish as he tries to accept Bella's decision to be a vampire in the face of the perceived mixed signals she sends him. By making Jacob the narrator, this humanises him and encourages a more sympathetic response to his plight. At the same time, this shift in narrators offers a different non-internal view of Bella to readers.

According to Andrea Schwenke Wyile, when the narrator and focalizer (who sees) are the same person, the narration can be 'an intimately engaging and insightful form'.⁷⁸ In addition, when there is 'unquestioning identification' with the narrator, 'the reader gets a fuller or experiential sense of the narrator's experience than would be possible in a distancing narration'.⁷⁹ By shifting the experience from Bella, who is actually an unreliable narrator although only where she herself is concerned, Meyer now offers readers a vastly different perspective on a similar situation.⁸⁰ That this perspective comes only from Jacob seems to invite readers to empathise with him, while at the same time to view him as more than just a nominal foil for Edward. As if to show that Edward, who loves Bella deeply, is not alone in his desire, love and pain (however self-imposed), Jacob also endures and suffers in his love for Bella. Meyer sets up a scene for Jacob's emotional pain, if

⁷⁶ *Eclipse*, p. 239.

⁷⁷ *Eclipse*, p. 150.

⁷⁸ Andrea Schwenke Wyile, 'Expanding the View of First-Person Narration', *Children's Literature in Education*, 30 (1999), pp. 185-202 (p. 189).

⁷⁹ Andrea Schwenke Wyile, 'Expanding the View of First-Person Narration', p. 197.

⁸⁰ Bella is an unreliable narrator especially on matters pertaining to herself. One example is her insistence that she is 'ordinary' even when several boys in school show interest in her (*Twilight*, p. 184).

only to gothicise the love triangle, albeit in equally melodramatic and hyperbolic levels.

This supernatural love triangle reaches its climax with Bella's labour which causes Jacob to experience his own personal hell. The depiction of Bella, seen through Jacob's eyes, features her undergoing labour pangs that include vomiting 'a fountain of blood' and Edward needing to use his teeth to cut through her stomach: descriptions which are grotesque, violent and bloody.⁸¹ This, I would argue, is the only time Meyer's *Twilight* series comes closest to what readers would normally expect in horror gothic books. However, these horrifying and grotesque descriptions soon switch back to Jacob's agony and deep-seated anger: he refers angrily to Bella's newborn as a 'monster' who 'brutally mutilate(s) its own mother', 'an aberration', 'a black soulless demon', among others. Then, just moments later, he falls hopelessly in love with the monster-baby through the werewolf phenomenon of 'imprinting' where his love and bond are now the equivalent of 'a million steel cables' connecting both of them: in other words, the 'monster' transforms to become 'the very centre of (his) universe'.⁸² In one fell swoop, Meyer dissolves all vestiges of the supernatural love triangle fallout, and bestows on Jacob his happy ending. This abrupt resolution to the issue definitely opens up a space for debate on this type of closure for Jacob. Where his love for Bella (and presumably hatred for her newborn child, Renesmee) once was, there exists now only his unwavering love for Renesmee. Responses from young readers, which I will show in Part Two, indicate that some are conflicted about Meyer's abrupt solution to the love triangle.

Just as suddenly, the point of view switches back to Bella who undergoes her own transformation as a vampire.⁸³ Meyer makes this transformation so physically painful for Bella that she wishes for death, 'Let me die, let me die, let me die', when earlier she stoically endures her literally bone-breaking labour.⁸⁴ This constant repetition of her pain, the intensity of emotions and psychological dilemma, I would suggest is also part of Meyer's appropriation from the ur-

⁸¹ *Breaking Dawn*, p. 319; p. 323.

⁸² *Breaking Dawn*, pp. 328-331. The phenomenon of 'imprinting' is explained in *New Moon* in which werewolves have no say in who gets imprinted but that it happens only with the one person meant for them by destiny.

⁸³ The narrative from Jacob Black's point of view which begins in Chapter 8 ends at Chapter 18 with Jacob, hearing Bella's heart beating again, after just being imprinted with Renesmee (*Breaking Dawn*, p. 331). The switch to Bella's point of view in Chapter 19 begins with her 'awake' and aware of every sensation but seemingly appearing still unconscious or asleep to everyone else.

⁸⁴ *Breaking Dawn*, p. 349.

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Romance myth, 'Tristan and Iseult' into her gothic narrative, not just Meyer gothicising Bella and Edward's relationship. In the ur-Romance myth, barrier after barrier are thrown at the lovers, perpetually keeping them apart; similarly in Meyer's case, she sets up conditions, situations and events, which keep both Bella and Edward apart, be it emotional turmoil or psychological dilemma, with torment and trauma playing a huge role in this romance gothic.

This type of young love which Bella has for Edward, from the stage of love-assumed-lost depicted in *New Moon* and the more prominent love triangle in *Eclipse*, seems a far cry from the horizon of expectation of a modern teen romance. Midway through *New Moon*, Jacob's constant uncomplicated presence becomes a stark reminder of Edward's absence/abandonment. Certainly the prolonged despair and dip into depression that Bella suffers as a result of Edward's absence in *New Moon* is an extreme situation. Many romances do observe the pattern of a love triangle but rarely does this pattern appear in contemporary teen romances in the form of two eligible teen males vying for a girl.⁸⁵ Lydia Kokkola suggests this type of love triangle is 'remarkably rare in the more conservative adolescent romance genre' in her analysis of the *Twilight* series.⁸⁶ More importantly, Meyer makes both male options supernatural and dangerous in different ways.⁸⁷

Thus far, I have selected what constitutes key elements from the gothic trope which Meyer has incorporated in her *Twilight* series. In the next section, I investigate what Meyer has appropriated from both contemporary adult and teen romances, tracing it to the ur-Romance myth of 'Tristan and Iseult' in order to analyse Meyer's version of the idealised love as traditionally symbolised by the

⁸⁵ Triangular relationships with two eligible males are not uncommon in fiction, notably appearing in *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Mill in the Floss*, *Gone with the Wind* etc.

⁸⁶ I agree with Kokkola's assessment on this rarity in modern teen romances especially in contemporary teen bestsellers. In a different study by Naomi R. Johnson on bestselling teen romances, the typical love triangle, when it appears, is often that of two females and a male. For love triangles in adult romances, although quite common, Janice Radway writes that respondents in her seminal study view it as a negative development because it distracts attention from the growing relationship between the hero and heroine. For more on these studies, see Lydia Kokkola in 'Virtuous Vampires and Voluptuous Vamps: Romance Conventions Reconsidered in Stephenie Meyer's "Twilight" Series', *Children's Literature in Education*, 42 (2011), pp. 165-179 (p. 170); Naomi R. Johnson in 'Consuming Desires: Consumption, Romance, and Sexuality in Best-Selling Teen Romance Novels', *Women's Studies in Communication* 33 April (2010), pp. 54-73; and Janice Radway in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991). p. 172.

⁸⁷ However, Meyer is not the first writer in young adult fiction to have two eligible supernatural males vying for a mortal girl. More prominent examples in young adult fiction are L. J. Smith's *Vampire Diaries* trilogy: *The Struggle* (1991), *The Fury* (1991) and *The Reunion* (1992), with two vampire brothers, Stephan and Damon, vying for Elena, a modern teen. However, as noted earlier, Smith's books have only been republished after the popularity of the *Twilight* series.

lovers. As will be shown in Part Two, these elements prove equally novel and comforting for young readers as they debate and discuss them.

Young Adult (YA) Fiction and Young Adult Romances

Books that focus on social issues for young adults have been traced back to the mid-1970s. They depict 'actual' problems faced by teenagers, albeit still with a clear code of morality.⁸⁸ Plotlines feature becoming pregnant, dropping out of school or facing estrangement from the family where 'appeals of passion and rebellion notwithstanding, the conventionally moral side of things must prevail'.⁸⁹ In addition, issues such as sexual orientation, gender stereotypes, changing family dynamics and the pressures faced by teens beyond the school environment were also making their appearances in books if not in films.⁹⁰ Meyer's *Twilight* series notably focuses on relationships and the repercussions from such relationships, albeit with supernatural consequences. As such, realistic portrayals are not so much ignored as downplayed in Meyer's romance gothic. For instance, Bella's pregnancy in *Twilight* becomes not so much a cause for family estrangement, but kills her; her friendship with Jacob risks injury etc.

Kimberley Reynolds writes that when authors started to include 'sex, sexuality and relationships between sexes', contemporary literature for young adults changed radically.⁹¹ Sex was more openly discussed and not just alluded to and, characters were shown facing the dilemmas associated with sexuality. These changes do not appear in *Twilight* or, at least in terms recognised as liberal and open which will be discussed in the next section.

However, even with such openness in modern teen fiction and higher acceptance in contemporary depictions of sex and its consequences, there was no corresponding mitigation or reduction in the confusion, pain and hurt associated with portrayals of young passion. The only difference is that in 'today's novels,

⁸⁸ Al Muller in 'Books for Young Adults: Thirty Popular Adolescent Novels: A Content Analysis', *English Journal* (1974), pp. 97-99.

⁸⁹ Geraldine DeLuca in 'Taking True Risks: Controversial Issues in New Young Adult Novels', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 3 Winter (1979-80), pp. 125-48 (p. 125).

⁹⁰ Roberta Seelinger Trites, ed., in *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000) and Lydia Kokkola in *Fictions of Adolescent Carnality: Sexy Sinners and Delinquent Deviants* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2013).

⁹¹ Kimberley Reynolds in *Radical Children's Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). pp. 114-5.

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teens just have more options to reconcile their emotional behavioural choices and consequences'.⁹² In more recent publications, young adult novels have even included 'adolescent prostitution and exchanging sexual favours for popularity or drugs'.⁹³ Thus in books currently marketed as young adult fiction, especially with themes on relationships, the portrayals of problems and issues surrounding sexuality are now more explicit and carefully drawn with protagonists placed in 'realistic' situations where they grapple with their own and other characters' sexuality. *Twilight*, with its theme of supernatural relationships at the forefront and its focus on abstinence, appears to be a radical departure from other contemporary teen novels.

In young adult books formally categorised as teen romances, realism about sex and sexuality, however, has taken on a slightly different focus especially in popular teen romances regularly appearing on the *New York Times* (NYT) bestseller lists such as the *Gossip Girl*, *Clique* and *A-List series*.⁹⁴ According to Naomi Johnson, these book series possess storylines which have changed significantly from those found in previous studies of teen romantic fiction.⁹⁵ The focus is now on the 'acts of consumption to prepare for romantic relationships' rather than the relationships themselves' and have 'three repeating narrative elements': heroine dress, cosmetics and body modifications.⁹⁶ Angela McRobbie's influential work on youth cultures in 1991 has already established the promotion of messages in teen magazines where the pleasures and rituals of enjoyable femininity can be bought and consumed even if such pleasures are ephemeral

⁹² Jeffrey S. Kaplan in 'Recent Research in Young Adult Literature: Three Predominant Strands of Study', *The ALAN Review*, Summer (2007), pp. 53-60. (p. 59).

⁹³ Lydia Kokkola in *Fictions of Adolescent Carnality: Sexy Sinners and Delinquent Deviants* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2013). p. 9.

⁹⁴ The original *Gossip Girl*, *A-List* and *Clique* series have collectively sold 13.5 million copies and between 2002 and 2008, the three series and their spin-off stories number more than 40 books. There is even a television series called *Gossip Girl* which ran from 2007 to December 2012 in the US. For more information on the books, see Naomi R. Johnson in 'Consuming desires: Consumption, romance, and sexuality in best-selling teen romance novels', *Women's Studies in Communication* 33 April (2010), 54-73.

⁹⁵ Naomi R Johnson in 'Consuming Desires: Consumption, Romance, and Sexuality in Best-Selling Teen Romance Novels', *Women's Studies in Communication* 33 April (2010), 54-73. It must be noted however, that many 'traditional teen-romances' such as the *Sweet Valley High* series which was first published in 1983 still stop at kisses. Even so, sex is still implied in the series, according to Francine Pascal, the creator of the *Sweet Valley High* series which has been republished in 2008, who has been reported as saying that 'Sweet Valley High was not without sex. It wasn't explicit but it was always there, because that's normal life' in 'Sweet Valley twins' return causes fan frenzy' in 'today.com', <<http://www.today.com/id/42319909/ns/today-books/#.VFkaPvNFDct>>, 30 March 2011, [accessed 4 November 2014].

⁹⁶ Naomi R Johnson, 'Consuming Desires: Consumption, Romance, and Sexuality in Best-Selling Teen Romance Novels', *Women's Studies in Communication* 33 April (2010), 54-73. (p. 59; p. 63).

and transient.⁹⁷ Hence, it is not surprising to find such links between pleasure and consumption in fiction for teen females although the links now seem more deliberate, intentional and purposive. Admittedly, the extent to which teen female attractiveness is deliberately 'linked recurrently to particular brands of clothing, shoes, and lingerie' is something which has not appeared before, although occurring several years prior to the publication of *Twilight*.⁹⁸ In addition, teenage female protagonists are also more aggressive in 'setting up the circumstances for their sexual encounters' even if, 'they are subsequently passive during these encounters' in '*most* (sic.) cases'.⁹⁹ In short, female agency in sexual choice seems a norm in modern teen romances even if such agency seems to include a focus on 'cosmetics and clothing' and also 'extreme strategies like plastic surgery' as part of the quest for romantic relationships.¹⁰⁰

In contrast, *Twilight* counters such forms of consumption or commercial messages that are directly associated or linked to female attractiveness. Unlike the teen female protagonists in the *Gossip Girl* and *A-List* series, Bella is indifferent to shopping at the mall and, there is no mention at all in the *Twilight* series about Bella buying any cosmetics or clothes so as to become attractive for Edward. In fact, she has to be tricked into attending her own prom, the highlight of most teen's social calendar. Bella declares angrily to Edward, 'In what strange parallel dimension would I *ever* (sic.) have gone to prom of my own free will? If you weren't a thousand miles stronger than me, I would never have let you get away with this'.¹⁰¹ This attitude is not without irony: Bella finds it stranger going to a prom than dating a vampire!

Bella's rejection of shopping, makeup and clothes does not change at all throughout the series; she grudgingly wears branded designer clothes when Alice, Edward's adopted sister, presents her with a new wardrobe as a wedding

⁹⁷ Writing more recently, Angela McRobbie claims that commercial culture with its long history has 'now accelerated and expanded with the effect that commercial values now occupy a critical place in the formation of the categories of youthful femininity' in 'Young Women and Consumer Culture: An Intervention', *Cultural Studies*, 22 (2008), pp. 531-50. For McRobbie's 1991 ground-breaking research, see her book *Feminism and Youth Culture: From 'Jackie' to 'Just Seventeen'* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1991, 2000).

⁹⁸ Naomi R Johnson, 'Consuming Desires: Consumption, Romance, and Sexuality in Best-Selling Teen Romance Novels', p. 63.

⁹⁹ Naomi R Johnson, 'Consuming Desires: Consumption, Romance, and Sexuality in Best-Selling Teen Romance Novels', p. 70.

¹⁰⁰ Naomi R Johnson, 'Consuming Desires: Consumption, Romance, and Sexuality in Best-Selling Teen Romance Novels', pp. 66-67.

¹⁰¹ *Twilight*, p. 431.

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present in *Breaking Dawn*; her new clothes, are 'wrapped in garment bags, pristine and white, row after row after row'.¹⁰² The depiction of Bella's attitude plays with conventions of consumerist teen romance but does not dwell on them: no labels are mentioned at all. This is in stark contrast to descriptions of blatant consumerism in an extract from *Dial L for Loser* (2006) from the *Clique* series of teen romances:

"Thank Gawd for spray tans." Massie beamed after checking her reflection in the brass knocker on Conner's front door. "Rate me?"
"Nine-eight," Alicia licked her lips. "Me?"
"Same," Massie lied. Her purple eyelet Betsey Johnson halter dress, white ankle socks, and BCBG wedges were way more eye-catching than Alicia's white, toga-inspired sarong and gold lace-up sandals.¹⁰³

Such detailed descriptions, Johnson asserts, can be found in scenes of 'both important and mundane interactions' in all three series of the top-selling teen romances.¹⁰⁴ In the *Twilight* series, Meyer offers Bella's pragmatic attitude and even her own self-awareness of her lack of interest in fashion. Implicit in the following extract and similar ones, is the knowledge that Bella is drawn to more important concerns instead of being a dressed-up 'oversized three-dimensional paper doll' as she calls it.¹⁰⁵

This deliberate lack of ostentation and interest in attire is never more evident than in the final book *Breaking Dawn* when Bella tries to find something suitable to wear on her honeymoon in which she explicitly rejects the 'girlish femininity' as defined by fashion,

'As I pawed for something familiar and comfortable, a pair of old sweats maybe – it came to my attention that there was an awful lot of sheer lace and skimpy satin in my hands. Lingerie. Very lingerie-ish, with French tags. I didn't know how or when, but someday, Alice was going to pay for this'.¹⁰⁶

There is certainly no allowance for any vicarious pleasure in lingerie: Bella insists on 'old sweats' instead. In this constant depiction of Bella's lack of interest in a consumer-led femininity, her actions which do nothing to attract male attention and Edward's oft-repeated insistence on her attractiveness, these collectively

¹⁰² *Breaking Dawn*, p. 451.

¹⁰³ Lisi Harrison in *Dial L for Loser: A Clique Novel* (New York: Little, Brown, 2006). p. 216.

¹⁰⁴ Naomi R Johnson in 'Consuming Desires: Consumption, Romance, and Sexuality in Best-Selling Teen Romance Novels', *Women's Studies in Communication* 33 April (2010), 54-73. (p. 63).

¹⁰⁵ *Eclipse*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁶ *Breaking Dawn*, p. 75.

imply genuineness or a more sincere form of attraction between them, even if it takes a teen vampire to do so. In effect, the relationship between Edward and Bella is authentic and goes beyond the merely superficial.¹⁰⁷ For readers more familiar and possibly tired of the constantly repeating narrative elements of 'heroine dress, cosmetics and body modifications' as promoted in the style of the *A-List*, *Clique* and *Gossip Girl* series, *Twilight* offers a refreshing departure. In more recent research, Diane Negra writes that 'across the female lifecycle, girls and women of every age are now invited to celebrate their empowerment in a culture that sometimes seems dedicated to gratifying their every desire', with postfeminism attaching 'considerable importance to the formulations of an expressive personal lifestyle and the ability to select the right commodities to attain it'.¹⁰⁸ I would go so far as to suggest that reading the *Twilight* series may offer a comforting respite from the constant barrage of post-feminist messages on consumption and consumerism.

In another departure from modern YA fiction focussing on relationships, Meyer's *Twilight* characters do not engage in premarital sex. However, this is not because this issue is ignored in the series. In fact, sex is an issue from the first book though more especially in the third book, *Eclipse*. When Meyer shifts the discussion to Edward's insistence on marriage before sex, seemingly negating Bella's freedom of choice while ostensibly protecting her, there is a sense that Meyer is returning to an earlier moralistic code. Then traditional behaviours and attitudes were offered in the treatment of key topics such as involvement in teen sex, gender stereotypes, sexual orientation etc., regardless of the setting or genre.¹⁰⁹ What soon becomes apparent in Meyer's writing is the conflation of sex and marriage which seems to imply that missing this special combination would result in a de-valuation of true love.

Many critics, such as Ananya Mukherjea mentioned earlier, have taken issue with what is perceived as Bella's lack of agency and freedom to choose as well as the

¹⁰⁷ In *Twilight*, descriptions of Edward's physical attractiveness is plentiful (as given by Bella) and I will not repeat them here but Meyer is also careful to write on how indifferent Bella is towards the Cullen's undoubted wealth e.g. her embarrassment and reluctance when receiving gifts from Edward and his family.

¹⁰⁸ Diane Negra in *What a Girl Wants?: Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism* (Routledge, 2009). pp. 4-5.

¹⁰⁹ See Marla Harris' discussion of Patrice Kindl's three fantasy novels, *Owl in Love* (1994), *The Woman in the Wall* (1997) and *Goose Chase* (2001) where the female protagonists are resourceful, and the texts challenge the 'naturalness and inevitability' of a narrow definition of femininity in 'How Difficult it is being human!: Transforming bodies in Patrice Kindl's Fiction', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Vol 27, No. 4. (2003), pp. 212-219. (p. 212).

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allegorical implication that pre-marital sex is 'toxic'. Taking a particularly critical stance, Renae Franiuk and Samantha Scherr view Bella as 'the prototypical "damsel in distress" who repeatedly defers to Edward's authority', which they suggest is Meyer 'further reinforce(ing) the notion that the man owns the woman's body (especially if he is the only one to "know" it)'.¹¹⁰ Franiuk and Scherr assert that the lack of sexual agency, typical in contemporary vampire fiction like the *Vampire Diaries* and *Twilight* series, both reinforce 'gender stereotypes and roles, favourably portrays male suitors with characteristics that are predictive of relationship violence, and erotize sexual violence'.¹¹¹

Citing research conducted by Julia Wood, who interviewed 20 women in physically and emotionally abusive heterosexual relationships, Franiuk and Scherr draw our attention to the similarities between the narratives used by these abused women and teen vampire narratives. They argue that gender stereotypes are 'a prime cause of relationship violence': such fictions 'describe men as dominant, tough, and aggressive' and women as 'submissive' and 'weak' who 'defer to the dominant man in their life', which can be found in the *Twilight* series. The early warning signs that are indicative of violence include 'direct guarding, jealousy, and public possessiveness'.¹¹² All these, they write (quoting yet another study) can lead to a situation where 'protectiveness can easily turn into possessiveness; concern into control; interest into obsession' and that these 'behaviours have been shown to predict relationship violence'.¹¹³ Reading teen vampire novels, it is implied, leads to occurrences and complicity of violence in relationships.

The 'parallels' and 'links' drawn by them are highly illuminative of the negative views on *Twilight* which is another example of moral panic at young, female readers' attraction for romance gothic. This is even reminiscent of historical adult reception of gothic works. Written in 1802, one writer in *Scots Magazine* offers similar warnings: that 'the female mind is more readily affected by the *tendency* of (such gothic) works' and 'besides generating imbecility of mind', such works will induce females to 'yield to the delusive sensations', unable to resist 'the false

¹¹⁰ Renae Franiuk and Samantha Scherr, "'The Lion Fell in Love with the Lamb" Gender, Violence, and Vampires', *Feminist Media Studies*, 13 (2013), pp. 14-28. (p. 17; p. 18; p. 24)

¹¹¹ Renae Franiuk and Samantha Scherr, "'The Lion Fell in Love with the Lamb" Gender, Violence, and Vampires', p.24.

¹¹² Renae Franiuk and Samantha Scherr, "'The Lion Fell in Love with the Lamb" Gender, Violence, and Vampires', pp. 18-20. The study by Julia T. Wood which they cite is from Wood's study published as 'The Normalization of Violence in Heterosexual Romantic Relationships: Women's Narratives of Love and Violence', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 18 (2001), pp. 239-61.

¹¹³ Renae Franiuk and Samantha Scherr, "'The Lion Fell in Love with the Lamb" Gender, Violence, and Vampires', p. 20.

representations of life' due to their 'weak and youthful minds'.¹¹⁴ By reading gothic works as realist fiction, Scherr and Franiuk fear for young susceptible readers who would emulate in real life what they read in contemporary vampire fiction.

To be fair to Wood's widely cited study, her research also includes strategies such as denial, which these abused women use to sustain their beliefs in the face of conflicting evidence; it is Wood's very broad labelling of what constitutes 'fairy tale' and 'dark romance narratives' which readily allows for others to co-opt parts of her research for their own purpose.¹¹⁵ In Franiuk and Scherr's case, it is to imply a causal link, however tenuous, between real-life (and by implication, typical) examples and non-realist fiction, and to identify 'the problematic themes that are prevalent in contemporary teen vampire fiction'.¹¹⁶ If some academics are willing to draw such links to *Twilight*, it will come then as no surprise, that wildly different interpretations exist among young readers vis-à-vis Edward's attitude and behaviour, from bordering on (maternal) protectiveness to the obsessed stalker.

In Meyer's gothic treatment of sex, this issue is complicated by the danger of the sex act posed by Edward. As such, Meyer offers abstinence-as-love to be the solution.¹¹⁷ Viewed through the prism of romantic love attachments, Anthony Giddens asserts that the 'element of sublime love tends to predominate over that

¹¹⁴ W.W., 'On Novels and Romances', published in *Scots Magazine*, vol. 64 (1802) in E. J. Clery, and Robert Miles, eds., *Gothic Documents: A Source Book 1700-1890* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000). p. 212

¹¹⁵ According to Google Scholar's search engine (accurate as of June 2015), at least 139 other studies have cited Julia T. Wood's research. Her real-life examples for the 'fairy tale' and 'dark romance' narratives are 'He was Prince Charming', 'He made me the centre of his universe' and 'I have to put up with what little I can get', 'All of them [men] have bad spells – that's what mama called them – and sometimes you just have to overlook those' respectively in Julia T Wood, 'The Normalization of Violence in Heterosexual Romantic Relationships: Women's Narratives of Love and Violence', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 18 (2001), pp. 239-61. (p. 248).

¹¹⁶ They admit that 'it is possible that some viewers are able to separate fantasy from reality and do not use these messages to inform their lives'. However, after that qualifier, they go on to write that 'none of the scholars' whom they cite such as Light, Radway and Modleski 'asserts that these forms of entertainment are purely innocuous' (Renae Franiuk and Samantha Scherr, p. 25.) In reading Franiuk and Scherr's article, I have to admit I was immediately reminded of the oft-repeated mantra 'correlation does not imply causation'.

¹¹⁷ William M. Reddy writes that desire is seen as 'an appetite, self-regarding (and) pleasure seeking' while love on the other hand is 'other-directed and entails placing the good of the beloved above one's own' in *The Making of Romantic Love: Longing and Sexuality in Europe, South Asia, and Japan, 900-1200 Ce* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012). p. 1.

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of sexual ardour' although 'paradoxically break(ing) with sexuality while embracing it.'¹¹⁸

In analysing Meyer's adoption of abstinence in *Twilight*, I borrow Denis de Rougemont's framework to show what Meyer seems to have appropriated from the myth of 'Tristan and Iseult', long considered a western signifier of passion and romance. In tracing this traditional myth, de Rougemont writes that the concept of chastity was already established by the 'poets of the first or second generation of troubadours (c.1120 to 1180)' where chastity was 'extolled' by its power to perpetuate desire.¹¹⁹ By the twelfth century, the 'Laws of Love', says De Rougemont, were already settled as ritual where they include 'Moderation, Service, Prowess, Long Expectation, Chastity, Secrecy and Pity and those virtues led to Joy, which was the sign and guaranteed of *Vray Amor* or True Love'.¹²⁰ Certainly, chastity was important because such 'love' was typically adulterous and forbidden, involving danger if consummated.

However, chaste love is not the only element which Meyer seems to have incorporated from the twelfth century Tristan myth. Just like Tristan and Iseult, both Edward and Bella find their love for each other as inevitable. Although unlike the former who needed to drink a magic potion to account for their passion, Meyer never quite explains their love or passion for each other, just how much each *loves* the other, adding further to the element of the supernatural in *Twilight*.

For de Rougemont, the myth of Tristan and Iseult, which he claims has been 'agitating us for eight hundred years as spell, terror, or ideal, is at one and the same time a passion sprung from dark nature, an energy excited by the mind, and a pre-established potentiality in search of the coercion that shall intensify it'.¹²¹ However, such passion can never end in marriage because both are 'essentially irreconcilable' as (t)heir origins and their ends make them mutually exclusive'.¹²² In short, '*passion wrecks the very notion of marriage*' and, that 'there is no arguing with passion, no reasoning with it; for it does not wish to

¹¹⁸ Anthony Giddens in *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1992). p. 40.

¹¹⁹ Denis De Rougemont in *Passion and Society*. Revised and augmented edn (London: Faber & Faber, 1956). p. 118. The book is published as *Love in the Western World* in the US.

¹²⁰ Denis De Rougement in *Passion and Society*, pp. 117-118.

¹²¹ Denis De Rougement in *Passion and Society*, p. 23.

¹²² Denis De Rougement in *Passion and Society*, p. 277.

have reason on its side'.¹²³ Therefore, to forestall the union, barrier after barrier appears to separate the love-struck pair, even when the barrier is self-imposed, such as Tristan's own drawn sword which he places between him and Iseult when they sleep in the forest.

At first glance, Meyer's adoption of the (chaste) romantic courtship bears no direct resemblance to what actually constitutes twelfth century love as sung by the troubadours which was, more precisely about adulterous love. However, it must be noted that Meyer's chaste love, just like the myth, has its equivalent in danger. What has been appropriated from such courtly notions of romantic love is the elevation of love as sublime and, in its courtship, as chaste or unconsummated.

The love that can only seek fulfilment in death as symbolised in the Tristan and Iseult myth, is changed in *Twilight*. Marriage which would have wrecked passion as argued by de Rougemont, is in fact portrayed as a feature of 'sublime' love, running its proper and implied true course in the relationship of Bella and Edward. To reiterate, in *Twilight*, this absence of sexual love reframes the romance between Bella and Edward. By shifting attention away from the physicality of the sex act into the dimension of emotions and the psyche, emotions such as yearning, ardour, thrill and the frisson of intimacy without the 'complications' of sex get to be played out.

Closely related to this reframing, is the attraction of the nurturing (male) lover for readers, first identified by Janice Radway in *Reading the Romance*.¹²⁴ Radway writes that it is through the 'hero's uninterrupted gaze and the tenderness of his caress', that readers are reminded of the time when 'she is the centre of a profoundly nurturant individual's attention'.¹²⁵ This desire for a mothering/nurturing Other, is derived from a feminist reworking of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory by Nancy Chodorow who first articulated and theorised this female desire for a nurturing relationship in *The Reproduction of Mothering* in the 1980s.¹²⁶ Reflecting on her theory two decades later, Chodorow reiterates her claim that 'women experience a sense of self-in-relation' with 'many feel(ing)

¹²³ Denis De Rougement in *Passion and Society*, p. 286; p. 299.

¹²⁴ Janice Radway in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984, 1991).

¹²⁵ Janice Radway in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, p. 84.

¹²⁶ Nancy Chodorow in *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender: With a New Preface* (Univ of California Press, 1984, 1999).

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intuitively connected to others, able to empathise, and embedded in or dependent upon relationships'.¹²⁷

The nurturing, attentiveness and protectiveness which Edward showers on Bella are highly suggestive of the attention and nurturing which females, regardless of age, yearn for as theorised by Chodorow. In turn, Bella seems bemused, amazed and even thrilled by Edward's attention and attentiveness to her needs. This nurturing love, I would suggest has been identified as something wonderful and even comforting by teen readers, which I will show in Part Two.

Through several revealing extracts, Bella recounts Edward's sedulous attention, 'all through the lunch hour, he questioned me relentlessly about every insignificant detail of my existence'; 'He wanted to know about people today: more about Renée, her hobbies, what we'd done in our free time together'; 'he would ask a random question that he hadn't gotten to in the past two days of interrogation. He asked about my birthdays, my grade school teachers, my childhood pets - and I had to admit that after killing three fish in a row, I'd given up on the whole institution'.¹²⁸

If there is a repeating theme in their conversations, it is that everything concerns Bella and nothing is considered inconsequential so long as it is salient to her life, her memories and her family. Such flattering attentiveness seems to suggest a very keen desire or motivation to know the person better, like a parent or specifically a mother.¹²⁹ When the first person narrative of Bella meticulously recounts what Edward says, her response and how she feels about him, the intensity of their shared attraction cum desire is emphasised or amplified. In lieu of the physical dimension in their romance (nothing much beyond frustrated desire and lingering gazes) is the repeated narrative of how much each means to the other. Uppermost in their interaction is always this desire, and how much

¹²⁷ Nancy Chodorow, 'Reflections on the Reproduction of Mothering—Twenty Years Later', *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 1 (2000), pp. 337-48. (p. 339).

¹²⁸ *Twilight*, p. 201; p. 212; p. 226.

¹²⁹ Some academics such as Sara Wasson and Sarah Artt have noted the extensive injuries suffered by Bella which has resulted in her 'being looked [sic.] at in fascination by her male friends, then cared for and physically cherished'. Offering a nuanced reading of *Twilight*, Wasson and Artt speculate that *Twilight's* appeal may be due to the transgressive pleasure of 'looking when we think we should not', an agency which they admit is not particularly 'liberating' nor 'positive' but an 'agency nonetheless'. See Sara Wasson, and Sarah Artt, 'The Twilight Saga and the Pleasures of Spectatorship: The Broken Body and the Shining Body', in *Open Graves, Open Minds: Representations of Vampires and the Undead from the Enlightenment to the Present Day*, ed. by Sam George and Bill Hughes (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 181-91. (pp. 182; 184; 189).

each loves the other sans sex which would have been the normal physical culmination of their love as well as the solution to their frustrated desire.

Reception material in Part Two shows teen readers to be divided on this careful attention showered upon Bella. One group clearly identifies with the comfort and nurture in Edward's attentions; another sees his actions as bordering on the sinister and stalker-like. However, it must be noted that in Meyer's facility as a storyteller, she offers an implied reason for this attention, beyond Edward's obvious attraction to Bella: he interrogates her because she is the only one whose mind he cannot read.

The 'Quest Motif' in Adult Romances

In this section, I offer an alternative response which is more positive and empowered to *Twilight's* romance plot. I will be borrowing Pamela Regis' research on romance because it offers a more comprehensive evaluation of the modern adult romance genre than other analyses. In *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, Regis identifies idealism as an integral part of an ideal romance.¹³⁰ Regis' model includes some form of social activism by the heroine who helps to better the environment or locale in the story. This is a departure from the writings of Janice Radway whose seminal research in 1984 helped to constitute romance-reading as a serious topic of study, looking at how a group of female adults selected, consumed and thought about romances.

Radway's research, in fact, has argued that romance reading is a 'profoundly conflicted activity centered upon a profoundly conflicted form'.¹³¹ In Radway's research on the romance genre, the quest is always towards marriage. Given that the outcome or ending in romances always culminates in marriage, the reason for readers to consume them is 'the sense of exquisite tension, anticipation, and excitement created' as they imagine 'the possible resolutions and consequences' of the encounter between the hero and heroine especially 'the importance of *development* in the romance's portrayal of love'.¹³² This development can be found in Radway's framework which shows thirteen functions performed by the hero and/or heroine. Called the 'narrative structure of the ideal romance', a

¹³⁰ Pamela Regis in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

¹³¹ Janice Radway in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, p. 14.

¹³² Janice Radway in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, p. 65.

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heroine in romances, however, only achieves fulfilment upon marriage.¹³³ In fact, she asserts that 'it cannot be overlooked that the fictional world created [in the romances] also reinforces traditional female limitations because it validates the dominance of domestic concerns and personal interaction in women's lives'.¹³⁴

Radway's analysis, it must be noted, is tempered by her commitment to 'social change' and therefore, her critique of the romance genre and the reading practices of her sample group of married female readers, is also influenced by her implicit assumption that reading should, or at least ought to provide some form of transformative potential for readers, particularly for readers who spend hours each week consuming books.¹³⁵ Understandably, and after writing about the various types of pleasure her group of readers have derived from consuming romance novels, Radway includes in her conclusion that

'(i)n the end, the romance-reading process gives the reader a strategy for making her present situation more comfortable without substantive reordering of its structure rather than a comprehensive programme for reorganising her life in such a way that all needs might be met'.¹³⁶

Although Radway acknowledges the complexity in romance-reading – as a 'profoundly conflicted activity centred upon a profoundly conflicted form' – her writing nonetheless indicates her expectation that romance reading can or should offer some form of 'comprehensive programme' for any reader to reorganise her life: an expectation which has elicited some criticism. Regis, in fact, argues that

¹³³ Radway herself borrowed the framework from noted structural folklorist Vladimir Propp in his *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1966) and adapted it to highlight what she calls the dominant, active role played by the hero in romances. Of her thirteen functions, the first and last functions more than the others, emphasise the heroine's passivity and dependence on the male. In the first function, the heroine begins by having her social identity destroyed and it is only and finally restored by the last function (function 13). This resolution can only happen after the hero has openly declared his love or commitment to the heroine in function 11. In turn, the heroine responds sexually and emotionally to him in function 12 (p. 134). To account for the interaction between the hero and heroine in romances (not possible in the Propp framework) Radway also incorporates part of Will Wright's research where 'the action of a character in the context of one social situation is seen to bring about a new situation, a new relationship of characters' (Wright 1977, p. 128). Concurring with Wright's critique of Propp, Radway also writes 'that a genre is never defined solely by its constitutive set of functions, but by interaction between character and by their development as individuals' (Radway, p. 120). This interaction between characters and, where there is character development is important in any story but as Regis' model shows, not all romance plots, especially those set in modern times, follow Radway's male-dominant model.

¹³⁴ Janice Radway in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, p. 214.

¹³⁵ She writes, 'I think it absolutely essential that we who are committed to social change learn not to overlook this minimal but nonetheless legitimate form of protest' in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, p. 222.

¹³⁶ Janice Radway in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, p. 215. Radway has deliberately adopted 'multiple perspectives' in her writing, because, as she 'hopes' this strategy 'might help us to comprehend what the [respondents] understand themselves to be gaining from the reading of romances while simultaneously revealing how that practice and self-understanding, have tacit, unintended effects and implications', p. 211.

Radway's criticism of the romance novel was more a criticism of its form especially its inevitable ending with marriage, rather than the romance novel and poses the question, 'Can the form of a novel accomplish, or, as Radway claims, thwart, a "comprehensive program for reorganising" the reader's life?'¹³⁷ The answer, Regis asserts is 'no' because while any number of books may be able to motivate readers, none can be said to lay out a comprehensive programme, in addition to the fact that even then, 'form cannot compel the aesthetic, intellectual, or psychological belief in those expectations'.¹³⁸

Unsurprisingly, Regis' more current research on romance novels is different from Radway's especially where female agency is concerned. One, because her analysis, unlike Radway's study, is not confined to 'historical romances', and two, because contemporary romance novels which Regis includes in her analysis 'have changed significantly' to be more reflective of 'contemporary ideas of love, sex and relationships'.¹³⁹ As such, these changes which are incorporated in Regis' model of adult romance offer a more positive analysis on romance texts.

Besides the fact that Regis' model features more contemporary ideas of love and relationships, I have borrowed her model of adult romance because her eight narrative elements also more closely resemble *Twilight*. Regis' eight narrative elements are:

a *definition of society*, always corrupt, that the romance novel will reform; the *meeting* between the heroine and hero; an account of their *attraction* for each other; the *barrier* between them; the *point of ritual death*; the *recognition* that fells the barrier; the *declaration* of heroine and hero that they love each other; and their *betrothal*.¹⁴⁰

By including the social dimension into the romance narrative and expanding the narrative beyond just the hero and heroine, Regis reconceptualises the traditional 'quest motif' of romances. From this perspective there is wider meaning to the romance brought about through the actions of the hero and especially the heroine. This element in modern romance is important because it allows the

¹³⁷ Pamela Regis in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 13.

¹³⁸ Pamela Regis in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 13.

¹³⁹ Andrea Cipriano Barra, *Beyond the Bodice Ripper: Innovation and Change in the Romance Novel Industry* (Doctoral Dissertation, Rutgers University-Graduate School-New Brunswick, 2014). Barra writes that 'both academic and popular perception has remained firmly in the early 1980s when many of the surface criticisms were still valid', but that has changed considerably with the content of romance novels in the past 14 years being 'more reflective of contemporary ideas of love, sex and relationships'. (p. ii).

¹⁴⁰ Pamela Regis in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 14.

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heroine to play another role, such as becoming the catalyst or primary cause for the transformation or reform of some aspect of society. Together, this female agency, and the definition of a 'betrothal' offered by Regis, are what set modern romances apart.¹⁴¹ There is still the happy ending which is a requirement in an ideal romance, Regis writes, but that happy ending is termed the 'betrothal'; a useful term now because it allows for other forms of personal partnership that do not necessarily culminate in a traditional marriage.¹⁴² Regis' definition and framework updates the romance genre to include more modern interpretations of partnerships, although it must be noted that Regis' analysis does not include same-sex partnerships.¹⁴³

Among the eight elements of romance that Regis proposes, she writes that two of the elements in particular are more 'important than the ending in determining a romance novel's meaning'.¹⁴⁴ The two are the 'barrier' and 'point of ritual death'. The barrier, Regis writes, provides the best defence 'against the claim that the marriage is the most important element of the book'.¹⁴⁵ The barrier, according to her, is the conflict in the romance and is 'anything that keeps the union of heroine and hero from taking place' and, can be in the form of any issue, such as incest and spousal abuse and, everything in between from interpersonal issues to world politics.¹⁴⁶ One example given by Regis for a conflict or barrier is the belief held by a heroine from a dysfunctional family that the hero, in courting her, will

¹⁴¹ In arguing for her re-formulated model, Regis first notes that Radway's own model only focused on historical romances; those identified as 'excellent or satisfying' by her group of respondents in the early 1980s. The implication being that the historical setting would affect how much empowerment or freedom female protagonists could 'realistically' and generally possess in the past unlike her own research which includes a wider range of contemporary modern romances including non-historical ones.

¹⁴² This contrasts Radway's criticism that the heroine's sexuality can only be 'unleashed effectively through marriage' and in the structures of patriarchal dominance' (p. 74). Radway's Smithton readers differentiated between good and bad romances with good romances avoiding promiscuous sex, physical torture and weak heroes. However, Radway implies that regardless of whether they are in good or bad romances, the heroine realises her 'feelings *only* (sic.) within the traditional, monogamous marriage' (Radway 1991, p. 74).

¹⁴³ Based on the definition by the 'Romance Writers of America' (RWA), an influential non-profit trade association of romance writers and related industry professionals, there are seven subgenres of romance. These include contemporary series romance and contemporary single title romance, inspirational, paranormal, romantic suspense, young adult romance and, historical romance in 'The Romance Genre', in 'www.rwa.org', <<http://www.rwa.org/p/cm/ld/fid=579>>, n.d., [accessed 10 May 2014]. However, as Linda Lee notes (2008) in 'Guilty Pleasures: Reading Romance Novels as Reworked Fairy Tales', the paranormal romance is considered a 'catchall category' which includes diverse topics such as 'time travel, futuristic settings, magic, shape-shifters, supernatural creatures like werewolves and vampires, or other-world settings' (p. 53).

¹⁴⁴ Pamela Regis in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 14.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

‘return her to a family in which the adults do not fulfil their obligations’.¹⁴⁷ The result, Regis claims, is a dark romance novel where the hero’s declaration of love is perceived as a threat because at issue for the heroine is ‘the difficulty in breaking old family patterns and of distinguishing love from unhealthy demands’.¹⁴⁸

In the *Twilight* series, many barriers appear to separate Bella and Edward. There is the main barrier, between life and the undead and also others, beginning with (the knowledge of) Edward’s vampirism in *Twilight* and all its ramifications through *New Moon*, *Eclipse* and *Breaking Dawn*; from Bella discovering and possessing knowledge of vampires, to the debate between Bella and Edward on the possible loss of her soul if she were to become a vampire, to the Volturi’s accusation that Bella is a threat to the vampires’ hidden existence, among other barriers. It must be noted that this constant succession of threats or barriers, is in keeping with a new trend observed in modern romances, especially those published after the 1980s. According to An Goris, romances in narrative series delay the ‘happy-ever-after’ or HEA by deliberately lacking a definitive ending.¹⁴⁹ However, Goris also notes that the happy end is only temporarily postponed ‘beyond the material boundaries of the single narrative’.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, in the *Twilight* series, each of the books except *Breaking Dawn* avoids any clear resolution in their conclusions. Readers know at the end of *Twilight*, *New Moon* and *Eclipse* that nothing has been resolved and that the biggest issue is, not so much the threat posed by the Volturi (first introduced in the second book *New Moon*) which is still looming over Bella and Edward like the proverbial sword of Damocles, as the issue of whether Bella will sacrifice humanity for love.

¹⁴⁷ Pamela Regis in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 15

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. Julia Wood’s broad definition of ‘dark romance’ narratives mentioned earlier, seems to include not just unhealthy demands but equally unhealthy concepts of romance or love. What seems problematic is when she bases some of her assertions on A. Jones’ book, writing ‘[Jones] notes that the controlling and violent behaviours of men who batter are synonymous with portrayals of love in popular romance novels and other media’ (p. 244). In Wood’s references, Jones is A. Jones, *Next time she’ll be dead: Battering and how to stop it*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994a) and *Where do we go from here?* (Unpublished manuscript, 1994b) pp. 56-63.

¹⁴⁹ According to An Goris, the ‘happy end’ in romances is ‘known in the romance community by the acronym HEA, which stands for Happy Ever After’ in ‘Happily Ever After... And After: Serialization and the Popular Romance Novel’, *Americana*, 12 (2013). pp 1-14. (p. 3.)

¹⁵⁰ This is also different from the teen romance series, *Sweet Valley High* and *Sweet Valley University* and the two books which continue the story of the twins, *Sweet Valley Confidential* (2011) and *The Sweet Life* (2012) because the romantic pairings of the twins change over the series. In the (adult) romance narrative series, the pairing is always the same; they may part for a while due to a conflict/ barrier but will return to each other at the resolution of the conflict.

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Meyer's *Twilight* series which begins with the traditional quest motif of betrothal between Edward and Bella, goes on to incorporate some form of social activism in their shared world which ends for the better in *Breaking Dawn*. In the final book, the corruption and deceit practised by the Volturi, the small ruling vampire cabal, is effectively countered by Bella and the Cullens. The world involving the vampires becomes better for it because the Volturi have 'been seriously shaken; their confidence shattered' and to emphasise how important the outcome of the encounter has been, Edward tells Bella that the 'Volturi haven't fought in a fair fight in about twenty five hundred years...they've only been involved with unopposed slaughterings'(sic.).¹⁵¹ Bella and Edward's love, as Meyer's narrative indicates, gets a happily-ever-after: the final threat/ barrier posed by the Volturi has been torn down.

The next narrative element, the 'point of ritual death' according to Regis is

that moment in a romance novel when the union of heroine and hero seems completely impossible. It is marked by death or its simulacrum (for example fainting or illness); by the risk of death; or by any number of images of events that suggest death, however metaphorically (for example darkness, sadness, despair, or winter).¹⁵²

Regis' definition seems to cover almost all possibilities where the term 'crisis' can equally be substituted. 'Ritual death' takes place almost literally in *Twilight* and literally in *Breaking Dawn*. In the first book, Bella chooses to save her mother and therefore risks death at the hands of the psychopathic vampire, James, because as she says, 'I had no choices now but one: to go to the mirrored room and die'.¹⁵³ As discussed earlier, Bella does die in *Breaking Dawn* albeit only for a few moments as she is turned into a vampire soon after. Finally, Regis' model is also useful because of her central contention that 'heroines in (ideal) romances do not get extinguished' with the corollary that they begin as strong agents who end up stronger than before.¹⁵⁴ Notwithstanding Bella's despair and suffering in *New Moon*, Meyer depicts her as a guardian angel when she flies to Italy in a bid to prevent Edward's suicide, all the while thinking of going through the harrowing pain of loss again: '(m)aybe, if I were very, very, very lucky, I would somehow be

¹⁵¹ *Breaking Dawn*, p. 689; p. 690.

¹⁵² Pamela Regis in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 14.

¹⁵³ *Twilight*, p. 375.

¹⁵⁴ Regis writes 'critics claim that the romance novel extinguishes its own heroine, confining her within a story that ignores the full range of her concerns and abilities', and 'binds readers in their marriages or encourages them to get married: it equates marriage with success and glorifies sexual difference' (p. 10).

able to save Edward. But I wasn't so stupid as to think that saving him would mean that I could stay with him... Seeing him and losing him again... This was the price I had to pay to save his life. I would pay it'.¹⁵⁵ This theme, that Bella and Edward's love for each other, deserves such sacrifice and devotion is repeated in many different ways throughout the series as obstacle after obstacle is thrown at them only to be overcome by their enduring love, in spite of mistakes, misadventures and unfortunate coincidences. Teen readers who prefer Jacob as Bella's partner, view this devotion with exasperation, if not annoyance, as this unflinching loyalty towards Edward seems redolent of disloyalty and unfairness to Jacob, which I will show in the next chapter.

In an ideal romance, the heroine passes the barrier and state of conflict to a state of freedom with the heroine possessing 'affective individualism', a term coined by Lawrence Stone in *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500-1800*.¹⁵⁶ This term, which Regis borrows, expresses the concept that 'the individual's fulfilment is the end of life itself'.¹⁵⁷ Regis frequently utilises 'affective individualism' to indicate the primary motivation of the heroine (not restricted to the love plot) as the freedom yearned for and successfully sought by the heroine in romance novels, beginning with a change from 'inhibition to action, from constraint to choice' and 'bondage to freedom'.¹⁵⁸

This is indeed an expansion and a re-framing of Radway's analysis. Returning to Bella's role in the *Twilight* series, one positive and sympathetic view is that she does what she can, to the best of her ability or what she knows or believes is the right thing, even though she is certainly not an action-oriented teen heroine. One example such as deliberately slashing her hand in order for her flowing blood to provide a distraction to the bad vampires comes to mind.¹⁵⁹ However, it must be noted, that examples such as these are far too few and teen readers have picked up other instances which situate Bella in a less positive light.

¹⁵⁵ *New Moon*, p. 381.

¹⁵⁶ Lawrence Stone in *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

¹⁵⁷ Pamela Regis in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, pp. 56-59.

¹⁵⁸ Pamela Regis in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 56.

¹⁵⁹ This occurs in *Eclipse*, and Bella does it in emulation of the werewolves' origin story where one of the wives in the tribe plunged a knife into her own heart so as to provide a momentary distraction for the vampire in its fight with the werewolves. *Eclipse*, pp. 228-229; pp. 487-488.

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To reiterate, Meyer has created a romance and gothic hybrid. As we will see, this blend has engaged but also exasperated and annoyed young readers. Earlier I have written about there being another seemingly consistent view of vampires which I call the horror archetype, whereon the vampire is clearly and unequivocally a monster. There can only be one logical outcome in the narrative of the purely horror archetype, the annihilation of the vampire.¹⁶⁰ This is because if the vampire is not vanquished, there is only the continuation or perpetuation of misery or crisis caused by the monster. I refer of course to Stephen King's vampires and those in *The Strain* trilogy by Del Toro and Hogan. In her blend of romance and gothic, however, Meyer actually includes both types of vampires, a fact which has been noted by some young readers, who debate their characteristics in their response.

In the denouement of Meyer's series, instead of a *battle royale* between the two types of vampires with one side aided by the werewolves, she offers brokered peace with only one death. This peaceful outcome, as described by Edward, says it all: '(I)t was a combination of things there at the end, but what it really boiled down to was... Bella'.¹⁶¹ Hence, no fight sequence and no major scene of significant action takes place in the final book in the series. Instead, Meyer, in a literary sleight of hand, introduces a new character called Nahuel, a cross-breed adult vampire who is able to 'realise for the first time that just because he is half immortal, it doesn't mean he is inherently evil. He looks at (Edward) and sees... what his father should have been'.¹⁶² For the 'climactic' scene, instead of annihilation of the 'horror' vampires, Meyer has their power and sway reduced while increasing the influence and power of the heroic vampires. The narrative and series end with Edward kissing Bella: predictably, her final thoughts are that 'we continued blissfully into this small but perfect piece of our forever'.¹⁶³

I have identified key scenes in the four books and speculated that Meyer's hybrid of gothic and romance changed the horizon of expectation for young readers. I have also looked at some of the more critical analyses offered by academics on *Twilight* which have underscored their concerns and fears of *Twilight's* effects

¹⁶⁰ A case in point is Stephen King's most recent book *Doctor Sleep* and his 'psychic vampires'. Their leader, Rose the Hatless, finally gets killed in a showdown but only after almost choking the teen heroine to death. In this scene and in previous ones: they follow the horror archetype where there is a lot of action, particularly in the climax, in contrast to Meyer's narrative. See Stephen King in *Doctor Sleep*, Paperback edn (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2014), pp. 457; 462.

¹⁶¹ *Breaking Dawn*, p. 688.

¹⁶² *Breaking Dawn*, p. 696.

¹⁶³ *Breaking Dawn*, p. 699.

and influence on young minds. Understandably, and given the variety and nature of these criticisms, any parent may be inclined to view Meyer's *Twilight* series with some trepidation and anxiety should the (presumably female) young reader spend hours consuming Meyer's four texts. However, and again it must be emphasised, such criticisms have been theorised on the implied young (female) reader who (unfortunately) is still viewed as quite susceptible or suggestible to romance gothic texts.

Part Two: Romance Gothic and Young Adult Readers: Evidence from the Internet

Not only is it critical to look closely at what young readers are actually responding to in *Twilight*, it is crucial that we look at their responses in their own terms. Much has already been written about *Twilight*'s negative effects by researchers; messages in mass media have been no different, bordering on the negative to spelling out the implied 'harm' to young impressionable female readers. One such example, taking into account newspapers' penchant for sensational headlines, is *Guardian* columnist Tanya Gold's 'Twilight is not feminist: it's female masochism', where she finds two of *Twilight*'s themes to be 'particularly disturbing': the 'sexual violence of the central relationship' and the 'anti-abortion agenda'.¹

Across the Atlantic, an article by the online *Huffington Post* expresses amazement that the final film of the *Twilight* saga has received what it calls the 'most shockingly good reviews' from the *New York Times* chief film critic Manohla Dargis.² However, the article was quick to point out that Dargis 'did note that she does not feel "Part Two" was necessary' and that other reviews were not as 'praise-filled' with selected (implied more accurate) quotes by other critics. The quotes range from 'so dull you might start yanking on your own head after about an hour' to 'has no upmarket aspirations...(m)any from the outside looking in may only be able to gasp in some form of disbelief'.³

From none-too complimentary comments by noted popular horror writers, mentioned in Part One, to disparaging comments by the media, most adult

¹ Tanya Gold in 'Twilight is not feminist: it's female masochism', *Guardian*, 17 November 2012, p. 46.

² Cavan Sieczkowski, 'Twilight: Breaking Dawn's Reviews: The New York Times Gives 'Part 2' Shockingly good review', *Huffington Post*, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/16/twilight-breaking-dawn-reviews-new-york-times-shocking_n_2145509.html>, 16 November 2012, [accessed 23 August 2015].

³ Cavan Sieczkowski, 'Twilight: Breaking Dawn's Reviews: The New York Times Gives 'Part 2' Shockingly good review'.

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responses, if not verging on the negative about *Twilight*'s detrimental effects, have been dismissive of teen readers' taste and judgement due to their preference for Meyer's romance gothic texts. Whether this is true about teens' reading preference is debatable; what matters more, however, is the need to analyse what teenagers or young adult readers are really responding to when they consume such works, and even more importantly (and ethically), that this is done, as far as possible on their own terms.

It must be noted that the terms 'Twi-hards', 'Twilighters' or '*Twilight* audiences' have sometimes been used to describe fans of the *Twilight* film series. Anne Gilbert notes that the use of 'Twilight audiences' can be misleading as it is nowhere near as 'uniform and coherent as the term might suggest'.⁴ Matt Hills, in fact, writes that 'it should be understood that there isn't one thing that can be dubbed "Twilight Fandom", and asserts that 'in actuality, there are many different "Twilight" fandoms'.⁵ Gilbert's use of the term 'fans' is interchangeable with 'subgroups' and her study makes clear her interest in how 'members of these subgroups interact with one another'.⁶ She describes these fans as vocal, active individuals who 'consume the primary texts with recognizable fervour', and who 'frequently pursue paratexts with equal enthusiasm by seeking out interviews with the author or actors from the films, news articles, reviews, spoilers, appearances, and any information related to the original material', and who, not coincidentally, also play 'a certain role for other members of the audience'.⁷ These roles include 'organis(ing) active fan communities'; creat(ing) original works of fan fiction, visual art, music, handicrafts, or video art, circulat(ing) newsletters, hold(ing) conventions, organis(ing) "Twilight"-dedicated groups both online and off; and decorat(ing) themselves with "Twilight"-themed tattoos'.⁸

⁴ Anne Gilbert, 'Between Twi-Hards and Twi-Haters: The Complicated Terrain of Online "Twilight" Audience Communities', in *Genre, Reception, and Adaptation in the "Twilight" Series*, ed. by Anne Morey (2012), pp. 163-80. (p. 164).

⁵ Hills also notes the irony of other media fans (e.g. fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) 'pathologizing' *Twilight* fans but sees it as a 'kind of fan protectionism, and boundary-maintenance, that can be analysed as inter-fandom' rather than being anti-fan as 'defined in existing literature' in Matt Hills, '"Twilight" Fans Represented in Commercial Paratexts and Inter-Fandoms: Resisting and Repurposing Negative Fan Stereotypes', in *Genre, Reception, and Adaptation in the "Twilight" Series*, ed. by Anne Morey (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2012), pp. 113-29. (p.115).

⁶ Anne Gilbert, 'Between Twi-Hards and Twi-Haters: The Complicated Terrain of Online "Twilight" Audience Communities', p. 164.

⁷ The exact phrase used by Gilbert is the 'role these subgroups play for other members of the audience' in 'Between Twi-Hards and Twi-Haters: The Complicated Terrain of Online "Twilight" Audience Communities', p. 164.

⁸ Anne Gilbert, 'Between Twi-Hards and Twi-Haters: The Complicated Terrain of Online "Twilight" Audience Communities', p. 164.

Gilbert's use of the term 'fan' follows closely the description in Henry Jenkins' seminal book, *Textual Poachers*, which spells out five distinct dimensions of fans' subcultures, with one dimension as possessing a specific set of practices in fans' 'embrace of favoured texts'.⁹ Some examples of fan practices, highlighted by Matt Hills in *Fan Cultures*, include visiting locations and sites linked to the favoured text or icon, and/or the use of their bodies as a 'site for the display of their devotion to texts and icons', similar to the "Twilight"-themed tattoos described by Gilbert.¹⁰

Although some young readers of *Twilight* cited here may have adopted certain 'practices' associated with belonging to a subculture, my focus is on the wider group of young readers of the *Twilight* texts who have posted their responses online. This, of course, naturally includes young readers whose responses to *Twilight* may have taken the form of a play, fanfiction or some other text production. In short, my study is not confined to a group of self-identified fans who have posted online their responses, but includes what young readers have thought about, written up – be it in the form of parodies and reviews or opinion pieces, both negative and positive – and then posted online in order to share their responses to the *Twilight* series of texts and films. As such, I have used the term 'fan' in the general sense to describe the readers of *Twilight* who have enthusiastically posted their positive responses to the *Twilight* texts onto three of the four websites mentioned in this chapter.¹¹

For this chapter on young adult response, I aim to address three interrelated questions: what it is that young people are responding to when consuming the

⁹ Jenkins' text describes 'at least five distinct dimensions' of fans' subculture: 'its relationship to a particular mode of reception; its role in encouraging viewer activism; its functions as an interpretive community; its particular traditions of cultural production; its status as an alternative social community' in Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. 10th edn (Routledge, 2012), p. xxxi; pp. 1- 2.

¹⁰ Matt Hills in *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002). Not just an entire chapter on 'how cult fandom moves beyond the text to take in fan tourism and cult geography', Hill also devotes another chapter about the fan-impersonator (such as Elvis impersonators) where the body of the fan becomes 'a site for the display of their devotion to texts and icons'. p. 8; pp. 158-171.

¹¹ One reason for not aligning my investigation solely as a study belonging to fan studies is that my second group of respondents are not fans but have been selected by their teachers. Another reason is the contested role of the academic fan or non-fan academic which is best explained by John Tulloch who spells out the issues of having different approaches used by researchers studying fandom who would either 'self-describe (e.g. Henry Jenkins and Matt Hills) as a fan of cult media' or would view the 'cult' as 'something that others were doing' (e.g. E.G. McKinley). Tulloch also mentions the impact such differences in approach might have on both theory and methodology used in these studies by academic fans (and non-fans) writing about other fans. Matt Hills has his own answer to Tulloch's concerns and proposes instead the term fan-scholar or scholar-fan in his book, *Fan Cultures*, in order to eliminate the perceived barriers and tensions in the non-fan or aca-fan. John Tulloch in *Watching Television Audiences: Cultural Theories and Methods* (Taylor & Francis US, 2000). p. 202 and Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002). pp. 15-20.

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romance gothic texts, *Twilight*, which has been seen as 'sappy'.¹² Secondly, what young adult readers are discussing: especially the topics and issues that they bring up and how they themselves respond to their fellow teens' response on the *Twilight* texts and films. Thirdly, I am also interested in the role or part that *Twilight* plays in the young readers' discussion, response and meta-response.

The latter is a term I have borrowed from Susan L. Feagin who defines a 'meta-response' as a response to one's own first -order response, or subsequent response(s) after the initial one.¹³ First introduced more than three decades ago in 1983, Feagin used it to explain the paradox of taking pleasure in works with unpleasant endings. These meta-responses are important and as Sally Markowitz argues, they can be valuable and deserve closer scrutiny because 'our meta-responses to fiction are real, even if the objects of our first order responses (and on some views, the first-order responses themselves) are not'.¹⁴ For the purpose of this study, I have broadened the idea of 'meta-response' to include responses made by others, besides the person who responded first.

Only by answering these three key questions, will any study be able to offer some form of systematic explanation as to whether there is a real basis for the variety of adult fears towards romance gothic texts targeted at young adult readers, which were discussed in Part One. In this section, I will argue that far from being a cause for concern, Meyer's blending of genres in her romance gothic narrative has further encouraged debate among young readers and audiences, enabling them not just to argue, debate and/or interrogate the text (films) among themselves but to do so in their own terms, creatively and in thought-provoking ways.

¹² I have borrowed this word from 'Halycon' (Teenink.com member) who posted in the comments section on Jul. 8, 2011, 'GAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHH!!!!!!! No...More...Sappy vampire books!!!! Oh no, There's another one! They're multiplying! Oh, the horror!!!! (sic.) from 'Twilight on Equality', in 'teenink.com', <http://www.teenink.com/opinion/sports_hobbies/article/82295/Twilight-on-Equality/>, 8 July 2011, [accessed 11 November 2015].

¹³ Susan L. Feagin, *Reading with Feeling: The Aesthetics of Appreciation* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996).

¹⁴ Sally Markowitz, 'Guilty Pleasures: Aesthetic Meta-Response and Fiction', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (1992), 307-16 (p. 315). Markowitz's use of 'real' in her article about 'meta-responses' refers to responses made by people on their actual and observable response, as opposed to the initial response to a character in fiction, an object of art, etc., which she notes some people (implied with strict definitions of 'real' referring to humans only) may not 'view' as 'real', being fictional or not human.

The Nature of the Evidence

Among the thousands of websites and fansites devoted to *Twilight*, I have selected four: they are *Teen Ink*, markreads.net, twilightguy.com and bellaandedward.com. These four websites have been chosen on the basis that they are by young respondents and that archived material still exists as of August 2015. This is because many websites included in Stephenie Meyer's 'official' *Twilight* site are now either dormant or no longer exist, offering instead broken 'links' to other sites with no association whatsoever to the *Twilight* series.

Of the four websites, two are listed in Stephenie Meyer's official website and not coincidentally, both website owners have attended at least one movie premiere of the *Twilight* series. Privately owned, these two websites have been endorsed by Stephenie Meyer herself. They are twilightguy.com by Kaleb Nation who was 20 years old when he began his posts in 2008 and, bellaandedward.com by 13-year-old Michelle Pan who started it in October 2006. Both have since gone on to become published authors.

The other two websites, however, cannot be found among Meyer's 'Twilight Series Fansites' presumably because one is an online teen magazine with print versions not solely devoted to *Twilight*, while the other adopts an openly critical stance. The latter is markreads.net owned by Mark Oshiro who was below 25 years of age when he wrote his reviews.¹⁵ *Teen Ink*, besides offering an online version, also distributes a monthly print teen magazine which has a national (US) circulation.¹⁶ As *Teen Ink* is distributed in American high schools, almost all its online users are, unsurprisingly, from the US with a few from different countries such as the UK and countries in Latin America. Of the four websites, only *Teen Ink* can claim that all articles and comments, or meta-responses on their website are by teenagers.¹⁷

¹⁵ In my email to Mark Oshiro, he kindly responded and wrote back that he was indeed below 25 years old when he uploaded his posts on Meyer's *Twilight*. In my research, I have tried to include only teenagers, and if anyone is above 20, he or she has to be at the most 25 years of age. I have set the limit to 25 in order to be able to include in my analysis the two male website authors, Kaleb Nation and Mark Oshiro who were then in their early twenties, while still maintaining and keeping my research focus on young adult readers.

¹⁶ *Teen Ink* is fully funded by the American based non-profit organisation 'The Young Authors Foundation, Inc.'

¹⁷ This is because for anyone to contribute articles or post a comment (meta-response), users have to first register via their 'Facebook' account. Age is determined through an honour system and all users have to click a box to confirm that they are indeed between the ages of 13 to 18 as part of the registration process.

Part Two: Romance Gothic

For *Teen Ink*, I have limited my survey to the first fifty articles posted on teenink.com as their search engine yielded 3390 results for the word 'Twilight' alone. Of the fifty articles, I have further categorised them according to format and content, paying particular attention to those which have received more than 300 meta-responses from readers. Pan's website bellaandedward.com is currently active but has simplified its form as a resource in which no further news articles on *Twilight* will be posted. Viewers of the site are also not able to view previous posts on *Twilight*. Instead, Pan's website now directs people to her book *Bella should have dumped Edward: Controversial views and debates on the Twilight series* (2010), published by Ulysses Press which includes her opinions along with other fans' response to *Twilight* posted earlier on her site.¹⁸ I will cite Pan's book as my source.

For both Kaleb Nation's twilightguy.com and Mark Oshiro's markreads.net, I will select the first 13 'chapters' as well as posts on similar scenes that are significant in the series. A comprehensive search of online material has indicated that both Kaleb Nation and Mark Oshiro are the only two *Twilight* commentators to have arranged their posts based on each chapter from all four books.¹⁹ Also, both websites are the only ones to have lengthy, meticulous and sizeable posts on each individual chapter. This means then that Nation and Oshiro have posted more than a hundred opinion pieces on *Twilight*, 119 to be exact, although Oshiro also includes an additional seven posts on (the online version of) *Midnight Sun*.

These online commentators from the four websites cannot be taken as representative of young respondents who possess opinions, be it negative or positive about *Twilight*. Nonetheless, these websites indicate that there is indeed great variety in the responses of young audiences, and this, therefore suggests the need for a rethink on how young readers/viewers respond to Meyer's romance gothic texts. At the very least, as my analysis shows, the default assumption of a highly suggestible, even naive group of young readers or viewers has to change.

¹⁸ Pan explains that she was first approached by people from Ulysses Press to write a book similar to the one published earlier by them called *Mugglenet.com's Harry Potter Should Have died* (2010, p. 16). In her website, Pan claims full credit for coming up with around 30 controversial questions (31 to be exact) to which fans are invited to respond. Michelle Pan in *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward: Controversial Views & Debates on the Twilight Series* (Ulysses Press, 2010).

¹⁹ I have confined my online search from January 2014 to February 2015 and so far, have not found any posts or website similar to the style of Nation and Kaleb who have systematically organised their posts based on Meyer's chapter headings.

BellaandEdward.com: A Twilight Fan Website

I begin with the writing of Michelle Pan (then sixteen years of age in 2009) who acts as the moderator in the discussions derived from 27 questions in her book, as reception material on her website is no longer available.²⁰ In her introduction, Pan uses the term, 'debate book', a particularly apt term because debate on *Twilight* seems to have been deliberately cultivated in teen reception material, not just in her website. On her website, she lists 31 questions which she originally posted for fans of *Twilight* and comparing the two lists, the four questions missing from her book are quite revealing.²¹ Three of those questions are related to issues of feminist concerns dealing with agency and freedom and, the value and worth of sacrifice. The fourth missing question however interests me the most. It asks: 'What makes the *Twilight* saga different from other vampire novels of our time?' which presupposes a wide knowledge of other books about vampires. The fact that the four questions are not included in Pan's book and no responses are available could suggest fans' lack of interest or knowledge, or possibly a combination of both.

The remaining 27 questions form individual sections as different fans respond to the same question.²² It must be mentioned here that of the 27 questions published in Pan's book, only several can be seen as slightly provocative and certainly not as 'controversial' as the book title, *Bella should have dumped Edward* suggests.²³ Pan also devotes a small section after each 'controversial' question, first summing up the various views and then offering her own opinion

²⁰ Pan writes that she could not have finished her book without 'dedicated Twilighters' from all over the world in *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward: Controversial Views & Debates on the Twilight Series* (pp. 16- 17). Thereafter the book will be referred as *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*.

²¹ Unfortunately, since all online answers have been deleted, we can only look at the original 31 questions. The questions with their actual number are: 1. Is Bella a strong, independent girl, or is she a "blank canvass" that needs to rely on a man? 2. Are Bella's relationships with Edward and Jacob abusive and controlling or are they healthy? 3. What makes the Twilight Saga different from other vampire novels of our time and 20. Did Bella do the right thing when she gave up her happiness and moved to Forks so Renee could travel with Phil? In 'Bella should have dumped Edward: controversial views on the twilight series' in 'bellaandedward.com', <<http://bellaandedward.com/baebook.php>>, n.d., [accessed 1 March 2015].

²² There are 30 respondents who are identified by their first name, age and location. For this section, I will only give the first name and *age* in Italics. Only four are above my age limit of 25. Of the remaining 26 fans, 19 of them have their responses listed under different questions, suggesting that these 19 wrote extensively and answered many different questions posted by Pan.

²³ The slightly more provocative ones are: Is there a significance to imprinting, or is it just plain creepy?; Should Bella have ended up with Edward or Jacob?; Would the series be as intriguing if Bella picked Jacob over Edward?; Should *Breaking Dawn* have ended with a fight? Are the comparisons between the Twilight saga and the Harry Potter series fair and justified or are they misguided? Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*. pp. 8-9.

Part Two: Romance Gothic

under the heading 'The Final Call'. Although the gender of the 30 respondents is not indicated in Pan's book, the 28 names cited by Pan are clearly female except for two which are used by both genders - Morgan and Alex - and therefore, could possibly be viewed as Pan's only two male respondents. The fact that more females read *Twilight* is not surprising. This replicates findings from earlier research carried out by the National Literacy Trust in 2005 on reading choices of pre-teens and teens which indicate a marked preference by 'a significantly greater percentage of girls than boys' for fiction about romance or relationships.²⁴

I have previously acknowledged that while Meyer has peopled her narrative with werewolves and vampires, the romance conventions in her narrative are definitely at the forefront. Pan's respondents clearly recognise this. In fact, none of Pan's respondents view Meyer's book as belonging to the horror genre. Nicole 21, even writes of her fears that '*Twilight* won't be remembered as an enchanting teenage-romance novel', but as 'that horrible fad that annoyed the s--- out of us all (sic.)'.²⁵ Alejandra 16 agrees writing that:

'The Twilight saga is a romance – a very chaste one at that, but a passionate, blood-boiling story nonetheless – in which the two main characters, Bella Swan and Edward Cullen, struggle through the conflicts of their forbidden romance. Everything appears to keep them apart....(but) their love prevails'.²⁶

The respondents note that Meyer's series has supernatural beings such as vampires and werewolves, but still hold firmly to the view that Meyer's hybrid narrative is most definitely a romance for teens, referring to the series either as a vampire romance or teenage love stories.²⁷ The very fact that there is a teen vampire who loves Bella and is also 'unselfish, considerate, humorous, and a complete gentleman, among many other things,' is taken as a central element which makes the series a compelling romance.²⁸ Nicole 21, also defends Meyer's version of vampires, writing that 'her vampires aren't wimpy (because) critics obviously have no knowledge of the vicious "newborns" in

²⁴ Christina Clark and Amelia Foster in 'Children's and Young People's Reading Habits and Preferences: The Who, What, Why, Where and When', *National Literacy Trust* (2005). p. 34.

²⁵ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 147.

²⁶ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 112. Alejandra 16 also writes that '*Twilight* is a sparkly alternative to traditional vampires' which chooses not to 'delve into the components of vampire integration in the human world', but focuses instead 'on the main character's relationship with her boyfriend, Edward Cullen'. (p. 148).

²⁷ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 74; p. 75. Pan herself uses both terms.

²⁸ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 19; p. 20.

Meyer's novels'.²⁹ In calling attention to the 'vicious newborns', Nicole 21, is not just acknowledging the existence of the more common horror archetype of vampires, mentioned in Part One, but is also criticising (adult) reviews that are, to her, only derived by skimming through, and skipping parts of Meyer's texts. On the whole, Pan's respondents accept Meyer's gothic world in *Twilight*: nonetheless the existence of supernatural beings such as vampires and werewolves are viewed as 'intriguing' elements which have combined to make the teen romance riveting for them.³⁰

In their response, the discussions have focussed on relationships and what it means to be loved by someone. Taylor 16, writes that 'even though (Bella) goes through all this hard stuff when she comes to live in Forks with (her father), she finds love. And not just her one true love – she also finds a best friend. She has everything that I will ever want out of life. She's so lucky'.³¹ '(L)ike any girl who loves the series', Kristine 20 writes, 'I would love to be Bella', explaining that some people 'go through life with someone who never loves them a fraction as much as Edward loves Bella' and that when Edward appears to be 'selfish in leaving her, he does it to protect her though he is wrong, as he admits, and he apologises for it'.³² These are responses in answer to the question, 'If you could be any *Twilight* character, who would you be?', and the supernatural is notably absent.³³

Even when some respondents change their opinions about Meyer's characters, by switching their preference from one character to another, the reason for changing their preference is still couched in terms associated with love and being loving to others. 'I used to want to be Bella', Sarah 25, writes. 'I think it was because she's the main character and she has this wonderful man who loves her so much that he would gladly lay down his life and happiness to save her. (However) I have found myself drawn to Alice. She is so caring and kind...compassionate (and) fiercely loyal'.³⁴ Deidre 22, answers along similar lines: about Bella finding the love of her life and having a child,

²⁹ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 146.

³⁰ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 3. Paige, 16, writes that the story 'is very intriguing' as 'readers see (characters) progress'.

³¹ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 19.

³² Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 20.

³³ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 19.

³⁴ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*. p. 20; p. 21.

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and that 'her life never was and never will be perfect, but she found essentially what everyone is looking for and that is love. She found love in so many forms and is so lucky to have so many wonderful and caring people in her life'.³⁵

Deidre 22's response offers two aspects about Meyer's romance gothic texts: one, that what the protagonist Bella is looking for, is not all that different from what people in real life hope to find, and two, because life is not perfect – 'and never will be perfect' – even in Meyer's fictional world, people (though not Bella) may not even find what they hope to look for. In other words, Deidre 22 takes comfort in reading about characters, such as Bella who has found love and has 'many wonderful and caring people' who have her best interests at heart, unlike what happens in real life. For another young reader, the response is similar. Dayi 19 writes, 'The best thing about the saga is the love and the continuity of the story'. She continues, 'I fell in love with their love', calling their love 'hard-core' and that when,

'(Edward) left her, she went into such a decline that cynics took light (sic.) but other readers could relate to. When you lose a love like that, you do not easily get over it and move on. Stephenie Meyer did not let Bella do that, and it was a good call. Bella is one of those people that choose to love with all their hearts, no holding back, and you just don't see that often anymore'.³⁶

The love and care, and all the associated emotions as described by all seven respondents cited including Pan, are akin to the love described earlier in Part One, which was first theorised by Nancy Chodorow. The love which takes the form of nurturance or tenderness, devoted care and attentiveness as displayed by Edward and to a certain extent by Esme and Alice, seems to have drawn these female readers to this romance gothic. In identifying the love and its associated meanings and collocations in *Twilight*, some of these young readers have also offered observations about what they view as a contrast to normal life i.e. 'you just don't see that anymore'. I would suggest that the same effect would not have been present for readers if the narrative was non-Gothic, given the extraordinary events that each character experiences, just because situations or problems get magnified in Meyer's romance gothic narrative.

³⁵ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 134.

³⁶ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, pp. 154-155; p. 173.

In another question, Pan offers a choice of any *Twilight* character respondents would like to be. The female respondents understandably chose female characters, naming Bella, Esme, Renesmee or Alice, justifying their selection on the basis of (maternal) love experienced by the character or the traits associated with nurturing and tenderness. In fact, these young adult readers have not written at all about the supernatural traits possessed by any of the female characters, focussing instead on how the female characters behave in loving relationships or how these characters have themselves been supported or cared for by others.

Two respondents comment at length about parental as well as romantic love. Savannah 14, seeming to combine both as different aspects of the same love, writes that: '(Renesmee's) family is huge and consists of vampires, werewolves, and humans. They all love her and care for her so much....her mother and father are deeply in love with her and each other, which just shows how much love there really is in the world'.³⁷ Deidre 22, highlights the character of Esme, 'who has a wonderful man who loves her and children to care for who love her back', a view which Pan agrees, writing that Esme 'cares for the entire Cullen family and opens her heart to Bella as well'.³⁸

These descriptions of the acts of love, of loving someone and/ or being loved in the *Twilight* series indicate just how readily young readers have zoomed onto them. It has not just drawn their attention: these respondents have picked up the same aspects of love, leading to the inference that these portrayals of love offer some form of reassurance and even comfort that such love exists, where, in the words of Dayi 19, 'there is no holding back'. Although the examples are drawn from fiction, these young respondents view Meyer's depiction in her romance gothic positively and more importantly, as ideals or approximations of love. As noted earlier in Part One, the positive traits which young readers have responded to and finding comfort in, are not viewed so positively by some researchers who fear that young minds may try to emulate them in real life which will adversely affect their relationships.

Clearly, the young readers quoted in Pan's book may have derived some comfort from Meyer's romance gothic and its lengthy depiction of love and tenderness. I would suggest that this love shown by the characters is given

³⁷ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 23.

³⁸ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 22; p. 24.

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special significance or value, because of the backstories of how the characters (traumatically) become vampires.³⁹ However, this form of appreciation or comfort in Meyer's texts does not suggest passive and unquestioning acceptance of what she has written in the series. These young respondents do indeed appreciate the tenderness and love depicted in the series, but crucially, this appreciation does not mean that they are themselves not critical or aware of flaws in Meyer's romance gothic narrative. This is also where I differ from studies which theorise the possibility of *Twilight*'s negative effects on readers.

Pan's respondents have not just recognised and picked up the romance conventions in the series, they also discuss extensively with keen awareness of what realism is and is not, and what makes for a credible, realistic plot in fiction. As one young reader points out, the series is fiction which 'sprouted from a vivid dream Stephenie Meyer had one night', although as another respondent suggests, the plotting could have been better rather than one where 'suddenly everything is all right and wrapped up nice and neat because it's "destiny"'.⁴⁰

In debating the merits of certain characters and plotlines, these young respondents argue on what constitutes an appealing or gripping story and how characters function or are developed in the *Twilight* narrative. On Bella's decision to be with Edward, Elizabeth 24 writes that 'Jacob is the logical choice' but '(w)ithout the drama and emotional despair, the story would not be nearly as intriguing. ..Edward is the far more interesting one'.⁴¹ Hannah 16 offers her response on a wry note: 'Don't get me wrong, Jacob is the type of boy/man I could see myself falling in love with, but the only reason I could is because people like Edward Cullen do not exist in the real world. People like Jacob do (forgetting that he's a werewolf)'.⁴² At first glance it would seem that Hannah 16's response shows supernaturalism to be incidental in her views even as she acknowledges that Jacob is a werewolf. However, the fact that she responds positively to Jacob implies also that the gothic plays a part precisely

³⁹ Edward is turned into a vampire because he was dying from the Spanish influenza (*Twilight*, p. 251); Esme fell from a cliff and was brought to the hospital morgue, with her heart still beating (*Twilight*, p. 252); Jasper, already a vampire but depressed and isolated until he met Alice and found happiness as her partner (*Twilight*, p. 253).

⁴⁰ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 113 (Alejandra 16); p. 115 (Elisabeth 24).

⁴¹ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 167.

⁴² Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 166.

because Jacob, as a werewolf, is able to show his loyalty, fidelity and love by saving Bella from drowning in *New Moon*, and protecting her and fighting alongside the Cullens against the vicious newborn vampires in *Eclipse*.⁴³

Young *Twilight* fans in Pan's book offer responses which seem to counter the fears espoused by researchers about young susceptible (female) readers who can be easily misled. Their responses, in fact, show extended and complex arguments. I have borrowed Joanna G. Crammond's more recent model of argument structure to help analyse some of the lengthier arguments offered by Pan's respondents. This is primarily because Crammond's model has not only been designed for persuasive writing with young writers in mind, but was developed with the aim to 'support the analysis of arguments in discourse' by offering a systematic account for 'variations in the quality ratings assigned to student persuasive texts'.⁴⁴ Ultimately, Crammond's model has been developed to help young writers hone their persuasive writing skills by enabling their writing to be both systematically evaluated, and compared against argumentation strategies employed by professional (expert) writers.⁴⁵

Unsurprisingly, Crammond's model is itself based in part on Stephen Toulmin's 1958 well-known model of argumentation which has six inter-related elements that were originally developed in response to the 'rigid, acontextual scheme proposed by traditional syllogistic logic'.⁴⁶ Expanding from Toulmin's model and, taking into account new research and developments in argumentation discourse (involving developments in semantic and linguistic theories), Crammond's model is able to incorporate descriptions for structural complexity which is normally found in persuasive discourse.⁴⁷

⁴³ *New Moon*, pp. 319-320; *Eclipse*, pp. 434; 500; 503.

⁴⁴ Joanna G. Crammond, 'The Uses and Complexity of Argument Structures in Expert and Student Persuasive Writing', *Written Communication*, 15 (1998), 230-68. (p. 233).

⁴⁵ Joanna G. Crammond, 'The Uses and Complexity of Argument Structures in Expert and Student Persuasive Writing'. p. 255.

⁴⁶ Karen J Lunsford, 'Contextualizing Toulmin's Model in the Writing Classroom a Case Study', *Written Communication*, 19 (2002), 109-74. (pp. 111-2).

⁴⁷ Joanna G. Crammond, 'The Uses and Complexity of Argument Structures in Expert and Student Persuasive Writing', pp. 232-233. In expanding her argument substructures, Crammond's model also includes research by C. H. Frederiksen which analyses the various 'propositional and conceptual networks of frames that comprise the semantics of discourse'. (p. 263). In other words, Crammond's model takes into account an audience-centred perspective (such as modals and counterarguments) and the conditional nature of claims.

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It goes without saying, of course, that Crammond's model views persuasive discourse from a rhetorical perspective, and considers argumentation to be part of the 'rhetoric of persuasion'.⁴⁸ To reiterate, what is particularly useful for my analysis here is that, first, in order to investigate the complexity of argument structures for her model, Crammond compared writings by both students (young writers) and professional writers, and secondly, her study highlights elements in extended arguments which are used frequently by experts. In her study, these elements, which come under the category of substructures and are present in texts by professional writers, are countered rebuttals and embedded arguments, which together indicate an awareness of the audience: an awareness that Crammond considers a crucial component in persuasive writing.⁴⁹

In addition, the use and frequency of extended arguments are viewed as important because they 'reflect the use of argument chains (such as) complex structures that can serve to strengthen a major claim'.⁵⁰ Crammond also asserts that 'meaningful assessment or production of persuasive text cannot proceed unless grounded in an appreciation of the social context or community in which it occurs'.⁵¹ In other words, *Twilight*'s 'social context' or respondents' awareness of their audience is important. Seen in another way, the fact that all respondents replied to Pan and posted their 'answers' online can be considered a 'performance' for the public (or those who will browse Pan's website). I am using the term 'performance' in a broad sense, to indicate that the respondents are viewed as being particularly deliberate in

⁴⁸ Joanna G. Crammond, 'The Uses and Complexity of Argument Structures in Expert and Student Persuasive Writing', pp. 248.

⁴⁹ Crammond's ten argument substructures are: a *claim* which is an assertion that is 'advanced to provide either an answer to a question or a solution to a perceived problem'; *modal qualification* refers to sentences that specify the applicability or circumstances under which the Claim would be true; there is *constraint qualification* while a *subclaim* is a secondary or minor claim due to limitations imposed on its scope such as the addition of a qualification, etc.; *Data* is the evidence or grounds for the Claim and 'generally take the form of facts or truths, although they may also involve subjective, personal views or value judgements'; *Warrant* 'serves to validate the supportive relationship between the claim' and justification; there is also *data backing* or *warrant backing* and *reservation*. *Countered Rebuttal* consists of a potential rebuttal and a response which is the arguer's attempt to counter the force of the potential rebuttal; and *alternative solution* which is a possible solution or answer to the problem statement or question that is under consideration other than the claim advanced by the arguer. For more information and details, see Joanna G. Crammond, 'The Uses and Complexity of Argument Structures in Expert and Student Persuasive Writing', *Written Communication*, 15 (1998), 230-68. (pp. 258-263).

⁵⁰ Joanna G. Crammond, 'The Uses and Complexity of Argument Structures in Expert and Student Persuasive Writing', p. 249.

⁵¹ Joanna G. Crammond, 'The Uses and Complexity of Argument Structures in Expert and Student Persuasive Writing', p. 255.

what they are writing, if not highly conscious, of their implied audience or readers, and as such, extra care seems to have been taken in what they write and how they write.⁵² This awareness is clearly reflected in the respondents' replies, which either directly address an audience or (indirectly) imply one. The use of a rebuttal, as it anticipates objections, is also another such element. This aspect of audience awareness (and as a performance), is shown more overtly in the next section with teen writers on *Teen Ink* directly addressing their online readers and offering counter arguments.

To Pan's question: 'Should Jacob have imprinted on Renesmee?', her six respondents are unsurprisingly divided on this issue of Jacob imprinting the infant Renesmee and, by implication, Meyer's choice to give a happily-ever-after to Jacob, albeit by partnering a werewolf with a human-vampire hybrid. Three feel that Meyer did the right thing, with one, Dayi 19 calling it a 'stroke of genius by Meyer to have Jacob imprint Renesmee'.⁵³ Two others disagree about imprinting, with the sixth respondent, Alejandra 16 only agreeing due to the arbitrary way Meyer has developed the 'Twilight universe'.⁵⁴ All these respondents are clearly comfortable in sharing and discussing their views, or more precisely debating the question of Jacob's action with its own in-built gothic elements.

Unlike the rest whose arguments are based on 'statements of fact' from the *Twilight* series, 16-year-old Alejandra's argument is predicated on Stephenie Meyer's 'obvious pleasure' in portraying a life that is 'truly perfect' which dispenses with any form of trouble or 'worry' for the latter.⁵⁵ Injecting a satirical note in her answer, Alejandra 16, writes that 'the Twilight universe' seems determined to maintain 'Bella Swan's perfect life' even when it seems ludicrous to do so as her response clearly implies. Hence unlike other

⁵² This also implies the anticipation of eliciting some form of response from their notional audience. I have borrowed the term 'performance' as it has been used and developed in Erving Goffman's writings in both *Frame Analysis* and *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* where Goffman introduces the idea that 'in any social setting we not only act but put on an act whether we know it or not'. Goffman's ideas have been developed further by other theorists such as Yi-Fu Tuan who develops the idea and writes about performance space, of how perception and context influence how we act. Irving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974) reprinted in Colin Counsell, and Laurie Wolf, eds., *Performance Analysis: An Introductory Coursebook* (Routledge, 2005). p. 156; p. 159. Irving Goffman, 'Performances: belief in the part one is playing' in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Doubleday, 1959) reprinted in Henry Bial, ed., *The Performance Studies Reader* (Psychology Press, 2004).

⁵³ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 111.

⁵⁴ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 112.

⁵⁵ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p.113.

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vampires, 'Bella magically develops an indifference to (a vampire's longing for blood) as long as her mind is otherwise occupied' just as she is 'not forced to battle a raging blood thirst or sacrifice her relationship with her father or face the Volturi's wrath'. She pointedly asks, 'Does this twist – that Bella does not steadily require what her new body should demand- have a logical explanation? Or does Bella's inexplicable success with vampirism suggest something else?'⁵⁶ I find Alejandra 16's response a succinct example of what Meyer's romance gothic text offers to readers: space to debate on contradictions and tensions caused by the romance/gothic hybrid and realism. Employing at least three argument substructures based on Crammond's model, Alejandra 16 offers an extended argument of why the imprinting on Renesmee 'appears' to be the right thing for Jacob to do.⁵⁷ Unsurprisingly in her ironic 'Yes' to Jacob imprinting Renesmee, she offers her critical take on what she finds preposterous in Meyer's plot.

Of all six respondents cited by Pan for that question, three offered a counter argument. Rachel 14 urges readers to 'think of what would've happened if Jacob hadn't imprinted on Renesmee...where would the story have gone from there?', writing that '(i)t would have turned into "the miserable life of Jacob Black"...why would anyone want to read a story like that?'⁵⁸ Although acknowledging its 'creepy' factor and that previously Jacob had been 'in love with Bella and hated Edward', Dayi 19 writes that it would have been a 'mistake... to leave Jacob still alone and heartbroken, waiting for his one true love [but a]s a result, it beautifully brought the story together and made for one of the best books of the *Twilight* saga'.⁵⁹ As can be seen briefly here, the young respondents' arguments, either for or against 'imprinting,' consider the situation from different angles. These range from evaluating the circumstances of the characters: 'Jacob Black is alone, desperate for help and dealing with utter grief'; 'I don't think the book would have been complete without it', to how the imprinting has had an impact on fans 'ma(king) both teams (Team Jacob and Team Edward) unnecessary'.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, pp.112-113.

⁵⁷ Based on Crammond's model, Alejandra 16 uses warrant, modal and constraint qualifications.

⁵⁸ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 110.

⁵⁹ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 112.

⁶⁰ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 109; p. 111; p. 111.

From the personal to the social, these answers, with well-considered rationales and abundance of examples are maintained throughout Pan's book. Loopholes in Meyer's plot, unsurprisingly, are also mentioned by Pan's respondents. Many respondents, deriving comfort and confidence from having closely and carefully read Meyer's texts, have also pointed to gaping 'holes' in the narrative. Elisabeth 24, finds the series 'anticlimatic', 'predictable' and even 'a bit of a cop-out'.⁶¹ She questions along ethical lines the unfairness of the whole situation for Jacob, writing that she want(s) to shake (Bella) and say,

'Get over it and look at the amazing guy that is in your life. Yeah, Jacob, remember him? The guy you used to feel better and in the end fell for? He is standing in front of you with open arms and a heart that already has you in it, and all you can think about is how alone you are because Edward left you!'⁶²

The same Alejandra 16, who earlier offers her satiric view on Bella's 'perfect world', writes frankly that she finds imprinting to be 'extremely disturbing and insulting' because it involves the fact that 'someone doesn't have to know my likes, beliefs, and habits before deciding that he is madly in love with me'.⁶³ While some respondents indicate an understanding of why the relationship of Jacob and Renesmee fits into Meyer's overarching plotline in that it allows for everyone to be happy as well as ending the quarrel between fans of Team Edward and Team Jacob, the fan response suggests that Stephenie Meyer came up with the ludicrous resolution of imprinting simply to placate pro-Jacob fans. It is also unlikely to have worked given the either fairly consistent outright negative responses or the elaborate qualifications and justifications in positive responses.

However, these 'weaknesses' or flaws found in Meyer's writing, do not detract from fans' enjoyment of the *Twilight* books and films. Showing a keen awareness of the criticisms that other people have about the series, and of their audience, Pan's respondents are frank about how others or outsiders view the series. Taylor 16, notes that 'I know a lot of people who just think the series is all so cheesy and poorly written' while Nicole 21, writes that just 'admitting to enjoyment of *Twilight* is met with groans and rolling eyes. The backlash the fans have created has even made me feel sheepish about liking

⁶¹ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 142; p.115.

⁶² Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 142.

⁶³ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 122.

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the series'. This positioning, of creating a distance between so-called 'rabid' and 'normal' fans will be mentioned later. In summing up the general attitude of non-fans, Pan writes that 'I get weird looks from people all the time, and it's really hard to convince someone to read a book they are already sceptical about'.⁶⁴ A fair and insightful point, indeed, about misconceptions held by people, and the difficulty in changing their preconceived views.

However, despite these 'outsider' criticisms, some of Pan's young respondents seem to have taken great pleasure if not comfort in some form of insider behaviour as indicated by one respondent. Nicole 21 shares that '(w)hen *Breaking Dawn* was released, my friend and I went to the beach and read it like fiends. We annoyed the rest of our friends a little, but it became a joke [shared by us]'.⁶⁵ That the respondents overwhelmingly view themselves as belonging to a select (insider) group who have earned the right to offer critiques of *Twilight*, by virtue of having actually read the books or seen the films, is the underlying sentiment in their responses. Pan mentions critics who 'laugh and make fun of the books' but 'who have never actually opened a copy of *Twilight*', a conclusion she seems to have reached, writing about the series being 'inaccurately' portrayed because 'you just can't do the *Twilight* saga justice in a couple of sentences...A human girl falling in love with a vampire! Critics have a field day with that one!'⁶⁶ As mentioned earlier, Pan seems to echo Nicole 21's view about critics who 'obviously have no [detailed] knowledge' of Meyer's texts which, in turn has compounded the number of inaccuracies in adult reviews of *Twilight*.

Respondents in Pan's book also overwhelmingly approve of the happy ending or HEA: to have it differently is not what they would have expected from a teen romance. That the HEA in the series is of paramount importance to the integrity of Meyer's narrative is never more evident than in the response to justify why there is an absence of fights or battle in the series' finale, *Breaking Dawn*. A fight would have resulted in too many favourite characters dying, writes Andrea, 21 and would not have made it possible for *Breaking Dawn* to end on 'a happy and positive note' given that 'the death of any number of them would have cast a shadow over the happy ending that people feel the characters deserve' and thus 'would have taken away the perfect ending' which 'to my mind (is) more

⁶⁴ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 152.

⁶⁵ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 145.

⁶⁶ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 152.

important than a fight scene'.⁶⁷ Dayi, 19 subscribes to the same sentiment, writing that any killing or deaths 'would have ruined the books and (been) greatly disappointing for thousands of fans (as) a fight would only have led the series down a more difficult and gloomy path. The ending is perfect as is'.⁶⁸

Pan, however, disagrees and argues for a more thrilling ending: 'I wanted something big, something grand (and) after everything that had happened in the series, it just seemed too simple for the Cullens and the Volturi to talk things over and find a resolution'. She continues, 'I wanted to see which clan was really the strongest, who had the most potent powers, and who would outshine the other in combat. The absence of a fight disappointed me and many other Twilighers around the world.'⁶⁹ As can be inferred, Pan feels that a battle is possible provided a HEA with Edward and Bella is still guaranteed. In a nod to cinematic conventions and anticipating negative responses, the film *Breaking Dawn: Part II* which premiered two years after Pan's book, offers an extended fight sequence with CGI werewolves and vampires fighting and killing one another. However, it is soon revealed as just a vision by Alice, a move which has received both criticisms and approval. To reiterate, the truce in *Breaking Dawn* avoids a gothic resolution but paves the way for a romantic one.

In Pan's book, her respondents write and discuss issues in their many different categories of response, using examples and sometimes making comparisons from life. While others see a danger in which readers or viewers may be taking the *Twilight* series too seriously, I find instead respondents who, having identified themselves as fans, are articulating their own worldview and making up their minds and offering their own value judgements. In staking their claims and opinions, these respondents seem to derive a lot of comfort in debating what *Twilight* is or is not and what works or does not in the *Twilight* texts and films.

Confident in their attitudes and positioning towards *Twilight* – be it critical or approving – these young respondents are willing to share how *Twilight* has been a source of comfort or reassurance for them as they find like-minded readers, bonding 'over a common interest' in their discussions and debate on *Twilight*.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 177.

⁶⁸ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 178.

⁶⁹ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 180.

⁷⁰ Michelle Pan, *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward*, p. 155. Pan writes about making great friends because of *Twilight*, and of personally knowing people who have become best friends because of the books.

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Certainly, the many different types of response from Pan's young respondents seem to counter academic fears of young predominantly female readers who are not only passive readers but have difficulty interrogating the texts, and thereby have trouble differentiating fiction from real life. From the perspective of fans of *Twilight* shown in Pan's book, the next section offers another perspective of young readers of *Twilight*. This time, these teenagers are not limited to specific questions unlike what then-13-year-old Pan asked on her website *BellaandEdward.com*, but are free to choose the type and even format in their response to Meyer's romance gothic texts.

Teen Ink: Twilight and Creative Space

In *Teen Ink*, there is unsurprisingly, a huge variety in the types of response to the *Twilight* series, including types of format. Although this may be partially explained by how online magazine *Teen Ink* operates with its encouragement for responses on fiction and non-fiction texts, this, still does not account for the diversity in teen responses for *Twilight*.⁷¹ The first 50 responses alone on Meyer's texts and films based on the series hosted by *Teen Ink*, come in the form of letters, book reviews and film reviews, or a combination of both, with also reviews on *Twilight's* soundtrack and graphic novels.⁷² Less common, there are also posts on fan fiction and a play, as readers respond creatively to Meyer's texts and films from just the first 50 posts analysed.⁷³

Before I continue about teen response and meta-responses in *Teen Ink*, I will briefly mention the software NVivo which I used to categorise the 50 posts uploaded by teenagers on *Teen Ink*.⁷⁴ The software NVivo was developed to help

⁷¹ The website *Teen Ink's* (static) banner on its home page has the following words, 'Magazine, website & books written by teens since 1989'. Teen contributors whose posts have been selected for the print magazine do not receive any financial compensation but will instead receive a complimentary copy of the issue containing their work. Source: www.teenink.com.

⁷² One of the 'letters' is a satirical one addressed to the Editor of the New York Times by **Melanie B** who added in the author's comments that while she did agree with some parts of the *New York Times* review, the "fangirl" side of her was 'horrifically disgusted with the article' and as she was assigned in her English class to write a satire, she chose this as a 'big fan of the *Twilight* series' in 'A (satirical) Letter to the Editor of the New York Times' in *Teen Ink*, <<http://www.teenink.com/fiction/all/article/71975/A-Satirical-Letter-to-the-Editor-of-the-New-York-Times/>>, n.d., [accessed 12 March 2015].

⁷³ Just like the above footnote, quite a few of the articles posted on *Teen Ink* mentioned that they originated from school assignments.

⁷⁴ NVivo is considered one of the newer computer software widely used for content analysis, a methodology which is defined by Klaus Krippendorff as 'a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their

researchers to systematically analyse texts while ‘effectively counter[ing] the natural tendency of humans to read and recall selectively’.⁷⁵ In effect, the software uses the methodology of content analysis which looks at common themes as part of the analysis of texts where categories are created to allow sections or parts of the texts to be assigned to them. In the case of *Teen Ink* teen writers, I first categorised them according to the various domains I have identified earlier which are of interest: domains which deal with the personal (relationships), social, even philosophical, and finally, on issues which pertain to or directly refer to horror or the supernatural in *Twilight*.

Early on, it became obvious that I needed to add sub-categories such as romance within the personal domain, vampires as a category on its own and even one on questions raised by teens on a variety of issues, among others. As such through the software’s function, I was able to differentiate what teens discussed about vampires in *Twilight*; whether it was along the binary of the horror gothic or romance gothic, and if the discussions on ‘vampires’ include other sub-topics. In short, with NVivo, I was able to look at what teens in *Teen Ink* were writing on or what was being discussed on both the macro and micro levels. For the latter, NVivo allows for similar discrete elements across the fifty teen articles which have been identified earlier, to be categorised and grouped together, allowing them to be analysed in their entirety as well as separately (individually). This form of categorising is not markedly different from the traditional way of reading the articles, highlighting key and/or similar sections and returning to them constantly to compare and to refer, except that with NVivo, the margin for error (such as missing out relevant sections given the disparate and variety of information), is minimised. In addition, NVivo’s function which allows grouping and categorising of information i.e. its ‘nodes’ function, also facilitates a more systematic process of reading while offering greater flexibility to group, compare and analyse relevant sections across the fifty articles. Similarly for meta-responses, I was able to group similar meta-responses to articles written by teens and analyse them across the fifty articles on *Twilight* that include similar issues which have captured their attention and consequently inspired further discussions.

use’. (p. 18). My primary purpose in using this software is to ensure that my analysis in the large body of texts by teens is not random and highly selective but more systematic and reliable. For more on content analysis and the use of the software NVivo, see Klaus Krippendorff in *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology 2nd Edition* (London: Sage Publications, Inc., 2004). pp.15;18-43.

⁷⁵ Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology 2nd Edition* (London: Sage Publications, Inc., 2004). p. 341.

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A quick overview of the fifty articles by teens shows tremendous creativity, if not originality in their response to the *Twilight* series. In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that *Twilight* seems to encourage its many readers to generate responses on a variety of issues and on a variety of formats and styles. For example, there is one post which has been written as a script with the irresistible title ‘The Twilight Saga in about two minutes’, where **LucyM**, under the ‘author’s comments’, writes, ‘(d)on’t flame, dudes. That’s seriously lame. Feel free to film, just credit me in the credits and let me know if you’re making a movie so I can check it out’.⁷⁶

Irreverent and funny, **LucyM** highlights what she sees as inconsistencies in Meyer’s *Twilight* narrative such as Edward’s declaration of love and behaviour, the animosity between Edward and Jacob, and even the disappointing resolution to the problem posed by the Volturi. Her succinct 269-word script includes a ‘Dance off’ between Edward and Jacob to resolve their differences but they are interrupted by Bella who yells, ‘Stop it! Can’t you see – my eggo is preggio!’.

LucyM ends her creative response with a prompt of ‘Cut to scene of the four skipping through a field’ before Edward, ‘already shiny, takes his shirt off and blinds everyone with his whiteness. Music abruptly cuts off’. Followed by ‘oops’ from Edward and then ‘End credits’.⁷⁷

Readers of *Teen Ink* clearly recognise the playful and cheeky nature, if not the sophistication in **LucyM**’s satire which pokes fun at different aspects of the four films such as Edward’s seeming change of heart towards Bella with his abrupt departure, Bella’s sudden pregnancy and even shorter gestation period and the awkward situation of Jacob falling in love with her baby.⁷⁸ Unsurprisingly, **LucyM**’s contribution has attracted more than 1700 meta-responses. Besides the creativity in **LucyM**’s response, I would suggest that *Teen Ink*’s many teen readers not only recognise but appreciate both *Twilight*’s open-endedness for differing interpretations, and **LucyM**’s confidence and enjoyment in writing a comedic response to *Twilight*’s perceived flaws. The meta-responses indicate enjoyment, and admiration, in particular for **LucyM**’s skill and confidence in her creative response, and also encouragement for **LucyM** to write more along the same style.

⁷⁶ Contributors can select how their names will appear on their posts. Other information such as location is also given. Readers can also look up the contributors through their user profile. For example in **LucyM**’s ‘about the contributor page’ she lists out eleven favourite categories i.e. favourite book, films, heroes etc. According to *Teen Ink*, as of 9 March 2015 at 20:15, **LucyM** has been a member for 65 months, 13 days, 2 hours, 3 minutes, 4 seconds.

⁷⁷ For the complete script, please see Appendix 1 – The Twilight Saga in about two minutes by **LucyM**

⁷⁸ In one scene, when Bella pleads for Edward to kill her so that she ‘can live forever’, Edward shoots her instead only to be advised by Jacob who first does a ‘face palm’, that Bella probably ‘meant “bite me”’. See Appendix 1.

There is evidently great comfort and confidence shown by **LucyM** which is implied in her comments as the author: she anticipates and pre-empt's possible negative meta-responses by offering a part-rhyming couplet and using humour in naming and discouraging any negative feedback – ‘don’t flame, dudes. That’s seriously lame’ – and also invites her readers to turn her script into a movie with one proviso, to acknowledge her ‘in the credits’. In effect, the playful invitation suggests that turning **LucyM**’s script into a film may not be that ludicrous after all among the technologically-savvy teenage readers. Although I have chosen not to analyse all 1783 meta-responses for **LucyM**’s creative response, the meta-responses can be said to be predominantly encouraging, highly positive and even filled with praise for **LucyM**.

From appreciation of creative responses to debates on certain issues, there is no doubting the fact that teen writers in *Teen Ink* have much to discuss and write about *Twilight*. In Meyer’s romance gothic, the horror and terror long associated with the supernatural get transformed into gothicised versions of teens’ own concerns if not, worries. Such topics by teen writers on *Twilight*, to name a few, include the meaning and worth of true love (by **Zakieameto**) and the value of genuine, true relationships. Admittedly less common than other domains discussed by teen writers, matters of a philosophical nature are also mentioned among the fifty articles such as the value of a vampire’s soul and the struggle of going against one’s ‘natural instinct’ (by **ScarletWater**).

Looking at these abstract concerns, **ScarletWater** focuses on the restraint shown by Edward towards Bella, writing that ‘(i)n her presence his thirst for blood was strongest’ and that ‘(t)he monster inside him screamed for satisfaction. But Edward Cullen had a strong will’ and so his response to the request ‘to make her like him’ is: “I will not take her soul” (sic).⁷⁹ **ScarletWater** goes on to link instinct with the discussion about possessing a soul, stating that ‘it is animal instinct to hunt and kill to provide the body nourishment’ and therefore, ‘Would you condemn a lion for killing a lamb? Of course not’ is her emphatic reply to her own rhetorical question. The issue of possessing a soul and working with one’s instinct seem to be on **ScarletWater**’s mind: she goes on to update her response to *Twilight*, only this time it is by offering her meta-response to her own article:

⁷⁹ **ScarletWater** in ‘Philosophy and the Twilight series. Does Edward Cullen have a soul (sic.)?’ in *Teen Ink*, http://www.teenink.com/opinion/entertainment_celebrities/article/140026/Philosophy-and-The-twilight-series-Does-edward-cullen-have-a-soul/, n.d., [accessed 10 March 2015].

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if (Edward) turns Bella into a Vampire she will lose her soul... Now, it seems funny to me that Edward thinks he would have such a power. The power to extract someones soul seems to be only a power that God himself could posses. Does Edward believe himself to be that powerful? If Vampires had the power to take away and erase ones soul during their change then (1) there would be many lost souls, and (2) they would be on the same playing field as God himself... am i wrong? (sic).⁸⁰

This discussion is immediately continued by **NotThatGirl** whose meta-response to both **ScarletWater**'s article and later meta-response, is the addition of 'awareness' and 'choice' into the philosophical discussion on instinct and soul:

You obviously did your research but it seems like you and I interpreted things differently... does his instinct justify that he has a soul? And also, when you say: "When a Vampire kills a human, he/she is completely aware of the harm that they cause in doing so." That statement is only true for the Cullens. When a lion kills an animal, it does not feel empathy, but it certainly understands that it has killed it to survive. All other vampires kill humans mercilessly, to survive.⁸¹

Discussions on instinct, possessing a soul and choice, are often not associated with teens vis-a-vis *Twilight* as literature on media has suggested that only (female) teens could appreciate its romance plot; however, Meyer's *Twilight* seems to have inspired such departures from the norm in perceived teen discussions. Joining in the philosophical discussion a few months later is **moonpetal** who feels that when killing is done to protect someone, then such acts show that the agent possesses a soul or more accurately a conscience (which presumably is accompanied by a soul):

edward has a soul, he killed only bad sick horrible people stopping them from harming others. Kinda like how Zelda fans would agree if Link was a person he would have a soul even though he killed people. It was in defense and for the good of Hyrule (where the game is set). IDK why Edward dissagree with having a soul, obviously the vampires in this series are not the classical souless evil dracula and such. But yeah way to go I liked it :D (sic).⁸²

What makes this discussion of special interest is that with Meyer's inclusion of supernatural beings such as vampires and the role of a protective vampire or vampires who choose not to kill, this has inspired teen readers to reflect further

⁸⁰ **ScarletWater**'s meta-response is shown to have been written on 16 November 2009 in *Teen Ink*, http://www.teenink.com/opinion/entertainment_celebrities/article/140026/Philosophy-and-The-twilight-series-Does-edward-cullen-have-a-soul/, 16 November 2009, [accessed 8 August 2015].

⁸¹ **NotThatGirl**'s meta-response is shown to have been written on 9 Jan 2010, in *Teen Ink*, http://www.teenink.com/opinion/entertainment_celebrities/article/140026/Philosophy-and-The-twilight-series-Does-edward-cullen-have-a-soul/, 9 Jan 2010, [accessed 8 August 2015].

⁸² **moonpetal**'s meta-response is shown to have been written on 26 July 2010, in *Teen Ink*, http://www.teenink.com/opinion/entertainment_celebrities/article/140026/Philosophy-and-The-twilight-series-Does-edward-cullen-have-a-soul/, 26 July 2010, [accessed 8 August 2015].

and respond philosophically to *Twilight*. More particularly, this discussion revolves around the value and meaning of having a soul especially if the sentient species is not human or as **moonpetal** is keen to point out: Meyer's vampires are clearly different from the 'classical soulless evil dracula and such'. **Moonpetal**'s response seems to indicate two things: one, not just the assumption that the references to Zelda, Link and Hyrule (from the fantasy action-adventure video game series, 'The Legend of Zelda') would be understood by fellow readers of *Teen Ink*, but two, there is also comfort and confidence that **moonpetal**'s meta-response would receive a positive reception. The confidence and comfort in responding to *Twilight* through multiple formats, and on various issues, are most definitely helped by the fact that users of *Teen Ink*, evident in their writing and responses, exhibit a warm and friendly, if not, collaborative ethos which I will mention more later.

With regards to the type of discussion by the three teenagers - **NotThatGirl**, **ScarletWater** and **moonpetal** - the *Twilight* texts clearly offer sufficient pertinence and relevance for them to begin and continue in this semi-philosophical vein in which the nature of vampires is briefly touched on. Catching the imaginations and intellectual curiosity of the three teen readers on topics normally considered beyond their perceived milieu or immediate concerns is something the *Twilight* series seems to offer for some teens who comfortably discuss these 'weighty' issues. Definitely, there is at least a comfortable space to discuss these issues with like-minded teens who take each other seriously, unlike adults or other teens who view *Twilight* as 'silly'. Again, this also counters the perception of adults who perceive teen discussions of *Twilight* to be focused on its romance plot, which will in turn, (badly) mislead them.

Even within discussions of *Twilight*'s romance plot, the young readers in *Teen Ink* debate the meaning of love, and the ethical considerations of fairness in a friendship or relationship. **Zakieamotoo**'s response focuses on types of relationship, writing that

'(l)ove often blinds people from what they don't want to see. Often, true love is right there in front of you, like Jacob to Bella. What they have isn't merely an obsession-driven lust fueled by a misleading chemistry, it's real and it's perfect for them'.⁸³

⁸³ **Zakieamotoo** in 'What is Love, Anyway? A "Twilight" Persuasive Essay' in *Teen Ink*, http://www.teenink.com/opinion/sports_hobbies/article/99822/What-is-Love-Anyway-A-Twilight/, n.d., [accessed 9 August 2015].

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The teen quotes knowledgeably from the series before writing why Jacob's love is considered more genuine,

'(i)n Eclipse, Chapter 26, page 599, Jacob explains Edward's effect on Bella perfectly: "He's like a drug for you, Bella...But I would have been healthier for you. Not a drug; I would have been the air, the sun,"'.

Summing up, **Zakieametoo** writes persuasively that Jacob 'would have filled Bella's life with happiness, freedom, and the purest, most sincere love that anyone could give', and finishes with the sentence that, 'If that's not what real love is, then I don't know what is'.⁸⁴ **Zakieametoo**'s writing readily identifies the response as belonging to the group which prefers Bella to choose Jacob, a group which is also more popularly labelled as Team Jacob. Unsurprisingly, meta-responses from teenagers who like the plot as it is (Team Edward), also join in the debate.

In the discussion first begun by **Zakieametoo** on what true love in relationships mean (and the implication that Bella should have gone with Jacob), **keziabbyx3** raises the issue of the supernatural element in Meyer's romance gothic.

According to **keziabbyx3**, 'if (Jacob) gets mad at Bella for a reason, he could really hurt her like Sam did Emily'. Raising the concept of safety, **keziabbyx3** writes that Edward might also similarly be dangerous to Bella, although in 'my opinion shes not right for neither (sic.)'.⁸⁵ Another teen, **Dani**, points instead to a key missing ingredient in the discussion, what she calls 'the factor that helped make Bella's decision' which is 'imprinting'. As depicted in the *Twilight* series about 'imprinting', none of the werewolves has a choice with whom they would irrevocably fall in love with, a point **Dani** is keen to emphasise as a reason for Bella choosing Edward instead of Jacob. Writing about the repercussions caused by 'imprinting', **Dani** offers the example of Sam, a werewolf, loving Leah until 'he imprinted on Emily and that caused a lot of pain' and so, that is the reason why Bella 'specifically asked Jacob if he'd imprinted on anyone...in which he'd responded "you would know it if I had"' which to **Dani** indicates Bella's awareness that she is not destined to be with Jacob.

These young readers raise different, if not important, concerns about relationships such as the repercussions, consequences and ramifications of being

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ **Keziabbyx3**'s meta-response is shown to have been written on 21 April 2009, in *Teen Ink*, http://www.teenink.com/opinion/sports_hobbies/article/99822/What-is-Love-Anyway-A-Twilight/, 25 April 2009, [accessed 21 August 2015].

with another person, even if their examples do come from non-realist texts.⁸⁶ I would suggest here that for some teens, these discussions on relationships in *Twilight* offer gothicised versions of boy/girl relationships such as the pull of attraction between two teens, and the problems that may arise in romantic relationships. Thus within the domain of the personal, these teens have zeroed in on interpersonal relationships and personal actions which have wider repercussions on others, not just the two romantic partners.

As briefly shown in the response of **Zakieametoo**, **keziabbyx3** and **Dani**, these teens have scrutinised Meyer's romance gothic and have gone on to analyse in detail the two types of romantic relationships involving Bella, inspiring one to write at length on what constitutes a genuine, healthy relationship, and for two others to add important considerations into the discussions on supernatural relationships. In another response on Bella's relationship with Edward, **lizzymwrites** who admits to having read *Twilight* nine times, *New Moon* five times, *Eclipse* three and *Breaking Dawn* four times, writes that

(t)his book is just plain unrealistic, and the fact that it's about vampires has nothing to do with it. Love doesn't grow in a few weeks. You have to know someone to love them – which is why Bella and Edward's relationship isn't exactly healthy...her life revolves around him, to the point that she has only one semi-friend outside his family. Love should compliment (sic.) your life, everyone, not become the reason for your existence!⁸⁷

As can be seen from these few extracts, Meyer's romance gothic has inspired teens to participate in online discussions, generating a variety of responses which has also enabled teens to venture into sometimes philosophical discussions on love, albeit in terms of what constitutes healthy (teenage) love, how actions and behaviours can be clear indicators of what genuine and realistic relationships should be, as well as discussions on how a relationship can affect others, not just the romantic partners alone. In *Twilight*'s case, there seems to be an area or space for different interpretations on what is healthy and genuinely loving in relationships, regardless of the supernatural nature of the characters. Meyer's romance gothic seems to generate responses which have encouraged teen readers to confidently and comfortably participate in discussions on various

⁸⁶ **Dani**'s meta-response is shown to have been written on 29 May 2011, in *Teen Ink*, http://www.teenink.com/opinion/sports_hobbies/article/99822/What-is-Love-Anyway-A-Twilight/, 29 May 2011, [accessed 21 August 2015].

⁸⁷ **lizzymwrites** in 'I Love(d) Twilight' in *Teen Ink*, http://www.teenink.com/opinion/pop_culture_trends/article/234386/I-Loved-Twilight/, n.d., [accessed 21 August 2015].

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domains – personal, philosophical, social - as they write extensively, even creatively, and comfortably share their views and attitudes on pertinent, salient issues in the texts.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, *Twilight*'s incorporation of both the gothic and romance genres have allowed for open-endedness in the space for discussion especially in the depiction of relationships and what constitutes love. These forms of open-endedness have not just provided space for divergent views on *Twilight*, but have allowed room for some teens to reflect and change their attitude or viewpoint on the texts. This change of attitude among some teens, albeit towards the negative view, did not come overnight. It must be admitted that this change in attitude or position taken among *Teen Ink* writers has tended to reflect a change from a positive or neutral stance on *Twilight* to one which is negative.

Writing in a semi-confessional mode, **lizzymwrites** explains about the change she observes in her behaviour, 'I wrote (and spoke) only about Edward and Bella for about a year. Then I watched a parody on **Youtube**. That was all it took for me to realize how ridiculously unsubstantial the plot was!'⁸⁸ Another teen offers a reason for her own switch in attitude: 'You know, now that I'm older, looking at this, I have to agree. At the time of writing this, I was in 8th grade. Now, being a senior in high school and having my eyes open to much more mature literature, I do not like Meyer's writing style. I prefer now the writings of Plath, and Poe, and Shakespeare'.⁸⁹ Yet another, **Abyssia101** explains about changing her mind and her mixed feelings, 'At one point I did enjoy this book. It is very enchanting in simply how she writes it. Really it shows it in such a way that it must be right and perfect. But, Edward in particular his level of affection is ridiculous and should be detested'.⁹⁰

Regardless of the response - negative or positive - the primary positioning of the teen writers in *Teen Ink* is typically that of an informed, 'knowing' insider, just like Pan's respondents, mentioned earlier. That these teens are comfortable in admitting to changing their views and in offering explanations for it, suggests

⁸⁸ **lizzymwrites** in 'I Love(d) Twilight' in *Teen Ink*, http://www.teenink.com/opinion/pop_culture_trends/article/234386/I-Loved-Twilight/, n.d., [accessed 21 August 2015].

⁸⁹ **Laurennnn**, 'The Twilight Phenomenon: It's all too much' in *Teen Ink*, <http://www.teenink.com/opinion/movies_music_tv/article/96405/The-Twilight-Phenomenon-Its-All-Too-Much>, n.d., [accessed 23 August 2015].

⁹⁰ **Abyssia101**, 'Defining Twilight Essay' in *Teen Ink*, <<http://www.teenink.com/opinion/all/article/124212/Defining-Twilight-Essay/>>, n.d., [accessed 23 August 2015].

also the fluid nature of their discussions and views. That they adopt the same insider viewpoint, as noted earlier in Pan's book, also shows how keen they are towards sharing their own response as valid consumers and commentators on the series. This fluidity in the nature of their discussion and views, I would assert, offers a strong counter to standard adult analyses of teens' reading of *Twilight* which suggest that the latter's susceptibility to the problematic elements of the romance plot will have a permanent effect on them. As the responses from the teenage writers suggest, their opinions can change, or simply put, the 'effects' if any, are also temporary.

Besides the fluid nature of discussions and responses and hence its temporary perceived effects, another feature of the writing in *Teen Ink* must also be mentioned. The insider view/ position held by young readers can be highly critical or supportive of Meyer's *Twilight* series. However, if the article is critical about *Twilight* and includes some mention of *Twilight*'s many fans, the teen writers themselves usually choose to adopt the 'third person effect'. This is a term borrowed from Philips Davison who first observed and theorised a particular position or attitude taken by people towards media messages and effects. As the name suggests, the third person effect postulates that people evaluate media messages to exert or have greater persuasive influence on other people than on themselves.⁹¹ I have used this term loosely because *Teen Ink* contributors when criticising 'fans' or certain responses, almost always qualify their statements as aimed at 'others' or at non-*Teen Ink* readers. Thus the target of the criticism does not apply to the writers themselves or to the (implied discerning) readers of their article, but is only applicable to outsiders: essentially the third person effect in action. This strategy of the third person effect is most definitely used by adults whose views and analyses imply that they see things (mostly negative) which the teens cannot or are unable to in *Twilight*.

This strategy of the third person effect which has been consistently adopted by the various teen contributors implies both attention and awareness of their target readers. I would like to point out here that these teens' own self-awareness is also paradoxically constructed by their newfound ability to use the third person effect. Certainly, great care seems to have been taken by teen writers not to appear

⁹¹ Philips Davison first came up with the hypothesis in 1983. For more details and its use in the mass media domain, see Bryant Paul, Michael B Salwen, and Michel Dupagne in 'The Third-Person Effect: A Meta-Analysis of the Perceptual Hypothesis', *Mass Communication & Society*, 3 (2000), 57-85.

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offensive and 'bigoted', but instead to engage other readers of *Teen Ink* and sometimes to invite a positive and encouraging meta-response, unlike the meta-responses for Oshiro in *MarkReads.com* which I will mention later.

The open nature of the online posting features in *Teen Ink* mentioned earlier, has encouraged a variety and huge diversity of responses towards the *Twilight* texts and films. However, as it is meant explicitly for teenagers, it is also like a gated community, albeit, one with a glass door or fence, which allows others to look in and 'check out' by reading the variety of posts and responses. However, to participate i.e. to post online or to offer meta-responses, only registered users who are teenagers can participate. As such, these posts and writing by the teens on the *Teen Ink* website, are available for anyone online to view.

This form of openness and *Teen Ink's* availability for public perusal, are also tantamount to a performance by the various writers of *Teen Ink*, whether on *Twilight* or on other texts. As a performance, in which there is both awareness of an 'audience' to one's writing and therefore a perceived reaction from the audience, it is not surprising that the young readers take great care in what they post and how they present themselves online. It must be mentioned again that the strategy of the 'third person effect' in the young teenagers' writing definitely highlights the teens' awareness of their audience, an awareness, which Crammond asserts, is important in persuasive writing. Therefore, by choosing to address their readers in *Teen Ink*, or making qualifications on who they critique, the teenagers' writing strategies or actions indicate that much thought has been put in, especially on whom they view as their audience/ readers and in their content. I would stress that these are not the actions of passive, and (implied) easily confused young readers. Instead what seems suggestive in the response, is the undeniable presence of young *Twilight* readers who are both comfortable performing (in public) and, also, comfortable with sharing their many different ideas on Meyer's texts and films. They are also invariably more receptive and accepting of differences in views and opinions held by other young readers of *Twilight* and users of *Teen Ink* too, which may be a refreshing change from the many reported cases of cyber-bullying on the internet.

The fact that so much has been written about *Twilight* by these teen writers, arguably more than on any other books, should be an indication of what seems to have gained currency and salience for them. Besides the discussions on relationships and philosophy, there is also debate and discussions pertaining to the gothic, especially relating to vampires. More particularly, there is quite

extensive debate on the types of vampires in *Twilight*, with the Cullen family embodying the noble, heroic ones.

Viewed as a whole, there is a split in agreement about the nature of a vampire; is 'it' a monster or can one be romantic and loving? There are several *Teen Ink* articles on this issue but essentially, these teen contributors fall into two groups – those who subscribe to Meyer's vampires in *Twilight* which actually has both the terrifying and appealing versions of vampires, and the second group of *Teen Ink* writers who prefer a solely horror archetype. **Lilith** in 'The Tragic Tale of How the Hideous Dracula became a Sissy who Happens to Sparkle', writes about the tragedy of the new vampire, implying that more discerning readers would prefer a return of the 'repulsive creature that scared us when we were kids'.⁹² Arguing that the vampire should be 'an actual purely scary monster' instead of 'inhumanly beautiful' characters 'in another sappy love story', **Lilith** clearly does not subscribe to Meyer's depiction of both horror and romantic vampires, choosing to focus instead on the attractive romantic vampire in *Twilight* which has diluted and diminished the terror of monsters. In another post, **Steph0804** in 'Dracula by Bram Stoker' recommends 'bookworms' to read Stoker's take on the vampire which 'will leave you tossing and turning in bed with nerve-racking nightmares', but reassures readers that 'the read will definitely be worth it'.⁹³ While **Steph0804** only mentions 'Twilight' and 'Stephenie Meyer' once, from the meta-responses, the readers of *Teen Ink* definitely know who and what the primary comparison that **Steph0804** makes against Stoker's horror archetypical Dracula.

I reproduce here **Vagialena**'s meta-response to **Steph0804**'s article in Figure 1 where **Vagialena** states that vampires are meant to be 'evil, bloodthirsty and ugly' unlike Meyer's version.⁹⁴ There is mention about Meyer's vampires who possess the physical quality of 'glow(ing) in the sun', but at the point of offering her meta-response, **Vagialena** now believes that they should also not be 'caring

⁹² **Lilith**'s article, 'The Tragic Tale of How the Hideous Dracula Became a Sissy Who Happens to Sparkle' only had 7 meta-responses which is a pity but also suggestive that many fans of Meyer's series do not agree with her assessment and have not bothered to read it and post a comment. From *Teen Ink*, <http://www.teenink.com/opinion/pop_culture_trends/article/161576/The-Tragic-Tale-of-How-the-Hideous-Dracula-Became-a-Sissy-Who-Happens-To-Sparkle/>, n.d., [accessed 12 March 2015].

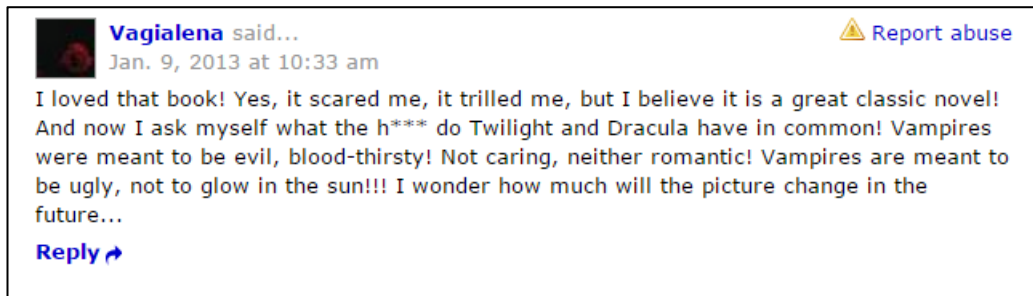
⁹³ **Steph0804**'s article, 'Dracula by Bram Stoker' in *Teen Ink*, <http://www.teenink.com/reviews/book_reviews/article/413693/Dracula-by-Bram-Stoker/>, n.d., [accessed 12 March 2015].

⁹⁴ This is taken from **Steph0804**'s article, 'Dracula by Bram Stoker' in *Teen Ink*, <http://www.teenink.com/reviews/book_reviews/article/413693/Dracula-by-Bram-Stoker/>, n.d., [accessed 12 March 2015].

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and romantic'. Clearly, **Vagialena**'s opinion has changed from her initial highly positive response upon reading Meyer's texts – 'I believe it is a great classic novel!' – to her critical meta-response which questions the depiction of romantic, attractive vampires.

Figure 1- Vampires are meant to be ugly



Clearly, from various meta-responses on the topic of vampires, readers such as **FluteGirl445** and **ahren** agree with **Steph0804**'s horror archetype which is seen as the better, if not more authentic monster. As **FluteGirl445** offers in her meta-response to another article, 'theses arent real vampires...I mean these people dont even drink humans blood (sic.)', a view which reflects a preference for the traditional vampires discussed in Part One.⁹⁵ Another teen, **ahren** has much to write about Meyer's version, where the themes in Meyer's romance gothic are seen as 'trite' because 'angsts and vampires ha(ve) been done and done by Anne Rice. Brilliantly'. To show what others are missing out, **ahren** offers the following recommendation to fellow teen readers, including her explicit approval of Joss Whedon's version or depiction of vampires:

For good vampire shows/books/movies- Blade, Van Helsing, Dracula(obviously), Let Me In, Anne Rice stuff.

For good vampire AND forbidden love- Buffy. The special effects might not have been the best at that time, but Whedon remains a god.⁹⁶

Another teen, **ninja_warrior**, objects to Meyer's lack of creativity: 'the combination of vampires and romance were first formed by L.J. Smith, writer of the Vampire Diaries...Therefore the concept of vampires in love really is not that

⁹⁵ **FluteGirl445**'s meta-response is shown to have been written on 28 Dec 2012, in *Teen Ink*, <http://www.teenink.com/reviews/movie_reviews/article/65635/twilight/>, 28 Dec 2012, [accessed 23 August 2015].

⁹⁶ **ahren**'s meta-response is shown to have been written on 20 May 2012, in *Teen Ink*, <http://www.teenink.com/reviews/movie_reviews/article/65635/twilight/>, 20 May 2012, [accessed 23 August 2015].

original'.⁹⁷ Even more negative towards the romantic vampire in *Twilight*, **Prosaic-Scriptor** writes of the series sweeping the 'nation like swine flu, infecting our youth with its sexist, unreal view of the world..till..they believe a stalker with fangs is the epitome of the perfect man', so that 'girls everywhere want a vampire to sneak into their rooms and watch them sleep in a rocking chair, rocking back and forth, back and forth'.⁹⁸ Meta-responses to **Prosaic-Scriptor** are mixed, with some jumping in to disagree even while acknowledging the persuasive style of **Prosaic-Scriptor's** writing. **Twilight_teen14's** meta-response, while disagreeing with the former, is that *Twilight* is really good and awesome and that it got 'our "I hate to read" generation to read!!!! (sic.)'.⁹⁹ Writing slightly more in the meta-response, **TheDreamWriter** offers two reasons for disagreeing with **Prosaic-Scriptor**, explaining that her preference for the series is not so much because she wants another Edward but that 'I like the idea of their being vampires in the world, cause it's a nice twist and it gets your imagination started (sic.)'; in addition, the Cullen family gives the positive message of 'its not what you are, its who you are (sic.)'.¹⁰⁰ Along similar lines as **TheDreamWriter**, another teen, **LordHelen** writes about Meyer's version of vampires as 'interesting', arguing that 'sparkling vampires are just as possible as vampires who burst into flames in sunlight and are a whole new concept that I loved exploring... Just because it is new and different doesn't mean it's bad' and that 'you have to have an open mind on the shimmery vampires'.¹⁰¹ Offering an argument along practical lines, **jzeal** writes:

It is rare that girls will find themselves in bad situations and relationships because they read a fictional story about a loving, caring vampire. ... *Twilight* is harmless, and there is no need to freak out about its effect on teens. Do not just assume that a girl's obsession with Edward Cullen is going to harm her in any way; it is simply a stage in teenage life that will

⁹⁷ **ninja_warrior**, 'A Letter to Twilight Haters' in *Teen Ink*, <http://www.teenink.com/opinion/movies_music_tv/article/145617/A-Letter-To-Twilight-Haters/>, n.d., [accessed 7 September 2015].

⁹⁸ **Prosaic-Scriptor**, 'The Twilight Series by Stephenie Meyer' in *Teen Ink*, <http://www.teenink.com/reviews/book_reviews/article/172324/The-Twilight-Series-by-Stephenie-Meyer/>, n.d., [accessed 23 August 2015].

⁹⁹ **Twilight_teen14's** meta-responses is shown to have been written on 27 August 2010, in *Teen Ink*, <http://www.teenink.com/reviews/book_reviews/article/172324/The-Twilight-Series-by-Stephenie-Meyer/>, 27 August 2010, [accessed 23 August 2015].

¹⁰⁰ **TheDreamWriter's** meta-response is shown to have been written on 10 August 2010, in *Teen Ink*, <http://www.teenink.com/reviews/book_reviews/article/172324/The-Twilight-Series-by-Stephenie-Meyer/>, 10 August 2010, [accessed 23 August 2015].

¹⁰¹ **LordHelen**, 'The Twilight by Stephenie Meyer' in *Teen Ink*, <http://www.teenink.com/reviews/book_reviews/article/617852/Twilight-by-Stephenie-Meyer/>, n.d., [accessed 23 August 2015].

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pass. .. the obsession will be gone in no time, and it is not a reason to panic. Edward Cullen is in no way an abusive dangerous role model; he is simply a teenage phase, making girls fall head over heels in love (sic.). So guys, why not learn a little from such a gentleman?¹⁰²

Similar to the fact that there are meta-responses which disagree with the (negative) views expressed in **Prosaic-Scriptor's** post on *Twilight*, **jzeal's** article which offers a positive spin on *Twilight*, is no different: she receives meta-responses which also disagrees with her view. **BlueRain's** meta-response is a point-on-point counter to the latter's views, numbering seven rebuttals.¹⁰³ On **jzeal's** contention that 'Edward allows (Bella) to pursue personal goals', **BlueRain** writes:

If you don't remember, she kept trying to apply for college in places **where he is capable of going** (sic.). Bella doesn't really have personal goals in the first place, but she was really set on making things better with Jacob. What does Edward do? *Has her kidnapped*, which forces Bella to resort to *sneaking away, which means ditching school*. Shows just how great their relationship is, huh? Bella never got her own life, she never went to college or did anything. She got pregnant at eighteen and now has to be careful whenever she's around her own family, as she now wants to eat them.

Then on the part of Edward setting an example 'for how women should be treated' as argued by **jzeal**, **BlueRain's** answer is just as acerbic:

First with hatred, then being stalked, then breaking up coldly with no explanation, then not allowing her to see her best friend or do anything by herself... then getting married and pregnant at 18 because she was so desperate to have sex.. yeah, no. Yes, it will lead girls to, at the very least, over-controlling partners. I don't care how many sparkles this guy sprinkles on his chest, he's not very admirable.

Clearly disagreeing about what constitutes 'loving and caring' in a relationship, **BlueRain's** interpretation of characters and events indicate a very close reading of both the *Twilight* texts, as well as **jzeal's** article. It must be noted that based on the first meta-response in 2010 and **BlueRain's** which appeared in 2012, a time-lag of two years has already passed with 23 meta-responses for **jzeal's** article.

Beyond the obvious grasp of details on the *Twilight* texts, and the spontaneity, as evidenced by the spelling and minor typographical errors, these teen readers' response clearly show that they are arguing about the very issues which adults

¹⁰² **jzeal**, 'Edward Cullen: Negative Influence on Teens?' in *Teen Ink*, <http://www.teenink.com/opinion/movies_music_tv/article/166629/Edward-Cullen-Negative-Influence-on-Teens/>, n.d., [accessed 23 August 2015].

¹⁰³ **BlueRain** (meta-response), in *Teen Ink*, <http://www.teenink.com/opinion/movies_music_tv/article/166629/Edward-Cullen-Negative-Influence-on-Teens/>, 10 July 2012, [accessed 23 August 2015].

think that they cannot possibly engage in. In fact, meta-responses by the teenagers do incorporate logical reasoning and ‘evidence’ or examples culled from the *Twilight* texts, which show clarity in argument, higher-order thinking (regardless of age) and careful reading, based on the details offered. The many examples in *Teen Ink*, where young readers actively offer a proposition and others give a counter example, are all exchanges of differing opinions, if not a debate, however time-delayed, though invariably always conducted with much civility and encouragement. These responses, I would assert, indicate the teens’ comfort and confidence in discussing the issues, and also comfort and confidence in engaging with one another in ‘debate’. There is clearly a comfortable space for the young teenaged readers and users of *Teen Ink* (and of the *Twilight* texts) to have and to be engaged in discussions on a variety of issues, ranging from the philosophical, to the inevitably personal, with one another on Meyer’s *Twilight* texts.

This form of civility just shown, sometimes takes on an even friendlier, if not encouraging form. In Figure 2, I offer one example where readers of *Teen Ink* praise, encourage or offer suggestions and where the contributor immediately responds under ‘Join the discussion’ after each contribution. The ‘Join the discussion’ section offers a viable, convenient platform for teen users to pursue further the issues which have piqued their interest from the original article, encouraging more engagement from readers towards an article based on a common interest.

In Figure 2, **AnonymousFate** offers a compliment, writes about his/her personal (positive) reaction, gives a valid reason for the reaction, agrees again with **remym**’s article and ends by inviting **remym** to read his/ her own post. As can be seen from **remym**’s friendly reply, the invitation by **AnonymousFate** to check out ‘my stuff’ is gladly accepted in a direct reply. I find this exchange, which is not uncommon in *Teen Ink* between strangers albeit fellow *Twilight* insiders, to be another prime example of how Meyer’s romance gothic has encouraged strangers to initiate ‘conversations’ and to write to one another on something obviously meaningful to them as the teens discuss and explore ideas. The ‘conversation’ between **AnonymousFate** and **remym** has taken a step forward, and is sparked by **remym**’s post which obviously resonates with **AnonymousFate**. The latter writes quite extensively, using a very personal (‘it bothered me’), reflective voice on her/his own strong reception to Meyer’s *Twilight* series.

Figure 2 - Invitation to check 'my stuff'¹⁰⁴



These types of 'conversation' are not isolated instances but are duplicated almost everywhere when users offer their meta-responses as a means to initiate and engage in friendly conversations. Invariably, the meta-response is often first a 'delighted', positive response, followed by a reason for that emotion and sometimes just appreciation to contributors for penning the article. In Figure 3, there are two separate meta-responses, quickly followed by the contributor's own reply to each. In the 'conversation' which I have duplicated here, the reaction from *Teen Ink* users towards contributors on *Twilight* is often a simple word of thanks for shedding light onto something which was not obvious before, or just the feeling of delight in taking pleasure from reading another contribution (article) on *Twilight*.

¹⁰⁴ Meta-responses are from 'The Case against Twilight', in *Teen Ink*, <<http://www.teenink.com/opinion/all/article/149586/The-Case-Against-Twilight/>>, n.d., [9 March 2015].

Figure 3¹⁰⁵ Feedback received with thanks

Sometimes, the contributor of the post does not take part in the discussion at all in the meta-responses, which usually takes place among a few *Teen Ink* users and readers of the article. This is not surprising because there may be too many meta-responses where giving each meta-response a reply will be too time-consuming. In Figure 4, the meta-responses shown are based on the article 'Twilight on Equality' by **Catcat** which itself garnered 588 comments. **Catcat** makes the case that *Twilight* is filled with female characters who portray 'helplessness' and that 'the fact that so many intelligent young men and women have been sucked into the *Twilight* series and have swallowed its sexist manifesto has (her) worried about the future of gender equality'. **Catcat** does not mention other books but as can be seen in the meta-response, other users of *Teen Ink* continue **Catcat's** argument and offer suggestions for books which can instead offer a more positive depiction of females than Meyer's *Twilight*.

¹⁰⁵ Meta-response from 'The Twilight Saga by Stephenie Meyer', in *Teen Ink*, <http://www.teenink.com/reviews/book_reviews/article/608855/The-Twilight-Saga-by-Stephanie-Meyer/>, n.d., [8 March 2015].

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Figure 4¹⁰⁶ - Meta-response only among users of *Teen Ink*

 **V!)"** said...

 Report abuse

Jul. 8, 2011 at 11:17 am

Anone who wants some origional fantasy with a strong female protagonist needs to read any of Tamora Pierce's novels.

 **fire_ice4ever**  replied...

 Report abuse

Jul. 8, 2011 at 12:16 pm

Oh I so agree with you! If Bella ran into Alanna in a forest...she'd have another thing coming! :)

 **bookthief**  replied...

 Report abuse

Jan. 17, 2012 at 1:30 pm

:) Absolutely.

Reply 

Halcyon said...

 Report abuse

Jul. 8, 2011 at 11:10 am

GAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!!!! No...More...Sappy vampire books!!!! Oh no, There's another one! They're multiplying! Oh, the horror!!!!

 **americanteen97** said...

 Report abuse

Jun. 16, 2011 at 10:41 pm

I wanted to aplogize for my earlier, rudeness. I fully realize your point and sorry my little 12 year old self was being so rude. I've changed directions and agree with you :)

Reply 

In Figure 4 we have the 3-person response with **V!)"** making an assertion about another (better) writer, which two other users agree, and in agreeing, one picks up the thread and mentions one of the heroines from Tamora Pierce's novels. These young readers write with the confident assumption that fellow *Teen Ink* members would be familiar with the books mentioned. Again, within *Teen Ink*, there is often this taken-for-granted assumption that fellow users of *Teen Ink* would be widely read and would know about the different books and references to popular video games such as 'The Legend of Zelda', mentioned earlier. In the same 'page', **americanteen97** offers an apology for 'my earlier, rudeness' (not shown any more on the *Teen Ink* website). What I must reiterate here is not so much how well-read users of *Teen Ink* are but that again, how useful a platform

¹⁰⁶ This is taken from 'Twilight on Equality', in *Teen Ink*,
<http://www.teenink.com/opinion/sports_hobbies/article/82295/Twilight-on-Equality/>, n.d.,
[accessed 8 March 2015].

such as *Teen Ink* is which allows teenagers such as **Halycon**, **V!)** and **fire_ice4ever** to meet virtually and to exchange views, however brief on subjects and topics salient to them. That these are based on Meyer's texts and films, emphasise how Meyer's romance gothic has provided an invaluable space or forum for teens to extend their discussion on issues and topics read in the *Twilight* series.

Sometimes, *Teen Ink* users also offer detailed suggestions on writing in their meta-reponses. I have duplicated in Figure 5 meta-responses which are based on **dkA.M**'s fan fiction called '5th Twilight: Glistening Sin (Renesmee's Story) Chapter 1'.¹⁰⁷ Unsurprisingly, as **dkA.M**'s title suggests, the fan fiction is centred on Renesmee and is narrated from the latter's point of view. In the exchange, **AfroSamurai** begins by affirming **dkA.M** as a young writer, which is followed by a practical suggestion and the reason for the suggestion. **AfroSamurai** later goes on to list several 'positives' about **dkA.M**'s article before directly complimenting **dkA.M** as fully deserving the '5 star rating'.

Similarly, the earlier meta-response by **mary_blue356** is completely complimentary. Even though **JessieBecker**'s meta-response indicates that she likes the article, she offers the feedback that **dkA.M**'s later post on the same fan fiction in 'Chapter 2' (the next fan fiction) seems to have lost the 'style', though she softens her criticism by also writing something positive about **dkA.M**'s article.

The friendliness in the feedback and discussion that these teen writers offer to one another, be it on content or on the writing style of responses to Meyer's *Twilight* texts, highlight the comfortable, if not safe space encouraged or created in discussions on *Twilight*. It must also be stated, that the fact the debates and discussions are friendly in *Teen Ink*, may have also allowed or further encouraged teens to participate and engage in virtual conversations with one another. To state the obvious, had there been animosity or hostility in the meta-responses, as I will show in meta-responses to Oshiro's site, the discussions may not have developed to the state that they have in *Teen Ink*. Thus the frank and more

¹⁰⁷ **dkAM**, from Vail, Arizona has been a member of *Teen Ink* for 64 months and has contributed 2 posts in the Teen Ink Forums, as of March 2015. According to Bronwen Thomas, fanfiction has 'long been the most popular way of concretising and disseminating [one's] passion for a particular fictional universe' in Thomas, Bronwen, 'What Is Fanfiction and Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things About It?', *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, 3 (2011), 1-24. (p. 1). For more on fan fiction from a theoretical perspective, see Matt Hills' book *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002).

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importantly, positive exchanges on the common topic of *Twilight* have encouraged extended discussions, and also reflect how important the role played by Meyer's romance gothic texts as the romance gothic that links, binds and helps fellow readers/ viewers to bond and comfortably discuss topics they find interesting in the *Twilight* texts and films.

Figure 5¹⁰⁸ - Constructive feedback on writing

**JessieBecker** said...
Jun. 14, 2010 at 5:12 pm
I love this chapter, but you lost your style in chapter two. The way you describes Renesme was beautiful though. (:
[Reply ↗](#)

**mary_blue356** VIP said...
May 13, 2010 at 9:31 am
You write like a professional/best-selling author. You're a wonderful writer. I'm going to read more!
[Reply ↗](#)

AfroSamurai said...
May 1, 2010 at 3:43 am
As an avid reader of FanFiction, occasionally in the Twilight category, I have to say you have a LOT of potential and talent here. I WOULD like to point out that if you aspire to become better in FanFiction, I'd lengthen the chapters some, if possible, because this is seeming more like a One-Shot than an actual FanFic. Other than that, I love it. You're very decriptive with her POV, and I love the way you played it off. Many have tried something similar, but I've NEVER seen someone accomplish it as you have. :) You truly deserve the 5 star rating.

**dkA.M** replied...
Jun. 2, 2010 at 2:52 pm
This is the one of the absolute best comments I have ever gotten. You are great at constructive criticism! Thank you for not tearing me and my writing apart :D
[Reply ↗](#)

Another point to note is that in the virtual space for discussion, time is not a factor. Responses are sometimes delayed by months although this seems not to have affected the conversations: the teenagers are able to comfortably pick up the last thread of the conversation and join in. In Figure 6, we see a contributor, the same **dkA.M** returning to her post and responding almost a year later to the feedback from several others. Some meta-responses are critical but these are

¹⁰⁸ This is from '5th Twilight: Glistening Sin (Renesmee's Story) Chapter 1', in *Teen Ink*, <http://www.teenink.com/fiction/fan_fiction/article/147355/5th-TwilightGlistening-Sin-Renesmees-Story-chapter-1/>, n.d. [accessed 8 March 2015].

invariably done politely, and in a spirit of helpfulness. The teenage readers of *Twilight* and *Teen Ink* value feedback from fellow teens, possibly taking comfort in the knowledge that articles (responses) and meta-responses posted will not be met by criticisms or derision, but with suggestions and tips, particularly on responses which clearly have invited feedback.

Figure 6¹⁰⁹ - Delayed Meta-response


dka.M said...
 Nov. 6, 2013 at 4:15 pm
 [Report abuse](#)

I was so young when I wrote this. I was probably 11 or 12. My grammar and conventions are terrible my god.

[Reply](#)


juneday said...
 Dec. 6, 2012 at 6:23 pm
 [Report abuse](#)

umm...NEED to check your grammar and spelling, rather disorienting...you keep jumping around from a crib, to clothes, to a meal...really confusing.

[Reply](#)


JessicaJay said...
 Dec. 4, 2012 at 7:40 pm
 [Report abuse](#)

This confused me..so I focusing and struggling on trying to follow the story instead of just letting it flow in and out of my mind. First off, you mention her room and her crib and her short she is implying her young age. However you go on to describe how she has gucci and juicy, poular designers for TEENAGERS in her closet. I felt like you were not letting the story flow freely. Try thinking up your own love story with supernatural characters where your writing style is not compared to a well-know and recognized author...be orignal and I think you will get more positive feedback(: -good luck, girl!


JessicaJay replied...
 Dec. 4, 2012 at 7:42 pm
 [Report abuse](#)

ugh I did not read through my comment before I posted, sorry guys! *so I was focusing and struggling.. **her shortness

[Reply](#)

Before moving to responses by two young male readers and owners of their respective websites in the next section, the generative responses, which I will use here and define as a 'diversity or large variety of responses' must be highlighted'. In this case, for *Teen Ink* users, this generative response is reflected in both the content and format of their response to *Twilight*. Not only have responses by

¹⁰⁹ This is taken from '5th Twilight: Glistening Sin (Renesmee's Story) Chapter 2', in *Teen Ink*, <http://www.teenink.com/fiction/fan_fiction/article/147366/5th-Twilight-Glistening-Sin-Renesmees-Story-Chapter-2/>, n.d., [accessed 8 March 2015].

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these young teenage readers of *Twilight*, touched on many different issues, these young readers have also responded creatively, comfortably employing different strategies in their writing to express their views and opinions about *Twilight*. In creatively finding their own voice, politely critiquing other views, and in encouraging other like-minded teenagers in their writing pursuits, these young readers of *Twilight* also show that there is a conceptual space or creative space in which they can comfortably express themselves, and with other similarly-inclined readers, can explore and extend their discussions on issues which they view as important. Again, this goes to counter adult views, mentioned in Part One, which can only see young readers from a very narrow perspective: young readers who are easily confused, who are highly impressionable and worse, are unable to differentiate between what is real life and what is between the covers of a book.

As the fluid nature of the discussions show, where teens can comfortably review, reflect and then sometimes change their minds, some of the adults' perceived fears about the negative effects from reading *Twilight* seem quite groundless. The encouragement and positive feedback given by fellow teens in *Teen Ink*, not to mention the frankness and civility in their exchanges have also widened the scope and space for discussions to enable young readers to comfortably and confidently engage and interrogate a particular issue pertinent to them vis-a-vis *Twilight*. The politeness and civility also imply eagerness by young readers to continue the discussions, and be genuinely engaged in a debate on Meyer's *Twilight* texts. As will be shown in Mark Oshiro's *Twilight* response in markreads.com, meta-responses can sometimes be downright cruel and destructive, especially when the avenue for posting such responses are open for all, unlike the relatively safe and protected space in *Teen Ink*'s website. And so, given the nature of such 'rude' responses, Oshiro's website does not have many detailed meta-responses and engagement among readers of his site, unlike those found in *Teen Ink* whose site, in possessing a friendlier and warmer environment, has encouraged *Teen Ink* readers to join in the discussions and debate with one another.

Markreads.com and Twilightguy: Twilight and Parodic Play

Mark Oshiro definitely does not believe in pulling his punches where Meyer's writing is concerned. Sardonic, sarcastic and employing trenchant humour in his writing, Oshiro plainly takes delight in dissecting Meyer's text for both egregious

and miniscule flaws and errors. Comparing Meyer's writing to what it is *not* – 'this isn't a great existential novel, and you're not Albert Camus or Dostoevsky. You do not possess the skill, desire, or literary talent to craft unlikable characters that work', Oshiro takes it upon himself to comb through Meyer's text, writing several times that if he had 'not publicly committed' himself to reading all four books – 'I'm sorry, *Twilight* fans, but this book is absolute garbage' - he would have gladly given up!¹¹⁰

Oshiro is quite open about his attitude and his background. By his second post, he writes about being a 'closet gay man living in an overly-masculine, conservative town for most of my life' in part to explain, and defend his critical stance on Meyer's perceived unrealistic depiction of 'unrequited love and impossible crushes' at the start of *Twilight*.¹¹¹ By virtue of having lived most of his life as a 'closet gay', Oshiro implies that he knows (more than most) what loving someone from afar entails.

Oshiro also mentions Stephen King and H. P. Lovecraft right from his very first post as if to establish his critical authority regarding the horror genre. He writes frankly that *Twilight*'s preface reminds him of 'the trashy horror books I used to read when I ran out of Stephen King and H. P. Lovecraft to read back in junior high'.¹¹² One can make the assumption then that Oshiro not only appreciates the horror gothic genre, he will be assessing Meyer's literary endeavour along the lines of the horror conventions used by both King and Lovecraft.¹¹³

Oshiro's response is not written in the 'straightforward' manner of Nation's *Twilight*. In fact, just like the responses in *Teen Ink* which show diverse formats and styles, Oshiro also offers his own generative one-person response to Meyer,

¹¹⁰ *MarkReads* C3; C4. For brevity, I will shorten the title based on the naming convention adopted by both Oshiro and Nation for each of their post. For example, I have used 'MarkReads C3' for 'Mark Reads *Twilight*: Chapter 3'. Similarly, *Twilightguy* C3 for 'Reading *Twilight*: Chapter 3 (Phenomenon)' by Kaleb Nation in his *TwilightGuy* posts.

¹¹¹ *MarkReads* C2.

¹¹² *MarkReads* Preface/C1. According to S.T. Joshi, HP Lovecraft is arguably the 'leading author of supernatural fiction in the twentieth century' with scholarly criticism emerging in the 1970s especially with publication of the scholarly journal *Lovecraft Studies* which was established in 1979. See S.T. Joshi in *A Dreamer and a Visionary: HP Lovecraft in His Time* (Liverpool University Press, 2001). p. 390-391.

¹¹³ For many horror gothic fans, H.P. Lovecraft is akin to the 'Father of the Horror Gothic fiction', whose works have inspired many writers on horror. Stephen King, in his book *Danse Macabre*, cites several of Lovecraft's stories as 'pack(ing) an incredible wallop' when he was 'on the money'. The stories are: 'The Dunwich Horror', 'The Rats in the Walls', 'and best of all, the "Colour Out of Space"' in *Danse Macabre* (London: Warner Books, 2002). p. 80.

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albeit with a highly critical tone. In Oshiro's 13 'chapters' alone, there are two letters, two plays (in multiple acts), one court case with a 'full transcript' and even one report from the coroner. However, unlike the posts in Michelle Pan's *bellaandedward.com*, and contributions from teenager readers in *Teen Ink*, Oshiro's work has a financial purpose: he compiles all his posts into e-books and sells them online through his website.¹¹⁴ Oshiro's more controversial response may also have a financial incentive: to create 'buzz' in order to increase the number of viewers to his site, and possibly leading to sales of his four e-book versions of *Mark Reads Twilight*, *Mark Reads New Moon*, *Mark Reads Eclipse* and *Mark Reads Breaking Dawn*.¹¹⁵

Not quite purely for financial gain, but more to increase visitors to his own website, Kaleb Nation, (then) a budding writer, blogs and posts about *Twilight* because of the high number of visitors he knows he will receive from Stephenie Meyer's legions of fans.¹¹⁶ Nation's posts typically include two sections. The first is his view on highly selective aspects of each *Twilight* chapter, followed by personal comments for readers under the heading of 'Notes'. More often than not, it includes comments about his forthcoming book (when it will be published, how readers can obtain chapter drafts, etc.), regular updates of his 'Youtube' channel, and specific requests such as suggestions for songs to accompany his next post. In none-too-subtle ways, Nation gets his willing audience to help promote his website. One striking example is his indirect request to be on Meyer's official fansite. Under his 'Notes', Nation writes,

'Congrats to The Fantastic Twi-Hards youtube for getting listed on Stephenie's website! I know all too well how it feels to know that Stephenie actually saw something you made. Now, all I need is a link from

¹¹⁴ In his website, Oshiro has more than 50 products ranging from his posts on individual books e.g. *Mark Reads Breaking Dawn* (USD 2.99) to his reaction on certain films or TV series e.g. *Mark Watches 'Supernatural': Season 1* (from USD 0.99).

¹¹⁵ For his take on *Breaking Dawn*, Oshiro's cover is that of an old half-eaten apple in black and white while for *Mark Reads Twilight* it is the same half-eaten apple only in colour, a parody of *Twilight's* cover of a pristine red apple. Definitely not the subtlest of hints! All similarly priced at USD 2.99, Oshiro only sells online versions. See 'Mark Does Stuff' in 'markreads.net', <<http://markdoesstuff.com/collections/mark-reads-twilight>>, n.d., [accessed 29 June 2015].

¹¹⁶ According to Nation, he noticed the fandom when he wrote a parody blog post 'saying Kaleb Nation has been cast as Edward Cullen in the Twilight movies' and 'about 40,000 people hit my website in a day' in 'Kaleb Nation: Author and Youtube Personality' in 'newmediarockstars.com', <<http://newmediarockstars.com/2012/02/kaleb-nation/>>, 28 February 2012, [accessed 12 March 2015]. In fact, according to three meta-responses from his first post on 'Twilight (Chapter 1)', Stephenie Meyer 'herself suggested' (Joanne Maria) his website, is 'herself blogging about it' (ashley) and 'Stephenie Meyer mentioned your site on her Myspace Blog so that says how exciting it is that you are reading Twilight' (Twi-Biter Sarah) in *Twilightguy* C1: responses.

her site too...though I guess her Myspace mention was golden enough for me (toothy smiley face icon)'.¹¹⁷

I bring this up to show the strategies employed by both men in their online performance vis-à-vis the *Twilight* franchise. Definitely aware of their audience and playing to them, each in his way maintains a fairly consistent message, where both do not deviate, if at all, from the persona they have adopted and established in their websites. In fact, Nation begins by making his purpose clear and setting his own '*Twilight*' stage:

'My Name is Kaleb Nation, and this is the start of a journey....and thus, despite the fact that I am a guy, and I do not read vampire romances, nor werewolf romance, nor hobbit romances, nor any other romance, I bought *Twilight*, the first book in the series, and am now reading it....as I seek to discover how Stephenie Meyer has cast a spell over nearly every girl in the world'.¹¹⁸

This gentle introduction immediately identifies Meyer's genre hybrid of romance and gothic, and is a stark contrast to Oshiro, who briefly explains each post where there is without fail, a negative sentiment such as 'In which I regrettably begin to read *Twilight* and it's clear I'm going to hate every moment of this'.¹¹⁹ However, as much as Oshiro indulges in complaining or 'yelling, whining and ranting' about Meyer's *Twilight*, he is clearly and comfortably enjoying himself picking apart her work.¹²⁰ Using a highly personal tone, replete with slang and some obscenities, Oshiro's work is not for everyone and certainly not for *Twilight* fans. His intended audience, because Oshiro is undoubtedly aware of his target readers, are those who deplore Meyer's *Twilight*. Whether it is because these anti-fans hold the view of Meyer's inability to craft a good sentence or write with a reasonable, rational plot, or her take on 'sparkly' vampires, Oshiro's posts have something to offer them.¹²¹

To say that Oshiro pokes fun at the vampires in Meyer's work is an understatement. In his 'Chapter 13' post, Oshiro vehemently objects to Meyer

¹¹⁷ *Twilightguy* C11. In the next post, Nation writes, 'After I mentioned wanting to be on Stephenie's fansites list, I magically appeared on her site. Thanks, Seth!' See *Twilightguy* C12.

¹¹⁸ In 'The Start of a Journey', in *Twilightguy*, <<http://www.twilightguy.com/2008/04/16/the-start-of-a-journey/>>, 16 April 2008, [accessed 11 November 2014].

¹¹⁹ See Appendix 2 – Mark Oshiro's *Twilight* Contents Page & Heading for each of the 13 posts

¹²⁰ *MarkReads* C5.

¹²¹ *MarkReads* C9.

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comparing Edward Cullen's hunger for blood to that of 'a heroin addict'.¹²² His response which even has its own set of footnotes, explains footnote 10 as:

10) Absolute proof that Stephenie Meyer is a fanfiction-loving fuck who hasn't the slightest clue about the world around her, so invents realities and tries to appear intelligent. Edward makes this EXACT COMPARISON IN THE BOOK (sic.). Eat shit, Meyer; drug use is a real issue, not a shitty metaphor for your crappy book.

The next footnote (11) is no better,

11) Just when I thought Meyer's terrible drug addiction analogy was the worst thing she's ever written, she has Bella say this. NEWSFLASH, STEPHENIE MEYER: **You actually had Edward meet Bella in a dark alley, remember?** (sic.) Also, is this how dismissive you are with rape? It's just a joke line for one of your characters? UGH THIS IS THE WORST BOOK EVER (sic.).

Again, it must be noted that Oshiro is no longer addressing gothic conventions in his posts but, just like some academic critics, neglects the supernatural or horror dimension. His reception of *Twilight* here shows him mixing gothic conventions with realism, and therefore accusing Meyer of trivialising the dangers of drug addiction. Oshiro's generative responses on *Twilight* are filled with different albeit highly creative and inventive variations of what seem wrong in Meyer's text.¹²³ Meta-responses to his *Twilight* posts, unfortunately, have also been horrific and personal. Oshiro himself has posted a response to the abusive meta-reponses, naming the post 'Mark Reads *Twilight* Hate Mail' where he highlights certain vitriolic responses to his own personal, whimsical (and highly negative) take on *Twilight* and answers his critics.¹²⁴ One particular hate mail gets mentioned because it had gone for 'the gay jugular immediately as if I haven't heard every gay slur in the book at this point. Seriously, dudes, I've been made fun of my whole life. You're going to have to do better than that to insult me'.¹²⁵

¹²² *Twilight*, p. 234.

¹²³ See his post in the form of a coroner's report in which Oshiro writes under the section of 'laboratory data' that (all in caps which I will refrain), 'There appears to also be a high level of dopamine in the deceased's system; it is unknown if this is natural or synthetic, but a common symptom of "Twilightism" is the overload of the human hormone system when a reader is forced to accept that people who can barely hold a normal, respectful conversation seem to fall in love in a single chapter, despite the lack of any real positive qualities between either of the main characters', in 'Mark Reads *Twilight*: Chapter 9', in *MarkReads*, <<http://cdn.buzznet.com/assets/users16/markreadstwilight/default/msg-125028905664.jpg>>, 14 August 2015, [accessed 12 March 2015].

¹²⁴ From 'Mark Reads *Twilight* Hate Mail', in *MarkReads*, <<http://markreadstwilight.buzznet.com/user/journal/4539731/mark-reads-twilight-hate-mail/>>, 9 September 2009, [accessed 12 March 2015].

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

In fact, Oshiro asserts that the only response is to 'mock them ruthlessly'.¹²⁶ It would seem that Oshiro's strategy to provoke controversy incites not just defences of *Twilight* but also abuse.

Oshiro's reception, based on his three objections to *Twilight* - he abhors Meyer's writing style, her 'bastardisation' of the vampire genre, and Bella's portrayal in the series - is also based on feminist theory.¹²⁷ In arguments which seem to have anticipated Franiuk and Scherr's scholarly article on *Twilight* mentioned earlier in Part One, in which contemporary vampire narratives are seen as encouraging domestic and relationship abuse, Oshiro also offers a list of everything wrong with Bella, her behaviour and the possible ramifications from her actions. According to Oshiro, Meyer's depiction is 'totally setting up an argument to excuse domestic abuse'.¹²⁸ He begins with Bella's disposition which allows her to 'put up with someone who is such an utter bag of douche' and Meyer's portrayal of her as 'inferior', and an 'annoyingly dependent woman'.¹²⁹ At the same time, Bella is also 'a sad young woman who must constantly need someone else to take care of her', while being 'manipulative' with 'debilitating, negative characteristics'.¹³⁰

Oshiro also objects to Bella's lack of agency in sexual choice, her passive behaviour, and even her penchant for finding herself constantly in need of rescue. Where others would have viewed as romantic when Bella and Edward share their first kiss in *Twilight*'s Chapter 13, Oshiro views it as blatant 'Mormon propaganda [on abstinence]'. He writes,

nearly every piece of dialogue and action is disgustingly sexual...short of penetration or foreplay, it's almost as if the two characters are actually having sex. But they're not, which is crucial to understanding the blatant Mormon propaganda that Smeyer forces down your throat. Literally. Like a giant cock of morality. Open wide!¹³¹

Oshiro's argument shown above, written in sexist terms and using words describing the sex act, is undoubtedly meant to provoke controversy on what he sees as the real agenda regarding Meyer's *Twilight* text. On Bella's inexplicable

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ *Markreads* C9. More specifically, Oshiro refers to Edward's 'sparkly skin' as 'this bastardisation of vampire lore'.

¹²⁸ *Markreads* C13.

¹²⁹ *Markreads* C2; C4; C9;

¹³⁰ *Markreads* C4; C6; C7.

¹³¹ *Markreads* C13.

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love and her 'utter devotion to a man she barely knows', Oshiro's response also betrays bafflement at *Twilight*'s popularity with its chaste depiction of romance. While conceding that he is 'willing to suspend belief' because it is a 'vampire story', and that 'I have no problem with' Edward stopping a 'skidding car with his bare hands' in Chapter 3, Oshiro still cannot get beyond Meyer's 'unfounded, unrealistic, and overtly soppy romance'.¹³² Somewhat hampered by his preference for the horror archetype, Oshiro seems unable to resist the temptation to pick apart Meyer's romance gothic, particularly the romance plot in *Twilight*.¹³³

He is consistent in finding fault with the way Meyer has written about chaste love, arguing not so much on the grounds of why chaste love seems ridiculous in our more liberal times, but on the grounds of Meyer's poor writing in capturing chaste love's desire and yearning in *Twilight*. On several occasions, Oshiro plays to his audience by asking Meyer to '(j)ust have sex with your fictional character already and put me out of my misery'.¹³⁴ In another post, Oshiro writes '(n)ot only does it all read like two sexless teens aching to strip off their clothes and penetrate every orifice in every way imaginable, it's not even entertaining on a superficial level'.¹³⁵ It would seem that Oshiro expects to read about plot development, rather than the emotional development in the relationship between Bella and Edward, of which he dismisses and disregards almost immediately. As Oshiro puts it, 'Meyer seems content rushing any sort of character development in order to get to this: mushy, unrealistic dialogue between two "destined" souls'.¹³⁶

From chaste teen love to Bella's portrayal, Oshiro constantly returns to criticise Meyer's writing. As Oshiro doggedly ploughs through the chapters and his argument incorporates more examples, he returns often, circling around his main as-yet-unanswered question: which is 'Why are so many (teen females) falling for *Twilight*?' Given what he has analysed and argued against in *Twilight*, it comes as no surprise to read of Oshiro's increasing annoyance, frustration and even bewilderment at the *Twilight* phenomenon which seems to have captured the hearts and minds of millions of young readers.

¹³² *Markreads* C3; C2. In C7, he admits that 'I'm quite aware that this project was biased from the start. I didn't like the book and had no real interest in reading it. I made fun of Twi-hards, poked fun at the novel's glaring absurdities, and just felt...better that I hadn't read it yet'.

¹³³ On this aspect of sexuality in *Twilight*, it must be noted that the erotic romance, *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011) by E.L. James, is a fan-fiction spin-off of *Twilight*.

¹³⁴ *MarkReads* C2.

¹³⁵ *MarkReads* C4.

¹³⁶ *MarkReads* C2.

What I would like to emphasise also, is Oshiro's performance before an audience, and that however exaggerated his views (or performance) may be, this does not mitigate or reduce his concerns, however extreme, about *Twilight*. As much as Oshiro dislikes Meyer's style, he cannot quite leave alone the element of romance in *Twilight*. Again, I would like to reiterate that Oshiro's issue with the *Twilight* series seem to be his intense dislike of Meyer's genre hybrid, where romance (with a teen vampire) is as important as gothic conventions. This leads one to infer that even though Oshiro is aware of *Twilight*'s importance to young readers, he cannot comprehend how Meyer's depiction's has captured their attention, much less their imagination. He writes, 'Meyer seemingly has no respect for the reader. Grammar is unnecessary; proper syntax is for the intellectuals; character development is for the nerds. And the plot explanations need not make sense, because clearly, all she's here for is the romance.'¹³⁷ Oshiro, in his persona as a highly critical but honest and frank reviewer of *Twilight*, also awards the 'World's Worst Book Ever' certificate to Stephenie Meyer for *Twilight*, complete with a picture of the certificate in his post writing that

'I'm quite aware that this project was biased from the start. I didn't like the book and had no real interest in reading it. I made fun of Twi-hards, poked at the novel's glaring absurdities, and just felt...better that I hadn't read it yet...(but) today is the day I announce that, regardless of anything Meyer writes in future chapters (and the other three books, for that matter) *Twilight* will eternally remain the World's Worst Book Ever.'¹³⁸

In this age of online visuals, Oshiro and Nation also provide static and flash-enabled pictures to accompany their posts. Unsurprisingly, Oshiro's are 'rude' though funny.¹³⁹ I attach one static picture in Figure 7 which is indicative of Oshiro's sentiments but with none of his (usual) inclusion of crudity. Remarkably graphic, the picture shows how Oshiro views Bella and Edward's relationship: unequal, ridiculous, even dangerous, and how wiser readers are perplexed by the *Twilight* phenomenon which does not seem to possess much, if any, redeeming qualities. Clearly, Oshiro would persuade readers to ignore *Twilight* completely or if they cannot resist reading *Twilight*, to see the flaws inherent in Meyer's hybrid narrative as clearly as he does. It must be noted also that Oshiro adopts the 'third

¹³⁷ *MarkReads* C4.

¹³⁸ *MarkReads* C7.

¹³⁹ As one example, Oshiro posted a film clip of Edward giving a piggyback to Bella. Obviously altered, the clip shows Bella repeatedly humping Edward with expressions to suit the action. See 'Mark Reads *Twilight*: Chapter 13', in *MR*, <<http://markreadstwilight.buzznet.com/user/journal/4466501/mark-reads-twilight-chapter-13/>>, 20 August 2015, [accessed 12 March 2015].

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person effect' in his responses: he can detect the errors and flaws in *Twilight* which many young readers seem unable to.

Figure 7 - From Oshiro's post on Chapter 13¹⁴⁰



As Oshiro owns his own website, there is no fear of any moderator curtailing his opinions unlike the environment in *Teen Ink*. Thus, he can be as blatant, and as rude as he wants. In all the posts, what stands out is Oshiro staking his claim (no pun intended) and marking his territory as the ultimate anti-*Twilight* critic who is brutally frank and honest. Again, this follows the pattern I have observed in young respondents, who have doggedly pursued their 'interests' and have confidently made their voices heard. In each case, their own voices are out there in cyberspace about what they really and truly think and feel about Meyer's romance gothic texts.

¹⁴⁰ From 'Mark Reads Twilight: Chapter 13', in *MarkReads*,
<<http://markreadstwilight.buzznet.com/user/journal/4466501/mark-reads-twilight-chapter-13/>>, 20 August 2015, [accessed 12 March 2015].

In mapping out Oshiro's arguments, his objections are mainly along feminist concerns of agency, choice and independence (or not being dependent on male figures). His responses question and criticise Meyer's Bella who seems to be frailer, more 'clumsy' and more 'klutzy' than the average girl.¹⁴¹ His one-man countered rebuttal on modern femininity rails against a portrayal that seems an embarrassment to all women.¹⁴² If Oshiro has such strong objections to Bella's characterisation vis-à-vis a modern young woman, it is no wonder that any romantic relationship involving Bella, will be found equally wanting and ridiculous. In his anti-*Twilight* response to Bella's perceived traditional, passive behaviour, Oshiro positions himself as both an enlightened discerning reader and a feminist; an ironic situation which he more than plays up, with his comments (and abuse) directly addressed to Meyer. Again, in Oshiro's reading of *Twilight*, his response seems centred on his objection to the romance gothic hybrid where the female protagonist is not depicted as someone strong, independent and assertive; his 'nit-picking' about 'facts' in the book would support this.

Unsurprisingly, by his fourth post, Oshiro writes about fully realising 'just how absurd and ridiculous the "love story" will be between Edward and Bella'.¹⁴³ Rejecting or ignoring gothic conventions, Oshiro objects to certain scenes in *Twilight*, where the 'author needs to create fake conflict to further the plot'. One example to support his point is Meyer depicting Bella lost in Port Angeles, which he finds ludicrous given that it is 'such a small city'. He questions how that is not 'demeaning' to Bella's intelligence, suggestive of the fact that she is 'utterly useless' especially when Edward has to 'magically save' her.¹⁴⁴ Objecting also to what he sees as horrible flaws in Edward's characterisation, Oshiro looks at the number of times Edward gives 'strict orders' (he counts nine) and how 'possessive' Edward starts to become and how 'controlling and condescending' he is.¹⁴⁵ Oshiro continues,

'I don't know what to tell you. I feel like this chapter was a demented special on Lifetime. You know: Women, don't go out alone and if you do,

¹⁴¹ *MarkReads* C8.

¹⁴² *Markreads* C3. Oshiro writes, '(Bella) further embarrasses herself with a stultifying conversation with Edward'.

¹⁴³ *MarkReads* C4.

¹⁴⁴ *MarkReads* C8. The scene in *Twilight* takes place on pages 137-139 where Bella soon realises that she is not being followed but 'herded' (p. 139), only to be rescued by Edward on p. 140.

¹⁴⁵ *MarkReads* C8; C10.

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hope you have a strong man to save you. And make sure to meet his every demand after he does so. It's weird.'¹⁴⁶

One of Oshiro creative responses is a letter addressed to 'Stephenie', and is another example of how Meyer's texts encourage readers to offer generative responses. In the persona of Bella, Oshiro asks if Meyer's depiction of weak women is 'a personal thing for you? You don't happen to be part of a religion that historically subjugates women, do you? I hope not'.¹⁴⁷ The next generative response, also a letter, is addressed to 'Mrs. Meyer', but this time in the persona of Edward. In that response, Oshiro channels Edward and picks on the latter's vampire talent of 'thought reading' to highlight what is tantamount to dangerous stalker-like qualities: 'I cannot tell you how many times, as a male, that I've wanted to know precisely where a girl I was following was heading...And I knew the exact moment when I could peek into her bedroom window to see her undress because of this gift you've given me'.¹⁴⁸

As can be seen, Oshiro has picked on issues which have been identified by certain theorists as troubling in *Twilight*, i.e. Edward's behaviour, Bella and Edward's relationship, and the unequal relationship dynamics which he labels their 'unhealthy and sexist relationship'.¹⁴⁹ While Oshiro may use phrases such as 'I found myself feeling genuine rage at the words on the pages in the tenth chapter', one cannot but look at his consistent message of dislike towards *Twilight* and marvel at what seems to be his comfort zone, as Oshiro marks out his space in the *Twilight* debate. Although Oshiro wonders in several posts at 'Twilighters' who cannot seem to see the text for its flawed vampire story and even more flawed characters, he is clearly comfortable and happy to 'mock' anyone who cannot hold a decent argument or debate on *Twilight*. Rejecting Meyer's romance gothic text, Oshiro is certainly deriving great comfort if not immense satisfaction and pleasure airing his anti-*Twilight* views and stance to one and all.

Returning to the same Port Angeles scene for Twilightguy.com, I find one meta-response for Kaleb Nation which stands out from the rest. This is mainly because it is also the only one written on a serious note. **Roxie** writes,

¹⁴⁶ *MarkReads* C8. According to its website, Lifetime (Networks), an American media (TV) company, prides itself as the 'most trusted' and 'most empowering' network among women for nine consecutive years. See 'About My Lifetime Commitment' in 'Lifetime', <<http://www.mylifetime.com/my-lifetime-commitment/about>>, n.d., [accessed 29 June 2015].

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *MarkReads* C10.

'I think it's important to address that what happened to Bella, happens to girls and women everyday in real life.

Strangers (usually men) (sic.) making rude, physically evaluative or sexually explicit comments to them. These comments and interactions increase fear among women of being kidnapped, assaulted, or raped.

I have been yelled at, I have seen girls followed, I know women who have been fondled, and followed in cars by strange men. This is a very common occurrence (sic.).

I think this part in this chapter was one of the most realistic scenes. I truly felt Bella's cold sweat. I know that fear. I have been followed by strange men. Unfortunately, there was no shiny volvo. I was very glad it was in there. And I think it should be discussed'.¹⁵⁰

Roxie's meta-response ends by asking for the issue to be discussed further, probably because of Nation's one-sentence reference to the scene and his 'light-touch' approach. Nation's brief response to this Port Angeles scene in his post is not unexpected: it is consistent with his genial persona, which is about being a (young) male keen to find out what makes *Twilight* so interesting for young women, rather than as a young man delving deeper into (more serious) issues such as dangerous situations faced by females (in isolation). Oshiro, in his strident criticism, has evidently hit on something salient written by Meyer. The fact that such dangers exist, young readers can recognise that with one personally relating to it after reading about the scene in *Twilight*.

The responses by the two young male readers – Oshiro and Nation – are contrasting. Oshiro's response to the Port Angeles scene is outrage that Bella is put in the ludicrous position of being lost in the first place in 'some strange warehouse district adjacent to the town' while Nation's response is first some concern, and then followed by the wish that Edward should have 'at least bumped into those guys slightly, to give (the stalkers) fair warning of what will eventually come their way'.¹⁵¹ In all three responses and meta-response, **Roxie**, Nation and Oshiro have sidestepped the gothic conventions and gone straight into treating the scene from a realist text. Clearly not meant to be treated as a realistic situation, the fact that Meyer has written something which readers can readily relate to in real-life, is not so much a cause for moral panic, but a situation of

¹⁵⁰ *Twilightguy* C8, Meta-response 11. Alas, **Roxie's** request goes unanswered: Nation just has too many meta-responses and other meta-responses seem more intent on responding to Nation than to **Roxie**.

¹⁵¹ *MarkReads* C8; *Twilightguy* C8.

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readers looking at something in fiction, and paradoxically feeling comfortable enough to raise certain issues based on it. This, I feel is another example of Meyer's gothic romance providing space for discussions and issues, even if in this instance, not many readers in Nation's site choose to continue the discussion.

In line with his light-touch approach, Nation's next sentence shows that his concern about Bella's predicament in the Port Angeles scene has shifted: he writes instead his amazement that he has already read '178 pages', as he has been so busy 'flipping' the pages without realising he has nearly gone to the next chapter. However, he is swift to reassure his audience, '(d)on't worry – I correct my mistake and immediately did a brain-wipe to erase any spoilers'.¹⁵² Of all (53 in total) meta-responses for Nation's post, four however, do reference the Port Angeles incident:

Teuners: I wanted revenge on those guys to stop them from doing that-or worse. Love this chapter.

Nora: There is just something so romantic about...attempted rape and casual discussion of murder.

Michelle: This was a great chapter. Even better in *Midnight Sun*, where you see that in a way, Bella gets her justice on those evil fiends;

Rebekah: It's funny that you wish Edward had "bumbed" into those guys or something...My brother said and I quote "I would have just beat them up...Who cares if you kill them!" Which makes my brother sound way creepier than he is. Anyway I just thought it was funny that you both (as guys) had the same reaction.¹⁵³

The four meta-responses offer different views, ranging from a desire for vengeance, the forbidden thrill of being in a dangerous situation, to a perceived similarity in young male responses. However, the majority of meta-responses are overwhelmingly on how refreshing it is to find a man reading and liking Meyer's text. One such example is **Sophsoph11's** 'i am in love with your reports!! and i am so glad that there is at least one guy out there who is willing to read twilight! (sic.)'.¹⁵⁴ Certainly, the meta-responses to Nation's posts indicate that readers follow his views very carefully, especially when he brings to their attention his 'male tendencies'.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² *Twilightguy* C8.

¹⁵³ *Twilightguy* C8: Meta-responses 37; 42; 47; 48.

¹⁵⁴ *Twilightguy* C8: Meta-response 49.

¹⁵⁵ *Twilightguy* C8.

In the same post for Chapter 8 (which includes the Port Angeles scene), Nation begins by bringing his audience's attention to Meyer's implicit distancing from consumerist female fiction, writing that:

Hopefully I don't have to remind you that I am a guy, and my male tendencies begin to win out when the girls go shopping for prom dresses. As I read that part (which is thankfully brief), I might as well be sitting there in the women's section, staring at the ceiling... I *can* suffer through shopping, but the problem here is that there are three girls who would talk to each other and ignore me, making me simply a pack-mule for the bags. Anyhow, it's one of those things that I can suffer through, until the party gravitates towards the makeup counter. Then you'll find me in the food court.¹⁵⁶

A picture of him in judge's robes inside a court with the sign 'Food Court' and the caption 'Not The Food Court I had In Mind' is followed by the sentence, 'Bella, like me, immediately goes to look for the nearest bookstore'.¹⁵⁷ By drawing attention to one similarity that he shares with Bella, however tangential the comparison, Nation is performing two acts at the same time: one, it underlines his liking for Bella because he is seeking out similarities between them, and two, it offers another opportunity for him, which he takes, to align himself with the interests of his own audience who, as readers of *Twilight*, are therefore, also more likely to visit a bookshop.

The mention about shopping and Nation's opinion about feminine retail behaviours are definite sources of amusement for several fans: 'ahahaha your paragraph on shopping made me laugh, because it's true. More often than not the guy DOES get ignored and used as a pack mule (sic.)'.¹⁵⁸ Another is an indirect comment on shopping as a teen activity. In this case, **Lisa** seems content to identify herself with Bella's dislike of shopping, unlike her 'many' peers who find much 'joy out of shopping'. **Lisa** writes,

I find myself being quite similiar (sic.) to Bella here. A fact is that I don't like to go shopping very often. Now and again when I have a bit of cash and need something, it can be alright, sometimes even fun. But I usually find it quite dull and boring, and don't seem to get the joy out of shopping that many other girls get. I would much rather be in a book shop examining the many books than examining a dress and its big price tag!¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ *Twilightguy* C8: Meta-response 17.

¹⁵⁹ *Twilightguy* C8: Meta-response 53.

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Returning to Nation's response to *Twilight*, there is simply nothing which can be seen as negative in his posts. His *Twilight Guy* website and posts are deliberately comedic and disguised to elicit response and perhaps disagreement in a non-abrasive style. Right from the start, Nation is highly flattering, if not complimentary, and deliberately links Meyer's writing to that of Jane Austen in his first ever post on *Twilight*.¹⁶⁰ Nation's response and performance for his audience is a contrast to Oshiro's response mentioned earlier, who compares Meyer unfavourably to literary giants: 'you're not Albert Camus or Dostoevsky'. Both comparisons to a first-time author are, of course, hyperboles belonging to opposite spectrums.

Since Nation's post is short, I have reproduced part of his webpage in the form of a picture in Figure 8. His rhetorical performance and comedic style is clearly set out in his first response. After directly praising Meyer with the phrase, 'that Meyer flourish', besides associating her with Austen (unlike Oshiro who immediately criticises Meyer's writing), Nation goes on to write positively about Bella by imbuing her with qualities such as intelligence, modesty and being a nice normal teen while ignoring anything gothic in the chapter:

I actually like Bella for some reason, right off the bat. She isn't stupid and she doesn't have her nose in the air. When her dad gives her an old red truck, she is actually pleased with it. She's normal but not a complainer, and that really stands out.

And speaking of her truck, what's the first thing you think of when I describe a vehicle with a "...*faded red color...big round fenders...one of those solid iron affairs that never gets damaged...*"¹⁶¹

Nation's style of writing, besides differentiating himself from many other (female) posts by virtue of being a(n appreciative) male blogger on *Twilight* is to write about something almost obscure yet relatable, akin to the 'non sequitur', out-of-the context variety. As can be seen from Figure 8, he compares Bella's old red truck to a fire engine which, as he continues, 'if Bella was driving that special vehicle, she'd get the best parking at the school and just sit it right up front in the Fire Zone'.¹⁶²

Engaging and personal, Nation writes with a clear intended audience, just like Oshiro, though obviously targeted at *Twilighters*. To put it colloquially - right off

¹⁶⁰ *Twilightguy* C1. It must be noted that the comparison is clearly odd: the first-person colloquial style adopted by Meyer is vastly different from Austen.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

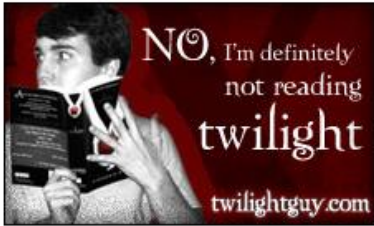
the bat - Nation has made his genial male-centric mark by focussing on a vehicle and then making comparisons to another.

Figure 8 - Nation's post on Chapter 1 (NB - only first part shown here)¹⁶³

Reading Twilight: Chapter 1 (First Sight)

April 18th, 2008 at 8:32 am by Kaleb Nation


The song for this chapter is Seven Days of Lonely by I-Nine:



The first thing I noticed as I read Chapter 1 (First Sight) of Twilight was the usage of big words like inconsequential, omnipresent, claustrophobia, apprehensively. I feel as if I'm reading something from Jane Austen, which I am actually quite convinced is the point. Sorry for starting off on this tiny detail, but using the word 'inconsequential' on the first page of one's book is an instant plus-3-points on my end, since most books these days would just say 'no matter what' and miss that Meyer flourish. Already off to a good start.

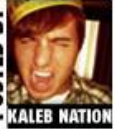
I actually like Bella for some reason, right off the bat. She isn't stupid and she doesn't have her nose in the air. When her dad gives her an old red truck, she is actually pleased with it. She's normal but not a complainer, and that really stands out.

And speaking of her truck, what's the first thing you think of when I describe a vehicle with a "...faded red color... big round fenders...one of those solid iron affairs that never gets damaged..."



In fact, if Bella was driving that special vehicle, she'd get the best parking at the school and just sit it right up front in the Fire Zone.

POSTED BY



KALEB NATION

He ends his post writing that '(s)o overall I am quite enjoying the read and I'll be onto chapter 2 sometime this weekend, and perhaps find out more about this Edward fellow. I am actually looking forward to it, so I'll write about it Monday-ish' (sic.).¹⁶⁴ His strategy to focus on obscure bits of information which also offers opportunities for humour and comic relief definitely works. One such example is Nation writing about listening to a clip of 'Clair de Lune' from 'Amazon' after

¹⁶³ From 'Reading Twilight: Chapter 1 (First Sight)', in *TwilightGuy*, <<http://www.twilightguy.com/2008/04/18/reading-twilight-chapter-1-first-sight/>>, 18 April 2008, [accessed 12 March 2015].

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

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‘hearing that Edward listens to Debussy’, only to be ‘shocked at the horrific sounds which came forth’. But, as he assures his readers,

‘I realised I was listening to Clair de Lune *With Songs of the Whales*, in which they had dubbed whales over the music. Suddenly it made sense and became somewhat relaxing (though I did skip to a whale-free version to get a taste of Edward’s music)’.¹⁶⁵

Three paragraphs later, he writes about feeling

‘almost as terrified as Bella when they started talking about taking blood samples in class... This was not helped by the fact that I always seemed to get the most inexperienced nurses who had previous careers in harpooning, ... I can perfectly see why Bella’s so faint’.¹⁶⁶

For readers primed earlier by his mention of ‘*With Songs of The Whales*’, Nation’s description of inexperienced nurses with previous careers in ‘harpooning’, can be seen as his attempts to infuse humour and light-heartedness in his writing. His style is consistent and in keeping with his genial, comic tone. Examples of how Nation maintains this is, one, his crowd-pleasing answer, such as preferring ‘Team Edward, definitely’, and two, the content in his posts, which usually seeks to reassure (female) readers about their reading choice because if he, a ‘typical young’ guy, enjoys reading *Twilight* then, by implication, reading and enjoying *Twilight* is a normal and perfectly understandable activity.¹⁶⁷

More so than Oshiro, Nation also writes about feedback from readers to his post and is not shy in posting pictures of himself albeit in ‘clownish’ positions in every single post. I have reproduced one such picture in Figure 9. As can be seen from his message to *his* fans, Nation has evidently received positive reviews and recommendations by readers to his site. The number to his website then was growing and, he writes gleefully, ‘try closer to 25,000 visits yesterday 😊’, complete with emoticon (reproduced here). Charming, agreeable and appealing in his tone and writing, Kaleb Nation’s very positive attitude towards *Twilight* has definitely paid dividends in visitor traffic. It is not surprising: he writes from the position of someone who is not from Meyer’s intended audience, but crucially, who enjoys and appreciates what Meyer is writing about in her hybrid romance gothic text.

¹⁶⁵ *Twilightguy* C5.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ From the section ‘Fun Facts’ in ‘Kaleb Nation: Author and Youtube Personality’, in ‘newmediarockstars.com’, <<http://newmediarockstars.com/2012/02/kaleb-nation/>>, 28 February 2012, [accessed 12 March 2015].

Figure 9¹⁶⁸ - Nation's own direct message to fans



Twilighters punish me for leaving The Book at home while I traveled

Overall, I'm still really liking it, and I'll be onto the next chapter as soon as I possibly can. I skipped work on my college final essay to read *Twilight*, so I shall read the next as soon as I get it turned in.

—IMPORTANT MESSAGES—

- For all of you kind people who have been friending me on Facebook, I'm sorry but I can no longer add you to my friends list unless I personally know you. I can, however, add you to [my Myspace site](#), which I'd be really glad to friend you on!

- When setting the book down, I noticed that my site is now at number 9 on the Twilight Top Sites. I can only say that a website still in its infancy, nary a week old, should never get that honor with such names as Bellaandedward.com and the Twilight Lexicon. However, I am overjoyed to be there, though their stats page of my site is a bit incorrect (try closer to 25,000 visits yesterday 😊).

- Also, to all of you who have sent emails: I still am going to reply to you. I just have to find a few spare hours, because literally if I only spent 5 minutes on each one I would be here an entire weekend (and I actually enjoy sleeping sometime).

As mentioned previously, many meta-responses to Nation's posts have mostly centred on his male perspective of *Twilight* especially on how wonderful and refreshing it is to have someone who is male and who appreciates the whole reading experience rather than rejecting it outright (**Becky**: thank you for not seeing this chapter as just a sappy love scene like many guys would!).¹⁶⁹ The meta-response to his site shows evidence that Nation's rhetoric does elicit

¹⁶⁸ From 'Reading *Twilight*: Chapter 2 (Open Book)', in *Twilightguy*, <<http://www.twilightguy.com/2008/04/22/reading-twilight-chapter-2-open-book/>>, 22 April 2008, [accessed 12 March 2015].

¹⁶⁹ *Twilightguy* C13: Meta-response 66.

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insecurities about the value of feminocentric narrative and gothic/romance hybrid text.

Nation does not disappoint in his role as the primary male reader on *Twilight* who, crucially, has also been endorsed by Meyer. This becomes evident when then 20-year old Nation offers advice to other males in his post in the same Chapter 13 which Oshiro dislikes so intensely, and which the latter sees as a precursor to domestic abuse.

Nation writes, 'Guys, I hate to break it to you, but there are many reasons girls love Edward Cullen. And one of them is he pretty much values her over himself'.¹⁷⁰ Just like Oshiro, Nation keeps to a consistent message in his posts. Within the persona of his genial, comedic self, he is not shy in offering his opinion on why *Twilight* has gained so many fans. Already by his second post, Nation writes that:

'right off I am getting hints of why the girls love him. He's extremely polite for one thing and when he talks there's a flourish to it but something that leaps out at me right off is that he is a professional listener. Guys especially, take heed of what I say next: you must learn this from Edward Cullen...Notice how Edward is keeping the conversation going, showing openly that he is listening to her, and gently keeping her talking to (and agreeing with) him, while showing that he cares. I am literally surprised! He is a pro at this like nothing I've seen before'.¹⁷¹

In describing Edward's active listening skills and his obvious attention devoted to Bella, Nation sees and identifies these actions (being attentive and even nurturing) as key to any boyfriend who wishes to make his girlfriend happy: this ties in with Radway and Chodorow's discussion, mentioned earlier in Part One, about the comfort of and longing by women for the nurturing (maternal-like) attention. Nation goes on to write, 'Guys especially, take heed of what I say next...' a message which is clearly aimed at both genders, even though Nation's readers can be safely assumed to be mostly females. Purportedly a piece of advice to his fellow males, I see this as Nation 'reassuring' female readers that some males do indeed 'get the message' in *Twilight*, and that some males can be sensitive, though maybe not up to Edward's exemplary standard. Nation's strategy has obviously won over his female readers - they ask him for relationship advice:

For some reason, I'm guessing because of writing for this website, some people have come to believe that I am their on-call Relationship Doctor.

¹⁷⁰ *Twilightguy* C13.

¹⁷¹ *Twilightguy* C2.

Or the Mister Fixit for 'How Can I Get My BoyFriend To Read Twilight And Grow Up A Little?'. I usually tell them basically the same thing:

Dear You, do this:

YOU: Boyfriend! Please read Twilight. It would make me happy.

BOYFRIEND (staring at video game screen): Whut?

YOU: Okay. Read Twilight or else.

BOYFRIEND (eyes not leaving screen): or else whut?

YOU: Or else I'm leaving you for a fictional character.¹⁷²

Soon after, on a self-deprecating note complete with emoticon, Nation writes,

'I'm hoping that I'm not just insane and completely off on this, since I am, after all, a guy observing from the outside... If I'm gravely mistaken, be sure to warn me in the comments. No point in me giving other guys bad advice'. (sic.).¹⁷³

Clearly comfortable in offering his advice, ostensibly meant for 'ignorant' males, besides writing about his views on *Twilight*, Nation has chosen to mostly confine his 'male-centred' views on why predominantly female readers have fallen for Meyer's romance plot. Unsurprisingly, there are 163 meta-responses to this post.¹⁷⁴ Of the first hundred, the overwhelming majority (77 in total) write that Nation has 'got it right' in his interpretation of the tender romantic scene in Chapter 13 which, is also reflective of Bella and Edward's relationship. One fan even asks, in mock amazement, if Nation has 'really just crack(ed) the code as to why girls are in love with Edward Cullen??'¹⁷⁵ A few identified with Nation's example of typical behaviour exhibited by young men who are more 'obsessed with video games' than paying attention to their girlfriends, with several meta-responses clarifying and elaborating further what Edward's love really entails. One reader writes, 'Edward says soo many beautiful things, but the point is, HE IS SINCERE, he really means everything he says and he doesn't say this stuff just to "get his way"...I hate to say this, but most guys truly have NO IDEA...' (sic.).¹⁷⁶ Another meta-response is,

¹⁷² *Twilightguy* C13.

¹⁷³ *Twilightguy* C13.

¹⁷⁴ I also looked at the meta-responses for Oshiro's Chapter 13. Surprisingly, they were usually in one or two sentences though like Nation's readers, meta-responses for Oshiro were supportive and in agreement with him. I count 63 out of the 80 which directly agreed with Oshiro with quite a few following Oshiro's cue to mock or parody Meyer's text, either in pictures or in text.

¹⁷⁵ *Twilightguy* C13: Meta-response 4; 45.

¹⁷⁶ *Twilightguy* C13: Meta-response 63.

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You hit that mark perfectly about what girls love about Edward, he puts Bella before himself and he pays attention to everything she says because he really is interested and really cares! The guys of today really do need Edward lessons (or a trip to your website!) Coming from a girl with a group of guy friends I would kill to get them to read *Twilight* (and show that they actually do care!) but it probably won't happen'.¹⁷⁷

Yet another and almost identical meta-response is,

I agree with everyone else that Edward's ability to put Bella above himself ...but I'd like to make one important addition: that trait wouldn't mean much if Edward didn't also FOLLOW THROUGH on his commitment.

Edward wanted to be with Bella forever, and he was willing to let her know that. But from a girl to a guy, if you go around telling whoever is your latest arm candy "You are the most important thing to me now... the most important thing to me ever" and don't follow through with that commitment, you're going to break a lot of hearts. For a lot of guys, those would be shallow words designed to get a girl's heart pounding; for Edward, it's the voice of his soul.¹⁷⁸

It didn't take Edward long to decide who his #1 was going to be, and when he knew it, he committed to her in his heart and then showed her with his words and actions. Now THAT's a real man!

Some of Nation's readers recognise that the gothic dimension adds to Edward's authenticity, stemming from his vampire identity, young age and even tragic predicament (being alone for so long until he met Bella). Knowing and taking comfort in recognising like-minded (and female) readers, seems to be slightly different from reading about Nation's positive male response where he has identified similar issues central to *Twilight*. As mentioned, there is something reassuring or comforting in Nation's writing or performance as a sensitive young male who adopts a gently inquiring, genial manner, in his bid to know the reasons why young (female) readers like *Twilight* so much. Unsurprisingly, meta-responses to his site number in the thousands with many taking comfort and reassurance from his response (performance) to Meyer's *Twilight*. Essentially subscribing to the idea of the idealised boyfriend who loves the girlfriend more than life itself, it comes then as no surprise that Nation himself was mentioned in Stephenie Meyer's own blog.

In tracing both Nation's and Oshiro's response to *Twilight*, I see two young male readers performing to separate audiences by attempting to analyse and comprehend Meyer's gothic text with very different criteria, and thus arriving at

¹⁷⁷ *Twilightguy* C13: Meta-response 41.

¹⁷⁸ *Twilightguy* C13: Meta-response 90.

two markedly different responses. Nation confines himself to only debating and discussing on the personal plane, choosing to comment and ask questions on love and relationships such as ‘everybody else knows you’re in love, except you, and meanwhile they’re giggling and pointing and you don’t know why. Anyone been there before?’; dare I suggest (Edward’s sudden changes in demeanour) is something some girls *don’t* like about Edward?’¹⁷⁹ In his posts, Nation seems to be mapping out his own answer on the gender debate of what makes a guy and girl respond to each other in a relationship, though he obviously writes more by seeing it or trying to see it, paradoxically, through young female eyes.

In contrast, and regardless of his sexual preference, Oshiro’s extended ‘debate’ on *Twilight* has been widened to include social concerns, such as Bella’s portrayal as a teenager in modern society, and her temperament or disposition, besides the dynamics of her relationship with Edward. Oshiro’s response, however, touches on the ethics and responsibility of the writer in imparting personal beliefs, particularly on the issue of pre-marital sex. There is certainly more ground that Oshiro covers in his generative responses unlike Nation who has, instead, focused on personal interaction, and on how young males can maintain loving relationships with their female romantic partner. That two males can write on the same chapter with such stark differences, is suggestive of *Twilight*’s conceptual space to inspire or instigate such personally felt responses, while triggering curiosity and further discussions on a variety of issues.

In this section of Part Two, I have offered a range of actual responses on the *Twilight* texts and films from young adult readers: from teens answering specific questions about *Twilight* in Pan’s book, or from their own generative responses, including meta-responses based on other posts in *Teen Ink*; and the two markedly different young adult (male) responses to Meyer’s texts with their different public performances for their own respective audience. These generative responses (because they trigger a variety of responses), although not representative of all young readers of Meyer’s *Twilight* texts and films, offer a strong counter to adult fears and even moral panic about the negative influence from reading or consuming the *Twilight* texts.

To reiterate, the young adult readers shown in this section, are not passive consumers or readers of *Twilight*. In the first example from a *Twilight* fan

¹⁷⁹ *Twilightguy* C4; C3.

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website, the young readers show awareness of their audience, and offer countered rebuttals, emphasising through their responses, their comfort, ease and even pleasure in responding to Meyer's *Twilight* series. As noted, quite a few fans identified with the love depicted in the series, not just romantic love but also familial love within the Cullen family. In identifying this positive emotion, in seeking comfort from that depiction, these responses also suggest that the fans find Meyer's romance plot even more compelling when events and situations get enhanced or magnified by the gothic.

For teenaged users of *Teen Ink* who have confidently and comfortably posted their responses to *Twilight*, given the openness for posting on the website, there has been a huge variety of responses. The generative responses have touched on issues beyond the confines of school work and family, on broad philosophical topics such as the meaning of love, independence and ethical concerns such as the merits or fairness in relationships, the nature of having a soul and the treatment of friends: all indicating how gothic conventions in Meyer's romance gothic has opened a creative space for teens to discuss, debate, even change their minds, and affirm or refute certain points found in the *Twilight* texts.

For his Markreads.com website, Oshiro channels in a 'populist' way, the dismissive views of professional reviewers and the ideological objections of feminist academics, and makes these views accessible to a wider audience which have inevitably allowed for deeply passionate fans of *Twilight* to object and take offense with his opinions. However negative Oshiro's opinion is of Meyer, the very fact that he has taken the opportunity presented by Meyer's texts to write so extensively, and trenchantly, also emphasises what Meyer's texts offer him: a platform to confidently and comfortably 'shout' his opinions in cyberspace.

In contrast to Oshiro's take on the individualist discourse of agency and influence, Nation's response in his *Twilightguy* website, has been focussed on the personal and relational. He sets out to analyse Meyer's text by viewing it from, not so much feminist eyes, but from the gaze of the young curious (female) reader, a move which has allowed him to respond with his 'male' insights. Understandably, this has gained him many (female) readers to his site. While, Nation may be performing to his online audience by offering his 'male perspective', his response to *Twilight* has opened up feminine insecurities on the value of reading romance gothic or feminocentric narratives. The two young male readers of *Twilight* – Nation and Oshiro – ostensibly writing and performing for different audiences, are paradoxically responding to the same tension, ambiguities and possibilities inherent in Meyer's romance gothic hybrid, with

discussions that sometimes blur the lines between realist and gothic texts in their reading of *Twilight*.

That Meyer's books offer a platform for so many engaged, interested teenagers or young respondents (even a cynical young man) is something that should not be discounted. Responses indicate also a change in views as young respondents write about arriving at an opinion, only to change it upon deeper reflection, suggesting comfort in having successfully worked out some 'thorny' issues besides reflecting the flexible, fluid nature of teen discussions: this also offers a counter to academic concerns about the (implied permanent and negative) impact to young readers.

If an overwhelming majority of teen readers do identify with the tenderness and nurturance in Edward's portrayal, as opposed to some who see an overly controlling male, this situation highlights the openness and debatable issues that Meyer's romance gothic offers its readers in which the young readers show great comfort in engaging one another in debate. The fact that young readers have noted Meyer's 'bad writing' also suggests that this has encouraged more young readers to respond, even if only to agree with the assessment. The generative responses on *Twilight* from the four sites alone, strongly suggest that young readers should not be viewed as susceptible and easily influenced by what they read: their interrogation of Meyer's texts, at the very least, is strong evidence that they are deriving comfort in their reading and consumption of romance gothic texts, as they perform for others, and along the way, find their own voice.

The next section, Part Three, focuses on horror gothic, and similar to the responses of young adult readers interrogating the romance gothic texts in Part Two, Part Three offers strong evidence, this time derived from fieldwork, of young readers who are similarly comfortable and confident in interrogating a horror gothic text.

Part Three: Horror Gothic and Young Readers: Evidence from Reading Groups

The *Demonata* series by Darren Shan, which was published in 2005, begins with the novel *Lord Loss* and ends with *Hell's Heroes* in 2009. Sandwiched between the two publication dates are the other eight books in the series with lurid titles such as *Blood Beast*, *Demon Apocalypse*, and *Death's Shadow*.¹ As the names suggest, the series involves gore, horror and violence, themes which are predominantly popular among young male readers, with sales in the UK alone having generated more than £8 million.² Shan himself has acknowledged the distinct presence of gore and violence in his *Demonata* series, going so far as to describe the series as having 'one of my most shocking openings: a boy finds that his dad's been decapitated, his mum's ripped to pieces and his sister's been bitten in half and a demon is using her carcass as a hand puppet. It's traumatic'.³

Despite such excesses in horror gothic texts for young readers, there have been few negative responses to the genre in recent years, in contrast to criticisms or moral panic around romance gothic texts aimed at young female readers such as the *Twilight* series. Whatever the reason for this general acceptance of horror gothic, whether it is mainly because adult audiences are more receptive towards it, or specifically because writers such as Shan are offering a more didactic explanation for the violence within the texts - 'I explore the consequences. He doesn't just go, "Oh well, too bad"' - what remains unquestioned and well-documented is that adult reception towards horror gothic for young readers has not always been that encouraging.⁴ In fact, the positive reception to Shan's books

¹The books in the series' order are *Lord Loss* (2005), *Demon Thief* (2005), *Slawter* (2006), *Bec* (2006), *Blood Beast* (2007), *Demon Apocalypse* (2007), *Death's Shadow* (2008), *Wolf Island* (2008), *Dark Calling* (2009) and *Hell's Heroes* (2009). The publication dates are taken from the UK which has a slightly earlier release date than in the US.

²This figure is based on sales data from Nielsen Bookscan (UK) which tracked the start of each publication of the series until November 2015, in response to my request on the number and value of books sold in Shan's *Demonata* series. Shan's audiences are described as a 'hoard of young teenage boys' in one news article on a book festival. Source: 'Gruesome tales with Darren Shan' in *Essential Surrey and South West London* <<http://www.essentialsurrey.co.uk/theatre-arts/gruesome-theses-with-darren-shan/>>, 30 October 2013, [accessed 5 September 2016].

³From 'The Conversation: Author Darren Shan, on racism, sex and a zombie apocalypse', *Independent*, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/the-conversation-author-darren-shan-on-racism-sex-and-a-zombie-apocalypse-8839140.html?origin=internalSearch>>, 27 September 2013, [accessed 5 September 2016].

⁴From 'The Conversation: Author Darren Shan, on racism, sex and a zombie apocalypse', *Independent*, 27 September 2013, [accessed 5 September 2016].

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is in direct contrast to the earlier reception of another horror series, the well-known *Goosebumps* books written between the years 1980 and 2006 by R.L. Stine. His books were 'attacked, assailed, insulted, and banned' with Stine himself demonised as 'wicked'.⁵

Other horror series have also been demonised by critics. In her widely cited book, *Children's Literature in the 1890s and the 1990s*, Kimberley Reynolds asserts that books like the *Point Horror* series with their 'emphasis on violence, aggression, horror and the bizarre', do not 'tell the reader something about violence nor release pent-up emotions'. Instead, such books seem to encourage an 'appetite for violence' with the violence described as 'titillating, gratuitous, and not cathartic'.⁶

Even as late as 1997, teachers were asking questions like, 'how can any self-respecting literature teacher encourage students to read the series books written by R. L. Stine ... – even as pleasure reading?'⁷ Around the same period, another educator wrote that it was imperative for 'teachers, librarians, and parents (to) take advantage of (*Goosebumps's*) popularity' to have 'meaningful and important discussions' with young readers (in order to) give them 'a chance to think critically, to tease out a set of values, to query a social terrain, and to interrogate a popular text for the way that it reflects the times'.⁸ In other words, adult intervention was seen as necessary for young readers of the early teen horror series. Any positive assessment of the *Goosebumps* series hinged on the fact that the books encourage students to read in the first place, thereby helping them 'to develop the motivation to improve their (critical literacy) skills', or that some knowledge of 'comparisons or contrasts' may be garnered from reading a 'poorly constructed text'.⁹ Unsurprisingly, when offering a more positive but qualified assessment on the *Goosebumps* series in 1997, Louann Reid and Ruth K. J. Cline

⁵ Patrick Jones, 'Nothing to Fear: RL Stine and Young Adult Paperback Thrillers', *Collection Management*, 25 (2001), 3-23. (p. 4).

⁶ Kimberley Reynolds in *Children's Literature in the 1890s and the 1990s* (Northcote House Pub Limited, 1994). pp. 73-74.

⁷ Louann Reid and Ruth K. J. Cline, 'Our Repressed Reading Addictions: Teachers and Young Adult Series Books', *The English Journal*, 86 (1997), 68-72. (p.68).

⁸ Heidi Anne Mesmer, 'Goosebumps: The Appeal of Predictability and Violence', *New Advocate*, 11 (1998), 107-18. (p. 116).

⁹ Louann Reid, and Ruth K. J. Cline, p. 69. They borrowed the term 'translation/critical literacy' from Miles Myers to describe the 'new kind of literacy (needed) if (students) are to be successful citizens of the 21st century'. See also Patricia O. Richards, Debra H. Thatcher, Michelle Shreeves, Peggy Timmons, and Sallie Barker in 'Don't Let a Good Scare Frighten You: Choosing and Using Quality Chillers to Promote Reading', *The Reading Teacher*, 52 (1999), 830-40. They write that 'on occasion, even poorly written books may be useful in literature study...We learn many things when we read a poorly constructed text'. (p. 836).

noted that the series still received 'less respect from critics, librarians, and teachers', suggesting that their more positive view was not shared by others.¹⁰

Twenty years later, it is fair to say that very few teachers harbour such strong reservations about horror gothic texts. The old *Goosebumps* series is now recommended as 'still a real draw for young fans of the shivers', a type of 'secret weapon that grabs a lot of kids'.¹¹ A shift in teachers' attitudes is confirmed by my own experience in carrying out field work for this study.¹² Both groups of school authorities which allowed me access to their students hold broadly similar views on horror gothic: that *Lord Loss* is just the type of text which will appeal to their students; also, any form of additional reading can only be beneficial for young readers, with literacy a major consideration.

Teachers in primary schools also seem to show similar shifts in attitude. In a recent survey reported by *TES* in 2015 (formerly known as *Times Educational Supplement*) which was conducted in association with the National Association for the Teaching of English, many teachers chose books that were 'dark and full of horror' which they think children should read before leaving primary school.¹³ According to Ann Mroz, many of the top one hundred books which were 'voted for' by teachers are 'tales of ferocious monsters, abuse, abandonment and even death'. Mroz also suggests that 'these books serve an important purpose, giving children a safe place where they can take control of troubling subjects, where evil can be glimpsed and then shut within their pages'.¹⁴

¹⁰ Louann Reid, and Ruth K. J. Cline, 'Our Repressed Reading Addictions: Teachers and Young Adult Series Books', *The English Journal*, 86 (1997), 68-72. (p. 69).

¹¹ Kate Coombs, 'There Are Monkeys in This Book', *The Utah Journal of Literacy*, 17 (2014), 4-9. (p. 7).

¹² An academic article, looking at the implied child reader, also mentions positive reviews from newspapers on children's Gothic in the past decade in the UK. The reviews are from *Telegraph*, *Guardian* and *Observer*, with the earliest review cited as the positive review published by the *Guardian* in 2002 on Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*. Reviewed by Philip Pullman, Gaiman's book is described as 'marvellously strange and scary'. Understandably, Pullman, being a writer of gothic books himself, may be partial towards this genre. However, there is no mention about the many reviews on Meyer's *Twilight* series, even though Meyer's *Twilight* is cited as an example of popular gothic works in the article. See Chloe Buckley, 'Gothic and the Child Reader, 1850-Present', in *The Gothic World*, ed. by Glennis Byron and Dale Townshend (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 254-63. (p. 254).

¹³ Ann Mroz, 'Take a Leaf out of Roald Dahl's Book This Summer', *TES* 24 July 2015, p. 4.

¹⁴ Ann Mroz, 'Take a Leaf out of Roald Dahl's Book This Summer', *TES* 24 July 2015, p. 4. Ann Mroz was also quoted in a BBC news report by Sean Coughlan, 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory Tops primary school book list', in BBC, < <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-33644201> >, 24 July 2015, [accessed 30 March 2017].

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It is safe to say that current adult attitudes towards horror gothic texts for young readers have taken a step forward: Shan's work has not only received a positive reception from parents, librarians and teachers, he has also been invited to give talks to them.¹⁵ In 2010, Shan addressed U.S. teachers in a national conference which was organised by the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English (ALAN).¹⁶ In the UK itself, Shan's book entitled *Koyasan* was commissioned for the UK's World Book Day celebration in 2006.¹⁷ In that book, Shan writes about the pleasure derived by young people from horror. Children sneak into graveyards at night and are immediately welcomed and entertained by 'delighted' spirits with 'gory, grisly stories from the past'.¹⁸ The narrator of *Koyasan* does not indicate just how gory or grisly the stories are, merely that the 'children happily lapped them up'.¹⁹

Compared to *Koyasan*, the violence and bloodshed in *The Demonata* series is much more pervasive and explicit. A brief summary of the plot in the first book in the series, *Lord Loss*, highlights the presence of trauma, violence and bloodshed. It is narrated by Grubbs, a teenaged boy whose idea of revenge against his sister for his humiliation in school is to smear rotting rat guts on her towel. Soon after, Grubbs barely escapes from demons when he surprises them in the act of mutilating the bodies of his family. He ends up traumatised in a hospital but is later released into his uncle's care, who happens to be the only adult who believes that he escaped from demons. While recuperating in Uncle Dervish's mansion and deferring his schooling, Grubbs makes a new friend, learns about his family curse and the reason why demons attacked his family. By the end of the book's narrative, Grubbs has recovered from his trauma to confront and vanquish the demons which slaughtered his family.

Books such as *Lord Loss* are what I categorise as horror gothic texts. Specifically, these texts include explicit violence and detailed descriptions which are

¹⁵ Shan wrote that he has not received any 'negative criticism of *The Demonata* that (he is) aware of' in response to my email on 17 October 2015 which was sent to his official website. The email was sent after internet searches on scholarly databases indicated very few scholarly articles on Shan's work could be found. Another search on the databases in early 2017 still indicate no change in results: no new scholarly articles on Shan.

¹⁶ The 2010 ALAN conference for the US National Council of Teachers of English, with the conference title of 'Finding yourself in books as a teenager' has published Shan's full text in a peer-reviewed journal called *The ALAN Review*, 38 (3) (2011).

¹⁷ World Book Day is the UK's own celebration of the UNESCO-organised World Book and Copyright Day, which takes place a month earlier for the former. As part of the celebration, selected books with a limited print run are sold for only £1 to schools, libraries and students.

¹⁸ Darren Shan, *Koyasan* (London: Harper Collins *Children's Books*, 2006).p. 102.

¹⁹ *Koyasan*, p. 103.

disgusting, as well as the presence of dark humour. As noted earlier, these types of texts are also particularly popular among young male readers. For the purpose of this study, texts which I will refer to as horror Gothic texts are texts which have the following features: a narrative which includes elements that cause disgust, have explicit violence and are grotesque, with protagonists, or a protagonist who thwart(s) and vanquish(es) monster(s) to save others, often with help from a supernatural source.

Given the lack of research on horror gothic for young readers, it is important for research in this area be carried out, and I would assert, equally important that more contemporary research be informed by both theory and field work. As an example, the second edition of Kimberley Reynold's book, mentioned earlier, still relies on research carried out in the early 1990s for her section on horror gothic. Although the later edition, published in 2012, acknowledges that '(t)he early twenty-first century has seen Gothic fiction finding favour with younger readers', Reynolds' less than positive assessment of horror gothic remains intact.²⁰ The same assessment made more than twenty years ago on horror books for young readers is still there: the 'violence is titillating, gratuitous, and not cathartic', as is the prognosis that the genre 'is unlikely to find widespread acceptance and approval amongst those working in children's literature'.²¹

There is also a need for research devoted to horror gothic texts targeted at young readers. Academics have sometimes conflated books on horror with realist novels which depict the horrors of sexual assault or abuse when discussing horror texts. Writing for the second edition of the *International Companion Encyclopaedia of Children's Literature* published in 2004, Charles Sarland cites one well-known study of young (aged 11 and 12) female readers conducted in the early 1990s, and writes that horror 'casts women in increasingly helpless roles' and that '(i)n its association of sexuality with violence it seemed to offer the girls in [Meredith Rogers] Cherland's study a position of increasing powerlessness, living in fear and thus denied agency'.²² At least three of the books mentioned in Cherland's

²⁰ Kimberley Reynolds in *Children's Literature: From the Fin De Siècle to the New Millennium*. Second edn (Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House Publishers, Limited, 2012). p. 73.

²¹ The same quotes can be found in pp. 73 and 74 of both first and second editions, published in 1994 and 2012 respectively. The examples to support Reynold's argument are the same *Point Horror* series of books, which saw the end of series in 2005 when Scholastic Children's Book Publishers stopped publishing new titles in the series.

²² Charles Sarland, 'Critical Tradition and Ideological Positioning', in *International Companion Encyclopaedia of Children's Literature*, ed. by Peter Hunt (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 56-75. (p. 70).

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original study are realist texts which depict child sexual molestation and/or child sexual assault.²³ Unsurprisingly, Cherland writes that '(t)o the sixth-grade girls of New Town, [horror] seemed to convey messages of female helplessness at the hands of a pervasive and gendered threat of violence', and 'the threat was gendered because the violence was associated with sexuality in the horror stories'.²⁴

In the 500-plus page *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* published in 2011, no study has been devoted to the horror gothic genre even though there is one chapter for comics and graphic novels. The only reference to horror gothic is R.L. Stine's *Fear Street* series which was mentioned twice in the chapter on 'Dime Novels and Series Books' with four titles given because of similarities in their story motif (i.e. the descent into a subterranean world).²⁵ The *Goosebumps* series gets one mention but is accompanied by the description that, 'the latter is an example of what Freud (1908/1985) means when he says, "not the writers most highly esteemed by the critics"'.²⁶ Clearly, there is a need for new and more objective research on horror gothic texts for young readers.

Crucially, new research on young readers needs to ask what it is that they are actually responding to when consuming horror gothic texts targeted at them, and not books on horror aimed at adults with adult themes and greater ambiguity on

²³ The three books discussed by Cherland and Edelsky in more detail vis-a-vis the young girls' negative experience are *The Trouble with Wednesdays* (1986), *Flowers in the Attic* (1979) and *Julie of the Wolves* (1972). The first book, *The Trouble with Wednesdays* (1986), is about sixth-grader Becky who has trouble talking to her parents about being sexually molested by her dentist. The second book, *Flowers in the Attic* (1979), which was adapted into a film in 1987, is not targeted at young readers: the girls in their study borrowed their mother's copy, which has both child abuse and incest by two generations of the same family. The third book, *Julie of the Wolves* (1972), is about a 13-year-old Inuit orphan who runs away from her new husband when he sexually assaults her but soon learns to survive on her own in the Arctic wild, co-existing with wolves when she gets lost. In spite of *Julie of the Wolves* being awarded the Newbery Medal in 1973, a prestigious award for American literature for children, several attempts have been made by parents to have it removed from schools' required reading list. Source: Herbert N Foerstel, *Banned in the USA: A Reference Guide to Book Censorship in Schools and Public Libraries* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002). p. 255.

²⁴ Meredith Rogers Cherland with Carole Edelsky, 'Girls and Reading: The Desire for Agency and the Horror of Helplessness in Fictional Encounters', in *Texts of Desire: Essays of Fiction, Femininity and Schooling*, ed. by Linda K. Christian-Smith (London: The Falmer Press, 1993), pp. 28-44. (p. 37).

²⁵ *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ed. by Shelby A. Wolf, Karen Coats, Patricia A Enciso and Christine A. Jenkins (New York and Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 345-55. (pp. 197, 200, 203).

²⁶ Roderick McGillis, 'Literary Studies, Cultural Studies, Children's Literature, and the Case of Jeff Smith', in *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ed. by Shelby A. Wolf, Karen Coats, Patricia A Enciso and Christine A. Jenkins (New York and Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 345-55. (p. 348).

violence and horror.²⁷ To be more specific, how do young readers respond to horror gothic texts such as Shan's *Lord Loss* which targets them as their primary audience? Besides horror gothic's ability to capture attention, entertain and inspire additional reading, new evidence suggests that these texts have much more to offer young readers.

For my argument here, I investigate how the inclusion of violence, the grotesque and what causes disgust can be appealing and even comforting for young readers of horror gothic. I also discuss the change in my methodology and how reception material for horror gothic is obtained from two reading groups on *Lord Loss*, the first book in *The Demonata series*, which is different from online reception material used for romance gothic which I considered in the previous section in Part Two on the *Twilight* series. It must be noted that the use of these two distinct methods to obtain reception material – in written and verbal responses – has the undeniable advantage of offering greater variety, not to mention depth in reception data. Beyond just 'finished' online posts and meta-responses in Part Two, there is now data which offers immediacy, and by inference the importance of the issues raised for the young readers, and even comparisons and contrasts on what is being discussed in the different sessions by the two groups. In addition, what becomes more obvious is when (the time) and why (the reasons) young respondents change their mind on certain issues in their discussions, and the context for their switch in opinion. In short, the inclusion of another approach in obtaining reception data offers more information on how young readers have consumed, reflected and responded to gothic texts targeted at them.

With the primary focus on young readers and their responses to horror gothic, this section is structured around the plot of *Lord Loss* as the groups discussed the book in its chronological order. Some themes recur throughout this chapter as young readers made repeated references to several scenes from the book, which I will mention in more detail later about the recursive nature of the

²⁷ Cherland and Edelsky also mention the young girls reading books by Stephen King and John Saul which are targeted at adult readers, with the girls preferring Saul's books as they 'were more like mysteries and things were always good at the ending', unlike King's books that sometimes left 'things unresolved at the end', which disturbed one of the girls. Cherland and Edelsky attribute this negative reaction to the fact that 'the horror was not always eliminated, nor was it always fully understood' by the young readers for King's books, with another girl reporting having a nightmare after only reading 'the beginning of a Stephen King novel', and was 'warned' by her mother 'not to look at Stephen King again for a good long while'. Another girl, who was described as having 'the highest tolerance for horror', watched three horror films on the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series, but ended up regretting and feeling 'sorry (that) she did'. (p. 39).

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discussions. The young readers also unanimously agreed that the chapter in *Lord Loss* describing Grubbs' trauma in a 'mental hospital' was the most boring, which suggests that by exploring the consequences of violence through Grubbs' suffering, Shan may not have anticipated such reactions from his young readers.²⁸

I also discuss Noël Carroll's cognitivist theory of horror, Julia Kristeva's theorising of abjection and Barbara Creed's application of abjection in horror films vis-a-vis young readers, and argue that types of audience, rather than just textual context, are equally important considerations in any theory on horror. By looking at the monstrous and abject in horror gothic through the lens of responses, Part Three attempts to shed light on how young readers interrogate horror gothic texts, and argues that violence and disgust offer the young readers more than just entertainment as a route to literacy.

Generating New Evidence

My two generic case studies – romance gothic and horror gothic – require two different types of methodology in obtaining reception materials. As mentioned, online reception material was used in Part Two for romance gothic texts while reception material for horror gothic texts was through fieldwork in two local schools. Besides the advantages, noted earlier, of providing depth and breadth in material for having these two distinct methods in obtaining reception data, there are also two practical reasons why conducting fieldwork on horror gothic was needed.

Firstly, younger readers who are predominantly readers of horror gothic do not, in general, post extensively on the internet. Instead, adolescents are most likely to listen to music, watch video clips on **YouTube**, and use social networking services (SNS) such as **Facebook**, **Skype** or **WhatsApp**, according to an updated 2014 report co-funded by the European Commission on internet use by adolescents, aged nine to sixteen, which was first conducted on more than 25,000 adolescents and their parents, in Europe and the UK in 2010, with additional fieldwork conducted in 2013.²⁹ Besides pointing to the most frequently

²⁸ I have borrowed the words of my respondents who refer to Grubbs' stay in 'an institute for people with problems (*Lord Loss* p. 48)' as a 'mental hospital'. As mentioned earlier, Shan has made it a point to 'explore the consequences' of violence in his books on horror gothic for young readers, implying that he does not sensationalise nor make violence attractive in his books. See footnotes 3 and 4 for details of Shan's interview published in *The Independent*.

²⁹ Giovanna Mascheroni and Kjartan Ólafsson in *Net Children Go Mobile: Risks and Opportunities*. (Milano: Educatt, 2014). p. 7. The first report called the 2010 EU Kids online Survey was published in 2011. For more details on the first report, see Sonia Livingstone, Leslie Haddon,

used types of online activity by adolescents, the report also shows that parents of younger adolescents are more likely to practise active mediation on their internet use, either by sitting with them while they use the internet, staying nearby or by sharing activities together on the internet.³⁰ This form of parental mediation, it must be admitted, does not make it particularly conducive for extended user-generated content by younger readers such as writing and uploading reviews on books or films.

A similar pattern has also been observed in the US on teenage online activities. Just like their European and British peers, American teenagers are most likely to use social networking services, with **Facebook** the most popular, followed by **Instagram**, **Snapchat** and **Twitter** as the types of social media platform most often used.³¹ The online environments of SNS in general, are not designed for lengthy user-generated messages, but for posting short messages or re-posting content in the form of photos or short messages. Not surprisingly, there is correspondingly much less user-generated content involving book reviews or blogging by American teenagers. In fact, since 2006, even blog commenting activities have been declining in popularity for teenagers.³²

The second reason for the need to generate reception material for horror gothic is the undeniable fact that suitable online reception material on these texts is not available. The *Twilight* films and books were media spectacles which created a lot of publicity, and also captured widespread attention.³³ *Twilight's* massive

Anke Görzig, and Kjartan Ólafsson in *Risks and Safety on the Internet: The Perspective of European Children. Full Findings*. (LSE, London: EU Kids Online, 2011). NB: SNS are sometimes also referred to as social networking sites.

³⁰ Giovanna Mascheroni and Kjartan Ólafsson in *Net Children Go Mobile: Risks and Opportunities*. (Milano: Educatt, 2014). p. 88. Both reports of 2014 and 2011 show the same pattern of behaviour: there is a significantly higher percentage of parents of younger adolescents who practise active mediation for their child's internet use than parents of older adolescents.

The original survey was conducted in 25 European countries in 2010 and involved a stratified sample of slightly more than 25,000 children aged 9-16. Since then, the project has been updated with another survey carried out in 2014. For the first survey report, see Sonia Livingstone, Leslie Haddon, Anke Görzig, and Kjartan Ólafsson in *Risks and Safety on the Internet: The Perspective of European Children. Full Findings*. (LSE, London: EU Kids Online, 2011).

³¹ Amanda Lenhart, *Teens, Social Media & Technology Overview 2015*. (Pew Research Center, (April) 2015). p. 25.

³² Amanda Lenhart, *Teens, Social Media & Technology Overview 2015*. (Pew Research Center, (April) 2015). p. 2. In 2015, the percentage of teens who read or comment online on discussion boards is only 17% in contrast to the 71% who use social media sites. (p. 3 and p. 20).

³³ The film adaptations of the *Twilight* series had a large part in turning the *Twilight* phenomenon into media spectacles, while Shan's *Demonata* novels have not been adapted into films. Only one of his books (from another series) has been adapted into a film, *Cirque du Freak: The Vampire's*

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popularity thus encouraged a significant amount of user-generated content and the creation of new websites, which collectively, accounted for the wealth of reception material online. Unlike the abundance of reception material for *Twilight* by both teenagers (and adults), online uploads for *The Demonata* series are either unsuitable or have insufficient content. Websites such as *Goodreads.com*, which have many reviews on *Lord Loss*, do not specify the age of their users which makes identifying young readers a major concern.³⁴ Similarly, websites which are exclusively for the use of teenagers, such as *Teen Ink* (which I have used as one of the four websites for reception material on romance gothic), do not have enough uploads on *The Demonata* series. In fact, of the eight responses found in *Teen Ink*, seven are short book reviews and one is a four-stanza poem based on a character in the second book *Demon Thief*.³⁵ As such, online material for the reception of horror gothic by young readers is insufficient for in-depth analysis.³⁶

To obtain reception material for horror gothic, a combined reading and discussion group was chosen for fieldwork. There are many benefits to this approach. Although the number of respondents is small (there were 23 young reader-respondents), the dynamism and interactive nature of a reading and discussion group allows for data of a different nature to be obtained compared to that found in online reception. Specifically, important themes in discussions become more obvious either because they are being repeated in discussions, or because young respondents make references to them at different sections in the book. This recursive process has been well-documented in reading and writing, and is described as a 'backward-and-forward exploration of what is being evoked in relation to the text'.³⁷ In discussions, this recursiveness has the added benefit

Assistant (2009). Source: IMDB, < <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0450405/>>, n.d., [accessed 13 March 2017].

³⁴ Goodreads.com, which was acquired by Amazon in 2013, offers user-generated book reviews and recommendations and has more than 16 million members in 'Amazon purchase of Goodreads stuns book industry', *Guardian*, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/02/amazon-purchase-goodreads-stuns-book-industry>>, 2 April 2013, [accessed 13 March 2017].

³⁵ The poem, by **MicroGiant**, is called 'Through His Eyes', with the author's comments as 'This poem was inspired by a character from Darren Shan's *Demonata* series'. 'Through His Eyes', in *Teen Ink*, <http://www.teenink.com/poetry/free_verse/article/780233/Through-His-Eyes/>, n.d., [accessed 16 March 2017].

³⁶ The only book review on *Lord Loss* from the seven found in *Teen Ink* to garner a meta-response is by Austin F., and the response is by Casper Candy who writes in April 28, 2010 that 'He is an amazing author lord loss is my all time favorite book by him, it keeps me on my toes and makes me always want to keep reading more (sic.)' in 'Lord Loss by Darren Shan', *Teen Ink*, <http://www.teenink.com/reviews/book_reviews/article/33176/Lord-Loss-by-Darren-Shan/>, n.d., [accessed 13 March 2017].

³⁷ Nicholas J. Karolides, 'The Transactional Theory of Literature', in *Reader Response in Secondary and College Classrooms* (Mahwah, N.J. and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000, 2013), pp. 3-24. (p. 7).

of being more apparent than in book and film reviews. Nicholas J. Karolides' observation about the nature of recursiveness offers a useful reminder of its importance,

'recursiveness may be thoughtful reflection on previous scenes, events, or behaviours to savour the images or sensations or to consider the import of a particular dialogue or event. Such explorations reveal additional nuances and developmental understandings...(and) implicit in this situation is the continuous, dynamic interplay between the reader and text'.³⁸

The dynamic and interactive nature of a reading and discussion group also allows young reader-participants to pose and answer questions, refute one another and immediately discuss and focus on aspects which have caught their interest. This immediacy and spontaneity in responses, besides recursiveness, have the added benefit of highlighting specific parts of the text which have attracted greater interest, curiosity and inquiry within each group – elements which may be lost in written formats or in online responses.³⁹

The reading and discussion groups were conducted and recorded in the premises of two schools, Malory School and Towers School, both co-educational secondary schools in south England from the middle of 2015 to the first two months of 2016.⁴⁰ The twenty three students who participated in the two reading and discussion sessions were between the ages of eleven to thirteen when the study began but due to a variety of reasons - school trips, exam preparation, class activities etc. – the study took longer than anticipated. Both groups, while mixed had more boys than girls, mostly White British. However, in each group there was at least one student of mixed ethnicity and/or another belonging to a minority group. In Towers School, of the eleven young reader participants, five were female students while in Malory School, three were female participants from the total of eleven students. The participants ended up being selected by their teachers for two reasons – either these students could afford to skip their lessons to attend my sessions in Towers school, or in Malory School, this was because they belonged to the same class which was selected to participate in my study. There was also the positive perception that attending my reading and discussion

³⁸ Nicholas J. Karolides, 'The Transactional Theory of Literature', p. 7.

³⁹ Due to data protection of under-age participants, the organisation which helped me obtain access to the schools does not allow the use of video recorders. Therefore, while making my own notes on the discussions, I could only rely on audio recordings to differentiate who said what and when. For more details on the fieldwork, see Appendix 3: Reading and Discussion Groups.

⁴⁰ The names of both schools have been changed as well as the names of all the young participants, though with names which reflect their gender.

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sessions may be a valuable experience: one parent who also teaches at Towers School requested for his/her child to be a participant.⁴¹

As all participants were underage, a preliminary session to speak to them before the start of the study was carried out in both Malory and Towers Schools. Prior to that, students and their parents had already received a written explanation of the research aims and ethical guidelines which addressed the nature of the study, assured participant anonymity and confidentiality, and spelled out the type of data storage, etc. The purpose of the preliminary session was two-fold: to ensure that the underage participants know their rights, and have full knowledge of the study and its potential risks, such as having nightmares, and to offer them the opportunity to reflect on their choice to participate in my study. It was important that all participants knew about the presence of gruesome details in the book *Lord Loss*, particularly a violent scene in which an entire family is killed, with the main character, of a similar age to them, suffering from nightmares because of his personal loss. Only this general description about *Lord Loss* was given during the preliminary session. Verbal assurances were also made and recorded: that it was acceptable if young students changed their minds about participating in the study. Questions regarding the study were also invited from the students.

Given the ethical requirement to inform the young reader participants about the presence and level of violence in *Lord Loss*, there was a need to balance information regarding the book, without raising or lowering reader expectations by answering factually, and keeping explanations or elaborations to a minimum. However, it must be acknowledged that the preliminary session to brief the young participants about *Lord Loss* may have decreased the element of surprise from reading Shan's horror gothic text.

Students were not offered any honorarium: however, they could keep their copy of the book *Lord Loss* at the end of the study. In Towers School, attending the reading and discussion group meant skipping their regular lessons which was much appreciated by the students. In Malory School, the entire class, which formed the Year 9 class of twelve students, took part. Their teacher, who was also the head of the English department, followed my suggestion of being present throughout my reading and discussion sessions: this was the recommendation by the voluntary faith-based organisation which helped me gain access to both

⁴¹ I made a conscious effort not to find out who the young participant is as I did not want to be biased in my analysis.

schools.⁴² However, in Towers School, having a school employee present throughout the sessions was not possible because the eleven students came from different classes (with different timetables), while other lessons were simultaneously held at the same time. A temporary solution was found during the preliminary session: to hold it in a huge science lab which had the continuous presence of at least one or two teachers and also some students. However, after noting the noise level and the difficulty participants had in hearing what was being said by their peers, their head of English who was my point of contact in school, subsequently arranged for the use of their conference room. This new location offered fewer interruptions plus not having a teacher in attendance may have encouraged participants to be more open.⁴³

For the whole study, at least four sessions of around two hours were held in each school with the reading sessions taking at least a minimum of eight hours each. All discussions were then taped and transcribed. As the reading and discussion groups were based around the students' timetables and school work, the decision to select the number of chapters for discussion were made collectively by each individual group, with the students playing a large influence on the pace and breadth of discussion. In that sense, some form of control was given to students such as decisions on how many pages to read beforehand for the next session, and for them to set the pace of discussions. For each session, there was a general set of questions to guide me in my role as the group facilitator cum observer.⁴⁴

However, I also wanted the discussions to flow naturally in directions which may not be related to the text. In a study conducted on 250 older teenagers that included discussions on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Lynn Schofield Clark discovered that the teenagers' conversations predominantly featured

⁴² As the organisation had sponsored my Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS) checks certificate, previously called the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks, I was obliged to follow their recommendations. In addition, since the middle of 2016, schools have become more stringent in their checks, according to the organisation, which now requires all volunteers to have with them their original DBS certificate, in addition to their personalised photo-ID badge that has the following printed information: full name of volunteer, name of organisation (stated as sponsor of the DBS), and the validity period of the DBS certificate. In my case, it was three years from the renewal of my DBS on 18 May 2016.

⁴³ I did not object to the change of venue or the absence of another adult. By informing each school about the faith-based organisation's requirement for another adult present, I felt that my duty had been discharged particularly since this was not a requirement by the university. The conference room was primarily used by their head teacher. On one occasion, I offered (which was smilingly accepted by the head) to clean up the room after his meeting with a group of parents.

⁴⁴ For more details about the types of question asked during the reading and discussion groups, please see Appendix 4: List of Questions on Shan's *Lord Loss*.

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interruptions, talking over by others and also the many occasions when multiple voices could be heard at the same time when it was student-led.⁴⁵ Clark suggests that by paying close attention to 'the nuances that were present in the conversations, such as the various cues that caused embarrassment, a quick change of topic, or loud and repeated efforts at being heard by one or more participants', these can indicate the 'varied levels of comfort with and interest in the topics' of the young participants.⁴⁶ Although my study was designed with me as the facilitator-observer, I wanted to encourage more of such moments when young participants take the lead by diverging from the topic, interrupting one another or discussing rapidly and loudly about what has caught their interest; therefore I did not strictly follow my list of questions on the text.⁴⁷

Although departures or deviations in the discussions can offer additional information, these, however, take time. As such, a balance had to be made between allowing for deviations, and in gently steering discussions back to *Lord Loss* given time constraints due to the students' different time-tables. Quite rapidly, it was found that some deviations yielded no further new information but elaborations of the same type. Thus steering the conversation to the next section of the book would be appropriate. One such example was when the participants of Towers School started listing the different types of haunted houses in the many funfairs they had visited, both in the UK and abroad, which was sparked off by the description of Uncle Dervish's mysterious mansion when Grubbs, released from the 'mental hospital', stays with him.

Besides taking note of individual cues within group discussions, as suggested by Clark, three basic strategies aimed at eliciting feedback or response were also used when there was a longer than normal silence, or when no one wanted to be the first to speak up. The strategies involved requesting the young readers to

⁴⁵ Lynn Schofield Clark, *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2005).

⁴⁶ Lynn Schofield Clark, *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2005). p. 243. Although the group discussions were student-led and made from a sociological perspective on belief, Clark's points are valid about teenage group discussions and the value of adopting a more passive role for an adult facilitator.

⁴⁷ I used a software called SoundScriber, an open-access computer programme developed by the University of Michigan, that allows for pre-programmed playback when transcribing a taped conversation. More importantly, its Media Control Interface allows for rapid conversations to be played at slower speeds. Such functions, it must be stated, are especially helpful for differentiating multiple voices, especially when voices are speaking over one another at the same time. Essentially, this means that returning to the same track multiple times becomes easier while marginally reducing the time spent in forwarding or backtracking segments of the recording. The version of SoundScriber used was Version 1.2., and can be easily downloaded for immediate use without prior training.

respond in turns, inviting responses – either directly or leaving it open - or on the rare occasion, by inviting a respondent to read aloud a short passage, usually when someone in the group has claimed to have forgotten the section, etc. Sometimes it was as simple as asking the question, ‘Why?’. From the second session onwards, participants were invited to briefly summarise what was discussed in the previous session. This was particularly helpful given the time lag of at least a week, if not more, between some sessions.

In general, there was no difficulty encouraging the young students to talk and discuss Shan’s *Lord Loss*. In fact, as evidence indicates, the young reader-respondents were more than happy to talk about practically anything under the sun, however tangentially or superficially related to *Lord Loss*, which will be mentioned in more detail later about this generative response, first noted in Part Two on responses to romance gothic.

In brief, although the twenty three reader-participants are not meant to be representative of students their age, their responses still offer a good indicator of what students of their age cohort (between eleven to thirteen years of age) may respond to when consuming horror gothic texts. These students were not selected for their representativeness: nonetheless their responses offer the best means by which to explore how young readers respond to the grotesque and detailed violence in texts written for them. Towers School and Malory School, a voluntary-aided comprehensive school and an independent fee-paying school respectively, also share two key features. One is their high ranking by the government’s educational body, and the other is that both are faith-based schools.

The ranking for schools which is administered by the UK’s Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (OFSTED) has its detractors. However, it is still widely accepted as a standard indicator of schools, their students’ educational profile, and attitude towards learning; and by extrapolation, the type of support offered towards students’ educational progress and achievement by the schools.⁴⁸ Both Malory and Towers Schools have been consistently rated

⁴⁸ OFSTED is a non-ministerial department of the UK government which carries out inspections and regulatory visits throughout England on services that care for children and young people, and services providing education and skills for learners of all ages. They are responsible for inspecting schools such as independent and maintained schools with the purpose of raising educational standards and achieving excellence in education where results of inspections are published online for public viewing. Source: ‘About us’, in ‘gov.uk’, <www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about> n.d., [accessed 17 January 2017].

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highly by OFSTED with several outstanding features mentioned in the latest inspection reports which are available in both school websites, not just in OFSTED's public domain.

This high rating enjoyed by both schools is not unexpected. In order to offer the type of support given to me to conduct and complete my study, each school undertook considerable time in administrative tasks, with which my study would not have been possible suggesting an efficiently-run school with cooperative and supportive staff.⁴⁹ The administrative tasks made by both schools include helping to recruit participants, checking their suitability (i.e. that none of the students had suffered any deaths in their family, or is undergoing any personal issues which may be exacerbated by reading *Lord Loss, etc.*), arranging for students to miss their classes without impinging on their learning, or giving make-up lessons, as well as distributing and then obtaining signed parental consent forms.

In addition to the positive reports by OFSTED on Malory and Towers Schools, teachers in Towers School selected student participants on the basis that missing classes would not have an impact on their learning. This suggests that students were perceived by their teachers to be of above average achievement. My own observations note these students as confident, polite and speaking with barely any noticeable regional accent suggesting their family background and/or the training by the schools to use a more Standard Southern British English pronunciation.⁵⁰ The same could be said for the reader-participants in Malory School. In general, students in Towers School were more likely to speak over one another and get more excited and animated than students from Malory School, but that spontaneity may be due to the fact that no other adult was present in the conference room with me.⁵¹ In Malory School, their teacher sat in the far corner,

⁴⁹ Malory School was commended for their teaching on five subjects, including English in their latest OFSTED report (2013) for independent schools, as is the 'quality' of their 'provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety'. In Towers School, the OFSTED report, which was published in 2016, showed that the school has not only maintained its high standards but has improved significantly in the number of students achieving 'five higher-grade GCSEs including English and mathematics'.

⁵⁰ British education tends to expect and train students to speak using a more neutral pronunciation, resembling the Standard Southern British Pronunciation. For more on this and the types of educational policy which have steered language practice in British schools, see Sue Aitken and Kate Beardmore, 'Accent, Dialect and Phonics' in *Inclusion and Early Years Practice*, ed. by Kathy Brodie and Keith Savage (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 56-74. I have also used the less evaluative term, Standard Southern British English (SSBE) which is preferred by linguists, rather than the dated label 'Received Pronunciation' or 'RP'. For more details on this recommended use, see Arthur Hughes, Peter Trudgill and Dominic Watt in their widely-cited book *English Accents and Dialects: An Introduction to Social and Regional Varieties of English in the British Isles*. Fifth edn (Routledge, 2013).

⁵¹ As part of my preparation for the reading and discussion groups, I spent at least five hours watching a variety of English programmes from the BBC iPlayer or YouTube in order to get used

marking or preparing lessons. However, occasional snorts or smothered laughter indicated that their teacher was also sometimes listening to the discussions.⁵²

The second similarity both schools share is that they are faith-based schools with their own pastoral departments. As mentioned, my volunteer work with one such faith-based organisation was the main reason I was able to gain access to both schools in the first place prior to proposing my research.⁵³ The fact that both schools are faith-based and are consistently given high ratings by OFSTED as well as having students whom I would have some difficulty in differentiating which school they come from – Malory School or Towers School – also suggests a greater similarity to students of above average abilities. In a recent study on faith-based schools published in 2011, the report showed that students from these faith-based schools are more likely to have parents who are ‘better educated, have a higher occupational class and a higher household income’, and that these students possess higher ability ‘than their secular counterparts’.⁵⁴ Given these findings, it must be acknowledged that this study of students from faith-based schools with high OFSTED ratings cannot be generalised as examples of the typical profile of students in the UK.

To reiterate, this field study is not meant to replicate the general population of students as the proportion of respondents based on gender, race and social background have not been controlled.⁵⁵ The only ‘control’ or requirement for my

to different speech patterns and speed, and regional accents. I need not have bothered streaming and straining my ears watching *Only Fools and Horses* and similar programmes featuring regional English accents. I had no difficulty understanding the students, and from their responses, neither did they. The list of programmes was recommended by a fellow postgraduate student who is English. Watching programmes from the sixties, seventies and eighties, it must be admitted, was not particularly helpful for my study, beyond a greater appreciation for modern British education.

⁵² If I could hear the teacher’s reactions, so could the young reader participants of Malory School who were alert and very responsive. The venue was their huge literature room and once, when their head teacher walked in with three guests, the students immediately stood up to greet them. At Malory School, the only time I was alone with the students was when I asked if I could individually ask them more about *Lord Loss* at the end of the fourth session. I was given the use of a small room adjoining the Literature room and was able to speak to each student for a few minutes.

⁵³ None of the reader participants had attended any of the seminars which I was involved in with the faith-based organisation for students of Towers and Malory Schools.

⁵⁴ Rebecca, Allen, and Anne West, ‘Why Do Faith Secondary Schools Have Advantaged Intakes? The Relative Importance of Neighbourhood Characteristics, Social Background and Religious Identification Amongst Parents’, *British Educational Research Journal*, 37 (2011), 691-712. (p. 691).

⁵⁵ To ensure such control may not have been feasible in the first place, particularly when the class size is very small. In my preliminary search for schools, I was informed that both Malory and Towers Schools were the only ones likely to grant me access because of the close working relationship between the faith-based organisation and their pastoral departments. In my first meeting with the head teacher of Malory School, I was informed that other research requests had

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reading group participants was that they should be between eleven to thirteen years of age and that students would be willing to read *Lord Loss* and spend time participating in the reading and discussion groups.⁵⁶ Notwithstanding all these constraints, data obtained from these young reader-participants offer us a glimpse, previously unavailable, of how and what some young readers are actually responding to when consuming horror gothic texts which have been written for them.

Ethics and Family Life

The first session for both student participants of Towers and Malory Schools was to discuss their initial reaction and response to the first two chapters in *Lord Loss*. In the two chapters alone, readers are not only introduced to Grubbs who is depicted as an imaginative young boy, but also to the three demons. The details about the demons, such as their appearance, and descriptions about the mutilated bodies of Grubbs' family take the entire second chapter. With these details about the violence and bloodshed in *Lord Loss*, it would not be surprising if the young reader participants become curious about the demons, particularly the reason why they have targeted Grubbs' family.

However, the responses from both groups of young readers were rather surprising: instead of focussing on the monsters, the violence or even the gruesome details, the young reader participants seemed more interested in Grubbs' behaviour, especially his choice to use rat guts to punish his sister for informing about him smoking in school. This focus on a teenage boy's actions rather than on monsters, suggests a departure from previous studies on horror, notably the theory proposed by Noël Carroll in his much-cited book, *Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart*.

Carroll's book, which offers an explanation of horror that goes beyond basic fear, emphasises the appeal of monsters as the source of fascination for consumers of

been turned down. It helped, of course, that the fellow volunteer who recommended me knew the head teacher personally, being a fellow member of the same church. This too may or may not have a bearing to the success of my request to do research at Malory School: I was introduced to the head teacher as one of the student volunteers from the University of Southampton who was supporting their outreach programme that morning, and that I had a research request to ask.

⁵⁶ My plan was for volunteers but as events turned out, their respective teachers got involved: either by recommending them or volunteering the students. Hence the importance of the preliminary session prior to the study: to ensure that no student had been coerced and that as far as possible, it was their decision to participate and remain in the discussion and reading group.

horror, with his theory meant to be applied across various media. Presumably theorised on adults, Carroll has borrowed the concept of what causes 'disgust' and 'nausea' to explain the appeal of, if not fascination with monsters from anthropologist Mary Douglas' seminal research on culture and taboos in *Purity and Danger*.⁵⁷ According to Carroll, Douglas' research 'correlates reactions of impurity (and disgust) with the transgression or violation of schemes of cultural categorisation'.⁵⁸ This means that 'an object or being is impure if it is categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory, categorically incomplete or formless', a list which 'may not be exhaustive', Carroll explains, but contends that it is useful nonetheless for 'analysing the monsters of the horror genre' as such beings cause reactions of disgust and trigger fears of danger in the audience or reader.⁵⁹

Carroll's description of monsters, which he calls art-horror monsters, given below, certainly fits the types of monster introduced by Shan in *Lord Loss*,

'putrid or mouldering things, or they hail from oozing places, or they are made of dead or rotting flesh, or chemical waste, or are associated with vermin, disease, or crawling things. They are not only quite dangerous but they also make one's skin creep. Characters regard them not only with fear but with loathing, with a combination of terror and disgust'.⁶⁰

As an example, Shan's description of the two demons which killed Grubb's family seems to follow Carroll's definition of art-horror monsters,

'an obscene creature spins around and snarls. It has the body of a very large dog (and) the head of a crocodile' while the second demon is 'a child, but no child of this world. It has the body of a three-year-old, with a head much larger than any normal person's. Pale green skin. No eyes – a small ball of fire flickers in each of its empty sockets. No hair – yet its head is alive with movement. As the hell-child advances, I see that the object are cockroaches. Living. Feeding on its rotten flesh'.⁶¹

Both descriptions are obviously about 'impossible beings', and are markedly different from the type of monster Aristotle describes, which is a 'mistake in

⁵⁷ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003). In a new preface dated 2002, Douglas writes that in the forty years since the first publication of her book in 1966, it has 'turned into a discourse on mind and society'. (p. xx).

⁵⁸ Douglas' book was re-issued in 2003, and has been widely cited: slightly over twenty thousand times since its first publication in 1966. The quote is taken from Noël Carroll in *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990). p. 31.

⁵⁹ Noël Carroll, 'The Nature of Horror', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 46 (1987), 51-59. (p. 55).

⁶⁰ Noël Carroll in *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990). p. 23.

⁶¹ *Lord Loss*, pp. 33 -34.

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natural teleology' though occasionally appearing in nature.⁶² So, unlike Aristotle's monsters which are natural deformities, Carroll's (and Shan's) art-horror ones defy the logic of science, are represented via the major tropes of '(f)usion, fission, magnification, massification and horrific metonymy', and if formed of animals, are also 'already potentially disturbing and disgusting' such as giant spiders or outsized ants.⁶³ Carroll also explains the attributes or characteristics possessed by his art-horror monster: it is 'combinatory in nature' or a fusion of distinct attributes such as 'inside/outside, living/dead, insect/human, flesh/machine, and 'can also be split into parts that alternate in occupying the same fantastic being' in question, such as the werewolf.⁶⁴

In this regard, Carroll's emphasis is consistently on the horror and repulsiveness of the monster which must cause 'disgust and/or phobia': only these will fit into his definition of 'art-horror' monsters.⁶⁵ Calling it the paradox of horror, he argues that it is the audience's reactions of disgust and fear, cued by characters in the narrative, which are mixed with curiosity at the existence of these monsters. It is (implied only) through the spectrum of curiosity, or, more explicitly, the 'processes of disclosure, discovery, proof, explanation, hypothesis and confirmation' about what is going to happen, that consumers of horror are able to overlook negative emotions associated with horror.⁶⁶ For Carroll, pleasure derived from horror fiction is ultimately cognitive; in other words, the same thing which produces fear and disgust also fascinates and arouses our curiosity.⁶⁷ In short, he suggests that we are drawn to horror because we are curious about the monster.

Based on Carroll's theory, one would expect a lot of curiosity along with revulsion and disgust to be focussed on the croc-dog or demon-baby mentioned earlier in

⁶² Robert Yanal, 'Two Monsters in Search of a Concept', *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 1 (2003).

⁶³ Noël Carroll, 'The Nature of Horror', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 46 (1987), p. 53 and p. 55 and *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart*, p. 49- 52.

⁶⁴ Noël Carroll in *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart*, p. 46-48.

⁶⁵ Not surprisingly, Carroll draws the line at rabbits, asserting firmly that 'few seem to have been convinced by the monster rabbits in *Night of the Lepus*' in *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (p. 50). Carroll's assertion that rabbits are not convincing monsters seems to rest solely on the premise that rabbits (with their soft fur) are not inherently seen as objects of disgust but are widely thought of as cute and are associated with spring (rebirth) and/or Easter.

⁶⁶ Noël Carroll, 'Why Horror?', in *Horror: The Film Reader*, ed. by Mark Jancovich (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 33-46. (p. 35) and 'The Nature of Horror', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 46 (1987), 51-59. (p. 54).

⁶⁷ Jerrold Levinson, 'Essay Review: The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 49 (1991), 253-58. (p. 253).

Shan's *Lord Loss*. Similarly, one would also expect curiosity at the appearance of the demons in the text, as well as the reason(s) why Grubbs' family was their target. However, this seems not to be the case for my young reader participants.

Instead, both groups of students were quick to share how 'strange' and 'disgusting' they found the narrative of *Lord Loss*, and its inclusion of what seems 'weird' and even 'creepy'. Their focus, if not fascination, was on Grubbs' behaviour. Although both groups mentioned the demons which had just killed Grubbs' parents and sister, it was almost in passing. One student offered the information that the description of the demons being a blend of two creatures offered him a clearer mental image of their appearance.⁶⁸ However, this mention of the demons' appearance did not encourage discussion in contrast to their animated responses towards Grubbs' actions. It would seem that Shan's incorporation of a teenage protagonist, and a plot that includes comparisons to adolescent experience, albeit within the horror gothic genre, seem to elicit more interest and curiosity than on the demon monsters, or the horror and violence wrought by them.

As the young reader participants' responses suggest, Grubbs' extreme reaction and the method he chooses to punish his sister for his humiliation in school, seem to have caught their imagination and sparked further debate. To be precise, their attention and imagination seem to have been caught by the fact that young Grubbs chooses to go to a rubbish dump, selects only rotting rat carcasses among the pile of rubbish, takes out their guts and, after mixing them with water to make them 'gooey,' smears them on his sister's towel as a means of revenge for getting him into trouble in the first place. As one participant mentioned in an amazed even half-admiring tone, 'I don't think I'd ever pull a rat's guts!'⁶⁹

The conversation at Towers School reproduced here indicates awareness of what seems disgusting, and also when a 'line' has been crossed in one's interaction with another. This suggests, also, an understanding of what seems fair and suitable as a means of punishment. As noted earlier about the spontaneity and

⁶⁸ Jem's exact words are '...the demons like the way they are described, they are like a lot different from how you would imagine them,' in Towers School, Session 3:34.

⁶⁹ Towers School, Session 1: 26. As all sessions have been recorded and transcribed, for easy identification of the conversation, I have marked them with the time (minute) that they occur. For example, Towers School, Session 1: 26 means that this utterance or conversation was by a reader-participant(s) in Towers School, during the first session and occurred during the 26th minute.

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interactivity of discussion groups, surprising information does surface: in this case sparked off from the discussion of Grubbs' novel means of vengeance:

Excerpt 1: Towers School - Grubbs and rat guts⁷⁰

Amber: *I think it's like gruesome.*

Iris: *Quite interesting how they react, the sister's reaction and why the brother thinks of doing that prank, like normally you wouldn't even think of doing that prank.*

Eva: *I think it's a bit of an over-the-top prank to do. I wouldn't do that, I mean I don't like my brother but I wouldn't do that.*

Jem: *I think it was a bit of an exaggeration to, um, why he would do that. Okay, the sister snitched on him but that's going like a little bit too far.*

Peter: *Could have gone further...(tails off).*

Ted: *Towel is funny. It's just funny seeing her reaction. I don't think (her reaction) was over the top but it was just funny (chuckles).*

Iris: *I would be pretty freaked out if I wiped myself with the towel and there was blood and guts all over me. I think I would freak out quite a lot.*

Eva: *I think it was more like nobody would think of doing it and that's why it's kind of funny.*

Amber: *It's like pushing boundaries.*

Frank: *to be honest, I could see why he did it – it's just like doing it in a different way. It's like sometimes I hit my father (chuckle) (laughter) my brother is really annoying and when he winds me up, [...]*

Peter: *I sometimes hit my brother too (yeah – someone agrees). It's okay because he's older than me. I don't hit my younger brother.*

Lynn: *Guys, I've been on the receiving end of that and it's NOT NICE (emphasis). Yeah my brother's hit me a couple of times...[...]*

Dex: *I like the humour but I think it's a bit extreme – that what, why he's actually done it just for snitching but I think snitching was probably was the right thing to do. [All agreed that snitching was the right thing because smoking is bad and is a serious issue].. But I don't think he should have come back like that...(laughter by group). [...]*

Ellie: *I think it's quite interesting how the author like presents their relationship to us by describing the exact event first cos he shows how then they're not really friends and they don't really like each other. And it'd quite interesting cos the reader would want to know what happens next between their relationship. [...]*

Nevil: *It's like there's going to be a limit and as soon as you cross the line, bad stuff happens.*

Facilitator: *Do you know the limit – when to cross and when not to?*

Lynn: *I know but my brother doesn't.*⁷¹

⁷⁰ To reiterate, all names have been changed with gender-specific names indicating male or female to protect the privacy of the twenty three young reader-participants.

⁷¹ Towers School, Session 1: 5-9.

These young reader-participants displayed a range of emotions, among them incredulity, disgust and even amusement. Whether some of my student-participants were taking their cue from Grubbs' sense of humour, evident in *Lord Loss*, and thus finding the incident funny, or were more intrigued by the 'over-the-top prank' than anything else, all however, recognised that he had transgressed beyond what was acceptable 'punishment' for 'snitching'.⁷²

That the 'prank' chosen by Grubbs was undeniably unique or different was recognised by this reading group which encouraged one young respondent, Frank, to share an example of what he views as a 'different way' of responding: the revelation that he sometimes 'hits' his father. It would seem that Frank's version of a 'different way' to respond, it must be noted, is through violence. However, as this was said jokingly, other male respondents jumped in and mentioned times when they too 'hit' or 'beat' a sibling in the family. The admission of hitting only came from male reader-participants, with the implication that participation in such activities also includes being on the receiving end as well. Lynn, however, rejects the use of fists even in jest, asserting that 'it's not nice', having been on the receiving end before, which she later explains is due to her brother's inability to differentiate when a 'line has been crossed', or to know when a limit has been reached.

The extract shows understanding and recognition by the group in Towers School about boundaries existing in actions and behaviour, even if different individuals interpret these boundaries or limits differently: as Peter stresses, he draws the line at 'hitting' his younger brother. As the conversation revolved around rat guts and the means that Grubbs took as his way of punishing his sister, this leads to the speculation that my young reader-participants were also bypassing the horrifying parts in *Lord Loss* by choosing to focus on actions and issues which are much closer to their own life experience. These students have also taken the incident of the rat guts out of its horror fantasy context. Admittedly, one can argue that both these - bypassing the horrifying parts and taking scenes out of the horror fantasy context - could also be related to the Gothic as a way of dealing with everyday horrors. After all, focussing on the demons, particularly when they were first introduced to readers, and then having the demons

⁷² In *Lord Loss*, Shan uses a different word 'grassed' in 'Gret grassed me up to Mum!' (p. 14) which the students easily substituted for 'snitching'. As I will discuss later in the section on symbolic adulthood, 'snitching' and keeping secrets seem to have their own unspoken rules.

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described as mutilating the bodies of Grubbs' family, is tantamount to also focussing on the death of an entire family; and that, may be one trauma which no one in either group wanted to dwell on. I will return later to the reaction by Ted, who could not stop chuckling at the towel incident as he simply found it funny – 'it just is (funny)'- when pressed further; a reaction which admittedly may not be shared by adults.

At Malory School, the responses from the twelve reader participants were similar. They were equally quick to point to the disgust and weirdness in using rat guts by Grubbs instead of other forms of punishment, with one reader participant offering the information of rats being associated with disease. Jasmine offers an alternative punishment, which to her, might just be as effective, but without the accompanying horror or shock, which is to use paint, instead of decaying bits of animals commonly linked to pestilence. Her emphasis is understandably, on Grubbs' poor sister having something horribly disgusting and terrifying – 'freaking' - smeared 'all over' her body and hair.

Excerpt 2: Malory School – Rat Guts and Disease

Andre: *It got weird quickly.*

Rick: *It's creepy [smiles].*

Mel: *It's dangerous, weird [chuckles].*

Jasmine: *All the rats. I hated that. Like you could have just put paint on her [three others agree].*

Dan: *Or mouldy vegetables. But he chose rats! He actually had to cut the rats up; it's carrying disease!*

Sam: *To be fair, I think it's fair because snitches are really annoying*

Jasmine: *But it freaking happened to her, if it was paint, it wouldn't have been as bad. It was all over her towel, around her.*⁷³

In both extracts, the young reader participants were taking and discussing the incident out of its fantasy/ horror context in *Lord Loss*. This is not particularly unusual in both the reading and discussion groups: they would often relate the incident directly to their own experience first or what they perceive to be the norm before developing their ideas further. The young reader-participants also mentioned several times, in later discussions, that such depictions can never happen in real life because demons do not exist, and that gutting rats as a prank

⁷³ Malory School, Session 1: 3-6.

seldom happens outside of films.⁷⁴ By first relating the event to semi-relevant aspects in the young participant readers' own real-world experience, they were generating some form of explanation or interpretation for Grubbs' strange behaviour. This form of interpretational response is not unusual among adolescent students: previous studies indicate that this type of response is the dominant mode for them at this age, followed by narrational re-telling, and self-involvement that relates the young reader to the characters within the story.⁷⁵

However on older readers, such as college freshmen, interpretational responses become even more dominant with increases in literary judgements, rather than narrational responses and self-involvement.⁷⁶ As subsequent extracts show in the discussion groups, the students of Malory School and Towers School were also applying critical skills learnt from school: they were making evaluations on *Lord Loss* and also judgements on Shan's plot based on their expectations of horror gothic texts. In fact, one of the participants mentioned HBO's (adult) fantasy epic TV series, *Game of Thrones*, which is well-known for its depiction of violence and excesses, certainly not a show meant for young viewers, as a comparison of what an exciting narrative is.

In more recent research by Lee Galda and Richard Beach on encouraging young students to offer responses which are more interpretive, they suggest that such responses (which are, naturally, viewed positively) can be achieved by 'relating relevant aspects in the text to their own-real world experiences', 'generating explanations or interpretations'; and 'critiquing characters and their own beliefs or ideologies (which) shape perceptions of these concerns, dilemmas, or issues'.⁷⁷ However, these suggestions by Galda and Beach, are based on the condition that teachers should first model or show the variety of language to be used in such discussions. This, naturally casts a different light on the responses by students of Malory and Towers school, who were already employing their own interpretational strategies, which were encouraged by Shan's horror gothic text.

⁷⁴ According to Frank, 'I've seen on TV (rat guts) being used as part of a prank!' Towers School, Session 1:10.

⁷⁵ Robert Protherough in *Developing Response to Fiction* (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1989).

⁷⁶ Cited by Robert Protherough, which is based on older research conducted by James R. Wilson on college freshmen in 1966. (p. 36).

⁷⁷ Lee Galda, and Richard Beach, 'Response to Literature as a Cultural Activity', *Reading Research Quarterly*, 36 (2001), 64-73. (p. 69).

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In fact, as subsequent extracts show, the students were commenting and analysing the horror genre plot devised by Shan with interpretive comments ranging from '(being in the mental ward and staying with the uncle) sets the scene...but if (the writer) shortens it, it would be better'; 'it's good because he's tried to plot for the next book' to '(by including the nightmares suffered by Grubbs), it takes away his strength...you're being stripped back to the small mentality of a child'.⁷⁸ As far as my role as facilitator is concerned, beyond asking basic questions regarding the text, the discussions by the young reader participants and direction were left to them. These young readers certainly had no difficulty generating their own explanations or interpretations as to why Grubbs acts the way he does, even if they sometimes strongly disagree with the ways or methods devised by Shan for his horror gothic narrative.

It must also be noted that both groups of students were also equally quick to assure me that smoking was harmful, with the majority convinced that Grubbs' sister not only did the right thing by informing their mother of him smoking, but certainly did not deserve Grubbs' form of punishment or revenge. Some ambivalence on 'snitching' did arise, with a few reader participants holding to the idea that keeping secrets, especially from adults, is important. However, to reiterate, all were vocal in informing me that smoking is bad for one's health. The fact that these young students were swift in volunteering this information - about the dangers of smoking regardless of the setting - suggests an awareness of what is considered appropriate behaviour for the (school) setting, and context (such as talking to me, an adult, and possible authority figure who might be expected to monitor certain behaviour).

What seems striking from the range of responses in the reading and discussion groups is the level and type of emotions displayed by my young reader-participants. There is also the possibility that these young students were 'performing' for me, the adult and outsider, and/or for their peers. These students may be enacting a form of performance in order to maintain a certain idealised image and/or be 'part of the group', a reaction which recurs later when their discussions led to the topic of being an 'insider' which I will mention more in the next section. These actions may be viewed as a performance particularly when used in giving or maintaining a certain impression to others such as offering an idealised self or projecting a certain self-image. This is not any different from the performance mentioned earlier in Part Two, because in both

⁷⁸ Malory School, Session 2:40; Session 4:25; and Towers School, Session 2:37.

contexts, the young readers were aware of their audience and the intended reactions sought. In fact, some of the young reader participants would perform by deliberately saying something outrageous or by 'playing for effect', and then immediately look around the reading group to see if the intended reaction - chuckles or laughter - occurs.

However, leaving this desire to perform aside, the emotional reaction towards Shan's *Lord Loss* points to something else beyond a cognitivist perspective in which the theory of horror is based on curiosity or, what Carroll's states as 'the pleasures derived from horror are cognitive in the broad sense - of engaging curiosity'.⁷⁹ Even if they were performing for their peers, through their use of incongruous humour and comments which elicited laughter from the group, the fact that the horror gothic text inspires such reactions definitely goes beyond mere curiosity which Carroll asserts is the source for the fascination with horror gothic.⁸⁰ In fact, one of the reactions or responses from the young reader participants, was the use of humour to elicit laughter from the rest of the group, such as 'Daddy, can you buy me a rat?' when discussing Grubbs' choice of punishment. I view this response, beyond its cheeky nature, or precisely due to the incongruity of it, as another way for the young reader participants to indicate how ludicrous or weird the depiction is in *Lord Loss*, as compared to ordinary life. As the question/ response highlights, the action of going and foraging at a rubbish dump was never going to receive any parental approval, least of all parental help: Grubbs' choice of punishment for his sister has to be his, and only his initiative alone given how extraordinarily weird the choice is.

In the extract below, which is based on Grubbs' mother yelling at him in front of the head teacher in his office, the students of Malory School were enjoying themselves by offering exaggerated accounts of what their own mother would do if they were ever (implied silly enough) to smoke. This discussion on parental behaviour evidently struck a chord, with them recognising the variety of parental ploys. Ned's response, which is most unlikely to ever happen, elicited the loudest laughter in the group. Again, another form of performance, within the group: this time incorporating hyperbole and unlikely scenarios.

⁷⁹ Noël Carroll, 'Why Horror?', *Horror: The Film Reader* (2002), 33-46. (p. 43)

⁸⁰ Malory School, Session 1: 6-7.

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Excerpt 3: Malory School - Grubbs' Mother with the Head Teacher

Andre: *My mom would do more than (yell at me in school).*

Rick: *My mom would shut me in the shed herself.*

Jasmine: *My mom would do the thing and say, I'm not angry, I'm that disappointed'.*

Fred: *Ahhhh...the guilt trip. [knowing nods and chuckle by others]*

Ned: *My mom would light a cigarette and put it out on my face [laughter by group] that's probably what she'd do!⁸¹*

By employing this particular form of humour, Ned, who was most definitely play-acting and performing for everyone, is also using what Julie Cross calls 'incongruity forms of humour'. It arises when a reader perceives 'a difference between their expectations and the "reality"'.⁸² This form of dark humour has been analysed in horror films; and according to Philip Brophy, its function is as 'an undercutting agent to counterbalance [the horror film's] more horrific moments'.⁸³ This strategy, Brophy asserts, overturns audiences' expectations of what would typically occur in a horror film. This juxtaposition of reader expectations and 'reality', more than anything, has been used many times by Shan especially when he describes the violence and gory parts in the *Demonata* series with descriptions which 'undercut' the horror, and are arguably funny.⁸⁴

Without going at length and into detail what these young reader-participants have said, what remains clear, however, is the indication and recognition by them that boundaries exist in actions and behaviour, even if different individuals interpret these boundaries or limits differently. Thus as the conversation revolved around rat guts and on the means that Grubbs took as his way of punishing his sister, this leads to the speculation that my young reader-participants were adopting a strategy of processing the horror in the text: they were bypassing the horrifying, if not traumatising parts in *Lord Loss*, and choosing to focus on actions and issues which were much closer to their own experience. When discussing Grubbs'

⁸¹ Malory School, Session 1: 6-7.

⁸² Julie Cross, 'Frightening and Funny: Humour in Children's Gothic Fiction', *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders* (2008), 57-76. (p.58).

⁸³ Philip Brophy, 'Horrority—the Textuality of Contemporary Horror Films', *Screen*, 27 (1986), 2-13

⁸⁴ Besides the rat guts in *Lord Loss*, one such example is Shan's descriptions of battle stratagems employed by Kernel, a character who first appears in *Demon Thief*, the second book in the series. Still terrified and perennially vomiting during battles with demons in later books, Kernel soon learns to transform his weakness into a strength: by using his magic to turn his vomit into liquid acid projectile that proves effective in killing demons. Arguably, Shan's use of weaponised vomit against demons falls under Julie Cross' description of 'incongruity forms of humour'.

actions in the beginning of Shan's narrative, principles of fair play were touched on as these young reader participants considered what counts as a suitable means of punishment. By looking at the ethical dimensions of fair play, based on the repercussions of being punished for smoking and 'snitching', these young reader participants were quite happily discussing and elaborating - sometimes with exaggerations - what they might typically encounter in their own lived experience. They were definitely comfortably and confidently sharing and discussing their opinions about Shan's *Lord Loss*.

I should state here that the element of curiosity as posited by Carroll only offers a partial explanation for my young readers' consumption of horror gothic. Curiosity evidently exists in both my reading groups, especially when they want to find out more about the mystery surrounding teen protagonist Grubbs Grady in *Lord Loss*, and why, based on the photos of dead members of his extended family, all have died young. As one young respondent says in amazement, 'I haven't read anything like this!', with another describing the many photos which were hanging on the walls of the mansion owned by Grubbs' uncle Dervish, as 'there's a whole corridor of death!'⁸⁵ My young readers' response and enjoyment clearly point to something more besides the spectrum of curiosity, suggesting a different appeal, or at least a consideration beyond curiosity alone as posited by Carroll.

Michael Benton in his article 'Readers, text, contexts: reader-response criticism' specifically mentions Jack Thomson's work with teenage readers as offering different stages of response to fiction. These stages include 'unreflective interest in action; empathising; analogising; reflecting on the significance of events and behaviour; reviewing the whole work as the author's creation'; and also the consciously considered relationship with the author.⁸⁶ These responses, in one form or other, were observed in the student participants of both schools though I would also include another type of response mentioned earlier: that of generative response which includes responses that offer a diverse range of topics, sparked off by the horror gothic text. Given these students' enjoyment and reaction, their responses also indicate that Carroll's cognitivist solution to curiosity may not

⁸⁵ Towers School, Session 2:16.

⁸⁶ Michael Benton, 'Readers, Texts, Contexts: Reader-Response Criticism', *Understanding children's literature* (2005), 86-102. (p. 92). Among the different theories mentioned are such as J. R. Squire's six elements of response and Robert Protherough's five major ways in which young readers see the process of reading fiction. Thomson's later work incorporates a developmental dimension which looks at the degree of both intensity of interest and sophistication of response. For more details, see Jack Thomson, *Understanding Teenagers' Reading: Reading Processes and the Teaching of Literature* (Melbourne, Australia: Methuen, 1987).

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apply to them. I am not alone in my reservations: other theorists have also questioned his assumptions, though it must be noted, not from an audience-centred perspective based on age.

Ken Gelder, in his introduction to *The Horror Reader*, remains critical of Carroll's analysis even as he acknowledges Carroll's critical insight that horror has the 'definitive capacity to disgust and fascinate'.⁸⁷ Gelder argues that Carroll's analysis tends 'to homogenise horror' and that his theorisation limits different types of horror to 'performing much the same kind of task' when 'the field of horror is a fractured, many-faceted thing'.⁸⁸ Another theorist, Berys Gaut, objects to Carroll's cognitivist solution by highlighting horror films' formulaic plots and stereotypical monsters. Due to the predictability in most horror films, Gaut argues that this would, in fact, negate the curiosity or fascination needed for consumers of horror films to overcome the 'disagreeable emotional states' that the films inevitably bring.⁸⁹ Besides the existence of predictable plots and monsters, Gaut also points to the popularity of modern horror films which feature psychopathic (human) serial killers, and concludes that 'formulas of horror are formulas for generating fear' rather than 'devices for primarily stimulating curiosity'.⁹⁰

Carroll's counterargument is that formulaic plots are used precisely because of their proven ability to capture attention, and that the popularity of horror films is due to the fact that audiences 'must enjoy something other than being horrified', i.e. they are 'fascinated by monsters'.⁹¹ It is useful to note that unlike books targeting adults, books for young adults are usually not 'morally ambiguous' and therefore, in horror gothic texts for young readers, the monsters do get vanquished by the narrative's conclusion.⁹² This generic plot device for texts

⁸⁷ Gelder, Ken, 'Introduction: The Field of Horror', in *The Horror Reader*, ed. by Ken Gelder (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 1-7. (p. 4).

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Berys Gaut, 'The Paradox of Horror', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 33 (4) (1993), 333-45 (p. 335).

⁹⁰ Berys Gaut, 'The Enjoyment Theory of Horror: A Response to Carroll', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 35 (1995), 284-90. (p.285 & p. 289). Modern examples which fit Gaut's assertion are the *Saw* and *Hostel* film franchises which have seen the release of several sequels since 2003 and 2005 respectively. For more on slasher-style films and their popularity in horror films especially in the seventies and eighties, see Carol Clover in *Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film* (1987).

⁹¹ Noël Carroll, 'Enjoying Horror Fictions: A Reply to Gaut', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 35 (1995), 67-73. (p.72).

⁹² I have borrowed this phrase from Darren Shan, where in an interview with the *Independent*, he is quoted as saying that, 'You can't be morally ambiguous in the way you can in adult books' in 'The Conversation: Author Darren Shan on racism, sex and a zombie apocalypse',

meant for young adult readers is important because given such reader expectations, there will not be any 'nasty' surprises, but a narrative which ends on a positive note. This type of formulaic plot, if it can be described as such where monsters get killed in the end, has also led Annette Curtis Klause, author of *The Silver Kiss* (one of the earliest teen vampire books, mentioned in Part One) to speculate that maybe young readers are drawn to horror because they 'project their everyday fears into a monster and confront them in an environment they control (which) gives them strength, especially when characters in books for younger readers defeat evil all by themselves', and concludes that this reading experience is 'reassuring' for them.⁹³ In other words, young readers derive comfort from confronting and then vanquishing the monsters.

Formulaic plots aside, at the hands of a good story-teller, a story even with a guaranteed positive ending, can still be refreshing and 'gripping', which my young readers found in *Lord Loss*, notwithstanding protests of boredom at certain points of the narrative.⁹⁴ As the two different short conversations below show, Shan's ability to keep surprises coming seems to negate the main drawback of formulaic plots with students at Malory School (Excerpt 4) devising their own strategy for reading the text, by either skipping the entire section, or if reading, critiquing it throughout, such as Ellie's verdict that the doctors at Grubbs' hospital are not good because their only solution was to keep him medicated and hence sedated.

Excerpt 4: Malory School – Trauma in the mental hospital

Sam: *It's unfair – cos he was talking about demons and no one was going to believe him (as) there's no proof.*

Will: *Right from the start (it is interesting) and then nothing happens. In this part, he's popping pills – bad cos what happened was real, so he didn't really need to take pills but everyone thought he was insane which was unfair.[...]*

Sam: *Fifty pages and nothing's happened. He just stays in the hospital – and it's a very long time.*

Alan: *The rest of (the chapter) nothing happens [...]*

<<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/the-conversation-author-darren-shan-on-racism-sex-and-a-zombie-apocalypse-8839140.html?origin=internalSearch>>, 27 September 2013, [accessed 5 September 2016].

⁹³ Annette Curtis Klause, 'The Lure of Horror', *School Library Journal*, 43 (1997), 38-39. (p. 39).

⁹⁴ As Iris says in her group, 'Not sure how well (Shan) has written is very good – but the story gets you "gripped,"' in Towers School, Session 2:16.

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Andre: *I skimmed through it.*

Jordan: *Yeah - I read really fast.*

Dan: *I skipped this part when it started getting boring.*

Fred: *I read it slowly cos I'm a slow reader [aww – a boy makes this response]*

Ellie: *Nothing's happening, adds nothing to the plot – not interesting. Not really good doctors (too), just giving him pills.⁹⁵*

In excerpt 5, the students at Towers School were indicating what they expected from the horror gothic genre. As the conversation shows, some of the plot twists made by Shan were found to be less than effective, or lacking the desired effect that they were expecting, indicating that these young readers hold some expectations about the horror gothic genre. As can be seen, some of the young reader participants were happy to be surprised, to have their expectations overturned while at least two either felt that they were 'lied to' or were 'shocked' by what finally transpired.

On the whole, regardless of how predictable the conclusion is – the young protagonist (hero) will inevitably vanquish or defeat the monster by the text's conclusion – the fact that skilled writing, and plotting can keep the readers guessing at how the plot will unfold, may be sufficient reason why young readers continue to read: particularly when readers are uncertain how, or by what means the monster will be eliminated or vanquished. This, I would suggest, may offer not only comfort and reassurance that the monster and the horrors will end, but also provide sufficient surprises and unexpected plot twists for the readers, as indicated by the young reader participants of Malory and Towers Schools.

Excerpt 5: Towers School - Uncle Dervish and Bill-E

(On Bill-E as nephew, not son of Dervish, and sharing the same father as Grubbs)

Jem: *'I wasn't too surprised because Dervish (the uncle) is kind of full of secrets. But it was like you could see it coming, but when it actually happened, you didn't think that it would happen'*

Lynn: *I think there was going to be some sort of a twist, you know when his parents weren't going to be who they said they were. Like Jem said, I wasn't expecting him to be the half-brother. Shocked more than anything.⁹⁶*

⁹⁵ Malory School, Session 2: 6-7; 13-18.

⁹⁶ Towers School, Session 3: 12-13.

(On Bill-E turning out to be the werewolf instead of Dervish)

Andre: *I felt like I was lied to...*(both Grubbs and Bill-E think and believe that Dervish might be a werewolf)

Jasmine: *It's not bad though, being led to believe that it would be Dervish.*

Fred: *Clues were good.*⁹⁷

While I disagree with Carroll's too-narrow definition of horror, he rightly points us towards disgust and revulsion as reference points to horror's attraction. However as noted, Carroll would first lead us neatly through the cognitivist path and avoid horror's messy viscera and violence. Important tropes such as death, destruction and transgressions are more often to be inferred from his art-horror monsters' existence than explored in his development of what fascinates, repulses and attracts (young) consumers to horror.

In the next section, I will be looking at Julia Kristeva's theory on abjection because it offers, in part, an explanation for my young reader participants' response to horror gothic: her theorisation of the abject is not confined to reactions of fascination and curiosity at the monster. As shown earlier, the young reader participants of both Tower School and Mallory School exhibit a range of emotions in their response to *Lord Loss*. In the next section as their discussions move nearer to the text's closure, their responses seem to indicate even greater confidence, if not more enjoyment, in vanquishing the monster, a development which Carroll's cognitivist solution to horror seems to have no explanation for beyond curiosity and fascination at the monster.⁹⁸

School and Socialisation

Julia Kristeva's work in her *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* has also borrowed Mary Douglas's research on impurity and defilement. Carroll's much later theory on horror mentions this fact, but he has chosen not to investigate her work. Instead, in a footnote, Carroll writes that since he is 'narrowly concerned with the genre of art-horror', Kristeva's 'project is of a scope that is probably not ultimately germane to this investigation; it is much larger', and also speculates

⁹⁷ Malory School, Session 3: 16-18.

⁹⁸ As *Lord Loss* is only the first novel in the ten-book *Demonata* series, the monster demon Lord Loss, gets defeated by the end of the book, and as one young reader participant points out, '(Shan)'s plotted for the next book': another mystery for the next book is already being alluded to in *Lord Loss*.

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‘whether Kristeva’s meanderings are even intelligible’.⁹⁹ This seems a pity: Kristeva’s theory on abjection widens the discussion on how horror both fascinates and disgusts on different levels, and not necessarily on the cognitive level alone. So while Carroll does acknowledge the ambiguity and/or ambivalence existing in horror, he will not consider it beyond the monster nor explore further beyond writing the following: ‘(the fact that) monster X is categorically interstitial causes a sense of impurity in us without our necessarily being aware of precisely what causes that sense’.¹⁰⁰ However, to iterate, Carroll’s focus on the monster is useful, particularly because many horror gothic texts targeted at young readers have supernatural beings as monsters: it is just that his theory is unable to account for the many other reactions shown by the young reader participants when responding to horror gothic.

My young respondents’ insistence on greater shock value or horror from *Lord Loss* than what has been depicted, such as an entire family being slaughtered; complaints of boredom in parts of the narrative which do not advance the plot, or pace; expressions of disgust and amazement at the plot twists, among other emotions: all these suggest that Kristeva’s development of abjection may offer a slightly better explanation why readers, and I would assert, particularly younger audiences, may be drawn to horror with its many faceted associations. The ‘subjective value’ of Mary Douglas’s symbolic system of what causes disgust, according to Kristeva, shows that ‘religious prohibitions (are) a reflection of social divisions or even contradictions’, which she then extends through her theory to show how abjection and the monstrous are universal.¹⁰¹

Kristeva’s theory emphasises the abject as ‘those fragile states where man strays on the territories of *animal*’, of which prohibitions such as taboos and what constitutes defilement, help to mark out threats from animalism.¹⁰² This is done by distinguishing what is considered sacred and defilement ‘in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals and animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder’.¹⁰³ Kristeva also asserts that ‘abjection, just like prohibition of incest, is a universal phenomenon; one encounters it as soon

⁹⁹ Carroll in *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart*, p. 221.

¹⁰⁰ Noël Carroll in *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart*, p. 34. It is also at the end of this sentence that Carroll places his footnote about Kristeva which contains the only mention of her seminal work in his book.

¹⁰¹ Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* (University Presses of California, Columbia and Princeton, 1982). p. 66.

¹⁰² Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, p. 12 -13, p. 66.

¹⁰³ Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, p. 12 -13.

as the symbolic and/or social dimension of man is constituted, and this throughout the course of civilization', with abjection assuming 'specific shapes and different codings according to the various "symbolic systems"'.¹⁰⁴

As Kristeva's research on abjection is wide-ranging and extends to the whole spectrum of an individual's life, I will confine my discussion to two aspects of her theory which are her discussions on 'symbolic order', particularly during the stages of adolescence - when individuals are on the brink of adulthood -, and the maternal which has been further developed by Barbara Creed as the monstrous-feminine in the latter's analyses of horror films.¹⁰⁵ Kristeva's theory makes a powerful case for our uneasy attraction to and repulsion from horror gothic, almost in reverse to Carroll's rational, 'homogenising view',

There looms, within abjection, one of the those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced.¹⁰⁶

Thus 'what is *abject*', 'the jettisoned object', is radically excluded even as it 'draws' us toward the 'place where meaning collapses'.¹⁰⁷ Abjection and the abject, Kristeva declares 'are my safeguards', the 'primers of my culture' and links encounters with abjection as early as beginning in the mother's womb 'with our earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal* entity even before ex-isting outside of her'.¹⁰⁸ It must be admitted, though, that on the surface, Kristeva's lyrical description of the abject seems quite a contrast to the young reader participants' response to Shan's horror gothic text. However, if one looks carefully at what is being described – evocative words aside -, and how Kristeva has carefully structured her argument, her theory of abjection offers an explanation of different aspects that, either taken together or individually, can draw an individual to confront something horrifying and terrible; in this case,

¹⁰⁴ Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, p. 67-68.

¹⁰⁵ Barbara Creed focusses on 'border' and the mother-child relationship in Kristeva's research through the prism of feminism and patriarchy while my focus is primarily on the reception of young readers vis-à-vis symbolic adulthood. Barbara Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', *Screen*, 27 (1) (1986), pp. 44-71.

¹⁰⁶ Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, p. 1 and p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, p. 2 and p. 13.

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readers to willingly encounter horrors, traumas and monsters in horror gothic books.

The first is Kristeva's explanation of separation which, she asserts is experienced by all as abjection. She writes, that from the symbolic to the literal, abjection is not just the deliberate separation of a child from the mother, but can be experienced in any number of ways. Thus taboos on menstrual blood, cannibalism, filth such as excrement, urine, vomit and, murder are analysed and explained by Kristeva as signifiers of abjection, and how these, in one form or other, define an order or border between what is sacred and clean, versus what is seen as filth and defilement. As noted by Barbara Creed, the examples of blood, corpses and murder are distinctly horror gothic tropes especially those in horror films. As noted earlier, filth in the form of rats and their rotting guts have caught the young reader participants' attention in *Lord Loss*. These examples all share a common theme - the fact that all inhabit the space of the 'in-between, the ambiguous, the composite'.¹⁰⁹ David Boarder Giles writes that it is through Kristeva's discussions of taboos and defilement indicating 'social divisions or even contradictions' that she locates a 'lacuna an "outside" to systems of identity and signification, the exception (which) can have neither predicate nor direct object'.¹¹⁰ This push and pull, the attraction to something and yet being repulsed by it, in short, is embodied in the visceral reaction towards horror.

However, it must be pointed out that reactions from adults will most probably be different from that of younger audiences. I refer, of course, to the discussion by the young reader participants on the occasion of Grubbs' sister, Gret, inadvertently smearing herself with rat guts and blood from her tainted towel, courtesy of Grubbs. This is especially so when the image of a young girl's naked body covered with blood (regardless of which animal, pig or rat) brings to mind Stephen King's well known horror book *Carrie*, and the iconic scene in the film version.¹¹¹ This scene of a young girl's sexuality evokes the metaphor of menstruation, when it includes both a naked young woman and animal blood. This scene is also reminiscent of another similar, though more modern film, the Canadian horror film, *Ginger Snaps* that was released in

¹⁰⁹ Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, p. 4.

¹¹⁰ David Boarder Giles, 'The Anatomy of a Dumpster Abject Capital and the Looking Glass of Value', *Social Text*, 32 (2014), pp. 93-113. (p. 106).

¹¹¹ For a more detailed discussion on King's *Carrie* (1974) and Brian De Palma's film version released in 1976, see Shelley Stamp Lindsey, 'Horror, Femininity, and Carrie's Monstrous Puberty', *Journal of Film and Video* (1991), 33-44.

2000, which explores young female sexuality, and violence through a teen girl werewolf.¹¹² To iterate, the young student participants of both Malory School and Towers School however, found the description of Gret having rat guts all over her body, as either disgusting and/or funny, but with no notion of sexual undercurrents or sexual violation (or at least none that was detected or observed).

Creed, however, reminds us of Freud's argument that the 'Medusa's head takes the place of a representation of the female genitals', and that this 'invokes castration anxiety in the male spectator'.¹¹³ Gret's newly cleaned hair dripping with rat blood and guts, evokes not just bodily changes and discharge such as the female menstrual blood – scenes of abjection – but Gret appears doubly defiled, with the second defilement coming from the semi-congealed blood of an animal widely accepted as unclean and a pestilence. This is reminiscent of a Medusa's head, and Grubbs, having been earlier humiliated by both his mother (who scolds him in front of his head teacher) and his sister, fits the mould of male castration anxiety.

My young reader-participants clearly recognise Grubbs' act as one that is particularly bad or horrible, an action which no one in real life would have done; however, for them, there were no overtones of sexual violation. On this alone, Shan seems to have succeeded in his aim of writing horror gothic texts that have no mention of sex: he has, in fact, claimed that 'sex is a no-go' in his books for young readers, and that 'the only time you get in trouble with the publishers [is] if there's kissing'.¹¹⁴ However, it must be said, that even if the young reader participants did not pick up the sexual allusion in *Lord Loss*, there are still hints of it, in spite of Shan's stated claim of not writing about sex in his books.¹¹⁵ One

¹¹² For more detailed discussions on Canadian filmmaker Karen Walton's *Ginger Snaps* and its two subsequent instalments, see Patricia Molloy in 'Perpetual Flight: The Terror of Biology and Biology of Terror in the Ginger Snaps Trilogy', *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, 49 (2007).

¹¹³ Barbara Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', *Screen*, 27 (1) (1986), 44-71. (p. 44).

¹¹⁴ Darren Shan made this claim in an interview with the *Independent* in 'The Conversation: Author Darren Shan on racism, sex and a zombie apocalypse', <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/the-conversation-author-darren-shan-on-racism-sex-and-a-zombie-apocalypse-8839140.html?origin=internalSearch>>, 27 September 2013, [accessed 5 September 2016].

¹¹⁵ This is like a perverse mirror image to the romance gothic *Twilight* series with the rare and arguably solitary presence of what is violent, grotesque and gory in the series: Bella's literally bone-breaking labour when her contractions cause her to die, albeit temporarily, with Edward tearing open her stomach by using his teeth, etc.

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is tempted to argue that Creed's theorising of abjection through the monstrous-feminine is rearing its head (pun intended) in this particular horror gothic scene.

This aspect of not including sex or overt suggestions of it seems to be a broad editorial guideline as another YA horror author, American Robin Wasserman, mentions something similar: that the only scene in her book which her editor objected to 'was one that involved a man who comes upon his wife sleeping with his boss' because the 'nitty-gritty details of adultery weren't something teens would be interested in reading'.¹¹⁶ This change in excluding sex seems to be a general trend, not just in horror gothic for young adults.

In a recent study on young adult books published between 1999 and 2005, Melanie D. Koss and Willian H. Teale write that 'surprisingly, sex and alcohol/drug use were not highly represented' given that an earlier study on YA novels shows them to 'have the reputation of being hard and edgy, filled with harsh social issues such as sex, violence, drugs and the like'.¹¹⁷ Koss and Teale go on to write that 'traditionally, YA books have been identified as "problem novels" – novels with social issues that affect teens – and coming-of-age novels – novels that deal with a significant event in a teenager's life that transforms one from childhood/ adolescence to adulthood'.¹¹⁸ Thus not finding much, if any depiction of sex, was for them surprising. In addition, they also note that 'an overwhelming majority of the books (85%) focused on teens finding themselves' such as 'grappling with events of everyday life rather than a singular, major transforming event'.¹¹⁹

However, given that most of the books analysed by them (59 which were considered representative) are contemporary realistic fiction, with only seven on fantasy and one on horror, this theme of finding oneself through everyday events may not hold true for horror gothic texts. In *Lord Loss*, everyday events take on a gothic magnitude where almost everything is magnified to a grand scale. There are anarchic qualities of abjection, in so far as it has been described, qualities

¹¹⁶ Daniel Kraus, 'Monsters, Murder, and Morality: A Graveside Chat About YA Horror Fiction', *Booklist*, 110 (18) (2014), 62.

¹¹⁷ Melanie D. Koss and William H Teale, 'What's Happening in YA Literature? Trends in Books for Adolescents', *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 52 (2009), 563-72. (p. 567 and p. 568). The earlier study Koss and Teale cite is from Michael Cart's *From romance to realism: 50 years of growth and change in young adult literature* which was published in 1996.

¹¹⁸ Melanie D. Koss and William H Teale, 'What's Happening in YA Literature? Trends in Books for Adolescents', p. 567.

¹¹⁹ Melanie D. Koss and William H Teale, 'What's Happening in YA Literature? Trends in Books for Adolescents', p. 567.

which describe horror gothic texts for young readers, where there is seldom any subtlety in the narrative. In fact, descriptions abound of events which do not just threaten but tear apart characters' lives. In *The Demonata* series' narrative, there are descriptions about incursions by different varieties of demons from the demon realm with the slaughtering of people on large scales: these details also include the violence suffered by (human) characters when they physically and magically fight the demons/ monsters.¹²⁰ In the first book, *Lord Loss*, however, tragedy is confined to one family: Grubbs' immediate family which takes place in his home. As noted by one young reader-participant from Towers School, Shan's choice of location is particularly horrifying because it's '(y)our own home, it's like your safest place', with the implication that this tragedy exerts the maximum amount of pain or trauma for any (young) person.¹²¹

Given the level of violence and depiction of personal phobias in horror gothic texts for young readers, Kristeva's abjection offers a better explanation than Carroll's cognitivist solution on why these (young) readers would return to reading something this violent, disgusting or traumatic. In point of fact, Kristeva describes the corpse as 'the most sickening of wastes', the ultimate in abjection as it no longer signifies anything but 'the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders', of 'death infecting life'.¹²² What more then, the horror and abjection, when characters however small a role they play in the narrative, suffer death with extreme violence from monsters. In *Lord Loss*, the descriptions are grotesque, horrifying and the stuff of nightmares, as mentioned earlier about the mutilated bodies of Grubbs' mother, father and sister.

However, to reiterate, and this may allay any parental concerns about the horrifying descriptions in these horror gothic texts: my young reader-respondents were in fact skimming and/or skipping the violent bits, and focussing on the disgusting parts instead. As Fred from my second reading and discussion group says of *Lord Loss*, 'it started off like really weird and then it just got quite

¹²⁰ As an example, Kernel, who is one of the main protagonists first introduced in the second book, *Demon Thief*, loses his eyes in a battle to a scorpion-shaped demon that 'aims its stinger at his right eye. With a pop the stinger goes in, then comes out wet and glistening. Shrieking with delight, the demon spits out a mouthful of eggs, filling Kernel's pulpy socket. Kernel screams in agony as the eggs hatch and maggoty insects gnaw at what's left of his eye, before working their way through to his brain....[the demon] strikes again and Kernel's left eye pops too,' in *Demon Apocalypse: Book Six The Demonata*, p. 139. NB: This is the same Kernel, who later learns to turn his vomit into a weapon after using magic, of course, to restore his sight.

¹²¹ Towers School, Session 1:19.

¹²² Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, p. 3 and p. 4.

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interesting' with the interesting portion referring to Grubbs' new life with his uncle Dervish, rather than the slaughter or even the pain and trauma suffered by Grubbs due to his personal loss.¹²³ This is not to say that my young reader participants were being callous in this instance or dismissive of the tragedy suffered by Grubbs: they just did not find the gore, and subsequent trauma experienced by Grubbs as playing a useful part in advancing the plot in *Lord Loss*. This, response, I would suggest, seems to indicate two possible strategies used by the young reader participants; one, that they were reading the horror and grotesque in *Lord Loss*, and accepting their presence as an essential or integral feature belonging to the horror gothic genre, and therefore assessing their presence in the narrative for effectiveness as a horror gothic plot device. As mentioned earlier, these young reader participants found the descriptions - of violence, and particularly the trauma experienced by Grubbs - boring, because in the anticipation of more action sequences and faster pacing, they were reading or having to resort to skipping 'lengthy' descriptions about Grubbs' trauma and temporary madness as the latter grapples with his personal loss.¹²⁴

The second strategy, used by the young reader participants upon encountering descriptions in the horror gothic text which depict trauma, pain and excesses of violence, is related to the first which deals with their expectation of how the plot in horror gothic should be: action-based, with rapid pacing in the narrative. Their responses on those descriptions which indicate excesses and trauma suggest that they were treating those sections and viewing them at a 'distance', as something definitely fictional and un-related to them. Hence even though they expressed sympathy for Grubbs (because of his personal loss), the young student participants did not bother to discuss his loss or trauma (much), other than critiquing how those descriptions worked or did not work for them as a horror gothic plot device. In short, the young reader participants of Towers and Malory Schools were aware of how Grubbs' loss affected him, but did not like the section(s) in *Lord Loss* when the focus was on his pain and trauma, expressing a pronounced preference for shorter descriptions on these types of depiction so that the pace in *Lord Loss* could accelerate and become interesting (again). It also goes without saying that both groups of students were enjoying themselves,

¹²³ Malory School, Session 3: 10.

¹²⁴ As mentioned earlier, this is an example of what Shan has described as him exploring the consequences of violence, with the implication that his books do not glorify nor valorise violence.

picking apart Shan's *Lord Loss*, and comfortably expressing their desire for 'more interesting' parts in the narrative.

Unsurprisingly, when the topic of schools returned in the narrative (during the time when Grubbs is allowed to leave the hospital with his uncle Dervish), the students' discussions became more animated. This leads to the inference that what seems interesting for the students is when the narrative in *Lord Loss* returns to a topic which is relatable, but more importantly, not excessively traumatic or painful, such as deaths in the family as depicted in the deaths of Grubbs' family or his suffering and temporary madness in a hospital. This is where Creed's discussion on ambiguity in her treatment of abjection is important: she writes and shows how abjection as being always 'ambiguous', particularly her discussion on borders, from Kristeva's theory on abjection.¹²⁵

The two ways Creed briefly mentions how abjection is always ambiguous (besides the extended treatment on the monstrous-feminine) are the saturation of 'images of abjection', and the 'encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability' in horror films. Examples of such images of abjection in horror films are the corpse – whole or mutilated, 'followed by an array of bodily wastes such as blood, vomit, saliva, sweat, tears and putrefying flesh'.¹²⁶

Curiously, fecal matter is rarely depicted in horror films: maybe there is at least one type of bodily waste too disgusting to be filmed and offered in mainstream cinema.¹²⁷ Shan, however, does not exercise such discretion. In his second book in the series, *Demon Thief*, he writes about young children being so frightened by the sudden appearance of demons, and the horror of watching their teacher's severed head 'pop like a melon dropped from a great height' that the 'thirty-four kids scream as one and crap their pants'.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection' p. 48. When Creed writes about how the 'horror film would appear to be, in at least three ways, an illustration of the work of abjection', in the 'socio-cultural arena', this implies that there are more than three ways. However, she only explains three - saturation of the images of abjection, encounters between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability, and the monstrous-feminine - leaving readers to infer what the other ways, beyond the three, are.

¹²⁶ Barbara Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', p. 48.

¹²⁷ I have used the adjective 'rarely' and 'mainstream', because there have been a few films where fecal matter has featured, such as the infamous *Human Centipede* series of films by Dutch filmmaker, Tom Six, which made its first appearance in 2009. There is also a parody of the Dutch film by the animated series *South Park*, in an episode first shown in April 2011 with the title 'HUMANCENTIPAD' which satirises the iTunes user agreement, and iPhone users who sign them without (carefully) reading the terms and conditions. Source: IMDB, <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1884035/>>, n.d., [date assessed 16 June 2017].

¹²⁸ *Demon Thief*, p. 50.

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Explaining that the function of the monstrous in horror films is 'to bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability', Creed also insists that this function of the monstrous 'remains the same' even if the specific nature of the border is different.¹²⁹ This strategy of looking at the 'function' of abjection (monstrous), it must be pointed out, rather than the types or specificity of borders or prohibitions, immediately widens Creed's examples of horror films to include those which do not have any monsters in the traditional sense, unlike Carroll's art-horror ones.

Not unexpectedly, Creed includes examples of films which depict borders separating 'those who take up their proper gender roles from those who do not' and those between 'normal and abnormal sexual desire'.¹³⁰ In short, Creed asserts that horror films are designed to construct and confront 'us with the fascinating, seductive aspect of abjection' even as some of these films have caused viewers to declare that they are causing them to feel sick or that they 'scared the shit out of me'.¹³¹ In a different study, though taking a theoretical approach, Katerina Bantinaki writes that audiences' enjoyment of horror 'seems to be bound up with the emotional responses that it elicits' though unlike Carroll, whose theory she was critiquing, Bantinaki argues instead that fear can be a positive experience.¹³² Creed, it must be noted, does not cite any audience studies, but presumably theorised on adults, she explains that audiences experiencing enjoyment in horror films are actually 'foregrounding that specific horror film as a "work of abjection" or "abjection at work" in both a literal and metaphoric sense'.¹³³ In other words,

viewing the horror film signifies a desire not only for perverse pleasure
(confronting sickening, horrific images, being filled with terror/ desire for

¹²⁹ Barbara Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', p. 49.

¹³⁰ The examples of films given by Creed which show uncertainties in proper gender roles are *Psycho*, *Dressed to Kill*, *Reflection of Fear* and, for films showing abnormal sexual desire, they are *Cruising*, *The Hunger* and *Cat People*. More obvious examples which Creed offers are *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, *King Kong*, *Carrie*, *The Exorcist*, *The Omen*, *Rosemary's Baby*; films (Ibid. p.49).

¹³¹ In fact, Creed mentions the 'ancient figures of abjection as the vampire (bodies without soul), the ghoul (corpse-eater) and the zombie (living corpse) and the witch (one of the many crimes was that she used corpses for her rites of magic), with the werewolf 'whose body signifies a collapse of the boundaries between human and animal' (pp. 47-48).

These descriptions which I have almost quoted wholesale only warrant two paragraphs, leading one to infer Creed's interest on the archaic mother/ monstrous feminine which is understandable given that the eighties has been a particularly fertile period for gender studies in institutions of higher education.

¹³² Katerina Bantinaki, 'The Paradox of Horror: Fear as a Positive Emotion', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 70 (4) Fall (2012), 383-92. (p. 384).

¹³³ Barbara Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', p. 48.

the undifferentiated) but also a desire, having taken pleasure in perversity, to throw up, throw out, eject the abject (from the safety of the spectator's seat).¹³⁴

However, reactions towards the macabre and gore in novels, may not be as strong as what Creed posits above for films, particularly when young readers are skimming through them in books. Kristeva's theory of horror with abjection as a 'vortex of summons and repulsion' and, Creed's further development of the maternal (monstrous-feminine), both look at 'borders' with abjection as fundamental to human subjectivity in which the subject turns away in disgust while at the same time experiencing a powerful if unacknowledged attraction towards it.¹³⁵ The earliest of such rejections, of the mother is sometimes called an 'archaic or very early process' of abjection and Estelle Barrett writes that this act cannot be viewed 'simplistically' because the rejection by the child is also a rejection of 'part of itself' given that 'abjection is also implicated in maintaining a border between the child and the womb – a place of plenitude and comfort that must be eventually jettisoned in order for the child to live'.¹³⁶

These attempts at breaking away are, unsurprisingly, described by Kristeva as both 'violent' and 'clumsy' due to 'the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling'.¹³⁷ Nonetheless, while abjection must be rejected 'as it threatens life', what is abject must also be tolerated because 'the activity of exclusion' allows 'the subject (to) take up his/her proper place in relation to the symbolic (order)'.¹³⁸ In other words, abjection plays a key role in defining life although abjection is also that which 'disturbs identity, system, order', with no respect for 'borders, positions (and) rules'.¹³⁹

In describing the pull and push of abjection, Kristeva also points out how weak or fragile prohibitions are. According to her, it is due to 'imprecise boundaries' and 'uncertainties of borders' of prohibitions, which, in effect give rise to abjection. Citing George Bataille as the only person she knows who 'has linked the production of the abject to *the weakness of that prohibition*, which, in other

¹³⁴ Barbara Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', p. 48.

¹³⁵ Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, p. 1.

¹³⁶ Estelle Barrett, *Kristeva Reframed: Interpreting Key Thinkers for the Arts* (IB Tauris, 2011). p. 71.

¹³⁷ Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, p. 13.

¹³⁸ Barbara Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', *Screen*, 27 (1) (1986), pp. 44-71. (p. 46).

¹³⁹ Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, p. 4.

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respects, necessarily constitutes each social order,' Kristeva even repeats the same quote from Bataille, underscoring its importance to her argument,

Abjection ...is merely the inability to assume with sufficient strength the imperative act of excluding abject things (and that act establishes the foundations of collective existence).¹⁴⁰

This weakness in prohibition arises too from ambiguity: 'if I am affected by what does not yet appear to me as a thing, it is because laws, connections, and even structures of meaning govern and condition me'.¹⁴¹ Kristeva also combines this weakness of prohibition, to abjection which 'border(s) the frail identity of the speaking being'; of abjection 'permanently engulfing' the subject, and therefore, it is in this sense that 'abjection is coextensive with social and symbolic order'.¹⁴² In short, there can be no forced separation from abjection, given that one is permanently 'engulfed'; this could not be more different from Carroll's theorising of horror as he does not place any importance on the affect (appeal to emotion) as part of the appeal of horror, preferring instead to view the cognitive as the primary (and only) appeal. Precisely because 'prohibition' and the emphasis on it is so ambiguous and undefined, this makes it is easy to transgress, leading to a compulsion or repetition to test the boundaries, to plunge into something (dangerous). In this way, it is analogous to horror's appeal for young readers who continue to consume horror gothic texts, in so much as the violence or disgusting aspects repel.

In describing abjection, Kristeva also emphasises the subjective value of 'demarcations, exclusions and prohibitions that establish the social organism as a symbolic system'.¹⁴³ These symbolic systems come in many forms and on a macro scale, we have such constraints which govern our daily lives through rules (both in legal systems, and those culturally agreed but unspoken) demarcating what is acceptable and unacceptable in society. One such symbolic system which particularly relates to my young reader-participants is that of symbolic adulthood. Symbolic adulthood, itself a construct, is also a biological process. My young reader-participants are, on the cusp of adulthood, in a liminal state, being neither an adult nor a child. In fact, in the field of cognitive neuroscience, recent studies

¹⁴⁰ The full quote is given above and in p. 56 of her book with the shortened version in p. 64, 'the inability to assume with sufficient strength the imperative act of excluding,' in *Powers of Horror*, p. 56 and p. 64.

¹⁴¹ Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, p. 10.

¹⁴² Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, p. 66 and p. 67.

¹⁴³ Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, p. 66.

show that this period is also a 'time characterised by immense hormonal and physical changes', and also 'characterised by dramatic changes in identity, self-consciousness and cognitive flexibility'.¹⁴⁴ These changes are also accompanied by changes in behaviour which have been widely studied in adolescents, and according to Jay N. Giedd, the 'three most robust adolescent behavioural changes are (1) increased risk taking, (2) increased sensation seeking, and (3) a move away from parent toward greater peer affiliation', in addition to the adolescent brain being 'highly adaptive' to changes in 'response to the demands of the environment' where this 'changeability is often referred to as "plasticity"'.¹⁴⁵ Giedd writes that '(a)reas such as the prefrontal cortex – a key component of neural circuitry involved in judgement, impulse control, and long range planning – are particularly late to reach adult morphometry, continuing to undergo dynamic changes well into the 20s'.¹⁴⁶ Without going into the specific details of this stage of development in adolescence, it is this liminal state that I am interested in, which suggests a greater susceptibility towards abjection's pull, as if testing boundaries through 'risky behaviour commonly associated with adolescence', and the longing or desire to belong, or have greater affiliation with one's peers.¹⁴⁷

Based on what my reader-participants have responded, I would assert that there is definitely also a recognition among them of being pulled to belong to a group, of wanting to be part of a bigger whole. This is shown in their discussions about wanting to fit in and belong which recurs on two different occasions – about the fear of not fitting in by attending a new school, and sharing a secret so as not to be left out – sparked off by Shan's depiction of Grubbs recovering at his uncle Dervish's mansion. At this stage of the narrative in *Lord Loss*, Grubbs decides not to attend school mid-way, a decision which his uncle Dervish supports.

In the excerpt below, the young reader participants of Towers School discuss Grubbs' decision to defer his studies, and discuss what they themselves have done or would have done, in order to lessen the implied stress, and fear of not

¹⁴⁴ Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, and Suparna Choudhury, 'Development of the Adolescent Brain: Implications for Executive Function and Social Cognition', *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry*, 47 (2006), 296-312. (p. 296).

¹⁴⁵ Jay N, Giedd, 'The Digital Revolution and Adolescent Brain Evolution', *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 51 (2012), 101-05. (p. 101).

¹⁴⁶ Jay N, Giedd, 'The Digital Revolution and Adolescent Brain Evolution', p. 102.

¹⁴⁷ Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, and Suparna Choudhury, 'Development of the Adolescent Brain: Implications for Executive Function and Social Cognition', p. 305.

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fitting in a new school. In other words, their discussions hinged on the importance of not standing out and not be marked as an outsider.

Excerpt 6: Towers School – New School and Fitting in

Ted: *I'd be anxious because I know that they'd know stuff which I hadn't done in class.*

Iris: *I'd want to go back to school just – I want to prove that I can beat what I'd seen.*

Frank: *I wouldn't like to go a year down.*

Amber: *I wouldn't want to go to school where everyone's made their friends and everyone's like...[tails off]*

Peter: *Been there.*

Nevil: *In a way, you wouldn't want to miss school, you want to stay home sometimes but then but then in a way, you want to go to school to make friends, because everyone is going to be like 'who are you, why are you here, why have you only just joined us, what is so special about you?' But then you wouldn't want to miss (school) because you would be behind and everyone's finishing (their year of study).*

Iris: *You'd be living a lie.*

Eva: *You'd feel like you wouldn't fit in. You'd be obviously older than everyone else...*

Iris: *Whichever way you go, you'd always be standing out a little bit, there are people who came to our school like last year, and like came in through half way through the year, and they're still the people who are new.*

Lynn: *We still think of them as the new kids. Apart from the girls from year seven...who are new [...]*

Ellie: *Me and my friend joined together, so people were staring at us but they were staring at all three of us – safety in numbers [chuckles]*

Lynn: *So if Bill-E's sister were still alive, it would not be as bad in school but she's dead now.¹⁴⁸*

Similarly, this attitude of not wanting to be an outsider, of being apart from others, even in the family, was picked up by the young reader participants who debated whether Grubbs should have been trusted with the family secret: the information that lycanthropy runs in the family, with the only cure offered by Lord Loss, the master demon, but at a very high price. However, even as these young reader participants offered various reasons why they wished to be told of secrets

¹⁴⁸ Towers School, Session 2: 27-29. Point of note: Lynn makes a mistake, it is Grubbs' sister not Bill-E's sister who dies, although after the revelation that Bill-E is their half-brother, she is not wholly wrong.

such as, '(i)t's like human nature, you want to have something up on them!', ultimately, the primary reason for them seems to be the overriding phobia of being kept apart from others.¹⁴⁹ In this discussion, the situation of not being part of a family group, of remaining apart from others, is due to the fact that key information has not been shared with Grubbs by his family. As Lynn, from Towers School asserts, she would not want to be left out as the only one ignorant of the facts or truth, even if horrible consequences are caused by acting upon that knowledge. The discussion also indicates the young reader participants' desire to feel more prepared, even if it means to be 'prepared' for any eventuality, so as to mitigate negative consequences such as the suffering Grubbs endures after his entire family gets killed.

Excerpt 7: Towers School – Family Secrets

Dex: *They should have told him (the secret). So that he's aware of what could have happen in the future so that it doesn't just come as a surprise and so that he could be ready what could happen in the future.*

Jem: *I can see why they didn't but I should have say they should've because his sister was younger (older) I can see why they didn't because Grubbs was in school and having a normal life however if they did tell him, the way he'd react, he would like constantly be thinking about it. If I was told that, I wouldn't be able to sleep and I wouldn't have a normal life at all - my school life would like crumble. I can see why they didn't however, I think they should have told him because otherwise most of this wouldn't have come as a massive shock to him.*

Lynn: *I think they should have told him so that he's more prepared and so that everything doesn't happen at once and he suffered more from it. If they had told him he probably wouldn't have suffered so much as he did [...] yeah, because if something happened and then I found out that someone was holding the information back from me and I'd be annoyed because I would have wanted to be told so that I could be prepared.*

Amber: *yeah, because if something happened and then I found out that someone was holding the information back from me and I'd be annoyed because I would have wanted to be told so that I could be prepared.*

Lynn: *I still want to know (regardless of the burden/ consequences).¹⁵⁰*

¹⁴⁹ Towers School, Session 2: 26. This was made by Iris who cites human nature as the reason for wanting to possess secrets.

¹⁵⁰ Towers School, Session 3: 38-42.

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In horror gothic texts, confrontations with the abject are usually via transgressions such as excesses in violence (causing death) and indulgence in things or actions which are disgusting, with the unspoken understanding of transgressing certain norms and rules. However, phobias and confrontations with them must be included even if the phobias are not normally seen as horrifying. In *Lord Loss*, I would assert, particularly for young readers, fears of not fitting in, being apart and standing out for the wrong reason can be just as distressing and abject. In the symbolic system of adulthood, being able to navigate such terrain and being seen as successful, also means taking one's 'proper' place and fitting in. In *Lord Loss*, Shan shows what happens when a young member of the family is set apart, even if the (adult) decision was motivated by good intentions, and the consequences which lead to much suffering. Being in a new school and not having friends, or not belonging to a group: these can be just as terrifying as these young reader participants have alluded to.

Kristeva's descriptions of abjection as 'violent' and 'clumsy' are both descriptions which have sometimes been used to describe the period of adolescence.¹⁵¹

However, for accuracy's sake, I should point out that it is not so much the stage of adolescence, which has been described as such (e.g. turbulent, tumultuous, etc.), but the attempts or behaviour to navigate out of this liminal, in-between-ness into adulthood which have been described as tumultuous and turbulent. In other words, the actions and words by adolescents to find one's place in society, and the perceived struggle endured by them, are what have been described as tumultuous and clumsy. This form of navigation - to find one's place and to belong - is part and parcel of an adolescent's life, and for the young reader participants on *Lord Loss*, it is no different. Hence their discussions highlight the importance of belonging, and the type of strategies they have used not to feel 'out of place' in a new school.¹⁵²

These feelings or types of experience have also been borne out in sociological studies. In the last decade, researchers such as Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, Alicia Facio and Fabiana Micocci and, Ofra Mayseless and Miri Scharf have written about a prolonged transition to adulthood with teenagers and those in the early-twenties

¹⁵¹ Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, p. 65.

¹⁵² The term 'out of place' is taken from Mary Douglas, whose well known assertion 'dirt is matter out of place' is from her book, *Purity and Danger* (p. 35). As mentioned, Douglas' anthropological research and ideas have been borrowed by Kristeva who develops them together with the following ideas: what she calls the 'anthropological delineation of the logic of *exclusion* that causes the abject to exist', along with her extended explanation of the 'weakness of prohibition', in order to show abjection's powerful pull in *Powers of Horror* (p. 65).

expressing a 'feeling of being "in-between"', of facing periods of instability and continuing one's exploration of identity.¹⁵³ While this relatively new concept of 'emerging adulthood' is still being debated, what seems to be 'one of the least contested issues in contemporary youth studies' is the social phenomenon occurring now of modern 'adulthood' being delayed or deferred, or 'is now taking longer on average than in the past', with 'social exclusions' playing a bigger role for those in the bottom group.¹⁵⁴ This liminal state, not only appears to be one which young people can readily identify with, as indicated by their desire to belong to a group or for greater peer affiliation, and the recognition of not wanting to be set apart, chronological age notwithstanding; this liminality also adds further weight to Kristeva's theorising of the 'clumsy' and 'violent' attempts of the individual to enter a 'symbolic adulthood'. On the flipside, this greater reluctance not to exercise the choice to leave the place of comfort and plenitude, associated with childhood, and the maternal presence, indicates also the powerful pull of what is familiar and predictable.

Not unexpectedly, Shan exploits this feeling in several ways, first by depicting Bill-E as an outsider who says to Grubbs that 'you're like me...(a)n outsider. Different. A freak. We're both weird, which is why we get along', and, secondly, by having Grubbs grappling with the possibility of attending a new school in the middle of the year.¹⁵⁵ Abjection, described as 'a composite of judgement and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives', can also be seen in

¹⁵³ Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, 'Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens through the Twenties', *American psychologist*, 55 (2000), 469-480. (p. 469).

Alicia Facio and Fabiana Micocci, 'Emerging Adulthood in Argentina', *New directions for child and adolescent development*, 2003 (2003), 21-32.

Ofra Mayseless and Miri Scharf, 'What Does It Mean to Be an Adult? The Israeli Experience', *New directions for child and adolescent development*, 2003 (2003), 5-20.

¹⁵⁴ James Côté and John M Bynner disagree with Arnett's psychological category which they believe is due to economic, social and demographic factors rather than to a new developmental phase, thus rendering 'the concept of emerging adulthood as no more than a limited reflection of its times' (p. 255; p.265). However, they do not dispute the challenges and problems faced by young people during this period. See James Côté, and John M Bynner, 'Changes in the Transition to Adulthood in the UK and Canada: The Role of Structure and Agency in Emerging Adulthood', *Journal of youth studies*, 11 (2008), 251-68.

Similar to Côté and Bynner, Leo Hendry and Marion Kloep who sampled respondents in the UK, specifically Welsh young people aged between 17 and 20, write of the importance of taking into account other interactions of various elements (such as self-agency, individual life experiences and health, structural forces and a problematic labour market among others), to explain this phenomena. As noted, these researchers do not deny the challenges faced by young people, merely the cause of this phenomena. For more details see Leo B. Hendry, and Marion Kloep, 'How Universal Is Emerging Adulthood? An Empirical Example', *Journal of youth studies*, 13 (2010), 169-79. (p. 169).

¹⁵⁵ *Lord Loss*, p. 108.

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how these young reader participants recognise Grubbs' reluctance to be the 'new kid in school' even as he yearns to belong again, as depicted by Shan, through the attempts that Grubbs makes in order to accommodate his new acquaintance Bill-E and thus earn his friendship.¹⁵⁶

Shan also upends popular notions of young masculinity in this depiction of Grubbs. In point of fact, desirable attributes which have been identified by 11-to-14-year-old boys in a large-scale study in the UK, as to what constitutes 'being masculine', are also some of the same attributes that Grubbs at this stage does not possess. In the study conducted by Stephen Frosh, Ann Phoenix, and Rob Pattman, they find that boys identify popular young masculinity as possessing "'hardness", sporting prowess, and (having a) fashionable style', as some of the attributes.¹⁵⁷ The researchers also add that to these boys, '(b)eing bigger than other boys could also be helpful'.¹⁵⁸ Given that Grubbs is slowly recovering from his trauma, this depiction of him as vulnerable and an outsider in a new place seems to be readily recognised by my young participants who show sympathy for him when they mentioned his suffering and trauma, particularly Grubbs' nightmares even when he is staying with his uncle Dervish.

Mind Games and Mastery

Underlying the discussion of anxiety and implied distress of being 'out of place', or in a totally new environment, the opposite of that state is the feeling of being at ease, and comfortable and/or being in familiar terrain. Thus I would suggest that the expectation of horror gothic's formulaic plot, in which monsters are predictably vanquished, offers some form of comfort and familiarity for readers amidst the inevitable chaos and turbulence. Simply put, the comfort of seeing

¹⁵⁶ Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, p. 10.

¹⁵⁷ Stephen Frosh, Ann Phoenix, and Rob Pattman in *Young Masculinities: Understanding Boys in Contemporary Society* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001). p. 77.

¹⁵⁸ It must be noted that notions of young masculinity are to be more accurately described as young masculinities – there is no one form of masculinity. However, Frosh, Phoenix and Pattmann show that in reality, boys (and men) generally share broad views of what constitutes popular notions of masculinity or, 'hegemonic masculinity', a term formalised by another researcher, R.W. Connell, in 1995. Stephen Frosh, Ann Phoenix, and Rob Pattman in *Young Masculinities: Understanding Boys in Contemporary Society* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001). pp. 75-78.

For general discussions of young masculinities, as well as the view that young masculinities in crisis only affect western, capitalist societies, see Anoop Nayak, and Mary Jane Kehily's section on 'Young masculinities in crisis: rethinking the dominant paradigm' in *Gender, Youth and Culture: Young Masculinities and Femininities* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). pp. 38-50.

horrors eliminated and monsters killed, may be another attraction for young readers of horror gothic texts.

Creed offers a more extended argument about why (adult) viewers may be motivated to confront the monstrous in horror films. She does this by incorporating Lacan's concept of the self during the mirror phase in which the unified self 'is always looking forward to self-mastery' although this is only 'an illusion of unity'. By borrowing Lacan's mirror stage which posits the urge for self-mastery in the early years of an individual's life, Creed is also implying a return to something primal, though she does not explicitly mention it, merely writing that this urge for self-mastery in the horror film viewer is akin to the desire to be challenged, 'to run the risk of continuing to look'.¹⁵⁹ In fact, 'these desires are constantly staged and re-staged in the workings of the horror narrative' where the viewer is 'forced to confront an unnameable terror, the monster'.¹⁶⁰ This 'unified self' is then restored by the 'conventional ending of the horror narrative in which the monster (or monstrous) is usually "named" and destroyed'.¹⁶¹

To reiterate, not only are both the attraction and the compulsion towards the abject ever present, but there exists also the desire to repeatedly confront the monstrous. However, there may be another reason for this: the fact that to confront and experience the monstrous is easy, not just in consuming horror gothic texts. According to Linda Williams, there is 'an apparent lack of proper esthetic distance' in horror films, 'a sense of over-involvement in sensation and emotion' where 'seemingly gratuitous excesses' occur in the portrayals of violence and terror for our viewing pleasures.¹⁶² Kristeva already notes the frailty of prohibitions which allows, if not encourages individuals to test and to confront the monstrous/ abject. Added to these are the excesses - what Williams refers to as the 'gratuitous excesses' - in horror films which make such confrontations with abjection more easily accessible, though Williams alludes to that as contributing

¹⁵⁹ For more on the visual pleasures of the film with the use of digital technology allowing viewers to slow down, zoom and pause certain favourite scenes, see Laura Mulvey who coined the terms 'possessive spectator' and 'pensive spectator' to reflect the use of these new technologies in *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2006).

¹⁶⁰ Barbara Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', p. 65.

¹⁶¹ Barbara Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', p. 64.

¹⁶² Linda Williams, 'Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess', *Film Quarterly*, 44 (1991), 2-13. (pp. 3-4; 8). Although Williams writes that viewing pleasures from these films may oscillate between identifying with victims and the vanquisher and that identification is 'neither fixed nor entirely passive', she emphasises the visceral effects of these films on predominantly adult (and male) viewers.

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to audience's viewing pleasures. It must be noted here that Williams is describing adult audiences; nonetheless, her ideas are applicable to younger audiences and even young readers. In fact, such excesses in horror are not uncommon, and as Shan points out in relation to his horror gothic texts for young readers, 'it's horror and you have to have gross-out moments', though as noted earlier, he also includes incongruous forms of humour for such moments.¹⁶³

Thus it can be paradoxically reassuring to consume horror gothic works whilst experiencing the thrill of 'a form of psychic death', as Creed calls it.¹⁶⁴ Taken in this context, one can see this line of argument as similar to Klaus's speculation, mentioned earlier, about horror texts offering young readers a paradoxically reassuring, if not comforting message, while at the same time frightening them. This is precisely because such experiences of fright end by the conclusion of the horror gothic narrative.¹⁶⁵

This is akin to experiences of risky play by children which Katerina Bantinaki sees as analogous to consuming horror gothic works. For Bantinaki, the parallels are obvious because in both situations, 'the subject is voluntarily exposed to a stressful situation which elicits fear and anxiety for no practical end'.¹⁶⁶ She cites Ellen Sandseter's study of young children engaged in risky play which shows that 'their primary motivation' to engage in such activities is 'the urge to experience the exciting feeling of heightened arousal, and the accompanying emotions: fear or anxiety'.¹⁶⁷ In fact, children's play can be 'repetitive in an obsessive way because the excitement' the children experience 'is so pleasurable that it makes them want to do it again and again'.¹⁶⁸ There is another parallel between risky

¹⁶³ Shan makes this claim while discussing the inclusion of brains being munched and humans as sacrifice in his latest series of horror gothic in 'Darren Shan interview: Darren Shan, author of the new Zom-B series talks racism, horror writing and the need for "gross-out moments"', <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/authorinterviews/9568899/Darren-Shan-interview.html>>, 28 September 2012, [accessed 10 November 2016].

¹⁶⁴ Barbara Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', (pp. 51- 52; 64).

¹⁶⁵ This concept is not entirely new, and seems to replicate findings in an old study carried out on young children based on a different genre on violence. In examining young children's responses to selected fairy tales, in which some of the tales were told without any violence such as the wolf running away instead (and hence no violent confrontations), Ann Trousdale discovered that this re-telling, in fact, caused the children to be more frightened, because it meant the wolf might or could return another day, and concludes in her study that 'the children need to have any danger in the story firmly resolved in the end, and that adults should not soften fairy tales by removing all violence from them' (p. 69). Ann Trousdale, 'Who's Afraid of the Big, Bad Wolf?', *Children's Literature in Education*, 20 (1989), 69-79.

¹⁶⁶ Katerina Bantinaki, 'The Paradox of Horror: Fear as a Positive Emotion', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 70 (4) Fall (2012), 383-92. (p. 389 - 390).

¹⁶⁷ Katerina Bantinaki, 'The Paradox of Horror: Fear as a Positive Emotion', p. 389.

¹⁶⁸ Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter, 'Children's Expressions of Exhilaration and Fear in Risky Play', *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 10 (2009), 92-106. (p. 96).

play and consuming horror gothic works: a later study, after the publication of Bantinaki's article, indicates a gender difference where boys are 'far more represented than girls in the(ir) willingness to take risks and engage in risky play'.¹⁶⁹ These include 'intense challenging physical play' as well as 'rough-and-tumble play', with boys consequently experiencing 'a higher injury liability than girls'.¹⁷⁰ Why boys are so inclined towards risky play, the study makes no mention, but it seems to correspond to other studies which show more boys than girls reading horror gothic texts.

By drawing this analogy to risky play and using the child as exemplar, Bantinaki sees consuming horror works as positive and even instructive. She cites the long literature on children's risky play as evidence of her assertion which indicates that from a longitudinal perspective, 'habituating experiences with stimuli that provoke innate fears and phobias', can provide 'antiphobic effects on adult fears and phobias'.¹⁷¹ Bantinaki writes that

(t)hrough our encounter with horror fiction we are given a chance to confront or learn to cope with fear in a safe environment: we learn to control our fear feelings and display mastery over our reactions to frightening stimuli; to direct our thoughts – often aided by the narrative – to aspects of the situation that counter the fear (for instance, to the weak traits of the “monster” or to the resources that a protagonist has to confront it).¹⁷²

Almost echoing Klause when she writes about young readers seeking reassurance when reading horror texts, Bantinaki speculates that 'perhaps we need the challenges that fear-eliciting situations provide, especially when we can experience them in small, controllable doses, so as to be more able to deal with fear when it matters most'.¹⁷³ Bantinaki sees fear in small, controllable doses as similar to the experience of disgust. She asserts that similar to the experience of fear in horror texts, the experience of disgust for consumers 'can be beneficial and rewarding in the same ways as fear', either through learning to manage reactions to disgust, or through easing 'the negative hold that they have on us in

¹⁶⁹ Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter, and Leif Edward Ottesen Kennair, 'Children's Risky Play from an Evolutionary Perspective: The Anti-Phobic Effects of Thrilling Experiences', *Evolutionary Psychology*, 9 (2011), 257-84. (p. 272)

¹⁷⁰ Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter, and Leif Edward Ottesen Kennair, 'Children's Risky Play from an Evolutionary Perspective: The Anti-Phobic Effects of Thrilling Experiences', *Evolutionary Psychology*, 9 (2011), 257-84. (p. 272).

¹⁷¹ Katerina Bantinaki, 'The Paradox of Horror: Fear as a Positive Emotion', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 70 (4) Fall (2012), 383-92. (p. 389).

¹⁷² Katerina Bantinaki, 'The Paradox of Horror: Fear as a Positive Emotion', p. 390.

¹⁷³ Bantinaki, 'The Paradox of Horror: Fear as a Positive Emotion', p. 390.

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real life'.¹⁷⁴ Bantinaki is, of course, referring to the effects of desensitisation whereby exposure to disgust, (and fear) in horror texts may be positive, and contends 'that we seek horror primarily in the hope of the intense, positive emotional experience it affords us'.¹⁷⁵

Bantinaki's argument, seen from the functionalist/ pragmatic view is a contrast to Kristeva and Creed whose analyses are derived from psychoanalysis. So while Kristeva does not explicitly mention excitement when arguing about the 'vortex of emotions' caused by what is abject, Creed's argument on abjection and the monstrous in horror films, leads us to the possibility that confronting abjection may indeed be satisfying, cued by a sense of mastery in confronting the monstrous/ abjection. Unlike Carroll who stops at disgust and fear being contained in the monsters, Bantinaki offers us another aspect of the monstrous – that confronting something challenging and gaining mastery (over a phobia), may be comforting and reassuring, even as it provides excitement in key moments.

Stephen King would agree. In one of his earliest non-fiction books dealing with horror, he writes that '(f)or now, the worst has been faced and it wasn't so bad after all. There was that magic moment of reintegration and safety at the end, that same feeling that comes when the roller coaster stops at the end of its run and you get off with your best girl, both of you whole and unhurt'.¹⁷⁶ In the excerpt given below, one can see how the young reader participants can be so objective, if not critical on how Shan's *Lord Loss* can be made more interesting by having more violence and more deaths: they are discussing it from the comfort of knowing that such violence and gore are contained within the pages. Put simply, this is another example of them viewing and evaluating the horrors from a comfortable, safe distance.

Excerpt 8: Malory School – How to make *Lord Loss* more interesting

Andre: *(the ending) was anti-climatic, it was just about to build up and turns out into a prank (about his uncle letting Grubbs believe that he had become a werewolf).*

Mel: *It's good and it's funny....but I wish he'd died – Dervish....not enough people died...*

Brian: *It's good because he's tried to plot for the next book.*

¹⁷⁴ Bantinaki, 'The Paradox of Horror: Fear as a Positive Emotion', p. 390.

¹⁷⁵ Bantinaki, 'The Paradox of Horror: Fear as a Positive Emotion', p. 391.

¹⁷⁶ Stephen King in *Danse Macabre* (London: Warner Books, 2000). p. 28.

Dan: *Anti-climatic it just kinda ended...I was expecting more like maybe something else happening with the demon.*

Alan: *It's like (Shan) got bored with the book and kinda finished it. I'd prefer (Grubbs) to be a werewolf.*

Brian: *It's quite predictable and more people could have died. I think it needs to be more violent.*

Jasmine: *More boys would like it but girls could like it as well.*¹⁷⁷

By exploring what seems disgusting and violent, my reader-participants have offered me clues on what appeals to them: when something is so unexpected and still relatable such as punishment for snitching; and what does not: extended treatment of mental trauma and anguish, particularly when pacing of the narrative seems to slow down considerably. Thus when discussing Shan's horror gothic text *Lord Loss* almost at the end of the book's narrative, my young reader-participants were all for more excitement and more deaths, claiming that *Lord Loss* could have been more interesting with more scenes of action and death. Clearly the inclusion of blood and rat guts, slaughter of an entire family and the appearance of demons do not appear to be wholly satisfying for my young respondents. Given their responses suggesting that Grubbs should have been a werewolf, Shan seems to have gauged and anticipated the young readers' reaction towards Grubbs, as the latter does become one in the middle of the series. Some of the students were also explaining why some of the later plot twists' in Shan's horror gothic narrative were no longer that surprising. This is not wholly unexpected: as Frank, from Towers School, points out, '(t)o be honest if there is a demon baby called Artery, a werewolf's kind of normal now [laughter from group]', with Iris adding the information, 'and a crocodile dog called Vein!'.¹⁷⁸

Whether Shan should have added more deaths, more 'thrilling' action sequences or more monsters remains moot. What is clear, however, is that in analysing how Grubbs defeats the master demon Lord Loss, the young reader participants' discussion swiftly moved to how similar strategies can be employed in real life. I see this response as not just about the young reader-participants enjoying the defeat of Lord Loss by Grubbs, but also an implicit admission that given similar circumstances, they themselves would have triumphed too, with equal success by using 'mind games'. It must be noted that Shan does not use the term 'mind

¹⁷⁷ Malory School, Session 4: 24-33.

¹⁷⁸ Tower School, Session 2: 47.

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games' in his horror gothic book *Lord Loss*: it was Brian from Malory School who readily identified the strategy used by Grubbs for the group, saying that what Grubbs did was 'clever because he played mind games' with Sam agreeing with him, but emphasising that the strategy was only 'clever' because '(Grubbs) won'.¹⁷⁹ This implies that for him, a strategy is only as 'clever' or as effective as the successful achievement or outcome of the goal in the first place.

In the next excerpt (Excerpt 9) by the young reader participants of Towers School, the discussion on mind games, or the subterfuge used in *Lord Loss* takes a surprising direction: the students go on to cheerfully discuss and explain effective (successful) mind games.

Excerpt 9: Towers School – Mind Games with Lord Loss, master demon

Iris: *It was the only way he could have won, isn't it (the self-mastery), he couldn't have beaten him on chess.*

Eva: *It links back to how he was a bit snarky at the beginning – it links back to his old character maybe coming through a little bit at the end as well [...]*

Frank: *It really puts people off - it comes like a good tactic. If you like act cocky while you're playing, it really makes the opposition angry at you or it completely puts you off [...]*

Dex: *In football it's when goalies are trying to take penalties, they do that - they try to point somewhere like they're going to dive that way, then it makes the person reconsider.*

Nevil: *But when they double bluff you, and then you just go that way.*

Frank: *But that's the point, you don't know for certain [...]*

Iris: *The other players would know like how Grubbs plays if you completely mentally wind him up, then he's not going on there is he? Chess is a mental game.*

Frank: *But to be truthful, everyone can play mind games.*

Peter: *But Lord Loss is like king of mind games.*

Facilitator: Really? How do you learn it?

Dex: *I never had to be taught how to play mind games.*

Iris: *You just develop.*

Eva: *If you're having an argument and you wind him up, if you don't believe something you just raise your eyebrow. You don't need to*

¹⁷⁹ Malory School, Session 4:10.

*practise, you just know it. You know how your parents are going to behave.*¹⁸⁰

To reiterate, Grubbs does not use the term ‘mind games’ in the book at all. The students identified the strategy for me, and as shown above, proceeded to explain, if not teach, how it can be done; and as mentioned earlier about their use of real life examples to explain their point, they comfortably bring in personal examples to illustrate how they would utilise mind games. Frank’s example of mind games is made on general terms, but Dex, who immediately joins in the discussion, uses a specific example: the goalkeeper in football, who deliberately points to a direction as if he or she is ‘going to dive that way’ which then ‘makes the (player) reconsider’ the direction to take. Frank’s confident assertion about everyone being able to play mind games obviously refers to himself and his peers.

What is also particularly interesting in this discussion is the declaration made by Dex, that he never ‘had to be taught how to play mind games’; a declaration which none in the group challenges, but accepts as a given (unlike other and previous assertions made in the group which gets challenged). From the conversation, Iris expands on this theme of possessing the skill for subterfuge, and implies that the skill to play mind games comes naturally over time: ‘You just develop’, or as Eva asserts, ‘You just know it’. Eva’s example implies that she does it on her parents and successfully too: ‘You know how your parents are going to behave’. The confidence and enjoyment shown by the young student participants of Towers School in their discussion about possessing and developing the ability for subterfuge, or mind games is another example of the young reader participants comfortably and happily reading something from the horror gothic text, and then relating and responding to it in positive terms. In this case, it is to discuss what has been successfully, if not masterfully done by the protagonist to defeat the monster, and as the excerpt shows, the discussion takes an interesting direction when the young reader participants transposed the strategy used in the text and relate it confidently to when they themselves have also successfully utilised ‘similar’ mind games, or observed them in action by others. Unsurprisingly, the students of Towers School were enjoying themselves and getting increasingly excited, as they confidently and happily asserted and

¹⁸⁰ Towers School, Session 4: 20-26.

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expanded on their own versions of mind games in action, by them or what they have observed of mind games played by others.

At the last reading cum discussion circles, my young student-participants in both groups at Towers School and Malory School were much freer in their comments, with quite a few freely admitting that they would not continue reading or finishing Shan's horror gothic *Demonata* series which comprises ten books. However, these students, possibly not to let me leave 'disheartened', mentioned the fact that if they had time after their holiday homework, they might possibly continue reading the series.

As the various excerpts show, these young reader-participants are vocal and critical when called for, and also equally surprising in what they share. One thing is clear in their response to Darren Shan's *Lord Loss*: his horror gothic text has inspired these young reader participants to talk and share about 'almost anything under the sun'. These have included, as mentioned earlier, about different haunted houses they have visited, to mentioning about hip and trendy grandparents (one offered the information that the grandmother uses the iPhone for online games) to talking about 'tigers' being an animal which would prevent them from entering a room they are forbidden to step in, to the use of **Snapchat** as a way to alert friends about possible dangers or as a warning for others should they encounter danger themselves. If there are key themes from these discussions, it is that their responses with their unique insight, interpretation and non sequiturs continually offer unexpected delights. Again, it must be mentioned, this generative response – on a variety of different topics and diverse themes – already noted in the responses for romance gothic texts, seems equally evident in the responses by these young readers towards Shan's horror gothic text.

Returning to my earlier point about these students of Malory and Towers Schools enacting a performance for me and among themselves, another voice sometimes emerges, which I suspect, is that of their teacher(s) with sentences such as, 'I think it's important because it shows more the storyline and like foreshadow what will happen', or 'But they're not really characters, they're like conventions'.¹⁸¹ Besides sometimes seemingly ventriloquizing their teacher's words, the fact that they are able to apply them in their discussions, also indicates their critical awareness and application of analytical abilities learnt in school.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Towers School, Session 2: 10; 43.

¹⁸² Without wanting to sound patronising, on the occasions that the students made these critical comments, they were often used appropriately and accurately.

These students also later adopted an ironic stance towards Shan's *Lord Loss*, particularly in claiming that his book should have been filled with more dead bodies or that Grubbs, in spite of being the hero, should have been the werewolf (which turns out to be Bill-E) and is portrayed as a mindless, savage and slaving monster by Shan. I term it ironic because their earlier response suggested that the depiction of the monsters and horrors were terrifying, hence their sympathy for what Grubbs' had endured, having experienced the horror himself. However, having now read and debated the merits of Shan's *Lord Loss*, the earlier depiction of horrors is now seen as insufficiently horrifying and terrible to cause any fright. This ironic stance, although used differently by the students, is a strategy that has been observed in adults who show a preference for films which are viewed as 'trash' in a recent study by Keyvan Sarkhosh and Winfried Menninghaus.

According to the researchers, these adults, who have been described as 'well-educated cultural omnivores', are able to adopt an ironic stance, a stance which expresses enjoyment (without a 'guilty conscience' at consuming 'trash' films) due in part, to their awareness, in the first place, of the film director's 'ambition to create something truly great, while simultaneously perceiving the outcome's artistic ineptness'.¹⁸³ For Sarkhosh and Menninghaus, this is a sophisticated strategy because it 'implies contextual expertise'.¹⁸⁴

With respect to the young reader participants, their ironic stance is possibly due to them having read, discussed and assessed Shan's horror gothic *Lord Loss*, and having comfortably 'processed' or 'dealt' with his horror gothic narrative, they then decide that Shan's book is more suited for much younger readers because the level of violence is, while insufficient to scare them, is enough to frighten much younger readers. Inevitably, the third person effect, noted earlier in Part Two, occurs here when they assert that Shan's book would be better appreciated by students younger than them. This third person effect is used by the young reader participants in their discussion, precisely because of their comfort and confidence having interrogated Shan's horror gothic text, *Lord Loss*. In addition, having processed the horrors, traumas and what seems grotesque in the horror gothic text through a variety of ways mentioned earlier, this process, I would suggest, has offered them comfort and confidence in making coherent sense of the horror gothic narrative, which has resulted in their unanimous judgement by

¹⁸³ Keyvan Sarkhosh and Winfried Menninghaus, 'Enjoying Trash Films: Underlying Features, Viewing Stances, and Experiential Response Dimensions', *Poetics*, 57 (2016), 40-54. (p. 42).

¹⁸⁴ Keyvan Sarkhosh and Winfried Menninghaus, 'Enjoying Trash Films: Underlying Features, Viewing Stances, and Experiential Response Dimensions', p. 42.

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both groups that much younger readers would be frightened by Shan's text, and hence appreciate it more as a horror gothic text.¹⁸⁵

As the reading circles took several months to complete, one young participant also shared about reading something in the intervening weeks, which she identified for me as gothic - the story of *Carmilla* by J. Sheridan Le Fanu,

'It's like 108 pages, I skipped like three chapters to be honest. Cos they'd done a webseries in 2014 and they did a season two last year and might do season three if they have enough money. It's modernised, and it's set in the university and I wanted to find the original. It's really, really different...*Carmilla* is done in Canada but you can watch it on YouTube, it's a webshow'.¹⁸⁶

It would seem Shan's *Lord Loss*, did not just inspire and encourage these young reader participants to offer generative responses – varieties of conversations spanning from different domains – but to seek out others texts in the gothic genre.

From the variety of responses shown, the young reader participants at both Malory School and Towers School, clearly have no problem processing and understanding the horror depicted in *Lord Loss*. Employing a variety of strategies, these young reader participants have sometimes supported and identified with the teenage protagonist, but this identification is temporary and flexible: they have also criticised Grubbs' behaviour when a 'line has been crossed'. However, such critiques are made with particular reference to what has been perceived as the general code of conduct. The young reader participants were not making judgements for the sake of evaluating and offering some form of response: they were looking at context, prior actions and then assessing the outcome. Hence, quite a few empathised with Grubbs after what transpired between him and his sister when he is given no opportunity to apologise for his use of rat guts as punishment. This suggests that while the incident of rat guts on a clean bath towel were viewed as disgusting, and captured the readers' attention with the majority finding the punishment excessive, they were also sympathetic towards Grubbs for not finding his 'closure' with his sister, where they showed empathy and understanding for what he has endured. I see this as another reading

¹⁸⁵ This unanimous agreement could also be due to the 'herd mentality', but given the fact that on other occasions, they challenged or objected to certain assertions in the group, this unanimous verdict may be because all agreed with it in the first place.

¹⁸⁶ Malory School, Session 4: 69-71. As Ellie says, the modern take on *Carmilla* is available on YouTube, and is set in a university called Silas University. Source: IMDB, 'Carmilla', <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4134838/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_ov_inf>, n.d., [Accessed 5 September 2016].

strategy the students were able to adopt, the ability to switch from taking a distancing stance to one which offers empathy for the character. This switch, or more accurately, the ability to change and adjust accordingly when reading or consuming the horror gothic text, suggests that these young student readers have no problem or difficulty when encountering the monstrous, violence or grotesque in the narrative. In fact, as suggested in their claims of boredom at lengthy descriptions of trauma or pain, or assertions for more violence to increase the level of fright, these young readers were comfortably anticipating even more violence or bloodshed. Again it must be noted, these young students were sometimes making comparisons to fantasy horror films and TV series such as *The Walking Dead* and *Game of Thrones* which are clearly targeted at adults, implying a higher threshold for adult themes and/or greater violence.

The young reader participants have also sometimes taken the scene in *Lord Loss* out of its fantasy context and applied and related it to their own circumstances. However, as noted, this was a preliminary strategy forming part of their interpretational responses. By questioning and even discarding parts of the text which they did not like or enjoy, these young reader participants were actively incorporating different aspects or dimensions in their discussions. They were engaged in the gothic text, interrogating aspects which were more related to their life experience such as relationships with a sibling, personal and familial responsibility and even on issues such as belonging and being part of a group of friends or being included in a family secret: issues of belonging and possessing insider status.

Clearly the horror gothic texts were dialogic, if not generative for these young reader participants: *Lord Loss* sparked and encouraged further discussion on the four main topics of personal, family, social, and ethical dimension and also on other topics, mentioned earlier. These generative responses by the young readers of Malory and Towers Schools are almost similar to the generative responses by the teenagers in *Teen Ink* whose diverse range of responses and formats indicate how Meyer's romance gothic texts too have inspired and triggered a rich variety of responses on various topics.

Previous adult concerns of young readers not being able to process the violence and gruesome details are shown to have no basis based on the responses of the twenty three reader participants in Malory and Towers Schools. However, a large part of this is possibly due to the horror gothic genre for young readers which explicitly and categorically vanquishes the monsters, leaving no ambiguity but a

Part Three: Horror Gothic

clear resolution at the end of the book's or series' narrative. This is also aided by the fact that the horrors and violence were instigated by monsters in the first place. It must also be noted that because there is no inclusion of sex or anything overtly sexual in *Lord Loss*, this has minimised what the young reader participants have discussed regarding boy-girl relationships. Beyond briefly speculating about the type of relationship between Uncle Dervish and his friend Meera, the young reader participants were more interested in Grubbs' reaction towards Meera teasing him and the age-difference in boy-girl relationships. But as noted, even with Shan deliberately not including sexuality in his text, hints of it has emerged in the form noted of Gret's naked body and hair smeared in blood, reminiscent of *Carrie* and even *Ginger Snaps*.

The teen readers' horror genre expectations were informed by what they had seen and watched previously in films and on television, suggesting that they expected more violence and thrills than were found in *Lord Loss*. Their responses also pointed to a desire for greater 'shock' value. This was indicated by them on at least three occasions: claiming that Grubbs should have become the werewolf instead of Bill-E, the expressed boredom during the narrative at the 'mental hospital' because there was no action sequence, and the suggestion for more dead bodies and a faster pace in order to make *Lord Loss* more appealing. Ultimately, what becomes obvious is that in a horror gothic book such as *Lord Loss* with its depiction of a teenaged protagonist who thwarts and vanquishes monsters, young readers are shown an appealing narrative which suggests self-sufficiency, if not mastery of key skills crucial for survival in a turbulent, chaotic world. Even if the teenaged protagonist has used a simple strategy of playing 'mind games', the fact that this strategy succeeds in achieving the desired outcome, was embraced enthusiastically by the young reader participants who offered their own instances of success with playing mind games, more often than not on adults.

As suggested, these eleven to thirteen year olds continue to surprise with their responses on horror gothic. Although my role as a facilitator in all the sessions has been more to manage the limited time allocated to me than to pump them for information, the possibility that my presence has an effect on the content and even direction of the discussions must be acknowledged. However the role as facilitator, it must be reiterated, has been more to encourage a further reflection, and this was often achieved by asking the question, 'Why?' which by its open-endedness, has led to elaborations and expanded explanations. Still, this must not negate the responses by these young readers on horror gothic. If anything,

their interrogation of the text indicates that their ability to process and understand explicit horror and violence in horror gothic is more developed and sophisticated than suggested by previous research.

In this section of Part Three, it is not hard to come to the conclusion that the young readers are finding comfort and confidence in their interrogation of Shan's horror gothic. Definitely, their gleeful explanation of how they would have eliminated problems and achieved goals in their own experience, triggered by the discussion of how the protagonist has vanquished the monster, is highly encouraging. This also offers a strong counter to some adult fears that explicit violence, bloodshed and trauma in horror gothic texts should be avoided for fear of young readers' inability to understand the fictional horrors depicted. In fact, horror gothic texts such as Darren Shan's *Demonata* series with the inclusion of explicit violence, grotesque descriptions and disgusting elements, are texts which can instead offer its targeted group of young readers something beneficial: a confrontation with the monstrous and horrific, along with the opportunity to vanquish the monster(s), thereby offering the young readers much comfort, satisfaction, and pleasure in eliminating the many horrors contained within the text.

Conclusion: The Comfort of Horror and the Ambiguities of Youth

Young readers of the gothic have uploaded a multitude of responses onto the internet, and these have ranged from persuasive writing which contains complex argument structures and countered rebuttals, parodies and satiric play, to time-delayed debates and discussions among themselves. This phenomenon, it must be emphasised, of young adult readers who can avidly interrogate books on the gothic, and comfortably and confidently share their opinions, is not new. To return to my Introduction, around 270 years ago, historical evidence shows at least two young (female) adult readers – Frances Grainger and Hester Mulso – whose wit and intelligence offer us prime examples of young readers critiquing and examining in detail the proto-gothic text, *Clarissa* by Samuel Richardson. Eighteenth-century documents even highlight the strength of Mulso's arguments in her correspondence with the author, and history, rightly credits Mulso for her influence on Richardson, leading him to re-edit and re-write a scene in the third edition of *Clarissa*.¹

It would, therefore, not be surprising if adult concerns and fears disappeared over time about young readers consuming texts belonging to the gothic genre. However, such concerns about the dangers posed by gothic texts persist, albeit couched in different words and in different contexts. I will not repeat the various adult fears and worries, which I have documented in previous chapters and which seem to be shared by both professional critics and academics about the reading choices of young readers of the gothic, and the young readers' perceived susceptibility to its persuasive and compelling narrative. Instead, this study has taken the perspective that adult concerns, fears and even anxiety towards young readers consuming the gothic are born out of sincere worries, which are mostly based on the implied young reader. In other words, notional fears regarding the influence of gothic texts on the behaviour of young readers. These fears, it must

¹ For more on Richardson's re-writing to minimise *Clarissa*'s portrayal as superstitious in his third edition of *Clarissa*, see Shirley Van Marter, 'Richardson's Debt to Hester Mulso Concerning the Curse in "Clarissa"', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 14 (1978), 22-31.

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be said, seem to periodically give rise to (adult) moral panic on the gothic. However, this need not be the case.

In my Introduction to this study, after acknowledging the historical cases of adult fears and moral panic directed at gothic texts, I offer a well-known eighteenth-century case-study, which presents a strong counter to adult fears of young readers being negatively influenced by novels which do not promote ‘an ideal version of the world by which the minds of “the young, the ignorant, and the idle” could be guided’.² By taking this historical perspective, I present actual, documented reminders that young, inquisitive minds have consumed the gothic, and fortunately, have not let their youth, or lack of experience stop them from making their voices heard in interrogating issues such as ethics and fairness in social contracts, and the reciprocity of familial duties and obligations, which adults, unfortunately even now, still perceived as outside their understanding or interests. These young readers in history (it can be inferred) seem to have taken great comfort and interest, if not pleasure, in offering their own youthful opinions on the gothic. More importantly, they offer historical insight that young readers, in spite of adult misgivings and fears, can and have actively interrogated a gothic text, and have not been misled, or gone astray due to their consumption of such texts. In addition, I also give compelling reasons why I am investigating two types of responses to the gothic, by first offering a definition for each type - romance gothic and horror gothic - which, not surprisingly, each has its own appeal for different groups of young readers.

From the start, I theorise that young readers of the gothic - romance gothic and horror gothic - seek comfort or have derived comfort from their consumption of the gothic texts. My primary investigation has therefore focussed on the different groups of young readers of romance gothic texts and horror gothic texts, where the goal has been to answer the key questions of what young readers actually discuss and debate (among themselves), and interrogate, when they consume gothic books from either category of romance gothic and horror gothic. As the chapters show, different groups of young readers and young adult readers of romance gothic and horror gothic texts have not just derived comfort from their consumption of these texts, they have offered generative responses - diverse

² The quote, cited by E. J. Clery, and Robert Miles, is by Samuel Johnson, and is part of Clery and Miles’ introduction to Johnson’s influential essay, *The Rambler No. 4* (1750), which ‘puts forward the general principle that fictional narratives should serve the role of instruction, offering an ideal version of the world by which the minds of the “young, the ignorant, and the idle” could be guided’. E. J. Clery, and Robert Miles eds. in *Gothic Documents: A Source Book 1700-1890* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000). p. 175.

responses on different topics based on the texts (first observed and defined in Part Two) – and depending on the types of gothic text, romance gothic or horror gothic, have either passionately embraced or gleefully vanquished the monster.

The Comfort of Romance Gothic

In Part One, given the well-documented criticisms by academics on romance gothic, I offer analyses of the various criticisms and reservations - some more nuanced than others – which are held by academics regarding young female readers' consumption of the *Twilight* books. In my analyses of books in the romance gothic genre, particularly on Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series, I demonstrate why the horizon of expectations for young readers may have changed by looking at data on print book sales prior to the publication of *Twilight*. I also discussed how Meyer's adoption and blend of both romance and gothic genres for her hybrid text have made them appealing to young readers. Meyer's hybrid text, it must be noted, includes certain tropes and motifs she has borrowed from adult romances, young adult (YA) romances, and YA realist novels, and what she has borrowed from more modern, and sympathetic depictions of the vampire, and other tropes from the gothic genre. By focussing first on critical concepts and theories, albeit taken from various fields in Part One, this focus offers critical insight on the interest shown by young adult readers towards the *Twilight* series of books and films.

The *Twilight* series' generic hybridity offered young readers many aspects to debate, discuss and share among like-minded peers. They argue, defend or persuade other readers to their own views. The comfort from reading romance gothic can be accrued in many different ways; and in Part Two, I discuss at length the different ways young adult and predominantly female readers have derived comfort from consuming them.

To iterate, the nurturing, tenderness and romance depicted in the *Twilight* series offer comfort to young readers. Even the familial love among the secondary characters such as members of the Cullen family was mentioned by young readers, as were the friendship, kindness and love evident in the Cullens strong family bonds. For the romance between Bella and Edward, where the latter prioritises Bella above everything else, this was seen positively and as a comfort for readers. The relationship is seen as genuine, and going beyond the superficial. Also, young female readers find it reassuring to read a popular book in which the narrative is focused on relationships, with the implication that

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relationships where emotions and actions indicate care, tenderness and nurturing are considered the most important in the text; of course, as noted, the gothic elements themselves amplify or magnify both the love and danger in the relationship. There are constant life and death situations. Hence gothic elements bring to the forefront the romance as well as the thrill (and danger) of Bella and Edward's relationship.

Secondly, and possibly due to adult censure or general disapproval (sometimes from peers), young readers find it especially comforting to share their insights and knowledge about *Twilight* with like-minded fellow readers. In fact, this has sometimes led to the comfort of being an insider or a member of a 'select' group of readers who are privy to shared knowledge about the books as opposed to the critical (usually adult) outsider (from the media) who may not have read the texts, or peers who only repeat negative views publicised in the media. For some, mutual interest in reading *Twilight* has sometimes become a comforting shared joke as readers pick on errors made by non-readers or poke fun at generalisations made of them. In tandem with this, readers also find it both comforting and reassuring to build on their knowledge of *Twilight* by discussing plot elements, characters and even discovering new ways of viewing certain scenes depicted in the books with other fans of *Twilight*. This indicates how the *Twilight* texts offer an invaluable platform for readers and fans alike, and equally for anti-fans, to confidently and comfortably find their own voice in stating their views, or performing for the public through websites, by proclaiming their allegiance as an insider/ supporter, or declaring their disdain for the books.

The *Twilight* books, I will assert, also provide an invaluable conceptual space for young people. As I have shown in Part Two, it does not matter if young readers support or absolutely detest the *Twilight* series. What is apparent though, is how the romance gothic texts offer a broad spectrum of issues and topics for young readers to argue, debate and proclaim to the world at large, encouraged no doubt by the many websites which sprang up during the height of *Twilight*'s popularity. This huge diversity in types of responses, on different topics and in various formats, has led to the idea of 'generative responses' which have been triggered by Meyer's romance gothic texts.

More importantly for the many young readers and young adult readers, the *Twilight* series of books and films offer a comforting space to share and/or rebut opinions. As noted about certain responses by young readers, the *Twilight* texts have even encouraged them to comfortably and confidently state their opinions and adopt persuasive strategies and complex argument structures which are

typically used by professional writers, to strengthen their own case or to object at unnecessary plot additions in the *Twilight* series.

Not just seeking comfort by reading about the love and nurturance depicted in the *Twilight* series, young readers have also sought comfort in discussing various aspects of the personal, social and familial domains which have resonated with them. Important themes such as ethical concerns also play a part in contemporary young reception, although for the *Twilight* series, discussions revolve around the merits of Bella and Edward's relationship, and Bella's friendship with Jacob, among others. The positions taken on different issues as well as the various refutations by young readers are certainly not indicative of young passive minds likely to confuse gothic fiction with reality, even with realist sections depicted in the series.

Primarily due to the comforting space provided by the friendly discussions about *Twilight*, young readers have also comfortably expanded their online conversations in a wide variety of topics, both in their posts and in their meta-responses to other posts. Besides responding to *Twilight* with their own insights and viewpoints, young readers have also felt comfortable enough to share their fears and insecurities; although as noted, these concerns tend to be feminocentric fears such as books which seem to appeal only to females. Both types of responses, I assert, indicate the openness provided by the conceptual space that *Twilight* books offer to young readers, as well as the comfort which young readers have derived from consuming the books; and more importantly, have motivated them to respond and upload their opinions onto the web for public consumption. Undoubtedly, young readers have derived comfort and confidence in consuming romance gothic texts; even better, the comfort and confidence from consuming the romance gothic texts, have led them to post their highly personal responses to Meyer's *Twilight* series.

The Comfort of Horror Gothic

Prior to looking at actual responses to horror gothic, I offer in Part Three discussions of contemporary horror gothic texts targeted at young readers where monsters are always vanquished at the end with no ambiguity about their possible return because monsters are always categorically defeated, and also the avoidance of sex or anything sexual. However, as discussed, allusions to sex or sexuality may still be present as seen from the lens of the monstrous feminine

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which have been theorised on adults, though, I would suggest, not necessarily applicable to young readers.

For responses to horror gothic, which was obtained through fieldwork, the interactive nature of the two discussion and reading groups offer greater spontaneity than the more measured online responses by *Twilight* readers. Comprising twenty three young readers between the ages of eleven and thirteen from two local schools, these young reader participants read and discussed Darren Shan's book *Lord Loss*, the first book in his horror gothic *Demonata* series.

For these two groups of young student participants, it became apparent there was much comfort and satisfaction in their ability to offer views and opinions on *Lord Loss*, particularly when backed accurately with specific examples. These young students' responses suggest comfort and confidence in discussing and debating issues and concerns which have been magnified in Shan's horror gothic text. Their comfort became even more evident when they offered interpretational responses, and drew analogies to their own experience, either as a contrast, or to show other options that they would have taken based on scenes in *Lord Loss*. By sometimes contributing highly personal information, incongruous statements, or far-fetched scenarios, these young readers were indicating not just their enjoyment and comfort, but confidence in reading and responding to the grotesque, violence and disgusting elements in Shan's horror gothic text.

To reiterate, both groups of students, through the recursive nature of their discussions, indicated their disbelief and fascination at the weirdness and disgusting depiction of the use of rat guts as punishment for a sibling. The young readers also seem to take delight, if not comfort in distancing themselves from aberrant behaviours (including smoking), either depicted or alluded to in the horror gothic text, though embellishments and hyperboles in their discussions suggest that they were also happily performing for their peers (and me) too. Given the breadth of topics discussed, the young readers were offering their own generative responses based on Horror Gothic, akin to the generative responses for Romance Gothic.

As the discussions took place during school hours within school premises, it was inevitable that discussions on *Lord Loss* often focused on familiar topics such as school life, homework and what they have learnt from their own English lessons. Thus when offering opinions on *Lord Loss*, the students mentioned the plot and literary conventions used, commented on the pace, and even Shan's use of

foreshadowing in the horror gothic text. Although the use of literary terms in the conversations sometimes seem to suggest the students were ventriloquizing their teachers, the appropriateness of their use also highlights the young readers' ability to apply critical thinking skills, as noted in Part Three. The young respondents were also eager to stress the importance of certain codes of behaviour; a topic which is not surprising given that these students are at the threshold of symbolic adulthood, with its own established (and implicit) rules and guidelines on socially accepted behaviour.

The students' enjoyment seemed greatest when discussing the master demon Lord Loss being vanquished by the teenage protagonist Grubbs. After having identified and labelled the psychological trickery used by Grubbs to defeat the monster as 'mind games', the young readers were happily explaining how mind games have been used by them, at home and in school. By confidently making assertions about their use of 'mind games', and by offering specific examples from their own lives, the students' discussion lead one to infer that they view themselves as possessing the same requisite skill set of the teenage protagonist, but none of his weaknesses or frailties.

By the final stage of the discussion groups, these students were no longer discussing aspects of *Lord Loss* but giving suggestions for improvements to Shan's horror gothic plot, such as making Grubbs the werewolf instead of Bill-E; including more dead bodies so as to make the text less boring and more frightening; and deleting portions which lingered too long on narration which did nothing for the plot. In short, these young students were not only actively and comfortably making their own recommendations for various improvements to *Lord Loss*, they seem to want to re-write Shan's horror gothic text. According to them, this is due to the fact that Shan has not included sufficient violence and bloodshed to frighten or scare them, which a horror gothic text is expected to. Therefore, the young reader participants confidently assert, *Lord Loss* may be a more suitable 'read' for much younger readers, precisely because these younger readers (unlike them), will be scared and frightened by the book.

In comfortably making suggestions and changes, even ones which would have markedly altered the plot, these students were deriving much fun and enjoyment from critiquing Shan's horror gothic text. As if to emphasise their own comfort and confidence in responding to horror gothic, these young readers were clearly indicating that horror gothic texts such as *Lord Loss* (which has been written with them in mind) hold no particular terrors or horrors for them. Clearly, these young

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readers had no difficulty interrogating and critiquing the text, or processing and understanding the explicit violence, grotesque and disgusting elements in *Lord Loss*. After all, as their responses suggest, they will have no problem comfortably defeating the monsters themselves.

Embracing or Vanquishing Monsters: The Comfort of Horror

In my investigation on how young readers have responded to two very different types of gothic genres, I have argued and demonstrated how these different groups of readers have confidently and comfortably interrogated the two types of gothic genres – romance gothic and horror gothic. Not surprisingly, two types of monsters are depicted, and as discussed, these supernatural beings elicit markedly different responses: one response is to cherish these monsters/supernatural beings as romantic partners/allies, or to treat them as threats or dangers which must be eliminated. As I have shown, the young readers and young adult readers have no problem interpreting both sets of texts, and neither do they have problems critiquing the texts, and differentiating fantasy/ fiction from fact. In all these responses, there is no sign suggesting that they are being misled, misguided or being negatively influenced by the compelling narratives of both gothic genres.

However, some academics still seem to view these gothic texts in a negative light because these texts do not provide didactic value of any sort, at least of the sort offered by *Little Women* as suggested by some. In spite of young readers' exposure to a variety of films, TV series and other mass media messages, academics still advocate, sometimes hopefully, about the need for certain positive messages to be presented to young readers in their reading material, even for leisure. Although not focussing on monsters and their ilk in horror for young readers, Kimberley Reynolds, who has published widely on literature for children and young readers, still strikes a cautionary note on 'frightening fiction', particularly on narratives which concentrate on 'future impacts of science and technology'. She writes,

'I believe that we need to think very carefully about the kinds of messages such stories convey to young people. As Marina Warner has pointed out, "Children's literature...writes the future, and this has given it its deep affinity with fantasy, fairy tale, romance, and other wishing, emancipatory mode which can branch in imaginative and surprising ways" (2005, 27). We need to be sure... we are not limiting the capacity of children's literature to be emancipatory, imaginative and surprising – qualities

future thinkers will need to shape a world better than the one they have inherited.³

However, if we take Reynolds as representing the majority view of most adults, are we, in truth, expecting too much, and putting too much pressure on young readers to choose wisely even to read for pleasure? Or, for that matter, placing unnecessary obligation on writers of YA fiction, and educators to ensure that content in fiction should be ‘emancipatory, imaginative and surprising’?⁴ For concerned parents and educators who firmly believe that reading material should be positive, if not possessing some forms of didactic value, my research suggests a more nuanced or mixed outcome for them. I am referring specifically to the temporary influence or effects that the gothic books seem to have on young readers.

As noted, responses by young readers show them changing their views about the books as time passed, with further self-reflection and discussions with friends among the reasons cited for the switch or change in opinions held. Even if young readers continue to hold on to certain views, data from neurological studies on brain morphology, particularly from advances in fMRI, show the brain’s plasticity (mentioned in Part Three) in which the brain is constantly developing, thereby suggesting effects on these young readers are only temporary. This may allay fears or worries which adults hold of long-term effects on these young readers from reading romance gothic or horror gothic texts.

Along with the many positive findings from this research, it would be remiss of me not to point out that this study has not investigated the responses of young readers which track them over a longer span of time, based on their accumulated reading of gothic texts. Although given increasing concerns about literacy in the UK educational system, this intensive reading on gothic texts may not be an overriding issue. To paraphrase Janice Radway, reading gothic books may be a ‘profoundly complex activity centred upon a profoundly contested form’, and yet,

³ Kimberley Reynolds, ‘Frightening Fiction: Beyond Horror’, *New Review of Children’s Literature and Librarianship*, 11 (2005), 151-61. (p. 160).

⁴ I am referring, of course, to those who view *Little Women* as the standard ideal reading material for young readers, and thus would probably not view romance gothic or horror gothic texts for young readers as ‘emancipatory, imaginative and surprising’; or at least ‘imaginative’ in a positive sense.

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I would assert, the comfort and confidence, if not the enjoyment that such reading brings may be a worthwhile activity for young readers.⁵

Also, even though findings of this study point to reading gothic texts as something positive and even empowering for young readers, my data has been based on what young readers themselves have chosen to post online for romance gothic (hence self-selective); and also what young readers, (who have been selected by their teachers), have chosen to share in their discussions on horror gothic. As such, it must be emphasised that findings from this research should not be generalised to the wider population of young readers. Nonetheless, I would argue that this research still offers useful data, previously unavailable, on what gothic texts offer to young readers and how readers have responded to them.

Therefore, if we focus on young readers' responses, particularly on how gothic texts seem to encourage a generative response, a different picture is revealed which suggests a re-consideration of how young readers are perceived in their reception towards gothic texts. At the very least, youth reception towards gothic texts should be viewed positively: evidence shows that young readers have carved out their own unique (albeit transient) conceptual space in which they have derived great comfort and enjoyment in consuming gothic works, and in responding to these texts they have further extended their discussions by sharing with others and seeking like-minded readers. By sharing their opinions online and in discussion groups, these young readers have offered us a glimpse of how they are creating opportunities to discover their own voice in embracing or defeating the monster in the comfort of consuming horror.

⁵ Radway's original phrase is about romance reading which she calls a 'profoundly conflicted activity centred upon a profoundly conflicted form'. Janice Radway in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984, 1991). p. 14.

Appendix 1 – The Twilight Saga in about Two minutes by LucyM

The Twilight Saga in About Two Minutes 📌 (online and print form)

By [LucyM](#), Kent, OH

The author's comments:

“Don't flame, dudes. That's seriously lame. Feel free to film, just credit me in the credits and let me know if you're making a movie so I can check it out.”

[BELLA and EDWARD are onstage. EDWARD is staring over his shoulder like a creeper at BELLA.]

BELLA: Are you a vampire?

EDWARD: No! Yes...

[BELLA whirls around to face EDWARD.]

BELLA: I love you.

EDWARD: I love you too.

[They kiss. JAMES enters and stands menacingly behind BELLA.]

BELLA: Help! I'm in danger!

[EDWARD punches JAMES. JAMES falls and is no longer onstage. The pair kiss again.]

EDWARD: I love you. I don't love you. I have to go now.

BELLA: Aww.

[EDWARD exits. JACOB enters.]

JACOB: I love you too.

BELLA: Yay!

[They embrace. EDWARD rushes back in.]

EDWARD: Hey, get away from my girl!

JACOB: Or what?

[Michael Jackson music plays, preferably 'Thriller.']

EDWARD and JACOB in UNISON: Dance off!

[They dance for a short time before BELLA interjects.]

BELLA: Stop it! Can't you see- my eggo is preggo!

Appendix 1

EDWARD: Yay!

JACOB: (with intensity) I am in love your child! [awkward pause] Hey, isn't there something about the Volturi?

EDWARD: Yeah, but that was anti-climactic.

BELLA: Nothing happened. Edward! Please! Kill me so I can live forever!

EDWARD: (looks doubtful) Okay.

[EDWARD pulls out a gun and shoots her. She collapses to the ground;

JACOB face-palms.]

JACOB: I think she meant "bite me."

EDWARD: Oh.

[EDWARD bites BELLA.]

BELLA: (rising with arms outstretched) I'm aliiiiive!

[RENESME, preschool aged, runs out from behind her.]

RENESME: I'm your daughter!

ALL: Yay!

[Cut to scene of the four skipping through a field with "Happy Together" by the Turtles playing. EDWARD, already shiny, takes his shirt off and blinds everyone with his whiteness. Music abruptly cuts off.]

EDWARD: Oops.

End credits.

This article has 1783 comments. **Post your own now!**

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Source: **LucyM**, 'The Twilight Saga in About Two Minutes' in *Teen Ink*,
http://www.teenink.com/fiction/fan_fiction/article/136169/The-Twilight-Saga-in-About-Two-Minutes/, n.d., [accessed 10 March 2015].

Appendix 2 – Mark Oshiro’s Twilight Contents

Page and Heading (for 13 Chapters)

Heading for each post	Brief explanation accompanying each post
Preface/ Chapt1: First Sight	In which I regrettably begin to read <i>Twilight</i> and it’s clear I’m going to hate every moment of this.
Chapter 2: Open Book	In which Mark realizes very early how unrealistic and creepy this book is by the second chapter.
Chapter 3: Phenomenon	In which Mark is irritated by a literary/movie trope he deems, The “I Am Going To Do Something Spectacular And Clearly Attention-Grabbing In Front Of Plenty Of People, Yet No One Is Going To Notice Except (Conveniently) The Main Character” Phenomenon. (sic.)
Chapter 4: Invitations	In which Mark claims that if he hadn’t publicly committed to reading this entire series, he would give up right here if he could. And part of me wishes I could reach back in time and stop myself. <i>BREAKING DAWN</i> , DUDE. <i>BREAKING DAWN.</i> (sic.)
Chapter 5: Bloodtype	In which Mark deviates (the first time) from a traditional review to write <i>Twilight: An Act In Multiple Parts</i> . I knew when I started this project that people would get bored by me yelling and whining and ranting, so I had to come up with ways to get my ideas across in different ways. This idea was spawned because I’d been reading Edward Albee the night before.
Chapter 6: Scary Stories	In which Mark writes a fake deposition that gives evidence of Bella’s manipulative tendencies, and

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	then she ruins all your pleasant thoughts. For the record, that court deposition is SO SO SO SO SO STRANGE (sic.) I have no idea what I was thinking when I wrote it.
Chapter 7: Nightmares	In which Mark declares this book as the very worst book ever almost entirely based on how Bella surfs the Internet, and then learns that she gets emo over Linkin Park. This is AWFUL (sic.).
Chapter 8: Port Angeles	In which Mark composes two letters, as Bella and Edward, to Stephenie Meyer, asking her WTF IS GOING ON (sic.).
Chapter 9: Theory	In which Mark writes the creepiest review of all time by creating a fake coroner's report for his death by Twilight. That is actually a copy of a form the LA County Coroner used at one point; I'm not sure if it's still up-to-date. And yes, it's just as creepy for me to read that as it is for you.
Chapter 10: Interrogations	In which Mark gets all SRS BSNS for a second, but then dies laughing when he learns that Edward eats mountain lions.
Chapter 11: Complications	In which Mark uses his handwritten notes to narrate the events of this awful, awful chapter.
Chapter 12: Balancing	In which Mark reviews the entire chapter using only two images.
Chapter 13: Confessions	In which Mark reaches THAT chapter in the series where Edward reveals he is a vampire who sparkles in the sun. Oh, and it's part II of the play format. Jesus, this is so bad.

Source: 'Complete Mark Reads Twilight Archive', in *Markreads*, <<http://markreads.net/reviews/2010/11/complete-mark-reads-twilight-archive/>>, 17 November 2010, [accessed 12 March 2015].

Appendix 3 – Reading and Discussion Groups

- 3.1 Gaining access to young students in the UK**
- 3.2 Use of SoundScriber for transcribing the taped discussions**
- 3.3 University Approval and Comments from Ethics Committee**
- 3.4 Joint Consent Form**

3.1 Gaining access to young students in the UK

Access to the two schools in south England was due to my on-going volunteer work with a faith-based organisation, which I was introduced to by the Catholic Student Society of the University of Southampton (CathSoc), of which I was a fairly active member. Volunteering with the organisation was done in two stages. Paperwork and recommendations from my home country was first sought in order for the organisation to complete its due process and checks on the background of all its new volunteers. After that, the organisation sponsored my Enhanced Disclosure Barring Checks (DBS) certificate (formerly called the Criminal Records Bureau [CRB] certificate) which is the compulsory government requirement for any adult working with underage students or minors in the UK. A half-day training for volunteers was then organised at university premises. Training included updates on UK health and safety regulations, compulsory information about the accepted code of conduct when interacting with underage students, as well as the purpose and objectives of the organisation's outreach programmes.

From previous visits to schools, one can already infer that gaining admission and access to students in schools is impossible without prior links or connection. In addition, checks and safety precautions in schools have only increased with additional measures added over the past three years, according to the regional coordinator of the organisation. Schools therefore need compelling reasons to justify allowing access to their students, and to answer or allay any parental concerns. In short strong support from both the faith-based organisation and the school was needed before my fieldwork could be conducted.

The regional coordinator of the faith-based organisation, a former teacher, was open to my fieldwork of conducting research by having reading and discussion groups in schools. Through the organisation's links, I was duly informed that two

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schools might be receptive to my research proposal because of the 'close working relationship' with the schools' respective pastoral department. However, my research was still subject to approval by their respective Head Teachers. After informal links had been first established regarding my study (between the Pastoral Head of department and the organisation's regional coordinator) plus the fact that I had been helping with each school's pastoral programme, I was then introduced to the Head Teacher of Malory School, and Head of English of Towers School. There was no issue conducting my research thereafter. Given all the prior steps, arrangements and links that had to be first established before I mooted my research proposal, the delays and possible difficulties (which I managed to avoid through extreme good luck and connection) may deter other foreign researchers from conducting fieldwork in local schools in the UK.

3.2 Use of SoundScriber for transcribing the taped discussions

Unlike what gets depicted in Hollywood films about machines that can separate different voices from a recording at a touch of the button, university researchers in the UK have to rely on traditional methods such as listening multiple times, or as many times as needed, in order to separate who says what and when. As noted in Part Three, young students do talk over each other and employ rapid speech. Advanced software on speech recognition and transcription are, unfortunately, not widely available to lowly student researchers. As some voices sound similar when played back even at reduced speed, those speech segments when transcribed do not have names: hence the need to also identify the time, when someone says something which has been adopted in this research i.e. Malory School, Session 2: 14-17 for location, which session, the minute of recording when the conversation or discussion takes place. Fortunately, most of the recordings have yielded useful data with quite accurate identification of voices to students. As noted about the many hours of listening in order to transcribe, fortunately, voices and patterns of speech become more readily identifiable over time. Nonetheless, this researcher believes that professional transcribers are a brave and valiant group of professionals.

3.3 University Approval and Comments from Ethics Committee

Submission Number 14576:

This email is to confirm that the amendment request to your ethics form (The Comfort of Horror and the Ambiguities of Youth - Reception of Horror stories and films by young audiences/ readers (Amendment 1)) has been approved by the Ethics Committee.

You can begin your research unless you are still awaiting specific Health and Safety approval (e.g. for a Genetic or Biological Materials Risk Assessment)

Comments

1.Thanks for your submission to ERGO, which I received yesterday. It looks as if you've planned the proposed research very carefully so this looks fine to approve (just note in terms of the start date that retrospective approval cannot be given). Good luck with your research! Michael

3.4 Joint Consent Form

Due to the students' age, the consent form was created to include the signatures of both parent and student. Also, students were informed to follow carefully the instructions such as to 'initial the boxes' (and not to tick) and to ensure their parents did the same. These additional checks were made to ensure ethical guidelines were followed: respondents should carefully read the statements, and by initialling the box as instructed, this implies careful reading (it is hoped).



JOINT CONSENT FORM – 1: 52015

Study title:**The Comfort of Horror and the Ambiguities of Youth**
 ~~~~~

**Researcher name:** Sumei Karen Anne Tan  
**Staff/Student number:**25768204  
**ERGO reference number:**14576

STUDENT:

*Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):*

- I have read and understood the information sheet (May: Version 52015) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

☐
- I agree to take part in this research project, to allow my response to be recorded and my data used for the purpose of this study.

☐
- I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected.

☐

*Data Protection*  
*I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.*

Name of participant (print name).....

Signature of participant.....

Date.....

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Please turn over for consent from parent or guardian:



PARENTAL/ GUARDIAN CONSENT:

*Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):*

I have read and understood the information sheet (May: Version 52015) given to my child/ charge.

☐

I agree to allow my child/ charge to take part in this research project, to allow her/ his response to be recorded and data used for the purpose of this study.

☐

I understand that her/ his participation is voluntary and I may withdraw my consent at any time without our legal rights being affected.

☐

*Data Protection*

*I understand that information collected during participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.*

Name of parent/ guardian (print name).....

Signature .....

Date.....



## Appendix 4 – Facilitator Sheet (List of Questions)

### *Lord Loss* by Darren Shan

NB: These questions are only to be used as a guide as students' own discussion and direction are crucial (not facilitator's).

1. at p. 11  
(Grubb's mother is 'screaming at the top of her lungs, blue bloody murder' because he was caught smoking. He finds out it is because his sister tattled on him and his revenge is to put rat guts on her bath towel. She accidentally smears herself with rat blood, gore and guts.)
    - a) **What happened in school?**
    - b) **Does anyone want to say something about Grubs' own form of revenge against his sister?**
    - c) **In real life, do you think these incidents will ever happen – tattling about smoking, mother's strong reaction; Grubb's revenge? Why?**
  
  2. pp. 33 – 44: The mystery of Grubb's escape and his family's murder by the 3 demons – Lord Loss, Vein, Artery;  
'Parents – dead. Sister- dead. All alone in the world. Face to face with demons. No idea who we are or why we're here...You don't know, do you Grubitsch? Nobody ever explained, or told you the story of Lonely Lord Loss?' (p. 36)
    - a) **Why do you think there is so much description about the house and the chase?**
    - b) **What would you do, if faced in this situation? Why?**
  
  3. Pain and loss: pp. 45 – 60 – Grubbs has recovered and stays with different relatives but has difficulty blending in with his new family (before Uncle Dervish).
    - a) **Why is Grubbs having difficulty staying with his relatives?**
    - b) **Whose fault is it – is anyone to blame?**
-

**c) Is this fair on Grubbs?**

---

4. Recovery and staying at Carcery Vale and a new friend Bill-E pp. 60 – 100
    - a) Is this section important to the story?
    - b) What role does Bill-E play in the story? (bff, brother, cousin)
    - c) Is Bill-E's relationship important? Why?
  5. New mystery pp. 101 – 130 & pp. 133 – 165 – Dervish is suspected to be a werewolf but werewolf is revealed to be Bill-E
    - a) At this stage, what is your take on Grubbs?
    - b) Has Grubbs moved on from his earlier personal loss?
    - c) We talked about Bill-E, what role do you think Grubb plays in the relationship? Is it an equal one?
- 
6. Puzzle 1 – pp. 166 – 196 – the family secret – old and new
    - a) Should Grubbs' parents have told him the family secret?
    - b) Should Grubbs' mother have made the choice to be the partner in the fight instead of Uncle Dervish?
    - c) Uncle Dervish is very careful about placing blame – he does not blame anyone. Is that usual? What do you think is the typical reaction?
  7. The Challenge pp. 199 –

'They're testing you...if they can drive you insane, I'll have nobody to protect me from Artery and Vein' (p. 216)

'My wits and chess skills are no match for Lord Loss's. ..What if I can compete with him in an emotional level and undermine him that way?' (p. 238).

    - a) How is the fight played out? What happens first?
    - b) What do you think of Grubbs' strategy? Why does it work and does this outcome fit the story?
    - c) That Grubbs succeeded when his parents failed; what does that tell you about him?

8. The ending: 'The look on your face!' My uncle says.  
And grins. (p. 264)

- a) The story ends on a high note. Would you prefer a different ending?
- b) This story has a lot of descriptions of loss, blood and gory bits – is this popular/ suitable for young readers like yourself?
- c) This book is classified as horror – what makes a book, a 'good horror' story? Characters, plot, gore, etc?





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