



Encoding and Decoding the Vampire Identity in Twilight From Monster to Hum

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Abstract

This paper examines the transformation of the vampire figure from a monstrous to a human figure in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* (2005). This study examines how Meyer encodes vampires as moral, restrained, and socially integrated beings within contemporary cultural contexts, and how readers decode these representations in light of Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding model. Edward Cullen's hybrid identity as both predator and protector, Bella Swan's desire for transformation, and the Cullen family's integration into suburban domesticity are highlighted in the analysis. The Hall model illustrates the polysemy of audience readings - dominant, negotiated, and oppositional - while Zanger's framework illustrates how vampires have evolved from metaphorical symbols of monstrosity to metonymic symbols embedded in everyday life. The study argues that *Twilight* (2005) illustrates the humanization of the vampire and its role as a cultural mirror that shows and reflects anxieties about gender, morality, adolescence, and identity. By demonstrating that vampire narratives remain vital sites for negotiating cultural meanings in the twenty-first century, the findings contribute to interdisciplinary scholarship on Gothic and popular culture.

Key Terms: Vampire, Twilight, Encoding/Decoding, Stuart Hall, Jules Zanger, Metaphor, Metonymy, Cultural Studies, Young Adult Literature, Gender, Identity, Monstrosity, Domestication, Reader Reception, Gothic Literature.

من وحش إلى إنسان- ترميز وفك هوية مصاص الدماء في رواية "الشفق"

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الملخص:

تناقش هذه الورقة البحثية تحول شخصية مصاص الدماء من وحش إلى إنسان في رواية "الشفق" لستيفاني ماير (2005). وتبحث في كيفية ترميز ماير لمصاصي الدماء ككائنات أخلاقية، مقيدة، ومندمجة اجتماعيًا في السياقات الثقافية المعاصرة، وكيف يفك القراء هذه التمثيلات في ضوء نموذج ستيوارت هول للترميز/فك الترميز. يُسلط التحليل الضوء على هوية إدوارد كولين الهجينة كمفترس وحامي في آن واحد، ورغبة بيلا سوان في التحول، واندماج عائلة كولين في الحياة المنزلية الضواحي. يُظهر نموذج هول تعدد معاني قراءات الجمهور - المهيمنة، والمتفاوض عليها، والمعارضة - بينما يُوضّح إطار زانجر كيف تطور مصاصو الدماء من رموز مجازية للوحشية إلى رموز مجازية متأصلة في الحياة اليومية. تجادل الدراسة بأن فيلم "الشفق" (2005) يُظهر إضفاء الطابع الإنساني على مصاص الدماء ودوره كمرآة ثقافية تُظهر وتعكس المخاوف المتعلقة بالجنس والأخلاق والمراهقة والهوية. ومن خلال إثبات أن سرديات مصاصي الدماء لا تزال مواقع



حيوية للتفاوض على المعاني الثقافية في القرن الحادي والعشرين، تُسهم النتائج في الدراسات متعددة التخصصات حول الثقافة القوطية والشعبية.
المصطلحات الأساسية: مصاص الدماء، الشفق، التشفير/ فك التشفير، ستيوارت هول، جولز زانجر، الاستعارة، المجاز، الدراسات الثقافية، أدب الشباب، الجنس، الهوية، الوحشية، التدجين، استقبال القارئ، الأدب القوطي.

1. Introduction

As a symbol of fear, death, and cultural anxieties, the vampire figure has long occupied a central place in world folklore and literature. From its folkloric roots in Eastern Europe to its codification in Gothic literature, the vampire has evolved from a demonic predator to a complex literary symbol. As a result of shifting societal values and cultural concerns, this transformation has taken place. Several nineteenth-century works, including John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), portrayed vampires as terrifying beings. In Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), vampires are recast as emotional beings experiencing conflict. In the twenty-first century, Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* (2005) revolutionized the vampire narrative by portraying vampires as romantic, moral, and socially integrated characters. In light of this radical shift in representation, it is necessary to conduct scholarly research into the encoded meanings within vampire texts as well as the methods by which readers decode these meanings.

As part of this study, we analyze how the vampire's identity changes from monstrous to human in Meyer's *Twilight* (2005). Using Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding theory (1973, 1997), this study examines how Meyer encodes the vampire as both predator and moral subject and how audiences decode this figure, considering contemporary cultural contexts.

2. Purpose of the Study

The research discusses how the author encodes his or her ideas about the character of bloodsuckers and how readers decode the social identities of vampires in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* (2005). The study aims to illustrate that the meaning of literary texts is not predetermined or fixed, but rather dynamically constructed through the processes of production and reception, as outlined in Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding theory (1997). In *Twilight*, Meyer included the vampire figure as both human and monstrous, incorporating cultural values of morality, self-



restraint, romance, and belonging into the characterization of Edward Cullen and the Cullen family.

The decoding process uncovers other potential interpretations. Depending on their cultural context, personal values, and gendered perspectives, readers interpret Edward and Bella's relationship in different ways. Dominant readings may present Edward as a romantic hero, negotiated readings may affirm the romance while criticizing its patriarchal implications, and oppositional readings may reject the narrative's reinforcement of restrictive gender norms.

In this study, the researcher will discuss more about the understanding of the construction and interpretation of the social identity of vampires in *Twilight* by utilizing Hall's framework. This underscores the wider cultural relevance of vampire fiction in addressing concerns related to identity, puberty, morality, and desire. The analysis shows how the time and place of a work of literature affect it and how readers help create meaning by decoding it.

3. Research Questions

1. How does Meyer encode the vampire figure in *Twilight* (2005) as both monstrous and human?
2. How do readers decode Edward Cullen's identity?
3. How does Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding theory illuminate interpretations of Meyer's vampires?
4. How does Zanger's metaphor–metonymy thesis manifest in *Twilight*?

4. Literature Review

• Vampire Studies: From Folklore to Gothic Canon

The vampire originates from Eastern European legend, serving as a rationale for epidemic disease, societal deviance, and the anxiety around incorrect burial practices. In the nineteenth century, John William Polidori's short prose narrative *The Vampyre* (1819) introduces the aristocratic, alluring predator in English literature, while Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) solidifies a compilation of characteristics—nocturnality, sanguinary consumption, contagion fears, and xenophobic "otherness"—that establish the Gothic vampire in the cultural consciousness (Polidori, 1819; Stoker, 1897). These basic works depict the vampire as a metaphysical menace, highlighting its deformity rather than its interiority.



- **Humanizing the Vampire: Late-Twentieth-Century Revisions**

Twentieth-century revisions adapt the representation from metaphorical monstrosity to psychological depth. Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) is seminal, redefining the vampire as a conscious being grappling with moral dilemmas, sorrow, and longing. The novel's first-person narrator emphasizes self-reflexivity and ethical conflict, therefore presenting a subjectivity that readers may interpret as tragic rather than merely predatory (Rice, 1976). Critical analyses indicate that this transition facilitates the genre's embrace of empathy and melodrama, paving the way for the social integration of the millennial vampire (Piatti-Farnell & Brien, 2020).

- **Metaphor → Metonymy: Rethinking the Monster's Semiotics**

Zanger's seminal theory, 'Metaphor into Metonymy,' posits that the contemporary vampire is demythologized: "no longer a distant, allegorical symbol of malevolence but a quasi-human neighbor whose preoccupations align with quotidian social existence." Zanger (1997) asserts that "the vampire is now not the foreigner from beyond, but the familiar next door, whose dilemmas mirror our own" (p. 19). This semiotic transition, from metaphor (transcendent, otherworldly significations) to metonymy (contiguity within the social sphere), elucidates *Twilight's* suburban environments, school hallways, and family meals as contexts where vampirism coexists with conventional institutions. Rickels (1999) similarly characterizes the vampire as a "recyclable mass-media icon," highlighting how popular culture encodes the figure for repeated consumption and emotional projection.

- **Encoding/Decoding and Reader Response**

Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the circulation of meanings in cultural texts: producers encode preferred meanings, which audiences decode through dominant, negotiated, or oppositional perspectives (Hall, 1973; Hall, 1997). Hall (1973) asserts that "there is no necessary correspondence between encoding and decoding" and that audiences "may decode the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded, or they may substitute alternative frameworks of interpretation" (p. 8). In *Twilight*, the favored code elevates self-discipline, romantic exclusivity, and moral citizenship; negotiated interpretations may embrace the romance while challenging its gendered imbalances; oppositional interpretations critique the normalization of surveillance, control, and disparities in age between immortals and humans. This concept aligns with reception-oriented research of young adult audiences, who



actively engage with texts for identity formation rather than passively consuming them.

- **Gender, Sexuality, and Morality**

The literature on gender in vampire fiction highlights how the creature's erotic economy reflects cultural worries around female agency and desire. Critics trace a progression from Stoker's perilous, "contagious" femininity to Meyer's re-domesticated romance, highlighting a shift from the surveillance of female sexuality to its governance through consensual chastity tales (Piatti-Farnell & Brien, 2020; Overstreet, 2006). In *Twilight*, Bella's yearning is both highlighted and limited by Edward's abstinence principle, resulting in conflicting interpretations that view the text as either empowering restraint or reinforcing paternalistic protection.

5. Methodology

This study applies the framework of cultural studies to examine how the vampire's social identity is constructed and interpreted in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* (2005). The analysis employs Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding theory (1973, 1997) to explore how Meyer encodes vampires as moral, humanized figures and how readers decode these representations through dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings.

Two methods guide the research:

Textual Analysis: A close reading of *Twilight* identifies themes, motifs, and characterizations—particularly Edward Cullen and the Cullen family—that encode morality, restraint, and belonging.

Content Analysis: The study situates the narrative within cultural contexts of adolescence, gender, and morality, examining how these values shape and are reflected in the text.

Additionally, Jules Zanger's (1997) metaphor–metonymy thesis informs the analysis by highlighting the shift from vampires as allegorical monsters to domesticated figures embedded in everyday life. Combining Hall's and Zanger's approaches allows this research to capture both the encoding strategies of the text and the interpretive practices of readers, situating *Twilight* as a cultural mirror of contemporary anxieties and desires.



6. Theoretical Framework

• Cultural Studies and the Vampire Figure

Cultural studies offer a comprehensive framework for this research, highlighting how cultural texts both mirror and influence social realities. According to Stuart Hall (1997), representation transcends the reflection of reality; it involves the creation of meaning through language, images, and discourse. The vampire archetype, as a persistent cultural construct, encapsulates evolving worries over mortality, gender, sexuality, and ethics. In this regard, vampires function as symbolic texts that audiences interpret variably according on social status, historical circumstance, and cultural background.

• Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model

Stuart Hall's foundational Encoding/Decoding model (1973) challenges linear communication theories by asserting that media producers encode texts with prevailing meanings, although these texts are susceptible to negotiated and oppositional interpretations by audiences. The model delineates three principal positions:

- Dominant-hegemonic interpretation: viewers interpret the intended meaning as envisioned by the producer.
- Negotiated reading: audiences embrace certain aspects of the prevailing meaning while contesting or reinterpreting others.
- Oppositional reading: audiences dismiss the prevailing encoding, generating counter-readings based on divergent beliefs.

In *Twilight*, Meyer characterizes Edward Cullen as a virtuous, celibate, and idealized vampire. Readers may interpret this in dominant terms (celebrating Edward as an idealized lover), in negotiated ways (accepting the relationship while fighting the gender dynamics), or oppositionally (critiquing Edward as a domineering figure that embodies problematic ideas). Hall's methodology enables this study to delineate the diverse audience reactions to the identical encoded picture.



- **Jules Zanger: From Metaphor to Metonymy**

Jules Zanger's essay "Metaphor into Metonymy: *The Vampire Next Door*" (1997) offers an alternative semiotic perspective. Zanger contends that early vampire literature portrays the creature symbolically, serving as transcendent representations of death, disease, or malevolence. In contrast, contemporary vampire novels recontextualize the figure metonymically, situating vampires inside recognizable, quotidian settings. In *Twilight*, Edward Cullen resides not in a Gothic castle but in a suburban American town, attends high school, and engages in familial activities. This metonymic domestication signifies the dissolution of metaphysical dread into social closeness—vampires become into neighbors, students, and prospective lovers instead of being entirely foreign Others. This paradigm illustrates how Meyer integrates vampirism into familiar adolescent environments, thereby transforming horror into a locus of desire and negotiation.

- **Integrating Hall and Zanger**

The integration of Hall's Encoding/Decoding model with Zanger's metaphor-metonymy thesis establishes a comprehensive framework for this investigation. Hall underscores the polysemy of texts and the agency of readers, whereas Zanger accentuates the semiotic evolution of the vampire archetype. Collectively, they facilitate a twin investigation: the manner in which *Twilight* represents vampirism as humanized and domesticated, and how viewers interpret these portrayals via various cultural and ideological lenses. The theoretical synthesis highlights the intricate link between creation and reception, metaphor and metonymy, and monstrous and humanity in modern vampire literature.

7. Analysis

- **Edward Cullen as a Hybrid Figure**

Edward Cullen exemplifies the transition from a ferocious predator to a humanized entity in Meyer's *Twilight*. Portrayed as both perilous and appealing, Edward refrains from consuming human blood, opting instead for animal sustenance. This food restriction positions him as ethically superior to conventional vampires, while concurrently maintaining the atmosphere of danger that enhances Bella's allure. Edward's dual identity as both predator and guardian exemplifies a societal negotiation of adolescence when libido must be moderated by ethical obligation. According to Hall, dominant interpretations laud Edward as a romantic embodiment of self-restraint, whereas negotiated interpretations acknowledge his



merits while critiquing his paternalistic authority over Bella. Oppositional interpretations perceive Edward as representative of contentious gender dynamics, wherein masculine authority constrains female agency.

- **Bella Swan and the Desire for Transformation**

Bella Swan's allure to Edward transcends conventional romance, delving into existential realms. She yearns for metamorphosis into a vampire, signifying her yearning for permanence and a sense of belonging. This aspiration encapsulates the societal obsession with perpetual youth, immortality, and the surmounting of human constraints. According to Zanger, Bella's closeness to Edward diminishes the metaphorical distance of monstrosity—Edward transforms from an allegorical demon into a student, neighbor, and personal lover. Bella interprets Edward's monstrousness mostly as a romantic element, perceiving it as a source of closeness rather than a threat. Critics contend that such decoding may normalize unequal power dynamics (Cantanzarite, 2014). Cantanzarite (2014) cautions that “romanticizing the vampire risks reinforcing models of male dominance and female submission under the guise of supernatural love” (p. 6).

- **The Cullen Family and Social Integration**

The Cullen family integrates vampirism into the context of domesticity and morality. By embracing a "vegetarian" lifestyle and assimilating into the human society of Forks, Washington, the Cullens tame the vampire myth. This transition signifies Zanger's metonymic shift: vampires are no longer seen in remote Gothic castles but within recognizable suburban homes. Dominant interpretations perceive the Cullens as moral paragons, exemplifying moderation and communal values. Negotiated interpretations acknowledge their ethical position while critiquing the family's surveillance and control over Bella. Oppositional interpretations may view the Cullen home as a metaphor for conformity, as uniqueness is suppressed by stringent standards of secrecy and moral regulation.

- **Negotiating Monstrosity and Humanity**

A primary theme of *Twilight* is the interplay between horror and humanity. Edward consistently asserts that vampirism is a curse, whilst Bella perceives it as a gift. This contradiction encapsulates extensive cultural discussions regarding desire, morality, and identity in late modernity. Hall's dualism permits various interpretations: readers may empathize with Edward's guilt, resonate with Bella's yearning, or attack both as indicative of conservative ideas. Zanger's paradigm emphasizes how the vampire, initially figuratively remote, becomes into a



metonym for adolescent challenges—navigating desire, identity, and social belonging within recognizable cultural contexts.

8. Discussion

• Cultural Transformations and the Anthropomorphized Vampire

The evolution of the vampire in *Twilight* exemplifies the wider cultural shift from Gothic monster to civilized humanity. In the eighteenth century, Stoker's *Dracula* encapsulated themes of foreignness, contagion, and apprehension towards the Other. In contrast, Meyer characterizes Edward Cullen as a morally cohesive individual whose monstrous traits are governed by self-discipline. This transition reflects late-modern concerns over youth, sexuality, and morality. It also emphasizes the cultural shift towards reintegrating monster figures within established social structures like the family and educational systems.

• Gender, Authority, and Ethics

The gender dynamics of *Twilight* complicate its cultural function. Edward's ethic of abstinence embodies chastity and restraint as moral principles, whilst Bella's aspiration for change highlights her yearning for empowerment and permanency. Dominant interpretations may perceive Edward's restraint as heroic, while counter interpretations regard his control over Bella as patriarchal and constraining (Cantanzarite, 2014). The negotiation between female autonomy and masculine authority serves as a major locus of interpretation, mirroring persistent cultural discourses regarding gender roles and ethics in teenage literature.

• Adolescence, Aspiration, and the Construction of Identity

The popularity of *Twilight* among young adult readers indicates that its embedded themes resonate with the building of adolescent identity. Bella's liminality—situated between humanity and vampirism, adolescence and adulthood—encapsulates the challenges of youth grappling with desire, belonging, and self-definition. According to Hall, young readers may interpret the narrative primarily as affirmation of their own challenges, perceived as a blend of fantasy and critique, or conversely as confining and retrogressive. Zanger's metonymic framework underscores this by placing vampires in familiar, quotidian settings, thereby diminishing the separation between myth and reality.



• The Vampire as a Reflection of Culture

Meyer's vampires ultimately serve as cultural mirrors, reflecting concerns over morality, identity, and community. While Dracula symbolizes external dangers to the social order, Edward embodies internal tensions: desire vs restraint, freedom versus control, and originality versus conformity. This anthropomorphized vampire encapsulates the contradiction of late-modern subjectivity, wherein individuals must balance autonomy with adherence to moral and social frameworks. The interpretation of this conundrum among various audiences demonstrates the adaptability and cultural influence of the vampire archetype in modern literature.

Conclusion

This study has analyzed the evolution of the vampire archetype in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*, utilizing the dual frameworks of Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding model and Jules Zanger's metaphor-metonymy thesis. The analysis of Edward Cullen, Bella Swan, and the Cullen family illustrates how Meyer encodes a novel vampire identity that is simultaneously terrible and very human. The vampire, previously a distant symbol of malevolence and infection, transforms into a metonymic neighbor, classmate, and amorous companion. This development exemplifies wider cultural changes in late modernity, as concerns regarding adolescence, morality, and identity are addressed within established social contexts.

According to Hall, *Twilight* conveys favored interpretations of chastity, restraint, and familial belonging, although these are interpreted differently by audiences. Dominant interpretations laud Edward as a romantic archetype, negotiated interpretations recognize the allure while interrogating gender dynamics, and oppositional interpretations condemn the series for perpetuating patriarchal norms. Zanger's argument elucidates how Meyer integrates vampirism into quotidian environments, diminishing distance and allowing readers to see the monster as an element of normal existence.

This research is significant as it illustrates that vampire fiction serves as a cultural mirror, reflecting and refracting societal issues. *Twilight* signifies a pivotal moment in which the vampire archetype serves as a medium for examining adolescent longing, gender dynamics, and ethical deliberation. This work integrates cultural studies with semiotic theory, contributing to the expanding area of vampire scholarship and highlighting the significance of interdisciplinary methodologies.



Subsequent studies may broaden this work by juxtaposing *Twilight* with other international vampire themes in literature and film, investigating the mechanisms of encoding and decoding across many cultural contexts. Moreover, examining reader reception through empirical research could enhance understanding of how varied audiences navigate the conflict between the monstrous and humanity. The vampire's versatility guarantees its ongoing significance as a framework for examining identity, culture, and society.

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