

A “Truth Like This”: Language and the Construction of Power and Knowledge in Vampire Fiction

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Abstract: The paper examines the relationship between power, knowledge, and language in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* from the vantage point of discourses on vampirism. Based on Michel Foucault’s notion of power as a localized, ubiquitous, and heterogeneous set of social strategies, it discusses the constitutive role of language in the construction of power relationships, focusing on gender and sexual relationships in both novels. In *Dracula*, the patriarchal system functions as a dominant discourse which prescribes legitimate sexual relations for women, while vampirism threatens this order by pointing out its gaps and inconsistencies. Revealing the ‘in-between’ of this order’s dichotomous relations, the rupture of its supposed coherence and ‘naturalness’ manifests itself through the notion of desire. Desire shares important features with language, as it is characterized by difference and deferral. Despite its appearance as an alternative social order, the interplay between power, knowledge, and language in *Twilight* suggests similar restrictions to female sexuality. This discourse on vampirism and sexuality is constructed by Edward and Bella, but is decisively mediated through Bella’s narrative voice. Their collaboration establishes a relationship of power which casts Bella in a state of weakness and submissiveness but also shows how language and knowledge may transform power relationships.

Vampires have captivated the attention of readers, writers, and critics for centuries. As literary figures, vampires fascinate due to the powerful but subtle manner in which they reflect upon a particular societal order—its precepts, prohibitions, and fears—and thus make visible the cultural and social dynamics in relation to the individual subject. The transgression they embody marks cultural, social,

and personal boundaries and, time and again, offers alternatives to dichotomous constructions of these categories. Uncovering the limits of the social order through attacking, challenging, and eluding them, the vampire reveals their production, their failures and silences, their gaps. As a result, the disguise of the social as the 'natural' order of things and the relations of power through which it maintains itself become discernible. It is in this sense that the vampire always also opens up possibilities of subversion and deconstruction of these boundaries: of seemingly fixed categories of the societal. In this game of social power, it is language which constitutes the essential instrument of challenge and collaboration, signifying both the speakable and the unspeakable, and ultimately revealing the constructedness of the social order. Language is, moreover, crucial in negotiating and locating the so-called individual subject, and its (im)possible positions of power within the social world.

Drawing on Victorian ideology, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is firmly grounded in discourses of patriarchy and humanism. Through Michel Foucault's notion of the interdependences of discourse, knowledge, and power, the analysis of this popular text focuses on the prominent issues of writing and textuality. These two notions play a crucial role in the production of the discourses about vampirism and illegitimate desire on the one hand, and humanism and control on the other. The central theme of desire, as embodied in the figure of the vampire, reveals the uncertainties in the Victorian system of reference characterized by binary and absolute values. Therefore, I will analyze how language is essential in the construction of desire and, accordingly, of the dichotomies which structure the social dimension. Precisely because *Dracula* refers to this lack of signification within the referential system, he threatens to subvert the social order. In order to master the vampires and reinforce the Victorian social order, the four male vampire hunters Jonathan Harker, Dr. John Seward, Arthur Holmwood, and Professor Van Helsing establish a discourse about vampirism which effectively produces knowledge about *Dracula*. I will show how language and desire, which both operate on the level of deferral as the essential characteristic of the signifying system, at the same time presuppose and produce power—that relational structure which Michel Foucault has argued is omnipresent in any social system and relation (113-14).

A recent example of popular vampire fiction, Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* sets the teenage romance of the two protagonists Bella Swan and Edward Cullen center stage. A closer look at the construction of vampirism in the novel reveals similar issues of patriarchal and humanist discourses, as well as control within gender relations. *Twilight*, too, negotiates ideas about social order and power through sexual relationships, and the possibility of the construction of an alternative lifestyle based on self-empowerment and self-determination within them. Especially the romantic relationship between Bella and Edward reveals how power relations in *Twilight* are

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distinctively gendered and sexual, driven by the desire of both protagonists, and decisively produced through language and the narrative voice of Bella. Power, as Foucault claims, demonstrates itself as productive, local, and dynamic (115), as interdependent with similar notions of desire and knowledge. Bella principally uses her own voice to negotiate her position as weak and submissive within the social world of both humans and vampires, thus pointing out the precariousness of female adolescence. Nevertheless, her use of language also displays awareness for possible alternative sites of empowerment, thereby highlighting the existence of a multiplicity of discourses and potential sources of subversion of the same ‘master’ discourse which seems to capture her in her less powerful role.

Drawing on these central notions of Foucault’s theory, both novels explicate the intertwining of language, desire, and power in the play of negotiating subject positions within the discourse that constructs the social world—a system of reference which is crucially structured by signifier and signified. Language is the medium through which power is brought to the fore, and its potential to challenge and subvert but also to produce and maintain the dichotomous and absolute structure of the social always arises from within these power relations. This will be demonstrated by the analysis of the production of knowledge and truth about vampires and humans, and the construction of gendered relationships in both novels.

***DRACULA*: THE TRANSGRESSION OF SOCIAL ORDER AND THE PRODUCTION OF POWER AND KNOWLEDGE**

Michel Foucault’s notion of power is tentative, complex, and fleeting—because for him, power in itself is. According to Foucault, power is first of all a multitude of relations and strategies which denote and characterize any given social order (113-14). Power, he claims, is ubiquitous: It is produced at any given point in time within any kind of relationship (114). Hence, every form of relationship, for example knowledge or gender, is always already a relationship of power (115). However, power does not work as something prohibitive from above, opposing those in power with the powerless; rather, power is seen as productive, constituting itself on all levels in a relationship—it is thus local and heterogeneous (115). Most significantly, power conceals itself and its complex strategies of producing knowledge and the ‘truth’ within social relationships (73, 78), to the point where it appears institutional, as something ‘naturally’ given.

Dracula demonstrates these localized relations of power and their role in the production of knowledge about vampirism: It is decisively through the construction

of discourse that power is negotiated time and again, where power surfaces in the form of language (Byron, Introduction 17). Constructing the vampire as a textual figure, the vampire hunters produce the knowledge and the narrative relations which they need in order to turn Dracula into a manageable sign of their discourse (Schäuble 45). In the course of the power/knowledge-production process, *Dracula* shows how this discourse produces knowledge and a 'truth' about desire and sexual excess, especially about female sexuality.¹ In this sense, gendered relationships are always necessarily relations of power. Because the novel foregrounds its own textual production, the different narrative voices and modes of expression exhibit what Foucault refers to as different forms of discourse, which in turn produce forms of power, submission, knowledge, and truth in their entirety and through the back and forth between the participants (Foucault 120-22; cf. Schäuble 46). The idea of discourse as a strategic form of power is represented by the textual construction of Dracula as a literary figure.

A canonical text and inspiration to a vast number of remakes, *Dracula*, first published in 1897, is often considered as featuring the original vampire figure. Jonathan Harker, an Englishman, visits the Count's castle in Transylvania to finalize a transaction of real estate in England. He becomes witness to the disturbing nocturnal behavior of the inhabitants: the Count and three beautiful, seductive women to whom he almost falls prey save for the intervention of the Count. Later, Harker realizes that he is held prison in the castle and his investigations cause him to almost lose his sanity. After the Count has set over to England, news of mysterious deaths follow in quick succession, coinciding with Mina Murray, Harker's fiancée, visiting her friend Lucy Westenra. Recently engaged to Arthur Holmwood, Lucy bewails having had to reject two more proposals: those of Dr. John Seward and the American Quincey Morris. Both Holmwood and Dr. Seward later join the vampire hunters, next to Harker and the accomplished scientist Abraham Van Helsing.

During her stay with Lucy, Mina notices strange developments in her usually vivacious friend: Lucy looks ill and pale, sleepwalks, and has red marks on her neck, which are later identified by Professor Van Helsing as Dracula's bites. Dr. Seward, who is first called by Mina to help Lucy, immediately turns to the professor for advice and asks him to come to England. The doctors begin a tiring rescue process consisting of

1 Within the systems of reference and of social values of the novel, it is reasonable to refer to this notion of 'truth' as singular and absolute; not only in order to avoid the excessive use of inverted commas as a sign of the tentativeness of the notion itself (which the reader should nevertheless be aware of) but mainly because the establishment of one single truth about legitimate female sexuality is exactly the central concern of the four men. Their power is at the same time revealed and maintained by their ability to define this truth, as will be shown in the course of the discussion.

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blood transfusions and protection with garlic to restore her strength, but they fail to prevent Lucy from turning into a vampire. Eventually, it becomes necessary for the vampire hunters to ritually stake her heart in order to cause her ‘sacred’ death and avert more innocent deaths: They witness vampire Lucy feeding on children. All of these events are recorded through individual diary entries, phonograph recordings, letters, and notes by the protagonists—all of which form the unique multiperspective of the novel. While the men vow to hunt down Dracula, Mina, by the time married to Jonathan Harker, helps to weave together the individual testimonies in order to construct one narrative which would provide them with the highest possible amount of knowledge about the vampire.

Upon their decision to eliminate Dracula, the four vampire hunters exclude Mina from their plan, as they deem it too dangerous for a woman. It occurs that Mina, too, is bitten at night, and while she slowly transforms into a vampire herself, the men succeed in tracking down Dracula crossing from England to Transylvania. Finally, the group eliminates the Count and the three women in his castle, leaving no trace of evidence, except for the manuscript produced by Mina.

Uncertainties and the Failure of the Sign System

Set at the fin de siècle, the novel rests on the assumptions of the dichotomized structures of Victorian society (Hollinger 202), which by the time the novel was published had already begun to slowly crumble (Byron, Introduction 14-15). The patriarchal and humanist ideology on which the novel rests—its dominant discourse—relies on a social order which features men “to occupy a privileged position and work to maintain and justify that position through control of others” (Walton 8). Moreover, the dominant discourse aims to conceal the “inconsistencies within its ethos” (6): uncertainties which threaten or challenge the perceived wholeness of this social order and the particular kind of truth it distributes. This is especially true for gender roles (Byron, Introduction 14-15). Men feature as more powerful vis-à-vis women, who obtain positions in this order at the margin as subordinated, powerless, and to be controlled (Auerbach, *Vampires* 66). Male power is constructed and distributed through the elimination of uncertainties, a process which strengthens this particular truth of the social order.

As Michaela Schäuble notes, vampires represent a number of uncertainties which cannot be reconciled with respect to patriarchal ideology (52-53). The vampires’ deliberate disregard of such binary-structured boundaries undermines this order and, hence, the truth of dominant discourse. Most profoundly, Dracula calls into question life and death as a stable, dichotomous system of relations; an inconsistency which

manifests itself in the language of Jonathan Harker, who discovers him during the day hidden in the catacombs of his castle:

He was either dead or asleep, I could not say which—for the eyes were open and stony, but without the glassiness of death—and the cheeks had the warmth of life through all their pallor, and the lips were as red as ever. But no pulse, no breath, no beating of the heart. I bent over him, and tried to find any sign of life, but in vain. (Stoker 50)

Dracula's state in between—neither alive nor dead, neither clearly real nor imaginary—is particularly dangerous because it cannot be grasped within a sign system resting on dichotomies. He signifies that which cannot be named—a concept without a signifier in the dominant discourse—and which therefore lingers in a realm beyond its control. Moving outside of all clear, definite categories, he signifies the collapse of a meaningful, absolute system of signs because he embodies its transgression (Schäuble 77). As a result, this system of knowledge, established by the dominant discourse to rule out variations between the binary oppositions of presence and absence and life and death, is threatened to be disintegrated. The lack of a signifier suggests that there exists a discourse outside of the dominant one and, hence, outside of patriarchal ideology, which undermines its claim to represent the absolute truth and its disguise as natural.

Desire as Threat

The notion of desire plays a crucial role in all vampire fiction. Dracula provokes in his victims a strong ambiguous fascination characterized by both allurement and rejection, and the intrinsic threat which emanates from Dracula derives from his ability to release “subversive disruptive desire in others” (Byron, Introduction 2). Desire, in Lacanian terms, repeats the lack of the absolute center of the sign system on yet another level. As Toril Moi summarizes:

[F]or Lacan, desire ‘behaves’ in precisely the same way as language: it moves ceaselessly from object to object or from signifier to signifier, and will never find full and present satisfaction just as meaning can never be seized as full presence. (99)

Desire is evoked and structured precisely through the eternal absence of that which is desired (Schäuble 62-63); if it was satisfied, it would cease to be desire and thus vanish. This deferral always points to the gaps and uncertainties in a structural system, as desire relates to both the structure of language and the sign system in which absolute meaning can never be achieved and must forever be postponed to the next signifier

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(63). Desire's ambivalence and instability within the dominant discourse of absolute dichotomies represents a disruptive and undermining force, which must be controlled in order to prevent it from overthrowing the patriarchal system. It is in this sense that Foucault takes the argument even further by suggesting that desire does not exist prior to or outside of power relations (101).

Desire is a particularly powerful means to subvert the social order because vampires embody desire and trigger the overwhelming wish to give in to their seductive powers in heretofore virtuous characters. When Jonathan Harker comes across the three vampire women in Dracula's castle, he readily submits to their excessive sensuality and their immodest sexual practices:

I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips. [...] I lay quiet, looking out under my eyelashes in an agony of delightful anticipation. The fair girl [...] went on her knees, and bent over me, fairly gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal [...]. I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited—waited with beating heart. (Stoker 42-43)

Significantly, desire is equaled in this matter to female sexuality—a form of excess which has no place and, therefore, no voice in the Victorian discourse of the 'true woman': "Desire, in being illicit, bringing surprises and subverting control is [dominant discourse's] enemy, and Woman as the instigator and object of desire, especially the [...] fluidity of appearances, must be petrified and purified" (Bronfen 57). Representing the absences and uncertainties in the system of reference of Victorian dominant discourse, Dracula aims at establishing a vast number of his kind by successfully constructing a counterdiscourse deriving its power from desire and female sexuality. These are, as Van Helsing claims, "the powers of the Un-Dead. When they become such, there comes with the change the curse of immortality; they cannot die, but must go on age after age adding new victims and multiplying the evil of the world" (Stoker 190). Like the system of language which functions through deferral of meaning, desire also postpones satisfaction as both challenge the social order that rests on absolute notions of life and death, good and evil, and dichotomous constructions of gender and femininity (Roth 31). As Nina Auerbach confirms, a "ruling woman has no place in the patriarchal hierarchy Dracula affirms" (*Vampires* 66), and the men's inability to resist their thrilling lustfulness jeopardizes their position of power. In fact, the ambiguity is perhaps at best demonstrated by the simultaneous (im)potence suggested in these scenarios. This relation between female sexuality and power is marked negatively, while access to sexuality via language produces gaps and uncertainties (Foucault 103), which the dominant discourse aims to eliminate.

Textual Strategies: The Dominant Discourse, the Construction of Humanism, and the Destruction of the Transgressive

In order to master these ambiguities and deferrals which undermine the social order, vampires as their embodiment must be annihilated. With respect to the sign system and desire, the death of the vampire denotes the “fixing [of] an ambivalent, fluid, oscillating body to a stable signifier” (Bronfen 57). Once the vampires have been turned into cannily decaying corpses, they represent a notion of death safely reflected in language and therefore controllable. Expelling vampires from their subversive, transgressive state simultaneously empowers the vampire hunters to reinforce patriarchal and humanist ideologies and their respective truths. By constructing Dracula and female sexual excess as evil Others, the dominant discourse simultaneously constructs itself as the representation of humanism and the good. It legitimizes its position of power and control, and it maintains its superior status with respect to the dichotomous relations which structure the social order.

The narrative structure of the novel plays a central role in coming to terms with the vampire Dracula: The entirety of knowledge about him essentially emerges from the multiplicity of voices presented in the novel in the form of letters, diary entries, phonograph recordings, and telegrams—many of which can be seen as a form of testimony. Put together, these reports represent a form of discourse about the vampire by producing knowledge about it. It is in this sense that Foucault claims that power is constituted through the production of knowledge based on the intimate information (which a testimony usually reveals) and the interpretation of it as a sign within discourse (85-86). The very process of writing about Dracula slowly but surely disperses the uncertainties he embodies:

Stoker’s text, rather than simply constructing the other, subversively reveals the process of othering at work. [...] As Foucault argues, it is through discourse that the play of power is conducted in western society; language is one of the material manifestations of the ways in which power is distributed on both the personal and the social level. (Byron, Introduction 16-17)

With each new part of knowledge added to the discourse, the vampire hunters gain power and control over Dracula because they are eventually able to define him, turning him into a sign they are able to dispense with (Auerbach, *Vampires* 65). Power, language, and knowledge form an interdependent relationship by enforcing their production mutually (Bronfen 56-57). The more knowledge the vampire hunters construct about him through discourse—closing the gaps between the single observations and experiences of the participants—the more they diminish the inconsistencies and uncertainties which threaten to overthrow the system (Schäuble

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45). It is the vampire hunters' position of power which enables them to tell the truth about Dracula as a sign of evil (45). At the same time, because of the construction of vampires as evil, the men maintain societal authority as they arrogate their function as the good.

When Van Helsing is first called by Dr. Seward to examine the Lucy's condition, he is introduced as a figure of authority, as

one of the most advanced scientist's of his day [...], [with] self-command and toleration exalted from virtues to blessings, and the kindest and truest heart that beats—these form his equipment for the noble work that he is doing for mankind. (Stoker 106)

Seward's statement constructs Van Helsing not only as an expert in the realm of science but as a model of humanism and righteousness (Auerbach, *Vampires* 65). Supported by Van Helsing's qualities, the vampire hunters usurp the role of defendants of the good who "strike in God's name" (Stoker 191), destroying that which they construct as evil. The process inevitably calls into question the supposed objectiveness of notions such as 'evidence,' 'knowledge,' and 'truth' by showing their constructedness: As language, they are defined by those who participate in the discourse from powerful positions. This arbitrariness becomes visible when the four men set out to turn the vampire Lucy, "a devilish mockery of Lucy's sweet purity" (190), into a real dead. The men's staking, which mutilates her body, therefore marks the "effort to counteract the false death of the undead" (Bronfen 61). In a manner which critics have noted resembles a group rape (cf. Schäuble 30), her fiancé Arthur performs the act of violent penetration:

[H]e struck with all his might. [...] [Lucy's] body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions; [...] But Arthur never faltered. He looked liked a figure of Thor as his untrembling arm rose and fell, driving deeper and deeper the mercybearing stake whilst the blood from the pierced heart welled and spurted up around it. His face was set, and high duty seemed to shine through it; the sight of it gave us courage, so that our voices seemed to ring through the little vault. (Stoker 192)

While his friends are watching the murder, they confirm time and again that Lucy, "callous as a devil" (188), must be killed by "a blessed hand" so that she might "die in truth" (191). From the vantage point of the construction of humanist discourse, the instance demonstrates how it is used "not only to exorcise the evil but to justify the murders" (Roth 35).

In addition to the fact that the humans, rather than the vampires, perform murders, the ritual of stabbing the vampire with a stake also resembles the same mechanism of penetration connected with the biting ritual (Schäuble 31). Both the

biting and the staking can be read in terms of an inscription of discourses: The penetration of the body is an act of writing, which marks the body as a subject of either discourse. As Foucault claims, power expresses itself with respect to sexuality by producing knowledge about acceptable and indecorous sexual behavior—essentially, power ensures its access to sexuality through language and discourse (Foucault 103-04; cf. Christian-Smith 30). Since the men employ the same mechanisms to perpetuate discourse as the vampires—namely, inscription of the body—the novel reveals the obvious arbitrariness of the supposedly fixed notions of patriarchal discourse and their production through language.

The connection between discourse, knowledge, and power is further emphasized on the level of gender relations. After Van Helsing decides that the destruction of Dracula “is no part for a woman” (Stoker 207), Mina is excluded from the dominant discourse, and therefore from knowledge and the empowerment it provides for the participants. With no other option than to “accept their chivalrous care” (214), Mina acknowledges that her lack of language is also a lack of power—she must yield to her “husband’s great love and [to] the good, good wishes of those other strong men,” and must submit to their power disguised as love and concern about her body and soul (226). Excluding her from their knowledge about Dracula immediately turns Mina into a victim, and Dracula appears in her sleep and bites her. While this denial of participation in discourse through language, and the distribution and production of knowledge, is presented as a denial of power, it is also the women’s lack of power and their supposed inferiority which excludes them from the partaking in the dominant discourse in the first place. However, as vampirism represents a form of resistance to the Victorian patriarchal system, feeding on its gaps and inconsistencies, it also presents an alternative empowerment: In correspondence to Foucault’s notion of power as local and productive, Mina’s transformation into a vampire reflects exactly this possibility of resistance from within the dominant discourse (cf. Foucault 116-17).

The analysis of the discourse on vampirism and desire in *Dracula* has shown that power is constructed during the course of producing knowledge and truth, and is always necessarily transmitted through language. Desire—the central feature related to the figure of the vampire—highlights this process by exhibiting the uncertainties which undermine the social system based on dichotomies and thus challenge the construction of the wholesome truth. Like language, desire is precisely structured by the deferral of the absolute meaning, laying bare the gaps which lack a signifier in the dominant discourse of Victorian ideology. Hence, eliminating illicit desire functions as a metaphor for erasing these uncertainties which the vampire represents, and reinstalls the power of the dominant discourse. It is in this sense that the literal production of knowledge about vampirism and the truth about legitimate sexuality, as conducted by

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the four vampire hunters, is crucial and always present together with the process of signification and the destruction of the vampire.

TWILIGHT: COLLABORATION, POWER, AND GENDER

Twilight, first published in 2005, has turned into a widely distributed instance of popular culture within recent years and is the first part of the tetralogy. Told entirely from her perspective, the novel features seventeen-year-old Isabella 'Bella' Swan. She feels compelled to move to small-town Forks to live with her father Charly in order to give her mother the freedom to move around with her new boyfriend. Always having been an outsider in Phoenix, she finds herself the center of attention of the small high school and makes friends easily. While especially the boys are following her around, shy Bella is instantly fascinated by a group of students who awkwardly stand out from everybody else, the Cullen siblings. She learns that they are the adopted and foster children of local medical doctor Carlisle Cullen and his wife Esme, and that they prefer to keep to themselves. Despite her fascination with the attractive Edward Cullen, their first meeting turns into a disaster: While she sits next to him in biology class, he acts strangely, refuses to speak or look at her, and turns away his face in disgust. Shortly before he disappears for a couple of days from school, she overhears his trying to change his schedule to avoid being in the same classroom with Bella.

Disbelieving and disappointed, Bella is all the more confused when he returns one day and treats her utterly nicely and is truly interested in her as a person. From then on, Bella is involved in one accident after another and Edward is always suddenly by her side to rescue her and save her life. She is startled by his actions which all border the impossible, inhuman, and inexplicable. Hearing local tribal stories from her Native American friend Jacob Black, she is determined to find out more about Edward's mysterious powers and finally confronts him with her 'theory' of him being a vampire. Edward responds with annoyance; refusing to listen or to accept Bella's true interest in him, he attempts to make her sound ridiculous and illogical. However, as they begin to fall in love, he successively explains to Bella the circumstances, which involve vampirism, the special powers which all of the Cullens have at their disposal, and the kind of life they have chosen to live. They refer to themselves as vegetarians who drink animal rather than human blood. Nevertheless, he simultaneously tries to make Bella understand that she is potentially in danger while with him. Everything is dependent upon the self-control of his desire, and he confesses to Bella that he has never been so tempted by any human scent before. Moreover, Edward is confused by the fact that his ability to read minds does not work on Bella—she remains a mystery to him.

Constantly demonstrating to her his extraordinary powers, he leaves her more dazzled than scared to such an extent that Bella begins to worship him and the life he is leading as a vampire. They start dating—much to the surprise of everyone in school and town—and Bella soon gets to know his family. They are very fond of her, with the exception of Rosalie, who is jealous of Bella and of her leading the life which she was denied. However, some of them are more worried than others about a possible loss of self-control, which would end in Bella's death. Moreover, this would jeopardize the social integrity of the Cullens in Forks as well as compromise the life they have constructed for themselves to live as humanly as they can. While Bella is constantly threatened, she is equally a constant threat to the vampires—two factors which fuel her wish to be turned into one of them.

The final complication arises when Forks is visited by another vampire clan and 'tracker' James determines to hunt Bella down after taking notice of the fact that she is a human among a vampire family. The Cullens split up into different teams in order to mislead the other vampire clan, and a chase for James and Bella begins in which he eventually manages to lure her into a trap and bite her wrist. At the very last moment, the Cullens arrive and save Bella from dying from the venomous bite and eliminate James.

Whereas *Dracula* principally enacts the lack of language on the part of women as an instance of powerlessness, *Twilight* demonstrates how the presence of language serves to construct not only male power but also inferiority of the self through a female voice. *Twilight* foregrounds the complexities and (im)possibilities of romantic love between the two protagonists. The novel addresses the uncertainties and relational complexities of a postmodern world (Martínez Díaz), and thereby acknowledges that the social order is no longer defined by an ideology based on dichotomous hierarchies.² Its subtext, however, suggests otherwise: Through discourse, *Twilight* constructs gendered power relations which largely maintain patriarchal ideas. In the course of creating truth and knowledge about both the male vampire and the female human, Bella collaborates in the production of power relations to her own disadvantage. Her struggle demonstrates how Foucault's notion of power is omnipresent in social and personal relationships: It is power which produces and negotiates identity constructions and knowledge within relationships of gender and sexuality.

2 For a profound discussion of the context of postmodernism with respect to the vampire figure, cf. Hollinger.

Alternative Orders, Alternative Empowerments?

Rather than representing an ‘outside’ of the social order, the Cullen clan serves as a model for an alternative way to organize social life without threatening to overthrow the system as such. As a patchwork family, their form of living presents a novelty to conservative small-town Forks, a fact which is not always met with understanding and toleration. The Cullens, however, stick “together the way a family should” (Meyer 31). Their self-assuredness and their power to construct their own family history characterized by mutual respect, love, and understanding appeal to Bella for various reasons (Martínez Díaz). Before her first day of school, Bella self-consciously reflects upon her status as the “[d]aughter of the Chief’s flighty ex-wife, come home at last” and expects to immediately be “a topic of gossip no doubt” (Meyer 12). She has never had many friends in Phoenix, and she ascribes the reason for this to her personal deviation from some fairly transparent social norm:

I should be tan, sporty, blond—a volleyball player, or a cheerleader, perhaps—all the things that go with living in the valley of the sun. Instead, I was ivory-skinned, without even the excuse of blue eyes or red hair, despite the constant sunshine. [...] Facing my pallid reflection in the mirror, I was forced to admit that [...] it wasn’t just physically that I’d never fit in. And if I couldn’t find a niche in a school with three thousand people, what were my chances here? I didn’t relate well to people my age. Maybe the truth was that I didn’t relate well to people, period. (9)

Her self-reflection and self-judgment makes clear that she considers herself unfit for Forks’ social order, leaving her vulnerable and powerless to the assessment of others. It is because of this that she is fascinated by the Cullens’ strategy to construct a community through an alternative social discourse: an order existing next to the dominant discourse of Forks, where families have been growing up together for generations. The construction of this discourse is governed by both “defining self as well as being defined—often with prejudice—by others” (Hughes 151), and it is through language that the power to define oneself and others is transmitted. In the course of their relation, Bella’s growing admiration is grounded in the clan’s power to construct their own identity and thus live a self-determined life.

Following the development of the vampire figure in recent years, the Cullens, too, reflect this change in the discourse on vampirism. As Jules Zanger confirms, the new vampire “tends to be communal, rather than solitary as was Dracula” (18). As a community of consent structured by the rules of their own social discourse, the Cullens’ “un-dead state is nothing more than a parallel lifestyle—a modified, rather than wholly new existence, typified by a change of diet and the imposition of a few

more-or-less onerous restrictions” (Hughes 148-49). It is both their being alternative to the human social order and the notion of self-empowerment which become increasingly appealing to Bella.

The developments of the new vampire figure are further visible by the struggle of their “good and evil selves” as two forces located within (Byron, Introduction 18). The difference to *Dracula*, where vampires are invariably cast as evil others threatening the good human self from the outside, is significant. Rather than accepting the position of the evil force qua ‘birth’—or, rather, transformation—these vampires are confronted with choices, as are humans. The Cullen family’s choice to live off animal rather than human blood is essential because, as Edward confides in Bella, he “do[es]n’t *want* to be a monster” (Meyer 163). In the course of the narrative, Bella’s mental and physical integrity is repeatedly a cause for anxiety, triggered both by the humans and by the vampire James. Equally craving for Bella’s blood, James, in contrast to Edward, is both unable and unwilling to control his desires in this respect. In the novel’s showdown of James’ “sadistic abduction” of Bella (Backstein 40), which foregrounds the immorality and illicit sexuality of the act, the notion of choice is further highlighted as it reinforces the Cullens’ mastery of these impulses through self-control: “[J]ust because we’ve been . . . dealt a certain hand . . . it doesn’t mean that we can’t choose to rise above—to conquer the boundaries of a destiny that none of us wanted. To try to retain whatever essential humanity we can” (Meyer 268). The possibility of an alternative social order constructed in *Twilight* through the discourse of vampirism moves away from both the dichotomous construction of the Victorian social order as well as from its destruction and moral dissolution through the overpowering by the vampires.

At second sight, however, the Cullens’ alternative social order, which is equally constructed through language and the understanding of rules and norms within the community, is similarly patriarchal. In a spirit of youthful rebellion, Edward decides to part from his father-figure Carlisle and his “new philosophy” (Meyer 295) in order to live out what he believes to be his nature: the living off human blood to satiate the hunger. Only after he realizes that he cannot cope with the guilt of murder and after he accepts the rules—which essentially are grounded in the control of his desire and are established by Carlisle as the most powerful member—Edward can return to the community. Carlisle, who takes over the role of the patriarch, “welcome[s] [him] back like the prodigal [son]” (299). While the moral connotations do undergo transformations in comparison to the binary constellation of human and vampire as good and evil, as constructed in *Dracula*, they also distort and complicate the relationship between Bella and Edward. With respect to their individual subjectivities constructed through language, the protagonists’ discourse on vampirism increasingly

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reveals a form of negotiating power to Bella's disadvantage. Referring to herself as prey through her own narrative voice, the power to control his instincts and willingness to use his power to protect humans clearly affirms Edward's observance of moral values—that is the control of desire—and highlights his superiority (Martínez Díaz). Transmitted through language both on the level of their discourse within the narrative as well as on the level of Bella as narrator, this form of power—over oneself as much as over others—appeals to Bella as a possibility to lead a more self-determined and emancipated life than currently achievable for her as a teenage girl in a conservative small town.

The Vampire's Desire and the Discourse of Morality

As argued above, desire and language are intricately connected with discourse and the social order constructed through it. As demonstrated, desire in *Dracula* surfaces in connection to female sexual excess, unleashed through Dracula's 'inscription' into his victims, and is therefore intertwined with constructions of gender. *Twilight* enacts notions of power and desire in more complex ways, although equally heavily drawing upon gender relations. Edward's initial reaction to Bella recalls the same emotions which Jonathan Harker has to cope with when visited by Dracula's three women: repulsion and fascination, fear and desire. In words which undeniably testify to the sexual connotations of the biting, he later explains to Bella:

It took everything I had not to jump up in the middle of that class full of children and—[...] When you walked past me, I could have ruined everything Carlisle has built for us, right then and there. If I hadn't been denying my thirst for the last, well, too many years, I wouldn't have been able to stop myself. [...] I thought of a hundred of different ways to lure you from the room with me, to get you alone. And I fought them each back, thinking of my family, what I could do to them. I had to run out, to get away before I could speak the words that would make you follow [...]. I so very nearly took you then. (Meyer 236-37)

In contrast to *Dracula*, Edward's self-control and morality are tested through his desire for a human. His struggle calls into question his existence and identity as a social being, since he is not only committed to his vampire community but also to his conscience: "Bella, I couldn't live with myself if I ever hurt you. You don't know how it's tortured me" (239). While he masters his lust for her blood, he is nevertheless unable to resist her and tests his own strength by being alone with her, away from the watchful eyes and ears of the community, wrestling "with the chasm between what [he] knew was *right*, moral, ethical, and what [he] *wanted*" (265). Through his desire, which

finds its embodiment in Bella's irresistible scent, the social order and his sense of identity are threatened because it calls attention to the possibility of its limits: The Cullens' discourse of an alternative diet and commitment to morality to ensure salvation (Martínez Díaz). After all, Edward clearly runs the risk of having to submit to his nature of a predator murdering humans for their blood (Backstein 38). This fact would precisely point to the inconsistencies in the vampires' discourse, laying bare the gaps which challenge his power and the supposed logic of its construction. A similar function is fulfilled by Edward's failure to read Bella's mind, which lays bare a gap in the discourse: The literally missing signifiers highlight the existence of uncertainties and clearly undermine his superiority so neatly constructed with respect to the powers of humans.

Edward's choice of words also highlights the role he assigns to Bella, which will be reinforced in the course of the narrative. Bella is inactive, a victim, entirely dependent upon what he chooses to do. Thus, her destiny becomes subject to his decision. His wording denies Bella any kind of autonomy: The question whether or not she would actually follow does never occur to him, although he is unable to read her mind as to know how attracted she is towards him. Edward thus supposes that desire is equally strong on the part of Bella, while suggesting that she does not have the power of self-control. Consequently, the definition of the roles within their (sexual) relationship becomes largely a condition of his will and conscience, and it is language through which this construction of power relations is achieved.

The coding of desire and sexuality as threatening is underlined by Edward's rejection of genital sexual intercourse with Bella. He admits that "most of those human desires are there, just hidden behind more powerful desires" (Meyer 270), and the loss of control Edward establishes in connection to sex would set loose his craving for her blood and result in killing her. However, he can maintain his self-control when he kisses Bella, despite the fact that her outbursts of passion come dangerously close to overwhelming him. Through their discourse—their conversations about desire and sex and their sexual interactions—power is demonstrated on the part of Edward by designating appropriate and illicit expressions of sexuality (Christian-Smith 30). The acting out of power relations is based on Edward's superior knowledge about vampirism and the fact that it is him who creates a truth about legitimate, that is, nonlethal, sexual behavior. Their discourse on sexuality constitutes itself exactly as a medium through which power is developed and expanded (Foucault 46). As Linda Christian-Smith's claims, Foucault's notion of "power operates at the very fundamental level of identity and meaning" (30). This demonstrates that Edward's loss of self-control would inevitably compromise his self-conception as morally good. This would jeopardize his construction of living a meaningful life through the promise of eventual

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salvation in opposition to eternal damnation because of his nature as vampire. His desire for Bella expressed as craving for her blood discloses an ambiguity in the system of self-control and alternative forms of sustainment: It reveals that Edward remains, after all, a potential "monster" (Meyer 299), and that the social order which has been constructed is not exempt from uncertainties.

Collaborative Discourses of Power and Gender

The construction of discourses in *Twilight* underlines the suggestion that structures of power are inescapable (Foucault 114). Though the Cullens might represent an alternative form of living, their lives are nevertheless regulated through rules which ultimately evoke conventional conceptions of social norms. In this sense, Auerbach bases her claim on Foucault's notion of the omnipresence of power relations: "[A]pparent ideological alternatives are mere offshoots of the tyrannical dominant discourse" (*Vampires* 171). Both Edward and Bella demonstrate their entanglement in patriarchal discourse through their relationship as lovers. In essence, Bella presents Edward as powerful, certainly beyond the human, and controlling; similar to the discourse of the vampire hunters in *Dracula*, Edward's authority over Bella arises from his patriarchal claim to protect her and act for her own good.

However, this discourse of Bella's victimization is positively brought about through her own voice and gaze as narrator and protagonist. Her idealization of Edward and the conditions of being a vampire can only be achieved through constructing herself as submissive. Her performance as victim and his performance as protector demonstrate the dynamics of discourse in the construction of power because both parts actively produce their roles. Power and truth about vampirism are reciprocally constituted through Bella's narration of Edward's words, and her interpretation of both of their roles within their relationship (Foucault 85-86). However, at the same time at which the discourse about vampirism constitutes a powerful position, it also opens up the possibility for Bella to construct a counterdiscourse within the given power structures (116-17). Knowledge and the truth about vampirism remain essential aspects in this respect.

Twilight ostensibly acts out conventional, patriarchal gender roles—a relation of power in which Bella is cast in a position of helplessness. While Bella continuously refers to herself as "a damsel in distress" (Meyer 46), Edward equally often acts as her devoted, if flawed "romantic hero" (Backstein 38), excelling at his patronizing attitude towards her. Conveyed through Bella's narrative and the knowledge she conveys about vampires, each of his rescue operations establish him as superior in every way. His power over her is both physical and mental: Bella frequently explicates instances in

which she constructs herself as controlled, either because thoughts about him entirely occupy her mind to the point of questioning her own sanity, or through her direct references to his superiority and her inferiority.

The chapters ‘Confessions’³ and ‘Mind Over Matters’ illustrate how both knowledge about vampirism and power are constituted within the same structures. Sharing his knowledge about vampires with her, he decides to exclusively tell her about their strengths and special abilities. In the course of the narrative, Edward emphasizes Bella’s powerlessness by demonstrating and explaining to her his extraordinary features: For example, deliberately ripping branches from a tree, he exposes his chest which is “literally sparkl[ing], like thousands of tiny diamonds” (Meyer 228). Through this he constitutes Bella as prey, who is attracted to her predator beyond her own control. Despite Edward’s outspoken attempts to put her into a passive role, Bella, on the level of her own narrative voice, assures herself that all his threats are meant “gently” (231). The more they are entangled in the discourse about Edward’s desire and the latent possibility of losing his self-control, the more Bella infantilizes and victimizes herself: “There was no resisting the iron strength of his hands. [...] [H]e pulled me around to face him, cradling me in his arms like a small child” (246). Edward characterizes their relationship through language, which clarifies the establishment of power relations:

[Y]ou are so soft, so fragile. I have to mind my actions every moment that we’re together so that I don’t hurt you. I could kill you quite easily Bella, simply by accident. [...] [I]f for one second I wasn’t paying attention, I could reach out, meaning to touch your face, and crush your skull by mistake. You don’t realize how incredibly *breakable* you are. (271)

For the sake of her own safety, the truth about the physical strength of vampires, and, of course, love, Bella decides to accept “all [her] human frailties” and Edward’s patronizing attitude towards her (271). The more Bella knows about vampires through Edward the more inferior she feels, thereby underlining the effect of knowledge and truth on gender and power relations. In consequence, their relationship is acted out entirely upon his conditions rather than hers (Backstein 41).

However, the same structures of power and knowledge which produce Bella’s inferiority also open up sites for her possible empowerment as a female. Knowledge about vampirism and its transmission through language again plays the essential role in altering the power relations within the same discourse. Before Bella is almost crushed

3 The notion of the confession related to sexuality draws another analogy to Foucault’s argument about the centrality of confessional discourse for Western culture in producing power, knowledge, and truth about sex. For a thorough discussion on the importance of the confession as an institution in discourse, cf Foucault 73-90.

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to death by a car in the school parking lot, Edward miraculously shoves her out of the way and stops the sliding van with his bare hands—despite the fact that he was not anywhere in her immediate vicinity when the driver lost control over his car. Bella denies the explanation of which Edward tries to convince her. She officially follows his pledge to go along with the story he has made up, but presses him for an explanation: "I want to know the truth [...]. I want to know why I'm lying for you" (Meyer 55). When a tribal story about vampires from the nearby reservation seems to suggest an unbelievable but well reasoned explanation, Bella tells him her version of the story of his inhuman strength and speed which he furiously rejects: "Nobody will believe that, you know" (55), he sneers at her. Only later Edward confirms what reads between the lines—that Bella could easily expose him and his entire family to Forks, thereby destroying the lives they have constructed for themselves: "I couldn't believe I had put us in danger after all, put myself in your power" (239). Once Bella knows the truth about vampires and which features identify them, her knowledge also puts her in a more powerful position vis-à-vis Edward. Moreover, from the point of starting an overt love relationship with Bella, Edward does no longer have the option of killing her out of an impulse of desire, since this would eventually trace back to him and his family, whom everyone in Forks treats with certain caution and suspicion. Knowledge and its transmission through language negotiate power relations and are able to open up localized and action-related possibilities to transform them. This form of resistance, nevertheless, always necessarily arises from within the power structures.

A second option of empowerment arises from Bella's friendship with Edward's sister Alice. Supportive of their relationship and extremely fond of Bella as a person and friend, Alice fills Bella in on the truth about vampires and the mechanisms involved in the transformation (Meyer 360). In the context of the power relations between Edward and Bella, it becomes obvious why he explicitly warns Alice to tell Bella the "theory" (361). For the first time Bella gets an insight into vampirism apart from the knowledge she receives through Edward, reinforcing her wish to become a vampire herself in order to be able to enjoy a life of superiority, empowerment through self-control, and female emancipation—for all of which Alice proves to be both her model and inspiration. Alice equally believes that it is Bella's own choice to become a vampire, a suggestion Edward vehemently opposes. When he refuses to "damn [her] to [...] eternity" through the bite (415), Bella unexpectedly revolts against his patriarchal decision:

"If you think that's the end [of the discussion], you don't know me very well," I warned him. "You're not the only vampire I know." His eyes went black again. "Alice wouldn't dare." And for a moment he looked so frightening that I couldn't help but believe it—I couldn't imagine

someone brave enough to cross him. “Alice already saw it, didn’t she?” I guessed. “[...] She knows I’m going to be like you . . . someday.” (415)

Through the bond between herself and Alice, Bella assumes a more powerful position by suggesting to Edward that she will get what she wants: a life characterized by self-empowerment, physical strength, and attractiveness. For Edward, having to imagine that someone else but him performs the act of biting Bella—since this evokes connotations of penetration and sexual intercourse—clearly challenges his potency. It recalls the idea of a lesbian sexual relationship between the two young women, circumventing Edward’s power as the male part of the relationship. This challenges his superiority, which is based on the construction of decisively gendered power relations and the gender roles performed in the novel. Further, it suggests a threat to the patriarchal, heterosexual norm on which their social system is based. As a result, both these instances remain possible sources for an empowerment of Bella, produced within the structures of knowledge and truth by means of language.

CONCLUSION

Language plays a central role in the production of knowledge and truth as well as in the constitution of power. Power relations—which exist and are reproduced as inevitable structures through discourse, and thus through language—are manifest in gender and sexual relations. In this sense, power is omnipresent. The analysis of both *Dracula* and *Twilight* has shown that language, power, and knowledge are interconnected in multiple, convoluted ways. While those participating in the dominant discourse may establish a truth about vampirism because of their powerful position to gather and maintain knowledge about Dracula, it is at the same time their knowledge which enables them to use language as a medium of power. As opposed to Dracula and the women in the novel, who lack a voice in this discourse and represent its gaps and ambiguities, the vampire hunters wield the power to use language. This power to use language eliminates the uncertainties represented by the transgressive state of the vampire and the threat of female sexuality. It thus eventually reestablishes and reaffirms the dominant discourse of patriarchal ideology. Through the notion of desire and its structural similarity to language, it becomes evident both how and why the vampire hunters in *Dracula* must construct a wholesome narrative about vampirism, and hence about proper female sexual behavior. By literally piecing together the single utterances of the participants, they construct an entity of knowledge about Dracula and the fate of illicitly sexually active women. This knowledge closes the gaps and uncertainties represented by Dracula and the desire connected to vampirism, which

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threatens to overthrow the Victorian social order characterized by absolute notions of dichotomies and binary structures of discourse.

The discourse constructed in *Twilight*, by comparison, enables alternative social orders to arise and confirms more recent ideas about the new vampire figure as a communal and conscious being. These alternative social structures are equally relying on relations of power and knowledge about vampirism. The fact that the Cullen family has actively chosen to play their part on the side of the good is predominantly produced through the discourse about morality and salvation, in which the construction of evil again serves as a form of self-empowerment in the process of the production of power. Within these same power structures, the relationship between Bella and Edward takes place and is ultimately connected to the discourse about vampirism, as both Edward's self-control as well as the omnipresent threat of its loss construct Bella as submissive, powerless, and frail. Most interestingly, desire functions as a threat to the vampires and their social order; as a risk to their integrity, which is underlined by the fact that *Twilight* establishes a discourse on patriarchal ideology hardly different from the dominant discourse in *Dracula*. Again, legitimate sexual behavior is defined by the more powerful part of the discourse and by the knowledge about vampirism Edward decides to share with Bella. The novel moreover demonstrates that the production of power and knowledge is never an imposition from above but rather constituted through the interaction which discourse signifies. This is most obviously so because the narrative is told exclusively from Bella's perspective and through her voice. Moreover, her choice of language reveals her collaboration with Edward in producing these relations of power within their sexual relationship. However, the discourse on vampirism also leaves room for possible sites of empowerment for Bella within these same power structures. Again, language and knowledge essentially support Bella in achieving a more powerful position within these structures and eventually reinscribe them with new knowledge about herself and her role as female.

As demonstrated through the analysis of both novels, language remains the decisive element in the construction of knowledge and power, and Foucault's notions allow for an access to and an approximation of these structures and their relation to the performance of gender and sexual roles as well as of identity constructions.

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