

Major Paper 2.5: Critical Approaches to Twilight

engl 111 / sec. D / autumn quarter 2010-11 / chang



Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, the editors of *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, and the Vampire Franchise*, argue in the introduction that the *Twilight* novels, films, and fandom warrant attention and study. From the novels' thematics to Stephenie Meyer's marketing strategies to the series' (un)popularity, they believe in the importance of *Twilight*. For example, they say, "None of this is to argue that the *Twilight* series has no faults, but we do wish to stress that the public dismissal of *Twilight*'s success is gendered, and we believe

scholars, critics, and fans should find this gender bias worthy of discussion and study" (7). Overall, they want to produce "a rich portrait of the popular culture sensation that is *Twilight*...[to] provoke discussion of *Twilight*'s cultural impact" (13). So, what is the value of and the provocation of *Twilight*? Are these books or other "young adult literature" worth reading, critiquing, and teaching?

In the first sequence, you were asked to interrogate the place, value, and critical potential of *Harry Potter* in the classroom and in scholarship. Now we turn our attentions to *Twilight*, which some might argue is the successor to the *Harry Potter* phenomenon. What are the "cultural assumptions and ideological tensions" (Anatol xv) of the *Twilight* novels. How might your reading, writing about, and analysis of the *Harry Potter* series serve as tools and lenses for the *Twilight* series? Keep in mind all of our discussions, provocations, and explorations about representation, about the conventions of different genres, and about the intersections of cultural and social formations such as race, class, nation, gender, and sexuality.

Like the first sequence, the culmination of the second sequence asks you to critique and analyze *Twilight* in the same cultural studies vein. How might you "read too much into it" (to quote Giselle Liza Anatol) in order to excavate, explicate, and analyze *Twilight* as literature, as rhetoric, as cultural production. This major paper assignment asks you to unpack and reconsider *Twilight* to show and to analyze the various cultural, political, and ideological ideas and ideals, through its language, its characters, its plots, its constructions, its voices, and even its silences.

Goals and Outcomes

For this **5- to 8-page** formal, researched paper, you will identify **one** central critical question, lens, or theory to use to close-read, analyze, and explicate *Twilight*. You may choose to work with one or more of the books we have read for class, but realize that your paper must be focused, specific, and deploy evidence carefully and strategically. Armed with the theoretical and cultural studies concepts from the readings, previous assignments, and class discussions **generate your own claim, your own argument** about *Twilight*. For example, how and why is *Twilight* important to read, analyze, and teach? How does your *Twilight* "make visible" race or gender or class or sexuality? How does *Twilight* work in and work against the conventions of young adult fiction, romance novels, or even the vampire genre? Is *Twilight* an allegory for sexual abstinence, idealized marriage, heteronormative family, or Christian values? How does Native American mythology function in the novels? Be selective and specific in your claim. Think about the following questions when you sit down to make your claim (pick and choose the best and most relevant questions to use as a way to generate ideas and subclaims).

You might address questions about literacy, genre, censorship, education, or pedagogy:

–In what rhetorical or reading context is *Twilight* best suited? Primary school? Secondary school? University?
–Why teach *Twilight* in the writing classroom? What might *Twilight* offer to other disciplines? Contexts other than just in English or in the writing classroom?

- What does *Twilight* and other similar literature reveal about our culture, our world? Is that important? What might be problematic, risky, or dangerous about *Twilight*?
- Who is the intended audience of *Twilight*? Is *Twilight* children’s literature? What does it mean to be for young adults? Or is it for adults?
- Is there a relationship between *Twilight* the novels, the story and *Twilight* the brand, the product line, the business? What does this relationship reveal?

You might address questions about social and cultural formations, power, politics:

- What are the central arguments (these can be more than just themes) of *Twilight*? Does it comment on identity, culture, or power? Are these arguments overt or covert?
- What stereotype or cultural assumption (about race, gender, sexuality, class, or nation) does *Twilight* make? How is this stereotype or assumption construction and deployed?
- What is the importance of *Twilight*? What does it tell its audience? How is its production, circulation, and consumption important to its meaning or meanings?

You might address a connection between *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* via one of the questions above:

- How might you analytically compare and contrast the educational, cultural, political, or critical value of each series?
- What might *Harry Potter* help you reveal in *Twilight*? Or vice-versa? How might the two relate or resonate with each other? How might they be radically different?
- How might you use both to argue for the value and importance of popular fiction?

Remember that the above questions **should not be a laundry list** for you to simply run down the answers. Be selective and focused about what you wish to write about and then generate your own claim about your artifact. You are required to include at least **6 to 8 outside sources** including the secondary texts read for this class, scholarly journals, and credible newspapers and magazines and websites; the sources must be relevant and useful to your claim but all of them need not be cited in your paper. The novels themselves do not count toward the five required outside sources.

Assume your audience is familiar with or has read the *Twilight* (and *Harry Potter*) books. You need not spend a great deal of time summarizing plot or character. Your paper must demonstrate your ability to **close read** both text and research. Like your previous papers, you will be expected to **critically argue and persuasively articulate** your argument with **direct quotes** from your research as support. Also, keep in mind the **course outcomes** as you work and write.

Guidelines and Due Dates

Format: This assignment is a formal, academic paper and should follow the manuscript guidelines outlined in the course policies (see the course website for an example of a major paper’s formatting):

- no formal title page, proper heading, appropriate title for your paper
- 69-92 inches, typed, double-spaced, with MLA citations, proper format, stapled
- works consulted page, at least 6-8 authoritative sources, correct MLA format

Targeted outcomes: _____

Paper Proposal/Conference Memo #1: Bring to your conference on _____ your Conference Memo (to be assigned), which identifies key concepts, your working claim, and a rough outline of your main ideas.

Draft Due: Monday, November 22 and Wednesday, November 24, e-copy

Final Due: Make revisions based on comments and responses from me and your peers and hand in the revised final version on WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 29.