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What the Myths of Romantic Love Hide in *Twilight*: A Feminist Perspective.

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Abstract

This paper examines how myths of romantic love are used to hide patriarchal violence towards women in a rose-tinted atmosphere, illustrating this with scenes from the *Twilight* film saga. This series of five films became a sociocultural phenomenon from the time of its release due to its worldwide popularity. While much has been written about the saga's problematic views on gender roles, sexuality and relationships, less has been said about how *Twilight* uses myths of romantic love to perpetuate patriarchal discourses. I draw attention to the fact that these myths are permeating films and they are particularly dangerous because of their ability to convey harmful ideology towards women in a way that makes it seem harmless and desirable. I will start with an explanation of the main myths and the origin of romantic love as well as their relationship to the perpetuation of violence and patriarchal structure, followed by the connection of these myths with vampires. Furthermore, I will illustrate how these myths convey anti-feminist discourses using scenes of the *Twilight* saga. The paper aims to identify the danger of romantic love myths due to their ability to hide, normalize or even romanticize discourses and situations that allow the systematic abuse towards women to continue.

Key Words: Feminism, Romantic Myths, *Twilight*, Sexist Violence, Love Myths.

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Introduction

A generation of youngsters grew up thinking that love meant pain, and it was partially due to the *Twilight* saga. From pre-teenagers who had their first encounter with romantic fiction to mature women, everyone was talking about these world-widely known books and films. This series of four fantasy romance novels deals with the romance between a vampire man and a human girl, and it became a sociocultural phenomenon from the time of its release in 2005. Stephanie Meyer's books have sold more than 100 million copies, and its popularity grew even more when the saga was adapted into films.

I will focus on the *Twilight* films since I believe that working on them is important as cinema is in itself a very powerful form of mass media. The reach of cinema is vast and therefore it has the capacity to spread a lot of ideology. These films have had an impact on several generations since their influence was such that another saga arose which was also highly popular: *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which started as an erotic fanfiction of *Twilight*.

The fact that the *Twilight* saga has had such an impact makes it extremely relevant to the study of cultural issues such as the myths of romantic love. I will focus on these myths as they are a central and important part not only of the films but also of the patriarchal society in which we live. These myths are full of fallacies and toxicity, and they are used as a resource to propagate the patriarchal structure. Yet, the negative consequences of these myths often get overlooked because of the romantic nature that surrounds them. Thus, they proliferate in fiction and are transmitted into real life, permeating society with subtle ways of propagating harmful ideologies.

As it commonly happens with romantic cultural products they are targeted to female audiences, and *Twilight* was not an exception. Overall, the saga became from the moment of its release an iconic piece of pop culture of the first decade of the 2000's. Some critics, particularly in the first years of this phenomenon, praised *Twilight* due to its portrayal of the teenage experience (Durham 2012, 6). They also supported the protagonist's romantic relationship by arguing that it was "a sweet and innocent love story" (Blasingame 2006, 828). Furthermore, both the books and the author won many prizes, such as USA Today's "Author of the Year" 2008 or American Library Association "Top Ten Best Book for Young Adults," among many others (Reynolds 2009, 13). However, some other critics do not hesitate to argue that this saga is representative of being anti-feminist (Torkelson 2011, 209), anti-abortion (Silver 2010, 128), romanticizing toxic masculinity (Bealer 2011, 140) and naturalizing toxic relationships (Silver 2010, 121).

The saga has attracted multifarious critical analysis since the first book hit the market. In order to discuss the topic of myths of romantic love in *Twilight* and the perpetuation of our patriarchal society through them, the present work is divided into two different sections.

In the first section I will focus on the myths of romantic love. I will give a brief explanation of the main myths that will be discussed as well as the relationship these myths have to the perpetuation of violence and patriarchal structure. I will be focusing on the three most persistent, toxic and repetitive myths throughout the *Twilight* saga that will be later used to exemplify them, as well as other sub-myths or ideas that are derived from these main three: love can overcome anything, predestined true love and love is the most important thing and requires total dedication. Interestingly, while bibliography of myths of romantic love is abundant in Spanish, it is scarce in English: “Within the academy there appears to be a dearth of literature on the myth of heterosexual romantic love” (Israel 1999, 1). I consider this explanation of the myths and their impact on society to be necessary in order to understand how this is translated into fiction, which in turn impacts reality. Furthermore, I will also provide a brief explanation on vampires and their connection to romantic love and sexuality. I will start with the origin and the evolution of different representations of vampires in film, to later on discuss their connection with romance and sexuality. Having some understanding of the portrayal of vampires and their relationship with love and sexuality will facilitate our awareness of the impact and consequences of these characters, particularly in our patriarchal context when combined with the romantic genre.

Finally, I will focus on particular examples taken from the films in order to illustrate the myths of romantic love and how they perpetuate patriarchal violence. The saga of five films of *Twilight* has many representations of the myths related to the idea of romantic love, and I will analyse representative key scenes that will demonstrate how these are present and persistent in their role to perpetuate the patriarchy and execute violence towards women.

This paper aims to argue that these myths are used as a way to hide or mask patriarchal violence in order to neutralize the reactions to it and allow this systematic abuse to continue.

The Dangers of Romantic Myths: from Jane Austen to Vampires

First of all, it is important to begin the analysis of the subject at hand, namely romantic love and its idealization and myths, with its origin. According to Berkin and Morales, our contemporary conception of what romantic love is “the feeling that started to gain popularity at the end of the 18th century, when conjugal relations, previously conceived in terms of economic

and social convenience, were joined by [...] romantic love.” (Berkin and Morales 2000, 51; my translation). Therefore, it is traced back to this moment the fact that the beliefs and idealizations of romantic love are beginning to spread. Jane Austen is considered by some experts to be the pioneer of what we know today as romantic love in novels, “as the fountainhead of all romance novels” (Frantz 2009, 1). The foundations established by her will be relevant later in constructing our analysis of romantic love in *Twilight*, such as the fact that: “Austen is the founder of the modern romance narrative, as the first to recognize the extraordinary narrative power of keeping the hero’s point of view in reserve” (Frantz 2009, 1).

The fact that this male protagonist is dark, inaccessible, distant until the moment of climax, with hidden feelings, is one of the reasons why the myths of romantic love are such a powerful influence. Behind this formula of “The domineering, emotionally remote alpha-male hero of modern hero-centric romances” lies the fact that he “embodies patriarchal power in all its glory” (Frantz 2009, 6), and taking into account that “Romantic love is the single greatest energy system in the Western psyche” (Johnson 1983, 66), this patriarchally charged notion of love has great power in our culture. Since Jane Austen's days, the climax of the novel comes when the hero voices his feelings overcoming all the difficulties these cause him for the sake of love. Therefore, the myth of love can overcome anything — which I will expand on shortly —, permeates the romantic novels as we know them today since the beginning. The fact that this is constructed as the climax of the plot — and of the life of these young women — makes the reader or viewer feel that overcoming difficulties for the sake of love is the most romantic, and therefore, the most desirable thing to happen. Hence, from the origin of romantic love as it is known today, these myths encourage the sustenance of the patriarchy by labelling an emotionally inaccessible man and the struggles that come with it as desirable. The barriers to overcome by the protagonists have become, with time, greater and more toxic to the relationship, but the romanticization of it has not ceased.

Behind something that is presented as only inherently positive and desirable such as love hides the patriarchal structure of society: “Romantic love is based on pre-existing gender inequalities in society, and on women's submissiveness to men.” (Bajo 2020, 258). According to Pascual, romantic love myths can be divided into four groups (Pascual 2016, 68; my translation).

The first group concerns the myth that love can overcome anything. It includes ideas or sub-myths such as the fallacy of changing for love, the myth of the omnipotence of love, the normalization of conflict in the relationship, the belief that opposites will attract and understand each other better, the myth of the compatibility of love and abuse, and the belief that true love

forgives and endures it all (Pascual 2016, 68; my translation). In general, this myth assumes that any “external or internal conflict” can be overcome by true love and should not “interfere in the relationship (Ferrer et al. 2010, 9; my translation). This leads to the justification and normalization of all kinds of violence and causes victims to tolerate abuse for the sake of love, since true love “is enough to solve every problem and to justify every behavior” (Ferrer et al. 2010, 9; my translation).

The second group consists of the idea that there is a predestined true love. Some sub-myths or ideas that fall under this myth are the myth of the soul mate and of complementarity and the belief that there is only one true love in life (Pascual 2016, 68; my translation). Another idea that this myth supports is emotional reasoning, which is “a cognitive distortion that relates to the idea that when one person is in love with another, it is because a special chemistry has been activated that produces such infatuation that is directed towards that person in particular, making them our soul mate. (Peña et al. 2011, 17; my translation). This soulmate or complementary half is seen as “the objectified ‘missing part’ of the lover” (Israel 1999, 10). Furthermore, this love is considered to be eternal: “the illusion that it can last forever” (Israel 1999, 1), i.e., the myth of durability, eternal passion or equivalence. In other words, it is argued that the feeling of love and passionate infatuation are equivalent, and this passion lasts forever (Peña et al. 2011, 17; my translation).

Thirdly, the myth that love is the most important thing and requires total commitment. This comprises ideas or sub-myths such as the fallacy of matchmaking and of making romantic love the center and the reference to existence as the only possible source of happiness (Pascual 2016, 68; my translation). According to this myth “the ultimate meaning in life can be found in another human being” (Israel 1999, 9). Furthermore, it supports the fallacy of total commitment and understands love as a process of depersonalization in which privacy must be sacrificed (Peña et al. 2011, 17; my translation). On the whole, this myth results in neglect of one's personal life and identity in favor of a pursuit of happiness that is considered to be equivalent to romantic love: “For so many, happiness means romantic love” (Novak 2013, 7).

The fourth myth is the belief that love is a matter of possession and exclusivity (Pascual 2016, 68; my translation). This fourth group will not be dealt with in this paper, but I believe it is relevant to mention it since it is also fully integrated in today's society.

It is important for the subsequent analysis to explain romantic love in the context of a horror creature in film: the vampires. Throughout the history of cinema, according to Kane in *The Changing Vampire of Film and Television: A Critical Study of the Growth of a Genre*, the narrative of vampire films has been changing and going through certain cycles, such as the

malignant cycle between 1931 and 1948, the erotic cycle between 1957 and 1985, and the sympathetic cycle, since 1987 (Kane 2006, 7). Thus, as time goes by, the vampire ceases to be a terrifying creature, to end up being someone to be pitied due to his condition, a sympathetic vampire who may even be the hero “This idea of mixing romance, sex, and a struggle to overcome the condition of vampirism” (Kane 2006, 98). I believe it is important to recognize this since the fact that these vampires are sympathetic and attractive makes the audience empathize with them and allows the myths of romantic love to emerge.

Moreover, romantic love myths grow stronger in the presence of vampires, as these creatures have a strong sexual component. This attracts the audience and makes vampires desirable, and therefore, the romantic relationships they have are also idealized, however healthy or unhealthy they may or may not be. It is interesting to know that it is often argued that all vampire films are actually about sex to a greater or lesser extent: “the vampire’s desire for human blood is interpreted as a sexual metaphor” (Durham 2011, 4). Therefore, the fact of repressing or not repressing the desire for blood will imply the representation of a more or less repressed sexuality: “The vampire’s ‘kiss’ on the neck in the dark, generally part seduction and part rape, involves the sexualized exchange of bodily fluids” (Weinstok 2012, 7). According to Dresser’s sociological desire the “erotic aspects of the vampire were the most frequently mentioned reasons for this creature’s appeal” (Dresser 1990, 148). Therefore, vampires start to look less like monsters and more like humans in order to appeal to the spectator and fulfill their role in the sexual fantasy. These aspects of the vampire's attractiveness translate into the victim, usually female, being completely charmed by him.

Case study: *Twilight* saga

As it is represented in the movie in the scene in the forest in which Edward’s nature is confirmed (Hardwicke 2008, 00:49:05 to 00:57:21), the myth of love can overcome anything is introduced by their dialogue: he insists on his violent nature while she dismisses his statements because his love will prevent him from hurting her. In this myth, as explained previously, the fallacy of changing for the sake of love and the omnipotence of it is also presented, as well as the idea that opposite people are more attracted to each other and get along better (Pascual 2016, 68; my translation). According to this myth any obstacle can be overcome if it is for love, even when the nature of the two subjects is so opposite that it makes them incompatible, since one of them may kill the other, as is the case in *Twilight*.

In *Twilight*, Bella is the vulnerable target, submissive to Edward's will to kill her or refrain from doing so, confident that he will not do it simply because of his love for her. According to the myth, this is a sign of his love for her, in the sense she is immensely lucky to have the love and validation of a man — or a male vampire, in this case — who loves her enough to control himself and not kill her. Moreover, this movie follows the trend of sympathizing with the vampire discussed previously in order to neutralize the audience's reactions to him and pity him as well as admire his self-control, therefore allowing myths of romantic love to bloom as well as the violence hidden behind them. When he tells her "I wanted to kill you..." and she simply answers "I trust you", it is perceived that the self-control he must practice in order not to murder her is proof of his love, since the notion of the omnipotence of love conveyed that the larger the obstacle in the relationship, the deeper their love has to be in order to overcome it. In fact, as Durham argues, *Twilight* establishes "this type of relationship as ideal — the pinnacle of romance" (Durham 2011, 14). These myths are so internalized in the collective imagination that it is not perceived as a toxic and pernicious relationship, in which one of the partners (male) is violent and the other (female) dismisses the danger in favor of the omnipotence of love.

Moreover, the establishment of patriarchal power dynamics is evident but undermined due to the overpowering love myths. He is the older one, with more economic and physical power which he displays while trying to scare her. She does not react to his display of physical violence, and neither does she react to the threat that he represents to her life. This extreme imbalance in power and the nature of the vampire would work as a metaphor of toxic and/or abusive relationships in which the abusive partner — the male — is justified by their partners because they love them and 'love can overcome anything'. Therefore, the cycles of abuse are perpetuated in time since every violent act is followed by a proof of alleged true love. Their violent nature or anger issues would be the equivalent to the character's vampire nature that will cause the female protagonist so much harm. This is very similar to *The Beauty and the Beast*, made so popular by Disney.

Twilight reinforces the connection that this myth romanticizes between violence and love with the light, the camera movements and their body language. The light is cold, misty and low. The sky is overcast and they are in a dark, dense forest where she is alone with the predator. The absence of the sounds of the forest acts, in some moments, as a signal of danger, as the silence before the hunt. Their body language establishes who is the prey and who is the hunter: she is not facing him, being therefore deprived of her sight to see him moving if he decides to attack, while he continuously stares at her. This is also exemplified by the dialogue "And so the

lion fell for the lamb”. Marking her as prey is very relevant in a patriarchal context: “The imbrication of female fear and male violence echoes Connell’s (1987) concepts of emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity, a relationship based on the patriarchal subordination of women.” (Durham 2011, 8). However, this is masked and neutralized by the romanization of this vital conflict since love can overcome everything and thus, the male’s violent behavior is dismissed.

The movement of the camera is also very relevant because when she starts talking about Edward’s vampire nature the camera circles them, which increases the sense of danger. However, it also suggests a strong link between the characters, highlighting the message that no matter the obstacles, they will be together. Therefore, not only in their discourse but also in the visual aspects of the film the idea that the danger is not as important as the love they share is supported. The young female audience to whom this movie is targeted learns to dismiss fear and makes a connection between male violence and love.

The myth of pre-destined love and the myth of love as the most important thing in life which requires total commitment is reflected in the fact that Bella willingly risks her life in order to achieve the ideal of romantic love.

This is exemplified in the fourth film in which vampire and human are having sex for the first time, a notoriously dangerous activity for the female human (Condon 2011, 00:34:42 to 00:37:00). In many vampire films, sex is a moment when the vampire bites or kills the human. In this case, her putting her life at risk is legitimized by love. It is important to notice the patriarchal implications of the power dynamics within this sexual scene, since he is the powerful one that could kill her at any moment. This translates in a romanization and sexualization of the submission of women and a normalization of male violence. An example of this is the best-selling saga that was a fanfic of the *Twilight* saga, *50 Shades of Grey*, in which this sexual power imbalance is translated into a more evident BDSM sexual relationship in which the male is the master and she is the submissive.

Moreover, in this scene the myth of love as the most important thing is used as a method to diminish and romanticize this power imbalance and the fact that her life is at stake. She is portrayed as pale and naked, and the camera looks at her from above making her seem small and fragile, while he is shown to be taller and muscular. Besides, it is also known that he not only has the physical power due to his vampire nature, but also the economic power since he owns the island they are in. This power imbalance is considered romantic because of patriarchy and romantic myths, and this is portrayed in the movie with the music, the scenery and the moonlight.

During sexual intercourse Edward breaks the bed, and she comforts him and they continue. This display of physical power as well as the way she comforts him instead of being worried about her safety is a clear example of this total commitment and devotion that is deemed necessary according to the mythicized romantic love. This hides and normalizes violence: “The representation of sexualized violence in the saga as perpetuation the societal normalization of violence” (Torkelson 2011, 7).

Furthermore, it is important to consider the fact that not only does it normalize the coupling of sexuality and violence, but also the coupling of love and violence: she can only get love if she dismisses it, even if her life is in danger. He says that “If this does not work...”, and shakes his head, implying that if he cannot control himself she will be killed, but she simply answers “I trust you”. Bella is hurt during the act, but she blames herself: “Bella’s self-blame for the injuries she obtained during consensual intercourse sounds all too similar to rape victims who blame themselves for being assaulted after the fact” (Ames 2010, 41). Since love is understood as the most important thing in life, this situation is romanticized and violence is dismissed, paving the way for abuse towards women to continue.

The myth of predestined love is also clearly conveyed in this scene thanks to the lyrics of the music with quotes such as “I’ve waited a hundred years, but I’d wait a million more for you”. In this quote, the idea of the complementary better half that is the ‘one’, the only true love possible for all eternity, is portrayed. Furthermore, the myth of love as the most important thing in life for which you must be waiting your whole life — since it is the thing that will give happiness and meaning to one’s existence — is also conveyed. Thus, romantic myths work as a method to hide, normalize or even romanticize patriarchal power imbalance and violence.

The myth of pre-destined love is clearly illustrated not only in the relationship between Edward and Bella, but also in the concept of imprinting that this saga introduces. In particular, I want to focus on the scene where Jacob, the werewolf who is in love in the first four films with Bella, imprints on her daughter as soon as she is born.

The concept of imprinting is introduced by Jacob in the third film: “Imprinting on someone is like...like when you see her, everything changes. All of a sudden, it's not gravity holding you to the planet, it's her. Nothing else matters. You would do anything, be anything for her.” (Slade 2010, 00:22:48 to 00:23:15). The notion of imprinting works as an allegory of two myths. On the one hand, the myth that believes that love is the most important thing and requires total dedication is observed. It is understood that the love of a partner is the focus of one’s existence, the only thing that is capable of giving happiness and for which it is necessary to give up one's own identity and life. On the other hand, it is also linked to the myth of

predestined love, which believes that there is such a thing as soulmates that will complement each other perfectly for all eternity. In the case of lycanthropes, when they imprint on someone it means that they have found 'the one'.

The myth of predestined love is particularly evident in this saga when Jacob imprints on Bella's newborn daughter, which causes an enormous reaction from the mother (Condon 2012, 00:11:11 to 00:13:36). However, it is later dismissed precisely because they accept it as predestined love. Predestined love is depicted as something that is not of one's own choosing but is really the fruit of destiny. Jacob Black states that he has "no control over it" and that "it wasn't my choice". Therefore, the fact that it is not a choice and the belief in two better halves or soulmates implies that it is okay to fall in love or to get imprinted on a baby, or in the case of Edward and Bella to fall in love when he is one hundred and nine years old and a vampire, while she is seventeen. Therefore, the myth of predestined love justifies falling in love with a newborn and Jacob's love towards Bella is explained because his destiny was to love her baby. As Jacob states: "Nothing ever made sense before. You, me, any of it. And now I understand why. This was the reason.". Again, the concept of predestined love is intertwined with the concept of love as the most important thing. The line of "nothing ever made sense before" is conveying the message that before romantic love appears in someone's life there is no sense in existence.

Moreover, the myth of predestined love portrays love as a kind of instantaneous, magical chemistry that justifies anything else. This is illustrated with the fact that Jacob, having hated the idea of this baby throughout the movie, in an instant changes his mind and recognizes her as his true love (Condon 2011, 01:37:45 to 01:38:46). Furthermore, the fact that the second he sees the baby has a sort of vision or flashforward in which we see the baby as an adult is a kind of justification that he is not being a pedophile. It is also an illustrative example of the idea that this myth conveys that there is a special chemistry that instantly activates when you meet 'the one'.

In the final scene of the third film in which Edward and Bella are discussing her feelings and future in a meadow (Slade 2010, 01:51:53 to 01:55:24). In the dialogue the myth of love as the meaning of existence and as depersonalization is introduced: she describes how she felt like her life had no meaning before he became her partner and his world became hers. The fact that Bella says that it was not a decision between Edward and Jacob but "between who I should be and who I am" indicates that there is an underlying sense of self identification between her sense of self and the romantic partner. Behind a seemingly empowering statement that appears to give importance to who she is and take it away from the subject of love, the opposite is

actually happening. It is only a façade that hides a process of depersonalization in which she begins to equate her own identity and her own life with the partner she is with. I think it is important to note that the myth that love can overcome anything is also observed in this sentence, particularly when she talks about who she is and who she should be. It is understood that with Jacob she is who she should be, since Jacob represents life throughout the series, as opposed to Edward who represents death. The idea that opposites attract is also portrayed: Bella feels more attracted to her opposite, Edward, than to a safer and similar option to her, Jacob.

Furthermore, in the following sentence it becomes clear that the myth of romantic love having the capacity to give meaning to one's existence, which is part of the myth of love as the most important thing in life: "I've always felt out of step, like literally stumbling through my life [...] I've had to face death and loss and pain in your world, but I've also never felt stronger and more real, more myself, because it is my world too. It's where i belong." Thus, there is a complete fusion with the other person "I wanna tie myself to you in every way humanly possible" and a forgetfulness of one's own life, sacrificing one's life and identity in the pursuit of love. Bella expresses that "I've chosen my life — I want to start living it.". However, I believe it is necessary to remember that this life she has chosen is one where she must renounce her family, friends and every habit she may have — eating, sleeping, etc. —, since she will become a vampire. The forgetfulness and sacrifice of her own life in pursuit of love is evident.

This myth of associating romantic love with the ability to give happiness and meaning to existence is especially dangerous considering the target audience for these films, women, and in particular teenage girls. This implies a great risk since women in heterosexual relationships would assume men as the focus of their existence and instead of trying to navigate the feelings of adolescence by seeking solutions for themselves to the problems that arise, the solution would unequivocally be sought in being saved by a man, and "accept the physical, emotional and sexual dominance of men over women." (Parke and Wilson 2014, 192)

Another factor to take into account is that Edward is portrayed as the sympathetic vampire, which means that he is often positioned as her hero, and in this case he is being portrayed as the savior of Bella's life by giving meaning and happiness to her existence. Therefore, Edward's "self-confessed struggles against his depraved instincts render him desirable, especially to young girls" (Durham 2011, 4).

Therefore, it conveys to the adolescent female audience that even if their romantic partner is harmful to them, the happiness and meaning of their lives depends on pursuing love. This romantic myth is emphasized with the setting of the scene which is in a beautiful meadow full of flowers in the middle of the woods as well as a warm filter and emotional music.

Furthermore, the way the actors are positioned — she is standing up and he is sitting down — gives the female character a facade of being strong and empowered when actually she is about to renounce her whole life.

The second film of the saga is a great example of the myth of romantic love that states that love is the most important thing in life. In particular, it illustrates that love has the capacity to bring happiness and that without your partner your existence is meaningless. In addition, it points out that complete devotion and dependence on the person you love is expected, even to the point of intentionally putting your life at risk. Some quotes of this film that reflect this ideology are: “I could not live in a world where you didn’t exist. You’re everything” (Weitz 2009, 01:39:37) or “You’re my only reason to be alive” (Weitz 2009, 00:13:07)”.

In the second film, Edward breaks up with Bella and she sinks into a deep depression. Since then, she regularly puts her life at risk because it is only when she is in mortal danger that she is able to have a vision of him. One of the best-known scenes in this film and one that is also quite relevant regarding romantic love is a scene in which we see the consequences the break-up has had on Bella’s life and the depression she is in due to it (Weitz 2009, 00:28:20 to 00:30:30).

The scene starts with Bella sitting in front of her window and the audience can observe how the months and seasons go by while she remains depressed: she barely changes her clothes, starts having nightmares, does not eat much and isolates herself from friends and family. She writes to Edward’s sister “Alice, you’ve disappeared, like everything else. [...] I’m lost. When you left and he left you took everything with you, but the absence of him is everywhere I look”. In this sentence and with the representation of her depression it is clear that she considered Edward to be the center of her life. Moreover, not only was he the center of it, but all the other elements of her life are secondary and do not provide happiness if he is not there, as it is exemplified when she explains how she feels that everything in her life disappeared when he left. “Edward exerts inordinate control over Bella’s life” (Durham 2012, 12) since her happiness is purely due to him.

Moreover, once she realizes that the only way to see him again is to endanger her life, she does not hesitate to do so, which is part of the myth of sacrificing one's own life for the person you love. In this myth there is an important depersonalization and devaluation of one's own life and individuality, shifting the focus of existence and happiness to the romantic partner.

I believe that it is highly problematic to portray a break-up in such a catastrophic way by emphasizing that without a romantic partner and in particular without a man there can be no happiness in life and that it is expected to fall into a deep depression and try to hurt or kill

oneself as a result. I believe that self-reliance and individuality should be encouraged in young women. It is important to empower women to stop focusing their lives around men as the patriarchy teaches them from a young age, and not to wait to be saved by a man like Bella constantly does, since the only solace that Bella finds in the period without Edward is another man. This other man — Jacob — becomes her protector in Edward's absence, and as critics argue: "Bella is consistently depicted as the damsel in distress forever in need of rescue by a male" (Ames 2010, 40). Therefore, by attributing the ability to give happiness to the partner and the need of women to be saved emotionally or physically by males a perpetration of patriarchal structures and discourses occurs.

Conclusion

The aim of this essay has been to argue that romantic love myths and their representations are used to hide, romanticize and perpetuate patriarchy. As previously mentioned, I consider this to be a very important issue as romantic films are targeted towards women, and especially young girls, instilling this harmful ideology in them. New generations of women should be empowered, not indoctrinated with traditional values that only seek to continue a systematic abuse of them. Romantic love myths dictate those women should center their lives around men, who will be their saviors and providers of happiness. Therefore, violence is dismissed or even romanticized. These mythologized representations of love are deeply detrimental to ending gender-based violence, yet these myths, so beneficial to patriarchy, continue to be perpetuated.

In the first section of the paper I have intended to explain the origin and foundations of romantic love. I deem this important in order to understand how romantic love myths became a central part not only of fiction but also of the collective imaginary, and how from the beginning they encourage patriarchal ideology. Furthermore, I discuss three of its main myths, and I have also touched on the ideas or sub-myths that each of these comprise, as well as touching on what is hidden and normalized behind these myths. In addition, I have explored the relationship between vampires in film and the romance genre, focusing on the connection of these creatures to sex as well as some of the most relevant vampire stereotypes that would lead to vampires starring in romantic films.

In the second section of the paper I have focused on particular examples from the *Twilight* saga in order to illustrate and analyze how the myths of romantic love are applied and what patriarchal violence they entail. Using examples of each film of the saga I have

exemplified how the three of these myths combine and act as a way to dismiss, minimize and even romanticize violence and abuse towards women. It is also analyzed how these myths sustain patriarchal ideology such as identifying women as weak and submissive and men as powerful and dominant, making it seem desirable for the audience. Moreover, these myths also serve as justification and romanticization of pedophilia, stalking or self-harm.

Ultimately, I consider these myths to be particularly dangerous because of their ability to appear harmless. These myths are used in the cinema in romantic films that target women, and through them, very harmful situations that should never be condoned are romanticized. In conclusion, the ability of these myths to make an inherently violent relationship or situation seem desirable makes it extremely important to analyze and dissect these myths as a method of gradually dismantling them.

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