

THE SUPERNATURAL IN *TWILIGHT* AND *HARRY POTTER*

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Every so often, a novel comes around that revolutionizes the way we see certain things and think of certain words. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, for example, made us see the love story in a whole new light – one in which the heroine doesn't have to be beautiful or delicate, and the hero doesn't have to be completely flawless. J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* are two recent books that are attempting another revolution. These books are giving us new ways of looking at the supernatural.

One of the first things the reader notices while reading these two books is the way that Rowling and Meyer have deviated from traditional ways of developing supernatural elements and characters. The witches of *Harry Potter*, for example, are merely girls and women who possess the magical ability to learn spells. This is far different from the typical stereotype of malicious green-skinned cacklers with nose warts. As far back as the early 1600's, William Shakespeare wrote of witches in *Macbeth* as hags who make potions using strange, foreboding ingredients like "Liver of blaspheming Jew" (4.1.26) and "Finger of birth-strangled babe" (4.1.30). The witches of *Harry Potter*, though, tend to use ingredients that are much tamer, like dried nettles, snake fangs, and porcupine quills (Rowling 138-139). Instead of wild hags, they are civilized people, generally governed by rules and laws that apply to all.

Meyer's vampires also deviate from the standard stereotype we as readers have come to expect. Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, for whom his novel is named, "throws no shadow; he make in the mirror no reflect . . . He may not enter anywhere at the first, unless there be some one of the household to bid him to come . . . His power ceases, as does that of all evil things, at the coming of the day" (222-3). He also displays other

TRACKS / THE SUPERNATURAL

qualities that make him everything the modern public has come to expect from vampires: he fears the crucifix, he drinks human blood, and he burns in sunlight. Meyer's vampires, though, are definitely not modern-day Draculas. True, they do still drink blood, but the protagonists at least subside on the blood of animals, not humans. Their diet, strength, and speed mark them as vampires, but much is different. The crucifix offers no threat to them, as the reader can see from the ancient cross hanging on the wall of the Cullens' hallway (Meyer 330), and they do not need permission to enter someone's house, leaving Edward quite capable of stealthily watching Bella as she sleeps (Meyer 293). The sun, also, offers no true threat to them except for exposure. Instead of burning in sunlight, the vampires of *Twilight* sparkle "like thousands of tiny diamonds" (Meyer 260). Both Meyer and Rowling push beyond the common archetypes to reinvent the supernatural in their own way.

More than breaking tradition, though, the authors use this reinvention to make a statement about the morality of magic and the supernatural. Despite the fact that Shakespeare's queen of the witches, Hecate, is "The close contriver of all harms" (3.5.7), Rowling's witches are not all evil. In fact, the book tells the reader many times that it is the choices one makes that defines them, not who or what they are. We see this the first time in Harry's decision to be in Gryffindor house instead of Slytherin (Rowling 121), the house he knows many evil witches and wizards have belonged to (Rowling 80). Witches, like Harry and all other wizards and magic users, have the choice to be good or bad. Hermione, therefore, may occasionally be a "bossy know-it-all" (Rowling 164), but she is inherently good, helping Harry and Ron to defeat the evil Quirrell.

Quirrell and Voldemort, on the other hand, are not good. Perry Glanzer argues in his article, "Harry Potter's Provocative Moral World: Is There a Place for Good and Evil in Moral Education?" that "Rowling clearly defends the existence of an objective moral universe" (526). After all, we do still have that dichotomy of good Harry versus evil Voldemort. This is true, however the reader is forced to notice that this dichotomy exists between the actual characters, not in the concept of magic. Because both good and evil can use magic, magic itself has no moral direction; it simply is.

The same can be said of the supernatural in *Twilight*. The reader can still see the good in the Cullens and the evil in James and Victoria. Some might argue that this is due to the fact that the Cullens drink animal blood instead of human blood, but I believe it is more complicated than this. Once more, Meyer is showing us the—forgive the term—humanity in the vampires. The goodness in Edward and his family does not stem from them hunting animals. Rather, their

abstaining from hunting humans stems from their goodness. Edward admits that he himself hunted humans for a time (342), but he soon returned to hunting animals (343). The reason, he tells Bella, is that he “[doesn’t] *want* to be a monster” (187). His reasoning reiterates the idea that choices shape the individual. The Cullens are good because they want to be, not because of their diet.

By denying that evil is inevitable in the supernatural, these authors pave the way for the idealizing and romanticizing of magic and vampirism. For young Harry Potter, magic is his escape from oppression. He is empowered and set free to live his own life, unhindered by the Dursleys. Rowling lets the magical world charm Harry and the readers with things like Bertie Bott’s Every Flavor Beans, which come in literally every flavor, invisibility cloaks, and a game called Quidditch. The thrill of the experiences and the freedom they offer give readers a satisfied feeling. This feeling is in direct contrast with the foreboding, fearful feelings the older stories about magic give. Because magic has the potential to be good instead of evil, it can be safe and fulfilling as well.

Vampires too are romanticized in *Twilight*. Gone is the “awful creature” who “lay like a filthy leech” and made “every sense in [man] revolted at the contact” (Stoker 48). In its place is a beautiful creature with diamond-like skin. Edward tells Bella, “Everything about me invites you in—my voice, my face, even my *smell*” (Meyer 263-4). Rather than repulse humans, they attract them. True, the vampires can still be scary, but the protagonists are so gentle and caring to those they love that their strength is more of a wonder to be marveled at than an abomination to be feared. Instead of a vicious animal in the shape of a man, the reader sees a good man that any woman could fall in love with, were she daring enough to risk believing that he could overcome his beast within. In contrast to the heartless and purely bloodthirsty Dracula, Edward is lost, a boy trying to be with his forbidden love despite the astronomical obstacles the world places in his path.

It is not enough to say that the supernatural is simply romanticized in these books, however. In fact, they are absolutely essential for the main characters in the novels to truly understand who they are and what they are capable of. For Harry, the magical world at the beginning offers him freedom from the Dursleys, friends, and a place to call home, none of which he had ever really had before. This begins his journey from a boy, trying to survive in an unhappy life, to a hero, courageous enough to risk death in order to stop evil.

The reader watches as Harry learns to have more confidence in himself through Quidditch. Before he begins to play, he constantly imagines himself failing—he imagines the sorting hat won’t pick him for

TRACKS / THE SUPERNATURAL

a house at all (Rowling 120), and even after his first time flying, he imagines that he is going to be expelled from Hogwarts, with a best case scenario of being allowed to be Hagrid's assistant (150). Soon, though, the reader sees him gain confidence, defeat a mountain troll, face all sorts of charms made by the teachers, and even fight Voldemort himself, embodied through Quirrell. No longer does he worry about being expelled. Instead of worrying about his own failure, he focuses on what he has to do to succeed. When he goes to stand in front of the Mirror of Erised, he does not think of what will happen when he somehow gives the stone to Voldemort. Instead he thinks "I must lie . . . I must look and lie about what I see, that's all" (292). The magical world of Hogwarts has at last allowed Harry to see what he can do, as opposed to what he cannot do.

Bella of *Twilight* also finds her true self through the vampires of Forks. When she first comes to the small town her father calls home, her biggest concerns are the weather, fitting in with the chief of police as her father, and trying to keep the boys from getting too close for comfort. Soon, though, she is catapulted into the world of the Cullens, and she must face worse dangers than she has ever seen before. The first danger, of course, is her own boyfriend. She knows that he is a vampire and that he craves her blood, but she ultimately decides it doesn't matter because she is "unconditionally and irrevocably in love with him" (195). She realizes that she is willing to risk her own life every day for the man she loves. But the danger doesn't end there. With Edward, she believes that she will most likely live. Soon, though, she must face the idea of certain death to save her mother. She "knew that if [she'd] never gone to Forks, [she] wouldn't be facing death now. But, terrified as [she] was, [she] couldn't bring [her]self to regret the decision" (1). She finds it in herself to face down a fearful hunter who has more strength than she could ever hope to match so that she can save someone she loves. Because of her interaction with the vampires, she learns just how courageous she can truly be.

Both *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* are vastly popular books with young readers, and even adults love to read about them. *Harry Potter*, however, has been a subject of great controversy over the years, whereas *Twilight* has not. In his review of *Twilight*, James Blasingame remarks, "many adult readers have confessed that they enjoyed the book and found nothing in it to suggest that it should be restricted to an adolescent audience" (633). They also, it seems, haven't found much reason to restrict it *from* an adolescent audience.

This acceptance has not been the case with *Harry Potter*. This series has managed to make it to number 7 on the American Library Association's list of the 100 most frequently challenged books of 1990-

2000. Many people may wonder why, with two books so similar in subject matter and target audience, only one is often challenged while the other is not. I would argue that this has more to do with Rowling's word choice than the content inside her novel. Rowling made the choice to call Hogwarts a school of Witchcraft and Wizardry, which may be the very thing that sparked the controversy in the first place. As discussed earlier, witches in literature have a history of bringing trouble and being malicious. They also have a background in satanic worship. The Salem Witch Trials is just one historical example of a religious group being so afraid of witchcraft that people gathered to kill the suspected witch's before they could bring any more harm.

In his article in *Education Journal*, Ben Hubbard discusses the outcry of book censors who feel *Harry Potter* is a "direct assault on Christian values" (17). The problem, says Linda P. Harvey, president of the Mission America, is the "bigger issue of the promotion of witchcraft on a large scale to our young people" (Hubbard 17). We notice, however, that this argument does not mention the word "wizardry," though the wizard is the male equivalent of Rowling's witch. This may seem such a slight difference that it is of little consequence, but even the Merriam-Webster's dictionary gives the first definition of witch as "one that is credited with usually malignant supernatural powers; *especially*: a woman practicing usually black witchcraft often with the aid of a devil or familiar." Wizard, however, yields the archaic definition of "wise man" and another common definition of "one skilled in magic." Though the open-minded may see this book as perfectly innocent, it is not difficult to understand how the debate arose.

Despite the controversy, both *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* still manage to be among the most popular novels in young adult literature. Many children who don't like to read on a typical basis will pick these books up and only reluctantly put them back down. Meyer and Rowling are changing the face of the supernatural world, giving readers a freedom to dream of a life where magic can happen, and it's not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, a little bit of the unreal can be exactly what people need to figure out their realities.

TRACKS / THE SUPERNATURAL

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