

The Twilight of Capitalism: Stephenie Meyer and the 24/7 Vampire

Even within the inherently conservative genre of YA romance (a formula largely dependent upon heteronormative variations of the marriage plot), Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series is notable for an unapologetically retrograde portrayal of twenty-first century youth culture, one in which the social experience of human teenagers includes dances, movies and dinner dates, but not sex, drug use, or social media. While the conventions of both paranormal and traditional gothic romance necessitate heroine Bella Swann's movement *away* from the modern world of contemporary culture into a comparatively old world of history, legend and superstition, Meyer's only reference to a recognizable modernity is through Bella's brief nostalgic reference to her old high school in Phoenix, AZ, which had metal detectors and "a feel of the institution." Comparatively, Forks High School, like small town Forks, WA is not the epicenter of modern teenage life, but a benevolent ghost that Bella finds easy to dismiss in favor of the far more exciting one hundred and ten year old virgin vampire, Edward Cullen, and his similarly ancient (patriarch Carlyle Cullen is over 300 years old) if more sexually experienced vampire family. While cultural critics like *The Atlantic's* Caitlyn Flanagan have suggested *Twilight's* "aura of an earlier time in American life and girlhood" in which "it was unheard of for a nice girl to be a sexual aggressor" must be "deeply comforting to its teenage girl readers," critical consensus tends to read Meyer's representation of the adolescent experience, informed by benignly passive youth culture and archaic gender and racial politics, deeply disturbing in its privileging of the *inactivity* that deflects from the activism of social critique.

And yet, while *Twilight* makes little attempt to deviate from the safe gloom of teen romance, stormy with feeling and weather, the series also subtly provides cloud cover for a postmodern rewriting of vampire capitalism. Marxist readings that figure the vampire as an avatar for capitalist consumption are hardly new but Meyer's particular emphasis on sleep and sunlight through the *Twilight* series points to a distinctly contemporaneous textual engagement with what political philosopher Jonathan Crary has recently defined as a '24/7' mode of twenty-first century consumption and production and perhaps an ultimate expression of capitalism in *accelerationist* mode.

In this paper I will argue that *Twilight's* quaint notion of 'forever' as a romantic ideal of eternal first love disturbingly aligns with Crary's assertion that "sleep is an affront to capitalism," and, relatedly, that Edward Cullen's propensity to sparkle like 'diamonds' in the sunlight, reconfigures the traditional vampire figure's dark depths into an ideal form of perpetual illumination and wakefulness in which, as Crary notes "personal and

social identity has been reorganized to conform to uninterrupted operation of markets, information networks, and other systems." Finally, I will argue a connection between Meyer's superhuman, supermodel vampires, as represented by the Cullen clan, and the military's quest for "the sleepless soldier," a research ideal that Crary views as "a forerunner to the sleepless worker or consumer." If this is an exceptionally grim reading of Meyer's fantasy series, it attempts to situate *Twilight* firmly within the evolving discourse of twenty-first century postmodern capitalism.