

Emotions as a Feminist Discourse: Female Writerly Consciousness and Affective Narrative Philosophy in Twilight and Midnight Sun

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ABSTRACT:

The article repositions the novels *Twilight* and *Midnight Sun* as culturally significant body works that foreground the self as a place of feminist practice and affect as a horizon for feminist thought. The chief argument of the research draws from the contemporary social theory of feminism and affect, such that the author engages the audience with the idea that Stephenie Meyer's works embody a "plan of affect"; that her narrative produces affective spaces in which readers can engage emotionally with and across the text; and that the affective qualities of the text, in turn, refigure and reposition feminism in the mind of the reader. "The reader understands how the novels promote the significance of emotions and affect in desires and agency, as opposed to the traditional rationalist literary criticisms that disregarded emotions and feelings, particularly those of women. The text, therefore, offers a comparative reading of *Twilight* and *Midnight Sun* by examining how the shift from Bella's to Edward's perspective in the latter refigures the practice of masculinity in relation to anxiety, control, and excess.

Keywords: Feminist discourse, Affect theory, Gendered subjectivity, Narrative voice, Emotional agency, Popular romance

Introduction

The romance genre has always been a tricky genre to deal with in literary and cultural criticism, but its reputation for sentimentality, regressiveness and lack of literary value remains alive and kicking. The *Twilight* series, however, by Stephenie Meyer is a phenomenon to be reckoned with and should be studied. Since the first book in the series, *Twilight* (2005), was released, readers have had a strong response to the series, especially young women, and there has been a critical discussion. The novels are located at the crossroads of popular culture, gender politics and affective narrative and therefore are relevant texts for feminist and affect studies. It is interesting to observe in the present study how

emotions are a discourse and how the affective feminist texts *Twilight* and *Midnight Sun* can be seen as having narrative authority, agency and subjectivity as a discourse. The concept of affect as a process, as an agent that is deployed, negotiated and challenged as a gendered experience. *Twilight's* personal voice establishes an emotional tone, which demonstrates the politics of a male-authored control of the authority and a male-authored version of the story. Bella has been described as passive, unresponsive, or self-effacing, but the elements of desire, fear, love, and longing are affective agencies which drive the story and the character development. This research is based on theories of feminist literary theory (Cixous, Toril and Moi)

and the context of the wider discussion of women's writing and the history of exclusion of emotion, embodiment and relationality from literature. Moreover, this study is based on an affect theory that was developed by Sara Ahmed and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who consider affect as social and cultural productive forces that produce attachments, relationships and structures of power. The effect is not only in the text but also in the reader, fandoms, and the larger conversations of culture in the *Twilight* phenomenon. Readers' emotional connection with characters and narrative gives a strong strength to the characters' identities and self-understandings, particularly that of the female readers. The point of view in *Midnight Sun*, which shifts from Bella to Edward Cullen, undermines the affective framework set up in *Twilight*. Edward's voice is not a masculine voice and focuses on emotions of fear, guilt, lust and self-monitoring. The fragility of his emotions and his introspection provide an alternative paradigm of masculinity and his own instability of command. Bella's point of view and Edward's point of view show the gendered nature of emotion, power and agency, as well as how the voice of the story affects the sense of authenticity and control. Feminist theory, affect theory and narrative theory provide the background for the following three questions in this study: How is feminism depicted in terms of emotion in *Twilight* and in *Midnight Sun*? What is the role of an affective female authorship in a narrative strategy? How does the changing perspective of narratives affect gendered power relations? Finally, this study proposes that the cultural meaning of the *Twilight* series is that it carries a feminist politics of affect. Emotion does not represent a weakness but rather becomes a potent story and political symbol that represents and negotiates gender, power and emotional subjectivity in today's popular culture.

The *Twilight* series has garnered the attention of literary, media, gender and popular culture scholars. The majority of research can be divided into two groups: critics who say that the novels perpetuate traditional gender roles and supporters who say that these novels are texts

that legitimise the female desire and emotional experience. Both sides are valuable perspectives, but there is little research that has focused on emotion as part of the narrative. Initial research has centred on Bella Swan's relationship with Edward Cullen, examining the notions of dependence, protection and patriarchal power. Other scholars, however, have suggested that romance fiction offers the opportunity for women to explore love, desire, and identity. Bella's first-person narration provides her with a lot of narrative authority and readers' emotional involvement in the story. The series is known to elicit strong emotional responses by readers, but few studies use affect theory to explore the emotions that are produced by the use of narrative techniques. Likewise, there is a lack of analysis of the changing point of view and emotional makeup in *Midnight Sun*. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring emotion, gender and narrative authority through feminist theory, affect theory and narrative philosophy.

Theoretical Framework

The research method used is a combination of feminist literary theory, affect theory, narrative theory and popular culture studies to analyse the core emotional texts of *Twilight* and *Midnight Sun* in building the identity, power and meaning of emotions. All these theories can be synthesised to a conception of the role of emotion in knowledge and agency, but not in making a person weak. The feminist literary theory is centred on the idea of drawing attention to the voices and emotions of women in literature. An example of this is through Bella Swan's narration in the novel, which illustrates how emotions such as love, fear and desire influence how a person understands themselves and their identities. Affect theory also extends this view of emotion as a social and cultural phenomenon that shapes relationships, power dynamics and identity. The novels reveal the influence of emotions on human relationships and choices through Bella's and Edward's emotional journeys. Narrative theory is a tool that can be used to explain the effects of perspective on meaning. The narration of Bella's story in *Twilight* and Edward's story in *Midnight Sun* are both emotionally different and

show how narration authority and power can vary based on perspective. Edward's vulnerability and emotional conflict also defy the notion of what it means to be a man and to keep one's emotions in check. The novels also have an emotional effect beyond the text, as evidenced by the novels' fan communities, interpretations, and discussions, as shown in popular culture studies. This research proposes that these theoretical frameworks can be brought together and that emotion is a potent discourse that has the power to influence gendered identities, agency and relationships. The framework goes beyond mere criticisms of romance and offers a more nuanced analysis of the role of affect in popular fiction and feminist cultural discourses.

Research Approach

The purpose of this study is to use qualitative research methods to conduct a feminist literary theory, affect theory, and narrative philosophy-based analysis of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* (2005) and *Midnight Sun* (2020). The research will not use surveys and quantitative research methods; it will focus on analysing the texts closely in order to understand how emotions are represented in the narratives. The comparative approach has been used because both novels provide an account of the same events, but from a different perspective. For example, *Twilight* has been described using dialect in a first-person narrative by Bella Swan, while *Midnight Sun* has related the same events using a first-person perspective of Edward Cullen. The purpose of this study is to evaluate how male and female storytelling perspectives represent emotion, power and agency. Close reading will be the dominant method of analysis for this study. Significant scenes that consist of love, fear, desire, danger and moral conflict will be evaluated through language, narrative structures, pacing and internal monologue. The study will also highlight the differences in the construction of narrative consciousness through emotional self-awareness from Bella and Edward's extreme self-reflection. Using Gérard Genette's focalisation/fiction theory, the analysis examines how narrative perspectives affect emotions and reader interpretations. Other themes of the

analysis include female desire, masculinity, emotional labour, protection, and agency through feminist discursive analysis. The overall effect of using these methods is to expand our understanding of the emotional functions of narrative and feminist forces within both books.

Analysis

The analysis of both *Twilight* (2005) and *Midnight Sun* (2020) shows that emotion serves as a primary narrative and feminist device—not merely a sign of femininity. Stephenie Meyer's use of emotional experience as a means of knowing allows her characters to create identity, negotiate power, and create meaningful relationships. Bella Swan's first-person narrative in *Twilight* positions her emotional reflections (fear, desire, love, uncertainty) as sources of understanding that help develop the narrative and her identity. Bella is positioned as an active interpreter of her experiences, and she has substantial power as a narrator. Additionally, *Moonlight* adds complication to traditional gender constructions of masculinity by utilising emotional vulnerability to define it. Edward Cullen's narration of *Midnight Sun* includes elements of anxiety, guilt, insecurity, and moral dilemma, which undermines the traditional stereotype of the emotionless male hero. Edward illustrates that masculinity is not an innate or timeless trait but that it is continually reproduced through work and control of emotion. Therefore, emotion is not exclusively female; it is central to both male and female subjectivity. Examining the two novels side-by-side illuminates the ways in which focalisation plays a critical role in the development of power relationships. Bella has narrative dominance in *Twilight*, whereas Edward's narration in *Midnight Sun* reveals the limitations of his perceived authority. This perspective shift indicates how the concepts of power extend beyond physical prowess to include how individuals interpret events, feel emotionally, and access information. Both characters engage in emotional work; however, they do so differently, resulting in a mutually dependent rather than a dominant-submissive-based relationship. The results suggest that the two novels present a rejection of the assumption

that all narratives of emotion are inherently regressive. Instead, both novels use affect as an effective tool for establishing identity, agency, and gender relations. The use of feminist theory, affect theory, and narrative philosophy combined within this study ultimately shows that emotion functions as a mode through which individuals continuously engage in negotiations around power, identity, and ethical relationships.

Conclusion

The research conducted analysed both *Twilight* & *Midnight Sun* using (a) feminist literary theory & (b) affective theory & (c) narrative philosophy in order to discover how emotion creates identity as well as gives rise to narrative authority through experiences of power. Emotions become more than simply an individual experience & become a means of determining how people understand themselves & their relationships. Through Bella Swan's narration in *Twilight*, we see how Bella's use of her experience with love/fear/desire & loss gives rise to an understanding of her own identity and supports her claim to narrative authority. Rather than portraying Bella as being passive, she is presented with an active engagement with the world around her. Whereas in *Twilight* we see the idea of masculinity as being

represented in the person of Edward Cullen; the emotional experience of Edward Cullen opens up notions about masculinity that run counter to conventional understandings. The male character's emotional experience allows him to challenge assumptions about what it means to be a masculine man because the emotional experience overcomes the notion that masculinity is only about controlling others. Comparing these two works highlights the way that narrators who experience emotional events view them differently, thus increasing the likelihood that the emotional event will affect an individual's view of themselves and others. Through presenting two different accounts of the same event, Meyer illustrates power is related to an individual's understanding of the event through the perspective they view the event rather than solely through physical dominance. This research demonstrates that *Twilight* and *Midnight Sun* are emotional feminist literature that advocates against the exclusion of emotion as a form of narrative. These works demonstrate that emotion is not a sign of ineffectiveness; rather, it serves as a major influence in the construction of subjectivity, relationships, and feminist discourse in popular contemporary culture.

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