

# THE GOTHIC ELEMENTS IN TWILIGHT MOVIES: A MODERN INTERPRETATION OF GOTHIC LITERATURE

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## Abstract

This research is motivated by the popularity of the *Twilight* (2008) film, which not only became a global popular culture phenomenon but also demonstrates the revival of key elements of the Gothic literary tradition in a modern form. As an adaptation that combines teenage romance with an atmosphere of darkness and mystery, the film is significant to study within the framework of Gothic literature because it illustrates how classical traditions are transformed in contemporary media. This research aims to (1) identify and analyze the Gothic elements contained in the *Twilight* film as well as its adaptation of the classical Gothic literary tradition, and (2) explore how the film represents the main Gothic themes of forbidden love, death, and identity in a modern context. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with content analysis, utilizing the theoretical framework of classical and modern Gothic literature as described by Wolfreys, Robbins, and Womack (2013), Spooner (2006), as well as previous related studies. The research data were obtained from dialogue excerpts, narratives, and visual elements in the *Twilight* film that contain Gothic elements. The analysis shows that *Twilight* adapts the core elements of classical Gothic literature namely forbidden love, death, and identity into a modern narrative context. These themes are represented through Bella and Edward's cross-world romance, the reinterpretation of death as sacrifice, and the characters' identity crises, all framed in the emotional language of contemporary youth. Supported by visual aesthetics such as dim lighting, fog, and isolated forest landscapes, the film bridges the classical Gothic tradition with 21st-century sensibilities.

Keywords: gothic elements, *Twilight*, forbidden love, death, identity, modern gothic literature.

## INTRODUCTION

Gothic literature is widely recognized as a genre that explores human fear, imagination, and psychological conflict through dark and supernatural narratives (Golaszewska, 1985). It often focuses on horror, terror, haunted settings, and the portrayal of troubled or anti-heroic figures. Scholars note that its core features include supernatural or mysterious events such as ghosts, vampires, werewolves, and curses, which create an atmosphere of unease and blur the line between reality and imagination (Prithwiraj, 2024).

This genre is further distinguished by recurring elements such as eerie settings, supernatural beings, emotional intensity, and themes of death, fear, and the unknown. Common tropes include gloomy castles, damsels in distress, brooding protagonists, ominous weather, and internal psychological conflict. These features are designed to evoke suspense and terror. In modern adaptations, traditional Gothic tropes are often reinterpreted through contemporary perspectives, blending horror with romance and identity exploration. Even architecture plays a role, with decaying castles and monasteries reimaged as mysterious and perilous backdrops (Ananya, 2024).

Understanding Gothic literature also requires tracing its historical origins. The term “gothic” was originally a disparaging label for medieval architecture characterized by grand arches and vaulted ceilings that evoked mystery and awe. The grotesque, the haunted, the macabre, and gigantic castles became defining features of the genre (Vashishat, 2019). Among its pioneers was Horace Walpole, whose novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is considered the first true Gothic novel, introducing tropes such as a haunted castle and the supernatural blurring of reality and imagination. Following him was Ann Radcliffe, whose

*The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) became a classic of Gothic storytelling. Radcliffe mastered the art of suspense, leaving readers uncertain whether events were supernatural or human contrivances. Her works explored imprisonment, persecution, and social anxieties of a rapidly changing world (Prithwiraj, 2024).

Over time, the Gothic tradition expanded beyond literature, influencing art, music, fashion, film, and architecture. Its aesthetic has become a cultural language of darkness and melodrama. In film and literature, Gothic expression often takes the form of brooding protagonists burdened by internal dilemmas, set against gloomy weather and exotic landscapes that intensify the atmosphere of fear and dread (Ananya, 2024).

The *Twilight* film series exemplifies the influence of Gothic tradition in modern popular culture, blending supernatural romance with Gothic themes. Adapted from Stephenie Meyer’s bestselling novels *Twilight* (2005), *New Moon* (2006), *Eclipse* (2007), and *Breaking Dawn* (2008) the films achieved massive worldwide popularity. Following the franchise’s commercial success, Summit Entertainment released the first film in 2008 under the direction of Catherine Hardwicke, followed by four sequels between 2009 and 2012. With Kristen Stewart as Bella Swan, Robert Pattinson as Edward Cullen, and Taylor Lautner as Jacob Black, the films made a significant cultural impact. They were praised for visual aesthetics and the portrayal of supernatural romance within a Gothic framework, though also criticized for depictions of relationships and gender dynamics (Wilson, 2014).

At the heart of the saga is the story of Bella Swan, a teenager who falls in love with Edward Cullen, a vampire, after moving to Forks, Washington. Their re-

lationship is complicated by supernatural dangers, interspecies rivalries, and Jacob Black's feelings for Bella. Key themes include forbidden love, sacrifice, transformation, and destiny, culminating in Bella's transformation into a vampire and a final confrontation with the Volturi. Through this narrative, the series reinterprets vampire mythology with Gothic undertones, engaging contemporary young adult audiences with themes of romance, identity, and supernatural conflict (Kim & Anatol, 2011) or a "vampire canon," constituted by a wide range of texts including novels like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897).

The vampire genre itself has deep folkloric roots, portraying vampires as undead beings feeding on human blood, avoiding sacred ground, and being vulnerable to sunlight, garlic, and wooden stakes. Traditional depictions emphasized their monstrous and terrifying nature. However, contemporary works such as *The Vampire Diaries* and *The Twilight Saga* humanize vampires, presenting them as morally conflicted individuals who often seek coexistence with humans (Ananya, 2024).

Despite the cultural impact of *Twilight*, few studies have examined how the films negotiate Gothic traditions within modern cinema. A deeper analysis is necessary to uncover the complexities of Gothic elements in the series, particularly through its characters, themes, and visual style. This study therefore aims to analyze the representation of Gothic conventions including supernatural beings, dark romance, and the themes of fear and the unknown in the *Twilight* films. By doing so, it seeks to reveal how traditional Gothic tropes are reimagined in a contemporary context.

This research explored how traditional Gothic elements were adapted and transformed within contemporary popular culture, particularly in widely influential

films like the *Twilight* series. Since modern reinterpretations often reshaped classical literary traditions, analyzing the *Twilight* films provided valuable insights into the evolution of Gothic themes in the 21st century. The primary objective of this study was to identify and interpret the Gothic elements presented in the *Twilight* movies and to examine how these elements were modernized to reflect contemporary values and anxieties. Furthermore, this research contributed to broader academic discussions on Gothic literature, film studies, and cultural analysis by offering a critical perspective on the adaptation of traditional Gothic motifs in modern media. The findings benefited students, scholars, and readers interested in Gothic literature, film adaptations, and popular culture, providing a deeper understanding of how classic genres continue to shape and influence modern storytelling.

### **Problems of the Study**

This research investigates two main problems. The first concerns the Gothic elements found in the *Twilight* films and how these elements are adapted from classic Gothic literature. The second focuses on how the *Twilight* films represent central Gothic themes, namely forbidden love, death, and identity, within a modern cultural context.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this research are closely aligned with the problems stated above. The study seeks to identify and analyze the Gothic elements presented in the *Twilight* films, particularly in relation to their adaptation from classic Gothic traditions. Furthermore, it aims to explore how these films reinterpret and represent Gothic themes in ways that resonate with contemporary audiences.

### Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding how Gothic literature has been reimagined in modern film. By bridging the gap between classical Gothic traditions and popular culture, the study not only provides insights into the persistence of Gothic motifs in contemporary media but also highlights their continued relevance in shaping modern storytelling. This makes the research valuable for students, scholars, and readers who are interested in Gothic literature, film adaptations, and cultural studies.

### Limitations of the Study

The scope of this research is limited to the *Twilight* films, which may restrict the generalizability of its findings to other Gothic adaptations. Nevertheless, the novelty of this study lies in its focus on how Gothic traditions are reinterpreted within one of the most influential popular film franchises of the 21st century. Unlike previous studies that largely emphasize the romantic or fantastical aspects of the series, this research foregrounds its Gothic dimensions and demonstrates how these classical elements have been reshaped for modern youth audiences. This unique perspective enriches the academic discourse on Gothic literature and film while offering fresh insights into the cultural significance of popular media adaptations.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design with a content analysis approach. The design was chosen because it allows for an in-depth examination of narrative, visual, and symbolic elements in the *Twilight* film series. Through this design, the study was able to identify Gothic conventions and analyze how they were

adapted from classical Gothic literature into a modern cinematic context.

### Respondents/Objects of the Study

The objects of this study were the five films in the *Twilight* series released between 2008 and 2012. These films were chosen because they provide a complete narrative arc and consistently depict Gothic motifs that are relevant to the research focus.

### Instruments

The primary instrument used in this study was a documentary analysis sheet designed to capture Gothic elements such as dialogue, character behavior, setting, atmosphere, and symbolic imagery. In addition, a review matrix for scholarly literature was employed as a secondary instrument to support the interpretation of data.

### Procedures

The research procedures began with viewing the *Twilight* films in order to transcribe and document scenes that contained Gothic elements. These scenes were then analyzed to identify conventions of Gothic literature, including supernatural beings, mysterious settings, and emotional intensity. Annotations and notes were taken to record visual and narrative cues. Secondary data were also collected by reviewing scholarly works on Gothic literature, film studies, and modern adaptations. To interpret the findings, the study applied theoretical frameworks from Freud's psychoanalysis and Kristeva's concept of abjection.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis employed a qualitative descriptive approach. The process involved selecting significant scenes and dialogues, categorizing the findings based on Gothic elements, and conducting a thematic analysis to determine their relevance



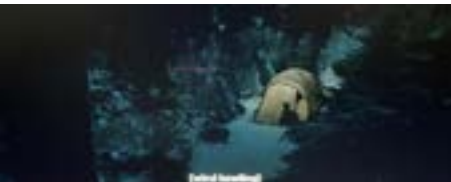
to themes such as forbidden love, death, and identity. The results were then compared to classical Gothic literature through comparative analysis, followed by contextual interpretation to link these adaptations to the values and sensibilities of modern audiences.





**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**



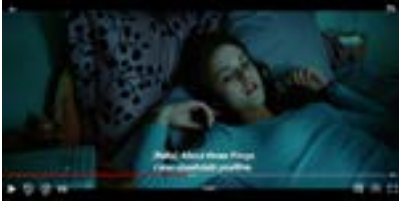

In this section, the results of data analysis based on dialogue excerpts and

narratives containing gothic elements in the *Twilight* films are presented. All data is sourced from the interactions and monologues of the main characters that represent adaptations of classical Gothic literary elements. The researchers found a number of quotes relevant to the three main gothic themes, namely forbidden love, death, and identity, which were analyzed in contemporary contexts. The results of the data analysis will be discussed as follows:

Tabel 1. Results of Main Gothic Themes

Full Quote	Main Gothic Themes	Duration	Contemporary Context Explained	Screen
(there is no dialogue, but the visual and symbolic expressions in Bella’s dreams become central to meaning)	Juxtaposition	00:09:10	The dream scene reflects death symbolically through marriage, typical of the gothic, but packed with modern visuals that combine white dresses, blood, and teenage love	
Bella : “ <i>Death is peaceful. Easy. Life is harder.</i> ”	Romanticized death	01:32:57	The scene after the fight reflects death as a path to peace, distinctly gothic, but packaged through the emotional voice of a teenager weighing life and death.	
[No live dialogue, only the sound of the wind: “ <i>wind howling</i> ”]	Sublime nature	01:25:22	The tent scene reflects the wilderness as a gripping, typical gothic threat, but packaged through the emotional drama of a teenage love triangle.	

Edward : <i>“I’m designed to kill.”</i>	The ghost-monster	00:56:09	Edward’s confession scene reflects the ambiguity of vampires as both alluring and dangerous creatures, distinctively gothic, but packaged through the intimate dialogue of modern teenagers.	
Edward : <i>“This is the last time you’ll ever see me.”</i>	Brooding male protagonist	00:20:08	The breakup scene reflects a tragic love filled with suffering, typical of the Gothic, but packaged through the figure of a modern teenage boy overwhelmed by emotional dilemmas	
-	The beast within	1:42:00	The wolf scene reflects a destructive savage side of humans, typical of the Gothic, but packaged through tense physical battles in a snowy forest.	
-	The damsel in distress	1:31:00	This scene reflects a fragile woman in a threatened position, typical of the gothic, but packaged through a visual of a suffering face that evokes emotional sympathy.	

	Extreme weather			The flashes of lightning reflect a typical gothic supernatural threat, but are packaged through cinematic visual effects that provide emotional tension.	
Bella VO: <i>"I'd never given much thought to how I would die... But dying in the place of someone I love, seems like a good way to go..."</i>	Death	00:00:12		The opening narrative reflects death romantically, typical of the gothic, but packaged in the voice of a modern teenager who associates death with the sacrifice of love.	
Bella VO: <i>"About three things I was absolutely positive. First, Edward was a vampire... And third, I was unconditionally and irrevocably in love with him."</i>	Forbidden Love & Identity	57:36		Combining Edward's recognition of his identity as a vampire with an irrevocable declaration of love, it places gothic conflict within the frame of today's teenage romance.	
Edward: <i>"I wanted to kill you. I've never wanted a human's blood so much in my life."</i>	Identity & Death	53:57		Showing Edward's inner conflict between predatory impulses (death) and his desire to maintain self-control, is relevant to the theme of self-search in the modern era.	

Edward: <i>"You are my life now."</i>	Forbidden love	01:30:50	The emotional statement of vampires to humans, marks a relationship that defies biological and social norms, but still uses the love language of contemporary teenagers.
Bella: <i>"I'm dying, already. Every second I get closer, older..."</i>	Identity	01:51:30	An expression of existential anxiety typical of modern teenagers, in which Bella questions her identity and wants to change her destiny in order to align with Edward's world.



### The Gothic Elements Present in the Twilight Movie and its Adaptation of Classic Gothic Literature

The results of the analysis show that *Twilight* (2008) contains a number of key elements of gothic literature adapted from the classical tradition, but reconstructed for the contemporary context. These elements include forbidden love, death, identity, a mysterious atmosphere, isolation, and the presence of supernatural creatures, especially vampires, all of which are wrapped in supportive visual aesthetics, such as dim lighting, cool color palettes, and the misty forest landscape of Forks. If in classic 18th-century gothic literature as described by Wolfreys et al. (2013) the setting is often a remote castle or haunted house, *Twilight* replaces it with the remote and memorable rainforests of the Pacific Northwest, creating a sense of alienation that is in line with the typical gothic "wilderness setting", but still relevant to modern audiences.

In the aspect of forbidden love, Twi-

light maintains a classic motif rooted in medieval romance and Renaissance tragedy, the story of two individuals from different worlds who should not be united. In classical works, obstacles are usually social or moral; in *Twilight*, the obstacle is biological and existential in the relationship between humans (Bella) and vampires (Edward). As Cooper (2010) explains about modern gothic, the attraction in this story arises from a combination of fear and desire, where romance is closely intertwined with the threat of death.

The element of death in *Twilight* also shows a continuation of the classic gothic tradition that often links death to sacrifice and tragic fate. However, as revealed by Crawford (2024), *Twilight* modifies the nuances of the horror of death into something romantic and personal, for example through the opening narrative of Bella expressing her willingness to die for her loved ones. This adaptation refined gothic terror into a form of "gothic romance" that was

more acceptable to teenage audiences without removing its existential tension.

The theme of identity represents the evolution of 19th-century gothic literature which, according to Wolfreys et al. (2013) began to explore the internal state of characters. Edward's inner conflict between predatory instincts and moral values and Bella's desire to abandon her humanity for eternity with Edward, reflects a typical gothic identity crisis that in its modern version is also related to the issue of adolescent identity search. This is in line with Spooner (2006) analysis that modern gothic has a lot to do with fractured identities and social disorientation.

In addition to these three main themes, *Twilight* also features elements of the classic gothic aesthetic through additional narrative and visual tropes. The presence of the beast within (data 11) confirms Edward's duality between the human and monster sides, which parallels the theme of duality in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Meanwhile, the trope of the damsel in distress (data 12) appears in Bella's representation as a vulnerable figure who is often the target of danger, reviving the classic gothic pattern in which women are at the center of the tension between love, threat, and rescue. The atmosphere (data 13) is built through the dim, rainy, and foggy landscape of the Forks, presenting isolation and a sense of emotional alienation. Parmiter (2011) emphasizes that natural landscapes play an important role in creating a gothic atmosphere, and *Twilight* expands this function not only as a visual setting, but also as a metaphor for the characters' emotional alienation.

*Twilight* takes advantage of the atmosphere of mystery and isolation through a setting that is constantly shrouded in fog, dim light, and the geographical remoteness of the Forks. This finding is in

line with Parmiter (2011) who emphasizes the role of natural landscapes in building a gothic atmosphere. This research expands on Parmiter's view by showing that the landscape in *Twilight* serves not only as a visual setting, but also as a metaphor for the characters' emotional alienation.

When compared to the findings of Calle (2016) which highlighted how *Twilight* softened gothic scary elements with fairytale elements to improve accessibility, the research found that despite such "softening" efforts, the film still retained the essence of gothic horror through suspense, death threats, and the moral ambiguity of vampire characters. Meanwhile, Ismatulayevna (2022) underscores the sustainability of the motifs of strangeness, isolation, and psychological instability in contemporary gothic finds that are also clearly reflected in *Twilight*, especially in the representation of the Cullen family as an isolated supernatural community but trying to live on the fringes of human society.

The adaptation of gothic elements in *Twilight* can be understood as a bridge between classic gothic aesthetics and modern sensibilities. Core elements such as forbidden love, death, and identity are retained, but presented through an emotional and visual point of view appropriate for a 21st-century audience. This makes *Twilight* not only the successor of the gothic literary tradition, but also a reinterpretation that combines horror, romance, and psychological drama in a narrative framework that is more familiar to today's audience.

### **Represent Major Gothic Themes, Such as Forbidden Love, Death, and Identity, in a Contemporary Context**

Building on the identification of gothic elements and their contribution to the overall atmosphere of the film in the previous section, this part examines how

those elements crystallize into major gothic themes. The analysis focuses on three central themes forbidden love, death, and identity that not only reflect the classical Gothic tradition but also highlight the adaptation of these themes into a modern narrative context.

The film *Twilight* (2008) represents the three main gothic themes of forbidden love, death, and identity by blending the conventions of classical gothic literature and contemporary narrative sensibility. If in classical gothic these themes are often presented in dramatic settings, full of death symbols, and wrapped in a horror atmosphere, *Twilight* adapts them through an emotional language that can be reached by modern audiences, especially teenagers and young adults. This is in line with Spooner (2006) view that modern gothic retains its core theme, but explores it through psychological conflicts and social issues relevant to the present.

The forbidden love in *Twilight* comes about through the relationship between Bella, a mortal, and Edward, an immortal vampire. In the classical Gothic literary tradition, as in the works of Ann Radcliffe or Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, this kind of relationship is always overshadowed by the threat of death, class or world differences, and social taboos. *Twilight* maintains this premise, but packs it in the form of a modern teen romance, with intimate dialogue, high school settings, and dating dynamics typical of youth. These findings are in line with Crawford (2024) who stated that *Twilight* bridges "traditional horror-driven gothic" with "gothic romance" for young audiences, but this research shows that layers of horror and threat remain present for example in the moment when Edward admits his desire to kill Bella because her blood is too tempting.

Death is represented not only as a

threat, but also as a conscious choice loaded with the meaning of sacrifice. In classical gothic literature, death often appears as an inevitable tragic climax; in *Twilight*, death is also present as something that can be chosen for the sake of love or eternal togetherness. Bella's opening narrative "*I'd never given much thought to how I would die... but dying in the place of someone I love seems like a good way to go*" describes a modern reinterpretation of gothic death: from simply a gruesome ending to a symbol of emotional dedication. Calle (2016) notes that Stephanie Meyer often borrowed fairy tale structures to soften gothic dark elements, and in the case of these deaths, the softening makes them part of the romantic narrative, without erasing the inherent sense of danger.

Identity in *Twilight* reflects a 19th-century gothic development that, according to Wolfreys et al. (2013) moved from external mystery to internal psychological investigation. Edward's inner conflict between vampire instincts and his morality and Bella's existential anxiety who considers himself "dying" every second as he gets older represents the identity crisis that characterizes modern gothic. In the contemporary context, this search for identity also touches on issues relevant to today's adolescents: dissatisfaction with oneself, the desire to change one's destiny, and the attempt to build compatibility with loved ones. In line with the findings of (Ismatullayevna, 2022), *Twilight* maintains the motif of strangeness and alienation, but wraps it in familiar social realities such as the school environment and family life.

This overall representation is reinforced by the visual and atmospheric elements of cold lighting, cloudy skies, misty forests that maintain an isolated and mysterious feel, as Prasantham (2024) studies in relation to gothic landscapes. The research

adds that in *Twilight*, the landscape is not only a physical setting, but also a symbol of the character's emotional state: the cold, foggy forks reflect the inner conflict and blurred boundaries between the human and supernatural worlds.

*Twilight* represents gothic themes in a modern context through a combination of classical narrative structure, gothic visual symbolism, and psychologically relevant emotional dialogue. Forbidden love becomes a cross-world romance story packaged for a teenage audience, death becomes a conscious choice that means sacrifice, and identity becomes a battleground between nature, desire, and self-acceptance. This adaptation makes *Twilight* an effective bridge between classic gothic aesthetics and contemporary narrative needs, expanding the relevance of the gothic genre in the 21st century.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis, this study concludes that *Twilight* (2008) incorporates key elements of classic Gothic literature—such as forbidden love, death, identity crisis, mystery, isolation, and supernatural beings (vampires)—which are adapted into forms relevant to contemporary audiences. While traditional Gothic works often set their stories in remote castles or haunted houses, *Twilight* replaces them with the cold, misty, and isolated forests of Forks. Forbidden love is depicted through Bella and Edward's relationship that defies both biological and social norms, death is reinterpreted as a symbol of sacrifice and loyalty, and identity emerges as the central conflict, reflecting both Edward's struggle with his instincts and Bella's desire to abandon her humanity. These themes are reinforced through visual aesthetics such as dim lighting, fog, and wild landscapes, which maintain a myste-

rious atmosphere while symbolizing emotional alienation. Thus, *Twilight* not only preserves the essence of classic Gothic themes but also adapts them to the emotional language, values, and visual aesthetics of 21st-century audiences.

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