

A Guide to Sweets: Research Paper

Cora Nicholson

Fantasies and dreams are ways for us to escape our hardships and pain, aren't they? The answer is an obvious yes. What happens when we dive into the origins from which so many of our fantasies have derived? The realism, pain and hardships these tales were originally written about has been stripped away and sugar coated to create stories that we glorify or fantasize about. By designing a cookbook of romanticized recipes, readers will learn about the origin stories, how they have been altered and the realities of these transformations. Romanticizing and glorifying refer to the notion of the admiration and praising of something more than what would be considered normal. The recreated version of the origin stories of creatures such as vampires, werewolves, and witches teaches us to develop fantasies about becoming them. Our fantasies have been constructed from the false truths represented in these romanticized tales. The original messages taught through these characters are important to consider because they teach us how to deal with pain, suffering and hardships in our own lives. Taking into account that the origins have gruesome and brutal truths, we must look at how far the stories we know today have deviated from their original plots.

In the case of vampirism, a popular and controversial subject that has swept the nation in the ten years, specifically in the hearts of young females we see a very profound sense of illusion and sugar coating. From skin burning in sunlight to shimmering diamonds, there is clear evidence of sugar coating or romanticizing within the films and literature about our fantasies. The example of skin shimmering in *Twilight*, a story about a teen vampire who falls helplessly in love with a human, differs greatly from a movie such as *Underworld*. A film about two warring races which displays a more brutal reality and displays the extreme violence that revolves around the origin and truth of these creatures. According to the Box Office Mojo, the highest grossing *Twilight* movie made approximately 145 million dollars in box office sales while the highest grossing *Underworld* film only made twenty-five million dollars. The *Twilight* film franchise as a whole made a profit of three point three billion dollars worldwide. While the *Underworld* franchise only made 539 million dollars worldwide. The preference for the softened truth can be seen in these statistics alone. Book sales for the first book in the *Twilight* series grossed one point seven million dollars in the first day it was released. According to the *New York Times*, the *Twilight* series has sold over one-hundred million copies which is four times more than the twenty-five million copies of Darren Shan's popular vampire series *Cirque De Freak*. *Cirque De Freak* being a novel that follows a young boy through a brutal path of hardship and adversity at the hands of vampires.

Harry Potter is considered one of the world's most renown franchises about a young boy who is set to a fantastical world in order to learn spells to defeat an evil man who killed his parents. The book series alone has been said to have an impact on culture. According to the *Boston Globe*, the books have turned literary culture into pop culture, mainstream culture, and merged a gap in age-appropriate literature. The *Harry Potter* books have grossed over one billion dollars and sold five-hundred million copies worldwide, making it the best-selling book series in history. Though these characters are considered witches and wizards, they lack the true stories behind these creatures. During the Salem Witch Trials in the England's Massachusetts Bay Colony, over two-hundred people were accused and over twenty were executed for witchcraft. Not only was it a horrific sentence to be put to death, but in the case of Giles Corey the sentence became much more gruesome. After denying the accusations of witchcraft, Corey was forced to lay down naked, with heavy stones placed on a board that was on his body. Each time he denied the accusations they added more weight to the board and ultimately crushed him to death. In September that same year his wife was hanged as well. Jone Johnson Lewis states in an article on ThoughtCo., that the other nineteen accused at Salem were also hanged to death.

According to Gwynn Guilford, a reporter for Quartz, there were nine-hundred estimated executions that took place during the Würzburg witch trials in Germany alone. Though stories such as Harry Potter discuss difficulties overcoming evil and growing up in a fantastical world, they fail to unveil the hardships people underwent as they were accused of sorcery or witchcraft. Many of those accused that were wrongfully sentenced, but not executed, died while in jail.

Mass witch hunts were not the only type of hunts occurring in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Wolf hunts also took place after massive attacks were recorded in Gevaudan, France. The Beast of Gevaudan was responsible for sixty to one-hundred attacks on men, women and children in the Providence of Gevaudan area which sent people into a panic. Killing over one-hundred wolves, the surviving victims of these attacks set out to find the Beast and put a silver bullet through it. France also had a pair of werewolves in the sixteenth century, who claimed to have ointment that turned them into wolves. Pierre Burgot and Michel Verdun were burned at the stake when they admitted to the murders of several children. According to Stephen Wagner, in an article on ThoughtCo., he discussed the fate of Peter Stubbe, the Bedburg Werewolf. Stubbe was a farmer than turned into a wolf-like creature at night. When neighboring farmers saw his transformation, he was blamed for killings of many people and executed. The origins of werewolves and the gruesome transformations that they go through are not represented in most of the popular films we fantasize about today. Take Jacob Black, from the Twilight series, with his transformation into a wolf we see his anger and a beautiful wolf. The lack of pain and agony that comes from growing and breaking bones, the change in direction of joints and the shutdown of all organs in order for them to resize would knock someone unconscious. In a film, such as Underworld, there is a real representation of the changing of bone structure and agony that comes with it.

Why do the movies and stories about glorified characters and environments receive more attention and earn more in the box office? According to an article by Charlotte Ahlin, at Bustle, the popularity of the romanticized creatures wins out due to vampires specifically, being able to hurt you but not wanting to. The struggle between the compassion and evil nature draws fans in and keeps them hooked. Since people are more apt to fantasize and daydream, the romanticized and glorified recreations of these stories become more popular. “The fact that they rack in so much money means one thing: humans like improvement. . . self-improvement.” (Megan Suckut, North by Northwestern). Suckut points out in her article that humans have the desire for happy ending and seeing the “monsters” making efforts to change. Showing compassion which has drifted far from the original stories such as Nosferatu, a story about a vampire who tracks down a man’s wife from Transylvania to suck her blood only to perish with the light of the morning, or Vlad the Impaler, a ruthless ruler from the seventeenth century who is known for impaling the soldiers of his enemies and dipping his bread into their blood. According to Erin Johnson, in an article on Modern Day Werewolves, she discusses the change to werewolf characteristics made by the millennial generation. Turning man-eating beasts into attractive men who suffer from the disease called lycanthropy is only one way in which werewolves have been romanticized. As discussed before, the transformations into these creatures have become a fantasized event as well with the scenes of Twilight in which Taylor Lautner, as Jacob Black, with seemingly no clothes which plays into desire and lust. Romanticizing these characters creates a sense of denial of the true origins from which they have derived.

Using denial allows one to pass the truth rather than face the “painful restrictions and demands of reality” (Carl Alasko, Psychology Today). The millennial generation and younger have a new sense of what a vampire, werewolf and witch is all come from popular films and literature such as Twilight and Harry Potter, but why are these generations disregarding the original stories? Studies by Margee Kerr, a sociologist who studies fear, show that movies that are frightening increase one’s heart rate and awakens the awareness of the body. The feeling of losing control over the body, brought about by scary films, can produce the same reaction as that of a panic attack. By romanticizing these creatures, they become more seductive and relatable to the audience and with a lack of threat, these characters become desirable. The fantasies become more sexualized as they lose the original messages behind them as well.

In the example of *Twilight*, Bella has to pick between two beautiful men who are both portrayed as gorgeous “monsters”, who women are captivated by. In the height of the series’ popularity, die-hard *Twilight* fans were split into two groups: Team Edward and Team Jacob. The debate itself sexualizes the two characters that are modeled after ferocious creatures and begins a new branch of fantasy characters.

By creating a cookbook, there is room to explore the vast differences presented above between original vampires, witches, and werewolves and the romanticized creatures. In the text *Visual Research: An Introduction to Research Methods in Graphic Design*, Ian Noble and Russell Bestley discuss the differences in connotation and denotation of symbols and images. With these key concepts in mind, the cookbook will display characteristics of these creatures in the literary sense of what they are through image and text relationships. The use of anchorage, text anchoring the meaning of the image by naming the intended denotation will assist in the understanding of the messages displayed within the book. Paul McNeil, a graphic designer who studied language and text, conducted a project in which he split into sub-projects which could all be independent of each other. This method of creating sub-projects within a larger scope as informed the layout and ideation of the cookbook in terms of the idea itself, as well as the sectioning and arrangement of its content. The text, *Visual Research* not only informed the layout of the publication but it aided in the consideration of the plasticity and durability of the book, regarding its materiality, is very important in the presentation of this information. Since meaning is communicated through the plasticity of materials, according to Ian Noble and Russell Bestley, creating the cookbook with durable and interesting paper will entice readers to pick it up and interact with it.

By diving into the darker truths about vampires, witches and werewolves readers will understand the true nature of their favorite characters and learn lessons about hardship, pain and suffering that have been sugar coated with romanticism and fantasy. The unrealistic characteristics of these romanticized, “monster-like” creatures, that have diverged from the origins in such drastic ways, have taught us to desire them. If the majority of Team Edward knew that the “father” of vampires used to dip his bread in the blood of his impaled enemies would they still desire to be “bitten” by him? Would those wanting to turn to werewolves still think to undergo the gruesome transformation after learning of the immeasurable pain? Can those who call themselves witches imagine going through brutal accusations and wrongful sentencing, that typically leads to execution? This cookbook is designed to creatively and simply outline and discuss the factors of the original stories about vampires, witches, and werewolves, show the comparisons to the now sugar coated characters, and the realities of these transformations. In dilettante terms, the book will bring to light the notion that people do not want to see realism or brutality, they want to fantasize.

