

Little Monsters: Hybrid offspring in steampunk and contemporary gothic texts

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In Stephanie Meyer's much maligned *Twilight* novels, the monstrous pregnancy and horrific birth of Bella and Edward's hybrid daughter leaves a particularly grotesque lasting impression on the reader. While critical discussion around Bella's pregnancy often focuses on her choice to continue to term despite the prospect of almost certain death, the surrounding rhetoric of the child as an abomination and a danger to both the werewolf and vampire communities is rarely questioned. Renesmee's hyper-monstrosity and characterisation as the monster that all other monsters fear drives the action in the final novel, bringing the series to its conclusion.

The figure of the hybrid offers a monstrous liminality that is configured as incredibly dangerous to the social order in their respective settings. All of the hybrid offspring in the texts considered in this paper are hunted by the 'pure breed' communities that vilify them as abominations. These hybrids draw attention to the constructed nature community boundaries, like those between the human and the monster, or between different monstrous communities such as the werewolf and the vampire. Their very existence proves that there are more similarities than there are differences among the supernatural communities.

These little monsters represent a threat to the established social order of the supernatural communities in which they reside. In this paper I will trace the evolution of the hybrid offspring in the novels of Stephanie Meyer, Kate Locke, Gail Carriger and Samantha Young, as well as the *Underworld* series of films. By exploring the creation of this liminal figure in these novels and films, I intend to show how the hybrid represents an evolutionary leap forwards that challenges the stasis of class and social structure. Rather than the perceived degeneration of the community, the hybrid offers a way forward through cohesion and renewal.

Karen Graham is a PhD student at the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy, University of Aberdeen, Scotland. Her thesis focuses on the form and transmission of myth in

contemporary fantasy literature, using the fiction of Gregory Maguire as a case study. She has undertaken a number of volunteer positions within creative and academic publishing and is an experienced editor of both creative short fiction and academic research anthologies.