

# Teenage Paranormal Romance Novels

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Nathan Taylor  
13 March 2011

Friday, August 5, 2011

This is the fruitiest Keynote theme that I could find. It's kind of disappointing.

# Warning

- This UDLS will have major plot spoilers for Wuthering Heights and Breaking Dawn; minor spoilers for Twilight, Eclipse, and the first Anita Blake novel.
- I'll also include a Yahoo Answers summary of the *super-disturbing* birth scene from Breaking Dawn.
- Lastly, the presentation will have a few moderately explicit quotations.

# Definitions

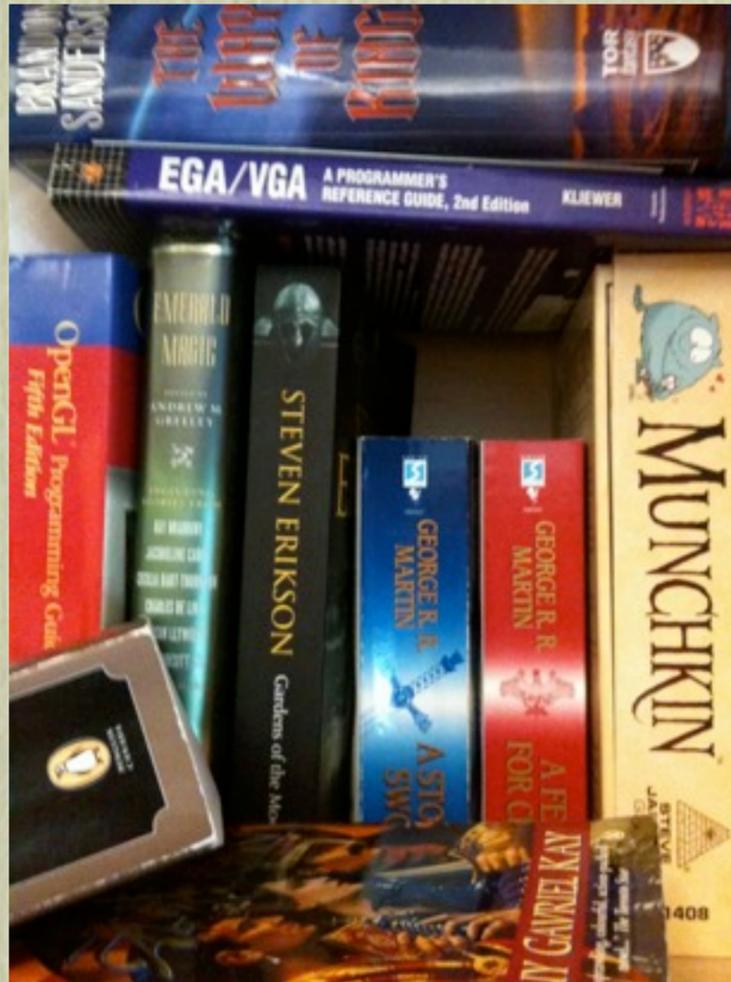
- **Genre fiction:** “a term for fictional works (novels, short stories) written with the intent of fitting into a specific literary genre in order to appeal to readers and fans already familiar with that genre.” [wikipedia]
- **Trope:** A convention or literary device. A cliché is an overused trope.

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So as I was making this presentation this afternoon I realized I kept using certain words over and over again – it's probably best to give you a definition or two just so we're all on the same page.



# What I won't do in this talk



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Before I go any further, though, I want to outline the things that I'm not going to do in this talk. Anyone who's seen my bookshelf at my desk knows that I have about eighty fantasy novels lying around at a given moment. For some reason my graphics books are mixed in with them too. I'm a fan, and I don't want to make fun of the fandom.

# What I won't do in this talk



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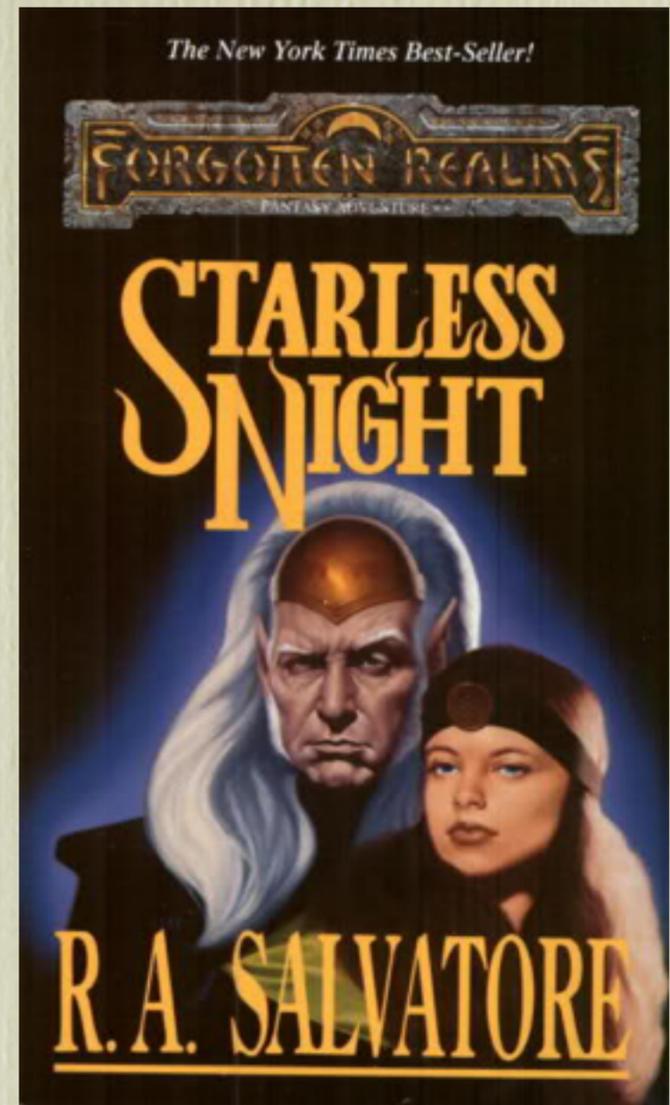
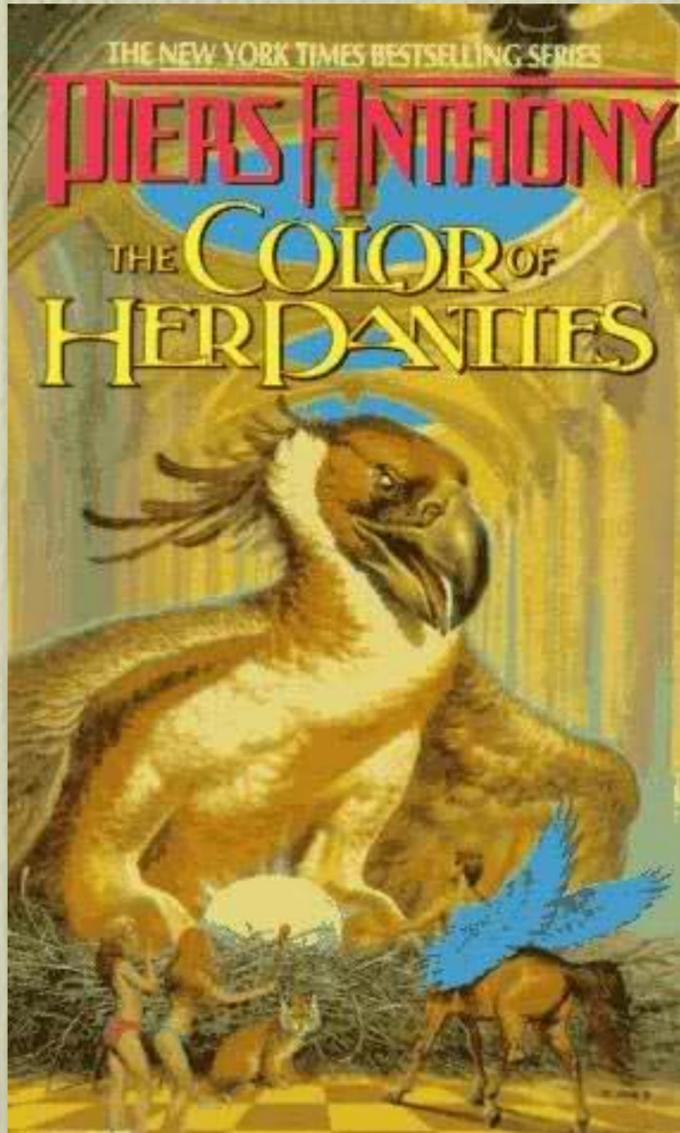
...

OK, I'll show this one picture, but then this is it from me.

Two reasons why: it'd be hypocritical -- pot, meet kettle --, but also, something that's significant that we'll talk about in a bit is that this subgenre has become popular with a broader audience than typical genre fiction.

Speaking of genre fiction and things that I don't want to make fun of:

# What I won't do in this talk

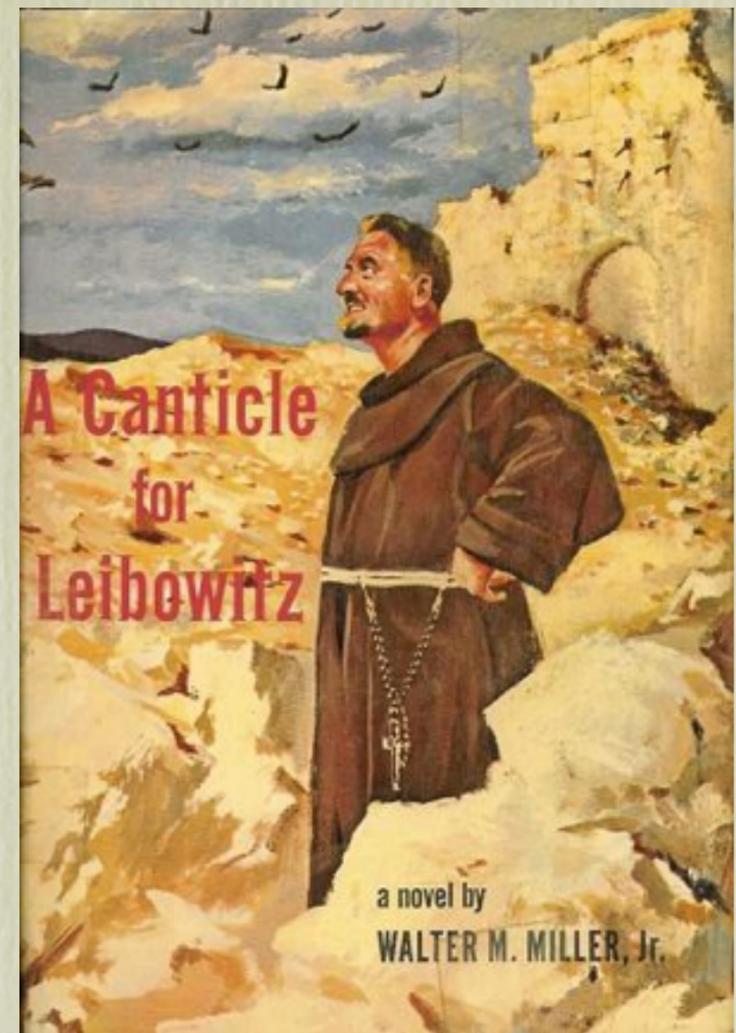
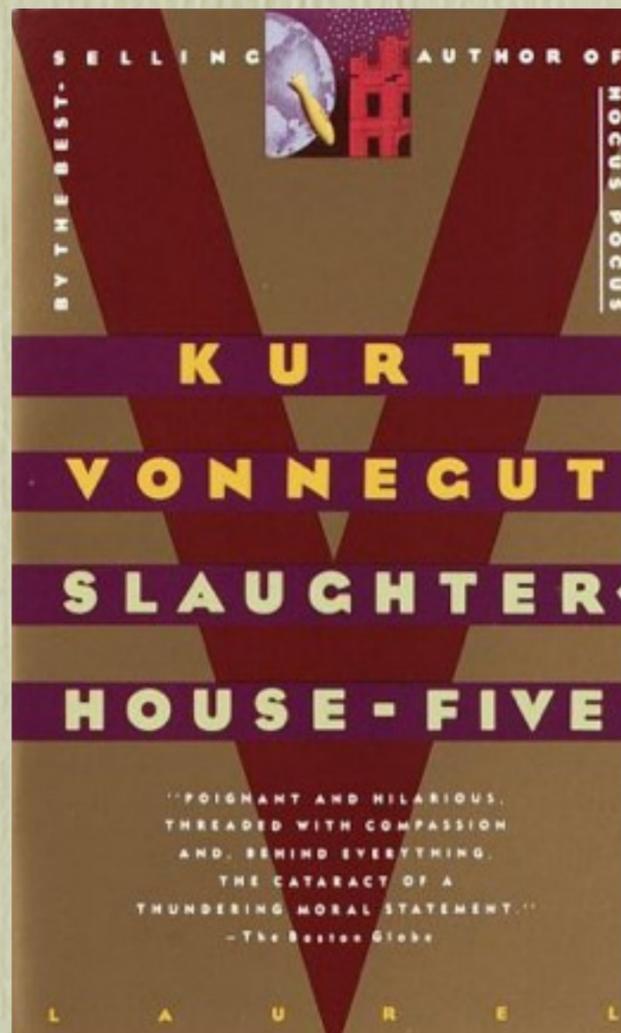
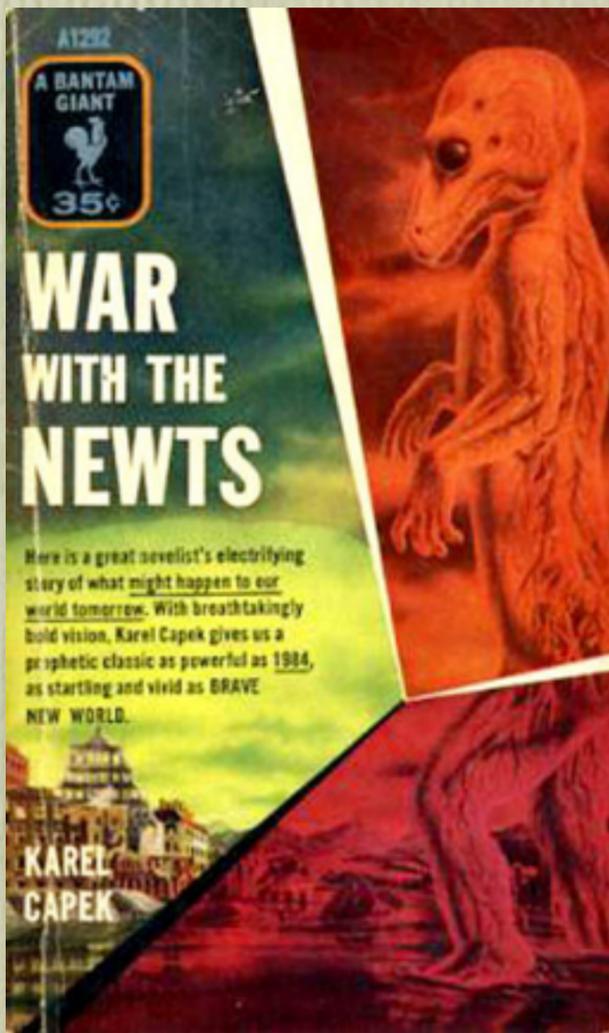


<http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3384692>

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Yes, it's true that there are terrible examples of genre fiction. A shit pulpy science fiction novel is only a stone's throw away from anywhere -- a fun game to play is to go into a used bookshop and try and find the most ridiculous piece of cover art -- but it's easy to forget that there are actually

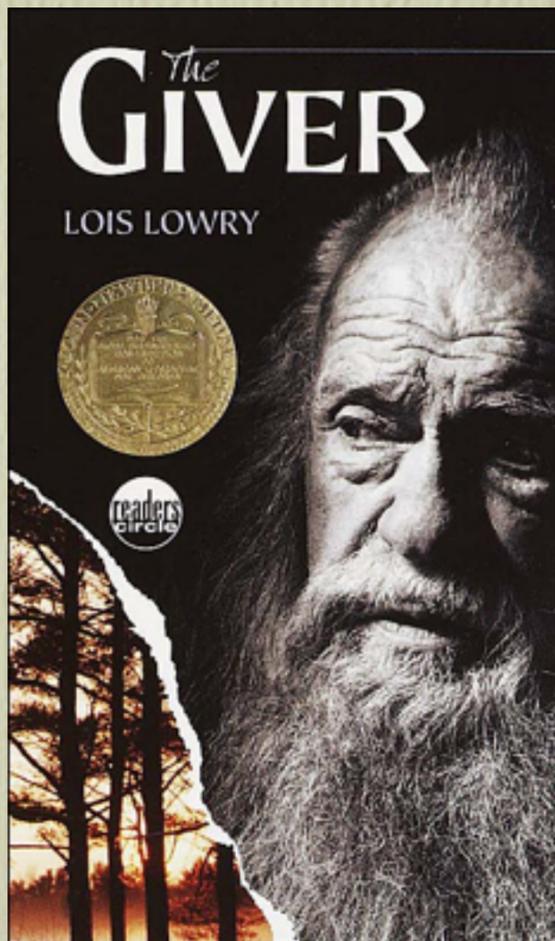
# What I won't do in this talk



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great examples of genre fiction that I would argue stand on their own merits. You might be able to think of others, or you might disagree with my examples up here, but the point remains. So, I don't want to come up here and say that the genre has to be categorically terrible.

# What I won't do in this talk



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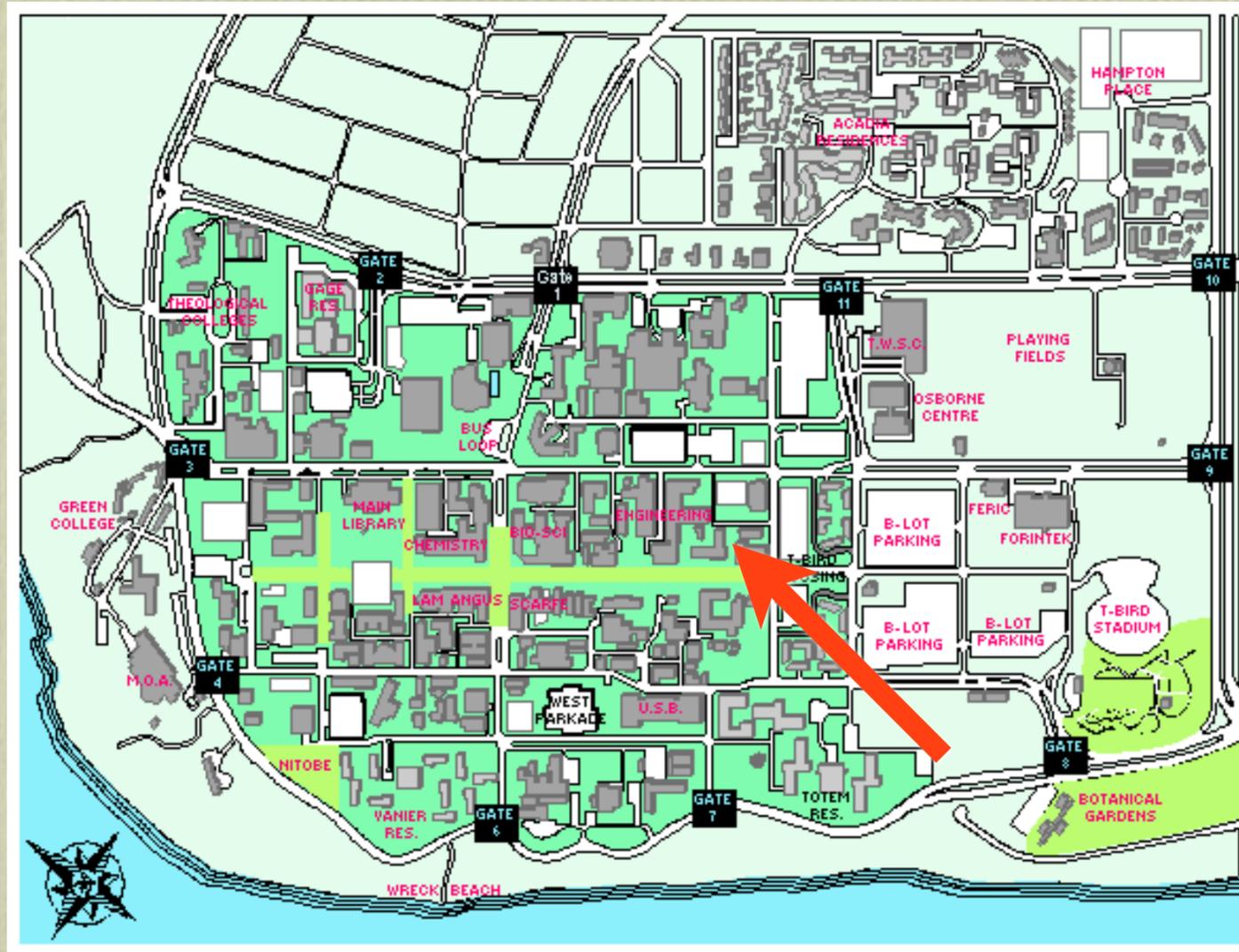
I also don't want to say that young adult novels have to be crappy either. It's easy to beat up on them because the prose is often simply written and there's not often much subtext to the novels, but there are some that are genuinely good reads, even if you're not 15.

# Part one

## Background, or, why this is all Emily Brontë's fault

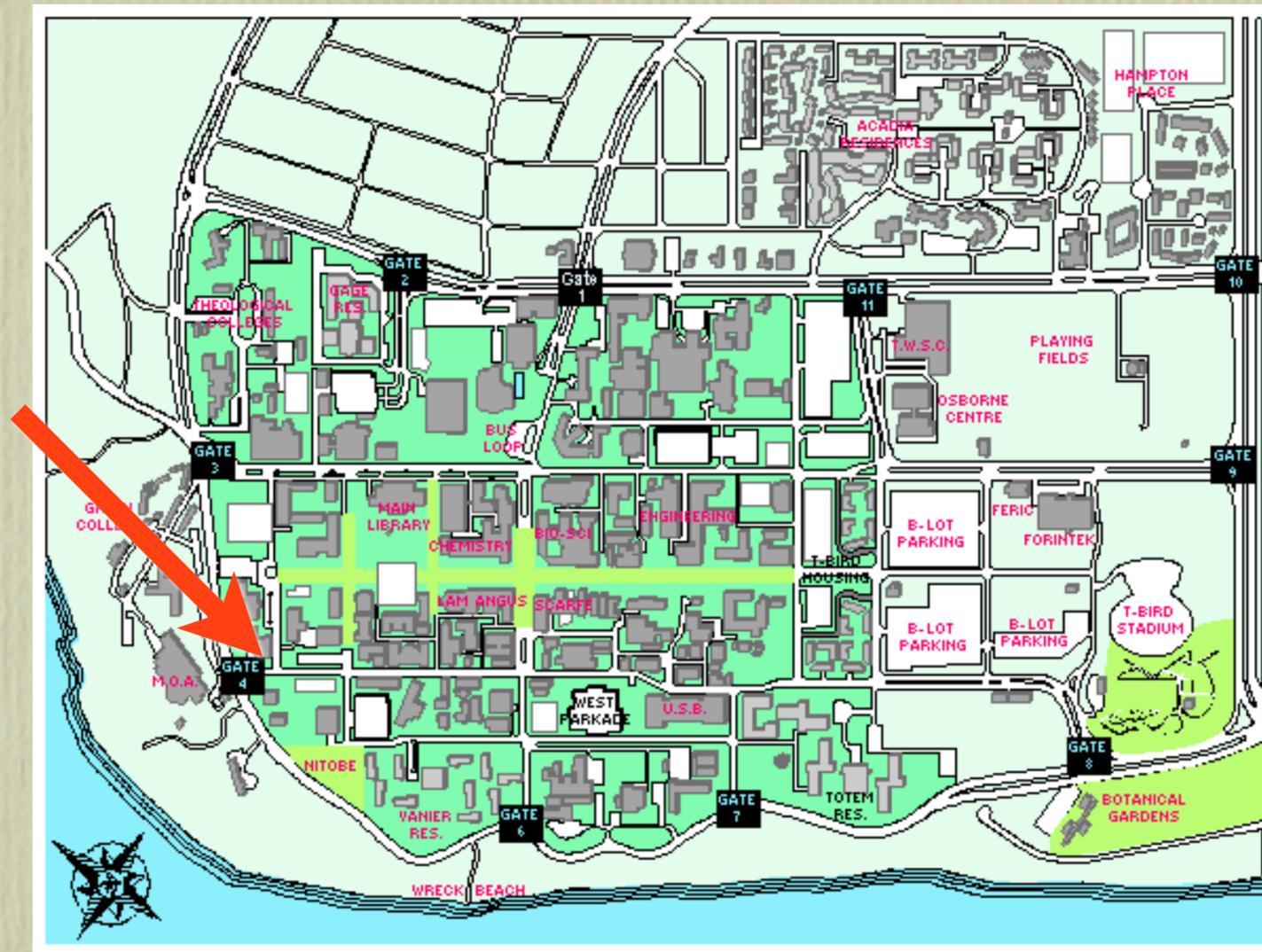
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So, let's get started. My first goal will be to try and paint a picture of how, even though the teenage paranormal romance genre only really exploded a few years ago, it's been a very, very, very long time coming. My old IB English teacher in high school would be very proud of these next few slides, I think.



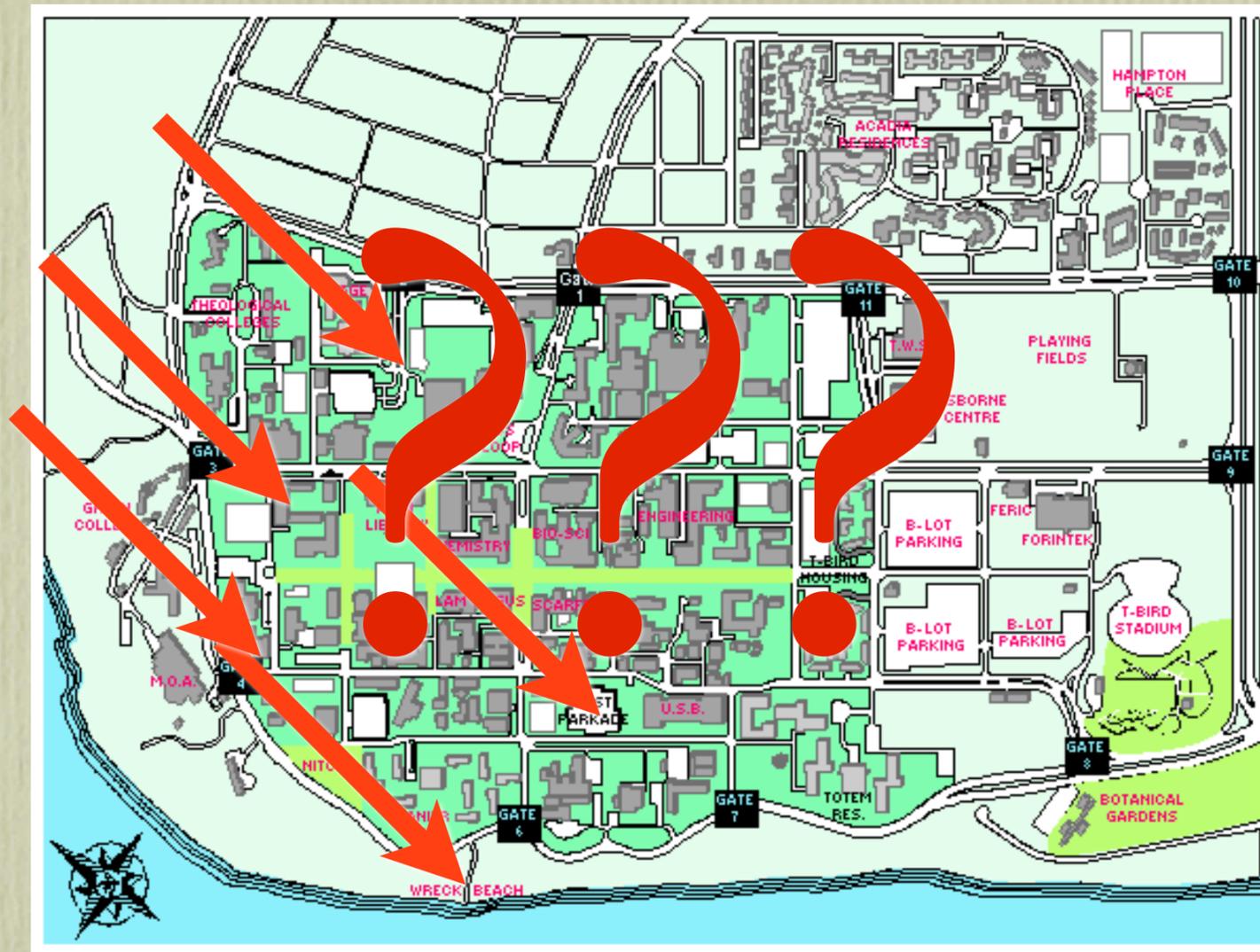
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So let's pretend for a minute that instead of being grad students in computer science in ICICS, we're instead



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grad students studying English literature in Buchanan.



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Or, wherever the hell Buchanan is. North of the SUB I only know how to find Koerner's.

Well, wherever it is, there's a term that we would all undoubtedly know:

# Magical realism

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Magical realism.

Now if we were doing our MA we'd probably spend all our time debating the precise meaning of this term -- it's nebulous -- instead of spending all our time debating vim vs emacs, but let me tell you some of the core tenets of magical realism.

# Magical realism

- Term originated when analyzing Latin American authors (ie. Márquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*)
- Wikipedia sez: it is a genre “in which magical elements blend to create a realistic atmosphere that accesses a deeper understanding of reality.”
- Sometimes used to satirize the political/social landscape of the era (Capek?)
- Notion of “magic” broader than “wizards’ spells” - think instead of “fantastical elements”

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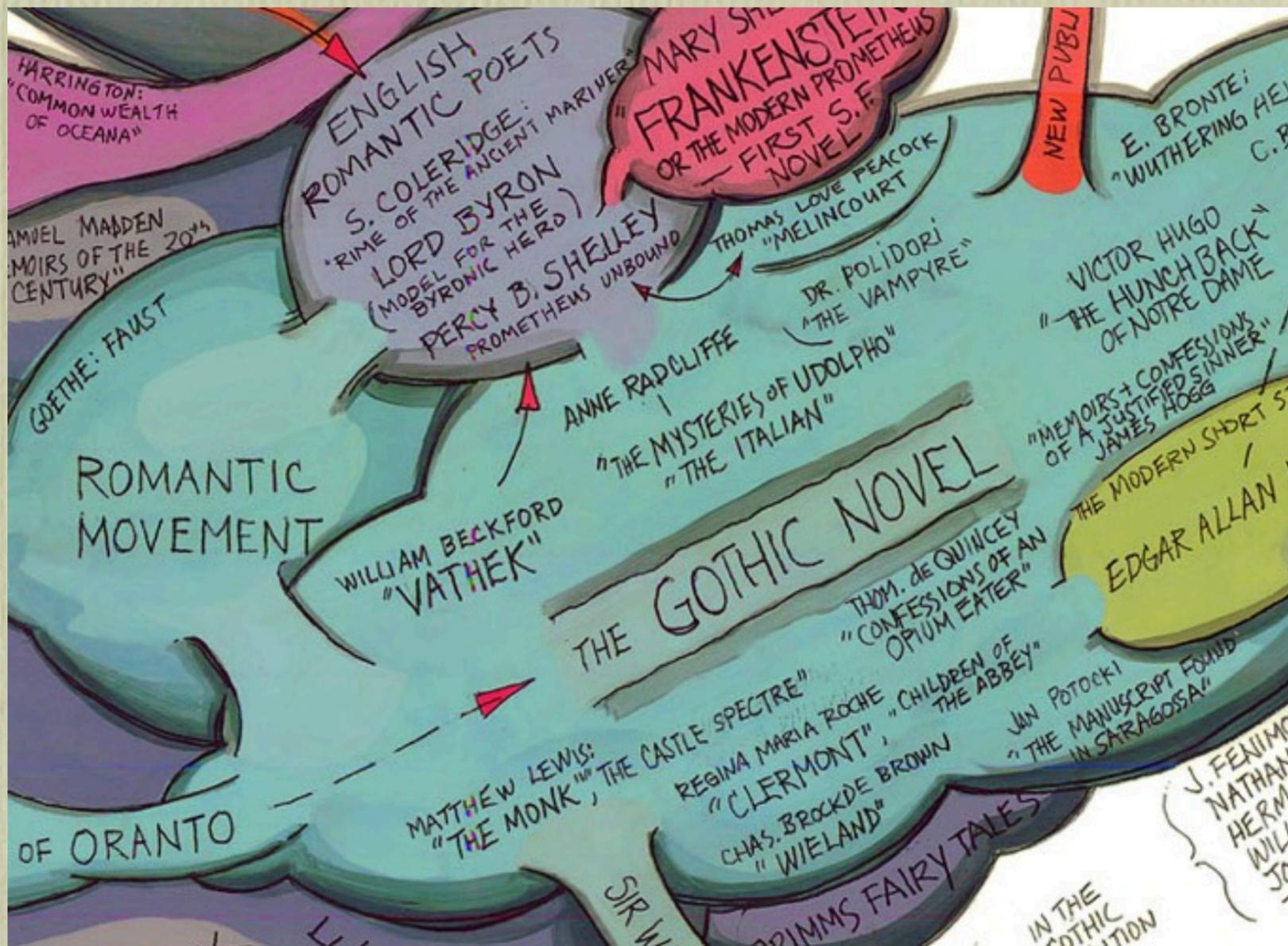
[after going through points] So what's significant here is that the setting of the novel is ostensibly our world, but there's something very “fantastical” lurking beneath the surface.



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An example from film that I think makes the distinction well is Magnolia.

# Gothic fiction



[http://scimaps.org/submissions/7-digital\\_libraries/maps/thumbs/o24\\_LG.jpg](http://scimaps.org/submissions/7-digital_libraries/maps/thumbs/o24_LG.jpg)

“The History of Science Fiction”

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So there's this very cool diagram called The History of Science Fiction which maps out SF's origins starting from antiquity. Here's a small part of it. For context, this “bubble” is representing around the late 1700s.

Gothic novels are a reaction against neoclassicism, which emphasized rationalism over emotion. So, an author writing in this style would have called on reviving memories of the middle ages, what was considered a dark and most “unenlightened” era.

# The gothic novel

- Wikipedia: “ the literary Gothic embodies an appreciation of the joys of extreme emotion, the thrills of fearfulness and awe inherent in the sublime, and a quest for atmosphere.”
- Prominent features: tyrants and innocent maidens, darkness, demons, madness, superstitious rituals
- typically set in a crumbling architectural setting such as a decaying country estate

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tends to play on both the thrill and the fear of the unknown, and places a great importance on atmosphere. It's usually heavily symbolic, sometimes even dreamlike. In addition to being important to the horror genre, the first scifi, fantasy, romance, mystery, and adventure authors drew inspiration from Gothic horror, so it's sometimes considered the parent of all modern genre fiction.

It's worth pointing out that these prominent features are ripe for parody; Austen would occasionally have a character being overly-brooding from having read too much Gothic literature.

# Wuthering Heights

- The orphan Heathcliff is brought to live on an estate on the windy steppes of Yorkshire, falls in love with the high-bred Cathy. Heathcliff's low breeding results in forbidden love / love triangle; Cathy marries an upper-crust fop, Heathcliff descends into madness, ruins Cathy's family's happiness, and is ultimately driven to suicide, where his ghost wanders the moors..
- TLDR: Class prejudice sucks, and love hurts.
- Significantly, no vampires; considered "literature", 16-year-old Nathan hated it

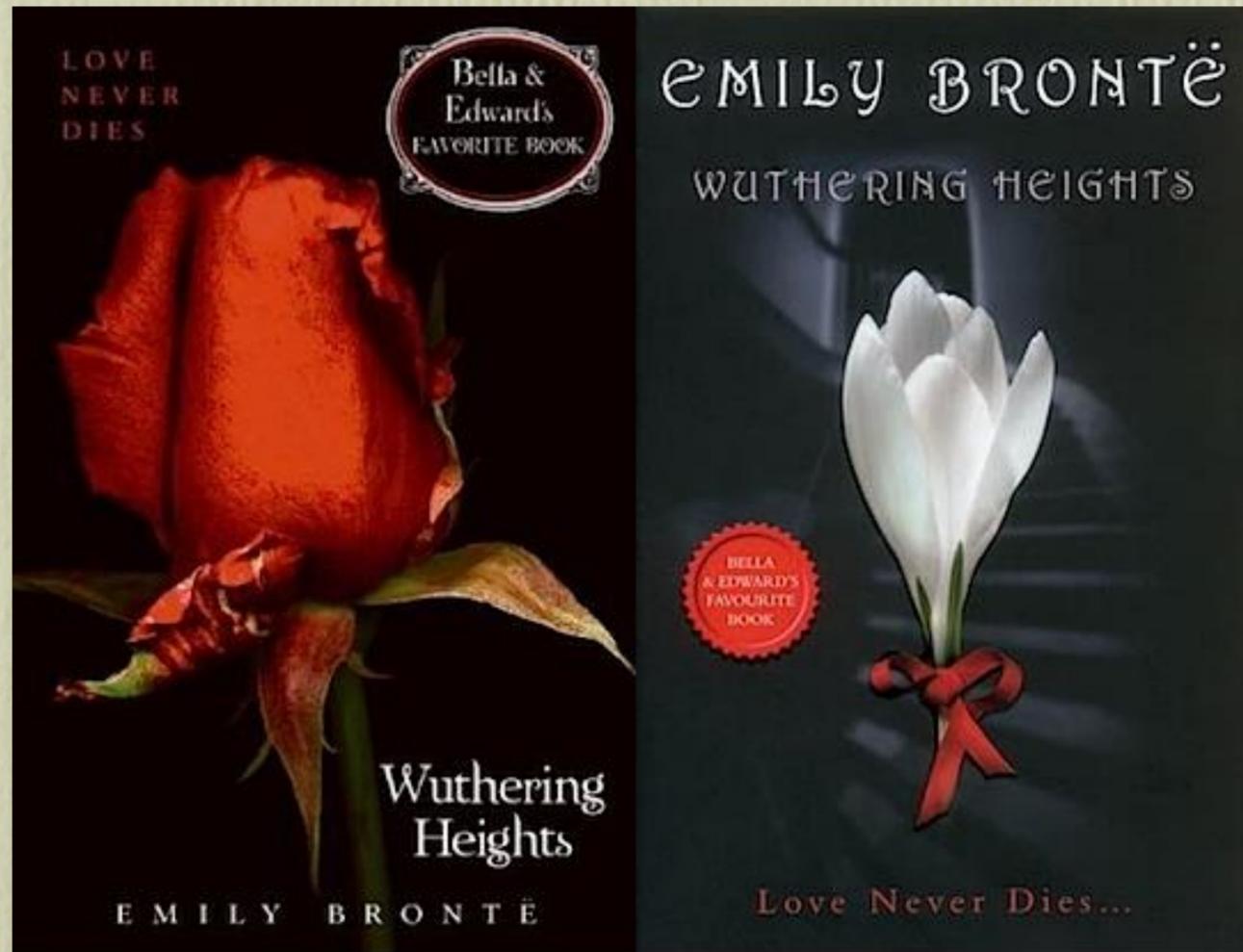
# Relevant tropes of interest

- “the love between Catherine and Heathcliff is passionate, but it is also clearly unhealthy and intensely destructive, leading to nothing but the ruin of the lovers and almost everyone around them.” [tvtropes]
- The setting: isolated, bleak, oppressive.
- Sidenote: quoted in Eclipse to compare Bella's relationships with Edward Cullen and Jacob Black to Catherine's relationships with Heathcliff and Edgar.

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[after bullet points]: So, speaking of Twilight:

# The worst thing in the universe



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Wuthering Heights is now being reprinted, playing up the Twilight connection.

# Back to the 20th Century



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I guess I'll show this picture twice. It's a good picture.

So I'm going to assume at this point everyone is at least slightly familiar with the premise of the novels and films.

- Washington State as gothic setting
- The relationships in the novel are even more dysfunctional/effed up
  - Bella is a teenager; Edward is 108
  - Edward yo-yos between barely-concealed hatred and detached interest
  - “Don’t tell anyone about our relationship; I may not be able to control myself otherwise”
  - "Bella Swan lives to serve men and suffer." [The Independent]

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I think maybe the thing to do at this point is observe how directly the tropes from the Bronte novel map to the Twilight series. The first is the setting: the novel is set in the Pacific Northwest (Vancouver stands in in the film versions, of course)

We can go back and forth about whether the way the relationship is played out in the novel is endearing, as I’ve heard fans describe it, or just plain creepy, but I find it hard to side anywhere but on the latter side. One subplot of Wuthering Heights that I didn’t mention was Heathcliff’s unsettling relationship with Catherine’s daughter. The massive age difference gets repeated here: it’s not at all clear why this guy is taking high school biology classes. But, more disturbingly, the relationship runs really hot and cold, to the point where it reads like it borders on the abusive. I’m paraphrasing the quote in the third bullet point, but he does often warn her that he’s dangerous, but Bella doesn’t seem to care.

I’ve asked fans about their reaction to how the relationship plays out, and people seem to say that even though they’re acutely aware of it being messed up, there’s still an endearing quality to it.

# Breaking Dawn birth scene: Yahoo Answers to the Rescue



Sierra

ok first srry with my spelling but i think it resnable (i cant spell that lol)  
any ways

breaking dawn has alot of sex scenes in it to begin with bella and edward and nude  
like half the books too

ok with the birth scene wat happens is the baby trys to eat its way out of bella so they  
have take the baby out before she dies  
and obviously she cant give birth to the child since its trying to eat its way out so  
edward has to preform a C section  
so he rips all of her clothes off and cuts her stomach open with i think his teeth (read  
the series a year ago) then once the baby is out he basically licks all of her wounds  
because his venom like heals them  
also the baby at one point bits her breast and edward bits her in the chest so she will  
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- Not mentioned: Bella's fricking spine gets fricking broken by the fricking fetus
- Yahoo Answers wisdom: "The birth scene wasn't even that bad at all. That could happen to anyone, so why is putting it in a book so terrible?"

- The writing is pretty clunky, particularly dialogue
  - The prose is a bit simple but that's often a symptom of YA books.
- ...it could be far, *far worse*...

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About the worst thing you can say is the dialogue doesn't work because the characters are too earnest in their lovey dovey romantic and/or dramatic vampire machination speeches. As much as I'd like to pull out a totally embarrassing quotation to demonstrate how god-awful the text is...it's tough. by young adult standards, it could be far, far worse. Additionally, because the series is only a tetology (modulo the spinoffs from the POV of other characters that are being contemplated), there's no time to descend into dozens of books of utter madness.

So, let's talk about worse ones.

# Jesus Chr^W^W Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter

- Long-running (>20 book) series
- Initial books held promise:
  - Protagonist works with the police to reanimate the dead for interrogation - first books were almost police procedurals
  - Blake was spunky, Whedonesque, and an oddly-conflicted character.
- Novels go off the rails around book (5? 6?)

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- Sex become increasingly prominent in the later books - fan base ended up being divided over the change in tone

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- *“Sadomasochism and lycanthropic sex doesn't even cover it. Gangbang DVDA Furry Squirting Undead Sadomasochistic Underage Magicrape Sex in as much squicky detail as Hamilton can conjure in her fevered imaginings.” --unhappy internet citizen*

- *“I think the scene where Anita Blake fucks the King of the Wereswans (yes, wereswans) and at the moment he climaxes he turns into a giant goddamn swan while still fucking her, and then flies away through the skylight honking was...one of the most memorable things I've ever read. They should have put that on the cover.”*

- Often it's not the premise that people make fun of the genre for, it's the implementation
- Either pick and choose the ones that aren't at the bottom of the barrel, or observe that the things about the novels that you like may be also found in different genres.

If you want “more”:

<http://sparkle-project.blogspot.com/>

[http://forums.somethingawful.com/  
forumdisplay.php?forumid=182](http://forums.somethingawful.com/forumdisplay.php?forumid=182)

<http://twitter.com/#!/teensinlove>