

A Structuralist Analysis of Binary Oppositions in Bella Swan's Characterization in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*

Nabila Rayati¹, Purwanto Siwi², Sempa Br. Perangin Angin³, Doni Efrizah⁴

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara (UISU), Medan, Indonesia

³Politeknik Mandiri Bina Prestasi, Medan, Indonesia

⁴Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: nabilarayati02@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study examines the characterization of Bella Swan as the protagonist in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* (2009) through Lévi-Strauss's structuralist theory, particularly the concept of binary opposition. By focusing on narrative and symbolic contrasts, the analysis explores how meaning is constructed within the protagonist's development. A qualitative descriptive method is applied through the analysis of selected scenes and dialogues from the film. The findings indicate that Bella Swan's characterization is shaped by dominant binary oppositions, including love versus loss, courage versus fear, humanity versus the supernatural, and Edward versus Jacob. These oppositions position her as a structural protagonist who embodies emotional and ideological tensions within the narrative. She also functions as a mediating figure between conflicting value systems, reflecting the dynamic and relational nature of identity construction in cinematic texts. Unlike previous studies that emphasize romantic themes or surface-level character analysis, this research highlights the underlying structural system that actively constructs the protagonist's identity. The findings contribute to literary and film studies by demonstrating how meaning in film can be systematically interpreted through Lévi-Straussian structuralism.

Corresponding Author:

Nabila Rayati

Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara (UISU), Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: nabilarayati02@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Film is widely recognized as a cultural text that communicates meaning through a combination of visual, verbal, and narrative elements. As a form of popular culture, film does not only function as entertainment but also as a medium that constructs and conveys social meanings, values, and ideologies. In literary and film studies, film can be analyzed as a structured system of signs that produces meaning through narrative organization and character relations (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019).

One important aspect of film analysis is characterization, which refers to the way characters are constructed and developed within a narrative. Characterization includes the presentation of personality traits, emotional expressions, motivations, and moral values that shape how audiences interpret a character's role in the story (Abrams & Harpham, 2015). In narrative films, protagonists are particularly significant because they function as the central focus of the story and often embody the major thematic tensions of the narrative (Patmarinanta & Ernawati, 2017).

Bella Swan in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* (2009) is portrayed as the central protagonist who experiences emotional instability, loss, and identity crisis following her separation from Edward Cullen. Her characterization is constructed through a series of emotional contrasts such as strength and vulnerability, dependence and independence, as well

as love and isolation. These oppositional traits indicate that her character can be effectively analyzed through a structuralist framework based on binary opposition.

Structuralism, as proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1963), emphasizes that meaning is generated through underlying structures of oppositions within a system. In literary and film analysis, binary opposition is used to reveal how meaning is constructed through contrasting elements such as life/death, love/hate, presence/absence, and stability/instability. These oppositions are essential in shaping character identity and narrative development.

Previous studies on *The Twilight Saga* have predominantly focused on themes such as romance, fan culture, gender representation, and popular culture discourse. For instance, several studies have examined the romantic ideology and adolescent identity construction in the *Twilight* series, emphasizing emotional engagement and cultural consumption rather than structural narrative patterns. However, these studies rarely investigate the structural relationships underlying character formation, particularly through binary opposition analysis. This indicates a research gap in structuralist film analysis, especially in understanding how Bella Swan's characterization is constructed through oppositional narrative structures.

Therefore, this study applies Lévi-Strauss's structuralist theory of binary opposition to analyze Bella Swan's characterization in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*. This approach aims to uncover the underlying oppositional structures that shape her identity and narrative role as the protagonist.

This study is significant in two ways. Theoretically, it contributes to structuralist film analysis by expanding the application of binary opposition in understanding character construction in contemporary popular films. Practically, this research can be used as a reference in literature and film studies classrooms to help students analyze character development through structuralist frameworks, particularly in popular culture texts.

Based on this background, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. How is Bella Swan portrayed as the protagonist in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*?
2. How do binary oppositions within the narrative structure shape Bella Swan's characterization from a structuralist perspective?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Film

Film is widely recognized as both an artistic expression and a cultural product that functions as an audio-visual medium of mass communication. According to Stringer (2003), film integrates technological, aesthetic, and narrative elements to convey meaning and engage audiences across different contexts. As a cultural artifact, film not only reflects social realities but also constructs ideological perspectives that influence viewers' understanding of the world. In addition, film can be understood as a system of signs in which meaning is constructed through structures, symbols, and relationships rather than isolated elements (Lin et al., 2023). This perspective aligns with structuralist approaches that emphasize the importance of relational meaning in narrative analysis. Furthermore, meaning in film is produced through the interaction of narrative structures such as contrast and alternation, which shape both plot development and character construction (Schmidt, 2024). Moreover, film narratives are constructed through the integration of dialogue, performance, and visual elements, which collectively contribute to meaning-making processes within cinematic texts (Zhou & Bamman, 2024).

In contemporary literary studies, film is increasingly analyzed as a form of text that can be interpreted similarly to written literature. As argued by Purwarno and Efrizah (2025), literary works including films, serve as sites of meaning-making where cultural, ideological, and symbolic elements intersect. Their work highlights how literary analysis can uncover deeper structures of power, representation, and resistance within a text. This perspective

reinforces the view that film narratives can be critically examined beyond their surface-level storytelling.

Furthermore, film also functions as a medium of intercultural dialogue. Efrizah et al. (2025) emphasize that literary and cinematic texts facilitate exchanges between different cultural frameworks, enabling audiences to interpret values, identities, and ideologies across cultural boundaries. This perspective is relevant to *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, which presents a hybrid narrative combining human and supernatural elements within a modern cultural setting.

2.2 Characterization in Film

Characterization is one of the most important elements in narrative analysis because it determines how audiences understand and interpret characters within a story. According to Abrams and Harpham (2015), characterization refers to the methods by which authors or directors present and develop characters' traits, personalities, motivations, and moral values. Characterization can be presented through direct characterization, where traits are explicitly stated, and indirect characterization, where traits are revealed through actions, dialogue, appearance, and interactions with other characters.

In film, characterization plays a crucial role in shaping narrative meaning because characters function as the main carriers of ideology, conflict, and emotional development. Through characterization, audiences are able to interpret the psychological and moral dimensions of a character, particularly the protagonist who drives the narrative progression. In *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, Bella Swan's characterization is constructed through both direct emotional expressions and indirect narrative cues, such as her behavior, decisions, and relationships, which reflect her internal conflict and identity crisis.

2.3 Structuralism by Claude Lévi-Strauss

This study adopts the structuralist framework proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss, particularly focusing on the concept of binary opposition. Structuralism views literary and cinematic texts as systems governed by underlying structures that shape meaning. Rather than focusing on the author's intention, structuralism emphasizes the relationships between elements within a narrative.

Lévi-Strauss (1963) argues that meaning is generated through binary oppositions, such as life/death, nature/culture, and good/evil. These oppositions function as fundamental cognitive structures that influence how narratives are constructed and interpreted. In this sense, characters are positioned within these oppositional frameworks, either embodying one side or negotiating between them.

However, while Lévi-Strauss's theory is highly effective in revealing underlying narrative structures, it has been criticized for being too rigid and universalizing, as it tends to reduce complex characters and cultural contexts into simplified oppositional pairs. Despite this limitation, the theory remains highly applicable in narrative film analysis because films often rely on visual and emotional contrasts to construct meaning, especially in mainstream cinema where binary structures such as love/hate, presence/absence, and strength/weakness are strongly emphasized.

In addition, binary oppositions create narrative tension, which is essential for plot development and character transformation. As noted by Efrizah and Purwarno (2026), literary texts often reveal underlying patterns of domination, resistance, and ideological struggle when examined through structural relationships. Their study demonstrates that structural analysis can uncover hidden meanings embedded within narrative conflicts, particularly through oppositional forces.

Applying this framework to film analysis allows for a deeper understanding of how narrative elements such as characterization, dialogue, and plot function within a system of signs. By identifying binary oppositions in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, this study aims to examine how these structures shape Bella Swan's character and contribute to the overall meaning of the film. This perspective is reinforced by recent studies highlighting the continued relevance of binary opposition in contemporary analysis. For instance, Akhtar et al. (2025) demonstrate that binary oppositions function not only as thematic contrasts but also as structural mechanisms that shape narrative meaning and character development. This reinforces the applicability of structuralist theory in analyzing modern cinematic narratives.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

This study is based on a structural relationship between film narrative elements and character construction. The conceptual framework of this research can be illustrated as follows:



In this framework, film functions as the primary text that contains narrative structures. Within the narrative, binary oppositions emerge as organizing principles that shape character interactions and conflicts. These oppositional structures directly influence characterization, particularly in the construction of Bella Swan as the protagonist. Ultimately, the interaction between narrative structure and characterization produces the overall meaning of the film.

3. Research Method

3.1 Study Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the characterization of the protagonist in the film. This approach is appropriate as it allows for an in-depth interpretation of narrative elements, particularly in understanding how meaning is constructed through character and structure.

Qualitative research focuses on exploring and interpreting meaning derived from textual and contextual data (Creswell, 2014), and emphasizes analysis within natural contexts where the researcher acts as the primary instrument (Sugiyono, 2016). This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to systematically describe and interpret the characteristics, behaviors, and roles of the protagonist. The primary data source is the film *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* (2009), directed by Chris Weitz, while the unit of analysis consists of selected scenes, dialogues, and character actions that reflect binary oppositions related to Bella Swan's characterization.

In addition, this study applies a thematic coding technique to systematically identify and categorize patterns of binary oppositions within the data. The coding process involves labeling relevant scenes and dialogues based on recurring themes related to oppositional structures. To ensure the validity of the findings, this study employs theory triangulation by comparing the data interpretation with structuralist concepts proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss and supporting literary theories.

3.2 Data Collection

The data were collected through several systematic steps. First, the film was repeatedly observed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the narrative. Second, relevant scenes and dialogues were identified and selected based on their significance in representing Bella Swan's character development. The selection of scenes was based on specific criteria, namely: (1) scenes with high emotional intensity that reflect Bella's internal conflict, (2)

scenes that frequently depict her interactions with opposing characters or forces, and (3) scenes that hold significant narrative importance in advancing the plot and character development. Third, elements of the narrative that reflect binary oppositions were identified, particularly those related to emotional conflict and character positioning. Finally, the selected data were categorized based on thematic oppositions, such as love versus loss, human versus supernatural, and courage versus fear.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a structuralist approach based on the theory of Claude Lévi-Strauss, focusing on the concept of binary opposition. The analysis aims to examine how meaning is constructed through oppositional relationships within the narrative.

The analysis was conducted through the following steps:

1. Identifying key binary oppositions in the narrative that relate to Bella Swan's character.
2. Examining how these oppositions generate narrative tension and influence the protagonist's development.
3. Interpreting Bella Swan's character as a structural element shaped by conflicting forces.
4. Analyzing her role as a protagonist within the framework of structuralism.
5. Coding the identified data into thematic categories of binary opposition using a thematic coding framework.
6. Validating the interpretation through theory triangulation to ensure consistency between the data and structuralist principles.

4. Discussion

4.1 A Structuralist Approach to Film Analysis

The structuralist theory proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss emphasizes that meaning is not derived from isolated elements, but from the relationships and oppositions between them. In this framework, texts including films, function as systems of signs structured by binary oppositions. Therefore, characters are not merely narrative agents, but structural elements positioned within a network of relationships that generate meaning.

In *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, Bella Swan is constructed as a central structural figure through whom various oppositional forces are articulated. Rather than functioning solely as a romantic heroine, she operates as a mediator of conflicting values embedded within the narrative. Her character is positioned at the intersection of multiple binary oppositions, including love versus loss, human versus vampire, happiness versus sorrow, courage versus fear, and Edward versus Jacob. These oppositions not only shape the progression of the plot but also define Bella's identity and psychological development.

Structurally, Bella's role as a protagonist can be understood as a mediating agent who negotiates tensions between opposing forces rather than merely experiencing them. Her transformation throughout the narrative reflects an ongoing process of navigating, reconciling, and internalizing these contradictions. Thus, her character is not static but dynamically constructed through structural relationships.

This finding differs from previous studies that primarily interpret Bella Swan as a passive romantic figure, such as the study by Nurjanah and Sibuea (2025), which emphasizes character development through narrative structure. In contrast, the present study demonstrates that her narrative significance lies in her structural position within a system of oppositions.

4.1.1 Binary Opposition as a Narrative Structure

Within the structuralist framework proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss, binary opposition functions as a fundamental mechanism for constructing meaning in narratives. Rather than being merely thematic contrasts, binary oppositions serve as organizing principles that shape the structure of a story and determine the relationships between its elements.

In narrative texts, binary oppositions operate by establishing tensions between two contrasting concepts, such as life and death, presence and absence, or stability and instability. These oppositions create a dynamic system in which meaning is continuously produced through conflict and resolution. Characters, in particular, are often positioned within these oppositional structures, either representing one pole or mediating between them.

In the context of film, binary oppositions are not only conveyed through dialogue but also through visual elements, character interactions, and plot development. This makes film a complex medium where structural relationships can be observed at multiple levels simultaneously. The interaction between opposing forces becomes a driving factor in shaping both narrative progression and character transformation. This view is consistent with Akhtar et al. (2025), who argue that binary oppositions function not only as thematic contrasts but also as structural mechanisms that organize narrative meaning and character development.

In *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, binary opposition plays a crucial role in structuring the narrative and defining the protagonist's identity. Bella Swan is consistently positioned between opposing forces, which not only generate conflict but also contribute to her development as a character. Within this oppositional framework, meaning is not fixed but continuously negotiated through Bella's shifting alignment with different structural poles.

4.2 Narrative Structure and Binary Opposition in Shaping Bella Swan's Character

According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, narratives are fundamentally structured around binary oppositions, which generate meaning through contrast and tension. In Bella Swan's character arc, several key oppositions emerge as central mechanisms that drive both narrative progression and character development.

4.2.1 Love vs. Loss

The primary structural conflict in Bella's character is represented through the opposition between love and loss. Her emotional attachment to Edward Cullen forms the foundation of her identity, while his departure creates a profound sense of absence and disorientation.

Edward: "You don't belong in my world, Bella."

Bella: "There's a hole in my chest... like someone ripped it open." (Weitz, 2009, 00:21:50)

Structurally, love operates as a stabilizing force, while loss functions as a disruptive element that fragments Bella's sense of self. Bella's prolonged depression can be interpreted not merely as emotional suffering, but as a structural condition in which the absence of one pole (love) destabilizes the entire narrative equilibrium.

This finding supports previous studies on emotional dependency in romantic narratives; however, it extends them by demonstrating that such dependency is structurally produced through binary opposition rather than purely psychological factors. This interpretation aligns with Akhtar et al. (2025), who emphasize that binary oppositions operate as structural mechanisms shaping both character development and narrative meaning. Similarly, Nurjanah and Sibuea (2025) highlight that character development in film narratives is influenced by narrative structures and relational dynamics. However, the present study further demonstrates that such development is specifically organized through oppositional structures that systematically construct the protagonist's identity.

4.2.2 Human vs. Supernatural Being

Another significant opposition is the conflict between the human and the supernatural. Bella's desire to become a vampire reflects her rejection of human limitations and her aspiration to transcend her current identity.

Bella: "I want you to change me."

Alice: "You're not one of us." (Weitz, 2009, 01:35:10)

Within this oppositional structure, humanity represents limitation and mortality, while the supernatural signifies power and permanence. Bella is positioned between these two categories, fully accepted in neither, making her identity inherently unstable.

This condition highlights her role as a liminal figure who destabilizes fixed categorical boundaries, reinforcing Lévi-Strauss's idea that meaning emerges through relational differences rather than fixed identities. Unlike earlier studies that interpret this conflict as a romantic fantasy, this analysis reveals it as a structural mechanism that constructs identity through exclusion and aspiration.

4.2.3 Courage vs. Fear

Bella's risky behaviors, such as motorcycle riding and cliff diving, illustrate the opposition between courage and fear. However, these actions are not purely expressions of bravery but are driven by emotional vulnerability and psychological distress.

Bella: "If I jump, I'll see him again."

Jacob: "Are you trying to kill yourself?" (Weitz, 2009, 00:26:00 - 00:28:00)

Within this framework, courage and fear are not binary opposites in a strict sense, but interdependent forces that coexist within the protagonist. Bella's actions demonstrate that fear can transform into seemingly courageous behavior. Structurally, this tension redefines conventional heroism by presenting courage as a product of emotional instability rather than rational control. This interpretation challenges traditional character analysis that separates bravery from vulnerability, showing instead that both are structurally interconnected.

4.2.4 Edward's Love vs. Jacob's Care

The opposition between Edward and Jacob represents two contrasting forms of emotional attachment. Edward embodies intensity, danger, and passion, while Jacob represents stability, warmth, and emotional support.

Jacob: "I'm not giving up. I'll be here as long as you need me." Bella: "Don't make me choose, Jacob. Because it'll be him. It's always been him." (Weitz, 2009, 01:15:40)

Structurally, Edward and Jacob function as opposing poles that represent desire versus security. Bella's preference for Edward reflects a willingness to embrace risk and emotional intensity. Within this oppositional framework, Bella's choice is not merely romantic but structural, as it aligns her identity with a particular value system.

This finding differs from previous studies that frame the Edward-Jacob conflict as a simple love triangle, as it reveals a deeper structural function in shaping the protagonist's identity.

4.3 Bella Swan's Character Development

Bella Swan's character development in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* reflects a gradual transformation shaped by structural tensions. At the beginning of the film, she is portrayed as emotionally fragile, dependent, and psychologically vulnerable. Her identity is largely defined by her relationship with Edward, and his absence results in emotional disintegration. This pattern reflects what Akhtar et al. (2025) describe as the role of binary

opposition in generating character transformation through continuous tension between opposing forces.

However, as the narrative progresses, Bella begins to regain agency through her interactions with Jacob and her engagement with the external world. This transition marks a shift from passivity to activity, indicating the beginning of her structural transformation.

Her confrontation with the Volturi in Italy serves as a pivotal moment in her development. In this scene, Bella demonstrates decisiveness and autonomy, asserting her desire to become a vampire:

Bella: "This is what I want. This is what I've always wanted." (Weitz, 2009, 01:45:00)

Structurally, this moment represents a temporary resolution of multiple oppositions, particularly human versus supernatural and fear versus courage. Bella's development can therefore be understood as the result of continuous negotiation between opposing forces rather than a linear progression of character growth.

Importantly, Bella's transformation does not eliminate these contradictions but integrates them into a more complex identity. She emerges as a protagonist who embodies both vulnerability and strength, reflecting the dynamic nature of character construction in narrative texts.

Thus, Bella Swan can be understood as a structural protagonist whose development is driven not by linear progression, but by the tension and interaction between opposing elements. Her character exemplifies how narrative meaning is generated through conflict, mediation, and transformation.

4.3.1 Bella Swan as a Structural Protagonist

From a structuralist perspective, Bella Swan can be interpreted not merely as a central character, but as a structural protagonist whose role is defined by her position within a network of binary oppositions. In line with the theory proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss, characters function as elements within a system of relationships rather than as isolated individuals with fixed identities.

Bella's character operates as a mediating figure who navigates and negotiates between opposing forces. Throughout the narrative, she is consistently positioned between contrasting elements, such as love and loss, human and supernatural, and safety and danger. This positioning allows her to function as a bridge that connects and reconciles these oppositions, making her essential to the production of meaning within the story.

Within this relational system, Bella functions as a dynamic structural subject whose identity is continuously reconstructed through interaction with opposing elements.

Furthermore, Bella's role as a structural protagonist challenges traditional notions of heroism. Unlike conventional protagonists who are defined by strength or dominance, Bella's significance lies in her emotional depth and her ability to endure and navigate internal conflict. Her vulnerability becomes a central aspect of her structural function, as it enables the narrative to explore complex psychological and ideological tensions.

This perspective supports contemporary narrative studies that emphasize relational identity construction rather than fixed character traits.

In this sense, Bella Swan embodies what can be described as a "dynamic structural subject," whose identity is continuously shaped and reshaped through interactions with opposing forces. Her development is not linear, but relational, reflecting the fundamental principles of structuralist analysis. Therefore, her character not only drives the plot but also serves as a key mechanism through which the narrative constructs and communicates meaning.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that Bella Swan's characterization is not driven by isolated emotional experiences, but by her structural position within a system of binary oppositions that continuously shapes and reshapes narrative meaning.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* constructs meaning through a structured system of binary oppositions rather than through linear narrative progression. These findings demonstrate that binary oppositions function as the primary mechanism shaping both character and narrative meaning. Rather than merely identifying thematic contrasts, these oppositions operate as structural forces that construct Bella Swan's characterization. The oppositions of love versus loss, human versus supernatural, courage versus fear, and Edward versus Jacob not only represent conflicts but also systematically organize the narrative and define the protagonist's position within it.

Furthermore, Bella Swan is best understood as a structural protagonist who functions as a mediating figure within a network of opposing forces. Her identity is not fixed, but continuously constructed through the negotiation of conflicting elements, indicating that character development in film narratives is inherently relational and dynamic.

This study contributes to literary and film theory by extending the application of Lévi-Straussian structuralism to contemporary popular cinema, demonstrating that mainstream films can be analyzed as complex systems of relational meaning. In addition, this research has pedagogical implications, particularly in literature and film studies, as it offers a structured approach for analyzing characterization through binary opposition in classroom settings.

For future research, it is recommended that structuralist analysis be combined with other theoretical perspectives, such as psychoanalysis or feminist criticism, to explore deeper psychological and ideological dimensions of character construction. Such integration would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how meaning is produced in cinematic narratives.

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