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By: Carolyn Friedman

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“Popular fiction” as a general object of study has rarely been explored, in part because it is often subsumed under the umbrella of popular culture. This is a mistake: just as film and television have developed their own approaches that reflect the unique social, cultural, political, and industrial dimensions of each medium, so popular fiction should occupy its own critical space.

– Matthew Schneider-Mayerson, "Popular Fiction Studies: The Advantages of a New Field"

In the field of literary criticism, we often find hundreds of dissertations on the classics written by authors such as James Joyce or Shakespeare. It is rare, however, to find serious discussion of “popular” contemporary authors. The critics have defined this subgenre of fiction and declared a war on it. The common definition of what we consider popular fiction varies, many scholars simplifying it to what they deem “bad” literature. Most incorporate profit into the definition to encompass the idea that popular fiction, unlike literary fiction, is motivated by marketability or sales (Schneider 21). And many forms of art that are popular are criticized for being lesser. Pop artists like Andy Warhol have been criticized over time for dumbing down art.

But these contributions are important; they reflect society’s changing attitudes. It is in this way that those critics who snub popular literature are missing out on the entire message. People are reading popular literature, and therefore it cannot and should not be ignored. Clay Reynolds in *Picketing the Zeitgeist* comments, “Sometimes, the worth of a piece of writing must be assessed in purely aesthetic terms, but overall, the measure of a novel's value lies in how many people buy it and find it worthwhile to read” (Reynolds 3). When a new book

becomes popular, many people worldwide read the novel within a short time span. The first novel of the Twilight series alone made \$370,000,000. With this type of widespread exposure to popular literature, readers are impacted by these books in substantial ways. Moreover, popular culture is simultaneously impacted by popular fiction; the two are mutually transformative. Because literature is a product of our times, the novels authors choose to write are invariably connected to the society we live in. However, when huge numbers of readers receive a message in a short time span, this literature is able to influence their ideas and behaviors. This connection between the authors and their audiences allow critics to understand the consciousness of readers and their cultural milieu.

The fact remains that people are drawn to popular fiction and encounter it in their daily lives. While not all literary scholars need to dedicate their lives to this sect of fiction, they should recognize the value in researching it. In his article “What Does Dan Brown Have to do with the Ivory Tower?” Mark Scott argues for the value of studying popular literature and describes the cautions and steps scholars should take.

As scholars, we approach these books not as admiring fans but as scholars who subject its assertions to critical scrutiny. By approaching popular fiction with our distinctive theories and methods, not at the pedestrian level of tracing themes and issues and taking its assertions at face value, we preserve the academic integrity of our discussions. Only thus will we avoid the academic purist's charge of pseudo-scholarship and diletantism... [W]e must not allow popular fiction to dominate our discussions, only to stimulate interest in them. Instead of focusing on the narrative, we should explore how the narrative surfaces important religious and theological themes and how the concepts and categories employed by our disciplines enable a deeper apprehension of these phenomena.

(Scott 3)

Scott argues for the importance of understanding popular novels in terms of the power dynamics and culture of their time. At the time of this article's publication, the best selling

novels and eventual movies by Dan Brown were creating a stir with the religious community. In his argument, Scott does not pay attention to weak character development or poor word choice. This is what he means by refusing to “[focus] on the narrative,” that the important issues are the themes rather than the plot. Most scholars and fans of popular fiction would agree that many best-selling novels are not narratively complex, and to create this argument would defeat the purpose of critiquing this body of fiction at all. In order to properly understand and critique popular fiction, we need to explore the implicit and explicit ideologies.

This project will focus on a recent bestselling novel series-turned-movie franchise: the Twilight series by Stephanie Meyer. How does one remain scholarly when discussing works of this nature? It is difficult to discuss a series in which the main character, Edward, is described as beautiful 165 times, or the word chagrin is used 15 times. These examples demonstrate the obvious fact that there are major writing faults throughout the book, and that repetition remains one of the larger problems. To go through the novel and point out these flaws, however, would produce no result but reiterate the fact that the writing does not compare with more respected works like The Scarlet Letter or Wuthering Heights. This is obvious to anyone who has any literary knowledge, as well as unimportant to the readers who love and adore this series; rarely does one admire Twilight for the writing. For this reason, this type of criticism lends no value to my discussion of the work. I am looking at a literary history of the components that lead us to a novel like Twilight. What are the elements in the novel that have made it so successful with readers? What cultural circumstances existed that allowed, and led to, the composition and publication of this book? I have researched in the

categories of romance fiction, vampire literature, and young adult fiction to find the answer to these questions.

The Twilight series is first and foremost a romance series. In the first chapter, I will demonstrate how in the history of romance fiction, Twilight borrows many underlying themes from Harlequin romances. To feminist critics, the gender roles imposed on the characters in the novel are obvious; to many readers, however, they are not. These romances consisting of weak, helpless women meeting strong, protective men are not a new idea. Twilight is based in a world where violence and sex go hand in hand, following a trend in much romance fiction in the past. Therefore, the disturbing themes concerning romance are not new, but are dangerous, particularly because they are geared towards young adult readers.

But Twilight is not simply a romance; it's a young adult romance. In the world of young adult literature, values are usually foisted on the reader as a means to gain the characters, and the reader, some type of acceptance into the civilized adult world the author chooses to portray. The second chapter of this thesis will focus on how Stephanie Meyer portrays a world that follows her moral code as a Mormon. In her world, patriarchy dominates. The women in the novel are expected to remain virginal until marriage and then fulfill their duty as women to reproduce. If they do not get the chance to reproduce, they in turn are seen as lesser. The danger of this type of literature aimed at young adults is that readers encounter it at a very impressionable age. While young people are seeking out the ideas and codes they want to live by, this type of literature can influence them. The problem becomes: how can we allow young adults to enjoy novels such as Twilight while encouraging critical thinking about its plot and characters?

The third chapter of this thesis discusses the Twilight series in the context of vampire literature. Vampire literature is diverse in nature, with creatures adhering to all sorts of rules, from fear of garlic to love of the moon. While not all the vampires relate to each other, their many manifestations do abide by particular patterns. For example, the type of vampire found in literature usually represents a fear or power struggle in society during the time it was written. Vampires allow authors to stretch the limits of reality in order to make a social critique. Another thing vampire stories do have in common is their treatment of women as their prey. Meyer uses the vampire fantasy to extend her ability to create a violent sexual atmosphere that is accepted by the general public. She uses the vampire in order to drastically increase the power inequality between the sexes.

While I will avoid an in-depth summary of the novels, a brief outline will be helpful to understand the timeline of events that occur. The first novel, Twilight, introduces the protagonist, Bella, who is sick of her giddy, irresponsible, newlywed mother. Bella chooses to go back and live with her estranged father in Forks, Washington to allow her mom to enjoy her new marriage unencumbered by children. Upon her first new day at school, Bella encounters a dark, ominous, incredibly handsome boy named Edward who shoots her angry looks. Eventually, she figures out that he likes her but is harboring the secret of being a vampire, and he thirsts particularly for her blood. He stalks her and watches her sleep outside her window every night. Over time they develop a relationship in which he must restrain himself from murdering her. He is very protective of her and sometimes follows her in order to make sure nothing bad happens to her, because Bella is clumsy and a magnet for trouble. He also refuses to get sexually physical with her to protect her from losing her virtue and potentially getting hurt. By the end of the novel, her friendship with Edward and his family

cause her to become the target of another vampire, James. She walks into James's trap, gets attacked, and almost dies, and Edward comes and saves her.

In the second novel, New Moon, Edward chooses to leave Forks in order to "spare" Bella. He realizes that he is not the right match for her considering he could hurt her at any second and put her in danger. Bella goes into a depression. She barely eats and cries to herself all night. Time apparently does not heal this wound, and she remains in a zombie state. Every time she does something reckless, she hears Edward's voice in her head telling her to be safe. Bella decides to keep doing dangerous things just to hear his voice. A local Quileute boy, Jacob, lessens her despair, and she depends heavily on him, even leading him on so he can help her do dangerous things. Jacob is revealed to be a werewolf, joining the rest of the Quileute in a wolf pack. Eventually Bella's despair becomes overwhelming, and she jumps off a cliff and almost drowns until Jacob saves her. Edward's sister, Alice, sees Bella jump off a cliff with her prophetic powers. Edward decides he has no reason to live without her and tries to commit suicide. Bella manages to reach him in time to show him that she is still alive, and Edward decides Bella cannot live without him, so he returns to be with her in Forks.

In the third novel, Eclipse, Edward returns to Forks with Bella. Bella has strung Jacob along over the past months, and Jacob finally admits his love for Bella, as well. Bella spends much of this novel going back and forth in the love triangle, confused. Jacob and his werewolves team up with Edward to fight a vampire army that is coming for Bella. Although Bella doesn't really care about college because she is determined to turn into a vampire herself, Edward applies to many colleges for her, encouraging her to delay her transformation as long as possible.

By the fourth novel, Breaking Dawn, Edward and Bella decide to marry. Bella enjoys having sex so much that she decides she can delay turning into a vampire and go to college for a few semesters. Unfortunately, these plans change when Bella ends up pregnant. The baby is not a normal human and grows at an unprecedented rate. The strength and foreign nature of the baby makes Bella violently ill, and it breaks her ribs from its kicking. Going against the advice of Edward's and the father figure in the Cullen family, Dr. Carlisle Cullen, both of whom advise her to abort the baby, Bella decides it is worth it to save her child and die in childbirth. While in labor, Bella is dying, and the Cullens decide they must convert her into a vampire, as well. Overall, Bella gives up her life, her family, and her friends in order to be with Edward forever.

Keeping this overview in mind will be useful in understanding the long-term effects of the characters' decisions. Some themes might be obviously jumping out at you even in this brief description—dependency, sexual tension, passivity, and the supernatural world. I will examine these elements even closer in order to illustrate how this novel fits into the context of romance, young adult, and vampire literature.

Chapter 1: The Romance Novel's Indifference to the Changing World

The romance novel has changed over time with shifts in political and social movements. Clearly modern day romances do not conform to Victorian social values—systems of behavior that would, for example, prevent a man and woman from being alone in a room unsupervised. This does not mean, however, that in romances today women are necessarily liberated; rather, they are usually constricted in other, sometimes more

subversive, ways. While society has evolved and changed, many aspects of the romance novel have remained static, clinging to antiquated ideals of relationships.

The most common form of romance novel is the Harlequin romance paperback that lines the shelves of convenience and grocery stores where women commonly shop. I will be classifying these readers as women only because women comprise the large majority of Harlequin readers. These novels vary in small details such as setting or time period, but the formula remains the same. Modleski explains:

Each book averages approximately 187 pages, and the formula rarely varies: a young, inexperienced, poor to moderately well-to-do woman encounters and becomes involved with a handsome, strong, experienced, wealthy man, older than herself by ten to fifteen years. The heroine is confused by the hero's behavior since, though he is obviously interested in her, he is mocking, cynical, contemptuous, often hostile, and even somewhat brutal. By the end, however, all misunderstandings are cleared away, and the hero reveals his love for the heroine, who reciprocates.

(Modleski 13)

When the pattern of romance literature is stated as blankly as Modleski states it here, it seems obvious to anyone with a basic understanding of feminism that something has gone awry.

While it is true that Modleski is describing novels written predominantly in the 1980s, these defining features remain in most modern romance novels. Even throughout the rise of the women's movement, these romance novels not only remained popular but increased in popularity. This increase in popularity can be misleading. It is easy to see how one could infer that the rise in romance novels is a direct and intense backlash against the feminist movement.

Janice Radway disagrees with the idea that romance plots are retaliation against the rise of the feminist movement as Ann Douglas conceptualizes in her article "Soft Porn Culture": "The timing of the Harlequins' prodigious success has coincided exactly with the

appearance and spread of the women's movement, and much of its increasingly anti-feminist content reflects this symbiotic relationship" (Douglas 26). Radway claims that,

Douglas's explanatory strategy assumes that purchasing decisions are a function only of the content of a given text and of the needs of readers. In fact, they are deeply affected by a book's appearance and availability as well as by potential reader's awareness and expectations. Book buying, then, cannot be reduced to a simple interaction between a book and a reader.

(Radway 20)

The problem with Douglas's conclusions, in other words, is that they rule out the importance of the intent of the reader as well as the intent of the author. It seems unrealistic to imagine that authors who write for publishers intend to diminish women (particularly because the majority of these authors are women themselves); rather, these authors realize that this formula appeals to women readers, and it sells. While discriminating against women might be a byproduct of this type of literature, it is not the sole purpose of its existence. This is one of the complications in studying popular literature; it caters to the readers. Douglas is forgetting that Harlequin used successful marketing techniques, such as putting the books in grocery stores, which contributed to its success. This, of course, is not a new phenomena, for many writers throughout the ages have written novels specifically to appeal to the general audience, but in this era of mass production, and in the light of the fame earned by authors who make bestsellers lists, this motive is intensified. For this reason, the purpose of my discussion of romance literature is not to chastise these authors but to understand the culture and patterns that surround this subsection of literature.

Because a vast number of Harlequin novels can be written and published in a short period of time, the company can quickly determine what works well in a romance novel and what does not. Just as literary critics would define in novels what they consider "good" and "bad" features of novels, romance literature follows its own criteria. Radway studied a group

of romance readers and discovered what she found to be the guidelines for what makes a “good” romance.

Hence, the “good” romance continues to maintain that a woman acknowledge and realize her feelings only within traditional, monogamous marriage. When another portrays a heroine who is neither harmed nor disturbed by her ability to have sex with several men, I suspect it is classified as “bad” because it makes explicit the threatening implications of an unleashed feminine sexually capable of satisfying itself outside the structure of patriarchal domination that are still perpetuated most effectively through marriage.

(Radway 74)

Radway demonstrates through her study that women want to read novels about women they could aspire to be within the society that they live in. The author does not impose these narratives onto women readers; rather, the readers desire these types of novels, and their preferences in turn shape the conventions of the genre. Of course, many times the plots that these women desire have been foisted onto them through patriarchal social pressures. We see these types of pressures everywhere: on TV, in classrooms, and even through the influence of parents who tell children that women who are promiscuous and loose do not end well. Loose women end up either pregnant or ostracized. This also suggests that perhaps these readers need reassurance that romance can make a monogamous lifestyle fulfilling and successful. Because they are invested in that lifestyle, they do not want to assume that chaste and well-behaved women can end up as unhappy as those “wild” ones.

The focus on plot over language is one of the aspects of romantic criticism that deviates from literary criticism in a general sense. In Radway’s research about what women are looking for in romance novels, most claimed that a happy ending was absolutely necessary. In fact, some of the women claimed that even if they realized quickly that they did not enjoy the novel, they would flip to the end of the book to make sure that at least the ending was happy. “The obvious importance of happy endings,” Radway argues, “lends

credence to the suggestion that romances are valued most for their ability to raise the spirits of the reader” (Radway 66). It is obvious the qualities mentioned above have nothing to do with literary elements of the novel—such as diction or ingenuity of expression—but rather with plot. To any literary critic, this raises a red flag. Language is often valued over plot in accepted methods of literary analysis. This preference, however, demonstrates an underlying difference with this type of reading: the purpose. Yes, as literary readers we want to be consumed by interesting language and complex narratives, but what if we were not reading for literary reasons? What would change? The difference between a literary reader and a romance novel reader is the reason itself for reading. Radway’s women all described a feeling of a necessity to escape. These were not the type of novels where one reads a chapter or two and spends a day thinking about it; these novels are ravished. Most women claimed they would read them in one sitting.

This creates an interesting dynamic; it almost seems the enjoyment of these novels is derived in the reader’s ability to escape within them. Many of us admit to guilty pleasures; however, the pleasure of reading romances is particularly frowned upon. The fact that women enjoy reading these novels does not mean they are unaware of the unrealistic and sometimes disturbing nature of the relationships. I do not condemn or condone the readership of these novels; rather, I strive to recognize the strategies romance writers use to convey male and female relationships. My exploration of the genre is merely to understand the factors that combine in order to create a romance novel.

How does Twilight fit into the romance genre? It certainly share—even eclipses—the Harlequin novel’s popularity. Twilight has sold 116 million copies worldwide and has captured the hearts of many young adult and adult readers. This adoration has perhaps

inspired many young women to read and kick start their desire to read. Unfortunately, however, I feel as if readers are missing some key elements of Meyer's plot that make the Twilight series disturbing for women readers. While people have the right to read what they enjoy, how do we prevent dangerous representations of gender dynamics, particularly in the relationship between Bella and Edward, from relaying damaging information about what a safe and healthy relationship should be? Censorship is never the right option; rather, more information and less ignorance is part of the cure. Many modern readers would think that Twilight series has come a long way from the Harlequin style romances; however, a close reading of the details of the books demonstrates it has not.

The unequal footing of male and female characters in Meyer's novels and the obsessive nature of the relationship between Bella and Edward can exert a bad influence for its readers. Meyer would deny that Edward and Bella's relationship is abusive. When participating in a question and answer session, Meyer responded to concerns about whether or not the relationship between Bella and Edward was abusive. Meyer answered, "So I think they have a healthy relationship. They're both trying. They're trying really hard to do what's best for the other person" (qtd. in *Time*). There are a couple problems with this explanation. Firstly, trying not to do something doesn't mean you are not doing it. You can try to not be abusive and still be an abusive person. Furthermore, a relationship is not about doing "what's best for the other person," it should be about what is best for yourself. Edward is considered the ideal man, and his abusive nature is glorified as romantic. According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, Edward's interactions with Bella fit eight of the fifteen criteria of an abusive relationship. Answering even one of the criteria questions with a yes is supposed to indicate an abusive relationship. Instead of generalizing the faults of the novels

briefly, it is important to understand the way that Meyer includes these underlying themes in her novel in a way that is not apparent to many readers. I will unearth these motifs in my reading of the Twilight novels, paying particular attention both to their indebtedness to the romance genre and to the ways Bella and Edward's relationship reflects the standards of abuse set forward by the Hotline.

Bella as a character is crucial to the conditions of the romance. The simplest way to describe Bella could be that she is everything that Edward is not. She thinks she is plain, she is clumsy, and she is sacrificing her happiness by living in a place she hates so that her mom can have fun with her new husband. Bella immediately acknowledges what she is giving up, the sun she loves and her mother's companionship, in order to go somewhere she dreaded visiting as a child with her near mute father. "Forks was literally my personal hell on Earth," she bemoans (Meyer, Twilight 25). Interestingly enough, no mention is given of friends or ties back home, even though Bella is in her junior year of high school. Bella is basically a blank slate. Immediately Bella's character is framed as inadequate, and her decisions pose questions about what is appropriate to give up for love.

Throughout the novel, Meyer continues to insist upon Bella's inability to measure up to an ideal. In the first novel, Bella claims, "I didn't have the necessary hand-eye coordination to play sports without humiliating myself—and harming both myself and anyone else who stood too close" (Meyer, Twilight 10). She sets herself in an image of mediocrity, where her talents are meager except for the exceptional food that she cooks her father. (He is unable to cook for himself despite living alone for at least ten years). This preference for cooking over sports might seem like harmless character development until it is put into relief in her relationship with Edward. Bella thinks to herself, "Possibly my crippling

clumsiness was seen as endearing rather than pathetic, casting me as a damsel in distress” (Meyer, Twilight 55). In the first 50 pages of the novel, all we know about Bella is that she can cook, she is helplessly clumsy, and her clumsiness is attractive because it makes her look like she is in constant need of assistance. This alone would lead a reader to scrutinize her character, as if Stephanie Meyer is attempting to say it’s “endearing” to be helpless.

Meyer emphasizes this even more dramatically when one witnesses how Bella compares herself to Edward. Besides her crippling clumsiness, little more is revealed about Bella in the introduction. Very quickly into her first day of school, however, we meet her future lover, in a strange and fearful way. In Loving With a Vengeance, Modleski discusses the prevalence in romance novels of a relationship starting out of fear.

The “odd, disturbing” looks men are shooting at women in every other line [in romance novels] mediate between the heroine’s worries (which, from a feminist point of view, may be perfectly justified) and the reader’s interpretation of the male’s behavior, which is seen as resulting from his resistance to the increasing power of her charms. In other words, since his look is so “odd,” we don’t view her persistence in blaming it on the bad weather and a bad mood as completely unwarranted, yet we can ourselves attribute it to happier causes unsuspected by the heroine.

(Modleski 42)

Twilight is full of these “disturbing” looks, especially when we are first introduced to Edward: “He was glaring down at me again,” Bella narrates, “his black eyes full of revulsion. As I flinched away from him, shrinking against my chair, the phrase *if looks could kill* suddenly ran through my mind” (Meyer, Twilight 24). With this first impression, one would hope to see disinterest from Bella, but only three pages later Bella describes her next impression of Edward. “But Edward Cullen’s back stiffened, and he turned slowly to glare at me – his face was absurdly handsome – with piercing, hate-filled eyes. For an instant, I felt a thrill of genuine fear, raising the hair on my arms” (Meyer, Twilight 27). Twenty pages into

the book and we are already seeing the mixture of violence and romance. In a period of three pages, Stephanie Meyer combines attractiveness to hate and violence. In the middle of a sentence using the words “glare,” “hate-filled,” and “fear,” she discusses how “absurdly handsome” Edward’s face is. It is as if Edward’s attractiveness nullifies his aggression, and that Bella’s attraction to him makes her disregard the undesirable qualities. This scene speaks to the first criteria of an abusive relationship, “Does your partner look at you or act in ways that scare you?”

In the four-book series, Stephanie Meyer talks about Edward’s beauty in some form or another 165 times. While it is obvious in this instance that looks should never be focused on in this manner, there is a more devastating result. Not only is Edward perfect, but also because of this Bella constantly thinks of herself as unworthy.

His white shirt was sleeveless, and he wore it unbuttoned, so that the smooth white skin of his throat flowed uninterrupted over the marble merely hinted at behind concealing clothes. He was too perfect, I realized with a piercing stab of despair. There was no way this godlike creature could be meant for me.

(Meyer, Twilight 256)

This is common of many romance novels. As Linda Christian-Smith argues, “Heroines feel that no boy could possibly care for them as they are” (Christian-Smith 47). Bella’s disbelief at Edward’s attraction to her repeats itself throughout the series; particularly, when Edward protests that Bella never allows him to give her gifts, she claims “and you’ve given me you. That’s already more than I deserve, and anything else you give me just throws us more out of balance” (Meyer, Eclipse 413). This difference between them that she despises is mostly a physical one; she muses, “[t]he contrast between the two of us was painful. He looked like a god. I looked very average, even for a human, almost shamefully plain” (Meyer, New Moon 65). This might appear to be a problem that is specific to Bella; however, evidence shows

otherwise. Christian-Smith, in her study, Becoming a Woman Through Romance, dissects 34 young adult romance novels and identifies a pattern. “When white heroines look into their mirrors, the reflection they see does not please them. They see freckles, drab hair, chubby cheeks, or a general unattractiveness” (46). Bella’s refusal to enjoy or accept any positive image of herself is not a coincidence but part of a formula that has been repeated over 30 years, perhaps even longer. Many critics find Bella’s self-deprecating attitude and her looks to be useful to the readers because they can sympathize with her. This reflects a deeper problem: we assume that so many women out there would relate to Bella because she is helpless and finds herself unattractive. This unequal footing makes Edward’s attraction and devotion to her seem like a gift rather than mutual admiration. Bella comments, “[e]ven after half a year with him, I still couldn’t believe my good fortune” (Meyer, New Moon 7). Why is his devotion so surprising to her? This is explained mostly through the physical plainness of Bella emphasized throughout the novel compared to her godlike boyfriend; but what of her charms? Insecurity over looks is a natural feeling at Bella’s age, but we hope that a young woman would consider her personality and other good qualities.

Unfortunately, Meyer has created a heroine without really any character that defines her besides her undivided adoration for Edward. After our initial introduction to Bella, Meyer describes nothing else about her besides her feelings for Edward. She is not funny, not charismatic, and not particularly intelligent. In fact, at the end of the series when she is turned into a vampire, she even reflects on this fact about herself:

As a human, I’d never been best at anything... I was a good student, but never the top of the class. Obviously, I could be counted out of anything athletic. Not artistic or musical, no particular talents to brag of. Nobody ever gave away a trophy for reading books. After eighteen years of mediocrity, I was pretty used to being average. I realized now that I’d long ago given up any aspirations of shining at anything.

(Meyer, Breaking Dawn 523)

Besides being best at loving Edward unconditionally, this quote exemplifies the idea that Bella has nothing else going on in her life, no ambitions. If this seems like an unfair conclusion, it would be careful to note the second book in the series addresses the question of who Bella is and what makes her unique. Without Edward in the picture, the second book of the novel could demonstrate to the reader that Bella has more to her besides infatuation.

Unfortunately, Meyer uses this opportunity to demonstrate that without a lover there is nothing left to live for... literally. When Edward tells Bella he is leaving her, she claims, “I had to keep moving. If I stopped looking for him, it was over. Love, life meaning... over” (Meyer, New Moon 73). This sensation could be considered an author’s liberty to be dramatic for her characters. This type of dramatization is often used in movies and TV where a character is depicted as feeling helpless without his or her lover. However, this sensation doesn’t end here. After being in love for a little longer than six months, Edwards’s departure leaves Bella a stranger to her friends and family. Bella’s father, Charlie, describes her as “lifeless” (Meyer, New Moon 95). Four months after Edward has left, when someone says Edward’s name, Bella reacts as follows:

It was a crippling thing, this sensation that a huge hole had been punched through my chest, excising my most vital organs and leaving ragged, unhealed gashes around the edges that continued to throb and bleed despite the passage of time. Rationally, I knew my lungs must still be intact, yet I gasped for air and my head spun like my efforts yielded me nothing.

(Meyer, New Moon 118).

She is not only emotionally tormented, but physically finds herself crippled due to loss. This imagery of emptiness only emphasizes the idea that Bella is a shell of a character without her supernatural lover. This goes beyond any type of normal behavior that we would expect from a 17-year-old. This description goes beyond just distress; it is frightening. The language

suggests that the separation of one from their lover is a pain that renders one useless. This emotional pain is described like a festering stab wound. It is hard to understand how Meyer finds this type of behavior to be romantic.

Even when confronted with a new potential partner, Bella has already decided that she is too broken for anyone else because of the hole Edward left behind. Because it would be too repetitive for Bella to cry on every page of New Moon, Meyer introduces Jacob to the narrative. Jacob also has strong feelings for Bella and seems as if he has a suitable personality for her; he is constantly happy, and she describes him like a puppy, ready to please her at her command. She relies on him heavily to help her get through the trauma of being deserted by Edward. Basically, Bella moves from spending all of her time with Edward to spending all of her time with replacement-Edward. However, when he asks her to consider them as more than friends, she comments to herself that he may be an option. “Especially if he was willing to accept me the way I was--damaged goods, as is” (Meyer, New Moon 213). This is a frightening statement because it suggests that because Bella had her heartbroken she forever is “damaged” and can never consider herself whole again. This concept promotes the ideal of having one true love, and having lost it nothing can replace it.

Bella turns to risk-taking in order to hear Edward’s voice chastise her, demonstrating that his role in her life was a protector and that her role was a need to be saved. She notices that when she places herself in extreme moments of danger she hears Edward’s voice yelling at her to be more careful. As this is the closest way to be reminded of him, Bella decides she has nothing more to live for but to hear his voice. She lets Jacob help her rebuild motorcycles so that she can put herself in danger over and over in order to be close to Edward. This type of unhealthy risk-taking takes her relationship with Edward to a new level; she places her

love for him over the value of her life. In a terrifying moment, Bella leaps off a cliff into stormy water in order to have Edward chastise her in her head to be more careful. Quickly, Bella realizes she is going to drown. Her reaction to this drowning is downright frightening:

Why would I fight when I was so happy where I was? Even as my lungs burned for more air and my legs cramped in the icy cold, I was content. I'd forgotten what real happiness felt like. Happiness. It made the whole dying thing pretty bearable.

(Meyer, New Moon 361)

Bella describes one of the most horrible ways to die, drowning, as “Oddly peaceful” (Meyer, New Moon 361). She can accept her death so willingly because Meyer has already described Bella as dead, as absent. She “had died. Because it had been more than just losing the truest of true loves, as if that were not enough to kill anyone. It was also losing a whole future, a whole family—the whole life that [she’d] chosen” (Meyer, New Moon 398). For Bella, who already considers herself “dead,” who cares what happens to her now?

It is not simply Bella’s feelings toward Edward that frame their relationship as dangerous; his feelings toward her are similarly unsettling. Edward’s attention to Bella can be seen as borderline stalking and controlling behavior. At the very beginning of Bella and Edward’s relationship, Edward sneaks outside her window every night and watches her sleep. Bella does not react with the expected horror. Instead, she says, “‘You spied on me?’ But somehow I couldn’t infuse my voice with the proper outrage. I was flattered. He was unrepentant. ‘What else is there to do at night?’” (Meyer, Twilight 293). There are a few things wrong with this scene. Firstly, it suggests that when you are romantically involved with someone, personal security boundaries do not exist. Second, she sees the fact that he violated her privacy as “flattering,” and not creepy. Lastly, Edward brushes this off with nonchalance as if it is within his right to stalk someone in that way. This instance is repeated

later in the first novel when Edward follows her to Port Angeles. “I wondered if it should bother me that he was following me,” reflects Bella, “instead I felt a strange surge of pleasure” (Meyer, Twilight 174). This reaction of feeling pleased when a lover has gone too far is disturbing. This relates to the common power dynamic often seen in romance novels, where men are accepted as the controlling factors in the relationship. As Christian-Smith notes, “[b]oys [in young adult romances] control the terms of romance by making heroines their exclusive property” (Christian-Smith 25).

This enjoyment over Edward’s overbearing presence relates to the fact that Bella is constantly in danger and Edward is repeatedly saving her. After he stalks her in Port Angeles, he ends up saving her from a group of rapists. Bella calls him her “perpetual savior” (Meyer, Twilight 166) and describes the sensation of seeing Edward: “amazing how instantaneously the choking fear vanished, amazing how suddenly the feeling of security washed over me – even before I was off the street – as soon as I heard his voice” (Meyer, Twilight 162). Because Meyer disguises Edward’s controlling behavior as protective, he gets away easily with things many would normally object to. Meyer writes Edward’s presence in Bella’s life in a way that makes it seem that Bella actually desires Edwards’s constant protection—to seem as if she is in control of the situation, that she asks for it—but it is obvious that it is the other way around.

“Don’t go away, then,” I responded, unable to hide the pleading in my voice.
 “That suits me,” he replied, his face relaxing into a gentle smile. “Bring on the shackles—I’m your prisoner.” But his long hands formed manacles around *my* wrists as he spoke.”

(Twilight 302)

In this passage it seems as if Edward is surrendering his control to Bella; he claims he is “your (her) prisoner.” But, in actuality, his hands are the ones constraining her.

Edward is simultaneously Bella's greatest protector and greatest threat to her health. As I mentioned earlier, Twilight participates in eight of the thirteen criteria for a relationship that is abusive. These criteria are written as questions that be answered with a simple yes or no. One of the criteria Twilight answers positively to is, "Does your partner act like the abuse is your fault?" Edward warns Bella repeatedly that she is constantly in danger around him yet does nothing to counteract this situation. He chastises Bella for being brave and states, "You *need* a healthy dose of fear. Nothing could be more beneficial for you" (Meyer, Twilight 216). He reminds her that any move he makes could kill her, and that he doesn't trust himself when he is alone with her. And yet, one of the first times they spend time together outside of class, he brings her to a meadow that is far away in the middle of the woods where it would be very hard for someone to find her. Bella doesn't tell anyone that she is going out alone with him, particularly because Edward had previously advised her to keep a low profile—"you said it might cause trouble for you...us being together publicly" (Meyer, Twilight 255)—which makes Edward beyond furious: "We were silent for the rest of the drive. I could feel the waves of infuriated disapproval rolling off of him" (Meyer, Twilight 255). He gets angry with her when she doesn't tell anyone she is going to be with him alone, for he feels like this gives him less incentive to bring her back. The blame then shifts to her responsibility to tell people she is alone with Edward rather than Edward's responsibility not to kill her.

Edward exerts his power over Bella not only through shifting the blame for his aggression but also through the promise of marriage—and martial sex—which he uses to twist Bella's arm into cooperating with him. Christian-Smith describes this relationship as follows: "Marriage is the vehicle for making women men's sexual property and for confining her within the home" (13). Bella repeatedly asks Edward to have sex with her. Edward

knows that Bella does not believe strongly in the institution of marriage, so he uses it as a way to protect and possess her virtue. “‘I have to marry you first?’ I asked in disbelief. ‘That’s the deal—take it or leave it. Compromise, remember?’” (Meyer, Eclipse 450). This is hardly a “compromise”; Edward is commanding that she compromise her beliefs and chain herself to him forever in order to have sex.

The use of sex in the series, like many other romance novels, “becomes a powerful way of controlling the range of their sexual pleasure. Hence, the code of romance is ultimately about power: who has it and who may legitimately exercise it” (Christian-Smith). Not only does sex become a tool to get Bella to marry Edward, but also once they have sex Edward uses Bella’s sexual desire to control her. “‘Sex was the key all along?’ He rolled his eyes. ‘Why didn’t I think of that?’ He muttered sarcastically. ‘I could have saved myself a lot of arguments’” (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 111). When Bella was encouraging Edward to turn her into a vampire, Edward was trying to think of ways to slow her desire for transformation down. He realizes quickly, after they have sex, that sex can be a compromising factor, for Bella is not eager to give up her human sex drive. What he does not mention to her is that vampires have a high sex drive and a great sex life. He almost hides this information from her intentionally so that her desire for sex keeps her human longer. What is surprising is that he acts as if he is surprised sex was the “key.” Edward has to restrain himself in sexual activity due to his need to remain in control, thereby controlling the limits of how often and how intensely they can make out. He controls how long and how intensely they kiss, and he will pull away or shove her aside if things go to far.

When Edward and Bella eventually do have sex, it is violent, and perhaps the most disconcerting passage in the series occurs when Bella wakes up after her first sexual encounter with Edward:

Under the dusting of feathers [from the bed], large purplish bruises were beginning to blossom across the pale skin of my arm. My eyes followed the trail they made up to my shoulder, and then down across my ribs. I pulled my hand free to poke at a discoloration on my left forearm, watching it fade where I touched and then reappear. It throbbed a little.

(Meyer, Breaking Dawn 89)

This completes another National Domestic Violence criteria: “Does your partner shove you, slap you, choke you, or hit you?” While we are not given the details of this sexual encounter, bruising from sex definitely fits under this category. His reaction to what he has done to her is horror: “I knew better than this. I should not have—” (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 89). But Bella is still eager to have more. She lackadaisically brushes off the fact that he hurts her and “concentrated on the bruises that would be the hardest to hide—my arms and my shoulders” (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 95). Her focus on hiding the abuse rather than fixing the problem makes it seem as if sex, and Edward’s love, is worth any type of injury.

Twilight can be reduced to the basic paradigms of the romance genre. Take a look back at our original formula for a Harlequin romance that Modleski provides:

Each book averages approximately 187 pages, and the formula rarely varies: a young, inexperienced, poor to moderately well-to-do woman encounters and becomes involved with a handsome, strong, experienced, wealthy man, older than herself by ten to fifteen years. The heroine is confused by the hero’s behavior since, though he is obviously interested in her, he is mocking, cynical, contemptuous, often hostile, and even somewhat brutal. By the end, however, all misunderstandings are cleared away, and the hero reveals his love for the heroine, who reciprocates.

(Modleski 13)

It is easy to see how all of the attributes of these romances still ring true today. While this may be a young adult novel sold as fantasy fiction, the basics from romances 20 years ago

have not changed today. Ideas such as the assumption that physical attractiveness can override all other attributes of a person and is the main reason for the feeling of love. Obsessive and controlling behaviors are acceptable if you truly love the other person and you can admit it is for your safety. It is standard to be weak and helpless and fall into trouble whenever trouble appears so that your significant other, who is usually stalking you anyway, can save you. Without your lover, your life is meaningless and dangerous activities or even death are an acceptable choices to soothe your pain. It is okay to use marriage to bribe someone to have sex with you. It is acceptable to ignore your friends and family in order to spend all of your time with the person you love. I do not think these conclusions are those of a cold-hearted Twilight-hater, but rather the result of close reading of the text.

Chapter 2: The Disturbed Universe of Forks

As a genre, young adult literature has solidified its place as a large commercial genre. Virginia Monseau's book, Reading Their World, describes the evolution to the modern day young adult novel. In the early 1800s, churches made literature designed for young adult readers to inspire them in spirituality and morality (50). As time went on towards the mid-1800s, the domestic novel began to take shape. Although these books originally were designed for adult readers, many young adult readers enjoyed them. They had much in common with the novels from Sunday School because they also were intended to inscribe morality onto its readership. A popular theme for these novels was the idea that if women were conservative they could save humanity from its downfall (51). In the era of 1900-1960, young adult novels turned into a more interior view of characters, where self-exploration played a key role (59). What all these eras have in common is that young adult literature has

played a part in trying to influence the younger generation. This genre is comprised of adults writing novels with the specific intent to impose ideals and morals onto young readers. Because they are directed at children in an impressionable age, these novels play crucial parts in communicating to upcoming adults what the “real” world is like.

Roberta Seelinger Trites’s revolutionary study, Disturbing The Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature, in its attempt to define adolescent literature, notes that the American Library Association classifies adolescent literature into three categories: “Books Written Specifically for Adolescents,” “Books written for General Trade Market Which Have Adolescent Heroes and Heroines,” and “General Books of Interest to Young Adults” (Trites 7). For the purposes of this discussion I will be focusing mostly on “Books Written Specifically for Adolescents.” These books are more unified in theme and intent of publishing and therefore make for a more streamlined analysis. Trites describes the basic underlying structure of these novels in that they

“can all be linked to issues of power. Although the primary purpose of the adolescent novel may appear to be a depiction of growth, growth in the genre is inevitably represented as being linked to what the adolescent has learned about power. Without experiencing gradations between power and powerlessness, the adolescent cannot grow. Thus, power is even more fundamental to adolescent literature than growth”

(Trites 42).

Power creates the main challenge in most young adult novels, whether that power dynamic is coming from friends, lovers, teachers, or society. She argues that societal constraints are intertwined in the basis of all young adult novels, and both plot and characters create these fundamental criteria. In order for a young adult novel protagonist to succeed, he or she must adhere to these predetermined standards, thereby leaving adolescent readers to accept power

relationships as unavoidable. This creates a dynamic that repression is a cultural imperative (Trites 55).

These novels are created with the intent of demonstrating a path that young adults should take in order to reach adulthood. The idea is that the novels start with protagonists who are in some way naïve or mistaken about the world. Through the trials and tribulations of the novel, eventually they find their way to answers about how to face the “real” world and become a part in it. The problem right away is that this leaves the reader with the assumption that “the only way teenagers can obtain that goal is to grow, to quit being adolescents themselves, to become more like insider, the adults. But if that is the case, by that formulation, young adults automatically become outsiders in their own novels. I am often surprised by the number of YA novels that imply the same ideology to adolescent readers: stop being an adolescent and become an adult” (Trites 79). This prejudice against youth and youthful behavior demonstrates the need for adults to tell children to grow up. This literature suggests not that life teaches you lessons as you encounter them; instead, these novels suggest there is a right way to live. I

A prevalent topic in young adult literature is sex and sexuality. The common idea throughout these texts is that curiosity about sex is natural, but if you have it you will either feel guilty or become pregnant. This necessity to prevent adolescents from sexual behavior is often burdensome. As Trites writes, “[s]ome YA novels seem more preoccupied with influencing how adolescent readers will behave when they are not reading than with describing human sexuality honestly. Such novels tend to be heavy-handed in their moralism and demonstrate relatively clearly the effect of adult authors asserting authority over adolescent readers” (Trites 85). Obviously a chance many adults find to convince young

adults to not experiment sexually, these underlying values show up in most young adult texts. Trites argues, “the adultist power these authors hold is very much tied to gender politics. Male and female authors alike who communicate that sex is to be avoided to protect vulnerable females ultimately end up affirming the patriarchal status quo, no matter how good their intentions” (95).

Ultimately, there are two major problems with this portrayal of young adult sexual experience. The first is that it is so desperate to prevent experimentation that it demonstrates unrealistic interactions that could greatly influence a young adult into thinking it reflects reality. The problem with this mentality is that once a young adult has sex without getting pregnant or feeling guilty, they can easily go from believing all these moral codes to believing none of them. The second is that they are restrictive in nature, responding to particular societal pressures and ideologies, and therefore influence adolescent readers to believe that outlying relationships that contradict the “norm” are wrong and to be avoided. Rarely can a woman in a young adult novel experiment sexually in a safe way and end up okay.

Trites explains that, enforcing these power dynamics are, in dialogue within the novel, two types of ideologies: explicit and implicit. Explicit ideologies are obvious throughout the text and are most likely apparent to even the most elementary reader. Implicit ideologies are more dangerous because although they are not spelled out as clearly, they influence the reader all the same. Explicit ideologies are those that the author intended to include in the narrative. Implicit ideologies are sometimes even unknown to the authors themselves; they are ideas about life that are usually ingrained in them as social or societal standards. These ideologies are usually not in question in the novel and are taken as fact. In

this sense, young adult readers are receiving opinions that are disguised as facts of life. This issue could be solved if teachers helped students become aware of these implicit ideologies, they could become “less vulnerable to textual manipulation” (Trites 150). In this way, students could become more self-aware and understand the literature that they read on a more complex level.

Twilight incorporates many of these implicit and explicit ideologies, and most are rooted in Meyer’s Mormon beliefs. In an interview with Time magazine, Meyer was asked if religion influenced her work. “Really, not so much. Not consciously at all,” she responded. “When I’m writing the stories I’m just looking to have a good time. But I do think that because I’m a very religious person, it does tend to come out somewhat in the books, although always unconsciously” (qtd. in *Time*). Although she says this influence is “unconscious” it does not mean that it does not exist. While an author has a right to let her faith influence her work, Meyer ties in abusive concepts to adhere to this faith. Because she is a Mormon and does not believe in sex before marriage, she makes Edward force Bella into marrying her only so she can have sex with him. Because Meyer is anti-abortion, she allows Bella to die for the sake of her baby. Because there is little mention of religion in the text, these ideologies are not explicit to the reader, and therefore many readers will not understand them to be ideologically tied to religious conservatism. They may believe instead that these are ideas are universally approved and endorsed. I do not suggest that we censor this type of literature, but I do think we need to consider the impact of such a work. Meyer was the best-selling author of 2008 and 2009. By turning a blind eye to this type of enculturation, by framing it as considered natural and encouraging our youth to relate to a character like Bella, we are ignoring a large problem. In this chapter, I will trace how Meyer’s ideologies, often

informed by her Mormon beliefs, are apparent in her female characters in particular and their adherence to ideals about chastity, motherhood, and passivity.

Twilight plays a prominent role in many lives and is, therefore, vital to any discussion of young adult literature today. As the best-selling young adult novel of the last couple of years, Twilight fandom has resulted in movies and merchandise being marketed to young teens. In a liminal stage in their lives, young adult readers become affected by the things they read. Most of us can remember relishing over our favorite books growing up and reading them over and over again. To many adult readers, the underlying messages might seem obvious and can be easily ignored or criticized. To young readers, however, these implicit ideologies might be overlooked or misunderstood as matters of general opinion. To children who are making crucial life decisions such as where and whether they want to consider schooling, and what jobs they want to have, a story about a girl who doesn't care about high school and ditches it frequently to be with her boyfriend, choosing marriage and pregnancy over college, and having no personal career or way to make money is not the best example. In my high school, everyone was passing Twilight around as a great love story, it had grown so far in popularity that even teachers were reading and recommending it to their students. Although the readership has expanded far beyond the intended audience, the reception and understanding of the novel differs. I fear the relationship to the young adult community more than the older fans of the novel due the impressionable age of many of the women reading these books.

The Twilight series addresses many of the power conflicts identified by Trites as common in young adult literature. Firstly, its description of teenage sexuality is clearly constructed by a moralizing adult rather than an adolescent. In the entire series, Bella never

once discusses sex with any of her friends, even though many of them date throughout the four years in the series. This is unrealistic in terms of sexual curiosity. Bella seems to have never bothered with any boy until she met Edward. Most teenagers at seventeen have had at least a crush on a boy before. If this weren't exaggerated in importance throughout the text, it would not be an issue. However, Meyer emphasizes Bella's virginity over and over again. Edward himself makes sure she has never had sex with anyone before him. Even though he casually comments that he doesn't think it is a big deal, it is obvious to the reader that it is. He has to manipulate Bella into marrying him against all of her wishes because he wants her to be married before having sex. When she asks him why he needs to marry her first she assumed that he was trying to protect his virtue, but he responds, "I'm trying to protect yours (virtue)" (Meyer, Eclipse 453). The sacrifice of not having sex, then, becomes one to protect the Bella for the sake of her virtue. Edward is physically seventeen but is actually over 100 years old; therefore, his role in the novel is as Bella's peer, but his is also the voice of authority. When it comes to sexual matters, Meyer represents Edward as the voice of reason and wisdom.

Sex—or the absence of sex—in fact creates most of the tension in the series. "It is fair to say that Twilight succeeds largely because Bella is chaste and Edward abstains—for a very long time. The primary conflict in the lean and simple plot of the first three books rests squarely on the sexual tension between withholding lovers" (Anatol 107). This idea of two lovers withholding sex from each other becomes the main source of the problems between Bella and Edward. Rather than focus on the frustration of Edward's vampire nature, Bella is much more concerned with the idea that he won't sleep with her. Edward eventually convinces Bella that it's a sin to have sex before marriage. For example, in the third novel,

Bella and Edward are left alone in the house all night. Bella is disappointed that they are not going to have sex like she thought they would. She tries to seduce him, and when she tries to remove her shirt Edward reacts aggressively: “Cold iron fetters locked around my wrists, and pulled my hands above my head” (Meyer, Eclipse 450). After she debates for a while why she wants to have sex, Edward comments, “Traditionally, shouldn’t you be arguing my side, and I yours?” (Meyer, Eclipse 451). This scene suggests that women are supposed to refuse men’s romantic advances. The way Edward rejects Bella’s advances shames her into believing her desire is childish and unmerited. She finally caves in and admits that she will just wait until marriage.

In terms of setting unrealistic representations of sexual relationships, Twilight takes the cake. Bella and Edward sleep in the same bed next to each other for almost four years without ever doing anything more than the occasional making out with their clothes on. Except among, perhaps, the extremely religiously conservative, this type of behavior is unlikely. More importantly, however, many people who experimented with sex in high school and college years did not end up pregnant and guilty and led normal lives. Meyer happens to be one of the religious minorities as a Mormon, and therefore adheres to and believes the necessity of chastity for women, “Chastity is a requirement for a temple wedding, which, in the Mormon faith, grants women entrance to the highest levels of heaven,” Giselle Anatol explains. “The pressure young Mormon women receive to remain chaste cannot be overstated. Perhaps a personal story captures it best” (Anatol 109). In this sense, Meyer has used Twilight as a foundation to impose her religious views through implicit ideologies that many of her fans will not recognize. They will think it’s possible and romantic to find the boy of their dreams who will share a bed with them every night without

having sex. They will imagine that it is better to marry young so that sex will be available to them, even if marriage is not what they want.

Bella's powerlessness in the bedroom is only one way Meyer signals female submission. The role of the women in this series, in fact, is repeatedly disappointing, particularly compared to their male counterparts. Esme is Edward's "mother" in the sense that she plays the role of the matriarch in her so-called adopted family of vampires. She remains passive and plays no strong roles in any decision-making. Her power as a vampire is maternal compassion. Bella narrates her first impression of Esme: "Something about her heart-shaped face, her billows of soft, caramel-colored hair, reminded me of the ingénues of the silent-movie era" (Meyer, Twilight 322). This passage demonstrates what values Meyer admires in women. The ingénues of silent movies epitomize a femininity that is innocent, virtuous, wholesome, and virginal.

These qualities are troubled, however, by the issue of fertility. Most of the women in the Twilight series are defined by their inability to have their own children; as Esme states, "I never could get over my mothering instincts—did Edward tell you I had lost a child?" (Meyer, Twilight 368). This loss of a child is what leads Esme to jump off a cliff, leaving her near-death. Carlisle saves her, and this is how she is turned into a vampire. This leaves the reader with the impression that losing a child is an acceptable reason to want to kill yourself, and that for the rest of your life you will be left with "mothering instincts."

Esme is not the only woman who thought her life was over because she could not have children. Leah is not only infertile but a character who exhibits the defeminization that accompanies the inability to have children. Leah is the only Quileute female werewolf in the pack. Leah and her boyfriend Sam went through a terrible breakup, and he left her for his

cousin. When Sam was feeling pain about imprinting on Leah's cousin, the pack was sympathetic. When Leah joined the pack and her thoughts were shared with the group, she was criticized for "Lashing out at everyone, trying to make [them] all as miserable as she was" (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 245). The rest of the pack mocks her, and they do little to include her. Jacob seems to be the only one to notice how ostracized she is, particularly when the leader of the pack, Sam, refers to the group of werewolves as "guys": "We fell silent, and I felt Leah's wince at the word guys" (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 157). Clearly, being a werewolf is masculine, something at which no woman can excel, demonstrated by Leah's failure when she tries to fight a vampire on her own. Jacob has to save her and gets hurt in her stead. What's most disturbing is Jacob's take on the event: "Leah found [the vampire]—she was being stupid, cocky trying to prove something" (Meyer, Eclipse 564). Since the second Jacob knew he was a werewolf, he has been showing off all of his skills and provoking danger to demonstrate his invincible nature. It seems that it is okay for the men to show off, but if a woman attempts to hold her own she is "cocky." Jacob is constantly frustrated at her bratty and impertinent behavior, but then is compassionate when he realizes that perhaps "she wasn't as female as she should be" (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 318). This question is answered when Leah admits she is missing Meyer's single ingredient to being a "female," the ability to reproduce. "I don't have the ability to pass on the gene, apparently, despite my stellar bloodlines," Leah admits. "So I become a freak—the girlie-wolf—good for nothing else. I'm a genetic dead end and we both know it" (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 318). Without her ability to reproduce, Leah is left feeling like a "good for nothing else." According to Leah, and the Twilight series as a whole, if a woman does not possess the ability to reproduce, she is basically an inferior man.

Rosalie's excuse for her self-obsessed, vain, and cold behavior towards the family and Bella is because she was not able to have a baby in her lifetime. When Bella first meets Rosalie, she is cold and distant for no apparent reason. When Rosalie needs to help save Bella, she exclaims, "What is she to me? Except a menace—a danger you've chosen to inflict on us all" (Meyer, Twilight 401). This attitude is repeated and appears to be just the nature of Rosalie. However, in Eclipse, Rosalie tries to explain her anger and resentment at the world. Rosalie was jealous of her friend Vera, and wished she was not so pretty "[s]o I could have been allowed to marry someone who loved me, and have pretty babies" (Meyer, Eclipse 162). This despair over not having a child seems to be the force that drives Rosalie's entire life. She even explains the reason she saved Emmett was because "he reminded me of Vera's little [boy] Henry" (Meyer, Eclipse 167). Rosalie describes Esme as using her adopted family to make up for not having children: "Esme's made do with us as substitutes" (Meyer, Eclipse 167), which is exactly how Rosalie perceives Emmett. Basically, Rosalie believes that once a woman cannot have a child, she will have to live forever through a substitute.

It is perhaps because female relationships are grounded in the ability or inability to conceive that Rosalie's relationship to Bella changes throughout the series. Bella and Rosalie remain on bad terms until Bella gets pregnant. Bella immediately knows the only person who would help her die for a child is Rosalie, and she claims, "I've never really understood Rosalie's pain and resentment before" (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 132). Although Rosalie has been unkind to Bella up until this point in the novels, once Bella is pregnant, Rosalie defends Bella as if the baby is her own. Completely uncaring about Bella's health, Rosalie's concern is for the baby, even though it is breaking Bella's ribs and pelvis. The promotion of the baby's life over the mother's is a problem in our own political atmosphere today, where some

are working to ban abortion at the state level even in cases where the mother's health is at risk. Maybe legislation in the world outside Meyer's novels doesn't deal with half-vampire babies, but the ideology is the same; a baby takes precedence over its mother. Naturally, because of Leah's fertility problems, she understands Rosalie's obsession over the baby and claims she would "want Bella to do that for me. And so would Rosalie. We'd both do it her way" (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 320).

This obsession with fertility and motherhood exists at the intersection of the young adult novel and the romance. In Becoming a Woman Through Romance, Christian-Smith demonstrates how young adult romance novels discuss the "relation between sexuality and procreation. Heroines learn that this relation is much closer for women than it is for men because almost every instance of intercourse results in pregnancy" (41). This formula holds true for Twilight. Bella realizes after enjoying sex with Edward that it might be useful to stay human and retain human urges. She figures she might as well try go to college for a couple semesters. But, of course, Bella has a much more important duty to herself than education, and that is to become a mother. Bella gets pregnant from her first instance of sexual intercourse. Instead of weighing her options as a newly married 18-year-old, Bella instantly decides, "This child, Edward's child, was a whole different story. I wanted him like I wanted air to breathe. Not a choice—a necessity" (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 132). Meyer carefully considered her word "choice" here, to obviously make the point that abortion is not a choice and that having a child is a "necessity" once conceived. This message aligns with her Mormon beliefs and upbringing, and while I think it is anti-choice propaganda, there is no harm in relaying a political or religious viewpoint. The problem comes when it is revealed very early in the pregnancy that the baby is destroying Bella's health. Bella recognizes that

she is going to have to die in order for her baby to be born, and Jacob notices her martyrdom immediately. “Her hand dropped from my face to her bloated stomach, caressed it. She didn’t have to say the words for me to know what she was thinking. She was dying for it” (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 190). Bella was counting on being turned into a vampire in order to save her dying body from childbirth. She had to give up her family, her future at college, her mortal life, and potentially her life itself in order to protect her baby from being aborted. This type of self-sacrifice should never be expected from a mother. The mother’s life and well-being should always come first. Meyer’s interpretation of pro-life propaganda here goes to the most extremist views.

Overall, then, there are a few key messages Meyer reiterates in her depiction of women. Through Esme, she demonstrates that the perfect wife/mother figure is an appealing, quiet, and demure. It also suggests that if a woman is stripped of the possibility of children, she spends the rest of her life yearning for or finding substitutes for children—a limbo mothering stage. Esme’s identity gets watered down to simply a mother who has no real desires or features of her own. Meyer also implies, through Leah, that motherhood and femininity are linked together when she questions how female can Leah be if she is barren. Through Rosalie, Meyer reiterates that if you pass up the chance to have a child, you will be tortured by it later in life. Bella perpetuates the female martyr and the responsibility of a mother to risk everything for a child’s life. Not only does Bella reject her plans of a higher education in order to have a baby, but not one person in the entire story mentions how she might miss out from not going to college, while every female character reminds her of how she will never be the same without her baby.

This depiction of passive femininity, a womanhood sutured to maternity at all costs, is enabled by Meyer's representation of the patriarchal family. Because turning people into vampires (essentially giving birth to them) does not require one to be female, Carlisle essentially "gives birth" to his family. In this sense, a vampire family is the ideal form of patriarchy, where women are not needed even for procreation. Bella adopts Edward's family as her own, especially because the Cullen family dynamic is depicted as so superior to Bella's. Bella's mother and father are divorced, and are both irresponsible and immature in different ways. Throughout the book, in fact, there are no real examples of strong mothers. Bella's mother is childish and does not receive much respect from Bella: "I'd spent most of my life taking care of Renee, patiently guiding her away from her craziest plans, good-naturedly enduring the ones I couldn't talk her out of. I'd always been indulgent with my mom, amused by her, even a little condescending to her. I saw her cornucopia of mistakes and laughed privately to myself. Scatterbrained Renee" (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 45). Jacob's mother is dead. Edward does not remember his mother, and a male pastor raised Carlisle. Bella does not meet any of her friend's mothers, and the rest of the female maternal characters are relatively weak.

Contrastingly, Edward's family is run by Carlisle, who is loving, intelligent, and powerful. Edward describes himself as "the first in Carlisle's family" (Meyer, Twilight 288). When Rosalie found Emmett, "She carried him back to Carlisle, more than a hundred miles, afraid she wouldn't be able to do it herself" (Meyer, Twilight 289). She was afraid she wasn't able to stop herself from drinking all of his blood instead of merely biting him, meaning that only Carlisle has the self-control to produce vampires. Carlisle essentially created everyone in his family, as he is portrayed as the only person with enough self-control to do so.

“Carlisle and company, in many ways, represent the Mormon ideal of how a family should operate,” Anatol argues, “and this representation is that much more striking against Bella’s less traditional, divorced parents” (Anatol 110). Carlisle plays the role of the leader of the Cullens, whereas Esme is left to be motherly in the traditional sense of being caring and emotionally supportive of the children. All questions and concerns, however, are brought to Carlisle to make the final decision. It is Carlisle’s family. He is the creator of them all.

Accordingly, Bella is painted as an ideal woman not through her power but through her sacrifices to this patriarchal system. She sacrifices moving to a place that she hates because she wants her mom to be free and enjoy her new marriage. In the first book, to spare her mother’s life, Bella willingly walks into a trap alone that will most certainly result in her death. She risks her relationship with her father in order to go to this trap where she will inevitably die. She sacrifices her relationship with Jacob to be with Edward. She sacrifices her commitment to not be married to please Edward so he will have sex with her. She sacrifices her college years to have a child. She sacrifices her mortal life for her child. In the sacrifice to die in order to have this child, she gives up what she believes will be her relationship with her family and her friends. She does not just sacrifice these things, but almost enjoys the pain she feels. When Bella is depressed about Edward leaving her, she is spending time with Charlie and comments “it felt good, despite my depression, to make him happy” (Meyer, New Moon 149). Jacob remarks on this behavior when he observes Bella dying for her child, “Of course, die for the monster spawn. It was so *Bella*” (Breaking Dawn 177). While Jacob disapproves of Bella’s behavior here, he still characterizes it as something *Bella*, as if it is one of the qualities that define her. Only ten pages later he reiterates this point: “This girl was a classic martyr. She’d totally been born in the wrong century. She

should have lived back when she could have gotten herself fed to some lions for a good cause” (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 187). Her sacrifice is not being demonstrated as the act of a foolish girl but rather an honorable act of a woman with antiquated views of the role of a woman in society. This is not the story of an empowered woman but rather the story of a protagonist who can only grow within the confines of a repressive society.

The character of Alice seems to be the only female to go against this obsession with motherhood. While Bella is dealing with her dangerous pregnancy, Alice stays out of the drama but clearly does not approve of it; Jacob noticed that when talking about Bella’s pregnancy, “I could see the flames in the very back of her [Alice’s] eyes. Edward and I weren’t the only ones who were burning over this” (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 321). A fast friend to Bella, Alice appears to let Bella make her own decisions in life. However, she is also obsessed with fashion and clothing, even at its least practical nature. A consumerist at heart, she constantly obsesses over clothing and fancy cars Carlisle comments, “Alice rarely allows us to wear the same thing twice” (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 273). Any agency Meyer suggests through Alice is, ultimately, undermined. For example, Alice is the only female character of Carlisle’s family with a special power, to see the future. While this might seem empowering, the nature of the power makes her rather subject to the will of others. Alice cannot simply see the future, but rather she can see the future of decisions other people have made. This power makes her helpless to either change the actions of others or know anything with certainty. She is at the will of other people’s decisions, but of the female characters, Alice is the most empowered within the confines of the novel.

Meyer incorporates explicit and implicit ideologies of female passivity into her series through patterns of resistance and compliance common to young adult literature. As Trites

notes, part of the formula of young adult literature is the rebellion against society, a resistance that is permitted until the young adult realizes the wisdom of traditional societal roles and returns to them. Bella spends the first three books of the series refusing to believe in the standard of marriage. After watching her mother's marriage fall apart, Bella does not believe in marriage as an institution. Once Edward convinces Bella to marry him so that she can have sex with him, she realizes the flaws of her ways. "I saw just how silly I'd been for fearing this—as if it were an unwanted birthday gift or an embarrassing exhibition, like the prom" (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 49). Of course, now that she is married, Bella loves being Mrs. Cullen and being a wife, realizing that all along she was completely wrong about marriage. When Edward reminds her that becoming a vampire would prevent her from having children, she did not think twice about it, "It had been a piece of cake to promise Edward that I didn't care about giving up children for him, because I truly didn't. Children, in the abstract, had never appealed to me" (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 132). However, once she becomes pregnant, she realizes the error of her ways. She comments that her weak imagination might be the reason "why I'd been unable to imagine that I would like being married until after I already was—unable to see that I would want a baby until after one was already coming..." (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 132). Basically, Bella admits that the typical life of having children and getting married might seem unappealing, but that is just because one hasn't experienced them yet. Meyer makes a young marriage and birth after high school seem like a perfect solution even to those who want neither.

Chapter 3: Sinking Your Teeth into Twilight

The history of vampire literature is a long one. Over time, many authors have created their own rules and reasons behind vampirism. Not all vampires are made the same, and their purposes in their narratives have changed over time. Some vampires fit the common lore of fearing garlic and sunlight, while others seem to be almost human. While it might seem like there is no connection between many of these novels, Nina Auerbach has discovered patterns throughout the history of vampire fiction. She describes our obsession with vampires as follows: “They inhere in our most intimate relationships; they are also hideous invaders of the normal. I am writing about vampires because they can be everything we are, while at the same time, they are fearful reminders of the infinite things we are not” (6). Auerbach claims that the type of vampires we find are related to the history and location of how they were written: “Vampires go where the power is” (Auerbach 6). Vampires and the powers they possess relate directly to the power dynamics of their age, whether those powers be political, economic, or sexual.

Vampires from their conception have always been known to prey on unsuspecting females. Lord Byron wrote one of the oldest narratives for vampires in 1813; he was known for his interest in vampires and his portrayal of them. His explanation of a vampire’s duty on earth is described in his epic poem The Giaour:

Then ghastly haunt thy native place,
 And suck the blood of all thy race;
 There from thy daughter, sister, wife,
 At midnight drain the stream of life.

[Byron 37]

Here, Byron explores the struggles and confinement of domestic life. Auerbach notes that “[t]he hell Byron’s Giaour envisions is the traditional folkloric hell –and American heaven— of domestic confinement, which is never free from revenants” (Auerbach 17). Therefore, the characterization of the vampire itself had relatively little to do with the monster world and more to do with the restraints in society. Interestingly enough, the victims of this vampirism are all women; “daughter, sister, wife.” These words are fearful for women or the people who protect them. This trend of danger to women seems to be a common thread throughout vampire tales. However, these tales differentiate in what exactly women and society should fear. Auerbach’s connection between vampire tales and their historical importance is a strong one; it explains how such a variety of tales with different characteristics are related. They are sometimes more closely related through their interaction with social climates rather than their similarities in the depictions of the vampires. In order to understand the historical use of vampires, I will discuss a few crucial tales that have impacted the vampire literature world.

Varney the Vamp, written by Thomas Prest as a series that ran from 1845 to 1847. It was considered a “penny dreadful,” a term for sensational stories that were sold for a penny, which is unsurprising considering the lurid nature of vampire tales at the time, they were considered cheap entertainment. Varney is a sympathetic character who only really lusts for money. He does not exhibit the usual vampire behavior, such as avoiding garlic and sunlight, and his vampire nature seems to be more of a predatory behavior than supernatural. His nature, however, is different from Byron’s vampire: “Hungrier for money than for blood, Varney seems worlds away from the dead-eyed, disembodied vampires Byron spawned, but Varney too lives in intimacy with mortals, embracing not a single chosen friend of his own class, but all the greedy strata of England’s hierarchy,” Auerbach writes (33). The fear that

Varney represents is the greed of the middle class attempting to infiltrate the aristocracy. His vampire nature could be interpreted as a metaphor for a person in society feeding off others. With the idea of communism on the rise—the Communist Manifesto was published in 1848—it is clear how vampires could be a symbol of how capitalism preys on others' achievements.

I agree with Auerbach's argument surrounding the impact of cultural context on these texts and on Varney in particular. However, something she doesn't focus on is the repeating pattern of female victims and how they are portrayed. For example, Flora is the first victim of Varney's vampirism, and she is described as follows: "Now she moves, and one shoulder is entirely visible—whiter, fairer than the spotless clothing on the bed on which she lies, is the smooth skin of a fair creature, just budding into womanhood, and in that transition state which presents to us all the charms of a girl—almost of the child, with the more matured beauty and gentleness of advancing years" (Prest 6). This description is undoubtedly a sexualized portrait of this victim, even more disturbing because of her apparent youth and how it enhances her erotic depiction. Flora does not die from this encounter, and as Varney begins to gain more and more power, she becomes afraid. She voices her concerns to Admiral Bell, a close friend, and he responds that she should not interfere with this business "Because—because, you see, a lady has no reputation for courage to keep up. Indeed, it's rather the other way, for we dislike a bold woman as much as we hold in contempt a cowardly man" (Prest 130). Admiral Bell's comment portrays a society where men hold contempt for women who step out of their bounds, when he discusses what "we," meaning men, dislike. Women in this novel are not only the victims of vampirism; they are not even allowed to have a say in how to enact revenge on their perpetrators.

Even when the gender of the vampire is female, the prey remains female. A famous and unusual vampire tale is Sheridan Lefanu's 1872 *Carmilla*, in which both the perpetrator and the victim of the vampire attack are female. *Carmilla* is a vampire story about a girl named Laura who lost her mother at a young age and is brought up by a relatively clueless father. She befriends a girl named Carmilla who is staying with them for a couple months. The young women remember each other from an erotic dream they once shared and become fast friends, until Laura realizes there is something very wrong with Carmilla. The fear Carmilla represents is the fear of girls without the guidance of their mothers. "The Byronic vampire was a travelling companion," Auerbach writes, "Carmilla comes home to share not only the domestic present, but lost mothers and dreams, weaving herself so tightly into Laura's perceptions that without a cumbersome parade of male authorities to stop her narrative, her story would never end" (Auerbach 45). The attitude in the novel seems to suggest that daughters need their mothers for normalcy, and fathers cannot fill this void.

Carmilla is strange for its time considering the homoerotic nature of the relationship between Carmilla and Laura:

"Sometimes after an hour of apathy, my strange and beautiful companion would take my hand and hold it with a fond pressure, renewed again and again; blushing softly, gazing in my face with languid and burning eyes, and breathing so fast that her dress rose and fell with the tumultuous respiration. It was like the ardour of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet overpowering; and with gloating eyes she drew me to her, and her hot lips travelled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, "You are mine, you *shall* be mine, and you and I are one for ever."

(Le Fanu 25)

Through homoeroticism, *Carmilla* demonstrates how even when the vampire is a woman, women still end up sexualized as prey. Just as many young adult novels punish their

characters from straying outside societal norms, *Carmilla* follows a character who experiences feelings that are outside expectations but fortunately realizes her transgression before it is too late. Whether featuring a male or female vampire, these stories suggest that lustful behavior for women can lead to their demise.

Of course, when thinking about vampires, Dracula is a name that comes to everyone's mind. Bram Stoker's Dracula is one of the most famous examples of a literary vampire. Having been adapted into many films over time, not all portray the Dracula that was described in the novel. Full of allegory and complexity, Dracula is a masterpiece in its depth and diction and has remained a topic of study for literary critics. Amid much sensationalized fiction such as Varney the Vampire and Twilight, it almost seems out of place to discuss a novel like Dracula here. Auerbach, however, dedicates an entire chapter of her study to discussing Dracula and its implications alone. "Dracula's disjunctions from earlier, friendlier vampires makes him less of an undead past than a harbinger of a world to come, a world that is our own" (Auerbach 63). Auerbach distinguishes Dracula as a vampire from the ones preceding him. Although these previous narratives certainly influence Stoker, the purpose of the vampire here changed, "Dracula is in love less with death or sexuality than with hierarchies, erecting barriers hitherto foreign to vampire literature; the gulf between male and female, antiquity and newness, class and class, England and non-England, vampire and mortal, homoerotic and heterosexual love, infuses its genre with a new fear: fear of the hated unknown" (Auerbach 67). Dracula is more about fearing a shift in power dynamics than about vampires.

The Twilight series is recognizably a vampire tale. Meyer borrows some concepts from earlier vampire novels and lore in order for the reader to understand the vampires in her

novel. She pulls elements, for example, from Anne Rice's Interview With a Vampire, a story about how character Louis was turned into a vampire to be an immortal companion for another vampire, Lestat. These vampires are immortal and frozen in time, and receive many of the heightened senses that Meyer describes for her vampires. Louis describes in detail the moment he turned into a vampire: "It was as if I had only just been able to see colors and shapes for the first time. I was so enthralled with the buttons on Lestat's black coat that I looked at nothing else for a long time. Then Lestat began to laugh, and I heard his laughter as I had never heard anything before" (Rice 20). This compares closely with Bella's immediate reaction upon turning into a vampire, "Everything was so clear. Sharp. Defined. The brilliant light overhead was still blinding-bright, and yet I could plainly see the glowing strands of the filaments inside the bulb. I could see each color of the rainbow in the white light, and, at the very edge of the spectrum, and eight color I had no name for" (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 387). A couple pages later, when Edward speaks for the first time, Bella notes, "I was lost in the velvet folds of his voice" (Meyer, Breaking Dawn, 391). Meyer also borrows from sensational fiction like Varney the Vampire. In that text, Varney's evil nature is evident in his eyes; "the only thing positively bad about his countenance, was to be found in his eyes. There was a most ungracious and sinister expression, a kind of lurking and suspicious look, as if he were always resolving in his mind some deep laid scheme, which might be sufficient to circumvent the whole of mankind" (148). This compares closely with the Cullen family, which Meyer describes as merely beautiful except for the lifelessness and darkness in their eyes. "I'd noticed that his eyes were black—coal black" (Meyer, Twilight 23), Bella notes of Edward, claiming that "his black eyes [are often] full of revulsion" (Meyer, Twilight 24). These elements alert us that this is a vampire tale. Although many of

the features of Meyer's vampires rely on information on vampires that had already been written, she uses those features to create a whole new monster.

If, as Auerbach suggest, vampires are a sign of their social contexts, what are the motivations behind the construction of Meyer's vampires? These vampires are the epitome of antiquity. Full of knowledge and experience, they behave with compassion and polite behavior that is more reminiscent of the 1800s than modern day. Carlisle Cullen is the head of the family, and through the vampire transition was able to technically give birth to his family, perfecting the concept of patriarchy. Edward, having grown up in the 1900s, is conservative in his beliefs and believes in no sex until marriage. Basically, Meyer has created a backward-looking world where women don't work, men take care of everything, and women's virtue is protected until marriage. Her use of vampires goes against the ideas of modernity and female emancipation. It is in this way that her vampires demonstrate her fear of the changing world.

With more monster main characters in the series than human characters, one might wonder why the Twilight series is considered romance over monster literature. Most of the monsters in the story, however, attempt to be more human than monster most of the time. The monsters in this series are not included for the sake of monsters, but to add to the complications of the love story. Melissa Rosenberg, the screenwriter for both Twilight and New Moon, argues that, in Meyer's series, vampires play a particular role. "Vampires are metaphors for sexuality," she writes, "but one of the reasons they're so popular in the Twilight universe is that they're safe, they're safe but tantalizing in their sexuality. Edward protects Bella from her own raging hormones" (qtd. in Vogner). For example, vampires hate werewolves not because they are monsters, but because it creates a better rivalry in the love

story between Jacob and Edward. These monsters live in the human world. Their monster qualities are merely used to enhance the quality of their lives.

Meyer uses the vampires to achieve to intensify not only the romance plot but also the power dynamics within the series. With the use of supernatural forces, Meyer gets to create the ideal family and lifestyle. Age, for example, is one of the Cullens' sources of power. There is a power both in the appearance and vitality of youthfulness as well as a power in the knowledge and wisdom of old age. Vampires in Twilight enjoy the best of both worlds. While stymied in never-ending beauty and vitality, the vampires get to remain young forever. Coupled with the series' obsession with appearance and aging, this ability holds them in power over everyone else, including human Bella. When she realizes that the werewolves, like vampires, do not age, she cries out "Am I the only one who has to get old? I get older every stinking day!" (Meyer, Eclipse 119). Bella obsesses over the two birthdays she celebrates in the novels, upset by both of them. She attempts to negate her 19th birthday because it occurs the day after she turned into a vampire. "I shook my head fiercely and then shot a glance at the smug smile on my seventeen-year-old husband's face. 'No, this doesn't count. I stopped aging three days ago. I am 18 forever'" (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 471). This type of behavior is seen usually in women in their mid-thirties—an obsession with the loss of youth and beauty. I am not personally aware of any 18-year-old who despises getting older. It is not merely that Bella is aging but rather that she aged while Edward was frozen in time. If this was a girl dating an older boy, I wonder if the novel would depict such an obsession with age? Meyer is suggesting that age equity in a relationship is a problem women, but not for men. She does not merely comment on this factor once, but multiple times throughout the series. This demonstrates that Meyer (as well as Bella) see ageing as a weakness and

promotes the importance of physical appearance. However, in terms of actual age, Carlisle's family is ancient.

Edward uses his age as an advantage over Bella in a non-traditional manner. Because of his supernatural nature, he has the wisdom that experience provides while not suffering from the decay of physical age. His attitude toward her is sometimes more fatherly than romantic or sexual. Especially because Bella already considers herself as an inferior to Edward, his ability to use his life experience as leverage tilts the power in his favor. He doesn't allow her to love him as much as he loves her, for when she confesses to him that she loves him he replies, "You compare one small tree to the entire forest" (Meyer, Eclipse 34). This unequal nature of their love, Edward claims, is a function of his vampire age. "For almost ninety years I've walked among my kind, and yours... all the time thinking I was complete in myself, not realizing what I was seeking" (Meyer, Twilight 304). After wandering the world and never finding anyone he felt romantic about, Edward can claim that his love for Bella is stronger than hers for him because she never had to wait that long. With the inequality of appearances and physical strength that Bella reiterates over and over again, emotions should have been the one characteristic where they could be equals. In most love stories, love is the common point between two people who may be very different. However, because of the large age inequality, Edward is even allowed to love more than Bella is.

Physically speaking, Edward is incredibly strong due to his vampire powers. However, these powers are usually described in combination with how fragile it makes Bella in comparison. Whenever Edward gets the chance to describe how easily he could hurt her, he does. "It's just you are so soft, so fragile. I have to mind my actions every moment that we're together so that I don't hurt you. I could kill you quite easily, Bella, simply by

accident” (Meyer, *Twilight* 310). It is rare in the story for Edward’s strength to be useful; rather, it is used to demonstrate the fragility of Bella. In this sense, his powers are used more as a determinate to increase Edward’s power over Bella. His unusual talents usually terrify Bella, as demonstrated through his driving and speed running. While driving, Edward claims he can react safely at speeds far faster than any one of us would attempt. This type of driving is uncomfortable to Bella, and she is constantly in terror of crashing. Similarly, when Edward demonstrates his ability to run quickly through the forest, Bella blacks out and feels like she is going to puke.

The vampire powers help the Cullen family reach an unrealistic perfection in their lifestyle. They live lavishly, never thinking once about the cost of anything. Alice has the ability to see moments in the future, and while Meyer does not delve deeply into this superpower, she does explain how Alice uses her ability to profit in the stock market. Therefore, none of the Cullen family has jobs besides Carlisle. Meyer glorifies this lifestyle characterized by freedom from money worries. The Cullens live in a beautiful house, have the rarest of the exotic cars, and never have to deal with the problem about how to afford things. When Bella chooses to marry Edward, she gets to join this lifestyle of carefree spending, which adds to the unrealistic nature of their relationship. When Bella is concerned about the welfare of her child, she creates a backpack that is a safety net to fall back onto. This backpack contains “about twice the yearly income for the average American household” (672). This type of financial safety cannot be denied in its importance. Basically, and unemployed 19-year-old can provide a serious safety stash of cash for her daughter that would never be realistic for most families.

Bella's transformation into a vampire allows her to enjoy the benefits of monstrosity, as well—powers that allow her to evade life difficulties, both large and small. Due to the violent nature of Bella's daughter's birth, Bella is turned into a vampire in order to save her. This allows the story to greatly romanticize the idea of motherhood. Because Bella's child is supernatural, she grows at a rapid rate. By the time Bella wakes up from her transformation, her baby, Renesmee, can communicate with her through thought. Unlike regular motherhood where a mother spends much of her time with a crying baby wondering what it wants, Bella gets to immediately know what her baby is thinking. There is not one mention of Bella or anyone else in the family changing a diaper. Most parents of newborns spend all night awake with a baby, however neither Bella nor Edward need sleep as vampires so this aspect does not matter to them. Renesmee never cries, and after about two weeks she is the size of a three-year-old. Not to mention, Bella's vampire transformation healed and beautified her entire body, so Bella has come out of childbirth looking more youthful and sexy than ever, "her flawless face was pale as the moon against the frame of her dark, heavy hair. Her limbs were smooth and strong, skin glistening subtly, luminous as a pearl" (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 403).

In my discussion of the Twilight series as romance, I discussed how there are severe inequalities in the power dynamic of Bella and Edward's relationship, often depicted in terms of domestic abuse. Some of these issues are created or intensified through the fact that Edward is a vampire and Bella is human. The vampire nature of Edward and Bella's relationship, in other words, adds to the unequal power dynamics in their relationship. One of the questions for domestic violence is "Does your partner stop you from seeing your friends or family members?" Because Edward's family has to be secretive about their nature, Bella is

the only non-vampire who enters their house. In order to be with Edward and his family, Bella cannot be with any other friends or her own family. This is an easy excuse for Bella to be separated from all of her friends, and by the last novel, Breaking Dawn, she never mentions her high school friends. In fact, in order to turn into a vampire, Bella makes the sacrifice of losing communication with both her parents. “My father and mother could not be allowed to see me again; I would be too different, and much, much too dangerous” (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 73). While eventually Charlie gets to see Bella after her transformation, she was unaware she would be able to see him when she decided to turn vampire, and therefore her relationship with her family was not a factor in her decision.

This segregation between Bella and her friends is dramatized even further with Jacob. According to lore, werewolves and vampires are mortal enemies designed to destroy each other. In this sense, Meyer took the formula of a love triangle and intensified it through supernatural means. Not only are Edward and Jacob competing for a girl, but also they have a history of thousands of years of hatred between them. The mere smell of each other is meant to burn their noses. Of course, the irony here is that Bella gets to choose between two stocky, incredibly handsome, protective men who could defend her from almost anything. The dichotomy between the two of them goes beyond monster species and demonstrates the type of people they represent. Jacob, in his simple (and rarely worn, according to the films) clothing represents a simple life in nature. Edward represents intellect and gentlemanlike behavior. The choice of monster suits their “natures”; one is a civilized individual who has had hundreds of years to study and perfect himself, while the other is instinctual, loving, and loyal. While the Cullens spend their evenings reading and listening to Edward play classical piano, the werewolves sit around a campfire on the beach and share stories and eat. Some

critics have interpreted this difference as racism, making Native Americans simpler and the white vampires as white privilege: “Read as a racial allegory, a white, working class human chooses between an ultra-white, ultra-privileged vampire and a far less privileged wolf of color” (Anatol 55). It is certainly clear how the battle between the vampires and werewolves could be seen as the educated elite versus the working class.

While Meyer intensifies Bella’s love triangle through the conventions of monster literature, she also uses monster lore to *solve* the series’ romantic conflict. Normally, when confronted with two competing lovers, only one can win. In the Twilight world, both lovers can win due to supernatural conventions. The werewolves have a trait called imprinting, where a werewolf will see a woman and fall instantly in love. “It’s not like love at first sight, really,” Jacob explains. “It’s more like... gravity moves... suddenly. It’s not the earth holding you here anymore, she does... You become whatever she needs you to be, whether that’s a protector, lover, or a friend.” When Bella asks Jacob if the females ever turn down the man that imprinted on her, he replies, “it’s hard to resist that level of commitment and adoration” (Meyer, Eclipse 123). This suggests that women are helpless to succumbing to undivided adoration, even if the person wouldn’t normally be a love interest. This takes the choice completely away from the women and frames them as weak, their opinion secondary. Jacob imprints on Bella’s baby, Renesmee. Bella after her vampire transformation realizes what has happened in her absence, “[Jacob was] staring at her [Renesmee] like...like he was a blind man seeing the sun for the first time” (Meyer, Breaking Dawn 448). This means that Jacob gets to be part of Bella’s family, has forgotten all of his obsession and love for her that he has nurtured over the last four years, and happily moves on. In reality, tough choices are necessary and not everyone wins. In Twilight, everyone wins because everyone is a monster,

and if it takes a creepy love story between a newborn baby and an 18-year-old werewolf to accomplish that neat ending, so be it.

The Cullens are a new type of vampire we have not encountered before. Without lust, greed, or malice, the Cullens are vampires who are only dangerous if you fall in love with their good looks and charm. They are civilized, educated people who are only encumbered by their vampire nature when they have to hide it from humans. Underneath this surface, however, they represent a world of patriarchy and antiquated gender roles. To Bella, they offered her a world of everlasting strength, beauty, and excitement to save her from her mediocre looks and personality. They have been the vampires of our time. Who knows who will be the vampires of the time to come?

Conclusion

The Twilight saga is famous because of its readership. On merit alone, the novels would not garner much attention. However, with the adoration from young fans, this series has blown up to become one of the most famous young adult series. Young adult literature is inevitably tied to education, because school is where most young people are exposed to books and reading strategies. What can we make of this young adult novel, then, in the classroom? Occasionally, “bad” literature can teach us just as much as “good” literature can. There is an advantage of popular fiction because often students relate to these works better than to some of the classics. Society is constantly changing, and popular literature changes along with it.

Studying literature should reflect this change, and prepare students for the problems they will be facing as they grow up into this world. Most students will grow up to read

literary texts as well as popular fiction for pleasure. Schools can do their part to help the student understand how to read these texts and critique their underlying messages. Trites recommends “that parents and teachers and librarians and literary critics take serious looks at the ideological intent behind most of the YA novels published with the seeming intent of validating teenagers’ self assurance about human sexuality. Most YA novels about teenage sexuality have at best a conflicting ideology and at worst a repressive ideology that both reflects and perpetuates Western culture’s confused sexual mores” (95). These are complex issues that are located in many books that are textually not complex. The Twilight series are not the first books that provide examples of patriarchy, gender roles, suppression of women, and abusive relationships and they will not be the last. As we move on, the question of how to interact with these pervasive texts appropriately will continue to be raised.

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