

Vampires are often described as monstrous, evil creatures that haunt the dead of the night for a meal. Now take everything you know about vampires—the crosses, the garlic, and disintegration by sunlight—and throw that mumbo jumbo out the window. In the world of *Twilight*, you might be bashed by a teenage girl or swatted by a mother—we know not to mess with momma—for suggesting that all vampires are evil. In the realm of vampires, in the *Twilight* domain, vampires seem...almost human. *Twilight*, written by Stephenie Meyer, presents many morals throughout the entire book—and the entire *saga*!

Before I start, I should explain to those who are out of “the know” (or ignorant) about *Twilight* and the entire series just what the crazy craze is about. *Twilight* was written by Meyer after she had a dream about a girl and a vampire in a meadow. This romantic novel, aimed towards teenage girls, is about a girl named Bella Swan, who falls in love with a handsome guy by the name of Edward Cullen...who happens to be a vampire. Now it seems a bit weird for a human and a vampire to be in love, especially considering that this vampire lusts for her blood, but the remarkable thing about Edward and his entire coven is that they do not feed off humans, but instead they feed off predatory animals, often joking among themselves that they are the “vegetarians” of the vampire world. Remember the stuff I told you to throw out the window? None of the established vampire myths deal with these “vegan” vampires.

Like any story, there are those who loved *Twilight* and those who hated it. Those who disliked *Twilight* have their own opinions on how the book was written (which is not the reason for this article), and mostly about Bella’s character. They commented about her low self-esteem characterized by her

feeling of unworthiness regarding her looks in comparison to Edward, her very “dependant” nature that needs to be constantly saved, her “desire” to become a vampire, and the age difference between herself and Edward.

Of course, there are many more morals such as her relationship with her father, her dislike for her classmates, and her “manipulation” of Jacob, but those things are fairly normal. Her relationship with her father is pretty normal between a father and a daughter, especially considering they are so much alike that they understand each other without speaking. As for Bella not liking others, this is high school--- not kindergarten where everyone is supposed to like each other (besides, Bella says, “I did not relate well to people my age. Maybe the truth was that I did not relate well to people, period (*Twilight*, 10),” before she even started school at Forks so her dislike for her classmates is well justified. As for manipulation...Jacob manipulated her as well in *Eclipse*, the 3rd book in the saga, with the infamous kiss, so they are pretty much even on the manipulation field, and acting very much like teenagers—acting very much *human*. Bella did state afterwards that she felt guilty knowing that she used Jacob (127).

Edward, though he shall forever remain looking like a seventeen year old, is over one hundred years old. A one hundred year old man dating a seventeen year old girl? Does seem weird, no? However, it does raise up the age-old question...what is the true age of love? In *Twilight*, Bella’s mother, Reneé, marries a man who is much younger than she is. My own parents have six years between them and my great-grandparents were a decade apart. So does love have an age range? As long as the person loves you, does age truly matter?

Since the end of *Twilight*, Bella has had the desire to become a vampire and many have labeled Bella as “suicidal”

or as a “sociopath” for her desire to be a vampire. I will admit that her wanting to become a vampire is rather *strong*, but so is her love. If you indeed loved someone so much, you would want to become exactly like them. If a couple loves each other, but one is Jewish and the other is Christian, in *most* cases one partner will convert to the other religion. Well Bella is human and Edward is a vampire. Edward can not become human again (based on what we know *so far*), but we know that Bella can become a vampire. And this is not a spur of a moment thing. Bella and Edward have long thought of her becoming ‘one of the night,’ but the decision was not a quickly made for Edward time and time again had told her no. They talked it out and even compromised with each other about the matter.

Bella, being seventeen, has reasonably normal teenage reactions when it comes to her looks, which gives her low self-esteem. She wonders whether she is worthy of Edward. ‘Bella,’ in Italian, does mean ‘beautiful,’ and when you think of her last name, Swan, you would think that Bella is as graceful as the animal which she’s named after. However, Bella feels she is not beautiful, but instead very “ordinary” and definitely not very graceful. In chapter one of *Twilight*, Bella stares at herself in the mirror and comments about her looks:

“Facing my pallid reflection in the mirror, I was forced to admit that I was lying to myself. It was not just physically that I’d never fit in...Sometimes I wondered if I was seeing the same things through my eyes that the rest of the world was seeing through there’s.” (*Twilight*, 10-11)

And then one day while Bella is sitting across from Edward at lunch, she states that she’s “asbolutely ordinary” (210). Edward contradicts her by stating:

“You do not see yourself very clearly, you

know...Trust me just this once—you are the opposite of ordinary.” (210)

It's often said that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, and sometimes I wonder if that saying does more harm than good to our esteem. In today's society, looks are clearly everything. People are no longer skinny enough, no longer pretty enough, no longer et cetera, et cetera. Even the front page of the popular search engine, Yahoo.com, had a tab on June 1, 2008, about a Web site that told you what people really thought about you. If the saying is true, that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, that may explain the reasons why people go to the extremes to look “beautiful”. Edward originally classified Bella as ordinary (I know. *Twilight* fans are probably up in arms at that comment, but it's true) when he thinks:

“Just an ordinary human girl.” (*Midnight Sun*, 2)

How did he go from “ordinary human girl” to “you are the opposite of ordinary?” What changed? Maybe looks are *not* everything; maybe the actions of a person are actually what make that person beautiful. For example, Rosalie is described by Bella as “statuesque.” “She had a beautiful figure, the kind you saw on the cover of the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue, the kind that made every girl around her take a hit on her self-esteem just by being in the same room (*Twilight*, 18).” There goes the self-esteem again. But even though “Rosalie is described as literally the most beautiful person in the world (MTV, Kiki Reed as Rosalie Hale in the upcoming *Twilight* movie)”, she has a “tenacity (*Twilight* Lexicon)” attitude about her. Although she is beautiful, her actions and personality tend to make her ugly.

But if actions make a person beautiful, does Bella's need to always be saved, her always cooking and doing house chores make her a weak and dependent woman? A children's author and journalist, Sue Corbett, states that “Bella is

constantly in need of getting rescued. She moves in with her father and immediately starts cooking for him and doing his laundry. She's on track to go to an Ivy League college, but does not because of Edward. It's the exact inverse of the values I'm trying to teach my daughter (Nawotka).” Leah Bowes, a Twilight Fan from Charleston, West Virginia, states that even though she loves the series, she does have problems about Bella’s “dependent” nature:

Bella's countenance precariously balances upon the "strong and capable" (example: dragging a rock down her arm to distract Victoria during the Edward/Victoria fight in *Eclipse*) and the "dependent and meek"... [it] almost seems unrealistic. A rip in her moral fabric: she can be strong for the ones she loves, but is weak when it comes to herself (Bowes).

Indeed, Bella does constantly need to be saved as Corbett states, but that’s mainly due to her klutzy nature. But Edward also needs to keep her safe, the reason *why* he keeps “saving” her. I’m klutzy like Bella, but does that make me dependent? Nope, just klutzy, and we all have those moment where you just manage to have tripped over your own two feet. We cannot say that we do not wish to have someone save us a time or two from hurting ourselves.

In a series of articles by The Movie Fanatic (TMF), they discuss Bella as seeming “wimpy”:

“In a way, it was Ms. Meyer’s intention to portray Bella as simply that—someone who might be considered a wimp. But once you get over the issues of physical clumsiness and so on, you will agree that Bella is a courageous and fearless human being. How could she even imagine marrying a vampire if she is a spineless

teenager? How could she be a weakling when she deals with both werewolves and vampires?”

It does take a rather strong person to actually hang with a bunch of blood-thirsty vampires (example in *New Moon*, Bella's eighteenth birthday party when Jasper, one of Edward's "brothers," attacks her when she gets a paper cut) and werewolves that can phase at any moment (example Sam Uley, the leader of the werewolf pack, "phased without meaning to and scarred Emily for life (Twilight Lexicon)"). Many would have ran for the hills at the first chance they got after encountering these monsters.

Bella doing the chores around her father's house raises a few feminist hackles, for throughout history, the woman's main place was in the house doing household chores. But is Bella doing the chores just because she's dependent...or because she thinks her father cannot take care of himself? I constantly had to make my brother's lunch just because I knew that if I did not, he would either starve or just eat Ramen or hot dogs. And Charlie, Bella's father, cannot really cook anything but eggs, bacon, and possibly fish (with all the fishing he does). Since he is not getting all the nutritional value he needs, maybe it is a good thing that Bella does the cooking. After all, we do not want another blob of semi-cooked noodles again or the Swan house burnt to the ground because Charlie tried to microwave metal. Because Bella does cook for her father and take care of her mother, that just means she truly cares for them and has the motherly ways about her, much like Esme, who is the motherly figure of Edward's "family."

Again in the TMF first article, there was a quote (that I absolutely agree with) that was given by Twilight Lexicon about feminist for those who felt that "Bella is a wimp" and that Meyer is "anti-feminist because she wrote such a "weak" main character."

Stephenie talked about how true feminism is about choice. It means that a woman can do whatever will bring her the most happiness. It does not mean that women have to do everything men do. Stephenie considers herself a feminist because she does what brings herself the most happiness—she stays at home and takes care of her kids. Some people think being a stay-at-home mom is anti-feminist, but it is not really (TMF).

The idea of Bella being “on track to go to an Ivy League college, but does not because of Edward” is actually quite misleading. Bella had never had a thought about going to an Ivy League school until Edward said she should go to one in *Eclipse*. And Bella does not want to go to an Ivy League college because she would have to *depend* on Edward’s money. Her deciding not to go to school on his money is a sign that she is not as dependent as people are making her out to be. Furthermore, does it *matter* if Bella goes to an Ivy League college? Ivy League schools mean nothing more than they are the *first* universities and colleges in the United States. There are other perfectly good schools that are not Ivy League, and one of my friends, Julie, actually turned down a free ride from Harvard to go to Texas Christian University because Harvard did not have the degree she was looking for. So in reality, Ivy League schools are not as great as they claim.

Now, there are some positive morals in the series, such as the powerful message of abstinence, *chivalry*, and exactly how the Cullen’s live, and of course the series did bring up deep psychological questions like whether it was right for Carlisle, the fatherly figure of the Edward’s family, to change Esme, Edward, Rosalie and Emmett, and of course the popular questions like, should Bella become a vampire and whether the Cullens have a soul.

In today's society, sex, drugs, alcohol, and violence are practically being shoved down our throats. And *Twilight* defies society. Meyer states that she writes a "reflection of the world as it has appeared to me through my life (Nawotka)." It seems that Meyer is saying too many people give away something that is very important.

"I don't think many people can read these books in the society we live in today, and not react in some way to Edward's refusal to sleep with Bella until after they are married," Jo Stapley wrote. "I think there is a message there for "young adults" to hold on to and not rush into sex without thinking seriously, and that can only be a good thing."

Even Charles Dickens says, "Subdue your appetites, my dear, and you've conquered human nature." I think that he was talking about food, though, but there is always a "sexual" appetite. For me to explain just how important I feel about abstinence, I'm going to state what the Catholic Church feels about abstinence:

"Chastity is a moral virtue. It is also a gift from God, a grace, a fruit of spiritual effort. The virtue of chastity therefore involves the integrity of the person and the integrity of the gift" (Catechism, page 561, sections 2337-2345).

They also state that the "gift" is to be given between husband and wife, as a sign of their true love for each other. In the series, Edward refused to have a sexual relationship with Bella until she became his wife because he's wants to protect her (and his) virtue, but also by waiting it will be more meaningful to them. He also wanted to wait until Bella was a vampire, afraid that he would hurt her if they were to sleep with each other, but like any couple compromises can be worked out.

Earlier, I stated that Edward keeps saving Bella from her little moments when she's about to go flat on her face. "He's like a knight in shining armor," my friend, April, stated to me when we talked about *Twilight* for the first time. "Though...he does not really shine but instead sparkles...and I guess he doesn't have armor either, does he? [hmm] I guess he's just a knight." Edward does have these chivalry tendencies about himself, especially towards Bella. Even before he knew her, he stated:

"Beneath the transient humor, I felt a strange impulse, one I did not clearly understand. It had something to do with the vicious edge to Jessica's thoughts that new girl was unaware of...I felt the strangest urge to step in between them, to shield this Bella Swan from the darker workings of Jessica's mind. What an odd thing to feel. Trying to ferret out of the motivations behind the impulse, I examined the new girl one more time.

Perhaps it was just some long buried protective instinct—the strong for the weak. This girl looked more fragile than her new classmates. Her skin was so translucent it was hard to believe it offered her much defense from the outside." (*Midnight Sun*, 7-8).

Even before he knew her or talked to her, he felt as though he needed to protect her, like Bella was this fragile person. In his eyes, Bella is so fragile that with "one wrong twitch of his fingers and he can kill her so easily (MTV, Stephenie Meyer speaking)." He constantly worries about Bella, which leads him to be distracted during one of his "hunting" trips because he's so far away from her.

Edward does show chivalry, a code of ethics that

knights in the eleventh and twelfth centuries were expected to uphold that was greatly influenced by the church. What April stated about Edward being a knight in “sparkling vampire” can definitely be seen and understood.

Another moral we should address (again) is how the Cullens live. I stated in the beginning that the Cullens are “vegan” vampires, feeding off animals instead of humans. The idea came from Carlisle when he became repulsed by what he became, staying away from humans, when he came across some deer he had to feed from them. After feeding, Carlisle “realized there was an alternative to being the vile monster he feared...He could exist without being a demon. He found himself again (*Twilight*, 337).” And each of the Cullens embraced Carlisle’s “philosophy,” though Edward did have an occasion where he strayed from feeding off of animals and on to humans, but he learned no matter how many vile and evil men (like murderers) he killed, it was not justifiable.

“I do not *want* to be a monster (187),” Edward told Bella when she asked him why his family hunts animals instead of humans. To feed from humans would be easier considering they live and are surrounded by them daily. But as Edward said, the Cullens do not want to be monsters. They would rather be human, which would mean to feed from other sources. However, though they feed from animals, it does not mean that human blood does not tempt them daily, for it does, making their lives difficult (especially Jasper). Bella’s blood tempts Edward, her being his “*la tua cantante*” for “her blood sings” (*New Moon*, 490) for him. Edward explained to her just how tempting her blood is to him, comparing it to flavors, and that she was “some kind of demon, summoned straight from [his] own personal hell to ruin [him] (*Twilight*, 269)” because of her blood tempting him like a “demon” and that his life is “hell” since he has been changed to a vampire.

The Cullens, though vampires, have emotions like love, hate, sadness (though they do not cry), surprise (except Alice, she's never surprised due to her talent, and possibly Edward with his reading of thoughts), and many other range of emotions. Edward told Bella the first time in their meadow that he could not live with himself if he ever hurt her (273). Clearly the Cullens are humanitarians, more humane than some humans though still more superior than them. It's been said that they are "super humans," more than vampires and more than humans. The way they live is so inspiring. They could be like every other vampire, yet they choose not to, which makes the Cullens so great.

It was this past summer, just shortly after my eighteenth birthday, when I picked up the series. I had read a few reviews on the city's summer reading program Web site that allows readers to leave reviews about the book. I'm a sucker for romance, and was open-minded to vampires. Thankfully, I was unprejudiced about vampires, otherwise I would not have found this wonderful series. It may have been how 'ordinary' Bella is that drew me to the books. Or how 'perfect' the Cullens are, how Edward just seems like the guy that every girl wants. Or it can be those action-packed characters where James tracks Bella in *Twilight*, or Bella rushes to Italy to save Edward in *New Moon*, or the intense battle scene in *Eclipse*. Or...it can be the morals that are hidden within the pages or it can be the deep psychological questions that can keep anyone up at night and talking over the dinner table. Or it can be all of those things that form the entire series. Over all, teenage girls, their mothers, and a few guys all are waiting for August 2, 2008, for the release of *Breaking Dawn*, the final chapter of Bella's story and then for December 12, 2008, for the movie to be released. But for now, everyone will reread the well worn pages of their books, theorizing what will happen next.

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