

2012

Why is Everyone Hatin' on Bella?: Choice Feminism and Free Agency in the Twilight Saga

Brynn R. Buskirk
Lehigh University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://preserve.lehigh.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Buskirk, Brynn R., "Why is Everyone Hatin' on Bella?: Choice Feminism and Free Agency in the Twilight Saga" (2012). *Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 1058.

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Lehigh Preserve. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Lehigh Preserve. For more information, please contact preserve@lehigh.edu.

Why is Everyone Hatin' on Bella?: Choice Feminism and Free Agency in
the *Twilight Saga*

by

Brynn Buskirk

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

American Studies

Lehigh University

April 23, 2012

© 2012 Copyright
Brynn Buskirk

This is accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in American Studies.

Why is Everyone Hatin' on Bella?: Choice Feminism and Free Agency in
the *Twilight Saga*
Brynn Buskirk

Date Approved

Dawn Keetley
Thesis Director

Jeremy Littau
Co-Director

Edward Whitley
Department Chair

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	1
Essay	2
Bibliography	48
Vita	52

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that choice feminism, the third wave, western feminist belief that each woman has the ability and power to make decisions and choose her life, even if those decisions may be traditional non-feminist choices, is principal in reading the *Twilight Saga* as Stephenie Meyer intends it to be understood. With this view, I examine Bella Swan from the perspective of choice feminism and illuminate her as free agent, knowing actor, and powerful heroine. By examining Bella in these more favorable lights, this research argues that Bella is not weak, helpless, stupid, or willing to throw herself and all she is away for a man, as some critics have argued. Bella's decisions throughout the Saga are calculating and smart, making Bella a strong female character worthy of both critical analysis and respect.

In the past four years, many religious and literary scholars have studied the phenomenal success of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Saga*. There is no shortage of these critiques and since 2008, numerous studies, as well as explorations of *Twilight* fan fiction, have populated bookshelves and shopping carts. Comic Con and The American Popular Culture Association have also dedicated panels, sneak peeks, and presentations to the popular *Saga*. Clearly, the *Twilight* phenomenon, which has taken the world by storm, is receiving the credit it deserves from scholars, students, and the media. The attention, however, is utterly polarized. For every essay celebrating *Twilight*'s popularity, there is another dismissing the series as whole, calling it "trash"¹ and even, "a tragedy."² These reviews give critics quite a lot to write—and disagree—about regarding the *Twilight Saga*. In short, while the *Twilight Saga* is being taken seriously academically, what is being said about the author, the books, and the readers is often less than positive.

A brief summary of the 2,722 page³ *Saga* goes a bit like this: *Young, strange girl (Bella Swan) moves to new, strange town (Forks, Washington). Girl meets equally strange boy (Edward Cullen) and is attracted to him. Boy is also attracted to her, but in common plot scheme, they cannot be together. Strange girl is human and strange boy is vampire. Girl is the only human in on the secret of the strange boy and his family. The*

¹ Granger, John. Spotlight: A Close-up look at the Artistry and Meaning of Stephanie Meyer's Twilight Saga, Zossima Press: Allentown, PA. 2010 P. ii.

² Dietz, Tammy. "Wake Up, Bella. A Personal Essay on Twilight, Mormonism, Feminism, and Happiness." Bringing Light to Twilight: Perspectives on the Pop Culture Phenomenon. Ed. Giselle Liza Anatol. Palgrave MacMillan: New York. 2011. P. 99-112. P. 111.

³ The entire series is comprised of Twilight, New Moon, Eclipse, and Breaking Dawn. This page count also includes Midnight Sun, the unpublished first draft of the *Saga* through Edward's point of view, available at stepheniemeyer.com/midnightsun.

boy and girl throw caution to the wind and pursue a relationship, even though it is mostly impossible to do so. Things get complicated rather quickly here. Strange boy must suppress his desire to drink the blood of his beloved, hence killing her, and strange girl is thrown into a completely coexisting mythical world full of vampires and werewolves, the latter of which proves to be a second love interest and best friend to girl. Ultimately, boy and girl fight numerous human and mythical battles to overcome their obstacles in order to stay together. Strange boy marries strange girl. They conceive a half-vampire-half-human baby on their honeymoon, and strange girl gives birth to new, strange baby before strange boy turns her into a vampire, which strange girl has been pursuing throughout the entire Saga. Strange boy, girl, and child live happily ever after. Though lacking almost all detail, the summary above highlights the common star-crossed lovers plotline, the issues of choice, the idea of “the other,” the desire to be loved for who you are, and numerous other motifs used time and time again in both literary and popular fiction. The use of these themes alone is reason enough why the *Saga* resonates (either well or poorly) with its differing female audiences.⁴

Perhaps most interesting are the subjects that critics choose to write about pertaining to the *Twilight Saga*. Edward Cullen and his family of new-breed vampires have been evaluated to the nth degree and used in allegories depicting them as gods, angels, and comic book superheroes. Let’s face it, vampires tend to be more interesting than humans. Vampires have been featured in legends and folklore for ages, and people

⁴ John Graver explores the plot devices and themes Meyer uses that make the *Saga* so popular in *Spotlight: A Close-Up Look at the Artistry and Meaning of Stephenie Meyer’s Twilight Saga*. Zossima Press: Allentown, PA. 2010.

have continuously been infatuated with them. Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, written in 1897, popularized the vampire trope in literature, which is still prominent in literature and film today.⁵ Vampire books, movies, and TV shows have been commercial successes in the United States. From *Dracula*, to *Buffy*, to *Lestat*, to *Edward*: vampires are box office gold. A brief cross section of books, shows, and movies over the last several years includes: *The Twilight Saga* (books and films), *I Am Legend* (film), *True Blood* (television series), *The Vampire Diaries* (television series), *Let the Right One In* (foreign film), *Let Me In* (American film), and *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* (book and upcoming film), and that only scratches the surface. In the last few years, small publishing and independent film companies have jumped on the vampire band wagon and boundless vampire love stories fill Netflix queues and sit on nightstands. Undoubtedly, there is something extraordinary going on with America's love of vampires, and studies of the *Twilight Saga* only bolster that fact.

It's easy to be smitten with the *Saga*'s vampires. But, what about the humans? Bella Swan, the heroine of the *Saga*, is commonly depicted in a less valiant light than the gallant vampires. While literature examining Edward & Co. abounds, Bella, the voice and consciousness of 95% of the *Saga*, is commonly examined in only one of two ways—as a teenage girl with low confidence, emotionally abused by her controlling boyfriend and willing to throw her entire personhood away, or as an “every girl” with no distinctive characteristics.⁶ She is often characterized as a shadow character, used so that most any

⁵ Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. New York: Penguin Classics, 1993.

⁶ Many scholars note this, such as: Kurt Bruner in *The Twilight Phenomenon: Forbidden Fruit or Thirst-Quenching Fantasy?* Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 2009, and Tammy Dietz in “Wake

female reader can identify with her. It also seems that when writers actually look past the two readings of Bella cited above and describe her as a worthy character in the *Saga*, she's mostly presented in a negative light. Moreover, the few scholars who actually give Bella the time she deserves by building her into the allegorical critique endow her with the negative traits of Eve from the creation myth central to Abrahamic religions.⁷

This essay argues that none of the readings performed of Bella to date are accurate depictions of her character. I will examine Bella Swan as a full, evolving character—the most powerful character in the *Twilight Saga*. Throughout the four books and *Midnight Sun*, Bella's choices control the narrative (and much more). Without Bella, we have no *Twilight Saga*; Bella as narrator and central character creates the framework and controls the entire plotline. This research examines Bella from the perspective of choice feminism and illuminates her as free agent, knowing actor, and powerful heroine. By examining Bella Swan in this more favorable light, my research argues that Bella is not weak, helpless, stupid, or willing to throw herself and all she is away for a man. Her decisions throughout the *Saga* are calculating and smart, making Bella a strong female character worthy of both critical analysis and respect.

Up, Bella. A Personal Essay on Twilight, Mormonism, Feminism, and Happiness" in Bringing Light to Twilight: Perspectives on the Pop Culture Phenomenon. Ed. Giselle Liza Anatol. Palgrave Macmillan: New York. 2011. P. 99-112.

⁷ John Granger focuses much of his book, Spotlight, drawing parallels between the *Twilight Saga* and the Bible, including a comparison of Bella to both Eve and Mary. Marc E. Shaw also analyzes religious allegory in *Twilight* in "For the Strength of Bella: Meyer, Vampires, and Mormonism." Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians, and the Pursuit of Immortality. Eds. Rebecca Housel, J. Jeremy Wisniewski, and William Irwin. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.: Hoboken, New Jersey, 2009. P. 227-236.

In order to evaluate Bella and her actions in the *Saga* as I have intended, we first have to look at what has been said about her and the *Twilight Saga*. Many pop culture critics and everyday readers alike view the *Twilight Saga* as an anti-feminist work. Christine Seifert, in her article in feminist *Bitch Magazine*, declares of *Twilight*: “when it comes to a woman’s virtue, sex, identity, or her existence itself, it’s all in the man’s hands.”⁸ She calls Edward a “controlling dick,” and says that Meyer’s “abstinence porn” objectifies Bella in the same way regular pornography objectifies women. *Twilight* anti-fandom websites abound with similar critiques.⁹ *The Venom Apple*, one of the most followed anti-*Twilight* pages, allows anti-fans to post responses to Meyer’s writing style, plot developments, and characters.¹⁰ From counting how many times Meyer uses specific adjectives, to questioning her world view and values, anti-fans do not hold back.¹¹ A user known as “paintedbird” posts, “It seems like Meyer is spinning misogyny and stories of women who hate themselves for girls who eat it up like candy, and that’s why I’m anti.”¹² “Paintedbird” muses on how, in the *Twilight Saga*, only the men seem special and the women are weaker. She discounts the female roles in the *Saga*, saying the women characters take a back seat to the men, who are “selfless, amazing creatures.”¹³ Clearly, everyday readers have taken issue with the conditions Meyer creates for her female characters.

⁸ Seifert, Christine. “Bite Me (or Don’t).” *Bitch Magazine*. Winter, Vol. 42. <http://bitchmagazine.org/article/bite-me-or-dont>.

⁹ An anti-fan is someone who dislikes and contests a specific work of literature, film, or music.

¹⁰ The Venom Apple. Accessed March 10, 2012. <http://the-venom-apple.livejournal.com/profile>.

¹¹ Sheffield, Jessica, and Elyse Merlo. “Biting Back: Twilight Anti-Fandom and the Rhetoric of Superiority.” *Bitten By Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, & the Vampire Franchise*. Eds. Melissa A. Glick, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz. Peter Lang: New York, 2010. P 207-222.

¹² *Ibid.*, P. 214.

¹³ *Ibid.*, P. 214.

Scholarly assessments are similar in tone to the critiques aforementioned, usually focusing on the choices—or lack thereof—that Meyer affords her characters. Merinne Whitton reacts in her anti-*Twilight* essay to Meyer’s characterization of Bella by saying “Meyer stoutly defend[s] her vision from all attacks, claiming that theories about Bella being an anti-feminist character ‘are usually predicated by [Bella’s] choices’.” As a second wave feminist—a feminist who believes women are still oppressed by America’s patriarchal society and calls women to action to shun typically feminized traits and roles—Whitton claims Bella (and Meyer) cannot be feminists because of the decisions they make. Whitton continues, “...[Meyer’s] implication is that true feminism supports a woman’s right to choose their own path, even one that limits her whole purview to marriage and babies.”¹⁴ Whitton argues that Meyer never really gives Bella a “choice” in her decision to be a vampire, and only affords her the opportunity to be weak girlfriend, teenage-wife, and mother. Using second wave feminist ideology, she questions Bella’s actual choices as constrained by stereotypical female ideals.¹⁵ Whitton does not find Bella’s choices to be “good” ones, and thus she discounts them immediately, saying her choices don’t count as real choices. While Whitton’s points are well argued, she is reading the *Saga* from a second wave feminist’s perspective, which offers a completely different framework for understanding the *Saga* than Meyer intends.

In Tammy Dietz’s equally negative review of Bella’s character and actions, “Wake Up, Bella. A Personal Essay on Twilight, Mormonism, Feminism, and

¹⁴ Whitton, Merinne. “‘One is Not Born a Vampire, But Becomes One’: Motherhood and Masochism in Twilight.” *Bringing Light to Twilight: Perspectives on the Pop Culture Phenomenon*. Ed. Giselle Liza Anatol. Palgrave MacMillan: New York. 2011. P 125-137 p. 126.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, P. 126.

Happiness,”¹⁶ one sees another critic of Bella’s supposedly predetermined choices. According to Deitz, the *Twilight Saga* presumes that “men are superior and women are subordinate.”¹⁷ As a former Mormon, Dietz explores *Twilight* and Bella through her own post-Mormon world view. Dietz calls Bella a character “of ineptitude.”¹⁸ She cites what she feels are Bella’s inadequacies in sections of her essay titled, “Bella the Helpless,” “Bella the Incomplete,” and “Bella the Entitled.” In each section, she explains the inadequacies of Bella as a character. She is hypercritical of Bella’s character flaws and relates them to what she feels are the stifling roles of Mormon women, namely Dietz’s mother, in an attempt to prove Bella’s true unhappiness. She likens Bella to a woman trapped in a relationship with an abusive man who really wants to leave but does not have the strength or support network to do so. She says, “*Twilight* is not a love story; it’s part one of a tragedy.” She fears that all we’ve done is “raise the height of the cage.”¹⁹ Dietz’s concerns echo those of Seifert, “paintedbird,” and Whitton. For all four readers, Bella is weak because she is written as such. Their second wave feminist beliefs that women should want to be more than girlfriends, wives, and mothers provide a radically different world view from Meyer.

Choice feminism – the third wave, western feminist belief that each woman has the ability and power to make decisions and choose her life, even if those decisions may be traditionally non-feminist choices – is crucial to reading the *Twilight Saga* as Meyer intends it to be understood. The main fault many second wave feminists find with choice

¹⁶ Dietz, P. 99-112.

¹⁷ Ibid., P. 100.

¹⁸ Ibid., P. 104.

¹⁹ Deitz, P. 111.

feminism is that they feel “women’s choices are still made under conditions of oppression that shape not only the options women have, but the desires themselves that shape their choices.”²⁰ Second wave feminists believe that the oppression of women is a powerful force that both constrains and shapes what women think they want in life. Nancy Hirschmann believes that when women make non-feminist choices, it is because they have been conditioned to do so by society, and are therefore betraying a feminism that has brought them out of historically deeper oppression. Michael Ferguson agrees with Hirschmann, and claims that choice feminism supposes women are already fully liberated, though they are not. By returning to classically gendered roles, such as that of a mother or housewife, we are implementing our own oppression.²¹ While choice feminists may argue they are using free choice to make their decisions, second wave feminists argue that the choices are not truly free; instead the decisions are really the effect of oppressive conditions. Both Hirschmann and Ferguson find third wave, choice feminism to be problematic and an obstacle to the advancement of second wave feminist liberation.

Choice feminists, on the other hand, have a rosier view of the status of westernized women. According to Naomi Wolf and Rebecca Walker, females need to stop judging any and all females’ decisions. These (often younger) feminists accept “all choices as valid.”²² Hanna Rosin points out in “The End of Men” that in 2010, “women became the majority of the workforce for the first time in US history. Most managers are

²⁰ Hirschmann, Nancy J. “Choosing Betrayal.” Perspectives on Politics. March 2010: Vol. 8. No 1. Pgs. 271-278. P. 271.

²¹ Ferguson, Michael L. “Choice Feminism and the Fear of Politics.” Perspectives on Politics. March 2010: Vol. 8. No 1. Pgs. 247-253.

²² *Ibid.*, P. 249.

now women, too. And for every two men who get a college degree this year, three women will do the same.”²³ Rosin feels that women are more suited for post-industrialized society and states that “men dominate just two of the 15 job categories projected to grow the most over the next decade: janitor and computer engineer.”²⁴ According to Rosin, women have caught up, and even surpassed, men in the current post-industrialized world; that is, most women’s choices are valid and should be respected because, in the United States, women are no longer oppressed. For choice feminists, women have the ability to choose what they want when they want for their own desires and happiness.

There are, moreover, individuals who believe in a modified form of choice feminism. This modified ideology uses the power of knowledge to validate choices and proposes that “we can avoid these problems of choice as long as we complement a celebration of the diversity of women’s choices with a political conscience” so as to “not celebrate all women’s choices equally—but only by those who are conscious of the politics of their choices.”²⁵ In simplicity, Ferguson explains that what a second wave feminist would call a non-feminist choice may not necessarily be non-feminist if a woman has a multitude of choices and she is aware of these choices, yet she chooses the purported “non-feminist” choice anyway. She is aware that there are other options for her and makes an informed, conscious decision, thereby meeting the criterion for a third wave feminist decision.

²³ Rosin, Hanna. “The End of Men.” *The Atlantic*. July/August 2010. Accessed Sept. 3 2010. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/07/the-end-of-men/8135/> .

²⁴ Rosin, Hanna. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/07/the-end-of-men/8135/>.

²⁵ Ferguson, P. 250.

The *Twilight Saga* represents Ferguson's modified definition of choice feminism, as Meyer has said, "You can choose what you do with your life."²⁶ Bella's choices are characteristically choice-feminist decisions in that her choices can only be directly tied to her personal experiences and desires. Bella has the opportunity for college; in fact, Edward urges her to attend. She alone decides that she does not want to go to school and instead marries Edward. As far as claims that the *Saga* exacerbates male superiority; yes, Edward reads minds and his brother Emmett is the strongest, but Edward's sisters also have super powers. Alice can see the future and Rose is the handyman around the house. Rose fixes and maintains all of the family automobiles, a classically male role. The women are completely independent and actually control their relationships with their mates. Because Alice can see the future, she dictates the actions she expects from Jasper, her mate. Alice sometimes manipulates Jasper's actions with her special power, telling him one thing when she actual sees another, which goes against "paintedbird's" claim that the women are inferior or less powerful. Since the closing chapter of the *Saga* is entitled, "Happily Ever After," I also find it problematic that Dietz finds fault in Bella's contentedness. Even if Bella's world view differs from Dietz's (or anyone else's for that matter) she is still "happy" and happiness is something fully personal and subjective. In choice feminism, to diminish an individual's feelings of happiness discounts the person's ability to feel, even if one's personal world view does not acknowledge another's happiness. According to the key choice feminist position, one should not discount another woman's decisions, especially if the woman knowingly made her decisions when there were obvious other options present and available to her. One may not agree with Bella's

²⁶ Granger, P. 48.

choices, but if one reads the *Twilight Saga* from cover to cover, it is evident that Bella is making them. Even if the choices are viewed by some as “limited,” they are still choices, and her choices drive the plot of the entire *Saga*.

The main problem with scholars classifying *Twilight* as an anti-feminist work is that Meyer wrote not just Bella’s life, but the entire universe in which that life operates as a fictional world that represents her world view. While it is customary to read stories through our own “real-world” beliefs and concerns, it becomes problematic for second wave feminists who have differing views from Meyers. In order to begin proper characterization of Bella, one has to look at the full context of the *Twilight Saga*, and not merely read it through the constraints of a real-world framework. Meyer made the decision to give Edward and his family’s innate knowledge is unknown to 99.99% of the world’s population, and this knowledge enables them to protect Bella and her family from monsters ready to attack at any given moment. Bella knows her life is constantly in danger and that these monsters can kill her or her family at any time. Without Edward and his family the entire town of Forks would likely be decimated. Because of these threats, Bella relies on the Cullen family to protect her and her loved ones. One should also note that it is not always Edward (man) saving Bella (woman). Often, Alice and Rose play significant roles in protecting Bella. Bella relies on Alice’s ability to see the future repeatedly to assure her own safety. It is also of importance to note that Bella does not let anyone else care for her. She cooks for her father. She practically raised her mother, thinking, as she moves to Forks, “How could I leave my loving, erratic,

harebrained mother to fend for herself?”²⁷ Yet, she allows the Cullens to care for her because her world is *not* the real-world and her world view is very different once vampires enter it. Bella is aware that Edward and his family’s super-hero powers are superior. In order to stay alive she must let them protect her. We could rewrite scenes in *Twilight* that would make Seifert, Whitton, “paintedbird,” or Dietz happy, but the *Saga* would be over on page 56 of *Twilight* when Edward shields Bella from an oncoming truck, saving her life. Instead, Edward, with his full knowledge and ability to save Bella, would stand by and idly watch as Bella holds her human arms out in a desperate attempt to shield herself from the oncoming vehicle. It would pin her between itself and her own truck and she would die in the parking lot in front of the entire student body. Bella would die thinking “I am a strong woman and I didn’t let anyone help me survive this debacle, even though someone out there may have had the uncanny ability to do so.” Edward would think, “I had the power to stop that... but eh, she’s a feminist woman. Let her try to take care of herself.” It is silly and irresponsible, like turning down chemotherapy for easily treatable but deadly cancer because you feel you can beat it on your own. Take the help, survive, and move on. That’s what Bella does, and she’s hated by many women because of it.

It is with this new, cosmic-world view—not the world we know, but the world Bella is subject to—that I examine Bella Swan. I will further develop a reading and characterization of Bella provided by Kristina Deffenbacher and Mikayla Zagoria-Moffet, who write, “Midway through the final book of the *Twilight Saga* Bella morphs from helpless prey to fiercely capable warrior, a female role that is central to other

²⁷ *Twilight*, P. 4.

subcategories of teen fantasy fiction.”²⁸ In reading the *Twilight Saga* as a *bildungsroman*, or a female coming of age story, Deffenbacher and Zagoria-Moffet at least recognize Bella’s growth as a character into her final woman-warrior status, but they stop short of holding Bella to the same feminist level as Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Jane Eyre, claiming that Meyer’s depiction of Bella does not present her to be as powerful as other literary and filmography heroines. While Deffenbacher and Zagoria-Moffet afford Bella some credit, this work argues that the *Saga* is not a Disney maid-to-princess story: Bella does not simply grow from weak child to woman-warrior. Instead, this research will look at Bella as heroic, powerful, and smart not only at the end, but from the very beginning.

In an interview, Stephenie Meyer discusses the major plot conflicts in the *Twilight Saga* and why young adults can relate to them saying, “Having free agency to decide what you’re going to do with yourself is a gift. I think kids pick up on that—it doesn’t matter if you’re a vampire.”²⁹ For Meyer, her fans, and her critics, one of the central themes in the *Twilight Saga* is choice.³⁰ Throughout the books, we see central characters struggling daily with their decisions and the outcomes of their choices. In *Twilight*, Bella chooses to come to Forks. Bella chooses to pursue a relationship with Edward even though she knows it is dangerous. Edward and his family choose to not take human lives. In *Midnight Sun*, Edward chooses to not kill Bella and instead explores a relationship

²⁸ Deffenbacher, Kristina and Mikayla Zagoria-Moffet. “Textual Vampirism in the *Twilight* Saga: Drawing Feminist Life from Jane Eyre and Teen Fantasy Fiction.” *Bringing Light to Twilight: Perspectives on the Pop Culture Phenomenon*. Ed. Giselle Liza Anatol. Palgrave Macmillan: New York. 2011. P. 32.

²⁹ Granger, P. 48.

³⁰ Though choices and consequences are common plot devices, the *Twilight Saga* is unique because Stephenie Meyer and her fans believe the female characters are afforded unconstrained choices, while most critics and anti-fans disagree. Being that choice is the most central theme in the series, this polarity makes studying the work all the more interesting.

with her. In *New Moon*, Edward chooses to break up with Bella and move away. Bella befriends Jacob to soothe her loneliness. In *Eclipse*, Bella chooses Edward, and marriage, over Jacob. Edward chooses to agree on pursuing a sexual relationship with Bella before she is a vampire. In *Breaking Dawn*, perhaps the book most focused on Bella's decisions, Bella and Edward marry, Bella becomes pregnant, and Bella is adamant about carrying the pregnancy to term even though it means her life is at risk. Ultimately, Bella's decisions in *Breaking Dawn*—her choices—lead to her finally getting what she's been asking for since the first book: the ability to be a vampire.

Understanding the foundation for the *Twilight Saga* and the choices within it involves looking closely at Stephenie Meyer's world view. It is well known that Meyer is a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, otherwise known as Mormonism. To the average reader this seems like a minor detail; however, the foundational Mormon values are paramount in understanding Meyer's intentions for her characters. An independent poll was published by *The Washington Post* in January 2012 which found the Mormon community to be a "conservative, devout community" – more traditional and devout than many other Christian denominations.³¹ Being that members of the Mormon faith live life strongly guided by Mormon principles and values, Meyer, as a Mormon, brings her world view into her writing both consciously and subconsciously. Her faith as a Mormon is such a part of her identity that she brings aspects of it to her writing. Sacrifice for love is principal in Mormon doctrine, and this in itself provides

³¹ Boorstein, Michelle. Pew Forum Poll: Mormons devout, moral, traditional. THE WASHINGTON POST, Friday January 13, 2012. http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/faith_and_values/2012/01/13/mormons-devout-moral-traditional.html. Retrieved April 20, 2012.

Meyer with the framework for the *Saga*'s plot. John Granger writes, "The difference between 'good' and 'evil' is what Mrs. Meyer and all Latter-day Saints call 'free agency' and what we and all *Twilight* characters call 'choice' and 'conscience.' The measure of one's fidelity to conscience, the hallmark of the virtue, is the willingness to sacrifice life itself in love for another."³² Viewers see exactly this virtue emerge immediately in the *Twilight* film; it begins with a monologue from Bella where she says, "'I've never given much thought to how I would die. But dying in the place of someone I love seems like a good way to go."³³ Bella evokes Mormon duty, as well as free agency, in her virtuous claim that she would chose to die for someone she loves. In *Twilight*, Bella is referring to protecting her mother but her comment also applies fully to Bella becoming a vampire herself. Her heart has to stop for her to become a vampire and forever be with her love, Edward. While many people would agree with Bella's proclamation to die for someone she loves, it is a true, virtuous ethic of the Mormon faith, not simply an act of selflessness.

According to Mormon doctrine, humans are on earth to test their ability to stay true to God by making virtuous choices, and Meyer utilizes these metaphorical tests throughout the *Saga*. Sandra Gravett explores this Mormon principle, writing:

The Church of Latter Day Saints stresses the idea of moral agency as central to their belief system. LDS doctrine teaches that humans dwell with God prior to their lives on earth and must prove themselves worthy during their existence in this world of eternity with the divine. The choices humans make demonstrate

³² Granger, P. 44.

³³ *Twilight*. Film, Summit Entertainment. 2008.

capacity to live as spiritual beings in control of more carnal natures. It further allows humans power over their own destiny.³⁴

Three elements of LDS moral agency—alternatives from which to choose and a law (from God) to define them, knowledge of the alternatives, and the ability to make choices—are shown habitually in the *Saga*. At times, characters follow the ‘law from God,’ and at times, they do not. For example, Bella has options of pursuing a romantic relationship with Edward, Jacob, or one of her many suitors at school. The “law from God,” for instance, could be that humans choose romantic companionship with other humans. Bella has knowledge of these alternative suitors, yet her choice counters law and she pursues involvement with Edward. Another example is how the Cullens need to drink blood in order to survive. Alternatives to this decision are scarce, yet one alternative is to feed on animals rather than humans. The “law from God,” is that killing humans is sinful; here, the Cullens make the virtuous choice to feed on animal blood instead of blood from humans. While it seems rather simplistic broken down in this manner, it clearly elucidates just how centrally Meyer wrote the Mormon philosophy of “choice” into the *Twilight Saga*.

Bella’s consistent free agency supports both her power and independence. Gender has been examined at great length in film studies, particularly in regard to horror films. The female behavior of looking has been heavily studied, namely by Rhona Berenstein. In 1930’s classic horror films, the trope of the women reacting to or looking at the

³⁴ Gravett, Sandra L. *From Twilight to Breaking Dawn: Religious Themes in the Twilight Saga*. Chalice Press: St. Louis, Missouri, 2010. P. 61-62.

imposing threat or sexual bait is shown as leading to her own demise.³⁵ It was understood in both film and greater society that women were to be looked at, not to be the ones gazing. Berenstein argues against this, saying “instead of aligning the heroine’s gaze solely with masochism and passivity, I argue that beneath its vapid veneer rest intimations of power, desire, and monstrosity.”³⁶ In refuting the problematic “woman looking,” Berenstein assigns both agency and power to a woman looking at the monster, and awards the female credit for doing so, even if there are consequences. Like Berenstein, Meyer also turns the woman as the object of the gaze on its head, and makes Edward—not Bella—the spectacle. Bella is rewarded for seeing, which provides her knowledge and enables her to realize that the Cullens are different.

Though critics cite Bella as the damsel in distress, Bella is actually masculinized in the *Saga*; her eyes are always exposed as she is looking and choosing. She is never harmed or punished for her ability to look. Before Edward and Bella officially meet, they often “meet gazes” in class or across the crowded cafeteria. At one point in *Twilight*, Edward seems to challenge Bella with his gaze, but she doesn’t back down. She says, “...Edward was staring at me curiously, that same, familiar edge of frustration even more distinct now in his black eyes. I stared back, surprised, expecting him to look quickly away. But instead he continued to gaze with probing intensity into my eyes. There was no question of me looking away. My hands started to shake.” The teacher calls on Edward,

³⁵ Berenstein, Rhona J. Attack of the Leading Ladies: Gender, Sexuality, and Spectatorship in Classic Horror Film. Columbia University Press: New York. 1996. P. 90.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, P. 30.

and he is forced to avert his eyes from Bella's to answer the question.³⁷ This scene sets Bella above Edward as the most powerful player in their newly forming dynamic. Edward comments on Bella's "penetrating gaze."³⁸ Edward is the phallic, male vampire equipped with both fangs and penis, but Bella is the one penetrating him. Edward is on the receiving end of her gaze, which is piercing him in an aggressive manner, not in the vapid way Berenstein notes above. Bella is also the only person who notices that Edward's irises change hue. She realizes this, Edward says, with her "eyes suddenly boring into mine."³⁹ She looks and she is neither ashamed nor scared. Additionally, the sexual symbolism is overt as she looks, foreshadowing Bella's actions as sexual actor. Her capacity to look is also carried over into the films. The first half of the two-part film *Breaking Dawn* ends with Bella's transformation into a vampire. The closing shot shows Bella opening her eyes as a vampire. Her irises glow red and she has a new way of seeing the world.⁴⁰ She looks directly at the camera and the future, undoubting and unafraid.

Equally important, and integrally connected to Bella's ability to look, is the objectification of Edward in the *Saga*. Edward is continually portrayed through Bella's gaze—a complete change from earlier vampire texts—as Meyer is using the male, not the female, to incite sexual desire. Marc E. Shaw writes, "Meyer focuses on the carnal instead of the spiritual with her array of lengthy descriptions of Edward's looks. Because almost all of the *Twilight Series* is told from Bella's point of view, and because Meyer fixates on Edward, *Twilight* returns the gaze that is usually reserved for men looking at

³⁷ *Twilight*, P. 73.

³⁸ *Midnight Sun*, P. 32.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, P. 39-40.

⁴⁰ *Breaking Dawn Part One*, 2011. Summit Entertainment.

women.”⁴¹ As a human, Bella is pretty but plain. Even at the beginning of *Midnight Sun* Edward calls Bella “very unexceptional” the first time he sees her.⁴² In contrast to Bella’s normal, human appearance, Edward is described from Bella’s viewpoint as being beautiful. Edward is so beautiful that Bella compares him several times to the Greek God of Rebirth, Adonis.⁴³ It is an interesting comparison, as if Bella feels Edward is not truly a vampire, but a rebirth of his prior self in a more perfect form. Bella also says of Edward, “I couldn’t imagine how an angel could be any more glorious. There was nothing about him that could be improved upon.”⁴⁴ Edward-as-spectacle is hard to miss as he sparkles in sunlight⁴⁵ and has abdominal muscles and a chest made of cool, hard marble.⁴⁶ Also, as powerful actor and narrator, Bella controls what we see and hear. At one point, she actually covers Edwards’s mouth to keep him from speaking. We cannot hear his thoughts or what he wanted to say. We only know Bella did not want us to hear it.⁴⁷ She’s not “Bella the Helpless,” as Deitz calls her,⁴⁸ instead she is “Bella the Powerful,” actively choosing and directing her gaze. Bella is, in many ways, very similar to Dracula in her otherness, assertiveness, and complete control of those around her. Her charisma and power always enables her to get what she wants: She devises an escape plan from James and convinces the Cullens to follow it, she convinces Edward to have sex with her when she is still human, she carries a child to full term, even though most

⁴¹ Shaw, Marc E. “For the Strength of Bella.” *Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians, and the Pursuit of Immortality*. Eds. Rebecca Housel, J. Jeremy Wisniewski, and William Irwin. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.: Hoboken, New Jersey, 2009. P. 235.

⁴² *Midnight Sun*, P. 8.

⁴³ *Twilight*, Pgs. 299, 317.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, P. 241.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, P. 260.

⁴⁶ *Breaking Dawn*, P. 25.

⁴⁷ *Twilight*, P. 366.

⁴⁸ Dietz, P. 104.

everyone around her urges her to abort it, and she ultimately becomes a vampire, something she's wanted since falling in love with Edward. As a human, Bella exudes power in both her control of Edward and others in her everyday life as she chooses her future for herself.

Meyer's choice to place Bella in the masculinized, powerful role of gazer, objectifying Edward, has led to Edward-mania. A simple Google search for "Edward Cullen" generates 23,300,000 results, including hundreds of thousands of fan sites, image galleries, and YouTube videos.⁴⁹ Forbes also listed Edward Cullen as the 5th most powerful vampire, and Entertainment Weekly named him "one of the greatest characters of the last 20 years...a literary influence and love of girls and women everywhere for a long time to come."⁵⁰ Through Bella's powerful gaze and narration, Edward has become a heartthrob to millions of readers.

Through Edward's eyes, the reader can more markedly see Bella's complete power over Edward than when Bella tells her side of the story. When Edward speaks in *Twilight*, and narrates in *Midnight Sun*, he often refers to himself as a victim of Bella, a complete perversion of the classic vampire/human relationship. Edward tells Bella that the first time they sat next to each other in Biology class, he thought she was "some kind of demon summoned straight from my personal Hell to ruin me."⁵¹ Edward—the actual vampire—is seeing Bella—the human—as the demon. Instead of the vampire, who is classically determined to be the evil creature ruining the lives of humans by transforming

⁴⁹ As of March, 2012.

⁵⁰ "Edward Cullen." Wikipedia. Accessed June 27, 2011. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Cullen.

⁵¹ Twilight, P. 269.

them or killing them, it is Bella, the human, who is the threat: She can “ruin” Edward. Although Edward experiences vampyric thoughts, his overall demeanor and thought processes in the Biology class scene show a person in deep despair. “Why Me?!” he asks. In this perversion, we see the super-strong, immortal Edward actually hide in his car on two different occasions just to avoid the human Bella.⁵² Through Edward’s eyes, Bella is dangerous and threatening. He is fearful of her and the ability she has to make him lose control. This makes Edward appear all the more human and Bella all the more powerful.

The most exhilarating thing about Bella’s numerous choices is the absolute determination she has to get what she wants. In *Twilight* she says of Edward, “I was unconditionally and irrevocably in love with him.”⁵³ For Bella, love includes several things, intimacy being one of them. Bela Lugosi, the star of 1931’s *Dracula*, claimed in an interview that women look for “monstrous love.”⁵⁴ In applying Lugosi’s claim to both the *Twilight Saga* and *Dracula*, one sees female characters and viewers fulfill their yearnings for sexual freedom.⁵⁵ In *Twilight*, Bella is free to explore her sexuality, and she wants to do so with Edward. Sarah Seltzer, freelancer for the *Huffington Post*, explores this dynamic in her essay, “‘Twilight’: Sexual Longing in an Abstinence Only World.” Seltzer writes:

Now that’s a real fantasy: a world where young women are free to describe their desires openly, and launch themselves at men without shame, while said boyfriends are the sexual gatekeepers. *Twilight*’s sexual flowchart is the inversion of abstinence-only/purity ball culture, where girls are told that they must guard

⁵² *Midnight Sun*, P. 13.

⁵³ *Twilight*, P. 195.

⁵⁴ Berenstein, P. 89.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, P. 90.

themselves against rabid boys, and they must reign in both their own and their suitors' impulses.⁵⁶

Seltzer is accurate in that Bella is the sexual aggressor and Edward is mostly sexually-passive. Bella is the initiator, seeking what she wants. She is actively making decisions about where she wants her life (and virginity) to go. Edward, passive and mostly sexually resistant due to his fear of both hurting Bella and violating her chastity, is still tempted by her sexual advances. At points where Bella doubts Edward's desire for her, Edward tells her "I may not be human, but I am a man,"⁵⁷ and "I have human instincts—they may be buried deep, but they're there." During a particularly steamy make-out scene, Bella narrates that:

His mouth was not gentle; there was a brand-new edge of conflict and desperation in the way his lips moved. I locked my arms around his neck, and, to my suddenly overheated skin, his body felt colder than ever. I trembled but it was not from the chill. He didn't stop kissing me. I was the one who had to break away, gasping for air. Even then his lips did not leave my skin, they just moved to my throat. The thrill of victory is a strange high; it made me feel powerful. Brave... I pulled his mouth back to mine, and he seemed just as eager as I was. One of my hands cupped his face, his other arm was around my waist straining me closer to him.⁵⁸

Readers of the *Saga* know brave is not something Bella feels often—understandably so—as she is a lone human surrounded by super-hero and villain vampires. To see her feel brave in bed with Edward is invigorating, and shows that she feels comfortable with her sexual choices and at ease with him. *Eclipse* is the third book in the series, and this scene is the only time where Edward almost succumbs to his sexual desires. But, ultimately, he murmurs in her ear, "Bella, would you please stop trying to take your clothes off?" He

⁵⁶ Seltzer, Sarah. ""Twilight': Sexual Longing in an Abstinence Only World." Accessed February 11, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sarah-seltzer/twilight-sexual-longing-i_b_117927.html.

⁵⁷ *Twilight*, P. 311.

⁵⁸ *Eclipse*, P. 450.

adds, “Not tonight.”⁵⁹ This scene leaves Bella wanting more and even more determined to make decisions to get what she wants.

The tagline for the 1931 classic horror film *Dracula*, “The Story of the Strangest Passion Ever Known,”⁶⁰ is completely applicable to the *Twilight Saga*. Meyer’s reversal of the sexualized gender roles is important to note when we’re looking at Bella as a powerful actor. Moreover, the characters are aware of the inversion of their gender roles. Edward comments on how it is unusual that the boy is playing hard to get and the girl is pursuing the sexual relationship. He says, “Do you get the feeling that everything is backward?”⁶¹ Bella has assumed the more dominant role of actor, and Edward is submissive and acted upon. In *Attack of the Leading Ladies*, Rhona Berenstein describes the classic horror narrative:

A monster is made and arrives in a village/town/city, wreaks havoc on its inhabitants, especially the heroine, and is destroyed by a bold and impressive hero... the relationship between the monster and hero plays out in a number of oppositions, such as inhuman versus human, uncivilized versus civilized, sexual versus asexual, and monstrous versus normal... Convention holds that males perform both the civilized and uncivilized parts, and their status as fiend or hero is determined via a woman. Attack a woman and you are a monster; save a woman and you are a chivalrous man.⁶²

Though the *Twilight Saga* is not a classic horror film, Berenstein’s outline is relevant to its plot. Bella and Edward form the inverse of the usual monster versus human relationship in classic horror. Consistent with Berenstein’s classifications, Bella actually appears more monstrous than Edward. She is less cultured than Edward and more sexual

⁵⁹ Ibid, P. 450.

⁶⁰ Berenstein, P. 13.

⁶¹ *Eclipse*, P. 451.

⁶² Berenstein, P. 2.

in nature. Edward is chaste and behaves more human-like than she does. Sexually, Bella is the consumer, an intrinsically vampyric trait,⁶³ and Edward is the non-consumer/victim. In *Midnight Sun*, Edward calls Bella “entirely other.”⁶⁴ Additionally, Bella remarks how human-like and vulnerable Edward is.⁶⁵ Edward shows his frustrations and emotions openly, while Bella is more guarded and mysterious. According to Berenstein’s formula, it is Bella who holds the powerful characteristics of the monster, which supports Bella’s control of Edward and her strength as a female character.

This “otherness” Edward speaks of makes Bella far from ordinary, which undoes Meyer’s attempt to craft Bella as the “every girl.” Edward points to this conundrum of Bella’s personality often, such as when he says, “Ordinary people seem to make it through the day without so many catastrophes.”⁶⁶ Even though Meyer presents Bella as normal, she inadvertently makes her very unique. James, a tracker vampire, agrees with Edward that Bella is extraordinary. Bella is so interesting that it leads James to create an elaborate trap to lure Bella to a ballet studio back in Arizona to kill her... The scheme leads James from Forks, Washington to Phoenix, Arizona, where he literally passes hundreds of thousands of humans along the way, and he does this simply to have Bella. That seems like a lot of work to entrap one simple human, and again points out her exceptionalism and the power she has over others, even before she is a vampire.

Bella introduces herself to readers as different and “other” from the beginning. Bella explains how she comes to Forks, a dense, green, wet town, from the dry deserts of

⁶³ Vampires consume blood, which is the fundamental act of vampirism.

⁶⁴ *Midnight Sun*, P. 100.

⁶⁵ *Twilight*, P. 264.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, P. 174.

Arizona. She is an outsider and deliberately sets herself apart from the other kids in both Forks and Arizona in her oration to the reader. She says, “I never fit in anywhere,” and laments to herself about her pale, translucent skin and pallid complexion. She feels she doesn’t look like a girl who was “living in the valley of the sun.”⁶⁷ In Arizona, she was already an outsider, and by moving to Forks, she feels she has ostracized herself even more. She explains to Eric, a boy in Forks who immediately takes interest in her but also questions her paleness, that her mother is “part albino.”⁶⁸ She thinks to herself, “Sometimes I wondered if I was seeing the same things through my eyes that the rest of the world was seeing through theirs. Maybe there was a glitch in my brain.”⁶⁹ Bella sardonically embraces her otherness, and through her thoughts and narration, Meyer already makes her unique in the readers’ eyes.

Bella’s otherness, when coupled with Meyer’s choice feminist stance, sets Bella apart as powerful—almost to a vampyric level—from the very beginning. When Bella sees the Cullens the first time, she immediately identifies with them in her mind, noting their similar paleness and saying they were “the palest of all of the students living in this sunless town. Paler than me, the albino.”⁷⁰ In Forks, Bella realizes that everyone thinks that the Cullens are different, as well. Another boy who shows interest in Bella tells her that Edward is “a weird guy.”⁷¹ Bella, after learning the Cullens are also new to Forks feels “a surge of pity, and relief. Pity, because, as beautiful as they were, they were

⁶⁷ Twilight, P. 10.

⁶⁸ Ibid., P. 16.

⁶⁹ Ibid., P. 11.

⁷⁰ Twilight, P. 18.

⁷¹ Ibid., P. 26.

outsiders, clearly not accepted. Relief that I wasn't the only newcomer here, and certainly not the most interesting by any standard."⁷² Even before she has met the vampyric Cullens, she is associating herself with them in likeness and similarities of "otherness". Meyer has Bella inadvertently aligning herself with the vampyric family, showing the reader that Bella's otherness and power provide her with the political consciousness to later make a knowing decision to become a vampire. These factors validate Bella's conscious decisions throughout the *Saga* as meeting the feminist criterion established by third wave feminists: making decisions using awareness and knowledge.

Bella's and the Cullens' vampyric otherness is shared by other vampires in literature. Transylvanian Dracula, like Bella and the Cullens, is a foreign intruder in London. In *Twilight*, Bella is from the desert and the Cullens are from Alaska—two places radically different from small town Forks, Washington. As outsiders to their societies, Bella, the Cullens, and Dracula, become more different but attractive, to "non-others." Dracula comes to England as an outsider and draws attention from others for his differences. Like Bella and Edward, Dracula is "ghastly pale."⁷³ Just as Bella describes in great detail Edward's odd, but beautiful appearance, Jonathan Harker, in *Dracula*, narrates the count's odd, "aquiline" features, such as fine hands, a look of "vitality" for a man of his age, and a thin nose.⁷⁴ The reader can see Harker's ambivalence in his description of Dracula; he cannot call Dracula ugly because he is entranced by Dracula's

⁷² Ibid., P. 22.

⁷³ Stoker, P. 135.

⁷⁴ Ibid., P. 28.

“otherness.” Though Bella begins the *Twilight Saga* human, her immediate connection and preoccupation with the vampyric others symbolize her vampyric inclinations.

Bella’s power and authority is further substantiated by her open sexuality. While critics have likened her sexual power to the negative power of temptation often projected on Eve, I’d like to classify this sexual power as vampyric in nature instead. The two other vampires examined in the essay are Edward and Dracula. Both have been pursued by many women. In *Twilight*, Bella’s friend Jessica says of Edward, “He’s gorgeous, of course, but don’t waste your time. He doesn’t date. Apparently none of the girls here are good-looking enough for him.”⁷⁵ It’s clear that Edward can have his pick of the ladies, but simply doesn’t act on his ability to do so. Throughout the *Saga*, the reader learns of three other suitors for Edward: Rosalie, whom Carlisle changed with the intentions that she’d be a mate for Edward; Tanya, a vampire from the Denali Clan who has pursued Edward in the past; and Jessica, who, to Bella, clearly has a case of “sour grapes.”⁷⁶ Dracula, like Edward, is also pursued by women, but unlike Edward, he does act on his impulses. While Harker is imprisoned in Dracula’s castle, he comes face-to-face with three of Dracula’s brides who also reside in the castle. Also deserving of mention is another vampire in Stoker’s novel: Lucy Westenra. Lucy is Dracula’s first victim in England and also becomes a vampire. She also has three human suitors, Dr. Seward, Quincey and Arthur. Note that Bella, like the three vampires above, also has three boys pursuing her: Mike, Eric, and Tyler. All three ask her to the “girl’s choice” dance, and she declines each offer, clearly showing her feminist decision that it is none of the three.

⁷⁵ *Twilight*, P. 22.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, P. 22.

This is significant because—though a conventional human—Bella is experiencing the same predicament as vampires: their power to entice the opposite sex. It also foreshadows Bella becoming an actual vampire, because, like Lucy from *Dracula*, both women are humans with three suitors who end up as vampires instead.⁷⁷ Lastly, it marks Edward’s insistence on marriage. Like Lucy, Bella has many men pursuing her—not only the human boys at school, but also Jacob Black, a werewolf. Bella has the power to elicit feelings of desire from men around her, and it seems at times that Edward wants marriage to keep Bella loyal to him. Marriage is Edward’s way of suppressing Bella’s inherent vampyric tendencies of alluring men while she is still human.

Bella’s power is even more clearly depicted as she grows closer to Edward. While trying to explain the control Bella has over him, Edward searches for a fitting analogy. First he compares her to chocolate ice cream, and then to hundred-year-old cognac, but he finds that neither provides a strong enough description of enticement. He finally settles on calling Bella “exactly [his] brand of heroin.” Heroin, a drug that entrances and hypnotizes, is an interesting choice, for it explains how Edward is helpless and Bella, the “heroin,” is in control. This is also an interesting play on words on Meyer’s part: Bella is heroin AND heroine. As both, she entices Edward physically with her drug-like command, but she also acts heroic and keeps him “good” by loving him, which make him love her in return and not drink her blood. Bella is in a unique feminist role. Carol Siegel calls this a third wave concept of identity— “the combination of toughness and

⁷⁷ Though it is important to note that Lucy kills children while Bella creates one.

femininity, self-assertion and voluptuous yielding.”⁷⁸ While she is female and has a woman’s body, she has dominant, classically male abilities, such as the ability to look, control, and act assertively. Viewing Bella in this light depicts her as a different type of female more aligned with the classically feminist heroines in literature and film.

Additionally, Bella’s power is also manifested as she is interested in satisfying her own desires. Like Dracula, who imprisons young, male Jonathan Harker for sexual pleasure and then preys on Lucy in Mina’s place, Bella is extremely sexual and almost pushy as she tries to convince Edward to have sex with her. When Edward breaks up with her and moves to Europe in *New Moon*, Bella substitutes Jacob in Edward’s place as the object of her own sexual desire. Bella’s actions are powerfully vampyric in nature because classic literary vampires, such as Dracula, are the embodiments of the pursuit of pure sexual pleasure.⁷⁹ Dracula, and other literary vampires, derive pleasure from men and women alike. In fact, when Harker is imprisoned in Dracula’s castle, Dracula catches his three brides sexually toying with Harker and tells them, “How dare you touch him, any of you? How dare you cast eyes on him when I had forbidden it? Back, I tell you all! This man belongs to me! Beware how you meddle with him, or you’ll have to deal with me.”⁸⁰ Though Bella clearly prefers men over women for sexual pleasure, she does have the same ability as Dracula to shift her desires as needed for her own fulfillment.

Additionally, Dracula and his brides have a power over Harker similar to the power Bella

⁷⁸ Siegel, Carol. “Female Heterosexual Sadism: The Final Feminist Taboo in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the *Anita Blake Vampire Hunter Series*.” *Third Wave Feminism and Television Puts Jane in a Box*. Ed. Merri Lisa Johnson. London: IB Taurus and Co. 2007. P. 58.

⁷⁹ Bruner, P. 59.

⁸⁰ Stoker, P. 55.

has over Edward. Harker is at first sickened by Dracula. He writes in his journal, “As the Count leaned over me and his hands touched me, I could not repress a shudder...a horrible feeling of nausea came over me, which, do what I would, I could not conceal.”⁸¹ Edward is similarly sickened in Biology when he first meets Bella. He covers his mouth and clenches his fists like he may vomit.⁸² Initially, she revolts him.

Furthermore, though Harker, a virgin, fights the seduction of Dracula’s vampire brides, in a scene depicting a female vampire performing fellatio on Harker, he is ultimately overcome with sexual ecstasy.⁸³ Stoker’s vampires not only act promiscuously, but they entice normally moral and rational humans to act in sexually licentious ways as well. Edward, like Harker, also fights Bella’s vampyrically lustful sexual advances and struggles internally to repress his sexual urges to remain a virgin. In Meyer’s more PG-rated tale, she has the couple marry first before Edward succumbs to Bella’s sexual advances, but when he does, he calls it, “the best night of [his] existence.”⁸⁴ Bella and Dracula’s brides have the powerful, vampyric ability to transform sex into something almost otherworldly for their virginal partners.

Bella’s vampire-a-human tendencies are further illustrated as Meyer actually poses Bella and Edward as vampyric doppelgangers of one another, even while Bella is still human. Once Edward and Bella enter a romantic relationship, Bella’s language choices point to her already vampyric nature. Bella frequently feels “consumed” by her love of

⁸¹ Ibid., Pgs. 28-29.

⁸² Felker Jones, Beth. Touched by a Vampire: Discovering the Hidden Messages in the Twilight Saga. Multnomah Books: Colorado Springs, Colorado, 2009. P. 20.

⁸³ Stoker, P. 54.

⁸⁴ Breaking Dawn, P. 92.

Edward and “obsessed” with him.⁸⁵ In fact, in *New Moon*, there are 37 mentions of Bella’s empty chest and unbeating heart while she is not with Edward.⁸⁶ Other features, such as her ability to smell blood, set her apart from fellow humans. Later, while human and pregnant, she actually drinks human blood for strength. In *Twilight*, Bella’s mouth actually waters when she smells Edward, which is a particularly odd occurrence given that she’s human.⁸⁷ Edward also tells Bella she is “perceptive” to an almost vampyric level and “the opposite of ordinary.”⁸⁸ In *Midnight Sun*, Edward even notes that Bella doesn’t “think like a human.”⁸⁹ Edward’s narration enables the reader to see just how different Bella is from other humans. Additionally, Edward has to repeatedly beg Bella to be reasonable, which is an interesting twist because vampires commonly aren’t reasonable, as Edward is. They are often more like Bella—impulsive, demanding, and self-determined—which are vampyric traits, even though Bella is human. Bella also has a special, vampyric power before she is even a vampire. She has the ability to block her mind off from Edward and the Volturi, which is a special trait the immortal Edward and Volturi have never seen in all of their time on earth. Her ability to shield her thoughts from the mindreading vampires is, in itself, one trait that makes Bella non-human and ultimately powerful from the beginning.

Bella’s masculine ability to look and powerful sexual assertiveness are not the only markers of her free agency. Bella’s simple, everyday choices also show her control in the

⁸⁵ Felker Jones, P. 20.

⁸⁶ Granger, P. 144.

⁸⁷ *Twilight*, 263.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, P. 210.

⁸⁹ *Midnight Sun*, P. 130.

Saga's narrative. Bella resists the rules. Edward warns her to stay away. She does not listen and chooses to trust his ability not to hurt her and to pursue a romantic relationship. When Edward explains his strong feelings about saving sex until marriage, Bella says, "Vampire rules aren't enough for you? You want to worry about human ones too?"⁹⁰ She tries to talk Edward into breaking his own rules regarding her chastity. It's clear that Bella wants two things: to have sex with Edward and to be a vampire. The two negotiate a deal: Bella will marry Edward and Edward will change her into a vampire. Bella also negotiates that their first sexual encounter must occur while she is still human. This important decision paves the way for the plot in *Breaking Dawn*. Both characters contemplate their choices and the effects these choices have on their friends and families. In the end, both Edward and Bella get their way. Edward gets to marry Bella. Bella gets to enjoy sex as a human and then becomes a vampire.

Additionally, Meyer supports her choice feminist stance by confronting Bella with many harrowing decisions and having her weigh her options. A major part of the subplot of the *Saga* revolves around Bella's decision between best friend/romantic interest Jacob and vampire/love Edward. At one point she calls both of them her soul mates, but she knows she must choose one for her future. She says, "Two futures, two soul mates... too much for any one person."⁹¹ Her practical side knows Jacob would be the easier of the two to choose if she wants a normal life. But she also has a magnetic relationship with Edward and since the beginning of the *Saga* she's wanted him and his vampyric lifestyle for herself. Ultimately, she chooses Edward and a life of vampirism,

⁹⁰ Eclipse, 453.

⁹¹ Eclipse, P. 599.

saying with resolve, “I’ve chosen my life — now I want to start living it.”⁹² Of losing her family to be with Edward, she says, “At least my mom and dad and my friends will know the best part of my choice, the most I’m allowed to tell them. They’ll know I chose you, and they’ll know we’re together. They’ll know I’m happy, wherever I am. I think that’s the best I can do for them.”⁹³ While critics Seifert, Dietz, and Whitton view this choice as non-feminist, Bella is deciding it with a mind open to other alternatives. Because she is aware of other options and still makes the decision to become a vampire, her choice—according to choice feminism—is a feminist decision. Bella does not go through the destructive newborn vampire stage because she chose it, the Cullens think. Skipping the newborn phase allows Bella to see her father anyway, so Bella gets the best of both worlds: her family and vampirism. Bella does not need to give up her desires for her future or her family; in this mythical world, they both can coexist harmoniously but only as a result of Bella’s self-conscious choices.

Once Bella is actually a vampire, the reader can see her choice to become one was the right one. Critics have noted this frequently, stating that Bella, as a vampire, “is more herself than ever before,”⁹⁴ and that she “continues as vampire to function as she did as a human.”⁹⁵ As a vampire, Bella never kills a human like most newborn vampires do. She thinks, “It was like I had been born to be a vampire. The idea made me want to laugh but it also made we want to sing. I had found my true place in this world, the place I fit, the

⁹² Ibid., P. 616.

⁹³ Ibid., P. 616.

⁹⁴ Felker Jones, P. 150.

⁹⁵ Gravett, P. 45.

place I shined.”⁹⁶ Though Bella was exceptional as a human, she is even more exceptional as a vampire. Vampire women in literature and film are usually classified as femme fatales. But unlike Lucy in *Dracula*, who feeds on children, Bella is the complete opposite. Her choice to become a vampire allows for her ultimate fulfillment and happiness. She is also the most powerful of all the vampires, able to protect herself and anyone else she chooses with her superpower of projecting a shield that stops harm from penetrating it. This is an intensified version of her previous human superpower to block her mind off from mindreading vampires, which shows the complete autonomy she carries over from her human form to her vampyric one. Her ability to make decisions behind this shield and impervious to the influence of others shows Bella’s powerful authority as both human and vampire.

Choosing Edward, marriage, and sex as a human also leads Bella into choosing to be a mother. As a vampire, Bella brings new life forth when she gives birth to her hybrid human/vampire baby Renesmee. Bella carries the baby to term, despite the effect it has on her health. Her desire to be a mother to Edward’s child is so overwhelming that she says:

From that first little touch, the whole world had shifted. Where before there was just one thing I could not live without, now there were two. There was no division – my love was not split between them now; it wasn’t like that. It was more like my heart had grown, swollen up to twice its size in that moment. All that extra space, already filled. The increase was almost dizzying. This child, Edward’s child, was a whole different story. I wanted him like I wanted air to breathe.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ *Breaking Dawn*, P. 523.

⁹⁷ *Breaking Dawn*, P. 132.

Bella does not abort the baby even though patriarchal Carlisle and husband Edward want her to. Instead, she enlists Rose to defend her choice so she can carry her decision, and the child, to fruition. Meyer has said, “For me, a big part of my feminist beliefs has to do with the concept of choice... feminism is about being pro-choice, which is not the same as being pro-abortion. The idea of pro-choice means supporting women in making the choice that’s right for them around a pregnancy—not proselytizing abortion as the only ‘right’ choice.”⁹⁸ Meyer’s weight on choice is paramount here. The *Twilight Saga* has been read by many as anti-abortion,⁹⁹ but Meyer is not so easily categorized. She uses the terminology “pro-choice” in its fullest sense, saying that this choice was right for Bella, but certainly not for everyone. Bella, as vampire, plays the role of warrior-superhero-defender-mother-wife. She experiences all forms of female “being,” which otherwise would not have been accessible to her as a human.

Bella’s many other choices drive other aspects of the plot more so than any other character. Her decisions regarding Jacob change the way the wolves and Cullens understand one another. A new truce is created to protect Renesmee.¹⁰⁰ Bella’s choice to become a vampire is also substantiated because it allows her to protect her family adequately. Though critics of Bella as an anti-feminist character, Deffenbacher and Zagoria-Moffet do recognize the power in her decisions; they write “Bella’s decisive actions in the epic battle at the end of *Breaking Dawn* invoke the fierce, aggressive

⁹⁸ Ames, Melissa. “*Twilight* Follows Tradition: Analyzing “Biting” Critiques of Vampire Narratives for Their Portrayals of Gender and Sexuality.” *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media & the Vampire Franchise*. Eds. Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz. Peter Lang: New York. 2010. P. 41.

⁹⁹ Melissa Ames, cited above, addresses this, as does Beth Felker Jones, cited earlier.

¹⁰⁰ Granger, P. 68.

strength that these warrior heroines demonstrate throughout the course of their respective journeys and novels.” She defends her family against the “corrupt patriarchs” of the Volturi.¹⁰¹ Bella, as free agent, has chosen her path as lover, wife, mother, vampire, and warrior. Her ability to choose, predicated by Meyer’s choice feminist beliefs, guides her as a strong female character in the *Saga*.

Meyer’s emphasis on the ability to choose is also illustrated in a multitude of other instances in the *Saga*. Bella is not the only one making decisions. When Edward is at first smitten by Bella in *Midnight Sun* and thirsts for her blood, he tells himself to control his vampyric urges, “There was always a choice. There had to be.”¹⁰² For Edward, a world without his own free choice is non-existent. Additionally, upon asking Bella out, he is happy when she says yes to going to Seattle and to sitting with him at lunch.¹⁰³ Meyer makes it obvious that Bella is indeed choosing Edward—she has many chances to turn him down and does not, which is something he is very excited about. “Here she was, still willingly at my side,” he says.¹⁰⁴ Even at the beginning of the manuscript, when Edward uses some of his vampyric charm on Bella, he later regrets it, saying, “From now on, it must always be her choice.”¹⁰⁵ Though Edward knows he has the ability to “dazzle” her to get his way, he abstains and lets Bella make decisions for herself. Additionally, Alice has premonitions that hinge entirely on choice. In *Midnight Sun*, her premonitions change several times as Edward is making up his mind on whether

¹⁰¹ Deffenbacher, 38.

¹⁰² *Midnight Sun*, P. 89.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, P. 148.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, P. 194.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, P. 194.

he wants to befriend Bella, love her, or kill her.¹⁰⁶ Meyer writes choice as just as important to Edward and Alice as it is to Bella.

Bella's powerful free agency can also be explored allegorically. Critics have heavily utilized allegories to critique the *Saga*, and a correlation between its plot and the Abrahamic creation myth is the most common narrative evoked. The role of Eve is the role typically attributed to Bella, and for good reason. Meyer starts *Twilight* off with a quote from Genesis, "But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," and the jacket cover of the novel shows pale hands offering a perfect, red, unbitten apple. Also, the first time Edward meets Bella in Biology, she thinks, "he wouldn't know me from Eve."¹⁰⁷ The entire first book is ripe with the forbidden fruit analogy, which Meyer incorporates consciously as she sets the stage for the star-crossed lovers. Meyer's Mormon beliefs are fundamental to her use of Genesis as an allegory. Mormons believe in a mythical cosmos. Margaret Toscano relates Meyer's religion to *Twilight* in that Meyer, "creates a world where myth and everyday reality mingle, reflecting Mormon cosmology, where the mundane and supernatural overlap."¹⁰⁸ Mormons believe in a cosmic universe and their time on earth is only a sojourn from their Godlike existence. Additionally, their relationships with others carries on into these other realms of existence, which explains Bella's belief in eternal love and the feeling that she's known Edward forever.¹⁰⁹ While Meyer depicts this

¹⁰⁶ *Midnight Sun*, P. 55.

¹⁰⁷ *Twilight*, P. 24.

¹⁰⁸ Toscano, Margaret M. "Mormon Morality and Immortality in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Series*." *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media & the Vampire Franchise*. Eds. Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz. Peter Lang: New York. 2010. P. 31.

¹⁰⁹ Felker Jones, P. 88.

eternity in vampyric, immortal terms in the *Twilight Saga*, her personal, Mormon belief in eternal love is foundational in understanding the plot.

Sandra Gravett explores the creation myth analogy in depth, citing the newness and intense greenery and foliage of Forks, Washington, comparing it to the Garden of Eden.¹¹⁰ Gravett makes the connection of Bella as temptress, likening her to Eve when she entices Adam to eat the apple and initiates original sin. Gravett calls Bella, “a woman using her desirability to lure a man to her will.”¹¹¹ John Granger also likens Bella to Eve and blames both for the fall of man, Eve because she eats the apple, and Bella simply because she “falls down a lot.”¹¹² He correlates Bella’s falling to the plot shifts of the *Saga*, saying her falls (both literally and figuratively) are what create the entire story. My concern with this reading of Eve transposed on to Bella is that, once again, it paints Bella in a negative light that involves a misreading of the novels. Those who have examined Bella as Eve write Bella off as a temptress or selfish woman, placing the negative attributes of a westernized Eve on the eighteen year old girl.

In Western culture, Eve—not Adam—has been classified as the one who brought evil into the world. In Colonial America, Puritan men were actually deemed closer to God, and women were often viewed as weaker because they were descendants from “fallen” Eve.¹¹³ Puritan culture considered church hierarchy and the domestic household to be the same. Women who believed in the order of God also had to believe in the order

¹¹⁰ Gravett, P. 29.

¹¹¹ Ibid., P. 28.

¹¹² Granger, P. 88.

¹¹³ Karlson, Carol. The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England. Norton; 1987.

of the family. Testing the order meant you were testing God.¹¹⁴ Men during this time had an absolute fear of female control and anxiety over women's changing roles. By aligning societal expectations with those of the Church, women were in no position to challenge either. Carol Karlsen in *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* says, "This model enhanced the position of all male heads of household and made any challenge to their authority a challenge to God's authority."¹¹⁵ Because of the negative reputation of Eve and its implications for both their private and public lives, some women found themselves better relating to the Virgin Mary and joined convents.¹¹⁶ This specific dissimilarity of the Catholic Biblical woman—the Madonna—from Eve allowed for women to have a completely altered relationship with their religion, and their own agency, but with that came the complete absence of both marriage and family.

The historical problem of classifying Eve as a temptress or selfish woman originates in a particular interpretation of the Bible. Susan Niditch explains the difficulty of this classification in present day Christianity, saying, "all too often readers come to Genesis weighed down by Augustine's or Milton's interpretation of the story."¹¹⁷ Niditch points out that in Genesis, the snake does not lie to Eve, but instead tells her honestly about the tree and its ability to provide the Godlike power of determining good from

¹¹⁴ Karlsen, 150.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 164.

¹¹⁶ Clark, Emily. Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727-1834. The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

¹¹⁷ Niditch, Susan. "Genesis." The Women's Bible Commentary. Eds. Carol A Newson and Sharon H. Ringe. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville Kentucky, 1998. P.17.

evil.¹¹⁸ Additionally, original sin is never mentioned in Genesis, but is instead reinterpreted by Paul in a later book in the New Testament.¹¹⁹ Milton and Augustine retold Genesis and inserted their own world views, and their retelling is the version Westernized society identifies with instead of the true Biblical version. All of these reasons, as well as literary explanations from different theologies and world views, cause misinterpretation of Eve and unfortunately cast the first Biblical woman in a negative light.

In *The Women's Bible Commentary*, Susan Niditch provides a different reading of Eve, one not bogged down by stigma. In Niditch's reading of Genesis, she sees Eve as a seeker of knowledge who knowingly eats from the tree of good and evil because she yearns for a meaningful existence in the world. Her reading claims, "Eve, as she is named in 3:20, is the protagonist, not her husband. That is an important point, as is the realization that to be the curious one—the seeker of knowledge and the tester of limits—is to be quintessentially human, to evidence traits of many culture-bringing heroes and heroines of Genesis."¹²⁰ She calls Eve the "bringer of culture" because Eve, not Adam, is the "conscious actor choosing knowledge." Niditch describes Adam as passive in the Garden of Eden, only eating the fruit after Eve hands it to him. Niditch notes Adam's childlike defense when chastised by God for eating the fruit: "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Niditch says, "Whose fault is it? The Woman's?" clearly arguing that the man was immaturely following the

¹¹⁸ Ibid., P. 17.

¹¹⁹ "Bible Errancy Part Two: Original Sin" Accessed 2.10.2012. <http://atheism.about.com/library/weekly/aa020800b.htm>.

¹²⁰ Niditch, P. 17.

woman then claiming a feeble excuse—as a toddler does—saying that he simply ate the fruit because Eve told him to eat it.¹²¹ Because of Eve’s actions as seeker of knowledge and bringer of culture, Niditch claims women were given the “most earthy and divine of roles,” the ability to bear children and nurture new life. Gravett very briefly summarizes Niditch’s reading, but only offers it as another less likely possibility. I instead believe this incredibly positive reading of Eve in Genesis is more in line with Bella’s characterization. Both Eve and Bella are misunderstood due to allegories that are often interpreted rigidly in only one way but are in fact quite open to debate.

Using Niditch’s interpretation, Bella is a likely Eve. In *Midnight Sun*, with Edward narrating, Bella “picks up an apple and twist[s] it in her hands.” She looks at Edward and says, “I’m curious. What would you do if someone dared you to eat food?”¹²² Edward described how, without looking, he picks up the closest item and bites into it, knowing he will have to throw it up later. Even though he does not look at what he bites, the reader can tell from the context and description of the item that it is an apple he has unknowingly bitten into. This scene almost perfectly parallels the reading of Genesis that Niditch provides. Edward, like Adam, eats the apple just because Bella, like Eve, challenges him to eat it. The women are assertive and the men are passive and simply acting on the requests of the women.

The strongest trait Bella shares with Eve is her need for knowledge. Throughout the entire *Saga*, Bella seeks information so she can be a knowing participant in her own

¹²¹ Niditch, P.17.

¹²² *Midnight Sun*, P. 234.

life. She asks her friends many questions about the Cullens, and even asks Jacob about old legends as she searches for answers about Edward and his family. When Edward saves her from being hit by a car, she corners him in the hospital and demands answers about his superhuman strength. Edward avoids the questions and Bella continually presses. “You’re not going to let it go, are you?” Edward asks. “No,” she replies.¹²³ Later, Bella searches vampire lore on the internet, and even discovers a friendly, Italian type of vampire that reminds her of the Cullens.¹²⁴ Once she learns Edward is indeed a vampire, she asks him many questions about his habits and his past. She is not afraid of his answers and likes learning all of these things about him: “Tell me more,” she says.¹²⁵ In *Midnight Sun*, Edward comments frequently on how perceptive Bella is. “You’re observant, aren’t you?” he says, after she figures out how his feeding schedule mirrors his pleasant moods. Additionally, in the infamous meadow scene where Edward first reveals himself in sunlight to Bella, Edward says, “And the lion fell in love with the lamb...” Bella replies, “What a stupid lamb,” to which Edward adds, “What a sick, masochistic lion.”¹²⁶ They are both referring to a popular quote, “the Lion will lay down with the Lamb,” derived from several passages in the book of Isaiah.¹²⁷ These sections of the Bible refer to when God will reign once again on earth and peace will prevail. The lion and the lamb, in love, is something unknown, except in God’s presence. This symbolizes Bella experiencing something unique and rewarding in her quest for information. Bella’s knowledge and her ability to seek it put her on a different level of human existence.

¹²³ *Twilight*, P. 65.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, P. 135.

¹²⁵ *Midnight Sun*, P. 204.

¹²⁶ *Twilight*, P. 274.

¹²⁷ “Isaiah, 11:6, 65:25,” *The Bible*. New Revised Standard Version.

Bella, like Eve, is both a seeker and a powerfully active participant in her own life, wanting to know the whole world she lives in, not only the Garden of Eden.

Along with this knowledge comes Bella's realization of her humanness. During her trip into the forest when she first arrives in Forks, she says: "The ferns stood higher than my head, now that I was seated, and I knew someone could walk by on the path, three feet away, and not see me."¹²⁸ In this Eden-like surrounding, Bella realizes she is only human and dwarfed by the giant greenery surrounding her. Gravett provides an amazing comparison of Forks-as-Eden and likens them both to gilded cages. Bella, like Eve, is locked in "childlike innocence" where nothing bad can happen, but her quest for more, like Eve's, opens up other possibilities. In Forks, she is surrounded by mythical beings, such as vampires and werewolves. Like the serpent in Eden, these beings have the ability to open up another world of knowing.¹²⁹ She desires knowledge of bigger things. Once Bella learns of these bigger things, she yearns to also be part of them. She asks Edward to change her into a vampire, again taking the role of Eve and wanting to experience both the good and the bad of existence, even if it is a vampyric one.

Bella, like Eve, is also a tester of limits. These limits present themselves sexually to Bella in the *Saga*. Bella as a tester of limits uses her sexuality to test the parameters of her own, and Edward's, self-control. Edward explains his new feelings, saying, "'But... There are other hungers. Hungers I don't even understand, that are foreign to me. ... I'm not used to feeling so human. Is it always like this?'"¹³⁰ Aside from his usual

¹²⁸ *Twilight*, P. 137.

¹²⁹ Gravett, P. 31.

¹³⁰ *Twilight*, P. 278.

hunger for human blood, Edward also hungers for a relationship with Bella. His sexual hunger is one that is foreign to him, as Bella lets Edward test the limits of controlling his thirst, which, in turn, lets him develop a love for her as a person. As a “bringer of culture,” Bella brings experiences to Edward that he has never known before. Additionally, Bella tests her own limits with reckless behavior in *New Moon*, racing motorcycles and cliff jumping, as she deals with losing Edward when he breaks up with her and flees to Europe. Meredith Wallis, in “True Blood Waits,” calls Bella “a resister, a revolutionary,” which again points to Bella as a radical tester of limits.¹³¹ Indeed, the Cullens do not know of any other human who ever had a romantic relationship with a vampire and lived to tell about it. Bella creates an entire new world—a new culture—for herself and the Cullens. Though human, which is imperative in Niditch’s reading of Eve, Bella shuns normative human existence and forges ahead into unknown territory with Edward.

Lastly, Bella as Eve also experiences the “divine role” of “conceiving, containing, and nurturing new life.”¹³² Like Eve, who bore forth Seth from whom Noah descended, Bella gives birth to Renesmee, a beautiful vampire/human hybrid with the special power of showing people her thoughts and feelings by touching their skin. Renesmee, like Noah, restores peace to the world, and like the great flood, also proves to be the cataclysmic force that restores harmony to the feuding wolves and vampires. Renesmee, in her childlike simplicity says, “‘I’m not dangerous at all... I love humans. And wolf-people

¹³¹ Wallis, Meredith. “True Blood Waits: The Romance of Law and Literature” Bringing Light to Twilight: Perspectives on the Pop Culture Phenomenon. Ed. Giselle Liza Anatol. Palgrave Macmillan: New York. 2011. P 83-95. P. 90.

¹³² Niditch, P. 17.

like my Jacob."¹³³ Renesmee, as innocent child, perseverates and re-establishes heteronormativity and the future of the social order.¹³⁴ The world will not end and procreation will continue. Because of Renesmee's existence, the future is safe.

Niditch's exceptional reading of Eve as seeker of knowledge, tester of limits, and divine powerful mother posits a remarkable, new Eve with confident, positive attributes. These attributes, when directly applied to Bella's character in the *Twilight Saga*, allow for a much more positive reading of Bella than other critics have offered using the same parable. Seen in this new light, Bella-as-Eve acts as bringer of culture and securer of future existence, a significantly more positive role than has been attributed to her by past critics. Bella-as-Eve is a smart, assertive, active participant in the *Saga*, attaining for herself a positive status as almost divine.

In conclusion, Bella Swan is a powerful free agent, and her abilities to make decisions and take action are what drive the entire plot of the *Twilight Saga*. Meyer's choice feminist stance is apparent in both the plot of the *Saga* and her explanation of her characters. Though many critics characterize Bella as weak and oppressed, Meyer's use of choice in relation to her Mormon world view emphasizes the active, calculating decisions Bella makes. Though not choices many second wave feminists are pleased with, alternatives are built by Meyer for Bella into the plot—college, Jacob, and returning to Phoenix—reinforcing her stance that Bella has a right to choose. According to choice feminist definitions, even choices that could be construed as non-feminist can take on a

¹³³ *Breaking Dawn*, P. 592.

¹³⁴ Vampires are often classified as queer, but the Cullen's de-queer the vampire trope. Renesmee is the exact thing Lee Edelman argues against in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, queerness being made into heteronormativity.

feminist ambiance when chosen with a politically aware conscience. Bella is aware and chooses her path. While many may argue it is not a traditionally feminist path, it is nonetheless predicated on her right to choose.

The *Saga* is dictated by Bella's choices as powerful, knowing, free agent. She does not progress from pawn to queen as many critics suggest; she is mighty from the very beginning. From her masculinized role as "looker" to her more domestic role of mother, Bella's calculating choices are exactly that: choices. Grounded by Meyer's Mormon beliefs in moral agency, the *Twilight Saga* provides Bella and other characters the ability to guide their own way on earth.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ames, Melissa. "Twilight Follows Tradition: Analyzing "Biting" Critiques of Vampire Narratives for Their Portrayals of Gender and Sexuality." Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media & the Vampire Franchise. Eds. Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz. Peter Lang: New York. 2010. P. 37-54.
- Arp, Robert. "Damned if You Do, Damned if You Don't." Zombies, Vampires, and Philosophy: New Life for the Undead. Chicago: Carus, 2006. P. 143-154.
- Auerbach, Nina. Our Vampires, Ourselves. University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Berenstein, Rhona J. Attack of the Leading Ladies: Gender, Sexuality, and Spectatorship in Classic Horror Film. Columbia University Press: New York. 1996.
- "Bible Errancy Part Two: Original Sin" Accessed 2.10.2012.
<http://atheism.about.com/library/weekly/aa020800b.htm>.
- Boorstein, Michelle. Pew Forum Poll: Mormons devout, moral, traditional. THE WASHINGTON POST, Friday January 13, 2012.
http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/faith_and_values/2012/01/13/mormons-devout-moral-traditional.html. Retrieved April 20, 2012.
- Breaking Dawn Part One. Dir. Bill Condon, Summit Entertainment, 2011.
- Bruner, Kurt. The Twilight Phenomenon: Forbidden Fruit or Thirst-Quenching Fantasy? Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 2009.
- Clark, Emily. Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727-1834. The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- Deffenbacher, Kristina and Mikayla Zagoria-Moffet. "Textual Vampirism in the Twilight Saga: Drawing Feminist Life from Jane Eyre and Teen Fantasy Fiction." Bringing Light to Twilight: Perspectives on the Pop Culture Phenomenon. Ed. Giselle Liza Anatol. Palgrave Macmillan: New York. 2011. P. 31-42.
- Dietz, Tammy. "Wake Up, Bella. A Personal Essay on Twilight, Mormonism, Feminism, and Happiness." Bringing Light to Twilight: Perspectives on the Pop Culture Phenomenon. Ed. Giselle Liza Anatol. Palgrave Macmillan: New York. 2011. P. 99-112.
- Edelman, Lee. No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive. Duke University Press: Durham and London, 2004.

- “Edward Cullen.” Wikipedia. Accessed June 27, 2011.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Cullen.
- Felker Jones, Beth. Touched by a Vampire: Discovering the Hidden Messages in the Twilight Saga. Multnomah Books: Colorado Springs, Colorado, 2009.
- Ferguson, Michaele L. “Choice Feminism and the Fear of Politics.” *Perspectives on Politics*. March 2010: Vol. 8. No 1. P. 247-253.
- Forry, Joan Grassbough. “‘Powerful, Beautiful, and Without Regret’: Femininity, Masculinity, and the Vampire Aesthetic.” Zombies, Vampires, and Philosophy: New Life for the Undead. Chicago: Carus, 2006. P. 237-248.
- Granger, John. Spotlight: A Close-up look at the Artistry and Meaning of Stephanie Meyer’s Twilight Saga, Zossima Press: Allentown, PA, 2010.
- Hirschmann, Nancy J. “Choosing Betrayal.” *Perspectives on Politics*. March 2010: Vol. 8. No 1. P. 271-278.
- Isaiah, 11:6, 65:25, The Bible. New Revised Standard Version.
- Karlsen, Carol. The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England. Norton; 1987.
- Matheson, Robert. I Am Legend. Orb: New York, 1995.
- McMahon, J.L., “Twilight of an Idol: Our Fatal Attraction to Vampires.” Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians, and the Pursuit of Immortality. Eds. Housel, Rebecca & J. Jeremy Wisnewski, Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2009.
- Meyer, Stephenie. Breaking Dawn. Little, Brown and Company: New York, 2008.
- Meyer, Stephenie. Eclipse. Little, Brown and Company: New York, 2007.
- Meyer, Stephenie. New Moon. Little, Brown and Company: New York, 2006.
- Meyer, Stephenie. Midnight Sun. Unpublished draft. Accessed February 6, 2012.
http://www.stepheniemeyer.com/pdf/midnightsun_partial_draft4.pdf.
- Meyer, Stephenie. Twilight. Little, Brown and Company: New York, 2005.
- New Moon: The Twilight Saga*. Retrieved April 16, 2010 from The Numbers Website:
<http://www.the-numbers.com/movies/2009/TWLI2.php>.
- Niditch, Susan. “Genesis.” The Women’s Bible Commentary. Eds. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville Kentucky, 1998.

- Rice, Anne. Interview with the Vampire. New York: Ballantine Books, 1991.
- “Robert Pattinson.” Wikipedia. Accessed June 27, 2011.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Pattinson.
- Rosin, Hanna. *The End of Men*. The Atlantic. July/August 2010. Accessed Sept. 3 2010.
<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/07/the-end-of-men/8135/> .
- Seifert, Christine. “Bite Me (or Don’t).” Bitch Magazine. Winter, Vol. 42.
<http://bitchmagazine.org/article/bite-me-or-dont>.
- Seltzer, Sarah. “‘Twilight’: Sexual Longing in an Abstinence Only World.” Accessed February 11, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sarah-seltzer/twilight-sexual-longing-i_b_117927.html.
- Shaw, Marc E. “For the Strength of Bella: Meyer, Vampires, and Mormonism.” Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians, and the Pursuit of Immortality. Eds. Rebecca Housel, J. Jeremy Wisnewski, and William Irwin. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.: Hoboken, New Jersey, 2009. P. 227-236.
- Sheffield, Jessica, and Elyse Merlo. “Biting Back: Twilight Anti-Fandom and the Rhetoric of Superiority.” Bitten By Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, & the Vampire Franchise. Eds. Melissa A. Glick, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz. Peter Lang: New York, 2010. P. 207-224.
- Siegel, Carol. “Female Heterosexual Sadism: The Final Feminist Taboo in Buffy the Vampire Slayer and the Anita Blake Vampire Hunter Series.” Third Wave Feminism and Television Puts Jane in a Box. Ed. Merri Lisa Johnson. London: IB Taurus and Co., 2007. P. 56-77.
- Stoker, Bram. Dracula. New York: Penguin Classics, 1993.
- Toscano, Margaret M. “Mormon Morality and Immortality in Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight Series*.” Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media & the Vampire Franchise. Eds. Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz. Peter Lang: New York. 2010. P. 21-36.
- The Venom Apple*. Accessed March 10, 2012. <http://the-venom-apple.livejournal.com/profile>.
- Twilight. Dir. Catherine Hardwicke. Summit Entertainment, 2008. DVD.
- Twilight*. Retrieved April 16, 2010 from The Numbers Website.
<http://www.the-numbers.com/movies/2008/TWLIT.php>.

Wallis, Meredith. "True Blood Waits: The Romance of Law and Literature" Bringing Light to Twilight: Perspectives on the Pop Culture Phenomenon. Ed. Giselle Liza Anatol. Palgrave Macmillan: New York. 2011. P 83-95.

Whitton, Merinne. "'One is Not Born a Vampire, But Becomes One': Motherhood and Masochism in Twilight." Bringing Light to Twilight: Perspectives on the Pop Culture Phenomenon. Ed. Giselle Liza Anatol. Palgrave MacMillan: New York. 2011. P 125-137.

BRYNN BUSKIRK

318 E 11th Street, Northampton PA 18067 | 610-730-417 | bsaltzer@alumni.moravian.edu

M.A. in American Studies

Thesis: *Why is Everyone Hatin' on Bella: Choice Feminism and Free Agency in the Twilight Saga*
Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA

2012

B.A. in English and Sociology

Concentration in Professional Writing, Graduated Magna Cum Laude
Senior Research Project: *Navigating the Plagiarism Minefield: Peer Tutors as Guides*

2004

AWARDS

Lehigh University Graduate Scholarship

2011 - 2012

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

The Edward Cullen Effect: Forbidden Fruit as Catalyst for Hypersexual Response

Vampires in Literature Panel, ACA/PCA National Conference
Boston, MA

2012

Navigating the Plagiarism Minefield

International Writing Centers Association/National Council of Peer Tutoring in Writing Conference
Hershey, PA

2003

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Guest Lecturer/Presenter

Vampire Philosophy 101
One class of Contemporary Horror Films

Summer 2011

The Paranormal in Pop Culture

One class of Introduction to Communications

Spring 2010

Writing Center Tutor

Moravian College

2002-2004

PAPERS

No Freedom: The Elemental Matter in the Contemporary American Horror Film

2011

Class and Civil Identities: Significant to the True Experience of Men and Women in US History

2011

The Tie that Binds: Children as Hope for Humanity in Handling the Undead

2011

Usefulness of Gender Spheres in Categorizing Homosocial Relationships

2011

The Edward Cullen Effect: Suppressed Sexuality as Catalyst for Hypersexual Urges

2011

The Sins of the Mother: Orleanna Price and Redemption in Barbara Kingsolver's The Poisonwood Bible

2011

The New Mother: A Transatlantic Assessment of the Dawn of Vampiric Mothering

2010

Doubly Jarring: One Character with Two Minds in Strangers on a Train

2010

Monster Pets: Humanizing or Dehumanizing Mechanisms of the Horror Film?

2010

An Analysis of Human Agency in Readings of the Industrial Revolution

2009

CAREER EXPERIENCE

Phoebe Ministries, Allentown PA

Director of Corporate Marketing and Community Relations, June 2011 – Present

Provide strategic and fiscal planning and create and implement marketing and and public relations plans across 16 senior service communities.

Metter Interactive, Bethlehem PA

Internet Marketing Account Manager, October 2010 - June 2011

Managed the Internet PR and Marketing for major retainer accounts, provided search engine optimization and social media marketing.

Lehigh University, Bethlehem PA

Assistant Director of Marketing for Business Services and University Athletics/Marketing Specialist, Feb 2007 - Oct 2010

Developed comprehensive marketing plans for all University Athletics, Analyzed and recommended marketing actions including positioning and branding for all departments of Business Services and Stabler Arena.

Hunterdon Healthcare System, Flemington NJ

Marketing Specialist, Feb 2006 - Feb 2007

Formulated strategic marketing plan for all elements of Hunterdon Healthcare system (hospital, wellness center, nine physician practices) including setting goals, tracking trends, and budget allocation, Completed all media buying for all constituents of the Hunterdon Healthcare System.

Moravian College

Associate/Assistant Director of the Annual Fund, August 2005 - Feb 2006

Oversaw all annual fund direct mail program, including writing, editing, and segmenting, coordinated and managed a student-managed phonathon program.

MEMBERSHIPS

American Popular Culture Association

National Public Relations Managers Association