

“You Are My Life Now”: Twilight as a Cultural Phenomenon and Fantasy

by

Julia Guyon

Submitted to the Department of Literature
School of Liberal Arts and Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College
State University of New York

May 2021

Sponsor: Paul Megna

Second Reader: Elise Lemire

Introduction:

My project examines the *Twilight* Saga by Stephenie Meyer, specifically the first book in the series. The overarching question guiding my project is why is *Twilight* regarded as a cultural phenomenon? The books were New York Times Best Sellers, while the films grossed millions of dollars. The fan base ranges from teenage girls to mothers known as *Twilight* Moms. Along with the love of the series, however, criticism of its themes and narratives has been raised as well. Critics often note *Twilight*'s misogyny and reinforcement of traditional gender roles, highlighting Edward Cullen's toxic masculinity. Regardless, Edward's behaviors are romanticized, while fans defend *Twilight*'s narrative as simply a work from the fantasy genre.

I think there is much more to be said about fantasy, not just as a genre but also as a psychological mechanism. Fans engage with *Twilight* extensively, feeling transported into the text and engaging in parasocial interactions with characters. Young girls express feeling like they were the ones falling in love as they read the text. Meyer's inspiration to write *Twilight* came from a dream she had. The main protagonist Bella, also experiences her own fantasy being fulfilled. In examining *Twilight*'s inspiration, plot, and reception, we ultimately see a trilogy of fantasy created between author, protagonist, and audience. Prior to meeting Edward, Bella looks at her life through a lens of banality. Edward's intense feelings appear to be a remedy to this regardless of their problematic implications. I examine Bella as a parentified child, which I discuss in the first chapter of my project. Bella's relationships with her parents ultimately shape her fantasies.

Meyer's Inspiration and Viewpoint

While Stephenie Meyer's perception of *Twilight* is not the sole interpretation we must follow, it is important to examine her background. By doing so, we see how *Twilight's* contents, audience, and author are interconnected by fantasy. We also see how Bella acts as a literary mirror for Meyer, as there are multiple parallels between the protagonist and her creator. I will specifically utilize a transcript of an interview with Meyer from November 29th, 2005 at Arizona State University. The interviewer describes Meyer as a "devoted mother of three very active, healthy, and wonderful boys" and asks how she finds time to write (630). Meyer explains she usually has to write in the evening after her children have gone to bed, "often at the sacrifice of sleep" (630). Two points can be pulled from these excerpts. First and foremost, Meyer is a domestic figure in her household. We see this quality in Bella, as I will discuss later on. It can also be argued this influences Meyer's reinforcement of traditional gender roles in her writing. Secondly, Meyer's "sacrifice of sleep" reflects her passion in writing *Twilight*. Her writing is ultimately a labor of love, which will be expanded upon later in the interview.

Crucial information is revealed when discussing Meyer's inspiration and influences, or more so lack thereof. An audience member asks, "Where did your inspiration come from for *Twilight*?" The audience member also commends Meyer's writing of her characters, and asks if she is "well versed in Anne Rice and other authors of vampire fiction" (630). Meyer reveals she has not read many vampire novels or watched vampire films. In turn, Meyer often goes against vampire traditions in her writing and puts her own twist on the iconic monster. We see this in her depiction of the Cullen's as a chosen nuclear family, which will be discussed in the third chapter of my project. Meyer then goes on to explain that the inspiration for *Twilight* came to her in a dream. She notes:

In my dream, the basics of which would become the meadow scene in chapter 13, I can see a young woman in the embrace of a very handsome young man, in a beautiful meadow surrounded by forest, and somehow I know that he is a vampire. In the dream there is a powerful attraction between the two. When I started to write this, I had no idea where it was going; I had no idea at all in the beginning that I was writing a book. I started writing out the scene from my dream, and when I got done I was so interested in the characters that I wanted to see what would happen to them next. (631)

Meyer's dream is important to consider when examining *Twilight*. Dreams are a subconscious form of fantasy, specifically wish fulfillment as theorized by Sigmund Freud, therefore we see Meyer's fantasy acted out in her writing. She did not write with the mindset that she would become a famous author. Meyer wrote to build the existence of her characters from her dreams, and most importantly, she wrote for herself. Meyer writes about dreams extensively in *Twilight*, specifically when Bella dreams of Edward several times.

Another audience member asks Meyer how she developed her characters. Meyer explains, "I spend a lot of time with my characters outside of the book-just letting them live outside the story" (631). For example, Meyer will listen to music on the radio and think of a character who would enjoy the song. Meyer's casual manner of fleshing out her characters is interesting since it differs from the plot of her books. Bella views her life as ordinary, lacking importance. It is not until she engages with mythological creatures that she feels she has a purpose. In the creative process, Meyer reverses this and places her fantastic characters in everyday situations.

Meyer's method of naming her characters, specifically Bella, is particularly interesting and revealing as well. Meyer explains, "What happened is that each of my boys, Gabe, Seth, and Eli, would have been named Isabella if they had been girls. This would have been my daughter's name, but I thought, 'Since I'm never going to get to use it, I'll use it in the book'" (632).

Meyer's explanation seems simple, but we must consider what this implies. Bella is essentially named after Meyer's non-existent daughter. This raises the question of whether or not Bella is how Meyer envisions her daughter. Do elements of *Twilight* reveal what Meyer would want for her daughter if she had one? Is Meyer attempting to write a continuation of her female lineage? Of course, we cannot make assumptions, but the origin of Bella's name raises multiple questions.

One of the final question asked about the text is:

Although many of the characters are vampires, and although there is always the knowledge that the Cullens have killed people and that thirst, although controlled, is always there with Edward in his most intimate moments with Bella- although all these things are true, you still have managed to tell a very sweet and innocent love story. How is that possible? (632)

The audience member correctly identifies the monstrosity of the Cullens, but makes incorrect observations about *Twilight's* love story. In the second chapter of my project, I discuss Edward's problematic behaviors and the misinterpretation of them as romantic. Edward frequently describes how dangerous he is and how he had considered murdering Bella by drinking her blood. Meyer's response to the question points out the contradictions of her writing while attempting to defend it. She states, "The core of the dream that I had was this sense of this innocent and unselfish love that is going on, but with the undercurrent of his natural desire to bite and kill her" (632). Meyer describes Edward's desire to kill Bella as an "undercurrent," yet there

is a moment where he explains in detail how he wanted to kill her the moment he met her.

Edward's love for Bella is not "unselfish." There is even a moment when Edward describes his desire to be with Bella regardless of the danger and says, "I'm essentially a selfish creature" (266). Examining Meyer's background provides useful information when examining *Twilight*, yet it cannot be our primary critical lens as readers. This brings me to a brief discussion on the Intentional Fallacy and breaking down literary ownership and interpretation.

The Intentional Fantasy and Reader Communities of Twilight

"The Intentional Fallacy" by W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley is a classic article that argues that literary critics should not worry about an author's intention when judging a literary text. I would like to examine this article alongside Meyer's authorial intention. Wimsatt and Beardsley emphasize how important questions of intention are to all aspects of literary criticism: "There is hardly a problem of literary criticism in which the critic's approach will not be qualified by his view of 'intention'" (468). They define "intention" as follows: "'Intention' . . . corresponds to *what he intended* in a formula which more or less explicitly has had wide acceptance" (468).

Later, they define it even more simply as the "design or plan in the author's mind" (469). Their main argument is: "that the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (468). Unlike Wimsatt and Beardsley, I believe authorial intention has value when examining literature. I think considering the perspective of the author is one of many pathways in critiquing their work. Although the author has inherent bias, as we see in Meyer's interview, her emotional attachment to her work prevents her from fully assessing its problematic elements and implications.

Wimsatt and Beardsley elaborate on their argument by offering a series of propositions. First: "A poem does not come into existence by accident . . . Yet to insist on the designing

intellect as a *cause* of a poem is not to grant the design or intention as a *standard*" (469). Of course an author has all sorts of intentions regarding their text, but these are not relevant in judging its success. Their second proposition is:

One must ask how a critic expects to get an answer to the question about intention. How is he to find out what the poet tried to do? If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem—for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem. (469)

Wimsatt and Beardsley elaborate on their first proposition, noting that we must go outside a literary work and authorial intent to examine it properly. This includes examining literary criticism, and more importantly the reactions of readers. The article proceeds to explore the concept of ownership for a literary work, specifically reader ownership:

The poem is not the critic's own and not the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge (pg number).

I am interested in the ways that the *Twilight Saga* belongs to the public and certain interpretive communities. It's not that I am entirely uninterested in Meyer's intentions, but I am more interested in the huge cultural impact that these texts have had. I intend to examine critical commentary of *Twilight*, along with audience reactions from *Twilight*'s intended and unintended audiences. Wimsatt and Beardsley's overarching point, with regard to my project, is that we cannot interpret the text by solely considering Meyer's authorial intent. While I am interested in

Meyer's intentions, I will not limit my interpretation to repeating her stated intentions. Because *Twilight* has become a cultural phenomenon, it is crucial to examine the reactions of those who made this possible, the readers. Therefore, a significant amount of my project will engage with reader-response criticism.

Reader-Response Criticism:

Gregory Castle provides an overview of reader-response criticism, noting, "reader-response theory explores the specific mechanisms whereby this self-understanding is achieved through the act of reading" (153). Reader-response criticism/theory emphasizes the importance of the reader's interpretation of a text. There are various interpretations of reader-response criticism with Castle citing New Criticism and Chicago School Neo-Aristotelians, but each school of thought concludes "reading is a part of a larger formal process that, far from being passive, is a skilled capacity for discovering the text's internal dynamics and structural unities" (154). Castle also emphasizes the importance of considering the reactions of the reader, rather than a text's structural features alone. The article notes William Empson's studies on poetry and his partial failure "to explore the reader's role in interpreting ambiguity" (154). I would like to look at textual evidence from *Twilight* to aid my writing, but it is just as important to consider the reactions of readers. An overarching question of my project is: Why is the *Twilight* Saga considered a cultural phenomenon? Therefore, we must consider reactions from those who have interacted with the text.

Castle's article proceeds to explain the importance of the reader and how the act of reading breathes life into a text. One of the schools of reader-response criticism that Castle explores is based in phenomenology. An important figure is Wolfgang Iser who expands on Roman Ingarden's point that, "the reader to some extent proves to be the co-creator of the

literary work of art” (156). This is very much true for *Twilight*, with fans engaging in parasocial interactions with the characters and also interacting with fanfictions in which they insert themselves into the text. I will elaborate upon this further in Chapter 2.

Another important figure in reader-response criticism is Stanley Fish. Fish emphasizes that communities of readers tend to interpret texts in certain ways. He calls these “interpretive communities.” My project examines the significance of interpretive communities. “*Twilight* Moms,” which I discuss in Chapter 2, would be an example of an interpretive community (159). Another concept that reader-response critics like J. Hillis Miller are interested in is an “ethics of reading.” For Miller, “ethics is a question that covers the whole domain of language” (158). My project is interested in exploring the ethical implications of Edward Cullen’s toxic masculinity. I focus on this in Chapter Two. Instead of simply labeling Meyer’s work as either ethical or unethical, I am interested in establishing a “grey area” in which the act of reading is open to multiple interpretations and therefore, a text like *Twilight* is neither simply good nor bad.

Chapter 1

“Someone Has to be the Adult”: Bella Swan as the Parentified Child

Twilight begins with Bella Swan moving from Phoenix, Arizona to Forks, Washington to live with her father, Charlie. This seems like an ordinary situation to start the text's narrative with, someone moving to a new place. Yet the context of these events must be taken into account, as they reveal crucial details about Bella. Bella narrates, “It was to Forks that I now exiled myself-- an action that I took with great horror. I detested Forks” (4). This excerpt reveals that despite not wanting to go to Forks, Bella has chosen to go regardless. But why has she “exiled” herself? What purpose does this serve?

Bella reveals she is leaving her mother, Reneé. Their interaction before Bella goes is brief yet telling. Reneé tells Bella, “You can come home whenever you want-- I'll come right back as soon as you need me” (4). This indicates Reneé will be leaving Arizona as well. It is later revealed that she is going to Florida with her second husband, Phil. It is unknown exactly how long Reneé will be away. Yet, Bella's further narration shows that Reneé has no interest in returning home anytime soon. She narrates, “I could see the sacrifice in her eyes behind the promise” (4). Ironically, Bella describes “sacrifice” in Reneé's eyes even though she is the one making a sacrifice by leaving when she does not want to. However, Bella's reading of her mother's expressions confirms her belief that she must leave Phoenix, which ultimately pushes her away.

Bella's sense of duty in her actions reflects how she prioritizes her mother's happiness over her own. This overall narrative is disorienting because children should not feel this way in their relationship with their parents. Bella's distorted perception of her relationship with her mother is a direct result of parentification. Barbara Chojnacka describes parentification as a

domestic situation that occurs when “the child takes on responsibility for the tasks, duties, safety and emotions of the family members (usually the parents), mostly in order to maintain the balance known also as homeostasis of the family” (85). Parentification, in simpler terms, is a role reversal between a child and their parents. It is a disorderly attempt to maintain order in the family. The children who are subjected to parentification are commonly identified as “parentified” children. Chojnacka proceeds to explain the harmful effects of parentification. She utilizes interviews with individuals who identified as parentified children and subsequent findings as evidence.

Chojnacka provides a timeline that leads to one becoming a parentified child. There are three specific phases within this timeline: proper childhood, transition period, and adult childhood. The time these phases occur varies in each individual. Proper childhood is described as “the time of proper, or relatively correct functioning of the family – as a period of normality, when the family roles seem natural.” The transition period is “circumstances and events significant or contributing to the transition from proper childhood to adult childhood.” Finally, adult childhood is described as “non-childhood” – i.e. childhood that has been lost or even taken away” (89-90).

If we take Chojnacka’s timeline for parentified children and apply it to Bella, it can be argued she does not experience a proper childhood. Bella is a child of divorce, having no memory of Charlie and Reneé’s marriage since she is only an infant when they separate. Charlie and Reneé’s divorce is the transition period that leads to Bella becoming a parentified child. Bella does not reveal her childhood memories in extreme detail, but her comments indicate her childhood was not conventional. When talking to Edward about her mother, Bella states, “My mom always says I was born thirty-five years old and that I get more middle-aged each year ...

Well, someone has to be the adult” (106). It is normal to acknowledge someone is mature for their age, yet Reneé’s exaggeration reveals an excessive maturity in Bella that is inappropriate. To say Bella was “born thirty-five years old” and journeys further into adulthood indicates there is something deeply wrong. Reneé’s passing comment blurs crucial temporal boundaries that must be established in a proper childhood. Therefore, Bella is essentially an adult child from infancy.

Chojnacka also notes four specific elements of adult childhood and how they are detrimental to development. The four elements of adult childhood are responsibility, self-managing, loneliness, and involuntary heroism. Responsibility and loneliness are fairly self-explanatory in what they entail. Chojnacka defines self-managing as “taking up an independent attitude in most spheres of one’s own life and family life” (92). This practice is inevitably intertwined with parentification’s aspects of responsibility and loneliness. Chojnacka concludes the parentified child is often an involuntary hero. These children are “forced into heroism directly (by orders, as well as duties and statements assigned) or indirectly (as a result of circumstances, their own sense of responsibility for the family, feeling bonds and duty towards family and family members, especially parents)” (94-95). The most prominent feeling of parentified children is isolation since they are forced to take on a parent’s responsibilities beyond their emotional and physical capability. As we look further into *Twilight*, it can be argued that Bella’s relationship with Reneé embodies these elements.

Bella’s sense of responsibility is emphasized through her descriptions of Reneé. Bella subtly infantilizes her, noting she has “childlike eyes” (4). She describes Reneé as “very young for her age,” reflecting how she views her as immature. Bella’s interactions with Reneé and manner of speaking to her also intensifies this perception. Reneé sends Bella multiple emails,

expressing that she misses her. These emails are sent within close proximity to one another, showing Reneé is worried. Bella attempts to calm down Reneé in her responses, telling her “Don’t do anything rash” and to “relax” and “breathe” (34). Bella takes it upon herself to alleviate Reneé’s anxiety when this should be the other way around. Bella also exhibits responsibility when identifying where her mother’s blouse is in the same email. Reneé writes to Bella, “I can’t find my pink blouse. Do you know where I put it?” (33). Bella replies, “Your blouse is at the dry cleaners -- you were supposed to pick it up Friday” (34). Bella’s ease in helping her mother indicates this is their usual dynamic.

Before I continue my analysis, I would like to acknowledge that other scholars have made similar observations about Bella and Reneé’s relationship. In “Parent-Child Relationships in the Twilight Saga: Implications for Family Life Education,” Karen Myer-Bowman and Joan Jurich write, “In this case, rather than Reneé offering the support and guidance a parent typically provides to a child, Bella took on these parent responsibilities with her mother, foregoing an important part of her middle childhood and adolescent experience” (374). Myer-Bowman and Jurich’s findings reinforce that Bella never truly experiences a proper childhood because she is occupied with parenting her mother. This excerpt also connects to the elements of sacrifice described in Chojnacka’s article.

As mentioned previously, Bella makes a great sacrifice when moving to Forks so Reneé can travel to Florida with Phil. This event that begins the text is the greatest example of Bella’s involuntary heroism. She later describes her sacrifice as a “self-imposed sentence here in purgatory” (79). Regardless of her misery in Forks, Bella undertakes this overwhelming burden for her mother. Reneé’s relationship with Phil further emphasizes her immaturity. This relationship is not described in detail, yet Bella notes how “Phil makes her feel even younger”

(106). Reneé is consumed by the relationship like a teenager, allowing her responsibility as a mother to be overshadowed. As a result of Reneé's negligence, Bella develops a sense of independence which can be identified as self-management. Bella's self-management is later exemplified in her dynamic with her father, Charlie.

“You Baby Me Too Much”: Functional Parentification in *Twilight*

While Bella's relationship with Charlie is not the same as her and Reneé's, it is still subject to parentification. Bella takes on the role of a domestic figure while living with Charlie. When establishing this dynamic, Bella narrates, “Last night I'd discovered Charlie couldn't cook much besides fried eggs and bacon. So I requested that I be assigned kitchen detail during the duration of my stay” (31). Bella is not forced to cook, yet she volunteers to regardless. Due to her relationship with Reneé, it is as if Bella is programmed to care for Charlie as well.

Bella takes it upon herself to get groceries and cook various meals for Charlie. For example, she narrates, “I unloaded all the groceries ... I wrapped potatoes in foil and stuck them in the oven to bake, covered a steak in marinade...” (33). Bella takes on multiple tasks and responsibilities to take care of Charlie and herself, reminding us of Chojnacka's observation of self-management in parentified children. As mentioned previously, Bella and Charlie's relationship is subject to parentification, specifically functional parentification. Chojnacka explains, “Functional parentification consists of using the child to carry out work related to housekeeping and the organization of family life; they take over duties such as cooking, cleaning, washing, taking care of siblings and other family members, or even earning money” (85). Charlie does not demand Bella to do these tasks, yet his lack of opposition reflects how he is initially complicit. Similar to Reneé, Charlie's behavior partially blurs the temporal boundaries between childhood and adulthood.

As *Twilight* progresses, however, Charlie exhibits more independence and reminds Bella of his position as an adult. When Bella is going out one evening, she asks Charlie, “You’ll be okay for dinner, right?” He replies, “Bells, I fed myself for seventeen years before you got here” (149). Charlie establishes Bella is not his sole caretaker, nor is she meant to be. He reminds her that he has always been capable of taking care of himself, therefore she does not have to worry whether or not he eats. Charlie also identifies how Bella’s actions infantilize him. For example, Bella hurries to clean the dishes after she and Charlie have eaten. He tells her, “Leave the dishes, I can do them tonight. You baby me too much” (358). Unlike Reneé, Charlie identifies how Bella’s behaviors create an inappropriate dynamic between the two of them and he is able to outwardly express to her, “You baby me too much.” We also see how Charlie prioritizes Bella’s well-being as her father.

“I Wasn’t Used to Being Taken Care of”: Charlie’s Care for Bella

Bella’s relationship with Charlie is significantly healthier than her relationship with Reneé. Charlie shows that he cares for Bella through his actions, and does not act as selfishly as Reneé. For example, there is a moment when Charlie puts snow chains on Bella’s tires. She narrates, “Charlie had gotten up who knows how early to put snow chains on my truck. My throat suddenly felt tight. I wasn’t used to being taken care of, and Charlie’s unspoken concern caught me by surprise” (55). Reneé’s negligence has conditioned Bella into not being “used to being taken care of.” This reflects Bella’s practice of self-management. Charlie is not perfect in how he communicates his love for Bella, as she notes his concern is “unspoken.” However, his actions prove he is a loving father that cares for his daughter. Charlie is willing to get up early on a cold morning to make sure Bella is safe when driving to school. This action seems so insignificant and could easily be glossed over, yet this is more than Reneé has done for Bella. For this reason,

Bella becomes overwhelmed by her emotions and feels a tightness in her throat as though she is going to cry.

Bella and Charlie's relationship develops with time and their bond also deepens. Myer-Bowman and Jurich explore this further in their writing. They build upon the idea of unspoken care, mentioning Bella and Charlie's evening routine of sitting and watching television in silence (365). This interaction is significant because Bella explains how she enjoys making Charlie happy. She thinks to herself, "it felt good, despite my depression, to make him happy" (149). Bella is able to feel some form of happiness while doing something for Charlie; whereas with René, this feeling is absent. There are also moments when Bella genuinely considers Charlie's feelings as a father. She narrates, "It must be a hard thing to be a father; living in fear that your daughter would meet a boy she liked, but also having to worry if she didn't" (227). Bella tries to put herself in her father's shoes, considering his perspective on her dating life. Bella and Charlie's relationship is not perfect, yet we witness compassionate and genuine interactions between them.

Conclusion

Bella's relationships with each of her parents differ greatly. René is rarely portrayed as generous. From the beginning of the text, Bella sacrifices a great deal of her happiness for her mother. This René's immaturity causes her to forget her responsibilities as a mother, making Bella feel the need to take care of her. We see the impact of René's behaviors impact Bella's relationship with Charlie, since their relationship demonstrates functional parentification. However, their relationship becomes more authentic as the text progresses. Ultimately, it is important to remember Bella's relationships with each of her parents because they influence her future relationships and what she desires from those relationships.

Chapter 2

“I May Not Be a Human, But I Am a Man”:

Edward Cullen’s Toxic Masculinity in Relation to Fantasy

Edward Cullen, a vampire who consumes the blood of animals instead of humans, is Bella’s primary love interest in *Twilight*. Edward’s presence shifts Bella’s focus from her life’s banality to a relentless desire for him. Edward’s interest in Bella often baffles her since her self-perception suffers from an overall lack of confidence. During their first conversation, Bella narrates, “I couldn’t fathom his interest, but he continued to stare at me with penetrating eyes, as if my dull life’s story was somehow vitally important” (48). Bella’s description of her life as “dull” reveals she does not feel her life is significant. She reads Edward’s watchful eyes as saying her life is “somehow vitally important.” Bella feels a sense of validation from Edward, which guides her affection. Before meeting Bella, Edward “doesn’t date” any girls (22). Many girls find him attractive, yet he only pays attention to Bella. The nature of their relationship has been subject to extensive controversy from critics. Edward is controlling, often disregarding Bella’s boundaries while she romanticizes his behaviors. We must ask ourselves why this is their dynamic while considering reactions to their relationship, both positive and negative. This also leads us to consider the general presence of the toxic masculinity in the text. Edward’s words and actions should be viewed as warning signs that he is a potentially controlling partner. However, Bella’s desire to be saved blurs her logic.

As noted before, Bella’s self-confidence is astoundingly low. She also expresses a subconscious desire to be saved. For example, she narrates, “Possibly my crippling clumsiness was seen as endearing rather than pathetic, casting me as a damsel in distress.” (55). Bella describes herself in reductive terms, hoping others will perceive her as “endearing rather than

pathetic.” Her inner narration reinforces her negative perception of herself. She deliberately characterizes herself as a “damsel in distress” because she wants to be saved by a “hero” or at least someone she perceives as a hero. Bella believes being saved by someone will provide her with a sense of purpose. Shortly after Bella’s narration, Edward saves her from being crushed by a swerving car in the school parking lot. Her inner desires align with Edward’s actions, drawing her to him as a result. Bella narrates, “Two long, white hands shot out protectively in front of me, and the van shuddered to a stop a foot from my face, the large hands fitting providentially into a deep dent in the side of the van’s body” (56). Bella describing Edward’s hands “protectively” stopping the van depicts him as the hero who has saved her. Bella’s fantasy to be saved is fulfilled in turn. Her fascination in Edward and her attraction grows, and she communicates with him more following this.

Before they enter their relationship, there are multiple moments in which Edward warns Bella to stay away from him. Edward tells her “You really *should* stay away from me” and “If you’re smart, you’ll avoid me” (88-89). Regardless, Bella is drawn to Edward more as the plot progresses. However, she is not completely to blame for not heeding Edward’s warnings. For example, Edward’s words often give off mixed signals. He tells Bella, “It would be more... *prudent* for you not to be my friend... But I’m tired of trying to stay away from you, Bella” (84). Edward’s words simultaneously push Bella away and pull her in. This tendency to not communicate clearly and choose one mindset is a negative quality within itself. Edward also playfully engages in Bella’s speculation that he is not a regular person, while expressing he is dangerous. Bella shares theories she has about Edward that have parallels to the origins of a superhero, nodding to her desire to be saved. Edward responds, “What if I’m not a superhero? What if I’m the bad guy” (92)?

Fans of *Twilight* defend Edward and argue that Bella maintains her autonomy in their relationship. In “How to Bring Your Kids up Sadomasochist: Intimate-Partner Violence and the Twilight Phenomenon,” Frann Michel discusses the criticism that Edward forces Bella to isolate herself from her friends. Fans argue Bella detaches from these relationships on her own. Elements of this argument are correct. For example, when Bella is deep into her relationship with Edward, her friend, Jessica calls her on the phone. Bella narrates, “It felt like months rather than days since I’d spoken to Jess” (355). Bella’s focus on her relationship with Edward inadvertently creates a distance between Bella and her friends. Regardless of Bella exercising her free will, Michel identifies this as “a sign that the relationship is unhealthy” (4). The article also notes that the manner in which Bella’s relationship with Edward consumes her causes her to lose a sense of herself. However, it can be argued that Bella never truly had a sense of who she was. She does not have a fully developed identity at seventeen when she meets Edward. Although Bella is portrayed as mature since she is a parentified child, this does not change her age. She has not thoroughly experienced life and she has only the lens of childhood and adolescence. Bella’s inner age and literal age brings us to the contrasting fanbases of *Twilight* and their reactions.

Narrative Transportation and Parasocial Interactions in Twilight Moms

In “The Twilight of Youth: Understanding Feminism and Romance in Twilight Moms’ Connection to the Young-Adult Vampire Series,” Jennifer Stevens, and Melissa Click, Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz discuss *Twilight* Moms, an unintended fanbase, and their interactions with the text. The article focuses on “the results of an online survey of self-identified ‘Twilight Moms,’ adult women who have at least 1 child and identify as fans of Twilight, the popular young-adult vampire series” (61). The survey specifically relates to “transportation into the Twilight narrative and parasocial interactions with the Twilight characters” (61). Notably, *Twilight* Moms with

more “traditional” beliefs about women and identified as nonfeminist were able to transport into the text’s narrative more easily than those with differing views. Dissatisfaction with romantic partners also “predicted parasocial interactions with *Twilight* characters” (61). Engaging in literary fantasy is ultimately a form of escapism.

Aubrey, Click, and Behm-Morawitz question why the *Twilight* Saga would be compelling to adult women since critics argue the series exhibits antifeminist themes. Examples include “Edward Cullen’s controlling behavior” and Bella conforming to “passive and stereotypical portrayals of young women” (61-62). Aubrey, Click, and Behm-Morawitz specifically note Bella’s submissiveness and insecurity, along with how she is “utterly content to serve the needs of others” (62). I agree with the first two attributes, but it is misreading the text to label Bella as “utterly content.” There are many moments when she expresses her grievances while narrating and how moving to Forks itself is a sacrifice.

Understanding the appeal of *Twilight* among this fanbase is important for two reasons. The first reason is that it “allows us to further our understanding about how fans use their fandom and fan objects as sites for self-reflection” (62). Aubrey, Click, and Behm-Morawitz expand upon this, noting C. Sandvoss’ argument that fans often “mimic and see themselves in fan objects” (62). The stronger this connection is, the more a fan object becomes part of the fan’s identity. The second reason is “the self-reflection process is likely to be even more salient when the fans perceive their fan objects to be not intended for them” (62). The article expands upon this point, noting that this specific fanbase is more likely to rationalize their fan identity and have more self-reflection than the intended audience of the series.

Transportation is described as the “readers’ ability to vividly imagine the characters and settings in a narrative world, the tendency to become emotionally involved in the text, and the

ability to become completely absorbed by the reading experience” (62). Aubrey, Click, and Behm-Morawitz are particularly interested in how this affects the beliefs of the reader, noting prior research that “audiences are more likely to be persuaded by a narrative if they are transported by it” (62-63). In other words, readers are more likely to accept the events of the narrative and the behavior of the characters. “Transported readers are expected to show more story-consistent beliefs and opinions than their less transported counterparts” (63) since they are not counterarguing with *Twilight*’s narrative or the behavior of characters.

Parasocial interaction is “when the viewer perceives a relationship of friendship with a character or media personality based on affective ties with that character or persona” (63). Aubrey, Click, and Morawitz argue that “Because *Twilight* readers have privileged access to characters’ innermost thoughts, feelings, and motivations, they likely develop an ‘illusion of intimacy’ with them” (63). This is true for Bella since she is the narrator of the text. However, our perception of other characters is strongly influenced by Bella’s narration since our access to their interiority is more limited. Aubrey, Click, and Morawitz also found that parasocial interactions were dependent upon the readers’ satisfaction with their romantic relationships. These interactions perhaps act as “an escape for them [*Twilight* Moms], especially those who were dissatisfied with their romantic relationships” (68). Another possible reason was readers remembering the nostalgia associated with first love, making them feel an attraction to *Twilight*’s plot. It is also important, however, to examine how young girls interact with *Twilight*.

***Twilight*’s Intended Audience and Their Reactions, Meyer’s Depiction of the “Sympathetic Vampire”**

It is also crucial to examine the reactions of young girls, *Twilight*’s intended audience. In “Vampires, Desire, Girls and God: *Twilight* and the Spiritualities of Adolescent Girls,” Joyce

Ann Mercer provides commentary on *Twilight* and Edward's behaviors, utilizing interviews with female adolescent readers. Mercer discusses the interviews, starting with a thirteen-year-old girl named Lexi. Lexi shares having a poster of Edward in her locker at school and claims, "He's like the perfect guy" (265). Lexi's response is parallel to Bella's narrations that depict Edward as perfect (which causes us to consider if the reader adopts elements of Bella's perspective since she is the text's primary narrator). Bella continuously notes Edward's inhuman beauty. In one excerpt, she narrates, "I couldn't imagine how an angel could be any more glorious. There was nothing about him that could be improved upon" (241). Bella acknowledges that Edward is not human. However, she ironically does this, not by identifying him as the monster he is, but instead by comparing him to an ethereal being, an angel. Her romantic feelings towards Edward causes her to view him as perfect and not needing to be "improved." This leads me to Mercer's mention of Milly Williamson's study of vampire fiction: "Williamson notes the literary appearance of what she terms the 'sympathetic vampire' with whom female reader-fans identify rather than fear" (268).

Bella often sympathizes with Edward. For example, Edward discusses his desire to be around Bella and his simultaneous fear he may hurt her. Bella narrates, "I realized slowly that his words should frighten me. I waited for that fear to come, but all I could seem to feel was an ache for his pain" (246). Bella's narration reveals that she views Edward as a tortured soul instead of a monster capable of harming her. "An ache for his pain" takes the place of the fear she should feel. Rather than avoid Edward for her safety, Bella wishes to learn more about him. Edward describes his early reactions to meeting her, noting his immediate desire to drink her blood and the restraint required not to do so. Even after Edward provides extensive evidence of how dangerous he is, Bella does not withdraw from him. She narrates, "Common sense told me I

should be terrified. Instead, I was relieved to finally understand. And I was filled with compassion for his suffering, even now, as he confessed his craving to end my life” (272). Bella strangely feels enlightenment rather than terror when listening to Edward’s monstrous tendencies. Edward’s restraint is viewed as a quality that makes him compelling to Bella and fans of the text.

Mercer’s interview shifts to discuss Lexi’s emotional response to the book and she shares, “I couldn’t put it down ... it was like I was addicted to this book and couldn’t stop reading it” (265). Mercer asks Lexi why she enjoys the book with such intensity, and Lexi’s response is rather interesting. She explains, “I got caught up in the story and just had to know what was going to happen next. . . but actually the main reason I couldn’t stop is that when I read this book I feel all these intense feelings inside, when I’m in these stories it’s like I’m the one in love” (265). As mentioned previously, fans defend Edward’s behavior, citing *Twilight* is simply a work of the fantasy genre. However, we must consider *Twilight*’s narrative beyond this context. *Twilight* also acts as a fantasy in the form of a psychological mechanism.

Mercer also discusses the appeal of vampires, specifically Meyer’s version of the vampire. She writes, “Meyer’s particular riff on the features of vampires makes them especially well suited to fill out the formulaic demands of romance fiction for leading men who are strong, gorgeous, dangerous, and available” (268). As mentioned previously, Bella often views Edward’s behaviors as an indication of his affection, and her perspective of him is influenced by her attraction. She often romanticizes these behaviors and brushes off their problematic implications. For example, when she learns Edward has been following her, Bella narrates, “I wondered if it should bother me that he was following me; instead I felt a strange surge of pleasure” (174). Rather than conclude Edward’s behavior is inappropriate, Bella perceives this as Edward’s desire

towards her and relishes in this. In the rare moments that Bella expresses her fear towards Edward, it is often intertwined with wonder. For example, when she reaches out to touch his hand when they are alone in a meadow, she describes being “always afraid, even now, that he would disappear like a mirage, too beautiful to be real” (261). Bella’s comparison of Edward to a “mirage, too beautiful to be real” demonstrates her disbelief of Edward’s physical beauty rather than his existence as a monster. Bella’s narration reflects her fear of Edward’s absence, instead of acknowledging the prominent dangers associated with his presence. Notably, Edward is not the only example of toxic masculinity in *Twilight*. A more sinister figure is depicted in James, the primary villain of the text.

Villainous Toxic Masculinity in James

In comparing Edward and James, it can be argued that *Twilight* provides us with two versions of toxic masculinity: one that is sympathetic and desirable, and another that is contemptible. What differentiates these expressions of masculinity is connection to family or lack thereof. Edward has been with his chosen family for a majority of his existence. He uses their guidance as a moral compass to consider potential consequences of his actions. James is nomadic and lacks connection to humanity because he does not connect to the concept of a family. James' first interaction with Bella reveals his disregard for humanity immediately. When he realizes she is a human, he comments to the Cullens, “You brought a snack” (379)? James notably does not address Bella directly when first acknowledging her. He does not speak to her, nor ask her name. Instead, he dehumanizes her by calling her “a snack.” Bella’s humanity/personhood is meaningless to James, it simply means he can consume her.

There is also a distinct contrast in Edward and James’ personas. Edward’s actions are thought of as protective of Bella, painting him as noble and heroic. James is portrayed as

predatory and sadistic, taking pleasure in pursuing Bella and subsequently causing her to suffer. James immediately decides that Bella is his prey and he will do anything to capture her. Edward comments, “Tracking is his passion, his obsession --- and he wants her, Alice --- *her*, specifically” and “Once he commits to a hunt, he’s unshakable” (382-383). Describing tracking as a “passion” and “obsession” for James reflects how he is willing to disregard every consequence to achieve his means and capture his prey.

When the Cullens position themselves as Bella’s protectors and show no intention of backing down to James, he is taken aback. He is also simultaneously intrigued by their willingness to protect what would traditionally be their prey. The Cullens deny their monstrous instincts to maintain their humanity. However, James has no interest in backing down either. If anything, he is more motivated to hunt Bella. Edward explains:

He’s not used to being thwarted, no matter how insignificant the object. He thinks of himself as a hunter and nothing else. His existence is consumed by tracking, and a challenge is all he asks of life. Suddenly we’ve presented him with a beautiful challenge --- a large clan of strong fighters all bent on protecting the one vulnerable element. You wouldn’t believe how euphoric he is right now. It’s his favorite game, and we’ve just made it his most exciting game ever. (397)

By identifying as “a hunter and nothing else,” James has closed himself off from feeling empathy or compassion. He takes enjoyment in challenges and views the suffering of his victims as a reward. The Cullens' connection to Bella, specifically Edward’s, makes her more desirable to James. This reveals the elements of possession and entitlement found in toxic masculinity. Edward demonstrates ownership of Bella throughout the text. James desires to not only harm Bella, but also infuriate Edward by taking Bella from him.

James does not care for humanity or what is morally right or wrong, yet he is able to navigate social mores/etiquette. He ultimately exhibits sociopathic tendencies. James' behaviors emphasize how horrifying it is to have a villain who is able to manipulate social elements in order to achieve their anti-social ends. Laurent, another nomadic vampire, warns the Cullens, "Don't underestimate James. He's got a brilliant mind and unparalleled senses. He's every bit as comfortable in the human world as you seem to be, and he won't come at you head on" (400). James more so views humanity as a spectacle, highlighting his role as an outside observer rather than an active member of human society. James elaborates on his perspective when attacking Bella towards the climax of the text and says, "I will give your strange coven this much, you humans can be quite interesting. I guess I can see the draw of observing you. It's amazing --- some of you seem to have no sense of your own self interest at all" (445). James never abandons self interest, contrary to the Cullens who have formed a chosen family, which is built on sacrificing self interest for a collective familial good. This leads us to observe the Cullens as a family and their behaviors.

Chapter 3

“This Is My Family”: The Cullens as the Nuclear Family

We see Bella’s desires extend beyond romantic into the realm of family. Specifically, Celia Jameson and Julia Dane provide an interesting commentary on Bella’s desire, writing, “From early on in the narrative, Bella’s fear of the vampires is overridden by her desire to become vampire herself, or more specifically to join the Cullens, who have organized themselves into a version of the nuclear family” (244-245). Using my previous observation that Bella is a parentified child, this assertion is valid. She comes from a broken family background, never experiencing a “proper childhood” in the words of Chojnacka. She also does not have siblings. The Cullens label themselves as foster siblings with Carlisle and Esme as their foster parents. Bella’s feeling of isolation as a parentified child ultimately shapes this desire to be part of the chosen family formed by the Cullens.

Due to the Cullen siblings forming couples, we briefly wonder about the incestuous implication this has. This is addressed when Bella first sees the Cullens at school. Her friend, Jessica, remarks, “They’re all *together* though --- Emmett and Rosalie, and Jasper and Alice, I mean. And they *live* together” (20). The romantic and familial bonds formed among the Cullens inevitably attracts controversy. Bella perceives Jessica’s comments and tone reflecting “the shock and condemnation of the small town” (20). While the Cullens identify as a foster family rather than a coven of vampires, they are still viewed as strange. We can also briefly turn our attention to the incest taboo, the universal but culturally variant custom that forbids sexual relations and romantic ties between two people classified as too closely related. With the Cullens, however, there are multiple factors to consider. They are vampires rather than people. During their lives as people, their pre-existence for lack of better terms, the Cullens led individual lives in which they

did not know one another. It is Carlisle who brings them together, which will be elaborated upon further. However, it should be noted that we see exogamy, the social practice of marrying or pursuing romantic relationships outside one's social group/tribe, in *Twilight's* narrative when Edward pursues Bella. Bella is undeniably drawn to Edward, but is also equally fascinated by his family. By close reading excerpts of the text and analyzing qualities of individual family members, Bella's interest is explained.

It is revealed the Cullens "moved" to Forks from Alaska two years prior to the events of *Twilight*. In actuality, the Cullens have returned home after being away long enough to not arouse suspicion of their immortality. Bella feels connected to the Cullens through their shared movement. She believes, similar to herself, the Cullens lack geographic roots. This is partially true, since they cannot stay in one area for a substantial time like several years. When Bella hears the Cullens' alibi, she narrates, "I felt a surge of pity, and relief. Pity because, as beautiful as they were, they were outsiders, clearly not accepted. Relief that I wasn't the only newcomer here, and certainly not the most interesting by any standard" (22). Bella is drawn to the Cullens because she believes they also lack a sense of belonging in their surroundings. She labels them as "outsiders," creating a mirror in which she sees elements of how she feels. Bella identifies with these beautiful and strange monsters, feeding her curiosity about them. Unlike Bella, however, the Cullens' lack of connection to the humans around them does not bother them because they have each other.

The monstrosity of the Cullens already draws in our attention as readers, yet their familial connection provides an interesting twist to Meyer's depiction of vampires. Carlisle and Esme act as parents, having compassion for each of their "children." Carlisle is the oldest Cullen at 362-years-old. Edward recounts Carlisle's origins to Bella, emphasizing his initial loneliness

among mortals. Edward is the first to be turned into a vampire by Carlisle and he explains to Bella: “Since he [Carlisle] couldn’t find a companion, he would create one” (341). Edward explains, however, that Carlisle only changed him because he was on the verge of death during the Spanish Influenza and his family had already died. In turn, Carlisle takes on the form of a father and, inadvertently, a savior. Carlisle continues to add more members to his “family” in a similar manner, saving them from dying. Carlisle’s behaviors prompts us to consider how he is an unspoken yet glaring patriarchal figure.

Carlisle acts as the family’s moral compass and he is depicted as faultless when Edward discusses his origins. Edward explains: “When he [Carlisle] knew what he had become... he rebelled against it” (336). Carlisle’s aversion to monstrosity is uncommon, as there are moments where he would rather choose death than live as a monster. Carlisle eventually discovers he can fight his monstrous instincts by consuming the blood of animals instead of humans, becoming a “vegetarian” vampire. Edward elaborates on Carlisle’s epiphany, saying: “His strength returned and he realized there was an alternative to being the vile monster he feared. Had he not eaten venison in his former life? Over the next few months his new philosophy was born. He could exist without becoming a demon” (337). Carlisle’s “philosophy” acts as a blueprint and moral code for the future members of his family.

As mentioned previously, Edward is the first to be turned into a vampire by Carlisle. Then there is Esme, Carlisle’s romantic partner. Their family is not perfect and there are challenges. Edward notes rebelling against Carlisle and Esme, abandoning their family for a few years while feeding on human blood. Edward’s absence is brief and he tells Bella: “It took me only a few years to return to Carlisle and recommit to his vision” (342). Carlisle is depicted as a morally upright and holy figure, while the rest of the Cullens are disciples to him. To build this

religious connection further, the text alludes to the biblical story of the Prodigal Son and Edward recounts: “They welcomed me back like a prodigal. It was more than I deserved” (343).

Carlisle’s character emphasizes the influence of patriarchy while prompting the reader to consider religious themes. Through these references to patriarchy and religion, Meyer solidifies the already apparent connection between morality and family.

Esme, Carlisle’s partner, acts as a mother to Edward, Rosalie, Emmett, Jasper, and Alice. She explains to Bella: “Well, I do think of them as my children in most ways. I never could get over my mothering instincts” (368). Esme, unlike Reneé, embraces motherhood. Each of the Cullen children could easily survive on their own, yet Esme’s care does not falter. Bella has been abandoned by her mother in every regard, therefore this alternate image of motherhood is likely overwhelming. Esme’s origins explain her nature. She recounts losing her baby shortly after childbirth, “Yes, my first and only baby. He died just a few days after he was born, the poor tiny thing... It broke my heart --- that’s why I jumped off the cliff, you know” (368). Bella is taken aback, not realizing Esme attempted suicide as a human. Reneé treats motherhood as burdensome, whereas Esme cannot bear the thought of living after losing her child. This contrast between Reneé and Esme emphasizes the neglect Bella has endured, pushing her to the Cullens.

Meyer also depicts the Cullens as a family that lives together when other vampires tend to be nomadic, often wandering the world alone. Towards the climax of *Twilight*, Bella and the Cullens encounter James’ coven. Carlisle first says, “I’m Carlisle. This is my family” (377). The use of the word “family” emphasizes their closeness. Laurent, a member of the coven, expresses curiosity regarding the Cullen’s living situation. When Carlisle explains they have “a permanent residence nearby,” Laurent questions, “Permanent? How do you manage that?” Carlisle also labels their residence as home and Bella narrates, “James and Victoria exchanged a surprised

look at the mention of the word 'home'" (377-378). The idea of having a home is a foreign concept to the nomadic vampires, therefore they are baffled and confused. Overall, the Cullen's connection to these elements of humanity provides the reader with an ideal image of vampires, whereas the nomadic coven's disassociation is a manifestation of anxiety.

Bella is not a stranger to the concept of living somewhere for an extended period of time. However, there is inevitable pain associated with her homelife. She spends most of her childhood living with Reneé, but she ends up feeling like an exile. Charlie is not a bad parental figure, but Bella's relationship with him is limited by the lack of time they have together. Before moving to Forks, Bella only spends a few weeks with Charlie during the summer. They are unable to build a close relationship. Of course, Charlie cares for his daughter the way a father should. Yet, Bella and Charlie are unable to express their care for one another openly. For these reasons, Bella feels drawn to the Cullens. Bella and the Cullens are connected through their experiences with loneliness and the attempt to remedy this. Being a super predator or immortal does not protect one from loneliness, there is an inevitable need for a family. This vulnerability and the desire to tend to it draws a bridge between Bella, a human, and the Cullens, a family of monsters.

Epilogue: An Interview and Analysis of *Twilight's* Ending

To conclude my project, I think it is only right to include an interview with a fan of *Twilight*, my sister. Amanda is both my sister and dearest friend who served as an inspiration for my project throughout this process. Notably, elements of Amanda's childhood and upbringing correlate with my descriptions of the parentified child. Amanda is technically my adoptive sister and her mother is my aunt. My aunt has developmental disabilities that affected her parenting skills, specifically her emotional development and maturity. In the past, Amanda has expressed sadness that she has emotionally outgrown her mother and their roles have been reversed at times as a result. When my mother and father took Amanda in, it was not without challenges. Amanda frequently expressed the feeling of not belonging in our house, and the fear that she was a burden to my family and those around her. With the years we have spent together, she has come to realize we are her family and she is loved and she does belong. The following interview consists of five questions that I sent Amanda via text, reflecting on her experiences as a reader and a parentified child, and her answers which she composed.

1. What resonated most with you when reading *Twilight*?

The world was immersive. The normal life of living in a boring town like Forks along with the supernatural element of vampires that Bella was just discovering for the first time was a solid form of escapism for someone like me who also lived in a small town attending a small high school.

2. How did you connect with Bella as a reader?

Bella was vague enough to put myself in her shoes. Brown hair, brown eyes. Describes like a majority of people. I also happened to have pale skin and be quiet and kind of boring. Her mom was kind of childlike, and so was mine. I grew up in a home that wasn't my mom's but it wasn't

by my own choice. It was nice to read about a character who chose it and sacrificed her own comfort for the sake of her mom's when all I ever wanted was to live with my mom.

3. Do you believe your upbringing made you connect to the text more deeply than the average reader?

I think a lot of lonely kids seek for something to bring excitement that will save them from the loneliness they experience. So yes, I do. I don't think Bella explicitly expressed her loneliness, but it was clear through the lukewarm friendships and her solitary day to day that she was. She found something extraordinary that saved her from that loneliness. Not only was it the dangerous and exciting world of vampires, but also a love that saved her from having to only look out for herself and everyone around her. Edward was a protector who made his entire existence about her. While the relationship is intense and problematic, I think the text provides a safe exploration of that kind of relationship and a needed escape.

4. Do you believe connection to family or lack thereof influences morality?

I think it does. Good people intervening in your life can change a person's entire outlook of life itself. While it definitely plays a part, I don't think family is the only factor that goes into someone's morality, individual differences can account for that too. It's kind of like the nature vs. nurture debate. I think both determine empathy and one's own view of morality. I do think we have some intrinsic understanding of right and wrong, but life circumstances and family can either encourage and honor that nature or jade and harden a person. Some people are more naturally resilient to the challenges and existentialism of life than others. Some people need a good community of people around them to encourage the good in them while negative influences may bring out the negative influence.

5. Do you believe your identity as a parentified child influenced your future desires such as dreams or romantic relationships?

It definitely has. Even with good relationships I feel a desire to be cared for and can be resentful if I don't feel that need met. Despite having this need, I also actively fight the attempts of those who want to care for me. I have the tendency to view others as incapable of caring for me and lacking self-sufficiency, so that to some degree I need to worry about their well-being and feel responsible for them because I don't expect them to do it for themselves. Overall, I feel it has affected my ability to depend on others and to an extent allowing others to depend on me because I view it as responsibility. I don't think the identity of the parentified child is something that I truly carry with me as a title I have for myself, otherwise I feel it leans into learned helplessness. Everyone's upbringing affects them to some degree, and I believe healing and life experiences can help shape you to have healthier relationships and life goals. Good people can show you a good balance of emotional give and take. I have seen it happen for myself. But I'll always have the goal to be self-sufficient in a truly healthy and life fulfilling way rather than it being rooted in a negative outlook of the world and relationships because of childhood experiences.

Although Amanda's early answers are quite general, as the interview proceeds, her answers become more personal. Amanda's first answer, referring to how the text is immersive, is representative of the way that *Twilight's* various fan bases feel able to insert themselves in the text's narrative. While escapism is part of *Twilight's* appeal to Amanda, it is clear that the contingencies of her personal experiences, particularly her loneliness, help her to connect to Bella's story. Having said that, *Twilight* does not act as a remedy for Amanda's traumas, but rather it is a literary mirror for her. Just as Bella is a mirror for Meyer's fantasies as a writer, and the Cullens are a mirror for Bella's loneliness, *Twilight* is a mirror through which Amanda sees

herself reflected. Although she recognizes that the label “parentified child” applies to her, Amanda does not desire to “carry” it as a title for the rest of her life. Instead of understanding herself as permanently defined by the family situation into which she was born, she leaves the door open to be a totally new identity defined by new family dynamics. Unsurprisingly, given Amanda’s connection to Bella, Bella too is eager to define herself as a member of her chosen family at the conclusion of *Twilight*.

“I Have my Own Life to Live”: Bella’s Desire to Become Immortal

At the end of *Twilight*, Bella concludes that she wants to become a vampire and join the Cullens. We question if Bella wants to reclaim childhood, since she is becoming an immortal adolescent and joining the Cullen family. Edward objects to this immediately and prompts Bella to consider her parents. Bella’s response is notable in that it emphasizes the impact of being a parentified child on her desires. She explains: “Reneé has always made the choices that work for her. She would want me to do the same. And Charlie’s resilient, he’s used to being on his own. I can’t take care of them forever. I have my own life to live” (475). Bella’s musings about her parents reveal both her resentment towards her mother and emotional distance from her father. Reneé makes “choices that work for *her*” (italics mine), not Bella. Charlie feels like a stranger to Bella, as he is “used to being on his own.” Bella concludes that she must detach from them for her own sake. We question whether this can be considered a healthy transition from adolescence to adulthood in which one concludes they can detach from their parental figures. Yet in Bella’s circumstances, there are elements of being jaded and we wonder if she desires to completely abandon childhood and its memories.

Bella's desire to become a vampire is also connected to elements of fantasy and escapism. When Edward argues that Bella should embrace her humanity, she narrates, "I wished there was some way to explain how very uninterested I was in a normal human life" (495). This narration connects to Bella's perspective of her life as banal before meeting Edward and his family. There is the realization that she does not want to return to this mindset and a "normal human life." Being a parentified child has given her a preview of how mundane adult life is. Perhaps unlike Amanda, Bella has internalized the role of the parentified child, making it the entirety of her identity. In turn, she wishes to escape her "self-imposed [...] purgatory" (79). Edward comments on Bella's desire to become a vampire, "So ready for this to be the end... for this to be the twilight of your life, though your life has barely started. You're ready to give up everything." Bella replies, "It's not the end, it's the beginning" (497). Meyer inadvertently stages a debate between Edward and Bella regarding Bella's escape from her internal purgatory. Edward acts as the skeptical heretic, questioning if Bella will experience eternal torment by becoming immortal. Bella, acting as the devout believer, concludes that becoming immortal will save her from her loneliness and provide the perfect chosen family.

Annotated Bibliography:

- Aubrey, Jennifer Stevens, Melissa Click, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz. "The Twilight of Youth: Understanding Feminism and Romance in Twilight Moms' Connection to the Young-Adult Vampire Series." *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*. 7.1 (2018): 61-71. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 Sep. 2020.
- Castle, Gregory. "Reader-Response Theory." *The Literary Theory Handbook*, Wiley Blackwell, 2013, 153-159
- Chojnacka, Barbara. "The Loneliness and Isolation of the Parentified Child in the Family." *Paedagogia Christiana*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2020, pp. 83-98. *ResearchGate*. Web. 22 Sep. 2020.
- James. "Interview with Stephenie Meyer." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 49, no. 7, International Reading Association, Apr. 2006, pp. 630-32.
- Jameson, Celia, and Julia Dane. "Bite Me! The Twilight Saga, a Fantasy Space of Self-Transformation as Self-Realization." *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, vol. 38, no. 3, SAGE Publications, July 2014, pp. 243-58, doi:10.1177/0196859914535953.
- Mercer, Joyce Ann. "Vampires, Desire, Girls and God: Twilight and the Spiritualities of Adolescent Girls." *Pastoral Psychology*, vol. 60, no. 2, Springer US, Apr. 2011, pp. 263-78, doi:10.1007/s11089-010-0322-7.
- Meyer, Stephenie. *Twilight*. New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2005. Print.
- Michel, Frann. "How to Bring Your Kids up Sodomasochist: Intimate-Partner Violence and the Twilight Phenomenon." *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, vol. 17, no. 1, Palgrave Macmillan, Apr. 2012, p. 111-, doi:10.1057/pcs.2011.19.

Myers-Bowman, Karen, and Joan Jurich. "Parent-Child Relationships in the Twilight Saga: Implications for Family Life Education." *Marriage & Family Review*, vol. 51, no. 4,

Routledge, May 2015, pp. 356–83, doi:10.1080/01494929.2015.1033311.

Wimsatt Jr, W. K., and Beardsley, M. C. Beardsley "The Intentional Fallacy," *The Sewanee Review* 54.3 (146): 468-88.