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## **Wife, Mother, Vampire: The Female Role in the *Twilight* Series**

By Lauren Rocha<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

This article explores a feminist critique of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series (2005-2008), analyzing the ways in which the series is a symbolic backlash against feminism. Whereas previous vampire works depicted vampires as threats and outsiders to society, the *Twilight* series depicts the vampire characters as accepted in society, integrating their lives into mainstream society; as such, they highlight modern society's fascination with female beauty ideals and physical beauty. In this article, I examine the ways in which Meyer's portrayal of the Cullen vampires is reflective of repressive beauty ideals targeted towards women, arguing that Bella devalues herself because as a human she does not conform to these ideals; instead, it is Edward, and her relationship with Edward, that provides value for Bella. Bella illustrates female submission in a male dominated world through her dependence upon Edward for meaning and identity, disempowering herself and symbolically disempowering women. In addition, I investigate the ways in which Meyer employs the traditional female gender roles of wife and mother as repressive means to which Bella is able to achieve fulfillment and identity, arguing that Bella is only allowed to become a vampire and truly be with Edward after she has cemented her roles as wife and mother, adhering to the rigid, traditional female gender norms.

*Key Words:* Feminism, women and vampires, vampires popular culture

### **Introduction**

In Stephenie Meyer's wildly popular *Twilight* series (2005-2008), Bella Swan and Edward Cullen are in love. The problem is that Bella is a human and Edward is a vampire who thirsts for her blood. Rather than giving into this hunger, Edward controls himself so that he and Bella can be together; in doing so, he represents a domesticated, or self-controlled, vampire. Domesticity does not only apply to vampires in the *Twilight* series; instead, Meyer confines females, particularly Bella, to traditional female roles. In doing so, the series represents an overwhelming backlash against the struggle of feminism. The change in vampire bodies throughout vampire texts marks a change in attitudes towards women's bodies, from the sexually repressed female of the Victorian era seen in *Dracula* and *Carmilla* to empowered, contemporary females shown in modern works such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Yet in *Twilight*, the female is not shown as empowered, but rather a regressive figure akin to the Victorian ideal of womanhood as well as highlighting repressive beauty ideals and gender norms, creating a backlash against the empowered feminist ideal.

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Bella Swan, the main character of the *Twilight* series, symbolizes that backlash. Unlike *Buffy* whose heroine is a strong, empowered female, the heroine in *Twilight* is weak and dependent on men to give her value. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Buffy demonstrates female autonomy in a male-dominated society, empowering not only herself but others. In *Twilight*, however, Bella illustrates female submission in a male dominated world; disempowering herself and symbolically disempowering women. The series does so by having Bella view herself in a negative light as well as through the largely domesticated nature of the vampires. Whereas previous vampire works depicted vampires as threats and outsiders to society, *Twilight* depicts vampire characters as accepted in society, integrating their lives into mainstream society; as such, they highlight modern society's fascination with physical appearance and the ideal of female beauty.

Bella has been at the center of an argument about the role of feminism in today's society given her submissive nature. As Bonnie Mann states in her essay, "Vampire Love: The Second Sex Negotiates the Twenty-first Century," (2009) "When Bella falls in love, then, a girl in love is all she is. By page 139 she has concluded that her mundane life is a small price to pay for the gift of being with Edward, and by the second book she's willing to trade her soul for that privilege" (133). Bella sacrifices herself, "her mundane life" to be with Edward; in doing so, her actions embody Victorian values of female sacrifice for men. By being more focused on being with Edward, Bella is unable to focus on developing herself. Mann comments:

Other than her penchant for self-sacrifice and the capacity to attract the attention of boys, Bella isn't really anyone special. She has no identifiable interests or talents; she is incompetent in the face of almost every challenge. She is the locus of exaggerated stereotypically feminine incapacities and self-loathing. She has no sense of direction or balance. She is prone to get bruises and scrapes just in the process of moving from one place to another and doesn't even trust herself to explore a tide pool without falling in. When she needs something done, especially mechanical, she finds a boy to do it and watches him. (133)

Typically, men watch women, objectifying the female in viewing them as a solely sexual object. Laura Mulvey explores this concept in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975):

Pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly...women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual impact and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (19)

In *Twilight*, however, Bella, the female, takes on the gaze through her first person narrative where she constantly watches Edward. While this might appear empowering to have a female character assume the gaze, it is not. Mann cites feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir's argument about the masculine gaze, saying that "when the young girl internalizes and assumes the masculine gaze, de Beauvoir said, she takes up a perspective on herself as prey. As in the

fairy tales, she becomes ‘an idol,’ a ‘fascinating treasure,’ ‘a marvelous fetish,’ sought after by men” (136).

The *Twilight* series does have a fairy-tale like quality with Bella as a damsel-in-distress. Like a fairy-tale, Bella has a handsome prince to fantasize about. In particular, Bella is fascinated by Edward’s physical appearance which is similar to the other vampires in the series. The vampires’ physical beauty is so stressed that it is the first characteristic the narrator Bella observes:

I stared because their faces, so different, so similar, were all devastatingly, inhumanly beautiful. They were faces you never expected to see except perhaps on the airbrushed pages of a fashion magazine. Or painted by an old master as the face of an angel. It was hard to decide who was the most beautiful – maybe the perfect blond girl, or the bronze-haired boy. (*Twilight* 19)

The comparison to “airbrushed pages of a fashion magazine” and a painted “face of an angel” elevates the vampire beauty to a humanly unachievable ideal Bella compares herself to. Just as the pictures in fashion magazines are airbrushed to eliminate any flaws, the vampires have no aesthetic flaws as well. That the vampires appear “so different” and yet also “so similar” implies that while each one has their own individual beauty, this creates a uniform beauty among the group.

The beautiful vampires are the products of the vampire transformation, where their imperfect human body is turned into a “perfect” vampire one. Instead of blood being the cause of the transformation, it is vampire venom which turns humans into vampires. When venom hits the bloodstream, it triggers the transformation process. Bella describes the venom as a “scalding pain” and a “fire” that does not stop (*Twilight* 454). The venom erases the human blemishes, flaws, and imperfections, so that the person is essentially born anew as a vampire. The skin, which is prone to aging and wrinkles, becomes frozen in time and sparkles in the sun “like thousands of tiny diamonds” are “embedded in the surface” (*Twilight* 260). Bella observes this in Edward, who she further states is “a perfect statue, carved in some unknown stone, smooth like marble, glittering like crystal” (*Twilight* 260). Edward’s description as “a perfect statue” with skin “smooth like marble...perfect texture, satin smooth” is similar to a person that has undergone Botox, where their skin becomes smooth and frozen, like a statue (*Twilight* 260).<sup>2</sup>

While Edward’s vampire skin is beautiful because it is unnatural, Bella’s attractiveness stems from her scent, heightening the desire for the taste of her blood. Edward tells Bella, “you are *exactly* my brand of heroin,” emphasizing the allure her blood has for him (*Twilight* 268).

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<sup>2</sup> Edward’s skin also highlights his race in the novels as well. Many scholars have analyzed the novels from the perspective of an intersection of race, gender, and social class; I did not touch upon this topic to prevent detracting from my examination focusing on the female body within the series. For further reading on the discussion of race, gender, and social class, see Natalie Wilson’s essay “Civilized Vampires Versus Savage Werewolves: Race and Ethnicity in the *Twilight* Series” (2010) in *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, & the Vampire Franchise* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010). Additional research can be found in the following essays in Wilson’s anthology *Seduced by Twilight* (2011): “The Allure of the Vampire, the Danger of the Wolf: Or, Why to Avoid Big, Bad Shape-shifters in Favor of Knights in Sparkling Armor;” “The Dawning of New Men: Hegemonic Masculinity, Sparkly White Male Vampires, and Ab-tastic Wolves of Color;” and “Got Vampire Privilege? Or, Why You Should Marry an Undead, White, Wealthy, Hetersexual Mormon” (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011).

Bella's blood further contributes to the sensuality of the novels because her blood manifests itself as a scent which in return brings Edward physically closer to Bella by arousing his senses. Bella often says how she can "feel his nose sliding along my jaw, inhaling," to which Edward responds, "Just because I'm resisting the wine doesn't mean I can't appreciate the bouquet [...] You have a very floral smell, like lavender...or freesia...it's mouthwatering" (*Twilight* 306). Edward's explanation that he is "resisting the wine" not only means he is resisting the desire to drink her blood, but also to express his sexual desire. Edward tells Bella that "on the one hand, [there is] the hunger – the thirst – that, deplorable creature that I am, I feel for you...But...there are other hungers" (*Twilight* 277-78). Among the "other hungers" he is referring to is his sexual attraction to Bella. He resists giving into his sexual desire because to give in to his desire would mean a loss of "control of his need" (*Twilight* 282). He has such a need to be in control of himself that he and Bella have a "standard of careful non-contact," where they are careful not to get too physically passionate (*Twilight* 283). This caution can be seen in their first kiss as Bella describes:

His cold, marble lips pressed very softly against mine.  
Blood boiled under my skin, burned in my lips. My breath came in a wild gasp. My fingers knotted in his hair, clutching him to me. My lips parted as I breathed in his heady scent.  
Immediately I felt him turn to unresponsive stone beneath my lips. His hands gently, but with irresistible force, pushed my face back [...]  
He laughed aloud. 'I'm stronger than I thought. It's nice to know.'  
'I wish I could say the same. I'm sorry.' [...]  
I kept my eyes on his, watched as the excitement in them faded and gentled.  
(*Twilight* 282-83)

Bella's reference to her blood as it boils under her skin and burns in her lips, a vaginal symbol, alludes to her sexual desire. Bella's use of "wild" conveys her passion as raw and untamed. Edward's response, turning to "unresponsive stone," cools Bella's desire and defers the sexual moment. Bella notes this by saying that she "watched as the excitement [...] faded and gentled." Edward and Bella's sexual desire is restrained; for Edward, this restraint illustrates his self-control whereas for Bella, it represses her sexuality.

For Bella, it is difficult for her to understand why someone as "perfect" as Edward would love her. She tells Edward: "I'm absolutely ordinary – well, except for bad things like all the near-death experiences and being so clumsy that I'm almost disabled" (*Twilight* 210). Bella devalues herself, highlighting a physically negative attribute – clumsiness – as her only distinctive quality. Debra Gimlin explains the relationship between the physical body and the internal self in her book *Body Work*, stating that, "the body is fundamental to the self because it serves to indicate who an individual is internally, what habits the person has, and even what social value the person merits" (3). Unlike Buffy, Bella is internally "disabled", needing romantic relationships to give her value. When Bella is not involved in a relationship, she loses self-value; as a result, Bella devalues her physical body by engaging in risky behavior. For instance, in *New Moon*, after Edward leaves her, Bella decides "to be as reckless as" she can "possibly manage in Forks" (147). She finds that as she engages in risky behaviors, she hears Edward's voice warning and berating her. Although she is physically endangering herself, she is

so amazed by the “sheer beauty” that she decides she can’t “allow [her] memory to lose it, no matter the price” (186). This price she is willing to pay is her own life, as her final risky act is jumping off of a cliff into the water below:

I knew that this was the stupidest, most reckless thing I had done yet. The thought made me smile. The pain was already easing, as if my body knew that Edward’s voice was just seconds away [...]

‘Don’t do this,’ he pleaded.

*You wanted me to be human*, I reminded him. *Well, watch me...you won’t stay with me any other way* [...]

I didn’t want to fight anymore. And it wasn’t the lightheadedness, or the cold, or the failure of my arms as the muscles gave out in exhaustion, that made me content to stay where I was. I was almost happy it was over. This was an easier death than others I’d faced. Oddly peaceful [...]

I saw *him*, and I had no will to fight...My subconscious had stored Edward away in flawless detail, saving him for this final moment. I could see his perfect face as if he were really there; the exact shade of his icy skin, the shape of his lips, the line of his jaw, the gold tinting in his furious eyes [...]

Why would I fight when I was so happy where I was? Even as my lungs burned for more air and my legs cramped in the icy water, I was content. I’d forgotten what real happiness felt like. (357-361)

Bella values Edward, “his perfect face” and “flawless detail,” so much that she is willing to literally die to be with him. The juxtaposition of “real happiness” with the description of her drowning suggests that for Bella, “real happiness” is masochism. Yet just as the Edward she sees here is not real, neither is her happiness; it is just a temporary relief from her emotional pain. According to Gimlin, “What women look like becomes symbolic of their characters – indeed, of their very selves” (4). After Edward leaves Bella feels “lifeless” inside; as a result, she intends to make her physical body “lifeless” as well (95). Bella believes that by endangering herself, she is proving her love for Edward by demonstrating the extremes she is willing to go to be with him and thus feel special. She tells him “*you won’t stay with me any other way*,” meaning that she is so desperate to be with him, she is willing to kill herself even though he has left her.

Bella is desperate to be with Edward because he tells her she is special. Although Bella has a hard time believing she is anything but ordinary, Edward tells Bella, “you are the opposite of ordinary” and “you are my life now” (*Twilight* 314). Despite these reassurances from Edward, Bella still feels insecure about her value to Edward. Her insecurity stems from the fact that as a vampire, Edward will never grow old, but as a human, Bella will. Her anxiety about aging is expressed on her eighteenth birthday when she wakes up from a nightmare:

It had hit, it was even worse than I’d feared it would be. I could feel it – I was older. Every day I got older, but this way different, worse, quantifiable. I was eighteen.

And Edward never would be.

I was almost surprised that the face in the mirror hadn't changed. I stared at myself, looking for some sign of impending wrinkles in my ivory skin. The only creases were the ones on my forehead.

*It was just a dream*, I reminded myself again. Just a dream...but also my worst nightmare. (*New Moon* 7)

For an eighteen year old to have this fear of aging is ludicrous and troubling. Yet for Bella, who has the ideal vampire beauty to compare herself to, aging is a concern. While there are no "impending wrinkles" on her "ivory skin" now, she fears that soon she will resemble her appearance in the nightmare and be "ancient, creased, and withered" (6). Her fear of looking "ancient, creased, and withered" reflects her deeper concerns that as she ages, her value will decrease because Edward will no longer love and desire her. The "impending wrinkles" on her skin she worries about not only symbolize a decline in beauty, but also a decline in value. That she will become "ancient" implies that she will be of no use to the eternal vampires who suggest a continuity of life. Eventually, she will be "withered" and have no aesthetic appeal. Naomi Wolf comments on the relationship between beauty and social value in her book *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, saying that "without 'beauty'" women slide "into nothingness and disintegration;" similarly, Bella feels that "without 'beauty'" she too will descend into "nothingness and disintegration" because Edward will not be attracted to her (230). Bella understands that "to someone in the know" about the immortal vampires, growing old does not conform to the "devastatingly, inhumanly, beautiful" ideal the vampires embody (*Twilight* 19). She feels that staying human, aging, will endanger her future with Edward because Edward will not be attracted to her as her looks fade. As she says, "If I could be *sure* of the future I wanted, sure that I would get to spend forever with Edward, and Alice and the rest of the Cullens (preferably not as a wrinkled old lady)...then a year or two one direction or the other wouldn't matter to me so much. But Edward was dead set against any future that changed me. Any future that made me like him – that made me immortal, too" (*New Moon* 10). Being human and aging do not ensure a future; it ensures losing value in society as an old woman. Being a vampire means having a future and more importantly, value.

Bella's yearning to become a vampire implies a desire to be beautiful and have value. Her desire for the unnatural vampire beauty can be compared to women who choose cosmetic surgery not only to enhance their physical appearance, but also to enhance their lifestyles by increasing their self-value. Wolf states that "Women choose surgery when we are convinced we cannot be who we really are without it [...] Women's fears of loss of identity are legitimate. We 'choose' a little death over what is portrayed as an unlivable life, we 'choose' to die a bit in order to be born again" (258-59). Bella chooses to become a vampire because she can not live without Edward just as women choose surgery because they feel they cannot be themselves without it. Bella chooses "a little death" so as to avoid "an unlivable life" without Edward. To live without Edward, just as to live without surgery, would mean a loss of identity for Bella. She reflects on this idea when Edward temporarily leaves her in *New Moon*, "It was depressing to realize that I wasn't the heroine anymore, that my story was over" (106). To not be a vampire would mean she would not truly have value.

Modern society's fascination with the ideal of female beauty is what Wolf terms the "Iron Maiden" (17). Wolf defines the Iron Maiden as "the modern hallucination in which women are trapped or trap themselves (that) is [...] rigid, cruel, and euphemistically painted. Contemporary

culture directs attention to imagery of the Iron Maiden, while censoring real women's faces and bodies" (17). The Iron Maiden produces a beauty backlash that "is spread and reinforced by the cycles of self-hatred provoked in women by the advertisements, photo features, and beauty copy in the glossaries" of magazines (73). While Bella does not have magazines to compare herself to, she does have the vampire beauty which she compares to "the airbrushed pages of a fashion magazine" (*Twilight* 19). As a result, Bella has a self-hatred for her human body, which she views as so clumsy that it makes her "almost disabled" (*Twilight* 210).

Just as the Iron Maiden traps women in an ideal of perfect, inhuman beauty, so too does being a vampire trap women in a perfect, inhumanly beautiful body. While the vampire body is perfect, the body comes at a price: a lack of choice. As Rosalie tells Bella, "once it's done, it can't be undone" meaning that once Bella is turned into a vampire, she can never go back to being human (*Eclipse* 167). Rosalie emphasizes the importance of this to Bella in telling her own past as a human. While Bella thinks that becoming a vampire means a happy ending, Rosalie has a different view, saying that "if we had happy endings, we'd all be under gravestones now" (*Eclipse* 154). Being a vampire does not imply a happy ending to Rosalie, but rather, being human implies happiness. To be human is to have a choice in life whereas being a vampire means being entrapped in an eternal body and yet without eternal possibilities. Rosalie exclaims to Bella:

'You already have *everything*. You have a whole life ahead of you – everything I want. And you're going to just *throw it away*. Can't you see that I'd trade everything I have to be you? You have the choice that I didn't have, and you're choosing *wrong!*' (*Eclipse* 166)

Rosalie is trapped in the body of a vampire, the ideal beauty; as such, she is trapped in the vampire version of the Iron Maiden, an ideal of perfect beauty. "The real problem is our lack of choice," Wolf writes; similarly, the real problem with being a vampire is the lack of choice as well. While vampires have an eternity ahead of them, it is not a true life marked with experiences and aging; rather, it is a monotonous life that restricts individuals to limited roles: the high school student, the doctor, the housewife.

Rosalie is the most appropriate character to advise Bella regarding the seriousness of becoming a vampire. Rosalie is "the incarnation of pure beauty," the most beautiful Cullen (*Twilight* 304). Even as a human, Rosalie was blessed with a beautiful appearance. She explains: "I was thrilled to be me, to be Rosalie Hale. Pleased that men's eyes watched me everywhere I went, from the year I turned twelve. Delighted that my girlfriends sighed with envy when they touched my hair" (*Eclipse* 155). While beauty was important to Rosalie as a human, so too was something else. She explains: "I yearned for my own little baby. I wanted my own house and a husband who would kiss me when he got home from work" (*Eclipse* 156). While Meyer's emphasis on Rosalie as an example of the beauty myth and the male gaze might seem like a critique of misogynist practices, Meyer ultimately recedes into a conservative view of women's roles in Rosalie's desire for the traditional female roles of wife and mother.

Rosalie's vision never became real; instead, she was turned into a vampire. When she first sees her vampire reflection, she is relieved to see that she is still beautiful. Yet she soon realizes the serious ramifications of being a vampire:



‘It took some time before I began to blame the beauty for what had happened to me – for me to see the curse of it. To wish that I had been...well, not ugly, but normal [...] So I could have been allowed to marry someone who loved *me*, and have pretty babies. That’s what I’d really wanted, all along. It still doesn’t seem like too much to have asked for.’ (*Eclipse* 162)

Rosalie blames her being a vampire on beauty. Carlisle turned Rosalie into a vampire, saying that “It was too much waste. I couldn’t leave her” (*Eclipse* 161). To let Rosalie die would have been a “waste” of beauty, of value. Rosalie feels vampire beauty is a “curse,” a vampire version of the Iron Maiden; here, the Maiden traps Rosalie into a beautiful body, making her conform to a life she did not choose. She would trade everything to be Bella, to be “normal” instead of “the most beautiful thing (she’s) ever seen” (*Eclipse* 162).

Rosalie’s conversation with Bella, highlighting the severe implications of becoming a vampire and achieving the beauty ideal, serves as a warning in the novels that beauty comes with a steep price: a lack of choice. Rosalie’s background highlights Wolf’s main argument that society’s message is “that a woman should live hungry, die young, and leave a pretty corpse” (231). Wolf says that the problem with cosmetics is “our lack of choice...the problem with cosmetics exists only when women feel invisible or inadequate without them” (231). This argument is illustrated in Rosalie’s warning to Bella that the problem with being a vampire is the lack of choice in lifestyle. While Rosalie’s warning is important in stressing a feminist argument, Bella unfortunately feels that not being a vampire would make her feel the way women without cosmetics can feel: “invisible or inadequate” (231). Bella choosing to become a vampire reveals Meyer’s feminist stance as hollow and conservative. Bella tells Edward that “it just seems logical...a man and woman have to be somewhat equal...as in, one of them can’t always be swooping in and saving the other one. They have to save each other *equally* [...] I can’t always be Lois Lane [...] I want to be Superman, too” (*Twilight* 474). Bella feels that staying human implies a type of inequality, or inadequacy, since she is powerless; she remains Lois Lane while Edward, with all his vampire powers, gets to be Superman.

Bella, however, does not end up as Superman in the end, but rather a domesticated female vampire in her role as wife and mother. She marries Edward and soon afterwards becomes pregnant with a half-human, half-vampire baby. Only after Bella gives birth to the baby, and thus solidifies her domestic role, does Edward turn her into a vampire. The birth scene is described:

It was a blood-curdling shriek of agony. The horrifying sound cut off with a gurgle, and her eyes rolled back into her head. Her body twitched, arched in Rosalie’s arms, and then Bella vomited a fountain of blood.

Bella’s body, streaming with red, started to twitch, jerking around in Rosalie’s arms like she was electrocuted. All the while, her face was blank – unconscious. It was the wild thrashing from inside the center of her body that moved her. As she convulsed, sharp snaps and cracks kept time with the spasms [...]

In the bright light, Bella’s skin seemed more purple and black than it was white. Deep red was seeping beneath the skin over the huge, shuddering bulge of her stomach [...]

Her legs, which had been curled up in agony, now went limp, sprawling out in an unnatural way. (*Breaking Dawn* 347-351)

The description of Bella's thrashing body "streaming with red" is similar to the description of Lucy's body when she is staked by Arthur in *Dracula*. Both bodies highlight male dominance over females; here, Edward's choice to turn Bella into a vampire after she has suffered through this horrific scene emphasizes his control (here over her body). Bella is experiencing the "sharp snaps and cracks" as she fully transitions to her role as mother, cementing her identity as domesticated female. As Jacob states, "She'd willingly sacrificed herself to be torn apart by that monster's young," (*Breaking Dawn* 356). Although the "monster" Jacob refers to is Edward, the larger monster at work is this backlash against feminism, where the "heroine" of the story is domesticated and oppressed as the male controls the female.

In addition to being representative of rigid beauty ideals, Meyer's *Twilight* series is reflective of what Betty Friedan terms the "feminine mystique." In *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Friedan states that under the feminine mystique women "can find fulfillment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love" and that a "woman can know fulfillment only at the moment of giving birth to a child...In the feminine mystique, there is no other way for a woman to dream of creation or of the future. There is no way she can even dream about herself, except as her children's mother, her husband's wife" (92, 115). Although Friedan's work was initially published in 1963, the arguments Friedan notes in her novel are very much prevalent in Meyer's *Twilight* series, a series published over forty years after *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan's very definition of the mystique with the focus on women finding fulfillment only through "sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love," is the model Meyer employs for Edward and Bella's relationship. Bella states in the first novel how she and Edward have a "standard of non-contact" so that Edward does not suffer a loss of "control of his need," reinforcing the mystique's model of sexual passivity and male domination (*Twilight* 282-83). The passage describing their first kiss further illustrates the mystique's message as Bella describes Edward's "cold, marble lips," a description connoting authority. Bella describes her reaction as one that is not passive by using such phrases as "blood boiled under my skin, burned in my lips," "breath came in a wild gasp," and "fingers knotted in his hair, clutching him to me" (*Twilight* 282-83). Her reaction is not passive, but passionate; as a result, it undercuts Edward's male domination. Edward is forced to reassert his male domination and turns to "unresponsive stone beneath my (Bella's) lips. His hands gently, but with irresistible force, pushed my (Bella's) face back" (*Twilight* 282-83). The use of the words "cold, marble," "stone," and "force" associated with Edward signify him as the domineering figure in the relationship while the words associated with Bella, "softly," and "gently," connote a fragile nature, reinforcing Bella as the passive, controlled figure who Edward must be in control of and take care of.

After Bella becomes a vampire, Bella's desire is further controlled. This is evident in Bella and Edward's kiss after Bella has become a vampire:

'I love you,' I said, but it sounded like singing. My voice rang and shimmered like a bell.

His answering smile dazzled me more than it ever had when I was human; I could really see it now.

'As I love you,' he told me.

He took my face between his hands and leaned his face to mine –slow enough to remind me to be careful. He kissed me, soft as a whisper at first, and then suddenly stronger, fiercer. I tried to remember to be gentle with him, but it was hard work to remember anything in the onslaught of sensation, hard to hold on to any coherent thoughts.

It was like he'd never kissed me – like this was our first kiss. And, in truth, he'd never kissed me *this* was before.

It almost made me feel guilty. Surely I was in breach of the contract. I couldn't be allowed to have this, too.

Though I didn't need oxygen, my breathing sped, raced as fast as it had when I was burning. This was a different kind of fire[...]

How different this kissing was! I read his expression as I compared the indistinct human memories to this clear, intense feeling. He looked...a little smug.

'You've been holding out on me,' I accused in my singing voice, my eyes narrowing a tiny bit.

He laughed, radiant with relief that it was all over – the fear, the pain, the uncertainties, the waiting, all of it behind us now. 'It was sort of necessary at the time,' he reminded me. 'Now it's your turn to not break *me*.' (*Breaking Dawn* 395)

The above scene depicting Bella and Edward's first kiss after Bella is turned into a vampire parallels that of Bella and Edward's first kiss in the series. In both, Edward controls Bella's desire: in *Twilight*, Edward's response of turning to "unresponsive stone" cools Bella's desire and represses her sexuality; in *Breaking Dawn*, Edward's comment that "'Now it's your turn not to break *me*,'" is authoritative, implying that while Bella can express her desire, she needs to take caution. Bella also feels a sense of guilt: in *Twilight*, she apologizes for her outburst of desire; in *Breaking Dawn*, she says "It almost made me feel guilty. Surely I was in breach of the contract. I couldn't be allowed to have this, too." Her thoughts in *Breaking Dawn* illustrate her sense of guilt over expressing her desire as well as illustrating the controlled nature of Edward and Bella's relationship with the use of the words "contract" and "I couldn't be allowed to have this too." Bella's statement that "I couldn't be allowed to have this too" further demonstrates that she does not feel self-worth; she feels she is not worthy of expressing her desire as well as not worthy of Edward's attentions.

Yet the two scenes differ as Edward displays more physical intimacy in the *Breaking Dawn* passage as noted by Bella's use of the words "stronger," "fiercer," and "sensation," to describe the moment; a contrast to their first kiss in *Twilight* where Edward is associated with such words as "cold, marble lips," and "unresponsive stone," connoting a void of displayed passion. This change in Edward's demonstrations of affection are due to Bella being granted the gift of vampirism after cementing her role as wife and mother, fulfilling the norm of the feminine mystique. Because of the fulfillment of the mystique, Bella also illustrates another of Friedan's arguments that "For the woman who lives according to the feminine mystique, there is no road to achievement, or status, or identity, except the sexual one: the achievement of sexual conquest, status as a desirable object, identity as a sexually successful wife and mother" (372). In *Breaking Dawn*, Bella's identity becomes that of a wife and mother; after she becomes a

vampire, her identity becomes that of “a sexually successful wife and mother,” one Edward no longer feels “the fear, the pain, the uncertainties, the waiting” of being with.

While Bella provides the narrative voice for much of the series, Meyer breaks Bella’s first-person narration to switch to Jacob as narrator when Bella finds out she is pregnant. Meyer returns Bella to the role of narrator after Renesmee is born; only after Bella becomes a mother is her narrative voice returned. This narrative change is reminiscent of Friedan’s discussion when she states, “The end of the road, in an almost literal sense, is the disappearance of the heroine altogether, as a separate self and subject of her own story. The end of the road is togetherness, where the woman has no independent self...she exists only for and through her children” (97). Bella’s pregnancy signals “the end of the road” for her, her disappearance as a separate identity other than the traditional female norm of wife and mother. Bella is no longer a “separate self;” as a result, Jacob takes over as narrator in order to continue the story while Bella transitions into the “togetherness” associated with motherhood. Bella is able to regain a narrative voice after she gives birth because she is now speaking to readers from her role as mother, and the story’s focus shifts from her to Renesmee.

Bella’s completion of the feminine mystique comes with her becoming a mother, showing “nurturing maternal love.” Friedan explains that under the mystique women “have no vision of the future, except to have a baby. The only active growing thing in their world is the child” (93). Bella’s daughter, Renesmee, mirrors Friedan’s argument as Renesmee is the only Cullen who physically grows after Bella is turned into a vampire. In regards to the female as mother figure, Friedan also states, “The housewife heroines are forever young, because their own image *ends* in childbirth. Like Peter Pan, they must remain young while their children grow up in the world” (93). Only after giving birth to Renesmee and becoming a mother, solidifying her identity as a repressed female, is Bella turned into a vampire, a “Peter Pan” who will remain forever young and frozen at nineteen while her daughter grows up. The novel further hints that Renesmee will most likely stop growing sometime when she is a teenager, following in the footsteps of her housewife heroine mother.

Bella has no qualms about conforming to her defined identity as wife and mother, a characteristic of the mystique. “The feminine mystique permits, even encourages, women to ignore the question of their identity. The mystique says they can answer the question ‘Who am I?’ by saying ‘Tom’s wife...Mary’s mother’” (126). In Bella’s case, she can answer the question of “Who am I?” by saying “Edward’s wife...Renesmee’s mother.” Bella tells Edward at the beginning of *Breaking Dawn*, “I want you forever. One lifetime is simply not enough for me...*You* are my future” (27-28). When she finds out that she is pregnant, she adamantly envisions her baby having no resemblance to herself, instead being a mirror image of Edward. Bella imagines her vision: “The tiny child with Edward’s eyes – green, as his had been when he was human – lying fair and beautiful in my arms. I hoped he would have Edward’s face exactly, with no interference from mine” (*Breaking Dawn* 131). Her choice of the word “interference” rather than resemblance is illustrative of her lack of an individual identity. Her identity is Edward’s wife, the baby’s mother; Bella feels she has nothing of individual worth to contribute to the child.

Not only does Bella find identity with her role as wife and mother, she also finds value with her appearance after she cements her role as wife and, more importantly, mother. Despite urging Edward to turn her into a vampire before childbirth, it is after she gives birth that he finally allows her to undergo the process to become a vampire. Before she became a vampire

Bella undervalued herself, denying herself self-worth because her appearance did not conform to the beauty standards set by the vampires. After fulfilling her roles as wife and mother, Bella finds fulfillment with her beauty; as a result, she is finally able to view herself as valuable. Upon looking at herself in the mirror after being transformed into a vampire, Bella describes:

My first reaction was unthinking pleasure. The alien creature in the glass was indisputably beautiful, every bit as beautiful as Alice or Esme. She was fluid even in stillness, and her flawless face was pale as the moon against the frame of her dark, heavy hair. Her limbs were smooth and strong, glistening subtly, luminous as a pearl [...]

Who *was* she? At first glance, I couldn't find my face anywhere in the smooth, perfect planes of her features [...]

All the while I studied and reacted, her face was perfectly composed, a carving of a goddess, showing nothing of the turmoil rolling inside of me. And then her full lips moved. (*Breaking Dawn* 403)

Bella is able to feel “unthinking pleasure” at her appearance because she now feels she has worth, specifically saying how she is now “indisputable beautiful, every bit as beautiful as Alice or Esme,” characters who embody the beauty ideal. Bella’s use of the words “fluid,” “flawless,” “dark, heavy hair,” “smooth,” “strong,” and “luminous” evoke a sensual image as well as one of purity with such phrases as “pale as the moon,” “luminous as a pearl,” and “perfectly composed” also present within the passage. She is no longer Bella Swan, awkward human; she is Bella Cullen, Edward’s wife and Renesmee’s mother. Because she embodies the traditional female norms of wife and mother, she is now able to see herself as “beautiful,” and “a carving of a goddess.” This passage harkens back to Wolf’s statement in *The Beauty Myth* that women “‘choose’ to die a bit in order to be born again” (259). Bella dies in order to be born anew as a vampire, a reflection of the beauty ideal. Bella is born again as an example of the Iron Maiden, “the modern hallucination in which women are trapped or trap themselves (that) is rigid, cruel, and euphemistically painted [...] while censoring real women’s faces and bodies” (17). Bella is a beautiful “alien creature in the glass” marked by her fluid “stillness,” a description symbolic of confinement. Bella is unable to recognize herself, saying “I couldn’t find my face anywhere in the smooth, perfect planes of her features” and describing herself as a “carving showing nothing of the turmoil rolling inside of me.” Bella’s real face has been censored, replaced with “stillness” and “perfect planes” rather than a real face.

By making Bella a vampire Meyer not only immortalizes Bella, but symbolically immortalizes the backlash against feminism presented in the novels. Unlike *Buffy* where females are shown as free and unchained, emphasizing feminism, *Twilight* creates a backlash against feminism, showing Bella as a chained, domesticated female. At the end of the series, Bella says, “And then we continued blissfully into this small but perfect piece of our forever” (*Breaking Dawn* 754). Her statement about her future with Edward is similar to the fairy-tale ending, of “then they lived happily ever after” as she can literally live forever with Edward. Meyer’s fairy-tale like ending is not, however, a happy ending for females; instead, it is a throwback to Victorian ideals of female submission and domesticity. Today, this female ideal is beyond outdated – and yet one that will not die.

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