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“I'm not that girl”: Vindicating the *Twilight* saga and Bella as Positive Members within a Female Tradition

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Abstract

Despite its widely acknowledged success, the *Twilight* saga is not considered canonical literature because it belongs to ‘popular’ culture and the female protagonist of the series has been usually negatively criticised in the academic world. This dissertation challenges previous harsh criticism of the series and aims to include Stephenie Meyer’s four novels within a literary tradition of female writers in order to vindicate its positive influence on an audience constituted mainly by female adolescents. This will be done by offering an in-depth literary analysis that will locate Meyer’s saga within a literary genealogy. In this way, it will be demonstrated that Meyer, continues with a tradition of forms and thematic motifs, adapting them to the new context of the 21st century, and that she promotes positive models of femininity for her young readers through the protagonist, Bella. The first section will deal with the connections of the first novel – *Twilight* (2005) – with female gothic fiction and Jane Austen. Then, the influence of romance in *New Moon* (2006) will be analysed in connection with the trope of the love triangle. Next, the climax of the love triangle in *Eclipse* (2007) will be considered next to its main intertext, *Wuthering Heights*. Last, links between *Breaking Dawn* (2008) and female bildungsroman and coming of age novels will be established.

Key Words: female, tradition, genealogy, influence, intertextuality

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Introduction

Twilight has been one of the most successful sagas of the 21st century. However, the novels have been unfavourably criticised for being part of what is considered popular culture. There are three main factors behind this harsh criticism. One of the main reasons has been that the author, Stephenie Meyer, had no previous experience in writing. As Dietz puts it, she went through “no graduate school, no writing classes, no queries and rejections, no years and years and years of writing and editing and quitting and restarting. [...] It took Stephenie Meyer under a year to whip a whimsical dream into a mega selling series of books” (2011, 99). Another issue seems to be the saga’s form, which can be broadly regarded as gothic teenage romance, which links to the third issue. This genre is generally targeted at a young female audience who reads popular fiction, which stands as a disadvantage for the saga, since “the reader of popular fiction is usually ignored because of the mediocre quality of the work he/she consumes, as opposed to the minority high-brow, more intellectual reader who has always played a determining role in establishing the literary canon” (Otano 2015, 2). All these factors have contributed to an overcritical analysis of Meyer’s four novels in terms of literary quality and content. But, as Elaine Showalter argues, there is no need to be a unique genius to legitimize women’s writing and continue with a female tradition (2003, xxxiii). The aim of this dissertation is to inscribe the *Twilight* series within a female literary tradition, vindicating its literary value and offering a new perspective on the female protagonist.

The incredible popularity of the saga and its appeal to girls in a postfeminist era has been debated (Jarvis 2014, 102). Literature by female authors targeted at an audience mainly constituted by female readers has been labelled as “chick lit” by Harzewski (2011) and it is framed within a postfeminist context. Postfeminism represents a stage in the constant evolution of feminism and it has gained importance recently (Brooks 1998, 1). As a term, it has been understood from the 90s onwards as “a useful conceptual frame of reference encompassing the intersection of feminism with a number of other anti-foundationalist movements including postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism” but it “has also been theorized as a marketing scheme, one pitching a feminism à la carte [...] often targeting a young demographic” (Harzewski 2011, 154). This is in my view the case of the *Twilight* series. Indeed, the success of the saga can be attributed to “postfeminism, seeing capitalism as a vehicle for self-fashioning [...] with consumption targeted at girls” (155) as Harzewski argues.

The impact of the *Twilight* saga on younger generations is paramount. Contrary to what happened in the 18th and 19th centuries, when the novel started to emerge as a genre, “with the globalization of culture [...] the national boundaries of the novel are fading and disappearing” (Showalter 2003, xxxiii). This is important because “most people’s initial knowledge and understanding of feminism has been formed within the popular and through representation” (Hollows and Moseley 2006, 2). Readers of Meyer’s work identify themselves with its female protagonist and see her as a model of representation. The role of novels such as Meyer’s are pivotal in the character formation of particularly adolescents of new generations. Within popular culture, one form which reinforces the changes of traditional gender relations is romance (Brooks 1998, 143), and “chick lit” in particular produces “productive frictions between ties to romance and the bildungsroman’s emphasis on individuation” (Harzewski 2011, 150). In fact, the term chick lit has become more inclusive with the passing of time, as it is observable in the *Twilight* novels, and “it no longer exclusively represents young, never-married, childless women” (195).

The literary heritage of the *Twilight* saga has received some attention in the last decade. While some authors have considered the connections between the novels and other literary works in isolation, this analysis will explore what I consider to be the greatest female influences on Meyer’s four novels – *Twilight* (2005), *New Moon* (2006), *Eclipse* (2007) and *Breaking Dawn* (2008) – by offering an in-depth literary analysis that will locate Meyer’s contribution within a literary genealogy. In particular, connections will be established with Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1818) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847). By comparing heroines, settings, themes and motifs, recollecting the intertextual references within the saga, and establishing connections with the previously mentioned works written by females towards a similar audience and of similar forms, the position of the *Twilight* series in literature and the relevance of Bella as a character will be vindicated. The dissertation will focus in each of the four novels that constitute the saga, so there will be four sections. The first and lengthier section will deal with the influence of female gothic fiction and Jane Austen on the first novel, *Twilight*. Then, the impact of romance in *New Moon* will be analysed in connection with the motif of the love triangle. Next, the climax of the love triangle in *Eclipse* will be considered next to its main intertext, *Wuthering Heights*. Last, links between *Breaking Dawn* and female bildungsroman and coming of age novels will be established, which suggests the final empowerment of the heroine.

1. The Influence of Gothic Fiction and Jane Austen on *Twilight*

The oldest retrievable source of inspiration for Stephenie Meyer is the gothic tradition, which dates back to the 18th century in England. Although a man was the initiator of the literary movement, Horace Walpole with *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), it was a woman who popularised the genre, Ann Radcliffe. As it happened with *Twilight* three centuries later, her gothic novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) became a best-seller, attracting specifically a female audience because her take on gothic fiction, sometimes categorised as “female” gothic, started “introducing topics of interest to women, encompassing interrogations of the patriarchal system with its rigidly defined gender roles and fears related to sexuality, body metamorphoses and birth” (Rogobete 2012, 113). Meyer’s softening of the gothic and her intensification of elements of romance are essential points that have contributed to the appeal of the saga to a young audience (111). Meyer continues with the gothic tradition, some conventions of the gothic are observable in *Twilight*, however, she gives gothic fiction her own twist by adapting it to a contemporary context and introducing fantastic elements.

Traditionally in gothic fiction, landscape and setting represented a source of danger and a hostile environment for the heroine of the story. For Emily St. Aubert in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the danger comes from the castle of Udolpho itself. For Isabella Swan, *Twilight*’s protagonist, her prison and source of restlessness is Forks, a small town in the Olympic Peninsula (USA). She decides to move from Arizona to her father’s house in Forks on her last year of high school because her mother has remarried. From the very first pages of the first novel, she compares her beloved “cloudless blue” (Meyer 2005, 3)¹ Arizona with “gloomy” (3) Forks, where “[she] could never see the sky [...]; it was like a cage” (10). Bella longs for Arizona in the same way Emily “pines for her dear native province” (Ledoux 2011, 11). The overwhelming green that surrounds the heroine in Forks makes her feel alienated from the rest of the world, she even compares it to “an alien planet” (7). Nevertheless, the excessively green landscape is a sort of innovation respecting the setting of the traditional gothic novel, in which the threat for the heroine is initially associated with spooky castles (Parmiter 2011, 221). Bella fears the woods instead of an indoors space. After researching about vampires, she makes a visit to the forest to clear up her mind, but she achieves the opposite, she starts to feel uneasy because “in the forest it was much easier to believe the absurdities that embarrassed [her] indoors” (119). The cliché of the castle in gothic novels is even mentioned by Edward,

¹ In further citations from *Twilight* in this section, the author and the year will be omitted to save space.

Bella's love interest, when she visits his house for the first time: "no coffins, no piled skulls in the corners; I don't even think we have cobwebs... what a disappointment this must be for you" (287). In the first novel, the woods constitute the source of uneasiness for the heroine rather than the traditional indoors space of a castle in gothic fiction. The safeness of the inside is contrasted with the dangers of the outside world, nevertheless, setting and landscape are sources of danger and fear for both heroines.

Resemblances between the traditional gothic heroine and Meyer's Bella are also observable. As the prototypical gothic heroine, Bella's self-declared clumsiness and tendency to faint are inexorably connected with the construction of her character, initially portraying her as helpless. Bella even wonders if this "crippling clumsiness was seen as endearing rather than pathetic, casting [her] as a damsel in distress" (46). As Dietz argues, in *Twilight*, words as "helplessly," "feebly" or "unwillingly" are frequently used by Meyer (105). The same is exemplified in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* with Radcliffe's recurrent references to Emily's inability to "support" her own weight (Ledoux 2011, 19). Meyer recurs to this trope of physical inabilities of the heroine as Radcliffe did, but she does so to emphasize her humanity and contrast it in the final book with her physical transformation, it is only a point of start.

What both heroines have in common is that, despite their physical weakness, they demonstrate mental strength to endure the adversities of life. Radcliffe's heroines "are wholly concerned with refraining from the wicked actions the hostile world tempts them to and withstanding the wiles of evil by fortitude" (Durant 1982, 525). This is also applicable to the character of Bella. Even though she "initially lacks the physical prowess of her vampire and werewolf friends, she has great mental fortitude and determination" (Kennedy 2014, 139). She has a great capability to endure emotional pain and she is the only exception to Edward's vampirical gift of reading minds. In fact, her mental fortitude will be a trait that she will carry on to her second life when she rises as a vampire in *Breaking Dawn*, as it will be further explained.

Both protagonists are also similar in the sense that they lack a family, which forces them to grow up early. Bella is not an orphan as Emily, but her mother does not hesitate when she is separated from her only daughter in favour of her new husband. Furthermore, Bella describes her mother as "irresponsible, and slightly eccentric" (90). She has always taken care of her and even feels bad for leaving her "erratic, harebrained mother to fend for herself" (4). Bella lacks a maternal figure to look up to since she has behaved as an adult her whole life while her mother behaved as a child.

After she moves to Forks, Bella's father is more present in her life in the sense that they share a roof, however, he is not much of a talker, and leaves her alone often. She describes living with her father as "having [her] own place" (45). Charlie's main role in "Bella's life is to provide a bed in which she can rest, to listen to her stories from time to time, and to eat the food she prepares. In essence, she has no father" (Dietz 2011, 105). So, despite not being an orphan, Bella lacks parental support, which forces her to be independent at the early age of seventeen. The struggle of both heroines will signify in the end their maturity and their coming of age. They both will get married, move out and start a new life. However, for Bella marriage will not be a source of submission, as it will be argued in further sections, but a mean to achieve power and equality with Edward and the rest of her in-laws since it is Edward's condition to transform her into a vampire.

Apart from gothic fiction, the second biggest influence on *Twilight* is Jane Austen. Austen foregrounded romance in her novels, and the success of Meyer's series in part "arises from its conformity to the genre conventions of romance writing in general and teenage romances in particular" (Kokkola 2010, 178). However, she adapts it to a contemporary context and "contemporary romances often reflect the changed social position of women and changes in heterosexual relationships" (Jarvis 2014, 103). Despite the clear influence of the novel of the nineteenth century in modern literature, it is more difficult for contemporary girls to identify themselves with those Victorian heroines from Austen's novels since their background is completely different. Nevertheless, a contemporary reader is able to see herself reflected in a contemporary heroine as Bella and to identify with her struggles as she leaves her teenage years behind.

Austen's novel *Northanger Abbey* (1818) is intrinsically related and sometimes studied alongside Radcliffe's *Udolpho* as a re-interpretation or even as a parody. However, the biggest intertext of this first novel is another Austen's work. The author has explicitly stated that *Twilight* (2005) is an homage to *Pride and Prejudice* (Kennedy 2014, 131). There are even direct references in Meyer's first novel of the saga. In Bella's collection of books that she has chosen to carry with her to Forks, the shabbiest volume is a compilation of Jane Austen's books and she states that her "favourites [are] *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*" (2005, 138). Novels and novel reading are a constant in the *Twilight's* heroine life.

A key element in *Northanger Abbey* that also permeates *Twilight* (2005) is the status difference between the heroine and her love interest. The contrast in social position Henry and Catherine in *Northanger Abbey* makes the heroine insecure, demonstrating "the social barriers

that create difference and distance” (Kennedy 2014, 136). In the same way, Bella feels insecure when it comes to Edward and the Cullen’s, with the additional difference of being supernatural beings added to the mix by Meyer. Apart from Bella’s fear “that Edward finds her plain and repugnant”, she is also afraid that Edward’s family “won’t like [her]” (276) or will not accept her since there is a clear status difference in terms of economic capital but also in terms of race. What she desires the most is to cause a good impression. Edward even teases her on this matter because she is not worried because she is meeting “a houseful of vampires, but because [she] think[s] those vampires won’t approve [her]” (280). They do approve Bella in the end because what matters the most to them is that they love each other despite their differences. However, this is not the case for Catherine Morland. General Tinley opposes to Catherine and Henry being together in *Northanger Abbey* due to their different social status and because she is not in possession of a fortune. This is a reflection of how times have changed. Heroines still share the same preoccupations, Bella probably because she has grown up reading stories like Catherine and Henry’s, but in a globalized world wealth and position in society are not now a determining factor in most relationships.

Twilight’s protagonist also shares some features with Elizabeth Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice*. Initially, they are both inexperienced in social terms and have to learn the rules along the way. In the same way that “Austen keeps us closely tied to Elizabeth’s consciousness as we follow her social embarrassments and triumphs” (Kennedy 2014, 134) Meyer does the same with Bella. As it can be observed in the opening chapters of the first novel, she is inexperienced in teenage life. When Mike Newton, a boy from her new school, starts expressing his admiration for her she admits that she has “no practice dealing with overly friendly boys” (26). Later on, she also admits to her friend Jessica that she has never attended a school dance back in Phoenix and that she has never had anything close to a boyfriend since she “didn’t go out much” (133). She has always been alone with her mother, so when she arrives to Forks she is socially awkward, likes to do the chores and dedicates her free time to reading. In this sense, she resembles the old-fashioned heroine (Kennedy 2014, 134). Another link with the traditional heroine is “her mellifluous traditional name, Isabella Marie Swan, [...] reminiscent of a different era” (134). But in the end, in the same way that her names connects her with the 19th century heroines, it also reflects how “Bella will be transformed in the story, like the white swan of her surname” (134). While some features of her personality link Bella with Austen’s heroines, she will gradually move within the course of the four novels from powerless and unable to take part in the physical action of the story to an empowered vampire warrior.

Another feature that Meyer shares with Austen is “the way the both foreground the structure of courtship romance” (Kennedy 2014, 131). As it happens in *Pride and Prejudice* with Elizabeth and Darcy’s relationship, the romance between Bella and Edward starts with the initial interest and rejection of the two parties involved. At first, Bella thinks that Edward is strange since at their first encounter at biology class he was “sitting as far from [her] as possible”, which makes the heroine wonder “what was wrong with him” (21). Later on, Bella will learn that his behaviour towards her has been rude only as a way of protecting her since her blood is particularly tempting for him. But before this realization Bella is very confused and angry. The early stages of their “relationship reflect the power imbalances between heroes and heroines of these earlier romances, [...] in which heroines spent their time worrying about heroes’ enigmatic behaviour” (Jarvis 2014, 102). This initial worry of the heroine is reflected in a passage where Bella starts to re-read *Sense and Sensibility* and she remembers that “the hero of the story happened to be named *Edward*” (128). Then, she turns “to *Mansfield Park*, but the hero of that piece was named *Edmund*” which makes her ironically wonder if “weren’t there any other names available in the late eighteenth century?” (128) because she is trying to forget about Edward. In addition, in the same way Austen describes Darcy as cold, Meyer often applies this depiction to Edward from the very beginning (Kennedy 2014, 136). This initial coldness and rejection from the hero evidences the similarities between the early stage in Bella and Edward’s relationship and Elizabeth and Darcy’s since they both follow the traditional pace of courtship.

The process of courtship moves forward after they are openly honest with each other and they start following rituals such as introducing themselves formally to each other's families. Searching for the acceptance of the family was also key in Victorian times. Edward is more traditional in this way, probably because he was born in a different century. He is the first to introduce Bella to his family and he has to insist in order for Bella to introduce him to her father as a formal partner:

[Edward] And you should introduce me to your father, too, I think.

[Bella] He already knows you, I reminded him.

[Edward] As your boyfriend, I mean.

[Bella] I stared at him with suspicion. Why?

[Edward] Isn’t that customary? (277)

This conversation reflects Edward’s traditionalism, which is the driving force of their love story, following the traditional romance formula. His emphasis on customs and societal rules

contrasts with and Bella's rejection of them, the same will be evidenced later on with their approach to marriage.

2. *New Moon* and the Trope of the Love Triangle

Continuing with the tradition of romance, Meyers recurs to the obstacle of the third party through the love triangle of Jacob, Bella and Edward (Kokkola 2010, 169). In fact, the biggest intertext in Meyer's *New Moon* is William Shakespeare's greatest tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*. This analysis is only concerned with female influences, however, Shakespeare's work is relevant because, his unique take on human relationships are precursors of romantic relationships in fiction, so he is a clear influence for female novelists. In *New Moon*, the motif of the love triangle is introduced, and it will be a pivotal driving force of the narrative in the rest of the novels. In the beginning, Edward decides that his world is too dangerous for Bella and leaves her. Then, she starts hanging out with Jacob Black, a young man from the Quileute reservation, and eventually starts falling in love with him. Meyer uses Shakespeare's Paris as a counterpart for Jacob: "What if Paris had been Juliet's friend? Her very best friend? What if he was the only one she could confide in about the whole devastating thing with Romeo?" (2006, 325 - 326)². The third party involved is still an effective way of constructing a romance and Meyer adopts it and it has in fact contributed to the popularity of the saga since the fans aligned themselves in one of the two parties, "team Edward" or "team Jacob".

The way of contrasting Bella's love interests is similar to the way in which in *Pride and Prejudice* Darcy is described as "haughty, reserved, and fastidious" in contrast to Bingley, who "was lively and unreserved, danced every dance" (Kennedy 2014, 72). Edward and Jacob are also described as polar opposites (134). Edward is always careful with words in order not to upset Bella, his main concern is always to keep her safe, both physically and mentally. This is evidenced when he is discussing with Jacob their ways of treating the heroine and he asks him if he thinks that "hurting her is better than protecting her" (2007, 72), referring to Jacob's harsh honesty with Bella. Jacob counterarguments that "she's tougher than [he] think[s]" (2007, 72). In contrast with Edward, Jacob is always getting on Bella's nerves and speaks what is on his mind, no matter the consequences. He is also more reckless, for instance, he teaches her how to ride a motorbike since for him "a little trouble makes life fun (2007, 73)".

² Since this section and the following ones will contain citations from more than one of Meyer's novels – *New Moon* (2006), *Eclipse* (2007) and *Breaking Dawn* (2008) – the year of publication will be included to distinguish them.

The contrast between the lovers is also seen in a work that has also clearly influenced Meyer's fantastic world, *Jane Eyre*. Charlotte Brontë in her most well-known work also "highlights the differences between Jane's two suitors, the marble-like Reverend St. John Rivers and the fiery Mr. Rochester" (Kennedy 2014, 134). Stephenie Meyer "even continues with the temperature trope used to characterize the male rivals [...] although she reverses Bella's preferences (Morey 2012, 15). Contrarily to Jane, Bella associates Jacob with warmth and Edward with coldness due to the temperature of their bodies, which also match their personalities. For instance, when she is spending time with Jacob at the beach she claims that even the sun "was not quite as warm as Jacob" and she wonders "how long it would take [her] to burn" (2007, 113). In fact, Robert Frost's poem "Fire and Ice" is the epigraph for *Eclipse*, continuing with this trope. The love triangle is a recurrent motif in romances and Meyer's devices to contrast the two suitors are definitely inspired in the previously mentioned influences.

At the end of the second novel the issue of marriage is introduced. Eventually, Edward comes back because "Romeo wouldn't change his mind. That's why people still remembered his name, always twined with hers: Romeo and Juliet. That's why it was a good story" (2006, 326). Then, he proposes to Bella. For him, marriage is a condition for turning her into a vampire and Bella shows her views towards marriage for the first time. She responds that "marriage isn't exactly that high on [her] list of priorities" (2006, 477). This will be the driving force of the third novel. Traditional heroines had marriage as a goal, it was their happy ending. But despite Bella's fondness of novel reading and her love for Austen's and the Brontë's work, she "is not that girl" (2007, 244). This is what lets us know that she is a modern heroine. She loves the constructions of her favourite novels, but marriage was the "kiss of death" (2006, 477) for her parents, so she has an aversion for marriage. Again, despite of Bella's love for novels and her tendency to look for advice in their protagonists she is a modern woman with modern experiences and those have shaped her views on engagement and marriage.

3. Eclipse and Wuthering Heights

During *Eclipse* Bella is troubled about her engagement. What she desires the most is equality with her partner, but in order for Edward to be the one that transforms her into a vampire she has to respect his values and his only condition, marriage. She is clearly worried about what her family and friends will think due to social conventions. Getting married so young is not

seen in the 21st century as it was in Victorian times. Bella explains to him that in the current century “people don't just get married at eighteen! Not smart people, not responsible, mature people!” (2007, 244 – 245). She is less conservative than Edward in terms of tradition, and “in [her] mind, marriage and eternity are not mutually exclusive or mutually inclusive concepts” (2007, 246). On the contrary, Edward was born in a different time, so he wonders “why should the transitory customs of one local culture affect the decision so much?” (2007, 246). In the end, she will come to terms with the idea of marriage as the last rite of passage from human to vampire and as a way to say goodbye to her human loved ones.

Apart from revolving around the issue of marriage, Meyer herself has admitted that *Eclipse* was her *Wuthering Heights* homage (Wakefield 2011, 117). The novel is permeated by references to Emily Brontë's novel. This led to an overflow of demand of one of Bella's favourite books. In fact, in 2009 the editorial Harper Collins issued new editions of *Wuthering Heights* with a new cover inspired by Meyer's saga and it was at the top of best-selling classics for four months (117). This reflects how the influence of the saga is positive for Meyer's audience. It promotes reading among young audiences, encouraging them to discover classic works of literature. Teenagers are still formatting their characters and views on life, and reading is a way of shaping their minds and of helping them develop critical thinking. By reading novels young girls learn to question things rather than take them for granted. Novels by female writers encompassing young female experiences are especially relevant for this female audience since they can relate to the heroines' experiences and see them as role models.

The state of affairs is definitely wuthering around Forks in this third book. On one side, there is the issue love triangle that has been escalating from the second book. There is a clear tension between the Cullen clan of vampires, and the Quileute pack of werewolves. They are trying to fight the same enemy, Victoria and her army of new-born vampires, but are constrained by frontiers due to their territorial treaty. The heroine is in the middle of this, too fragile physically to be of any help in the fight, too human dealing with her emotions for the two boys she loves, and afraid that the supernatural world that now surrounds her and puts in danger the ones she loves, specially the human ones, unaware of the dangers. What Bella desires the most is to be transformed into a vampire in order to be able to defend herself and defend the ones that she loves. To be part of this supernatural world where her friends and newly found family belong is her main goal throughout the saga.

Edward views on one of Bella's favourite books are clear from the beginning. He wonders “how Heathcliff and Cathy ended up being ranked with couples like Romeo and

Juliet or Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy. It isn't a love story, it's a hate story.” (2007, 25) To which Bella responds that “their love is their only redeeming quality” (2007, 25). The same can be applied to their story. She thinks that she is the one to blame for the emotional mess, she even warns Edward that “Catherine is really the source of all the trouble, not Heathcliff” (2007, 25), identifying herself with Catherine. Bella wants to keep them both Edward and Jacob in her life despite that the hate that they profess for each other. That is why she argues that she is “like Cathy, like *Wuthering Heights*, only [her] options [are] so much better than hers, neither one evil, neither one weak” (2007, 459). When Bella states that her options are much better she refers to the fact that “Jacob, the dark, hot-blooded childhood friend, mirrors Heathcliff in everything, from his minority roots to his psychological role as the impulsive id” and “Edward combines Edgar’s best qualities - his good looks, wealth, adoring family, and psychological function as the controlled superego to the heroine’s ego” (Wakefield 2011, 119). They both complement Bella in one way or another, and although she is hesitant on her choice and the situation is hurting the three of them, the love they profess for each other is the redeeming quality of the story as it is in *Wuthering Heights*.

In the end, her choice is Edward. This is a reflection of how Meyer’s work “shares with the Victorian novel an insistence on passionate soulmates, the impossibility of living without one’s beloved” (Wakefield 2011, 118). Bella even quotes a fragment from *Wuthering Heights* that exemplifies this. For *Twilight*’s protagonist “if all else perished, and he remained, [she] should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger” (2007, 541). She cannot live without Edward. So, she chooses to marry him, despite her aversion to marriage. It is a way of keeping him by her side forever and a previous step on her way to eternity, since it is his condition for turning her into a vampire.

4. *Breaking Dawn* as the Heroine’s Coming of Age

Despite the lack of explicit intertextual references, *Jane Eyre* is clearly one of the big intertexts of the saga. It is one of the greatest examples of coming of age novels and “in both narratives, the heroine rises from misprized child to powerful woman, tracing an arc of a *Bildungsroman* that may be one of their shared attractions for both girls and women” (Morey 2012, 16). Jones defines bildungsroman as a “novel of formation, learning, maturation, and enlightenment [that] arises from the tradition of bildung, a theological and philosophical education/cultivation of citizenship” (2011, 445). She also argues that the point of start of this

traditional bildungsroman is a child coming of age (446) as it is the case of Bella in *Breaking Dawn*. After a series of rituals, she crosses the threshold that separates her from adulthood. After graduating from high school, she gets married, has sex for the first time, becomes pregnant, gives birth and finally she is reborn as a powerful vampire. The importance of representation is a pivotal element to take into account when trying to account for the success of the series. What drives the plot is “the hopes and dreams of a girl” (441) and this is appealing for “consumption by women of all ages” (441). This final book is the conclusion in which the heroine is empowered and at the same time achieves her fairy-tale ending.

Continuing with the comparisons to *Wuthering Heights*, in the fourth book Bella as a “revised Cathy marries a newly passionate Edgar and, because her motivation is love rather than money, she’s content” (Wakefield 2011, 118). When Jacob implies that Bella might be attracted to Edward because he is wealthy she responds that she does not love him “because he’s beautiful or because he’s rich!” [...] but because he is “the most loving and unselfish and brilliant and decent person (she has) ever met” (2007, 98). She marries him out of love, but also because it is the only way in which Edward accedes to transform her into a vampire, so they can be equal and together for all eternity. Another important reason behind the heroine’s decision to accede to marry Edward is that he wants to preserve Bella’s virtue intact, so he refuses to have sexual relationships with her until they are married. He is even wary even after they have gone through the ceremony, but then, as in *Jane Eyre*, both heroines “morph into figures capable of exciting erotically a more powerful man” (Morey 2012, 15). Despite Edward’s rejection of sex in the first three novels, in *Breaking Dawn* Bella starts to take advantage of her femininity and is finally able to seduce her husband during their honeymoon.

Then, the issues of unplanned pregnancy and motherhood are introduced. It is almost impossible, but Bella becomes pregnant. Then, as in *Jane Eyre*, both Bella and Jane “dream of a child who must be protected and who represents a great responsibility” (Morey 2012, 15) maybe because both heroines have grown up with the absence of the mother as a constant in their lives. Motherhood had never been a goal for Bella, but once she is pregnant she is determined to keep the baby at all costs because she sees it as the result of the love between her and Edward. The baby turns out to be half human and half vampire and grows at alarming rate, putting Bella’s life in danger, but contrary to what happens in *Wuthering Heights* “where Cathy Earnshaw dies, vampire venom saves Bella Swan” (Wakefield, 119) when she almost dies giving birth to her daughter Renesmee. Bella becomes a strong supernatural creature, which means that she becomes equal to her friends and family, so the “supernatural chromosomes displace the desire to move up in social rank” and disparities between Bella and

Edward” (Morey 2012, 16) disappear. Bella is now unexpectedly a mother, and a vampire, her main goal across the saga is achieved.

Bella is finally empowered. She is no longer the weak element in the life of those she loves. When she is reborn as a vampire, Edward and his family initially look at her as she “[is] the danger” (2008, 360) because new-born vampires are especially unstable. Indeed, she is “too strong” (2008, 362) physically now, but she is also rational as when she was human, which surprises her husband and her in-laws. She behaves like she is “decades rather than days years old” (2008, 388). When the ultimate danger arrives to her life in the form of the Italian ancient vampires known as the Vulturi, she does not have to rely on others for protection anymore. They threaten to eliminate her child, but she is now able to fight back as a powerful vampire. She is no longer limited to be an intelligent but fragile human being, now her physical strength accompanies her mental fortitude. In fact, this mental strength that she has had since she was just mortal is emphasized with her transformation into a vampire, it becomes a supernatural gift. The other characters start to refer to her mental gift as a mental shield, a “purely a mental defense. [...] Limited but strong” (2008, 553). Eventually, she discovers that she is able to extend her mental fortitude to physical confines, creating a physical protective shield. Traditionally, those who carried a shield were male soldiers, so she is given a masculine attribute associated with strength. Even the ancient Vulturi, which constitute the greatest threat to the Cullen’s and the heroine, are “terrified of Bella” because “their gifts were rendered useless by [her]” (2008, 690) and her shield. Bella is finally an active agent. She is a soldier in the battlefield and ends a potential war, avoiding the slaughter of her daughter and her family.

In the final pages of *Breaking Dawn* Bella fully embraces her role as a vampire, as a wife and as a mother. The final chapter is symbolically called “The happily ever after”. In the end, Bella achieves her purposes, being with Edward forever and becoming a supernatural creature, achieving equality with her husband and the rest of the Cullens, with the surprise element of becoming a mother, which she enjoys despite never having pictured herself as one. She reiterates the importance of respecting Renesmee’s childhood. After the final conflict she states that “it was time she got to be a child again - protected and secure. A few more years of childhood” (2008, 694). Bella is mending her own parents’ mistakes, leaving her alone in her journey to maturity. Bella and Edward get their happily ever after, and so does Jacob by means of imprintment with Renesmee, the love triangle is finally dissolved. Bella becomes empowered and she will forever live a happy life surrounded by her unconventional supernatural family.

Conclusion

From this analysis it can be concluded that “specificities and resonances of the female bildungsroman for the twenty-first-century girl” (Jones 2011, 440) are a key element to the success of literary products like *Twilight*. In her saga, Meyer certainly continues with a tradition of female writers while at the same time renders “chick lit” fiction anew by introducing fantastic elements. As it has been proved, she has clearly cultivated a complex network of intertextuality and literary references that instil in her readers the curiosity to discover other literary works. The saga indeed vindicates the importance and influence of other female writers that, as Meyer herself, were criticised in their time because their works were successful. In addition, Meyer’s novels are the clear example of how important it is to give voice to and represent teenage women’s experiences in fiction, especially through a positive role model like Bella Swan.

Narrating women’s experiences is a formula that has been constantly repeated and readapted from the 18th onwards and, contrarily to what has been argued by some detractors of the saga, as I have shown, Meyer’s take on it does not have a negative impact on a young generation of readers. Any female adolescent can relate to Bella’s struggles entering adulthood and getting initiated in romantic relationships, and it is important for this audience that has been diminished for consuming popular culture to be aware that all models of representations are valid despite the form in which they are presented. Although Meyer’s novels are set within the world of fantasy, they constitute a source of solace for young female readers that are still trying to find their voice and their place in the world. The main source of criticism towards Bella as a character has been her passivity, but in the end of the saga her initial powerlessness is reversed, and she is transformed into a contemporary empowered heroine and a female warrior, as portrayed in the last novel.

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