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Trabajo Fin de Grado

Analysing toxic relationships: a feminist perspective on Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight and Midnight Sun.*

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ABSTRACT

Literature has always been a device which captures the society we live in. Whether one is telling some fantastic story or an ordinary one, we can always draw some messages, be these good or bad. In this End of Degree Dissertation, I will focus on the feminist perspective of literature in general. The aim is to analyse the origins and development of feminism, paying special attention to toxic relationships and how these can affect people nowadays through literature. In addition to this analysis, this project will address the figure of Stephenie Meyer and her notorious saga *Twilight* and how the relationship of the main characters is toxic.

KEY WORDS: feminism, feminist perspective, fantasy fiction, toxic relationships, Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight*, *Midnight Sun*.

RESUMEN

La literatura ha servido siempre como recurso para expresar la sociedad en la que vivimos. No importa que nos cuenten una historia fantástica o una real, siempre podremos sacar un mensaje de ellas, tanto bueno, como malo. En este ensayo me centraré en un enfoque feminista de la literatura. El propósito de este Trabajo de Fin de Grado es analizar los orígenes y el desarrollo del feminismo, haciendo énfasis en las relaciones tóxicas y en cómo pueden afectar a la gente hoy en día mediante la literatura. Además de ese análisis, este proyecto hablará de la figura de Stephenie Meyer y su aclamada saga *Crepúsculo* y de cómo la relación de los protagonistas es tóxica.

PALABRAS CLAVE: feminismo, perspectiva feminista, literatura fantástica, relaciones tóxicas, Stephenie Meyer, *Crepúsculo*, *Sol de Medianoche*.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this End of Degree Dissertation is to determine whether the well-known books of Stephenie Meyer praise toxic relationships. In order to do this, I will focus on the relationship of the main characters, Bella and Edward, in the first and last book of the saga, *Twilight* (2005) and *Midnight Sun* (2020), and study them from a feminist perspective. This essay will be divided in four parts: the first one will describe the religious and feminist background of the author, Stephenie Meyer. Secondly, the feminist movement will be explained, focusing attention on toxic relationships. Then, the role of these novels in the early 2000s will be interpreted. Finally, the main romantic relationship will be analyzed regarding the information already seen.

In the first part of this dissertation, the background of Meyer will be analysed, paying special attention to the religion she is part of and to the feminist movement, in order to understand her point of view better. The second part will be divided into three: firstly, some definitions of the feminist movement will be explained. Then, the origin of this phenomenon and its four waves will be studied. Thirdly, I will define what a toxic relationship is and the signs to identify one. The different types of toxic relationships that exist will also be analysed. Finally, the fourth part will be divided again in three parts, the first one being a summary of the story of *Twilight* and *Midnight Sun*. The second one will approach the characters and the last one will attempt to analyse whether this controversial relationship is toxic or not. Finally, the general conclusions of this final project will be drawn.

2. STEPHENIE MEYER'S RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

2.1 Biography

Stephenie Meyer was born 24th November 1973, in the capital city of Connecticut, Hartford, in the USA. However, when she was very young, her family moved to Phoenix, Arizona, where she was raised. When Meyer finished her studies in Chaparral High School, she was given a scholarship, hence she was able to fund her studies at the BYU¹ in Utah. She graduated in 1997, obtaining a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature. Before she graduated from college, she married her childhood friend from Arizona, Christian Meyer, in 1994. In the present day, they have three children who are being taken care of by Christian, who chose to stay at home to raise them. (Ruiza et al, 2004)

Before writing her acclaimed novel *Twilight*, Meyer thought of studying law, because she did not think of herself as a good writer. Nonetheless, in 2003, she changed her mind and wrote her first story, *Twilight*, within three months. Two years later, in 2005, her story was published by Little, Brown and Company, an American publisher. This would change Meyer's life completely. (Ruiza et al, 2004)

Having an unexpected success, Meyer wrote three more books to complete the *Twilight* saga: *New Moon* (2006), *Eclipse* (2007) and *Breaking Dawn* (2008). Also, she wrote three additional books to the saga. The first one, regarding the life story of a minor character in the third book of the tetralogy, called *The Short Life of Bree Tanner* in 2010. After that book, she wrote two complementary guides, *The Twilight Saga: The Official Illustrated Guide* (2011) and *Life and Death: Twilight Reimagined* (2015). Due to the success that this saga gave Meyer, she has been awarded with *Author of the Year* by the journal *USA Today* and she was number 49 in *Times 100: The Most Influential People*, by *Times* in 2008. (Meyer, 2020b) In addition, in 2009 *Forbes* magazine chose Meyer as number 29 in *Top 100: The World's Most Powerful People*.

Apart from her famous saga, Meyer also wrote other types of fiction. For instance, in 2008, she created *The Host*, a science fiction romance novel where we have a post-apocalyptic Earth, invaded by an alien race. This book was also received well, and subsequently was adapted into a film version in 2013. Another work of adult fiction that Meyer wrote is called

¹ Brigham Young University.

The Chemist (2016), an action thriller about “an ex-agent on the run from her former employers.” (France, 2016). Her last published work has been the fifth part of the *Twilight* saga: *Midnight Sun* (2020), a novel telling the story of Bella and Edward, the protagonists of the saga, but from Edward’s point of view, in contrast with the rest of the saga, which is told from Bella’s point of view.

2.2 Faith and Feminism

Stephenie Meyer is a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which is commonly known as Mormonism. Growing up, her family and friends have been involved in this religion, so it was natural for her to join. She follows the religion’s strict rules, such as not smoking, not drinking alcohol or even coffee.

Since she was a little girl, Meyer’s life revolved around this Church and she even chose to study at BYU, which is a university related to these beliefs. Even though she considers herself as a very spiritual person, Meyer has stated in an interview with the magazine *The Guardian* that “I never decide to put a message in anything. I decide on a story that I think is exciting, and I entertain myself, and then some of it obviously reflects my personal experience.” (Cochrane, 2016).

In spite of this, Meyer has been badly criticized for her star saga. Many of her readers have criticized this novel for its lack of sexual scenes or have even labelled it as an ‘abstinence’ story. The general thought about this topic is that even if Meyer wanted or not, she was transmitting a religious message in *Twilight*, which continues throughout the books in the series. It is also relevant to mention the traditional family stereotype Meyer depicts in these novels with the Cullen clan, which is very similar to what a family would be according to the LDS² beliefs.

Continuing with the criticism Meyer has had to face, a very controversial question is whether Meyer is a feminist or not. According to an interview in *The Guardian*, Meyer considers herself a feminist, stating: “I love women, I have a lot of girlfriends, I admire them, they make so much more sense to me than men, and I feel like the world is a better place when

² Latter-day Saint. An acronym generally used to refer to the believers of the Mormon church .

women are in charge. So that kind of by default makes me a feminist. I love working in a female world.” (Cochrane, 2016)

However, many experts in the field and feminists do not consider Meyer a feminist. For example, Donna Ashcraft, a scholar specialized in Women’s Studies, does not think of Meyer as a feminist, yet also not as an antifeminist. According to Ashcraft, Meyer could not be a feminist because of the story of Bella and Edward depicted in her novels. This relationship perpetuates very fixed and traditional gender roles where Bella is always the clumsy and weak part and Edward is the protector and the hero. (Ashcraft, 2013: 19). In the same way, many feminists and therapists, like Susan Jeffers or Jonathan Decker, label Bella and Edward’s relationship as an abusive one, ignoring several red flags or warnings which let us know that Edward is an abusive partner.

3. UNDERSTANDING FEMINISM

3.1 Definition(s)

In order to make assumptions or judge Meyer's works, we would have to give a definition of what feminism is. Although the term 'feminism' or 'feminist' had not gained popularity or spread until the 1970s, the aim of this movement has its roots very early in human civilization.

If we look for the definition of 'feminism', one can find several. For instance, the *Cambridge Online Dictionary* states that feminism is "the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state." (2021). Here we see a broad explanation of what the feminist movement wants to accomplish. According to Blackburn, the term 'feminism' refers to: "The approach to social life, philosophy, and ethics that commits itself to correcting biases leading to the subordination of women or the disparagement of women's particular experience and of the voices women bring to discussion." (Blackburn: 2008). As we can see, this definition is more precise and mentions more aspects in which this term is used.

As a general conclusion, we could say that the term 'feminism' refers to a political, cultural and economic movement which aims to create equality between the rights of men and women, advocating for women's interests and criticising bad behaviour towards gender equality. This movement stands up for several rights towards women in different fields, such as legally, defending women's right to vote or even to protect them from sexual assault in the workplace or public places.

3.2 The Origin and Development of Feminism

Since the beginning of time, society has been created by and for men, which one can label as 'patriarchy'. Thankfully, in these modern years, society is changing and women are closer to having the same perks and privileges that men have, but as we all know, it has not always been this way. Although we do not know with certainty what are the roots of feminism, it is inevitable to think of Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen as early feminists. All these people defended the value of the female sex and advocated for equality in genders. (Rampton, 2015). According to Rampton, the feminist movement is classified into four waves, each one representing one period in time and defending different rights. This classification was not

acknowledged until the 'second wave' was coined, differentiating it from the first one. (Rampton, 2015)

Between the late 19th and early 20th century, the first wave was developed mainly in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. In this time, women were relegated to being merely caretaker of their family and home, without taking into account a woman's worth as an individual. Nonetheless, in the late 1800s, the society and environment changed into a liberal and industrialized one. With these changes, women took their opportunity and rebelled against the injustices they suffered. The most influential women in this dispute were the suffragettes, who fought the traditional laws to gain the right to vote just as men did.

This feminist movement formally began in the USA in July 1848, when several hundreds of people rallied for the equality in genders in the Seneca Falls Convention, in Seneca Falls, New York. Then, they worked on the Seneca Falls Declaration stating the beliefs, focus and strategies of the feminist movement. Besides, this wave focused on political changes, such as the one just mentioned, the right to vote, and even the possibility of women to gain higher positions in the political sphere. These demands led society to analyse gender roles and the differences between women and men in society.

Slowly, the right for women to vote started to gain power and in 1893, New Zealand approved the right for women to vote, followed by Australia in 1902 and Finland in 1906. Years later, the United Kingdom granted this right, in 1918. The first wave is considered to end by 1919, when the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution fulfilled the goal of stating women's right to vote.

The second wave is generally thought to have developed between the 1960s and 1980s. In this period of time, we can see a change in feminism. Having gained some political power, the feminists reclaimed more and more influence in the society. This wave came together with more social movements, considering minority groups an important part of the movement. Because of the influence of other movements that appeared at the same time, such as anti-war and civil rights or black movements, the previous goals of feminism, faded a little bit. In 1968, there were some protests against the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City, claiming that the competition only remarked on the stereotypes forced on women, objectifying them and basing the winner on the exterior beauty of the candidates. It also reinforced the idea of the perfect woman: wearing high heels and makeup as a standard.

The first wave was mostly ruled by “middle class, Western, cisgender³, white women” (Rampton, 2015), but the second wave connected women of all races and classes. This wave focused more on social issues, like sexuality, reproductive rights and equality for all sexes. As stated by Rampton:

The second wave was increasingly theoretical, based on a fusion of neo-Marxism and psycho-analytical theory, and began to associate the subjugation of women with broader critiques of patriarchy, capitalism, normative heterosexuality, and the woman's role as wife and mother. Sex and gender were differentiated—the former being biological, and the later a social construct that varies culture-to-culture and over time. (2015)

Two of the most relevant works in this period of time are *The Second Sex* (1949), by the French writer Simone de Beauvoir, and *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), by Betty Friedan. Although the work by de Beauvoir was written years before the second wave started, it became popular by that time. This novel with women's oppression and focuses on the female gender as a social construct rather than a biological characteristic. It is one of the most famous works of de Beauvoir and it is a well-known feminist book. The second one, reviews the idea of women finding their happiness and fulfilment of their aspiration in life by being housewives who stay at home taking care of their children. Friedan's work has been a respected book dealing with the feminist topic. As a matter of fact, the journal *The New York Times* stated in one of its articles that “*The Feminine Mystique* is widely regarded as one of the most influential nonfiction books of the 20th century.” (Fox, 2006).

Later on, by the mid 90s, the third wave of feminism began. Even though the root of the movement is the same, in this wave the focus changed due to postmodern thinking. Now, feminists reappropriated some pejorative insults, such as ‘bitch’ or ‘slut’ in order to gain control over the use, trying to erase the negative part of the meaning. (Rampton, 2015) With this wave, also came the high-heels and makeup again, used to empowered women dressing and looking as they wanted, instead of being used to please the sexist desire of the patriarchy. As explained by Rampton, this feminism “tends to be global, multicultural, and it shuns simple answers or artificial categories of identity, gender, and sexuality.” (2015). It also includes women of all kinds, regarding their race, class or sexual orientation.

³ “Of, relating to, or being a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

Concluding with the fourth wave, we have to take into account that it is still in development. This recent wave aims to obtain some of the main goals of the second wave, considering the third wave to be too optimistic. In recent years, the main focus of feminism has been placed on trying to solve social issues such as, violence against women, sexual abuse, unequal pay, female representation or higher positions in politics or business. For instance, by 2010, the *#MeToo* movement was created in order to give visibility to the so called ‘rape-culture’. This movement took and continues to take place mainly in the social networks of Twitter and Instagram and started to gain importance in 2017, when very important profiles in the American high society, such as the producer Harvey Weinstein or the president himself, Donald Trump were accused of sexual assault. Later on, many people use the *#MeToo* movement to talk about their personal situations regarding misogyny.

One of the most relevant events which happened because of the feminist movement is the Women’s March that took place in Washington DC, USA, the first day of Donald Trump’s presidency, on January 21, 2017. It gathered hundreds of thousands of people protesting for this presidency, which was considered antifeminist. As a result, over three million people all over the world held similar protests, resulting in a massive exposure to this movement. (History.com Editors, 2021).

3.3 Toxic Relationships

When talking about the *Twilight* saga, one criticism which always stands out is how the relationship of Bella and Edward is in some ways, toxic. But, what is a toxic relationship? According to *Urban Dictionary* a toxic relationship is:

When the relationship between two people is toxic, dangerous. They're slowly destroying each other but they don't see it. They're unhealthy for each other, blinded by their romance. A kind of abusive relationship, a toxic relationship is poisonous to the individuals emotionally, spiritually. (2018)

Originally, this term was coined by Dr. Lillian Glass, in 1995 in her book *Toxic People: 10 Ways Of Dealing With People Who Make Your Life Miserable*. Here, Glass defines a toxic relationship as “any relationship [between people who] don’t support each other, where there’s conflict and one seeks to undermine the other, where there’s competition, where there’s disrespect and a lack of cohesiveness.” (1995).

Taking these two definitions into account, we could analyse the signs to determine if a relationship is toxic or not. Unfortunately, there is not a common ground about what is a red flag in a relationship, yet these are the more studied ones by Dr. Melissa Smith and Jeanne Segal:

- Violence. This is one of the most important signs, but it does not have to be only physical violence, it can also be verbal. Having big arguments can be considered a kind of violence, too. (Smith, M., & Segal, J., 2021)
- Control or manipulation. This is a very common one and it is, along with the previous one, the easiest sign to determine if it is a toxic relationship. This signal could also be followed by possessiveness, gaslighting⁴, jealousy and being judgmental about everything your partner does. (Smith, M., & Segal, J., 2021)
- Co-dependency and isolation. These two are very subtle, yet they connect several more signs which let us recognize a toxic relationship. For instance, if one part of the relationship has low self-esteem, it can lead to an idealization of the other part and to put their needs above their own ones. As a result, this person could lose themselves in order to please the other person and isolate themselves from their family and friends. (Smith, M., & Segal, J., 2021)

In this context, we also examine the different types of toxic partners we could find in these kinds of relationships. According to what Dr. Thomas Corey wrote in an article on the online magazine, *Health Scope: Health and Wellness Magazine*, we could find eight types of toxic partners. First of all, the ‘deprecator-belittle’, who would make fun or underestimate their partner in front of people in order to feel good. Secondly, we have two types, the ‘guilt-inducer’ and the ‘overreactor/deflector’. These two types share some similarities, such as to try to blame everything on their partner in order to inflict guilt or deflect their own blame. Then, we find the ‘user’, who will always use their partner to their own benefit and would never be satisfied with anything. Following this, we could analyse two opposite ones: the ‘over-dependent’ and the ‘independent toxic controller’, the first one being an extremely dependent person, always requiring care, and the second one an extremist independent profile who will say things like ‘you cannot control me’, in order to do whatever they want. Finally, we should remark on the most dangerous ones: the ‘bad temper’ and the ‘possessive toxic controller’. These two profiles

⁴ “Gaslighting is a form of psychological abuse where a person or group makes someone question their sanity, perception of reality, or memories.” (Huizen, 2020)

are based on the same principle: to use fear as the controlling device to dominate their partners, either using physical or verbal abuse. (Corey, 2020).

These types of behaviour could lead to domestic abuse, a very significant problem we find in today's society. Most importantly, we have to examine the data regarding this issue. According to the *National Coalition Against Domestic Violence* (henceforth, NCADV), “nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States.” (NCADV, n. d.). This alarming information is followed by:

1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men experience severe intimate partner physical violence, intimate partner contact sexual violence, and/or intimate partner stalking with impacts such as injury, fearfulness, post-traumatic stress disorder, use of victim services, contraction of sexually transmitted diseases, etc. (NCADV, n. d.)

In this context, we also have some statistics about Spain, for example. According to the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística*⁵ (INE), 8.279 people were victims of domestic violence in Spain in 2020. (2021). Moreover, we can study the information given in Figure 1, which shows us the number of victims of domestic and gender violence in Spain from 2011 to 2020 , of both women and men. As we can see, women are more likely to suffer from this type of violence.

⁵ *National Statistics Institute*, in English.

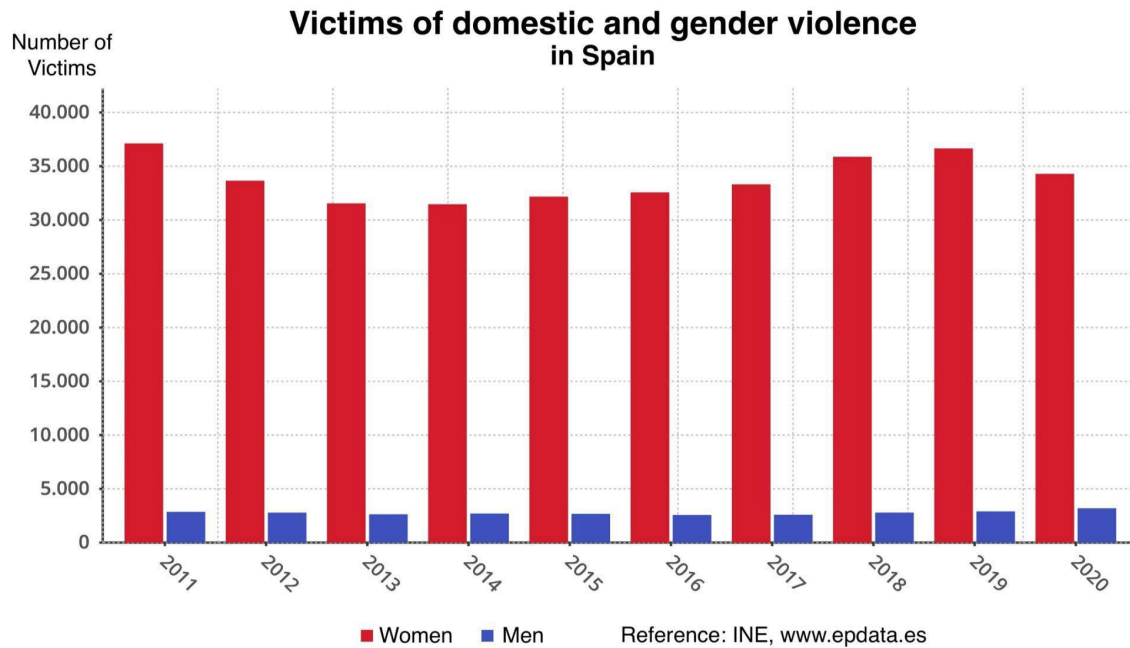


Figure 1. Victims of domestic and gender violence in Spain from 2011 to 2020.

When we analyse this alarming information, we have to bear in mind the factors which may trigger this violence. One element we should consider is the relevance of literature and media in children and young adults. In this group, we could have a potential victim of domestic or gender violence, so it is fundamental to take into consideration which content these children receive. This is the reason why the *Twilight* saga has been so harshly criticized, because it might influence younger readers and, if the message transmitted is not the appropriate one, it could cause significant problems in future relationships.

4. THE ROLE OF *TWILIGHT* IN THE EARLY 2000s

When in 2005, Stephenie Meyer published the first book of the *Twilight* saga, nobody was expecting the phenomenon that it caused. Its readers, usually teenagers and young people, went mad about it, reaching number five on the *New York Times* bestseller list in the first month of its release. The same year of its release, this novel won *Best Books of 2005* by *School Library Journal*. It was also awarded with *Best Fiction for Young Adults* by *Young Adults Library Services Association*, in 2006. (FictionDB, 2007) In addition, in 2008, *Twilight* was number 26 on the list of *Bestselling Books of Last 15 Years*, by the journal *USA Today*. (Jones, 2008) The same year it sold over 29 million copies and the next one, over 26. (Meyer, 2020b)

In 2006, the sequel, called *New Moon*, was published and immediately was placed on the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list. It also ranked number 29 on *USA Today*'s top-selling book list of 2007. The following year, *Eclipse*, the third book of the saga, was released and ranked number one in the top 150 best sellers list of *USA Today*, and a year later, peaked on the *Bestselling Hardcover Backlist Children's Books* of the *Publishers Weekly*. This novel became the fourth bestselling book of 2008 and the second one the following year. (FictionDB, 2007)

Lastly, in 2008, *Breaking Dawn*, the final part of the saga was published, obtaining the first position of the top 150 best sellers list of *USA Today*. It was the best seller of children's books of that year, and furthermore, in 2009 receiving another two awards: the *Teen Choice Book of the Year* by the *Children's Choice Book Awards* and *Children's Book of the Year* by the *British Book Awards*. (FictionDB, 2007)

In total, the *Twilight* saga has sold over 100 million copies around 50 countries and has been translated to 37 different languages. (Meyer, 2020b) Having this impact, every teenager (especially girls) was in love with the story of Bella and Edward. It was a worldwide phenomenon, so the saga received its film adaptations thanks to Summit Entertainment producer.

In 2008, the film adaptation of *Twilight* was released, earning over 70 million dollars in the first weekend. It was nominated several times at the *MTV Movie Awards* of 2009, winning almost everything. Additionally, the film won *Best Fantasy Film* at the 35th *Saturn Awards* and two *Grammy Awards*. The following adaptations of the saga were released in

consecutive years earning millions of dollars and winning numerous awards again. (IMDb, n.d.)

With this unexpected success, Meyer became one of the most recognizable authors regarding fantasy romance literature for young adults. The books became very famous and everyone was talking about them. The *Twilight* fandom was created and millions of people bought merchandise of Bella, Edward and all of the beloved characters of the saga. Several blogs were created just so readers could talk about them and many fanarts⁶ and fanfics⁷ were created around this vampiric world. In fact, the popular erotic saga *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011) was based on Edward and Bella, according to her writer, E. L. James. (Cuccinello, 2017)

Nonetheless, *Twilight* was the forefather of this kind of children or young adult literature: romance between a fantastic or supernatural creature and a human. Years later, a vast number of books were written based on the same concept. For example, the *Evernight* saga (2008-2011), by Claudia Gray or *The Shadowhunter Chronicles* (2007-present day) by Cassandra Clare.

With all this information, we could see that this saga has made a great impact on the society of those years. Having been harshly criticized by many experts on the field of psychology, these novels are very controversial, as seen before. This is the reason why many people find it dangerous to encourage young people to act as the main characters of the novels. But, is the relationship between Bella and Edward actually toxic?

⁶“Artwork based on popular works of fiction (such as books, movies, etc.) that is created by fans.” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

⁷ “Fanfiction is fiction written by a fan that features characters from a particular mythical universe such as a TV show or book.” (Cuccinello, 2017)

5. TWILIGHT AND MIDNIGHT SUN

5.4 Summary

In *Twilight* (2005) we learn the story of Bella Swan, a seventeen-year-old girl who has moved to Forks, Washington, from Phoenix, Arizona. She moves in with her father, because her mother is travelling across the country with her boyfriend. So Bella has to stay with Charlie, her father who she has not seen in a long time. Bella is a pale girl, but she loves the sun, so moving to the rainy Forks is not what she has wanted the most.

Being an introvert, she struggles a bit to make friends the first days, yet she manages to spend time with some of her classmates, becoming friends by the end of the week. However, she never truly feels comfortable around them, because she is an old soul. One day, she spots an extremely handsome group of people who sit together at lunch. She asks about them to their friends, only to find out that those people are the Cullens, the adoptive children of Carlisle Cullen, a great doctor there in Forks, and Esme Cullen, his wife. She is fascinated by all of them, but by one in particular: Edward.

Having a rough first meeting, when Edward could not bare to be in the same room as Bella because of her scent, they start talking in Biology class, where they sit together. When he first meets Bella, Edward does not speak to her, nor even look at her and then, he disappears for a week. When he comes back, he is nice but always warns Bella that they should not be friends. Bella finds Edward mysterious and sometimes, a bit rude. But, most of all, Edward is confusing for her.

Days later, an incident takes place: a van almost crushes Bella because of the ice on the road of the high school's parking lot. However, Edward manages to save her, leaving his fingers marked on the vehicle, even though he was across the street and has had to run very fast to get there in time. Bella asks Edward about it, but he gaslights her in order to maintain his secret.

When the school dance is near, some boys ask Bella to go out with them to the dance, but she refuses and lies about leaving that day to go to Seattle to visit the place. Nonetheless, Edward overhears them and asks Bella if he can drive her there. Bella says yes. Then, she goes on a trip to the beach with her friends and meets an old friend, Jacob Black, a Quileute boy who tells her about 'the cold ones', which we would call 'vampires', with the difference that the

Cullen clan is 'vegetarian': they do not drink human blood, but animals'. Bella starts to investigate on the internet because she is suspicious of Edward.

One day, Bella and her friends decide to go to Port Angeles to shop, but Bella gets lost in the city as she looks for a book shop. Then, when she is being bothered by some men, Edward appears in his car and rescues her. In the car, he confesses he can read everyone's minds, except for her's. When they are coming back to Forks, Bella surprises Edward telling him that she knows about the Cullen being vampires. Edward is really confused by why Bella is not horrified by his secret, but she is falling in love with him, so she is not afraid.

As they grow closer, Edward and Bella share a beautiful moment when, instead of going to Seattle as planned, they spend the day together at the forest, so Bella can see Edward in the sun and learns that he glows with direct sunlight. Days later, Edward tells Bella about his family story and how they all turn into vampires. He also confesses that he is falling in love with her and that he spies her every night while she sleeps. Bella is flushed about that and does not get mad at all. Next, Bella goes to the Cullen's mansion to meet his family and, later that weekend, they go to play baseball together.

While they are having fun, three other vampires appear in the field, but they do not follow the same 'vegetarian' diet as the Cullens, so Bella is at risk. The whole family tries to cover her, but her scent gets to James, an unstoppable tracker who wants to kill Bella in order to drink her blood. This event changes everything and Bella has to leave the city immediately. She lies to her father and escapes with Alice and Jasper, two members of the Cullen family, while the others are trying to catch James so they can kill him before he kills her.

After a tired hunt, James disappears and Edward calls Bella to tell her that he is going after her so he can protect her. Later that day, Bella receives another phone call, but this time it is from James, who tells her he has her mother so she has to sneak out from her vampire friend and meet up with him at her old dance studio. When Bella gets there, she realises her mother's voice was just an old recording, and everything was a trap from James. He hits and bites Bella and she passes out. When she wakes up, Edward is by her side, sucking the vampire poison from her arm in order to stop her from turning into a vampire but having a doubtful moment, because he desires Bella's blood so much, so he thinks he might not be able to stop. However, he can stop and identify that as proof of how much he loves her. Meanwhile, the other members of the family kill James.

Days later, Bella wakes up in a hospital room and Edward tells her everything that happened. They decide to tell Bella's parents that she had an accident but that she is going to be ok. When Bella is better, she and Edward go to the prom and they argue about why Bella could not be a vampire. Edward points out that he does not want her to miss any human experience, so they compromise and kiss.

Midnight Sun (2020) tells us the same story, but having Edward Cullen as the narrator, so we get to see his point of view, which is much wider than Bella's, due to his ability to read minds. With this novel, we get to understand certain things we could not know if it were not for Edward's perspective. For instance, we find out why he disappeared for a week at the beginning of the novel when he meets Bella for the first time or what Bella's friends really think of her.

5.5 Understanding Bella

Bella Swan is, along with Edward Cullen, the main character of the story. She is seventeen years old, with skin "clear, almost translucent-looking"⁸ (Meyer, 2005: 9) and a slim figure. She also has dark brown hair and brown eyes. She usually wears comfortable clothes, due to her lack of interest in fashion.

Concerning Bella's personality, she is described as a good and responsible girl, doing all the housework by herself. She is also smart and a bookworm, saying. "they didn't know how preoccupied I could get when surrounded by books" (135). She loves to read, but her favourites are Jane Austen and:

Everything by any Brontë. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, obviously. *Fahrenheit 451*. All of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, but especially *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. *Gone with the Wind*. Douglas Adams and David Eddings and Orson Scott Card and Robin McKinley. Did I already say L. M. Montgomery? (Meyer, 2020: 311)

In the story, she is perceived as clumsy, falling and tripping several times throughout the novel. This characteristic gives her a childish look, Edward being the hero who rescues her

⁸ All the quotations of the two novels will be taken from Meyer, S. (2005). *Twilight*. Great Britain: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers and Meyer, S. (2020a). and *Midnight Sun*. Great Britain: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

many times. She is depicted as a loner, much as being ‘an old soul’, as said by Bella herself “I didn’t relate well to people my age.” (Meyer, 2005: 9)

Regarding her relationship with her family, we could say that Bella was not raised in a traditional one. Her parents got married very young, and after having Bella, they got a divorce and her mother Renée moved from Forks, to Phoenix, leaving Charlie, Bella’s father. Then, Renée raised Bella alone, until she started a relationship with Phil, who made her fall in love immediately. However, Bella was the responsible one, as seen here: “How could I leave my loving, erratic, harebrained mother to fend for herself? Of course she had Phil now, so the bills would probably get paid, there would be food in the refrigerator, gas in her car, and someone to call when she got lost, but still” (4)

As we can see, Bella had to be in charge of her house, due to her mother’s personality. This is an important factor which shapes Bella’s personality, making her more mature than she would have to be as a child. When Bella moved to Forks, she also took the role of caretaker of Charlie, although he had been living by himself from the moment Renée and Bella left.

5.6 Understanding Edward

Edward Cullen was born in 1901, but Carlisle, his vampire adoptive father, turned him into a vampire in 1918, when Edward was only seventeen years old. Then, he became part of Carlisle’s family and they spent some years together. Carlisle also turned, Esme, who became his wife, into a vampire, when she was about to die. Next, Carlisle turned the dying Rosalie into a vampire, becoming Edward’s sister. Years later, Emmett appears in their lives and joins the family. And finally, Alice and Jasper join the Cullen clan, making it seven members large with Carlisle and Esme as adoptive parents and the rest of them as adoptive children.

Edward is described as “lanky, less bulky, with untidy, bronze-coloured hair” (16). He has reddish coloured hair and as, all the members of his family, black and golden eyes. The reason behind this change of colour is the time between when they feed: if the Cullens are well fed, they have golden eyes, but if they are hungry, their eyes turn black. He is very attractive, this being a quality all vampires share. They are also very strong and fast and a few have a certain power. Edward’s power is reading minds.

In terms of personality, Edward is very traditional, due to the period of time he grew up. In the story, he is described as charming and well-mannered, too. He is also very smart and

he is considered an intellectual, due to his passion for books and music. He has many books in his house, along with a big piano which he loves to play for his family and friends.

He is also depicted in the story as a pessimist. He considers himself “a monster”, thinking he has no soul, due to his vampire condition: “At the time I became a vampire, trading my soul and mortality for immortality in the searing pain of transformation, I had truly been frozen.” (Meyer, 2020: 124). This is the reason why he is so tortured and thinks of himself as worthless of salvation, saying “If there were any way to atone for my sins, this ought to count toward the tally in some measure.” (1).

Nonetheless, we can see that he also thinks of himself as better than humans, giving him a bit of a god complex⁹, as seen when talking about the arrival of Bella to the high school: “Just an ordinary human girl. The excitement over her arrival was tiresomely predictable—it was the same reaction as one would get from flashing a shiny object at a group of toddlers.” (1).

5.7 Is this a Toxic Relationship?

Having researched about the topic, the next step is to analyse Edward and Bella’s relationship. First, we search for signs of possible toxic behaviour, such as, controlling, co-dependency or even violence.

As explained before, Bella is a normal girl. She is shy, with some low self-esteem, but very kind-hearted. She always puts others’ necessities above her own. When she falls in love with Edward, this ‘good’ part becomes obsessive and she becomes very dependent on Edward, as seen in the last chapter “You *are* my life. You’re the only thing it would hurt me to lose.” (Meyer, 2005: 413). This is the first sign of the toxic relationship they have. However, Edward also proves to be dependent on Bella, stating: “There was nothing left inside me that wasn’t entirely about her. I remembered our first conversation, remembered thinking then that I did not truly have a life. That was no longer the case.’ You are my life now,’ I whispered.” (Meyer, 2020: 488)

As stated above, Bella is depicted several times as clumsy, which gives her a shade of infantilization, always requiring salvation, as if she were a damsel in distress. In this case, her

⁹ “A god complex is an unshakable belief characterized by consistently inflated feelings of personal ability, privilege, or infallibility.” (Definitions.net. (n.d) *What does god complex mean?* Retrieved 17 June, 2021 from <https://www.definitions.net/definition/god+complex>)

saviour would be Edward, building the co-dependency mentioned before: Bella always needs Edward to save her and he is always needed to save her. This is shown in chapter nine: “I’ve never tried to keep a specific person alive before and it’s much more troublesome than I would have believed. But that’s probably just because it’s you. Ordinary people seem to make it through the day without so many catastrophes.” (Meyer, 2020: 216-217)

The next red flag we can appreciate in this relationship is the controlling and possessive personality of Edward with Bella. He needs to know everything about her, keeping tabs and stalking her in her house, at night. All of the above without Bella’s consent, obviously. He spends most of his nights watching Bella sleep, even before they both had a proper conversation. As we can read in chapter 13, where Edward says, “I did not feel the usual guilt when I returned to Bella’s room that night, though I knew I should. But it felt like the correct course of action— the only right thing to be doing.” (303). He also searches for her in everyone’s minds, due to his power; in order to know where she is and what she is doing at all times. At the beginning of chapter six, we can read “I followed her all day through other people’s eyes, barely aware of my own surroundings.” (132).

In addition, we see that Edward gets jealous several times when other boys speak to Bella, showing a possessive train of thought. For instance, this happens in chapter two and five:

Why did it bother me, the protective concern that suddenly emanated from Mike Newton’s thoughts? What did it matter that there was a possessive edge to them? (35)

The wild envy in his thoughts—envy for whomever this girl preferred to him—suddenly put a name to my emotion.

I was jealous. (109)

However, Edward is not the only one showing toxic traits. Bella tends to idealize Edward, thinking he is perfect, comparing him to a god several times in the novel. For example, when she describes him, she says he is “looking more like a Greek god than anyone had the right to” (Meyer, 2005: 180). Another example would be when she thinks that Edward is too perfect to be with her, saying “He was too perfect, I realize with a piercing stab of despair. There was no way this godlike creature could be meant for me” (Meyer, 2020: 224). This trail of thoughts, leads Bella to mostly care about Edward, leaving behind her previous friends of school and even, her family, at the end of the saga. We can see throughout the story how Bella detaches herself from her friends: she stops going out with them and sits at the same table at lunch, focusing only on her developing relationship with Edward. This is one of the red flags

we have seen before: the possible isolation that one or both parts of the relationship could develop during their time together.

To sum up, we could say that the controversy and all the criticism which the *Twilight* saga has received along all these years has been right. One can conclude that Bella and Edward's relationship is toxic, with several signs we cannot forget in order to enjoy the story itself.

6. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Through history, we have read several books which have had an impact on ourselves, on how we see and interact with the world. This is the reason why we have to be careful and very analytical with everything we read. It is perfectly alright to read just for fun, but we also have to bear in mind that we can always extract a message from everything we read, whether we are aware of this or not.

Nowadays, the feminist movement is a very important topic in society. Thanks to our foremothers, we have gained many rights which help us balance the inequality we still suffer. However, the topic of toxic relationships was brought to the public eye not many years ago. Since then, more and more information is forthcoming and we have enough data to confirm that this is a real problem to society itself.

In 2005, Stephenie Meyer published *Twilight*, a novel which revolutionized the fantastic literature for young readers as we know it. Having the generational impact and success that it had, more novels came. A whole phenomenon was created. But, not everything was good. Many experts and readers criticized these novels because they sent the wrong message; a message which was old and traditional. They claimed the novel to be misogynistic, with the main romantic relationship between Edward and Bella being very toxic.

With all the information gathered together, we can determine they were right. Although it might not seem at first, Edward, being so charismatic and polite, is very possessive and controlling. It all comes from a good place, the love of Bella, but his actions are wrong in order to have a healthy relationship. Furthermore, Bella is also a culprit of this unhealthy relationship. She is very dependent on Edward and always puts himself above her, becoming the clichéd ‘damsel in distress’.

Although we may enjoy the story for its fantastic characteristics or like the characters, it is clear that we cannot see their relationship as the goal to achieve. At the end of the day, we have to judge if the message a story is sending is beneficial to ourselves or whether it is not worth keeping .

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