

Derek Godin
Women Writers
Roxanne Rimstead
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A Kick to the Ovaries: A Feminist Reading of Stephanie Meyer's "Twilight"

Released in October 2005, *Twilight*, a young adult novel written by American author Stephanie Meyer, has become a veritable cultural phenomenon. It became a *New York Times* best-seller, was translated into 20 languages, and was named one of the Top Ten Books for Young Readers by the American Library Association. It has also spun off a series of sequels and a feature film franchise. But upon further inspection, this seemingly innocent vampire romance stars a protagonist that paints an unflattering picture of young women.

Twilight centers around Phoenix native Isabella Swan, referred to as Bella in the novel, her relocation to Forks, Washington, a small town of approximately 3000, and her burgeoning relationship with mysteriously alluring student Edward Cullen. When she is saved from getting run over under highly unlikely circumstances by Edward and after being lectured in local folklore by Native resident Jacob Black, Bella starts suspecting that Edward may not be as human as he seems. Her doubts are proven legitimate when Edward reveals to her that he is, in fact, a vampire. They start falling in love, a difficult situation (he thirsts for her blood) rendered more precarious with the arrival of a rival coven who sets out to kill Bella.

Ignoring her overwrought prose, schizophrenic pacing, and flagrant disrespect of established vampire lore, the author has difficulty with the characterization of her protagonist, Bella. Meyer commits a rookie mistake in making Bella a one-dimensional character with no perceivable faults other than a being clumsy and a knack for getting into dangerous situations, the perfect set-up for vampire in shining armor Edward. As the book progresses, Bella becomes more and more incapacitated due to Edward's chivalrous heroics and Earth-defyingly good looks (we learn little else about Mr. Cullen during the course of the narrative) to the point that when they kiss for the first time, the poor woman cannot even breathe anymore. In essence, Bella is a damsel in distress, one of the patriarchal literary tropes that feminist writers worked so hard against. Case in point: Edward saves Bella from being crushed by a van early on. He pops out of nowhere a few chapters later and saves her from a band of thugs after she absent-mindedly walks into an alley in a strange town late at night. She becomes emotionally dependent to a frightening degree by the time the prom arrives at the end of the book. Meyer has simply created a vessel of clumsiness needed to advance a meandering plot forward.

In writing a novel with a female protagonist who is in constant need of saving, Stephanie Meyer falls prey to the sexist tropes of yesteryear while combining them with her own restrictive religious views (she's a Mormon, who aren't known for their equal treatment of women), making the novel that much more off-putting. Some have interpreted this book and its sequels as allegories for teen abstinence, complete with reference to the Bible's forbidden fruit on *Twilight's* cover, further cementing this book's status as one that undermines its protagonist and ostensibly tells young girls that it's perfectly fine to get into trouble, because your knight in shining armor will save you and whisk you away, relieving you of the burden of thinking and acting of your own free will.