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Tracing Female Subjectivity and Self-affirmation
in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Saga*

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Astrid Ernst

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1.) Introduction

Most approaches on the *Twilight Saga*, like Natalie Wilson's *Seduced by Twilight*, mainly focus on Cultural Studies topics such as race, gender, sexuality and the influence of Meyer's religion on the representation of those issues. My aim is to take those discussions as a starting point and to go deeper into the psychological set-up of the characters by taking up psychoanalytical and feminist theories.

I will focus mainly on Bella Swan's character and her struggle for self-affirmation in a rigidly patriarchal setting, which forces her to identify with traditional concepts of femininity. Bella's life revolves around Jacob and Edward, who form an axis of binary oppositions that slowly tears her apart. The two men represent two separate worlds and two mutually exclusive modes of life. It is made clear from the beginning that choosing Edward Cullen and joining his highly idealized vampire family is the only way for Bella to escape her marginalized state and to gain access to a 'higher' realm. Jacob, on the other hand, represents everything she has to leave behind in order to be transformed into a superior being. I will argue that Bella's inner conflict is paradigmatic for the situation of woman in patriarchal culture. Taking Beauvoir as a starting point I will show that Bella can be seen as the prototypical "Woman in Love", who loses herself in an attempt to gain access to the higher realm which her lover represents. Furthermore, I will show that similar patterns can be found in the stories of other female characters in the saga, and that these stories are interweaved with various patriarchal myths.

Wilson reads the saga as a product of the current socio-political situation in the US seeing the Cullen vampires as idealized representations of patriarchal capitalism. In her book the focus lies on the depiction of norms concerning body image and physical attractiveness, the impact of anti-feminist and conservative messages on the largely female fandom, and the religiously motivated abstinence message. Wilson concludes that *Twilight* is a series that "presents neither a subversive nor a conservative view of larger social contexts but is an ambiguous mixture of both" (Wilson 8). By engaging more closely with the characters through the lens of post-

structuralist feminism it becomes clear that traditional patriarchal structures constitute the basic tone of the series, while subversive aspects appear only marginally.

One of the more controversial aspects that will be treated in greater detail concerns Bella's daughter Renesmee and the way her hybrid identity destabilizes the binary structure of the saga. The Twilight Saga could basically be described as Bella's way from teenaged outsider to perfect vampire mother and wife. Of course, if we focus exclusively on Bella's story, the narrative does indeed present itself as an uncritical celebration of traditional patriarchal family structures. Only when taking a closer look at Renesmee and her relationship to Jacob, can it be argued that she represents a possible solution to the conflict that Bella could not solve. Instead of seeing the saga as an ambiguous mixture of controversial and conservative messages, I want to suggest that *Twilight* is a conservative love story that brings in a subtle criticism of its own values in the form of characters like Renesmee.

2.) Tracing Bella's Subjectivity: Ideal Love as the only Way Out

Is that what you dream about? Being a monster? (Twilight,433)

In this chapter I will trace the development of Bella Swan's character looking at the ways in which her situation can be seen as paradigmatic for women in patriarchal culture. Concerning Bella's psychological development in the part of the narrative that covers her human existence, I want to differentiate between three different phases. In the beginning of the narrative the reader is introduced to Bella's life and her character prior to her relationship with Edward. I want to draw attention to the fact that her initial situation – lacking a positive self-image and feeling socially placeless – already points to the problematic status of her subjectivity.

.A special focus will be put on the second phase, which starts when she enters into the love relation with Edward Cullen. Here, the most important aspect is Bella's attempt to use the idealized lover as a route to escape her initial social marginalisation. I will show how her wish to become a vampire develops into Bella's central motivation because participating in Edward's infinite reality seems to be the

only way to affirm her identity as a subject. Paradoxically, it is precisely this love relation, characterised by her total identification with Edward that almost reaches the point of fusion, which endangers her status as autonomous subject.

Shockingly, her return to life is not initiated by her own life-affirming powers, but it is Jacob Black who fills the void that Edward left behind by becoming her “personal sun” (N.M. 174). Once again Bella finds herself in a marginal position, setting up Jacob as her new centre. The problematic conflicts that her relationship to Jacob and her unaltered attachment to Edward bring along will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

Let me now return to what I have called the first phase of Bella’s inner development. Looking at the first chapter of *Twilight* it is striking how little information the author gives about Bella, who is not only the central female character, but also the only narrator in the first three parts of the saga. We only learn that she loves Phoenix, the sun and “the vigorous, sprawling city” and that she decided to “exile” herself to rainy Forks, which she always “detested” (T.L. 4). The first decision that we see Bella make in the novel is one of selfless sacrifice. She leaves her mother, who seems to care more for her new husband than for her daughter, behind and goes to live with her father who is almost a stranger to her.

This decision is not easy for Bella, who seems to feel an exceptionally strong attachment to her mother. We even learn that she experiences “a spasm of panic” when leaving her “loving, erratic, harebrained mother to fend for herself” (T.L. 4). The situation can be seen as paradigmatic for the violent split in the mother-daughter relation that, according to french feminist theory, is imposed on women by patriarchal culture. According to Irigaray “the love between mother and daughter is forbidden in the sense that it reminds the daughter, the woman, of the singularity of the female gender she has to renounce, except as an abstract duty imposed upon her by a culture that is not hers” (Irigaray, *Love* 109)

I want to suggest that Bella’s decision to leave her mother reflects – in psychoanalytic terms - her attempt to individuate as a subject and to find her place in the symbolic order, which due to her gender turns out to be problematic.

Elisabeth Grosz claims that in the daughter's attempt to find her place in the symbolic order "her (pre)history is erased, and her primal relations to the love object, and thus to her own sex, are renounced. This is an exile from the maternal continent"(Grosz 63) Bella's "exile" is thus not only characterised by physical distance from the "vigorous sprawling city" and the warming sun of Arizona, but it can also be seen as an inner exile from the maternal. It is exactly this first step into the unknown that forms a preliminary condition for the following adventures Bella is about to experience, in the attempt to find her place in a culture that does not seem to hold many options for her.

Apart from the few passages I have quoted above, we do not receive any information on Bella's character in the first chapter. Nothing about her plans for the future, her interests, her hopes, dreams and fears in life is mentioned. But of course the reader does not have time to notice this inner emptiness of the central female character because Edward, who is first mentioned on page 17, soon steps in to provide Bella's life with aim and meaning, and the story with a centre that overshadows everything else.

In the days that follow Bella's first sight of Edward, when he ignores her completely, we get the impression that she is trapped in a world that most of the time makes her feel inadequate and out of place. She listens to her classmates' "easy chatter" feeling "terribly uncomfortable, waiting nervously for the moment he would arrive" (T.L.26). Bella is "miserable" in the sports lessons where she usually tries to "cringe out of the way of the ball" (T.L. 25).

At home her main duty seems to consist of being her father's cook and housekeeper. This creates the impression that Bella perceives herself as "an inessential creature [...] incapable of sensing the absolute at the heart her subjectivity" She begins to see in Edward "a superb being whom she cannot possibly equal", and from the moment of her first encounter with the Cullens she starts to "dream of transcending her being towards one of those superior beings" (Beauvoir 653).

The moment Edward enters her life, and she attaches all her dreams and aspirations to him, represents the beginning of what I have called phase two of Bella's

development. The following dream sequence at the beginning of chapter four shows the dramatic change in Bella's psyche.

In my dream it was very dark, and what dim light there was seemed to be radiating from Edward's skin. I couldn't see his face, just his back as he walked away from me, leaving me in the blackness. No matter how fast I ran, I couldn't catch up to him; no matter how loud I called, he never turned. [...] After that he was in my dreams nearly every night, but always in the periphery, never within reach. (T.L. 58)

In this passage we can see how Bella perceives Edward as the only source of light in her personal darkness, but he is "never within reach". Bella feels herself limited through her body that never lets her run fast enough, in addition to that she finds herself silenced without a voice that would make him turn around and become aware of her as a subject.

Not only in her dreams, but also in real life, Bella seems to experience her body as a limiting factor that leaves her in constant need of protection from her own clumsiness, as well as from all kinds of exterior dangers. First, Edward stops a car with his bare hands to save Bella from being squashed. At a later incident he has to protect her from stalking strangers in Port Angeles, but she does not "even look shaken" because she feels so safe with her god-like protector by her side. (T.L. 148) Later, when Edward is away on a hunting trip, he is "anxious" whether she would "make it through the whole weekend unscathed", without falling in the ocean or getting run over. (T.L.164). All these incidents show that instead of finding herself as an autonomous being, Bella regresses to a childlike status in her relationship with Edward. This becomes even more apparent at later points in the narrative, especially in *Eclipse*, when Bella seems to have become a precious object divided among various people, who all try to protect her against other predators. But let me return to the beginning of Bella's relationship with Edward before going into more detail concerning these topics.

From the first disturbing dream it does not take Bella a long time to realize that she is "unconditionally and irrevocably in love with him" (T.L. 171). It is striking how little the fact that Edward is "the world's best predator" (T.L. 231) frightens Bella. Instead of keeping a safe distance, she is fascinated by the vampire world, and she instantly senses that a possible transformation would give her access to a world of infinite freedom and transcendence, something that will never be accessible for her in the

human world. As her relationship with Edward progresses, we can trace all the typical symptoms that Beauvoir ascribes to “The Woman in Love”. The wish to become a vampire becomes her central motivation, even though she knows the transformation will be painful and that she most probably will have to give up parts of her personality, as she is likely to become “ forever a prisoner to [her] own thirst” (E. 66). As Beauvoir writes about the Woman in Love:

There is no other way out for her than to lose herself, body and soul, in him who is represented to her as the absolute, as the essential. [...] She chooses to desire her enslavement so ardently that it will seem to her the expression of her liberty; she will try to rise above her situation as inessential object by fully accepting it; [...] she will enthrone him as supreme value and reality. [...] Love becomes for her a religion. (Beauvoir 653)

It can be claimed that Edward becomes Bella’s religion. A religion that requires of her to sacrifice herself like a lamb to the lion (T.L. 240) in quest for her personal salvation. She gives herself up in the hope that by transforming her into a vampire “[Edward] will give her at once possession of herself and of the universe he represents” (Beauvoir 656). She is quite literally willing to “consecrate each heartbeat [and] each drop of her blood” (Beauvoir 661) to him. When Bella climbs on Edward’s back and lets herself be carried “through the dark, thick underbrush of the forest, like a bullet, like a ghost”, we get the impression that this is an exhilarating, almost transcendent experience for her. But afterwards she feels “the dizzy faintness of motion sickness”, her “muscles wouldn’t respond “ and her head is spinning uncomfortably. (T.L. 245) This is once again reminiscent of Beauvoir’s words on the ‘The Woman in Love’, who - in an act of “profound self-abandonment” – “feels as if borne by waves, swept away in a storm, shrouded to darkness”. But once the man moves away from her, “she finds herself back on earth [...] she again has a name, a face: she is one vanquished, prey, object” (Beauvoir 658).

The motion sickness Bella feels, when Edward puts her back down to earth after running through the forest, is only a faint echo of the bitter awakening that is yet to come: the moment when Edward decides to disappear from her life telling her “It will be as if I’d never existed” (N.M. 63). This violent split in the love relation has a traumatic impact on her psyche, therefore I see it as the beginning of phase three in Bella’s development. Having gone through a period of extreme identification with her

lover, Bella feels her whole existence shaken by his words. As she has attached all her “love, life, [and] meaning” (N.M. 65) to Edward, it seems as if Bella fears the annihilation of her own ego. She drowns in “waves of pain” that keep “pulling her under” (N.M. 74), and throughout the empty pages that follow, we start believing that it will be as if Bella had never existed either.

When she finally resurfaces, after months of total numbness, she shows clear symptoms of melancholia. The nightmare that haunts her continually best expresses the inner void she experiences when Edward is absent. In order to draw attention to Bella’s precarious psychological state, I want to quote the whole dream sequence here.

My nightmare probably wouldn’t even frighten someone else. [...] There were no zombies, no ghosts, no psychopaths. There was nothing really. Only nothing. Just the endless maze of moss-covered trees, so quiet that the silence was an uncomfortable pressure against my eardrums. [...] it was dark, with only enough light to see that there was nothing to see. I hurried through the gloom without a path, always searching, searching, searching, [There was a point] when I couldn’t remember what it was that I was searching for. When I realized that there was nothing to search for, and nothing to find. That there never had been anything more than this empty, dreary wood, and there never would be anything more for me....nothing but nothing.... (N.M. 108)

What is striking about this passage is the frequent use of the word “nothing”, it occurs seven times in one paragraph. The inner void that Bella feels is also haunting her in her waking hours, where she experiences “a hole in [her] chest” that is “aching around the edges” (N.M. 109) whenever she is reminded of Edward, or anything connected to him. What causes the hole in Bella’s chest is clearly the loss of a love object. But it is a loss she cannot actually mourn because she identifies her whole being with this lost object.

As Freud writes, in melancholia, “the object has not perhaps actually died, but has become lost as an object of love” furthermore “the patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost”. Even though he might remember whom he has lost, he is not aware “what he has lost in him”. Melancholia is thus caused by an “object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness” (*Mourning and Melancholia* 245).

All this applies to Bella's case. By saying "It will be as if I'd never existed", Edward attempts to erase himself completely from her consciousness, even forbidding her to keep memories and to love him still in his absence, which would help her in the mourning process. The point in Bella's dream where she cannot remember what it is she is searching for, reflects the repressed memories of her relationship with Edward. She remembers that there is something she has lost, and she keeps searching frantically for it, but she cannot recall what it is. She realizes that "there never had been anything" and "there never would be anything" because the object of her identificatory love has been annihilated.

The hole in her chest shows that Bella has internalised the lost object. By fusing her subjectivity with Edward, who is not only absent but in a way inexistent, she feels a split from her own ego. In order to make her condition more bearable and to counterbalance this split, she tries to conjure up Edward's voice by bringing herself into life-threatening situations. Bella is aware that "this [is]wish fulfillment – a momentary relief from pain by embracing the incorrect idea that *he* cared whether [she] lived or died" (N.M. 100), but hearing his voice is "an irresistible lure" that makes her want to repeat the experience. Knowing that these delusions are generated by her unconscious, which has split from her conscious mind, she still tries to trigger them for the sense of wholeness she experiences in these moments.

In chapter seven of *New Moon*, when she intends to conjure up Edward's voice by jumping off a cliff, we learn that Bella is fully aware of the motivation for her reckless action.

For that brief moment, when his voice came from some other part of me than my conscious memory, when his voice was perfect and honey smooth rather than the pale echoes my memories usually produced, I was able to remember without pain (N.M. 141)

As I have claimed previously, the consciously triggered hallucinations are a way of coping with the painful split from parts of her own ego that Edward's leaving has provoked. But Bella soon finds another way of minimizing the pain of her loss by turning to Jacob Black. In the beginning her only intention is to break her promise to Edward about not doing "anything reckless" (N.M. 63) by letting Jacob teach her to ride a motorcycle. Soon she finds out that being around Jacob improves her

condition, as for the first time in four months she sleeps through the night “without dreaming *or* screaming” (N.M. 125) and the thought of seeing him again makes her feel “almost...hopeful” (N.M. 126). It does not take a long time until Bella begins to arrange her life more and more around her friendship with Jacob.

I even want to suggest that she becomes addicted to the “abnormal sense of well-being” (N.M. 125) that makes her feel “weightless” (N.M. 124) when she is with him. It is worth mentioning here that Bella seems to receive her sense of self exclusively from her relations to other people, or more precisely from her attachment to male characters. She never seems to define herself without reference to either Edward, Jacob or her father. First, it is the “irresistible lure” of Edward’s voice that prevents her from slipping back into numbness, and later Jacob becomes her drug against the pain, or her “personal sun” (N.M. 174) as she calls him. Bella’s new ‘happiness’ with Jacob is not profound in the beginning, but it only forms – along with school and work – “a neat and effortless pattern to follow”(N.M. 177). Once again Bella sees the expectations of others as her priority, even as concerns her own mental well-being. As she emphasises: “ And Charlie got his wish: I wasn’t miserable anymore” (N.M. 177). The following passage shows that her friendship with Jacob can do nothing to change her initial melancholia, as Edward is still the absent centre of her life:

I was like a lost moon – my planet destroyed in some cataclysmic, disaster movie scenario of desolation – that continued, nevertheless, to circle in a tight little orbit around the empty space left behind, ignoring the laws of gravity (N.M. 177)

Nevertheless, a deep friendship evolves between Bella and her werewolf companion. This might seem to imply a contradiction at first glance. How can Bella be a lost moon circling around an empty space, while Jacob becomes her personal sun? To solve this dilemma, I want to suggest that the nature of her relationship to Jacob is fundamentally different from the idolatrous love she feels for Edward. While Edward represents “ a superb being whom she cannot possibly equal” (Beauvoir), Jacob is in various ways not only her equal, but he is also trapped in a similar situation that limits him to ‘the laws of nature’ and his changing body. In the following chapter I will explain this notion in more detail.

To sum up the main points of this section, it has to be emphasized that Bella Swan lives in a constant state of self-alienation. After the separation from her mother, which symbolizes the split from a positive self-image through the loss of a female identificatory figure, she tries to transcend her limited self in ideal love. The extreme identification with Edward leads her further away from her autonomy as a subject, while regressing to a state of childlike dependence. Edward's leaving throws her into melancholia, which can be seen as a result of internalising the loss. Later, we see Bella oscillating between Edward, Jacob and her father, who all try to protect her like a precious object against exterior dangers. Being transformed into a vampire stays, for her, the only option to find a way out of her limited existence, and a way of becoming equal to her god-like lover. Later, we will see that even after her transformation, the question of her subjectivity remains problematic.

3.) Edward and Jacob: magnets with reversed polarities or two poles of Bella's existence?

"It took a little effort, they were strong enough to put up a fight, but I forced them to co-exist side-by-side." (Eclipse 86)

In this chapter I want to take a closer look at the two male characters who play a crucial role in Bella Swan's life. As we have seen in the previous section, Bella's quest for self-affirmation is mainly characterized by her desire for recognition from male characters. They determine how Bella defines herself as a subject in society by confining her to pre-defined gender roles, while Bella sees her attachment to men as the only way to transcend precisely these limitations. After her love relationship, in which she identifies extremely with the invincible and immortal Edward, she is left behind "like a lost moon" circling around an empty space (N.M. 177). In order to compensate for this unbearable void she turns to someone who seems more her equal: the werewolf Jacob Black. This move throws Bella into a severe dilemma, which can only be fully comprehended if we see it as the representation of a fracture line running through her own ego. Looking at the ways in which Bella's character is

shaped by her relationships with Jacob and Edward, I want to find out what the two male characters represent for her, and why they have the power to tear her up inside.

The main point I want to suggest in this chapter is that Edward and Jacob represent two irreconcilable parts of Bella's personality, which she desperately tries to integrate into a world that forces her to choose between mutually exclusive binary oppositions. In the dream that Bella has in the night following her first long conversation with Jacob, which introduces her to the mythological world of the *Twilight Saga*, the inner split that corresponds with the outer enmity between vampires and werewolves becomes apparent for the first time.

I opened my eyes to a familiar place. [...] I recognized the green light of the forest. I could hear the waves crashing against the rocks somewhere nearby. And I knew that if I found the ocean, I'd be able to see the sun. I was trying to follow the sound, but then Jacob Black was there, tugging on my hand, pulling me back toward the blackest part of the forest. [...] 'Run Bella, you have to run!' he whispered terrified. [I was] still pulling against Jacob's grasp, desperate now to find the sun. [...] I was watching a light coming toward me from the beach. And then Edward stepped out from the trees, his skin faintly glowing, his eyes black and dangerous.
(T.L. 113-114)

In this passage we can find images opposing the dark enclosed space of the forest, with sunlight and the vastness of the ocean. Jacob is here associated with a force that keeps pulling Bella back into the sheltering darkness of the forest, while Edward is a light coming towards her from the beach, tempting her to step out into the open space where she would finally find the sun. Even though Edward poses a threat to Bella's life, he holds a great fascination for her, as he embodies freedom and transcendence of all physical limitations. Jacob, on the other hand, acts as her protector, and Bella feels safe in the familiarity of his world which is closer to her own, but he is also associated with the comforting, confined spaces Bella longs to escape.

Bella soon starts to believe that by transforming her into a vampire, Edward could give her access to a new world that would imply unlimited freedom to realize herself as an autonomous subject in a reciprocal love relation. Opposed to this, her old friend Jacob does not offer this kind of transcendence, but he is himself limited to a body that is not fully under his control. His transformation into a werewolf that coincides with puberty seems a great burden for him at the beginning, and we get the

impression that his whole existence is biologically determined. As he explains to Bella: “What I am was born in me. It’s part of who I am” (E. 99). This is reminiscent of the “anatomy is destiny” doctrine of biological determinism, and stands in opposition to Beauvoirs famous claim that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (*The Second Sex* 295). Taking this as a starting point, and looking at what Beauvoir writes about the female experience of puberty, I want to explain why Bella feels so strongly linked to Jacob.

When Jacob changes into a werewolf the transformation comes upon him like an illness that determines his destiny by unalterably defining his purpose in life. Due to his bodily constitution he has to commit himself forever to the protection of humans against vampires. In addition to this he also has to submit himself to the biologically pre-defined order of the pack, where the voice of the ‘Alpha’ has priority over all other voices. Bearing this in mind, it is not surprising that, when Bella asks him what is wrong, he replies: “Everything, every part of me hurts” (N.M. 196). Beauvoir claims that the young girl goes through similar experiences during puberty. She writes:

It is a strange experience for an individual who feels himself to be an autonomous and transcendent subject, an absolute, to discover inferiority in himself as a fixed and preordained essence: it is a strange experience for whoever regards himself as the One to be revealed to himself as otherness, alterity. This is what happens to the little girl [...] The sphere to which she belongs is everywhere enclosed, limited, dominated by the male universe (Beauvoir 324)

I want to suggest that it is this similarity of experience that forms the basis for the strong emotional bond between Bella and Jacob. They both feel themselves limited by and trapped in social structures, which force them to subordinate themselves to a pre-defined order that is presented as natural. Beauvoir describes this experience of submission as one that is specific to women in patriarchal culture:

The young boy, [...] looks towards an open future; he will be a seaman or an engineer, he will stay on the farm or go away to the city, he will see the world [...] the young girl will be wife, mother, grandmother, she will keep house just as her mother did [...] she is twelve years old and already her story is written in the heavens. (Beauvoir 325)

I am aware that *The Second Sex* was first published in 1949, and that after the socio-political changes that Second Wave Feminism brought about in the 1970s, the

situation of women has improved considerably, at least in Western democratic societies. But applied to the fictional world of the *Twilight Saga* this quote describes the reality of Bella Swan's life very well. As we will see later, her future is defined in exactly these traditional terms of marriage and motherhood, leaving only little room for her to develop as an autonomous individual.

Taking into account that Jacob's experiences in puberty are very similar to what Beauvoir describes as specifically female, we can explain Bella's feelings of fusion, and the way she internalises Jacob's pain as her own, in the scene where Jacob kisses her in *Eclipse*:

“ In this moment, it felt as though we were the same person. His pain had always been and would always be my pain – now his joy was my joy. I felt joy, too, and yet his happiness was somehow also pain. Almost tangible – it burned against my skin like acid, a slow torture. (E. 469)

In this scene Bella sees a possible future with Jacob unfold before her eyes, she admits that she is in love with him, but at the same time we learn that this love is “ not enough to change anything” (E. 469). She is determined to share her future with Edward, who would not only give her a prestigious place in the social order, but would also transform her into a superior being freed from all physical limitations. Jacob represents everything Bella has to sacrifice in order to gain this new freedom. He is associated with the body, nature and all uncontrollable passions and emotions that are rooted in the physical domain. His transformation into a werewolf is caused by a “natural” genetic disposition, while the existence of vampires “goes against nature” (E. 99). Jacob's anger and his inability to control it stand in opposition to Edward's superhuman self-control. We learn from many small instances, but most clearly from the big scar on Emily's face, that “Werewolves are unstable” (E. 110), and that they present a greater threat to humans than the Cullen vampires.

Jacob can even be seen as a link to the animal world. In his wolf-form he is completely detached from his human mind, while instincts and drives have a great influence on his perceptions and judgements. This becomes especially clear in the last chapter of *Eclipse* when he phases into wolf-form in order to escape the pain that Bella's final decision to marry Edward inflicted on him.

And I was alone. So much better. Now I could hear the faint rustle of the matted leaves beneath my toenails, the whisper of an owl's wings above me, the ocean [...] Hear this, and nothing more. Feel nothing but speed, nothing but the pull of muscle, sinew, and bone, working together in harmony as the miles disappeared behind me[...] I pushed my legs faster, letting Jacob Black disappear behind me. (E. 558)

Even the way in which werewolves find their partners echoes biological determinism and seems to leave little room for the decisions of an autonomous human subject. The process of "imprinting" is very similar to the biological fixation that young animals have on their mothers, as it is presented as absolute, final and unalterable. It is also worth mentioning that imprinting works only on the male side, which means that women are the objects that male werewolves imprint on. But I will go into more detail concerning this topic in the chapter on Quileute legends.

Let me now focus once more on Bella's subjectivity and the ways in which Jacob and Edward influence her self-image. I have already pointed out that the two male characters form a structure of binary opposites that represent a split in Bella's ego. It can be claimed that in order to achieve equality with Edward, Bella has to repress everything that Jacob represents. But I want to draw attention to the fact that there are two different aspects to Jacob Black's personality that also have to be viewed as separate aspects of Bella's character.

Until now I have only mentioned Jacob's existence as a werewolf and the way he rebels against his biologically determined destiny. But Jacob's friendship with Bella develops in the weeks prior to his transformation into a werewolf. During this time he finds himself in the situation of a child that has not yet been initiated into the social structures that determine his later role in life. He is presented as innocent and carefree. The Quileute myths, which later shape his entire existence, are nothing but "scary stories" (T.L. 108) that he only tells to entertain and impress Bella. It is this spirit of childlike freedom that first attracts Bella to him and makes her choose Jacob as her "personal sun" (N.M. 174). When she is with him Bella feels equally freed from social pressures. Even at later points in the narrative when Jacob is already

trapped in his changing body, and Bella's future with Edward is fixed, Bella can still trace a former version of herself in him, as the following passage shows.

As we walked, I felt myself settling into another version of myself, the self I had been with Jacob. A little younger, a little less responsible. Someone who might, on occasion, do something really stupid for no good reason. (E. 90)

From this instance we can conclude that Jacob also represents the parts of Bella's personality that are associated with her childhood. In the chapter on Bella's subjectivity I have already mentioned the separation from her mother, and what this implies for her psychological development as an individual. Bella is forced to leave the maternal space behind in order to find her place in the symbolic order, which ultimately causes a split from her own ego. Now I want to point out that the young Jacob, prior to his transformation into a werewolf, is a representation of Bella's childlike self. The self she was before patriarchal structures formed her into a woman, and burdened her with all expectations that are implied in this role. This explains why she frequently speaks of "my Jacob" when talking about the first weeks of their friendship. Seen from this point of view, Jacob is not only diametrically opposed to everything that Edward represents, but he also stands for aspects of Bella's personality that do not stand in direct relation to Edward at all. Considering this double identification with Jacob, it is not surprising that the separation from him is a painful experience for Bella that makes her question her entire existence. In the beginning, she turns to him because she tries to hold on to her free childlike self, and later Jacob becomes a fellow sufferer in an equally aporetic situation.

But still, this deep bond with Jacob is not strong enough to make Bella sacrifice her future as a presumably superior being at Edward's side. The following passage shows this quite clearly:

I loved him, much more than I should, and yet, still nowhere near enough. [...] And then, quite distinctly, I felt the splintering along the fissure line in my heart as the smaller part wrenched itself away from the whole. (E. 469)

Let me now turn to Edward, and explore the role he plays in Bella's quest for subjectivity and self-affirmation. I have already pointed out that Edward is constructed as the binary opposite of Jacob. As lies in the nature of all binary constructions, one

term is always elevated over the other, while its opposite is devalued in the process. From the very beginning of the novel it is clear that Edward is the one who is presented as more powerful, in his social status as well as in his super-human abilities that even include the defiance of death. His physical appearance is over-idealised, his face being described as one that “any male model in the world would trade his soul for” (E. 15). The way in which his white and sparkling skin is glorified, in contrast to Jacob’s darker complexion has often been criticized as being racist.

What I want to point out is that this outer contrast of physical appearances corresponds to an underlying symbolism of contrasting mental and psychological qualities. First of all, Edward’s most striking quality is his immense self-control when it comes to emotions and physical impulses. Even though his craving for Bella’s blood is compared to heroin addiction, he is still strong enough to resist. It is clear that this mental strength has been instilled in him by his family, or more specifically by his father Carlisle, who is constructed as the embodiment of Christian ideals. Edward is constantly concerned with what his family might think of him, and how they might condemn him according to their high moral standards. In order to escape the temptation that Bella represents, he goes to Alaska, confessing: “I was too ashamed to tell them how weak I was, they only knew something was very wrong” (T.L. 237). He even goes so far as to say: “ I am essentially a selfish creature. I crave your company too much to do what I should” (T.L. 233).

Generally speaking, controlling his physical drives in order to protect Bella from the ‘monstrous’ tendencies inside himself, seems to be something that Edward is constantly preoccupied with. This attitude of constant restraint and renunciation is a factor that also has a great influence on the way Bella sees herself. She is forced to accept Edward’s policy of minimal physical contact, even though it is not as easy for her as it is for him. When Edward announces: “I am stronger than I thought”, Bella can only add: “I wish I could say the same, I’m sorry” (T.L. 248). Once again, Bella is presented as limited or even burdened by her body. This time it is not her clumsiness, but her sexual feelings that make her struggle with her physical limitations. Opposed to Edward’s superhuman self-control, Bella’s very ‘human’ impulses are presented as something that makes her appear weak and inferior to

him. Nevertheless, Bella submits to Edward's rules because the promise of transcendence through becoming a vampire is too tempting to make her argue.

Let me comment once more on the way in which Edward and Jacob shape Bella's existence by forming two mutually exclusive poles. While Jacob represents the body, animal-drives and uncontrollable emotions, Edward stands for the mind, spiritual and moral values, and everything that is associated with transcendence of the physical. Bella calls Edward: "the most loving and unselfish and brilliant and decent person [she has] ever met" (E. 98). When talking about the Cullens she never grows tired of emphasizing "how truly good they are to the core" (E. 99). In her attempt to achieve equal status with these morally, socially and physically superior beings, Bella is forced to make many sacrifices. These sacrifices are symbolically represented in the narrative by her separation from Jacob.

By leaving Jacob behind, she irrevocably turns her back on the carefree self of her childhood, and she agrees to repress her physical impulses in exchange for a presumably superior existence. It is worth mentioning that she finally chooses the death of her human body in order to gain equality with her lover. So, we can say, that Bella literally sacrifices everything that links her to the physical realm to get access to Edward's world, which can be seen as a representation of the masculine sphere. This is not an easy choice for her, as Bella is aware that she has to split a part of herself off, to gain the freedom and transcendence she has hoped for. Secretly, she dreams of a world that would not require her to choose between mutually exclusive binaries. According to Jessica Benjamin, the aim of psychoanalytic feminism is "to transcend the opposition of the two spheres by formulating a less polarized relationship between them" (Benjamin 92). This is exactly what Bella aims to do when trying to make the two magnets on the fridge "co-exist side by side" (E.86).

4.) The Cullen Vampires: the ideal family and its enemies

you have no idea how truly good they are – to the core (Eclipse, 99)

In this chapter I want to explore how the Cullens are constructed as the ideal family, representing notions of gender identity and moral values that can be traced back to 19th century concepts of purity, renunciation and self-sacrifice. A special focus will be put on the female Cullens, and the way in which their stories and the depiction of their characters perpetuate patriarchal concepts of femininity. I also want to comment on the other vampires in the saga, who – in their antagonism to the ideal Cullens – are constructed as their wild and uncivilised counterparts. Finally, I want to take a look at Bella's role in relation to the Cullens, especially concerning her inferior status due to the fact that she comes from a dysfunctional family, and the ways in which she tries to integrate herself into the ideal family by marrying Edward.

4.1. Carlisle and Edward Cullen

Let me start with Carlisle Cullen, who is constructed as the central figure of the Cullen clan in various ways. He is not only the father and traditional head of the family, but he can also be seen as the founder of a new religious group of 'vegetarian' vampires. Furthermore, Carlisle is much more powerful than a normal father: he literally is the creator of his family. His ability to transform humans into vampires without killing them, gives him a godlike status and the power of male mono-creation, as Carlisle is not only his children's creator, but he also gives new life to his wife Esme. He was born in 17th century London as the son of a clergyman, who had "a rather harsh view of the world" (N.M. 32) which Carlisle does not share. It becomes clear from the beginning that Carlisle has been infused with Christian morals, but he is at the same time depicted as a rebel who strives to realize his own ideas of religion. He tells Bella in *New Moon*: " I didn't agree with my father's particular brand of faith. But never, in the nearly four hundred years now since I was

born, have I ever seen anything to make me doubt whether God exists in some form or another” (N.M. 32)

His strong faith explains why Carlisle reacts with extreme self-destructiveness when he is transformed into a ‘monster’ after a vampire attack. After “two centuries of torturous effort” Carlisle becomes a true master of self-control and he finds “his calling, his penance [...] in saving human lives” (T.L. 297). His transformation into a vampire is comparable to the concept of Original Sin, an evil that is inherent in his existence without any conscious misdeeds, which he tries to counterbalance with good deeds and a moral lifestyle. As he tells Bella: “By all accounts, we’re damned regardless. But I hope, maybe foolishly, that we’ll get some measure of credit for trying” (N.M. 33). In this way Carlisle is set up as an incarnation of various Christian virtues. His hold on self-control, his patience and his altruism seem nearly unattainable for ‘normal’ humans like Bella, who admits that she “couldn’t imagine anyone, deity included, who wouldn’t be impressed by Carlisle” (N.M 33). Opposed to Carlisle’s saintly character Bella, whose life is “fairly devoid of belief” (N.M 32), appears clearly inferior. She is depicted as somebody who has not been brought up according to the one and only ‘right’ faith, with a father who “worshipped by the river with a fishing pole” and a mother who “tried out a church now and then” (N.M. 32). But this is not the only way in which Bella is devalued with respect to religion. She is also presented as temptress in her relationship to Edward. At one point Edward even describes her as “some kind of demon summoned straight from [his] own personal hell to ruin [him]” (T.L. 236). This statement is interesting, considering Edward’s conviction that vampires have lost their souls, and as a consequence there is no hope of an afterlife for them. (N.M. 33). Various instances in the novel suggest that this conviction is not as strong as it appears to be. Especially towards the end of *New Moon* when Bella saves Edward from suicide in Volterra and he admits that “Carlisle was right” (N.M. 398) we get the impression that there must be some spark of hope left in him. In this instance we can see that Carlisle’s influence on Edward is very powerful, and that Edward has already, unconsciously, taken over his father’s beliefs.

Regardless of the Cullens’ own religious beliefs, Bella has doubtlessly set up Edward and his father as her own personal gods. As she tells Carlisle: “ the only kind of heaven I could appreciate would have to include Edward”. When Carlisle goes on to

praise his son's "goodness" and "brightness", Bella nods "in fervent agreement" (N.M. 33). Not only does Bella idolize Edward – a dangerous tendency that I have already discussed previously – but she even goes so far as to claim that she would give her soul for Edward without hesitation. It is shocking enough that Bella does not realize how much she devalues herself by accepting her status as Edward's object of desire, and by consciously choosing to sacrifice her subjectivity for him, but she is not even empowered to make this one self-destructive choice herself. In her conversation with Carlisle about her potential transformation into a vampire she insists: " It's my choice", but the leader of the Cullens counters: "It's his choice too" (N.M. 34). Taking into account the rigidly patriarchal context of the *Twilight Saga*, it does not seem surprising that Edward's decision can easily annihilate Bella's choice.

If we consider the chronological order in which Carlisle creates his family, it is interesting to note that the first person he changes is his son Edward. Following the traditional biblical pattern one would expect Carlisle to create a female companion first. But as the female reproductive capacity becomes redundant in the vampire world, creating a wife does not seem to be the first priority. Due to the fact that Carlisle has the power to create a child without female intervention, he can sidestep all social conventions connected to the formation of a family, and go on to create the perfect son, which is presented as the ultimate aim of marriage and family life. Edward is even idealized in his sickbed before his transformation: "Sick as he was, he was still beautiful. There was something pure and good about his face. The kind of face I would have wanted my son to have" (N.M. 36), Carlisle tells Bella in *New Moon*. It seems that only "good" and "bright" Edward is worthy of being Carlisle's companion, while his biological mother is presented as the traditional self-sacrificing woman, who "worried obsessively over her son" and "hurt her own chances of survival trying to nurse him" (N.M.35). It is even hinted that her concern about Edward's survival transcends her own death, as Carlisle describes her face in the hours before Edward's transformation as "not yet peaceful, not even in death" (N.M 36). This suggests that a woman's entire existence is defined by her capacity to care for others, and that her only hope for transcendence lies in following this purpose even beyond her own death.

4.2. Esme Cullen

Once Carlisle has fulfilled his first priority of creating the perfect son, he goes on to transform Esme, his wife, who is described in equally idealized terms as concerns her duties as a mother. She is one of the three female Cullens whose human pre-histories can be seen as similar from a certain perspective. All of them are, in the widest sense, victims of male violence, and they do not have to be saved from physical illnesses, but from the results of various crimes committed against them. In *Twilight* we learn that Esme “fell from a cliff” and was brought “straight to the hospital morgue, though, somehow her heart was still beating” (T.L.250). Later, it becomes clear that the fall was not an accident, but a suicide attempt, after she had lost a child from her abusive husband. When Carlisle transforms her she develops the “unparalleled ability to love those around her passionately”, which seems to push her automatically into the role of “the greatest maternal figure”¹ of the Cullen clan. Her human pre-history depicts her as an ambitious girl, who wants to become a teacher, but she is pressured by her parents to marry an abusive man at the age of 22. She endures the marriage for some time, wanting to be a “good wife”, but when Esme becomes pregnant she flees trying to find work. When her baby dies only some days after its birth, Esme feels “that she no longer has a reason to live”. When Carlisle finds her in the hospital, he recognizes the “happy, beautiful young girl he treated ten years earlier” when Esme had broken her leg. In this psychologically instable state, victimized by social structures that entrap her in a world where she is unable to realize herself as an autonomous subject, her transformation into a superior being seems to be the only solution. But the situation in which she finds her self after her transformation is surprisingly similar to her human existence. After developing only “basic vampiric abilities”, her special talent solely consists of her ability to love others passionately. This not only suggests that her maternal qualities are deeply, and somehow ‘naturally’ rooted in her character, it also means that her whole personality is limited to her role as loving, caring and self-sacrificing mother. It is never even hinted that Esme has any other interests or character traits beyond those we would traditionally ascribe to the archetypal mother. Her subjectivity seems to be almost inexistent, as her entire being is defined by a stereotypical social role. According to

¹ all quotes on Esme’s character : http://twilightsaga.wikia.com/wiki/Esme_Cullen

Jessica Benjamin this is the common way in which woman's role in patriarchal society is defined:

Though the image of woman is associated with motherhood and fertility the mother is not articulated as a sexual subject, one who desires something for herself [...] the mother is a profoundly desexualized figure. And we must suspect that this desexualisation is part of her more general lack of subjectivity in society as a whole. [...] Her power may include control over others, but not over her own destiny. [...] Woman is to accept the abrogation of her own will [...] to live for another. (Benjamin 88-89)

All of the aspects that Benjamin describes can be applied to Esme. From the very beginning of her life she is not in control of her own destiny, as she is forced into an unhappy marriage that makes her the victim of male violence. After her transformation she may have gained some measure of control over her adoptive children, but she is still pushed into a fixed social role where she is expected to live solely for others. Many of these aspects also apply to Bella, when she becomes a mother in *Breaking Dawn*, but I see Esme as the central mother figure of the *Twilight Saga*, as she is the role model that Bella looks up to. When Bella first comes to the Cullens' home she feels as if she was "meeting a fairytale – Snow White in the flesh" (T.L. 282). She is utterly struck by Carlisle's "outrageous perfection", while she compares Esme to "the ingenues of the silent-movie era" (T.L. 282). Interestingly, Esme is one of the characters with the least amount of dialogue in the whole saga, which might explain Bella's tendency to associate her with the beautiful, but silenced, women of early films. When Esme gets to say something, her words are mainly intended to welcome people into the family, or to give emotional support to others. It is exclusively the task of the male Cullens, to narrate the family history.

At this point it is interesting to note that all myths and family stories in the saga are told by male characters. Carlisle and Edward inform Bella about the vampire world, while Jacob and his father introduce her to the Quileute legends. Even though most of the every-day life is told through Bella's perspective, we still get the impression that male characters have a better insight into the ways in which their culture is mythologically constructed. The myths that constitute the way in which meaning is produced within the community are exclusively told through a male perspective. This way, what is constructed as 'the truth' in the fictional world, is defined by men. Even though Bella gets most of the narration time, the power to create meaning and to

define what is seen as the 'true' history of the family or the tribe lies entirely in the hands of male characters.

4.3. Rosalie Cullen

Let me return once more to the Cullen family, and more specifically to the individual stories of its members. So far, I have discussed Carlisle and Esme, and the way in which their idealized characters influence Bella's self-image. In the following section I want to continue with discussing Rosalie's story. Interestingly, Rosalie is the only female who gets to tell her own story, but a closer look at her human pre-history reveals that this does not necessarily put her into a privileged position. The title of her chapter, *Unhappy Ending* (E. 136)², already suggests that her story is not a very pleasant one. After a long period of time in which Rosalie is almost hostile towards Bella, being the only one of the Cullens who votes against her transformation into a vampire, Rosalie decides to tell her story and to explain the reasons behind her decision to Bella.

Rosalie starts her narrative by claiming that in 1933, her world was a simpler place: "I was eighteen, and I was beautiful. My world was perfect" (E. 138), she tells Bella, as if youth and beauty combined with her "thoroughly middle class" background were the only necessary ingredients for a perfect life. She describes her parents as "social climbers" who see Rosalie's beauty as a means to reach higher social spheres. From the beginning Rosalie is preoccupied with her physical appearance, seeing her beauty and attractiveness to men as her main capital in life. She is "pleased" that men's eyes follow her everywhere, and "delighted" when girlfriends touch her hair with a sigh of envy. Her only desire in life is to be "loved" and "adored", which is expressed by her dreams about "a huge flowery wedding, where everyone in town would watch [her] walk down the aisle on [her] father's arm and think [she] was the most beautiful thing they'd ever seen". She even goes on to tell Bella that "Adoration was like air for [her]. After this brief description of her character we get the impression that Rosalie fits perfectly into the feminine role, as she is narcissistically obsessed with her beauty and desires exactly the life that patriarchy has allotted her as a woman. Even though Rosalie is presented as a very determined woman, who knows

² quotes on Rosalie's story: *Eclipse* 136-152

exactly what she wants to achieve in her life, it can still be claimed that she has no desire of her own, as she relies solely on being desired by men. As quoted above, admiration is like air for Rosalie, but if the air is gone, her shallow subjectivity is in great danger of collapsing. Jessica Benjamin claims that “if a woman has no desire of her own, she must rely on that of a man, with potentially disastrous consequences for her psychic life” (Benjamin 89). Rosalie builds her whole self-image on her ability to evoke desire in men, and envy in women. She can be seen as a representation of the *femme fatale*, the other construct of ideal femininity, which is opposed to that of the mother, but does not signify an active subjectivity either. Benjamin claims that:

The ‘sexy woman [...] is sexy, but as an object, not as a subject.
She expresses not so much *her* desire, as her pleasure in being desired;
what she enjoys is her capacity to evoke desire in the other, to attract.
Her power does not reside in her own passion, but in her acute desirability.
(Benjamin 89)

Rosalie describes herself as “silly and shallow” with very few non-material needs. She feels powerful and in control of her life due to her ability to attract men with her beauty, but somehow she seems to sense that her self-image is an empty mask only designed to please others and to ensure her social status. In search for an outer representation of this inner void, Rosalie soon finds somebody who has something that she, despite her ‘perfect life’, lacks. The only person Rosalie envies is her friend Vera, a young woman who had married early and had given birth to a “beautiful little boy” a year later. Rosalie tells Bella: “ It was the first time I’d ever felt truly jealous of anyone else in my entire life”. Here, it is interesting to note that Benjamin concludes: “desire in woman appears as envy – perhaps only as envy”, as “many women enter into love relationships with men in order to acquire vicariously something they have not got within themselves” (Benjamin 89) In Rosalie’s case the child becomes a symbol for everything she cannot achieve out of her own power within the limits of patriarchal society, and she becomes convinced of the idea that motherhood will finally fill the shallowness she feels inside herself. So, when Royce King, the son of the town’s ‘royal family’, shows interest in her, Rosalie sees him as “The fairytale prince, come to make [her] a princess”. But unfortunately, the prince turns out to be an abusive man who offers his fiancé to his drunken friends “like a horse he was buying”. At this fateful night, when Royce and his friends take advantage of her, Rosalie feels for the first time that her strategy of setting herself up as men’s object of

desire is not empowering, but it backfires on her, leaving her in the road “impatient for death to come, to end the pain”.

After Rosalie’s transformation, instead of blaming the men who attacked her, she begins to blame everything that happened to her on “the curse” of her beauty, still wishing to have “pretty babies” just like her ‘normal’ friend Vera. Of course Rosalie takes revenge on her attackers, killing her fiancé last, while wearing a wedding dress. But her wish to be a mother and wife is still unaltered. Her mate Emmett, whom she saves from a bear only because he reminds her of “Vera’s little Henry”, is only half of what she wants. “He is exactly the kind of person someone like me needs”, she tells Bella, “but there will never be more than the two of us” she adds, full of regret. At this point it is worth mentioning that female vampires are unable to bear children because their bodies stop changing, as is explained later in *Breaking Dawn* (114), but male vampires, like Edward, are still able to father a child. This is not only illogical, even in a fantasy world, as the male body has to go through changes as well, but it is also a misogynist notion. In traditional binary fashion, women and their reproductive system are linked to the changing cycles of nature, while male vampires are depicted as entirely detached from anything physical. Nevertheless, they still have the power of procreation, which suggests that they are the more powerful beings in the vampire world. While Rosalie has to give up everything she wants in life, because she is denied the one role that would give her recognition in society, male vampires do not have to give up anything. They either have the gift of male mono-creation, as in Carlisle’s case, or they are able to give their superior genes to ‘normal’ human women, the way Edward does.

Thus, Rosalie is doomed to suffer eternally because she is unable to live the ideal of motherhood, the only concept of a perfect life that has been imprinted on her mind by patriarchal structures. Of course, it is suggested in the narrative that this idea of family life is biologically pre-determined in every woman’s mind, but Esme has taken her adoptive children as substitutes, and Alice does not remember any aspect of her human existence, which automatically also frees her of this one basic desire.

In her blog entry *Team Rosalie*³ Allie Garcia claims that Rosalie is presented as one of the most powerful female characters in the saga, as she is “the only female character who does not seem to mind voicing her opinion”. Furthermore the article points out that Rosalie shows agency when choosing her mate. She is also the only one of the female Cullens who does not accept her existence as a vampire, “thus acknowledging that she had no choice in the matter, but rather her fate was left to man”. I agree with Garcia that Rosalie’s character can be seen as more subversive than Esme’s, but I do not see her as “the one female character that is actually seen standing up for herself [...] not falling into the typical gender roles that the other female characters do”. As I have pointed out above, with her eternal mourning over the fact that she will never be a mother, and her obsession with outward appearance, Rosalie is still very much trapped in traditional gender roles. It is however interesting to note that Rosalie, as the only female Cullen who takes revenge on the men who abused her, is portrayed in a very negative way, especially in her attitude towards Bella in the first three volumes of the saga. I strongly disagree with Garcia’s suggestion that young women should wear “Team Rosalie” shirts in order to present themselves as “independent [and] outspoken and to question the structures that oppress them”. By identifying with Rosalie they run the risk of supporting exactly those oppressive patriarchal structures, only disguised as feminist empowerment.

4.4. Alice Cullen

Let me now take a brief look at Alice’s story and the depiction of her character. First of all, it has to be mentioned that Alice is the only female of the Cullen family who possesses a special talent that goes beyond ‘basic vampiric abilities’. However, it is interesting to note that her visions of the future can be seen as a passive, receptive ability that she cannot consciously control. While Edward can actively access the minds of others, Alice can only search for random visions that give her insight into other character’s motivations. At this point it is worth mentioning that also Bella’s later vampiric talent can be seen as a passive or defensive quality. Bella is able to shield herself, and later also her family, against the intrusive abilities of other vampires. Thus, it can be concluded that none of the female Cullens actually possesses an

³ http://seducedbytwilight.wordpress.com/2010/10/15/team-rosalie-a-guest-post-by-allie-garcia/?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter

active talent that would enable them to change the world around them, or which would empower them to influence other's decisions. Consequently, we can observe the traditional polarization along the lines of gender, which ascribes agency to men, and passive, receptive or sheltering qualities to women.

Returning once more to Alice's character, it has to be said that her human pre-history depicts her as a 'social failure', just as Esme and Rosalie, but in slightly different terms. She is constructed as the classic 'mad woman', who is brought into an asylum in order to prevent her from bringing shame on her family. Later, we even find learn that her parents have set up her grave with the death date equalling that of her admittance to the asylum, which suggests that they prefer a dead daughter to one who does not conform to the social expectations of the time. At the asylum Carlisle saves Alice from a male vampire, who threatens to kill her. In her vampiric existence, Alice's 'madness' turns into her talent of seeing visions of the future. Interestingly, it is claimed that Alice has forgotten every aspect of her human life, but she is still very much interested in fashion and beauty, things that have been traditionally associated with femininity. From the point of view of constructivist gender studies, one would expect that her gender identity has been erased together with all of her human memories, but she has obviously not forgotten how to be a woman. This suggests that in the universe of the *Twilight Saga* it is still seen as the truth that one is born, and not made a woman.

Taking a look at Bella's relationship to Alice, it can be said that Alice has a great influence on the way Bella perceives herself in her feminine role. Alice becomes not only her best friend, but also her guide to the social reality of the Cullens. She is present at all of Bella's 'special occasions', from her high school prom to her wedding, shaping Bella's outward appearance and her behaviour in socially significant situations. Even though we might perceive Alice as the most autonomous of the female Cullens, on a deeper level her situation does not differ much from that of Esme or Rosalie. The story of her human life also depicts her as a victim of social pressures and male violence, taking into account that a vampire tried to attack her in the asylum. Her 'special talent' is limited to seeing uncontrollable visions of the future, an ability that has stigmatized her as mentally abnormal in her human life.

4.5. The Cullens' Enemies: The Volturi and Victoria

It can be said that the Cullens are constructed as the ideal family, representing traditional gender roles and Christian morals. Carlisle and Edward are set up as godlike incarnations of altruism and self-control with supernatural abilities of procreation, while females are without exception shown as helpless victims, who have to be saved by them in order to take part in the ideal family in strictly predefined feminine roles. To highlight the superior status of the Cullens even further, Meyer has created a variety of other characters who form a contrast to them. All other vampires in the saga are either uncivilized hunters, like Victoria and James, or they are shown as immoral and sadistic, like the Volturi clan.

Interestingly, in all the clans which are opposed to the Cullens, women are depicted as especially intimidating and cruel. First of all, there is Victoria, who is very much reminiscent of a witch, with her flaming red hair and her revengeful character. She can be seen as Bella's main enemy in the whole saga, as she even creates an army of newborn vampires to destroy Bella and avenge the death of her mate James in *Eclipse*. Victoria represents a concept of femininity which is diametrically opposed to the morally idealized Cullens. In addition to her revengefulness she is also very determined and powerful, with a well developed skill of manipulating others for her purposes. In *Eclipse*, she transforms a young man from Forks, pretending to be in love with him only to use him as a leader for her army. This is not the only instance in the saga that shows a woman using a man as an instrument to achieve her aims, which seems to be the worst of all imaginable evils in Meyer's fictional world. We learn that also Jasper was the puppet of a very powerful and manipulative woman, who created an army of newborns to fight over territory in Mexico. Maria is depicted as obsessed with ideas of conquest and revenge. I want to point out that the same qualities would not seem cruel in a male warrior, but they might even make him a fearless hero fighting for justice. But Jasper claims that "In so many years of slaughter and carnage" he had become a "monster of the grisliest kind" (E. 266). Only when Alice finds him he is converted to the more 'moral' lifestyle of the Cullens.

The other, more civilized but still cruel, female vampire is Jane from the Volturi clan, who can inflict pain on others just by looking at them. It is interesting to note that she

appears to be the leader, or at least the spokesperson of the Volturi with the power to decide over the life of her enemies. Her special talent is, in opposition to those of the female Cullens, an active and offensive ability. Even though Jane appears as a representation of the Law, she is shown as immoral and unforgiving, lacking the Cullens' compassion.

In conclusion, it can be said that in the vampire world of the *Twilight Saga* we are confronted with two opposing constructions of femininity. On the one hand we have the morally idealized Cullen family, which contains women who are either ideal mothers, or victimized objects of male desire. Set up as a contrast to this patriarchal ideal of family life, we have a variety of powerful but immoral, manipulative and sadistic women, who are clearly marked as 'evil' and inferior. This dichotomy creates the impression that women who do not conform to the ideal of self-sacrificing motherhood and passive sub-ordination, automatically become cruel villains who need to be eliminated. By using the polarization of 'good' and 'evil' to prioritise one version of femininity over the other, traditional concepts of ideal womanhood are re-affirmed, while alternatives are condemned as wrong. In the following chapter I will show that the werewolf myths in the saga are constructed along similar lines.

5.) Quileute Legends: re-affirming patriarchal myths

I was trying to imagine the face of the unnamed woman who had saved the entire tribe [...] I wished they'd remembered her name...(E. 231)

In this chapter I want to take a look at Quileute myths that the author presents in connection with the werewolf world in the saga. A special focus will be put once more on the representation of gender relations, constructions of femininity and the way in which patriarchal concepts are perpetuated in Meyer's presentation of Native American legends. First of all, it has to be said that the Quileute tribe is a people that actually exists in the real world. Today the Quileute Nation is located in La Push, Washington, where the Quileutes have lived and hunted for thousands of years, even though their original territory encompassed a much wider area along the Pacific

coast.⁴ The myths that Meyer presents in the *Twilight Saga* through the perspectives of Jacob and Billy Black are in some ways related to real Quileute legends, but to a great extent they are the author's own invention. I also want to comment briefly on the real Quileute creation myth to point out, how Meyer shaped and expanded existing legends to fit the highly polarized vampire-werewolf dichotomy in the *Twilight* world.

However, it is true that wolves do play an important role in Quileute mythology, as the tribe's creation myth states that the first Quileute man was formed from a wolf by a the traveling shape-shifter Kweeti. The version of the legend which seems the most reliable, says that when Kweeti came upon the territory which is now the Quileute reservation, he transformed two wolves into people, and told them that "a pauper might have only one wife, while a chief or wealthy man might have from four to eight"⁵. It is interesting to note that in most versions of the myth that I have found during my research, which mainly differ in the spelling of names, the only thing the shape shifter tells the first Quileutes concerns the number of wives they are allowed to have. This shows not only that their culture is fundamentally patriarchal, but it also highlights the importance of these prescribed family structures. I find it surprising that Kweeti does not give any instructions on basic survival strategies such as hunting, but that he is very precise about the number of wives the Quileute men are allowed to have. It is not explicitly stated how the wives come into being, even though it is probably implied that one of the two transformed wolves is female. This tendency of mentioning women only implicitly as nameless birth-givers and property of men is very common in patriarchal creation myths, as for example in the Old Testament.

The legends that Meyer presents in the novel are much more elaborate than this very simple creation myth of the real Quileute tribe. She has taken up the Quileutes' closeness to wolves, which also shows in the tribe's artifacts today, and has created a much more complex mythological world in which the wolves are only one aspect of a rigidly polarized construct.

Bella is first confronted with Quileute legends in *Twilight*, when Jacob tells her about the "scary stories" of his ancestors, which Jacob does not yet believe in himself.

⁴ <http://www.quileutenation.org/>

⁵ <http://www.quileutes.com/quileute-legend/kweeti-quileute-wolves.html>

During her first walk on the beach with Jacob, Bella learns not only that the Quileutes are descended from wolves, but also about “the *cold ones*”, blood-drinkers presented as “natural enemies” of the “wolves that turn into men” (TL 107). Jacob goes on to tell her about the treaty that his grandfather has made with the “civilized” Cullen clan, who promised not to kill people and to respect the borders of the Quileute territory.

The border line of the reservation can be seen as a symbolical fracture line separating binary oppositions, which structure the psychological set-up of the whole saga. The cold, civilized Cullens are opposed to hot-blooded and impulsive shape-shifters, who are constructed as ‘savages’ due to their link to the animal world. Bella literally stands in the undefined space between these opposites. Her skin is not as hot as the werewolves’ and not as cold as the vampires’. Her body links her to nature, but her cultural up-brining also makes her a ‘civilized’ being. Caught in-between these extremes, Bella instinctively opts for the choice that promises to give her a more powerful and esteemed social position. As I have already mentioned previously, Jacob represents an aspect that Bella has to leave behind in order to participate in Edward’s superior existence. But it is not only the opposition of vampires and werewolves and Bella’s placelessness in-between these opposites that reflect the hierarchy of patriarchal gender relations. Also in Meyer’s presentation of the mythological history of the Quileutes we can observe a dichotomy that devalues women, while it aligns masculinity with spirituality and transcendence.

In the chapter called *Legends*, in *Eclipse*, we are presented with the most extensive account of tribal mythology. Billy Black, who suddenly morphs from a helpless old man into a majestic Quileute elder, tells the stories of his tribe’s creation “in his rich, deep voice [...] Like poetry performed by its author” (E. 216). All the “first-timers”, who are about to be introduced to their tribe’s history, are humbled by Billy’s ‘natural’ authority, that according to Bella, “had always been there” (E.217). Especially the female members of the community are eager to absorb every word of Billy’s account, with Leah closing her eyes “to help her concentration”, and Emily “looking exactly like a student set for an important lecture” (E. 216).

The first legend of Billy’s narration is that of the “spirit warriors”. It tells of a battle over land and fishing territories between the Quileutes and another tribe. In the course of

this battle the Quileute men discover the ability to leave their bodies and attack their enemies in spirit form, “while their women watched over the bodies and the waves” (E. 217). Here it becomes clear that the ability to become a spirit warrior, and to exist as a transcendent being detached from one’s body, is restricted to Quileute men only. Women have the duty to watch over the warriors’ bodies, while their husbands enter a world where they become “their spirit selves” (E . 218) and know each other’s thoughts. This realm of transcendence stays inaccessible for the wives, who seem to be limited to and associated with their bodies, without possessing any kind of independent subjectivity that could be called a “spirit self”. At this point it is interesting to note that Irigaray claims “ woman represents *place* for man” and that “the maternal-feminine also serves as an *envelope*, a *container*, the starting point from which man limits his things” (Irigaray, 11). Taking this into account it is not surprising to find the Quileute wives associated with the containers that root the spirit warriors in the material world. Meyer writes that, after the battle, “The Quileutes returned to their bodies and their wives, victorious” (E. 218), establishing a direct link between the body as a limiting but comforting home for the spirit, and the maternal-feminine. This is supported by the claim that “Being bodiless was disorienting, uncomfortable and horrifying. [...] torturous nothingness” or even “horrible empty consciousness” (E. 220).

The next myth makes the spirit warriors’ need for a containing body even more apparent. It explains how the Quileute men became shape-shifters. The legend says that after the destruction of his body by his enemies, Chief Taha Aki makes an alliance with a wolf in order to escape “the void of the spirit world” (E. 221). By sharing the wolf’s body Taha Aki becomes the first in a line of shape-shifters, who do not age as long as they decide to keep their “spirit wolves” (E. 223) alive. Women however are doomed to die, even if they turn out to be the chief’s “true spirit wife”, as in the case of Taha Aki’s third wife. The legend of the “third wife’s sacrifice” (E. 223), which Billy tells next, reinforces once again an ideal of femininity that is characterized by self-denial and sacrifice for the sake of the community. It is interesting to note that after many generations of male spirit warriors, it is ultimately the confrontation between two very different women that changes the destiny of the entire tribe.

In this legend the first appearance of a terrifying creature “that looked like a man, but was hard as granite rock” (E. 225) signals the end of the Quilieutes’ seemingly invincible status. When the tribe manages to kill this first ‘Cold One’, an unearthly beautiful “Cold Woman”(E. 227) returns to avenge the death of her mate. Taha Aki decides to fight the blood drinker alone, with only his family following to support him. His sons are too young to defeat the Cold Woman, and even the great Chief can only be saved when his third wife “[falls] to her knees, at the blood drinker’s feet and [plunges] the knife into her own heart” (E. 229). By spilling her own blood she distracts the vampire and gives Taha Aki a chance to win the battle. The myth of “the Third Wife’s Sacrifice” (E.223) is the most striking example of female self-sacrifice in the saga because in this case a woman literally gives her life for the sake of the community.

Taking a look at the way in which Bella reacts to the myth of “the Third Wife’s Sacrifice”, it is interesting to see that she instantly identifies with the role of the Third Wife. It seems that in this legend, Bella has for the first time found a character that reflects her own situation in the *Twilight* universe. In the Third Wife she sees a heroic character who is situated “outside the magic altogether” (E. 231), just like Bella herself, which explains her fascination with the myth. In her thoughts we can feel Bella’s need for a positive identificatory figure, and her regret about the fact that the Third Wife stays faceless and unnamed in Billy Black’s narration.

I was trying to imagine the face of the unnamed woman who had saved the entire tribe, the third wife. Just a human woman with no special gifts or powers. Physically weaker and slower than any of the monsters in the story. But she had been the key, the solution. [...] I wish they’d remembered her name...(E. 231)

The Third Wife is only another example of countless unnamed women in patriarchal mythology. She becomes one with her act of self-sacrifice and is only remembered for her deed, while her status as an individual subject is annihilated. On a symbolic level we could also see the myth as a re-enactment of the sacrifice that patriarchal structures expect of woman in general. As Jessica Benjamin writes: “Woman is to accept the abrogation of her own will, to surrender the autonomy of her body in childbirth and lactation, to live for another.” (Benjamin 89) If we take a closer look at the way in which the Third Wife is presented as “the key, the solution”(E. 231), the

factor that ensures the survival of the entire tribe, we can say that the myth reinforces the idea that a tribe's survival ultimately depends on a woman's will to sacrifice her autonomy for the sake of the community.

Let me return once more to Bella and her reaction to the myth of The Third Wife's Sacrifice. In her nightmare after hearing the legend, we can see once more how Bella connects the story to her own situation. She sees Rosalie, as a representation of the monstrous Cold Woman, fighting Billy Black in his wolf-form. As in most of her dreams Bella finds herself powerless, silenced and unable to intervene.

I broke into a run, but found myself moving in the frustrating slow motion of dreamers. I tried to scream to them, to tell them to stop, but my voice was stolen by the wind, and I could not make a sound. [...] I held a long, sharp blade, ancient and silver, crusted in dried, blackened blood. (E. 234)

The blade in Bella's hand suggests that she identifies with the Third Wife and sees self-sacrifice as the only way to draw attention to herself. In her dream, her life-affirming instincts are still strong enough to make her cringe away from the blade, instead of plunging it into her own heart. But at a later battle scene in *Eclipse*, when Edward and the young werewolf Seth are fighting Victoria and Riley, we see Bella's dream and the underlying myth re-enacted once again. In order to save Seth from the vampires Bella cuts herself with a sharp stone and clearly makes the connection to the Third Wife's 'heroic' deed in her head.

Was I strong enough? Was I brave enough? How hard could I shove the rough stone into my body? Would this buy Seth enough time to get back on his feet? Would he heal fast enough for my sacrifice to do him any good? (E. 487-88)

However, this is not Bella's only act of self-sacrifice in the course of the saga, as we will see in the discussion of *Breaking Dawn* later. Now I will continue with discussing other female characters presented in connection with Quileute mythology in the saga. I have already commented on Jacob and the difficulties he faces concerning his biologically determined existence as a werewolf. There is however one member of the wolf-pack whose situation is even more complicated than Jacob's.

Leah, as the only female werewolf finds herself marked as an outcast on various levels. Not only does Leah carry the burden of being the only female in the

exclusively male wolf-pack, but she is also not “as female as she should be” (B.D. 291). In *Breaking Dawn* when Leah shares her thoughts with Jacob, who has been rejected by Bella, we get some insight into her suffering. It seems that Leah is able to share her problems with Jacob for the first time without having him “running for cover just like any stupid male”, who does not want to be burdened with her “female stuff” (B.D. 290) In this chapter we also learn that Leah blames the fact that she has been left by Sam on her inability to “carry on the line”(B.D 291).

In this way the process of imprinting, which caused Sam to leave Leah for Emily, is presented as purely biological. The more romantic ideas of “love at first sight” or finding one’s “soul mate” (E. 109) that are presented in *Eclipse*, are replaced by concepts like “survival of the species” and “genetic override” (B.D. 291). In the following passage it becomes clear that Leah devalues herself completely due to her lacking reproductive abilities.

You’re drawn to the person who gives you the best chance to pass on the wolf gene. [...] If I was any good at that, Sam would have been drawn to me. [...] There’s something wrong with me. [...] So I become a freak – the girlie wolf – good for nothing else. I’m a genetic dead end and we both know it. (B.D. 291)

By reducing herself to the status of a “genetic dead end” Leah feels placeless and inadequate, being “not female enough” to fulfill what she perceives as her biological destiny, and not male enough to become a respected member of the wolf-pack. Considering her situation of being caught between two diametrically opposed worlds, it can be said that Leah’s conflict is in some ways similar to Bella’s. It is also interesting to note that Leah is the only character who shows sympathy for Rosalie, supporting her attitude concerning Bella’s pregnancy. Obviously, she understands Rosalie’s perspective because both women share their unfulfilled wish to have a child. Leah claims that motherhood is not her first priority in life and that she only wants the “options” that were taken away from her, but it has to be pointed out that the saga does not really present any options for Leah. As is the case with most of the female characters in *Twilight*, traditional concepts of femininity are central to Leah’s idea of a fulfilled life. Once again the focus is put on her inadequacy as a woman, due to her inability to fulfill her biological destiny. Like Rosalie, Leah is forced into a life that takes the one socially most valued version of femininity away from her. But

Leah's situation is even more difficult because as a werewolf she is part of an exclusively male community, which constantly reminds her that "her body is wrong" (B.D. 291).

In contrast to Leah, who is stigmatized as an outcast, Emily is presented as more integrated into the wolf-pack. She is "the wolf girl" (N.M. 292) acting as a mother figure for the werewolves, preparing food and giving comfort. The big scar on her face speaks of Emily's unconditional dedication to Sam, who had once "lost control", making her the victim of male violence. The relationship of Emily and Sam is presented as the ultimate ideal of romantic love, as we can see in Bella's comment: "This was worse than any romantic movie; this was so real that it sang out loud with joy and life and true love" (N.M. 293). Emily is just another one of numerous female characters who become victims of male violence in the saga, but in her case it is suggested that it is 'normal' or even desirable for a woman to stay with a man who abused her.

In conclusion it can be said that the Quileute myths presented in the saga prioritize the same patriarchal concepts of femininity which also prevail in the vampire world. The focus is put on the idealization of female self-sacrifice and the traditional dichotomy that aligns woman with the body and man with transcendence.

6.) The Power of Abstinence?

he would change me himself whenever I wanted...just as long as I married him first
(Eclipse, 84)

In this chapter I want to focus on the way the theme of sexual abstinence is represented in the *Twilight Saga*, especially concerning Bella's status as object of Edward's desire, and the question whether abstinence can be seen as an empowering factor for her. Furthermore, I want to concentrate on the discourse about purity and abstinence-only education, which is reflected in the story, and also finds expression in fans' reactions to *Breaking Dawn*, the controversial final part of the saga. I also want to comment briefly on the way that Meyer's Mormon faith has influenced the fictional world of her novels.

In her online article *Bite Me! (Or Don't)*⁶ Christine Seifert claims that the *Twilight* series has created a “new surprising genre of teen-romance” that she has termed “abstinence porn”. It refers to the way in which the relationship of Bella and Edward is presented as extremely sexually charged, while they refrain from any sexual activity throughout the first three volumes of the saga. Seifert sees this celebration of purity and virtue as a threat to “feminist sensibilities” because the genre of abstinence porn objectifies Bella in the same way that real porn might. Here, she mentions the disturbing tendencies to conflate Bella’s losing her virginity with the loss of a sense of self and even her whole human existence, aspects that I have already mentioned in the previous chapter. After taking a look at Mormon sexual doctrine it becomes obvious that these notions are inspired by Meyer’s own faith. The doctrine says that “chastity is worth more than life itself” and “unchastity is next to murder in seriousness”⁷. This even goes so far as to suggest that “True Believing Mormons” should prefer to see their child dead, than alive and sullied by pre-marital sex⁸. Bearing this in mind it does not seem surprising that in Meyer’s fictional world pre-marital sex literally equals death for Bella.

However, there are some aspects in the saga which suggest that Meyer is “questioning and working through ideas about sexuality and purity “ (Wilson, 117) instead of blindly following Mormon doctrine. Even though the messages of the *Twilight Saga* may seem very conservative from a feminist perspective, we have to take into account that from the point of view of a practising Mormon, some aspects can be seen as controversial. The representation of Bella as a woman who is actively desiring sexual activity, her attitude towards marriage, and the fact that Bella is attracted to more than one man can be seen as a tentative critique of Meyer’s own faith. Furthermore, Wilson suggests that the vampire/human dichotomy can be read as an analogy to patriarchal gender relations: “If we superimpose this dyad onto the real world, we can read males as representing the power both of the church and patriarchy, and women representing the fallible, licentious humans” (Wilson 117). I

⁶ <http://bitchmagazine.org/article/bite-me-or-dont>

⁷ http://www.i4m.com/think/sexuality/mormon_sex_war.htm

⁸ http://www.i4m.com/think/sexuality/sex_test.htm

agree that this metaphor can be read as an implicit attack on patriarchal power structures. However, it is reasonable to assume that Meyer could not include any more controversial messages, if she wanted to remain a respected member of her church. Hence, the re-affirmation of monogamous heterosexual marriage and motherhood as the only ways to Bella's eternal superior existence at the saga's end.

At this point the question arises how this religiously fundamentalist message can appeal to such a wide audience across national and cultural borders. Wilson claims that the way in which the relationship of Bella and Edward is presented as a special case, given the vampire/human framing, can function as a justification for the strict abstinence message. (Wilson 108) She suggests that Meyer presents the physical relationship between vampires and humans as extremely dangerous in order to justify Bella's and Edward's chastity. Furthermore Wilson suggests that the inequality presented in the human/vampire situation can be read as an analogy to patriarchal gender norms "that result in unequal male/female pairings". In her opinion Meyer might be "oh-so slightly indicating that if the world were not dictated [by these gender norms] egalitarian, violence free relationships would be far more likely" (Wilson 108). This is an interesting suggestion, but I find it problematic to claim that *Twilight* promotes the idea of equal and violence free relationships, as so many examples in the saga frame the exact opposite as normal and desirable.

Even though Bella and Edward may finally be equals at the saga's end, we still have to keep in mind the extremely high price Bella has to pay in order to reach this status. Only via her decision to accept Edward's abstinence policy, her will to sacrifice her human life, and possibly even her whole existence, for her unborn child, and her acceptance of extreme pain and suffering can Bella ever become a superior being. Taking into consideration the narrative as a whole, without focusing exclusively on the "happily ever after", the separate life stories of Bella and Edward can never be seen as equal.

What is also problematic is the representation of domestic violence against women in the saga, which has to be read especially in connection with the discourse on purity and 'proper' femininity. In the chapter on the Cullen family I have already mentioned that the theme of domestic violence and abusive relationships is very common in

Meyer's fictional world. Wilson has observed that instead of holding male characters responsible for their deeds, women are blamed for provoking violent reactions in men: "Rosalie because she is vain, Bella because she walks down a dark alley, Emily for courting a wolf lover. Males [...] cannot control themselves [...] hence females need to police themselves so as to avoid becoming victim of rape culture" (Wilson 113). I especially want to support the claim that sexual violence occurs "when females step outside the abstinence paradigm and the passive virgin model it promotes, when they want – whether it be sex, money, independence" (Wilson 113). Here, we can see that Bella and other females are depicted as actively desiring beings, but in most cases they are violently punished for their desires, and then integrated into the Cullen family as 'proper' passive females.

However, I agree with Seifert that Bella is not in control of her body, as abstinence proponents argue, but that " she is absolutely dependent on Edward's ability to protect her life, her virtue and her humanity". She claims that Bella can even be seen as " a secondary player in the drama of Edward's abstinence", meaning that she only appears as a tempting object that serves to prove Edward's superhuman self-control. Here, it is worth mentioning that Mormon doctrine claims that "The signal of worthy manhood is self-control"⁹, a point that is certainly emphasized throughout the *Twilight Saga*. The claim that Bella can be seen as Edward's temptation, testing his hold on self-control, is also supported by Edward's confession in *Twilight*: " To me, it was like you were some kind of demon, summoned straight from my own personal hell to ruin me." (T.L. 236) Still, it has to be pointed out that *Twilight* is centrally Bella's story, almost entirely told through her perspective. Due to this I find it problematic to suggest that Bella is only a secondary player in Edward's fight for self-control. I would rather suggest that the story centres around Bella's struggle to affirm her desires, which are constantly controlled and regulated by male characters. Hence, I partly disagree with Seifert's conclusion that the *Twilight Saga* ultimately presents women as objectified and powerless, sending the message that "when it comes to woman's virtue, sex, identity, or her existence itself, it's all in man's hands". Most female characters in the saga may turn out to be powerless with regard to patriarchal power structures, but characters like Esme, Rosalie and Bella are nevertheless presented

⁹ http://www.i4m.com/think/sexuality/little_factory.htm

as rebellious in some aspects. In Rosalie's case, who takes revenge on her abusive fiancé, even the claim of powerlessness is questionable.

Twilight reinforces old stereotypes about the dangers of 'uncontrollable' male sexuality that threatens 'fragile' female virtue. But even though Bella is presented as the object of Edward's desire and she is in constant danger of losing her life and humanity, I do not see her as completely silenced and powerless. As I have already mentioned, she is the only narrator in most parts of the saga, which means that we get more information about her feelings, wishes and motivations than about any other character in the novel. At least she has a voice that empowers her to tell the story from her perspective, enabling her to confront the reader with a world that can only be perceived through the lens of her subjectivity.

Here, I favour Wilson's claim that "the series represents female sexuality with a twist" with its "representation of a young female protagonist who actively desires sexual activity". I agree that "Bella is nevertheless represented as active in her desire" (Wilson 106) Taking this into consideration, we cannot see Bella as a silenced object. We also have to take into account her status as a desiring subject, whose sexuality is nevertheless constantly negotiated and controlled by the male characters around her. In my opinion it is not necessarily a contradiction to see Bella simultaneously as a desired object and a desiring subject. What is problematic is the fact that desire does not imply power or agency in the *Twilight* world. Bella does have the ability to express her wishes, but she is forced to accept a patriarchally defined concept of female identity in order to act upon these desires in a socially sanctioned way.

Even though Bella's choices might be influenced by patriarchal myths that present ideal love as the only way to realize herself as a subject in society, we still have to acknowledge that she does have a choice concerning her future. What I want to point out as problematic, is the way in which Bella's desire is focused on being transformed into a superior being by the idealized lover. This makes her totally dependent on Edward's decision to change her, leaving no alternatives that would enable her to take a more active part in shaping her future. In a way her desire entraps her in an inferior position reflecting the biblical imperative "thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Genesis 3:16). Taking into account that Freud described

“ woman’s renunciation of sexual agency and her acceptance of object status” as “ the very hallmark of the feminine” (Benjamin 87), it can be claimed that *Twilight* reflects, not only the biblical, but also the traditional psychoanalytic construction of femininity.

The ideal of devotion to the husband and self-sacrificing motherhood is further established in the saga’s final part, which transforms the romantic lovers into the equivalent to “our traditional grandparents, or the Moral Majority”, as Seifert writes. I agree with her claim that “if the abstinence message in the previous books was ever meant to be empowering, [the violent honeymoon scene in *Breaking Dawn*] undoes everything”. But from my point of view, the glorification of abstinence never functions as an empowering factor for Bella. First of all, it is Edward who sets up the rules, tying her transformation into a vampire and sex alike, to the condition of marriage. With this move he forces Bella to agree to a future that “isn’t exactly that high on [her] list of priorities” and that even fills her with panic, due to the fact that marriage was “the kiss of death” (N.M. 477) for her parents’ relationship.

There is not a single scene indicating that it is Bella’s primary concern to protect her own virtue and purity. On the contrary, there are several instances where Edward has to regulate and control Bella’s ‘unexpected’ passion. When they first kiss Bella confesses: “What neither of us was prepared for was my response.” (T.L. 247) Of course, it is Edward who turns to “unresponsive stone beneath [her] lips” pushing her face away “with irresistible force” (T.L. 247). Even in the last chapter of *Eclipse*, when Edward finally speaks the magic words: “ I love you. I want you. Right now” (E. 548), she refuses him only because she is worried about the purity of *his* soul. As she says: “I’m following all the rules, Edward. Your soul is far, far too important to me to take chances with. (E. 549). What I want to point out, is that the abstinence policy is not empowering for Bella at any time in the narrative because it is something that is imposed on her from outside. Marriage, and pre-marital abstinence, is a deal she has to make in order to get what she most wants in life: Edward, and a superior, immortal existence at his side. It is certainly not a choice she makes according to her own moral beliefs, or to affirm her right to say ‘no’ to something she does not want.

The only aspect that could be seen as empowering in the *Twilight Saga* is the element of choice that is especially highlighted in *Eclipse*. But it is highly problematic that the only choice Bella is offered seems to consist of deciding whether she wants to be wife and mother in the vampire, or in the werewolf community. The option of a college education is presented as unattractive and is never seriously considered. College is only used as a cover-up story for Bella's transformation into a blood-thirsty monster. Interestingly, after her transformation, Bella is very much in control of her need for human blood, but it seems that the conversion has made her "a prisoner to [her] own thirst" (E. 66) concerning her sexual desires. After her first love scene as a vampire Bella wonders:

it didn't feel like I was ever going to find a point were I would think
Now I've had enough for one day. I was always going to want more.
[...] how did we ever *stop*? [...] Does this... *craving* ever let up?
(B.D. 447-48)

What I want to point out here, is the way in which female sexuality is described, as if it were a dangerous drug that could keep people "all day locked in their rooms" (B.D. 448), if they fail to learn how to "prioritize and mange" (B.D. 449) their desires. It can be claimed that the final part of the saga still, indirectly, supports the abstinence message of the first three books. From a certain point of view, if we follow the logic presented in *Twilight*, it appears to be the better option to stay abstinent, instead of unleashing a force that one might not be able to control. I will comment in more detail on Bella's married life, the implications of her life-threatening pregnancy, and the symbolic significance of her half-vampire child in a separate chapter on *Breaking Dawn*.

Interestingly, it is *Breaking Dawn*, with its portrayal of very traditional gender roles and morals, which caused outrage among many fans. Especially on *Twilightmoms.com*, a message board for adult *Twilight* fans and mothers, the reactions were extremely negative. However, none of the members is complaining about the violent nature of Bella and Edward's sexual relationship, or about the fact that Bella is willing to give her life for an unborn child that is eating her from within. The only thing that seems to upset the *Twilightmoms* is the loss of "the brilliantly innocent eroticism that took our breath away", and the absence of "the sweep and

scope of a grand love affair”, as a poster called Shimmerskin writes.¹⁰ Of course, the first chapters of *Breaking Dawn* destroy not only the abstinence message, but also the story’s central driving force, which consisted of the unfulfilled erotic tension between Bella and Edward. But it is still shocking that this ‘loss of innocence’ is the only thing that upsets adult readers, about a story that includes some disturbing messages concerning the role of women in our culture. The fans’ reactions show that abusive relationships and the idea of a woman sacrificing her own life for that of an unborn child, are notions that are still encoded as ‘normal’ or even desirable in patriarchal societies.

Seifert claims that this negative response to *Breaking Dawn* shows that readers believe that “pre-sex, Edward and Bella were the perfect couple”. In my opinion, this does not necessarily imply that all of the readers, who were disappointed by *Breaking Dawn*, are supporters of a morally motivated abstinence message. It seems more likely that they were disillusioned by the very traditional and unsurprising outcome of a story that promised a more empowering or liberating solution for the central female character. I want to point out that it is probably not the ideal of pre-marital abstinence that fascinates readers about the first three volumes of the *Twilight Saga*, but it is the fact that Bella’s future is not yet fixed, and readers are still free to imagine what empowering and transcendent experiences her vampiric existence might bring.

I want to stress once more that the abstinence message presented in the *Twilight Saga* does not function as an empowering factor for Bella, as it is Edward’s primary concern to protect her virtue and not her own wish. Bella is presented as object of Edward’s desire and she is dependent on his ability to control his needs, but she has the power of narration, and the possibility to choose, even though her options are limited and shaped by patriarchal ideals of marriage and motherhood. The disappointment that the saga’s final part caused is, in my opinion, not directly linked to the loss of sexual innocence, but it expresses a disillusionment caused by the way in which Bella’s vampire life is presented. The depiction of Bella as an ordinary teenaged mother destroys the hope for a more empowering solution that would present her as an autonomous subject in full control of her own life. The fact that, despite her transformation into a ‘superior being’, Bella is still limited to the traditional

¹⁰ quoted in <http://bitchmagazine.org/article/bite-me-or-dont>

role of wife and mother, is certainly something that disappoints readers more, than the loss of the “brilliantly innocent eroticism” presented in the first three books.

Let me conclude with Wilson’s claim that Meyer may want to suggest:

that patriarchy (and religion) circumscribes female agency, giving women limited choices and thus forcing them to align with male partners in order to gain power. Such alignment with males is no doubt presented as desirable in the series, but mightn’t we also read this alignment as the only way to *survive* patriarchy? (Wilson, 75)

It appears reasonable to suggest that in Meyer’s religious community the only way for a woman to gain power and social acceptance consists of her connection with a powerful man. However, I want to suggest that the better way to “survive patriarchy” lies in finding and promoting alternative concepts of femininity, which are not shaped by the patriarchal dictate of purity and pre-marital abstinence.

7.) The Dawn of Bella’s Immortality

It was like I had been born to be a vampire. [...] I had found my true place in the world, the place I fit, the place I shined. (B.D. 485)

In this chapter I want to continue tracing Bella’s development focusing on the events that lead up to her eagerly awaited transformation into a vampire. First, I will explore the transition from Bella’s human life to her “superior existence” as an immortal by connecting my argument to the previous chapter on Bella’s subjectivity. I will comment on Bella’s last weeks as a human, during which she already goes through various life-changing transformations. Then I will consider in how far her transformation can be seen as a process of self-affirmation and liberation from limiting gender constructions, taking into account that her life as a vampire conforms very much to the traditional patriarchal ideal of marriage and motherhood. The second part of this chapter will be concerned with Renesmee, Bella’s half-vampire child, who can be seen as a link between two opposing worlds, which presents a threat to the patriarchal order. In the next step I want to analogise Bella’s situation in *Breaking Dawn* to other patriarchal myths that show a great similarity to Bella’s story. I want to consider the *Twilight Saga* as a modern fairy tale, which reflects a great

deal of the current cultural imagination and its ideas on gender identity and sexuality. I will also briefly consider Andersen's myth of *The Little Mermaid* especially focusing on the aspect of the painful transformation and the things that the girl has to sacrifice in order to gain access to a higher realm. Finally, I will show how some aspects of the *Genesis* myth are reflected in *Breaking Dawn* especially as concerns Bella's relationship to Edward and her torturous pregnancy.

7.1. Bella's transformations: marriage, pregnancy, motherhood

As I have noted earlier, in her human life Bella feels inadequate and placeless in most situations with her clumsiness and her physical fragility being a burden that marks her as an outsider. When she meets Edward, Bella sees in him a means to escape her social marginalisation and she strives to participate in what seems to her a superior existence. From the moment that Edward first appears in her life Bella clearly shows the behaviour that Beauvoir ascribes to "The Woman in Love". Edward becomes the centre of Bella's world and she is ready to give up her human life for him as "she hopes that he will give her at once possession of herself and the universe he represents" (Beauvoir 656). In *New Moon* it becomes apparent that Bella identifies herself completely with the idealized lover and even fuses her identity with him. When Edward tells her: "It will be as if I'd never existed" (N.M. 63), we get the impression that her subjectivity is annihilated with him. She falls into a black hole of numbness from which she can only resurface by establishing Jacob as her new "personal sun" (N.M. 174). In *Eclipse*, Bella's placelessness in a world of rigid binary oppositions is even more clearly expressed by her profound emotional attachment to both Edward and Jacob. In the end she is forced to leave Jacob, who represents a link to the uncontrollable forces of nature but also stands for a part of her former, childlike personality, behind in order to reach a more socially valued position at Edwards side.

In *Breaking Dawn* we experience not only Bella's transformation into a vampire, but it has to be pointed out her personal transformation actually consists of four parts, which are all interlinked. She marries Edward, loses her virginity, becomes a mother and is finally turned into vampire - all within the space of a few weeks – if we take into account the accelerated pregnancy. In this chain of events every step is the logical consequence of the previous one, at least if we follow the traditional patriarchal logic

of a biologically pre-determined female development. It is interesting that Bella's original aim – to become a vampire – stands at the very end of this logical chain, which suggests that only by fulfilling her biological destiny as a woman, she can finally reach her superior, immortal existence. We can also see how motherhood is presented as the most defining event in a woman's life in the second chapter of *Breaking Dawn*, when Edward tells Bella he wishes that they “had that kind of potential”, and that he does not want to “steal her future” (B.D. 25). If we take this into consideration, it becomes clear that Bella is only one more example in a series of female characters who are primarily defined by their (in-)ability to reproduce.

I have already discussed Rosalie, who even hates Bella for her conscious choice to give up the one thing Rosalie herself has always lacked. Then there is Leah, the female werewolf, who is stigmatized for being “not female enough” due to the fact that she is seen as a “genetic dead end” (B.D. 291). Esme has decided to dedicate her life to her adoptive children as substitutes for biological ones. Only Alice is presented as being happy in her childless existence. She is also the only vampire who does not have any memories of her human life, which supposedly implies that she has also forgotten what a woman's life-defining wish should be. Basically, it can be said that all female characters in the saga are primarily driven by their wish to find fulfilment in motherhood. Interestingly, Bella turns out to be the one who enacts the ideal of totally self-sacrificing motherhood in the last part of the saga, even though she is presented as the most rebellious female in the beginning.

Let me now continue by tracing Bella's development in *Breaking Dawn* step by step . At the beginning of this final volume of the saga the reader gets the impression that Bella has actually achieved her greatest goal. She is finally engaged to Edward, who promises to change her into a physically perfect and immortal being. However, as we continue reading it becomes clear that the most life-changing experiences for Bella – in the truest sense of the word - are yet to come. In *Breaking Dawn* I have observed three stages of Bella's development, which I will now explain in more detail. The first phase encompasses the chapters in which Bella is still human up to the honeymoon on Isle Esme. The second stage begins with Bella's pregnancy and ends with her transformation into a vampire. This section is particularly interesting, as the greatest part of it is told through Jacob's perspective. This creates the impression

that Bella is entirely robbed of her subjectivity and she turns into an object that is observed from the outside through male eyes. In the third phase we see Bella discovering her vampiric talents and growing more and more into her role as mother and wife. Renesmee, her vampire-hybrid child who blurs the boundaries of the rigidly polarized *Twilight* universe, will be discussed in greater detail in the second part of this chapter.

The first phase presents Bella in the same way that the reader has known her throughout the first three volumes. She is still a fragile and insecure human, who apparently is not yet fully convinced about her decision to marry Edward. In the first chapter Bella is scared of applying the word “fiancé” to Edward and she adds: “there really was no getting around that truth with the wedding only days away” (B.D. 4) Her hesitation reminds us of the fact that marriage is not Bella’s original idea of a perfect life, but that she has been forced into this decision by the condition that Edward has put on making her a vampire. She is also concerned about losing what is left of her human identity and being turned into a blood-crazed newborn, as the following passage shows:

I knew a little about what I was going to be like when I wasn’t human anymore. [...] For several years my biggest personality trait was going to be *thirsty*. It would take some time before I could be *me* again. And even if I was in control of myself I would never feel exactly the way I felt now. (B.D. 19)

Here it becomes clear that Bella is aware of the fact that she is about to sacrifice a great part of her identity for her new life with Edward. Still she is ready “to lose herself, body and soul, in him who is represented to her as the absolute, as the essential” (Beauvoir 653) We get the impression that Bella does not care much for the things she is leaving behind, as in her human life she had the feeling of “never quite fitting into [her] world” (B.D. 458).

There is however one human experience that Bella does not want to miss before going through the painful transformation:

I wanted the complete experience before I traded in my warm, breakable pheromone-riddled body for something beautiful, strong...and unknown. I wanted a *real* honeymoon with Edward. And, despite the danger he feared this would put me in, he’d agreed to try. (B.D. 19).

It is interesting to note that throughout the first three volumes of the saga, Edward is absolutely convinced that having sex with him while she is still human, would equal a death sentence for Bella. As soon as they are married this logic does not seem to apply anymore. This shows once more that the only logic that the narrative really follows is the policy of pre-marital abstinence. In this case it is also not very convincing to claim that Edward suddenly cares about Bella's desires as he has never cared to fulfil them before. Some readers might also wonder why Edward does not transform Bella into a vampire earlier to put her out of mortal danger. In my opinion there is only one reason why Meyer decides to leave Bella human until after the wedding: Bella has to fulfil her biological destiny in motherhood before ascending to a higher realm. In the second part of this chapter I will comment on the way Bella is changed by motherhood. Furthermore I will explore the question whether becoming a vampire liberates Bella from a limited existence, or whether it actually entraps her further in traditional gender roles.

The next phase in Bella's development I want to comment on concerns her wedding and the following honeymoon on Isle Esme. What is especially striking about this passage is the fact that by entering the Cullen family, Bella seems to give up not only her human life, but also her own free will. Her passive surrender to the decisions of others, who claim to know what is best for Bella, starts when Edward buys her a "tank-resistant car" (B.D. 7) to keep her safe. At this point in the narrative Bella is so convinced that she is "so fragilely human, so accident-prone, so much victim to [her] own dangerous bad luck" (B.D. 7) that she does not even notice how her future husband is taking control of her life, not leaving any room for autonomous decisions. The same kind of passivity can be observed when Alice takes over planning the entire wedding celebration including Bella's outward appearance. When Bella tells Charlie on the morning of her wedding day: "Alice will be working on me all day long" (B.D. 36) we get the impression that she is not more than an object, which will be turned into a work of art. This is even more highlighted when Alice scolds her for staying awake all night by saying: "you might have taken better care of my raw material" (B.D. 36). It is obvious that Bella is not comfortable with Alice's attempt to make her look "stunning" (B.D. 36). I want to suggest that Bella feels herself being transformed into an ideal construct of femininity, which threatens to take away her

individuality. When Alice leaves her alone for a moment we get a glimpse at Bella's real feelings:

I concentrated on my breathing, counting each movement of my lungs and stared at the patterns the bathroom light made on the shiny fabric of my skirt. I was afraid to look in the mirror – afraid the image of myself in the wedding dress would send me over the edge into a full-scale panic attack. (B.D. 40)

Here we can see that Bella is unsure about her future and she cannot identify with the “image” of herself presented in the mirror. Her new identity suddenly appears threatening to her as she realizes how much of her former self she is about to sacrifice for her life with Edward. Simone De Beauvoir summarizes Bella's dilemma in her chapter on *The Married Woman*:

In marrying, woman gets some share in the world as her own [but] He is the economic head of the joint enterprise, and hence he represents it in the view of society. She takes his name, belongs to his religion, his class his circle; she joins his family, she becomes his ‘half’. [...] she breaks more or less decisively with her past [...] she gives him her person, virginity and a rigorous fidelity being required. (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 449)

Taking into account that Beauvoir's text was written in the first half of the 20th century, it is more than irritating to find this traditional view on marriage represented one to one in a 21st century novel. This shows once more how the *Twilight Saga* perpetuates traditional constructions of femininity. Let us look once more at the transformation Bella goes through on the day of her wedding, long before she actually becomes a vampire. I want to point out that in the passage describing the wedding day we find many passive constructions, which contributes further to the impression that Bella has become an object that is being exchanged between two families. Not only does Bella allow Alice to turn her into a stunning work of art, but she also permits Alice to pack the luggage for her honeymoon. Alice claims that letting Bella pack her own things would have given the surprise away. Of course this is just another strategy that gives Alice the opportunity to shape and mould Bella's new identity to make her more compatible to the Cullen's version of femininity. As Alice says: “you'll be my sister officially in ten short hours...it's about time to get over this aversion to new clothes” (B.D. 37).

As soon as Alice has completed her work Bella lets herself be pulled from the room by her father concentrating on “the idea of Edward waiting below to get [her] feet to shuffle forward” (B.D. 43). In the following ceremony in “a symbol as old as the world” (B.D.45) Charlie places Bella’s hand in Edward’s, which again is an expression of the traditional patriarchal idea that woman is only an object of exchange among men. Throughout the whole wedding day Edward stays the centre of Bella’s world and the force which keeps pulling her forward into situations that are unfamiliar and threatening to her. His perfect face fills her vision and overwhelms her mind (B.D. 44), while she feels her world “which had been upside down for so long now [...] settle into its proper position” (B.D. 45). The moment Bella tears herself away from Edward she is once again passively “handed through the crowd, passed from embrace to embrace”.

The following honeymoon on Isle Esme is literally, and on various levels, a journey into the unknown for Bella. On the outward level the destination is kept secret, but seen from a psychological perspective, this mirrors the life-changing experiences she is about to go through on this journey. When they finally reach the island there is profound silence while Edward carries Bella “onto a pale pathway through the dark vegetation” which is described as “pitch-black [...] jungle-like growth” Only the house in the distance is “a warm light ahead” (B.D. 72). This scene is reminiscent of Bella’s first dream of Jacob and Edward in *Twilight*, in which Jacob is analogised with the dark confusing forest, while Edward is associated with sunlight and the vastness of the ocean. (T.L. 58) This creates the impression that Bella’s dream has finally come true, as a result of her decision to leave Jacob behind and spend her life with her god-like vampire-husband. Before reaching the desired state of ultimate happiness Bella has to “face the unknown” once more. Bella’s thoughts before her wedding night show that the transition from virginity to “grown womanhood” seems to trouble her much more than the idea of being transformed into a blood-crazed newborn vampire.

And I wasn't freaking out because I thought we were making a mistake.
[...] I was freaking out because I had no idea how to do this. [...] This felt exactly like having to walk out in front of a theatre full of thousands with no idea what my lines were. [...] If it weren't Edward out there, if I didn't know in every cell of my body that he loved me as much as I loved him – unconditionally and irrevocably and, to be honest, irrationally

I'd never be able to get up off this floor. (B.D. 76).

As the actual wedding night scene is omitted, the reader gets only the results in the morning after. While Bella “would have been happy to lie there forever, to never disturb the moment” (B.D.79), Edward’s expression is somewhat more troubled when he discovers Bella’s bruises. On the one hand we see Bella who thinks of her relationship with Edward as “corresponding pieces, made to match up”, while on the other hand there is Edward looking so “cold and severe” that Bella is shocked. Due to her low self-esteem, and as a “result of a lifetime of insecurities” (B.D. 80) Bella instantly blames herself for Edward’s troubled expression. Later, we learn that Bella is actually the one who should be worried, as the following passage shows:

There was stiffness and a lot of soreness [...] and the odd sensation that my bones all had become unhinged at the joints, and I had changed halfway into the consistency of a jellyfish. It was not an unpleasant feeling. (B.D. 80)

What is especially surprising here is Bella’s way of downplaying her injuries and describing the feeling of having her joints unhinged as “ not unpleasant”. This leads us on to the question whether the sexual relationship of Bella and Edward can be seen as sadomasochistic. Considering the quote given above it seems that Bella does have masochistic tendencies, as she takes pleasure in pain. According to Jessica Benjamin this is a very simplified way of viewing masochism which dates back to Freud. Current psychoanalytic theories have expanded this notion in claiming that “ pain is a route to pleasure only if it involves submission to an idealized figure” (Benjamin 61). Taking into account my earlier claim that Edward is constructed as a highly idealized figure, constantly defined through Bella’s idolizing love and admiration, her masochistic tendencies can be explained. Furthermore, Benjamin claims that in a sadomasochistic relation, the slave experiences a profound and chaotic fragmentation of the self. But only under a specific condition can the slave enjoy this loss of self-coherence:

that her sacrifice actually creates the master’s power, produces his coherent self, in which she can take refuge. Thus in losing her own self, she is gaining access, however circumscribed, to a more powerful one. [...] Her lover is like a god, and her need for him can only be satisfied by obedience, which allows her to transcend herself by becoming an instrument of his supreme will.

(Benjamin 60- 61)¹¹

This notion supports my earlier claim that Bella sees in Edward a means to gain access to a superior, more powerful existence, which otherwise would have stayed closed to her forever. Also, Beauvoir's ideas on *The Woman in Love* are similar to what Benjamin suggests here. Taking this into consideration, we can assume that Bella's decision to surrender to Edward sexually, and her positive reaction to pain, are just further attempts to participate in his superior existence. But I believe it is problematic to analogise the relationship of Edward and Bella fully to Benjamin's description of the sadomasochistic relation. In her study, both partners consciously decide to take on certain roles, while Edward and Bella just stumble into them. Bella may enjoy being "an instrument of his supreme will", but Edward seems to have lost this supreme will, at least to some extent. He is not the partner who provides "control, order and boundary [...] essential to the erotic experience of submission" (Benjamin 64), as he is fighting to keep in control himself. It can be concluded that the relationship of Edward and Bella can only partially be explained with reference to sadomasochism. Bella clearly enjoys being the submissive partner, but Edward is not really the supreme master who is in total control of the situation. Otherwise, he would not have to bite pillows and destroy furniture in order to stop himself from biting Bella. It is difficult to apply psychoanalytic theory to a relationship which is as idealized as the love relation in *Twilight*. Nevertheless, I still want to point out that Bella loses her status as an autonomous subject in her relationship with Edward in her attempt to merge her subjectivity with his.

The next step along the line of Bella's personal development is her surprising pregnancy. I want to draw special attention to Bella's thoughts about pregnancy and the way in which male and female bodies are constructed as diametrically opposed. In order to explain the fact that Edward can father a child, while vampire women do not have reproductive capacities, Meyer draws on traditional ideas about biologically determined gender differences, as the following passage shows.

...well, there was a difference. Rosalie could not conceive a child, because she was frozen in the state in which she had passed from human to inhuman. Totally unchanging. And women's

¹¹ Benjamin uses the feminine pronoun, as her study is based on Pauline Réage's *Story of O*, in which the slave is a woman

bodies had to change to bear children. [...] And human men, well they pretty much stayed the same from puberty to death. (B.D.114)

This reinforces the idea that only female bodies are connected to the cycles of nature, while men are presented as unchanging, god-like, but still endowed with reproductive powers. After having gone through these 'logical' conclusions – reaffirming once more the rigidly polarized gender constructions which form the psychological set-up of the whole saga - Bella immediately identifies with the idea of becoming a mother. Within minutes the vision of a “ tiny child with Edward’s eyes [...] lying fair and beautiful in [her] arms” (B.D. 119) appears in Bella’s mind, sending “a warm shiver” down her spine. From one moment to the next Bella changes from a person who had never thought about children in her life, to a woman who loves her unborn child so unconditionally that she is even ready to sacrifice her own life for it. The following passage shows the next step of Bella’s psychological transformation.

It was funny how abruptly and entirely necessary this vision had become. From that first little touch the whole world had shifted. Where before there was just one thing I could not live without, now there were two. There was no division – my love was not split [...] it was more like my heart had grown, swollen up to twice its size at that moment. (B.D.119)

While Edward realizes quickly that the child is harmful to Bella’s health and promises to “get that thing out before it can hurt any part of [her]”, Bella wants the child like she wants air to breathe: “ Not a choice – a necessity “ (B.D.120). From this moment on, Bella uses all her energy to protect a child which is slowly eating her from the inside. The child literally sucks the life out of her veins, which could be seen as a symbolic slow killing of her subjectivity. Suddenly Rosalie, the one member of the Cullen family who never understood Bella’s decision to give up motherhood for an eternal lifetime with Edward, becomes her only friend. The time span from the end of the honeymoon up to the birth of Renesmee is told entirely through Jacob’s perspective. This once again creates the impression that Bella disappears more and more as a free speaking subject, and she stays only as a curious medical case which is observed by the other characters. Not only is her suffering described from the outside, but we can also see the conflict between Jacob and Edward, which is mainly a battle over possessing Bella. In the scene where Jacob sees Bella pregnant for the first time, it seems that the territorial battle over Bella’s body has become the central driving force of the plot.

I didn't want to see this, didn't want to think about this.
I didn't want to imagine him inside her. I didn't want to
know that something I hated so much had taken root
in the body I loved. (B.D. 160)

It is the primary concern of both to keep Bella alive, but it can be argued that they are violating Bella's will and entirely reducing her to object status in doing so. Of course Bella's case is problematic, and we have to look at it from two perspectives. Previously, I have argued that Bella is ready to give up her subjectivity when she decides to sacrifice herself for her unborn child, but it is still her own decision to do this. This is actually the only time we see Bella speaking up against Edwards will, but ironically, it is a decision that puts her own life in danger instead of affirming her right for an autonomous existence. In order to keep Bella alive Edward even suggests that she might have a child from Jacob in substitute for his own. Jacob's reaction to the idea once again emphasizes that Bella is treated like a precious possession by both of them. He starts contemplating whether "she wouldn't mind being shared"(B.D. 166), or whether he should borrow Bella for weekends and then return her Monday morning "like a rental movie", a suggestion that Jacob finds "so messed up."- but - "so tempting"(B.D. 167).

All through her pregnancy we only get Bella's thoughts and feelings indirectly through Jacob's point of view. We see Bella disappear more and more as a person, while the half vampire child is feeding on her life. At the birth scene we get the impression that Bella has been completely reduced to her body as she is only moved by "the wild thrashing from inside the center of her body", while her face stays "blank-unconscious" (B.D. 320). Even in the short moments in which she regains consciousness, Bella's only concern is to save the life that is destroying her own. We could see the moment when Bella's heart stops beating as the point at which she finally gives up what is left of her subjectivity. As soon as Renesmee is out of her body the two men find themselves "working over a corpse". As Jacob observes:

Because that's all that was left of the girl we both loved.
This broken, bled-out, mangled corpse. We couldn't put
Bella together again. (B.D. 326)

It can be claimed that the fight between the two men, which is also a fight of irreconcilable choices within Bella's psyche, has finally killed Bella as an autonomous human being. She can now only continue to exist, if Edward decides to recreate her. He injects his venom into her heart, giving her new life though his supreme will and power. By doing so he creates a being which is more similar to himself and which is more compatible with his world. As the one who gives Bella eternal life and frees her from many physical limitations, Edward can also be sure of Bella's thankfulness and devotion. In her new life Edward is not only Bella's husband, but also her father. Even though it is suggested that, by becoming a vampire, Bella gains total equality with Edward, their relationship is still clearly asymmetrical due to this pre-history.

7.2. Bella's new life: motherhood and other talents

Bella's new life starts in the same way that her old one has ended: she is suffering pain which has been inflicted on her by another person. When Bella finally overcomes the pain that fragments her being into black nothingness and red agony, she starts contemplating the events that lead up to her transformation. What is surprising here is the fact that it is not Bella's own life-affirming drives that keep her fighting for survival. Once again, even in a near-death experience, Bella only thinks about the wishes of the two men who have brought her into this life-threatening situation.

If I did the easy thing now, let the black nothingness erase me,
I would hurt them. Edward. Edward. My life and his were twisted
into a single strand. Cut one, and you cut both. [...] If I were gone,
he wouldn't be able to live through that, either. And a world
without Edward seemed completely pointless. Edward *had*
to exist. (B.D. 345)

What is striking here, is the logic that Bella uses to define and justify her whole existence through Edward's. It seems as if she, in her own right, had no justification to exist. Only because the absolutely essential and all powerful Edward would be removed from the world with her, Bella sees a reason to fight for her life. When Bella finally wakes to her new life after days of torturous burning her senses are clear and strong, but the rest of Bella's psychological set-up has not changed at all. Instead of becoming a blood-crazed newborn vampire she still desires Edward more than anything else. Interestingly, this makes her feel guilty, like she is "in breach of the contract" because she "couldn't be allowed to have this, too" (B.D.364). Her feeling of

guilt seems strange considering the torture she has just gone through. After weeks of painful pregnancy, and days of burning we could assume that Bella actually deserves to experience sexual pleasure in return. Of course her other main concern, beside her desire for Edward, in the second part of *Breaking Dawn* is protecting her half-vampire child against the rigid law of the Volturi, who see Renesmee as a threat to their established order. I will comment on Renesmee in more detail in the following section of this chapter.

Besides being a mother and a dedicated wife, Bella also slowly discovers her vampiric talent. A gender-specific distribution of talents can be observed in the Cullen family. Male vampires tend to have the more active or more controllable talents, while females either have more receptive gifts, or they do not have any supernatural talents at all. Alice's visions of the future are uncontrollable, while Edward can actively decide which mind to read. Jasper has the gift to influence emotions, which gives him a great deal of power over others, while Esme and Rosalie are not talented at all. Bella's talent fits into this pattern, as it seems to be a supernatural extension of her mother role. Her defensive shield, which Bella can extend to protect the loved ones around her, represents the archetypal quality of the ideal mother. As Jessica Benjamin writes on motherhood:

Just as the mother's power is not her own, but is intended to serve her child, so, in a larger sense, woman does not have the freedom to do as she wills; she is not the subject of her own desire. Her power may include control over others, but not over her own destiny. (Benjamin 88)

This is the situation that Bella is confronted with in her supposedly superior existence as a vampire. Her life is now controlled by the wish to protect her "little family" in the battle against the Volturi, not leaving room for any other aspects of her personality. As Bella says: "It felt like I had never wanted anything so badly before this: to be able to protect what I loved" (B. D. 556). Once again Bella is not the centre of her own existence. Her idolizing love for Edward has been expanded to include her child. As opposed to her human life, in which Bella was depicted as weak and fragile, always in need of protection, she is now in a position to protect others. It can be claimed that she has reached a more powerful status in relation to those around her, but Bella cannot use this power in a self-affirmative way. She only defines herself through

serving and protecting others. Stephenie Meyer's version of the "happily ever after" is rigidly defined by the traditional image of femininity, not leaving Bella much freedom to develop as an individual. It also has to be mentioned that in the final chapter of the narrative Bella even gives up the last part of her mental privacy : when she learns how to push her protective shield away from herself, Edward is able to read her thoughts. I want to suggest that by opening her thoughts to Edward, Bella gives up another part of her subjectivity, merging her identity more with Edward. Thus, it is highly questionable whether Bella's eternal life gives her the promised freedom. It can be observed that, instead of being liberated, she is further entrapped in an asymmetrical relationship.

In the course of the saga Bella makes a series of sacrifices starting with the decision to leave her mother behind, to move to a town that seems to represent the exact opposite of her preferences. We could say that instead of growing up to be a free and self-confident individual, Bella is constantly making choices that put others in the centre of her life, leaving her in the periphery where she is trying to live up to other people's expectations. In *Twilight*, Edward appears on page 17, before the reader has the chance to create a mental picture of her that shows her as anything besides insecure and obsessively in love. When Edward's leaving in *New Moon* shatters her world, Jacob is there to compensate the loss. But later, in *Eclipse*, Bella is forced to give him up again for the sake of her new, supposedly perfect life. Finally, in *Breaking Dawn*, Bella has to go through various kinds of transformations, which are either emotionally unsettling or physically painful. Even as a newborn vampire, Bella is in possession of "superhuman self-control" and primarily concerned with protecting her child. Bella's vampiric talent is yet another example of her tendency to dedicate her life entirely to others. If we take all this into consideration, we can conclude that Bella's new life is not the superior, liberated existence she, or we as critical readers, had hoped for. Even though Bella is now physically equal to Edward, the relationship is still asymmetrical. He is the one who has recreated her and has given her eternal life, making her forever indebted to him. Her life as an immortal is therefore not different to the traditional feminine role of motherhood and marriage. In the following section I will comment on Renesmee and her unique status among the characters of the saga, questioning whether she could be seen as a possible solution to the central conflict.

7.2. Renesmee: link between binaries, threat to the patriarchal order

Bella's vampire-hybrid child Renesmee is one of the most interesting characters in the whole saga. What sets her apart from the others is her status as a being that comes from two worlds, connecting two modes of life, and questioning the rigid binary oppositions that constitute the rest of the narrative. Her name is a blending of Bella's human mother Renée, and her vampire mother-in-law Esme, which already hints at the fact that Renesmee is a creature situated in-between those two worlds. In the following section I want to question whether Renesmee can be seen as the ultimate solution of the central conflict – bridging the gap between binaries – or whether she can even be seen as a destabilizing factor threatening the patriarchal order.

Concerning Renesmee I want to draw on Julia Kristeva's theory of Abjection, claiming that, especially in her unborn form, Renesmee can be seen as the abject. The abject is a threatening space that lies between subject and object "a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable the thinkable"(Kristeva 1). Bella's pregnancy clearly goes beyond the scope of the thinkable, as it leaves her paralysed in shock and seems "impossible" (B.D. 113) from a biological point of view. Bella's world is shaken and all her certainties are put into question. The existence of a being that is neither vampire, nor human, yet somehow both, transgresses boundaries and shows "the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders" (Kristeva 4). Since the unborn child is a part of Bella's own body - not yet a subject but not an outside object that can be confronted either – it bears many characteristics of the abject. From the beginning of the pregnancy Renesmee is a threat to Bella's life: something that "beseeches, worries and fascinates"(Kristeva 1) Especially when the Brazilian housekeeper whispers the word "*Morte*"(B.D. 124), we know for sure that something is not the way it is supposed to be. Pregnancy is a process that usually gives life instead of destroying it, something that can be seen as the exact opposite of death. If we see Renesmee as a kind of living corpse, it can be claimed that she represents "the

utmost of abjection”, a case of “death infecting life” (Kristeva 4) In her discussion of Nazi crime as an example for abjection, Kristeva claims that:

the abjection of Nazi crime reaches its apex when death, which in any case, kills me, interferes with what, in my living universe, is supposed to save me from death: childhood, science, among other things. (Kristeva. 4)

The same mechanism can be observed in the case of Renesmee, which makes her appear especially uncanny and threatening. It has to be pointed out that the threat she presents lies not only in her death-bringing nature, but it is also Renesmee’s in-between status that de-stabilizes the patriarchal order. Kristeva claims that abjection is caused by “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous”. (Kristeva 4). Renesmee certainly represents this kind of ambiguity. While Edward assures Bella that they are going to get “that thing” (B.D. 120) out of her before it can do any more harm, Bella instantly has visions of “a tiny Edward in [her] arms” (B.D.116). On the one hand Renesmee is a death-bringing “thing” from which Bella needs to be protected, while simultaneously Bella is ready to give her life for the child, which merges with Edward in her imagination.

If we look at the werewolves’ reaction to Renesmee, it can be observed that their world is also shaken by the “monster” growing in Bella’s body. The questions that run through the collective mind of the wolf pack, when Jacob returns home, are confused and unfocused:

*How can this be? What does it mean? What will it be?
Not safe. Not right. Dangerous. Unnatural. Monstrous.
An abomination. We can’t allow it. [...] The treaty does
not cover it. [...] This puts everyone in danger. (B.D. 183)*

The werewolves are facing a dilemma. As they are sworn to protecting human life, the question arises how to kill “*this creature*” (B.D. 185) without killing Bella. Of course, at this point they are still uninformed about Renesmee’s hybrid nature, which would throw them into further confusion. A being that is at the same time their worst enemy, and the thing they have sworn to protect against this enemy, breaks all boundaries and is not covered by the law of the treaty. In this way, Renesmee represents a paradox, a perversion that makes existing rules and laws useless.

Once again I want to point out that Renesmee can be seen as the abject in this context. As Kristeva writes:

The abject can be seen as perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them [...] it kills in the name of life. [...] it curbs the other's suffering for its own profit. (Kristeva 15)

It can be claimed that, especially in her unborn form, Renesmee bears many of these characteristics. Renesmee corrupts not only the distinction between human and vampire, destabilizing the Quileute law in the process, but she also misleads and turns aside values and ideas associated with motherhood. While usually the child is in need of protection, in this case it is the mother who needs to be protected from something much stronger than herself that is growing inside her body. Also later, when Renesmee is born, she continues to upset existing rules and laws. While at first the confusion is restricted to the rules regulating the co-existence of werewolves, humans and vampires, Renesmee later also poses a threat to the supreme law of the Volturi clan.

In the beginning, the Volturi believe that Bella and Edward have broken their law by creating an "immortal child": a vampire child which would kill uncontrollably and thus endanger the secret life of vampires in human societies. When they find out about Renesmee's uniqueness and her unpredictable development, they still see her as a threat to secrecy. But it has to be pointed out that the Volturi are not only troubled about Renesmee, but they are also in conflict with the Cullen's alternative way of life. The vampires serving as witnesses to support Renesmee's case see this problem clearly: "Are the Volturi here to protect the safety of our secrecy, or to protect their own power? Did they come to destroy an illegal creation, or a way of life?" (B.D. 667). Suddenly, the Cullen's attempt to protect a creature that is seen as abnormal turns into a revolution against the strict law of the Volturi. Due to the fact that the Cullens "deny their very natures" (B.D. 666), by creating strong family bonds, the Volturi see them as a threat undermining their power. It is interesting to note that it is Renesmee's existence that finally resolves the conflict between the Cullens and the Volturi, which may suggest that she is a revolutionary character. Of course it has to be mentioned that, in the end, the Cullens are re-affirmed as supreme moral rulers of

the saga. Taking this into account, we can say that the defeat of the Volturi is not a real revolution, but it represents a return to the Cullens' over-idealized Christian values, as the speech of one witness shows:

These strange golden-eyed ones deny their very natures. But in return have they found something worth even more, perhaps, than mere gratification of desire? [...] - that which makes them possible at all- is the peaceful character of this life of sacrifice (B.D. 666)

Even though Renesmee helps to re-establish the Cullens' supremacy, something that I have criticised previously in relation to Bella's subjectivity, it can still be claimed that she has revolutionary potential. With her in-between status she forms a bridge between previously irreconcilable binary oppositions. This is not only expressed by the fact that she is half vampire and half human, but also by her relationship with Jacob. The central conflict between vampires and werewolves is reconciled when Jacob imprints on Renesmee and chooses her as his life partner. I want to suggest that the conflict which tears Bella apart in *Eclipse* is resolved in the bond between Jacob and Renesmee, showing that a solution that makes binaries unnecessary may be possible. At this point I want to refer to Luce Irigaray, who sees the dissolving of binary constructions as a possible way to establish gender equality.

In her text *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* she mentions angels as symbolic representations of messengers that form a bridge between binary oppositions. I want to suggest that Renesmee, especially in her relationship to Jacob, can be seen as a similar messenger between opposing spheres.

...there are *angels*. These messengers who never remain enclosed in a place, who are also never immobile. [...] *angels* would circulate as mediators of that which has not yet happened [...] of what is on the horizon. Endlessly reopening the enclosure of the universe, of universes, of identities. [...] The angel is that which [...] goes from one side to the other, reworking ever deadline, changing every decision. [...] Angels destroy the monstrous, that which hampers the possibility of a new age. They come to herald the arrival a new birth, a new morning. (Irigaray, *Ethics* 15-16)

It can be claimed that Renesmee has the characteristics that Irigaray ascribes to angels. She belongs to the world of vampires and humans while also establishing a link between werewolves and vampires. We can say that she symbolises "that which

has not yet happened “ by creating a new identity that can exist in the space between binary oppositions. Especially Irigaray’s claim that angels “herald the arrival of a new birth, a new morning” echoes the title *Breaking Dawn*, suggesting that it refers not only to Bella’s new life, but also to her daughter who creates a new level of hybrid identity. It is also worth mentioning that Renesmee has a special position as concerns vampiric talents. While all other female Cullens have passive or receptive talents, Renesmee can show her own thoughts and feelings visually to others. Taking this into consideration we can say that Renesmee has reached a new, more self-affirmative female identity.

In conclusion we can say that Renesmee combines all contradictory elements in herself, which have caused the central conflict within Bella’s character throughout the first three volumes of the saga. She is half human, half vampire thus forming a bridge between Bella’s and Edward’s form of existence. Furthermore Renesmee reconciles werewolves and vampires in her relationship to Jacob and integrates Jacob, who can be seen as a repressed part of Bella’s personality, into Bella’s new life. In addition to that Renesmee, as her name shows, also combines two versions of femininity in herself. Esme, the perfect self-sacrificing mother, and Renée, the single mother who leaves her daughter for a younger lover, are in some way reconciled in Renesmee. Her threatening and destabilizing quality, which I have mentioned earlier, can be seen as a result of Renesmee’s hybrid identity. By establishing an identity which renders patriarchal binary constructions unnecessary, Renesmee destabilizes the patriarchal order. Taking up Irigaray’s concept of angels once more, her existence can also be seen as the *Breaking Dawn* of a new social order, as she is a “messenger who never remains enclosed in a place” showing “what is on the horizon” (Irigaray 15).

8. Twilight as Modern Fairy Tale: patriarchal myths reflected in the saga

In this section I want to consider the events in the *Twilight Saga* as elements of a modern fairy tale reflecting notions about gender hierarchy and proper femininity which can be found in many patriarchal myths, whether it be folk tales or religious narratives. Wilson has observed that Bella goes through several stages that can be analogised to *Red Riding Hood*, *Snow White*, *The Ugly Duckling* and *Sleeping Beauty* among other tales. She claims that before reaching the 'happily ever after' in marriage "Bella enters the dark wood (*Twilight*), emerges from her Sleeping Beauty state (*New Moon*), manages to ward off both witch and wolf (*Eclipse*) and is transformed from clumsy Swan to beautiful, married vampire. (Wilson, 72).

However, I want to focus on some myths which especially highlight the elements of transformation and loss of innocence, including *Red Riding Hood*, *The Little Mermaid* and finally the fall of Eve in the *Genesis*, which can be seen as the backbone of Western patriarchy.

8.1. Little Red Riding Hood

Looking at the Grimm version of *Little Red Riding Hood*¹² we can observe some surprising parallels to Bella's story. First of all, Bella is sent away by her mother, leaving sunny Phoenix for the dark forests of Forks, where she takes care of her father like Red Riding Hood does of her grandmother. Along the way she meets the wolf in the form of Jacob Black, who distracts her with his enchanting myths, and she follows him into dangerous activities like motorcycling and cliff-diving. Like the little girl in the fairy tale Bella is not afraid of him because "she [does not] know what a wicked animal he [is]"¹⁶ But just in time, before Bella's virtue can be harmed by the wolf's uncontrollable sexuality, which comes to the surface in Jacob's violent kiss in *Eclipse*, Edward appears (literally) in the form of the hunter to give Bella a new life.

¹² <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0333.html#grimm>

Here it is interesting to note that the act of cutting Red Riding Hood out of the wolf's belly has often been interpreted as an instance of rebirth¹³ where the naive girl, who listens to the wolf is saved and reborn into a better life. This element can certainly be found in *Breaking Dawn* where Bella literally has to die in order to experience her vampiric rebirth brought about by Edward.

It also has to be mentioned that Jacob is not the only male character who could be seen as the wolf. Almost all men in the saga, except the over-idealized Cullens, are presented as dangerous, violent and unpredictable. The overt moral lesson included in the Red Riding Hood story warning little girls not to talk to strangers or to go into the dark woods alone, is also present in several scenes of the *Twilight Saga*. The first instance is the Port Angeles scene where Bella nearly gets raped by strangers when walking down a dark street alone. But the scene which most echoes Riding Hood's decision to talk to the wolf can be found in *New Moon* when Bella approaches four strangers on motorcycles in order to hear Edward's warning voice in her head. (N.M. 97) In both cases Bella is, once directly and then indirectly via his voice, saved by Edward, the hunter. Basically, it can be said that *Twilight* and *Red Riding Hood* both centre around the theme of protecting female virtue and ensuring a safe transition from childhood to adult womanhood, which is strictly defined by the patriarchal ideals of marriage and motherhood.

Another version of the fairytale presented in Catherine Hardwicke's film *Red Riding Hood* (Warner Bros. 2011) creates a situation that is in some ways similar, but in other ways different to the story presented in *Twilight*. In this version a young woman called Valerie is torn between a rebellious outsider and a man of higher social rank while the town is haunted by a bloodthirsty werewolf. It becomes clear that the werewolf has to be one of the town's inhabitants. Following the traditional scapegoating dynamics everybody suspects Peter, the girl's dark rebellious suitor to be the wolf. But it is finally found out that the girl's father has been terrorising the town in his wolf form for years. As the wolf's daughter Valerie is stigmatised and persecuted as a witch. Before Peter can kill the wolf he is bitten and becomes a werewolf himself. After a few months, when he has learned to control the beast within

¹³ Bruno Bettelheim: [*The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*](#), Knopf, New York, 1976

himself, the young woman and Peter can finally escape and start a new life in the woods together.

What I find interesting about this version of the myth is the fact that, despite its similarities to *Twilight* and the Grimm version, it presents a situation and an outcome that is much more liberating for the female protagonist. First of all, the world of *Red Riding Hood* is not so rigidly divided into binaries, as the other man soon sets Valerie free to be with Peter, whom she has always loved throughout her childhood. Of course we can easily see the similarities between Peter and Jacob, and it seems that the movie presents *Twilight* with an alternative ending in which Bella chooses to be with her wild, untamed werewolf friend. It is also interesting to note that the monster haunting the town turns out to be Valerie's father, and that only by killing the father Peter and Valerie can start a new, liberated life together. We could interpret this as a symbolical killing of patriarchal law, and an attempt to find alternative ways of life freed from social restrictions. Furthermore, the idea that Valerie carries the wolf's blood and his power inside herself can be seen as a quite revolutionary concept of femininity. Of course she is persecuted as a witch for this rebelliousness, but the fact that a werewolf's power can be passed on to his female offspring, shakes up the male dominated werewolf world of the *Twilight Saga*. Leah, as the only female werewolf in *Twilight* is stigmatised as eternal outsider who is "not female enough", while Valerie, as the film's protagonist, manages to escape her social entrapment and to live a liberated life in nature. In addition to this the story does not contain the patriarchal imperative of marriage and motherhood, which is certainly a subversion of *Twilight's* socially restricted happily ever after. I believe that the messages it carries are much more in line with feminist thought than the strictly patriarchal gender constructions of *Twilight*.

8.2. The Little Mermaid

After this one example of a more rebellious, contemporary re-writing of *Twilight*, let me return to an older myth, which reflects Bella's situation in *Breaking Dawn* almost entirely. I want to suggest that Bella, especially after her engagement to Edward, faces a similar situation as *The Little Mermaid*¹⁴ in Hans Christian Andersen's tale

¹⁴ all quotes from *The Little Mermaid* taken from: http://hca.gilead.org.il/li_merma.html

from 1837. In this story we are presented with the paradigmatic dilemma of the young girl in patriarchal culture. All through her childhood the Little Mermaid lives happily in a magic underwater world where she is free to play all day long in her father's castle. But when her grandmother tells her: "When you have reached your fifteenth year, you will have permission to rise up out of the sea" she starts waiting eagerly for the day when she would "see the world as we do". On the day the little mermaid finally reaches her fifteenth year, her grandmother adorns her with lilies and oysters even though that causes her pain. "the red flowers in her own garden would have suited her much better". When the grandmother tells her that "Pride must suffer pain" that reminds us very much of the procedure that Alice puts Bella through on her wedding day. Just like the *Little Mermaid*, who would have preferred her own red flowers, Bella would have preferred to pack her own things for her honeymoon. But in both cases other, more powerful and experienced female characters, take control of the situation. They decide how the young girls will take their life-changing journeys into the unknown by trying to shape and mould them into the traditional patriarchal ideal of femininity.

The following scene in which the mermaid rises to the surface for the first time and witnesses the prince's birthday celebration is very much reminiscent of Bella's first encounter with Edward in the school cafeteria. Even though the mermaid knows instantly that the prince is "the most beautiful of all" and is unable to take her eyes away from him, while Bella finds it "hard to decide who was the most beautiful [of the Cullens]" (T.L. 17) the element of fascination with beautiful strangers who come from another world or represent another way of life is the same in both narratives. Both girls want to gain access to this new world, which represents a higher realm promising more freedom and a valuable place in the social order. The fact that the Little Mermaid does not have an immortal soul and can only obtain one via the prince's love is a direct reflection of Bella's situation, who can only become an immortal by receiving Edward's venom in her body. The following passage might as well be taken from *Twilight* if we substitute the word "man" for "vampire":

unless a man were to love you so much that you were more to him than his father or mother; and if all his thoughts and all his love were fixed upon you, and the priest placed his right hand in yours, and he promised to be true to you here and hereafter, then his soul would glide into your body and you would obtain

a share in the future happiness of mankind. He would give a soul to you and retain his own as well

It is interesting to note that the prince will “give a soul and retain his own as well”, just like Edward, who gives Bella eternal life when his venom enters her body, and at the same time gains his own soul through her. Just like the Little Mermaid, Bella does everything to gain Edward’s love despite the sacrifices she has to make in order to get a share of his superior life. Interestingly, in Andersen’s story, it is not the prince himself who has transformational powers, but the transformation is induced by an evil witch. She is another instance of an active and powerful female character who is framed as evil, just as Victoria and Jane in the *Twilight Saga*. She promises the Little Mermaid that she will become “the prettiest little human being they ever saw”, but in return she has to accept “great pain, as if a knife were passed through [her]” and she also has to sacrifice her beautiful voice. I want to suggest that Bella goes through a very similar process. Not only is her transformation equally painful, and she can never return to her father or her human friends, but she also has to give up her voice in a symbolical way. If we take ‘voice’ to mean agency and the ability to make self-determined decisions, it becomes clear that Bella in *Breaking Dawn* is as silenced as the Little Mermaid. As soon as she gets engaged to Edward the Cullens start to take over all her decisions. Starting with the cars Edward buys for her safety, up to Alice’s planning the wedding celebration and Bella’s outward appearance, as well as packing the luggage for her honeymoon.

Bella makes all these sacrifices for her immortal life with Edward, and it is even suggested that she might dissolve into nothingness without him, like the Little Mermaid who turns into “foam on the crest of the waves” without the prince’s love. In *New Moon* when Edward leaves her with the words: “It will be as if I’d never existed” (N.M 109) Bella feels a hole in her chest and has nightmares where there is “nothing to search for, and nothing to find” (N.M. 108) This suggests that Bella cannot find a self-determined existence in order to live as a free speaking subject. In a rigidly patriarchal system she, just like the Little Mermaid, has to accept that “On the power of another hangs her eternal destiny”. When the prince stops loving the Little Mermaid, the only possibility to break the witch’s curse would be to kill him with a knife which her sisters bring. But she is unable to stab him, which could be interpreted as an expression of her powerless state in patriarchy. Here, I see a

parallel to Bella's inability to kill the unborn child which is destroying her. Considering that the pregnancy leads to her death and ultimately causes her transformation, it can be claimed that an abortion would be the last way out in the same way that killing the prince would be for the Little Mermaid.

While the Little Mermaid is doomed, or maybe blessed, to float "among the daughters of the air" for three hundred years, Bella gets her patriarchally defined happily ever after, which is similar to the Disney version of *The Little Mermaid* (1989). In the animated film the prince discovers that the Little Mermaid is his true love, the evil witch is destroyed and in the end it is her father Triton who gives the girl an eternal soul and a human life. This way patriarchy is doubly restored: on the one hand in the form of marriage, and on the other hand by destroying a powerful female character, re-establishing Triton as supreme ruler of the sea and endowing him with life-giving powers. In this scene Triton acts very much like Carlisle who has the power to decide over life and death of his family. In conclusion, it can be said that the myth of *The Little Mermaid* bears many similarities to the *Twilight Saga*, as both narratives centre around a girl's transformation from childhood to womanhood focusing on the painful and self-sacrificial aspects this transition entails. While Andersen's original story shows what might have happened to Bella without Edward's love and Carlisle's decision to make her a member of his family, the Disney version establishes the same over-idealized, patriarchally defined happily ever after as *Breaking Dawn* does. It can be claimed that the *Twilight Saga*, Andersen's story and the Disney film all suggest that the alignment with strong male characters is the only way for women to survive patriarchy. (Wilson, 75).

8.3. The Genesis

The last myth I want to focus on is the fall of Eve in the Genesis, which is very often alluded to throughout the *Twilight Saga*. Not only does *Twilight* open with the quote from the Genesis: "But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17), but Bella is also established as temptress who leaves the apple unbitten for a long time. This can be understood metaphorically, relating to sexual abstinence, but also literally as Bella toys with an unbitten apple in her hand while eating with Edward in

the cafeteria (T.L. 181). In the chapter called *Confessions* we learn that Bella appears to Edward “like some kind of demon summoned straight from [his] own personal hell to ruin [him]” (T.L. 236). However, keeping Meyer’s Mormon background in mind, we have to acknowledge that seeing Bella as Eve does not necessarily condemn her as the source of all evil. Wilson observes that unlike most branches of Christianity, Mormons support the “fortunate fall view” in which the fall is seen as

a necessary progression that allowed for the experience of life in a physical body, the right to choose between good and evil, the opportunity to gain eternal life, and the ability to experience joy. Eve’s role thus presents the possibility of being less as the cause of ,man’s fall from grace and more as a conduit through which humanity was allowed joyful corporal existence. (Wilson 144).

Nevertheless, before Bella can achieve her “joyful corporal existence”, she first has to suffer pain in childbirth just like the biblical Eve. Wilson claims that Bella appears as “a martyr Eve [...] one who never bites the apple, but who willingly suffers the consequences nevertheless”(Wilson, 145). Considering that Bella stays a virgin until after marriage, it seems almost unjust that she should be punished with this painful and life threatening pregnancy. I want to suggest that Bella’s biting the apple is not necessarily related to sexuality, but to her decision to gain more knowledge about the supernatural world around her, and her will to participate in a realm which is not defined as her ‘natural’ home. We could also see her status as doom bringing temptress in relation to Jacob, who is weaker and more easily seduced than Edward. In several scenes it is suggested that Bella brings out the beast in him. If we see Jacob’s transformation into a werewolf as his fall from innocence, it could even be argued that Bella is directly related to it, as they spend the evening before his transformation together. It also could be argued that Bella is painfully punished for the fact that she got emotionally involved with two men. In *New Moon* at the eve of Jacob’s transformation into a werewolf we see that Bella actually feels guilty about her feelings for Jacob:

How I wished that Jacob Black had been born my brother, my flesh-and- blood brother, so that I would have some legitimate claim on him that still left me free of any blame now. Heaven knows I had never wanted to use Jacob, but I couldn’t help but interpret the guilt I felt now to mean that I had. (N.M. 192)

Bella's "using" Jacob goes back to the chapter *Scary Stories* in *Twilight*, where Bella uses her Eve-like seductive powers to get information about Edward via Quiliteute mythology. Jacob is the first character who opens the world of the supernatural to her and in this way sparks her desire to gain access to the 'forbidden', 'unnatural' world of vampires. Following this chain of thought, it can be claimed that Jacob functions as the apple tempting Bella/Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge. She can in return be seen as his seductress, leading him away from his innocent pre-werewolf life and into the conflict with Edward.

In conclusion it can be said that the Genesis myth is never fully enacted in the relationship of Bella and Edward because Edward is not seduced by Bella, who decides to be obedient and leaves the apple unbitten. In relation to Jacob, Bella appears as seductive Eve bringing about the end of his childlike innocence by making him aware of his 'natural' enmity with Edward. I see her painful pregnancy as a punishment for her desire to gain access to a higher realm on the one hand, and for her strategy of using Jacob while falling in love with him in the process, on the other hand. The fortunate fall view supported by Mormon doctrine is in my opinion only present in Bella's married life as a vampire. In this, finally egalitarian, relationship Bella and Edward are allowed a very "joyful corporal experience", which even includes eternal life and the knowledge of good and evil, as is evidenced in their defeat of the Volturi. Before this is granted, Bella has to be punished for her rebellious quest for knowledge, her attempts to seduce Edward before marriage, and the fact that she desires two men at the same time, all of which are unacceptable for a woman in *Twilight's* strict patriarchal hierarchy.

9.) Intertextuality: The Twilight Saga and Wuthering Heights

Catherine is really the source of all the trouble, not Heathcliff (Eclipse, 25)

Throughout the *Twilight Saga* Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* is mentioned repeatedly. In this chapter I want to look at parallels and differences between the novels and show how Bella's situation can be read in context with Catherine's. While many feminists have read Bronte's novel as rebellious in regard to traditional

Christian gender roles¹⁵, *Twilight* is often seen as saturated with Meyer's own Mormon beliefs¹⁶, reaffirming a rigidly patriarchal social order. I want to question whether *Twilight* can be seen as a more conservative re-writing of *Wuthering Heights* celebrating Bella's eternal life as superhuman mother and wife, while Catherine gets to escape these norms to be "incomparably beyond and above [them] all" (W.H. 143) in her spirit form. Furthermore I want to trace possible controversial aspects in the saga that show the author as engaging critically with her faith, in similar ways that Bronte did question existing social norms at her time. Still, the focus will lie on Bella's subjectivity and the way in which she defines herself in relation to the characters of this 19th century classic.

Bronte's novel is mentioned at a very early point in *Twilight*. In chapter two we learn that Bella decides "to read *Wuthering Heights* [...] yet again for the fun of it" (TL,30). As the reader soon discovers Stephenie Meyer's choice of Bella's favourite novel is not a mere coincidence, but it hints at the events that are soon going to shape Bella's own life. However, it is interesting to note that Bella is fascinated by the novel, but she does not consciously sympathise with the characters. While Bella finds the main characters "evil" and "selfish", she still reads the book over and over again, claiming that what appeals to her is the fact that "nothing can keep them apart" (E. 25). But I want to suggest that what really attracts her is Catherine's quest for identity and origin, and her rebellious reaction to limiting social conventions. It can be claimed that Catherine, with her selfishness, enacts a character quality that Bella represses in herself. At a later point in *Eclipse* Bella claims that: "Catherine is really the source of all the trouble" (E. 25) reaffirming once more the basic misogynistic tone of the *Twilight Saga*, but also acknowledging that Catherine is a powerful character with manipulative and subversive qualities, which Bella seems to admire secretly.

I want to look at the ways in which Bella unconsciously identifies with Catherine despite her outward disregard for the 19th century heroine. Bella's hidden wish to be equally focused on her own desires, without considering the feelings of the two men who form the corner stones of her existence, may be the underlying reason for her fascination with Catherine. Even though I have called Catherine a powerful character, it is problematic to see her as a positive role model for Bella because, in her

¹⁵ Gilbert&Gubar: *The Madwoman in the Attic* 1979

¹⁶ Natalie Wilson *Seduced by Twilight*, 2011

selfishness, she is also self-destructive. Catherine can be seen as stronger than Bella in her unalterable attachment to Heathcliff, but she consciously decides to starve herself in order to punish the two men around her. It can be claimed that, paradoxically, Catherine can only make herself heard by choosing death. Bella, on the other hand, decides to give up Jacob, who can be seen as her free-childhood self, to gain access to Edward's superior world. She certainly does not die in the same way as Catherine does. The end of Bella's human life can at the same time be seen as her birth into a strictly defined new role, which gives her a culturally sanctioned identity on the one hand, while also limiting her ability to develop as a free subject. For Catherine on the other hand, death can be seen as liberating, as it takes her into a natural, culturally less defined space where she can be with Heathcliff. This is the reason why I want to suggest that *Wuthering Heights* is actually more subversive in feminist terms than Meyer's 21st century novel.

It can definitely be said that, during their lifetime as humans, both women find themselves in a similar dilemma that ultimately destroys their human lives. Strictly speaking, both their hearts stop beating in order for them to "escape into that glorious world, and to be always there" (WH.143). But in Bella's case, matters are still more complicated, as the "glorious world" of her eternal life does not turn out to be the desired space of liberation. I have already discussed the nature of Bella's supposedly perfect happily-ever-after in the chapter on *Breaking Dawn*.

The most striking similarity between the novels is the fact that their fictional worlds are structured in extreme binaries. In both novels there is a spatial division separating two territories associated with two men. The two houses in *Wuthering Heights* mirror the two towns in *Twilight* with similar connotations attached to them. I want to suggest that La Push and the Quilieute territory can be compared to the Heights, while Forks and the Cullen house carry the same symbolical meaning as Thrushcross Grange. According to Gilbert and Gubar *Wuthering Heights* can be seen as "a topsy-turvy retelling of Milton's and Western culture's central tale of the fall of woman and her shadow self, Satan" (G&G 255) They suggest that it represents a fall from hell into heaven reversing the biblical tale by showing hell as "eternally energetically delightful, whereas the state called 'heaven' is rigidly hierarchical" (G&G 255). I want to suggest that *Twilight* hints at the idea that the werewolf world

connoted with what Gilbert and Gubar describe as hell, might be delightful too, but at the end, strict, hierarchical patriarchal heaven is reaffirmed as the only way to happiness.

Especially in the chapter on Edward and Jacob and the way in which they shape Bella's self-image, I have pointed out the culture-nature dichotomy the two men represent. Edward is associated with a higher, spiritual and more socially powerful realm, which Bella strives to enter, while Jacob represents wild and uncontrollable beastly forces, but also Bella's free childhood-self. The same oppositions projected on two male characters, who symbolise a woman's inner split can be observed in *Wuthering Heights*. Catherine finds herself in a similar kind of dilemma. Her strong, fusalional attachment to Heathcliff, who is of low social rank and therefore not a suitable partner in marriage, stands in conflict with her option for a secure and socially accepted life with Edgar Linton.

However, we cannot simply equate Jacob with Heathcliff and Edward with Edgar, as the situation in *Twilight* is in some ways more complex, and even contradictory, not allowing for a clear-cut solution. Of course, Edward is framed as the good, white, socially powerful Christian with super-human self-control, while Jacob is constructed as the dark, uncivilized, unpredictable Native American. Along those lines the Edgar-Heathcliff division seems to work perfectly well. But if we take a closer look at the two male characters, we can see that they both have contradictory character traits, which make it difficult to categorize them. Edward's past, in which he killed people, actually makes him more dark and Byronic than Jacob. Still, Edward is presented as totally altered through Carlisle's religious influence. Jacob and the werewolf pack, even though they have sworn themselves to protect human life, are framed as dangerous and unpredictable.

The complicating factor in Meyer's saga is brought about by the way in which both relationships are described as deep rooted. Catherine's famous exclamation: "I *am* Heathcliff" (W.H. 81) is very much reminiscent of Bella's feelings when she kisses Jacob in *Eclipse*. In this scene she claims that: "In this moment it felt as though we were the same person." When she goes on with: " His pain had always been and would always be my pain – now his joy was my joy" (E. 469), we can almost hear

Catherine say: “My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff’s miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning” (W.H. 81). Yet, the same scene of *Wuthering Heights* is used at a later point in *Eclipse* to justify her decision to marry Edward. When Bella quotes in reference to Edward: “ If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be” (E. 541), her profound connection to Jacob does not seem to matter, even though we know that she “felt the splintering along the fissure line in [her] heart” (E. 469) when deciding to leave him for Edward. Mormon feminists have claimed that the representation of Bella as having two soul mates can be seen as a heretical reading of Mormon doctrine questioning the institution of monogamous marriage¹⁷. Also the frequent mention of *Wuthering Heights* can be seen as an indirect critique of traditional Christian gender constructions, if we take into consideration its religiously subversive meaning. I have already suggested in an earlier chapter that Meyer might use her writing as a means to show some critical awareness about her own church, but she is at the same time limited in her critique if she wants to remain an active member of the community. In conclusion it can be said that the *Twilight Saga* is in many ways similar to *Wuthering Heights* especially as concerns the aporetic position which the two female protagonists face. I perceive the 19th century novel as more subversive in its outcome. Even though both narratives offer a solution to the central conflict in the next generation, *Breaking Dawn* re-affirms the patriarchal ideal of marriage and motherhood as the only acceptable option for Bella. However, a slightly subversive note is added in the form of Renesmee and her relationship to Jacob, which bridges the gap between oppositions. Taking all this into consideration we can say that, despite its conservative ending for the female protagonist, *Twilight* still expresses doubts about established patriarchal gender roles. The frequent mention of *Wuthering Heights* can be seen as another hidden way to in which Meyer voices her dissatisfaction with the role of women in her religious community.

¹⁷ Maxine Hanks “Mormon Vampires? Religion in Twilight”, Summer School in Forks, A *Twilight* Symposium, Forks, Washington, June 27 2009, quoted in *Seduced by Twilight*

10.) Conclusion

After looking at Stephenie Meyer's popular saga through the lens of critical feminist theory it has to be said that *Twilight* celebrates and perpetuates traditional patriarchal gender roles and family structures. Even though various controversial aspects are brought in, in the form of minor characters, the ideal of heterosexual marriage and motherhood triumphs over everything else when Bella finally becomes a vampire. From the beginning of the saga Bella is defined by her relationships with the men in her life. She takes care of her father, is dedicated to Edward up to the point of total self-denial, and she becomes an object to be hunted by some and protected by others. Bella does have options, but both possible versions of her future are basically restricted to marriage and motherhood. Considering all this, it is alarming to have millions of young women worldwide identify with Bella. The idea that one day a sparkling vampire in a Volvo will marry you and solve all your problems in the process, contains the seductive magic of fairy tales, but it does not encourage women to actively shape their independent lives.

Only if we look at the next generation, it has to be admitted that Bella's vampire-hybrid child Renesmee can be seen as implicit criticism of this ideal. As I have suggested earlier Renesmee is a creature standing in-between the various irreconcilable worlds of the saga, and therefore she has the power to function as a bridge connecting them. She is the only character who is part of the human, vampire and werewolf world suggesting that a new mode of life which transcends oppositions may be possible. Taking this into account it can be assumed that Meyer herself may have some doubts about the strict gender roles her religious community prescribes. From a feminist point of view it is inspiring to treat the *Twilight Saga* as an unfinished narrative and consider a possible continuation of Renesmee's and Jacob's story. Would they render the treaty between vampires and werewolves useless while teaching humans to accept other creatures in their society? Would they have a vampire-human-werewolf child who transcends all oppositions, or would they decide to live in a still more unconventional community together with other outcasts like Leah? No matter how we as readers, or even the author, may decide to continue the saga, we always have to keep in mind that concepts of identity do not have to be limited to mutually exclusive options. Once again I want to suggest that Renesmee

can be seen as one of Irigaray's angels who "circulate as mediators of that which has not yet happened [...] endlessly reopening the enclosure of the universe, of universes, of identities" (*Ethics* 15).

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Zusammenfassung

Weibliche Subjektivität und Selbstbestätigung in Stephenie Meyers *Twilight Saga*

Die Arbeit betrachtet die *Twilight Saga* aus feministischer Perspektive und konzentriert sich dabei vor allem auf die weibliche Protagonistin Bella Swan, welche in einem rein patriarchalen Umfeld auf der Suche nach ihrer Identität ist. Besonders wird auf Bellas starke Identifikation mit den beiden männlichen Hauptcharakteren eingegangen, um zu zeigen, dass Bellas Welt von einer rigiden Dichotomie geprägt ist, die es ihr schwer macht sich als autonomes Subjekt zu entwickeln. Bellas niedriges Selbstvertrauen und ihre Liebe für den über idealisierten Edward Cullen können als ein Symptom für ihre Platzlosigkeit in der patriarchalen Kultur gelesen werden. Ihr Wunsch ein Vampir zu werden gleicht dem Versuch der Frau, durch ihren Ehemann einen höheren sozialen Status zu erreichen, und auf diese Weise ihrer Marginalisierung in der patriarchalen Ordnung zu entfliehen. Um ein unsterbliches Wesen zu werden, und um in der idealisierten kapitalistisch-patriarchalen und streng christlichen Welt der Cullen Vampire ihren Platz zu finden, muss Bella einige Opfer in Kauf nehmen. Sie muss ihre Mutter verlassen, und in eine männlich dominierte Welt ziehen, die sich in religiös idealisierte Vampire und ethnisch abgewertete Werwölfe teilt. Sie ist gezwungen ihre Freundschaft mit Jacob Black, der als ihr kindliches Selbst gesehen werden kann, aufzugeben und wird letztendlich in die gesellschaftlich vorgeschriebene Rolle der idealen Ehefrau und Mutter gedrängt. Ähnliche Repräsentationen von einengender, traditioneller Weiblichkeit können bei fast allen weiblichen Charakteren der *Saga* beobachtet werden. In einem weiteren Schritt werden diese Frauenbilder mit verschiedenen patriarchalen Mythen in Verbindung gebracht, um die Ursprünge von Meyers populärer *Saga* zu erkunden. Kontroverselle Aspekte, welche die strenge Dichotomie der *Saga* destabilisieren, kommen allerdings durch Bellas Vampirhybrid Kind hinzu, welches als mögliche Kritik an der patriarchalen Ordnung gelesen werden kann.

Lebenslauf

Geboren: 10.06.1983, Linz OÖ

2003- 2011: Studium der Anglistik und Amerikanistik an der Universität Wien

Studienschwerpunkt: Gender Studies, Kulturwissenschaften