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Twilight haters: the Good, the Bad and the Ugly of Internet Popular “Hatedom”

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Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series is undoubtedly among the biggest and most visible phenomena of early 21st century popular literature. The first book was published in 2005 and started a seven-year adventure of worldwide popular success: each of the four novels and five movie adaptations has broken a variety of best-selling and box-office records. The series is second only to *Harry Potter* in terms of popularity among the young adult readership. As is the case for any cultural success, a portion of *Twilight* readers characterize themselves as fans, and adopt the typical behavior which has been largely observed and commented upon by cultural critics: creating and gathering in spaces devoted to the exploration and enjoyment of their beloved series, integrating their love of *Twilight* in the personal identity they wish to present to the world. Another subset of *Twilight* readers characterize themselves as “anti-*Twilight*”, or haters. Generating haters has become unavoidable for any cultural phenomenon nowadays. However, the visibility of *Twilight* haters is unusually high. Facebook groups such as “*Twilight* sucks” or “I hate *Twilight*” have attracted several hundred thousand members each, a degree of unpopularity not achieved even by hyper-mediatized popstars (Lady Gaga, the Kardashians) and unheard of for a book series¹.

Twilight haters are also particularly active in their “anti-fannish” productions: they create pictures, texts, articles, videos and webcomics that aim to denigrate, parody or make fun of the novels and their fans. This anti-fan production is so frequent on the Internet that it appears in any conversation about the reception of *Twilight* even when one isn't really looking for it: in 2013, when both fans and haters were still very active, a simple search for “*Twilight*” on Google Images brought up haters' productions along with official and fannish pictures in the first ten pages. The prevalence of *Twilight* hating, expressed through active *Twilight* “bashing” on the Internet, has led several other authors to analyze this phenomenon. Anne Gilbert in particular observes haters on the Internet to study their attitude and relationship to the series; she argues that hatedom is a form of audience participation of its own, which “negotiates a position between subversive opposition and

straightforward appreciation”². Following her lead, this article will investigate the behavior of this particular subset of *Twilight* audience on the Web. It hopes to complete Anne Gilbert's essay on haters with testimonies and quotes from different pages and forums, and to further enrich our understanding of this specific expression of contemporary cultural reception; furthermore, exploring the hating community may also offer another perspective on a series which has attracted so many negative reactions, and on the possible responses to a cultural event of this magnitude.

While haters seem to position themselves as the opposite of fans, the organization of “hatedom” and the pleasures it provides appear very similar to what fandom grants. Gilbert points out the existence of various Internet spaces devoted to *Twilight* hating: much like fans, haters take the time to create accounts and entire groups, blogs and forums on all kinds of platforms (Tumblr, Blogger, Facebook, Twitter, and many forum hosting providers). These groups and forums are carefully organized, moderated and animated by Internet users, some of whom are occasional passers-by while others dedicate a considerable amount of time over several months or years to the discussion of the series³. Gilbert also underlines the fact that at least some of the haters have actually read the four books and watched the five movies; some engage in in-depth, lengthy analyses of the novels to explain their dislike⁴.

In fact, Jostein Gripsrud describes fanhood as “characterized by strict discrimination and productivity”⁵, and adds that it is “a relationship between a subject and an object that is to some extent marked by obsession and intolerance to other views and preferences”⁶: these definitions fit haters as well. As mentioned above, they gather in communities, another essential part of the fan experience⁷:

Anti-Twilighter groups establish a strong sense of community through commiseration, like-minded behavior, and a shared interpretation of the pleasures offered by the saga, and explicitly work to perpetuate the camaraderie.⁸

Hatedom and fandom are both used as a means to assert personal identity and to define oneself through public exhibition of cultural choices and preferences. “'Fandom' is more about defining an identity and / or lifestyle than just any engaging 'hobby' is”⁹; *Twilight*

haters associate their personal social network profiles to pages, groups and other profiles dedicated to hating the saga (following haters' accounts and pages on Tumblr, Facebook or Twitter). They create pictures and memes¹⁰ to display as their profile pictures or to share with their Internet friends and followers; they can even engage in non-virtual self-definition by wearing *Twilight Sucks!* paraphernalia, such as T-shirts and badges sold online.

In other words, *Twilight* hatredom seems to function exactly like a fandom, with the exception that it is a cultural gathering *against* a saga rather than around it. This rejection of the saga may be linked to the definition Henry Jenkins gives of contemporary fan culture:

[Media fanhood] embraces not a single text or even a single genre but many texts – American and British dramatic series, Hollywood genre films, comic books, Japanese animation, popular fiction (particularly science fiction, fantasy, and mystery) – and at the same time, it constructs boundaries that generally exclude other types of texts (notably soap opera and for the most part, commercial romance.)¹¹

This seems to fit the cultural preferences of haters, as exemplified by the Literature and Media sub-boards of the *Twilight Sucks* forum which include Fantasy, Horror, Science Fiction, Anime & Manga and Graphic Novels & Comic Books; it also offers a Romance sub-board, in which only seven conversations have been opened (four of them to criticize other romance novels deemed as bad as *Twilight*). On the contrary, *Twilight* fans exhibit little interest for genres other than supernatural romance; their forums rarely include sub-boards dedicated to other texts, and fans even occasionally express their scorn for haters' preferences, such as science-fiction which is deemed “uncool” and for “nerdies”¹². The numbers of active *Twilight* fans are also relatively low: their websites, fan productions and real-life conventions are much less numerous and frequented than one would expect, given the sum of books effectively sold¹³.

Users of these *Twilight* hating forums are then precisely persons who already have a culture of fanhood, of cultural appreciation and expression on the Internet, but who usually exclude romance from acceptable genres. The importance and visibility of Twi-haters on the Web may partly be explained by a convergence between Internet popular

culture fandom and the cultural consumers most likely to reject romances such as *Twilight*.

Enforcing the criteria of “good” literature

The haters' willingness to describe in detail and explain the strong, negative emotions elicited by the saga amounts to a desire to map out their own aesthetic, cultural and literary expectations in opposition to *Twilight's* perceived failings. Four types of accusations against the saga often recur among haters: Stephenie Meyer's poor writing skills, the lack of internal coherence and convincing plot developments of the story, and *Twilight's* rendition of the vampire figure. The fourth major reproach involves the novels' so-called misogyny, which will be discussed later on. The first three causes of dislike lead the haters to highlight by contrast their own reading behavior, and the way they position themselves when engaging with a fictional story.

Their first grievance with *Twilight* is that “Stephenie Meyer can't write worth a damn”, to quote Stephen King¹⁴ (much to the glee of Internet *Twilight Sucks* groups.) This umbrella accusation includes criticism of the author's spelling and grammar, her vocabulary choices and the characterization of her heroine. A fashionable behavior among haters is to write long Facebook or blog posts listing in detail every spelling and grammar mistake made by the author¹⁵, and declaring the saga unbelievably poorly edited. (Most of these mistakes were corrected in the second and third editions of each book.) They emphatically express their righteous indignation at the thought that *Twilight* was accepted and published with all these errors:

Once upon a time, in a land just on the other side of town, there lived a naive little girl that truly believed that some things in life were perfect. She believed that everyone was nice, that brothers never told porky pies, and that books would be scrutinised by the author and publishers, before being put out onto the shelves of millions across the world. Then along came Stephenie Meyer, and well, let's just ask: When books get to the Publishers, do they actually pay proofreaders to check the spelling, punctuation and grammar?¹⁶

Meyer's vocabulary is also frequently accused of being affected, poorly chosen and sometimes incorrect:

Stephenie Meyer is guilty of excessive purple prose. Of course, we all know she is guilty of raping her thesaurus. [...] Stephenie Meyer, stop using big, fancy words where simpler ones would do just fine. Retire the use of the words "chagrin," "murmur," "glower," "scowl," "perfect," "dazzling," and "infinitesimal." You clearly don't know what they mean so please stop it.¹⁷

The author's taste for uncommon words, especially associated with otherwise simple and modern syntactical structures, is deemed a proof of bad taste and bad writing by haters. They paint her as an unintelligent woman and ridicule her as someone who tries to achieve an elegant and refined writing style, but who fails spectacularly. By issuing such condemnation, haters construct and enforce their own position as capable of distinguishing between "good" and "bad" style, and consequently, as rightful judges of "good taste".

The final proof of Meyer's poor writing skills rests with her main character, Bella, described by haters as a Mary Sue. The Mary Sue concept was born in 1973 when Paula Smith published a parody of *Star Trek* fanfiction¹⁸. It refers to a female main character whose personality is unrealistically perfect, and whose skills and powers of attraction over all other characters are excessive. Often perceived as a self-projection or "self-insert" by the author herself, she is conceived to invite readers to identify with her and to allow intense narcissistic gratification through this identification. Smith intended to denounce a tendency among fanfiction authors to write their own fantasies inside the fictitious world they loved, thus imagining an idealized version of themselves and re-writing the fictitious world as centered around this new character.

Smith's parody was very successful among popular culture fans. Mary Sue, the heroine's name, has since been used to describe characters who are too perfect and too pleasant to identify with, within a fictitious world which centers too much around him or her. A "Mary Sue" is usually deemed an example of poor writing. *The Oatmeal*, a humorous website, published a much read and much shared article on *Twilight* and its faults; it starts as follows:

The author creates a main character which is an empty shell. Her appearance isn't described in detail; that way, any female can slip into it and easily fantasize about being this person. [...] Appearance aside, her personality is portrayed as insecure, fumbling, and awkward – a combination anyone who ever went through puberty can relate to. By creating this "empty shell," the character becomes less of a person and more of something a female reader can put on and wear.¹⁹

The literary and artistic implications of this analysis are made clear with a small drawing depicting Bella in tears, crying: "I'm not even a real character!" It may be relevant to note that *Twilight* hatred is composed of unusually high numbers of people thinking of themselves as authors. Several articles criticizing *Twilight's* grammar or characters are hosted not on haters' spaces, but on writing blogs (see examples above). In Facebook groups, many of the most active haters are aspiring or self-published fantasy writers; and the support of best-selling author Stephen King, especially as he is usually prone to celebrating other writers, or of Internet celebrity and published author Matthew Inman (*The Oatmeal*) is loudly welcomed by haters. In other words, the aesthetic and artistic crusade against *Twilight* is also a battle by haters to establish themselves as genuine literature lovers and creators endowed with sensibility and taste, to whom Stephenie Meyer's success is an insult.

Referentiality as a mode of reading

Following the same logic, haters define their own mode of reading by criticizing another fault: the lack of coherence of Meyer's novels, which can be understood as a lack of referentiality in the haters' literary conception. Anti-*Twilight* blogs and forums accuse the series of being nonsensical and illogical, of relating sequences of events, characters and motivations in a deeply unsatisfactory manner. The *Twilight Sucks* forum has an entire conversation dedicated to the finding and analysis of "plot holes"²⁰. These plot holes designate diegetic mysteries that remain unexplained²¹; choices or reactions that seem irrelevant or unconvincing given the characters' possibilities and previously established personalities²²; and, more interestingly, what haters consider as breaches of realism.

We need to remember here that haters are mostly amateurs of fantasy and science-fiction, i.e. stories which do not attempt to represent a fictitious world more or less identical to ours. They are used to reading non-mimetic tales and have their own requirements and demands to adhere to the story. According to them, it is unforgivable that Stephenie Meyer should set her story in a world supposedly similar to our non-fictitious universe, the only difference being the existence of supernatural beings, but then commit basic mistakes such as geographical errors²³ or unrealistic blood sampling for school students without any forewarning or parental agreement.

Because the story starts out in contemporary America, with realistic elements such as planes, high schools and existing cities such as Phoenix or Seattle, haters demand that all deviations from the mimetic laws of biology or physics be acknowledged as unexpected and extraordinary by the fictitious characters, and explained in some way – something Stephenie Meyer does in fact attempt to do, as she links her vampires' characteristics to various evolutionary and biological discourses²⁴. Unacknowledged mistakes in the meteorological, geographical or legal fields – in which statements can be objectively verified or challenged – threaten the haters' suspension of disbelief. These readers constantly refer what they read to their previous knowledge of the extra-textual world; they check whether the fictitious world they're reading about corresponds to this knowledge, and are particularly interested in the modalities and explanations for any deviation from mimetic representations.

Haters also grant or rescind their suspension of disbelief according to the logical organization of all the different information given throughout the novels:

I was [...] meditating on my hatred for *Twilight* in general when I started thinking about a particular inconsistency in the story. [...] in *New Moon*, the Volturi want to kill vampires that expose themselves by showing the world that... They sparkle? Okay, seriously, this is where my suspension of disbelief ends. If I see a guy walking down the street *sparkling*, I assume he was glitter-bombed. "Vampire" does not jump to mind. Not even close (Okay, so after reading *frickin' Twilight* it does, but in the *Twilight universe* we are led to believe that the typical mythos of vampires are still in place). So... Just in general, the Volturi's reaction is stupid because *no one* is going to think "Vampire" when they see a guy sparkling in the sunlight. [...] Clearly, the

issue with the Volturi was thrown in purely for the sake of creating a conflict beyond Edward and Bella's Twu Luv and how it conquers all. New Moon wouldn't have been *interesting* (I use that word with extreme reservation) if there wasn't some kind of tension at the end. But it's details like this one that make me want to slam my head against the nearest solid object.²⁵

Because the general belief of vampires burning in the sun has been established as common among the fictitious humans of *Twilight*, their supposed ability to associate vampires with their actual reaction to the sun in Meyer's story (sparkling) seems unconvincing. The comment quoted above exemplifies the strong, almost violent reaction any perceived lack of coherence incites in haters (“...make me want to slam my head...”): in their reading patterns, exploring a novel and particularly a novel including fantasy elements means connecting together the information given by the text. Their goal as readers is to build an imaginary picture of a coherent fictitious universe, complete with informed motivations and logical sequences of events.

Referentiality does not only function inside the story itself, or with regard to extra-textual scientific laws; haters also practice cultural referentiality. As a very popular figure in non-mimetic literature for over a century, the vampire is naturally a part of these genres embraced by media fans. *Twilight* haters tend to be vampire fans; they have come to the series armed with previous readings of vampire stories, while some of the fans admit freely their lack of interest in vampire literature, *Twilight* being the exception²⁶. Haters read the series from within an imaginary personal space already filled with knowledge about the vampire in literature, and their understanding of the text is performed through reference to and comparison with this knowledge. This constitutes one of the most common reproaches addressed to the saga: haters are adamant that the vampires created by Meyer are not “real” vampires, in particular because of her choice to make them sparkle in the sunlight.

They have coined the word “Meyerpire” to avoid calling Meyer's inventions “vampires”. The term has its own page on *Urban Dictionary*, on which all the proposed definitions insist on the fact that whatever Meyerpires are, they are not actual vampires: “They are NOT, I repeat, NOT vampires.”²⁷ The phrase “vampires don't sparkle” offered up four million six hundred thousand results on Google Search in 2013, including

numerous pictures usually assembled following two possible approaches: on the one hand, photos of a glittery Edward Cullen are captioned with accusations that he is a teenage girl wearing make-up, a fairy or more explicitly a homosexual human male²⁸ rather than a vampire. On the other hand, images of vampires derived from another book or movie are captioned with the haters' anthem, "Real vampires don't sparkle!" (or, alternately, "Real vampires burn in the sun".)

The fictitious vampires thus called forth to shame *Twilight's* choices mainly originate from Anne Rice's novels and their movie adaptations, from the movies or series *The Lost Boys*, *True Blood*, *Blade*, *30 Days of Night*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Sesame Street* and various *Dracula* adaptations (mostly starring Bela Lugosi or Christopher Lee) and occasionally include portraits of Vlad III the Impaler. The only Japanese *manga* quoted by haters is *Hellsing*. Most striking here is the fact that this pantheon of respectable vampires cannot be assimilated to an extensive knowledge of literary vampire culture; it leaves out entirely all romance and sentimental novels and series, even though the supernatural romance subgenre has played an important role (and sold more than a few million books) on the vampiric literary stage for several decades. Haters also concentrate mainly on works that have been successfully adapted to the screen, thus ignoring many relevant landmarks in vampire history. The best-selling *manga* *Vampire Knight*, all supernatural romances such as *Anita Blake* and *The Vampire Diaries*, but also Polidori's Lord Ruthven (the original British literary vampire, 1819) and Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* are ignored. Besides, identifying Vlad Tepes to a vampire relies more on contemporary popular urban beliefs than on a careful reading of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and declaring that "real vampires burn in the sun" overlooks the fact that no vampire (including *Dracula*) ever burnt in the sun in the 19th-century literary tradition, the brutal death caused by sunlight being a cinematographic invention by Murnau in 1923.

Haters are not vampire specialists, outraged by Meyer's transgression of vampiric rules. Indeed, such transgression would be hard to define in a tradition as plastic and changing as the vampire lore. What their reaction to *Twilight* denotes is a specific cultural and reading position. Philippe Le Guern describes the attitude of media fans as a "cultivated relationship to non-cultivated culture", and the texts they choose to adore as "saturated with references"²⁹. Paradoxically, this precisely fits haters. Their encounter with a text allows them to erect and delineate their culture, an ensemble of works deemed

legitimate and acceptable; they read by continuously comparing the book in their hands to this legitimate culture. As such, the haters' position is based on cultural judgment, i.e. an evaluation of the correspondence between what they read and their pre-established acceptable culture – a personal popular culture which is largely validated by sharing it on the Internet or in fan-clubs (or hate-clubs) with similarly-minded cultural consumer peers.

The bad: resistance through social contempt

Everything from the haters' literary preferences to their productivity and gathering on the Internet or their reading behaviors indicates that they can largely be assimilated to popular culture fans, an audience often described as enacting a form of resistance against mainstream cultural pressures:

The ability of corporations to control their "intellectual property" has had a devastating impact upon the production and circulation of cultural materials, meaning that the general population has come to see themselves primarily as consumers of – rather than participants within – their culture. [...] Fans respond to this situation of an increasingly privatized culture by applying the traditional practices of a folk culture to mass culture, treating film or television as if it offered them raw materials for telling their own stories and resources for forging their own communities.³⁰

Anne Gilbert shows how haters appropriate and reinterpret the *Twilight* saga in ways never intended by the writer or producers, and how they become themselves producers of meaning, challenging the monopoly of publishing and movie industries³¹. She also shows that the pleasure haters find in a text they deem to be irremediably bad and enjoyable precisely because it is bad, recall the attitudes of camp lovers analyzed by Susan Sontag³². To some extent, *Twilight* haters fall into this category of popular culture audience, operating a form of resistance and of self-expression through their rewriting and repositioning of a mainstream text: "Spectator strategies like those of irony and camp help characterize the resistant interpretation."³³

However, these counter-cultural dynamics are at odds with attempts at securing cultural legitimacy by excluding "bad" texts and the literary judgments of haters' reading

behavior. In this regard, anti-Twilighthers are closer to an older and more traditional vision of culture, one that is usually supported by elitist upper classes rather than resistant textual poachers. It is reminiscent of the artistic and bourgeois opposition to the democratization of literature in the 19th century, as described by Peter MacDonald³⁴. Of course, rejection of anything that is too successful is to be found in many fandoms, but is usually not motivated by elitism per se, but rather by the desire for “authenticity” (it is important for fans that their passion be taken seriously and not assumed to be a mere tendency to follow anything that is fashionable.)³⁵ It is also common to see fans trying to establish the superiority of their fandom over every other cultural product.

Nonetheless, this superiority is usually defended through rejection of traditional definitions of good taste as well as mainstream commercial dynamics: Philippe Le Guern explains how the fans he followed tend to invest their passion in objects “relatively free from any cultural authority”³⁶ so as to establish their own. On the contrary, *Twilight* hatred appears to associate productive, autonomous resistance to a saga issued by publishing and producing monsters (Hachette and Summit Entertainment) and an elitist opposition to a popular text in the name of good taste, quality writing and literary traditions.

After all, haters are not gathering around a common passion, which can exist in a solipsistic fan sphere oblivious of the rest of the world, but around a common hatred *against* something: hatred is necessarily a public expression of contempt and anger against something. Bourdieu and others have shown that, more often than not, at the heart of issues of cultural legitimacy stands the question of social classes and social status. From this perspective, the positioning of haters within the cultural dialogue around *Twilight* seems even more fraught with tension.

Indeed, they paint themselves as a small minority facing a vast and dominant point of view, one that is enforced upon them and society at large for commercial purposes (“*Twilight* is a fad, it’s right up there with slinkys, furbies, and beanie babies”³⁷); rules and introductions on most anti-*Twilight* websites insist more than once on their right to freely express their opinion on the saga without being insulted³⁸. According to them, their dislike of *Twilight* is an unwelcome opinion, hard to voice and likely to be received with disdain and attempts of censorship. Haters have published stories of violent verbal or physical assaults by hysterical fans after they heard unfavorable assessments of their beloved saga

(none of these stories have been confirmed or disproved by legal action or professional journalism.)³⁹ *Twilight* hatred thus puts forward a picture of itself as a minority painfully resisting silencing.

Simultaneously, this rhetoric paints *Twilight* lovers as savage, uncontrollable, idiots. Stupidity, but also lack of education and manners are constantly associated with Meyer and her fans by haters, sometimes on the very pages that invite respectful and open conversation a few lines above. The following quotations all originate from the same page on *Twilight Sucks* (the “you” addressed here being an imaginary fan):

This site doesn't simply revolve around pure hatred of the book. It's centered around allowing individuals to freely discuss their views on the series. [...]

I'm not easily lulled by repetitive narratives into a state of zombieness and ignorance like the vast majority of kids my age. Because of this I'm screwed, I can no longer safely walk into a public building without getting trampled and attacked by rabid Twi-Tards... [...]

We exist for the few who are smart enough to express their true feelings [...]

...this site is devoted to allowing EVERYONE the right to express their opinion so what are you [fans] waiting for? [...]

If high school has taught you anything...⁴⁰

Even as the administrator firmly upholds freedom of expression and respectful conversation as major values on the site, s/he clearly states the scorn and condescension s/he feels for the “ignorant” and not “smart enough” fans who probably did not get an education after high school. Most haters deliberately misspell words when they imitate fan speech⁴¹; the *Twilight Sucks* forum even misspells the author's first name (their sub-board is titled “Stephanie Meyer” rather than “Stephenie Meyer”).

Whether this corresponds to the actual demographics of *Twilight* fans or not, there is no mistaking the imagined population haters seek to attack and ridicule: uneducated teenage girls. On the other hand, while there are very few hints to be found on haters' spaces regarding their social and economical situations, they all have regular access to a computer, as well as the time and competences to set up and manage websites and forums. Most of them are legal adults, and given their literary and cultural references and conversations, they can afford to consume a variety of novels and movies. Without

necessarily being wealthy or benefiting from a higher social status, most of them are unlikely to be underprivileged, and at any rate, they consider themselves to be above the fans from a social perspective – fans they like to imagine unable to read any book other than *Twilight*. This is consistent with the haters' advocacy of knowledge, good taste and quality writing.

In other words, the haters' relationship to the saga itself is fueled by their desire to engage with the text, to offer a meaningful critique of it and to produce and publicize their own aesthetic and cultural standards from a position they perceive as a minority one; but the expression of hatred, especially through a medium – the Internet – they master so well, easily turn into enforcement of social cultural divides *via* aggressive bashing of fans painted as socially inferior. The sense of oppression and anger at a hyper-mediatized phenomenon, which may be justified given the millions of dollars invested by big publishing and producing companies in the marketing of the saga, is difficult to separate from the scorn and desire to silence more ignorant, younger and less educated readers; the hatred resents what it perceives as an overwhelming marketing campaign aimed primarily at an audience of young girls unused to reading fantasy, and reacts by violently attacking the very targets of this campaign rather than the publishing agents behind it. In this regard, they join forces with the trend they intend to denounce; both *Twilight* publishers⁴² and haters capitalize on what they perceive as an audience of young, immature female *Twilight* fans, be it for commercial or cultural purposes.

The ugly: the mad women in the *Twilight*-themed attic

Nowhere is this tension more visible than on the question of feminism. The last major reproach against the saga lies with the supposed conservative, patriarchal or even misogynistic values upheld by the text.

I've hated Twilight for quite a few years. i am offended by the way this abusive relationship of two people who have absolutely no chemistry and have had 8 conversations with little to no substance is held up as a romantic ideal. [...] i hate how misogynistic it is (being passive is held up as ideal, a woman should never stand up for herself or her interests, she should just let the men solve all of her problems).⁴³

Meyer is regularly accused of writing a series that celebrates chastity, domesticity, the precedence of sentimental relationships over everything else, and also of depicting abusive and dangerous relationships as something beautiful and romantic⁴⁴. Whether the saga is indeed guilty of “eating feminism”⁴⁵ is a very complex question which will not be explored here⁴⁶.

Even as it denounces the conservatism of the saga and accuses it of being anti-feminist, the *Twilight* hatredom appears violently sexist and misogynistic. Though haters criticize Meyer for her supposed sexism, they rarely call each other out on their own misogyny. Yet the occasions are numerous: the *ad hominem* attacks against the fans mentioned above are not only socially condescending. They also frequently berate fans and writer on their looks, sexuality and femininity. According to haters, *Twilight* lovers are fat, ugly and sexually frustrated, and deserve to be mocked for these reasons: *The Oatmeal's* drawing of illiterate fans also paints them as obese, and a very popular article on *Cracked* jokes about an earlier title of the saga being “Vampires who love fat girls”⁴⁷. Pictures of “Twi-moms”, these mothers aged 40 or more who are *Twilight* fans, are passed around and mocked as if the mere vision of non-adolescent women sharing their passion for a love story and its handsome and muscular male protagonists was inherently funny⁴⁸. The hatredom restricts these women to their mothering position, concluding that their passion for *Twilight* necessarily drives them away from their household duties (implicitly put forward as their only relevant function):

Twimoms: A group of 'adults' who have children and/or are married, who are overly obsessed fans of the overrated 'Twilight' book series. They usually spend their time, neglecting their children, ie. - forgetting to feed them...⁴⁹

References to sexist jokes are common and often well-received by other haters, regardless of their own gender; one picture stating, “*Twilight*: This is why women belong in the kitchen” has been reshared with the following added caption: “I'm a woman who hates *Twilight* and I don't know whether to punch you or hug you...”⁵⁰

Twilight fans are also depicted as hysterical women who lose control of their emotions and sexual desires: they are accused of being “crazy”, “obsessed” and “rabid”⁵¹, even for behaviors that are not uncommon in most fandoms (such as camping outside a

cinema before the release of a film or getting a tattoo inspired by their favorite book⁵².) Their explicit sexual interest in the male characters and actors of the *Twilight* franchise is particularly derided as something weird, funny and disturbing: “It's time to take a look at the always entertaining, slightly disturbing photos of *Twilight* fans gathering in frantic, sexually bewildered longing at premiere events around the world,”⁵³ comments one entertainment website before offering pictures of supposedly crazy fans to the mockery of Internet users (even though these photographs show nothing unheard of in other fandoms.)

Physical threats or jokes about physical assault are not rare, though not frequent. Haters organize online mock events called “Slap a Twilight Fan Day”⁵⁴, “Slap some Sense into a Twilight Fan”, or write on *Urban Dictionary*:

I would probably find it difficult to go on without this book [...] because on some days, fantasizing about brutally killing every diehard Twilight fan that ever lived is my only reason for living. Just kidding. But I will bitch-slap one of them someday. Seriously. Watch me.⁵⁵

They also upload Youtube videos of themselves burning a copy of *Twilight*. One particularly revealing post on Reddit forums is entitled “Bella Swan, you are a shitty role model. I wish Buffy would stake you”⁵⁶; it accuses Bella Swan of being weak, overly dependent on her boyfriend and of lacking dignity and self-esteem, personality traits for which one apparently deserves to be violently killed, according to the writer of the post.

Haters thus construct an image of the fan as a hysterical, out of control female (“rabid Twi-hards” who supposedly attack haters and lose control when they hear any negative comment about the saga) who deserves to be mocked for neglecting essential duties of female individuals (beauty, sexual restraint and household or family chores.) Meyer and her fans are guilty of being too feminine (sentimental, brainless and endowed with uncontrollable emotions) and not feminine enough (neglecting their appearance and duties.) These contradictory accusations are consistent with patriarchal stereotypes, and so are the references to old-hat sexist jokes about women in the kitchen or making sandwiches. The desire to hurt this clichéd femininity is also directly linked to a patriarchal culture of violence against women; Susan Faludi has described how the anti-

feminist backlash took over the American culture in the 1980s both by enforcing a fragile, emotional, appearance-obsessed femininity and by exposing this femininity to violence⁵⁷.

Haters thus denounce the success among mostly young female readers of a series they deem anti-feminist and misogynistic, something that certainly calls for discussion and examination; but they denounce this while themselves resorting to violent misogynistic and anti-feminist attacks. Even more specifically, they denounce the abusive, stalking and violent behavior of *Twilight* heroine's two fictitious suitors⁵⁸ and threaten fans with abusive and violent behavior (or at least they do not seem to mind the presence within their ranks of the few who joke about physical assault against fans).

This final contradiction tells us something about haters as well as about the saga itself. While criticism of *Twilight's* potential sexism is probably a sincere motivation of many haters, a second, equally or more powerful motivation may be to construct and reinforce their own social, moral and cultural standards. In their cultural world, themes and values such as the centrality of romantic love, the helplessness and chastity of female characters, sexual thrills elicited by a dangerous but sexy male protagonist are apparently unacceptable. Similarly to what we have observed about the vampire figure, haters need to leave aside certain references from their own culture to uphold this moral and thematic positioning: for instance, they ignore the two-seasons-long love story between *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* heroine and the archetypal immoral serial killer bad boy, Spike – something which should at least elicit a few comments and reflections from haters given their attacks on *Twilight*. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is an explicitly feminist series, and it deals precisely with issues of female helplessness and sentimental relationships with dangerous men from a feminist perspective⁵⁹. However, the *Twilight* hatredom does not offer so many detailed comparisons between the TV show and Meyer's series; instead, it creates jokes and pictures⁶⁰ positing Buffy as the ultimate strong heroine, about to kill the weak and ridiculous Edward Cullen and Bella Swan.

To keep their own cultural sphere of “good” fantasy or “good” vampire literature pure from ideals and representations they dislike, haters symbolically but violently expel femininity from their spaces: they do so by denying a text perceived as feminine any possible legitimacy from an artistic perspective, and by refusing to acknowledge its audience, also perceived as mainly female and absolutely feminine, as capable and responsible cultural consumers. On haters' sites and pages, *Twilight*-loving women are

thus driven out from the field of cultural competence and sent back home to the kitchen, assigned to a status of hysterical, uneducated and immature beings whose political, intellectual and aesthetic capacities are simply negated. In other words, what may start out as an attempt to resist harmful and socially enforced representations of love and femininity ends up as a mere bashing of femininity.

Twilight has attracted many devoted fans and many equally devoted haters. The fans are indeed overwhelmingly female⁶¹, and happily acknowledge the fact that what makes the series so pleasurable for them is the way it depicts the sentimental experience of a female and very feminine protagonist. Conversely, the representations of love and femininity are one of the most central and recurring causes for reproach from haters. Cultural tastes and legitimacy put aside, we can safely conclude that Stephenie Meyer has managed to encapsulate something crucial about the contemporary feminine experience; indeed, the saga elicits the same kind of violent misogynistic attacks that target individuals, behaviors and attire perceived as feminine in patriarchal and sexist societies. As a conclusion to this exploration of *Twilight* hatred, I would like to point out the fact that while haters raise many relevant questions about the object of their scorn, the way they publicly treat both the series and its fans is just another example of how feminine culture is socially received, and may partly explain why some women feel the need to write and read stories of female helplessness in a hostile environment – such as *Twilight*.



As an alternative conclusion, this webcomic perfectly illustrates the two opposite attitudes of fans and haters (and has not been well received by all haters). <http://xkcd.com/591/>

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- 1 For instance, *The Hunger Games*, published only a few years after *Twilight*, was aimed at the same audience (young adult readers and movie-goers) and quickly became a worldwide best-seller. Yet no Facebook group against *The Hunger Games*, or even *Harry Potter*, reaches over a few thousand members. Research on Facebook was done in September 2013 and again in August 2016.
- 2 Gilbert, Anne. "Between Twi-hards and Twi-haters: The Complicated Terrain of Online "Twilight" Audience Community" in Morey, Anne, ed., *Genre, Reception and Adaptation in the "Twilight" series*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2012, pp. 163-180.
- 3 For instance, some of the administrators of the *Twilight Sucks!* forum have been active since 2010 or before up to August 2016. It must be noted that the forum has been expanded to include topics other than *Twilight*; however, the specific sub-board allocated to the series was still active in December 2015. tsdcv3.proboards.com (last accessed Sept. 2016).
- 4 "These are not fans in the traditional sense, so enamored of a text that they create original work or communities to express their devotion. But neither do these individuals opt for the opposite reaction, disliking the saga and therefore avoiding everything associated with it. Instead, these are audiences who actively dislike "Twilight" and waste no opportunity to publicize that disdain, but who nevertheless read the books, perhaps multiple times; see the films; follow the actors and author in the news; and discuss all of these at length." Gilbert, Anne. "Between Twi-hards and Twi-haters: The Complicated Terrain of Online "Twilight" Audience Community", op.cit., p. 163.
- 5 Gripsrud, Jostein. "Fans, viewers and television theory" in Philippe Le Guern, dir.. *Les cultes médiatiques, Culture fan et oeuvres cultes*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2002.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 118.
- 7 "[Les oeuvres cultes] fédèrent les membres d'une même génération autour de styles de vie ou de goûts communs, [et] apparaissent rassembleuses." Le Guern, Philippe. "Introduction : Il n'y a pas d'oeuvres cultes, juste le culte des oeuvres. Une approche constructiviste des cultes médiatiques." in Le Guern, Philippe, ed., *Les cultes médiatiques, Culture fan et oeuvres cultes*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2002.
- 8 Gilbert, Anne. "Twi-hards and Twi-haters", op. cit., p. 170.
- 9 Gripsrud, Jostein. "Fans, viewers and television theory", op. cit., p. 126.
- 10 A meme is "an image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by Internet users, often with slight variations." (Online *Oxford Dictionary*, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/meme>).
- 11 Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1992, p.1.
- 12 « I hate it when people say stuff like 'Twilight's Dumb.How can You Like it'? when in reality,they like dumber stuff-Star Wars,Star Trek,Bakugan,etc. [...] theyre nerdie.i'm a die-hard twilight fan.i'm not saying that twilight's the epitome of coolness or anything.but i'm saying how can they say that twilight's stupid,when theyre in to nerdier stuff is my question. » <http://forum.twilightersanonymous.com/index.php?topic=22025.0> (last accessed Feb. 2013.)
- 13 *Fanfiction.net* has only 200,000 fanfictions for *Twilight* (600,000 for *Harry Potter*); websites officially dedicated to *Twilight* fan productions such as *Twilight Fan Center* offer hardly a few thousand productions, fanfictions and visual creations included. *Twilight* forums themselves are relatively rare and not much frequented, with only 657 members at the peak of *Twilight Lexicon's* activity, for instance (see at the bottom of the page: <http://forum.twilightlexicon.com/index.php?sid=4e0ac8e0fd1d37bede90c208a373cdb7>). Fan forums are not always maintained regularly (*Twilight Moms* and *Twilighters Anonymous* both disappeared around 2013 and 2014 and were never set up again, for instance.)
- 14 "Both Rowling and Meyer, they're speaking directly to young people... The real difference is that Jo Rowling is a terrific writer and Stephenie Meyer can't write worth a darn. She's not very good." *USA Weekend*, 6th March 2009.
- 15 See for instance <http://www.superheronation.com/2011/08/21/editing-errors-in-twilight/>. The Tumblr <http://reasoningwithvampires.tumblr.com/> is mostly dedicated to pictures

- isolating one or two sentences from the saga to make fun of their organisation, punctuation or meaning. (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 16 <http://katmusselwhite.jigsy.com/entries/rants/stephenie-meyer-syndrome> (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 17 <http://whytwilightfails.wordpress.com/2011/01/26/the-fail-is-in-the-writing/> (last accessed Feb. 2013.)
- 18 Smith, Paula, "A Trekkie's Tale" in Smith, Paula, ed., *Menagerie 2*, 1973. Extracts available at <http://www.ftlpublications.com/bwebook.pdf> (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 19 <http://theoatmeal.com/story/twilight> (last accessed Aug. 2015.)
- 20 <http://tsdvc3.proboards.com/thread/522/plot-holes> (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 21 "Edward has mind-reading powers, except they don't work on Bella. This isn't really as big a part of the story as most people think it is, and in fact we can (and will) get away without ever mentioning it again." <http://www.cracked.com/funny-36-twilight/> (last accessed Aug. 2015.)
- 22 "Is there any good reason why Edward *has* to be the one sucking out the venom from Bella in the first book? Isn't she supposed to be his cantante or whatever the shit it is? Carlisle was right there! He's used to it, he sees blood everyday and he has successfully transformed his whole family into vampires, which means he has perfect control."
<http://tsdvc3.proboards.com/index.cgi?board=twilightlit&action=display&thread=522> (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 23 "Bella and Edward being on the west coast of Brazil bothers me way more than it should. I'm in tenth grade and it took me less than thirty seconds to double check if Brazil had a west coast or not, how come SMeyer couldn't." <http://tsdvc3.proboards.com/index.cgi?board=twilightlit&action=display&thread=522> (last accessed 07/02/2013.)
- 24 See for instance the use of botanical, biological and Darwinian vocabulary in descriptions of vampire abilities. Meyer, Stephenie. *Twilight*, New York: Little, Brown & Company, 2005, p. 361.
- 25 <http://twilight-sucks.livejournal.com/1625454.html?thread=23556974> (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 26 See for instance: "[Meyer] has brought vampires into the 21st century since most others are always so effing old like set into the nineteen hundreds. I have tried after becoming addicted to Twilight but have failed to really get into any other vampires. Twilight stands alone in having pulled me in to something involving vampires."
<http://forum.twilightersanonymous.com/index.php?topic=22025.msg698661#msg698661> (last accessed Feb. 2012.)
- 27 <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=meyerpire> (last accessed Feb. 2013.)
- 28 <http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/twilight-series/answers/show/477860/what-want-twilight-haters> (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 29 "...un rapport cultivé à la culture non-cultivée" and "des oeuvres saturées de références", Le Guern Philippe, "Introduction : Il n'y a pas d'oeuvres cultes, juste le culte des oeuvres. Une approche constructiviste des cultes médiatiques" in Le Guern, Philippe, dir., *Les Cultes médiatiques*, op.cit., pp.20-21
- 30 Jenkins, Henry. "The Poachers and the Stormtroopers : Cultural Convergence in the Digital Age." in Le Guern, Philippe, ed., *Les cultes médiatiques, Culture fan et oeuvres cultes*. op. cit., p. 355.
- 31 Gilbert Anne. "Twi-hards and Twi-haters", op. cit., p. 167.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 170.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 163.
- 34 MACDONALD, Peter. *British literary culture and publishing practices, 1880-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- 35 See Jean-Charles Ambroise and Christian Le Bart for a description of the attempts by fans of the Beatles to distance themselves from supposed "fake fans" who only want to be fashionable. Ambroise, Jean-Charles and Le Bart, Christian. "Le fan-club des Beatles : une communauté imaginaire ?" in Le Guern, Phillippe, dir., *Les cultes médiatiques*, op. cit., p. 171.

- 36 "...à peu près libre de toute autorité culturelle", Le Guern, Phillipe. "En être ou pas : le fan-club de la série *Le Prisonnier*, une enquête par observation." in Le Guern, Phillipe, dir., *Les cultes médiatiques*, op. cit., p. 211.
- 37 Extract from the F.A.Q. from *Twilightsucks.com*.
<http://twilightsucks.com/2016/02/25/common-questions/> (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 38 See for instance the rules on *Twilight Sucks Live Journal* ("No one is allowed to flame the members, this includes other members. We can critique each other's opinions, but don't attack anyone personally.", <http://twilight-sucks.livejournal.com/profile>); the *Twilight Sucks* forum's rules ("If you can't stand talking to people you don't agree with, don't participate in discussions.", <http://tsdcv3.proboards.com/thread/6/forum-rules-updated-16-12>); or the F.A.Q. from the *Twilight Sucks* website ("Just because we refuse to go with the flow or to 'give in' to Twilight's 'greatness' doesn't mean (*like many of you*) we automatically loathe anyone who opposes our views. Because unlike yourselves we appreciate and admire the right to express one's opinion freely without being attacked, bashed, or scrutinized.", <http://twilightsucks.com/2016/02/25/common-questions/> (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 39 See for instance "2: *Twilight* fans almost killed some non-Fans",
<http://www.ranker.com/list/top-10-batsh-t-insane-twilight-fan-moments/mark?&var=12>
 (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 40 <http://twilightsucks.com/2016/02/25/common-questions/> (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 41 See the following parody of fan speech:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/18045071355/permalink/10150505100951356/>. The article from *The Oatmeal* features a drawing representing *Twilight* fans screaming "EDWARD U UNDERSTAND ME", "TWILIGHT 4 EVER", "EDWARD I LUV U".
<http://theoatmeal.com/story/twilight> ; one hater reports supposedly real quotes from fans: "do you WANT a cult of angry twilight lovers like myself at your doorstep at night trying to behead you???? you shouldnt voice an absurd oppinion like this on the internet."
<http://fuckyeahtwilightsucks.tumblr.com/post/137071004/100-reasons-why-twilight-sucks>
 (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 42 In an article for *The Guardian*, Ruth Jamieson comments on the "story of a film industry that met a demographic and fell equally hopelessly, head-over-heels in love. [...] It turns out that teenage girls, usually overlooked in favour of their brothers and boyfriends, are a film-maker's dream come true." <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2012/nov/16/twilight-saga-marketing-hollywood> (last accessed Sept. 2016.) Marc Stein describes a marketing machine aimed at teenage girls (Stein, Marc. *Twilight Exposed! The Inside Story of a Billion Dollar Franchise*. New York: Nook Publishing Group, 2011.) The large quantity of merchandising products and tie-in products also gives an idea of the campaign targeting female adolescents: mass-produced girls' and women's clothes, jewelry, bags, dolls were sold in shops such as Hot Topic or Target, which seek to attract female and teenage customers.
- 43 <http://tsdcv3.proboards.com/thread/5693/hi-name> (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 44 See for instance <http://tsdcv3.proboards.com/thread/5716/signs-abuse-jacob-renesmee>. The topic is in fact so likely to generate traffic on the Internet that it is also taken up on commercial websites with no link to haters such as Sugarscape or BuzzFeed.
<http://www.sugarscape.com/bookclub/a1072056/10-reasons-why-twilights-bella-swan-is-a-terrible-role-model-and-pretty-awful-person/> (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 45 <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2010/jul/12/twilight-eclipse-feminism> (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 46 Pour une analyse plus approfondie de ce point en particulier, voir Bernard, Lucie. *Les Filles qui aimaient les vampires: la construction du féminin dans Twilight de Stephenie Meyer et deux autres oeuvres de bit lit*, Brest: Université de Bretagne Occidentale, 2016.
- 47 <http://www.cracked.com/funny-36-twilight/> (last accessed Aug. 2015.)
- 48 See for instance : <http://applesparkles.wikia.com/wiki/TwiMoms> (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 49 <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Twimom>. The definition of Twi-moms given by *The Urban Dictionary* is identical to the one used by the Anti-Twilights Wikia,

mentioned in quote 42.

- 50 <http://annysbookreviews.blogspot.fr/2010/09/attentiontwilight-l-or-h.html> (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 51 <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=twitard> (last accessed Oct. 2016.)
- 52 <https://uk.movies.yahoo.com/blogs/movie-editors/crazy-things-twilight-fans-done-165846526.html> (last accessed Oct. 2016.)
- 53 <http://www.someecards.com/life/cry-for-help/16-unsettling-photos-of-fans-at-twilight-premieres/> (last accessed Oct. 2016.)
- 54 <http://allevents.in/events/slap-a-twilight-fan-day-d/130845536963434#> (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 55 <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=twilight&defid=3564479> (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 56 https://www.reddit.com/r/offmychest/comments/2u3cw2/bella_swan_you_are_a_shitty_role_model_i_wish/ (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 57 Faludi, Susan. *Backlash, The Undeclared War Against American Women*, [1991], New York, Three Rivers Press, 2006.
- 58 The *Twilight Sucks* forum has an entire thread dedicated to Jacob's potentially abusive behavior (<http://tsdcv3.proboards.com/thread/5716/signs-abuse-jacob-renesmee>). As for Edward, he is frequently accused of stalking and trying to control Bella: "Look at what all Edward did over Bella before he even shared a conversation with her! He broke into her HOUSE! He stalked her! And for a bit of a while there, she was at the top of his "to kill and eat" list." <http://tsdcv3.proboards.com/thread/5710/cullens-cover> (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 59 See Jowett, Lorna. *Sex and the Slayer. A Gender Studies Primer for the Buffy Fan*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2005.
- 60 Haters create images showing Buffy about to stake Edward and Bella, or even Bella herself. See for instance: <http://www.westword.com/arts/buffy-vs-twilight-is-there-really-a-question-of-what-will-win-5791453> (last accessed Sept. 2016.)
- 61 A 2013 online survey by Barna Group found that the *Twilight* readership was mostly young and overwhelmingly female (86 % of the readership). Available at <https://www.barna.com/research/the-books-americans-are-reading/#> (last accessed January 2017).