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English 404 - Adolescent Literature

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<center>"A Swan Dive for a Teen Girl's Self Image"</center>

A Comparative Analysis of the Female Deuteragonists of the *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* series.

Teen and young adult girls are constantly bombarded with media based ideas, images, and models about who and what they are supposed to eat, drink, think and be like. The very root concepts of who they are supposed to be and be like surround them virtually from birth. Television and magazines target them and throw pictures, models and unrealistic body images at them from every available angle. Literature plays the part of the deepest, most involved media form, and through whose depth an author has considerable time to forge their characters, weave their stories, and craft their tales. The depth of characterization and portrayal of female role models in young adult literature can have a critical effect on their social, intellectual, emotional and societal development. Although authors certainly have the freedom to write any and every character as they choose, we as literary consumers have that same freedom to choose to consume and recommend the literature that represents the positive characteristics and roles that young women should be encouraged by. The *Twilight* series of novels promote an example of primary female characters that are damaging to the self image of females in these age groups. Novels with strong female leads, such as *Harry Potter*'s Hermione Granger promote the positive self image that we should be using as role models.

In *Twilight*, we see that Meyer uses a particular literary technique when describing the main female character Bella Swan - we are given only the briefest of physical descriptions (that she is light skinned, somewhat clumsy and does not have blue eyes), and an almost entirely generic personality. By refusing to give a strong physical or emotional description, and using common specifics that could easily apply to nearly any teenage girl, "the character becomes less of a person and more of something a female reader can put on and wear." (Inman, "How Twilight Works"). In terms of straight characterization this is less important, but it becomes pertinent as look at the emotional and societal role that Bella fills, and realize that Meyer's intent is to have these malleable young women project themselves into Bella's life. What's more, Bella is not shown to have many defining character traits, and those that she does have, such as being a good student or enjoying reading are passed over by her in very brief terms, causing the reader to realize that Bella finds herself uninteresting and unimpressive. In addition, Bella even expounds that she often considers how others see her, as opposed to how she feels about herself - "Sometimes I wondered if I was seeing the same things through my eyes that the rest of the world was seeing through theirs." (Meyer, "Twilight", 11). Bella is in many ways a very typical teen - she is attempting to navigate a new social situation, dealing with the attention of boys, and trying to find out where she belongs after upheaving her life and moving. She encounters a boy, deals with her first crush, bordering on obsession, and through a series of questionable circumstances and difficulties engages in her first serious relationship. Some of these are absolutely understandable and relatable. The major failing that comes with this is that her desire to be with Edward and continue being in a relationship with him becomes her defining character trait - everything else is secondary, and when the time comes, she is willing to give up her whole

past and family just for the chance to be with Edward. The most condemning trait of Bella is that she is an incredibly static character. Bella evolves very little emotionally or societally throughout the course of the series - she gains very little maturity, wisdom, insight, or empathy, and never really grows as a person.

As a contrary, when Hermione Granger is introduced, she is explicitly portrayed with very specific defining physical and social characteristics: "a bossy sort of voice, lots of bushy brown hair, and rather large front teeth" (Rowling, Sorcerer's Stone, 105). While there is not a lot of specific detail given - for instance, we haven't been told Hermione's height, eye color, or other personality traits, Hermoine comes across as well defined and memorable. In direct contrast to Meyer's portrayal of Bella, we see a character that is her own person, not just an empty shell that's meant to be worn like a pair of pants. Although not introduced until a third of the way through the book, Hermione becomes a critical part of the primary story and grows throughout the book and series. At the beginning of the series, we are presented with an 11 year old girl who, in similar fashion to Harry is finding out a lot about the wizarding world and has to adapt to an entirely new culture. During the first part of the series, she is portrayed as bossy, frightened, and somewhat insecure about her role as an academic, as opposed to what she naively views as important traits: "Books! And cleverness! There are more important things…" (Rowling, Sorcerer's Stone, 287). Each book however, brings us new depth in the character, until in the final installment we see that Hermione plays the cool-headed pragmatist that is the primary driver of the plot and the only main character who stays true to the overarching need to triumph over evil, regardless of the cost (NOTE: FIND REFERENCE IN DEATHLY HALLOWS)

***SECTION TODO:

How do these characters stand up as positive or negative female role models for teen/YA girls?

 - Bella: discuss codependence with Edward, stalking/obsessive behavior

- Hermoine: discuss drive to succeed, willingness to give up most precious parts of her life

  (Parents & Hogwarts) to do what she thinks is right.

*** SECTION TODO:

How do Hermoine & Bella overcome a specific major issue in the series?

 - Hermoine issue: Deathly Hallows - Death eaters are killing muggles, and she Obliviates her

parents to protect them.

- Bella Issue: Going to die in childbirth, relies on Edward to "fix" things

*** SECTION TODO:

Are the secondary female characters in both series generally similar or generally different to the

primary deuteragonists?

Secondary Characters from Potter: Cho Chang - love interest, Seeker on Ravenclaw

Ginny Weasley - Gryffindor seeker, becomes defacto commander of DA

Need Twilight/Breaking Dawn references.

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