

The Twilight Saga Was Not Enough. I Need More!

Fan Fiction as a Means of Assembly



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Sara Hagar

I love Edward Cullen,

and I think it's safe to say that many women my age feel the same. The problem with this one-sided love affair extends beyond the fact that he does not feel the same way about me, but more importantly that he is a fictional character who also happens to be a vampire. Yes, very unrealistic, yet highly romantic. In this fraudulent world, where things that can never happen do happen, why do so many women find themselves drawn to these novels, envisioning themselves as the female lead that allows them to press beyond the boundaries of the ordinary?

That question answers itself; the allowance given to readers to explore a world that is obviously not real causes them to spend more time contemplating the possibilities that exist within a world so fictional. A large amount of this creativity stays in the mind as daydreams, but in recent years, there has been an explosion of a particular genre: fan fiction. People from all over the world, with varying skill levels in writing find themselves assembling their thoughts, dreams, and desires into a fictional story that expands far beyond the original work.

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Now as the old saying goes, imitation is a form of flattery. I do not believe that any writer should feel offended or concerned if their writing is turned into fan fiction, especially in the case of Stephenie Meyer, who created *Twilight* out of fan fiction she had written about a band.¹ Fan fiction not only allows for one's personal creativity to expand, but also for a community of people to be born. Smartphones and laptops become more than just ways of connecting; they can encourage new thoughts between people with shared interests and passions. With websites like Wattpad and Fandom, people from all across the globe can post their stories and anyone can read them. This paper will examine how passionate interests, gathered and shared through the creative assembly of fan fiction, can lead to community. This particular exploration through *Twilight* asks how Bella's humanity allows readers to imagine a posthuman future for themselves, with the agency of choosing and being chosen, of being loved and respected with an honor and devotion that often seems to be possible only in posthuman speculation. Further, when readers connect through the imaginative process of fan fiction, they give each other more courage to create.

Every author dreams of creating a book series that skyrockets in popularity and leads to multiple streams of income. The thing about this dream is that there is no formula to create the perfect book. Still, studying bestsellers remains a good way to gain more understanding as a writer. *Twilight* is a very interesting case because of how many other books contain a similar theme, yet pale in comparison to the popularity that Stephenie Meyer has garnered. Wang Hui employs research to discover what makes the *Twilight* series so popular. "The vampire has long been the theme of literary works since ancient Greek and Roman mythology and inspired numerous horror novels in which Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is the most famous and lasting example. Unlike the typical devil image of vampires in previous works, Edward Cullen's family is a group of vampires who have the dazzling appearance, vegetarian diet feeding only on the animal blood, and caring humanity."² There is something magical, aside from the fantastical aspects of the story, in *Twilight* and the way in which it allows for expression to be brought about amongst its readers.

It is a key theme of all successful books to have something that endears readers to want more. More books in the series, movie franchises, and more fan-centered products. Given that the main characters in the novel, aside from Bella, are supernatural creatures, what is it that the average young woman finds so endearing about the franchise? The romantic appeal that comes with both a forbidden and impossible relationship between a human and a vampire? Though readers are sure to understand that this is not practical, it is a work of fiction, which then allows for the exploration of both the unknown and the impossible. When I read *Twilight*, I became Bella Swan, and I got the experience of falling in love with a vampire without the real-life repercussions that might come along with this. Ideally, all fiction ought to elicit a similar feeling, of leaving one's own body and taking on another's. Bella is an average girl, and human at that. What separates us readers from the Cullen family and the Quileute people is that we are human and lack supernatural powers. If Meyer had made Bella a vampire from the beginning, we would see her story as unattainable, but Bella's humanity gives us access so that we can imagine ourselves in her position.

Perhaps another reason why readers find themselves so drawn to this story is because of the Cullen family's posthuman attractiveness. Edward Cullen is described as handsome, and while this visual appeal is certainly important in any relationship, Edward has more than just aesthetic beauty, he has immortality. "The vampire and werewolf in the series both have what human beings long for—immortality and youth."³ It's safe to say that many people would like to stay young forever or at least look and feel young. A vampire brings the promise of graceful aging, better than any serum at Sephora ever could. While this is not the main reason readers are attracted to Edward, it certainly plays a role in their desire for him, knowing that he holds a power that humans can only receive if he chooses to turn them. But readers desire more than eternal youth and beauty. It's more than just desire for Edward and his power exclusivity of it—we desire his exclusive affection. Being chosen, a trope in every romance, has different stakes. "Love, the eternal theme of literature, finds its grandest expression in the *Twilight* series. The love between Bella and Edward, which has stood the test of lust, separation, and death, represents the ideal state of affection people could ever expect."⁴ High stakes in a romance add drama and intrigue readers.



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The vampire-human relationship takes it even further, as Edward must fight against his desires to feed on humans; and in this abstinence, his love for Bella is shown to be strong. He breaks the trope of saving a damsel in distress or coercing her into behaviors she does not wish to partake in. A male's responsibility for his own actions is something seldom seen in literature, and this offers a breath of fresh air and allows readers to imagine a world where traditional male and female gender roles do not have to hold full precedence. As much as *Twilight* focuses on the supernatural as unattainable-turned-attainable, it urges readers to think about society and the ways it could function differently.

Perhaps the most notable difference between *Twilight* and other vampire stories is who holds the agency. Female characters are often reliant on the male character, and his actions serve as the incitement of her own. With Bella, we see a strong female lead who has the power of her life in her own hands. Barbara Creed mentions that, "the most distinctive feature of the vampire – central to all of the various sources—is that he is a consummate sexual initiator." In the traditional vampire novel, and many romantic novels overall, the male is the initiator of all things sexual. He initially chases after the girl, and so on, as the relationship progresses. In the case of Edward, he practices great restraint in resisting Bella, not only because he is a vegetarian, but because he does not want to force his lifestyle upon her. Bella is the more proactive of the two in the relationship, seeking out information about him and yearning to get to know him better. As this paper has already made clear, fiction allows people to live lives that do not reflect their own, and such is the case with female agency. The stereotype of the man chasing the woman is very prevalent in modern society, but *Twilight* allows for female experimentation, even if it is just in the imagination, of what could be done, further establishing a sense of posthuman possibility. "For Bella at least, Edward is the object rather than the agent of sexual desire. It is Bella who pursues Edward and initiates sexual contact, rather than Edward who instead operates as a barrier to consummation."³ Gender roles are switched at the extreme in this novel. This allows for female readers to follow alongside Bella, taking on a more provocative role typically assigned only to males. Regardless of whether women want to take on this role, the ability to envision oneself doing so is a form of roleplaying, something that will become more prevalent as we approach works of fan fiction and understand how readers continue to play out the fantasy accepted in the novel.

Now that we have established what sets the *Twilight* series apart from other fantasy works, we will look at assembly and examine ways it could change with a progression in technology. In Kyle Parry's "A Theory of Assembly: From Museums to Memes," he addresses what an assembly is and how assemblies are formed in modern times. "The convening of these constituents is not meant to convey a single, decided meaning, but to furnish an encounter with a space of crisscrossing media constituents capable of coproducing multiple levels of feeling, connotation, and enigma."⁶ He focuses on the idea that an assembly does not need to pick a single idea and propel just that forward, but rather, it should emphasize shared emotions within a group.

As for how these ideas are to be spread, technology is the natural course of action, though he suggests that smartphones and laptops are more than just a way of connecting; they are a way of encouraging new thoughts. "Digital devices are not just the bridges to these assemblies. They are also the engines, as the reservoir of possible constituents constantly expands, and as the distribution of the drive to assemble across people and machines becomes increasingly widespread and even seemingly immanent."⁷ The internet is an obvious means of connecting groups of people, but this connection does not have to directly correlate to consumption; it can just as easily be related to the creation of new ideas.



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As the saying goes, art inspires art, and so even with the intake of another's art, new ideas can be planted in the consumer's mind. Researching why and how people assemble leads to never-ending questions about assembly: "it calls for attention, action, and care within the shifting limits of the possible. Questions concerning how we assemble, why we assemble, with whom and for whom we assemble, and when and where we assemble are just as important as the elemental question of what we assemble."⁸ By applying Parry's thinking to the question of Twilight's appeal and inspiration for many women, we can examine when and where these assemblies are formed.

There are two main platforms where *Twilight* fan fiction is easily found, Wattpad⁹ and Fandom.¹⁰ Wattpad is available as an app and a website, giving writers the ability to upload their stories for people all around the world to read. Readers can vote on stories for competitions and there is the potential for publishers to make deals with the authors. The Wattpad Creators' Program selects certain stories to be available for purchase at a nominal fee which then allows the writers to make some money out of their passion.⁹ Fandom is a similar concept in the sense that people can post their works of fan fiction on a blog available to anyone who visits the website. Both Wattpad and Fandom allow for comments on posts and stories, and these often lead to back-and-forth communication in the community, with people recommending similar stories, or complimenting someone's way of thinking.

This is very different from what you might see if you were to open a comment section on another social media platform, where people start drama. This is why, as Parry says, the location of assemblies is just as important as what is being assembled. By using the tag Twilight Stories on Wattpad, more than one thousand stories pull up, and there are many more under different tags. Fandom hosts fan fiction, but there are many other creations posted as well. Some community members upload pictures of artwork they have created; others post fun quizzes and trivia, etc.¹⁰ These websites have taken something preexisting and offered the opportunity for its continued expansion. Fanfictions hold a lot of power that is unknown to outsiders of the culture, but there are many real-world impacts that result from this form of self-expression.

Twilight may be viewed as a silly little fantasy-romance novel for young women, but it is so much more than that. *Twilight* opens a portal to another world. Things that we know are impossible become possible, and not just for a select few. As a result of this story, countless people have found community in like-minded people and found an encouraging safe space to write their own stories without judgment. This is the power of fiction and assembly coming together; two worlds commonly set against each other, human creativity and technology now working together to create something beautiful.

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Hi! I'm Sara! I graduated from the University of Alabama in 2025 and am currently pursuing my MA in English at South Alabama. I've loved writing since I was in high school. Primarily, I write fiction (I completed the manuscript for my debut novel last fall), but I adore dabbling in nonfiction, and I often find that my more "scholarly" essays assist in my creative writing pursuits. I'm team Edward by the way :)