**http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2008/12/twilight200812**

For all Buffy’s efforts, vampires have been sinking their teeth ever deeper into Generation W’s pop culture. To a spate of hugely profitable books and HBO’s *True Blood,* add this month’s *Twilight,* a movie based on Stephenie Meyer’s blockbuster saga, which has sold millions of copies in the U.S. alone. As starlet Kristen Stewart plays the mortal innocent to Robert Pattinson’s undead rebel, the author explores the buried messages of this bloodsucking invasion.

by [James Wolcott](http://www.vanityfair.com/contributors/james-wolcott)

It’s as if Buffy the Vampire Slayer’s valiant afterschool activities went for naught. For seven seasons (1997–2003), Sarah Michelle Gellar’s girl-power prodigy “Buffy Summers” stalked and staked nearly every bulbous head with bared incisors menacing the graveyard mists and nightclub shadows of Sunnydale, a mission climaxing in the series finale with an Armageddon showdown where the outnumbered forces of light faced off against the pale legions of darkness and emerged torn and scraped, but victorious. Yet here we are, only a few years after Buffy retired her pointy stick, up to our glazed eyeballs with the children of Dracula.

Perhaps this fresh profusion of vampires is representative of a pop culture that is sucking itself dry—draining the last drops out of a pulp genre, having exhausted its creative resources—or perhaps it testifies to the procreative power of gothic sensibility to regenerate fear and eros and reclaim the night. A batch of vampire serials are running concurrently in the publishing world,

he undisputed golden calf of the vampire cotillion is Stephenie Meyer’s “The Twilight Saga,” a blockbuster bloodsucker series that has helped fill the yearning void left by the boarding up of J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter wizard shop. Commercially, “The Twilight Saga” has given book publishing a blood transfusion, with sales topping seven million copies worldwide; it’s also a global sensation, translated into 20 languages. The physical properties of the books themselves may explain their popularity. They’re thick, chunky, promising a fat read—you don’t so much curl up with them as gulp them down.

“The Twilight Saga” shivers under the cloud canopy of rainy northwest Washington State, where the gray-green light and damp haze make it hard to tell the people from the mushrooms. A teenage “adult child” of divorce, Isabella Swan—everybody calls her Bella—migrates from the glassy sprawl of Phoenix, Arizona, to move in with her father, a police chief who watches a lot of sports on TV in lieu of having a personality.

On her first day at a new high school, always an awkward initiation rite, Bella discovers an ethereal clique occupying a corner table in the cafeteria, ready for their photo shoot. “[Their] faces, so different, so similar, were all devastatingly, inhumanly beautiful. They were faces you never expected to see except perhaps on the airbrushed pages of a fashion magazine.” Perhaps the most beautiful, fashion-modelly of the lunch bunch is Edward, Bella’s future and forever vampire lover, a high-cheekboned cross between Rudolf Nureyev and Chris Isaak in their princely prime, whose irises change color according to his moody moods (“Anger flashed in his tawny eyes”). Presumably flossing after every forest kill (ecologically correct,

Meyer’s “Twilight Saga” is light on bloodsucking lore, heavy on high-school humdrum. “My fourth hour class got out late, and the lunch table I always sat at was full by the time I arrived. Mike was there, Jessica and Angela, Conner, Tyler, Eric and Lauren. Katie Marshall, the redheaded junior who lived around the corner from me, was sitting with Eric, and Austin Marks—older brother to the boy with the motorcycles—was next to her.” Glad we got those seating arrangements sorted out! Vampires aside, “The Twilight Saga” is primarily young-adult fiction for unjaded palates, another rendition of the classic courtship tale about a modest duckling (with strength of character that sets her apart from the shallow and silly) who falls under the spell of a black swan of a man and, after much sparring, melts his Rochester/Mr. Darcy reserve. Here it is not a haughty man with the secret hurt that makes him vulnerable and attainable, but a beautiful boy at the peak of his slender translucence, which gives “The Twilight Saga” a gay crossover appeal. Everything a girl could want in one dreamy envelope, Edward is the answer to a princess’s prayers—doting, fiercely protective, carrying his beloved great distances in his arms like a groom forever crossing the honeymoon threshold. In the novels it gets monotonous having Bella sigh

**It’s Edward to the rescue, and one of the unintended lessons of *Twilight* is that America has gotten so moribund that it’s the undead who come through in the clutch while the living go through their daily paces oblivious. They have more vitality and clarity than the average breather. The vampire clan in *Twilight* even has elevated taste in architecture—no gewgawed McMansion for them! *Twilight* is the *Brideshead Revisited* of the** fanged and forever young.

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