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Vampires and Werewolves: Rewriting Religious and Racial Stereotyping in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Series

GEORGINA LEDVINKA

Stephenie Meyer's Twilight series (2005–8) demonstrates a strong connection with the theology, cultural practices and history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), of which Meyer is an active member. One of the strongest ways in which this connection is demonstrated is through characterisation: specifically, by featuring vampires and werewolves as prominent supernatural characters in the text. Twilight employs vampires as a metaphor for the LDS Church. By eschewing literature's traditional association of vampires with subversive acts, especially subversive sexuality, and rewriting them as clean-cut pillars of the community, Twilight not only charts but promotes the progression of Latter-day Saints from nineteenth century social pariahs to modern day exemplars of conservative American family values. The series represents its Native American shapeshifting werewolves as an ancient group of people from LDS scriptural history called Lamanites, who were cursed by God with 'a skin of blackness' for their 'iniquity' (Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 5:21). The construction of the werewolves as impoverished and socially marginalised yet with strong family ties enables the treatment of race in Twilight to move beyond a standard white/non-white binary frame to engage at a deeper level with LDS stereotyping of Native American people.

Key words: *Twilight, Mormon, vampire, polygamy, Lamanite, Nephite*

It is no longer groundbreaking to assert that Stephenie Meyer's religious beliefs are reflected in her *Twilight* series (2005–8). Following Caitlin Flanagan's observation in 2008 that Meyer 'is a practicing Mormon is a fact every reviewer has mentioned, although none knows what to do with it, and certainly none can relate it to the novel,' numerous critics have combed through *Twilight*¹ and identified a variety of ways in which the series reflects the theology and cultural practices of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, of which Meyer is an active member (Morris).

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Critics who have undertaken this project have been mostly concerned with examining narrative elements in the series in order to establish a connection between *Twilight* and the Latter-day Saints (LDS) religion.² Thus, for example, it has been suggested that the immortal vampire marriage of the series' protagonists, Bella Swan and Edward Cullen, in *Breaking Dawn*, reflects the unique LDS doctrine of eternal marriage, according to which faithful Latter-day Saints who marry in the temple and meet other relevant requirements stay married beyond death for all eternity (Toscano 28), and that when Bella is transformed into a vampire and acquires a stunningly beautiful, virtually indestructible version of her former human body (*Breaking Dawn* 372), this reflects the LDS theology of resurrection, according to which each human being who has ever lived will be duly resurrected with spirit and body reunited in their 'perfect form' (*Book of Mormon*, Alma 11:43). Several critics have observed that *Twilight's* extended pre-marital sexual abstinence narrative accords with Latter-day Saints teachings, which prohibit all forms of extra-marital sexual activity and place sexual sins on a par with murder (Alma 39:5).

Rather than examining narrative events in *Twilight*, this paper takes a different approach by focusing on characterisation. Situating my analysis of the series in relation to the historical background of the Church and Latter-day Saints scripture, I argue that one of the strongest ways in which *Twilight* reveals its connection with the Latter-day Saints religion is by featuring vampires and werewolves as the two major types of supernatural creature in the series.

First, the *Twilight* series constructs its most prominent and privileged group of vampires, the Cullen family, as an idealised Latter-day Saints family (Schwartzman 123, Farnsworth 36). By writing the Cullens as squeaky-clean and sexually conservative, in contrast to the way that traditional vampires were written as subversive and sexually aberrant, I argue that the series confronts and rewrites historical religious prejudice against Latter-day Saints by those outside of the Church. The series cleverly promotes a clean and attractive image of Latter-day Saints by piggy-backing upon and making its own contribution to a recent literary tradition that sees vampires transformed from reviled figures of sexual transgression, death and predation into a desirable alternative lifestyle option.

Second, I argue that *Twilight's* shapeshifting werewolves engage with Latter-day Saints racial stereotyping of Native American people. Meyer's werewolves, who derive from a tribe of Native American characters in the series, represent a group of people from LDS scripture called Lamanites. According to the *Book of Mormon* (2 Nephi 5:21), the Lamanites were a wicked people who were cursed by God with 'a skin of blackness' because of their 'iniquity', and the Church teaches that modern Native Americans are descended from the Lamanites (Burnett). While on the one hand, *Twilight* constructs its underprivileged Native American werewolves as Lamanites, on the other it accords them close family bonds which are highly valued by Latter-day Saints, and thus it could be said that *Twilight* does its part to gently redress LDS stereotyping of Native American people. However, closer analysis suggests that the series adopts a deeply orthodox LDS position by perpetuating the Latter-day Saints conception of Native Americans as a racially

isolated people who warrant special consideration due to their skin colour and heredity.

VAMPIRES

In order to appreciate how Meyer uses the Cullen vampire family in *Twilight* to re-write religious prejudice against Latter-day Saints, it is necessary to understand the nature and the extent of religious intolerance and persecution to which Latter-day Saints were subjected, particularly in nineteenth century America, as this is the historical context that informs Meyer's writing.

A brief history of Latter-day Saints religious persecution

The Latter-day Saints religion was founded in 1830 in the American state of New York by a young man named Joseph Smith. Smith's scriptural account of events states that during his youth, an angel called Moroni appeared to Smith and informed him of the presence of some golden plates that were buried on a hill near the Smith family farm in New York. In his twenties, Smith dug up the golden plates and found they were inscribed in a foreign language. Using some seer stones that he discovered with them, Smith translated the plates and his transcription became the *Book of Mormon*, which was published in 1830. While some critics have suggested that the *Book of Mormon* is a work of invention, others argue that such a complex theological work would have been beyond the scope of a simple farm boy such as Smith (Ostling 27).

Within a couple of years, Smith's new religion had attracted thousands of intensely loyal followers but local populations in the eastern states of America felt threatened by the rapidly expanding community of Latter-day Saints. Religious persecution forced the Latter-day Saints to flee from New York State to Ohio, from Ohio to Missouri, and from Missouri to Illinois, where anti-LDS violence culminated in the murder of Smith by a mob in 1844. Shortly afterwards, the new president of the Church, Brigham Young, determined that the Latter-day Saints would leave the eastern states altogether and establish their own religious community in the west. In 1846 the exodus began. Over the next decade, tens of thousands of Latter-day Saints made the thousand-mile journey from Nauvoo, Illinois to the Salt Lake Basin in the territory of Utah, many of them travelling by foot and dragging their belongings by hand the entire way. In Utah, the Latter-day Saints established themselves as a theocratic community, which became known as Salt Lake City. For decades the Latter-day Saints lived in Utah in self-imposed isolation from the outside world, and during this period polygamy became an established practice within the community.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Utah wished to be recognised as a social and political power and to take its place as one of the states of America. However, there was strong resistance to Utah joining the Union. One major sticking point was Latter-day Saints' practice of polygamy, which was regarded

by mainstream Americans as one of the 'twin relics of barbarism' alongside slavery (Gordon 55). Outside of Utah, polygamy characterised Latter-day Saints as sexual deviants, marking them as practitioners of a transgressive, excessive sexuality.

In 1890, in an effort to smooth Utah's entry to the Union, the LDS Church issued a manifesto outlawing polygamy, although some members continued to practise it secretly into the twentieth century (Ruthven 10). The manifesto caused a major schism in the Church. Numerous members, who considered that the Church had wrongly abandoned one of its central tenets, left and set up an assortment of alternative religious groups that sanctioned the practice of polygamy. Often collectively referred to as 'Mormon fundamentalists,' these religious groups continue to exist today and it is estimated that tens of thousands of people still practice polygamy in America, especially in and around Utah (Ostling 56).

Nowadays the LDS Church, which has over fourteen million members and has been described as one of the world's fastest-growing religions, is at pains to distance itself from polygamy, which still causes large numbers of Americans to hold an unfavourable view of the religion (Coffman). The Church repeatedly states that 'Mormon fundamentalists' are not Latter-day Saints and that members of the Church have not practised polygamy for over a century. Religious writer and LDS convert, Jana Reiss (9), notes that in the last decade the LDS Church has engaged in 'an extensive and expensive PR effort' to try to align itself with mainstream American family values. In October 2011, the Church launched a large-scale American television, bus and billboard advertising campaign, titled 'I'm a Mormon,' which seeks to convince the nation that Latter-day Saints are mainstream Americans who hold strong family values. While this latest advertising campaign coincides neatly with the 2012 American presidential election bids of two Republican Latter-day Saints candidates, Mitt Romney and Jon Huntsman, a Church spokesperson has stated that the timing is purely coincidental (Coffman). However, it follows a June 2011 Gallup poll which found that 22 per cent of Americans would not vote for 'a Mormon for President' (Saad).

Sexual deviancy, death and predation

There are surprising similarities between the public image of Latter-day Saints in the late nineteenth century and the image of vampires, as typified by Bram Stoker's renowned novel, *Dracula* (1897). Similarities arise because both late nineteenth century Latter-day Saints and vampires were associated with notions of sexual deviancy, death and predation.

Vampires were represented as predatory, horrifying creatures in print media and in early film (see Figure 1). Literally the walking undead, these traditional vampires were said to have hunted human prey at night to satisfy their



Nosferatu (1922)



Dracula (1931)

Fig. 1. Traditional vampires: *Nosferatu*, film, directed by F. W. Murnau. Germany: Films Arts Guild, 1922, and *Dracula*, film, directed by Tod Browning. USA: Universal Pictures, 1931.

bloodlust. As such, traditional vampires are often read as signifying transgressive sexual practices that could not be discussed openly in society at the time of their creation. *Dracula*, for example, had three wives (Stoker 37), and the vampire's use of its teeth to penetrate and exchange bodily fluids with victims, both male and female, has led to the attribution to the vampire of all manner of complex sexual significances (see, for example, Gelder 65–79).

Late nineteenth century Latter-day Saints were associated with sexual deviancy as a result of their practice of polygamy, a notion that was shocking to many contemporary Americans. Perhaps unexpectedly, Latter-day Saints were also publically associated with notions of death and predation. The following selection of satirical cartoons from the end of the nineteenth century makes this association clear, and underlines the ubiquity of religious prejudice against Latter-day Saints at the time.

In 1882, *Puck* magazine published a cartoon titled 'The Carrion Crow in the Eagle's Nest' (see Figure 2). The image depicts a nest of pale-coloured baby eagles representing the United States of America. Each baby eagle has the name of one of the states on its side. However, the nest has been invaded by a black crow, which has the name 'Utah' written on its side and holds in its mouth a bone inscribed with the word 'Mormonism.' The image implies that the territory of Utah does not belong among the states. Further, by representing Utah and the LDS Church as a 'carrion crow' with a bone in its mouth the cartoon makes an overt link between the Latter-day Saints religion and death.



Fig. 2. 'The Carrion Crow in the Eagle's Nest'. *Puck* 25 January 1882. 15 May 2011.
 < <http://www.fightingreligiousintolerance.org/coppermine/displayimage.php?album=3&pos=4>>

In 1884, *Puck* published a multi-faceted cartoon titled 'A Desperate Attempt to Solve the Mormon Question,' of which Frederick Opper's contribution, 'How Long Will this Destructive Monster be Allowed to Live?', forms the upper right quadrant (see Figure 3). Opper's image depicts a large octopus that has many more than eight tentacles. The monster bears the face of the LDS Church president at the time, Brigham Young, and his tentacles are wrapped around thirteen American institutions or groups including Uncle Sam, the US Capitol, Lady Justice and the Young Men's Christian Association. The image suggests that through their predatory behaviour, Latter-day Saints have managed to infiltrate all aspects of American society and that they pose a serious threat to the nation. The image provokes fear and invites the audience to perceive that the predatory LDS monster has to be stopped.

The late nineteenth-century cartoon at Figure 4 (title and artist unknown) depicts a horrifying, almost *Nosferatu*-like figure with round, fixated eyes and long fingers. The word 'Mormonism' on a building directly below the figure indicates that it represents the LDS Church. The long, pointed fingers on each of the creature's four hands grasp at women who are trying to escape its clutches. The image evokes fear of predatory behaviour by Latter-day Saints, and by



Fig. 3. Opper, Frederick, 'How Long Will this Destructive Monster be Allowed to Live?'. *Puck* 13 February 1884. 16 May 2011. < <http://www.fightingreligiousintolerance.org/coppermine/displayimage.php?album=3&pos=16>>

depicting the long fingers of the monster grasping at women there is a specific reference to polygamy.

The image at Figure 5 appeared in an 1884 book by William Jarman, 'ex-Mormon priest, from Salt Lake City, Utah' titled *Startling Revelations, For Saints and Sinners: Hell Upon Earth!* The image, which is captioned 'How women and girls are ensnared,' shows a line of women and girls disappearing into the cavernous mouth of a skull on which the word 'Utah' is emblazoned across the forehead. In the background, on the right of the image, are the words 'Salt Lake' so that readers cannot fail to associate the image with Latter-day Saints. By featuring women and girls disappearing into the mouth of a death skull, thereby evoking fears about humankind's relationship with evil, the image explicitly communicates an association between the LDS religion and death, predation and polygamy.

The popular identification of traditional vampires with predatory, sadistic, sexually transgressive beings constitutes sexual violence as a site upon which gender and cultural otherness are negotiated. The association of Latter-day Saints with such vampiric representation produces a context for the construction of the Cullen vampire family in the *Twilight* series. While it has been noted that the Cullens represent an idealised Latter-day Saints family (Schwartzman 123, Farnsworth 36), very few if any commentators have considered what use the series makes of the Latter-day Saints connection with vampirism. I argue that the connection is used in order to confront and rewrite historical prejudices against Latter-day Saints.

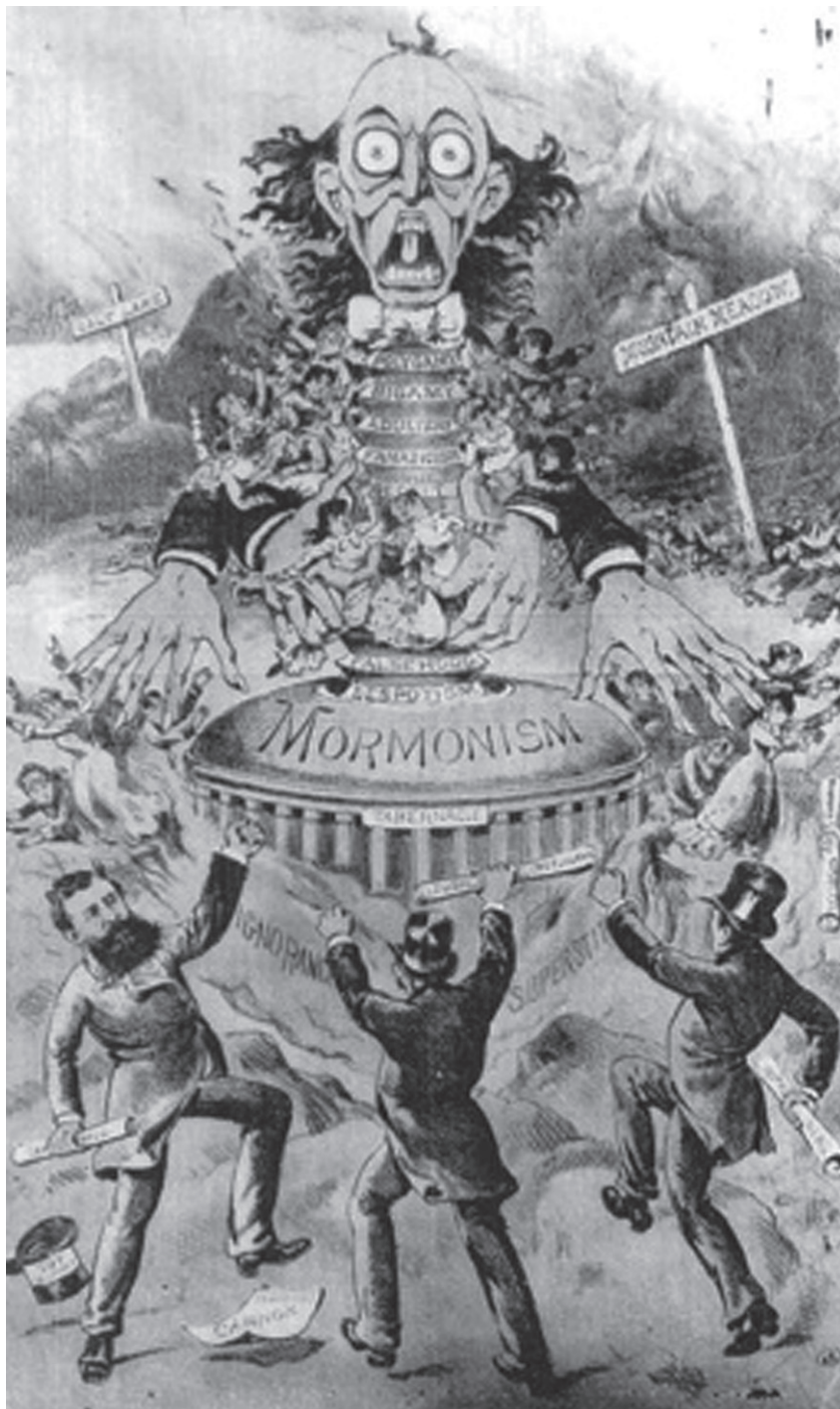


Fig. 4. Untitled image. From Charles W. Carter Collection, undated. *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. Ed. Daniel H. Ludlow. 4 vols, New York: Macmillan, 1992. i. 50.

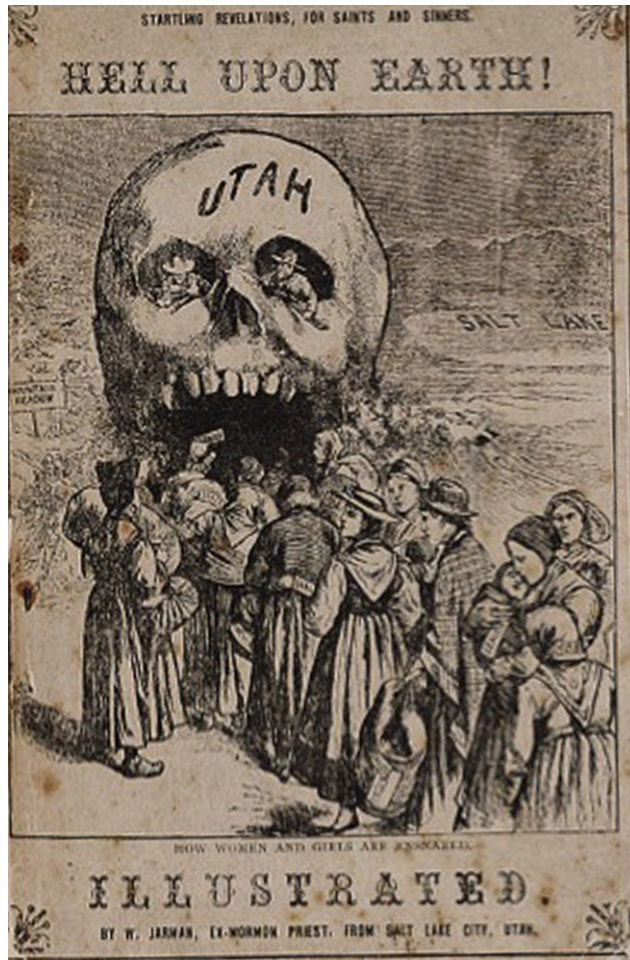


Fig. 5. Jarman, William. *Startling Revelations for Saints and Sinners: Hell Upon Earth!* Exeter: H. Leducs Steam Printing Works, 1884. 15 May 2011. < http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Startling_Revelations_for_Saints_and_Sinners_Hell_Upon_Earth_by_W_Jarman_Ex-Mormon_Priest.jpg >

The Cullen family consists of two ‘parent’ figures, Carlisle and Esme, who were both transformed into vampires in their mid-20s and stay frozen at that age forever. Carlisle and Esme perform traditional gender roles – while he goes out to work, Esme is a stay-at-home mother who is entirely occupied by family concerns – and the children attend the local high school. There are five ‘children’ in the family, who were all transformed into vampires while they were teenagers. They include the male protagonist, Edward Cullen, and two other couples. Although these couples are married, they represent themselves to the outside world as brothers and sisters, enabling the Cullen family to blend in with the human community in which they live. The Cullens are a clean-living,

devoted and obedient family, and they all demonstrate unswerving loyalty to the patriarch, Carlisle.

Most of these features contribute to the construction of the Cullen family as an idealised Latter-day Saints family. The LDS Church places extreme importance on family devotion and its members are required to perform traditional gender roles. The Church teaches that by God's 'divine design' LDS fathers are to be breadwinners and patriarchs, while mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children (*The Family: A Proclamation to the World*). Latter-day Saints are taught they have a spiritual obligation to marry and procreate, and they are encouraged to marry young and to have large families. The Cullens not only reflect these LDS requirements but many more as well. For example, as required by the Church, they live a clean lifestyle involving no alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, and their recreation time is focused around wholesome activities, such as the family baseball game in the first *Twilight* book (320).

The Cullens also exemplify the Latter-day Saints doctrine of agency, or free will, which requires members to consistently deny the baser aspects of their nature and make correct moral decisions in life. All of the Cullens resist the urge to kill people and drink human blood; they make do with animal blood instead although it is said to be far less appealing. As Edward says, 'we call ourselves vegetarians, our little inside joke' (*Twilight* 164). Carlisle, the head of the family, is so able to overcome his natural instinct for human blood that he works as a doctor in the local hospital.

On the surface, Meyer's rewriting of vampires as attractive and desirable creatures is unremarkable: late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century literature and film abound with examples of sympathetically portrayed vampires, which tend to depict the undead state of the vampire as an attractive parallel lifestyle (Klaus and Kruger). What is remarkable, however, is the sophisticated way in which the series harnesses this rehabilitation of vampires and uses it in order to confront and rewrite historical prejudice against Latter-day Saints.

By writing the Cullen vampires as an idealised LDS family, Meyer addresses all three of the notions of predation, death and sexual deviancy that pertain to traditional vampires and late nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints. Meyer even puts these words into the mouth of *Twilight* character Jacob Black, who worries that if Bella becomes a vampire, he will no longer know her because she will let 'her mind twist into some crystallized predator's head. A monster. A Stranger' (*Eclipse* 554). But as readers learn from the books, the Cullen family are not predators: they do not hunt humans for blood, and rather than preying on women and girls, the narrative firmly establishes that it is Bella who wants to become one of them. The association with death is also banished in favour of eternal life, because the Cullen family is loving, beautiful and immortal – they offer a kind of eternal existence that is very much in keeping with Latter-day Saints theology. Finally, *Twilight* takes to task – on two levels – the notion that vampires and Latter-day Saints are practitioners of sexual deviancy: in a literal

sense, whereas Dracula was a polygamous character who had three vampire wives, the Cullen family consists of four devoted, monogamous couples; and, at a metaphorical level, whereas traditional vampires practised transgressive sexuality by multiply penetrating both male and female victims, these connotations of perversion do not apply to the Cullens because they have altogether rejected the penetration of human victims; they consume only animal blood.

By her *Twilight* series, Meyer very clearly achieves a rehabilitation of the public image of Latter-day Saints by piggy-backing upon, and making her own contribution to, a recent literary tradition that sees vampires transformed from reviled figures of sexual transgression, death and predation into a desirable alternative lifestyle option. She creates for the worldwide reading public an image of vampires and Latter-day Saints that is clean-cut, wholesome and attractive.

WEREWOLVES

While the figure of the vampire is used in *Twilight* to rehabilitate the image of Latter-day Saints as viewed by the outside world, the figure of the werewolf is used to engage with racial stereotypes that exist within the Latter-day Saints Church with respect to Native American people.

The LDS Church has articulated its position on race in relation to two prominent American racial minority groups, African Americans and Native Americans, in such a way that it has been accused of having ‘an ugly history of racial discrimination’ (*Seduced by Twilight* 149). Although the Church has now largely repaired its position in relation to Americans of African descent, its controversial teachings regarding Native Americans are still in place, and it is these teachings that Meyer addresses through the werewolves in the *Twilight* series.

Unlike traditional Christianity, the LDS Church has no professional clergy. Instead, every male member of the Church—virtually without exception—is ordained as a priest. Boys born into the religion are usually ordained as priests at the age of twelve. Having the priesthood is a matter of great significance in the highly gendered Latter-day Saints religion, as without it men are precluded from many routine forms of Church participation (Ostling 95). However, for many years the Church’s rules regarding participation in the priesthood included racial segregation: for well over a century the Church taught that God did not allow a person with ‘any black African blood’ (95) to be admitted to the priesthood. This ban was overturned in 1978, when the Church announced that its president had received a revelation directly from God that ‘all worthy male members of the Church may be ordained to the priesthood without regard for race or color’ (*Official Declaration - 2*).

While the revelation on priesthood instantly improved the situation of African Americans in the LDS religion, Native Americans still occupy what can be regarded as a racially isolated position in LDS theology. Brigham Young

University professor emeritus, M. Dallas Burnett, states that,

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is unique in its theological and philosophical understanding of the peoples in the Americas known as Indians [...] These people are a remnant of the House of Jacob and descendants of Lehi, an Israelite who left Jerusalem and came to the Americas around 600BC.

According to the *Book of Mormon*, the prophet Lehi had one righteous son, Nephi, whose descendants are called Nephites; and another son, Laman, who was wicked and rebellious, and his descendants are called Lamanites. The *Book of Mormon* tells the story of centuries of war that took place between the Nephites and the Lamanites.

The *Book of Mormon* ascribes very specific racial stereotypes to the Nephites and the Lamanites. Whereas Nephites are described as ‘white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome’ (2 Nephi 5:21), Lamanites are described as ‘dark, and loathsome, [...] a filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations’ (1 Nephi 12:23). The *Book of Mormon* says that God cursed the Lamanites and ‘cause[d] a skin of blackness to come upon them’ because of their ‘iniquity’ and because they had hardened their hearts against him (2 Nephi 5:21). However, it offers hope to Lamanites that if they shall accept God, ‘their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a white and delightsome people’ (2 Nephi 30:6). Although in 1981, following the 1978 revelation on priesthood, the Church revised the wording of 2 Nephi 30:6 by replacing the word ‘white’ with ‘pure’, nonetheless it appears that the *Book of Mormon* associates righteousness with white skin colour and wickedness with dark skin colour.

Because the LDS Church teaches that modern Native Americans are descended from the Lamanites, and has used the terms ‘Lamanite,’ ‘Indian’ and ‘Native American’ interchangeably, this can be regarded as a problematic aspect of Latter-day Saints theology because all of the negative racial stereotypes in the *Book of Mormon* regarding Lamanites are implicitly associated with modern Native Americans.

The Church has run numerous programmes for Native Americans that are intended to help remove their ‘scales of darkness’. For example, between 1947 and 1996 the Church ran an ‘Indian Student Placement Program’ under which young Native Americans (at their parents’ request) were placed with white Latter-day Saints families to attend school. In a 1960 Church report, it was stated that Native American children in the programme ‘are often lighter than their brothers and sisters in the hogans on the reservation’ and that ‘now they are becoming white and delightsome, as they were promised’ (Kimball 923). The Church still cleaves to its position that Native Americans are descended from Lamanites, notwithstanding the publication in 2002 and 2004 of work by Latter-day Saints scholars showing that there is no genetic evidence to support these claims. Indeed, the Church reacted by instituting disciplinary proceedings against both scholars, and one of them has been excommunicated (Vance 127).

Turning to *Twilight*, it is no great stretch to interpret the Cullen vampire family as Nephites and the Native American werewolves as Lamanites (*Seduced by Twilight* 149, Granger 173). The Cullens are ‘white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome’ as the *Book of Mormon* says (2 Nephi 5:21). They are described in the series as ‘chalky pale’ (*Twilight* 16), an ‘asset to the community’ (31) and ‘well behaved and polite’ (31). With their high levels of education, their appreciation of art and taste for classical music, the Cullens are constructed as representing the highest degree of civilisation.

The dark-skinned, impoverished werewolves in *Twilight* represent Lamanites, not only because they are Native Americans; there are narrative events in the series that parallel LDS scriptural history as well. For example, the *Book of Mormon* tells that the Nephites and Lamanites were constantly at war, except for a period of several centuries in which they managed to resolve their differences and live together in peace and prosperity (4 Nephi 15–17). This scriptural episode is paralleled in *Eclipse* when the Cullen vampires/Nephites and the Native American werewolves/Lamanites are required to resolve their differences in order to defeat a common enemy. Further, the name of the most prominent Native American werewolf character in the series, Jacob Black, semiotically implies that Jacob and his tribe are Lamanites. As noted above, the Lamanites are said to be ‘a remnant of the House of Jacob’ and the surname Black provides a literal reference to the Lamanites’ ‘skin of blackness’ (2 Nephi 5:21).

The deployment of attributes associated with Nephites and Lamanites in the *Book of Mormon* enables Meyer to construct a hierarchy of privilege between different groups of characters in *Twilight*. While critics generally interpret the series as representing race in accordance with dominant Western binary perceptions that privilege white over non-white (Weaver, Jensen 101, *Civilized Vampires* 55), knowledge of Latter-day Saints theology reveals that the hierarchy of privilege in *Twilight* is in fact more complex. This is because *Twilight* features a third social group alongside its Cullen/Nephites and werewolves/Lamanites, namely the Swan family who represent ‘gentiles’ (a LDS word for people who are outside the Latter-day Saints religion), and because the series accords a highly valued form of privilege to its werewolves/Lamanites that unexpectedly serves to align them with the Cullen/Nephites.

At first glance it appears that in all respects the Cullen vampires are at the top of the privilege hierarchy in *Twilight*, the gentile Swans are in the middle and the werewolves are at the bottom. In terms of housing, the enormous Cullen residence, situated in the countryside outside of town, is a haven of understated taste and luxury, with a grand piano and decorated in layers of pale shades (*Twilight* 281); the Swan family home is described in modest terms as a ‘small, two-bedroom house’ (*Twilight* 7) but it is certainly middle-class; by contrast, Jacob and his father live on the reservation in a little wooden house that resembles a ‘tiny barn’ (*New Moon* 115), with its poky front room and dull red paint. In terms of employment and social standing, Carlisle Cullen is a highly skilled doctor whose family occupies the highest possible social position in the community;

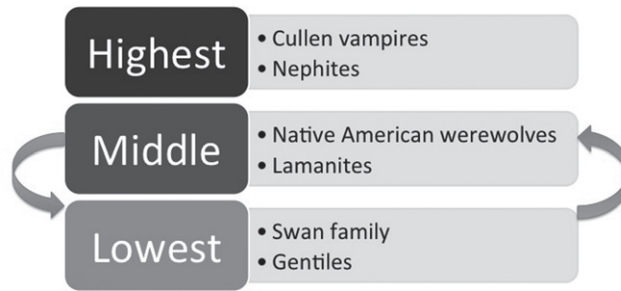


Fig. 6. *Twilight* privilege hierarchy.

Charlie and Bella Swan occupy a solid middle position reflecting Charlie's role as the local chief of police; and, again, in contrast, Billy Black is impoverished, confined to a wheelchair and apparently unemployed, and apart from interacting with the Swan family, Billy and Jacob appear to confine all their social activities to the reservation.

However, Meyer gives readers a strong hint that she proposes to upset this perceived hierarchy, and that the series will in fact privilege the werewolves over the gentile Swan family (see Figure 6). The clue comes in *Breaking Dawn* (218–219) when Carlisle Cullen, the doctor, confesses to Jacob Black that he took some of Jacob's blood and ran tests on it. Carlisle tells Jacob that while human beings have twenty-three pairs of chromosomes, vampires have twenty-five pairs, and werewolves twenty-four pairs. By giving werewolves one more pair of chromosomes than humans (but still fewer than the vampires), readers are given a hint of the more significant way in which *Twilight* privileges the werewolves/Lamanites over the gentile/Swans.

By according the Native American werewolves in *Twilight* strong family bonds, Meyer gives them something that Latter-day Saints regard as a considerable privilege. For Latter-day Saints, who have no professional clergy and for whom the family is the basic building block of society, strong family ties are of utmost importance. Not only does the LDS Church teach that men and women are obliged to marry and raise families in homes run according to traditional gender roles and presided over by a male who is father, priest and patriarch (*The Family: A Proclamation to the World*), members are instructed to set aside one evening per week for 'family home evening,' which is specified as 'a time for families to study the gospel together and to do other activities that strengthen the family spiritually, create family memories, and increase unity and love' (*Family Home Evening*). For Latter-day Saints, families are at the heart of the system (Ostling 160).

When the family is used as a frame through which to analyse *Twilight*, it becomes apparent that the Cullens are blessed with exceptionally strong family bonds. They are all loyal and obedient to the family patriarch, Carlisle, who is their moral compass. Charlie Swan observes that the Cullens 'stick together the way a family should' (*Twilight* 31) and Bella makes clear on several occasions in

the series that her quest to secure Edward as a husband is as much about joining the Cullen family, her 'future family' (*Eclipse* 77), as it is about marrying him.

The family bonds of Bella's gentile family are very weak by comparison, and Latter-day Saints would regard her family situation as very unfortunate indeed. Instead of the Latter-day Saints family model of numerous children raised within a cohesive, loving home, Bella is an only child, her parents divorced when she was a baby and she was shuttled back and forth between them in school holidays as a child. From an LDS perspective, Bella is the product of a small, dysfunctional, broken home, and it speaks volumes about the importance *Twilight* places on strong family bonds that Bella so insistently wishes to join the large, strongly bonded Cullen family.

In contrast to Bella's gentile family, the Native American werewolves are blessed with family bonds that are very strong, and this is how Meyer upsets the surface privilege hierarchy in *Twilight*. Readers have knowledge of two main Native American families in the series: the Black family and the Clearwaters. Although both of these families are small and incomplete, at least the cause is not divorce. Readers are told that Billy Black's wife died in a car accident, and although two adult daughters have moved away for marriage and education, the bond between Billy and Jacob Black, who is still at home, is deep and strong. Sue Clearwater loses her husband to a heart attack in *New Moon* but she retains close bonds with her two children. Thus *Twilight* carefully constructs its Native American families, which are otherwise impoverished and on the social fringe, with the significant good fortune of having strong family ties, something that Latter-day Saints regard as a central blessing of their religion.

Through these contrasting representations of family, it is possible to read *Twilight* as suggesting that it is better to be impoverished and socially shunned as the Native American characters are (and as many Latter-day Saints were in the early days of the Church) and yet enjoy close family bonds, than to be middle class but with a broken (gentile) family. On a deep reading, *Twilight* subtly privileges its werewolves/Lamanites over the gentile/Swans, and it also suggests that regardless of economic and social differences, in their close family bonds the werewolves/Lamanites have one very important thing in common with the Cullens/Nephites.

Because *Twilight* bestows privilege upon its Native American characters by according them strong family bonds, it may be tempting to suggest that Meyer's series makes its own contribution towards removing the 'scales of darkness' from the Lamanites, and that accordingly Meyer gently addresses years of racial stereotyping of Native Americans from within the Latter-day Saints Church. However, closer analysis indicates that in fact the *Twilight* series adopts a deeply orthodox Latter-day Saints position: by conceiving of Native Americans as a racially isolated group of people due to their skin colour and heredity, and then according them special privileges, Meyer merely perpetuates racial prejudices towards Native American people by Latter-day Saints.

Regardless of how one interprets *Twilight's* treatment of its Native American characters, it can be seen that Meyer uses characterisation in the series to engage

with deep issues of religious and racial prejudice in connection with the LDS Church. By associating Latter-day Saints with attractive, clean-cut, twenty-first century vampires, the series complements recent attempts by the Church to align itself with mainstream American family values and rewrites historical prejudices against Latter-day Saints. By constructing the series' werewolves as characters from LDS scriptural history, Meyer engages with racial stereotyping of Native Americans by Latter-day Saints. Accordingly, by its characterisation, as well as narrative elements in the story, the *Twilight* series demonstrates a deeply embedded connection with the Latter-day Saints religious beliefs of its author.

NOTES

1. Except where indicated otherwise, a reference in this paper to *Twilight* includes the entire series (2005–8).
2. Because, historically, the term 'Mormon' has pejorative overtones, this paper uses the terminology 'Latter-day Saints' or 'LDS' to refer to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its members.

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