

Jane Austen, with a Twist

Twilight

By Stephenie Meyer.
Little, Brown, and Company, 2005.
498 pages. Hardcover. \$17.99

Reviewed by Shirley and Wallis Kinney.

Pride and Prejudice, with its wonderful romance, witty dialogue, and captivating plot line, enjoys enormous popularity after almost two hundred years. Its “boy meets girl, girl dislikes boy, they eventually fall in love” story is repeated in numerous books and movies. In 2005, a novel was published that follows the *Pride and Prejudice* plot closely but gives quite a different twist to the romantic tension.

Twilight, by Stephenie Meyer, is the story of Bella Swan, a 17-year-old girl who moves to Forks, Washington to live with her father after her mother remarries. On her first day of school, Bella meets Edward Cullen, a wonderfully handsome boy who is her science lab partner. The romance between them sweeps both Bella and the reader off of their feet. However, it differs from a normal teenage romance because Edward is a vampire. On the surface, the novel seems to have nothing to do with Jane Austen; however, when one looks carefully, many similarities emerge.

Stephenie Meyer, an avowed admirer of Jane Austen, bases *Twilight* on events and characters in *Pride and Prejudice*. The second novel in the series, *New Moon*, was inspired by *Romeo and Juliet*. Unless you are a Bronte fan, don't read the third book, *Eclipse*, because it was inspired by *Wuthering Heights*. The *Twilight* series is now a best-selling sensation, and the first movie adaptation was a box-office hit last year.

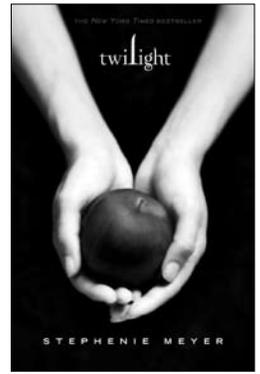
Shirley Kinney is a senior at North Hills Prep in Irving, Texas. Wallis Kinney is a freshman at The Taft School in Watertown, Connecticut. Both are life members of the Jane Austen Society of North America and devoted Stephenie Meyer fans.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, the first time Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet meet, Mr. Darcy is rude and unforgivable. Elizabeth walks away with slightly hurt feelings but is able to laugh it off with her friend Charlotte Lucas. Bella Swan, *Twilight's* female protagonist, is a bit more fragile emotionally, and when Edward is rude (and slightly scary) at their first meeting, a hurt Bella walks away with no one to console her. What she doesn't realize—and here you must suspend your disbelief and get into the spirit of the novel—is that Edward is rude because of his strong attraction to her; specifically, he wants desperately to drink her blood. He comes from a family of self-proclaimed “vegetarian” vampires. If he were to drink human blood, not only would he feel a huge amount of guilt, but he would also endanger his family.

In addition to similar events in *P&P* and *Twilight*, many of *Twilight's* characters resemble those in *Pride and Prejudice*. Whereas the Bennets are minor gentry, Bella Swan and her father are middle class. While finding a husband isn't on Bella's mind, finding enough money for college is. The Swan family and the Bennet family both struggle with the need for money. Bella's mother, like Mrs. Bennet, is slightly neurotic and childish. And neither Elizabeth's nor Bella's parents are in love with each other anymore. While Elizabeth is very close to her father and finds comfort in him, Bella has never had the experience of living with her dad. Their relationship deepens as the story unfolds.

At Bella's new high school, the boys find her irresistible. Elizabeth Bennet and her sister Jane have always been talked of as the prettiest girls in their small town. Mr. Darcy, to the dismay of Miss Bingley, even notices Elizabeth's “fine eyes.” The male protagonists in both novels, Edward and Mr. Darcy, are exceptionally rich, handsome, and intelligent, but also unattainable. They each have a close female acquaintance who is rude to the novel's heroine and

wishes to win the hero for herself. Edward, like Mr. Darcy, has family expectations placed upon him regarding marriage. Edward's sisters are consumed with fashion, as Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley are preoccupied with rank and money. The evil Mr. Wickham character does not play a large role in *Twilight* but is important in the third book in the series.



One of the strongest similarities between Edward and Mr. Darcy is that they are both drawn to the heroine even though they know they shouldn't be. Mr. Darcy should not be attracted to Elizabeth because she is not (in his initial view) his equal in social standing. Edward should not be drawn to Bella because his family plans for him to marry a woman “created” for him—not to mention the impropriety of his desire to drink Bella's blood. One reason for the heroes' attraction to the heroines is that Bella and Elizabeth are much smarter than the other girls around them. (This is obvious because Bella reads Jane Austen!) Edward and Mr. Darcy become trapped by an unwished-for attraction. They both make attempts to forget the heroine, but they are, of course, drawn back.

The main themes of both novels deal with men and women finding each other, finding themselves, and overcoming the problems imposed on them by their families and society. Despite multiple obstacles, including a fanged version of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, the couples eventually prevail. Although *Pride and Prejudice* does not contain evil vampires or rapid chase scenes, and *Twilight* does not contain assembly balls or scandalous elopements, the similarities make *Twilight* a fun read for anyone who loves Jane Austen.