

Episode 2.19 – All That Glitters is Probably a Vampire with Kali and Maija

Angourie (host)

Before we begin, we would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation as the traditional custodians of the land on which this work was developed and is presented. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

[theme music]

Angourie (host)

Hello, everyone, and welcome back to The Community Library: a podcast, book club and discussion space. I'm your host, Angourie Rice.

Kali (guest)

I'm Kali Shanthi.

Maija (guest)

And I'm Maija O'Keeffe.

[theme music]

Angourie

This week, we are bringing a very, extra special bonus episode to you, and we are talking about ... drumroll please ...

Kali

[drum roll sound effect]

Angourie

[drum roll sound effect] *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer!

Kali

Whoop whoop!

Angourie

Yay!

Kali

[DJ sound horn effect]

Angourie

First of all, I want to address why we're making a *Twilight* episode. *Midnight Sun* is coming out, and it just reminded me of the *Twilight* series, and we kind of all had this resurgence – it's like our twelve-year-old selves just like – just like crawled out of the rubble and said: "Hello, I'm here, and I am in love with *Twilight* and you must re-read me."

Kali

That's kind of what a pandemic does to one.

Maija

Hundred percent.

Kali

It makes you revisit your past!

Angourie

I thought, to begin this episode, we should all go around and talk about our *Twilight* journey. We – we've all taken different paths to get to this point. Um, I think, Maija, we should start with you, cos in my mind you are, like, one of the OG *Twilight* stans that I know.

Maija

Wow, thank you. I mean, like, it's a little bit embarrassing, but yes, I love *Twilight*. So, I really liked it when I was a kid, like, maybe I, like, read the first one when I was about eight, and then I watched all of the movies in cinema. Um, I had a shirt that said "I Love Edward", and another one that said "I Love Jacob", and then I had another one that said "I Love Vampires", and another one that said "I Love Werewolves." Um, and then I became a teenager, and I started, like, reading feminist theory, and then I really hated *Twilight*. And now I'm an adult, and I can see its flaws, but I also have, you know, tender, nostalgic feelings towards it.

Kali

Fair enough.

Angourie

That's fair. That's totally fair. You reread the first book in preparation for this episode, right?

Maija

Oh, I reread all of them!

Angourie

[laughs] Overprepared! Okay, awesome.

Kali

She doesn't need an excuse to reread *Twilight*!

Maija

Yeah!

Angourie

Kali, what is your *Twilight* journey?

Kali

Well, I remember – I have, like, a distinct memory of reading the first *Twilight* when I was in grade 4. Like, in our first exam period we could take a book to read, like, after we were finished with our exam. And I remember being, like, "I'm gonna read *Twilight* cos everyone's talking about this

book.” And, like, my ten-year-old self was like, “Wow, this is trash.” But I kept with it, I kept reading. I don’t think I finished the whole series. I watched the first movie in cinema, I must have, but then I forgot – like, I fell off, and watched *Breaking Dawn, part 1* and *part 2* in cinema because I was obsessed with, like, people, like, getting pregnant and having babies, and getting married! Like, that’s –

Angourie

[laughing] What?

Kali

That’s what I wanted to see! Context: the three of us had a Netflix party where we watched the first two *Twilight* movies, and when I was watching that movie again, it was like these blocked out memories from my childhood were just coming back, and I was like, oh my god, I forgot about how influenced I was by this movie as a child! But, yeah, that’s my *Twilight* journey. Not as intense as Maija’s, but it was present in my upbringing nonetheless.

Angourie

I remember growing up, I had a friend who was obsessed with *Twilight*. Because I was so in love with *Harry Potter* at that time, I was not a *Twilight* stan, I never read the books. The first time I tried to read the books was when I was ten, and I was living in Germany, and there was a very small library at my school, and they had an even smaller English section. And one of the books that was in English at my school library was *Twilight*. So I picked it up, cos I was like, “Great, this is in English.” And I read the first chapter, and me as a ten-year-old, I was like, “No, I can’t do this, I don’t like this at all.” Then, my next encounter with the *Twilight* series happened much later, six years later, when year 11 exams rolled around, and I was procrastinating for my exams, and all of the *Twilight* movies were on Netflix, and I binged all the *Twilight* movies in the space of, like, two weeks leading up to the exams, except for the last half hour of the last one. Cos I got to that point, and I was like, “I don’t understand what’s happening, why am I doing this to myself,” and I stopped watching. Cut to middle to late 2019, I was here in Melbourne, I had a job coming up but I wasn’t working yet, and so I was just hanging out. All my friends were at uni, thanks you guys. Nobody was available to hang out, and Kali, you were travelling and doing fun stuff in Greece and shit like that.

Kali

I’m so sorry!

Angourie

So, I turned to *Twilight*, cos I was like, okay, let’s see what all the fuss is about, I’m gonna read the *Twilight* series. And I did, and I got through them really quickly, and I hated it, but I also loved it. And then I reread the first book for this episode, and rereading it, I liked it more than when I first read it, which was such a plot twist. So, that’s my very complicated *Twilight* journey. I have so many feelings about it.

Maija

Ah, but it’s so good! Yeah, well, I honestly reckon Stephenie Meyer is on the same level as *Pride and Prejudice*.

Kali

Woah.

Angourie

Wow.

Maija

No, I'm joking! [laughing]

Angourie

Controversial!

Kali

Woah, that is a spicy take.

Angourie

You're gonna get hate mail for that, Maija.

Kali

Jane Austen is gonna haunt you for the rest of your life.

Maija

Yeah, it's okay, I don't believe it, but I wanted to see your guys' faces!

Angourie

Maija just likes stirring the pot!

Maija

Hell yeah.

Kali

Goddamn.

Angourie

Usually at this point in the – in the podcast, I will give everyone a quick rundown of the plot of the book just in case they haven't read it, but I feel like *Twilight* is so embedded in our culture, that everyone knows, it's about Bella, she falls in love with a vampire, meanwhile there's also a hot werewolf, she doesn't know who to choose.

Kali

That's basically, like, that's it though. Like, you didn't leave anything out of that!

Angourie

That's it!

Maija

Yeah!

Angourie

I wanna talk about the legacy of *Twilight*, and how people responded to it in the world. I feel like even me growing up as, like, an eight-year-old, and it was at the height of its fame then, cos 2009, it had been a year since the first one came out. My friend was obsessed with the series, and even me as an eight-year-old, I was looking upon it scornfully, like, “Oh, no, no, no, well that’s trash, I know that that series is trash.” Did you guys feel that? And – and why did you think you had that immediate response, if so?

Maija

I – I mean, like, I grew up in Wollongong, which, for those of you who don’t know, um, it’s a small town in Australia, and it’s very surf-y culture, and it’s quite bogan. Melbourne definitely had, like – you know, like, when I moved here, I, like, joked to some of my friends that we should, like, re-watch *Twilight* for nostalgia when we were, like, fourteen, and they were all like, “I’ve never seen it before.” And I was like: “What the fuck, have you lived?” It definitely is, you know, like, I think it was much more, kind of, a big thing. Like, everyone saw *Twilight* in cinema. People would go on the first, like, day it was released and go. Um, and I think it wasn’t as big of a thing in Melbourne, cos you guys are classier. So, yeah, I just love *Twilight*, and like, I wasn’t even ashamed of it.

Kali

Melbourne thinks it’s classier than it is, let’s just put that out there.

Angourie

Yeah, I don’t know about that.

Maija

Yeah, what about you, Kali?

Kali

Yeah, I don’t know, I had this – a similar experience to Angourie, where I was like, this small child being like, “This is bad literature!” Like, what the fuck did I even know about – about books and good writing? Like, I was reading absolute trash. Yeah, it fits with what you were gonna say about, like, girl hate, and how every – the world just, and the media, and pop culture just likes to shit on things that young girls love. And I definitely had a part of that in me. I’m like, the biggest *High School Musical* stan in the world, and so maybe it was like, I can’t like two of the things that everyone is shaming young girls to like, so I had to be like, okay, well I choose *High School Musical*, and fuck *Twilight*. But at the same time, I went to see – to see those movies in cinema, I was still reading the book, so it obviously appealed to me in some way, but I just had to be like, “No, it’s ironic. I don’t like it that much.”

Angourie

I had a similar thing in that, I felt this kind of weird, sick pride that I was like, #notlikeothergirls because I read *Harry Potter*, and like, *Harry Potter* was my thing, and like, that was on a higher level than *Twilight* for some reason, you know, in my mind that’s how made the distinction. And I think that, like, that whole idea of not being like other girls is not healthy. The first time that I really thought about girl hate critically was when the whole idea of a “VSCO girl” came to light in social media. I mean, look, it’s pretty funny, like, the tiktoks and the memes, like, they’re all pretty funny. But I was thinking about it, and thinking, actually, this happens with anything that teenage girls

love, and you're making fun of all these teenage girls who dress the same. Come to my high school, I will show you that every single boy dresses exactly the same, and nobody gives them shit for it, because they're not a teenage girl!

Kali

Has the same hairstyle, has the same music taste. Like, honestly, I think we would make better tiktoks about the shit that teenage boys like!

Maija

Yeah!

Kali

Like, it's meme-able.

Maija

Honestly. And I think, like, VSCO girls as well, it was just girls who cared about the environment and like, liked drinking from water bottles.

Kali

Yeah, and like didn't dress like they were trying to impress anyone, like, they just dressed comfy and wore scrunchies.

Maija

Yeah, like, they wore baggy shirts –

Kali

Like, let them live, bitch!

Maija

Yeah!

Kali

Yeah, no, so I have an uncle, who I love. I love you, Suvesh, okay, you're the best. But also, he likes to remind me of all the different obsessions that I've had in my teenage-hood, and you know, like, tween obsessions. And he totally, like, takes the piss out of my One Direction obsession and my *High School Musical* obsession, my Justin Bieber obsession, you know, all the things. It's like, okay, yeah, you can make fun of me for those things, I was obsessed. But also, isn't every young child enamoured with something at that stage of their lives? Like, Fortnite, for example, doesn't receive half of the shit that One Direction, you know? Like, why aren't those things getting as much shit and as much hate as the things that teenage girls love. Like, come on, man?

Maija

Fortnite culture, and like, video game culture in general is a lot more toxic.

Kali

Like, *High School Musical* and *Twilight* never hurt anyone! Oh, actually, wait, *Twilight* did.

Maija

Twilight did.

Angourie

Although –

Maija

Twilight is really problematic.

Angourie

I do wanna segway into that, because *Twilight* is a series that gets so much hate, but does it get criticism for things that it should get criticism of?

Kali

No, not at all!

Angourie

Segwaying into that, let's talk about Bella. Our icon, our protagonist, our awkward teen! Rereading the first book for a second time, I did not hate her as much as I did the first time, and I think because I – I was able to move past my #notlikeothergirls bias and see that Bella was just kind of an awkward teenage girl not wanting to draw attention to herself. Discuss, how do you guys feel about Bella?

Maija

I think she's a blank slate for many reasons, because you're supposed to be able to insert yourself into Bella's position. Reading it as an adult, I was like, she's actually quite a complicated and sad character in a lot of ways, because I think there was a lot of parentification. If you don't know what I mean by parentification, it just means when a child takes on a role more like a parent. So, say, her mother was never really very emotionally present, um, you know, it's constantly said in the book, um, how Bella felt like she was caring for her, and how she talks about her mother with this, like, fondness – and almost maternal fondness, which is more, like, you know, how a mother would talk about a child, especially when she's talking about how her mother's relationships. And then there's a scene that really stuck with me, where, um, Charlie's put, like, I don't know, I don't – I live in Australia, I don't know anything about snow, um, but like, put, like, snow protection on her wheels, um, so like she doesn't crash. Yeah, and she starts crying, like, pretty much, because she's like, "Wow, I've never felt this taken care of." And I was like, wow, like, so, although she seems boring, I think she just seems much more mature than a lot of teenagers in quite a boring way. [laughs] Like she's not allowed to be fun and young, because she hasn't had that opportunity.

Kali

I guess, like, I don't know. It's – obviously it's been a long time since I've read the books, and I probably – I wouldn't be able to give a good analysis of what happens in the book, but from my perspective, it feels like, while all those things definitely may be true and may be present with, like, when you're reading it from an adult perspective and from an educated perspective such as yours, Maija – I wonder whether that's Stephenie Meyer's actual intention, you know? Especially when you – I mean, the movies, it plays up that whole, like, #notlikeothergirls thing, which is just like, you know, the only way to be cool and alluring is to, like, not be the stereotypical archetype of a

teenage girl, and be, like, #quirky, like, I don't like girly things, I drive a truck, like, I don't wanna try on a dress! Like, you know? Maybe that's just the movie, like I said, I do need to reread the book. Maybe she comes across that way, but I'm not sure if that's the intention, and it does definitely play into that whole narrative of you've gotta reject the societal depiction of what a girl is to be, like, a cool girl and to get guys to like you.

Maija

And I think that might also be the Mormon influence, um, because Mormons aren't into consumerism, um, they're also very much, like, they're very against vanity, um, especially for women. Um, so women aren't allowed to be aware of obsessed with their own beauty, and I think that's really reflective in Bella's character, how she almost views herself as being slightly sexless, because she views sex as being so wrong, she can't imagine herself being in that situation.

Kali

Omg, so deep.

Angourie

Mmm, yeah! And she's so uncomfortable in her body, and uncomfortable with taking up space, and being seen as a desirable object, like, she frequently wonders what Edward sees in her, and why he's so attracted to her. She's disbelieving of his love for her. I also think it's kind of ironic that Bella exhibits all of these traits of, like, not being like other girls, and you know, she's into books, and she's – she's just more tomboy-ish and she's not like the girls – the other girls that we see, like Jessica, who wants to go to prom, and she loves dancing, and she wants to wear pretty dresses. And yet, it's ironic that the series has become such a popular thing amongst teenage girls, that teenage girls are making *Twilight* the thing that they're not into to not be like other girls, if that makes sense. Like, it's just ironic in that way. Also, I wanted to mention about Bella, um, her favourite colour is brown.

Maija

Yeah!

Kali

Bitch, you're lying!

Maija

It's the colour of earth!

Kali

Shut up! Whose favourite colour is brown? Honestly!

Angourie

Dying!

Kali

Like, when you're trying so hard to be different that you have to say your favourite colour is fucking brown! Bitch! No.

Angourie

Okay, so if we're looking at Bella in the context of being written by Stephenie Meyer, and Bella as a symbol for #notbeinglikeothergirls, if we look at her as a character and analyse her that way, she does have a lot of internalised girl hate and misogyny. In the movie they don't do this as much, but in the book she flirts with Jacob to get him to tell her more about the Cullens, and when she's doing that she's disgusted with herself because she's acting like the girls that she doesn't like in high school, or – she's acting like all the other girls who flirt to get attention, and flirt to get things out of boys, and so she's got a lot of, um, internalised hate and misogyny, and that's really sad cos I think a lot of girls deal with that, actually. And I'm not saying that she's not allowed to like books and trucks and things like that, but it's coupled with an assumption that girls who don't like those things are ditsy or stupid or somehow not as good as Bella, and I think that's a big problem.

Maija

I think it's also interesting how Jessica's written, um, cos Jessica, like, is just Bella's friend, and although in *Midnight Sun*, it's revealed that she doesn't always have the nicest thoughts about Bella, you know, thoughts aren't necessarily something that someone can control, and her actions kind of show, she's like, you know, she's usually a good friend to Bella. Um, but she's kind of written off as being slightly ditsy and less deep because, you know, she's obsessed with Edward, and Edward didn't like her, and she's obsessed with Mike, and Mike doesn't like her –

Kali

And she's just a girl who likes, like, "girly" things, therefore she's stupid.

Maija

Yeah, exactly. Yeah, and she also seems to be more, kind of, pursuing men than Bella is, um, and that's kind of written as being desperate and undesirable, and she becomes kind of like a slight joke in a lot of ways.

Angourie

Re-watching the movie, Jessica is played by Anna Kendrick –

Maija

Iconic!

Angourie

And I love Jessica in the movie!

Maija

Yeah, she's so good!

Kali

Anna Kendrick steals the show. Like, not gonna lie.

Angourie

She's amazing as Jessica! Like, so unapologetically bright and bubbly, and like, yeah, go for it, girl! Like, you do you, that's amazing!

Kali

Yeah, she killed it.

Maija

And Bella's like: I have a cactus and depression.

Kali

[laughing] Okay, but why does she hold the cactus the whole way! Like –

Maija

It's a metaphor for her character. She's prickly on the outside, but she still needs water.

Kali

Aw!

Angourie

Mm, true.

Kali

That was beautiful!

Maija

That's fake. I was trying to tell a joke, but you guys took that seriously!

Kali

No, but that was beautiful!

Maija

[laughing]

Kali

You could be a poet.

Angourie

So, on the other hand, Maija, you send us frequent memes about a feminist reading of *Twilight*. Can you tell us about a possible feminist reading of it?

Maija

Yes! In the beginning of the book, well, I don't know if it happens at the beginning of the book actually, but in the beginning of the movie, she's doing a monologue about how she would, like, you know, [if] she was going to die, she would like to die in the place of someone she loves. You know, you go throughout the whole movie thinking she's gonna die in the place of Edward, however it's revealed she later wanted to die in the place of her mum, which is, you know, it's feminist prose because it's kind of understating – like, you know, we automatically thought she would die for the man, and then the whole time, really, she was gonna die for her mum, so it's kind of like that girl love, that relationship between mother daughter.

Kali

Frozen totally copied that shit, just gonna say.

Maija

Yeah!

Angourie

[laughing] Exposed!

Maija

You know, like, undermining, kind of like, our patriarchal automatic mindset that she would be willing to die for Edward. And then other thoughts that why it's kinda slightly a feminist book, um ... is just kind of like, making a lot of stretches to be honest!

Kali

[laughing] Go, stretch away! Stretch away!

Maija

But I definitely think that Bella, um, she can set a lot of boundaries with the men in her life in a very – in a very accessible way. Um, so say, with Mike Newton, she consistently, you know like, will say no to him while still remaining polite, and when I was younger I really struggled with being assertive, and so it was quite good to see someone say no without, like, you know, being kinda like, too aggressive with it, because that always scared me. And then, I think, that's probably about it for feminism. [laughing] Then the rest is very anti-feminism!

Angourie

And that's that on feminism and *Twilight*. [laughing]

Kali

Yeah. In other words, um, not an extremely feminist book, but a little bit feminist nonetheless!

Angourie

Good segway into Edward and Bella's relationship, because ... I mean, I was actually shocked, rereading the book, how many weird phrases there are about power and their power struggle. There's a running theme that Edward is dangerous, right, he's like "I'm dangerous", but Bella isn't scared of him, and she frequently says, like, "I'm not scared of you," and he's like, "But you should be." And that's this running theme, is that he's worried that she's not scared enough of him. I was thinking about that, and thinking how, like, is it almost this idea of – of this, kind of toxic masculinity, where in order to feel validated, he must be feared by women, and he must have that power over them. And that's why he kind of feels so uncertain with Bella, because one, he can't read her thoughts, so that's taking him down a notch, and two, she's not scared of him, and so he feels kind of emasculated in that way.

Kali

Hundred percent.

Maija

Hundred percent.

Kali

Jinx.

Maija

Jinx. [laughing] Kali, what are your thoughts?

Kali

Oh, I don't know, I mean, exactly that. I just – I think it's, like, it feels a bit pathetic, like he's constantly, like, "I'm not good for you. I'm so bad, I could hurt you." And she's just like, "I don't give a fuck, like, you're fine. You're just a pasty-ass white boy, like, chill out. I kind a wanna bang, like, why are you making such a big deal about this!" And he's like, "Wait, what? No, I could kill you, bitch, aren't you scared?" So, yeah.

Maija

She's like, "That makes it hotter."

Kali

She's into it.

Angourie

He sets all these rules for their relationship. Like, honestly, when I was rereading it, I was like, this is an episode of *Too Hot To Handle*. He's like, "We can't kiss, we can't touch, and at the end, there will be no prize."

Kali

Oh, my god, it's Kelz! Edward is Kelz!

Angourie

[laughing] Genuinely! But it's like – it's like she's – she's walking on eggshells around him, she's like, always so careful. It's this unhealthy, manipulative relationship, and at the end, Bella is talking about how, like, how relationships work – about two people in a relationship she says, quote: "They have to save each other, equally." End quote. And I'm like, but should a relationship be about people saving each other?

Maija

It really shouldn't. If it's healthy, it shouldn't be about saving people, it should be about growing together.

Kali

Mm, and supporting each other, and not being the reason that you guys are alive.

Maija

And I think that's, again, parentification where she's then developed a saviour complex because she's been having to mature a lot faster. I also think that there's a consistent, like, it's consistent that Edward steps across barriers, um and boundaries that Bella's set. Um, so the most obvious is

his – him watching her sleep. So there's no consent in that, he goes and watches her sleep, and then, you know, he gets over-excited because, you know, she'll say, like, "Edward" in her sleep and stuff. Um, the other thing is when they're kind of dating and Jessica wants to know what the deal is. He, like, listens to Jessica's thoughts to find out what she says, which is, you know, quite intense eavesdropping, and Bella asks him not to but he still does it.

Kali

What an arsehole.

Maija

Yeah! In the movie there's the gaslighting, and in the book as well, where after he saves her from the truck, he goes, "No, I was right next to you the whole time. You've hit your head."

Angourie

That bugs me more than anything else, is him gaslighting her. And like, when we were watching it on our Netflix party, as soon as that scene happened –

Kali

We were all, like, "Oh"

Angourie

Everyone in the chat wrote "Gaslighting, gaslighting, gaslighting!"

Maija

Yep.

Kali

Nah, that was such bullshit. Oh my god.

Angourie

But that's the – that is the other thing, is that, I mean – we were talking about this before, Maija, is that it ain't that deep. It's just vampires loving in this, like, intense, exciting way. I mean, we don't – it would ... it would be boring if they settled down and they had this healthy relationship the whole time, and I – I do think their relationship gets better. When Stephenie Meyer is asked about this, and she's said, she's been quoted in interviews saying that they're not meant to be role models. They're kids, you know, they're not supposed to be the model of a perfect relationship, they're learning as they go, and it's this intense love. On the other other hand, people will make role models of whoever they want. If you put something into a book, once it goes out into the world, it's out there, you can't control it anymore, you can't control how people respond to it or what they feel about it. And millions of teenage girls are reading this thinking: "Oh my god, I want a relationship like that."

Kali

Yeah, that was what everyone was hoping for, that was like, the standard of teenage love. Like, that's a bit dangerous. I mean, let's – let's take out the fact that everyone's trying to kill each other and drink each other's blood, it's like a real toxic relationship that everyone's aspiring to, and that is – yikes, that's a big yikes.

Maija

Yeah, and how Charlie tries to set parental boundaries for Bella and limit the amount of time they spend together, because Bella just ditches her friends and is completely isolated with Edward and Alice being her only two support people, and it's like – literally, like, you can count – you can Google signs of abusive relationships, and every single category will be a part of Bella and Edward's relationship, um, which is a bit insane.

Angourie

When Stephenie Meyer responds to this sort of criticism, she's like, well, they're teenagers, it's young love, it's – it's intense. And this is the kind of love that we see in *Romeo and Juliet*; they're teenagers, it's all or nothing, and they just go into it head first, they dive in, and it's like, yeah, that is actually quite realistic in terms of young, adolescent relationships, it's very melodramatic. But, usually in YA novels when they end up together at the end, they're still teenagers, and they will continue to exist off the page and not necessarily together in this wild love affair. However, the way it's presented at the end of the *Twilight* series is that, oh, no, no, no, they're married, they have a child, they will be together forever in this wild, insane, manipulative, drug-like love. It's presented that this kind of love is a forever love, whereas what I like about *Romeo and Juliet* is that that kind of love is doomed from the beginning.

Maija

It's very reflective of the Mormon ideals of relationships where the wife is obedient and the husband is, um, kind of, you know the – the enforcer and the boss. Um, and I also think, um, she doesn't just have Bella and Edward as having this insane love, she has Alice and Jasper, and she has Emmett and Rosalie, and she has Carousel or whatever his name is – Carousel ... the daddy vampire.

Angourie

Carlisle!

Kali

Carlisle! Carousel!

Angourie

Carousel Cullen!

Maija

Daddy vampire and Esme!

Angourie

Can you imagine! [laughing] Carousel Cullen!

Maija

Um –

Kali

Wait, how many times have you read the books, Maija, and you thought his name was Carousel!

Angourie

Carousel!

Maija

Yeah!

Angourie

I can't!

Kali

That is iconic, oh my god. Petition to change his name to Carousel @stepheniemeyer!

Angourie

[laughing]

Maija

And, I mean, Victoria and James have that level of an intense relationship as well, where Victoria is willing to kill for James to get revenge, and I think there's a very, kind of, animalistic way to the Vampire's love, where it's mating for life and it's intense, like there's not the human, critical thinking to it. Um, which, you know, is hot. Um, but it's also problematic and unrealistic.

Kali

Yeah. Yeah, it's just condoning all of the abuse and all of the toxicity in saying that, "Yeah, I mean, like, you can't have a real love without all of this shit." That – it's like that with a lot of stories. At what point does the role of the author and their responsibility to tell a healthy story come into it? Like, they know that they have this audience of millions and millions of impressionable people, yet they're choosing to tell this story that is condoning all of these things. Like, does the art still stand by itself, and is it still just, like, you know, a depiction of something that could potentially happen, or do they have to take responsibility for telling a narrative that – that has a good message and teaches a good lesson.

Angourie

But it's also – Stephenie Meyer wouldn't have known how much her book would blow up when she was writing it. she wrote it from her heart, not knowing the millions and millions of people it would reach.

Maija

And then it becomes a question of do parents enforce censorship to their kids and create kind of like a healthy dialogue about how this romanticises relationships, or does the author have to censor their art?

Angourie

I mean, I think – and, you know, this is something that I remember discussing with my English at length about. When we studied a particular book that shall not be named in English class, I did not like the depiction of women at all, and I was very vocal about that, because this male author wrote a book in which the protagonists were always men and boys, and the female characters usually

existed in B-plots, and they were always in some sort of abusive relationship, and this was used as a plot device to further the growth of this male character. And then once these abused women had served their purpose in the story of helping this young man grow, they either died or disappeared, but either way, they were still in these abusive relationships. And I remember really taking issue with that, and saying to my English teacher I think that this is a harmful portrayal of female characters. And my English teacher was like, well, the author isn't intending to be misogynistic, you know, his – his intention is to show the harsh realities of the world for women. And I kind of thought, I don't really care. I don't care what the author intended, because no matter his intention, my response as a reader was to the work that he created, and he made those decisions consciously, and my response as a reader to the work that he created is that this is a harmful and misogynistic portrayal of women, and he has no control over how people respond to his narrative. Anyway, that's a very long-winded way of me saying that I don't care about what the author intended anymore. I think the work speaks for itself and once you send something out into the world, um, that's it.

Kali

No, a hundred percent, because that isn't being released alongside a written statement, and not every viewer was gonna go and look up this person who shall not be named, and read about all the things that he intended when he made this work, you know? That's – that's not what's gonna happen. Whatever they intended doesn't matter if it's gonna be interpreted in all these different ways, they have – they have to take responsibility for that.

Angourie

The – the author of the work has to be ready to take all of the praise, and also all of the criticism and responsibility for certain messages that people take from it. But – ah, I mean, again, on the other other hand, it's like, Stephenie Meyer put *Twilight* out into the world, I guess she's no longer responsible for how people respond to it? Or is she, because she created it? I don't know!

Kali

Mm.

Angourie

Existential questions about Stephenie Meyer!

Kali

Ooft.

Maija

Yeah, a lot of the hate she got was not this critical, and it wasn't this well-thought out as well. A lot of the hate she got was just from men being like, "I hate it because it has teenage girls in it and cos teenage girls like it!"

Kali

Yeah, that relates back to what you were saying, is was it receiving hate for the right reasons.

Maija

And she's like – she's a human, and like, can you imagine getting millions of messages a day just being like, "I hate you and I hate your work." So like, to a point as well, does she necessarily, like – cos she got a lot of flack because she stopped, like, replying to people's messages that was hate. Um, and she also wouldn't, um, answer some questions in interviews that were hateful. And at first I was like, well, you know, she wrote this book and now she has to deal [with] the consequences, but then I was also like, she's a person, she has addressed it before, and she's gotta look after her own mental health to a point as well. And if you're just being hateful without, like, being, like, I don't wanna say, like, intelligently hateful, but like, critically hateful.

Kali

Or, not even hate, but like, a critique of the art –

Maija

Yeah, criticism.

Maija

What did you guys think of, um, kind of throughout the book it's very present that Bella's constantly talking about cooking, um, she cooks every day, she cleans, and she kinda cares for Charlie in that domestic way. What did you guys think of that?

Angourie

I mean, I guess there are a few ways you can look at it. You can look at it at her being in that, um, that quintessential female role of cooking and cleaning, you can look at it as her being in this role of the parent to her parents, and then, on another level in the *Twilight* canon, you can look at her being – talking about food all the time to juxtapose Edward who doesn't eat, who only drinks blood. And for, you know, further down the line in the series when she does become a vampire and how, you know, it's a symbol for her changing, and she starts out being so human, like that's one of the human things that she does. She sleeps, she goes to the toilet, she eats, and that's part of her human identity, and then when she becomes a vampire, that changes. So, I think there are a few ways you can read it, I guess.

Maija

[In] my opinion, in the books, it wasn't less about parentification, her, like, inhabiting the domestic space so much, I think it was more about her role as a woman in the Mormon community, and her kind of taking on that domestic role, and Charlie being the provider, because he provides for her financially. Like, when she first moves, she's saved up money to buy a truck, and then he surprises her by already have bought a truck. Um, so here's the feeling that like, that kind of patriarchal role, um, of kind of being the financial provider, um, and then she provides the kind of more feminine, maternal role of kind of being the, you know, house-maintainer. And I think, um, in a lot of ways, um, with Edward's family's wealth, there's no need for her to become that, like, kind of, like, for him to work. Um, and also there isn't that much providing to, because they don't eat. Um, and so I think in a lot of ways, becoming a vampire offers and escape, um, from the traditional, um, patriarchal roles offered to women within the Mormon community.

Kali

[snaps fingers] Go off Maija!

Angourie

And also it means that someone's taking care of her for a change.

Maija

Yeah. And he's over a hundred years old, so there's also the maturity factor.

Kali

Although, is he that mature?

Angourie

Age is just a number, guys!

Kali

He's still, like, "Rawr XD, I'm a moody teen," like –

Maija

Oh, a hundred percent, and he's so dramatic, but so's Bella. But they have that maturity effect where they're like, "We're not like other teenagers, we understand life on a deeper level."

Angourie

Okay, real question, though. So you know how people's brains, like, keep developing into their twenties, especially men, like, men's brains' keep developing until they're twenty-five or some –

Maija

Oh, it's not even twenty-five, it's forty-five is when men are emotionally mature.

Kali

Bruh. BRUH.

Angourie

Maija just coming for all the men!

Maija

No, it's true! Hey, Google, when do men emotionally mature?

Google

Forty-three.

Maija

Forty-three!

Kali

Oh, damn! Please do not edit that out, Angourie! That was iconic.

Angourie

So, when Edward is turned, he is seventeen, he still has the brain of a seventeen-year-old, so he's still impulsive, he's still kinda reckless, he's still a little bit emotionally stunted, not gonna lie, so it

makes sense that he is – he is a one-hundred-and-nine-year-old emo, and he's been emo for a hundred years!

Maija

So, what did you guys think of the pace of Bella and Edward's relationship?

Angourie

Oh, my god, she was in love with him, like, super quick!

Maija

Yeah!

Kali

Yeah, I mean, watching the film, it's just like, what the fuck? You guys just met and spoke once.

Angourie

Here's the other thing, though, that I wanted to talk about, is that, yes, their relationship develops super quickly, on top of that, she is so open to the fact that he's a vampire, like –

Kali

Yeah! Implausibly!

Angourie

Like, it's insane how she's like, "Oh, no, I've already considered that you're possibly a superhero. Oh, turns out you're a vampire? Oh, that's fine, I guess!"

Kali

Yeah, that whole research sequence where she's, like –

Maija

Googling it!

Kali

Where she becomes a detective and she's, like, discovering all this long-forgotten history that's freely available on the internet! And then – and then she's like, "Oh, my god, he's a vampire," and then he's just like, "Yup, I am a vampire," and she's like, "Yeah, okay. Cool."

Angourie

It's one aspect of the series that I kind of love, because so many fantasy YA books in that way have a moment where the protagonist finds out about that fantastical world or whatever, and they're like, "What, I can't believe this, I must be dreaming! This is – you're playing a prank, what?" And I just kind of loved how she was so open to it and ready to believe it, and I just kind of really liked that, cos in – in that way, I mean, if you think about a lot of the other fantasy books that were happening around that time, it was kind of new and different that she exists in the real world and there's a fantasy world that she doesn't know about, but when that fantasy world presents itself, it's not totally out of the question for her.

Maija

You know, in the beginning of the book, she's like, "I hate Forks, and I hate how my mum has chosen, you know, this new relationship over me, and I hate how, you know, Charlie doesn't get me, and I hate the rain." And I think she was in a position where she would have accepted almost anything to make it more exciting. And I think Edward definitely became, like, a – an escape. And although he was deeply flawed, he – he was an escape from a patriarchal society, which leads into the omnipresent threat of sexual assault within the books.

Angourie

Yeah, I mean the first way that it's addressed in the first book is Bella. She – she is walking alone at night, and a group of men corner her, and she freaks out and she freezes, and Edward comes spiralling around the corner in his silver Volvo to rescue her.

Kali

His Volvo!

Angourie

No, no, no, the reason I mention specifically that it's a silver Volvo, is because it is mentioned so frequently in the books, it's like Stephenie Meyer had, like, a sponsorship from Volvo or something.

Kali

[laughing] It's a metaphor for, like, a white horse!

Angourie

[laughing] Genuinely! Like, okay? It's a silver Volvo? But sorry, enough about the silver Volvo. What were you going to say, Maija?

Maija

You know, it's a very real presence in our society, um, there is a constant threat from male violence, um, and Edward kind of being the protector from that, um, I think – I think in a lot of ways it is a real reality that men can offer a level of protection from the threat that is men. Like, if I wanna go for a walk past about eight o'clock, you know, my older brother has to come with me, um, that kinda thing. Um, so I do understand it, but I also think, um, it would have been cool if she could have protected herself a little bit more, but that also would have been a bit unrealistic.

Angourie

I – I struggle with the fact that Edward is the one to save her, again, because it's like – but at the same time, you know, within myself, just in my day to day life, it's a really attractive quality in a man when they can protect you from something like that, and it's really nice. But it's – it's this kind of twisted thing of like, well, thank you for looking out for me, but also, I shouldn't have to modify my behaviour anyway. I mean, that's a whole rape culture thing that we could get into later, but it just – yeah, I would have preferred if she had saved herself.

Kali

I definitely grapple with that same thing, Angourie, of like, I shouldn't – I shouldn't feel more attracted to someone, a man, who is like, aware of the threat of men to women. And I have that, like, conflict, because it's almost like, I mean, in the context of *Twilight*, it's like Edward is using the

threat of men – of other men – to get Bella to like him more, even though he’s just as toxic. He’s offering this protection, but it’s conditional, because he still wants her to be with him. Meanwhile, you know, who’s to say that he’s not as dangerous as those guys. I mean, he himself thinks he’s as dangerous as them, but he’s using his protection as a way to, yeah, get with her, which I find gross. And I think – that’s also a thing that’s just very real is like, oh, is this guy – is this guy saying all these nice things about me or acting like a feminist because he wants something from me? Or is he actually a good guy? Like, we don’t know – we don’t know what the actual intentions are, and I think that’s just, like, a very real thing in a woman’s life.

Angourie

Very well put.

Maija

And I think Stephenie Meyer definitely included that to kind of show that [Edward] wasn’t, you know, the worst guy he could be. And it goes back to that Hannah Gadsby quote, um, which is, um, there’s good men, and there’s bad men, but the problem is that men draw the line between good men and bad men. So, bad men can say, “No, I’m a good man, because here’s the line, and I haven’t stepped over it,” whilst they’re moving the line to suit them and their own personal agenda. And I think, you know, Edward’s abusive and he’s manipulative, and he gaslights her, um, and there’s a constant threat of physical abuse, that he might, you know, kill her, because he loses control, which is a bullshit excuse. But because, you know, these men are bad men because they have impure thoughts and have impure intentions, they are bad and he is therefore good because he can save her from it. I think that’s really problematic.

Angourie

Can we talk about Jacob and the Quileute Tribe and La Push? Maija, you were really the one who – who drew my attention to this.

Maija

You know, I would first like to acknowledge that I’m white, I’m not Indigenous American, um, I also live in Australia, where education from Indigenous Americans is very, very limited, and so I really genuinely apologise if I don’t get this quite right, and you know, feel free to leave me comments, you know, telling me where I messed up and I’ll, kind of, take that on board. Um, but I think, from what I’ve read online, Stephenie Meyer took these real people, and took aspects of their culture and appropriated it and misused it and rewrote it to suit her kind of white saviour and white America perspective. Its culture was kind of misused and rewritten. I think the only time that really a lot of people had heard about these Indigenous Americans was through *Twilight*, and she wrote their stories for them, and she wrote it really incorrectly.

Kali

Also, like, the whole depiction of Native Americans in the movie and in the text is just – it’s so condescending and primitive. It’s so clear that it’s, um, from a white perspective, and obviously again, I’m not Native American, I’m not Indigenous, I don’t have that perspective, but looking at it from a non-white perspective, it was like, mm, I cannot imagine that this is an accurate portrayal of their culture. And I think it’s just really important when bringing Indigenous narratives to the mainstream – to the white mainstream – that you get it right.

Angourie

So, when I was researching this, Maija actually sent me a – an article, or a literary criticism of the representation of the Quileute Tribe in the *Twilight* books, ah from a university journal which I will link in the show notes. And that took me to a link to a website called Truth vs. Twilight, and this was created around the same time that the *Twilight* films were really popular, and this is a collaboration between the Burke Museum in Seattle, Washington, and the Quileute Tribe, um, who live in La Push, which is a real place, and Forks, Washington, is also a real place. Um, and so the aim of this website is to share the stories of the Quileute People and the history of their Tribe, and kind of debunk all of the, um, misconceptions and the fiction that Stephenie Meyer has created in *Twilight*. This was a very comprehensive and educational resource for me to use when researching this topic, especially because it talks about *Twilight* specifically, so I will link that website in the show notes, but I will also link the official Quileute Nation website which has more information about who they are and their stories, specifically not in relation to *Twilight* or Stephenie Meyer. And I want to read this quote from the home page of Truth vs. Twilight, which I think is a really important quote:

“The phenomena of the *Twilight* series has had vast economic benefits for Summit Entertainment, Stephenie Meyer, the tiny town of Forks, Washington, and even Nordstrom department stores, but the Tribe whose culture was represented for background fodder in the teenage love story has seen little benefit. In addition to shedding light on the appropriation of Quileute culture, we wish to expose how the *Twilight* Saga has presented a skewed version of modern Native American life, and to offer visitors to this site an alternative perspective with links and resources for a more meaningful understanding of Indians in the modern era.” End quote.

I also thought this quote about the response from the Quileute Tribe was really interesting and important to highlight. Quote,

“Quileute responses to the *Twilight* book and film series have been as diverse as the community itself. Some have enjoyed the newfound public interest in their culture, while others find the whole story and all the attention distasteful. And still others are not interested in the hype, and see this phenomenon as a phase that will fade soon enough.” End quote.

With a lot of exposure there comes of course good things and bad things, but overall what I understood from what the website is trying to say is that Meyer’s, um, fictionalised and skewed version of the story of the Quileute Tribe has eclipsed, no pun intended, the stories and histories and culture of these real people, and, um, that, I think is kind of a problem.

Maija

And I think the segregation between, um, Forks High School and the Reserve, um, is really, really interesting, because, you know, there’s no Native Americans that go to the school in Forks, um, they all go to the school on the Reserve, and I think that’s really quite problematic. And I also think it’s, um, you know, from a Mormon perspective, um, the Mormons, like, this is quite a problematic part of their history. In the 80s and 70s, um, there was this project of, kind of, Mormon people kind of sponsoring and adopting, kind of, Native American children, um and a lot of abuse happened, you know, from Mormon priests onto Native American children. Um, and I think it’s really, really interesting that this Mormon woman has taken parts of their culture and stolen it and made a fortune, and that has made no repercussions.

Kali

And it’s not even like it’s a common criticism of the – of the novel in the mainstream, you know? You can find these criticism if you go looking for it, but it’s not a conversation that’s very present – present? That’s very present when you bring up *Twilight*. I think just in the context of education

on Indigenous Americans and First Nations People in general, it's so tone deaf, because it's – people are still not learning about the history of their land, and about the first people to inhabit the land, and then you go and release something like this, it's just, yeah, it's really insulting, I think.

Angourie

I have a few themed discussion questions: would you rather be able to read minds or see the future?

Kali

Oh, god. Probably read minds, to be honest.

Maija

Yeah, I'm so nosy I wanna read minds.

Kali

Yeah, cos reading the future, like, we all – that would just end in a feedback loop. To quote Gabriel García Márquez –

Angourie

Yes, do it!

Kali

Time is cyclical, and the future is inevitable, and anything you do to change the future will just backfire, and you'll end up in the same place, basically. Not a direct quote, but a paraphrasing.

Angourie

I don't know, though, but being able to read people's minds, like, ah, I think that would be really bad for my anxious brain.

Kali

Yeah, oh god, self-esteem.

Angourie

Ooft. Okay, another discussion question: do you believe in vampires, yes or no?

Maija

No.

Kali

Oh, my god.

Maija

I wish. Like, I really want to, but no.

Angourie

Unless?

Maija

And I'm the most batshit crazy out of you two, so like ...

Kali

No, I like, lowkey do. But like [laughing] but like not – not in a *Twilight* way, like that shit doesn't exist. But like, I don't know. Maybe there's been some – some people in history that ... I don't know, okay! I believe in a lot of stupid shit, so like, don't listen to me!

Angourie

I mean, full disclosure, and we talked about this yesterday, we all believe in ghosts.

Maija

Yeah.

Angourie

However, I draw the line at vampires. I don't think that vampires exist.

Kali

Okay, fine, I don't either! Shh! You didn't hear what I said!

Maija

No, believe in them!

Angourie

Do you know what, actually? When I was younger – and actually part of me still does believe that there's a theory about *Harry Potter* that J. K. Rowling is Rita Skeeter in exile from the Wizarding World because she wrote a whole book about the Wizarding World and they exiled her.

Kali

Oh. My. God.

Angourie

Yeah, and the Wizarding World still exists. Like, a small but fierce part of me believes that that is real.

Maija

I can see that.

Kali

That is a hundred percent real, oh my god! I'm actually so happy right now. I can't believe – what?

Angourie

Team Edward, team Jacob, go! No ums or ahs or buts, go!

Maija

Edward.

Kali

Oh, my god! Ah, no, but I'm like, so ...

Maija

I mean, neither, ideally, but Edward, like if I have to pick one. I'm team, like, go to university.

Angourie

True!

Kali

No, I tend to lean more towards Jacob because I just found Edward so annoying, but then when I watched the movie, like, just now the other day, I was like, oh my god, okay, he – he do be kinda cute though. So, I do not know.

Angourie

For the record, I am team Jacob, I will always be team Jacob. No hate.

Kali

Yas, okay, cool. I feel validated.

Angourie

I'm also controversially team Gale, so I feel like I lean on the controversial edge of things.

Maija

I feel like more people are team Jacob than they are team Edward.

Angourie

Interesting.

Kali

Because Edward is toxic.

Angourie

Do vampires have to go to the toilet? If so, do they pee blood.

Kali

I was literally just thinking this, like –

Maija

Yeah, or do they shit it?

Angourie

Uuuuaaagggghhh!

Kali

But like, surely they have to excrete it in some way, like ...

Angourie

I don't know!

Maija

Yeah, or do they just use all the nutrients, cos there's that scene in the book where, um, Bella's like, "Can you eat the food?" um and then Edward, like, eats the food to show her, but he has to choke it up later. Like, that's kind of talked about in *Midnight Sun* where he physically has to choke it up later, which shows he doesn't shit.

Angourie

One last thing that I wanted to say before we close off is that the thing that I love about the *Twilight* series, and this is something that I loved when reading it for the second time, is the aesthetic. The aesthetic of rainy, cold, dark, gloomy, forest, trees, vampires, werewolves, love it! Just – and the movie, and it's all blue, and just [kiss noise] love it. Chef's kiss, that is one of my favourite things ever, and I think the aesthetic is really what, like, solidified my complicated enjoyment of this series.

Maija

Yeah. Iconic soundtrack as well.

Angourie

Oh, my god!

Maija

Iconic.

[theme music]

Angourie

Thank you so much for listening! If you enjoyed it, you can subscribe on iTunes so you never miss an episode, you can also rate and review on your podcast platform of choice. You can follow The Community Library on Instagram @the_community_library, and use the hashtag #thecommunitylibrary on Instagram or Twitter. The podcast artwork is designed by Ashley Ronning. You can look at more of her work at ashleyronning.com, or you can go to helio-press.com, that's dash the symbol. Once again, thank you very much for listening, thank you for hanging out with me, guys, this was really fun!

Maija

Yeah, thank you!

Kali

This was the best, and thank you to everyone [for] listening to this really dumb deep analysis of *Twilight*!

Angourie

If you guys want a part two, then part three, then part four, there are three other books in the series, so if you like it, I guess let me know and we'll do more? Ah, we might be back, we might not be, but stay safe, wash your hands, and read a book, preferably *Twilight*.

Angourie, Maija and Kali

Bye!

[theme song]

Kali

Definitely, I mean, like, I –

Angourie

It – it also assumes –

Kali

Sorry –

Angourie

No, you go!

Kali

Classic! Classic!

Maija

Yeah, I mean, like, I think Bella is just relatable –

Kali

I don't know, I feel like that wasn't –

Kali

Sorry –

Maija

Ooh, sorry, you go first –

Kali

Mm-mm! You go, you go, you go!

Kali

And also just that whole montage where she, like –

Maija

The Community Library – Angourie Rice

Another thing is that – oh, you go first, babe.

Maija

And I think –

Angourie

I mean, I think –

Maija

You go first –

Angourie

No, you go, you go, Maija. No, no, you go, you had a thought before.