

EXPLORING NATURE'S NARRATIVE: ECOLOGICAL THEMES IN STEPHENIE MEYER'S LIFE AND DEATH

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Abstract

This research comprehensively explores Stephenie Meyer's literary works from a dual perspective. The first analysis delves into the intricate interplay between nature and narrative in *Life and Death*, a gender-swapped reinterpretation of the *Twilight* series. Through an exhaustive examination of setting, characters, and thematic elements, the study unveils nature's transformation from a backdrop to a dynamic force intricately interwoven with characters' emotions and experiences. Meyer's strategic use of nature as a metaphorical canvas mirrors inner worlds, emotional dynamics, and pivotal moments, with recurring natural environments paralleling characters' transformations and relationships. Furthermore, the study posits that interactions involving vampire characters and the Quileute wolves emphasize a thematic focus on balance and interconnectedness between humanity and nature. The second facet of the research centers on ecological elements within *Life and Death*, analyzing the significance of the setting, character-environment interactions, ecological imbalances, and the depiction of the vampire lifestyle in relation to ecological themes. This inquiry demonstrates how supernatural fiction can effectively convey ecological messages, deepening our understanding of environmental themes in literature and popular culture.

Key Words:

Vampire, Ecology, Twilight, Environment, Popular culture, Interconnectedness, Ecological imbalance, Stephenie Meyer

Stephenie Meyer's novel *Life and Death* reimagines her popular *Twilight* series with the genders reversed. Released in 2015 as part of the 10-year anniversary edition of *Twilight*,

Life and Death essentially reversed the genders of the primary characters. In this alternate version, Beaufort (Beau) Swan is the human protagonist, and Edythe Cullen is the Vampire's love interest. Beau moves to the small town of Forks, Washington, and enters a perilous romance with Edythe, a vampire. The novel's narrative structure remains the same. The gender switch gives readers a new perspective on the characters and their relationships. The novel *Life and Death* offers an alternative perspective to the original narrative. The depiction of ecological concepts through the setting, characterization, and morality of the vampire characters highlights the enduring significance of these subjects in literature. The novel focuses on the relationship between the natural world and supernatural elements that make one think of the complex connections between mankind, nature and the decisions that influence the environment.

Cherryl Glotfelty, in Introduction to *Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis* states that "all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" (xvix), and he defines that "Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature" (xviii). Peter Barry in *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, suggests that the primary objective of an eco-critic is "to re-read major literary works from an eco-centric perspective, with particular attention to the representation of the natural world" (264). The ecological crisis is a multifaceted challenge with significant implications for both the natural world and human societies. While witnessing the effects of human activity on the environment, there is a growing realization that preserving nature is essential for supporting and maintaining life on Earth.

One author who subtly discusses the importance and ecological concerns in her fiction is Stephenie Meyer. She deftly incorporates a variety of ecological factors into her novels that are crucial in determining the atmosphere and themes of the plot. The book's cover, which conjures up images of Adam and Eve in the beautiful Garden of Eden, is a perfect example of Meyer's deft use of vivid imagery from the very beginning. One of these key ecological elements is the setting itself. The setting of Forks, Washington, is an integral component of *Life and Death*, serving as more than just a backdrop—it becomes a dynamic force that influences the story's mood, character interactions, and overall atmosphere. Forks is depicted as a small town characterized by lush forests, a perpetually rainy climate, and abundant natural beauty. The town's dense and mysterious forests, towering trees, and thick undergrowth create an immediate sense of isolation and seclusion. This seclusion becomes a

metaphor for the characters' emotional states, emphasizing their individual struggles and the intensity of their relationships. The forests also contribute to the story's romantic allure and danger, providing a backdrop for key moments of intimacy and suspense.

The constant rain in Forks sets a melancholic and introspective tone. Rainy weather is closely associated with emotional moments in the narrative, matching characters' internal conflicts and desires. The rain intensifies the characters' emotional experiences, creating an atmosphere of heightened tension and passion. It also adds a layer of realism and grounding to the fantastical elements of the vampire narrative. Furthermore, the town's natural beauty and animal presence contribute to the sense of interconnectedness between the characters and their environment. The abundance of wildlife, such as deer and wolves, reinforces the idea that all life forms are connected within the ecosystem. This resonates with the vampires' ethical choices in the story, who opt to hunt animals instead of humans. Overall, the setting of Forks plays a pivotal role in moulding the narrative's ambience and themes. It amplifies the emotional resonance of the characters' experiences, indicates the interconnectedness of life, and provides a rich backdrop for the story's supernatural elements. By immersing readers in this atmospheric and nature-rich environment, the setting becomes essential in *Life and Death*, enhancing the overall reading experience. Timothy Morton once said in *The Ecological Thought* that,

Ecology has to do with love, loss, despair, and compassion. It has to do with depression and psychosis. It has to do with capitalism and with what might exist after capitalism. It has to do with amazement, open-mindedness, and wonder. It has to do with doubt, confusion, and skepticism. It has to do with concepts of space and time. It has to do with delight, beauty, ugliness, disgust, irony, and pain. It has to do with consciousness and awareness. It has to do with ideology and critique. It has to do with reading and writing. It has to do with race, class, and gender. It has to do with sexuality. It has to do with ideas of self and the weird paradoxes of subjectivity. It has to do with society. It has to do with coexistence (2).

Characters' interactions with the environment emphasize their emotional states and development. Meyer uses the setting and nature to establish a mood and reflect Beau's emotions. The symbolic connection between Beau's emotions and the natural environment is described in the novel. The natural world becomes a reflection of internal struggles and desires. For instance, the rain might imitate moments of tension or longing between characters. The author uses the weather and surroundings to mirror Beau's emotional state

and to establish a sense of atmosphere that reflects his feelings. Beau's move from the sunny Phoenix to the rainy Forks is a metaphor for his transition from happiness to sadness. The gloomy weather in Forks aligns with his feelings of loneliness and isolation, echoing his internal turmoil after his mother's remarriage. The rain can be seen as an extension of Beau's tears, linking his emotional pain with the weather. The use of rain as a symbol of sadness is a common literary device; in this case, it helps the reader better understand Beau's emotional journey. Additionally, the imagery of the thick fog covering the sun can represent Beau's sense of being trapped or confined.

The lack of sunlight and the obscured view symbolize his feeling of being stuck and not having clarity or direction in his new life. Meyer's choice to interweave nature and emotions in this way enhances the reader's understanding of Beau's experiences and emotions. The environment reflects his inner world, providing the narrative with deeper meaning. It is evidenced through her words in *Life and Death* that,

I didn't sleep well that night, even after I finally got my head to shut up. The constant *whooshing* of the rain and wind across the roof wouldn't fade into the background...I couldn't fall asleep until after midnight, when the rain finally settled into a quick drizzle. Thick fog was all I could see out my window in the morning, and I could feel the claustrophobia creeping up on me. You could never see the sky here; it was like that prison cage I'd imagined (9).

Indeed, a parallel mood shift can be observed in relation to the protagonist, where the absence of rain aligns with the character's positive and comfortable emotions. This correlation is highlighted by Beau's own words, suggesting a direct connection between the weather and his emotional state:

People greeted me in the parking for Monday morning. I didn't know all their names, but I smiled at everyone. It was colder this morning, but at least it wasn't raining... I was feeling a lot more comfortable than I had thought I would feel by this point. More comfortable than I had ever expected to feel here" (30).

When the rain subsides, it improves his overall mood, indicating that sunny or clear weather brings about a sense of contentment or well-being. This interplay between the protagonist's emotions and the weather further underscores the author's skill in using the natural environment to mirror and enhance the narrative's emotional depth. Beau calls Forks a "green hell". The term can be interpreted ecologically as describing a lush and dense forest environment. In this context, "green" symbolizes the abundance of vegetation, while "hell" adds an element of intensity, suggesting that the environment might be overwhelming or challenging for the protagonist to navigate or adapt to. The continuous rain and widespread forest can create a sense of being overwhelmed by nature, which could evoke feelings of both awe and potential unease. This ecological interpretation accentuates the impact of the environment on the protagonist's experience, highlighting the immersive nature of the setting and the interplay between human emotions and the natural world.

Meyer skilfully captures the allure and significance of nature through its breathtaking landscapes. Wearing by the complexities of human interactions, Beau seeks refuge in a realm beyond the human. His affections turn toward Edythe Cullen, a vampire of ice-cold demeanour, distinctly non-human. Edythe and her kin reside in the forest, a locale often chosen by vampires for its inherent connection to nature. Beau's aspirations extend to becoming part of this natural world as a vampire himself. Amid moments of contemplation, Beau wanders through the woods, where nature becomes a catalyst for clarifying his thoughts. Yet, lurking amidst his desires for belonging and introspection are the perils posed by a rival group of vampires.

Meyer frequently employs the forest as a recurring motif in Beau's dreams, intentionally underscoring the forest's vital role and the wildlife within. These elements emphasize the narrative's exploration of the blurred boundary between the human and the supernatural. Indeed, the novels hint at a fluid boundary between humanity and the animal kingdom, subtly interweaving these realms. This holistic approach is highlighted by Timothy Morton in *The Ecological Thought*:

Ecology includes all the ways we imagine how we live together. Ecology is profoundly about coexistence. Existence is always coexistence. Human beings need each other as much as they need an environment. Human beings are each others' environment. Thinking ecologically isn't simply about nonhuman things. Ecology has to do with you and me (4).

The book's cover depicts a scene reminiscent of the tale of Adam and Eve in the lush Garden of Eden. Similarly, within the same novel, a breathtaking meadow is a picturesque

setting, becoming the backdrop for intimate moments shared between Edythe and Beau. This evokes a desire for a perfect and peaceful life, adding depth to the story's themes. The meadow scene transports us to a time reminiscent of Adam and Eve, where they coexisted harmoniously with nature in a balanced and serene manner:

I reached the edge of the pool of light and stepped through the last fringe of ferns into the most beautiful place I had ever seen. The meadow was small, perfectly round, and filled with wild-flowers – violet, yellow and white. Somewhere nearby, I could hear the liquid rush of a stream. The sun was directly overhead, filling the circle with a haze of buttery sunshine. I walked slowly through the soft grass, swaying flowers, and warm, gilded air (201).

The interplay between the experiences of characters and the natural world adds depth to the narrative, immersing readers in a world where emotions and nature are intricately intertwined. Meyer intricately frames each crucial juncture against the backdrop of nature, employing diverse landscapes like the ocean and forest. For example, Julie Black, Beau's friend, subtly alludes to the reality of vampires during a beach encounter. Edythe reveals her true vampire nature to Beau amidst the encompassing tranquillity of the forest. These carefully selected settings serve to emphasize both the inherent beauty and the significant role of nature within the narrative.

The concept of a 'Vampire' can also be viewed as an ecological imbalance. Vampires are not naturally born but are created through an unnatural process. The production of such unnatural beings can have a profound negative impact on the natural world, leading to a collapse of the entire ecological balance and a loss of authentic identities. Eventually, the proliferation of these preternatural entities can result in destruction. Meyer's use of the phrase "so the lion fell in love with the lamb" (214) in *Life and Death* symbolizes human infatuation with animals, suggesting that such infatuations can disrupt the environmental equilibrium. Consequently, Meyer portrays how characters like Beaufort Swan also become symbols of ecological imbalance. The idea that vampires are not naturally occurring creatures and that their existence can upset the balance of nature is similar to how human activity can disrupt ecosystems. This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of the ongoing climate crisis, where one can witness the effects of human activity on the environment in real time. Meyer's portrayal of the relationship between humans and animals is a powerful example of how human behaviour can cause ecological damage. By depicting Beau as an

element of ecological imbalance, Meyer highlights the importance of preserving the environment and maintaining a balance between human activity and the natural world.

Moreover, the concept of vampires as disruptors of ecological balance can serve as a powerful metaphor for the pressing issue of overpopulation. As human populations surge, resources become strained, and ecosystems are stretched to their limits. This replicates the narrative where the natural food chain collapses due to extinction in a dystopian society. In this context, the vampire concept becomes a symbolic representation of an apocalyptic society in its entirety. These parallels draw attention to the potential dire consequences of unchecked growth and environmental disregard. Just as the presence of vampires upends the natural order in Meyer's narrative, the real-world consequences of overpopulation and ecological imbalance can lead to a world where resources are depleted, ecosystems are irreparably damaged, and society faces a catastrophic future. The cautionary tale woven into vampire mythology thus becomes a mirror reflecting human's responsibility to maintain ecological harmony in the face of burgeoning challenges.

Meyer marks the delicate equilibrium between vampires and their environment by highlighting the roles of Vampire leaders and the Quileute wolves. These characters serve as custodians of this equilibrium, ensuring that vampires are contained within certain limits. When the vampire population escalates, the vampire leaders and the Quileute werewolves step in to eliminate the excess vampires, thereby maintaining this crucial balance. This dynamic illustrates how nature and its creatures are interconnected and how nature enforces harmony through these characters' actions.

In Stephenie Meyer's *Life and Death*, the seamless fusion of nature and narrative unfolds as a tapestry of symbolism and emotional resonance. Nature, in all its forms - from the rainy backdrop of Forks to the picturesque meadow and beyond - serves as more than a setting. It becomes a dynamic, ever-present force that mirrors the characters' emotions and experiences, a canvas on which their inner worlds are projected. The transformation of Beau Swan, his yearning for the non-human world, and his connection with the enigmatic Edythe Cullen all find resonance in the natural world. Meyer masterfully crafts every significant moment against the backdrop of nature, from hints dropped on the beach to revelations in the forest. Furthermore, this interplay extends to a delicate balance, exemplified by the Vampire leaders and the Quileute wolves, who vigilantly safeguard the equilibrium between the vampire population and the environment. Through meticulous imagery and poignant symbolism, Meyer features the parallels between the characters' emotional journeys and the rhythms of nature. The themes of longing, harmony, duality, and the inherent

interconnectedness between humanity and the natural world are interwoven throughout the narrative. Just as Beau navigates the complexities of his emotions and choices, so does she navigate the dynamic natural world that serves as both a refuge and a challenge.

In conclusion, *Life and Death* is not merely a love story but a harmonious blend of human emotions and the nature surrounding them. Meyer's storytelling prowess lies in her ability to use nature as a setting and a living, breathing entity that resonates with the characters and readers alike. This nuanced interplay between the human heart and the natural world enriches the narrative, inviting an exploration of the deeper connections that bind both emotions and the environment.

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