I've heard that growl somewhere before . . .

SATURDAY'S WEREWOLF

THE DOCTRINE THAT MAKES
STEPHENIE MEYER'S LYCANTHROPES
GOLDEN INVESTIGATORS

By Eric W. Jepson

WEREWOLVES REALLY LATCH ONTO THE whole eternal marriage thing. Have you noticed? I don’t know if there was a substantial werewolf population where you served your mission; but on mine, they would hem at how we, like others, believe in a Supreme Being, and haw at the Joseph Smith story, but once we got into sealing and the eternal bonds of matrimony and families-can-be-together-forever, they really perked up. Ask anyone who’s ever taught a werewolf. They’ll tell you.

Better yet, ask Stephenie Meyer, the werewolf expert. Part of what makes her monsters so interesting is where they diverge from the monstrous norm. Most pre-Twilight vampires don’t sparkle, and most pre-Twilight werewolves don’t believe in eternal marriage. But Meyer’s do.

For all the online chatter about Stephenie Meyer and her Scary Mormon Agenda, most alarmed bloggers have overlooked how her monsters—werewolves in particular—fall into a classic Mormon literary pattern: 1 the Premortal Romance.

The Premortal Romance we tend to remember best is the Douglas Stewart / Lex de Azevedo cheese fest, Saturday’s Warrior, but the tradition goes back much farther than that.

NEPHI ANDERSON STARTED things off in 1898 with Added Upon, a book that at one time (at least in Nephi, Utah) was given to every young woman to read. Added Upon is Anderson’s first book and by far his most popular—too bad, because it certainly isn’t his best—because it appeals to something deeply Mormon in us. Beginning in the premortal realm, the story follows a boy and a girl through mortality, paradise, the Millennium, and finally to exaltation.

Out for a premortal walk one day, Honan sees Delsa’s “sweet face” and is drawn to her immediately. When she sees him, a “pleased smile overspread[s] her face,” and she explains that she had been making a “dream picture” of her ideal face when he arrived and that now her “dream face seem[s] to blend with [his].” Drawn together, they converse and “both faces [shine] with a soft, beautiful light. The joy within [...] too deep for words. [...] Instinctively, they [cling] to each other.”

The story of Honan and Delsa (Rupert and Signe on earth) thus becomes the prototypical Premortal Romance. When they meet on earth, they bond immediately. When Rupert first hears Signe’s voice, he is “spellbound” and she, noticing him, looks upon him “steadily.” One thing leads to another, and pretty soon they’re in heaven again, together forever.

It’s this mode of romantic relationship, popular in Mormon literature since Anderson came up with it, that Stephenie Meyer’s werewolves experience.
Saturdays

WEREWOLF

The most significant distinguishing trait of a Meyer werewolf is “imprinting,” the sudden and permanent formation of a mate relationship. Jacob, the novel’s preeminent werewolf, describes imprinting as an experience akin to gravity: “When you see her,” he says, “suddenly it’s not the earth holding you here anymore. She does. And nothing matters more than her.” Even Meyer’s human heroine, Bella, recognizes that an imprinted werewolf couple are “utterly right together, two puzzle pieces, shaped for each other exactly.” The vampire Edward compares imprinting to “fairies’ love spells, [...] like magic.” Through imprinting, Twilight’s werewolves find their “soul mates.” One party is bound to the other, becoming the other’s “perfect match. Like he was designed for her alone.”

The *Twilight* books’ werewolves never know when (or if) they will imprint on someone. Once they become werewolves during adolescence, they may imprint at any time, and when they do, any prior relationship becomes unsustainable. An imprinted werewolf can never turn away from his or her imprintee.

Sudden recognition that lasts eternally? The Premortal Romance.

Meyer has expanded—maybe exploded—this classic device of Mormon fiction and brought to it a moral complexity missing in her progenitors’ work. Let’s look a little closer at *Added Upon* and *Saturday’s Warrior*.

After *Added Upon*’s Honan meets Delsa, he cannot make immediate sense of his reaction to her:

He was drawn to her more than to the many others who were equally valiant. As he thought of it, its strangeness occurred to him. Why should it be so? He did not know. Delsa was fair; so were all the daughters of God. She had attained to great intelligence; so had thousands of others. Then wherein lay the secret of the power which drew him to her?

He has no answers and no one around seems to have had a similar experience. What Honan and Delsa learn about their upcoming mortal adventure is that, once born, they have no guarantee of meeting again. Yet they dare to hope they will, that “Father may order it that way.” Honan leaves first, and Delsa tells him, “You will go before and prepare a welcome for me. Then I will come.”

The reader’s not stupid, though. The first rule of romantic fiction dictates that these two will consummate their love in mortality. Anderson plays with that expectation, though, withholding identities as the reader strives to match mortals to their premortal counterparts. Identifying the non-Mormon Rupert as Honan comes rather easily, but Delsa’s mortal identity is uncertain until Rupert meets Signe and they all but call each other by name.

As they fall in love, Signe teaches Rupert Mormon theology and he finally suggests that “if we ever lived as intelligent beings in a pre-existent state—and I now can not doubt it—we two knew each other there. Perhaps we were the closest friends.” And Signe reveals she has long felt the same: “Well, I seemed to know you from the first. Though you looked bad and like a tramp, I knew you were not, and I felt as if I had known you before.” Then, “they were silent again, ‘reading life’s meaning in each other’s eyes.’”

From then on, Rupert and Signe are like Meyer’s imprinted werewolves. “The peace and certainty they always [radiate is] downright puke-inducing,” as she writes in *Breaking Dawn*.

Having finally met in mortality, Rupert and Signe are no longer free to pursue other romantic interests—indeed, they have no need to. Relationship expectations, now fulfilled, need only be lived and enjoyed. This is the state of satisfaction that will be the endgoal for all future premortal romantics in Mormon literature.

We don’t meet *Saturday’s Warrior*’s premortal romantics Julie and Todd until after they have already been in love “forever.” As they near the beginning of earth life, Julie panics: “What good are promises in a world where everything will be forgotten?” But Todd assures her that he will find her. “And as for not recognizing you, that’s like saying that the sun and the moon and the stars will never recognize their glory. And beauty and virtue will never recognize their own!” They then enact their future meeting in song, claiming that “The circle of our love extends / Beyond the reach of time / Beyond the span of days and years, it goes forever.”

Like Rupert’s in *Added Upon*, Todd’s mortal search for gospel truth climaxes with his discovery of lost, premortal love. Julie, however, is born into a Mormon family and is thus wrapped up in a quest for love from the beginning. When we first meet her as a Mormon mortal, she is engaged to Wally, whom she abandons for Peter, later returning to Wally who, as a returning missionary, brings the newly converted Todd with him. Upon seeing each other, Julie and Todd sing the song they last sang in premortality. And in true imprinted-werewolf fashion, they are lost to any other potential mates—even to one standing right next to them.

This distinction between a premortal romance and a merely mortal romance is a typical component of the genre. Before meeting Signe, Rupert had been betrothed to someone else. And the first *Twilight* werewolf to imprint, Sam, had been in a committed relationship with Leah before imprinting on Emily. But here we get into Meyer’s strengths. Her handling of the mate-swap offers the arguably more mature perspective I’ve been hinting at. When *Saturday’s Warrior*’s Wally is horrified by Julie’s abandonment, his friend tells him, “It’s all part of the plan, remember?” And Rupert’s fiancée conveniently dumps him, leaving him free to discover Signe. But in Meyer’s world, for Sam to be with Emily, he must abruptly abandon her cousin Leah. “And that’s what happened. He broke Leah’s heart. He went back on every promise he’d ever made her.”

That word “promise” is key. Each of *Saturday’s Warrior*’s...
major characters makes premortal promises to be fulfilled while on earth, and the individual character arcs see these promises met. The script generally avoids having characters make conflicting promises after the veil falls, and those who do must recognize their error and fulfill only the premortal promise in order to be happy. Julie’s stress and uncertainty are not alleviated until she has her “imprinting” experience, nullifying her engagement to Wally. In *Added Upon*, Rupert’s promises were broken by another, leaving him morally unconflicted.

This conflict between promises mortal and eternal—and Sam the werewolf’s struggle to resolve them—shows a new complexity in the previously simplistic trope of the premortal romance. Sam’s bliss with his soul mate is tainted by self-loathing.

Julie and Todd experienced instant certainty that the “circle of [their] love [began] In God’s eternal plan”; Rupert and Signe shared a “glimpse of past glories”; but Meyer’s werewolves have no simple, doctrinal explanation to fall back on. Their devotion is accompanied by broken promises and heartbreak, making any pre-imprinting relationship hazardous and uncertain. If imprinting is a form of the premortal romance, it is a version in which mortal events do not agreeably follow a forgotten script.

**BUT THIS ALTERATION,** in addition to making for a more complex fiction, better confronts a key Mormon concept: agency. The very concept of a soul mate suggests that the question, “Whom shall I marry?” has but one correct response and that each person must live in fear of inflicting pain on others while seeking a fated, imprint-like experience. Spencer W. Kimball famously said (and his timing suggests he may have been responding to *Saturday’s Warrior*), “‘Soul mates are fiction and an illusion.’ A mirage leading one away from self-directed, agency-based, mate-seeking into a sort of romantic roulette in hopes of accidentally finding the one-and-only soul mate.

Indeed, a one-and-only soul mate, as demonstrated by *Added Upon* and *Saturday’s Warrior*, is never a matter of agency. In neither story is even the premortal falling-in-love shown to be a matter of choosing. It’s a matter of happening. And if such soul mates do exist, then President Kimball was wrong: soul mates aren’t fiction—agency is. The soul-mate conceit—the entire premortal romance—conflicts with a core Mormon doctrine.

So when the werewolf Leah—whom Sam rejected when he imprinted on Emily—wants to have her romantic choices made for her, Jacob rightly calls her on that desire, calling it “just another way of getting your choices taken away from you.” She parries that “Sam, Jared, Paul, Quil . . . don’t seem to mind,” to which Jacob replies, “None of them have a mind of their own.” Is the price of being happy the loss of personal freedom?

Jacob attempts to take control of his romantic interests when he leaves Bella to allow her to pursue another. But this use of his agency plunges Jacob into romantic agony, leading him to double back on his words to Leah and covet the agency-free imprinting process. “Seemed like maybe getting your choices taken away from you wasn’t the very worst thing in the world. Maybe feeling like this was the worst thing in the world.”

Any attempt by the reader to resolve the apparent disconnect between agency and happiness requires a return to Meyer’s Mormon heritage and the climactic event in Mormonism’s premortal narrative. As *Added Upon*’s Honan describes the conflict, the question was whether to “retain our agencies to choose” or “without that privilege [...] cease to be intelligences, and become as inanimate things [...] [saved without] choice on our part.” This, according to Mormon understanding, was the central conflict of premortal life, and Meyer’s adaptation of the premortal romance for her werewolves revives the War in Heaven here in the mortal plane. She thus showcases the difficulties inherent in the premortal-romance formula, giving her werewolves neither a “glimpse of past glories” nor an “atmosphere of peace and assurance” nor a...
sense of “why they’re here / [Nor] . . . who they really are.”

Instead, Meyer’s werewolves are left with no comforts beyond those given them in relationships they did not choose for themselves. And Meyer doesn’t allow the question of agency to slip to the side with a manufactured pre-mortal excuse. She has not forgotten that, in Mormon doctrine, agency “is the specific gift by which God made his children in his image and empowered them to grow to become like him through their own progression of choices.”9 The werewolves’ loss of agency in this matter suggests a stopped progression and complicates the pat conclusions presented in previous premortal romances. Speaking with Time Magazine, Meyer calls free will, “a huge gift from God.”10 By stripping it from her werewolves, by making their happiness dependent on losing their freedom, she makes an artistic choice that resonates more deeply with readers who understand the decidedly Mormon ethos on which she made that choice.

Which is exactly why we as Saints need to redouble our efforts to bring the gospel to these tortured souls. Just imagine the werewolves’ joy when we explain to them that they, like Rupert and Signe, like Julie and Todd, were not forced into love by the vagaries of nature but encountered each other long ago, before the worlds were, as they sat in a heavenly council, surreptitiously holding hands as the creation of the earth was planned.

NOTES

1. No, not the creepy-stalker-boy-who-follows-you-around-but-won’t-sleep-with-you pattern. Although it does offer that, too. But those are vampires. They never get past the first discussion.
2. My father’s hometown. I hear lots of strange things happened there in the ‘50s and ‘60s.
3. If you didn’t receive Added Upon as a gift from your ward upon turning twelve, you can read it for free online at Project Gutenberg (gutenberg.org). The site also offers Anderson’s masterpiece, Dorian.
4. Another trait of the premortal romance is the cheesy line. Here’s one. Prepare yourself for more.
5. Whatever the heck that means.
6. Poor Wally.
7. More comforting words were never spoken.