



Simply surrender to the vampire

AFTER A YEAR of crunching through life creditless – a year of collapsing banks, inflation, deflation, high interest rates, low interest rates, the pound falling, the dollar rising, and unemployment burgeoning – we are now all standing like Icelanders, on edge of the abyss – the edge of a catastrophic slump, wondering like the experts, what exactly will happen next. We, in common with central bankers, economists and government advisors, haven't the foggiest idea. Will there be headlines about breadlines? Will some latter day Busby Berkeley cheer us all up by putting a thousand chorus girls through their paces in bizarrely disciplined musical displays? Will there be movie extravaganzas? Will there be mass displays of youthful calisthenics in white blouses and black knickers, or shoals of bathing beauties engaging in tastefully choreographed swimming displays? Who knows whether we will keep smiling through, or simply surrender to hysteria and depression?

Modern youth are so untested and so . . . well there's no other word for it . . . *pampered*. They think about nothing except getting free texts and free minutes on their increasingly fancy phones and carousing through Primark stores looking for bargains; there they go, at every available moment, mooching around Zavvi and HMV looking for the latest shoot-em-up games and CDs to drown out the boredom. High spenders? They certainly are, thinking nothing of packing food courts with their unruly displays of

conspicuous consumption; sated upon luxury, logos, and preternaturally ragged clothes.

And then there is the fashion, if you can call it that, of failing to keep your pants hitched up – the idea being that the lads can display the outline of their shapely bottoms and their good taste in underwear. Girls have fought back by displaying their bras and the tops of their skimpy knickers. Even Barack Obama has been moved to pontificate upon *anti-fit chic* and perpetually falling down jeans. At Kings School, a comprehensive in Hampshire, the boys have been told to wear white or black underpants and a belt to keep their trousers up. The girls have been told that coloured bras are offensive. Outraged parents have, as a matter of course, leapt to their offspring's defence attacking the school authorities for "invading their children's privacy" blithely unaware that their children's disregard for privacy is exactly the problem.

How are such youngsters, I wonder, going to cope with the tough times ahead? Given as they are to an excess of mawkish sentimentality and emotional indiscipline, how are these youths going to deal with the need to tighten their belts and pull themselves up by their bootstraps? Will those *emo* boys get their foppish hair cut? Will those given to *screamo* enthusiasms lose the metalwork and let the multiple piercing holes heal? Let's hope so, because it is difficult to see how these fads will fit with the dark days of depression ahead.

More fitted for the times are perhaps the *Goths* with their bold embrace of collapse and disorder, their allusion to pale ill health, caked with make-up and noisy with the rattle of chains and studs. Black, white, and livid purples, there is definitely something of the tomb about them. Pessimistic about their prospects, these young people appear to have surrendered to the *undead*, a twilight world in which raw emotion, upsetting their mums, and outraging the neighbours has taken precedence over the need to accommodate to the demands of the labour market. "What labour market?" I can hear you say. And, you may have a

point as the Wonder of Woolies evaporates and the *High Street* is just beginning to remind us of *Elm Street*. Perhaps these kids have got just what it takes – they are unlikely to play the *fight for work and dignity* game. Perhaps they will greet the slump with a buoyant nihilism, a refusal to embrace the idea of their place on the scrapheap.

One of the *Latterday Saints*, out there in Utah, has been closely studying these developments and has decided that *paranormal romance* is just the thing that modern youth needs, tales of the *undead*: werewolves, zombies and vampires. This has led Stephanie Meyer, a Mormon mother of three, to hit upon a best-selling formula with her *Twilight Series* of novels about vampires (14 million copies sold worldwide). It is a world in which a beautifully pale consumptive-looking young man protects the girl he is drawn to by refusing to consummate their relationship – he refuses to bite her proffered neck – he refuses to drink from her fountain of life, becoming instead preoccupied with the struggle to protect her from less scrupulous vampires, who fulfil their desires at every available opportunity.

The print run for *Breaking Dawn*, the fourth novel in the *Twilight Series*, was 3.2 million copies. 1,300,000 copies were sold within the first 24 hours after the book's release in August. Not quite Harry Potter, but not far off. Now, the first movie adaptation called *Twilight* is about to be released and the sound track has become the biggest selling album in the United States. Stephanie is so busy working on new novels and movie treatments that she has no time to answer her fans – consequently, she has delegated her “little brother” Seth to deal with fans and to post cheesy comments on the *Official Stephanie Meyer's website*. Evidently, there will be other films and many more books.

This is, I have no doubt, due to the fact that teenage girls and quite a few lads are drawn ineluctably to the boy who just says “no” while all the time exuding an erotic energy pregnant with the possibility that he

might one day, disastrously to be sure, just say “yes!” We all know that the exchange of body fluids can be lethal, particularly blood and semen, so when Bella Swan (Kirsten Stewart) offers herself to Edward Cullen (Robert Pattison) the much-loved son of a family of suburban vampires, we can all be reassured that she will withhold the blood and he will withhold the semen.

This is an uplifting tale of restraint in which an impossibly sexy young chap proves that not even vampires are all bad. I’m not sure whether the President and Counsellors of *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* will entirely approve, but Ms Meyers, who “refuses to write about pre-marital sex”, should definitely be given credit for delivering her wholesome message in such a cunning subliminal guise.

Yet as this literary enthusiasm takes its course generating a vast fortune amid the deepening economic gloom I hope that the vampires and their lovers succeed in overturning the debilitating moral strictures issuing from Hollywood and Utah.