

Fifty Shades of Grey ?

BY SYLVESTER TONDERAI

Fifty Shades of Grey is a 2011 erotic-novel-turned-movie by British author Erika Mitchell under her pen name E L James. The second and third volumes, *Fifty Shades Darker* and *Fifty Shades Freed*, were published in 2012. The Fifty Shades trilogy was developed from a *Twilight* fan fiction series originally titled *Master of the Universe* and published episodically on fan-fiction websites under the pen name "Snowqueen's Icedragon". The piece featured characters named after Stephenie Meyer's characters in *Twilight*, Edward Cullen and Bella Swan. After comments concerning the sexual nature of the material, James removed the story from the fan-fiction websites and published it on her own website, FiftyShades.com. Later she rewrote *Master of the Universe* as an original piece, with the principal characters renamed Christian Grey and Anastasia Steele and removed it from her website before publication.

E. L. James's *Fifty Shades* trilogy is topping best-seller lists around the world, including those of the United Kingdom and the United States. The series has sold over 100 million copies worldwide and been translated into 52 languages, and set a record in the United Kingdom as the fastest-selling paperback of all time. The trilogy was dubbed "mommy porn" by some news agencies (though it's not just mommies who are reading it). Thirty- to fifty-year-old women are recommending the trilogy as the jump start to mommy libido. In the US, the film has become the fastest selling R-rated movie in decades. *Fifty Shades* revived interest in female erotica. Several popular works, such as Anne Rice's *The Sleeping Beauty quartet* and M.M. Majer's *Ero 4*, have been republished to meet the higher demand.

On *The Today Show* on MSNBC, James described the *Fifty Shades* trilogy as "my midlife crisis, writ large. All my fantasies in there, and that's it." And her fantasies include her male lead and successful entrepreneur, Christian Grey, making contracts of sexual bondage, dominance, discipline, female subjugation, sadism and masochism (BDSM) to the virginal college student Anastasia Steele. The movie premiered in theatres on the eve of Valentine's Day. And, as a Christian apologist and columnist, I reviewed it. *Fifty Shades* has been popularised and sensationalised by the steamy, lengthy, and ultra-explicit sex scenes that are scandalous and shocking. But those ultra-explicit and scandalous sex scenes are exactly why believers should steer clear of *Fifty Shades*.

It is not recommendable to read *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy or watch the movie because sex is more than use. Sex – and all the things that physically, emotionally, and mentally lead to sex – was created by God to be mutually shared between a married man and woman. Sex is an expression of love that reflects the divine love of God – love that is free, total, fruitful, and faithful. Pornography and erotica are a mockery of the intimacy and beauty of that love. It reduces the essence of sex to mere use, turning something sacred and Godly into something profane and dark. The lust that these books infect us with is all about self-gratification – it's all about use. Lustful thoughts lead to lustful actions. The movie is pornographic in the extreme. It is a "terrible" movie, according to *The New York Times*, with bad writing and awkward dialogue (*Us Weekly* lists "50 Problems With the Raunchy Flick"). But far worse, it is a porn movie disguised as a romance. According to *The Atlantic*, the film shows at least 20 full minutes of sex.

The plague of pornography is an epidemic in today's culture, and this movie will make things far worse. *GQ*, a magazine not known for biblical morality, recently cited reasons readers should quit watching pornography immediately. Among them:

- Porn damages the brain. Scientists at Cambridge University recently determined that people addicted to pornography show similar brain activity to alcoholics or drug addicts.
- Porn motivates people to seek new sexual partners. This is an example of the Coolidge Effect, or novelty-seeking behaviour.
- Porn use escalates. In one study, 64 percent of porn viewers reported that their tastes in porn had become more extreme or deviant.
- Pornography saps energy. In the same study, 67 percent reported an increase in energy levels and productivity when they stopped viewing porn. *Fifty Shades of Grey* will spread the plague of porn to even more people. Don't be among them.

The movie glamorizes and normalizes sexual abuse. One study concluded that nearly every interaction between Ana and Christian was emotionally abusive, including stalking, intimidation, and isolation. It also noted pervasive sexual violence, and that Ana exhibits classic signs of an abused woman. A second study showed a correlation between those who read the novel and developing an eating disorder, having abusive romantic part-

ners, engaging in binge drinking, and having five or more sexual partners before the age of 24. E L James' misogynistic fantasy in *Fifty Shades* promotes a warped idea of healthy sex. *Fifty Shades* is the most sexually explicit, most notorious, most morally questionable film of the year so far. Although it is clear the movie directors tried to tone down the sordid details in the trilogy, the film still loses its footing – both morally and structurally. After taking away Anastasia's virginity, Christian even reveals to Ana that he lost his at fifteen to one of his mother's friends, Elena Lincoln, and that his previous dominant/submissive relationships, in which he was the submissive partner, failed due to incompatibility. She is made to sign several dominant/submissive sex contracts – bondages without chemistry. He even spansks her. One horrifying scene towards the end is when Grey administers six lashes to Ana with a belt. It is virtually impossible to watch. Even the organization Stop Porn Culture called for a boycott of the movie based on the book because of its sex scenes involving bondage and violence.

Sir Salman Rushdie said about the book: "I've never read anything so badly written that got published. It made *Twilight* look like *War and Peace*." Maureen Dowd described the book in *The New York Times* as being written "like a Bronte devoid of talent," and said it was "dull and poorly written." Jesse Kornbluth of *The Huffington Post* said: "As a reading experience, *Fifty Shades*...is a sad joke, puny of plot". Archbishop Dennis Schnurr of Cincinnati said in an early February 2015 letter, "The story line is presented as a romance; however, the underlying theme is that bondage, dominance, and sadomasochism is normal and pleasurable." The US Executive Director of the National Center on Sexual Exploitation calls the movie "a sensationalized lie, telling women that they can, and should, fix violent and controlling men by being obedient and devoted, and that, somehow, this is romantic. It is no surprise that Hollywood is betting millions of dollars that now is the right time to offer sexual abuse and sexual violence against women as mainstream entertainment."

At an interview before the awards began in February 2015, Melanie Griffith was standing beside her daughter, Dakota Johnson, who stars in *Fifty Shades of Grey*. A reporter asked Griffith if she had seen the movie. She immediately answered, "No, I don't think I can." Johnson was clearly angered and even the reporter tried to get Griffith to see it, but she was firm. If a film is so immoral that a mother can't see her daughter act in it, why should anyone else see it? In March 2012, branches of the public library in Brevard County, Florida, removed copies of *Fifty Shades of Grey* from their shelves, with an official stating that it did not meet the selection criteria for the library and that reviews for the book had been poor. In Macaé, Brazil, in January 2013 court ruled that bookstores throughout the city must either remove the series entirely from their shelves or ensure that the books are wrapped and placed out of the reach of minors.

Genesis 1:18-19 teaches that men and women are made in God's image; this means that what a couple does, including sex, should express the will and purpose of God. In *The Meaning of Marriage*, Pastors Tim and Kathy Keller point out, "Sex is God's appointed way for two people to reciprocally say to one another, 'I belong completely, permanently, and exclusively to you.' You must not use sex to say anything less." God hates any form of violence in marriage (Malachi 2:13-16). BDSM includes humiliation and domination, practices that are at odds with the way we were created and is at odds with honouring your spouse's body as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:18; Hebrews 13:4). In Ephesians 5:25 Apostle Paul applies the term 'ought' signifying that love is an expression of willingness not a command. Love is essentially a choice, not a feeling. Your body belong to God first (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) then to your spouse (1 Corinthians 7:4). There are some things you cannot do with a sacred vessel. God cautions us to "flee from sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18) and to take our eyes off worthless things (Psalm 119:37). Job remarked, "I have made a covenant with my eyes" to refuse sexual sin (Job 31:1). Let's make the same covenant today. The Hebrew term 'ezer (Genesis 2:20-25) means "helper-companion" or closest friend; it comes from a verb that means "to surround and protect." May your spouse be your best friend. *Fifty Shades of Grey?* No shades at all! ❏

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