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"Is That What You Dream About? Being a Monster?": Bella Swan and the Construction of the Monstrous-Feminine in The Twilight Saga

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“Is That What You Dream About? Being a Monster?”:

Bella Swan and the Construction of the Monstrous-Feminine in *The Twilight Saga*

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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DEDICATION

First, I dedicate this dissertation to my mom and dad, Brenda L. Firestone, Ed.D. and Timothy Firestone. Thank you for instilling in me a belief that I could do anything I wanted with hard work, dedication, and practice. Between the music lessons, endless band practices, musical rehearsals, and recitals, I ran them ragged all over town in the pursuit of a richer artistic life. They complained little although it took up a great deal of time, gasoline, and expense, because they believed that not all learning happens in books. I'm grateful for their willingness and ability to let me experience those things and many more.

Next, I dedicate this labor of love/hate to my husband, Michael Rowland. The Board wishes to recognize your exemplary effort and hard work these last six years. Thank you for loving me, putting up with me, and enduring the string of stray dogs, nights with little sleep, small battles over chores, and my endless talk about menstruation, feminism, and *Twilight*. I know it's been downright nauseating at times. You're a good man—the *best* man—and I'm fortunate to have found a partner in life who challenges me as much as he delights me. For this you deserve so much more than thanks.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my fellow Aca-fans who choose to critically engage in texts that they genuinely love. It is difficult and sometimes scary work pulling to pieces the very *thing* that brings us joy, but we do it in the pursuit of academic inquiry and creating tighter bonds within fan communities. To my fellow Twi-hards especially, thank you for the overwhelmingly positive responses to this research. We may choose different "Teams" but we know we're all part of something special.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that Bella Swan is a representation of Barbara Creed's monstrous-feminine which serves to reinforce ideologies that insist women are abject, inherently dangerous to men, and threatening to a patriarchal status quo. Through close-textual analysis of *The Twilight Saga*, I demonstrate how the monstrous-feminine frames the hysterical teenage body, hypersexuality, and eternal motherhood as simultaneously unacceptable and unavoidable. These negative women's stereotypes continue to persist in dominant popular culture, and this double-bind is overcome only by the impossible perfection of vampirism. The monstrous-feminine invites constructions of teenage bodies as unstable and unreliable, women's sexuality as dangerous and impure, and motherhood as a requirement for a complete identity. These constructions are particularly dangerous in Young Adult literature and particularly inspirational in fanfiction.

CHAPTER 1:
“AND SO THE LION FELL IN LOVE WITH THE LAMB”¹:
AN INTRODUCTION TO *THE TWILIGHT SAGA*

In 2003, Mormon housewife and mother, Stephenie Meyer, had a dream about a teenage human girl and a vampire declaring their impossible love for each other in the quiet of a sunlit meadow. Less than a year later, Meyer would go on to write *Twilight* using the details of her dream as the basis, and her sister, Emily², encouraged her to try to have it published. When the novel hit bookshelves in 2005, it quickly gained popularity and went on to become a *New York Times* Best Seller, reaching number one just two weeks after being included in the list. To date, the saga has spent 219 non-consecutive weeks on the Best Seller list, last appearing April 21, 2013 (Best Sellers).

A quick Google search using the term Twilight saga (with no quotes), returns 17,500,000 hits. The top sites are corporate driven ones, ranging from official websites for the film franchise, the extensive Wikipedia entry for the general *Twilight* universe, and links for merchandise retailers like Amazon.com. Indeed, merchandise connected to the series has become serious business. The films alone have grossed more than 1.3 billion dollars

¹ (Meyer, *Twilight* 274)

² Her sister, Emily, and her brother, Seth, would both become characters in subsequent novels in the saga as Emily Young (imprintee to Sam Uley, alpha to the Quileute Pack) and Seth Clearwater (youngest member of the Quileute and later Black Pack).

domestically³ and the purchasing power of fans has meant that everything from bed sheets to *Twilight* themed cruises is available for a price.

One retailer that was particularly affected by the sales of saga related merchandise is Hot Topic. *Twilight* merchandise is credited with saving, at least in part, the company from filing chapter 11 bankruptcy (Odell). Hot Topic consistently produced negative sales data from 2005 until October 2008 (Rosenbloom, Odell). When the company secured permission to produce exclusive merchandise for *Twilight*, sales began to rise. The first *Twilight* film took an estimated \$500 million in merchandise sales, a hefty chunk of which belongs to Hot Topic (Dorian, Odell). While the subsequent sequels from the initial *Twilight* movie boom continued to buoy sales, Hot Topic's chief executive officer, Betsy McLaughlin, is concerned that there will not be another *Twilight* to sustain the company (Odell, Rosenbloom). This likely is true, but the saga's popularity has extended through other Young Adult focused series like *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, *The Mortal Instruments*, and *Divergent* which are helping to maintain the stores' sales momentum (Dorian).

While it appears that *The Twilight Saga* has been put to rest as all the books are published, the movies are released, and Meyer has gone on to write other works and start a film production company, the fan community who fell in love with Bella and Edward is still thriving. Google the phrase Twilight fan (without quotes) and it returns 60,100,000 hits. The first site on the Google search list, bellaandedward.com – THE Twilight Fansite, started on October 7, 2006, claims to be, “One of the largest fansites online dedicated to *The Twilight Saga* by Stephenie Meyer” (Bellaandedward.com). This page, like many others, includes a news board, message

³ *Twilight* - \$192,769,854 (2 April 2009); *New Moon* - \$296,623,634 (1 April 2010); *Eclipse* - \$300,531,751 (21 October 2010); *Breaking Dawn I* - \$281,287,133 (23 February 2012); *Breaking Dawn II* - \$ 292,298,923 (3 March 2013) (*Internet Movie Database*)

forum, and informative links to each book, film, and Stephenie Meyer. Perhaps most important is the fan section where people can upload fan art, fanfiction, convention information, and participate in the “fan of the month” contest.

But of course, as fandom and hype for the series grew so did anti-fandom and criticism, branding the Young Adult Paranormal Romance (YAPR) as regressive and anti-feminist. Much of this critique was pointed toward Bella Swan, the human heroine, and the relationship with appropriately Byronic vampire, Edward Cullen. While there was nothing strictly new about Meyer’s love story given the conventions for the Romance genre, there was mounting concern that Bella was not a good role model for teen girls and that the relationship was nothing short of abusive in the ways that Edward exercised control over her.

How and Why Study *Twilight*?

Still, for all of the back and forth over whether or not *Twilight* is “good” or “bad,” which is totally subjective to the critic, there is a necessity to examine the series further. Other scholars have noted it as a text worth mining because of its popularity and its wide reaching influence across ages and countries (Santos, Spahr, and Allan iv-v). Natalie Wilson makes the point that because the saga is coded female in terms of its genre, target audience, and fan base it’s a “perfect subject for feminist analysis” (“Utilizing *Twilight*” 61). She goes on to say:

[T]he realization that the *Twilight* phenomenon deserves feminist attention is in evidence not only in the growing number of publications devoted to analysis of the series, but also via the fact that various Women’s Studies courses ... now incorporate analysis of the phenomenon into their curriculum. (Wilson, “Utilizing *Twilight*” 61)

I add my voice to this research as an Aca-fan, someone who maintains a positive fan investment in the series and a critical researcher who seeks to uncover distressing, critical issues which may be present within the text. Like Wilson, I use the series as a common classroom example to engage students in conversations that cover broad topics like feminism, Romance, domestic violence, and gender stereotypes.

The How

For this analysis, I specifically examine only the books of the canon series and the associated supplemental texts by Meyer (*Midnight Sun* and *The Twilight Saga: The Official Illustrated Guide*). The films constitute their own fictive universe, and the inevitable comparisons of the two different worlds would ultimately serve to muddy some of the nuances that can only be found within the books' pages. Film is a visual medium, inviting an audience to immerse themselves in how the story plays out in front of them. Interpretation and imagination are limited through film as everything from lighting and camera movements to actors and costumes inevitably shape how the story is told (Belton 23). Generally, the audience is positioned as a fly on the wall, observing the events of the narrative as they unfold with no separation from that illusion unless a character specifically breaks the fourth wall (Belton 23).

My intent in my analyses of the books is to take into account Bella's first person limited perspective, through which the majority of the story is told. In telling her own story, drawing from her thoughts, feelings, and experiences, Bella is the best source to interrogate the monstrous-feminine as she at times describes herself in the language of an Other. For example, in discovering that Edward can't hear her thoughts she asks him, "My mind doesn't work right? I'm a freak?" (Meyer, *Twilight* 181). While the verbal question subtextually exposes her

insecurity, it's her inner thoughts that follow it—"I'd always suspected as much, and it embarrassed me to have it confirmed"—that truly provides the insight for the upheaval and discomfort of her lived experience (Meyer, *Twilight* 181). These key observations and explanations are largely absent from the films and can only be garnered from close reading and analysis of the books, making it crucial to remain contained to the canon source material.

The theoretical work of Barbara Creed, Julia Kristeva, and Elizabeth Grosz provides the tools to examine Bella as the monstrous-feminine. While scholarship which applies to body politics and more particularly adolescent bodies abounds, the work deriving from the French psychoanalytic feminist tradition best serves to unpack the ways in which Bella performs and experiences abjection and monstrosity. Creed coined the term "monstrous-feminine" and her work is heavily reliant on that of Kristeva, so it makes sense to use both scholars' works as foundational to the analysis. Kristeva is credited as the first to so thoroughly explore the subject of the abject and abjection, and her examples in explaining and stretching these theories are diverse ranging from modern literature to the sociopolitical caste systems in India (18, 79). This presents the theoretical basis of the abject and the monstrous as flexible yet solid as both deal in uncertainties and liminalities while holding fast to the dichotomies that hold tensions of the double-binds that the characters encounter constantly.

Grosz's text *Volatile Bodies* specifically tackles gendered bodies, especially women's, and the corporeality of experiences that are sometimes dismissed as being only in the mind (vii). Bella often describes both emotionally and physically her state of being, and Grosz's text deeply investigates the cooperation between mind and body in matters of hysteria, sexuality, and reproduction—the three driving subjects of the content chapters for this dissertation.

The Why

My approach, methodologically situated as close textual analysis, is rooted in the work of Kenneth Burke, who theorized as early as the 1930s that literature functions as “equipment for living” (293). He explains that novels are “proverbs writ large,” providing prescriptions concerning reoccurring situations, themes, and messages; in turn as each novel is the strategic naming of a circumstance, which inevitably shares characteristics from other novels of its kind (e.g. *Twilight* would be similar to *The Vampire Diaries: The Awakening*), these texts begin to reveal commonalities which then provide observations that “should apply beyond literature to life in general (thus helping to take literature out of its separate bin and give it a place in a general ‘sociological’ picture)” (Burke 296).

Therefore, it is necessary and crucial for critical researchers to examine and analyze popular culture texts like Young Adult novels as a means of discovering the commonalities and ferreting out those implications for “life in general.” Bonnie Dow, who works primarily with television, asserts that media texts which are considered low-brow or low-culture are in need of more critical scholarly engagement, especially from people who do take enjoyment from them but have the additional lens of education to engage more deeply with the material (xiii). Dow further declares that media texts must be culturally and contextually situated rather than analyzed as stand-alone artifacts because they operate as a “public discourse that carries important meanings for its viewers, meanings that cannot be separated from their links to the larger context” (xiii-xiv). Her work recapitulates that of Burke as well as others; Wayne C. Booth insists that outside influences like the implied author must be accounted for side by side with the analysis of the text (71).

In order to situate and contextualize *The Twilight Saga* as a YAPR series, it must first be explained according to its distinct set of genre traditions and conventions. Critical research about Young Adult (YA) literature has grown significantly in the last ten years as the popularity for other series like *Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games Trilogy* has skyrocketed the genre into our cultural lexicon. Indeed, Leisa Clark recalls how she was tasked with separating books for young children from those for teen readers when she worked for a bookstore in New York during the 1980s; when her task was complete, “the new young adult section filled only four shelves on a wall unit situated in the back of the store” (Clark 1). Today, any bookseller, including online sellers like Amazon, has a section completely devoted to YA that takes up a more significant amount of space than Clark’s four shelves.

Similarly, Romance is consistently rated as the number one or number two selling genre, just behind Mystery, year after year. Scholarship focused on Romance literature began in the early 1980s just as the contemporary genre market started to boom. *The Twilight Saga* is first and foremost a Romance, so it’s necessary to examine the conventions for the genre because even more so than being catalogued as YA, these are the structural elements that truly shape the characters and the plot lines. Paranormal Romance, a subgenre in the larger Romance category, adds the supernatural elements like vampires and werewolves without distorting the major genre’s conventions.

This cursory explanation for genre and genre conventions leads me to the review of the relevant academic literature that has been published specifically about *The Twilight Saga*. Next, I propose my intervention in the available scholarship concerning the monstrous-feminine and abjection. I follow this with the preview for the content chapters which delve more deeply into

Creed's theories and others through close textual analysis of Bella and hysteria, sexuality, and motherhood.

Young Adult as a Literary Category

YA literature comes in all shapes and forms, but one convention holds true across genres and formats. One of the key elements is that the major protagonist is a young adult and the emphasis for the story is about how s/he navigates their world from that perspective (VanderStaay 48). These characters experience the rites of passage appropriate to their fictive universes that allow them to become fully formed adults. Sometimes YA makes use of common teen experiences like going to high school and navigating those social relationships, but not all genres favor the "realism" of that part of the teen experience (Cline and McBride 115).

Storylines often mirror adult fiction in subject matter but are enacted by a central cast of characters who are of similar ages to the text's demographic. Themes like social "problems, feelings, relationships, love, and sex" are common in these texts, allowing readers to work through their own growing pains via symbolic interaction with literature (Ramsdell 209). While there is often controversy about the specific subjects that are tackled in YA literature, in recent years the genre has dealt with things like male rape, oral sex, incest, and teen pregnancy (Yampbell 350, 351). Authors recognize that these subjects, once limited to adult narratives, are part of the young adult's ever shifting landscape (Stevenson 87; Yampbell 351).

There's some controversy over which novels specifically mark the beginning of literature purposefully written for teenagers. Some cite series like *Nancy Drew* (1930) or *The Hardy Boys* (1927), while others look to *Sue Barton, Student Nurse* (1945) and, most popularly favored,

Seventeenth Summer (1942)⁴ as the first examples (Cart 8-9). By the end of the 1950s, the American Library Association (ALA) recognized that young readers needed to have books that were categorized for their age group (Cart 8). This led the publishing industry to implement the term “Young Adult” in the early 1960s which helped to strengthen overall sales and appeal to an increasing demographic of new consumers (Ramsdell 208, 212). Young adult is ambiguous at best because it can encompass ages from the late teens to children as young as eight (Ramsdell 208). In popular culture today, children falling in the age range from eight to twelve years old are commonly known as “tweens” (Cook and Kaiser 204). What used to be considered preteen or subteen, ages ten through twelve, has extended to much younger children who are emotionally and physically further behind than young teenagers ages thirteen through fifteen (Cook and Kaiser 204). So the YA demographic encompasses children as young as eight and as old as, and perhaps older than, fifteen. Ruth Cline and William McBride assert that adolescents at age fourteen intellectually function as adults, so the spread in the age range makes for some variance of cognitive development dependent on the individual (6).

If this is taken into consideration, then age hasn’t got much to do with what is listed as Young Adult. Instead of an age, this can be thought of as the “transitional period of one’s life that children enter at varying ages and from which adults emerge” (Ramsdell 208). Experiences rooted in rapidly changing bodies, puberty, advancing and increasingly complex social structures with peers, and the move toward independence from parents are more likely to guide the transition from childhood to adulthood (Cline and McBride 6-10; Latrobe and Drury 15-32). In this extended period of emotional upheaval, YA literature can function as a mode of escape to

⁴ While academics and literary critics favor *Seventeenth Summer* as the first, true YA novel, its author, Maureen Daly, staunchly disagrees and insists that when it was written, she intended for it to be considered, read, and critiqued as adult literature. (Cart 11)

help young readers cope with life (Ramsdell 209). As a category, YA appeals far beyond the reaches of the marketed age range as well, and offers adults the opportunity to symbolically return to the teenage years.

This no doubt adds to the YA genre's increasing popularity which means there will be no shortage of material for readers. Literature is often recast or reclassified as YA when it was initially published as adult literature. While some authors agree that there seems to be a discernable shift during the 1950s and 60s that indicate books are being written specifically with YA readers in mind, older texts that detail coming-of-age stories have been added to the genre (Martens 245; Cline and McBride 25; Yampbell 350; Stevenson 87). Classics like *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Little Women* (1868), and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) are all examples of coming-of-age tales which are sometimes included in YA reading lists. As such, this means that parameters for a potential YA canon are constantly in flux. Where the aforementioned stories may have appeal to some of the readers lumped into the YA category, others may find them dated and juvenile as the historical and cultural context is greatly inaccessible (Hunt 7).

Contemporary YA has a heavy investment in fantastic genres, including those stories that work within the niche of Paranormal fiction. Typically, these stories include elements of myths, legends, and folklores that allow young readers to make connections with certain aspects of culture that aren't accessible in other ways (Cline and McBride 157). *Twilight's* vampires, werewolves⁵, and Native American legends lend to this kind of literary competency that shows readers how these fantastic elements fit into larger folklores. However, because *Twilight* is also firmly planted in the romance genre, it's accessible to readers who may not necessarily favor traditional paranormal fiction (Latrobe and Drury 104).

The Romance Genre

Pamela Regis defines Romance fiction as: “a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines” (19). Her definition “focuses on the narrative essentials of the romance novel,” where, in her estimation, many critics distill the definition to a story that requires a love plot at the center of the narrative and a happy ending (Regis 21-22). Indeed, the participants in Janice Radway’s study of romance readers corroborate this where most of the women she surveyed said that the happy ending was the most important ingredient for a successful romance, while the desire to see a slow building and consistent love bud between the heroine and hero was secondary (Radway 67).

By emphasizing the heroine and turning courtship and betrothal into active events, Regis’s definition allows for works from various time periods and literary traditions to be analyzed and compared in terms of what exactly makes a Romance (22). While the focus of a Romance is the love story centering on the heroine and her potential partner, Regis takes care to map the arc of plot points that must align in order for the story to meet her definition. She hones eight specific conventions which essentially mark a text as Romance. Should a book miss just one these, it cannot be a Romance⁶. Regis’s requirements are as follows: 1. The Society Defined, 2. The Meeting, 3. The Barrier, 4. The Attraction, 5. The Declaration, 6. Point of Ritual Death, 7. The Recognition, and 8. The Betrothal (Regis 31-37). *Twilight* as a standalone novel meets all of these plot points, as do each of the subsequent novels.

⁵ To be clear, the wolves in *Twilight* aren’t traditional werewolves in that they don’t require a full moon to transform, nor do they receive the transformative ability from being bitten. They would be more appropriately deemed shapeshifters.

⁶ Regis uses two examples to drive home her point. *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen is, by her account, a Romance because it meets her eight requirements. *Gone with the Wind*, by Margaret Mitchell, is not although it meets six of the eight requirements and is often listed as a Romance because the major plot concerns the love “triangle” between Scarlett, Rhett, and Ashley.

Notice that Regis doesn't explicitly designate a sex scene as one of the stipulations. Often definitions of modern Romance insist that some kind of sexual relationship must be visible to the reader regarding the heroine and hero. This largely is due to the publication of *The Flame and the Flower* by Kathleen Woodiwiss in 1972 (Radway 33, 34). Significantly, it was the first published romance novel to include explicit descriptions of sexual situations—including a rape scene (Radway 34; Ramsdell 90, 150). Sexual attraction is sometimes the root of “The Attraction,” but it is just one factor that may also include “friendship, shared goals or feelings, society's expectations, and economic issues” (Regis 33). Slow building romances that don't necessarily revolve around sex are much more appropriate and marketable in the YA category (Ramsdell 209). *Twilight's* reputation as “abstinence porn” or the “erotics of abstinence” engages with this idea.

Romance as a genre is riddled with subgenres. Subgenres essentially “mash-up” existing genres, pairing the two categories' conventions together. For example, Mystery Romance (where Mystery works as an adjective describing the type of Romance) requires a central love story to drive the plot for the reader, again hitting Regis's eight hallmarks, while simultaneously the characters, usually the heroine, must solve an Agatha Christie style mystery. Other subgenres include but are not limited to: Paranormal (like *Twilight*), Gothic, Medical, Historical, Regency, and Saga Romance.

Additionally, subgenres can further distill into sub, subgenres. While a subgenre like Paranormal can include many elements of the supernatural all at once⁷ (e.g. vampires, werewolves, witches, ghosts, magic, demons, etc.), more likely there are a few key elements that add the fantastic essentials. *Twilight* only makes use of vampires and werewolves and is listed

best as Vampire Romance, which is its own legitimate subset of Paranormal Romance. Adult texts within the sub, subgenre include Charlaine Harris's Sookie Stackhouse novels⁸, Laurell K. Hamilton's *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* series⁹, and Susan Sizemore's *Primes* series.

YA Vampire Romance usually includes a teenage vampire protagonist and other YA conventions like a small town or high school setting (Gelder 136; Altner 115). Since the very early 1990s, YA Vampire literature has become a staple within the larger YA category. *The Twilight Saga* is arguably the most popular of the texts available, however there are a number of other series that have received popularity and acclaim on the coattails of the success of *Twilight*. L.J. Smith's *The Vampire Diaries* series¹⁰ has become incredibly popular, most particularly in part to the creation of the eponymous TV series in 2009 for the CW (Latrobe and Drury 104; Altner 119). *Vampire Academy* is the latest thing to excite readers and viewers as the first book's adaptation came to theaters just last year.

Critically Evaluating Romance

YA readers are encouraged to symbolically interact with texts in an effort to help them cope with the "growing pains" associated with growing up. There's no stigma attached to the teen reader looking for a momentary escape from the sometimes rough and disconcerting realities of high school life. Romance readers, however, are or feel that they are stigmatized for

⁷ For my money, the best YA Paranormal Romance that has a wealth of the supernatural is Cassandra Claire's *The Mortal Instruments* series. The heroine is part angel, Nephilim, and joins forces with others of her kind to defeat demons, aided by other "Downworlders" like werewolves, vampires, and a glittery warlock.

⁸ This now complete book series is probably best recognized by its other title, *True Blood*, which technically refers to the HBO show that was based on Harris's first book in the series, *Dead Until Dark* (2001). *True Blood* actually alludes to the synthetic blood, branded TruBlood, that the vampires drink.

⁹ This series is sometimes listed under the genre Urban Fantasy rather than Vampire Romance.

¹⁰ It's worth noting that Smith's series, originally published between 1991 and 1992 and which largely flew under the radar until *Twilight* gained popularity, uses many of the same conventions that Meyer's series made popular. This includes a vampire protagonist that lives largely on animal blood, that goes to high school as a way to socialize and become closer to humanity, and who protects a human woman love interest from other supernatural beings.

their choice in reading material (Pettigrew Brackett 348). As a genre historically written by women for a women's audience (Ebert 19), there's a certain amount of criticism that goes along with it, and negative stereotypes for the genre appear to insist that Romance novels are nothing but poorly written pornography. Romance is effectively branded as frivolous, feeble, and totally unreflective of "real life."

Still, it is a consistently top selling genre, and Janice Radway's groundbreaking study that first examined why women choose Romance discovered that most of the participants cited "escape" as the primary reason. Symbolically interacting with the text through the heroine provides these readers a form of escapism not available in other outlets (Radway 90, 91). She explains that romance readers are aware that reading "draws the individual *into* the book because it requires her participation" (Radway 91, author's emphasis).

For many Romance critics, this is problematic. Teresa Ebert explains that Romance narratives are by and large reproductions of patriarchal, masculinist fantasies and desires, despite the fact that the majority of them are written by women (5). At the end of many Romance novels, the heroine must "[deny] her independent goal-oriented action outside of love and marriage" (Regis 10). This reinforces traditional, rigid gender roles and potentially subtextually advises women readers to accept their fate as eventual lovers, wives, and mothers (Radway 207).

I would like to challenge this notion by first pointing to Lynda Crane's research where the readers she interviewed and surveyed discussed their desire for change in their lived relationships that echoed some of the characteristics of the heroes from their favored Romance novels (262). Her participants expressed desire for their partners to embody more femininely ascribed characteristics like being caring, understanding, and affectionate, which were key ingredients to many of the contemporary Romance heroes (Crane 263). Second, I must point to

Henry Jenkins's concept of the "rogue reader" (18). Readers are powerful and the act of symbolic interaction is powerful, magical (Firestone, "I Was With Edward" 75). It's ridiculous and passé to assume that readers are dupes¹¹, mindlessly consuming texts without any critical engagement. Sure, both Radway and Crane's participants talk about escape as a desired effect in reading Romance, but these readers also know that these stories aren't usually indicative of real life, that life goes on after the happily-ever-after. Jenkins defines rogue reading as the ability "to assert [one's] own right to form interpretations, to offer evaluations, and to construct cultural cannons" (18). Returning to *Twilight*, it's presumptuous, to say the least, to assume that women by the scores are reading the series and seeing Bella and Edward's relationship as perfect, that Edward's behavior is 100% chivalrous and not dangerous, that Bella's self-sacrifices are all in the name of love and not shortsighted.

Romance has an undeserved reputation as a genre that can't stack up to the likes of other genre fiction like Political Thrillers or Science Fiction. The reputation extends to readers, who are assumed soft-hearted, soft-headed women who have nothing better to do than read badly written drivel. The reality is that Romance is neither better nor worse written than any other genre, and there are shining examples of both¹². Again, this kind of assessment is completely reliant on the reader's/critic's aesthetic point of view. Further, this confirms for me that pernicious trend in devaluing and mocking all things woman centered as being less than and weaker in a patriarchal, phallogocentric culture.

¹¹ The take-home of Radway's 1983 article is that her participants are likely using Romance novels as a safety valve to prevent becoming overwhelmed by the dissatisfaction in their lives. If these women didn't have this crutch, they would likely do things deemed "crazy" like divorce their husbands or leave their unhappy circumstances.

¹² A few months ago, I was suckered into purchasing the .99c Kindle novel *A Shade of Vampire*. The blurb described it as *Twilight*-esque, but by my aesthetic judgment, it only wishes it could be *Twilight*. It read like truly terrible fanfiction. And, I am confident in saying it probably was at some point as the author's name is Bella Forrest. Then again, who am I to argue with the 1,452 five star reviews?

Situating Myself among *Twilight* Scholarship

In the years since *Twilight* fever broke, scholarship has been consistently published to examine the critical issues concerning its wide consumption as a popular culture artifact, the tremendous fanbase that has developed as a direct response to its publication, and the ways that the series has irrevocably changed the vampire trope. I add my voice to the growing stockpile of research that has dared to evaluate *Twilight* beyond the knee-jerk dismissal of it as *just* a cheesy YA Romance. While not all of the available scholarship is published in big journals or university press books, critical engagement abounds through scholarly¹³ and not-so-scholarly blogs, periodicals such as *Bitch Magazine: The Feminist Response to Pop Culture*, and several edited collections for mainstream consumption like *Twilight and Philosophy* (2009) and *Bitten by Twilight* (2010) from the *Mediated Youth* series.

The dominant subjects for discussion are the gender constructions and heteronormative relationships within the text (Silver 125; Nayar 62; Miller, “The Hunger Games”; Malhiet Robillard 14; Murphy 56; Eowyn Nelson 3) as well as the potential anti-feminist backlash for readers (Peterson 2; Bode 713; Seifert; Zack 121). Overwhelmingly, the articles touching on this subject are negative in their conclusions about the *work* that *Twilight* is doing. Authors seem in agreement that *The Twilight Saga* is a clear expression of sinister postfeminism (Mukherjea 70; Shachar 147), where Bella’s sole focus is her relationship with Edward. Any perceived agency she has is directly related to maintaining the relationship, offering her no independence or recourse from his smothering attentions. As Robin Browne is quoted, “*Harry Potter* is about confronting fears, finding inner strength and doing what is right in the face of adversity. *Twilight* is about how important it is to have a boyfriend” (Futral). These examinations of the text often

¹³ Natalie Wilson’s scholarly blog “Seduced by Twilight” is probably the best example.

include discussion about concerns that the series romanticizes domestic violence (McKay and Maple 21; Miller, “Maybe Edward” 165; Torkelson 209; Housel, “The ‘Real’ Danger” 177).

Articles about race largely focus on Jacob Black and the representations of Native Americans presented by the other Quileute characters. Most of the articles touch on constructions like the “noble savage” with heavy emphasis on the connections between native people and animalism. Obviously, Jacob transforms into a giant wolf so there are strong links for this critique, in addition to the ascribed Native American practice of having animal spirit guides and totems (Wilson, “It’s a Wolf Thing” 194; Worley 107; Wilson, “Civilized Vampires” 55; Housel, “The Tao of Jacob” 237). There isn’t, so far as I can tell, any scholarship that approaches the raced vampires that appear largely in *Breaking Dawn*, which indicates a gap in the conversation that will need to be filled in future. Class research overlaps with critical race scholarship, given the inequalities between the white, hyper-rich Cullens and the perceived poverty of the Quileutes (Wallace 7; Platt 71).

Finally, religion (Fosl and Fosl 63), specifically Mormonism, is addressed as Meyer is an “out” member of the Latter Day Saints (LDS). Many of the articles analyze the series and search for clear connections with Church teachings. This is often where conversations concerning abstinence (Seifert), abortion (Issow Averril 224), family, and personhood are explored (Arnaudin; Toscano 21; Shaw 227; Chadwick, “Reading the Mormon Gothic;” Chadwick, “Toward a Mormon Gothic”).

There is a small, but growing, conversation about how *Twilight* fits into Young Adult as a genre category with the likes of *Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, and similar fantastic series like *His Dark Materials* (Parkin 65; Cappella 6). In 2010, it was estimated that the saga had already sold over 100 million copies, making it a top seller in the YA category (Sellers).

Likewise, there is plenty of research about the vampire trope in various facets: as a literary character, cultural myth, and metaphor for the Other. The scholarship about how Meyer's vampires place among their undead cousins is still relatively unexplored outside of discussions of anti-fandom (Ames 37, 38; Klaus and Krüger n.p.). The vampires in *Twilight* have received criticism for their not-so-vampiric traits, among them the fact that they sparkle in sunlight (Meyer, *Twilight* 260). A brief search of the web reveals a calculable amount of backlash for Meyer's interpretation of why vampires don't traditionally go out in the sun. The responses vary from, "real vampires don't sparkle," citing vampires like Dracula, Lestat de Lioncourt, and Blade to, "glitter and sparkles have never scared anybody—ever." Here we see evidence of an anti-fan community that is a direct response to *Twilight* fandom (Sheffield and Merlo 207), as well as fan assessment of where the *Twilight* vampires fit into their mythical genealogy. This shifting of the vampire trope specifically connected to *Twilight*, illustrated in these two examples, has been ignored by recent scholarship. The closest books to address this recent change for the vampire are Nina Auerbach's *Our Vampires, Ourselves* and Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger's *Blood Read*.

Academic discussions about *Twilight* fan communities observe, explore, and dissect *Twilight* fandom. Part of this discussion also attempts to place it in the fan hierarchy within that fandom and within larger fan communities such as Science Fiction (SF) fandom (Behm-Morawitz, et al. 140; Summers 316; Parke 25; Kalviknes-Bore and Williams 189). A brief search of the web yields multiple community groups, tribute cites, and information caches such as the *Twilight Lexicon* where fans commune and share their fandom. Tourism to the actual

town of Forks has boomed, giving fans a physical destination to experience some of the books in real life¹⁴ (Willis-Chun 261; Erzen 11).

Finally, I want to talk about the research being produced by people like me... the Aca-fans, to use Jenkins's term. There are a handful of us who are transparently fans of the series. Natalie Wilson has been the most visible considering her scholarly blog "Seduced by Twilight" which later lent its name to the title of her book. Anne Helen Peterson conducts research with women who self-identify as both feminists and *Twilight* fans; her work is inspirational as she groups herself with her participants in trying to rationalize the draw the series has (14). I make a similar reflexive move in my article "I Was With Edward in My Happy Place" which examined how I use *Twilight* in the classroom to teach concepts about Romance and gender roles (75). While the fan community is rich and large, there are not enough academics willing to claim themselves as fans at this juncture. Perhaps it is as Pettigrew Brackett suggests, and these scholars are performing the necessary facework in order to avoid negative pushback from others.

Fans are often intensely critical of the texts their fandom revolves around (Jenkins 86). They spend significant amounts of time questioning, debating, and talking about their text, getting to know it on intimate levels. While this behavior sometimes adds to the stigma that fans receive, it essentially translates to a kind of textual savviness that may be elusive to non-fans (Jenkins 19, 87; Coulson 6). As a fan, I am party to this textual savviness. I have an investment in the text and the fan community surrounding it. I am also a scholar, and my dual habitation of both worlds provides me the opportunity to use a set of tools to interrogate the saga in ways that are different from other fans. I am included in critical fan conversations but have the added

¹⁴It's unusual for fans to have physical places they can go to feel like they're inside the pages of their favorite books, especially where fantastic literature is concerned. Perhaps the best example of this is the Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Studios in Orlando where fans can visit Hogwarts, receive a wand from Ollivander, and drink butterbeer. Although "artificial" it's the closest any *Potter* fan can get.

benefit of education to articulate those conversations differently. This means that I am in an excellent position to do this research and perhaps provide separate insights and conclusions than an “objective” researcher might. Peterson says it best when she states:

Whether in the form of good old fashioned consciousness raising, mentoring girls and teenagers, leading book groups, or teaching in the classroom, feminism needs voices—voices that do not decry or dismiss, but encourage thought, critique, and examination. (65)

Statement of Purpose

I will argue that Bella Swan is a representation of Barbara Creed's monstrous-feminine which serves to reinforce ideologies that insist women are abject, inherently dangerous to men, and threatening to a patriarchal status quo. Through close-textual analysis of *The Twilight Saga*, I will demonstrate how the monstrous-feminine frames the hysterical teenage body, hypersexuality, and eternal motherhood as simultaneously unacceptable and unavoidable. These negative women's stereotypes continue to persist in dominant popular culture, and this double-bind is overcome only by the impossible perfection of vampirism. The monstrous-feminine invites constructions of teenage bodies as unstable and unreliable, women's sexuality as dangerous and impure, and motherhood as a requirement for a complete identity. These constructions are particularly dangerous in Young Adult literature and particularly inspirational in fanfiction.

Summary of Chapters

My intervention into this critical conversation centers on Creed's theory concerning the monstrous-feminine. That is to say, she uses Julia Kristeva's work about abjection and monstrosity in order to make assertions that women are consistently an embodied horror for men, representing their deepest fears about castration anxiety, disempowerment, and the loss of subjective identity in the symbolic order. I use this work to interrogate enduring stereotypes about women—the hysterical woman, the hypersexual woman, and the enduring mother—as a means of making connections between *The Twilight Saga* and the ways we see these scenarios played out in “real life” that re-enforce the double-binds that women are often locked into which prevent them from participating in productive talk that broadens their knowledges and possibilities.

Hysteria

Bella struggles with feeling hampered by a body that continually misbehaves at the behest of her emotions. I argue that Bella's desire to maintain supreme control over her emotions is a reflection of a consistent devaluation of women's feelings and experiences as irrational and hysterical. In turn, this stigma marks women as monstrous and unreliable to dictate the decisions of their lives. This corroborates a cultural fear that a woman's emotions are a ruling factor in how she behaves and that left unchecked, she risks both her sanity and rationality which ultimately threatens that patriarchal status quo.

Sexuality

As Bella's sexual awakening comes to the fore, the conversations that she and Edward engage in pertaining to a sexual relationship are always veiled in vague euphemisms or pauses of

silence, identified by written ellipses. I argue that in *The Twilight Saga*, the use of euphemisms rather than frank language that openly accepts or confronts sex and sexuality serves to reinforce an ever-present moral panic about teen girls' sexuality. In pushing the subject of sex, even through euphemism, Bella becomes the monstrous-feminine or the hypersexualized Other.

Motherhood

Rosalie and Esme share with Bella details about what it means to live an undead life without creating a child. I argue that the Cullen women, and others in the series, are representations of an incomplete femininity where these characters have failed the prime directive of womanhood: being a biological mother. This work speaks to a longstanding Western cultural assumption that motherhood is both the natural and desired primary identity for a woman and those who do not pursue motherhood are abnormal.

CHAPTER 2:
“A FRESH ROUND OF HYSTERIA”¹⁵: BELLA SWAN AND THE
HYSTERICAL TEENAGED BODY

Seventeen year old Bella Swan literally stumbles through her life, navigating the classic teen angst associated with high school, falling in love, and family relationships. Through her experiences, she exhibits a struggle of being hampered by a body that continually misbehaves at the behest of her emotions. Consistently, Bella attempts to discipline both her body and emotions as a means of fitting in and maintaining her identity. I argue that Bella’s desire to maintain supreme control over her emotions is a reflection of a consistent devaluation of women’s feelings and experiences as irrational and hysterical. In turn, this stigma marks women as monstrous and unreliable to dictate the decisions of their lives. The tension between feeling emotions yet being perceived as weak or incompetent inevitably places women in a double-bind where neither option—becoming emotionless or becoming totally hysterical—is sustainable or viable. This is perhaps most problematic for the teenage woman who is automatically discounted as erratic and undependable because of her age. This corroborates a cultural fear that a woman’s emotions are a ruling factor in how she behaves and that left unchecked, she risks both her sanity and rationality which ultimately threatens that patriarchal status quo.

I theoretically ground this chapter in the work of Barbara Creed, Julia Kristeva, Elizabeth Grosz, and Michel Foucault. Bella represents Creed’s “monstrous-feminine” because a body that cannot be controlled is unruly to a point of monstrosity. Bella’s continued frustrations with her

¹⁵ (Meyer, *Eclipse* 609)

fragile human body speak to the ways that Grosz theorizes women's embodied experiences as well as their corporeal bodies as part of binarized systems, like the mind/body split, that inevitably devalue and demean them as less than according to the patriarchal authority. Foucault's work in his chapter titled "Docile Bodies" supports this conversation through his descriptions of how power is wielded, disseminated, and enforced as a means to make physical bodies and their actions more pliable and amenable to instructions. The work of Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English concerning hysteria¹⁶ as a diagnosis and excuse for treating/disciplining women in social, medical, and psychological ways works in concert with Foucault as a means of exploring the ramifications for labelling women's actions as hysterical. This is crucial to understanding the nuances of why Bella feels it is imperative to achieve a kind of supreme control over her emotional body.

I use this theory to analyse excerpts of the series as a means of examining how Bella is rendered the monstrous-feminine in her emotionally stimulated bodily outbursts. While Bella does her best to self-discipline, she cannot achieve the kind of control that she desires until she becomes a vampire. She often criticizes herself for her perceived inability to maintain control over her emotions and body which is understood as a weakness. These embodied experiences appear singular to her, as she frequently observes that others do not seem to be grappling with the same difficulties, neither her human classmates nor her vampire family. I begin my analysis by first discussing the relationship Bella has with her mother, Renée, and the impact it has on her subjective identity as a young woman and burgeoning adult. I then examine three excerpts from the series where Bella's emotions produce a physical reaction, specifically crying. These

¹⁶ "Hysteria comes from the Greek word for uterus" (Ehrenreich and English 152). A common treatment for hysteria "was manual stimulation to orgasm by a doctor. ... Okay, it wasn't actually *called* an orgasm back then, it was a 'hysterical paroxysm'" (Stein and Kim 47, authors' emphasis).

instances, which increase in intensity in the series, offer insights to her acts of self-discipline, avoidance of male authority, and the disidentification between her mind and body.

Theorizing Monstrosity and Hysteria

Creed, in defining the monstrous-feminine, says that every society has ways of marking women as “shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject” (251). She makes direct connections with Freud and his assertions that women’s genitals are the confirmation that castration exists, which causes men acute anxiety (Creed 251-252). Conceptually, the monstrous-feminine is the recognition of sexual difference in women from men, and the necessity of the patriarchal system to control and bind women as a means of rendering them innocuous so as to prevent the dreaded event of castration (Creed 251, 264-265). This serves to reaffirm the social order as well as continue to repress and prevent women from making significant changes to that system which would allow for a more egalitarian way of life.

Of Creed’s descriptive words for the monstrous-feminine, her use of abject is perhaps most apt. She evokes the work of Kristeva, who defines the abject as something that ignores and crosses boundaries at will, something that “disturbs identity, system, order” (4). In relation to women’s emotions and bodies, there’s an instability that is understood as inherent for women making them volatile and unpredictable, the very essence of abjection. Bella identifies her strongly experienced emotions and ungainly body as problematic because she doesn’t want to be seen as weak, inexperienced, or unreliable to other people. And, no matter how rational she remains, she often appears at the mercy of her feelings which corroborates that there’s something dangerous about women. This is proof positive that women are not to be trusted to govern their

bodies or lives alone. It is men, presented as rigid, rule abiding, border reinforcing beings, who are charged with that task.

The teenage body is especially noted as a site for struggle. Adolescence is a crucial time for the creation and settling of an identity, belief systems, and social mores. It is also the time when the body undergoes drastic changes to produce secondary sex characteristics which indicate the transition from the child body to the adult body. Grosz explains that, “Adolescence is also of significance in understanding the development of body image... the [teenager] feels the greatest discord between the body image and the lived body, between its psychological idealized self-image and its bodily changes” (Grosz 75). This is true for Bella who often notes that she disidentifies with her fragile human body that rarely behaves as she wants it to. It’s only after she becomes a vampire that she begins to feel the desired stability in her body that she longed for.

Monstrosity is “produced at that which separates those who take up their proper gender roles from those who do not” (Creed 253), and for women this is a tenuous line. For bodies that do not perform within prescribed parameters, the threat of discipline looms large. Historically, this discipline manifested through the wide-spread diagnosis of hysteria (Ehrenreich and English 147), resulting in “docile bodies” that were more easily “manipulated, shaped, [and] trained” (Foucault 179, 180). Bella’s strong emotions, uncontained crying and blushing, and clumsy body could well have been recognized as symptoms of hysteria by a male authority: a father (Charlie), lover (Edward), or doctor (Carlisle). Since the 19th century, hysteria has plagued women as a catch-all diagnosis for behaviors and physical conditions that are pathologized as sickness or disease (Ehrenreich and English 147). Ranging from physical symptoms like headaches and menstrual cramps to psychological ones like depression (Ehrenreich and English

114), hysteria is marked specifically a “feminine” problem, and it “is precisely the status of the female body that [causes] psychological conflict” (Grosz 38). Hysteria has come in and out of fashion (Grosz 40), but always remains tied to the monstrous-feminine, a body that resists control.

Analyzing the Hysterical Body

Bella experiences the disconnect between what she wants and how her body behaves in two ways. First, she feels her emotions acutely, which she describes as she encounters different experiences that provoke frustration, pain, anger, distress, embarrassment, and joy. Second, these emotions often physically manifest as tears. There are several coping strategies she employs to minimize the impact of these expressions which include her oft repeated, “I’m fine,” statement, hiding her face behind her hands or hair, and changing the subject of the moment to deflect her reaction. Her inability to command her body and rule her emotions is an indicator that she is the monstrous-feminine in need of discipline and control to prevent her from rupturing the patriarchal system. Additionally, these also function as symptoms of hysteria where Bella actively recognizes these feelings and behaviors as inappropriate.

Renée and the Mother/Child Binary

In order to interrogate Bella’s desire to control her emotions and her body, I begin by examining her relationship with her mother, Renée. As Bella’s primary role-model and initial fulltime parent, their relationship sets precedence for how she perceives “correct” adult behavior, “correct” gendered behavior, and body image. Early in *Twilight*, Bella makes it clear that from a young age she had played parent to Renée, describing her as “loving, erratic, [and] hare-

brained,” (Meyer, *Twilight* 4). This indicates that while her mother has good intentions, she is not necessarily reliable. In fact, in the next sentence she observes, “Of course [Renée] had Phil now, so the bills would probably get paid, there would be food in the refrigerator, gas in her car, and someone to call when she got lost...” (Meyer, *Twilight* 4). The subtext is that Bella, who is seventeen, would have been responsible for those things in the past, up to the time Phil became her stepfather and moved into the role of caretaker.

Effectively, Bella’s further description of her mother as “irresponsible and slightly eccentric” solidifies Renée as child-like (Meyer, *Twilight* 105). Women are infantilized (or encouraged to behave in child-like ways) as a means of creating patriarchal hierarchy where women are placed in subordinate positions to men in similar power dynamics to how children are immediately subordinate to adults (Goffman 140). By viewing women on par with children, they can be easily dismissed, scolded, or superficially praised but rarely taken seriously. Time and again, Renée proves herself an incompetent adult as exemplified in her email exchange with Bella when she asks, “I can’t find my pink blouse. Do you know where I put it?” (Meyer, *Twilight* 33). Bella responds: “Your blouse is at the dry cleaners—you were supposed to pick it up Friday” (Meyer, *Twilight* 34). Bella sarcastically tells Edward, “Well, someone has to be the adult” (Meyer, *Twilight* 106).

For Bella, being an adult is characterized by being responsible (paying bills and grocery shopping). As she tells Edward, “My mom always says I was born thirty-five years old and that I get more middle-aged every year” (Meyer, *Twilight* 106). By watching her mom, she has learned what “incorrect” adult behavior is and seemingly sought to correct this in herself by doing the opposite. Undoubtedly there were events that spurred child-Bella to take on responsibilities that by normal standards would not be expected of a kid. She discloses that

Renée is an “imaginative cook, and her experiments weren’t always edible,” which likely prompts Bella to learn to cook (Meyer, *Twilight* 35). Culturally, we expect women to be able to cook, if only a basic level. When there are children to feed, it is assumed they are supposed to become the center of the woman’s life where all of her efforts are for them (Ehrenreich and English 209). Renée’s inedible experiments are further proof that she’s at least partially ineffectual to take care of her own life, but with no male authority to tell her so, she’s free to do as she pleases.

When Bella moves in with Charlie, she requests to be “assigned kitchen detail for the duration of [her] stay” after discovering he can only cook eggs (Meyer, *Twilight* 31). She takes on a traditionally woman-gendered task, recreating the classic binary where a man works for a paycheck in the public sphere while a woman does unpaid labor in the domestic one (Ehrenreich and English 157). In this example, Bella exhibits the “correct” gendered behavior for the situation by caretaking her father, a role that Renée implicitly failed at as their marriage resulted in divorce.

Most importantly, Bella learns the value of maintaining emotional composure instead of “giving in” to each emotional whim. Renée’s open, emotional displays add to her infantilization rather than supporting the performance of the adult she should be. For example, after the incident with the van, Bella describes Renée as being “in hysterics, of course,” as though this was the anticipated reaction she might have to the situation (Meyer, *Twilight* 66). “I had to tell her I felt fine at least thirty times before she would calm down. She begged me to come home—forgetting the fact that home was empty at the moment...” (Meyer, *Twilight* 66-67). In this case, Bella must placate her mom with reassurances, knowing that in the moment her words fall on deaf ears. Renée, in the midst of her hysteria, can’t rationally comprehend what it is that Bella is

telling her. Additionally, Bella immediately remembers that there is no “home” for her per se, which Renée has forgotten.

It’s significant that Bella chooses the word “hysterics” to describe her mother’s reaction. Although the term hysteria hasn’t been a legitimate diagnosis for decades, Grosz maintains that the pathologization and medicalization of women’s behaviors and bodies remains ever-present (40). Hysterics in this context indicates that Renée has behaved in an irrational matter, symptomized by crying, begging, and disregarding Bella’s assertions that she’s okay. She is “bodily” swept away by how she is feeling, all rational thought (evidenced by her absurd request for Bella to return home) apparently gone. In this way, she becomes the monstrous-feminine, an abject phallic mother who makes a desperate plea in order to re-gather her only child (Creed 254). Bella has nearly successfully forged an independent subjective identity (Creed 254), and Renée’s momentary pleas for her return fall on deaf ears.

Kristeva asserts that the mother is understood as the child’s earliest object, the *thing* with which she constitutes her own subjectivity (33, my emphasis). The “mother-child relationship is one marked by conflict” where the child attempts to become an individual while the mother continues to use the child to fashion her own identity; without the child, she doesn’t know her place in the symbolic order (Creed 254). So, when mother and child meet in a conflict in those awkward moments of adolescence where the child attempts to assert her agency and dominance in the relationship, “the mother becomes an abject” (Creed 254). Perhaps more appropriately, Renée’s emotional instability indicates resistance to the acceptable parameters for her behaviour. With a lack of self-awareness and control, she risks discipline from the patriarchal order which could well be enacted by her new husband, Phil.

Engorged Emotions and Traitor Tears

In watching her mother, Bella has learned the differences between appropriate behaviours for adults and grown women. Most pressing and important, she has also recognized that it is necessary to behave in a composed, rational manner in order to be taken seriously. While she *knows* this, she cannot—to her frustration—seem to keep her body from physically manifesting signs of her emotions, largely in the production of tears. Grosz calls this somatization, or the inclination to experience psychological or emotional distress in the form of physical symptoms (Grosz 38). In extreme cases, such as with hyperhidrosis or overactive sweating, people may seek medical treatment in order to both live more comfortably and navigate social situations more easily.

In Bella's case, her tears unmistakably alert those around her that she's experiencing a heightened emotional reaction to something. Erving Goffman explains: "When emotional response causes an individual to lose control of his facial posture, ... he can partly conceal the lapse by turning away from the others present or by covering his face, especially his mouth, with his hands" (Goffman 57). Tears are a consistent plague for Bella in the series and cause her the most distress. She angrily wipes them from her cheeks or covers her face with her hair as a physical means of hiding them. However, her actions cannot hide that she is trying to repress or conceal what has already been given away about her emotional state (Goffman 57). As though to corroborate this, Bella later tells Edward that her "face is so easy to read—my mother calls me her open book" (Meyer, *Twilight* 50).

The separation of mind and body, or as Edward puts it "mind over matter," is not so clear or manipulatable as Bella would like (Meyer, *Twilight* 300). Grosz agrees, declaring that the boundary "becomes increasingly eroded" as the psychical experiences people perceive are

always already ground in “the body as the subject lives it” (39). For Bella, her inability to prevent or control tears from leaking from her eyes causes a momentary alienation from her body, which places her in the liminal space of abjection.

I outline three instances in which Bella’s emotional and bodily conflict become a source for her distress. These scenes range in the intensity of her somatization from the least intense to the most and represent a significant emotional moment from *Twilight*, *New Moon*, and *Eclipse* respectively. Each time, she does her best to repress the tears and employs some of her tactics to downplay the response. In each scene, there is also recognition, either by Bella or other characters, that her behavior is improper for the situation. Additionally, each scenario provides subtle and/or blatant coercions which attempt to modify the body’s behaviors, thus creating a pliant, docile body that can be more easily directed (Foucault, “Docile Bodies” 182).

Twilight

This first excerpt shows the most minimal instance of Bella in conflict with her body. While the root example is from *Twilight*, I’ve also chosen to specifically supplement some of the synopsis with Edward’s thought process as it is available through the partial draft of *Midnight Sun*¹⁷ which is *Twilight* from his perspective. In this moment, it’s valuable to have Edward’s observations of Bella to offer further proof to how hard Bella tries to keep her emotions and body in line.

¹⁷ Shortly after the huge success of the series, Stephenie Meyer began writing a new book called *Midnight Sun*. This was intended to be Edward’s version of the events in *Twilight* as well as some of the “behind the scenes” moments that happen between him and the other Cullens. During the filming of the *Twilight* movie in 2007, Meyer gave PDF copies of the partially completed novel to several cast and crew members. The draft was leaked and fans immediately started illegally sharing it across the web. Meyer posted the document to her website so fans could have legal, sanctioned copies, but she has on a number of occasions said that she will not finish the book as a result of the breach in her author rights.

Just after the accident where Edward uses his vampire speed and strength in front of half the school in order to save Bella from a van careening across the icy school parking lot, she confronts him in an empty hospital corridor, insisting he make good on his promise of an explanation. While no one else seemed to notice that Edward streaked across the lot or dented the van with his bare hands, Bella has seen and, more importantly, remembers everything. At this stage, he cannot tell her the truth and laments: “I would be the villain. I would lie and ridicule and be cruel” (Meyer, *Midnight Sun* 72). He insists that she hit her head hard and her “temper flare[s]” as she defiantly retorts: “There’s nothing wrong with my head” (Meyer, *Twilight* 64). She quickly relates her view of the accident filling in every detail of Edward’s heroics, and by the time she finishes she thinks: “I was so mad I could feel the tears coming; I tried to force them back by grinding my teeth together” (Meyer, *Twilight* 64). Edward notices this reaction, stating “Suddenly, she clenched her teeth together and her eyes were glistening with unshed tears” (Meyer, *Midnight Sun* 73). He likens her behavior to “a furious kitten, soft and harmless, and so unaware of her own vulnerability” (Meyer, *Midnight Sun* 74). He walks away, and she “was so angry, it took [her] a few minutes until [she] could move” and leave the hospital (Meyer, *Twilight* 65).

Emotionally, it’s a pivotal moment for the couple. They’ve only just started speaking civilly with each other, laying the groundwork for a budding friendship. This is their first argument and the stakes are significant; if Bella should tell people about what she saw, the Cullens would leave town and she might be killed¹⁸ as collateral damage. It also means the tenuous trust between them is momentarily broken because he won’t hold up his end of the

¹⁸ The Cullens have a private conversation about whether or not to kill Bella because she knows too much. They risk disobeying the prime vampire law—keep the secret—and if discovered, they could be killed. Rosalie and Jasper agree to kill Bella while Alice, Carlisle, and Esme feel she poses no threat. This is also the moment where Edward realizes he has fallen in love with Bella. (Meyer, *Midnight Sun* 79-86)

bargain. As the conflict escalates, her anger flares and increases in response to his hostile behavior. This is the strong emotion that somatizes as tears. Immediately, she disciplines herself by grinding her teeth as a means of preventing the tears from overflowing her eyes.

As Grosz describes it, the teenage body is a site of upheaval and change (75), and Bella's tears could be construed as a result of a hormone imbalance indicative of teen body chemistry. However, that argument is reductive as it negates Bella's lived experience and further separates her mind from her body as though truly different entities. Although Grosz acknowledges the disconnect and disidentification that can happen between the "psychical idealized self-image" and lived body (75), she also agrees with Merleau-Ponty as she says: "It is the body as I live it, experience it, and as it shapes my experience" (86). Bella feels her temper and becomes angry in this interaction, and her tears are the physical sign of these emotions.

She seeks to discipline her body, and this time she does successfully prevent the tears from falling and controls her anger. Foucault largely theorizes the docile body as a product of discipline by an external force and explains that "in every society, the body was in the grip of very strict powers, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions, or obligations" ("Docile Bodies" 180). In looking at Bella's relationship with her mother, she appears to recognize that Renée's "hysterics" are unacceptable. It stands to reason that she specifically seeks to stem her body's responses to emotions as a result of watching Renée's behavior, which she perceives as improper and over-dramatic. Bella's jaw clenching is not only a form of self-discipline but also means that she implicitly recognizes that there would be direct consequences if she was to allow her tears to flow.

Indeed, as Foucault notes, bodies become practiced and docile through repeated coercion, discipline, and praise ("Docile Bodies" 181). This is evidenced in the way hysteria was

diagnosed and treated in white, upper-crust women. One of the common treatments was known as “the rest cure” which consisted of isolation, sensory deprivation, and being cared for like an infant including being fed and bathed by a nurse (Ehrenreich and English 144-145). While other treatments were much more invasive (e.g. clitoridectomy¹⁹), the apparent goal of medical professionals was to both keep a woman sick and prevent her from acting against medical authority (Ehrenreich and English 113). Grown women were expected to behave as good little girls, and if they didn’t, discipline—treatment—wasn’t far behind. Though Bella fully feels her emotions, she understands that crying is not acceptable. And, where Edward notices her effort in maintaining bodily control, he also doesn’t take her anger seriously, effectively infantilizing her by comparing her with a kitten. Through Bella’s verbal sparring with a combative Edward, she seeks to hold her composure and manages to maintain it with physical intervention.

This scene also hints at Bella’s potential in becoming the monstrous-feminine. As something which is understood as uncontrollable and transgressive of the contextual rules in place, she is just to the edge of the metaphoric borderline. Monstrosity is often defined in terms of elements considered abject, such as bodily wastes (Creed 252). While tears aren’t usually considered in the same category as blood, urine, or pus, they are evocative of what Kristeva notes as the “collapse between the inside and the outside” (53). The individual is swiftly reminded that the skin, the body, is fragile in its constitution, and the appearance of bodily fluids that are expressly contained within, like tears, heighten this recognition. That one’s body is unstable and perhaps unpredictable makes subjective identity vulnerable and in the struggle with that instability one becomes abject, monstrous. Here, Bella fights back the tears, staying on the

¹⁹ According to Ehrenreich and English: “The last clitoridectomy we know of in the United States was performed in 1948 on a child of five, as a cure for masturbation” (136).

right of the contextual rules and standing her ground in the face of a potential disciplinarian, Edward.

New Moon

In the next excerpt from *New Moon*, her control tactics fail her as she and Edward are reunited and granted a reprieve by the Volturi rulers after a tense meeting. In the lavish waiting room, both Edward and Alice recognize that Bella's behavior is problematic, drawing unwanted attention to their group. Edward asks "Are you all right?" but it's perfunctory; he knows she's not all right. Alice follows up by speaking what is visible to the two of them: "You'd better make her sit before she falls, ... She's going to pieces." It's at that point that Bella silently observes that she's "shaking hard," her teeth are chattering, and the room is blurry. She hears a shrill sound and can't place where it's coming from. Alice says: "I think she's having hysterics. Maybe you should slap her." Combined with Edward's worried face, Bella realizes the sound is her sobbing which is also causing her to shake. Now conscious of her bodily state, their surroundings, and her proximity to Edward, she chides herself. "It was stupid to react like this. ... To have my eyes so filled with tears that I could not see his features clearly was wasteful—insanity." She calms herself by taking deep breaths and asks Edward how much Gianna, the human secretary, knows about what happens in Volterra²⁰. (Meyer, *New Moon* 485-487)

This scene is a clear escalation from the previous one. As the chapter opens, she appears confused by Edward's question and Alice's statement. Her descriptions for her physical state of

²⁰ In the castle in Volterra, a group of humans are being led into the room that Edward, Bella, and Alice are leaving. Bella makes eye contact with a woman who is clearly terrified, somehow aware of what her fate will be. Bella hears the people screaming as they race down the hallway toward the waiting room, apparently being eaten alive by the guard and rulers, Aro, Marcus, and Caius. Gianna, the human secretary, knows all about the vampires and what goes on in the castle; she knows she may be killed but hopes to become a vampire.

being come one at a time as Bella consciously notices them: shaking, chattering, blurred vision, sobbing, and tears. Her mind and body appear momentarily disassociated, what Grosz notes as depersonalization. She explains that in this particular state of being, individuals “lose interest in the whole body,” leading to a clear separation of mind from body as though viewing the body from the position of a spectator (Grosz 76). Slowly, Bella comes to realize that it is her body shaking, it is her sobbing, and her eyes are blurred by her tears. Her body has been briefly at a distance while her mind has tried to make sense of the situation to hand. According to Grosz, a state of depersonalization allows someone to withdraw from the emotional investment of their subjective position in the world (77).

This lasts just a second for Bella, but it’s long enough to see how she’s effectively compartmentalized herself for this situation. Her descriptions for her emotions are noticeably absent, and she returns to clarity through cataloguing her physical actions. Inferentially, her emotions are so strong that she’s been totally overtaken by her somatized reactions. Unfortunately, Alice and Edward are fully aware of how Bella’s body is behaving and recognize that it is potentially detrimental to their circumstances. They haven’t left Volterra and could still be subject to punishment if the vampires of the guard take exception to her sobs.

While Edward attempts to soothe Bella by shh-ing her and gathering her into his lap as though a child, it is Alice who names her actions as first “going to pieces” and a moment later “hysterics.” She encourages Edward to sit Bella down, implying they should physically manipulate her to a seated position because Bella appears without control over her body. When sitting fails to resolve Bella’s sobs, Alice suggests that Edward slap Bella²¹, implying that the

²¹ Alice’s suggestion to slap Bella could also be interpreted as sarcasm. Although Edward throws “a frantic glance at [Alice],” it’s plausible that she’s simply calling upon the common trope of slapping a hysterical woman without actually meaning that this should be done. (Meyer, *New Moon* 486).

physical jolt will jar her from what her body is unconsciously doing and return her rational mind to the situation. Effectively, Alice seeks to impart the correct discipline in order to create the docile body necessary for those circumstances (Foucault, “Docile Bodies” 182).

In the previous scene, Bella disciplined herself by clenching her jaw; here, Alice ups the stakes by suggesting physical violence. Her proposal could be dismissed by either an account of her human history which included barbaric treatment methods—such as electroshock “therapy”—for her precognitive visions or the enduring mediated trope of slapping a hysterical woman to bring her back to her senses as seen in hundreds of films and TV shows. Either way, suggesting violence toward Bella is both disconcerting and an indicator of how desperate Alice perceives the situation to be. Even Foucault recognizes that domination via violence doesn’t necessarily produce the desired docility (“Docile Bodies” 181). He concludes that a policy of coercions, which includes manipulation of the body’s behaviors and psychology, is far more effective (Foucault, “Docile Bodies” 182).

But of course, Alice deems the slap a potential measure as a result of diagnosing Bella as “having hysterics.” As Ehrenreich and English explain, hysteria has largely been localized to middle to upperclass white women (151). Women of color and poor women were exempt from hysteria as they often could not afford medical treatment or were deemed inconsequential for study. As a disease, it has no true medical cause yet produces a plethora of symptoms. At one time, symptoms for hysteria encompassed everything from toothache to ennui, but over time it has become closely associated with a heightened state of irrationality accompanied by crying, sobbing, and incongruent speech or thoughts. Perhaps most importantly, bouts of hysteria are noted as episodic, coming and going “in unpredictable, and frequently violent, fits” (Ehrenreich and English 151). Their description fits Bella reasonably well.

This is potentially what Bella feared in behaving too much like Renée. If she is unable to bring her body under reasonable control that proves to Edward and Alice she is fully aware of herself and the situation, she could be, at the least, verbally chastised, and at the worst, physically assaulted. Both options were used as treatments by 19th century doctors (Ehrenreich and English 153), so there's precedence. The perception is that she is somehow exempt from consent and decision-making because she is emotionally unstable, evidenced by her body. Without rationality and control, she becomes an abject, a monster that must be tamed and restored to its cage. Totally alone in her behaviors in that moment, she's caught in a double-bind in what Kristeva describes as the pull between "I" and "Other" (7).

Fortunately, it is unnecessary to slap Bella as Edward's cajoling and coddling is sufficient for her to begin to gain control. As he soothes her sitting atop his lap, she is treated like a child. Arguably, this is an intimate gesture of physical comfort for Bella, but her posture on his lap and his whispered reassurances suggest that this is the same response a distressed child would receive. Her sobs, tears, and momentary disassociation from her body appear to give Edward and Alice license to act unilaterally in her best interest in a similar way a parent might for a child.

She notes "it was stupid to react like this," recognizing that there maybe more pressing matters²² for her personally. While Alice and Edward might have perceived her behavior as an indicator of hysteria, Bella thinks that continued crying is insanity because it hinders her from seeing Edward clearly. In this moment, she rallies not to appeal to the authority but rather to her sense of urgency about the state of her relationship. With deep breaths, the situation resolves and Edward and Alice cease treating her as though she is a threat.

²² At this point, Bella is afraid that as soon as they exit Volterra, Edward will leave again, reaffirming that he doesn't love her.

Eclipse

In the prior two scenes, Bella's somatized emotions last a paragraph and a page, respectively. The instance in *Eclipse*, taking place after she and Jacob have their final heart to heart about the state of their relationship and her firm decision to marry Edward, lasts for nearly five pages. As she drives away from La Push, it becomes impossible to see the road through her tears and pulls over to allow the emotions to come to the fore²³. "[T]he force of it took me by surprise. Yes, I'd been right to hide this from Jacob. No one should ever see this." Edward arrives to comfort her and eventually drives them back to her home. On the way she "fought for control" so that she could get into the house, make excuses to Charlie, and privately "break down" in her room. Her conversation with Charlie is brief, and she retreats to her room where she spends the night alternating between weeping and self-described hysteria. In the morning she affirms for Edward that she is okay and the bout is over; the scene ends with them confirming their love and resolving to see Alice to plan their wedding. (Meyer, *Eclipse* 605-610)

First, she describes the influx of her emotions in her truck as "as the weakness I'd fought" (Meyer, *Eclipse* 605). She specifically recognizes that acknowledgment of her feelings and their resultant tears are a sign of weakness. This is in keeping with discourses that brand women's emotions as proof of an unstable nature which implicitly makes them unreliable (Ehrenreich and English 113). Bella's assertion that "No one should ever see this" corroborates that emotions are potentially hazardous and are best kept hidden to protect others as well as protect her from discipline.

²³ This particular scene lends to Rachel E. Dubrofsky's interpretation of the pornographic "money shot" where intense emotional displays function as a climactic and pivotal moment for women in the reality television series *The Bachelor* (Dubrofsky 68). She draws from work by Laura Grindstaff who first applied the term to women's emotionality on television talk shows (Dubrofsky 68-69). This instance for Bella is an open moment of letting go, almost painfully revealed to the reader through Bella's inner-monologue.

Edward's arrival initially makes things worse as "fresh guilt to season the pain," intensifies her sobs (Meyer, *Eclipse* 606). It becomes difficult for her to communicate effectively, and it takes "several attempts" to tell him "it wasn't going to get better anytime soon" (Meyer, *Eclipse* 606). In her recognition that she is prepared to fully and completely experience her somatized feelings, she effectively begins the process of crossing Kristeva's borderland and becoming abject. But, as much as it is a personal process, it is also one that is policed by those around her. She says "I needed to get past Charlie," marking him as the hurdle to clear which will allow her to finally "break down" (Meyer, *Eclipse* 606). She describes wrangling her will and control as "searching desperately for a reserve of strength," which echoes her earlier notion that showing others these emotions denotes weakness (Meyer, *Eclipse* 606).

The confrontation between Bella and Charlie is brief, but telling. Initially, Charlie mistakes her disheveled appearance as proof that Jacob has died²⁴. Upon her assurance "he's fine," Charlie's worried and anxious demeanor swiftly changes to "disapproval" when Bella says "I... just had to talk to Jacob about... some things that were hard. I'm fine" (Meyer, *Eclipse* 607). She uses her classic "I'm fine" to further deflect his scrutiny, but it's clear that Charlie isn't too worried about Bella's state. He questions "Was this really the best time?" and chastises "I hope you didn't mess up his recovery" (Meyer, *Eclipse* 607). His only daughter is clearly distressed ("I must look worse than I'd imagined"), but his sole focus of the conversation is Jacob (Meyer, *Eclipse* 607). Here, Charlie defaults to male privilege and the law of the father in the face of his woman-child with whom he cannot identify (Kristeva 72). As Bella notes earlier in *Twilight*, "Charlie wasn't comfortable with expressing emotions out loud" (Meyer 7). Further solidifying the danger of an emotional body, Bella reveals "Nothing scared Charlie worse than

tears” (Meyer, *Eclipse* 608). It’s odd for a professional police officer that a few tears would cause such discomfort and panic. As such, he doesn’t try to stop her from retreating to her room and doesn’t attempt to check on her once she’s cloistered inside.

By the time Bella gets to her room, she’s fully within the process of becoming abject. She attempts to rip the charm bracelet²⁵ from her wrist, and Edward reminds her that “It’s part of who you are” (Meyer, *Eclipse* 608). His words are apt as Creed reminds us that while the subject seeks to exclude the abject, it cannot because while the abject destroys meaning and logic, it simultaneously helps to reify and define it (253). This is the moment where she stops fighting against herself; her emotionally provoked sobs taking precedence. Perhaps more appropriately, it is as Kristeva suggests when she notes the confrontational ability of the abject as “those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal,” suggesting there’s something primal and instinctual about this kind of behavior which is marked as dangerous (12).

Bella fully embodies the monstrous-feminine. She notes that both Charlie and Edward are fearful of her, uncertain of what to do in order to bring her back to control. Charlie chooses avoidance, failing to comfort her though she discloses she is not quiet in her crying. Edward holds her on his lap—again resorting to the posture used for soothing a child—but says nothing as she cries herself to sleep. The difference in her behavior evokes an anxiety in the men in her life that cannot be quelled by the patriarchal order while she is human (Creed 264-265). While there’s no threat of physical violence here as Alice suggests in the scene from *New Moon*, this might be far worse. While Alice and Edward were prepared to intervene then, both her dad and

²⁴ Several chapters earlier, the La Push wolves and Cullens fought in a battle against an army of newborn vampires. Jacob was severely injured during the fight and had to undergo a painful treatment which involved re-breaking his healing bones. Charlie was aware he was injured though ignorant of the circumstances.

²⁵ Bella wears a bracelet containing charms given to her by Edward and Jacob. Edward’s charm is a large diamond, which she mistakes for a crystal, that was once his human mother’s. Jacob’s is a figurine of a howling wolf, which he carved specially for her.

he have essentially stopped trying to help Bella while she's in this state of being, no attempt to produce a docile body from the unruly one. Even in the morning, when she insists "that won't happen again," Edward is "dubious" and unwilling to take her at her word (Meyer, *Eclipse* 609-610). The vampire is afraid of the crying woman.

She diagnoses this experience as hysteria, which apparently "frighten[s] Edward more than the weeping" which came earlier in the night (Meyer, *Eclipse* 609). This is the ultimate collapse between the inside and the outside (Grosz 193). She now takes the label of hysteria, which she once bestowed to her mother in an effort to differentiate herself from Renée's perceived child-like actions, as a descriptor for her almost total abandon to her emotions. Both Edward and Charlie fail to intervene so she isn't subject to direct discipline, but should this behavior continue then it's probable that the men would conspire to act on her behalf because she would not be considered competent to make rational, consensual decisions. The historical precedence for this was set by husbands and doctors who determined what was best for women who were diagnosed as sickly or dis-eased (Ehrenreich and English 142).

Additionally, while she may appear the epitome of abjection with her literally leaking body, tears are not treated in the same manner as other bodily fluids (blood, pus, urine, etc.) (Grosz 195). Instead, tears are interpreted as clean and waterlike indicating potentially purifying properties (Grosz 195). As Bella wakes and comes back to her rational self, there's no "disorientation" and no hesitancy in her decision to stay with Edward (Meyer, *Eclipse* 609). It's presented as though her night of crying has allowed her to purge any doubts and discomforts she had concerning Jacob and Edward; the tears are a catharsis. And, where her last experience began with depersonalization, this one is marked by a kind of supreme clarity as she reflexively acknowledges her history with both men. But, it was only when she was able to fully "give in"

to her feelings and the resulting somatization that she was able to access such a cleansing. In some ways, she had to make a complete circle, to become the monstrous-feminine, in order to reclaim her stable subjective identity. This is, of course, short-lived. Because as long as Bella remains human, then she runs the risk, the likelihood, of becoming embroiled in her emotions again.

Discussion and Conclusion: Vampires Don't Cry

At one point Bella tells Edward that couples seem to work best when there's equality between partners²⁶. She sums it nicely when she says, "I can't always be Lois Lane, ... I want to be Superman, too" (Meyer, *Twilight* 474). He spends the better part of the series attempting to persuade her to remain human, that becoming a vampire is not worth trading her precious humanity. But, after Bella undergoes the transformation, she has the control that she pined for as a teenage girl. Instead of fighting with herself, fighting her emotions and her misbehaving body, she relishes the discovery of how to make her body obey. She describes this new power thus:

It had come slowly, but I could feel it now—the raw, massive strength thrilling in my limbs. I was suddenly sure that if I wanted to tunnel *under* the river, to claw or beat my way straight through the bedrock, it wouldn't take me very long. The objects around me—the tree, the shrubs, the rocks...the house—had all begun to look very fragile. (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 410, author's emphasis)

²⁶ This conversation occurs near the end of *Twilight* when Bella is lying in a hospital bed after she's been brutally assaulted by the vampire, James. With her broken leg, blood loss, and vampire bite, she's barely survived the attack, and largely because Edward arrived in the nick of time. At this point it's clear to Bella that becoming a fully-fledged part of the supernatural world is the only way for her to be able to maintain a long-term relationship with Edward and protect herself and her loved ones if danger is present.

As a teenager, Bella's prominent and often intense emotions take center stage as she stumbles through the difficulties of normative adolescent events like moving between divorced parents, transferring schools, falling in love for the first time, and the first devastating break up. These are wrapped up with experiences concerning unfamiliar emotions, a changing body, and the challenges of cultivating positive self-confidence. Arguably, there's a universality to the emotional journey that Bella takes; she's the every-girl and those common experiences appeal to a broad readership, myself included (Firestone, "I was with Edward" 75).

Of course the difference between Bella and readers, teens and adults alike, is that she gets the ultimate body, one that is eternally strong, beautiful, and stable. As for her emotions, she still feels them deeply, but she no longer fears the somatized blushes or tears because her body produces neither. There's no possibility for the rupture or collapse of the inside with the outside anymore (Kristeva 53). Effectively, in becoming a vampire, she does get to be Superman.

I am concerned with what is at stake for the woman reader, regardless of her age, when faced with a heroine's happy ending that insists Bella had to become an actual monster in order to feel fully confident and positive about herself. Perhaps more disturbing is that this is an ideal that can never be reached. Readers can symbolically bask in the control that Bella attains, but no amount of dieting, exercise, makeup, and airbrushing can produce the vampire body into which Bella transforms. As a human teenager, Bella does what she can to prevent herself from crying so as not to appear weak to those around her, but as a vampire she is able to feel without the unwanted physical reactions. Again, this is an impossible ideal for the reader who inevitably will experience the collapse of the inside and outside.

In this chapter I have argued that Bella's desire to control her emotions is a representation of the insistent devaluation of women's feelings and experiences which in turn are used as

evidence that women suffer from an innate irrationality. This assumption led medical experts to widely diagnose women with hysteria, further branding them as incapable of taking care of their own lives due to perpetual emotional sickness. The solution for Bella is a kind of anti-hysteria through vampirism. She becomes the strongest, physically, of the Cullens; she has a gift, a shield that protects her mind from psychic invasion and can be extended to protect others. She becomes Edward's bodily superior, at least for a time, and their relationship appears more egalitarian than it was when she was a human.

However, these characteristics—the strength, the lack of emotional displays, the protection—are often associated with classic definitions for alpha masculinity. In her fictive universe, she gets to be and do everything that Edward is and does. But in this world, where we tell girls that they can be anything they want to be in the face of a reality where that is sometimes blatantly not true, Bella would have to essentially transform into a man for her to receive that much privilege and power (Klein). This is not an option for most women. So the teen woman, who perhaps struggles in a body that feels more like an alien planet than someplace comfortable and safe, is faced with potentially difficult and harmful options to create the docile body. We need look no further than the huge numbers of young women who suffer from eating disorders²⁷ as proof that some are willing to go to extreme lengths to achieve the kind of control that Bella desires for much of the series.

Adult women, more particularly those stereotypically lumped into the “middle age” category, face changing bodies that bear the physical marks of age. The beauty industry makes millions on anti-aging wrinkle creams that include scientific-sounding names of chemicals which are meant to hide or temporarily reverse signs of aging (so long as the product's use is

continuous). More extreme, cosmetic surgery rates continue to rise which indicates that adult women are willing to financially invest in creating the ideal body. Commonly, the rhetoric that supports this is about recapturing youth, the body when it was potentially at its “best” before weight gain, stretch marks, and wrinkles. It appears that women are trapped in the vicious cycle of always wanting to be what they are not at any stage in life.

As such, women’s bodies represent an emotional battleground of sorts, and while hysteria has gone out of fashion as a diagnosis the ugly connotation that women’s emotions render them unstable and unsuitable to participate in many public arenas persists. Hillary Clinton, in her 2008 campaign for the democratic presidential nomination, was constantly plagued by the double-bind of appearing either emotionless or overly emotional. Clinton disclosed during an interview, “If you get too emotional, that undercuts you. ... A man can cry; we know that. Lots of our leaders have cried. But a woman, it’s a different kind of dynamic.” (qtd. in Dowd). It’s clear she was acutely aware of the additional scrutiny she faced as a woman on the campaign trail. Bella Swan gets her happily ever after and never needs to worry that her body will stage a revolt or her emotions will overwhelm her. Then again, she had to become a monster to escape being the monstrous-feminine.

²⁷ Although the article was published in 1993, Naomi Wolf writes a staggering statistic that of ten American college women, “two will be anorexic, six will be bulimic, and only two will be well” (223). That’s one in five college women who aren’t obsessively monitoring their food/caloric intake or puking up most of what they eat.

CHAPTER 3:

“IT’S ALL I WANT”²⁸: BELLA SWAN’S UNSPOKEN SEXUAL DESIRE THROUGH EUPHEMISMS AND ELLIPSES

Like many teenagers, Bella Swan finds herself in the all-consuming throws of first love. However, she hasn’t exactly chosen a conventional partner. While many of her classmates, namely Jessica Stanley and Mike Newton, are figuring out the mysteries of sex in the usual ways, Bella’s exploration of her sexual identity is hampered by vampire boyfriend, Edward Cullen. His anxiety of accidentally injuring or killing her combined with his moral righteousness prevents her from experiencing much beyond basic kissing.

She recognizes a desire, a need inside of herself, but she appears to have little language to describe these emotions, placing her in a double-bind between *want* and suppression. Indeed, the conversations that Bella and Edward have pertaining to their sexual relationship are usually veiled in vague euphemisms or pauses of silence, identified by written ellipses. I argue that in *The Twilight Saga*, the use of euphemisms rather than frank language that openly accepts or confronts sex and sexuality serves to reinforce an ever-present moral panic about teen girls’ sexuality. This fuels a conservative cultural concern of acceptable parameters for the appropriate behaviors and feelings of teenage women²⁹. Ultimately, this reaffirms the notion that sexual

²⁸ Meyer, *Eclipse* 448, my emphasis

²⁹ It’s important to know that there isn’t a single definition for an appropriate performance of a teenage woman’s sexuality. The larger critical conversation is deeply connected to issues of race and class where women of color and women from lower socio-economic standings are always already immediately connected to discourses about hypersexualization and promiscuity. Bella, as a white, middle class woman, is given the benefit of the doubt, so to speak, in concern to her sexual purity.

intercourse, and by extension women's sexuality in general, is a dangerous prospect for a young woman and the repercussions of beginning a sexual relationship, even with oneself, could have the direst of consequences. Thus, in pushing the subject of sex, even through euphemism, Bella becomes the monstrous-feminine or the hypersexualized Other.

I begin by examining the two distinct veins of theoretical scholarship that guide this work. First, literary criticism specifically focused on the use of euphemism supplies insight for the ways that it affects the tone or connotation of a narrative. Bella is unable to verbalize and articulate ideas about sex, even after she and Edward have married, which ultimately renders all things sex related shameful. I also note the extensive use of written ellipses that function as silent euphemisms, pauses in conversation or thought where any words are absolutely unspeakable. To the best of my knowledge, there is little to no scholarship available about the function of this device as a stand-in for euphemisms and none related to *Twilight*.

Second, I refer to the theories crafted by Barbara Creed, Julia Kristeva, Elizabeth Grosz, and Jeffrey Weeks to anchor the arguments concerning representations of women's sexuality. This body of literature speaks to Bella's continuous struggle to assert her sexual desire, and Edward's subsequent dismissal and discipline of it in order to maintain the status quo. Kristeva and Creed offer insights about abjection and the monstrous-feminine respectively; this scholarship underpins my arguments that Edward's repeated dismissal of Bella's sexual desire is bound to fears about the dangers of women's bodies and desires, marking them as monstrous Others. Grosz provides theory that highlights the embodied experience of sexuality for women which speaks to Bella's recognition for her feelings that go unexplored until after her marriage. Finally, Weeks recognizes that sexuality and gendered sexual practices are a matter of social construction and cultural reinforcement. While their gender roles may appear reversed in their

approaches to sex, Bella and Edward are effectively re-enacting an old script that reaffirms the capital of a woman's sexual purity and that the ultimate purpose of sexual intercourse is the production of children.

I then apply this scholarship to a chapter where the characters' use of euphemism and elliptical pauses are clearly in practice. This excerpt is from *Twilight* and it takes place during the chapter "Mind over Matter." It's the first evening that Bella invites Edward to stay in her room for the night. She offers the earliest insights for how Edward physically makes her feel as well as first broaching the possibility for a sexual relationship. I've specifically chosen this chapter because it includes their first discussion about sex, which sets precedence for later conversations which enact the same tactics in euphemistic language.

To conclude, I offer discussion about how the text, supported by the scholarship, promotes a view of teen sexuality that directly feeds discourse rife with angst and discomfort for the idea of young women willingly participating in sexual activity. I question the potential repercussions of such subtext in the wake of broad teen readership as well as the oft noted "*Twilight* Mom" audience of adult women in their 40s and beyond.

Euphemistic Sexuality

Euphemism and Ellipses

It might seem a no-brainer, but language is dynamic, constantly changing to accommodate an also ever-changing society. Individual words are rarely confined to their dictionary definitions, though there maybe many, and more often the connotation or tone of a word's meaning adds to its overall use. Hugh Rawson argues that few people can get through a

day without using any euphemisms in conversation because they function as verbal smokescreens that mitigate difficult or taboo subjects such as sex (1). But, context plays such a crucial role in how words are interpreted that any classification of a word or phrase as euphemistic is difficult at best (Linfoot-Ham 229). The words I would choose when sitting down to Sunday roast dinner with my in-laws are invariably different from those I would use on a women's night out at a local bar. Equally as important in word choice is the way those words are interpreted by others, which adds to the inherent messiness of language, meaning making, and idea transmission from one person to others.

For Edward and Bella, they ostensibly are constrained by the category in which their narrative is published: Young Adult literature. Sexual content is usually highly restricted, and publishers do have a say over how explicit the descriptions are (Ramsdell 209). Therefore, the language exchanged between the couple concerning sex is overly euphemistic, vague really, leaving readers to interpret the subtext in the broadest sense possible. Douglas Robinson affirms that the use of euphemism is widely recognized as the means of evading the "truth" or "reality" of a subject in favor of a conservatism (405). However, Robinson asserts that euphemisms provide opportunity for people to make any number of interpretations about a subject; when euphemisms are mistakenly understood as blatant, one for one substitutions for other words or sentiments, the complexity of language is lost (407). Everything is far more complicated when it comes to interpreting the motivations and desires of others, even fictional characters (Robinson 407).

The subject of sex itself is intrinsically part of the human experience, yet it persists as one marked by embarrassment and taboo (Linfoot-Ham 229). As such it garners a significant number of euphemisms which are sometimes only obliquely related to the sex act (Linfoot-Ham

229). Rawson claims that sex has the largest number of associated euphemisms, which ultimately indicates the size of the difficulty people have for speaking about the subject (15). Combined with the case by case issue concerning context and interpretation, the struggle is real in choosing language that is precise and adequately describes just what one wants to explain. As Robinson questions: “What is the ‘real’ word that will avoid euphemism and give me the unvarnished truth?” (407). Indeed, even the word ‘sex’ carries significant ambiguity as it applies to biological bodies, physical acts, and individualized philosophies of desires (Weeks 4).

Considering the restrictions for the YA genre, the “real words” are likely to prove problematic and distressing for a young reader. However, in the case of the adult reader, the ambiguity offers an opportunity to symbolically relive the time in life before any significant sexual knowledge was gained. In fact, there were hundreds of readers who criticized *Breaking Dawn* because Edward and Bella physically consummated their relationship, ending the “innocent eroticism” found in the three earlier books (Seifert). The euphemisms in *The Twilight Saga* are only understood within context, otherwise they are non-descript words and phrases such as “it,” “that,” and “be with.” All understanding of sex or sexual desire is completely dependent on the knowledge and savviness of the reader.

With such ambiguous euphemisms, unsurprisingly there are moments when the characters are rendered speechless, unable to articulate even those vague words in the face of inadvertently imparting some forbidden information about sex. These pauses in conversation and Bella’s thoughts are indicated by written ellipses (...). The *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines ellipses as “the omission from a sentence of a word or words that would be required for complete clarity but which can be usually understood from the context” (Baldick 77). I assert that the ellipses function in the same manner as euphemisms for Bella and Edward,

ultimately allowing readers to fill in the literal blanks based on the breadth of their own knowledge about the potential subject. This ensures the topic of conversation remains veiled which serves to mark sex as dangerous and problematic.

Theorizing Monstrous Sexuality

Julia Kristeva defines the abject as that which ruptures the stability of identity, borders, and rules (4). Women are recognized almost universally in patriarchal systems as fragmented or partially formed subjects, which in turn marks them as abject Others that threaten the status quo (Creed 252). More particularly, it is the recognition of women's sexual difference that clearly sets them apart from men, "which is grounded in monstrosity and which invokes castration anxiety in the male spectator" (Creed 252). This fear of women is a guiding force in the patriarchal system's consistent oppression, devaluation, and suppression of women's lived experiences. Kristeva also notes that abjection is firmly attached to *want*, the thing on which "meaning, language, or desire is founded" (5, author's emphasis). So the abject monstrous-feminine simultaneously attracts while it repels, making women doubly dangerous to the solidity of the system.

The subjects of sex and sexuality in relation to women pose danger. Kristeva explains that "sexual prohibitions intended to separate men from women and ensure the power of the former over the latter" are deeply rooted in phobia both purported by practice and language (77). These binarized tensions women are placed in and result in an inherent double-bind, between the proper and abject, are further exacerbated by language which is constructed as phallogocentric and repressive toward the feminine (Kristeva 72). In order for a body to be read and recognized fully as part of the symbolic order "it must be clean and proper," and menstruation alone is enough to

connote women's bodies as unclean (Kristeva 102-103). Women's sexual desire, always tied to the potential generative function of the woman's body, is understood as inherently immoral in accordance with religious doctrines and cultural mores concerning purity and promiscuity (Creed 252).

Grosz also recognizes the danger in reducing women's experiences to binarized, and often hierarchized, dualities. For her, disciplines like philosophy have actively excluded women's knowledges by implicitly coding femininity as unreasonable and unreliable by aligning it with the irrationality of the body (Grosz 4). There is distinct danger in producing new knowledge that is rooted in the significant, undeniable corporeal differences between women and men (Grosz 20). In terms of sex and sexuality, Grosz explains that both are simultaneously body-based and socially constructed, where men's sexuality is the exemplar model and women's sexuality is either ignored or demonized by mainstream ideologies (108). For a woman, the body automatically becomes a hazard and handicap, used against her in arguments as though she has no control over her body or her body's perceived unruliness which automatically trumps her rational mind.

Ultimately, this fear of women's bodies and sexual desires manifests in the policing and discipline of how women behave. Weeks corroborates this when he explains that sexual difference has been used as a "sufficient explanation for different sexual needs and desires" (42). While "we like to indulge in the fantasy that our sex is the most basic, the most natural, thing about us," there are deeply rooted cultural assumptions about sex and sexual practices that more often than not defer lived experiences to the scientific explanations of hormones (Weeks 42). And, these explanations have historically been based on observations and studies concerning men's bodies and sexualities that further promote agendas of mandatory heterosexuality, male

privilege, and the “animal” nature of sex (Weeks 43). Unsurprisingly, this means that women’s sexuality has remained a problematic mystery; attempts to rationalize, neutralize, or demonize have often been based on notions that women’s sexuality exists as a complement to men’s and is dutifully tied to reproductive capacities rather than pleasure principles (Weeks 43).

As an additional observation to this analysis, Foucault writes: “What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the secret*” (*The History of Sexuality* 35, author’s emphasis). In *The Twilight Saga*, the absence of sex is one of the most crucial things that drive the narrative forward. What critics have latched onto is that there is “no sex” in most of the series, yet this continued harping on “no sex” only makes the ideas and questions about sex that much more visible and transparent. There is sex because we’ve developed a discourse that makes it present even when no descriptive act takes place. The extensive use of vague euphemism and silent ellipses further exposes this preoccupation with sex. As Jean Baudrillard says, this idea of the secret is seductive (64). We want there to be a secret, some knowledge that can be uncovered and (re)discovered so that it’s new and fresh again, yet the rub is that there is no secret. In Baudrillard’s words: “There is, for that matter, nothing hidden and nothing to be revealed” (64).

Analysis

The following scene from *Twilight* is a clear example of euphemisms and ellipses in play. Euphemisms present in two distinct ways. First, there are the words or phrases that stand in for sexual excitement or desire, which are further categorized in two ways: biological cues or emotional/cultural cues. The second kind of euphemisms are those that directly stand in for

physical sexual contact. Undoubtedly, these references are far fewer in number and are much vaguer in their construction. Ellipses are actual pauses in talk or thought and can represent either sexual excitement or physical sex, and the interpretations for either are even more ambiguous than the euphemisms.

The euphemisms I identify here are not restricted to one or two words. Effectively, the construction of the text, down to grammar and syntax, supplies the smokescreen necessary to keep sex covert. As Beatrice Warren explains, euphemisms are created as a result of the needs of the context at hand (130). And, the words become a “desirable alternative” to the referent, or the words deemed incorrect for the circumstances (Warren 130). Thus, the euphemisms I’ve identified fall under Warren’s category of “semantic innovation” which depends on classic literary devices such as metaphor, metonym, and hyperbole, as well as the more contextual “particularisation” and “implication” (Warren 133).

“Until the Hormones Kick In”: Physical/Biological Euphemisms

I begin with the chapter “Mind over Matter” where Bella offers some of her earliest observations about how she reacts to Edward now that their relationship has been solidified. The first euphemisms to examine are those which indicate sexual excitement or desire. Further distilling these words and phrases to indicate either physical/biological references or emotional/performed ones means that general talk surrounding sexuality and sexual (self)awareness has two distinct discourses. The physical/biological euphemisms are strictly tied to concepts like hormones, as well as descriptors for physical states of feeling and being. Emotional/performed references are linked to descriptions of feelings that are not necessarily provoked from within the body but by external stimulus.

In the chapter, the biological euphemisms I've identified are as follows: "Keyed up" (296), "Hormones kick in" (296), "calmed my pulse" (298), "the calming process" (298), "look a little overexcited" (299), "look very warm" (299), "scattered concentration" (299), "heart was crashing in my chest" (306), "euphoric at the thought" (308), "blushed" (309), "feel the sudden warmth under my skin" (309), "fidgeted" (309), "those human desires" (310), "hidden behind more powerful desires" (310), "flushed" (311), "your human instincts" (311), "I am a man" (311), "exhausted from the long day of mental and emotional stress like I'd never felt before" (311).

Read out of context, few of these words or phrases directly point to sex or sexual excitement. Interestingly, read in this way these choice quotations, listed in the progression of the page by page narrative, seem to mimic the rise, fall, plateau, and fruition of the orgasmic experience from start to finish. Bella begins "keyed up" and ends "exhausted" in a way that is new and unfamiliar to her (Meyer, *Twilight* 296, 311).

Initially, it is Charlie who observes that Bella looks "keyed up" as she rushes through putting together his dinner (Meyer, *Twilight* 296). Contextually, she and Edward have just parted ways, and he's currently waiting for her in her bedroom. Charlie's observation of "keyed up" is the first euphemism for sexual excitement, which he unknowingly validates by forcing a conversation about how it's Saturday night and she doesn't have plans to go out. "None of the boys in town your type, eh?" he asks; Bella interprets his question as "suspicious," as though he senses her lie of omission (Meyer, *Twilight* 296). She's not going out because the "boy" she wants to be with is already in her room. Ultimately, Charlie determines she's "too good for them all" and college is a more appropriate time to "start looking" (Meyer, *Twilight* 296). Bella thinks: "Every father's dream, that his daughter will be out of the house before the hormones

kick in” (Meyer, *Twilight* 296). Her sentiment indicates that her hormones are already “kicking.”

“Keyed up” describes her physical appearance, a euphemism for words such as agitated, excited, on edge, and eager. While not explicitly sexual, combined with Charlie’s prodding about the customary Saturday date night and Edward’s position in her bedroom, it’s not a leap to conclude that her tension has a sexual element. Additionally, Bella’s recognition of hormones as a factor in seeking a heterosexual partner provides more evidence, lending to Warren’s assertion of euphemism via implication where readers must essentially fit linguistic puzzle pieces together in order to arrive at the nearest correct interpretation (133). The default to hormones as an explanation for Bella’s subsequent physical reactions—“overexcited,” “warm,” “heart was crashing” for example—is reductionist in scope, dualistically separating mind from body. Grosz specifically points to Freud’s categorization of “endogenous” stimuli; these come from within the body, are a kind of constant pressure, and require some object of satisfaction for momentary relief (52-53).

As Weeks asserts, humans tend to think of sex as the most basic, natural instinct there is (42). Indeed, as an instinct or drive, it can be compared to hunger, thirst, and the need for excretion (Grosz 53). But these instincts, among others, can be over-ridden so to speak as the rational mind tangoes with the body as it is lived (Grosz 53). Ultimately, the notion of a sex drive or sexual instinct is a matter of how this biological process is made meaningful through the process of signification in the symbolic order (Grosz 55). Language, perhaps our most prolific symbolic system, is transformed and manipulated constantly which also continually adapts the perception of sex (Weeks 42). Foucault admits, “the discourse on sex has been multiplied rather than rarefied” (*The History of Sexuality* 53).

Edward says to Bella: “I told you, most of those human desires are there, just hidden behind more powerful desires” (Meyer, *Twilight* 310). His use of the euphemism “human desires” connotes a kind of basic, body driven nature attached to humanity. Situated within the conversation he and Bella are having concerning vampire marriage as the same as human marriage, his statement is code for: *Yes, vampire married couples have sex, feel sexual attraction, but sex is secondary to the constant need to drink blood.* Edward absolutely confirms that when he later reveals to Bella that he spoke to Carlisle, Jasper, and Emmett privately about sex before their wedding night, and “they told [him] it was a very great pleasure. Second only to drinking human blood” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 93). Of course in this statement, “it” serves as the euphemistic, one for one substitute, for the physical sex act.

Bella seeks confirmation from Edward that he finds her sexually attractive and prods a response from him with the ambiguous almost-question: “Your human instincts...” (Meyer, *Twilight* 311). She defaults to the use of “instincts” which further supports the notion that “human desires” are endogenous to the body, somehow separate from rational thought or consideration. Edward does confirm his attraction saying, “I may not be human, but I am a man” (Meyer, *Twilight* 311). He doesn’t explicitly spell out his attraction to Bella, but instead cites his gender status as a man as though it somehow imparts some meaning and knowledge for the given situation.

If this is his assumption, he’s right. Gender is a guiding force in how sex and sexuality is understood and discussed (Weeks 41). First, men are most often represented as the primary or default body, somehow the embodiment of a universal person (Grosz 198). Unsurprisingly, early sex research identified that “sexual instinct was essentially one derived from male practices and fantasies,” which served to promote a cultural knowledge that espoused men’s sexual desires as

overpowering, animalistic in nature, and active (Weeks 42). Further, the binary system depends on mandatory heterosexuality, continuously insisting that men—all men until proven otherwise—are permanently sexually attracted to women because this innate sexual instinct is a constant pressure that's always hovering on the periphery of consciousness. As such the automatic inference to Edward's "I am a man" statement is all of that knowledge (Meyer, *Twilight* 311), assuming that his attraction to Bella is taken for granted because sex is *always* on a man's mind³⁰. Because men's sexual drive is taken for granted, including assumptions that it's inherently aggressive and potentially violent, it's neutralized as normal and as such isn't stigmatized as monstrous. Women's sexuality is conceived quite differently, which will become clearer in the analysis of emotional/cultural euphemisms.

"You're Driving Me Crazy": Emotional and Cultural Euphemisms

Biological euphemisms that apply to sexual excitement and desire begin to reveal what is to come for Bella and Edward in their physical relationship. There's recognition of corporeally-based physical feelings, from Bella's heated skin to her rapid pulse, and the subtext of sexual desire is there. However, it is the use of euphemisms for the emotional and cultural cues that (c)overtly alerts readers to the state of their potential sexual relationship. These euphemisms are far more complex in their construction, usually whole sentences rather than a word or two.

³⁰ Edward basically notes himself as asexual until Bella comes into his life and awakens his sexuality. At 108 years old, he's a virgin, and more interestingly he has serious contempt for other people's sex lives, both the private and pseudo-public. He can *hear* Jessica Stanley's sexual fantasies specifically about him, and he finds them repulsive (Meyer, *Midnight Sun* 5). Vampire hearing alone means he knows the other couples in his family have sex, but Emmett and Rosalie are fairly open about their sex lives, purportedly destroying whole houses sometimes while in the midst of the act. He has serious contempt for them as well for being so open about their sex life. This could be a holdover from the Victorian/Edwardian morals and principles he was brought up with within his wealthy, white human family; it could also be a result of a stunted adolescence where he was not encouraged to "leave the nest" to experience the world and find a mate.

These expressions of sexual excitement are exogenous, coming from outside the body and provoking or manifesting emotions closely associated with sex (Grosz 52).

To make things clearer, I have separated the emotional euphemisms from the cultural ones, although they will be analyzed together. The emotional euphemisms are particularly tied to language that cites a feeling, whether emotion or body based, that are provoked by an external influence (e.g. “You’re driving me crazy” or “I felt the tremor of his breath on my neck”) (Meyer, *Twilight* 300). Cultural euphemisms are signs that when read outside of the context of *Twilight* would still have implications of sex or sexuality assigned to them. These can be objects or items (e.g. “Victoria’s Secret silk pajamas”) (Meyer, *Twilight* 298), or they can be language that is almost universally acknowledged as having a sexual connotation (e.g. “If I don’t want to sleep...?”) (Meyer, *Twilight* 306, my emphasis).

As these euphemisms are much more complicated in their construction, almost wholly in Warren’s categories of “particularisation” and “implication,” they require much more interpretation on the part of the reader and in some cases, solely rely on the reader’s knowledge of sex in order to make sense (145). Also note that these examples contain a significant number of one for one euphemisms where a single word is the clear stand in for “sex,” as well as ellipses that offer the momentary pause in thought or conversation that works in the same manner as the other euphemisms.

The emotional euphemisms are as follows: “the hysterical edge to my voice” (295), “It was difficult, while he was touching me, to frame a coherent question” (299), “his fingers were slowly tracing my collarbone, and I lost my train of thought” (300), “I felt the tremor of his breath on my neck” (300), “my voice shook, embarrassing me” (300), “You’re driving me crazy” (300), “I never imagined anything like this. I didn’t believe I would ever find someone I wanted

to be with...in another way than my brothers and sisters” (300-301), “even though it’s all new to me, that I’m good at it...at being with you” (301), “if I was strong enough...” (301), “that possibility that I might be...overcome” (301), “unable to hide the longing in my voice” (302), “But I had to be good” (308), “Because it would be too hard for you, if I were that...close?” (310), “I told you I’ve never felt like this about anyone before, not even close” (311), “I know love and lust don’t always keep the same company” (311), “Well, do you find me attractive, in *that* way, at all?” (311 author’s emphasis)

The cultural euphemisms are as follows: “I thought about having Edward in my room, with my father in the house” (297), “Too late to regret not packing the Victoria’s Secret silk pajamas” (298), “Like I could sleep³¹ with you here!” (306), “So if you don’t want to sleep...” (306), “If I don’t want to sleep...?” (306), “What do you want to do then?” (306), “Is that...marriage...the same as it is for humans?” (309), “Is *that* what you’re getting at?” (309, author’s emphasis), “Well, I did wonder...about you and me...someday...” (310), “I don’t think that...that...would be possible for us” (310), ““Have *you* ever...?” He trailed off suggestively” (311, author’s emphasis).

These two sets of euphemisms offer a clearer picture of the subtext of the narrative than the physical/biological ones alone. As Bella sits with him on her bed, she thinks “about having Edward in [her] room, with [her] father in the house” (Meyer, *Twilight* 297). This acknowledges the usual taboo of leaving a young couple alone in a bedroom—a space that is often associated with sexual activity; if Charlie knew that this was the case, he undoubtedly would follow what Weeks calls the “traditional forms of regulation of adolescent courtship” and insist the couple be

³¹ “Sleep” is one of our most common euphemisms for sex. Douglas Robinson spends considerable space in his article “Henry James and Euphemism” to talk about the common phrases like “sleep together” or “sleep with” and their multiple meanings. He notes that his trusty dictionary includes sex as the fifteenth definition for the word. (Robinson 409-411)

either separated or move to a public part of the house such as the living room (25). Because Bella understands that she and Edward are flouting the moral rules by being in her room alone without Charlie's knowledge or permission, it adds to the increasing tension and excitement of the situation.

She attempts to diffuse some of the tension by taking a shower and changing into her night clothes; this serves to both give her some space and perspective from Edward and further the ruse for Charlie that she isn't planning to sneak out. As she pulls on her usual jammies—"a holey t-shirt and gray sweatpants"—she thinks of the "Victoria's Secret silk pajamas" which she's never worn and are stashed in a drawer back in Arizona (Meyer, *Twilight* 298). Bella knows that her sweats aren't the ideal apparel for this momentous situation, rather this is a moment when a costume connected to seduction and sexiness would make more sense. To drive it home, she name-drops Victoria's Secret, the largest national retailer of women's lingerie which is known for its brand image as synonymous with sex.

Thus begins Bella and Edward's physical interactions that provoke the emotional euphemisms for sexual excitement and desire. It is Edward who touches Bella while she refrains from touching him at the risk of unexpectedly inflaming his vampire instincts. She thinks to herself, "But I had to be good; I didn't want to make this any harder for him than it already was" (Meyer, *Twilight* 308). On the surface, she's talking about Edward's difficulty in being near her because the scent of her blood is so strong. Rather, Bella recognizes that it's up to her to moderate and control this situation, because if she attempts to physically express her sexual desire for him there is a distinct possibility that Edward's behavior may become unmanageable or dangerous. It's a slippery slope, and as Joan Jacobs Brumberg says, "American girls have to negotiate between their desire for sexual expression and the prospect of sexual danger. ... they

must learn to handle the emotional and physical risks that are involved in being sexually expressive in a postmodern, postvirginal world” (142-143). Hence, Bella feels that she must be “good” and suppress her sexual feelings in favor of making sure the situation remains stable. The further inference is that should she “give in” to her desires, she would be the one responsible for the consequences, thereby making her monstrous as a transgressor of the established order.

But as Edward touches her, Bella finds it increasingly difficult “to frame a coherent question” and “[loses] her train of thought” (Meyer, *Twilight* 299-300). These descriptions indicate that these new sensations from the external, exogenous, stimulus of Edward’s caresses actually serve to negate a coherent language; there are no words for how she feels and forming speech to have conversation becomes problematic. Language is a function of the symbolic order, which Kristeva defines as a product of the law of the father, or phallogocentric authoritarianism (72). In this moment, Bella effectively comes to represent the time in psychological maturation that precedes Lacan’s mirror phase, a time before the cognitive separation of the subject from the Object (Kristeva 12). If this is so, then Bella momentarily experiences a break from the symbolic order and her failed grasp and production of language means that she, as well as sex/sexuality, is rendered abject (Kristeva 12). Without properly claiming a stake in language, she lives in the borderland where feeling becomes the guiding force, far removed from the disciplined hierarchies of signification.

Still, this doesn’t last long as Bella attempts to bring herself into symbolic meaning by giving her emotions descriptive language. She says, “You’re driving me crazy,” which is the closest euphemism to saying *I am sexually stimulated*. Even something as prosaic as “turned on” is too explicit for Bella. Again as Robinson explains, the search and use of the right words is futile and ultimately a quest in appeasing some sense of morality, which greatly depends on

author, characters, and readers (409). Then again, her statement at least provides the glimpse toward sexual excitement. Edward's response is vaguer still and requires much of the reader in order to make the leap toward a conversation about sex.

At her admission, "a triumphant smile" lights Edward's face and he says:

In the last hundred years or so, [...] I never imagined anything like this. I didn't believe I would ever find someone I wanted *to be with*...in another way than my brothers and sisters. And then to find, even though it's all new to me, that I'm good at *it*...at *being* with you... (Meyer, *Twilight* 300-301, my emphasis).

The key words are "to be with" and "it." Small, vague, but telling. Edward differentiates his time with Bella from that with his brothers and sisters³². Should he spend time or merely want to spend time with Rosalie, Alice, Emmett, or Jasper in the way he does with Bella, it immediately implies the incest taboo. He *cannot* spend time with his siblings in the manner where he specifically invokes sexual excitement in them as the taboo, in varying degrees, appears a universal construct of culture (Weeks 22). And, his obvious pleasure at being "good at *it*," at sexually exciting her, further separates his relationship with Bella as different from his siblings' (Meyer, *Twilight* 301, my emphasis).

That and It: One for One Euphemisms

More so, "to be with" and "it" are instances of one for one substitutions for sex or sexual excitement. Read slightly altered, the sentences become, "I didn't believe I would ever find

³² Of course, Edward, Rosalie, Emmett, Alice, and Jasper are not blood kin and so are not necessarily affected by the incest taboo. However, in Meyer's universe, their performance as a strict family unit is necessary for the group of vampires to be read as more human than their nomadic or covenanted counterparts. Weeks supplies an answer: "The truth is that kin ties are not *natural* links of blood but are social relations between groups, often based on residential affinities and hostile to genetic affinities" (22, author's emphasis)

someone I wanted” *to have sex with* and, “And then to find, even though it’s all new to me, that I’m good at” *making you sexually excited* (Meyer, *Twilight* 300-301). Edward is pleased at his affect, adding to the masculine mystique that men are by nature sexual dynamos, having an innate command for sexuality (Grosz 198). More that there is innate command over women’s sexuality which is to be wrought, tempered, and extinguished through men’s sexual privilege (Grosz 199). The more blatant euphemisms that act as specific counter-parts to sex are near the end of the chapter as Bella asks about marriage between vampires. This marks the first time that Bella covertly opens the subject of sex. It also provides the earliest glimpses of how Bella is cast as the monstrous-feminine in her desire to have sex with Edward. Bella blushes as she considers her last question to ask Edward for their evening together, and the conversation is as follows:

“You said Rosalie and Emmett will get married soon...Is that...marriage...the same as it is for humans?”

He laughed in earnest now, understanding. “Is *that* what you’re getting at?”

I fidgeted, unable to answer.

“Yes, I suppose it is much the same,” he said. “I told you, most of those human desires are there, just hidden behind more powerful desires.”

“Oh,” was all I could say.

“Was there a purpose behind your curiosity?”

“Well, I did wonder...about you and me...someday...”

He was instantly serious, I could tell by the sudden stillness of his body. I froze, too, reacting automatically.

“I don’t think that...that...would be possible for us.” (Meyer, *Twilight* 309-310, author’s emphasis)

In this brief conversation, the words “that,” “marriage,” “*that*,” “it,” and “that” are direct euphemisms for sex. Initially, Bella invokes marriage as her entrance into the tricky subject of a sexual relationship. Because she is prohibited from opening the subject with the dead-on question—*Can we have sex?*—she resorts to what is perhaps the safest, yet most descriptive euphemism available. Weeks notes that much of Western culture is codified by its deep connections with Roman Catholic traditions, and as such it continues to “define appropriate behavior in terms of a limited range of acceptable activities” (20). As each age progressed and developed, notions concerning the sexually licit and illicit put into place and practice laws, both judicial and doctrinal, which eventually insisted that sex was purposefully for heterosexual married couples (Foucault 37-38).

While the rigidity of society’s rules pertaining to premarital and non-heterosexual sex have relaxed, the norm remains that married people have sex as part of their marriage contract, if only in an effort to produce children (Weeks 29). By substituting marriage for sex, Bella effectively tells Edward that she, on some level, knows what happens between married men and women behind closed doors. Her tact in the euphemism also means that Edward doesn’t have to question her moral or virginal purity; more blatant, but non-clinical, euphemisms for sex could mark her as impure and immoral, potentially polluted with too much carnal knowledge (Grosz 192-193).

Of course Edward understands her meaning immediately, though he doesn’t seem to catch onto why she might be asking. “Is *that* what you’re getting at?” he questions (Meyer, *Twilight* 309, author’s emphasis). His emphasis of “*that*” indicates that he simultaneously understands yet is confused. And, he doesn’t attempt to clarify her question with the use of another euphemism, one that might be more explicit. Whatever the gag rules involved in this

conversation that prohibit them from having a frank discussion about the possibility of a functional sexual relationship, he is hampered by them, too. Interesting as men are often recognized as “masters of reason” who tend to “talk straight,” yet “men can be shown to rely just as heavily on euphemism as women” (Robinson 411).

It is Bella’s admission, “Well, I did wonder...about you and me...someday...” that reveals her potential as the monstrous-feminine (Meyer, *Twilight* 310). While the naïve reader might assume she wonders if they could marry someday, the initiated reader knows better. Bella openly wonders whether she and Edward will have sex. His immediate serious reaction confirms that this is not the correct thing for her to think about. When she admitted to him that he was “driving her crazy,” it was acceptable because he was doing it to her (Meyer, *Twilight* 300). Now that she has broached her own curiosity, and I daresay desire, about their potential sexual relationship, Bella has overstepped the borderline into the space of abjection.

While men’s sexuality is rarely codified as monstrous, although often noted as violent and aggressive, women’s sexuality is most understood as working as a complement to men’s (Weeks 43). As such, women’s sexuality then poses a threat or danger to this hierarchy and balance. Her *want*, her desire to experience sexuality and the sex act with Edward, makes her abject, and she unwittingly presents him with seduction and repulsion simultaneously (Kristeva 5, author’s emphasis). He is sexually attracted to her, but the immorality of premarital sex, couched in the dangerous possibility he could accidentally kill her if he lost concentration and control, further stigmatizes her revelation. In raising the subject of sex, Bella ruptures the fantasy of the clean, pure “good girl” and exposes herself as a threat to the symbolic order; she reifies the potential of castration to Edward, and it’s only through controlling her body or her

sexual desires that he can maintain his individual, masculine identity without fear of being consumed by Bella (Creed 263).

In this scene, his solution to distract her from the subject and reassert his dominance is evident by the way he first attempts to scare her by explicitly saying, “I could kill you quite easily,” promoting his physical strength as significantly greater than her own and a reason for her to keep control of her sexual desire (Meyer, *Twilight* 310). Second, he deflects her question: “Well, do you find me attractive in *that* way, at all?” by neutralizing the sexual component by doing something decidedly asexual (Meyer, *Twilight* 311). “He laughed and lightly rumbled [Bella’s] nearly dry hair” (Meyer, *Twilight* 311). Although he confirms his attraction via his gender, he defuses any sexual tension by treating her like a child³³. His laughter connotes that her serious question, which has a lot riding on it, is actually frivolous and potentially absurd. Rumbling her hair is patronizing and further highlights Edward’s performed superiority over Bella; he essentially pats her on the head dismissively. His next statement, “I’ve answered your questions, now you should sleep” closes the conversation and completely extinguishes any sexual tension remaining between them.

“I Don’t Think That...That...Would Be Possible for Us”: Ellipses

Ellipses, an under researched punctuation mark, function in the same way as the euphemisms. They are not just a break in dialogue or thought where the word or words can be inferred based on context, but work to further mask the subject at hand. There are two ways that

³³ Edward, at this time, is 108 years old. Bella is 17. Although his body looks like a teenager’s body, he is far older, meaning that the relationship between them is über inter-generational. In any other situation, this would absolutely be classified as pedophilia. Although Edward is also a physical virgin, his eidetic memory, mind reading ability, age, and two medical degrees are more than enough knowledge to mark him as sexually savvy next to the appropriately naïve Bella. Still, there doesn’t seem to be a lot of controversy about this among fans as his body and performed “teenagerness” are enough to stabilize the illusion that they belong together.

ellipses are employed. First, there is a break in the middle of a sentence (e.g. “Is that...marriage...the same as it is for humans?”) or aposiopesis, better recognized as the ellipsis at the end of a sentence that indicates an incomplete and trailed off thought (e.g. “Have *you* ever...”) (Meyer, *Twilight* 309, 311, author’s emphasis).

The closest research available that might offer some classification for this device is Linfoot-Ham’s suggested additional category of “Deletion” to Warren’s existing one of “Phonemic modification” (241). Linfoot-Ham does offer two examples of deletion that are aposiopetic; however her examples use dashes at the end of the partial sentence rather than ellipses (“Did you –”) (241). She also includes words that have letters replaced with other characters yet convey the meaning (e.g. F--- for Fuck) and the bleeps heard on TV to replace words considered inappropriate for a general audience (Linfoot-Ham 241).

In *Twilight* the way that this device is used in terms of grammar is interesting. The chapter “Mind over Matter” has a total of 55 ellipses. Of these, 21 are aposiopesis and 34 are the traditional line break. There are three sentences that contain both styles. This brief count offers some indication to how often this euphemism is employed in the series. The aposiopetic euphemisms function exactly as expected, abruptly severing a thought so the reader can fill in the rest. It’s the elliptical line breaks that offer something new.

The speaker, either Edward or Bella, stops part way through a thought, the ellipsis is there, and then the completion of the sentence. What’s fascinating is that in nearly every example, the line break happens in a moment where a host of words or descriptions could be used. It’s as though the characters take a second to mentally decide which word is most appropriate among the many choices. In almost all cases, after the ellipsis the words appear

deliberate and are themselves either euphemisms or clearly softened terms that downplay the subtext of the subject.

For example, Bella's question, "Is that...marriage...the same as it is for humans?" functions exactly in this way (Meyer, *Twilight* 309). It's as though she weighs what the best word will be for a moment after saying "that" and then settles on the end of the sentence. In the pause of the ellipsis, Bella knows that the question should be: *Is sex the same as it is for humans?* But, she understands the moral implication of asking such a direct question. If she *outs* herself as a young woman interested in sex, interested in experiencing sex with Edward, she risks losing her good girl status and being reassigned as a slut. So she sticks with the safest euphemism, marriage, as means of protecting her reputation while still seeking the information she desires. And as their relationship develops, she does get to push the border of what is acceptable sexual activity with Edward—still limited only to kissing and lying entangled together that the reader can see. The stakes are high for Bella, because a woman who owns her sexual self-identity, who is confident in her body, desire, and ability is a dangerous creature indeed; she's a monster.

As the conversation continues, Bella partially states: "Well, I did wonder...about you and me...someday..." (Meyer, *Twilight* 310). This is one of the examples that contain both the traditional ellipses and aposiopesis. Grammatically, the construction is the same as her previous question. She stops abruptly after "wonder," weighing what the precise words would be to make her point while also staying within the acceptable parameters of the conversation. The statement should read: *Well, I did wonder if you and I will have sex someday.* But, it would be too blatant.

Edward immediately understands her meaning and responds in the negative. "I don't think that...that...would be possible for us" (Meyer, *Twilight* 310). Again his use of "that"

functions as a one for one substitute of the word sex, so the sentence should rightly read: *I don't think that sex would be possible for us*. The ellipsis is the pause he needs to choose the most nondescript word possible to get his point across without naming the actual subject of the conversation. His immediate excuse is that he would likely kill her if he “wasn't paying enough attention” (Meyer, *Twilight* 310).

The subject of their potential sexual relationship returns in each book, and every time Bella attempts to press her advantage. At one point, she asks him, “which is tempting you more, my blood or my body?” (Meyer, *New Moon* 52). While he declares, “it's a tie,” he also tells her to stop pushing her luck, immediately silencing her desire (Meyer, *New Moon* 52). But of course, Bella eventually wears Edward down. “[Y]es I *can* have a real honeymoon!” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 65, author's emphasis).

Bella's Big Night

After the wedding, Bella and Edward travel to the private Isle Esme³⁴ off the coast of Brazil. The newlyweds arrive, both jittery with nervousness considering the monumental occasion. Bella has fulfilled her part of their bargain by going through with the wedding, and now Edward must, ah-hem, hold up his end by at least attempting sexual intercourse. Keep in mind, up to this point, so far as the reader knows, the couple's sexual experiences are totally limited to kissing/making out. While they are usually curled around each other while they kiss, there's never any description of any other kind of “petting” happening between them. No groping. No talk of hands exploring any body parts. And now, they're mentally preparing for

³⁴ Carlisle bought Esme the island as a gift, and she loans the use of it (with its huge beach house) to Edward and Bella for the duration of their honeymoon. (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 78)

penetrative sex. To put it euphemistically, they've barely gotten to first base and are already trying to steal home plate.

Edward admits: "I tried to think of everything that would make this...easier" (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 80). "This" acts as his euphemism; he can't say *our first time having sex*. The ellipsis offers the pause he needs to soften the sentiment with "easier" at the end of the sentence. He suggests that they take a moonlight swim first, and specifically notes "The water will be very warm," equalizing their body temperatures (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 80). He leaves Bella to have a "human minute or two" and she frantically searches the suitcase for something familiar; Alice has packed her luggage full of "Lingerie. Very lingerie-ish lingerie, with French tags" (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 81). This is a far cry from the Victoria's Secret silk pajamas she mentioned earlier, but the sign reads the same. Lingerie has only one function, seduction intended for sexual activity.

Distraught, she discreetly checks on Edward who has walked through the French doors straight onto the beach. His clothes are draped over a low tree branch, and Bella's nerves spike. The connotation of course is that Edward is naked. She doesn't think this but instead says, "A rush of heat flashed across my skin again," defaulting to the physical euphemisms for sexual desire while still avoiding the subject (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 82). Just like in "Mind over Matter" she chooses to shower ("Also, shaving my legs again seemed like a pretty good idea") and brush her teeth to give herself some distance and time to calm down (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 82).

The tactic fails as she contemplates what she's supposed to wear when she leaves the room. Not a swimsuit, and not her traveling clothes, and the lingerie that Alice packed intimidates her. What it really comes down to is her confidence. All the way through the series,

she's been prepared to push the borders of their sexual relationship, but now that the big moment has arrived, she's unsure of herself. "I was freaking out because I had no idea how to do this, and I was afraid to walk out of this room and face the unknown. Especially in French lingerie. I knew I wasn't ready for *that* yet" (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 83, author's emphasis). She grapples with the situation, "how to do this." Do what? Perform a version of sexiness or sexuality that is constantly splashed on magazine covers and in television commercials. To parrot the stance, gate, eyelash flutters, and coquettish smiles associated with demure but sizzling women's sexuality. She equates her terror to that of stage fright: "This felt exactly like having to walk out in front of a theatre full of thousands with no idea what my lines were" (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 83).

But she rallies and leaves the room to find Edward. Once she spots him in the water, "his back to me, waist deep in the midnight water, staring up at the oval moon" (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 84). She drops her towel and notes all her "awkwardness, [her] shy uncertainty" has "smoldered away" (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 84). She joins him in the water, and although her observation indicates that Edward's "private parts" are at least partly concealed in the water, her breasts are bare to him. Ostensibly it's the first time either of them has seen the other naked. There's no mention of that. Instead they clasp hands and Edward breaks the mood by reminding her of the potential danger they're facing. "I promised we would *try*" ... "If...I do something wrong, if I hurt you, you must tell me at once" (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 85, author's emphasis).

His warnings and insistence that he could hurt her or worse kill her do nothing but reaffirm that sex, particularly first penetrative intercourse, is supposed to be about pain for women. And with no talk, no frank conversation between them about the logistics of what it actually means to have sex with another person that goes beyond the basic biology or sex

education lesson of penis in vagina, is short-sighted and decidedly not adult. Assuming Edward's alarm is really about his bloodlust and is not a metaphor for rape, it would make sense that the couple build up to the moment by slowly testing his boundaries and ability to control the bloodlust while engaging in sexual activity. It would make sense that they would take reasonable precautions, such as attempting intercourse for the first time in Edward's room in the Cullen house so that the other vampires could intervene if Edward's bloodlust should spike and Bella should get hurt or bitten. But no, here they are on this island in the middle of nowhere with absolutely no fore-knowledge to depend upon.

Bella tries to assuage his concerns by saying "We belong together" and he agrees, responding "Forever" as he "pulled [them] gently into deeper water" (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 85). And that's it. The paragraph breaks with a gaping space before: "The sun, hot on the bare skin of my back, woke me in the morning" (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 85). There are absolutely no details about what has happened between them, and the space between the paragraphs leaves *everything* to readers' imaginations. Even euphemisms and ellipses are apparently too explicit, and Meyer instead options to not reveal the scene at all.

Whatever happened, Bella "would have been happy to lie [in bed with Edward] forever, to never disturb this moment" the morning after (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 86). Her happiness is quickly sullied by a brooding Edward who demands "How badly are you hurt, Bella? The truth—don't try to downplay it" (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 87). She stretches and while feeling sore, "it was not an unpleasant feeling," but he persists until he shows her several handprint bruises developing on her body (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 87). Bella does her best to hold onto her initial morning after bliss, but to no avail as she snaps, "You are *killing my buzz*, Edward" (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 91, author's emphasis). And that's their first time, supposedly, having

sex. Bella awakens happy but the situation quickly devolves into a fight, and Edward insists they won't have sex again until she's a vampire.

Discussion and Conclusion: The Price for Pleasure

In this chapter, I argued that the use of euphemisms rather than frank language pertaining to sex and sexuality serves to reinforce an ever-present moral panic about teen girls' sexuality. There are particular social rules in place that are meant to instruct, guide, and discipline young women in the parameters of acceptable sexuality. Women are quickly placed in the double-bind of choosing between acting on their sexual desires or performing the socially correct version which is nearly totally linked to men's desires. Sex is almost immediately linked with danger rather than pleasure where women's adolescent coming of age is specifically bound to the impurity of menstruation and a pregnancy-ready body, while men's is celebrated through spontaneous erections and ejaculation (Grosz 195). Sadly, this discourse for women includes the continued fear-mongering and victim blaming which results in forcing women into the role of sexual gate-keepers. Thus, in pushing the subject of sex, even through euphemism, Bella becomes the monstrous-feminine or the hypersexualized Other.

Once Bella gets to have sex with Edward—on her honeymoon after their marriage—it's clear that she enjoys the initial experience, saying: “for a human, well, I can't imagine that life gets any better than that” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 92). But Edward is having none of it, stewing in self-disgust that her body is bruised from where he held her too tightly.

Beth Felker Jones, a Christian professor of Theology, makes a keen and sobering observation.

If you, like many readers, find these scenes exciting, it may be because it's part of a powerful cultural tradition in which sex is seen as dangerous, especially for women, and the excitement and intensity of sex is heightened by that sense of danger. We have to reject these lies. Sex is exciting—not because of danger, but because it's a gift from God. (Felker Jones 57)

Bella must badger Edward into having sex again³⁵, and it's only because she wakes from a dream clearly emotionally distressed that he acquiesces. And while he concedes that sex *is* pleasurable, he must remain constantly vigilant that he doesn't inadvertently kill her. Indeed he agrees that “it might be safer if it's premeditated, rather than if I wait for you to assault me again” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 116). They're a young married couple, and he's likened his wife's sexual advances and desire for sex with him to assault. He's marked her as a predator, a monster, looking to take advantage of him; never mind that she kept her end of the bargain and jumped through the correct social/moral hoops to have sanctioned sex.

Just as she's becoming acquainted with this new facet of her identity and the huge transformation in her relationship with Edward, Bella is almost immediately *rewarded* with an unplanned pregnancy that turns her into a grotesque host forced to drink blood and endure being destroyed from the inside out. It's clear that the threat of sex as dangerous comes to fruition, because it's only after she has her baby that Bella can actually enjoy a functioning sex life. Sex for pleasure alone, even after marriage, is still immoral or impure.

³⁵ While I absolutely agree with Felker Jones's assertion about rejecting the lies that sex equals danger, I also think that sometimes if you don't end up a little bruised and sore, you haven't done it right.

Where euphemism is concerned, the constraints of the YA genre mean that overly explicit language is impossible. And, Meyer didn't write a manual for sex education. She wrote a Paranormal Romance novel so the use of euphemism makes sense. However, there is a disservice to readers by not offering any realistic talk or expectations shared between Bella and Edward. It's abundantly clear that she's the one pushing for a sexual relationship; she even feels badly about that saying, "You make me feel like a villain in a melodrama—twirling my mustache while I try to steal some poor girl's virtue" (Meyer, *Eclipse* 453). Bella doesn't have adequate language to express her desires or concerns and is effectively gagged by the oppressive need to keep sex under wraps, which totally fails because this series is so focused on the "erotics of abstinence" or "abstinence porn" that sex is everywhere. Even when it cannot be mentioned by name.

Sex and sexuality is communicated through ellipses in moments where sex is absolutely made unspeakable. There largely are no acceptable words to use. After all, the word 'sex' appears just eight times in the entire series; three of those are specifically references to the "sex talk," "sex speech," and "sex education" (Meyer, *Eclipse* 58, 60, 61), which actually are covert conversations about unplanned pregnancy (oops!). The other five are in *Breaking Dawn*, and they all occur after Bella and Edward are married and have had sex during their honeymoon. Essentially, it isn't until they've followed all the rules and done things in the morally correct order that the most specific word can be applied

What's at stake for the teen reader is the potentially disempowering messages that continue to insist women's sexuality is only valid when experienced in relation to men's. Worse, if not experienced in the correct moral order, a woman risks being branded as a deviant hypersexual Other, the monstrous-feminine. This is wrapped into the persistent, vicious fallacy

that sex—particularly first penetrative sex—is about pain. No matter how hard Bella struggles to experience the jouissance of her body and sexual desire, she must bow to Edward’s consistent sexual suppression. His prudery and moral righteousness is what allows him to control this aspect of their relationship so fully, which has nothing to do with being a monster. Sure he’s a vampire, but discussions of abject monstrosity are almost always applied to women instead of men. What happens when a man is theoretically combined with abjection? I surmise it produces a version of hypermasculinity that has more in common with a superhero instead of a monster where Bella is resigned to being the “villain in a melodrama” because she makes it known that she actually enjoys sex.

What of the other side of this story? Yes, there were adult readers who mourned the loss of the “innocent eroticism” between Edward and Bella (Seifert). Yet, there were other readers who wanted more than the words within the series offered them. These fans took to the web to write fanfiction where they could write through, in the smallest minutiae, Bella’s sexual experiences. There are thousands of stories marked as Mature in FanFiction.net which offer the broadest varieties of sexual pleasure (and deviance) in relation to the *Twilight* universe. The most well-known of these is the text *Master of the Universe*³⁶, better known to the public as international best-seller *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E.L. James. The original fanfiction follows a human Edward and Bella as they explore a new relationship based on his predilection for sadomasochism. The S&M storyline has become a staple subgenre in *Twilight* fanfiction, garnering monikers for the characters like “Domward” and “Subella.”

³⁶ *Master of the Universe* was specifically posted to FanFiction.net as *Twilight* fanfiction. James wrote under the pen name Snowqueens Icedragon, and her profile remains up on the site although it’s blank as all of her work has been removed. There are bootleg PDF copies of *Master of the Universe* and the sequel book titled *Master of the Universe II* (which became *Fifty Shades Darker*), widely available on the web.

While the euphemisms in *The Twilight Saga* aid a discourse that shames and devalues women's sexuality, the fans have not necessarily taken it to heart. Reading Bella as a resistant agent in the series, her *want* is apparent and she would have what she wants were it not for Edward. Fans have taken that and given her a multitude of new and exciting lives where she can live out all those unspoken fantasies and desires that she struggled to articulate in the pages of *Twilight*. Perhaps this eruption of fanfiction is the expression of this need to recognize that the borders of sex and sexuality are infinitely bigger than culturally conceived, which produces "an explosion of discourses around sexuality, a new willingness, and compulsion indeed, to speak about sex, to tell sexual stories in ever more inventive ways, resulting in unprecedented profusion of sexual speech in everything" (Weeks 98).

CHAPTER 4:

“THERE WILL NEVER BE MORE THAN TWO OF US”³⁷:

THE TWILIGHT SAGA’S MONSTROUS MOTHERS

Traditionally, vampires don’t have children; they are makers, sires, and progenitors, depending on the fictive universe, but they do not, as a general rule, reproduce in the same ways as biological human beings. For the female vampires in Stephenie Meyer’s *The Twilight Saga*, this truth causes a great deal of grief and longing. Through the narrative, Bella Swan, the human heroine, hears a number of perspectives about what it means to live an undead life with a never changing body that will never create a child. For several of the vampire women in the saga, their eternal youth, beauty, and intelligence is a steep price to pay for the loss of motherhood. I argue that the Cullen women, as well as other vampire women from Meyer’s universe, are representations of an incomplete femininity where these characters have failed the prime directive of womanhood: being a biological mother. This work speaks to a longstanding Western cultural assumption that motherhood is both the natural and desired primary identity for a woman and those who do not pursue motherhood are abnormal.

I begin by theoretically grounding this chapter in the work of Barbara Creed and Julia Kristeva. Creed, drawing from Kristeva’s theories about abjection, examines what she titles the “monstrous-feminine” (251). The vampire women in *The Twilight Saga* become abject mothers in their own rights through their individual coping strategies that mitigate their inability to produce their own children. These narratives of lost motherhood and motherhood through

³⁷ (Meyer, *Eclipse* 167)

substitution are symptomatic of a culture that continues to value women through their enforced reproductive capacity.

Next, I analyze the narrative stories of Rosalie Hale, Esme Cullen, Sasha Denali, and Bella Swan, as a means of examining the individual circumstances that these characters are rendered monstrous mothers. Each woman copes with her frozen, vampiric identity in a different way, and only Bella has the opportunity to reconcile what it means to become undead and still have a biological child. In each of their personal narratives, discussions about biological children are prominent, often working to solidify their specifically gendered identities and their desires to perform femininity or womanhood properly. Their stories are arranged in accordance with their representations as pre-phallic, phallic, archaic and phallic, and authentic archaic motherhood.

I conclude this chapter by drawing distinct parallels between the literature and the theoretical constructs I will outline. Additionally, I offer some discussion about the potential rhetorical repercussions for continuing to teach such a narrow and inflexible definition for womanhood.

Abject Motherhood

Creed explains that, “All human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject” (251). Whether stemming from castration anxiety, an Oedipal complex, or commingled disgust and pleasure from the sight of women’s genitals, there’s a consistent and pervasive recognition that there’s a distinct *difference* that marks women as monstrous (Creed 251). In effect, to be a woman is to be a monster. And to be a monster is to be that which is abject and lives in spaces of abjection.

Julia Kristeva loosely defines the abject as that which “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). The abject is nothing short of a paradox. Even as it is recognized as repulsive it is also simultaneously seductive. “[A]ll abjection is in fact recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded” (Kristeva 5, author’s emphasis). By these definitions, Bella nicely sums what makes Edward Cullen abject when she says:

About three things I was absolutely positive. First, Edward was a vampire. Second, there was part of him—and I didn’t know how potent that part might be—that thirsted for my blood. And third, I was unconditionally and irrevocably in love with him. (Meyer, *Twilight* 195)

Spaces of abjection are those of liminality, where there is no Truth with a capital ‘T’. It’s not a physical place, rather a one where it becomes difficult to define a state of being, an identity, or where meanings collapse. Abjection is a site for rupturing subjectivity, objectivity, and identity. It’s the borderland that is rife with change, where things are made and unmade to the possibilities of what they might become.

Monsters are inherently abject and exist in spaces of abjection. Vampires are perfect examples as their corporeal bodies are neither alive nor dead, indicating an abject state of being. They arguably are cadavers, yet they do not fester and decay. Kristeva identifies the corpse as something with the ability to violently upset the individual who comes into contact with it, as something that reveals how inevitably all living things die, rot, and cross the borderland to abjection (3). Creed significantly points out that those things which cross or threaten to cross the border are abject (253). The vampire, in its dead yet living as-though-still-alive state (walking, talking, thinking, and existing communally and quietly amongst humanity) is an abject being.

And, most disturbingly, the vampire survives on the consumption of living blood; the vampire body disturbingly transgresses the border in a way that logically, scientifically, and religiously makes no sense. It is a body and state of being predicated on anachronism³⁸ and dichotomy.

For the vampire women in the series, they are in some ways doubly abject because their monstrosity “is produced at that which separates those who take up their proper gender roles from those who do not” (Creed 253). After the transformation, a vampire woman’s body remains in a fixed state. This means that the biological mechanisms for pregnancy—a menstrual cycle and a changing womb environment—are effectively frozen in time (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 126). For this reason, a number of the vampire women appear to need to find ways to cope with this perceived loss because they cannot “take up their proper gender roles.” Through these coping strategies, they take on aspects of abject mothers described by Creed, the phallic mother and the archaic mother (254).

The phallic mother³⁹ is one who effectively refuses to release her child to become an independent individual. More so, it is a mother who *lives* through her child, asserting agency and activeness by her will and ability to control the child (Creed 254). “Fear of losing oneself and one’s boundaries is made more acute in a society which values boundaries over continuity and separateness over sameness,” so the woman recognizes her subjectivity through her role as a mother and holds tightly to that identity in a bid to maintain those boundaries (Creed 262). The

³⁸ As immortal beings, Meyer’s vampires have the possibility of becoming suspended from time and culture. For example: to Bella, Edward appears old-fashioned in his desire for them to marry so young and his resistance to beginning a sexual relationship (Meyer, *Eclipse* 452). Edward describes it thusly: “My *self*, also, had frozen as it was—my personality, my likes and my dislikes, my moods and my desires; all were fixed in place” (Meyer, *Midnight Sun* 109, author’s emphasis). In some ways, Meyer’s vampires become out of touch and out of place to the human world because they live for such a long time and the Cullens maintain their general sense of morality based on the context of their human lives.

³⁹ Creed’s definitions for the phallic mother are specifically tied to Freud’s theories concerning the male child’s reaction to seeing the mother’s genitals; her distinct lack of a penis confirms that castration is not only possible but potentially inevitable and so the child sees her as both terrifying and as a fetish object. (Creed 263)

archaic mother is “the image of the mother in her generative function—the mother as the origin of all life” (Creed 258). This is a mother that actively produces life, but in that process becomes embodied liminality. Archaic mothers are those who produce life from within, although they do not necessarily gestate their offspring inside the body; the transference of bodily fluids, eggs, or embryos to a host is also indicative of the archaic mother. Often, the archaic and phallic mothers are one in the same, combining different aspects of each in a single body.

The monstrous-feminine is, at its heart, the recognition that women are monsters and therefore abject. Women’s bodies do not look, let alone function, as men’s bodies and so that *difference* becomes the point of contention and oppression. The ability to produce children in the patriarchal system is an expression of monstrosity, yet it is also an understood expectation. This places women in a “damned if you do, and damned if you don’t” double-bind. Meyer’s vampire women do their best to meet the expectations for their gender, but ultimately it’s an inauthentic and incomplete version of motherhood. Only Bella can perform authentic mother because she births her own offspring. It is this need on the part of these women to play out some expression of motherhood that ultimately constructs them as the abject monstrous-feminine.

The Monstrous Mothers

In this section, I offer details for the human and vampire lives of Rosalie, Esme, Sasha, and Bella as means of evidence for their representations as abject mothers. Their stories provide a spectrum of motherhoods: the pre-phallic, phallic, combined archaic and phallic, and the authentic archaic. Each woman struggles to reconcile her perceived loss of biological reproduction with the positive attributes and potentials in being a vampire. In an effort to make

peace with this state of being, each of these women finds different coping mechanisms which offer them some sense of motherhood.

Rosalie Hale

Rosalie was born in Rochester, New York, as the only daughter of rich social climber parents in 1915 (Meyer, *The Twilight Saga* 110-113). By 1933, she was “considered the most beautiful girl in Rochester,” and received a great deal of attention, including the interest of Royce King II who came from the richest family in town (Meyer, *The Twilight Saga* 111). Rosalie had only one jealousy in her life and that was for her close friend Vera who had married young and promptly produced a son. When Royce proposed scarcely two months after meeting, she imagined a future with a doting husband and a baby of her own (Meyer, *Eclipse* 157).

A week before the wedding, Rosalie spent an evening with Vera. Without an escort to walk her home, she tried to hurry past a group of men who were obviously drunk. Royce was among them and called her by name, insisting she come over and speak with them. He ripped off her coat and hat, and he “and his friends brutally assaulted and raped Rosalie. Thinking her dead, they abandoned her in the road” (Meyer, *The Twilight Saga* 112). Carlisle found her and used the transformation to save her life. After awakening as a vampire, Rosalie enacted vengeance on her attackers, murdering each one in gruesome ways—without drinking their blood. But, eventually she began to blame her beauty for what had happened. She speculated that if she had been “normal” then she might’ve married a man who truly loved her “and [had] pretty babies” (Meyer, *Eclipse* 162).

Rosalie is a pre-phallic mother. She makes it clear to Bella that “Esme’s made due with us as substitutes,” but she has no opportunity for that, and her deep-rooted unhappiness about

being childless and bodily frozen manifests as anger and resentment toward Bella (Meyer, *Eclipse* 167). As the phallic mother maintains close bonds with her children as a means of stabilizing her subjectivity, Rosalie fixates on the children she might have had. At eighteen, she “yearned for her own little baby,” and rather than seeking substitutes of her own, she lashes out at Bella who bodily has the ability to produce children but is resolved in choosing a future without them (Meyer, *Eclipse* 156). “You already have *everything*. ... And you’re going to *throw it away*. ... You have the choice that I didn’t have, and you’re choosing *wrong!*” (Meyer, *Eclipse* 166, author’s emphasis). Bella reminds her that she had a happy ending with her marriage to Emmett⁴⁰, but Rosalie clarifies that it’s only half a happy ending. “But there will never be more than two of us. And I’ll never sit on a porch somewhere, with him grey-haired by my side, surrounded by our grandchildren” (Meyer, *Eclipse* 167). Rosalie continues by telling Bella that she can’t know what she’ll want in ten or fifteen years, and becoming a vampire isn’t something she can take back, inferring that she’ll face the same grief and anger without children of her own. It’s no secret that she is the most malcontent with being a vampire as Edward reminds Emmett during one of their hunting trips. “We both knew that Rosalie would do anything, give up anything, if it meant she could be human again. Even Emmett” (Meyer, *Midnight Sun* 151).

As a pre-phallic mother, she is the reiteration that women who cannot have children—for whatever reasons—are to be pitied and they will always be incomplete. Stacy Holman Jones, in recounting her struggle with infertility and decision to adopt, describes how a social worker requests that she write down that she has accepted the loss of biological fertility and is prepared

⁴⁰ In 1935, Rosalie discovers Emmett being mauled by a bear in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee. His curly black hair and dimples remind her of Vera’s son, and she carries him more than a hundred miles back to Carlisle so he can put Emmett through the transformation. (Meyer, *The Twilight Saga* 115-118)

for other alternatives. She does so, but privately feels that this testimony “doesn’t prove that [she’s] accepted loss. It doesn’t promise that [she is] ready to love a child who was never, not once, a part of [her]” (Holman Jones 118). As a result of Rosalie’s desire for a child, she becomes bitter and angry, which suggests that even a substitute child would not begin to fill that void. That is until Bella unexpectedly becomes pregnant on her honeymoon. Initially, she acts as bodyguard, preventing Carlisle and Edward from getting too close to Bella in fears they will take steps to induce miscarriage (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 178). Edward laments to Jacob Black: “Rosalie’s always there, feeding her insanity—encouraging her. Protecting her. No, protecting *it*. Bella’s life means nothing to her” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 181, author’s emphasis).

His comment reveals new heights of Rosalie’s abject monstrosity. Jacob agrees that her actions are focused toward the growing foetus rather than Bella’s health. “The baby, the baby. Like that was all that mattered. Bella’s life was a minor detail to her—easy to blow off” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 303). Rosalie zealously encourages Bella to drink a cup full of human blood as means of nourishing the foetus when traditional foods are rejected. “But it will help the baby ... We’ve thought of a better way to feed him.” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 241). Her language is clear; she’s focused on feeding the foetus instead of Bella. While Bella readily agrees, it’s Rosalie who continues to offer encouragement and persuades her to drink as much blood as she can although the potential for Bella’s human body to have an adverse reaction is significant according to Carlisle.

When Bella’s placenta detaches, triggering the need for an emergency caesarean section, it’s Rosalie who wields the scalpel that cuts open Bella’s abdomen (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 350). Her mania is at its peak, as is her thirst as the smell of Bella’s blood fills the air. She’s literally kicked out the room, but returns once she’s controlled. “Give her to me, ... Give me the baby,

Edward. I'll take care of her until Bella..." (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 354). Her speech ends abruptly, not voicing what undoubtedly is her deepest desire: that Bella will die, Edward will make good on his promise of suicide, and she'll finally have the child she's so desperately craved for nearly a century. Jacob observes how Rosalie becomes "totally absorbed in the creature," and he watches her coo as she nuzzles the child against her face (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 357). In this moment, she embodies an adoptive mother, waiting to take *her* child for the first time. Holman Jones describes a similar occurrence in her article, noting that "[adoptive mothers] are not selfless, saintly, good. They are greedy, impatient. Only flesh and bone—molecular miracles their own bodies cannot sustain—will satiate such longing" (114).

Unfortunately for Rosalie, Bella survives her ordeal and reclaims her child so she and Edward can be a complete nuclear family. Her feelings of loss connected with her inability to produce children are acute. While there is sense in her assertion that Bella is young and perhaps will want children when she is older, Rosalie's continued persecution of Bella denies her agency and right to make the best reproductive choices for her. For Rosalie, the only understandable and correct course for womanhood includes children. In telling Bella she's throwing her life away by becoming a vampire, she reaffirms that there's something inherently wrong with not choosing biological motherhood. And, when Bella does produce a child, Rosalie is vindicated in that Bella agrees that Renesmee is the best thing to happen to her.

Esme Cullen

Born in 1895, Esme grew up in Columbus, Ohio (Meyer, *The Twilight Saga* 105-108). When she was sixteen, she fell from a tree and broke her leg, which was set by a travelling doctor, Carlisle Cullen. Several years later, she was pressured by her father to marry Charles

Evenson, who physically abused her after they wed. Evenson, unfortunately, returned from World War I in 1919, and Esme became pregnant in 1921. Fearing for the life of her unborn child, she fled to Wisconsin, posed as a war widow, and became a school teacher. According to *The Official Illustrated Guide*⁴¹:

Esme began building a life for herself and her baby. She loved the unborn child more than her own life. But two days after her son was born, he died of lung fever. Feeling as if she had lost everything, Esme walked to a cliff outside of town and jumped. (Meyer, *The Twilight Saga* 107)

Her body was recovered and taken directly to the local morgue. Carlisle was working there and detected a faint heartbeat inside of her body; he decided to induce the vampiric transformation as a means to save her life (Meyer, *Twilight* 288).

Much of Esme's adult human life is shaded by the repeated violence at the hands of her husband, and it's safe to assume that her child was a product of marital rape. With no other known romantic attachments in her history, she has little firsthand knowledge of what a positive, healthy relationship functions like. When she becomes pregnant, she not only pins all of her future hope to the would-be child but also begins to act in its best interest rather than solely her own. "The baby was Esme's motivation to escape—she would not bring a child into Charles's home" (Meyer, *The Twilight Saga* 106).

Although she successfully flees her husband and builds a solvent life for herself, the death of her infant precipitates her depression and subsequent suicide. Eluding death, she

⁴¹ *The Twilight Saga: The Official Illustrated Guide* was published in 2011 by Little, Brown as a way to offer fans an expansion of the *Twilight* universe. Much of the information had been collected in the online *Twilight Lexicon* by the two co-founders of the site known as Alphie and Pelirroja. Although Meyer is given author credit on the jacket, it's widely known that Alphie and Pelirroja ghost wrote much of the text beyond Meyer's interviews and answers to common fan questions.

becomes the second of Carlisle's companions, next to Edward who was turned in 1918. She remembers Carlisle from her fuzzy human memories and the relationship changes easily to romance and marriage (Meyer, *The Twilight Saga* 107). Of course she and Carlisle cannot produce biological children so Esme quickly slips into the role of matriarch of the family, playing mother to Edward and the other family members as they are added.

In an early conversation with Bella, Esme candidly reveals that her human child died. Bella notes that her tone is matter-of-fact as she adds "that's why I jumped off the cliff⁴², you know" (Meyer, *Twilight* 368). This information contextualizes Esme's role in the family as she insists, "I do think of them as my children in most ways. I never could get over my mothering instincts ... Edward was the first of my new sons. I've always thought of him that way..." (Meyer, *Twilight* 368). Here, Esme offers a glimpse of her positionality as abject mother, the phallic mother who cannot let go of her children.

Most of the Cullens were transformed in their late teens or early twenties, and in their lifetimes they would have been well-within the limits of what was considered a functioning adult. Yet, Esme persists in performing the role of mother. She acts as referee to prevent them from cheating during family games like baseball (Meyer, *Twilight* 368). She acts as cheerleader and emotional support when Edward is conflicted about dating Bella (Meyer, 2008c, pp. 145-146). She cleans up Bella's blood with bleach, despite that the scent of human blood is antagonizing (Meyer, *New Moon* 42).

For Kristeva, the mother child relationship is fraught with struggle where the child perceives a desire for autonomy while the mother reinforces her bonds to keep the child close.

⁴² In *New Moon*, Bella repeats Esme's actions by jumping from a cliff located in the La Push Reservation to evoke a hallucination of Edward's voice. Jacob Black, her best friend and the third angle in the love triangle with Bella and Edward, pulls her from the water and saves her life. (Meyer, *New Moon* 359)

The Cullen “siblings” endlessly pose as high school or college students, meaning that Esme’s public face is that of doting stay at home mom. But, her performance remains firmly in place in their private home so far as the reader sees. This is most evident in her interactions with Edward, who in many ways epitomizes the child grappling with the “clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling” (Kristeva 13). At a physical age of 17, Edward is the youngest member of the family and the only one without a partner until Bella comes into the picture. With the exception of the majority of 1920s, he’s never been away from the protection of Carlisle and Esme’s home⁴³ (Meyer, *The Twilight Saga* 99). He thinks of the couple as his parents, though he has some memories of his biological ones, and occasionally refers to Esme as “Mom” (Meyer, *Midnight Sun* 146).

After Edward and Bella marry, Esme builds them a cottage on the Cullen property to offer them respite from the shared family home. As newlyweds, there’s no discussion about where they might live or what they’d like to do with their future. In building their home, Esme solidifies that Edward and by extension Bella will remain close to her. The ability to keep her perceived children in near proximity authenticates her as both woman and mother (Kristeva 13). Creed insists that the continued need for validation and authentication on the part of the mother, especially when received through the actions of the child, is what allows her maintain a stable subjective identity (254).

The continued desire for the mother to maintain her hold over her child so that she effectively knows how to recognize herself through her maternal role is what makes her abject.

⁴³ In the early 1920s, Edward rebelled against Carlisle’s ideologies concerning the worth of human life and the value of preserving it in favor of drinking an animal blood diet. He left Carlisle and Esme and started hunting human prey, taking care to use his gift to kill only those he deemed deserving: rapists, child molesters, and murderers primarily. He returned to his “parents” in 1931 and did not leave them again until the events of *New Moon* that sent him tracking Victoria across South America. (Meyer, *The Twilight Saga* 98-99)

Esme represents the phallic mother in this way, consistently performing the labor of motherhood regardless of the fact that her “children” are adult people who are self-sufficient and are indestructible vampires who are in little need of mothering. Her relationship with Edward further establishes her as abject because his desire and need to become a fully formed, independent adult is consistently hampered by his perpetual reliance on the security of his relationship with Esme. Even when he finds a suitable partner and produces a family unit of his own, she is unable to allow him to “leave the nest” and builds him a house to keep him close to her, maintaining her hold over him.

Sasha Denali

Sasha’s history is the least complete of these narratives. Estimated at being alive during the 1000s, she was born in what was Slovakia (Meyer, *The Twilight Saga* 201). After becoming a vampire, she wanted companionship and transformed her biological great-niece, Tanya. Within a century, she added Kate and Irina to their coven, and by all accounts the women formed tight familial bonds with Tanya, Kate, and Irina regarding Sasha as their mother (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 32).

Although the details are vague, at some point Sasha made the decision to turn a three year old boy, Vasili, into a vampire, thus creating what was called an Immortal Child (Meyer, *The Twilight Saga* 202). The ruling vampires known as the Volturi had outlawed the making of Immortal Children in 750 A.D. after nearly three hundred years of eradicating these children and the covens that so fiercely protected them (Meyer, *The Twilight Saga* 405). By Carlisle’s account the children were very beautiful, “So endearing, so enchanting, you can’t imagine. You had but to be near them to love them” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 33). However, like all vampires,

the children were frozen in their toddler bodies as well as their stages of cognitive development. Without a capacity to learn or grow, the Immortal Children indiscriminately killed humans, and this behaviour was contradictory to the primary law among vampires: keep their existence a secret (Meyer, *The Twilight Saga* 78). Sasha's punishment for making Vasili a vampire was death for both of them.

While Sasha's reasoning for creating an Immortal Child is unknown, it squarely places her as an abject mother. Indeed, she becomes the conflation of archaic mother and phallic mother. Creed states that "it is difficult to separate out the figure of the archaic mother ... from other aspects of the maternal figure" (260). While Sasha does not bodily birth Vasili, she would have bitten him and injected her venom into his body to begin the transformation (Meyer, *The Twilight Saga* 74). This makes her the "oral/sadistic mother" (Creed 258), effectively castrating the boy to ensure he will remain a toddler for eternity. Through her bite, she becomes the archaic mother, creating a new life in her own image through the transmission of her venom, bonding them together through bodily fluids. This form of creation also makes Sasha the "parthenogenic, archaic mother," where no father is necessary in order for her to produce offspring (Creed 258).

Christopher Craft makes a keen observation about the vampire's mouth when he describes it as being the combination of masculine and feminine traits. The oral cavity is red, soft, warm, and moist, evoking imagery of the vulva and vaginal opening (Craft 109). The teeth contrast completely as they are white, hard, and sharp, penetrating through the skin of a victim in a phallic manner (Craft 109). In Craft's words: "Luring at first with an inviting orifice, a promise of red softness, but delivering instead a piercing bone, the vampire mouth fuses and confuses ... the gender-based categories of the penetrating and the receptive" (109). While

Sasha does not create Vasili from within, she is no less generative in her ability to transform the boy from human to vampire, thereby creating a venom-tied child forever.

Craft's assertions solidify the vampire as abject; his definitions of the vampire's mouth mean that it embodies all genders at once, providing that contrast and confusion that is indicative of the abject. Rigid boundaries make for understood, stable, and comfortable ways of thinking and being, and to remove or meld boundaries is to fear losing one's identity as a whole (Creed 262). Craft points out that "this mouth, bespeaking the subversion of the stable and lucid distinctions of gender, is the mouth of all vampires, male and female" (109). In this way, all vampires that "sire" others are simultaneously mothers and fathers, yet this perceived need for *children* appears unique to the vampire women.

Sasha already has three "daughters," but they are somehow not enough. And, while she might've chosen another family member of a similar stature, she instead transforms a toddler. The child's human history is unknown; she might have seen him as an orphan and taken pity on him. She might have stolen him away from his family home in a moment of his own mother's inattention. Whatever the history, her desire for a toddler-aged child rather than a school-aged child or a teenager suggests that there was something appealing about having someone who would eternally rely on her completely for this relationship bond. Sasha undoubtedly knew the law about Immortal Children and the consequences of creating one, but in her need flouted the law and became both the archaic and phallic mother who would die for creating her child.

Bella Swan Cullen

Bella Swan was born in Forks, Washington, in 1987. An only child, her parents divorced when she was two, and she grew up in Phoenix with her mother, Renée, visiting her father,

Charlie, during summers. She moved back to Forks in January 2005 after her mother remarried. On her first day at school she met Edward Cullen, and though their initial interactions were fraught with the difficulty of his bloodlust, they quickly fell in love. Their relationship endured and strengthened through hardships such as Bella being stalked and attacked by nomad vampires, the intrusion of Jacob Black as a potential suitor, and the wrath of the Volturi. Ultimately the couple married on August 13, 2006 (Meyer, *The Twilight Saga* 135-138).

On their honeymoon, they sexually consummated their relationship for the first time, and Bella immediately and quite unexpectedly became pregnant. Edward initially made plans for them to return to Forks so Carlisle could perform an abortion. Upon returning, Bella ran to the custody of Rosalie who acted as bodyguard while Bella adamantly insisted she would carry the foetus to term. A mere twelve days later, after her body had undergone tremendous changes, she was given an emergency caesarean section (with Edward chewing her womb open to retrieve the baby) and produced their hybrid child, Renesmee. Because the damage to her body was so catastrophic, she had to undergo the vampiric transformation as a means to survive. When she woke she discovered she felt an indelible connection to the child she had carried. Subsequently, she also discovered that the child grew at an almost exponential rate, had full cognitive reasoning faculties, had a vampire gift, and slept through the night. (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 438-447)

Childfree by choice. Initially, Bella is clear in that she doesn't want biological children, and she doesn't consider her future inability to not have them a loss. In the early stages of her relationship, she shares with Edward that she's always played parent to her mother. Bella jokes that she was "born 35 and getting more middle aged every year" and that "someone has to be the adult," indicating that even at seventeen, she's had her share of caretaking when she ought to have had a childhood (Meyer, *Twilight* 106). She says, "I'd spent most of my life taking care of

Renée, patiently guiding her away from her craziest plans, good-naturedly enduring the ones I couldn't talk her out of" (Meyer, *Eclipse* 45). Her caretaking responsibilities shift to her dad when she moves in with him, taking over all the cooking and general cleaning duties. For these reasons, Bella insists that she's happy to forego children as a matter of course in being with Edward and becoming a vampire.

But at every turn, she's reminded about giving up potential children. Rosalie is the most vocal, but even Jacob talks about how normal their life could be if Bella would choose him instead of Edward. "And she could be human, with Charlie and Renée, and she could grow up, and have kids and...be Bella" (Meyer, *Eclipse* 502). His statement implies that by choosing Edward—choosing vampirism—she can't somehow maintain an authentic self because those options at that time appear to become void after her transformation. Without maintaining ties to her blood parents and the opportunity to produce children of her own, she's at risk for being unable to identify her positionality in the symbolic, subjective order. More simply, "It's assumed that if you are a woman, you are meant to be a mother. Period" (Notkin).

When Edward and Bella go to Charlie to tell him about their engagement, his instinctive response is to shout "You're pregnant!" (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 14). Bella understands that this is the conclusion most people will come to when a teenage couple becomes engaged. Edward later admits to her that he wishes Charlie had been right. "More that there was some way he *could* have been. That we had that kind of potential. I *hate* taking that away from you, too" (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 28, author's emphasis). When Bella rebukes him by declaring she knows what she wants, he counters by asking: "How could you know that, Bella? Look at my mother, look at my sister. It's not as easy a sacrifice as you imagine" (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*

28). From his standpoint, he's taking away her ability to have children, forcing her to sacrifice that for him.

Effectively, Edward disregards and dishonours Bella's decision in this process; for most of the story, she's had to plead her case for becoming a vampire over and over—to Edward, to Jacob, to the other Cullens—because her word isn't good enough for them. Her rational approach to the transformation and her frozen reproductive cycle are time and again met with assumptive questions and comments that she's not yet old enough or experienced enough to definitively know what she wants for her future. Melanie Notkin in her article titled "Unnatural Women: Childless in America" states: "Women are also made to feel that their bodies exist only as vessels for childbirth." And, Rosemary Gillespie further explains how the women she interviewed often met outright disbelief, disregard, and were cast as deviants because they had decided to be childfree. By Western cultural standards, "motherhood is fixed, unchanging, natural, fulfilling and in particular, central to feminine identity" (Gillespie 224), and for a woman to choose to remain childfree, she is the blatant opposite of those lauded expectations.

"Instinctual" motherhood. Up until her honeymoon, this is Bella's constructed identity. She consciously chooses an alternative path away from motherhood, satisfied that she's going to spend eternity with Edward, which is much better than one human lifetime. Then, just seventeen days into the honeymoon, she discovers she's pregnant (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 125). "What happened to change everything was that a soft little nudge bumped my hand—from inside my body" (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 127). Edward is understandably frantic and frightened worried about what could be happening to Bella, but she is wondering why he seems to think there is something wrong. She points out that "he was the one who had actually wished out loud for a shotgun wedding" (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 131). From that first nudge, she is resolute in

carrying the foetus to term, to produce their child. “I wanted [Edward’s child] like I wanted air to breathe. Not a choice—a necessity” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 132).

Without question this makes Bella the authentic archaic mother. She generates her child in the traditional sense, but unlike normal human pregnancy, she’s turned into a grotesque monster. Jacob describes her thusly when he sees her for the first time:

Bella’s body was swollen, her torso ballooning out in a strange, sick way. It strained against the faded grey sweatshirt that was way too big for her shoulders and arms. The rest of her seemed thinner, like the big bulge had grown out of what it had sucked from her. It took me a second to realize what the deformed part was—I didn’t understand until she folded her hands tenderly around her bloated stomach, one above and one below. Like she was cradling it. (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 174)

Bella is so “deformed” that the sight of her body makes Jacob swallow down vomit (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 175). Her body functions as a sign of abjection, in a similar way to blood, pus, vomit, etc., which fills the spectator “with disgust and loathing,” identifying her as something improper and fragmented (Creed 256). And as the days pass it just gets worse. Her skin is so ashen it’s only when she starts drinking donated human blood that some of her colour returns. As per the intention, the foetus gets stronger and begins breaking her ribs as it grows. At just eighteen, pregnancy has turned her into a monstrous host, robbing her of her independence, mobility, and ultimately her human life.

The birth of the child is much as Creed describes: “Her body is transformed into the ‘gaping wound’” (256). Bella vomits “a fountain of blood” as her placenta detaches, and she’s rushed to the makeshift operating room for the emergency caesarean section (Meyer, *Breaking*

Dawn 247). Rosalie uses a scalpel to slice open the skin of Bella's abdomen, and she is further mutilated by Edward's teeth as he chews the vampire-skin-like womb open to retrieve the infant. In an unexpected moment of lucidity, Bella croaks for Edward to hand her the newly birthed infant, Renesmee. Adding to her injuries, the child bites her seeking blood to drink.

It is impossible to deny Bella's bodily *difference* in these last chapters of her human life⁴⁴. She's grotesquely transformed into the authentic archaic mother, her body destroyed by the foetus as it gestates. Ultimately she ends up being "slashed and mutilated" by her husband through the birth, which Creed insists operates as signification for her castrated state and as Edward's hopeful deterrent for a similar fate, "transforming her entire body into the bleeding wound" (Creed 256-257). Still, among the other women, she is the only one who is able to maintain a stable subjective identity bound to motherhood because she has biologically produced her child. She has the opportunity to perform some of the labour of motherhood, although her child behaves nothing like an average human infant, and is able to see her child grow up in ways that are unfeasible for Rosalie, Esme, and Sasha.

Discussion and Conclusion: Eternal Abject Mothers

In this chapter, I argue that Rosalie, Esme, and Sasha are representations of an incomplete femininity where these characters have failed the prime directive of womanhood: being a biological mother. The desire to be a mother is presented as instinctual for the women of

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Bell and Linda C. Forbes make interesting connections to representations of women's bodies as not "pretty places" in the context of corporate, male-centered work environments. Bella's momentary status as an actual monster during her pregnancy echoes some of their observations in how "women in office folklore speak a language of female rage and irrationality in anthropomorphized violence, biological destinies, graphic depictions of hags, and quantifications of hysteria." (Bell and Forbes 190)

The Twilight Saga. Rosalie insists that a baby is the only thing meaningful she ever wanted in life, vain and shallow as she was. Esme says she never lost that instinct after the death of her human baby and continues to “mother” the clearly self-sufficient members of the family. Sasha’s instinctual need to be a mother lead her to transform a toddler into a vampire; her desire so deep-seated that she knowingly broke the law, understood the consequences of what she would create, and the punishment for doing so. Finally, Bella’s initial decision to forego children for the transformation is unthinkable to Rosalie and questionable to Edward and Jacob. To give up such a gift would be to spit in the face of humanity. But Bella does become pregnant, and in that moment she reflects that perhaps she was previously “unable to see that I would want a baby until after one was already coming...” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 132). In spite of the shock of it, that she had never imagined herself as a mother or wanted that, she somehow knows that having the baby is “Not a choice—a necessity” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 132).

Early in *Twilight*, Edward tries to explain to Bella why the Cullen family abstains from drinking human blood. “But you see, just because we’ve been...dealt a certain hand...it doesn’t mean that we can’t choose to rise above—to conquer the boundaries of a destiny that none of us wanted. To try to retain whatever essential humanity we can” (Meyer, *Twilight* 307). Although this is in relation to their diet, it speaks volumes about how Rosalie, Esme, and Sasha make motherhood a focal part of their lives, and their individual coping mechanisms that allow them to feel as though they in part can maintain a stable subjective identity. The correct performance of womanhood is to become a mother. Try as they might as the pre-phallic, phallic, and archaic and phallic abject mothers, they can never be authentic in their performances of motherhood. Creed maintains that those things which threaten to cross the border are abject, and these women try to conquer the boundaries of their abject frozen bodies by becoming mothers in anyway possible.

Of course Bella crosses the divide a dozen times over through her pregnancy in the gross transformation of her body from healthy, human teenage girl to swollen, sickly host to indestructible vampire. But, what is most disturbing about this journey is that right after Bella concludes that she is pregnant, the story's narration shifts to Jacob's perspective. While individual characters have harped at her that giving up her ability to become pregnant is too great a price, when she is pregnant she somehow is unfit to tell that part of the story. Everyone has made motherhood out to be something longed for and fantastic, but practical talk of what it means to be pregnant is totally ignored. When she becomes pregnant, she's no longer a reliable narrator because her sole focus is on the foetus inside of her. She isn't able to provide a detailed embodied experience of what it means to actually be *growing* this child, to vomit continuously, to drink blood, to have ribs broken. No, that would be too close to home. Because a pregnant woman's body is both abject and the space of abjection. So readers watch these things happen to Bella from Jacob's perspective as a way of simultaneously buffering the intensity of the experience and marking it as something truly monstrous.

Creed's conclusion perhaps offers the clearest and most worrisome insights for this chapter. She says: "But the feminine is not *per se* a monstrous sign; rather, it is constructed as such within a patriarchal discourse which reveals a great deal about male desires and fears but tells us nothing about feminine desire in relation to the horrific" (Creed 265, author's emphasis). Patriarchal oppressive discourses and ideologies are repeated and reaffirmed by many members of the system, so that means both men and women continue to assert notions that motherhood is something that all women should aspire to. For women who are unable to biologically produce children, there's a sense that they are to be pitied, that they are somehow disabled in that they may become mothers through adoption, marriage, or surrogacy, but it will never be an authentic

motherhood because they did not *grow* those children. Women who willingly choose to be childfree are puzzling abominations of sorts. Gillespie asserts “Experts and opinion formers constitute powerful elites who have been able to privilege their accounts of the natural inevitability of a desire for motherhood in women; of motherhood as women’s principle social role; and crucially, the centrality of motherhood to understandings of feminine identity” (225).

Bella’s experience, as the only authentic birth mother in the Cullens, reifies this idea that through her daughter she is validated as a person, but more so as a woman. Her abrupt mental shift in wanting to be a mother as much as she needs to breathe reaffirms that her earlier position of not wanting children was indeed short-sighted and naïve. Her focal point, in some ways understandably, shifts from Edward to Renesmee and the last book ends with the nuclear family intact to return to their little cabin on the larger Cullen family property. And that’s all. Bella ostensibly gets her happy ending, but would her ending have been any less happy or fulfilling if things had gone according to plan? Would Bella have, in twenty years or so, gone down that dark path that Rosalie surmises when she realized what she had indeed given up in becoming a vampire? Or, would she have gone on without a second thought to it, basking in the joy and freedom of a childless eternity with her soulmate by her side and nothing but time?

CHAPTER 5:

MONSTERS ARE POWERFUL, SO WHAT DOES THAT MAKE ME?

When *Twilight* was first published in 2005, I'm not sure anyone would have predicted the huge cultural phenomenon it became. After all, Vampire Romance was well-trod ground, with several examples in YA already in existence. What was it about Bella Swan, Edward Cullen, and the fantastic journey they would take to show that love really does conquer all borders that hooked readers and moved fans? Of course in the midst of all of this popularity, critics almost immediately branded the series, Bella in particular, as anti-feminist and regressive.

In so many ways, I can't help but agree. To say that Meyer is tough on her women is an understatement. Esme is a battered wife who commits suicide after the death of her newborn. Rosalie is gang raped and left for dead by her fiancée and his cronies. Alice is sent to an asylum by her parents and is tortured under the guise of treatment for nearly a decade. Bella is repeatedly stalked by sadistic vampires and then suffers a horrific, body breaking pregnancy. Emily⁴⁵ is facially disfigured by her imprinted lover, Sam. Leah⁴⁶ is forced to relive her breakup with Sam through the pack mind. The list goes on and on. While there are men characters that

⁴⁵When visiting her cousin Leah, Emily Young was introduced to Sam Uley, the first member of the Quileute tribe to transform into a wolf, who immediately imprinted on her. Sam unintentionally phased too close to her and scratched her face in the process. Bella observes upon meeting Emily for the first time: "The right side of her face was scarred from hairline to chin by three thick, red lines, livid in color though they were long healed. One line pulled down the corner of her dark, almond-shaped right eye, another twisted the right side of her mouth into a permanent grimace." (Meyer, *New Moon* 331)

⁴⁶ Leah Clearwater was Sam's long term girlfriend, but when he imprinted on Emily, he broke up with her. After Leah transformed and became a pack member, the shared thoughts and memories of the pack mind made the pain of their broken relationship, his love for Emily, and her anger and humiliation public information to everyone in the pack. (Meyer, *Eclipse* 5).

have difficult pasts, the women's histories are by and far worse and are predicated on the fact that they are women.

And, in telling their stories, their suffering is always couched as “worth it” or “part of the process” for getting the reward of their man's love. The continued presentation of their pain—both emotional and physical—is somehow an expected part of the relationship equation. Meyer provides difficult and often disturbing histories for her women, and I contend that these are manifestations of the ideologies of abjection, reflections of a patriarchal status quo built on the consistent, pervasive, and insidious devaluation of women's lives.

Statement of Purpose

I argue that Bella Swan is a representation of Barbara Creed's monstrous-feminine which serves to reinforce ideologies that insist women are abject, inherently dangerous to men, and threatening to a patriarchal status quo. Through close-textual analysis of *The Twilight Saga*, I demonstrate how the monstrous-feminine frames the hysterical teenage body, hypersexuality, and eternal motherhood as simultaneously unacceptable and unavoidable. These negative women's stereotypes continue to persist in dominant popular culture, and this double-bind is overcome only by the impossible perfection of vampirism. The monstrous-feminine invites constructions of teenage bodies as unstable and unreliable, women's sexuality as dangerous and impure, and motherhood as a requirement for a complete identity. These constructions are particularly dangerous in Young Adult literature and particularly inspirational in fan fiction.

Chapter Summaries and My Interventions

In the second chapter, I assessed Bella's diagnosis as being hysterical, both by other characters and herself. She experiences extreme frustration as her emotions somatize as tears, indicating a collapse between the inside and the outside border which makes her abject and monstrous. Vampirism becomes a cure for the dis-ease, an antithesis to hysteria which Bella relishes. Her "treatment" is one no human woman can ever have or replicate. As a consequence of setting impossible standards for women, some choose other interventions that are potentially detrimental and dangerous in a bid to capture some of this perfection and control that Bella longs for as a human teenager.

My third chapter proved that Bella's burgeoning sexual desire is signified as monstrous through the use of euphemisms and ellipses which prevent her, as well as Edward, from having transparent dialogue about sex. While these literary devices are intentionally employed to soften and conceal information about sex, they ultimately fail as they operate as a discourse all their own to render sex dangerous and shameful. Indeed, Bella's early sexual experiences are clouded by violence, and for the YA reader her experiences potentially, and likely, reinforce common notions that first sex is about pain and gate-keeping is a necessary tactic in violence prevention. Adult readers, however, opted to (re)write Bella's sex life through the venue of fanfiction where the varied sexual scenarios she encounters are indicative of the centrality of sex to women's lived experiences.

In chapter four I demonstrated how characters like Rosalie, Esme, and Sasha are monstrous as they employ different tactics in order to fulfill the perceived instinctual need to become mothers. As the pre-phallic, phallic, and archaic and phallic abject mothers, these women go to great lengths to maintain their stable, subjective identities dependent upon being

recognized as mothers. Bella, too, is monstrous as she initially declares that children are not a necessity for her to have a happy life, bucking the gendered expectation that she must want children. However, upon discovering her unplanned pregnancy, she fiercely insists that she *needs* to birth the child despite becoming a grotesque host. In the process, her narrative voice is stolen because all reality of pregnancy and parenthood is obscured in favor of the romanticized normative tales about how great and essential motherhood is for women.

To date, the majority of the available scholarship pertaining to *The Twilight Saga* has centered on the gendered issues, largely those circulating around the heterosexual relationship between Bella and Edward, concerning the anti and/or postfeminist regressive politics which guide that narrative and hold potential influence over readers. Of those analyses, none have examined the implications of gendered subjects like hysteria, sexuality, and motherhood through a lens of psychoanalytic French feminism, focusing on abjection and the monstrous-feminine. I argue that Bella's monstrosity is deeply embodied, rooted in her very essence as she cannot separate herself from or escape being a woman. Where women's bodies are not indicative of the default bodies, men's bodies, they are immediately Othered and made monstrous through their emotions, sexuality, and reproductive capacities. I suggest in each example that Bella overcomes the challenges of body by becoming a vampire which frees her from the frustrations and concerns tied to her biology. This impossible answer leaves readers with few practical options in terms of navigating the all too real and familiar scenarios of appearing weak in front of other people, exploring sexual expression that is at once safe and sanctioned, and navigating cultural expectations that motherhood is for every woman.

I began this study hoping to examine some aspects of *The Twilight Saga* that didn't sit well with me upon a second or third read of the series. As an Aca-fan, there's much at stake for

me in critiquing the text I love with the intensity and sometimes ruthlessness that is required of research and the method of textual analysis in particular. And, as I have come through the process I have struggled to reconcile these two facets of my investment in *Twilight*. As a critical feminist researcher, the problems are blatant and many and my rationality dictates I research, critique, and share my concerns as a means of changing the larger conversations that continue to ignore women's issues. The fan in me is saddened and more than a little frustrated that so many scholars (myself included) have taken the easy path to critique the saga as all doom and gloom. Damn the patriarchy! Down with misogyny! And so on and so forth. There are real opportunities to see Bella as an active agent who struggles as best she can in a genre that has, for mass readership, very particular conventions to which she must adhere (Firestone "Apples to Oranges" 217). I struggle to see how *Twilight* is the "gateway drug to feminism" as Natalie Wolf states, but my Aca-fan heart fervently hopes it's true ("Utilizing *Twilight*" 61).

This final chapter is my opportunity to offer some further insights to the implications of these analyses. First, I discuss the difficulties with the double-bind, for Bella and readers, where the illusion of either/or choices disturbs the reality of a practical world where so much decision-making is reliant on a nuanced reading of context and the necessity for educated, informed assessments. Second, I address the lack of serious, practical "talk" about the subjects I've argued where information is too often distorted, glossed, or withheld altogether; for the YA readership, there could be serious consequences for keeping young women in the dark about their emotions, bodies, and the expectations that they ought to have for a fully-fledged adult life. I conclude this chapter with a hopeful look toward the productive and often good work being done in the *Twilight* fan community by way of fanfiction that seeks to fill in the gaps and fix the cracks connected to those often glaring inadequacies of the canon.

Difficulties with the Double-Bind

In each of the chapters I've outlined, Bella is faced with decisions that distinctly place her in double-binds. That is to say, the apparent answers or actions to these specific situations proffer dichotomized, and usually conflicting, solutions which provide no solvent, long term outcomes. In each case the answer is: Become a vampire and all is solved. Vampirism allows Bella to feel her emotions without producing any outward sign of them. It allows her to sexually pursue Edward with no fear of injury or death. It allows her to surpass death to return to the world of the living in a body far superior to the one she effectively left behind, as well as care for a child that needs no caretaking. Becoming a vampire appears as a wish fulfilled for her, but there are serious repercussions and downsides in choosing to be a vampire that aren't thoroughly discussed or considered, particularly by Bella.

We live in a system that prizes binaries and hierarchies which insist that decision making comes down to either/or, good/bad, right/wrong, and yes/no choices (Grosz 28). Bella's experiences echo this where every big decision she's faced with appears a choice between extremes. The system doesn't allow her to choose answers associated with grey points along the continuum between the dichotomies. She can't accept tears of frustration or anger as normal, perceiving the rupture as an expression of positive emotional growth. It's either become a stone or descend into full blown hysterics. Sex, too, is presented in this false binary as all or nothing; it's kisses or intercourse with no room for the richness that encompasses sexuality and sexual practice in between. Motherhood, while assumed as the desired primary identity of each woman, also becomes dichotomized as the difference between authentically produced children and inauthentic substitutions.

In each example, one of the extremes is clearly presented as a right or correct ideal to choose above the second, pitted as Other, deviant, or monstrous. Indeed the interstitial space between the ends is the liminality of abjection. It's the place where things are not so cut and dried, and borders shift as new experiences destabilize the perceptions of what constitutes the clean, pure, and proper. Each time Bella is faced with the choice—become a vampire or else—and vampirism is purposefully withheld from her by Edward, she enters into this liminal grey space, thus making her the abject monstrous-feminine.

The stakes are high in presenting this kind of binary, reductionist logic to readers, particularly teen women. As Grosz reminds us, adolescence is the time when there is the greatest disconnect and discord between the lived body and the idealized self-image (75). The continued prizing of binaries with little to no talk of the potentials in between disturbs the reality of a practical world. Life is experienced corporeally, everything—including intellectual pursuits—is embodied (Grosz 87). Grosz puts it well when she writes, “The relation between the subject and objects is thus not causal but based on sense or meaning,” and we continually organize the world into relatable, distinguishable categories that produce symbolic meaning as a result of our embodied interactions (87). So much decision-making is reliant on a nuanced reading of context, which is read through multiple channels and influenced by many more.

Perhaps the example most closely tied to the potential lived experiences of readers is Bella's decisions concerning sex. Frankly, she wants to “do it.” But wrapped in this decision-making process is cultural rhetoric about being a “good girl,” about hormones that somehow hijack rational thought—leading to trouble of the most epic proportions, and about the consequences of engaging in sexual intercourse, namely the expectation that pain is probably involved somehow.

Without offering teen women a more comprehensive picture of sexuality, one that certainly includes masturbation as an option, then we resign them to the forced binarized choice between sex/abstinence. While one could argue that we resign teen men to this same dichotomy, I disagree as general expectations for expressions of men's sexuality, which is assumed to awaken within them at much younger ages than women, are that their sexual desires are basely connected to animalism and biological chemistry, rationalized as the performed sexual dominance over women (Weeks 43-44).

For women, the story is very different and I concur with Brumberg that 21st century women have the added pressure of navigating sexual desire with the ever-present fear and danger of sexual violence, evidenced in the ways many women—myself included—are taught “risk reduction” techniques in our early teens as a means of rape prevention (e.g. clutching keys between our fists when walking alone, traveling in pairs or groups to bathrooms or other out-of-the-way yet public spaces, and avoiding unfamiliar men by crossing streets or changing routes). In fact, this fear is reaffirmed in the pages of *Twilight* as Bella finds herself pursued and corralled by a group of men intent on raping and murdering her (Meyer, *Twilight* 160-163; Meyer, *Midnight Sun* 170-172). Yet another instance where Edward saves the day and Meyer has placed Bella in harm's way for the sake of the reward of Edward's love.

A way to destroy the unrealistic binaries, not just of sex/abstinence but of all those that pit two seemingly opposite choices against each other in a privileged, hierarchized continuum, is to make sure that we consistently seek to present all decision-making as operationalized by educated, well-rounded assessment of a situation. We can do this by talking candidly about the range of options available in the liminal space between the dichotomies.

Serious, Practical “Talk”

On subsequent reads of *The Twilight Saga*, it became distressingly clear to me that Bella and Edward don't talk about much. They do the obligatory twenty questions when they first get together, discovering each other's aesthetics concerning books, music, food preferences⁴⁷, and so forth, but they never have heated intellectual debate; they don't talk about what it's been like for Edward to live through decades of history that Bella's only read in books. They don't talk about what would happen if he should bite her, even if it was an accident. And they certainly don't talk about their potential sex life.

I can only speak for myself, but my memories of those early months of a relationship are filled with talk. If we weren't together, Michael and I were Instant Messaging; if we couldn't be with each other or near computers, the time seemed agonizing until we could be together again, either physically or virtually, to catch up on the day. The first summer we were apart, separated by the Atlantic Ocean, I spent hundreds of dollars on phone bills for the reassurance of hearing his voice, for the talk. Sure, there was a lot of “meaningless” talk about subjects that had no great bearing on the trajectory of our lives. More importantly, there was a significant amount of talk pertaining to the big issues we were facing: my enrolling in university in England, how I would apply for student visas, how much money he and I needed to bring in to keep the flat running while we were both going to school fulltime, and what would happen if we discovered after a few months that we didn't get on at all and wanted to break up.

This emphatically is not the case for Bella and Edward. There are very few subjects that they thoroughly cover as a matter of getting to know each other⁴⁸, the logistics of the uniqueness

⁴⁷ Edward prefers mountain lion as his animal blood of choice.

⁴⁸ The only subject they do cover in a candid matter is Edward's animal blood diet. He tells her about their philosophy about choosing animals to humans, the differences between herbivore blood and carnivore blood, and the ability to detect the nuances of blood's scent and flavor.

of their relationship, and preparation for a future together. In fact, when Bella wants to talk about these kinds of things the subject is usually neutralized by Edward as a means of shielding her from what he perceives are the difficult details that she doesn't *really* need to know. In consideration of her emotions, sexual desire, and later motherhood, there are few, if any, conversations between them about these subjects that cover the realities and practicalities of those embodied experiences which are so much bigger than those two points at the ends of a spectrum.

There are dozens of examples in the series where talk is eschewed in favor of the non-talk of euphemisms or a change in subject so as to obscure the topic at hand. In adult relationships, that's not a sustainable form of communication nor is it a responsible one. There seems a cultural desire to sanitize certain subjects like emotions, sex, and pregnancy because the Truth, capital T, is far too gritty to know in detail and the knowledge associated with them are meant for a privileged, select few. Notice that two of the three are subjects are immediately tied to women, emotions and pregnancy. Together, these three topics represent areas of knowledge and information which are too often distorted, glossed, or withheld altogether from young women as a means of preventing them from making more fully-formed, educated, and empowered decisions for themselves.

For the YA readership, there could be serious consequences for keeping young women in the dark about their emotions and bodies. Without having access to all of the information about these topics, how are young women to talk about them? More importantly, how are they to make educated decisions about what is best for them in their lives? I suspect Bella's story is indicative of a systemic problem in providing teen women the straight talk about their bodies, certainly where their sexuality and reproductive capacities are concerned as the former is totally ignored

(“Good girls don’t think about that”) and the other is discussed as though a *disembodied* experience (“Sperm travels up the birth canal to reach the egg”).

The continued embargo on talk that pertains so intimately to women’s lives speaks to systemic devaluation of women’s experiences and the necessity to keep them as ignorant as possible in a bid to maintain the man-privileged status quo. It continues to enforce those false binaries where decisions appear to be between the either/or of things instead of recognizing the both/and potential in so many situations. As a result of the continued gravitation to the binarized system, which arguably makes things much simpler, it disregards the liminal grey space of the potential decisions that are between the two dichotomous options. And it is talk that allows us to examine the grey space, to explore all the options and consider all the information before reaching an educated decision in one way or another.

If Bella had been able to effectively talk about sex with Edward, they might’ve come to a mutual agreement that would’ve been both pleasurable and considerate of his very real limitations. Or, they might have been able to talk about how to proceed in the face of an unexpected pregnancy⁴⁹ as a family unit instead of choosing opposite ends of the spectrum. Talk is the gateway to more comprehensive understanding of circumstances and situations that move beyond a false binary; talk proffers an almost limitless number of possibilities.

Fanfiction Fills the Gaps

I want to end on a high note, which brings me to some brief discussion about the *Twilight* fan community and how some members choose to address and re-envision some of the perceived

⁴⁹ Clearly, there was no conversation prior to their wedding night about what they would do *if* Bella became pregnant; Edward just assumed that wasn’t possible, so they didn’t bother to use a barrier method during intercourse. It also means they didn’t talk about any other possibilities like, what if his ejaculate had enough venom in it to start the transformation if it entered her body?

problems with the series. Fanfiction is the writing practice of using an existing fictive universe, characters, world building, and conventions to create new stories with those elements as the basis and inspiration. FanFiction.net is the largest online repository for fanfiction stemming from many fandoms. While there are universe specific fanfiction sites, I choose to root this discussion in what's available on FanFiction.net because it's open access and it's usually the first place people go when they discover fanfiction.

Fanfiction communities, such as FanFiction.net, work to make the writing process cooperative and collaborative, and my experience is—as a returned fanfiction writer—that most people are supportive and positively constructive when it comes to providing feedback, fielding beta requests, and receiving constructive criticism. These online communities are creative spaces where people can come together over shared fandom interests and a love of story telling and writing to produce works and relationships that function in any number of ways with real-world repercussions.

The Twilight Saga currently has 216,000 stories posted to FanFiction.net. The series is surpassed only by *Harry Potter* which numbers at 681,000 stories. The closest runner up is the *Percy Jackson* series with a meager 51,400 stories to its name. The numbers don't lie. *Twilight* affected enough people for thousands of them to take to their laptops and write out something inspired by Meyer's universe. Writers have used *Twilight* as a jumping point to create works that are at once new and very familiar.

As I mentioned in my introduction, fans are sometimes the most critical of their chosen texts, seeking to answer questions or deign motivations for the hows and whys certain things turned out. *Twilight* fans are no exception, and one of the most common scenarios for its fanfiction is the interpretation of Bella and Edward's wedding night. Where Meyer inserted a

line break in the novel, fans have filled the space with hundreds of stories that share their imagined details for how the evening played out. They range in the intensity of the transparency of the sex act, some relying on Meyer's tactics of veiled, euphemistic language while others go straight to a Mature rating for a lemon, the euphemism for explicit smut.

Other writers seek to correct some of the elements noted as anti-feminist and regressive. Many of these stories begin in the *New Moon* timeline just after Edward and the Cullens leave Forks. Rather than going to pieces, Bella finishes school and carries on to become emotionally independent and goal oriented outside of Edward. Fans saw some of the critical issues⁵⁰ that scholars brought up and used fanfiction as a kind of intellectual interrogation rather than applying theory or textual analysis as a means of calling out what is "really" happening there.

I briefly touched on E.L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which began as a fanfiction for *Twilight* named *Master of the Universe* and penned under the name Snowqueens Icedragon. James is now an internationally best selling author. Although there are very few differences between the fanfiction and published novel save a change of character names and the removal of Forks, James's text is different enough from Meyer's universe that it doesn't infringe on her copyrighted material. The inspiration James gleaned from reading *The Twilight Saga* offered her an opening to produce something that would go on to become something very different from its source material. Perhaps best, and a little ironically, there are now 2,000 stories posted to FanFiction.net that are attributed to the *Fifty Shades Trilogy*.

⁵⁰ I have to give a shout-out to my All Time Favorite fanfiction for *Twilight* called *In the Blink of Eye*. By an author pen-named "thatwritr," Bella jumped from the cliff in La Push during *New Moon* and survived, but as a paraplegic. Almost ten years later, she's working as a women's studies doctoral graduate student when tragedy strikes and the Cullens return to her life. "Thatwritr" is clearly an academic and probably has leanings in the Communication discipline given the content of the story. The full text is nearly 241,000 words, the length of a novel. <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/4500819/1/In-the-Blink-of-an-Eye>

The universe has gone full circle and to me, this is proof positive why we need to keep examining, sharing, and critiquing sources like YA novels and their cultural products like fanfiction. We may not be able to make assertions about media's effects, but we know for certain that it changes people's lives. If I hadn't idly picked up a copy of *Twilight* in the Gatwick airport six years ago, I wouldn't be here now.

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