IMAGES OF THE MODERN VAMPIRE

THE HIP AND THE ATAVISTIC

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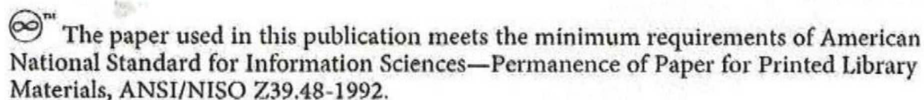

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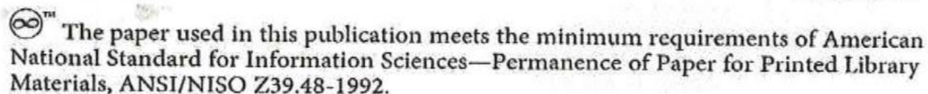

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Disciplinary Lessons: Myth, Female Desire, and the Monstrous Maternal in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Series

Hope Jennings and Christine Wilson

Twilight HAS BECOME ONE OF "the most popular teen-girl novels of all time,"[1] and as such, it is potentially one of the largest cultural influences on young women coming of age during the early 21st century. Caitlin Flanagan argues that *Twilight* is so appealing because "within it is *the* true story, the original one . . . [It] centers on a boy who loves a girl so much that he refuses to defile her, and on a girl who loves him so dearly that she is desperate for him to do just that, even if the wages of the act are expulsion . . . from everything she has ever known." If this is the "true story" of "What Girls Want" (the title of Flanagan's review), then it seems the female sex is as masochistic and self-abnegating as Freud once proposed when he attempted to solve the age-old question "What do women want?" Indeed, Flanagan claims the "riveting" thrill of the erotic relationship sustained throughout the series derives from "Bella's fervent hope . . . that Edward will ravage her, and . . . the harrowing pain that is said to be the victim's lot at the time of consummation means nothing to her . . . This is sex and romance fully—ecstatically, dangerously—engaged with each other. At last, at last." Flanagan is on the verge of ecstatically, dangerously forgetting that regardless if, in her estimation, *Twilight* "perfectly encapsulates . . . the rapture—and the menace—that inherently accompany romance and sex for [teenage girls]," this is not necessarily what mothers want for their adolescent daughters, and the books themselves stress the menace of sex far more than its rapture.

As popular romance, *Twilight* offers a heroine with whom many female readers identify: Bella, to all appearances, crosses conventional gender boundaries and is able to produce her own desiring gaze through her often

aggressive pursuit of Edward. Accordingly, the novels allow for a degree of power located in the desiring female gaze; yet when considering the overall arc of the series, particularly in light of its concluding novel, *Breaking Dawn*, we find that the representation of female desire in these texts problematically situates women's bodies and desires within the boundaries of patriarchal, and yes, Freudian, myths of femininity. The popular appeal of *Twilight* becomes quite troubling when we consider the extent to which it holds readers' imaginations hostage to an oppressive—and seductive—romance in which female desire must be contained within the "traditional" enclosures of motherhood and family.

Twilight also clearly aspires to present a new mythology within the tradition of vampire literature, yet it engages in a dangerous form of myth-making that fails to consider its ideological premises. Overall, Stephenie Meyer employs the vampire genre as a medium for rewriting the Genesis myth, with the apparent intention of offering an alternative version of female desire and motherhood that is productive and liberating for young women. Her myth-making, however, reinscribes the gender dynamics that inform the Genesis myth and its subsequent structuring of sociocultural discourses often aimed at repressing the disruptive threat of female desire when it ranges outside the parameters of patriarchal control. Bella is emblematic of a transgressive, sexually disruptive Eve who is eventually redeemed by her role of self-sacrificing mother; yet if Meyer's task is to convince teenage girls to trade the risks of sex for the safeties of motherhood, as if sex and motherhood were irreconcilable, then Meyer's representation of female desire and maternity end up trapping women within the same oppressive ideologies and gender hierarchies her rewriting of myth superficially resists. Thus, what we find both exciting and disconcerting in the *Twilight* series are the ways in which Meyer plays with myth while demonstrating a lack of understanding of how myth works or its effect on the very readers she is attempting to reach.

Myth functions as a language that communicates the seductive lie of universal truths.[2] The seduction lies in the fact that myths "do not present themselves neutrally but in codes that are always and already political," and their danger derives from "their accessibility and dissemination [which] means that they can be more . . . influential than state laws in educating, unifying, and perpetuating a society and its cultural conventions and expectations."[3] As Flanagan correctly notes, *Twilight* does tell the "original story," which is concerned with disciplining and controlling female desire. In her epigraph to the first novel, Meyer signals her use of the Genesis myth as a framework for her own narrative of forbidden desire and its dangerous consequences: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely

die" (Genesis 2:17). Of course, the threat of death directly links to Meyer's vampire mythology, but it also subtly highlights the inherent tensions the series sets up between sex and death.

In the *Twilight* novels, sex is represented as something menacing and dangerous. Bella insists on having sexual intercourse before she becomes a vampire and "trade[s] in [her] warm, breakable, pheromone-riddled body for something beautiful, strong . . . and unknown."[4] However, Bella's longing to fulfill her sexual desires also indicates the relentless pursuit of her own death, at least according to the narrative mechanism Meyer employs to explain why Bella and Edward are unable to consummate their erotic relationship: sex is so dangerous (for Bella) because Edward is so strong that he might accidentally tear her apart. Not only is this atypical within the vampiric literature, but the implication here is that sex is a time when one can no longer retain control in even the slightest manner; it is mythologized as an activity removed from ordinary life and emotions, and the physicality of it is, of course, absent, even when it does occur. For young female readers who are already subject to a wide array of conflicting cultural myths surrounding sex, Meyers adds yet another confusing and misleading spin on consensual sexual relationships.

When Edward and (the still human) Bella actually do have sex, she ends up covered with bruises and is made to feel ashamed for taking uninhibited pleasure in the sexual act. If Meyer were simply preaching sexual abstinence before marriage then this would not come off as so odd, but Bella and Edward have sex *after* becoming married. Furthermore, the following morning Bella is afraid to open her eyes, which is justifiable since the first thing she sees is an infuriated Edward. Bella's response underscores her profound sense of shame: "My first instinct, the product of a lifetime of insecurities, was to wonder what I had done wrong."[5] Although Bella reassures Edward that she had enjoyed herself, he informs her in patronizing tones, "That doesn't change the fact that it was wrong. Even if it were possible that you really did feel that way."[6] Regardless if Bella insists her experience of sex is "better" than her "happiest memories,"[7] Edward decides it is "wrong" and dismisses her feelings as insignificant, if not delusional.

Edward's insistence on protecting Bella at all costs depends on him remaining in perfect, rational control of his desires, which leads him to displace his guilt onto Bella. He blames her for seducing him and accuses her for taking pleasure in an act that he insists almost killed her. According to this scenario, Bella's desire is dangerous not simply because she is unable to control it, but because she tempts Edward into losing control of his own actions. Bella becomes the "Guilty One," a positioning enforced upon women, as theorized by Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, when their desires threaten masculine self-control over the integrity of the male body/phallus.[8] This positioning is

constructed by the gender dynamics underlying the Genesis text where it encodes women's bodies as the site of primal, regressive desires focused purely on the pursuit of pleasure, while masculine powers of rationality are set up as the authoritative word or law that ensures the progress of civilization and culture through the repression of (female) flesh.[9] Although the *Twilight* series articulates the romantic appeal of transgressing forbidden desires, it seems more concerned with reiterating the dangers of temptation (and sex), especially as they exist for the female subject. In this way Meyer reinforces those patriarchal myths in which female desire is represented as rampant, disruptive, and most of all shameful because it transgresses or circulates outside the rationale of male inscribed boundaries, thus justifying the need for male authority/control over female bodies and desires.

Bella's all-too-human lack of self-control and unrepressed sensual appetite brings us to Meyer's unusual employment of the vampire trope. Though Meyer is ostensibly writing within the genre of vampire novels, the vampire has a much more specific function here that goes beyond generic convention. Imagine, for a moment, what the *Twilight* series would look like without the supernatural vampire. A much older man becomes interested in a vulnerable teenage girl who has just moved into town; he commences upon a complicated series of games in which he acts as if he despises her, which triggers her insecurity and desire to be liked. Secretly, though, he is so overwhelmingly attracted to her that he is afraid he will be unable to restrain himself in her presence. So he resorts to stalking her, and after he has rescued her from a number of menacing situations, she feels indebted to him; they profess their mutual attraction and become a couple. His almost obsessive worry often translates into possessiveness; he forbids her to be friends with those he finds dangerous, even though, by his own admission, he is the most dangerous one of all, leading him to abandon her, supposedly for her own good. She nearly dies of heartbreak, but he returns to save her, yet again, from her own reckless, suicidal actions. Eventually he pressures her to get married at the age of eighteen, against all of her misgivings and reticence. While on their honeymoon, she insists they consummate their marriage; he resists, gives in, and then blames her for making him hurt her. From that one sexual act, she becomes pregnant; his response is to call their child a monster and try to force her to have an abortion. In many respects, this sounds like a 19th-century instruction manual warning girls away from a predatory and abusive lover.

With the insertion of the vampire, the story transforms. The age gap does not implicate Edward within a pedophilic framework; instead, it demonstrates how long he has waited to meet his soul mate, thus testifying to his supreme patience and the inevitability of their union (since Edward is an old-fashioned Edwardian, for whom marriage is the only honorable thing to do if

they are going to consummate their mutual desire). Edward being a vampire, it's the intoxicating smell of Bella's blood that Edward can't resist, and so what looked like sadistic game-playing becomes a display of his admirable willpower and unwavering devotion, thus sacrificing his own monstrous impulses for Bella's well-being as well as deterring Bella from her own death-wish. All the same, in what seems to be the most culturally potent love story of our time, the lesson to be learned is that girls need to be protected, both from the outside world and themselves; and what girls really want is to find this protective father figure, especially if he is cloaked in the disguise of a sexy stranger with the proverbial heart of gold. More problematically, the *Twilight* series preaches abstinence while endorsing teenage motherhood, and for this confusing message alone it would have probably fallen into the abyss of contemporary teenage romance, yet with the addition of vampires, the novels seem much sexier, for lack of a better term.

Vampires have been nearly irresistible romantic figures in popular culture; they "evoke a marginal world of darkness, secrecy, vulnerability, excess, and horror. Whatever they are, it is positively Other."[10] This "Otherness" makes the vampire a potent love interest, and Meyer draws on many of the popular tropes of the vampire myth, but with a little tweaking. Her vampires drink blood and cannot eat food; they are not affected by garlic, crucifixes, or churches; and though the sun affects them in strange ways, it does not kill them—to be killed, they must be burned. Like many contemporary vampires, the *Twilight* vampires are immortal, refined, affluent, and beautiful. More importantly, Meyer capitalizes on the seductive sense of transgression inherent in the figure of the vampire, as Margaret Carter explains:

> Where the vampire's otherness posed a terrifying threat for the original readers of *Dracula* . . . today that same alien quality is often perceived as an attraction. As rebellious outsider, as persecuted minority, as endangered species, and as a member of a different "race" that legend portrays as sexually omnicompetent, the vampire makes a fitting hero for late twentieth-century popular fiction.[11]

What we also now have, especially in the young adult fiction market, is the "nice" vampire male, who is seductive and dangerous, while still holding on to a core of morality (often figured as humanity), thus making him an ideal figure of lust for the teenage American girl.

Ultimately, Meyer removes all traces of subversion and excess that traditionally attracted humans to vampires in the first place, though the *Twilight* vampires are certainly not unique in this regard. Jules Zanger, for example, delineates a number of relevant characteristics of "new vampires," which are no longer figures of the "Anti-Christ" or mere "social deviants."[12] We now have "good" vampires who live in families or communities, rather than alone.

They are often portrayed as possessing "secret sources of wealth" and an abundance of sexual appeal and sophistication, and they seem more human than monstrous, indicating an increasing domestication and "demytholigiz[ation] of the vampire."[13] Although Meyer is not concerned with demythologizing the vampire, she domesticates the Cullens to the point that they are *more* tame, *more* humane, and *more* disciplined than the humans in the texts. Furthermore, and oddly enough, Meyer does not want her novels to be read as vampire novels, much less as part of the genre of horror. Her books instruct us to read them, rather, as "harmless" fairy tales: "Edward had always thought that he belonged to the world of horror stories . . . It was obvious that he belonged *here*. In a fairy tale."[14] For Bella, at least, Edward is not monstrous, and the desired happy ending is achieved through the domestication of (her) desire through Edward's mediating control, since he is the only one capable of constraining her "raging" teenage hormones.

Again, Meyer seems minimally aware of how her texts inadvertently articulate the ambivalent pleasures afforded by the genre(s) in which she is working to the point where horror and fairy tale are shown to have more in common than realized. One of the chief pleasures of vampire tales is hedonism, or the indulgence in carnal pleasures. Likewise, fairy tales are often imbued with elements of horror in their symbolic staging of violent, unsanctioned desires, thus allowing readers the opportunity to release unconscious drives or fears by exploring taboo or repressed impulses. On the other hand, fairy tales are constructed in a way that ultimately impresses upon readers the safety of conforming to social norms and expectations of behavior that insist on the repression of desires.[15] The reward for doing so is the conventional happily ever after, and it seems the increasing domestication of the vampire story and all its powers of horror is in many ways rooted within the fairy tale.

Repression of carnality (and its attendant rewards) is one of the chief characteristics that mark the Cullens as "unusual" vampires. Through their choice to live a "vegetarian" lifestyle, they practice supreme self-control, resisting their natural appetites. Previous vampires, to be sure, have resisted drinking human blood—Anne Rice's Louis, for example, subsists on small animals instead of humans. In fact, this refusal to drink human blood is "at the heart of [Louis's] eventual domestication."[16] In Charlaine Harris's more recent Sookie Stackhouse novels, on which HBO's *True Blood* is based, the Japanese create a synthetic blood, which allows vampires to survive without killing humans or animals. However, in Rice's and Harris's novels, the vampires do sometimes drink human blood, whether for nourishment or sexual pleasure. The most significant difference between the *Twilight* vampires and their predecessors, or contemporaries, is that in "traditional" vampire stories, abstaining from human blood makes the vampire weaker. For the Cullens, such abstinence

makes them stronger, smarter, and capable of "form[ing] true bonds of love."[17] They are extraordinary because they are so good at keeping their bodily desires under control, and throughout the *Twilight* series, rationality and its implicit companion, self-discipline, are valued above all else. Shortly behind them, for Bella at least, comes self-sacrifice.

These values reiterate those found in fairy tales and the Genesis myth, and in this way, Meyer's attempt to rewrite Genesis in order to make it more favorable to and for women proves unsuccessful. She may allow the sinful Eve/Bella a powerful redemption, but only because Bella reforms by embracing the culturally sanctioned role of motherhood. In the process, Meyer creates a seductive series of books that is (unintentionally) damaging in its influence on young women because it promotes and normalizes a hatred and fear of the female body. Just as Eve is punished with suffering in childbirth for her act of transgression and temptation, so too is Bella; her sexual desire is more or less the desire for a dangerous knowledge that culminates in an explicitly monstrous pregnancy, which we would argue is the most genuinely monstrous, terrifying aspect of the *Twilight* series (and the 2011 film adaptation of *Breaking Dawn*).

Indeed, the physical consummation of Bella's desire and her pleasure in the sexual act is answered—if not repudiated—by her becoming immediately impregnated with a hybrid, parasitic fetus gestating at such a rapid rate that her body turns against her, transforming her into a swollen, disfigured, and literally drained receptacle for the "*thing* that's sucking the life from her."[18] Edward tries to persuade Bella to have an abortion, but for once Bella resists Edward's authoritative control and insists upon continuing the pregnancy. She suffers at an inordinately horrific level for that decision, and Meyer seems almost sadistic in the punishment she inflicts upon Bella for engaging in some good, old-fashioned sex with her husband; or Meyer's view of pregnancy seems terribly conflicted and ambivalent, as her heroine morphs into a monstrous maternal figure bearing a blood-sucking, alien fetus that attempts to chew its way out of her womb (the imagery of the *Alien* horror films immediately comes to mind, and if one is going to scare teenage girls away from sex this is certainly the way to accomplish it).

Meyer's gruesome depiction of pregnancy may seem surprising, given the text's overall investment in promoting motherhood. However, it is not as contradictory as one might think, since *Breaking Dawn* supports a widely accepted view of pregnancy and mothering as two entirely separate endeavors. Sara Ruddick explains:

> Mothering and birthgiving, as experienced and practiced, are quite unlike each other. Mothering is a set of ongoing organized activities requiring discipline and attention. By contrast, pregnancy can appear as a condition, a physical

> state of being. Whereas mothering requires deliberative thought, pregnancy may appear to require only the rational capacities that Aristotle attributed to slaves: the ability to understand and obey [doctor's] orders. Mothering is moral—a relational work that involves at least two separately and willfully embodied persons. A birthgiver seems to take care of her fetus by taking care of herself. Seen from a temporal perspective of the life of a mothered child, pregnancy and birth are but moments; birthgiving is a dramatic physical event soon out of sight or in the footnotes.[19]

In other words, mothering is cultural work—it is "moral," requires careful thinking, and "discipline and attention." Pregnancy, in contrast, requires only that the body function at its biological optimum, and all the woman needs to do to gestate a baby successfully is take care of her body; preserving the fetus simply involves self-preservation from this point of view. Meyer sets up a similar division between biology and culture, but she takes the distinction a step further, emphasizing that the female subject cannot exist in both realms of the physical and cultural but is categorically placed in one or the other: the "Bad" biological mother (since the pregnant female body has a "mind" of its own) or the "Good" culturally regulated mother. That which is physical in this text, Bella's pregnancy, is thus positioned as horrifying and "unnatural."

Furthermore, we are not allowed insight into Bella's subjective experience of her pregnancy; she is rendered passive (and mute) not only by her own body and the protective, oppressive guardianship of the Cullens, but also by the narrative device of shifting to the first-person perspective of Jacob. This switch is an oddly disruptive choice since it's the first and only time in the series that we are not given Bella's first-person point of view, yet it is a telling choice, revealing the text's attitudes toward the maternal body. Jacob, like Edward, expresses revulsion, fear, and confusion in reaction to Bella's gross physicality and her even more disturbing attachment to the "thing" growing inside of her. Through Jacob's eyes, Bella is reduced (or inflated) to a monstrous, aberrant object of loathing, describing her "torso" as "swollen . . . in a strange, sick way . . . 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 over her bloated stomach . . . Like she was cradling it."[20] Bella is presented here as a grotesque maternal body—unruly, excessive, and threatening—even while protecting her unborn child, yet Jacob's lack of "understand[ing]" provides insight into why Bella's pregnancy is viewed so negatively.

The pregnant body exists outside of male desire, knowledge, or power, and precisely because of "the one aspect of child care that men cannot undertake. The (hitherto) ineradicable inequality in women's ability and men's inability to give birth—the bodily potentiality, vulnerability, and power that is wom-

en's alone—evokes guilt, envy, and resentment."[21] Jacob, Edward, and Carlisle are unable to control Bella's pregnancy and are forced into becoming helpless spectators. This seems almost commonplace, or clichéd, but Meyer intensifies this lack of (male) understanding and marginalization of pregnancy, even for her female readers, by making Bella's thoughts during pregnancy inaccessible and, by implication, insignificant. It is as if Bella can only do one thing at a time—make a baby. She is the nonspeaking, unspeakable subject since in order to become "a speaking subject and/or subject to the [paternal] Law," one must become distinctly removed from the maternal body.[22]

That said, her pregnancy is the one time Bella takes some control over her own (human) body, subverting the wishes (or law) of the text's protective father figures; it is the only instance when Bella rejects Edward's desires and guidance by following her own "instincts." Her primary concern for protecting the child leads us to conclude, however, that the assertion of Bella's autonomy is permissible only because it is not about saving herself but the "fetus." Thus the value of the fetus over the mother is clearly at play within the reproductive politics of the novel. Moreover, even if desire is supposed to be the impetus for the subject to assert herself, Bella's desires are nullified by her desire *not* to assert herself: her desire is, first, for Edward to desire *her*, and second, to protect (i.e., mother) everyone around her, and always at the risk of her own safety, since she repeatedly states her willingness to die for those she loves. Jacob identifies Bella's penchant for self-sacrifice as one of the characteristics that make her "so *Bella*," observing that she is willing to "die for the monster spawn."[23]

In some ways, the representation of Bella's pregnancy is a reassuring myth. If we use Bella as a model, all of this can happen—during a pregnancy our bodies can rebel, and we can feel utterly terrible—yet we still love the child that is making us feel so awful, and we can still fulfill the role of "Good Mother." At the same time, Meyer's representation of pregnancy is quite insidious, particularly for young women, because a loathing and distrust of the female body and its reproductive capabilities is evident. Pregnancy is presented as a diseased state that must be managed, rather than as a natural condition, and the fear of death through childbearing, which is rare in industrialized countries, is insinuated as a likely outcome. The contradictory message Meyer offers here is that motherhood is the one function women are born to fulfill, yet the process of becoming a mother is a trial that just may result in disfigurement or death. Nevertheless, young women should take on this risk because, well, being a mother is the only path to asserting and gaining genuine identity, agency, and power. As Luce Irigaray argues, because women are granted little to no autonomous positioning within a patriarchal society, then children become their only form of currency "in exchange for a market

status for *themselves,*" and to the point where motherhood "gets wrapped up in some weird kind of holiness."[24]

Bella certainly insists on playing the "martyr" for her child,[25] and she does indeed die when giving birth, but it is only her human body that dies, since Edward is there, as always, to save her. Upon her initiation into vampirism (and motherhood) Bella is ironically no longer monstrous but "gifted" with perfect control over all hungers and desires; as Edward observes, "You shouldn't be so . . . rational."[26] Of course, Bella's self-discipline only occurs after she is rid of the chaotic maternal body and consigned to the traditional role of "Good Mother." All disruptive desires are neutralized the very moment her "pheromone-riddled" body literally dies, and at this point in the narrative, her voice is conveniently returned to her. She is no longer an unsettling force, and there is no longer any need to keep her body and desires safely contained (or silenced) because Edward has regained control by giving birth to *her* (as a "newly born" vampire).

This ultimately adds the phallus back into the equation of reproduction, something that adheres, and problematically so, to the typical representation of vampire reproduction. Sandra Tomc explains how traditional maternity is thrown over by vampires: "When Louis and Lestat [of Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles*] make a vampire out of Claudia, they do so quite literally over her mother's dead body . . . This violent demystification of maternal power [is] centered . . . on the mother's body as something dead and obsolete."[27] Vampires do not need women to reproduce, nor do they need sex. They can simply create a vampire by exchanging fluids. In *Twilight*, producing a child through traditional vampiric means, as discussed below, is forbidden, yet Edward, as Bella's savior, lover, and metaphorical father, coopts the act of childbirth, as he simultaneously delivers Renesmee and Bella (who remains unconscious and powerless during the "ordeal" of labor). The phallus is thus represented here as the only acceptable (symbolic) mode of reproduction, severing all connection to the flesh of the maternal body.[28]

In the mythology of the text, then, Meyer redeems the "terrible flesh" of Bella with the combination of transforming her into a vampire and a mother, ultimately granting her a sense of coherent power: "It was like I had been born to be a vampire . . . I had found my true place in the world, the place I fit, the place I shined."[29] Bella discovers her greatest power is the ability to create a "shield" that protects those she loves, which becomes especially useful since Edward and Bella have violated the most sacred of vampire taboos. According to the myth Meyer has created, making a child into a vampire inevitably brings a death sentence to its creator. The logic behind this prohibition is that toddler vampires have no self-control and are apt to bring too much attention to themselves, breaking the cardinal rule of the vampire community: hide

from humans.[30] The enforcer of vampire law is the Volturi (a corrupt group of vampires), and as soon as they hear reports about a child vampire living with the Cullens, they assume the worst and set out to destroy it. Since the Cullens will die to defend the child, their paradise is set to be destroyed—alluding to the expulsion from Paradise in the myth of Genesis. Bella, after all, has tasted the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and though she managed to escape immediate death during the act of sexual intercourse, this death is only delayed; she dies during childbirth to be reborn as a vampire only to face a more permanent death at the hands of the Volturi. Thus Bella's carnal lust, her one act of selfishness, even within the sanctioned bond of marriage, threatens the imminent destruction of everyone she loves. When the Volturi show up to punish the Cullens, however, Bella redeems herself by shielding her loved ones—and most importantly, her child—with an invisible, all-encompassing, and impenetrable bubble; their psychic powers rendered impotent against this gigantic metaphorical womb, the Volturi are forced to leave.

Through the power of maternal love, Bella conquers even the most omnipotent of forces. As a woman, her sexual desires threaten everyone, including herself. Fulfilling the archetype of the "Good Mother," she channels personal desire into the need (and ability) to protect those around her. Ironically, becoming a vampire, a figure that is supposed to embody decadence and unrepressed appetite, grants Bella the self-discipline that eludes her when she is human. This further demonstrates how the *Twilight* series reverses everything we have come to expect from the vampire genre: rather than the vampires existing as the dangerous other, representative of the return of the repressed, they are the norm, as not only the Cullens but nearly all the vampire groups, including the Volturi, conform to the patriarchal family structure. Vampires are typically boundary crossers, the epitome of a hybrid. Meyer inverts this and privileges stability over fluidity. It is Bella the human, with all of her messy human desires, her lack of a stable family, her ability to traverse boundaries (between the communities of werewolves, vampires, and humans), which makes her the dangerous other in the text, and no more so than when she is monstrously pregnant with her hybrid fetus—all of which, again, becomes safely contained the moment she gives birth, which is simultaneous to the moment her body dies.

This leaves us with the same metaphor/myth: motherhood equals the death of female desire, and in the world of *Twilight*, this is a positive thing, which makes its conclusion (and premise) so disturbing. Moreover, because the taboo of vampire reproduction is founded on the assumption that when children are "turned" they become enormously strong desiring machines, far too biologically driven to be controlled, and since creating a vampire child is the worst offense in Meyer's vampire culture, we might read this as an implicit critique

of feminine-maternal desires. That is, because vampires cannot reproduce "naturally," and the most illicit thing a vampire can do is desire a child enough to make one into a vampire, then this seems to be a way of regulating the unruly female body, which Meyer's texts suggest is necessary for the survival of society. As such, *Twilight* remains faithful to the Genesis text; if read as maturation myths, or even fairy tales, the didactic message of both narratives asserts that the female subject cannot engage in unsanctioned or transgressive desires without disciplinary regulation and punishment. Pleasure is denied, and can only lead to shame, even within the socioculturally scripted confines of normative, heterosexual marriage and motherhood.

Lastly, once Bella becomes a vampire there is no threat of punishment/death as a consequence of sexual desire, and she and Edward can have sex as much as they like (which they do). Rather, all the attendant dangers or risks of erotic love are subtracted. Love inevitably entails risking oneself in relation to the other,[31] yet Meyer indicates that the ideal is to remove all risk, that desire can only be satisfactorily experienced once its dangers are negated, thus elevating sex to an activity that has nothing to do with women's lived realities. Bella is the perfect Freudian masochist—a self-sacrificing (somewhat sexless) mother, more at place in the 19th century rather than a positive or realistic role model for 21st-century girls. The most detrimental aspect of the myth that Meyer promotes is that what is "natural" about motherhood is to place the value of the child over the value of the mother/self, and that every girl should want a father/lover who controls and effaces her desires. If anything, like most fairy tales, *Twilight* demonstrates how girls are shown great rewards for adhering to a system that endeavors to discipline their desires. Bella certainly receives her "happily ever after," as she and Edward "continued blissfully into this small but perfect piece of . . . forever,"[32] yet Meyer's romance merely offers a sanitized and unsatisfying utopia.

Notes

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3. Maria Aristodemou, *Law and Literature: Journeys from Her to Eternity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 182, 29.
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5. Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 87.
6. Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 93.
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12. Jules Zanger, "Metaphor into Metonymy: The Vampire Next Door," in Gordon and Hollinger, *Blood Read*, 17.
13. Zanger, "Metaphor into Metonymy," 18–19.
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17. Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 603.
18. Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 181.
19. Sara Ruddick, "Thinking Mothers/Conceiving Birth," in *Representations of Motherhood*, ed. Donna Bassin, Margaret Honey, and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 35–36.
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21. Ruddick, "Thinking Mothers/Conceiving Birth," 36.
22. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 94.
23. Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 177.
24. Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 84.
25. Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 187.
26. Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 420.
27. Tomc, "Dieting and Damnation," 78, 98.
28. Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 11, 14.
29. Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 524.
30. Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 34–35.
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