Happily (For)ever After: Constructing Conservative Youth Ideology in the *Twilight* Series

by

Julia Pearlman
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You are the most important thing to me now. The most important thing to me ever.
--Edward, Twilight 273
Introduction

On June 2nd, 2003, Stephenie Meyer awoke from the dream that would eventually launch one of the most pervasive cultural phenomena in American memory. In her dream, Meyer envisioned a beautiful teenaged couple in a picturesque meadow, deeply in love and engrossed in conversation. The dazzling young man of her dream just happened to be a vampire who could hardly control his urge to ravage the young girl and drink her sweet-smelling blood. Ultimately, the love the young vampire felt for the girl curbed his desire to drink her blood. On June 2nd, 2003 the Twilight series was born.

Since its publication in October 2005, the Twilight series has sold over eighty-five million copies in nearly fifty countries¹ and has inspired incredible hysteria surrounding the franchise. The series has spawned a movie deal and a generation of young adults who dedicate their time and attention to the lives of the series’ protagonists, Isabella Swan and Edward Cullen. Loyal Twilight devotees (often referred to as Twihards or Twilighters) have created communities—such as Twilighthoms.com and theTwilightsaga.com—wherein they can share fanfiction, pose and answer questions about their favorite characters and connect with other Twilight disciples. Countless companies have capitalized on the novels’ popularity to market clothing and makeup lines, dolls, calendars, school supplies, even Edward Cullen unmentionables. The Twilight series is not just a collection of novels—it is an American obsession, a staple of a new American iconography and a revision of American mythology.

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In light of the frenzy surrounding the books, movies, and actors, this thesis seeks to navigate the view of American culture and identity propagated by the *Twilight* series. As youth literature, *Twilight* is positioned in a unique role—it has the power to simultaneously transform society while being transformed by society. In other words, *Twilight*, both the novels and the movie, has shaped teenage girls’ identities—young girls identify as members of “Team Jacob” or “Team Edward,” as “Twihards,” or as teenagers in opposition to the *Twilight* culture. In turn, the very teens that embody the characteristics *Twilight* disseminates have transformed the American ethos to be receptive to and obsessed with everything *Twilight*. The phenomenon fuels the participant while the participant fuels the phenomenon.

Rejecting conceptions of female power, sexual freedom, and racial and class equality, *Twilight* situates the American teenager in a conservative ideology based on the power and superiority of the white male. To discuss an ideology is to discuss what Marx and Engels, as quoted by Raymond Williams, identify as “the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas.”\(^2\) Williams further cites Engel’s conception of ideology as false thought precipitated by “the thinkers of a ruling class...active concepitive ideologists.”\(^3\) More generally, ideology refers to a set of ideas which develop from “a given set of material interests or, more broadly, from a definite class or group...”\(^4\) Thus, the ideology to which I refer is the set of conservative ideas and values that arise from *Twilight*’s penetration into American culture. The series has become the

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\(^2\) Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Revised ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) 155.

\(^3\) Ibid., 155.

\(^4\) Ibid., 156.
dominant cultural material disseminated by Stephenie Meyer, by the heads of major publishing houses, clothing brands, marketing corporations etc. The series establishes a desirable morality which teenagers are encouraged, through their consumption of the novels, to adopt. The girl who remains chaste, virtuous, kind and beautiful will obtain the ultimate prize: Edward Cullen, the handsome, strong, honorable and wealthy white male (a vampire). The ideal male is inherently alien to the teenage girl; the male’s dangerousness and coldness is only tamed by his love for the heroine and his consequent sexual self-denial (to maintain her virtue, of course).

In discussing the persuasive nature of the texts, we inevitably abuse the language of morality. Jeffrey Weeks tells us, “Speaking of values is a way of describing the sort of life we want to lead, or think we should lead,” and that “human beings are value making and value bearing subjects[sic], that values form the substratum of individual and social existence.” Americans live in a society formed by core values—family, decency, hard work—that have historically been based in religious rhetoric. For Weeks, “the problem is not our lack of values, but the hierarchies in which they are trapped, which claim truth, concepts of right and wrong, as their exclusive prerogative.” In the American context, this hierarchy of values is what controls and limits the adolescent girl’s sexuality. Though Weeks claims that identities are chosen, he recognizes the limitations out of which those “alternatives” arise; choices are made within a specific context--economic, political, cultural etc--

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6 Ibid., 50.
7 Ibid., 50.
8 Ibid., 33.
and often, “the individual finds herself in a position where real choice is an illusion.”

The American value system offers the girl two ways to affirm her identity as a social being--she is a good girl or a bad girl, virgin or slut, saint or sinner.

The average Twilight reader is a young, white, middle-class girl between the ages of twelve and seventeen. She is inundated by a highly sexualized media—as seen in the popular television series, Gossip Girl, Beyoncé dressed in skin-baring leotards, Lady GaGa dressed in almost nothing, the list is endless—and yet she chooses, for the time it takes to read the seven-hundred page sagas, to ensconce herself in the abstinent and “moral” world of Forks, Washington. This reader is not just a fan, though. She is a Twi-hard, Team Edward, Team Jacob—she is a participant in a unique fan-culture devoted to everything Twilight. These teenage girls dedicate fan-sites, blogs, parties, reading groups, their bedroom decorations (the life-size wall sticker of Edward Cullen that reads “Be Safe” is of particular interest), and even their virginity to Twilight.

The series follows the lives of two star-crossed lovers, Isabella (Bella) Swan and Edward Cullen. The reader is immersed in the landscape of the fantastic and given glimpses into a world of magic, myths and immortality. The novels are narrated by Bella, a self-proclaimed klutz—a kind of every-girl for the twelve to seventeen-year-old teenage girl. In Twilight, the first of the series, Bella transplants herself to Forks, Washington after her mother chooses to live and travel with her boyfriend. Bella settles in with her father, Charlie, Forks’ simple sheriff and assumes the role of wife: cooking, cleaning and maintaining the home.

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9 Weeks, Invented Moralities: Sexual Values in an Age of Uncertainty 60.
Edward, born in 1918 (as a seventeen-year-old vampire), has found a home with the Cullens—a band of vampire misfits who choose to live on the blood of deer, elk and grizzly bears rather than slaughter humans as vampires traditionally do. They are self-proclaimed vegetarians, likening their diet to a human who subsists on tofu—physically fit but never fully satisfied. Having mastered their hunger urges, the Cullens are able to live in society, functioning as an imagined family.

Bella is the new girl; boys want her and girls want to be her friend. But, she is too intrigued by Edward and his beautiful family--their seclusion and seductive nature--to notice the attention of even the most popular boy in school. Bella incites Edward’s curiosity. She is immune to his mind-reading powers and her scent is mouth-wateringly irresistible; her presence triggers Edward’s animal urges. Though he poses an incredible threat to her life, Edward’s love for Bella is too great; he cannot stay but neither can he leave her.

Bella learns the legends of “the cold ones” from her friend Jacob Black, a member of the Quileute Indian Tribe, and is able to guess Edward’s dark secret, that he is a vampire. In the infamous meadow scene, the two confess their passion for one another and their fate is sealed; the young lovers become inseparable. The reader is thus enmeshed in the world of Forks, Washington (the mythical west, the frontier) and struggles with the hero and heroine to navigate first love and sexual lust. As we follow the mismatched couple, we are thrown into a world of revenge, magical creatures, danger, violence and above all, the narrative that true love waits.

*New Moon*, book two of the series, finds the lovers together on Bella’s eighteenth birthday. Disheartened by the reality of aging, Bella pleads with Edward
to turn her into a vampire. Edward refuses; he believes that Bella will lose her soul after becoming a vampire. Edward’s father, Carlisle, does not share this belief and Bella takes great comfort in Carlisle’s belief in the eternal soul. The Cullens view their lifestyle as atonement for their “sins,” a vehicle to achieve a celestial resting place. The reader is persuaded to believe in the vampire’s possession of a soul as well—for if vampires do not have souls, what purpose would the Cullen family’s lifestyle serve?

Bella suffers a small paper cut at her birthday party. Jasper, the newest Cullen to adopt the vegetarian lifestyle is overwhelmed by the incredible smell of Bella’s warm blood. Thirsty for human blood, Jasper tries to attack her, but Edward and the rest of the family quell his efforts. Edward, realizing the danger in which his presence places Bella, leaves Forks and a broken-hearted Bella behind.

After falling into a deep depression, Bella finds solace in the company of Jacob Black. As a member of the Quileute Indian Tribe’s mythical pack of wolves, whose mission is to protect humans from vampires, Jacob detests Edward. Jacob’s intense hatred towards Edward is twofold; he loathes Edward for hurting Bella, the woman he loves, and on a more basic animalistic level, is repulsed by Edward purely for being a vampire. Jacob and Bella begin to fall in love but their burgeoning feelings are interrupted by conflict.

Alice (Edward’s clairvoyant sister) informs Bella that, due to a misunderstanding, Edward believes Bella is dead. Edward plans to go to the Volturi, the vampire law-keepers, to ask for his death. Bella is the only one who can save him. Though Bella saves Edward, the Volturi decree that Bella, as a human who
knows of the existence of their kind, must either be killed or turned into a vampire. Edward agrees to complete Bella’s transformation...after they marry.

_Eclipse_ opens with Bella’s birth as a vampire looming. Bella tells Edward that she wants to experience sexual intercourse as a human but he refuses, claiming that he could too easily kill her in the heat of passion. Edward soon realizes Bella’s intense desire to experience lovemaking as a human and agrees to try, so long as they are married first. Edward proposes to Bella with his human mother’s ring.

The final novel in the series, _Breaking Dawn_, details Bella and Edward’s nuptials and ensuing honeymoon. The two lovers take part in romantic late night swims, Bella parades in sensual lingerie and the couple consummate their marriage (many times). Edward feels guilty for bruising Bella during their lovemaking, but Bella insists that she feels only pleasure. For the happy newlyweds, their honeymoon results in an anomalous pregnancy. The half-vampire, half-human fetus weakens Bella as it kills her from the inside, drinking her blood for sustenance. Though Edward encourages Bella to abort the fetus as its unusually quick growth rate frightens him, Bella resolves to carry whatever is growing inside of her to term.

Bella cannot survive childbirth as a human. When the stone-hard womb cracks and Bella begins to die, Edward infects Bella with his venom (the vehicle for vampire transformation) thus saving the lives of both his wife and daughter and marking Bella’s birth as a vampire. After an excruciating transformation, during which Bella is immobilized and loses her voice, Bella wakens as a newborn vampire. She has gained beauty, strength and unparalleled speed. Bella learns that her daughter, Renesmee, both grows at an accelerated pace and possesses the skill to communicate
her thoughts through touch. Bella also discovers that Jacob Black has imprinted (the Quileute phenomenon of finding one’s soul mate) on Renesmee.

The family falls into a comfortable and happy pattern. Though conflict arises, it is ultimately resolved peacefully. Bella and Edward retreat to their fairy tale cottage and put their daughter to bed. Bella manipulates her newfound vampire powers to allow Edward, for the first time, to read her thoughts and he is able to see how deeply she loves him. They live happily ever after (forever, of course).

This thesis seeks to understand the implications of the *Twilight* series in the formation of teenage girls’ identities and values. Through the uses of literary vampire convention; the didactic structure of the fairy tale; the return to traditional sexuality norms and gender roles and the reinforcement of conservative race and class relationships, *Twilight* works to socialize young girls into a conservative ideology that positions the American, white, middle-class male as superior.

Chapter One explores the historical convention of the vampire story. Tracing the figure back to Bram Stoker’s archetypal Count Dracula, I follow the vampire through its many interpretations to the modern popular cultural fascination with the figure. Reacting against an increasingly liberal representation of vampirism, Meyer not only breaks all the rules, but creates her own. Her unique subversion of the literary tradition works to initiate the adolescent reader into a conservative moral paradigm.

The second chapter establishes the fairy tale as the essential narrative structure of *Twilight*. The series epitomizes the romance, violence, danger and magic inherent to the genre and, additionally, the didactic nature of the fairy tale. Reading the series
through the framework of the fairy tale lends an understanding of the transformative potential of the novels as well as insight into the reader’s comprehension of the story as a guidebook for social interaction.

Following the exploration of the fairy tale tradition, I investigate the sexual undertones (and definite overtones) of the novels. How does the narrative of abstinence, both from blood and from sexual intercourse, work to form teenage sexuality? The inhibited desires of the lovers and the repression of their urges communicate that sexuality, both in and outside of the world of Forks, Washington, is something to be expressed only within the confines of a loving and committed relationship—namely, a marriage. The role the romanticization of true love, marriage and motherhood plays in the construction of the teenage girl’s sexual identity is central to the reader’s formation of a conservative moral identity. Gender, and by extension race and class, are constructed in the novel within an American hierarchy steeped in paternalism and inform the readers’ sense of what it means to be powerful and “good” in America—that is, to be a white male or to be loved in a heterosexual marriage by a white male.

The following chapter explores portrayals of race and class in the series. The interactions between the vampires, wolves and humans of *Twilight* are marked by archaic stereotypes and beliefs that perpetuate conservative perspectives of race and class. Utilizing Professor Richard Slotkin’s work on American mythology, we see the Quileute Tribe as the location for white colonization and domination. The treatment of the Quileute Nation exhibits relationships that value the white middle-class male over the non-white, the “alien.”
The myths proliferated by the series instruct the reader on how to be American. The fascination with *Twilight* is symptomatic of the culture at large. Vampires have become a part of the American lexicon—we crave the danger, mystery and sexual power the vampire signifies. More than that, we crave the invincibility and brute strength the vampire possesses. The “good” vampire represents enhanced physicality and morality and is a translation of the myth of American exceptionalism. The vampire fascinates Americans because it represents how they see themselves in the world: superior. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *True Blood*, to name only a few, represent contemporary adaptations of the traditional vampire narrative wherein sexual desires are fully realized. *Twilight* positions itself in opposition to the stock vampire story; sexual appetite is curbed, true love and virtuosity triumph over evil. Edward is a knight in (literally) shining armor—he is the prince and Bella, the damsel in distress. The narrative constructs conservative gender, class and race relationships. *Twilight* is a portrait of American mythology, a reproduction of traditional morals, 1950s gender relationships, conservative ideologies and American desire to be the best.
In truth, young Bella, immortality does become you most extraordinarily. It is as if you were designed for this life.
—Aro (of the Volturi), *Breaking Dawn* 69
The figure of the vampire is inescapable in contemporary American popular culture. Whether you read the *Twilight* series in all of its manifestations, the countless vampire fiction series and novels that number the shelves of bookstores across the nation, watch *True Blood* (HBO), the cult series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB, FOX), or the *Vampire Diaries* (CW), vampires have saturated the American consciousness. Pick your poison—it will certainly be biting. *Twilight*, as a product of a specific cultural climate, is not acting as an isolated phenomenon. Vampires are everywhere and, consequently, we must consider what the figure (the monster, the alien) represents in the American context. The vampire, as historically imagined, is a monster—solitary, pale, murderous, repelled by garlic, burned in the sun. Meyer’s vampires subvert the conventions of this specific literary figure; she redefines a centuries-old tradition and thereby makes use of the cultural fascination with the vampire (who traditionally represents sex, death, and rebellion) to enforce a conservative viewpoint. She utilizes the draw towards the figure to instill a desire for a “virtuous” morality. The vampires of Forks, Washington are a reaction against the more liberal depictions of the sexually promiscuous and integrated “undead”—they take a uniquely abstinent and conservative position in stark contrast to the more “mature” and sexually driven vampires of, for example, *True Blood*. Meyer takes advantage of the American fascination with the vampire and subverts the conventions of the literary tradition to indoctrinate the reader into a distinct conservatism.
To understand the world Meyer has created, a brief review of the tradition from which the vampire was created and first understood is critical. Though the vampire made appearances in Germanic Gothic, British and Irish literature—namely John Polidori’s (Lord Byron’s physician) The Vampyre (1819) and Sheriden Le Fanu’s Carmilla (1872)—it is Bram Stoker’s publication of Dracula (1897) that established the mythology and literary tradition of the vampire. Stoker created the popular conception of the vampire; Count Dracula has infiltrated the imagination of children and adults alike. Indeed, Count Dracula is so notorious “that his name is now synonymous with ‘vampire.’” Dracula is the portrait of the vampire most commonly portrayed and which modern depictions adapt.

Vampire myths are couched in the rhetoric of repressed sexuality, fear of the alien, death and of society’s degenerating morality. The vampire represents the anxieties of the people—of outward social issues and, more subtly, the fear of evil within the self: “the term vampire has in many cases come to symbolize otherness and the fears that difference from societal norms engender.” The traditional vampire embodies all that society rejects—he is diseased, alone, evil, infecting society with bad blood and bad morals. Bram Stoker’s Dracula (the quintessential vampire) is “…the monster that threatens the white middle-class male protagonists…he is largely absent, an exotic metaphor for an unspecified contagion which they perceive to be preying on a vulnerable, homogeneous society.” The traditional vampire differs drastically from the modern vampire who has the potential to be integrated into

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12 Ibid, 3.
human society. Meyer utilizes the figure not to threaten the middle-class male but to reinforce his authority and privileged position.

The vampire represents an intense sexuality that penetrates the reader’s consciousness and interpretation of the figure—the vampire myth is often considered a chief symbol of eroticism. Historically, the vampire emerged as a response to the pervasive cultural ethos of sexual repression. Victorian sexuality was “bourgeois, patriarchal, heterosexual,”¹⁴ and threatened by any deviation from the norm. As Franco Moretti quotes David Pirie: “[Dracula is] the great submerged force of Victorian libido breaking out to punish the repressive society which had imprisoned it.”¹⁵ Nursel Icoz explains that the vampire came to symbolize “dangerous subversive desires, which disrupt[ed] Victorian moral and sexual codes, because in the nineteenth century, the vampire became an erotic figure as the outcome of a process, which transformed the supernatural into the pathological and monsters into sexual perverts.”¹⁶ As the vampire moved throughout literary history he was implicitly understood as a highly sexualized social deviant. Meyer utilizes this history to make Edward incredibly desirable. But Edward’s sexuality (rather than society’s) is repressed—he abstains from sexual intercourse until marriage. The female reader wants to experience Edward’s strength and manhood but learns, through the subversion of vampire convention, that she can only express sexuality within marriage. Meyer’s vampire is highly sexualized but represents a distinct moral code. She arouses the desire in her reader that the vampire traditionally awakens and then

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tells her that that desire is only to be acted upon within a committed, loving and patriarchal relationship.

The imagery invoked by the vampire, of “…biting, sucking, and drinking blood,” partners “sex with violence, risk and possible death.”¹⁷ The sexual nature of the vampire was marked by “indecent” sex acts, disproportionate power dynamics, and the corruption of the virginal and innocent female. In traditional society, the woman is pure—she is sexually desirable but chaste. Vampires not only awaken her desire, and thus threaten the male-dominated social order, but they encourage the woman to embrace and indulge her urges: “one of the most appalling things that Dracula does to the matronly women of his Victorian enemies (in the novel as in the film) is to make them sensual.”¹⁸ The vampire uses his charm and supernatural powers to draw his victim to him into a relationship marked by abuse, manipulation and death. Under the vampire’s spell the human victim is lured into sexual degeneracy and ultimately vampirism. Edward rouses Bella’s desires and eventually lures her into a life of vampirism, but it is a life of good Christian values rather than depravity. (In another interesting subversion, Crosses and Holy Water, which traditionally repel the vampire, have no effect on the vampires of Twilight.) Bella is able to maintain her virginity and therefore her purity—the vampire is not infecting society with indecency but morality, and becomes a desirable figure.

The traditional vampire, seeking to seduce decent and innocent citizens into a life of sex and sin, taints society with its own characteristics—iso lation, deviance, racial and ethnic impurity, mental degeneracy etc. The vampire bite, the contagion of

¹⁸ Moretti, "The Dialectic of Fear," 78.
pure blood with that of the vampire, instigates the victim’s transformation from human to vampire and, even more, acts as a metaphor for the contamination of good society. Specifically, this fear of polluted blood acts as an allegory for the spread of syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases (in modern adaptations of the vampire, this will become the threat of AIDS). The bite, in Meyer’s world, does not represent this anxiety but acts as method by which to purify society. It is a tool used to save Bella from dying during childbirth; it completes her transcendent transformation from human to vampire. The fears the bite inspired no longer apply; the vampire is no longer a monster, but a hero.

The conventional literary vampire was used as a caution against what society deemed immoral behavior. The vampire represented the fear that the root of this immorality was internal and present within the self. The vampire is both an outsider that presents a threat to the social order and a representation of our greatest anxiety: that the immorality we fear and condemn stems from the self. Franco Moretti posits that “…the literary formalization [of the vampire], the rhetorical figure…has a double function: it expresses the unconscious content and at the same time hides it.”¹⁹ Our collective social fears are located in the vampire so that we do not have to name our real fears; as long as the vampire is the “other,” humans cannot occupy that role. We imbue the hero with socially constructed morals and set him in opposition to the alien vampire; when the hero kills the depraved vampire, he kills the threat to the status quo. But, when the vampire represents the moral values of the community and maintains the figure’s desirability, as in Twilight, he reinforces existing conditions.

¹⁹ Moretti, "The Dialectic of Fear," 81.
As the vampire tradition matured, the figure was continuously used “as [a vehicle] to express the fears and upheavals felt by many people in the new century,” including the fears of the new woman, sexual deviance, racial contamination and fear of mental and physical degeneracy. The female vampire embodies three distinct characteristics in which the patriarchy’s fears of female empowerment are situated: 

…bloodsucking, rebellion, and overt eroticism…these traits were more feared in traditional women than in men, primarily because the traditional woman was expected to be a nurturer rather than a bloodsucker, a docile creature rather than a rebel, and a being who sublimated her eroticism to child-rearing and monogamous marriage. Because of her extreme deviation from the ideal, therefore, the female vampire was both more fear-inspiring and more desire-provoking than her male counterpart.

Because the woman was supposed to be in the home, caring for the family, the image of the female vampire threatened male-dominated patriarchies and, as such, she was presented as a monster to be feared. Meyer addresses the issue of female vampires in a manner that locates the female vampire’s identity as woman first, vampire second and erases the risk she poses to the social order. Esme (the Cullen family matriarch) is relegated to the home, she does not work, cares for her “children”--she is the embodiment of motherhood. Her vampirism is no threat to society for she maintains her femininity and womanhood by virtue of her role in the home. Even as a vampire, Bella poses no danger to the social order because her sexuality is only expressed

20 Day, ed., Vampires: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil XI.
within a marriage. The female vampire of *Twilight* does not threaten but reinforces the patriarchy.

In an interesting exchange between Bella and Edward, Bella exhibits knowledge of the vampire conventions established by Bram Stoker. Bella asks, “How can you come out during the daytime?” and Edward replies “Myth.” She asks, “Burned by the sun?” “Myth.” And finally, “Sleeping in coffins?” “Myth.”

Meyer tells the reader that she knows the commonly held assumptions about the vampire the reader has, but urges the reader to abandon that knowledge—Meyer’s vampires are nothing like the vampires of traditional convention. The vampires of *Twilight* sparkle in the sunlight as if diamonds are reflecting off their skin; making a moral choice to abstain from human blood, the Cullens drink the blood of animals to survive; they never sleep; though Edward possesses the ability to read human minds and all vampires possess incredible strength, very few vampires have the extraordinary ability Dracula possessed to control humans. Meyer’s vampires are incredibly beautiful and invoke the desire conventionally achieved in literary representation, but do not allow that desire to be acted upon. However much Bella yearns for Edward, the pair remains chaste until marriage, offering a unique subversion of the inherent sexual liberty with which vampires are usually associated.

As time progressed, the literary vampire took on new qualities and came to represent new social anxieties. While Count Dracula stood for the fear of syphilis, today’s vampire often represents the fear of the AIDS epidemic. The modern vampire is no longer created in the image of Count Dracula: “Instead of a ruthless

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monster driven by appetite, readers find a lonely, anguished creature yearning for understanding.”23 When Anne Rice first published *The Vampire Chronicles* in the late 1970s, traditional assumptions about the vampire began to break free from the conventions established by Bram Stoker. Before Rice, vampire fiction and popular cultural representations had portrayed the isolation of the vampire, the gloom of decay and death. Rice took every opportunity to turn the convention of the vampire on its head; her vampires sought companionship and wrestled with issues of identity, religion and moral responsibility. She “modernized the nature of the vampires; no longer simple or single-minded personifications of evil, her blood-drinkers are fully realized characters who sensibly confront the problems of their lives.”24 Rice brought the vampire into the realm of humanity and demonstrated that what we think of as monstrous and alien is more closely related to ourselves than we thought.

Rice forced the reader to focus his attention inward—the vampire’s struggle to understand his identity and place in the world asked the reader to recognize his own struggles. The vampire was: “…no longer the outside antagonist, the enemy whose destruction marks humanity’s triumph and the end of the story.”25 Rice’s vampires battle the monster within—she depicts the deep conflict within the vampire between his inner monster who thirsts for human blood, who needs it to survive and the humanity that tells him murder is somehow inherently wrong. Rice’s vampires are deeply sexualized and engage in “gross” social misconduct yet maintain positions in society. They hold company with and experience emotions for humans despite their vampire urges. The struggle to understand their personal dissonance resonated with

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23 *The Blood Is the Life : Vampires in Literature* 64.
24 Ibid, 60.
Americans who sought to understand themselves in society. Rice’s vampires paved the way for countless reinterpretations that position the vampire as an integral part of society, befriending and desiring humans as companions rather than dinner.

Though the vampires of *Twilight* struggle to understand themselves and their place in the world, ultimately Meyer positions the vampire as the figure to which readers aspire. While contemporary popular cultural representations of the vampire generally depict “…a being who is simultaneously terrifying and attractive—even envied, a being whose allure reaches to the deepest levels of the collective unconscious,”26 the Cullen family are only terrifying because of their devastating good looks, expensive cars and designer clothes that signal social superiority (whiteness) and intimidation. Meyer’s vampires embrace a more traditional, wholesome lifestyle and take great pleasure in their heightened vampire abilities. Meyer utilizes the subversion Rice founded—embedding the vampire in society—but rather than force the reader to consider his inner “demons,” tells the reader that the social order is corrupt. Unlike Rice’s vampires, who yearn to reject their vampirism, Meyer gives the reader Bella, who longs for eternal life. Bella rejects human society in favor of the fairy tale her vampire lover can provide. She must become a vampire because the Cullens are better, more moral, more beautiful, wealthier, and wiser than the rest of Forks. Bella embodies the American desire to be the strongest, the wealthiest—the best. Meyer uses the vampire to assuage her reader’s fears and bring them into a world that is marked by conservative values and ideologies.

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Though there are “bad” vampires in *Twilight*, good and evil are easily recognizable. There is no middle ground or moral ambiguity as offered by the more liberal, modern adaptations of the vampire. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *True Blood* represent *Twilight’s* contemporaries and, as such, position Meyer’s vampires as a reaction against the more liberal characters and beliefs presented. Buffy Summers and Sookie Stackhouse (*True Blood*’s human protagonist and a mind reader) are sexually liberated females who maintain realistic and modern conceptions of love and sexual relationships. Buffy and Sookie are sexy, sassy, blonde and virgins—until they meet their vampire lovers. Bella and Edward’s relationship, on the other hand, embodies traditional ideas of love and sex; the reader is told that the “right” way to love someone is within a marriage.

Buffy, unlike the heroines of Dracula, is strong—stronger than most men on the show and, obviously, stronger than the demonic forces she vanquishes— independent and sexually liberated. As a mind reader, Sookie is granted a certain amount of autonomy and power—she is impervious to vampires’ attempts to “glamour” (control her actions with their mind) her and though this does not give her power over vampires, it does not render her powerless. Buffy and Sookie stand in stark contrast to Bella who is both weak and powerless, whose only unique ability (to block Edward’s mind-reading ability) is uncontrollable and a mystery.

Though Buffy and Sookie are represented as strong, they are simultaneously represented within a discourse of femininity that works to assert the strength of their male counterparts and align them, if only tangentially, with Bella. Though they are subversive characters, as they embody a distinct “girl-power,” Buffy and Sookie exert
their power within the context of heterosexual, male-dominated relationships. They are at once complicit and subversive actors in the performance of femininity, in the dominant ideological formation of the female in American society. Sookie is often in peril--Bill gladly saves her time and time again. Though Sookie cannot be glamoured, she remains subject to Bill’s will; he tells other vampires, “Sookie is mine,” leaves her for long periods of time and is infinitely stronger than her. She wears sundresses and possesses a virtuous reputation. Angel, Buffy’s centuries old vampire boyfriend (with a soul), saves her life on countless occasions and Giles, her “watcher” and mentor, gives Buffy the knowledge she needs to fight her enemies. Buffy is portrayed as highly fashion-conscious, easily distracted by her infatuation with and desire for boys, and not even remotely interested in her education. She breaks down the notion that females are meant to be in the kitchen, dominated by stronger males, yet she reinforces the ideal of the woman as disinterested in intellectual pursuits and reliant on men.

Interestingly, Angel, Bill and Edward all leave their human love interests to assert the freedom and mobility that, traditionally, the man possesses. In doing so, the vampires leave Buffy, Sookie and Bella open to emotional and physical harm and highlight the females’ lack of agency. Though Buffy is emotionally distraught after Angel leaves her, she remains the slayer. Her life is never in any (more) danger without Angel. Though he often saved her, Buffy adapts to life without a man; Buffy always wants a boyfriend, but does not need one to survive. Sookie, though not a slayer, is very capable. When Bill leaves Bon Temps, she too adapts—in the Season One finale, though Bill attempts to save Sookie from a murderer (who chooses his
female victims for their vampire-human sexual relationships), Sookie kills the murderer herself and then saves Bill from exposure to the sun. She is vulnerable to danger but able to protect herself. Buffy and Sookie represent powerful women who love their men but do not need them to survive. Bella, on the other hand, falls into a deep depression after Edward leaves Forks; “It was a crippling thing, this sensation that a huge hole had been punched through my chest, excising my most vital organs and leaving ragged, unhealed gashes around the edges that continued to throb and bleed despite the passage of time.” Bella is in grave danger without Edward’s protection—until Jacob assumes the role of Bella’s caretaker. Bella’s depression and subsequent relationship with Jacob offer a traditional view of womanhood, that women cannot function without a man, and need men to survive.

While both *Twilight* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* locate social anxiety in the adolescent, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* focuses that anxiety not on teenage sexuality but on teens engaging in unsafe sexual behavior. After Buffy loses her virginity to Angel he loses his soul and becomes evil (due to a curse inflicted upon him by a band of gypsies): “that this happens when Buffy first has sex with him is the ultimate teen allegory in early seasons, reflecting girls’ real anxieties about the value of sex in relationships,” that he won’t love or respect her in the morning. Sexual intercourse is proven to be dangerous, consuming and corruptive; the act represents Buffy’s loss of power over the male (another indication that a woman’s worth is her sexuality—the female virgin is powerful while the female who is “impure” is positioned as powerless). But, Buffy is not a “slut” and she learns from the experience to later

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28 Ibid, 63.
become involved in committed, loving, sexual relationships. For Buffy, the vampire is the wrong sexual partner. The message is not one of abstinence but of safety and sexual responsibility.

Sexuality, expressed in *True Blood* by Bill and Sookie, is presented as acceptable within a loving relationship regardless of marital status. Sookie yearns for Bill and, after only a few episodes, with their love barely cemented, the two consummate their passion for each other. Fear is not located in pre-marital intercourse but in the deviant sexuality in which the Bon Temps community participates. Sex, here, is represented as both good and evil. Vampires as well as humans embody moral depravity; both parties are complicit in the process of becoming immoral by participation in dangerous activities outside of committed relationships:

The way a victim gets ‘unclean’ from a vampire bite involves illicit intimacy, and these pictures run the gamut of marginalized sex acts contained in the political unconscious: pre-marital hook-ups, gay and bisexual relationships, adultery, cheating, polygamy, S&M, the sexuality of children and the hovering specter of quasi-willing sexual violence.29

The show exposes the community’s sexual urges and private lives as corrupt. Sookie, herself, allows Bill to bite her and drink her blood during sexual intercourse. Innocence and morality lie in contested ground.

Both *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *True Blood* offer a view of morality that is subjective—a great divergence from the sexual morals represented in *Twilight*

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Buffy and Sookie participate in pre-marital sexual activity but neither female is portrayed as a “slut.” Indeed both women engage in loving and committed relationships that solidify their characters as moral. Stephenie Meyer, however, positions sexuality within a conservative, even antiquated, sphere. In a marked departure from contemporary (and traditional) representations of the vampire, Meyer tells her reader that sex is okay...only in a marriage. She positions the female within the good girl/slut dichotomy—because Bella does not engage in sexual activity before marriage, as Buffy and Sookie do, she is a “good girl.”

Meyer’s depiction of motherhood represents a return to traditional family values and rejects more modern, liberal definitions of family that Buffy and Sookie embrace. When Buffy’s mother dies, Buffy takes on the role of mother to her little sister, Dawn. Buffy’s status as slayer (arguably the ultimate caretaker), mother and woman enforces the notion that women are, by nature, mothers but have the capacity to do and be more; as Lorna Jowett states, “Buffy’s position as heterosexual and as a mother to Dawn reinforce a conventional gendered position in the ‘real’ world, at the same time that her action hero role seems to blur gendered characteristics.”

Likewise, Sookie and Bill adopt Jessica (a teen-vampire created by Bill) as their pseudo-daughter following the death of Sookie’s grandmother (Sookie’s guardian). Sookie assumes the role of family matriarch. Meyer rejects the definitions of modern families that both shows depict (Buffy is a single-mom and Sookie and Bill are neither biological parents nor married). Bella and Edward wait until marriage to engage in sexual intercourse, have a biological child and a nuclear family—they are

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moral. Their lives are centered around a traditional, conservative depiction of the family that reinforces the subversion of vampire conventions as a socializing force.

All three series work to de-alienate the vampire but Meyer’s depiction of the figure imposes a social hierarchy in which the vampire is superior. The vampires of Sunnydale and Bon Temps don’t necessarily inspire disgust and fear, but are positioned as members of the community who have the capacity for both good and evil. The vampire becomes a figure who is not automatically rejected from popular culture but is accepted on the basis of their morality. Identity is a question not of what you are but of character--the message Buffy and Sookie send is acceptance based on moral integrity. In opposition, the vampires of *Twilight* integrate into human society but maintain personas that hide their true identity (to maintain anonymity, as proscribed by vampire law). They are superior to and set themselves apart the human community.

Though the three series place the vampire within human civilization, they do so within a racialized discourse. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the featured “good” characters are white, middle-class and good looking. Many of the series’ villains are of color, from “exotic” places, of ancient heritage and placed in opposition to the all-American teenagers who vanquish them. *True Blood*, set in the Deep South, works as an allegory for America’s overwhelmingly prevalent racism. The question of vampire integration is a thin veil to the issue of racial (in)equality in America. And, obviously, there is the glaring fact of Buffy and Sookie’s blondeness/whiteness. The shows, perhaps not consciously, enforce an idealized representation of womanhood in Buffy and Sookie (our heroines) that is white, privileged, and American. Meyer, too,
positions the ideal adolescent as obedient, conservative and embodying traditional
gender, class and race relationships. As discussed in chapter 4, *Twilight* uses the
figure of the vampire to assert the dominance of the white wealthy upper class over
the “other” (the Native American wolves)—Bella chooses Edward (the white
aristocrat) over Jacob (the Native American “savage”). Ultimately, in a move
unprecedented by *Twilight*’s contemporaries, Bella becomes a vampire and thus
asserts the superior position of the vampire in the discourse of white privilege. *Buffy
the Vampire Slayer* and *True Blood* use the vampire to represent the alien trying to
assimilate into white society; *Twilight* utilizes the figure to assert a hierarchy that
locates the vampire (the white, aristocratic figure) as morally superior. All three
series assert a hierarchy that valorizes whiteness.

The world Stephenie Meyer creates is swarming with monsters, vampires,
werewolves etc. She makes clear the distinctions between good and evil so that
characters can only be identified as villainous or virtuous. Invoking the sexuality
inherent in the vampire figure, Meyer then subverts the figure’s desirability by
imposing a conservative ideology on her characters. Her vampires abstain from
human blood and human urges (pre-marital sex) and embody Christian values of
abstinence, purity, good works (in order to ascend to heaven) and family. In a distinct
break from the popular representation of the vampire, Meyer’s world works as a
reaction against the liberal depiction of the vampire who integrates openly into
American society, who participates in pre-marital sexual activity and who cannot be
so clearly defined as either good or evil. The vampires of *Twilight* work to further
indoctrinate the reader into an ideology of conservatism, Meyer’s morality.
If the world was the sane place it was supposed to be, Jacob and I would have been together...He was my soul mate in that world—would have been my soul mate still if his claim had no been overshadowed by something stronger, something so strong that it could not exist in a rational world.

--Bella, Eclipse 599
Chapter Two
What Big Teeth you Have; Twilight as Fairy Tale

*Twilight* subverts literary vampire conventions to indoctrinate the reader into a conservative ideology. The narrative structure of the series—the structure of the fairy tale—works to further instill traditional values in the reader. Scholars such as Bruno Bettelheim and Jack Zipes focus their work on the socializing capacity of the fairy tale; through fairy tales, children are trained to behave properly, given a distinct moral code, and are taught the virtue of performing marked gender roles. The implication of the fairy tale as it is read and understood by youth is the construction of a social order based on the conservative values and ideals of the fairy tale’s originators. Positioning *Twilight* within the realm of the fairy tale, we gain an understanding of the novels’ literary function and, moreover, of its cultural significance. The series illuminates gender, class and race relationships that encourage a return to bourgeois ideals and have been engrained in the predominantly white, middle-class, teenage-girl readership. Through this lens, we view the narrative structure of *Twilight* as inherently coercive. The fairy tale is a powerful mechanism by which to form the child’s social identity; the *Twilight* series reflects deeply engrained American beliefs and cultural ideologies that value aristocratic ideals and a male-dominated hierarchy.

Vladimir Propp, one of the foremost scholars of the fairy tale (wondertale, as it is also called), acknowledges the potential of the fairy tale to create a specific mythology that informs the reader’s actions and morals. The original myths upon which the fairy tale is founded seep into the structure of the tale (what Propp
identifies as the “degeneration of myth into the wondertale”31) and cannot easily be separated out. Propp identifies the significance of myth as “components of life; they are part of every individual person...myth provides a living link between a tale and the entire reality of a people, their economic production, social structures and beliefs.”32 These myths are critical for without commonly shared stories and beliefs societies “would not be able to perpetuate [themselves].”33 Indeed, the myths of a people are so deeply engrained in their understanding of the wondertale--and certainly in the writing of the tale in the first place--that one cannot separate the two. Myth and tale work in conjunction to produce the story and its consequent meaning. In the American context, these myths are evident in the culture’s belief in individualism, capitalism, the belief that hard work will lead to success and, of course, the myth of American exceptionalism. These commonly understood stories and legends imbue Twilight with cultural meaning: the setting of Forks, Washington (the far west, the uncivilized land to be conquered by strong and brave Americans) and the focus on traditional womanhood and the family represent the underlying myths that inform and are informed by the narrative.

Propp analyzes the manner in which the fairy tale is organized and defined by its structure; he identifies thirty-one functions that qualify a story as a fairy tale and place Twilight within the genre. Likewise, Propp categorizes certain character types (actors within the tale who perform the functions) who are relegated to specific

32 Ibid, 120.
33 Ibid, 120.
spheres of action. The series’ characters satisfy Propp’s roles; Edward is the hero and Bella, the princess. Propp recognizes that the fairy tale exists successfully insomuch as it is re-worked to fit contemporary cultural standards: “everything that is out-of-date and incongruous with new attitudes, tastes, and ideology will be discarded…a work of folklore exists in constant flux.” Twilight re-imagines the wondertale in a contemporary setting; the narrative is established within a set of easily identifiable cultural signifiers—the Volvo, the high school cafeteria, prom. Twilight appropriates the fairy tale structure to rearticulate current social norms and maintain a connection with its contemporary readers—teenaged, middle-class girls.

It is essential to understand not only the structure of the fairy tale but the ways in which its intended audience read the tales as formative. Peter Hunt, in Understanding Children’s Literature, sheds light on the ways in which texts for children (or as he posits, read by children) are disseminated and work to form the structures of our cultural understandings. A universal designation of “child” is nearly impossible to define—there are schools of thought that believe there is an “essential child” constituting fundamental needs and thoughts, while other notions claim the child is nothing more than a result of adult discourse. For our purposes, it is best to consider the child (or the youth) as constitutive of an essential nature (impressionable, dichotomous) and as a product of the social and cultural structures enacted by adults. As Hunt describes: “…while children can be constructed as the powerless objects of adult discourse, they also have subject positions available to them that resist such a

34 For an in depth study of the fairy tale’s narrative structure see Propp’s, The Morphology of the Folktale.
35 Propp, Theory and History of Folklore 8.
move.” Though the child has agency, “there is an imbalance of power between the children and young people who read the books, and the adults who write, publish and review the books…there is here immediately a question of politics…” Children’s literature is a vehicle to express the adult’s point of view, to form the child whose autonomy is fearful and threatens the social order. Meyer articulates a conservative definition of morality in Twilight that works to develop the child’s ideology.

As adults help children grow, socializing forces such as the fairy tale are encountered as an integral part of the process by which meaning is given to the child’s comprehension of himself and of the world. Maria Tatar describes that “…reading and the attendant process of interpretation engage us in an active process that creates a text by constructing its meaning…the literature we read to our children by and large stands in the service of productive socialization.” The choices parents make attach meaning to a text and disseminate the parent’s values to the child. Of course, as the child matures, the parent continues to exert influence over the youth. The youth who no longer needs to be read to still constructs meaning from the texts they are given and read. Publishers and authors who create the works and parents who buy them are all contributors to the youth’s understanding of the world. Bruno Bettelheim asserts that “…more can be learned from [fairy tales] about the inner problems of human beings, and of the right solutions to the predicaments in any

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37 Peter Hunt, Understanding Children's Literature, 2 ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005) 17.
39 For a more complete understanding of the ways in which Children’s literature is disseminated and read see Peter Hunt’s Understanding Children's Literature.
society, than from any other type of story within a child’s comprehension.”\textsuperscript{41} The story must recognize the situations children face as they encounter the world and the anxieties those situations consequently produce; the literature must also present solutions to these problems. The morals and social constructs extracted from the series are directly related to the ideological formation that Bettelheim terms “the uses of enchantment.” The code of ethics supported by \textit{Twilight} is thus viewed as “right” and, as such, should be adopted by the reader as their own.

Bettelheim places great import in the fairy tale’s ability to communicate the realities of life. Fairy tales, according to Bettelheim, communicate;

that a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, is an intrinsic part of human existence—but that if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious.\textsuperscript{42}

But, for many children, strong morals and a good work ethic do not necessarily allow them to “emerge victorious.” Many children, though good, remain the victims of broken social systems. Fairy tales are one of the main socializing tools used to instruct children about the world--are we giving these children only false hopes and empty promises? Are the romantic, mythical and idealistic depictions of the world distorting the child’s ability to comprehend reality and the harsh nature of the situations they may encounter? Though Bettelheim does assert that the fantastic nature of the tales, “is an important device, because it makes obvious that the fairy tales’ concern is not useful information about the external world, but the inner

\textsuperscript{41} Bettelheim, \textit{The Uses of Enchantment} 5.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, 8.
processes taking place in an individual,“\textsuperscript{43} the craze surrounding the \textit{Twilight} phenomenon signals the existence of a disconnect between the youth’s ability to understand this process and their actions. The fairy tale is supposed to end with a return to reality, thus teaching the child, “that permitting one’s fantasy to take hold of oneself for a while is not detrimental, provided one does not remain permanently caught up in it.”\textsuperscript{44} The failure of the \textit{Twilight} series to produce healthy social frameworks lies in its inability to return to reality in the end: Bella, transformed into a vampire, lives outside of the realm of normal cultural and social situations. The reader is disallowed entry back into reality and is trapped in the world of the fantastic (wherein true love waits). The purity pledges, pregnancy pacts, \textit{Twilight} paraphernalia—all are possible because the series allows the reader to believe that fairy tales come true.

Ultimately, Bettelheim believes in the transformative power the fairy tale wields over the child’s worldview:

Fairy tales, unlike any other form of literature, direct the child to discover his identity and calling, and they also suggest what experiences are needed to develop his character further. Fairy tales intimate that a rewarding, good life is within one’s reach despite adversity—but only if one does not shy away from the hazardous struggles without which one can never achieve true identity.\textsuperscript{45}

The formative action of the fairy tale is extremely important to our understanding of the ways in which the \textit{Twilight} saga is able to shape relationships and gender, race


\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 63.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, 24.
and class identity. Maria Tatar illuminates that the unique quality of the fairy tale is that it enables the child to “readily slide into the role of a tale’s main character, absorbing all the pains and privileges attending the role of primary actor.” The lessons the protagonist learns are the lessons that are disseminated to the child. The child feels the pain the hero feels, yet at a safe and sheltered distance. *Twilight*’s reader is shown a young girl who cooks and cleans for her father, who passively submits to her male lover (a member of the aristocracy—white, wealthy, an intellectual) and who ultimately gives her own life for that of her child. The reader is indoctrinated into the conservative realm of the fairy tale.

The solution to the two greatest challenges facing the child—fear of death and the threat of desertion—purported by the fairy tale is true love. Fairy tales posit that when one has found true love, “one has reached the ultimate in emotional security of existence and permanence of relation available to man; and this alone can dissipate the fear of death.” This “solution” is particularly relevant to our reading of *Twilight*; Bella becomes immortal and secures eternal love. The young reader learns to believe that true love can and will solve humanity’s greatest problems—the fears of loneliness and death. The world, then, is a comforting place in which there is always a “happily ever after.” Social anxiety, economic trouble, political turmoil—all pale in comparison to the power of true love.

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46 Tatar, *Off with Their Heads: Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood* 90.
48 Ibid, 11.
Jack Zipes’ work further situates the fairy tale as a mechanism to teach children to accept and perform their social place and function.\textsuperscript{49} The fairy tale emerged from a long oral folktale tradition; the “classic” tales we know today were reinterpreted from traditional peasant stories passed down from generation to generation. Fairy tale writers, such as Charles Perrault (b. 1628-1703) and Mme LePrince de Beaumont (b. 1711-1780), appropriated these folktales to entertain the aristocracy. The stories were molded and adapted “to standards of literacy to make [them] acceptable for diffusion in the public sphere.”\textsuperscript{50} Perrault and Beaumont re-worked peasant tales and “designed [the tales] to rearrange the motifs, characters, themes, functions and configurations in such a way that they would address the concerns of the educated and ruling classes.”\textsuperscript{51} Though the fairy tale was regarded as having little literary merit, the stories began to gain popularity as they “… could be codified and used to reinforce an accepted discursive mode of social conventions advantageous to the interests of the intelligentsia and ancien regime, which made a fashion out of exploiting the ideas and productivity of the bourgeoisie.”\textsuperscript{52} The genre became a tool with which to socialize the lower classes. Fairy tales (embodying writers’ interests, which often remained sympathetic to the elite classes) began to work as “…[an] introduction of the norms and values of the bourgeois civilizing process…”\textsuperscript{53} As the tales spread throughout the country and among different classes, fairy tale authors began to “cultivate the literary genre for children…with clear


\textsuperscript{50} Jack Zipes, \textit{When Dreams Came True; Classical Fairy Tales and Their Tradition}, Second ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007) 3.

\textsuperscript{51} Zipes, \textit{Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion; the Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization} 6.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. 3.

\textsuperscript{53} Zipes, \textit{When Dreams Came True; Classical Fairy Tales and Their Tradition} 17.
didactic and moral lessons...to serve as a subtle, more pleasurable means of initiating children into the class rituals and customs that reinforced the status quo.”

The fairy tale was used to socialize children to accept a distinct ideological structure. The history of the fairy tale, entrenched in class struggles and bourgeois ideals, makes clear why *Twilight*’s utilization of the genre’s structure (and thus its formative capabilities) is an influential tool in the creation of conservative teenage identities.

Historically, the focus of the tale was “on class struggle and competition for power...the tales were those symbolic acts in which the [lower classes] enunciated their aspirations and projected the magic possibility...that anyone could become a knight in shining armor or a lovely princess.”

Fairy tales offered readers the possibility of social mobility. The tales enforced the notion that the lower classes should aspire to achieve upper-class status, and thus implied that the lower classes were somehow inferior to the aristocracy. Conservative socializing principles were engrained in the tales and inscribed specific gender and class relationships. The tales taught women to be obedient and subservient to the hero—her husband. *Twilight* continues this tradition; Bella is the member of the lower-class who is upwardly mobile. She marries the “prince,” becomes a vampire and thereby gains social status and cultural capital. Bella teaches the young reader that, if you subscribe to a distinct and passive womanhood, fairy tales come true.

Charles Perrault’s “Little Red Riding Hood” and Hans Christian Anderson’s “The Little Mermaid” allow a much better understanding of the fairy tale’s rich tradition. Both “Little Red Riding Hood” and “The Little Mermaid” represent a strict

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code of gender identity and social norms that we find re-iterated and re-imagined in *Twilight.* *Twilight* is a return to traditional patriarchic gender relationships wherein the assertive and heroic male dominates the subservient female.

“Little Red Riding Hood,” and all its subsequent versions, is Charles Perrault’s warning to curious little girls everywhere: if you indulge your thirst for knowledge, you will be eaten by the wolf, swallowed by the evils of this world. Little Red Riding Hood is instructed by her mother to take a basket of goodies to her ailing grandmother; she is directed not to stray from the path. But, of course, she wanders into the woods thus giving the big bad wolf following her the opportunity to eat Red’s grandmother and don the grandmother’s clothing before Red’s arrival. Little Red Riding Hood arrives at her grandmother’s house to meet a quite changed grandmother--“Grandmother, what big teeth you have?” The wolf instructs Little Red Riding Hood to undress and get into bed, after which he eats her.

In Perrault’s version of the tale, disobedience and curiosity are vices punishable by death. The girl learns that her sexual urges must be curbed and that her natural desires are dangerous. Likewise, the moral posits that the girl remain obedient to authority—when she strays, she is eaten by the wolf. Maria Tatar recognizes that “disobedience is generally a function of curiosity and stubbornness in the behavioral calculus of most folktale collections, and both vices are repeatedly singled out for punishment in cautionary tales,”56 such as “Little Red Riding Hood.” Bella learns, too, that her sexuality is dangerous. When kissing Edward, she forgets to breathe, Edward loses control—indeed, she places her life at risk every time she

56 Tatar, *Off with Their Heads: Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood* 25.
physically expresses her love for Edward. He reminds her over and over that with one false move or one split second of distraction, his brute strength could spell disaster. Both Bella and Edward must learn to control their sexual urges.

Perrault’s treatment of gender is not unique to “Little Red Riding Hood.” His stories reinforce the belief that the female should forgo her curiosity and relinquish power to the male. We learn, in tales like “Beauty and the Beast” and “Cinderella,” that “the female must learn to deny her sexual urges and subordinate her wishes and drives to please the reasonable man who knows what is best for her,”57 and that “…the female cannot behave civilly or live happily without the male to temper her.”58

In Perrault’s stories, the female cannot be successful without a male counterpart: “the task confronted by Perrault’s model female is to show reserve and patience, that is, she must be passive until the right man comes along to recognize her virtues and marry her. She lives only for the male and for marriage.”59 As we read Twilight, the implications of the fairy tale are central to our understanding of the ways Meyer indoctrinates the reader into a very specific and traditional femininity. Bella lives only for Edward; her sexual urges are awakened by the “right man” and indeed they marry. The reader learns to embrace conservative gender relationships.

There is also a strong link between the story of Adam and Eve and “Little Red Riding Hood” (and consequently, Twilight). Eve’s indiscretion worked to “identify [her] as the principal agent of transgression and ha[d] infused her act of disobedience with strong sexual overtones. Eve not only ‘disobeys’ commands but also ‘tempts’

57 Zipes, Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion; the Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization 34.
58 Ibid, 34.
59 Ibid, 25.
Red is positioned as an actor in the socializing process that asserts woman as transgressor; as unable to control her sexual urges; woman as the downfall of man. She needs man to rein in her strong compulsion to disobey the laws of her social order. And indeed, Edward acts as such an inhibiting force. He remains constantly aware of his overpowering strength and capabilities and, in order to maintain his and Bella’s virtue, renders their sexual urges irresponsible and impossible to satisfy until they are bound by marriage.

The Grimm brother’s version, “Little Red Cap,” fosters a new understanding of “Little Red Riding Hood”’s moral. Little Red Cap (as she is called in the Grimm’s version) does not die at the conclusion of the tale. In one version of their story, she springs forth from the belly of the wolf alive and well; in a subsequent account, a hunter cuts her and her grandmother free from the wolf’s belly. Ultimately, Red Cap denounces her disobedience and vows to always obey her mother. Red Cap’s sexuality is dangerous, but it is her tendency to disobey orders that gets her in trouble. Bettelheim suggests that Red Cap is “universally loved because, although she is virtuous, she is tempted; and because her fate tells us that trusting everybody’s good intentions, which seems so nice, is really leaving oneself open to pitfalls.”

This reading applies to Bella. Bella is good, but does not yet have control over her sexuality; she is tempted by her urges and sees life through innocent eyes. However, Bella learns to always be obedient to Edward, the man who will protect her from the wolves (and evil vampires) of the world.

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60 Tatar, Off with Their Heads; Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood 96.
61 Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment 172.
“Little Red Cap” can also be viewed as a coming-of-age tale. Mircea Eliade allows that the fairy tale gives “symbolic expression to initiation rites or other rites de passage—such as metaphorical death of an old, inadequate self in order to be reborn on a higher plane of existence.” Mircea Eliade allows that the fairy tale gives “symbolic expression to initiation rites or other rites de passage—such as metaphorical death of an old, inadequate self in order to be reborn on a higher plane of existence.” Red Cap must be eaten in order to be re-born; it is the act of being consumed that represents adolescent transformation. Thus, Bettelheim concludes that the child “understands that Little Red Cap really ‘died’ as the girl who permitted herself to be tempted by the wolf; and that when the story says ‘the little girl sprang out’ of the wolf’s belly, she came to life a different person,” who has gained wisdom and shed childhood innocence. Applying this reading of “Little Red Cap” to Twilight, we see Bella’s transformation from human to vampire as representative of her emergence into adulthood. We learn that in order to become an adult, you must marry into and adopt characteristics of the aristocracy.

Hans Christian Anderson’s “The Little Mermaid” portrays a different story, though the morals remain similar. In Anderson’s tale, the Little Mermaid falls in love with a prince she saves him from a shipwreck. In order to be with her true love, the Little Mermaid exchanges her voice (her tongue is violently cut from her throat) for human legs (an incredibly painful transformation, granted to her by the sea-witch) and the ability to dance gracefully. The prince falls in love with and weds the woman he mistakenly believes saved him from drowning. The Little Mermaid is unable to communicate to the prince that it was not his bride, but she who saved him. In the end, she must either kill the prince (who she loves) and return to her family in the sea

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62 Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment 35.
63 Ibid, 179.
or suffer death. The Little Mermaid chooses death and plunges a knife into her heart. Through this self-sacrifice she is granted a place in heaven.

Anderson’s tale is a manual to teach young girls their social function. Just as the Little Mermaid loses her tongue and voice in her transformation, Bella, too, loses the ability to speak during her transformation from human to vampire. This reinforces the notion that women are supposed to be subject to the power of men—the ultimate motivation for both women’s transformation is their love for the hero who requires the woman to change. The transformation, from mermaid to human and from human to vampire, is indicative of a girl’s need to mature from a child who indulges curiosity and disobedience into a woman who understands her subservient role. Anderson identifies suffering for beauty and virtue as the distinction between the lower classes and the nobility. The woman must suffer in order to transcend her lower status and “establish her true nobility and virtues.”

The fairy tale is irrevocably entrenched in Christian rhetoric. In its beginning stages “the morality and ethics of a male-dominated Christian civil order had to become part and parcel of the literary fairy tale.” The Little Mermaid must perform good deeds in order to gain an immortal soul. Likewise, Bella and the Cullens believe that their good deeds and their abstinence from human blood will gain them a place in heaven. They must “justify [their] existence to [themselves] through abstinence and self-abnegation—values preached by the bourgeoisie…true virtue and

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64 Zipes, Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion; the Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization 84.
65 Ibid, 9.
self-realization can be obtained through self-denial.”66 This self-denial and Bella and the Little Mermaid’s self-sacrifice link the stories in a unique way. Both women must give up their lives in order to be re-born as someone deserving of the love they desire. Both women sacrifice their voice—the symbolic lack of agency that positions the female as a subservient and silent presence. Bella, additionally, gives her womb and her human life in order to achieve immortality, a place in heaven—a soul.

Bella’s eternal life is the reward for piety, goodness and self-sacrifice; Bella’s life with Edward is heaven on earth. The reader understands that, if they embody these Christian principles, they too can live happily (for)ever after with their prince. When fairy tales are re-imagined so too are the principles of male domination and of a Christian social order.

Fairy tales are an incredible tool by which to indoctrinate children into a specific social and political order. These tales reflect the deeply held principles and values of their community and induct the child into a conservative culture. Jack Zipes emphasizes that fairy tales are “dependent on customs, rituals and values in the particular socialization process of a social system. They have always symbolically depicted the nature of power relationships within a given society.”67 Twilight represents a mythology that posits the female as subservient to the male and places great significance on class differentiation and worth. Twilight, as fairy tale, represents to its reader the cultural and social values that Americans give significance. The series teaches the child to expect to live happily ever after.

66 Zipes, Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion; the Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization 85.
67 Ibid, 41.
It was a surprisingly sensual experience to observe Edward hunting...his hands were so sure, so strong, so completely inescapable; his full lips were perfect as they parted gracefully over his gleaming teeth. He was glorious. I felt a sudden jolt of both pride and desire. He was mine.

--Bella, Breaking Dawn 425
Chapter Three
Teen Sexuality, Gender and Vampires; Meyer’s Moral Motherhood

The *Twilight* series, utilizing the didactic fairy tale structure, promotes a chaste and conservative view of teenage sexuality (though statistics offer a different reality; by the age of nineteen, seven out of ten teenagers have engaged in sexual intercourse\(^68\)) and enforces the ideology that the ideal woman is a wife and mother. *Twilight* is a highly influential piece of popular culture that promotes a return to 1950’s middle-class ideals (the centrality of the family, marriage and traditional gender roles) the cult of domesticity (the women of *Twilight* are relegated to interior spaces centering on the home and the kitchen) and the discourse of true love. The series indoctrinates the young reader into the realm of desire, abstinence, motherhood and a very narrow definition of morality. She is told that any power she holds should be wielded to obtain the end-goal, her highest form of happiness—motherhood. The central focus on teen sexuality and the romanticization of marriage and motherhood position the adolescent reader in a conservative framework.

Popular culture phenomena are indications of the nation’s generally held beliefs—they have the power to enforce and shape ideologies held by the mainstream. *Twilight* represents widely held social mores and standards, offers insight into the adult populace’s fear of the adolescent and, moreover, the way adults want to observe the teenager in society—virginal, pure, innocent. Louis Althusser claims that “…individuals form their identities in conjunction with their culture’s dominant ideologies, which they absorb through institutions like the media. By virtue of this

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absorption process, individuals are ‘interpellated’ into those ideologies, becoming
complicit in their own subjugation. This complicity allows the governing order to
reproduce itself with the full assistance of the governed.”

Thus the teenage mainstream—those who participate in popular cultural phenomena with great
ferocity—form their identities within the discourse of the patriarchy that produces the
material they consume. Though they might reject their subjugation, ultimately the
teenager participates in a consumer culture codified by the adults who oppress
teenage “individuality.”

Teenage pregnancy is engrained in the American consciousness; the covers of
our magazines and the subjects of blog posts belong to the pregnant celebrities who
are a permanent fixture of our cultural fascination. In the past few years television
programs and films, such as The Secret Life of the American Teenager and Juno, have
glamorized pregnancy and motherhood while glossing over many of the difficulties
involved with teenage and/or single motherhood. Though television programming on
MTV, such as 16 and Pregnant and Teen Mom, highlight the struggles facing teenage
mothers, these shows normalize teen motherhood and familiarize youth audiences
with the possibility of pregnancy without the knowledge to prevent conception.
Pregnancy is so deeply engrained in the American cultural framework that
motherhood has become the ultimate achievement for young girls. This is the

70 In the spring of 2008, controversy exploded across the nation over the much debated “pregnancy
pacts” supposedly taking over teenage girls’ imaginations and bodies. Gloucester, Massachusetts took
center stage as the nation’s fascination with teenage sexuality escalated. It was supposed that a group
of seventeen high school sophomores entered into a pact to become pregnant and raise their children
together. School officials now deny the existence of such a pact.
culture out of which teenagers shape their knowledge of the world and that made the 
Twilight phenomenon possible.

The politics of abstinence and “morality” are an influential force exerted over the youth in the series. After reading Twilight, many young girls pledge their virginity to their future husbands. Meyer, a Mormon and self-proclaimed “good girl,” disseminates a specific view of morality (that she does not hesitate to say is influenced by her religious background) that is supported and further encouraged by the publishing companies and sponsors of the series.71 Here, we could argue that children have no option but to accept the choices laid out for them by the adults who rule the publishing process. But, we cannot ascribe the fan-communities and hysteria surrounding the novel to the publishers and author. The youth have exercised their power to reclaim the novels, and thus the “Meyer Morality,” as their own.

The adolescent girl—the ever-ridiculed figure in American culture—has been poked and prodded at by the American media. She is subordinate to men, women and her male peers; she is sexually and intellectually repressed; she must exude sex, yet must maintain her innocence. She is represented in American media as white, middle-class—the adolescent girl has almost no freedom to be anything other than a boy-crazy, fashion-obsessed mother-in-waiting. Roberta Trites claims that young teenagers must experience adolescence, a time in which they “…learn their place in the power structure and learn to negotiate the many institutions that shape them,”72 including the Twilight series. The power structure she speaks to subordinates the female adolescent on many levels. She is subject to the power of a patriarchy that

72 Roberta Seelinger Trites, Disturbing the Universe (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000) X.
posits men, women and her male counterparts as superior; the girl is “collectively imagined…as a non-person constructed as a foil for adult men, the persons whose needs and desires a patriarchal society caters to, and who predominantly controlled the production and circulation of popular culture during the twentieth century.” This hierarchy holds the power to control and shape the structure of American lives and communities and reinforces its own power by disseminating cultural stereotypes, such as the adolescent female, that subvert the power held by individuals.

This “imagined” girl is indoctrinated into a culture that enforces motherhood as the pinnacle of her success. American culture, reliant on the concept of family values, manipulates the girl to accept and become a full participant in the patriarchy. Barbara A. White discusses the unique position of the adolescent girl who is expected to, in due course, realize her ultimate function as mother:

the adolescent girl…is crucial to the replication of the social system…So long as women’s main function is conceived to be marriage and childbearing, and so long as wifehood and motherhood carry lower status than male pursuits, the adolescent girl will be in conflict with society.

The teenage girl is at once trying to understand her new body, new self and her position in society; she wants power but feels powerless.

Young girls are taught from the outset that boys and girls play very distinct roles in society; sexuality belongs locked in the adolescent boy’s realm:

As early as middle school or even the waning moments of elementary school, girls and boys are relentlessly exposed to a set of rules, principles, and roles

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73 Nash, America's Sweethearts 3.
that are mapped out for the production of ‘normal’ heterosexual adolescent relationships and sexual behavior, in which gender is the most salient factor. Teenage girls continue to be denied entitlement to their own sexuality, and girls who do defy irrepressible double standards continue to do so at their own risk.\textsuperscript{75}

Within this paradigm of repressed sexuality, the girl is encouraged to embody sensuality without being sensual. Her body is the focus of society’s gaze, subject to criticism and speculation. Elizabeth Grosz explains that the female body is a site for the expression of American anxiety over the de-centralization of the family and of the male-dominated hegemonic hierarchy; thus “The female body continues to be coded in patriarchal discourse as weak, incompetent and unstable.”\textsuperscript{76} Her body is political, at once representing the desired image of femininity and the fear Americans have that she will not fulfill her role as mother or as sexual object. It comes as no surprise, then, that Bella is constantly tripping, injuring herself and prey to the harms that befall the human but cannot hurt either of her male companions—the werewolf and the vampire. It is not until Bella completes her adolescence and moves into adulthood as wife and mother that she becomes a vampire and is afforded physical prowess. Her body is coded as weak until she fulfills her gendered role, and commits her life to husband and child.

American culture supports a binary that categorizes girls as either virgins or sluts. The female body is a source of cultural tension and fascination that situates the teenage girl within “the Madonna/whore dichotomy—a polarization of women’s

\textsuperscript{76} Saxton, ed., \textit{The Girl: Constructions of the Girl in Contemporary Fiction by Women} 44.
options between approved chastity and obedience, and a seductive sexuality that is simultaneously shunned and avidly consumed.”

Girls are supposed to be chaste but sex sells; society wants our girls to be sexy without being sexed. Bella is the sex symbol America wants—she holds the attention not just of the muscular and handsome Edward, but of the entire Forks High male population. She is at once unaware of her sexual powers and yet wields them over every boy she meets. Bella is the ultimate adolescent girl—virginal, yet desirable and desiring. The girl reader who aligns herself with Bella (a connection allowed by the fairy tale structure) thus seeks to embody the restrained sexuality represented in the text. She longs to be like Bella—innocent, pure, loved by a hero.

Body image and confidence rest on unstable ground: “Because of its tenuousness, the body image is particularly amenable to external influences during adolescence, making it susceptible to political and ideological inscription.” The girl is insecure in herself and her body; she is given choices for how to live in our social order and chooses what fits best. As Bella marries, becomes pregnant and ultimately achieves domestic bliss, her young followers see a way of being in the world that is represented as positive, fulfilling and desirable. Bella is the model for the young girl who sees Edward—the chivalrous, muscular, sensitive, and dominating male—as the object of desire. Though Meyer describes Bella as an “everygirl. She's not a hero…She doesn't always have to be cool, or wear the coolest clothes ever. She's normal,” Edward describes her as “utterly, heart-breakingly beautiful.”

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77 Nash, America's Sweethearts 3.
78 Saxton, ed., The Girl: Constructions of the Girl in Contemporary Fiction by Women 44.
79 Kirschling, Stephenie Meyer's 'Twilight' Zone.
Bella marries, gives birth, and is thus turned into a vampire she achieves ultimate happiness and is transformed into a “dizzying beauty.” This “every-girl,” is in fact stunningly beautiful. Girls who want to be like Bella are encouraged to believe that to marry a man like Edward, you must achieve and maintain this standard of beauty—pure, white beauty.

A discussion of real adolescent girls’ experiences of sexuality helps illuminate the discord between reality and the narrative of romantic love portrayed in *Twilight*. Deborah L. Tolman conducted a series of interviews with girls from both urban and suburban settings. Tolman’s findings illuminate the position of the teenage girl—her sexual desires are repressed within the context of casual relationships, yet she is expected to be fully desirous and desirable within the context of committed and loving relationships. She is sent mixed messages concerning how she is to experience her body and how her body is read. The dominant American social structure maintains the heterosexual relationship as the norm; working in this “institution of heterosexuality is the master narrative of romance, which is premised on female passivity and male aggression and dominance, denoting appropriate feminine and masculine behavior in relation to the opposite sex.” Young girls who are indoctrinated into this domain of heterosexuality are stifled--their sexual urges and desires are predicated on the assumption of male dominance. Thus, Tolman finds that

> Romance provides a script not only for how males and females interact but also for expectations about female and male sexuality, including that resilient distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ girls…the romance narrative entices and

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82 Tolman, *Dilemmas of Desire; Teenage Girls Talk About Sexuality* 81.
invites girls into trading in the full range of their real feelings, including
sexual desire, taboo emotions, and knowledge of what is actually happening in
relationships and reality, for male commitment, care and attention.\footnote{Tolman, \textit{Dilemmas of Desire; Teenage Girls Talk About Sexuality}, 81.} Readers and fans of \textit{Twilight} are provided the script by which to act out their greatest fantasies and gender identities, as dictated by a male-dominated social structure.

Ilana Nash shows, in \textit{American Sweethearts}, that the girl has gained autonomy over the years, but that her freedom is superficial. In reality, teen fiction works to produce participants in the American patriarchy.\footnote{Ibid, 7.} “Culture produced for girls, then, potentially teaches its consumers that their subordination to patriarchy is normal, proper and even desirable.”\footnote{Nash, \textit{America's Sweethearts} 13.} Bella remains subject to the overpowering wills of her male counterparts, she is treated as a child--at one point she is literally handed over from the protection of Edward into the care of Jacob. Nash argues that the representation of teenage girls leaves them one-dimensional and prey to society’s demands on their bodies and selves: “Because teen girls appear as types rather than people, they are subject to a form of idealization...[t]here is an assumption that the (white) teenage girl embodies an ideal of innocence, loveliness, and purity.”\footnote{Ibid, 9.} Bella is the ideal type—virginal, beautiful, wholly devoted to the love she feels for Edward and subsequently her child. Her character is defined by her relationship with Edward: the male determines the female’s worth. Bella represents American society’s wish fulfillment; she is an adolescent to be praised and honored rather than feared and

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\textsuperscript{83} Tolman, \textit{Dilemmas of Desire; Teenage Girls Talk About Sexuality}, 81.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid, 7.
\textsuperscript{85} Nash, \textit{America's Sweethearts} 13.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, 9.
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ridiculed. Her character is a cultural force that restricts the female adolescent to a narrow definition of acceptable behavior and identity.

The idealization of Bella creates a process of othering that dis-empowers the real girl who chooses not to be defined by her sexuality, who dares to subvert popular social conventions. This othering excludes the minority teenager from belonging to American culture...unless she rejects her cultural heritage to assume ideals of whiteness. To be a “good” girl in America is to embody all that white womanhood represents: “domestic protection, angelic innocence, and superior spirituality.”

Nash recognizes that the vision of whiteness as inherently good is “…intensified in the portrayal of white female youth in particular, because adults have so often required the young to represent our best hope for the future.”

Twilight, emerging as a cultural phenomenon in a turbulent period of American history, puts forth an image of youth that is comforting, non-threatening and embracing of a conservative point of view that represents nostalgia for the “good old days.” This positions traditional values as “right” and more liberal values as “wrong.”

Though, conventionally, the sexual gaze has rested on the female in adolescent literature, Meyer rests her gaze on Bella only as an after-thought to her incredible attraction to Edward. Twilight as a sexual guidebook relies on the reader’s desire for Edward—he is the lynchpin to popularizing abstinence and a conservative social framework. In the famed meadow scene (the romantic dream that sparked the series into being) Bella makes note of Edward’s appearance, “the fabric clung to his perfectly muscled chest. It was a colossal tribute to his face that it kept my eyes away

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87 Nash, America’s Sweethearts 9.
88 Ibid, 9.
from his body.”

To further identify Edward as sexual object, the following two passages exalting Edward’s good, manly looks appear within five pages of one another:

His white shirt was sleeveless, and he wore it unbuttoned, so that the smooth white skin of his throat flowed uninterrupted over the marble contours of his chest, his perfect musculature no longer merely hinted at behind concealing clothes. He was too perfect, I realized with a piercing stab of despair. There was no way this godlike creature could be meant for me.

His skin, white…literally sparkled like thousands of tiny diamonds were embedded in the surface. He lay perfectly still in the grass, his shirt open over his sculpted, incandescent chest, his scintillating arms bare. His glistening, pale lavender lids were shut, though of course he didn’t sleep. A perfect statue, carved in some unknown stone, smooth like marble, glittering like crystal

Meyer makes Edward irresistibly sexy—he is the model of the perfect man and of abstinence.

Meyer’s descriptions of Edward’s overwhelming good looks read like the heroes of the romance novels that populate middle-aged housewives’ bookshelves. In *Reading the Romance*, Janice Radway illuminates the ways in which romance novel readers use the genre to escape their mundane lives and inform their greatest desires. Radway identifies “The hero of the romantic fantasy [as] always characterized by

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89 Meyer, *Twilight* 197.
90 Ibid, 256.
91 Ibid, 260.
spectacular masculinity,”

and finds that “pleasure for women is men.” This holds true for the Twilight devotee. Both Edward and Jacob embody pure sexuality. Constantly shirtless, muscles rippling, Jacob is the exotic, mysterious, purely sexual object of desire. Karin A. Martin maintains that young girls read their lives in discordance to their realities—the teenage girl, who is well-versed in teen literature which tends toward the romantic, interprets her life and relationships as though she were a character in a fairy tale: “As teens, many girls acquire boyfriends and construct narratives about their boyfriends that cast them in the light of ideal love…In narratives of ideal love girls often describe boys as heroes.”

The adolescent reader attributes male physicality as a quality to value and desire in a partner. The reader desires Edward and Jacob and transplants that longing onto the boys and men who compose her reality. The girl is taught to fetishize and crave the male body and is encouraged to act out the love between two imagined characters that do not represent her reality; the girl learns to desire marriage. Though this may seem sweet, idealistic, and even innocent, the realities of ascribing hero status to teenage boys and casting young love as ideal love, are teen pregnancy, marriage, abortion, divorce—the girl’s stifled imagination and ambition.

Though Meyer breaks the traditional convention of resting the gaze solely on the female body, she does not exempt Bella and the other women of the series from the objectification she readily applies to Edward and Jacob. It is easier perhaps to ignore descriptions of Bella as beautiful and desirable because we are conditioned to

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93 Ibid, 54.
accept them as an integral component of adolescent literature. Girls are conditioned to reject their own sexuality in favor of the males. The girl reader is able to gloss over Edward’s uncomfortable objectification of Bella in favor of focusing on his musculature and beauty. As Nash describes, “To call audiences ‘supporters of patriarchy’ is only to describe the subject position delineated for them by the texts they willingly consume; as they read, watch, or listen, consumers are asked to adopt patriarchal perspectives as the necessary eyeglasses through which to view the narrative in question.”

We fail to notice the sexual objectification of the female adolescent as extraordinary because, indeed, it is not. But, when we view the male body as sexual and desirable, we very clearly recognize a break from convention. Our sensitivity to the male body is thus heightened and drenched in the discourse of desire.

The men in Bella’s life are devastatingly handsome and are either superhuman or hold powers of position. Jacob is a werewolf, Charlie is Forks’ Sheriff and Edward is, of course, a vampire. Bella is positioned as subservient to all of these men by nature of their strength, age, social position and desirability—man is equated with power and patriarchy. These men need to protect Bella not just from herself but from the world—she is weak and child-like. Edward maintains, “…[Bella], you are so soft, so fragile. I have to mind my actions every moment that we’re together so that I don’t hurt you. I could kill you quite easily, Bella, simply by accident.”

Jacob, too, employs patriarchal rhetoric: “[Jacob] patted [Bella’s] head ‘you’re like a

95 Nash, America’s Sweethearts 17.
96 Ibid, 65.
97 Meyer, Twilight 310.
little doll,’ he teased. ‘A porcelain doll.’ Moreover, Bella participates in her own patronizing; describing Jacob’s fascination with mechanical work Bella exclaims, “I figured I’d have to have a Y chromosome to really understand the excitement.”

Edward watches Bella sleep, restricts her actions and even follows her (under the guise of his consuming and loving obsession to protect her from harm) and instead of shouting sexual harassment, Bella feels “a strange surge of pleasure.” Bella is at once subjugated by and accepting of male patriarchy. She passively submits to male domination and further encourages the reader to do the same.

Linda K. Christian-Smith’s cites that, “At the juncture of the moments of romance and specialness, the heroine becomes sexually aware and is subjected to the male power and control underlying sexuality. This represents the heroine’s incorporation into the power relations underlying heterosexuality. The formal control of romance by boyfriends is consolidated through positions as definers of girls’ sexuality.” Ultimately, Bella experiences her body and sexuality in reaction to Edward. Bella describes kissing Edward:

Blood boiled under my skin, burned in my lips. My breath came in a wild gasp. My fingers knotted in his hair, clutching him to me. My lips parted as I breathed in his heady scent. Immediately I felt him turn to unresponsive stone beneath my lips. His hands gently, but with irresistible force, pushed my face back.

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98 Meyer, New Moon 179.
99 Ibid, 139.
100 Ibid, 174.
102 Meyer, Twilight 282.
Because Bella experiences sexual urges only in response to Edward—the only man for whom she has ever felt sexual attraction, the only man she has ever loved—her desire works to integrate Bella into the patriarchy that struggles to control female sexuality. *Twilight*’s readership learns that desire is only acceptable in response to a dominant male and within marital relationships and that her desire is permissible so long as it is unrealized.

The sexual interactions in which Bella engages are couched in terminology that posits Bella as weak-willed and defenseless to the overpowering manhood she encounters. The men with whom Bella shares her sexual encounters wholly dictate her experiences: “[Edward’s] mouth was on mine then, and I couldn’t fight him. Not because he was so many times stronger than me, but because my will crumbled into dust the second our lips met.” Even when Bella wants to engage sexually, Edward’s physical force limits her ability to express her body’s wishes: “…though I was clearly beginning to cross his cautious lines, for once he didn’t stop me. His body was cold, but I crushed myself against him eagerly. When he stopped it was abrupt, he pushed me away with gentle, firm hands.”

The reader is tantalized by restrained sexuality, encouraged to read further, lost in the possibility the lovers will give in to their desires. The forbidden nature of sexual intercourse makes abstinence from sexual activity appear desirable to the reader. The sexual interactions Bella encounters often verge on harassment, or even assault, and bring the reader into a patriarchal sphere:

I grabbed at [jacob’s] face, trying to push it away, failing again. He seemed to notice this time, though, and it aggravated him. His lips forced mine open and I

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103 Meyer, *New Moon* 512.  
104 Ibid., 51.
could feel his hot breath in my mouth. Acting on instinct, I let my hands drop
to my side, and shut down. I opened my eyes and didn’t fight, didn’t
feel…just waited for him to stop.  

The discourse is of violence and male domination.

Though Bella feels a strong sexual yearning for Edward, she is unable to
express these feelings maturely. The reader identifies with Bella’s confusion and
longing for sexual contact with Edward. Teenage girls feel desire but they cannot
fully participate outwardly, publicly, in that desire. Indeed, when Bella tries to voice
her sexual desire for Edward, she finds the subject uncomfortable and difficult to
discuss: “I couldn’t believe how awkward and idiotic I felt. I was too innocent—
which was, of course, central to the discussion. I didn’t have the faintest idea how to
be seductive. I would just have to settle for flushed and self-conscious.” When
Edward denies her sexual advances, Bella feels rejected—her identity as woman is
undermined by Edward’s morality. Speaking to Bella as if a parent comforting a
child Edward explains, “Of course I [want you], you silly, beautiful, oversensitive
girl…you’re too desirable for your own good,” “…silly girl, I’m trying to protect
your [virtue].” Her inability to discuss her own sexuality, comingled with her
incompetence, clumsiness and insecurity work within the familiar conventions of the
teen novel whereby the girl “mak[es] [herself] even more ‘lovable’ by [her]
vulnerability and ineptitude.”

108 Ibid, 453.
109 Nash, America's Sweethearts 225.
both the stifling nature of the patriarchy within which Bella participates, and also the notion that girls should not and do not have sexual knowledge.

Bella regains the reins, so to speak, and adopts the traditional role of female protector of innocence when she agrees to marriage. Edward, feeling that Bella is his, initiates sexual contact and pursues intercourse. In an exchange that highlights the ultimate gender roles portrayed, Edward allows himself to be consumed by his desire; he tells Bella, “I love you. I want you. Right now,” to which Bella replies, against her body’s wishes, “I am going to do this right...everything in the right order...I will tie myself to you in every human way, before I ask you to make me immortal [and make love]. I’m following all the rules, Edward. Your soul is far, far too important to me to take chances with...”\textsuperscript{110} In the end, Bella is the protector of virtue and must curb the male’s desire for the female body. Though she craves Edward physically, she does not fail to participate in her gender role. The girl reader is thus reminded that though she may have physical urges, she must not act on these sexual drives. For if she waits, as true love does, she will obtain her fairy tale ending—her husband, her child, her home.

Bella agrees to marry Edward under the condition that he be the one to enact her transformation: “I wanted his venom to poison my system. It would make me belong to him in a tangible, quantifiable way.”\textsuperscript{111} This statement thinly veils Bella’s longing for Edward’s semen and children; she wants to be marked as Edward’s possession. Their marriage solidifies the notion that the woman is never an autonomous agent, but rather a possession to be traded from one man to another:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{110} Meyer, Eclipse 620.
  \item \textsuperscript{111} Ibid, 324.
\end{itemize}
Edward held out his hand. Charlie took my hand and, in a symbol as old as the world, placed it in Edward’s. I touched the cool miracle of his skin, and I was home.”

The notion of finding a home in a husband fits with the very conservative view of womanhood endorsed throughout the novels. Radway’s study of romance novels helps us understand the position of the woman for whom the ‘ultimate triumph’ is marriage, “a formal commitment from the hero [that] simultaneously provides for her own future in the only way acceptable to her culture.”

The woman is taught to revere the man (Edward) and in doing so is indoctrinated into a belief system that places marriage to the hero as the ultimate accomplishment. The reader’s identification with the heroine, having been firmly cemented, allows enjoyment of …the moment of her greatest success…When she secures the attention and recognition of her cultures’ most powerful and essential representative, a man.

The happy ending is, at this level, a sign of a woman’s attainment of legitimacy and personhood in a culture that locates both for her in the roles of lover, wife and mother.

Bella’s early marriage to Edward is not viewed, then, as culturally unacceptable or taboo but as a representation of what conservative society considers the girl’s completion into adulthood and her fundamental success. (Paradoxically, to be truly female, and to be fulfilled as a female means to become a vampire, the “living dead.”

Perhaps a comment on the housewife’s social status, this sub-textual interpretation posits that the female who satisfies a conservative definition of femininity achieves life only through the death of her former self.)

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112 Meyer, Breaking Dawn 49.
113 Radway, Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature 81.
114 Ibid, 81.
The lovers’ marriage is viewed as their entry into adulthood and the realm of sexual intercourse. After Edward and Bella’s perfect wedding, the pair retreat to the Cullens’ private island off the coast of Brazil. The island is isolated, tropical—it is a veritable romantic paradise (and completely couched in the discourse of colonialism and patriarchy—a topic that merits further discussion in the following chapter). Bella nervously awaits her first romantic tryst. Though Edward is a virgin as well, he shows no sign of apprehension and seems to have the skills and know-how Bella lacks. She wonders how anyone could engage in this kind of physical relationship without first being married: “How did people do this—swallow all their fears and trust someone else so implicitly with every imperfection and fear they had—with less than the absolute commitment Edward had given me?”115 This works, again, to enforce the ideal of the virginal wife who has waited for true love to engage in sexual intercourse.

Though both Edward and Bella are virgins upon their arrival at Island Esme, they certainly do not leave that way. Meyer is quick to describe their sexual encounters in almost lewd language making clear that within the confines of marriage sexual activity is encouraged, healthy and consuming. When Bella and Edward finally consummate their love (on their wedding night) Edward cannot help but bruise Bella’s human body. Though he agonizes over his inability to control his sexual desire for her the marital tryst, if not rape, is incredibly violent. Working within the previously established discourse of violent sexuality, Bella enjoys the passion Edward cannot control: “Edward placed his hand against the bruises on my arm, one at a time,

115 Meyer, Breaking Dawn 83.
matching his long fingers to the patterns…I couldn’t recall a moment when his hold had been too tight…I only remembered wanting him to hold me tighter, and being pleased when he did.”¹¹⁶ Bella’s pleasure of Edward’s aggressive sexuality normalizes violence and teaches the young reader to submit to dominant males.

Once married (and of course, after Bella has become a vampire), sex becomes an integral component in daily life: “I was never going to get tired, and neither was he…we had no more mundane human needs. He had the most beautiful, perfect body in the world and I had him all to myself, and it didn’t feel like I was ever going to find a point where I would think, ‘now I’ve had enough for one day.’ I was always going to want more.”¹¹⁷ The idealization of their sexual relationship makes abstinence from intercourse before marriage attractive. For those who abstain, a world of pleasure (including motherhood) awaits. Bella’s restraint makes sex more enjoyable—the passion Bella and Edward express, within a romantic marriage, acts as pornography for the reader interpellated by the series’ traditional values.

Edward’s central reservation about transforming Bella into a vampire is that she will forgo motherhood. He tells her, “I hate taking [motherhood] away from you…I don’t want to steal your future.”¹¹⁸ Edward’s statement communicates that a woman’s worth is dependent on her childbearing abilities. This position indicates the fundamental belief that all women want children, that it is natural and right. Luckily—due to Bella’s incredible resolve to experience sexual intercourse as a human—Bella and Edward conceive their child before Bella’s transformation.

Bella’s sexual desire leads to her fulfillment of her womanhood; the reader

¹¹⁶ Meyer, Breaking Dawn 89.
¹¹⁷ Ibid, 483.
¹¹⁸ Ibid, 28.
understands that sexual urges within the confines of marriage are natural and satisfy social expectations of womanhood. (Interestingly, Bella and Edward had planned to attend college following their honeymoon—a plan that dissolved when Bella discovered she was pregnant. Indeed, it is Bella’s motherhood, and not her education, that determines her value; Bella’s cultural worth is dependent on her child. The reader learns that society values her womb, her ability to bear children, and not her intellect.)

Bella undergoes an incredibly accelerated pregnancy that endangers her life and causes her great pain. Edward cannot bear to see Bella suffer and insists, “We’re going to get that thing out before it can hurt any part of you. Don’t be scared. I won’t let it hurt you.”119 Bella cannot understand Edward’s need to keep her safe, she assumes maternal instincts and is horrified that he would consider aborting their child:

From that first little touch, the whole world had shifted. Where before there was just one thing I could not live without, now there were two…I’d never imagined myself a mother, never wanted that. It had been a piece of cake to promise Edward that I didn’t care about giving up children for him, because I truly didn’t…This child, Edward’s child, was a whole different story. I wanted him like I wanted air to breath. Not a choice—a necessity.120

This passage affirms the belief that women innately want and are designed to become mothers—especially when their husband fits the heroic ideal. The pregnancy changes Bella; she at once puts her baby’s health before her own. For the first time, Bella sees

119 Meyer, Breaking Dawn 133.
120 Ibid, 133.
Edward as someone to fear, as someone who would harm her baby: “He didn’t care about the baby at all. He wanted to hurt him….My pretty baby crying, my weak arms not enough to protect him…I would not allow [an abortion].”\textsuperscript{121} Not only does Bella adopt maternal qualities, her insistence on keeping the child and her disgust at the thought of aborting Edward’s child demonstrates to the reader a moralistic stance that posits abortion as inherently wrong. The reader’s identification with Bella works in this moment to indoctrinate the reader into a conservative and religious ideology supported by the text.

The pregnancy is impossibly painful and results in Bella’s death as a human. In an oddly sensual scene of passion, love and urgency, Edward plunges a syringe of his venom into Bella’s un-beating heart and kisses her “broken, bled-out, mangled corpse”\textsuperscript{122} with his venomous lips. Bella’s sacrifice of her own life for that of her child’s is the ultimate gift. Through this act of self-sacrifice, Bella is able to become a vampire and achieve eternal bliss with her child and husband. Upon meeting her daughter, Renesmee, (who, in accordance with her accelerated development in pregnancy, develops at super-human rate in infancy) Bella says, “It was so odd, so wrong not have her inside me still. Abruptly, I felt empty and uneasy.”\textsuperscript{123} The reader learns that a woman is most complete during pregnancy—the time when she actively fulfills her traditional societal and biological obligations.

Bella satisfies both her role as mother and wife—she is caretaker for her daughter and maintains a strong sexual appetite for her husband: “The days were not long enough for me to get my fill of adoring my daughter; the nights did not have

\textsuperscript{121} Meyer, Breaking Dawn 134.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid, 355.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid, 426.
enough hours to satisfy my need for Edward.”  She gives Renesmee a locket bearing the inscription “more than my own life” signifying that a mother’s love for her child is greater than all else. Bella completes “the heroine’s transformation from an isolated, asexual, insecure adolescent who is unsure of her own identity, into a mature, sensual and very married women who has realized her full potential and identity as the partner of a man and as the mother of a child.” The adolescent girl applies the model Bella provides to her own life and, in doing so, idealizes the conventions of marriage and motherhood. The glorification of the woman’s role limits the possibilities the young girl sees for herself in the greater social world. She narrows her definition of success as a woman and thus participates in the patriarchy that reinforces motherhood as the ultimate achievement.

Bella, positioned as “right” because she embodies traditional values, represents a return to the cult of domesticity (1950s gender roles that position the woman in the home—her responsibilities limited to caring for the children, cleaning and cooking). Twilight enforces a definition of womanhood that signifies a reaction against the increasingly sexual and liberal representation of the female in popular culture. Upon moving to Forks and discovering that Charlie (the father and bachelor figure) possesses no cooking skills, Bella requests, “to be assigned kitchen detail,” prepares steak and potatoes for Charlie and cleans the dishes. Bella feels comfortable being domestic: “It was nice to be in the grocery store; it felt normal.” As a vampire and mother, Bella takes her daughter hunting—she cares for and feeds her

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125 Ibid, 651.
126 Radway, Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature 134.
127 Meyer, Twilight 31.
128 Ibid, 32.
child. Similarly, Emily (the leader of Quileute wolf pack, Sam Uley’s girlfriend) acts within the realm of the home. When we first meet her, she is preparing breakfast for the wolf pack and scolds the boys as a mother would: “‘Save some [muffins] for your brother,’ Emily chastised him, hitting him on the head with a wooden spoon.”

Though Emily and Sam share a house, Meyer refers to the kitchen as belonging to Emily: “Emily’s kitchen was a friendly place, bright with white cupboards and pale wooden floor-boards.” Bella and Emily are positioned in the home and thus fulfill the woman’s traditional role of caring for the family. They allow the reader entry into the domain of domesticity.

Likewise, Alice and Esme function to reinforce the notion that women are inherently domestic—restricted to the home and the kitchen. Alice and Esme work together to design Bella and Edward’s cottage in the woods, “something from a fairy tale...it was a place where anyone could believe magic existed...” The women designed the cottage as a wedding present; Edward tells Bella that Esme “loves any excuse to renovate,” and carrying Bella over the threshold further enforces stereotypical gender roles when he says, “Thresholds are part of my job description.” The cottage symbolizes the cult of domesticity through Esme and Alice’s interest in and design of the home, the location for woman’s work. Moreover, the cottage, as the site where Bella performs her roles as wife and mother, brings the reader further into the domestic sphere. Bella and Edward spend Bella’s first night as

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129 Meyer, New Moon 332.
130 Ibid, 333.
131 Meyer, Breaking Dawn 479.
132 Ibid, 476.
133 Ibid, 478.
a vampire (and truly a wife, now that she is a mother) exploring their uninhibited sexuality:

I heard the fabric tearing under our hands...this second honeymoon wasn’t like our first...I could really appreciate him now—could properly see every beautiful line of his perfect face, of his long, flawless body with my strong new eyes, every angle and every plane of him. I could taste his pure, vivid scent on my tongue and feel the unbelievable silkiness of his marble skin under my sensitive fingertips.134

After Bella spends the evening performing her wifely duties, Edward reminds Bella of her “priorities...Renesmee,”135 thus marking Bella’s function as both wife and mother. Her nights are devoted to her husband, her days to her child. The cottage is symbolic of a return to an idealized time, an era in which women stayed in the home and catered to their duties as wife and mother.

For those who achieve motherhood, their womanhood is complete. But, for those such as Esme, Rosalie and Leah Clearwater (the sole female member of the wolf pack) who do not bear children, their lives are void of meaning. They have failed as women to perform their societal duties; indeed, Esme devotes her eternal life to be substitute “mother” to the Cullen “children.” Rosalie is icy, irritable and unforgiving until she is able to act as surrogate mother and protector to Bella’s daughter. Rosalie embraces her maternal desire—willing to sacrifice her physical well-being she places herself between the Cullen men (who wish to abort the fetus) and Bella who instinctively knows the fetus will grow into the beautiful and charming

134 Meyer, Breaking Dawn 482.
135 Ibid, 486.
Renesmee. The message is clear: women are meant to be mothers. If they are incapable of bearing children, they must either find alternatives to perform their roles or suffer a discontented life.

Leah Clearwater’s case helps illuminate this point. Leah had been dating Sam Uley (the leader of the wolf pack) when he imprinted (became tied to) on Emily Young, Leah’s cousin. Soon after, Leah became a member of the wolf pack and consequently lost her period, her ability to bear children. Jacob wonders if “her body changed because she’d become a werewolf? Or had she become a werewolf because her body was wrong? The only female werewolf in the history of forever. Was that because she wasn’t as female as she should be?”

The assumption is that Leah is somehow less than a woman. The discourse of right body and wrong body maintains that because Leah cannot have children, her body lies outside the realm of normal. The theory behind “imprinting” is to enhance the possibility of passing on the wolf gene, the man’s legacy. Because Sam rejected Leah, she declares “There’s something wrong with me. I don’t have the ability to pass on the [wolf] gene, apparently, despite my stellar bloodlines. So I become a freak—the girlie-wolf—good for nothing else. I’m a genetic dead end...” Because Leah cannot carry on the line, she is denied her true love and her womanhood. The reader views Leah as a failure; to have neither the ability nor the desire to bear children is to be marked as an outsider and as less than female. The reader, fearing isolation from and condemnation by society, is taught that to be a woman is to be a mother at all costs.

137 Ibid, 318.
The *Twilight* reader is thus indoctrinated into the hegemonic, patriarchal discourse of womanhood. As Linda K. Christian-Smith clarifies “…teen romance novels shape young women’s femininity and secure their consent to the dominant organization of society.” Twilight is no exception; the series works to define the girl’s femininity through her desire for man and her consequent motherhood. The woman who does not or is unable to bear a child is somehow seen as lesser than woman—she is the portrait of failure. Teenage girls who are viewed as “…a potential threat to the security of established social practices and standards,” are positioned in popular culture in ways that assuage the adults’ fears of the adolescent. The ways the teenage girl is portrayed reveal the “…deep and persistent fear of teens’ potential to disrupt the patriarchal status quo,” and demonstrate that popular culture “engaging and amplifying ideas already in circulation…is a powerful ideological tool in teaching socially acceptable assumptions and beliefs.” Bella, as mother and wife, is the representation of female success in the American patriarchy. Dominating multiple forms of social media, the *Twilight* series has become a cornerstone in contemporary youth culture. The series works to indoctrinate the adolescent girl into a culture wherein male dominance, power and sexuality and consequently female passivity, subservience and body-consciousness are the norm. *Twilight* acts as a guidebook, a moral social manual for young girls to learn their roles in the American patriarchy; the series teaches youth not only to accept but to desire socially constructed gender norms and relationships.

138 Irvine, ed., *Sexual Cultures and the Construction of Adolescent Identities* 207.
139 Nash, *America's Sweethearts* 12.
140 Ibid, 12.
They all had the same long, round muscles under the same red-brown skin, the same cropped black hair, and [their] expressions altered at exactly the same moment.

--Bella, New Moon 323
Chapter Four
Jacob Black: Native American, Wolf, “Other”; Race and Class in *Twilight*

*Twilight* operates as a popular cultural artifact that both reflects and informs the American teenager’s social and political identity. *Twilight* indoctrinates the adolescent into a conservative ideology of sexual repression and race and class relationships that position the upper-class white male as superior. Meyer (mis)represents the Quileute Tribe’s (an existing tribe) customs and history for the betterment of her story, her success and her ultimate rising social status and power. Her depictions of the Quileute Tribe represent the legacy of American colonial domination and perpetuate cycles of racism and classism. Peter Hunt explains, in *Understanding Children’s Literature*, “…the discourse of imperialism is structured around a process of ‘othering’, a process that it shares with the discourses of racism, of xenophobia, of class distinction, of paternalism, of homophobia.”

*Twilight* partakes in this process of othering; the heroes are white, middle-class, and heterosexual. The *Twilight* series is an indication of how the general public view and interact with social differences, and further influences its readers into a hegemonic social structure that stifles the voices and expressions of unique cultural heritages.

American mythology—the creation of a shared history—is critical to the formation of American identities. Professor Richard Slotkin identifies mythology as “a complex of narratives that dramatizes the world vision and historical sense of a people or culture, reducing centuries of experience into a constellation of compelling

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141 Hunt, *Understanding Children's Literature* 41.
metaphors.” These myths are rearticulated by individual artists and disseminated to individuals in the community. Ultimately, the myth’s function “is to reconcile and unite these individualities to a collective identity,” thereby defining what it means to be uniquely American. Slotkin posits that the United States feels a “…continual preoccupation with the necessity of defining or creating a national identity, a character for us to live in the world.” As a nation born of immigrants, The United States struggled (and continues to) to define a distinctive “American” culture. We turn to mythologies that work as “the intelligible mask of that enigma called the ‘national character’” to foster a shared sense of belonging. We utilize the tales of our forefathers whose persistence, strength and fearlessness led our nation out of the wilderness and into modernity—the legacies of manifest destiny and the discourse of exceptionalism prevail. Though, certainly, we view Twilight as a perpetuation of the fairy tale and teen novel, we must also consider the series an amalgamation of distinct American mythologies that convey messages about what it means to be an American (namely white and wealthy) or to achieve the American dream (the family and the cottage in the conquered woods).

Professor Slotkin, in Regeneration Through Violence, classifies the many established American myths and conventions that make them. The Indian figure in American mythology is what connects our history to the land. Slotkin, quoting Kenneth Rexroth, writes:

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143 Ibid, 8.
144 Ibid, 4.
145 Ibid, 3.
Our memory of the Indians connects us with the soil and the waters and the nonhuman life about us. They take for us the place of nymphs and satyrs and dryads—the spirits of the places. They are our ecological link with our biota—the organic environment which we strive to repudiate and destroy…the actual savage environment that reason and order and humane relationships can penetrate but cannot control.146

The creation of the American myth, that vilified the natives and depicted the white man overpowering nature and conquering the savage, was an attempt to assuage the fears and assert the power of white Americans. Our “inheritance” of the land we were destined for was marked by amazing amounts of bloodshed and tyrannical domination of the Native American Indian—“at the source of the American myth there lies the fatal opposition, the hostility between two worlds, two races, two realms of thought and feeling.”147 This opposition remains the source of tension in Twilight—are you Team Edward or Team Jacob? Readers are forced to ally themselves with one hero or the other—ultimately choosing a model of whiteness over the Indian.

In American mythology, the Indian is necessarily positioned as a counterpoint to the morality and strength of the white man. The relationship between contemporary beliefs and our connection to these myths is a reflection of commonly held American values; Slotkin notes,

…it is a significant comment on our characteristic attitudes toward ourselves, our culture, our racial subgroupings, and our land that tales of strife between

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146 Slotkin, Regeneration through Violence; the Mythology of the American Frontier 17.
147 Ibid, 17.
native Americans and interlopers, between dark races and light, became the basis of our mythology and that the Indian fighter and hunter emerged as the first of our national heroes.\footnote{Slotkin, Regeneration through Violence; the Mythology of the American Frontier 17.}

Though a trend emerged in which the savage was portrayed to have the “capacity” to become white (by embodying the values and ethics of Anglo culture—namely to convert to Christianity), “the Indian is consistently portrayed as inferior to whites, his presence remains necessary to the revelation of the heroic stature of the Anglo-American Hero. The Indian is his foil, the opponent against whom he exercises and develops his heroic power as a representative of civilization.”\footnote{Ibid, 189.} Jacob is the barbaric foil to Edward, whose civility and upper-class status is highlighted by comparison. Professor Slotkin’s examination of the myths that built America resonant as portrayals of subcultures in film, television and media outlets continue to employ mythical (racist, classist) rhetoric. \textit{Twilight} positions itself as yet another example of the misrepresentation of indigenous cultures by the white man--the appropriation of cultural traditions in order to preserve the American hierarchy.

White and wealthy Americans have consistently located their fear of losing power in the image of the Indian. The subordination of the native elevates the position and power of the white man. Meyer furthers this tradition in her (ab)use of the Quileute Tribe. We are first introduced to the Quileute Tribe through Jacob Black. He tells Bella “scary stories,”\footnote{Meyer, Twilight 123.} the Quileute legends of his ancestry: Jacob tells Bella that the Quileute Tribe descended from wolves, “that the wolves are our
brothers still. It’s against tribal law to kill them.” Meyer asks Bella if she thinks he’s one of “a bunch of superstitious natives”—the connotation is that his legends and ancestry are inferior to modern, “rational” thought. This first introduction to the Quileute Tribe is steeped in a patronizing tone that undermines the authority of the Tribe in favor of what Jacob calls the “pale-face’s” ideologies. Moreover, this first encounter with the Quileute Tribe begins the process by which Meyer fictionalizes and thereby discounts the Tribe’s actual traditions.

Since the series began its rise to popularity, consumers have not been able to get enough of all things Twilight. Twi-hards make the trip to Forks, Washington as if making a pilgrimage to their personal Mecca. And, indeed, LaPush, Washington (the Quileute’s home) has made the Twilight tour-maps. The reservation remains open to the public despite egregious violations of their laws and customs. In November of 2009, MSN.com filmed a video for their website that included images of the Quileute reservation taken without permission from the Tribe council. MSN filmed and posted the video that highlighted the Tribal Council building, totem poles as well as the Quileute Cemetery (specifically the grave of a Tribal Chief). Jackie Jacobs, the spokesperson for the Quileute Nation, described the video as set to “macabre” music; Jacobs further comments on her reactions to the film, “As a native woman, I was astounded and sick to my stomach...This situation has caused an enormous amount of pain and suffering to the Quileute Nation as a whole, but especially to the

151 Meyer, Twilight 124.  
152 Ibid, 126.
descendants of the Quileute chief...An apology will never erase that hurt.”

Though the filmmakers had contacted the Forks Chamber of Commerce for permission to shoot their town, they had not contacted the Quileute Nation in any way. What’s more, the MSN crew disregarded the clear code of conduct posted on the Quileute website: “Ask before photographing or recording an individual, an event, or activity...Burial grounds and religious ceremonies are sacred and are not to be entered.”

The Reservation is the site for the expression of white privilege. (Jacobs does say that the Tribe and MSN are utilizing the incident as an opportunity to work together to create informational videos “the tribe can use to teach about its culture.”)

Carol Hatch, the Quileute Tribal Chairwoman, views the situation as “an educational opportunity to teach the world how to conduct themselves when visiting a sovereign nation.”

The Tribe’s name has also been commercialized to create a multitude of products bearing “Quileute” symbols. In promotion of the movies, Nordstrom department stores sold Quileute sweatshirts, tee shirts, jewelry etc. Though the products are marked as Quileute, they have no affiliation with the Tribe nor does the Tribe receive any kind of compensation from the Twilight phenomenon. According to Angela R. Riley, the head of the American Indian Studies Center at the University

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155 Dickerson, Quileute to Receive Apology for Msn.Com's 'Twilight' Video.

156 Ibid.
of California, Los Angeles, nearly half of the Quileute tribe lives in poverty.\footnote{157} Exploiting the native community for profit is not a modern concept—the Quileute Nation signed treaties (giving up their native lands in exchange for the promise of education, healthcare and job training) with the United States government as early as 1855.\footnote{158} The Quileute Tribe is currently in the process of closing a court case initiated in 1974 to protect the tribe’s fishing rights.\footnote{159}

With this Tribe’s specific history, as well as the history of the United States’ treatment of its native inhabitants in mind, we view Meyer’s portrayal of the Quileute Indians as a vestige of the nation’s violent colonial past. Lana Whited, in a discussion of \textit{Harry Potter}, illustrates that often “…race determin[es] class…one material difference (race) can naturalize another (class) within a society that marks difference and accords power through material signs.”\footnote{160} The American Indian’s race determines his class in the United States. His dark skin signifies inferiority to the white man, who stole native lands and resources and forced Native populations onto reservations that tried to force assimilation into white culture. Meyer utilizes the image of the wild, savage, shirtless Indian to convey a dichotomy of race and class that positions the Indian beneath the white hero.

Meyer’s representations of fatherhood enforce a doctrine of white superiority. Charlie Swan, (Bella’s father) and Billy Black (Jacob’s father) demonstrate that whiteness is inherently better, privileged and powerful. Charlie is the town sheriff; he


\footnote{159} Ibid.

\footnote{160} Lana A Whited, ed., \textit{The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter} (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002) 326.
holds authority and wields a gun. He is the quintessential middle-class American
dad—he cannot cook, clean or express his emotions, but he provides a comfortable
(though modest) lifestyle for his family and is protective of his daughter. Billy, on
the other hand, is physically disabled--condemned to a wheelchair, he is reliant on the
aid of his friend Charlie and unable to control his son. The physicality that Meyer
incorporates into her essential definition of manhood is undermined. Billy is
emasculated; he is lesser than Charlie. Though Billy is a tribe elder, he lives in
relative poverty and is unable to provide his son with new clothes when Jacob’s
transformations from human to wolf leave his jeans a casualty. Though Charlie and
Billy both hold positions of authority within their respective communities, Charlie is
economically more secure than Billy, thus positioning white as superior to Indian.
Charlie is cast as the ideal father while Billy is prey to the process of “othering,” by
advent of his disability and economic status.

Bella’s love interests (Edward and Jacob) represent the struggle between the
white hero and the “exotic” figure. Edward is the archetypal hero; he is white,
wealthy, has fine artistic taste (Debussy) and restrained sexuality. Jacob is the Indian;
he lives in relative poverty, works with mechanics, never wears a shirt (late in the
series, he only wears drawstring, cut-off sweatpants) and gives in to his sexual urges.
Though Bella loves both “men” she ultimately chooses Edward and, in doing so,
affirms the position of the white male as hierarchical to the Indian. This choice, the
political in Twilight, is critical to the reader’s understanding of self in relation to the
world. Roberta Trites highlights the importance of the ways in which different races,
cultures and classes are portrayed in literature:
Identity politics matter most in adolescent literature in terms of how an adolescent’s self-identifications position her within her culture. How an adolescent defines herself in terms of race, gender, and class often determines her access to power in her specific situation. The reader, who desires Edward, learns to aspire to whiteness and deny her ethnic heritage to embrace a more “civilized” (white) identity. She learns that to have power is to be white or to be loved by a white male.

The problematic role of race and class in the *Twilight* series is further heightened by the interactions between the Cullens and the Quileute wolf pack. According to legend, the “cold ones” and the wolves are mortal enemies—the Quileute boys’ transformations are triggered by the presence of vampires. The hatred between the two families runs deep and they do not hide their distaste for one another. In a discussion of race and class in the *Harry Potter* series, Lana Whited claims, “The fear of miscegenation finds expression through those like Malfoy who sling taunts of “mudblood,” segregating Muggle-born witches and wizards such as Harry’s friend Hermione from “pure bloods” like himself.” Edward and his siblings constantly refer to the Quileute in language that is steeped in the conventions of American racism, that separates and diminishes the status of the wolves; the wolves are labeled, “dog,” “leech,” “mongrel,” etc. The Cullens complain of the terrible stench they claim emanates from the wolves. The fear of miscegenation—the contamination and corruption of the pure white woman—is present. Ultimately, Bella eschews

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161 Trites, *Disturbing the Universe* 47.
162 Whited, ed., *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter* 313.
164 Ibid, 80.
165 Ibid, 80.
miscegenation in favor of the white hero—the civilized man—who will be able to protect her and maintain her virtue.

_Eclipse_ marks a unique collaboration and understanding between the wolves and vampires, but the legacy of their respective hatred for the other is impossible to escape. The wolves agree to fight with the Cullens against a common enemy, though the decision is made on the grounds of protecting the people of Forks and LaPush. The Cullens agree to train the wolves; the wolves are impressed by the Cullens’ fighting prowess and Edward murmurs to Bella “it’s good for them to learn some respect.” The connotation of this statement is more than paternalism; it is the memory of slavery and colonialism, of white domination over indigenous cultures. Even after the wolves help the Cullens, the Cullens continuously drop snide comments such as “Go fetch,” that reaffirm their status as superior.

_Breaking Dawn_ characterizes the devolution of the very loose bond the Cullens and Quileutes had formed in _Eclipse_. The wolves understand that Bella cannot survive her pregnancy as human—to save Bella, the Cullens will have to break the pact they formed with the Quileutes that stipulates they not bite a human. Though the wolves cannot prevent the Cullens from breaking the pact, they fear Bella’s mysterious pregnancy and decide to kill Bella’s baby. Jacob (fulfilling what professor Slotkin identifies as the “good Indian” convention) refuses and, ever longing for the pure white woman, vows to protect Bella. Jacob re-negotiates the treaty his ancestors enacted and compromises his heritage for the white woman. Though the Cullens and Bella accept Jacob’s aide, he is subjected to the vampires’

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166 Meyer, _Eclipse_ 396.
167 Ibid, 489.
derision and contempt; the vampires cite his sour smell and refer to Jacob as a “mutt.”

Esme embodies a passive paternalism that enforces the Cullens’ position as superior to the subservient Quileutes. Esme is the gentle, wealthy, white female—she is the head of the home, virtuous and sympathetic to those “beneath” her station. While the wolves aid the Cullens they forgo the comforts of their homes—food, showers, and clean clothes. Edward tells Jacob:

“Esme was troubled by the hardships this is putting you through…we’re easily able to help out with any needs there. Alice rarely allows us to wear the same thing twice. We’ve got piles of brand-new-clothes that are destined for Goodwill, and I’d imagine that Leah is fairly close to Esme’s size…”

Though this act is altruistic, the language is couched in a paternal discourse that asserts the kindness, wealth and power of the Cullen family. The wolves, the Indians, are dependent on the wealth and kindness of the Cullen family. The reader sees the Indians, unable to provide for themselves, living off the excesses of the white family.

Herbert Kohl discusses the process by which social ideologies are disseminated through children’s literature. He posits that children learn to make class and racial distinctions through the stories they read and, moreover, assign value judgments to those distinctions. Kohl claims that, “Children’s books contribute to the formation of culture, and some books can even transform the way children look at and relate to the world.”

In an analysis of Babar the Elephant, Kohl traces the

formation of Babar from elephant into a functioning member of society. Babar is forced to leave his elephant world behind, to shed his elephant ways and embrace the dress and customs of the Rich Lady’s society. Kohl notes that “the reader learns that there are different classes of people and the Rich Lady is of the better (that is richer) class and that elephants are not as good as people, but might be if they imitate people,”171 and the Rich Lady can be seen as “…an extension of the patriarchy, a product of capitalism and colonialism who maintains power by buying it.”172 Babar emulates the Rich Lady’s behavior—he begins to wear a suit and learns how to drive a car. Esme is the Rich Lady. Jacob, the Indian (who is connected to nature, savage and uncivilized), is the elephant from the jungle, the unknown barbaric, Babar. By giving clothes, food and shelter to the Quileute wolves Esme gives them “civility.” The wolves’ nakedness becomes unnatural; the gesture of giving the wolves (“natives”) clothes symbolizes the destruction of the many cultures and peoples the United States dominated through the process of colonialism. This act glorifies the Cullens’ culture and status while devaluing Quileute traditions. This cultural framework is implicitly embedded in the reader’s understanding of the series and of the world.

This civilizing process offers an interpretation of Jacob’s final entrance into the Cullen family. After Jacob imprints on Renesmee, Edward (asserting his position as superior) continues to demean Jacob’s authority by calling him a “mongrel.”173 Though Jacob has taken on the material goods the Cullens offer him (that symbolize whiteness) and is able to enter into civility, he will never be on equal footing. Even

171 Kohl, Should We Burn Babar? Essays on Children's Literature and the Power of Stories 7.
172 Ibid, 8.
as a Cullen, Jacob will be Edward’s son—Jacob’s race limits him from ever having power over Edward. Jacob is able to join the world of the Cullens—a patriarchal world of whiteness, wealth and power—because of his love for the white woman (no longer Bella, but Renesmee) who tames his wild, Indian heritage and dilutes his “blood,” his genetics.

Twilight asserts the white man’s role in the “civilizing” process and invokes the memory of colonialism when Bella and Edward honeymoon on a private island off the coast of Brazil. The island is gorgeous, warm, exotic—it is the perfect site for the white man’s play. Though the Cullens have an excess of time on their hands (never sleeping would have its advantages), they employ two Brazilian housekeepers to clean and care for the house. Bella’s comments are illustrative of the legacy of a history steeped in racism, classism and colonialism:

The two Brazilians looked incredibly short and dark next to [Edward]…the little man smiled at me politely. But the coffee-skinned woman didn’t smile…she was raised to be more superstitious—or you could call it more aware—than those who live in the modern world.174

The comparison between Edward (our hero) and the Brazilian housekeepers works to signify the white man’s greater worth. The Brazilians are incredibly short—they are beneath Edward. In conjunction with their stature and occupation, their darkness communicates inferiority.

Bella’s comments are paternalistic in tone and simultaneously convey the devaluation of indigenous customs and peoples, and the raising of the white man’s

status and power. When Bella calls the Brazilian man (who is never given a name) “the little man,” she takes away both his manhood and his agency. His “polite” smile is reminiscent of a history of slavery, inequitable power relationships and the domination of peoples and land by white Europeans. The power dynamics of the relationship are distorted by the fact that Bella is his employer. She, the white citizen of the U.S., is responsible for this man’s livelihood. The message conveyed is that the Brazilian nation is reliant on the excesses of the United States. Citizens of the United States can leave their lives, their worries and their stress at home to enjoy a romantic, sex-filled honeymoon on their private island in Brazil. Brazilian culture and land is for the United States citizens to consume.

Bella wonders why the Brazilian woman will not smile at her—it makes her feel uncomfortable. Bella is, perhaps, aware of her position as colonizer for just a moment, but explains the discomfort she feels by utilizing the stereotype of the “primitive” native: “she was raised to be more superstitious—or you could call it more aware—than those who live in the modern world.”175 This dichotomy between the superstitious and the modern indicates to the reader that indigenous peoples are less intelligent, savage, wild and more attuned to the spiritual or occult world (i.e. Voodoo). Of course, the Brazilian woman would be correct to fear Edward but, she is either unable or lacking the knowledge to understand his vegetarian lifestyle. The unease Bella feels when confronted by the coffee-skinned woman’s reluctance to placate the white vacationers, is rationalized by Bella’s greater capacity to understand

175 Meyer, Breaking Dawn 114.
the reality of her situation. Meyer essentially communicates to the reader that white is right.

Through the process of “othering” Meyer upholds the patriarchy through which white governments gained and maintained power. Meyer describes the Cullen family in such an enticing way—beautiful, wealthy, privileged, powerful—that the audience wants desperately to be a part of their world. The reader views entry into that world as the ultimate goal, the achievement of the American dream. Bella’s love for Edward, her ultimate choice to marry the white hero, indicates that the American Indian maintains a position of subservience to the white man. Meyer’s treatment of the Quileute Nation maintains the paternalism that plagues this nation—she disregards their cultural heritage in order to further her own story. While Meyer has gained status as a cultural icon and grossed millions of dollars off the franchise, the Quileute Nation has had its burial grounds and traditions disrespected and misrepresented. Twilight fans ultimately view white culture and conventions as superior to the traditions and society of the “other.” Meyer perpetuates the patriarchy that enforces the racial and class divides afflicting United States communities today.
And then we continued blissfully into this small but perfect piece of our forever.
--Bella, Breaking Dawn 754
Conclusion

*Twilight* has saturated the American consciousness—the force of the phenomenon is considerable and powerfully shapes the ideologies of the youth who consume the series in all of its manifestations. The teenage girl readership, because they become engrossed in the narrative, are socialized into distinct gender, race and class roles. Stephenie Meyer’s subversion of the literary vampire conventions; use of the didactic fairy tale structure; manipulation of teenage desire and sexuality; and portrayal of race and class work in conjunction to impose a traditional ideology on her readership that reinforces a white, male, upper-class patriarchy. The reader allies herself with Bella and, in doing so, learns her place in a conservative social order. She learns to desire the white, wealthy hero but to express that desire only within the context of marriage and motherhood. The teenage girl, who sees herself in Bella (the ultimate mother and wife), understands her place in American society as subservient to the male she is persuaded to believe will provide her a fairy tale ending.

My interest in the issues surrounding teenage sexuality was sparked when I spent the summer of 2009 interning with NARAL Pro-Choice Texas in Austin, Texas. During my time with NARAL I came into contact with the realities conservative agendas produce: teen pregnancy, teen STD infection and other related health concerns. My research that summer focused on crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs), unlicensed, unregulated anti-abortion counseling centers that often employ religious rhetoric and provide factually inaccurate medical information to persuade young girls and women facing unplanned pregnancy to discount abortion as an option. My task
was to visit government-funded Texas CPCs to explore the aid that is offered to girls seeking sexual health information/care.

Over the course of the summer, I was told that condoms are ineffective in preventing the spread of sexually transmitted infections, induced abortion causes breast cancer, and that girls and women who undergo abortion procedures can face depression, weight gain, anorexia, bulimia and/or suicide. I was told, despite my personal religious background, that I had the opportunity to be “saved” if I accepted Jesus Christ into my life. Another CPC told me that to have an abortion would be to deny my womanhood, as bearing children is a woman’s purpose. As I sat in the countless “counseling” rooms of these Texas CPCs, I found myself shaken; though I was (and remain) confident in the values I hold, it was unsettling to be told that I was a “sinner.” It was unsettling to be offered “medical information” I knew to be false. In my work, I also encountered employees of abortion clinics and Planned Parenthood centers who relayed that one of their greatest challenges is combating the falsehoods that so many of the young girls they serve fervently believe. Whether these inaccuracies are circulated in schools, on television, by peers, or by CPCs, young girls are not given the access they deserve to the facts. The culture surrounding teenage sexuality is silence and denial. It was for this reason that I began to question how conservative ideologies are formed and why our culture is sympathetic to and even encouraging of views that stifle the teen’s individual rights and access to information.

In the context of a society informed by competing visions of sexuality, the widely popular Twilight series has the potential to shape the national ethos. The
impact children’s and youth literature has on the formation of the individual—their beliefs, values and aspirations—cannot be underestimated. As Peter Hunt posits:

“...most adults, and almost certainly the vast majority of those in positions of power and influence, read children’s books as children, and it is inconceivable that the ideologies permeating those books had no influence on their development.”

Twilight must be viewed as critical to both the individual’s and the culture’s formation. The conservatism that fills the pages infuses the reader’s interpretation of the novels with meaning that informs their attendant cultural attitudes. The reader who embraces Twilight embraces the conservative political ideology it purports.

While young adults are being bombarded with images and songs that relate free-sex to power and wealth (and rarely mention the advent of the condom), they are simultaneously being taught abstinence-only curricula that encourage “purity” and deny the truth of teenage sexual activity. It comes as no surprise, then, that some of the latest research has revealed the first increase in teenage pregnancy rates since the 1990s. Teen pregnancy rates rose three percent between 2005 and 2006, signaling the inefficacy of the abstinence-only education funded and strongly supported by the Bush administration. (According to a new study published in Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine in February of 2010, a specific type of abstinence-only education was shown to delay sexual activity in 67% of participating students. The curriculum did not advocate abstinence until marriage and did not

176 Hunt, Understanding Children's Literature 1.
suggest that condoms are ineffective. The curriculum was designed solely for the study and has not been practically applied in the classroom.\textsuperscript{178}

Our society is a product of the ideologies entrenched in our cultural stimuli—the result is communities that are receptive to and supportive of policies that enforce traditional values and views of teenage-hood that are discordant to the American teen’s reality. Politics is about concessions, deals and negotiations; often this leaves women subject to conservative policies that reinforce race, class and gender hierarchies. On March 24\textsuperscript{th}, 2010 President Barack Obama signed an executive order upholding the “Hyde Amendment” (which bans the use of federal funding for abortion)\textsuperscript{179} in order to help to push healthcare legislation through congress. When artifacts of popular culture, like \textit{Twilight}, are widely celebrated, individuals foster a society that embraces conservatism and makes legislation, such as the “Hyde Amendment,” both possible and popular. Ideologies embedded in popular cultural texts—movies, television, magazines, novels—shape not only the individual but the community’s social and political values. \textit{Twilight} acts in such a capacity; the highly influential nature of adolescent literature yields a culture drenched in the discourse of patriarchal family values and gender roles that assert the dominance of the white, wealthy male in America.

Works Cited


<http://www.quileutenation.org/culture/history>.


