



# BITTEN *by* twilight

Youth Culture, Media, & the Vampire Franchise

EDITED BY Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, & Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz

"This lively collection of essays explores the narrative riches of the Twilight stories themselves even as it looks seriously at the ways they have been marketed and taken up both by their passionate fans and by critics who see them as evidence of a range of cultural and political problems."

—Janice Radway, *Author of Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature;*  
*Professor of Communication Studies/Rhetoric and Gender Studies and American Studies,*  
*Northwestern University*

"Team Edward. Team Jacob. Twilighters, Twihards, and Twilight Moms. Merchandise from clothing to jewelry to Barbie™ dolls. *Bitten by Twilight* critically examines the extraordinary franchise of Twilight and pushes our thinking in new directions. In this diverse and engaging collection, we learn what it is about Twilight that both appeals to us and enrages us."

—Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Author of Kids Rule! Nickelodeon and Consumer Citizenship;*  
*Associate Professor, Annenberg School for Communication and American Studies and Ethnicity,*  
*University of Southern California*

"*Bitten by Twilight* presents us with an enlightened look into the world of vampires, werewolves, and fan culture and romance narratives. The editors and contributors to this book appreciate the significance of the stories, movies, and artifacts as a culturally gendered phenomenon and present a variety of lenses through which to appreciate this popular franchise."

—Norma Pecora, *Author of The Business of Children's Entertainment;*  
*Professor, School of Media Arts and Studies, Ohio University*

Focusing on the wildly successful Twilight series, this collection of scholarly essays examines the phenomenon from diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives. Particular attention is paid to cultural, social, and economic aspects of the series and to the recurrent messages about youth, gender roles, romance, and sexuality. Essays discuss race and religion, and provide audience analyses of young adult, adult, anti-, and international fans. Other chapters are political-economic examinations into celebrity, tourism, and publishing. With new research by established and rising scholars, this volume is a significant contribution to the growing field of youth studies and complements existing feminist cultural analyses of media texts.

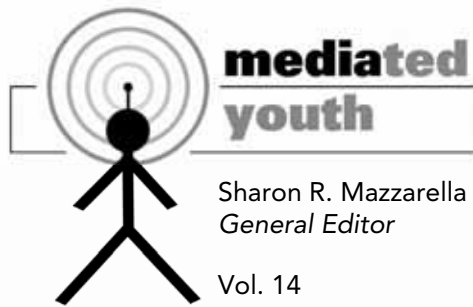
Melissa A. Click is Assistant Professor of Communication at the University of Missouri. Her research interests include audience and fan studies and ideological analysis of popular culture, particularly concerning gender, race, class, and sexuality.

Jennifer Stevens Aubrey is Assistant Professor of Communication at the University of Missouri. She studies the ways in which media influence young people's self-perceptions, including sexuality, body image, and gender roles.

Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz is Assistant Professor of Communication at the University of Missouri. She studies media representations of gender and race/ethnicity, and the effects of these portrayals on individuals and society.



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# Prologue

Our taxi pulled up to the Dallas Sheraton on July 30, 2009, and we jumped out and ran through the lobby, waited impatiently at the registration desk, and then tore through the lobby again, in search of our hotel room. We, the three co-editors of this edited anthology, were late to TwiCon, the “premiere unofficial conference for Stephenie Meyer and the Twilight saga” (PRWeb, 2008). Officially, we were at the fan convention as researchers, attending the convention in order to conduct focus group interviews with fans of the Twilight series, and we foolishly scheduled our first focus group only two hours after our plane touched down. Unofficially, we went to TwiCon to participate in the Twilight fandom.

Between December 2008 and February 2009, the three of us had all been surprised by how engrossed we became in the four Twilight books. We are three feminist thirty-something married mothers who happen to also be professors of communication—not exactly the target audience of Twilight. Nevertheless, we found ourselves swept away by the romance between a mortal teen girl and a sparkly vampire. All the while bemoaning the sappy writing style and too-traditional gender dynamics of the books, we were very much bitten by Twilight.

Throughout our research, we have encountered Twilight fans seeking a diagnosis of sorts; this is especially the case among “Twilight Moms” and other adult fans who love the series even though they acknowledge its flaws. Why, they wondered, were they so taken with these books, so clearly not intended for them? They hoped we would be able to provide them a clear, definitive answer. And in some ways, we suppose we are looking for a diagnosis for ourselves as well.

Back in Dallas, we had a chance to observe the fans who had traveled to the convention, some from a long distance and at great personal expense—there was little else to do as we waited in the registration line that snaked around a gigantic convention hall. According to organizers, TwiCon 2009 was to-date the largest Twilight convention in the United States. Officially, 2,800 people were pre-registered for the convention

(Bressler, Gautheir, Grapsy, & Scoggins, 2009); ultimately, over 3,000 fans were in attendance (TwiCon, n.d.).<sup>1</sup> Some of what we saw in the convention hall confirmed our expectations. For example, the attendees were almost exclusively female, save the handful of boys and men (one father wore a handmade t-shirt that said “Team Charlie. It’s a Dad Thing”). And many of the fans were groups of teens with one or two adults as chaperones. But other aspects were quite surprising. In equal numbers to the teen girls were groups of adult women—Twilight Moms, even Twilight Grandmas—who had traveled to the convention for a girls’ weekend. We met women who attended with their sisters or lifelong best friends, and we even met some fans who had become friends online through the Twilight fandom and now roomed together at the convention. Far from the stereotypes of Twilight fans as “shrieking throngs of manic” teenage girls (Koski, 2009, para. 3), what we saw were women of all ages, classes, shapes and sizes, excited and invested in the same phenomenon. And we were all there in Dallas to celebrate Twilight. We were all in this sparkly vampire thing together.

This desire to connect and bond over Twilight was especially evident in our focus groups. Many of the fans—particularly the adult women—approached the group interview almost as therapy; their observations about Twilight were deep, personal, and thoughtful. They were more than willing—even excited—to speak to us (at odd hours of the morning or evening) to discuss their attraction to Twilight.

As academics, and fans, we see the Twilight fandom as diverse, reflective, and insightful. We are proud to be the producers of this anthology and be among the contributors to this book who take this fandom seriously. Ultimately, we seek to understand the reasons that so many have connected with the powerful messages the books and the films deliver.

—Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey,  
and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz

# Introduction

*Melissa A. Click,  
Jennifer Stevens Aubrey,  
& Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz*

In 2005, Little, Brown Publishing released Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* with an initial printing of 75,000 copies ("Stephenie Meyer," 2008). The novel, the first of a four-book series about the unlikely romance between high school student Bella Swan and vampire Edward Cullen, became wildly popular. The story came to Meyer in a dream in which an average girl was discussing a budding affair with her love interest, a vampire, who was having difficulty fighting the urge to kill her (Grossman, 2008). This dream became the infamous "meadow scene" in Chapter 13 of *Twilight*. Though the novels are situated in a fantasy about vampires and shape-shifting werewolves, at its heart *Twilight* is a story of true love prevailing against all odds. Using classic tales, such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Wuthering Heights*, as inspiration, Meyer's books intertwine romance, fantasy, and suspense to communicate messages about love, family, and morality.

## The Twilight Narrative

Readers experience Bella's journey of love and loss through her eyes<sup>2</sup> as she comes to find love and a home in Edward and his family of vampires (the Cullens). A product of middle class divorced parents, 17-year-old Bella has spent her childhood living with (and raising) her flighty mother, Renée Dwyer. At the beginning of *Twilight*, during the middle of her junior year of high school, Bella moves from Phoenix, Arizona, to Forks, Washington, to live with her father, Charlie Swan, who has had very little involvement in her life until this point. This fateful move introduces Bella to Edward and his family, who live in Forks due to the dependably rainy weather, appropriate for hiding their vampire status.

Though Bella finds popularity among her peers in Forks, she does not fit in well with them. Ironically, it is only with supernatural creatures—vampires and werewolves—that she truly feels at home. We learn early on, however, that her relationships with the supernatural come at a cost. Bella's life is endangered frequently throughout the series. Despite the clear danger of dating a vampire, she never questions that Edward is right for her. Bella states in *Twilight*:

About three things I was absolutely positive. First, Edward was a vampire. Second, there was a part of him—and I didn't know how dominant that part might be—that thirsted for my blood. And third, I was unconditionally and irrevocably in love with him. (Meyer, 2005, p. 195)

Edward is equally passionate about Bella, but throughout the series, he struggles with the morality of being romantically involved with a human girl; Edward feels selfish for indulging his desire to be with Bella because he knows his presence endangers her life.

Perhaps because of this guilt and his desire to keep Bella safe, Edward takes the upper hand in the relationship, controlling when, where, and how often they see each other, and the level of intimacy of their courtship. Bella, as a result, is frequently depicted as the stereotypical damsel in distress who needs to be saved by a man. This portrayal has drawn criticism from some who worry that as a role model for the target audience of this series, Bella is too weak and dependent on men for her worth and existence (Siering, 2009).

In book two, *New Moon*, Bella experiences a devastating loss when Edward leaves her. His decision, motivated by his fear for her safety, is interpreted by Bella as proof that she is not good enough for Edward. Meyer uses this breakup to introduce an alternate love interest for Bella—her best friend, Jacob Black. Jacob is a member of the Quileute Native American tribe, and he is pitted against Edward both because Edward is his romantic rival and because he is a vampire. In the *Twilight* series, some Quileute males transform into wolves to protect their people when vampires become a threat to humans. Jacob and other teenage Quileute undergo this transformation in *New Moon* when vampires from outside the region begin to kill in the Forks area.

Though Meyer offers a love triangle to readers, it is the passionate, all-consuming, love-at-first-sight (and scent, in Edward's case) romance

between Edward and Bella that is destined. As Edward says to Bella at the end of *Breaking Dawn*, their relationship is “forever and forever and forever” (Meyer, 2008, p. 754). By the end of the series, Bella transforms from an average girl to a powerful vampire and married mother who chooses a life with Edward and the Cullens over a life in the human world.

### The Twilight Phenomenon

Though the books were marketed as a young adult series, they are popular with fans, particularly female fans, of all ages. As of November 2009, the series, which includes *Twilight* (2005), *New Moon* (2006), *Eclipse* (2007), and *Breaking Dawn* (2008), has sold more than 85 million copies worldwide and has been translated into 37 languages (Adams & Akbar, 2009). Together the four books have spent 235 weeks on the *New York Times* best-seller list (Grossman, 2009). *The Atlantic* suggests that the “books are contenders for the most popular teen-girl novels of all time” (Flanagan, 2008, p. 110).

The success of Meyer’s series is credited in part to her savvy use of the Internet to reach out to fans. Green (2008) argues that *Twilight*’s success is not simply based upon it being a good story:

[Meyer] also figured out before almost anyone in the book industry how to connect with readers over the Internet and inspire them to build on her work. ... She has reached out to readers on social networking sites, such as MySpace, and participated in online discussion groups. ... Meyer went well beyond the standard marketing. (para. 2)

Meyer’s use of her own website, social networking sites, and fan-created websites to speak directly to fans about the *Twilight* series created “the first social networking best seller” (Drayton qtd. in Green, 2008, para. 2). *Twilighters*,<sup>3</sup> too, have utilized the Internet as an outlet for *Twilight*-related discussion and creative expression. Online communication has facilitated connections with other fans and the sharing of *Twilight*-related news, fueling the *Twilight* fandom to a much greater degree than many would have thought possible.

In November 2008, Summit Entertainment released the film version of *Twilight*, which earned \$35 million in its opening day, nearly recouping its budget and setting a record for a female director (Johnson, 2008).

In total, *Twilight*'s theatrical release grossed \$350 million at the box office (Grossman, 2009). The *New Statesman* proclaimed that the film was "by far the most financially successful vampire flick of all time" (Jackson, 2009, p. 50). When the franchise's second film, *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, opened in November 2009, its midnight ticket sales (\$26.3 million) broke the record set by *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince* in July 2009 (Fritz, 2009). In its first weekend, *New Moon* earned \$140.7 million in North America, and an additional \$118.1 million overseas (Barnes, 2009). *New Moon*'s opening was the third biggest on record, displacing *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* (Barnes, 2009, para. 3). Similar success is expected of *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*, which is scheduled to be released in June 2010, shortly after the publication of this book.

Beyond its record-breaking sales figures, *Twilight* has made a significant cultural impact on female audiences and the media industry. For example, *Twilight* has been credited with rejuvenating the vampire genre (Davies, 2009) and, more generally, renewing interest in reading (Memmott, 2009). Reaction to *Twilight* has been intense, as evidenced by the over 300 English-language fan websites listed on [StephenieMeyer.com](http://StephenieMeyer.com). And one could scarcely get through a day without encountering a news story speculating about the *Twilight* actors' love lives. This media scrutiny intensified fans' and the public's interest in the actors, so much so that Robert Pattinson, who plays Edward Cullen in the *Twilight* Saga, was named one of *People Magazine*'s "Top 25 Most Intriguing People of the Year" for 2009. *Twilight*'s success, and the public dismissal of it, which we discuss below, makes it an important topic for study.

## Studying *Twilight*

Though the popularity of Meyer's series is noteworthy on its own, the public reaction to *Twilight* has been striking. The *Twilight* novels do not purport to be great literature, yet the books have been "mercilessly panned" (Adams & Akbar, 2009, para. 6), and their "faults have been endlessly, and publicly rehashed" (Doyle, 2009, para. 1). *Variety* described Meyer's writing as "embarrassingly overripe prose" (Chang, 2008, p. 40), and *Newsweek* called her writing style "ungainly" (Thomas, 2009, para. 3).

*Twilight* and *New Moon*, the two films of the *Twilight* Saga that have been released to date, have received a "lukewarm critical reception"



(Adams & Akbar, 2009, para. 7). *USA Today* reported that *Twilight* had “questionable casting, wooden acting, laughable dialogue, and truly awful makeup” (Puig, 2008, para. 2). *Rolling Stone* suggested that in *Twilight* “The vampires have no fangs. The humans are humdrum. The special effects and makeup define cheeseball” (Travers, 2008, para. 1). *New Moon* was reviewed similarly: *The New York Times* called it a “juiceless, near bloodless sequel” (Dargis, 2009, para. 1), *The Boston Globe* suggested it was “a drag—paced like a dirge and cursed with dialogue and a goopy musical score” (Burr, 2009, para. 3), and Roger Ebert argued that it “takes the tepid achievement of ‘Twilight’ (2008), guts it, and leaves it for undead” (Ebert, 2009, para. 2).

Acknowledging the gendered dismissal of the *Twilight* Saga’s poor reviews, *Maclean’s* explained that “the vast majority of film critics are [sic] male, and they tend to have fixed ideas about vampires and horror” (Johnson, 2008, para. 9). *The American Prospect* agreed that the *Twilight* Saga films are not “great art” (Doyle, 2009, para. 1), but argued that the films are reviewed differently than “male escapist fantasies ... [which] tend to be greeted with shrugs, not sneers” (para. 6). The mainstream press regularly ridicules *Twilight*’s story, characters, and relationships instead of taking these elements seriously. For example, a review of *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* called the storyline “intermittently ridiculous” (para. 9). The review also stated:

Let’s just say it: It’s great there’s a movie that makes teenage girls scream. Half the movies Hollywood makes are designed to make teenage boys scream ... still, when you come face to face with the source of all the screaming, it’s hard not to laugh. (LaSalle, 2009, paras. 4-5)

Not only does this discourse follow the familiar pattern of degrading media that girls and women find appealing, but also it invalidates what about these texts is so engaging.

In addition to ridiculing the books and films, the popular press has also derided *Twilight*’s fans. Despite the fact that girls became a much-coveted target market in the 1990s due to the perception that they are “voracious consumers of popular culture” (Mazzarella & Pecora, 2007, p. 111; see also Kearney, 2009), the popular press seemed bewildered by the success achieved by a series targeted to female fans. For example, after *Twilight*’s big opening in November 2008, *Maclean’s* declared, “*Twilight*

confirms there's a powerful new demographic in play: the fangirl" (Johnson, para. 6). *Daily Variety* proclaimed, "A \$70 million opening is generally reserved for family pics or fanboy fare" (McClintock, 2008, p. 1) and added that "female-driven properties aren't always the safest bet" (p. 42). The accusation that the influx of girls and women who attended *New Moon* sessions at Comic-Con 2009 "ruined" the fan convention (Buchanan, 2009; Ohanesian, 2009) sheds some light on why the popular press was perplexed by *Twilight's* success: franchises and fan activities are for boys and men.

Despite its dismissal, the female-oriented *Twilight* franchise is comparable in profit and cultural impact to other well-respected media franchises, such as *Lord of the Rings*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and *Harry Potter*. Even though Summit sought the male demographic with increased emphasis on action sequences in *New Moon*, these efforts failed. Women loved *New Moon*; men clearly did not (Berardinelli, 2009). Thus, Summit is staking new territory in developing a female-oriented series into a full-blown media franchise. We argue that this has changed and will continue to change how the industry approaches girls' and women's media.

Though the derision of the *Twilight* Saga's success is not altogether surprising, the public commentary repudiates the appeal of the narratives, positions girls and women as unexpected and unwelcome media fans, and denies the long and rich history of the relationships female fans have had with media texts and personalities (see, for example, Douglas, 1994; Ehrenreich, Hess, & Jacobs, 1992). On top of this, the mainstream press has belittled the reactions of girls and women to the *Twilight* series and the actors who play their favorite characters, frequently using Victorian era gendered words like "fever," "madness," "hysteria," and "obsession" to describe *Twilighters*. *The New York Times* described *Twilight* fans as "on the rabid side" (Rafferty, 2008, para. 3), and *Entertainment Weekly* reported that an appearance by Robert Pattinson sent "thousands of besotted girls into fits of red-faced screaming" (Valby, 2008, para. 2). *The Boston Globe* suggested that fans' interest in the films' stars is "enthusiasm bordering on hysteria" (Gorov, 2009, para. 5). These reports of girls and women seemingly out of their minds and out of control disparage female pleasures and curtail serious explorations of the strong appeal of the series.

None of this is to argue that the *Twilight* series has no faults, but we do wish to stress that the public dismissal of *Twilight*'s success is gendered, and we believe scholars, critics, and fans should find this gender bias worthy of discussion and study. Feminist cultural studies scholars have long fought the stereotypical treatment of girls and women and the media they enjoy. McRobbie and Garber's (1978) foundational "Girls and Subculture" argued that subculture scholarship positioned boys as resistant to mainstream culture and rarely discussed girls at all. Arguing against the assumption that girls are uncritical consumers of mainstream culture, McRobbie and Garber insist that "girls negotiate a different leisure space and different personal spaces from those inhabited by boys. These in turn offer them different possibilities for 'resistance' ..." (p. 14).

McRobbie and Garber's (1978) work is part of what Brunsdon (2000) calls "the feminist 'return to the feminine'" (p. 20) in cultural studies that began in the late 1970s. Brunsdon suggests that feminist cultural studies work at this time began to critically examine the messages of "women's genres," or mass cultural artifacts directed at female audiences, with the goal of demonstrating that women were active media consumers. To this end, feminist cultural studies scholarship has demonstrated the importance of studying women's media texts such as soap operas (Brunsdon, 2000; Geraghty, 1991; Hobson, 2003) and romance novels (Modleski, 1982; Radway, 1984), and the female fans who enjoy women's media (Ang, 1982; Baym, 2000; Brown, 1994; D'Acci, 1994; Harrington & Bielby, 1995; Scodari, 2004).

A related area of research, girls' studies, has also been heavily influenced by McRobbie and Garber's (1978) work, though the field developed later than feminist cultural studies scholarship, experiencing "phenomenal growth ... since the early 1990s" (Kearney, 2009, p. 14). Like feminist cultural studies, girls' studies is concerned with cultural artifacts and media messages directed at girls and the ways in which girls understand and use them and strives "to listen to the voices of girls themselves ..." (Mazzarella & Pecora, 2007, p. 112). Girls' studies scholarship has examined girls' magazines (Currie, 1999; McRobbie, 1991), girls' book series (Pecora, 1999), teen romance audiences (Christian-Smith, 1990; Moffitt, 1993), girls' online activities (Mazzarella, 2005), prime-time television programs targeted to girls (Levine & Parks, 2007; McKinley, 1997) and girls as media producers (Kearney, 2006). The

interrogation of media created for girls and women, and the deconstruction of the romantic ideologies that accompany many of these popular mainstream texts, has been an enduring preoccupation of feminist cultural studies and girls' studies scholars.

Despite this influential feminist research, scholars continue to fight the persistent cultural assumption that male-targeted texts are authentic and interesting, whereas female-targeted texts are schlocky and mindless—and further that men and boys are active users of media while women and girls are passive consumers. For instance, Driscoll (2002) argues that feminist cultural studies scholars still contend with the “tendency to represent and discuss girls as conformist rather than resistant or at least to study them almost exclusively with reference to that division” (p. 11). Inness (1998) maintains, “The belief that girls' culture is no culture at all proves to be remarkably tenacious...” (p. 1).

Thirty years after McRobbie and Garber's (1978) “Girls and Subcultures,” the *Twilight* series presents an opportunity to disrupt the persistent stereotypes about girls and women, the media they enjoy, their cultural activities, and the way the media industry targets them. If we ignore the narratives girls and women enjoy, then we miss the important opportunity to understand what is so enticing about this series. What is going on in the current cultural moment that makes *Twilight*'s messages so powerful? How do they reinforce and yet also disrupt powerful ideologies regarding gender, sexuality, and romance? What sense do fans make of these texts? And how has *Twilight* been marketed and merchandised? We deem these important questions to answer. With at least two films left in the *Twilight* Saga, there are ample opportunities to enter the public dialogue about girls' and women's interests and practices.

### **Bitten by Twilight**

The collection of 15 scholarly essays in *Bitten by Twilight* gives crucial attention to the cultural, social, and economic aspects of the *Twilight* phenomenon. Building upon the work of feminist cultural scholars who examine girls' and women's relationships to media, our overall goal in this collection is to examine *Twilight*'s themes, appeal, and cultural impact. In particular, we scrutinize *Twilight* as a media text with powerful and salient themes, as a site of fan activity, and as a lucrative business and publicity machine.

*Bitten by Twilight* is informed by a range of disciplinary traditions, such as American Studies, Classics, Communication, English, Library and Information Sciences, and Women's Studies; and theoretical perspectives, such as cultural studies, theology, fan studies, gender studies, queer theory, relational communication, and media studies. The authors use a diversity of methodological approaches, including textual analyses, focus groups, survey research, interviews, political economy, and participant observation.

The collection is organized into three sections, broadly mapping on to our overall goals for the book. The first section, "Biting into the Twilight Narrative," is comprised of chapters that perform close textual readings of the series' messages. This is the lengthiest section of the collection, which is not surprising given the richness and salience of the themes that Twilight encapsulates. The second section, "Biting into the Twilight Fandom," includes audience analyses of the series' young adult, adult, anti-, and international fans. The underlying goal of this section is to understand how fans and anti-fans negotiate and interpret the themes and messages contained in the Twilight narrative. The final section, "Biting into the Twilight Franchise," examines the industry practices of the motion picture, publishing, and tourism industries that are currently capitalizing on the Twilight phenomenon.

### **Biting into the Twilight Narrative**

The first section critically examines Twilight's messages, particularly those about gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, the female adolescent body, family, romance, and religion, because we believe these messages matter. Media messages are a powerful source of cultural meaning (Hall, 1997), and the stories media tell both reflect and create reality, as well as act as a socializing force. Many media producers, authors, and critics dismiss the influence of entertainment media, citing their fantasy or fictional nature as reason not to take them seriously or worry about what they might be communicating to audiences. Meyer, too, has been dismissive of the potential impact of her texts on audiences, stating:

I never meant for [Bella's] fictional choices to be a model for anyone else's real life choices. She is a character in a story, nothing more or less. On top of that, this is not even realistic fiction, it's a fantasy with vampires and werewolves, so no one *could* ever make her exact choices. (Meyer, n.d., para. 33)

Unlike Meyer's dismissal of the cultural impact of her work, we argue it is essential to study the texts to better understand this popular culture phenomenon and the impact it may have on audiences.

The first chapter, by Margaret M. Toscano, connects the theology and cosmology of Meyer's religion, Mormonism, to the messages about love, family, choice, and morality in the *Twilight* series. Toscano's insider knowledge about the Mormon church makes for an informed and interesting analysis of themes of Mormon teachings that appear in *Twilight*. She argues it is clear that Mormonism influences Meyer's writing but that Meyer is subversive in her treatment of some of the church's teachings.

Melissa Ames provides context to the *Twilight* phenomenon by comparing the *Twilight* texts to preceding adult and young adult vampire narratives, arguing that *Twilight* largely follows tradition with its messages about gender and sexuality. Her analysis highlights anti-feminist themes in vampire narratives and examines differences and similarities in texts across time and medium.

Natalie Wilson investigates how race is portrayed in *Twilight*. Her analysis centers on the Cullens and the Quileute, and she argues that Meyer's narrative is imbued with white privilege. Wilson suggests that the Cullens are linked to goodness and godliness and concludes that *Twilight* perpetuates stereotypical representations of indigenous people through the characterizations of the Quileute.

Carrie Anne Platt analyzes the gender and sexual politics present in the *Twilight* series. Through an analysis of the character Bella and her relationship with Edward, Platt considers how the intersection of sexuality and gender in the texts results in problematic messages about female sexuality. She argues that *Twilight* polices female desire, reinforces traditional gender roles, and promotes conservative sexual politics.

Danielle Dick McGeough's chapter investigates the representation of the adolescent female body in *Twilight* through a close analysis of three of Bella's bodily experiences in the books: Bella's sexual relationship with Edward; pregnancy and childbirth; and, finally, vampirism. McGeough argues that whereas the female adolescent body is portrayed as unruly, messy, and uncontrollable, *Twilight*'s vampires offer a solution, a fantasy of transformation into a perfect, orderly, unchanging body.

Next, Kathryn Kane examines how Meyer's vampires, namely the Cullens, deviate from the traditional narrative in which vampires are queer figures who disrupt society and must be contained. Using queer theory, she argues that the Cullens are "the anecdote to queer times," reinforcing heteronormativity and conservative values.

In the last chapter of this section, Tricia Clasen performs an analysis of *Twilight's* myths of romantic love. The myths she examines include the myth that true love is love at first sight, that love is forever and unchanging, that romantic relationships trump all other relationships, and, finally, that true love requires the ability to communicate without words. Clasen suggests that these myths are unrealistic but communicate powerful messages about love nevertheless.

### **Biting into the Twilight Fandom**

Many cultural studies scholars argue that the study of media messages is necessarily linked to the study of audience members. Dismissing the idea that audience members simply receive the messages sent by the media, Morley (1992) posits that viewers participate in "an active process of decoding or interpretation, not simply a passive process of 'reception' or 'consumption' of messages" (p. 76). Beginning with the assumption that *Twilight* fans are active in their engagement with the series, the chapters in the second section examine fans' generational and transnational differences, on- and off-line communication strategies, and attempts to rework and re-imagine Meyer's series. Through inquiry, observation, and discussion with *Twilight* fans, these chapters illustrate the ways fans have understood the series and have made it an important part of their lives.

In the first chapter of this section, Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, Melissa A. Click, and Jennifer Stevens Aubrey use survey and focus group research to examine the sense teen and adult female fans have made of *Twilight's* romantic messages and relational models. The authors find significant differences among fans' preferences for the different romantic pairings in the series, due in part to age and feminist identity. They additionally argue that fans' identification with Edward and Bella's romantic relationship is tied to their descriptions of their ideal partner and their satisfaction in their current relationships.

Cathy Leogrande surveyed and interviewed mother and daughter Twilight fans to investigate the impact Twilight had on their relationships. She finds that the Twilight series helped them deepen their relationships by allowing each to more fully see the other and by providing a bridge for discussion of difficult topics like romance and sexuality.

Demonstrating the Twilight fandom's high level of involvement with the series, Juli Parrish explores the world of online Twilight fan fiction. Particularly focused on fan fiction writers' revision of *New Moon*, Parrish reveals the strategies fans use to fill empty spaces left in Meyer's narrative and rework portions of Meyer's texts with which they are displeased.

Inger-Lise Kalviknes Bore and Rebecca Williams explore the Twilight fandom transnationally, comparing Norwegian, British, and U.S. fans. Despite differences in language, location, and access to the Twilight books, films, and merchandise, they find that the online fandoms they studied discussed many common topics in similar ways—this is clearly illustrated in their analysis of the three fandoms' discussions of Edward and Jacob.

The last chapter in this section examines the rhetoric employed by anti-fans online to position themselves as superior to Twilight fans. Jessica Sheffield and Elyse Merlo argue that anti-fans' strategies are based upon a disdain of feminine fandom practices and a characterization of the girls and women who employ them as "dupes." They suggest that the strategies of those who negotiate between fans and anti-fans may offer an opportunity for increased communication—and understanding—between fans and anti-fans.

### **Biting into the Twilight Franchise**

When Twilight crossed over from a popular book series to a blockbuster film with multiple sequels, a full-blown media franchise was born. Both Little, Brown and Summit utilized many of the elements of the "Midas Formula" (Epstein, 2005, para. 1) of building successful media franchises, such as mobilizing a loyal fan base (Johnson, 2009), building successful merchandising tie-ins (Thompson, 2007), and appealing to a PG-13 audience (Epstein, 2005). The third section of this volume examines how different industries—in the case of Twilight, the motion picture, publish-



ing, and, surprisingly, the tourism industries—profit from the Twilight phenomenon.

The first chapter of the section, by Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, Scott Walus, and Melissa A. Click, examines how Summit has tailored the films to a young-adult audience by capitalizing on the appeal of the characters in the series and enmeshing it with the young actors hired to portray them. The chapter argues that the success of the franchise is at least partially explained by the films' ability to deliver carefully constructed teen idols to fans who so desperately want their Twilight characters to be real.

Marianne Martens contextualizes the success of the Twilight series by examining how the publishing industry commodifies young-adult literature by developing works with low literary merit but high marketing potential. And in particular, the chapter argues that Little, Brown commodified the Twilight fandom by enticing fans to participate in "immaterial labor," such as library programs, online review sites, and Little, Brown's proprietary website, so that the publisher could mine their efforts for marketing material.

Cynthia Willis-Chun, in her chapter, investigates an unexpected business venture that has arisen from the popularity of Twilight: the cultural tourism of Washington's Olympic Peninsula, a region made famous by Meyer in the Twilight series. Through participant observation, Willis-Chun argues that this tourism offers visiting fans two types of nostalgia: one that permits them to more fully imagine the development of the chaste yet passionate relationship between Edward and Bella, and another that allows them to experience the small-town atmosphere of the Peninsula that harkens back to kinder and simpler times.

Taken together, these chapters provide a rich portrait of the popular culture sensation that is Twilight. We hope these chapters provoke discussion of Twilight's cultural impact, awareness of the dismissive treatment of girls' and women's media interests, and support for future scholarship examining female-oriented media texts and female audiences.

## Notes

1. Since its inauguration, Summit has announced its own official conventions, all but supplanting TwiCon (Ditzian, 2009). But in the summer of 2009, TwiCon was a big deal in the fandom.
2. Bella Swan narrates the entire series except for the epilogue in *Eclipse* (2007) and parts of *Breaking Dawn* (2008). In the final installment of the series, Meyer switches between Bella's and Jacob Black's voices. The book is divided into three parts, with Bella narrating the first and third sections and Jacob narrating the middle section.
3. Twilight fans are often referred to, both within and outside of the fandom, as Twilighters or Twi-hards.

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# **I. Biting into the Twilight Narrative**

