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Revamping the Vampire Heroine: Reshaping the Character of Bella Swan through Twilight Fan Fiction

Kaitlyn D. Boisvert

Salve Regina University, kaitlyn.boisvert@salve.edu

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Revamping the Vampire Heroine:

How *Twilight* Fan Fiction Allows Writers the Chance to Re-Shape the Character of Bella Swan

A Thesis Research Dissertation

Prepared by Kaitlyn Boisvert

Salve Regina University Undergraduate

Prepared for

Dr. Madeleine Esch

English Department

Salve Regina University

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Within the span of a few short years, Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series managed to sweep the world in high sales numbers and deep cultural impact. What began as a simple story about a girl and a vampire launched into a massive cultural phenomenon that amassed a large number of fans who helped further cement the popularity of the series and its presence in society. Fans, or "Twi-hards" as they have been dubbed by the media, become involved with the series, as they show their support through either attending movie screenings, purchasing related merchandise, or actively pledging to which characters they love the most. ". A mere leisure activity suddenly progresses into an active, ongoing process, as the fans further pursue the "Twilight Experience" beyond the books. . One pursuit that can enable fans to do this is partaking in the act of writing fan fiction, or a type of spin-off writing that contemplates certain paths that either the story or the characters could possibly follow. Published author Heidi Kneale offers a very sufficient definition of fan fiction in her scholarly essay regarding the topic, describing it as: "Fanfiction is creative writing that uses pre-existing characters and worlds from television, books or other media," (Kneale). While being a fan activity that most patrons pursue solely for fun, fan fiction can also be seen as an alternative way to respond to a piece of media- either working with certain facets already established in the original, or creating something entirely new from an already established media text. Fan Fiction based off of *Twilight* can offer up the same opportunity for exploration, as writers can potentially either flesh out strengths or pinpoint certain weaknesses of Meyer's original books. This creative process can potentially offer fresh insight into a series that has inspired a lot of criticism in its wake.

Upon the publication of the first book *Twilight* in the year 2005, Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series made a huge splash in both sales and in earning young fans-especially girls. Stephenie Meyer's novels arguably tapped in to something that the young female demographic desired in their story-reading experience, as the staggering number of females who became engrossed and passionate for the series seemed to indicate such a success. In the beginning stages following its publication, the reception

for *Twilight* was very positive, as it was labeled “Best Book of the Year” and was dubbed “Best Book of the Decade...So Far” by Amazon (Stephenie Meyer –Bio). It was around this time that *Twilight* began to gradually seep its way into society-sparking intrigue amongst many literary critics and landing itself on many “Must Read” lists. As Stephenie Meyer’s continued her work in the series, many readers scrambled to read the sequels in great haste-eager to see what would happen next to Meyer’s characters and story. In the time that the *Twilight* phenomenon swept the world, Huffington Post Writer Sarah Seltzer acknowledged that the novels were filled with flaws, yet they still obviously held some sort of unique appeal with their targeted audience, as “Meyer has tapped into a serious artery of the teen female psyche,” (Seltzer). Many other critics acknowledge Meyer’s success in this trait, as her novels seem to allow her readers an opportunity to experience a cathartic reading experience.

While the *Twilight* novels may have struck a right note amongst young female audiences, other responses to the novels have not been so favorable. The series received much scorn and critique, for its presumably poor writing, bland characters, and failure to produce a substantial story with enlightening themes. In an article featured on Mommytracked.com, Jo Keroes reviewed the novels negatively, saying, “Good books deal with themes of longing and loneliness, sexual passion and human frailty, alienation and fear just as the *Twilight* books do. But they do so by engaging us with complexities of feeling and subtleties of character, expressed in language that rises above banal mediocrity,” (Keroes). Such negative criticism has become so rampant that in the present day, it is almost impossible to research responses to the series that do not dabble into satirically mocking the novels and lambasting them as feeble attempts at literature.

Many critics accuse Meyer of presenting a story that subtly endorses rigid, old-fashioned stereotypical roles for women through having a submissive female character who is so over-reliant on others that she can hardly stand on her own as a self-aware character. In a feminist response to the

Twilight series, writer Carol Seifert accuses *Twilight* of being “abstinence porn,” and that the books ultimately suggest that “when it comes to a woman’s virtue, sex, identity, or her existence itself, it’s all in the man’s hands,” (Seifert). Other critics of *Twilight* also share this same sense of disapproval for Meyer’s novels, and the characters of Bella and Edward, as they claim that the two portray what they consider is an unhealthy relationship. Many of them find fault in Edward’s domineering nature and Bella’s tendency to center her entire existence around her beloved-sacrificing her interests, goals, and relationships in order to pursue her love for him. In her article “In Love With Death”, writer Gina R. Dalfonzo comments: “young readers are left with the image of a girl who discovers her own worth and gets all she ever wanted, by giving up her identity and throwing away nearly everything in life that matters.” While a majority of the critiques focus in on Edward possessive personality, most of them spends time critiquing Bella for her character flaws, as she is the first-person protagonist.

Meyer is often regarded as a writer who has little regard for her own main character Bella, giving her a personality that is shaped and defined through her relationship and reliance on other characters. In a feminist critique of the novels, writer Taylor Anthea remarks that Bella is a “blank slate, with few thoughts or actions that don’t centre on Edward.” This same concept of Bella being a blank slate has been reiterated in numerous critiques, as Bella is commonly perceived as a sort of empty canvas that young consumers can assemble and color in with all of their desires and fantasies. Internet personality and film buff Doug Walker, otherwise known as “The Nostalgia Critic”, likened Bella to an old-fashioned comic book hero, as her bland personality allows readers to write and imagine themselves in her place. In his words, she acts as a “skin for female readers to put on to enter a fantasy world full of love and excitement,” (Walker). Meyer herself seems to admit to creating Bella for the very purpose of having a character that female characters could imagine themselves within. Upon being asked why she did not provide much of a physical description for Bella in the novels, she responded: “I left out a detailed description of Bella in the book so that the reader could more easily step into her shoes,”

(Meyer). Although Meyer's creating a notably bland character has stirred a lot of criticism and mockery, it is perhaps a possibility that through her mundaneness, Bella can assume a sort of malleable personality that can perhaps inspire reader interpretation and response. Her sense of being like a sort of blank slate can perhaps offer up a new window in which readers can either re-imagine her character.

Caitlin Flanagan recognizes the negative connotations of Bella's character, yet also explores how Bella, as an imperfect teenage girl character, may provide insight towards what it means to be a young girl in modern times. According to Flanagan, the teenage girl is "a creature whose most elemental psychological needs-to be undisturbed while she works out the big questions of her life, to be hidden from view while still in plain sight, to enter profoundly into the emotional lives of others-are met precisely by the act of reading" (Flanagan 1). Flanagan claims that while Bella's character is flawed, she still managed to achieve this very sense of connection with her young audiences. Although Bella is essentially a throwback to old-fashioned female stereotypes, her struggles with sexual desire and curiosity are arguably the most riveting themes for young female readers. Flanagan praises the novel for its approach to such a topic, saying: "no writer, from Bram Stoker on, has captured so precisely what sex and longing mean to a young girl," (Flanagan 2). Through exploring Bella's reaction and contemplation of sex, the novels effectively capture the universal experience of a young woman trying to reach her own decisions in the face of a society filled with voices trying to sway her to act a certain way. In this way, the reader can easily slip into Bella's place and feel as if she understands her feelings and experiences.

After reading numerous critiques that reiterated different, substantial claims, I found that I was mostly intrigued by the concept of Bella being a character that allowed readers to assume her personality through a cathartic reading experience. I began to speculate whether the structure of her character and her tendency towards catering to reader's indulgent delights granted some readers the opportunity to re-explore and re-write her character in *Twilight*-inspired fan fictions. As an individual

who has upheld a perennial personal interest in fan fiction, I wished to approach the *Twilight* phenomenon and the character of Bella through studying fan fiction writings based off on the *Twilight* series.

Fan fiction is often dismissed as a mere leisure activity that only die-hard fans partake in, and often times these fans are treated as either social outcasts, or mindless consumers. Yet both literary and media scholars view fan fiction and their participants in a different light, seeing them as a unique culture phenomenon that helps consumers give a new sense of insight into both society and a particular media trend. It can also inspire consumers to try to build off of the framework of a particular media text and attempt to expand open its structure, using both their talents and life experience to breathe new life into it. Literary Scholar Giselle Liza Anatol describes how all novels are open to reader interpretation, as “all literary works contains ‘gaps’ that allow individual readers to make individual inferences, link ideas, build metaphors, and conceptualize characters in certain ways,” (Anatol 8). *Twilight* fan fiction potentially offers its followers the opportunity to do just this through engaging in fan fiction writing, and so it is important to consider whether this could pertain to *Twilight* and its character Bella. While pursuing *Twilight*-inspired fan fiction as a potential area of study, I began to consider whether writers could use fan fiction as a way to re-explore dimensions of Bella’s character. I began to consider whether Bella’s sense of being a character that is akin to a blank slate grants consumers the opportunity and incentive to fill in the empty spaces and to explore something new with her.

Literature Review

From Poachers to Coachers-How Fans of Media are So Much More Than Passive Consumers

Ever since fan-generated writings have arisen in response to popular media texts, many critics have expressed ambivalence towards the trend. As writer Alexandra Alter notes, “While some see it as free marketing, others regard it as derivative dreck at its best and copyright infringement at its worst,”

(Alter 1). The activity of fans writing in response to a favored media trends is perplexing to many, as it seems like an act that encourages imitation and lacks originality. It is for this reason that fan fiction is often prone to breaching upon the issue of copyright and fair use. According to Alter, fan fiction does not breach copyright law, as writings are often circulated for mere pleasure and not profit, and thus do not pose a real commercial threat. It allows participants to “live with a group of favorite characters forever, crafting new story lines when the original ones run out,” (Alter). The essay “Friction Over Fan Fiction: Is This Burgeoning Art Form Legal?” also reaches the same conclusion that fan fiction does, in fact, constitute as fair use. According to the essay, fan fiction is “fair, because it takes the source material as raw materials and creatively transforms it in ways that copyright laws is meant to encourage,” (Literary Review of Canada). Such a copyright law suggests the concept that all media texts are always open to interpretation, and subject to individual fan responses. No piece of media contains a singular set meaning, as many consumers are free to drawing their own inferences and interpretations.

Cultural Studies scholar Stuart Hall presents a relevant case of audience interpretation in light of media texts within his theoretical essay “Encoding/Decoding”, which studies how media messages are produced, disseminated, and interpreted to a vast audience. In the essay, he rejects the old-fashioned notion that the relationship between product and consumer follows a linear model of messenger- to-receiver. Instead, he claims that it involves a complex process that presents a system of codes that presents meaningful discourse-inspiring consumers to draw upon their personal experiences in order to interpret and make sense of the artifacts they are consuming. Culturally distributed artifacts contain codes and messages, which “have an effect, influence, entertain, instruct, or persuade, with very complex cognitive, emotional, ideological, and behavioral consequences,” (Hall 3). Everyone is subject to their own opinion, and based on their knowledge and experience, their personal reactions are susceptible to being different from the reactions of others. In relation to this notion, the concept of fans writing fan fictions as personal response builds off of Hall’s theory. His claims can be used to support the

perspective that media texts are not confined to being solitary or closed in meaning and discussion. To the contrary, they consist of an ongoing culture and media phenomenon that can inspire numerous responses, thoughts, and critiques in its wake. Fan Fiction, or writings that allow readers to respond to and re-explore media texts, is a part of the response process that can draw upon consumers' own personal experiences and knowledge and yield new insights and perspectives.

Fan Fiction first arose in response to the popular television show, *Star Trek*, in the form of circulated "fanzines" that were distributed at public conventions. While the activity brought satisfaction and pleasure to its participants, it stirred a lot of confusion upon the general public. Those who were involved in the fan following were often regarded with apprehension, as they were labeled as "Trekkies", and were viewed as a strange group of people who were socially awkward (Jenkins). They were often subject to mockery and ridicule, particularly in the 1986 *Saturday Night Live* episode where *Star Trek* actor William Shatner pleaded his audience to "get a life" and stop devoting their lives to devoutly following *Star Trek* and writing fan fiction. Following this tongue-in-cheek commentary, many critics provided their own insight in an attempt to bring redemption to fan fiction or to at least present it in a new light. While the general perception of fan fiction is still mixed, some scholars have shifted their perception on the phenomenon of fan fiction and view it as a credible source worthy of study.

Scholar Henry Jenkins was one of the main contributing forces behind this shift of perception. His ground-breaking study of fan activity and the dynamic relationship between die-hard fans and their particular favored media phenomenon laid a lot of groundwork for future studies of fan fiction. Amidst the negative perception surrounding fans and fan fiction, Jenkins wished to take a step back and offer a new perspective on fans. He concluded that when fans become actively involved with a favored media text, they enter an interpretive community that enables them to discover their sense of identity and belonging in society (Jenkins 2). In Jenkins' eyes, immersing oneself in a trend can offer a cathartic

experience that can help audiences escape constraining social norms and explore depths of their personality they may have never gotten to explore before. Creativity and imagination is often a by-product of interactions between fan and media, and thus a lot of fan-generated writings arise as an alternate form of the media dynamic. According to Jenkins, these writings allow fans an alternative, deeper way to re-experience and re-assess the original media text, and a chance to rework the content and flaws as they see fit. Pursuing fan-based writing suddenly progresses from a leisure activity to a productive, introspective process, as Jenkins proposed that the content helped “expand the experience of the text beyond their initial consumption,” and “accommodate the particular interests of the individual speaker,” (Jenkins 45 and 51). In this sense, fan fiction becomes a unique, artistic form of expression that enables consumers to explore their personal response to a particular media text and create something inventive that presents the text in a new light.

From Fiction to Reality-Analyzing the Context Behind Fan Fiction

Since the time Jenkins conducted his research on fans and fan fiction and published his writings, the public perception of fan fiction has shifted to fit a more positive and open reception. Numerous scholars have followed forth in Jenkins’ scholarly steps, and have re-explored and expanded upon his theories in their own individual studies of fan fiction. Many of them adhere to the same agreement of fan fiction writing being a dynamic process that enables innovation and creation, yet offer a bit more insight into what else fan fiction has to offer in terms of both a social process and a cultural experience. In her article “In Defense of Fan Fiction”, writer Becca Schaffner laments how many people have the tendency to either reject or pigeon hole something that they do not understand-and fan fiction is no exception to this habit. While many people criticize it for being a genre of spin-off writing, Schaffner sees fan fiction as a bit more liberating and legitimate than traditional fiction, as readers have more freedom to explore whatever they may desire in their writings. In comparison to authors of published

works, fan fiction writers are less likely to be influenced by other people's insight or desires. With no publishers trying to influence and re-shape their work, they are free to stick to their own personal vision. The end result, in effect, is one that can produce a product that is more wholly original, unhindered by conventionality. Upon reflecting the liberating nature of fan fiction in comparison to published literature, Schaffner comments: "we like it more, because it *hasn't* been polished, dismissed, or dictated by any standards but what the reader enjoys!" (Schaffner). Schaffner's theory suggests that fan fiction is more authentic and enjoyable than traditional pieces of literature because it is not commercially or editorially influenced. It is for this reason certain fan fiction can allow certain media texts reach their furthest potential in both story and characters.

For her Master's Thesis in English Studies at Notre Dame University, Amanda G. Michaels completed her dissertation on fan fiction, further expanding upon Jenkins' theories. Michaels theorized that while Jenkins did make a breakthrough with his research, the definition of fan fiction and its relationship with its participants changed along with the progression on fan fictions becoming more circulated on the Internet. While many of his principles still hold true, she claims that his study needs a fresh new approach that accommodates the changing times. She suggests the term "performativity" as an alternative definition of fan fiction, as it entails "performance through language and the exploration of personal and social identity through the manipulation of theatrical figures," (Michaels 51). In this vein, consumers who pursue fan fiction can potentially tap into the potential of characters and possibly flesh out new qualities that can potentially add more depth to them. For her thesis, Michaels considers the character Bella, and how fan fiction writers can re-write her to assume characteristics reminiscent of a harlequin romance novel heroine. She focuses in on *Twilight* fan fiction, and studies stories that seem to succeed in re-writing Bella to suit a stronger character model that perhaps allows the reader to explore her own social identity. Much of her dissertation is based on considering the personal motivations of the fan fiction writers, viewing them as a possible insight into what sort of personal value

that fan fiction writers can possibly attain through pursuing fan fiction. While she does manage to explore the more personal aspects of fan fiction and its participants, Michaels spends less time focusing on the actual creative nature of fan fiction itself and its relationship to the original text it was inspired from. Rather than focusing on the writing patterns that writers adapt and whether or not they bring more to the story through their interpretations, she places more emphasis in studying the psychological traits and motivations of the fan fiction writers. While this provides a lot of insight into the role of a fan fiction writer, her dissertation ultimately leaves open a gap for future study in fan fiction and its nature as a re-interpretive work that can either expand upon or deviate from an original work.

Revamping The Vampire Heroine -How *Twilight* Fan fiction can Improve Upon Bella's Character

Building off of the approach of studying *Twilight* fan fiction as a fan response, scholar Juli Parrish focuses on *Twilight* fan fiction based on *New Moon*; the second installment of the series. Parrish specifically narrows in on fan fiction works submitted to *Twilighted.net*, a mainstream fan fiction website completely devoted to all things *Twilight*-related. Her process of selection involved her reading and analyzing stories that seemed to present a more empowered interpretation of Bella. According to Parrish, many of the fan fictions explore Bella's personal life and relationships, assuming the same sort of sentimental and emotional prose that *New Moon* worked with. They explore the emotional trauma that Bella underwent after being left behind by her boyfriend, Edward, and use their own interpretive imaginations to present new ways for Bella to cope with and make light of her heartbroken pain. Within the original book, there is a series of months that are intentionally left blank, as Meyer herself stated that she did so because, "she didn't want to put those four months into words, because they would never be as good as the reader's imagination," (Parrish 174). Expanding upon this comment, Parrish claims that it was this big gap in story that provided a lot of leeway for potential writers to work their imagination and alter the story and characters. In some of these stories, Bella seems to assume a more

independent, self-reliant role where she is able to cope with being on her own and away from Edward. Parrish notes that in many of these fan fiction, Bella “often quite explicitly distinguishes between two versions of herself; the version she is in the fanfic and the one she was in the ‘old chapter,’ that is, *New Moon*,” (Parrish 186). Through such a creative, transformative process, Bella has the potential to be reshaped to a new character type that readers find more fitting and fulfilling. Through doing this, the *Twilight* fan writers are able to fulfill both Jenkins’ and Michaels’ theories of fan fiction allowing fans the chance to create a more fulfilling experience from their initial reading.

“Beautiful Swan” Spreads Her Wings- How Meyer’s Heroine Seems to act as Fodder for Self-Insertion

Bella Swan can potentially serve as a perfect character sample for fan fiction writers to rework within their writings, due to her rather malleable personality that allows room for development and exploration. Certain readers can feel as if they can effortlessly slip into Bella’s character and get fully immersed within the story universe that Meyer creates. While this can perhaps be seen as an effective approach towards cathartic story-telling, many people laud Meyer for creating what seems like an empty shell of a character. The popular, mainstream site Cracked.com has a detailed article devoted to Bella Swan, highlighting her greatest flaws and touching upon the most commonly upheld critiques on her character. In a long-winded list of complaints against *Twilight*’s lead protagonist, the article states: “Bella is known for being positively devoid of personality, emotion, any facial expression whatsoever,” (Cracked). The article then proceeds to describe how the character of Bella Swan seems to draw a close similarity to author Stephenie Meyer’s own character. Both females share both physical and personality traits, and the article accuses Stephenie Meyer of creating a “Mary Sue” through Bella, in which she creates an essentially perfect character whose only flaw is her overt clumsiness. A rather derogatory term, “Mary Sue” first arose in the time of *Star Trek* fan fiction, in which some female writers were accused of putting “self-inserts” into their stories. These “self-inserts” often involved a character that

reflected aspects of their own personality, and enabled them to feel as if they could easily place themselves within the stories amongst their favorite characters. In her presentation, Pflieger claims that although the “Mary Sue” arguably derives from rather creative origins, her presence is often ridiculed and scorned, because she often embodies a character that is unrealistically perfect in nature. To create a “Mary Sue” is an act equated with amateurism, for it often derives from the author’s desire to immerse herself into a fantasy world where she can be revered and loved. While Pflieger highlights the negative qualities of the “Mary Sue” within her presentation, she also takes note of the positive benefits and attributes the character type has to offer. She also ultimately acts as an effective starting point for aspiring writers, as her malleable personality allows them to easily slip into her personality and eventually establish their own distinct voice as a writer.

Building on Pflieger’s defense of the “Mary Sue” and Parrish and Michaels’ explorations of *Twilight* fan fiction as performative art, I wished to further explore the potential routes that both fan fiction and Bella provide for readers in terms of making sense of the original *New Moon* novel, and providing new paths that the story could possibly traverse, both in plot and in Bella’s character. While I do assume a similar approach to Parrish and Michaels, I did not select solely fan fiction that seemed to rewrite Bella’s character to assume a more empowered role. Instead, I selected the stories entirely at random, which left open the possibility for stories that either did or did not succeed in revamping Bella’s character. Instead of just following the mindset that all fan fictions expand and improve upon certain flaws of the original work, my study acknowledges that fan fiction can either add something new to the original story, or stay true to the canon by sticking to the author’s traditional framework. I will be reading different fan fiction stories for my Thesis, and I will not be focusing so much on the personal motivations of the writers. Instead, I intend to place more emphasis on focusing upon the level of change that Bella undergoes in certain fan fiction treatments, and analyze how these interpretations either deviate from the original or stick to the source text. While I may draw upon some of Parrish and

Michaels' ideas in order to piggyback on in my approach, I intend to come up with observations and conclusions that expand upon her research and earn the distinction of being entirely my own

Amidst my research and at the offset of my approaching a set method to obtaining my own results, I drafted the research question: how do fan fiction writers re-shape the character of Bella Swan within their writing spin-offs?

Method Section

Twilighted.net exists as the leading website for *Twilight*-based fan fiction stories that pledges to welcome all different types of stories, as long as they are "well-written". Any story spin-off, no matter how preposterous, stands a fair chance of submission, as long as the entries can boast originality and abide to a succinct, grammatically correct structure. In order to fulfill its mission for curating good quality, the website specializes in well-trained beta readers who review and edit the stories for content and are ultimately the deciding factor on whether prospective stories are worthy of being added to the Twilighted.net archive. With almost 8,000 fan fiction stories offered on the site, it is clear that the web site offers the opportunity to bring in many talented writers who have imaginative interpretations and responses to the *Twilight* novels. The community-based web site Twilighted.net becomes a meeting ground for them to come to let their ideas percolate and allow their distinctive voices to be heard. For this thesis, I have chosen to use Twilighted.net as my main source for primary study, as I will be using a randomly selected number of fan fictions to draw upon as credible sources to support my scholarly claims regarding my topic. In order to narrow down my research approach, I have honed in on studying solely fan fiction writings that have been categorized as reader responses to *New Moon*, the second novel of the series. My reasoning for focusing in on *New Moon* is because this book presents Bella in a very vulnerable state, as Edward has ended their relationship and abandoned her to cope with the pain and confusion alone. Bella's methods of dealing with her grief has caused a lot of controversy from

readers & critics alike, as she relies upon rather questionable coping methods in light of her heart-break, and her sense of being a weak female character is especially strong within this story.

At the outset of my research, I wished to get a feel for what sort of patterns Twilighted.net fan fictions based off of *New Moon* seemed to follow. I also wished to see if there was a wide diversity in the sort of story scenarios the fan fiction writers chose to work with. It is for this reason, I spent hours reading through the synopses for all 665 entries for *New Moon*-based entries, making mental notes on which themes and key words seemed to make a recurring appearance in the synopses before me. Many of the stories involve the categories of Hurt/Comfort, Tragedy, Drama, and Romance, as they focus on how Bella may choose to cope with and move on from Edward's breaking up with her. Most of the stories present a "What If?" scenario that explores alternative paths and twists from the canonical work. They often present a new insight into the story's original framework, and they can either stay true to the story or completely deviate from it. While Edward, Jacob, and many other characters such as Alice and Jasper receive their own story spin-offs, Bella receives the re-interpretation treatment the most, primarily because *New Moon* mostly focuses on Bella's pain and means of coping with heartbreak. Many of the *New Moon* fan fictions explore alternatives to Bella's coping with Edward's absence and her coming to terms with their relationship. The most common key phrases dealt with Bella reaching a point where she must face "her inner demons" and "make an important decision" that affects her life in a significant way. Many of the synopses are set within a similar time frame of *New Moon*, focusing on her coping with heartbreak, while others jump into the future and show the character of Bella at a different, more advanced stage in her life. Yet ultimately, both types of stories often imply that Bella will be met with an opportunity where she can choose to either forgive Edward and rekindle their romance or to embark on a new life on her own. Although the latter scenario seems to suggest more power and independence of Bella's character, I would like to argue that even the stories where Bella and Edward get back together could allow Bella enough of a chance to grow as a person. Through most of the

common challenges and themes presented in *New Moon* fan fictions, their relationship can become more tangible and believable to fan writers and readers, as Bella and Edward have to put in work and effort to rekindle and preserve it.

Although I initially intended to pursue solely fan fiction that interested me personally and seemed to benefit my research, I eventually discarded this idea. I realized that pursuing only the fan fictions I deemed worthy of study would inflict a great deal of unprofessional bias in my research. It would also keep my findings close-minded, as I could potentially miss out on other opportunities for discovery within other fan fictions that could potentially benefit my study. To reach a bit of a fair compromise and attempt to justify the long amount of time I spent reading through all the synopses, I personally set only two stories aside for further analysis, while leaving the rest to random selection. With these two stories set for study, I decided to randomly select 8 more so my full number of studied fan fictions would reach a total of 10. I felt that such a set, traditional number was a good amount to follow, as it would provide just enough room to allow different observations and findings to surface.

Exploring the Heartbreak Gloom of *New Moon*: Fan Fiction as an Alternative Glimpse Into

Bella/Edward Relationship Woes

The two synopses and the 8 fan fictions that I selected at random each pick up the reins of Meyer's original story, assuming the same tone of grief and heartbreak that the original *New Moon* abides to. They explore the pain and confusion caused by Edward and Bella's separation, focusing on the character dynamics of both Edward and Bella and their separate means of coping with their feelings. As far as Meyer's original story goes, the authors mainly stick to the basic plot point of Edward breaking up with Bella, and then use their imagination to create a spin-off story to explore alternatives in terms of plot and character. They explore the aftermath of the breakup, and focus on the emotional and physical effects that could have been brought to the *New Moon* universe as a result. While the end result

involves a very creative product that sets itself against the original, authors still pay respect to Meyer's original plot and character structure. Author aerialla1 captures this sense of respect very effectively in the disclaimer that she enclosed with her fan fiction *Love, Lies and Lullabies*, which states: "Stephenie Meyers [sic] owns the sandbox I play in." Such a statement conveys how these *Twilight* fan fiction writers are creative interpreters, who use their imaginations to reshape certain story aspects as they see fit.

All of the fan fiction synopses I studied seem to share the same theme of exploring the potential consequences that could arise in the aftermath of Edward's abandoning Bella. In Meyer's original *New Moon*, a small accident almost leads to Bella almost getting attacked by Edward's brother Jasper. The incident leaves Edward shaken, and he comes to realize just how much danger both his and his family pose on Bella with their vampire natures. It is for this reason he tells Bella that he must leave town in order to protect her-encouraging her to forget him and move on in her life without him in it. Such an act is much easier said than done, for Bella is left completely distraught by his departure, and spends much of the novel in a numb state of confusion and helplessness. His decision arguably brings more pain and anguish onto both himself and Bella than he had anticipated, ultimately making his decision one that brings more bad than good. One common fan reaction demonstrated through fan fiction responses often considers the aftermath of Edward's departure - delving into the means of coping the two characters could potentially follow and exploring feelings they may harbor towards one another- ranging from sadness, anger, confusion, respect, and hope. All of the fan fictions I read offered an alternative exploration to the Edward/Bella love complication, infusing bits of the authors' own interpretations and incorporating different ways in which the dynamic of the lover's quarrel could further be pursued and deciphered. As a result, Bella and Edward are often portrayed as flawed characters that each experience their own separate pain and confusion following their split. Bella is often associated with traits that suggest over-reliance and fragility, with Edward seems to demonstrate possessiveness and poor

judgment. Their break-up was often treated as unsatisfactory and incomplete in the eyes of the fan fiction writers I studied, as the authors seemed to believe that there was still much to be said between the couple, and certain matters still needed to be settled. Many of them seemed to believe that Edward and Bella were too quick to give up on their relationship in their relationship and took the initiative to create an alternative scenario where the two would have to undergo more personal challenges and put in more of an effort to make sense of their break-up and its powerful aftermath.

Exploring new alternative terrains with Bella and Edward's relationship can allow any fan fiction author rework the relationship to make it fit a more substantial and fulfilling example-especially if the author themselves had a few caveats with the way the relationship was initially portrayed. Through responding to certain aspects of Bella and Edward's relationship, fan fiction authors can potentially re-interpret and re-shape the relationship in a way that fits their definition of realistic and fitting. This opportunity for reworking is fully recognized by stumbledlove, who penned the story *Baneberry*. Through my thorough reading of all of the plot synopses for fan fiction, I set aside this particular analysis for further study because I found the author's commentary very insightful and compelling. In the story's synopsis, the author actually directly addresses her audience, as she expresses her personal critiques and concerns regarding the original text of *New Moon*. She states: "The idea for this fanfiction [sic] story came from my one main critique of Meyer's novels: that Bella and Edward's relationship lacks conflict...They experience small quibbles and spats, all of which are resolved on the very next page!" The author continues to lament how Meyer's depicted relationship seems to lack a hint of realism, and how the author wishes to rework the original material to make the relationship seem more realistic. She reveals that her story picks right up from *New Moon*, after Bella and Edward reunite. Yet in the original, the author claims that Bella forgave Edward far too quickly for her liking, and so this important plot point receives the reworking treatment. Bella undergoes character transformation, as she is much more reluctant and apprehensive in accepting Edward's plea for forgiveness. In doing so, the author claims

that she “wanted to give her character a new and interesting chance to stand her ground on her own turf.” Through providing her own voice in her synopsis, the author makes it clear that she is using her fan fiction writing as a means of responding to a certain aspect of the original story that unsettled her. Another story, *Love, Lies, and Lullabies*, seems to explore this same sense of dissatisfaction with the set-up of Bella and Edward’s break up, as the fan fiction presents the scenario where Bella herself grows frustrated with Edward’s pessimistic attitude. She warns him that if he does not shift in his manner of thinking, then she will lose interest in putting in an effort in maintaining their relationship. She tells him: “If you leave now, Edward Cullen, don’t ever come back. If my love and our relationship are not worth fighting for, then I am better without you,” (aeriala). Through incorporating such a statement, the author seems to be drawing upon her own sense of dissatisfaction with the original relationship, and takes matters into her own hands in order to bring more of an element of depth and conflict to the relationship. While Meyer seems to treat her characters as almost one-dimensional, these writers potentially break free from this pattern and offer a new treatment that can present them as three-dimensional.

How Much “Fiction” is in Fan Fiction? – An Analysis of Fan Fictions that stick to the traditional of the original vs. those that seem to deviate on a whole new path entirely

Five out of the eight fan fictions I studied seemed to present a new glimpse into the Bella/Edward complications, yet ultimately remained faithful to Meyer’s original text by sticking to the canonical couple. Bella and Edward reconciled in many of the fan fictions I read, which ultimately sticks to Meyer’s establishing Edward and Bella as a couple that is meant to remain together. Such a path in exploration perhaps suggests that authors do not necessarily reject the Bella/Edward pairing when they pursue their stories. Rather, they just might wish to add more depth and insight into the relationship, requiring the two to go through more reflection and transformation before finally reuniting. The fan

fiction *A Three-Day Reconciliation in Bullet-Time* presents a set-up where Bella and Edward attempt to find reason in their failed relationship and attempt to find answers to certain unsettled matters. It takes place about five years following the main events of *New Moon*, and presents an alternate scenario where Bella and Edward attempt to analyze and reflect on their relationship in a mature, collected manner. The story treats Edward and Bella's relationship as a complex thing that requires effort, work, and communication on part of both parties. Through telling the story in third-person, the author deviates from Bella's former pattern of introducing the world of *Twilight* through a first-person experience. The author also channels both the angst and confusion felt by the two characters, touching upon all of the complications that arose from the abrupt end of their relationship. While reflecting upon the aftermath of Edward's decision, the author reflects: "It'd taken just a handful of words and enough lying to damn him to *another* eternity to break it all to millions of *what-ifs* and *almosts* and *damn-it-I-shouldn't-have-lefts*," (Willow). Such a tone and approach arguably deviates strongly from Meyer's original text, as it seems to emphasize more bitterness and misconceptions, instead of just focusing on the grieving aspect of the story. As the two begin to discuss the positive and negative highlights of their relationship, bits of angst and bitterness begin to seep through, as they realize that their break-up was wrought with miscommunication and left a lot of questions unanswered. Edward acknowledges that he was wrong to leave Bella for such vague reasons, while Bella admits fault for being so willing to believe that he did not love or care for her. Both acknowledge the full weight of their actions and decisions, as Edward tells Bella: "I left because I knew you could do better, that you deserved so much more than I could offer. I never dreamed you would suffer like I did," (Willow). By the end of the story, the two acknowledge that they both still love each other, and that their relationship was never completely over. After declaring their affections towards one another, they re-assemble the loose threads left by their relationship, and rekindle their romance with a newfound sense of respect and understanding for one another. Such a re-interpretation can potentially provide readers the chance to experience Edward and

Bella's relationship in a new light-through giving it a deeper treatment that can give it more poignancy and impact. It also allows the chance to bring more development to both the characters, as they seem move from angsty teenagers to mature young adults who are able to think more logically and are able to save their relationship through approaching it with maturity, patience, and clarity. The story suddenly stops being a tale about two teenagers, and presents a romance set-up with plenty of depth and pathos.

Twilighted author Its_Twilight also presents a scenario where Bella and Edward must sift through the wreck left from their relationship, in the story *I Don't Want to Want You*. Her fan fiction follows Bella six years following Edward's departure, chronicling her experiences as a homicide detective in Seattle. While she has established a new life for herself through pursuing a successful career, she still harbors a lot of bitterness towards Edward. She develops an overall pessimistic view towards love in general, as she has not pursued any more romantic relationships since Edward. She even reveals how pursuing a career that requires physicality and brutality helps her channel out her inner anger that still presides from her heartbreak. Even when Edward ultimately does come back into Bella's life, she is still too upset to forgive him and accept him back into her heart- to the point where readers of the fan fiction started to voice disapproval in the comment threads, claiming that her bitterness was starting to grow redundant and irksome. In light of the criticism, the author responded: "It's *New Moon*. There's supposed to be angst and there's only a few ways you can go; either Bella takes Edward back extremely quick, it takes a while, or she doesn't take him back at all," (Its_Twilight). Although her Bella expresses much more bitterness and hesitance than the original, she does acknowledge that she still has feelings for Edward, and ultimately rekindles her romance with him.

While some stories may explore alternatives towards Edward and Bella overcoming their obstacles and reconciling, other stories may choose to completely deviate from Meyer's canonical couple, and keep Bella and Edward permanently separated. The intentions and reasoning behind such

scenarios are muddled, but many of them seem to point towards the possibility that such authors are not satisfied with the pairing, and believe that the two should not remain together. In her story *Sunshine*, author Miss Dare kills off Edward and presents a new pairing: Bella and Edward's brother Jasper. In the story, Edward's poor decisions made in Meyer's original *New Moon* have led to the death of both himself and his sister Alice. Both Bella and Alice's surviving lover, Jasper, are both left distraught and confused in the aftermath of the tragedies, as they must accept life's cruel fate and cope with their impending heartbreak. They eventually find that they are able to understand one another, and ultimately pursue a romantic relationship in wake of their shared emotional connections. Their newfound relationship seems to fill voids that were present within their previous relationships, as the two find a balance in having similar natures and conflicts. Bella eventually realizes that she and Edward were not the best match because of his rather domineering nature, while Jasper seems to find that his relationship with Bella connects them as equals who are in tune with one another. After undergoing countless obstacles and grievances within the story, the two find that they feel so fulfilled with being in one another that their love is all they need in order to embark on their long road to recovery. Upon the story's end, Bella reflects: "We could go home and try to gather the pieces. Even if the whole picture wasn't ever possible for us. At least we would be together in it," (Miss Dare). Through pursuing such a story, Miss Dare rejects the canonical Edward/Bella pairing, and presents an interesting scenario where Bella pursues a relationship with a different character, and ultimately finds more fulfillment. While such an ending may suggest a sense of ambiguity and sadness in Bella and Jasper's relationship, Miss Dare effectively sets up Bella and Jasper as a couple that complements one another well. While seeking out one another amidst their heart-break, both of them finally begin to acknowledge the shortcomings that were in their original relationships. Alice to Jasper was very similar to Edward to Bella, as they both rather domineering, and were the ones who always called the shots in their relationships. Both Jasper and Bella were the more submissive members of their relationships, and were easily swayed and re-

shaped by the insight and desires of their partner. In pursuing a relationship with each other, both Bella and Jasper are able to escape constraints such as this, and are able to balance each other through having interchangeable roles of caring for one another. Out of all of the stories I read for this Thesis, this story was the only one that deviated far from the canonical couple and provided a new romantic pairing for Bella. As a result, I would say that this story encountered the greatest change from Meyer's original work through its re-interpretive process. This author presents Edward and Bella's relationship as much more flawed than it is portrayed in Meyer's novels and even goes as far to suggest that Bella would be better off if she pursued a relationship with someone else. Such an approach deviates very far from Meyer's original work, as it completely moves away from her set structure of keeping Edward and Bella together.

Taking Out the "Vampiric" Nature Through the Revamping Treatment

One particular pattern I noticed within my selected fan fictions was that stories seem to place more emphasis on exploring the humanistic qualities of the characters, and the supernatural elements of the original works seemed to become superfluous. While many of the characters, particularly Edward, retained their "vampiric" natures, they were not the main focus of the story. Instead, the author placed more emphasis in focusing on the emotional characteristics of the characters, and so the pathos became the heart of the story-rather than the elements of supernaturalism. Interestingly enough, on the fan fiction site Twilighted.net, there is a category titled "Alternate Human" (AH), which entails stories that strips all of the vampires of their supernatural natures, and makes them all human. Such stories tend to focus more on their emotional developments and all of the other characteristics that are quintessential of being human. None of the stories I read were strictly categorized as AH, yet through focusing on the pathos of their characters, they seemed to take a very similar approach one would find in an AH story. Many of these stories were instead categorized as either Hurt/Comfort, Tragedy, or simply Romance.

While I cannot explain why many of the authors choose to pursue the AH approach without entirely writing stories that were directly AH, I can theorize that they perhaps chose to do so because they felt that the emotional dimensions of their stories were more important than the supernatural elements in the story, or lack thereof. Branding their stories as “AH” could potentially deviate from the true intent of their story and could potentially turn away potential readers because they could misinterpret the intention of the fan fiction. AH arguably deviates very far from the original *Twilight* novels, and such a fact could dissuade some readers-especially if the supernatural elements of the original works were one of their favorite traits about the original novels.

The fan fiction *Numbness is All I Feel* takes a particularly dramatic and drastic approach in exploring the possible after-effects of Edward’s departure, as Bella falls into a deep depression that leads to her physically harming herself. After being rendered heart-broken and helpless, Bella takes to cutting herself as an emotional release from her pain. Her inner turbulence stems from the feeling that Edward never truly loved or cared for her as much as she did for him. At one point in contemplating her sorrows, she reflects: “It was one-sided, all along. During all those times when he had come through this window, holding me through the night, I was the only one who felt whole,” (FallenFlowers). Through presenting Bella in such a low, distraught state, the author delves into extremities when it comes to exploring Bella’s response to Edward’s departure. She is treated as a person who is in a dire situation, putting her own life at risk in order to elicit some sort of feeling to relieve herself from her numb state. The fan fiction takes on a hurt/comfort theme, as Edward ultimately does return, and finds Bella in her weakened state. Although the author chooses to bring Edward back into Bella’s life in the midst of her heartbreak, his character is not entirely validated. His actions have sent Bella into a deep state of despair that has wrought drastic consequences, as she is injured and weak from her self-inflicted wounds when he finds her. Unlike his original counterpart, he finally realizes the true gravity of his actions, and acknowledges that he did much more harm than good when he left Bella. He assumes a

much more apologetic attitude in this fan fiction in comparison to the novel, as he is faced head-on with the harsh truth that it was he who has brought Bella into this shattered state-he is responsible for her downfall. Although the fan fiction remains unfinished, its remaining segment seems to suggest that Edward becomes determined to take care of Bella and help her recover from her dangerous depression. He realizes that he is the only one who can save her, and acknowledges it is going to take a lot of time and work to help mend Bella's broken heart and earn her forgiveness. This story scenario could potentially send a problematic message to readers, as some could interpret that Bella in this story is even less empowered than the original Bella- since the only way Edward comes back is by Bella hurting herself. Such a treatment can suggestively show that while fan fiction writers can expand upon Meyer's character model and flesh out Bella's strengths, they can also potentially bring out weaknesses in Bella's character.

Another story, titled *Only Yesterday*, also traverses the pathos path, through catapulting the *New Moon* universe 70 years into the future and having Bella on her death bed. In this scenario, Edward has remained estranged from Bella throughout the course of 70 years, and Bella has lived her life bitter and alone-never finding a second love. When Edward finally re-appears into her life to bid her farewell, Bella is in such a frail state that she believes that they are still in the time period where they met and fell in love. She is over-joyed to see Edward, but is still heart-broken and confused upon his leaving of her. She remorsefully asks him: "This is all so much, Edward. How could this have happened to us?" (FallenFlowers). Edward attempts to console her by telling her that there are things in life that cannot be reasonably explained, but promises he will be there with her to comfort her amidst all the confusion and heartbreak. As he speaks to Bella, he comes to realize that he was wrong to leave her under such false pretenses. In this vein, this fan fiction Edward recognizes the faults and mistakes of the Meyer Edward, and seems to redeem himself from this old character. Although his character transition brings upon a lot of pain and grievances, he arguably seems to reach a state of much-needed maturity through finally

bringing more closure to both his and Bella's failed relationship. By the story's resolution, he sees that they are meant to be together, but it is too late for them to reconcile. Bella eventually ends up dying peacefully, leaving Edward alone with his remorse and his regrets. Through ending the story in such a way, the author successfully pursues *New Moon* in a new light – exploring an established media text in such a different way that it almost seems to adapt an entirely new set of tone than the original environment of the novel- presenting an entirely new scenario for the main characters that does not grant them the desired happy ending that many other fan fiction writings seem to give them, as well as Meyer herself.

Revamping the Vampire Heroine

In receiving the fan fiction re-interpretative treatment, Bella has the potential to be re-explored as a character and to undergo certain changes and transitions. Such alterations can possibly reshape her to fit a more independent, assertive character that differentiates from her original submissive role. One of the main critiques of Meyers' original work is that on her own, Bella is a very weak, fragile character who serves as a very poor depiction of a strong, contemporary woman. Yet such fan fiction re-interpretations suggest that Bella is perhaps not an entirely weak character at her core; she perhaps just needs a bit of reworking in order to truly bring out her potential. In Maranda's *No Longer the Prey*, Bella is placed in an entirely new scenario that calls upon her to bring out her more aggressive side. The title alone implies that Bella undergoes a complete character transformation that rids her of her vulnerable status and makes way for a new level of assertion. The synopsis also supports this theme, as it states: "After Bella left in *New Moon*, something changed in Bella." While Maranda does work with Meyers' original story structure, she invents a wholly new universe based off of the *Twilight* world, as Bella is recruited by a team of vampire hunters. Such a change in role marks a huge transition in part of Bella's character, as she is trained to become a vampire vanquisher. This new occupation is arguably a step up

above her original role, as it transforms her into a much stronger character. Yet the fact that Bella was recruited at all suggests that the author possibly believes that Meyers' original Bella must have possessed some characteristic that implied strength and potential, and that it was only a matter of bringing it out and acting upon it. This altered Bella has no doubt reached a higher state of power and independence, yet further reading of the plot reveals that she is still prone to facing the same challenges that the original Bella was likely to face. According to the synopsis, the newly empowered Bella faces a big obstacles when a "familiar family is brought to the agency's attention," and that "Bella must make a choice." The end of the synopsis then deviates from its third-person approach to story-telling and suddenly addresses the readers directly, asking: "How much would you risk to save the one you love?" Such a direct plot set-up suggests that while she may have reached a higher and more empowered role, the same tragic and dramatic elements of the original story have been preserved. Bella is still prone to being thrust into emotionally intense situations where she must use her feelings and intuition to make an important decision. Although she has undergone a great transformation, many of the elements of her original personality have still remained.

The synopsis of the story *I Don't Want to Want You* by Its_Twilight follows a similar pattern of presenting a new version of Bella, yet choosing to have her still prone to being put in the same sort of situations she was originally afflicted with. Similar to the position as a vampire hunter, a homicide detective is a considerably higher status than Bella's original character. Yet although Bella seems to have reached a level of newfound success and empowerment, she is still just as vulnerable to her emotions as she was in the original story. Like *New Moon*, Bella is also forced to face her demons and come to terms with her past experiences of pain and grief. In midst of coping with these emotions, Bella is often called upon to make a decision in an effort to either cope with or move on from them. In this story, Bella pursues a successful career and establishing a life of her own, which notably sets her apart from her original counterpart. Yet although Bella is given the initiative to completely transform herself and fit

more of the author's role of "empowerment", her transformation only goes so far-as she still retains many of her old characteristics, and ultimately still chooses to be with Edward. This manner of character development suggests that while the authors found joy in re-working Bella to fit a stronger role, they only altered a few traits in order to maintain a sense of believability-as Bella still seems to retain characteristics that were quintessential of the original.

Conclusion

In light of all of my research, I found that most of the fan fictions I studied were effective in exploring Meyer's main characters in a way that could enable readers to re-shape them and explore alternative destinies and routes they could follow. Instead, the writers seemed more interested in working with the humanistic qualities of the original story and its characters-focusing on their personalities and almost treating them as real people-who were prone to strengths & weaknesses, as well as undergoing change. I would like to think that such a treatment suggests that like all writers of good literature, these fan fiction writers took these characters seriously, and like all writers of good fan fiction, succeeded in being interpreters who expanded upon a text while still preserving the spirit of that text. Bella, as a result, was prone to undergoing change, but not to the point where she would completely deviate from her original counterpart. Her transformation would reach a certain extent, to the point where she could possibly rise above her original weaknesses, yet still remaining faithful to Meyer's vision.

My findings effectively provided an outlet for bringing all of the theories I had studied into full circle, managing to support already established concepts while also proving new ground-breaking material and discoveries. The fan fictions I studied managed to complement the theories of the scholars that I drew upon within my research. Following the theories of Jenkins and Alter, the fan fiction works managed to provide new insight into a media text, through exploring possibilities that went beyond the

original story model-with the potential to create something new and improved. Similar to Hall's theory of media messages, these fan fiction writers took the initiative to make something out of their initial consumption of a media artifact-drawing upon their own experiences and opinions as a means of response. In coordination with both Parrish and Michaels and their own academic studies of *Twilight* fan fiction, the fan fiction writers used Bella as an outlet to further pursue possible routes Meyer's work could traverse upon-either expanding upon limitations or sticking to the traditional framework of the original text. Bella, as a result, undergoes a re-imagining treatment that either changes her from her original counterpart or keeps her in tradition to her original character model. Such findings indicate the explorative potential of fan fiction as a new, innovative type of response and literature.

Although I take pride in being thorough in my investigations, I do acknowledge that there could be shortcomings within my research. I obviously only studied a limited number of fan fiction, and so my observations may be only an exception-and may not hold true to all of the fan fictions on *Twilighted.net* based on *New Moon* with Bella as their focus. To suggest further expansion upon my research, an interested scholar or patron may find it beneficial to study more fan fiction based on *New Moon*, and perhaps even reach out to the authors themselves to ask for their intentions for writing their fan fictions-and see if they really did intend to improve upon Bella's character. They may also even consider deviating away from *Twilighted.net* entirely, and decide to study fan fiction published on either *Fanfiction.net* or a different fan fiction archive site, in order to gain another perspective of both the *Twilight* fan fiction base and the fans' means of creative interpretation and response.

Regardless of its limitations, I believe that my Thesis research holds value because it shows how fan fiction can provide a creative outlet for writers to explore their feelings regarding a particular text, and potentially create something new than can improve upon certain flaws, yet still remain faithful to the original story they are working with. Rather than regarding fan fiction as a sort of obscure fan

activity pursued only for entertainment purposes, fan fiction can perhaps be considered as a unique alternative form of literature and response that that can challenge us to re-think the transformative power a single reader's interpretation can have.

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