Bringing Light to *Twilight*

Perspectives on a Pop Culture Phenomenon

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engaged in an intimate relationship with one male. But that is a topic for another essay.

3. In some estimates, Stephenie Meyer has earned more than $300 million dollars from the sale of *Twilight*. As a Mormon in good standing, she has likely tithed 10% of that—$30 million dollars—directly to the LDS church.
4. Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 54.
5. Meyer, *Twilight*, 55.
6. Stephenie Meyer, *New Moon* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2006), 76.
7. Meyer, *New Moon*, 85.
8. Meyer, *New Moon*, 254.
9. J.E. McCullough, "Home: The Savior of Civilization," *Conference Report* (1995), 116.
10. Colette Dowling, *The Cinderella Complex: Woman's Hidden Fear of Independence* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1981), 40–41.
11. Meyer, *New Moon*, 127.
12. Stephanie Vermeulen, *Kill the Princess: Why Women Still Aren't Free from the Quest for a Fairytale Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005), 156.
13. Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 83.

CHAPTER 8

"WHEN YOU KISS ME, I WANT TO DIE": ARRESTED FEMINISM IN *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER* AND THE *TWILIGHT* SERIES

RHONDA NICOL

NO DOUBT DUE TO THE SURFACE SIMILARITY OF THE ROMANCE NARRATIVE—teenage girl falls in love with a vampire—comparisons between Buffy Summers of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (*BtVS*) and Bella Swan of the *Twilight* series are ubiquitous. One comparison, Jonathan McIntosh's widely viewed (over a million hits on YouTube) mash-up, *Buffy vs. Edward: Twilight Remixed*, imagines a universe in which Edward Cullen attempts to woo not Bella Swan but Buffy Summers, vampire slayer and feminist darling. McIntosh sees his work as an argument against the specific way in which romance and gender roles are constructed in the *Twilight* series, praising *BtVS* for its resistance to gender stereotypes and condemning *Twilight* for its "antiquated, sexist" constructions of gender.[1]

McIntosh, a self-described "aspiring feminist guy," claims that *BtVS* and *Twilight* represent "the metaphorical battle between two opposing visions of gender roles in the 21st century."[2] His construction of Buffy as the "good" feminist and Bella as the "bad" feminist is typical of Bella/Buffy comparisons. Dana Stevens, for instance, speaks for many *Twilight* critics when she proclaims, "Bella Swan is the anti-Buffy,"[3] and texts pitting Buffy against Bella, asking how well each heroine measures up to a monolithic, authoritative (yet oddly ill-defined) version of feminism, abound.

Buffy/Bella comparisons often tout Buffy as a good, progressive feminist role model[4] and Bella as an anachronistic throwback to prefeminist conceptions of a feminine ideal. They generally fail to give serious consideration to the reasons behind the phenomenal popularity of the *Twilight* books, often simply vilifying them and implying that fans (and sometimes even Stephenie Meyer herself) are naïve dupes of

the patriarchy who have not been appropriately "enlightened" by feminism. Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley note that feminist critiques of popular culture often assume that "feminism, or the feminist, can tell us about popular culture, but [do] not examine what popular culture can tell us about feminism" and that a feminist critique should "judge and measure feminism's success or failure in making it into the mainstream."[5] Certainly feminist critiques of the *Twilight* phenomenon tend to manifest this impulse. For example, media critic Lucy Mangan deems the series "depressingly retrograde, deeply anti-feminist, [and] borderline misogynistic"; she dismisses fans as generally "young, inexperienced and underinformed" and therefore too naïve to choose their pleasure reading wisely.[6] The brisk sales of all the *Twilight* books, however, suggest that the trope of the unapologetically, unambiguously happy ending, complete with rescuing Prince Charming, maintains its allure for women of all ages. How might we account for the continuing popularity of a romance masterplot that would seem to run counter to feminist ideals? Given the acknowledged breadth of the *Twilight* series' fan base, it seems disingenuous in the extreme to characterize the fans en masse as "inexperienced and underinformed." Surely at least some of them have heard of feminism.

I suggest that instead of regarding *BtVS* and the *Twilight* arc as oppositional texts, regarding the former as a triumph for feminism and the latter as an embarrassment, it might be productive to consider both in terms of their similarities in order to explore what *BtVS* and the *Twilight* stories, both artifacts of popular culture, can tell us about the state of contemporary feminism. Rachel Fudge observes that for young women, "a certain awareness of gender and power is ingrained and inextricably linked to our sense of identity and self-esteem—call it feminism's legacy";[7] both Buffy *and* Bella certainly express beliefs and exhibit behaviors that mark them as inheritors of this legacy. However, "feminism's legacy" is riddled with contradiction and conflict. Ariel Levy posits that the mid-twentieth-century schism between the women's movement and the sexual liberation movement resulted in a kind of stalemate with regard to the relationship between feminism and women's sexuality, thus leaving unresolved questions about the definition of "sexual liberation" and the forms that a woman's engagement with and performance of sexuality could and should take.[8] Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards argue that the young women coming of age during feminism's third wave, inheritors of this ongoing conflict, struggle to resist "the false impression that since women don't want to be sexually exploited, they don't want to be sexual"[9] and have embraced both a belief in basic feminist tenets (social, political, fiscal, and sexual equality for women) and a performance of gender that unabashedly embraces more traditionally "feminine" and sexualized aspects of gender performance.

BtVS had its broadcast premier in early 1997, which was an interesting moment for third wave feminism. At this point, the messy, angry Riot Grrl movement of the early-to-mid-1990s had largely given way to the Spice Girls craze of the mid-to-late-1990s; "girl power" had gone from a fringe movement to a full-blown mainstream phenomenon.[10] The integration of feminism as "girl power" into the mainstream ushered in conflicting social pressures; suddenly young women were told both to allow themselves to revel in their sexy girliness and simultaneously to resist being sexualized and objectified, resulting in a tension between a persistent fetishization of female as a sex object and a celebration of an idealized "girl power" that remains

unresolved. Jessica Valenti, founder of feministing.com, distills this contradiction to its simplest terms: "We're too slutty. We're not slutty enough."[11]

The mainstreaming of a sexualized "girl power" feminism that created a space for a performance of gender both "feminine" and assertive has given rise to an equal and opposite movement to bring back the ever-popular "traditional values" and to reinscribe femininity as modest and chaste rather than bold and aggressive. As Valenti puts it, "[S]exualized pop culture and a conservative movement to reinforce traditional gender roles are colliding to form a modernized virgin/whore complex. We're getting abstinence-only education during the day and *Girls Gone Wild* commercials at night."[12] Feminist rhetorics spent many years situating discussions of sex and sexuality in terms of a woman's right to say "no," but the integration of "girl power" feminism's message of sexual empowerment and autonomy reframes the discussion, telling women that they should say "yes" to their own desires and thereby claim the cultural and personal power to which contemporary feminism tells them they are entitled.

Levy argues that many young women, caught in a culture that tells them to act like sexual beings even as they are discouraged from actually having sex, "are conceiving of sex as a performance you give for attention, rather than something thrilling and interesting you engage in because you *want* to."[13] And although the *Twilight* series has been criticized for implicitly advancing an abstinence-until-marriage agenda (Christine Seifert calls it "abstinence porn"[14]), both Meyer's novels and *BtVS* are refreshingly sex-positive in at least one important way: they both configure female sexual desire as intrinsic rather than performative. Bella may wait until marriage to have sex with Edward, but waiting until marriage to have sex *isn't* her idea, nor does she seem to be concerned with maintaining her chastity. However conservative the series might be in other respects, Bella is never criticized, either implicitly or explicitly, for her sexual curiosity. When she and Edward kiss for the first time, Bella's physical reaction is passionate and visceral: "Blood boiled under my skin, burned in my lips. My breath came in a wild gasp. My fingers knotted in his hair, clutching him to me. My lips parted and I breathed in his heady scent."[15] Buffy, too, experiences desire for and curiosity about sex, and even though her choice to have sex with Angel results in some unforeseen (and very unfortunate) consequences, she is never vilified for her decision to have sex. Her friends and family may wish she had picked a different partner, but none of them suggests that she deserves censure simply because she has sex. Giles, her Watcher and substitute father figure, tells her, "If it's guilt you're looking for, Buffy, I'm not your man. All you will get from me is my support and my respect."[16]

Both *BtVS* and *Twilight* deviate from a historical tendency for popular fictions to manifest a "reluctance to treat girls as active in their own sexual pleasure" and to construct them as "enforcers of the traditional code of sexuality that limits sexual expression"[17] Sexual activity is not specifically maligned in either series, but, as Roberta Seelinger Trites observes, "reassurances to teenagers that their actions are normal still start from the assumption that someone thinks their actions are not."[18] Certainly the boundaries of acceptable sexual expression are very tightly policed in each series, and neither *BtVS* nor the *Twilight* books offers a truly revolutionary perspective on sexual relations between young adults. Both locate sexual activity as something that should

only transpire within the context of a narrative of romantic love and as the culmination of the process of courtship; sex is only sanctioned as an expression of love. When Giles reassures Buffy that her decision to have sex with Angel, although "rash," was not unreasonable, he tells her, "I know that you loved him, and he has proven more than once that he loved you."[19] In *Twilight*, choosing to have sex outside of a stable romantic relationship is not entertained as a possibility. As far as we know, Bella is the only (human) teenager in Forks who is even considering having sex, and neither Bella nor Edward regards sex as an activity engaged in primarily for sheer physical pleasure. After they have made their declarations of eternal love, Edward asks her if she is a virgin, to which Bella replies, "I told you I've never felt like this about anyone before, not even close." When Edward points out that "love and lust don't always keep the same company," Bella counters, "They do for me."[20]

Bella and Buffy manifest the belief that sex and love ideally should go hand-in-hand, and they believe this not only because they are "good girls" but because they are good at *being* girls. To be female is to be *not* male, and despite feminism's challenges to the dominant cultural script of females as vigilant guardians of virginity and to the practice of stigmatizing female sexual desire, the cultural script of male sexual desire remains essentially the same; it is still constructed as predatory and dangerous. Brad Perry argues that males are socialized to view their sexuality as "characterized by action, control, and achievement" and to view sex as "the get-some game."[21] While females are still socialized to see sex primarily as an expression of love, males are encouraged to construct sex as conquest, and both males and females understand not only their role but also the role of the other in the dance of courtship. This paradigm perpetuates a power imbalance between males and females in intimate relationships and affirms heterosexual sex as a locus of male domination and control.

Not surprisingly, both series repeatedly construct men as inherently sexually aggressive and rapacious, casting women in a position wherein they must *re*act to sexual advances rather than initiate them. Both Buffy and Bella are obligated to defend themselves against unwanted advances, especially when they enter the public sphere. Fudge suggests that Buffy challenges the paradigm of girls' vulnerability in public spaces, observing, "With her preternatural strength and supreme confidence, she can literally go wherever the hell she pleases. Her domain is a traditionally male, conventionally dangerous one: the darkened streets, abandoned buildings, and stinking alleys that girls have long been cautioned to beware of."[22] However, the overwhelming majority of the vampires that Buffy stakes are male. Over the course of the series, she finds herself pinned to the ground by a male vampire in a missionary-position tableau during countless vampire/Slayer skirmishes, thus implying that every time she makes a foray into the "darkened streets," she is putting herself at risk for rape, metaphorically if not literally. Bella, too, is, as Edward tells her, "a magnet for *trouble*." He notes, "If there is anything dangerous within a ten-mile radius, it will invariably find you,"[23] and, truly, whenever she ventures outside of Edward's protection, she frequently faces the threat of sexual violence. Not only is she nearly gang-raped[24] by a mob of human males but she is also bitten by James, which functions as a metaphorical rape; fortunately Edward is able to suck out the venom, thus rendering the act of penetration, if not incomplete, then at least sterile.[25]

Additionally, both Bella and Buffy must deal with unwanted sexual advances from trusted members of their own respective social circles. When Jacob forcibly kisses Bella, Bella's reaction underscores her perceived helplessness and her sense of the encounter as an assault: "I opened my eyes and didn't fight, didn't feel... just waited for him to stop."[26] Later, Jacob abuses Bella emotionally when he obliquely threatens suicide in order to coerce her into asking him to kiss her.[27] Buffy is also repeatedly forced to defend herself against implicit and explicit threats of sexual assault from friends and even lovers. She is not only sexually harassed by a hyena-spirit-possessed Xander[28] but also, in one of the show's most disturbing turns, by Spike, a vampire with whom she had been having a consensual sexual relationship[29] (and who becomes a legitimate romantic interest *after* the near-rape incident) despite regarding him as "an evil, disgusting thing."[30]Strikingly, Buffy characterizes her first sexual encounter with him as "the most perverse, degrading experience of my life."[31] When she inadvertently admits to Tara that she's been having a sexual relationship with Spike, Tara assures her that she does not need to be in love in order to have sex, but Buffy rejects this possibility, begging Tara, "Please don't forgive me."[32] When Spike attempts to rape her, it seems like an inevitable consequence of her poor decisions and thus a punishment she believes she deserves.

Disturbingly, both *BtVS* and *Twilight* imply that sexual assault often carries with it a degree of culpability on part of the female victim. Buffy makes "poor kissing decisions"[33] that lead to her assault by Spike. Bella chooses not only to remain friends with Jacob despite his repeated assaults but even asks Edward to punish her for having been coerced into kissing Jacob. She tells Edward, "I want you to tell me that you're disgusted with me and that you're going to leave so that I can beg and grovel on my knees for you to stay."[34] The *Twilight* series offers an additional example of a young woman being sexually assaulted and internalizing blame for the assault: Rosalie, Edwards's "sister," tells Bella she was raped and left to die by her fiancé and some of his friends. Rosalie implies that she was victimized due to her own desirability; she tells Bella she came to see her beauty as a "curse."[35] She also implies that her own vanity and her own pleasure in her sexual desirability made her a target for abuse, noting that before the assault, she was "[p]leased that men's eyes watched me everywhere I went, from the year I turned twelve."[36] Before Royce (her fiancé) and his friends rape her, Royce rips her clothing in an attempt to expose her to the other men, turning her vanity and pleasure in her own body against her, the objectification that she had found pleasurable and empowering becoming a justification for her rape.[37]

Both *BtVS* and *Twilight* illustrate how sexual assault can be used to enforce a male/female power differential, but even when sexual acts are mutually welcomed, a power differential still persists. As Heather Corinna points out, "the young woman who is provided with a sexual awakening by a paternal male partner remains an ideal, common fantasy,"[38] and this fantasy is definitely perpetuated in both Bella's relationship with Edward and Buffy's relationship with Angel. The figure of the powerful, authoritative male provokes in each heroine a commensurate desire to submit and to be consumed. Since both Edward and Angel are vampires, this desire to be consumed by love could possibly literally come true; for both Bella and Buffy, their fears of the actual physical risks of sex with their paramours (sex with a vampire might

result in death) symbolize young women's fears of being damaged (emotionally and/or physically) even should they willingly choose to engage in physical intimacy.

This association of fear with desire underscores the point that although sex might be dangerous for young women, that edge of danger is not only expected but eroticized in romance narratives, and when one's love interest is a vampire, the stakes are raised considerably. While contemplating her romantic history, Buffy wonders, "Can a nice, safe relationship be that intense? [P]art of me believes that real love and passion have to go hand-in-hand with pain."[39] Early in their relationship, Angel tells Buffy their romance is a bad idea and it "could get out of control." He warns, "This isn't some fairy tale. When I kiss you, you don't wake up from a deep sleep and live happily ever after." "When you kiss me, I want to die," Buffy replies.[40] Bella, too, seems to subscribe to this view of romance; she indicates her willingness to risk her life to be with Edward at least as many times as he warns her that he's a danger to her. Very soon after their first meeting, Bella realizes that Edward "thirsted for my blood" but that she is "unconditionally and irrevocably in love with him,"[41] thus making the risk irrelevant to her and possibly even part of Edward's appeal. "[T]he romance-novel script of ravishment"[42] has demonstrated considerable staying power, perhaps because it implicitly acknowledges young women's not-unreasonable fears about acting upon their own sexual desires.

It may seem paradoxical, but I suggest that the figure of the virtuous vampire lover dominates the currently wildly popular urban fantasy/paranormal romance movement—a sort of hybrid genre *Salon*'s Laura Miller characterizes as "eschewing the conventional 'happily ever after' ending and depicting romantic relationships as uncertain and ambiguous"[43]—precisely because it both installs and subverts "the romance-novel script of ravishment." The (male) vampire body both makes the dangers of male sexuality overt and obvious and pathologizes the male body rather than the female body; it is the male vampire body that is unruly and must be subject to discipline. A romantic relationship with a vampire might be characterized by ambiguity and uncertainty, but the understanding that he is dangerous and the specific reasons why he is dangerous are never the slightest bit ambiguous. Additionally, these "good" vampires *know* that they are dangerous, that their bloodlust is tied to their sexual impulses, and that their sexual impulses are therefore suspect and must be rigorously policed. Edward warns Bella repeatedly that her life is at risk by being with him, telling her, "It's not only your company I crave! Never forget that. Never forget I am more dangerous to you than I am to anyone else."[44] Angel, too, warns Buffy that he's dangerous, even before he turns into Angelus. Shortly after their first kiss, during which his face morphs into its demon visage, thus reminding Buffy that Angel is a vampire, he tells her, "I can walk like a man, but I'm not one. And I wanted to kill you tonight."[45]

Both *BtVS* and *Twilight* make male sexuality less frightening by offering a strategy of separation and containment for dealing with predatory male sexuality via the figure of the vampire lover. If your boyfriend is a vampire, then his "otherness" (read maleness) can be qualified and therefore made manageable. Fang-equals-penetrating-phallus is a time-honored metaphor, and the vampire love interest with control over his vampire nature also leashes his aggressive male sexuality. Sarah Seltzer suggests that the "good" vampire boyfriend offers female consumers of paranormal romance "a real fantasy:

a world where young women are free to describe their desires openly, and launch themselves at men without shame, while said boyfriends are the sexual gatekeepers."[46] The vampire lover's self-awareness imposes a burden on him to bear the primary responsibility for reining in his own darker impulses, ironically making him less of a threat than a human male. If the "good" vampire love interest can simply restrain the overriding vampiric impulse (to penetrate/bite, to consume), then his paramour is free to explore her sexual desires without fear of degradation.

However, this shift of responsibility from the female to the male is not absolute in either *BtVS* or *Twilight*, and in a variation on the old "blame and shame" script, both Angel and Edward struggle with their own impulses and then punish Buffy and Bella for their own failings, using both young women's naïveté as a mechanism for this punishment. Interestingly, Bella and Buffy are shamed for not being worldly enough to suit their more experienced paramours.

Edward implies that when he was turned seventeen, his sexual impulses became permanently conflated with his thirst for blood, thus making it virtually impossible for him to experience sexual desire as something separate and distinct from bloodlust.[47] Therefore, his period of adolescent rebellion, during which he parted ways with Carlisle and chose to feed from humans, can be read as a period of sexual exploration. Edward tells Bella, "I wasn't sold on his [Carlisle's] life of abstinence, and I resented him for curbing my appetite."[48] Even if he is virginal in the strict sexual sense of the word, Edward has indeed sated his carnal appetites. When Edwards ends their relationship in *New Moon,* he knows exactly how to hurt Bella; he configures her body as the inadequate one. He tells her, "I'm . . . *tired* of pretending to be something I'm not, Bella. I'm not human. I've let this go on much too long, and I'm sorry for that."[49] Because Bella understands that bloodlust and sexual desire are inexorably intertwined for Edward—he cannot allow himself to become physically intimate with her for fear that he will drain her—when he criticizes her for forcing him to control his predatory impulses, she understands that he is implicitly criticizing her for being an inadequate sexual partner. Ironically, she is quite willing to risk her safety to satisfy her sexual desires; Edward is punishing her for his own inability to control his vampire nature.

Angel, like Edward, was not always a "good" vampire; as Angelus, he tortured his (usually female) victims with relish until he was "cursed" with a soul, and when he and Buffy have sex, his moment of untrammeled bliss revokes his soul, at which time he loses the ability to control the darkest aspects of his nature. Although the conditions of the curse were supposed to ensure that Angel would remain in torment forever, it is primarily Buffy who suffers when Angelus reemerges. Angelus taunts Buffy mercilessly, and his first line of attack is to belittle their sexual encounter, ridiculing her for her sexual inexperience and characterizing it as cause for humiliation. He tells her, "You've got a lot to learn about men, kiddo. Although I guess you proved that last night." After demeaning her sexual performance, he also denigrates her for her choice to have sex with him, sneering, "You know what the worst part was? Pretending that I loved you. If I'd known how easily you'd give it up, I wouldn't have bothered."[50]

The fact that both Buffy and Bella are subject to this particular kind of humiliation underscores the extent to which changing sexual mores have introduced even more possibilities to fail in performing one's gender role adequately. Failure to have sex can result in being labeled "frigid" or "uptight," and choosing to have sex, even

under the "right" circumstances, exposes one to multiple risks: being labeled a "slut" or "easy" and/or being found sexually inadequate. Joss Whedon claims when he was writing the script for the confrontation between Buffy and Angel, "I actually felt like an ugly person. I don't know how I was able to write this so easily. It felt icky that I could make him say these things. It felt icky and kind of powerful. It was very uncomfortable and very exciting for me to do it."[51] The scene is excruciating to watch (and, I would speculate, was so easy for Whedon to produce) precisely because Angelus' emotional evisceration of Buffy so perfectly reflects an all-too-familiar cultural script that doubly damns women for acting upon their sexual desires.

By changing the stakes for women's sexuality—no longer is there a simple dividing line between the "good girl" who does not have sex before marriage and the "bad girl" who does—a young woman of the third wave struggles with a peculiar kind of performance anxiety: she must be concerned not only with when to "do it" and with whom but also with her prowess as a sexual partner once she does have sex. Women are conditioned to believe that they must negotiate a complex set of social codes in order to perform sexuality adequately; excess of any kind results in social censure. If there are more possibilities available to young women than ever before, there are equally more opportunities for failure, and unwise choices carry penalties. Both *BtVS* and *Twilight* provide foil characters as a model of what one should avoid becoming: the mad/bad woman whose promiscuity reads as indicative of larger pathologies. In *BtVS*, Faith's disdain for sexual monogamy is symptomatic of her emotionally and psychologically damaged state. Renee, Bella's mother, is portrayed as slightly "boy crazy" (she marries a much younger man), which is presented as indicative of her overall irresponsibility: her ditziness is a running joke in the series, rendering her powerless.

Valenti notes that women's "morality is defined by our sexuality"[52]; for women, choices about their sexual behavior are just about what they do but about who they are. Sex is always a risky proposition for a woman; both Buffy's and Bella's stories tell us that women are defined by the acts of their bodies and that those acts are read and interpreted by men. When Edward and a still-human Bella finally do have sex for the first time, Bella's bruised and battered body sets off another round of Edward's self-flagellation. Somewhat disturbingly, Bella can only resist the narrative that Edward imposes upon her body and assert her bodily autonomy by defending her right to be battered.[53] In Buffy's case, after she has sex with Angel, he is quite literally no longer the person she fell in love with, and when Angelus belittles her, the normally confident and assertive Buffy doubts her own worth. At least when Angel returns to his virtuous, ensouled self, Buffy's choice of lovers—and thus her own judgment— is validated. Her attempts to engage in sex *without* love and commitment end in either a near rape (c.f. her relationship with Spike) or, in the case of her brief relationship with Parker, her first college boyfriend, in humiliation. Ironically, Parker persuades Buffy to have sex with him by utilizing rhetorics of empowerment and bodily autonomy that are clearly influenced by third wave feminism. After they have sex, however, he avoids her, and she finds him giving the same speech to a different girl.[54] When he hears of her romantic woes, Spike mocks her, sneering, "Did he play the sensitive lad and get you to seduce him? That's a good trick if the girl's thick enough to buy it."[55] In every case, when Buffy's relationship fails, she internalizes its failure; she effectively pays for her "poor kissing decisions" over and over again.

Bella manages to avoid the perils of serial monogamy by marrying her vampire and embracing the promise of a literally eternal love. However, she too recognizes that sex equals danger for women. On her honeymoon night, she thinks, "How did people do this—swallow all their fears and trust someone else so implicitly with every imperfection and fear they had—with less than the absolute commitment Edward had given me? If it weren't Edward out there, if I didn't know in every cell of my body that he loved me as much as I loved him—unconditionally and irrevocably and, to be honest, irrationally—I'd never be able to get up off this floor."[56] Although Bella initially objects to Edward's demand that they marry before having sex, she eventually comes to see its appeal, positing that Edward's value system, rooted in his late-nineteenth-century/early-twentieth-century human life, comes from "[a] world where it would surprise no one if I wore his ring on my finger. A simpler place, where love was defined in simpler ways."[57]

Little wonder that such a worldview, with its promise of an easily navigated morality, holds such appeal for Bella (and for legions of *Twilight* fans) given the complexities of female sexuality for women in the twenty-first century. As long as women continue to receive contradictory messages about sex, romance, and gender performance, a masterplot of romantic love, with its promise to mitigate the emotional and social risks of sexual activity by providing young women a socially sanctioned space in which to explore their sexual desires, will maintain its power and its allure in the popular imagination due to its promise of safety, however illusory.

NOTES

1. Jonathan McIntosh, "What Would Buffy Do?: Notes on Dusting Edward Cullen," *Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture*, August 12, 2009. Web. http://bitchmagazine.org/post/what-would-buffy-do-notes-on-dusting-edward-cullen. Accessed September 11, 2009.
2. Ibid., n.p.
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4. However, I should note that there are many critiques of Buffy as feminist role model. For an excellent overview of such critiques, see Patricia Pender's article "I'm Buffy and You're... History" in *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, eds. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002. Print).
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13. Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, 163.
14. Christine Seifert, "Bite Me! (Or Don't)," *Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture*, Winter 2009, no. 42, 23. Print.
15. Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight* (New York: Little, Brown, 2005. Print), 282.
16. "Innocence," episode no. 14, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Second Season on DVD* (January 20, 1998; Los Angeles, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2002).
17. Linda Christian-Smith, *Becoming a Woman Through Romance* (New York: Routledge, 1990. Print), 34;41.
18. Roberta Seelinger Trites, *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000. Print.), 88.
19. "Innocence," *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.*
20. Meyer, *Twilight*, 311.
21. Brad Perry, "Hooking Up with Healthy Sexuality: The Lessons Boys Learn (and Don't Learn) About Sexuality, and Why a Sex-Positive Rape-Prevention Paradigm Can Benefit Everyone Involved" in *Yes Means Yes: Visions of Female Sexual Power and a World Without Rape*, eds. Jaclyn Friedman and Jessica Valenti (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2008. Print), 200.
22. Fudge, "The Buffy Effect."
23. Meyer, *Twilight*, 174.
24. Ibid., 156–162.
25. Ibid., 454–457.
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