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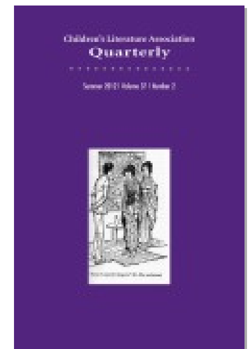

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"Unconditionally and Irrevocably": Theorizing the Melodramatic Impulse in Young Adult Literature through the *Twilight Saga* and *Jane Eyre*

Katie Kapurch

> *I cried and curled up in my bed. I was so sad I didnt come out of my room all weekend. Then when I went back to school my friends said they did the same the thing. After I got over the shock I read on and cried when Bella saved him. I want to see new moon throught* (sic) *his POV* (team_Edward_4_ever, "I cried" on *TwilightTeens.com*)[1]

Responding to Stephenie Meyer's *New Moon* (2006) in an online discussion forum for *Twilight* fans, team_edward_4_ever confides the personal and affective reactions associated with her reading experience of the second novel in Meyer's saga. Another fan, manuela, agrees: "yeah, new moon is a very sad book. whenever Bella thought of the holes edward left in her, I felt so sad! and I remember this one paragraph after edward left in which Bella said something like : time passes, every aching second, even for me. I cried :/ haha."[2] These two preliminary responses on the thread "I cried" are followed by thirty more fan comments that detail emotional reactions to—and pleasure in reading about—the traumatic separation of first-person narrator Bella Swan from the perpetually seventeen-year-old Edward Cullen, a vampire whose moral convictions prohibit him from drinking human blood.

Such fan reactions demonstrate how melodramatic conventions, particularly occasions of exaggerated suffering prior to a joyful reunion, speak to contemporary readers, in this case girls participating in an online fansite.[3] The young adult novels of Meyer's *Twilight Saga* are indeed brimming with melodramatic moments that motivate affective reading experiences. In the second novel, *New Moon* (2006), the characters' high school romance initiated in *Twilight* (2005) is temporarily thwarted when Edward, driven by guilt over Bella's safety, insti-

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gates a break-up early in the book. The remaining three hundred-plus pages depict Bella's depression and struggle to live without Edward. However, when she rescues the vampire from a suicide attempt, the young lovers reunite at the novel's end. *Eclipse* (2007) and *Breaking Dawn* (2008) continue the tale of Bella and Edward's romantic involvement, which eventually culminates in their marriage, a vampire-human hybrid child, and Bella's conversion to vampirism—a happily-ever-after ending consistent with the melodramatic mode.[4]

Intriguingly, *Twilight* fan responses are comparable to reader sympathy with another pair of fictional lovers: first-person narrator Jane Eyre and the secretive, brooding Edward Rochester, who, like Edward Cullen, also happens to be ridden with guilt and in need of salvation only the heroine can supply. Sandra M. Gilbert offers a central insight into the appeal of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), explaining how the novel challenged Victorian literary norms in part through the intensity of characters' expressive discourse, another tenet of melodrama:

> Unlike most of her predecessors, too, [Brontë] endowed her main characters—hero as well as heroine—with overwhelmingly powerful passions that aren't always rational and often can't be articulated in ordinary language. This sense of unspeakable depth or fiery interiority imbues both Rochester and Jane with a kind of mystery that has always been charismatic to readers. (357)

Accounting for *Jane Eyre*'s sustained popularity, Gilbert identifies the main characters' passionate feelings as part of the reason for female readers' continued captivation with Brontë's text (357). One cannot deny the phenomenal (and global) popularity of Meyer's series for contemporary readers, particularly (though not limited to) Western girls and adult women,[5] who may be compelled by textual qualities that mirror those in *Jane Eyre*.

While the *Twilight* and *Jane Eyre* readerships are not identical and cannot be regarded as one homogenous group, awareness of their sympathetic and empathetic reactions permits us to consider both texts through the framework of melodrama. As works characterized not only by similar heroines, heroes, and romantic plots, Brontë's and Meyer's novels share a melodramatic reader response. An exploration of melodrama's significance in these female coming-of-age stories, then, yields insight into the important relationship between *Jane Eyre* and the *Twilight Saga*—while offering some justification for the latter's appeal—and ultimately works to invigorate scholarly appreciation for melodramatic impulses in contemporary young adult fiction.

Although scholarship in the latter part of the twentieth century—especially feminist literary and media criticism[6]—worked to recuperate the study of melodrama,[7] these reclamation efforts failed to make a significant impact on scholarship addressing children's and adolescent literature, especially contemporary young adult fiction.[8] Holly Virginia Blackford does offer one recent reading of melodrama's function in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a novel whose narrator retrospectively recounts her experiences as a child. Blackford draws on

an earlier text, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in order to explicate the conventions of melodrama in Harper Lee's mid-twentieth-century novel: "By updating Uncle Tom melodrama, Lee taps into a thriving American literary tradition to which readers have been conditioned to react: they must not only think about but also feel the outrage of persecuting innocence" (*Mockingbird* 90).[9] Blackford's examination thus demonstrates how theorizing the melodramatic mode in more recent texts often requires analyses that acknowledge and appreciate its nineteenth-century legacy.[10]

Even with studies like Blackford's, there exists an absence of scholarly treatment of melodrama in texts about and for youth—particularly adolescent literature—in spite of its profound visibility today. Nevertheless, recognizing and naming the formal characteristics of melodrama, without fear of its historically pejorative connotations, offers critics addressing young adult literature a tool for advancing interpretations of political, social, and cultural messages ascertainable only through that mode.[11] In the 1995 preface to his important and continuously cited study of melodrama, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (1976), Peter Brooks articulates the capabilities of melodrama: "the melodramatic mode no longer needs to be approached in the mode of apology. We know about its limitations, its easier effects, and its more inauthentic thrills, but we have also learned that it is an exceptionally supple and adaptable mode that can do things other genres and modes can't" (xii). While the poignant validation of life's trivialities has always been part of the appeal of melodrama on both page and stage (Brooks; Booth), these are the very moments to which many modern readers, especially female youth, are still drawn, but for which they often are still derided by critics.[12] Accordingly, appreciating melodramatic moments in young adult fiction might help to further a regard for affective responses cited by readers, validating the seriousness of coming-of-age experiences.

Theorizing the melodramatic impulse in young adult literature, then, not only offers scholarship another lens through which to view texts but also works toward the project of recognizing the emotional lives and cultural preferences of youth. Given this perspective on melodrama, especially its redeeming potential for the study of young adult literature, my goals in this article are twofold. First, after a general consideration that supports the coupling of *Jane Eyre* and the *Twilight Saga* through their coming-of-age narrators' interiority, a side-by-side analysis of the literary works reveals how much the contemporary vampire romance owes to its Victorian predecessor. In discussing the *Twilight Saga*, the presence of melodramatic conventions so popular among nineteenth-century audiences means that I draw heavily on two scholars: Brooks, who recuperates the mode through taking seriously the appeal of excessive, black-and-white melodramatic tendencies of artists like Honoré de Balzac and Henry James; and Michael Booth, whose *Hiss the Villain* (1964) offers an exploration of nineteenth-century English and American stage melodramas. Certainly, the study of melodrama exploded following Brooks's and Booth's initial contributions, expanding to encompass nineteenth-century Victorian discourses as well

as twentieth-century film and popular culture, and the field has been experiencing renewed scholarly interest over the past three decades. Returning to the foundational scholarship assists in defining and identifying key characteristics of melodrama with the purpose of facilitating a conversation about the mode in the study of children's and adolescent literature.

I highlight the following shared features of melodrama—overall structure and narrative devices like expression, dreams, and suffering[13]—in order to explain the saga's current appeal as well as to argue for the potency of the melodramatic mode for young readers.[14] While structured on the premise of these formal connections, in my analysis I recognize shades of difference within these shared melodramatic moments in order to point out particularities of melodrama in young adult fiction today. Outlining the characteristics of melodrama in these two landmark female coming-of-age stories permits appreciation of the form and function of melodrama as a redemptive category for the study of young adult literature.

Preliminary Brontë Connections: Coming-of-Age Interiority

Bella's worn copy of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* haunts the action of *Eclipse*, the third installment of the saga; the nineteenth-century novel both becomes a point of discussion between characters and parallels Bella's interior conflict when she is forced to choose between Edward, the vampire, and his rival Jacob, a werewolf. Nevertheless, while *Eclipse* explicitly acknowledges *Wuthering Heights*, the influence of another Brontë's work, Charlotte's *Jane Eyre,* also pervades the saga. In an interview recalling her artistic inspirations, Meyer acknowledges *Jane Eyre*'s impact: "I read it when I was nine . . . and I've read it literally hundreds of times. I do think that there are elements of Edward in Edward Rochester and elements of Bella in Jane. Jane was someone I was close to as a child—we were good friends! I think in some ways she was more real to me than any other fictional heroine" (Valby).[15]

Even without knowledge of the author's preferred childhood reading, a reader can recognize obvious similarities between *Jane Eyre* and Meyer's novels. Jane's and Bella's growing self-consciousness align their stories more accurately with the particularly female coming-of-age story. In *The Voyage In*, Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland distinguish the female bildungsroman from the male prototype: "Novels of female development, by contrast, typically substitute inner concentration for active accommodation, rebellion, or withdrawal" (8). Jane's and Bella's self-doubts characterize much of their narrations, and are often directed at questioning their potential for their respective Edwards' love. For example, when Jane (mistakenly) perceives Rochester's romantic affection for the beautiful and cunning Blanche Ingram, she commands herself to render portraits of Blanche and herself with precise attention to detail, and to title her own, "Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain" (161). Just as Jane peers into her glass and sees a plain mis-

fit, at the beginning of *Twilight* Bella gazes into her own mirror and reflects, "physically, I'd never fit in anywhere" (10). Thus, Jane's and Bella's insecurities speak to a perceived otherness that parallels the overt monstrosity of their love interests. These counterpoints not only explain the heroines' sympathy for and points of connection with these men, but may also explain why the texts hold such appeal for readers who sympathize with these characters.

Jane and Bella are cognizant, to varying degrees, of their presentation of psychological distress, another aspect of the interior functions of melodrama in Brontë's and Meyer's texts. Jane continually positions her readership to understand her motivations through addresses to "Reader." While Bella does not directly name and call forth the "Reader" as Jane does, she does seem conscious of how her perceived weakness and the extremism of emotional turmoil might be judged by an audience. In her analysis of Bella's narrative through the myth of Persephone, Blackford addresses Bella's presentation of her interiority through the *Twilight*–*Wuthering Heights* relationship: "Catherine's writing in *Wuthering Heights* inscribes her voice into the margins of a male text and Lockwood's consciousness, a theme that becomes paramount in Bella's 'twilight' story. She is the narrator for most of the series and her voice becomes her compensatory agency in the struggle against her inner feelings of monstrosity and insecurity" (*Myth* 12). Bella's interior conflict is thus largely a struggle to overcome her own freakish humanity—a correlation of which Bella is aware as she reads *Wuthering Heights* and later compares her choices with Cathy's, whom Bella acknowledges is "a monster" (*Eclipse* 610).

As first-person narrators offering intensely interior perspectives, Jane and Bella frequently highlight their sexual attraction to their respective Edwards; this attraction is another way melodrama characterizes their ongoing inner turmoil. Gilbert explains Brontë's novel's lasting appeal through its erotic undercurrent, which is mitigated by Jane's hunger for equality (357).[16] That tension mirrors Bella's ardent devotion to, sensual admiration of, and committed yearning to be on equal footing (as a vampire) with her undead love interest.[17] In addition, just as Jane and Bella share specific qualities, Edward Rochester and Edward Cullen are strikingly similar as Byronic heroes: they are temperamental, moody, and plagued by nearly debilitating secrets.[18] Secrecy is both an opportunity for melodramatic expression and an impetus for Jane and Bella's anxiety, made further apparent through melodramatic structure and narrative devices.

Melodramatic Structure: Vampires and Violations of Virtue

The plots of both texts adhere structurally to conventions of melodrama, particularly as they articulate dreams and suffering. According to Brooks, who addresses melodrama's connection to the bildungsroman and romance, "In the typical case, . . . melodramatic structure moves from presentation of virtue-as-innocence to the introduction of menace or obstacle, which places virtue in a

situation of extreme peril" (31). Brooks's observation is especially applicable to the beginning of Brontë's novel, which presents Jane's memory of childhood desolation as an orphan living in the home of the Reeds, her unwelcoming and unkind aunt and cousins. The first chapter depicts cousin-John's violation of Jane's reading space, his subsequent verbal and physical abuse, and what Jane terms "unjust!" (15): her punishment, banishment to the presumably haunted "red-room" (11).

The fact that Jane is presented as an "innocent," first enclosed within a secure space, aligns the physical setting of her introduction to the reader with melodrama. As Brooks reveals, "Remarkably prevalent is the setting of the enclosed garden, the space of innocence, surrounded by walls . . . into this space, a villain, the troubler of innocence, will come to insinuate himself" (Brooks 29). Accordingly, Jane describes her sanctuary, an escape from her unloving family: "Folds of scarlet drapery shut in my view to the right hand; to the left were the clear panes of glass, protecting, but not separating me from the drear November day. . . . With Bewick on my knee, I was then happy: happy at least in my way. I feared nothing but interruption, and that came too soon. The breakfast room door opened" (8–9). John discovers Jane's private space and attacks her verbally before literally striking her hard enough to draw blood with the very book, *Bewick's History of British Birds*, in which she had sought refuge. Both in his literal movement into Jane's space and his bullying actions, John becomes a villain—according to Jane, a "Wicked and cruel boy!" (11)—against whom her virtue is brought into relief.

As in *Jane Eyre*, throughout Meyer's saga evil insinuates itself into secure spaces, especially as threats to the physical safety of Bella, herself a kind of innocent. The first chapter of *Twilight*, however, does not depict disruptive circumstances in the stereotypical way readers might expect; a male family member is not responsible for Bella's oppression. *Twilight* opens as Bella moves to Forks to live with her father, Charlie, because her mother has married Phil, a minor-league baseball player who frequently travels. Yet Phil is not an evil stepfather—Bella describes him as "fine" (48), a depiction that perhaps disrupts clichéd portrayals of step-parents. Furthermore, despite Bella's anxiety about entering a new high school in a small community, she is generally welcomed and the students, especially the boys, are rather fascinated by her. Interestingly, like Jane, Bella does use reading as an escape from being the center of attention, an awkward social position for the protagonist; Bella's reading, however, occurs in open spaces like her backyard or the school parking lot. The lack of an obvious physical encapsulation does not necessarily preclude an interpretation of Bella's reading as an enclosure consistent with melodrama; rather, such a depiction suggests that melodramatic impulses in contemporary young adult fiction may also function in symbolic, interior ways. Bella certainly finds refuge in the comfort of books frequently read, as evidenced by her "dog-eared" copy of *Wuthering Heights* (*Eclipse* 610).

As in *Jane Eyre*, which depicts John Reed's intrusion in its opening pages, the preface of *Twilight* provides the reader with a taste of the villain. The first paragraphs introduce the sinister vampire James, who will eventually materialize in the last quarter of the novel: "I stared without breathing across the long room, into the dark eyes of the hunter. . . . Surely it was a good way to die, in the place of someone else, someone I loved. . . . The hunter smiled in a friendly way as he sauntered forward to kill me" (1). This preface clearly endows Bella with an innocent's (even a martyr's) virtue, consistent with the heroine of a melodrama (Brooks 29), also explained by Booth: "The heroine comes in for more persecution than the hero, especially as possession of her is frequently the villain's main object" (10). Thus, just as John Reed encroaches upon and then abuses Jane, James also enacts similar violations when he appears in *Twilight*.

Attended by his human blood–drinking vampire companions, Victoria and Laurent, James first interrupts the Cullens' friendly game of vampire-baseball, a sport Edward justifies as "the American pastime" when Bella wonders why vampires would enjoy such an activity (*Twilight* 347). The playful intimacy of the patriotic pursuit is heightened because this particular occasion is Bella's first time, as Edward's girlfriend, witnessing the Cullen family game. James's intrusion into the secluded field, accompanied by his realization that Bella is a human—one whom Edward and the Cullens are committed to protecting—thus ruins the intimate experience, and moreover inspires his pursuit of Bella in the remaining pages of the novel. Despite the Cullens' efforts to secure her safety, James tricks Bella into meeting him alone at her childhood ballet studio under the false pretense that he has kidnapped her mother (another spatial violation of virtue).[19] James's wickedness as a melodramatic villain is solidified when he physically attacks Bella, delivering a potentially fatal bite to her arm before Edward arrives just in time; the Cullens execute James as Edward sucks out the venom that could facilitate Bella's vampiric conversion.[20]

While villainy functions as a kind of "motor" for the plot (Brooks 34), the melodrama's conclusion typically ends not only in resolution, but more importantly, with an ending that audiences would also perceive as a "happy" one (Booth 9). As Brooks concludes, the melodramatic narrative "ends with public recognition of where virtue and evil reside, and the eradication of one as the reward of the other" (32). The final resolution offered by Brontë's *Jane Eyre* especially conforms to the melodramatic structure, since evil is expunged through the death of Bertha, Rochester's first wife and the obstacle to his legal marriage to Jane. Viewing his first marriage as the product of manipulation and deceit (305), Rochester's description casts Bertha as a drunken, philandering, and verbally abusive woman before her eventual descent into madness.[21] Bertha's wicked lunacy necessitates her confinement to the attic, and Rochester confesses: "Bertha Mason,—the true daughter of an infamous mother,—dragged me through all hideous and degrading agonies which must attend a man bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste" (306). Furthermore, while Jane, then completely unaware of Bertha's existence, is living at Thorn-

field, Bertha torches Rochester's bed while he sleeps, savagely attacks her own brother with her teeth, and enters Jane's room at night to destroy her wedding veil. Recounting the latter episode to Rochester, Jane reveals that Bertha (whom Jane believes to be the product of her own dream) is reminiscent "Of the foul German spectre—the Vampyre" (284). Thus, descriptions of Bertha in Jane's narration not only serve to highlight the madwoman's villainy, but also her lack of humanity: a quality consistent with the melodramatic villain (Booth 10), in addition to the association of melodrama with the Gothic (Brooks).[22]

While Bertha's existence is thus an obstacle to Jane and Rochester's future happiness, Rochester's own attempt to marry Jane while Bertha lives and his efforts to entice her to join him in France as his "wife" represent additional threats to her virtue (303). Jane refuses him, thereby solidifying her moral stance: "I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad—as I am now. Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour" (317). Bertha's ultimate death thus both eliminates the tempting prospect of intimacy outside of an authorized marriage and facilitates Jane and Rochester's final reunion and legal marriage at the end of the novel.

As the vampiric Bertha's death leads to resolution and a "happy" ending in *Jane Eyre*, the vampire James's demise in *Twilight* not only reunites Bella and Edward, but also clearly establishes where good and evil reside for Meyer's characters, human and vampire alike. Edward is undoubtedly the hero at the end of *Twilight*; he saves Bella from James's grip, musters the strength to remove the toxic venom from her blood without sucking her dry, and promises to remain with Bella for as long as is "best" (479). Nevertheless, *Twilight*'s preface actually does more than foreshadow the conflict with James. Such an introduction adds suspense, temporarily suspending the certainty of the hunter's identity. Since James is not initially named, when the reader is subsequently introduced to Edward, who warns Bella to "avoid" him (89) since he might be "the bad guy" (92), the preface then inspires some preliminary questions: Could Edward be the hunter? Will Edward, who lusts insatiably for Bella's blood, lose control and give in to his thirst, wounding or killing her?[23] At the end of *Twilight*, Bella, desiring perpetual youth with Edward, offers her neck to the vampire; despite the temptation this would have posed for him at the beginning of the novel when he first detected her intoxicating scent, Edward is now in perfect control as he calmly denies Bella the change she so desires.

Consequently, Edward's role as composed protector solidifies, and Meyer thus establishes what constitutes good (restraint) and bad (indulgence) in the context of vampire morality—a model she implicitly extends to govern adolescent sexual experiences. These moral implications are not necessarily surprising given the saga's melodramatic impulses; as Brooks suggests, "Morality is ultimately in the nature of affect, and strong emotion is in the realm of morality: for good and evil are moral feelings" (54). If Edward is charged with control,

then spikes in romantic passion must be carefully monitored or eliminated altogether.[24] Therefore, when Edward's heroics are juxtaposed against James's villainy at the end of *Twilight*, Meyer clearly delineates good and evil, an opposition that is a persistent function of the melodramatic mode (Brooks 32).

Expression: Edward's Secret as Melodramatic Opportunity

One of the hallmarks of melodrama is exaggerated expression, especially through the mode of revelation, which is clearly present in both *Jane Eyre* and the *Twilight Saga*. According to Brooks, "The desire to express all seems a fundamental characteristic of the melodramatic mode. Nothing is spared because nothing is left unsaid; the characters stand on stage and utter the unspeakable, give voice to their deepest feelings, dramatize through their heightened and polarized words and gestures the whole lesson of their relationship" (4). Interestingly, Rochester's secret, his marriage to and clandestine lodging of Bertha, functions as an initial impediment to his confiding completely in Jane. Once Jane and Rochester's wedding is interrupted and the secret is wholly apparent, however, he releases an avalanche of expressive discourse—from parading the violent Bertha into public view, to later private revelations to Jane about his past. Rochester certainly "utter[s] the unspeakable" (Brooks 4), detailing how his and Bertha's families conspired to secure the match, Bertha's appalling behavior pre- and post-marriage, and the subsequent mistresses with whom he associated (Brontë 304–12). In keeping with Brooks's definition, a reader might imagine Rochester onstage (complete with backdrops and furniture to resemble a library) during the disclosure, pouring out memories and emotions monologue-style while Jane remains relatively silent.

In addition to divulging long-ago recollections, Rochester uses the opportunity in the library to expose exhaustively how his fascination with and attraction to Jane evolved, and the extent to which he views her as a necessity in his life (312–18). Jane resolves to leave, but Rochester pleads, "All happiness will be torn away with you. What then is left? For a wife I have but a maniac up-stairs: as well might you refer me to some corpse in yonder churchyard. What shall I do, Jane?" (316). As a result, while Rochester's furtiveness drives much of the suspense of the novel, the outed secret enables melodrama's prominent feature, expression.

Just as Edward Rochester's secret functions as an opportunity for emotional confession, so does Edward Cullen's. Prior to the conflict with James, which only comprises the last quarter of *Twilight*, Bella worries about Edward's mysterious behavior, which is largely due his thirst for and conflicted feelings about her. Edward's cryptic behavior creates much of the tension in the book, just as Rochester's mysterious behavior does in *Jane Eyre*. However, two important distinctions should be made. First, Bella suspects Edward's vampirism before his own confession. Perhaps she demonstrates more agency as a heroine in this particular circumstance than does Jane; although she recognizes strange occurrences at Thornfield (like Bertha's nighttime visit to destroy the wedding

veil), Jane does not, like Bella, actively investigate and interrogate her own suspicions. On the day of her wedding, Jane is completely shocked to discover Rochester's attempt at bigamy.

Another distinction between the representations of revelation in *Jane Eyre* and *Twilight* relates to the timeframe of Edward Cullen's disclosure. When Edward does begin to confide in Bella, he, unlike Rochester, does not disclose all of his secrets at once in one long sitting; such a difference may speak to the lessened influence of stage theatrics in contemporary fiction.[25] For example, Edward reveals details relating to his telepathic condition (which preclude the reading of Bella's mind) and his abstention from human blood over the course of several chapters. The chapter "Confessions" contains his deepest revelation—that the smell of Bella's blood is so intoxicating that he continually fights the urge to kill her. Just as Jane remains relatively silent during Rochester's shocking and expressive discourse, Bella quietly and calmly listens, speaking only to encourage Edward's further disclosure. The vampire, wracked with emotion, provides insight into his supernatural condition that would understandably inspire fear in a human. Notably, he reveals, "Bella, I couldn't live with myself if I ever hurt you. You don't know how it's tortured me. . . . The thought of you, still, white, cold, to never see you blush scarlet again. . . . [I]t would be unendurable. . . . You are the most important thing to me ever" (273). This example draws a further correlation to *Jane Eyre* in the context of melodrama; despite their relative impropriety, Rochester's and Edward's expressive revelations, full of sensational and exaggerated hyperbole, also reveal their bodily attraction to and fascination with Jane and Bella.

Such melodramatic moments of exaggerated expression consequently deepen both female characters' romantic feelings while alleviating some of their characteristic self-doubt. As soon as Rochester expresses his regret, but prior to his lengthy explanation, Jane reveals, "Reader!—I forgave him in that moment, and on the spot. There was such deep remorse in his eye, such true pity in his tone, such manly energy in his manner; and besides there was such unchanged love in his whole look and mien—I forgave him all: yet not in words, not outwardly; only at my heart's core" (298). Likewise, after Edward confirms her suspicions about his vampiric nature, Bella reveals, "About three things I was absolutely positive. First, Edward was a vampire. Second, there was part of him—and I didn't know how potent that part might be—that thirsted for my blood. And third, I was unconditionally and irrevocably in love with him" (*Twilight* 195).

Jane does exhibit significant agency when she insists upon following her ethical and moral convictions by refusing to stay with Rochester as his mistress. Likewise, Bella also follows her convictions when she refuses to leave Edward, who she believes is not "a monster" as he suspects (187), and this commitment to her principles evokes melodramatic convention. For Bella, staying with the vampire proves her steadfast confidence. Thus, within the context of each novel's framework, the heroine's choices are consistent with melodramatic morality,

in which right and wrong are clearly delineated as recognizable options. This insight has important implications not only for interpreting Bella's agency in the context of seemingly antifeminist values, but also for understanding other contemporary young adult works in which extreme choices are contextualized in outwardly limited frameworks.

Nightmarish Dreams: Melodramatic Coming-of-Age Anxiety

Not surprisingly, as Jane and Bella are both characters consumed with habitual self-doubt and self-consciousness, their anxieties are also reflected in melodramatic terms through dreams, specifically nightmares. Melodrama is "preoccupied with nightmare states, with claustration and thwarted escape, with innocence buried alive and unable to voice its claim to recognition" (Brooks 20). Thus, in many ways, the nightmare as melodramatic moment validates and elucidates truth; dream states reflect sincere human experiences. Brontë's "pre-Freudian" use of dreams articulates Jane's tacit anxieties and fears about marriage and motherhood (Berg 9).

Before Jane and Rochester's marriage ceremony, she tells him about one of her most troublesome dreams in melodramatic and nightmarish language that certainly deviates from the straightforward discourse that typically characterizes her communication. Not only does Jane's dream anticipate the impediment to their marriage—"some barrier dividing us" (281)—she also foresees her self-imposed expulsion from Thornfield:

> "I was following the windings of an unknown road; total obscurity environed me; rain pelted me; I was burdened with the charge of a little child: a very small creature, too young and feeble to walk, and which shivered in my cold arms, wailed piteously in my ear. I thought, sir, that you were on the road a long way before me; and I strained every nerve to overtake you and made effort to utter your name and entreat you to stop—but my movements were fettered; and my voice still died away inarticulate, while you, I felt, withdrew farther and farther every moment." (281)

Consistent with the melodramatic convention of the loss of communicative function as obstacle, Jane's dream depicts her inability to hear (due to the screams of the baby) and speak (in order to attract Rochester's attention). Certainly, the child in Jane's dream could represent her own anxiety as she approaches her wedding night and the possibility of motherhood. The child, however, also speaks to the innocence-as-virtue function of melodrama; perhaps the baby symbolizes an ungovernable part of Jane, who, striving to uphold her moral convictions, must mother herself through the trial of leaving Rochester.

Bella's anxieties are also manifest in dreams of a baby in peril at the beginning of the last novel of Meyer's saga, *Breaking Dawn*. These dreams foreshadow the vampire-human baby to whom she eventually gives birth.[26] Nevertheless, Bella's angst is apparent in dreams earlier in the series. *New Moon*, for instance, foregrounds the concept of nightmarish dreams in both its preface and in the

first chapter's opening line, "I was ninety-nine point nine percent sure I was dreaming" (3). Bella's dream begins in an idyllic meadow setting, the secret spot in which she and Edward share the intimate revelations in *Twilight*. Although she believes she is introducing her grandmother to Edward, Bella soon realizes her mistake:

> With a dizzying jolt, my dream abruptly became a nightmare. There was no Gran. That was me. Me in the mirror. Me—ancient, creased, and withered. Edward stood beside me, casting no reflection, excruciatingly lovely and forever seventeen. He pressed his icy, perfect lips against my wasted cheek. (4)

As Meyer's second novel begins with Bella's eighteenth birthday, this dream clearly articulates her anxiety about aging past Edward's perpetually seventeen-year-old state.

Consistent with the melodramatic impulse evident in *Jane Eyre*, Bella's inability to recognize herself speaks to her sense of being trapped by her own humanity. Since Edward refuses to change Bella into a vampire at the end of *Twilight*, her dream represents the silencing she feels in relation to that choice. The nightmare also overtly reflects Bella's self-consciousness and fear about Edward continuing to love her as she ages, and her anxiety over what she perceives as an unequal match between absolutes: Edward's vampiric splendor in looks and strength versus her ordinary human frailty. In this case, Bella, not Edward, is the monster; while Bella has always acknowledged what she perceives as awkward clumsiness, here her aged human body becomes monstrous.

Likely a point of identification for many readers, the vampire's immortality places the very real prospect of aging in perspective; Bella's desire to turn vampire so she cannot age past Edward's age, seventeen, might be viewed as a metaphorical expression of a fear of the unknown presented by the aging process. This fear may, however, also speak to the precarious social capital that the dominant culture grants to youth. As Roberta Seelinger Trites notes, adolescents "occupy an uncomfortable liminal space in America," since that society at once privileges the young through the exaltation of youthful beauty and adolescents' consumer potential while diminishing adolescent agency, especially through the "objectification of the teenage body" (xi). Like other contemporary young adult fantasy fiction so popular today, the *Twilight Saga*'s depiction of its protagonist's real and nearly debilitating anxiety about aging is a melodramatic impulse that bears serious consideration. Bella's nightmares poignantly accentuate the anxiety produced by a youth and beauty–obsessed culture; the extremism of melodramatic conventions may thus function as broader social critique.

Melodramatic (Separate) Suffering and Excessive Pain

Rochester's and Edward's expressive discourses, which regularly highlight their suffering, bring forth a consideration of this feature as another characteristic

of the melodramatic mode. While Rochester's exposure of his secret aligns *Jane Eyre* with melodrama, so, too, does the suffering experienced by both Jane and Rochester, especially during the latter part of the novel. Booth asserts that "One of the rules is that the hero and heroine must suffer distress, persecution, and separation, and that their suffering must continue unabated till a few moments before the final curtain, when they emerge happy and united" (10). Certainly, throughout the novel Jane has suffered in various measures of intensity, particularly as a child at the hands of the Reeds and when Helen dies. Later, at the beginning of her Thornfield stay, she is frequently frustrated by Rochester's contradictory actions: "He was moody, too; unaccountably so: I more than once, when sent for to read to him, found him sitting in his library alone, with his head bent on his folded arms; and, when he looked up, a morose malignant scowl, blackened his features" (146). Her anxiety about Rochester's mixed signals culminates in a dismissal of her worthiness through self-abuse and chastisement when she learns of a Rochester's rumored interest in another woman: "That a greater fool than Jane Eyre had never breathed the breath of life: that a more fantastic idiot had never surfeited herself on sweet lies, and swallowed poison as if it were nectar" (160). The distress that thus encumbers Jane speaks to a type of interior melodrama since, as a first-person narrator, she negotiates this suffering within the setting of her own psyche.

Although Rochester reveals his affection for Jane through a marriage proposal, thus temporarily allaying her anguish, the couple is doomed to commence suffering for many of the remaining pages of the novel. In accordance with Booth's observation, both Jane and Rochester suffer separately once Jane resolves to leave Thornfield after the thwarted wedding and aforementioned library scene. She wanders the moors for days and is physically and mentally exhausted once she reaches a town, whose inhabitants rebuke her meager requests for morsels of bread. Although Jane recovers through the benevolent assistance of a family (who turn out to be another set of cousins), the acquisition of a teaching position, and later a substantial inheritance, she still yearns for Rochester, who actually anticipates the misery that will ensue: "remember, you leave me here in anguish. Go up to your own room; think over all I have said, and, Jane, cast a glance at my sufferings—think of me" (318). In Jane's absence, Rochester suffers a dramatic plentitude of loss; Bertha sets fire to Thornfield, and during the destructive blaze his unsuccessful efforts to save her result in his loss of a hand as well as his vision.

Throughout the *Twilight Saga*, Bella and Edward also experience periods of separate and parallel suffering prior to happy reunions at the conclusions of each of the four novels. Perhaps the most poignant representation of suffering, referenced by the *Twilight*-fan responses in the introduction of this paper, occurs when Edward leaves Bella at the beginning of *New Moon*. Intriguingly, both Jane and Bella enclose themselves within their bedrooms and then describe the crush of grief in water and burial imagery. When she learns that Rochester is already married, Jane confesses: "My eyes were covered and closed: eddying

darkness seemed to swim round me . . . I lay faint; longing to be dead. . . . That bitter hour cannot be described: in truth, 'the waters came into my soul; I sank in deep mire: I felt no standing; I came into deep waters; the floods overflowed me'" (296). Bella's narration presents her sorrow with similarly crushing and melodramatic exaggerated diction that also longs for a loss of consciousness: "I hoped that I was fainting, but, to my disappointment, I didn't lose consciousness. The waves of pain that had only lapped at me before now reared high up and washed over my head, pulling me under. I did not resurface" (84). These selections are so similar that one wonders if Meyer intentionally constructed her text with *Jane Eyre* in mind.

Just as Jane's expressive passage appears at the end of volume two, Bella's descent into grief marks a temporary end to her narration, since the text of the following four pages only includes the individual names of months (October through January) to signify her complete loss of voice. Bella's silence is furthermore characteristic of the melodrama, which is marked by expression, as Brooks explains: "Mutes correspond first of all to a repeated use of extreme physical conditions to represent extreme moral and emotional conditions" (57). Additionally, the literal space structurally produced through the narratives provides an exaggerated pause for readers to grieve with the heroines (as team_edward_4_ever and manuela indicate in relation to Bella) before they resurface to resume narration.

While Bella suffers at home in Forks and readers are privy only to her experiences throughout *New Moon*, they later learn that Edward grieves abroad and that his absence was inspired by his moral convictions about upholding Bella's soul-endowed humanity; the moral grounds resulting in Edward's disappearance from Forks indeed parallel the reasons for Jane's departure from Thornfield.[27] His devotion to Bella is so profound that when he learns of a funeral occurring in Forks (as in a classic *Romeo and Juliet* scenario, to which the novel makes explicit reference), he mistakenly believes that Bella is dead. In an extreme move indicative of the melodrama, he attempts to end his own life by exposing his supernaturally sparkly skin in public in order to provoke the Volturi, an evil coven of Italian vampires, to kill him. Although Bella does arrive in time to thwart Edward's full revelation, he still incurs the wrath of the Volturi, who torture him before releasing Edward, Bella, and Edward's sister, Alice.

In both *Jane Eyre* and the *Twilight Saga*, the pattern of separate suffering prior to a happily-ever-after does eventually culminate in definite closure, especially through the presentation of romantic, heterosexual coupling. While Kathryn Kane's critique has questioned the ideological implications of such pairings, the final coupling of Bella and Edward, in addition to the pairing of their daughter Renesmee (a vampire-human hybrid child) with Jacob (a teen werewolf), squarely locates the saga's final curtain within the melodramatic mode. While the latter pairing might seem disconcerting given Renesmee and Jacob's age difference, the narrative closure it grants is indeed consistent with

melodramatic impulses present in the endings of nineteenth-century works. Not only does *Jane Eyre* conclude with a description of Jane's marital bliss as buoyed by the domestic contentment of her female cousins, but other literary works like *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and Mrs. Henry Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) also provide closure largely through final images of seemingly happy couples. Expecting this kind of happy ending is not simply a point of appeal for many of the fangirls posting to *Twilight Teens*' forum. These readers' responses indicate that their real, personal reactions (such as crying or physically hurting along with Bella's heartbreak in *New Moon*) were assuaged primarily by the very promise of such a conclusion, which sustained their continued engagement with the saga.

Once cataloged, the suffering experienced by Jane and Rochester and Edward and Bella prior to their happy reunions might be described as excessive. Yet just as suffering is necessary for the happy resolution offered by the melodrama, so, too, is excess, which Brooks relates to the meaningful way in which melodrama speaks to the ordinary and the contemporary: "those melodramas that matter most to us convince us that the dramaturgy of excess and overstatement corresponds to and evokes confrontations and choices that are of heightened importance, because in them we put our lives—however trivial and constricted—on the line" (ix). Thus, the extensive and excessive suffering endured prior to the couples' respective final reunions not only serves to place their subsequent happiness in perspective, but also functions as a major point of appeal for popular audiences of melodrama.

Conclusion: Directions for Future Research on Melodrama and Young Adult Fiction

Referring to nineteenth-century audiences, Booth justifies melodrama's attractiveness: "The popularity of melodrama is not difficult to understand. Presenting its public with a world of fulfilled dreams in contrast to a miserable monotonous reality in which virtue did not necessarily prosper, nor villainy suffer, melodrama nullified distress and danger by directing them to the ultimate happy ending" (40). Perhaps the same could be said for today's readers of the *Twilight Saga* and other contemporary young adult literary works marked by melodramatic impulses; melodramatic conventions, such as a plot driven by villainy in order to ultimately delineate good and evil, and narrative devices like expression, dreams, and suffering, are perhaps predictable, yet comforting. What are the ideological implications of such reliable melodramatic impulses in addition to the legacy of Victorian novels in contemporary young adult fiction? My analysis, which sets out the formal characteristics of melodrama through a comparison of Brontë's and Meyer's novels in order to invigorate interest in the scholarly recognition of melodrama in adolescent literature, only scratches the surface of this important question.

Recognizing contemporary melodrama's discursive potential with an eye for its Victorian roots and its particular historical context falls in line with

more recent scholarship such as Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou's anthology, *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre* (1996); and Elaine Hadley's *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace, 1800–1885* (1995). In both studies, scholars consider the unique exigencies and audiences associated with melodramatic discourses in the nineteenth century. An understanding of melodrama's appeal could thus be more completely achieved through a reception study focusing on readers' responses to the *Twilight Saga.*[28] In addition, researchers could pursue the legacy of Victorian fiction in young adult texts today and explore the function of melodramatic structures in contemporary novels—especially paranormal romances trailing in the wake of the trend Meyer helped inaugurate.

Following an analysis of *Jane Eyre* and the *Twilight Saga* to theorize the melodramatic impulses in young adult literature, one might return to the online fan responses cited in the introduction. These responses corroborate Brooks's validation: "The study of melodrama has come to be an engagement with an inescapable and central form of our cultural lives" (xii). Serious attention to melodramatic moments validates team_edward_4_ever's emotional reaction to *New Moon*; although an adult-oriented culture is often quick to trivialize adolescent suffering (in the context, for example, of a teen relationship's break-up) or angst (especially anxiety about change and growing up), melodrama as a genre confirms the sincere, human feelings that seemingly ordinary circumstances can elicit. For this reason, serious attention should be given to melodramatic moments in young adult literature, for the mode can better explain characters' experiences and popular works' connections to canonical literature. Such considerations also give credence to representation of adolescents in fiction and the very real, affective, and empathetic responses shared by readers.

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Notes

1. *Twilight Teens* is "Your #1 teen source for everything Twilight," according to the Web site's description. The fansite specifically encourages participation by girls in their mid- to late teens; forum moderators are teen girls, and the forum delineates separate

categories for "18 and over" and "Twilight Guys." While *Twilight Teens* is not the only fan Web site dedicated to Meyer's vampire romance, the site is noteworthy not only for its girl-only organization, but also the global interaction displayed: fans are girls from the US and other English-speaking countries such as England and Australia, as well as countries like Norway and Brazil.

2. team_edward_ 4_ever's and manuela's responses are unedited so as to retain the language, character, and voice of their online postings. On the forum, however, their responses do contain accompanying emoticons (e.g., sad faces) and graphics (*Twilight*-themed pictures).

3. American novelist Stephen King has tacitly referenced melodrama, speculating about *Twilight*'s appeal among girl readers in his open dismissal of Meyer. In an interview with *USA Weekend* circulated in US news and entertainment mediums, King offers an arbitrary comparison between Meyer and J. K. Rowling: "The real difference is that Jo Rowling is a terrific writer and Stephenie Meyer can't write worth a darn. She's not very good." King goes on to speculate as to the reasons for *Twilight*'s popularity:

> [I]n the case of Stephenie Meyer, it's very clear that she's writing to a whole generation of girls and opening up kind of a safe joining of love and sex in those books. It's exciting and it's thrilling and it's not particularly threatening because they're not overtly sexual. A lot of the physical side of it is conveyed in things like the vampire will touch her forearm or run a hand over skin, and then she flushes all hot and cold. And for girls, that's a shorthand for all the feelings that they're not ready to deal with yet. ("Exclusive")

While King does not explicitly discuss melodrama, the moments he recalls speak to that mode's qualities, especially in relation to affect. His postulation is troubling for a number of reasons. First, speaking from an unresearched position on behalf of girls, he assumes a limited readership, thereby essentializing girl readers' cultural tastes and their emotional and sexual experiences. Moreover, while some readers may indeed find the melodramatic moments to which he refers appealing, King tacitly diminishes these features by foregrounding his argument in an aesthetic dismissal.

4. My use of the term "mode" instead of "genre" to qualify melodrama in relation to *Jane Eyre* and the *Twilight Saga* is a choice informed by Brooks's and Hadley's respective scholarship. In *Melodramatic Tactics* (1995), Hadley offers an instructive explanation of melodrama and justifies the term "mode" to articulate melodrama's pervasiveness in Victorian culture: "Melodrama's familial narratives of dispersal and reunion, its emphatically visual renderings of bodily torture and criminal conduct, its atmospheric menace and providential plotting, its expressions of highly charged emotion, and its tendency to personify absolutes like good and evil were represented in a wide variety of social settings, not just on the stage" (3). One should note, however, that Hadley sees her historically motivated perspective as varying significantly from Brooks's treatment of melodrama as a psychic mode connected to the individual and the imagination (9).

5. Marketed as a literary series for young adults, the *Twilight Saga* no doubt enjoys a definite girl readership (including younger girls, tweens, and teenagers); however, followers of the series include many adult women, as evidenced through such Web sites as *TwilightMOMS.com* (Behm-Morawitz, et al. 137). Both impressive book sales and the visible online presence of non-US girls and women on fansites corroborate the global appeal of a series that takes place in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. Moreover, the worldwide popularity of the films demonstrates how the *Twilight* texts enjoy a much broader audience (inclusive of males [Barnes]). These diverse interests are

beyond the scope of this article, which is concerned with the appeal of the melodramatic mode as an entry point into textual analysis and works to advance a better appreciation of melodrama in young adult literature. For reception studies of *Twilight* readers, see the recent edited collection, *Bitten by Twilight* (2010), which includes explorations of fan preferences for romance (Behm-Morawitz, et al.), as well as Norway-based *Twilight* fandom (Bore and Williams).

6. Tania Modleski, E. Ann Kaplan, and Christine Gledhill are feminist scholars who have forwarded literary and media studies approaches to the study of melodrama as a genre particular to women's experiences. In addition, such twentieth-century feminist literary critics as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Elaine Showalter, and Ann Cvetkovich have advanced an appreciation for nineteenth-century female-authored, largely female-read novels like *Jane Eyre* (as well as other more overtly sensationalist fiction). The association of stage, literary, and other artistic varieties of nineteenth-century melodrama with the feminine, the sensational, and the "low-brow"—and thus the aesthetically wanting—is well documented (Brooks; Booth; Hadley). According to Cvetkovich's study of Victorian sensation novels and affect, "The 'sensational' became an aesthetically, morally, and politically loaded term used to dismiss both particular kinds of representations and the affective responses they produce" (13).

7. Hadley observes: "Although in the middle decades of this century historians of the theater obligatorily documented the rise and dominance of the nineteenth-century stage, and some more recent literary criticism has studied the translation of its theatrical style into canonical Victorian novels, melodrama has consistently suffered from the low expectations and unacknowledged biases of its critics" (2). Hadley argues for an appreciation of the pervasiveness of the melodramatic "tactics" in Victorian culture, including but not limited to the stage, literature, and rhetoric; such an inclusive perspective provides fertile ground for a study of melodrama in contemporary young adult literature, especially texts so obviously influenced by nineteenth-century British literature.

8. In her important contribution to the study of young adult literature, *Disturbing the Universe*, Roberta Seelinger Trites mentions melodrama only in passing:

> One critic of adolescent literature, Perry Nodelman, dismissively describes characters in adolescent fiction as people who live "ordinary lives, but see them in terms of melodrama ('Robert Cormier' 102)." Nodelman is undoubtedly reacting to the profound seriousness that many of these characters express in their first confusion about social institutions. (3)

While Trites sees Nodelman's reference as diminishing, a revised vision of melodrama is necessary in scholarship addressing adolescent literature.

9. According to Blackford, "Reading *Mockingbird* through [the nineteenth-century novel's] nexus of meaning enables us to more thoroughly understand why a young daughter is the witness to the American romance—to all it excludes and affects. If we view *Mockingbird* through the lens of melodrama, we find that pantomime in the trial overwhelms the literary form of the novel's earlier emphasis on consciousness and irony. Pantomime and spectacle shut down Scout's usually perceptive mind, explaining her increasing sleepiness" (89–90).

10. Just as I have cited *Twilight* fangirls' reactions as inspiration for understanding the textual qualities of the literary series, Blackford's study of melodrama in *Mockingbird* was also initially motivated by the responses of young readers: "I wrote chapter 2 on racial melodrama after analyzing the remarkable way young people voiced their pride at

'figuring out' the trial and believing they had uncovered Tom's innocence" (*Mockingbird* xi). Our similar approaches point to the importance of acknowledging reader affect when it comes to the melodramatic mode.

11. A prime example of the literary establishment's classist disparagement of melodrama is prominent Victorian literary critic George Henry Lewes's published appraisal of *Jane Eyre* in *Fraser's Magazine* (1847). Lewes identified melodrama as Brontë's novel's central weakness: "There are some defects in it—defects which the excellence of the rest only brings into stronger relief. There is, indeed, too much melodrama and improbability, which smack of the circulating-library,—we allude particularly to the mad wife and all that relates to her, and to the wanderings of Jane when she quits Thornfield; yet even those parts are powerfully executed" (85). Even though Lewes derides the seemingly common use of melodrama, he nonetheless still concedes the force of those melodramatic moments. In *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Elizabeth Gaskell reproduces Brontë's written response to Lewes; the correspondence indicates, as Elke Mettinger-Schartmann points out, that mid-nineteenth-century market demands necessitated melodrama:

> You warn me to beware of melodrama, and you exhort me to adhere to the real. When I first began to write . . . I determined to take Nature and Truth as my sole guides . . . I restrained imagination, eschewed romance, repressed excitement. . . . My work . . . being completed, I offered it to a publisher. He said . . . such a work would not sell. I tried six publishers in succession; they all told me it was deficient in "startling incident" and "thrilling excitement[.]" (Qtd. in Mettinger-Schartmann 382)

In the context of Lewes's criticism, Brontë's explanation of her publication endeavors makes clear the cultural stakes; while melodramatic tendencies were critically scorned (and such derision was anticipated), the appeal of melodrama for the reading public was undeniable.

12. Young (female) audiences of melodramatic texts are often undervalued or written off altogether when adult critics diminish the kind of affective responses that go along with melodrama. In the case of *Twilight* fans, Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz observe how US news outlets fixate on masses of girls screaming; these expressive, bodily reactions are reduced to "Victorian era gendered words like 'fever,' 'madness,' 'hysteria,' and 'obsession'" (6). Drawing on foundational research in girls' studies, including that of Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, Click, et al. contend: "Though the derision of the Twilight Saga's success is not altogether surprising, the public commentary repudiates the appeal of narratives, positions girls and women as unexpected and unwelcome media fans, and denies the long and rich history of the relationships female fans have had with media texts and personalities" (6).

13. Because many melodramatic moments appear in Meyer's lengthy novels, this examination will be limited to a few significant examples.

14. Addressing the appeal of what feminist film critic Laura Mulvey calls "feminine" melodrama, which is characterized by a variety of subplots that encourage multiple levels of identificatory practices by the spectator, Tania Modleski asserts, "It is scarcely an accident that this essentially nineteenth-century form continues to appeal strongly to women" (cxv). One may extend Modleski's claim to encompass many of today's young people, especially girls, whose preference for *Twilight* calls for a consideration of the legacy of Victorian melodramatic conventions in contemporary young adult fiction.

15. Interestingly, Meyer's own articulation of appeal signals an empathetic relationship with characters in *Jane Eyre* consistent with what some her own readers report on online forums in relation to *Twilight*.

16. "That *Jane Eyre* introduced audiences to the 'wild declarations' and egalitarian strivings of an unprecedentedly passionate heroine certainly explains why the novel has always had a special appeal for women, who tend to identify—and want to identify—with this compelling narrator's powerful voice" (Gilbert 357). While Gilbert theorizes appeal for *Jane Eyre* readers past and present, a 2010 reception study uses survey and focus-group data to demonstrate the engrossing nature of *Twilight* texts on the basis of romance. Behm-Morawitz, et al.'s study of *Twilight* readers concludes that:

> Although the Twilight series offers fans a range of romantic relationships with which to identify, Twilight directs readers' and viewers' attention to the most arguably traditional and unequal one in the series—the relationship between Edward Cullen and Bella Swan. Indeed the Edward-Bella relationship was the most frequently desired by the adult and teen fans in our study. Our results echo Radway's (1984) findings that romance readers may use the genre as escape to fulfill their need for nurturance, which is relatively absent from their lives. (152)

Nevertheless, the study's results also show that readers who identify with feminist thought "cannot completely immerse themselves in the text or connect with the Edward-Bella relationship because they are too distracted by the conservative gender politics of the series" (152). Certainly, the appeal of *Jane Eyre* and the *Twilight Saga* can be located in part through comprehending the draw of romance and the outlet such a reading experience provides, even when readers are engaged in a resistant reading.

17. An understanding of the complex appeal of romance, specifically for female readers, dovetails with an appreciation of melodramatic impulses in both *Jane Eyre* and the *Twilight* series. Insight into mass-mediated romances and the (sometimes contradictory) manner in which they speak to women's experiences can be understood through foundational scholarship, Modleski's *Loving with a Vengeance* (1982) and Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1984), an ethnographic study of women readers of romance. Modleski, like Radway, reclaims texts formerly dismissed by academic study—Harlequin romances, gothic novels, and soap operas—demonstrating "that even the contemporary mass-produced narratives for women contain elements of protest and resistance underneath highly 'orthodox' plots. This is not to say that the tensions, anxieties, and anger which pervade these works are solved in ways which would please modern feminists: far from it" (16). Likewise, Radway concludes that "while the act of romance reading is used by women as a means of partial protest against the role prescribed for them by the culture, the discourse itself actively insists on the desirability, naturalness, and benefits of that role by portraying it not as the imposed necessity that it is, but as a freely designed, personally controlled individual choice" (208).

In a more recent study that references Radway's research, Anne Morey has explicitly illustrated connections between Meyer's series and Brontë's work on the grounds of romance, noting the complicated interconnection between romantic yearnings and the political implications of feminist strivings inherent in *Jane Eyre* and *Twilight*. Focusing on the form and function of the romance, Morey notices some connections (especially the significance of dreams) that my comparison involving melodrama also uncovers.

18. According to Abigail Myers, who uses the Byronic hero as the basis for a comparison between Rochester and Edward, "There is an implied immortality to the figure of the

Byronic hero; Meyer's use of Byronic characteristics for Edward, immortal as both a vampire and a Byronic hero, show a deeper level of meaning to the book series that has swept the tween population in the United States" (149). Similarly, in *The Lure of the Vampire* (2005), Milly Williamson argues that many females identify with the vampire due to his (or her) conflicted and outsider status. Although Williamson's research just predates *Twilight*, she, like Myers, suggests that the sympathetic construction of the vampire is not recent, but has roots in nineteenth-century "public adoration" of Lord Byron (30).

19. When considering *Twilight* in the context of melodrama, James's continual violation of the boundaries marking Bella's physical space is not surprising. According to Brooks, "The violation and spoliation of the space of innocence stands as a recurrent representation of the dilemma confronting innocence" (30).

20. James's intrusion not only drives the suspense and major conflict at the end of *Twilight*, but his death sets off a chain of events that inspires further conflict in the series; Edward, ridden with guilt about Bella's safety, doubts whether he is good for her, and those doubts culminate in their break-up in *New Moon*. Additionally, James's mate Victoria seeks retribution for his death in *New Moon* and the third novel, *Eclipse*.

21. A female villain's certifiable insanity is indeed a recurring motif in subsequent Victorian sensation fiction, for example, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862). According to Modleski,

> The villainess embodies the "split-off fury" which, in the words of Dorothy Dinnerstein, is the "underside of the 'truly feminine' women's monstrously overdeveloped talent for unreciprocated empathy." This aspect of melodrama can be traced by to the middle of the nineteenth century when *Lady Audley's Secret*, a drama based on Mary Elizabeth Braddon's novel about a governess turned bigamist and murderess, became one of the most popular stage melodramas of all time. (cxix)

One might further examine the portrayal of Meyer's vampire Victoria as a melodramatic villain whose representation is rooted in Victorian characterizations of wicked females.

22. Bertha, of course, is not *Jane Eyre*'s only villain, and "evil" takes the form of multiple characters and scenarios in Brontë's work. In fact, villainy is recognized and to some extent punished throughout the novel. For example, while Jane is still a student at her boarding-school Lowood, the cruel headmaster, Mr. Brocklehurst, is censured after exposure of the shameful management that resulted in many girls' deaths. In addition, when now-adult Jane is serving as a governess at Edward Rochester's estate, Thornfield, she learns of the Reed family's disintegration through John Reed's suicide, Mrs. Reed's imminent death, and her female cousins' disaffection for each other.

23. Some *Twilight* readers expressed their confusion about the preface and the hunter's identity. "I'm confused by the preface; who is the Hunter?" is an inquiry on Meyer's Web site under "Frequently Asked Questions: *Twilight*." In her response, Meyer actually apologizes for the uncertainty, explaining that the hunter is indeed James. This confusion, however, is not necessarily a quality of unclear writing, as her apology seems to suggest; rather, the ambiguity adds to the complexity of and tension within the novel.

24. In the context of such morality, Carrie Anne Platt finds the contradictory representations of female sexual desire "troubling" (84). Problematizing the kind of role-model worries Platt espouses, I also discuss contradictions associated with female agency in "Girlhood, Agency, and Pop Culture Literacy: The *Twilight Saga* as Exemplar,"

but I encourage an appreciation for both *Twilight*'s genre concerns and girl readers' capacities to engage with paradoxical messages.

25. For recent work, see Rohan McWilliam's "Melodrama" in *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*; and Laura Vorachek's "Female Performances: Melodramatic Music Conventions and *The Woman in White*" for instructive discussions of the influence of melodramatic stage theatrics on fiction and relationship between them.

26. According to Modleski, "The connection between melodrama and mothers is an old one. Harriet Beecher Stowe, of course, made it explicit in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, believing that if her book could bring its female readers to see the world as one extended family, the world would be vastly improved" (cxvi). Although it is beyond the scope of this article, one might interrogate the melodramatic function of motherhood and babies, since both Jane's and Bella's dreams foreshadow motherhood, a point Morey has also taken up in her treatment of *Jane Eyre* and *Twilight*.

27. Booth's explanation is relevant when thinking about Edward's absence in *New Moon*, throughout which Bella negotiates Victoria's pursuit without his help: "The heroine comes in for more persecution than the hero, especially as possession of her is frequently the villain's main object. In fact the hero is often of little use to her, either being in prison, or across the sea, or tied up in a cave, or without a weapon at inconvenient times" (10).

28. Comprehending the appeal of melodrama, especially among youth or girls specifically, involves more than the analysis presented here. In my paper "Affective Resistance: Exploring the Popular Appeal of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Saga* through Fangirls' Online Writing," I examine melodrama and affect through a reception study.

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