

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Coral Rost for the degree of Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies in English, English, and Women Gender and Sexuality Studies presented on June 20, 2014.

Title: Team Bella: Reimagining Character Portrayals and Engaging with Social Constructions of Power in *Twilight* Fanfiction

Abstract approved:

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Online fanfiction communities have received attention for providing spaces of creativity and individual empowerment. Yet as critics have sought to establish fanfiction as a worthy object of study, many have not grappled with the ways that fanfictions not only trouble, but also reinforce various discourses and ideas of gender and power. This paper recognizes the value of analyzing fanfiction, using Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight Saga* to explore the ways fanfiction can provide a space for negotiating and reworking conventional coming-of-age narratives for young women, while also supporting and even endorsing associations amongst power, agency, violence, and masculinity.

The *Twilight Saga* engages both a coming of age narrative for girls as well as issues of gender representation and access to power. As previous critics have shown, Meyer's canon invites the incorporation of abuse into rewritings or reimaginings of the narrative, as Bella experiences a number of traumatic events in the original text.

These moments are not framed as abuse in the canon text, but fanfiction authors who self-disclose that they are writing about a "stronger" Bella have shown patterns of responding to the canon by altering the narrative to directly include abuse. The incorporation of violence within the *Twilight* fics suggests that the canon prompts the questioning of what a young girl character could experience when overtly seeking safety and independence. Within the selected fics, this path translates into physical violence, rejection of feminine identity, and the frustration of encountering limited access to power.

This thesis engages with current critics and scholars of fanfiction, online digital spaces, and the original *Twilight* canon, as well as with scholarship on coming of age stories and trauma in narratives. In doing so, the thesis performs a discourse analysis of four fanfiction texts selected for this project from fanfiction.net. In treating these narratives as valuable documents, compositions, and narratives, the thesis draws upon Abigail Derecho's idea of fanfictions as archontic literature, which establishes that fanfictions are texts that archive and add variations to an idea, but are not necessarily an inferior or an unoriginal borrowing of thought. The analyses of the texts also engage theories of trauma narratives and coming of age stories to determine how fic authors are rewriting Bella as a "strong" woman. Chapter 1 focuses on how a pair of fanfiction texts imagine Bella seeking agency by reversing traditional gender roles, and Chapter 2 examines narratives that explore what happens to a female character who experiences trauma and loses the protection of traditional masculine power sources.

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Team Bella: Reimagining Character Portrayals and Engaging with Social  
Constructions of Power in *Twilight* Fanfiction

by  
Coral Rost

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the  
degree of

Master of Art in Interdisciplinary Studies

Presented June 20, 2014  
Commencement June 2015

Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies thesis of Coral Rost presented on June 20, 2014

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Coral Rost, Author

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout my graduate program, I have been supported by so many individuals and collective groups, that as I approach graduation and the completion of my degree, I would like to take a moment to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude:

to my Committee Chair and Head Advisor, Lily Sheehan, whose unwavering dedication, support, and positivity kept this project moving forward. All of your hours of work are greatly valued and your intellectual insights have shaped and developed the content of this project to a higher level than I could ever have achieved on my own.

to Lisa Ede who, as a committee member and as a professor, has shared some of her exceptional knowledge and experience in the field with me, helping me navigate through my research, writing, and academic career with her perceptive conversations, questions, and investment in my progress.

to Kryn Freehling-Burton who was so quick to support me in my educational journey and thesis project as a committee member through her willingness to commit her time, attention, and interest in my project and topic.

to Yuji Hiratsuka, who is the Graduate Council Representative on my committee, and who ensured that my project is able to maintain fair and appropriate treatment of myself and all committee members, as well as the integrity of the degree. Thank you so much for your willingness to become a part of my committee and for your enduring flexibility.

to the school of Writing Literature and Film, and the school of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies for allowing me the opportunity to develop through a master's program, taking fascinating and stimulating classes with exceptional professors from each school, and for the department of MAIS, providing me the opportunity to explore and pursue an education that incorporates three fields of study within two separate departments that are both deeply integrated into my career path, life goals, and personal interests.

to David Bernell who first encouraged me to apply to the MAIS program and has provided continuous encouragement and helpful advice.

to Peter Betjemann who has been the Graduate Coordinator throughout my time in the graduate program and who has provided me with professional academic guidance and supported me through the many complicated twists and turns that a graduate student's path often encounters.

to the Graduate School, especially Anita Azarenko, Julie Kurtz, and Jessica King, who were incredibly helpful, caring, and supportive throughout the process of completing my degree.

to the OSU Writing Center, which provided me with a Graduate Teaching Assistantship, and especially, to Dennis Bennet who has been a wonderful mentor, boss, and friend, encouraging me throughout my academic career, supporting me through my professional development, and developing my appreciation and long-term interest in tutoring pedagogy, writing centers, and all the stages of the writing process. The lessons that I have learned from you are immeasurable.

to Gail and Kayleen: Graduate school would not have been the same without you two. You have both provided me with a long-lasting friendship of shared experiences, frustrations, triumphs, happy hours, and coffee breaks.

to my Parents, who have always stood by me and provided their unconditional love throughout my life.

to my friends and family who have supported and believed in me throughout my life and my graduate school experiences.

and to my husband, Michael Rost. Our friendship, love, and relationship mean the world to me. Thank you for the immeasurable amount of love and support you give me.

Thank you all very much! I could not have arrived here without your support.

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## **Team Bella: Reimagining Character Portrayals and Engaging with Social Constructions of Power in *Twilight* Fanfiction**

### **Introduction**

Fanfiction is the use of pop culture icons, stories, and fictional characters to create, extend, or expand on an original idea, narrative, or fictional universe. It provides a space to interact with, alter, contribute, and create content related to personal interest, experience, and cultural issues. This multifaceted space is able to provide a community for exploring character representation and alternative narratives. These avenues of expression are particularly applicable for writers engaging with representations of femininity, socially constructed norms, and social acceptance. Participating in fanfiction communities provides some individuals with the chance to reflect upon their own experiences through narrative as well as to reframe stories to share the complexities of coming of age narratives in the context of systems of oppression.

Within this paper, I will be analyzing four fanfiction (fic) texts responding to Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight Saga*. This analysis will investigate the patterns of feminine character portrayals within narrative and how the authors might be engaging with a canon text that contains damaging gender roles and incorporating coming of age and trauma narratives into their new, creative stories. Though the observations, claims, and analysis provided in this text are in no way representative of the entire fanfiction community, I believe that I have identified some patterns within fic narratives that suggest that the "reimagining" of Bella into an "independent" woman

places her into a cyclical pattern of violence, limited access to power, and the alignment with masculine power.

As critics such as Anna Silver and Sarah Seltzer have shown with their research, the original *Twilight* canon invites fans to confront abuse in their responses to the text, as it places Bella in several moments of intense trauma: emotional trauma of abandonment, lack of autonomy over her future and present life choices, isolation from friends, and constant intimidation. Bella also faces moments of extreme violence where vampires are ripped apart, body parts are piled and burned, she is physically threatened, kidnapped, and her own transformation into becoming a vampire is extremely painful. These moments are not framed as abuse in the canon text, but readers that self disclose that they are writing about a "stronger" Bella have shown patterns of responding to the canon by altering the narrative frame in ways that make it clear that these are forms of trauma. Fic authors are able to identify several moments where Bella faces trauma and can open up the discourse to frame the trauma as abuse. As Silver points out, the abandonment Bella experiences in the "Forest Scene" in *New Moon* (the second book of the *Twilight Saga*) has received extensive responses from fans. By framing their own narratives as texts intending to provide a "stronger" Bella character, what the fic authors write is a heroine contradictory to the passive Bella figure, who does not resist and arguably is complicit to, and even encouraging of, the abuse.

The canon text can be seen as an act of violence against women through the portrayal of Bella and her unshakable devotion to Edward, despite the perpetual physical danger she faces, the emotional isolation and abandonment he inflicts on her, and the lack of autonomy she holds over her future with him. Stephanie Meyer's narrative connects with a larger cultural issue of creating entertainment through stories of passive female characters, who face abuse and trauma, and are meant to be comforted, protected, and ultimately controlled by the powerful masculine forces present.

Because the canon story of *Twilight* is a young adult adventure book and since Abigail Derecho has shown that an overwhelming percentage of fanfic authors are teenaged girls, it can be assumed that the patterns commonly seen among fanfiction texts can be generally applied (but not exclusively) to online teenage girl culture within the fanfic communities. The incorporation of violence within the *Twilight* fics suggests that the canon invites the questioning of what a young girl character would experience if she were to reject the violent limitations of fictional and social representations of women and girls, and to overtly seek agency. Within the fics, this path translates into physical violence, rejection of feminine identity, and the frustration of limited paths of access to power.

To explore the reactions that fic authors are having to the canon, the following analysis will examine four fics that each incorporate abuse and trauma into Bella's narrative. These fics are not fully representative of the massive amount of narratives

available, but provide insight into the patterns that are present within representations of femininity and the rewriting of the Bella character into an “independent and strong” woman.

Throughout this exploration, it became clear that fanfictions provide a space for making some invisible violence and abuse, visible and "witnessable." Through the incorporation of violence and trauma into Bella's story, fic narratives establish a relationship between the text and the reader that breaks some of the silence of "unspeakable" events. To better understand the narratives analyzed, and to comprehend the positioning of the texts within online public spaces, this Introduction will provide a brief description of fanfiction, online culture, and fanfiction communities, and discuss Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight Saga* texts in relation to feminine coming of age stories as well as trauma narratives. Following the Introduction, Chapter 1 will focus on fics that depict Bella seeking agency through engaging with reversing traditional gender roles and Chapter 2 will examine narratives that explore what happens to a feminine character who experiences the trauma of having her benevolent and protective masculine power figure killed and taken away from her. Both chapters will engage with the idea that patriarchal society limits the access of power to masculine structures which women are forced to align with if they are seeking power and safety.

## **Fanfiction**

Most literature around fanfiction presents it as a cultural phenomenon rather than an artistic practice. Although research has been done that provides empirical knowledge about existing types of fanfictions, the authors, and the motivations behind their works, what is still needed is the development of "concepts that would enable us to think more critically about how this enormous amount of artistic output...works as art, in terms of whether they serve as adequate forms of resistance to the culture industries or...forms of cooperation with media corporations" (Derecho 63). Though this paper does not engage in an analysis of what constitutes what material is classified as "adequate" or not, what is discussed is the question of if fanfiction has created a space for questioning larger cultural issues, such as limited representations of femininity in fiction, or if it is a form of reflecting back an already existing system of power and control within popular culture. In order to acknowledge fics as credible sources of complex thought and creative expression, it is important to treat fic narratives as texts with agency, deserving of an engaged audience, analysis, and discussion.

Fanfiction comes from the subgenre of "derivative" or "appropriative" literature (Derecho 63), but can be redefined as "archontic" literature to attribute a respectful classification of archiving and adding of variations to an idea, rather than implying a lower-ranked product, or unoriginal borrowing of thought (Derecho 64). Derecho explains that the classification of archontic writing allows each representation

and reflection of an idea to stand as an open, complete, and worthy product (Derecho 64). This form of writing "never allows the archive to remain stable or still, but wills it to add to its own stores" (Derecho 64). Fiction is more than a final product, but each idea can be taken in an infinite direction of possibilities to represent all the "what ifs" of each character, setting, and plot.

Authors of these narratives can be encouraged through the community aspect of fanfiction spaces. Education scholar Tracy Kell notes that fanfiction communities bring together individuals passionate about the writing, creativity, and learning and show a strong commitment to developing and supporting each other as writers (33). Fanfiction scholar Anne Jamison supports this idea of community by pointing out that fic authors "value fic as a way to explore or celebrate non-normative desires that may be excluded from mainstream culture or simply from their own experience or "real life" community" (Leman). She continues this explanation, declaring that fic authors are usually "into fanfic for the freedom, support, and community—for the opportunity to talk back to culture" (Leman). What this means is that fic authors are creating a space to participate in, respond to, and engage with society and culture while exploring new avenues of expression and community identity. Yet, it is important to consider how oppressive and marginalizing practices are also present within these communities.

Within these multifaceted spaces, archontic literature can be a form of writing intended "to draw the readers' attention to unjust power relations between dominate

and subordinate subjects" (Derecho 70) or by introducing and engaging with issues of access to power and limited depictions. By applying a parallel narrative or repetition of themes and content within familiar literature, authors can take a traditional or widely read text and shift the focus to an alternative character portrayal in order to emphasize an unconventional view, representation, or understanding of an oppressed social group. Fanfiction therefore, "is the literature of the subordinate, because most fanfic authors are women responding to media products that, for the most part, are characterized by an underrepresentation of women" (Derecho 71). By looking at fanfiction as archontic writing, it might be possible to explore some of the ways that fic texts are engaging with or reinforcing social issues of marginalization.

Jamison emphasizes the writer's exploratory agency within fanfiction communities, by stating that fic authors often represent "non-normative" desires and reactions to mainstream culture. Some of these narratives reflect stories that have not been, or cannot be told in the original canon texts (Leman). This idea might suggest that within some online fan communities, there are spaces to question and respond to personal observations, experiences, and intellectual inquiries. Fanfiction scholar Rebecca Black agrees that fan communities have the possibility of helping individuals engage in critical discourses and states that in "terms of agency, participatory media fandom has a long history of negotiation between individual fan's perspectives and the 'globally defined fields of possibility' of the mass media" (421). What Black adds to the discussion is the acknowledgement that individuals are engaging in a community

and simultaneously questioning and reflecting back their own environment while participating with new possibilities for narrative. This reflection is found in the form of imagination, employed through the creation of fics within a community that hold elements of “emancipation” and “discipline,” but leaves room for a diversity of expression (Black 417).

As literature scholar Kerri Mathew argues, fanfiction then, provides a clear support for the development of critical thought among younger generations where “young people can not only read and respond to literature, and do so voluntarily, but can also craft their responses in sophisticated, polished writing” (Mathew). The complex interactions that authors of fanfiction engage in with literary source material allows students to incorporate their contemporary society within the context of literary analysis, the writing process, and the highest cognitive levels of interpretation and to sort out how they want to relate to the content they discover (Mathew).

Recent scholarship within new literacies argues that "students read popular culture texts more critically than conventional wisdom assumes and that their reading and writing both in and out of school, draws from the genres and discourses of popular culture" (Williams and Zenger 7-8). This scholarly conversation is central to fanfiction and fanfiction communities as they are highly participatory and responsive to popular culture in their interactions with canon texts. Within this "tampering" of a canon narrative, novel ideas, representations, and identities are able to be created, presented, and shared at a rapid and influential speed that snowballs into creative formations of

new narratives and explorations of content. This rapid interaction implies a movement of creation and response, but does not implicitly imply an evolution of content and thought. The new representations may be simultaneously empowering or oppressive depending on the individual narrative created.

Fanfiction provides a bridge for the gap between the fictional world and the material world of social injustices, inequalities, and oppressions by “enabling the story’s author and readers to engage with real world problems through the safe outlets of reading and writing. In a sense, fanfics can help their young writers to escape and heal” (Mathew). The process of writing, evaluating, and responding to the fantasy worlds of fiction potentially allows individuals to communicate their personal struggles, difficult realities, and insecurities (Mathew). Fanfiction then, might be a hopeful resource for some young writers to develop passion for literature while also providing a space to respond to the challenges within contemporary society; however, the fics might also reinscribe and reinforce (whether inadvertently or not) systems of oppression and limitations of gender representations.

Though fanfiction is not a mode of complete resistance or social defiance, the writing and principles of both fanfiction and archontic writing "seeks to empower and elevate what is subordinate" (Derecho 76) by representing an alternate and unrepresented form of a story. With such hopeful conclusions regarding the possibility of fanfiction, it is my goal to look at specific fanfiction texts to identify and articulate how the authors are engaging with Stephanie Meyer’s canon texts and the retelling or

altering of feminine identity representation. In analyzing these texts, it is important to understand some of the background and history of fanfiction communities, as well as the role of online participatory culture.

### **Online Communities and Spaces**

Fandom scholar Francesca Coppa claims that the first media fandom originated around 1966 and was originally associated with sports and theatre before moving to science fiction enthusiasts who defined much of the fanfiction terms, community structures, and language in current use (42). However, Jenkins adds that the history of fandom started “long before the introduction of networked computers” which is evident from the shaping of pulp science fiction as a genre (influenced and defined by Hugo Gernsbeck) in the 1920s and 1930s (137).

Women have always been present in fandoms, but have been underrepresented in the public presentations and distributions of the fandom materials. These women, who were “better educated than most, heavy readers, and scientifically literate” (Coppa 45), had to carve out space and representation for themselves, much like the feminine characters do within some of the fic narratives. Similarly, Internet scholar Lisa Nakamura points out that “people of color were functionally absent from the Internet at precisely that time when its discourse was acquiring its distinctive contours. The repercussions of the discursive gap are immense” (Nakamura xii). The practice of marginalization and exclusion during the development of these spaces has long lasting

effects, shaping the language, interactions, and functionality of these platforms to meet the needs of the majority, maintaining that structure even when diverse populations are later present (Nakamura xii).

Internet scholar Pamela Takayoshi explores the unique and complicated relationship of women and technology and the digital spaces that are often portrayed as "empowering" or "oppressing" toward women (123). Early research about the Internet wavered between looking positively and negatively at the Internet as a cultural force. Many critics viewed the space as oppressive, observing that it does not welcome or include women unless they intentionally create an area that is gender specific, much like the fandom communities mentioned above. Pamela cites critics such as Barbara Kantrowitz as representing this era of diagnostically gendering the different experiences of Internet spaces (124). Lisa Nakamura includes scholar Sandy Stone in this list of "second wave...post-utopian backlash," examining the roots of the special structure within society (Nakamura 61). As fans were "early adopters of digital technologies," fandom and Internet scholar Henry Jenkins emphasizes the animosity that fan women found when their fandoms embraced digital spaces, facing hostility and discrimination from the predominantly male population (Jenkins 138).

In response to these critics, Takayoshi cites scholars Emily Jessup, Gail Hawisher, and Cynthia Selfe as defenders of an optimistic view of the Internet, classifying it as empowering, accessible, and working toward egalitarianism (125). Henry Jenkins adds scholar Pierre Levy as an optimist, framing online communities

(specifically fandoms) as “the way culture might operate in the future...a vision of collective intelligence as an achievable utopia not something that grows inevitably from the new configuration of technologies but rather something we must work toward and fight to achieve” (Jenkins 134). Jenkins also notes that while many women fans faced hostility when transitioning to digital spaces, Sue Clerc presents an alternate argument that claims the involvement in fan communities helped women to learn new technology and ensured that their friends also participated in learning the technology, in order to maintain their fandom community (Jenkins 138).

To complicate this discussion, Takayoshi represents a distrust of the dichotomy of spaces being wholly empowering or oppressive and suggests that the same space, technology, and device can be more nuanced, practicing both positive and negative aspects. Takayoshi fights against the duality of oversimplified terms such as "good" or "bad" and implies that resorting to such a dichotomy is as damaging as a patriarchal society that separates and privileges males over women (130-3). In calling for a balanced and layered perspective of digital spaces, Takayoshi “accounts for and understands both negative and positive experiences with technology—exists outside the dualism of optimistic and critical traditions” (132). What this perspective means is that the spaces of these discourses are neither positive nor negative, but are able to house practices, reflections, and explorations of user content that can lead to personal and communal avenues of damage or growth. What becomes apparent in looking at the scholarship available on Internet spaces, and especially on fanfiction studies, is

that there needs to be more of an intersectional approach in understanding these complex and layered spaces. Many scholars want to maintain an optimistic, utopian view of these digital communities as empowering and representative of diverse identities, but it is imperative to look at the different experiences of people in various social positions and realize that all populations and demographics do not interact with these forms of media, representation, and digital mediums in the same way.

Nakamura references Internet researcher Daniel Punday who explains that "critics are debating whether participants in online discourse are constructing coherent identities that shed light on the real world or whether they are merely tacking together an identity from media sources" (Nakamura xiii). What is important to ask then, is if online spaces are creating new discourses of thought or if they are merely reenacting the same material already present within popular media. Nakamura complicates this discussion by claiming that it is unquestionable that the Internet is a force for social transformation; however, instead of ascribing to the "utopian or pessimistic" views, where the Internet is described as either a "a vector for progressive change in the classical liberal tradition or as the purveyor of crude and simplistic 'stereotypical cultural narratives,' it seems crucial to first narrow the focus a bit and examine the specific means by which identities are" expressed within these spaces (Nakamura xiii). Addressing the common dichotomy of Internet scholarship, Nakamura states that of "course, the truth lies between these two poles: The Net changes some things" (Nakamura xii). Through several examples, Nakamura explains that discrimination

and oppression are present on the Internet, but that creative expressions of identity, diversity, and progressive discourse also take place. What is important to examine then, is the individual artifacts of the internet, and the patterns that form out of the grouping of images, language usage, and interactions (Nakamura xiii).

Many young people are engaging with the majority of their reading and writing experiences online and "since so much of that reading and writing takes place both about and with popular culture, the content and rhetoric of popular culture is shaping literacy practices around the world" (Williams and Zenger x). Within this rapid environment, it is important to remember that the "socially marginalized have a different relation to postmodernity than do members of majority cultures or races. Hence they have a different relation to cyberspace" (Nakamura xv). While online interactions provide social connections and reflect a significant amount of popular culture and social constructions of expectation, belief, and power structures, these spaces can also influence the practices of social engagement and the understanding of various identities.

Individuals that are experiencing diverse thought, representation, and culture might be altering narratives to relate back to their own personal experiences. The level of analysis and understanding present in these processes show that "young people are appropriating and reusing these same texts to perform identities and make meaning in their own lives" (Williams and Zenger 2). Globalization and increasing online activity are changing the way that individuals are interacting with traditional concepts. Though

it might be possible that social limitations are being challenged by individuals engaging in discourse about what is being represented and presented in culture, only too often does one person's "liberation" constitute another's recontainment within the realm of racialized discourse" (Nakamura xv). In a reactionary culture, individuals are able to interact with ideas while introducing novel knowledge into the synthesis of established perceptions, the question is, which individuals and identities are still being marginalized and excluded.

Within fanfiction communities, there is an opportunity for individuals to interact with others based on a common association with a favorite canon media or narrative instead of immediately being sectioned into social assumptions based upon immediate physical representations or gender restrictions. Individuals that visit online forums or respond to content are responsible for not only reading comprehension and writing skills, but also contextual analysis, rhetorical situations, and a history of references (Williams and Zenger 6). Creativity and collaboration is then emphasized over the physical qualities, or gender of the individual. This is particularly important to women and girls, who were given an opportunity to interact within a community without immediately identifying themselves with a feminine self. Identities can be fluid, connected, and flexible organisms that can change over time to develop cultural and social awareness (Black). Nakamura counters this idea, stating that the "celebration of the 'fluid self' that simultaneously lauds postmodernity as a potentially liberatory sort of worldview tends to overlook the more disturbing aspects of the fluid,

marginalized peoples, which is not nearly so romantic a formulation" (Nakamura xvi). If Internet research incorporated an intersectional perspective, it would be increasingly valuable to look at the practices within the community of fanfiction, where identity can develop through the wide range of practices that engage the reader and writer such as writing skills, critical discussions, peer reviews, collaborative writing, and a source of collective knowledge. Though much of the scholarship has not yet incorporated an intersectional view, Nakamura points out that research needs to incorporate "different types of critical approaches and examples, since cyberspace makes so many different kinds of narrative possible" (Nakamura xiii). In moving the scholarship forward, fanfiction research needs to look at the fic texts as complex documents, focusing an analytical gaze on the content, rather than adopting an exclusive utopian or oppressive view.

### **Feminine Coming of Age Narratives and the *Twilight Saga***

In order to effectively examine the fics in this study and their potential in questioning or reinforcing socially constructed limited representations of femininity, it is essential to examine coming of age narratives about girls and depictions of women and girls in the *Twilight Saga*. Female characters within fiction have the potential to reflect the oppressions, limitations, and discriminations within society. When harmful gender roles are depicted in fictional narratives, they can reinforce an imbalance of power within society, limiting women and girl's access to power and supporting patriarchal power. An exploration of female icons, narratives, and portrayals is

necessary to understanding the expectations of society, the socially constructed injustices, and the avenues of influencing culture to allow women and girls the right to express their unique identity with agency.

Through the interlacing of fiction and actual experience, the complex limitations forced upon women in society can be reflected back through narrative. The coming of age story of a female character provides insight into the process that girls in society are expected to inherit and reflects “a complex psychological journey as she grows into and creates her own identity” (Walker 83). What is important to note is how literature on fictional gender representations are also limiting the "girl" or feminine identity to a single form of identity, marginalizing the representation of diversity and intersectional, complex, and layered personal characteristics.

The *Twilight Saga* tells the story of Bella’s coming of age narrative, but reverts to damaging gender norms, restrictions, and limitations. Anna Silver states that often critics argue that “the series perpetuates outdated and troubling gender norms” characterizing Edward (the lead male character) as “controlling and domineering, saving the hapless Bella time and again from danger; Bella suffers from low self-esteem and seemingly has no close friends except for Edward, his family, and Jacob, a suitor-turned-werewolf; and at the end of the series, she foregoes college in order to marry Edward and bear, at great risk to her own life, a half-human and half-vampire child” (Silver 122). Even “from the inside [of] the sometimes rabid fan community”

there are critiques of the gender roles portrayed within the *Twilight Saga* and the “gender ideology, [which] is ultimately and unapologetically patriarchal” (Silver 122).

Silver argues that Bella’s desire to be a vampire is inseparably tied to her desire to be unquestionably connected to a family, which she has been missing from her own life. Her parents are divorced, and the Cullen family can provide a stable family unit. Silver states that “Edward becomes a father figure to Bella, and the Cullens as a group stand for the ideal family of a mythic past” (Silver 122). This motivation of Bella’s can parallel trauma narratives, where the "mythic past" represents a "pre" experience to the trauma, a point at which the individual cannot fully return to, but can remember and desire for a different reality (Silver 126).

Silver states that *Twilight* is an iconic YA narrative, concerned with the coming of age story, centered on the experiences and identity formation of the characters. This “transitional point between childhood and adulthood” presents characters with new experiences, responsibilities, and decisions (Silver 123). According to Silver, YA narratives might push too hard to present a message within their story, attempting to create the appearance that they are representing a unified message with society, culture, and the majority experience, in order to drive a sort of agenda of morals, principles, or life choices (Silver 122). Silver states that *Twilight* is an example of this intentional influence, portraying a “virtuous” representation of what is a “good” woman and family and points out that the “series is part of a genre that is often written expressly to teach young men and women in the confusion of

identify formation how to live what the author deems a virtuous, moral, and meaningful life” (Silver 122-3). What is remarkable about this moment of adolescence is the confusion that accompanies the transformation, confusion that might parallel (though over a different potential timeline) the confusion that literature scholar Julie Taylor explains regarding trauma narratives is part of experiencing, remembering, and testifying trauma. Looking to traumatic stress researcher Dr. Rivka Tuval-Mashiach et al.’s definition of trauma, it is possible to connect the coming of age transformation narrative as a testimony of trauma, inviting overt instances of violence, abuse, and the act of testimony within the fic narratives that express adolescent agency (Taylor and Mashicah et al.'s works are outlined more in the next section of this paper).

Culture researcher Brenda Daly explains that representations of femininity in fiction can reflect patriarchal stereotypes that imprison females into conforming to assigned roles, or forces them into rebellion, ultimately isolating them and leaving them vulnerable (Daly 2). Though these representations are in and of themselves limiting the idea of what "feminine" identity represents, the experiences of growing up with a certain feminine identity can come into contact with gender-specific roles and grapple with the contraction of identity. Gender scholar Gina Hausknecht explains that if a text includes damaging gender roles, the narrative can send the message to girls that they are to "acquiesce to their adult status as passive objects of male erotic attention; meanwhile, their own bodies relate a different story" (32). This disjointed experience then shows that the coming-of-age story for women is often a story of "a

process of loss rather than an acquisition of identity" (Hausknecht 32). When a female character looks for recognition of herself within the images of pop culture and is not able to see her own reflection there, she can experience an extreme rage and isolation (Hausknecht 32-33). What is important to note is that the coming of age story for characters with feminine identities can be one of conflict, confusion, and loss of agency.

In the *Twilight Saga*, reading plays an integral role for the female protagonist in forming her identity as well as interpreting the conflicting situations she personally experiences (Steiner 196). The forming of identity through fictional narratives can influence the reader's character and help shape her decisions. Though she incorporates classic literature to influence her characters, "Meyer hearkens to the past for her model of male/female relationships" (Silver 128). These harmful gender representations mirror some of the social gender oppressions contemporary in the societies of the classic English novels that Bella reads and relates to throughout the novel.

Referencing Sarah Seltzer, Silver presents the argument that even though she is "inverting the [gender] positions, Meyer doesn't change the game. Purity is still the goal. Man or vampires, are still dangerous and threatening while females are still breakable and fragile" (Silver 129). In contrast, Silver thinks that Meyer is "more nuanced," changing the social expectation to one that encourages abstinence for both men and women, equally placing the moral burden on both genders. As seen with the character's interest and identity formation through reading, "[m]etafiction as self-

conscious reflection questions realism, but it also offers an opportunity to examine different textual forms of representation" (Steiner 200). This mirroring of textual representation and the real life experiences of the reader illustrates the significant role that the act of reading and responding to literature has on females (Steiner 200).

Young adults look to literature to help them navigate the struggles they face in their own lives (Bean 638). Adolescents dealing with identity and the representations they are seeing within literature might find empowerment through questioning the intentions of a canon text and the construction of the characters regarding the social shortcoming that society has accepted (Bean 638). The literature that adolescents read and the representations of identities within the texts send a message of who is important in society and who deserves visibility (Bean 638). The scope and depth of fanfiction allows these borders of visibility to bend and weaken, allowing for the exploration of new spaces, portrayals, and variations to traditional structures. Rhetoric and Composition scholar Sarah Summers states that Meyer has encouraged fans through online spaces to engage with her texts and converse with her as the author, but also within the community (321). Summers also states that this interaction "begins as shared interest in a text in the context of convergence culture quickly develops into transmedia narratives that allow readers to extend their literacy practices not just to different media but to public audiences" (321).

What this representation provided then is a way to interact with the narratives and practice alternative avenues each character has for making choices, seeking

agency, and questioning their place in a larger context of society (in and out of the fictional universe). Though this might be a possible practice of redefining and questioning limited portrayals of seeking independence, power, and safety, the narratives within the fics referenced in this thesis show that this reimagining might also be done by merely appropriating violence, and aligning with masculine forms of power and agency.

### **Trauma Narratives**

What became apparent in looking for fics that addressed social constructions of gender oppression was the reoccurrence of trauma narratives within fics that address Bella's coming of age story and her quest for agency. Looking back at the original narrative, it is clear that trauma is already a part of Bella's story.

Meyer's canon narrative holds traumatic events that force Bella to experience extreme emotional and physical distress. Rachel Dubois states that the "scenes of Bella's giving birth, and her death, mime trauma for readers [displaying] Bella's visceral transformation in these experiences" (Tan 204). Silver references the trauma from the canon when she explains that "Losing Edward in New Moon, Bella admits, 'had been more than just losing the truest of true loves...It was also losing a whole future, a whole family'" (Silver 127). What is particularly interesting is that Silver also notes how "it is surprising how often readers post not just love letters to Edward, but to the entire Cullen clan" showing that they too are attached to the whole family, and understand the suffering that losing them would cause (Silver 127). When fanfic

authors declare that they are creating a new Bella, a “stronger” or “more independent” Bella, they often center their narrative on the trauma that Bella experienced when Edward and the rest of the Cullen family abandoned her. What can be concluded then, is that the original canon serves as a sort of trauma narrative, which opens up a space for fic authors to respond to the trauma with their own interpretation of “strength” in the face of pain. What is important to note is that these narratives not only “allow adolescents to lose themselves in adventurous situations and idealized characters, but it also represents, in dramatic and exaggerated fashion, the conflicts in their own lives” (Silver 136).

Rivka Tuval-Mashiach et al. define a traumatic event as confronting individuals with “extremely unusual stress, and requires coping with a new, unexpected, and unfamiliar situation” (280) and suggest that writing narratives of trauma is a positive method for recovery. This method is important because “it is through stories that individuals come to know themselves or to reveal themselves to others” (Tuval-Mashiach et. al 281). What this suggests is that trauma can be translated through narrative, sharing some of the experiences with others through their readership. Holocaust scholars Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub’s research takes this idea further and explains that readers are witnesses to the narrative, “watching” events, ideas, and experiences that the reader does not own or understand, but are connected to through the testimony. Literature can provide the opportunity for testifying and creating witnesses to events that may have been experienced previously alone.

(Felman & Laub xiii). Though the discussion of witnessing an immense and complex event such as the Holocaust is not the same as discussing the use of abuse within *Twilight*, some of Felman and Laub's research on trauma narratives and the process of witnessing is applicable to the research for this thesis.

By analyzing trauma narratives, it is important to recognize the “complex relationship between language and life and in the methods and techniques of reading, and of listening to, truths that are unspoken—or unspeakable” providing a possible platform for expressing ideas that are not easily approachable through speech (Felman & Laub xiii-xiv). What this suggests then is that trauma narrative might provide a space for authors to share experiences of trauma (that possibly they personally experience, or can relate to through a violence-saturated culture) with readers and ensure that they have a witness to their events. What this concludes then is that “literature becomes a witness, and perhaps the only witness, to the crisis within history which precisely cannot be articulated” (Felman & Laub xviii).

According to Felman and Laub, even though the particular empirical truths might not be present in the narratives “the meeting point between violence and culture, the very moment when, precisely, the phenomenon of violence and the phenomenon of culture come to clash—and yet to mingle—in contemporary history” (xiii) is present within trauma narratives. What this idea shows is that the trauma represented in the text might not have been experienced directly by the author, but might have been experienced and reflected throughout culture, saturating the author with the

shared experience from social prominence and preoccupations with violence. What is particularly important to note here is that the analysis of trauma narratives can provide the creation of a witness and explore the traces of trauma experience within the narrative without knowing or seeking the empirical "truth" of the author's experiences with trauma.

Tuval-Mashiach et. al. points out that trauma "by its nature, breaks the continuity and smooth flow of daily life. This break is expressed in the stories trauma survivors tell about themselves and about their lives" (Tuval-Mashiach et. al 281). Trauma is not experienced in one solitary event, but becomes a cyclical experience that is re-experienced and re-remembered over time. Emphasizing this idea that trauma is experienced in non-linear timelines, Felman and Laub state that trauma can be understood not as an "event encapsulated in the past, but as a history which is essentially not over, a history whose repercussions are not simply omnipresent (whether consciously or not) in all our cultural activities, but whose traumatic consequences are still actively evolving" (xiv).

Taylor emphasizes that "performing and restaging events allows for a focus on the process of remembering rather than the revealed, already remembered event" (Taylor 136). Through this action, the verb of "remembering" is active, experienced, and present, rather than the past tense "remembered" that implies a completion, or finality to the experience, something that is over, rather than currently affecting the individual (Taylor 137). Through re-invoking, or re-imagining the trauma, the

testimony places the event in the future of the narrative, making it an event that has not yet been experienced, and shares the trauma with witness(es). The process of testimony then, emphasizes the importance of the witness. Testimony requires a listener, and as the event is revealed, a witness. Through the practice of “re-enactment of the trauma,” the characters, or at least the reader, is “forced to witness anew the events of the past, which are” presented before them (Taylor 135). Therefore, “the traumatic image is brought into the world by its testimony and witnessing...trauma is not merely exposed but rather created through its telling” (Taylor 136).

Trauma testimonies and narratives allow authors to represent trauma through “an altogether different and exploratory light” where the facts of the events or histories “are neither simply represented nor simply reflected, but are reinscribed, translated, are radically rethought and fundamentally worked over by the text” (Felman & Laub xiv-xv). Taylor discusses the urgent desire of individuals to know the empirical “facts” about traumatic experiences, possibly in order to mitigate “female hysteria” or exaggeration of events, manipulation, or “unsuccessful testimony” in order to pinpoint exactly who is the “victim,” the “perpetrator” (133). Taylor emphasizes that “fact finding” is not the most expressive, or representative narratives, but that creating imaginative stories that are inspired from trauma can be the most healing. These narratives can focus instead on the telling and hearing of the experiences, rather than the accuracy of the text (135).

## **Methodology for Chapters 1 & 2**

When I first started this project, I was looking to fanfiction texts for an encouraging and obviously positive resistance to the social injustices and limited portrayals of identity and gender roles within patriarchal societies. I expected to see various interpretations of a Bella character, transformed into an independent, complex figure who takes control of her life through healthy action. After reading the current scholarly sources on fanfiction communities, I was full of encouragement regarding the depth and complexity of these digital spaces of collaboration and creativity. When I started exploring fanfiction.net and reading various *Twilight* fanfiction texts, I started seeing some of these positive interactions, the encouragement for growth, and the engagement with cultural issues. However, after further exploration, I was not seeing a large pattern of overt resistance or direct questioning of the gender roles in the individual fics. What I did find was a complex interaction with the canon text that overtly added trauma into Bella's story. In looking at the fics individually, I realized that many of them incorporated trauma into Bella's story, and had a pattern of incorporating flashbacks, testimonies, and violence. What developed then, is an exploration of these trauma narratives and their relation to the original cannon, as well as the larger implications for the texts' engagement with gender portrayals and coming of age stories.

Throughout this exploratory process, the following methodology developed for the analysis included in this thesis. I used the site "fanfiction.net" as my source for

finding and reading fanfics. This site was commonly used within the fanfiction literature referenced in my literature review and is often referred to as the most popular and well known online fanfiction community. Through my searches of fics from fanfiction.net, I narrowed my search down to fics that are only responding to Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight Saga* Books. In preparing to examine how authors are responding to the characterization of Bella in the canon story and the larger social positioning of the texts and the questioning of powers structures within the narrative, I looked for texts that self-declared in their pre comments, or intro fic descriptions that they are writing about a "stronger" Bella, a "badass" Bella, or a Bella character with a "backbone." In reading through the various texts that intentionally signify that they are addressing Bella's character development, I found many interesting patterns of what a re-imagined, powerful woman looks like to these authors. To appropriately provide space for exploring these complex patterns, I perform a textual analysis of four fics. To do so, I draw upon literary criticism about trauma narratives and coming of age stories, using perspectives from trauma and feminist theory. Each text is representative of larger patterns, issues, and reoccurring themes that became apparent in fic narratives that explored the idea of a new Bella character: an "independent" girl-becoming-woman character fighting for an assumed "desired" agency. While many fics I looked at included some form of violence, trauma, and abuse, these four texts were selected because they centered their narratives on violence, power and

independence. Looking at these four fics together provided an opportunity to explore the patterns of trauma narratives within the context of Bella's coming of age story.

I have not had any contact with the authors of these individual texts and am looking only at the public text posted on the fanfiction.net website. In developing my research and methodology, I referred to the "Terms of Service" page of the site. Because I am not altering the website, using the content provided by the site for any commercial use, and not distributing the material for commercial purposes, no written consent was required in conducting this research.

Fanfics are posted in varying stages of development and revision (at least in their public availability) and therefore, several typos, abbreviations, and usage of informal language is often present. All quotations used within this paper are original to the fic authors and have not been edited, altered, or "corrected" (unless otherwise noted) to ensure that the authors are being represented in their own voice as authentically as possible. As fandom scholar Abigail Derecho has shown with the idea of archontic texts, I aim to progress with my literary analysis, respecting each fic as a complete and complex artifact, with layers of meaning and significance.

What follows in the chapters are literary textual examinations of the four fanfictions that were selected for this project. In honoring these narratives as valuable documents, compositions, and narratives, I will be closely examining some of the layered content to determine how fic authors are rewriting Bella as a "strong" woman

and what happens when Bella is re-imagined as an independent character with  
“agency.”

## **Chapter 1: Reimagining a Bella with Agency and the Alignment with Masculine Power Structures in Fanfiction Narratives Incorporating Trauma**

### **Introduction**

Through examining fanfictions that declare they portray a “strong” Bella figure, it can be seen that many fic authors explicitly add abuse into the narrative of Bella's back-story or current situation in order to create a Bella that rejects the abuse. During her coming of age story in the fic narrative, Bella is directly facing trauma and trying to grow out of it, but the result is to disassociate from feminine identity and identify with patriarchal systems of power.

Within this chapter, I explore two fanfictions that seek to imagine a Bella character with agency, by which I mean the freedom to pursue a future with choice, independence, and self-reliance. Within the narratives, agency is found through aligning with patriarchal systems of power, forcing Bella to reject some of her feminine identity and adopt traditional masculine traits, reactions, or power structures. These new imaginings of Bella's character place into question assumptions about what are desirable characteristics for an “empowered” feminine character. The narratives within this chapter seem to reflect, or suggest that the society in which these authors work has limited women and girl's access to power, forcing the girl's coming of age transition into a decision either to reject feminine identity and seek access to autonomy, independence, and strength through the mentorship of powerful men, violence, revenge, and the military or to break away from society and still lose agency.

### **Protection, Militaristic Training, and Power in ScarletteVamp's "Onyx Knight"**

Trauma can be used within narratives to explain character development, decisions, and motivations, or present a catalyst for change. It can also be part of a narrative that pushes a character into seeking power over their personal situation, forcing them to seek alternate forms of power and strength. Within ScarletteVamp's fic "Onyx Knight," Bella rejects traditional female traits of emotion and passivity. Silver describes these gender roles as iconic gender norms from the Victorian romance novels Stephanie Meyer incorporated into her canon narratives. Meyer's text embraces "masculine" characteristics of the same era: strength, power, and militaristic structures, in order to fight against other masculine threats to women, girls, and symbolic female figures. Bella's personal trauma informs her understanding of the danger of being female within a patriarchal society, and in response, she disassociates with her feminine identity to align with traditional masculine power structures.

"Onyx Knight" is informally separated into two main parts: a present day reflective narrative where Bella's character and personality are developed, and a retelling of trauma in the form of a flashback that helps to explain to the reader Bella's motivations for aligning with patriarchal systems of power. Through Bella's actions, she shows that she is interested in seeking power over her situation, mitigating external threats of violence by building physical defensive skills and aligning herself with the power sources that she views as the "powerful protectors." On this path to power, Bella chooses masculine power structures to align herself with because they

can provide her with power (in this sense, "power" is represented by access to weapons, militaristic training, and an authority to enact violence) where feminine power structures appear to be weak, vulnerable, or missing. Without a strong feminine role model to align with, Bella attaches to the strongest source of power she has observed: her father, controlled violence, and the military.

### **Aligning with Masculine Power Sources**

Part one of the fic is of Bella's present day experience while traveling to live with her father. She is rejecting her childhood home, mother, and female characteristics while realigning herself with masculine power through identifying closely with her father and then later, the masculine power structure of the military. This section is building, defining, and explaining the character development of Bella through both exposition and self-reflection.

The narrative starts out with Bella running away from home as a sort of revenge for the neglect and isolation she faced from her controlling "Psycho-mom," who prevented her from having any real connections with friends. There is no direct reference in the fic's narrative to abuse in Bella's home life, but Bella's past helps to prepare the reader for the modification in personality that contradicts the original canon narrative and clearly defines control, isolation, and a lack of autonomy as key components to a home life that Bella rejects and abandons. What is clear is that Bella was unhappy, isolated, and felt a sense of being an outsider from her previous home

life. As the author states in their pre-text comments, this is a portrayal of "the complete opposite of [canon] Bella" (ScarletteVamp, Onyx Knight) and therefore, this fic can be seen as a direct response to the canon text by defining a duality in the canon Bella character and the new, fic Bella. As the fic Bella is aligning with an active masculine power, it can be assumed then, that the canon Bella is understood as a representation of a passive, weaker feminine character. Fic Bella leaves her mother, complaining about her home life and treatment, and the back story can be seen as a motivation for the main character to leave her home to move in with her father across the country. At the end of the fanfic, the author declares "Hopefully you understand her past a little better" (ScarletteVamp, Onyx Knight) showing that the back story is deliberately meant to either fill in a gap that the canon left out, or to emphasize the change in the narrative and explain the reason for Bella's move to Forks, Washington.

Building on her character development, Bella gives a description of herself stating: "I was the trouble maker. I was demanding and creepy. People who weren't acquainted with me shied away, but I was really a good person. I was loyal to my friends, kept all of their secrets, and I protected them" (ScarletteVamp, Onyx Knight). This self-description portrays Bella as a protective individual who has the ability to intimidate and scare others that may be threatening. A "good person" here is defined as someone who is loyal and cares about the safety of others, both physically and emotionally, as seen from the emphasis of "keeping secrets" rather than exploiting or disrespecting someone's trust. Paying particular attention to the value of

trustworthiness might support Taylor's emphasis on the importance of confessing and witnessing, valuing the ability to be witness-able. This emphasis and value on being trustworthy then is a form of signifying who is able to provide protection and power. This version of Bella is able to look after her own safety, as well as the safety of others. She even declares her intent to have a career in the military and "vowed to protect America" (ScarletteVamp, Onyx Knight), a traditionally literary feminine symbol. This Bella figure is a defender, fighting for the freedom and safety of others, specifically, the passive, vulnerable woman or girl.

As the narrative moves forward and Bella is reuniting with her father in Forks, she uses key descriptions to align herself and her identity parallel to that of her father's, showing that she is mirroring the masculine power and embracing a paternal inheritance, after disassociating with her mother. The reader can now speculate that Bella's mother is described as "psycho" either because she is cruel and controlling, or possibly (and maybe even probably) because she is the contrasting figure to the powerful "terminator," and could be seen as an emotional, weak, and undesirable figure. In contrast, to establish the ideal masculine figure, Bella describes her father as the "best ass-kicker in America. He had been featured on America's Most Wanted several times for lockin' up the bad guys once and for all. He is ex-FBI since he retired a couple of years ago" and is now "somewhere on the lines of an 'assassin' or perhaps a 'spy'" (ScarletteVamp, Onyx Knight). Bella's father, Charlie, is described as a "Terminator," or a mechanical assassin, with super human strength and control

especially skilled in destruction and death. He is unemotional and silent, not talking to Bella when they see each other, but only giving "a welcoming nod, no hug or welcoming 'hello'" (ScarletteVamp, Onyx Knight) before helping her with her bags. Bella states that "Charlie was never emotional and barely ever talked. It was soo freaky how much we were alike" (ScarletteVamp, Onyx Knight).

To solidify that Bella is meant to impersonate her father, the story indicates that she physically mirrors him. Bella states that he is dressed "much like myself" and even accepts a sort of uniform when she explains: "Father wordlessly handed me a black trench coat that looked eerily similar to his, and I covered my dark ensemble. I had to admit, Charlie and I are quite alike" (ScarletteVamp, Onyx Knight). Bella then "steps in line" saying "I followed in-step behind Charlie (I probably looked like a mini him)" (ScarletteVamp, Onyx Knight). With the constant reminder from Bella that she is "just like" her father, it is clear that she is not just observing their similarities, but emulating him, wanting to be aligned with him, at least superficially, with appearance, mannerisms, and attitude. What Bella is grasping on to is a uniform, a job title, and a "look" that represents belonging to the "group" that possess the most power. Revisiting her self-assessment within the fic that other people found her "creepy" might imply that appearance is a deep factor in holding power, specifically to intimidate others and as a defense against future threats.

The fic Bella's protective personality takes on another meaning when connected to Silver's point that Stephanie Meyer uses mothering as a "life force" that

“protects the vulnerable, protects others from evil” (Silver 134). What is observable within this fic’s narrative is a rejecting of the “mothering” role Silver discussed and a narrative that directly contradicts the canon’s path to becoming the “protector” through that role of mother. This alternate path might be a way for the text to be critiquing the original text and rejecting some of the Victorian gender roles that are embraced “about femininity and women’s domestic power, in which the middle-class woman is guardian of the home, shielding her family from the pollution and immorality of the public sphere” (Silver 134). This idea might be what Seltzer points out as just reversing but not changing the meaning of the designated gender roles; however, the fic might be pushing the idea a bit farther, suggesting that feminine characters are forced to either accept the gender roles designated to them through social construction, or disassociate from that gender and realign with the “opposite” role, in this case, masculine power symbols. In doing this, the fic not only supports the idea that binaries of gender roles exist, but they are the only options for feminine characters.

### **Protector Bella**

After having established her alliance with her father, the narrative shifts to introduce Bella's experience with trauma. This section is in the form of a flashback where Bella recounts how she had killed a man out of self-defense. The use of breaking the narrative to revert to a flashback parallels and exemplifies the idea from Felman and Laub that trauma disrupts the continuity of daily life, causing a break in a

linear timeline. This trauma narrative enhances the character development Bella previously set up and further embraces her role in a masculine narrative. Bella has moved on from the iconic innocent girl from Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight Saga*; she is now knowledgeable and proficient with guns, and even worked with the FBI to catch internet predators. This version of Bella is contrasting the canon Bella, becoming the “protector figure” through the use of guns, violence, and government organizations. What this contradiction might exemplify is Cicilia Hartley’s claim that online participation might help individuals “clarify, explore, and question some of the assumptions that are often left unstated and unexamined in traditional face-to-face linear dialogue.’ Summers points out that online spaces can provide the freedom to experiment with and resist the language that ascribes gender” (Summers 318). However, this positive assertion is too simplistic and optimistic an analysis of online spaces, as the fic narratives do not so much “resist language that ascribes gender” but engages with reassigning gender roles and exploring the possible avenues for feminine characters adopting masculine characteristics of power.

The flashback is prefaced when Bella discusses her remorse for having to kill someone, but also declares that “the sick bastard deserved it” (ScarletteVamp, Onyx Knight), showing that she believes that some violence, death, and punishment is justified in certain situations, especially as self defense. This declaration is coupled with a description of her father, who kills people to protect America; he is a professional assassin who is targeting Osama Bin Laden. The author is pairing his/her

characters with modern events and discussions within American culture, inserting a female character that is also inspired and capable, while embracing masculine and nationalists power structure as the answer to fighting against violent threats. What is seen here is an alignment with American cultural current events similar to what Mathew presents as responding to real life experiences and bridging a gap into a fictional narrative to explore important societal events and experiences. Incorporating these elements into the narrative signifies that to some degree, this text is making some social issues visible in stories that are often, as humanities and communication scholar Renee R. Curry claims, “unspeakable” or invisible within society. The joining of American cultural allusions within this fic’s narrative exemplifies what Felman and Laub define as the clash of violence and culture common within trauma narratives. The joining of these two elements can signify that the text is responding to a culture that is inundated with violence and responding to a shared experience of trauma.

In response to violent threats, fic Bella is redefining the “protective” figure from the canon, challenging the original text’s gender roles and becoming an alternative “protector” figure. As Silver points out, canon Bella is motivated by belonging to a clearly defined family unit, where fic Bella is motivated by her ambition to belong to the military. Here, the military is directly personified by her father, showing that the military is her family, and that she is intentionally choosing to participate and belong to a collective identity of power rather than canon Bella’s narrative, which places her in a passive role of hoping to be “accepted” (Silver). Bella

proves to be a competent protector of others as well as herself when she retells a story of having to physically defend herself.

Bella states that her experiences with trauma “opened my eyes to see all the bad in the world” (ScarletteVamp, Onyx Knight) showing that she is meant to displace the construction of the “innocent figure” described in Daly’s research, and is now realizing that feminine identity is not a safe identity within a patriarchal society. Bella is provided a gun to defend herself, and even though there are FBI agents present on the scene to protect her physically, they fail to show up in time to keep her safe. The FBI is willing to place Bella in reoccurring situations of “controlled” violence, where she experiences a cycle of repeated events relatable to Tuval-Mashiach et al.’s idea of cyclically reliving trauma. The FBI also provide Bella with a weapon, sending the message that “protection” is a masculine power, only available through physical violence and intimidation. Bella is left alone with the threat of danger and encouraged to embrace violence as the only form of control and safety. In this moment, if Bella embraced a feminine passive role, she would have been further assaulted, but as her attacker physically pulled her off the ground by the hair, Bella used her symbolically masculine tool and shot him in the throat. She is an active character who takes steps to influence her future path, but her independence relies on traditional masculine systems of power to provide her with the power necessary in fighting against the abuse of women by men.

What is particularly interesting about this narrative is that even though Bella personally suffered from a traumatic experience due to a failing of the masculine power system of the FBI, she does not reject the institution that could not protect her; instead she further aligns with them. This narrative implies that men are the only significant figures within power negotiations, and women are present only to be protected. In order to gain power, Bella has to be willing to become violent, physically indistinguishable from the masculine power source around her, and driven to grow as a defender of the “weaker” figures within the fic that are unwilling or unable to defend themselves without masculine violence and strength.

### **Socially Constructed Gender Roles and Hetero-normative Family Structures in Starless Flight’s “Plane to Freedom”**

In the fic "Plane to Freedom," Starless Flight writes a back-story for Bella that also questions the role of power and authority within a patriarchal society, but emphasizes the role of trauma and abuse within the narrative. Within this fic, Bella discloses her situation to her reader through a series of flashbacks that show how her "stepfather has anger issues, and [her] mother's a coward" (Starless Flight, Plane to Freedom). The use of flashbacks include the reader as a witness to the trauma Bella experiences and exemplifies the cyclical timeline that trauma can create on individual experience, memory, and narrative structures. In this fic, Bella wants the reader to know her experience as she starts out admitting that "I should explain" (Starless Flight, Plane to Freedom), implying that there is a deep story behind the moment the reader first meets the main character and a reason that her personality has developed in

a certain direction up to this point in her life. By providing Bella with a complex past, the author is opening up the possibility for her to have an equally, if not more, complex identity and future. This fic depicts a coming of age story for Bella that leads her from an abusive household to a supportive, loving environment where she can develop into, as the author labels her a "[s]mart, independent, kick ass Bella!" (Starless Flight, Plane to Freedom). Bella reacts to her experience of abuse and trauma by questioning the relationships she has with her parents, expecting to find protection and support from them, the same "mothering protection" and support that Silver points out is integrated into the canon narrative, and readjusting her own actions when she does not find those attributes at home. Like "Onyx Knight" this fic rejects the acceptance of the mother protector and in so doing, challenges the idea the women are safe within a patriarchal society without aligning themselves with a strong, masculine power source to fight the external threats of society, discrimination, and limited access to power.

This fic is informally sectioned into three parts: a back story to the escalating abuse Bella faces in her home, as well as flashbacks to her experiences of trauma; Bella's present day arrival in Forks to live with her father, Charlie; and a joint reflection with her father over the memories of self defense training Bella learned from him when she was younger. From Bella's point of view, the reader is taken through a coming of age story that questions the role of traditional male and female

power structures and the reaction girls-turning-into-women can have when faced with violence and trauma.

### **Unfolding Testimony and Seeking Protection**

Within the fic's narrative, Bella does not grow up experiencing abuse, but after Bella's stepfather, Phil, starts undergoing chemo treatments, he develops anger management issues. Bella states that throughout his emotionally and physically taxing journey, he found the "tongue lashings he gave me made him feel just a bit better. So he started doing it when he was mad, then whenever something went wrong, and then whenever I was in sight" (Starless Flight, Plane to Freedom). What this quotation shows is the progression of abuse and how it can seem helpful to let someone take their emotional issues out on another human being that is simply near them; however, abuse is not an appropriate response to personal pain and only grows into more extreme and inappropriate behavior if not stopped. Bella states that "he didn't just wake up one day and decide to hit me" but there were "events that led up to it" (Starless Flight, Plane to Freedom). Actions and responses develop throughout this fic, showing that there are reasons, motivations, and personal developments behind individual events.

Through Bella's explanation of the progression of abuse, the text is enacting Felman and Laub's idea of "unfolding" a narrative of trauma, allowing the reader to actively engage with and participate in its retelling. Bella is using first person to relate

her story to the reader, setting up a sort of relationship of “confessing” and addressing the reader as a confidante, someone safe to share her story with. This text is another example of Curry’s claim that within narratives, there is the possibility to explore the range of female identity and provide an outlet of expression for females that know that “sometimes paper is the only thing that will listen to you” (Curry 97), making texts then, a form of testimony for “unspeakable” topics, events, or representations. Society risks “erasing girls if we refuse to hear the chaos of their positions” (Curry 100). This chaos then, can be found within texts that provide confessionals, testimonies, and socially “unspeakable” content such as abuse.

As Bella continues her story, she explains to the reader that she develops resentment toward her mother who abandons her by not supporting or protecting her when she is facing abuse. Throughout all of the verbal (and eventually physical) assaults that Bella experienced, she would look to her mother for some form of protection, but she states, “my mom stood there and let him” (Starless Flight, Plane to Freedom) hurt her. Bella does not state that Phil is innocent, but she does provide him with some tolerance and understanding due to his medical situation and the effects that the treatments are having on him physically and mentally. What Bella is most confused and hurt by is the lack of action that her mother takes when Phil verbally assaults her. Her mother allows her daughter to face these experiences, even though they are hurtful, inappropriate, and rapidly escalating. What the narrative is responding to is Silver’s idea of the “protective mother” figure that is supposed to

provide safety and guidance for girls throughout their coming of age story. Instead of following the gender role models outlined in the canon, this fic provides a mother that is complicit in the abuse of her daughter. The lack of a protective feminine power figure supports Hausknecht's idea of the coming of age story that is "really a story of loss" where the girl is losing safety, power, and authority, and is instead gaining awareness of her vulnerable position within a patriarchal society (32).

Bella admits that she felt "resentment toward [her] mother, who never bothered to offer help. Who only called [her] when she wanted something done, ...[and took her away from her] dad only for the personal house elf she got out of the deal" (Starless Flight, Plane to Freedom). When Bella would be recovering from the verbal abuse of Phil, she would retreat to her room and cry "all the while wondering, why my mother, who had been standing right behind Phil, hadn't said anything" (Starless Flight, Plane to Freedom). What Bella's reactions show to the reader is that this text is invested in hetero-normative biological ideas of kinship where Bella's biological mother is responsible for her protection and ultimately, holds more blame when Bella is not safe from external threats to her safety. This investment in a set social moral code is similar to Silver's claim that the canon text is participating in presenting a unified message of socially normative behavior emphasizing the role and importance of a hetero-normative biological family structure.

Taking into consideration the text's engagement with social messages, Bella could also be a stand in for girls experiencing their personal coming of age moment,

questioning why other women role models, or “mother figures” have not protected them better, sheltering them from the abuse of society and the outside threat to their personal autonomy and safety. The questions that Bella confesses to her reader might represent the larger questions the text is asking of readers: why are women threatened within patriarchal society and why are feminine power figures unwilling, or unable to help girls grow into a safer society? When Bella is looking to her mother for guidance, protection, and support, the text might be simultaneously looking to the reader for the same things. This narrative is an enacting Summers’ idea that “problems and questions that begin in the text transform into discussions that negotiate and challenge cultural messages about young women’s roles and choices as well as provide the opportunity to experiment with feminist identities” (316). What the fic’s narrative is activating then, is the start of questioning, engaging, and responding to social constructions of gender roles and access to power (or at least personal safety) and challenges the current patriarchal Western society that limits women and girls.

As Bella is trying to understand her mother's reactions/inaction to the abuse, she starts adapting to her environment and attempts to mitigate the traumatic events by leaving the house in the evenings to avoid any interaction with Phil. She only returns home when she is sure Phil is already asleep. Bella explains that she had made friends with a lady that owned a motel about a mile from her home who allowed her to stay in the front lobby each evening. The motel owner:

didn't ask questions, but she had a knowing glint in her eyes that all abused kids had. The acknowledgement of another sufferer, which never went away, even if you were too young to remember the abuse itself. Because what your mind didn't remember, your body had lived, and what your body had lived, your instincts knew.

Starless Flight, Plane to Freedom

At this point in the narrative, trauma is directly acknowledged as a life-altering factor that is recognizable and inescapable, even after the abuse is no longer an active threat to the individual's personal safety. This "reoccurrence" of trauma is similar to Felman & Laub's explanation that trauma is continually re-enacted, renewing the events so that they are continually relived, recreated, and re-experienced (xiv-xv).

At this point in the narrative flashback, Bella reveals that the abuse she was experiencing escalated into physical assault. This moment of intensification happens for Bella when she returns home one night from the motel and Phil waited up for her to start in on one of his aggressive episodes. Bella no longer was willing to take the abuse silently and submissively and asserts herself by yelling back at Phil who reacted by hitting Bella in the face. When Bella is knocked to the ground she tells the reader that "I looked at my mom, and she looked at me, but did nothing" and because of this reaction, "My heart hardened with my eyes, and I knew, that I would never have anything to do with these people again. I . Was. *Done!*" (Starless Flight, Plane to Freedom). Bella then runs to her room, packs some essentials, and leaves immediately for the airport to travel to her dad's home across the country. Bella's first reaction to the abuse is to look to her mother for support. When this feminine power figure fails

her, she promptly realigns herself with alternate forms of power: her father, the stronger, masculine force in her life.

This event in the fic is the moment when Bella decides she is not only going to survive, but also take control of her situation. She leaves home because it is abusive, no longer healthy for her personal safety or emotional stability, and because her mother failed to provide her with the protection and support that Bella deserved as her daughter. What Bella has learned is that as a young woman, she is no longer safe from her stepfather and cannot rely on her mother to protect her from harm. What this might imply then, is that this is another narrative that declares the insecurity of being a girl/woman within patriarchal society, and how the feminine role model that her mother provided was weak, disappointing, and could not protect her. This feminine power source was not strong enough to fight against the threats of violent and abusive men. Bella might not be blaming Phil for his abuse then, because this story imagines it is expected for some men to present a threat to women. Bella's solution to rejecting this abuse is therefore to align herself with her only other source of power, her father, the alternative masculine power that will provide her the support and protection that her mother failed to give. What this might signify then is that to fight against a masculine threat, another masculine power is needed. Women again are passive figures in the narrative, and the young woman experiencing their coming of age moment has the option of either accepting the abuse and the passive role as the

receiver, or rejecting being the subject of abuse, and finding a beneficial masculine power to align themselves.

Through sharing this experience of trauma, Bella is turning the reader into a witness. As she frames her narrative in the present tense, Bella relives a flashback that Taylor explains, “makes the reader aware that testimony is an activity in which the past is not simply revealed, overtly or covertly, but created anew” (Taylor 128). This supports the idea that trauma is constantly re-experienced, creating a cyclical timeline that can be used to help cope with the abuse, emphasizing the “performative nature of testimony, the role of witnessing, and the possible therapeutic value of repetition and ritualized violence” (Taylor 135). Through testimony, Bella is able to create a witness, someone to experience the violence with her in a created present tense. Bella uses this form of testimony to revisit and share her experience, participating in a potential therapeutic practice of narrating her interactions with trauma in order to sort out and make sense of her personal story. Tuval-Mashiach et al. emphasizes the importance of this practice stating that through the telling of stories individuals are able to find identity and possibly recover from trauma.

### **Realigning with Masculine Power**

In the second part of this fic, Bella lands in Washington and reflects “I was far away from Arizona, and hopefully I’d never go back to that state” (Starless Flight, Plane to Freedom). This indicates not only that Bella is physically away from her

abusive situation and home state, but also understood as Bella's declaration that she hopes to never be in an abusive state again; she is optimistic for turning her life into a positive environment. Moreover, the reader's role as witness is now resolved or at least in the past and there are no more flashbacks to trauma within the fic. The lesson that Bella carries with her, and that the experience with trauma has taught her, is that aligning herself with the feminine power structures in her life has proven to be ineffective, and her coming of age moment is then to reject her current home and reunite herself with the masculine power of her biological father.

The emphasis on this narrative being a coming of age story continues during the cab ride to Bella's father's house. The cab driver starts up a conversation inquiring about Bella's light luggage and then states "Everyone seems to take a trip like that in their teens. It's part of life for a lot of kids" (Starless Flight, Plane to Freedom). This reaction points out that the situation of abuse is common for teens and that the cab driver has seen the pattern. Again, the stories imply that abuse is recognizable and expected as many youths are looking to find a better situation, driven to leave one place in a hurry for the hope of a new opportunity or to run from an old one. When they reach Bella's destination, the cab driver says "I've seen a lot of kids head out hoping for something better. A lot of em' don't find what they're looking for, so I just wanted to say, good luck" (Starless Flight, Plane to Freedom). This fic presents a harsher coming of age story reality than that of the original canon, again, one closer to Hausknecht's "story of loss." Many teens are in abusive situations and even when they

do seek out new opportunities to change their lives for the better, many of them don't find the safety and happiness that they were hoping for. When young women are the subject of abuse, they might also need the support of a masculine power in order to find protection and space for their individual growth and independence. Part of the coming-of-age experience for girls is to realize that society is dangerous for women; however, literature and gender studies scholar Brenda Boudreau points out that if the girl is able to receive guidance, understanding, and enough privilege to keep her safe from resorting to these pressures, she will be able to assert her own autonomy (50-1). Similar to the previous fic, the "autonomy" comes in the form of reliance on masculine power.

This point is made clear when Bella and her father interact. Bella arrives without notice on his doorstep and when she notes that he is still at work, she does not enter the house stating "I wanted to make sure I was welcomed before I went inside" (Starless Flight, Plane to Freedom). Bella's experiences have made her wary and she wants to ensure that her father is a benevolent masculine figure, as opposed to a threat, like her stepfather had been. When her father arrives home, he is immediately supportive, comforting, and loving. Bella has finally found a healthy, safe home like that which Boudreau has described, where she can reflect over her experiences. As she tells her father about the abuse, Bella states that her father "listened intently, doing his best to stay calm, despite the rage I could see as I described their actions, especially last night's. It was comforting to see, knowing it wasn't directed at me but rather for

me” (Starless Flight, Plane to Freedom). Bella's father is trying to control his rage, contrasting her Step-father's inability to control his emotions. Bella is "comforted" by this reaction and the protection her father wants to provide for her. She realizes she is experiencing a supportive and safe environment and is able to relax, accepting his shelter. Bella's father then, becomes another witness to her trauma, reliving the experiences with her in what Taylor describes as the “collective witnessing of the past” (126). Through this testimony, Bella is able to recreate the trauma and re-experience it, actively in the present tense with her father as a witness, emphasizing the contrast to what Taylor explains is the passive “remembered” event that emphasizes a completion or finality to the experience. At this point in the fic, it is clear that the coming of age story is going to end positively for Bella. Though she experienced abuse and trauma from her home in Arizona, a violence that shook her confidence in traditional female access to power, she found a safe supportive relationship with her father.

### **Bella: Son or Daughter?**

Part three of this fic provides an additional element to the support that Bella receives from her father: he does not simply save the innocent Bella from abuse, but rather, supports and comforts an active Bella character that is willing to admit she needs help and takes the steps to find herself a safe and healthy environment. Bella's father is not just supportive of Bella's success, but also supportive of Bella taking action over her own life and teaches her self-defense. What this might suggest is that

masculine sources of power might be able to help support feminine figures to develop their own defensive strength, or, this might be another example of reversing the gender roles without altering the narrative story. Is Bella stepping into a role that would be traditional for a son? Is she simply taking on a role as a masculine character rather than challenging the gender roles established within a patriarchal society? This ambiguity might suggest that being a masculine figure is the only way to seek autonomy, independence, and safety. Without a clear alternative for Bella's character, she is forced to accept the role of a "son" in order to protect herself and receive guidance from her father.

These questions continue through the narrative, which explains that when Bella was younger, her father taught her to shoot a gun, and teases her by saying “my little Hells Bells, will reek havoc!” to which Bella replies “And it’ll all be thanks to my mad Dad!” (Starless Flight, Plane to Freedom). This interaction shows that Bella’s father is not intimidated or afraid of his daughter’s independence or self defense, rather, he is proud of it. However, is he reinstating the idea that power, safety, and self defense can only be secured by the use of masculine violence and weapons? He started her training when she was young, supporting her to defend herself, even before there were any obvious threats in her life, or possibly while she was still a child, physically resembling a more-androgynous figure rather than the older, feminine figure of a woman. Bella’s father encourages her to have power in her life, giving her the gun

instead of just using it for her; however, the feminine character is once again limited to resorting to violence in order to ensure safety.

While the fic shows that her father supports Bella, it is unclear whether he is teaching her how to be a strong woman, or is showing her how to adopt masculine power through the physical training of violence. He does not shelter her from the violence, but teaches her safe gun practices, even when a fellow male peer (who could be a stand in for society in general, or masculine sources unwilling to share power with feminine figures) questions these decisions and “muttered something about abnormal and demon children” (Starless Flight, Plane to Freedom) in their presence. As this support from her father came when she was young, it might be suggested that Bella was able to question, resent, and reject the abuse she faced in her coming of age transition because she was able to remember the alternative power and independence that her father had encouraged when she was younger.

Though canon Bella does not have the same back-story of abuse, as Silver points out, she does encounter situations where she does not display any ability to defend herself. When she is in danger, she is saved by the super strength of the men in her life. Canon Bella is too clumsy to be in control of using a weapon properly and she is notoriously a martyr figure that places herself in additional or unnecessary harm in reaction to her romantic devotion to Edward. Therefore, even if she did have the skills to protect herself, she might not choose to. In contrast, the Bella in Starless Flight's fic is a survivor and displays how she is willing to fight for power and independence from

the social threats many girls face and broader, even if this path leads to the reliance on masculine power.

This chapter has argued that, the selected fics present an exploration of a new Bella character, encountering a coming-of-age moment and aligning with masculine strength in a quest to gain power, autonomy, and personal safety. In rejecting being the subject of abuse, Bella is forced to also reject aligning with characteristics such as passivity, weakness, and emotionalism, which are often associated with femininity in these fanfics. The structure of these fics came in the form of using original, canon Bella, and adding a back-story that includes flashbacks to her experiences of trauma. By adding abuse and trauma overtly into Bella's backstory, the authors engage the audience directly and create witnesses to the experiences that Bella testifies through first person. These fics also explore the dangers of being a girl/woman within a culture that favors patriarchal constructions of control and the necessity for girl characters to align themselves with those masculine powers through rejecting or contradicting of traditional gender roles and adopting traditional masculine figures of violence, weapons, and military training. The narratives of these fics might be pointing to the beginning of a path towards questioning, imagining, and eventually articulating a route for feminine characters to not just adopt masculine characteristics in order to find power, but possibly to gain power within society through their alignment with feminine identity. These fics are starting this process by engaging with the initial questions of "why" and "how" but not quite moving into a new imagined social power system. By

including trauma into Bella's backstory and incorporating flashbacks to connect to the reader through testimony, the fics provide a narrative space to show how performance can lead to what Taylor calls a "therapeutic practice" and a connection of empathy among characters, as well as between the reader and the text.

## **Chapter 2: Seeking Agency and Having Power Structures Fail: Acting Out to Violence, Disassociation, and Revenge**

### **Introduction:**

Within the last chapter, the fic narratives aligned Bella with traditionally masculine structures to seek independence, safety, and power. This chapter explores two additional fanfics that incorporate most of the same narrative, stylistic, and intentional aspects discussed in the last chapter such as the use of testimony, the reader as witness, and the rewriting of a "stronger" Bella character. The following two fics however, add another layer to Bella's story. Instead of finding a benevolent masculine power source and realigning with traditional masculine traits to become indistinguishable from another "masculine soldier," the Bella characters in these fics experience such extreme trauma that they resort to what Taylor calls "acting out" the trauma experienced and creating more violence.

Like the fics in the last chapter, these texts are in direct response to the original canon, interrupting the narrative to create an "alternate universe" (AU) where something changes in the plotline of the story. Both of the following fics use the original canon's story and Bella's history, but drop the reader into a particular point into the canon narrative to change the events, reactions, and outcomes of the story and explore what happens to Bella as she seeks power, experiences trauma, and eventually resorts to enacting extreme violence on others. What these two fics are investigating is what happens to a Bella character that seeks agency and then has her power

traumatically striped from her. These texts ask: what happens when the path to agency leads to more trauma and pain, not because it did not provide power, but because this power leads to a cycle of violence and a loss of self? What is significant about this question is the implication that women and girls are unable to find power, safety, and independence apart from masculine powers or associations. Even when a feminine character does find a benevolent masculine power, that source of security can be taken away by other power forces that present bigger threats to safety, recreating a state of vulnerability to external violence, and leading to a break in the feminine individual to start violently “acting out” the trauma that has been inflicted on her physically and emotionally. This is different from the previous chapter where, if Bella used violence, it was to physically protect herself. In this chapter, Bella uses violence to seek revenge or "justice." This change shows Bella as trapped within violence, unable to break free from this cycle, and imprisoned by the lack of stability and protection this path has provided her.

### **Violence, Loss, and Trauma in Plain J’s “Hell Hath No Fury”**

Plain J writes a revenge story in the fic "Hell Hath no Fury" where Bella follows the canon narrative up to the point where Edward leaves her in the forest, reasoning out that his actions are for “her own protection.” The fic then alters the plot to have Victoria, another vampire from the canon, return and torture Bella and her father, eventually killing him. Bella is haunted by the violent events of torture, physical intimidation, and emotional anguish from watching her father brutally killed.

Victoria, the vampire that administered the violence, acts out of vengeance for her murdered lover. In the canon, as well as this narrative, she blames Bella for the death of her "mate" and since she is denied justice from the vampire world of authority, she decides to torture Bella and her father. Both Victoria and Bella employ the "acting out" of their traumatic experiences that is presented in Taylor's research, and commit torture, brutal violence, and show delight in murdering figures that align with their adversaries.

What this fic is initially presenting is the suggestion that women are able to align themselves with masculine power structures when seeking power and independence, but when justice is denied, characters will act independently of their power source, violently seeking revenge without the traditional "discipline and structure" that are associated with masculine power. Within these narratives, Bella gains power from her masculine figures of authority, but when those sources are taken from her, she maintains the power, using it for violent revenge rather than for protection, love, or even personal gain. The motivation to act for Bella is for revenge and/or justice. What this reaction implies is that feminine figures aligning with masculine power sources are still vulnerable to external societal threats of violence, and the danger that, if they lose their power source of protection and power, they will lose some of their masculine privilege, such as the authority to engage in violence without punishment. Within this fic, the violence Bella resorts to a reactionary,

destructive violence motivated by revenge and perpetual suffering, condemned to repeat itself in a cyclical pattern of constantly creating future trauma events.

### **Involuntary Cycle of Violence and Re-experiencing Trauma**

This narrative starts with Bella reliving the trauma that she has experienced through nightmares. This fic does not set up an initial relationship between Bella and the reader like the fics in the previous chapter did, but place the reader right at the scene of trauma where Bella is relieving the torture of herself and her father. This effect makes the reader a witness without building any initial sort of empathy or “testimonial” relationship. Bella is not reliving her traumatic experiences through the performative practices that Taylor introduces that might lead to healing, but rather, is forced to relive the trauma through the unwanted and involuntary form of nightmares, re-experiencing the suffering in a constant positioning of present tense. What this fic is clarifying for the reader is that Bella is not in control of her experience right now; she is being forced to relive trauma and share that trauma with the reader without any relational intentionality. This is not the kind of healing testimony of narrative that Tuval-Mashiach et al. detail in their research, but is a forceful, reliving of trauma.

In the nightmare, Bella is in the present tense, reliving her trauma, trapped in the cyclical timeline of suffering. Bella is calling to her father, telling him "Wake up, Daddy. You gotta fight. The pack will find us soon; you just have to fight" (Plain J, Hell Hath No Fury). This appeal to her father shows that Bella is relying on the

"pack," or group of werewolf friends to come and help them. Bella is identifying her father as a source capable of fighting and is trying to rally his energy to continue in that role long enough for another, stronger masculine power source to come and save them from the violent torture and abuse they have been facing.

Still within the nightmare, Victoria kills Charlie (Bella's father), which prompts Bella to wake up screaming. In that moment of pain and anguish, "The warm embrace of a wolf hugged and rocked her until she fell back into a peaceful slumber" showing that Bella is still relying on the wolves to comfort and protect her. Later in the fic's narrative, it is revealed that Bella had also received comfort from Jacob, also a werewolf and Bella's best friend who becomes her lover when she moves on from Edward. Bella states that after she was abandoned by the Cullens (Edward and his family), "Jacob took care of me, wanted me, loved me. He brought brightness back into my life" (Plain J, Hell Hath No Fury). Though the support and love of alternative power sources, (and conventional heterosexual romance), Bella is able to move on from the emotional trauma of abandonment. After the further physical and emotional trauma from Victoria, Bella finds comfort with another werewolf because Victoria also kills Jacob. Bella is adaptable and can move from one source of power to another, but she has experienced significant loss and pain, and throughout these experiences, she has learned that she is not safe, even when she aligns with powerful masculine sources. This seems to suggest that women are not safe within a patriarchal society, even if they do find protection under the umbrella of a benevolent masculine power

structure. If masculine power sources are the only option for feminine characters to align themselves with power, then all security is dependent on the strength and existence of that power source. This fic explores what happens to Bella when she loses her benevolent power sources (first Edward, then her father, and then Jacob), and experiences extreme perpetual trauma and abuse.

When Jacob was dying, he asked his family take his bones and create a dagger for Bella to protect herself against vampires. His last act is to provide her with some of his protection to carry around with her. This image could be an allusion to the Biblical account of the creation of man story, where Adam involuntarily has a rib removed by God to create the first woman, Eve. In that story, God is the creator with ultimate power, authority, and autonomy, sharing some of his power by “creating man in His image.” What this fic is suggesting then, is that Jacob (with the help of his pack) is able to pass some of his power on to Bella, awarding her a small portion of the power that he possesses, and that she is without. Jacob’s power is innate in him, he did not create it, but he is able to share it with Bella when he faces his own mortality. As he is mortal, he has to rely on the power of his collective pack to help him pass on the power, positioning his strength within the masculine collective, enlisting their permission in including Bella in the circle of power. Jacob’s superhuman bones create an effective tool in fighting vampires and signify a tool of power that Bella can use apart from any power structure. After losing Jacob and gaining her token of power, Bella decides to react to her experiences of physical torture and abuse by becoming a

vampire hunter and devoting herself to repaying the Cullen family back for the pain they forced into her life. In this fic, Bella uses her power to intimidate and threaten the vampires that have wounded her.

Bella is not the self-sacrificing or weak character that is the canon Bella; in this fic, she is violent, selfish, and determined to physically punish the individuals whom she blames for her emotional and physical trauma and personal loss. Her transformation is a direct response to the violence, trauma, and loss that have defined her existence directly following the Cullens' decision to leave Bella's life. She is aware that she has changed from the passive creature that she was before Edward left her and rejoices in violence, taking pleasure in causing pain to those she believes deserve to pay for the torture and death of Charlie and Jacob, and her previous, pre-trauma identity. What this suggests is that trauma has the power to transform an individual so that one becomes isolated and eventually violent. This transformation causes the individual to lose some of their identity, turning into a form that is "unrecognizable" from their previous pre-trauma self. As Taylor described, the individual is trapped within the repetition of experiencing trauma, and therefore, violence becomes part of their identity until the individual does not exist without it.

Bella does not want sympathy; she wants action. She wants to inflict violence and pain on those who she has judged are responsible for her trauma, reenacting the violence through more violence. Though testimonies are a form of repetition to the traumatic events, Taylor distinguishes a difference between "acting out" the trauma,

and therefore, perpetuating violence, and revisiting trauma through the retelling and reimagining of testimony that can lead to healing and personal growth (140). Within the fic, Bella refuses to enact the healthy performativity of trauma that Taylor explores, but chooses to "act out" the trauma she has experienced, producing more violence and suffering. Bella refuses the opportunity of voluntary, therapeutic testimony when her werewolf friends state that they wish she would talk with them so they could help her. Instead, Bella is acting out the events that haunt her, symbolically reliving the torture and death of her father, the death of her lover, Jacob, and the emotional destruction that she experienced when the Cullen's left her by creating more violence in the future.

### **Acting Out Violence and Seeking Revenge**

Bella's first act of violence is seen when Alice Cullen visits Bella and Bella immediately cuts off her hand. Alice is shocked by the change in Bella and asks, 'Bella, what happened to you? You were never this cruel'" (Plain J, Hell Hath No Fury). Bella responds by outlining the distress that the Cullen's actions have had on her life, which prompts Alice to react with remorse and surprise. Bella is outraged by this seemingly innocent reaction and the following dialogue occurs:

Bella almost didn't recognize the wicked sound coming from her mouth. It sounded a bit deranged. 'Why would you care? YOU left ME, remember? Without so much as a 'see ya later, have a nice life'. Why the fuck would you care if I was dead or alive anyway?' 'You're my sister, Bella. Of course I care!' 'Bullshit! If you cared, where were you the last nine months, huh? Where were you when I needed you? Where were you when she killed my Jacob? HOW

ABOUT MY FATHER, ALICE? WHERE WERE YOU?' Treacherous tears fell down my cheeks. I wiped them away with vengeance.

Plain J, Hell Hath No Fury

Bella's response shows that she is rejecting apology and forgiveness and seeks violent "justice" or revenge. After facing the trauma of losing several sources of masculine power and security, Bella has become her own form of a violent super human, not by becoming a vampire (as in the canon), but by hunting, dominating, and destroying super-humans. She is beyond obeying any power structure rules and takes matters, literally, into her own hands. Moving through this transformation, the original Bella has been violently destroyed and is now unrecognizable to the original characters, as well as to Bella herself, who "almost didn't recognize" her own voice. Bella still struggles with the pain from experiencing trauma as well as her emotional characteristics. She reacts to the "treacherous tears" she has and to her own feminine identity by stifling it immediately "with vengeance." Denying this identity that expresses emotion and could possibly lead to a testimony, then, becomes an act of violence and rage.

In her fury, Bella explains that even though the Cullens did not necessarily intend to cause harm to her by leaving, they still started the chain of events that devastated her and limited her ability to find happiness. Bella believes the Cullens are to blame. What the above quotation establishes is that not only did the Cullens' initiate the cause of such serious consequences, they also abandoned Bella to deal with all of

the aftermath, forcing her to accept responsibility for the decisions they made. In making her a passive figure in decisions that dramatically influence her future, they damaged Bella beyond repair, and condemned her to live a life that forever experiences violence, either in the form of harsh memories, or future actions.

This reasoning can carry over to the pain that can be seen in Hausknecht's idea of a coming of age story that emphasizes loss, rather than of empowerment. By embracing limited gender roles for women, the *Twilight Saga's* canon text can be seen as reinforcing this process of loss, and therefore, emphasizing the trauma that is part of the coming of age story as a genre. The original canon's text might be encouraging the portrayal of women being a submissive, passive, controllable figure. However, as Summers points out, Stephanie Meyer's authorial intent might have been to engage and encourage fans to respond to and question the material through participation in digital spaces of discussion that "encourages both reinforcement of and resistance to cultural messages in a space created for and by an audience of girls and young women" (Summers 319). What is clear is that limited gender roles do exist in the original text narrative and that through responding to the portrayals of characters from the canon, individuals might be able to engage and imagine how to question the established systems of power within Western society. In writing a fiction of action, Plain J is creating a space where Bella is able to reject and destroy the image of Bella as the "weak human that they thought her to be" (Plain J, *Hell Hath No Fury*).

Bella is delighted at the success of her violence, seeking out each Cullen individually, as well as those associated with them, and killing them, dismembering them, and then burning them so that they can never reform and return to their power to bring her future harm. Bella rejoices in each victory, taking pleasure in the destruction of her adversaries. This startling reaction is visible when Bella kills a hyper-sexualized vampire, Tanya, and "Watching [her] fall to the ground, Bella started laughing" (Plain J, Hell Hath No Fury). Bella is seeking out the Cullens, stating "I have a score to settle with them" (Plain J, Hell Hath No Fury). This reaction echoes a previous event in the fic when Bella kills Alice and then calls the "Pack" to come help her with the "clean up." When her werewolf friends, Embry and Quill, arrive, "Embry picked Bella up, spinning around while Quill whooped and hollered about what a bad ass Bella was" (Plain J, Hell Hath No Fury). The werewolves celebrate Bella's violence and murder of a vampire, showing that her actions are, within the context of this fic, appropriate and desirable. This might signify to the reader that the text is destroying something dangerous, something that threatens peace and must be eradicated.

Bella is symbolically dismantling and destroying her enemies as a sort of vigilante, traveling alone, bringing "justice" to the world of fiction, one where vampires and Victorian gender roles exist, imagining a "stronger" Bella character that will not allow further abuse to happen to her. This Bella character however, embraces violence, relives her trauma through "acting out" the brutality she has experienced, and loses some of her original sense of self so that she is now "cruel" and

"unrecognizable," even to herself. She takes an offensive role to fight back against injustice and has a "score" then, to settle not only with the Cullens, but with the coming of age story for girls within patriarchal society, which is structured by trauma, loss, and a struggle for safety and independence.

### **Justice, Testimony, and Redemption in AlwaysTheDarkAngel's "Justified Reasons"**

The Bella character within the fic "Justified Reasons" experiences another representative coming of age story for girls that is defined by trauma, abuse, and a loss of self. The same themes are present within this narrative that have previously been discussed: reader/text roles of witnessing, cyclical tendencies of trauma, the difference between "acting out" violence and "practicing" it, the healing aspects of testimony, and the need for aligning with masculine power structures in order to find protection against other masculine power sources that present physical and abusive threats to women and girls. As those patterns will be discussed in this section, some variations will be emphasized as well. Even though this fic is focused on Bella and the transformation she goes through to turn from "sweet little innocent Isabella Swan" (AlwaysTheDarkAngel, Justified Reasons) into a murderer, prisoner, and traumatized adult, the fic is from the point of view of Jasper (one of the Cullen family members from the original canon). Again, we see a Bella character that has undergone extensive abuse and trauma and is unrecognizable from her previous self, but we see that "self" through the eyes of another character.

AlwaysTheDarkAngel writes about an alternate universe (AU) where Bella is in jail for a murder she commits soon after the Cullens leave her in the canon narrative, linking the events that occur in this narrative directly as an effect from the traumatic events of loss and abandonment that Bella experiences in the canon. Like the previous fics, this story is also in direct conversation with the canon narrative as it accepts all of the facts of Bella's canon story and world up to the point where the fic interrupts the story and readjusts the path and the character's futures. This fic recognizes the canon text up to the same "Forest Scene" from *New Moon* where Edward and the rest of the Cullens abandon Bella.

The fic's narrative picks up three years after this event, and Bella is introduced when Jasper is visiting a prison to scout out his next meal. He over hears a guard state the name "Isabella Swan" and in recognizing the girl his family abandoned several years ago, his attention is drawn to Bella and he starts wondering about the events that lead to her imprisonment.

### **The Reader and the Collective Witness**

In previous fics, when narration is from Bella's point of view, the author is providing the audience with the opportunity to share knowledge of trauma with the reader from the "safe distance" that Mathew describes, building empathy for Bella's experiences and creating a solidarity among "survivors" of the fictional characters, and the readers who "live through" the retelling of the trauma. This fic's alternate view

point guides the audience through observing Bella, witnessing the testimony of her traumatic and violent experiences to another character, rather than reliving them through the flashbacks and nightmares that were present in the previous fics. As this text is detailing experiences that are often unspeakable, especially for young adults, confined beneath the legal power of their parents, this testimony is challenging that silence and enacting the importance of testimony to multiple audiences. Bella is not just testifying to Jasper, but the text is also testifying to the reader. This action's "whole effort is, precisely, to decanonize the silence, to desacralize the witness and, in so doing, to enact the liberation of the testimony from the bondage of the secret" (Felman & Laub xix). By having more than one witness, the text is able to make this story "sharable" and not a solitary experience.

This alternate viewpoint of this narrative allows the reader to experience and examine Bella from another perspective, that of the outsider, rather than the previous fics that lead readers through the narrative from Bella's perspective. The gap of three years between the "Forest Scene" from the canon text, and the moment that the fic narrative picks up, leaves Jasper (and the reader) wondering what events lead to the transformation of Bella and the change from the original plot line. Looking from Jasper's perspective then, allows the reader to discover Bella's story and realize the devastating impact the alteration to the narrative has had on her life. Within this fic, the reader is positioned through the point of view of another character. This placement removes the reader one step from being Bella's witness and instead, watches the

unfolding of Bella's story through her voluntary confession to Jasper and witnesses the whole story, rather than individual events.

When Jasper first discovers that Bella is in prison, he is looking for humans to kill for his next meal. As a vampire, he has super human abilities of extreme strength, speed, sensory skills, as well as acute emotional perception and manipulation. Jasper explains that unlike other vampires who stalk their pray from the general public, "I preferred to search the local prisons" and even though he was looking in a co-ed prison "I only fed off the males" (AlwaysTheDarkAngel, Justified Reasons). Jasper represents a masculine power that only poses a threat to other males, specifically males that have been tried by a legal system and are classified as "guilty" for criminal charges. In this fic, Jasper is set up as a benevolent masculine figure of power, and again, the male figures are warring entities with each other. This fic also engages with the systems of "justice" and "guilt" which will be important in defining who is the "victim" and who is the "perpetrator" in regards to Bella's suffering of abuse and involvement of violence, taking into consideration the motivations and reasoning. This text seems to be invested in upholding the deeply problematic, unjust system of judgment that is the American criminal justice system. This is yet another patriarchal structure that the text already has found faulty in judging Bella's situation by denying her a the opportunity to seek justice for the acts of violence committed against her, but Jasper's feeding habits seem to suggest that the men within prison are sub-human or unquestionably guilty, disposable, and forgettable. Is this analysis of violence against

women then obscuring the violence done against men by the prison system? This question engages Taylor's discussion on the "dichotomy between victim and perpetrator(s)" (Taylor 130) implying that there is a desire from audiences and witnesses to clearly see these roles defined in order to pinpoint blame; however, there is often a layering to the events that should be represented in "the complexities of traumatic testimony" (Taylor, 130). Though this text incorporates the complexities of what Taylor defines as a "successful testimony," the text is still showing troubling commitment to believing in patriarchal systems of power, even while identifying some of the instances where it contributes to the abuse, marginalization, and continued violence to certain individuals.

During his hunt, Jasper takes time to investigate Bella's situation and backstory. He listens to two guards talking and overhears the following information:

She's been here for almost three years. Always starting fights and doing things she shouldn't. She used to almost live in solitary confinement because she was put in so often, but we just took her out because it wasn't doing anything. She has her own room so she doesn't fight with the other inmates. This place is practically her home. She'll sneak around, wandering into places she shouldn't be. She's incredibly smart too. Once we found her just sitting by the entrance. She could have escaped by just walking out the gate but she didn't. When we ask her why she didn't run she just says that she has nothing outside of here. We know she won't run so we pretty much just let her do what she wants

AlwaysTheDarkAngel, Justified Reasons

What is significant about this information that Jasper overhears, is that limited gender assumptions are present in patriarchal society and masculine power structures,

such as prison, where an independent girl could represent a threat to the established power structure. When this challenge to authority is present, some power might be offered by the masculine figure as an extension of some privileges to coax the feminine figure in to giving up larger access to her freedom in other forms (Daly 10). As long as those with power will be generating these fears about female power, sexuality, and identity, societal institutions of churches, courts, schools, and family structures will remain silent and compliant with these suggested “prisons.” The repression and invisibility of female sexuality will be upheld and viewed as a morally corrupt attribute that must be purged and removed from the pure female (Daly 10). This is relevant to the idea of “breaking the silence” of “unspeakable events” through the actions of testimony, showing that maintaining this silence might be a form of prison, where testimony might lead to a form of freedom.

Bella tests out her boundaries, constantly "doing things" and "wandering" where she "shouldn't." This pushing of the limits can be seen as representing a challenge to her confined physical spaces, but also a symbolic reference to her search for power and agency within the limitations of her fictional world. Bella is "incredibly smart" and shows that she is able to navigate around the limitations and restrictions placed on her (and her gender), but when she has the chance to leave confinement, she just sits and passively accepts her situation, claiming that "she has nothing outside of here." As Taylor's research implies, Bella is unable to leave her prison because she has not had the opportunity to testify her experiences with trauma and therefore,

remains in confined. She has no alternate path but one of compliance and incarceration. When the male guards realize that Bella poses no real threat to the system, they stop trying to control her behavior, and just remove her from the rest of the inmates so that her deviant behavior is mitigated.

### **Past, Present, and Future Trauma: a Cycle of Violence**

When Jasper later approaches Bella in her cell, she asks him if he is there to harm her or kill her like the "other vampire" that visited her. When Jasper shows concern, she explains that another vampire would "show up every once in a while and torture me' she took off her shirt and turned around...[to show] her back, scarred with cuts and bites...[with] the same scars on her arms and stomach"

(AlwaysTheDarkAngel, Justified Reasons). Bella explains that this physical abuse and emotional intimidation is accomplished by Victoria, the same vampire who had her mate killed by the Cullen clan and is blaming Bella for the violent murder of her mate. Similar to previous texts, Victoria is seeking revenge, "acting out" her own experiences with violence through brutally killing Bella's father. Bella states that she "ripped his heart out and put it right next to him" (AlwaysTheDarkAngel, Justified Reasons), and continually returns to torment, intimidate, and physically abuse Bella. Again, this fic encounters the theme that violence and abuse perpetuates more violence and abuse and that Taylor's idea of "acting out" violence is a common path for individuals experiencing trauma and abuse without the outlet of performance through testimony.

As Bella describes this trauma, she moves into her testimonial, deciding that Jasper is a figure that she can share her experiences with. She starts to reveal her experiences and tells Jasper that after her father died, “People started treating me different... It just made me stronger and I decided I needed to start taking care of and stand up for myself” (AlwaysTheDarkAngel, Justified Reasons), showing that Bella is an active character, ready to fight for her personal safety. She is willing to endure pain and grow from suffering, but she is also altered from the trauma. Her "innocent" self is brutally destroyed from abandonment, loss, and violence. Bella enters womanhood in reaction to the death of her father and the isolation she faces from her community treating her as a "different" or "other" character.

This active personality becomes apparent when Jasper asks Bella how she ended up in prison. Bella admits to killing someone from high school and that he "deserved what he got" (AlwaysTheDarkAngel, Justified Reasons). Jasper reflects that "she wasn't even sad that she did it. she was proud" (AlwaysTheDarkAngel, Justified Reasons), emphasizing the transformation Bella undergoes into a violent figure. The boy had asked Bella on dates repeatedly, and finally, she agreed to go. The date went well, but on the way home Bella explains the details of sexual abuse that she experienced. She states, "he pushed me into an ally and against the wall...I told him to stop. I begged him, but he wouldn't listen...He left me there crying” (AlwaysTheDarkAngel, Justified Reasons).

After Jasper hears Bella's testimony, he asks her if she went to the police. He is, in effect, asking her if she sought out the closest traditional masculine power structure to seek "protection" from the male threat of violence she experienced. Bella laughed "darkly" and replied, yes, but, "they didn't believe me. They said I was just making it all up to get attention...so I decided one night that something needed to be done. I got my dad's old gun and went to pay Mike a little visit" (AlwaysTheDarkAngel, Justified Reasons), showing the intentionality of her actions to respond to the abuse she encounters. What the narrative shows here is that even though Bella is willing to align herself with the masculine system of power and justice, she is rejected, blamed, and mocked. In this story, masculine power fails Bella and leaves her vulnerable to future threats of violence against her physical person, as well as placing a condemnation of blame on her. This narrative places into question who is the victim and who is the individual enacting violence. This testimony is an example of a text that "invites us to problematize the idea of a transparent and unmediated narrative of sexual trauma with static and clearly defined subject position of victim and perpetrator" (Taylor 128). Taylor questions the idea of a "successful testimony" and emphasizes that the idea of "truth" or "fact finding" and the judgment of "innocence" is more problematic than what traditional masculine power structures such as government, prison, and patriarchal society have established.

Bella confesses that she was willing to take justice into her own hands and fights against the violence that was done to her. Throughout this narrative, Bella faces

abandonment from the Cullens, witnesses the violent death of her father, experiences isolation from her community, is sexually assaulted on a date, and denied protection from the masculine power structure supposedly set up to protect her and administer justice. Bella has been denied all sources of power except for her own ability to “act out” violently against her trauma. Because Bella was denied the opportunity to testify to a benevolent masculine power source, she is forced to reciprocate the violence done to her. As Mishiach et al. point out, “the ability to [tell] a coherent story after experiencing traumatic events is positively correlated with better recovery and coping” (Tuval-Mashiach et. al 281). Because this is unavailable to Bella, she decides to kill the man who sexually assaulted her. By acting on this decision, Bella is aggressively ripped from girlhood to face a prison sentence that condemns her to further isolation, abuse, and trauma.

This fic interacts with this original canon narrative by placing Bella in a situation that emphasizes real-world implications of trauma, abuse, and violence that are all present in the canon text, but underscored with the story of romance, the desire for belonging to a family, and the excitement of super-human fantasy. When the Cullen’s abandon Bella in the canon, the emotional trauma that she experiences sets her up to encounter future abuse. This fic picks up on the canon’s willingness to portray Bella as "abuse-able" and pushes the narrative to show what can happen when characters are denied access to agency, justice, and personal protection. In trying to be an active character, Bella is further limited in freedom and subjected to prolonged

physical and emotional abuse. What this fic might suggest then, is that Bella is being punished because she stepped outside of her appropriate or designated feminine position in society and acts independently, without the approval of the masculine power structures established around her. This narrative emphasizes the imbalance of power and justice showing that men are able to enact violence on women without punishment from masculine power structures, but when a woman or girl enacts violence against a man without masculine authority, even if that violence is in response to abuse, they are punished. This narrative might be pointing out that feminine figures are not ever meant to take violent action; only masculine powers have access to engage in physical violence, and therefore, Bella is an independent and deviant figure. Because her autonomy poses a threat to traditional masculine power structures, she is forced into isolation, imprisonment, and perpetually experiencing abuse.

Bella's violence is seen as justifiable to Jasper, who then decides to take Bella with him. He tells her that you "don't deserve to be in here so I'm breaking you out. We'll get you new papers so you can just have a new life'...I couldn't stand the thought of leaving her in here when she didn't do anything wrong" (AlwaysTheDarkAngel, Justified Reasons). The fairy tale ending that Bella receives in this fic is that a stronger masculine source of power is willing to listen to her testimony, re-judge her as "innocent" and provide her with the resources, protection, and support to break out of prison and start a new life. What is essential to Bella's future is the approval of a

masculine power that is able to “judge” her and “free” her. This fic might be suggesting that some violence is acceptable, or at least unavoidable, in response to abuse and therefore, not justification for condemnation. Redemption is therefore attainable for a feminine character that is willing to align with the right masculine power source.

Throughout the narrative, the text is sending the message that patriarchal systems of power are trustworthy in providing safety and judgment, as is apparent from Jasper feeding off of the male inmates without the text offering any moral opposition. However, when the system does fail to provide justice and safety, as in Bella’s individual story, a higher masculine power, represented by Jasper in this fic, can provide a second judgment, or path to redemption.

As Bella leaves prison with Jasper, she is moody, defensive, dealing with "anger problems" and physically skittish, all affects from the multi-layered abuse, trauma, and violence that she has been experiencing for the last several years. Though a fairytale romance is written into the canon story, the original narrative sets Bella into a cycle of violent abuse that only super human powers, or stronger, masculine power sources can intervene to prevent. The transformed Bella figure is trapped within abuse and trauma until she is able to find a benevolent masculine figure to listen to her testimony and judge her as "innocent." Only then can Bella’s narrative move beyond the imprisonment of violence and start to recover, under the adopted protection of a powerful masculine source of power.

### **Conclusion: Fanfiction as a Complex, Layered, and Important Practice of Reimagining Stories**

Online fanfiction texts engage in a complex and important discourse with social constructions of power, representations of femininity, and access to safety and independence for women and girls. Many scholarly sources valorize these online spaces by concluding that they offer forms of resistance against social injustices. A common claim among current fanfiction scholarship is that some fic texts present alternate representations of an "independent" woman and girl seeking agency. Although this is a very optimistic view, what is hopeful about these narratives is the possibility they hold of using creativity and imagination to interrogate social constructions, and thus represent a possible first step towards dismantling oppressing social constructions.

What can be seen in these fics however, is not so much a questioning or reconstructing of power structures and gender roles, but an engagement with these challenges, and a repositioning of the gendered characteristics, thereby altering the narrative, but not necessarily changing it. The fics within this paper are representative of larger patterns apparent in *Twilight* fanfictions because of their incorporation of trauma narratives into the coming of age story for girls. By bringing together these narratives, fic texts struggle with reimagining a feminine character that can seek independence and safety. These features can only be found for the feminine characters in these fics through aligning with preexisting masculine power structures, and trapping the feminine character within a cycle of violence, either through trauma

testimonies and the recreation of violence, or from acting out violence in a forward perpetuation of the unresolved trauma.

If to "name the hope of a better world is to begin to forge that world" (Hausknecht 40), then rewriting and disrupting the current coming of age story within fictional dimensions is a step towards forming a more accurate and equal place for all individuals within society. At this point, fanfiction texts are not positively a space of empowerment; however, they are able to make clear the abuse that is often unacknowledged and even excused and normalized within canon texts such as the *Twilight Saga*. Fanfictions are valid texts, responding to canon narratives in complex, important ways. By looking at these spaces with a nuanced, critical approach, these online spaces of voluntary and public contributions can be unpacked to provide simultaneously encouraging and frustrating reflections, representations, and reimaginings of stories, society, and structures of power.

If limiting narratives like *Twilight* are able to be rewritten, then women and girls have some hope in rewriting their roles to imagine a future with new forms of independence. Yet to assume that imagination and rewriting of narratives automatically creates an empowering stage for representation is to simplify and belittle the active involvement with complex discourses these fic texts hold through their cultural positioning, composition development, and overall maturity of critical thought. It is important to look at fic texts as archontic texts, respecting them as

complex documents rather than projecting onto them the desires of the academic researcher.

From the analysis of the four fics selected for this paper, it is apparent that these texts are engaged with exploring access to power, independence, safety, and gender representations. By engaging with this material, the texts show that they are simultaneously relying on current masculine power structures, hetero-normative family structures, and limited gender roles, while also imagining ways in which these structures fail to protect, empower, and encourage women and girls. What is clear from the current scholarship on fanfiction, online digital spaces, and the narratives found within specific fics is that fanfiction texts are able to explore the possibility of reimagining social barriers and provide insightful thought: however, they are also reinforcing oppressive power structures and gender roles and representations. What the fic texts show is that a feminine character seeking independence and safety within patriarchal society is limited in her current access to power.

The active questioning and reforming of narratives allows for an opportunity to explore and engage with individual representations of trauma and abuse that might not be as accessible or are commonly unspeakable within society. Narrative imagination presents a hopeful space in theory, but the execution of resistance, even from fics that openly announce that they want to portray a “strong” and “independent” Bella still struggle with the established power structures and harmful gender assumptions.

What these findings suggest is that future research of fanfiction texts should focus on the documents as layered narratives, worthy of discourse analysis and close textual readings that do not either praise the texts as positive, progressive narratives, or critique them as oppressive, limited documents. Fics are engaging with canon texts, narrative reconstruction and character portrayals, but they are also providing both positive engagement and complex representations that could lead to the reimaginings of a more supportive and positive society.

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