
A Latter Day Eve: Reading *Twilight* through *Paradise Lost*

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Abstract: Critics have demonstrated how Stephenie Meyer's Twilight saga reinforces the notion that the appropriate roles for women are those of wife and mother. Viewed from a literary historical perspective, however, the Twilight saga can also be seen as reinterpretation of the Genesis story, told from a female point of view as a vampire narrative. Meyer's "New Eve" is part of a literary tradition that springs from Paradise Lost. Meyer's portrayal of the concept of free will and her connected depiction of the redemptive power of motherhood emphasizes elements in the Latter Day Saints tradition that present a more positive view of Eve, and by extension of "Woman," than is common in traditional portrayals of Genesis.

Keywords: Twilight (Stephenie Meyer), Paradise Lost (John Milton), Mormon (Mormonism, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints), Genesis, feminism

It may seem unlikely to pair together John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the canonical seventeenth-century epic about the Fall of Man, and Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga, a twenty-first-century series of novels about young love and vampires. In this essay, however, I want to argue that Meyer's Bella is a new Eve, whose story needs to be understood in the context of the Genesis story both in the Miltonic tradition and within the Mormon tradition that Meyer has claimed as an important influence. Like Eve, Bella Swan, the heroine of the *Twilight* saga, is a desired and desiring female figure who must weigh the costs of transgression. *Twilight* has been called an "allegorical tale about the dangers of unregulated female sexuality" in which Bella is "ostensibly a hero" but "in truth she is merely an object," a description that could easily be applied to the tradition of representations of Woman, exemplified by the first woman, Eve, from at least as far back as the Middle Ages.¹ Meyer's portrayal of Bella is, however, like Milton's nuanced portrayal of Eve, more complex than a choice between hero and object. While Bella, like Eve, appears to be dominated by her older, more physically powerful partner, she clearly has her own desires, opinions, and abilities, and she is shown acting upon them.

Reading Bella through Milton provides a literary antecedent for Bella's portrayal and can help us to understand *Twilight* as part of a tradition of women's responses to the legacy of the book of Genesis, especially as shaped by Milton's reimagining of it. Looking at the *Twilight* saga as part of this tradition can help us to continue beyond a discussion of what many see as the anti-feminist values of these novels toward an understanding of them as part of a long tradition of women writers' myriad responses to gendered questions of agency, desire, and reproduction.

Critics have not yet claimed *Twilight* as part of a tradition of women's writing, perhaps in large part because many perceive the values in the *Twilight* saga as inimical to feminist values. As feminist critiques have pointed out, Meyer's saga only allows Bella to operate within a narrowly circumscribed set of roles.² She may be given choices, but she ultimately

chooses the traditional roles of wife and mother, decisions that come to seem inevitable in the context of the narrative. The Twilight saga, with its championing of chaste sexuality within the context of a heterosexual married family and its depiction of a natural antipathy between a white vampire family and arguably animalized Native American werewolves, is clearly ripe for critique by progressive feminist readers.³ At the same time, Bella's choices are portrayed as powerful and redemptive and because the reader is given insight into her motives, her role as a new Eve becomes potentially empowering for women, not only within a Latter Day Saints (LDS) context, but also more broadly within Christian traditions of representations of women through Eve.

In creating a story in which the free will and sacrifice of the heroine save the day, Meyer is presenting us with a new version of the Eve of the LDS tradition, whose choice to eat the forbidden fruit is seen not as a transgression, but as a sacrifice. In this way, Meyer brings us an alternative to a long-standing and dominant version of Eve as destructive temptress, a tradition that Milton also reinterprets by presenting a complex and sympathetic portrait of Eve. Milton portrays Eve with interiority and depth, although she ultimately remains subordinate and submissive as part of a divinely ordained hierarchy of beings.

I want to suggest that Meyer is, in her own way, a "resisting reader," part of the long and significant literary tradition of women writers responding to the Genesis story as reimagined by Milton.⁴ For Meyer, as for Milton, the concept of free will is central to the narrative. Through the character of Bella, Meyer rewrites the tradition of Eve as responsible for the woes of mankind by giving us a heroine who exercises her free will to redemptive results. In my attempt to demonstrate how Meyer has created a "new Eve," I will first reference the tradition of women writers responding to *Paradise Lost* and also briefly introduce *Paradise Lost* and sketch out the main plotline of the Twilight saga for those unfamiliar with it. I will then point to some key connections between *Paradise Lost* and the Twilight saga, including *Twilight's* specific reference to the Genesis story and Milton's and Meyer's engagements with concepts of the Fall and Free Will. Next, I will look at Bella as a "new Eve," a figure whose embrace of a monstrous identity through her own free will is a revision of Eve's choice: Bella's transgression is a new "fortunate Fall." I will conclude with a glimpse at the implications for future study of reading the Twilight saga as part of a tradition of responses to *Paradise Lost*.

How have women writers responded to *Paradise Lost*? In the now-classic *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar demonstrate that women writers from the Brontës to Virginia Woolf wrestled with Milton's portrait of Woman: "Since the appearance of *Paradise Lost* . . . all women writers have been to some extent Milton's daughters, continually wondering what their relationship to his patriarchal poetry ought to be and continually brooding upon alternative modes of daughterhood"⁵. The truly thorny problem for women readers and writers is the ambiguous nature of Milton's portrayal of Eve. As Mary Wollstonecraft, best known for *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), points out, Milton's portrayal of Eve's story is utterly contradictory. He presents an Eve who is submissive, yet who was created because Adam yearned for an equal. How, Wollstonecraft asks, could any woman fulfill that role? The problem of Eve is not one of simple misogyny. Aspects of Milton's portrayal are misogynistic, but Milton also allows Eve a dignity and "majesty" that his contemporaries "rarely conceded."⁶ His Eve is desired and desiring, and her desires are not only for love and companionship, as Adam longs for, but also for knowledge and for freedom. Eve's desires are portrayed as having disastrous consequences, but also as somehow understandable and as a part of a story that ultimately leads to salvation.

Milton's Eve is at the heart of *Paradise Lost*, which relates the origins of humankind, attempting a new, even grander subject for the epic genre than its usual focus on the founding of a nation or a people, as in Virgil's *Aeneid*. His poem is meant to "justify the ways of God to men" through a retelling of the interconnected stories of Satan's rebellion against God, the story of Creation, the Original Sin of Adam and Eve, and the Expulsion from Paradise. The Hebrew of Genesis, which Milton knew and drew upon, paints the story of the Fall in broad, spare strokes. Milton's Latinate verse fills in many missing details in the Genesis account. His Eden, his Adam, and, most importantly for our purposes, his Eve still colour our imaginings of biblical origins as much as his powerful phrasing (e.g., all Hell broke loose) inflects our speech.

Like *Paradise Lost*, the Twilight saga has at its heart the story of a loving couple and an engagement with the themes of death, immortality, and the danger of trespassing the boundaries of forbidden knowledge and desire. The saga consists of four books, *Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse*, and *Breaking Dawn*, and tells the story of Bella Swan, who moves to the small town of Forks, Washington, to live with her father. There she meets and falls in love with Edward Cullen, who appears to be a seventeen year old, but is actually a nearly century-old vampire, part of a "family" of vampires headed by Carlisle Cullen, Edward's adoptive father. The Cullen clan has chosen a "vegetarian" lifestyle, hunting large animals instead of taking human prey. In this they distinguish themselves from almost all other vampires. In including Bella in their family without turning her into a vampire herself, the Cullens run afoul of the vampire leaders, the Volturi, who threaten to kill Bella if she is not herself made into a vampire. Bella, in love with Edward, desires to become a vampire and to be with him for eternity. He resists this, believing that he is a monster and that becoming a vampire means losing one's soul. Bella and Edward do marry and plan to make Bella a vampire, but consummate their relationship before she is turned. She becomes pregnant and gives birth to a human/vampire hybrid, a process that almost kills her, but one she insists that she endure for the sake of her child. Bella is only saved from death by being turned. In the end, Bella, her family, and supporters fight off the threat of the Volturi and the series ends with Bella, Edward, and their daughter bonded together as an eternal family.

While these two narratives may seem unrelated, those familiar with *Paradise Lost* will immediately recognize echoes of it in *Twilight*. The novel's epigraph is Genesis 2:17, the biblical injunction at the centre of Milton's epic: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." The cover design for *Twilight* features a pair of hands offering a ripe, red apple, the traditional instrument of the Fall. This striking design, which wouldn't be out of place for a *Paradise Lost* cover, highlights the importance of themes of forbidden desire, sexuality, and death in the novel. Carlisle, the Cullens' patriarch, turned vampire "just before Cromwell's rule," and Carlisle's own rabidly Protestant father, who persecuted innocents in the name of finding monsters, sounds like a man who, had he actually existed, might well have moved in the same circles as the passionately and militantly Protestant Milton (*Twilight* 331). The Reformation was not only an origin for the Cullen clan, but also a source for central components of the theology of the Church of Jesus Christ of LDS, which Stephenie Meyer has acknowledged as a major influence in her life and work. While Milton would not have endorsed much of the theology that can be traced to the beliefs and writings of the Church's nineteenth-century founder, Joseph Smith, the poet was deeply engaged with the movement of reform, and echoes of the hermetic texts that influenced Smith can also be found in *Paradise Lost*.⁷

The concept of free will, an essential component of Milton's justification of God's plans, is perhaps the crucial connection between the Twilight saga and *Paradise Lost*.⁸ Adam and Eve are created "free to fall," and while God in *Paradise Lost* is unfettered by human temporality and knows providentially all that will occur, he does not control his creations like puppets on a string. Free will and will power also drive the plot in the Twilight saga. Edward conquers temptation and triumphs over the evil elements in his nature, an example of virtuous self-control that demonstrates exactly how humans, or in this case, former humans, must wrestle with the temptation to transgress.⁹ Those who stand with the side of right in the Twilight saga do so, we are explicitly told, out of their own free will, a volition that binds the Cullens family together and that binds Bella to them. In the series' climax, the saga's equivalent of Milton's "War in Heaven," the supporter of the Cullens' cause, Garrett, declares that the Volturi seek "the death of our free will" (*Breaking Dawn*, 719).¹⁰ The Cullens and their allies are bound together through their free will and they stand against the Volturi in defence of this freely chosen allegiance.

The fall and free will both have important places in Mormon theology, which refers to free will as "agency" or "free agency." Mormons do not view Adam and Eve's disobedience as an evil thing; rather it was a necessary sacrifice and an ultimate good. Their view of the fall shares something with Milton's. His Adam, who has been informed of future redemption through Christ, is unsure about how he should feel about his transgression:

Full of doubt I stand,
Whether I should repent me now of sin
By me done and occasioned, or rejoice
Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring,
To God more glory, more good will to men
From God, and over wrath grace shall abound. (12.473–78)

Here Milton expounds on the idea of the *felix culpa* or fortunate fall, an idea present as well in the Mass for Holy Saturday, "O blessed sin that was rewarded by so good and so great a redeemer!"¹¹ LDS theology takes this idea further, praising both Adam and Eve for making a necessary sacrifice, for giving up their lives in the Garden of Eden in order to be able to have offspring. *The Book of Mormon* states, "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25). LDS theology, through the canonical *Doctrines and Covenants*, provides a role of importance for Eve and even depicts a Heavenly Mother, but LDS scripture (like the Hebrew Bible) does not provide much insight into Eve's interiority nor does it linger on the details of her experience. Just as Milton gives us more of the story of Eve and explains her motivations and temptations, Meyer, through the figure of Bella, a new Eve, retells her story in a way that brings to the fore the female will and sacrifice that is present, but rarely emphasized, in LDS versions of Eve's story.¹² And while Edward's struggle with his demons, with what could be called in the Mormon context his "natural man," is often foregrounded in the saga, it is finally Bella and her choices that are the fulcrum of the narrative. Like Milton's Eve, Bella is faced with a choice that will affect her own fate, her beloved's, and that of many more, but *Twilight* rewrites the Eve story to make Bella's struggle and her ultimate choice not only intuitively wise, but redemptive. In her triumphant exercise of her free will for the cause of good, Bella can be seen as a response to the biblical Eve.

How does Milton paint a portrait of the biblical Eve? Milton's Eve, along with the monstrous allegorical character, Sin, is one of only two developed female characters in the

10,565 lines of Milton's poem. What elements of Milton's portrayal of her are most salient to our understanding of Bella Swan? The reader first views Adam and Eve through the eyes of the fallen Seducer, Satan, who encounters them after he sneaks into Paradise. He sees all sorts of new types of living creatures, finally coming upon Adam and Eve:

Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,
God-like erect, with native honor clad
In naked majesty seemed lords of all,
And worthy seemed, for in their looks divine
The image of their glorious Maker shone,
Truth, wisdom, sanctitude severe and pure,
Severe, but in true filial freedom placed;
Whence true authority in men; though both
Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed;
For contemplation he and valor formed,
For softness she and sweet attractive grace,
He for God only, she for God in him. (4.288–99)

Milton captures the magnificence of Adam and Eve as well as their hierarchical relationship. By portraying Adam and Eve in a naturally hierarchical state, these lines present as a kind of original truth Paul's declaration in Ephesians 5:22–24 that the husband is the head of the wife and has authority over her.¹³ Milton's depiction of the gendered balance of power is further reinforced by his privileging of the creation story of Genesis 2:21–24, in which Eve is created from Adam's rib, rather than the earlier account of Genesis 1:27, in which man and woman are created together in God's image.¹⁴

Milton, therefore, creates an Eve who, at first blush, seems completely subject to Adam. Indeed, she refers to herself as inferior, but there are indications that Eve is more than she appears. Eve's partner, Adam, realizes her depth. As Adam confides to the archangel, Raphael, there is something about Eve that makes her not simply equal, but even superior to him; she is "in herself complete" (8.548). Indeed, as Eve recounts the story of her own creation, she remembers being initially rather unimpressed with Adam and more enamored of her own reflection. She needed divine guidance, and a little hands-on encouragement from Adam in order to accept the prescribed order of things (4.440–91). Eve and Bella are similar in that they both appear to be dominated by their mates, but it is the actions that they take independently, or even in defiance of their partners, that actually drive their stories. Bella may seem to be an average teenage girl (and an often maddeningly self-deprecating one at that), but she, like Eve, is more than she gives herself credit for.

Milton's Satan exploits Eve's situation. He has overheard Eve's ambivalent account of her creation and masterfully manipulates the weak spots in the perfect union to seduce her. Satan first causes Eve to have a dream that she has obtained godlike powers by eating the forbidden fruit, including the power of flight. With both Bella, who has frequent dreams, and Eve, the subconscious often seems to drive them: they ultimately act upon what they perceive as their own desires and drives, rather than doing what men (or supernatural beings) have explicitly instructed them to do, or not to do. Satan presents arguments on why Eve should break God's commandment and then draws upon this dream by promising her a higher state of being, status as a "goddess among gods":

Ye eat thereof, your eyes that seem so clear,
Yet are but dim, shall perfectly [perfectly] be then
Opened and cleared, and ye shall be as gods,
Knowing both good and evil as they know. (9.707–10)

Satan is successful in seducing Eve because he exploits her desire for something more, something beyond her expectations. Despite Eve's demure demeanour, continual deferrals to Adam, and submissively curly locks,¹⁵ she harbours a desire for true equality with or even superiority to her mate.

In Eve's subject state and longing for equality, we can discern seeds of the character of Bella Swan. As a mortal, Bella lacks the superhuman abilities of a vampire, but she also has gifts of her own and a desire not simply for Edward, but for a different kind of life. Bella intimates her desire for something more in the Preface to *Twilight*. Faced with the prospect of death, Bella seems to have no regrets, explaining that "When life offers you a dream so beyond any of your expectations, it's not unreasonable to grieve when it comes to an end" (1). Like Eve, Bella longs to have and to be something more, even if the path toward fulfillment is forbidden and dangerous. She too wishes to soar, to be "superman" as well as Lois Lane, and by the saga's end, she will, but not without undergoing a transformation (*Twilight*, 473–74). Milton's Eve is made mortal; Bella inverts this process, becoming immortal.

Although, like Milton's Eve, Bella may not truly understand what either death or eternal life might actually mean for her, immortality has its attractions, as she muses,

And I supposed . . . if I could be *sure* of the future I wanted, sure that I would get to spend forever with Edward, and Alice and the rest of the Cullens (preferably not as a wrinkled little old lady) . . . then a year or two one direction or the other wouldn't matter to me so much. But Edward was dead set against any future that changed me. Any future that made me like him—that made me immortal, too.

An impasse, he called it.

I couldn't really see Edward's point, to be honest. What was so great about mortality? Being a vampire didn't look like such a terrible thing—not the way the Cullens did it, anyway. (*New Moon*, 10)

Bella is clearly motivated by desire for Edward and it is her strong longing for him that may lead some to dismiss her as a woman who completely subjugates herself to her man. But even if desire for Edward is the main thing for Bella, it is not the only thing. Bella also has affection for Edward's family, but more significantly, she longs to remain young, to remain Edward's equal in youth, or at least in aging. Bella's desire not to age is a desire for a kind of equality with Edward, who is eternally youthful.

Bella also wants another type of equality, the ability to defend herself without having to rely on Edward:

In theory, I was anxious, even eager to trade mortality for immortality. After all, it was the key to staying with Edward forever. And then there was the fact that I was being hunted by known and unknown parties. I'd rather not sit around, helpless and delicious, waiting for one of them to catch up with me. (*Eclipse*, 269)

Like Eve, Bella is in danger, threatened by hostile vampires who are as bent on her destruction as Milton's Satan is bent on the Fall of Man. But unlike Eve, Bella is aware of

the threat and wants to defend herself—to arm herself against danger and to protect those she loves.

Bella does not desire to be subordinate to those she loves. She wishes to be their equal or even their protector. As she tells Edward:

“I’ll be the first to admit that I have no experience with relationships,” I said. “But it just seems logical . . . a man and woman have to be somewhat equal . . . as in, one of them can’t always be swooping in and saving the other one. They have to save each other *equally* . . .” [...]

“You *have* saved me,” he said quietly.

“I can’t always be Lois Lane,” I insisted. “I want to be Superman, too.” (*Twilight*, 473–74)

In addition to an equality that she takes as natural, or at least as rational, Bella also desires knowledge from the very beginning of her encounters with Edward. When Edward rescues Bella from being crushed by exhibiting strength and speed that clearly exceeds human limits, she refuses to accept explanations from him that she knows are false. Her own research into the story of the “cold ones” leads her to understand Edward’s true nature. Bella does not simply want to be with Edward forever at any cost, she wants to be his eternal equal and that, in the end, appears to be what she achieves.

In *Paradise Lost*, Eve can only dream of flying, but by the end of the *Twilight* saga, Bella’s dreams of flight are realized. She gains the physical powers of a vampire and as she races through the forest with Edward she rejoices in her new powers:

The forest was much more alive than I’d ever known—small creatures whose existence I’d never guessed at teemed in the leaves around me. [...] My leaping bounds stretched longer, and soon he was trying to keep up with me. I laughed again, exultant, when I heard him falling behind. My naked feet touched the ground so infrequently now it felt more like flying than running. (*Breaking Dawn*, 413–14)

Bella has wished to be as a god, and after she transforms into a vampire, she does achieve immortal powers. And, some of the powers that were innate in her are enhanced, powers that in the end are what saves her family and their supporters. This power is the ability, in the words of Adam, to be “in herself complete” (8.548). While like Eve, Bella may be younger than her mate and seemingly subject to him, there is something in her that neither he nor anyone else can reach or control. Just as Adam found Eve’s self-containment elusive and attractive, Bella’s mind remains inaccessible to Edward and it is this inscrutability and intellectual containment that is as seductive to him as the scent of her blood.

The *Twilight* series depicts desires and dangers for Bella that are similar to those faced by Eve, but the series transforms Bella’s situation so that these desires and dangers are challenges that Bella conquers. Because of her exercise of free will, Bella experiences the opposite of forced exile from an idyllic realm: Bella enters into an eternal domestic Paradise. It seems quite clear that this transformation of the story of the first woman reflects LDS ideas about the Fall that is viewed in Mormon theology as a necessary and positive event. Eve’s role in it is viewed as self-sacrificing and even heroic and necessary for the entry of souls into an eternal life that is very much like what Bella experiences, one of marital and familial bliss. But Meyer’s twist on the tradition is not simply to present us with a retelling of Eve’s story through an LDS lens. Meyer’s heroine’s choice is transformative and powerful in specific ways: she sacrifices for her child in the process of giving birth and in doing so alters her

being, becoming one of the “monsters.” Unlike the other vampires in the Twilight saga, including the Cullens, Bella chooses to become a vampire. Her choice to become a monster of her own free will is the central choice of the saga. In this way, her story is a twist on that of the seduced and fallen Eve, a “felix culpa” that unlike Eve’s transgression is, in and of itself, redemptive.

What exactly it means to become a “monster” is a point of contention in the Twilight saga. The question of whether becoming a vampire risks her soul is never resolved, but the term “monster” is continually debated as Bella and Edward disagree about her desire to become a vampire. The heart of their disagreement concerns the nature of the vampire. Edward sees himself as monstrous, while Bella does not:

“I hate to burst your bubble, but you’re really not as scary as you think you are. I don’t find you scary at all, actually,” I lied casually.

He stopped, raising his eyebrows in blatant disbelief. Then he flashed a wide, wicked smile.

“You really shouldn’t have said that,” he chuckled.

He growled, a low sound in the back of his throat; his lips curled back over his perfect teeth. His body shifted suddenly, half-crouched, tensed like a lion about to pounce. [...]

I didn’t see him leap at me—it was much too fast. I only found myself suddenly airborne, and then we crashed onto the sofa, knocking it into the wall. All the while, his arms formed an iron cage of protection around me—I was barely jostled. But I still was gasping as I tried to right myself.

He wasn’t having that. He curled me into a ball against his chest, holding me more securely than iron chains. [...]

“You were saying?” he growled playfully.

“That you are a very, very terrifying monster,” I said, my sarcasm marred a bit by my breathless voice.

“Much better,” he approved.

“Um.” I struggled. “Can I get up now?”

He just laughed. (*Twilight*, 345)

In his attempt to prove his “monster” status Edward takes on animal characteristics, growling, leaping, and pouncing on Bella, his lips curled, albeit over “perfect” teeth. Displaying traditional vampire speed, he imprisons Bella as surely as if he were made of iron. This iron both traps and protects her, emblemizing another traditional element in Meyer’s portrayal, Edward’s attempted dominance over Bella who has arguably challenged not only his monstrosity, but also his masculinity. Despite Edward’s overwhelming physical superiority, Bella nevertheless continues to attempt equality with him, deploying sarcasm even as she runs out of breath. Her human body may make her an object, but she struggles against this status.

Twilight concludes with another scene that emphasizes the tension between Bella and Edward—their clash of wills—and that brings together the question of monstrosity with the sexual and gendered dynamics of the story. Here Bella expresses her willingness to become a vampire:

“Yes,” I whispered, so my voice wouldn’t have a chance to break. If he thought I was bluffing, he was going to be disappointed.

I’d already made this decision, and I was sure. It didn’t matter that my body was rigid as a plank, my hands balled into fists, my breathing erratic . . .

He chuckled darkly, and leaned away. His face did look disappointed. “You can’t really believe that I would give in so easily,” he said with a sour edge to his mocking tone. “A girl can dream.” His eyebrows rose. “Is that what you dream about? Being a monster?” “Not exactly,” I said, frowning at his word choice. Monster, indeed. . . . No one was going to surrender tonight. He exhaled, and the sound was practically a growl . . . “Look,” I said. “I love you more than everything else in the world combined. Isn’t that enough?” “Yes, it is enough,” he answered, smiling. “Enough for forever.” And he leaned down to press his cold lips once more to my throat. (498)

This passage exploits the familiar equation between vampirism and sexuality, but here it is the human in the role of the seducer, albeit one with a “rigid” body and “erratic” breathing. But Bella’s dreams of union remain unrealized at the end of *Twilight*, as the relationship between Bella and Edward is framed as a battle, with no ready surrender in sight. The book ends with a mixture of expressions of love and inhuman growling and bodily cold.

At the heart of the tension, again, is Edward and Bella’s fundamental disagreement on the nature of the vampire. Edward mocks Bella’s desire to become a monster, asking her if that is what she dreams of, and of course, she has had such dreams, but she does not see what she longs for as becoming something evil: “Monster, indeed.” Arguably sexuality itself is the monster here; this scene is perhaps one of the best examples of Meyer’s exploration of the erotics of abstinence, but the monsters themselves can display great humanity. In this way, Meyer follows in the tradition of *Paradise Lost*, in which Milton pioneered giving interiority and dimension to figures that had previously lacked these characteristics, most importantly Satan and Eve.

Meyer is giving us a new literary Eve in an LDS context. Feminist critics have demonstrated how Meyer’s books reinforce the traditional notion that the appropriate roles for women are wife and mother: what we have here is an old Eve in new clothing. From a literary historical perspective, however, we have a new engagement with the Genesis story, presented from a female point of view as a vampire narrative. The most potent force in the narrative is arguably not Bella’s desire, but her free will, which she exercises to powerful and redemptive effect. Following both the Miltonic and LDS emphasis on free will, Meyer gives us a story in which it is the free will of the female protagonist that ultimately saves the day. In *Paradise Lost*, the archangel Michael tells Adam of the Virgin Mary’s future redemptive role and Adam proclaims, “Why our great expectation should be called/ The Seed of Woman: Virgin Mother, hail” (12.378–79). In the *Twilight* saga, however, Bella herself is the source of redemption for her family; she does not need a future prophecy to right her transgression. In Meyer’s emphasis on Bella’s choice, we can, I think, see her narrative as a new response to *Paradise Lost*. In *Bella*, Meyer gives us a story in which a woman’s exercise of free will is the fulcrum of the narrative and serves as a model of sacrificial and redemptive choice that reflects back upon that central humanizing choice of her lover and his family to conquer the impulses of their vampiric state.

From a progressive, secular feminist point of view, the values of the *Twilight* saga are, without doubt, problematic. But Meyer’s new Eve nevertheless deserves further examination as part of a tradition of women’s writing. The most obvious “missing link” in a tradition of women’s fiction that includes Meyer is a text that I have not had time to discuss here, Mary

Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). This "monster narrative" is also, famously, a response to *Paradise Lost*. Shelley begins her novel with an epigraph from *Paradise Lost* and we know that she had engaged in study of Milton's epic just before she began her famous exploration of monstrous creation (Gilbert and Gubar, 221–24). Meyer can be seen as following in Shelley's footsteps, exploring the moral dynamics of reproduction and presenting monsters that are humanized and sympathetic. Shelley's and Meyer's works are joined through a tradition of representations of Genesis, creation, and Eve that comes through *Paradise Lost*. The possibilities for further exploration here give us a glimpse of what we have to gain by contextualizing Meyer's work within a tradition of women's writing. Such work might also help illuminate other allusions in the Twilight saga, such as that to Emily Brontë's 1847 *Wuthering Heights*, also included in Gilbert and Gubar's pathbreaking exploration of the traditions of women's responses to *Paradise Lost*. The examination of connections such as these is in keeping with the foundational work of critics such as Gilbert and Gubar, even if the gender politics of Meyer's works are extremely different from, or even inimical to, those of many feminist critics.

Despite calls on Facebook, therefore, to "Revoke Stephenie Meyer's English Degree," or web posts that declare "Twilight is so Anti-Feminist that I Want to Cry," Meyer's work is part of a venerable tradition of women's responses to the story of Eve and, in particular, to its retelling by Milton.¹⁶ Meyer's portrayal of the sacrifice of childbirth and the redemptive power of motherhood emphasizes elements in the LDS tradition that present a potentially more positive picture of Eve than the more mainstream Christian denominations that predominate influence in the English language canon. These elements, along with the idea of a Heavenly Mother, are underemphasized in contemporary LDS practice, but, in Meyer's retelling of the origin story, a positive role for women is significant, even arguably dominant. Like Shelley and many others, Meyer is "looking at Milton's bogey," and responding to his retelling of Genesis in her own voice (Woolf, 112).¹⁷

Notes

1. Carmen D. Siering, "Talking Back to Twilight," *Ms. Magazine*, Spring 2009, <http://www.msmagazine.com/spring2009/Twilight.asp> (accessed 5 July 2010). The literature on the Western misogynist tradition is extensive; see Lisa Lampert, *Gender and Jewish Difference from Paul to Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), especially chapter two and bibliography. Jeffers ties Bella to Eve in the Biblical and Mormon traditions, but not the Miltonic one. See Susan Jeffers, "Bella and the Choice Made in Eden," in *The Twilight Mystique: Critical Essays on the Novels and Films*, ed. Amy M. Clarke and Marijane Osborn (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 137–51. The Twilight saga, published by Little Brown, New York, consists of *Twilight* (2005), *New Moon* (2006), *Eclipse* (2007), and *Breaking Dawn* (2008). All references to these editions appear in the text.
2. See, for example, Natalie Wilson's "Seduced by Twilight: The Allure and Contradictory Messages of the Saga" at <http://seducedbytwilight.wordpress.com>.
3. See Wilson and Kristian Jensen, "Noble Werewolves or Native Shape-Shifters?" in *The Twilight Mystique: Critical Essays on the Novels and Films*, ed. Amy M. Clarke and Marijane Osborn (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 92–106.
4. I borrow this term from Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).
5. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 219.
6. Susanne Woods, "How Free are Milton's Women?" in *Milton and the Idea of Woman*, ed. Julia M. Walker (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 15–16. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (New York: Norton, 2009).

7. Historian John Brooke explores in depth the Reformation roots of LDS theology in John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). John Granger has an extensive reading of Meyer's Mormonism in his *Spotlight: A Close-Up Look at the Artistry and Meaning of Stephenie Meyer's Twilight Saga* (Zossima Press, 2010), 148–229. See also Edwin B. Arnaudin, *Mormon Vampires: The Twilight Saga and Religious Literacy*. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree (April 2008. University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, unpublished, <http://www.ils.unc.edu/NSpapers/3348.pdf>, accessed 26 April 2011), Jan Riess, "Book of Mormon Stories that Steph Meyer Tells to Me: LDS Themes in the Twilight Saga and *The Host*," *BYU Studies* 48, no. 3 (2009): 141–47, Sarah Schwartzman, "Is Twilight Mormon?" in *The Twilight Mystique: Critical Essays on the Novels and Films*, ed. Amy M. Clarke and Marijane Osborn (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 121–36, and Margaret M. Toscano, "Mormon Morality and Immortality in Stephenie Meyer's Twilight Series," in *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, and the Vampire Franchise*, ed. Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 21–36. Janice Liedl, "Carlisle Cullen and the Witch Hunts of Puritan London," in *Twilight and History*, ed. Nancy R. Reagin (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2010), discusses Carlisle's historical context, although none of these critics register allusion to *Paradise Lost* (145–62). Journalists Dan Glaister and Sarah Falconer note Meyer's open acknowledgement of her LDS beliefs in "Mormon who put new life into vampires," *Guardian*, 20 July 2008, Books Section, Final Edition, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/jul/20/news.booksforchildrenandteenagers> (accessed 5 July 2010). On Mormonism more generally, I have also relied greatly on Douglas J. Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation* (New York: Ashgate, 2000), Maxine Hanks, *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), and Linda Wilcox, "The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven," in *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism*, ed. Maxine Hanks (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 3–22.
8. There are other, less obvious, connections between the texts. The gorgeous Cullens, especially Edward, are frequently described as preternaturally beautiful, even angelic, with an obvious example being chapter twenty three of *Twilight*, "The Angel," where Edward is explicitly referenced as one. The Cullens' beauty and their heightened powers are reminiscent of Milton's angels, even if angels shine rather than sparkle. The Cullens' "vegetarian" diet evokes the pre-Lapsarian diets of Adam and Eve, who are vegetarians in a world in which all creatures live in harmony. The Cullens' refusal to hunt humans seems part of a search for their own pre-Lapsarian states, to a return to a time before each of them individually "fell" into vampirism. For just as the human state after the Fall is one to be lamented and the desires of fallen humans are urges to be wrestled with and hopefully controlled, the state of vampirism is viewed by the Cullens as a condition to be struggled with and tamed. It is only Bella, as we shall see, who comes willingly to vampirism, a state she has longed for to satisfy her own desires, but which she finally takes to avoid the death she has willingly faced in order to give birth to her child.
9. In LDS terms he is wrestling with the "natural man" (Mosiah 3:19). See discussion in Riess.
10. On the Mormon version of the "War in Heaven," see Abraham 3:22–23.
11. See notes to John Milton, *Paradise Lost: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism* (New York: Norton, 1975), 398. References to this edition appear in the text.
12. Much could also be made of the literary genealogy of Edward Cullen from Milton's Satan. Critic Abigail Meyers has already gone halfway toward such a connection by noting that Edward is a type of Byronic hero. *Paradise Lost* was a key source text for the Romantics, and the Byronic hero and the Byronic vampire can both be seen as deriving in part from Milton's Satan. See James B. Twitchell, *The Living Dead: A Study of the Vampire in Romantic Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1981), 75–78, and William Patrick Day, *Vampire Legends in Contemporary American Culture: What Becomes a Legend Most* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 14–16. What Meyers does not note, however, is that Edward belongs to a special sub-type of the Byronic hero, the Byronic vampire, a sort of Heathcliff with fangs. This male vampire figure is dangerous but alluring and often, although not always, conflicted about his existence

- as a vampire. Of course, Satan and numerous of his vampiric descendants are very consciously hell-bent on doing wrong. In contrast, Edward strives to use his free will to overcome an evil part of his nature. He longs to be on the side of good and seems to triumph in his quest, but the struggle itself is a Byronic and ultimately a Miltonic one because of its portrayal of a struggle between good and evil. His struggle is also clearly a Mormon one, the struggle with “the natural man,” but it is finally Bella, as a type of Eve who provides the most critical component in these vampire tales, creating a powerful female figure who is neither victim nor slayer.
13. On Paul and gender, see Lampert 21–32.
 14. On the conflicting versions of creation in Genesis, see Mieke Bal, “Sexuality, Sin and Sorrow: The Emergence of Female Character [a reading of Genesis 2–3],” in *The Female Body in Western Culture*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 317–38, and Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988).
 15. *She as a veil down to the slender waist*
Her unadorned golden tresses wore
Disheveled, but in wanton ringlets waved
As the vine curls her tendrils, which implied
Subjection. (Milton, 4. 304–11).
 16. I have been unable to ascertain if Meyer has read *Frankenstein*. An examination of the requirements for the English major at BYU, however, where Meyer earned her bachelor’s degree, shows that she is supposed to have studied *Paradise Lost*. Thanks to Tessa Hauglid of the BYU English department for sending me a copy of their course catalogue for the appropriate years. For reference to the post “*Twilight* is so Anti-Feminist I Want to Cry” and a study of online responses to Meyer’s work, see Sarah Summers, “‘*Twilight* is so Anti-Feminist that I Want to Cry’: *Twilight* Fans Finding and Defining Feminism on the World Wide Web,” *Computers and Composition: An International Journal for Teachers of Writing* 27, no. 4 (2010): 315–23.
 17. Virginia A. Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (New York: Mariner, [1929] 2005).