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Cover Page Footnote

Jami McFarland is currently completing her M.A. in Women's Studies at the University of Ottawa. She received her B.A. in English Studies with a minor in Fine Arts from Nipissing University in 2011. Jami is currently involved in research concerning queer media and theory.

Triangulated Desire in Meyer's *Twilight*: A Queer Dynamic

Jami McFarland

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In February 2012, a photograph informally referred to as “The Kiss Seen or Heard ‘Round the World” (Okita np) of two men kissing in an airplane hangar went viral. The now iconic image of Sergeant Brandon Morgan leaping into the arms of his boyfriend, Dalan Wells, serves as a landmark piece of documentary photography because it exposes shifting socio-cultural attitudes toward gay couples participating in the military. The viral image and the reaction it initiated acutely capture the success of and support for the dismantlement of the U.S. military’s ban on gays and its “don’t ask, don’t tell” (DADT) law, which was repealed by the Obama administration five months prior to the notorious kiss (Scarborough np). Certainly, this is necessary imagery for queer representation as it is an intentional and public demonstration of a man desiring another man. But what constitutes this imagery as being queer or gay in nature? Is it simply that two men have been captured kissing? And if so, some have dared to ask, what could be queerer or gayer than this representation? According to the “Still Not as Gay as *Twilight*”¹ meme, which employs the celebrated image of Sergeant Brandon

¹ Retrieved from <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/still-not-as-gay-as-twilight> on January 4, 2013.

Morgan and Dalan Wells, Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*—the paranormal romance series which chronicles the love story between a clumsy, cis-gendered female adolescent and a chivalrous, cis-gendered male vampire—is, apparently, *gayer* than the image of the two lip-locked, pelvic-grinding men. The meme, which is unexceptional in its homophobic sentiment, compares the well-known image of the recognizable couple to the *Twilight* series.

While “gay” has often been deployed as an organizing identity construct for individuals, specifically men, who experience same-sex desires, attractions, and sex, use of the word “gay” in the “Still Not as Gay as *Twilight*” meme is more likely participating in the relatively recent incidence of the word connoting “disappointing” and/or “unfashionable.” Contemporary (homophobic) use of the word “gay,” as in “that’s so gay,” conveys that there is something fundamentally wrong and/or bad with being gay. This language which contributes to maintaining a homophobic social climate normalizes negative feelings and/or attitudes toward individuals identified or perceived to be LGBT. As the “Still Not as Gay as *Twilight*” meme illustrates, there is a popularized understanding of the *Twilight* text as being “gay,” meaning “uncool,” and, more appropriately, “terrible” and “inadequate.” This type of response is typical of a patriarchal culture that first, undermines, devalues, and trivializes feminine activities, pursuits, values, and genres like Meyer’s romantic *Twilight* and second, conflates male homosexuality with femininity. Consequently, the symptomatic “Still Not as Gay as *Twilight*” meme—likely an expression of a largely male, adolescent population attempting to distance themselves from a text principally associated with femininity—has less to do with the text consisting of same-sex sex acts and more to do with a socialized contempt for all things

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feminine in nature. Put differently, the meme's probable message does not necessarily imply that *Twilight* consists of queer and/or gay messages, themes, and/or characters, as previously considered, but that *Twilight* is sentimental, romantic, and girly (hence, gay) and therefore unworthy of our attention.

However, what if the meme did, indeed, intend for its audience to think of *Twilight* as consisting of queer and/or gay messages, themes, and characters? The "Still Not as Gay as *Twilight*" meme, arguably, *can* be understood as participating in a queering of the *Twilight* series. Certainly, other web users have imagined the *Twilight* series as containing queer possibilities. For instance, the "Screw Bella"² meme which, perhaps sweetly, depicts Edward (the vampire protagonist) and Jacob (the werewolf protagonist) leaning in for a kiss illustrates an imagined attraction between two characters who we are to assume, for all intents and purposes, are attracted to Bella and *only* Bella. In another meme which reeks of homophobic sentiment, which admittedly may very well be intended to be playful, humorous, and even endearing (yet not likely), a predatory yet frightened-looking Robert Pattison (who plays Edward Cullen in the *Twilight* films) skulks in a tree next to a caption which reads: "Edward Cullen is pale because there's no light in the closet."³ Proffering the suggestion that Edward Cullen is, indeed, a non-straight individual who has yet to disclose his "actual" or "real" sexuality, the metaphoric "closet" or "closeted" lifestyle referenced in the meme functions to associate Edward with queerness and/or a queer lifestyle, at the very least. And finally, in yet another meme which disrupts the hetero-romantic arc

² Retrieved from http://www.iswimforoceans.com/2011_02_01_archive.html on 3 March, 2012.

³ Retrieved from <http://cheezburger.com/template/768049/page/3> on 3 March, 2012.

of Bella and Edward, an image of a grinning Fred Gwynne as Herman Munster from the American sitcom *The Munsters* is employed with a caption below reading: “Twilight? Back in my day vampires sucked blood, not dick.”⁴ Again, the implication is that Edward the vampire is a decidedly less heterosexual individual. The highlighted cases as well as the previously mentioned “Still Not as Gay as *Twilight*” meme, although likely oblique and unintentionally queer, reject Bella as a referent for Edward’s desire and (hetero?) sexuality and instead cast Edward as a sexually ambiguous character which disrupts and, in effect, resists Meyer’s hetero-metanarrative.

Correspondingly, I argue that *both* fans and “haters” alike, straight and non-straight, participate in queer readings of the *Twilight* text. Considering these fictions to be astute queer readings, ultimately, I argue that the creators of these queer fictions can read queer possibility into the *Twilight* text because the *Twilight* narrative, whether intentionally or unintentionally, partakes in aesthetics, traditions, and figures traditionally perceived to be associated with queer and/or gay culture. The article begins by contextualizing queering(s) of or queries with the *Twilight* series. This section delineates the intentions of a queer reading(s) while highlighting its key characteristics for the purpose of illustrating how visual and textual fictions created by fans demonstrate a queering of *Twilight*. It then considers how Meyer’s text employs (perhaps unintentionally) the homoerotic graphic schema of the love triangle which, I argue, makes possible queer readings of the series. Given the popularity of the “Still Not as Gay as *Twilight*” meme, I return to the queer potential of the (homophobic?) *Twilight* meme, concluding the article by considering the

⁴ Retrieved from <http://www.addfunny.com/pictures/funny/108334.html> on 20 February, 2013.

productive potential of the meme to disrupt, unsettle, and challenge heteronormativity.

Queering Cyberspace: Slash Fiction and Memes and Fansites, Oh My!

Although a definition of “queer” and “queer reading” may, in fact, be counterproductive to the intentions and goals of the Queer project given that defining requires fixing, limiting, and stabilizing while queering, alternatively, requires unfixing, delimiting, and destabilizing, definitions that recognize that their borders are always shifting and in flux may, nevertheless, be useful for advancing my argument. Given that “queer,” according to David Halperin, is “by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (Halperin 62), a “typical” queer reading refuses to accept established meanings, identities, and norms. As a result, queer readings are often called resistant readings because characters, themes, and plots largely perceived to be heteronormative like those of *Twilight* may be considered ‘queer’ even in the absence of any explicit representation of homosexuality. Unwilling to accept hegemonic values and beliefs, whether they be about race, gender, sexuality, class, and/or ability, “resistant readings” move beyond the preferred and/or dominant meanings and, instead, offer an alternative reading. Thus, many marginalized communities, specifically those of a queer nature, find themselves in the awkward position of offering stubborn, unconforming, and *perverse* understandings of otherwise fairly benign dialogues, styles, aesthetics, and moments.

Although queer readings traditionally scrutinized the semiotics of cultural artefacts and/or texts to uncover hidden, almost latent, meanings, recent queer readings

recognize that the subtextual codes no longer have to be intentional. Although it is irrelevant to a contemporary queer reading if the queerness is intentionally hidden in a text, there exist many reasons why many may insist on a reading that supposes that symbols, dialogues, and styles were intentionally incorporated and hidden. Accordingly, Barbara Mennel maintains that a queer aesthetic was created in post-World War II Hollywood films as a consequence of the 1934 censorship code, also known as the Hays Code, which prohibited major studios from depicting “unacceptable” content—displays or suggestions of homosexuality being among the list of banned content (Mennel 26). However, as those aesthetics created an identifiable genre associated with individuals identified or perceived to be gay and lesbian, queer readings increasingly moved away from readings that understood the subtext to be intentional, as this proved to be too prescriptive and, ultimately, counterintuitive to the Queer project. As a result, contemporary queering(s), according to Maria Wiedlack, focus less on uncovering hidden or latent signs, symbols, and meanings and more on acknowledging “the very aspects of texts that irritate the binary gender system and challenge the assumptions of heterosexuality and heteronormativity” (Wiedlack 317). Consequently, the “aspects of texts that irritate,” understood as deviations, inconsistencies, and tensions with/in the heteronormative matrix expose alternative realities, meanings and narratives that may be in contention with the author’s and/or characters’ preferred or intended meanings, and/or desires. Thus, queer readings, fundamentally, reveal that cultural signs, symbols, and actions have multiple and shifting entry points.

Correspondingly, fan fictions, which often re-imagine the narratives and characters of popular novels, films, and television series, ought to be thought of as

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participating in resistant or queer readings as their producers recognize and offer alternative understandings of popular cultural texts such as *Twilight*. Also known as “fanfic,” fan fiction broadly defines a plethora of fan created stories and visuals which intend to extend the narratives of well-known texts—*Star Trek*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Harry Potter* being three notable examples. Although fan fiction must be understood in relation to the original text, fan fiction differs from the proposed narrative in two main ways: fan fiction can either alter the text by re-presenting characters, settings, and relations in divergent ways (e.g. although Bella is depicted as pursuing Edward the vampire in Meyer’s *Twilight*, Bella might be imagined as pursuing a romantic relationship with Jacob the werewolf instead), or it can uphold the text by bolstering characters, settings, and relations through elaboration (e.g. Bella and Edward are imagined playing with their daughter Renesmee at a park which is a nonexistent scene in Meyer’s *Twilight* but functions to perpetuate the intended narrative without deviating from Meyer’s metanarrative). It is the former that proves to be a site of queer potential as the (hetero-) sexuality and/or desire of characters—only one of the many variables that can be adjusted within fan fiction—can be altered and re-presented as being less (straight)forward and more complex, ambiguous, and fluid. Thus, in spite of strong parallels between the forbidden love of Meyer’s Edward and Bella and Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, a significant fraction of fan fiction creators recognize Jacob and Edward to be the star-crossed lovers—their love thwarted by the hindering Bella and their supposed innate incompatibility.

Known as slash fan fiction, “slash”—referring to the punctuation symbol which divides the named pair (e.g. Edward/Jacob)—invents or imagines an intimate

relationship between two male (or female) characters which fundamentally challenges and queers the hetero-romantic trajectory of the text. In other words, many online communities devoted to the creation and consumption of slash fan fiction challenge and disrupt the intended hetero-metanarrative by stubbornly refusing to accept established ways of being and relating: “Slash fandom thumbs its nose at the insidious heterosexism underpinning most forms of literary expression and seeks to subvert its dominance by introducing and celebrating sexualities that fly in the face of traditional heterosexist discourses” (Hayes and Ball 223). Accordingly, while slash fan fiction communities can buttress typical social discourses surrounding gender and sexuality, Sharon Hayes and Matthew Ball argue that slash fan fiction communities can also offer spaces where new ways of relating are produced and explored by their participants (Hayes and Ball 223). The slash fandom of *Twilight* is certainly not an exception to Hayes and Ball’s argument.

The Internet abounds in queer *Twilight* fandom, including everything from fan art images that depict a digitally manipulated Kristen Stewart kissing Ashley Greene⁵ (the female actors who play the unimpressive Bella Swan and vivacious Alice Cullen); to YouTube videos like the “Brokeback *Twilight* Trailer,”⁶ which represents and repurposes scenes and dialogue between Edward and Jacob from the *Twilight* films; to “smut” writing which envisions *Twilight* characters engaging in same-sex relationships as well as poly relationships, including a semi-incestuous threesome that occurs when “Bella stumbles into Edward during a girls’ night out

⁵ Retrieved from <http://www.tumblr.com/tagged/alice%20and%20bella> on 17 February, 2013.

⁶ Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kC2nJiKvJE6> on 10 February, 2013.

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with Rosalie [Edward's surrogate sister of sorts]."⁷ Fan fiction sites such as *Twilighted.net* and *Livejournal.com* build on the pre-existing homosocial intimacy of Jacob and Edward among other pairings. Rather than accepting *Twilight* as a "disturbingly rosy account of teen marriage and pregnancy" (North np), these audiences reform it as a narrative exploding with queer potential, capable of containing same-sex relationships (gay, lesbian, bisexual, etcetera), unconventional relationships (threesomes, polyamory, group sex, etcetera), and erotic subcultures (BDSM, fetishes, etcetera).

Addressing audiences such as these, both John Fiske and Henry Jenkins propose that many underrepresented communities not only resist the textual intentions of the producers, but reinterpret the text and, in doing so, become producers themselves. The producers of these texts detect and perceive textual conations that are incongruous and inconsistent with the seemingly heterosexual arc of the narrative. As a result, a scene in which Bella is assumed to be fought over by an envious Jacob and a defensive Edward gets re-presented in a way that demonstrates Bella as being secondary and, indeed, an obstacle to an angst-ridden and conflicted homoerotic relationship between Jacob and Edward ("She has a right to know that we're gay..."⁸), or a scene in which Jacob and Edward are momentarily depicted working in unison for the protection of Bella gets repurposed and rethought to similarly explore homoerotic desire and longing between Jacob and Edward with Bella being immaterial to the plot ("You're in love with me too. Choose me"⁹). Although these resistant audiences and

⁷ Retrieved from <http://www.fanfiction.net/s/5527003/1/Three-Hopeful-Thoughts> on 19, 2013.

⁸ Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5tB-USJdGA> on 10 February, 2013.

⁹ Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kC2n>

producers of fan fiction can and do imagine the characters in their textual and visual narratives as assuming an identity or identifier such as “gay” or “bisexual”—always understood in direct relation to the norm—many narratives more often than not, interestingly, imagine characters impetuously acting on unnamed desires and longings. These desires and longings which frequently culminate in lengthy and explicit descriptions of same-sex sex acts between at least two characters do not define the identity or personality of the characters; nor do they cause the characters to experience some supposedly revelatory and liberating “truth” or “nature” about themselves. These texts, in addition to presenting alternative sexualities, sex acts, and sexual politics, largely abandon the defining and limiting constructs of contemporary, modern sexuality and instead offer alternative possibilities.

Producers of slash fiction, memes (like “Still Not as Gay as *Twilight*” and “Screw Bella”), and videos devoted to the *Twilight* series, I argue, present compelling and astute queer readings. As a result, these texts, both intentionally and unintentionally (likely the case for the “Still Not as Gay as *Twilight*” meme), disrupt and unsettle the heterosexual couple as referent; challenge the normalization and legitimization of heteronormativity which makes possible hegemonic heterosexuality; and, finally, problematizes privatized sexual culture and its privileged institutions which, in the *Twilight* series, are presented as offering the good life. Resisting the unabashedly (hetero)normative tale, fan fictions offer queer readings of the *Twilight* series.

Two Monsters and a Girl: That's So Queer!

Although the *Twilight* films revel in monogamy, the supercouple, soul(less) mates, marriage, and coupledom, the overall plot of the *Twilight* saga largely relies on the European tradition of triangulated love. The “love triangle,” most often represented in romantic literature and film, is often characterized by themes of jealousy, unrequited love, and instability because frequently the love of the beloved is not distributed equally among the two rivaling lovers. Theorized by both Rene Girard and Eve Sedgwick, the rivalrous triangle—most often, but not always—involves bonds of rivalry between two men over a single woman. While the “Bella, Edward, and Jacob triangle” is the most dominant expression of this graphic schema in the films and the focus of this article, *Twilight* abounds in other triangle imagery, triangulated relations, and hindering third wheel(s). Focusing on love triangles involving two men and a woman, specifically the Bella, Edward, and Jacob relationship, I argue that theoretically queer relationships and sexual continuums which disrupt conventional binary understandings of sexuality and gender are present, making *Twilight* slash fiction not just possible, but plausible. In queering what is often considered and accepted to be a traditional heterosexual text, I deploy the foundational works of Rene Girard and Eve Sedgwick to explore how resistant readings of the *Twilight* films such as the “Still Not as Gay as *Twilight*” and “Screw Bella” memes are possible.

Rene Girard's book, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, which relies heavily on triangle imagery, traced a formulation of power that was structured by the relation of rivalry between the two active members, often if not always male, of an erotic triangle. Ultimately suggesting that the bonds of love and rivalry are equally powerful if not equivalent, Girard maintains that “in any erotic

rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved” (Girard 39). This erotic triangle vested with intense libidinal energy, which results from the competitive imitation of another person, is often referred to as mimetic desire, “mimetic” since we borrow our desire from another’s pre-existing desire (Girard). Girard employs mimetic desire to explain the triangular formulation, suggesting that our desire for a certain object, far from being unique, is motivated by the desire of another person (model) for the same object. Consequently, the relationship between subject and object is not direct, but triangular because it involves subject, object, and, most importantly, model. Thus, in desiring the object, the subject is inevitably drawn to the model who poses as an obstacle to the acquisition of the object, and as a result the subject seeks the model.

Correspondingly, evidence of mimetic desire can be traced within the infamous triangular relations of *Twilight*’s Bella, Edward, and Jacob. As the object of desire of both competing monsters, Bella occupies the apex of the triangle. Edward and Jacob, consequently, constitute the two points at the base of the triangle, but which competing rival assumes the role of mediator and which assumes the subject? Although always imitated, Girard insists, desire cannot be neatly divided into original (Model) and duplicate (Subject) (Girard 44). Indeed, simplifying the order and dynamics of the desire of both Edward and Jacob is too reductive and, more importantly, irrelevant to exploring the libidinally electric and stimulating relationship between the two.

While Edward and Jacob are neither wholly Model nor Subject, both—perhaps more accurately and usefully—can be understood as occupying the role of Model and Subject separately, but at irregular and asymmetrical instances within the text. Thus, there are

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moments within the text when Jacob is presented as the Model and Edward the Subject and vice versa. This is perhaps a more plausible formulation for understanding the triangular dynamics of desire because often the competing rivals' actions, behaviours, and gestures are noticeably dependent on the actions, behaviours, and gestures of whomever, whether it was Edward or Jacob, modeled them first. Girard associates this type of interaction with "internal mediation," one of two mediations proposed by Girard, which is possible when a mediator becomes aware of the tangible presence of a rival and the immediate threat he/she poses: "Desire always increases in intensity as the mediator approaches the desiring subject" (Girard 83). Internal mediation, Girard argues, is often riddled with conflict and subsequent violence which is not just substantial in the *Twilight* series, but amplified because of the pre-existing rivalry and opposition between the interspecial duelling of the vampire and werewolf. Recognizing that neither has substantial claim to the object of desire (especially because both rivals cannot read Bella's mind—an idiosyncratic lapse for Edward who can read the minds of all humans, save that of Bella's), conflict between the duelling suitors is inevitable.

Unable to destroy each other because of an established truce between the werewolves and the 'vegetarian' vampires (better known as the Cullens) and because, perhaps more importantly, both Edward and Jacob recognize that killing off the competition, so to speak, would likely reduce, if not eliminate, their opportunity to be wholly loved by Bella, the rivaling Edward and Jacob resort to titillating displays of 'one-upmanship.' Characterized by outdoing the competitor, acts of 'one-upmanship' allow both rivals to be individually Model and Subject throughout the series. Although there are several instances of this behaviour

within the *Twilight* series, I highlight two notable instances of ‘one-upmanship’ that demonstrate Girard’s claim that the bond that connects Edward and Jacob to one another is as potent—and, I argue, exciting—as the bond that connects either of the rivals to Bella, the beloved. First, the act of gifting, an ancient tradition tied to courtship rituals, is explored within the series, *Eclipse* particularly, as an invidious site of mediation. In *New Moon*, a dreamcatcher, for instance, is gifted to Bella on her eighteenth birthday from Jacob which proves to be a particularly convenient and significant gift to Bella, who later in the film experiences violent nightmares brought on by Edward’s purposeful absence. Symbolic of Jacob’s protection of Bella, especially from Edward, the dreamcatcher is met with passive-aggressive attention from Edward: “So how come Jacob Black gets to give you a gift and I don’t?” (*New Moon* 0:07:30). Edward demonstrates a corresponding and analogous display of desire, offering Bella the greatest gift of all—the assurance that her existence is the most precious and important thing to Edward: “Bella, you give me everything just by breathing” (*New Moon* 0:07:39). The sappy sentiment, typically yearned for by a self-obsessed, adolescent female, is triggered by Jacob’s display of affectionate gifting and, thus, his desire. Thus, more of a reactionary twitch to Jacob and his actions, Edward is illustrated as demonstrating his desire for Bella by imitating Jacob who, in this case, first models his affection for Bella.

Additionally, a greater, more obvious example of tit-for-tat, competitive gifting occurs in *Eclipse*. After forcing an unwanted kiss on Bella as a declaration of his desire for the beloved—which is met with anger, repulsion, and scorn by Bella—Jacob attends a graduation party hosted by the Cullens for Bella’s graduating cohort. In an act of forgiveness and affection,

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Jacob gives Bella a bracelet which dons a hand-carved wolf fashioned by Jacob himself. Aware of the foreign object on his beloved, Edward inspects Bella's wrist. Edward looks questioningly at Bella who offers in response, "It's a graduation present" (*Eclipse* 55:51). The bracelet given by Jacob represents a physical and symbolical marking of Bella, a territorializing of her body and her personal space. Bella is riddled with objects that symbolize another's desire for her. Paralleling or, perhaps more appropriately, mimicking Jacob, Edward subsequently gives Bella a charm to add to the bracelet that was given to her by Jacob: "It seems only fair that I be represented as well" (*Eclipse* 1:13:34). The imitative or "mimetic" nature of human, or, perhaps more appropriately, monstrous desire creates a bond between the duelling rivals. Exemplary of mimetic rivalry, the gesture of giving Bella a token of his affection has less to do with Bella and more to do with the rivaling Jacob. Accordingly, the original cause of both monsters' desire is forgotten. Displaced to the background, Bella's relationship to either Jacob or Edward becomes secondary to the rivals' relationship. Marked by obsession, fascination, and hatred for one another, Jacob and Edward are bonded together in a morbid relationship, but a relationship nonetheless. Thus, both instances of gifting described here not only reveal that desire is produced more through mimesis than need, but that in desiring Bella a unique relation is produced between Jacob and Edward.

Second, another way in which mimetic desire is enacted by the antipathetic yet jointed duo is through physical contact with Bella which includes—but is not limited to—hugging, kissing, cuddling, and comforting. Again, these actions point less to a unique and autonomous need or care for Bella per se and more to a mimicked and reflexive response to another's interest in

Bella. Each suitor respectively performs his desire for Bella knowing that he is actively being watched by the other suitor. Eve Sedgwick, correspondingly, discusses the erotic triangle in relation to homosocial male desire which she explores in her text, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Recuperating desire within the “homosocial” and disavowing binary dialectics, Sedgwick imagines a continuum between the homosexual and homosocial (Sedgwick 1). Sedgwick suggests that within the triangular relation, men have intense libidinal relations but, nonetheless, nonsexual relations with other men and women serve as the channels through which that libidinal energy is explored (Sedgwick 14). Although libido often denotes sex drive, I employ it here to illustrate the emotional and psychic excitement and titillation it generates between the rivals, “not for a particular affective state or emotion, but for the affective or social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred or something less emotively charged, that shapes an important relationship” (Sedgwick 2). Accordingly, vested with libidinal energies, competitive moments between Edward and Jacob which are seemingly driven by a desire to affect Bella reveal a desire to, in fact, affect the other male suitor. Put crudely, it is less about getting Bella off in these moments and more about getting the other suitor (ticked) off.

Although Bella’s objectified presence in the kiss, embrace, or touch is necessary as she acts as conduit for relations to be explored between Jacob and Edward, Bella as a desiring subject might as well be absent during instances of mimetic rivalry between the two men. Homosexuality and sexism collude in this social formulation to ensure that men are able to engage in intense, libidinal bonds with individuals of the same sex while maintaining their heterosexual privilege. For

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instance, an exaggerated display of desire between Edward and Bella is exhibited before the shirtless Jacob who awaits Bella for their arranged departure to La Push, a werewolf-only area. Disembodied and performative, the seemingly intimate moment between Edward and Bella is emptied of libido and is, instead, relocated between the invidious voyeur and the provocative exhibitionist. This interaction between Bella and Edward executed for the envious gaze of Jacob is followed by a similarly performative and mimicked expression involving Bella and Jacob. With arms wide open, Jacob invites Bella into his intimate and shirtless embrace. The exchange, loaded with smugness and self-righteousness, is both a demonstration for and dependent on Edward's gaze. Here, we are encouraged to assume that Jacob locates greater pleasure in Edward's dissatisfaction than in Bella's satisfaction. Excessive displays of physical closeness between Bella and either suitor are thus deprived of hetero-libido and, instead, are swelling with homoerotic undertones.

Developing Girard's claim that triangular relations may initially appear to be pure rivalry, but in fact actually emphasize an attraction between men, Sedgwick's analysis of the love triangle in which two men appear to be competing for a woman's love offers an understanding of power and meaning that makes clear how individuals, specifically men, must negotiate and reorganize their relations (sexual and non-sexual). Sedgwick suggests that "the goal of triangulation is not for two men to desire the same woman, but rather to cement the problematic relations between men" (17). For Sedgwick, there is nothing coincidental about two men desiring the same woman: desiring the same woman allows the two men the rare opportunity and space within an anxious, homophobic culture to safely explore a relationship, platonic or otherwise, with one another.

This formulation offers a spectrum fertile with possible relations between men. Neither entirely homo(sexual) nor homo(social), triangular love in *Twilight* provides instances where audiences can abandon binary conceptions of sexuality to explore its complexities.

As a result, the love triangle proves to be a quite useful graphic schema for a largely homophobic and masculinist culture because it “avoids the homoerotic threat and it keeps male domination in place by treating the female love object as object” (18). This is best illustrated in the infamous tent scene in *Eclipse* that so much of the slash fiction of the *Twilight* series develops upon. In an attempt to protect Bella from Victoria—a female vampire who is determined to avenge the murder of her vampire lover James who was killed by Edward to protect Bella—Edward and the Cullens with the help of the werewolves hide Bella up high in the mountains of Forks, Bella and Edward’s city of residence. Shivering and unable to get warm, Bella’s chattering teeth draw Jacob to the intimate tight space of the tent that Bella and Edward occupy. Recognizing that as a dead, cold creature he is useless to a freezing Bella and more importantly that Jacob as a living, warm being can protect Bella from hypothermia, Edward temporarily puts aside his resentment for Jacob in Bella’s best interest. The tightly shot scene in which Jacob makes Bella hot depicts Edward carefully watching the prostrate, clinging bodies of heavily clothed Bella and almost-naked Jacob. Pregnant with double interpretation, the scene flirts with the duplicitous meaning of getting someone warm or hot—Jacob is capable of both warming Bella’s temperature and arousing her sexually: “You’re freezing Bella. Relax. You’ll warm up soon. Faster if you took your clothes off” (*Eclipse* 1:27:16). This instruction to Bella which is depicted as clearly being less about Bella and more about antagonizing an

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inadequate Edward—if at the very least because Jacob haughtily glares up at an angered Edward—begins to illustrate both Bella’s objectification and her simultaneous significance and insignificance to the proceedings between the men. Meaning that Bella’s presence which becomes further absent as she eventually drifts off to sleep, further rendering her body unconscious, is necessary to the scene which depicts the two men becoming increasingly more intimate with one another because her stand-in, objectified female body signifies the heterosexual privilege of both Edward and Jacob even as it is undermined. Thus, her female body which reinforces the heterosexual desire of both men is required to alleviate any homosexual tension the audience may recognize in the rather homoerotic exchanges between Jacob and Edward in the intimate confinement of the tent.

According to Sedgwick’s theory, Bella—the woman, the object, the stand-in for heterosexual privilege, the sign of exchange—would be considered the mediator of homosocial desire between the two rivaling yet admiring men. Treated as object in the scene, Bella’s unconscious body provides the opportunity for both men to explore their feelings for one another while simultaneously dispelling any real threat of homoeroticism. If we indulge Sedgwick’s theory and suspend our heteronormative understanding(s) of the text, an additional reading of the tent scene reveals to be quite homosocial, if not homoerotic:

Edward: “This might sound odd, but I’m glad you’re here.”

Jacob: “Meaning, as much as I’d like to kill you, I’m glad she’s warm.”

Edward: “If we weren’t natural enemies and you weren’t trying to steal my reason for existing, I might actually like you.”

Jacob: “Well, if you weren’t planning on sucking the life out of the girl I love, I might...no not even then.”

Pointed by moments of coy smiles, heavy sighs, and lip biting which is often symptomatic of bashfulness, embarrassment, and even sexual reservation, the intimate scene with its gestures full of duplicity is susceptible to double interpretation. Suspending the overall heteronormative arc of the text, libidinal moments such as these facilitated by the triangular schema offer the audience opportunities to comprehend relations between Edward and Jacob to be more diverse and plural than those of strict heterosexual and homosexual binary.

To conclude, I uphold that triangular love renders statements like Bella’s “Edward hated the idea, but it [the relationship between Edward and Jacob] wasn’t about rivalry anymore. It was about my safety and Charlie’s,” very queerly accurate (*Eclipse* 0:28:34). Their relationship *is not* about a rivalry any longer, nor is it about the safety of Bella. It *is*, I argue, about a love or a feeling (at the very least) that dare not speak its name because it does not fit neatly into one of the existing rigid, conceptual categories of male intimacy.

Conclusion

Lacking any explicitly queer characters, the *Twilight* series is perhaps most accurately described as being a tale of hetero-romance. Still, we must not assume that viewers of *Twilight* comply with and/or glean pleasure from the hetero-romantic arc of the text. The “Still Not as Gay as *Twilight*” meme with the re-appropriated image of Sergeant Brandon Morgan and Dalan Wells which incongruously pairs men loving men with nationalism and militarism—both of which evoke a history steeped in competition, brute masculinity,

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homophobia, and, paradoxically, men hating men—suggests as much. Although the meme is likely participating in homophobic discourses surrounding the *Twilight* series, I have argued that *Twilight* themed memes and fan fictions of this sort participate in a queering of the *Twilight* series. Disrupting and resisting Meyer's hetero-metanarrative, the "Still Not as Gay as *Twilight*" meme among others troubles the notion of Edward and Bella as the heterosexual referent. Gleaning queerness or aspects of the text which trouble the heteronormative matrix, these fictions expose alternative realities, meanings, and narratives.

While it is quite unlikely that Meyer intended for her two male protagonists to be understood as being involved in an intimate relationship, sexual or otherwise, audiences can potentially read queer potential into their exchanges. The triangular schema and the rare and unique ways of relating it offers to men in a largely competitive and homophobic society not only make queer readings possible, but easy. As a result, the triangular relations of Bella, Edward and Jacob involving angry, voyeuristic gazing, pouting, and showing off facilitate understandings of the text which are less (straight)forward and clear and more homoerotic and queer. Thus, Girard's triangular formulation and Sedgwick's theorization of homosociality not only offer a useful lens for exploring a queer reading of the libidinally charged relationship between Edward and Jacob, but they also provide an understanding of why the consumers of *Twilight*, homophobic or otherwise, comprehend the series to be by "gay". Both homophilic and homophobic written and visual fictions that imagine a more intimate bond, whether that be romantic or sexual, between Jacob and Edward are facilitated, in part, by the complicated and muddled dynamics of triangulated love.

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