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### The Creature in The Looking Glass: Miltonic Marriage and The Female Self in Breaking Dawn

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English 482

Fall 2020

The Creature in The Looking Glass: Miltonic Marriage and The Female Self in *Breaking Dawn*

Near the close of *Breaking Dawn*, the final installment of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga, Edward asks his new wife Bella a question. "When will you ever see yourself clearly?" (*Dawn* 744). Bella has no answer for him. Edward's question and, more importantly, Bella's apparent inability to answer is symptomatic of a broader issue throughout *Breaking Dawn*, in which, even as Bella obtains all that she has desired, her sense of self begins to fracture. *Breaking Dawn* formalizes Bella's union with Edward through a series of increasingly binding steps: first through legal marriage, then sexual intimacy and pregnancy, then through vampiric transformation, and finally through her admission of Edward into her mind. Each of these steps grants Bella the power and equality with Edward that she has craved since the series' beginning. But these events also formalize the fracturing of Bella's identity and make her dependent upon Edward for self-definition. *Breaking Dawn*, therefore, characterizes Bella's marriage to Edward as a simultaneous source of joy and unease.

I argue that we can make sense of this apparent paradox by examining *Breaking Dawn* in light of two of its intertexts: *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*. Both works grapple with a construction of marriage engendered by John Milton's depiction of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*, a construction in which two individuals do not just legally unite but also fuse their identities, becoming a sort of plural self. *Breaking Dawn*, as the daughter-text of *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, necessarily wrestles with this same construction of marriage. Bella does not merely become Mrs. Cullen but melds her identity with her husband, losing her independent self completely. I will first examine Bella's empowerment through her marriage by applying Gilbert and Gubar's prelapsarian reading of *Wuthering Heights* to *Breaking Dawn*. I will then

illustrate how Bella's identity fractures by paralleling Jane's fragmentation of identity before her marriage to the similar fragmentation that Bella undergoes throughout the novel. Finally, by placing all three texts in dialogue with *Paradise Lost*, I will explore the implications of the Miltonic marriage for Bella's sense of identity. As I will show, *Twilight* depicts marriage and love as sublime forces of absolute power to which identity and agency must submit.

**"WHATEVER OUR SOULS ARE MADE OF, HIS AND MINE ARE THE SAME"<sup>1</sup>**

Much critical attention has been paid to *Twilight*'s use of *Wuthering Heights* as an intertext, particularly in its metatextual acknowledgments of the stories' similarities in *Eclipse*. *Eclipse* uses the Heathcliff-Catherine-Linton love triangle of *Wuthering Heights* to make sense of the Edward-Bella-Jacob love triangle. But I argue that *Wuthering Heights*'s framework may also be applied to *Breaking Dawn*. Specifically, by reading *Breaking Dawn* as a reversal of *Wuthering Heights*, I will illustrate how Bella's decision to subsume her identity to Edward's brings her new strength and joy, leading to an absolute union with the man she loves. To do this, I will use Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's influential prelapsarian reading of *Wuthering Heights* as a cipher for *Breaking Dawn*.

Gilbert and Gubar argue that *Wuthering Heights* subverts Milton's *Paradise Lost* by reversing the Fall of Man, "a radically political commitment to the belief that the state of being patriarchal Christianity calls 'hell' is eternally, energetically delightful, whereas the state called 'heaven' is rigidly hierarchical, Urizenic, and 'kind' as a poison tree" (255). The authors read the estates of *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange* as allegories for Hell and Heaven respectively, wherein Hell represents an environment in which Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff enjoy the subversive sexual and spiritual oneness that made "*Wuthering Heights*... as

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<sup>1</sup> *Wuthering Heights* 100.

authentic a fantasy for women as Milton's Eden was for men" (Gilbert and Gubar 265). They write that Catherine's stifling education into womanhood at Thrushcross Grange, while recovering from a dog bite, pushes her into self-denial by marrying Linton, therein falling into a patriarchal Heaven (Gilbert and Gubar 276-7). I argue that *Breaking Dawn* subverts this model still further. Like Milton's First Parents, Bella travels from Heaven to Hell, but this journey is not a Fall but an Ascension.

Bella and Edward begin the series as profound unequals, a sort of hyperbole of the Gothic anxieties surrounding gender inequality within relationships, wherein femininity becomes synonymous with humanity and masculinity with vampirism (Morey 16). Unlike Catherine, who Falls into the patriarchal Heaven of sexual difference, Bella escapes it by Ascending into Hell—that is, vampirism. Kelly Brudrueweit argues that because the saga repeatedly emphasizes the vampires' superhuman strength, speed, and beauty, it reverses monstrosity back onto Bella's humanity (277). Bella's transformation into a vampire, therefore, functions not as an aberration of her humanity but an apotheosis. Bella's own feelings on her transformation further suggest this:

After eighteen years of mediocrity, I was pretty used to being average. I realized now that I'd long ago given up any aspirations of shining at anything. I just did the best with what I had, never quite fitting into my world... I was amazing now—to them and to myself. It was like I had been born to be a vampire... I had found my true place in the world, the place I fit, the place I shined (*Dawn* 523).

Here, we understand explicitly that Bella sees vampirism as the antidote to the insecurities that plague her through the majority of the series, in addition to being the literal antidote to the damage wreaked on her body by her pregnancy. The power that Bella gains through this supernatural antidote takes three main forms: physical strength, the power to protect, and, in that protection, maternal agency.

Bella first discovers evidence of her new physical strength when, upon reaching for Edward after her transformation, she embraces him too tightly. This interaction is significant because it effectively reverses their roles through the majority of the series. It is now for Bella to manage her desire. But despite this, they can express physical affection with more abandon than they ever could before. "It was like he'd never kissed me—like this was our first kiss. And, in truth, he'd never kissed me *this way* before" (*Dawn* 394). Bella later describes her first sexual experience as a vampire:

"He was all new, a different person as our bodies tangled gracefully into one on the sand-pale floor. No caution, no restraint. No fear—especially not that. We could love *together*—both active participants now. Finally equals... I tried to keep in mind that I was stronger than he was, but it was hard to focus on anything with sensations so intense, pulling my attention to a million different places in my body every second; if I hurt him, he didn't complain" (*Dawn* 482, original emphasis).

This scene extends the role reversal that begins when she awakens from her transformation. It is now Bella's turn to mind her strength—but unlike Edward, who is consumed with self-loathing when he bruises her on their wedding night (*Dawn* 90), Bella does not appear overly preoccupied with the power differential between them. To her, they are equals.

But Bella's transformation also enables another power that was previously unavailable to her: the ability to protect. Throughout the majority of the saga, Bella is tortured by her inability to protect those she loves. The only method of defense available to her is that of self-sacrifice. At the climactic moments of each installment, she deliberately places herself in harm's way—whether by sacrificing herself to James (*Twilight*), setting foot as a mortal in a city full of vampires (*New Moon*), or attempting self-mutilation to stop a battle (*Eclipse*)—to save the ones she loves. But after her pregnancy and transformation, the most spectacular demonstration of her martyrdom, Bella is rewarded by the ability to at last protect without self-destructing. She discovers that her new vampiric body cannot blush, meaning that she can lie successfully to

Edward and Carlisle about the agony of transformation. With the vampirization of her body, Bella becomes completely sealed against Edward, meaning that she can "protect Edward from the truth" (*Dawn* 397). What this signifies is an evening of the power in their relationship. Previously, although Edward could not read her mind, her human body's fallibility still made her accessible and legible to him. Note also that she constructs her withholding of information as *protection*, much in the same way that Edward initially considered his lying to Bella a form of protection (*New Moon* 509-10), illustrating further how their roles have reversed. Bella continues to withhold information from Edward for the sake of protection when she makes her plans to get Renesmee and Jacob out of the country (*Dawn* 644-5), a decision that connects her power to protect to her new identity as a mother.

But the most remarkable manifestation of Bella's new power to protect is the magical shield she discovers she can wield. It is with this shield that Bella can protect all of her loved ones and save the day during the Cullens' final face-off against the Volturi. That Bella's central mission during this face-off is to protect her daughter Renesmee, and that her shield's emphasis on defense over offense, renders her will to protect a strikingly *maternal* power. Moreover, Meyer makes clear comparisons of Bella's shield to a womb. It "puls[es] like a living thing" and "flexes like just another muscle" (*Dawn* 690). "I held there, *contracting* this new muscle so that it closely surrounded Edward, a thin but unbreakable sheet between his body and our enemies" (*Dawn* 691, my emphasis). Words like *contract* have obvious connotations with childbirth, and Bella observes that everything her shield protects seems to become "a part of me" (*Dawn* 690), recalling the unity of mothers and their children during pregnancy. Moreover, the text subsequently parallels Bella and the vampire-human hybrid Nahuel's mortal mother: "He looks at you and sees the life his mother should have had" (*Dawn* 751). Through Bella's deployment of

her shield, she becomes a kind of maternal avatar, one who can protect not only her biological children but all of her loved ones.

Through the gaining of physical strength and the power to protect, accentuated by her new agency as a mother, vampirism is an unmistakable blessing to Bella, one that empowers her in ways previously unavailable to her. Whereas Catherine Earnshaw Falls into the rigid, patriarchal world of Milton's Heaven, Bella Ascends into vampirism. To be clear, we must consider vampirism in the world of *Twilight* a Hellish state of being due to the vampires' animalistic nature and their questionable eschatological condition. As the novels make clear, vampires are ruled by their instincts and thirst, a fact that quickly becomes apparent to Bella, who is startled by her new semi-ferality during her first hunt (*Dawn* 417). In the terms bequeathed to us by *Wuthering Heights*, Bella seems to have gained the "half savage" girlhood that Catherine relinquishes when she marries Linton (*Heights* 158), a state illustrated by the motif of the window in both novels. Liminal spaces such as windows are "a standard gothic trope that [signify] a space where the natural world and the supernatural world meet... This space 'outside the window,' or outside Victorian convention is dark, sublime, turbulent, sexual" (Metalin 29). In *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine begs Nelly to open her bedroom window, only for Nelly and Linton to pull her away from it (158). But after Bella's transformation in *Breaking Dawn*, Bella is encouraged by Edward to leap *through* the window (*Dawn* 407). The married Catherine is denied the wild, sexual exterior world, but Edward ushers Bella into it when she follows him through the window to hunt. Vampirism is, then, an animalistic state of being in which Bella finds total freedom.

The final realization of *Breaking Dawn's* retelling of *Wuthering Heights* is Bella's decision to allow Edward to read her mind, allowing for his complete understanding of her and,

through that understanding, complete spiritual, romantic, and sexual union, one that is strongly reminiscent of Catherine and Heathcliff's union in *Wuthering Heights*. Just as Catherine's "great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries" (*Heights* 102), Bella granting Edward access to her memories allows her great joys to become his and amusingly literalizes Catherine's claim that Heathcliff is "always in my mind" (*Heights* 102). Bella deliberately compromises the absolute impregnability of her vampire body by opening her mind to Edward. But this is not a *relinquishing* of her supernatural power, as some may read it. The text illustrates the effort and vigilance such compromise requires, to the extent that the slightest break in Bella's concentration undoes her work (*Dawn* 754). She is the active participant within the scene, whereas Edward waits for the fruits of her labor. Moreover, this union of supernatural power, in which Bella's power as a shield combines with Edward's telepathy, suggests the all-encompassing nature of this telepathic union: including the otherworldly as well as the emotional and physical pleasures they share in the moment, resulting in ultimate unity.

### **"THE ALIEN CREATURE IN THE GLASS"<sup>2</sup>**

In the previous section, I illustrated how applying Gilbert and Gubar's framework for *Wuthering Heights* to *Breaking Dawn* reveals how Bella's marriage and transformation empower her. I will now show that this same marriage and transformation results in the fragmentation of Bella's identity by applying Gilbert and Gubar's reading of *Jane Eyre* to *Breaking Dawn*. *Jane Eyre*, although never acknowledged within the text as *Wuthering Heights* is, is nonetheless a key intertext of the *Twilight* saga. Stephenie Meyer has stated in interviews that she based the character of Edward Cullen on Charlotte Brontë's Rochester (Purdon), and Bella's hallucinations of Edward's voice throughout *New Moon* recall Rochester's cry that Jane hears at Marsh-end.

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<sup>2</sup> *Dawn* 403.

Moreover, as Anne Morey notes, both Bella and Jane are "'plain Quakeress[es]' in dress and general affect" who investigate and eventually marry their Byronic lovers (15). Moreover, in applying to *Breaking Dawn* the motif of fragmentation that Gilbert and Gubar uncover in *Jane Eyre*, we find that Bella undergoes the same rupturing of identity as a result of her marriage to Edward that Jane does before her marriage. Like Jane, Bella fails to recognize herself as a bride. Like Jane, Bella dreams of a child in the nights before her wedding. And just as Jane is haunted by her dark double Bertha, Bella is haunted by the prospect of her future vampire self, a creature governed by violence and appetite.

Gilbert and Gubar read *Jane Eyre* as a tale of "enclosure and escape" in which Jane searches for freedom within her patriarchal society (339). Specifically, they argue that Jane's proto-feminist rage finds its chief expression through the fragmentation of her identity, which begins when she experiences "the dangerous sense of doubleness... in the red-room" as a child (Gilbert and Gubar 357). The most dramatic of these fragmentations occurs in the weeks before her attempted marriage to Rochester, in which "Jane Eyre [splits] off from Jane Rochester, the child Jane [splits] off from the adult Jane, and the image of Jane weirdly [separates] from the body of Jane" (Gilbert and Gubar 359).

On the morning of her disastrous wedding, Jane studies her reflection: "I saw a robed and veiled figure, so unlike my usual self that it seemed almost the image of a stranger" (*Eyre* 284). This stranger is, of course, "Jane Rochester, a person whom as yet I knew not" (*Eyre* 273). Jane's characterization of her future married self is decidedly uneasy. To Jane, marriage is "the great change," a birth with uncertain outcome. "I would wait to be assured [Mrs. Rochester] had come into the world alive before I assigned to her all that property" (*Eyre* 273). The characterization of

Jane's married self as a newborn, with its associations of dependence and daughterhood, underscores the crux of her reservations regarding her marriage to Rochester.

The parallels between Jane Eyre and Bella Swan are many. Like Jane, Bella is uneasy with her impending marriage and nettled by her fiancée's "outrageous gifts" (*Dawn* 21). Like Jane, who concentrates her resentment on her bridal veil, Bella barely describes her wedding gown, referring to it only indirectly as "the dreaded white garment bag" (*Dawn* 21). And just as Jane fails to recognize her reflection before her first marriage to Rochester, Bella encounters her defamiliarized reflection with Edward during their wedding reception. "I caught just a glimpse of Edward's reflection... with a dark-haired beauty at his side... Before I could blink and make the beauty turn back into me..." (*Dawn* 57). Note that Bella acknowledges *Edward's* reflection. Edward has not changed to her, but she finds herself unrecognizable, suggesting that marrying him has altered her self, much in the way that it has changed her name from Swan to Cullen. Bella's separation of self from reflection may be read as a failure to reconcile Bella Cullen with Bella Swan. Significantly, Bella never looks at her reflection before her wedding, "afraid the image of myself in the wedding dress would send me over the edge into a full-scale panic attack" (*Dawn* 44). She can only face her reflection after the ceremony when Edward is at her side (*Dawn* 57). This suggests not only Bella's discomfort with her married self but also that—as a married woman—her new self can only be faced alongside her partner. It seems that Bella, as a married woman, cannot be independent.

*Jane Eyre's* view of marriage as birth is literalized by Bella's transformation into a vampire. After waking, she studies her reflection. Her first reaction is "an unthinking pleasure" as she takes in the beauty of "the alien creature in the glass," but this pleasure quickly turns to "horror" as she struggles to recognize herself (*Dawn* 403). Tellingly, she does not refer to the

reflection as hers. When asking about her changed eye color, she is "unwilling to say *my eyes*" (*Dawn* 405, original emphasis), and all the descriptions of her reflection treat it as a separate woman, not herself. The scene's clear paralleling of the earlier passage at the wedding reception invites us to consider the transformation a second marriage to Edward, one so binding that it changes the physical makeup of Bella's very being, a new kind of birth.

But Jane's comparison of marriage to a birth that will bring forth Jane Rochester corresponds not only to her anxieties about her impending wedding but also recalls her recurring dreams of the wailing orphan child, another manifestation of how Jane's identity fragments. "It seems clear that the wailing child who appears in all of them corresponds to 'the poor orphan child' of Bessie's song at Gateshead, and therefore to the child Jane herself" (Gilbert and Gubar 358). Like Jane, Bella has recurring dreams of a child—sometimes a vampire, sometimes human—whom Bella must protect. But unlike Jane's dreams, Bella's dreams do not correspond to her child self. Rather, these dreams seem to predict her future daughter, Renesmee, in whom we find the most dramatic fragmentation of Bella's body and self.

Because of the richness and complexity of Renesmee's implications for Bella's independent self, it is worth exploring the pregnancy and labor in depth. Significantly, as Sara K. Day observes, Bella surrenders narrative control during this section (66). Instead, the story is related by Jacob. The reader is not given to know Bella's true thoughts and feelings through her pregnancy; they must extrapolate from the evidence of Jacob's eyes, filtered through his perspective. Additionally, Jacob's narration of her pregnancy grants the reader the only exterior glimpse of Bella in the original series. While this allows the reader a more comprehensive view of the pregnancy's horror, it also means that the reader views Bella's body *without* her interior

thoughts. In this way, pregnant Bella becomes the unfamiliar image in the mirror, the creature with whom the reader may not identify.

Jacob's narration of Bella's pregnancy also alters the significance of her pregnancy. From his perspective, her pregnancy symbolizes a patriarchal kind of possession and claiming. Jacob's fantasy of Bella "[r]ound with *my* child" (*Dawn* 182, original emphasis) suggests that, in impregnating Bella, he could claim ownership of her and victory over Edward. Moreover, this construction of pregnancy as a mark of possession suggests that—at least in Jacob's eyes—Bella's pregnancy is evidence of Edward's claiming of her and his victory over Jacob. Under Jacob's narration, Bella's pregnant body becomes the battleground for his competition with Edward, partially divorcing the "meaning" of Bella's pregnancy from Bella herself.

In this way, we begin to see that Bella's pregnancy—and, by extension, her body as a whole—becomes divided between various characters as a source of identification, desire, and resentment. Bella's chief ally in her fight to carry her baby is Rosalie, whom Jacob's friend Leah accuses of "living vicariously" through the pregnancy (*Dawn* 320). Deprived of her own chance to have children, Rosalie views Bella's pregnancy as an opportunity to acquire the child she's always wanted. Jacob observes that "It seemed like Rosalie and Bella were both talking in plurals now." (*Dawn* 222). The two women ally to share their motivations and, as a result, form a kind of plural identity as twin mothers. In this way, Bella's pregnancy—and her child—is not solely *hers*. By living out both her desire and Rosalie's, she becomes a source of identification and, later, embodiment: Alice's observation that Renesmee always sleeps in someone's arms suggests that although Bella may be her biological mother, she is being raised in a more communal manner that de-emphasizes Bella's active role as a mother (*Dawn* 473).

But it is Renesmee herself who is the most dramatic and violent fragment of Bella's identity. A vampire-human hybrid, Renesmee destroys Bella's body from the inside by sucking the life force from her. Moreover, Bella's labor becomes a spectacle of violence, in which Renesmee's strength mangles her mother's body from the inside (*Dawn* 348-55). The grotesquerie of these scenes underscores the halving of identity that Bella undergoes throughout the pregnancy and the birth: the separation of "Edward's Bella" and "Jacob's Bella", the archetypes that she concludes cannot coexist in *Eclipse* (608). In giving birth to Renesmee, Bella relinquishes the part of her that desires Jacob and becomes free to love Edward without exterior concerns. This is further illustrated after her transformation when she realizes that "the strange need I'd felt for him before I'd changed was completely gone. He was just my friend, the way it was supposed to be" (*Dawn* 433). Later, Jacob points out, "Do you remember how much you wanted me around three days ago? How hard it was to be apart from each other? That's gone for you now, isn't it?... That was her... We had to be together, even then" (*Dawn* 451). Renesmee is the ultimate manifestation of Bella's love for Jacob, a desire that cannot survive within her new identity as Bella Cullen. The violence of Renesmee's birth corresponds to a physical division of self, the ultimate fracture of identity.

I have explored how Bella's fragmentation within the context of her marriage and new motherhood parallels the dissolution of Jane's identity in *Jane Eyre*. But what of Bertha, Jane's "vampire" double (*Eyre* 281) and most infamous fragmentation? While there is no direct comparison to Bertha on the page, Bella is still haunted by a mad, vampiric specter of her own for the first part of *Breaking Dawn*: the prospect of her newborn vampire self. "I knew a little about what I was going to be like when I wasn't human anymore... For several years, my biggest personality trait was going to be *thirsty*. It would take some time before I could be *me* again"

(*Breaking Dawn* 22, original emphasis). In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha's madness is characterized by her twin desires for drink and sex, bodily appetites that she either cannot contain or else simply desires in excess. Even Bertha's acts of violence are associated with feeding: Mason reports, "She sucked the blood: she said she'd drain my heart" (*Eyre* 214).

Just as Bertha's madness is characterized by violent consumption, with no room for intellectuality, so also is the hypothetical newborn Bella. Bella bases her predictions on what she will be like as a vampire according to the newborn vampires she has seen, most significantly Bree Tanner in *Eclipse*. "She was still watching me, her eyes *half-mad*... It was hard to tell if her features were beautiful, twisted as they were by rage and thirst. The feral red eyes were dominant—hard to look away from... I stared at her, mesmerized, wondering if I were looking into a mirror of my own future" (*Eclipse* 571, my emphasis). The description of Bree as "half-mad" alongside the emphasis on her anger and thirst connect back to Bertha's madness and her desire for consumption. Moreover, that Bella compares gazing at Bree to "looking into a mirror" predicts her defamiliarized reflections in *Breaking Dawn*, essentially foreshadowing how her identity will fragment in marriage.

By the end of *Jane Eyre*, the fragmentation that occurs as a result of Jane's anger has ceased. Jane strikes out on her own, uncovers her biological family, and receives an inheritance, and Rochester, meanwhile, finds a new clarity and spirituality through his disability (Gilbert and Gubar 369). Their changes in situation allow for the egalitarian relationship that Jane extols at the novel's conclusion. Yet although Bella and Edward's relationship at the end of *Breaking Dawn* mirrors Jane and Rochester's marriage at Ferndean in its isolated domesticity, there is no definitive resolution to the ongoing drama of Bella's fragmentation. The issue of Bella's dwindling sense of independent self simply fades into the background. Rather than attempt to

understand her independent self, Bella relinquishes it by allowing Edward to read her mind. The diction in this scene is particularly telling: "I understood the part that fought against separation from me, the automatic instinct to *preserve self* above all else... I felt the elastic recoil again as my shield fought to *protect me*... It snapped back like stressed elastic, *protecting my thoughts* once again" (*Dawn* 752-3, my emphasis). Not only does the repetition of *protect* suggest the vulnerability of Bella's decision, but it also characterizes Edward as a kind of benign aggressor—a state of being he supposedly relinquished when Bella's transformation put her out of danger from him for good. Because she cannot read Edward's mind in return, she is not permitted to "know" Edward in the way that he is permitted to know her. Their union is not one founded on mutual understanding but on his understanding of her. But most significant is the description of Bella's mental shield fighting to "preserve self." The implication is that, in allowing Edward into her mind, she will lose her identity completely. Yet even as Bella consents to this last step in the subsumption of her independent identity, she appears to be surrendering it in favor of a composite identity with Edward. The absolute union this subsumption creates connects the obliteration of Bella's self to her marriage. Her independent self must be relinquished to have the union she desires.

### **"TO LOSE THEE WERE TO LOSE MYSELF"<sup>3</sup>**

But what, exactly, is the union that Bella creates? And what leads to her decision to create it? To answer these questions, we must look beyond *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* to their ancestor-text: John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Milton's construction of marriage within *Paradise Lost* haunts both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, wherein Jane and Catherine must grapple with the meanings of their unions with the men in their lives. Catherine destroys her union with

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<sup>3</sup> Milton 9.959.

Heathcliff and, in so doing, destroys herself. Jane, meanwhile, resists the Miltonic union until she and Rochester are on an equal footing. Because of *Breaking Dawn's* heavy drawing on both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, it follows that the Miltonic marriage haunts *Twilight* too. By reading Bella and Edward's relationship as a Miltonic marriage, we come to understand how Bella can at once find unity and lose her sense of self. Moreover, by comparing her relationship to that of Jacob and Renesmee, not only do we see how Bella can grow to accept her subsumption, but we also see how, in the world of *Twilight*, love itself is a sublime, all-powerful force, one that ultimately trumps free will.

Book IV of *Paradise Lost* sees Eve describe her first hours of life, in which she awakens and then examines her reflection in a pool of water, unaware that she is gazing at herself:

As I bent down to look, just opposite,  
 A Shape within the watry gleam appeard  
 Bending to look on me, I started back,  
 It started back, but pleas'd I soon returnd,  
 Pleas'd it returnd as soon with answering looks  
 Of sympathie and love; there I had fixt  
 Mine eyes till now, and pin'd with vain desire,  
 Had not a voice thus warnd me, What thou seest,  
 What there thou seest fair Creature is thy self... (Milton 4.460-8).

Milton—through Eve's retrospective narration—labels her desire to look at herself "vain desire" (4.466). The pun on "vain" may refer either to a narcissistic pleasure in Eve's study of her reflection or to the futility of her self-study. This first reading censures Eve's understandable desire to explore her identity as self-absorption, suggesting that Eve, and through Eve women as a whole, are immoral and selfish for their desire to know themselves. But the second reading, that Eve gazes at her reflection *in vain*, implies that Eve's perusal of her reflection, her first attempt as a newly created being to know herself, is an impossible task. God's intervention, in which he reveals her as the "image" of Adam from whom she is inseparable, suggests that she

herself reflects Adam, and her identity is necessarily entwined with his (Milton. 4.472-3). Her effort to know herself by gazing at her reflection *is* therefore a vain effort. Eve is not her own being but rather part of a composite, plural self, one which she can only understand by joining Adam. Note also that Adam's identity is similarly tied to Eve.

So forcible within my heart I feel  
The Bond of Nature draw me to my owne,  
My own in thee, for what thou art is mine;  
Our State cannot be severd, we are one,  
One Flesh; to loose thee were to loose my self (Milton 9.955-9).

As Milton shows us, Adam and Eve's absolute unity is what leads to the Fall of Man but also, through that Fall, the rise of Christianity. Moreover, as First Parents, they fulfill God's vision of Eve as "Mother of human race" (Milton 4.475). Therefore, while Eve and Adam lose their independent selves to the composite "Adam-and-Eve," their marriage is a generative, positive force that results in the birth of humanity and Christian history.

Emily Brontë used Milton's framework as a launch point for *Wuthering Heights*, wherein she reimagines Milton's Eve and Adam as Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff. As previously established, Catherine and Heathcliff each understand the other as extensions of themselves; just as Catherine finds the masculine extension of her self in Heathcliff, Heathcliff's spiritual self finds its home in Catherine. But unlike Milton's Eve and Adam, Catherine and Heathcliff fail to maintain their plural identity. Rather than risk social ruin by marrying Heathcliff, Catherine instead chooses Edgar Linton, a wealthy man whose status provides her power and security, denying herself at the most literal level. By relinquishing Heathcliff, Catherine's identity splinters, a fracture vividly illustrated by her inability to recognize her reflection.

"Don't you see that face?" [Catherine] inquired, gazing earnestly at the mirror.  
And say what I could, I was incapable of making her comprehend it to be her  
own; so I rose and covered it with a shawl.

"It's behind there still!" she pursued, anxiously. "And it stirred. Who is it? I hope it will not come out when you are gone! Oh! Nelly, the room is haunted! I'm afraid of being alone!" (*Heights* 155).

Recall Eve's examination of her reflection, unaware that it *is* hers. God must introduce Eve to herself and, in so doing, tie her identity to Adam. *Wuthering Heights*, by contrast, reveals Eve torn from Adam, unable to recognize herself without his presence. Moreover, Catherine's fear that her reflection will "haunt" her bedroom suggests a sort of death of the self, as though rejecting Heathcliff is a form of suicide. Her fear of "being alone" points still further at her plural identity. For Catherine, solitude amounts to being halved.

Charlotte Brontë explores a similar crisis of identity in *Jane Eyre*. But she treats the absolute union idealized by Milton with more skepticism than Emily Brontë. Jane resists the Miltonic marriage and questions its roots in patriarchal authority. Although Rochester has proposed to Jane as an equal (*Eyre* 253), she feels degraded by his ostentations of wealth and disregard of her reservations (267). Moreover, that Rochester has concealed from Jane the existence of his wife Bertha further illustrates the inequality of their relationship. Jane is rightly wary of an absolute union with a man who will not respect her. For a true absolute union to take place, Jane must uncover her biological family and come into money, and Rochester must, through his castigating blindness and amputation, learn to "[draw] his powers from within himself, rather than inequity, disguise, deception" (Gilbert and Gubar 369). In the quiet of Ferndean, Jane and Rochester are free to create "a natural order of their own making" that supports their marriage of equals (Gilbert and Gubar 370), the virtues of which Jane extols.

No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh... To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company... to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking... perfect concord is the result (*Eyre* 439).

Jane constructs her marriage as an absolute union in which her body and consciousness blend with Rochester's, as though creating a single body. That such a union must take place in the isolated Ferndean with only "the parson and the clerk... present" (*Eyre* 437) suggests that this egalitarian marriage can only take place when isolated from the patriarchal exterior world. Egalitarian marriage, Miltonic union, and the plural self, *Jane Eyre* argues, cannot exist alongside patriarchy.

*Paradise Lost* reveals the absolute union that ties Eve and Adam together, a force so strong that Adam cannot help but Fall alongside Eve. *Wuthering Heights*, meanwhile, illuminates the nightmarish consequences of betraying that union, in which the self is irreparably shattered. Finally, *Jane Eyre* questions and resists the Miltonic marriage until it can be done under conditions that will allow for absolute *equality*, not just absolute union. I will now explore how *Breaking Dawn* engages with the Miltonic union. If *Paradise Lost* establishes the Miltonic union, which *Wuthering Heights* destroys and *Jane Eyre* resists, *Breaking Dawn* becomes a narrative of submission to the Miltonic union, in which Bella must learn to accept herself as part of this union and make the final gesture toward it by allowing Edward into her mind. By exploring the subplot of Jacob's imprinting on Renesmee as a parallel to Bella's acceptance of her union with Edward, I will illuminate that Bella's submission must take place because *Twilight* constructs love as a sublime force that destroys all agency.

The first implication of Bella's impending subsumption to Edward comes in *Breaking Dawn's* preface, in which Bella describes her complex emotional responses to being destroyed by someone she loves.

You could run from someone you feared, you could try to fight someone you hated. All my reactions were geared toward those kinds of killers—the monsters, the enemies.

When you loved the one who was killing you, it left you no options. How could you run, how could you fight, when doing so would hurt that beloved one? If your life was all you had to give your beloved, how could you not give it? If it was someone you truly loved? (*Dawn* 1-2).

As is typical in the saga, the preface is left deliberately vague to increase suspense and allow for reader speculation on the novel's events. Here the vagueness sets up a question: who is killing Bella? Within the novel's broader context, it appears clear that the killer is Renesmee. Yet although Bella's pregnancy is the novel's most dramatic and violent set piece, it lasts only for a rough quarter of the novel, making the preface's applicability only glancing. I argue that the preface's vagueness allows for an alternate reading: might the beloved, unnamed killer be Edward? For although Edward does not destroy Bella's body as Renesmee does, in another sense he is responsible for the death of Bella's independent self. Bella's conclusion in the preface that surrendering to the one she loves is her only option becomes a kind of cipher for the novel as a whole. It argues that surrendering one's life—one's selfhood—to the beloved is the only true choice. In other words, Bella *must* accept the absolute union inherent in marrying Edward and subsume to something greater than herself: her dual consciousness with Edward.

This dual consciousness puts Bella's defamiliarized reflections into a new light. Rather than show Bella unable to recognize herself without Edward, Bella cannot recognize herself *with* him. But the confusion and horror she experiences upon glimpsing her transformed reflection are accompanied by delight. Whereas Jane Eyre finds Jane Rochester a source of unease, Bella Swan considers Bella Cullen an object of desire. Bella's remarkably sensual descriptions of herself as a new wife, with her "cream and roses" complexion, "thick lashes," and "elegant and graceful" body, powerfully illustrate the degree to which she longs for herself as Edward's companion (*Dawn* 57).

But it is also this beauty that alienates her reflection from herself. Her reflection's unfamiliarity—its unnatural beauty—is not a mitigating factor of her horror, but its source. Throughout the *Twilight* series, Bella is consumed by her insecurities. As a comparatively weak and unattractive mortal, she fails to see what appeal she might have for Edward, or how her attraction could be reciprocated. That her glimpse of herself after marrying Edward is a *flattering* one suggests that, through marriage, some of Edward's glamour has rubbed off on her. But this flattering glimpse of herself also illustrates that Bella is learning to see through Edward's eyes. What Bella sees in the mirror is the evidence of Edward's earlier praise for her beauty. In looking through Edward's perspective, Bella's point of view begins to unify with Edward's, signaling the gradual meshing of their identities.

But Bella does more than look through Edward's eyes. When she awakens from her transformation, she has taken on his whole form. Her acknowledgment that "the creature in the mirror was... every bit as beautiful as Alice or Esme" (Meyer 402) implies that, by extension, she is also as beautiful as *Edward*. Just as Eve is the "image" of Adam (Milton 4.472), Bella-as-vampire reflects Edward's physical perfection at him, becoming a kind of mirror herself. The transformation, therefore, functions as a literalized version of Milton's absolute bond, wherein bodies, as well as souls, blend. As a result, her defamiliarized reflection does not suggest Bella's halved identity, as it does in *Paradise Lost* and *Wuthering Heights*. Rather, it suggests that Bella must still learn to see herself as half of a duality.

But Bella is not resisting this union out of a feminist impulse, as Jane resists hers. Anne Morey observes that *Twilight* largely rejects feminist concerns regarding gender relations by amplifying sexual difference to species difference: woman and man become mortal and vampire (20). As a result, *Breaking Dawn* is not concerned with any patriarchal implications extant in

Bella's marriage, as *Jane Eyre* is Jane's. It is not expected that Edward should alter his behavior for their marriage to be equal. Once Bella becomes a vampire and can match Edward's physical strength, the logic of the text considers them equal partners. As a result, Bella must embrace her total union due to the absolute power of that union. To better illustrate how this union—and love itself—functions within the text, I will explore Bella's marriage in light of the novel's secondary Miltonic union, that of Jacob and Renesmee. Jacob's imprinting replicates Bella's marriage in extremity: total union regardless of social taboos, personal desire, and autonomy. By viewing Jacob and Renesmee's union as the dark double of Bella and Edward's marriage, we come to understand the drama of Bella's subsumption, as well as the saga's broader construction of love as a sublime power.

The most infamous shadow over Jacob's imprinting is, of course, Renesmee's infancy. The saga introduces the possibility of adult werewolves imprinting on children in *Eclipse*, when Jacob's friend Quil imprints on Claire, a two-year-old girl. While the text attempts to negate the possibility of sexual attraction—"Quil will be the best, kindest big brother any kid ever had" (*Eclipse* 176)—it cannot totally banish the specter of pedophilia that lurks in the narrative's periphery. The Christmas party during which Jacob gifts Renesmee a promise ring looms particularly large, recalling Bella's earlier implication that Jacob is grooming Renesmee for marriage, a claim he vehemently denied at the time (*Dawn* 450). This narrative inconsistency fails to put the reader at ease with Jacob's imprinting, rendering his subsumption to Renesmee deeply disturbing. More importantly, that his imprinting is so strong and yet skirts the edge of such a profound social taboo illustrates the sheer power of their connection. Whether Jacob wants to imprint on a child is beside the point.

And Jacob does not want to imprint on *anyone*, child or adult. He argues, "Imprinting is just another way of getting your choices taken away from you... None of [the werewolves] have a mind of their own" (*Dawn* 319). Jacob understands imprinting—that is, subsuming one's identity—as the total loss of autonomy. And he is correct. The passage in which he imprints on the newborn Renesmee vividly describes how his sense of self shatters and restructures around Renesmee.

All the lines that held me to my life were sliced apart in swift cuts, like clipping the strings to a bunch of balloons. Everything that made me who I was... my home, my name, my *self*—disconnected from me in that second... A new string held me where I was.

Not one string, but a million. Not strings, but steel cables. A million steel cables all tying me to one thing—to the very center of the universe... It was the baby girl in the blond vampire's arms that held me here now (*Dawn* 360, original emphasis).

The grand, sweeping language used in this passage emphasizes the profound power of his connection to Renesmee. More importantly, however, in its characterization of their connection as earth-shattering and inevitable, the language evokes Edmund Burke's aesthetic category of the sublime, a central attribute of the Gothic. Of the sublime, Metalin writes, "we are temporarily extricated from our own selves and minds; our sense of reality is shattered and fragmented as we unwittingly experience something so awesome it overwhelms us" (24). Jacob's first experience of Renesmee shatters and fragments him, suggesting the process of engaging with the sublime and the process of imprinting—that is, the Miltonic union—are much the same. But Jacob's shattering is not temporary, as the experience of the sublime is. His sense of self never regroups, and he is tied irrevocably to Renesmee.

What Jacob's sublime connection to Renesmee illustrates is that, in *Twilight*, the Miltonic union not only shatters the sense of self but also personal agency. The terms of it cannot be negotiated, the way that Jane Eyre negotiates the terms of hers. The only option—as Bella hints

in the preface and Jacob's imprinting proves—is to submit. And that Bella compares her love for Edward to imprinting in *Eclipse*, suggests that she, too, has undergone a total loss of self and agency with Edward (600). Bella's attraction to Jacob is "overshadowed by something stronger, something so strong that it could not exist in the rational world" (*Eclipse* 599). This description of her love as a powerful, preternatural force recalls the effect of the sublime and hearkens back to Bella's earlier extolling of "the inevitability" of Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff's love (*Eclipse* 29). In this way, love and marriage are constructed in *Twilight* as a sublime experience, one to which Jacob—and Bella—must submit.

And submit Bella does. Her decision to allow Edward to read her mind becomes the ultimate gesture of her submission to the power of her marriage and their love, wherein Bella gives her life—and her self—to Edward as the preface of *Breaking Dawn* foretells. In return, she gains the bliss of an absolute union with the man she loves, the "small but perfect piece of *our* forever" (*Dawn* 754, my emphasis). Through their telepathic connection, Edward now reflects Bella's interiority, just as she reflects his bodily perfection and strength. In this way, the loss of her independent self is the final step of the apotheosis she experiences in becoming a vampire. Bella Ascends from her mortal, single consciousness to an eternal dual self with Edward.

I have shown how Bella's journey throughout *Breaking Dawn* results in her simultaneous empowerment and destruction. In a reversal of *Wuthering Heights*'s structure, Bella travels from the mundane mortal world of Heaven to the sensual Hell of vampirism, where she gains bodily perfection, her longed-for ability to protect her loved ones, and maternal agency. But even as she gains these many blessings, Bella's sense of self fractures and divides as Jane Eyre's does before her marriage. Bella's defamiliarized reflection and her violent, almost parthenogenic pregnancy, in which her selfhood divides to create her daughter Renesmee, signal that Bella's independent

identity cannot survive in her marriage to Edward. What has occurred is that, through their marriage, Bella's identity has subsumed and meshed with Edward's, creating the plural consciousness that Milton describes in *Paradise Lost*. This consciousness, while portrayed as fallible in *Wuthering Heights* and questionable in its patriarchal implications in *Jane Eyre*, is the ultimate, absolute power in *Twilight*: a sublime, preternatural force with which the characters can neither negotiate nor fight. Bella may only submit to her union, a decision represented by her allowance of Edward into her mind at the novel's conclusion. While Edward may ask when Bella "will ever see [herself] clearly?" (Dawn 744), it is he who gains the ability to see through their telepathic connection. When will Bella see herself clearly? The answer, it seems, will be never.

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