

## Jay Wright: 2021 Research Award Entry Essay

My project for Professor Pfeiffer's Senior Seminar explores the depiction of marital power dynamics in Stephanie Meyer's *Breaking Dawn* within the context of the novel's intertextuality. Although I initially wanted to explore how Bella Swan's marriage to Edward Cullen simultaneously undermines and increases her agency, my research into critical thought on *Twilight* and its intertexts helped me realize that what interested me most in *Breaking Dawn* was how marital power is reflected through the loss of Bella's independent identity.

I broke my research process into two parts: the first accompanying my summer reading in preparation for the project, and the second during the course itself. During my summer reading, I performed searches on OneSearch and Jstor for scholarly material on each book. It was during these preliminary searches that I read much of the baseline scholarship on the Gothic for my paper, particularly Joseph Crawford's *The Twilight of the Gothic*, which provided a comprehensive timeline of Gothic's evolution, and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

The second half of my research occurred during the Fall 2020 semester. The information session our class conducted with Rebecca Seipp taught me how to use databases beyond OneSearch and Jstor. The Modern Language Association Database (MLA) proved particularly useful in pointing me toward Anne Morey's *Genre, Reception, and Adaptation in The "Twilight" Saga*, a collection of critical writing on *Twilight* that I acquired through Interlibrary Loan. The essays in Morey's book called attention to aspects of *Twilight* that I had previously overlooked, such as the implications of Bella relinquishing narrative control in *Breaking Dawn*.

But the vast collection of sources I amassed in my research made it difficult to decide what path my discussion of *Breaking Dawn* should take. I needed to narrow my proposed topic's focus. For inspiration, I returned to Gilbert and Gubar's foundational work on *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*.

The critics' study of Jane Eyre's identity fragmentation, especially before her wedding, recalls parallel scenes in *Breaking Dawn* in which Bella's sense of self detaches. By reading *Breaking Dawn* in the context of Gilbert and Gubar's analysis, I arrived at the most crucial idea of my project: that Bella does not merely lose *power* in marrying Edward but also her independent self.

Meanwhile, Gilbert and Gubar's interpretation of *Wuthering Heights* as a subversion of Milton's *Paradise Lost* illuminated that, were I to discuss *Breaking Dawn* in the context of *Wuthering Heights* as I wanted, I must also discuss *Paradise Lost*. Reexamining *Paradise Lost*'s construction of marriage between Eve and Adam yielded up my reading of "Miltonic union", a key concept for understanding how Bella's identity evolves in *Breaking Dawn*. In this way, not only did my research on *Breaking Dawn* and its intertexts give me a stronger understanding of all the works involved, but it also taught me to evaluate and synthesize critical thought when applying it to my critical work.