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Young Adult Literature 2.0: Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* and Digital Age Literary Practices

by

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Abstract

This study examines the progress of young adult (YA) literature in the twenty-first century, as influenced by Web 2.0 social networking technology and sliding structural temporalities of age and maturity in these digital times. The context is Stephenie Meyer's popular *Twilight* saga, a pioneering example of an author purposefully engaging with online social networking communities and there encouraging derivative creativity, including *Twilight* fan fiction. This successful integration of YA literature with Web 2.0 is considered by first appraising tensions between traditional theoretical notions of the genre (and its readers) and contemporary manifestations of the same. Second is an investigation of the genre's evolving readership and textual practices using the *Twilight* series, focusing on literary activities of Digital Natives (young adults) in online social arenas. A concentration on the integration of national identity into Canadian *Twilight* fan fiction examines such evolving practices in reference to an American product (a threat of Americanization) being re-coded in a Canadian reader's personal, public and online spaces.

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Introduction

The first decade of the twenty-first century has witnessed a "renaissance" of young adult literature, also known as YA literature, on a mass cultural scale in North America (Cart 187). With this rise in production and demand, there is discord between traditional theoretical notions of youth and young adult literature and actual contemporary manifestations of the same. Social technology, comprising of communitarian online spaces which encourage user activity, as well as sliding structural temporalities of age and maturity, have contributed to the involvement of young people with literature in a first-hand, creative manner that has been previously unseen. As authors, publishers, marketing agencies and retailers increasingly acknowledge the cultural and economic impact of youth in today's "forever young" North American society (Danesi), the importance of young readers' contributions to the literary process is intensifying in tandem. As the genre of young adult literature as such has only been in development for approximately forty years, it is a complex and transformative component of contemporary literature as a whole.

Statement and Justification of Problem. In this thesis, I examine the recent popularity of young adult fiction in North American culture and attempt to determine the reasons for, and the impact of, this rise in mainstream centrality of the genre. I also consider how this development necessitates new interpretations of youth and their literary activity when juxtaposed with contemporary crisis rhetoric involving degrading youth literacy and the tenuous viability of literature in the digital age. This is best summarized by YA literature scholar Michael Cart:

"[…] I find it so wonderfully ironic that the field's renaissance which has driven the publication of more YA books than every before, should have occurred during the same period in which many people are also saying that – thanks to a dazzling array of digital distractions – no one is reading anymore" (187). My thesis work is focused on three areas: Firstly, an observation of the tensions that exist between persistent negative stereotypes of YA literature, including youth readers, and the current commercial success of YA literature, part of which has been attracting a large number of youth readers; Secondly, a consideration of the reasons for this success, the most significant for literature as a discipline being the integration of the genre with Web 2.0 (online social technology such as *Twitter*[1] and *Facebook*[2] which functions on user-generated content and consumer activity); And thirdly, the ways in which readership and textual practices are shifting through this integration.

My corpus is significantly focused on a singular literary series, Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga of four volumes published between 2005 and 2008, as it is considered to be the "first social networking bestseller" wherein Web 2.0 was explicitly used to generate reader interaction, largely contributing to Meyer's extreme commercial and cultural success (Green). Often referred to as a literary phenomenon, the *Twilight* series has sold over 100 million copies worldwide (Sellers) and has expanded to become an entire literary universe, replete with five

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1 *Twitter* ©2011 (http://twitter.com/) is a real-time network of information that is user-generated (in a format of 140 characters or less entitled "tweets").

2 *Facebook* ©2011 (http://www.facebook.com) is an online community hosting website wherein users develop personal profiles and interact in a multimedia capacity (video, photography, text) with other users via private and/or public message boards.

blockbuster feature films and a particularly invested and expressive fan community of "Twilighters" or "Twi-Hards" of all ages that is worldwide. The novels are also extremely controversial, as critical discussion often revolves around the poor writing quality and questionable thematic elements of Meyer's hyper-emotional vampire-romance plot. Accordingly, the binary of *Twilight* critical controversy/readership popularity is akin to the tensions between literary theory (adult mediation) and practical application (youth readership) of young adult literature as a whole in the twenty-first century. The use of the *Twilight* series is also interspersed with references to its most similar predecessor, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, which also has a highly interactive online literary community.

Methodology. As this study considers both theoretical and actual expressions of the genre, I have used an interdisciplinary approach that integrates literary theory, cultural studies and technological discourse to create an all-encompassing assessment of the status and identity of young adult literature in today's North American society, specifically Canada and the United States. This approach thus includes a look at the development of both the YA genre and the valuation of youthfulness during the Sixties youth revolution, just as it considers the current statistics of both youth presence and YA literature success. This is a study of Digital Natives, a term coined by Marc Prensky to indicate those youth who are developing as individuals in the digital age, and the way they relate to and integrate literature into this new technological socio-cultural space. Therefore, in place of a focused textual analysis of the *Twilight* saga, the novels are

considered in this study as a literary entity existing in a larger cultural scenario. In substitution, the textual analysis of derivative fan fiction pieces written by invested *Twilight* readers reveals the ways in which the *Twilight* phenomenon, as such an entity, is actualized as a part of a young person's cultural world. The use of specifically chosen fan fiction pieces is intentional as to mimic the selection process in traditional comparative methodological approaches to literature. This forms part of my attempt to highlight the shifting authorial and critical roles in this new literary space where "official" and "unofficial" authorial creations form part of the same literary community. Young adult literature is being modified. Instead of acting as a representative voice for young people, through social technology it is becoming an avenue for personal expression of a young reader's experiences.

According to John Palfrey, the "creative revolution in cyberspace" is not only concerned with authorial and readership roles and resulting balances of creative power, it is "also about who gets to control to shaping of culture, the making of 'meaning'" (125). Therefore, I intend to explore this negotiation of meaning and identity in derivative creative work on the part of young people, in light of the ways social technology has influenced the success of *Twilight*. This is done by a specific look at the construction of culture and meaning for the Canadian identity by Canadian youth in selected Canadian-themed *Twilight* fan fiction. Instead of a statistical or generalized overview of *Twilight* fan fiction practices, the result is a portrait of how young fan fiction writers are responding to young adult literature on their own terms (through Web 2.0-facilitated creative

expression), in their own contexts (this being the national context), and how they are integrating into their lives and identities through social technology.

Chapter Outline. Chapter 1 begins by looking at the time period, the Sixties, in which young adult literature was established as a genre and how the concurrent ideological trend towards youthfulness worked to establish the current obsession with being "forever young," which has placed young people and their activities at the cultural centre. The inheritance of this "process of juvenilization" for young adult literature is the perception of youth as a potential socio-cultural force and that YA literature is meant to communicate "to" or "for" this demographic (Danesi 12). I explore how this mythologizing of "youth" also occurs within literary theory, wherein conventional notions of the genre are based on the age of its "intended audience," thereby separating the readership of young adult literature from the literary process, a field largely controlled by adults as based on the "presumed inability" of youth readers to do the same (Nodelman 3, 5). In summation, the "youth reader" remains an imaginary concept so long as young people are kept separate from the conception, creation, dissemination and critique of the genre. My subsequent study of the contemporary realities of youth and YA literature reveals that such social constructs have led to a separation between actual young people and the concept of "youth," facilitating stereotypes and exaggerations. Finally, an introductory assessment of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series in North American culture at large addresses such stereotypes and shows that, in our increasingly technological (and therefore borderless) society,

discourse that aims to define youth and young adult literature is now inhibiting this same aim.

Chapter 2 continues the discussion of boundary narratives, which constrict a proper assessment of young adult literature, by examining new readership practices. Part of such a dialogue is the consideration of YA literature as a transitional gateway tool, which will lead youth readers to becoming life-long readers of adult literature. However, just as digital spaces erase limitations of time and space, the new interactive relationship with young adult literature through social technology centralizes works such as *Twilight* in an invested way that makes them much more than a "rung on a ladder between children's and adult literature" (Cart 23). Active YA readership through online communitarian outlets now defies previous abstract notions of the youth reader as passive in the literary process. Readership has also evolved in terms of YA literature's "intended audience" definition (Nodelman 3). I examine the new readership of young adult literature in three categories: youth, adults and female readers. It becomes evident that individuals who are engaging with young adult texts are now defying all previous methods of categorization.

Web 2.0, social technology and user-generated content are examined in more detail in Chapter 3, which is an analysis of the ways that such technologies are redefining textual practices within the context of young adult literature. As malleability, manipulation and "multiple literacies" are core components of social technology, concepts of authorship and readership roles are being re-written in such a framework (Cart 191). Scholars have identified that Digital Natives have

an innate sense of this capacity for active interaction online, which leads them to frequently engage in narrative-based digital activities (e.g. Jenkins, Palfrey, Urbanski). As the Internet has facilitated mass access for younger individuals to creative outlets from which they were previously excluded, such as fan communities, this activity is a new engagement with source literature that presupposes interactive engagement with literature, a trend identified by Juli Parrish and Henry Jenkins. Fan fiction is a particularly interesting area of study within the world of user-generated content as it is literary in nature and, as in the realm of *Twilight* fandom, the works can rival the originality and fictional scope of the source texts. Therefore, the secondary portion of Chapter 3 examines fan fiction within the Canadian context, another instance where literature is engaged with boundary narrative, as in interaction with American-based *Twilight* source material. The analysis of five particular fan fiction works from *FanFiction.net* demonstrates how young Canadian readers construct meaning from the *Twilight* canon by situating it in their own national, cultural and personal contexts.

Chapter 1. Growing Pains: Young Adult (YA) Literature and Theory

Mythical Youth: Young Adult Literature's Legacy

Young adult literature, whose target audience traditionally spans from approximately 12 years of age to the early twenties, is a fluid concept that is most generally defined as "whatever young adults are reading" (Latrobe and Drury xi). Young adults have been reading literature long before a distinction was established regarding literary works designed specifically for them. It was in the 1940s that literature began to be marketed directly to adolescents, primarily in the form of conservative, yet light-hearted novels and magazines (Cart 11). However, the development of young adult literature in North America (also referred to as YA literature) that addressed the adolescent reality and changed the face of "teen reading" forever on, began during the late 1960s and into the 1970s, a "liberal political climate" wherein "many topics theretofore considered taboo for young adults (e.g. sex, drug abuse, way, the occult) were addressed head-on by pioneering young adult authors of contemporary fiction […]" and then matured into a permanent component of modern literature during the 1990s (Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown 5). This wave of young adult literature arose from a desire for representation of the identity and struggles of young people in modern times. In the history of the written word, the designation of texts for young adults is an extremely new area of literature that reflects the changing and increasingly examined social conceptions of age and maturity as they affect subjectivity and the self. There are many parallels with the early development of Canadian

Literature (or CanLit)[3], which also began developing in the late 1960s to address the maturation of the country as a distinct global presence. This "historically specific project of national 'identity' formation" was linked to the sentiments of the emerging youth counter-culture that sought to break with the ideologies of traditional Canadian politics and the economic "establishment" (Wright 18). For English Canada, this meant separating from its British colonial parent as well as distinguishing its identity from its stronger and larger American counterpart. Similarly in Quebec, the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s incited a new, fervent literary culture in *la belle province* that explored the Quebecois identity in political and ideological transition. The Liberal slogan "*c'est le temps que ça change*" is representative of the ensuing development of a Quebecois identity distinct from Canada proper as well as from French colonial traditions of the past (S. Mann 299). The urgent need for a youthful voice to communicate identity led to these all of these new areas of literary expression "coming of age", opening paths of dialogue about inclusion and exclusion[4], the individual, community and nation.

Complicated histories notwithstanding, a unifying point of these politicized cultural movements in literature was the foregrounded power shift of the concept of "youth". Marcel Danesi notes that, by the 1960s:

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[3] Discussion here and hereafter of "Canadian literature" is in specific reference to the development of Canadian literature in English Canada, unless otherwise explicitly stated. Literatures developed in Quebec, French Canada and Aboriginal communities have distinct histories and are by no means considered in this study to be directly related to the Anglophone literatures of Canada.

[4] The binary of "inclusion" and "exclusion" in relation to identity is a common trope when considering the development of Canadian literature (not British/American) and of *littérature québécoise* (not Anglophone Canadian/French/American) and even *littérature canadienne-française* (not Quebecois/Anglophone Canadian).

> Being old meant being part of the corrupt and morally fossilized 'establishment,' as the consumerist way of life was called by the counter-culture dissidents of the era. By the end of decade, the process of juvenilization had reached a critical mass, on the verge of becoming *the* defining feature of Western groupthink. (12)

Nicholas Olsberg also identifies this common age-centric idea saying that "youth and recklessness" were the unifying components of a decade that was otherwise inconsistent on a global scale (168). For various communal and individualistic reasons, including human rights and politics as well as personal identity and freedom of lifestyle choice, the power of youth became the driving force of social change in contemporary Western cultures. For Canadian literature during the Centennial era, "in myth, if not in reality, young people were at the centre of the movement" as the goal of creating an autonomous national literature "was literally awash with the exuberance of Sixties youth" (Wright 24). It appears that the social and cultural links that were forged with youth at this time – anti-establishment sentiment, nationalism, civil rights and second-wave feminism – have become mythologized as the revolutionary capabilities that all youth innately possess. Confidently proclaiming "never trust anybody over thirty!," Sixties youth glorified and romanticized the young for times to come. In *The Sixties: Passion, Politics and Style*, editor Dimitry Anastakis muses whether it remains the "endless decade" as the elements that defined the era, including youth, "remain seared into the collective memories of the generations that have come after the baby boomers" (4). In the context of this study, the heritage of the decade for young

adult literature in North America is the perception of youth as a potential socio-cultural force and the perspective that YA literature is tasked with communicating "to" or "for" this demographic. The arrival of change within YA literature at this time was prompted by a desire to communicate the "reality" of the teenage experience, something that had been lacking in the girls' romance and boys' adventure stories of the '40s and '50s (Cart 27). Ironically, the snapshot taken of adolescence during this time, through iconic and still-studied texts such as S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*, became so "real" that it has persisted to inform narratives of adolescence, even though this time has now past. The notion that adolescents and young people are at the forefront of cultural change is now commonly accepted, although the perception of the types of change that these individuals produce has shifted.

Beyond youth power, the boomer generation was also the first group of adolescents to be aggressively targeted by the media, who capitalized on the new teenage reality of leisure time and disposable income (Danesi 20). Although literary products for teens had been on the market for a few decades prior, such as the arrival of *Seventeen* magazine in 1944 (Cart 12), Sixties media turned to an approach that would integrate consumerism with revolution, style with ideology and the term "youth" synonymous with "trend." Since the late 1960s, "the worlds of advertising, marketing, and entertainment have become totally intertwined with youth lifestyle movements, both responding and contributing to rapid fluctuations in social trends and values" (Danesi 25). This has become especially pertinent as we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century, wherein "youthful

groupthink" is embedded in media and marketing narratives and is the driving force behind the engagement with the newest trends and increasingly rapid technological advances. As will be demonstrated further on, this also opens dialogue concerning the "fads" in literature that young people may be attracted to, exposing a hierarchical critique of YA literature that often demeans the texts on the basis of their mass popularity, and of those who read them for their lack of literary sophistication as evidenced by their adherence to a shallow consumerist culture.

As each generation conceptualizes and reveres youth within their own subjective framework, Robert Wright observes that these two outcomes of the 1960s – youth as revolutionary and youth as lucrative customers – have morphed to have now stigmatized today's Canadian youth as either "deviant" or as "savvy consumers" and continue "to frame public perceptions of young Canadians and even to inform public policy in this country" (3). I would suggest that the mythologizing of "youth," perpetuated by media and marketing industries, has led to a separation between actual young people and their imagined social counterpart, facilitating stereotypes and exaggerations. Perry Nodelman asserts that "'young adults' in the phrase 'literature for young adults' are most usefully seen as the adolescent readers that writers, responding to the assumptions of adult purchasers, *imagine and imply* in their works" (emphasis added, 5). Therefore, it is the "mythical youth" as portrayed by the media and in advertising targeted to young people that is communicated to the general adult public, whose own youth is veiled with nostalgia and defined by a past cultural system. As will be discussed

further, part of the contemporary image of teens is their lack of interest in "outdated" technologies, including print literature. The preoccupation with literacy, a decades-old concern married with the rise of adolescent education in the 1940s, has intensified in the twenty-first century from fears that "teens today don't read" surrounded as they are by a dizzying array of audio-visual technologies. This has led to the perception, both positive and negative, of contemporary youth as the "digital generation": a group of young people on the cusp of communication revolution that will inevitably dispense with literature as such (Urbanski, "Blurring" 4). There is truth in this generational identifier, as many of today's youth are "digital natives[5]," born into a technological world that means their relationship to such environments differs greatly from older "digital immigrants" adapting to this lifestyle (Hansford and Adlington 57). As a note, John Palfrey prefers the term "population" to describe Digital Natives as an acknowledgment that this segment of individuals is, in fact, a privileged minority globally in their access to digital technologies (14). This population has a significant, even pioneering, voice and presence within the realm of digital technologies in a world where Internet access is constantly and rapidly expanding.

Despite this digital dialogue, as will be demonstrated, the YA genre has undergone a period of extreme growth in the past decade, as explained by Michael Cart:

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[5] The terms "digital native" and "digital immigrant" were coined by media scholar Marc Prensky in his 2001 book entitled *Digital Game-Based Learning*, published in New York by McGraw-Hill.

> […] I find it so wonderfully ironic that the field's renaissance which has driven the publication of more YA books than ever before, should have occurred during the same period in which many people are also saying that – thanks to a dazzling array of digital distractions – no one is reading anymore. (187)

The examination of concerns regarding this rhetorical shift, including literacy degradation, extinction of print culture, and media-controlled cultural Americanization of the Canadian identity, will indicate how youth today are being marginalized by the stereotype of their aimless literary futures. Concern about the lack of youth interest in literature is often framed as socio-cultural lethargy through technology: "For the Twitter generation, the new slogan seems to be 'Don't trust anyone over 140 characters'" (Charles par. 13). In this light, young adult literature is tasked to be a guiding tool (or, for youth appeal, a "gateway drug") for initiating apathetic teens into the world of reading. However, Urbanski is careful to consider that "the nostalgia may disguise" the need for a scholarly reappraisal of "the social nature of that media" that is redefining interactions with literature, narrative and text ("Meeting" 249). As according to Hansford and Adlington, "texts are no longer experienced as singular artifacts" as in the linear fashion of traditional print culture (55). However, this is not an indication of youth today rejecting print literature and literacy, as the authors are mindful that "being a teenager today does not guarantee that they are fully-fledged and avid users of new technology" (59). A recent study conducted by Ipsos Reid Market Research found that teens (aged 12 to 17) actually spend less time on the Internet

that their adult counterparts, for reasons of parental control and other time-encompassing activities, primarily going online for social purposes ("Canadian Teenagers"). Siva Vaidhyanathan also warns that the idea of an all-encompassing digital youth population is a "generational myth" that misrepresents the realities (differing in areas of ethnicity, nationality, gender and class) of young people's relationship with print, which, he argues, continues to be useful and relevant (par. 9). Furthermore, he is mindful that not all youth are in a social or financial position to engage with digital technologies, and so print media and libraries continue to be engaged with (he notes that library use by Americans has increased in the past decade) (par. 7). Wright concurs that the rich pedagogical use of print text has ensured that "Canadian youth have never been better equipped to enjoy a lifelong relationship with the printed word" (13). Nonetheless, American[6] and Canadian[7] Internet usage surveys are reporting that that majority (upwards of 93 to 98 percent) of teenagers and young adults in North America are going online on a daily basis. A look at the ways in which "text" is conceived and manipulated by contemporary young people, who are evidenced to utilize technology for their textual interactions, will also reveal a new engagement with critical readership and authorship roles and the development of community, as well as a new identity for young adult literature beyond the gateway in its relationship with its readers of all ages and the new generation of digital participatory culture.

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[6] According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project "Social Media & Mobile Internet Use" study, 93% of American teenagers aged 12 to 17 years and young adults aged 18 to 29 go online regularly (Lenhart et al.).

[7] A 2009 Statistics Canada "Canadian Internet Use Survey" cites that 98% of Canadians aged 16 to 24 go online regularly (Canada *Canadian Internet*)

YA Literary Theory: A State of Perpetual Adolescence

The subject of identity is a central component of young adult literature, as its function within literary criticism is entangled in the "mythical youth" narrative. For example, while nationalist literatures developed in 1960s Canada were carried into maturity with the aging of their baby-boomer advocates, young adult literature has remained in a perpetual state of adolescence due to its youthful origins. According to Nodelman, children's and young adult literature[8] is defined as a genre "by virtue of what the category implies, not so much about the text itself as about its intended audience" making "the term highly unusual as a category of literature" (3). The perceived inequality of child and adult in areas of life knowledge and maturity has been translated to the structure and status of literature for young people, making the group of children's and YA texts a singular phenomenon in the realm of literature: the field is largely created, managed (controlled), promoted, purchased and critiqued by adults as based on "the presumed inability" of a separate, frequently-evolving age category to do the same (Nodelman 5). Jack Zipes has also observed this privileged structure in which "the evaluative processes established by critics, parents, the press, institutions, authors and illustrators of what is 'good' children's literature exclude, for the most part, the opinions of young people […]" (63). Margaret Atwood anticipated that people would ask "what is Canadian about Canadian literature?" in the opening of her seminal CanLit text, *Survival,* at a time when identity was at

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[8] The terms "children's" and "young adult" when concerning literature are often used together, and even interchangeably, as young adult literature as a distinctly separate genre is still relatively recent. Additionally, the two are considered to have followed a similar path of development in literary theory.

the forefront of personal and communal fulfillment (11). We can ask, for the same need: What is "young" about young adult literature in today's adult-driven society? The premise for the genre is the concept of the literature's audience, which fluctuates frequently, as determined by a distinctly separate social group who views their regulation of the genre as necessary. Therefore, there is an undercurrent of explicit intention for this intended audience – the genre involves many cultural and ideological subtexts about adult-youth relations of inequality that go beyond the simple assembly of the end textual product. This type of adult supervision acts as a mediation function of the didactic and aesthetic functions of the genre[9]. Such mediation will be explored further as a highly problematic and marginalizing act (due to assumed authority in the production and evaluative processes) that can undermine the position of YA texts as legitimate objects of study. Subsequently, it maintains hierarchical literary structures in its continual reduction, and therefore alienation, of the YA reader. Finally, it also has the potential to demean the importance of the social activity (participatory culture) generated through communal enjoyment of popular YA works.

To continue, children's and young adult literature developed in response to the realization that children and youth were inherently different. The *Oxford Canadian Dictionary of Current English* defines the concept of "otherness" as "the state or fact of being different" and/or "a thing or existence separate from the

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[9] In his article "The Limits of Literary Criticism of Children's and Young Adult Literature," Hans-Heino Ewers identifies four types of addressees within the communicative situation of the literatures, namely "the adult as a mediator and as a reader, the child or the young adult as a sanctioned, exemplary reader and as a nonsanctioned, secret reader" (83). He further observes: "There is probably no other literary realm in which mediating groups have such power" (84).

thing mentioned" ("otherness"). Both definitions apply to young people as they are viewed as both "different from adults" and as "non-adults". Transferred to their literature, otherness has become the basis of identification of the genre, despite the wide range of styles and subject matters within the genre itself. Difference from the (adult) center subjects children's and young adult literature to marginal placement. According to Zohar Shavit, children's and young adult literature originated and has traditionally remained on the periphery to its centralized parent, "adult literature," as it is the adult socio-cultural group who determines the position of the systems: "From the beginning, children's literature was regarded by other systems as inferior" (34). Shavit goes on to explain that the cultural hierarchy that has structured "adult" literature above that of children and young adults is clearly demonstrated by the absence of children's writers and books in the greater study of literary criticism and history, excluded from lexicons and encyclopedias other than those specific to children's literature (35). Further, Deborah Thacker writes that the "battle against marginalization of children's literature within the academic mainstream is an old one" (1). Beverly Lyon Clark concurs: "Although children's literature has continued to garner enthusiasm in the popular press, the more academic gatekeepers all but ignored it in the middle to late twentieth century" (xii). For children's and YA literature, Shavit concludes, its cultural and literary status is "inferior" and is often the neglected component of literary studies as a whole (33). This has impeded the consideration of young adult novels as texts of legitimate study within academia. Thacker suggests that this oversight hinders the contemporary study of literature, which has undergone a

general shift from pure textual analyses to more interdisciplinary considerations of the "interplay between reader and text and the social and political forces that mediate those interactions" (1). This observation is a positive consideration of young adult literature as a potential socio-cultural force for cultural change that necessitates academic study as such, as youth readers are modifying their concept of "literary text" in the digital age, and so, are ensuring that author-text-reader communicative processes are shifting in tandem.

Young adult literature has remained on the periphery by virtue of the perception that youth is equated with inexperience and so "the genre is uniquely subject to social supervision and frequent challenges in public and school libraries, which puts YA novels in a marginal cultural position like that of the life stage they seek to describe" (Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown 5). As previously mentioned, the common expectation of young adult literature is that it should fulfill a pedagogical function for its specified readers as either "communication to" or "expression of" the adolescent experience. Cart refers to this view of YA literature as "a ladder" or "more precisely, a rung on a ladder between children's and adult literature" thereby mimicking the view of adolescence as a period of transition (23). The genre is unique in that within it "the boundaries separating literary criticism, education, and librarianship are particularly permeable" (Clark 75). Traditionally, therefore, it is rare that a YA text could be evaluated critically external to the educational and censorious considerations of adults reading the effects of young people reading. It is true, as Cart finds, that "[a]s long as there has been a young adult literature, there has been a raging debate over the relative

importance, in evaluating it, of merit and popularity" (68). While there have been advocates of the artistic value of the genre, Hans-Heino Ewers identifies that the two positions taken with regards to the critical consideration of YA texts ("aesthetics or didactic concerns, pedagogy or art, autonomy or utility") are becoming archaic to useful critical study of a genre that is becoming more interactive with culture at large (77). Also, from both of these viewpoints, the "youth reader" remains an imaginary concept. As noted by Thacker and Cart, the rise in popularity of the young adult novel in the twenty-first century is demanding that our perspective of the critical position and the functions of the genre, as well as the reality of youth reader, be reconsidered.

Therefore, the defining elements of YA literature, namely age-based inabilities and non-canonized literary practices, ensure that it is continually discordant with the ideals of centralized adult-focused and canonical-centric cultural groups. Nodelman concludes *The Hidden Adult* by observing that "literature for adults exists and is discussed primarily as itself, not in terms of what it is not. But the reverse is almost never true" (340). Many children's literature theorists (e.g. Nodelman, Zipes, Shavit, Clark) have identified this double standard that encompasses the whole field, YA literature included, in that the literatures must appeal to adult-mediators and their conception of youth (and of the needs of youth) in order to be successful, despite their non-inclusion in the target youth audience. As will be subsequently explored, in the past decade young adult literature has entered the North American cultural consciousness due to the runaway, and therefore cultural, success of YA novels such as J.K. Rowling's

Harry Potter series. As the genre has roots in didacticism and mediation by interested adult parties, the impact of these highly successful titles on readers, both young and not so young (as temporalities of age become increasingly blurred in our juvenilized society), is scrutinized in a manner from which adult literature is generally exempt under the guise of "artistic freedom." Nodelman also explores the concept of "doubleness" in the sense that adult-mediated children's and young adult literature "simultaneously celebrates and denigrates both childhood desire and adult knowledge" (181). Adults want children to learn the control and maturity that they have developed to survive in life but also desire a child's freedom of self, therefore secretly hoping this ability survives. This may point to the increasing celebration of "youth" in society that occurs parallel to the maintenance of age-structured social hierarchy in North American culture.

There is a palpable tension between the actual and the imagined relationship between youth and literature. Writing for the *Globe and Mail*, author Joan Clark summarizes that the term "young adult" leads to assumptions that ignore the individualized quality of a YA work: "Simply put, the Y/A label influences whether a reader is likely to choose or ignore a book" (par. 7). The very real marginalization of young adult literature within literary criticism is discordant with the expectation of this literature to inform and educate adolescents in the same way that the treatment of "digital" youth, stereotyped as literacy deviants, is inconsistent with the "mythical youth" ideal perpetuated by the media and nostalgically constructed by adults. In *Survival*, Atwood intended to write something "that would make Canadian literature, as *Canadian* literature – not just

literature that happened to be written in Canada" (13) and, similarly, this study will attempt to present young adult literature, as *young adult* literature, wherein literature is claimed by its youthful readers – and not just literature that happens to be (or decided it *should* be) designated for young adults or about young adults. It becomes apparent that, beneath the surface of a seemingly unambiguous label, young adult literature today is a quietly complex and transformative component of literature as a whole.

YA Literature in the Twenty-First Century

The young adult segment of North American society is playing an increasingly important role in cultural, technological and economic fields as "[o]ver the past decade adolescents have been one of the fastest growing segments of the U.S. population" (Koss and Teale 563). Cart states that this rise in youth population is, following a fifteen-year period of decline in the U.S., "widely expected to outstrip that of the general population," with a peak in 2010 (57). Furthermore, the 2001 Statistics Canada census rated the growth of the youth population (born in years 1980 to 1995) as "relatively large," totaling more than 4.8 million and second only to the baby boomer population (Canada, *Shifts* par. 6). A 2010 Government of Canada report also comments on the growing gap between the aging baby boomer and youth populations as a "significant change engine that, while exerting tremendous pressure on today's youth also sets the stage for new opportunities for the youth of tomorrow" (Franke 16). As a group, young adults have the ability to make a significant impact on cultural and commercial trends in North American society as they negotiate a new space of

youthful identity that is highly desirable in Western culture at large. Cart continues that the cultural "youth renaissance" began at the cusp of the millennium: "Seldom in our history had so much attention been lavished on teens, who now seemed omnipresent […] in every medium of popular culture: magazines, movies, television, and more" (63). Echoing the youth power of the Sixties, both in sheer numbers and in cultural presence, the "young adult" has reclaimed its central position in cultural rhetoric.

Nonetheless, the nature of this centrality has evolved from that of Sixties youth due to the inseparability of media from youth culture, as Danesi explains: "There is a veritable synergy today between that [media-entertainment] industry and adolescent lifestyle, they influence each other in tandem" (24). Once again, we can observe an interplay between the actual and the fictional youth in society. Just as the Government of Canada sees the new reality of youth as being a highly pressurized situation open to many possibilities, so is the concept of "youth" becoming a veritable obsession, simultaneously exalted and scrutinized by culture at large, which Danesi calls the "merging of our fantasyland and scientific views of childhood" (6). As will be shown, this is especially observable in the substantial dialogue surrounding the newly termed "crossover" young adult literature, which has attracted readers of all ages and has generated considerable controversy academically and in the media as it defies traditional age-based definitions and pedagogical functions of the genre.

As will also be explored as crucial to the new identity of YA literature, the concept of "young adulthood" has become increasingly fluid, expanding to a

demographic aging between thirteen and thirty, as various socio-cultural factors including media influence, global economic hardship, advanced educational requirements and ideological age-centric discourses have simultaneously expedited the process of maturation of teens and delayed their entrance into the adult world of the professional workforce, parenthood and property ownership. Franke reports that the "trend towards an extended youth phase has become widespread in industrialized countries over the last 30 years" wherein the transitions are no longer sequential, thus making the period of "youth" longer as well as more complex (10). Young adulthood is a critical period of growth and discovery in the process of identity formation and the way this is experienced has evolved with society: "With the 'postmodern, fluid conditions' of adolescence today, youths no longer live life as a journey towards the future but as a condition" (Bean and Moni 640). Wright sees the result of this development being a continuation of adult mediation, noting that "[y]outh today live in worlds into which adults have consigned them, sometimes well into their thirties" (3). However, this also allows individuals to experience a "coming of age" experience at any period of time, such as the popularity of the "mid-life crisis" rite of passage experienced by people later in life. Whether the experience of youthful transitions is voluntary or an imposed holding pattern, the need for and appeal of a literature that reflects this new, fluid identity space is being responded to with abundant success.

What are the implications of this "youth renaissance" for young adult literature? There are more educated young adults than ever before, this being

compounded with the fact that the demographic has expanded to include *even more* readers. Furthermore, all of these individuals are maintaining youthful interests throughout their life and are more comfortable with the existence of print culture, and its technological successors, than previous generations. The outcome has been a new commercial focus on the buying power of teens in the literary market, with publishers delineating young adult-specific divisions, "many specializing in reader-friendly (i.e. commercial) fiction" as well as cross-age marketing of the genre (Cart 91). According to Koss and Teale, "[t]his increased 'market' has spawned more products designed for the young adult (YA) population, resulting in a growth spurt in YA literature and other reading materials targeted to teens, such as teen websites, and graphic novels" (563). As reported by *USA Today*, children's and young adult books accounted for 29% of all literature sales in the United States in 2009, setting a new sales record for the market (Minzesheimer and DeBarros par. 6). In the same year, Canadian retail giant Chapters and Indigo Books reported a 200 percent increase in YA sales since 2004 (Reece par. 3). At a time when claims abound that we have entered a "post-book age," the YA novel is triumphing both in creative output and in demand. I will suggest that the release of YA fiction from the purely didactic realm mediated by educators and parents into the commercial market has asserted the legitimacy of young adult literature as viable literature, regardless of audience and of purpose, on the literary market.

Within the framework of comparative literature, young adult literature bears attention not only due to the fact that it is forming the next generation of

readers, but that it is an area in which critical literary claims (adult-mediators reading) and practical application (youths reading) collide while belonging to traditionally-different cultural spheres – a complex inter-systemic relationship that few, if any other, areas of contemporary literature have negotiated as noted by scholars (e.g. Ewers, Nodelman, Shavit). Complicating this relationship is the reality that, in our contemporary multimedia and globalized society, literary products are no longer only texts but also, as literary and cultural theorist Itamar Even-Zohar observes, "images, moods, interpretations of 'reality,' and options of action" that freely transcend boundaries ("Factors and Dependencies" 29). With the increased market of young adult books for young adult and adult readers alike, the convergence of previously separate readership groups[10] is beginning to be observed as a serious cultural and commercial shift by the literary community. This inquiry goes beyond the debate of whether young adult literature should fulfill a didactic function or be considered aesthetically. Indeed, Even-Zohar explains that "the 'text' is no longer the only, and not necessarily for all purposes the most important, fact, or even product" in the Western literary system where interdisciplinary issues such as technological influence, readership roles and participatory cultural manipulation are being called into question ("The 'Literary System'" 33). The immense popularity of crossover works that draw readership of all ages, such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* and Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*

[10] It must be noted that "crossover" works as such have always been in existence, noteworthy examples being Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, (not to mention the countless "adult" novels read by young people historically). Nonetheless, the new phase of child-to-adult "crossover" literature is deliberately occurring outside of the structured age-based genres of children's and young adult literature that dominated literary practice from the mid-nineteenth century, so that these new works are considered simply as "literature" as such.

sagas, are indicative of the movement of the YA novel towards the center of the literary system on a mass cultural scale in North America. It becomes necessary to examine whether such works can be properly critiqued in any form by the literary structure that inherently defined them "in contrast" – as an "Other" and a "gateway" - discounting the cultural momentum of their popular consumption by what they "are not."

Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*: A Popular Controversy

One such wildly popular and controversial teen series that challenges traditional considerations of YA literature as "purely target-group-oriented utilitarian literature"[11] is the *Twilight* saga, written by Stephenie Meyer and comprised of four chronological volumes entitled *Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse* and *Breaking Dawn* released between 2005 and 2008. There is a veritable storm of commentary and controversy surrounding the success (often dubbed as a "phenomenon") of these YA-designated novels, as they have essentially discounted the age-based definition of the genre as well as proudly succeeded as non-canonical texts and as commercial commodities. Issues of center and periphery, inclusion and exclusion are all as equally important to the consideration of the *Twilight* series as to the genre which it has helped to transform.

The tale is narrated by 17-year-old Bella (Isabella) Swan, a modern child of divorce who relocates to Forks, Washington to live with her father following

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11 This observation is made by Ewers: "Quite a few areas of [children's and young adult literature] can no longer be classified as purely target-group-oriented utilitarian literature, something that has certainly come to be noticed in the realm of the cultural public. Both theory and critical are challenged intellectually and practically by this development" (79).

her mother's remarriage. Clumsy, quiet and better acquainted with Victorian novels than contemporary teenagers, she is resistant to the male attention her arrival has generated at the small-town high school. Instead, she becomes fixated on an equally resistant group of students, the Cullens, and their youngest member, Edward, in particular. She and Edward have an immediate "fatal" attraction, hers of a human's sexual interest, while his is one of vampiric desire. As Bella is introduced to the world of the supernatural through the vampire Edward (who is more reminiscent of Austen's Darcy than Stoker's Dracula), they embark on a passionate journey of "teenage" love (Edward is seventeen in body, but a centenarian in spirit) and she immerses herself in his family of "vegetarian" (animal blood drinking-only) vampires who sparkle in the sun, never sleep and have supernatural strength, supreme talents, and supermodel looks. It is a modern-day version of star-crossed lovers, in a fantastical reality where immortality is possible and love can last forever – in short, a perfect teenage dream. Throughout the series, which totals over 2000 pages, they encounter danger and drama, while, through Bella, the supernatural world expands for readers with werewolves and magic and allows fairy tale and horror to become reality. Myth becomes two-fold in the *Twilight* world, as the author herself describes the books' creation as obsessive and all-consuming after the story descended upon her in a dream, likening the characters to children: "Bella and Edward were, quite literally, voices in my head. They simply wouldn't *shut up*" ("The Story Behind" par. 9). Between the magic in the novel and the fairy tale of a first-time author reaching astronomical success, *Twilight* has been fixated in North American consciousness

as an unlikely success story. The result has been the evolution of an entire cultural movement spawning movies, graphic novels, "Twihard" fan sites and conventions, *Twilight* vocabulary, fan fiction, themed art and crafts, controversial critical discourse, spin-offs and spoofs, and even a spike in the use of characters' names for newborn children (McKinley). For younger generations, *Twilight* has become an integral part of their twenty-first century cultural world, for better or for worse.

As of March 2010, the books have sold more than 100 million copies worldwide to date (Sellers) and have spawned an equally successful movie series with the first three movies released (*Breaking Dawn* is to be released in two parts, the first going North America-wide on November 11th, 2011) with nearly one billion dollars in box office sales in the United States alone to date, with successful international releases as well (IMDB[12]). The books have spent a total of 235 weeks on the *New York Times Bestseller List*, with 136 of them at the top spot (Grossman par. 3) and Meyer ranks as the second-highest paid author for 2010, according to *Forbes.com* (Smillie). On January 14th, 2010, *USA Today* headlined that the tomes of the *Twilight* series occupied the top four spots of their bestseller list for both 2008 and 2009, a feat that "no other author – not even J.K. Rowling – has done in the list's 16-year history" (Associated Press, "Teen Star" par. 2). There has even been a graphic novel based on the series, released March

[12] This figure has been calculated by the author for this thesis by a method of addition: Sales figures posted on the International Movie Database (or IMDB at www.imdb.com) for the films *Twilight*, *Twilight: New Moon* and *Twilight: Eclipse* under the section "Box Office" were added manually to arrive at a figure of nearly one billion dollars. These figures are: *Twilight* $191,465,414 (USA) (2 Apr. 2009), *Twilight: New Moon* $296,619,304 (USA) (28 Mar. 2010), and *Twilight: Eclipse* $300,523,112 (USA) (17 Oct. 2010), totaling $788,607,830.

16th 2010, which set a new graphic novel sales debut record in the United States with over 660,000 copies sold in the first week ("*Twilight*: The Graphic Novel"). In short, there is no doubt that Meyer's literary creation has been commercially successful, reaching many readers in many countries.

The cultural impact has been as equally potent. *Time* magazine declared on November 23rd, 2009, that "It's *Twilight* in America" noting that "Beatlemania is the comparison everyone makes" to the *Twilight* phenomenon whose "shadow has fallen over the entire globe" (Grossman par. 11, 25). *Breaking Dawn* was chosen as the 2008 British Book Award for "Children's Book of the Year" ("Breaking Dawn Wins"), the entire series won the *Nickelodeon* 2009 Kid's Choice Award for Favourite Book ("2009 Winners") and in August of 2010, *CBC Arts* reported that "Vampires dominate Teen Choice Awards." As Karen Backstein explains, "it would be impossible to overestimate the popularity of the novels" (39). While the *Twilight* series has won many kids' and teen's choice awards, it has, more often than not, been regarded as popular and accessible rather than as "literary" fiction by critics and academics. Aesthetically, the series has been negatively viewed by many critics: "The faults of Meyer's immensely popular teen vampire-romance series have been endlessly, and publicly, rehashed: the retrograde gender roles, the plodding plotlines, the super-heated goofiness of Meyer's prose" (Doyle 29). Further even than aesthetic and thematic critique, the series has become "an especially easy target for mockery" in the general media for these same observed faults (Sheffield and Merlo 219). Meyer herself addresses the intense controversy over plot and style that erupted after the final novel,

Breaking Dawn, was released, noting that "[i]t was bigger than I thought it would be on both the positive and negative sides" ("Frequently Asked Questions: *Breaking Dawn*" par. 16). The critical storm that has followed the commercial success of *Twilight* has certainly created an unusual amount of interest around the literary work, making young adult literature a "hot topic" once more.

Such strong and developed controversy is a direct result of the reality that the series has significantly increased readership on a mass cultural scale, both YA and adult, and especially female. In fact, in a downturned literary market, Backstein attributes the survival of Meyer's publisher Little, Brown to the success of the series alone (38). Cart concurs: "The runaway success of Meyer's series is surely at least partly responsible for making the genre the biggest fiction category in 2007" (100). Since the young adult novel has been traditionally linked with educational and formative activities, there has also been concern about the saga's influence on its teen readers. A recent *Guardian UK* article profiled a conference held at Cambridge University in the summer of 2010 where "neuroscientists and literary, education and media academics came together to investigate whether dark novels such as *Twilight* are affecting children's brains in a worrying way" (Tobin par. 2). The socio-cultural influence of the texts has also been recognized by parents, putting the four *Twilight* novels high on the list of books most challenged by parents and educators in both the United States and Canada (Associated Press "*Twilight* series on List"). Furthermore, many feminist scholars have denounced the novels for perpetuating antiquated gender roles and associating romance with violence while preaching abstinence and pro-life

choice[13]. There has even been academic discussion of *Twilight*'s promotion of the idealized "American Dream" and "Cinderella" motifs, leading to unrealistic expectations of reality on the part its young readers[14].

In all critical respects, therefore, the popularity of *Twilight* seems illogical, if not misguided. Some see the true success of *Twilight* as being at the basic level of pleasure reading, as Cart, referencing the obsessive focus on crossover YA novels by the media, sees as a magical mix of storytelling and marketing that has caught the attention of mass readership in a way that realist and literary fiction has not (115). He, himself admits: "Meyer, though a natural storyteller, with a thorough understanding of her readers' interests, is no stylist, and her four-volume saga shows little promise of ever becoming part of any literary canon" (100). In my opinion, a debate about the relative aesthetic and pedagogical merits of *Twilight* would mislead a study intended to understand the socio-cultural function of such a popular and controversial set of texts. As Alvermann and Hagood preface in their study of adolescent media literacy, "students' pleasures in popular culture need neither our valorization, as adults, nor our critique" for them to engage with popular texts (194). The article explores the fact that popular culture has been kept as a leisure activity separate from didactic discourse and "high" culture, therefore insisting that the consumption of such products be maintained as a pastime and kept separate from critical readership activity (200). Quality of

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[13] Some examples found in this bibliography include: "*Twilight* is Not Good For Maidens: Gender, Sexuality, and the Family in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Series" by Anna Silver; "The 'Real' Danger: Fact vs. Fiction for the Girl Audience" by Rebecca Housel; "Vampire Love: The Second Sex Negotiates the Twenty-First Century" by Bonnie Mann.

[14] See: "CinderBella: *Twilight*, Fairy Tales, and the Twenty-First Century American Dream" by Sara Buttsworth

writing or thematic influence aside, one must consider how this dialogue of critique is a continuation of the marginalization of the YA novel – the idea that it *must* fulfill some mediated purpose in the readers' lives beyond their own personal experience of the text (an expectation not always held to adult literature in the name of "art" or "freedom of speech"), while also demeaning the critical work that invested readers, who take pleasure in such texts, feel motivated to produce and share with society, such as through commentary on fansites and online literary reviews. It is important to not assume that all interaction with popular media is passive, as will be explored through an analysis of *Twilight* fan fiction within online participatory communities in Chapter 3.

Twilight defies categorization within the YA literary genre as it is discordant with adult-mediator conventions of pedagogical communication as well as with aesthetic considerations of "literariness." Beyond these two traditional poles of critique, Meyer has negotiated a new space for YA literature (and literature in general) in the lives of her readers, especially those of the digital generation, through her unprecedented use of online chat forums and discussion groups to involve her fans in the *Twilight* world, as the vice-president of Canadian bookseller Indigo is quoted as observing: "Stephenie Meyers [sic] Twilight[15] series is the first social networking best seller" (qtd. in Green par. 2). Green tracks how "Meyer eagerly followed her fans online," encouraging their development of fansites and fan fiction and providing background information and additional details about the novels through her personal website (par. 12). In fact, the boost

[15] This article does not italicize the title *Twilight*, for reasons unstated by the author.

offered by online communication to fan-readers of the series propelled "the Twilight[16] fandom to a much greater degree than many would have thought possible" (Click, Aubrey and Behm-Morawitz 3). Through a combination of Meyer's sanctioned blending of *Twilight* fiction and reality, invested fan communities and a responsive media-marketing presence on behalf of the saga's publisher Little, Brown (as well as film producer Summit), the novels expand their influence past the notion of "text" and into the "images, moods, interpretations of 'reality,' and options of action" of our contemporary juvenilized North American society (Even-Zohar, "Factors and Dependencies" 29). These factors have brought *Twilight* off the page, thereby involving readers and non-readers of the series alike into the phenomenon, controversy and all. The "digitalization" of the *Twilight* universe has rallied a significant faction of invested readers and fans of all ages and genders around a literary product in a way previously unseen, generating large amounts of interest and controversy equally directed towards all of its participants. The popularity of the saga contributes to the centralization of youth in society and defies claims of youth illiteracy, but it is also grounds for acts of stereotyping as *Twilight* controversy denounces as much as it celebrates those who engage with it because of the various structures (age, gender, literary canon) that such participation in a primarily female-oriented romantic YA genre transgresses. Due to the *Twilight* phenomenon, a term indicating all parts related to the initial textual creation by

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[16] The collection edited by Click, Aubrey and Behm-Morawitz entitled *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media & the Vampire Franchise* falls under the category of cultural and media studies and does not therefore italicize *Twilight* as the scholarship generally pertains to the cultural phenomenon that the series has generated, rather than to the works themselves as literary entities.

Meyer, literature has developed a new relationship with multiple generations of readers through the integrated use of social technology. The consideration of the digital generation (or population of Digital Natives) and their relationship to literature requires a closer examination of the use of technology *as* society (hearkening to Marshall McLuhan's revelation that the medium *is* the message), in ways of developing critical media literacy, the conception of age and "coming of age," as well as subsequent local and global identities. It becomes clear that, as a YA work, *Twilight* is an excellent literary ground on which to examine issues of "boundary" between literature and culture in terms of age and genre, readership identity and literary participation (such as through reader-generated fan fiction) – all which are being called into question in a very serious way by our increasingly borderless society.

Chapter 2. *Twilight* as a Gateway: Boundary Narratives of YA Literature and Readership

Boundary Narratives of Contemporary YA Literature

In contemporary culture, where different forms of media are in direct and fierce competition for the attention of young adults, YA literature is often tasked with the important function of acting as the "gateway" for the development of a new generation of life-long readers. In 1999, the International Reading Association released a position statement detailing the "ever-deepening crises in adolescent literacy" in response to the proliferation of multi-sensory stimulating media, the evolution of communication and the resulting affects on the literacy of youth maturing in such a culture (Moore et al. 1). Green concurs that the economic struggle of American book publishers in recent times has been primarily due to other forms of entertainment vying for the attention of the masses (par. 6). According to Latrobe and Drury, "twenty-first century technology has changed the ways people communicate and has motivated the debate about how best to assist young people to achieve full literacy" (234). With an increased literary market for young adults that comprises not only books, but also graphic novels, magazines, smart phone applications, blogs and websites, there is more choice of "text" than ever before for these Digital Natives. Koss and Teale identify the result of this shift in textual interaction as being the onset of multiple literacies since, in the digital age, "[i]nformation comes to us piecemeal, causing the need to blend multiple perspectives and points of view into one cohesive whole" (570). What becomes apparent is that, while the number of young adults and young adult literary texts are rising in tandem, the opportunities for their

intersection are less abundant with the increased media competition. According to Even-Zohar, "[l]iterature as a socio-cultural institution may go on existing for good, but the degree of its 'adequacy' may very well be judged by its position within culture" ("Polysystem Theory" 17).Therefore, the thought is that when young adults and literature come to a mutual place and interact, it is a positive step for the future of literature as a whole. *Twilight* has been portrayed in the media as such a tool, perhaps as a method of justifying its stylistic and thematic faults.

If viewed simply as a literary product, the *Twilight* saga appears to offer little to the world of literature: "The mainstream press regularly ridicules Twilight's story, characters, and relationships instead of taking these elements seriously" (Click, Aubrey & Behm-Morawitz, Introduction 5). At a closer level of examination, however, the development of *Twilight* into a digital space of literary social networking has aligned literature with its media competitors and has made the act of reading also an act of *interacting*, therefore asserting its "adequacy" and timeliness as a medium. As Hansford and Adlington are mindful of Digital Natives: "Print is not the dominant feature of texts, and texts are not only encountered through the mediation of family or school" (55). In contrast to crisis rhetoric that fears literature is now a dated pastime, according to Green, "[w]hat set Twilight apart was the way teens tracked down fellow readers immediately after closing the books" in person and online (par. 10). As of December 2010, Stephenie Meyer's official website listed a total of 502 "sanctioned" fan sites, wherein 378 are English-language sites while the remaining represent a total of 24

other languages worldwide (Meyer "*Twilight* series fansites"). Meyer's online interaction with her fans has even led her to host two real-life *Twilight: Eclipse "*proms" at Arizona State University in 2007; sold-out events filled with teenage attendees in costume, paying homage to almost every character imaginable from the books (Meyer "*Eclipse* Prom"). As a socio-cultural institution, the union of *Twilight* and social technology has allowed for literature to be a relevant tool for its readers as they negotiate the themes of the saga (family, morality, romance, individualism) in their own lives and with others in online spaces. The recognition that technology *is* society for many *Twilight* readers means that reading becomes "an option of action" that is a desired expenditure of personal time and energy as it is directly relatable to both their personal and public lives, i.e. their "moods" and "interpretations of 'reality'" (Even-Zohar, "Factors and Dependencies" 29). As will be also shown further in this study, this public act of reading/interacting has also shed light on YA literature as a space for different niches of readers, some outside its typical audience boundary – teens, young women, mothers, fathers, homosexual males – who all congregate online on target-specific and general websites to discuss *Twilight*. Perhaps it is this conscious display of readership that has contributed to the consideration of *Twilight* as a gateway text.

According to bestselling author Jodi Picoult, *Twilight* is engaging many in the act of reading, even if it is in an escapist fashion: "Stephenie Meyer has gotten people hooked on books […] and that's good for all of us" (qtd. in Yabroff par. 7). Another critic likens *Twilight* readers' "passionate investment" in the novels to "nineteenth century readers clamoring at the docks for the latest installments of

Dickens's work" (Silver 121). As YA literature is often considered to be separate and distinct from general literature, the gateway concept assumes that readers will begin engaging with the central system of "adult" canonical texts via the YA textual periphery. Cart identifies that this "ladder" mindset, wherein YA literature is one of transition, was dominant during the 1940s and 1950s and a significant factor in the development of young adult literature as it is known today (23-24). However, I would suggest that the gateway model is still being employed in criticism of the genre, as a means of justification for popular works that are widely read, but do not serve as proper pedagogical texts.

Being popular and widely read, *Twilight* is often framed as a contemporary gateway for today's teen girls who are distracted by other technologies, providing an attractive literary world for these otherwise non-readers. For example, Maria Nikolajeva, an education professor at Cambridge who organized the interdisciplinary conference centered around the negative effects of *Twilight*, concludes: "If they read Romeo and Juliet and Wuthering Heights because the back covers say 'Bella's […] favourite book', […] That's a welcome side-effect of Twilight[17]" (qtd. in Tobin par. 8). It is a perspective that assumes that reading will lead to more reading. That, if nothing else of merit, YA texts will perform the didactic function of instructing individuals to enjoy reading and to "advance" in their reading selections. While reading of any type is positive, the assumption that "all books are good for you […] some are just better than

[17] This article does not italicize the titles *Romeo and Juliet*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Twilight*, for reasons unstated by the author.

others" is one that can keep young adult novels in the margins, functioning as stepping stones to "better" works of literature, as according to Yabroff: "Implicit in this theory is the idea that at some point reading should stop being a pleasurable diversion, and start being work" (par. 3). Meyer, who studied English literature in college, draws inspiration from and makes reference to many classic romances, including Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Merchant of Venice*, Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*; all of which would provide additional fodder for the invested *Twilight* reader. One reviewer feels that the allusions to these titles are "a nice touch that will inspire fans to hit the classic sections of their bookstores" (Seltzer par. 3). In fact, HarperCollins Children's Books division published a 2009 edition of *Wuthering Heights* dressed in red, white and black *Twilight* imagery and stamped with a seal exclaiming "Bella and Edward's Favourite Book" (Brontë). This marketing ploy to engage readership has worked to an extent: *Wuthering Heights* was once again a top seller on the classics charts in France and the United Kingdom in 2009[18]. However, as a *Guardian UK* article headline ponders in reference to this act of rebranding, "If presenting *Wuthering Heights* like a new Stephenie Meyer gets people reading, does it matter?" (Barnett). The author concludes that there can be tension between the act of writing and the act of marketing, the latter of which may not be in the best interest of preserving the dignity of literature (par. 9). Certainly, *Twilight* is a franchise, a

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[18] *United Kingdom:* See Bibliography under Adams, Stephen. "Stephenie Meyer's vampire pushes Wuthering Heights to top of Waterstone's classic charts".
France: See Bibliography under Sage, Adam. "French teenagers bitten by the Emily Bronte bug".

"two-tiered commodification" according to Martens, simultaneously placing worth in literature as based on earning potential and transmedia product marketing as well as awarding value to readership by their online and in-store participation, which Martens highlights as free "market research" (243-44). Essentially, from this perspective, *Twilight* is a gateway for "better" literature (education) or "more" profit (pleasure), a schema that posits readers as pawns for the invested interest of mediators.

In children's and young adult literature, the binary between education (intellectual value is positive) and pleasure (entertainment value is tolerated so long as it is profitable) is evident in the actions of adult-mediators of the genres, who generally fall into categories of pedagogy (educators, librarians, parents) or commerce (literary agents, publishing houses, merchandisers). Accordingly, value judgments about the worth of a YA text are often made based on its position between these two poles. However, as "text" is now only one component of the intricate socio-cultural world of multimedia interaction for youth, the theory of literary stepping-stones is short-sighted if it does not consider how such readers relate to texts in contemporary times. Digital Natives have "a non-traditional view of textual interaction and often spend a lot of their out of class time employed in significantly creative, narrative-based activities that do not fit the traditional structure of textual engagement" (Urbanski, "Meeting" 239). As further explanation, "Digital Natives engage with chat and instant messaging technologies, and enjoy trading everything from songs to videos, to jokes and advice on how to use online tools […] [and] borrow ideas from one online tool or

object and use them in a new situation or for a new purpose" (Hansford and Adlington 57). In my opinion, Urbanski's identification of Digital Natives' current penchant for variable "narrative-based" activities is the key to the analysis of literature's present cultural adequacy. It appears that, although there has been a proliferation of media types, the functions of such technologies have evolved little from traditional print culture – they all intend to engage an audience with narrative.

Therefore, it is worth considering that perhaps youthful readers are simply interacting with narrative external to the confines of "Literature" or a traditional canonical text hierarchy. With the evolution of textual engagement, the choice in text has less to do with prescribed literary practices and more to do with individual choice. Malleability and manipulation, as well as "multiple literacies," are core components of social technology (Cart 191). Palfrey expands, saying "[m]any Digital Natives perceive information to be malleable; it is something they can control and reshape in new and interesting ways" (6). As according to Ames in reference to soap opera viewers, "regular consumers of these [popular culture] items are doing a plethora of things with them […] they are affected not only *by their interactions with* these cultural products, but *by the cultural status acquired* in being associated with them" (emphasis added, 19). Therefore, the definition of *Twilight* as a gateway, for example, alienates those critics from readers who truly enjoy such texts, such as one English professor remarks: "The students today do not have any shame about reading inferior texts" (qtd. in Charles par. 8). Views of inferiority discount *how* readers are choosing their literature by assuming their

ignorance in the process of reading (i.e. interacting with the text), when, as with the *Twilight* series, it is just as likely that they are using the narrative to construct personal expressions of this literary universe within the realm of social technology.

How much of the frustration of adult-mediators with regards to popular reading selections (such as *Twilight*) is a reflection of the "mythical youth" that adults seek to identify in their successors? Ideas about the "social nature of literary media" have evolved in the twenty-first century, so it is possibly nostalgia about the power of literary inspiration for youth revolution that is veiling criticism about the popularity of texts such as *Twilight*, a mindset that Urbanski sees as requiring a re-evaluation ("Meeting" 249). As Mike Connery, of the teen politics website *Future Majority*, is mindful, "[p]eople don't necessarily read their politics nowadays. They get it through YouTube and blogs and social networks" (qtd. in Charles par. 12). Also continuing with this rhetoric is Danesi's view of today's socio-cultural "youthful groupthink" which, in relation to literature, Charles suggests "young people's choices [of literature] reflect our desire to keep them young" (par. 11). In consideration of this idea that literary activity has been juvenilized and de-politicized, it is worth recalling Hans-Heino Ewers' identification of YA readers who are, alternatively, "sanctioned by mediating authorities" or "unsanctioned" in their "literary communication" (82). One the one hand, it is possible that by engaging with such popular texts, contemporary youth are subversively rejecting the artistic and cultural ideals of the previous generation, just as the latter did of their predecessors. On the other, this

predilection for young, popular novels is highlighting the current Western cultural paradox that is evidenced by the "mythical youth" ideal: the tension between an "anxiety of immaturity" (Clark 4) that is concerned with the degradation of literary engagement and media practices; and a desire for youth (Danesi) that keeps young adults and their literature at the eye of the cultural storm.

This boundary struggle indicates a crisis of identity wherein it appears that popular young adult literature, *Twilight* being a central example, has become a chosen ideological battleground. Parallel to YA market growth is the increasing number of readers that engage with teen material who are not actually young adults themselves, complicating the gateway definition of YA literature and highlighting the problems of defining readership and suitability that are currently encompassing the genre. In "Cross-reading and crossover books," Rachel Falconer explains that, in the twenty-first century, the "divisions between age groups are becoming increasingly porous, and the crossover of fiction across previously well-defined boundaries is an important sign of this general cultural shift in the West" (375). Cart concurs: "Indeed, over the course of the past five or so years [2005 – 2010], coming of age itself has become a significantly more attenuated process, and as a result a new category of human development has begun to appear that is being called, variously, kidults, adultescents, twixters, and boomerangers" (119). As previously discussed, the concept of "coming of age" has morphed due to the postmodern dissolution of social boundaries of linear development, ensuring that the "defining feature of contemporary coming of age" is that now "it can happen at any age of life because age, like gender, is being

treated as a conscious ideological construction rather than a biological fact" (Falconer 375-76). The fixation on youthfulness has spawned an age of plastic surgery, bioidentical replacement hormone therapies and reproductive and fertilization treatments that aid people to defy their biology. Socially, it has created the "kidult"[19] movement, a mindset which rejects the notion that youthful activities (such as video games, cartoons and comic books) are solely children's territory. In the literary field, the popularity of crossover books, defined as texts (typically YA novels) that have gained all-ages readership (e.g. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series), is a sign of the impending shift of the youth concept in Western culture. This "cross-reading" relationship is of central importance to this study as it is disrupting the power of the adult-mediator and subsequent literary hierarchies. This is where the idealization of the "mythical youth" struggles between a desire for youth (Danesi) and the "anxiety of immaturity" that considers contemporary child or youth-oriented objects and behaviours as inferior in order to "validate 'maturity'" (Clark 4). As according to Cart, the "rampant confusion" over the boundary definitions of adult and YA "has captured the attention of both the professional and mass media and has made the crossover book one of the most buzzed about phenomena in today's publishing world" where realist and literary fiction has failed to sustain the attention of mass readership (116, 115). Therefore, while YA literature comprises otherness at its core, born on the literary periphery, young adults and the concept of "youth" are

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[19] Coined by Peter Martin in 1985 in the *New York Times* and defined as an adult who maintains interest and enjoyment in activities and objects that are generally considered as children's or youth areas of interest/enjoyment (Martin).

moving increasingly towards the centre of society. It is only logical that their literature will follow, albeit not without resistance.

From *Harry Potter* to *Twilight*: Controversial New Readership Identities and Practices

There are often links identified between J.K. Rowling as predecessor and Meyer as successor of the lucrative YA-crossover market. Meyer herself acknowledges the path Rowling forged for other YA authors: "First of all, she got publishers to believe that millions of people will pick up an 800-page-book. She got adults reading YA literature. What a gift: She got kids reading and she got adults reading" (Associated Press, "Teen Star" par. 20). If there is any comparison to be made between the two series, it is their function as developers of readership. Most notably, and mostly due to Rowling and *Harry Potter*, readers of all ages have become more public about their enjoyment of such novels over the past decade – crossing readership boundaries that were traditionally seen as separate[20].

Positive, negative or ambiguous reviews aside, it remains a fact that the *Twilight* books are being read. YA author and vice-president of Scholastic, David Levithan has observed: "You go on the subway and see 40-year-old stockbrokers reading 'Twilight,' […] That wouldn't have happened five years ago" (qtd. in Carpenter 1). Nonetheless, critique of these readers abounds due to the questionable literary merit of popular works, a negative view of YA readers that has been intensified by the success of *Twilight* and the emotionally invested "Twi-

[20] Even if crossover reading and writing has been common practice for centuries, significant examples being works by Louisa May Alcott, Lewis Carroll, and L.M. Montgomery.

hard" fandom. According to Doyle, J.K. Rowling was subject to as much criticism for literary merit as Meyer in the early years of the series, yet "*Potter* fans were never mocked as much as *Twilight* fans are, and respect for the series grew along with its readership" (31). It appears that, now that the crossover "formula" for success has been established, popular new series such as *Twilight* undergo an even harsher critical process as the scope of their potential cultural influence can now be clearly grasped. The four types of readers that Hans-Heino Ewers has identified within the YA genre best summarize the struggle between acceptable (desire for youth[21]) and unacceptable ("anxiety of immaturity"[22]) boundaries of contemporary YA readership. On the one hand, the "adult as a mediator" communicates with the literature in order to assess the suitability of the text for the readership they conceive as the "intended" target, which is the "the child or young adult as a sanctioned, exemplary reader" who conforms to the former's pedagogical objectives (83). On the other, the "adult reader" engages with the text with a purposeful disregard of genre boundary (and without intentions of mediation) (83). Simultaneously, the "non sanctioned, secret" young adult reader independently enjoys a controversial text such as *Twilight* with similar disregard for the structure of adult mediation (83). Critical manifestations of desire and anxiety occur when positive (sanctioned) or negative (unsanctioned) meanings are assigned to these reader profiles.

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[21] (Danesi)
[22] (Clark 4)

Subsequently, identifying readers as "readers of young adult literature" can be an act of marginalization as it highlights the adult-youth binary of what these readers are *not* reading: adult literature. The adult-youth demarcation is perhaps the most strongly defined boundary still perpetuated in a postmodern world that has rewritten the space of other marginalized groupings, such as race, gender and class. In *Kiddie Lit*, Clark questions "our indulgence in age discrimination" (5) while Wright identifies youth as "the one social group about which the most casual and stereotypical generalizations may still be made" (81). For example, Vappu Tyyska is mindful that there is a tendency in the media to present "slanted coverage" that sensationalizes teen problems and focuses on the "passivity," "preoccupation with trivial pursuits" and disinterestedness of youth with life beyond their immediate social circles (5). It is arguable that there are practical reasons for age distinction. However, just as divisive stereotypes are harmful to social collectivity, in literature this creates a hierarchy of worth between literary fields (here adult and young adult) that discounts its own cumulative power in a competitive, multimedia society. As Ames describes, readers of YA literature are "affected not only by their interactions with these cultural products, but by the cultural status acquired in being associated with them" (19). Essentially, the gateway perspective held by certain adult-mediators not only undermines the position of Meyer and Rowling's products as legitimate objects of interaction, as they are simply initiators of reading, but it assigns a cultural status of inadequacy to those individuals who engage with YA novels, whether as "immature" youth, "kidult" adults or as "hysterical" female

participants, whose acts of reading are discounted by the view that they are experiencing nothing more than youthful obsession or escapist pleasure. However, the very interaction of these same readers with their chosen texts, here the *Twilight* series, is representative of the fact that such "unsanctioned" readers are engaging in a readership practice that employs a purposeful disregard for existing boundary narratives that traditionally defined the genre (Ewers 83).

Twilight: Young Adult Readership

Beginning with the intended readership, young people, the act of marginalization firstly occurs by the adult-centric nature of YA literature as whole. As according to Clark, who explores the marginalization of children and young adults within the framework of other marginalized groups, "[w]e are so adult centered that the only child we adults can see is ourselves; we do not recognize what it means to attend to children's perspectives" (7). Consequently, the youth reader is merely a conception[23], rather than an actuality, and a simple one at that: "In general, we tend to assume that what it means to be a child, what it means for an adult to understand a child – never mind what it means to write from or for a children's perspective – is unproblematic" (Clark 9). Clark identifies the stepping-stone phenomenon as the inherent issue for the continual demotion of children and youth in society, wherein marginalized groups (e.g. women) use other equally marginalized groups as bases for elevating their own cause (e.g. feminist women rejecting motherhood) (10). As a marginalized group, children and teens are

[23] The adult construction of "the child" is also explored by Karin Lesnik-Oberstein in *Children's Literature: Criticism and the Fictional Child*.

barred from obtaining serious cultural capital by the conception of what their "minor" age entails - immaturity. Essentially, it is easy to discount children as a distinct social group when they are under the care of adults. As previously discussed, Nodelman explains that the YA genre itself is founded on the belief that the age of young readers signifies that they are less experienced, and therefore less capable, of properly negotiating the literary arena (5). The voice of the young adult reader is not ignored, but it is considered to be less significant than that of the adult-mediator who oversees the construction of their young adulthood. For example, the plethora of negative reviews of *Twilight*, which link the novels to young adult readership, are essentially employing a rhetoric of superiority. The fact that the *Twilight* phenomenon is a "massive cultural force" while it is simultaneously "marginalized and mocked" is indicative of this inequality of power (Doyle 31). It is an issue of perspective, as one must consider the true target of publications that denounce YA titles for being, on the one hand, didactically toxic, and on the other, stylistic poor. Granted, young adults who enjoy books such as *Twilight* and *Harry Potter* may be indifferent to such opinions, as Alvermann and Hagood have noted (194). Nevertheless, the act of judgment is still being performed and, through this lens, any young reader of *Twilight* is forced to be a dissentient "unsanctioned" reader (Ewers 82). However, with the mass attention paid to the *Twilight* phenomenon comes the loss of secrecy that Ewers defines as part of the "unsanctioned literary communication" between reader and author (82). The controversy surrounding the series becomes a part of an individual's decision to engage with the texts as the act of reading

means that they will be affected, potentially quite negatively, "by the cultural status acquired in being associated with" the *Twilight* phenomenon (Ames 19). Through an analysis of reviews of the *Twilight* film, Lisa Bode reflects on such a system of confinement that criticism can situate young readership within, as the situation is identical for the novels: "For instance, in the negative reviews is *Twilight* a 'bad' film because it is supposedly made for teen girls, or are teen girls deficient because they like *Twilight* and reveal their intense engagement with the film […]?" (709). This two-fold denigration ensures that "interaction with" the *Twilight* world indicates a reader's literary shortcomings and that the "cultural status acquired by being associated" with the books and films is one of deficiency (Ames 19). In other words, it is a cultural pitfall of inferiority for young invested readers of *Twilight* that ensures that the "mythical youth" remains an unattainable ideal should they choose to make choices that do not conform to the adult-sanctioned literary structure.

One pedagogical concern that justifies mediation is that young people are prey to the capitalist commercial market which merchandises desire and discourages critical thought, so that a young person's interest in these YA literary phenomena is simply a "commodity fetishism" which, in turn, constructs their identity for them (Turner-Vorbeck 13). Jack Zipes sees the identity of young adulthood developed through commercialized cultural materials such as *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* as an "*induced* experience calculated to conform to a cultural convention of amusement and distraction" (172). This is an act of invested mediation of positive concern and guidance (rather than a superficial

discrimination of age based on stylistic and thematic faults of the *Twilight* series) that certainly highlights the issues surrounding negative literary influences on developing identities. Feminist concerns about the portrayal of violence against women in the series, primarily based around Edward's fixation on protecting Bella and the violent pregnancy and birth of Bella and Edward's vampire-human hybrid child, are centered around the inability of young girls to recognize the commercial exploitation of this serious issue: "Painted with the romantic, *fictitious* flourish of author Stephenie Meyer's pen, what in reality would be a horrific account of violence against women […] becomes a dangerously romanticized fantasy" (Housel 178). Anna Silver frames the concern that mediators may have about such dark themes identified in the series: "Are the books particularly troubling in the genre of young adult (YA) literature, whose readers might not yet have developed the critical apparatus of the adult reader?" (122). This is an important concern that reflects the adult-mediator view that there is a threat of passive intake in the pleasure reading undertaken by young people. At this point in the critique of YA texts, it is important note that the critical media literacy taught within educational reading situations is not necessarily lost when pleasure reading is undertaken. Certainly, critical thinking should be encouraged – including a critical look at the media outlets and other public arenas that make a point of scorning such popular texts and those who engage with them.

The passive, hypnotized youth caught in the capitalist machine is a legitimate concern for those mediating the environment created *for* adolescents, but it should not discount what is being created *by* adolescents: "While it is

certainly appropriate and important, then to identify and critique aspects of Meyer's work […] it is also essential that critics not create an imaginary, wholly passive reader of *Twilight*" (Silver 137). Peter Applebaum questions this notion as well, "Do we want to say that children are passive, naïve recipients of greedy corporate cultural products?", and notes that, while popular culture is central to the modern experience of young people, they exercise cultural agency that makes the success of commercial marketing on them uncertain at best (26). He explains that distancing these cultural practices with disapproval and anxiety will distance their users, children and young adults, as well (30). Young adults, especially, are in the process of developing their own independent identities and so they are aware of their capacity for agency. Perception of cultural tropes is extremely variable and one generation's interpretation can be transmitted to the next, but not necessarily as their truth. Mechling observes this inconsistency of criticism as age-related and generational, as Meyer's detail-oriented style where a scene can span twenty pages mentioning "every infinitesmal change" may seem redundant or "flat-footed" to an adult reader but "seems to hold youngsters in a hypnotic sway" (par. 6). It can be a challenging environment for a young YA fan who meets with reproach from adult-mediators one on side for their unsanctioned choice, and ridicule by opposing cultural industries on the other for what they construct out of their chosen text. An example of this is the "Team Edward" and "Team Jacob" factions of fans who became opposed by their desire for the right mate for Bella (and ultimately, for themselves), which became a point of ridicule of the extreme emotional investment of "Twi-hards." Doyle explains: "*Twilight*

fans (sometimes known as "Twi-hards") are derided and dismissed, sometimes even by outlets that capitalize on their support" citing news outlets such as *Time* magazine, the *New York Times* and *MTV News* who profit from the enthusiasm of the young fans while deriding their immature, frantic and obsessive behaviour (31). By maintaining distance from the works, adult-mediator critics simultaneously "other" the works and those who engage with them, faulting both for their interaction with the other without acknowledging the capacity of manipulation and ownership that such young fans are exercising in their interaction with the *Twilight* phenomenon.

Even positive mediatory opinion, that takes the perspective of youth into account, can marginalize young fans. In Bode's analysis of reviews of the *Twilight* film, she notes that regardless of opinion, "it is nevertheless the case that neither in the positive nor in the negative reviews is the adolescent girl mode of engagement imagined as rational, mindful or critical" (713). What remains constant is the perspective that a young person's undeveloped critical media literacy is best dealt with through mediation of literary choice (including positive encouragement and critical discouragement), especially for a young fan. Peter Gutierrez observes that it can appear that "fans shy away from the hard work of criticism in much the same way that critics shun the hard work of fandom" (96). It may seem that the emotional commitment that young readers give to their preferred fictional worlds is indicative of a lack of critical thought, as has been frequently observed of young *Twilight* fans. Nonetheless, the fact is that young people do engage in a critical act through their autonomous decision to "read what

they read." The process by which this is accomplished may go unnoticed as it is unmediated by parents and educators, as Karen Valby quotes one 11-year-old girl telling Meyer at a book signing: "I'm a person who judges authors a lot, and I don't have anything bad to say about you. I mean, I'm really tough, I didn't even like Harry Potter" (6). The choice of literature that occurs outside of educational situations is actively personal and critical, even if at the most basic level of "like" and "dislike." However, even further than this is the new active role that Digital Natives are taking in their narrative-based activities by creating content related to their chosen entertainment outlets. As will be explored in Chapter 3, the use of social networking has eliminated the system of adult mediation that separated young people from the literary process. Further to this, the sensitivity of Meyer and Little, Brown to *Twilight* fans has shown young people that they have the ability to directly impact authors and publishers, as well as marketing and retail agencies.

Thacker suggests that an age-centric view of reading comprehension is prohibitive to a complete theoretical consideration of literature: "As theorists explore the implications of the multiplicity of readership and the influence of socio-cultural constructions on response to fiction, so the site of interaction between readers and texts requires a perspective that includes a continuum of experience that begins in childhood" (1). The seriousness of commitment of young readers to series such as *Harry Potter* and *Twilight,* and the central importance of these works in their cultural arena, highlights the distance of a teen's actuality from gateway and "Other" classifications that are perceived from

the adult world. Chapter 3 will take a more in-depth look at the interactive ways young readers engage with literature. I will suggest that teen-driven *Twilight* creative activity transgresses conceptions of youth passivity and undeveloped critical thought as such interactivity exhibits strong ownership of and confident agency with the source text and surrounding cultural phenomena.

Twilight: Adult Readership

Logically then, it would seem that the increasing amount of adults reading YA novels would lend credibility to the genre. The 10-year span of *Harry Potter* success has led to a gradual acceptance of adult YA readers. Still, it has become almost legendary that, during the first few years of publication, adults would read the books secretly by wrapping the covers in brown paper - until Bloomsbury began publishing "adult" editions with abstract dust jackets to respond to demand. In the present day, Pottermania has transcended the apprehension of adult readers as it is now firmly entrenched in twenty-first century culture, but not necessarily that of the critics. As Beckett notes, the "child-to-adult crossover trend has taken the literary world by storm, much to the surprise of most and to the chagrin of some" but adult readers have become "permanent residents" of the genre (85, 254). The conflict between reproach, stemming from an "anxiety of immaturity" (Clark 4), and pleasure, a desire for youth (Danesi), can be observed by the responses of adult readers of *Twilight* who are currently embroiled in controversy surrounding their participation in the phenomenon. They often use adjectives such as "addictive," "hooked," and "hypnotic" to seemingly describe their lack of

agency in enjoying the books[24]. Due to adult-mediator criticism of the series, the main emotion that adult readers feel through their pleasure of the novels is shame. Often, enjoyment is prefaced with some pretext of apology or awareness of irrationality, as "collette" shared with *The New York Times*: "I hid what I was reading when I took it on the bus by putting a paper cover over it. I was ashamed" (qtd. in Itzkoff par. 3). As Monica Hesse explains in her investigation into "good, smart, literary women" who become *Twilight* fans: "This is a story about shame" (par. 2). The main critique is that adults should be engaging with more literary works, and so their default to "young" books is an act of cultural infantilism. By retreating nostalgically into childhood and engaging in youthful activities, they can ignore their responsibilities as adults and avoid intellectual challenge. Cart suggests that the current popularity of wide-appeal YA fantasy novels is in the "invitation to escape" from the deluge of contemporary global issues, including terrorism, civil wars, financial recession and global warming (102). Conversely, Beckett suggests that such escapist opinions are rooted in traditional age binaries: "In the past, children's books that had wide appeal were often viewed suspiciously, in the belief that their popularity with so many children was a sign that they were too easy and of inferior literary quality" (112). In short, the line between adult readers and adult-mediators is clearly drawn through the lens of maturity.

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[24] There have been many non-academic articles published about the adult fans of *Twilight*. See in bibliography: Hesse, Monica. "'Twilight' the love that dare not speak its shame"; Itzkoff, Dave. "Readers confess: I Was an Adult-Twi-Hard"; Bascaramurty, Dakshana. "Twi-Dads: Hooked on Twilight, but don't tell their friends".

However, as Falconer has noted, concepts of "age" and "maturity" are becoming ambiguous in postmodern society: "Adult readers engaging with such fiction are not so much becoming 'infantilised', then, as being made more keenly aware, as well as critical, of the sliding temporalities involved in growing up, and down, in Western culture today" (376). The "mythical youth" is therefore thriving, as Marcel Danesi suggests (12). The ideological revolution of the 1960s caused youthfulness to become a collective state of mind for Western societies and has eliminated the signifiers that indicate an end of youth. Yet, maturity continues to be associated with socio-cultural legitimacy as power is obtained by the ability to surpass other members of society. In short, young adults are acting more mature and adults are acting more kid-like – the term "kidult" evidencing cultural acknowledgement of this shift – and this narrowing of borders threatens the power of the adult-mediator. Shavit observes that it is difficult for scholars to reconcile with this change as "their system attribution" (how they categorize young adult literature, for example) is "based on the criterion of audience age (children versus adults)" and so the rise of adult reader popularity upsets tradition (65). Adult readers who designate themselves as "fans" of *Twilight* upset many facets of traditional power structures by prioritizing change and unsettling the *status quo*. Thus, they lend cultural credibility to YA literature as a model for popular "adult" literature and challenge the center-periphery relationship of these literatures. For example, the *Globe and Mail* featured a group of "Twi-Dads" headlined as Meyer's "most unlikely fan base" who state that they are often met with skepticism and ridicule by their peers (Bascaramurty). Their enthusiasm for a

literary series that is perceived as young and feminine is at odds with their masculine role in society. Nonetheless, these "Twi-Dads" engage in Internet fan communities and discuss the texts with their daughters.

For female adult fans of *Twilight*, there is the same struggle regarding their status as role models for young women. As with young fans who find themselves in a closed circuit of criticism for the texts they read and for reading those texts, so too are adult readers "shamed" for engaging with an "unsuitable" form of literature. In enjoying *Twilight*, they are performing no mediating function as traditionally outlined within the YA genre. Bode's question (709) may then be reformulated here: Is *Twilight* unsuitable literature for adults because it is "for" teens or are adults "unsuitable" because they engage with such literature? The threat these adult readers pose to the canonical structure of "Literature" is their disregard for cultural rules that dictate age-related literary suitability. Furthermore, the mass success of this practice has propelled such crossover works to the top of the literary commercial market. Once again, we see the opposition between the expectations of the adult-mediator wherein guidance necessitates distance, maintaining young adults and young adult literature as "other," and the readership that transgresses these boundaries and finds pleasure in the texts as simply literature.

***Twilight*: Female Readership**

Issues of cultural labels and genre identification that categorize literature and its readership have contributed to the perspective of *Twilight* as decidedly feminine, with the saga often defined as a fantastical horror-romance. As opposed to *Harry*

Potter, whose omniscient narrative and quest theme have led to its consideration as less gender-specific, *Twilight* is often seen as the territory of women and young women readers. *Twilight* is a female-focused narrative that "strive[s] for audience identification with the heroine" (Backstein 38). It has been noted that it is perhaps the female-oriented success of Meyer that makes the series subject to above-average criticism from both didactic and aesthetic perspectives. Despite the apparent acceptance of women as viable consumers, "the popular press seems bewildered by the success achieved by a series targeted to female fans" (Click, Aubrey & Behm-Morawitz, Introduction 5). The editors of *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media & the Vampire Franchise* say that mainstream media has "belittled" the female response to *Twilight*, "frequently using Victorian era gendered words like 'fever,' 'madness,' 'hysteria,' and 'obsession' to describe Twilighters" (Click, Aubrey & Behm-Morawitz, Introduction 6). By framing the commercial success of *Twilight* within an emotional realm of irrational obsession, such commentary demeans the cultural power of the franchise, even though it is comparable thematically and commercially to many other gender neutral and/or male-oriented fantasy trilogy franchises, such as Rowling's *Harry Potter* and J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. In "Girls Just Wanna Have Fangs," Doyle observes that fans of *Harry Potter* "are seen as dorks at worst, participants in era-defining cultural phenomena at best" and that male fans lend credibility to the series, thereby allowing Rowling to avoid *Twilight*'s "girly ghetto" (31). Indeed, the surprise and consternation that "unlikely" heterosexual male fans of *Twilight* encounter (being neither "screaming tweens, the bloodsucker-smitten moms" or

"gay male followers" as according to the *Globe and Mail*) supports Doyle's opinion (Bascaramurty par. 3). Within the spectrum of the controversy surrounding female *Twilight* readership, there emerges two factions that are the focus of criticism: young women readers and adult women readers.

In much of the criticism, young women are the focus of the concern but rarely a central voice in the critical process. Doyle suggests that the "massive cultural force" of *Twilight* is marginalized critically due to its "girliness" even though "mass-market success rarely coincides with critical acclaim," and states: "The *Twilight* backlash is vehement, and it is just as much about the fans as it is about the books. Specifically, it's about the fact that those fans are young women" (31). For example, while Backstein summarizes the dilemma, she does so from an adult-mediator perspective which centralizes a young woman's engagement with *Twilight* on her emotional attachment: "Despite the fact that *Twilight* is remarkably poorly written and astonishingly repetitive, clearly Meyer has her finger on the pulse of young female America" (39). The association of *Twilight*'s success with emotion, rather than rational critical choice, perpetuates the image of the "hysterical" female fan. Sheffield and Merlo identify that this ecstatic female image is part of the "paratextual Twilight[25]," those cultural elements external to the *Twilight* texts themselves, which is "represented as hyperfeminine: uncontrollable, silly, and irrational" (211). For example, in summarizing the

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[25] As the term "paratextual Twilight" refers to such elements of the cultural phenomenon surrounding Meyer's works, it is inferred here that the omission of italics for the title *Twilight* is intentional on the part of Sheffield and Merlo, as also with subsequent quotations from their same article found further in this study.

overall success of the *Twilight* literature-to-film transition, Lev Grossman reflects: "In retrospect, it's surprising how long it took the sound of hundreds of thousands of teenage girls *hysterically keening* to reach Hollywood" (emphasis added, par. 13). The commercial force of the teen girl market grants young women a certain social power, however, their simultaneous marginalization renders this power illegitimate and temporary. It is as if it is only by sheer force in numbers and noise that their "emotional tantrum" been noticed culturally. Essentially, as Beverley Lyon Clark explains in *Kiddie Lit*, society is so "adult-centered" that young women remain doubly-marginalized both as female (and not yet women) and as children (not yet adults) (8). Bode captures this space as transitional and so this type of criticism of young women is sanctioned as it is not a permanent type-cast: "Because of the teen girl's temporary occupation of her identity, and the sense that she is not yet properly initiated into systems of culture, and not yet fully sexual, reviewers appear to denigrate or sentimentalize her without guilt" (717). This is another aspect of the central issue surrounding YA literature as a whole, wherein the youth subject remains an abstract concept separate from the adult critic's reality, and can therefore be detachedly discussed in such discriminatory terms.

Underlying this critical attitude is the fact that teen girls have a strong consumer presence in North American popular culture. Doyle explains that teen girls "have the power to shape the market because they don't have financial responsibilities, tend to be passionate about their interests, and share those interests socially" (32). And it is evident that they can exercise this power

successfully as "[d]espite its dismissal, the female-oriented Twilight franchise is comparable in profit and cultural impact to other well-respected media franchises, such as Lord of the Rings, Pirates of the Caribbean and Harry Potter" (Click, Aubrey & Behm-Morawitz, Introduction 6). Drawing from the work of Andreas Huyssen, Bode traces the association of popular culture forms "such as romance, soap and melodrama" with the concepts of irrationality and the feminine, in contrast to the "'real, authentic culture' for men" to having beginnings in the nineteenth century (707). As this binary of female (popular) and male (high culture) has been a long-term part of cultural consciousness, it could seem as though the critical dialogue surrounding the teen girl audience is simply one of patriarchal discrimination. However, Bode identifies that the success of *Twilight*, which blends YA romance, horror and action genres, can be seen as a "threat" to the "male-coded horror and action genre boundaries" should this assertive teen girl faction become "the dominant economic determination" (711). Perhaps, the portrayal of the teen girl as rationally immature is a safeguard against the collective social power that these young girls have acquired in our "forever young" society. While idealizing youth from a retrospective viewpoint may be a gratifying experience, the actualization of a centralized youth presence can seem intimidating to factions of society, such as male-dominated fantasy and horror genres of fandom, who have been occupying such central positions. With *Twilight* specifically, this gender clash was strongly felt at the 40th annual 2009 San Diego Comic-Con convention, a traditionally male-oriented event profiling comic books, fantasy films and video games. However, the 2009 convention offered a panel

discussion of the *Twilight: New Moon* film, including nearly the entire teen idol cast, therefore attracting an influx of young and older female fans that nearly overwhelmed the hall in which it was hosted. The now-iconic cardboard sign held high by one "fanboy" claiming "*Twilight* ruined Comic-Con!!" "is emblematic of a troubling gendered tendency to represent the (mostly) female Twilight fandom as unworthy of entry to traditional fandom spaces – including fandom's largest event" (Sheffield and Merlo 207). The importance of this very public hostility is that female "Twilighters" have remained undeterred in their acts of public expression. The strong women-oriented community aspect of the *Twilight* phenomenon has provided a vast number of public spaces, digital (Stephenie Meyer's official website recognizes 502 fansites worldwide) and otherwise (the large physical numbers of female fans at Meyer's book signings and at *Twilight* film events), for young girls to voice literary opinion and openly exhibit personal and collective desires.

A common feature of *Twilight* communitarian websites, chat rooms and forums is the lively debate in which readers, invested readers, fans and anti-fans engage. A strong example that speaks to the cultural influence that adolescent girls are realizing was the organized "book returning" protest surrounding the release of the fourth *Twilight* novel, *Breaking Dawn*, initiated by Internet fan communities ("Disappointed Breaking Dawn" par. 3). Meyer's conscious interaction with readers and her willingness to expand on her novels by consistently responding to readers' questions has been carried on between readers as "the books have got teens arguing about gender roles, when to have sex, what

defines a heroine, and the meaning of true love" (Seltzer par. 11). Even if *Twilight* has troubling anti-feminist messages within the novels as identified by feminist scholars and concerned adults alike, acknowledging the impact of teen girls in society through the *Twilight* phenomenon is good practice for promoting collective female power: "If we admit that girls are powerful consumers, then we admit that they have the ability to shape the culture" (Doyle 32).

Questions of feminist models and choices become complicated for adult women readers who enjoy Meyer's works. While *Twilight* was originally a young adult series targeted at young girls, it "crossed over to capture a huge audience of older women, who lapped up [its] Gothic atmosphere, dreamy heroes and romantic focus" (Backstein 38). Even more than simply reading the *Twilight* novels, "[a]dult female fans have become equally devoted and vocal Twilighters as their teen counterparts" (Click, Aubrey & Behm-Morawitz, "Relating to *Twilight*" 137). The conflicting feelings of shame and enjoyment that women appear to be experiencing when participating in the *Twilight* phenomenon are particularly illuminating when considering the boundary rhetoric of YA literature. One adult reader questions the act of "confessing" to the *New York Times* about their engagement with *Twilight*, likening it to *Gone With The Wind, Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, all of which follow young women making difficult decisions about love in fantastical circumstances: "Why shouldn't adult women be fascinated?" (Itzkoff par. 10). The reasons why adult women "shouldn't" are seemingly numerous and often self-evident for women readers of the series. Therefore, as previously mentioned, the act of self-shaming through self-

awareness of *Twilight* critique often accompanies their interaction with the texts and makes "the experience of loving 'Twilight' a conflicting one" (Hesse par. 18). As Sarah Seltzer writes for *The Huffington Post*, the "lure of the books is so strong, even for feminist media critics […] that it's disturbing to resurface and ponder how retrograde Meyer's world is" (par. 9). Feminist and media scholar Lisa Bode is quoted in an article for *The Australian* (profiling the founder of the fansite *TwilightMOMS*) as explaining that the social "hostility from all sides" towards adult women *Twilight* fans "is driven largely by expectations of what adult female behaviour should be" ("Guilty Pleasures" par. 22).

There is certainly anxiety concerning the transgression of traditional age-based guidance roles that women desire to fulfill for subsequent generations of strong, empowered females. In a study of *Twilight* "anti-fans," Sheffield and Merlo have found that some women on online forums use rhetorical strategies to validate their enjoyment, such as calling their involvement with *Twilight* an "addiction" to highlight their reluctance or identifying themselves as "sane fans[26]" to emphasize their rationality (216-17). Similarly, the website *TwilightMOMS* describes in its "History" that symptoms of *Twilight* infatuation include neglecting household duties and spouses in favour of an "irrational obsession" (Hansen par. 1). Subsequently, the acceptable reasons for adult women to enjoy *Twilight* constitute either an absurd obsession that evades reason or a rational (sane) critical textual engagement separate from the "hyperfeminine" "paratextual

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[26] "Sane fans" are defined in the article as those whose fandom is directly related to the stories, rather than the related phenomena (Sheffield and Merlo 217).

Twilight" that borders on foolishness (Sheffield and Merlo 211). It would seem that, although many adult readers of YA novels are openly engaging with the texts (as evidenced by adult *Twilight* fansites such as *TwilightMOMS* and the more scandalous *Twitarded*), the reasons for this attraction remain obscure and contentious.

Ewers distinguishes the communicative process between author and adult reader of a YA text as different from that between author and youth reader. Essentially, the adult reader who engages in cross-reading derives meaning from the text within his or her own adult frame of reference, therefore interpreting the text on a level of meaning that is inherently different (or secondary, "two-level or ambiguous") to that of young readers (82). Children's literature theorist Barbara Wall has termed this tiered comprehension structure as "dual address," which accounts for the repeated occurrence of cross-reading practices across history: the appeal lies in the ability of adults to gain a secondary (or higher) level of meaning from such texts that speaks to their adult sensibility. I would suggest that crossover texts such as *Twilight* are re-writing the role of the adult reader who engages with such texts as the *actual* reader. It appears that the contemporary cross-reader derives pleasure and experience from the texts from the same attributes that attract young adult readers. Interestingly, David Levithan, editorial director and vice-president of Scholastic, explains the concept of "the mother test" that his company uses as an indicator of a young adult novel's potential crossover success: "If a lot of us on staff are sending a book to our mothers because it's really engaging literature, that's a good sign" (qtd. in Carpenter 1). The ability to

engage adults suggests that, through cross-reading, adult readers are fulfilling some literary need. Rachel Falconer posits this act of "crossing over" as one of conscious boundary blending: "Not only are the texts themselves often generically hybrid, but readers are *hybridizing different readerly identities* when they 'crossover' to reading a book that was intended, at least ostensibly, for someone other and elsewhere" (emphasis added, 370). Women Twilighters, such as the founders of *TwilightMOMS*, are adopting a readerly identity that is in line with that of *Twilight'*s younger female readers as they enjoy and interact with the texts in online spaces in similar ways: they write fan fiction, post favourite quotes and pictures on fansites and express their pleasure with fellow fans on forums. Previous hierarchical rules that would limit a book to a specific category of readers lose potency when such boundaries cease to be perceived as limiting. The malleable capabilities of social technology facilitate this breakdown. Readers can then approach a chosen literary text from an individualized perspective.

It is apparent that conflict accompanies such a hybridization of women and girl sensibilities as it a hyper-feminine identity that has proven to be culturally powerful in the wake of *Twilight*'s mass popularity. It evidences that the binary of "feminine" areas of popular culture juxtaposed to those of "masculine" ownership is still one of inequality. The responsibilities felt by women as mediators and caretakers engenders them to feel remorse and shame for desiring and engaging with emotional, feminine, and sexual popular material. However, through the dissolution of temporalities of age, which has led to a re-definition of YA literature readership, it appears more and more individuals are disposed to

personalizing their readerly identities, and so, defying all previous methods of categorization. As evidenced by the *Twilight* phenomenon, the twenty-first century reader can be at once feminist and feminine, masculine and romantic, mature and youthful.

Chapter 3: Reader, Text and Identity in the Digital Age

The *Twilight* Universe: Web 2.0 Literature and Fan Texts

Young adult literature was established as a genre in the late 1960s and early 1970s to be a representative "voice" for a faction of young individuals who were of an independent and revolutionary mindset. It has become, through social technology and user-generated content such as fan fiction, an avenue for personal expression of a young reader's *own* emotions, cultures and identities. Instead of simply being a set of novels, the *Twilight* saga is a fictional universe for an entire literary community. Conceptions of and concern for the "audience" are typically undertaken within areas of mass communications research, but as the audience is now able to influence and modify the structure of literature's commercial and creative processes through Web 2.0, thereby determining its viability in a media-saturated world, they are now, in essence, contributing to the future of literature.

Advancements in technology are having a profound effect on literature in relation to its form, from print to digital, as well as to its relationship with readers in this digital world. This textual shift has caused a significant departure from the traditional structure of mediation that has defined the genre of young adult literature, displacing the role of the adult-mediator and positing the reader, who can no longer be defined within past conceptions of the age-centric "intended audience," as an active participant in the cultural trajectory of any particular young adult text (Nodelman 3). The historic conception of the consumer as passive is no longer the case, as Thacker describes: "The multiplicity and subjectivity of meaning suggested by the direction of much response theory

implicate the reader as an active participant within the text, ascribing authority to any individual reader to engage creatively with any text" (2). The new online capabilities of social technology, often referred to as Web 2.0, have resulted in an outpouring of user-generated content online (UGC or, alternatively, user-created content or UCC) wherein many readers are now performing analytic and creative acts with literary products on their own terms. This activity can be as simple as indicating approval of a book by posting a "Like" on their *Facebook* profile, critiquing the latest poetry on the literature review website *GoodReads.com*, or creating a piece of peer-reviewed fan fiction that rivals the longest of novels. It is the combination of social technology and "this phenomenon of user-generated content" that "the Web 2.0 buzz is all about" (Palfrey 114). Henry Jenkins explains that discourse surrounding Web 2.0 "has been animated by a hunger to develop a new, more empowered, more socially connected, and more creative image of the consumer" ("The Future" 358). Creative acts of reader interactivity with literature have always been undertaken. However, the introduction of user-friendly social technology outlets means that the ability to act is democratized and accessible to people on a larger scale – such acts are no longer the sole realm of scholars and artists, or even traditional fandom, in the public space. Essentially, the advent of Web 2.0 has facilitated the potential for *every* consumer to be active, for every reader to become a creative responder to text with the opportunity for his or her voice to be openly heard.

Fan fiction is a particularly interesting area of study within the world of UGC as it is literary in nature and, as in the realm of *Twilight* fandom, the works

can rival the originality and fictional scope of the source texts. For example, the online Canadian pop culture news website *Dose.ca*, which is part of the *Postmedia Network*[27], has published a "*Twilight* Quiz" which asks participants to determine whether various excerpts are from Meyer's original work or from fan fiction authors, citing "there are plenty of *Twilight* fans who love the books so hard that they can easily mimic Stephenie Meyer's writing style." From the beginning, the *Twilight* phenomenon has demonstrated that a work of literature can be a dialogue. In other words, it is an open intertextual creation that defies the closed structure of the "book-as-object," consumer passivity culture that was easier to maintain prior to the participatory nature of Web 2.0. As "the first social networking best seller," Meyer and her readers are utilizing the Internet to purposefully further *Twilight*-related social and creative work (Drayton qtd. in Green par. 2). Through this one seed – the *Twilight* series – an entire online community has developed as an example of the power of mass textual engagement, making literature an interactive, central part of the social experience of culture and identity for millions of individuals worldwide.

Definitions of fan fiction, or fanfic, fic or FF, are numerous and variable:

> [M]any critics would agree that the term "fan fiction" refers to creative written work commencing from the characters, plots, and/or settings of an identifiable published or produced text (such as a

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[27] *Postmedia Network Inc.* is Canada's largest publisher by circulation of paid English-language daily newspapers.

> television show, comic book, or novel) but not itself professionally published, and calling attention to itself *as* fan fiction. (Parrish 176)

In the seminal fan fiction study *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins traces the development of modern fan fiction to the popularity of the *Star Trek* series in the late 1960s and the resulting circulation of a large number of print fan magazines or zines. It is interesting to note that this development of active textual expression on the part of the modern media consumer is temporally aligned with those of young adult literature and the Sixties youth movement. These areas of human activity and interaction have many ideological commonalities, including the desire for free expression, the need to develop and communicate identity and the ambition to revolutionize the existing social structures from within these groups were previously confined. In fact, the ways in which technology-facilitated fan fiction allows individuals to easily express their personal ideas, providing a method to communicate identity and, through Web 2.0, to revolutionize the concept of the literary "text," are all very much reflective of this continuing desire for change.

Within literary studies, the notion of the "literary text" necessitates constant revision and modification in order to remain a pertinent object of study, especially with the proliferation of globally accessible derivate work such as fan fiction. In the digital age, "the hypertextuality of the Internet forces the reader/user into the active construction of the text's boundaries" (Sandvoss 23). This activity becomes creativity when personalized on an individual basis, as what an individual actively does with a text becomes an act of personal

expression. Creativity of this type has been largely facilitated with technology: "The Internet has unleashed an explosion of creativity – and along with it thousands of new forms of creative expression – on a vast scale" (Palfrey 112). Personalized active content construction means that, through hypertextuality, the literary text in all its forms also becomes intertextual. It relays between the "canonical" texts serving as the basis for derivative fan fiction (as most fanfic writers generally refer to the referenced literature in their works as the "canon") and the larger online textual community within which such works circulate, such as *Fanfiction.net*. As Sandvoss explains, "the fan text is thus constituted through a multiplicity of textual elements; it is by definition intertextual and formed between and across texts as defined at the point of production" (23). He continues that the product of this literary activity "is a radically different conceptualization of 'texts' than in literary theory" as the fan text draws from a variety of sources and mediums (23). The *Twilight* fan text is thus a pastiche of influences including Meyer's canon, the *Twilight* films, online interactions and the cultural "paratextual Twilight" that Sheffield and Merlo have identified as the "hyperfeminine" portrayal of female Twilighters (211), among many other influences that are internalized on an individual basis. The result of this intertextuality is an interactive relationship between "literariness," as the writing of fanfic is a literary activity, and traditional folklore practices of participatory expression and creation. The communal aspect of online writing results in "a demystification of the creative process, a growing recognition of the communal dimensions of expression, as writing takes on more aspects of traditional folklore

practice" (Jenkins, *Convergence* 179). What emerges is a vital community of literary production that is proving to be a successful environment for a novel to find an enthusiastically receptive audience, should it be willing to make the transition from text to "text."

In this community there is no finite, final object of study. The entirety of interactions with the source text ensures that the canon and its derivations become a unified "work in progress, insofar as it remains open and is constantly increasing" (Hellekson and Busse 7). The Meyer-sanctioned *Twilight* universe as a "work in progress," which includes a large and vital fan fiction community, means that the novels transcend the printed page and into the "images, moods, interpretations of 'reality' and options of action" of its active readers (Even-Zohar, "Factors and Dependencies" 29). Narrative fits easily into digital lives, being malleable on the part of the user who can use and manipulate it to reflect whatever particular physical or emotional space they are in, or to project into other options of reality that they might prefer through digital avatars and online profiles. This is how Urbanski has identified a shift in the relation to textual activities on the part of Digital Natives, citing that it is narrative-based activity, rather than a traditional reading relationship with "Literature" as such ("Meeting" 239). Subsequently, the shift from print to digital is a loosening of structure and authority in terms of narrative and text. Literary social networking is now negotiating a cultural space of legitimacy, modifying the power structure of authorial and readership roles central to traditional notions of print culture.

A "Right to Create": *Twilight* Fan Fiction and Digital Natives

Changes to concepts of literature and text have always been true within the realm of fan fiction, which has consistently aimed to modify and evolve fictional worlds beyond original source material. However, the Internet has intensified this process in two ways. Firstly, it has facilitated mass access for younger individuals to fan communities, which were previously more adult-centered and primarily circulated through a subscription service of print magazines, mailing lists and conventions. Secondly, being Digital Natives, these young members of society have an innate sensibility towards the communitarian, folkloric aspect of fan activity due to their affinity for social technology. This development of an intuitive sense of participatory culture, promoted by Web 2.0, has led active online users to a different process of developing identity and cultural meaning from such creative literary activity. In other words, to create is a right rather than a privilege.

In her article on *Twilight* online fan fiction, Juli Parrish discusses the work of Rebecca Black, who has noted that "demographics of fan fiction have shifted from a majority of adults producing hard copy zines to large numbers of tech-savvy adolescents who are writing and publishing fics on fan and personal Web sites as well as in online archives" (qtd. in Parrish 177). In *Fan fiction and fan communities in the age of the Internet,* Hellekson and Busse concur: "Fan texts are now overwhelmingly electronic, and many are transient. Moreover, demographics have shifted: ever-younger fans who previously would not have had access to the fannish culture except through their parents can now enter the

fan space effortlessly […]" (13). For Digital Natives in particular, the consideration of a text is not dominated by its print form and neither it is solely encountered through mediated circumstances, such as parents, schools or bookstores, as "the net-savvy adolescent is quite able to produce texts and publish online as easily as any adult" (Hansford and Adlington 55). The addition of these "tech-savvy adolescents" to the public literary community has contributed to an increased fan presence online and within North American culture at large as *Harry Potter* and the *Twilight* series, identified as YA works and targeted at this intended audience, are now the "twin giants of the fan fiction world" and have "generated well over a half a million stories at *FanFiction.net* alone" in the past decade (Parrish 177). The ease that technology brings to the ability to "create" in a community setting combined with the perspective that this ability is a right, rather than a privilege, are indicative of a change in how young readers relate to literature and vice-versa.

In fact, Parrish views this surge in the popularity of fan fiction writing as an indicator of an expanding trend towards active interaction with source textual material, rather than as an increase in the number of individuals who identify themselves as "fans" in the conventional sense of an individual with above-average loyalty to a particular media product (177). Jenkins also observes that "many of these young people are being drawn towards fan communities" for reasons of creative networking, "to get what they have made in front of a larger public" rather than to consciously display their passion for any particular fan object ("The Future" 360). As Palfrey is mindful, digital creation is becoming the

defining feature of the Web 2.0 phenomenon (117) and is "one of the hallmarks of the emerging global culture of Digital Natives" (112). He explains this is a generational difference, as "[u]nlike older generations, which grew up relying on a small cluster of networks, newspapers, and film studios, Digital Natives presuppose their role as shapers of culture" (126). And, Digital Natives "take the breakdown of the old hierarchy for granted" as opposed to "older Internet users who are participating in this creative revolution" (Palfrey 125). For this reason, Digital Natives will inherently take more creative liberties with source material, be it literature, television or film. It is this innate sense of a right to creative input with source text that is most important to recognize culturally. The mythologized image of youth as revolutionary needs to be re-worked in terms of the innovative creative activities undertaken by Digital Natives in such contexts. This active creativity is a significant shift from the passive, removed YA readership that has been previously exempt from the productive and critical processes of the genre. Fan fiction is currently one of the most creative online activities that Digital Natives are undertaking, and while this may be a small faction of society at the moment, it is "the extent to which this creativity represents an opportunity for learning, personal expression, individual autonomy and political change" that these products represent that is truly novel (Palfrey 113).

Therefore, it can be proposed that the conceptual framework of a young reader when he or she approaches a text is one of the right to active (creative) participation with the textual materials. When a reader finishes *Twilight: New Moon*, for example, and then proceeds to write a fan fiction piece about Bella's

heartbreak, this activity "is as much a function of its engagement with the source text" as it about the *Twilight* fandom that surrounds the novels (Hellekson and Busse 26). Within the conventional consideration of media consumers as passive, the targeted youth readership of YA literature was especially inactive within the processes of creation and selection of reading material, all of which were mediated by adult groups. The "old gatekeepers" with whom creators would have needed to collaborate to publish their work and through whom young readers would have to gain access to reading material are no longer needed (Palfrey 125). Further to this is the re-writing of the role and power of the author, with Meyer setting an example as one who embraces the creative input of the *Twilight* community, encouraging the expansion of the fictional world that she pioneered. The expansive outpouring of derivative creative work as a result of her support is indicative of this new "engagement with the source text" as readers feel free to be contributors to a folklore, a community (Hellekson and Busse 26). Interestingly, the "gatekeepers" are keen to capitalize on this role re-organization. A *Twilight* companion book published by Ulysees Press in 2010 entitled *Bella Should Have Dumped Edward: Controversial Views on the Twilight Series* is authored by Michelle Pan, a teenage *Twilight* fan who started the wildly popular fansite *BellaAndEdward.com* at the age of fourteen. The book addresses major questions posed to Pan by *Twilight* readers and includes essay-form answers from Pan and a sample of other teen fans active on the website. Pan's introduction to the work evidences the reality that contemporary youth readers are committed to being active in both the processes of reading and writing young adult literature: "The

next couple of months were hectic as I tried to balance school, band, and BellaAndEdward.com *on top* of writing a book" (16). In short, individuals such as Pan are re-defining the genre for themselves and for future authors as communal and integrated with social technology, open to constant development through derivative user-generated content. Responsive actions of the "old hierarchy," i.e. publishing houses, only aid to demonstrate the permanency of this ideological shift.

These actions of interpretation, creation and definition through the hyper/intertextual online literary activity by digital-minded participants also signifies that the process of deriving meaning from text, in both personal and social areas, has undergone notable change. According to Palfrey, the "creative revolution in cyberspace" is not only concerned with authorial and readership roles and balances of creative power, it is "also about who gets to control the shaping of culture, the making of 'meaning'" (125). Young adult literature is manifesting such a determination of control as role reversals of intended readership and mediation are occurring, such as with teenage fans publishing internationally-marketed books and engaging with fan fiction communities outside of parental control. The meaning of the genre as "young adult" is being remade as youth become more involved in all areas of its production and reception. As the genre has been traditionally founded on the concept of the "intended audience," this means that the identity of this audience is also being re-made (Nodelman 3). In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins explains that "media convergence," which is the process currently affecting literature in the digital age

wherein multiple medias co-exist and interact, is more than a simple issue of technology and form (15). Rather, it "alters the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres and audiences" (15). The ways in which the composition of the young adult audience has significantly changed in the twenty-first century contribute to this "alteration" of audience, technology, market, industry and genre. The youth phase has become non-linear and more complex, since the transition from child to adult has been extended and is less mediated by rigid social institutions, such as education and parental control. Online technologies have allowed identities to simultaneously become fixed and variable, singular and multiple: "Instead of thinking of their digital identity and their real-space identity as separate things, they [Digital Natives] just have an identity (with representations in two, or three, or more different spaces)" (Palfrey 4). Marketing and publishing industries are now communicating with (instead of *to*) this increased and strengthened youth presence in North American society. With all of this, the genre of young adult literature is now looking entirely different from the traditional mediated structure that managed its theoretical framework. There are similarities in the relationships between the dissolution of boundaries between age-defined identities, text and "text," author and fanfic writer, as well as intended and derived meaning from literature in the digital age. Essentially, boundaries that were initially instituted to aid the understanding of young adult literature and its readership are now inhibiting this same aim.

Fan fiction writing provides a formidable environment to continue the discussion of boundary with a literary context, since identity is invested with how

source material is interpreted and how meaning is made. The following section will take a specific look at the ways a fanfic writer's identity is negotiated within their making of personal and cultural meaning sourced from the *Twilight* series. Specifically, it will focus on Canadian Twilighters and their negotiation of their national identity through engagement with an American product. Whether or not this constitutes an action to "control the shaping of culture" remains to be determined (Palfrey 125). The national context is a favourable area of concentration as defining characteristics of national identity, here the Canadian identity, are firmly entrenched in the portrait of a nation. These markers of cultural identity are subsequently reflected onto its inhabitants, thereby affecting the individual's interpretation and self-expression of their personal and social spheres.

Twilight "Text" and Boundary Narrative in Canada

Through social technology and media, the digital generation is negotiating literature and textual interaction in relation to identity in an increasingly borderless global society. In tandem, dialogue about boundaries and borders is a central component of literary criticism within Canada, wherein literature has been a prime medium of exploring and communicating the Canadian voice and identity. When popular literary phenomena such as the *Twilight* series captivate the attention of Canadians from beyond national borders, interest regarding such texts as gateways to other cultures is readily engaged. Additionally, online interactions with other societies have been identified as contributing to cultural globalization in that such activity is not easily restrained by distance or political

policy. For Canadians, American culture is the closest and most pervasive source of such interactions. In "Transnational Twilighters," scholars Bore and Williams explore the "center/margin" organization of the online *Twilight* fandom from a Norwegian standpoint in relation to the American centre, both in how it is reflected nationally and globally (195). This "center/margin" positioning is also true for Canadian Twilighters, who are not American citizens. However, it differs in that the geographical and cultural closeness of these two North American countries often results in a sense of familiarity and identification with American cultural objects on the part of Canadians. American influence on Canadian media and culture also often attracts interest of a more suspicious nature. Young adult literature is an American creation[28] and there has been a long history of concern regarding the "Americanization" of Canadians. The *Twilight* series, which sold 600,000 copies in Canada in 2008 alone ("It's Official" par. 1), is an important instance of cross-border interaction that adds to the debate of identity surrounding the world's longest undefended border, in a digital age where such borders can seem invisible and irrelevant in online spaces.

Writers of *Twilight* fan fiction are situated all over the globe. In online communities where they interact, "national boundaries and time zones have ceased to limit fannish interaction" (Hellekson and Busse 13). However, the proximity of Canadian readers to this American product adds to a sense of identification with the series in an exclusively North American context. The

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[28] In his history of young adult literature, Micheal Cart explains: "There is a ready and well-nigh universal agreement among experts that something called young adult literature is – like the Broadway musical, jazz, and the foot-long hot dog – an American gift to the world" (3).

online interaction on websites such as *FanFiction.net* and *Twilighted.net* neutralize the specificities of American/Canadian national identity markers in that the primary focus is the fictional world of the *Twilight* series, wherein time and place is malleable. At the same time, fans of the series are extremely familiar with the original setting of the works and identify with these spaces as part of the canon that constructs the basis for the *Twilight* universe. Therefore, for Canadian readers, there is a sense of nearness to the novels as the Washington setting, cultural references to music and style, as well as, the manners of action and speech of the characters, are relatable to their own, somewhat similar, culture. There is also an awareness of difference that persists, as it is an American (i.e. not Canadian) space. As emphasized in this study through Itamar Even-Zohar's work on the cultural nature of literature, that it becomes "images, moods, interpretations of 'reality' and options of action" for the reader, the interpretation of a literary text through derivative work is an active expression of these areas for a fan-writer who has integrated the canon into their personal lives ("Factors and Dependencies" 29). He further explains that "[t]he products on this level are items of cultural repertoire: models of organizing, viewing, and interpreting life" ("Factors and Dependencies" 29). As Digital Natives do not distinguish between their online and offline personal and social identities, manifestations of fan fiction (by Canadian fans for example) are reflective of how they organize, view and interpret Meyer's works within the larger *Twilight* phenomenon in which they live and participate both globally and locally.

Cultural interactions with the United States have perpetually been a part of negotiating the Canadian identity. Historically, the development of children's and young adult literature in Canada began with the importation of books from other countries, primarily Britain and the United States (Nodelman 290). While the development of Canadian children's and young adult literatures has been strong since the CanLit golden age of the 1960s, the inauguration of NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) in 1994 resulted in "an almost universal availability in Canada of all the books published in the United States – not only in Canadian bookstores but through the Internet from American firms like Amazon […]" (Nodelman 293). The dominance of American media within Canada has been a constant concern as the development of the Canadian national identity, which must negotiate a fine balance between vast expanses of natural space and a diffuse multicultural population, is readily acknowledged as being in perpetual development. This concern is reflected in the cautionary words of Murray Dobbin, writing on behalf of the Council of Canadians, who cites the 1988 Free Trade Agreement (as a precursor to NAFTA) as the turning point in the Canada-U.S. cultural relationship: "As we become integrated with the most powerful example of consumer society in the world, we face the threat of commodification of our cultural traditions and their gradual assimilation into the American entertainment industry" (4). Apprehension for the "Americanization" of Canadian life through proximity and similarity to the culture of the United States seems especially manifest in the context of young adult literature, wherein traditional pedagogical

aims are indicative of the consideration of literature as influential in the lives of its readers.

The American identity of the *Twilight* series is straightforward and manifest. The rainy and gloomy Washington setting of the novels has become iconic, a gothic reflection of the characters' inner turmoil that is faithfully reproduced in the film adaptations. The actual existence of Forks, Washington, which Meyer describes in almost perfect copy, has blurred fiction and reality to the point that an entire *Twilight* tourism industry has developed successfully in the region (Willis-Chun). Furthermore, there has been scholarship on the centralized theme of the American Dream that pervades the novels. As Sara Buttsworth identifies, the key belief that "an individual can attain wealth and power regardless of his origins or structural or social obstacles" and the emphasis on free will and individual choice is omnipresent in the series (52). Meyer emphasizes the "unique, individual destiny" of her "vegetarian," compassionate vampires, who have attained a stable and satisfying life through their freedom to choose such a lifestyle (53). Also, the feminized American Dream is reflected in Bella's Cinderella-like path to happiness as the texts revolve around her personal choice to renounce her humanity in favour of marriage to Edward, an act through which she gains vampire immortality, extreme personal wealth and social power (56). For Canadian readers, being on the "margin" of this American phenomenon means that the American setting and themes of the novels, as well as the hyper-marketed American-based *Twilight* products, enter our consideration as instructional "tools" of identity and culture. Some may see this influence as

potentially serving to Americanize the social realities of invested Canadian *Twilight* readers.

At the same time, the borderline between *Twilight*'s American setting and Canadian culture is blurred both within and external to the novels. Primarily, the sense of kinship that Canadian fans have with the *Twilight* series derives from the use of Vancouver Island and the surrounding British Columbian coastal regions as the iconic "Forks, Washington" landscape for the second and third films, *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* and *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*[29]. The presence of the teen idol cast in the Vancouver area has generated an abundance of international media attention, even resulting in *Twilight*-related Canadian tourism. One writer for *Canada.com* profiles *Twilight Tours Vancouver*, which profitably caters to fans from all over the world looking to experience the *Twilight* landscape by touring the film sets and celebrity "hot spots" (Fralic). The perception of the *Twilight* world as a North American, rather than simply American, entity is evident in the reactions of the interviewed fans being shown "Bella's" house, located in Surrey, British Columbia: "It's this stop, they say in unison, that 'makes it all seem so real'" (Fralic sec. 9). There is no recognition in these words that "Bella's" house is located in the wrong country, just that its actual presence indicates the tangibility of the *Twilight* universe. Even within the novel *Eclipse*, Bella makes reference to having "*Anne of Green Gables* flashbacks" when considering the marriage proposal from Edward and imagining living in a simpler

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[29] The British Columbian filming locations will also be used for *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn*, the fourth part of the film series to be released in two installments in November 2011 and November 2012 respectively (*The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn*).

time when young marriages were the norm (277). Furthermore, throughout the series it is a frequent joke among the vampire and werewolf circles alike that they can effortlessly run to Canada due to their superhuman speed. Considering the ease with which Canadian and American media and products can interact with each other cross-border, these blended references to Canada and America alike contribute to the *Twilight* series as an embodiment of a more neutralized North American society, a perception that lends itself to the current trend towards a globalized, rather than national, culture.

As Ames has identified, *Twilight* readers in Canada are affected by their "interactions with" the novels and the fictional *Twilight* universe as well as "by the cultural status acquired in being associated" with the American pop culture phenomenon (19). For young readers especially, who are considered to be in the process of personal development, "[l]iteracy provides a forum upon which to build cosmopolitan world-views and identities," and so their choices in and interactions with literature become part of their interpretation of themselves and their surroundings (Bean and Moni 642). This forum is assuredly accessible for the targeted audience of the genre as, "[o]n the conservative side, youth are certainly avid consumers of global industry products and services," such as literature from other cultures and countries (Nilan and Feixa 8). In fact, in "the 'new' media, youth are central to the global leisure market, not just the 'marketing focus' for cultural industry innovations, but the source of their inspiration" (Nilan and Feixa 8). Robert Wright comments on this transnational reality from a Canadian perspective:

> As Canadians probably do not need to be reminded of in this age of seemingly relentless "globalization," Canada's "cultural industries" are now more than ever subject to forces originating from beyond their border; the same thing may also be said of "youth culture," at least insofar as trends in the lives of young people in the industrialized West (and arguably elsewhere) are themselves products of global mass media. (4)

This fluid cross-cultural interaction reflects the Digital Native's use of technology *as* society, wherein the development of community is not hampered by physical distance or political policy. If we acknowledge that "youth are central" (Nilan and Feixa 8) to global trends in entertainment and leisure and that "global mass media" is central "in the lives of young people" (Wright 4), a circular relationship appears wherein one is dependent on and perpetuated by the other. Web 2.0, as a (increasingly) global medium, is subsequently a centralized tool of cultural exploration. Furthermore, the Web 2.0 "creative revolution in cyberspace" is "about who gets to control the shaping of culture, the making of 'meaning'" as consumers become active in the development of their multimedia environments (Palfrey 125). Online fan fiction is one such active development of culture in that it re-interprets the source view-point into a personal interpretation influenced by the fanfic writer's own perspectives, and then disseminates it in a borderless online space for a diverse community of individuals who are like-minded in their choice of cultural activity.

In "Making Our Voices Heard: Young Adult Females Writing Participatory Fan Fiction," Susanna Coleman postulates that, because of the Internet's communitarian capabilities, "online participation in fan fiction enables female fan fiction authors to have a voice in the elements of popular culture with which we fill our free time" (96). She notes that fan fiction is an act of "*interrupting* this [source] text as we write, reshaping it into what we deem a more satisfactory narrative and exposing this new text to other fans," an act that seems applicable to all fan fiction writers, regardless of gender (96). Therefore, Canadian Twilighters who write Canadian fan fiction are interrupting the American *Twilight* canon, reshaping it into a narrative that is more satisfactory in terms of reflecting their national identity/reality and communicating (voicing) this alternative interpretation to online *Twilight* communities. In the words of John Palfrey, they are "making meaning" by associating their Canadian experiences with the *Twilight* series and "shaping culture" by re-writing the American setting to reflect their realities as individuals living in Canada.

In his study on the relationship between Canadian youth and their national literature, Robert Wright observes that "there can be little question but that the children of NAFTA, globalization and the Internet live in imaginative (perhaps even ideological) worlds in which the idea of 'nation' is eroding apace" (146). However, Wright is quick to distinguish that this does not mean Canadian literature is irrelevant for Canadian youth, rather that "their interests tend to vary without reference to the traditional notion that literature somehow represents 'the national" (148). This would support the perspective that the *Twilight* series can be

popular with its Canadian audience without necessarily dictating that their cultural perception becomes more American, especially if they are active Web 2.0 users. Their interest in *Twilight* is not a reflection on their national identity, as such associations may not be considered necessary by individuals who cross borders easily through digital technology. However, just as Wright is mindful that youth are not intentionally abandoning the national in their literary choices, such digital cross-border movement does not mean that the Internet will completely displace national identity, as also according to Frank E. Manning:

> The medium itself, as a combined symbolic and technical form, is not necessarily a homogenizing influence that draws every audience into a global village. Rather the medium allows for cultural differences, expressed not only through content but also, and perhaps significantly, through the subtle influences of style, tone, characterization, and direction. Influences of this variety play a crucial role throughout Canadian popular culture, defining its distinctiveness in the light of contrasting conceptions of American alternatives. (13)

Essentially, online *Twilight* communities allow for cultural differences surrounding a communal fictional world that, as will be evidenced through an analysis of Canadian *Twilight* fan fiction, Twilighters feel comfortable modifying and interpreting on their own terms. The national context is an important issue to be addressed when considering the relationship between social technology, youth and the shaping of culture. In light of discourse surrounding the Americanization

of Canadians, an implication of an erasure of culture, the following is a guideline to which this study adheres: "So, while it remains important to pay attention to what American, and increasingly global, culture industries 'do' to Canada […] it is also important to pay attention to what Canadians 'do' with the products of those industries" (Bodroghkozy 572).

Canadian *Twilight* Fan Fiction

The fan fiction texts chosen for analysis in this study (within the context of national identity, borders and technology) were chosen from the website *FanFiction.net*, where *Twilight* and *Harry Potter* have "generated well over a half a million stories" (Parrish 177). The use of beta readers, or individuals who peer-review stories on a volunteer basis, is encouraged but not mandatory, as on other websites such as *Twilighted.net*. The process of determining the identifiable characteristics necessary for an analysis of Canadian *Twilight* fan fiction is inherently subjective, as online spaces provide individuals with the opportunity to craft an identity for themselves that may or may not reflect their offline identity in society at large. Therefore, the sole criterion for this process was that the writer indicated in their profile and/or fan fiction that their country of residence was Canada. However, other indications of age and/or nationality were often apparent in author's notes in the stories themselves, thereby tailoring this analysis to "youth" writers. For example, -gypsyrin- indicates locale in the author's note (often dubbed as an "A/N" in fanfic stories) before Chapter 6 of her story "A New Breath": "Yeah, I'm from Calgary myself […]." For –gypsyrin-, another determining identity factor is that she indicates her age on her profile (e.g. "I'm

20 and I now sell children's clothes…again") (Member Profile). Another author, AlyssaLutz, is more straightforward on her profile, including a picture of herself: "I'm a 17 year old obsessed Canadian *Twilight* fanfiction author" (Member Profile). Even more conscious of nationality, author Felt With The Heart both lists her country of residence as Canada on her profile and dedicates her story "Detour to Canada's Wonderland" to "all those Canadians or anybody, who knows and loves Wonderland like I do!" (Chap. 1). A fourth chosen for this study, Britt.Dan simply indicates Canada on his/her profile as country of residence, and does not disclose any other factors, but in his/her fan fiction piece "The Cullens Take Canada," indicates age at the end of Chapter 2: "The next chapter should be up soon, if it isn't you can blame it on my teachers for giving me too much Homework!" Subjectivity and variability in representation of identity are necessarily part of such an exercise, and so findings cannot be considered as concrete truth, or as an accurate sample representation of a general larger public. For example, writer SkyeSyren changed her user name to DemonicEmbrace during the writing of this study. However, indicators of age and nationality influence the interpretation of such stories by readers on the website. Notably, the presence of Canadian identity within their profiles and published fictions has been chosen by the authors to communicate such an identity to their online readers.

This study addresses four points of reference that involve national identity and the concept of borders within Canadian *Twilight* fan fiction pieces: firstly, Canadian cultural objects and media, landmarks, places and general identifiers; secondly, those same of American origin; thirdly, those of a more general North

American nature (i.e. brands and cultural activities shared by both Canadians and Americans); and, finally, identifiable characters and character traits, plots, themes and/or locations from the *Twilight* canon. Published on *FanFiction.net* between 2008 and 2010, the five stories included here[30] focus on situations involving the larger *Twilight* cast of characters wherein Canada is the central location and/or plays into the outcome of the plot for the characters. Quotes have been referenced by chapter, as this is the traditional organizational format for fan fiction stories, with each chapter generated as a new web page on *FanFiction.net* and listed in a drop-down table of contents. As this study is from a comparative literary approach, concern for equal statistical representation is not as important a focus as is the analysis of representative texts within the Canadian *Twilight* framework. In other words, the analysis of these stories, which are just a few among many more on *FanFiction.net*, aims to present a portrait of the ways in which young fan fiction writers are responding to young adult literature on their own terms (the online space), in their own contexts (Canadian being one such context), and how they are integrating this activity into their lives and identities through social technology.

With respect to the interpretation of American cultural products in Canada, Aniko Bodroghkozy writes in "As Canadian as Possible…:Anglo-Canadian Popular Culture and the American Other": "By engaging with the Other's popular media, inflected with the particularities of Canadian subjectivities during the

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[30] "A New Breath" by –gypsyrin-, "Living the Dream" by AlyssaLutz, "The Cullens Take Canada" by Britt.Dan, "Silent Tears" by DemonicEmbrace (formerly SkyeSyren) and "Detour to Canada's Wonderland!" by Felt With The Heart.

process of reading, Canadians recode those texts as their own popular culture." (574). There is evidence that such a process of recoding occurs when Canadian fan fiction writers incorporate American fictional worlds such as *Twilight* into their own personal and social contexts. As previously mentioned, Canadians have an exclusive sense of identification with the saga due to the geographical and cultural similarities that they share with this American product. However, there simultaneously exists a sense of difference, of "center/margin" positioning, as such readers are conscious that they are not American (Bore and Williams 195). In addition, on a textual level, readers identify with the canonical Forks, Washington setting as part of the basis for the *Twilight* universe. This is true of the fan fiction pieces studies here – they all include Forks as either the place of habitation or the point of departure for the characters, from which there is either travel or immigration to Canada.

In Britt.Dan's "The Cullens Take Canada," the Cullen family, residing in Forks, decides to fly to Canada for a vacation, specifically visiting Victoria, British Columbia and Edmonton, Alberta. In Felt With The Hearts's "Detour to Canada's Wonderland!," they travel by car: "We were all moving to a small town in Quebec and of course, Emmett made us take a different route, forcing us to stop at Canada's Wonderland" (Chap. 1). Alternatively, -gypsyrin- provides a short explanation for Bella residing in Calgary, Alberta, explaining that Charlie, her policeman father, was re-assigned to Calgary from Forks and so she enrolled as a student at the University of Calgary (Chap. 1). In "Silent Tears," author DemonicEmbrace simply begins with vampire Bella and her new coven attending

their first day of school at Marc Garneau Collegiate in Toronto, Ontario at a date 100 years after the events of the *Twilight* series[31]. However, the canonical setting is referenced at the end of Chapter 3, when Alice confronts Bella (who is pretending to be Bella's human granddaughter): "Oh drop the charade Bella. I know you're a vampire, and I know you're the same Bella from Forks." Finally, in AlyssaLutz's all-human "Living the Dream" fan fiction, Bella, Alice and Rosalie are residing in Forks, which is described in detail: "Forks is a small town in Washington. Forks homes about 2000 people. There I attend the only high school" (Chap. 1). It is in a daydream that Bella finds herself in Toronto, Ontario, meeting the famous band The Cullen Brothers (a play on the popular music group the Jonas Brothers) outside the Molson Amphitheater (Chap. 1). In all of the stories, the interplay between center and margin is apparent, as, accompanied by a sense of intimacy with Forks as canon, there is always a conscious explanation of difference between the canon (American setting) and the Canadian destinations of the stories.

There are also indications that the authors use the exercise of writing fan fiction to reflect how they view, organize and interpret the *Twilight* series with relation to their identities as Canadian, in light of Even-Zohar's theory that literary products can become "models of organizing, viewing, and interpreting life" ("Factors and Dependencies" 29). All of the fan fiction works centralize

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[31] This particular fan fiction is set after the events of the second novel *New Moon*, wherein Edward feels that his vampire lifestyle is too dangerous for Bella and makes the decision at the outset of the novel to abruptly leave Forks with his family, telling Bella that he no longer loves her. *New Moon* follows Bella as she copes with this heartbreak and is a popular focal point for many Twilight fan fiction pieces. See: Parrish, Juli. "Back to the Woods: Narrative Revisions in *New Moon* Fan Fiction at Twilighted" included in the bibliography of this study.

Canadian settings and almost all incorporate Canadian spaces, products, cultural objects, media and/or activities into the stories (with the exception of "Silent Tears," which focuses more on the *Twilight* plot and leaves Toronto and Marc Garneau Collegiate as a background setting). For example, -gypsyrin-, having revealed in an author's note that she resides in Calgary, includes some specificities of Calgary in "A New Breath," such as road names ("traffic going southbound on deerfoot [sic]" (Chap. 3)), the local grocery store, Sobeys (Chap. 6) and the climate: "I thought Forks had some cold weather, boy was I wrong. On this lovely day in December the weather outside was a freezing -30 […]" (Chap. 1). Most importantly, the author contrasts Bella's old life in Forks with Calgary as a positive transition: "I suppose my room in Forks was pretty dull, but here in Calgary I've made some friends that will actually do things and there's places to go" (Chap. 4). Here, -gyspyrin- is positing Forks as Bella's past, where she was isolated and Edward abandoned her, and Calgary as her present, where she has made new friends and has found a new happiness, as she explains to Edward (who comes to Calgary to find her), "So I've sort of come to enjoy the cold, learned to find the beauty in life instead of the ugly" (Chap. 6). In this, -gypsyrin- is using her experience as a Calgarian as basis for her fan fiction, thereby interpreting *Twilight* through a local lens, relating it to her offline reality.

The presence of Canadian culture within other fan fiction pieces is also readily identifiable. In Britt.Dan's "The Cullens Take Canada," the characters specifically go to Miniature World in Victoria, a tourist attraction that houses miniature life-like models of people, places and objects. They discuss the various

exhibits and comment on their experience, with Edward's brother, Emmett exclaiming "This places [sic] was so much fun! I loved Canada already!" (Chap. 2). Their second stop on the Canadian tour is West Edmonton Mall, in which the stores and food providers are described in great detail, including Alberta-born smoothie bar Booster Juice, where Bella purchases a "Tropical Tornado with a Warrior Booster," Quebecois shoe boutique Aldo and electronics store The Source by Circuit City (Chap. 5). Similar in detail, Felt With The Heart names and describes nearly all the rides present at Canada's Wonderland, with the imposing rollercoaster The Behemoth being a focal point for the character. In the opening author's note, she directs readers to the thrill park's website should they wish to get more information about the rides (Chap. 1). In "Living the Dream," AlyssaLutz references the Canadian pop music television channel MuchMusic and includes the lyrics to "Never Too Late" a song by Canadian rock group Hedley, italicizing the beginning lines to emphasize that they mirror Bella's desire to leave Forks and become a famous movie star: "*Hoping I can run today and get away faster / Than ever from here / Another night and who can say if leaving is better / Than living in fear*" (Chap. 2). Once again, there is a Canadian presence in the stories, which can be interpreted as stemming from the authors' personal experiences within this national context.

In consideration of the "center/margin" structure identified by Bore and Williams with relation to the global *Twilight* fanbase, the prevalence of distinctly American cultural objects and media, landmarks, places and general identifiers in the stories featured here is less than those of Canadian and/or North American

origin (the latter being those that are shared between Canadians and Americans, rather than simply American exports *to* Canada). In fact, only AlyssaLutz's "Living the Dream," is more heavily focused on American culture than on Canadian and/or North American elements. This is in part due to the plot, which follows Bella as she is discovered by a film producer and moves to Los Angeles to film a movie. There, she goes on the American talk show, *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, and meets The Cullen Brothers for the second time. However, there is also frequent mention of American films and television, such as *Transformers*, *The Notebook*, *Hairspray*, and *Friends* as well as actors, songs, magazines and books, including *Sports Illustrated* and *The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold. This gives insight into the popular American culture influences that are available for Canadian participation. Bodroghkozy's observation that a process of recoding occurs when Canadians intercept American culture means that these spaces have the possibility to be re-written. AlyssaLutz writes an author's note that the idea for the story was a personal fantasy that materialized while she was watching MuchMusic, wherein she was featured on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* and there discussed the Jonas Brothers, a band that inspired her creation of the Cullen Brothers (Chap. 1). Furthermore, the opening scene in which Bella, as the fan, meets the Cullen Brothers, is a reinterpretation of the same event that AlyssaLutz actually experienced in meeting the Jonas Brothers, as she explains at the end of the first chapter. There is a cultural transaction that occurs within such a context. AlyssaLutz is organizing personal experience, personal desire and a combination

of Canadian and American settings and culture to create a reflective literary product.

The identification of cultural reciprocity between Canada and the United States as a communal North American arena is validated by the observation that "[y]outh cultures are always emphatically local, despite globally-derived details, since youth are embedded in immediate and embodied economic and political relations" (Nilan and Feixa 8). In other words, products included in the stories such as iPods and certain brands of cars are integrated into the lives of Canadians in a way that they integrate them into their personal identity, without considering that such an act being the adoption of another nationality's customs and habits. According to Palfrey: "This culture is global in scope and nature" and youth are "connected to each other in terms of how they relate to information, how they relate to new technologies, and how they relate to one another" in such a global youth culture (13). Nonetheless, in tandem "to their digital universe, Digital Natives are embedded in regional and local customs, habits, and values" (Palfrey 13). These profiled Canadian fan fiction writers are communicating with other users of *FanFiction.net* in a digital space uninhibited by borders, but they still present an amalgamation of this globalized space and their local culture. Examples of such a globalized culture include products such as iPods, cell phones, digital cameras, televisions and laptops, mentioned in "A New Breath," "The Cullens Take Canada," "Living the Dream," and "Detour to Canada's Wonderland!". Technology in general is integral to all of the stories, save for "Silent Tears" wherein the characters are mostly talking in person (although they

drive a Ferrari to high school). The characters frequently talk or text on cell phones, listen to music on iPods, take digital photos or watch television. Shared experiences such as student life, including homework and generalized subjects like Science and Math, are also identifiable cross-border. School and student experience is part of "A New Breath," "Living the Dream," "Silent Tears," and "The Cullens Take Canada" whether as part of the story or in the author's notes. Through the common participation in the *Twilight* phenomenon, such individuals are also discovering and sharing other mutual interests that lend themselves to a culture that crosses local and national lines and expands into international reciprocity.

Web 2.0 is progressively becoming a global tool of cultural exploration and expression, as active participants have a chance to process, recode and share meaning and identity. As Palfrey (125) and Coleman (96) have underlined, this is a process of interruption, creation (or re-creation) and definition of cultural spaces, including popular culture, in which these individuals are involved. To reiterate Manning's viewpoint, the medium(s), being here Web 2.0 and fan fiction, "allows for cultural differences, expressed not only through content, but also, and perhaps significantly, through the subtle influences of style, tone, characterization and direction" (13). In the sense that technology acts as a gateway *to* other cultures, thus lending itself to the trend of globalization, it is also a portal to voice culture *for* others, therefore making difference a locus of expression: "The Internet, by giving people the ability to shape and reshape cultural understanding through digital creativity, has introduced something that is

truly different" (Palfrey 125). Given the innovative and rapid evolutionary nature of digital technologies, this "something" has the capacity to be many different things, ranging from the positive intercommunication of diverse cultures to the unfavourable homogenization of the same, and continues to negotiate such expanses of meaning. However, it is clear that, in the end, the outcome of meaning within Web 2.0 as borderless creative space is up to the individual – the base site for identity both personal and social – in the digital world.

Conclusion

So far, the twenty-first century has proven to be "the new golden age of young adult literature," as YA novels and youth culture have become centralized and celebrated in North American society (Cart 187). In response to this success, my thesis demonstrates that the literary activity surrounding the genre, including readership and textual practices, is indicative of a significant cultural shift with regards to technology and social constructs of identity, including age, in our postmodern lives. Once a marginal genre defined simply by its "intended audience" (Nodelman 3) and supervised by a mediatory system wherein this audience was a wholly passive, subjective imaginative construct – a "mythical youth" – young adult literature and its readers are now representing themselves in a bold, outspoken manner that is demanding a reassessment of such definitions. In an online article for the *School Library Journal,* it is observed that "the genre" of fan fiction "requires an active community to survive" (Burns and Webber par. 8). This study has shown that, amidst crisis rhetoric about youth literacy rates and the survival of literary culture, so too will literature thrive best in a multimedia society when it is part of an active literary community that feels empowered to engage, adapt and appropriate works of literature into their lives and identities. Creativity is a core component of social technology and is thus re-writing authoritative roles, such as those of readership and authorship, and giving any individual, young or old, the capacity to design and define their cultural space. For Digital Natives, who can be seen as the next generation of life-long readers, this capacity is a right that they inherently exercise, thereby using Web 2.0 as a

fundamental tool of cultural exploration. This major shift in "who gets to control […] the making of 'meaning'", which Palfrey calls the "creative revolution in cyberspace," is why young adult literature is at the forefront of cultural change in North American society (125). Online creative activity through social technology, such as fan fiction, exemplifies the shifting relationships between text, reader and author for Digital Natives as it facilitates the public exploration of identity through literature. The genre is no longer a mouthpiece for a generation, it is a channel for personal expression. Instead of *Twilight* existing solely as a set of novels, it has become a fictional universe for an entire literary community. As a result, boundaries which were instituted to aid in the understanding of the genre of young adult literature, founded during a time of youth revolution, are now detriment to this same aim, as the creative revolution in Web 2.0, which furthers the empowerment of youth, progresses and intensifies.

Chapter 1 aimed to examine the historical and theoretical backgrounds of young adult literature as a genre in order to better understand the inconsistencies between its simultaneous marginalization and success. A look at the Sixties youth movement revealed that this period of time, during which YA literature developed as a genre, has left an enduring legacy of youthfulness, a myth of what "youth" should be, for subsequent generations of young people. Simultaneously, in literary theory, young adult literature has traditionally been a field largely conceived, created, disseminated and critiqued by adults. This system of mediation ensures that the youth reader remains an imaginary concept. The separation between myth and reality has led to a critical portrayal of digitally-minded youth whose creative

and social activities do not conform to the rules of traditional print-based mediums. However, the "renaissance" of young adult literature, and the reality that today's youth are more comfortable with print mediums and their successors than any previous generation are instances that defeat such crisis rhetoric (Cart 187). Similarly, the textual engagement undertaken by YA readers of all ages is defying previous theoretical considerations of the genre's pedagogical and transitionary purposes. Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga is an excellent example of a popular YA series which has succeeded cultural and commercially by engaging readers in a communitarian setting, both on- and offline, outside of traditional YA literature structures. The critical conflict that surrounds the novels and their readers demonstrates that these boundary shifts of readership and text are having a significant impact on North American society at large.

The assessment in Chapter 2 of new readership practices that transgress temporalities of age, maturity and gender continues this discussion of boundary narratives that resist such changes. I suggest that the current controversy surrounding YA-crossover novels, *Twilight* in particular is, more broadly, a struggle between the "forever young syndrome" (Danesi 21) valued by modern culture and an "anxiety of immaturity" that maintains youth-oriented objects and behaviours as inferior to "validate 'maturity'" and maintain existing hierarchical social order (Clark 4). In consequence, readers of such contentious objects, the emotionally-charged vampire-romance *Twilight* saga being such a battleground, encounter discriminatory reception for seriously and publicly engaging with them. Emotionally invested youth readers are assessed to be immature and lacking in

critical awareness, and must endure both reproach from adult-mediators and ridicule from opposing cultural industries who see *Twilight* as unfit for admiration. Adult readers are seen to be "infantilized" by their association with *Twilight*, critiqued for their abandonment of mediatory roles by engaging first-hand with the novels and subject to a process of "shaming" in order to justify their interaction. Finally, female readers of all ages are perceived as "hysterical" within "Victorian era gendered" modes of discourse in order to demean the cultural power of the franchise (Click, Aubrey & Behm Morawitz, Introduction 6). However, the presence of more than one hundred million *Twilight* readers is indicative that a re-definition of YA literature readership is underway despite such marginalization. These individuals perceive their readerly identities to be intrinsically malleable, thereby defying previous modes of categorization and disrupting past hierarchical narratives.

Subsequently, Chapter 3 relates this progression towards personal agency to core components of social technology – malleability, manipulation and "multiple literacies" (Cart 191). The "non-traditional view" of Digital Natives towards textual engagement is re-writing authorship and readership roles in the Web 2.0 creative space (Urbanski "Meeting" 239). In essence, it is the reader who is now affecting the future of literature through his or her ability to be a creative responder to text. Within the realm of user-generated content, fan fiction in particular is causing literature to become an open, intertextual dialogue in a manner akin to communal folkloric practices that demystify the creative process (Jenkins, *Convergence* 179). As the Internet has facilitated mass access for

younger individuals to fan communities, many scholars (e.g. Jenkins, Palfrey, Parrish) have identified that the activity of Digital Natives in such online spaces is not simply a continuation of traditional fan activity. Instead, it is a new engagement with source texts on a mass cultural scale. Since this interactive, creative engagement with texts in the digital context allows readers to publicly construct personal meaning, it reflects on both readerly authority and identity. An analysis of Canadian-composed, Canadian-themed *Twilight* fan fiction demonstrates how Digital Natives feel free to transpose their identities and contexts, in this case those of a national level, onto source material with which they identify. In the individualized digital realm, boundaries can be simultaneously acknowledged and surpassed, and difference can be a locus of expression without being restrictive.

The twenty-first century has ushered in the digital age, a time when rules are being rewritten and roles redefined. In the literary field, the examples of this socio-cultural shift provided in this study both challenge and blur those boundaries that persist in the contemporary appraisal of young adult literature and its readership. Asserting itself as a viable medium in this digital space, young adult literature 2.0 is revealing new and exciting avenues of possibility for literature as a whole in our modern multimedia society. It is my hope that this study provides insight into the scope of such possibilities. Certainly, the relationship between young people and literature today, as they assist in defining the future face and fate of literature, demands our attention as scholars if we are to

establish a place for the literary community in this new era of boundless creativity and interactivity.

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