Table of Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................2
Acknowledgements ..........................................................................3
Introduction ......................................................................................4
A Brief History of Courtly Love ......................................................5
Modern Criticism and Analysis of Courtly Love ..........................16
A Word on Methodology ...............................................................21
Courtly Love in Modern Culture ...................................................22
Conclusion .....................................................................................30
Appendix A – A Brief and Selective Summary of the source texts ..........................................................................32
Works Cited ...................................................................................47
Abstract

The courtly love trope is one of the oldest and most pervasive elements of medieval literature. It has had a hand in shaping social concepts such as romance, gender roles, social responsibility, and even religious devotion over the last several centuries. While 21st Century feminism may lead one to believe that we have done away with, or at least are in the process of doing away with, the specific patriarchal power dynamic and gender roles which are considered a quintessential part of the courtly love trope, an analysis of current popular culture reveals that in many ways, this trope is alive and well, especially in the increasingly popular genre of supernatural romance. Applying a feminist examination of two popular pieces of writing, specifically Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* trilogy and Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl*, allows us to evaluate whether the courtly love trope still exists in modern popular culture and to determine whether the power dynamic between male and female participants in a romantic relationship has changed as much as we may imagine it has, and what effect this change, or lack thereof, has on popular trends. This paper applies the analyses of courtly love made by Slavoj Žižek to modern literature, with the assistance of the philosophies of Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan, to attempt to answer for a contemporary preoccupation with supernatural romance. Žižek’s discussion of the appropriation of the female body and courtly love as a sado-masochistic transaction works in cooperation with Foucault’s discussion of the history of sexuality, especially as sexuality and love function as objects of power, to analyze the role of love and the supernatural in modern popular culture, a role that has recently assumed more cultural value because of the role that the creation of such popular works plays in our concept of reality.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the North Central College faculty members who supported me as I crafted this project. First and foremost, I would like to thank my wonderful thesis advisor, Professor Sara Eaton, who patiently guided me through the dense fog of theory necessary to understand Courtly Love, and who daily inspires me to be a lifelong learner, a critical reader, and a better person. To my second reader, Professor Wioleta Polinska who so generously allowed me to prevail on her time, and who has provided me with invaluable learning experiences both in the classroom and out. To Elizabeth Nicholson, Osterle Library’s Arts and Letters librarian, who taught me much more than I ever dreamed of knowing about research, and whom I once infected with a particularly virulent Pat Benatar song. Ladies, I do not have the words to express how much your support, your expertise, and your patience have meant to me. It has been an honor to work with each of you. Thank you.

I would also like to thank my friends and family for their support and love, especially during this thesis writing process. My thanks go to my best friend, the only person with whom I can stand to spend more than a few consecutive days, my husband, Kieran, who constantly assured me that I was capable of completing this, or any, project. I would also like to thank Amy (no, not that Amy, an actual Amy) for introducing me to Foucault’s work, and for the use of her copy of History of Sexuality, which I have monopolized for far too long.
In Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Darcy rudely proposes to Elizabeth Bennet, saying “You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you” after listing all of the reasons which should prevent him from loving her (188). In explaining why she cannot possibly marry Heathcliff, Catherine of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* tells Nelly that Heathcliff “shall never know how [she loves] him,” a love which she attributes to Heathcliff being “more [herself] than [she] is” (80). When he is discovered by Gorvenal upon the shore, Tristan claims that “without Iseult [he] may not and will not live” (61). Shakespeare’s 88th sonnet declares “Such is my love, to thee I so belong,/That for thy right myself will bear all wrong” (In 13-14; 1236). In his 16th elegy, titled “On His Mistress,” John Donne asks his love to “Temper, oh fair love, love’s impetuous rage,” to allow him release from the violence of his affections by accepting his declaration of love (In 13; 1392). Such all-consuming, aggressive declarations and descriptions of love come in all shapes and sizes, but arguably, none of these declarations and attitudes are particularly surprising to readers.

There seems to be a convention, at least in Western cultures, of expecting grand gestures and violent declarations of love, an expectation which can be traced back to the Courtly Love trope which is so abundant in medieval literature. If modern literature can be considered an amalgamation of multiple cultural sources and traditions, then the influence of Courtly Love makes it seem as if the angst-riddled declarations of romantic relationships in modern literature are perfectly understandable. It is not unusual to read a novel in which characters declare that they simply cannot continue to exist without the love of another, or that they themselves were never truly complete until they encountered their lover in the world.
One of the many purposes of making a study of the humanities and the arts is to come to a greater understanding of human nature, creating a dialogue about the parts of culture which are important enough to be included in the expressions of our collective soul. The themes and tropes that have been perpetuated over centuries of documented human civilization are important enough to bear analytical scrutiny. One of the most pervasive of these tropes is that of Courtly Love. Elements of this trope can be identified in most pieces of popular literature and film, from the archetypal characters that are a regular part of Courtly Love tales, to the religious and feudal themes that are equally central. Because expressions of this trope are so commonplace, even in contemporary popular culture, a close analysis of them seems to be important. This thesis will discuss themes of Courtly Love in popular culture, specifically those found in the novel *Gone Girl* and the novels of the Twilight Saga, *Twilight, New Moon, Eclipse*, and *Breaking Dawn*. A comparison of these works demonstrates a change in the power dynamic of the Courtly Love relationship, a change which seems to be compensated for by the addition of supernatural protagonists and love interests.

**A Brief History of Courtly Love**

To discuss Courtly Love in the modern context, it is necessary to attempt to comprehensively define the trope, and to do so, it is important to discuss the historical importance of it. A product of the late middle ages, Courtly Love, or *l’amour courtois*, “[symbolizes] a code of attitudes toward love, as well as the conduct considered suitable for lords and ladies” (Lambdin NP). It was first identified in Gaston Paris’s essay on Chrétien de Troyes’s *Lancelot* as a romantic relationship which closely resembles the relationship between a subject, the Courtly Lover, and his feudal lord, the beloved. Because the tradition instructs its participants in specific behavioral patterns, it is perhaps not at all surprising to find it in medieval
manuals describing the appropriate behavior for nobility, manuals such as Andreas Capellanus’s *De Arte Honeste Amandi* and Castiglione’s *The Courtier*. However, the tradition reaches back even further, and crucial aspects of it can be found in Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria*.

Ovid, born in 43 BC, appears to have written his *Amores* over the course of several decades, and the *Ars Amatoria* is considered one of the offences for which he was exiled from Rome by the emperor Augustus (Ovid viii-x). As a poet writing in the fervent atmosphere of early Christianity, his often irreverent attention to romantic love drew the importune attention of Augustus, whose campaign for morality would have been injured by the set of poems. The *Ars* are broken into three books, the first describing the way in which a young man may win the affections of a woman he desires, the second book teaching him how to keep the affections of a woman he has wooed, and the third instructing women in the art of winning and keeping the affections of the man she loves. Much of Ovid’s advice for young men would be familiar to a modern reader. He advises men to “learn the spots that damsels most frequent” to find the ideal woman, that the first step in winning the affections of a woman is to believe that in fact “all women can be won” (Ovid ln 50 88, ln 269 94). He counsels men to beware of the birthdays of their women, lest they fall into poverty in purchasing her gifts for which he will never properly be repaid.

In the second book, Ovid tells his young lover to make use of “A wise forbearance,” to “Give little, but that little in good taste,” to “make her think he’s ravished by her looks,” that one should “Ne’er cast a woman’s defects in her face:/Dissembling oft were wise in such a case,” and to never, under any circumstances, ask a woman’s age (ln 145 111; ln 262, 296 115; ln 641-642, 663 125). Ovid’s manual for wooing women instructs men to become good hunters of them, to have the confidence that a woman wishes to be won over, to use wisdom in winning them,
remembering to flatter them by remembering their birthdays, bringing them small but tasteful trinkets, paying them compliments, and ignoring the more ignoble aspects of their humanity. It seems that Ovid believes that the way to a woman’s heart is by setting her apart from humanity, creating an Other for the male lover to idealize and possess.

Perhaps the most critical part of Ovid’s instruction to young men who wish to keep the love of their ladies is that they should keep their love secret. Secrecy is a key element of Courtly Love, and Ovid tells us that “babbling secrets is the worst of sins” (ln 604; 124). Love should be an acknowledged secret, and true love should never be subjected to the slanders of the world. Everyone knows that “in [Venus’s] ritual freely all indulge,” but never should it be spoken of (ln 611; 124). One may advertise one’s sexual conquests, or even make up conquests to brag about, “Failing the body they assault the name,” but real love must be kept safe from the gossip and potential slander of the world (ln 633; 124). Ovid’s injunction to protect one’s love from public scrutiny not only acknowledges that bragging about a conquest of one’s beloved (and not some random sexual encounter) seems tawdry, but it also acknowledges the real danger of being a lover in the public sphere: that a stray morsel of gossip may be taken as a truthful accusation against one’s beloved.

In his advice to women seeking a lover, Ovid is unique in that he openly counsels women to use guile in obtaining a lover. Of course, he recommends the usual strategies: a woman should make herself look good, groom herself well, conceal physical defects with artifice, be “soft and feminine” (ln 286; 135) in look and behavior, and be educated in the arts and dance, be available to the lover she wishes to attract, and to mind her health and weight. However, he also counsels women to try both old and young lovers, to be ready to play the game of intrigue which loving often winds up being, to make her lover believe that she is in the clutches of love as much as he
is, if not more. He finishes his instruction to women with a rather specific description of the ways a woman should behave in bed to seal the desire of her lover. He describes in verse a spectrum of sexual positions and “many a naughty word” to demonstrate her enjoyment (ln 796; 149). Finally, he instructs those “whose nature feels no sexual joys,/to] Feign ecstasy with much delusive noise,” a performance which should never be betrayed to one’s lover (ln 797-798; 149). Although his language does not necessarily imply that he intended to do so, in advising a woman to fake an orgasm to satisfy her lover, Ovid outlines a very basic strategy by which a woman may gain the upper-hand in a romantic relationship: feigning romantic (or even physical) fulfillment at the hands of her lover, a strategy which is most effective when the lover does not notice the deception. While Ovid lived hundreds of years before the institution of the kingdom of France and the courtly atmosphere which would later give rise to the troubadour tradition of Courtly Love, he lays down the groundwork for the poets who will follow.

Andreas Capellanus’s *De Arte Honeste Amani*, or *The Art of Courtly Love*, as I shall refer to it, is a dialectic work disguised as an instruction manual for a young man wishing to engage a woman in a romantic relationship. Much like Ovid’s advice, Capellanus’s pickup lines are familiar even today. Also like Ovid, Capellanus’s advice is intended to instruct its reader in “the way in which a state of love between two lovers may be kept unharmed” by the surrounding world (Capellanus 27). The work seems dialectic, not because it attempts to answer any grandiose metaphysical question, but because the dialogues which Capellanus includes are quite similar to those used by classical philosophers, such as Aristotle, to discuss such things as the meanings of truth, beauty, and life. Capellanus, like his classical predecessors, outlines his understanding of socially constructed love.
Capellanus acknowledges an important precedent for descriptions of romantic love: that love is a physical malady of some sort. Cupid, son of Aphrodite and mythological matchmaker, creates love by shooting his targets with one of his arrows. Capellanus defines love as “a certain inborn suffering derived from the sight of and excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex, which causes each one to wish above all things the embrace of the other and by common desire to carry out all of love’s precepts in the other’s embrace” (28). He stresses the importance of this “excessive meditation,” since “restrained thought does not, as a rule, return to the mind,” a lover who cannot or does not fixate on his beloved cannot truly be in love (28, 29).

That love is a burden to bear, a wound which never heals, a sickness with no cure, and an obsession without relief is a familiar concept to modern readers. In Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*, Beatrice asks Benedick “for which of my good parts did you first suffer love for me?” (5.2.55). In countless poems, innumerable songs, and almost every single work of prose in which one character can be thought to love another, that love is expressed as a heart-piercing, dire need.

Love is inevitable. It is an inexorable force, and there is no valid excuse for not rendering service to the god of Love. Capellanus tells us that whether or not one wishes to love, one will inevitably do so. Love, he argues, “gets its name (*amor*) from the word for hook (*amus*), which means “to capture” or “to be captured,” for he who is in love is captured in the chains of desire and wishes to capture someone else with his hook” (31). Love is a form of bondage, it seems inescapable, and compels one to desire nothing more than to ensnare someone else in the same chains. According to the rules of love which Capellanus outlines, there is no excuse for refusing to love, not even being married to someone whom you do not love. Capellanus’ eighth rule of love is that “No one should be deprived of love without the very best of reasons,” and the only
reasons which seem to be ‘the very best’ are if one loves another, or if a lover is not worthy of love (185). The bar for ‘worth’ in a lover, however, is not particularly high since Capellanus tells us, in his eighteenth rule, that “Good character alone makes any man worthy of love” (185). Even if one could escape the chains of love, Capellanus tells us that we ought not.

Capellanus also stresses the importance of secrecy to love. A public love is a love spoiled, he argues. When one’s love becomes public knowledge, “it ceases to develop naturally and even loses what progress it has already made” (151). The burden of public scrutiny destroys a true love, and his thirteenth rule states that “When made public love rarely endures” (185). If your love is lucky enough to endure being made public, there are ways to increase it. Capellanus recommends using “real jealousy,” that lovers show anger towards each other, and that they use the pressure of external criticism to fortify their romantic bonds (153).

The signs of love are well documented in literature. From the heavy sighs of Shakespeare’s lovelorn characters to the repetitive, bordering on obsessive-compulsive, thoughts and behaviors of modern lovers, a specific type of behavior is associated with love. In a section discussing how one may know that one’s love is requited, Capellanus spends a great deal of time describing the signs which would indicate that the fictional Walter’s beloved is enamored of another, but he also details the behavior of a true lover. A true lover “[pays] more attention to the care of her person than she had [previously] been doing…turns pale in the presence of her lover…[and is] deeply smitten with an unbearable jealousy” (158). When tested with plays meant to inspire jealousy, a true lover becomes “upset,” and a lover, when concerned that his beloved is angry with him, “is always in fear and trembling lest the anger of his beloved last forever” (158, 159). This type of behavior lays the groundwork for certain illogical expectations. Capellanus tells us that “even if one lover does show at times that he is angry at the other without
cause, this disturbance will last but a little while if they find that their feeling for each other is really love” (159). So, too, does Capellanus’s instruction to men who wish to win the love of a woman, that a “man ought to be sparing of praise of his beloved when he is among other men,” that he should avoid being in her company, and “not try to communicate with her by signs, but should treat her almost like a stranger” when in the company of other men (151, 152). This advice lends credence and a certain amount of romanticism to the advice given to many young girls on the playground, advice which will be discussed in greater detail later, that if a boy treats you poorly or ignores you, it is because he likes you.

Marie de France, the earliest known female French poet, wrote in the twelfth century, and her lais are rife with examples of Courtly Love. In “Guigemar,” a beautiful and valiant knight who was “brave and loved by everyone” yet completely uninterested in the idea of being in love, is taken on a journey in a magical ship to a land where he meets the love of his life, a lady who is not named who has been locked up by her jealous husband in a tower (43). The lovers are separated because the lady’s husband catches wind of their affair, and Guigemar is forced to flee after they both exchange a token of their love: the lady ties Guigemar’s shirt in a knot which only his one true love can untie. He returns to Brittany and goes about his life, though “there was no lady or maiden who did not make the attempt” to untie the knot that would open his heart (51). The lady escapes her oppressive husband and finds her way to Guigemar. The couple is reunited and Guigemar’s “tribulations were over” (55). Like most Courtly Lovers, Guigemar and his unnamed beloved are destined to be together, so much so that a magical boat takes him to her, saving him from a mortal wound, and even after being discovered by her husband, their love still survives. Their love is destroyed once it becomes public – when her husband learns of their affair, it must necessarily end. Of course, each lover is worthy of the love they happen upon. The
lady, although she has no name, is “noble, courtly, beautiful and wise,” and Guigemar, as already noted, was a beautiful and valiant knight (46). In much of de France’s work, the exact lady is of little consequence. Her only importance is that she fit a specific image: a beautiful noblewoman who behaves courteously.

One of the only lais which de France wrote in the Arthurian tradition is “Lanval,” which tells the tale of a knight of Arthur’s court. A loyal servant to the king, he is nonetheless treated poorly by his peers, who “Because of his valour, generosity, beauty and prowess,…[are] envious of him” (73). Resting in the country one day, he is approached by ethereally beautiful handmaidens who take him to an even more beautiful noblewoman who “…[has] come far in search of [him]…for [she loves him] above all else”’” (74). Scantily adorned in “ermine covered with Alexandrian purple,” she luxuriates in a tent so decadent that queens would perhaps feel uncomfortable with its opulence (74). She tells Lanval that “[he] would lose [her] forever if this love were to become known” (75). For a time, Lanval and his mysterious lady engage in a romantic relationship in which she is available at his beck and call. When the queen, Gwinevere, hits on Lanval and refuses to take no for an answer, Lanval tells her that he is in love with “a lady who should be prized above all others” whose “servants, even the very poorest girl, is worth more than [her]” (76, 77). Lanval, having besmirched the honor of the Queen, is put on trial by an enraged King Arthur, and ordered to produce this mythical lady. At the last minute, when it seems as if Lanval will be executed for his offense, the lady steps in to prove his claim. Again, the beloved is an unnamed, ethereally beautiful noblewoman. Because of the way she seems to magically appear throughout the story, her superhuman beauty, and her decadent accoutrement, she is often referred to as a fairy queen. If a Courtly Love lady is to be a perfect, unattainable
figure of beauty, a perfection and beauty bordering on the divine, then Lanval’s lover is the
courtliest of them all.

The medieval Courtly Ladies which this essay has already discussed do not completely
represent the character which belongs to the trope because they do not necessarily conform to
one of her defining characteristics. The traditional concept of the Courtly Lady is that of a
supremely chaste love object, yet this aspect of chastity is notably absent in the earliest iterations
of the figure. Ovid’s Lady certainly does not insist too strongly upon maintaining her chastity,
and the lais of Marie de France are loaded with implied intercourse between the lover and his
Lady. While the idea of a chaste Lady had surely existed well before it was written, Edmund
Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* offers a prime example of a chaste Courtly Lady. In the *Norton
Anthology of English Literature*, noted critic Stephen Greenblatt describes Spenser’s tale as “an
epic celebration of Queen Elizabeth, the Protestant faith, and the English nation” (776). Because
of the influence of Queen Elizabeth, who is widely known as the Virgin Queen, Spenser’s
references to chastity cannot be ignored.

There are many examples of chaste Ladies in *Faerie Queene*, but perhaps the easiest of
these to understand is Una in the first book of the epic. Una, whose very name means truth, is
Redcrosse’s future wife, and she accompanies Redcrosse on his journey to fight a terrible
dragon. She is described by Spenser as “much whiter” than snow, “So pure an innocent…/She
was in life and every virtuous lore,” and Redcrosse believes her “To be the chastest flower, that
ay did sprig/On earthly braunch” (783; book 1: canto 1: stanzas 4, 5, 793; 1:1:48). After
Redcrosse gruesomely defeats Error, the party takes their rest at an inn owned by Archimago, a
sorcerer in disguise, who raises Sprites to plague Redcrosse. One of the Sprites gives Redcrosse
a “drea me of love and lustfull play,” while the other Sprite was made into a lustful copy of Una
who tempted Redcrosse to succumb to his base desires upon waking (793; 1:1:47). Redcrosse is enraged by Una’s apparent wantonness, “at her shameless guise,/He thought have slaine her in his fierce despight” (794 1:1:49). Redcrosse rebuffs the Sprite’s temptation, although his faith in her has already been shaken by her brazen disregard for her own virtue. When Archimago then contrives to have Redcrosse witness the false Una in bed with the first Sprite, who now resembles a random boy, he is enraged, so much so that he “would have slaine them in his furious ire,/But hardly was restreinèd” (797; 1:2:5). Redcrosse leaves the next morning before Una wakes, abandoning her to her apparent lust. Before the interference of Archimago, Redcrosse and Una enjoyed a perfectly courtly relationship – he is a valiant knight who defeats monsters, and she is a beautiful, chaste, and virtuous lady who rewards his chivalry with her love. It is not until Una’s chastity is apparently compromised that Redcrosse even begins to question her worth as an object of love. Chastity becomes another key component of the character of the Courtly Lady, and it is one of the most obvious contradictions in applying the rationale of Courtly Love to modern literature.

As the world evolved, so too did the role of women in daily life. The first volume of *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* summarizes significant changes to the ideology of femininity which were in place by the nineteenth century. Gilbert and Gubar, editors of the volume, assert that nineteenth century femininity was driven by Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s vision of “The ideal woman…a pure, submissive, decorous, and even angelic creature…a standard against which every middle- and upper-class woman’s conduct was measured,” an ideal upon which “other writers, female as well as male, elaborated” (414). The immediate needs and desires of the Victorian woman were sublimated into satisfying the needs and desires of the Victorian man. The compulsion to behave in such an arguably selfless manner is expressed in
almost devotional language by Coventry Patmore in his poem *The Angel in the House*. “Man must be pleased;” he tells us, “but to please/Is woman’s pleasure; down the gulf/Of his condoled necessities/She casts her best, she flings herself” (qtd. in Gilbert 414). The attitudes expressed by Patmore represent a significant shift in the power dynamic of romantic relationships.

Gilbert and Gubar elaborate that “for many writers, such a self-sacrificing and angelic woman became the paradigm of renunciatory Christian love” and that thinkers of the period “employed a rhetoric drawn from religion to characterize the good mother as a sort of Madonna and the dutiful maiden as a virginal angel” (414-415). This figure, which is often referred to as the Angel in the House, complicates the medieval Courtly Lady by internalizing the submission implied by the original Courtly Love relationship. Capellanus’s Lady, who makes her lover work to prove his worth, is replaced by the unquestioning adulation of the devotee. Ovid’s lover need not fear the cruel power reversal of a feigned orgasm since the Victorian Angel would no more think of deceiving her lover than she would of having an orgasm in the first place.

The Victorian Angel of the House also complicates the medieval Courtly Love paradigm by shifting the object of devotion from the Courtly Lady to her lover. It is no longer the man who blindly and beseechingly obeys the instructions and caters to the demands of his exacting deity of a lover, but the woman who dotes upon her perfect, omnipotent and omniscient husband. The wholehearted, intrinsic devotion of the Angel to her husband calls into question the apparent devotion of the Courtly Lady to her lover. If a Lady who is wholly submissive to her lover looks, acts, and feels as the Angel does, then has the medieval Lady truly internalized this identity? The medieval Lady lacks the sense of duty and obligation, qualities which are similar to the medieval Courtly Lover, that the Angel seems to have in spades. The Angel bridges the gap between the medieval Lady and the modern object of affection not only because she is brought to life by the
voices of a century of authors, but also because she represents the very ideal that modern female literary heroines arguably seem to try to actively work against. The modern heroine prides herself on her independence, on her absolute refusal to submit to patriarchal demands and to fit neatly into the assiduously-crafted boxes of society. However, the modern heroine, as an object of love, is trapped in the same power dynamic that her medieval counterpart endured.

**Modern Criticism and Analysis of Courtly Love**

A significant aspect of any attempt at a comprehensive definition of Courtly Love is the criticism available on the subject. There is a great deal of scholarly work which deals with the elements of Courtly Love, and perhaps the most pertinent theorist to a discussion of Courtly Love in modern culture is Slavoj Žižek. In his essay “Courtly Love, or, Woman as Thing” Žižek discusses it in the context of modern culture which he dubs “an age of permissiveness when the sexual encounter is often nothing more than a ‘quickie’ in some dark corner of an office” (89). A consideration of Courtly Love, an ideology that emphasizes chastity, is possible in a promiscuous modern context because of the increasing prevalence of sado-masochism. Žižek argues that the Lady is not a “sublime object” but rather “an abstract Ideal…emptied of all real substance,” an “abstraction that pertains to a cold, distanced, inhuman partner” (89). The Lady is imbued with an “uncanny, monstrous character – the Lady is the Other which is not our ‘fellow-creature’…she is someone with whom no relationship of empathy is possible” (90). Whether she is a truly powerful figure within a Courtly relationship or she is merely a reflection of her lover’s desires and needs, the Courtly Lady is inherently inaccessible, intrinsically unhuman.

This feeling of Otherness is crucial to Courtly Love. The Lady who empathizes too much with her beloved could not command him to take on the impossible quests, to undergo the personal transformation that makes Courtly Love a redeeming process. Moreover, a Lady
imbued with an identity and history of her own, what Žižek describes as “the Real…the hard kernel that resists symbolization,” cannot reflect the lover’s “narcissistic projection” (90). The Lady serves as a Lacanian mirror, “Deprived of every real substance,” a “mute mirror-surface [which] must already be there…[functioning] as a kind of ‘black hole’ in reality, as a limit whose Beyond is inaccessible” (90, 91). The moral and personal transformation which the lover must undergo to maintain the illusion that love will forge him into a better person could be considered an extension of such a mirroring property. The lover, putting his best foot forward to impress his Lady, projects what he determines to be the best image of himself onto her, and that superior identity is reaffirmed by her reflection of it.

Žižek argues that Courtly Love is a masochistic exchange by drawing connections between the masochistic and Courtly Lovers. Much like Courtly Lovers, the masochistic couple enters into a social contract which compromises the apparent distribution of power within the relationship. Žižek observes that “The knight’s relationship to the Lady is…the relationship of the subject-bondsman, vassal, to his feudal Master-Sovereign who subjects him to senseless, outrageous, impossible, arbitrary, capricious ordeals” (90). Courtly Love, like sado-masochistic love play, depends on both parties willingly submitting to a set of rules, or “courtesy and etiquette” (91). Žižek observes that “Sadism follows the logic of institution, of institutional power tormenting its victim and taking pleasure in the victim’s helpless resistance,” and that “Masochism…is made to the measure of the victim: it is the victim…who initiates a contract with the Master…, authorizing her to humiliate him in any way she considers appropriate…and binding himself to act ‘according to the whim of the sovereign lady’” (91-92). A masochist in a sado-masochistic couple willingly submits to punishment, punishment which he or she interprets and assigns meaning to in terms dictated not by the sadist, the dealer of punishment, but by the
masochist, the receiver of punishment. The masochist asks for his or her punishment and he creates the terms by which the sadist may deal out punishment. While the obvious power structure places the sadist in a dominant position over the masochist, the masochist, in laying out the terms of the relationship, is in fact in the truly dominant position. This logic has an application in Courtly Love. The Courtly Lover appears to be in a position of subjection to his Lady, he places himself at her beck and call, he fulfills her will and works to be a better man because it will serve her. However, having willingly entered into a courtly relationship, and because the Lady is a reflective object, the lover writes his masochistic contract.

The effect of Courtly Love is not limited to works of fiction, it is reflected in the very fabric of society. As one scholar points out, Courtly Love “has been widely absorbed into American popular culture…the courtly fantasy of an empowered and untouchable ladylove has been replayed forcefully in a recent self-help manual authored by two women, The Rules: Time-Tested Secrets for Capturing the Heart of Mr. Right” (Burns 23). In her essay, “Courtly Love: Who Needs It? Recent Feminist Work in the Medieval French Tradition,” E. Jane Burns points out that Courtly Love exists on a spectrum, and that it is not confined to one specific definition. In discussing feminist analyses of the trope published prior to 2001, she asserts that “[The analyses] show that even courtly accounts that reinforce rigidly gendered stereotypes of the lovestruck suitor and beguiling lady provide a range of alternatives to these pat formulations…an array of historical and fictive women who move through the courtly world while deploying varied forms of resistance to its misogynistic, hierarchical, and normative paradigms of gendered interaction” (25). Moreover, Burns observes that “there are a significant number of single women in courtly literary texts, female protagonists not defined primarily by their relation to a husband, male lover, or knight-savior” and that the same-sex relationships between medieval
women in courtly texts, “whether homosocial, homoaffective, homoerotic, or more mystical and metaphorical…offer other paths of resistance to heterosexual courtly coupling” (26). It is important to remember that the Courtly Lady cannot be defined by any single characterization, or even a single idea of sexuality. While, for the purposes of this discussion, we will consider the Courtly Lady as a character which adheres, loosely, to a specific set of characteristics, any definition of her or the trope should be considered a mere glimpse of a much larger animal.

Of course, no discussion of the power dynamics of Courtly Lovers could be considered complete without discussing Foucault’s analysis of sexual power structures in his *History of Sexuality*. In the first volume, Foucault claims that “Where there is desire, the power relation is already present” (81). Foucault discusses the commodification of desire and sexuality following the rise of Victorian prudishness. Following the relative sexual freedom of their forebears, “the Victorian bourgeoisie…carefully confined [sexuality]” by removing it from the public sphere and restricting it to the home (3). Restricting sexual behavior and all social interaction associated with physical intimacy to the most private of spheres creates a new and unique power dynamic. Because knowledge of sex “must be deflected back into the sexual practice itself…there is formed a knowledge that must remain secret, not because of an element of infamy that might attach to its object, but because of the need to hold it in the greatest reserve, since, according to tradition, it would lose its effectiveness and its virtue by being divulged” (57). Recall that for Courtly Love, a love made public is a love ruined. Foucault’s argument that restricting knowledge of the act and currency of love is crucial to retaining its perceived value is similar to the law of silence that permeates Courtly Love. While Courtly Love’s law of silence can be thought to be intended to preserve the intimacy of the lovers’ relationship, or at least protect
them from public scorn, it also serves the purpose of creating yet another form of power to be
manipulated by lovers.

In her article, “Psychoanalysis and Courtly Love,” Ellie Ragland discusses the
application of Lacanian psychoanalysis to Courtly Love. She summarizes Jacques Lacan’s
discussion of Courtly Love which asserts that, in general,

- love is courtly love, given, if you will, the mathematical
  impossibility of a symmetrical rapport of one plus one in the
  couple of man and woman. That is, opposites do not merge into a
  synthesis. Even the magic of love, then, cannot make One out of
  two who are structured in asymmetry. And courtly love was, in
  Lacan’s view of it, the greatest admission in the history of Western
  love practices of the non-rapport at the heart of sexual relations. (2)

It is this “non-rapport” which Lacan asserts creates culture, according to Ragland. The failure to
synthesize one whole being by combining two asymmetrical individuals creates a lacuna of
meaning, around which culture grows. Love, and by extension Courtly Love, cannot hold
intrinsic meaning but is rather defined by the culture which springs forth around it. Of course,
this assertion is predicated on the inequality of the two individuals who would ideally be forged
into a cohesive, single whole. Courtly Love can therefore be thought of as both creating and
being created by the society which surrounds it, a recursive cycle of destruction and creation.
This lends credence to the belief that one of the many functions of Courtly Love in the medieval
period was to mold the behavior of an unruly, even barbaric, court.

As previously stated, any attempt to provide a concrete, absolute definition of Courtly
Love would be an exercise in futility. However, a reading of any modern text in the context of
Courtly Love requires at least a loose definition of the term. For the purposes of this discussion,
Courtly Love can be defined as a romantic relationship in which the distribution of power
between lovers is deceptively unilateral, the expressions of love are devotional, and which can be
understood in the context of sado-masochism.
A Word on Methodology

To discuss Courtly Love in a modern context, it is important to compare stories which share similar qualities. The Courtly Love trope has its beginnings in early medieval literature, a time period rife with transcriptions of stories which had, for centuries, been transmitted through oral tradition. Troubadours traveled the European continents, gathering stories and performances, tailoring them to the audiences in each village, keeping the stories which were received well in their repertoires and discarding stories which did not. The stories which survived this process long enough to be recorded would, therefore, be extremely popular, and contain formal elements which appealed to a large number of audiences, a kind of popularity which can be thought of as on-par with modern best-sellers. It is possible that the medieval texts which we study today survived, not because they were great aesthetic works of art, but because they appealed to the largest number of consumers. In this same way, some modern popular works are not necessarily aesthetically artistic, yet they appeal to a diverse and, more importantly, large audience. When discussing the influence of the Courtly Love trope on modern literature, it makes sense to analyze modern examples which have been extremely popular because they seem to mimic the popularity and narrative needs of the tradition from which Courtly Love emerged.

To this end, I selected two works of fiction published within the last decade which have garnered a great deal of mainstream attention. According to a USA Today article, Stephenie Meyer’s Twilight saga “smashed records that until [2009] had belonged to J.K. Rowling,” author of the Harry Potter series, and the publication of the final book in the Twilight saga, Breaking Dawn “broke the first-day sales record for publisher Hachette at 1.3 million copies” (Memmott 2009 NP). The books and the films became aggressively commercially successful as both adolescent and adult readers took sides in the love triangle which is central to the novels,
declaring themselves for ‘Team Edward’ or ‘Team Jacob’ by purchasing t-shirts, stickers, jewelry, and other paraphernalia. Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl* enjoyed similar, if not as rabid, success. Within a year of the novel’s release, “Sales [had] reached 1.5 million copies in hardcover and e-book formats,” and the novel was adapted to the screen in 2014 (Memmott 2012 NP). Both of the novels which were selected for this analysis have been quite commercially successful. Although these works are all reasonably popular, it is possible that one who is interested in the application of the Courtly Love trope to modern culture may not be particularly familiar with the details or plots of either *Gone Girl* or the books of the Twilight saga. Please refer to Appendix A for a brief summary of the primary sources.

**Courtly Love in Modern Culture**

If the courtly Lady were allowed to evolve, allowed a cultural context and a place in history, she would surely be the Cool Girl described by Gillian Flynn’s character, Amy. After Amy’s plot is revealed, she explains her motivation for framing Nick for her abduction and murder. Nick wants for Amy to be a Cool Girl, meaning that

[he is] a hot, brilliant, funny woman who adores football, poker, dirty jokes, and burping, who plays video games, drinks cheap beer, loves threesomes and anal sex, and jams hot dogs and hamburgers into her mouth while she’s hosting the world’s biggest culinary gang bang while somehow maintaining a size 2, because Cool Girls are above all hot. Hot and understanding. Cool Girls never get angry; they only smile in a chagrined, loving manner and let their men do whatever they want…they’re pretending to be the woman a man wants them to be…[she] is basically the girl who likes every fucking thing he likes and doesn’t ever complain (222-223).

If the courtly Lady is merely a reflection of her lover’s desires, an inscrutable Other with whom an empathetic relationship is impossible, then Flynn’s Cool Girl is the natural progression of the courtly Lady in response to evolving cultural standards. The modern lover does not necessarily value chastity and secrecy as much as his medieval counterpart, and it makes sense that the
nature of a courtly relationship would change as drastically as its subjects do. But, like the Courtly Lady, the Cool Girl, the ideal love object, is meant to be a persona, not a person.

In reality, Amy is not a Cool Girl, but like any savvy twenty-first century woman she realizes that the Cool Girl is a mask which must be worn to attract the quality of lover she desires. Amy’s idealization of her relationship with Nick, or her idealization of relationships in general, is that men do not actually want the Cool Girl either, that after the Cool Girl mask has been removed, her lover will appreciate the complex individual that lies beneath. Amy tells us that “Committing to Nick, feeling safe with Nick, being happy with Nick, made me realize that there was a Real Amy in there, and she was so much better, more interesting and complicated and challenging, than Cool Amy,” and that it was Nick’s preference for Cool Amy which drove her to seek retribution (225). “Can you imagine,” she asks us, “finally showing your true self to your spouse, your soul mate, and having him not like you? So that’s how the hating first began” (225). Žižek tells us that “there is more truth in the mask we wear, in the game we play, in the ‘fiction’ we obey and follow, than in what is concealed beneath the mask,” and this holds especially true for both Nick and Amy (92). In the end, they both wind up donning the masks which seem to be the root cause of all of their problems. Amy returns to her Cool Girl persona, and Nick, for the sake of his unborn child, wears the façade of the dutiful and loving husband. The Cool Girl is just as troublesome for Amy as it seems the Courtly Lady should be for women in general.

Amy is a terrifying character in many ways. Not only does she seem to exhibit some of the traits of a true sociopath, she is a skilled liar and an accomplished actress. Even worse, she is a well-disguised predator. Nick explains that “the Amy of today…was only remotely like the woman [he] fell in love with. It had been an awful fairy-tale reverse transformation. Over just a
few years, the old Amy, the girl of the big laugh and the easy ways, literally shed herself, a pile of skin and soul on the floor, and out stepped this new, brittle, bitter Amy” (49). The Amy of old, Cool Amy, “damn, she was fun. She was funny. She made [Nick] laugh…And she laughed.

From the bottom of her throat…She released her grievances like handfuls of birdseed: They are there, and they are gone” (49). Amy had become an “angry woman,” the “thing [Nick] feared most” (49). Amy represents all of the most ancient patriarchal fears. She is a terrifying anglerfish, luring men into her reach by seeming to be a bright, shining ideal woman, only to lunge from the shadows to devour them whole simply because they wandered too close. Stories which feature courtly love motifs are rife with fears of cuckoldry and deception. Courtly ladies are not trusted by their lovers as a matter of course, and women like Amy only reinforce the need for such distrust.

How, then, can true romance still be possible? If the ideal woman may, or quite possibly invariably will become a lover’s worst nightmare, in what context is romantic love even possible? Characters like Amy unbalance the comfortable power dynamics of traditional romance. They call attention to the reality which Žižek’s argument establishes, that true power in a romantic relationship lies not with the Lady who seems to be ordering her lover around, but with the lover who submits willingly to the yoke of her demands. The Real Amys of the world remind readers that the lures we create to forge romantic relationships do not need to define us, nor should they. Amy takes a page from Ovid in meting out her retribution to Nick. She withholds true affection when he, perhaps unknowingly, refuses to uphold his end of the bargain. Amy creates power for herself by refusing to accept the paltry offerings of Nick’s love for Cool Amy. She ultimately attempts to forge a relationship with Nick in which they are both equals, both aware of the true dynamics of their relationship, in which they are both essentially stuck.
Such a relationship violates the lacuna discussed in Ragland’s article about Courtly Love because its meaning is forged less by the outcroppings of culture that surround it than by the lovers themselves. When Amy and Nick are emotionally equal partners in their relationship, the relationship itself takes on meaning, and that meaning is sheer misery. If the result of both lovers having equal amounts of power within the relationship is untenable misery, the equation of romance becomes bleak at best, soul-crushingly depressing at worst. The answer to this problem seems to be to return to the comfortable and socially acceptable power dynamics of the original Courtly Love trope. To do so, the lover must undergo a drastic change. He must become, in some ways, the monster over which the Real Amys cannot triumph.

In the Twilight saga, Bella is imbued with Otherness in many ways. Firstly, she is human, a state of which Edward has only century-old memories. In the natural order of vampires and humans, Edward is the hunter and Bella is the hunted, and in the stark light of day, the obvious relationship between Edward and Bella is similar to the relationship found between an apex predator and livestock. Secondly, Bella is immune to Edward’s mind-reading abilities. She is literally his only blind spot, the only unknown quantity in Edward’s world. This unpredictable Otherness is rendered acceptable because Edward exerts supernatural power over Bella. When she confronts Edward with her belief that he is a vampire, in the first novel, Edward demonstrates that he is “the world’s best predator” by “[circling] the meadow in half a second. ‘As if [Bella] could outrun [him],’” and by “effortlessly [ripping] a two-foot-thick branch from the trunk of the spruce…As if [Bella] could fight [him] off” (2005; 263-264). In the Twilight universe, there is no one Edward understands less completely, or less immediately than Bella.

Moreover, throughout the saga, Bella makes demands which seem unreasonable to Edward. When she is being pursued by James in the first novel, she insists on returning to her
home in Forks before being whisked away by Alice and Jasper to Phoenix, a request which seems insane to Edward, who believes that delaying her escape even a second will put her at risk. In reality, Bella’s demands are reasonable, she wishes to lure James away from her father, who could quite easily pay with his life for Bella’s relationship to the Cullens, but Edward, in a devotional fit of love, does not initially think this a reasonable request. Bella also insists on being turned into a vampire, a request which comes as early in the series as the end of the first book, and which is repeated often throughout the four novels. This request is problematic for Edward because he believes that he is a monster, and that turning Bella into a vampire will condemn her soul to Hell.

Edward’s need to protect Bella both physically, from the vampires who seem to threaten to kill her at the drop of a hat throughout the series, and spiritually, from his own inherent monstrousness, can be read as a sublimation of his own libidinal desires as well as his imperative to avoid “Being a monster” himself (2005; 498). Žižek summarizes Lacan’s discussion of sublimation as “shifting the libido from the void of the ‘unserviceable’ Thing to some concrete, material object of need that assumes a sublime quality the moment it occupies the place of the Thing” (96). While Bella’s humanity is more of an existential state of being than a ”concrete, material object,” it does seem to be a sublime object for Edward. According to the encyclopedia Key Ideas in Human Thought, “the Sublime is a conglomerate name for anything for which human beings feel wonder…which [transcends] understanding” and places humanity “in danger of being overwhelmed by its limitless power” (“The Sublime” 719-720). Sublime objects are both immeasurably beautiful and infinitely dangerous. Bella’s humanity is beautiful to Edward because he does not even want to consider taking it from her, but it is also dangerous to him, not only because her humanity makes her prey for him, but also because he is drawn to it like a moth
to a flame. In the second novel, when she saves Edward from committing the vampire
equivalent of suicide-by-cop in Italy, Aro, one of the Volturi, calls Bella “la tua cantante,” an
Italian phrase which roughly translates as ‘your singer’ (2006; 471). Aro is referring to the fact
that Bella’s blood sings out to Edward in a very specific way, she “[is] exactly [Edward’s] brand
of heroin,” as Edward explains in the first novel shortly after he is revealed to be a vampire
(2005; 268). Bella’s humanity, symbolized by the blood in her veins, is an exquisitely beautiful
object to Edward, an object to which he is utterly devoted, an object which poses a very real
threat to him physically and emotionally, the sadist to which he willingly submits.

Another way in which the romance between Bella and Edward fits the courtly paradigm
is that Edward is initially only able to love Bella obliquely. Žižek tells us that “the Object [of
Courtly Love] can be perceived only when it is viewed from the side, in a partial, distorted form,
as its own shadow…[it] is literally something created – whose place is encircled – through a
network of detours” (95). Like Nick, Edward loves Bella, not for the Real Bella, but for Cool
Bella. The Cool Bella is exactly what Edward wants: a beautiful, socially awkward, soul-imbued
human who is intrinsically ‘good,’ whom he alone can adequately protect (because, although he
briefly admits that Bella could live a safe and happy life with Jacob Black, he in no way believes
that Jacob can protect Bella as well as he and the Cullen clan can), and whose value seems to
require almost constant reassurance. The Real Bella does not even exist until the second half of
the last novel when she becomes a vampire. As a human, Bella is “so clumsy that [she’s] almost
disabled,” and she is plagued by near-death experiences (2005; 210). Her life as a human is not
exactly miserable, but it is clear that she was not living very successfully as a human, even
before she met the Cullens. The Real Bella emerges when she is transformed into a vampire.
In the third novel, *Eclipse*, the Cullen clan faces an army of newborn vampires, and a great deal of attention is paid to the inhumanity of a newborn vampire’s first few years. In explaining the dangers of a newborn army to Bella, as well as his own backstory, Jasper says that “Very young vampires are volatile, wild, and almost impossible to control…They’re incredibly powerful physiologically…But they are slaves to their instincts” (2007; 290). This information is of particular interest to Bella, who realizes that she will soon become an almost mindless beast, wanting nothing more than to mindlessly slaughter as much humanity as she can get her hands on. But after she is turned, she does not become a bloodthirsty monster. When Edward takes Bella on her first hunt as a vampire, she is distracted from the pursuit of a hart in the woods by the scent of a few human hikers in the area, and although she has never fed before, although she should be ruled entirely by her primal instinct to drink human blood, she maintains control. When she first wakes to her new life, Bella does not even notice her thirst until Carlisle points it out to her, noting that “Until he’d mentioned it, the thirst actually wasn’t unmanageable,” and she exhibits extraordinary control over her emotions (2008; 397). Bella seems to have been designed for life as a vampire. Being a vampire is natural to her, and her human life seems like the stumbling first steps of a fawn in comparison. Cool Bella becomes Real Bella when she is turned into a vampire, and although Edward loves Real Bella, it will always be Cool Bella who caught his attention.

As a Courtly Lady, Bella cannot be expected to fall for any regular guy. In fact, the many regular guys with whom she attends Forks High School fail to capture her attention. It is only Edward, with his stunning good looks and air of mystery, who sparks her interest. This is possible, of course, because Edward is a supernatural being. Vampiric characters inherit a specific identity from their forebears: centuries of mythological blood-sucking creatures from
nearly every record-creating culture in the world, and iconic literary and film characters such as Bram Stoker’s Dracula, Murnau’s Nosferatu, and Anne Rice’s Lestat. They are demons who feed on the lifeblood of humans, whom they regard as cattle, and although they were often once human beings themselves, have long ago shed any vestiges of compassion or moral rectitude. A classical vampire would only consider interacting with a human as a food source, as entertainment, or as a daytime servant. Meyer’s representation of vampires in the Twilight saga is drastically different. Vampires are still quite dangerous to humans, and there are vampires who choose to only interact with humans in the classical sense, but there are also vampires who value human life and live in harmony with it. Meyer’s vampires do not smolder in the sunlight, a quality long regarded as evidence of their damned state, they shine like diamonds. The Cullens choose to live in the least ‘monstrous’ way possible, feeding only on animals rather than humans. Because the Cullens maintain a permanent residence in Forks, they live in harmony with humans, as a part of the community. Carlisle works as a doctor at the local hospital, and the Cullen ‘children’ attend Forks High School. The vampires who prevail throughout the series are domesticated, rendered socially acceptable and morally virtuous, and therefore fit to be subjects of Courtly Love. Edward is an especially fit subject because he is valorous, choosing a life of subsistence, a diet which “doesn’t completely satiate the hunger – or rather thirst” for the sake of moral virtue (2005; 188). He is fiercely loyal to those he loves: his vampiric family and especially Bella. But above all, he is powerful, powerful enough that he is not truly at risk of being truly duped by a Cool Girl. Valorous Edward may fall for a Cool Girl to begin with, but, in keeping with the Courtly Love trope, his Lady is equally morally upright.
Conclusion

Within the last few decades, popular culture has increasingly embraced the supernatural as a part of our fictional world. Stories in which creatures escape our nightmares to walk the streets with us, rub shoulders with us on the subway, or stand in line with us at the grocery store seem to be more commonplace than ever before. There are likely many reasons for this increased interest in what was previously regarded as the seedy underbelly of human imagination, and one of these reasons is the unsettling of old, comfortable modes of thought about gender and romance. Courtly Love, as one of the oldest and most utilized tropes, can be thought of as one of these comfortable modes of thought precisely because it is reproduced in culture so continuously. Portrayals of romance in modern literature and movies are framed in the very matter of Courtly Love, in the privacy of a love not meant for public consumption, in the elaborate sighs of lovers who cannot bear the thought of a life bereft of their beloved. This mode of thought seems comforting because Western culture constantly returns to it, devours it, and integrates the trope into its very fabric. While Courtly Love seems inherently medieval, it is in fact very applicable to any number of modern cultural applications, and these applications further complicate the trope.

This examination merely scrapes the surface of the influence of Courtly Love on modern culture. Further study is required to fully understand the trope’s reach and the ways in which modern culture re-forges it. Attention should be paid to the influence of first person narration from the perspective of the beloved object, the popularity of Courtly Love and supernatural romance in Young Adult literature, and the implications of non-heterosexual relationships on the Courtly Love dynamic, to name only a few avenues of research which have bearing on the subject.
Modern romance is a terrifying gamble, much like life in general. It is, and always has been, a battlefield, but advances in weapons technology seem to have leveled the playing field, or at least give the illusion of having done so. Characters like Amy remind us that romance is a deadly dance, and such reminders run the risk of convincing us that love is too dangerous a game to play. Supernatural lovers allow romance to return to its original, comfortable power dynamic, to once again be Courtly. Lovers can once again believe that true love can ennoble anyone, can right the most insidious wrongs.
Appendix A – A Brief and Selective Summary of the Source Texts

Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl* is divided into two sections. The first half of the book is narrated by Nick Dunne, husband of Amy, and interspersed with selections from Amy’s diary. The second half alternates perspectives between Nick and Amy. On the morning of their five-year anniversary, Amy Dunne has gone missing. The Dunne home appears to have witnessed some sort of violence, and Amy is nowhere to be found. As the police investigate Amy’s disappearance, we learn that Nick has been cheating on Amy, that their marriage has been falling apart for quite a while, and through Amy’s diary entries, that she had become afraid of Nick in the months leading up to her disappearance. He becomes an even more likely suspect when the police learn that he has a mountain of credit card debt, which he claims to know nothing about, a large life insurance policy on Amy, and a deadly-sized pool of blood on his kitchen floor which had been cleaned up. Moreover, the scene in the living room, taken to be the place that Amy would have been abducted from, seems to have been staged.

Nick’s behavior during the search for Amy is highly suspect: he does not really love his wife any more, and his diminished affection makes it difficult for him to genuinely appear concerned about Amy’s whereabouts. As an anniversary tradition, Amy has created a treasure hunt for Nick, including heart-felt notes about her love for him which almost seem to woo him all over again, even as the evidence against him in his wife’s disappearance continues to accrue. Nick follows Amy’s treasure hunt as discreetly as he can while trying to keep his affair from becoming pubic knowledge. Eventually, the treasure hunt leads him to his own sister’s back yard shed, full of the things which were purchased to create the credit card debt attributed to Nick’s penchant for living beyond his means.
In the second half of the book, we learn that Amy is very much alive. In fact, she is hiding out in a cabin in the Ozarks, thoroughly enjoying the national coverage of her disappearance which continues to demonize Nick. In reality, Amy has been playing a long con. She has been systematically setting Nick up to be the aggressor and herself to be the victim for years, since they moved from New York to Missouri to care for Nick’s dying mother. She made fake friends with a neighborhood woman, faked a pregnancy, and created a treasure hunt for Nick which wound up being an elaborate trap, all without Nick noticing a thing. She planned to set Nick up to take the fall for her murder, hide away in the Ozarks, and then kill herself, sealing Nick’s fate, but when she gets robbed by other travelers and Nick begins begging for her return on national television, her plans change. Instead of drowning herself in the Gulf of Mexico, she lures her high school boyfriend, Desi, who seems to have been obsessed with her for quite a while, into taking her in, claiming that she escaped from an abusive Nick and is fleeing for her life. She kills Desi, framing him for her abduction and stages her own rape. She stumbles back to Nick and the police, answering all of the questions raised by the investigation and handing them Desi as her abuser. A few weeks pass, the media attention to her abduction dies down, and Nick wants to leave Amy, who he realizes has murdered Desi and crafted an elaborate plot to frame him for murder. She coaxes him into staying by telling him that if he leaves she will tell the police that he tried to poison her with antifreeze, a measure for which she has planned carefully, ingesting antifreeze willingly and collecting her own antifreeze-laced vomit as evidence. However, Amy wants more from her fake marriage, she wants the happy, idyllic storybook marriage that she feels she deserves. So, she has in vitro fertilization using Nick’s preserved sperm to become pregnant with his child. Nick cannot allow his child to play the victim to an abusive psychopath like Amy, and so he agrees to play along with Amy’s fantasy.
In the first novel of the Twilight saga, *Twilight*, Bella Swan, seventeen, exiles herself to the damp and doleful town of Forks, Washington and the care of her father because she wants to give her mother the freedom to travel with her new husband, a minor-league baseball player. Bella is socially and physically awkward, prone to accidents which become increasingly life-threatening as she continues her association with the Cullen family. She is popular in Forks, and the local teenagers, excited by the novelty of a new student, pay her a great deal of attention at first, a spotlight with which Bella is quite uncomfortable. For the most part, she does not welcome the scrutiny of the townsfolk, except for the attention of the Cullens. They are beautiful creatures, aloof and introverted in a way that draws Bella’s attention. When Bella attends her first biology class, she finds that she is forced into close proximity with Edward, who seems to violently dislike her. His behavior only piques her interest more, as does his absence from school in the days that follow and the fact that she catches him in the registrar’s office trying to switch out of his biology class. When Edward finally returns to school after his absence, he is friendly to Bella, even conversational. That afternoon, a classmate’s truck loses control in the student parking lot, hitting black ice and nearly crushing Bella to death as a result. She is saved by Edward who, with seemingly superhuman speed and strength, crosses the parking lot and physically stops the truck.

When she goes on a trip to a beach at La Push, a local Indian reservation, Bella reconnects with Jacob Black, a mechanically-inclined teenager who she used to play with as a child on her annual visits to Forks. He tells her a Quileute legend which explains that the tribe descended from werewolves and that their mortal enemies are ‘the cold ones,’ hinting that the Cullen family is the same Cullen family who, in centuries past, made a pact with the Quileute tribe. The Cullens, Jacob tells Bella, did not seem like other ‘cold ones’ because they claimed to
hunt only animals, and so the Quileute tribal leaders allowed them to remain in nearby Forks unmolested as long as they agreed to never hunt humans. Bella feels as if Jacob’s legend is the key to understanding the mystery of Edward Cullen, whom she has decided that she loves too deeply to be concerned with the trifling matter of his being a vampire.

Later, Bella is asked to a school dance, anathema to the uncoordinated, by several of the boys who have developed crushes on her at Forks High School, and she turns them all down, insisting that she will be out of town on the day of the dance. She does, however, go with some of her girlfriends to Port Angeles under the pretense of shopping for dresses. In reality, she has tracked down a bookstore which seems to have information on Quileute legends, and she tries to find the bookstore on her own. However, Port Angeles is a confusing place, and she is soon lost, about to fall victim to some local thugs, but she is once again mysteriously saved by Edward, who shows up out of nowhere and drives her away from her would-be attackers. They have dinner and Edward tells Bella the truth: he is a vampire, but he and his family drink only the blood of animals, and he has the ability to read minds. Although he repeatedly warns her that she should stay away from him, Bella decides that his thirst for her blood does not dampen her affections for him.

They grow closer, Edward spending his nights in Bella’s bedroom, watching her, and watching over her, as she sleeps. Bella formally meets his family: Carlisle and Esme, who are the ‘parents’ of the family, and Edward’s ‘siblings’ Alice, Jasper, Rosalie, and Emmett, all of whom are concerned because Edward’s relationship with Bella has become public knowledge, and if Bella were to suddenly go missing, victim to their thirst, they would all be implicated. Bella and Edward are not deterred, and the family gathers to play baseball, a spectacle of physical power that is only possible for the Cullens when a thunderstorm is brewing. As the family plays, three
other vampires who are passing through the Forks area hear their game and come to join. Although the Cullens try to disguise Bella’s humanity, the visitors notice that they seem to have brought a snack to their game. The Cullens protect Bella, but their response earns the interest of James, a vampire who has is particularly skilled at tracking prey. Edward hears James’s thoughts, which indicate that he has already fully committed to hunting Bella. Bella is taken to Phoenix, her hometown, by Alice and Jasper to get her away from James, but James manages to follow them, and he lures Bella away from her protection by indicating that he has captured her mother, who is actually not in town at all. James toys with Bella, recording his treatment of her to taunt Edward with later, and bites her as Edward shows up to fight him. The rest of the family shows up to help bring James down, and in the battle, Bella is badly wounded. Carlisle, a physician, triages her wounds, but because she has been bitten, she is being turned into a vampire. It is up to Edward to suck the vampire venom from Bella’s blood, and he does, nearly killing her in the process. Bella wakes in a hospital with a broken leg and a new scar, bite-shaped and cold to the touch. She refuses to return to Phoenix, or to go to Florida to live with her mother, to be separated from Edward. They return to Forks, and Edward takes Bella to her prom, where she asks him to turn her into a vampire, a relatively simple process in which Edward must simply bite her without draining her of blood. He, of course, refuses.

In the second book of the series, *New Moon*, Bella turns 18, making her older than Edward was when he was turned into a vampire. Bella worries that she will become an old woman before Edward will agree to turn her, and Edward argues that he will not compromise Bella’s soul just to keep her with him forever. The Cullens host a birthday party for Bella, which nearly becomes a tragic event because Bella gets a paper cut, and Jasper, the family’s newest “vegetarian” almost loses control of himself because of the scent of her blood. As he tries to
defend her, Edward winds up injuring Bella even more. He takes Bella for a walk in the woods and tells her that the Cullens will be leaving Forks because people are beginning to suspect that Carlisle is not as human as he seems, and that they are leaving without her. He tells Bella that he has wants a safe, human life for her, but that he has tired of their relationship. He asks her to promise that she will not do herself any harm after he has left. The Cullens leave, and Bella sinks into a deep depression, often responding viscerally to the feeling of a gaping hole in her chest where her heart once was. She ignores the small group of friends she had assembled in Forks, and disappears from life in general. Her father, Charlie, becomes deeply concerned, and tells her that if she does not begin spending time with her friends, he will send her to live with her mother. She cannot face the idea of leaving the one place which Edward would know to look for her in, so she begins to make small, placating efforts to socialize.

She goes to see a movie with her friend in Port Angeles, and discovers that if she does dangerous, reckless things, she will hear Edward’s voice, or perhaps even see his face, in her head. She begins to take small risks in her everyday life, begins a project with Jacob Black to restore two dirt bikes, and she begins to heal. Bella and Jacob grow closer, and although it is clear that Bella still very much loves Edward, Jacob also clearly has feelings for Bella, feelings that are not exactly unwelcome. One day, when Bella visits a meadow deep in the woods that was special to Edward, she is discovered by Laurent, one of the group of other, carnivorous vampires from the first novel. He decides to kill her, something that he says would be better for Bella than letting Victoria, James’s mate, find her since Victoria wishes to kill Bella as an act of revenge for James’s death. Victoria, Laurent believes, would make the experience infinitely more painful for Bella, and he promises her a swift, relatively painless death. Just as Laurent is
about to attack her, he is set upon by a pack of preternaturally-large wolves, chased from the clearing, and torn to pieces in the woods.

Jacob seems to fall ill, and for a long time he does not see or speak to Bella. She believes that the group of boys, whom Jacob had previously complained about, on the Quileute reservation have convinced him to join their gang, and so she goes to confront him. She learns that this is partly true: Jacob *has* joined a gang of Quileute boys, but it is not because he was coerced to do so, it is because he has become a werewolf. The gang is trying to protect the area from a predatory vampire, Victoria, and they realize that she is in the area because of Bella. They set up a plan to catch and destroy Victoria, but implementing this plan means that she cannot spend as much time with Jacob, and it has been his company that has been keeping the worst of Bella’s pain at bay. She begins making reckless choices again, and when she goes cliff diving, she nearly drowns.

Edward’s sister, Alice, can see the future. Like Edward’s talent for hearing the thoughts of others, Alice can see the future based on the decisions which individuals make. Also like Edward, her gift is limited: she cannot see past the causal interference of the Quileute werewolves. She sees Bella jump from the cliff, but she does not see Jacob rescue Bella. Alice tells her family, except for Edward, about the accident and returns to Forks to console Charlie, but instead finds a damp, but living, Bella. However, word of Bella’s apparent demise has already made its way to Edward, who never stopped loving Bella. Devastated by the news, he travels to Italy to provoke the Volturi, a governing body of ancient vampires who enforce the most basic rule of living as a vampire: that the mortal world may never truly know of their existence. Edward plans to earn their wrath and a death sentence for himself. Alice sees his
decision and the future it will create, and she and Bella travel to Italy to stop Edward from making a mistake.

At the last moment, Bella finds Edward, about to expose himself to the human population. Bella is brought before the Volturi, who cannot allow her, a mortal, to live with her knowledge of the vampire world. Bella insists that she will become a vampire, and Alice tells the Volturi that her vision of Bella’s future includes her becoming vampire. They return to Forks and Bella and Edward reaffirm their love for each other, and Jacob reminds Edward that the treaty that the Quileutes have formed with the Cullens prohibits them from turning any humans. Turning Bella will violate the treaty, and an all-out war will be declared. Edward, having resigned himself to the eventuality of Bella becoming a vampire, offers her a compromise. He will turn her himself if she will marry him.

The third book in the series, *Eclipse*, the conflict between Bella and Jacob becomes even more problematic. Jacob writes Bella a letter indicating that they cannot be friends as long as she continues to throw her lot in with the vampires, and her father Charlie, remembering the deep depression which followed Edward’s disappearance in the second novel, encourages Bella to diversify her social life. He encourages her to hang out with Jacob, or if not him, at least other friends. To make matters worse, there have been a series of killings in Seattle that attract the attention of the Cullen family. They believe that the killings are the work of several newborn vampires, who do not have the self-control to disguise their feeding. Bella’s friendship with Jacob becomes a sore point for Edward, and he prevents her from visiting Jacob on the reservation under the pretense that he cannot protect her from Victoria or the looming threat in Seattle when she is on the reservation.
Edward eventually convinces Bella that they should both visit her mother in Florida. When they return, Jacob tells Bella that Victoria had returned to the area, and that the pursuit of her had caused a conflict between the Quileute werewolves and the Cullen family because in the chase, one of the Cullens had trespassed on Quileute land. When Edward goes to hunt, he leaves Alice in charge of Bella’s protection, but Bella manages to slip away and visit Jacob. She returns to an outraged Edward, and demands that they both consider her neutral territory, and that she be allowed to spend time with both of them. She also takes the decision about her impending transition to the Cullen family directly: she asks them to vote on whether or not she should be turned after she graduates from high school. Edward and Rosalie are the only ones who vote against it. Rosalie tells Bella her tragic backstory: once a beautiful, popular young woman, Rosalie had dreamed of having a family, a dream which was shattered not only when she was beaten to death by her drunk fiancé, but also by being turned into a vampire. She was turned against her will, and wishes that someone had been able to vote ‘no’ for her.

Edward decides to not interfere with Bella visiting Jacob. However, when she visits with Jacob, he tells her that he would be better, romantically, for her than Edward is and that he would rather see her dead than turned into a vampire. When she returns to her home, Bella discovers that some of her clothing has gone missing, and Edward determines that an unknown vampire has been in her home. The killing in Seattle has worsened, and the Cullens believe that someone is building an army of newborn vampires for an unknown purpose. The Cullens and the Quileute werewolves begin collaborating when they all start working on hunting the unknown vampire who stole Bella’s things.

When it is his turn to guard Bella, Jacob declares his love for her and kisses her against her will. She punches Jacob, but because he is a werewolf only succeeds in breaking her hand.
Edward confronts Jacob when he returns her to her home, and they officially begin competing for her affections. Bella finally realizes that there is a connection between her missing property, the danger in Seattle, and the constant threat of Victoria’s vengeance: Victoria is creating an army of newborn vampires for the sole purpose of killing her. The Cullens and the Quileute werewolves team up to combat the newborn army, and they all meet to train in the particular fighting style needed for such combat. Since newborns are still replete with their own human blood, and so new to the vampire way of life, they are exceptionally strong and ruled by their bloodlust. Bella, who cannot abide the idea of losing either Edward or Jacob, makes them promise to stay with her, out of the battle.

Two nights before the battle, Bella stays at the Cullen house with Edward, and confesses to him that, although she is ready to become a vampire, she wishes to have one final human experience: she wants to make love with him. He eventually agrees, but only after they marry, something she had been resisting because she felt that she was too young to get married. She agrees, and they are officially engaged. The night before the battle, Edward, Bella, and Jacob camp for the night on a mountain overlooking the battle field, where Bella will be kept safe from the ravenous newborns. Neither Edward nor Bella have adequately prepared for the temperatures at the high altitude that they camp at, and Bella winds up using Jacob like a space heater. As she sleeps, Edward and Jacob discuss their mutual love for her. Edward acknowledges that Jacob is the safer romantic choice for Bella, and tells Jacob that, if Bella chose Jacob over him, he would not stand in the way. In the morning, Jacob learns that Bella and Edward are engaged and immediately plans to plunge recklessly into battle, hoping that he will be killed. In an effort to keep him from committing suicide, Bella kisses Jacob, and admits that she is, at least in some part, in love with him.
The Cullen-Quileute battle with the newborn army is relatively quick, with no deaths for the Cullens or the Quileutes, although Jacob is nearly crushed to death. He is taken home by his pack members, and Carlisle tends to his wounds. On the mountain, Victoria and her new lover find Edward and Bella, and they fight. They defeat Victoria after Bella tries to distract her by cutting herself and bleeding. Everyone returns to Forks, and Jacob tells Bella that he will let her go, but that he will never give up on her loving him. Bella ultimately decides that she has made the right choice, even about getting married at so young an age. When he receives Bella’s wedding invitation, Jacob runs away to live as a wolf for a while.

The fourth novel, *Breaking Dawn*, is broken up into three books told from different perspectives. The first book is told from the perspective of the other books, from Bella’s point of view. Jacob is still missing, and Bella is settling into engaged life. Her parents seem to have both accepted the fact that she will soon be married to Edward, and that she will attend Dartmouth after the wedding, a story manufactured to create distance between her and her parents during her transition into being a vampire. Bella and Edward are soon married, and Jacob makes an appearance at the wedding. When Jacob learns that Bella plans to sleep with Edward while she is a human, he is disgusted and enraged. The newlyweds head off on their honeymoon, to Isle Esme, an uninhabited, but well-developed, island that the family owns. They consummate the marriage, an act that leaves Bella bruised, but happy. Edward is disturbed by the result of their lovemaking, but she eventually convinces him to try again. After a few days, it becomes apparent that Bella is pregnant with Edward’s child. They immediately return to Forks where Edward hopes Carlisle can remove the child, and Bella asks Rosalie for help in protecting her child.

The second book is told from the point of view of Jacob Black. When he hears that Bella has returned to Forks, he assumes that she has become a vampire, and immediately visits her to
find out if it is true. He finds her human, but very pregnant, a state which he considers perhaps even more repugnant than her being turned into a vampire. Pregnancy has not been kind to Bella, the child, which seems to be a complete mystery to the entire Cullen family, rejects nearly all of the food that Bella can consume, and is incredibly strong. Bella has become gaunt, and the motions of the child have broken bones and bruised her body badly. Edward is equally pained by her state, he even becomes desperate enough to offer to allow Jacob to give Bella a child, one which will likely not kill her in utero. He tells Jacob that if Bella dies because of the pregnancy, that he will happily allow the wolf to kill him. Bella plans on staying alive long enough to give birth to the child, hoping that Edward is able to turn her at the last moment. The Quileute pack gets wind of Bella’s situation and plans to kill the child, which they consider to be an unknown threat, even if they have to kill Bella to do so. Jacob is incensed at the pack’s decision, and he breaks from them. Because Jacob is the descendant of a Quileute chieftain, he has the power to lead a pack on his own. Jacob, and two other Quileutes who do not wish to remain with the original pack, settle in to protect the Cullen family.

Bella’s condition gets worse until Jacob suggests that perhaps the baby is craving blood. Bella tries drinking some of the blood that Carlisle had laid aside for her transition, and it seems to work: she is able to keep the blood down, and she begins to feel better. Edward discovers that he can hear the baby’s thoughts, and he forms an emotional bond with it, finally agreeing with Bella’s actions. However, the child grows quickly and Bella’s bones are breaking more and more, eventually breaks her spine. She is forced to have an emergency cesarean section at the Cullen house, and Jacob’s portion of the book ends with Edward frantically trying to inject his vampire venom into Bella’s increasingly lifeless body.
The third portion of the novel is told from Bella’s perspective. Of course, Edward’s last-minute Hail Mary play worked, and Bella has been transformed into a vampire. She finds that she is more beautiful, physically perfect, and that she has heightened senses, but no immediately identifiable gift. She is thirsty, but the blood thirst that she has been warned about does not seem as all-consuming as she was led to believe it would be. Edward takes her hunting, and although she nearly kills a hiker who wandered into the wrong part of the forest, she turns away from the human and hunts a mountain lion, a demonstration of self-control which seems nearly miraculous to the Cullen family. Because she exhibits such remarkable self-control, she is allowed to see her child, Renesmee. As a test to see if she can truly control her thirst, the Cullens have her meet with Jacob, and his overbearing protection of Renesmee worries Bella. Jacob, it seems, has imprinted on Renesmee. When Jacob saw Renesmee after her birth, his world completely rearranged itself. Bella is enraged by Jacob’s appropriation of her daughter, and nearly attacks him, but is held back by some of Jacob’s pack members, injuring one of them in the process. She is sobered by the knowledge that she hurt one of her friends because of her anger, and manages to reign in her temper.

Charlie has been regularly contacting the Cullens, having been told that Bella had contracted some sort of unusual disease on her honeymoon, and now that she can speak to Charlie on the phone, he is determined to see her. In an effort to facilitate the meeting, Jacob reveals his secret to Charlie. He does not tell Charlie about the vampire family, but he explains to Charlie that the world is full of things that cannot be fully explained to him, things like how the Quileute boy whom Charlie has known for at least seventeen years turns into a large wolf sometimes. Bella, he warns Charlie, will look and feel different, and that difference is something that they cannot explain to Charlie, but she will still be Bella. So, Charlie meets with the newly-
Healey 45
turned Bella, and his new grandchild Renesmee, and survives the encounter. The Cullens give
Edward and Bella a cottage near their home as a wedding gift, and life for the newlywed Cullens
seems as though it will quite likely be perfect, despite the looming question of what will become
of the quickly-growing and uniquely talented Renesmee.

Renesmee grows quickly, and in only a few weeks is large enough to walk and hunt. She
is spotted by another vampire, a friend of the Cullen family, who immediately assumes that she
is an immortal child and travels to Italy to tell the Volturi of the Cullens’ transgression. Immortal
children have been anathema to the vampire world since the middle ages. They were children
turned into vampires during their formative years, incredibly beautiful, but perpetually stuck in
early developmental stages, unable to learn the self-control that is essential to maintaining the
secrecy of the vampire world. Immortal children could, in a tantrum, destroy entire towns and
draw unwanted attention to the vampire community. Alice sees the Volturi coming to Forks to
destroy Renesmee and the entire Cullen clan, and the family immediately begins preparing. They
gather witnesses who will attest that Renesmee is not an immortal child, that she is immortal not
because she was bitten, but because she was born of a vampire and a human, and that she grows
and develops in a similar way to human children.

Vampires from around the world converge on Forks, driving the Quileute werewolf
population even higher. Many of them agree to stand as a witness for the Cullens, but do not
wish to fight the Volturi, who are also amassing a vampire army to mete out justice in Forks. The
Volturi and their army arrive in Forks, and although they believe the witnesses that Renesmee is
not an immortal child, they do not wish to allow her to live because they do not know that she
will not still pose a threat to the secrecy of vampires. Alice and Jasper, who had disappeared
while the family gathered its witnesses, return when the Volturi confront the Cullens along with
a witness of Renesmee’s future: a child of a vampire and a human, like Renesmee, who answers many of the family’s questions about what will happen to Renesmee. However, the Volturi are resolved to destroy the Cullen family because they desire Edward’s power to read minds and Alice’s knowledge of the future. The Cullens and their witnesses make a show of strength, and the Volturi decide that they would rather collect Edward and Alice’s power later, through more subtle means. The series closes with Edward, Bella, Renesmee, and Jacob, and the rest of the Cullen family, poised to live impossibly long, impossibly happy lives.
Works Cited


