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Sacrificial Bodies and Hegemonic Femininity: The Creation of the Heroine in the *Twilight*, *The Hunger Games*, & *Divergent* Series

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**Sacrificial Bodies and Hegemonic Femininity: The Creation of the
Heroine in the *Twilight*, *The Hunger Games*, & *Divergent* Series**

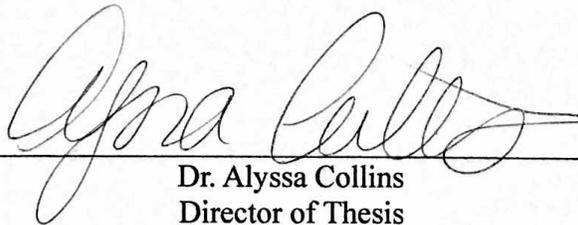
By

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Thesis Summary

Within this thesis, I analyze *The Twilight Saga*, *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, and *The Divergent Trilogy* and how the portrayal and treatment of the protagonists' bodies within these texts uphold tenets of white, hegemonic femininity. I discuss first how their bodies are feminized, in part by their whiteness and smallness, but also through the comparison to the bodies of male characters. While the men are strong and physically capable, the protagonists are weak and physically incapable. As a result, the protagonists cannot act in the way a traditional hero might, using offensive action for self-preservation. Instead, the protagonists must establish their heroism through acts of sacrifice, seeking to preserve others rather than the self. However, these acts of sacrifice are frequently interrupted by the male character, who insists on rescuing the protagonist from herself. This disrupts the protagonist's narrative authority, forcing her into a cycle of mutilation and redemptive beautification. Though the protagonist is allowed to perform heroic acts of sacrifice, she must always return to a state of feminine beauty. Thus, her value resides not in her actions but her body. Given the immense popularity all three of these series amassed, this presentation of the heroine is troubling. The illusion of power these narratives create is dangerous. Though the label of heroine alleges empowerment, the actual roles these protagonists play within their narratives sustain the tenets of hegemonic femininity and the gender binary itself.

Introduction

In her 1982 book *Becoming a Heroine: Reading About Women in Novels*, Rachel M. Brownstein suggests that the heroine of the Western novel is “unlike all other women, being important and unique, but...also quintessentially feminine, therefore rightly representative of her sex” (xxi). Despite this description having been written nearly forty years prior to this thesis, and sixteen years prior to the publication of *Twilight*, the earliest novel in discussion, Brownstein’s presentation of the Western heroine remains remarkably relevant. Though Brownstein focuses primarily on the work of English authors such as Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, and Charlotte Brontë, her claims are easily applied outside of this realm of literature. In fact, many of Brownstein’s ideas about the Western heroine fall directly in line with a number of American, young adult novels published between 2005 and 2015. For this thesis, I will be looking at three series within this time frame, *The Twilight Saga*, *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, and *The Divergent Trilogy*, and how their protagonists are reflective of deeply rooted expectations placed on the novel heroine which continue to manifest in contemporary literature, especially within the young adult genre. I will also observe how these expectations of the heroine are complicated by the idea of empowering the protagonist while maintaining the tenets of hegemonic femininity, a dynamic that simultaneously attempts to position the protagonist as powerful and weak.

I have chosen these series in particular for a number of reasons, though primarily because of their consecutive publication between the years of 2005 and 2013 and the popularity they garnered within this time frame. From the time of their publication to their release as feature films, these series amassed an incredible following, with book and box office sales projected to be in the millions (Roback, “Facts and Figures 2009: Meyer's Reign Continues”; Roback, “Facts & Figures 2012: ‘Hunger Games’ Still Rules in Children's”; “The HarperCollins 200:

Divergent”). Consequently, these series were rapidly launched into a highly visible arena. However, this is not merely coincidence. These series and their protagonists all share characteristics that granted them access to this kind of visibility and, in turn, immense marketability. First and foremost, the body of these protagonists are all reflections of one another. They are presented as white, thin, and small. They fall into a category of the “default body,” a phrase I have adopted from Sonya Renee Taylor’s book, *The Body Is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love* (2018). According to Taylor, “default bodies” are those bodies that are granted high visibility because of select characteristics that society deems normative or favorable. For this thesis, visibility refers to one’s ability to be seen and recognized as important or valuable by their society. As thin, white, cis women the protagonists of these series indisputably occupy positions of visibility within our society. Accordingly, these protagonists and the stories they belong to are easily marketed. Adherence to ideas of hegemonic femininity only make them more so.

Sarah Banet-Weiser argues a similar point in her 2018 book *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*, suggesting, “In a capitalist, corporate economy of visibility, those feminisms that are most easily commodified and branded are those that become most visible,” (13). Though Banet-Weiser refers more generally to manifestations of feminism rather than individual, feminine bodies, feminism often is represented by the image of a certain kind of individual. In this case, the idea of the “empowered” protagonist that was touted in promotion of these series is representative of a kind of feminism that is easily stomachable — white, familiar, not too radical. Their visibility made them more accessible to consumers. These series and their protagonist became so popular in part because they were allowed to be seen.

Thus, these protagonists represent an embodiment of familiar and unobtainable femininity. Their whiteness and small bodies are only one aspect of this. In Brownstein's words, the heroine is a "paragon of paradoxes...both chaste and suggestive of erotic ecstasy, famous and private, embowered and imperiled" (xxi). Likewise, these characters are feminine without being too feminine, walking contradictions. Below the surface, there are cracks in the facade of their empowerment. These contradictions in their character give way to conflict, a struggle to maintain authority over their story while adhering to white, hegemonic femininity. They cannot be powerful and weak at once, and so they are caught in a cycle of attempting to fulfil the role of heroine by utilizing the only asset they are given within the sphere of hegemonic femininity: their bodies. Time and time again in these series, the protagonist uses her body as means of negotiating the power structures in which she exists. Yet, unlike the traditional hero, the protagonist is not allowed to use her body for offensive action or self-preservation. Instead, she must constantly be on the defense, ready to give up her life for others. The consequence of this is a cycle of violent sacrifice, failure, and redemptive beautification. The character performs actions in an attempt to gain authority, she fails, and she is effectively reset, her body returned to the feminine ideal and the effects of her actions erased. Failure in this case is not defined by the protagonist's inability to save another by sacrificing her life. Rather, it is defined by whether or not the sacrifice is completed. Though there are times in these series in which the sacrificial act is carried to completion, there are many more in which it is halted.

The perpetrator of this failure is not the protagonist herself, but the male savior character. Primarily, this character serves to affirm the protagonist's femininity through his masculinity. This comparison works to illustrate that the protagonist is physically weak when compared to the male character. Secondly, whenever a sacrificial act is committed by the protagonist, this male

character intervenes. Such intervention serves not only to inhibit the sacrifice and “save” the protagonist, but to undermine the protagonist’s action. Repeatedly throughout these series the protagonist’s attempts at gaining control within her environment are met by the mockery, disbelief, or distress of the male characters around her. Even when the protagonist successfully sacrifices herself, even when she effectively dies as Bella and Tris do, it is the male character’s response that is highlighted. The attention directed within the texts towards these male characters serves to uproot whatever authority the protagonist has over the narrative. The control she has over herself and her body, illustrated by her acts of sacrifice, is dismantled by his intervention. Because of this, she is displaced as the heroic figure. Her status as heroine is overshadowed by the emergence of the male hero and his role as savior. Unlike the protagonist, he is allowed to fulfill this role using offensive action. He rescues the damsel in distress, while the protagonist’s action is framed as reckless or stupid. This removes the protagonist’s authority over the reader as well. While her heroism is diminished by the male character’s disapproval, his authority is granted greater precedence within the narrative. Rather than using the heroine to subvert hierarchies of power positioned by hegemonic femininity, these texts make the heroine subordinate to the hero.

Given that these novels were intended to be read by preteens and teens, specifically young girls, this presentation is troubling. If Brownstein is right in suggesting that “novel readers are often women who want to become heroines,” then readers of these texts may unknowingly adopt the practices of gender hegemony (xv). I myself first read these series from the ages of 11 to 15, and while I believed these characters to be strong women at the time, I did not yet recognize the patterns of hegemonic femininity that defined them. As a white, thin girl myself, I certainly did not question the portrayal of these characters either. It was not until I returned to

these series as an adult that I began to observe the concerning trajectory these series take. Hidden beneath the surface of the empowered protagonist exist these harmful presentations of the gender binary and subordinate femininity. Worse still, these texts present their readers with a normative, idealized body centered in whiteness and thinness. Like many other young readers, these presentations informed my understanding of my own body and gender.

Looking back on the personal impact of these texts, I chose to begin this thesis by discussing the protagonist's physical appearance as it relates to race and gender. In the first part of section one, I explore how whiteness is projected onto the protagonist's body and how this plays a role in her perceived social value. In part two of this section, I continue this discussion as it relates to the process of feminizing the body. I posit that the protagonist is positioned on a hierarchy of power, a hierarchy defined by its adherence to the gender binary. Though she adopts the role of heroine, the protagonist operates as the age-old damsel in distress, necessitating the involvement of a male savior character. As a result, her social value as a woman is reaffirmed.

Referencing Mimi Schipper's framework of hegemonic femininity in section two, I explore the protagonist's acts of ineffective violence and compliance. In part one, I discuss how the protagonist's weak body inhibits her from performing successful acts of violence, forcing her to rely on male characters in order to escape physical conflict. As a point of contrast, I look at female characters in the texts who do not conform to hegemonic femininity and how they are treated. While the protagonists are positioned as moral figures because she fulfills standards of hegemonic femininity, non-conforming female characters are framed as indisputably immoral. In part two, I turn to the protagonist's compliance with male structures of power. In each series, the institutions opposing the protagonist are headed by male figures. Observing this fact, I use this

section to further reveal these texts' presentation of gendered hierarchy and the protagonist's place within it.

In the final section, I discuss the protagonist's acts of sacrifice and the cycle of mutilation and redemptive beautification that succeed them. In part one, I argue that these acts allow the protagonist to be presented as heroic, without forcing her to act in opposition to hegemonic femininity. Sacrifice, rather than offensive action, promotes the idea that these characters are selfless, moral representations of femininity. In part two, I explore how the mutilation these protagonists endure serves to indicate their strength, while their rescue indicates their continued weakness. Finally, in part three I propose that the erasure of this mutilation allows the protagonist to return to a state of idealized, feminine beauty.

Within all three sections of this thesis, I present how the protagonists of *The Twilight Saga*, *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, and *The Divergent Trilogy* operate within a framework of hegemonic femininity, and how this framework complicates their role as heroine. Ultimately, these texts attempt to position their protagonists as being both strong and weak. However, their strength in these texts is merely an illusion. The acts of sacrifice they perform do not fully function as heroic acts, because they are not allowed to. In order to maintain the tenets of hegemonic femininity, these characters act in subordination to the male characters around them. They must hand over their heroic authority to the more capable hero: the male savior.

Portraying the “Default Body”

I. Implying Whiteness

In *The Body Is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love*, Sonya Renee Taylor defines the “default body” as a construction of normative body image that is replicated and presented constantly by our society (22). Taylor argues that these bodies inform our ideas of

what is typical and, consequently, what is socially expected of our own bodies (32). In an endless cycle, these bodies meet expectations that they also reinforce. They exist around us at all times, more often within the media we consume than not. When discussing what gets published, what gets made into a film, what is ultimately popular, normative body standards are inevitably part of the equation. Bodies play an incredibly important role in what we consume because they also play a role in what gets to be seen. So much so that Taylor argues that this normative standard forces “all other bodies to conform or be rendered invisible” (32). The question is, what does this “default body” look like? For Taylor, the default body revolves around the image of a “youthful, blonde, thin, able-bodied” figure (66-67). Implied in this description, and eluded to throughout her book, is the idea of whiteness.

For these three characters, whiteness is the forefront of their physical presentation. For example, very early on in *Twilight* Bella is described as being “ivory skinned,” immediately informing us of her whiteness (Meyer 10). When Bella says that she “*should* be tan, sporty, and blond” it seems almost like an attempt to dissuade the reader from believing that Bella’s pale, white skin is desirable (Meyer 10). However, Meyer’s use of the word “ivory” serves not only to indicate the color of Bella’s skin, but the cultural value of it. From this description, it seems that Bella’s body is sheathed in a precious material, hardly something undesirable. Of course, we must not forget that ivory is a material often obtained through killing and theft. In this regard, Bella’s whiteness is never brought into question because Meyer outright informs us of it. The same cannot necessarily be said for Katniss.

Collins describes Katniss as having “olive skin,” a description that is ambiguous and does not immediately assign Katniss to any particular race. And yet, Katniss is portrayed in the films by a white actor, Jennifer Lawrence. At the time of the film’s release, this casting decision

sparked controversy, with some popular articles suggesting that the producers had “whitewashed” the character (Seltzer; Wilson). Despite these articles, it was Rue’s casting and not Katniss’ that caught the public’s attention. As Ryan M. Rish notes in his 2015 essay “Investigating the Implications of *Racelifting*,” the choice to cast Katniss with a white actor was met with “considerably less outrage,” than the choice to cast Rue with Amandla Stenberg, a Black actor (8). While the ambiguity of Katniss’ “olive skin” does not assign Katniss to any particular racial category, Rue’s “satiny brown skin” leaves little room for her to be perceived as white (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 114). And yet, as illustrated in an article titled, “White Until Proven Black: Imagining Race in Hunger Games,” people were outraged that Rue was not being presented as white (Holmes). This, of course, plays right into Taylor’s assertion on the visibility of default bodies. Some readers rendered Rue’s brown skin invisible, they ignored it.

Consequently, when the casting choice did not reflect this racial projection, many of them expressed outright anger. One of these readers went to Twitter to say, “Awkward moment when Rue is some black girl and not the little blonde innocent girl you picture” (Holmes). The poster of this comment not only equates innocence with whiteness, but their comment harkens back to the idea of uniqueness that Brownstein touches on in her discussion of the Western heroine. When the poster says “Rue is some black girl,” they imply that the actor is nameless, one of many other nameless Black girls. The poster suggests that Rue’s Blackness renders her insignificant, disappointing even. Meanwhile, the Rue that the poster pictured is not merely *a* “blonde innocent girl” but “*the* blonde innocent girl,” the unique embodiment of innocence, granted the status of an important individual rather than being reduced to a member of the masses (Holmes). Needless to say, this poster and many others likely would have reacted even more poorly had Katniss not be cast by a white character on account of her olive skin. After all,

as Rish suggests, the audience is “accustomed to viewing central characters as white” and the choice to cast a white actor for Katniss “did not disrupt the status quo” (8). It does beg the question though, that if Rue cannot be innocent with brown skin, how would Katniss or Bella or Tris ever become popular characters if they were not seen as white?

In conversation with this controversy is the idea of the default body. Whiteness is the default, and so Katniss became widely regarded as white. Presenting her in this way allowed the films to cross that barrier of visibility; they forced Katniss’ character to conform. The ambiguity of Katniss’ “olive skin” plays into this conformity, it allows whiteness to be implied. The same implication is present in the *Divergent* series. Though Roth never specifies Tris’ skin color, she frequently uses descriptors such as “dark brown,” “warm brown,” and “olive” to present the skin tones of other characters. Though perhaps it is telling that Tris has blonde hair and blue eyes and that her skin, unlike Christina’s, shows bruising easily. It is notable also that, like Katniss, Tris is portrayed by a white actor in the film and so is presented to the audience as indisputably white. This is the epitome of whiteness being cast as the default. Unlike other characters in the series, Tris does not need to have her skin tone signified. As a matter of fact, none of the white characters in the series do, only those with brown, black, and olive tones — the ones who are not considered default. Tris’ whiteness is an unspoken fact, unspoken because it does not need to be. We are led to assume, and even expect, that Tris is white because if she was not Roth would have told us otherwise. This is a prime example of Taylor’s idea of normative body image and how whiteness tops the racialized hierarchy. Whiteness for these protagonists is a given, it is expected. They are allowed to become heroines in and outside of their narrative world because without this whiteness, they would not have been granted such high marketability.

II. Feminizing the Body

Of course, implied in Taylor's idea of the "default body" is also the idea of femininity. While whiteness is at the core of normativity, the gendered body is always being standardized, specifically as it exists within the binary. For the feminine body, adhering to these standards is key to being seen. Only the white, feminine body gets to be visible, and only if that body meets our expectations of femininity in form and behavior. Thus, within these series, the process of feminizing the protagonist's body is essential not only to her visibility in and outside of the narrative world, but it is also necessary to her status as heroine. Part of this process is utilizing the masculine body to feminize the protagonist, a tactic which Mimi Schippers explores in her 2007 essay, "Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony." Schippers suggest that hegemonic femininity works in relation to hegemonic masculinity; comparison between the two asserts the subordination of the former (85). Whereas the hegemonic masculine is defined by "physical strength, the ability to use interpersonal violence in the face of conflict, and authority," Schippers argues that hegemonic femininity meets these standards by characterizing the feminine through "physical vulnerability, an inability to use violence effectively, and compliance" (91). Thus, when these series use male characters to feminize the protagonist's body, they are assigning values of hegemonic femininity to her. They are assuring us that these characters are feminine, even if their role as protagonist gives them a kind of authority in the series.

In *Twilight*, Bella describes herself as "slender, but soft somehow" (Meyer 10). Immediately, this suggests that Bella is thin, a category of the "default body" proposed by Taylor. However, this description also works to feminize Bella by ensuring that her thinness is not confused for masculine athleticism. On the contrary, she is "soft," a word that evokes qualities of

malleability and vulnerability. Notably, in this regard, Bella's body is presented as the antipode to the book's forefront representation of masculinity: Edward. His body is repeatedly described as "hard" and "muscular" (Meyer, *Twilight* 24). This early distinction between these gendered bodies is important to the sacrifice-and-savior dynamic that rapidly forms between the two characters. Bella is very quickly positioned beneath Edward on the hierarchy of power that is inherent to gender hegemony and she is consequently portrayed through this gendered lens throughout the rest of the series. For example, in another moment of establishing Bella's adherence to the default body, Meyer specifies Bella's exact weight and height: a whole "hundred and ten pounds" and "Five foot four" (*Twilight* 97; *New Moon* 147). These specifications serve to standardize Bella's body, to fit her into the default, feminine category. They also continue to work as an active point of contrast between Bella's body and the male characters around her.

After Jacob Black is presented in *New Moon*, Bella's size difference is mentioned quite a few times. When jokingly comparing their ages, Jacob goes so far as to suggest Bella should be considered twelve years younger because she is just "so small" (Meyer, *New Moon* 146). It is a comparison that serves to present Jacob as the older, more mature of the two, though he is actually two years younger than Bella. Further, when Bella retorts that "Five foot four is perfectly average," it is to assert the normalcy of her body (Meyer, *New Moon* 147). The word average comes up in relation to Bella's weight as well. When Edward moves to pick her up for the second time in *Twilight*, Bella warns, "I'm a bit heavier than your average backpack," to which Edward merely responds with laughter (Meyer 279). Referring to herself as a "backpack" serves multiple purposes in further gendering her body. First and foremost, this comparison suggests that Bella is an object, one specifically made to carry other items. On its own, without

anything to be carried, this item becomes unnecessary. In discussion of the female body, this is hardly unfamiliar territory. Female bodies are expected to carry children, their social value resides in their ability to become pregnant. In that regard, Bella is metaphorically assigning a purpose to her own body. On a more surface level, however, this comparison also serves to place Bella's body in the default category using the voice of male authority. While Bella is attempting to separate herself from the word "average," Edward's response suggests that her concerns about being heavy are unfounded. His reaction repositions her into that category.

Katniss' body is just as prominent within her series and though Collins does not provide us with a look into a mirror the way Meyer does, she does show us Katniss' reflection through Gale, her male counterpart. They both have "Straight black hair, olive skin...even the same gray eyes," common features among district twelve people (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 9). This description positions the two characters as mirrors of one another. Gale functions as a means of defining Katniss' physical body; thus, their similarities make their differences all the more striking. Like Bella, Katniss' small size is remarked upon quite often. When recalling her first encounter with Gale, Katniss describes herself as a "skinny twelve-year-old" while Gale "already looked like a man" (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 11). Much like the game played by Bella and Jacob, the comparison between bodies here serves to position Katniss as younger and smaller than Gale. Her body is directly juxtaposed to his, and this juxtaposition informs the reader's perception of Katniss. Away from Gale, Katniss' size only becomes a more significant feature in the arena. Katniss admits that of the tributes, "almost all of the boys and at least half of the girls are bigger," a consequence of her being "naturally smaller" (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 108). Of course, Collins does not paint this size difference in an entirely negative light. On the contrary, Katniss' smallness helps her survive climbing the high branches of trees (Collins, *The*

Hunger Games 212). However, the instances of her size being a detriment to her survival are far more numerous than those in which it is a benefit. Her size allows her a means of temporary escape when she climbs the trees to evade the larger tributes; it does not ultimately protect her.

Like Katniss, Tris's body size is explicitly referenced throughout the series, and often cited as a detriment to her combative success. As the "smallest initiate," she has a harder time winning hand-to-hand fighting (Roth, *Divergent* 72). Like Katniss, this smallness is not the byproduct of external conditions but a natural component of her genetics. It is a fact that is repeatedly brought to the reader's attention, often when Tris is engaging with male characters, particularly with Tobias. For instance, when being trained by him, Tris remarks on the length of his hand equaling the width of her torso (Roth, *Divergent* 84). Their bodies, just like Bella and Jacob, and Katniss and Gale, are juxtaposed in order to inform our perception of Tris herself. Whereas Tobias is bigger, older, and more physically capable, Tris is made to seem comparably smaller and weaker. This is only reinforced by the description of Tris on the first pages of the series. When looking into a mirror, she says, "I see a narrow face, wide, round eyes...I still look like a little girl" (Roth, *Divergent* 2). In contrast, Tobias is described as "the young man" and his voice as "deep" (Roth, *Divergent* 59-60). Of course, Tobias is two years older than Tris, much like Katniss and Gale. This age gap allows for Tobias to have greater authority within the Dauntless faction and, in some ways, grants him power over Tris. As her mentor, he is the stronger of the two, the more influential, the more knowledgeable. Such circumstance is comparable to both Bella and Katniss' descriptions; they are both considered young, small, and, in some ways, weaker than their male companions.

All three of these series utilize a comparable tactic of juxtaposition to characterize their protagonists. The heroine's body, already fulfilling default expectations, is then compared to the

bodies of male counterparts in such a way that secures their femininity. Their smallness works to make them appear weaker than their male companions and, as such, places these characters on a kind of hierarchy. Bella's size informs Jacob's own sense of greater maturity; Katniss' smallness gives an advantage to her enemies in the arena, especially those who are male; Tris' size reinforces her instructor's physical strength and capability. These protagonists are on a lower rung, and it is this placement on a lower rung that allows them to maintain an identity grounded in standardized femininity. This position only continues to be affirmed through these protagonists' actions. As they are forced into situations of physical conflict, we see the results of this process of gendering the characters' bodies. Because the protagonists cannot commit successful acts of violence on account of their weak bodies, they must rely on the strength of the male characters to save them.

Fulfilling Hegemonic Femininity

I. Ineffective Violence

To delve deeper into Schipper's specific definition of hegemonic femininity, it is important to note that these characters' smallness plays a significant role in their "physical vulnerability" (91). As previously mentioned, Katniss and Tris' bodies make them weaker opponents in physical combat. Likewise, Bella's body is not only small but "soft," a specific indicator of fragility. Just as these physical characteristics establish the protagonists' physical vulnerability, they also point to their "inability to use violence effectively" (91). For my purposes, this phrase refers to two aspects of the protagonist's engagement in violent behavior. Firstly, a character's violent action is rendered ineffective when that action fails to achieve what she initially desired it to accomplish. For these protagonists, this failure is the result of her being weaker than her opponent. Secondly, within this idea of ineffective violence is the presentation

of the protagonist as an inherently moral character. Because the protagonist is presented as failing to perform effective acts of violence, she is allowed to maintain her moral status, regardless of her desire to and initiation of violence.

To delve into the former aspect of ineffective violence, we can first look at Bella's reaction after Jacob's unwanted romantic advance. Despite using "as much power as [she] could force out of [her] body," Bella's attempt at punching Jacob results neither in his pain nor an end to his advances (Meyer, *Eclipse* 331-332). In this case, her violence was ineffective not only because it did not inflict pain onto her opponent but also because it did not achieve her desired end results. The action would have been effective if it had stopped Jacob. Instead, Bella must resort to the threat of vengeance through Edward, as she says, "I can't wait to see what Edward does to you! I hope he snaps your neck" (Meyer, *Eclipse* 332). Her physical weakness against Jacob leads her to rely on Edward's masculine strength. Because she cannot perform violence effectively against her opponent, she requires a savior.

There are several circumstances such as the one described above throughout the *Divergent Trilogy*. One of Tris' first experiences of ineffective violence occurs when she is forced to fight another initiate, Peter. The first thing Tris acknowledges upon discovering her opponent is that he "is almost a foot-taller than" her (Roth, *Divergent* 107). This acknowledgement, along with the other initiates' doubt that she will succeed, reinforces her smallness and weakness. For instance, Christina voices her incredulity at the match when she says to Tris, "Are they serious? They're going to make *you* fight *him*?" (Roth, *Divergent* 107). Similarly, Al suggests, "Maybe you can just take a few hits and pretend to go unconscious... No one would blame you" (Roth, *Divergent* 107). Neither of these characters believe that Tris can win against Peter; their perception of her vulnerability is informed by her smaller size. Indeed,

Tris ultimately does not win against Peter, proving Christina and Al's perception of her to be justified. Even when Tris "punch[es] as hard as [she] can," Peter "barely groans" and, worse still, responds by "laughing under his breath" (Roth, *Divergent* 111). Peter mocks Tris through his laughter, suggesting that her attempts are not only futile but worthy of ridicule. This idea is only strengthened when Tris is saved from further beating by a third-party, a voice that shouts "Enough!" (Roth, *Divergent* 111).

Of course, given the basic plotline of *The Hunger Games*, there are many instances in which Katniss is forced into violent circumstances and is unable to match the strength of her opponent. For example, in book one, Katniss is attacked by Clove, a fellow tribute. When Clove straddles Katniss, she is unable to unseat Clove as she is "too heavy and her lock on [Katniss] too tight," (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 334). When this attempt at flight does not prove effective, Katniss resorts to violence, trying to "bite her hand," but this too is ineffective as Clove "grabs the hair on the top of [her] head, forcing [her] back to the ground" (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 335). Again, by comparison, Katniss is smaller and weaker. The only way she survives is because of the interference of a larger, stronger, masculine figure. Any attempt at employing violence herself was useless; instead, a male savior was necessary for her survival. And yet, this is a slightly different situation from the one Bella or Tris is placed into. Katniss does not need to be saved from another male character, she needs to be saved from a female character.

Violently capable, feminine characters appear throughout all three of these series and, often, they appear in direct opposition to the protagonist. Some, in fact, perform as major antagonists. In *Twilight* there is Victoria, in *Divergent* there is Jeanine Matthews, and in *The Hunger Games* there is President Coin. While characters such as Clove provide a brief contrast to the protagonist, these three characters in particular offer a more in-depth look at a different

kind of gendered body, specifically one that is coded as female. In fact, these characters serve to show the reader an example of undesirable or socially unacceptable femininity in that they do not fulfill the standards of hegemonic femininity in the way the protagonist does. For instance, all three of these characters hold positions of leadership and use these positions to commit major acts of violence. In *Eclipse*, Victoria becomes the leader of a newborn vampire army and she leads them to battle against the Cullens. Jeanine Matthews is the leader of the Erudite faction and she uses her authority to organize the genocidal killing of Abnegation members. President Coin leads District 13, the heart of the rebel operation; she is essentially the figure leading the war against the Capitol. They are strong, powerful, ambitious women within these narratives and yet they are presented to us as immoral. They are evil characters and all three of them are killed in order to thwart their plans of violence. Their treatment as immoral characters worthy of death is the punishment for their non-conformity. Meanwhile, male characters in positions of power who oppose the protagonist do not receive the same sentence. As I will discuss in the next section, the Volturi, President Snow, and David are all allowed to live.

Comparably, literature surrounding these series, particularly *The Twilight Saga* and *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, sometimes situate acts of violence performed by the protagonists in a similar discussion on morality. For instance, in her 2012 essay “*The Hunger Games’ Feral Feminism*,” Katha Pollitt suggests that Katniss refrains from killing in the arena because of a “moral centeredness” that leads her to “kills only in self-defense” (10). However, given the scene between her and Clove, it would seem that Katniss’ restraint is not simply the result of a moral unwillingness to kill. After all, killing Clove would have been justified as an act of self-defense and yet Katniss could not gain the upper hand. Though Katniss may be presented as a moral character, her inability to physically compete against fellow tributes is more often the reason

behind her restraint. For instance, there are moments when Katniss seems to want to perform a violent act even when it would not necessarily be made defensively. When a tribute lights a fire near her post on the first night in the arena Katniss thinks, “I won’t have the least problem taking out my new neighbor....Stupid people are dangerous. And this one probably doesn’t have much in the way of weapons while I’ve got this excellent knife” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 185). Though this character has the potential to be a threat to Katniss, she is not in any immediate danger from them at this moment. In fact, the character likely does not even realize that Katniss is perched in the trees above them. However, before Katniss can act, her victim is killed by a group of tributes. Had they not shown up when they did it is suggested that Katniss would have readily killed this person, not because they posed any direct threat to her, but because they were “stupid.”

There are similar instances within the *Twilight* and *Divergent* series as well. For example, when Bella awakens as a vampire the others seem to believe that she has supernatural control over her body and instincts. When she comes into contact with humans while hunting she simply stops hunting, something the Cullens are shocked to discover (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 441). And yet, when Jacob announces that he has imprinted on Renesmee, she spares no thought before attacking him. Her anger, though perhaps justified, ignites in much the same way as Katniss’. Her choice to commit violence is her own, just as it was when she hit Jacob as a human. Of course, it should not go unnoted that this act of violence against Jacob is almost as ineffective as her attempt as a human. The only difference in this situation is that Bella does successfully injure Seth, someone she did not intend to attack. The reactions from those around her suggest that her behavior was not immoral. Edward even tells her, “You’re doing so well” when she is attempting to apologize to Seth (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 453).

Tris, by comparison, frequently imagines committing acts of violence against others and yet seems to be perceived as a good person by those around her. For example, after joining the Dauntless faction Tris overhears someone crying in their bed. Tris thinks, “I should comfort him — I should *want* to comfort him...Instead I feel disgust. Someone who looks so strong shouldn’t act weak” (Roth, *Divergent* 74). Later, after Al joins a group of rival Dauntless in attacking Tris and is seeking to apologize, Tris threatens to kill Al, calling him a “coward” (Roth, *Divergent* 300). He commits suicide shortly following this interaction, and Tris maintains her opinion of it. It is a harsh critique but Tris’ regard is justified by those around her. They enable her to believe that she is, without a doubt, a good and selfless person.

The difference, then, between the protagonists and the three female characters mentioned previously, is how their acts of violence or desire to commit acts of violence are framed within the narrative. Part of this frame is that the acts of violence performed by the protagonists are presented as ineffective more often than not. Those few acts of successful violence that the protagonists may perform are glazed over in comparison to the amount of time dedicated in the text to their failures. Because their acts of violence are perceived as moral, justified, and even necessary, they are simply not questioned. In contrast, the violent actions of Victoria, Jeanine Matthews, and President Coin serve to vilify them. Again we begin to see the contradiction of these protagonists. They are allowed to desire and perform violence, so long as their actions are not successful. They maintain their femininity while still seeming to meet the base requirements of being the hero. And yet, if their acts of violence are not effective, can these characters be the hero of their stories? After all, the Western hero almost always relies on his physical prowess, often presented through acts of violence. He is offensive, self-preserving, perhaps even selfish. Meanwhile, these protagonists are the opposite: physically incapable, selfless, and

self-sacrificial. They must comply with the expectations of their gender, they must embody femininity.

II. Compliance

It would be remiss not to acknowledge that all three of these protagonists are frequently powerless not just against the individuals around them, but within a larger scheme of power. Already I have discussed the idea that these protagonists are placed lower on the hierarchy of power through the feminization of their bodies — a process that does not serve to empower them, but to depict them as weak. However, this hierarchy of power extends beyond individuals, functioning within and throughout the institutions presented within these series. These institutions, all headed by male characters, work to continue feminizing the protagonist, forcing her to commit acts of compliance. As Schippers suggest, these acts of compliance serve to maintain standards of hegemonic femininity, namely the subordination of those who are forced to comply. Within these series, male institutions threaten the protagonist using those she loves and the protagonist must comply in order to save her friends and family. These characters do not question their compliance not only because of this threat, but because the protagonist has no real means of fighting against this institution; not even the savior male character can defend her against them. Unlike the opposing female characters, the male characters who lead these institutions are not killed as punishment for their actions. In fact, it seems at times that they cannot be killed, as to do so would dismantle the gendered hierarchy of power established in these series.

In *The Twilight Saga*, this institution is the Volturi, an ancient ruling class of vampires composed of three male characters. With their introduction in *New Moon* Bella is told time and again that the Volturi are an “old and powerful family—like royalty,” one “enforcing the rules”

and “punishing transgressors” (Meyer 428, 430). Bella, who is human at the time, poses no threat to them and, yet, neither do the Cullens. As Alice says, “if there were a way that the four of us could save my brother by fighting for him, maybe it would be different. But we can’t...” (Meyer, *New Moon* 426). Thus, Bella is forced to be compliant in order to save Edward. She must follow every rule Alice gives her and, once Edward is saved, is left with a single stipulation from the Volturi in return for their lives: she must become a vampire. It should be noted that the Volturi is composed of three male vampires. They are the ones that force Bella to become a vampire in order to save Edward and his family. Though I have mentioned female antagonists within these series previously, it is not women who are forcing the protagonists to comply in return for the safety of their loved ones. Men head the institutions that continue to perpetuate ideas of hegemonic femininity and the protagonist’s adherence to it. They do so not only by requiring the protagonist comply, but by forcing her to comply for the safety of her family.

For instance, in *The Hunger Games Trilogy* the institution is the Capitol and it is led by President Snow, another male character. In a parallel situation, President Snow forces Katniss to adhere to conditions in return for her and her loved ones’ lives. When later reflecting on these conditions, Katniss comes to the realization that “...there is only one future, if I want to keep those I love alive and stay alive myself. I’ll have to marry Peeta” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 50). In a way, the two stipulations are quite alike. They force the protagonists to perform acts of compliance that confine them to conventional expectations, namely marriage. Though being married is not a requirement from the Volturi, it is later imposed by Edward as a condition of the arrangement (Meyer, *Eclipse* 450). The idea behind these stipulations is to lessen the threat that both Bella and Katniss pose to their respective institutions. Bella’s outsider knowledge of vampires risks the Volturi’s exposure, while Katniss’ rebellious influence risks the overthrow of

the Capitol. Both the Volturi and President Snow attempt to minimize the threat the protagonists pose to them by forcing them into more conventional roles; Bella must become one of them and conform to their laws. Katniss must be married to fortify the idea that her actions in the arena were nothing more than girlish impulse. Both characters do eventually go through with these stipulations, though their choices to do so are framed as separate from the institutions that originally enforced them. At the end of each series, they both end up fulfilling conventional roles. Bella marries Edward, has a child with him, and becomes a vampire. She is fully integrated into his family as a mother, wife, and vampiric mate. Katniss' story ends, too, with her being matched with Peeta and bearing his children.

Tris' forced compliance is somewhat different, given that her ending does not allow her to fulfill the role of mother or wife. However, she does face a powerful institution in the form of the Bureau of Genetic Warfare and it is led by a male character named David. Though neither the Bureau nor David are formally introduced until the final novel, they both play a significant role in the first two books as instigators of faction life (Roth, *Allegiant* 105). Initially, this Bureau works to force Tris' belief in the faction system. Her whole life is arranged around the Bureau's decisions and so she must comply with the given arrangements simply because she has no other option. Even if she chose not to belong to a faction, she would simply exist as a "factionless," her identity still defined by the mere existence of the faction system (Roth, *Divergent* 25). However, once the Bureau is unmasked Tris is forced to comply differently. In order to protect herself and her friends, she must work within the Bureau as a loyal member (Roth, *Allegiant* 323). Like Bella and Katniss, Tris is given a stipulation, though an unspoken one: work with the system or be perceived as a threat. Though she is not forced into a role of conventional femininity in the same way Bella and Katniss are, she is forced to comply. Her membership

within the Bureau and her concession to the hierarchy of genetics work to make her less threatening to the institution itself. At its core it is a stipulation that functions in the same way it does for Bella and Katniss.

Interestingly, the acts of compliance serve to frame the protagonist as heroic, despite the fact that on a deeper level they operate by subordinating her. When Bella, Katniss, and Tris comply with these institutions, they are doing so not to save themselves, but to save others. This is the basis for their heroism, it is what allows them to be presented as heroines within their stories. However, in complying with institutions that force them to adopt more conventionally feminine roles — through the mere act of complying alone — their proposed heroism seems to operate in greater unity with hegemonic femininity than against it. A contradiction exists within this dynamic. The characters are seemingly empowered through acts that simultaneously take power away from them. We see this dynamic throughout all three series. On the surface, we are continuously being informed that these characters are our heroines. They are supposed to be the driving authority of their story and, yet, beneath the surface of this claim is the constant subordination of these characters on the basis of their femininity. They are weaker than male characters because of their feminine bodies. They are forced to be compliant with institutions, led by male characters. They are presented to as powerful characters, and yet the text insists that we believe that they are also weak. This conflicting presentation comes to a head through the acts of sacrifice performed throughout each series.

Creating the Heroine

I. Sacrifice: Acts that Lead the Texts

When discussing violence, there is not merely violence against others. In the case of these protagonists, violence against the self is a driving component of their stories. In her essay “The

Twilight of Feminism? Stephenie Meyer's *Saga* and the Contradictions of Contemporary Girlhood" Christine Jarvis expands on this idea of violence in relation to expectation of femininity, going so far as to propose that *The Twilight Saga* positions "self-harm as a defining characteristic of female identity" (101). While Jarvis positions this claim in conversation with adhering to the "norms of female beauty" I would like to posit that self-harm in these texts functions as a consequence of the conflicting notions of strength and weakness assigned to the protagonists within them (101). In order to present these characters as simultaneously strong and weak, the actions they take within their stories must reflect both their status as heroine and the standards of hegemonic femininity. Thus, when these characters attempt to gain power within their environment, they must do so using the only resource of empowerment that hegemonic femininity grants them: their bodies. However, as I have already discussed, these protagonists do not have bodily strength. They are, more often than not, weaker and smaller than their opponents. The only way that these protagonists are allowed to use their bodies to establish control over their circumstances is by sacrificing them. Thus, all three of these series are driven by acts of sacrifice performed by the protagonists, acts that intentionally put them in harm's way. Much like the acts of compliance previously mentioned, these acts of sacrifice are essential to establishing these protagonists as realized heroines. Their sacrifices are presented as acts of righteous bravery, and are to be perceived as such by both readers and the protagonists alike.

Within *The Twilight Saga*, each novel has its own leading sacrificial act. In the first novel, it is Bella's choice to let James kill her to save her mother. This act is recognized on the very first page, in which Bella laments, "Surely it was a good way to die, in the place of someone else, someone I loved. Noble, even. That ought to count for something" (Meyer, *Twilight* 1). From this preface forward, Bella's belief in the nobility of sacrifice, perhaps even suicide, serves as the

driving force behind the saga's conflict. In each novel, she moves deliberately toward death. Nevertheless, her attempts at sacrifice prove time and time again to be reckless and, in such recklessness, occasionally futile. In the first novel, Bella goes to meet her end in place of her mother. Except, Bella's mother was never in danger, in fact, "She was safe" the entire time (Meyer, *Twilight* 444). Her mother's safety diminishes Bella's act, making her behavior seem both foolish and pointless. In that instance, her sacrifice is rendered ineffective; the violence she intentionally endures serves no purpose beyond the progression of the plot, the establishment of conflict, and, ultimately, the justification of Edward's role as savior. The irony that Bella believes her act should "count for something" despite not doing anything beyond putting her own life in danger is certainly not lost on any attentive reader (Meyer, *Twilight* 1).

The second novel's sacrificial act proves somewhat successful, as Bella acts to save Edward from his own attempt at suicide and does. Yet, even if her act of sacrifice had proved ineffective, Bella would have welcomed death, as she suggests, "...I wasn't really planning on living much longer without seeing him. Or at all, if we were too late. It was comforting to know I had an easy way out" (Meyer, *New Moon* 431). In this regard, Bella seems almost eager to meet her end. Her words in this instance suggest that between losing Edward and dying, death would be not only easier but preferred. In short, whenever someone else is at risk, Bella's first impulse is to offer up her life instead. Her body and life seem to be her only negotiable piece; otherwise, she is powerless. As Meredith A. Powers suggests in her 1991 book, *The Heroine in Western Literature: The Archetype and Her Reemergence in Modern Prose*, modern heroine narratives use "suicide to present metaphorically 'the helplessness of women in face of overwhelming male superiority'" (6). Through Bella's sacrificial acts, *The Twilight Saga* represents this power dynamic. Indeed, Bella's purpose in this series is informed by her attempts at sacrifice; until she

becomes a vampire, this is all she has to use against those that threaten her and her loved ones. The conflict of *Eclipse*, for example, is driven by Bella's desire to confront the newborn army and save the Cullens and the Quileute wolves from harm. Though the Cullens do not allow her to be present on the battlefield, Bella still uses her body in an attempt to assist those who can actually fight. She goes so far as to cut open her palm to distract Victoria and her partner, an act she herself refers to as a "sacrifice" (Meyer, *Eclipse* 550). But like her first act, this is also a sacrifice made in vain. After its performance, Edward disapproves of its execution, telling Bella that neither he nor Seth were in any danger and, consequently, that her attempt at sacrifice was unnecessary (Meyer, *Eclipse* 559).

In the fourth and final novel, Bella successfully sacrifices her life and humanity in order to save her child. This serves not only as an act of sacrifice but one of transformation also. As such, it will be discussed in greater length in a later section. However, it should be noted here that Bella's body is not so easily sacrificed once it has become essential to protecting the one she loves. She needs to live long enough for the fetus to fully develop and be born. Her asset is temporarily non-negotiable, her powerlessness is fully exposed. This is evident when Bella acknowledges that against Edward and Carlisle, those who wish to terminate the pregnancy, her "weak arms are not enough to protect" the child (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 133). Additionally, Jacob affirms this powerlessness when expressing his shock to Edward that Bella refuses to have an abortion, saying, "She won't let you...Did you ever notice that she's exactly as strong as a normal hundred-and-ten pound human girl?...Hold her down and knock her out with drugs" (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 178). We again are reminded of Bella's weakness, especially against those around her. We even get another reference to her weight, a detail that was used earlier in the series to establish the social desirability of Bella's body.

When Bella can no longer use her body as a sacrificial pawn in defense of the one she loves, the only way for her to regain control is by making a pact with Rosalie. That said, although Bella is willing to die for her child, her act is not necessary to sacrifice her life in the place of someone else, here it is merely her human life that she intends to give up. She is not content to only die and let the child live, she aspires to live on with her. Here we see a shift in the idea of Bella's womanhood. In becoming a mother, her job is no longer to sacrifice her body and life to protect those she loves. Instead, she must be present in order to raise that child. If she were to sacrifice her life and leave behind her daughter, she would fail as a mother. Thus, her adherence to ideas of conventional femininity has expanded to accommodate this new role. However, in order to fulfill this role of motherhood, Bella must abandon the one negotiable asset she has had throughout the series in order to become a vampire: her human body. Her choice to do so is mocked by Jacob, and its success is doubted by almost all of those who know of her condition. For example, Edward says, "She thinks she's strong enough for this" before begging Jacob to convince her to abort the pregnancy (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 180). He has no faith in her ability to live through the birth of the child, believing that she is too weak to do so. Jacob, likewise, refers to Bella's choice to carry the child to term "insanity" and says that she is "dying for *nothing*," that she is "*not* strong enough" (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 189-190). Of course, once the child is born Bella stops breathing and her heart stops. Her human life ends and her sacrifice is complete. Only after several days have passed does she reawaken as a vampire.

In *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, each novel is also driven by an act of sacrifice. In fact, it is Katniss' choice to take Prim's place in the arena in the first novel that spawns the rest of the narrative. Katniss makes the decision to take the place of a loved one knowing it may be the death of her, acknowledging that "in District 12...the word *tribute* is pretty much synonymous

with the word *corpse*” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 26). Despite this acknowledgment, Katniss acts almost without thinking, her primary goal is to save her sister. Though she promises to try to survive at her sister’s behest, she thinks to herself, “I can’t win. Prim must know that in her heart. The competition will be far beyond my abilities... Boys who are two to three times my size. Girls who know twenty different ways to kill you with a knife” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 41-42). Here we see again the distinction between Katniss and the other girls in the arena, those that oppose her: Katniss’ powerlessness makes her sympathetic, her adherence to ideas of hegemonic femininity are what work to establish her as the heroine. The doubt that surrounds Katniss’ ability to be victorious works in favor of this establishment. For instance, Prim entertains the idea that “Maybe [Katniss] can win,” but the uncertainty in her suggestion is telling (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 41). However, Katniss does prevail in the games and emerges as a victor. Her victory, in this regard, seems to be an extension of her original act of sacrifice. Had she not been victorious, had she died in the arena, her mother and Prim would have had to survive without her. Katniss’ victory allows her to continue protecting them, an interesting contrast to many of Bella’s sacrifices but one. In this way, Katniss’ continued survival is much like Bella’s choice to carry Renesmee to term. Katniss needs to preserve her body if her family is to survive, but the mere act of taking Prim’s place in the arena does not help them survive in the long term.

The secondary act of sacrifice that guides the series is Katniss’ attempt at committing suicide with Peeta in the arena. While Katniss’ choice to take Prim’s place puts her in this position to begin with, it is this act in particular that catalyzes the narrative conflict specifically. Though Katniss does not believe she will actually die, she still takes the risk. Her uncertainty surrounding her action is clear when she says, “Maybe I’m wrong...Maybe they don’t care if we

both die” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 403). And yet, they do. From this point on, Katniss’ choice to eat those berries, whether she actually intended to sacrifice her life or not, serves as the instigating act, the catalyst of rebellion.

The motivation behind Katniss’ choice to protect Prim is somewhat maternal. Katniss cares for her sister in much the same way a parent would, taking on this role when her mother no longer could. This uniting factor between *The Hunger Games Trilogy* and *The Twilight Saga* illustrates that the sacrifice of the heroine’s body is, in some ways, tied to the idea of motherhood. For the heroine, and for all people who give birth, the process of pregnancy is a bodily sacrifice. It is an act that is not associated with the hero; for the heroine, however, pregnancy and motherhood play a significant role in their heroic narrative. Katniss’ leading act is a maternal one: to save Prim. Her final scene is as a mother of two. Likewise, Bella’s initial act of sacrifice (attempting to save her mother) could be perceived as a maternal act, given the repeated assertion throughout the series that Bella was forced to become the caregiver in her relationship to her mother. For instance, in the beginning of *Twilight*, she says, “I felt a spasm of panic as I stared at her wide, childlike eyes. How could I leave my loving, erratic, harebrained mother to fend for herself?” (Meyer 4). Bella views her mother as “childlike” and unable to “fend for herself,” and because of this, she takes on the role of a parent in their relationship (Meyer, *Twilight* 4). She worries that her mother will get lost, not pay her bills, or even forget to get food, concerns that a mother would typically have for her child. Thus, when she acts to save her mother later in the novel, it is not an act made by the child but by a maternal protector. Bella’s final scene, too, revolves around her newly adopted role as mother.

Both Katniss and Bella’s sacrificial acts are informed by maternal feelings. This is a quality reserved for heroines and is particularly tied to the idea of sacrificing the body. Within

Western culture, becoming a mother and sacrificing your body for your child might even be regarded as the ultimate selfless act. This quality is noticeably absent from *The Divergent Trilogy*, the most recently published series. While Bella and Katniss become wives and mothers at the end of their stories, fully achieving the goal of hegemonic femininity, Tris dies. Her sacrificial tendencies lead her to commit a seemingly selfless suicide. In this regard, this series and its protagonist break away from the pattern that is observed in the other two. The cycle of sacrifice is broken, not by marriage or motherhood but by the Tris' death. She is freed from the role of heroine, no longer required to uphold ideas of femininity to heroism. And yet, the story does not end with her. Her narrative role is immediately handed over to the male savior character, Tobias. He gets the last word in the series and Tris becomes a passive memory, serving to propel Tobias' story rather than her own. In some ways, *Divergent* shows a shift from the other two series. Tris is the only one freed from the expectations of hegemonic femininity. But the story carries on without her, suggesting that perhaps her role as heroine truly was secondary to the male character, borrowed only to be returned.

Though neither Katniss and Bella fully die, the idea of preserving the story for a male character does persist throughout their series as well. As we have already seen, Bella attempts to sacrifice her life for Edward several times. Likewise, Katniss attempts to sacrifice herself for Peeta in *Catching Fire*. She begs Haymitch to work with her in this attempt, saying "it's [Peeta's] turn to be saved... I'm as good as dead now. He still might have a chance" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 202). In this act Katniss dismisses the value of her own life, suggesting that her death is a certainty, a fate to which she is doomed. At one point in the novel she even suggests, "I would be more valuable dead. They can turn me into some kind of martyr for the cause and paint my face on banners, and it will do more to rally people than anything I could do if I was living" (Collins,

Catching Fire 275). It is this idea of martyrdom that leads the narrative, and her only chance to redeem this fate is to ensure she is sacrificed in the place of another, someone she loves. She believes that her body is only useful in its ability to be immolated for the cause. Thus, choosing to sacrifice her life is the only way to gain control over her situation. Just as Bella suggests, it seems to be a noble endeavor. And yet, when the time comes it is Katniss who is saved and not Peeta, leading Katniss to believe that she has “failed to keep him safe in life” (Collins, *Catching Fire* 429). Her attempt at violence against the self is ineffective, her plans for sacrifice are impeded and, consequently, her control over the situation is eliminated. While Katniss’ attempt at self-sacrifice and its failure occur within the same novel, the third and final book returns to Katniss’ original act of sacrifice.

In the final book, Katniss devotes herself to the rebel cause. She willingly puts her life at risk in hopes of dismantling the Capitol’s oppressive reign, even accepting a pill that would end her life should she be captured (Collins, *Mockingjay* 94). Though her death never becomes a necessary act to preserve this cause, the guiding momentum of her first sacrificial act comes to a head. Her underlying endeavor throughout the entire series was to keep Prim alive. The goal of the narrative was simply that. Thus, when Prim is killed as a consequence of the rebel cause, the one spawned by Katniss’ attempt at committing suicide with Peeta in the first arena, all the acts of violence performed by Katniss throughout the story, self-directed or otherwise, become ineffective. Her control is entirely dismantled, her distrust and uncertainty manifesting as a “rising hysteria” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 409). Despite trying to save Prim by volunteering in her place, Katniss’ sister inevitably meets an untimely end (Collins, *Mockingjay* 391). In one of the last moments of the final novel, Katniss’ most important sacrifice is rendered meaningless. While Katniss’ sacrifices have led to the birth of a movement that destroyed an oppressive

system, her own aspirations within that sacrifice are dismissed as if unimportant to the larger scheme of conflict. Ironically, the cause that Katniss dedicates herself to is likely the perpetrator of her sister's murder.

The Divergent Trilogy splits from this trend of sacrificial acts in that Tris actually does lose her life, thus ending her role as protagonist. However, before her suicide, Tris, like Bella and Katniss, does fail a few times in her attempts. The most notable instance of ineffective, self-directed violence occurs in the second novel of the series, in which Tris chooses to surrender herself to the Erudite to save her remaining faction-members from death. Like Bella and Katniss, Tris seems to believe that her sacrifice "is the right thing to do," and so is a necessary moral action (Roth, *Insurgent* 310). However, in believing this, Tris also disparages her own life, saying "I'm not important. Everyone will do just fine without me" (Roth, *Insurgent* 311). These two beliefs work in tandem to decide Tris' behavior. Just like Bella and Katniss believe that the people they intend to save deserve to live more than they do, Tris believes that her life is of lesser value than her faction members. She is merely the replacement, the stand-in. And yet, it is also Tris' purpose in the series to perform this act of sacrifice. The reaction this choice garners is much like the reactions Bella receives when she attempts to perform self-directed violence. Upon catching her in the attempt to leave their haven and turn herself in at the Erudite headquarters, Tobias scolds Tris, telling her, "Don't be an idiot," thus implying that her choice to sacrifice herself is an ignorant, senseless action (Roth, *Insurgent* 310). Later, when Tris is being held at the Erudite headquarters, it is suggested by a guard that she "wanted to be executed," and that she does not have "good survival instinct" (Roth, *Insurgent* 333). Tris herself confirms this when she says, "I'm going to die tomorrow. It has been a long time since I felt certainty about anything, so this feels like a gift" (Roth, *Insurgent* 379). What little control she secures in

believing that her death is forthcoming is comforting to her, it allows her to view her own death as a kind of gift. Her choice to come to the Erudite headquarters and to knowingly face death is her choice. If nothing else, it is liberating because it provides her with an illusion of control. However, while this Tris presents this feeling as a gift to herself, it is ultimately a gift to those she intends to leave behind, believing her death to grant them greater security than she herself can gain access to.

However, Tris' life does not end here. Instead, the role Tris plays as protagonist comes to a head in the Bureau of Genetic Welfare when she gives up her life “to stop other people from losing everything...to save the city and people [her] mother and father loved,” as well as spare her brother from the task (Roth, *Allegiant* 468). During this scene, Tris describes sacrifice in her own words, suggesting that “it should be done from love,” “from necessity,” and “for people who need your strength” (Roth, *Allegiant* 471-472). Interestingly, Tris approaches this action believing that she is strong enough to survive. Yet, she does not; the faith she places in her own strength proves unfounded and so her action proves ineffective in a different way.

Of course, her action is not entirely pointless. By choosing to risk her life, Tris not only saves Chicago and its inhabitants, she also revitalizes them. In her absence, the previously dystopian city is turned into a haven, “a kind of paradise” (Roth, *Allegiant* 504). Her sacrifice was necessary for this change, maintaining her purposefulness in the text. However, it must be asked why “paradise” can only be achieved once the heroine has given up her life. Similarly, Bella's decision to sacrifice her life lead her to a state that she describes as the “perfect piece of our forever” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 754). And for Katniss, though true happiness may always evade her, it saturates the implied futures of her children (Collins, *Mockingjay* 438). Do these happy endings necessitate the heroine's suffering and sacrifice? More importantly, what do these

seemingly “happy endings” say about the responses of other characters to the protagonist’s acts of sacrifice? On the one hand, these acts of sacrifice destroy aspects of the protagonist’s life. Katniss herself may never experience true happiness again. She loses all the people who were dear to her at the beginning of the series. Tris literally loses everything, as her life and her narrative voice are taken. And though Bella is happy, lingering there in the background is the threat of the Volturi’s return.

II. Mutilation: Cyclical Violence and the Male Savior Character

Though Bella, Katniss, and Tris all fail to successfully sacrifice their lives at some point in the series, their bodies all suffer the consequences of their attempts. As if aiming to end their own lives was not harmful enough, all three of these protagonists suffer physical injuries, injuries which are described by the authors in explicit detail. This is a topic touched on by Jarvis, specifically in relating Bella’s self-harm to a means of “reconciling the impossible demands of being a successful girl in the twenty-first century” (105). I argue instead that the effect of self-harm throughout these series is not a means of reconciling the conflicting expectations placed on the feminine body, but rather a product of them. The mutilation in all three series work first and foremost as a consequence of the protagonist’s self-sacrificial acts. Her performance of this act is only one step in the process, the pain she endures because of this act affirms her role as heroine. However, the entrance of the male savior character, a figure who swoops in to save the protagonist, diminishes the act’s significance because it inhibits the act from being completed. As a result, the violence the authors depict becomes a necessary means of affirming the heroism of the protagonist without eliminating her need to be saved. The gruesome display of her pain, rather than the completion of her noble act, becomes the indicator of her strength.

In *The Twilight Saga*, Bella's first attempt at sacrifice in choosing to give her life to James leads to her suffering "a broken leg, four broken ribs, some cracks in [her] skull, bruises covering every inch of [her] skin" and significant blood loss (Meyer, *Twilight* 460). The most significant of her injuries, however, is the bite wound inflicted by James. This wound in particular causes Bella tremendous pain, described as a "grip of fiery torture," and exacerbating her other injuries: "making the pain in [her] leg flare sickeningly" (Meyer, *Twilight* 455). It is also the only wound that leaves scarring significant to the rest of the series. The wounds James inflicts reinstate Bella's powerlessness against him. And yet, the nobility of Bella's sacrifice is also reliant on these wounds. If she had gone to meet her end and been saved without any consequence, her actions would have merely been foolish. Instead, Bella's injuries make her seem brave, strong. Meanwhile, Edward's intervention in her sacrifice ensures that she does not step outside of the lines of hegemonic femininity. The message is clear: she endured all this and lives on to endure more. Edward's role as the male savior character merely allows her to continue the cycle of sacrifice.

And so the cycle continues. *Breaking Dawn* features the most gruesome instance of mutilation after Bella becomes pregnant. This instance is preceded by what is described as a "blood-curdling shriek of agony," and features "a fountain of blood" pouring from Bella's body and the "shattering crack" of her spine (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 347, 351). For nearly ten pages, Bella's pain is thoroughly detailed as the child within her literally fractures its way out and as Edward and Rosalie help. Bella herself has no control within the situation. What little control she exerted in deciding to keep the child is eliminated in this scene. She lies helpless on the medical table while the child breaks her bones from the inside and Edward and Rosalie cut open her skin and tear away the embryonic sac with their teeth. The scene only stops when Jacob can no longer

bear witness to the macabre display. As previously mentioned, this scene is presented as Bella's most noble act of sacrifice, and yet it is also the most horrifying display of violence in the series. Her success in this sacrifice is reliant on her pain. Though Bella does leave behind her human life as a result of this sacrifice, it is Edward again who saves her from dying forever. He restarts her heart and injects his venom into her bloodstream. He is the reason she continues to live on as a vampire.

Similarly, Katniss' sacrifices prove time and time again to be intimately tied with physical injury, the pain of which seems to increase with each novel. In the first, she experiences large, second degree burns on her leg, a ruptured eardrum, and a head wound; and yet, though horrible, none of these wounds compare to the injuries she endures in the second and third novels. For instance, in *Catching Fire*, Katniss is lashed across the face with a whip and the pain she experiences is described as "blinding and instantaneous" (Collins 121). This wound is inflicted as a result of Katniss' attempt to spare Gale from being lashed himself. Functionally, Katniss' choice served as a means of gaining control within an unfamiliar situation, one that came about because of the Capitol's interference in District 12. The wound she receives as a result of her interference confirms that she is virtually powerless against the Peacekeepers she faces. So much so that it is only because of Peeta and Haymitch that she walks away without further injury (Collins, *Catching Fire* 122-123). They are the ones that convince the Peacekeeper to halt his assault on Gale, not Katniss. And yet, like Bella, the wound validates Katniss' bravery. Her choice to oppose the new and dangerous Peacekeepers is a selfless act, one that is recognizable as such when she tries, and fails, to protect Gale. Had she merely failed to protect Gale, without the consequences of injury, her actions may not be perceived in such a favorable light.

Once she returns to the arena Katniss' injuries only become more severe. The worst of her wounds occur when Johanna cuts open her forearm to dislodge the tracker implanted in her skin. This tracker represents another means the Capitol uses to control Katniss' body. The only way for Katniss to regain control is to endure pain; she describes the action as "an excruciating ripping sensation" as Johanna is "digging something...the point of her knife, into [Katniss'] flesh" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 417). The damage to her body is extreme; when she attempts to care for the wound, "blood sprays [her] in the face," a gory display that suggests an artery has been cut (Collins, *Catching Fire* 419). Here, Katniss' means of gaining some control of her body (i.e. being rid of the tracking device) is preceded first by losing all control. She is hit hard on the head, incapacitated, pinned down, and cut open. And again, when she shoots the arrow into the force field, she acquires some semblance of control but loses it immediately after. The shot paralyzes her, literally taking from her the ability to exert control over her limbs and rendering her "body useless" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 425). She only survives this incident when the rebels rescue her, an event associated again with two male characters: Haymitch and Plutarch. In order to gain control, Katniss must also always lose control. It is an endless shift between power and powerlessness, a cycle of violence that would only end if Katniss chose to die, which she illustrates through the assertion, "if I slide quietly, privately into death, it will be a victory" (Collins, *Catching Fire* 428). The mutilation that occurs within this novel, this alternating condition of being in control and being controlled, illuminates Katniss' self-sacrificial tendencies. Her decision to end her own life would mark a final act of control. To die on her own terms, rather than for the Capitol's games, would be an irreversible act, one that would seal the authority she has over her own body.

This is the case also for Bella and Tris, whose decisions to leave behind their lives affirm not only the control they have over their own bodies but the control they have over their circumstances. For Bella, to leave behind her human life means that she gains strength she never before had and gains access to a sense of authority that she could not as a human. For Tris, to die means that her supposed genetic superiority is rendered meaningless; the hierarchy of existence is all but eliminated, thus saving her remaining family and friends from its oppressive reign. And yet, always, this ability to gain control is preceded by incredible violence. Though we do not see the full, physical effect of Katniss' second time in the arena in *Catching Fire*, we do see the effect in *Mockingjay*. She describes herself as having "acid-damaged hair, sunburnt skin, and ugly scars," all products of the few days she spent in the games (Collins, *Mockingjay* 67). The wound Johanna left when removing the tracker is the most noticeable of her old injuries, said to be a "gaping hole" that formed into a "lumpy, jagged scar that ripples out over the size of an apple" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 69). As will be discussed in the following section, these scars and evidence of damage are removed only to be replaced later on by worse afflictions. For instance, long after these wounds have been healed, Katniss is caught in the perimeter of an explosion. When she says, "I am on fire" it is because she is (Collins, *Mockingjay* 392). Metaphor long gone, Katniss' skin and hair are eaten away by the flames of the explosion that kills her sister. What is left of her body is a "patchwork" of old and new skin, the grafts appearing "red, hot, and melted in places" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 397). Her hair, too, is like patchwork, areas having been "singed off completely" while others were simply "chopped off at odd lengths" (Collins, *Mockingjay* 397). As previously mentioned, this instance of mutilation precedes the greatest loss of control that Katniss experiences within the series. Though the rebel cause wins the war and Katniss is given the opportunity to kill the one person who threatened her authority throughout

the series, this instance of loss invalidates all control she sought to and otherwise would have acquired.

Tris, too, experiences multiple instances of mutilation, the first of which occurs when she is shot in the midst of a genocide staged by the Erudite and enacted by mindless, Dauntless soldiers. Tris, not controlled by the Erudite, is targeted by Dauntless, and the pain she endures is described as “sharp and sudden,” as if “spreading outward with electric fingers” (Roth, *Divergent* 425). Like Bella and Katniss, this wound is the consequence of her attempt at saving another person, Tobis, whose life is threatened by a Dauntless soldier. The soldier she shoots to save Tobias is the same one who, in return, shoots and captures Tris. By attempting to gain control over the situation, Tris is placed in an even more powerless position, one marked by her injury. Interestingly, the character that saves Tris is not a male character, but her mother. In this way, the *Divergent* series breaks away from the pattern presented in the other two series yet again. However, not in such a way as to truly position Tris’ mother in a place of significant power. As soon as she saves Tris, she herself is killed in an act of sacrifice, choosing to die in order to protect her daughter (Roth, *Divergent* 443). Thus, while Tris’ mother does briefly fulfill the role typically occupied by a male character, she immediately falls into the same pattern of behavior that Bella, Katniss, and Tris do. Just as Tris’ death suggests that she had temporarily borrowed the role of hero, only for it to be returned to a male character, Tris’ mother borrows the role of the male savior, only to swiftly release it to a male character. For example, later in the series, after Tris has been tortured by Jeanine Matthews, she is only saved from death by Peter, the same character she fought with as a new initiate.

This cycle of powerlessness continues. Each time Tris attempts to gain authority in her situation and comes face to face with her own lack of control, with the mutilation always

following. In fact, the bullet wound that she endures in this first book follows Tris throughout the series, never fully healing and serving as a constant reminder of her vulnerability. Roth does not hesitate to continue using this wound to explore Tris' endurance. When the bullet is being removed, for example, Tris describes the experience as pain that "spreads through [her] body and...screams through gritted teeth," screams that continue as she feels "the knife moving under [her] skin" (Roth, *Divergent* 449-450). She rips the stitches in combat mere moments later. This is a theme among the two following novels as well. Her continued use of her wounded arm when fighting and fleeing keeps it from healing. When it inhibits her from using a gun as well it becomes a true marker of her helplessness.

The most significant instance of mutilation in the *Divergent* series, however, appears when Tris is committing her final act of sacrifice. Even though she is dying from exposure to the death serum and has no weapons of her own, the head of the Bureau shoots her multiple times. When she is first hit she hears the gunfire and "pain races through [her] body," she does not even have time to see where the bullet hit her before the gun fires again (Roth, *Allegiant* 474). Her only thought is "So much pain" as "black edges on [her] vision" (Roth, *Allegiant* 474). When she finally hits the ground, "Red...Dark" blood pools around her head and she drifts into death (Roth, *Allegiant* 474). No male savior character comes to save her from her act of sacrifice, the role is left unfulfilled. Without anyone to intervene, male or otherwise, Tris dies. And yet, her death seems to end the cycle of violence and powerlessness that looms over her. Neither Bella nor Katniss experience an end to their own cycles of violence, not in marriage or motherhood. While the ending of *The Twilight Saga* hints at the return of the Volturi to attempt at destroying the Cullens, the ending of *The Hunger Games Trilogy* is marked by Katniss' nightmares, memories of the violence that she must relive forever.

Though there are exceptions, the most notable instances of injury or scarring can be traced back to the protagonist's decision to put herself in harm's way. Thus, the protagonist's status as heroine seems to be reliant partially on the mutilation of her body, especially as a consequence of attempted sacrifice. But these characters' bodies do not always stay mutilated. Frequently, there is a point of intervention that serves to erase the damage they have done, to return their bodies to a state of unaltered beauty. The effect of this erasure serves to maintain that idyllic, feminine standard that they are held up to. The mutilation of their bodies functions to justify their acts of sacrifice, thus establishing their role as heroine, while simultaneously reinstating the lack of control they have. The erasure of this mutilation, though different for all three protagonists, allows them to prove the nobility of their attempting sacrifices without also sacrificing their beauty and outward femininity. In fact, some instances, which I will refer to as transformations, serve merely to make these characters more feminine.

III. Transformation: Erasure and Redemptive Beautification

In her essay, "The Twilight of Feminism," Jarvis briefly explores the relationship between self-harm and transforming the body, referencing Kinneneun and Orbach's arguments in favor of cosmetic surgery functioning as a form of self-harm (110). However, within these series, the relationship between the mutilation of the body and transformation is intersected with the act of erasure. Whereas cosmetic surgery will often leave scars, reminders of the violent process necessary for transformation, the transformative process goes hand-in-hand with the erasure of marks left on the body. In keeping the theme of feminizing the body, these series allow their protagonists to perform seemingly heroic acts of sacrifice and then promptly erase the effects of their action. Not only are they halted in their attempts at gaining control over their situation by

the male savior character, the effects of their action are forever removed from them. However, these transformations do not always serve to remove physical or bodily marks.

Brownstein suggests that “What the female protagonist of a traditional novel seeks...is an achieved, finished identity, realized in conclusive union with herself-as-heroine. Her marriage or death at the end of the narrative signifies this union” (xxi). In the case of these three series, this union is part of the transformation process in these series. Bella not only becomes a vampire, she also becomes Mrs. Cullen. Katniss does not merely transform into the Mockingjay; in the end, she lives separately from this identity, her relationship with Peeta secured. And Tris’ identity is established through her suicide, the weight of her action ultimately reflecting not on her but on Tobias, whose voice concludes the narrative. Their lives, achievements, and heroism are passed on to the men around them. In Tris’ case this happens literally; the role she fulfilled as protagonist is fully surrendered to Tobias. The book ends with his voice. Though Bella and Katniss do not pass on their voices to their male love interests, both series do end with the image of the heroine and love interest together, existing as a unit rather than separate entities. The “achievement of a coherent, integral self” is dependent on their connection to those male counterparts, through marriage or death (Brownstein xxiii).

However, these characters undergo several transformations between the start of their series and the end of them. For Bella, transformation comes in several forms. The first is through her marriage to Edward, a change that Bella undergoes begrudgingly in hopes of becoming a vampire. Though perhaps a less physical transformation than the others she experiences, the change carries greater implications beneath the surface. When Bella Swan becomes “Mrs. Cullen,” it is not only her name that changes but her outward appearance and social status. Upon becoming engaged to Edward, her old truck is replaced by a new luxury vehicle, she is given a

“shiny, black credit card,” and she even gains “acceptance into an Ivy League college” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 5). Her status as Edward’s fiancée grants her access to objects and institutions that she herself would have never had access to. By marrying him, she climbs higher on the ladder of social and economic hierarchies. While she gains greater influence and social recognition because of this change, she has little control over the objects and institutions she actually receives. All these are choices that Edward made for her, rather than choices she makes for herself.

The second transformation Bella undergoes is her pregnancy, a physical process. Though it has already been discussed, it is important to note here that this process leads into another form of transformation: from human to vampire. Most importantly, this transition serves to erase the horrific effects of Bella’s pregnancy on her body. The gruesome display that Meyer detailed so thoroughly is gone within mere days. The broken bones, destroyed skin, even her emaciated form disappear, erased by the venom that Edward pumped into her system. However, Bella is not only healed, every old scar, every physical flaw she had as a human vanishes. When she looks into the mirror post-transformation she sees that she is “indisputably beautiful,” and “flawless” (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 403). However, she does not immediately recognize herself, referring to the reflection as an “alien creature,” someone or something that cannot be her (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 403). And yet, it is her. Bella has become inhumanly beautiful, a transformation that she largely ignored in her question to become a vampire. The effect of this change seems almost like an attempt to make up for the pages and pages dedicated to Bella’s destruction. It becomes almost like a process of redemptive beautification, to not only remove the evidence of Bella’s pregnancy, but to ensure that her body is still worthy of belonging to the heroine.

Secondary to this transformation is Bella's transition from alterable to unalterable, a significant shift when discussing the changing body. As Bella herself suggests, change is an inherent component of a woman's body, especially to accommodate a developing fetus (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 126). When Bella becomes a vampire she loses that ability to change. Her body is static, existing forever as an eighteen-year-old. And yet, becoming a vampire also grants her the ability to become autonomous. Whereas, in her human form, she was reliant on Edward for protection, reassurance, and generally codependent within their relationship, the power she acquires as a vampire allows her to step outside of this role. She even decides to become the primary negotiator of the Cullen family, securing the documents necessary to blend into human society (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 749). Part of Bella's newfound confidence in becoming a vampire stems from her sudden beauty. When Bella is taking the first steps to adopting the role of the Cullen family negotiator, she is anxious. However, the responses to her beauty break through this anxiety. Bella's beauty is immediately noticed by those around her, literally turning the heads of bystanders. In her 2012 essay, "Girl Culture and the "Twilight" Franchise," Catherine Driscoll explores the effect of this change. For Driscoll, Bella's sudden attainment of luxuries, physical objects and bodily, and her continuous assertion that she does not want them, operates "simultaneously as an embrace and as a rejection of contemporary girlhood," (95). Bella gets to be presented as someone who does not need or want these luxuries while still enjoying them. It is just another means of the text presenting a contradictory protagonist in order to appeal to conventional standards of femininity. Much like the idea that Bella can be strong, but not too strong, she can also be materialistic or vain without really engaging in materialism or vanity. As Jarvis seconds this claim in "The Twilight of Feminism," suggesting that Bella is able to enjoy

wearing makeup and dresses, but only when it is forced onto her by Alice (107). We see the same thing happen when Katniss and Tris.

When first encountering her stylist team and her first transformation, Katniss expresses distaste when they remove her body hair, saying simply “I don’t like it” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 71). And yet, when she sees her full transformation, she describes herself as “breathtaking” and begins to hope that others will notice her and provide for her in the arena (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 80). Likewise, when she encounters this team again before the interview process, she undergoes a similar process. She says they “erase my face...and draw my features back out” and when she looks into the mirror, like Bella, she does not recognize herself, even using the word “creature” to describe her reflection as Bella does (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 139). She does not associate herself with the individual in the mirror. She gets to separate herself from the idea of being beautiful and desirable, while still ultimately being both. And while these transformations do not erase the evidence of Katniss’ action, the one she undergoes at the end of the novel does. After she awakes from a period of sedation, she finds that all of the evidence of her injuries have disappeared. She remarks on her “skin’s perfection,” saying, “Not only are the scars from the arena gone, but those accumulated over the years of hunting have vanished without a trace” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 410). In the same way Bella’s violent experience is followed by the erasure of its evidence, so too is Katniss’. Her body returns to its expected state, not only the action of her sacrifice for Prim removed from her, but all evidence of her life as hunter and provider for her family.

Katniss undergoes this same process of transformation in *Catching Fire* prior to her entrance into the arena. However, it is in *Mockingjay* that we see the most significant of Katniss’ transformations. After she is transported to the rebel base stationed underneath District 13,

Katniss is forced to fully become the face of the rebel movement, the Mockingjay. Her stylist teams, with the exception of Cinna, play a big role in making Katniss into this face of revolution. Like prior transformations, they restore her to what they call “Beauty Base Zero,” and though they do not have the same technology as they did in the Capitol, they do their best to remake her body into something feminine and attractive (Collins, *Mockingjay* 67). Though, this time, they do not do so with the intention of removing all evidence of violence. As Katniss suggests, “With my acid-damaged hair, sunburned skin, and ugly scars, the prep team has to make me pretty and *then* damage, burn, and scar me in a more attractive way” (Collins, *Mockingjay* 67). Through this transformation, we can observe how standards of femininity inform the presentation of Katniss’ body. She is allowed to have scars, but only if those scars are attractive.

Like Katniss and Bella, Tris does not engage in standard performances of femininity. She does not wear makeup and dresses on her own, only when someone else forces her to. In Tris’ case, that person is Christina, who encourages Tris to put on a little black dress, let her hair down, and wear eyeliner (Roth, *Divergent* 86). The effect for Tris is immediate: with the makeup on, Tris’ eyes become “piercing,” her face “softer and fuller” (Roth, *Divergent* 87). And though Tris asserts that she is “not pretty,” Christina describes her as “striking” (Roth, *Divergent* 87). Like Katniss, the makeover gives her a sense of hope for her acceptance into the Dauntless faction. Her outward appearance is tied to her ideas of social acceptance. Though she does not believe that she has become beautiful, she does believe that she has become more socially acceptable. However, like Bella and Katniss, Tris asserts that she does not recognize herself after the change. When she looks into the mirror she says it is not “like seeing myself for the first time: it’s like seeing someone else for the first time” (Roth, *Divergent* 87). Thus, like the other two, Tris is allowed to be attractive without associating that attractiveness with herself.

Though, in some ways, Tris' death cuts short her ability to be remade, the evidence of her sacrifices physically wiped away, she does experience a kind of redemptive beautification. After Tobias fully takes the narrative voice, he himself erases the evidence of Tris' past mutilation, though he does so symbolically. The last scene we get of Tris is also Tobias' first memory of her, as she was alive and "Beautiful" (Roth, *Allegiant* 491). Thus, the image we are left with is not Tris' body bleeding out from multiple gunshot wounds. It is not even the picture of Tris as she appears throughout the most of the series, bearing wounds that she suffered in the climax of the very first novel. No, the image of Tris we are left with calls back to page 60 of *Divergent*, before she is propelled into the wild struggle for survival that defines the rest of the series. And this image is not even Tris', but Tobias' -- from *his* perspective, *his* first memory of her, and capturing *his* idea of her beauty. Gone are all the sacrifices and injuries she endured throughout the series. Tris is effectively returned to the state she began her story in, the events of her narrative stretching out before her. In this way, perhaps the cycle of violence, failure, and erasure is continued for Tris. At the end of her series, we are returned to its beginning by Tobias. Though Tris does not live on to endure the cycle in other ways, Tobias' memory of her is trapped in the cycle, and because he becomes the final voice of authority in the series, so too must the reader's.

In these series, transformation serves to meet yet another contradictory expectation of the protagonist's body. So long as the marks on her body are not evidence of her own actions, so long as they do not make her ugly, they are okay. She must fulfill the expectations placed on the feminine body, but she also must do so without trying to. She can be beautiful, but only if that beauty renders her unrecognizable to herself. She can wear dresses and makeup, but only begrudgingly. She must be feminine, but she must also be anti-feminine. In this way, she must

be, as Brownstein says, “unlike all other women” and, thus, “rightly representative of her sex” (xxi).

Conclusion

In the last year two books have been released by Meyer and Collins that return to the worlds of *The Twilight Saga* and *The Hunger Games*. Out of curiosity and respect for my adolescent love of these series, I read them and discovered that both authors tell their newest stories from the perspective of male characters. Meyer’s latest publication, *Midnight Sun* retells the entirety of *Twilight* from the perspective of Edward. He takes over the narrative that was once Bella’s, reforming it and her as he tells it. Through Edward’s eyes, Bella is removed from the position of heroine. She becomes instead merely the helpless love that he must protect at all costs. Any authority that she seemed to have in *Twilight* changes, twisting to accommodate all the information that Edward never tells her. Our image of Bella, *my* image of Bella, is altered by Edward’s narrative intrusion. In this way, Meyer’s newest novel works in the same way the ending of Roth’s *Allegiant* does. It not only hands over the narrative voice to the male counterpart, it decides how the heroine will be perceived. In the progression of the series, *Midnight Sun* gets the last word.

In some ways, what Collins does in *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* has worse implications still. She lends the narrative voice to Coriolanus Snow, also known as President Snow in *The Hunger Games Trilogy*. Though this book is a prequel to the trilogy and Katniss does not appear in it, she seems to be represented through a spiritual doppelganger, a district 12 tribute named Lucy Gray. While Katniss escapes the grips of President Snow for good in the original trilogy, the representation of her does not. His younger version, Coriolanus, acts as Lucy Gray’s mentor, guiding and controlling her throughout the novel. Like Katniss, she is named

victor and must endure Coriolanus even after she escapes the arena. Though her ending is ambiguous, it is implied that Coriolanus kills her, a feat that he attempts and fails to accomplish with Katniss. In this way, his act may serve as a metaphorical killing of Katniss. Though the story is a prequel, many readers like myself are returning to this narrative world after having read *The Hunger Games Trilogy*. In that way, this book also gets the last word in its series.

Though neither of these books were brought into my main discussion, my purpose in introducing them in the conclusion serves to exhibit how these series continue to undermine their heroines nearly a decade after the series' initial publication. In my introduction I proposed that the visibilities of these stories stemmed first from the whiteness of their protagonists, and second from their perpetuation of hegemonic femininity. I argued that these novels present us with a heroine that is simultaneously meant to be both strong and weak, feminine but anti-feminine. I also suggested that, because of the contradictions in this presentation, these protagonists were forced to endure a cycle of violence, failure, and redemptive beautification. These newly published novels present this same contradictory image of the feminine character and, while the original protagonists are entirely removed from their narrative authority, the cyclical violence they endured persists. Only now, we do not even get to experience that cycle with the character who endures it. Rather, we are told the stories from the perspective of those characters used throughout the original series to perpetuate it. Much like *Allegiant*, these two novels take away the protagonist's voice. They erase her struggle, centering instead on the male character's experience. In doing so, these novels truly affirm the gendered hierarchy of power they established throughout the rest of the series, topping it with the male character.

Though these two novels will not likely garner the same global popularity that the original novels did, I am interested in the fact that these presentations of heroines did not exist

singularly in the period from 2005 to 2013. Through these two novels alone, we can see these presentations persisting eight years later. Because of this, it is more important than ever to discuss these series. Despite their age, they continue to emerge and are readily granted a platform. Their troubling adherence to default bodies and hegemonic femininity still do not limit them or their visibility. In fact, this adherence is likely bolstering their visibility in silent ways. If we do not discuss them, if we do not point to these issues, then books such as these will continue to be granted positions of visibility while other series are rendered invisible because they do not conform to society's ideas of normative body image and gender.

However, in order to someday shift the gaze of our society, we must not only discuss these series. To do so would continue to perpetuate them as the standard. Rather, we must also look outward, to find those texts that are not granted visibility in popular media. Thus, I will end my discussion by looking at two young adult novels that feature protagonists of color. I have chosen these two novels in particular primarily with regard to their genre. The first serves to fulfill the fantasy genre that *The Twilight Saga* also occupies, while the second fits into the dystopian genre that *The Hunger Games Trilogy* and *The Divergent Trilogy* belong to. This way, we can observe two narratives that engage with similar generic tropes, without being led by white protagonists.

The first is *Labyrinth Lost* by Zoraida Córdova, published in 2016. This fantasy novel follows the Latinx protagonist Alex as she attempts to save her family from a failed attempt at ridding herself of magic (Machota). This story in particular offers an exploration of Latin American cultures as well as bisexual identity, a major step away from hegemonic femininity's obligatory whiteness and heterosexuality. The second is *Orleans* by Sherri L. Smith, a science fiction novel published in 2013. It follows Fen de la Guerre, a Black teenager who attempts to

navigate the remnants of New Orleans after it has been destroyed by natural disaster and disease (Law). Though this novel does not so readily remove itself from the standard of heterosexuality, it does decenter the white perspective. In fact, only one white character appears throughout the entire novel (Law).

Of course, both of these novels were published roughly within the time frame of the three series in discussion, and both also present us with issues of standardized femininity. While Alex seeks to save her family, Fen is tasked with protecting a newborn. In this way, ideas of domesticity and maternity still saturate these character's narratives. However, these concepts are reframed, made different by the cultural intersections of race, gender, and ethnicity — intersections that must be acknowledged in order to fully understand all presentations of femininity within our society. After all, harmful expectations placed on the feminine body do not exist solely for the white individual. While we must acknowledge those texts that are made visible because of their adherence to gender hegemony and default bodies, we must also look to and discuss those novels that are not granted visibility. We must challenge the structures of hierarchy that exist in both if we hope to see change.

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