

**Ashcraft, Donna M. *Deconstructing Twilight: Psychological and Feminist Perspectives on the Series*. Pp 247. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2013. US \$42.95 (paper). ISBN 978-1-4331-1638-4.**

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Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Saga has created a polarizing media franchise for the better part of the past decade, encompassing books, films, dolls, travel tourism, jewelry, and lately, academic interest. Its popularity has spawned a host of imitators and imitations, not to mention the entire sections of bookstores that are now given over to selling said volumes. It is time to recognize and reconceive what impact hybridized romance fiction of *Twilight* has had on the romance genre, and what that means for both romance readers and scholars. To date, there are probably a dozen volumes of academic and popular analysis on Meyer's books, many of which are thought-provoking and rigorous works of scholarship. Unfortunately, Donna M. Ashcraft's *Deconstructing Twilight* is not one of these books.

The volume promises an investigation of the series using feminist and social psychology theories, distancing itself from literary critique. While psychological analysis of the fictional characters and their relationships is an interesting theoretical exercise, as a book-length study it falls rather flat. Chapters on "The Motherhood Mystique," "The Work-Family Dichotomy," and "The Damsel in Distress" discuss the women of the series; the chapter "Dr. Jekyll or Mr. Hyde?" discusses the men. The chapters "Feminist or Feminine?" and "The Embodiment of Patriarchy" analyze feminism and feminist theory as applied to Meyer's texts. While Ashcraft makes good arguments regarding each of her points (best summed up as: the women aren't feminists, the men are patriarchal, and together they reinforce traditional roles; also, both Edward and Jacob are abusive and this is bad) they are backed up by weak research that lend the feeling of reading an undergraduate thesis to what should be a professor's work. The majority of citations are culled from the *Twilight* books themselves as well as Meyer's website; others are pulled from a dozen academic works and a host of popular resources. (A particularly egregious example comes from an assertion that the *Twilight* books are "based upon classics in literature: *Twilight* is based on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. ... and *Breaking Dawn* is based on two of Shakespeare's plays, *Merchant of Venice* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" (205). The source? An article

from *The Examiner*.) The only references to romance scholarship as such are to Radway's classic *Reading the Romance* (1984), Dixon's 1999 volume on Mills and Boon, and Juhasz's essay from 1988 on reading romance fiction.

Ashcraft also unfortunately succumbs to the classic fallacies of reader-response criticism; because the *Twilight* series is bestselling, she assumes, its readers therefore view the relationships depicted in the books positively. Throughout her analysis she refers to "fans of the series" in a derogatory way, referencing their presumed opinions without citation. This is particularly grating when another study, Leavenworth and Isaksson's *Fanged Fan Fiction: Variations on Twilight, True Blood, and the Vampire Diaries*, also published in 2013, examined the same texts through the fans' own words and often found that fans' opinions were divided regarding Meyer's work. Even without access to that book, however, the entire body of fan studies scholarship available across over twenty years should demonstrate how problematic it is to assume that fans of any sort subscribe to a singular view of any text. Alas, Ashcraft's concluding statements regarding readers' inclinations towards "confirmation bias" and their "need to preserve their theories on the tales" (224) seem to say rather more about her views than those of Meyer's readers.

I would recommend this book to an undergraduate writing a paper on the topic; a more general audience would likely find the discussions of theory uninteresting, and the specialized reader will find the study problematic altogether. In retrospect, the book as a whole seems like an inflation of what could have been a fascinating article, but for what it is, it falls far short of what it could have been—and that is a pity.

## **Bibliography**

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