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Certificate  and  :
“they were children yesterday...”

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Abstract

Representations of young teenagers and adolescents (not yet young adults) in popular culture are problematic. All too often the term teenager is less about age and experience and more about consumer merchandise and lifestyles aimed at them as a demographic sector. This paper addresses some of the issues and myths that writers and film makers are confronted with when producing teenage culture – everything may not be as you think.

Keywords: *Twilight, Harry Potter*, teen-culture, teen-films, teenagers, young adults

Introduction

“People are very anxious about teenagers aren’t they?” said Melvyn Burgess, who is described in the same article as “one of Britain’s top writers for teenagers.” “Everyone’s rather frightened of their suddenly being adults because they were children yesterday” (Burgess 2013: 2).ⁱ People are, indeed, very anxious about teenagers, and yet looking at the way writers write for them, film makers produce for them and consumer commodities are packaged for them, you wouldn’t think this was the case at all. It is now well recognised that books, toys, films, DVDs, electronic games and clothes for those non adults, “who were children yesterday,” are continually graded, marketed, advertised and targeted as a specific teenage group, with supposed age specific content. A walk through even

the friendliest bookshop will reveal shelves that say things like, Age 11-13 or Teen Fiction; electronic games and DVDs are similarly marked on suitability. Indeed, in the USA in 1957, the Young Adult Services Division of the American Library Association was established and in 1992 it became the YALSA, the Young Adult library Services Association, whose guidelines define literature targeted at the age 12-18 year old as “young adult” or “YA.” This makes Melvyn Burgess a “YA” writer, in their eyes. But this kind of blanket classification of teenagers, adolescents and young adults is problematic. I contend, it is for this reason that the film classifications, Certificate 12A by the BBFC and PG-13 by the MPAAⁱⁱ raise important issues and tell us much about how adult produced, textual culture addresses a complex matrix of young teenagers in representation – especially those who were, indeed, “children yesterday...” I have written this paper in two parts, the first serves as critical background and the second is an analysis of the awarding of those certificates to two major pieces of popular culture aimed at this demographic, to show how successfully writers have addressed the issues raised.

Part one: Old Children/ Young Adults

Representations of young teenagers and adolescents (not yet young adults) in popular culture are problematic. All too often the term teenager is less about age and experience and more about consumer merchandise and lifestyles aimed at them as a demographic sector. They are young people, no longer children, not yet adults, temporarily caught on the cusp between child and adulthood and if we are honest, convenient, designated terms like young adults (YA) on shelf groupings don’t describe them either. It is clear that the terms “teenager” and “adolescent” are homogenous words that attempt to contain many differences qualified by issues such as gender, socioeconomics status and many, many other subdivisions. Even the teenage definition, thirteen years to nineteen years, reveals a grid that highlights the extent of the descriptive dilemma. They are, for all of us, the years of confusion, physical changes and puberty, which are tied into a bewildering and ongoing psychosocial transition that takes place through

childhood into adulthood. It is a period of uncertainty and liminality – as Burgess went onto say, “it’s all a bit weird, isn’t it? You know, you’re a kid one minute and you’ve got sexual desires the next” (2013: 2).

Stanley G. Hall (1904) wrote the first recognised text to address this complex, curious and liminal period, which he referred to “adolescence” (the realm of the teenager). But while it would be a mistake to think Hall was able to define adolescence as a fixed descriptor over the 100 years that followed his contribution to the debate, it is extremely important to our understanding of the particular teenage demographic. Hall’s, “understanding of adolescence as a physiological *and* as a social construction... which varies according to historical period and cultural context” (McLennan 2012) is probably the most important issue in understanding adolescence. They are, in the words of Benedict Anderson (1983), an “imagined community,” whose collective identity is, in large part, brought into existence via the simultaneity of the mass media. New sociologists might say they are “socially constructed rather than being intrinsic to the state of being” (Jackson and Scott 91). It is with this in mind that we may say that what we call teen culture is invariably an adult intervention, constructing a vision for teenagers, writing for teenagers, producing for teenagers, that which is always *for* them but almost always not *by* them, of which Jack Zipes writes,

It is one of the worst kept secrets in the world that, within the past fifty years or so, we have reconfigured our children [and teenagers] to act and to behave as commodities and agents of consumerism, and we continue to invent ways to incorporate them flawlessly into socio-economic systems that compromise their integrity and make them complicit in criminal behaviour such as mutual economic exploitation... (Zipes 27)

Cultural products, such as books, film, video games, clothes and so on, targeted at a teenage audience, are invariably created for them and almost always by anyone but them. But one step at a time because while we can see how teenagers exist within particular socio-cultural and consumer contexts, we do have to consider the question of power; and Webb et al’s reading of Foucault is useful on this:

While categories such as “childhood” were generally understood as being stable (“everybody knows what a child is”), in reality they were subject to transformation and revision as new forms of knowledge were developed... we all think we know what a child or adolescent is, in fact these categories have histories... and are always in the process of being transformed. (Danaher, Schirato & Webb 78)

Teenagers are indeed becoming defined more and more by the cult and culture of representations created through commodification, advertised lifestyles, media and an unalienable cultural crisis wrapped up in the irrepressible rise of capitalism. But this is problematised by other issues that aim to define who or what teenagers are – which, it seems to me, are questions only they can answer. What we can establish is teenagers are not adults and I am uncomfortable with the “young adult” categorisation, but neither are they the children represented in Jacqueline Rose’s idea (below) but it is a useful starting point:

Children’s fiction [culture etc] is clearly about the relation [between adult and child], but it has remarkable characteristics of being about something which it hardly ever talks of. Children’s fiction [culture] sets up a world in which the adult comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes after (reader, product, receiver), *but where neither of them enter the space in between.* (Rose 1-2, my italics)

It can be accepted that in many respects the adult “author, maker, giver” still leaves the teenager as the receiver, but in their transition from childhood to adulthood they are inherently entering the “space in between.” It is the liminal space which identifies them as neither child nor adult. Alison Waller has commented on this in relation to Rose’s intervention, by saying,

Adolescence is quite distinct from childhood and cannot be described in straightforwardly oppositional terms [child/adult]. For instance, adolescence does not clearly refer to ideas of innocence, origin or moral security, and it is located, not merely as ‘other’ to adulthood but also as ‘other’ to childhood. It is a liminal space onto which a distinct dichotomy of desires or fears cannot be easily be projected. (Waller 6-7)

But I have trouble with Waller’s intervention too.

Unlike feminism for women, for example, there simply isn't a collective voice of teenagers. Simply labelling the teenager as 'other' to both adults and children, as Waller does, is not reliable. It would be convenient if it was, but it is just not that simple. This is because the teenager occupies a radically different social space; theirs is contingent and genuinely temporary. In a way that is only ever shadowed in all the other demographic categories, they truly are in a process of becoming, not being, the woman, the black person, the gay etc. Those other demographic categories are pretty much stuck with their markers and have (wittingly or otherwise) entered the social contract but a teenager or adolescent is an identity under erasure; he or she has only a few years before being camouflaged as 'one of us.' Furthermore, they are not a group who can exercise full agency, independent of the structural and contextual forces at play in their lives. Anderson's "imagined community" is a demographic group labelled by age aligned to some cultural ideas which claim to represent them, but this is a much more complex process than cultural imagineers and the media (for example) try to present.

The stage of teenage-hood and adolescence is at once transitory and fluid, where identities are constructed through the "absorption, rejection or bricolage" of adult ideologies and social patterns. As Waller (2009: 6) acknowledges, "For this reason, Stephen Thomson considers the defining quality of adolescence to be performative, each alternative identity or youth subculture merely being one possible décor draped over an abiding and essentially unchanging scene of youth." It is an age of changing possibilities. But significantly, these possibilities are not without cultural and critical markers. Therefore I propose to address this idea of teenagers in representation, through three major media events: *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Rowling 2007), *Twilight* (Meyer 2006) and *Breaking Dawn* (2008) and the subsequent films (2008, 2010 and 2012), to show how teenagers are symbolically addressed by way of the film Certificate 12A by the BBFC and PG-13 classifications. Their success is a way of revealing something of the complex matrix of representing young teen culture in a media context.

Melvyn Burgess has also reflected, there are few secrets we can keep from children these days, saying, "in a world more embedded in

fictions than ever, in the form not just of books but gaming, politics, film, TV, adverts, even education, kids are probably more able than their parents to appreciate the different ways stories are used.”ⁱⁱⁱ Lee, Conroy and Hii add to this debate:

The acceleration of technology has helped define a new breed of consumers – “net generation” or “cyber-teens”, terms used to describe adolescents of this generation who are computer savvy and techno-literate, and whose abilities often exceed those of their parents and teachers. (2003: n. pag.)

And the statistics serve to reinforce this. In the UK, 79% of 7-16 year olds have Internet access (57% of 15-16 year olds have access in their bedroom) and 73% have mobile phones (Livingstone 2009: vi).^{iv} But this information does not fully provide a true or complete view of the teenager and indeed the way they use those stories in a shortening of the growing up process.

The idea that childhood (as we now know it) is shorter than in previous generations is at once a modern myth. As Lemish advises, it is in part brought to the fore through “discussions of the processes of globalization in regards with the construction of reality and youth culture [which] focuses on the concept of the ‘disappearance of childhood,’ inspired by technological determinists” (2007: 217). The shortening of childhood, the crossing over from being a child to teenager and beyond, it is suggested, is shorter. But the shortening of childhood idea has more to do with adulthood than is suggested here.

Roland Barthes writes:

In theatre, in cinema, in traditional literature, things are always seen *from somewhere*, this is the geometric basis of representation: there must be a fetishistic subject in order to project this tableau. The point of origin is always the Law: law of society, law of struggle, law of meaning. (96)

Of which Webb comments, “certainly it is possible to view art and the mass media... as providing a point from which to see: a point that lays down the law of seeing, the ‘law of society’... it never gives only one point of view...” (128). But all forms of representation do attempt to influence that point of view. In the case of “youth culture,” it can be

suggested, as Lemish does, that at the same time that it encourages the *rush of children into adulthood* it encourages adults to cling *on to that youth*, thereby blurring the boundaries between teen and adulthood. This “somewhere,” Barthes refers to, becomes a kind of “‘ideal’ age, the age of attractiveness and the adventures, age of sexual blossoming and romance, the age when the interesting life-stories supposedly happen – the life of youth” (Lemish 2007: 218). But surely, if adults and even young adults cling to this “ideal age” they are so familiar with in early adulthood, then young teenagers are equally capable of clinging to the security of their late childhood while they confront that confusing but enticing age yet to come. That point, sitting right at the cusp of this “ideal age” is the site of the Certificate 12A and PG13 and exploration of it is very significant in the development of representational, adolescent teenage culture, such as films and books.

Certificate 12A and PG-13 (the early part of the YA classification by YALSA) are carefully considered film classifications from the BFFI and the MPAA which allow adult normative authority to decide what an early teenager should be able to view. Maria Nikolajeva reminds us that in a world of adult led normativity, the, “child/adult imbalance is most tangibly manifested in the relationship between the ostensibly adult narrative voice and the child focalizing character” (8). This means that essentially, nowhere else are power structures as obvious as they are in the relationship between adults and children. These can be seen through home, health, education, educators, extended family, social and cultural exchanges, and in the culture adults produce for children, such as books, toys, television shows etc. In the case of movie classification it is a simple case of preserving young teenagers from receiving too much vicarious sex, drugs and alcohol at too young an age. Here is the guideline from the BBFC film classification website^v:



Suitable for 12 years and over.

Exactly the same criteria are used to classify works at “12A” and “12.” These categories are awarded where the material is suitable, in general, only for those aged 12 and over. Works classified at these categories may

upset children under 12 or contain material which many parents will find unsuitable for them.

The “12A” category exists only for cinema films. No one younger than 12 may see a “12A” film in a cinema unless accompanied by an adult, and films classified “12A” are not recommended for a child below 12. An adult may take a younger child if, in their judgement, the film is suitable for that particular child. In such circumstances, responsibility for allowing a child under 12 to view lies with the accompanying adult.

The “12” category exists only for video works. No one younger than 12 may rent or buy a “12” rated video work.

Discrimination Discriminatory language or behaviour must not be endorsed by the work as a whole. Aggressive discriminatory language or behaviour is unlikely to be acceptable unless clearly condemned.

Drugs Any misuse of drugs must be infrequent and should not be glamorised or give instructional detail.

Horror Moderate physical and psychological threat may be permitted, provided disturbing sequences are not frequent or sustained.

Imitable behaviour Dangerous behaviour (for example, hanging, suicide and self-harming) should not dwell on detail which could be copied, or appear pain or harm free. Easily accessible weapons should not be glamorised.

Language Moderate language is allowed. The use of strong language (for example, “fuck”) must be infrequent.

Nudity Nudity is allowed, but in a sexual context must be brief and discreet.

Sex Sexual activity may be briefly and discreetly portrayed. Sex references should not go beyond what is suitable for young teenagers. Frequent crude references are unlikely to be acceptable.

Theme Mature themes are acceptable, but their treatment must be suitable for young teenagers.

Violence Moderate violence is allowed but should not dwell on detail. There should be no emphasis on injuries or blood, but occasional gory moments may be permitted if justified by the context. Sexual violence may only be implied or briefly and discreetly indicated, and must have a strong contextual justification.

From this we can see how the classification is designed to protect the sense of childhood while allowing for the ongoing development of actual, lived in, and vicarious, lived out, experience that comes with growing up. It is also easy to see how films that come into these categories can act as exemplary providers of both actual and vicarious experience in the process of growing up. But I would also contend that these film categories also allow the young teenager time to (re)consider his or her position. Otherwise, why would young teenagers acquiesce and enter into this social contract when confronted with examples; as evidenced in the popularity of both *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* phenomenon? Thus it is important to analyse seminal moments in both books and films to show what they reveal about teenage representations that have been accepted in huge numbers by those they are supposed to be representing.

Part Two: Booking the Film/Filming the Book # 1

In a pivotal scene in the final book in Rowling's septology, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007), the characters Harry Potter, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger find themselves sharing a tent together, while searching for "Horcruxes" (Rowling 221-361). All three of them are supposed to be seventeen years of age (it's a given that when representing teenagers authors normally allow their reading demographic to "read up" to their next peer group^{vi}). If ever there was an opportunity for our heroes to grow up, away from the prying eyes of adults, this was it. But strangely, while there is mild referencing to the male and female characters in the novel getting close in the tent, there is little or no sexual frisson between them whatsoever on view. Of course the fact that there are two boys and

one girl gives the text a good, teenage “gooseberry” get out clause (it’s hard to be sexy when there is someone else watching). But the scene comes to a head as a tension sets in. It begins with a sulk and ends in Hermione having to choose between the two boys/friends:

Harry looked around. For one bewildered moment he thought that Ron had left the tent, then realised that Ron was lying in the shadow of a lower bunk, looking stony.

“Oh, remembered me, have you?” he said.

“What?”

Ron snorted as he stared up at the underside of the bunk.

“You two carry on. Don’t let me spoil your fun...”

He turned to Hermione, “What are you doing?”

“What do you mean?”

“Are you staying or what?”

“I...” She looked anguished. “Yes – yes I am staying. Ron, we said we’d go with Harry, we said we’d help –”

“I get it. You choose him.”

“Ron, no – please – come back!” (Rowling 251-254)

“I get it. You choose him.” It is an immediate young teen anxiety on friendship, developing puberty and developing sexual attraction, so crucial to the entire novel and film. This is as close we get to any sexual tension or frisson disrupting the tri-party friendship that accompanied them (and us as readers/viewers) throughout the entire series. But there are some things we need to consider here. What Rowling is presenting in this scene is little more than a juvenile spat. But it can also be registered as a cultural comfort zone for the young teenager.

Consider this; the result of that scene was that Harry and Hermione are left in a tent together, just the two of them, night after night during a period that includes Christmas day. If we follow the thought process through to a logical conclusion, they must undress, bathe and sleep in close proximity to each other. But as literary representations of two seventeen-year old teenagers the readers have to suspend a great deal of disbelief. Puberty had long been confronted, Hermione would most certainly be at the menstruating stage, both would most certainly be sexually aware, sexually curious and on the cusp of a sexualised life; and yet this isn’t revealed for the teen readers who grew up with the novels. But it’s a testimony to the success of the books and films that these teen

readers allow for the suspension of disbelief to continue. Rather than rejecting the stories as something they grew out of in their teenage development, they, the readers and viewers, accept these child-like seventeen-year olds and, when the films came along, allowed this childlike state to continue unquestioned. Why else would they have attended the film of the book?

Having been a commentator of the series from its inception, I often wondered how Rowling would cope with her character and her audience all growing up in tandem. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* introduces us to Harry, Ron and Hermione at age eleven and they are seventeen by the final book. As the books arrived I had been intrigued to see how Rowling would cope with their puberty and adolescent development. Now that we are able to reflect on the textual development of the novels and films, it could be suggested that the demands of millions of cultural consumers of the Potter phenomenon (pre)dictated the terms of engagement that Rowling was permitted to reveal (without alienating her readership). In dealing with their teenage development, the "targeted readership" almost demanded that that the three friends remained at the childish end of the teenage scale. Of course, there is some mild flirtation in the later novel but nothing that would make a prude blush. This is made all the easier because the villains in the novels are the adult wizards and witches and the teen-children, the goodies such as Harry, Hermione and Ron and the baddies such as Draco Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle are seen to be just that, kids, even though the coming of age is seventeen in the their world. This juggling between the malign adult world of wizards and witches, and the more benign world of the young teenagers gives space for the suspension of disbelief. The real tension between the adults and the kids is never resolved. This echoes the state of being an early teenager who can see adulthood ahead but holds it in deferral and he or she is ready to meet it. Only at the end of the book do we see the characters revealed as adults, with their own children being presented as evidence of their eventual sexualised evolution.

While having established, the books sit firmly in the Certificate 12A and PG-13 category, the film of the book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1* (2010) takes a similar tack. In the film, we get a

slightly different treatment of the scene I have just described because the images and music present a very distinct representation. But I was taken by the filming technique and how the scene was constructed. The semiological elements are all assembled to add an almost nostalgic air of an earlier age of innocence.

The three heroes are in a tent once again, but one which has a nineteen-forties army issue look about it. This image is reinforced with the tent being dimly lit by a storm lantern hanging from the tent pole, and then I began to realise that's exactly what is going on. The resulting brown hues of the lighting and the shabbily dressed Harry and Hermione addressing each other over an old wooden desk strewn with papers and army issue looking tin mugs, makes them look like they were in a film about a couple of members of the French resistance in the second world war (and of course they were resisting Lord Voldemort). The entire scene says no sex please we have a war to win. It has all the visual appearance of a film that might have starred a young Anna Neagle and Trevor Howard taking part in a special ops exercise in WWII France.^{vii}

This idea is compounded further when, in true Second World War filmic style, in a moment of relaxed down time, and to add a little levity, the director introduces a scene that isn't in the book. Harry and Hermione come together in the tent for a dance. But a nineteen forties (albeit clumsy) dance with proper holds, man's right hand on her waist, woman's left hand on his shoulder, his left hand holding her right. It's a chaste dance, a dance between friends that can't betray Ron (for the viewer). All the images point to the sexlessness of the two characters and takes them back to a time when teenagers didn't really exist (based on the idea that teenagers came with the nineteen sixties as we came out of the austere fifties after the war). And indeed I found myself harking back to Deleuze's ideas, where he saw the movie as an event which raises the idea that film doesn't represent time but creates it with a capacity to generate concepts rather than simply reflect them. The film generated a concept of chaste teenagers and created a time in which Harry and Hermione could come together without the complications of their developing sexuality being called upon to interfere. The filmic style of an old time WWII movie, where camaraderie and comradeship were more important than sex

and gender came to the fore. Indeed, that might be said of the entire *Harry Potter* franchise, with its school setting and rather old fashioned view of the world, which is as a pre-nuclear, pre-internet and international travel age. Indeed, like the Certificate 12A and PG-13 it portrays a time of teenage innocence in the face of adults woes. And of course the issue of friendship in the trinity alliance they formed in the book and films continues. A little later in the episode I described, Ron does return. But not before he is taunted by the sliver of Voldemort's soul when they destroy the Horcrux. The ghosted sould tells Ron he has every right to suspect his friends prefer each other to him. But after they destroy the Horcrux/ locket, Harry confirms the truth:

After you left... she cried for a week... she's like my sister... I love her like a sister and I reckon she feels the same way about me. It's always been like that. I thought you knew. (Rowling 309)

The sexual politics of cuckoldry are a long way off and they are friends reunited, in true school story form.

While the film of the book reveals a carefully constructed image of the pre-sexual teenager which fits the Certificate 12A and PG-13 categories well, we cannot discount another factor here. Viewing the film as a cultural event is a collective exercise in which we critics could witness a teenage audience participating as a social group. However, we also have to pay attention to the cultural event which preceded the films; a cultural event that took place in private which also required their suspension of disbelief. It was the act of reading. With four hundred and fifty million copies of the books, translated into sixty-seven languages, making it the best-selling books series in history, and it is still the highest-grossing film series of all time, the point, surely, is that while the book reading and film viewing demographic audience was aged between eight and eighteen years of age, more than half of those were teenagers, aged between thirteen and eighteen years, were quite happy to cling to representations of the childhood they were about to leave for the aforementioned "ideal age." In that sense then, the idea of the young teenager rushing out of childhood is not as evident as suggested by

Lemish (218). But of course, we cannot rely on one, albeit four hundred and fifty million strong, example as evidence of this.

Booking the Film/Filming the Book # 2

Having travelled with my own children through the *Harry Potter* septology, I arrived at Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* (2006) with a thirteen year old daughter. I was a critic and she (and all of her school year across continents) was a fan. But even before I had encountered the books (after she had read them) I had pre-conceived ideas. These were largely based on an interest in eighteenth and nineteenth Gothic fiction. I initially expected the vampiric *Twilight* to confront the *Harry Potter* model of a chaste representation of teenage-hood and adolescence. For me, the entire idea of the vampire existed as a representative of repressed sexuality and aggression, which has a long history from John Polidori's *Vampyre*^{viii} forward. But *Twilight*'s representative teenagers, in the guise of Bella and Edward, show remarkable "ability to be simultaneously arousing and chaste" (Schwartzman in Clarke and Osborn 127). I found both the books and the film series genuinely and surprisingly innocent and equally naive while still confronting the (oxy)moronic paradoxes that are adolescence. That's not to mean the series doesn't have issues that require confrontation, in relation to the Certificate 12A and PG-13 idea, it most certainly does. Issues such as Edwards stalking and controlling behaviour, the eventual violent sexual consummation after Edward and Bella marry, and the birth of a child in later episodes, are crucial. But so too is the statement by Edward, early on in the series when he implores Bella to stay in the woods, saying, "I am not the most dangerous thing out there." (Meyer 2006: 192). This, it seems to me was a deliberate ploy on the author's behalf.

In some way many of the teen paradoxes portrayed in *Twilight* are instantly recognisable, at least by adults, because they come as a literary trope in the guise of Edward. As the new arch hero for the emerging adolescent, Edward's capability of extreme strength (and thereby potential for violence) is juxtaposed with his sexual allure very early on and he becomes Heathcliffian in design. He becomes the Byronic hero, mean,

mad and bad to know hero, which I, as an adult, can recognise, but which the teen-child is yet to encounter. Indeed, this image is cleverly posted by Meyer when she has Bella producing copy of *Wuthering Heights* which she is reading for her English class (2006: 34-5). It is a very skilfully assembled narrative device with all the traits of Romanticism which Emily Bronte exploited so well for Heathcliffe and Cathy and which Meyer delivers with panache for the contemporary reader/viewer.

The crucial moments become two major points in both book and film. The first is the potential killing of Bella (always a good place to begin, introduce danger and then make it even more dangerous):

Edward Cullen was standing four cars down from me, staring at me in horror. His face stood out from a sea of faces, all frozen in the same mask of shock. But of more immediate importance was the dark blue van that was skidding across the ice of the parking lot. It was going to hit the back corner of my truck, and I was standing between them. I didn't even have time to close my eyes... Two long, white hands shot out protectively in front of me and the vans shuddered to a stop a foot from my face, the large hands fitting providently into a deep dent in the side of the van's body. (Meyer 2007: 47-48)

In film terms this is the key moment, the inciting incident, the obligatory scene where the character Edward makes a choice. His choice is to expose himself to save Bella from certain death, which makes him an instant hero in most adolescent eyes and adds to his good looks cache. Of course this could also have been his undoing. His strength and thereby physical presence in the face of a violent situation is all too obvious. And so the reader/viewer has to be brought back on board, lest they shy away from the potential this physicality presents because it also underlines Edward's sexual potency. And so it happens, the second major point (earlier in the book than the film) is the potential saving of Edward as a (R/)romantic hero. Edward, as we have witnessed, is big, strong, mysterious and attractive in an uncanny way (to give him a Freudian allusion) and yet there is a romantic side (with a small "r" to be seen too):

I was preparing to give him the silent treatment – my face in full pout mode – but then I recognized the music playing, and my curiosity got the better of my intentions.

“*Clair de lune*?” I asked, surprised.

“You know Debussy?” He sounded surprised, too.

“Not well,” I admitted. “My mother plays a lot of classical music around the house – I only know my favourites.”

“It’s one of my favourites, too.” He stared out through the rain, lost in thought. (Meyer 2007: 90)

And then it unfolds in a boy meets girl in a time honoured fashion that has belonged in popular culture since the words popular and culture were coupled. Edward’s strength and potency is juxtaposed with his romantic, Debussy tinged other (a side which Bella’s mother would certainly approve of). Indeed this coupling continues throughout, the romantic tension between the virginal Bella and Edward as the vampire love interest develops. It is immediately obvious in their breathy exchanges in the chapter entitled “Confessions”:

I inched closer, stretched out my whole hand now to trace the contours of his forearm with my fingertips. I saw that my fingers trembled, and I knew it wouldn’t escape his notice. “Do you mind,” I asked, for he had closed his eyes again.

“No,” he said without opening his eyes. “You can’t imagine how that feels.” He sighed. (Meyer 2006: 229)

And the book and film are full of such exchanges, breathy, nuanced, chaste flirting with the language of sex without the actions. But the sex is always put on hold because Edward’s vampiric traits and strength means he could overwhelm and kill her.

“Isabella.” He pronounced my full name carefully, then playfully ruffled my hair with his free hand. A shock ran through my body at his casual touch. “Bella, I couldn’t live with myself if I ever hurt you. You don’t know how it has tortured me.” He looked down, ashamed again. “The thoughts of you, still, white, cold... to never see you blush scarlet again, to never see that flash of intuition in your eyes when you see through my pretences... it would be unendurable.” He lifted his glorious agonized eyes to mine. “You are the most important thing to me now. The most important thing to me ever.” (Meyer 2006: 239-40)

Of course to some extent the teenage Bella is meeting a vampire who is too strong for her. But instead of being disturbed by this threatening

strength combined with his passion and death-laced imagery, Bella simply leads the entire scene into a romantically safe place to be, as she soon tells him that she has, “never felt like this about anyone before, not even close” (Mayer 2006: 311).

Throughout the book and the film, the tension between fear and excitement echoes the giddiness of early sexualised socialisation. And even the cutely represented idea of Edward following her, and reading the minds of people who have spoken to her as well as sitting unseen (by Bella) by her bed every night as she sleeps is not seen as stalking (which he is doing) but simply infatuation. Of course, this says much about a representation of masculine power and indeed patriarchal ascendancy. For me this is most problematic in *Eclipse* (Meyer 2009: 526-7) when the language of rape or at least a forceful advance is invoked by a rival love interest. Jacob is described as kissing Bella with “an eagerness that is not far from violence...”

I could feel his anger as his mouth discovered my passive resistance. One hand moved to the nape of my neck, twisting into a fist around the roots of my hair. The other hand... dragging me to him. (Meyer 2009: 526)

When she fights back we end up with Bella excusing him because he “misunderstood” her struggle with him. At first reading, this seemed very much at odds with Meyer’s intervention, when she said:

There are those who think my stories are misogynistic – the damsel in distress must be rescued by strong men... When a human being is totally surrounded by creatures with supernatural strength... he or she is not going to be able to hold his or her own story. (Meyer 2010)

But as the story developed, Bella begins to take control of the situation in the best way available to her. That is to say, she is suddenly presented as enjoying the rough and tumble of it, “My brain disconnected from my body and I was kissing him back...” (Meyer 2009: 527). Holding her own in the story, not, as Meyer suggests, combating force by force, but with feminine guile in being able to extricate herself from danger through submission. The whole scene is discomforting until we realise that in the same way we had a Harry, Ron and Hermione axis in *Harry Potter and*

the Deathly Hallows, where Ron is taunted by the part of Voldermort's soul in the Horcrux, Edward returns and the idea of friendship, rivalry and making the right female choice is manifest. Hermione signals her choice, so too does Bella. The stories are not so very far apart, except in the telling. Of course, this doesn't solve the patriarchal ideology issues but both works were written by women who have to negotiate this too.

Thus, as the series unfolds, Bella makes her choice and soon enough she and Edward inform Charlie – her father – that they are to marry. In true chivalrous fashion, Edward does ask for Charlie's blessing, and the patriarchal father to husband transference is well recognised (Meyer 2008: 14-17). But there is a puritanical streak in the permission scene when Charlie's thoughts are revealed as, "But what could he say? *I'd prefer you to live in sin first?*" The book and the film toy with the conventions of adult romances, teen romances and children's literature and the inherent ideas on romance narratives, which are essentially oppressive. More generally, it might be said that the *Twilight* series' appeal is its ability to confront these issues and to hold them up as youthful representations of how such oppression occurs in society. These are not issues that can be avoided. I would contend that the cultural success is once again in the ongoing suspension of disbelief by the teen-child audience, the same age-related demographic as the *Harry Potter* generation, who are still clinging to the childish side of their developing selves. Sure, the 'suppressed' sexuality is suggestive and tantalizing but it takes three more books and a total of around twelve-hundred pages before their love is consummated after marriage in *Breaking Dawn* (Meyer 2008: 38-50). But this is worthy of exploration, especially bearing in mind Meyer's own intervention into this debate.

Meyer was aware the developing, sexualizing nature of her books would be controversial. The developing Bella had nowhere else to go if the stories were to retain the credibility of their mass readership, who, like the *Harry Potter* readership, were also ageing with the series. This meant that the movement away from the Certificate 12A/PG-13 idea was inevitable, at least in literary terms. And this is important. On the subject of *Breaking Dawn*, USA Today's Carol Memmet quoted Meyer saying, "I was for an age limit of 15 or 16 and a warning... I think the content is just

a little harder to handle, and a little more grown-up...” (Benning in Parke and Wilson 90). Whether a child accesses the series younger than Meyer’s suggestion is a responsible, parental guided choice and I have no problem with it at all. However, while the content she refers to is all too obvious, contrast between the literary and the strictly guided Certificate 12A and PG-Cert filmic versions are noteworthy by their absence.

In an obvious summary, Bella and Edward travel to the Cullen’s private and secluded Brazilian island where they have sex for the first time. Having realised how much he had bruised Bella in the encounter, Edward resolves never to put her through that again – much to her disappointment. And Bella’s disappointment is crucial in acknowledging the feminine idea of *jouissance* and desire if we are indeed to read challenges to the aforementioned patriarchal order. To this end, the marital consummation in the book is initially romantic and peppered with such images,

He didn’t speak; his fingers moved up and down my back... I would have been happy to lie here forever... but my body had other ideas... It had all been simpler than I’d expected; we’d fit together like corresponding pieces, made to match up... (86-87)

This is followed by Edward asking, “How badly are you hurt, Bella?” as he examines the bruising of his passion on her arms, “a discoloration on my left forearm... It throbbed a little.” But Bella’s response is marked, “...I feel alright now! Or five minutes ago, anyway. I *was* perfectly happy. Totally and completely blissed out. Now – well, I’m sort of pissed, actually” (90-91). Edward is the concerned husband, scared he hurt her on their first time and Bella, spluttering under a shower of feathers that spilled from a burst pillow, had been ecstatic and was now pissed at him for being too cautious. It is difficult to see how the text goes beyond the advice on sex in the Certificate 12A guidelines which says, “Sexual activity may be briefly and discreetly portrayed” (op cit). It was! There is little except the cautious fumbblings of an inexperienced, newly married couple to shock any reader. The actual violence and the fact that Edward is a vampire extends required for a suspended disbelief (as does the subsequent pregnancy of Bella). This wasn’t pornography for teenagers,

but a delicate description of an inevitable happening which the readers will all experience in time.

As for the film version, the activity is even more discreet. They leave a noisy and rambunctious and rather clichéd sexually alluring street party and arrive at their sumptuous villa before taking a moonlit, skinny dip in the sea, heavy on monochrome imagery and then to bed. Edward's physical strength is juxtaposed by the serenity of Bella's appearance, overlain with a lush soundtrack, entitled, "Turning Page" by Sleeping at Last, until we are left with an almost comic scene of a severely ruffled bed and balmy feathers falling like wisps of snow. It's intoxicatingly romantic and there would barely be a dry teenage eye in the house. The line, "How badly are you hurt?" (Dir. Condon 2011) appears again. But Bella dismisses the bruises on her arms as simple passion to tell Edward how happy she is. She is in control, the situation for them both is tricky but they confront each other to say it was the best night of their lives. In Edward's case it was the best night of his existence. The teenager doesn't have to try too hard in suspending the disbelief on the vampiric traits, because what is being represented is married love, married consummated love. Once again it's not pornography but a promise (or a hope) of life to come, and a bit like the chess game Bella and Edward go on to play.

And so once again, millions of young teenagers, in this case mostly girls, aged between twelve and eighteen years turned up in their droves to witness a Certificate 12A and PG-13 certification film, knowing that even the sex would be "discreetly portrayed." *Twilight* is cultural comfort food for an early twenty-first century, mostly female adolescent generation. Hall would have seen them as teen-children who were of their time.

Concluding

As Waller says,

Ideological assumptions about adolescence, its form, its status, and its wider meaning permeate a number of different discourses, from psychological models to media portrayals, and these are clearly bound to fiction that aims both to describe something of that state of being and to


somehow affect (through reading, and however subtly) the thoughts of behaviour of adolescents themselves. (Waller 26)

No one made these teen-children buy and read the books I have referred to in such great numbers, they chose to. They had a choice whether to read or not, engage or not and decide whether or not they felt safe with the material and stories being presented. The same goes for the subsequent films and for the millions who engaged in these phenomenal cultural events, it is/was their time of the Certificates 12A and PG-13. The *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* fiction and films, written for them, captured their imagination for that very reason. I am not here advocating a PG symbol for books, the system of regulation encouraged by publishers, libraries and booksellers has that covered. The same might be said for the film regulations currently in place; the system of regulation is largely working. There is a need to maintain a constant vigilance on material targeted at this demographic, of course there is, electronic games being an obvious target. This is especially so when we no have companies such as TenNine advertising in UK schools.^{ix} But when we read statements like, “People are very anxious about teenagers aren’t they?” we need to remember that these same teenagers can also think for themselves. They seem to have demonstrated in their millions that they are fairly secure in their representation in these stories.

Notes:

ⁱ *The Guardian*, “The Books Interview,” 13/04/13.

ⁱⁱ  BBFC film classification certificate in the UK;

 MPAA film classification certificate in the USA

ⁱⁱⁱ Burgess M., “Sympathy for the Devil”
<http://www.melvinburgess.net/articles.html>, accessed March, 2012. Also see Sonia Livingstone’s highly informative book, *Children and the Internet* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009) for an informed and coherent reading of this.

^{iv} ChildWise, *The Monitor Report 2008-9: Children’s Media Use and Purchasing* in Livingstone S., *Children and the Internet* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), vi.

^v Suitable for 12 years and over
<http://www.bbfc.co.uk/classification/guidelines/12a12/>, accessed 9 February 2012.

^{vi} See Andrew Melrose, *Here Comes the Bogeyman: exploring contemporary issues in writing for children* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

^{vii} A snapshot of this can be seen here:

<http://www.imdb.com/media/rm776767232/tt0926084>, accessed 29 February 2012.

^{viii} Polidori, John William, *The Vampyre* (1819).

^{ix} A company called TenNine has hung hoardings in the corridors and common rooms of 750 British schools. Among its clients are Nike, Adidas, Orange, Tesco and Unilever. It boasts that its “high impact platform delivers right to the heart of the 11-18 year old market.”

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/apr/15/advertisers-leave-defenceless-children-alone>, accessed 16 April 2013.

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- Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Part 1. Dir. David Yates. 2010.
- Twilight*. Dir. Catherine Hardwicke. 2008.
- The Twilight Saga: New Moon*. Dir. Chris Weitz. 2009.
- The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn I*. Dir. Bill Condon. 2011.