

"This Damp Green Hole": Topographies of the Maternal in Stephanie Meyers' Twilight Series

Forks, Washington, the primary setting of Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series, is described by its teenage protagonist as 'a nearly aquatic hamlet,' a 'damp green hole' whose 'dripping forest' and 'perpetual drizzle' offer a vivid contrast to the hot, dry landscape of Phoenix, Arizona. While our heroine's remove, in virginal white eyelet, from the land of the sun to the uncanny gloom of her birthplace is in many regards pure formula insofar as it vigorously if unimaginatively deploys the standard tropes of traditional gothic romance within the popular YA subcategory of paranormal romance, the power that the *Twilight* series wields over its significant readership is also deeply rooted in Bella's various *returns* to Forks and the consequent displacement of the phoenix/rebirth motif onto a particularly detailed female landscape of the self.

In this paper, I will argue that Meyer's singular mapping of physical landscape (the Olympic Peninsula) serves as a complex gothic mirroring of the heroine's own psychic topography *and* of the narrative tracts that structure her unconscious (that is, her psychic contouring by pre-existing commercial and archetypal story forms). Of course, the slippage of narrative development from a conventionally vacuous female protagonist onto the landscape around her is hardly an innovative strategy in YA fiction. But the complexity of Meyers' interweaving of the return to geographical locale (the Olympic peninsula, the town of Forks, La Push Beach), to inherited and potentially confining fictional space (Perrault's fairy tale 'forest,' the Brontes' moors), and to the body of the mother (the necessary revisiting of the first home, the 'first Universe,' the revision of the topos of the past) makes this text most uncannily *real*. This deserves some explanation as does the fact that the 'real' settings of the *Twilight* series have themselves become inscribed as fictional texts, Forks now a tourist attraction remapped as a 'Twilight Tour' for Twilight 'pilgrims' further evidencing the peculiar permeability of physical and psychical boundaries for the reader within this landscape.

My own critical reading of Meyers, framed in part by Roni Natov's *The Poetics of Childhood*, thus seeks to combine the approaches of object-relations psychoanalysis in its Winnicott ('potential space') and Kristevan ('semiotic chora') derivatives towards the "environmental unit" of the infant with a related focus on the symbolic function of the green *topos* within a Bachelardian 'poetics of space.' This critical realignment deployed to explore more thoroughly the key suggestion, as per Natov, of Bowlby and Ainsworth's social attachment theory that the link with the mother's body is, in the fullest sense of the phrase, "emotional *in nature*."