



VAMPIRES, DESIRE, GIRLS, AND GOD:
TWILIGHT AND THE SPIRITUALITIES OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Joyce Mercer, *Virginia Theological Seminary*

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Teen girls do love their vampires. Since its first book's publication in 2005, Stephenie Meyer's young adult novel series *Twilight* has become a literary success and pop culture phenomenon among U.S. teen girls. Like the popular television show before it, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Twilight* features an adolescent girl protagonist who falls in love with a vampire.

While some commentators herald the girl-affirming power of such fiction for the centrality of female characters as well as the series' apparent ability to encourage girls to read (with frequent comparisons to Harry Potter in this regard), critics express concern about the kinds of relationships depicted in *Twilight*, in which romantic attractions take on obsessive and even abusive qualities.

Some conservative Christian critics deem the book "nothing more than pornography for young girls." Meanwhile, more than five million copies of the *Twilight* series have been sold, most to young female readers who, after the first book, lined up at bookstores waiting for the release of the latest volume.

What accounts for the intensity of *Twilight's* appeal to young women? In this paper I explore the role of young adult fantasy literature in girls' experiences of negotiating puberty, sexual desire, and spirituality. Fantasy fiction has long been read for its capacity to narrate religious meanings and themes for young readers. Although vampires have a long and noble place as supernatural characters representing dangerous desire in horror- and fantasy literary genres, rarely have these creatures been treated as spiritually attractive figures. And yet, as creatures existing on the borders between life and death, the fictional figure of the vampire occupies a symbolic location of particular coherence with the religious issues of many young women.

Amidst a plethora of scholarly analysis concerning the attraction of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to adolescent girls, to the religious or spiritual aspects of fictional vampire characters for girls receives little or no attention. Through the lenses of feminist psychology and gender theory together with Christian feminist theologies of desire, I argue that *Twilight's* appeal for adolescent girls in part stems from its ability to tap into the entwining of the sexual and spiritual desires of girls.



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The normative value attributed to *Twilight's* depiction of such desires is contradictory, however: While these books do not employ explicitly religious imagery, (as do the fantasy stories of C.S. Lewis, for instance) they nevertheless bear the imprint of the Mormon faith of their author Stephenie Meyers in the views of family, women's roles, and authority they conjure for readers. Exploring the spiritual and erotic power of *Twilight* among its adolescent female readership, the paper appreciates the role of such works as a form of "resistance literature" for some girls, while critiquing the constructions of young women, of intimate relationships, and supernatural masculinities narrated in the series.