

6. Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent B. Leitch et al., and translated by Alix Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2001), 933, 944.

7. Ibid., 952.

8. Tory C. Anderson, "Just the Fiction, Ma'am," in *Tending the Garden: Essays on Mormon Literature*, edited by Eugene England and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 73.

9. Ibid.

When Your Eternal Companion Has Fangs

Stephenie Meyer. *Breaking Dawn*. New York: Little, Brown, 2008. 768 pp. Cloth: \$22.99. ISBN: 978-0316067928

Reviewed by Jonathan Green

As a teacher of language and literature, I am probably supposed to sneer at Stephenie Meyer's novels. They are not just genre fiction but, by blending urban fantasy and romance, genre fiction twice over; they are not only written for the young adult market, but they also avoid offending the sensitivities of Mormon readers; and their prose does not insist that you stop and weep over its sheer beauty. But the students whom I've observed reading one of the *Twilight* novels before class—the only unassigned books I've seen anyone reading so far this semester—are among my brightest and most articulate students. That in itself is evidence that Meyer has chosen some of the right steps in the mysterious dance between authors and readers. Certainly *Twilight* (New York: Little, Brown, 2006) and *The Host* (New York: Little, Brown, 2008), Meyer's recent science fiction novel, have demonstrated the author's talents, among them the ability to open novels so that readers don't put the book down until they reach the middle; and in *Breaking Dawn*, the last novel in the *Twilight* series, Meyer effectively renders the narrative voices of Bella, her protagonist who is in love with the vampire Edward, and Jacob, her perpetually second-best werewolf friend. There would have been nothing wrong with bringing the plot to the satisfying conclusion that my students have been anticipating, but *Breaking Dawn* undertakes

something much more ambitious and interesting than merely finishing off a story about love between the living and the undead. The questions to which *Breaking Dawn* is a sustained and vividly imagined answer are instead very Mormon questions: What will it be like to have a marriage continue past death into the eternities? What does it mean to have a perfected body, or to love an eternal being? *Breaking Dawn* is a profoundly Mormon book by a proudly Mormon author—a good reason to move on from anguished hand-wringing about the state of Mormon letters and instead start circling all the major deals in *Publishers Weekly*.

A conventional romance would have seen Bella's marriage to Edward (or, more crassly, her conjugal union with him) as the culmination of the story, but *Breaking Dawn* does not share the teleology of bridal magazines. For Bella, marriage is not the culmination, but the beginning (and Meyer spends barely 100 pages getting us to that point, leaving over 600 for the rest of the novel). If Meyer had wanted to write a tear-jerker, Bella would find fulfillment in sacrificing her life for her child. But for Bella, maternal self-sacrifice is also only prologue. The previous novels in the *Twilight* series were driven by the tension between Bella's self-destructive wish for vampirehood and the seeming impossibility of its fulfillment, but the story Meyer wants to tell at the close of the series is about wishes fulfilled, not self-denial or personal destruction. Bella, as it turns out, has always been a goddess in embryo, meant to become a magnificent being with a glorious, powerful, unaging body in which no blood flows. Her real destiny is to put aside the physical clumsiness and limitations that have previously defined her and to become endowed with talents and abilities beyond her imagination, becoming a partner equal in every respect to Edward. Bella's marriage, her relationship to their child, and her extended ties to everyone she loves are not meant to be limited by mortality. If the first three novels in the series are very human stories involving love and indecision, frustration and self-denial, *Breaking Dawn* tries to imagine a life that is no longer mortal.

One might criticize *Breaking Dawn* out of misplaced prudery. Although the author lowers the curtains discreetly over the scenes of Bella and Edward's intimate relations, she makes no attempt to hide what they're doing or that they rather enjoy it. It is, after all,