

AN ORDINARY TEXT WITH EXTRAORDINARY AFFECT: HOW READING
TWILIGHT CAN CHANGE THE WORLD

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ABSTRACT

AN ORDINARY TEXT WITH EXTRAORDINARY AFFECT: HOW READING *TWILIGHT* CAN CHANGE THE WORLD

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Stephenie Meyer's four-part series, *Twilight*, has caused a ruckus in popular culture; however, this love triangle among a high school student and two supernatural beings has had less of an effect on academia. Rather than continuing to ignore *Twilight*, I illuminate the importance of this text in academic study by examining its influence on the town in which it was set.

Since the publication of Meyer's series, Forks, Washington, the real town in which the narrative is set, has undergone many changes. These changes, caused by the text, are evidence of *Twilight*'s power. Using textual analysis, theories of the act of reading to discuss the potential of the series, and actual accounts of Forks illustrate the text's influence on the town, I conclude the text has had a significant economic and cultural effect on the town without being a revolutionary text in itself. *Twilight*, while being quite typical, has caused seemingly atypical results, and I argue this paradox is worthy of further academic pursuit.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Something is happening in Forks, Washington. Since 2005 the town at the foot of the Olympic mountain range has experienced a 600% increase in tourism (Gray sec Life). This jump in tourism has given the struggling timber town a much needed economic boost. The cause of this boost is evident from the tourists that flock there. Between 350 and 400 giggling adolescent girls, people asking about vampires and werewolves, and mothers in “Team Edward” t-shirts crowd into Forks’s center of commerce daily (Brown). They come because of *Twilight*.

An influx of *Twi*-hards is not the only change Forks has experienced since the publication of the first book in the four-part series about the love triangle between a human girl, turn-of-the-century vampire, and teenaged-werewolf. The town has recreated itself as the fictional Forks, Washington where Stephenie Meyer set her story. This recreation is both a reaction to and in cooperation with the hundreds of *Twilight* fans that visit the town each day. But how does one series cause such a physical change in a previously unknown town?

I see *Twilight* as a convergence of several theories about texts, and while this combination is not particularly unique, it does have the potential to be revolutionary.

First, Janice Radway's description of female reading habits in her book, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, suggests reading a novel simply for enjoyment is a kind of escape for women. The readers Radway interviewed for her book have a similar relationship to the text as fans have to *Twilight*. For *Twilight* fans, reading the series is an escape from their routines. By extension, Forks becomes an opportunity for escape.

Compounding Radway's theory about reading is William Patrick Day's description of vampire texts in his work, *Vampire Legends in Contemporary American Culture: What Becomes a Legend Most*. Day finds vampire texts sites of escape for contemporary readers. *Twilight*, fitting Day's description of vampire texts, arguably offers readers the escape that is particular to this genre. The escapism of *Twilight* is grounded in the real town of Forks, Washington. The citizens of Forks have reacted to their role in the escapist fantasy of *Twilight* fans by creating the fantasy in reality.

The creation of these fantasies in reality is potentially revolutionary in light of Diane Long Hoeveler's description of the female gothic in her chapter "The Female Gothic, Beating Fantasies, and the Civilizing Process." *Twilight* follows the cycle of the female gothic, as suggested by Hoeveler, in that, after much struggle, the female-created fantasies of the white heroine (and presumably the reader) have been fulfilled (120). As an example of female gothic literature, *Twilight* overthrows patriarchal values for female-created fantasies. As a real life setting for the drama of *Twilight*, Forks does the same.

Taking into account Radway and Day's descriptions of escape through reading and Hoeveler's discussion of the female gothic, the changes in Forks, Washington become less surprising. Yes, the town has been completely restructured into a fictional

setting, experienced an economic rebirth and cultural shift, but these changes are within the power of a great number of texts. Theoretically, the *Twilight* series is nothing special, thus the seemingly extraordinary effect it has had a small, unknown timber town, could be quite typical. In this discussion of the power of the series and the changes of the town, I illustrate how revolutionary change is possible through typical texts.

CHAPTER II FORKS WASHINGTON B.T.

The reality of Forks, Washington before *Twilight* can be understood as the “mundane” described by Joe Sanders and Rich Brown in their glossary of fanspeak. They define mundane as “a fannish noun describing the majority of the human race that is content with familiar types of literature and thinking. Frequently used with disdain to describe people who denigrate fandom because it differs from the mainstream” (268). This term is helpful in distinguishing between Forks before *Twilight* fans arrived and Forks after the influence of *Twilight* fans. Like Sanders and Brown’s definition suggests, before *Twilight*, Forks was a part of the majority of the human race, “content with familiar types of literature and thinking” (268). After *Twilight*, the town has broken from this tie to the ordinary. However, though I find the term useful in distinguishing between Forks B.T. and Forks A.T., I do not wish to imply the disdainful connotation Sanders and Brown include because, as I will show, there is very little disdain between the mundane and fandom in the town.

The creation of a new Forks was made possible through the relationship among the citizens of Forks, representatives of the mundane, and *Twilight* fans. Before *Twilight*, Forks was a floundering timber town. Since the release of the series, the town has been transformed due to the influx of *Twilight* fans who visit as tourists. The benefit of Forks’s transformation is multifaceted. One aspect is financial; the town has been economically

resurrected. Another result is the opportunity for *Twilight* fans to continue to experience the escapism of the text at a physical location. Finally in Forks's transformation, one can observe a re-centering of values from certain masculine values to specific feminine fantasies. In an attempt to thoroughly explore the creation of *Twilight* fans and Forks citizens, I'll begin by describing Forks, Washington "B.T." (Before *Twilight*) (Henheffer 75).

In "Timber Towns," an article by D. Fisher and C. Schubert published in *Progressive* in 1992 about the economic decline of towns financially relying on timber, and more specifically the logging industry, they use Forks as the model of this economic downfall (28). The authors report that in the town, "unemployment among the 3,400 residents is soaring, families are stressed and the people are angry. ... the community food and clothing banks are being emptied" (28). Due to the rapid decline of the logging industry during Fisher and Schubert's research, Forks did not have an economically bright future. Though the authors cite others with hope for some timber towns, they conclude "towns like Forks will probably never see the booming economy of the 1970s and the late 1980s again" (28). Clearly, Fisher and Schubert were not anticipating *Twilight* fans and their desire to come to Forks and participate in the supernatural love story of Bella, Edward, and Jacob.

The reality of the mundane Forks was bleak; however, the relationship the mundane Forks would create with the fictional Forks of *Twilight* solved the town's economic woes. Chris Gray reports in *USA Today* that Forks has seen a 600% increase in tourism since 2005, when the first novel was released (Gray sec. Life). Citizens interviewed in Jason Brown's documentary, *Twilight in Forks: The Saga of a Real Town*

corroborate Gray's report and speak to the changes caused by this influx of tourism. For instance, Marcia Bingham, a member of Forks's Chamber of Commerce, states Forks is visited by 350-450 people a day, and most are *Twilight* fans (Brown). Likewise, Bruce Paul, co-owner of Forks Outfitters explains that his store has begun to stock new, *Twilight*-themed merchandise to appease the "different demographic" of customers (Brown). The other owner of Forks Outfitters, Bert Paul, gives the *Twilight* phenomenon credit for turning Forks around saying, "it's been so good for our economy" (Brown). A science teacher at Forks High School, John Hunter admits there was a "time when [Forks's future] looked pretty bleak" (Brown). But, as Mayor Reed states in Tom Henheffer's article, "*Twilight* Central's Sobbing Pilgrims," "*Twilight* has been an absolute blessing. It's kept the last person from turning out the lights, as a matter of fact, lights are going on in abandoned buildings" (74). These proverbial lights are being turned on because *Twilight* has sparked a particular desire in its fans.

These positive economic changes in Forks were due in part to the town's willingness to give *Twilight* fans what they want: the Forks from the fictional series. But why would fans want to see the fiction of a book played out in reality? Janice Radway's theory about female reading practice and William Patrick Day's description of vampire texts help explain the motivation for a real-life experience of the series. These theories of reading and vampire texts come together to describe a potent, though not completely unique, text that motivates readers to draw a connection between their reality and the text. As *Twilight* is such a text, its fans continue the connection between their reality and the series in the town of Forks.

CHAPTER III THE ACT OF READING *TWILIGHT*

In her book, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, Janice Radway interviewed a group of women about their romance novel reading habits. The women's explanation of their reading surprised Radway and caused her to develop the idea of "the act of reading" (Radway 86). Radway explains, "although I learned later that certain aspects of the romance's story do help to make this event especially meaningful, the early interviews were interesting because they focused so resolutely on the significance of the *act of romance reading* rather than the meaning of the romance" (86). Radway's discussion of the act of reading explains the escapism that facilitates a person's transition from a mere reader of *Twilight* to an active agent of change in Forks.

According to Radway, the mere act of reading offers a special experience to readers, something that other forms of entertainment cannot. This experience is specific to reading for two related reasons. Radway found women described reading as a very intimate, personal act, and this privacy allowed women to focus their attention "on a single object that can provide pleasure for themselves alone" (91). Unlike television, movies, or other more social, passive forms of entertainment, reading cultivates an experience of private focus. Reading requires the reader to actively engage a text, to actually read, whereas movies and the like simply require sitting and absorbing. The focused reading requires of readers allows them to experience an intense escape through

the text. The escape *Twilight* readers experience while reading the series is the impetus for their journeys to Forks. Readers want to steal away to the place where they have mentally escaped.

Continuing with her theory, Radway argues the act of reading that engenders escape is a “special gift” to one’s self (Radway 91). In other words, reading is an intimate inner exchange. It is a way to give the self pleasure without relying on outside forces. Reading, in other words, is like a mini-vacation that a woman takes with herself, for herself, whenever she can. In applying Radway’s beliefs to the *Twilight* phenomenon, the power of the text becomes clear. As a text, *Twilight* offers this mini-vacation experience to its readers. According to Radway, when the millions of *Twilight* fans read the novel, they begin to feel self-gratifying pleasure, and this pleasure mitigates a break from the mundane for the reader. Radway suggests that her interviewees’ main goal was to do something different than their daily routine (Radway 88). Her theory suggests the act of reading *Twilight* empowers readers to escape from the routine or mundane.

It’s important to note *Twilight* fans are not homogenously female, but many of their reactions to and descriptions of the text parallel Radway’s findings with specifically female readers. There are other studies that have discovered a similar escapism in reading that have not totally focused on women. An example of gender neutral reading habits is Richard Hoggart’s comprehensive study of working class people in 1950s England. In the conclusion of his work, *The Uses of Literacy*, Hoggart makes a discovery similar to Radway’s act of reading. Hoggart’s opinion of that discovery, however, is markedly different than Radway’s. He writes, “There is no virtue in the habit of reading for itself; however unexceptional the subjects and presentation may be, it can become as

much as addiction, as separated from the reality of life, as the reading of some of the more occasional literature I have described earlier” (257). According to Hoggart, reading for pleasure separates the reader from reality. He sees this separation as lacking virtue and akin to addiction; while Radway sees this separation as empowering. I agree with Radway. For *Twilight* fans, the series is a pleasing avenue through which they can experience a narrative different than their lives.

Evidence of fans’ positive separation or escape from reality can be found in the responses of the fans interviewed in *Twilight in Forks: The Saga of a Real Town*. Several people interviewed describe *Twilight* as a hopeful story that suggests there is something more to life than what they are currently experiencing. For example, Robyn Duong says the story gives readers hope (Brown). Christyna Whatman says *Twilight* is “the story [readers] always wanted to live out” (Brown). Tomoko Yuzawa explains, “People want to know there could, maybe, be something like that out there” (Brown). I see the statements of these fans echoing Radway’s theory of reading as an escape from the mundane and extending her theory beyond the act of reading to the content of the text. While Radway argues the mere act of reading breaks the routine of the mundane, it is clear from their testimony that *Twilight* fans also find escape through the content of the *Twilight* series. For fans, *Twilight* offers a narrative different than their lives and is thus an experience outside the mundane.

Duong, Whatman, and Yuzawa describe their understanding of fans’ relationship to the narrative of the series, and we can see that they recognize the story as different than their own. For example, when Yuzawa states fans like *Twilight* because it suggests there could be something like that “out there” she’s implying that she, and other fans, haven’t

experienced what is happening in *Twilight*. Because the story is not something they've experienced, as Duong explains, it gives them hope that something outside their experience exists. This hope is the way readers escape the mundane while reading *Twilight*. The transformation of Forks is a logical continuation of this experience. The break accessed through reading *Twilight* is physically manifested through the transformed Forks.

Twilight fans have particular interest in transforming the mundane into a fictional escape because they are fans of a vampire text. Radway's theory does not emphasize the influence of the content of the novel on the significance of the experience for the readers, but I believe *Twilight* fans' descriptions of their relationship to the text suggests content greatly influence a reader's experience. The content of the novel can enhance the reader's liberation from the mundane. Reading itself is gratifying; however, reading a text about vampires is a more specific experience, with a more defined form of escape.

Vampire stories, due to their content, are texts that especially facilitate rupture with routine. Due to particular fantastic elements of these texts, namely vampires, they offer readers a compounded experience of escape. Readers of vampire texts are not merely experiencing the intimate focus that allows for a break from their routine; they are reading, with intimate focus, a text that breaks from all routine or any idea of normalcy. Thus reading a vampire text such as *Twilight* is evidence of a person's stronger desire to split with the mundane than a person who is reading something other than a vampire text.

To illuminate this point, I turn to William Patrick Day. In his conclusion to *Vampire Legends in Contemporary American Culture: What Becomes a Legend Most*, Day suggests vampire narratives are productive sites for liberation through pleasure. He

writes that vampire stories “fulfill our desire to escape from our fears into the imaginary world where terror takes the benign shape of entertainment and comes back to us as pleasure” (Day 169). The vampire texts, texts with an aesthetically pleasing monster, allow readers to avoid the burden of terror because they turn terror into a thing of enjoyment, pleasure, and even beauty.

Edward Cullen is perfect example of Day’s terribly beautiful monsters. From the first moment readers are introduced to him, as well as his four siblings, his beauty is made clear. Bella explains, “I stared because their faces, so different, so similar, were all devastatingly, inhumanly beautiful” (*Twilight* 19). Yet this other worldly beauty is couched in danger. When Bella first gets near Edward in Biology class, his beauty takes a turn for the deadly: “He was glaring down at me again, his black eyes full of revulsion. As I flinched away from him, shrinking against my chair, the phrase *if looks could kill* suddenly ran through my mind” (*Twilight* 24). As the narrator of the majority of the series, Bella experiences Edward as something both beautiful and terrifying. Through her paradoxical description of Edward, fans experience him in ways that, Day argues, all textual vampires are experienced. Readers are able to experience terror that is ultimately pleasingly benign in its beauty through Bella’s description of him. Edward, then, represents the specific form of escapism offered to *Twilight* fans because *Twilight* is a vampire text.

Keeping Day’s theory of vampire texts and Radway’s theory of female reading practices in mind, one can see how fans of *Twilight* are getting a double dose of escapism through reading the text. As Radway describes and *Twilight* fans corroborate, the mere act of reading the series allows for a break from the mundane routine. Reading Meyer’s

storyline gives fans “the story they’ve always wanted to live out” (Brown). The plot of *Twilight* is not the story readers are currently living, but a divergent narrative with vampires, werewolves, and true love in high school through which they can escape. Through reading this divergent narrative, *Twilight* fans experience a break from the routine of their own plots.

Day’s theory, specifically addressing vampire texts builds on Radway’s theory and compounds the escapism found in *Twilight*. Certainly, as Day argues all textual vampires do, the beautiful vampires of *Twilight*, specifically Edward Cullen and Bella’s description of him, offer a benign way to experience terror. In other words, as Edward Cullen demonstrates, something that should be terrifying is rendered a non-threatening, thing of pleasure in the mind of readers because of that its beauty. The break with their fears and routine fans experience while reading the text is projected as the reality of Forks, Washington. The fantasy of *Twilight*’s escapism is rooted in the reality of the town.

The relationship between fantastic escape and reality is addressed by Day as he argues for the importance of the connection between fantasy and reality. He writes that vampires “show us that we cannot understand reality without fantasy” (170). In this part of his argument, Day suggests readers need fantasy such as vampires in their texts to better understand the world outside the text. This suggestion, when applied to Forks and *Twilight*, implies Forks needs the vampires of *Twilight* to make sense. Day continues writing, “perhaps most significant, these stories make clear how important both ethics and imagination are to our sense of identity and purpose” (170). Here the connection between imagination and identity Day makes is important to understand the changes in

Forks, Washington. According to Day, imagination is key when cultivating a sense of identity. In my discussion of *Twilight*'s effects on Forks, Day's theory means for the town and those who come to visit it, imagination is needed to fully understand Forks's identity in reality. This reliance on imagination allows the vampires of *Twilight* to come in and help the fans and citizens make better sense of the world. For citizens, this understanding facilitates economic growth; for fans, this understanding encourages the escapism already in the text.

As Day explains, the escapism fostered by vampire texts is tightly bound to understanding reality. The connection between fantasy and reality is cemented and physically playing out in Forks. Because Forks is a setting of a vampire text, it is an especially productive site for escape, and thus, Forks has been transformed by fans and citizens to encourage such escape, and such a transformation, in turn, is evidence of the important connection between fantasy and reality.

CHAPTER IV FORKS WASHINGTON A.T.

Although Forks once existed outside of fandom, Forks citizens actively transform their town into a *Twilight* fan's dream. In Tom Henheffer's article "*Twilight* Central's Sobbing Pilgrims," Mike Gurling, manager of Fork's visitor center, is quoted saying, "we realized these folks would be coming to Forks and we wanted to give them an experience"(74). The experience Forks gives *Twilight* fans is possible through the blurring of the boundary between the text and reality. In this same article, Annette Roots calls her gift shop "immersive" and says, "I sat down and thought: what would it feel like for me to walk into the book?" (74) The result of her pondering is a gift shop divided into four sections: "a forest with giant fake trees, a beach with sand and driftwood, a broken down castle and a dim back-lit dungeon" (Henheffer 74). Roots's immersive shop mimics the physical descriptions in *Twilight*, bringing the fiction into reality. In Brown's documentary about Forks, Bert Paul explains why he pages Bella Swan to the sporting goods section of his store: "We just help them add to the fantasy and make it real when they come here." Paul, Roots, and Gurling are citizens of Forks who understand that in order to benefit from *Twilight* fans they must transform their mundane town into the fictional experience fans desire.

Forks has been transformed by a blurring of reality and fiction, but before delving much deeper, I'd like to nail down a definition of ambiguity. In the preface to his book,

The Flight from Ambiguity, Donald N. Levine offers clues useful for completely understanding the idea, suggesting that ambiguity encompasses, “studied skepticisms toward...exclusively univocal formulations.” He also suggests ambiguity is a practice of “devious imprecision,” and the ability “to harbor a multiplicity of meaning” (Levine ix-x). Drawing Levine’s clues together, I understand ambiguity to mean people’s embrace of intentional multiplicity in meaning. In Forks, multiplicity arises between the layers of reality and fiction and is embraced by citizens and *Twilight* fans alike. The town is never totally a mundane reality or completely Meyer’s fictional creation. The deliberately imprecise distinction between Forks’s reality and the fiction of Forks can be divided into three categories: people, places, and mythology.

People of Forks

The people living, working, and visiting Forks cultivate ambiguity between fictional characters and human individuals. An example of this can be seen in the filming of the *Twilight* series occasionally takes place in the actual town. The actors who have come to embody the fictional characters can be spotted in Forks, making the distinction between reality and fiction hazy. Lindsay Mcghee and Tomoko Yuzawa, fans interviewed in Brown’s documentary, came to Forks to watch the filming of *Twilight*. On the streets of Forks, they ran into Kirsten Stewart, Robert Pattinson, and Taylor Lautner. While both girls occasionally use the actors’ real names, they describe their experience as if the three people they interacted with were the characters from the book. For example, Mcghee recounts how she shouted, “Oh my gosh Jacob’s here, Jacob’s here!” when she saw Taylor Lautner (Brown). As this

demonstrates, the presence of the actors who have come to represent Meyer's fictional characters makes Forks appear akin to the fictional Forks of *Twilight*. It's clear from Mcghee and Yuzawa's stories that some fans, when confronted by the actors, don't automatically distinguish between what is real and what is fiction.

It's not only the Hollywood actors who develop the fictional aspects of the people of Forks. Actual citizens of Forks are being confused with or purposely identified as fictional characters. When she was interviewed for *Forks: The Saga of a Real Town*, Christyna Whatman explains how smaller children are frightened to have their pictures taken with her when she plays Alice Cullen in Charlene Leppell's gift shop. Staying in character, Whatman tells them she's "already eaten," suggesting that the children are safe because she isn't hungry for blood (Brown). Roy Black Jr., a wrinkled Quillete tribal elder, once introduced himself as Jacob's Grandpa to a speechless young fan (Brown). Somewhat less intentionally, Sassy Belford adds to the ambiguity between fiction and reality in Forks as a fair skinned brunette with long hair and brown eyes who works as a cashier at Forks Outfitters. She was repeatedly asked to work at the *Twilight* gift store, but didn't understand why until someone told her she looks like Bella Swan. Fans visiting Forks frequently ask to take her picture (Brown). These people, slipping between characters, actors, and citizens, work to transform mundane Forks into the fictional reality of the *Twilight* series.

Places of Forks

As the people of Forks are both real and fictional so too are the physical places of the town. Real locations are manipulated to parallel the realities of Meyer's fiction. Even though the hospital, school, and homes of Forks were created before Meyer's fictional

portrayal of them, they are recreated by citizens in an effort to transform Forks. As these preexisting buildings take on the identity of the text, they propagate the lack of distinction between Meyer's Forks and the mundane Forks, which exists outside the fiction. The *Dazzled by Twilight* Tour stops at places in the town and addresses them as if they were places from the novel. For example, Travis Belles, the tour guide, identifies Forks High School as "the high school of the Cullens" (Brown).

Many citizens interviewed in the documentary also discuss physical places in their town as if they are the places from *Twilight*. Hunter, the science teacher, says, "Actually, the Swans kind of live in my neighborhood" (Brown). The textual description of Bella's home is vague enough that such a house may very well exist in Hunter's neighborhood. In the first installment of the series, the Swan's home is described as a small two-bedroom, two-story house, with Bella's window facing the front yard (*Twilight* 8-9). The ambiguity of this description and Hunter's claim demonstrates how text and Forks citizen work together to create the fictional Forks in reality.

Similarly, Kevin Rupprecht, the principal at Forks High School, stands outside his red-brick school and tells about the crash site that is sectioned off in the school parking lot where Bella was saved by Edward (Brown). In the school, described in the text as, "a collection of matching houses, built with maroon-colored bricks" the Cullens and Bella even have lockers (*Twilight* 13)! Kenneth Romney, a doctor at Forks hospital, describes the location of Dr. Cullen's parking spot (Brown). These are examples of how fictional elements of the *Twilight* series are being recreated in Forks. These recreations bridge the gap between the mundane Forks that exists outside *Twilight* and its fandom and the Forks created in Meyer's text and alive in the minds of the fans.

As a fan myself, I experienced the blurring of fiction and reality while watching the video tour included in Brown's documentary. I have read the *Twilight* series multiple times, seen the movies multiple times, and when the tour took the documentary film crew to Jacob Black's house, I had a hard time deciding if the house had been stylized or was simply Jacob's house. Like Forks High School, Tour Guide Belles identifies the little red house as Jacob Black's home (Brown). In the second installment of the *Twilight* series, Bella arrives at the Black house for the first time with motorcycles in the back of her truck (*New Moon* 130). She describes the home as, "a small wooden place with narrow windows, the dull red paint making it resemble a tiny barn" (130). The actual house on the outskirts of Forks identified as Jacob Black's house has a motorcycle on the porch, a barn in the back, and the name Black on the mailbox. It's a worn, little red house that has seemingly been at this location for some time. This house especially emphasizes the blur between fiction and reality in Forks. It's not a set, and it looks just like the fictional house of the fictional character. For me as fan, the indistinguishable line between fiction and reality at Jacob's house worked to transform Forks. The town no longer seems the mundane setting of a series about teenage love and mythical creatures, but a piece of reality where those elusive things may actually exist.

Mythology of Forks

The ambiguous reality of the people and places of Forks is amplified in the stories being told about the town. A mythology is being created by fans and citizens alike. Narratives that build the myth of *Twilight* and are equally rooted in the reality of Forks are discussed in the beginning of Brown's documentary. For instance, Charlene Leppell, the owner of Leppell's Flowers and Gifts (where Whatman is employed as Alice Cullen),

has discovered that people with the last name Cullen lived on a ranch near La Push. She also explains about parts of the woods she and her friends mysteriously knew not to play in when they were kids (Brown).

Leppell's eerie descriptions of life in Forks pre-*Twilight* add credence to the town's current, fantastic recreation of itself. Her stories thus intentionally suggest the Forks presented to *Twilight* fans is not a mere mimicry of the text but it is reality. Marcia Bingham blatantly states, "We've got vampires and werewolves" (Brown). The same doctor who talked about Dr. Cullen's parking spot alludes to a very handsome doctor who spends a large amount of his time in Seattle, and wonders whether the doctor is going there to work or hunt (Brown). These stories, as well as others, spun by citizens and *Twilight* fans alike continue to blend fiction into reality and reality into fiction. By intertwining stories about Forks with the narrative of *Twilight*, the people propagating these stories tie the reality of the town to the fiction of the text.

The combination of people, places, and mythology closely connected to the fiction of the *Twilight* series has significantly transformed the reality of Forks, Washington. Larry Carroll, a senior writer for MTV, alludes to the effects of these aspects of the town when he describes the reality of Forks. Carroll says, "Stephenie's world isn't as imaginary as some people would have you believe" (Brown). The people, places, and stories of Forks help to transform the small town from a mundane, faltering timber town to an imaginative world where the line between fiction and reality isn't defined. The play between fiction and reality creates a place where the typically opposing forces of fantasy and reality peacefully coexist. A tribal elder is also the grandfather of a fictional hero. A normal high school educates vampires. A quiet town has forbidden

woods. These examples of ambiguity between fiction and reality have drawn *Twilight* fans to Forks for a special experience of their favorite series.

Ambiguity at Play

Robyn Duong, a *Twilight* fan, says she went to Forks to get in touch with the story of *Twilight*. In her words, she came “to keep going on the journey” (Brown). But fans’ actions can speak just as loud as their words. Gurling explains Forks’s center of commerce receives a multitude of letters addressed to many of the characters from *Twilight*. Bella receives the most mail, usually love letters and book club invitations, but even Alice and Jasper get their fair share (Brown). The beliefs and actions of Duong, those who have written letters, and (I suspect) many other fans demonstrate the extent to which Forks has been transformed from the mundane to the fictional realm of *Twilight*. For these fans, Forks exists in-between the lines of reality and fiction where the story of *Twilight* lives.

The extent of Forks’s transformation was made possible through the ambiguity between reality and fiction that encourages fans to further experience and participate the text. In other words, the play between fiction and reality in Forks helps fans escape into the fiction of *Twilight*. In his chapter “Ambiguity and Modernity,” Levine describes the various functions of intentional multiplicity in modern culture. What is most relevant to understanding the circumstances at work in Forks and affecting *Twilight* fans is Levine’s description of the nuanced expression possible through ambiguous communication. Levine argues that the precise presentation of facts strips communication of its “expressive overtones and suggestive allusions” (Levine 32). In other words, direct, simple, or straightforward communication leaves out shades of meaning. But, Levine

continues, “ambiguous communication, by contrast, can provide a superb means for conveying affect” (Levine 32). In order to express nuances of meaning, communicators may rely on ambiguous communication, or communication that encourages the receiver to participate in the construction of meaning. To be specific, in Forks, those who are working to transform the town employ ambiguities in their communication to express a fictional reality to *Twilight* fans. According to Levine, through imprecise distinction, or purposeful lack of clarity, one can allude to shared experiences and sentiments that evoke a “wealth of affective responses” (Levine 32). Intentionally vague statements can better communicate an experience than more precise communication. As I have shown, Levine’s description of ambiguous communication is being invoked by the people, places, and stories of Forks.

The dimensions of reality and fiction expressed by the people and places of Forks evoke an experience of the text that would not be possible through a precise depiction of facts. For example, if the young fans who hesitate to have their pictures taken with Whatman were informed she’s a human dressed up like a fictional character, their experience of the fictional reality of *Twilight* would be over because of the preciseness of the communication. Instead, they are informed she’s “just eaten,” thus their participation in the fictional realm continues through Whatman’s intentionally indistinct response. As a whole, Forks is an extension of fans’ experience of *Twilight* through ambiguous communication. The citizens could smile, shrug, and say, “Yes, we’re the town where Stephenie Meyer set her story, but remember, it’s just a story.” Instead, they’ve accumulated fictional characters like Jacob Black’s grandpa or Sassy Belford, created real fictional locations like the Cullen’s lockers in Forks high school, and added to the

story of *Twilight* like Charlene Leppell's eerie childhood stories in order to better express the fictional Forks of the *Twilight* series. The citizens of Forks have transformed their mundane town, a struggling timber town that existed outside fan practice, into a fictional reality that appeases *Twilight* fans' desire to continue to experience the text.

While the ambiguity at work in Forks is mainly propagated by citizens of Forks, it would not exist without *Twilight* fans. The relationship between citizens of Forks and *Twilight* fans is reciprocal. Without the demand of fans, fostered by the fantastical distractions offered by *Twilight*, Forks would never have undergone such a transformation. The motivation of this demand to continue the journey begun in the text is an important aspect of Forks's changes. However, the transformation of Forks has further significance. Yes, the series and its setting facilitate the escapist fantasies of *Twilight* fans and are evidence of the strong connection between these fantasies and reality, but the significance of the town's change does not end with fulfilling the fantasies of a few thousand screaming teenagers.

CHAPTER V *TWILIGHT* A CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLE OF THE FEMALE GOTHIC

Reading the text as a contemporary example of the female gothic subgenre, the plot can be viewed as an example of a woman's struggle against patriarchy, and the creation of *Twilight*'s setting has perhaps revolutionary cultural significance. Diane Long Hoeveler, co-editor of the collection *Comparative Romanticisms*, authors a chapter about the sub-genre of gothic literature, the female gothic. Although Hoeveler's main concept of the female gothic is focused on the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, there are striking parallels between her description of this genre and *Twilight*. Therefore, I wish to draw on Hoeveler's conclusions about the female gothic in my analysis, arguing that these conclusions ultimately speak to the significance of the series and its effects on Forks, Washington.

Before analyzing the content of the female gothic, Hoeveler argues for a more complex description of the genre. She suggests critics of female gothic texts need to get away from the "laundry list" of characteristics that typically identify gothic literature (104). Instead of offering her own laundry list, Hoeveler presents a more plot-centered description of the female gothic, relying on several texts at the heart of the female gothic genre. Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* are two texts Hoeveler relies on most to create this description, but she regularly references Charlotte

Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and at one point cultivates a lengthy list of female gothic texts including, but not limited to Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, du Marier's *Rebecca*, Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," and Shelley's *Mathilda*(117). With these and several other texts in mind, Hoeveler portrays the subgenre in a way that goes beyond a superficial laundry list of characteristics to an in-depth analysis of the plot and its purpose.

In Hoeveler's description of the female gothic, the parallels between Hoeveler's female gothic and *Twilight* are most evident. She explains, "the most common situation in all of these novels concerns an inheritance, a property, or an estate whose entail is in dispute. And although she has all of the considerable forces of the patriarchy aligned against her—you guessed it—our young, innocent, naïve heroine manages to gain her rightful inheritance, usually by besting an evil uncle (read: displaced father-figure)" (108). Here, Hoeveler notes several important conventions of female gothic texts. First, the heroine is "young, innocent, and naïve," an apt description of Bella, the heroine of *Twilight*. Bella is young, a junior in high school at the beginning of the series (*Twilight* 13). And if we equate innocent with virginal, then Bella is also a virgin, at least until her honeymoon in the last installment of the series (*Breaking Dawn* 85). Bella is also naïve; perhaps the best example of her naivety is her belief that involving herself with a coven of vampires will bring her no harm. In a discussion of this threat, Edward says, "I could kill you," to which Bella quickly responds, "I don't think you could" (*Eclipse* 447). He continually warns her, "That is something to be afraid of, indeed. Wanting to be with me. That's really not in your best interest" (*Twilight* 266). And yet Bella spends thousands of pages traipsing around after vampires regardless of her own peril. As a virginal, high

school student who believes being in love with a vampire will not place her in danger, Bella demonstrates she is everything Hoeveler says a female gothic heroine should be: young, innocent, and naïve.

Another parallel between Hoeveler's description and the series' plot is the inheritance in dispute. In *Twilight*, the inheritance is vampirism. Bella believes becoming a vampire is something she is entitled to now that she is in a committed relationship with a vampire, but her inheritance isn't forthcoming. In the end of the first novel a scene plays out that demonstrates Bella's struggle for vampirism. All dressed up for prom, Bella confesses to Edward, "So I was hoping that you might have changed your mind...that you were going to change *me*, after all" (*Twilight* 496). In a bluff, Edward kisses her throat, but refuses to turn her into a vampire until the final book (*Breaking Dawn* 360). In this way, Bella must struggle to earn her rightful inheritance. This struggle carries much of *Twilight*'s plot and parallels the struggle Hoeveler argues is characteristic of the female gothic subgenre.

Like Hoeveler's female gothic heroines, in order to receive her inheritance, Bella must best several "evil uncles." As the series progresses, Bella's "change" and ultimate happiness is impeded by several evil characters that would like to see her dead. A tracking vampire named James wants to eat her for fun (*Twilight* 378). Once James is out of the way, his revenge crazy girlfriend, Victoria, and a hoard of new vampires attack Bella and her supernatural friends (*Eclipse* 348). It's only when these threats appear to be overcome that Bella can marry Edward, have sex, become pregnant, and ultimately receive her new identity as a vampire. As a female gothic heroine, Bella's final triumph is when she gains her rightful inheritance, becoming a vampire.

Bella, as Hoeveler argues a true female gothic heroine should, comes to her own rescue. In most of the major conflicts that impede her ultimate fantasy fulfillment, Bella bests the evil uncles. In the first installment of the series Edward and his family kill James (*Twilight* 461), but this killing only causes the larger conflict where Bella offers herself as the necessary distraction to defeat James' enraged girlfriend and her vampire army (*Eclipse* 550). Finally, Bella alone saves the entire Cullen family and friends with her protective shield (*Breaking Dawn* 728). Ultimately it is Bella who paves the way for her own happy ending.

Like her identity and struggle for vampirism, Bella's happy ending also matches Hoeveler's female gothic. Hoeveler writes, "to make matters perfect, our heroine further triumphs over the patriarchy by creating an alternative companionate family, marrying a 'feminized' man who promises, if not in word then through his sheer incompetence, to be completely malleable" (108). In the end of the series, as a married, vampire, mother Bella lives out the female gothic happily-ever-after in the final chapter aptly named "The Happily Ever After" (742-754). Edward, Bella's husband, has been physically feminized throughout the series as he is continually compared to his favorite food, mountain lion (*Twilight* 216). This comparison portrays Edward as feline, sleek, and lithe, not exactly a robust, masculine character. Also, while he may not seem incompetent, Edward reveals his malleability when he says to Bella, "It was only a matter of time—and not much of it—before I showed up at your window and begged you to take me back. I'd be happy to beg now, if you'd like that" (*New Moon* 514). When he does occasionally refuse one of Bella's requests it causes him actual physical pain. For example, when he refuses to have sex with Bella, Edward responds, "This is unbearable. So many things I want to give

you—and *this* is what you decide to demand. Do you have any idea how painful it is, trying to refuse you when you plead with me this way?” (*Eclipse* 448). Edward, as the feminized malleable companion, helps Bella to fulfill Hoeveler’s description of her role as the heroine of a female gothic series. He is the feminized, malleable, companion gothic heroines settle down with once they have triumphed over the patriarchy. By marrying Edward and becoming vampire fulfills her female gothic fantasies.

These plot moves, found in the *Twilight* series as well as popular novels written in the turn of the century, served a particular purpose for the authoresses of the late 18th and early 19th century. According to Hoeveler, “middle-class women writers of this period were particularly attracted to the female gothic because they could explore within its parameters their fantasized overthrow of the public realm, figured as a series of ideologically-constructed masculine ‘spaces’ in favor of the creation of a new privatized, feminized world”(106). Through the heroine’s besting of the evil uncles, achievement of her rightful inheritance, and companionable husband, she re-envisioned the life the patriarchy has created for her. In telling the stories of women who defeat the patriarchy, the authors of these novels express their own dissatisfaction with the system and encourage their readers to feel the same. Hoeveler explains, “the female gothic became a coded system whereby women authors covertly communicated to other women—their largely female reading audience—their ambivalent rejection and at the same time outward complicity with the dominant sexual ideologies of their culture” (107). The female gothic is a place where female fantasies of domination are acted out. The acting out of these fantasies leads to the fictional oppression of male places. Hoeveler states, “female authors ironically inverted the ‘separate spheres’ ideology by valorizing the

private female world of the home and fictively destroying the public/juridical masculine world” (107). In the female gothic tradition, in order for women to create a life outside the patriarchy, they must destroy the places the patriarchy exists.

The female gothic text’s overthrow of the public, masculine domain creates a place for the fantasies of the heroine and readers alike. Hoeveler explains, “the female gothic novel accomplishes the cultural work of fantasy for women; it convinces them that their safely-proscribed rebellion will result in an improved home for both their mothers and themselves. In rebelling against the patriarch they paradoxically reify the power of the home and family to which they will return” (111). According to Hoeveler, in this genre, women destroy the public realm in order to make room for their desired, safe, domestic place. As previously described the *Twilight* series is a part of the female gothic genre because Bella struggles to overthrow of the public realm in favor of female fantasies. *Twilight*, then, is a contemporary reincarnation of the revolution written about in the early female gothic texts.

This part of Hoeveler’s theory, where she suggests the texts are a way to rebel against the status quo of patriarchy, echoes aspects of Radway’s act of reading. According to Hoeveler, female gothic texts are sites of female fantasy that diverge from their reality (106). Similarly, as I have already shown, Radway sees the act of reading as a way for women to break from routine (88). The two theorists see texts as a way for women to break from reality. As previously discussed, Radway sees the break with the mundane taking place in the act of reading alone, whereas Hoeveler, like Day’s argument about vampire texts, focuses on the content of the piece. All three theorists contend that reading, in some way, offers readers escape from reality. Hoeveler takes her discussion

of escape one step further when she points to the implications of the fantasies of the text. I'll discuss these implications and their relationship to the changes in Forks in the following section.

Hoeveler does seem open to the possibility that this genre is not relocated to the past. While Hoeveler, couches her discussion of the female gothic in turn of the century terms, she speaks to the power the female gothic still has on contemporary readers arguing that readers of female gothic texts:

like the characters in the novels or proponents of a monolithic feminism, want to find something hidden, mysterious, deep and esoteric behind the black veil.... The lure of the gothic has precisely this quality, this notion that as readers we have creative or quasi-artistic by investing empty signifiers with our own self-created meanings. (105)

Readers of the female gothic are still interested in the creation made possible in the text. Hoeveler's suggestion that the creative instinct in female gothic readers today is an eerie foreboding of the effect *Twilight* fans have had on Forks.

CHAPTER VI THE FEMALE GOTHIC REVOLUTION IN REALITY

While Hoeveler's description of the female gothic is largely based on plot, she emphasizes the space of these texts as well. The conflict of the genre begins with the heroine's "intense ambivalence toward the paternal home and, by extensions, the patriarchy" (111). Throughout the text the heroine works to "re-shape her versions of 'reality'; in the female gothic novel she creates what she thinks are alternative, empowering female created fantasies" (123). As discussed, *Twilight* follows this evolution of space from the confining paternal home to a new, bucolic, feminized home of female fantasies. In the beginning of the series, as a young, innocent, naïve heroine Bella comes to live with her father in Forks (*Twilight* 8), and in the end after she has married her feminized, malleable companion and received her rightful, vampiric inheritance, she retires to a sweet cabin in the woods with her new family (*Breaking Dawn* 750). What's more is that the transformation that Forks, Washington undergoes parallels this overthrow of patriarchy in favor of female fantasy.

As previously described, before *Twilight*, Forks was a town barely surviving on the income brought in by logging. According to Fisher and Schubert unemployment was "soaring" and domestic violence cases were up from one or two cases to seven or eight (28). Clearly, unemployment was high, as was domestic abuse. This town was an

example of constraints patriarchy can place on women which the female gothic heroine wishes to circumvent. In her article, “Reworking Race, Class, and Gender into Pacific Northwest History,” Laurie Mercier points to the injustices suffered by women in Pacific Northwest Logging jobs as late as the 1990s. She describes employment in the area as “a white, male, ‘wageworkers frontier’” (61). This understanding of the workforce led to discrimination against women and minorities (62). Mercier does suggest women have made advances into this vocational frontier, but these advances are in either fishing or farming and only when jobs become seasonal and low paying (62-63). As Mercier describes, the major source of employment in Forks before *Twilight* was for men and, if employment existed at all for women, it was inadequate. But the problems with patriarchy in Forks did not end with employment.

A study of domestic violence reporting conducted by Cathy Ferrand Bullock and Jason Cubert supports D. Fisher and C. Schubert’s suggestion that domestic violence was a problem for women in Forks. In their study, “Coverage of Domestic Violence Fatalities by Newspapers in Washington State,” Bullock and Cubert studied the reports of domestic murder or attempted murder where the perpetrator had been identified in Washington in 1998 (480). They found 69% of the cases had a female victim and male perpetrator; 21.4% of the cases had a male victim and a female perpetrator; 9.5% of the cases had a male victim and male perpetrator; no cases had a female victim and female perpetrator (481). Over half of the cases that had a female perpetrator and male victim were classified as self-defense, and the cases that involved both a male victim and male perpetrator involved women, for example an ex-boyfriend murdering a current boyfriend (481). The findings may be typical for many regions in the US, but they still depict a

dangerous majority for women in domestic violence cases. According to these statistics, women in this area were more likely than men to be victims of domestic violence deaths, and when committing the acts themselves, women were more likely to be acting in self-defense than unantagonized aggression. Mercier's as well as Bullock and Culbert's studies describe a Forks where women were not valued in the frontier of employment, and they were more likely to be victims of domestic violence.

This Forks parallels the patriarchal space Hoeveler's gothic heroine chooses to overthrow. In her chapter, Hoeveler characterizes patriarchy as "oppression and corruption" (110), "the protection racket" (110), and a system that, "denies women the chance to exercise their subjectivity" (111). As Forks B.T. is a place akin to the original space of the female gothic heroine, it undergoes a radical change; just as the space of the heroine transforms, so too does her environment change into a reality where female fantasy exists and is valued. After combating the patriarchy the female gothic heroine creates her own "self-serving ideology" (Hoeveler 125). In the texts Hoeveler examines and more specifically, in *Twilight*, this ideology is the "companionate family" (Hoeveler 125). While the companionate family is characteristic of Hoeveler's female gothic revolutions, it is not the only culmination. After close examination of Hoeveler's chapter, I believe what is most significant about the female gothic's overthrow of the patriarchy is the installment of female fantasy. Hoeveler suggests the female gothic constitutes "female-created fantasy" (108), "accomplishes the cultural work of fantasy for women" (111), and "valorizes female-constructed fantasies" (120). A companionate family may be one female fantasy, but the transformed Forks, Washington is another. Like the

heroines of female gothic texts, *Twilight* fans have transformed a threateningly patriarchal space into a space of female fantasy.

Fans' testimonies speak to the creation of this fantasy. As previously quoted, Robyn Duong, Christyna Whatman and Tomoko Yuzawa see Forks as a creation of their fantasies, a place where they can continue the journey of the fantasy they began while reading *Twilight* (Brown). Though not all *Twilight* fans are female, it is largely assumed the base of the group is female. Evidence of this female-centered fan base can be seen in the actions of the movie production. The studio has tweaked the trailers, adding disproportionate action scenes, to attract male audience members (Young 25). The transformation of Forks into this female-created fantasy means an overthrow of the patriarchy is possible in real life. Forks, by evolving from an oppressive and dangerous place for women to a place based on female fantasy, is evidence of the real-life overthrow of patriarchy described in Hoeveler's theory of the female gothic. Forks, Washington A.T. breaks from the reality of patriarchy.

However, in suggesting Forks is no longer strictly patriarchal or male-centered, I do not mean to imply the town is free from domestic violence or that there is an influx of female loggers. Instead, Forks should be seen as a place that revalues female-created fantasy and in doing so has weakened the power of such cultural institutions as work place discrimination and domestic violence. There has been a shift of values that has reconstructed the reality of Forks. For example, male-centered logging is no longer the life blood of the town, but now boutique shops that cater to the *Twilight* fantasy are booming. This shift, like that of Hoeveler's female gothic, displaces the space of patriarchy with a female-centered fantasy.

Conclusion

It has not been my purpose to argue for a new subgenre of literature or suggest a need for a new way of examining certain types of texts or a different way of defining a reader's experience with a text. In fact, the relationship between *Twilight* fans and the series is quite common. The effects of this relationship on Forks seem fantastic, but these too, in time, may prove quite ordinary. But being ordinary does not diminish the power of the text on the fans and place. As I have been arguing, there is power in seemingly common acts. Reading novels about vampires and becoming a fan can drastically alter the course of reality.

By simply being a series with vampire characters and having a plot that follows the pattern hundreds of years old, *Twilight* has revolutionized a town economically and, perhaps most significantly, socially. The desire to experience fiction in reality, which *Twilight* inspires in its readers, facilitated Forks economic and social change. Because of the text's effects on readers, Forks, Washington went from a depressed, mundane, male centered town to a thriving, fictional, female-fantasy-centered destination.

Before the release of *Twilight* in 2005, Forks was struggling financially due to its reliance on logging, as D. Fisher and C. Schubert suggest. A reliance characterized by Mercier as "a white, male, 'wageworkers frontier'" (61). This male-centered frontier made the area a difficult and dangerous place for women. As Bullock and Cubert report violent domestic acts were most likely committed against and always involved women (480-481). But, with the publication of a stay-at-home-mom's four part series, the conditions in Forks changed.

Because *Twilight* is, as Radway explains, a “special gift” readers give themselves that enables them do something different than their daily routine (Radway 91, 88), fans see the story as a way to escape the mundane. Similarly, Day argues *Twilight*, as a vampire text, allows readers escape from fear to pleasure (Day 169). Again, *Twilight* offers readers a way to break from the typical. This break, as Day describes, creates an important bond between the fantastic and reality (Day 170). This escape bonded to reality leads hundreds of *Twilight* fans a day to journey to Forks, Washington. The town’s pre-existing conditions could not sustain such an influx.

The fans are a catalyst to a change that occurs in the people, places, and mythology of Forks. As shown in Brown’s documentary, these three aspects of life in Forks have become intimately connected to the fictional story of *Twilight*. Vampires and werewolves haunt the town, and fictional locations are literally set-in-stone (Brown). Both citizens and fans see these new aspects of the town as fulfilling the fantasies of *Twilight*’s female readership (Brown). This fulfillment through transformation mirrors the change outlined by Hoeveler as the female gothic plot. In Forks, like in *Twilight* and other female gothic texts, patriarchal norms are overthrown for female fantasy. There is one significant difference between Forks and female gothic texts; its revolution happens in reality.

Forks’s shift from a patriarchal society, to a town that strongly values female-created fantasies, is evidence that the cultural revolution of the female gothic is possible in contemporary reality, not simply in sensational novels of the past. Though many of the texts Hoeveler relies on to create her description were written hundreds of years ago, *Twilight* is evidence that the subgenre is still, not only practiced, but potentially wildly

successful today. The supplanting of patriarchal space with female-created fantasies is possible with a quite typical, not even critically acclaimed text.

The change of Forks also points to the flexibility of the mundane. Originally described by Sanders and Brown as separate from the experience of fans (268), the melding of reality and fiction in Forks suggests the distinction between fans and “mainstream” people is more a permeable than rigid barrier. The reading practice of *Twilight* fans built the permeable boundary between the Forks, from the series, and Forks, Washington. The escapism of reading discussed by Radway and other theorists is evident in fans description of their relationship with *Twilight*. This escape encouraged them to make the journey to Forks, beginning the town’s transformation. The relationship between *Twilight* fans’ reading practices and the reality of Forks suggests reading has the potential to greatly affect reality outside the text. Though the *Twilight* series has suffered harsh criticisms and, admittedly, offers readers nothing particularly unique, it has managed to alter the reality of one small town in the Pacific Northwest. This change should illuminate the close relationship between text and reality, fact and fiction, fan and citizen that’s possible in even the most unexceptional of texts.

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