

Season 1, Episode 13: Twilight with Jackson Bird

SPEAKERS

Jackson Bird, Marcelle Kosman, Hannah McGregor

[Material Girls Theme plays: “Shopping Mall” by Jay Arner and Jessica Delisle]

Hannah McGregor 0:30

Hello, and welcome to Material Girls, a scholarly podcast about popular culture. I’m Hannah McGregor.

Marcelle Kosman 0:36

And I’m Marcelle Kosman. And joining us this week, we have another thrilling guest. Oh my gosh. Jackson Bird (pronouns: he/him) is a multidisciplinary creator who writes and performs original works on the stage, on the page, and online. Many of his works aim to demystify the trans experience, a selection of which can be found on his YouTube channel, jackisnotabird, and in his debut book, *Sorted: Growing Up, Coming Out, and Finding My Place*. Currently, Jackson can be found performing 30 plays in one hour many Friday and Saturday nights in New York City with the experimental theatre company The New York Neo-Futurists. Welcome, Jackson. It is so nice to have you with us.

Jackson Bird 1:28

Thank you so much for having me. I’m very, very excited to be here after we all hung out over the summer at camp. And yeah, I’m also very excited that you accepted the only pitch that I gave Coach about what I wanted to talk about on this show. **[Everyone laughs]**

Hannah McGregor 1:44

We were like, “Yeah, we really want to talk to Jack, like, what’s he into?” **[Jackson laughs]** And Coach was like, “*Twilight*, end of list.” Here’s how the conversation actually went. Marcelle went, “Oh, *Twilight*? I refuse to read the book.”

Marcelle Kosman 1:56

We are not shaming our listeners. **[Hannah laughs]** Because the reason I refuse to read it is because it sucks and we’re taking this out. **[Everyone laughs]**

Jackson Bird 2:06

I mean, I don't know. I think that's kind of the larger discussion we're here to have.

Hannah McGregor 2:10

Oh, my god. Yeah, you can't take it out. It's the whole point of the conversation. Okay, but before we get into a in depth conversation about the pros and cons of *Twilight* the novel, because we are, dear listeners, talking about the novel, not the movies. I want us to talk just a little bit about vampires. Because, Jackson, you mentioned in an email exchange that you actually hate vampires.

Jackson Bird 2:38

Yes, yeah. I really don't like vampires.

Hannah McGregor 2:42

So one, what did they ever do to you?

Jackson Bird 2:44

I am not entirely sure why I dislike vampires. But I do know that I spent the entire *Twilight* series being like, "She can't be turned into a vampire. I don't want her to be a vampire." And any vampire media I've engaged with where the main character's a human who wants to be a vampire, I'm like, "No, that would be so bad for you." And I don't know why, I think I must just be so human. I have this carnal evolution. trait that's like, "No, can't be a vampire."

Hannah McGregor 3:07

You're like, "Yes. Better not to be dead." Really reasonable.

Jackson Bird 3:10

Yeah, see, right? That's an evolutionary trait, I think.

Marcelle Kosman 3:13

I don't know, Jack. I feel like that makes you an extremely rare breed of human who is like, "Vampire? Nah."

Hannah McGregor 3:21

Yeah. All the rest of us—I mean, we haven't taken a poll. We don't know how

many humans are hot for vampires.

Jackson Bird 3:27

But that is kind of the point of the vampire trope, right? Is that they're sexy to humans.

Marcelle Kosman 3:32

Yeah, I feel like we don't need a poll. I feel like we can rely on the material evidence of countless, countless vampire franchises.

Jackson Bird 3:41

I will say, and this literally only occurred to me in the last hour as I was thinking about this podcast, which is, I think maybe a reason that I like *Twilight* is because in *Twilight*, Edward Cullen hates being a vampire. He really hates being a vampire. And so maybe that's part of why I like it.

Hannah McGregor 3:56

So you only like self-hating vampires.

Jackson Bird 3:59

Exactly. I want them to really hate themselves for what they are. **[Laughs]** That's so terrible.

Hannah McGregor 4:05

So big fan of Angel from *Buffy*.

Jackson Bird 4:08

You know, that does track and yet, he was very mid to me. **[Hannah laughs]** But what employers do you like or particularly hate?

Hannah McGregor 4:18

[Laughing] Yeah, Marcelle, what's your favourite vampire?

Marcelle Kosman 4:20

I believe my first exposure to vampires was the Anne Rice novel and the adaptation of that novel, *Interview with a Vampire*. So **[laughing]** Brad Pitt and

Tom Cruise, which now when I say it out loud, is so silly.

Hannah McGregor 4:38

Really funny.

Marcelle Kosman 4:39

Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise as Louis and the vampire Lestat.

Hannah McGregor 4:43

They were so pretty in that movie. Jackson, I think we are maybe a decade older than you. Is that true?

Jackson Bird 4:50

I think about so. Culturally, that seems true. I am 33.

Hannah McGregor 4:53

Culturally it feels right, right.

Jackson Bird 4:55

Yeah.

Marcelle Kosman 4:56

That's only six years.

Hannah McGregor 4:57

It's only six years, but we came of age nestled deep within the black lace-draped bosom of Anne Rice. And I think that really formed a lot of vampire cultural understanding, which was that they were sexy and deadly. That's the whole thing,

Jackson Bird 5:16

Right.

Marcelle Kosman 5:17

That's right.

Jackson Bird 5:17

You were probably the right age to see Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in theatres.

Marcelle Kosman 5:22

Actually, no. So we simply do not have time for me to get into the details of my annual Sweet November Keanu Reeves movie festival. But we did just watch Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. It came out in 1992, so we would have been like around seven or eight.

Hannah McGregor 5:38

Yeah, so a bit young for the sheer quantity of blood in that movie.

Jackson Bird 5:45

Yeah.

Marcelle Kosman 5:46

Like multiple orgies—

Jackson Bird 5:47

— so many orgies in that movie.

Hannah McGregor 5:49

So many orgies. A year later, I would watch *Jurassic Park* in movie theatres. So obviously we weren't—

Jackson Bird 5:55

Well, see, *Jurassic Park* was the first movie I ever saw in a movie theatre when I was three years old.

Hannah McGregor 6:00

Well, I guess you're coming back for the *Jurassic Park* episode.

Marcelle Kosman 6:03

Yay!

Jackson Bird 6:03

I am so excited. **[Everyone laughs]**

[Upbeat interlude music plays]

Marcelle Kosman 6:10

Jackson, I know you've never heard of our podcast before, so I'm just gonna share this with you, just for you, because nobody else needs this reminder. But our first segment is called Why This Why Now, and it is dedicated to the materialist question, what are or were the historical, ideological and, dare I say, material conditions for our object of study to become Zeitgeisty?

Hannah McGregor 6:38

And I hope everyone's ready to go way back in time today, because we are talking about 2005.

Marcelle Kosman 6:45

Oh, my God.

Jackson Bird 6:48

2005 was like, three years ago, what are you talking about?

Hannah McGregor 6:49

If it was only three to ten years ago, that means that we should all remember it really well. So Jackson, what do you remember about 2005?

Jackson Bird 6:58

Oh, what a great challenge, because not too much. **[Everyone laughs]**

Marcelle Kosman 7:01

[Laughing] I know, right?

Jackson Bird 7:03

I was a 15-year-old in Texas. So the first thing that comes to mind when I think of 2005 is George Bush.

Hannah McGregor 7:12

Yeah, absolutely. You know what? He's not not going to come up. **[Jackson laughs]**

Jackson Bird 7:16

Yeah, I mean, I think being in Texas, 15 was around the time I started coming into my own political ideas. But instead of that making me want to take action in society, because I was in Texas, it just sort of made me go internal and pay less attention to the news and stuff because I was scared of expressing my opinions that were different than others.

Hannah McGregor 7:36

It seems pretty reasonable. You know?

Marcelle Kosman 7:38

Yeah.

Jackson Bird 7:39

What do you remember about 2005?

Hannah McGregor 7:43

2005, I was in second year university, because I took two years off between high school and my undergraduate.

Jackson Bird 7:49

Good for you.

Hannah McGregor 7:50

Yeah. I was living in a rundown farmhouse in the country. I was working full time at a bookstore while also putting myself through school. My roommate Jessie and I were binge watching the entirety of *Sex in the City* on DVD. And I sure as hell wasn't reading *Twilight*. **[Jackson laughs]** Marcelle?.

Marcelle Kosman 8:18

Hmm. I was also in university. I was and had been volunteering for the sexual assault center at the McGill University Student Union. And it was my whole life. And so I also did not read *Twilight*, and was very much not interested in *Twilight*.

Because if I remember correctly, it had a real reputation of being not good for women in like—that organization was wonderful and continues to be wonderful. I'm really glad it exists. But it was not super nuanced when it came to things like popular culture. And I think that maybe that's okay, for a sexual assault center to not make a lot of space for nuance and to be a little bit, you know, toe a hard line.

Jackson Bird 9:03

Yeah.

Hannah McGregor 9:04

Yeah, toe a hard line about books that maybe represent a lack of consent in a romanticized way.

Marcelle Kosman 9:10

Definitely, definitely. So that's what I was up to. **[Hannah laughs]** I was being angry about men. I was being angry about rape culture in general.

Hannah McGregor 9:20

Yeah. So Jackson, you were 15.

Jackson Bird 9:23

Mm-hmm.

Hannah McGregor 9:24

Were you reading *Twilight*?

Jackson Bird 9:26

Not at that point. I didn't read *Twilight* until the last book was coming out. And I think I had sort of heard about it. I have this memory of one girl a year younger than me who had the *Twilight* books on her bookshelf. And I was like, "She must be into weird vampire romance. That's very strange." And that was my only awareness as the earlier books were coming out. But by the fourth book, the movies were starting, and it was a really big thing. And so I ended up reading them for two reasons. One was I was working at Barnes and Noble at the time, and so I was scheduled to work the midnight release of *Breaking Dawn*, the fourth and final book of the main series of *Twilight*. And our events director was like,

“Not a single one of you who is working this event has ever read a *Twilight* book, and will someone else please just read one of these books so you know what’s going on?” **[Hannah and Marcelle laugh]**

And so we were allowed to check out the *Twilight* books for free from the store to read the first one. And I did and I sped through it. I read all four of them just that week, in a few days. I got really, really—pretty much just into the books, like I didn’t get into it in any further way. But another reason I was interested in reading them beyond our events director just being like, “Please, dear God, someone else read this with me,” was for many years before that, I had been listening to a Harry Potter fan podcast. So as the *Twilight* movies were coming out, as the phenomenon was really taking off—and that was around the same time the *Harry Potter* books were ending—these podcasters were like, “Well, maybe *Twilight*’s the new thing. Why don’t we start a *Twilight* podcast?” And so I listened to that *Twilight* podcast for months to years before I ever read the books. And I didn’t even plan on reading them, I just liked listening to their discussions about them.

Hannah McGregor 11:08

And you know what, we’re gonna get a little bit more into this, but I suspect that was a lot of people’s entry point into *Twilight*. Being pulled into the *Twilight* fandom via the Harry Potter fandom.

Jackson Bird 11:17

Yeah.

Hannah McGregor 11:18

Okay, now that we’ve located ourselves a little bit in 2005, I do want to just give us a little bit of context around what turned *Twilight* into an international sensation and the logical inheritor of the fandom of *Harry Potter*. So the first novel in the series, *Twilight*, was published in 2005 by Stephenie Meyer, who was a first-time novelist and a Mormon wife and mother, which is an aspect of her identity that has been discussed a lot, particularly in the context of critiquing the series’ gender politics.

So just real brief summary, just in case there’s anybody listening who doesn’t know what happens in *Twilight*: it is the story of an introverted and horrifically

parentified 17-year-old girl, Bella Swan, who moves to Forks, Washington to live with her father after her mother remarries and she decides to remove herself from her mother's care, because she's the adult in the relationship. And while in Forks, Bella meets and quickly becomes obsessed with Edward Cullen, a vampire just thinly masquerading as a teenage boy in high school, really not trying that hard. The success of *Twilight* absolutely outstripped her publishers expectations, she got a \$750,000 book deal for a trilogy, which is good, but is not the kind of advance you get on a three book series if you think it's going to be this big. So they knew it was going to be good, but they didn't know it was going to be this kind of blockbuster.

Marcelle Kosman 12:50

Okay.

Hannah McGregor 12:51

And the reason it got signed is because she was part of the explosive rise of contemporary YA publishing. And, of course, part of the moral panics that accompanied that rise. And do we know what else was really key to the rise of YA publishing in the 2000s?

Marcelle Kosman 13:08

Can I take a little stabby stab?

Hannah McGregor 13:10

Take a little stabby stab.

Marcelle Kosman 13:11

Was it *Harry Potter*?

Hannah McGregor 13:13

Yeah, it was *Harry Potter*. [**Marcelle laughs**]

Jackson Bird 13:17

What?? No way!

Hannah McGregor 13:17

Well, it was the biggest publishing phenomenon of all time, and people were like, “Ah, it seems that the youth like books. Hmm. Really interesting, okay. What if we give them more books to read?” So *Harry Potter* had really reignited the flagging YA market in the late 90s and early 2000s, and really demonstrated to publishers that there was an appetite for YA not only among the traditional target demographic, but also much more widely among adult readers. And not among only teenage girls; people of all genders and people of all ages were reading YA. So according to an article published in *McSweeney’s* in 2011 called “Young People are Reading More than You,” Lauren Ross and Hannah Withers explain that reading among young adults surged between 2002 and 2008, which is a trend that can absolutely be linked to the *Harry Potter* series, but has continued even after Rowling stopped publishing new books in this series. So Jackson, could I ask you to read this quote for me?

Jackson Bird 14:22

Yes. “Half of the nine to 11 year olds surveyed by Scholastic said they read books to help you figure out who you are and who you could become. What began with *Harry Potter* in undoubtedly captivating and even inspiring work is now commonplace. The *Twilight Saga*, a four book series by Stephenie Meyer, has sold over 28 and a half million copies in the US in the five years since the first book, *Twilight*, was released in 2005. *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, released in 2008, is the first book in Collins’s *Hunger Games* trilogy, and has already sold over 540,000 copies in the US. There are many new young adult series, and kids line up at midnight to get their hands on the first available copies. This is a sign of avid, even voracious readership, not as the NEA reported in 2004, a diminished role of voluntary reading in American life.”

Hannah McGregor 15:19

Beautifully read. Yeah, so a huge and ongoing sustainable growth in YA publishing.

Marcelle Kosman 15:27

Incredible. But seriously, though, if we want young people reading, and YA gets more young people reading, than why all the moral panic? Surely it can’t just be the midnight releases. **[Hannah laughs]**

Hannah McGregor 15:41

It's not just the midnight releases and children being up past their bedtimes. I saved us all the extensive Jonathan Frazen quotes. But in the early 2000s—

Marcelle Kosman 15:52

Fuck that guy. [laughs]

Hannah McGregor 1:52

—there were so many concerned-troll-y op-eds from white men being like, “Wow, I guess that’s the death of moral complexity. Nobody wants to read a serious book anymore.” So much sense that particularly adults reading YA was really dangerous. And of course related concerns about, if this is what the children are reading, then what are they learning from these books? So I want to link those moral panics and the rise of YA and the particular popularity of *Twilight* all to a particular cultural phenomenon of the early 2000s. And maybe not uniquely early 2000s, but certainly at a peak in the early 2000s, which is Western culture’s raging disdain for teenage girls. So do you guys remember anything in particular about public treatment of girlhood in the early 2000s? Like what kind of narratives we were attaching to girlhood around that time?

Jackson Bird 16:53

I mean, it wasn’t great. [Marcelle laughs] I also think that it’s stuff that I feel like I have observed more in retrospect and comparing to—not that things are perfect and great now, but even just some of my friends who are 10 years or so younger than me, a lot of them having much better relationships to their body image and stuff in ways that I’m just like, “Whoa, it was very toxic when we were living in the early 2000s.”

Hannah McGregor 17:22

Yeah, yeah.

Marcelle Kosman 17:23

Yeah, definitely.

Hannah McGregor 17:23

A real “Kate Winslet in Titanic is fat” era.

Jackson Bird 17:26

Yeah.

Hannah McGregor 17:27

Do you remember that?

Marcelle Kosman 17:28

No.

Hannah McGregor 17:29

There was so much tabloid coverage calling Kate Winslet fat in Titanic.

Jackson Bird 17:34

Oh, yeah.

Hannah McGregor 17:35

Yeah, the body policing for girls at the time was—makes our contemporary moment feel like a fucking body positive paradise in comparison. It was horrific. So part of why I can pretend that I remember this, rather than having put it in my trauma oubliette like everything else in my past, is that I have been reading this great series by Constance Grady. She's a culture writer for Vox. I love her work. I quote her work a lot. I teach her work a lot. Anyway, she has a whole series over on Vox about what she calls the "bubblegum misogyny of 2000s pop culture," which really beautifully summarizes some of the cultural forces that were acting upon girlhood at the time. So Marcelle, could you read this quote?

Marcelle Kosman 18:25

"When today's 30-somethings were teenagers, the culture was awash in confusion about sex, purity, and femininity. We were post-feminist: women had already achieved equality and had become butt-kickers with girl power, and there was nothing left to complain about. We were in the midst of raunch culture, and it was important to be tanned and sexy and taut and down for anything. We were entering the Bush-era purity ring years, when virginity would be held up as a prize to be fetishized and evaluated. Only one thing was clear: There was no right way to be a girl. There were only different ways to fail. And we learned that from pop culture." A lot came back to me while I was reading that. **[Hannah laughs]**

Jackson Bird 19:17

Yeah, same.

Hannah McGregor 19:18

Did it kind of bring—like it opened up that oubliette, huh? In that, well, you better be like super fucking hot, super down to exploit yourself and other women at all times, but also, if you have sex, you're gonna get slut shamed really hard.

Marcelle Kosman 19:39

That's true.

Jackson Bird 19:40

Mhmm.

Hannah McGregor 19:40

Yeah, like just this landscape of, you're just walking this high wire of gender performance. And you can't do it right.

Marcelle Kosman 19:50

Like you got to look hot and desirable, so that people want to have sex with you. But then if they try to have sex with you, you can't. Again, this is my sexual assault center training. But then if you end up getting sexually assaulted, it's your fault for looking hot and like you wanted to have sex, which was what you were supposed to do. It's the whole—what a fucking mess.

Hannah McGregor 20:15

Yeah.

Jackson Bird 20:15

Yeah.

Marcelle Kosman 20:16

Man, I hate that era.

Hannah McGregor 20:18

Yeah, I think part of the reason why we're particularly talking about girlhood in

the early 2000s right now is the impact that the Britney Spears documentary had. It came out, I think, a couple of years ago. And of course, we've got her memoir, which just came out, but all of it is really reframing collectively the way that we treated girls in the early 2000s. Like the way that tabloid media treated girls, but also the way that the rest of us as consumers of that media consented, and Britney Spears was obviously particularly in the limelight, and so was particularly bearing the brunt of that culture. But we were all living in the thick of it.

Jackson Bird 20:57

Yeah.

Marcelle Kosman 20:58

Where we're at right now re: Britney Spears sort of reminds me of where we were at maybe, I can't actually remember how many years ago, but with Monica Lewinsky.

Jackson Bird 21:07

Mm-hmm.

Hannah McGregor 21:07

Yeah.

Marcelle Kosman 21:07

Remember how we had that moment where we were like, "Oh, hey, yeah, the way that Monica Lewinsky was treated was real fucked up. Too bad we didn't know that at the time." And now I think the same sort of thing is happening.

Hannah McGregor 21:22

Yeah, for sure. So into this landscape of crushing disdain for girls comes a book series that treats with profound seriousness the internal emotional landscape of a single teenage girl who's navigating identity and belonging and family and romance and sexuality, all of which is framed through the familiar tropes of fantasy romance, which Meyer was undoubtedly saturated in—this book is trope city— and tons of intertextual references to the very classics that its target demographic was likely reading in school, like *Romeo and Juliet* and *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*. And—

Marcelle Kosman 22:00

—Hannah, I hate to interrupt, but I worry that you're getting ahead of yourself. And I really want to slow us down, and gently ask you to please talk to me about some theory.

Hannah McGregor 22:14

Marcelle, thank you for asking me so sweetly. **[Marcelle laughs]** Because you were so kind, we can have a little theory.

Marcelle Kosman 22:24

As a treat?

Hannah McGregor 22:25

As a treat.

[Upbeat interlude music plays]

Hannah McGregor 22:33

So what is the theory we need to talk about *Twilight*?

Marcelle Kosman 22:39

Hannah, you know that I hate to be this guy. But some of it we've already kind of talked about, right? Like, we talked about Lauren Berlant's concept of intimate publics and women's culture—

Hannah McGregor 22:50

—absolutely very relevant to *Twilight*.

Jackson Bird 22:52

And probably also encoding and decoding, and the role of audience autonomy and making use of popular culture in ways that might challenge or expand beyond the messages encoded in the text.

Hannah McGregor 23:04

Yeah, Jackson, great point, that too! Actually, I suspect the more we talk about popular culture and the material conditions for its popularity, the more we're

going to need to really keep circling around this question of how communities take up works that might be culturally disdained or politically retrograde or, for lack of a better word, aesthetically bad, and what they might be doing with those works that isn't just straightforwardly absorbing the messages. And because *Twilight* might seem like a deeply disempowering book at a textual level, I think we really need to think about the way teen girls embraced it, and the fan practices that emerged around it, which are anything but disempowering.

Jackson Bird 23:50

Alright, so we're going to talk about fandom.

Hannah McGregor 23:52

No.

Jackson Bird 23:53

No? [Laughs]

Hannah McGregor 23:53

Absolutely not. We're going to talk about girlhood.

Jackson Bird 23:56

All right.

Marcelle Kosman 23:57

Girlhood!

Hannah McGregor 23:58

Yeah, girlhood.

Marcelle Kosman 23:59

That doesn't sound like a real field! [Hannah laughs]

Hannah McGregor 24:05

And yet! And yet! My starting point here is an essay by Catherine Driscoll called "Girl Culture in the 'Twilight' Franchise," which I recommend, it's really interesting.

But reading that article, I then was like, “Who is this Driscoll person? She seems very smart.” So I did a little more digging into her. Catherine Driscoll is a professor of Gender and Cultural Studies at the University of Sydney in Australia, who helped to define the field of Girl Studies. So her understanding of girlhood, as the person who helped to create that field, is really rooted in the work of cultural theorists like Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser. And it’s really deeply interested in the tension between how girlhood is a function of power and ideology, and then how girls position themselves as actors within a really fraught ideological landscape.

Jackson Bird 24:59

So she is thinking of girlhood as ideological and political, not biological.

Hannah McGregor 25:06

Precisely. So she sees girlhood as, essentially, a cultural construct rooted in the intersection of youth and femininity as well as race and class. So she’s interested in, like, how is girlhood associated with white femininity in particular, and the lack of access to culturally sanctioned forms of girlhood for women of colour, which we have touched on in our more extensive conversations about Taylor Swift as well, right? That Taylor Swift gets to be a girl and then that’s linked to her whiteness. So Driscoll is asking questions like, how has girlhood been culturally defined in different historical contexts? And how is the creation of an identity called “girlhood” been linked to the increasing buying power of adolescent women and the development of something she calls a “girl market”?

Marcelle Kosman 25:56

Okay, so we as a culture invented girlhood to sell things. Capitalism invented girlhood to sell things.

Hannah McGregor 26:04

Like, kinda, yeah. So girlhood as a category is quite hard to divide from the markets that have shaped it, and from the way we’ve culturally relied on girls for their enthusiastic fandom, and then treated that fandom with consistent crushing disdain. We’re going to briefly go back to Constance Grady again. Jackson, could you read this quote, where she beautifully summarizes the role of girls in popular culture?

Jackson Bird 26:28

Yes, absolutely. “To be a teenage girl is to simultaneously be pop culture’s ultimate punching bag, cash cow, and gatekeeper. Teen girls helped popularize novels in the 18th century, and we called them hysterical until novels became a respectable subject for dinner party conversation. They’re language disruptors, doing everything from ditching *doth* and *maketh* to inaugurating the modern use of the word “like” and speech patterns like up talk and vocal fry, and they’re called airheads incapable of speaking properly. They are the base of an entire media economy of TikTok stars and influencers, and people tell them that the things they care about are fundamentally meaningless and do not matter, even as those teen girls make millions of dollars.”

Marcelle Kosman 27:16

Okay, so the girl market is about selling girls things and then mocking them for the things that we’ve sold them.

Hannah McGregor 27:30

Yeah, for sure. And then in turn, monetizing the culture that teen girls shape while continuing to insist that they’re a meaningless and powerless cultural sector. Like, you know who loved the Beatles before every middle-aged white man you know said they’re the most important group of all time?

Jackson Bird 27:45

Teenage girls!

Hannah McGregor 27:47

Yeah, yeah.

Marcelle Kosman 27:48

Definitely.

Hannah McGregor 27:48

And there was a big moral panic about, like, “Uh oh, teenage girls are too excited about the Beatles.”

Jackson Bird 27:55

Oh, man.

Hannah McGregor 27:55

And then men started liking them and that was fine.

Jackson Bird 27:58

I just really want to see in ten years, a bunch of, like, 40-year-old white men talking so intellectually about BTS. I can't wait to see that.

Hannah McGregor 28:10

They're gonna, Jack!

Jackson Bird 28:11

Yeah, they're gonna.

Marcelle Kosman 28:12

You fuckin' know they're gonna.

Hannah McGregor 28:14

It's so infuriating!

Jackson Bird 28:16

Okay, okay, so how does *Twilight* fit into all of this? Is it another example of a thing that teen girls made popular and then were disparaged for liking? I think it kind of was, but what do we do with all of the *Twilight* fans who aren't girls? Like me.

Marcelle Kosman 28:32

Great question.

Hannah McGregor 28:33

Like you. **[Jackson laughs]** And lots of other people who are all genders, and also a lot of adults who love the series. These are really great questions. And I think it's really vital here to distinguish between girl culture and culture that is only consumed by girls. Because the reality is that a lot of girl culture, like what Driscoll is talking about as girl culture, is much more widely beloved, but that those of

us, like male *Twilight* fans and adult YA readers, who are not girls but engage with girl culture, get really wrapped up in that disdained class. So if you like the thing that teenage girls like, you just get the girl disdain. So as we have been discussing, the only way for girl culture to really gain cultural capital is for straight white cis men to endorse it. Like, for example, Ryan Adams' cover album of *1989*, which got a Pitchfork review, when literally no Taylor Swift album had ever received a Pitchfork review.

Jackson Bird 29:36

That's wild.

Marcelle Kosman 29:37

I'm sorry. Wait, what?

Hannah McGregor 29:38

Yeah. Pitchfork has gone back, they've totally admitted that that was misogyny. And they have gone back and, in retrospect, reviewed all of her albums. But at the time that they gave a Pitchfork review to Ryan Adams' cover of *1989* they had never reviewed a Swift album.

Marcelle Kosman 29:57

That is fucking wild.

Jackson Bird 29:59

Yeah, that is really astonishing. In a way it's not, but but it is. It truly is.

Hannah McGregor 30:05

Yeah. It's one of those things that you go like, "Holy shit," and then you're like, "Yeah, checks out actually."

Jackson Bird 30:10

Right. Right. Yeah.

Hannah McGregor 30:12

Kind of actually fits with everything I know about the way our world works...

Marcelle Kosman 30:15

Yeah, yeah.

Hannah McGregor 30:16

Still mad, wow.

Marcelle Kosman 30:18

Wooo!

Hannah McGregor 30:19

So in the case of *Twilight*, teen girls reading the series contributed to the rising trend of YA publishing, which is good for the publishing industry and good for reading rates and good for illiteracy rates and all of these things that we care about.

Marcelle Kosman 30:34

Teenagers have the most disposable income, don't they? Isn't that demographically the case? Like, if you want to sell stuff, you got to sell it to teens because they can just spend their money with abandon. And so if the YA market is like—you see what I'm saying?

Hannah McGregor 30:50

Yeah, so as I was saying, it's good for the publishing industry. It's good for reading rates. Teenagers have disposable income; they are buying books. And yet at the same time, "twihards," as the fandom is sometimes referred to, have been openly disparaged, and Stephenie Meyer mocked for her bad writing, about which we can talk more in the next segment if we feel drawn to do so. But I want us to get back to Catherine Driscoll and her arguments about *Twilight* and girl culture. So now that we've nuanced the concept of girl culture a bit, Jackson, could you please read this quote from Driscoll?

Jackson Bird 31:28

Yes. "*Twilight* is girl culture: popular culture for girls, about girls, and circulated by girls. Girl culture in this sense clearly takes many forms and is shaped by many cultural contexts, But it appears wherever the modern ideas of gender and adolescence intersect with mass-produced popular culture that enables girls'

sharing of ideas about girlhood. In this sense, girl culture emerges in the 19th century in multiple locations, and has continued to both appear in new places and spread across distances and borders, developing some impermanent but particular generic allegiances and conventions along the way. It is as girl culture that *Twilight* seems to me particularly significant.”

Hannah McGregor 32:16

Thank you. Beautiful. Yeah, so she talks in the article about some of those conventions. What are the trappings of girl culture, which includes conversations about fitting into or failing to fit into different subcultures in your high school. Prom tends to feature very strongly narratively in girl culture. The whole premise that all of this story has to happen at high school, even though it makes no sense for these vampires to be going into high school, has a lot more to do with it fitting into the conventions of girl culture than any sort of narrative logic. So what do you think, Jackson, as our resident *Twilight* fan? Does this interpretation of the franchise makes sense to you?

Jackson Bird 33:01

Yes, in so many ways. I also think there’s some nuance that I would probably add to it.

Hannah McGregor 33:07

Well, luckily for you, we’re headed into the nuance segment.

Jackson Bird 33:12

Great. [Laughs]

Marcelle Kosman 33:13

Oh, goody.

[Upbeat interlude music plays]

Marcelle Kosman 33:17

Thank you so much for giving me that theory to whet my appetite, but I think I’m really ready to sink my teeth into a thesis. Something juicy.

Hannah McGregor 33:29

Okay, I'm gonna keep this one pretty straightforward, I think, because I am so excited to really get into the series with Jackson. Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* was published in 2005, a historical moment marked by the simultaneous ascendance and profound cultural denigration of what Catherine Driscoll calls "girl culture," culture often produced by and for, or at least popularized by, teenage girls. In the early 2000s, when teen girls could see humiliating stories about Britney Spears splashed across the front of every tabloid while simultaneously being told that feminism was done and women had achieved equality, *Twilight* emerged to capture the spirit of the moment, one in which girls were presented with a seeming abundance of choices, while simultaneously being told that whatever choice they made was not only wrong, but was ultimately responsible for their own oppression. In this essay, I will...

Jackson Bird 34:25

Alright, okay, I can't take it anymore. I gotta talk more about my hate-love with vampires. [Laughs]

Hannah McGregor 34:31

I mean—

Jackson Bird 34:32

—which I think really fits, though, with the abundance of choices while being told that whatever choice you make is not only wrong, but responsible for your own oppression.

Marcelle Kosman 34:41

Mmhmm.

Hannah McGregor 34:42

Yeah, yeah. 100%. So I love the *Twilight* movies. I love them.

Jackson Bird 34:50

Woah.

Hannah McGregor 34:50

I think that they are perfect camp.

Jackson Bird 34:53

Wow. I did not know this.

Hannah McGregor 34:55

I think they're so funny. I think they're so funny. I will rewatch them anytime. We watched them all together in the early days of the pandemic. We did a virtual viewing party thing, me and Marcelle and some of our mutual friends, and the way that everybody else came out of that experience like, "Well, those were the worst movies I've ever seen," and I was like, "No, I've been changed." **[Jackson laughs]** I love these just fully and unironically.

But this is the first time I had read any of the books. And what really struck me was the intense interiority, you are super inside Bella's head, and inside the micro interactions she's having on a day-to-day basis, and the banality of what her day-to-day looks like, particularly as like a parentified, under-parented teenager who does not have a stable adult in her life at all. And is fucking cooking dinner for her dad because she cooked dinner for her mom, because that's how she grew up. So it's much more interested in a very banal lived experience of being a teenage girl. And also, it's really concerned with questions of her autonomy, and her right to choose her choice. Because from really early on, she's like, "Well, you're a vampire. I want to be a vampire." And Edward's like, "No." And she's like, "Fuck you. I get to choose."

Jackson Bird 36:34

I feel like I am having a revelation in this moment about why the *Twilight* books resonated with me.

Hannah McGregor 36:40

Good. Good, because I actually think you could read them as a trans narrative.

Jackson Bird 36:45

Oh, no, that didn't. Okay, well—

Hannah McGregor 36:47

—I do. I really do. Okay, but tell me tell me about your revelations.

Jackson Bird 36:52

Okay. So first I have to say if you think that there's a lot of interiority in *Twilight*, you gotta read *Midnight Sun*, which is *Twilight* rewritten from Edward Cullen's perspective. This is a Stephenie Meyer book, it's one of the real books, and in that book, anything that's a two paragraph action in the *Twilight* book is like 20 pages of existential rambling from Edward Cullen's perspective. I actually do call that book the boys' Happy Meal of the *Twilight* books. It's *Twilight* for boys.

Okay, so we can talk about the trans thing in a second, but I want to just talk about what you were saying of the banality of life and the lack of choice because I was just realizing, I first read the *Twilight* books the summer in between the end of high school and the start of college for me, I think was when I read them. And my life at that time was just, like, going to my Barnes and Noble job and hanging out with friends and I didn't have a ton going on, and it was also this onset of adulthood and the fears around that. And so this is all making a lot of sense of why it resonated with me so much. I've heard people talk about the *Twilight* books, the becoming a vampire thing can kind of be a metaphor for Bella of becoming an adult. And to your point of how she is someone who grew up without a lot of choices, and having to be the parent, now she is having a very big choice that she is seizing. But at the same time, it's a choice that comes with taking away a lot of other freedoms. It's a very, very tough choice. So it's like, choice but not necessarily in a good way. Which, wow, doesn't that sound like adulthood? **[Hannah laughs]**

Marcelle Kosman 38:31

You'd be amazed at the lack of choices you get to make as a parent.

Jackson Bird 38:34

Exactly. Yeah.

Marcelle Kosman 38:37

Fuck. We can either be late for school, or we can take a cab, or we can do both.

Jackson Bird 38:43

Aww.

Marcelle Kosman 38:47

Carry on.

Hannah McGregor 38:48

Yeah, absolutely. I think it's—it's a coming of age narrative, which is classic for YA, but it's a coming of age narrative sort of intensified into this—she is a girl and she is making the decision to become something else. And the something else is this vampirism as death. And it's associated with the end of change, and the end of a lot of the latent promises of girlhood. Right, both growth and development and the possibility of parenthood. That's really driven home even in this first book, that the lady vampires are sad because they can't have babies. And that's a foreclosure of the promise of girlhood, is to become a mother. And so vampirism is figured as this simultaneously unbelievably alluring possibility, but also as a terrible foreclosure, of the total openness of girlhood. And in that way, I think it does really figure effectively as a metaphor for adulthood, for what happens to you as a girl when you cease to be a girl? It's like—

Marcelle Kosman 40:08

Like Britney Spears said, not a girl, not yet a woman.

Hannah McGregor 40:12

I mean, which is exactly the space that Bella is in, which is exactly this really liminal, in-between space of moving out of girlhood into something else. And what strikes me so much when I'm thinking about this book, and the way that it circulated, is how many readers resonated profoundly with this character, and with her choice-making. So much of the fandom was organized around Team Edward versus Team Jacob, and all of this stuff. And how much of the cultural disdain also circulated around the girls who are reading these books making the wrong choices. Like, you can choose what to read, but you read this, so you're bad. And also Bella making the wrong choice, right? There's a lot of moral panic around her interest in this relationship with this vampire and the bad messages that that's sending.

Marcelle Kosman 41:12

Okay, I want to interject here, because Hannah, you had said that you think that you can read this book as a metaphor for a trans experience, and I really want to hear more about that because I'm thinking about—everything you're describing right now sounds so much like the moral panic around “protecting children” from drag queens, “protecting children” from “the gays,” “protecting children” from curricula that is “inappropriate” for them, because it teaches them that gender is fluid or that gender is a spectrum instead of biological. So can you make those connections for me, because I'm excited about that?

Hannah McGregor 41:54

Yeah, I mean, I think the fetishization of girlhood ties in to that moral panic in a lot of ways, and it has to do with the way that we situate, as we were discussing, a simultaneously hypersexualized and profoundly desexualized, and the sense that we must protect our children from sexuality, unless that sexuality is hegemonic sexuality, in which case, it's good. We see that playing out in all kinds of ways in this first book. The way that everybody is obsessed with Bella going to the dance with a boy, and Bella is like, “I'm not interested in boys, I'm interested in beautiful 100-year-olds made out of stone.” **[Jackson laughs]**

Marcelle Kosman 42:48

Like, sparkly stone.

Hannah McGregor 42:49

I guess you could call that relationship heterosexual if you must. **[Jackson and Marcelle laugh]** I don't know if that's what the appeal of Edward Cullen is. I would say he's very clearly feminized in the book, in terms of what his appeal is for her. So I already feel like there's lots of shimmering queerness throughout. I also think about the way that anti-trans moral panics are connected to a sense of ownership of the bodies and identities of children and young people, particularly on the part of parents, but also on the part of culture as a whole. This sense that children are not whole people. Teenagers are not whole people. They don't understand themselves. They don't understand what they want. They don't understand who they are. And so they must not be allowed to articulate anything about themselves that is not what we are telling them they're allowed to be. And how that ties into this sort of obsession over curtailing and restricting the choices that

girls have, and panicking when it seems girls are making choices that are not the ones culturally we want them to make.

And I think the agency with which so many teenage girls have taken up this series and embraced it, particularly via the framework of transformative fandom, so fanfiction, fan art, cosplay, all of the stuff that we do when we take up fandoms, is not unrelated to the sense that culturally it is our job and our right to restrict and curtail the identities of young people. But also just the whole premise of her insisting on her right to undertake a transformation that is going to turn her into a person who is not what either of her parents want her to be. That in fact, from her parents' perspective, will be read as death, which again resonates with a lot of the ways that narratives of transition currently circulate culturally.

Marcelle Kosman 45:10

Jack, is it okay for me to ask you if you want to talk about—I read your enthusiastic email, but I also don't want to put you on the spot.

Jackson Bird 45:18

No, yeah, I've just been trying to formulate my thoughts.

Marcelle Kosman 45:22

Yeah.

Jackson Bird 45:23

Yeah, Hannah, I mean, one thing that stands out to me with what you're saying in connecting this to girlhood particularly, is that flavour of anti-trans panic that happens towards specifically younger trans men, trans boys, transmasculine people, is the "you are a confused girl, you have been led astray somehow." It is very much seeing girls as incapable of being able to make decisions about their own bodies and about their own lives. And that is something that really, really resonates with me in what you were saying. But it's also so funny listening to you say this, and I'm like, "I think I've maybe circled around this idea in liking *Twilight* before, but I don't think it's ever been a conscious resonance for me." Which is really amusing to me, that I feel like you're just sort of telling me why I have always liked this franchise, but I wasn't exactly conscious of it. **[Hannah and Marcelle laugh]**

Hannah McGregor 46:23

I would really love to hear more about what brought you into loving this franchise. You've said part of it was this coming of age moment for you. But can you talk more about what you found in this fandom?

Jackson Bird 46:36

Yeah. So I first read the books going into college. And then my freshman year of college, I had a lot of bad experiences and I got into a deep depression and I think some of it was like, the gender dysphoria about to emerge, but it was also just a lot of life stuff, and in particular, a bad relationship. And one thing that I did as I was recovering from that was, I read and watched *New Moon*, the second *Twilight* book in which Bella gets broken up with and there's literally just blank pages illustrating her depression. I read and watched those on loop for months, because somehow that was very comforting to me. So of all of the *Twilight* series that people say are bad, *New Moon* is often the one that people are, "Oh, it's the worst." And I'm like, "Oh, that was the one that was the most healing for me." And I—yeah, I was really into *Twilight*, to the extent that I have been to Forks twice—

Hannah McGregor 47:25

Incredible.

Jackson Bird 47:26

I do think—there's stuff that resonated with me about the text, I think, but to talk a little bit about the fandom as well, I do think part of why I really like the franchise is that I think I fetishize the part of the world that you live in, Hannah.

[Laughs]

Hannah McGregor 47:44

The Pacific Northwest?

Jackson Bird 47:46

The Pacific Northwest is so beautiful. I love it so much.

Hannah McGregor 47:51

So wet up here.

Jackson Bird 47:52

It's so wet. It's so wet. It's so green.

Marcelle Kosman 47:54

All right, everybody.

Jackson Bird 47:55

I absolutely love it. So I had put away *Twilight* for years and years and years. There was a little bit of a renaissance that seemed to happen at the start of the pandemic and I didn't get into that. It wasn't until this past spring, I had a trip out to Vancouver and Washington and Oregon, and I was just driving around for hours by myself and I was like, "You know what music absolutely slaps? The *Twilight* soundtracks". I knew leading up to this trip, I was gonna be driving around all these national parks listening to the *Twilight* soundtracks, and they were just as good as I remembered. Because for people who don't know, these soundtracks—legitimately good. I don't know how this happened, but all of the soundtracks were able to get some of the coolest up-and-coming or established artists of that era, of the early aughts and early 2010s, and put them on the *Twilight* soundtrack. They are so good.

Hannah McGregor 48:47

There must have been a really talented music supervisor on that particular team.

Jackson Bird 48:52

Exactly. So they're very good. But I was driving around through Washington listening to this music, and then I'm alone in hotel rooms, and one night, I was like, "I'm just gonna rent the *Twilight* movie. Just gonna watch it again." And it was real good. So then the next night, I rented the next one, and then I was getting the books on Libby, renting them from the library, and then I was reading them all again. And by the time I came home from this trip, I was so desperate to watch the DVD features and listen to the commentaries that I ended up buying a special edition box set of the DVDs that I have now. **[Marcelle laughs]**

Hannah McGregor 49:23

Y'all, if you haven't listened to Robert Pattinson's commentary—

Jackson Bird 49:27

Exactly!

Hannah McGregor 49:28

—on the first *Twilight* movie, it's a really important cultural artifact because he is so hard on himself. Like, he's making fun of himself so hard.

Jackson Bird 49:39

The commentary is so good, because it's him and Kristen Stewart critiquing themselves and making fun of the movie, and then the director Catherine Hardwicke trying so hard to stay on brand. **[Everyone laughs]** Bless her heart. But no, it is really funny, but that is another thing to bring into this as well for me, which is that I loved Robert Pattinson and Kristen Stewart. I thought they were both so cool, and even in the intervening years where I did not like *Twilight* anymore and people still hated Kristen Stewart and said she was a bad actress, I was constantly defending her. And so I feel very validated now that she's queer and cool to people, like, "I always knew!" But there was a thing for me, that with the two of them—I think as a not-yet-out queer trans guy, I looked at both of them as, like, "I would like to be and bang both of them, not sure which, very confused but very alluring, both of them."

But in all of that, even when we were just bringing up the "Oh, listen to the commentary because Robert Pattinson just makes fun of it the whole time." In liking *Twilight*, especially during the time when it was big, you had to make fun of it. If you were to even admit that you liked it, you still had to make fun of it, because it was a thing that was very shameful and embarrassing to like, because of what society said about it. And I think the treatment of Kristen Stewart is totally wrapped up in that, but we're just talking about the book here.

Hannah McGregor 50:59

Yeah, because that's the tax you pay for liking a thing that's shameful.

Jackson Bird 51:02

Exactly.

Hannah McGregor 51:03

You can like it, but you have to be like, “Ha, ha, ha, I’m reading these ironically.”

Jackson Bird 51:08

Yeah, it was like, you were embarrassed to admit that you actually liked them because of everything that we’ve talked about, the way that society had disdain for anything that was girl culture. And I think this is really wrapped up in the way that everyone treated Kristen Stewart as well for years, but that’s—

Marcelle Kosman 51:22

Totally.

Jackson Bird 51:23

—you know, that’s about the movies, not about the books.

Hannah McGregor 51:28

Oh man, but what perfect casting, my God.

Marcelle Kosman 51:31

I need to ask you two a really important question, because having not read the books and having watched the movies and not been in the right frame of mind to appreciate them full stop, let alone appreciate them as camp, I feel like there’s a lot in this discussion that I can’t participate in. And I am feeling left out, so I just really need to ask: are you Team Edward or Team Jacob, because this is the only thing I have strong opinions about.

Hannah McGregor 52:01

Yeah.

Jackson Bird 52:03

I am always so tempted to be like, “I’m Team Bella, God dammit.”

Hannah McGregor 52:07

But you are, aren’t you? You are Team Bella-to-be-a-vampire.

Jackson Bird 52:11

Well, that’s true. But I’m reevaluating a lot of these opinions now. What I will also

say is I got very annoyed that every other YA franchise then had to make the team things, particularly for *The Hunger Games*, when it was like—

Marcelle Kosman 52:24

Are you Team Gale or Team Peeta?

Jackson Bird 52:24

—No, that is Team Katniss, that is about Katniss.

Hannah McGregor 52:27

Explain to me why, in the fucking dystopian future where children are murdering each other, they can't have a throuple.

Jackson Bird 52:34

Right? Great point. I think that's an excellent point.

Hannah McGregor 52:37

Like, everybody calm down. You're about to get murdered with a pitchfork. Just fuck two guys. I don't—

Marcelle Kosman 52:48

One of them's gonna hunt and the other one's gonna bake bread for you.

Jackson Bird 52:51

It's perfect.

Hannah McGregor 52:51

It's ideal!

Marcelle Kosman 52:52

Like, there's her ideal scenario. But seriously, though, Team Edward or Team Jacob, I need to know.

Jackson Bird 52:57

Hannah, do you have an affiliation?

Hannah McGregor 52:59

I mean, I've only read the first book.

Marcelle Kosman 53:02

Okay, but you've seen all the movies.

Jackson Bird 53:03

Yeah.

Hannah McGregor 53:04

But I've seen all the movies. I am solidly Team Edward, for sure.

Marcelle Kosman 53:09

Interesting. Okay.

Hannah McGregor 53:10

Because it's what Bella wants.

Jackson Bird 53:13

Yeah.

Hannah McGregor 53:14

She never really wants anything else. Like, Jacob is really into her and she likes having a friend. And it sucks that the possibility of friendship is continuously foreclosed for her because so many of the men around her can only perceive her as a sexual object. But that's their problem, not hers. She is unbelievably stubborn when it comes to the thing she has decided she wants. And everybody around her, including Edward, is like, "No, you are not allowed to want this." And she repeatedly almost dies. And she's like, "No, I want this." And that for me is the crux of where people are like, this is disempowering, because she's given up everything else about her life for this romantic attachment, and where Catherine Driscoll's article convinced me that in the context of girl culture, the right to make a choice is the thing that actually matters. But I think if you're team Bella, you're Team Edward, because Edward is who Bella wants.

Jackson Bird 54:21

Yeah.

Marcelle Kosman 54:21

interesting.

Jackson Bird 54:22

And there is a point in the later books where Bella does tell Edward, “I don’t just want to be a vampire to be with you. I’ve never felt that I fit in as a human. I’m so clumsy”—that always comes back to her clumsiness, that’s how you can be #quirky and relatable, I guess. But she does say she really feels like more of a vampire than a human. And so I think that was a good thing within the context of the discussions about the book at the time, for Stephanie Meyer to put in there, and is really strong for our trans narrative argument. However, I think, Hannah, what you were just saying, at the end of the day it doesn’t matter why she was making that choice; it’s about her right to make the choice.

Marcelle Kosman 55:01

Mm-hmm.

Hannah McGregor 55:02

Yeah. I mean, it’s what Stephenie Meyer says when people are like, “This isn’t a very feminist book,” and Stephenie Meyer is like, “Well, feminism is about choice.” That always makes me cringe a little, because I think choice feminism is a pretty white liberal, neoliberal fantasy of individual autonomy and like, “Oh, it’s actually not about creating structural transformation to the ways in which people’s choices are curtailed on all sides. It’s about me and what I want,” and that way lies deregulation and privatization. So what I’m saying is, maybe I’m not on board with Stephenie Meyer’s personal understanding of feminism...

Jackson Bird 55:45

What??

Hannah McGregor 55:45

But we all know how I feel about authorial intent, so fuck it. I definitely find reading a story about a woman who has decided she wants something and fuck

everybody who disagrees kind of fun.

Jackson Bird 55:58

Yeah.

Marcelle Kosman 55:59

Okay, so Jack, you have been into the book series for a long time, since before you were an adult, and now as an adult. And so I'm really curious if and how your thoughts about the series have shifted and changed and developed over time. Or if you have new insights that maybe teenage Jack may have been missing.

Jackson Bird 56:21

Yes, and I think some of that has evolved within this conversation.

Marcelle Kosman 56:27

Ooh!

Jackson Bird 56:27

Or at least in reflecting ahead of this podcast, because one thing I'm thinking about is, we talked about my hatred of vampires, and that perhaps I like this book because Edward hates being a vampire, even though upon rereading, it's so obviously clear that Bella is going to turn into a vampire and that's what she wants. Like, narrative, foreshadowing, everything, she's going to be a vampire. I kind of missed that when I read them as a teenager, because I was so like, "I don't want her to be a vampire." And I think part of it, for me, it was all the stuff that she was giving up, that was a big part of it—like, of her human life. And it was also the idea of immortality, I think I was really scared of and resistant to in any narratives.

And nowadays, both on my reread of *Twilight*, and just generally with the concept of immortality, I'm like, "Yes, please. Give me infinite life." I want to see 100 years from now, as we're probably living on another planet because we've destroyed this one, whatever. And I'm thinking about how, for me, that is probably very wrapped up in the fact that when I first read the books, I hadn't figured out my gender yet. I was deeply depressed. I could not imagine a future for myself as a woman, which for me is a very binary gender transition thing that happened, but

plays into a lot of what we were talking about, of this being also a metaphor for entering adulthood, and that “not a girl, not yet a woman” state of things. So I think it resonated to me on the surface when I first read it in that way, but in the way that I couldn’t see until now, was resonating in a much deeper gender way. Whereas now I’m very comfortable as the man that I am and happy in my life as an adult. And maybe I wish I had gotten turned when, like, my knees weren’t hurting as bad in my mid-30s. **[Marcelle laughs]** But hey, I’ll take immortality. Sounds great to me. If I get to be a man vampire, then I’m cool with it.

Hannah McGregor 58:18

Yeah, and I think once you’re a vampire, you go back to peak physical form.

Jackson Bird 58:21

Oh, that’s right. That’s right. Okay, cool, then I’ll take it.

Hannah McGregor 58:25

Yeah, don’t worry, Your knees will be just fine. Yeah. Man, that resonates with me so much when I think about my teenage self, who was closeted, and miserable, and absolutely incapable of imagining a future for myself. People would talk about, like, what do you want to be when you grow up? Or what do you want to do? Or what do you imagine your adult life looking like? And I just pictured nothing. There’s all kinds of reasons for that. But I really share that feeling of having grown into an adulthood that is not something I was able to imagine for myself, because it wasn’t part of any of the narratives that were available to me.

And now feeling so much more into the future than I used to be, because I can picture a future in which I actually get to be the person I am. Like, as an adult, reading this book for the first time, I’m like, I totally fucking get why adults are into it, but also why teenagers would read this and resonate with that feeling at once of being totally out of control, and incapable of imagining a future for themselves as they are now. In conclusion, *Twilight*, pretty gay, turns out. **[Jackson laughs]**

Jackson Bird 59:50

Yeah, when you were saying that that was not a hetero relationship, I was just like, I love how continually I find out that characters and actors and whoever that I was really obsessed with when I was closeted are also queer or can easily be read as

queer. Like, of course.

Hannah McGregor 1:00:05

Yeah.

[Upbeat interlude music plays]

Marcelle Kosman 1:00:12

Material Girls is a *Witch, Please* production and is distributed by Acast. Once you're done looking at vampires on your favourite search engine, you can head over to ohwitchplease.ca to check out the rest of our episodes as well as transcripts, reading lists, and merch. We have an excellent newsletter at substack.com/ohwitchplease, and an even better patreon at patreon.com/ohwitchplease. Also we're on Instagram, X, and Threads at [@ohwitchplease](https://www.instagram.com/ohwitchplease) and on TikTok at [@ohwitchpleasepod](https://www.tiktok.com/@ohwitchpleasepod). Jackson, where can people go to find more of you and your work?

Jackson Bird 1:00:54

Well, I am [@jackisnotabird](https://www.instagram.com/jackisnotabird) on X and Instagram and YouTube and TikTok. And I don't really post anywhere in this post-Twitter landscape that we're in. I'm a little bit trying to figure that out, but theoretically you can follow me in those places. You can find my book *Sorted* in your local library or independent bookstore and I am on substack as my name, or my newsletter is called First Draft Theater, and I will probably put on another one of those at some point. You know, we're in this weird world with social media. I'm trying to reevaluate my relationship to it. I also do things in the meat world; if you're ever in New York City, you can come see me doing experimental theater with the Neo-Futurists. Our show is called "The Infinite Wrench" and it is our ongoing ever changing attempt to perform 30 original plays in under an hour. So you can go to nyneofuturists.org to learn more about that.

Marcelle Kosman 1:01:46

Sorry, did you say the "meat world," M-E-A-T?

Jackson Bird 1:01:49

Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Hannah McGregor 1:01:50

Yeah. It's the opposite of the Internet. We're the meat world.

Marcelle Kosman 1:01:54

Wow, do I ever hate the world we live in.

Hannah McGregor 1:01:57

Hey, guess what, Marcelle? We're all made of meat.

Marcelle Kosman 1:01:59

Ew!

Hannah McGregor 1:02:00

Thanks to Auto Syndicate for the use of our theme song "Shopping Mall." And of course, thanks to the whole Witch, Please Productions team: our digital content coordinator Gaby Iori [**Sound effect of BOING**], our social media manager and marketing designer Zoe Mix [**Sound effect of record player reversing**], our sound engineer Erik Magnus [**Sound effect of chimes**], and our executive producer Hannah Rehak, aka COACH [**Sound effect of sports whistle blowing**]!

Marcelle Kosman 1:02:28

At the end of every episode, we thank everyone who has joined our Patreon or boosted their tier to help make our work possible. Our enormous gratitude goes out to Jane B., Disha. S., Chris W., Amy, Kathryn K., Holly G., John Travolta—holy shit!— Jessica B., and Eliza C.

Hannah McGregor 1:02:55

We'll be back next episode to tackle another piece of pop culture through a whole new theoretical lens. But until then...

Jackson Bird 1:03:02

Later, vamp haters!

