

## Review

Laurena Aker (ed.), *Fan Phenomena: The Twilight Saga*, Bristol: Intellect Books, 2016, pp 170, ISBN: 9781783206506, paperback, price £28.50.

The Fan Phenomena series is a fantastic development in accessible work that brings together fans, professional researchers and academics, and cultural content producers, as readers and authors. The potential for each volume to range across varied journalistic and literary disciplines, such as star studies, critical theory, and industry personnel interviews is unique. The exact composition of each volume depends upon factors such as the engagement of producers from within the entertainment industry with the particular fandom under consideration, and the circulation and formatting of the call for papers within and outside of traditional academic circles. The *Twilight Saga* volume is more weighted towards the input of those with an academic background than some of the previous volumes, such as that on Jane Austen, and this can be both a strength and a weakness depending upon the wants of the reader as formal aca-fan, student, or interested fandom participant. The style of authorship is always accessible in this volume, without the more academic authors 'writing down' in terms of complexity or nuance. However, with the fan fiction author and on-set experience interviewee both coming from an academic background, the experience of fandom in this book does feel quite mediated through a particular analytical perspective.

That said, the interviews with those from the convention circuit industry provided a neat contrast between younger and older fans and their experiences. Gary Berman, of Creation Entertainment convention organisers, has been involved with a number of fandoms from both a personal and professional perspective, and his knowledge of fan practices across more than forty years gives him the perspective to fit *Twilight* fandom within a continuum of practices. The sisters Hilly and Hannah Hindy, creators of the online parodic series of films *The Hillywood Show*, are roughly of a generation with *Twilight* fans who were teenagers when the books were released. Their experiences as creators of content for the expanding digital marketplace, and their difficulties in funding this form of creative content, provides interesting insight into the niche between the fan gift exchange model and the traditionally commercial product. This is also addressed by 'Lucy' the fanfiction author in her interview, which demonstrates the strengths of an aca-fan

perspective by bringing her researcher abilities to bear on a subject about which she is a passionate advocate.

There is a strong strain of feminist advocacy for women in the entertainment and literature industries, and by association academia, in this collection, which is very gratifying to read in essays foregrounding the contributions of women and girls to popular culture. The chapters 'The Music of Twilight: Battling for Authenticity' by Melissa Avdeeff and 'Breaking the Celluloid Ceiling: New Voices of *The Twilight Saga*' by Natalie Wilson and Laurena Aker are particularly focussed on these issues of women's cultural participation and production being routinely denigrated and overlooked. The focus on female fandom is very empowering, particularly to a fandom often maligned, as several chapter authors note, on specifically gendered grounds. However, the very brief references to *Twilight* Dad fans in Jane Kubiesa's 'Breaking All the Rules': Team Twilight and Cross-Generational Appeal' made me wish for a little more on the phenomena of straight men's experiences within this fandom. What is it like to find themselves a minority, judged doubly for their participation in a maligned subculture from an external perspective, and perhaps alienated from the majority core interests at work within that subculture itself?

I was pleased to see the topic of pop culture industry sexism addressed as early as chapter two with the provision of a good set of references and further reading for a budding feminist. However, there is a tendency in earlier chapters, born of a desire to position *Twilight* fandom and production as particularly innovative, towards a lack of critical perspective. Perhaps this is due to a belief that these uncritically positive texts are more accessible to non-academic audiences, but I would suggest that critically engaged does not mean negative, and complexity and nuance – as I am sure *Twilight* fans would agree – make for engaging reading material. For example, I was disappointed that Patricia Arquette's 2015 Oscar's speech about gendered wage gaps was referenced without regard to the criticism she received, particularly from women of colour, regarding her follow up remarks about racism and LGBTQ equality. This reader would also gladly ban the use of the word 'females' as a noun for human women and girls, finding it a dehumanising practice, and therefore found this a particularly grating stylistic habit in this volume. Strong feminist advocacy must retain a critical perspective on its own actions and pronouncements, to remain relevant, inclusive, and to keep developing in power and nuance.

Reading the introduction, I found myself wondering where references to earlier fandoms and related cultural products were – such influential books as L.J. Smith's *Vampire Diaries* (1991-2011) and *Nightworld* (1996-1998) series, and television's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), were not mentioned until chapter six. Although J.K. Rowling is referenced in the introduction her name is uncontextualised, which indicates that the reader and the average *Twilight* fan must be expected to have a passing familiarity with *Harry Potter* as a cultural production and fandom. I found it odd, therefore, that these connections between fandom experiences, practices and object choice were not explored until much later in the book. Gary Berman's interview as an older industry participant and Lucy's experience as a non-teenage fan are also in the latter half of the text. The book thus

feels rather divided by age in this progression from a younger, largely approving, perspective, to a more critically balanced approach. I found myself enjoying the later chapters more, as they brought in these wider connections and situated *Twilight* within the continuum of fandom and fan practices, which brought context to the earlier analysis.

There is much to interest *Twilight* fans as well as fandom researchers in this book, particularly those interested in the changing face of fandom in a digital era, and the marketization of fan and other independent creative productions. Simon Turner's chapter 'The Sun Doesn't Always Set in the West: *Twilight* in East Asian Popular Culture' was particularly engaging, bringing a fresh and nuanced perspective to transnational fandom, and broadening the focus of the book away from North America. The focus on creativity and scholarship from women, about women, is welcome in fan studies and in academic publishing more broadly, and it is great to see the pop cultures dominated by teenage girls being addressed with a combination of warm admiration and critical rigour. It would have been a gross oversight for there not to be a *Twilight Saga* volume in the Fan Phenomena collection, and disappointing had it not foregrounded a female perspective so thoroughly: this collection is a welcome addition to the series.

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**Biographical note:**

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