

# The Hybrid Turn: What the Figure of the Vampire Hunter Tells Us about the Humanities in the Twenty-First Century

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*Our essay grounds the epistemological task of the vampire hunter in Stoker's Dracula and then explores the changing representations of these figures and their task in later media including Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Twilight, Blade, True Blood, The Vampire Diaries, and Breaking Dawn. Traversing the realms of logic as well as representation and faith, we trace components of the epistemological task of the vampire hunter that demand a challenge to deeply held beliefs about the nature of reality and the horizon of what is possible and impossible. We close with the exciting provocation such a critique offers a (post) humanities.*

## Introduction

Two seemingly unrelated trends have been underway for the past twenty odd years: the state of the humanities in American higher education has continued to erode, and there has been a marked increase in the appearance of vampire narratives in American fiction and popular culture. We argue, quite simply, that these trends can be meaningfully connected. More specifically, throughout this piece, we demonstrate the pedagogical resonances between a certain traditional paradigm of the vampire hunters, typified in the figure of Abraham Van Helsing, and humanities professors. This paradigm figures the relationship between humans and vampires as one of antagonism, in which, humanity's response to vampires can only be one of fear and violence. We argue that the current response of the humanities under the constant threat of budget cuts, reduced student enrollment, and the pressure to measure one's contributions purely in terms of economic utility is, at least among a small but vocal minority of humanities professors', appears eerily similar to that of nineteenth and twentieth-century vampire hunters to vampirism. We then explore the emerging and



evolving character of the vampire "hunters" of the past two decades, across an array of books and films, analyzing the radical changes in their relationship to the monsters they face. Contemporary "hunters" have become mediators negotiating an emerging hybridity between humans and vampires, a hybridity that speaks directly to the current state of the humanities. We end by arguing that, given the similarities between the pedagogical projects of vampire hunters and humanities professors, the humanities could learn much from the evolution of the vampire hunter and that professors also must evolve, changing especially how we face the "practical" and "economic" threats to our profession, an evolution that offers, we believe, the possibility of a "post-human" figure of the humanities.

## The Lineage of the Vampire Hunter

Vampire hunters throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, at least in the Western tradition, emerge from the lineage of Stoker's Van Helsing. As the ur-text of European and American vampire narratives, *Dracula* permeates nearly every treatment of the subject that follows, and echoes of the novel's bookish slayer prove just as persistent as the title villain. Van Helsing and the hunters who follow often draw their identities as much from the fact that they kill vampires as from their intellectual prowess. Van Helsing is a notable scholar, well versed in the history and mythology of vampirism. These qualities prepare Van Helsing to teach others to believe in the existence of vampires. This educational task proves multifaceted, as Van Helsing must (1) identify a group of students who can be taught of the existence of vampires; (2) protect all others from this knowledge; (3) teach the chosen students to go beyond traditional or exclusively scientific ways of knowing; and (4) teach them to know that what they previously believed to be impossible is possible—vampires exist.

Stoker's Van Helsing largely embodies these four qualities of the vampire hunter for the Western Tradition. Alerted to the mysterious case of Lucy Westenra, Van Helsing suspects immediately what he faces and lays the groundwork for educating a group of hunters. Knowing that evidence, in the traditional sense, will not serve to recruit or educate a group of slayers, Van Helsing sows the seeds of alternative methods of knowing. After his initial examination of Lucy, Van Helsing instructs Dr. Seward to tell Arthur "all you think. Tell him what I think, if you can guess it, if you will. Nay I am not jesting. This is no jest, but life and death, perhaps more" (Stoker 106). In this utterance, Van Helsing initiates all four parts of his educational task: (1) He identifies John Seward and potentially Arthur Holmwood as promising students. (2) He withholds all of his own suspicions to protect as many as possible from the reality of the case. (3) He encourages alternative means of knowing, in this case conjecture. (4) And he subtly plants the suggestion that there is the implausible reality of something beyond life and death.

By the end of Lucy's ordeal (her "illness," death, undeath, and final rest), Van Helsing identifies the small group who will come to know of vampirism. Joining himself and Dr. Seward are Arthur Holmwood, Quincey Morris, and the Harkers. Binding this group together is their shared "education." As Van Helsing explains, "[W]e have learned to believe, all of us—is it not so? And since so, do we not see our duty? Yes! And do we not promise to go on to the bitter end?" (193). This duty is, of course, "to find the author of all this our sorrow and to stamp him out" and, in so doing, to protect all humanity from *Dracula* (193). However, there is also the duty to protect humanity from the knowledge that the group now shares. In fact, the novel closes with Van Helsing's proclamation, "We want no proofs; we ask none to believe us" (327). In assembling his group of students capable of



coming to know of vampires, Van Helsing excludes the vast majority of those threatened by Dracula, protecting them as much from knowledge as from vampires. In so doing, he accomplishes the first and second parts of his educational task.

The third and fourth parts of the task, teaching others to open themselves up to alternative ways of knowing and subsequently teaching them to accept the existence of vampires, largely constitute the first half of Stoker's novel. Realizing that simply showing the facts of Lucy's case to Seward would do little to convince him of vampires' existence, Van Helsing encourages Seward to record even "his doubts and surmises" (112). Aware that Seward's scientific training eclipses the reality of his current case, Van Helsing leads him into cognitive processes wherein Seward may permit himself wild speculation. Such encouragement is often repeated during Lucy's final days. In one instance, Van Helsing cryptically refuses to tell Seward his thoughts saying, "[T]hink what you will. Do not fear to think even the most non-probable" (121). In another, Seward flippantly suggests that Van Helsing's efforts appear to be the "working of some spell to keep out an evil spirit," to which the professor replies, "[P]erhaps I am!" (121). Van Helsing continues feeding Seward veiled hints and puzzling suggestions for a full twenty-four days, from September 2nd, when he is brought onto the case, to September 26th, when he finally deems his student ready to hear the "truth."

Armed with a copy of the *Westminster Gazette* detailing the strange occurrence of children found in Hampstead with puncture wounds in their throats, Van Helsing forces Seward to account for the similarity between the children and the recently deceased Lucy. Seward's response demonstrates that, even after twenty-four bizarre days, he still cannot see past the horizon of his existing knowledge: "Simply that there is some cause in common. Whatever it was that injured her has injured them" (170). With Seward still unable to consider the obvious truth, Van Helsing chides, "You are a clever man, . . . but you are too prejudiced. You do not let your eyes see nor your ears hear, and that which is outside your daily life is not of account to you. . . . Ah it is the fault of our science that it wants to explain all; and if it explain not, then it says there is nothing to explain" (170-71). After more frustrated dialogue between the two, Seward finally asks the professor, "[L]et me be your pet student again. Tell me your thesis" (171). Van Helsing replies, "My thesis is this: I want you to believe . . . to believe in things that you cannot" (172). Having secured Seward's agreement "not to let some previous conviction injure the receptivity of [his] mind with regard to some strange matter," Van Helsing offers his pupil the first actual fact in the process of redefining the doctor's understanding of what is possible: the holes on the children's throats "were made by Miss Lucy!" (173).

Of course, this first fact does little to convince a stubbornly incredulous Seward, and Van Helsing offers to "prove it" in the cemetery that night (173). Filled with "hesitation," Seward allows that he will go and see the "proof" (174). Where the redefinition of the possible took twenty-four days, the proof, the fourth part of Van Helsing's task, requires not quite three nights. The nights spent in and around Lucy's tomb indeed "prove" to Seward the reality of vampires' existence as well as showcase a condensed version of Van Helsing's lessons for Arthur and Quincey. Fittingly, the actual teaching of vampires' existence takes only an eighth the time needed to teach the pupil how to relearn what is possible. The educational challenge facing the hunter is creating the paradigm shift that redefines the conditions of possible knowledge. Once accomplished, the act of revealing cold bodies that parasitically feed on the living is relatively simple.



What should at this point be clear from our treatment of Van Helsing is that the vampire hunter is traditionally more than merely the killer of vampires, serving also as a kind of mediator between society and vampires. This mediation calls for knowledge as much as protection and killing and involves a series of interrelated educational tasks. In particular, the practice of education championed by Van Helsing involves not simply teaching new "facts" but expanding the horizon of his pupils' thinking so that what was previously thought to be impossible becomes possible. A key element of this consciousness raising emerges in Van Helsing's unwillingness to spell out clear answers. He encourages the use of doubt, imagination, and supposition unbounded by the constraints of rationality as an avenue for his pupils to abandon "prejudice." The vampire hunter shows his students that the essence of their world, the very horizon of the possible and the impossible, is not what they think it to be. However, insofar as Van Helsing's discourse reinscribes the horizon of the possible, it also delimits a certain relationship between human society and the alterity represented by the vampire and vampirism. Van Helsing's ideology necessarily draws sharp distinctions: between humans that "know" and humans that do not; between humans and vampires; and between the pure (human world) and the impure (vampire world). This basic paradigm of the relationship between human society and vampiric alterity, and particularly this concern for purity, is passed down through much vampire fiction, a point to which we shall return. Moreover, there is also a resonance between this paradigm and a certain understanding of education and particularly the role humanities professors.

### **Vampire Hunters in the Humanities**

Like Van Helsing's project, the general hope of liberal arts education is that by exposing students to new, different, and challenging ideas, they will come to a radically different understanding of both themselves and the world. In Van Helsing's call to set aside preconceptions, to rethink the limits of the possible, and to think in new, radical, and imaginative ways, one hears a basic hope of liberal arts education: the hope that through the process of education students will be fundamentally and positively changed and better equipped to handle the realities of our social and political world. However, insofar as Van Helsing's educational paradigm resonances with the basic goals of liberal arts education, it also reveals some limitations of this kind of educational project, specifically, its potential to foster elitism or exceptionalism, an "us vs them" mentality. This risk seems particularly present at a time when the humanities feel embattled, threatened by funding cuts, program reductions, lower student enrollment, and the continuing corporatization of the university.

William Chace articulates a certain seemingly persistent response to the current sense of threat within the humanities in "The Decline of the English Department" (he includes in this analysis "philosophy, foreign languages, art history, and kindred fields, including history," in other words, the humanities) (1). For Chace, the humanities face threats both internal and external: "First the facts . . . in one generation, then, the numbers of those majoring in the humanities dropped from a total of 30 percent to a total of less than 16 percent; during that same generation, business majors climbed from 14 percent to 22 percent" (1). Externally, the loss of majors to the more economically driven, or, in Dr. Chace's words, "practical" fields threatens the humanities (2). Literally the people that have historically made up the humanities are, in Chace's account, being turned into something else, seduced by the promise of better pay and more reliable employment. Simultaneously, there are also internal threats, for Chace, the most significant being "the failure of departments . . . across the country to champion, with passion, the books they teach and to make a strong case to



undergraduates that the knowledge of those books and the tradition in which they exist is a human good in and of itself" (1). He goes on to say that departments have "substitute[d] for the books themselves a scattered array of secondary considerations (identity studies, abstruse theory, sexuality, film and popular culture)" (1). In other words, the purity of the humanities is being sucked away by other entities within our own ranks. For Chace, we in the humanities no longer make a passionate case for the inherent value of our disciplines, in large part because we no longer teach the texts that highlight this inherent value. Following out the logic of positions like Chace's, those within the humanities bear significant responsibility for their own elimination, insofar as the move away from a traditional canon of texts makes it impossible for students, teachers, or anyone else to identify clearly what the humanities is and does. Hence, Chace paints a Van Helsingesque picture of the state of the humanities, his field being turned, like Lucy, into an impure and ultimately revolting version of itself, a field of study that has become a horrifying caricature. Moreover, like Van Helsing, Professor Chace's solution to the crisis is exclusivity,

Despite having opened the piece with the acknowledgement that these trends are "probably irreversible," Chace contends that the only hope for the humanities lies in asserting "that the study of English (or comparative literature or similar undertakings . . .) *is* coherent, *does* have self-limiting boundaries, and *can* be described as *this* and not *that*" (6). He continues, "The disciplines we teach are in a free fall, as ideology, ethnicity, theory, gender, sexuality, and old-fashioned 'close-reading' spin away from any center of professional consensus about joint purposes" (8). Instead the focus "would or should be on books, not the theories they can be made to support" (9). We "must agree on which texts to teach . . . yes it is a literary tradition. That's all. But without such traditions, civil societies have no compass to guide them" (9). Professor Chace articulates the only way forward for the humanities as a return to the purity of our textual roots, to stamp out the contagion of other, non-literary "considerations" creeping into our very bloodline and to reassert the literariness of the humanities for the sake of humanity.

Chace makes no argument for the practical value of the humanities besides the claim that it provides the "compass" for civil society, and he leaves completely unanswered the question of how books provide us a compass for our civil lives, how they tell us about our existence, or show us what it means to be a community without precisely leading us outside books, outside the merely literary questions posed in Chace's vision of the humanities. In fact, one can almost see Chace, like Van Helsing, surrounded by his cadre of vampire hunters proclaiming that it is up to we initiated few to take on the fool's errand of saving the humanities from the contagion of foreign blood: identity politics, film studies, popular culture, economic concerns and so forth. Like Van Helsing, Chace needs no one to believe in his vision of the humanities, as its value is inherent in the texts themselves. Hence, Chace posits a logic in which the insularity of the humanities becomes the very emblem of its value, as if to claim any practical, cultural, non-literary vision of the humanities is to condemn it to a kind of living death.

Now Chace is obviously only one voice within the discourse around the current plight of the humanities, and his is surely not the only or most productive way to understand our current situation.<sup>1</sup> Yet, Chace is also not some uninformed novice or unknown figure within the humanities.

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<sup>1</sup>There is a quite large body of literature on the current state of the humanities. See for example, Belfiore, Eleonara, and Anna Upchurch. *Humanities in the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Utility and Markets*. New York:



He is a scholar and teacher who has spent the entirety of a long and distinguished career serving and teaching at such notable institutions as Wesleyan, Emory, and Stanford. He clearly, deeply, personally cares for and about the discipline to which he has contributed so much and no doubt thousands of students have been enriched by him. However, more than this, Chace's articulation seems to us emblematic of a certain persistent, popular vision of the humanities as inherently "impractical" and "unemployable," as something that might very well make individuals better and more interesting people but which has no clear career path or economic potential. Who among us has not, for example, had the experience of talking with a student who, although excited about the possibility of majoring in English or Philosophy, worries (or whose parents worry) that such a degree will be fiscally useless? To take just two high profile example of this popular conception, *Forbes* recently published a piece by Peter Cohen entitled, "To Boost Post-College Prospects, Cut Humanities Departments." While Cohen's thesis is clear from his title, he admits in the piece that "he would be in favor of conducting more research on this" (1). What is so intriguing about this statement is that Cohen so thoroughly knows that the humanities are a financial liability, he feels comfortable publishing his piece without looking much into the actual numbers. In a way this should hardly come as a surprise, when this popular conception of the humanities has become so widespread that it can even appear in a film like the *Twilight Saga*—recall Jessica's graduation speech from *Eclipse* wherein she encourages her classmates to "make mistakes. . . . Major in Philosophy, because there's no way to make a career out of that" (Kendrick). Hence, while Chace's view is certainly reactionary and perhaps not the dominant view within the academy, it does speak to a real sentiment and anxiety about the humanities, one that promotes a distinctly Van Helsingesque vision of the educational task and limits of the humanities.

Like Van Helsing, this popular view is one of purity, a belief not only, as Chace would have it, in the purity of the humanities as a literary tradition with intrinsic rather than practical value, but also in the impossibility of the humanities to have anything but an antagonistic relationship to its other, whether that other be the economically-oriented departments of business and marketing or those discourses within the humanities that fall outside the narrow canon of traditional literary texts, or its own inherent uselessness before the forces of capital. Like Van Helsing, this popular view can envision no relationship between the humanities and those vampiric forces feeding on its lifeblood other than one of absolute antagonism. The consequence of this focus on exclusivity and purity is that the humanities' only recourse is to remain doggedly committed to a focus primarily on the ever-present threat of anemic funding, low enrollment, and practical and economic pressures, and to double down on its own anti-economic value. Yet, this focus largely surrenders the terms of the debate confirming that most of what this popular view suspects about the humanities is true, even if, as Chace would have it, this will prove to be precisely the humanities strength. However, this tale that we have spun about the cause of our loss in the humanities turns out to be misguided in

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Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; Bérubé, Michael. *The Employment of English: Theory, Jobs, and the Future of Literary Studies*. New York: New York UP, 1998; Di Leo, Jeffrey R. *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education: Moving beyond the Neoliberal Academy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; Donoghue, Frank. *The Last Professors : The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities*. Bronx: Fordham UP, 2008; Ferrall, Victor E. *Liberal Arts at the Brink*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011; Klein, Julie Thompson. *Humanities, Culture, and Interdisciplinarity: The Changing American Academy*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2011; Nussbaum, Martha. *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010.



important ways. True the humanities are being sucked dry of needed funding, but the cause of this hemorrhaging is, in general, not what Chace, and those like him, believe it to be.

Let us begin with the facts. The humanities ARE both practical and financially competitive majors. *The Wall Street Journal* recently published an article on the financial reality of careers from various undergraduate degrees, looking not only at starting salary (the usual measure) but also at salary information from the mid-career point: "Your parents might have worried when you chose Philosophy or International Relations as a major. But a year-long survey of 1.2 million people with only a bachelor's degree by PayScale.com shows that graduates in these subjects earned 103.5% and 97.8% more respectively, about 10 years post-commencement" ("Degrees"). The article includes a table showing several dozen majors and their starting and mid-career salaries demonstrating the financial competitiveness of fields like English, History, Philosophy, and Film against more supposedly financially practical fields: Accounting, Business Management, and Biology. This is not a surprising conclusion, if one considers that degrees in the humanities provide a widely applicable and desirable skill set, including critical thinking, public speaking, writing and research skills, and creative problem solving. This skill set is much versatile than those provided by more narrowly focused trade degrees like Accounting or Business Administration. Hence, while it is certainly true that one will not end up getting a job at the local Philosophy Factory with a degree in philosophy, that fact, in no way, translates into philosophy being an unemployable degree. It is important to note here, and we shall return to this point shortly, that this is not an argument about making the humanities practical and employable; rather, we are pointing out that it already is. Hence, to deny this is actually to deny the facts on the ground. The assumed fact that the humanities cannot compete for the interests of economically driven undergraduates is simply inaccurate.

Furthermore, the tacitly assumed "truth" that student interest in the humanities is waning is also not the case. As Scott Jaschik finds in his analysis of data collected through the *Humanities Indicators Project*, "Humanities enjoy strong student demand" (1). While majors are dropping, "in the three largest humanities disciplines—English, foreign languages and history—substantial numbers of students who are not majors are taking multiple courses to minor in those fields. In 2006-7, those fields had 122,100 majors in the colleges studied, and 100,310 minors" (1). Hence the number of students enriched by these fields is nearly double the number of declared majors. Again the objective facts do not bear out the humanities' self-reflexive assessments.

These studies are not the only two of their kind. Repeatedly, the humanities have been found to be financially competitive and of interest to students, but for even a few humanities professors themselves to embrace these facts might seem, at times, as difficult as acknowledging the existence of undead, parasitic beings. Faced with these truths, the prominent figures within the humanities continue to mouth the tale of external and self-created monster that preys on us. We have allowed this narrative to become the dominant "truth" of ourselves. Even a small but loud minority in our own fields perpetuating this dominant narrative have allowed it to creep into popular culture. This is not to suggest that the humanities do not face challenges from the very sectors that folks like Chace point to; rather it is to say that some of us in the humanities have too easily adopted a defensive, exclusionary, and insular stances, one that tends to concede and reinforce our "competition's" inaccurate characterization of us.



Yet, even if we in the humanities want to reject Chace's purity, and there seems good reason to do so, does there not seem to be some truth to the necessarily antagonistic relationship both inside and outside the humanities, antagonisms that cannot simply be done away with by showing their untruth? In a world in which the humanities necessarily compete with other areas of study for students, resources, and recognition, it seems difficult to see a way forward that would not take the form of antagonistic competition. Equally, one can understand the resistance many in the humanities feel towards glorifying the humanities' economic competitiveness, as it might seem to suggest that economic potential is the only measure of value or importance, a position long critiqued within many humanities courses (and for good reason). Yet, at the same time, to ignore the real economic competitiveness of the humanities cannot be the best way forward. Hence, our question is what kind of post-antagonistic relationship the humanities might have to its other, one that would not be defined pure through antagonism? It is here that we see the connection between the vampire hunter paradigm and the humanities, and more specifically, the fading away of the vampire hunter and the emergence of more hybrid relationships between humans and vampires offering a potential answer.

### Popular Culture's Evolving Vampire Hunter: Love, Hybridity, and the Humanities in the Twenty-First Century

Recent popular culture representations of vampire hunters have moved away from the paradigm of the slayer seen in Van Helsing. While Van Helsing's model concentrates on educating a small group of slayers and on the elimination of vampires, the growing body of contemporary media depicting vampires in film and television challenges the assumptions that knowledge of vampires must be controlled, that vampires must be destroyed, and that humans and vampires must exist antagonistically. Moreover, given the affinity between Van Helsing's educational task and that of the humanities, this critique of Van Helsing's project offers insight into how the humanities might similarly respond to some of their challenges. Of particular note is the way in which this critique suggests profound limitations to conceiving of the humanities in an exclusive or insular way.

Contemporary vampire narratives resist Van Helsing's insistence on limiting knowledge of vampires. The commitment to restrict knowledge of vampires to a small group serves, in Stoker, to mediate the interactions between humans and vampires, while, simultaneously, protecting humanity from the knowledge of vampirism. However, as the Twentieth Century drew to a close and, subsequently, in the first decades of the twenty-first century, the individuals allowed knowledge of vampirism became far more inclusive. This inclusivity manifests in depictions that maintain, albeit to a lesser degree, a "team" of knowledgeable hunters and in depictions wherein that "team" has completely disappeared.

The first category brings to mind Buffy's "Scooby Gang."<sup>2</sup> *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* begins, not unlike the Stoker tradition, with a small group of individuals who have been taught that vampires exist: Rupert Giles, the knowledgeable, trained "Watcher" who supplies the mysticism and lore of vampirism; Willow, the computer-savvy, nerd girl who assists through her research and later her witchcraft; Xander, the all-too-human comic relief; and, of course, Buffy, who supplies the muscle.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> While not quoted directly, we are indebted to South and William's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale*.

<sup>3</sup> Michelle Callender also notes the affinities between Van Helsing's group and Buffy's Scooby Gang. See "Bram Stoker's Buffy: Traditional Gothic and Contemporary Culture."



Although one finds here a close-knit team, their attempts to retain the exclusivity of their knowledge overwhelmingly fail. In fact, the series self-reflexively acknowledges that maintaining any kind of exclusivity regarding the knowledge of vampirism is unsuccessful and largely unnecessary. Three episodes into the second season, a host of vampires publicly attacks the high school, doing considerable damage to the building. Following the attack, an official asks Principal Snyder, "I need to say something to the media people. . . . You want the usual story, gang related, PCP?" to which Snyder replies, "What'd you have in mind, the truth?" ("School Hard"). It is noteworthy how poorly the "the usual story" fits the evidence and how many people, including Buffy's mother, witnessed the attack; as a result it is the standard story that is unbelievable rather than the reality of vampirism. To make the point even more forcefully, a season later the entire Sunnydale High School class of 1999 bestows the first ever "Class Protector Award" on Buffy, saying, "We don't talk about it much, but it's no secret that Sunnydale High isn't really like other high schools. A lot of weird stuff happens here" ("The Prom"). The class of 1999 has the lowest mortality rate of any graduating class in the school's history, and the award openly acknowledges Buffy's contribution to this rather grisly accomplishment. These episodes demonstrate that, in *Buffy*, the group allowed knowledge of vampirism (and other supernatural occurrences) has become quite inclusive, challenging the notion that the general public needs protection from such knowledge.

Other recent representations of vampire hunters dispense entirely with the limited group of those aware of vampires' existence. For example, *True Blood* begins just after a group of Japanese hematologists develop True Blood, a synthetic blood substitute, ostensibly freeing vampires from their need to prey on humans. With the vampires now able to "come out of the coffin," *True Blood* foregoes entirely the question of vampires' existence, transferring all of the educational challenges associated with vampirism into the realm of identity politics ("Strange Love"). Humanity now wrestles not with the fact of vampires' existence but with how their existence works alongside that of humans. Deemphasizing limiting knowledge of vampires is, in part, the result of advances in technology. It is hard to imagine a vampire attack at a high school, like Sunnydale, would not immediately spawn videos through social media. However, more fundamentally, this resistance suggests a desire to rethink, challenge, and reconceptualize the relationship between humans and vampires, and, particularly, to imagine mediating that relationship by categories other than danger, threat, and insular protectiveness.

While there certainly are still attempts to represent the vampire hunter's task as that of protecting all but a select group from the knowledge and danger of vampirism (*Abraham Lincoln Vampire Hunter* comes to mind as a somewhat feeble example), the past twenty years have seen vampire hunters become far less concerned with concealing their knowledge and with assuming that vampirism is, by necessity, an existential threat to humanity. One result of this change is that vampire hunters have greatly broadened the spectrum of responses they have to the threat of vampires far beyond Van Helsing's unquestioned moral imperative to send vampires to their final rest. These new engagements tend to fall into two categories: vampires as love interests and vampires as fellow citizens. These expanding engagements with vampires have also broadened the mediating role of the traditional vampire hunter. For example, while "hunter" figures such as Blade, Buffy Summers, Jacob Black, and Alaric Saltzman still mediate the relationship between humans and vampires primarily through antagonism and violence, they have also been joined by such mediating



figures as Bella Swan, Caroline Gilbert, and Sookie Stackhouse, who mediate the relationship between humanity and vampires in increasingly diverse and far less antagonistic ways.

In many stories, vampires command sexual power over their human prey. Certainly part of the sisters' spell over Jonathan Harker works through eroticism. However, more recently, this kind of predatory, erotic engagement has given way to explorations of vampires as amorous objects. Buffy and Angel represent one of the earliest mass-media experiments with a human/vampire relationship. While little comes of the relationship, except a five-season spinoff, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* returns to the possibility of a slayer engaging romantically with a vampire through the figure of Spike. In *Buffy*, the emphasis remains on antagonism and threat, as throughout both affairs, Buffy reduces legions of vampires to dust, often with her undead consort fighting at her side. However, her relationships challenge the prescription forbidding any but a violent engagement between hunters and vampires and begin to deconstruct the notion that all vampires are existentially opposed to humanity.

The *Twilight* series much more thoroughly inscribes the possibility of a romantic engagement between humans and vampires. While on the one hand considering Bella Swan a vampire hunter is a misnomer, on the other hand, she certainly mediates between vampires and humanity. Furthermore, the first book/film explicitly demonstrates her following an educational investigation of vampirism that echoes the intellectual work of Rupert Giles or Abraham Van Helsing. Additionally she pursues vampires, or rather a vampire, as intently as any slayer. While the narrative itself is a rather clumsy attempt to update the nineteenth-century marriage plot, examining the reconception of what it might mean to "hunt" vampires as portrayed in the *Twilight* films, offers, as in *Buffy*, an alternative interpretation of the threat posed by vampires and by vampirism more generally.

The threat and worry over Edward "turning" Bella into a vampire is something that the books/films repeatedly address. Yet, it is Edward and later Jacob who do the worrying. Bella herself quickly becomes obsessed with becoming a vampire. While there is nothing new in humans wishing for the power and immortality of the vampire, Mr. Reinfield for example, Bella's desire to be turned comes from a yearning to be closer to Edward and also, importantly, by a desire to be more fully herself. Articulating her wish to be turned, Bella addresses Edward, "This wasn't a choice between you and Jacob. It was a choice between who I should be and who I am. [In your world] I've never felt stronger . . . more real . . . more myself" (Stewart). Bella naturalizes her desire to become a vampire, presenting it as a coming-of-age narrative. The fundamental shift to vampire is figured as who she "should" be: a move toward a truer self. In fact, once Bella becomes a vampire, she seems to have lost nothing of herself, instead augmenting her humanity with vampirism. Jacob remarks how much like herself she remains, and Aro ironically sums up Bella's transformation saying that immortality "becomes" her. While a bit of a cliché, Bella's undeath involves her becoming Bella as much as it involves her becoming a vampire. Responding to the threat of vampirism with romance rather than violence has the effect of redefining humanity's engagement with the vampire as one not defined by antagonism and violence. Buffy and Bella are not the only popular culture examples of a romantic response to vampirism. Figures such as Caroline Gilbert and Sookie Stackhouse also engage with vampires as love interests. Moreover, such romances suggest an engagement with otherness that is not figured in terms of antagonism. In Bella's sense of vampirism as a truer expression of herself, we see a model for thinking about the antagonism between the humanities and economic concern, insofar as it is not a matter of reconciling the humanities to the economic or practical but in



recognizing what the humanities already are. However, this question of the identity of the humanities relates also to the other dominant reconceiving of the relationship between human and vampire: vampires as fellow citizen.

While a film like *Daybreakers* depicts a world filled with vampires holding down jobs, taking the subway, or waiting for a coffee (flavored with blood rather than cream), it achieves this by inverting the human/vampire narrative, wherein society is made up of vampires, and humans live on the fringes. Alternatively, *True Blood* depicts engagements with vampires as true fellow citizens. Once vampires cease to be purely supernatural monsters and become citizens, the spectrum of possible and even necessary engagements radically expands. Hence in *True Blood*, a host of ethical, practical, philosophical, and civic concerns regarding the integration of human and vampire culture arise. Key to this integration is the awareness that vampires and humans still pose a direct threat to one another, in the sense that many vampires still seek out human blood over "True Blood" and humans still hunt vampires both out of fear and for their blood, which operates as a powerful aphrodisiac. Nonetheless, staking or draining vampires and protecting humans from them cease to be the only adequate responses. In relation to the questions we have posed about the humanities, this focus on "the other" as fellow citizen emphasizes that there is a real risk of antagonism and aggression in the attempt to mediate between the humanities and the economic sphere and between competing conceptions of the humanities. Like the various interests and subcultures of *True Blood*: "fangbangers," "bloodwhores," "V" dealers, and users, the American Vampire League are those within and without the humanities whose interests must be considered and mediated. Hence, insofar as the notion of vampire as love interest suggests the possibilities of a more peaceful integration of human and vampire, or between the humanities and their other, the notion of vampires as fellow citizens reframes the important difficulties and differences facing such an integration. The question of what it would mean to reorient our understanding of the humanities remains in many ways an open one. Beyond the need to represent accurately the already practical and economically viable nature of the humanities, there are deeply troubling tensions particularly between the notion of education as a formative human right and education as a business. However, here again, the rethinking of the threat of vampires in twenty-first-century depictions offers some guidance, as the relationship between humans and vampires increasingly highlights the possibility of hybridization, the mixing of vampires and humans into some third species. Two prime examples of this hybridity are Blade and Renesmee Cullen.

Blade is a classic hybrid figure, neither wholly human nor vampire. He is the product of an assault by a vampire, Deacon Frost, on his pregnant mother, causing her to die in the process of giving birth to Blade. The introduction of the vampire's venom to an unborn child infuses Blade with vampiric abilities (strength, rapid regeneration, heightened senses, etc.), while simultaneously leaving him none of their weaknesses (to daylight, garlic, silver, etc.) with the important exception of the vampiric "thirst" for blood. Blade is neither human nor vampire, existing as a kind of third species; in that sense, his hybridity offers an alternative to, if not a critique of, a strict division between vampire and human. Yet, the *Blade Trilogy* also takes on much of the essential ideology of Van Helsing's understanding of vampires, Blade perceives his own vampirism as a curse or disease, and vampires in the *Blade* films are cruel, merciless, and violent figures. Although this kind of hybridity suggests that there is power in the incorporation of the other, it is a power that remains rooted in the antagonism between self and other.



In the context of the humanities, this kind of hybridity suggests that recognizing the practical strength of the humanities would necessarily involve contamination precisely by "the thirst" for economic success, a desire that one could perhaps manage but which would remain at odds with a commitment to the humanities. In addition, this model of hybridization remains committed to a discourse of purity suggesting not only an insurmountable antagonism between the humanities and other disciplines but also between the "true" or "pure" humanities and other "impure" versions. This discourse of purity is at the heart of Chace's picture of the humanities as a specific literary tradition, and the exclusionary, xenophobic nature of such claims to purity necessarily raise concerns for the potentially dangerous forms of exclusion that have so often accompanied such claims, i.e., patriarchal, homophobic, white supremacist, colonial, or conservative claims. Hence, while this model of hybridity raises the possibility of a more fundamental integration, there remains little possibility of meaningful dialog between the humanities and their other. However, this antagonist image of the vampire/human hybrid stands in marked contrast to the hybridity of Renesmee Cullen.

Renesmee is, like Blade, a genetic hybrid of human and vampire. She is the child of the then human Bella Swan and Edward Cullen. She has a sampling of vampiric abilities including unusual strength, rapid development, and telepathic communication. However, in utter contrast to Blade, the vampiric aspects of Renesmee's character are not defined by the desire for human blood. Nowhere in *Breaking Dawn Part 2* does Renesmee drink blood or battle the desire to do so. Her relationship to blood, and to the killing that accompanies it, occurs entirely off camera. In the absence of any relationship to blood drinking, her vampirism manifests in other superhuman acts, in particular her telepathy. This communication, along with her rapid growth and unique physical abilities, are certainly aspects of her vampirism, but they are remarkably less off putting than drinking blood. This conspicuous absence of blood in relationship to Renesmee bolsters her presentation as an utterly sympathetic character. Imagine how different her character would seem if there were but one scene of her on the hunt, one scene of her childlike figure hunched over a dead or dying animal, her gruesome meal dripping from her chin in a disturbing parody of any human toddle at dinner. She is, in fact, fundamentally defined by the absence of such moments, in the same way that vampires have been historically defined by their presence. This absence puts forward a reinterpretation of the vampire/human hybrid, suggesting that such a hybridization changes our picture of the vampire as much as of the human.

In Renesmee, we see the possibility of a vampirism not reducible to the inhuman act of drinking blood, a vampirism transformed into something completely unrecognizable within the ideology of Van Helsing or even that of Blade. Renesmee is a hybrid that fundamentally rewrites the possibilities of vampirism to the point of offering what one might call a post-vampiric vampire: a vampire not defined fundamentally by blood drinking. Certainly, Renesmee still survives off the consumption of blood, but this fact does not define her nature in the way it does other vampires. In the figure of Renesmee, we see a new kind of vampire, one which, through its encounter with humanity, is transformed. In the context of our concern with the humanities, the figure of Renesmee move us further away from a model of antagonism.

In contrast to Blade, for whom "the thirst" for blood remains the marker of his impurity and inhumanity, Renesmee's hybridity is marked by far less violent characteristics. The removal of "the thirst" for human blood as the marker of the vampire's inhumanity suggests a relation between the humanities and its other no longer defined by a discourse of purity and antagonism. In this vision of



hybridity, the practicality and economic strength of the humanities would not be an impurity to be minimized or tolerated and would become a positive fact and reason to major in the humanities. Deemphasizing the practical as a problem opens up entirely new concerns, questions, and possibilities for the humanities. In a world in which the economic practicality of the humanities was simply a given, on what other interests could our time and energy be spent? What other relationships, communities, and discourses could be formed both between the humanities and other disciplines, and within the humanities itself, as well as between the humanities and society at large? Hence, the figure of Renesmee opens up a number of interesting possibilities, yet they remain only possibilities.

Renesmee is not entirely a vampire nor entirely a human and, in this sense, the possibilities she offers our conception of vampirism or humanity remain trapped within a framework of hybridization, a framework where two different, even opposed forces, come together. Like any hybrid, she is not so much a new species of vampire or human, as much as she is a prism through which we come to see aspects of the human and vampire in new ways. Going even further, in contrast to the hybrid figures of Blade and Renesmee Cullen, *Daybreakers* depicts a relationship between vampires and humans that leads not to the creation of a hybrid but to a new humanity.

In the Spierig Brothers' 2009 film *Daybreakers*, humanity has been infected by a plague that has turned almost the entire human race into vampires. The protagonist, Edward Dalton, is a hematologist working for a vampire run corporation researching a blood substitute that would replace the ever dwindling supply of human blood. As the film begins, Dalton's research has been remarkably unsuccessful. However, through a series of fortuitous events, Dalton meets and ultimately joins a group of human survivors working on a cure for vampirism. This "cure" involves an intense and brief exposure to sunlight. The interesting twist in this storyline comes with the discovery that drinking the blood of a "cured" human is itself a cure for vampirism. In fact, the discovery of the curative power of the blood of former vampires drives the final scenes of the film and suggests a fascinating inversion of the post-vampiric figure of Renesmee Cullen.

If Renesmee embodies the possibility of a vampirism unweaved from its need to consume human blood, the curative power of the blood of former vampires in *Daybreakers* depicts a humanity that is no longer a potential victim of vampirism. Just as vampirism is largely defined by the consumption of blood, humanity in this film is equally defined by its condition as food for vampires. A human that can no longer be fed on by vampires is then, from a vampire's perspective, no human at all but something else, something post-human. *Daybreakers* thus puts forward a picture of the human that is not only cured of its vampirism but is cured of the possibility of being a vampire's victim. This, like the hybridity of Renesmee Cullen, suggests that the confrontation between vampires and humans may well result in a post-humanity. It is in passing through the otherness of vampirism that, in *Daybreakers*, opens the path to the post-human, a human no longer defined by its antagonism to the otherness of vampirism. This possibility appears as both the radical critique and culmination of the ideological position of Van Helsing, for surely one could imagine in Van Helsing's call to liberate ourselves of our prejudices, a humanity that is no longer exactly human. In this notion of a humanity that has moved beyond the antagonism of its other, we see the hope for a humanities that would no longer define itself purely in opposition to "practical" pursuits and, in so doing, would move past an embattled discourse that defines the humanities as merely food for economically driven university cultures.



## Post Human Calls for Post Humanities

As we have illustrated, there is a disparate but coherent theme emerging within the current interest in vampire narratives: as monsters have evolved, so too have those who "hunt" them. Importantly, this evolution manifests not only in the slayer figures themselves but also through their engagements with monsters. Twenty-first-century slayers model new and productive engagements to threats, engagements that can be instructive to the humanities. Additionally, we have illustrated resonances between the traditional paradigm of the vampire hunters and humanities professors: affinities that have persisted for over a century. We have also reimagined the current plight of the humanities as, in part, a reactionary and Van Helsing like response to threat. While these observations contribute to various interests in humanities scholarship, we see the final conclusion of this piece as a call to action.

The humanities, in fact, faces a threat to our very existence. The monster is real! The time to act is upon us! We have proposed that humanities professionals bear a striking resemblance to certain aspect of the vampire hunter paradigm, operating in important ways as mediators between the humanities and its other. However, the seemingly vampiric beast of economic utility will not be bested with Chace's Van Helsing-like methods, with exclusivity, antagonism, and the glorification of the humanities "uselessness." The humanities must take their cues from the new breed of vampire hunters. We must dispense with our own exclusivity and actively recruit from a generation of students bent on practicality, a task made easier by the fact that the practical benefits of the humanities are already a reality. The students of Sunnydale High appreciated Buffy's efforts. Why are the humanities not sending representatives to every high school in the nation? And why is Peter Cohen our spokesman in *Forbes*? We can tell our own story in the popular press. Once we believe that we are what many seem to think impossible—practical and financially lucrative disciplines—we will have reinvented our relationship with the monster and consequently reinvented ourselves. Like the post-humans of *Daybreakers*, we must come to see our current state as a moment of evolution, seeing the dissolution of canons and the interdisciplinary turn of the past thirty years as not a loss of purity but as the emergence of the post-humanities. If we are able to reconceive the humanities, we will realize our full strength and continue to train future generations of vampire hunters, those who are able to broaden the horizon of what they believed to be possible. The post-humans are counting on us.



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