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**Paradigmatic Brilliance—
Or, So Sparkly, It's Broken**

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It would be difficult to speak about contemporary views of vampires without considering the effect of Meyer's *Twilight* saga. The story moved swiftly from print to film, so the black covers of the original books are almost as familiar a sight as the soulful gaze of perhaps the most sincere vampire in the literature. Edward Cullen looks out at us from a million movie posters and a hundred thousand ads. Blockbuster vampires are, of course, not a new phenomenon; they've been with us at least since the rise of Anne Rice's characters, not to mention the string of 1950s Hammer Horror films. However, with Mr. Cullen and family, Meyer offers something new to the genre.

Throughout this progression, the image of the vampire has undergone a more or less subtle transformation in its representation, as others have pointed out (Hjelm; Ramsland). Hjelm's notion of the shifting paradigms of vampirism within film is apt. For Hjelm, the old paradigm is reflective of vampires as demonic, motivated by malevolence and desire. For example, the original film vampire, Max Schreck's

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Nosferatu, (a name which means, significantly, “living corpse”) had nothing whatsoever about him to attract the viewer; he may have had a certain fascination, but it was the fascination of horror; one would not have been tempted to share a quiet evening with him. He was foreign, totally other. Human only in form, he could never be mistaken for anything other than the dangerous monsterⁱ he was. In comparison, the new paradigm sees vampires as motivated by survival and power, and represented as sexualized and sexual creatures.ⁱⁱ

This, of course, accords with the early folk beliefs about vampires; at times little more than vaguely animate sacks of blood, they were monstrous of essence. They generally sought no refuge among human society, polite or otherwise (although there were some folkloric exceptions) (D. Keyworth). Indeed early folk-lore would tell that vampires were the reanimated corpses of the ‘other’ in society – of sinners, the unbaptized, heathens, prostitutes, black magicians, suicides, or people whose corpses had been in contact with various animals (Miller *A Dracula Handbook*; Spence; Johnson). More unfortunate, however, are those babies who were believed to become vampires because a cat (a symbol of evil) had jumped over their cot (Holte). However, there was still something that set vampires apart from the “normal” run of humanity, an example of the sociological phenomena known as “othering” (Canales).

By the Victorian era this image had changed enough that a serial penny dreadful about an aristocratic vampire could run for two years, until Varney did the noble thing and took his own life.¹ And the best known Victorian vampire could move among humans with

¹ One assumes that his leap into an active volcano – his own version of the Reichenback Falls - accomplished his final demise; he at least did not return due to pressure from a grieving populace as other contemporary heroes did.

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relative ease, often not even restricted to the hours of darkness (Stoker).

But still, there was no question that these were, quite literally, the dead walking. The pallor, the unease engendered in those around them, and in Dracula's case, the need to rest in the soil of his homeland, and above all, the need to take human blood to survive are all markers of the undead. Vampires in both the folkloric view (Caciola) and most modern representations remain just this – animate corpses (Greer). Stith Thompson's motif index includes being a corpse as one of the defining features of being a vampire (Miller "The Question of Immortality: Vampires, Count Dracula, and Vlad the Impaler").

There are differences about what that animating factor might be: a demon (Buffy and some older traditions (Johnson)), the personality and/or soul of the original human (Saberhagen and Angel in Buffy, and many others) (Ramsland), but the point remains that the vampire is marked out as other, and has not relinquished his (or her) connection with the grave. Sunlight has caused the demise of countless TV and movie vampires, emphasizing the connection between vampires and all that is dark, hidden and evil. Even if they are able to withstand the rays of the sun, they tend to prefer the dark.

Other characteristics, of course, link vampires to death. In the Buffyverse², vampires, when about to act as

² "Buffyverse" is a term used for the mythical but generally consistent world inhabited by the characters in the Buffy the Vampire Slayer TV series. A. Bradney, "The Politics and Ethics of Researching the Buffyverse," *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 19 (2006), L. Call, "'Sounds Like Kinky Business to Me': Subtextual and Textual Representations of Erotic Power in the Buffyverse," *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 6 (2007).

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vampires, “vamp out”; their faces change and mutate, showing their lack of humanity and perhaps suggesting the changes in the body after death³.

Yet, in Edward Cullen and his ilk, we find vampires who avoid the light not because they are creatures of the dark, but because they sparkle; sunlight reflects off skin which bears more than a visual resemblance to alabaster. They are, quite literally, brilliant in the sun. This completely changes the import of the vampire’s avoidance of the sun. No longer is it a retreat to the umbra of the grave; now it is a way of hiding just how beautifully their skin reacts to the sun.

Other vampires have been “day walkers”; Stoker’s *Dracula* showed little aversion to the sun; Blade used medical aids to be able to endure the sun; the ability to rise during the hours of daylight is a sign of increasing power in Hamilton’s universe (L. Hamilton). However, what is new with the Cullens is not the ability to be in the sun, but their reason for avoiding it; they are not reanimated corpses. The paradigm has changed.

With Edward and his family, the vampire literature finally breaks through what Kuhn characterized as a paradigm boundary (Kuhn); the underlying structure of “that which is a vampire” has stretched so far that it is our contention it has broken. Although the name is the same (just as we can speak of the same cosmos as the pre-Copernican astronomers), we are in fact talking about something which is conceptually a new thing. Vampires have been undergoing a nearly systematic “humanization”, from monster to misunderstood superior being, for forty years (Carter); with Edward

³ The alignment of the vampire mythos with the changes to the body after death has been investigated above all by Barber Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

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Cullen, the last barrier to being human – death – is removed.

With the new explanation for vampires' sun-avoidance, Meyers has severed the last link with the grave; it may be significant that Edward did not actually die; his conversion to a new type of life happened to prevent that very eventuality, and clearly this is not unusual (CF Bella begs to be made a vampire in the early books, but is still depicted as fearing death. When Bella does eventually become a vampire in *Breaking Dawn* (Meyer et al.), it is not through the usual means of either some predisposition (as per folklore) or attack by another vampire; rather, she is injected with vampire "venom" by Edward in a quasi-medical procedure to save her life. Here, the paradigm has completely broken – no longer is the state of being a vampire the state of death, now it has become a means of prolonging (indefinitely) life.ⁱⁱⁱ

This in turn is an interesting departure from the Anne Rice novels, in which the one defining aspect of the narrative concerns the process of 'siring', or the process through which one vampire transforms a mortal being into an immortal being. Although it may be said that part of the definition of a vampire is an *inability* to experience death (Holte), this is generally understood in relation to death not being, for vampires, the final act it is for other humans; the immortality they might be said to experience (Miller "*The Question of Immortality: Vampires, Count Dracula, and Vlad the Impaler*") arises from experiencing death and continuing in physical existence, rather than in avoiding it altogether. The vampire of even most current lore and media, as well as historical belief, was one who "achieved eternal life without the attainment of spiritual perfection or salvation," they have, significantly, "conquered death" (Bunson, 263), they have not avoided it.

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A paradigm shifts when previous explanations – or understandings – can no longer be stretched to include new information. As long as new information can be accommodated within the old explanations, the paradigm holds, although it may be increasingly tenuous, and more and more tweaking of the model is required to accommodate new knowledge. Eventually, however, the model is no longer fit for purpose; it no longer functions as a realistic explanation of the data to which it relates. In terms of the vampire, this change, this shift in the paradigm may be timely. Bunson holds that the fascination of the vampire is rooted in our fear of death, among other things, but it has become the “reflection of the contemporary society’s morbid preoccupation with aging and death” (Bunson, 263). The works of Ramsland (2002), Guiley (1991), Russo (2005), Dresser (1989), Konstantinos (1996) and Keyworth (2002) demonstrate the importance of the old paradigm to the lives of vampire enthusiast across the world. For these vampire enthusiasts, the old paradigm speaks to the darker side of existence, to the grandeur and splendour of times past, and of the elegance of desire. The modern paradigm, however, speaks of a more naive audience, perhaps described as “wannabes”, who do not yet fully appreciate the intricacies of life and the complex nature of existence. Meyer’s vampires are truly undead in that many of them do not experience death – they are not reanimated corpses, because they have never known the grave. The distance between the old paradigm, favoured by the subculture, and the new paradigm, favoured by modern culture, could result in a greater degree of commitment being shown by those affiliated with the old paradigm. The potential is for an implicit religiosity to be formed with greater strength in light of the new paradigms.

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What Meyer has created is a vampire who is no longer a monster, but instead has the characteristics of a superhero (Greer), particularly a 21st century superhero who has a dark side (Batman), weaknesses (Hancock) or is frankly not super at all (Ironman). Edward Cullen and his family demonstrate all the typical characteristics of the superhero: more than human strength, speed, endurance, life span, as well as a concern and care for the innocent (Heer and Worcester).

What Meyer has left is a vampire who earns the title simply by a need to ingest blood – mammalian blood, perhaps, but still, this is the only characteristic that allows these creatures to be called vampires. While others have suggested that this is the defining mark of the vampire, this was only in relation to their description in one place and time (G. D. Keyworth). The Cullens do not need to rest during the day (if at all), they do not fear the sun other than for the risk of exposure it presents, they are unable to shift shapes, and they cannot even be accurately described as “the living dead,” as many of them have never experienced death.

We are not arguing that a new term is needed for these creatures; they are clearly still vampires. Rather, we argue that the paradigm that has bounded the edges of what it means to be “vampire” has changed enough that it needs to be re-formed. Now, the defining marks of being a vampire are simply a need to ingest blood, and a certain propensity to live forever. This is a change from the previous understandings of “what it is to be vampire.”

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ⁱEven in an age where vampires seem to be everywhere in our media, we may take some comfort in the definition of "monster" offered by Greer: "a strange and frightening being whose existence is doubted by most or all of the currently accepted scientific authorities" John

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Michael Greer, *Monsters: An Investigator's Guide to Magical Beings* (Body, Mind & Spirit, 2001). (pg. 8)

ⁱⁱFor all that the romance between Edward and Bella may have overtones – at least – of the abstinence/chastity agenda, the only reason this works is because the tension between them is sexual in nature – there would have been no need to urge most young girls to abstinence in relation to Schreck's monster.

ⁱⁱⁱThis theme is also part of the idea behind the Church of Eternal Life, in the Anita Blake series. However, the human adherents become full members of the church through the time honoured means of vampire bite L.K. Hamilton, *The Harlequin* (Berkley Pub Group, 2007).

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