



The Vampire in Slavic Cultures

Thomas J. Garza

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The Vampire IN SLAVIC CULTURES

THOMAS J. GARZA



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Map of Central Europe and Transylvania.

Introduction



By Thomas J. Garza

The vampire at once intrigues and horrifies, seduces and repels. It has become one of the most enduring figures of Western—and, in an even more ancient context, Eastern—literatures and cultures. For more than a thousand years, stories of reanimated creatures that sustain their own lives by taking away the “life force” of other living beings have filled our imaginations and the pages of world literature. These tales, which deal with the most essential questions of life and death, continue to resonate and fascinate around the globe in novels, film, and popular culture.

This volume draws together original historical texts, critical commentaries, and literary works to create a unique portrait of the vampire in the Western experience in general, and in the Slavic and Eastern European context in particular. It aims to provide a substantial sample of the historical, geographic, religious, folkloric, and cultural backgrounds on which literary and, more recently, filmic depictions of the vampire are based. This edition provides a broad, topical introduction to the creatures of the night that remain a fixed feature of Slavic cultures to the present day.

Beginning with the myriad of definitions of the word “vampire,” the volume invites the reader to come to an understanding of the “universals” in meaning from varying suggestions. Next, religious, folkloric, and pagan sources for early vampire tales are presented as the basis for the development and expansion of the vampire story from Old World mythology to newfound religious practices. Early images and representations of the vampire as a female harpy set the stage for the development of a long line of vampiric successors, including the first male vampires and werewolves.

A substantial portion of the volume is devoted to history’s “real life” vampires: Vlad Tepes Dracula of Transylvania and Elizabeth Bathory of Hungary, whose remarkable reigns accorded them infamous reputations. Though there is no documented evidence that either of these figures actually consumed human blood, their respective exploits were heinous and bizarre enough to give each the moniker of “vampire.” Significantly, as Romanian and Hungarian historical figures, neither is linguistically nor ethnically “Slavic”; however, the geographic proximity of their dominions to the lands of the Slavs clearly had an effect on the development of the vampire myth in those neighboring countries and thus, both Dracula and Bathory figure prominently there.

With the place of the vampire in European history established, the volume continues with a survey of the development of vampire lore and myth throughout the Balkans,

Central and Eastern Europe, and Russia. These stories incorporate the diverse cultures and traditions of indigenous peoples, as well as of transient populations in the region such as the Roma. Through these various portraits, the reader becomes familiar with the major similarities among the regions and their stories, as well as with their inherent differences. Some of the earliest recorded stories from these regions are provided to highlight the most significant markers of each region's particular slant on the vampire tale.

The literary portraits of the vampire presented in this volume focus on those from Eastern European and Slavic writers, beginning with several examples from Russia's early literary tradition in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Classic writers such as Nikolai Karamzin, Vasily Zhukovsky, and Aleksandr Pushkin, each famous for his prose and poetic works, tapped into themes of death and revenants and added a Gothic twist to the ages of Russian Sentimentalism and Romanticism. Russia's Golden Age of great literature began later in the nineteenth century, and the theme of the vampire developed in tandem. Writer Nikolay Gogol, known primarily for his humorous works of satire, invokes vampires, witches, and werewolves in his story "Viy." Other writers including dramatist Aleksey K. Tolstoy and novelist Ivan Turgenev (best remembered for his novels of the Russian gentry, such as *Fathers and Sons*), all contributed major works to the vampire genre.

Even writers of the Soviet period, such as the author Mikhail Bulgakov, incorporated vampires into their works. Bulgakov writes an early short story on revenants and includes vampires in his brilliant novel *The Master and Margarita*. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 does not slow the production of Slavic literature featuring vampires, as evidenced by Viktor Pelevin's story about post-Soviet werewolves and Sergei Lukyanenko's popular *Watch* trilogy.

No edition dealing with the subject of vampires would be complete without a section on the dispatching of the creatures. Well before Buffy slew her first vampire and even before Dr. Van Helsing faced off with Dracula, an entire history of how to prevent, ward off, and ultimately destroy the vampire developed in the Slavic lands. From the uses of garlic to the efficacy of wooden stakes, the lore and practice of vampire slaying is discussed.

Finally, this volume includes the lyrics to some popular Russian songs of the 1990s and the 2000s, which also resonate with the vampire theme. Harking back to a wickedly satirical musing on his own funeral by Vladimir Vysotsky in 1973, these songs embrace not only the Russian fascination with the subject, but the wide range of meaning that has been ascribed to vampires and vampirism in contemporary Russian popular culture.

For some, it is the first reading of Bram Stoker's seminal novel, *Dracula*. For others, it is a youthful crush on Buffy or Angel; for others still, it is the lure of the gothic club scene and its New Romantics lifestyle. As for myself, it was a road trip into Transylvania and the uncanny experience of standing amid the ruins of Dracula's castle. We all find

our particular initial way into the vampire myth and develop a unique understanding of the relevance of the story in our own lives and experience. But in every instance and for every person, there is no question that once the vampire's story takes hold in one's psyche, it does not easily let go.

TJG
Austin, Texas

Definitions of Vampire



A Definition of Vampire from *Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*



Edited by Maria Leach

VAMPIRE

One of the types of the undead; a living corpse or soulless body that comes from its burial place and drinks the blood of the living. Belief in vampires is found all over the world—in India, China, Malaya, Indonesia, etc.—but typically it is a Slavic concept; Russia, Poland, Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovenia and thence Greece, Rumania, Albania, Hungary, are the great vampire area. In Hungary in the 18th century, the uproar about vampires was as great as that during the witch hunts of colonial New England. The vampire cannot rest in the grave; it must spend the night searching for a victim, but at cockcrow, when the sun rises, or when the bells ring in the morning, it must return to the coffin. Anyone bitten by a vampire becomes a vampire upon death; vampires are also made if a cat or other baneful creature jumps or flies over the corpse before it is buried; suicides, witches, those under a curse become vampires. Light, bells, iron, garlic are all effective against vampires. If a corpse about to be buried has its mouth open, it will probably be a vampire; the mouth must be stuffed with clay before the coffin is closed. If it is suspected that a certain corpse already buried is a vampire, it must be dug up and examined; if it proves to be red-cheeked and fresh, not decomposed, with blood-stains around the mouth, it is a vampire. Such a body must be decapitated, burned, buried at a crossroads, or a wooden stake driven through its heart. It will twist in agony as the stake pierces it, but after that it will lie in peace.

“A Definition of Vampire,” from *Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*, Edited by Maria Leach, pp. 1154. Copyright © 1984 Harper and Row. Permission to reprint granted by the publisher.

A Definition of Vampire from *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*



Edited by Ivor H. Evans

VAMPIRE

A fabulous being supposed to be the ghost of a heretic, criminal, etc., who returned from the grave in the guise of a monstrous bat to suck the blood of sleeping persons who usually became vampires themselves. The only way to destroy them was to drive a stake through their body. The superstition is essentially Slavonic.

But first on earth, as vampire sent,
Thy corse shall from its tomb be rent, Then ghastly haunt thy native place
And suck the blood of all thy race.

BYRON: *The Giaour*, 755.

The word is applied to one who preys upon his fellows—a “blood-sucker”.

One of the classic horror stories, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), centres on vampirism. The Dracula of Transylvanian legend appears to originate from Vlad V of Wallachia (1456–1476), known as Vlad the Impaler, although he was not a vampire. It is suggested that Stoker's Count Dracula was a composite figure derived from Vlad the Impaler and the Countess Báthori, who was arrested in 1610 for murdering girls. It was her habit to wash in the blood of her several hundred girl victims in order to maintain her skin in a youthful condition. The name comes from Vlad's membership of the Order of the Dragon, although *dracul* in Rumanian also means *devil*.

“A Definition of Vampire,” from *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, Edited by Ivor H. Evans, pp. 1158. Copyright © 1981 Harper and Row. Permission to reprint granted by the publisher.

A Definition of Vampire from *The Encyclopedia of Ghosts and Spirits*



By Rosemary Guiley

VAMPIRE

In folklore, the undead. There are many types of vampires in beliefs found all over the world. A vampire is either the living dead—a resurrected corpse—or the spirit of a corpse that leaves its grave at night and walks the world of the living to feed off of them to survive. Some vampires, particularly in Eastern, Middle Eastern and tribal mythologies, are demons that attack at night, and are associated with night terrors.

The term “Vampire” came into English usage in 1732, handed down from German and French accounts of vampire superstitions discovered in Eastern Europe. The Slavic vampire cult contains many words for “vampire” with different shades of meaning that refer to werewolves, revenants, demons that eat the sun and moon, humans who can shape-shift, certain kinds of witches, and monstrous sucking animals, as well as living corpses.

In the Balkans, where a vampire cult flourished in the late Middle Ages, a vampire was suspected of infesting a graveyard when people reported seeing apparitions of the dead that pestered them and bit them, or sat on their chests and suffocated them at night. Such symptoms are similar to cases of biting poltergeists and to the old hag. Vampires also were blamed for plagues, invisible terrors that bothered people at night and wasting diseases that brought death. A search of graves was made, and if a body was found seemingly incorrupt with signs of fresh blood on it, it was decreed a vampire and was dispatched by being dismembered, burned or staked through the heart. Such measures are universally employed to keep ghosts of the dead from leaving their graves and wandering about.

Modern researchers have suggested premature burial as a natural explanation for the incorrupt corpse. It is more likely that normal decomposition conditions perhaps medically unknown in earlier times explain the vampire corpse. For example, it is

Rosemary Guiley, “A Definition of Vampire,” from *The Encyclopedia of Ghosts and Spirits*, pp. 344.
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normal for corpses to shift; this might give the appearance of life and movement when a coffin was opened. A corpse that is staked may emit noises interpreted as “shrieks” simply from air in the lungs being forced past the glottis. The “fresh blood” probably is the corpse’s own blood, which often leaks from orifices. The shiny nailbeds that earlier peoples took to be fresh fingernail growth probably are the underfeeds that are exposed when the outer finger nails slough off.

Western fiction and film have popularized the vampire as an entirely different creature, a glamorous and seductive living dead person who bites people (usually on the neck) to drink their blood.

FURTHER READING

Barber, Paul. *Vampires, Burial and Death: Folklore and Reality*. New Haven: Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988. Guiley, Rosemary Ellen. *Vampires Among Us*. New York: Pocket Books, 1991.

Definitions of Upyr' and Vampire



By Thomas J. Garza

УПЫРЬ, в славянской мифологии мертвец, нападающий на людей и животных; образ У. заимствован народами Западной Европы у славян (см. *Вампир*). Согласно древнерусским поучениям против язычников, те клали требу (приношения) У. и берегиням до того, как стали поклоняться Перуну. По позднейшим поверьям, У. становится после смерти человек, рождённый от нечистой силы или испорченный ею (ребёнка-У. можно узнать по двойным рядам зубов), умерший, через гроб которого перескочила чёрная кошка (чёрт), чаще — нечистый («заложный») покойник, самоубийца, умерший неестественной смертью, особенно колдун. По ночам У. встаёт из могилы и в облике налитого кровью мертвеца или зооморфного существа убивает людей и животных, реже высасывает кровь, после чего жертва погибает и сама может стать У.; известны поверья о целых поселениях У. В литературе, начиная с Пушкина, У. неточно отождествляли с вурдалаком, волком-оборотнем (см. *Волкодлак*). Ср. также тюрк. *Убыр*.
В. Я. Петрухин.

UPYR', in Slavic mythology is a corpse which attacks people and animals; the peoples of Western Europe have borrowed the form of the *upyr'* (cf, "Vampire"). In accordance with ancient Russian preachings against paganism, they would give rites (offerings) to *upyr'* and other gods that they began to worship Perun [Slavic god of the underworld], According to recent beliefs, *upyr'* becomes a person after death, born of *evil* or touched by it (a child-*upyr'* can be recognized by its double rows of teeth), or having died in grave across which a black cat (a devil) has jumped, or more frequently—a dishonorable ("marked") deceased, a suicide who died by artificial means, especially in a well. By night the *upyr'* rises from the grave and in the form of a blood covered corpse or animal being kills people and animals—more rarely by sucking their blood, after

which the attacked dies and itself becomes an *upyr'*; there are known beliefs of entire settlements of *upyr'*. In literature, beginning with Pushkin, the *upyr'* is inaccurately identified with the *vurdolak*, the werewolf (cf. *vurdolak*). See also the Turkish *ubyr'*.

V. J. Tsetrukhin

Thomas J. Garza, "Definitions of Upyr' and Vampire," translated from *The Great Encyclopedic Dictionary of Mythology*. Copyright © 2007 by Thomas J. Garza. Permission to reprint granted by the author.

ВАМПИР, в низшей мифологии народов Европы мертвец, по ночам встающий из могилы или являющийся в облике летучей мыши, сосущий кровь у спящих людей, насылающий кошмары. В. становились «нечистые» покойники — преступники, самоубийцы, умершие преждевременной смертью и погибшие от укусов В. Считалось, что их тела не разлагались в могилах, и прекратить их злодеяния можно было, вбив в тело В. осиновый кол, обезглавив его и т. п. Оберегами против В. служили также чеснок, железо, колокольный звон и др. В славянской мифологии — *упыр*.
М. Ю.

VAMPIRE, in the lowest mythology of peoples of Europe, is a corpse that by night rises from the grave or takes the form of a bat, which sucks the blood of sleeping people, invoking nightmares. "Impure" deceased became vampires—criminals, suicides, premature deaths, and deaths by vampire bite. It was believed that their bodies did not decay in the grave, and that their evildeings could be stopped by driving an aspen stake into their body, or beheading them, etc. Protection against vampires also included garlic, iron, a bell chime, and others. In Slavic mythology—it is *upyr*.

M.J.

What Is a Vampire?



By Dudley Wright

What is a vampire? The definition given in Webster's *International Dictionary* is: "A blood-sucking ghost or re-animated body of a dead person; a soul or re-animated body of a dead person believed to come from the grave and wander about by night sucking the blood of persons asleep, causing their death."

Whitney's *Century Dictionary* says that a vampire is: "A kind of spectral body which, according to a superstition existing among the Slavic and other races on the Lower Danube, leaves the grave during the night and maintains a semblance of life by sucking the warm blood of living men and women while they are asleep. Dead wizards, werewolves, heretics, and other outcasts become vampires, as do also the illegitimate offspring of parents themselves illegitimate, and anyone killed by a vampire."

According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*: "The persons who turn vampires are generally wizards, suicides, and those who come to a violent end or have been cursed by their parents or by the Church. But anyone may become a vampire if an animal (especially a cat) leaps over the corpse or a bird flies over it."

Among the specialists, the writers upon vampire lore and legend, two definitions may be quoted:—Hurst, who says that: "A vampyr is a dead body which continues to live in the grave; which it leaves, however, by night, for the purpose of sucking the blood of the living, whereby it is nourished and preserved in good condition, instead of becoming decomposed like other dead bodies"; and Scoffern, who wrote: "The best definition I can give of a vampire is a living mischievous and murderous dead body. A living dead body! The words are idle, contradictory, incomprehensible, but so are vampires."

"Vampires," says the learned Zopfius, "come out of their graves in the night time, rush upon people sleeping in their beds, suck out all their blood and destroy them. They attack men, women, and children, sparing neither age nor sex. Those who are under the malignity of their influence complain of suffocation and a total deficiency of spirits, after which they soon expire. Some of them being asked at the point of death what is the matter with them, their answer is that such persons lately dead rise to torment them."

Dudley Wright, "What Is a Vampire?," from *Vampires and Vampirism: Legends from Around the World*, pp. 1–19. Copyright © 2001 Lethe Press. Permission to reprint granted by the publisher.

Not all vampires, however, are, or were, suckers of blood. Some, according to the records, despatched their victims by inflicting upon them contagious diseases, or strangling them without drawing blood, or causing their speedy or retarded death by various other means.

Messrs Skeat and Blagden, in *Pagan Races of the Malay Peninsula* (vol. i. p. 473), state that “a vampire, according to the view of Sakai of Perak, is not a demon—even though it is incidentally so-called—but a being of flesh and blood,” and support this view by the statement that the vampire cannot pass through walls and hedges.

The word *vampire* (Dutch, *vampyr*; Polish, *wampior* or *upior*; Slownik, *upir*; Ukraine, *upeer*) is held by Skeat to be derived from the Servian *wampira*. The Russians, Morlacchians, inhabitants of Montenegro, Bohemians, Servians, Arnauts, both of Hydra and Albania, know the vampire under the name of *wukodalak*, *vrkulaka*, or *vrykolaka*, a word which means “wolf-fairy,” and is thought by some to be derived from the Greek. In Crete, where Slavonic influence has not been felt, the vampire is known by the name of *katakhaná*. Vampire lore is, in general, confined to stories of re-suscitated corpses of male human beings, though amongst the Malays a *penangglan*, or vampire, is a living witch, who can be killed if she can be caught in the act of witchery. She is especially feared in houses where a birth has taken place, and it is the custom to hang up a bunch of thistle in order to catch her. She is said to keep vinegar at home to aid her in re-entering her own body. In the Malay Peninsula, parts of Polynesia and the neighbouring districts, the vampire is conceived as a head with entrails attached, which comes forth to suck the blood of living human beings. In Transylvania, the belief prevails that every person killed by a *nosferatu* (vampire) becomes in turn a vampire, and will continue to suck the blood of other innocent people until the evil spirit has been exorcised, either by opening the grave of the suspected person and driving a stake through the corpse, or firing a pistol-shot into the coffin. In very obstinate cases it is further recommended to cut off the head, fill the mouth with garlic, and then replace the head in its proper place in the coffin; or else to extract the heart and burn it, and strew the ashes over the grave.

The *murony* of the Wallachians not only sucks blood, but also possesses the power of assuming a variety of shapes, as, for instance, those of a cat, dog, flea, or spider; in consequence of which the ordinary evidence of death caused by the attack of a vampire, viz. the mark of a bite in the back of the neck, is not considered indispensable. The Wallachians have a very great fear of sudden death, greater perhaps than any other people, for they attribute sudden death to the attack of a vampire, and believe that anyone destroyed by a vampire must become a vampire, and that no power can save him from this fate. A similar belief obtains in Northern Albania, where it is also held that a wandering spirit has power to enter the body of any individual guilty of undetected crime, and that such obsession forms part of his punishment.

Some writers have ascribed the origin of the belief in vampires to Greek Christianity, but there are traces of the superstition and belief at a considerably

earlier date than this. In the opinion of the anthropologist Tylor, “the shortest way of treating the belief is to refer it directly to the principles of savage animism. We shall see that most of its details fall into their places at once, and that vampires are not mere creations of groundless fancy, but causes conceived in spiritual form to account for specific facts of wasting disease.” It is more than probable that the practice of offering up living animals as sacrifices to satisfy the thirst of departed human beings, combined with the ideas of the Platonist and the teachings of the learned Jew, Isaac Arbanell, who maintained that before the soul can be loosed from the fetters of the flesh it must lie some months with it in the grave, may have influenced the belief and assisted its development. Vampirism found a place in Babylonian belief and in the folk-lore and traditions of many countries of the Near East. The belief was quite common in Arabia, although there is no trace of it there in pre-Christian times. The earliest references to vampires are found in Chaldean and Assyrian tablets. Later, the pagan Romans gave their adherence to the belief that the dead bodies of certain people could be allured from their graves by sorcerers, unless the bodies had actually undergone decomposition, and that the only means of effectually preventing such “resurrections” was by cremating the remains. In Grecian lore there are many wonderful stories of the dead rising from their graves and feasting upon the blood of the young and beautiful. From Greece and Rome the superstition spread throughout Austria, Hungary, Lorraine, Poland, Roumania, Iceland, and even to the British Isles, reaching its height in the period from 1723 to 1735, when a vampire fever or epidemic broke out in the south-east of Europe, particularly in Hungary and Servia. The belief in vampires even spread to Africa, where the Kaffirs held that bad men alone live a second time and try to kill the living by night. According to a local superstition of the Lesbians, the unquiet ghost of the Virgin Gello used to haunt their island, and was supposed to cause the deaths of young children.

Various devices have been resorted to in different countries at the time of burial, in the belief that the dead could thus be prevented from returning to earth-life. In some instances, *e.g.* among the Wallachians, a long nail was driven through the skull of the corpse, and the thorny stem of a wild rose-bush laid upon the body, in order that its shroud might become entangled with it, should it attempt to rise. The Kroats and Slavonians burned the straw upon which the suspected body lay. They then locked up all the cats and dogs, for if these animals stepped over the corpse it would assuredly return as a vampire and suck the blood of the village folk. Many held that to drive a white thorn stake through the dead body rendered the vampire harmless, and the peasants of Bukowina still retain the practice of driving an ash stake through the breasts of suicides and supposed vampires—a practice common in England, so far as suicides were concerned, until 1823, when there was passed “An Act to alter and amend the law relating to the interment of the remains of any person found *felo de se*,” in which it was enacted that the coroner or other officer “shall give directions for the private interment of the remains of such person *felo de se* without any stake being driven through

the body of such person.” It was also ordained that the burial was only to take place between nine and twelve o’clock at night.

The driving of a stake through the body does not seem to have had always the desired effect. De Schartz, in his *Magia Postuma*, published at Olmutz in 1706, tells of a shepherd in the village of Blow, near Kadam, in Bohemia, who made several appearances after his death and called certain persons, who never failed to die within eight days of such call. The peasants of Blow took up the body and fixed it to the ground by means of a stake driven through the corpse. The man, when in that condition, told them that they were very good to give him a stick with which he could defend himself against the dogs which worried him. Notwithstanding the stake, he got up again that same night, alarmed many people, and, presumably out of revenge, strangled more people in that one night than he had ever done on a single occasion before. It was decided to hand over his body to the public executioner, who was ordered to see that the remains were burned outside the village. When the executioner and his assistants attempted to move the corpse for that purpose, it howled like a madman, and moved its feet and hands as though it were alive. They then pierced the body through with stakes, but he again uttered loud cries and a great quantity of bright vermilion blood flowed from him. The cremation, however, put an end to the apparition and haunting of the spectre. De Schartz says that the only remedy for these apparitions is to cut off the heads and burn the bodies of those who come back to haunt their former abodes. It was, however, customary to hold a public inquiry and examination of witnesses before proceeding to the burning of a body, and if, upon examination of the body, it was found that the corpse had begun to decompose, that the limbs were not supple and mobile, and the blood not fluidic, then burning was not commanded. Even in the case of suspected persons an interval of six to seven weeks was always allowed to lapse before the grave was opened in order to ascertain whether the flesh had decayed and the limbs lost their suppleness and mobility. A Strigon or Indian vampire, who was transfixed with a sharp thorn cudgel, near Larbach, in 1672, pulled it out of his body and flung it back contemptuously.

Bartholin, in *de Causa contemptus mortis*, tells the story of a man, named Harpye, who ordered his wife to bury him exactly at the kitchen door, in order that he might see what went on in the house. The woman executed her commission, and soon after his death he appeared to several people in the neighbourhood, killed people while they were engaged in their occupations, and played so many mischievous pranks that the inhabitants began to move away from the village. At last a man named Olaus Pa took courage and ran at the spectre with a lance, which he drove into the apparition. The spectre instantly vanished, taking the spear with it. Next morning Olaus had the grave of Harpye opened, when he found the lance in the dead body, which had not become corrupted. The corpse was then taken from the grave, burned, and the ashes thrown into the sea, and the spectre did not afterwards trouble the inhabitants.

To cross the arms of the corpse, or to place a cross or crucifix upon the grave, or to bury a suspected corpse at the junction of four cross-roads, was, in some parts, regarded

as an efficacious preventive of vampirism. It will be remembered that it was at one time the practice in England to bury suicides at the four cross-roads. If a vampire should make its appearance, it could be prevented from ever appearing again by forcing it to take the oath not to do so, if the words “by my winding-sheet” were incorporated in the oath.

One charm employed by the Wallachians to prevent a person becoming a vampire was to rub the body in certain parts with the lard of a pig killed on St Ignatius’s Day.

In Poland and Russia, vampires make their appearance from noon to midnight instead of between nightfall and dawn, the rule that generally prevails. They come and suck the blood of living men and animals in such abundance that sometimes it flows from them at the nose and ears, and occasionally in such profusion that the corpse swims in the blood thus oozing from it as it lies in the coffin. One may become immune from the attacks of vampires by mixing this blood with flour and making bread from the mixture, a portion of which must be eaten; otherwise the charm will not work. The Californians held that the mere breaking of the spine of the corpse was sufficient to prevent its return as a vampire. Sometimes heavy stones were piled on the grave to keep the ghost within, a practice to which Frazer traces the origin of funeral cairns and tombstones. Two resolutions of the Sorbonne, passed between 1700 and 1710, prohibited the cutting off of the heads and the maiming of the bodies of persons supposed to be vampires.

In the German folk-tale known as *Faithful John*, the statue said to the king: “If you, with your own hand, cut off the heads of both your children and sprinkle me with their blood, I shall be brought to life again.” According to primitive ideas, blood is life, and to receive blood is to receive life: the soul of the dead wants to live, and, consequently, loves blood. The shades in Hades are eager to drink the blood of Odysseus’s sacrifice, that their life may be renewed for a time. It is of the greatest importance that the soul should get what it desires, as, if not satisfied, it might come and attack the living. It is possible that the bodily mutilations which to this day accompany funerals among some peoples have their origin in the belief that the departed spirit is refreshed by the blood thus spilt. The Samoans called it an “offering of blood” for the dead when the mourners beat their heads till the blood ran.

The Australian native sorcerers are said to acquire their magical influence by eating human flesh, but this is done once only in a lifetime. According to Nider’s *Formicarius*, part of the ceremony of initiation into wizardry and witchcraft consisted in drinking in a church, before the commencement of Mass, from a flask filled with blood taken from the corpses of murdered infants.

The methods employed for the detection of vampires have varied according to the countries in which the belief in their existence was maintained. In some places it was held that, if there were discovered in a grave two or three or more holes about the size of a man’s finger. It would almost certainly follow that a body with all the marks of vampirism would be discovered within the grave. The Wallachians employed a rather

elaborate method of divination. They were in the habit of choosing a boy young enough to make it certain that he was innocent of any impurity. He was then placed on an absolutely black and unmutilated horse which had never stumbled. The horse was then made to ride about the cemetery and pass over all the graves. If the horse refused to pass over any grave, even in spite of repeated blows, that grave was believed to shelter a vampire. Their records state that when such a grave was opened it was generally found to contain a corpse as fat and handsome as that of a full-blooded man quietly sleeping. The finest vermilion blood would flow from the throat when out, and this was held to be the blood he had sucked from the veins of living people. It is said that the attacks of the vampire generally ceased on this being done.

In the town of Perlepe, between Monastru and Kiuprili, there existed the extraordinary phenomenon of a number of families who were regarded as being the offspring of *vrykolakas*, and as possessing the power of laying the wandering spirits to which they were related. They are said to have kept their art very dark and to have practised it in secret, but their fame was so widely spread that persons in need of such deliverance were accustomed to send for them from other cities. In ordinary life and intercourse they were avoided by all the inhabitants.

Although some writers have contended that no vampire has yet been caught in the act of vampirism, and that, as no museum of natural history has secured a specimen, the whole of the stories concerning vampires may be regarded as mythical, others have held firmly to a belief in their existence and inimical power. Dr Pierart, in *La Revue Spiritualists* (vol. iv. p. 104), wrote: "After a crowd of facts of vampirism so often proved, shall we say that there are no more to be had, and that these never had a foundation? Nothing comes of nothing. Every belief, every custom, springs from facts and causes which give it birth. If one had never seen appear in the bosom of their families, in various countries, beings clothed in the appearance of departed ones known to them, sucking the blood of one or more persons, and if the deaths of the victims had not followed after such apparitions, the disinterment of corpses would not have taken place, and there would never have been the attestation of the otherwise incredible fact of persons buried for several years being found with the body soft and flexible, the eyes wide open, the complexion rosy, the mouth and nose full of bloody and the blood flowing fully when the body was struck or wounded or the head cut off."

Bishop d'Avranches Huet wrote: "I will not examine whether the facts of vampirism, which are constantly being reported, are true, or the fruit of a popular error; but it is beyond doubt that they are testified to by so many able and trustworthy authors, and by so many *eye-witnesses*, that no one ought to decide the question without a good deal of caution."

Dr Pierart gave the following explanation of their existence: "Poor, dead cataleptics? buried as if really dead in cold and dry spots where morbid causes are incapable of effecting the destruction of their bodies, the astral spirits enveloping itself with a fluidic ethereal body, is prompted to quit the precincts of its tomb and to exercise on living

bodies acts peculiar to physical life, especially that of nutrition, the result of which, by a mysterious link between soul and body which spiritualistic science will some day explain, is forwarded to the material body lying still within its tomb, and the latter is thus helped to perpetuate its vital existence.”

Apart from the spectre vampire there is, of course, the vampire bat in the world of natural history, which is said to suck blood from a sleeping person, insinuating its tongue into a vein, but without inflicting pain. Captain Steadman, during his expedition to Surinam, awoke early one morning and was alarmed to find his hammock steeped almost through and himself weltering in bloody, although he was without pain. It was discovered that he had been bitten by a vampire bat. Pennant says that in some parts of America they destroyed all the cattle introduced by the missionaries.

Vampires



By Brad Steiger

On Monday, January 15, 1991, the day following the premiere of the new primetime *Dark Shadows* television series featuring actor Ben Cross as the vampire Barnabas Collins, a bearded man approached a 42-year-old woman in a library parking lot in Missoula, Montana, and demanded money. The woman complied and handed him two dollars. Then the man pulled her hair back, cut her neck with some kind of sharp object, and kissed the open wound. Police detectives launched an intense manhunt for the grisly vampire bandit.

In February 1991, a jury in Australia convicted Annette Hall of stalking and killing Charles Reilly so her vampire lover, Susi Hampton, could drink his blood. Hall described in detail how her girlfriend had gone into a “feeding frenzy” after she had stabbed Reilly over a dozen times. Ms. Hampton, a self-confessed vampire who lives on human blood, pleaded guilty and both women were sentenced to life in prison.

For Anne Rice, author of such bestselling novels as *Interview with the Vampire*, the vampire is a “romantic, enthralling” figure. She perceives the vampire’s image to be that of a “person who never dies . . . takes a blood sacrifice in order to live, and exerts a charm over people.” In the view of Rice and the millions of readers who enjoy her novels, the vampire is a “handsome, alluring, seductive person who captivates us, then drains the life out of us so that he or she can live. We long to be one of them, and the idea of being sacrificed to them becomes rather romantic.”

The vampire legend, like that of the werewolf, is universal. The villagers of Uganda, Haiti, Indonesia, and the Upper Amazon all have their local variety of nocturnal blood sucker. The Native American tribes, the Arctic Eskimos, and many Arabian tribes know the vampire well and have as many elaborate precautions against the undead as do the inhabitants of Transylvanian villages.

In the eighteenth century, the highly respected French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote: “If there ever was in the world a warranted and proven history, it is that of vampires; nothing is lacking, official reports, testimonials of persons of standing, of surgeons, of clergymen, of judges; the judicial evidence is all-embracing.”

Brad Steiger, “Vampires,” from *The Werewolf Book*, pp. 294–300. Copyright © 1999 Visible Ink Press. Permission to reprint granted by the publisher.

Theories to explain the universality of the vampire myth are many and varied. All cultures, regardless of how primitive, have come to understand the basic fact that blood is the vital fluid of life. To lose one's vital fluid is to lose one's mortality—the spark of life. Such knowledge would be a powerful stimulant to fear in the primitive mind and the creation of hideous monsters intent on draining one's life essence would not be long in coming.

In appearance, the traditional vampire is a grotesque, demonic presence, perhaps best captured cinematically in *Nosferatu* (1922). A newly rereleased Werner Herzog version of *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979), starring Klaus Kinski, was praised by Michael Sauter in the February 5, 1999, issue of *Entertainment Weekly*: “Like Max Schreck’s original *Nosferatu*, Klaus Kinski’s Transylvanian count is a far cry from the Bela Lugosi model. Sporting sunken eyes, devil ears, and talons, he lurks in Herzog’s expressionistic shadows like some oversize vermin.”

The classic vampire is also a shapeshifter, able to transform itself not only into the familiar form of the bat, but also into a wolf—and it was able to command the rat, the owl, the moth, the fox. The vampire of tradition is able to see in the dark and travel on moonbeams and mist. At times, the vampire could vanish in a puff of smoke. The hypnotic powers of the vampire are irresistible. And woe to anyone who boldly grabbed hold of the monster, for it has the strength of a dozen men.

After Bram Stoker’s novel *Dracula* (1897) became a popular play and a classic motion picture version with Bela Lugosi as Count Dracula, the image of the vampire transmuted from hideous demon to a suave, sophisticated, handsome, well-dressed fellow who would fit right in at the very best parties. And his sisters and mistresses of the night are beautiful, sensuous, voluptuous creatures who fill out their evening dresses in the most delightful ways. With few exceptions, contemporary audiences know the vampire only as an attractive and seductive presence, an emissary of the dark side who presents a very compelling case for letting him or her bite your neck so that you may join the ranks of the undead. Of course days at the beach and power breakfasts are now out of the question.

On the other hand, the fact that the modern vampire is virtually undetectable from the rest of us—with the exception of the aversion to sunlight and the hunger for blood—preys upon another basic fear of humankind. The menace of a monster hidden among us can oftentimes be more horrifying than a grotesque, easily identified creature that lurks out there in the darkness. The ever-present thought that your congenial chess partner who always seems to arrive late at the club, or the attractive pale-complexioned man who kept trying to get you to dance with him out on the terrace, or the beautiful lady who will only meet you after dark might be a member of the society of vampires can be a very frightening thought. How can we fight vampires if we can’t tell them from our friends?

Well, of course, there’s wolfbane, the lotus flower, wild garlic, and sacred objects such as the crucifix and holy water. But do they really render a fanged fiend powerless?

Maybe it would best to be prepared like Buffy the Vampire Slayer and always carry a couple of wooden stakes in your purse or attache case. A stake in the heart just has to work. Of course that is best applied, according to tradition before and after *Dracula* and Hollywood, when the vampire lies at rest in his coffin during the daylight hours. Or if you're not quite up to the stake in the heart bit, you can destroy his coffin while he's on his nocturnal hunt and let the rays of the early morning sun scorch him to ashes.

Even at the dawn of the scientific age, scholars and members of the clergy were convinced of the vampire's existence. In the eighteenth century, a Benedictine monk, Dom Calmet, turned his attention to the subject of vampires and tried to offer a "scientific" explanation:

Chemical substances of the soil may conserve corpses indefinitely. By the influence of warmth, the nitre and sulphur in the earth may render liquid coagulated blood. The screams of the vampires [caused no doubt when vigilante vampire hunters went about driving stakes in the chests of suspect corpses] are produced when air passing through their throats is stirred by the pressure which the stake causes in the body. Often people are buried alive, and certain dead, such as the excommunicated, can rise from their tombs; but it is not possible to leave the grave bodily without digging up the soil, and none of the stories about vampires mention that their tombs were disturbed.

When we begin to examine the spark of truth behind the legend of the vampire, we soon discover that the myth disguises a very morbid reality. Today medical science recognizes a vampire psychosis wherein troubled individuals may become convinced that their life depends upon drawing fresh blood from human victims. The persons suffering from such a psychosis may, in extreme cases, actually believe themselves to be dead.

The sexual metaphors to be found in the many cinematic and literary portrayals of the vampire's seductive bite are many and are undeniably a large part of the appeal of the vampire in contemporary popular culture. And while the sexual symbolism may be sensually appealing when a sophisticated Count Dracula or a cultured and stylish Barnabas Collins emerges from the shadows and bites his beautiful victim's bare throat, the bloody accounts of real-life vampires reveal that they seldom act with such dignity and poetry.

A classic case of vampirism was that of Vincent Verzeni, who terrorized an Italian village during 1867 to 1871. Verzeni's method of attack was to seize a victim by the neck, bite her on the throat, then suck her blood. He murdered two women and victimized many others before he was apprehended.

Although Verzeni's examiners found "no evidence of psychosis," there can be little doubt that his vampirism was the expression of deep derangement and sexual perversion. That such was the case is shown lucidly in Verzeni's own words:

I had an unspeakable delight in strangling women, experiencing during the act erections and real sexual pleasure ... I took great delight in drinking ... blood ... It never occurred to me to touch or to look at the [women's] genitals ... It satisfied me to seize the women by the neck and suck their blood.

John George Haigh was a British vampire who, it is said, acquired a taste for blood when he accidentally tasted his own while sucking a scratch. Intoxicated by the act of drinking blood, he was soon “tapping” the jugular veins of his victims so that he might indulge both his perverse thirst and his fanaticism.

In keeping with the religious bent of his illness, Haigh evolved a ritual. First he would sever the jugular vein of his victim, then he would carefully draw off the blood, a glassful at a time. The actual drinking of the blood was observed with great ceremony. Haigh later became convinced that his faith could only be sustained by the sacrifice of others and by the drinking of their blood.

For nearly a week in February 1960, women in the town of Monteros in Argentina were terrorized by the nocturnal attacks of a vampire. At least 15 women were victimized by the midnight marauder, who crept into bedrooms through windows left open because of a heat wave. Hysterically, the women told police of savage teeth biting deeply into their throats and drawing blood.

When officers managed to track the vampire to his lair, they discovered a young man sleeping in a coffin which he had secreted in a cave on the outskirts of the city. He lay swathed in a black cloak, his eyes closed in deep sleep. On his lips was the dried blood of his most recent victim.

In police custody, the real-life Dracula identified himself as Florenico Fernandez, age 25, a stonemason. He was at a complete loss to present an intelligible explanation for his sadistic attacks.

On October 30, 1981, James P. Riva II, a self-proclaimed vampire, was convicted in Brockton, Massachusetts, of murdering his grandmother by shooting her with gold-tipped bullets, then attempting to drink her blood from the wounds. Riva's mother, Janet Jones of Middlebury, Vermont, testified that her son had believed himself to be a vampire for four years. According to Mrs. Jones, Riva had told her that voices informed him that he was a vampire and insisted that he must drink blood.

Defense psychiatrist Dr. Bruce Harry testified that Riva was insane at the time that he murdered his grandmother. According to the young vampire, the voices had told him that he could not become a good person until he killed someone and drank their blood.

John T. Spinale, defense attorney, explained to the court that Riva felt that he needed human and animal blood in order to survive. Riva truly believed that he was a vampire who must roam the countryside in search of his demonically prescribed “food.” According to Spinale, Riva did not eat normal meals. He ate what he could find in the evening, then went in search of animal blood.

Superior Court judge Peter E Brady sentenced the 24-year-old James Riva II to a mandatory life sentence at Walpole State Prison on the charge of second-degree murder.

On February 12, 1998, a 12-member jury heard graphic testimony from self-professed teenage vampire Rod Ferrell to help them decide whether he should be sentenced to death or jailed for life without parole. The 17-year-old Ferrell, the leader of a coven of vampires, pled guilty to the murders of Richard and Naoma Ruth Wendorf on November 25, 1996. Ferrell said that he had initiated the Wendorfs' 15-year-old daughter into the cult with a blood-drinking ritual in a graveyard. Ferrell's mother, Sondra Gibson, was also a member of a vampire cult and had pleaded guilty in 1997 to attempting to seduce a 14-year-old boy as part of a vampire ritual.

The late parapsychologist Stephen Kaplan, director of the Vampire Research Center in Elmhurst, New York, stated c. 1982 that his research indicated that at that time there were at least 21 "real" vampires secretly living in the United States and Canada. Some of these vampires had admitted to Kaplan that, on occasion, they had even murdered humans to obtain blood. He also stated that some of the vampires may truly have been as old as 300 years, but still appeared amazingly youthful, due to the blood they ingested. Or at least the vampires believed that "there are some elements in the human blood that slow down the aging process," enabling them to live far longer than nonblood drinking humans.

At that time, Kaplan's survey found that the vampires were distributed throughout North America, but Massachusetts was in the lead with three self-proclaimed vampires, followed by Arizona, California, and New Jersey, with two each.

Kaplan told of one vampire who worked as a technician in a hospital. He simply took blood from the hospital's reserves whenever he needed it. Although the man was nearly 60, Kaplan said, he passed as a man in his early twenties.

The vampire researcher met a vampire in Arizona who looked like a teenager, but who was actually in his late thirties. He posed as a university student and lured people into the desert to drink their blood.

One attractive blonde vampire appeared to be in her vigorous twenties, but was really in her sixties. She exchanged sexual favors in return for blood from her dates. Kaplan said that he was present on one occasion when such a barter occurred: "I watched her drink blood from a willing victim. I watched her use a scalpel to make several incisions in the body and drink some blood."

Kaplan found that the blood needs of the vampires varied considerably. Some required two pints a week; others, half-gallon. Some vampires admitted that they would sometimes render a victim unconscious to take some blood, but that they always left their unwilling donors alive. Those who confessed to having killed humans for blood insisted that they preyed mostly on hitchhikers, the homeless, and people they assumed to be transients with few family associations.

Although it appeared that the vampires he interviewed were long-lived, Kaplan stated, they were not immortal. They slept in beds, rather than coffins. They possessed

no preternatural ability to transform themselves into bats, wolves, or other animals. They could function equally well in daylight or in darkness, and they had absolutely no fear of a crucifix.

Kaplan came to believe that true vampirism is a genetic disorder, that people were born into it. “Their mothers and fathers were vampires,” he said, “and it appears that their children are always vampires.”

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