

# **Vampires: Folklore to Fiction**

A Delve Into the Dastardly Creatures of the Night

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SURF 2024

A special, sincere, and heartfelt thank you to Dr. Deborah Augsburg, who diligently advised and oversaw this project. This project would be nothing were it not for her insight and assistance - and also genuine open mindedness and interest in tackling something somewhat unfamiliar, new, relatively obscure and slightly strange.

Also a major thank you to Julie and Mark Venhuizen, who kindly and supportively listened to me endlessly ramble about this project, and my warmest appreciations to fellow History student Mara Loder, who served as a second set of eyes for my writing, particularly when it came to formatting, writing technicalities, and the dreaded particularities of proper citations.

Thank you.

“Ha! What a delightful thing is friendship.”

*-Varney the Vampire*

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## Introduction

Vampires and the symbols and iconography associated with them are everywhere. Look no further than a teen bedroom bedecked in *Twilight* memorabilia, a scroll through your favorite streaming service complete with the new *Interview with the Vampire* series and Taika Waititi's mockumentary series *What We Do in the Shadows*, emo pop band *My Chemical Romance's* heartthrob lead singer and vampire impersonator Gerard Way, the Hot Topic retail store at your local mall, or the angsty, dark, gothic fashion senses of youth in America, often complete with coffin, fang, cross, bat, or blood motifs. And with Robert Eggers' *Nosferatu* set to come out later this year, December of 2024, it seems that vampires are not going anywhere any time soon. But how did this come to be? How did the legends and folk stories of blood-thirsty revenants become so closely intertwined with so much of our pop culture?

I've always been absolutely smitten with the macabre darkness and achingly romantic nature of vampire stories, which is why this research is so deeply personal to me. The *Twilight* bedecked bedroom and angsty teenage fashion senses I mentioned before are a pretty clear glimpse into my adolescence, and I admittedly still carry a lot of that with me today. I would still consider myself to be goth - a subculture closely intertwined with vampires, much more on that later - as I listen to goth rock music, I adore Victorian English literature, I dream about someday owning a hearse, I wear a lot of black, and perhaps most importantly, I love vampires, and the idea of an agonizingly complex eternal life of darkness. Quite angst-filled, yes, but deliciously fun.

That being said, I bring a level of personal experience and perspective into this research. I think this helped me greatly in my research process - even just in simply having an idea of where to start. As aforementioned, vampires are *everywhere* - so trying to refine and narrow down

sources could be extremely daunting for someone unfamiliar with the subject. So, before we dive into the nitty-gritty of the fanged, ominous creatures of the dark, I want to outline my process as the field is so broad that some narrowing down and refining of sources had to be done for clarity and efficiency.

To go about this research, I first wanted to get a “lay of the land” in terms of vampire literature. I thankfully came into this research already quite widely read in vampire literature, so I selected 3 pieces of literature that I had already read that I thought to be the most influential and remembered in terms of pop culture and my own understanding of the subject, and that also spanned a few generations so I could track the changing, elusive nature of the vampire as an icon, archetype and symbol.

*Dracula* was an obvious first choice - the book is extremely widely read even over 125 years after its publishing, with the name Dracula being an easily identifiable icon in pop culture and a pretty standard household name. *Dracula*, for those unaccustomed with the iconic tale, is a story of a vampire whose name is shared with the title of the novel who lives in Transylvania, Romania.<sup>1</sup> The story is quite long and winding, but in essence, follows the classic horror icon Dracula throughout his journeys spreading terror across Europe, and the heroes going against this foe.

My next selection was *Interview with the Vampire*, a book series with an intense cult following, a prime moment in the cultural zeitgeist with its film starring Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise, and a television series released in 2022. This is one of the first vampire stories to have a very significant cult following and “fandom” associated with it, so to speak, something which

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<sup>1</sup> A real region in Romania, by the way; the fictional nature of this famous story has left many people convinced that Transylvania is a fictitious location, but it is actually an extremely historically rich and ancient area in the Carpathian arc region within Romania. The so-called “real” Dracula, Vlad Dracul “Tepes” III, known colloquially as “Vlad the Impaler,” was also born in this region - but his relationship to the novel is murky at best, and heavily debated by scholars. It felt remiss not to mention here, but I will not be contributing my own opinion on Stoker’s inspiration for *Dracula* and whether or not it was the aforementioned Wallachian ruler in the following essays.

would become a hallmark of vampire fiction as it continued into the more modern age. I chose this book because I see it as extremely exemplifying of the transition of the vampire, from the more classic literary approach to a brooding, somber adolescent, such as in *Twilight*.

My final extremely easy choice was *Twilight*, a book and film series that was catapulted into pop culture's limelight in the late 2000s and early 2010s. The story follows a typical "ordinary girl," Bella Swan. She has drawn the attention of a vampire boy, Edward Cullen, who attends her high school. This story, too, is quite winding and convoluted at times, as is common with vampire literature, but mostly hinges on the complexity of their romance as a human-vampire one. These 3 pieces of media were my primary references when dealing with the literary aspect of vampires, as I found them to be broad enough spanning to cover a variety of subjects, but also all quite similar in their general approach to storytelling using these monsters.

I next wanted to find what was already out there in terms of research surrounding vampires. I was expecting to find a lot of literary theory and criticism surrounding great classics such as *Dracula*, and these expectations were met in abundance. Great articles by literature specialists, psychologists, and culture critics alike all document the nuances and particularities of these stories - many of which I'll discuss in great detail later on.

In addition, and in a bit different context, I found many sources by anthropologists and folklorists documenting real belief in vampires, predominantly in Eastern Europe. While vampire mythos and tales of blood-sucking undead creatures generally referred to as revenants crop up across the globe, and even appear as early as classic Greek mythology, the mythos of the literary "transylvanian vampire" - though it has been warped and drastically changed over time - predominantly belongs to the Balkans in origin. More specifically, these stories are most often found in Bulgaria, Serbia, and Romania. In addition, tales of Vlad Dracul III, the historic leader

of Wallachia, Romania, and alleged inspiration for Bram Stoker's *Dracula* become critical to the understanding of these stories - not because of his involvement, but rather because of the retrospective confounding that modern interpretations of the folklore and *Dracula* cause, leading to confusion and misinterpretation of historical facts and documented oral tradition in the Balkans.

I also found a lot of research into more modern vampire stories, usually relating to some sort of cultural ramification of said media, such as research into *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* revealing that the show heavily informs feminism in fandoms. This cultural element is what was so initially intriguing to me, as one of my main goals with this research was to extrapolate a connection between the changing and yet ever present figure of the vampire and the changes in our culture. No source has been more of a holy grail for this question of mine than *Our Vampires, Ourselves* by Nina Auerbasch - a book that immensely and critically informed many of my takeaways.

With all these in mind, my research is somewhat triple-pronged in nature, as I wanted to devote specific and intentional attention to each of the aforementioned subsets of vampirology that I identified as being most integral to my goals - those being the literary element, the folkloristic element, and the cultural element. In the following essays, I aim to connect all three of these prongs in what I found to be the most important and useful takeaways of my research - how vampires first appeared, how vampires have changed, why vampires are consistently so appealing to people, and how we can utilize all of the aforementioned to have a more informed understanding of modern groups and modern storytelling.

Each of these essays are intertwined, and generally follow a somewhat chronological order, but they are also all designed to be able to be read independently of one another as

standalone pieces. I make references back to previous essays in some, but not without enough explanation to keep you caught up. That being said, if you're unfamiliar with vampire fiction/folklore, I think they are best and most clearly read in order, but feel free to use your own discretion.

I also want to make clear that, though this is a work focused partially on the true belief in vampires and the stories that were based on and followed these beliefs, I do not believe in vampires and do not intend to make an argument in favor of their existence by any means. Their existence is easily (and fascinatingly) explained by scientific and psychological measures - even if I had the inclination to believe in them, it's too easily explained away to have much hold. This may seem a confusing disclaimer, but as noted in the phenomenal book *Vampires, Burials and Death: Folklore and Reality* by Paul Barber, it's important for researchers in this field to make this distinction so as not to cause undue confusion. According to a survey conducted by an acquaintance of Barber's, "...about 27% of [the acquaintance's] respondents answered affirmatively to the question, 'Do you believe it is possible that vampires exist as real entities?'"<sup>2</sup> And, as we will later see, people in many parts of the world today still do believe in their existence too - or at least still fear that they *could* be out there somewhere, lurking in the darkness, untouched by sun and unaffected by time, death, and all things human.

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<sup>2</sup>Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 4.

## The Foundations of the Vampire: A Bloody Beginning

Vampires are an incredibly interesting figure in our modern pop culture for a variety of reasons, but one that strikes me most as a researcher is the fact that their point of origin is not purely fictional, but instead has its roots embedded in folklore - a true belief in revenants, “undead” beings that rise from their graves and wreak havoc on the living. This is not unlike many other legendary figures that still persist in media even today, for example the fairy is a well known creature that similarly derives its origins from European folklore and is seen today in children’s books, movies, and television shows. Elves, leprechauns, and gnomes hold similar roots, and yet to many, the vampire remains separate.

For one, the vampire is a somewhat inarguably malicious creature, and when it doesn’t appear as such, it’s done with intention. For example, in the *Twilight* series by Stephanie Meyer, the vampires are seen as potentially dangerous and certainly powerful due to their superhuman powers, but they aren’t generally seen as malicious *because* they make a conscious effort to be vegetarian, thus not hurting humans. In *Dracula*, the imposing vampire is certainly seen as a villain, and a danger and evil to all, and in *Interview with the Vampire*, while Lestat and Louis are seen as somewhat sympathetic, they are undeniably a threat to humans and perceived at many points as being inherently evil.

The vampire also takes hold in the modern psyche as undeniably human-like - as if their presence is among us, not separate, as their inherent need for consumption of human parts requires some level of integration into human society. But their anthropomorphic characteristics alone do not separate them from these other beings of folkloristic origin - elves and fairies often take a similar form to humans, if slightly altered by different minor traits, and sometimes live amongst humans, too. I believe that the most important distinguishing factor between vampires

and other mythological beings is that the vampire's very roots are human. They are transformed beings, not inherently non-human, but rather *undead*, an entirely separate category of mythological or legendary beings that are shaped from humans themselves, thus increasing their threat level immensely as humans do not just have to fear being attacked by them, but being transformed into them.

With all this in mind, I think it is important to first give a brief but detailed catalog of the folkloristic foundations of vampires, as these stories, myths, and legends do indeed pave the way for the significant and important later literary works rooted in vampirism and revenants. There are lots of complexities and nuances to the vampire's existence and presence in storytelling, and this information aims to give a jumping-off point for all of that.

### *A Timeline of the Spread of Folklore*

Where better to begin but the Balkans? There is no distinct, official agreement for which nations belong to the Balkans, but it's generally agreed on that Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia make up the heart of this ancient Eastern European region. These three nations also just so happen to be the owners of some of the earliest, most defined and culturally significant vampire legends - legends that generally seem to be the most influential in the Western visualization and identity of the vampire.

The interest and fascination with the folklore surrounding vampires first emerged on a wide-spread level in the early 1700s after Austria's acquisition of portions of Serbia and Wallachia, both being Balkan places where the rituals of exhuming and re-killing the dead were practiced. Western Europe became immediately interested in this practice once the knowledge of it became wide-spread, and Germany took an exceptional interest in the subject, as throughout

the 18th and 19th centuries many works would be published involving vampires and the practices involved in trying to rid them from villages within Germany.<sup>3</sup> As these old, previously culturally-confined practices and stories spread across Europe, so too did the fears associated with them.

These fears were not a brief cultural hiccup, either. They lingered on in the Balkans for centuries. A source from 1923 discusses the origination of the folklore in great detail, and shows how it progressed in its place of origin as the myth spread - British anthropologist Edith Durham tells of an account from Montenegro wherein a young woman was forbidden from marrying a young man, who then left the country in despair, died, and then returned as a vampire. After he returned, he allegedly visited the woman who then bore a child who was "so exactly like the man that there could be no possible doubt of paternity." This source also talks of how to kill a vampire according to the people of Montenegro. As stated, "A corpse suspected of being a vampire can be stopped from rising from the grave either by the usual method of transfixing the body with a stake - a ceremony at which the priest must assist - or by hamstringing the corpse, or by burning it."<sup>4</sup>

Most of these accounts are from long ago, but not all. Take, for example, the legend of Sava Savanovic. In 2012, an old water mill on the Rogacica River in Serbia collapsed - one that was fabled to have housed the legendary vampire Sava Savanovic. A public health warning was issued in the collapse's wake, the community fearing that Savanovic was now on the loose and looking for new victims to drink the blood of. According to Miodrag Vujetec, a local municipal assembly member who was interviewed by ABC following the mill's collapse, "People are very worried. Everybody knows the legend of this vampire and the thought that he is now homeless

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<sup>3</sup>Barber, 5.

<sup>4</sup>Edith Durham, "Of Magic, Witches and Vampires in the Balkans," *Man* 23 (December 1923), 189.

and looking for somewhere else and possibly other victims is terrifying people... We are all frightened. [Villagers] are all taking precautions by having holy crosses and icons placed above the entrance to the house, rubbing our hands with garlic, and having a hawthorn stake or thorn."<sup>5</sup> Dr. James Lyon was also interviewed by ABC about the incident, saying, "In the dark forested mountains of Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Croatia, many people still believe in vampires and take them quite seriously... In local folklore, vampires are not potential boyfriends. Rather, they are hideous, blood thirsty creatures with red eyes and iron teeth that bloat when they feed, and are able to shift their shape."<sup>6</sup> Indeed, belief in vampires is far from dead. Ancient, certainly, but not so easily killed.

#### *How to Become a Vampire According to Folklore: A Complex, Multi-Step Guide*

In many modern literary adaptations of the vampire myth, becoming a vampire is pretty simple. It usually has something to do with blood, and is usually performed by an existing vampire, such as being bitten by a vampire like in *Dracula*, by having the vampire inject their vampiric venom into the victim like in *Twilight*, or by drinking the blood of a vampire to strengthen one's vampirism like in *Interview with the Vampire*. However, in the folkloristic origins of the vampire myth, the path to becoming one of these ghastly, undead entities is not so simple or cut-and-dry.

There are many different ways to become a vampire according to European folklore, documented well by Paul Barber in *Vampires, Burial, and Death*. There is the subset of belief that people are predestined to become vampires, and this can be predicted by a multitude of factors. Included in his documentation are: babies who are born with teeth, born with a split

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<sup>5</sup>ABC News, "Vampire Threat Terrorizes Serbian Village," *ABC News*, November 28, 2012, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/vampire-threat-terrorizes-serbian-village/story?id=17831327#.ULdq69Pjnop>.

<sup>6</sup>ABC News.

lower lip, born with a red amniotic membrane covering its head, people with red hair and blue eyes, and more. More commonly, though, is the belief that certain events that occur during one's life will cause one to become a vampire after death. These are extensive in nature and also quite peculiar at times. Below is a list of some of the most common and interesting I've found.

- If the deceased's brother is a sleepwalker,
  - If, during the deceased's lifetime, his shadow is stolen,
  - If the deceased committed suicide,
  - If the deceased was murdered,
  - If the deceased drowned,
  - If the deceased died of a stroke,
  - If the deceased is the first to die of an epidemic, (and, in his wake, he will be cited as the *cause* of the spread of disease, not because of pathology, but because of evil, vampiric ways,)
  - If the deceased is a woman who died in childbirth,
  - If the deceased's corpse swells before burial (notably, a normal stage of decomposition explainable by modern science),
  - If the deceased died alone,
  - If the deceased is a mother whose child needs or wants her post-mortem,
- Among many others.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the most common and most well-documented cause of vampirism in the dead is, strangely, an animal jumping or flying over the dead before they are buried. In Edith Durham's 1923 account of Montenegro, she states, "When a corpse is awaiting burial it is most necessary that it should be constantly watched. If a cat should jump over it, it is sure to become a

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<sup>7</sup>Barber, 30-37.

vampire.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, a bat flying over a coffin is also a sure sign of vampirism post-mortem, according to Barber, an interesting note as bats are very common in vampire literature but scarcely mentioned in folklore.

Many of these deaths and events have a strong similarity: They are all, in some way, tragic or untimely deaths, or involve an improper burial. Dying in a “bad way” or being buried carelessly or with haste seem to be rather surefire ways for a deceased individual to become a vampire. So, in short, becoming a vampire is not as simple as simply being bitten on the neck by a tall, elegant, caped man - an unfortunate disappointment to many of those interested in vampire literature.

### *Keeping the Dead, Dead*

A common theme in vampire literature is the idea of staking a vampire through the heart to kill it. This method of killing one of these beasts is not just a literary construction; it is actually thought to trace its origin back to that of folkloristic methods of keeping the dead buried.

*Vampire-Proofing your Village*, by Matthew Brunwass, discusses two skeletons dated to the 14th century found in the Bulgarian town of Sozopol by archaeologist Dimitar Nedev. These skeletons were found with evidence that people really wanted them to stay in their graves. One had a metal object driven through the solar plexus, and the other a “plowshare-like object” in the left side of his ribcage. Nedev believes these burial sites to be evidence for belief in vampires during the middle ages in Bulgaria, a belief that went beyond simple storytelling, and one that even called for tangible mitigation tactics. However, he also notes that, “It is not as if the word ‘vampire’ were written on their foreheads or they had very long teeth.” These burials do indeed suggest the

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<sup>8</sup>Durham, 189.

belief in vampires, but we can never know what the intentions of these rituals truly were with absolute certainty.<sup>9</sup>

Another easy method of keeping revenants underground is by placing an object with the corpse, which, as Barber puts it, “are usually expected (1) to satisfy it somehow, thereby relieving it of the need to return from the dead, (2) to render it incapable of returning, or (3) to satisfy or thwart any demonic force that attempts to interfere with the corpse.” Many of these accounts involve placing something inside or overtop of the mouth of the corpse, such as a cotton or wax seal<sup>10</sup> or a brick.<sup>11</sup> This was thought to give the corpse something to chew on or otherwise keep them preoccupied so they would not arise from the dead and eat or harm the living. These are just a few examples of methods of keeping the dead in the ground - there are many, many different ways, and all tend to vary by culture but often simply focus on the logistics of keeping the revenants under the ground and out of sight and mind.

### *How did these Beliefs all Start?*

There are several proposed theories as to why vampire myths and legends first came into fruition and why so many people became convinced of their existence, but across the board, they were used as a way to explain the minutiae of decay, grief, and all things associated with death that may have been poorly understood at the time. *Plague Vampire Exorcism* by Samir S. Patel discusses how some stages of decay and putrefaction were not understood by those in the middle ages, and thus natural stages of decomposition were misinterpreted by many as being signs of vampirism. In this particular case, the archaeologist finds a skeleton with a brick in its mouth,

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<sup>9</sup>“Vampire-Proofing Your Village,” *Archeology Magazine*, Archeological Institute of America, September/October 2012, <https://archaeology.org/issues/september-october-2012/digs-discoveries/vampire-proofing-your-village/>.

<sup>10</sup>Barber, 47.

<sup>11</sup>Samir S. Patel, “Plague Vampire Exorcism,” *Archeology Archive*, Archeological Institute of America, 2009, <https://archive.archaeology.org/online/features/halloween/plague.html>.

determined to be a form of exorcism intended on keeping the dead revenant from eating its way out of the grave - eating its way out being the proposed means of excavation that people believed these creatures took in making their way out of the ground.<sup>12</sup> In actuality, and in very stomach-turning detail, the shrouds that the dead would be covered with would sometimes absorb the purge fluid that came out of the mouths of the dead, making it appear as though the dead were trying to eat their way out or had consumed blood.

This lack of knowledge about decay was an especially important factor during times of plague, interestingly enough. As it was common to reopen mass graves to add more corpses, people were more often exposed to the stages of decomposition that they really would have no reason to have seen before, and if they were under the false but pre-scientifically logical explanation that bodies stay completely still and unaltered post-mortem, these stages were easily misinterpreted as something else, and at that, something supernatural. As Paul Barber puts it, “Lacking a proper grounding in physiology, pathology, and immunology, how are people to account for disease and death? The common course... is to blame death on the dead, who are apt to be observed closely for clues as to how they accomplish their mischief.”<sup>13</sup>

The plague aspect of this theory not only interests me as an incredibly logical and sensical reason for why people could have believed in such creatures, but it also makes me wonder if this is why the vampire myth was so prevalent in middle age villages rife with the Black Death, and then also popular in Western Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, a time where diseases like tuberculosis and cholera were ever so common - did the vampire myth itself that spread like the plague spread *with* plagues, too?

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<sup>12</sup>Patel.

<sup>13</sup>Barber, 3.

Did the fear and uncertainty associated with disease translate to a fear of undead revenants as a means to give tangibility to an otherwise intangible horror? It's certainly a likely possibility, and one that would explain people's relative ease in accepting vampires as being real. I think it is often far easier for people to accept something horrific than to admit they do not know what is going on. "The unknown" is far scarier than a dead man rising from his grave - and serves as an immensely powerful driving force in the construction of belief systems in general.

But, enough of our long-gone mythos of old - it is time to begin unraveling the links between the folkloric vampire - a frightening, ghastly, bloated old corpse, and our fictional vampire - an otherworldly creature of beauty, mystery, and allure.

## The Flight of the Vampire: A Transition from Superstition to Storytelling

As we've already covered, the vampire, a creature of legend, malice and fear, has transformed from a localized myth in the Balkans into a pervasive cultural icon with global reach. Its origins are traced back to the mythology and superstition of Eastern Europe, where, after the Treaty of Passarowitz in 1718, Austrian authorities documented reports of people exhuming and re-killing their dead, spurred on by a belief in vampires. So taken aback by such a foreign and frightening affair, these accounts would go on to spark widespread interest across Europe and beyond, blending science, superstition, and storytelling into one cultural entity. What began as a localized fear soon morphed into a literary phenomenon and scientific endeavor, eventually resulting in an iconic figure of Western cinema and beyond. From early Gothic stories in Germany to the famous works of Lord Byron and John Polidori to the modern, global cinematic utilization of the vampire as an iconic, totemic figure, the vampire has undergone a dramatic transformation over the course of its existence. This paper will explore, detail, and timeline how the vampire, once a figure confined to the folklore and superstitions of Eastern Europe, became an international, worldwide symbol of terror and intrigue, influencing literature, superstition, and pop culture on a global scale. In other words, this essay will deeply examine and delve into that deliciously fleeting time where vampires were not just folkloristic or fictional entities - but both, and neither.

The Balkans as a region had been largely sequestered from Western Europe up until the Treaty of Passarowitz due to both the geological limitations - the Carpathian Mountains being the major example of this, but so too were harsh winters and various other factors - as well as a general lack of political overlap. Signed in 1718, the treaty ended the Austro-Turkish war and annexed parts of Serbia and Wallachia (a historic region of Romania) to Austria. With Austrian

foot regiments entering these regions upon their acquisition to patrol and secure the area once the treaty was signed, immense cultural differences were noticed and recorded by the new Austrian overseers - the most eye-catching being that of the vampire. Recorded accounts of Austrian authorities, particularly medics that were part of foot soldier regiments, such as Viennese physician Johann Friedrich Glaser and Regimental Field Surgeon Johannes Fluckinger, describe the seemingly supernatural occurrences of the undead coming back to life to wreak havoc on the living - or at least the fears and practices of the villagers who believed this to be true.

Glaser and Fluckinger originally composed their reports for an elusive investigative report entitled *Visum et Repertum* which still sneakily evades scholars to this day, at least in its full, comprehensive and untouched form, but according to a translation from the text found in Klaus Hamberger's original dissertation on vampirism from 1689-1791, Glaser writes,

[I] searched and examined the same village from house to house, carefully and precisely, on December 12, 1731; but not a single contagious disease or contagious condition was found... when I inquired further why they then swear that 13 people had died within 6 weeks, and what they complained about before their death... from which conditions they believe the all-too-quick burials, one after the other, cannot be possible, but rather because the aforementioned vampires, or bloodsuckers, were present. Whereupon I, as well as their own officers, tried to put it out of their minds as best we could... but it was not possible to change their opinion.

In this account, Glaser describes what must have felt like an irrationally superstitious village, concerned that a creature of the night was causing this death and destruction when it was almost certainly merely an ordinary (yet elusive, clearly, as no "contagious

condition” was found) pathogen wreaking its havoc on a community, as pathogens so often do. I’ll try not to sound like a broken record here, but the notes of disease and plague here should be ringing some bells - and the theme of scapegoating the vampire as an explanation for unexplainable terror and decay should be, too.<sup>14</sup>

In a different translation from Sturm and Volker’s *Von denen Vampiren oder Menschensaugern*, another account of a vampire can be seen, with the text by Field Surgeon Fluckinger reading,

In twenty or thirty days after his death some people complained that they were being bothered by this same Arnod Paole; and in fact four people were killed by him. In order to end this evil, they dug up this Arnod Paole forty days after his death— this on the advice of their Hadnack, who had been present at such events before; and they found that he was quite complete and undecayed, and that fresh blood had flowed from his eyes, nose, mouth, and ears; that the shirt, the covering, and the coffin were completely bloody; that the old nails on his hands and feet, along with the skin, had fallen off, and that new ones had grown; and since they saw from this that he was a true vampire, they drove a stake through his heart, according to their custom, whereby he gave an audible groan and bled copiously.

Most with even the slightest interest in Balkan vampire folklore have at least a familiarity with the name Arnold Paole (Germanized into Arnod here, but the same entity regardless) or Petar Blagojevic, both alleged vampires who were first documented by these regiments of Austrian foot soldiers and medics. It spread far and wide following the publication of *Visum et Repertum*,

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<sup>14</sup> See previous pages 15-16 for a comprehensive detailing on vampires, disease, and plagues. Oh, joy!

and would soon manifest itself in wider society both in genuine scientific interest and the long awaited Gothic literature.

In 1728, German theologian Michael Raft penned “Über das Kauen und Schmatzen der Todten in Gräbern,” which literally translates to “about the chewing and the smacking of the dead in graves,” but I find it translates less humorously and more helpfully to simply “a scientific treatise on vampirism in Europe.” This was not an out of the ordinary publication for the time, as Germany was going through an immense scientific enlightenment period, and curiosity or answer seeking of this nature was common, particularly in relation to supernatural or paranormal occurrences. However, this *is* thought to be the first time the vampire was studied in a traditionally Western, scientific lens, and was published on a broad scale, no doubt due to the influx of vampire stories from the Balkans.

In another instance, Christolob Mylius, the editor for the popular scientific journal *Der Naturforscher*, or *The Naturalist*, (notably a disappointingly less funny translation than the former,) wrote a journal on vampires in 1748 and commissioned his close friend poet Heinrich August Ossenfelder to write a poem for the subject, entitled *Der Vampir*. This poem is the first known use of a vampire character in a poetic setting, and one of the very first to be used in fiction as a whole according to a wide variety of scholars in the field. Following this creative leap into the foray of combining science, superstition, and fiction, many other writers followed suit. The amount of Gothic German literature during and following the enlightenment is easily understated - even if the creature himself is not outright described, the influence is potent and clear in many works of Gothic fiction, with heavy themes of death, decay, blood, and monsters influencing a vast amount of Gothic literature at this time.

Though concentrated within the nation's bounds, vampire fiction was not limited to Germany in this time. In 1764, even the famous French writer Voltaire entered the vampiric literary scene with a satirical piece comparing predatory businessmen and stock market traders to vampires.<sup>15</sup> Eventually, the vampire stories made their way to Britain, with the nation's Romantic literary era taking hold. Lord Byron was likely inspired by these revenant figures and began to tell stories of his own regarding the creatures after reading notes from poet laureate Robert Southey about Joseph Pitton de Tournefort's account *A Voyage Into the Levant*. This account contained his musings of Eastern European culture following his return home from said "voyage," with special focus on antiquities and paranormal/supernatural entities such as the vampire. Thus began an obsession by British writers and readers alike of the monster, the totemic icon, the vampire, taking off on the peaceful coast of Lake Geneva.

During the slow summer holiday of 1816, often called "the year without a summer," as it was particularly rainy and gray all season long, Lord Byron and Dr. John Polidori (Byron's personal physician and literary rival) were renting a beautiful mansion on the shores of Lake Geneva, Villa Diodati, hoping for a relaxing summer getaway. (*This "relaxing getaway" was spurred on by a disgracing of Lord Byron after it was rumored that he'd cheated on his wife with his half-sister. Always the deeply concerning relationships with these fellows - eccentric writers will do as eccentric writers will do I suppose.*) The two grew wearisome and bored, however, as

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<sup>15</sup> In this piece, Voltaire essentially posited that Balkan countries were *not* the only countries to have vampires, as was commonly believed, but instead that French and English vampires shamelessly stepped out into the daylight as businessmen and bankers. Having read this, if you've an ounce of media literacy, it might not shock you to know that many literary critics believe Voltaire to have been very anti-semitic, and that his depiction of the vampire along with many other monsters were simply harmful negative Jewish stereotypes and anti-semitic propaganda. I don't have time in this already too long footnote to explain to you how much of a racist, sexist, and altogether not very good person Voltaire was (even for his time... yikes!) while still being a very influential and important-to-mention writer. Go do some research, and think critically!

incessant rain and cold kept them confined to the indoors for nearly the entire season. Mary Shelley, (*Mary Godwin at the time, as her and Percy were still on the lam after Percy had run away from his wife and children to have an affair with Mary. This wife, named (Who was also 16 at the time. Uh oh!)*) Percy Shelley, and Mary's stepsister Claire Clairmont (*Will you be surprised if I inform you that, not only were Percy Shelley and Clairmont likely sexually involved for a time, but that also Byron and Clairmont had an extremely scandalous series of sexual escapades during this summer which resulted in a child in January of 1817 that Byron would go on to reject at first but then put in a convent where she later died at 5 years old? Life at that Villa MUST have been boring.*) were also renting a smaller house nearby, and would often visit the Villa Diodati to convene with their close literary friends. Bored as they were, and as all of them were avid writers, they decided to have a story writing contest - this time, given the dreary, grim weather, it would be a ghost story writing competition.

This tale is an incredibly famous one passed around as a sort of folklore by literature scholars even still today, and is most famous for having produced *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*, Mary Shelley's most influential work that is often described as being the first true science fiction book. However, this contest also produced the two first British vampire stories. Byron and Polidori, long time literary rivals, spent their summer attempting to outdo each other in their stories, and would eventually produce *Fragment of a Novel* and *The Vampyre* respectively, taking after Tournefort's ghoulish tales of Eastern Europe. Influenced by Polidori's work as evidenced by the use of similar themes and iconography, James Malcolm Rymer would write *Varney the Vampyre* in 1820, one of the most successful penny dreadfuls of all time. Again, just as the German Enlightenment era saw an impossible to understate amount of vampire fiction in that time, so too did 1800s England, largely due to the success and cultural weight of that

summer at Lake Geneva. These stories paved the way for a far higher anxiety level and extremely prevalent levels of superstition once disease and death raged through the country through this century, especially during the haunting killings of Jack the Ripper. An account of one of the Ripper's killings even directly mentions the vampire as a figure, stating,

...it is so impossible to account... for these revolting acts of blood that the mind turns as it were instinctively to some theory of occult force, and the myths of the dark ages rise before the imagination. Ghouls, vampires, bloodsuckers, and all the ghastly array of fables which have been accumulated throughout the course of centuries take form, and seize hold of the excited fancy.

These anxieties, then, were clearly not just the fears associated with fiction. A real fear of the vampire began to extend beyond the page in Western Europe, permeating all that was bad, evil, or taboo about society, an easy blame for what was unexplainably horrific.

This true and superstitious anxiety even made its way across the pond as a number of accounts of vampirism were documented in New England in the 19th century. Colloquially referred to as the "New England Vampire Panic," it's thought that, with the invisible threats of tuberculosis and other diseases ravaging communities in the Northeast United States, people turned to last resort, superstitious means to end the suffering. Because of how epidemics spread, being that one member of a community contracts a disease, spreads it to the others, and then dies, it is easy to point the blame at that first individual, and to attempt to end the terror by further ending their life, a.e. exhuming and re-killing them. According to a Smithsonian article, "Incredulous city newspaper reporters dished about the "Horrible Superstition" on front pages. A traveling minister describes an exhumation in his daily log on September 3, 1810. (The "mouldy Specticle," he writes, was a "Solemn Site.") Even Henry David Thoreau mentions an exhumation

in his journal on September 29, 1859.” Another account from *American Anthropologist* in 1896 describes an event in New England wherein an exhumation on the suspicion of a vampire was performed.

In the same village resides Mr. [ ], an intelligent man, by trade a mason, who is a living witness of the superstition and of the efficacy of the treatment of the dead which is prescribed. He informed me that he had lost two brothers by consumption. Upon the attack of the second brother his father was advised ... to take up the first body and burn its heart, but the brother attacked objected to the sacrilege and in consequence subsequently died. When he was attacked by the disease in his turn, [ ]'s advice prevailed, and the body of the brother last dead was accordingly exhumed, and "living" blood being found in the heart and in circulation, it was cremated, and the sufferer began immediately to mend and stood before me a hale, hearty, and vigorous man of fifty years. When questioned as to his understanding of the miraculous influence, he could suggest nothing and did not recognize the superstition even by name. He remembered that the doctors did not believe in its efficacy, but he and many others did. His father saw the brother's body and the arterial blood.

The influence of the vampire in explaining away the unexplainable is clear, and yet, parallel to these developments, he as a figure remained steadfast in literature - and, soon, film.

*Dracula* by Bram Stoker scarcely needs an introduction. Published in 1897, the work swiftly and steadily became the most influential piece of vampire literature to ever exist. As Matthew Beresford states, “Love it or loathe it, [*Dracula*] is certainly one of the most famous stories ever written, be it a classic text or otherwise, and is perhaps the only occasion where all

the different aspects of the vampire, from history, folklore and literature, combine.” The novel is not only a foundational text in the entire legacy of the vampire in media, but so too is it a culturally pervasive figure around the world, even today. The vampire in general as we know it is directly inspired by Count Dracula as a character and a myth, and countless interpretations of the character - like Count Chocula, The Count from *Sesame Street*, and Bela Lugosi’s 1931 depiction of the fearsome creature in *Dracula*. This film took a hold of culture of America - immersed in the Great Depression, horror films of all kinds boomed. As William Manchester states in a 1975 article for the *New York Times*, “[T]he worst years of the Depression were great years for horror movies. What was sick in these films seemed to appeal to what was sick in the country. . .” *Dracula* was no exception, with its thrilling and terrifying supernatural story. It was unlike any other story of its time, as most horror stories had a more rational explanation - *Dracula*, on the other hand, “expected its audience to accept a five-hundred-year-old vampire as a reality.” Despite Tinseltown’s hesitations, the film took off and was even more appreciated for its departure from everything else of its genre.

As previously discussed, the vampire had been present in Europe and the United States for some time by the famous 1931 film depiction of Dracula, with various enterprising and influential works being both penned and filmed during the turnover of the vampire from folklore to fiction, but no work of vampire fiction was more *globally* renowned and influential than Lugosi’s *Dracula*. This film spurred global interest in the vampire in a way never seen before. No longer was the vampire limited to Europe and America - he was an enterprising, totemic figure of terror and taboo across the globe. With the far more commercially successful and potential-filled industry of cinema becoming far more viable and global, *Dracula* saw near immediate and triumphant success. As Matthew Beresford states, “...it was not until the

mass-market technology of cinema, which allowed for the widespread success of the *Dracula* films starring Bela Lugosi and Christopher Lee from the 1930s onwards, that any really widely accepted vampire form became apparent... Had it not been for Stoker's novel the vampire we all recognize today may never have existed." In the wake of *Dracula*, a booming genre was expanded and, in many ways, truly created on a global scale within cinema: the monster movie.

Following Bela Lugosi's *Dracula* comes works like *Drakula Istanbul'da*, or, *Dracula in Istanbul* from Turkey in 1953, 吸血蛾 or *Vampire Moth* from Japan in 1956, *El Vampiro* from Mexico in 1957, *Mr. Vampire* from Hong Kong in 1985, *Outback Vampires* from Australia in 1987, *Night Watch* from Russia in 2004, *Perfect Creature* from New Zealand in 2006, *Let the Right One In* from Sweden in 2008, *The Twilight Saga* from the United States beginning in 2008, *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* from Iran in 2014, *Curse* from India in 2018, *El Conde* from Chile in 2023, and many, many, many others. The vampire as a figure has undergone a drastic transformation from a localized folkloric creature from Eastern European superstition to a global icon of horror, taboo, and darkness. The Treaty of Passarowitz in 1718 and the subsequent Austrian reports on alleged vampires and sightings of these creatures acted as a spark to ignite the flame of the vampire's spread. Spurring on both cultural and scientific explorations into the vampire, the vampire moved from a purely folkloric entity to a powerful character of literary fame, becoming a central figure in the Gothic and Romantic literary movements. This movement reached its peak with the publication of *Dracula* in 1897, and went truly global after the release of the 1931 Universal Pictures film of the same title. In summary, the vampire, originating in a small sector of Eastern Europe, has spread its legacy across the globe, slowly but surely becoming a worldwide phenomenon, rivaling the largest literary icons and film stars with its influence and legacy.

## The Traits of the Vampire: A Dissection of what makes a Vampire, a Vampire

“I have found it necessary to distinguish repeatedly between the fictional and the folkloric vampire... The two would be unlikely to meet socially.” -Paul Barber

To compare and contrast all of my vampiric subjects, I’ve devised this chart including the vampires of the aforementioned Balkan folklore and 3 of the most famous vampires in literature: Dracula from *Dracula*, Lestat de Lioncourt from *Interview with the Vampire*, and Edward Cullen from *Twilight*. The traits I’ve chosen are traits that I find to be incredibly popular stereotypes when discussing vampires. This reality will become relevant later on in the discussion of the implications of this chart.

Trait	<i>Folkloric Vampires</i>	<i>Dracula</i>	<i>Lestat</i>	<i>Edward</i>
<i>Blood-sucking</i>	Allegedly	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Immortal without outside intervention</i>	No	Yes <sup>16</sup>	Yes	Yes
<i>Averse to sunlight</i>	No	Yes	Yes	No <sup>17</sup>
<i>Superhuman strength</i>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Shape-shifting</i>	No	Yes	No	No

<sup>16</sup>This one’s a bit puzzling - Dracula is physically immortal without outside intervention, but he is killed at the end of the novel. The other two also *can* be killed, but are *not* in their respective novels.

<sup>17</sup> The Cullens do not show an aversion to sunlight, but it should be noted that they *do* sparkle in the sun. As Stephanie Meyer writes, “Edward in the sunlight was shocking. I couldn’t get used to it, though I’d been staring at him all afternoon. His skin, white despite the faint flush from yesterday’s hunting trip, literally sparkled, like thousands of tiny diamonds were embedded in the surface.”

Trait	<i>Folkloric Vampires</i>	<i>Dracula</i>	<i>Lestat</i>	<i>Edward</i>
<i>Blood-sucking</i>	Allegedly	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Superpowers of some kind</i>	No	Yes <sup>18</sup>	Yes <sup>19</sup>	Yes <sup>20</sup>
<i>Weakness to garlic</i>	No	Yes	No	No <sup>21</sup>
<i>Weakness to silver</i>	No	Yes	No	No
<i>Weakness to holy symbols</i>	Varies <sup>22</sup>	Yes	No	No
<i>Dark cloak/cape</i>	No	Yes	Yes	No
<i>Bats as a motif</i>	No	Yes	No	Debated <sup>23</sup>
<i>Gothic/dark fashion</i>	No	Yes	Yes	No <sup>24</sup>
<i>Fangs</i>	Varies	Yes	Yes	No

<sup>18</sup> As aforementioned, Dracula can shapeshift. He also has abilities such as superhuman strength, flight, hypnosis, etc.

<sup>19</sup> Lestat possesses otherworldly strength and other superhuman feats early on in his vampire-hood, but he gains even more strength through drinking the blood of the original vampires later on. This makes him nearly unkillable.

<sup>20</sup> All of the Cullens have superpowers of some sort. Edward can read minds, Alice has precognition abilities similar to clairvoyance, Jasper has pathokinesis or the ability to manipulate others' emotions, Emmett has superior strength, etc.

<sup>21</sup> The Cullens also do not have an aversion to garlic, but as a potential nod to this historic literary aversion, in the *Twilight* movie, Esme Cullen (Edward's adoptive mother) prepares Bella Italian food when she first visits the family home, a culinary sect rife with garlic.

<sup>22</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, priests often had to be present at burials of those thought to be likely to turn into a vampire, but nowhere in my research did I find evidence of crucifixes or holy water being used against so-called "real" vampires.

<sup>23</sup> Admittedly, this fact is not debated by many. However, one of the most iconic scenes in *Twilight (2008)* is "the baseball scene," a dramatic and cheesy scene where the whole family plays baseball, with their powerful swings of the baseball bats being disguised by a thunderstorm overhead. I've seen some discussion online about this scene being a nod to the shapeshifting, bat-bedecked vampires of yester-year, with the baseball *bats* referencing the small, winged mammals. A loose connection, but an interesting and awfully fun one nonetheless.

<sup>24</sup> While the modernizing, vegetarian Cullen family is never depicted in gothic or traditionally vampiric clothing, their rival coven the Volturi are incredibly reminiscent of Bela Lugosi's original Dracula portrayal, bedecked in very formal Victorian gothic attire and possessing long, black hair with a widow's peak so sharp it could kill.

Trait	<i>Folkloric Vampires</i>	<i>Dracula</i>	<i>Lestat</i>	<i>Edward</i>
<i>Blood-sucking</i>	Allegedly	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Attractive</i>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Pale skin</i>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Lack of Mirror Reflection</i>	No	Yes	No	No

Now, that's a lot of information to unpack. I'm going to break it down into some subtopics so it can be a bit more easily digested, and then go over some of the implications I believe this has on the trajectory of the vampire as a literary and cultural icon.

### *Dracula Sweep*

As is incredibly obvious upon consulting the chart, *Dracula* does not just fit over half, nor a majority of these items, but every single one. Every vampiric stereotype I could come up with, from dress to appearance to behavior, all fall in line with *Dracula*'s description. Folkloric vampires fit almost none, *Lestat* fits a little over half, and *Edward* just under half, but *Dracula* shows no variance. He fits every category. He embodies the fictional vampire in every possible sense. This will become extremely relevant to my theorization surrounding the trajectory of the vampire, discussed at length later in this chapter.

### *Folklore vs Literature*

As aforementioned, the vampires of folklore share very, very little with the vampires of literature. The vampires of folklore are vile, repulsive, and frightening, and the vampires of literature are overall alluring, beautiful, and powerful - this is easy to see. However, one note I wanted to make here regards *Interview with the Vampire*. In the novel, when main character Louis and his vampiric daughter Claudia travel to Eastern Europe to search for other vampires, they stumble across Balkan villages rife with the belief in vampires. They find the vampires there to be slow, sluggish, grotesque, and zombie-like - not unlike the vampires of folklore discussed here. I thought this was interesting and important to note because, as far as my research took me, this was the only piece of literature I found that retained some portrayal of the vampires of yesteryear. What is also interesting is that this scene is omitted *completely* from the movie version of *Interview with the Vampire* - it is simply skipped, and has no recourse on the plot. This could be a sign that the pop cultural familiarity with traditional, folkloric vampires is waning and is not as prevalent or known by many.

### *Gender and Sexuality*

I think it would be an error to not mention the fact that all of these characters that I've utilized here are male. There are some extreme nuances and critical details when it comes to the differences between female and male vampires in literature. As will be explained in greater depth in the next essay, gender plays a massive role when it comes to the perception of vampires in literature. Psychology has a great deal to do with this - sexuality and sex in general is inherently intertwined with the vampire's existence as a figure, (again, we'll jump into that much more later,) and so the roles and norms of different genders in sex acts has a great deal to do with how

vampires are perceived as well. My reason for excluding some famous female vampires is a hesitation to compare apples to oranges - these 3 male vampires can be compared easily without any confusion or confounding, where the vampire *Carmilla* may pose some more challenges.

### *The Modernizing Vampire*

It seems that in the wake of Dracula's so-called "sweep" we have a sort of drop-off in terms of fittingness with the stereotypical attributes. The Count fits 16, Lestat 10, and Edward 6. Nowadays, a vampire who resembles Dracula would not be unfamiliar to audiences familiar with western media and pop culture even on a surface level, but many might imagine a younger, brooding teenage boy like Edward Cullen when thinking of a vampire in the modern age as they have become so transformed. I believe that a survey regarding how one imagines a vampire in accordance with their generation would yield incredibly informative results as to how the vampire has changed through the past century, especially now in the 2020s, where the oldest generations grew up with *Nosferatu* and Bela Lugosi's *Dracula*, and the younger generations grew up with *My Babysitter's a Vampire* and *Twilight*. Certainly something interesting to think about, and potentially an avenue for further study on the subject.

### *Conclusions*

It seems to me that later literature such as *Interview with the Vampire* and *Twilight* construct their vampires in reference, even if loose, to the first famous fiction work, that being *Dracula*, and not the folkloric vampires of old. Moreover, this points to the idea that *Dracula* inherently transformed and revolutionized how we see vampires in the modern age - less as grisly monsters, but more as a character archetype and device for interesting storytelling and

spooky, supernatural world-building. And as is evidenced by the chart above, Dracula does not make any significant reference to the vampires of Bulgarian legend. It's simply no wonder that our modern vampires bear very little resemblance to those bloodsucking folkloristic beasts of the olden days - but why is that, exactly? Why have they become so transformed, so unrecognizable from their frightening, otherworldly and dangerous roots?

## The Appeal of the Vampire: Why We Can't Resist

One of the greatest mysteries of the vampire in my own personal opinion is not how a mythological creature of Balkan folklore became so complexly intertwined with American popular culture, nor how their existence was attempted to be defended by science up until the 1800s in England. Though these do certainly raise an eyebrow, one of my greatest fascinations with these creatures is how their vile, loathsome, and fearsome selves became dominating, powerful sex symbols in the 20th century and angsty, brooding teen heartthrobs in the modern age. Perhaps a blunt way of putting it, but a truth nonetheless.

Each vampire has his or her own way of approaching sex and attraction, but it should first be noted that vampirism in itself is often utilized as an extended, sometimes complex metaphor for sex and sexuality. Oftentimes in vampire stories, a virginal and young woman is bitten by a vampire, blood is taken from her, and as she turns into a vampire herself she is essentially inseminated with evil by the, oftentimes, older and male vampire. In this sense, the blood that is taken from the woman symbolizes the pure and often highly culturally valuable virginity. The insemination of evil represents reproductive insemination, as the biting *is* reproduction in a sense for vampires as it turns the woman into a vampire, and she essentially births a new vampire from herself. Additionally, in *Dracula*, the image of “red blood on a white nightgown” is used liberally, a visual representation of the aforementioned metaphor for defloration.<sup>25</sup> This coupled with the so-called otherworldly, inhuman beauty and appeal of so many of these characters and the hypnotic, mind-controlling powers that many of them possess makes it quite easy to see how sexuality and attraction is a critical piece of the puzzle when dissecting this literature, and the cultural shockwaves and perceptions caused by it.

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<sup>25</sup>James Twitchell, “The Vampire Myth,” *American Imago* 37 (Spring 1980), 87.

What's less obvious and a bit more covert is the interesting dynamics and implications that this fact poses, and what we can extrapolate from its presence in literature.

### *Family Matters*

One very interesting aspect of vampire sexuality is the transient nature of it - due to the mechanics of vampire reproduction, that being that a vampire often takes a person romantically and then turns them into a vampire, vampires turn from lovers of the vampire into kin. This also makes familial/romantic lines incredibly blurry, which is a slippery slope in a lot of this literature.

This fact is why the appearance and relationships of the vampire women Dracula has taken is so confusing - are they daughters, or are they wives? In *Dracula*, Jonathan Harker meets 3 vampire women in Dracula's castle - referred to as *lamias* - and is confused as to their relation to Dracula himself. According to *A Vampire in the Mirror* by John Allen Stevenson, the answer is both in regard to their status as lovers or kin - however, not simultaneously. Rather, the women start as lovers or wives, and when they turn into vampires, they become kin/companions to Dracula, not unlike daughters in their nature as they were born from his insemination. As vampires, they now are devoid of a means for Dracula to copulate; he couldn't commit the implied sexual act of biting and thus a blurred line of incestuous behavior, even if he wanted to.

There exists a similarly confusing familial dynamic in both *Interview with the Vampire* by Anne Rice, and this one also brings up some interesting potential romantic implications. In *Interview with the Vampire*, Lestat turns Louis into a vampire because he is captivated by him, in some sense. Most who have read this series understand the depth of this so-called "captivation," but I hesitate to use any stronger or implicating adjectives for the two vampires' relationship as it

is never outright defined as being anything but an alliance in the original book by Anne Rice. However, it's incredibly difficult to read the book and not sense the undertones of romance between the two, even without having to read between the lines terribly much. Lestat goes to great lengths to keep Louis in his life, even turning a 5-year-old that Louis is fond of into a vampire just to keep him tied to him forever. This turns the girl, Claudia, into a sort-of daughter for Lestat and Louis, turning them into a sort of family.

Yet another complicated familial situation occurs in *Twilight* by Stephanie Meyer. While the act of biting itself is generally not approached with an air of sexuality in *Twilight* and, in fact, when these tones are even slightly alluded to, it is always closer to love and romance rather than lust, there still exists a strange dynamic in terms of family situations. The Cullen family (or coven, in vampire terminology,) admittedly does a pretty bad job of disguising their status as an oddity in terms of familial situations - in fact, it's at times quite unbelievable as a reader that no one was alarmed by their family dynamic. The family is composed of 7 unrelated vampires, all having been turned at different points in history and eventually joining the coven, or "family," at different times. Within the family, the children, Alice Cullen, Emmet Cullen, Edward Cullen, Jasper Hale, and Rosalie Hale all pose as high schoolers. The eldest two, Esme and Carlisle Cullen, pose as the family's parents. Out of these seven, six are romantically involved with one another. This isn't inherently challenging, as none of them are related by blood and do not pretend to be as their cover story involves adoption of all the children, but it's still an incredibly odd dynamic that should have certainly raised some red flags at Forks High School.

*A Freudian Approach: In Defense of Freud*

There exists a plethora of research into *Dracula* in particular and how his image became synonymous with sexuality, as well as the cultural and psychological motivations and implications of his depiction. In particular, there exists two theories within this field that I find to be most convincing and intriguing: one citing Freud's Oedipus theory, and another citing more complex cultural and historical factors as explanations to his rampant and overt sexual nature.

First, let us deconstruct the Freudian approach to *Dracula*. A prominent article in this subset of theorization is called *The Vampire Myth*, written by James Twitchell. Twitchell's primary interest in this vein of literary theorization is why young women were drawn to the powerless females of vampire fiction as they were not the typical femme fatales that he claims are usually appreciated by this group. Thus, this article is somewhat dedicated to investigating why young adolescents, particularly females, are attracted and drawn to the vampire myth. He posits that, according to Freud's theories, young women desire an older man to essentially take their virginity, as they are experienced and far more gentle than men their own age. Because blood sucking is such a direct but *not* explicit allegory for sexual intercourse, namely the first sexual intercourse a young woman experiences, it appeals to young women as a sort of metaphor for early sexual experiences. Conversely, female vampires in *Dracula* are depicted as being enticing, alluring, almost siren-like in nature. This then appeals to the young male fantasy (according to Freud) of an older, experienced, and enchanting woman having sexual intercourse with the young man.

All of these factors of vampire fiction serve to reinforce male-dominant female-passive gender norms, especially in relation to sexual intercourse, and can be used to explain why the sexuality of vampire fiction is generally surprisingly approachable to the average person -

because it reflects our commonly accepted societal values, and appeals to what we know in a covert, metaphorical way.

*A Freudian Approach: In Opposition to Freud*

Not all literary critics agree with this incestuous interpretation of the vampire. “The foreign other” argument, in opposition to Freud, is detailed well by *A Vampire in the Mirror* by John Allen Stevenson. Essentially, Dracula as a story is most commonly discussed from the Freudian perspective - that being inherently incestuous in its nature. That of an older man (usually referred to as a “father,” but this figure may be presented figuratively instead of biologically, it does not matter) seeking sexual conquest of a young, often virginal woman, and vice versa, and young men feeling angered by this perceived injustice to their own sexual conquests. This aligns well with *Dracula’s* plot, as previously mentioned. However, the author of this article asks literary critics to reconsider it as more of an interracial dynamic as opposed to intrafamilial. The greatest overall “fear” and tension in *Dracula* is *not* necessarily the idea of Dracula himself being older and more experienced, and wronging a younger man in taking his younger woman, but rather the idea of sexual conquest of a betrothed woman by “the enemy” or “the other,” in this case being the Count himself. Mina Harker herself even says that she would rather die than be turned into a vampire and thus betray her husband by not only breaking vows, but by breaking them with an “othered” individual. Clearly a product of its time, and a narrow but accurate glance at Stoker’s portrayal of women and non-white, non-English individuals, but exemplifying nonetheless of this idea. This racial aspect, too, makes sense in a historical context - written in the thicks of British colonization, social darwinism, and pervasive, normalized racism, this story serves as an interesting commentary on the “foreigner,” and the fears of

multiculturalism during this time in England.

This article also does a great job in pointing to the rather upsetting portrayal of women that Stoker routinely provides - that pure, angelic women are just one step away from becoming harlots, utterly useless and rejected by society, and better off dead than in the hands of the enemy. Bram Dijkstra even went so far as to call *Dracula* a “central document in the late nineteenth-century war on women,” as the positionality of woman in *Dracula* is so extremely submissive and powerless in nature that they are almost inherent victims throughout the entire story, serving only as motivation for men to become heroes.<sup>26</sup>

### *Vampires and Women*

There exists a conundrum within vampire literature and the critics of such - why is the primary consumer demographic of this kind of fiction young girls when young girls themselves are often portrayed as weak, powerless victims in these stories? As aforementioned, in *The Vampire Myth*, James Twitchell makes the argument that essentially, this is extremely odd considering young women generally should gravitate toward media that is empowering to them, like noir films with femme fatales or comic books with female superheroes. He then posits this must be explained by the Freudian concept previously described, wherein women subconsciously desire an older man or “father” figure, someone who is close to her father but *not* her father due to the cultural incest taboo, to have sexual intercourse with for the first time. As the biting act of vampires usually happens between an older, male vampire and a young, virginal girl, this act is reminiscent of this very concept of a young woman losing her virginity to an older, experienced man, which could explain why young women are drawn to it.

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<sup>26</sup>John Allen Stevenson, “A Vampire in the Mirror: The Sexuality of *Dracula*,” *PLMA* 103 (March 1988), 139-149.

I do admit that I have no basis in or experience with psychology in an academic setting, but as a former teenage girl, I can say from personal experience that I don't know if this theory has much value at least in a tangible or practical way. It's certainly an extremely thought provoking way to explain an anomaly in demographics of literature, but it also seems to equally make mountains out of molehills. By this logic, do people who love slasher-type horror films subconsciously have a deep-rooted psychological desire to be murdered at the end of Freddy Krueger's sharp claws? Do those who watch *Jaws* want to be chomped up and swallowed by a shark, but only in the deepest recesses of their mind? Of course, I am being facetious, and probably unfair - but I don't believe I am exaggerating by too much. It just seems an unnecessary and yet common conclusion to draw that has strange airs of misogyny and puts an odd desire onto young women that may or may not exist.

### *Conclusion*

In essence, the depiction of vampires and their appeal is dramatically different in each era, but is consistent in that it is heavily present in almost all. As Nina Auerbach puts it, "Each [vampire] feeds on his age distinctly because he embodies that age. The vampire reflects national moods and, hence, tells us who we are."<sup>27</sup> The vampire may be transient, mysterious and fleeting - but one thing is for certain: As a figure in media, the vampire has dramatic and widespread appeal, and is almost synonymous with sex to a certain degree as its defining characteristic of biting is usually portrayed as a sensual, sexual act and is almost always used as a covert metaphor for sex.

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<sup>27</sup>Teresa A. Goddu, "Vampire Gothic," *American Literary History* 11 (Spring 1999), 129-130.

## The Modern Vampire: Reflections in the Mirror, and Where we go from Here

I believe that one of the strongest holds that vampire fiction still has in terms of visible cultural implications is goth culture. I may be biased in saying this - as I mentioned in my introduction, I personally participate regularly in goth culture, fashion, music, and philosophy. But I do vehemently believe that an understanding of goth culture exponentially enhances one's understanding of vampire fiction's shockwaves and impacts across artistic movements even decades later. My goal in this essay is not to fully analyze and thoroughly understand the wide, broad-spanning implications of these links - there are far too many for that to be feasible in this essay - but rather to defend and examine the connection between the topics and perhaps present a need for further research and study in these fields.

### *A Brief Introduction to Goth*

The history of goth itself is a dense and long one - one very inherently intertwined with vampirism, though, so do stick with me - perhaps best cataloged and documented by Lol Tolhurst's *Goth: A History* which I will be making reference to throughout a majority of this essay. Being one of the founding members of one of the most mainstream and famous goth bands, *The Cure*, it seems to me that he has a fairly strong grip on what goth truly means. I will spare the soapbox, though - the movement as a whole is less so my point, as I'm more interested in the particularities of the modern goth culture and how they are so intrinsically linked with vampires.

Before we dive into the specifics, let's first discuss the movement in general. "Goth" as a singular identity and personhood is difficult to squarely define. But in essence, I think the link that ties goth together is a deep emphasis on emotionality. A fondness for dramatics, idyllic and

peaceful lethargy and apathy as a form of rebellion against a pencil pushing society, and an extreme romanticization of death and all things that cause intense negative feelings within people are all critical to the goth puzzle. All things sad, gloomy, and dreary are looked at with fresh eyes - turning what would be rejected and admonished into something beautiful in its own unique and fascinating way. It is not nihilism, per se, but rather almost the antithesis of nihilism - an admittance that nothing matters, and that pain and darkness is in everything, but so too is there beauty in everything. All of these pieces, too, connect to vampires - the gloomy, frightful, dark, dreary and pitiful vampires still have otherworldly levels of beauty, and through it all, we sympathize with them, and their scorned, admonished, outcasted ways.

Needless to say, there is a very strong connection between vampires as a symbol and source of iconography and the aforementioned goth motifs and the subculture as a whole. I aim to identify these links via analyzing Lol Tolhurst's *Goth* as well as by identifying vampiric influences in goth music, gothic fashion, and gothic literature still utilized in modern goth culture.

### *Bela Lugosi is Dead: Melodies of the Macabre*

Vampires, bats, coffins, blood, and all things associated with the aforementioned are incredibly closely intertwined with goth music. Many things that are macabre and otherwise deemed taboo or grim by many other parts of society are often very graciously and openly accepted by the goth community, a community often based in radical acceptance of odd outcasts and misfits. (Pun relating to the Goth Rock band "The Misfits" *definitely* intended, by the way.) One of the earliest and also most obvious examples of this intertwining is the song *Bela Lugosi is Dead* by Bauhaus. Bela Lugosi, the main subject of this dark and gloomy song, is most well

known for portraying Count Dracula in Universal Pictures' 1931 adaptation of the Bram Stoker novel. I needn't spell out for you the obvious relationship this song has to vampire literature, then - the lines quite easily draw themselves. Instead, here are some lyrics from the song to seal the deal:

Bela Lugosi's dead  
 The bats have left the bell tower  
 The victims have been bled  
 Red velvet lines the black box  
 Bela Lugosi's dead  
 Bela Lugosi's dead  
 Undead, undead, undead  
 Undead, undead, undead  
 The virginal brides file past his tomb  
 Strewn with time's dead flowers  
 Bereft in deathly bloom  
 Alone in a darkened room  
 The count

Clearly, Bauhaus wastes no time with subtlety. The song is clearly and definitively about Bela Lugosi's portrayal of Count Dracula, and is filled with iconography associated with vampires, such as virginity, bats, blood, and the color red. This song was extremely influential to the goth artistic and musical movement of the 1980s, being released as Bauhaus' debut single in 1978. As Tolhurst says, "Bela Lugosi's Dead' lays the groundwork for Goth in all its myriad

forms to come: the gloomy, haunted feeling of the track, Murphy's subdued vocals, the ominous bass line, and the horror imagery of the lyrics."<sup>28</sup>

Another song that evokes the images of vampires and macabre, gruesome death is *We Hunger* by Siouxsie and the Banshees. Below are some lyrics from this tune:

Sucking leaches feel the need  
 Sucking dry unsated stomach pops  
 Sharpened knives, oh, with flying sparks  
 Sagging bodies with stretch marks  
 And your belly aches  
 Do you hunger for this, hunger for this?  
 Hunger for this, bled white with avarice  
 As the rust creeps  
 Corrosion seeps a rotting seed  
 Eat me, oh, feed me  
 With your belching foul breath  
 Your destructive kiss, death  
 Do you hunger for this, hunger for this?  
 Hunger for this, just a taste of a sweet kiss

Certainly some pretty visceral and mildly disturbing imagery in these words, but nonetheless extremely reminiscent of vampires and vampire fiction. The idea of romance and death going hand-in-hand with a destructive kiss, sucking leeches presumably sucking blood, hunger, and bleeding all evoke feelings and imagery of the vampire.

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<sup>28</sup>Lol Tolhurst, *Goth: A History* (New York: Hachette Books, 2023), 93.

Finally, another song that is extremely reminiscent of vampire fiction and overall gothic and vampiric imagery is *The Killing Moon* by Echo and the Bunnymen. Below are some lyrics from this song:

Under blue moon, I saw you  
 So soon you'll take me  
 Up in your arms, too late to beg you  
 Or cancel it, though I know it must be  
 The killing time  
 Unwillingly mine  
 Fate  
 Up against your will  
 Through the thick and thin  
 He will wait until  
 You give yourself to him

Imagery of nighttime, of giving oneself to a vaguely malicious entity under moonlight, of killing and covert romantic undertones. Still, though presented in different forms, the vampire and the frightful beings of the night remain distinctly relevant throughout.

These three songs are but a few among many songs belonging to the goth musical subgenre relating to vampires. Some are more esoteric in nature and make less direct reference to the creatures of the night, and some are a bit more overt and obvious in nature. Regardless, the connection is there, and vampires consistently serve as an incredible artistic vessel for those in the goth community to express a dark creativity and passion.

*What's Black and White and Red all over? Sinking our Fangs into the Gothic Aesthetic*

So, we know what a goth person might listen to. But what does a goth person *look* like?

It's probably not very difficult for most people to conjure up an image of a generic goth person. Many in modern Western society have at least a vague idea of what a goth person might look like, if not a more solid, concrete image. But the minutiae and details associated with this visual and fashion identity is an incredibly interesting idea to explore. As aforementioned, the roots of goth as an artistic and identity-based movement are firmly in music, but Tolhurst argues that "Goth is so much more than the music."<sup>29</sup> And, one of the greatest and most deeply informative facets of the goth subculture is the fashion that coincides with it.

The aesthetics and fashion tastes of goth are not dissimilar from the previously expressed emotional and philosophical interests of the group: dark, macabre, gloomy, and romantic. I think usually people may imagine a person dressed in dark, garish clothing, sometimes bedecked with crosses, bats, skulls, blood, or coffins. They might imagine a face painted white with dramatic, carved out black cheekbones and dark lipstick, or back-combed black hair a la Siouxi Sioux or Robert Smith. (This hairstyle is often dubbed a "bat's nest" by those in the community, by the way.) There are also subsets of goth fashion within itself. First you have trad goth, which usually has the teased shaggy black hair and fishnet stockings I mentioned before. Then you have romantic goth, which is often a bit more subdued in nature and is usually more soft and often has accents of red or lace or ruffles. So too do you have vampire goth, also sometimes referred to as Victorian goth, which derives its fashion senses from the Victorian vampires of yesteryear like Dracula's film depictions or the Volturi coven from *Twilight*. The list goes on and on, including corporate goth, gothabilly, and even steampunk. In general, though, almost all gothic fashion is relatively head turning, and tends to stand out in a crowd.

However, not every goth person "dresses goth." Again, the subculture is music based, meaning that if you listen to the music and actively participate in the scene either socially or

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<sup>29</sup>Tolhurst, 220.

philosophically, you're goth, no matter how you present yourself. Tolhurst describes the crowd at The Batcave, an early goth club in London, saying, "Yes, there were women in flowing black dresses that seemed more apropos to a funeral than a dance floor. There were sinuous men in ripped tights... And there were spiky-haired people of indeterminate gender... but that was not everyone. There were also kids in blue jeans, button-up plaid, and plain brown hair, dancing alongside the pale, otherworldly figures."<sup>30</sup> So, as you can see, there is no one way to "look goth," which makes the question of "what does a goth person look like?" uniquely hard to tackle.

While we're on the subject, though, this idea of so-called "pale, otherworldly figures" strikes me especially when looking at the links between goth and vampires. One of the goals of traditionally goth makeup and attire is to look tired, lethargic, pallid, and even deathly. Ripped, battered tights and teased, messy hair - all reminiscent of the dead, but put together in a clean, appealing, fashionable package, ready for dancing or strolling around the cemetery. It is a clear evocation of the image of the vampire, or at least the dead - but the risen dead, the *undead*, so, indeed, the vampire.

Another important aspect of the visuals of goth is the album art and general aesthetics of the goth subculture. As Tolhurst puts it, "While the sweeping buttresses and cavernous spaces of Gothic cathedrals no doubt informs the aesthetics and general funeral moods of Goth, one can also trace the origins of the Gothic aesthetic to the Symbolist painters and poets of the mid-nineteenth century who sought to portray things not as they were so much but rather through the emotional states they produced."<sup>31</sup> Tolhurst makes this claim in reference to The Cure's album cover for *Faith* - their third studio album - but these funeral-esque and Symbolist style nods can be seen on the covers of many different goth albums. Some album covers that come to

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<sup>30</sup>Tolhurst, 186.

<sup>31</sup>Tolhurst, 213.

mind immediately are *Seventeen Seconds* by The Cure, *Tinderbox* by Siouxsie and the Banshees, *The Bela Session* by Bauhaus, *Closer* by Joy Division, and *Treasure* by Cocteau Twins, among many, many others. Again, the visuals of goth are dark, macabre, gloomy, and highly emotional - a shared trait of the dark, macabre, gloomy and highly emotional under and overtones of much of vampire literature.

### *Conclusion*

I tend to agree with Nina Auerbach's overall claim that the vampire as a figure throughout history can be used in radical ways to inform our perception of societies and cultures - what the vampire of a given culture looks like often tells us more about ourselves than we'd like to admit, as a harrowing, distorted reflection in the mirror of our very selves and what we hold dearest - and, what we fear most. I think there is a lot we can look at in regard to this fact, and can use vampire literature as a surprisingly effective tool to explore many different and more specific subsets of society and culture.

Of course, goth is just one of many examples of this. In my own opinion, one of the other most interesting and useful implications of even some of the oldest vampire literature in today's culture is the significant inclusion of homosexual undertones or even overt same-sex attraction or relations. This is imperative in analyzing how the vampire affects culture and how culture affects the vampire as it has been a critical piece of the puzzle since the earliest days, as seen in De Fanu's *Carmilla*, and it is still ever-present in novels such as *Interview with the Vampire* with the very thinly veiled romance between Lestat and Louis. In addition, in a modern context, there is a quite undeniable link between darker and more alternative subcultures and those in the LGBTQ+ community. In *Goth: A History*, Tolhurst makes direct reference to these links, stating in

reference to The Batcave goth club, “[The owner of the club] once described his club as ‘very friendly. Basically, it’s about fun.’ To him, ‘fun’ meant tolerance. Better yet, it mean inclusion. There was a large overlap back then between Soho’s Goth scene and its gay scene. The two were kindred spirits, opposed by mainstream society - often violently so.”<sup>32</sup>

Nina Auerbach essentially argues that the vampire as an elusive, mysterious figure reveals the deepest recesses of our humanity - it exists as an entity that is too human, too unnervingly reflective of our own state of mind, which is why an air of discomfort, unease, and horror surrounds them in a thick fog.<sup>33</sup> We as humans are terribly afraid of our own darkness, our own vices, our own sins, and place them onto the backs of vampires to shoulder the burden for us. Homosexuality and vampires may seem like two merely coincidentally linked topics, on a surface level only united in their overlapping scenes in London’s Soho in the 1980s, but I really don’t find them to be terribly unrelated when you really examine what makes each of them so different from the mainstream and the taboos associated with both. Themes of transformation, death, lust, sexual expression and freedom are completely synonymous with both groups, despite presenting themselves in differing ways. Societal rejection, outcasting and ostracization are all shared themes by both groups, too. My theory is that, since greater society has failed to carve out an adequate place for non-mainstream people to belong, be they goth, gay, both, or otherwise, they seek refuge in what has already been deemed taboo by society, a safe haven of exploration, creativity, and expression. Seeing a reflection of themselves in the transformed, the outcasted, but the truly expressive and free vampires of literary fame, they find solace in the dark and macabre.

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<sup>32</sup>Tolhurst, 185.

<sup>33</sup>Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1997)

In my opinion, this is the most valuable lesson we can learn from the vampire. When we peel back the layers of plot and complex storytelling, the vampire is merely a distorted image reflecting the most human qualities we can have - the darkness inside us all, the unforgiving nature of death and time, and the beauty interlaced so carefully and gently with all of it. To villainize and recoil from the vampire is to villainize and recoil from “the other” - the outsider who is still deeply human, deeply alive and deeply themselves. The vampire is not the harrowing, disgusting monster we want him to be - he is us, simply us, the parts we deny or cannot admit to possess. Vampires serve as a reminder to us all to not neglect our own human nature, and not to admonish what may be taboo. To invest in creativity, in decadence, in satisfying melancholy - to do this all is unforgivably and undeniably human.

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