



Vampires

Vampires are mythological or folkloric beings who subsist by feeding on the life essence (generally in the form of blood) of living creatures. Vampires often visited loved ones and caused mischief or deaths in the neighborhoods they inhabited when they were alive. A vampire is the manifestation of an unclean spirit possessing a decomposing body. This undead creature needs the blood of the living to sustain its body's existence and is considered to be vengeful and jealous towards the living. Through history, almost every nation has associated blood drinking with some kind of undead being or demon. Ancient Babylon had tales of the mythical Lilitu, giving rise to the Hebrew Lilith, Adam's first consort, who refused to be subservient to Adam and was later considered a demon, depicted as subsisting on the blood of babies. The Roman equivalent, the Lamia, preyed on young children in their beds at night, feasting on their flesh and sucking their blood, also preying on young men as nocturnal seductresses in an effort to produce more demons. Although this concept of vampire exists in slightly different forms throughout many cultures, it is possible to trace the development of modern vampire belief to Slavic spiritualism preceding Christianity.

Voltaire in 1764 stated: These vampires were corpses, who went out of their graves at night to suck the blood of the living, either at their throats or stomachs, after which they returned to their cemeteries. The persons so sucked waned, grew pale, and fell into consumption; while the sucking corpses grew fat, got rosy, and enjoyed an excellent appetite. It was in Poland, Hungary, Silesia, Moravia, Austria, and Lorraine, that the dead made this good cheer. Bram Stoker's 1897 novel, *Dracula* is remembered as the quintessential vampire novel and provided the basis of the modern vampire legend. The success of this book spawned a distinctive vampire genre, still popular in the 21st century, with books, films, and television shows. The vampire has since become a dominant figure in the horror genre. The figure used by Stoker as the basis for his story was Prince Vlad III, the Impaler of Walachia, Romania: "Count Dracula", was not viewed as a blood drinking sadist by his countrymen, but as a national hero defending his land and Christendom from the invasion of the Ottoman Turks. His tactics, however, were horrifyingly real and bloodthirsty. For example in 1462 an invading Turk army was turned back toward Constantinople after being sickened by the sight of 20,000 impaled corpses outside Vlad's capital city. Blood-soaked, dark and inhospitable, Transylvania became the home of the monster indifferent to human life: the Vampire.

Vlad was excommunicated for renouncing the Orthodox Church. In a romanticized telling of his story in the 1992 film, Gary Oldman's *Dracula*, in pursuit of his re-incarnated wife generates both terror and sympathy, as the image of the vampire begins to be humanized and rehabilitated. Talk about a public relations campaign: In Anne Rice's "Vampire Chronicles", a ten volume series spanning 1973 – 2003 the elegant and tragic French nobleman turned vampire, Lestat, enthralled readers sufficiently to result in 100 million books sold. We obviously love a vampire tale. Today's Vampire is mesmerizing. An irresistible dichotomy: we are fearful, threatened and repulsed, yet also fascinated and hypnotically drawn in. The psychologists would say that people identify with immortal vampires because, by so doing, they overcome, or at least temporarily escape from, their fear of dying. They embrace the inevitable to make it familiar and thus, somewhat disarm it. Would we even consider joining their ranks rather than face oblivion or the potentially torturous afterlife?

The *Twilight* Saga, a recent series of films, demonstrates the continuing popularity of the vampire themes: The powerless maiden succumbing to the dramatic, forbidden, unholy courtship, and the irresistible domination of the sophisticate, immortal male's compelling hunger. The theater is packed with adolescent boys and girls who, vicariously and safely, violate the not-so-subtle social taboos. Do these characters become envied role models, empowered beyond the authority of conventional societal constraints? Now that's entertainment!

But: Fear not and be prepared. Equip yourselves with cloves of garlic branches of rose and Hawthorne, sprinkle mustard seeds on your roof, grab a sacred cross, rosary, and holy water; take refuge on sanctified ground like a church or temple. Chased? Throw salt behind you as vampires are compulsive counters who must tally every grain. That'll buy you some time. Should they catch up, be ready to thrust a stake through the heart or mouth, or, best, decapitate the vampire. Then bury it face down with its head between its feet or behind its buttocks. Spike it to the ground so it can't rise, or dismember and burn it after embedding sharp metal objects in its torso. Then pour boiling water over the grave site, go home and lock your doors for forty days. As did our superstitious forbearers, we would expect to see the Vampire emerge from its crypt to gorge and satiate its blood lust during the dark Halloween season. It is, after all, the time when such creatures are reported to roam about and though they violate all norms of behavior expected of the living; their compulsions are as natural to them as they are un-natural to us. Offer them a little understanding, or perhaps, your neck.

