



ES1 Dracula, Twilight, and Blood Cults: Why Is It That Vampires Never Die?

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentations, attendees will: (1) gain knowledge in the historical, medical, and psychoanalytic theories behind vampire beliefs; (2) advance skills regarding the manner in which “vampirism,” “vampire cults,” and “vampire communities” may present clinically and forensically; and (3) improve knowledge in historical reports of sadistic mass murder that may have contributed to vampire lore.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by increasing the existing knowledge of the fundamentals of the current field and thus improve forensic competence and performance.

From the ancient world to the present, vampires have held a tight grip on our fascination and fear and this has yet to be released. Traces of the legend are found in some of the oldest surviving mythologies and have spilled over into history and lore. Such mythology associated vampires with female figures representing potential destruction and with children in a state of dependency and helplessness. Similar beliefs are traced to ancient cultures across the globe, often depicting demonic female figures who fused relationships between the living and the dead, expressed through blood rituals as well as sexualized and aggressive exchanges.¹

However, it was Bram Stoker who introduced us to the great Dracula in the late 19th century, and it was this quintessential Byronic hero who fathered countless other characters. From the monstrous presentations of Nosferatu, and Underworld’s Markus, to the charming Lestat and adorable sparkly Edward, and everything in between, our fascination with Dracula and his ever-evolving progeny shows no signs of decay.

In the modern era, some vampires have been transformed from evil beasts to misunderstood, and ostracized, supernatural heroes.² With this change, some of their ideologies went from that of those cursed with tormented “un-deadness” to those having (and sometimes offering) immortality; from forced isolation to offering a new community; from subhuman viciousness to displaying animal traits that convey energy and natural instincts. Flaunting the appeal of the aristocrat or outlaw and inciting adventure at once terrifying and safe, the vampires in these stories have “evolved” into uncannily irresistible figures.³ What is it that so intrigues us about them? This presentation will lead us on a journey where we can explore this fascination via culture and psychoanalytic theory, as well as historical figures purported to have inspired the legend—tales of which include sadism and mass murder eclipsing any terror found in fiction.

Also discussed will be cases from the early 1800s where the misperception of infectious illness caused mass hysteria, leading to the belief that the dead were rising from their graves and literally sucking vitality out of the living. This hysteria ultimately culminated in the cannibalistic rituals of the recently deceased to stop the dead from harming the living. However, such a ritual has been documented as recently as 2003, proving that these seemingly old beliefs from a forgotten time of darkness and irrational superstition for some reason draw appeal to this day.

Indeed, we are far from immune to such seeming madness. Modern vampire “cults” tragically show us how an obsession with these creatures can go too far. What drives such people into these alternate realities? Mental illness? Sadism? Or is there more complexity to these stories? Perhaps we will never know, but one thing is certain: while legends postulate many ways that vampires may be killed, time has proven that they will, indeed, live forever.

Reference(s):

1. Jaffe, P.D. and F. DiCataldo. Clinical Vampirism: Blending Myth and Reality. *Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 22, no. 4 (1994): 533-44.
2. Melton, J. Gordon and Alys Hornick. *The Vampire in Folklore, History, Literature, Film and Television: A Comprehensive Bibliography*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Publishers, 2015.
3. Bosky, Bernadette Lynn. Making the Implicit, Explicit: Vampire Erotica and Pornography. In *The Blood Is the Life: Vampires in Literature*. Edited by Heldreth, Leonard G. and Mary Pharr. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999.

Mass Murder, Blood Cults, Vampire