

**The History of Vampire Folklore: Fear and Introspection,
2000 BCE.-2000 CE.**

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Abstract

The History of Vampire Folklore: Fear and Introspection, 2000 BCE.-2008 CE., is an exploration on the history of vampire folklore and how legends of vampires have influenced the behaviors of different cultures for centuries. Part one of this paper argues that vampire folklore was created as a fear tactic to force common citizens to submit to the “cultural capital” specific to their region. “Cultural capital” will be explored thoroughly, and many examples throughout a myriad of cultures will be provided to prove this claim. Chapter one “Ancient and Classical Vampire Legends” begins with examples of pre-Christian vampire mythology including: the vampire king Abhartach from Celtic Ireland, Classical Greecian vampires, Lilith as she is depicted in Sumer, as well the Old Testament during the Talmudic period of Hebrew mythology, and finally the *Rakasha* from Ancient Indian legends. The following chapter “Slavic Vampire Folklore” concerns European vampire folklore, more specifically the three types of vampires in Russian folklore, as well as the key aspects found through all European vampire folklore and how this relates to the ideas of “cultural capital.” The final chapter of part one titled “Vampire Folklore in Asia and South America,” introduces examples of vampirism from Peru and Indonesia.

Part two argues that after the Enlightenment people became less concerned with pleasing God and following social codes in order to gain acceptance both on Earth and into heaven. Resulting from this folklore became old-fashioned, but the vampire evolved through literature to represent this shift. Chapter four, “The Transformation of Vampires in post-Romantic Literature,” explores how vampires shifted from being a representative of failure to follow cultural capital into a representation of humanity's battle with our own consciousness resulting from the publication of post-Romantic age vampire literature. The final chapter, “Vampires Evolution Through Film,” explores how after the release of the film *Nosferatu: a Symphony of Horror* in 1922, many film adaptations of both Dracula and other vampire characters influenced the vampire to once again change, causing him to become a staple in popular culture.

Introduction

Out of all folkloric creatures, vampires are one of the most important to analyze when trying to understand the culture of any society with strong folklore; this is because legends of vampires arise universally. Almost every culture uses a creature who has succumbed to evil forces to express fears that lie within its people. “Evil forces,” of course, is a very subjective term, simply because what is evil and what is good changes from region to region; for this analysis, “evil forces” will be defined as anything a culture deems inappropriate; this could be someone who has committed grave sins, is thought to be a demonic figure by locals, or has caused harm and brought fear to others.

Throughout history, vampire folklore has been used as a fear tactic to stop people from entering the realm of otherness¹. Along with the fear of being turned into a vampire, discovering that someone in the community was turned can bring great shame. However, this is not true for every vampire legend, as the fear of otherness is not always a tactic used to bring shame on ordinary citizens. Vampire legends seen in cultures affected by colonization are frequently used to bring awareness to the danger of outsiders so people will know to stay away. When colonizing a foreign land, Europeans often tried to eradicate any form of culture, hoping to force the “uncivilized” people to submit to their will. Written records and accounts of colonization come from the perspective of the oppressors, but folklore stories are unbiased depictions of how life was for the oppressed people.

In broad terms, a vampire is a creature that represents a failure to follow the cultural capital of a region. “Cultural capital” is defined as the traditions, and expectations members of a society are expected to follow to fit social standards in their community.² A person who fails to follow these expectations is often given a title that means “other,” this idea of otherness is essential to understanding why vampires are so interesting. Vampires also represent the relationship humanity holds with life after death; death is a fear all humanity shares because it's illusive and inevitable. Many of us take refuge in the idea that our souls will transcend into the next place as long as we follow the guidelines before us. A vampire's soul will never transcend, and they will forever be chained to their vessel, unable to travel into heaven, and forced to roam the Earth with an unsatisfiable hunger for the life of the living. As the west moved towards the Enlightenment, our fears became more complex than what becomes of those who displease God. There was no longer a need for superstition. Still, vampires remained relevant to humanity by representing the battle with our consciousness and our relationship with the turmoil of introspection.³

Through the Romantic period of literature, vampires transformed into a creature that is almost human but lacks the vital aspect that makes a human complete: mortality. The Romantic vampire is also chained to the Earth, but they have a melancholic, introspective outlook on their existence; often depicted as a miserable creature forced to exist against its will when all it wants to do is rest peacefully. In the modern age, the vampire has gained a firm footing in film. After the release of *Dracula* (1931), the vampire became a staple in the horror genre.

The vampire has remained popular today because they have transformed over time, representing the current climate of whatever culture they reside in, whether through fear of death, outsiders, or the complexity of the human mind. This analysis will explore the history of vampire folklore, from Ancient civilizations to the modern age. Following that, how vampires were transformed through literature will be explored, and finally, how vampires became such a staple of popular culture.

Ancient and Classical Vampire Legends

Vampires are genuinely ancient creatures; legends existed in many cultures before the birth of Christ, even though the church has dominated the modern-day conception of a vampire.

Vampires in popular culture are resistant to any Christian iconography, including holy water and crosses, they also cannot enter sacred sights like the church. All of these concepts were configured far after legends of vampires arose. Prior to 1000 C.E., Celtic groups in Europe had created tales of demons whose characteristics closely resemble the vampire. As the Church fought for dominance over the poor serf class, they would preach about following Christian doctrine to secure a spot in heaven. Since the serf population generally led miserable lives, the emphasis on salvation in the afterlife was not as appealing as ways to improve life on Earth. In order to scare serfs into converting to Christianity, the Church would combine pre-Christian ideas of undead creatures with their conception of the afterlife to emphasize the importance of salvation.⁵

One great example of pre-Christian vampire folklore in Europe was the Abhartach from Celtic Ireland. The legend of the Abhartach comes from fifth and sixth-century Ireland in Glenullin, a conglomeration of small kingdoms, each with its king; these kings held little to no power outside of their domain and were similar to tribal warlords. The Abhartach held the power of one of these kings, and the legend states that he would rise from his grave during the night to feast on the blood of his subjects. The Abhartach was said to be a physically deformed dwarf and was also an extremely evil and powerful sorcerer. Abharatch was slain by a neighboring king named Cathán. But the following night the Abharatch rose again, demanding blood to revive his withering corpse. Soon after consulting a local Druid, Cathán discovered that the Abharatch was not alive but could never die. He was a *dearg-diúlai* or a “drinker of human blood.”⁶

During the prime of Ancient Greece after 500 BCE., the people of the Greek Orthodox Church were creating folklore to emphasize the importance of respect towards the dead. The central concept that causes vampirism in Greece is *Mnemosyne* or mourning rituals.⁷ The rituals after someone's death are essential to the Greeks, the goddess Mnemosyne (the Goddess of Memory) centers around this idea. The Greeks have two significant themes regarding mourning rituals, remembrance and forgiveness. Forgiveness means cleaning the dead of their sins; while remembrance comes from mourning rituals to honor the dead. The Greeks believe that the Gods were the ultimate form of forgiveness and remembrance, so it is clear that a vampire, who was neither forgiven for their sins nor remembered by the living is by extension the antithesis of the Gods.

According to Greek Orthodox, after death the body goes through a cycle of purification that lasts three years. Afterward, the body is free to transcend into heaven, but completion only occurs if the living properly carries out the three-year mourning period. The fortieth day or *thresto hrono* is the first day of judgment; this stage decides what will happen to the soul from

1. The term “otherness” is used several times throughout this paper. In terms of folklore, otherness is any behavior or appearance that is deemed inappropriate or strange by local people. Otherness directly relates to the idea of “cultural capital,” and was used in the creation of folklore like the vampire to scare common people into conforming to social expectations.

2. Avdiko, Evangelos. “Vampire Stories in Greece and the Reinforcement of Socio-Cultural Norms.” *Folklore*, vol. 124 (December 2013): 307-26

3. Inoue, Yoshitaka. “Contemporary Consciousness as Reflected in Images of the Vampire.” *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche* 5, no. 4 (2011): 83–99.

4. Kane, Tim. *The Changing Vampire of Film and Television: A Critical Study of the Growth of a Genre*. United Kingdom: McFarland, Incorporated, Publishers, 2006

this time to the final day. When the third year concludes, the body is exhumed from the grave so the bones can be collected and placed in a family tomb. A happy soul that has transcended will leave nothing behind but the bones of the vessel it used to inhabit, indicating to the family that they have done their part in honoring their lost loved one and that their soul has joined the Gods inside the heavenly bodies. In the third year, if the body has not decomposed, the dead did not purify and will be forever chained to their vessel. When the soul cannot transcend, the corpse can rise from the grave as a vampire and wreak havoc on its former community. If a member of someone's family is proven to be a vampire, the blame falls onto the family, bringing dishonor.⁸

Another important figure when it comes to pre-Christian vampires is the she-demon Lilith. Although Lilith is usually associated with the Christian Bible, she appears in Mesopotamian mythology and the Old Testament. Her first appearance can be seen in the Sumerian epic tale *Gilgamesh and the Huluppu Tree* in 2000 BCE, where she was described as a beautiful female vampire who sought after a lover, although she could not bear children and never gave him sexual gratification.

After Lilith appeared in *Gilgamesh and the Huluppu Tree*, she would be found in Jewish mythology in the centuries following. During the Talmudic period (c. 350 BCE) of Jewish history, the Old Testament stated that Lilith was the first wife of Adam, but she was banished from the Garden of Eden after refusing to allow Adam to overpower her. After leaving the garden, she would bear hundreds of demon children in the Red Sea before God sent three angels, Senoy Sansenoy and Semangelof, to end her terror. Lilith claimed that she was brought into this world to bring death to babies from their birth to the eighth day of their life, but in order to save herself from death, she made a vow to leave babies marked with the amulet of the angels unharmed.

Lilith was described as not only a vampire but a succubus as well. She seduced Adam against his will several times during his 130-year separation from Eve after she ate the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. Lilith was said to visit Adam at night to cause “involuntary nocturnal emissions.” Resulting from this story, Lilith became the title for a group of she-demons who seduced men sleeping alone in their homes. Lilith’s also posed a significant threat to young women, especially during menstruation and childbirth. She would hide in the shadows and attack any young maiden foolish enough to leave herself unprotected during these periods of vulnerability. Liliths were envious of the relationship between humans and their children. Raphael Patai states:

Jealous of the human mates of their bedfellows, they hate the children of Ordinary human wedlock, attack them, plague them, suck their blood, and strangle them. The Liliths also managed to prevent the birth of Children by causing barrenness, miscarriages, or complications during Childbirth.⁹

Another excellent example of ancient vampire legends can be seen in the Indian representation of vampirism known as the *Rakasha*. The main idea behind the *Rakasha* is that they are a group of evil demigods created by Brahma when he took the body of darkness, as described in the Sanskrit text *Brahmanda Purana*. The *Rakasha* have two fangs that stick out from their teeth and have an insatiable appetite for human flesh, and they are said to drink blood from human skulls.¹⁰

What is essential to understand about the *Rakasha* mythology is that it is deeply rooted in a fight between Indo-Aryans and Native Indian Tribes. It is ubiquitous in Hindu mythology to demonize non-Aryan groups who fought violently against conquering, leading to stories of the *Rakasha*. The Indo-Aryans (*Arya-varna*) were a group of settlers who conquered the natives

(*Dasa-varna*) after they colonized the subcontinent of India between 1800 BCE and 1500 BCE. The conflict between these two groups eventually led to the stories of *Rakasha*, who incarnated the violence of the *Dasa* when they refused to conform to the *Varna*'s imperialism, religion, and the overall Indo-Aryan way of life.¹¹ This demonization of natives, turning them into monsters who denounce the faith of the “good people,” is a prime example of a fear of otherness. The *Dasa* was eventually placed in the untouchable category of the Hindu Caste System, while their mythological counterparts, the *Rakasha*, took a significant role in Hindu Mythology.

Slavic Vampire Folklore

There are records of vampire legends in many regions of Europe, including the Romanian *Moroi* or the Icelandic *drauguar*. Still, the most fascinating tales of vampirism are present in the Slavs. The Russian term for a vampire (there are several different terms, depending on the type) and the word for heretic (*upyr*) became interchangeable after vampiric folklore was intertwined with Christianity around 1057 BCE.

There are three main types of Slavic vampires, the first being the *eretik*; this is the version that most closely resembles the literary Dracula-type vampire we see today. An *eretik* is a sorcerer, heretic, or overall harm-doer who dies and returns as a vampire. A soul unable to cleanse itself of sins cannot transcend from the grave to the heavens and comes back to harm the living as an *eretik*. The following form is the *erestun* or an evil sorcerer spirit who possesses an ordinary person the moment before their death. This form of a vampire does not rise from the grave but is a reanimated corpse who became possessed moments after they passed. After being possessed by the evil *erestun* spirit, the corpse will continue to cause harm until the *erestun* rests in a grave. The last type is the *eretica*, which is always female, and resembles vampiric and witch-like characteristics. An *eretica* is an evil woman who has sold her soul to the devil; in the daytime, she walks around as a haggish woman in rags, and by night she enters her proper form and dances around the village before slumbering in a sunken grave. An *eretica* is one of the most dangerous forms of Slavic vampires; if an unfortunate person stumbles into a sunken grave, they will wither away. If by chance they happen to lay eyes on an *eretica*, her open vampiric eye will pierce the soul and most certainly cause death.¹²

Vampire folklore across Europe is all relatively similar, the only disparities coming in the technical terms, which change from language to language. The most consistent idea within all European vampirism is that it is caused by the sins of the dead, but more importantly, the sins of the living. Sins of the dead will not always cause the soul to remain chained to its vessel, but if the family of the living does not follow the proper procedures when handling the dead, its soul will surely be unhappy in the grave. Along with burial rights, there is a consistent idea of a “magic circle” and how breaking this circle causes the dead to be unhappy and return to seek vengeance. If a human or animal walks over an unburied corpse, it breaks the magic circle,

5. Ivey, Dorthoy “The Vampire Myth and Christianity” *Rollins Scholarship Online*, (1010): (12-38)

6. Curran, Bob. “Was Dracula an Irishman?” *History Ireland* 8, no. 2 (2000): 12–15.

7. Avdiko, Evangelos. “Vampire Stories in Greece and the Reinforcement of Socio-Cultural Norms.” *Folklore*,

8. Kenna, Margaret Elizabeth. “Rituals of Forgiveness and Structures of Remembrance: Memorial Services and Bone Depositories on the Island of Anafi, Greece.” *History of Religions* 54, no. 3 (2015): 225–59.

9. Patai, Raphael. “Lilith.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 77, no. 306 (1964): 295–314.

10. Banerjee, Madhubani. “Rakashas and Asuras In Hindu Epic Tales.” *International E-Journal of Advances in Social Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Aug. 2015): pp. 1-6,

11. Thapar, Romila. “The Theory of Aryan Race and India: History and Politics.” *Social Scientist*, Vol. 24, no. 1/3 (1996): 3–29.

upsetting the soul. Allowing the eyes to remain open is also seen as disrespect toward the dead, and Slavic folklore is also dangerous to the living. The *eretica* kills her victims with her vampiric eye, which pierces the victim and causes them to experience death by madness.

Along with niche actions performed to allow for a peaceful transition, an unfortunate or “bad” death is also a surefire way to ensure a soul will not be at peace in its grave. Heretical deaths like suicide or murder are common “bad deaths.” A corpse who is murdered and placed in a shallow grave will feel forgotten and will not be able to transcend. Regarding relations between the living, a dead man might return to console his widow. Alternatively, if a man dies and discovers his widow has taken another lover, he will return to seek vengeance on them both.¹³

Vampire Folklore in Asia and South America

Many non-Eurocentric vampires hold little to no similar characteristics to their European counterparts. They do not rise from the grave, and are not always ordinary people who have died an unpleasant death. These vampires do not use their fangs for drinking blood, a characteristic sometimes seen in European vampires. The only tenet that allows them to fit the vampire description is that they represent fear of otherness and take the life force of mortals by conspiring with evil. The following will be two examples of vampires from Peru and Indonesia, with periods ranging from the age of the Spanish conquest in the 16th Century to the 18th century of Indonesia.

The *Pishtaco* from Peru is one the most notable vampire legends from the Americas; the word *Pishtaco* comes from the Quenchian word *pishtay*, which translates into “beheading” or “cut the throat.” They are said to be wealthy men who capture natives, slit their throats with a sickle knife, and hang them from the ceiling allowing their fat to drip into a bowl. While many claim that the legends of the *Pishtaco* date back to pre-colonial times, it is mostly agreed that the folklore dates back to the Spanish Conquest of Peru.¹⁴

In 1532 CE., Francisco Pizzaro would take forth on the conquering of the Andes, starting the age of the conquistadors. These colonizers would begin a decade of violent resistance from the Peruvians until 1542, when the Viceroyalty of Peru began. The *unto* (fat) of the natives was highly valued by the colonizers and was often used to heal the wounds of soldiers or boiled down to grease their guns and cannons, fueling the violence even further. Along with conquistadors, missionaries also used the fat of Natives. In an article concerning *Pishtacos*, Ernesto Vasquez states:

Missionaries were said to have searched for the indigenous unto (fat) to improve the sounds of their bells, and to shine the faces of Catholic saints. They were said to have evangelized during the day and killed their victims at night.¹⁵

With the violence of the Spanish accounted for, it is easy to understand how such legends of a fat-sucking vampire like the *Pishtaco* would arise. Any stranger who appeared on Peruvian land would most likely be labeled a *Pishtaco* to ensure distance from the rest of the community. Natives would have to fight for their safety outside the hands of authorities because the Catholic Church protected the *Pishtaco*; therefore, it was impossible to seek justice for the brutal killings. As centuries went on, the folklore around the *Pishtaco* evolved. The Natives were no longer fearful of conquistadors but instead of the influential land owners who continued to suppress the

12. Oinas, Felix J. “Heretics as Vampires and Demons in Russia.” *The Slavic and East European Journal*, vol. 22, no. 4 (1978): 433–41.

13. Avdiko, Evangelos. “Vampire Stories in Greece and the Reinforcement of Socio-Cultural Norms.”

indigenous population. These people were white or mestizo (meaning mixed-race individuals generally of Spanish origin). As wealthy landowners, their status gave them power over the natives. Instead of using the Peruvian fat for missionary bells and cannons, they used it to fuel coal mines and other weapons of industrialization.

Regardless of the period, the central tenet of a *Pishtaco* is a man who gained wealth by harming or taking advantage of the indigenous population. While this has undoubtedly been a superstition responsible for keeping many indigenous people safe, it has also caused many issues for the native population. Peru today is extremely racially divided, with white Peruvians seen as the racial standard, despite representing less than half of the people. Those who still believe in legends of “pishtacosim” are often seen as ignorant and fuel the stereotype of the indigenous as uneducated. These stereotypes result from hundreds of years of Spanish colonization and the fact that only around 6% of the indigenous population has access to education due to extreme poverty.¹⁶

Another very notable vampire is the *Kuntilanak* of Indonesia and Malaysia. While the contemporary version of the *Kuntilanak* is more of an icon in popular culture, she has a rich history in Indonesian culture. The first mention of the *Kuntilanak* appeared from the first Sultan of Pontianak Sultana of the 18th century; this vengeful spirit supposedly haunted him. The *Kuntilanak* is a fierce demon with long black hair, sharp nails, white clothes, and a sizable pregnant abdomen. She is said to reside inside large trees deep in the forest, far from the cities, because the pollution of urban life scares her away. Like all vampires, she is extremely violent. While some variations claim she drinks the blood of young virgins, this is most likely due to the infiltration of westernized vampire stories. According to the Indonesian *Kuntilanak* stories, she uses her long nails to dig out the organs and eyeballs of the men she targets. Her tendency to target men is the first glimpse of the societal fear incarnated in the *Kuntilanak*.

She appears as a woman who, after being raped, was impregnated and then murdered by her oppressor. In other cases, the *Kuntilanak* died from painful childbirth. Like many vampires, the *Kutilanak* died an unfortunate death and now seeks revenge because she cannot find peace. This revenge against men created the central aspect of her character; she exemplifies to young women what becomes of girls who do not act the way a good wife should. In her ghostly form, she seduces men, laughs hysterically, and is openly erotic. After being staked, however, the *Kuntilanak* transforms into the beautiful woman she was before her soul was tainted with evil. Timo Duile points to the symbolism behind the spike:

When human, *Kuntilanak* is a beautiful and subordinated woman. However, when the spike or nail is removed she turns into a ghost again. She is then uncontrolled and symbolically depicts the inappropriate aspects of female behavior.¹⁷

The Transformation of the Vampire in post-Romantic literature

As stated previously, vampires represent fear of ostracization from society or a failure to conform to cultural capital, meaning the traditions and social expectations people must acknowledge to gain social acceptance. If a member of one's family is proven to be a vampire, it

14. Oliver-Smith, Anthony. “The Pishtaco: Institutionalized Fear in Highland Peru.” *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 82, no. 326 (1969): 363–68.

15. Vasquez del Aguila, Ernesto. “Pishtacos: Human Fat Murderers, Structural Inequities, and Resistances in Peru.” *America Critica*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Dec. 2018): pp. 140-156.

16. Vasquez del Aguila, Ernesto. “Pishtacos: Human Fat Murderers, Structural Inequities, and Resistances in Peru.”

17. Duile, Timo. “Kuntilanak: Ghost Narratives and Malay Pontianak, Indonesia.” *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia*, vol. 126, no. 1/3 (2022): pp 279-303.

brings shame to the family for failing to follow social codes. Outside of dishonor to the family, cultural capital concerning vampirism is the relationship humans hold between worldview and the conception of life and death. More specifically, vampires represent fear of being perceived as evil, failing to please God, and not securing a spot in heaven for themselves or a loved one; this causes humans to remain in a moralistic worldview while alive or rather act in accordance with their religion. Put simply, morals are a conception of life, vampires are a conception of death, and worldview is the religion one adheres to avoid this conception.¹⁸ Fear-based morality is how religions and social expectations have survived for so long. The Jews used Lilith to scare young men and women from sexual promiscuity, India and Peru used the vampire to warn people of the danger of outsiders, and Malaysians used the *Kuntilanak* to scare young maidens from independence.

After the Enlightenment, people became far less concerned with salvation and the ability to transcend after death. Although folklore became rather old-fashioned, the vampire was able to transform from a folkloric creature used as a fear tactic on the uneducated class to an anti-hero who represents the sorrows of the human mind. This is due to vampiric representations in literature, which caused them to become a symbol of introspection on the nature of the human soul.¹⁹

This type of vampire has an undoubted origin in the Romantic period. Lasting from roughly 1798 through 1836, the Romantic period of literature was highly influential in changing the superstitions behind vampires into the creatures we know today. While many of the most influential vampire novels outdated the Romantic period, they still hold strong similarities with their themes, novels like John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), and of course, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). The romanization of the vampire moved it away from being a creature of pure violence and terror but instead became a creature of allure and passion. This transformation is stated brilliantly by James Twitchell:

The vampire's actual attack is notable for its total lack of violence.
 I cannot think of any other monster-molester in our culture who does
 Such terrible things in such a gentlemanly manner... The female victim
 Is most often preparing for bed, dressed in a negligee, usually white
 and inviting; the vampire mysteriously approaches; she somehow
 encourages the reproachment; he captivates her (literally entralls her),
 kisses her, then bites her on her neck and sucks her blood... and leaves
 her swooning.²⁰

The curse of the vampire evolved from ideas of the afterlife to a complex representation of consciousness. The result of the Romantic movement caused the vampire to become human, or instead, less animalistic. The vampire of today is eternally hungry and eternally lonely. He roams the Earth aimlessly, unable to die, attempting to fill the void in his soul with sex, money, or violence. As the ideas of morality evolve, so does the vampire; he represents how Earthly desires we know today, like excessive lust, greed, or violence, only lead to unhappiness. Even though the vampire is wealthy and attractive, his existence brings nothing but unhappiness; he is

18. Avdiko, Evangelos. "Vampire Stories in Greece and the Reinforcement of Socio-Cultural Norms."

19. Inoue, Yoshitaka. "Contemporary Consciousness as Reflected in Images of the Vampire." *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche* 5, no. 4 (2011): 83–99.

20. Twitchell, James. "The Vampire Myth." *American Imago*, vol. 37, no. 1 (1980): 83–92.

21. David Barker, Stephanie Green, and Agnieszka Stasiewicz-Beinkowska. "Vampiric transformations; the popular politics of the (post) romantic vampire."

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forever chained to the Earth, never able to feel like the release of death, and left with an eternal hunger for chaos.²¹

Vampires Evolution through Film

After the age of the romantic vampire had begun, the creature had found its way into being a cultural icon in film. This new age of influence began with *Nosferatu: a Symphony of Horror* by F.W. Murnau, made in 1922, which was banned in many countries for copyright, as well as excessive violence and lack of censorship. Many copies were destroyed following a lawsuit from Bram Stoker's widow claiming the character Count Orlock and the entire plot of *Nosferatu* was stolen from *Dracula*. This argument is hard to deny, because Murnau created the movie illegally after Florence Stoker refused to sell the rights to the novel. Despite this, Murnau continued his adaptation of *Dracula* and simply changed the characters' names to avoid prosecution. Although the movie is technically illegal today, *Nosferatu* has become a staple of horror culture. But one undeniable fact about Count Orlock is that he is not romantic. With long sharp claws, animalistic fangs, and goblin-like ears, Orlock is hardly the alluring anti-hero we see today. In fact, the imagery in *Nosferatu* was so jarring, some people were reported to have fainted in the theater! Almost a decade later, the gothic icon would truly come to light with the filming of Tod Browning's *Dracula* in 1931.

Browning's *Dracula* was the first vampire film to air (legally) worldwide. Starring Bela Lugosi, this version of Dracula would be the true turning point for horror culture. Lugosi's signature Hungarian accent, as well as his outfit of evening formal wear adorned with a red velvet cape, became traditional for Dracula representations. Along with his appearance, Lugosi's character also became a staple for how a Romantic acts vampire for years to come. Unlike Count Orlock, Dracula was conventionally attractive, aristocratic, and had a piercing gaze that was designed to be appealing to the audience. Another factor that played into the change in Dracula's menace was that Bela Lugosi refused to wear vampire fangs, and many of the more intense scenes were censored due to film restrictions at the time.²²

After the release of the 1931 *Dracula*, many recreations were made, all taking different approaches when filming. In 1958, *The Horror of Dracula* was released. Directed by Terence Fisher and starring Christopher Lee, it includes many aspects that the 1931 *Dracula* lacked. This version of a vampire was less romantic but is still humanized, and had the typical Dracula appearance; slicked back hair, pale skin, and aristocratic clothing. Not only was this version the first vampire film in color, but Christopher Lee can also be seen with large fangs doused in blood and bloodshot eyes when he is uncovered devouring the blood of Mina Harker.

Dracula of 1992, directed by Francis Ford Coppola, would be the beginning of the truly romantic vampire. Instead of being the antagonist, this version of Dracula is the tragic main character, who was forced to become an immortal being, and the viewer can't help but feel sorrow for his condition. By playing into emotions rather than fear, and making the vampire a creature of love, *Dracula* of 1992 would be very telling to the increased consciousness that we see going into the modern age. With all of the powers of modern film making, people were no longer fascinated by color pictures and shocking imagery. The only way to truly create a powerful story is to use unique aspects of the human consciousness to create a character that we sympathize with, because they represent aspects we see in ourselves. As vampires have done for centuries before, they changed once again into the highly romantic version that would become very popular in the 21st century, creating a new archetype: the introspective.

The first notable piece of media to come out of the introspective vampire was *The Vampire Chronicles* by Anne Rice, the most famous of the chronicles being *Interview With the*

Vampire. Although the book was written in 1976, the film adaptation would be created in 1994, which is one of the most significant in the vampire genre. The movie was highly romantic, with the main character Louis being the epitome of the “introspective vampire.” He is extremely self aware, and the misery he feels for being forced to kill humans is a common theme throughout the film. He is directly contrasted with his vampire accomplice Lestat, who carries absolutely no remorse for what he has become, as he is seen killing aimlessly, taking the perspective that since he is bound to this Earth forever, he might as well take advantage of his position as an apex predator.²³ These two are a great example of how vampires represent the human condition, by either living your life in misery because you know what it means to be alive, or choosing to act aimlessly with no remorse for the monster you truly are.

Conclusion

Vampiric folklore is a precious tool to gain a unique cross-cultural historical insight and understanding. Only looking at written records or the effects of wars and conquests fails to account for what day-to-day life might have been like for many societies of the past. A wide range of societies seem to have an undead vampire-like creature who plays into the fears of their culture. In cases like the *pishtaco*, the stories give insight into the fear Peruvian natives held towards the conquistadors, without the stories being clouded by biases of those who could read and write. In the case of the *Kutilanak*, we see how women's sensuality was so taboo that it was demonized to the point where men were killed by a female spirit who indulges in pleasure. Folklore gives insight into what behavior was acceptable and what was deemed inappropriate. It tells us the underlying fears of a culture and how those fears affect the social relations between people. By looking into fictional stories, we can see the fears and traditions a group of people held from word-of-mouth storytelling without the biases of the wealthy elite.

In the post-Enlightenment age, vampires are also a unique tool to see how the individual has evolved. After the introduction of the introspective vampire, they became tools for examining man's relationships with society and his relationship with the mind. As humanity moved away from total devotion to God (or Gods), our myths and folklore had a coevolution. Outside of superstition, vampirism beautifully represents man's struggle with the subjective. Whether one views vampire mythology through a historical or literary lens, it is hard to deny that they represent the fears and weaknesses embedded deep within humanity. The vampire changed as our fears changed, and we became aware of just how vicious our battle with the psychological can be.

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