

The modern vampire's "breaking dawn"

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It all starts like this: a clique of vapid, blond girls wander into the dark.

Cheap, manufactured fog rolls in. Eerie music begins to play. From nowhere, fangs burst out of the darkness. Swifter than wind, a single vampire yearning for bloodshed bites the girls' necks and drains them of life. Except this vampire hasn't been recognized as a "vampire" for most of history.

In ancient history, vampires merely were the lost shades of the dead, briefly experiencing life again when he or she consumed blood left out for them. The Odyssey's Tiresias is one such example of a vampire of antiquity. Before the nineteenth century, vampires were not depicted as having fangs or fearing water. Something changed in the 1800s, during the Age of Enlightenment, and the myth of the vampire survived and evolved into a violent, gruesome serial killer: rabies. The rabies pandemic of the 18th and 19th century was the catalyst for the modern vampire. Between 1700 and 1881, rabies became a pandemic, infecting our canine companions by the boatload.

There had been previous cases of rabies, yet they were scattered throughout time and across civilizations. There had never been any substantive outbreaks prior to the 18th century. Rabies had never been seen before on such large a scale. Rabies is a viral disease passed not through the bloodstream, as most others are, but through the peripheral nerves. In other words, rabies attacks the brain.

The brain shields itself from most diseases because it is covered in a layer of special capillaries. These capillaries use endothelial cells to allow the diffusion of oxygen, carbon dioxide, and hormones in and out of the brain,

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but block anything else. However, rabies circumvents this protective layer by traveling through the peripheral nerves. The barrier then becomes a chokehold, not allowing any immune responses to slip into the brain. Because rabies is a viral disease and so requires electron microscopy, even the greatest scientists at the time could not begin to understand rabies. Bereft of any explanation, the populace began to panic and create wild, unsubstantiated theories.

One of these theories was vampirism. During the rabies pandemic, there was also a pandemic of vampire sightings. Voltaire noted, " Nothing was spoken of but vampires." These incidents often involved the death of one supposedly-suspicious citizen and the subsequent deaths of many more in the surrounding villages. In the minds of the newly-formed " vampire inspectors" instated by Habsburg Empress Maria Theresa, there was only possible reason for these deaths: the existence of vampires. Their hypothesis: the first corpse awakens in the middle of the night, climbs out of the coffin, and commences chomping on innocent farmers' necks.

The non-paranormal explanation is the ease of transmission of the rabies virus would allow the spread of the virus to a huge population. Rabies' one-hundred percent death rate would then decimate the population to snarling insanity. Many other symptoms of modern vampirism have their roots in rabies. One indicator of rabies is hypersensitivity of the senses. A rabid person might be susceptible to the strong stench of garlic or the brightness of light.

As it is a neurological disorder, rabies can also tinker with the part of the brain that controls sleep patterns. This manipulation of the brain could result in a nocturnal human being. A main characteristic of rabies is hydrophobia, or fear of water. A rabies victim suffering hydrophobia cannot drink water, no matter how much he or she thirsts. This may have contributed to the 19th century belief that vampires cannot cross bodies of water or drink holy water.

The method of transmission for rabies is the same for that of modern vampirism: biting. The ancient vampires lacked the sharp teeth and strong jaws necessary to rip out a living human's neck. However, during the rabies pandemic of the 1800s, the vampire species coincidentally developed fangs. None of these characteristics of the modern vampire existed prior to the rabies epidemic. Finally, there is a socioeconomic parallel between vampires and rabies victims.

Rabies, in the 19th century, disproportionately affected city dwelling, middle-to-upper class families whom could afford to own a dog. One of the most famous rabies cases was that of Maria Caroline Manners, wife of the Earl of Fife. She died from an "innocuous" nip given on her nose by a fluffy French poodle she loved. In the Bronte sisters' novels of the same time-period, over half use rabies as some sort of plot device. The best example of this is Jane Eyre, after Jane discovers Bertha Rochester in the attic. "It was a discolored face — it was a savage face.

I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened lineaments! . . . The lips were swelled and dark; the brow furrowed; the black

eyebrows widely raised over the bloodshot eyes. Shall I tell you what it reminded me of?" " You may.

" " Of the foul German spectre — the Vampyre." Though Bertha is not shown to be a vampire throughout the course of the novel, Bronte uses Bertha's case of rabies to demonstrate that one bite — from either a vampire or a rabid animal — can turn even the most proper upper class Englishman into a snarling and insensate subhuman. These parallels of social prestige and bloodlust are integral to both rabies and vampirism. The modern vampire, with his mouth of viciously sharp fangs, is a mindless and ruthless killer that will stop at nothing to spread the plague of vampirism. He can transform into an intelligent, arrogant gentleman in moments of lucidity.

His " familiars" include a covey of feared rabies vectors, such as the bat and the wolf. He fears nothing but garlic, sunlight, and water. He appears to be a normal, human, member of society until you feel his teeth against your neck. To conclude, today's werewolves (like Jacob Black) had better watch out, because the modern vampire is nothing short of rabies' physical manifestation: the apex predator.