

Bloodsuckers: walking among us?

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It is the dead of night. Darkness encircles the suburban home, overshadowing every object and any aspect of light. Silence infiltrates the air around her room. A slight breeze blows in from the open window, and she stirs sleepily in bed.

All of a sudden, an icy cool, wisp of air brushes against the back of her neck, causing goosebumps to rise, and her eyes fly open with a start. All reason lost, she sits up abruptly, and fails to hold back a scream. For she finds herself face to face with an inhumanly beautiful yet frightening creature staring back at her from the penetrating darkness. His features are tense; skin as pale as chalk but giving off a misty glow, eyes a shimmering bright gold, bronze hair tousled back in waves, and a hungry, fervent smile etched on his face, revealing two prominent canine-like fangs. He stares at her intently. Her heart hammers against her ribs.

Her instincts tell her to flee, scam. But she finds she cannot tear herself away from his intense gaze. She stares transfixed with fear, horror, and yet wonder. Her mind a blank slate, her barely audible voice murmurs one word through her quivering lips: “ Vampire....” He grins satisfied.

Eyes never leaving her throat, he slowly advances towards her, like a predator on his prey. This example creates the typical image we are used to seeing these days with the media-vampire-franchise. The concept of Vampirism has been given a modern twist. Vampires. The word itself conjures up different images and meanings for different people. For some it's the breathtaking, strong, romantic characters that grace the pages of Stephanie Meyers' “ Twilight Saga.

” For others it’s the bloodthirsty, frightening, horrific creation of Bram Stokers’ “ Dracula.” Both novels seek to entertain and at times frighten the reader. But the questions remain: Is the media’s depiction of vampires valid? Is there a bit of truth behind these glossy novels and movies? Most of all do Vampires even exist? Have they ever existed? The controversial, highly debated issue about vampires existence; by historians, scientists, and everyday people, has been around for ages. From ancient folklore and cultural legends to the modern day media franchise, the topic of vampires goes unmissed. The two standing arguments on the topic of vampires existence are: the side claiming vampires did exist in the past and still do today, and the opposing side claiming that vampires do not exist, never did, and anyone thinking otherwise is just too caught up in the media vampire flare.

Through significant research I have found what might have triggered people’s belief in vampires in the past, and evidence contradicting some people’s claims that vampires do exist. The absurdity and impossibility of vampire’s existence can be proven with historical accounts, scientific/medical data, and logical thinking and common sense. It all begins with some insight into the historical past. The concept of Vampirism comes from ancient Indian and Asian legends. For example, the Hindus believed in a frightening woman named “ Langsuir” who during her lifetime “ died of grief after learning that her baby was born dead” (Scavone 14). She later came back as an evil spirit to haunt woman everywhere.

Her appearance was said to be horrifying. Her hair flowed down to her ankles, hiding the big hole at the back of her neck, from which she sucked

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the blood of babies. This legend suggests that the woman simply came back from the dead for revenge and maybe out of jealousy also. For one she would definitely be heartbroken and jealous that her baby died and other ladies' newborns survived. She might also want revenge on the living, for her baby's death, so she goes around sucking other babies blood and ends up killing them, so the mothers can feel the same way she did, endure the same pain she did, when she learned of her child's death. Another similar legend comes from Malaysia, where people believe in a terrible creature named "Penanggalen.

" According to Malaysian legend, " A woman startled during her prayers, accidentally kicked herself so hard in the chin that the skin split around her neck and her head became detached from her body. Attached to the head were her stomach and intestines, hanging down in strings" (Scavone 15.) Legend has it that Penanggalen enters the body of a woman and uses that body to feed on the bodies of children. This legend of course seems over exaggerated and absurd to the extreme. For one, how in the world can you "kick" yourself in the chin, a person's leg/foot cannot touch their face by kicking, no matter how hard they tried.

Secondly she supposedly "kicked" herself so hard that she ended up tearing her skin and making her head fall off(wow, she must have been strong....). Really? That is just ridiculous. Sounds more like demonic activity than a woman merely "startled during her prayers". Which may have made people link this legend with vampirism in later generations.

Although it can also be inferred that people of the later generations may have tampered with this legend and added in additional information, to merely frighten and disgust people. An addition, since these legends are passed down from generations, as cultural traditions and heritage, most of the people within the culture group fail to question any part of the logic within the legends. They just listen and believe in what their told, then pass it on to the generation after them, without ever questioning any aspect; because they think since the legend was remembered and the fear kept alive for all those centuries, then the overall story must be true. Both legends create a sense of horror, repulsion, and shock. Both legends were intended to evoke fear in people, with its tactics of cannibalism, and to not only frighten them, but to make them believe in the unthinkable, the impossible, and the supernatural.

Thus, the Vrykolakas (Greek for Vampire), Strigoi (Roman for Vampire), or Vampire was born. The belief in vampires started as early as 1100 and went on through the Middle Ages. Vampirism and the Vampire myth originated from three main areas: Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the region along the Indus River Valley. The belief started around the 1100's because during this time, majority of the people were uneducated, highly opinionated, fearful, and relayed on higher authority to protect them from any potential dangers that would threaten society. In Eastern Europe, Christianity and the Catholic Church greatly influenced people's belief in vampires. They publicized the idea of Heaven and Hell, of God and Satan, and of angels and demons that occupied society.

The church was highly powerful during this time, and they advocated the idea that if one did not attend church, one would be doomed towards Hell and its demons. Moreover, they supported the idea that “ Vampires existed and that they were the agents of the devil” (Scavone 20). The church’s intention behind this claim was to frighten people enough, so that they would come to church constantly for the church’s advice on how to best defend themselves and ward off vampires. People sought the church to rid them of demons and vampires. The church established that they were the only authority strong enough to exterminate vampires. Failure to attend church regularly was regarded as a crime and led to terrible consequences.

For example, in the Greek Orthodox Church, the tradition has always expected obedience, conformity, and attendance from its members. Failure to do this resulted in excommunication. For example “...the church charged that if a sinner was excommunicated, he or she was prone to vampirism. This was because excommunication supposedly stopped the body from decomposing after death and prevented the spirit from finding internal rest in Heaven” (Scavone 32). Clearly no one wanted to be condemned a vampire, so they went to church regularly and were constantly brainwashed into believing vampires roamed the earth. The accounts of Vampirism became common in Europe in the fourteenth century.

In 1348, the bubonic plague (Black Death) swept across Europe.

Approximately twenty-five million people died from this disease. The ones fortunate to survive, were completely perplexed and unsure of what was behind this plague. (It should be noted that during this time the majority of the people were uneducated and could neither read nor write. Without

knowledge it is almost impossible for people to evaluate sensibly, common superstitions and fears.) So they made up and used vampires as scapegoats for their problems and the cause of the plague.

After all vampires were acknowledged as existing by the church. To uncover the truth behind modern day myths, and perhaps clear some of the confusions of the past of how many times innocent people were mistaken as being vampires, we move on to the medical aspect of the argument, or the truth behind so called vampires. Vampires are said to be bloodthirsty, bloodsucking, blood craving maniacs. This is in fact false. The “ body is not designed to process large amounts of blood for nutrition.” (Vampires do not exist).

Food alone goes through a complex process in digestion. From the mouth, through the esophagus, it is broken down into the stomach to where the digestive process begins. The nutrients are separated from the rest of the broken down food and sent into the bloodstream and distributed throughout the body. The blood vampires supposedly drink from their victims, the ingested blood would not go directly into the veins or bloodstream but would go through the digestive system, like any food. Thus causing problems. Firstly blood takes a long time to be chemically broken down, and would just end up building and taking up space within the stomach.

And “ the stomach is far too small to hold that much liquid volume” (Vampires do not Exist). The stomach is roughly the size of your clenched fist. This would later result in a difficulty of the blood to pass through the intestines and would create an intestinal impaction. Which would cause “

massive vomiting from the large concentration of iron present”(Vampires do not exist). Thus making it impossible for anybody to drink blood, for food or nutrition.

However there is a rare disease out there that often gets innocent people stereotyped as vampires. It is known as Porphyria. Porphyria is a rare hereditary blood disease that is “ characterized by the inability of the body to produce heme, a component of hemoglobin, which is a major component of red blood” (Scavone 56). In other words it is a major component in the making of blood or blood cells. Fortunately today there is treatment for Porphyria, such as the injection of heme into the bloodstream.

Without treatment however, like cases in the past, people diagnosed with Porphyria suffered greatly. The horrible symptoms included extreme sensitivity to sunlight, which if exposed to the sun, caused these people to get sores and scars on their skin, and all over their body. Other symptoms included excessive hairiness, extreme cravings for blood (since their own bodies failed to produce enough), and the skin of the gums and lips tighten and stretch causing the teeth to stick out and appear pointy or fang- like. In extreme cases porphyriacs were driven to acquire the blood, the heme that their own bodies could not produce, by trying to suck the blood from a small animal or a person nearby. Their attempts were feeble and hardly ever successful.

This enabled innocent people to get labeled as vampires when they were really just innocent victims of a terrible disease. Another example that involves the suffering of innocent people is in the past, immobile bodies were

found that seemed to be “drained of blood.” These bodies would therefore be buried into the ground to reside with the rest of the dead bodies. The catch is, some of these bodies were not what they appeared, dead or drained of blood, they were actually in a state of Catalepsy. “Catalepsy is suspended animation, it is the state of a person who is alive but whose breathing, pulse, and other vital signs have slowed down so much that the person seems dead” (Vampires do not Exist).

Cataleptics can see and hear everything, but cannot move a muscle, they are completely paralyzed. This disease is the result of a disorder in the nervous system. Often people in a cataleptic state were buried alive, because they looked dead. Their body would appear to be pale or even gray, because all the blood collected in the back of their body. So it could easily suggest a body drained of blood. Catalepsy was not permanent; eventually cataleptics would come out of their trance, only to find themselves imprisoned in a coffin.

They would then frantically and hectically try to escape by scratching or biting the tops of the coffin. Many died in the attempts to freedom by suffocation. Another medical fact is that no one and I repeat no one is born a vampire. (Not even half of one, in rare cases, such as that of Renesme from “Breaking dawn”?) There is no such thing as a “vampire gene.” Because for example “If such a gene existed, in today’s world with today’s technology it would have been found” (Vampires do not exist). In other words, if a vampire baby was about to be born in a hospital, surely the doctors would notice an abnormality in the baby’s body or overall structure.

This would not have gone missed, because of the advanced technology, such as machines, that would pick up an abnormality within the child. And all the claims of these newborn vampires “ escaping the notice of the medical/scientific community, are so low as to being nonexistent”(Vampires do not exist) On whole, something that unordinary and peculiar has no way of escaping the attention of medical experts or a community. On the logical aspects of things, vampires are recognized for biting humans and turning them into vampires themselves. As quoted in one article “ Vampires would most likely one day rise against humanity, [. . .

] and turn the human population into a vampire one” (Vampires: The Undead). This statement can obviously be perceived as delusional and obviously false. There has been no reported cases of a “ vampire population”, by far most of the population in the world is pure human. The statement can also be proven false through the use of statistics. For example “ if a vampire feeds once a week, and his victim also becomes a vampire, that is exponential growth, with four iterations a month.

First iteration: one makes one, total two. Second iteration: two makes two total four. Third iteration: four makes four total eight. Fourth iteration: eight makes eight total sixteen. 16 vampires at the end of one month, 256 at the end of the second month...” (Vampires do not exist).

There are currently more people in the hospital these days suffering from worldwide diseases such as AIDS, then people suffering from a vampire attack. There has been no documented cases, ever, of people suffering from a vampire attack. Therefore, vampires defeating and taking over the human

population is a mathematical impossibility. It can also be viewed as “ since there is no vampire plague swarming the earth, the logical deduction is that they don’t exist”(Vampires do not exist). Some irrational people still wonder if there is any “ vampire activity” around today.

They say they have the evidence. For example, they claim that Highgate Cemetery in London, England is a “ rather frightening place” (Vampires: the Undead). And that it is haunted and filtered with vampires and vampire activity. It can be assumed that graveyards like the one shown in Figure 1, must look frightening to some. The overgrown grass sticking up in all directions, the rickety leafless tree in the background, the disarranged, tilted tombstones, and the mist surrounding the background are all characteristics intended to evoke a sense of chills and fear in the viewer. The picture might even look haunting to some, because the area clearly looks as if its been isolated, deserted, and unkempt for quite some time.

Graveyards like the one above are rumored to be filled with spirits, and supernatural activity. With this idea in mind, if you were to visit this area (which I don’t know why anyone would) knowing it to be secluded and quiet, and suddenly you heard a snapping of a twig, or a sudden misty chill sweep over you, what would stop you from making opinions and superstitions about the remote place, saying such things as the graveyard is haunted. Well that is exactly what people up in London inferred about Highgate Cemetery. They found the cemetery to be abandoned, unkept, and isolated. Thus they reflected the idea that the place was haunted. Their claim went into full gear when they supposedly found ” dead foxes and rabbits [.

. .] had wounds around their throats and their bodies have been completely drained of blood” (Vampires: the Undead). Thus, suggesting the idea the vampires swarmed and haunted the graveyard. They really should not have gone jumping to conclusions, for the marks around these animals throats could have been from just about anything, such as a fight with another animal, or maybe the animal was being hunted by a poacher, anything could have been possible. What made these people suddenly jump to vampires? All in all, in my opinion I think that people in charge of the cemetery are just trying to keep people away from there, by frightening them and suggesting that the supernatural infiltrate the area, for their own selfish reasons.

From the research and evidence provided it can be concluded that people from the past, that believed in vampires, were arrogant, delusional, and unintelligent. Claiming vampires exist is like claiming Santa Claus is evil, humans can fly, and that the world’s going to end in 2012. Its impossible! So give it up people. All in all, it can obviously be inferred that vampires do not walk among us, that they are merely fictional creatures part of our imagination, set to entertain and frighten us. Anyone thinking otherwise, anybody who thinks vampires are real, as quoted in an article “...is either living in a fantasy, lying through their teeth, has mistaken autonomic biofeedback adrenaline/endorphin release for “ draining”, or are caught up in a delusion bordering mental illness” (Vampires do not Exist).