

# The myth of dracula

Literature



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In October of 1999, a television series began that would run for approximately four and a half years. This series would again sate the American appetite for vampire stories begun by the likes of Bram Stoker, Anne Rice, Tanith Lee, and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro. The name of the series? Angel. The Premise? A vampire, originally named Angelus, had been cursed by a gypsy victim, with a soul, and could no longer kill humans. And if he fell in love with one, his dark side would return, which he feared more than anything else. The series featured many flashbacks to many centuries past because the vampires depicted were several centuries old.

Not only that, but the vampire had true eye-appeal for the female audience. He was tall, dark, and handsome, just like almost every vampire in almost every myth America has ever heard (Angel site, 2004). But could such a creature truly exist? Although the vampire myth is present in many societies around the world through the centuries, there is a basis in science and fact, for this legend. To start off with, one of the most popular modern vampire stories, written in 1897, was Bram Stoker's Dracula. To this day, it sets the bar for the modern vampire.

Authors have a tendency to pull juicy pieces of many different tales together to patchwork them into something to hold the reader's interest. From where could he have gotten this character? First off, the legendary figure of Vlad Dracule was the basis, for this character. Dracule was born in November or December of 1431 in Romania (Leblanc, 2000). In 1442, he and his younger brother were taken hostage by the Turks for political reasons. During his imprisonment, he was badly abused by his captors (Highby, 2003). His father

was assassinated by the Wallachian Boyars while the young Dracule was being held by the Turks.

Dracule took power of the Wallachian throne in July of 1456 and immediately killed the Boyars that had assassinated his father, impaling some on stakes, others, he forced to march 50 miles to build a fortress. He had grown to become a very handsome and strong Christian leader, much revered by his people (Leblanc, 2000). He was very devout in his beliefs, choosing to wear the black cape over red garments every Friday, which signified penance (Highby, 2003). In 1462, Vlad took his vengeance on the Turks for their cruelty, Christianizing the entire region.

History, however; marks him as a bloody tyrant who tortured and staked his enemies and drank their blood as he surveyed the staked bodies of his victims. Legend has it that once; he was angered by what the emissary of one of his enemies had to say, so he had the man's metal cap nailed to his head. This monster was said to have been assassinated by the Wallachian Boyars who had replaced those who killed his father, because they disagreed with his foreign policies (Leblanc, 2000). Vlad Dracule was not the only source of Bram Stoker's Dracula myth. He also pulled elements from Countess Elizabeth Bathory.

She was called the Blood Countess because she led blood cults in her country. Countess Bathory was born in 1560 or 1561. Rumor had it that, as a child, she suffered from fits and exhibited uncontrolled rages that may have indicated a brain disorder associated with increased aggression. The same rumor also says that her nurse from childhood practiced the black arts

requiring the sacrifice of children for their bones and blood (Ramsland, 2007). She first started preying on her serving girls. When villagers began missing their wives and daughters, they launched an investigation (Wyatt, 2003).

The result of this investigation was that the Countess had been murdering these young women and bathing in their blood in order to keep her beautiful, youthful appearance (Wyatt, 2003). The scene at her castle was considered too disturbing to be written down. There were reportedly bodies found throughout the keep. According to her hearing records, she had 11 cohorts to her crimes, and her death toll, officially, was 80 young women.

Unofficially, it is said that she, and her cronies, killed upwards of 300 to fill her bloodlust.

Her family took her and walled her up in a small set of rooms in her castle, except for slits for food, water and air, until she died three and a half years later. After her trial, the records were sealed for a century (Ramsland, 2007). Even before Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the vampire was occurring in civilizations that had no access whatsoever to English or European literature. The Chinese have a word in their language for a vampire, *Jiang Shi*, which is completely dissimilar from the English version, which indicates that their knowledge of vampires either predated or co-dated the European occurrence (Canal, 2004).

The Native American Cherokee call them either *Jumlin* or *U`TLUN'TA* (NightPoe, 2006). These tales predate Columbus' appearance in the New World. The vampire has also appeared in myths from India and Russia, at the

time of appearance, a third world country under British control and an isolationist country. Even Spain has its own vampire legend (Canal, 2004)! How is this possible? What could cause such tales, legends and myths throughout the world? What is a vampire? What signs point to a vampire? According to popular legend, vampires are creatures of the night, highly sensitive to daylight.

They have long, sharp canine teeth. They are immortal. They thirst for blood. The only way to kill them is a stake in the heart. They are warded off by Garlic and Crosses. They cannot enter a home without being invited. These are the things people learn from the tales of their childhood, but can they be explained by science? Sensitivity to daylight can be explained by many things. There is such a thing as an allergy to the sun. This has become more common recently, as the ozone layer continues to erode. Certain illnesses, such as Lupus, can cause a severe skin reaction when the sufferer goes out in the sun.

Certain common prescription drugs carry warning labels to be cautious of exposure to the sun because it affects the body's ability to protect itself from sunlight. Porphyria would also explain the sensitivity to the sun as well as the blood thirst, and the elongated teeth. The affects of Porphyria are well-documented. The skin weakens and is unable to protect itself against ultra-violet rays. The skin blackens and ruptures. Lips are burned and peel back, allowing more of the teeth to show. The nose erodes and the fingers disintegrate, creating a paw-like appearance. How common is this illness? Porphyria is said to affect one in 100, 000.

Considering that the population of the world today is well over 6 billion, this means that there is a fairly large community of Porphyria patients. And considering that a 16th century European judge, H. Bouget, had 600 Porphyria victims burned at the stake as monsters after they were given the choice of confessing their sins or facing trial, this would also explain their fear of crosses (Tikkanen, 1998). In the more enlightened society existing today, Porphyria has been explained as a genetic enzyme deficiency that can be treated with proper diet and certain prescription drugs (Porphyria Foundation, 2007).

What of their extraordinary long life? Could it just be another side-effect of genetics? A recessive gene that has been triggered can cause the person to age extremely slowly. Scientists have been working to unlock the secrets of the Human Genome and map the Human Gene. One of the research goals is to stop aging. Why could this gene not be triggered by accident in certain people, causing life spans that are two to three times that of a normal human being? To ignorant people of the middle ages, this long life would seem almost god-like.

They would either look upon it in awe or look at the person as a monster, trying to assume god-like abilities (Meyers, 1993). From another point of view, there are people these days that form the basis for the Goth movement, and who call themselves vampires, and enter into blood cults and such. They wear period clothing from the 18th century and wear dark makeup to make them look pale. They also wear fake vampire teeth and other trinkets to mark themselves as vampires. There are two ways of looking at this group.

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The Psychological point of view would have us believe that these people are mentally ill, suffering from delusions, and would have people believe that they need to be treated by medicine and hospitalization, if necessary (Wartofsky, 1997). On the other hand Sociologists view these people as sociopaths, completely untreatable. To them, these people should be locked up for the rest of their lives (Lee, 2006). Can these experts possibly be right? Are they mental or social deviants that need to be removed from society? Most of these people just want to be noticed. They want to set themselves apart from the crowd.

Surely, there is no harm in that so long as they do no harm to themselves or those around them. Goth is nothing more than a passing phase. Once these people grow more, emotionally, they will move past wanting to be vampires and will return to societal norms. But, what does the Church have to say of all this? Religion continually blasts the occult, and vampirism is classified as occult, for them. In the 16th century, Porphyria victims had the option of confessing their sins to the church, or face Judge H. Bouquet. 600 of them died, burned at the stake, because of that (Tikkanen, 1998).

Christianity has proven to be intolerant of such things as vampirism, witchcraft, and such. The Church has hunted and burned witches, vampires, and any other practitioner of the occult for centuries. These days, the Catholic Church has taken a more lenient stand against the occult. In the past several decades, they have refused to even acknowledge that such things as haunting, vampirism, and witchcraft even exist (Catholic.org, 2008). This is obviously a relief to the occult communities, as they no longer have to hide their activities from religious persecutions

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As a matter of fact, since the dawn of the Information Age, there has been resurgence in the openness and ability to practice the religions and beliefs of choice. Such religions as Wicca, Satanism, and even Vampirism have moved out into the world. Witches no longer fear wearing a pentacle or triquetra. Satanists openly wear the reversed pentacle or the rams head. And not to be left in the shadows, vampires will wear their little fake teeth and period clothing that mark them as vampires. Vampires have become myth in many countries, but, as with any myth, there is a basis in reality for such myths.

If a person were to Google Vampires, 19.5 million sites dealing with vampires are returned. More sites are returned, for this search, than if the same person were to Google Witchcraft. The Vampire myth is currently undergoing a love affair with the world, once again, even though the origins of the legend have become lost to time. Porphyria and allergies to the sun explain some of the facets of the myth, but Vlad Dracule and Lady Bathory never had such illnesses. In these cases, their sheer viciousness, cruelty, and bloodlust is what named them as vampires in the annals of history.