

Vampire Essentiality Derivation From Religious Beliefs^{*}

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This paper detracts vampires' traits from definitions by famous biblical exegetists and alike. Based on accounts of vampire-synonymous species from the *Holy Bible* (2000), *The Vampire Book* (2010), *Encyclopedia of Vampire Mythology* (2010), etc., it attempts an analysis of essential vampire features derivation from religious beliefs with the aim to amply appreciate vampire culture and paint evidentially-built vampire portraits as against totally self-imagined traits.

Keywords: vampire, essentiality, religious beliefs

Introduction

Hit shows like *Twilight* (2009), *True Blood* (2008), *Vampire Diary* (2009), etc., popularize the vampire image as an ancient devil. However, such a character, catering to curiosity though, blurs the view on vampires in authoritative accounts and entails a research revealing vampires' evidentially-built traits. Tracing the development of vampire culture from preeminent literature works and vampire movies, this paper presents typical vampire figures widely accepted by relevant interest groups. Some authoritative and precise definitions to vampires are given to clarify what a vampire actually is. And derivation from religious beliefs is discussed of essential vampire traits. Such vampire attributes could be the fundamentals to understanding the vampire image, providing proof and cultural notes for vampire fans and movie makers.

Vampire Culture

"Since the dawn of man, there has been the belief in supernatural vampire" (Bane, 2010, p. 7), and debates of its existence boom the vampire culture in many fields like literature, movie, drama, psychology, etc., with the word "vampirism" created to tag vampire researches and stories (Melton, 2010, p. 5). Popular and influential vampire novels and movies are suffused with mystery, darkness as well as romance. And researchers from various fields have been trying to figure out what bring about vampires' traits and why.

Prominent Vampire Novels and Movies

One of the major factors for vampire essential traits derivation is art works, mainly novels and movies. John Polidori's short story *Vampire*, published in 1819, creating the vampire Lord Ruthven, a heartless world-traveling

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aristocrat who lures and kills innocent women in order to feed on their blood, was considered by many as the foundation of modern vampire fiction (Melton, 2010, p. xi). John's work influenced many writers, especially drama writers in France and England. Then in 1872, a more innovative approach to the vampire was provided by an Irish writer Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu with the release of his short story *Carmilla*, which incorporates vampire lore in a gothic setting. The story involves a male vampire who develops a long-term attachment to a female victim. Works with vampire theme in 19th century after these two masterpieces were less popular and featureless till the publication of *Dracula* (2010) by Abraham Bram Stoker, re-initiating the popularity of vampire fiction that has continued to this day. Elements in *Vampire* (1819) and *Carmilla* (1872) are utilized to produce a gothic background for the story of an unholy aristocratic predator from the grave that mesmerizes, defiles, and feeds from the beautiful women he killed. Stoker's novel distinguishes vampire's appearance and characters with more specific details, and it has been adapted into dramas, movies, and music plays. Some clubs and associations are founded for studying and publicizing this historic vampire figure, Dracula. Noticeably both the heroes in the novels and members of modern vampire clubs are blood-adoring and night-activated none-Christians without a faith to God.

In 20th century, few vampire novels were published worthy of attention until 1954 with Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (Melton, 2010). Unable to surpass the general popularity of *Dracula* though, Matheson's book enriches vampire stories and introduces an updated vampire to new generations. Another innovation of vampire's image is originated from Anne Rice's *Interview With the Vampire* published in 1976. "Rice paints a macabre picture of a highly cultured and sensitive person, Louis de Pointe du Lac, who is unwittingly cast into the ghoulish world of vampire" (Melton, 2010, p. 55). Different from Stoker's cold, ferocious, and mysterious vampire, Rice's vampire is endowed with thought and humanity instead of a pure monster or devil, stressing the concept that vampires, transforming from humans, do not emerge out of nothing. In 1970s, other prominent and influential vampire novels come to debut, such as *The Night Stalker* by Jeff Rice in 1973, *Salem's Lot* by Stephen King in 1975, and *The Space Vampires* by Colin Wilson in 1976. All of them are made into movies later.

In 1972, a non-fiction *In Search of Dracula* written by Florescu Radu and McNally Raymond was released focusing on finding the prototype of vampire Dracula through history and explaining vampire's cruelty and blood addiction in an evidential way. These two scholars from East European Research Center of Boston University argue that the character of Dracula in Bram Stoker's novel is actually based on a historical figure who was a 15th century warlord and prince named Vlad Tepes of Wallachia, a Romanian region that borders on Transylvania. He was known as a fierce warrior and sadistic ruler who ordered the deaths of thousands, often insisting that his victims be impaled on long stakes (Radu & Raymond, 1994, p. 134).

Vampire movies have a shorter history than vampire novels but, in the e-generation, become globalized in a rather short time, e.g., the *Twilight* movie series, impressing people with vampires' pale skin, immortality, and bloodthirsty nature. In 1931, the movie *Dracula* was released and became the landmark motion picture, standardizing the vampire image as a sinister aristocratic figure with elegant manners, an exotic accent, and dressed in formal evening wear with a long flowing cape. Another standard vampire trait came with the re-made movie *Dracula*—elongated eye teeth, or fangs. And since 1970s, handsome actors playing *Dracula* further innovated the vampire image. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in 1997 is considered as the most successful vampire movie series and influences a new generation of writers. And movies like *True Blood*, *Vampire Diaries*,

Underworld Evolution (2006), and *Being Human* (2008) all reveal basic vampire traits: noble, isolated, pale-skinned, bloodthirsty, emotional, and darkness-preferring.

Vampires' images vary in different cultures of distinct faiths, but they also have characters in common. It can be assumed that the vampire, existent or non-existent, is born to visualize humans' fear, panic, evil, loneliness, and other passive emotions that go against their sacred beliefs, hence the meaning of studying vampire essential traits derives from human being's religious beliefs.

Social Groups Concerning Vampires

Nowadays, in America and England alone, there are 25 vampire culture organizations. These vampire fiction/movie fan clubs, vampire role-play game clubs, and several publishing institutes devote to gothic music and vampire-like life style with regular publications to express interest in vampirism. The oldest and most reputable vampire organization is the British Dracula Society founded by Bernard Davis and Bruce Whiteman in 1973. The major research targets of this organization are Dracula and Bram Stoker. And it regularly organizes programs, auctions, and parties to gather its members in memory of vampire Dracula and art works about him. Another famous vampire organization is The Count Dracula Fan Club set up in 1965. This club aims at advocating, supporting, and studying *Dracula* and other vampire subjects.

Many may wonder if a vampire club's member will possibly be a Christian or a Catholic. Would God share a table with the Demon? This curiosity leads to the authors' research for an answer.

Vampire Essentiality

Before defining vampire essentiality, the classic question has to be asked: What is a vampire. The definition will never please all, but what is widely accepted about vampire traits can describe and distinguish it from other species.

Some definitions are detailed and precise. For example, "A soul or re-animated body of a dead person believed to come from the grave and wander about by night sucking the blood of persons asleep, causing their death" (*Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*, 2002, p. 679). Whitney (2009) interpreted a vampire as:

A kind of spectral body which, according to a superstition existing among the Slavic and other races on the Lower Danube, leaves the grave during the night and maintains a semblance of life by sucking the warm blood of living men and women while they are asleep. (p. 1355)

Another authoritative definition is given by a famous biblical exegetist:

We are told that dead men, men who have been dead for several months, I say, return from the tomb, are heard to speak, walk about, infest hamlets and villages, injure both men and animals, whose blood they drain thereby making them sick and ill, and at length actually causing death. Nor can men deliver themselves from these terrible visitations, nor secure themselves from these horrid attacks, unless they dig the corpses up from the graves, drive a sharp stake through these bodies, cut off the heads, tear out the hearts; or else they burn the bodies to ashes. The name given to these ghosts is Oupires, or Vampires. (Calmet, Christmas, & Leatherdale, 1993, p. 336)

Some key words from all the definitions on vampire traits are: blood, living-dead, grave, and darkness. Besides, the explanation from Calmet et al. (1993) expresses the method to perish vampires. Other concepts and symbols widely accepted and frequently represented in art works are: isolation, cross-taboo, and immortality. In a word, all those traits develop from either a religious background or regional beliefs.

Vampire Essentiality Derivation From Religious Beliefs

However different vampire images are in countless literary works, dramas, or digital products, they share some common essential traits informative of the vampire theme, hence the fundamental traits of vampires, which could very possibly have a tied relation with religious beliefs as is suggested in the previous section.

Vampire Birth Origin From Religious Beliefs

There are two evidence-based versions on the appearance of the first vampire from the *Holy Bible* (2000).

The story about Judas:

{27:1} When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death; ... {27:3} Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, {27:4} Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. ... {27:5} And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. {27:6} And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, it is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. (*Holy Bible*, 2000, p. 161)

This quotation does not describe the birth of the first vampire, but it supplies a blood-subjected background for a logical assumption. Many people continue the story that God was so sorrowful for his son's death that he turned Judas into a blood sucker after his suicide, making him the first vampire suffering from the nature of bloodsucking immortally. Meanwhile, since Judas committed his suicide in dawn, vampires are cursed to live in darkness and never see sunlight; all saint matters can hurt him, especially silver and the cross, the crucifix easily accessible to protect a person from the attack of a vampire (Bane, 2010). Since Judas' punishment is sentenced after death, his transformation to be a vampire starts when he dies. That is why vampires are not born to be but died to be.

The manner of death reinforces Judas' identity as a vampire and shapes the vampire as a devil—a religious belief. In ancient Greek, it is believed that “Wretches who have destroyed themselves become vampires after death”, and “According to the Zoroastrian creed, suicide is a most fearful crime, and is classed among the marg-arzan, the abominable offences” (Summers, 1928, p. 166). What is more, the greatest Saint of Hippo¹ ever said:

For if it be not lawful for a private man to kill any man, however guilty, unless the law have granted a special allowance for it... and so much the more guilty doth that killing of himself make himself, by how much the more guiltless he was in that cause for which he killed himself. For if the act of Judas be worthily detested, and yet the Truth saith, that by hanging of himself, he did rather augment than expiate the guilt of his wicked treachery, because his despair of God's mercy in his damnable repentance... for Judas in hanging himself, hanged but a wicked man and died guilty, not only of Christ's death, but of his own also... (Augustini, 1999, p. xvii)

His announcement proves the serious sin of Judas and pictures vampire a villainous image. Some regional beliefs about the suicider also explain vampire's birth related to religious beliefs. For example, the Scottish think that crops of the suiciders would not decay until the destined age. So the vampire comes out from the grave and scares people as a living-dead. Besides, ancient Jews would not bury suiciders committed after sunset, for they were believed to transform into something horrible. In England before George IV, people buried the suicider at the crossroads, and impaled stakes into the body in case their souls would move and become vampires.

Another version of the first vampire comes from Chapter 4 of the *Holy Bible*. The story goes to Cain and

¹ Hippo is an ancient city in northwest Africa, in which St. Augustine served as a bishop from 396 to 430.

Abel, children of Adam and Eve. “Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard” (*Holy Bible*, 2000, p. 35). So Cain was angry and he killed his brother Abel later. Finally the Lord found Cain’s crime and sentenced:

Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground! And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. ... You will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth. (*Holy Bible*, 2000, p. 1328)

Cain said to the Lord:

My punishment is greater than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me. (*Holy Bible*, 2000, p. 1328)

Then the Lord said to him, “Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance” (*Holy Bible*, 2000, p. 1328). And the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who came upon him would kill him. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and settled in the land of Nod (Nod means wandering) east of Eden.

Cain is regarded as the vampire ancestor by a great many people, indicating vampire’s birth derivation from religious beliefs. First of all, with Lord sentence Cain cannot get any food either from underground or on the ground, so his food available is blood then. His life depends on blood and he suffers painfully from the addiction to blood, also a punishment. Secondly, as a fugitive and wanderer, Cain has no fixed abode and has to hide from the public, so vampires always live alone and isolated, and only appear at night in order to avoid human beings in day time, a cold and lonely figure. Thirdly, Lord’s kindness to protect Cain from being killed indicates vampire’s immortality. So some innovators endow vampires with supernatural powers in their modern works.

The birth of the vampire is a product of religious beliefs. Not a holy character like Jesus or Virgin Mary but a rebel of brightness, ethic, and regular goodness; the vampire’s essentiality originates from the opposite side of the teaching of God. Its traits appear to be abnormal from human beings, because only dead men can be vampires and this is the most serious condemnation to God’s children. So vampires are born to be the devil for the real living.

Vampire Living Customs From Religious Beliefs

Vampires exist or show in certain circumstances called vampires’ living customs or limitations. Belanger (2007) defined essential vampire traits as spiritual immortality, life-force, manifested as prana or blood, affinity with night, darkness, and shadows.

Walking in the Dark

Vampires belong to the darkness. Their night-only actions or shadow-preferring stays prove that vampires always show after sunset. Although some modern movies put them under the sunshine, such a sunshine-proof ability relies on some mysterious articles that are used to protect them from burning. So they are still essentially afraid of light.

Why do vampires only appear at night? Generally speaking, it is because vampire represents the devil that is rejected by the bright Heaven. The legends of vampire’s birth mentioned above show that vampires are turned from dead people believed guilty by the religions; they are criminals and deserve punishments. But how does a punishment execute on the dead? The answer is a penalization to their souls and to whatever they would be after death. “Whatsoever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound also in Heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose upon

earth shall be loosed also in heaven” (*Holy Bible*, 2000, p. 525). Vampires are born to be sinners, so they have to suffer from the light out of heaven. Another explanation for vampires walking in the dark can be dated back to its ancestor Cain. Because Lord sentences Cain as a fugitive in the earth, this first vampire has to avoid humans, which implies hiding in the dark.

In Slavic areas, which is the source of vampire tales, dead people would transform to vampires if they are drinkers, thieves, murders, witches, excommunicated, or not baptized. In Bulgaria, there is a saying that children born on Saturday and die before baptism will send their spirits back to the ground on the 9th day after burying, sucking the blood of flocks and herds during the night and returning to their graves before dawn. This ancient vampire-synonymous demon in regional belief lays a foundation for modern vampire image and develops a vampire’s trait of walking in the dark.

Sleeping in the Coffin

Previous sections clearly indicate that vampires are dead people in spite of their human-alike faces and movements. Generally, dead people are put in the coffins and buried. Therefore, sleeping in the coffin, which is one of the typical features of vampires, symbolizes its identity as a dead man and renders a horrific atmosphere. “The corpse of the suspected vampire, when examined, appears well-nourished with healthy blood, and presents the appearance of one in cataleptic sleep, rather than of death” (Olcott, 1989, p. 3). Related to other vampire traits, sleeping in the coffin is a protection for vampires from sunlight and recognition.

Living Immortally

Immortality, a super benefit to the secular eyes, is actually a fearful destiny of the vampire, a punishment from God for sinners.

Vampire is an abnormality; the androgyne in the phantom world; a pariah among the fiends. ... There are few things more beautiful and there are few things sadder than the songs of our modern Pagans who console their aching hearts with the wistful vision of eternal sleep. (Summers, 1928, p. 211)

A life without an end is boring and passionless, suggesting vampires’ desperation to the pitiless essentiality of immortality.

Vampires Behavioral Traits From Religious Beliefs

Vampire behavioral traits reflect their dirty spirit and are shaped by holy concepts. Avoiding sunlight in day time and sucking blood at night are two typical vampire behavioral traits.

Burning in Sunlight

Vampires burn in sunlight. Seen from its birth, it is because Judas was punished by God never to see the sunlight any more, and Cain was sentenced a life away from the public. Since these vampire ancestors were convicted of sins, if their descendants go against the judgment, touching the sunshine, they will be burning.

Secondly, light also means firelight, which in many religions is the best way to perish vampires completely. “If the corpse be cremated, the vampire ceases to trouble. I have found no exception stated in this respect” (Olcott, 1989, p. 4). Summers (1928) gave a similar account:

It is taken up out of the grave, the priests recite the appointed prayers, and it is thrown on to a fiercely blazing pyre. Before the orisons are finished, skin will desquamate and the members fall apart, when the whole body is utterly consumed to ashes. (p. 58)

Obsessing Blood

Vampires' addiction to blood, the most typical attribute among all, does not develop from modern people's creation, but from certain religious beliefs, in which blood is said to be sucked by the dead to strengthen themselves. As a criminal crop, the vampire is an anti-religious devil that keeps seeking for energy or life and rebelling against the church. Cain, the vampire ancestor, was sentenced a curse from the ground without any food, so he had to suck blood for survival. And according to the *Bible*, "The blood is the life". So it is not necessarily the blood itself that the vampire seeks, but the psychic energy or "life force" it symbolizes.

Conclusions

With an aim to build a convincing typical vampire figure, this paper analyzes essential vampire's traits derived from religious beliefs based on authoritative references as regards. Seen through the religious aspect, vampire's essentiality such as night walking, bloodsucking, and immortality, does reflect its evil soul and sinful identity. This may be helpful to vampirism fans when it is lacking among huge amount of vampire-themed products. Future researches may explore into the topic through the lens of other fields such as psychology or literature, informative of what vampires are, how, and why they behave.

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