

david cohen



the psychology of
VAMPIRES

Not suitable for younger readers

THE
PSYCHOLOGY
OF **EVERYTHING**

ROUTLEDGE



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF VAMPIRES

Why have vampires become such a feature of modern culture? Can vampire-like conditions be explained by medical research? Is there a connection between vampirism and Freud?

The Psychology of Vampires presents a captivating look at the origins of vampires in myth and history and the psychological theories which try to explain why they fascinate us. It traces the development of vampires from the first-ever vampire tale, written by John Polidori in 1819, to their modern cultural legacy. Together with historical detail about Polidori's eventful life, the book also examines the characteristics of vampires and explores how and why people might identify as vampires today.

From sanguinarians who drink blood to psychic vampires who suck the energy from those around them, *The Psychology of Vampires* explores the absorbing connections between vampirism and psychology, theology, medicine and culture.

David Cohen is a psychologist, film maker, writer and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine. His books include the bestselling *Diana*, *Death of a Goddess* on the controversies surrounding the Princess' death and *Great Psychologists as Parents*, and his film on the Soham murders was nominated for a BAFTA award.

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF VAMPIRES

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The year 2019 marks the 200th anniversary of the publication of Polidori's *The Vampyre*. It was an instant success and quickly reprinted five times. Since then the vampire has become a staple of novels, films and computer games, and also an academic subject.



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APERITIF – THE VAMPIRES’ FAVOURITE ICE CREAM

My dearest and nearest don’t understand why, when eating what Bertie Wooster called the ‘eggs and b’, I like a slice of blood pudding. Blood pudding was traditionally seen as a Northern working class treat. Such culinary class distinctions have been binned now. London’s Goring Hotel, where Kate Middleton spent the night before she married Prince William, dishes it up as part of its full British breakfast. In the Hebrides, a Scottish variant – why not call it McBlood? – even has protected status, like cognac, champagne and camembert. France has boudin, its own version of blood pudding, laced with enough garlic to make any vampire reel.

Japan boasts a Vampire Café whose colour scheme is, of course, blood red; the basins in the toilets are stained with what looks like blood. This is very appropriate, as some myths claim the urine of vampires is red. The menus are shaped like coffins. A café in Soho in the 1960s was called the Macabre and also had coffin tables. The Japanese Vampire Cafe does not serve blood pudding, however, so it’s vampire lite. My son Nicholas and I went to Romania 15 years ago and found restaurants where the waiters were dressed as vampires. A sad sign of the times; they all offered a vegetarian option.

Blood pudding is not always a savoury in these days of experimental cuisine. One company now produces black pudding ice cream, which is surely the gourmet vampire’s favourite dessert.

XII APERITIF – THE VAMPIRES’ FAVOURITE ICE CREAM

Vampire literature has taken an academic twist recently, as it has become postmodern and third wave feminist. Buffy the Vampire Slayer is now a feminist icon and so empowered she can stuff the vampires back in their coffins and sit on the lid while flossing her total normally teeth.

One of the key distinctions today is between sanguinarians who drink blood, psychic vampires who are content merely to suck energy from those around them and hybrids who do both. The personality of vacuuming vampires who Hoover energy from those they interact with has not been much studied formally. I argue that passive aggression does often involve sucking the energy of your significant others till they might as well be zombies. I offer four case histories. Vampire studies deserve credit for drawing attention to a neglected area of psychology.

Vampires lust for that most precious and symbolic of substances, blood, the liquid of life. It is so sacred that Judaism forbids the blood of animals to be consumed. Kosher slaughter drains them of it entirely before they can be cooked and eaten. So do the rules of what is halal or permitted for Muslims.

Ironically Jews have been accused of thirsting for blood like vampires. A perfect example of ‘the blood libel’ was the murder of an 11-year-old boy in 1141 in Norwich. Jews needed his blood to bake the Passover matzah or unleavened bread, apparently.

Nosferatu, the silent vampire film, was screened in 1922, and the Nazi propagandist Julius Streicher sat in the audience. The film gave him the idea of depicting Jews as vampires when he was in charge of Nazi propaganda. In his vile *Mein Kampf* Hitler ranted that the bloodthirsty Jews became the bloodthirsty capitalists. The Nazis were very interested in the occult.

One attraction of the vampires is their power, which has made the military use the word perhaps too freely. An RAF plane, for instance, is called the Vampire. The Honorary Chief Air Marshals since 1936 have included the future George VI, the Shah of Iran, King Hussein, the Sultan of Brunei and Prince Charles, who was promoted to the position in 2012. None of these eminences minded commanding a force

which gloried in the name Vampire. A number of ships of the Royal Australian Navy are also called HMS Vampire. Since vampires can't cross water, according to some legends, this seems especially odd.

Vampires have sometimes even worn crowns. Vlad the Impaler, the fifteenth-century Romanian ruler, was a vampire who was given to every variety of murder. He was known as Dracula from around 1470. It is no accident that Dracula's first name – not his Christian name, as his actions flout every tenet of the Bible – is Vlad. Vladimir, the long version of the name, is popular again now; the latest Czar Vladimir Putin personifies the alpha male, in the eyes of his loyal followers, at least.

The great-great 16 times removed grandson of the original Impaler is the current Air Chief Marshall, the Prince of Wales. There is no evidence that Prince Charles, who allegedly used to commune with his carrots, is a vampire, but he is a fan of Transylvania and has been a regular visitor ever since 1998. He owns properties there, some of which he rents out. Sadly, I cannot report that the Prince's Trust advertises any of these as Dracula's Royal Den. Transylvania has enough lore to attract tourists without royal endorsement. There are even plans for a Dracula-world, although the investment to make it happen never quite materializes.

Vampire tourism is something of a family business. Dacre Stoker, the great-grandnephew of the author of *Dracula*, offers tours of sites in Romania, as does the Romanian Tourist Agency. The tours include the palace of Vlad, the original Impaler, the fortress where he started his murderous career and the town of Targoviste, where one can climb 1,460 steps up a tower bedecked with effigies of his victims.

Other must-see sites include Snagov Monastery and Huniady Castle, which holds Vlad's tomb. He died as he lived. Being beheaded in the woods around Bucharest when fighting the Turks. His enemies took his head as a war trophy, but loyal monks brought his body to the monastery to be buried. Legend says that Vlad was imprisoned in the dungeons of Huniady after being accused of treason by Matthias Corvinus, King of Hungary. The House of Dracula is in Sighisoara, the most mediaeval town in Transylvania. The cobblestone streets and

colourful houses make it feel like a sixteenth-century town. UNESCO have made it a world heritage site. You can visit the yellow house where Vlad was born in 1431.

Finally, there is the lovely and also mediaeval town of Brasov, which I visited with my son Nicholas and which my mother loved. Vlad lived for some time there to keep an eye on a rival, a pretender to the throne of Wallachia. Bears sometimes wander into Brasov to scavenge the dustbins.

Vlad was a monster of cruelty. A king is rarely an outsider, but vampires are. The outsider is a personality type that has been attractive in literature for over a century. Make him a teenager, and he is even more magnetic. In the best-selling book and subsequent movie *Twilight*, the hero knows he is not like his classmates. It's not only his need for blood that sets him apart, but the fact he's done basic biology 40 times since he was em-vamped in 1918, when he was about to die in the influenza epidemic. Another clue that Edward Cullen is not a normal teen is that does not have acne or zits, as America calls them. *Twilight's* success has helped boost the vampire profile. In many public libraries there is a section devoted to Vampire DVDs. The British Library catalogue has 3,167 entries on the subject.

Some authors even describe themselves as a vampire when they have really no connection with them. In his recent *Diary of a Vampire in Pyjamas*, Matthias Malzieu describes his battle with a disease which makes his white blood cells melt 'like ice cubes in a bonfire'. A disease cannot be a vampire, and Malzieu does not even claim to be a psychic vampire.

The slightest hint of vampires often makes headlines. In 1990 police in Griswold, Connecticut, dug up a grave after a child had found a skull. They found more and more remains which, it soon became clear, were more than a century old. The find produced headlines. One body was astonishing. Nicholas Bellantoni, the state archaeologist, found that it had been, "had been completely . . . rearranged." The skeleton had been beheaded; the skull and thighbones rested on the ribs and vertebrae. "It looked like a skull-and-crossbones motif, a Jolly Roger. I'd never seen anything like it," Bellantoni recalled. It was the way vampires were sometimes buried.

There has been some recent violence too. In 1996 four teenagers were charged with first-degree murder after killing two parents of a cult member. The cult of some 40 western Kentucky teenagers called itself the 'Vampire Clan'. It started innocently enough. The group initially played complex games based on the role-playing game 'Vampire, the Masquerade'. They later named themselves the VAMPS for "Victorian Age Masquerade Performance Society." A new leader made the group's activities more vicious and intense. He had a history of being abused in a dysfunctional family. Under his influence the group gloried in group sex, drug use and violence. This teenager later became the youngest person on death row in the United States. The story made headlines.

Ten years later archaeologists unearthed a sixteenth-century skull in Venice; it had been buried among plague victims with a brick in its mouth. The brick was probably supposed to prevent *strega* – Italian vampires or witches – from leaving the grave to bite people. The story did not just make the front page of the construction trade papers. It was, again, very widely reported.

An author should explain the origin of his book. Since I saw a plaque in his honour in Soho, I have been interested in John Polidori (1795–1821), who wrote the first vampire tale and has been a little neglected since. Polidori knew the romantic poet Lord Byron, met Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft and was an aspiring writer who was to leave an enduring cultural legacy. There have been thousands of vampire novels, but poor Poldori has so far inspired only one biography; he deserves better given all he did in his short life. While this is not a biography, I interweave aspects of his life with chapters on myth, psychology, theology (for the vampires are much like demons), medicine and culture. I try to explain why they have become such a feature of modern culture. It is not easy to find the proper tone for serious issues, fads like vampire cafes and harmless nonsense like *Carry on Screaming*, which stars Kenneth Williams as an electrically charged doctor. Poor Frankenstein, that it should come to this.

Chapter 1 – **Poor Poldori and the human jam** introduces the neglected author of the first vampire tale. The 'human jam', means