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Blood, Breath, and Beauty:
Consumption and Vampirism in the
Western Imagination

By

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“What! is it in our eighteenth century that vampires exist?” – Voltaire, 1776¹

The summer of 1816 was wet and dreary. Trapped inside their Swiss lakeside villa, four friends passed the time by telling scary stories and debating the possibility of corpse reanimation. From this would come Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*—the 1831 introduction to which shares this tale—but, initially, little else of note. Lord Byron began a story which he would print, unfinished, at the end of his poem *Mazeppa*, but John William Polidori—Byron’s physician at the time—could only come up with “some terrible idea” which he “was obliged to dispatch... to the tomb of the Capulets, the only place for which [it] was fitted.”² In 1819, however, inspired by Bryon’s fragmentary tale and disagreeable nature, Polidori published “The Vampyre”: a short Gothic romance which popularized the vampire for Western European audiences.³ “The Vampyre” opened with an introduction relaying the history of the vampire, as Polidori knew it, and made a subtle yet notable connection:

[The vampire] formed the subject of many wonderful stories, still extant, of the dead rising from their graves, and feeding upon the blood of the young and beautiful. In the West it spread, with some slight variation, all over Hungary, Poland, Austria, and Lorraine, where the belief existed, that vampyres nightly imbibed a certain portion of the blood of their victims, who *became emaciated, lost their strength, and speedily died of consumptions*; whilst these human blood-suckers fattened—and their veins became distended to such a state of repletion, as to cause the blood to flow from all the passages of their bodies, and even from the very pores of their skins. [emphasis added]

¹ Voltaire, *A Philosophical Dictionary, Volume 10*, translated by William F. Fleming (Paris: E. R. DuMont, 1901; Project Gutenberg, March 29, 2011). <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/35630>.

² Mary Shelley Wollstonecraft, *Frankenstein* (Standard eBooks, 2021), 4.
<https://archive.org/details/mary-shelley-frankenstein/mode/2up>.

³ Montague Summers, *The vampire, his kith and kin* (New Hyde Park, N.Y.: University Books, 1960), 290-291.
<https://archive.org/details/vampirehiskithki0000summ/mode/2up>.

The vampire's victims "became emaciated... and speedily died of consumptions." As a physician, Polidori would have been familiar with the wasting disease of consumption. So would his audience: Western Europe and North America faced an epidemic in the eighteenth century which killed approximately 900 people per 100,000, each year, and the first half of the nineteenth century saw death rates close to 25%.⁴ Percy Shelley himself was diagnosed with consumption only a few months before that fateful Swiss vacation, although he would die at sea before the disease could run its course.⁵

While the vampire's connection to consumption has been considered in passing, or secondary to other analyses, it has yet to be thoroughly established. Katherine Byrne came close in arguing that, to Victorians, the consumptive was seen as "fitting into a vampiric paradigm."⁶ Byrne believed that nineteenth-century conceptions about consumption stemmed from medieval vampire folklore, and defended this by citing vampire stories alongside Victorian medical texts. However, as I will show, her theory is reversed: it was not the vampire which created complex social conceptions about consumption, but longstanding conceptions about consumption which created the vampire. Similarly, Michael Bell has spent forty years hunting New England vampires due to the region's

⁴ I. Barberis et. al., "The history of tuberculosis: from the first historical records to the isolation of Koch's bacillus," *Journal of Preventative Medicine and Hygiene* 58 (2017): 10. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5432783/>. Thomas Daniel, "The history of tuberculosis," *Respiratory Medicine* 100, Issue 11 (2006): 1864. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rmed.2006.08.006>. Edward Delafield, *An Inaugural Dissertation on Pulmonary Consumption* (New York: John Forbes & Co., 1816), 62. <https://ia600604.us.archive.org/19/items/39002086173086.med.yale.edu/39002086173086.med.yale.edu.pdf>. M. Daskalopoulos, C. Dikeos, and I. Tagarakis, "Tuberculosis - General Facts - Historical Background," *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review* 6, Issue 8 (August 2023): 221. https://www.academia.edu/107492574/Tuberculosis_General_Facts_Historical_Background. John Frith, "History of Tuberculosis. Part 1 – Phthisis, consumption, and the White Plague," *Journal of Military and Veterans' Health* 22, No. 2 (June 2014): 32. <https://doi-ds.org/doi/10.1016/j.jmvh.2014.06.002>. John Murray, "A Century of Tuberculosis," *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine* 169, Issue 11 (2004). <https://doi.org/10.1164/rccm.200402-140OE>.

⁵ Lewis Moorman, *Tuberculosis and Genius* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), 215-216 and 232.

⁶ Katherine Byrne, *Tuberculosis and the Victorian Literary Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 124.

nineteenth-century “vampire panic”—propagated from a consumption epidemic—which folklorists and archaeologists have thoroughly researched.⁷ Literary analyses of Poe’s consumptive vampires have theorized their cultural connections, but these similarly center on New England. Such scholarship has remained isolated from the larger historical context which I will provide.

Vampire Studies, although not an official discipline, has existed almost as long as its subject-matter. The vampire’s boundless cultural potential has generated a vast archive across the fields of English, History, Folklore, Anthropology, and Media Studies. Those interested in the history of medicine have studied the vampire’s scientific and epidemiological connections, and many attempts have been made to identify a specific illness behind it. Suspects include acute leukemia, rabies, porphyria, and pellagra.⁸ Yet these diseases are rare, and they cannot account for every aspect of the

⁷ Michael Bell, “Vampires and Death in New England, 1784 to 1892,” *Anthropology and Humanism* 31, No. 2 (October 2008): 124-140. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ahu.2006.31.2.124>. Michael Bell, *Food for the Dead: On the Trail of New England’s Vampires* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2013). Michael Bell, “New England and the Undead,” in *Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire*, ed. Simon Bacon (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, May 3, 2023). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-82301-6_5-1. Faye Ringel, “The New England Vampire Belief,” in *New England’s Gothic Literature: History and Folklore of the Supernatural from the Seventeenth through the Twentieth Centuries* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1995), 137-156. <https://archive.org/details/newenglandsgothic0006ring/page/136/mode/2up.P.S>. Sledzik and N. Bellantoni, “Bioarcheological and biocultural evidence for the New England vampire folk belief,” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 94 (1994): 269-274. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.1330940210>.

⁸ A.C. Chambers, “Virological Vampires,” in *Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire*, ed. Simon Bacon (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, June 24, 2023). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-82301-6_85-1. A.M. Cox, “Porphyria and vampirism: another myth in the making,” *Postgraduate Medical Journal* 71, No. 841 (November 1995): 643-644. <https://doi.org/10.1136/pgmj.71.841.643-a>. Juan Gomez-Alonso, “Rabies: A possible explanation for the vampire legend,” *Neurology* 51, No. 3 (September 1998): 856-859. <https://doi.org/10.1212/WNL.51.3.85>. Jeffery and William Hampl, “Pellagra and the Origin of a Myth: Evidence from European Literature and Folklore,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 90, No. 11 (1997): 636-639. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014107689709001114>. R.P. Maas and P.J. Voets, “The vampire in medical perspective: myth or malady?” *QJM* 107, No. 11 (November 2014): 945-946. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qjmed/hcu159>. Stinne Tranekær et. al., “Malignant but not maleficent: acute leukaemia as a possible explanation of disease and death in vampire victims,” *Irish Journal of Medical Science* 189 (November 2019): 627-631. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11845-01627-6319-02124-2>. Moreno Tiziani, “Vampires and vampirism: pathological roots of a myth,” *Antrocom* 5, No. 2 2009: 133-137. <https://antrocom.net/archives/2009/volume-5-number-2/vampires-and-vampirism-pathological-roots-of-a-myth/>. Koen Vermeir, “Vampires as Creatures of the Imagination: Theories of Body, Soul and Imagination in Early Modern Vampire Tracts (1659-1755),” *Diseases of the Imagination and Imaginary Disease in the Early Modern Period* (2012): 341-373. <https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00609387/>.

vampire as it is known in the West. Of course, the vampire can—and has—represented a wide variety of subjects, but I argue that its consumptive roots are responsible if not influential for most.

One such subject is the vampire's relation to sexuality and romance. This, too, has been thoroughly researched, especially since Stephanie Myer's *Twilight* dominated U.S. popular culture in the early 2000s. The media questioned when monsters became sexy; ties have been made to Polidori, whose vampire Lord Ruthven took after the womanizing Byron.⁹ Another popular answer has been Anne Rice's queer vampires—or the inherent queerness of vampires—and attempts to reassert Christian patriarchal hegemony.¹⁰ While important analyses have been made on this topic, none locate the true historic origin of consumption: the disease of the young, beautiful, and sexually deviant.

As such, I wish to clear up misconceptions regarding consumption and the vampire of Western imagination. I will do so by reviewing medical texts alongside the history and dramatizations of Western European vampires. In what follows I will demonstrate how longstanding ideas about

⁹ Christopher Beam and Chris Wilson, "The Garlic Years: When have we not been in the midst of a vampire craze?" *Slate*, Sept 23, 2009.

<https://slate.com/culture/2009/09/when-have-we-not-been-in-the-midst-of-a-vampire-craze.html#:~:text=The%20up%2Dand%2Dcoming%20King,Dracula%2C%20Rabid%2C%20and%20Martin>. Rachel Feder, *The Darcy Myth: Jane Austen, Literary Heartthrobs, and the Monsters They Taught Us to Love* (Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2023).

¹⁰ Brian Alexander, "Dangerous liaisons: Why we find vampires sexy," NBC News, October 29, 2009.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna33509755>. Mark Dawidziak, "When did vampires turn from monsters to sex symbols?" *Cleveland.com*, August 02, 2009.

<https://www.cleveland.com/tv/2009/08/when-did-vampires-turn-from-monsters-to-sex-symbols/>. Kristina Durocher, "Men That Suck: Gender Anxieties and the Evolution of Vampire Men," in *Gender in the Vampire Narrative*, eds. A. Hobson and U.M. Anyiwo (Rotterdam, the Netherlands: Sense Publishers 2016), 45-59.

https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-94-6300-714-6_4?pdf=chapter%20toc. Jami McFarland, "Resuscitating the Undead Queer in Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* Saga," *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* 5, No. 2 (2016), 1-22.

<https://www.jprstudies.org/2016/07/resuscitating-the-undead-queer-in-stephanie-meyers-twilight-sagaby-jami-mcfarland/>. Christine Prevas, "Homonormativity and the Contemporary Vampire," *Journal of Dracula Studies* 20 (2018): 30-55.

<https://research.library.kutztown.edu/dracula-studies/vol20/iss1/2>. Emily Schuck, "Re-masculating the Vampire: Conceptions of Sexuality and the Undead from Rossetti's *Proserpine* to Meyer's *Cullen*," *LUX: A Journal of Transdisciplinary Writing and Research from Claremont Graduate University* 2 (2013): 1-8.

<http://scholarship.claremont.edu/lux/vol2/iss1/26>.

consumption seeded the vampire, through which they maintained cultural continuity. Recognizing this continuity is important so long as humanity struggles against disease, so that previous mistakes may be avoided and treatment inequality may be taken seriously enough to enact change. Likewise, it is important to understand where conceptual descendants of vampire-consumption myths originated, so that they may be recognized as cultural and thus changeable, rather than natural fixtures of humanity.

Vampire History

In order to establish the vampire's consumptive origins, it is first necessary to understand how it was introduced to the West. Between 1725 and 1732, Hapsburg-occupied Serbia faced a vampire epidemic. Food shortages, disease, and postwar tension haunted civilians in the aftermath of the 1718 Treaty of Passarowitz. An immigrant farmer named Arnold Paule, who claimed to have been haunted by a Turkish vampire, died falling off a hay wagon around 1727. In the following years he is said to have returned as a vampire and fed from the villagers and their cattle, killing multiple people before they exhumed and staked his body in 1731.¹¹ While Paule was not the first or only of his kind, his case was the first to garner widespread attention. On January 7, 1732, Austrian Army Surgeon Johann Flückinger published a report on the Arnold Paule incident. Glaser, an epidemiologist for the Hapsburg army, was sent on December 12, 1731 to evaluate the situation. While Glaser did not find

¹¹ Clemens Ruthner, "Outbreaks of the Balkan Village Vampire in the Eighteenth Century," in *Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire*, ed. Simon Bacon (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, January 17, 2024): 3-4.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-82301-6_113-2#DOI.

any signs of epidemic disease, his investigation was “the first instance of vampire incidents being considered from an epidemiological point of view.”¹²

Vampires are a kind of revenant: an undead corpse which typically assaults the living in some way. The vampire is a unique form of revenant for its specific origins and consumption of lifeforce.¹³ As is often the case with folklore, the history of the vampire prior to Flückinger’s report is uncertain, though Jan Perkowski has done fantastic work in attempting to trace its cultural and linguistic origins. She has claimed that the first written occurrence of the word “vampire” was as a proper name in an East Slavic manuscript dating to 1047 A.D.¹⁴ Revenant activity in Eastern Europe had been documented and studied by Catholics since 1693, who were largely interested in the undead’s theological implications; these included Karl Ferdinand von Schertz’s 1706 *Magia Posthuma per juridicum illud pro et contra suspensio nonnullibi judicio investigata* and Michael Ranft’s 1728 *De masticatione mortuorum in tumulis*, although Dom Calmet’s 1746 *Dissertation sur les apparitions des anges, des demons et des esprits, et sur les revenants et vampires de Hongrie, de Bohême, de Moravie et de la Silésie* is perhaps the most famous. However, Flückinger’s account was the first to provide the term “vampire,” which incited a “vampire debate” amongst “learned” German-speaking peoples before

¹² Jan Perkowski, *The Darkling* (Columbus, Ohio: Slavic Publishers, Inc. 1989), 41. Ruthner, “Outbreaks of the Balkan Village,” 4.

¹³ David Keyworth, “Was the Vampire of the Eighteenth Century a Unique Type of Undead-Corpse?” *Folklore* 117, No. 3 (December 2006): 241-260. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30035373>.

¹⁴ Perkowski, *The Darkling*, 18.

spreading to England and France.¹⁵ The first English account of the word “vampire” was in a translation of Flückinger’s report published by *The London Journal* on March 4, 1732.¹⁶

In 1748, German poet Heinrich August Ossenfelder was commissioned by scientific journal editor Christlob Mylius to write a poem based on the Slavic vampire reports. As a result, Ossenfelder produced *Der Vampir*: a poem which received little attention in its time but has since been recognized as the first vampire story in creative literature.¹⁷ Later, August Bürger and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe were similarly inspired by Slavic folklore and the vampire debates, producing *Lenore* (1773) and *Die Braut von Korinth* (1797) respectively. The English Romantic poets shortly followed suit with Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s unfinished *Christabel* (1797-1800), Robert Southey’s *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), John Stagg’s *The Vampire* (1810), and Lord Byron’s *The Giaur* (1813).¹⁸ These early literary vampires were steeped in corrupted relationships and damaged family structures, with daughters often straying or being torn from their virtuous mothers. Eroticism and romanticism were common as the vampire deceived the living through false identity or beauty, although sometimes the tragedy lay in the truth of a loved one’s (un)death. The vampire did not penetrate Gothic Romance prose until Polidori, but he had been inspired by these early poems; *Christabel* was among the stories Lord Byron had recounted whilst the rain poured down on Lake Geneva.¹⁹ “The Vampyre” was quickly adapted,

¹⁵ Bell, *Food for the Dead*, 250. Niels Kristian Petersen, “Magia Posthuma: Karl Ferdinand von Schertz, Calmet and revenant beliefs,” *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov* 14, No. 63 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.31926/but.pcs.2021.63.14.3.3>. Summers, *The vampire*, 201.

¹⁶ Perkowski, *The Darkling*, 127. Perkowski states that “vampire” was not commonly used in England until Dom Calmet’s study was translated in 1759. This is arguable considering that Lord Sandwich, the future 4th Earl of Sandwich, had a Bay horse named Vampire in 1751 according to the *Derby Mercury*.

¹⁷ Heidi Crawford, “The Cultural-Historical Origins of the Literary Vampire in Germany,” *Journal of Dracula Studies* 7, No. 1 (2005): 4. <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/dracula-studies/vol7/iss1/1>.

¹⁸ Summers, *The vampire*, 276-280.

¹⁹ Summer, *The vampire*, 164-166 and 290-291.

translated, and parodied across the U.K., France, and Germany in 1819 and the following decade, popularizing the literary vampire for a wide audience.²⁰ Countless vampire poems and stories would continue to be written throughout the century, culminating in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897).

Western Europeans were quick to adopt and appropriate the vampire for their own purposes; another common use was as a scathing insult. Anyone disagreeable was a vampire, but especially those who took advantage of others such as the bourgeoisie, bandits, landlords, resurrection men, surgeons, quack doctors, and politicians.²¹ Marx is perhaps the most famous example, having compared the vampire to capital, its economy, and its propagators.²² In 1776, Voltaire wrote that "the true vampires are the monks, who eat at the expense of both kings and people."²³ The earliest recorded instance, however, appears to have occurred on April 21, 1774 during a London House of Commons debate over the Boston Port Act. During this debate, one Mr. Burke had to apologize to a man named Grenville for having "cast the least slur on [his] character," stating that "he would not raise the bodies of the dead, to make them vampires to suck out the virtues of the living."²⁴ Such usage continued

²⁰ Jean Marigny, "French Vampire Literature in the Nineteenth Century," in *Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire*, ed. Simon Bacon (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, June 7, 2023): 3. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-82301-6_14-1#DOI. Summers, *The vampire*, 289-291.

²¹ Nick Groom, "John Polidori, "The Vampyre," and the Rise of the Aristocratic Vampire," in *Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire*, ed. Simon Bacon (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, September 25, 2023). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-82301-6_114-1#DOI. *North American*, May 20, 1799, 3. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/587796666>. *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, November 18, 1833. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1050136137/>. "The Lancet," *Lancet* 9, Issue 221 (November 1827): 315-317. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(02\)83221-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(02)83221-4).

²² Mark Neocleous, "The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx's Vampires," *History of Political Thought* 24, No. 4 (Winter 2003): 668-684. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26220011>.

²³ Voltaire, *A Philosophical Dictionary*.

²⁴ "Postscript to the Pennsylvania Packet No. 139," Dunlap and Claypoole's *American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), June 20, 1774, 5-6. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1034010990/> and <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1034010993/>.

throughout the nineteenth century. Western Europe had its own history of revenants, yet chose a word from a foreign and colonized group to describe those they hated most.

Reports of Slavic vampire activity would continue until 1738 and debates regarding their legitimacy were not settled until 1766, when Banat surgeon Georg Talla classified them as figments of disease-induced imagination.²⁵ Yet it is likely that vampire activity did not end in 1738; rather, it appears to have spread in response to a growing consumption epidemic. New England's "vampire panic" occurred from 1784-1892, during which at least 80 of the recently deceased were exhumed, burned, and sometimes consumed in an attempt to treat consumption.²⁶ One of the most widely known and documented cases was that of Mercy Brown in 1892: when her entire family began to suffer from consumption, the locals began to suspect a vampire. Her mother and sister were also exhumed but Mercy's body was the only one found with blood in her heart and little decomposition, so her heart and liver were burned and the ashes were fed to her brother, Edwin. Unfortunately, he died shortly afterwards. While some genuinely believed that vampires were preying on their families, many—such as Mercy's father—were simply desperate; a 1784 letter by a man named Moses Holmes confirmed that these vampire rituals were marketed by a foreign quack doctor (a vampire?) as a cure for consumption.²⁷ Cases such as Mercy's were reported in newspapers throughout the 1890s, and further sensationalized by anthropologist George Stetson's ethnography on "The Animistic Vampire in New

²⁵ Bell, *Food for the Dead*, 250. Ruthner, "Outbreaks of the Balkan Village," 11. *Gloucester Journal*, July 4, 1738, 2. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970883929/>.

²⁶ Bell, "New England and the Undead," 2. Bell has since found evidence of potential vampire activity in the upper Midwest and the Deep South, and cases dating as late as the mid-twentieth century. In fact, Edith Durham observed a vampire exhumation in Bosnia in 1906.

²⁷ Bell, *Food for the Dead*, xxx-xxxi. Bell, "New England and the Undead," 14.

England.”²⁸ A similar case in Germany garnered some attention in the early 1870s, suggesting that the vampire had not simply emigrated to New England.²⁹ Consumption was everywhere, so vampires were, too.

Consumption

The Industrial Revolution triggered a consumption epidemic across Europe and the United States in the mid-eighteenth century. Overcrowding, poor hygiene, and undernourishment caused overwhelming infection amongst the working class, who died at a rate double that of the bourgeoisie — with youth being more at risk, particularly between the ages of 18 and 35.³⁰ Yet Enlightenment thinking offered little help; despite being an ancient disease known since ancient times, modern understandings still relied on ancient medical knowledge.

Rather than one specific illness, consumption was a category of symptoms defined primarily by a mysterious wasting away of the body. In 1694, Dr. Richard Morton’s *Phthisiologia, or, A Treatise of Consumptions*, was published as a thorough review of all known consumptions. Morton defined consumption “in general” as “a wasting of the *Muscular* parts of the Body, arising from the Substraction, or Colliquation of the Humours, and that either with, or without a Fever, and it is either

²⁸ George Stetson, “The Animistic Vampire in New England,” *American Anthropologist* 9 (January 1896): 1-13. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/658266>. “Weird Superstition: A Strange Belief Among Rhode Island Natives,” *Lincoln Herald*, August 6, 1892. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/309499330/>.

²⁹ “Article 1 – No Title,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Oct 12, 1873. <http://proxy.uchicago.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/article-1-no-title/docview/171451893/se-2?accountid=14657>. Perkowski, *The Darkling*, 111-112.

³⁰ Barberis et. al., “The History of Tuberculosis,” 10. Firth, “History of Tuberculosis,” 32.

Original, or Symptomatical.”³¹ Consumption was thus not always diagnosed based on physical symptoms more complex than weight loss. Original consumption could arise “purely from a Morbid Disposition of the Blood... not the effect of any other preceeding Disease.”³² The two types of consumption which Morton described under the category of original consumption were “Atrophy... an Universal Consumption proceeding from the whole Habit of the Body, and not from any Distemper of the Lungs, or of any other Entrail...” and “Consumption of the Lungs... an Universal wasting of the Parts of the Body, caused by some Distemper of the Lungs, as a stuffing, swellings, inflammation, and exulceration of them...”³³ Atrophy could present “without any remarkable Fever” and be caused by either “Evacuation of the Nutritious Juice” or “an ill and morbid state of the Spirits, and to the weakness, or destruction of the tone of the Nerves, from whence as an imbecillity, and an Universal Consumption in the whole Habit of the Body upon the want of a due assimilation of the Nutritious Juice do at length proceed...”³⁴ The latter was also known as nervous consumption. Whereas an atrophy primarily caused “a want of Appetite, and a bad Digestion in the Stomack,” a consumption of the lungs would be “attended with a Cough, difficulty of Breathing, and other Symptoms of the Breast, and accompanied with a Fever, which at first is slow, and Hectical, afterwards Inflammatory, and at last Putrid and Intermitting.”³⁵ In Dr. Benjamin Marten’s 1722 *A New Theory of Consumptions: More especially of a Phthisis, or Consumption of the Lungs*, he described how “*Phthisis, or Consumption of the Lungs, may be very justly defined to be A wearing away of or consuming of all*

³¹ Richard Morton, *Phthisiologia, or, A Treatise of Consumptions* (London: Prince's Arms, 1694), 2.
<https://archive.org/details/phthisiologiaort00mort/mode/2up>.

³² Morton, *Phthisiologia*, 2.

³³ Morton, *Phthisiologia*, 2-3.

³⁴ Morton, *Phthisiologia*, 2-3. “Nutritious juice” seems to refer to blood.

³⁵ Morton, *Phthisiologia*, 3.

the muscular or fleshy Parts of the Body, accompanied with a Cough, purulent Spitting, hectic Fever, shortness of Breath, Night-Sweats, etc."³⁶ Consumption, then, was a vague diagnosis based on weight loss, poor appetite and digestion, coughing, and fever, with symptoms worsening overnight but also highly variable in nature. Patients were either born with or, through some physical or psychological fault, attained "bad" blood, causing their condition.

Meanwhile, a "Symptomatical Consumption," to Morton, was "that, which although it does immediately proceed from a Pretatural, and ill state of the Blood and Spirits, yet has a mediate dependance upon some other preceding Diseases, which had given that ill Tincture to the Spirits and Humours."³⁷ This could also be referred to as Secondary *Phthisis Pulmonalis*.³⁸ Marten explained that these diseases "frequently terminate in a Consumption, as well of the Lungs, as of the whole Habit; so that in this Disease all other Chronick Distempers very often center."³⁹ In other words, a symptomatic consumption would arise not from another disease directly, but from the state of poor health which it brought about. The possible preceding conditions which Morton considered include dropsy, hemoptysis, scurvy, diabetes, dysentery, gonorrhea, gout, anemia ("Green-Sickness"), scrofula, syphilis ("French Pox"), smallpox, sweats, salivation, prolonged breastfeeding, suppressed menses, kidney or bladder stones, stones or nails in the lungs, ulcers, and passion. From a modern medical perspective, symptomatic consumption may be either the final stages of an advanced illness, or a

³⁶ Benjamin Marten, *A New Theory of Consumptions: More especially of a Phthisis, or Consumption of the Lungs* (London: Bishop's Head, Crofs Keys and Bibles, Flower de Luce, and Judge's Head, 1722), 3.

https://archive.org/details/bim_eighteenth-century_a-new-theory-of-consumpt_marten-benjamin-md_1722/mode/1up.

³⁷ Morton, *Phthisiologia*, 3.

³⁸ Delafield, *An Inaugural Dissertation*, 62.

<https://ia600604.us.archive.org/19/items/39002086173086.med.yale.edu/39002086173086.med.yale.edu.pdf>.

³⁹ Marten, *A New Theory of Consumptions*, 1-2.

separate disease contracted by a weakened immune system. These cases would be referred to by altering the word consumption with the preceding illness: scrofulous consumption, venereal consumption, etc. *Phthisical consumption*, or consumption of the lungs, was even recognized by some as a symptomatic consumption caused by *phthisis*, rather than these conditions being one and the same.⁴⁰ The line between a symptomatic consumption from *phthisis* and an original consumption of the lungs, then, was not always clear.

Consumption of the lungs was, however, considered “the most deplorable, and what we most frequently meet with.”⁴¹ Morton offered many possible causes for a consumption of the lungs, which he believed would generate the disease by gradually causing a “vitiating disposition of the Mass of Blood, and of the Spirits in the Nerves.”⁴² In addition to those conditions which could lead to a symptomatic consumption, Morton listed risk-factors such as “troublesome Passions of the Mind, but especially Fear, Grief, Anger, too much Thinking, and Sollicitude, as also unreasonable and too long Studies,” “a too plentiful, and an unreasonable gorging of Meat and Drink, and also an imprudent choice of such Meats and Liquors,” “the neglect of due Exercise,” “Night-studies, and long Watchings” as well as “sleeping in the Day, and sleeping much, but especially presently after Eating.”⁴³ Sexual overindulgence would be added to this list by 1880—likely due to the Romantic-period idea that overstimulation from frustrated desire could bring about consumption.⁴⁴ Essentially, any excess of

⁴⁰ Marten, *A New Theory of Consumptions*, 10.

⁴¹ Marten, *A New Theory of Consumptions*, 2.

⁴² Morton, *Phthisiologia*, 64.

⁴³ Morton, *Phthisiologia*, 64-66.

⁴⁴ Frederick Roberts, *Theory and Practice Of Medicine* (London: H. K. Lewis, 1880), 281, 287, and 436-438.

<https://archive.org/details/dli.bengal.10689.7700/mode/2up>. Clark Lawlor, *Consumption and Literature: The Making of the Romantic Disease* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 115-116.

mind or luxury put one at risk for consumption. Consumption of the lungs was considered most common in England, in part, due to these exact associations. As Marten stated: “There is no Country in the World more Productive of Consumptions, than this our Island.”⁴⁵ England was a wealthy nation, so it had access to more luxuries for wealthy people to excessively partake in them.⁴⁶ More wealthy people, then, were recognized as consumptive, and an association between beauty and wealth was reasserted in the process.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, consumption was considered “the most flattering of all diseases,” despite also being “the most insidious and fatal.”⁴⁷ Lord Byron is often quoted for stating: “How pale I look!—I should like, I think, to die of a consumption... the women would all say, ‘See that poor Byron—how interesting he looks in dying!’”⁴⁸ The consumptive was seen as beautiful and delicate, strong-willed and virtuous, and inclined to creative genius.⁴⁹ These associations began as risk factors. Certain physical features were thought to correlate with consumption, but also overlapped with what was considered attractive. Romantic passion and melancholy were thought to cause imbalance and suppression of anatomical functions, but also to be more common with the young women and genius men. Intellectual and creative pursuits often meant staying indoors, being physically inactive, and going to sleep late. They also required wealth, indicating a heightened risk of overindulgences. Over time, these associations became so strongly intertwined that

⁴⁵ Marten, *A New Theory of Consumptions*, 1.

⁴⁶ Lawlor, *Consumption and Literature*, 45-46.

⁴⁷ Lawlor, *Consumption and Literature*, 123. Katherine Ott, *Fevered Lives: Tuberculosis in American Culture since 1870* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 10.

⁴⁸ Thomas Moore, *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron with Notices of his Life* (London: John Murray, Albemarle-Street, 1830), 242. <https://archive.org/details/lettersjournalso0001thom/page/242/mode/2up?q=consumption>.

⁴⁹ Lawlor, *Consumption and Literature*, 19-24. Ott, *Fevered Lives*, 14.

the order of causation became unclear—or unimportant, considering the widespread need for coping mechanisms.⁵⁰

Associations such as these had time to develop and fully integrate into social thought because medical understandings of consumption stagnated until the end of the nineteenth century. Aside from minor differences of opinion regarding terminology and treatments, I found minimal variation in data while reviewing medical texts from 1694 to the 1880s. Medieval concepts such as humors lingered in Morton's writing, but these were largely filtered out by the 1720s. This is, of course, to be expected; we know that sanatorium care—the first successful treatment—was not discovered until 1854, and the bacillus most commonly responsible for consumption was not isolated or considered infectious until 1882 and 1865 respectively.⁵¹ However, I find it notable that physicians were still primarily citing ancient sources such as Hippocrates, Galen, and Aretaeus.⁵² Consider Aretaeus' description of consumption:

If an ulcer form in the lungs from an abscess, or from a chronic cough, or from the rejection of blood, and if the patient spit up pus, the disease is called Pye and Phthisis... the characteristics of phthoe are, that a febrile heat is lighted up, which breaks out at night, but during the day again lies concealed in the viscera, as is manifested by the uneasiness, loss of strength, and colliquative wasting. For had the febrile heat left the body during the day, how should not the patient have acquired flesh, strength, and comfortable feeling? For when it retires inwardly, the bad symptoms are all still further exacerbated, the pulse small and feeble; insomnolency, paleness, and all the other symptoms of persons in fever.

⁵⁰ See Clark Lawlor's *Consumption and Literature* and Carolyn Day's *Consumptive Chic*.

⁵¹ Barberis et. al., "The History of Tuberculosis," 11. Daniel, "The History of Tuberculosis," 1864. Frith, "History of Tuberculosis," 33. Marten had theorized bacteria and infection in 1722 but his idea was paid little mind.

⁵² Marten, *A New Theory of Consumptions*, 4.

If one of the common people see a man pale, weak, affected with cough, and emaciated, he truly augurs that it is phthoe (consumption). But in those who have no ulcer in the lungs, but are wasted with chronic fevers—with frequent, hard, and ineffectual coughing, and bringing up nothing, these, also, are called consumptive, and not without reason. There is present weight in the chest (for the lungs are insensible of pain),—anxiety, discomfort, loss of appetite; in the evening coldness, and heat towards morning; sweat more intolerable than the heat as far as the chest; expectoration varied, as I have described.⁵³

It should come as no surprise that some considered the vampire a real possibility, when the same doctors preaching science had made no scientific advancements for their illness in over 1,500 years.

Vampiric Diathesis

Given a lack of medical knowledge and the vague nature of consumptive symptoms, it became necessary to identify potentially consumptive patients through less scientific means. It was long thought that consumption was a hereditary disease, whether passed down from parent to child or simply genetic predisposition.⁵⁴ Such a predisposition—which could also be considered constitutional—was referred to as a “diathesis,” and thought to be identifiable based on physical characteristics. Dr. Marten wrote: “The diving *Hippocrates*, and from him, several others tell us, that Persons of a fine Contexture, tender, and who have a small shrill Voice, thin clear Skin, a long Neck, narrow Breast; depressed or strait Chest, and whose Shoulder-blades stick out, are of all others, most

⁵³ Aretaeus, “Chapter VIII: On *Phthisis*,” *The Extant Works of Aretaeus the Cappadocian*, (Boston: Milford House Inc., 1972).
<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0254%3Atext%3DSD%3Abook%3D1%3Achapter%3D8>.

⁵⁴ Morton, *Phthisiologia*, 66.

subject to a Consumption.”⁵⁵ Over a century later in 1880, Dr. Frederick Roberts wrote in his *Theory And Practice Of Medicine*:

Many persons unquestionably become [consumptive] who present no obvious peculiarities, but the following characters are looked upon as evidencing a tendency towards the disease in children and young persons. They are tall, slim, erect, and delicate-looking, having scarcely any fat; while they present usually a pretty oval face, a clear complexion, bright eyes, and large pupils. The skin is very thin, soft, and delicate, and through it bluish veins are visible; the hair is fine and silky, often light, the eye-lashes being long.⁵⁶

These descriptions are quite flattering for medical texts, and vampiric comparisons are boundless. The titular character of Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872) was described as an exceedingly beautiful young woman who appeared to be consumptive—but was, in fact, a centuries-old vampire. Her arrival was as sudden and mysterious as she was, and led to the illness and deaths of many other young women in the area. According to the narrator, Carmilla had “burning eyes,” “so full of melancholy fire,” sometimes with quick breathing but “always a languor about her, quite incompatible with a masculine system in a state of health.”⁵⁷

She was above the middle height of women... She was slender, and wonderfully graceful. Except that her movements were languid—very languid—indeed... Her complexion was rich and brilliant; her features were small and beautifully formed; her eyes large, dark, and lustrous; her hair was... exquisitely fine and soft, and in color a rich very dark brown, with something of gold.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Marten, *A New Theory of Consumptions*, 4.

⁵⁶ Roberts, *Theory and Practice of Medicine*, 287.

⁵⁷ Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, *Carmilla* (London: The Dark Blue, 1871-1872; Project Gutenberg, November 1, 2003), 26-27. <https://ebook-mecca.com/online/Joseph%20Sheridan%20LeFanu%20Carmilla.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Le Fanu, *Carmilla*, 24.

Carmilla was tall, slim, and delicate-looking, with a clear complexion. Her eyes were large and lustrous. Her hair was fine and silky, and, although not light colored, has a golden tint. She displayed the wasting languor of a consumptive—just as her victims slowly lose strength and breath before their untimely deaths. As Carmilla fed on her, Laura described that she “had grown pale, [her] eyes were dilated and darkened underneath, and the languor which [she] had long felt began to display itself in [her] countenance.”⁵⁹ Both women also led leisurely, sheltered lives of wealth, which would have made them susceptible to consumption: “[Carmilla] used to come down very late, generally not till one o’clock, she would then take a cup of chocolate, but eat nothing; we then went out for a walk, which was a mere saunter, and she seemed, almost immediately, exhausted, and either returned to the schloss or sat on one of the benches that were placed, here and there, among the trees.”⁶⁰ A semi-nocturnal life could also be characteristic of a consumptive, who may be bed-ridden during the day.⁶¹ Likewise, Carmilla’s lack of appetite could be either cause or symptom of consumption—or indicate a diet based on blood.

Dracula’s Lucy Westenra is perhaps the most widely known vampire-consumptive. Her health waxed and waned throughout the novel without clear cause, improving in the day only to deteriorate again overnight. She was an upper-class woman with an inclination for sexual deviancy in her desire for multiple men.⁶² She likely had a history of anemia, which Dr. Morton considered a cause of symptomatic consumption which women were more prone to.⁶³ Lucy herself even concluded that

⁵⁹ Le Fanu, *Carmilla*, 45.

⁶⁰ Le Fanu, *Carmilla*, 27.

⁶¹ Byrne, *Tuberculosis and the Victorian*, 140.

⁶² Byrne, *Tuberculosis and the Victorian*, 137-138. Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Westminster, U.K.: Archibald Constable and Company, 1897), 72-74. <https://archive.org/details/dracula-bram-stoker..>

⁶³ Byrne, *Tuberculosis and the Victorian*, 133-135.

her illness must be pulmonary, writing: “My face is ghastly pale, and my throat pains me. It must be something wrong with my lungs, for I don’t seem ever to get air enough.”⁶⁴ To others, her illness and later death only enhanced her consumptive charm: her skin was pale but her lips and cheeks were rosy, while her hair was described as “sunny ripples” and her eyes had an “angelic beauty.”⁶⁵ Even the coroner thought she made a beautiful corpse.⁶⁶

Of course, the consumptive diathesis was not limited to female vampires. The eponymous protagonist of the penny-dreadful, *Varney the Vampire*, was described as tall and gaunt, with a white face which alternated between bloodless and flushed, eyes which appeared as either polished tin or remarkably lustrous, boney fingers with exceedingly long nails, and protruding white fangs. He was a wealthy man with a melancholy attitude, and human food did not agree with him.⁶⁷ Similarly, consider this description Johnathon provided upon breaking into Dracula’s room:

There lay the Count, but looking as if his youth had been half renewed... the cheeks were fuller, and the white skin seemed ruby-red underneath; the mouth was redder than ever, for on the lips were gouts of fresh blood, which trickled from the corners of the mouth and ran over the chin and neck. Even the deep, burning eyes seemed set amongst swollen flesh, for the lids and pouches underneath were bloated.⁶⁸

It is easy to imagine that the Count was laying in his sickbed, rather than a coffin, flushed from fever, the blood lingering from a recent coughing fit. His eyes may have been deep-set due to emaciation or

⁶⁴ Stoker, *Dracula*, 143.

⁶⁵ Stoker, *Dracula*, 210.

⁶⁶ Stoker, *Dracula*, 214.

⁶⁷ Perkowski, *The Darkling*, 130. Thomas Preskett Prest and James Malcolm Rymer, *Varney the Vampire: or, The Feast of Blood* (London: E. Lloyd, 1847; Project Gutenberg, January 29, 2005). <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/14833>.

⁶⁸ Stoker, *Dracula*, 86.

his diathesis, and may have burned from fever or passion. Likewise, he was described as tall and thin with pale skin, long nails, stark white teeth, and a face which Mina described as “sensual” despite its hard cruelty: all characteristics of the consumptive diathesis, as long fingernails and pale, withdrawn gums could occur as the disease progressed.⁶⁹ It seems unlikely that these similarities are coincidental considering that, in 1896, Bram Stoker cut out and included in his notes for *Dracula* an article about vampires in New England.⁷⁰

Spes Phthisica

When no physical cause could be found for Lucy’s malady, the doctors initially concluded that her illness must be psychological. John Seward believed her cause of death to be “nervous prostration following on great loss or waste of blood.”⁷¹ Yet Lucy’s growing weakness never dampened her lovely demeanor. If anything, it was enhanced: “She was very sweet to the professor (as she always is), and tried to make him feel at ease; though I could see that the poor girl was making a hard struggle for it.”⁷² Alongside appearance, psychological traits were key to a consumptive diagnosis. Some recognized the nervous diathesis as a manifestation of the consumptive diathesis, occurring either before or in place of full-blown consumption.⁷³ Youth were also thought to be more susceptible to consumption due to

⁶⁹ Byrne, *Tuberculosis and the Victorian*, 137 and 146. Stoker, *Dracula*, 226.

⁷⁰ Byrne, *Tuberculosis and the Victorian*, 132-133. The article in question was from *The New York World* on February 2, 1896, but quotes provided by Byrne prove that the article was the same as Figure 4.

⁷¹ Stoker, *Dracula*, 250.

⁷² Stoker, *Dracula*, 148.

⁷³ J. Grasset, “The Relations of Hysteria with the Scrofulous and Tubercular Diathesis,” *Brain* 7, No. 2 (July 1884), 161–177. <https://doi.org/10.1093/brain/7.2.161>.

their inclination towards impassioned emotions and sensitive nerves.”⁷⁴ The consumptive diathesis dictated that patients were “frequently afflicted with Sadness and very great Anxiety of Mind; under all which they are supported only by Intervals of Hope that they shall at last overcome their Distemper, and meet with a perfect Cure; which Hope, being the greatest Comfort they have, they very justly endeavour to keep up in their Minds as much as possible...”⁷⁵ Lucy’s good spirits in the face of suffering was characteristic of the *spes phthisica*, or “hope of the *phthisic*,” a key part of the consumptive’s psychological profile.⁷⁶ Prior to her illness, Lucy was also nervous, sensitive, and mentally fragile, making her more inclined to consumption.⁷⁷

In Le Fanu’s novel, Laura’s father alternatively blamed disease and psychological distress for the deaths of the townspeople who were, in reality, being preyed upon by Carmilla—though, for the consumptive, both factors would have been at play. As Laura’s condition worsened, she described how:

For some nights I slept profoundly; but still every morning I felt the same lassitude, and a languor weighed upon me all day... A strange melancholy was stealing over me, a melancholy that I would not have interrupted. Dim thoughts of death began to open, and an idea that I was slowly sinking took gentle, and, somehow, not unwelcome, possession of me. If it was sad, the tone of mind which this induced was also sweet. Whatever it might be, my soul acquiesced in it.⁷⁸

Laura, like Lucy, seemed to have been experiencing *spes phthisica*: despite her languor and melancholy as she approached death, Laura accepted if not enjoyed the experience, thinking it “sweet.” Carmilla

⁷⁴ Marten, *A New Theory of Consumptions*, 4-5.

⁷⁵ Marten, *A New Theory of Consumptions*, 3-4.

⁷⁶ Lawlor, *Consumption and Literature*.

⁷⁷ Stoker, *Dracula*. Byrne has suggested that Lucy may have had consumption before becoming Dracula’s prey.

⁷⁸ Le Fanu, *Carmilla*, 44.

also experienced *spes phthisica* through her relationship with Laura, which gave her hope for their future.

Alongside *spes phthisica*, consumptive patients were thought to be “very quick, full of Spirit, hasty, and of sharp ready Wit, and are commonly very impatient, and tenacious of the least Disrespect that is shewn them; and as for the most part they talk very well, so they frequently use that Faculty much too much for their own Advantage in Point of Health...”⁷⁹ Roberts described how “subjects cut their teeth early, and are generally precocious and clever, walking and talking soon. They are excitable and active in body and mind.”⁸⁰ Carmilla was a perfect example of this psychological diathesis. She displayed sharp intelligence alongside impatience and an unstable temperament which would frequently and suddenly shift between melancholy, violent anger, lethargy, and passionate affection for Laura:

Sometimes after an hour of apathy, my strange and beautiful companion would take my hand and hold it with a fond pressure, renewed again and again; blushing softly, gazing in my face with languid and burning eyes, and breathing so fast that her dress rose and fell with the tumultuous respiration. It was like the ardor of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet over-powering; and with gloating eyes she drew me to her, and her hot lips traveled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, “You are mine, you shall be mine, you and I are one for ever.” Then she had thrown herself back in her chair, with her small hands over her eyes, leaving me trembling.

Between these passionate moments there were long intervals of commonplace, of gaiety, of brooding melancholy, during which, except that I detected her eyes so full of melancholy fire, following me, at times I might have been as nothing to her.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Marten, *A New Theory of Consumptions*, 3-4.

⁸⁰ Roberts, *Theory and Practice of Medicine*, 287.

⁸¹ Le Fanu, *Carmilla*, 26-27.

Carmilla's consumptive countenance was, here, eroticized by Laura, who maintained complex feelings for the vampire even after her death. The novel closed with Laura writing: "It was long before the terror of recent events subsided; and to this hour the image of Carmilla returns to memory with ambiguous alternations—sometimes the playful, languid, beautiful girl; sometimes the writhing fiend I saw in the ruined church; and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing room door."⁸² Carmilla's ambiguity mirrored that of the consumptive, whose experience with their illness oscillated between beauty and horror in the eyes of others. Sometimes, the consumptive was a beautiful but languid waif. Other times, they might writhe in agony and "appear with Ghastly looks" as disease robbed their features of humanity.⁸³ The consumptive, appearing cadaverous in their advanced illness, was an apt comparison for the vampire, whose status as living or dead could often be ambiguous.

Psychics and Vamps

Reminiscent of folkloric and early literary vampires, the turn of the twentieth century brought the rise of the living vampire who preyed on energy rather than blood.⁸⁴ Jan Perkowski quoted occultist Franz Hartmann from 1896 in describing a psychic vampire's victims:

⁸² Le Fanu, *Carmilla*, 87.

⁸³ Marten, *A New Theory of Consumptions*, 3.

⁸⁴ Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 101-112. Perkowski, *The Darkling*, 151.

Persons obsessed by a vampire may be very intellectual and refined, but they are always sensually inclined people, and usually given to secret vices. To a sensitive person the shake of their hand feels clammy and cadaverous... It is also very likely that after you leave them you will be for a few days in a very bad humour, liable to quarrel and to find fault, and not unfrequently it happens that a person having been in company of such a 'medium' will feel strongly inclined to commit suicide... Moreover, the abstraction of vitality does not necessarily cease upon leaving the presence of the 'medium'; the connection once formed the vampire will follow you to any distance and abstract life from you. A case is known to me in which a previously healthy young lady, after visiting such an obsessed person, experienced a continual loss of vitality, causing a waste of flesh amounting to three pounds per week... mediums usually have a voracious appetite, they sleep a great deal; but, nevertheless, they do not grow strong, but are always exhausted and unfit for fatiguing or continuous labour. They are irritable, highly emotional, ready to shed tears for insignificant reasons, loving solitude, and finding their greatest comfort in the intercourse with their duals. Being continually vampirized they, in their turn unconsciously vampirize every sensitive person with whom they come into contact, and they instinctively seek out such persons and invite them to stay at their house.⁸⁵

A psychic vampire would cause mysterious weight-loss and fatigue in a person who otherwise indulged in food and sleep. They would feel as cold as death and be subject to an unstable mental state. Prior, they were sensitive but sharp. The vampire was often not visibly present, and their victim would spread their illness to others. This form of vampirism appears equally related to consumption, simply in an adapted form.

"A Beautiful Vampire" (1896) from Dr. Arabelle Kenealy's *Some Experiences of Lord Syfret* series related the downfall of a thrice-widowed psychic vampire named Lady Deverish who slowly siphoned the lifeforce of everyone around her. The nurse who ultimately defeated her, Marian, was a keen but emotionally stable woman, and protected herself with a disguise which made her appear "plump" and healthy—unlike a victim of consumption.⁸⁶ Lady Deverish—or Devilish, as the

⁸⁵ Perkowski, *The Darkling*, 56.

⁸⁶ Arabelle Kenealy, "A Beautiful Vampire," *Ludgate Magazine* (November 1896), 38.

<https://archive.org/details/1896someexperiencesoflordsyfretn6abeautifulvampireintheludgate>.

characters joked—had been previously diagnosed with consumption and succumbed to it once put in isolation. Only once she perceived her powers to be failing did she attempt to consume human blood, having lived off wine and “meat juice” up until that point. Deverish was portrayed as a rather typical, if unpleasant, British lady, and her story ended with a note that “there are a score of such vampires in this very town”—clearly meant by Kenealy to denounce emotionally draining or sinful individuals, but likely an accurate assessment of consumptive patients as well.⁸⁷

The following year would see the exhibition of Sir Philip Burne-Jones’ painting, “The Vampire,” as well as the publication of Rudyard Kipling’s poem of the same name, inspired by Burne-Jones’ work. Both depicted a female “vampire” triumphing over a man she had sexually taken advantage of. Coming to be known as “vamps”—and later, “gold diggers”—these women inspired a series of theatrical and early film adaptations which popularized the trope for British and American audiences in the twentieth century.⁸⁸ While most vampiric and consumptive themes were erased in these stories, Brenda Hammack has suggested that consumptive women were demonized as vampires for draining the resources of their husbands and fathers. These women were often considered at fault for their own illness, having brought it upon themselves through lifestyle choices such as sexual deviance.⁸⁹ Byrne, citing Alfred Hillier, wrote that:

Hillier’s writing reveals that society believed consumptives had control over the spread of their disease, and... a moral obligation to protect others from it. Their lives must be ‘entirely

⁸⁷ Kenealy, “A Beautiful Vampire.”

⁸⁸ James Card, *Seductive Cinema* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 182-185.

⁸⁹ Brenda Mann Hammack, “Sicker Ever after: The Invalid as Vampire in Fiction by Arabella Kenealy and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman,” in *The Vampire in Nineteenth-Century Literature: A Feast of Blood* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 27-46.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003173083>.

adapt[ed]' in order to protect 'the public health'. Implicit here is the suggestion that if consumptives fail to follow medical advice and persist in their usual lifestyle – which presumably many of them did – they will knowingly and maliciously infect others.⁹⁰

Indeed, Samuel Butler criticized this sentiment in *Erewhon* (1872)—his satirical representation of Victorian society—by having his narrator witness “the public trial of a man who was accused of pulmonary consumption—an offence which was punished with death until quite recently.”⁹¹ Illness was illegal in the country of Erewhon, punishable by lifelong imprisonment, and even those who disagreed with this law placed economic value over the consumptive’s livelihood by arguing for better treatment so long as they could work.⁹² As is often the case, this demonization of the ill and disabled was not strictly limited to women, but they suffered greater ire for it—despite simultaneously being eroticized for their condition. In this way, the consumptive birthed a generation of vampires in name only.

Conclusion

Polidori wrote that the vampire “formed the subject of many wonderful stories, still extant, of the dead rising from their graves, and feeding upon the blood of the young and beautiful... who became emaciated, lost their strength, and speedily died of consumptions.” In effect, he diagnosed

⁹⁰ Byrne, *Tuberculosis and the Victorian*, 143.

⁹¹ Samuel Butler, *Erewhon* (London: Trübner & Co., 1872), 95.
<https://archive.org/details/ErewhonOverrang00Butl/mode/2up>.

⁹² Butler, *Erewhon*, 106-107.

vampire victims with consumption. This diagnosis formed the basis of Western understandings of the vampire, maintained throughout the centuries by stories such as Polidori's.

The vampires of literature and folklore are sometimes pitted against one another by scholars.⁹³ The literary can be considered less “real” because it is understood to be fiction—“no corpses were harmed in the making of this story.” This understanding is deceiving, however, because the line between fiction and folklore is easily blurred. All narratives hold cultural power, and belief matters little when in conflict with desire. When considered through a consumptive lens, there is little difference in the vampires of literature and folklore; one simply reflects the wealthy consumptive, whereas the other reflects the working class. The wealthy vampire-consumptive could be beautiful, intellectual, passionate, languid, seductive. The peasant vampire-consumptive was an ever-present horror.

Christine Prevas defined the contemporary vampire of Western pop culture as “a vampire who abstains from — or, attempts to abstain from — drinking human blood.”⁹⁴ Their “constant, careful self-regulation... caus[ing] great pain or displeasure” is a prerequisite for sympathy—reminiscent of the consumptive’s moralization for enduring their illness.⁹⁵ Perhaps this indicates that the vampire of consumption can no longer harm humanity, allowing us to embrace the supposedly non-violent aspects of their mythology instead (aspects which, of course, are not non-violent but only more subtle

⁹³ Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death: Folklore and Reality* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2008), 2. K.H. Shawgo, “European Folklore and Burial Rites,” in *Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire*, ed. Simon Bacon (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, September 28, 2023), 2. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-82301-6_2-1.

⁹⁴ Prevas, “Homonormativity and the Contemporary Vampire,” 32.

⁹⁵ Prevas, “Homonormativity and the Contemporary Vampire,” 32.

in their violence). Or perhaps it suggests that *some* forms of vampirism/consumption have been eradicated. The abstinent vampire is only unique so long as other vampires remain non-abstinent, and even then it only “attempts” to abstain—it may not always be successful.

The ghost of consumption haunts Western society, disguised by many names. I have avoided using the modern word for consumption in favor of focusing on the historical, cultural perspective which I feel better represents the vampire and its social meanings. However, it should be noted that the bacterium which killed so many across Europe and North America, which was sorely misunderstood for thousands of years and only identified in 1882, is now known as *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. Consumption was known to sometimes be caused by tuberculosis as early as 1398 but was considered a separate disease from *phthisis*, which is now recognized as its original name. Prior to 1882, tuberculosis simply meant a pulmonary condition involving coughing up tubercles, which was not always a symptom of consumption.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, “tuberculosis” and “consumption” were used interchangeably in the twentieth century to avoid confusion—but, ironically, leading to confusion amongst modern scholars.

Tuberculosis is now identifiable and curable, but inequalities of care still allow millions of deaths every year. 60% of people with multi-drug resistant tuberculosis were unable to access treatment in 2022. It is the world’s second deadliest infectious disease after COVID-19, and mortality rates have only risen since 2020. Approximately 33% of the world’s population are currently infected, although

⁹⁶ Aspasia Stephanou, “Lovely Apparitions and Spiritualized Corpses: Consumption, Medical Discourse, and Edgar Allen Poe’s Female Vampire,” *The Edgar Allen Poe Review* 14 (Spring 2013): 39. <https://doi.org/10.5325/edgallpoerev.14.1.0036>.

only 10% of those lead to active cases.⁹⁷ What about other forms of consumption? Many of the causes of symptomatic or secondary consumption can still be lethal despite modern medical advancements. Nervous consumption kills: eating disorders directly result in 10,200 deaths annually.⁹⁸ Not to mention the remaining prevalence of villainizing, eroticizing, and moralizing illness in Western culture. Vampires still lurk among us, and we've let our guard down.

⁹⁷ Madeline Carwile, Natasha S. Hochberg, and Pranay Sinha, "Undernutrition is feeding the tuberculosis pandemic: A perspective," *Journal of Clinical Tuberculosis and Other Mycobacterial Diseases* 27 (May 2022). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jctube.2022.100311>. M. Daskalopoulos, C. Dikeos, and I. Tagarakis, "Tuberculosis - General Facts," 225-226. "Tuberculosis," World Health Organization, November 7, 2023. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tuberculosis>. Saloni Dattani et. al., "Tuberculosis," Our World In Data, accessed July 1, 2024. <https://ourworldindata.org/tuberculosis>.

⁹⁸ "Eating Disorder Statistics," ANAD, accessed July 2, 2024. <https://anad.org/eating-disorder-statistic/>.

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