Untitled Essay, Research Paper

Vampires have been seen and documented throughout history. The history of

vampires goes further back in time than most people realize. The chaldeans,

who lived

near the Euphrates river in the southwestern part of Asia more than five

hundred years

before the time of Christ , feared vampire or creatures similar to vampires

enough so that

they created charms to protect themselves from being attacked by such creatures.

The

Assyrians and the Babylonians feared a creature similar to a vampire known

as an

Ekimmu. These creatures known as Ekimmus were believed by the Assyrians to

roam the

planet searching for food although it was not always a persons blood but

rather a persons’

vitality or that persons’ energy force. It was believed that if such a creature

would enter

someone’s house that person along with his or her family would slowly weaken,

get sick

and probably die. In the countries of Syria and Palestine references were

made to such

blood sucking monsters on ancient carved tablets. In Ireland the people believed

in these

creatures, which they affectionately came to call “red blood suckers” . Due

to their belief

in these mythical creatures they began the practice of placing stones on

these vampires

graves to kep them from escaping.This then became standard practice and is

still used to

this day in the form of a tombstone. Tombstones were used to control ghosts

and other

spirits instead of their original use in controlling vampires.

Due to the fact that vampires seemed to be so commonplace

around the globe,

there was a large variety of vampires that differed in shape, behavior and

method of

becoming a vampire. All of these factors varied from region to region. In

the country of

Bulgaria a vampire had only one nostril. This Bulgarian vampire would rise

out of it’s

grave nine days after death in the form of a shower of sparks and remained

in this shape

for a period of forty days. After the completion of these forty days the

shower of sparks

would regain it’s human form. Once human-like the vampire goes from playing

childish

tricks, which it did in it’s “spark” form , to more serious matters , such

as the attacking of

humans and drinking of their blood. Vampires are well known for their craving

for

blood but in many countries vampires were not limited to just that substance

as part of

their diet, but would also consume foods that humans ate such as eggs and

rice. That,

however, does not mean that their yearn for blood was any weaker than before.

Most

vampires would attack their victims and suck the blood from puncture wounds

made in

the neck (The Russian vampire would suck the blood directly from the victims

heart).

Sometimes the vampire would gorge itself until it had drained the victim

completely

while other times it would take just enough to satisfy that night’s thirst

and come back the

following night and take a bit more. The method of drinking from the same

victim night

after night would cause the victim to get weaker and weaker . Due to the

fact that the

victim was indeed attacked by a vampire, that would mean that upon the victims

death

they too would become “undead.” (. Vampires p22)

Certain cultures around the globe also had systems to

recognize vampires. In

some cultures vampires were distinguished due to the color of their hair.

In most

Christian countries vampires could be recognized because they had red hair

like Judas

Iscariot, the man who betrayed Christ in the bible, was said to have had

red hair. Eye

color was another tell-tale sign used to identify vampires. In Greece ,where

most people

have dark colored eyes, vampires were said to have blue eyes, Rumania they

were said to

have had gray eyes, and in Ireland they had black eyes.

Vampires have been around for centuries , in some cases

they have been

recognized and feared by cultures that were around thousands of years before

the time of

Christ, such as the Babylonians and the Assyrians. Throughout the ages many

medical

explanations that could explain the vampire phenomena have been overlooked.

The first

reason was the lack of education that many people, because schooling was

not an

important part of these societies. Their lack of medical knowledge about

diseases, some

of which are quite rare and hard to explain even to this day was a large

factor in the

spread of vampire lore. Along with the fact that very uneducated people have

always had

a tendency of being overly superstitious also contributed to the vampire

legend. In 1985

Dr. David Dolphin, Ph.D., a professor of chemistry at the University of British

Columbia

presented his theory that blood-drinking vampires were not vampires at all

but rather

victims of a disease known as Porphyria.(Dresser, Norine. American Vampires

p171) ”

Porphyria is an incurable genetic disease which affects at least 50,000 patients

in the U.S.

that causes sudden symptoms of severe pain , respiratory problems, Skin lesions

and

sometimes death.”(Dresser, Norine. American vampires p171) “Porphyria may

well have

been responsible for many a vampire tale – especially since the disease is

hereditary”

(Garden, Nancy. Vampires p98) A person that is affected by Porphyria can

seem very

scary to the average person since the disease causes the persons gums to

tighten. That

causes their teeth to be seen much more prominently as well as causing their

teeth and

nails to gain a fluorescent glow.These traits could then go on to explain

the fact that

many vampire stories described the vampires as giving off a greenish glow.

Victims of

this disease are likely to be deformed in other ways as well but usually

in the facial area.

Because of the skin lesions suffered by victims of Porphyria they are usually

very

sensitive to light which would cause them to not venture out of their homes

until night.

This aspect of the lifestyles of people suffering Porphyria would fit in

very well

with vampire lore. Garlic was used as a repellent of vampires butmore likely

victims of

the disease known as Porphyria would have a strange chemical reaction with

garlic which

would cause the person to have a severe porphyria attack. This would then

make that

person very reluctant to come close to the garlic since it contains large

amounts of

Dialkyl Disulfide which destroys Heme in the persons blood ( Heme is the

pigmented

component of Hemoglobin and related substances found in largest amounts in

the bone

marrow, red blood cells, and the liver ). The further destruction of Heme

in a Porphyria

victim would set off a severe allergic reaction. Since Porphyria is also

a genetic disease

several siblings in a family usually carry the defective gene. While the

siblings may share

the same defective gene sometimes only one of the siblings will display any

of the

symptoms . It is known that in many vampire tales , vampires return to attack

their

sibling or other family members.This along with the fact that Porphyria could

be

triggered in a person who is genetically predisposed to have the disease

by a sudden loss

of large amounts of blood. When these factor are taken into consideration,

one could say

that when a vampire came back to attack a sibling and when the sibling also

began to

show some vampire characteristics , it could be assumed that the Porphyria

gene in the

second sibling could have been triggered by the loss of blood which was suffered

during

the attack by the first sibling or the “vampire.” This would make it seem

as though the

vampire attack had caused the second sibling to turn into a vampire as

well.

Plague was another factor which could explain the growth

of the vampire legend.

In the Stephen King book Salem’s Lot which is the story of a town that is

infested by

Vampires and due to the infestation of vampires causes the town to become

a ghost town.

In the book it says” But a little over a year ago something began to happen

in Jerusalem’s

Lot that was not unusual, people began to drop out of sight.” (King, Stephen.

Salem’s Lot

p15) This phenomenon which is found in Stephen King’s book was not at all

uncommon

in ancient times especially in remote places. Villagers in these remote places

would have

believed that blood was a Vital substance that gave life. Since they did

not know much

about disease their lack of knowledge of diseases and their lack of medical

practitioners

in these remote areas would give the perfect opportunity for their superstitious

beliefs to

come into play. If suddenly much of the town began to fall ill at the same

time and they

all displayed similar symptoms such as weight loss , weakness and paleness

they would

think that these people must have been drained of the vital substance, blood.

Searching

for an explanation without any medical knowledge the one thing that would

make sense

to them would be that a vampire was on the loose while the fact that the

town could be in

the middle of an epidemic such as the black plague during the Dark Ages.

In Stephen

King’s book a town would just seem to disappear for no reason and the only

explanation

would be vampires. In the Dark ages the situation would be very similar to

that in the

Stephen King book except that in Stephen King’s book the vampires are real.

Tuberculosis or consumption as it was often called is

a disease that although was

not highly contagious was a very common disease up until the mid-1800’s .

The

beginning stages of this disease do not contain very recognizable symptoms.By

the time

the symptoms showed up (such as weight loss and fatigue which is where the

name

consumption came from) the disease was already in it’s later stages. Tuberculosis

would

have been very difficult to diagnose by people with no medical knowledge

especially

when the most serious symptoms of the disease such as coughing and spitting

up blood

were not present. Tuberculosis was often openly confused with vampirism as

was the

case when in the mid- 1800’s the corpses of many victims of Tuberculosis

were treated as

vampires and buried face down or by being dug up and burned when members

of their

families suddenly came down with Tuberculosis.(Garden,Nancy. Vampires p69)

The mental aspect of vampires has always seemed to be

that of someone who was

not in their right mind. In Anne Rice’s book The Vampire Lestat at one point

one of the

vampires in the book just looks at the other one and simply says “You’re

the mad one.” (

Rice, Anne. The Vampire Lestat p73) not realizing that madness plays a large

part

towards explaining the vampire legend as well as other mental conditions.

One of these

conditions which could explain the vampire legend is the condition known

as a cataleptic

condition which many times is brought