

# THE EVOLUTION OF VAMPIRES

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Vampire, *n.*  
Animated corpse  
Alpha predator

### WHY VAMPIRES?

The **vampire's** most salient feature is its **salience**. It demands the blood of its victims, and the **attention** of its audience.

Why is the vampire such a **successful** figure? It rises from graves **around the world**, and has been around for **centuries** (Hallab, 2009). Yet the basic vampiric **genotype** - an undead bloodsucker - appears as vastly **different phenotypes** in various cultural ecologies (see Clasen, in press).



Nasty old-school vampire: Nosferatu (1922)

### ORIGINS

**Rotting bodies** do all sorts of interesting things: move around, groan when staked, bleed at the mouth, grow new hair. The origin of the vampire myth is a common, pre-scientific **misunderstanding** of **natural decomposition processes** and causes of disease (Barber, 1988). If you believe an **epidemic** is caused by a **vampire**, you exhume bodies. And if you find what appears to be a vampire, you **stake it**. It **groans** when gases are forced through the larynx. Vampire dispatched, case closed ... until the **next outbreak**.

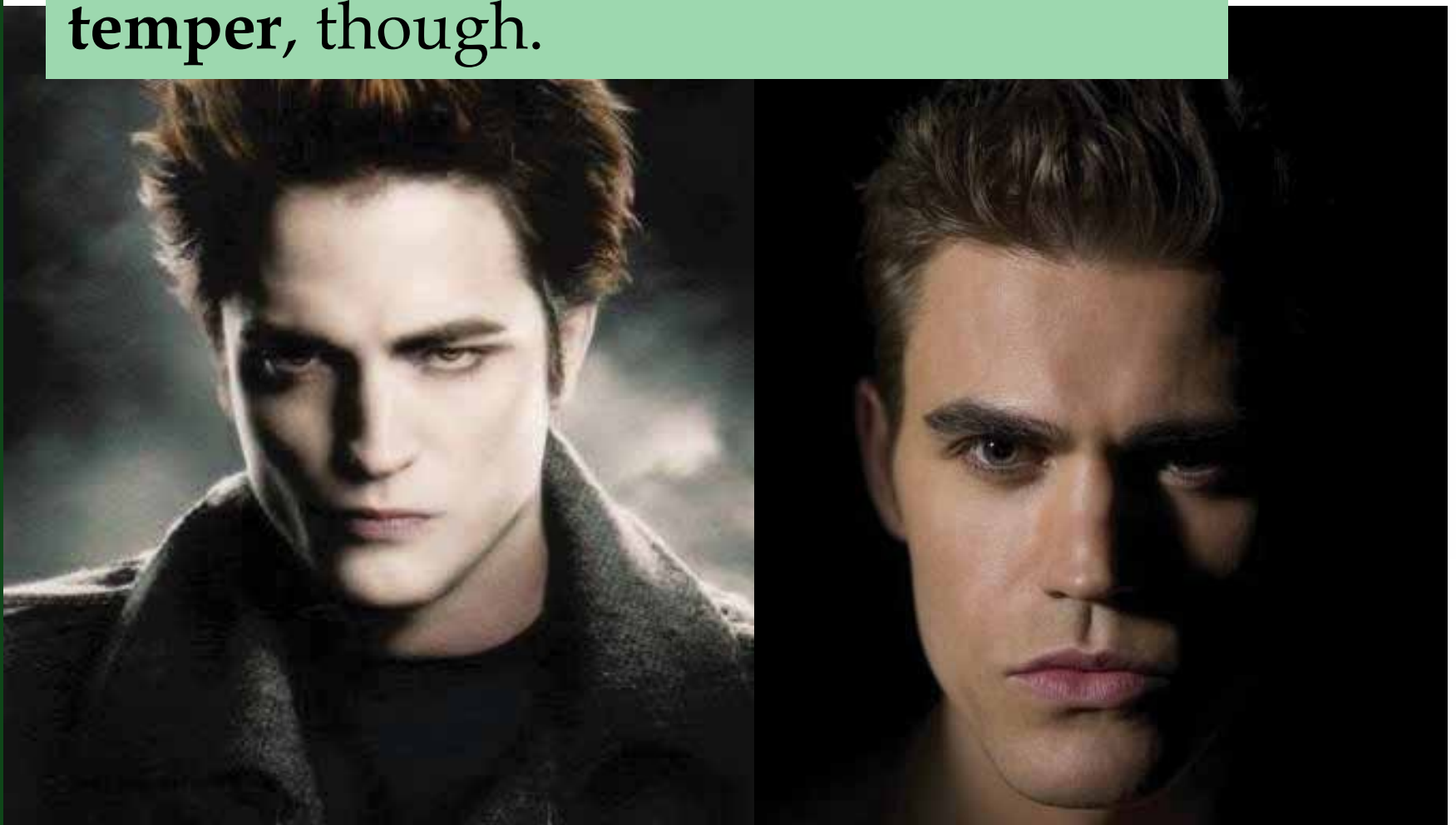


Preventive burial: a woman buried with a brick smashed into her mouth, to prevent her from rising as a vampire (common Medieval measure.)



### SEXY VAMPIRES

The **sexy vampire** is consolidated in the **Romantic** era, but truly comes into its own with Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976). It is now **ubiquitous**, in stories such as *True Blood*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and the *Twilight* series. The sexy vampire is still a **predator** (albeit occasionally with "**vegetarian**" sensibilities), usually male, and **female mate choice** may be more pertinent to understanding it. Sexy vampires seem to integrate the steady, dependable **dad** type with the dangerous, philandering **cad**; an **all-in-one** package which never dies, to boot. It is also often very **wealthy** and **well-educated**. It does tend to **lose its temper**, though.



Super-hot dad-cads, descended from Lord Byron and Count Dracula, but with less bite. They like to cuddle, yet have a mad, bad, and sort of dangerous side, as well.

### NASTY VAMPIRES

The vampires of **Romanticism**, as well as their **Victorian** descendants, are more **ambivalent** than their folkloristic ancestors. Yet all hail to Stoker's *Count Dracula* (1897), an **evil gentleman** with hairy palms and bad breath. The **prey** population of Transylvania can no longer sustain **predation**, which is the game-theoretical realization that makes Dracula pack up and move to London.

The **nasty vampire** has recently lost territory to its **sexy rival**, but is **far from extinction** (e.g. *From Dusk Till Dawn* [1996] and *30 Days of Night* (2007)).



### COUNTER-INTUITIVE HORROR

Our species has been **prey** to other organisms for a very, very long time (Hart & Sussman, 2009). The apparently **irrational** human preoccupation with **monsters** and **homicidal maniacs** reflects our **dangerous past** (Clasen, 2010): our **phylogeny** constrains our **imagination**, and our **attention** is differentially engaged.



All vampires are **undead**, and all **drink blood** from the living. They are essentially **predators**, but with **counterintuitive traits** (centrally, **undead**). This makes them **salient** to a prey species, and their taxonomic abnormality gives them an **edge** in the **struggle for cultural survival**. Minimally counterintuitive agents are easy to **remember**, and likely to be **transmitted** (Boyer, 2001). The vampire is, in short, a **good idea**, and its adaptability ensures its survival. Of course, there were **no vampires** in the **EEA** - it's all in our **minds**. But that does not put the **vampire** and its fellow **figments** of the human **imagination** outside the scope of **evolutionary explanation**.

*Homo sapiens vampiris*

Divergence from ancestral line: 1000 BC

Prey: preferentially *Homo sapiens sapiens*

Sustenance: blood

### SOURCES

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