

HOW VAMPIRES BECAME JEWISH

Peter Dan

Abstract: The connection between antisemitic stereotype and the image of the vampire is examined taking into account the psychological and historical factors involved. The symbolic link between Jews and blood through a history of blood libel and the depiction of Jews as alien and parasitic are seen the main themes that allowed the merging of the two images. The evolution of modern antisemitic stereotypes is examined.

Key Words: antisemitism, stereotype, vampire, blood libel, Dracula, Jew

One can draw many parallels between the antisemitic stereotype of the Jew and the image of the vampire: both are parasitic and drain the life force out of the host –in the case of the vampire the victim and in the case of the Jews an unwitting nation. Both have a symbolic connection to blood, and contact with either of them taints the blood. The eternal Jew (Der Ewige Jude of Nazi propaganda) and the vampire represent different forms of immortality: the Jews are virtually unchanged since the beginning of time and vampires cannot die on their own. They have certain physical characteristics in common: pallor and a generally unhealthy aspect, they wear black clothes and loathe the cross, holy water and other symbols of Christianity.

We will try to show that far from being coincidental, these similarities are the result of a convergence that took place at the end of the nineteenth century between the antisemitic stereotype of the Jew and the image of the vampire. This did not lead to a complete overlap, but rather to a host shared identity clues, and it worked indirectly, through hints and allusions, allowing the transfer of negative feelings between the two images.

Blood sucking demons and vampires

Humans are the only species with awareness of its own mortality. This has naturally led to a quest to overcome it. Gaining immortality has been an abiding aspiration of humankind, present in one form or another in all the major religions and in our earliest recorded epics.

One of the main functions of culture, according to Becker (1976), is to alleviate the horror of that ultimate aloneness- death- by offering the alternative of symbolic immortality. Symbolic immortality can be attained by gaining fame, fortune and power, whether directly or by association with someone who did, or by joining a social movement which seeks a transcendental goal, such as the greater glory of the Motherland. The quest for immortality symbols is an undertaking which supports and validates the culture which generates it. On the other hand, the individual quest for true immortality represents a challenge to the culture because it brings into question one of its main purposes: death denial. That is why, represented symbolically by the desire to be like the gods or

to cheat death, it usually takes the form of a cautionary tale. The myth of the vampire is an example, and since it is present in one form or another in most if not all cultures, an evolutionary point of view would suggest that it must have an adaptive role. It is a warning about the perils of gaining immortality outside the cultural value system, encouraging people to seek symbolic immortality with culturally sanctioned means rather than physical immortality. A vampire's body does not die, but its captive soul is damned.

The etymology of the word is unclear, related probably to the Old Russian term "Upir". In Serbian the word is "Vampir", and it passed in this form in German after the vampire hysteria of 1725-1730 forced the Austrian bureaucracy to write official reports in German. The English "vampire" and the French "vampyre" are derived from the German version of the word.

As mentioned, the belief in blood drinking demonic beings seems universal and is present in all ancient cultures. The iron toothed "asanbosam" of the African Ashanti is a vampiric being that hunts people from trees. The Chinese "pinyin" kills the living by robbing them of their life essence. The Philippine "Mandurugo", the Malaysian "Pennanggallan", the Indonesian "Leyak" prey on pregnant women or their children. In India, the goddess Kali is linked to the drinking of blood, and the vetalas are undead ghouls who possess bodies. The Colombian "Tunda" and the "Soucouyant" of Trinidad are female monsters while the Aztec "Cihuateteo", the spirits of those who died in childbirth, steal children and drive the living insane by seducing them.

The ancient Persians depicted blood drinking demons on pottery. The Babylonian goddess Lamashtu is described as a "flesh eating, blood sucking monster" that preys on pregnant women, drinks the blood of newborn babies and eats them. The related Babylonian and/or Sumerian myth of Lilitu, which is at the origin of the Jewish myth of Lilith, also describes a female sexual predator, a demon who feeds on the blood of babies. In Greek mythology, Lamia, feeds on sleeping children, and Empusa seduces men before drinking their blood. In Roman mythology the strix (from the Greek striges) are the undead; the Romanian "strigoi" are their direct descendants.

In 12th century England, stories of revenants can be found in the writings of Walter Map and William of Newburgh. In late 15th and early 16th Century, Saxon accounts of Vlad the Impaler's bloody Transylvanian campaign were printed as pamphlets, for example by Ambrosius Huber of Nuremberg in 1499, whose frontispiece reads: "Here begins the very cruel frightening story about a wild bloodthirsty man Prince Dracula". In several other pamphlets, Vlad is called "Prince Dracula, the Great Berserker". Popular literature kept alive the specter of Dracula, the bloodthirsty monster and its connection to Vlad the Impaler.

During the 1720's and 1730's vampire hysteria swept over Eastern Europe, leading to the desecration of the graves of those suspected of being vampires and the driving of stakes through their hearts in an effort to banish them for

good. In Serbia, the cases of Peter Plogojowitz, Arnold Paole and Sava Savannovic gained notoriety, forcing Empress Maria Theresa to dispatch her own physician, Gerard van Swieten to investigate. He concluded that vampires did not exist, but Voltaire disagreed: "These vampires were corpses, who went out of their graves at night to suck the blood of the living, either at their throats or stomachs, after which they returned to their cemeteries. The persons so sucked waned, grew pale, and fell into consumption; while the sucking corpses grew fat, got rosy, and enjoyed an excellent appetite. It was in Poland, Hungary, Silesia, Moravia, Austria, and Lorraine, that the dead made this good cheer". (Philosophical Dictionary).

A century later, in Rhode Island, the body of Mercy Brown, suspected of being a vampire and the cause of her brother's illness was exhumed. Her heart was removed, burned and the ashes made into a mixture that was fed to her brother. He died anyway.

The origins of the modern cultural phenomenon of the vampire can be traced back to Romanticism. Polidori's 1819 "The Vampyre: A Tale" was the first English publication of a vampire story, followed in 1847 by James Malcolm Rymer's "Varney the Vampire or The Feast of Blood." and in 1872 by Sheridan Le Fanu's "Carmilla". Bram Stoker's "Dracula" was published in 1892 and it started a vampire fad that goes on to this day. What are the reasons for this enduring interest?

The psychological symbolism of the vampire

From a psychological standpoint, the vampire represents powerful conflicts, as Jones (1931) noted. The idea of the return of a loved one can elicit conflicts centered on love, hate, guilt and the denial of death. As the wish to be reunited with a lost loved one is fraught with anxiety, desire becomes mixed with fear and love with aggression. The fear of destroying the loved one and of being hurt, the lust, the anger felt toward the loved one are all part of the relationship between vampire and victim.

The behavior of the vampire has obvious sexual connotations: the penetration, the drawing of blood are references to virginity. The vampire represents the lure of the exotic, the danger of giving in to desire. He sneaks into the bedroom of a maiden, and his seductive powers overwhelm the vulnerable victim. In a world dominated by rigid Victorian mores allowing oneself to be seduced leads to utter destruction: the women who give in to Count Dracula become child killers and ultimately die. The seduction aspect of the relation between vampire and victim has been emphasized by some interpreters of the role of Dracula, for example Louis Jourdan

The vampire is also a complex ambivalent symbol. Because it subsists on the nourishing fluid it sucks, the vampire is orally dependent, like an infant. Because it has to bite to get his food, it is orally aggressive like an infant biting the breast. This indicates that the vampire represents a regression to a very early stage in infancy: teething when the conflict is between the natural desire to bite and the desire to receive continued love and nourishment. The successful outcome of this conflict requires the child to gain mastery over a desire for the first time in life. The disapproval and punishment that follow the biting behavior, and the frustrations associated with the withholding of the feeding and the perceived loss of love, are incorporated into a developing personality structure—the “Bad Me”—which is an internalized and later generalized repository of patterns of behavior that elicit negative reactions. In this sense the vampire represents the return of the repressed, the re-emergence of the Bad Me.

The vampire is a parasitic being. It depends on humans for nourishment, yet it kills them. The fear of destroying what one loves is another deep seated anxiety which has its roots in the child’s fear that his anger can cause harm to others.

Finally, the vampire is alien – the other onto whom we project our fear of strangers, our sexual and violent fantasies.

Jews and blood

Blood constitutes the symbolic connection between Jews and vampires. The symbolic importance of blood is made clear in the Old Testament, for example in Leviticus 17:11: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul” and in Exodus 24:8 “And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words” as well as in the New Testament in Hebrews 9:22 “And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission” and in 1 John 1:7 “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

The connection between Jews and blood can be traced back to the blood curse in Matthew 27: 24-25 “His blood be on us and our children” which constitutes the basis for blood libel: the accusation of human sacrifice performed for obtaining the blood of the victim for ritual purposes. The function of the blood libel is to validate and maintain core antisemitic beliefs (Dan, 2008). Accusations of blood libel against the Jews precede Christianity : Apion of Alexandria accused the Jews of annually fattening a Greek in the Temple to offer his body as a sacrifice, and certainly there is a history of Islamic blood libel:(Amasya 1545, Damascus 1840, Rhodes 1840) but the accusations of blood libel started proliferating in Europe after the 12th century. Typically the unexplained death or the disappearance of a Christian child was followed by the

accusation that the Jews murdered the child in a re-enactment of the crucifixion, and collected the blood to be used as an essential component of the Passover Matzoth, or as a remedy for some mysterious ailment typical of the Jews. The Jews are believed to be afflicted with hemorrhages (Thomas of Monmouth, 1173, *The Life and Miracles of William*), or Jewish men are said to menstruate (Tyrnau 1494), and need to drink Christian blood (*solo sanguine Christiano*) as an only remedy (*remedium*).

“Furthermore, Jewish communities are said to draw lots to decide “which congregation or city” will “kill the Christian as we killed Christ” in order “to send Christian blood to the other congregations.” (Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Miracles of William*, 1173). Note how the myth of worldwide Jewish conspiracy is added on to amplify the concept of collective guilt, and at the same time serve as an explanation for the apparently random location of the re-occurrence of blood libel around Easter.” (Dan 2008)

The proof of blood libel was either considered self evident, obtained by torture (Tyrnau 1484, Bazin 1529, Rhodes 1840, Syria 1840); or proven by a miracle ((Margraviate of Baden 1267, Alsace 1270, Oberwesel 1286).and was sometimes followed by a massacre (Norwich 1144, Blois 1171, and Trentino 1475)..By 1532, blood libel had become part of the popular culture: Chaucer, in “The Prioress’ Tale”, describes the death, at the hand of the Jews, of Little Saint Hugh of Lincoln, which had taken place two hundred years ago. The Jewish Encyclopedia lists 121 documented instances of blood libel from 1144 to 1900.

Jews and Vampires: the convergence of stereotypes

With the advent of racial antisemitism, the concept of the Jews being a race rather than as a religion led to the emergence of a stereotypical image of the Jew which emphasized the perceived defects as signs of biological inferiority. Drumont (1986) notes that the Jew has “ a hooked nose, blinky eyes, tightly packed teeth, salient ears, square rather than almond shaped nails, an overly long torso, flat feet, the ankle turned very much outward, an arm often shorter than the other... and the soft and melting hand of the hypocrite or traitor.” (1886, p. 34) He also quotes Lavalier ‘s description of the physical characteristics of the Jew:“the pale face, the hooked nose, the sunken eyes, the prominent nose, the pronounced development of the constrictor muscles of the mouth, the fuzzy hair, red or dark, the sparse beard, normally indicative of effeminate character” (p.34)

An alternative stereotype is that of the bloated Jew, who retains the hooked nose, salient ears, thick lips and beard, and usually represents a predatory business man. As Oisteanu (2009) has shown, there are many images of “the imaginary Jew” and sets of beliefs associated with them within the same culture, differing in various degrees from “the real Jew”. The stereotypes described above were the dominant ones in Western Europe, within an antisemitic mind set.

The Jews are seen as sapping the host nation of its vital energy. They are, in Drumont's words "like an evil bird that occupies the nest that others have built." Because of their ability to adapt to most societies and yet remain unchanged, the Jews are seen as possessing symbolic immortality obtained at the detriment of other nations. Comparisons of Jews with parasites, including blood sucking parasites such as leeches, lice, bed bugs etc. were common. Karl Lueger, the mayor of Vienna from 1897 to 1910, a man Hitler called "an inspiration", referred to the Jews as "Blutsauger" - a word meaning "bloodsucker" or "vampire".



A contemporary cartoon published in Germany illustrates the manner in which religious and political antisemitic themes merge: it depicts a Satan like figure with horns and a pointy beard, clad in a black cloak emblazoned with a Star of David, standing astride the Earth and holding up a flag while planting a foot shaped like an eagle's claw on a fallen maiden. He holds a bloody scimitar in his other hand; behind him there is a broken cross and to the side a fallen crown. Another cartoon depicts Jews clad in black clothes committing ritual murder.



Commenting on the physical blemishes of the Jews, Drumont asserts “Physical degradation always follow moral degradation, even more so in the case of the Jews”. This was a recurring antisemitic theme: with blood being seen as the locus of heredity and race, the mixing of inferior, Jewish blood with that of the superior blood of the host nation was seen as necessarily resulting in degeneracy. Just as the bite of the vampire carries the contagion with it, the contact with the Jews taints the blood. In these context depictions of the Jews as sexual predators suggest that the Jews are determined to racially undermine the host nation. The relationship between vampire and victim has its parallel in the relationship between the host nation and the Jews..

According to Bering (1992), one core antisemitic belief is that “.Jews bring disaster on their 'host societies' or on the whole world, and they are doing it secretly” allowing the antisemites to feel that they have to unmask the danger represented by the Jews in self defense..

The 1882 blood libel trial of Tisza Eszlar , Hungary, was widely covered in the European press and kept the connection between Jews and blood alive in the public consciousness. In 1888 the gruesome murders committed by Jack the Ripper terrorized the East End of London. Almost one third of the suspects were Jews, a disproportionate number compared to the percentage of Jews in the

general population.(Severyn Closowski, Aaron Kominsky. Michael Ostrog, Carl Feigelbaum, John Pizer, David Cohen and Joseph Silver) As Gilman (1991) notes, the description of Jack the Ripper printed in the press: “dark beard and moustache, dark jacket and trousers, dark felt hat, spoke with a foreign accent” was modified in the accompanying published portrait by the addition of a hooked nose, thick eyebrows and prominent ears, bringing it much closer to the antisemitic stereotypical image of the Jew.



Jack the Ripper sketch, Illustrated Police News, September 1888
From Sander Gilman "The Jew's Body" p.115

Robinson (2009) observes that the last quarter of the nineteenth century in Britain was a period of mass emigration from Eastern Europe, accompanied by a rise in xenophobia and racism, including antisemitism and makes the argument that Dracula is not a medieval monster, but a metaphor for modernity and British antisemitism. She notes that Dracula's precursors, namely Lord Ruthven of Polidori's "Vampyre", Rymer's Varney and Le Fanu's Carmilla "typically belong(ed) to the circles they preyed upon, no worse than a local decadent aristocrat,"(2009), while Dracula is a foreigner, sharing some of the characteristics of the immigrant: a foreign accent, dubious hygiene habits, a lack of loyalty to one's country., a proclivity for criminal activity, which are mixed with some of the elements of the antisemitic stereotype: mercantilism, a desire to "pass" in English society and to adapt to it in order to subvert it. While noting that Count Dracula is a composite figure sharing some of the characteristics of the older, German immigrants as well as the newer, East European ones,

Robinson nonetheless believes that because his preoccupation with financial transactions and money, "Count Dracula is the faithful embodiment of the caricature of the Jew as greedy and parasitic." (2009)

Stoker had made the connection between his fictitious character, Count Dracula the vampire, and the historic character Vlad Dracula the Impaler, claiming they were one and the same. Nicholas Modrussa of Cusa had met Vlad the Impaler while the latter was in captivity in Visegrad Castle, and left a detailed physical description: "He was not very tall, but very stocky and strong, with a cruel and terrible appearance, a long straight nose, distended nostrils, a thin and reddish face in which the large wide-open green eyes were framed by bushy black eyebrows, which made them appear threatening. His face and chin were shaven but for a moustache. The swollen temples increased the bulk of his head. A bull's neck supported the head, from which black curly locks were falling to his wide-shouldered person."

Compare this with Stoker's description of Dracula: "a tall old man, clean shaven save for a long white moustache, and clad in black from head to foot... His face was a strong, a very strong, aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils, with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion. The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth. These protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years. For the rest, his ears were pale, and at the tops extremely pointed. The chin was broad and strong, and the cheeks firm though thin. The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor" Stoker goes on further noting the hands: "rather coarse, broad, with squat fingers."

As one can see the touches added by Stoker: changing the nose from straight to hooked, the complexion from reddish to pale, as well as the additions: the pointy and pale ears, the cruel mouth, the coarse hands with squat fingers, the black clothing are meant to increase the similarity between Dracula's appearance and the antisemitic stereotype of the Jew as well as the "criminal type" as described by Lombroso, whose theories were in vogue. The scientific view at the end of the nineteenth century was strongly influenced by Social Darwinism, thus conferring to the perceived negative characteristics of the Jews the immutability of a biological fact. One does not have to travel far to reach Goebbels point of view that "The Jews are...a pseudopeople wielded together by a history of hereditary criminality."

I am not making the argument that Stoker was an antisemite, but rather as Davison puts it "'anti-Semitism has remained a consistent and readily adaptable component in British identity construction" (2004,p. 14) For example, Stoker describes Dracula bringing a child to feed his vampire wives, thus linking him symbolically to the history of blood libel. Dracula becomes emblematic of the

outside forces taking over the country from its rightful inheritors and changing its destiny Stoker used the fear of that eternal “other” –the Jew- as well as the fear and resentment against the new immigrants to amplify the anxiety evoked by the character of the vampire. The relationship is dynamic, reciprocal and reversible: in Nazi propaganda the anxiety evoked by the vampire was used to amplify the anxiety and resentment created by the Jews.



Max Schreck as Nosferatu the Vampire

Once established, the connection between the image of the vampire and the antisemitic stereotype of the Jew continued to be exploited. In Frantz Murnau’s “Nosferatu”, the eponymous main character (we are told the name means “Bird of Death”) bears a strong resemblance to an antisemitic caricature. He is accompanied by an invasion of rats and suspected of having brought the plague. The accusation of carrying disease and pestilence was often made against the Jews during the Middle Ages, and is a major theme of anti Jewish Nazi propaganda.



Peter Lorre as "M", the child murderer
In Fritz Lang's "M" Peter Lorre (who was Jewish) plays the role of a pedophile serial killer. His portrayal is considered one of the defining performances in the history of cinema. (The character was based on Peter Kurten, the vampire of Dusseldorf, who attacked 41 victims, killing 9 of them before he was arrested. May 24th, 1930) .The Nazi propaganda machine made an issue of Lorre's Jewishness, accusing him, in the movie *Der Ewige Jude*, of harboring secret sympathies for the murderer and portraying him in a manner intended to create compassion for the criminal rather than the victim.

In the cartoons and posters of the Nazi era, the Jew is represented both as bloated with the blood and wealth of other nations, as a pedophile, or as a monstrous creature bent on world domination



„Hier, Kleiner, halt du etwas ganz Süßes! Aber dafür müßt ihr beide mit mir gehen...“

The Jew as pedophile



The Jew as a monster dominating the world. Note the similarities with Nosferatu

After the Holocaust, the negative image of the Jews underwent a modification, and for a number of years the Jew was the symbol of the ultimate victim. This was accompanied by a de facto interdiction of public manifestations of antisemitism in most of Western Europe. However, according to The Pew Global Attitudes Project Report, the unfavorable view of the Jews has increased significantly in Europe, and a new type of antisemitism has grown rapidly, a type that is not seen as politically incorrect and whose target was Israel.

The evolution of antisemitism. A new convergence of stereotypes: Israelis and Nazis

With the advent of worldwide television and the internet it became increasingly hard to maintain the old stereotype of the Jew. The exploits of the Israeli army and the images of Jews everywhere undercut the argument that Jews are not fit for military service, are physically inept, or indeed that an identifiable type of Jew even exists. In addition, as of late, the image of the vampire in popular culture enjoys a vogue and has acquired a certain romantic panache. This undermined its usefulness as a component of the old antisemitic stereotype which had lost its effectiveness anyway.

Several adjustments were made: Israel has become a stand-in for the Jews, and is depicted as sadistic, militaristic and bent on world domination. Making Israel the ostensible target for negative feelings offered antisemites the additional advantage of not being hindered by the legacy of the Holocaust. A new potent symbol of evil was found and connected to the depiction of Israel: Nazism. The dynamic of this new connection is similar to the previous vampire -Jew one: the negative feelings associated with Nazism are projected onto Israel and by extension, the Jews.



Ariel Sharon as Hitler



Blood Libel Cartoon

Cartoons of Israelis identified both by the Star of David and the swastika, performing atrocities, ritual murder, cannibalism of children can be found in abundance in the Arabic and Western press. As Kotek noted in a 2004 interview “other predominant antisemitic zoomorphic motifs are the blood-thirsty vampire and the octopus. The vampire image is a classic theme used by antisemites. I have not found any other people besides the Jews represented as such.”

These representations lay the foundation for a genocidal mind set by dehumanizing the Jews, making them the focus of hostile projections and justifying pre-emptive violence against them. Frequent parallels are drawn between Israeli actions and the Holocaust, paradoxically often in countries which deny the Shoah ever took place. The drumbeat of antisemitism goes on.

As Eotvos Karoly, the defender of Jews in the 1882 blood libel trial of Tisza Eszlar, wrote: “There are Jews everywhere. Their role in each society is larger than their proportion in it. Because of this, jealousy accompanies them in the great race of life. Their religion has its origins in ancient times, and still stands today. Their racial being is the very same today as four and a half

thousand years ago, when one could find nary a trace of today's great cultures and nations....

. That is why the mob cannot forget the blood libel... why the flames of the blood libel flare up from time to time... and its embers still glow after one and a half thousand years, under the layers of ashes and oblivion. And yet, they cannot be extinguished definitively" (1904, p. 3).

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Peter Dan, PhD in Personality and Social Psychology from the City University of New York, is a practicing School Psychologist in New York City, and an Adjunct Professor at Long Island University Graduate Program in School Psychology.