

The Psychic Vampire and Vampyre Subculture

A. Asbjørn Jøn

‘Vampire is not a career choice’ – Bart Simpson¹

Recent years have seen both the preliminary recognition and initial analysis of the recent ‘Vampyre’ subculture by folklorists and sociologists alike. In brief, Vampyre subculture draws heavily upon supernatural lore, manipulating its content — so as to allow many participants to maintain re-mythicised and romanticised personas, that are to some extent ‘vampiric’ — whilst participating in the regular rituals and social interactions of subcultural life. Members share a loosely similar dress code and philosophical outlook with those of the ‘Goth’ scene — which many social commentators credit as jointly parenting, with some sections of the S/M subculture, the Vampyre scene. However, the Vampyre scene is much more closely knit than that of the Goths, with members placing a high emphasis on Vampyre nightclubs and peer relationships that at times even replace family based structures.

‘Vampyre’ subculture participants are particularly interesting to the folklorist, as they function within high level, complex interactions, in traditional supernatural lore. Often those interactions adapt, or re-mythicise the lore, through specific subcultural rituals. In that way the subculture is playing an important part in the ‘evolution’ of supernatural lore.

One of the more prominent Vampyre subcultural organizations that are participating within that ‘evolutionary’ process is the *Vampire Church*. The *Vampire Church* was founded in 1998 and is run by Damien Daville. Daville explains that the *Vampire Church* is not a ‘church’ in the traditional sense — as it asserts no religious doctrine — but rather an organization for individuals who share a like philosophy and lifestyle, which sets out to ‘defend against the hate of those who do not understand vampirism [... whilst asserting] its ideas and philosophies

¹ The Bart Simpson character of *The Simpsons* cartoon wrote this line on the blackboard at the start of the 18/3/02 episode, broadcast by KHMT-4 (Fox), in Billings MT – USA.

when appropriate'.² Like most Vampyre organizations *The Vampire Church* embraces a belief in vampires being 'real' – at least to some extent — suggesting that 'real' vampires can be classified in the following ways:

There are those who draw their strength or energy from pranic sources or direct life giving sources such as blood and sexual energy. And there are also those who derive their energy from their empathic abilities, the ability to absorb the emotional energy of others and "feel" other people's emotions thereby deriving sustenance.³

Those who 'feed' directly from 'blood and sexual energy' seem to loosely resemble some blood fetishists of S/M subculture, or perhaps even sufferers of *haematodipsia* (a rare and often misrepresented psychological condition in which drinking blood gives one sexual pleasure), and are hence not the most interesting of the groups to the present survey.⁴ The other grouping however, of individuals who can 'feed' from the emotions of those surrounding them, does appear to be more closely connected to the re-mythicization and adaptation of supernatural lore – and hence this survey.

Dr Mark Benecke, of the University of Cologne, recently completed a semiquantitative field study of Vampyre subculture, which recognized that a growing percentage of 'Vampyres' are identifying themselves within Daville's vampiric category of those who can feed from emotions. The preferred title for that group has come to be 'Psychic Vampires', which is often shortened to 'Psi-Vampires', or even 'Psi-Vamps'. Benecke's research suggested that in most cases individuals expressed the belief that they were able to 'feed' upon the psychic energy of others through various means – as Daville has also claimed.⁵ Notably the title, 'Psychic Vampire', is one that has been used within the field of folklore for many

² Daville, Damien, *Vampire Church Manifesto* (<http://www.vampire-church.com> — 28/02/00). The present writer notes that when he checked the site on 7/04/02 the *Manifesto* had been removed. It should also be recognised that whilst current *Vampire Church* documents give a formation date of 1998 those of 2000 gave the formation date as 1997.

³ Daville, Damien, *Vampire Church: Purpose and Philosophy* (<http://www.vampire-church.com/purpose.html> — 23/03/02).

⁴ Notably *haematodipsia* was recently discussed during the *X-Files* episode entitled 'Bad Blood', directed by Cliff Bole, season 5 episode 12 (Original broadcast date: 22/02/98). After the broadcasting of that episode that Vampyre and Goth subcultural groups seem to have begun discussing blood fetish in terms of *haematodipsia* — a practice still current.

⁵ Benecke, Mark, and Aleksandra Blak, 'Vampire Youth Subculture in New York City', presented at the *Second World Dracula Congress* (Poiana Brasov, Romania: 24-28 May 2000). That paper presented the findings of Benecke's field study (1997-2000) of youth Vampyre subculture within the Manhattan area.

years to describe a specific category of beast that perform 'entity attacks' in order to feed.

The Psychic Vampyre grouping has been the focus of growing academic attention. At the *Dracula 97* conference in Los Angeles (14-17 August 1997) Vincent Hillyer, the Vice-President of the Count Dracula Fan Club, presented a paper titled *Psychic Vampires*.⁶ Hillyer's paper set out to stress that the psychic vampire is a predator that has existed within the lore and traditions of the paranormal over a considerable time span. According to that traditional lore, — like modern Vampyre subculture's interpretation — the psychic vampire is a beast that attacks people and drains them of their life force or energy. However, unlike better known forms of vampires, the psychic vampire does not 'feed' by extracting blood or any other physical element, it preys upon life force or 'pranic' energy.

Many Vampyre subculture psi-vampires seem to couple their romantic aspirations with this notion of energy feeding. Various online 'dating' sites for alternate lifestyles appear to include advertisements for partners who are willing to become energy 'donors' to a psi-vampire — in addition to other aspects of the relationship. It would appear that the 'donor' role is a highly submissive position within many such relationships. Commentators have previously indicated that Vampyre relationships often include various aspects of sadomasochism.

In most cases it would seem that both the traditional and the Vampyre subculture psychic vampire have an apparent lack of the energy that they seek from their 'donors' or victims. Like the traditional, blood drinking vampire, psychic vampires maintain their existence through acquiring sustenance through parasitic feeding practices. Some surveys have referred to a prevalent feeling of angst, unquenchable 'boredom' and lethargy amongst segments of the Vampyre subcultural group. Dr Steven Kaplan, the founder of the Vampire Research Centre in New York, has suggested that the 'psychic vampire is [actually even] aware of his lack of energy, and of its ability to sap energy from others which [... it] has developed with practice'.⁷ Both Kaplan and Hillyer, in their respective studies, also sought to indicate that the folkloric psi-vampire lore-herd is still actively employed today by the Vampyres — as a tool for re-

⁶ Abstracts for the *Dracula 97* conference, submitted by the presenters, can be accessed at: <http://www.ucs.mun.ca/~emiller/abstr.htm> The E. Miller who maintains that archive is Professor Elizabeth Miller of the Department of English at Memorial University of Newfoundland — Canada. Professor Miller is also the President of the Canadian Chapter of the Transylvanian Society of Dracula (the broader society is based in Romania) and Past President of the Lord Ruthven Assembly, a constituent group within the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts.

⁷ Kaplan, Stephen, *Vampires Are* (Palm Springs: ETC Publications, 1984), p.157. The Vampire Research Centre, P.O. Box 252, Elmhurst, NY 11373.

mythicizing their subcultural practices and explaining their belief in being able to ‘feed’ from others.

Some modern interpretations of psychic vampire tradition further break the group into categories. In his work, *Vampires: The Occult Truth*, Konstantinos – who has not only lectured and written on occult philosophy for many years but is also a member of the moderately successful New York based Goth band *Bell, Book & Candle* — wrote of the lore of both living psychic vampires – who are human beings that prey upon the energy of other living beings, sometimes in a physical state, through the power of touch (pp.134-135), eye contact (pp.135-136), or an astral state (pp.143ff)-; and dead psychic vampires, who need to continue preying upon the life force of living beings to maintain their own existence (pp.154ff).⁸ The interesting thing about Konstantinos’ work is that his categories loosely conform to the distinction between a traditional interpretation of the psychic vampire and that of the Vampyre scene. In a way that reinforces the notion of the lore of the beast undergoing a transformational, or evolutionary, process.

During his analysis of the psychic vampire Konstantinos also makes close reference to the similarities between their lore and that of the Hag. Primarily basing his claims upon the work of the respected scholar David J. Hufford, Konstantinos not only discusses the similarities between the two beasts entity attacks, but also goes on to include psychic vampire attack case studies as supporting documentation.

David Hufford, the Professor of Humanities and Behavioural Science at the University of Pennsylvania’s Hershey Medical Centre, published an interesting survey of the Hag’s characteristics and lore in 1982 titled *The Terror that Comes in the Night*. Perhaps the most interesting feature of Hufford’s work to the folklorist in general, and to our current survey, was that it contained many case studies of the Hag form of entity attack.⁹ A distinct and aged body of lore that deals with a succubus-like form of hag – such as that mentioned by Konstantinos —, who visited people and animals during the night, is well documented. The Hag was reported to sit ‘on a person’s chest and “riding” then through the night’ draining their energy – sometimes to the point of spurring death.¹⁰ Legend also records an impressive body of lore dealing with the ways to guard against hag-attacks – such as it being possible to prevent them by placing either a table fork or a sifter under one’s head or a penknife upon

⁸ Konstantinos, *Vampires: The Occult Truth* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2001).

⁹ Hufford, David J., *The Terror that Comes in the Night: An Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia University Press, 1982).

¹⁰ Guiley, Rosemary Ellen, ‘Hag’, in *The Encyclopaedia of Witches and Witchcraft* (New York: Facts on File, 1989), p.148.

one's breast during sleeping hours. Additionally, Hags would sometimes steal horses at night, riding them to the point of complete exhaustion before returning them. A strong tradition of hanging preventative charms and amulets within stables, to protect the animals, grew from that belief. However, the present writer must stress, that within traditional folkloric sources of Hag lore there is little evidence to suggest that the hag-attack is a method employed for 'feeding', it is simply presented as a form of the broader 'entity attack'.

Konstantinos' claim is however supported by the activities and research of Drew Sinton – who is connected to a Vampyre subcultural group in Australia. In a selection of newspaper accounts it has been well documented that over the past five years Sinton has run 'vampire workshops attended by a broad cross-section of the community, from Geelong Gothics to Melbourne business people'¹¹ – with a heavy focus on the effects and workings of psychic vampirism. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Sinton's efforts however is the way in which he describes psychic vampire attacks. In an interview with the *Shepparton News* Sinton described such an attack in the following way:

'Imagine this situation. It's three in the morning and you wake up for no apparent reason. You feel like someone is watching you. You get an adrenaline rush and feel paralysed. There is pressure on your chest.' Mr Sinton believes this is a spirit vampire draining energy from the heart chakra, a powerful energy point on the body.¹²

Notably, toward supporting the parallel suggested by Konstantinos, Sinton's above description is almost synonymous to the ancient lore of the Hag. Further investigation may reveal closer ties between Hag lore and Vampyre subculture psi-vampire lore.

Locally, within Australia, organizations such as the *Vampire Legion* of Melbourne (which is associated with Drew Sinton – a Melbourne based businessman who runs the 'Haunted Bookshop', guides 'vampire tours' to Transylvania and wrote the recent occult release, *The Antichrist's Bible*) have suggested that numerous psychic vampire groups and/or networks have been formed in recent years.¹³ A Queensland-based organization, *The Australian Vampire Information Association*, who

¹¹ Johnston, Kate, 'Sinton seeks our Vampires', *Geelong Advertiser* (24 September 2000), p.16.

¹² Sinton, Drew, in 'Tales from the crypt: ghosts and vampires', *Shepparton News* (8 July 1998), pp.1,11 (p.11).

¹³ Arnoume', D Christie Sinton, *The Antichrist's Bible* (Melbourne: Antichrist Enterprises, 2001). *Psychic Vampires* (Queensland: Australian Vampire Information Association). Australian Vampire Information Association: PO Box 123, Mt Gravatt Plaza, Qld 4122, Australia. The Vampire Legion: PO Box 4202 Melbourne University Post Office, Vic 3052, Australia.

publish the reader *Psychic Vampires*, has lent much support to that claim — even providing a service for psychic vampires to gain contact with others. It seems that the majority of Vampyre subculture groups within Australia are focused in the centres of Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Brisbane — with only very scant reports of such groups in Hobart, Perth, Darwin, Canberra or regional areas.

In sum, it can be said that the lore of the psychic vampire is currently moving through an active process of adaptation and re-vitalisation, primarily at the hands of the Vampyre subcultural group, yet also to a lesser extent within the broader community. That adaptation and usage is a folkloric and sociological phenomenon that deserves further and deep consideration. It is important, for as a process it allows for the re-mythicization of a body of lore that otherwise might become aged, and hence less likely to be remembered by new generations. What is even more significant is the notion that participants within Vampyre subculture are voluntarily transferring aspects of supernatural lore that may be classified as monster lore upon them. This creates a definite re-shaping of the construction of the supernatural beast, or monster, that includes not only the process of adapting lore to meet the needs of both contemporary environments and users, but a the process of revising the concept of the supernatural beast being a part of the ‘other’.

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