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## Curing Consumption: Blood Drinkers of the Nineteenth Century

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Curing Consumption:  
Blood Drinkers of the Nineteenth Century

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in History

by

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Arkansas State University  
Bachelor of Arts in History, 2015

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University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## Abstract

During the nineteenth century burgeoning cities in the United States saw the spread of disease. Most common among all parts of society was tuberculosis or as it was commonly known at the time, consumption. The most terrifying aspect of consumption was that it could attack anyone at any time and no cure existed. The poetic image of a red stained handkerchief was a death sentence. The common cure was to seek fresh air in a warmer climate. However, for some Americans an experimental cure seemed hopeful and easily accessible, drinking blood. According to many newspaper accounts consumptive victims were not only participating in this cure but finding results. Because physicians were not able to cure consumption, desperate victims turned to an unlikely cure from an unlikely source, the butcher, a trade worker.

The grotesque imagery of a pale, emaciated consumptive victim drinking blood from a freshly slaughtered animal conjures one image strongly, that of a vampire. These blood drinking consumptives were indeed compared to vampires and feared by both the press and parts of the medical community. Using romantic literature of the time and of the future a strong correlation is found between these blood drinking consumptives and the western vampire character we are so familiar with today.

Consumptives' doubts that the medical community could offer anything to save them, led to drastic decisions being made in regards to their health. Newspaper accounts containing interviews with consumptives, butchers, and medical men were heavily drawn on to answer questions of why this cure was tried and reactions to the cure. Medical journals and romantic literature were also investigated in order to examine the risks that were believed to accompany this cure. These sources together provide a complete picture of just how desperate these people were to try this blood cure.

## Dedication

### To my family

for listening to my endless history lessons. I have always had the passion, but you have helped me nurture it into an obsession and I will forever be thankful (hopefully you won't regret it when

I am still rambling twenty years from now.)

### To Joel

thank you for always being there. I'm sorry a crazy vampire lady took over for so long, but she is now being released into the wild.

### To all my friends, coworkers, and random strangers

who have listened to my tales of real vampires and the blood cure of the nineteenth century,

finally my work is here. I hope it lives up to the hype.

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## Introduction

“suddenly she stopped, clutched her throat, and a wave of crimson blood rushed down over her breast.” -Edgar Allan Poe

A pale, beautiful girl in her early twenties, with striking dark hair, entertains her and her husband’s guests in a quiet, yet charming manner. The guest, author Captain Mayne Reid, describes her in this way: “a lady angelically beautiful in person and not less beautiful in spirit...her grace, her facial beauty, her demeanor, so modest as to be remarkable.”<sup>1</sup> The woman was poet Edgar Allan Poe’s wife Virginia. She was dying of tuberculosis or as it was termed at the time, consumption. Although she was dying, the descriptions of her speak only of her beauty, but even more than that of how the disease enhanced her beauty; “And when we talked of her beauty, I well knew that the rose-tint upon her cheek was too bright, too pure to be of Earth. It was consumption’s color – that sadly-beautiful light which beckons to an early tomb.”<sup>2</sup> She was painted as unfit for this world, her beauty could only exist because she was dying, often described as “unearthly” like in a quote from Mrs. Mary Gove Nichols, “Mrs. Poe looked very young; she had large black eyes, and a pearly whiteness of complexion, which was a perfect pallor. Her pale face, her brilliant eyes, and her raven hair gave her an unearthly look. One felt that she was almost a disrobed spirit, and when she coughed it was made certain that she was rapidly passing away.”<sup>3</sup> Virginia was the perfect example of a person dying of the beautiful, peaceful, wasting disease that consumption had become in the Victorian mind.

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Hobson Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 346.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Silverman, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 81.

<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Mary Gove Nichols, “Reminiscences of Edgar Allan Poe,” <https://www.eapoe.org/people/poevc.htm>.

Consumption was a disease so overwhelming to Western populations that it became a part of the culture, forming a cult of the consumptive starting in the eighteenth century. The consumptive look was fashionable. This included pale white skin, red lips, flushed cheeks, and large, dilated eyes. Frailty was also valued. Thinness to the point of a skeletal like being was seen as beautiful. Collar bone, breast bone, and shoulder blade protrusions were aspirations. Women, if not already affected by consumption, painted their faces with make-up and starved themselves for the consumptive look. Not only the physical attributes of a consumptive victim were sought after, but also the attitude and air the afflicted had. Consumptives were seen as graceful and demure. They were quiet, fragile, and delicate. The model of Victorian sensibility. Carolyn Day in her book *Consumptive Chic* speaks to how these traits embedded themselves into society, trapping women who were not ill into the constraints of the gravely ill. Sentimentality became what all women had to strive for because it was seen as the female's true state. Women were now confined to looking and acting as if they had consumption: "decorous, mild, and meek" was the way women were to act and dress.<sup>4</sup> Consumption had shown the Western world the true ways of a woman, creating an ideal where dying was what the living strived for.

Dying may have seemed beautiful and poetic until one started to truly die. Consumption was far from the wasting, calmly coughing blood into a handkerchief, delicately decaying on a pillow that was painted in literature and art. It is a horrible disease in which the patient suffers extreme diarrhea and vomiting, high fever spikes at night, and of course the most notable symptom of coughing up blood. The victim has little appetite, but when they do eat, they will most likely vomit or have diarrhea afterwards. This led to the emaciation that was sought after.

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<sup>4</sup> Carolyn A. Day, *Consumptive Chic: A History of Beauty Fashion, and Disease* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 124.

The flush on the cheeks and the dilated eyes were both caused by the constant fever held by the victim, causing chills, night sweats, and fatigue. The crimson lips were of course caused by incessant coughing and vomiting of blood. These realities were often concealed from the popular image of consumption in order to protect the cult of consumption and not frighten those who just wanted to be fashionably ill.

It is speculated that the reasoning behind making such a long living and debilitating disease into something beautiful was an act of self-preservation. In order to make the disease more palatable people began to think of it as something that was meant for those who were too beautiful or too brilliant to survive in this world of the living. Consumption was a disease that did not discriminate by gender, race, or age.<sup>5</sup> It could attack anyone you loved at any time. By viewing it as almost a goal or at least an asset in society people, especially parents, could use it as a coping mechanism if their child or other loved ones became ill.

For those who did contract the disease, there was not much nineteenth century doctors could offer, but hope did come from an unlikely source, the city butcher. During the mid-late nineteenth century, many consumptive victims throughout the United States went to slaughterhouses to drink blood in the hopes that it would cure their consumption. The people who did this were from all parts of society, men, women, and children. They were never charged money for the blood, and for the most part drank it willingly, barring a few children. For many they explain that it did take a few tries to get the first sip down, but now they drink about two glasses every visit. How often they take the remedy is up to personal preference, some even come everyday,

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<sup>5</sup> While the disease did not discriminate by gender, race, or age, consumption was mostly seen as a disease that attacked Caucasian youth. Consumption also had a feminine connotation. Carolyn Day dives into this idea in her book *Consumptive Chic*, even men who became afflicted suddenly became more feminine, not weak, but fragile. They were given the excuse that their genius could not be contained by their earthly selves; a bright star that burns too brightly and too quickly.

but the general consensus is about once every week or two is beneficial. Most of the consumptives partaking in the cure testified to reports that it had indeed cured them and that they believed it was necessary to continue drinking the blood to keep the disease at bay.

The blood-drinkers of this peculiar phenomenon are researched using mostly newspaper articles in which reporters interviewed butchers, consumptive victims, and doctors to investigate the possible cure. By exploring this popular cure of the late 1800s, distrust of the medical community is revealed. People begin to trust a trade worker, the butchers, for medical advice over those of the medical community. While following along with this research the imagination pictures pale people wandering into slaughterhouses to drink fresh blood, one monster is surely present: the vampire. Consumption has been linked to vampires through folklore and literary traditions. The medical communities inability to treat consumption, allowed people to go to extremes searching for a cure, propelling the link between vampires and medical quandary.

## Chapter 1: Explaining the Phenomenon

Throughout the nineteenth century consumptives tried a number of cures, most popular being fresh air in a warm climate. Some consumptives chose a more experimental method: drinking blood from freshly slaughtered animals. Beginning in 1874 newspapers all across the United States reported on ill people trekking to slaughter houses in order to receive this life blood. The same newspaper article was published separately at least three times in *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, the *Little Rock Daily Republican*, and the *Georgia Weekly Telegraph & Georgia Journal and Messenger*. The article interviews a man who partakes in this “blood cure.” The man, Mr. C. H. Stickney tells the reporter he “drinks half a tumbler of blood twice a day” and reports that ten to twelve others attend the abattoir with him.<sup>6</sup> He even goes so far as to recommend a particular slaughterhouse, Brighton Slaughter House in Boston commending their staff on their generosity and helpfulness to the ill.<sup>7</sup>

For the next few decades stories such as these are sporadically printed in newspapers across the United States. Some tout that two to three hundred people attend their slaughterhouses every killing time.<sup>8</sup> Many of the newspaper reports are much the same, but considering their interesting nature, I will include a detailed account of one newspaper report that is much the same as others found.

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<sup>6</sup> “Drinking Warm Blood,” *Little Rock Daily Republican*, February 9, 1874, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> “Mr. Nordheff telegraphs to the New York Herald that the reports that the President is a Grant ,am are Without Foundation,” *Georgia Weekly Telegraph and Georgia Journal & Messenger*, December 31, 1878, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

*The St. Louis Globe-Democrat* article begins by revealing the shocking news that blood drinking vampires are not just a part of fiction, but actually exist in St. Louis.<sup>9</sup> The author states that “between two and three hundred... daily drink from a half to a pint of BLOOD, PIPING HOT, from the veins of slaughtered cattle.”<sup>10</sup> Upon hearing these rumors, *The St Louis Globe-Democrat* sent a reporter to the slaughterhouses to do a thorough investigation. His inquiries began at the Union Market where butchers confirmed the phenomenon, and if he would like to witness the blood drinking he should go to Abe Mack’s slaughterhouse. Abe is described as a “jolly butcher, of tremendous avoirdupois” or weight.<sup>11</sup> When asked if people really came to drink the blood of slaughtered cattle, Abe replied “Certainly; everyday four or five--some times fifteen and twenty. They have been coming here for fifteen and eighteen years.”<sup>12</sup> He says it began at his slaughterhouse when a man who according to Mack only weighed “ninety pounds” and was “weak like a little child” came in asking if he could drink some blood.<sup>13</sup> Mack said that the first few times the man tried to drink it he couldn’t, but came back day after day trying to make himself swallow it because his doctor had recommended it.<sup>14</sup> Finally, after many days of trying to summon the courage he shut his eyes and swallowed the blood.<sup>15</sup> After that he began to be able to look at the blood while he drank it and by two weeks of drinking it he “took it like a baby would his milk.”<sup>16</sup> Mack claims within a year and a half of the man’s first drink of blood, he had doubled his weight and was now “AS STRONG AS A PRIZE-FIGHTER.”<sup>17</sup> Even

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<sup>9</sup> “Blood Drinkers,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, December 15, 1878, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

politicians were endorsing the cure. Captain T.L. O’Sullivan was apparently a “well-known butcher and politician” in St. Louis at the time.<sup>18</sup> According to the article he was a proponent of the cure purely because he believed it could help people.<sup>19</sup> He said he had known people who were sick that had been drinking blood for fifteen years and were still alive because of it.<sup>20</sup>

The reporter was then taken to witness the blood drinking:

“With a poll-ax one butcher swung and killed the steer, another butcher immediately came forward and a long knife was lunged clear to its heart with one deft thrust just at the shoulder. The life-blood spurted forward in a thick stream, and with considerable force. An apprentice stood by with a clean glass goblet in his hand. He stooped and filled it to the brim with the ensanguined fluid from the spurting stream, as he would from a hydrant. The dark red liquid was surmounted by a half-inch of bloody foam. A vapor rose from the horrible looking drink.”<sup>21</sup>

The boy handed the glass to a consumptive man who had been waiting on the slaughter. The man did not delight in drinking the fluid but was brave and took it as medicine, drinking the entire glass in one swallow. He was then handed a second glass, but could only drink half of it.<sup>22</sup> The reporter then approached the consumptive and opened a dialogue with him. The man indeed had consumption, and was thirty-six years old. He had been drinking blood since he was twenty-eight. He did not feel he was improving, but also didn’t feel in decline and had plans to move to Florida in the spring to try a climate cure. The reporter confessed that to him it “seems a horrible appetite.”<sup>23</sup> The consumptive replied: ““So it did to me at first, but I have gotten over that...The first glass of blood does not taste as bad as the first glass of whisky.””<sup>24</sup> The reporter returned to the slaughter house to find four more people waiting for their glass of blood. All were looking

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

for a cure for consumption. One healthy looking man said he once had consumption, two years ago, and had now developed a taste for the blood, and was afraid if he discontinued the practice his health would fail again. Others were just hoping to prolong their life. One man to earn enough money for his family before he died, and a mother to prolong her daughter's life long enough to earn enough money to move to the countryside. The reporter visited three other slaughterhouses, and saw the same events he had witnessed at Mack's, "enough to convince him that all that had reached his ears of the blood-drinkers was true."<sup>25</sup> The article ends with a short discussion of doctors' feelings on the subject. This article concludes that doctors only recommend this type of treatment "in the most extreme cases, when the choice is this or starvation."<sup>26</sup>

The most outlandish story comes from a man in Chicago found in an article in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* in 1884 in which an accident caused a heifer's blood to fall into his mouth. The man (an engineer) is a "confirmed blood-drinker."<sup>27</sup> He suffered from consumption, and his illness progressed to a stage that made it hard for him to work and he feared being laid off.<sup>28</sup> He says people had suggested blood drinking to him, and had tried to drink it two or three times, but "'twas no go."<sup>29</sup> This is when the accident happened: A heifer was crossing the tracks as they were driving down them and the pilot ran over the cow. Somehow the cow, cut, landed on top of the smokestack of the engine. Because she had landed on the smokestack, blood was able to run into the engine and even more miraculously into the engineer's mouth. The engineer

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> "A Confirmed Blood Drinker," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, August 7, 1884, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

states that after that moment he “had unwillingly become a blood-drinker... and I’ve been drinking blood ever since. That heifer saved my life.”<sup>30</sup>

No matter how detailed the story, they all seem to follow the same basic lay out: reporter finds out through hearsay that people go to slaughterhouses to drink blood, is astonished, goes to the slaughterhouse, finds people there to drink blood, interviews them. They all say at first it was difficult to drink, but can now drink large quantities at a time, and feel all the better for it. Reporter is asked to try some blood, most decline this, but not all. A reporter for the *Cincinnati Commercial* drank the blood and said “There was no odor, no thickening, no consequent feeling of nausea; and, the first mouthful swallowed, the glass was easily drained.”<sup>31</sup> The reporter then goes on to describe the actual taste of the liquid; “Fancy the richest cream, warm, with a tart sweetness, and the healthy strength of the pure wine...It was a draught simply delicious, sweeter than any concoction of the chemist, the confectioner, the wine-maker...”<sup>32</sup> The generic reporter then questions how the patient began drinking blood, and most answer that their doctor advised it, but unfortunately will not give the doctors’ names.

There are a few steadfast rules that accompany the medical practice: the blood must be fresh from the animal and it must be steaming hot. The blood had to be drunk fresh at the slaughterhouse because if you waited there was risk of the blood cooling and then it would clot and be undrinkable.<sup>33</sup> The steam is also important to the remedy so much so that one article

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> “Blood Drinkers,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 8, 1875, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> “Blood Drinkers,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, December 15, 1878, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

suggests that “it might be a good idea for consumptives to sit around the slaughterhouse every day about killing time to inhale this vapor as the cattle are slaughtered.”<sup>34</sup>

There was particular concern about women going to these slaughterhouses in search of the cure. One New York correspondent for the *Cincinnati Enquirer* admits that he had heard rumors of consumptives receiving blood transfusions, but had largely ignored them.<sup>35</sup> However, while on assignment near the slaughterhouses he observed ladies who by their way of “dress and manner” made it plain to him that “they were members of the *bon ton*.”<sup>36</sup> The correspondent was so shocked to find refined ladies at such a place as a slaughterhouse that he could no longer ignore the trend and felt a need to investigate it. He then observed a disturbing activity in which they “extend[ed] little silver cups under the necks of the suspended animals” allowing them to fill up with blood to be drunk.<sup>37</sup> He began to interview a woman with the standard questions: he wanted to know the reason she drank the blood, she replied that her doctor told her she had a “lung affection” that he believes will “result in consumption.”<sup>38</sup> Her physician told her that this blood drinking cure was “the only certainty of recovery--that [she] partake of it freely.”<sup>39</sup> The woman then speaks as all who drink the blood do; “At first my stomach rebelled at the sight and taste of it... I gradually became resigned to it, until now I can drink a quart.”<sup>40</sup> She answered that her health had been improving “rapidly” and credits it all to the drinking of cattle or sheep blood on a regular basis.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> “Fashionable Blood-Drinkers,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, October 17, 1875, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Another newspaper article from *The New York World* published in the *Rocky Mountain News* expresses the same shock in “Elegantly Attired Ladies Who Regularly Visit Slaughter Houses.”<sup>42</sup> The interviewer in this piece did not question the lady in the carriage who looked “in fragile health.”<sup>43</sup> Instead he commented on the wealth seen in her attire “millions of silk worms had spun away their lives” to make her gown and she handed a “large cut-glass goblet” to her coachman who fetched her blood from inside the slaughterhouse.<sup>44</sup> Her ailment is unknown, but the proprietor of the slaughterhouse informs the reporter that he believes she has no physical ailment, but drinks the blood for fashionable reasons. The reporter described the incredible transformation that takes place after she drank the blood. The woman’s appearance and demeanor was immediately strengthened by the blood; “A pretty color had [?] into her whilom, pale cheek, her lack-lustre eyes of a moment ago were sparkling and animated, and as she regloved her jeweled hand her gesture and attitude were assured and vigorous.”<sup>45</sup>

It is very difficult to find the reasoning behind the beginning of “the blood cure.” Many of the newspaper articles allude to the fact that this activity has been practiced before and is now re-emerging in the late nineteenth century. Because blood drinking was apparently so popularly known in the upper class, newspapers that allude to its previous practices do not give many specifics on why it began in the first place. There are articles that state “I have heard of people drinking blood... for the cure of consumption, all my life”<sup>46</sup> or “It is said that between 200 and 300 men and women of St. Louis drink daily from a half to a pint of blood” -this is also true of

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<sup>42</sup> “Feasting on Beef Blood,” *Rocky Mountain News*, March 22, 1885, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> “Bathing in Blood,” *The Emporia Daily Gazette*, August 11, 1894, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

New York City, Boston, and Denver.<sup>47</sup> There is even an ad published in 1875 that simply reads “The latest fashion in medicine, the drinking of blood for consumption, has passed away.”<sup>48</sup> However, this ad was one of the earliest accounts of this phenomenon appearing in the press. Unfortunately, the articles never step back to explain why these people may have begun this gory practice. Where did the inspiration for blood as a digestible cure come from?

Other articles written during this same time period seem to be completely shocked at the horror they have discovered in their own cities; headlines obviously designed to stir panic include “Mad for Raw Meat.” In the article “Mad for Raw Meat” a man named Bartholomew Eppel claimed for two years to only have eaten raw beef and drank only bullocks’ blood. He says he eats but one time a day and drinks twice. During the interview the reporter witnessed Eppel drinking the blood and after described “his sunken eyes gleaming with a savage fire, there was something so indescribably wolfish and unnatural in this man who had taught himself to live as the beasts live.”<sup>49</sup> This article is an example of how some reporters looked at these people and their actions as what nightmares are made of.

Lastly, a medical report published in 1879 entitled *Report of the Results in Thirty-One Cases of Phthisis* outlined thirty-one case studies of consumption all treated by Dr. W. H. Geddings in Aiken, South Carolina. One of those case studies, number eleven, involved the patient drinking blood. The patient did succumb to his disease, but his physician deemed the blood drinking as very beneficial. Rather he blamed the man’s lifestyle and career choice for his

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<sup>47</sup> “Mr. Nordheff telegraphs to the New York Herald that the reports that the President is a Grant ,am are Without Foundation,” *Georgia Weekly Telegraph and Georgia Journal & Messenger*, December 31, 1878, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>48</sup> “General and Personal,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 10, 1875, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>49</sup> “Mad for Raw Meat,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 15, 1879, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

failing to overcome the disease. The man had begun drinking blood on a regular basis, and “remarking his rapid improvement while drinking fresh blood, he was advised to change his occupation and become a butcher; but instead of this he unfortunately opened a bar-room where the irregular life, late hours, and constant exposure to cold draughts, favored the development of laryngeal phthisis.”<sup>50</sup> The man apparently died after battling consumption for seven years. The physician does not seem to have prescribed the initial drinking of the blood, but was wholly in favor of it after his patient has seen an improvement.

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<sup>50</sup> W.H. Geddings, M.D., *Report of the Results in Thirty-One Cases of Phthisis Treated at Aiken, S.C., During the Season 1878-79* (New York: William Wood and Company, 1879), 10-11.

## Ch. 2: The Medical Community's Response

Doctors' opinions on the drinking of blood as a remedy for consumption or any other illness were split, to say the least. As mentioned in the examples of the newspaper articles, frequenters of the abattoirs refused to give their physicians' name. Either the refusal was based on Victorian civilities or more likely that it was known the medical community did not support the drinking of blood. When some physicians were interviewed directly by the reporter, they asked that their names be withheld; another clue that this was not a supported cure at the time.

Most medical journals do not even make mention of the blood cure. One specifically states to "*Never prescribe raw beef*" which is sometimes mentioned along with the blood cure.<sup>51</sup> Most prescribed diets simply state food should be in moderation, nutritious, and not stimulating, i.e. no liquors, sweets.<sup>52</sup> Specific, acceptable foods are given as "meat and bread and milk and butter and eggs and vegetables and fruits."<sup>53</sup> The addition of cod-liver oil was also recommended frequently. Some people who participated in the blood cure started out by drinking the blood along with cod-liver oil, and then gradually phased out the oil until they were drinking blood alone.<sup>54</sup> Cod-liver oil was described as being beneficial to the blood, suggesting that some physicians were under the belief that the disease was contained at least partly in the blood.

It is easy to see why some physicians associated blood closely with consumption, after all the first signs to them were usually bloody sputum. Some doctors of the time thought that consumption was actually a disease of the blood. Dr. Carl Both in 1868 said that phthisis was

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<sup>51</sup> Medical Society of the County of Albany, *Albany Medical Annal* 11, no. 1 (Albany: Burdick and Taylor, 1890), 184.

<sup>52</sup> J. J. Speed, M.D., *The American Practitioner* 5 (Louisville: John Morton and Company, 1872), 286.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> "Female Vampires," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, April 30, 1876, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

“contained in the blood of [consumptive] persons” as an “impurity.”<sup>55</sup> Dr. Gowan in 1878 argued that it was a lack of blood that caused consumption to infect a person, stating that while the exact cause of “diminished and retarded supply of blood to the lungs and body” is unknown it is the common factor between all those afflicted.<sup>56</sup> By assuming that at least some other doctors subscribed to the same thinking as Dr. Gowan, it is more understandable why they would advise their patients to drink blood. If a patient is coughing up large amounts of blood, the physician would be concerned with them losing that blood and try to replace it, prescribing blood drinking as a method of blood transfusion. Rose George, in her book *Nine Pints*, confirms that for centuries humans had thought the only way of blood transfusion was through the mouth.<sup>57</sup> These doctors would have obviously condemned the practice of bloodletting, agreeing that the patients needed all the blood that remained in the body.

One physician interviewed by a reporter investigating the blood drinking phenomenon did subscribe to this blood transfusion belief. According to the article “Hot Blood” doctors of “the blood drinking school” find the method a much safer way to transfuse blood into a consumptive victim over what the article calls (but does not provide details on) “the transfusion operation.”<sup>58</sup> The reporter interviews Prof. Dwyer, who somewhat condescendingly and confusingly tells the reporter that patients who are anemic, and will suffer organ damage are candidates for a prescription of blood. The physician describes the blood cure as an “invaluable remedy for feeble mortality.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Katherine Byrne, *Tuberculosis and the Victorian Literary Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University, 2011), 128-9.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>57</sup> Rose George, *Nine Pints: A Journey Through the Money, Medicine, and Mysteries of Blood* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2018), 66.

<sup>58</sup> “Hot Blood,” *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, August 13, 1874, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

Specific mention of the blood cure is brief, if at all, in medical journals, and only two reports were found in favor. In *Consumption: A Re-Investigation of its Causes* by Dr. de Lacy Evans published in 1881 states “Many people have been greatly benefited by drinking the warm blood of animals. This practice especially the drinking of lamb’s blood, is carried on in many parts of the Continent. Dr. Marcet has invented some biscuits, composed of a clot of sheep’s or bullock’s blood and chocolate; but the blood must be freshly drawn to be of any service. There is no doubt that newly-drawn blood is invigorating, sometimes exciting, and that from it many people have experienced ‘a great increase of power’.”<sup>60</sup> *Report of the Results in Thirty-One Cases of Phthisis* by W.H. Geddings, M.D., mentioned before, outlines one case in which a man was cured of his ailments of consumption while participating in the blood cure. He had recovered quickly from a decline of health from consumption by drinking blood, but as Dr. Geddings states he did not continue with the cure and worse took up a job as a barman.<sup>61</sup> Dr. Geddings blamed the irregular hours and damp working conditions on the return of his symptoms rather than his not drinking the blood. Dr. Geddings also offered no reason that the blood cure should have worked only that his patient should have become a butcher, a healthy occupation. These two articles offer no real insight into how these doctors believed drinking the blood would help. The abstract of “a great increase of power” does not exactly stir the scientific mind, and it is not known why butchery was seen as a healthy profession.

One medical writing found does offer another reasoning for the use of blood specifically. Dr. William H. Burt’s *Therapeutics of Tuberculosis, or Pulmonary Consumption* published in 1876 explains that “The use of raw meat, where there is great emaciation, has often been

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<sup>60</sup> Charles Watkins de Lacy Evans, M.D., *Consumption: A Re-Investigation of its Causes* (London: Baillière, Tindall, and Cox, 1881), 51.

<sup>61</sup> W.H. Geddings, M.D., *Report of the Results in Thirty-One Cases of Phthisis Treated at Aiken, S.C., During the Season 1878-79* (New York: William Wood and Company, 1879), 10-11.

invaluable,” and also there is “no doubt that the blood is really valuable, it being so easily assimilated, but it seems so disgusting we believe but few patients could be induced to use it.”<sup>62</sup> Here we have a clue as to why doctors may have prescribed this addition to the consumptive diet, to add weight. With consumption, doctors and patients were not only concerned with a consumptive coughing themselves to death or choking on their own blood, but also starvation. The consumptive found it difficult to eat much of anything, allowing the disease to consume them, hence the terms both consumption and wasting disease. The practiced was prescribed by physicians only temporarily, until the muscles of the stomach were “toned up” and a normal diet resumed.<sup>63</sup> The drinking of blood in place of a solid meal was a popular practice of butchers. It is unknown if this practice was a tradition of butchers adopted by doctors because of its seeming benefits or the other way around. It depends on which group you ask.

Famously, the resounding cure of the day was “Go outside. Get some clean, fresh air.” Doctors who are prescribing the blood cure may not have been arguing against that. Some patients at the abattoirs admitted that they were drinking blood to buy time in order to save money to move to a better climate; “He would go to Florida next spring if he lived...”<sup>64</sup> Doctors interviewed by newspaper reporters said that the cure was only reserved for the most extreme cases, “when the choice is this [drinking blood] or starvation” so no respectable doctor would be publicly in favor of the blood cure.<sup>65</sup> Still, many doctors argued both in public newspapers and in medical journals against this cure. The *Chicago Herald* interviewed “several physicians [and] [t]hey were all unanimous in saying that the whole practice was based on superstition and

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<sup>62</sup> William H. Burt, M.D., *Therapeutics of Tuberculosis or Pulmonary Consumption* (New York: Boericke and Tafel, 1876), 58.

<sup>63</sup> “Blood Drinkers,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, December 15, 1878, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

ignorance.”<sup>66</sup> Dr. J. M. Macauley was quoted as saying ““it’s all sheer nonsense...Consumption can certainly not be cured with blood.”<sup>67</sup> He also debunks the theory that seems to be held by some physicians who are proponents of blood drinking, that it can provide some nutrients to those consumptives unable to digest any other food; “If the stomach has strong enough digestive power to assimilate such blood it is strong enough to assimilate milk and bread and meat, things which contain as much or more nourishing power than blood.”<sup>68</sup> He ends his interview by stating the real cure for consumption, “pure air, simple living, plenty of exercise, regular hours.”<sup>69</sup>

A large concern for many medical men of the time was that once their patients began this treatment they would become addicted to the taste of blood. One doctor interviewed for the article “The Blood Cure” says that drinking blood “is dangerous because a person engenders a passion for it stronger than even for liquor.”<sup>70</sup> Another doctor says he objects to the practice not on medical but moral grounds, “arguing that its effect is intensely demoralizing, and that it is in the last degree unnatural and degrading.”<sup>71</sup> One newspaper article states that “most [doctors] object to it on the ground that it created a depraved appetite that might in time pass beyond all control.”<sup>72</sup> He claims that most physicians do not accept the blood cure “for fear of evil after-effects upon their patients; for it is generally conceded that the appetite for blood becomes even

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<sup>66</sup> “Effects of Blood Drinking,” *Atchison Daily Champion*, August 14, 1888, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> “The Blood Cure,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, November 28, 1877, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>71</sup> “Hot Blood,” *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, August 13, 1874, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

stronger than that for liquor, and cases have been known where it has produced mania of the most violent type.”<sup>73</sup>

One reporter took the time to record a dialogue held with Dr. C. Platt Saxton in order to provide “the gist of the opinions of those of the fraternity who have studied the subject at all: ‘Do physicians ever prescribe the blood of animals to their patients?’ asked the writer. ‘Not to my knowledge: I never heard of any physician prescribing it to be taken internally.’”<sup>74</sup> The physician does admit that if a patient chooses to drink bullocks blood, there is an improvement in their health that “may be attributable to the blood being more readily assimilated by weakened and debilitating organs, as it contains all the nutrition and vitality of animal life.”<sup>75</sup> Another example that the physicians of these consumptive patients were worried about the wasting part of the disease, and felt it necessary that their patients get nutrients any way possible.

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<sup>73</sup> “The Blood Cure,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, November 28, 1877, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

### Ch. 3: Understanding the Blood Cure

There seems to be different ways in which blood was thought about. It is not wholly recommended by the medical community, yet butchers are recommending it wholeheartedly. Some people do say they have come on the recommendation of their doctors, but others because of the healthfulness of butchers. It may seem suspicious that the butchers are the ones peddling this cure so readily, maybe for some extra money on the side, but the butchers do not charge for the blood at all. They simply believe it will help cure people, and make them stronger. It seems more than anything, the health of butchers and word of mouth sent people in search of the nearest slaughterhouse looking for a cure.

Slaughterhouses at this time were on the outskirts of the town, and if possible near water for ease of transport and dumping. This is in line with abattoirs, or slaughterhouses that had been moved out of the city, for obvious reasons, such as the stench and that cities were becoming more populated and people do not want to walk down the street with animals and/or look over to see the animal being killed. The addresses of the slaughterhouses were given in the stories, supposedly to instruct readers where they could find this cure. This was helpful in researching, since the slaughterhouses could be found on a map, confirming that they were outside the center of the city. The article collected from New York cited two different slaughterhouses, both found on a 1879 map, where one slaughterhouse was one block from the Hudson River and the other located on the opposite side of Manhattan, directly on the East River.<sup>76</sup> Abe Mack's slaughterhouse named in St. Louis is difficult to see on the map, but the twenty-third block it is

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<sup>76</sup>Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library. "Atlas of the entire city of New York, complete in one volume. From actual surveys and official records by G. W. Bromley & Co." New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed August 12, 2019. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/36cb3840-0ac7-0132-3354-58d385a7bbd0>

located on is well outside the city.<sup>77</sup> Most outside the city was Butchertown in San Francisco. Destroyed in the 1906 earthquake, Butchertown was built on stilts in the bay, so that butchers could slaughter the animal and all the blood and parts would fall or be put directly into the bay.

This information on the locations of the slaughterhouses is significant, because it shows the status of the butchers, and the distance people had to travel in order to get to the slaughterhouses. Most of the respectable businesses were placed for easy access in the city center, but because of the type of work the butcher were doing they were pushed to the outskirts. Despite their brutal work and location in the city, butchers were still regarded as healthy, necessary, and contributing members of society.

Articles such as “Disease for Every Trade” demonstrate that the public was desperate to know what occupations had the reputation for acquiring which disease of the time. Published in *The Milwaukee Journal* in 1897 “Disease for Every Trade” details each profession and the diseases associated with that trade. While bakers are found to be more likely to contract consumption because of “their irregular life, sleeping in the day and working at night, and because of the hot air and dust,” carpenters and cabinetmakers are afflicted with varicose veins, and dressmakers suffer with “indigestion, poverty of the blood, and poor eyesight” because of the long hours they work and being confined to one space. Miraculously butchers are found to be the healthiest of all professions, no specific disease or ailment attacking them: “Butchers are very

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<sup>77</sup> Richard J. Compton and Camile N. Dry, Composite (Pictorial of St. Louis) [map]. 1876. 37 cm x 53 cm. “(Pictorial St. Louis) Composite (By C.N. Dry, 1876).” <https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~24321~890020:-Pictorial-St-Louis-Composite--By>.

strong and healthy...”<sup>78</sup> Many articles include lines such as “It is a well-known fact that butchers are the healthiest people in the world...”<sup>79</sup>

When interviewed, butchers credit their health to the fact that they drink blood; one prominent St. Louis butcher stating “Blood is bully.... Look at all the butchers. They all drink blood, and they are never sick. Look at Butchertown...the time the cholera came here there wasn’t a single butcher died.”<sup>80</sup> In an article entitled “Animal Magnetism” the author states “Look at the strong, burly butcher, his body full of the grosser animal magnetism that is thrown off the slaughtered meat.” Butchers are looked at in amazement in these articles as having the superpower of wellness, something very uncommon in the disease ridden nineteenth century. A trade that would seemingly be looked at in disgust, even one butcher calls Butchertown “stink town... the worst place in the city” has been elevated to an example of living based on their extreme health. <sup>81</sup>

As stated in the previous chapter, butchers and some doctors were seeing eye to eye on the benefits of blood drinking. During interviews butchers explained how when they had a busy day and had to work through a meal, or just became hungry on the job, they would reach for a cup and fill it with blood; “It fills the belly and does a man more good than a meal. Plenty of times, when I can’t go to my supper, I go into the slaughter-house and drink some blood, and then I don’t feel hungry at all.”<sup>82</sup> Blood drinking is a tradition in which butchers all across the country participated, however it is still unclear if ordinary people attending the slaughterhouses

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<sup>78</sup> “Disease for every trade,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, April 3, 1897, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>79</sup> “Missouri Blood Drinkers,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, December 21, 1876, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>80</sup> “Blood Drinkers,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, December 15, 1878, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

at the time were aware of this justification or if they were simply looking for a cure out of desperation.

According to the article “Blood Drinking” published in *The St. Louis Globe-Democrat* in 1884, most people who became aware of the blood cure were not prescribed it by their doctors, but rather heard about it from other family members who had tried it (or had read about it in the newspapers); “The doctors advise it in some cases,...but with most folks who come here it is a tradition. They take it because some other member of the family took it.”<sup>83</sup> The blood drinkers are actively going against the prescribed advice of medical professionals of the day. True, it is not known if these consumptives even went to the doctor after seeing their handkerchiefs stained red, of course already knowing the sentencing. It does though show the distrust everyday people were feeling with the medical community. They might have seen their friends and relatives save all of their money in order to move to a warmer climate only to die there instead of at home. Or they could not afford to move miles away to a warmer climate, they needed a cure accessible in their hometown. It is not hard to understand why people would look to the only members of society that were seemingly untouched by disease and follow their example.

Society seemed to have believed that the disease was somehow entangled with the blood itself, like some sort of blood poisoning that then infected the lungs. Based on the fact that coughing or vomiting blood was the main clue of the disease and distinguished it from other illnesses of the time, this is a believable assumption. What is different in these cases is that if one believed the blood contained the disease it is reasonable that they would accept bleeding in order to purge the infected blood, however these people instead chose to add “clean” blood to their bodies. They viewed even animal blood to be cleaner than human blood. Perhaps because living

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<sup>83</sup> “Blood Drinking,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 16, 1884, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

in an urban environment it is probable that almost every human they knew had some sort of illness if not specifically consumption. Again this shows the trust of the healthy society members, butchers and the distrust of the medical community.

It is not unreasonable that in a time of such desperation, ordinary citizens would turn to those of their society that are seemingly free of what scourges the rest. A newspaper article published in 1888 states “Consumption probably destroys more of the human species than can be charged to the account of any other disease. It knows no such phases as epidemics. It is unceasingly at work.”<sup>84</sup> An article in *New York Medical Gazette and Journal of Health* published in 1851 observed that 14, 209 people had died of consumption over the last five years in the state of Massachusetts alone.<sup>85</sup> In a poll in 1896 *American Journal of Psychology* people were asked what diseases they feared most; consumption ranked the third highest.<sup>86</sup> Consumption was generally seen as a super disease. One that did not seem to slow at any point, one that attacked all persons, no matter their age or status, and one that did not have a cure. Upon seeing the splashes of red against a white handkerchief, it is not unsurprising that the terror would drive a person to try any cure possible.

All of the consumptives interviewed agreed that at first they were repulsed by the idea of drinking blood. Some even said it took them several tries before they were able to drink it. Many consumptives compare their distaste for blood at first to their initial distaste for whisky, which may not have been a wise description since many Americans were for the Temperance Movement at this time. Blood drinkers continued to try and persuade reporters of their mind over

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<sup>84</sup> “The World’s Wise Men on Consumption,” *The Daily Picayune*, August 8, 1888, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>85</sup> D. Meredith Reese, M.D., “Births, Deaths, and Marriages in Massachusetts,” *New York Medical Gazette and Journal of Health* 2, no. 1 (1851).

<sup>86</sup> Colin A. Scott, “Old Age and Death,” *The American Journal of Psychology* 8, no. 1 (1896), 100.

matter approach to drinking blood; “All tastes are matters of education. A person can be trained to live on anything nutritious, no matter what its taste. The first glass of blood does not taste as bad as the first glass of whisky.”<sup>87</sup> Other consumptives needed encouragement from more seasoned blood drinkers: “‘Drink it right down, Clara, as I do,’ ‘I disliked it as much as you do at first, but now I find it perfectly delicious...’”<sup>88</sup> Almost all consumptives agree that the blood does not taste as bad as expected and continue the curing process.

And what did the butchers make of those unable to be cured of consumption when drinking blood? They simply stated that the consumptive had waited too long to be cured, and their lungs were too infected to be cured, even by this extreme method: “The trouble was people whose lungs were affected put off coming too long. They waited until their lungs were almost gone and then took to blood-drinking as a last resort. These kind of people were never cured.”<sup>89</sup>

If this cure was so repulsive to the consumptives why do it? Again, we are shown the desperation these people are feeling. No matter their reasoning for venturing to the slaughterhouse, medical prescription, familial advice, the butchers’ own health, disillusionment with the medical community, lack of money for travel, or disbelief in the fresh air cure, these consumptives were fearful enough of the disease lurking inside them that they were willing to force down goblets of blood each day.

These people also believed in this cure so strongly, they forced their children to participate. One article describes the willful disgust of a child when she is asked to drink the

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<sup>87</sup> “Blood Drinkers,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, December 15, 1878, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>88</sup> “Feasting on Beef Blood” *Rocky Mountain News*, March 22, 1885, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>89</sup> “Blood Drinkers,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, December 15, 1878, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

blood; ““Ugh! I can never drink it!””<sup>90</sup> The child finally musters enough courage to drink “the dark red fluid... [she] had not found the blood so bad a beverage as she had anticipated.”<sup>91</sup>

Another mother brought her child in order to keep her alive until the spring, when they could move to the country;

“A few weeks ago a neighbor told me that some remarkable cures had been brought about by drinking blood. It is my only chance to save her, horrible as the remedy seems. ‘Yes, my darling, I know you are cold, but wait a few weeks and will go out into the country where the sun shines, and the air is pure and the flowers are.’ ‘When, mamma?’ ‘In the spring, my darling.’ ‘Will I live until then?’ ‘Of course you will. Don’t you feel yourself growing stronger every day?’ The poor child sighed drearily.”<sup>92</sup>

Through this mournful exchange between mother and child, the reporter tries to appeal to the readers’ sympathies, in order to explain the desperation these people were in. These blood drinkers were not to be seen as monsters in this article, but desperate, dying people who see this method as a last hope.

It is to be assumed that some of these people could not afford to receive medical care so this free alternative may have been more appealing. However as revealed in the first chapter, many of these blood-drinkers were wealthy. The man, Appfel, who survives on a diet of raw meat and blood, is dressed as a dandy in a suit and carrying a silver cane. Also there is an entire demographic of wealthy women who attend the slaughterhouse and drink blood. These women claim to be partaking on the advice of their doctors, yes, but they will not reveal the doctor’s identity and some will not even exit their carriages, handing their silver goblets over to be filled and returned. We cannot be certain that a doctor has in fact prescribed this method of cure, especially since much of the community is wholeheartedly against it. This is the time in which

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<sup>90</sup> “Blood Drinkers,” *The Daily Bulletin*, September 22, 1883, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

eccentricities are embraced by the upper class, including high participation in Spiritualism rituals and gothic sentimentalities.

#### Ch. 4: The Vampire

Disease and illness has served as inspiration for vampires for centuries in many cultures around the world. It is a common belief that the vampire creature was created to explain mysterious deaths in a variety of cultures. There was no knowledge of germs or how diseases were spread so for centuries diseases, especially those that did not have many physical signs were believed to be the product of an attack by a vampire. A clear example of this is the penanggalan of Malaysia which is always a female head that flies around primarily feeding on small children and women giving birth, offering an explanation for infant and child mortality as well as deaths during childbirth. However, eventually vampires were linked to one disease, consumption.

The most famous vampire fiction of today, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker would not be published until 1897, however other western vampire stories were circulating. Two different types of vampire fiction were popularized by the gothic horror tradition of the nineteenth century with stories such as Edgar Allan Poe's *Ligeia* and John William Polidori's *Vampyre*. American vampire was one of a more mystical quality, a memory or a haunting image of a deceased loved one, and the British vampire was a blood-sucking vampire. Oddly the British vampire has more in common with the blood drinking consumptives of nineteenth century America, but because the cultures are so close, they are often lumped into the same category-- Western Culture; therefore discussion of the formation of the general Western Vampire will be the focus instead of American or British.

Although these blood sucking vampires existed in America, England prospered the bloody vampiric tales. Edgar Allan Poe, master of the macabre, wrote vampiric tales such as *Ligeia* and *Berenice*. These tales however focus on the energy/ life force sucking vampire, not a

blood drinking one. In the tales the ghost or memory of a dead wife haunts the living person, slowly taking away their life's meaning if not their literal life. From British authors have come the most memorable and formative tales of the western vampire. Scholars agree that the modern idea of the vampire came from John Polidori's *The Vampyre* in 1819. Polidori turned the past folkloric monster into a suave gentleman, moving through society choosing young, beautiful victims. He planted the idea that vampires could be walking among the living. This image of the vampire was continued with the British serial *Varney the Vampire*, beginning publication in 1845. *Varney the Vampire* was distributed as a cheap weekly serial in which Varney lives in the human world and sustains a diet of blood by attacking humans.<sup>93</sup> The most popular of all vampire novels, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, was published in 1897, long after the news of blood drinking consumptives was released in America. The vampire that sucks the energy and life out of a living person as described by Poe's stories, is a legitimate use of the term, but here we are focusing on an earthly blood drinking vampire. No research has been done in British newspapers to suggest the same blood cure was happening across the ocean, but their literary vampires are more closely connected with the real life American blood drinkers.

There are a couple of clues that suggest that blood sucking vampires may have been popular in America, through the newspaper platform, perhaps not in the literary one. Sylvanus Cobb, Jr. was a serial novelist in the nineteenth century; a collection of his horror themed stories is not readily available today, but one newspaper article credits him with the ability to imagine a blood sucking vampire. Published in 1878 the exposé on blood drinking in St. Louis mentioned above was published in *The St. Louis Globe Democrat*. The beginning of the article cites a story that Cobb imagined about a dashing vampire "with wolfish teeth" that climbs up an ivy wall in

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<sup>93</sup> Thomas Preskett Prest and James Malcolm Rymer, *Varney the Vampire or The Feast of Blood* (London: E. Lloyd, 1847), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14833/14833-h/14833-h.htm>.

the middle of the night to enter the bedroom of a beautiful to puncture her neck and drink her blood.<sup>94</sup> Once she wakes up and screams he rushes to the window and disappears down the wall “with the agility of a squirrel.”<sup>95</sup> Published almost twenty years before *Dracula*, this article proves that a gentlemanly vampire that preys on beautiful young women must have been circulating around Western culture at least.

The consumptive/vampiric aesthetic had been popular for many decades before the nineteenth century. Their pale skin creates a stark contrast with their surroundings; their emaciated and exhausted body created a delicate disposition desired by society. Katherine Byrne has made a detailed study of this consumptive aesthetic in *Tuberculosis and the Victorian Literary Imagination*, and notes the comparison between vampiric imagery and that of the consumptive. Physically, the long narrow fingers, pale skin with wide feverish eyes, and most importantly blood dripping from the corners of their mouths. Consumptives also possessed the nocturnal nature of vampires, because of the fever that would spike at night causing them to become the most active they had all day.<sup>96</sup> Even an olfactory tier was given to the vampire; consumptives often had “‘offensive’ breath” due to the rotting state of their lungs and the constant vomiting and coughing up of blood.<sup>97</sup> Byrne cites many literary examples to prove the relationship between the literary vampire and the consumptive. Byrne also looks to the psychology that would make the consumptive the perfect model for the vampire.

The Spiritualist community of the nineteenth century, the same that dealt with Ouija boards, séances, and other communication with the dead, added a mystical element to the

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<sup>94</sup> “Blood Drinkers,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, December 15, 1878, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Katherine Byrne, *Tuberculosis and the Victorian Literary Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University, 2011), 140.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

vampiric practice being carried out by other consumptives. In a newspaper article published in *The St. Louis Globe Democrat* told how one spiritualist believed these “blood drinkers” were staying alive through a process called Animal Magnetism. Animal Magnetism is a specific process within an offshoot of the Spiritualist movement, Mesmerism. The process, invented by German physician Franz Mesmer, involves what can be described as a transfer of energy from one healthy person to another ailing person or can reach the level of hypnotic sleep to heal an ailing person. The man that has written the article for *The St. Louis Globe-Democrat* has a slightly different opinion from the guides on Animal Magnetism published at the time, but he claims to be an expert because of his “twenty years’ experience with it [spiritualism] in all its present known manifestations.”<sup>98</sup> His explanation is this: all animals have a life binding force called animal magnetism. Each animal can feed off of the other’s force, i.e. an old person can take the vitality of a child, or a sick person that of a healthy; he warns “never let an old person sleep with a child. Eight cases out of ten they will draw the vital element from the child; it will become weak, exhausted, and dark under the eyes.”<sup>99</sup> In *Nine Pints* the cultural thinking of blood as outlined by George backs up this theory of thinking; beginning with the revival of Aeson performed by Medusa a concept was put into place that blood is what holds a person’s life force.<sup>100</sup> He also explains that all things in life have a magnetism or energy supplied to it. The strongest example of this in society is “the strong, burly butcher, his body full of the grosser animal magnetism that is thrown off the slaughtered meat.”<sup>101</sup> The butchers are receiving this magnetism second hand by the work they perform, but by seeing how butchers are strong and

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<sup>98</sup> “Animal Magnetism,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 23, 1879, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Rose George, *Nine Pints: A Journey Through the Money, Medicine, and Mysteries of Blood* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2018), 66.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

healthy, others have found a way to get the same benefits in a purposeful, direct manner, by “drinking hot blood, the animal magnetism not having left it. He becomes stronger, and will help him till his own organs will make it for him.”<sup>102</sup> This man does not see the blood as being beneficial to the body in fighting off the disease of consumption, but sees the blood as full of life, so the person is taking the life fluid from the slaughtered animal and literally pouring that fluid into their own body keeping themselves alive--becoming a vampire.

Examining the Spiritualist thinking of drinking blood, it seems as if a person could continually drink blood and live forever. This gives a much more mystical outlook on the cure, and in turn makes it less believable. Others seem to drink the blood for its nutrients or don't question why it is working, just accepting that it is. These outlooks are more concrete; more grounded in the reality of desperation of the ill. The non-spiritualist consumptives see drinking blood as a necessary cure. It is a real medicine to them, a real cure, just as a liquid diet or antibiotics would be to us. Most view the blood as carrying the nutrients they need to stay alive, as they are not able to eat enough solid food while others simply go to the slaughterhouse for their dose of medicine and believe they will soon be cured.

Vampires were already a well-known enough creature to some of society that newspaper articles describing these consumptives would print lines such as “these are not vampires, but consumptives.”<sup>103</sup> As you will remember one article even went so far as to begin his editorial by stating that if Sylvanus Cobb, JR., (a writer of popular dime novels) wants a vampire for his next novel he doesn't have to “depend on his imagination for one,... ample material is furnished right

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> “Blood Cure,” *Georgia Weekly Telegraph and Georgia Journal & Messenger*, August 11, 1874, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

here in St. Louis.”<sup>104</sup> So, these consumptives journeying to drink their daily dose of blood would have been fully aware of this image they were portraying. This may be why the blood is always drunk from cups or wine glasses, brought by the consumptives or provided at the slaughterhouse. As an attempt to make the practice more dignified than being reduced to a bat-like vampire sucking its victims blood straight from the neck. Perhaps this was to indulge the eccentric of society, those who attended the feeding, but were not ill with consumption, the fashionable vampire.

Reporters of these articles also show the shared anxiety with the medical community that these blood drinkers would develop an irresistible craving for the liquid. One reporter asked a consumptive at the slaughterhouse if he could stop drinking blood, he answered “Of course he could: why shouldn’t he?” To which the reporter responded that he had heard that “the appetite took hold upon the victim like that of whisky or morphine.”<sup>105</sup> Another article reports that “At first the taste is said to be repulsive, but, subsequently, the desire for the ensanguined fluid becomes intense, and its good effects make it commendable to invalids.”<sup>106</sup> The use of the word “desire” is very common in these articles, implying that once the appetite has been acquired the person will always live with its unnatural effects. Much like those addicted to any substance today when asked if they could stop drinking the blood, the reply is most often “of course, but I don’t want to.” There is no way to tell from these answers if the persons interviewed are truly addicted to the blood, but it is clear that the newspapers, along with the medical community want the public to believe that they are.

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<sup>104</sup> “Blood Drinkers,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, December 15, 1878, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> “Blood Cure,” *Georgia Weekly Telegraph and Georgia Journal & Messenger*, August 11, 1874, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

Horror stories were printed in the newspapers, giving examples of vampiric transformations in the United States during the nineteenth century. In an article titled “Female Vampires” published in 1876 by *The St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, stories are produced in which women have become vampires after feeding on blood for medical purposes. The article begins by acknowledging that readers of this newspaper know that many people frequent slaughterhouses in order to indulge in drinking blood, but they may not be aware that an addictive habit can form from this practice.<sup>107</sup> It is explained that people under this “blood spell” as they call it will eventually start to crave human blood, animal blood no longer enough to satisfy their desire.<sup>108</sup>

The first story involves a young woman who “suffered in health” although it is not detailed from what disease she does gain the same benefits from drinking animal blood as the other consumptives: “The pallor left her cheek. Her frame became more robust; and in ten months she gained fifteen pounds in weight.”<sup>109</sup> After regaining her health she married the young assistant of the physician that suggested the blood cure, so he was fully aware of how she had regained her health. He “encouraged her natural curiosity respecting the effects of various kinds of blood...” by cutting a small opening in his leg and allowed her to suck his blood or as described in the article his “vital tide.”<sup>110</sup> By using the phrase “vital tide” the author is suggesting that it is more than blood she is taking, but his actual life, making her more monstrous. The article tells us she soon became addicted to his blood, and her husband continued to let her drink his blood many times until one day he became disgusted by her.<sup>111</sup> Because of his disgust

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<sup>107</sup> “Female Vampires,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, April 30, 1876, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

towards his wife and the monster he had helped perpetuate, he abandoned her, and sailed to Peru to escape her.<sup>112</sup> The vampiric woman was then put in a hospital where animal blood was delivered to her from a slaughterhouse, but the readers are assured that if she had the choice she “would undoubtedly become a vampire and banquet perpetually on human blood.”<sup>113</sup>

The next story told in the same “Female Vampires” article is also a young woman who was prescribed blood for her deteriorating health. She was prescribed “four times a day, a tablespoon of cod-liver oil mixed in a wineglassful of blood,” not an outlandish prescription as we have seen.<sup>114</sup> Once she was better she stopped adding the cod-liver oil, and continued to drink the blood for what reason is not known.<sup>115</sup> One day the young woman’s husband fell down the stairs, and cut the back of his hand and wrist. The wife ran to her husband’s side to aid him but instead was overcome at the sight of the blood and began to drink his blood until she had drained him so much that he “lay ghastly, exhausted and motionless as one dead.”<sup>116</sup> At this moment the landlady arrived to see the wife both “sucking her husband’s wrist” and lamenting over the fact that her husband was hurt and that she could not control herself; “her face was smirched with blood. Her mouth literally dropped with gore.”<sup>117</sup> A doctor was of course called and had to administer morphine to the husband to keep him comfortable during his recovery, which the landlady aided in. The wife was said to be “in a dreamy, melancholy condition, incapable of action,” seemingly drunk on her husband’s blood.<sup>118</sup> The landlady was a diligent nurse, and after nursing the husband for a few nights, left the husband and wife alone. The husband asleep and

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

under the influence of narcotics, the wife was described as in a daze “sullen and unconcerned.”<sup>119</sup> The landlady returned after only an hour away, due to a suspicious noise from inside the room to find that the wife had removed her husband’s bandages and was “voraciously sucking” blood from his now reopened wounds.<sup>120</sup> This story does not have a definitive ending. The readers are only left with the knowledge that the wife or “the wretch bloodsucker is now a helpless lunatic....”<sup>121</sup> These two stories appeal to both the fear of vampires and also the curiosity of this blood drinking phenomenon.

These stories of the consumptive victim turned full-fledged vampire, were a type of cautionary horror story. They warn against the blood drinking cure, lest you want to become a monster, controlled by your desire for blood, not caring who gets hurt in the search for blood. These obviously sensationalized stories were meant as entertainment, but reveal that the question of addiction to blood was one in the public mind as well as alerting the public to the dangers of this cure and excess. Public concern of the transformation into a vampire may have stopped some from partaking in the cure. These stories were also published in a medical journal, *The American Observer Medical Monthly*, expressing the medical community’s same concern that people would begin with animal blood and then crave human blood, leading to attacks.<sup>122</sup> One reporter who on a visit to a slaughterhouse, tasted the blood, proclaimed he could understand how the taste and effects could be addicting.<sup>123</sup> These newspaper accounts told explicit tales of what could happen to a consumptive should they partake in this “dangerous” cure. The women in the

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> The Albany Argus, *The American Observer Medical Monthly* 14 (Detroit: Edwin A. Lodge, 1877), 149.

<sup>123</sup> “Blood-Drinkers,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 8, 1875, Gale 19th Century Newspapers.

stories had literally become monsters, unable to control their blood lust, feasting on anyone around them. Cautionary tales like these married popular horror literature with what was supposedly happening in day to day life, strengthening the bond between consumptives and literary vampires.

As Byrne's and other newspaper account research shows, the relationship between the vampiric and consumptive appearance is widely acknowledged. However, in this paper it is proved that not only is the image shared but also the incentive and actions. In its simplest form a vampire is a being that needs to drink blood in order to sustain life. By participating in this act, these nineteenth century consumptives were real vampires. These consumptives believed that without their regular doses of blood, their health would deteriorate and they would die. This motive for the continuation of blood drinking is shared with that of the fictional vampire, who for its own health drinks the blood of living creatures. People feared these creatures but were also willingly becoming a vampire in order to sustain life. These blood drinkers explicitly strengthen and promote the correlation between the consumptive victim and the western vampire through their appearance, motivations, and efforts.

## Ch. 5: The Modern Day Vampire

You may read this evidence and research and be astonished that people were willingly drinking blood so late in the nineteenth century, so close to the modern day, but the practice continues. Today there are people who identify as vampires or sanguinarians that sustain themselves on a diet of blood. Upon contacting these vampires I found some connections between them and the blood drinking consumptives of the nineteenth century. The main connection being that both feel a drive to drink blood in order to live a healthy life, the most essential part of vampirism.

The inspiration of the nineteenth century consumptive vampire on the modern day vampire is clear even if modern day vampires may not realize it. The modern day vampire is very private, also sees blood as a cure for physical ailments, using blood in a medical way, they also drink the blood from glasses, and even some of their dress harkens back to the nineteenth century. Type in vampire or sanguinarian<sup>124</sup> into the search engines on Tumblr or Instagram and after wading through the Vampire Diaries and Twilight fandoms, you can find corseted women, dressed in all black, some with high necklines and frilly collars, although many images of women in corsets are meant to be erotic more than nineteenth century chic. Men and women appear with pale skin, dark hair, sharpened canines, and blood dripping from their mouths. Other times you will find a wine glass full of crimson fluid with captions such as “Cheers” or “A fine glass of red.” According to imagery found on social media sites, the blood is mostly consumed from a glass, just like the goblets brought to the slaughterhouse by the nineteenth century blood

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<sup>124</sup> Sanguinarian is a term that means a vampire that consumes blood, rather than psychic energy which some modern vampire claim to feed. The terms sanguinarian and vampire are used here interchangeable to mean a person who consumes blood as part of their diet.

drinkers.<sup>125</sup> After searching my way through many social media sites, I found a small community on Reddit who agreed to talk with me and answer a survey I put together.

I asked questions in order to find out similarities and differences between the vampires of the past and those of today. I found that the vampires of today are much more influenced by literature than those of the past, which was not surprising, since that is where most people discover vampirism today, whereas the consumptive vampires were the inspiration for this literature. Instead of finding out that the vampires had a lot in common, what I found was confirmation that the consumptive vampires of the nineteenth century helped to lay the groundwork for the literary vampires that would inspire the vampires of today; I believe I found the history of the literary and modern vampire.

Before diving into the questions asked, there needs to be a disclaimer added. These people are highly criticized by the public, even on their own private social media platforms. In the age of internet bullying they are a target. In my questionnaire I received false answers to my survey, some with quite rude answers. All of the survey answers were anonymous so I cannot be absolutely certain that all the answers I received were from those in the vampire community, or from those who criticize the community. All of the answers that I could reasonably determine as sincere I am using in this research.

I asked four questions in order to see if their early blood drinking experiences were like those of the consumptives of the nineteenth century: Question 1. Was there a medical reason that led you to the conclusion that you were a sanguinarian? How did you make the conclusion to try blood?<sup>126</sup> I wanted to see if the motive for trying blood was the same as that of the nineteenth

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<sup>125</sup> [theredcellar.tumblr.com](https://theredcellar.tumblr.com), “A fine glass of red.,” entry posted August 5, 2018, <https://theredcellar.tumblr.com/post/176656106242/a-fine-glass-of-red>.

<sup>126</sup> Interview with vampires from Reddit community, all interviews were confidential, online survey, August 22, 2018- August 2019.

century blood drinkers. Question 3. Did a doctor recommend it or did you hear about it from other people?<sup>127</sup> I asked this because there were a few nineteenth century blood drinkers who said that a doctor had recommended it, although they refused to give the name of the doctor, but most heard about it from other people who had tried it. Question 4. Do you drink human or animal blood? If you have tried both, which do you prefer? Why do you prefer it? And Question 5. When you began to drink blood, did you begin with human or animal blood?<sup>128</sup> In order to determine if the fears of the nineteenth century graduation to human blood was still true today or in some way justified.

The answers were that their experience in the modern day was similar but also different from those of the past. They felt that they must consume blood in order to live a healthier life, not from a specific disease but for health all the same. However, out of the thirty-four answers I received none saying a doctor had recommended they drink blood. About half said they decided to drink blood after finding information on the internet and the other half said that they just had an innate, intense craving from it. Four people said it happened on accident, such as licking a wound or eating a rare steak. Almost all started out drinking human blood, and a rare percentage had even tried animal blood. One answer included that they were a vegan who drank blood, admitting this sounded contradictory, but adding that humans could verbally consent to the donation of their blood, while animals could not. Almost all blood drinkers of the nineteenth century drank exclusively animal blood, but it was a great fear that they would graduate to human, and those who did taste human blood said it tasted profoundly better, sharpening this anxiety, creating a fear of vampiric murders. All the sanguinarians of today that I spoke to have consenting human donors who not only consent to their blood being drawn, but to having regular

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

blood tests done, in order to ensure the drinker that they are disease free. It seems that the fears of vampiric murders of the nineteenth century have been put to rest and vampires of today have opted for a safe, consenting environment.<sup>129</sup>

Another question asked was Do you consume blood? If so, how often? In order to determine if modern vampires are drinking more blood than those of the nineteenth century. It turns out that they are drinking around the same amount. Most answered about twice a month or once every two weeks. On average this is how much the nineteenth century blood drinkers drank. Some accounts had them attending a slaughtering every few days, but these were only the extremely ill, others came about once every two weeks. The final question was Have your medical conditions improved with the consumption of blood?. Almost all responded yes. Not all respondents had medical issues to begin with, although the majority did. Most of those medical issues are not noticeable to outsiders, so the improvement cannot necessarily be measured. Modern vampires also claim, like their past counterparts that they must continue to drink blood in order to stay healthy.<sup>130</sup> However, the goal of a healthier life has been accomplished according to those sick, just like the healthy claimants of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

## **Conclusion: Fear as Fuel**

While blood sucking, horrific vampires are fun to discuss the important thing to remember is that these blood drinking consumptives were real people who legitimately thought they had found a cure. They were not characters in a book or a newspaper serial but real desperate people driven by a major compelling force, fear. Fear of watching your loved one waste away, fear that you will contract the disease by caring for them, fear of the awful physical toll the disease will have on your body, and most of all fear of death. This fear compels doctors to concoct strange remedies, twisting them into the cure they desperately need. This fear drives a mother to force a goblet of blood down her child's throat in the hopes that she will no longer be in pain. This fear also breeds the fetishism of the disease and the creation of both beauty and monster in order to cope with the devastation left in its crimson path.

In the nineteenth century in a crowded, dirty city, one of the hardest things to confront would be your health and the health of your loved ones. The people who consumed blood turned themselves into literal vampires in order to feel in control of their health. Vampires were painted strongly as monsters, even insane, unable to control their need for blood. There are newspaper accounts of people who were found to have vampiric tendencies, being sent to insane asylums for the affliction of drinking blood. These blood drinkers probably believed they would have to live on the gory substance for the rest of their lives before even trying the cure. Lastly, there was a fear that they would lose their control of their urges, perhaps committing murder. Despite knowing all of these dangers: they may commit crimes, be a slave to their appetite, eventually going insane, consumptives went to drink blood, so that they could actively participate in a cure. They needed to feel as if they were part of the healing process, much like we do today by taking

antibiotics when we are sick. By drinking the blood they at least felt like they were doing something to make themselves healthier.

A person's health can be one of their most fragile possessions, even today in a world full of technology and medicines. The same process of taking a role in one's health is being played out with the modern vampire, those who drink blood in order to gain a healthier life, are doing what they can to better their health and lives. Many of them have unexplained health issues that seem to diminish when they drink blood. Much like consumptives these people have lost faith in the medical community and have decided to take their health in their own hands. It is unclear why these people have chosen the same route as the nineteenth century consumptives. Vampires still hold a mysterious quality, a protective quality in that these modern day vampires are able to distance themselves from "normal" society. By using the vampire as a way to explain their health issues and as a way to cure them they are, like their nineteenth century counterparts aligning themselves with the basic tradition of the vampire, offering a way to not only to explain the unexplainable, but also to actively participate in their own cure.

Vampires have often stood in place as an explanation for the mysterious, especially where disease is concerned. Although it may seem disgusting and strange that a group of people would participate in drinking blood, perhaps culturally it is not that far off. As it has been pointed out throughout this paper that the consumptive and the vampire are very clearly aesthetically linked, and with the explicit action of drinking blood the two grow even closer. Image and action of the two seem identical, some consumptives even allegedly went so far as murder to satisfy their craving just like the horrific vampire. The consumptive vampire is willing to become so in order to prolong their life, the same motives as the fictional or folkloric vampire. Blood is seen as the life force needed and craved by both. With such similar image, actions, and

motives it is hard to object that these nineteenth century blood drinkers were in fact real vampires.

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