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Storytelling in the 18th Century as a Means of Hiding Tuberculosis and Sensationalizing Suspected Vampirism”

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In the 18th century, the symptoms of tuberculosis included red, swollen eyes, light sensitivity, gray, pale skin and coughing up blood. People who showed these symptoms during this time were considered “vampires,” due to the sensationalized storytelling of Eastern European gypsies.

The word ‘vampire’ did not become popular until the 18th century when the stories from Serbia, Romania and Hungary circulated to other parts of the world. The tales caused mass hysteria, especially when tuberculosis swept the country by storm, particularly in the East Coast of the United States.

Tuberculosis is spread by coughing, sneezing, spitting and even speaking. The infectious dose of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, the bacteria that causes the disease, is very low and inhaling just a small amount of the bacterium can infect an individual.

When one person died from the disease during the prime outbreak time in the 18th century, other family members started getting sick as well. The gypsy stories from Eastern Europe told this was happening because the person who died was draining the life out of those who were still alive. The stories claimed the deceased were vampires, because when their bodies were exhumed, their chest cavities were still filled with blood. They people were found like this because they died of tuberculosis, which attacks the lungs, filling them with blood.

“Storytelling in the 18th Century as a Means of Hiding Tuberculosis and Sensationalizing Suspected Vampirism” would discuss the legend of vampires, how the stories told by the gypsies traveled across the nation, how tuberculosis was mistaken for ‘vampirism,’ and how the folklore continues today.