An evil spirit that robs graves and devours corpses. The word and the concept were acquired from Arabic in the late 18th century. More recently the term has been broadened out to apply to someone who takes a morbid interest in macabre things, especially someone who goes and gawps at road accidents, murder scenes, etc.

The ghoul, a traditional monster frequently associated with the vampire, originated as part of Arabic folklore. It played a part in several tales in the Arabian Knights. Ghouls represented a more demonic aspect of the world of jinns, the spirits of Arabic mythology. The Arabic ghul (masculine) and ghulah (feminine) lived near graves and attacked and ate human corpses. It was also believed that ghouls lived in desolated places where they would attack unsuspecting travelers who mistook the ghoul for a traveling companion and were led astray. Ghul-I-Beában was a particularly monstrous ghoul believed to inhabit the wilderness of Afghanistan and Iran. Marco Polo, reflecting on the accounts of ghouls he had heard about during his travels, suggested that ghouls, gryphons (an imaginary animal, part eagle, part lion), and good faith were three things people frequently referred to but did not exist.

The ghoul returned to popular culture in the twentieth-century through a multitude of monster movies. New ghouls were similar to vampires because they were reanimated dead people in humanoid form. The ghoul, however, ate human flesh, while the vampire drank blood. The ghoul also acted with neither a will nor intellect, and seemed to have somewhat derived from the zombie—the figure in Haitian folklore reportedly brought back to life by magic and destined to work in the service of the person who brought it back to "life." One nineteenth-century case, that of François Bertrand, was a popular example of ghoulish behavior. Bertrand, a noncommissioned officer in the French Army, was arrested after he entered and desecrated several tombs in Paris. He was convicted and sentenced to a lengthy term in prison in 1849 after confessing to an overwhelming compulsion to tear the corpses of women and girls to pieces. His story later became the basis of a popular novel, The Werewolf of Paris by Guy Endore.

Modern ghouls, really a ghoul/zombie mixture, made definitive appearances in two movies directed by George Romero: Night of the Living Dead (1968) and Dawn of the Dead (1979). Romero acknowledged that the numerous vampires of Richard Matheson’s 1954 novel, I Am Legend, inspired his “living dead.” Night of the Living Dead pictured the dead returning to life by some form of radiation and eating their fellow humans. The ghouls walked slowly, were limited in their actions, and were destroyed by a bullet or sharp blow to the head. Although they could be killed relatively easily, in packs they could simply overwhelm individuals and small groups, such as those trapped in the farmhouse in the movie. Night of the Living Dead and Dawn of the Dead seemed to have inspired a group of Italian movies featuring a variation on Romero’s ghoul/zombie as exemplified in Umberto Lenzi’s City of the
The ghoul, in a somewhat different form, has been given new life in the 1990s through *Vampire: The Masquerade*, the popular role-playing game. In the mythology of the game, ghouls are people who have received some vampire blood, hence have attained a degree of immortality, but have not gone through the full Embrace which would make them a vampire. They are servants of the vampires and can be most helpful as they easily move about in the daytime.

The ghoul is a rare creature in Western popular culture, though its cousin the zombie enjoyed extensive revival in the 1990s. It has been integrated into White Wolf’s game, *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle*, and a modest number of fictional writings, most designed for a teen or younger audience have appeared. R. L. Stine has written several ghoul stories in his juvenile series.

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