

The Lord Byron / John Polidori relationship and the
foundation of the early nineteenth-century literary
vampire

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Abstract

John William Polidori (1795-1821) was appointed as the personal physician to Lord George Noel Gordon, 6th Baron Byron (1788-1824) in April 1816. Byron was not in the best of health, and Polidori was recommended to him by Sir William Knighton, who had previously treated him. Placing himself in self-imposed exile, Byron left England for good, taking Polidori with him and travelling in Europe. They settled in Switzerland, on Lake Geneva, where soon they were joined by the Shelleys and Claire Clairmont for the now infamous 'Summer of Discontent', spent largely at the Villa Diodati. At Diodati, Byron allegedly challenged the party to each write a ghost story, Mary Shelley writing what would become *Frankenstein* and Byron starting a tale of a vampire that he subsequently abandoned. After Polidori was dismissed, in September 1816, he was challenged on the request of 'a lady' to turn the fragment of the story started by Byron into a more complete piece – the result was *The Vampyre*, published in 1819 under Byron's name. In this thesis I explore the relationship between Byron and Polidori during their time together, and seek to understand what led Polidori to cast Byron as his fictional vampire Lord Ruthven. I also analyse the controversy around the publication, which some believe contributed to Polidori's death in 1821. In order to fully understand their relationship, I dedicate the first part of the thesis to an exploration of the lives, education and works of the two men, before finally reflecting on the legacy of *The Vampyre*, a legacy which changed the literary vampire from the folkloric Undead corpse into the Gothic figure so easily recognised today.

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Peter also provided me with a wealth of knowledge and material, and sent me a huge chunk of his work, translations and annotated pieces on Byron and the period. I still recall the day, in late 2013, when a vast amount of his material arrived in my Inbox along with a little note saying “Please, DO ask questions!”. The news of his passing was a sad day, and I am sorry that it happened before he had chance to read my finished piece, so it seems only right that I dedicate it to Peter, alongside Geoffrey. Thank you both for your unwavering support, it means a lot.

Balancing a PhD with work and family life was far from easy, so I must here thank my friends and family who understood when I needed to go off on research trips, spend hours locked in the study writing, or sit in the corner reading yet another vampire book with a maniacal look in my eye. Special thanks to my partner Helen, my parents and my daughter Holly, who inspire me to continually better myself.

Final thanks go to the two men I think I know fairly intimately now, and who continue to intrigue and inspire me in equal measures – George Gordon, 6th Lord Byron, and John William Polidori, both of whom achieved so much in their short lives. It is a big and bold statement when I say there could be no Dracula without those two men, but I hope my work here shows this to be true.

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Timeline of events

January 1788 – Lord Byron is born

September 1795 – John Polidori is born

1813 – Publication of Byron's vampiric poem 'The Giaour'

April 1816 – Polidori is hired as Byron's personal physician

April – September 1816 – The Diodati Summer. The Shelley party arrived in May.

May 1816 – Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon* is published

September 1816 – Polidori is dismissed by Byron. Polidori subsequently writes *The Vampyre* at the request of a lady

January 1818 – Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is published

April 1819 – *The Vampyre* is published, under Byron's name, in the *New Monthly Magazine*

June 1820 – Charles Nodier adapts *The Vampyre* for the stage in Paris. Shortly after, James Robinson Planché adapts it for an English audience in London

August 1821 – Polidori dies after a jig accident in London

July 1822 – Shelley drowns in a boat accident in Italy

April 1824 – Byron dies of a fever in Greece

March 1829 – Heinrich Marschner's play 'Der Vampyr' is performed in London

March 1834 – George Blink’s play ‘The Vampire Bride’ is performed in London

December 1851 – Alexandre Dumas’ play ‘Le Vampire’ opens in Paris

July 1852 – Dion Boucicalt’s play ‘The Vampire’ opens in London

May 1897 – Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is published

INTRODUCTION

The Lord Byron / John Polidori relationship – A Historiography

The publication of the short story entitled *The Vampyre* (1819) by John William Polidori (originally credited to Lord Byron) was the first Gothic vampire narrative to use the now familiar guise of the aristocratic vampire, who preyed on young females and drank their blood to prolong his own life.

This model, created by Polidori and based on Lord Byron, is now widely recognised through Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (1897) and the many Hollywood cinematic versions. And yet Polidori's novella is largely forgotten, and when it is referenced it is still largely credited to Byron in concept if not in authorship. The main strand of my thesis is to argue that Polidori's text was crucial to the development of the modern vampire image, and that the time he spent with Lord Byron between April and September in 1816 – and public perceptions of Byron at this time - was crucial to the vampire model he helped create.

The Vampyre follows the aristocratic, mysterious Lord Ruthven and his travelling companion Aubrey. Throughout the tale, events occur that lead Aubrey to realise that Ruthven is a vampire, but he is forced to swear an oath that he will not reveal the truth. The anxiety and mental disturbance this knowledge brings to Aubrey eventually kills him, but not before Ruthven preys on Aubrey's own sister and escapes.

Polidori, allegedly, composed the tale at the request of a lady whilst in Switzerland in 1816, having spent three months working as Byron's personal physician before being sacked in September of that year. He used a concept that Byron had created during the now infamous 'ghost story writing' challenge at the Villa Diodati, where Byron and Polidori resided with the Shelley party over the summer of 1816. He never

intended it to be published, or so he claimed, yet the tale found its way to Henry Colburn, who published it in April 1819 as a tale by Lord Byron in his *New Monthly Magazine*.

Although the publication of *The Vampyre* has been discussed on several occasions before – most biographies of Byron feature this – I have offered the most thorough analysis, to date, of the many and complicated chain of events that occurred in the weeks both before and after the publication, and believe that the information contained in this thesis finally answers the questions as to how and why it was indeed published. This was made possible due to the access granted to me by Geoffrey Bond of his private collection, in which he has a copy of the original *New Monthly Magazine* that *The Vampyre* first featured in. Through this, I was able to see that all of the explanatory material was included in the magazine format, and not as many believe solely within the book version, published later that year.

Whilst many critics have recognised the similarities between Byron and the vampire Ruthven, most dismiss the importance of the text to the developing literary vampire genre. Often this is down to most scholars being dismissive of Polidori as a person, and his text as part of the developing literary vampire genre. By closely studying the relationship of the two men, the background knowledge of the vampire myth they had, the publication of the tale and both parties' reaction to this, and the subsequent stage versions of the tale and how all this influenced later and more widely known tales such as *Dracula*, it is possible to 'rescue' Polidori as an author from obscurity and show his creation was in fact hugely important to the genre.

This is important because Polidori's tale is not widely known or used in the present, outside of university modules and by a handful of scholars. And yet, as is argued throughout this thesis, without his text the modern vampire image could not have existed in the format it does, and works such as *Dracula* could not have existed. Understanding and acknowledging Polidori's work is therefore hugely important in tracking the development of the literary vampire.

It is also important to set *The Vampyre* within the framework of Gothic literature, and especially within the subject of Gothic villains/monsters. Halberstam suggests that the monsters of the nineteenth century were created as a 'balancing act' of polar opposites – 'inside/outside, female/male, body/mind, native/foreign, proletarian/aristocrat'.¹ This way of analysing them is particularly important for Polidori's narrative, as with the Aubrey/Ruthven dynamic he blends proletarian and aristocrat, and his landscape changes switch between native and foreign. Madoff continues this theme when he suggests that 'the true picture of gothic savagery is a picture of the repressed soul, without reference, finally, to time or place'.² Again, *The Vampyre* fits this model by having Ruthven seemingly inhabit everywhere and nowhere, morphing between east and west, life and death.

Halberstam also argues that, often, the Gothic is a metaphor for excess and that the 'production of fear in a literary text emanates from a vertiginous excess of meaning',³ with the monster itself being the embodiment of the excess and the chaos created. This, again, fits Polidori's narrative perfectly, with the fictional Ruthven embodying the chaos and excess created by Byron's activities in real life. This chaos is also prevalent within the mind of Aubrey, especially towards the end of the tale, where he is struggling with the oath and whether he should break it to save his sister. This oath, or the secret it protects, is another important element of Gothic literature, as Więckowska explains - 'It is perhaps the possession of the secret, or the illusion that there *is* a secret to be possessed, that best describes the mechanisms of the convoluted gothic structure'.⁴ As Sedgwick suggests, it is 'the Unspeakable',⁵ and this is certainly how Polidori portrays it.

¹ Judith Halberstam *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995), p.1

² Mark Madoff 'The Useful Myth of Gothic Ancestry' in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 8, 1979, pp.337-350, p.345

³ Halberstam, 1995, p.2

⁴ Katarzyna Więckowska 'Reality, or the illusion of the secret: gothic fictions of masculinity', in Katarzyna Więckowska (ed) *The Gothic: Studies in History, Identity and Space*, (Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2012) pp.107-117, p.108

⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick *Between men. English literature and male homosocial desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). P. 94

To return to Halberstam's theory on polar opposites, there is also an element of the female/male within the Aubrey/Ruthven relationship, as many incidents that occur in the text can be read as feminising Aubrey. When I discuss this in Chapter Three, I ask the question as to whether this may have been purposeful on Polidori's part with his female audience in mind (the Countess Breuss).

However, this idea of masculinity, often linked to class systems, is another important topic within the Gothic. Andrew Smith discusses how Gothic novels often seek to demonise the middle-class bourgeoisie, thus making the 'normal become deviant'.⁶ He cites examples such as Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde, or the Whitechapel murderer ('Jack the Ripper') who the press represented as a respectable doctor turned serial killer, but it is possible to add Ruthven to this trope, with aristocratic gentleman becoming sadistic vampire. These examples, suggests Smith, are fictional representations of the degeneration of the masculine 'norm' which creates an element of otherness and abnormality. Smith's argument is that it was the end of the century and the uncertainty it posed that gave rise to Gothic novels like *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *Dracula*, but it is possible to apply this to earlier novels around the turn of the eighteenth into the nineteenth century, in which *The Vampyre* can be located.

This is possible due to the subject matter of the vampire character, a character that embodies this notion of 'degeneration' discussed at length by Max Nordau and others.⁷ Nordau argued that humans could 'devolve', a theory that sought to challenge the evolutionary theories of Darwinism. Daniel Pick saw the theory of degeneration as something created by the political and social turmoil of the 1840s and 1850s,⁸ but it is possible to suggest that this could be pushed further back into the period of turbulence in the immediate aftermath of the French and Napoleonic Wars (in which Polidori was writing). Więckowska thus sees the vampire being as a Gothic character that hovers between evolution and degeneration, and disrupts the agreed masculine moral codes, a 'liminal figure, neither dead nor alive, neither

⁶ Andrew Smith *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the Fin-De-Siècle*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004). P.6-7

⁷ Max Nordau *Degeneration*, (London: William R. Einemann, 1895)

⁸ Daniel Pick *Faces of Degeneration*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)

human nor animal, whose mouth functions as the sexual organ, [and thus] compounds the anatomical division into male and female'.⁹

The vampire, through Ruthven in Polidori's tale, therefore represents a threat to nationhood and manliness. Charles Kingsley argued that without an adherence to manliness, and health, there is a 'tendency to sink into effeminate barbarism'.¹⁰ As I argue in Chapter Three, Aubrey displays both feminine elements and a state of poor health (albeit mental rather than physical), and is therefore a character that contrasts Ruthven's manly demeanour. This is much how Jonathan Harker is portrayed by Stoker in *Dracula*, and several studies of the manliness (or lack of for Harker) contained within *Dracula* could equally be applied to *The Vampyre* and Aubrey. This is another example of the influence that Polidori's tale had on later texts.

For example, and as Smith has noted, 'Harker is represented as having a sexual and physical passivity which...associates him with femininity. What Harker learns from his encounter with Dracula is that he needs to transform himself into a man of action'.¹¹ This is exactly how Aubrey is portrayed in Polidori's tale, but unlike Harker he cannot find the courage to act manly and thus the vampire is allowed to drink the blood of his sister – a clear indicator of what happens when men do not act as men. Instead, Aubrey displays the characteristics of a degenerate who 'weeps copiously' in an act of unmanly emotionalism¹² - 'he fell upon his knees to them, he implored, he begged of them'.¹³

Considering some of these literary frameworks alongside a historical approach to my research allowed for a detailed understanding of how and why Polidori was able to develop his tale from Byron's initial conception, what his sources were and who his

⁹ Więckowska, 2012, p.112

¹⁰ Charles Kingsley 'The Science of Health' in Charles Kingsley *Sanitary and Social Lectures and Essays*, (London: Macmillan, 1880), p.31

¹¹ Smith, 2004, p.36

¹² Nordau, 1895, p.19

¹³ John Polidori *The Vampyre* in *John Polidori: The Vampyre, and other tales of the macabre*, Robert Morrison and Chris Baldick (eds), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.21

intended audience was. He clearly used existing models of gothic writing, but he blended this with his own personal experiences of Byron, and what wider society thought they knew of him in order to create *The Vampyre*.

Methodology

I explored this premise by adopting an historicist approach, which I used to establish the context for the history of the publication of *The Vampyre* and the Byron/Polidori relationship. I benefitted from having access to unique primary sources in Geoffrey Bond's private Byron archive and a wealth of material from the late Peter Cochran. The Bond archive included access to manuscript versions of some of Byron's works, which allowed a feel for how he constructed and adapted his works, and access to several collections of Byron's letter and journals. As mentioned earlier, Bond also housed a rare First Edition copy of the *New Monthly Magazine* from April 1819, which allowed me to undertake a unique first-hand reading of the original format of both *The Vampyre* (in magazine form) and the associated material. I also explored other significant material, a review of Polidori's collection of poems entitled *Ximenes, The Wreath and other works*, for example.

The Cochran material included many annotated versions of documents such as Hobhouse's diary and numerous letters, all with explanatory material included. Through the entire research element for this thesis, no examples were apparent of any other scholar having access to the *New Monthly Magazine* version of *The Vampyre*, something which highlights the importance and originality of my research.

A detailed analysis of the contemporary newspapers and press pieces for the period also appears to be a unique element of my research. Very little reference is made to this source of information within wider scholarly publications, and through a historical consideration of the primary source material it was possible to see that the publication of *The Vampyre* was advertised for two weeks before its initial publication. It also shows that Polidori did little, publicly, to highlight that he was the

author for several months after the publication, despite many within the press discussing it.

Considering the plays with a historicist approach also benefitted the thesis greatly, as again very few scholars have studied the plays other than from a theatrical perspective. Understanding the chronological development of the content and the way the plays took Polidori's tale and added their own elements was crucial in tracking the way Polidori's 'Ruthven formula' developed into a recognisable vampire guise, one that was itself utilised and developed by Bram Stoker for *Dracula*.

The main strand of this thesis is to argue that Polidori created in *The Vampyre* a model that has lasted some two hundred years, and without his tale the Dracula-type vampire may never have appeared. I also argue that the close relationship of Polidori and Byron and the subsequent mishaps, falling outs, Byron's behaviour and the altered dynamics that occurred with the arrival of the Shelley party were all crucial to the way Polidori portrayed Byron as Ruthven.

Rescuing Polidori is not easy, as most scholars are dismissive of him, or paint him in a very negative light. The relationship of Byron and Polidori and the role this played in the foundations of the early literary vampire is also often dismissed. This is usually due to Polidori being viewed by many as nothing more than an inconvenience, someone who got in the way of Byron and Shelley's relationship. As John Buxton has argued in his work on the relationship of the two poets, Polidori's presence at Byron's side served to do nothing but embarrass his lordship. Buxton claims that on the occasion the two poets first met, 'Byron, not wishing to be embarrassed on this occasion by the presence of Polidori, left him in the boat'.¹⁴ And indeed, this is the view that most scholars take, suggesting that Polidori created nothing more than a 'discord in the harmony' of life at the Villa Diodati,¹⁵ was 'vain and flighty'¹⁶; an

¹⁴ John Buxton *Byron and Shelley*, (London: Macmillan, 1968), p.4

¹⁵ Leslie A. Marchand *Byron: A Portrait*, (London: The Cresset Library, 1987) p.242

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.242

‘unknown quantity’.¹⁷ Even his own biographer concluded him to be ‘vain and self-centred’.¹⁸

And yet there is clear evidence that Byron felt some sort of fondness for Polidori. For as many times as he is cruel or unkind to him, there are equal occasions where he shows him acts of kindness. For example, when Byron made him a gift of fifteen pounds for the purchase of a watch – ‘May 27 - L[ord] B[yron] paid 15 nap. towards a watch; I, 13’.¹⁹ One of the main issues that is overtly apparent is that the majority of critics treat Polidori with such disdain that they regurgitate the (often false) viewpoint of others. Take Buxton’s explanation of the first time Byron and Shelley met, cited above, for example. Buxton alleges that Byron ‘left Polidori in the boat’ so he could not embarrass him, and yet in Polidori’s own words (from his *Diary*):

May 27 - Went into the boat, rowed across to Diodati; cannot have it for three years. And then Getting out, L[ord] B[yron] met M[ary] Wollstonecraft Godwin, her sister, and Percy Shelley. I got into the boat into the middle of Lemman Lake, and there lay my length, letting the boat go its way.²⁰

Polidori felt eclipsed and unable to compete with someone of Shelley’s standing and reputation, unable to compete for the attention of Lord Byron that had so far been his alone. He therefore opted to return to the lake alone – it was not Byron leaving him there so as not to embarrass him as scholars such as Buxton claim. It is possible to see this is how Polidori felt, and that perhaps ‘being left in the boat’ was rather down to one of his many ‘sulking episodes’, by reflecting on his Diary entry for the day after:

May 28 - Went to Madame Einard. Introduced to a room where about 8 (afterwards 20), 2 ladies (1 more). L[ord] B[yron]'s name alone was mentioned; mine, like a star in the halo of the moon, invisible.²¹

¹⁷ Fiona MacCarthy *Byron: Life and Legend*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2003) p.285

¹⁸ D.L. MacDonald *Poor Polidori: A Critical Biography of the Author of The Vampyre*, (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1991) p.30

¹⁹ William Rossetti (ed) *The Diary of Dr. John William Polidori, 1816, Relating to Byron, Shelley, Etc*, (London: Elkin Matthews, 1911), p.103

²⁰ *Ibid.* p.99

²¹ Rossetti, 1911, p.105

What also becomes apparent when considering opinions on the relationship is that the instances when Byron and Polidori clash are always mentioned, and it is very rare to read examples of their friendship. Indeed, Doris Langley Moore, who so admirably detailed the events that followed Byron's death, even went so far as to claim that 'Dr Polidori never had been Lord Byron's friend' (and also adds that Polidori had been 'discharged...for misconduct', which was also not the case).²² Thomas Moore may well be to blame for this dismissive view of Polidori, especially when considering his comments from 1830:

When Polidori was of their party (which, till he found attractions elsewhere, was generally the case), their more elevated subjects of conversation were almost always put to flight by the strange sallies of this eccentric young man, whose vanity made him a constant butt for Lord Byron's sarcasm and merriment.²³

It may also be these comments that led many scholars to deem Polidori to be vain and pretentious, as Fiona MacCarthy²⁴, D. L. MacDonald²⁵ and Leslie A. Marchand²⁶ have. The earliest depictions of Polidori have fared him little better – John Cam Hobhouse described him as 'an odd dog'²⁷, whilst Lockhart referred to him as a 'venomous bat'.²⁸

Not all opinions on him have been so scathing, however. The most recent consideration of Polidori, by Andrew McConnell Stott, depicts him as almost being Byron's victim, albeit a rather sensitive one, perhaps best encapsulated in this quote adopted from Thomas Moore:

²² see Doris Langley Moore *The Late Lord Byron: a biography*, (New York: Melville House, 2011), p.386

²³ Thomas Moore *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, Vol. II (London: John Murray, 1830) p.26

²⁴ MacCarthy, 2003

²⁵ MacDonald, 1991

²⁶ Marchand, 1987

²⁷ see Andrew McConnell Stott *The Vampyre Family: Passion, Envy and the Curse of Byron* (London: Canongate, 2013), p.18

²⁸ Pryse Lockhart Gordon 'Sketches from the Portfolio of a Sexagenarian', *New Monthly Magazine*, 26, 1829, pp.191-200, p.19

Call *me* cold-hearted – *me* insensible!’ thundered the ‘Lord of Feeling’, ‘as well might you say that glass is not brittle, which has been cast down a precipice, and lies dashed to pieces at the foot!’²⁹

James Rieger, too, defends Polidori and also sees him as Byron’s victim, describing Byron as a ‘leech’, and reflects how ‘just as no man is a poet, much less a matinee idol, to his physician, so no master credits his valet with a soul’.³⁰ In fact, Rieger is perhaps too far the polar opposite of Polidori’s detractors, claiming his suicide (in 1821) meant that

England lost a religious novelist who, had he fulfilled the promise of Ernestus Berchtold, might now hold a place in the nineteenth-century hierarchy slightly above Charlotte Bronte.³¹

Although, as I shall argue throughout this thesis, *The Vampyre* was much more influential than is generally accepted, Polidori’s writing style hardly puts him in the realms of Bronte, so Rieger is here being rather flattering.

The Vampyre

The main strand of my thesis is to argue that the relationship between Byron and Polidori heavily affected the composition of *The Vampyre*, and that this relationship is clearly visible within its narrative. I am not the first to argue this point, the very subject matter of the aristocratic vampire who preys on young women and consumes their life is a mirror image of the way Byron was perceived by the public, so the parallels cannot be ignored. These parallels are made more overt when considering that Polidori’s vampire is named Lord Ruthven, the very name given to

²⁹ Thomas Moore *The Life, Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, Collected and Arranged with Notes*, New Edition, (London: John Murray, 1860) p.321

³⁰ James Rieger ‘Dr Polidori and the Genesis of Frankenstein’, in ‘Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900’, Vol. III, No.4, *Nineteenth Century*, 1963, p.464

³¹ *Ibid.* p.464

the Byron character in Lady Caroline Lamb's novel *Glenarvon*, in which she publicly attacked Byron in an act of revenge. I discuss this in more detail in Chapter One.

Yet, I would argue that it is these very obvious parallels that mask many other 'hidden' elements in the text that draw upon the Byron / Polidori relationship, elements that only become obvious to those with an intimate knowledge of Byron, Polidori and the vampire lore of the period and beyond. Without this knowledge, crucial factors are missed or misunderstood. Critics such as Ken Gelder, for example, have argued that what Byron wrote was merely 'a fragment of a horror story which may or may not have been about a vampire'³² and suggests that Polidori 'fleshed out' the story by using Greek vampire lore. The issue here is that Byron would have had more knowledge of this lore than Polidori, given his Eastern travels, and yet his *Fragment* chose to ignore this. By alluding to this Greek lore, Polidori may have been re-affirming the links between Byron and Greece, links that society would have understood due to Byron's poetry (for example *Childe Harold*).

Mair Rigby has argued that Ruthven and Aubrey travelling to Greece is symbolic of their homosexual relationship (implied or aspired, she does not infer) and that 'Greek love' is a euphemism for sex between men, Greece being the 'most homosexually symbolic of spaces'.³³ She also believes it appropriate that the 'deviant Lord Ruthven' should die and be buried in Greece, but the problem here is that Ruthven is *not* buried at all, merely laid out on a rock after which he disappears and Aubrey assumes he is buried. It is these base errors that mean that many critiques of this subject cannot fully understand the intertextual connections between the Byron / Polidori relationship and the narratives themselves.

It is therefore worth a close critique of the two narratives (*The Vampyre* and *Fragment*) to fully realise the similarities and differences between the text and the subject matter, and this forms the main part of Chapter Three. Although Polidori's

³² Ken Gelder *Reading the Vampire*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p.26

³³ Mair Rigby 'Prey to some cureless disquiet': Polidori's Queer Vampyre at the Margins of Romanticism, in *Romanticism on the Net*, Numéro 36-37, novembre 2004, février 2005, <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/011135ar> (accessed 9/12/13) p.6

text follows the general framework of Byron's text, the content is markedly different, but I would argue that is because Polidori's uses the Byron / Polidori relationship as its muse, whereas Byron's does not. Having stressed this point, it is worth considering, as Patricia L. Skarda has done, the fact that 'Polidori's story draws on so few of the vampire characteristics or rituals mentioned, paraphrased, borrowed, or quoted that the tale seems to establish its own tradition, one not distinct from vampirism but obscured by now familiar blood images'.³⁴ And this is one of the problems for modern critics – we have had so much emulation and 'tweaking' of Polidori's 'Byronic vampire' model that the foundations for the conception have become distorted somewhat.

As Twitchell has pointed out, generally, it is nigh-on impossible to determine the point in which a 'primordial image' becomes a conscious application - when was the very first occasion that a particular subject was used - but: 'the vampire [in prose] is an exception; for although we are unsure about his entrance into poetry, we know exactly when he burst from mythic imagination into prose'.³⁵ That came with Polidori's tale. That is the vampire image as is recognised today, the Polidoric / Byronic vampire, as earlier versions do exist but in very different guises.

Twitchell also supports Skarda's view that *Fragment* is not overtly a vampire story, and argues that 'the most crucial bit of evidence that Darvell is not a vampire is the rapid decomposition of his body, for this decay violates the most important principle of the vampire myth, namely, the awful imperishability of the flesh'.³⁶ This is not entirely accurate, however, and although some folkloric accounts tell of an untainted corpse, many others depict the opposite. Again, without a detailed knowledge of early, and contemporary, vampire lore, it is difficult to fully understand the background to Polidori's tale.

³⁴ Patricia L. Skarda 'Vampirism and Plagiarism: Byron's Influence and Polidori's Practice', in *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer, 1989), p.259

³⁵ James B. Twitchell *The Living Dead: A Study of the Vampire in Romantic Literature*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), p.103

³⁶ *Ibid.* p.115

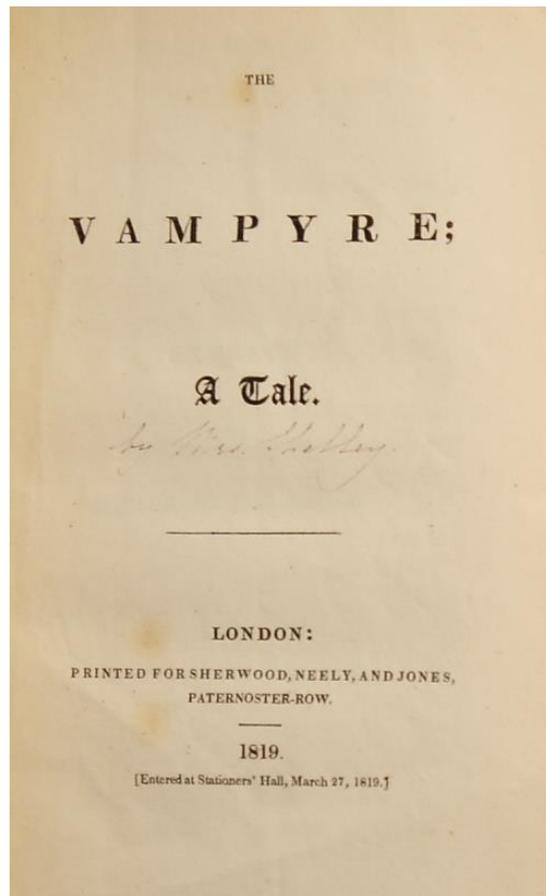


Figure 1: Cover sheet for the book version of Polidori's tale, printed in 1819.

(Source: Public Domain)

Despite the vampiric connotations of the text, and the parallels made between Ruthven and Byron, Erik Butler has suggested that actually Ruthven bears traits that separate him from both Byron and the aristocracy in general. He argues that Ruthven does not appear as an aristocrat, has no title or ancestry, nor is he a poet. Instead, he is merely mysterious and rather resembles a 'high-stakes mountebank'.³⁷ He also has no visible fangs (yet we are led to believe he drinks the blood of Aubrey's sister). What Butler does suggest of Ruthven is that he is mirror-like, he reflects what others wish to see of him. This is also a trick, ironically, that Byron uses to fool his reading public that the Byronic hero is actually Lord Byron himself. Although this is

³⁷ Eric Butler *Metamorphoses of the Vampire in Literature and Film*, (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2010) p.89

undoubtedly what brought him such fame, it also brought infamy in equal measures. And in the same year that Polidori cast him as the vampiric Lord Ruthven, 'in the public mind he, like the Childe Harold of the third canto, became cruel, heartless and too wild to be constrained by morality'.³⁸ To Byron's closest friends, indeed to Byron himself, this view of him was shocking:

Even the strange, perverse pleasure which he felt in painting himself unamiably to the world did not prevent him from being both startled and pained when the world took him at his word; and, like a child in a mask before a looking-glass, the dark semblance which he had half in sport, put on, when reflected back upon him from the mirror of public opinion, shocked even himself.³⁹

A historiographical approach reveals that, generally, there are two 'camps' on the subject of Polidori and his tale. On the one hand there is the very scathing and negative stance that scholars such as Skarda, MacDonald and Marchand take, whereas the other, more 'defensive' stance is supported by Gelder and Rieger. The issues that are never fully investigated, and which will form the focus of my thesis, are a more in-depth understanding of the Byron / Polidori relationship, which forms the basis for Chapters One and Two, the circumstances leading up to the publication, and to what extent Polidori wrote his tale with a view to it being published, discussed in Chapter Three, and how the tale itself affected the development of the vampire, as evidenced through the subsequent stage versions of this, in the years that followed, dealt with in Chapter Four.

³⁸ Ben Wilson *Decency & Disorder: The Age of Cant, 1789-1837*, (2007, London: Faber and Faber), p.332

³⁹ Moore, 1830, p.1-2

Early images of the vampire

To understand the cultural changes in the vampire myth that *The Vampyre* created, it is necessary to explore the various guises that the being took previously. Although Polidori's tale is credited with introducing the vampire to literature, this is not entirely accurate. It did, indeed, introduce the modern vampire image into literature but as I have shown elsewhere⁴⁰ the being existed for hundreds of years previously within literary sources.

One of the earliest versions of the vampire being is that of the ancient Lamia, who was a female demon that drew in unwary young men and devoured them. Whilst not a vampire in the true sense of the word, there was no typical vampire before Polidori's tale. Keats described the Lamia in his 1820 poem of the same name:

She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,
Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;
Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd;
And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,
Dissolv'd, or brighter shone, or interwreathed
Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries—
So rainbow-sided, touch'd with miseries,
She seem'd, at once, some penanced lady elf,
Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self.

Upon her crest she wore a wannish fire
Sprinkled with stars, like Ariadne's tiar:
Her head was serpent, but ah, bitter-sweet!
She had a woman's mouth with all its pearls complete:
And for her eyes: what could such eyes do there

⁴⁰ Matthew Beresford *From Demons to Dracula: the creation of the modern vampire myth*, (London: Reaktion, 2008)

But weep, and weep, that they were born so fair?
As Proserpine still weeps for her Sicilian air.
Her throat was serpent, but the words she spake
Came, as through bubbling honey, for Love's sake,
And thus; while Hermes on his pinions lay,
Like a stoop'd falcon ere he takes his prey.⁴¹

Here the Lamia is part serpent, part human, with traits of other creatures. Nevertheless, she draws in her victims and consumes them, much akin to the modern vampire. The ancient world is full of these mythical beings – Medusa, the serpent-headed female, the half-bull, half-man Minotaur – and tales of humans devouring flesh and turning into wolves.⁴² And yet, there is nothing that would serve as a true vampire in the modern sense.

Not until the twelfth century is there evidence of what appears to be a vampire. In the writings of William of Newburgh, he describes several occasions where people return from the dead to reanimate their corpses and plague those around them. One such instance takes place at the Abbey of Melrose, in the Scottish Borders, and recounts how a monk who had passed away was later seen by his fellow clergymen, haunting the Abbey grounds. A similar example comes in the fourteenth century, when two peasants arrived at the village of Drakelow in Derbyshire and subsequently died of some disease. They were later seen walking the streets, carrying their coffins with them.⁴³

These tales clearly exist within British history, and yet they are largely unknown. Not until the 18th century do tales such as these become widespread and popular, brought back by returning soldiers who had been stationed in the East. These tales

⁴¹ Quoted from *The Poetical Works of John Keats*, (London, 1884). 36. *Lamia*, lines 47-67. Available online at <http://www.bartleby.com/126/36.html> Accessed 7/9/17.

⁴² See Matthew Beresford *The White Devil: the werewolf in European culture*, (London: Reaktion, 2013)

⁴³ *Ibid.* p.82-83

depict cases such as those of Arnold Paole,⁴⁴ the Medvegian peasant who had allegedly been attacked by a vampire and upon his death he returned as a vampire himself in order to plague his family, and Peter Plogojowicz, whose tale is similar to Paole's.

These tales⁴⁵ were subsequently published and were popular amongst the British public, who saw them as depicting some far-off superstition, unaware that they had their own history of such tales. To what extent these eighteenth-century tales inspired the early Gothic and Romantic writers is unclear, though several of them were clearly aware of them – Polidori himself referenced them in his Introduction to *The Vampyre*. If not familiar with the tales themselves, they were certainly aware of the discussions around them and other vampire superstitions. Eighteenth century publications by Rousseau, Voltaire, Calmet and Fluckinger all described in great detail the philosophy, beliefs and alleged cases of vampires.

As Frayling has argued, however, many of the interpretations of vampires, and their use in early literature, were 'based on a very limited frame of reference defined by the critical controversy surrounding Calmet's work in France, and by the misrepresentation of this controversy in the pre-Romantic atmosphere of 1780s Paris'.⁴⁶ Calmet's work, *Treatise on Vampires & Revenants: The Phantom World* (1746) detailed the evidence for vampires, or more specifically the dead rising from their graves, in early history, mythology, belief systems and from a religious perspective. It received much criticism, for example from Voltaire, although he still referenced and discussed the text in his own work *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (1764).

⁴⁴ Beresford, 2008, p.106-111

⁴⁵ For an account of these, see Beresford, 2008, p.106-111

⁴⁶ Christopher Frayling *Vampyres: Lord Byron to Count Dracula*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), p.37



Figure 2: 18th century illustration of a suspected vampire, depicted with stake through the heart
(Source: The British Library)

Calmet revised his work in 1751, as he was sent a wealth of information on the subject due to the popularity of the first edition. The reason it was met with such learned criticism was due to his open-mindedness on the possible existence of vampires. That is not to say he openly accepted their existence, but nor did he deny it.

Following on from Calmet, a host of literary tales and poems were published that featured vampire-type beings. At this point, there was no typical vampire, not until Polidori created his Ruthven, so each text differed in its portrayal. Notable examples include the short poem *Der Vampir* by the German poet Heinrich Ossenfelder (1748), Gottfried August Burger's *Lenore* (1773), Goethe's *The Bride of Corinth* (1797) and

Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801). Although not technically about a vampire, *Thalaba* is categorised as such due to the resurrection of Oneia – 'Her very lineaments, and such as death / Had changed them, livid cheeks, and lips of blue / But in her eyes there dwelt / Brightness more terrible / Than all the loathsomeness of death'⁴⁷ - and includes a magical ring that is reminiscent of Byron and Polidori, and some of the later vampire plays.

Devendra P. Varma has shown that the German Gothic was a huge influence on the early vampire literature, and particularly the 'shudder novel' - 'shadows of death and the supernatural, phantoms of terrors of the invisible world, and cold-blooded brutalities fill the pages of the Schauerromantik with spectres of horror.'⁴⁸ Murnane suggests that this influence is clear within the English Gothic, and that Byron's close friend Matthew 'Monk' Lewis is by far the best-known example of this.⁴⁹

With the birth of the Romantic vampire, these early influences and examples were retained, but modified to fit the new Romantic way of writing. As Butler argues, the 'Romantics sought to preserve the past even as they transformed it'.⁵⁰ Coleridge was one of the first Romantics to utilise this theme, composing no less than four pieces between September 1797 and April 1798. These were *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel* (which Byron helped to get published and read aloud to the party at Diodati), *The Three Graves*, and *The Ballad of the Dark Ladie*. Each 'combines highly picturesque rather Gothick imagery (in the German 'horror-romance' style) with typically acute observations of nature and human psychology. Of the four, only the *Mariner* was ever finished, and first appeared in 1798'.⁵¹

Like Byron, Coleridge also suffered with bouts of depression. As his biographer Richard Holmes writes: '[his] worst enemies were within. His notebooks at this time

⁴⁷ Quoted from D. Appleton (ed) *The Complete Poetical Works of Robert Southey*, (New York: Appleton, 1851), p.288

⁴⁸ Devendra P. Varma *The Necromancer*, trans. By Peter Teuthold, (London: Folio Press, 1968), p.viii-ix

⁴⁹ Barry Murnane 'Haunting (literary) History: An Introduction to German Gothic' in Andrew Cusack and Barry Murnane (eds) *Popular Revenants: The German Gothic and its International Reception, 1800-2000*, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012), p.11

⁵⁰ Butler, 2010, p.59

⁵¹ Richard Holmes *Coleridge*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.10

show him besieged by bouts of terrible depression, hysteria, fits of weeping, hallucinations, long nights of self-laceration and disgust...Strange horrors and fixations assail him'.⁵² One such paragraph from his working notebooks serves to typify his trains of thought:

Semen compared with urine is itself a proof and an effect of the natural union of love and lust - thoughts and sensations being so exceedingly - dissimilar from the vehicle - as if a beloved Woman vanishing in our arms should leave a Huge Toad - or worse.⁵³

As Holmes continues,

This has a more than literary force of revulsion, an existential horror that recalls the city hallucinations of Baudelaire: as in his poem 'Une Charogne', or 'Les Metamorphoses du Vampire', where the beloved woman, lying on the bed after love-making, turns into a foul old leather wineskin, 'toute pleine de pus'.⁵⁴

Despite his mental sufferings, Coleridge had a clear vision of how a Romantic poet operated within the parameters of the genre, seeing the subject matter something that needing dissecting and rebuilding into something tangible and easier to recognise (essentially exactly as Polidori did with *The Vampyre*):

[A poet] dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events, it struggles to idealise and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid. p. 31

⁵³ Kathleen Coburn & Anthony John Harding (eds) *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. III: 1808-1819*, (London: Routledge, 1974).

⁵⁴ Holmes, 1982, p.31

⁵⁵ Quoted from *Biographia Literaria*, ed. G. Watson, (London: Dent, 1956), p.167

His notion that a writer's task is to bring something 'dead' to life is overtly vampiric, and again is reflective of what Polidori achieved in his vampire tale. As Coleridge further explained in a letter to his nephew in 1826, 'Remember, that whatever is, lives. A thing absolutely lifeless is inconceivable, except as a thought, image or fancy, in some other being'.⁵⁶ The vampire therefore fit the Romantic ideology perfectly, as even in death the vampire still lived. As Frayling points out, this is how the folkloric vampire before it (that is, the Romantic one) was seen, referring to 'the Turkish opinion that men that are buried have a sort of life in their graves'.⁵⁷ Nowhere is this more obvious than in the other tale to be born at Diodati, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, where something dead was given new life that brought horrors along with it:

I considered the being whom I had cast among mankind, and endowed with the will and power to effect purposes of horror, such as the deed which he had now done, nearly in the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me!⁵⁸

The French Revolution in the late eighteenth century brought an obvious state of turmoil and fragility to France, but the threat was also very real for Britain. Due to the precarious situation of the period, the subsequent art – paintings, statues, music – took on a more refined and calming form to try and soothe the atmosphere. As Moore argues, 'It is true that high drama flourished...but only if it conformed to the romantic yet very carefully contained lines prescribed by fashion'.⁵⁹

The vampire as subject matter threatened to disturb this cautious air, and men like Byron with his debaucherous behaviour also. When the two were combined, through Polidori's tale, the result was dangerous indeed. And yet, strangely, the tale, and the subsequent plays, had their highest degree of success in France.

⁵⁶ Quoted in *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, ed. J. Colmer, (London: Routledge, 1976), p.183

⁵⁷ Christopher, 1991, p.37

⁵⁸ Mary Shelley *Frankenstein*, (London: Great Writers Library, 1987), p.74

⁵⁹ Moore, 2011, p.168

Another issue that was bringing horror and fear to society in this period was the matter of bodysnatching, that is stealing newly-buried corpses from out of their graves for the anatomists. The issue arose, as Stott explains, because 'practical anatomical experience fell short as the law forbade dissecting any bodies except those of executed criminals. With upward of five hundred students a year taking private lessons just to pass anatomy, the university authorities turned a blind eye as the ghoulish practice of "resurrection" began to take hold'.⁶⁰ Polidori would no doubt have borne witness to this whilst at university studying medicine.

Whereas Mary Shelley would later create her literary monster from a cadaver brought back to life – an act seen more as 'terror' – the real-life bodysnatching was an act of horrible reality. Radcliffe discusses the difference between terror and horror, and suggests that terror (as seen within literature) awakens one's senses, whilst horror is altogether different. Horror is something that 'contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates [the senses]'.⁶¹ Digging up fresh corpses and performing dissection on them is a clear act of horror and one which fits Nordau's 'degeneration' model, as well as being an act that would have gone against society's accepted constraints.

As discussed earlier, this notion of degeneration developed out of the social and political turmoil of the early nineteenth century, and Ben Wilson, who has studied the period immediately after the French Revolution and the subsequent French / Napoleonic Wars, paints a bleak picture for England at this time. This is the same period in which Byron left England for good, taking Polidori with him, and is representative of the society that the Romantic vampire was released into. As he says, 'those evil passions that had been unleashed on the world had been vanquished'⁶² with the end of the wars but, according to the Quarterly Review

⁶⁰ Stott, 2013, p.32

⁶¹ Ann Radcliffe 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' in *New Monthly Magazine*, Vol.16, No.1, 1826, pp.145-52, p.150

⁶² Wilson, 2007, p.217

war had created new industries, and public investment had provided London with three new bridges and the country with a network of roads and canals. Wealth seemed to spring from expenditure, armies and fleets from the waste of battle, and courage and hope from disaster. She entered the conflict poor and feeble, she came out of it rich and invincible.⁶³

What this meant was that by 1815 a situation had been created where the population had grown while trade was artificially protected and now the country faced 'an uncertain and dangerous future'. This meant that unemployment increased, food prices went up as harvests failed, returning soldiers joined the growing ranks of unemployed, and for six years there was a revival in political agitation. 'The poor did seem brutal and violent, simmering with discontent and rebellion'⁶⁴ with Southey asking 'Can we educate the people in moral and religious habits, and better the condition of the poor, so as to secure ourselves from a mob-revolution?'⁶⁵

London's population in the England that Byron left behind was 'mixed up with swindlers and pickpockets, thieves, vagrants, beggars, and prostitutes' with Colquhoun allowing us to 'trace them to their lurking places'.⁶⁶ The popular *Life in London* described how 'Prostitutes are no longer fair and frolicsome but sirens who lure thoughtless men to the gallows and spread disease. Low-life drinkers were once life-affirming and worthy of emulation; now they are wrecks of human beings whom no one would envy.'⁶⁷ The way prostitutes are described links them to the vampiric Lamia, and the whole paragraph places the ordinary poor within fairly contemporary vampire poems such as Thomas Moore's *Corruption and Intolerance*: 'That greedy vampire, which from Freedom's tomb / Comes forth with all the mimicry of bloom /

⁶³ *Quarterly Review*, XXVIII, Oct. 1822, pp.197-98

⁶⁴ Wilson, 2007, p.220

⁶⁵ Quoted from Wilson, 2007, p.220

⁶⁶ Patrick Colquhoun *A Treatise on the Wealth, Power, and Resources of the British Empire*, (London: Joseph Mawman, 1814)

⁶⁷ Pierce Egan *Life in London*, (London: Sherwood, Nealy & Jones, 1822)

Upon its lifeless cheek, and sucks and drains / A people's blood to feed its putrid veins!⁶⁸

The Romantic vampire had begun to emerge before Polidori's tale was published, then, but was still a version of the earlier, folkloric 'undead' vampire, rising from its grave to haunt the living. With the publication of *The Vampyre*, this changed. Polidori created something new, something fresh, which left the folkloric version behind and replaced it with a being that was better suited to the city drawing rooms than it was the rural villages of Eastern Europe. The Polidoric vampire also possessed the capability of feeling. Whereas the folkloric vampire simply preyed on those around it in order to spread its disease, the new vampire could love as well as destroy. It also gained a conscience, and thus became a vampire that grieved for itself, and spent its time undergoing 'cursed eternal wanderings'. As Butler suggests, the Romantic vampire 'was split in two and tortured itself just as much as it preyed on others'.⁶⁹

In order for him to create his Byronic vampire, Polidori had to get to know the real Byron and understand the traits that society would recognise. Without Byron's *Fragment*, though, he still would not have been able to write his tale, and without a knowledge of vampires, despite pleading the opposite, Byron would not have created the foundations for Polidori to build upon.

Chapter One explores the life and events of both Byron and Polidori, and explores the previous 'vampiric knowledge' the two men had. I consider their younger lives and education, their family ties and friendships and their writings in order to attempt to understand the two men at the moment they met. I then analyse the initial period that they spent together in April-May 1816, before they arrived at the Villa Diodati. Finally, I consider the previous time Byron was cast as Ruthven, in Lady Caroline Lamb's novel *Glenarvon* (1816) and how the use of biographical writing in both that

⁶⁸ Thomas Moore 'Corruption and Intolerance, 1808'. Quoted from Albert Schroeder *Vampirismus: Seine Entwicklung vom Thema zum Motiv* (Frankfurt: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1973), p.117

⁶⁹ Butler, 2010, p.60

and in *The Vampyre* was able to create two distinct, fictional characters that the readers instantly recognised as Byronic.

Chapter Two explores the now infamous ‘Summer of Discontent’, in which Byron and Polidori travelled to Lake Geneva in Switzerland and met Percy and Mary Shelley, and Claire Claremont. This short period between April – October 1816 saw the development of the Byron / Polidori relationship, and how the arrival of Shelley created an element of disequilibrium in that relationship. Although dramatically changing the dynamics, I argue that it was necessary in order for Polidori to view Byron in the way he needed to in order to typecast him as Ruthven, and thus make him a vampire. The events and incidents of that summer shaped the way Polidori composed and structured his tale, but also sparked the initial ghost story writing challenge that saw Byron lay down the foundations for the tale.

I then examine the way Byron is reflected in text, both through Polidori and his own compositions at this time, before briefly looking at the events that occurred after the Diodati period. This saw the Shelley party leave for England, Polidori dismissed and Byron venture on to Italy.

Chapter Three includes a critical comparison of the two versions of the tale – Byron’s *Fragment* and Polidori’s *The Vampyre* in order to understand the similarities and differences of the two texts. I also explore the magazine and subsequent book version of *The Vampyre*, and discuss the explanatory material that was published with both, before examining the initial publication in great depth. Initially credited to Byron, the magazine version was published in the *New Monthly Magazine* on April 1st, 1819. Polidori composed the tale while still in Switzerland almost three years previous. In this chapter, I unpick the many theories and falsehoods that surround how the tale made its way to Henry Colburn, editor of the *New Monthly*, and to what extent Polidori was involved in this. For this critique, I was allowed access to an extremely rare First Edition copy of the *New Monthly Magazine*, in which *The Vampyre* first appeared, which enabled me to prove that Polidori’s explanatory Introduction piece did indeed form part of the very first publication – and not just

added for the book version as some critics suggest. This means the context was provided for the reader from the start.

Chapter Four compares and contrasts the main vampire plays that were based on Polidori's tale. Each play changes the tale to varying degrees and adds its own elements, until the later plays deviate from the original plot considerably. Nevertheless, the salient factor of all is how the vampire character remains true to the Polidoric / Byronic image. The purpose of the chapter is to show how the stage vampire evolved through each adaptation – each one sees the vampire narrative shift further away from that of Polidori, but the Byronic (Polidoric) image is never lost, and ultimately is reflected in *Dracula*. It is not an attempt to critique wider Victorian theatre and melodrama, more a specific examination of the ways in which Polidori's vampire was able to evolve with each stage adaptation.

As Ken Gelder suggests, ever since Polidori wrote his tale, the vampire is cast in the atypical Byronic image, a 'solitary wanderer in a perpetual state of exile'.⁷⁰ It is difficult to see that view change in the near future, even in a genre that continually reinvents itself, such was the way Polidori perfectly cast his vampire. So, while Polidori the man is all but forgotten, his creation lives on in true vampire style, and that is a testament to the importance of *The Vampyre* to the genre of vampire literature.

⁷⁰ Gelder, 1994, p.27

CHAPTER ONE

Lord Byron, John Polidori and their connections to vampirism

This chapter explores the nature and background of Byron and Polidori, and how their experiences helped to shape them into the people they were when they met in 1816, which is important to my reading of their relationship during the Diodati period. It also looks at the clear connections with vampires that both men had, through their careers, relationships and interests. It builds upon the image of both men created by the historiographical analysis of the Introduction, and considers the public perception of Byron in 1816 and how this fitted the Ruthvenic vampire model created by Polidori.

Lord Byron (1788-1824)

Although one of the most famous poets of the nineteenth century, Lord Byron divided opinion across all levels of society. For many he was a hero and a genius, for equally as many he was an unethical, immoral debauchee. Many people, including the poet himself, believed he was both of these elements, that he had an almost dual-personality. Lady Blessington, Byron's confidante in Genoa in the early 1820s, believed 'that his ineffable longings and his orinic recognition of the unideal nature of the world and himself were but two sides of the same coin'⁷¹. She further suggested how 'the day after he has awakened the deepest interest, his manner of scoffing at himself and others destroys it'.⁷²This, from one of the people who knew Byron first hand, suggests a level of duality in his personality, a duality that transcends into his poetry.

⁷¹Ernest J. Lovell, (Ed) *Lady's Blessington's Conversations of Lord Byron*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), p.21

⁷² *Ibid*, p.21

Andrew Stott has recently argued that the key to Byron's success was through the 'finely tooled sense of introspection his poems conveyed, laying bare a private soul in turmoil through a prematurely jaded protagonist sore and sick at heart'.⁷³ This point about Byron's introspection is hard to ignore, since many of his poems appear to be self-reflective, none more so than *Childe Harold*. Yet, as I argue in Chapter Three, this may merely be Byron giving his audience what they want, rather than an accurate portrayal of himself. In this I mean Byron as a character rather than as a person. It is then possible to argue that Polidori also created a Byron character in his



Ruthven, as opposed to a true likeness.

Figure 3: Lord Byron in 1813, by Thomas Phillips.

(Source: Public Domain)

Byron's early works did not contain this introspection however, and his first pieces were not even well received. One contemporary reviewer of his *Hours of Idleness*

⁷³ Andrew McConnell Stott *The Vampyre Family: Passion, Envy and the Curse of Byron*, (London: Canongate, 2013), p.8

(1807) could not understand why Byron, 'a minor [had] favoured the world with this collection'⁷⁴ – and Henry Brougham, in the *Edinburgh Review*, believed the publication to be the last the world would hear of Byron.⁷⁵ But these poems were not the apparently biographical narratives that would later make Byron famous, nor were they from a poet that was widely known. Still, these reviews show how Byron's fame arrived in an instant and transformed him into a very public figure. Once he discovered his formula, Byron largely stuck to it, and this allowed him to create a Byronism that was 'covered by no very thick disguise' in which he 'directly appeared before the public, an actual living man expressing his own sentiments, thoughts, hopes and fears'.⁷⁶

This Byronism may even have been how Byron viewed himself. Even if it was not the actual truth, it was a truth that Byron afforded himself. Through Byron's early biographer Thomas Moore, we have a snapshot of this view (and alluded to earlier):

Even the strange, perverse pleasure which he felt in painting himself unamiably to the world did not prevent him from being both startled and pained when the world took him at his word; and, like a child in a mask before a looking-glass, the dark semblance which he had half in sport, put on, when reflected back upon him from the mirror of public opinion, shocked even himself.⁷⁷

It is almost as if Byron portrayed himself as a monster, but by doing so became the monster more. And it is this paradox that Polidori seized upon when creating Ruthven who, like the child in Moore's looking-glass, reflects the darker side of Byron. Lady Blessington again affords us a contemporary glance into Byron's introspection when she wrote how he believed himself to be 'so changeable...such a

⁷⁴ Mr Hewson Clarke in *The Satirist*, quoted from Edna O'Brien *Byron in Love*, (London: Orion Books, 2009), p.30-31

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p.31

⁷⁶ Stott, 2013, p.8-9

⁷⁷ Thomas Moore *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, (London: John Murray, 1830), Vol. 2, p.1-2

strange mélange of good and evil'.⁷⁸ And Anabella Milbanke, Byron's wife, suggested that although Byron 'inflicted misery.... he suffered more than he inflicted'.⁷⁹ The period of Byron's marriage, from 1815 to 1816, is one in which he suffers much misery, and his mental state visibly declines, with his poetry of the period reflecting this. I shall discuss this in further detail in the following chapter.

There are examples in Byron's early life that suggest he may have been prone to this self-reflection and melancholy however. When he was eight years old he read Gessner's *Death of Abel*, and the idea that Cain was predestined to evil fascinated him greatly. He also read John Moore's novel *Zeluco* in which the hero-villain was 'fated to perform dark deeds by forces beyond his control'.⁸⁰ The following year, aged nine, his maid May Gray, 'used to come to bed to him and play tricks with his person'.⁸¹ Marchand suggests this may have caused psychological traumas to the young Byron, in which 'the disillusioning experience of seeing her devote her caresses to others after their intimacy may well have roused a maddened jealousy [in him]'.⁸² Perhaps these incidents were repressed in his psyche, or perhaps he used these early influences to shape the Byronic hero, as from *Childe Harold* onwards they are certainly represented within his works.

In her biography of Byron, Fiona McCarthy describes *Childe Harold* as a 'pilgrimage of the divided self'.⁸³ Of all his works, it was *Childe Harold* as a character that saw the greatest comparisons to Byron as a person. By revealing his insecurities, his faults, Byron was allowing the public to see another side of him from the more common image, whether real or imagined (on Byron's part). Another Byron critic also saw this 'divided self' within Byron, describing him as being 'at his best, noble and generous, and at his worst, capricious and destructive'.⁸⁴ Even contemporary critics agreed there was an element of the divided self within him:

⁷⁸ Lovell, 1969, p.220

⁷⁹ Leslie A. Marchand *Byron: A Portrait*, (London: The Cressett Library, 1987), p.195

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p.14

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p.57

⁸² *Ibid.* p.20

⁸³ Fiona MacCarthy *Byron: Life and Legend*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2003) p.105

⁸⁴ Doris Langley Moore *The Late Lord Byron: a biography*, (New York: Harper & Row, 2011) p.15

some minds are cast in so sombre a mould, that they seem naturally disposed to delight in gloom, mysteries, and terrors. There is something in human existence which dissatisfies them, and produces a discontent and ill humour that drive them to seek familiarity with painful emotions. They love to enforce the awful, darken the gloomy, and aggravate the dreadful. No one, I think, will deny that this was the bent and ruling genius of Lord Byron.⁸⁵

If it was merely an act on Byron's part, there is enough evidence in his post-separation period to suggest that he took on a good degree of his own creation. The Byron that Polidori knew in 1816 was certainly a self-loathing, depressive version of the preceding one. But because Byron had built himself up (in the public image) to be this version of himself, it made Polidori's task of casting him as Ruthven all the easier. Taking Polidori on as his physician in early 1816 in preparation for his self-imposed exile may well have been a way of Byron obtaining company for himself in the same manner he did with Hobhouse for his travels in 1813. But Polidori was younger, more attractive and less cautious than Hobhouse. In fact, Polidori turned out to be too incautious, and this ultimately led him to be dismissed in September 1816, discussed in the following chapter.

Byron's exact reasons for selecting Polidori remain unclear, although throughout his life Byron appears to have had a close relationship with a few men. Byron met John Clare at Harrow in 1803, and had such deep feelings for him that twenty years later (1821) he wrote how 'I never hear the word "Clare" without a beating of the heart – even *now*, & I write it – with the feelings of 1803-4-5 – ad infinitum'.⁸⁶ In that same letter, Byron suggested that Clare was the only real male friendship he ever had. Any others were merely 'men-of-the-world' friendships.⁸⁷ Some critics take this to mean that Byron was in love with him, and that the two had engaged in a homosexual

⁸⁵ Sir Egerton Brydges *Letters of the Character and Poetical Genius of Lord Byron*, (1824) quoted from Moore, 2011, p.60

⁸⁶ Letter from Byron to Mary Shelley, 16th November, 1821. Quoted from MacCarthy, 2003, p.38

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p.38

relationship, an act still punishable by death in the period. John Edleston was the young chorister he met at Cambridge and who he also clearly had deep feelings for – ‘his *voice* first attracted my notice, his *countenance* fixed it, & his *manners* attached me to him forever’.⁸⁸ So when he was recommended John Polidori as his personal physician, a younger, well-educated Italian with good looks, this may have helped him decide to take him on.

David Ellis has recently argued that ‘there is no doubt that as he developed Byron was strongly drawn to attractive adolescents just a few years younger than himself’,⁸⁹ and Polidori clearly fits this. However, this is not evidence of homosexual relationships (thought to be one of the reasons he left England in 1816) but rather an attraction to younger men. Although Ellis suggests not, and cites the example whereby Byron could discuss his adorations for John Edleston (the aforementioned chorister at Cambridge) with ‘a wholly respectable female friend five years older than himself’,⁹⁰ MacCarthy is adamant that they certainly were, and argues this repeatedly in her biography of him. My own view on this sides more with Ellis, in that although Byron may well have experimented in this manner, this does not need to mean all his close male relationships were of a sexual nature. The important question here, though, is whether there may have been an element of sexual chemistry between Byron and Polidori. Most scholars ignore this in favour of Byron feeling nothing but disdain and annoyance at Polidori, and although this may be the case later in their relationship, it is not how it started. In fact, their relationship seems perfectly fine until the arrival of Shelley in Geneva, as I shall argue in the following chapter.

The question of Byron’s sexuality is less important for the theme of this thesis than is his attitude towards sex more generally. There is something overtly vampiric about how his attitude appears on the surface, the way he draws females in and then moves onto someone else. And yet, a closer reading of Byron’s life reveals how he

⁸⁸ Letter from Byron to Elizabeth Pigot, 5th July, 1807. Quoted from MacCarthy, 2003, p.58

⁸⁹ David Ellis *Byron in Geneva: That Summer of 1816*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011) p.19

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.19

did indeed have much deeper, meaningful relationships than this 'surface view'. For example, Byron clearly loved Teresa Guccioli, and in the first phase of their relationship he clearly had feelings for Caroline Lamb.



Figure 4: G.H. Barlow's sketch drawing of Byron in 1815. The way his hair falls makes it seem like he has pointed ears, and his pale complexion is exaggerated by the red lips, creating a rather vampiric depiction of him.

(Source: Public Domain)

Others, most obviously Clare Clairmont, he simply used in that vampiric manner. However, as Ellis has pointed out, this blasé attitude was quite the norm in the period – 'It would take a revolution in attitudes before those in a position comparable to his [Byron's] could be made to feel as uneasy as they ought to have felt about casual sex as an exploitation of social privilege and power.'⁹¹ This is itself a very vampiric sentiment, especially taken from the Ruthven vampire onwards, which therefore suggests that Ruthven could be applied to other people within the period. Perhaps that is why the tale and, more so, the subsequent plays proved so popular as it parodied this elitist behaviour and popularised it for the lower-class audiences.

⁹¹ Ellis, 2011, p.25

Byron's behaviour generally was one of habit. He might have been a 'wild Romantic poet [but] he was also a creature of habit'⁹² - many of those habits appeared unusual, not least his preference of writing in the middle of the night. It was not unusual for him to go to bed at 4 o'clock in the morning, and he clearly worked well in this manner. This nocturnal tendency may well have been something Polidori seized upon when formulating his vampire tale, and there are many other examples of behaviour that could be seen as vampiric.

One such trait that Polidori must have witnessed was Byron's obsession with keeping his teeth in good order - he had 'white, even teeth of which he took great care, badgering his friends while he was abroad to keep on sending him from London special powder for cleaning them'.⁹³ There is, of course, no reference to his teeth being sharp or pointed, merely that they were white, but nevertheless his obsession with them may well have given Polidori some material for his tale. One of Byron's closest friends, John Cam Hobhouse, also noted Byron's vampiric traits when he referred to him as a 'loup-garou',⁹⁴ tormented with self-doubt of his own poetical abilities and generally depressed. Although the word relates more to the werewolf being, I have recently argued that often the two beings are interchangeable.⁹⁵ The word Hobhouse used certainly refers more to the werewolf but the traits he witnessed in Byron were more vampiric – melancholic and self-loathing.

This occasion (in 1814) was not the first time Byron had shown these tendencies. He had earlier claimed that he 'shall not live long, and for that reason I must live while I can...For the night cometh.'⁹⁶ And two months after the publication of Polidori's tale Byron claimed, in true vampiric style, that his 'bones would not rest in an English

⁹² Ibid. p.37

⁹³ Ibid. p. 8

⁹⁴ O'Brien, 2009, p.95

⁹⁵ See Franck, K & Beresford, M 'Banishing the Beast: The role of the wolf in 'Dracula's Guest' and its omission from *Dracula*', in *Supernatural Studies*, Number 2, Issue 2, Summer 2015, pp.14-28

⁹⁶ Peter Quennell (Ed) *Byron: A Self-Portrait. Letters & Diaries, 1798-1824*, (London: John Murray, 1950), Vol. II, p.440

grave'⁹⁷ should he be buried there upon his death. Not that Byron wanted to die, but as he grew older he became more reflective and melancholic on the subject. And, in his final years, Byron, like Rymer's or Rice's vampires became disillusioned and disgusted by his status – 'Do you suppose that I wish for life? I have grown heartily sick of it, and shall welcome the hour I depart from it'.⁹⁸

There are several other occasions in the years leading up to 1816 where it is possible to link elements of the vampiric or the macabre with Byron. In November 1808, Byron was at Newstead and in melancholic mood (he had invited several friends for Christmas but no-one could come). His gardener came to him with a human skull he had found within the grounds - Byron promptly sent it to a jeweller in Nottingham and had it polished and set on a heavy silver stand at a cost of £17 17s, thus turning it into a drinking cup.⁹⁹ Marchand writes how 'it suited his sardonic whim to have it made into a drinking cup', and 'probably [believed it] belonged to some jolly friar or monk of the Abbey'.¹⁰⁰ Byron then dedicated a poem to the occasion 'Lines Inscribed upon a Cup Formed from a Skull':

Quaff whilst thou canst: another race,
When thou and thine, like me are sped,
May rescue thee from earth's embrace,
And rhyme and revel with the dead.¹⁰¹

Although referring to the relic of the skull, these lines nevertheless show Byron's willingness to accept the possibility of returning to this life beyond death.

The following year, in 1809, Byron spent some time in Albania, staying with the chieftain Ali Pasha where he had 'a horrid fascination with Ali's most un-English

⁹⁷ Letter of June 7th 1819. Quoted from Rowland E. Prothero *The Works of Lord Byron: A New, Revised and Enlarged Edition, with Illustrations, Letters and Journals*. (London: John Murray, 1901), Volume IV, p.315

⁹⁸ Julius Millingen *Memoirs of the Affairs of Greece*, (London: Unknown, 1831), p.119-20

⁹⁹ Marchand, 1987, p.55

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p.55

¹⁰¹ Lord Byron, *Lines Inscribed upon a Cup Formed from a Skull*, 1808, quoted from *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron*, (London: Henry Frowde, 1904), p.53

practice of impaling and then roasting his enemies'.¹⁰² These actions mirror those of the fifteenth century Wallachian Voivode Vlad Tepes, the Impaler, whom Bram Stoker named his famous vampire count Dracula after. It seems very unlikely that Byron ever discussed this with Polidori, however, but it may have in some way influenced Byron's poetry, especially his *Oriental Tales*. And, when Byron was dangerously ill in Patras in 1810, a very remarkable incident occurred whereby the future Prime Minister swore he saw Byron walking down St. James' Street in London.¹⁰³ This may be where Polidori got the idea of having Ruthven appear back in society even though he had supposedly been mortally wounded in Greece.

Perhaps Byron's close encounter with death in Greece changed his sentiment, as in 1812 he offered his belief that 'I almost rejoice when one I love dies young, for I could never bear to see them old or altered'.¹⁰⁴ To return to his 'Lines Inscribed on a Skull Cup,' and the phrase 'Quaff while thou canst', Byron certainly led a life to its fullest. He always believed he would die young, and in this he was right. It is ironic that although he died from a fever, it was actually the continued bleeding of him by the doctor that weakened him further and eventually led to his death. Byron initially opposed this bleeding, but in the end he gave in: 'Come; you are, I see, a d--d set of butchers. Take away as much blood as you will; but have done with it'.¹⁰⁵ Marchand suggested that 'his detached spirit must have enjoyed the mad medley of bickering and weeping servants about his deathbed'.¹⁰⁶ But, like Ruthven, Byron was to live on through his poetry and through the image that Polidori created. Although Polidori only knew Byron for a few months in 1816, he managed to capture a lot of the 'vampiric spirit' that Byron possessed, but much of the version he saw was yet another 'Byron character', created by his separation, accusations of incest and his depressive moods.

¹⁰² MacCarthy, 2003, p.104

¹⁰³ Ibid. p.129

¹⁰⁴ Letter of February 16th 1812. Quoted from Prothero, 1901, p.100-101

¹⁰⁵ Millingen, 1831, p.132

¹⁰⁶ Marchand, 1987, p.461

When Byron and Polidori left England in 1816, Byron was so disillusioned with English society that his works often reflected a bitter and almost reckless opposition to the ruling class. In his words, he described how he 'withdrew - But this was not enough...I was persued [sic] and breathed upon by the same blight. I crossed the Mountains - but it was the same - so I went - a little farther, and settled by the waves of the Adriatic - like the Stag at bay who betakes him to the waters'.¹⁰⁷ Here Byron could be describing the actions of Ruthven (or any of the vampires from the plays for that matter, discussed in Chapter Four) and Polidori would undoubtedly have borne witness to Byron's bitterness and anger at a society that he felt were extremely hypocritical towards him.

The two poems published in the wake of Byron's self-imposed exile, *Fare Thee Well* and *A Sketch from Private Life*, leaked to the *Champion* by Henry Brougham, were seen as evidence of Byron's 'deep hypocrisy, an impostor who performed remorse to conceal a thwarted, vengeful heart'.¹⁰⁸ So, society saw Byron in just the same way as he in turn saw society.

Writing his *Detached Thoughts* (1821-22) Byron reflected how 'no man would live his life over again, is an old and true saying...at the same time there are probably moments in most men's lives, which they would live over the rest of life to regain'.¹⁰⁹ And again in 1821: 'It has been said that the immortality of the soul is a grand peut être - but still it is a grand one. Every body clings to it - the stupidest, and dullest, and wickedest of human bipeds is still persuaded that he is immortal'.¹¹⁰

Byron's interest in immortality is another facet of Polidori's typecasting him as Ruthven. The subject is discussed several times in Byron's works, and was again the subject of conversations between Polidori and Shelley (discussed in the next chapter). In fact, Robert Charles Dallas, Byron's friend and advisor, suggested that

¹⁰⁷ Quoted from 'Some Observations upon an article in Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine', (Edinburgh: Blackwoods, 1820)

¹⁰⁸ Stott, 2013, p.15

¹⁰⁹ Prothero, 1901, p.439

¹¹⁰ Ibid. p.187

Byron never had a real desire to be published, but what he did crave was immortality.¹¹¹ Polidori's biographer, D. L. MacDonald, also noticed this fascination with immortality that Byron seemed to have, calling it a 'grotesquerie of mortality',¹¹² in which Byron questions how 'one certainly has a soul; but how it came to allow itself to be enclosed in a body is more than I can imagine. I only know if once mine gets out, I'll have a bit of a tussle before I let it get in again to that or any other.'¹¹³

These questions seem to have been born in him quite early on in his career. In fact, there is a common story of how Byron saw an illustration of a monk rising from his coffin, a vision that supposedly left him horror-struck, exclaiming 'I am damned by a just judgement' yet Doris Langley Moore questions the credibility of this incident.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, there is an occasion when Byron appears to have 'resurrected' the image when he made one of his servants at Newstead dress as a monk, lay in a stone coffin, and then rise upon his signal in order to scare Hobhouse:

One dark midnight, Byron told him that he dared not go over to the Abbey alone at that hour; which piqued him so, that he forthwith took a candle, and proceeded to show his fearlessness. Byron had previously put a servant into the stone coffin which then lay in the hall, dressed in the costume of a monk, who was to rise on a given signal, as though disturbed from his eternal sleep. It was not long before the hero of the scene had occasion to pass through the room where the coffin was; and as he approached it, up rose the monk, down went the candle – all was darkness; and the shrieks of the affrighted adventurer brought in the rest of the party to laugh at his terror.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ O'Brien, 2009, p.58

¹¹² D.L. MacDonald *Poor Polidori: A Critical Biography of the Author of The Vampyre*, (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1991) p.136

¹¹³ Marchand, *Byron's Letters & Journals*, Vol. 5, p.210

¹¹⁴ Moore, 2011, p.391

¹¹⁵ 'Sketches of Society: Byroniana No. 11', in *The Literary Gazette: A Weekly Journal of Literature, Science, and the Fine Arts*, Volume 12, 1828, p.36



Figure 5: Newstead Abbey, Nottinghamshire, Byron's ancestral home. The Gothic setting inspired his work on several occasions.

(Source: Unknown)

Elements of the macabre often feature in Byron's sense of humour, but these are always at the expense of his friends. Personally, his gothic tendencies appear to create a degree of fear and fragility to his mental state. He confided as much to Lady Blessington, telling her 'do you know that when I have looked on some face that I love, imagination has often figured the changes that death must one day produce in it - the worm rioting on lips now smiling, the features of health changed to the livid and ghastly tints of putrefaction...this is one of my pleasures of imagination'.¹¹⁶ The underlying concern may well be that of legacy – or the 'immortality' of himself through his works. David Ellis has recently argued that Byron had an 'almost religious or superstitious respect for anything the dead left behind, clearly feeling that it was largely through their relics that they could be remembered'.¹¹⁷ As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, Byron at times seemed almost obsessed with doing or creating enough in his life in order to be remembered when he died. This may well reflect on his Classical education in relation to people such as Socrates who often discussed immortality in his works, or the mythology around Achilles. In 1813,

¹¹⁶ Quoted from Christopher Frayling *Vampyres: Lord Byron to Count Dracula*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), p.7

¹¹⁷ Ellis, 2011, p.162

when Byron got the chance to visit the alleged battle site of Troy and the tomb of Patroclus, he openly chose to believe the legends of Homer rather than the more likely reality that it was simply myth.¹¹⁸ When he first visited Greece with Hobhouse in 1810, he confessed to him that these ancient sites 'had haunted my dreams from boyhood'.¹¹⁹ For Byron, it was these worldly sites and relics and deeds that created immortality, and through his own works and actions he hoped to create that for himself.

As Thomas Moore suggested not long after Byron's death, 'in Lord Byron, the real was never forgotten in the fanciful. However Imagination had placed her whole realm at his disposal, he was no less a man of this world than a ruler of hers; and, accordingly, through the airiest and most subtle creations of his brain still the life-blood of truth and reality circulates'.¹²⁰ Byron's ability was to cleverly weave the real with the fanciful and create pieces that left his audience unable to see myth from reality. Often, he drew on his real-life experiences in order to make his poetry seem all the more real. For example, during his travels in Albania he witnessed a girl sewn inside a sack and about to be thrown into the sea for some misdemeanour. Byron rescued the girl, and later included this scene within his vampiric poem *The Giaour* (1813).

Towards the end of his life, Byron became ever more troubled within himself and this was reflected within some of his works. Poems with a darker content, such as *Manfred* and *Cain*, appeared, the publication of the latter leading Marchand to argue that 'nothing real in the human and tangible world could ever satisfy one who aspired to the freedom of spirit and the omniscience of deity'.¹²¹ And in the second Canto of *Childe Harold*, Byron offered more evidence of his interest in legacy and immortality beyond this life:

VIII

¹¹⁸ For example, see MacCarthy, 2003, p.118

¹¹⁹ Edward John Trelawny *Records of Shelley, Byron and the Author*, (London: Routledge, 1905), p.27

¹²⁰ Thomas Moore *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, Vol. II (London: John Murray, 1830) p.24

¹²¹ Marchand, 1987, p.346

Yet if, as holiest men have deemed, there be
A land of souls beyond that sable shore,
To shame the doctrine of the Sadducee
And sophists, madly vain of dubious lore;
How sweet it were in concert to adore
With those who made our mortal labours light!
To hear each voice we feared to hear no more!
Behold each mighty shade revealed to sight,
The Bactrian, Samian sage, and all who taught the right!

IX.

There, thou!—whose love and life together fled,
Have left me here to love and live in vain—
Twined with my heart, and can I deem thee dead,
When busy memory flashes on my brain?
Well—I will dream that we may meet again,
And woo the vision to my vacant breast:
If aught of young Remembrance then remain,
Be as it may Futurity's behest,
For me 'twere bliss enough to know thy spirit blest!¹²²

This is Byron saying that although a person may be dead, and gone, can they truly be gone and forgotten if memories of them still exist? And what better way of creating a permanent memory than through published poetry or, indeed, a tale based upon him.

John William Polidori (1795-1821)

¹²² Lord Byron *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto II, Verses VIII-IX (London: John Murray, 1812)

Polidori is much less known than Byron, with only one biography dedicated to him, and as such it is difficult to understand him much more than a mere surface view. Nevertheless, there is enough to briefly explore his relationship with his father, his education, his own literary narratives and his initial time with Byron.

Despite there being only one biography on him,¹²³ most Byron biographers touch on the relationship between the two, and most take the same view – that Polidori was ‘vain and flighty’ and caused ‘discord in the harmony’ at Diodati.¹²⁴ Fiona MacCarthy takes an even more savage view, dismissing him as an ‘unknown quantity’, taken on solely for his medical knowledge and ‘presumed literary skills’. She further describes him as ‘pretentious and neurotic’¹²⁵ and sarcastically writes how he ‘claimed to have walked across the alps’. Discussing his alleged suicide, she suggests that ‘having found his métier he had become deranged’ and that we should ‘consider Polidori a sad casualty of the Diodati summer’.¹²⁶

Contemporary views on Polidori fared him little better, with Hobhouse describing him not long after meeting him, in a rather coded manner, as ‘an odd dog’, which Stott has recently argued¹²⁷ may be a reference to Polidori being gay. His view of him did not change – after Byron eventually dismissed him in September 1816, Hobhouse wrote how he had the ‘most unmeasured ambition, as well as inordinate vanity; the true ingredients of misery.’¹²⁸ Even Polidori’s only biographer offered little in the way of rescuing his honour, suggesting that the view of him being vain and self-centred is usually supported by his actions. For example, towards the end of his studies at Edinburgh he belittled the seventh Earl of Leven at a party for his linguistic capabilities, saying ‘your pronunciation...is so bad I did not know whether English or French was your language’.¹²⁹ And, on visiting William Taylor, the Norwich

¹²³ MacDonald, 1991

¹²⁴ Marchand, 1987, p.242

¹²⁵ MacCarthy, 2003, p.285

¹²⁶ Ibid. p.314

¹²⁷ Stott, 2013, p.18

¹²⁸ John Cam Hobhouse *Recollections of a Long Life*, (London: John Murray, 1905), Vol II, p.16

¹²⁹ ‘Letter to Frances Polidori’, 4th May 1815. Helen Rossetti Angeli-Imogene Dennis Collection, Special Collections Division, University of British Columbia Library, Box 31, File 6

intellectual, one of his guests was so struck by Polidori's character he drew his 'head on a card with the attributes of Apollo'.¹³⁰ Even when he knew about this, Polidori was still rather vain in his actions, commenting to his sister Frances 'see how I must have caught them?'.¹³¹



Figure 6: John William Polidori, by F.G. Gainsford. Date unknown.
(Source: National Portrait Gallery)

This vanity may have been a self-imposed act, as his school years were difficult and he clearly did not get on well with his fellow pupils. Unlike Byron, who constantly wrote of his school friends at Harrow and Cambridge, Polidori does not make a single reference to any school friend in any of his surviving letters.¹³² Little is known of his time in education, but a clue may be offered in his work entitled 'An Essay Upon the Source of Positive Pleasure' of 1818, in which he suggests that the 'schoolmaster and the tyrant [bully] are but types of each other'.¹³³ Perhaps this suggests that Polidori was bullied at school and that his teachers were no better. Nevertheless, he left

¹³⁰ William Taylor, 'Letter to John William Polidori', 12th March, 1815. Angeli-Dennis, Box 31 File 5

¹³¹ 'Letter to Frances Polidori', 4th May 1815, Angeli-Dennis, Box 31, File 5

¹³² MacDonald, 1991, p.17

¹³³ Quoted from MacDonald, 1991, p.7

Edinburgh with a medical degree aged just 19, an incredible achievement in the period.

In the years leading up to Polidori's education at Edinburgh, there was a large increase in enrolment numbers, from 158 in 1750, to 650 by the turn of the century.¹³⁴ This would have meant that students needed to acquire their own cadavers - as MacDonald ponders 'whether or not Polidori was directly involved it must have stimulated his Gothic imagination'.¹³⁵ This could be the reason why he was so knowledgeable on the subject during his discussion with Shelley, and Mary, during the Diodati period. It may also have been this knowledge, and the discussions of such, that influenced Mary Shelley's creation of *Frankenstein*.

Polidori also appears to have had a fraught relationship with his father, Gaetano, and through his letters he seems to feel hurt at his father's lack of expressed love. For example, he writes how he always calls him 'merely John' and signed his letters 'your father Polidori'.¹³⁶ Even from the very first surviving letter from Polidori's father to him, (aged 9), he was harsh and critical and Polidori appears to have continually sought to win his father's affections or praise (which he very rarely received). Perhaps there is an element of this in his relationship with Byron, in which several incidents occur where Polidori appears to be trying to impress Byron or gain his approval.

In another letter to his father, he writes how 'you know that the Roman and Greek histories were always given to me as the Bible according to which I should order myself'¹³⁷ and this reflects an education, and a way of seeing the world, very similar to Byron's. But, perhaps in another example of vanity, Polidori took this beyond that of Byron's, and firmly believed that he was of that ancient Roman ilk via his Italian heritage. Despite his father assuring him that he was in fact English, Polidori

¹³⁴ David Hamilton *The Healers: A History of Medicine in Scotland*, (Edinburgh: Canongate Academic, 1981), p.147-48

¹³⁵ MacDonald, 1991, p.15

¹³⁶ For example, see 'Letter to Gaetano Polidori, 1st December 1812', Angeli-Dennis, Box 31, File 6

¹³⁷ Quoted from MacDonald, 1991, p.18

attempted to argue the opposite, saying 'Italy is certainly my country. You have given me Italian blood: I feel that I am Italian'.¹³⁸ In fact, he goes as far as to want to leave Britain because he 'believes that he is among people who cannot feel with him - who perhaps cannot feel at all'.¹³⁹ In Polidori's own words he says he is 'not an Englishman', his disposition is 'not that of the English' and they have 'no enthusiasm, nor other vivid passion'.¹⁴⁰ It could well have been this attitude and these feelings that drew Byron to him in early 1816, and he may have seen a kindred spirit in Polidori, or at least someone who had the same views as him at a time when he needed this empathy. This may also be why he took Polidori with him in April 1816, and not Hobhouse, his usual travelling companion.

His father's response to this was to brand Italians as 'foreigners' and, tellingly, in his response to Polidori's 'Englishman' letter, he opens by addressing him simply as 'John'. Polidori was deeply hurt by this rebuff and his father's dismissal of his suggestive plans to fight for his country, and wrote (somewhat vampirically) that 'your letter is nothing but a thorn which pierces me'.¹⁴¹ His father also tried to oppose him joining Byron, but Polidori would not be dissuaded, another element that would have added to their volatile relationship. Despite his attitudes towards him, Polidori still appears to have needed this father figure in his life, someone to please and in turn be praised by. Maybe this is what he sought from Byron, who was a few years his elder, and this way of reading things becomes apparent in the Aubrey / Ruthven relationship in *The Vampyre*. Polidori's relationship with his father, however, is best witnessed in Byron's poem *The Giaour* (1813):

But one that for thy crime must fall,
The youngest, most beloved of all,
Shall bless thee with a father's name –
That word shall wrap thy heart in flame.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Ibid. p.19

¹³⁹ Ibid. p.20

¹⁴⁰ Angeli-Dennis, Box 31, File 5

¹⁴¹ 'Letter to Gaetano Polidori', 16th February 1814. Angeli-Dennis Box 31 File 5

¹⁴² Lord Byron, *The Giaour*, Lines 767-770, (London: John Murray, 1813)

If he could not get the relationship he required with his father, Polidori was determined to get it with Byron. After he gained his employment with Byron, he told his father (in a similar way to how he felt about joining the Italian Army) that 'ambition, and the love of glory, which consumes me, call me to action'.¹⁴³ And just as his father attempted to dissuade him from going, Hobhouse did the same with Byron (most likely due to him being Italian). Subsequently, Polidori decided to call off the arrangement, and Byron accepted in writing.¹⁴⁴ However, Polidori then changed his mind again, probably due to his wish to leave England - he perhaps only hesitated due to his father's wishes, but in the end decided to oppose him. For Polidori, travelling with Byron guaranteed him more fame and literary success than being a doctor did, or at least that is how he saw it. For Byron's part, the reason for taking Polidori was because he was depressed and had been drinking heavily and not eating, and was in general ill health at the end of his marriage. According to Byron's friend Leigh Hunt, Polidori was recommended to him by Sir William Knighton (who had previously treated Byron) - 'B. talks of taking a young Physician recommended to him by Sir W. Knighton as a travelling companion'.¹⁴⁵

So, for Polidori it was out of 'ideas of aggrandisement'¹⁴⁶ and for Byron it was out of necessity, or so it seems. Doris Langley Moore has argued that the two were never friends during their time together, but through Polidori's *Diary* this can be seen not to be true. Moore suggests that when Stendhal wrote of Byron's 'friend and physician, Polidori' he was wrong, and counters that 'Dr Polidori never had been Lord Byron's friend nor was he at the time his physician', adding that Polidori had been 'discharged some time before for misconduct'.¹⁴⁷ This is true – Stendhal met Byron in Milan in 1816, by which time Polidori had been dismissed. However, Polidori also turned up in Milan, which may have caused the confusion. Either way,

¹⁴³ 'Letter, John Polidori to Gaetano Polidori', 9th December 1813, Angeli-Dennis, Box 31, File 5

¹⁴⁴ 'Letter of 2nd April, 1816', Angeli-Dennis, Box 31, File 6

¹⁴⁵ 'Letter from Leigh Hunt to Francis Hodgson', 28th March, 1816, quoted from Malcolm Elwin, *Lord Byron's Wife*, (London: MacDonald & Co, 1962), p.461

¹⁴⁶ 'Letter, John Polidori to Gaetano Polidori', 9th December 1813, Angeli-Dennis, Box 31, File 5

¹⁴⁷ Moore, 2011, p.386

Moore is incorrect when she says the two were never friends, as shall become clear in the next chapter.

Before the two left England in April, Polidori was allegedly offered £500 by John Murray to keep a record of his time with Byron (which he did and was subsequently edited and published by William Rossetti, Polidori's nephew). MacDonald is very sceptical about this, calling it a 'suspiciously large amount for a publisher to offer an unknown writer'¹⁴⁸ and he has a point here. There is no evidence that Polidori received the £500, and his subsequent debts suggest not, and Murray clearly never published the journal. Perhaps it was another vain attempt at self-importance on Polidori's part. Nevertheless, he did write the journal although the version that survives today was heavily edited by Polidori's sister before Rossetti could obtain it, and so a lot of the more 'risque' material has been edited out.

As they waited for their ship to sail, an incident occurred that set the relationship off in a bad way. Polidori attempted to entertain Byron and the friends who had come to see him off (including Hobhouse and Scrope Davies) by reading to them one of his plays, but the whole party burst into laughter at the piece, which deeply hurt Polidori. Although the 'play reading' ended in mocking laughter, Polidori suggested it was perhaps more 'from the way it was read'¹⁴⁹ - he suggested this, it seems, because after laughing 'one of the party' picked up the play and recited part of it 'with great attention', to the applause of the others. MacDonald believes this was Byron due to Polidori refusing to name him¹⁵⁰. If so, we have the earliest evidence of Byron doing what he was to do often - mocking Polidori only to, it seems, feel bad and attempt to console him - this is a common practice between two people who share a 'love bond', with one continually belittling the other, but following this with 'loving acts'. Whether this affection was akin to a 'younger brother' is not clear, but Byron had overtly apparent attraction towards younger men (and girls too). This could be seen as part of his domineering 'vampiric personality' as subjugator. The

¹⁴⁸ MacDonald, 1991, p.57

¹⁴⁹ William Rossetti (ed) *The Diary of Dr. John William Polidori, 1816, Relating to Byron, Shelley, Etc.* (London: Elkin Matthews, 1911), p.28

¹⁵⁰ MacDonald, 1991, p.59

way Polidori turns the episode around in the *Diary* is such that, in MacDonald's words, it 'turns an account of *somebody's* travels with *Byron* into an account of *Polidori's* travels with *somebody* [author's emphasis], meaning that '[his] feelings about his father were beginning to be replayed in his relations with Byron'.¹⁵¹ This is the point I discussed earlier, that Polidori may have been attempting to replace his own father with Byron as a father figure.

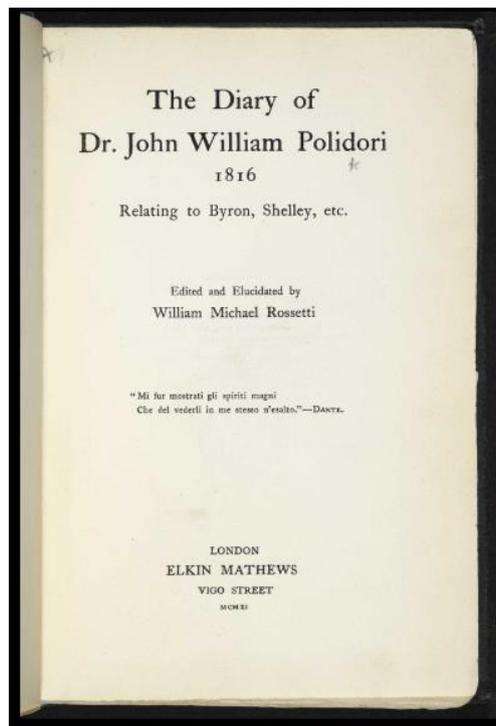


Figure 7: Cover sheet for Polidori's *Diary*, edited by his nephew William Rossetti and published in 1911.

(Source: The British Library)

A second incident, which occurred on the same night and supposedly after the 'play incident', saw Polidori commit an act that he suggested hurt himself and those around him. Neither he nor Hobhouse (who of course could not help but comment) explain exactly what occurred, but it seems certain the incident was a sexual encounter – Polidori wrote in his *Diary* how 'for a long time [I] kept my eye upon its

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p.59

stern white cliffs, thinking on her who bade me join her remembrance with the last sight of my native soil'.¹⁵² The fact he felt the need to confess to Byron & Hobhouse is odd, but it may have been to try and impress Byron. As usual, it backfired.

MacDonald comments on this and notes the sexualisation that Polidori enters into (perhaps due to his 'Byronic freedom') thus: 'It is sexuality of domination...it is exotic. And it is, on the whole, dirty, obscene, beastly, unmentionable or unexposable, commercialized [sic] and yet forbidden, even dangerous'.¹⁵³ These traits sound as if he could be describing Lord Ruthven in Polidori's tale.

The play that Polidori read aloud to the group was supposedly, according to Hobhouse, one of 'three tragedies' that Polidori composed. These are deemed to be 1) Ximenes, 2) Boadicea - referred to by William Rossetti - and 3) Cajetan, referred to by Polidori. Although many believe that Cajetan was about his father, it is more likely the poem referred to the 15th century Italian Cardinal Thomas Cajetan, especially when considering that the Spanish Cardinal Ximenes (Francisco Ximenes de Cisneros) was Cajetan's contemporary.¹⁵⁴ Only Ximenes has survived, published in 1819. Byron encouraged him to write it,¹⁵⁵ an act which shows that he did support and befriend him initially. And once they left the well-wishers behind and it was just the two of them they clearly had a good relationship. They visited the church at St. Ursula at Cologne together on 9th May 1816, examining the macabre collection of the skulls of over 11,000 martyred virgins, and Byron later bought Polidori a watch (discussed in the next chapter).

It was not until the arrival of the Shelley party several weeks after leaving England that Byron and Polidori had their first falling out (which turned out to be one of many). There are three different versions of what happened, the first via Thomas Moore,¹⁵⁶ which seems the most plausible. In this, Polidori questions Byron as to what he could do that he could not. Byron replies that he could 1) Swim across the river, 2) Snuff

¹⁵² Rossetti, 1911, p.31

¹⁵³ MacDonald, 1991, p.64

¹⁵⁴ Pers. Comm. Professor Owen Davies to the author, Monday 11th November, 2019

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p.60

¹⁵⁶ Thomas Moore *Life of Lord Byron*, (London: John Murray, 1854), p.223

out that candle with a pistol-shot, 3) Sell 14,000 copies of a poem in one day (he actually managed 10,000 with *The Corsair*). The other two explanations involve, respectively, the 'consumption of four bottles of wine and the dup[e] of four women'¹⁵⁷ and the damned good thrashing of Polidori.¹⁵⁸ This was followed, a few days later, by Polidori becoming annoyed at Byron while they were out rowing on the lake, and purposefully striking his leg with the oar. When Byron challenged him, Polidori said 'I am glad to see you can suffer pain', to which Byron responded ominously 'let me advise you Polidori when you another time hurt any one [sic], not to express your satisfaction'.¹⁵⁹

The subsequent chapter deals with their relationship and the time spent at Diodati in much more detail, but the relationship subsequently ended with Polidori's 'sacking', which MacCarthy describes as being a 'painful if inevitable parting' and tells how one final error on Polidori's part was when he was supposed to meet a dinner guest off the boat below Diodati and failed to do so, which 'put Byron in a fury'.¹⁶⁰ It was one mistake too many on Polidori's part, yet Byron held no particular grudge, telling Murray 'I know no great harm of him; but he had an alacrity of getting into scrapes, and was too young and heedless'.¹⁶¹ This shows that the relationship meant more to Polidori than vice versa, and what could have been a relationship that transformed his life and career came to nothing. Less than five years after their parting, Polidori was dead, allegedly taking his own life by drinking prussic acid.¹⁶² Byron wrote of Polidori's obsession with suicide as early as 1816, saying how 'he was always talking of Prussic acid, oil of amber, blowing into veins, suffocating by charcoal, and compounding poisons'.¹⁶³

His death came about from a jig accident, reported in the local press:

¹⁵⁷ Lovell, 1966, p.214-15

¹⁵⁸ Maria Gisborne and Edward E. Williams *Shelley's Friends*, (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), p.122

¹⁵⁹ Moore, 1854, p.278-279

¹⁶⁰ MacCarthy, 2003, p.308

¹⁶¹ 'Byron to John Murray, Letter of November 1st 1816'. Quoted from Prothero, 1898, p.379

¹⁶² MacCarthy, 2003, p.314

¹⁶³ Lovell, 1966, p.104

a melancholy accident happened Sunday evening [14th September, 1821]...As Dr. Polydore [the anglicised form of Polidori] was returning...in a gig...he drove against a tree, upset and broke the gig, and falling on his head, a violent concussion of the brain was the consequence...He remained for several days in an almost senseless state.¹⁶⁴

Polidori was unconscious for four to five days afterwards, something he almost certainly could not recover from. As MacDonald points out, with this length of time unconscious he most likely suffered some form of brain damage.¹⁶⁵ There is not the scope to go into the full details of his death, but although the official verdict was 'Death by the Visitation of God' (most likely to help ease his family's shame) the widespread belief is that he committed suicide. Rieger, one of the few critics to be supportive of Polidori, suggested that through his death 'England lost a religious novelist who, had he fulfilled the promise of *Ernestus Berchtold*, might now hold a place in the nineteenth-century hierarchy slightly above Charlotte Bronte'.¹⁶⁶ This may be rather exaggerating Polidori's potential, but it is worth quickly considering a couple of his literary narratives, *The Vampyre* aside.

The first piece to examine is his University dissertation submitted at Edinburgh. His chosen topic was somnambulism (sleep walking), which Stott describes as a 'self-consciously Gothic phenomenon...that reflects his poetic interest in the moonlit motivations of the mind'.¹⁶⁷ He based his etymological interpretation of the subject on Francois Boissier de Sauvages¹⁶⁸ description of a 'nightmare', from the Greek 'ephialtes' - 'epi' and 'allomai' (to mount on). This was because the sufferer believes that something is mounting his chest and choking him, and is very much akin to folkloric accounts of vampirism (and the incubus / succubus from the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the 15th century 'witch hunters' manual) such as those referenced by Polidori in the Introduction to his *The Vampyre*.

¹⁶⁴ Source: *Norfolk Chronicle and Norwich Gazette*, 20th September, 1817, p.2

¹⁶⁵ MacDonald, 1991, p.153

¹⁶⁶ James Rieger 'Dr Polidori and the Genesis of Frankenstein', in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. III, No.4, *Nineteenth Century*, 1963, p.464

¹⁶⁷ Stott, 2013, p.38

¹⁶⁸ 18th century French physician and botanist

Somnambulism as a concept is similar to that of mesmerism, a theory first written upon by Franz Anton Mesmer in the 1770s.¹⁶⁹ Mesmer's belief was that mechanical laws control both heavenly and animate bodies, and that by manipulating these it is possible to influence people and objects. For example, through this manipulation, which he called 'animal mesmerism', it may be possible to alter the psyche of a person suffering from mental unrest. Through the same process, however, it may also be possible to control a person's actions or feelings, and thus 'the art of healing will reach its final stage of perfection'.¹⁷⁰

Although hugely sensationalised and popular in France, there was no public presence of mesmerism in England for the first forty years of the nineteenth century, and as Kaplan notes, 'most histories of mesmerism in the first half of the nineteenth century are small sections, often only a chapter or two, of works that either attempt to defend and explain or confound and explain'.¹⁷¹

Therefore, it must have been the continental influences that Polidori was drawing upon for his tale. In fact, much of Polidori's knowledge for his dissertation appears to come from his Uncle Luigi's own case studies, which he has submitted to the Royal College of Medical Doctors in London in 1793. This research seemed to suggest that through somnambulism, or the 'vampire-trance', man was not responsible for his actions. Therefore, through using this, the vampire was in effect able to 'control' the mind of his victim. Polidori pondered this further in his dissertation when he wrote 'how are we to believe that we shall come near to grasping the principles of vegetable life, much less those of animal life and of the soul?'.¹⁷² What his vampire tale allowed him to do was to experiment with this thought in a much less factual way than his medical research required of him.

¹⁶⁹ Franz Anton Mesmer *Mémoire Sur la Découverte du Magnétisme Anima*, (Paris: Geneve, 1779)

¹⁷⁰ Fred Kaplan 'The Mesmeric Mania: The Early Victorians and Animal Magnetism' in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1974), pp. 691-702, p.692

¹⁷¹ Ibid. p.692

¹⁷² John William Polidori 'Disputatio Medica Inauguralis', 1815, 1-2, PR 10, N9, R6a, UBC

The discussions Polidori, Shelley and the party had at Diodati in 1816 concerned this thought process, and whether it may be possible to manipulate someone's mental state or thoughts. Polidori continued this thinking by having Ruthven 'mesmerise' his victims via his dead grey eye, in keeping with the nineteenth century process of having male operator and female.¹⁷³ Shelley, on the other hand, wrote his poem *The Magnetic Lady to her patient*, in which he creates a gender role-reversal and has a female mesmerist. The importance of somnambulism to the literary vampire is overtly apparent –in *Varney* Flora Bannerworth sleepwalks into the arms of the vampire, in *Carmilla* she allows the suggestion of sleepwalking to cover her vampiric actions, in *Dracula* Lucy Westenra sleepwalks to the Count in Whitby. How much this is down to Polidori is not easy to know, but there are clear elements of his knowledge within *The Vampyre* and in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, formulated at the same time.

Recent research on the use of somnambulism in Polidori's tale by Anne Stiles argues that through his studies at Edinburgh and his subsequent dissertation, Polidori developed a clear knowledge of sleep-walking and trance states. She further argues that this knowledge, used extensively in *The Vampyre* but also in his tale *Ernestus Berchtold*, had an influence on many later Victorian writers including Mary Shelley, Coleridge, De Quincey, Hogg Collins and others.¹⁷⁴ Whereas mesmerism concerns the ability or actual function of putting a subject into a trance state, somnambulism is the physical trance state itself, brought about by some factor not widely understood at the time. Polidori suspected it was related to brain function, but as to what exactly caused this he was not sure. In his tale, however, it is the vampire Ruthven who is the cause, but he does not mesmerise his victims in the true nature of mesmerism, he is able to do this solely by his stare.

Stiles further suggests that the increased use of somnambulism by subsequent authors may well have been linked to the popularity of the stage adaptations (which

¹⁷³ See Kaplan, 1974, p.695

¹⁷⁴ Anne Stiles, Stanley Finger and John Bulevich 'Somnambulism and Trance States in the Works of John William Polidori, Author of *The Vampyre*' in *European Romantic Review* Vol. 21, No. 6, December 2010, pp.789–807, p.804

I discuss in Chapter Four), something which brought the phenomenon to a wider popular audience. Medical advancements in the latter half of the nineteenth century allowed for a better understanding of brain function and its control over the body which, coupled with the ongoing legacy of *The Vampyre* on the stage, influenced late-nineteenth century offerings such as *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *Dracula*.

By considering some of Polidori's other works it is possible to gain a fuller understanding of his literary knowledge and abilities. For example, in his play *Ximenes* (1819) he wrote in the Preface how 'a young author must in many cases be a plagiarist, his personal experience is limited'.¹⁷⁵ This reads now almost as a disclaimer given that *The Vampyre* was published just a few weeks later. However, *Ximenes* was actually written as early as 1813, before Polidori knew Byron let alone seized upon the vampire concept of *Fragment*. What does seem apparent, based on the setting and plot of the play, is that there are hints of Byron (*Childe Harold*, *The Giaour*) Brochden Brown (*Wieland; or the Transformation*) and perhaps, as MacDonald suggests, elements also of Shakespeare. As he explains 'many of the big speeches are modelled on *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure* - for example "For what is death but sleep, / Whence none can wake?" [from *Ximenes*]'.¹⁷⁶

A more obvious example is apparent in the lines '...what annihilate this very self? / Oh then shall nought remain, but this vile corpse, / And that too food for worms?',¹⁷⁷ which could come straight out of Byron's *The Giaour* - 'But first, on earth as vampire sent, Thy corpse shall from its tomb be rent'.¹⁷⁸ It seems, then, that Polidori (as he openly admits) was quite happy to borrow ideas from other authors to use as inspiration for his own works. The theme of the vampire also seems to appear in his 'An Essay on the Source of Positive Pleasure' (1818) when he talks of 'the hostile horde / Of many-nationed spoilers / Quaff blood and water' and again when Darius

¹⁷⁵ MacDonald, 1991, p.27

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. p.58

¹⁷⁷ *Ximenes*, 100-2, V. vi in *New Monthly Magazine*, II, 1819, p.246

¹⁷⁸ Lord Byron *The Giaour*, 1813, p.252

drinks from a stream 'reddened by...blood...[he had] never drank so pleasant a draught'.¹⁷⁹

The examples from his dissertation, his play and his essay all reflect that the subject of vampirism was not exclusive to his tale *The Vampyre*, although he had written this by the time the latter two were compiled. Nevertheless, he had not published his vampire tale nor, according to him at least, did he intend to. Regardless of whether he did or did not intend to publish that tale, it does not detract from the fact that vampirism was a subject he understood and felt competent enough to write about, even as early as within his dissertation. In fact, it could be that Byron himself was partly influenced by Polidori and Shelley discussing somnambulism at Diodati (discussed in the next chapter) when he composed his *Fragment*.

Ironically, reviews of *Ximenes* were quite positive. The *New Monthly Magazine* reflected upon his depressive mood, saying how 'the melancholy observable in all these [Ximenes, The Wreath, and other Poems] does not seem to have resulted from staidity, but from the consciousness of the insubstantiality of those forms of bliss which sprang up in beautiful succession beneath the wand of the enchantress'.¹⁸⁰ This contradicts what Polidori wrote in the Preface to this work, and suggest the reviewer saw experience and understanding within Polidori as an author. This should have stood his literary career in good stead, but unfortunately *The Vampyre* was published (in Byron's name) in the very same edition of the *New Monthly*. Opinion is still divided as to *The Vampyre's* worth, with MacDonald calling it 'brief and mediocre'¹⁸¹ yet Erik Butler felt it was such a success that it may have been the cause of Polidori's eventual suicide.¹⁸² The publication and reception of *The Vampyre* is discussed in much more detail in my Chapter Three.

¹⁷⁹ John William Polidori 'An Essay on the Source of Positive Pleasure' (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1818), p.13

¹⁸⁰ *New Monthly Magazine*, II, 1819, p.246-47

¹⁸¹ MacDonald, 1991, p.ix

¹⁸² Erik Butler *Metamorphoses of the vampire in literature and film: Cultural transformations in Europe*, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), p.85

Byron, Caroline Lamb & Biographical Writing

Polidori was not the first person to use Byron as an inspiration for a literary work. Caroline Lamb, who had a brief but tempestuous affair with Byron in 1812, used a thinly disguised portrayal of the poet in her novel *Glenarvon* (1816) as inspiration for her character Lord Ruthven. And when Byron received a copy of the novel during his time at Diodati, he read the novel aloud to Polidori¹⁸³ (who would later adopt Ruthven as his own thinly disguised Byron character). This use of biographical writing by both authors (and the adoption of two separate characters with the same name, based on the same real-life person) enabled them to ensure their characters were recognised by their audience by reflecting traits already known to society.

Conkle suggests that the use of biographical writing as a practice aims to give the reader an insight into the character of the subject.¹⁸⁴ Caroline Lamb did this to great effect in *Glenarvon*, in which she gave her readers a very personal insight into the character of Lord Byron, based on her own experiences of him. By using real-life events and weaving these into her semi-fictional account, she gave readers the opportunity of experiencing some of Byron's real-life character traits for themselves. For example, when she wrote (fictionally) of the letter sent by Glenarvon (Byron) to Lady Avondale (Lamb) in which it stated he was 'no longer her lover' and 'was attached to another'.¹⁸⁵ This incident is based on the letter Byron sent to Lamb stating exactly the same, and his letter was sealed with the coronet and initials of Lady Oxford.¹⁸⁶ By publicly revealing this act, Lamb was attempting to show Byron's cruel and heartless persona in an overtly obvious act of revenge. Despite the many similar revelatory references to their relationship and the personality of Byron, he

¹⁸³ MacDonald, 1991, p.96

¹⁸⁴ E. P. Conkle 'Writing a Biography', in *The English Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 8, Oct., 1926, p.621 suggests that 'the aim of our biography is to interpret and reveal character by recounting interesting acts and speeches of the subject that we have got first hand or have heard about. [So] when the reader has finished, he should have left in his mind not only the dead facts about his subject, but also a vital impression of what kind of person the subject really is'.

¹⁸⁵ Lady Caroline Lamb *Glenarvon*, (London: Orion Publishing, 1995), p.281

¹⁸⁶ Marchand, 1987, p.136

himself casually dismissed it, claiming the picture could not have been good, as he did not sit long enough.¹⁸⁷

The use of this picture or 'mirror effect' is a useful tool, as it is suggestive that all is not always as it seems. Later popular works also use this effect, for instance, Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), or Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). Indeed, the portrait is widely used within Gothic literature to convey elements of the supernatural and to portray the horror of when seemingly innocuous objects become real and terrifying, something Freud describes as 'the uncanny'.¹⁸⁸ Horace Walpole used this imagery in his *Castle of Otranto* (1764) when he had the portrait of Manfred's grandfather come to life and 'descend on the floor with a grave and melancholy air'.¹⁸⁹

It also has the modern reader connect with the notion that the vampire has no reflection – 'He make in the mirror no reflect'¹⁹⁰, most obviously witnessed in *Dracula*. Although much later, it shows that the idea of 'distorted reflection' has its foundation within the early literature, and here Byron is inadvertently likening himself to this. The Gothic obsession with haunting portraiture is vividly encapsulated in Henry Fuseli's painting *The Nightmare*, created at the cusp of the Romantic period, an image that Frayling believes 'made real and visible to us the vague and insubstantial phantoms which haunt like dim dreams the oppressed imagination'.¹⁹¹

On the surface, Byron's suggestion of how 'the picture could not have been good' simply suggests that he was not involved long enough for Lamb to fully understand

¹⁸⁷ Lord Byron, Letter dated December 5th 1817, in *Letters & Journals*, Vol. IV, (London: John Murray, 1973), p.12.

¹⁸⁸ See Sigmund Freud *The Uncanny*, (London: Penguin Books, 2003)

¹⁸⁹ Horace Walpole *The Castle of Otranto*, (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p.24-25

¹⁹⁰ For a discussion on the use of the vampire's reflection (or lack of), see Sam George 'He make in the mirror no reflect': undead aesthetics and mechanical reproduction – *Dorian Gray, Dracula* and David Reed's 'vampire painting', in Sam George & Bill Hughes (eds) *Open Graves, Open Minds: Representations of vampires and the Undead from the Enlightenment to the present day*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp.56-78

¹⁹¹ Christopher Frayling *Nightmare: The Birth of Horror*, (London: BBC Books, 1996), p.6

him, and yet like the examples cited above it can also be viewed in such a way as to hint that what appears on the surface is not always as it seems. Polidori subsequently portrayed this by casting his vampire as an ordinary person and yet with a fatal alter ego, or doppelganger, and this is how Byron came to see himself after his failed marriage, reflected in his works of this period (*Fragment, Manfred, Canto III of Childe Harold*). For instance, Manfred is cursed to exist within ‘the burning wreck of a demolish'd world, A wandering hell in the eternal space; By the strong curse which is upon my soul, The thought which is within me and around me’,¹⁹² and this reflects how Byron was then seeing his own existence.¹⁹³

Returning to Conkle’s perspective of how biographical writing can give insights into a person’s character, links can be made to both Polidori’s novella and Lamb’s novel, and it is critical for the development of the literary vampire that both chose to depict Byron as a vampiric figure. As Lamb’s novel came first, it is possible that Polidori was influenced by her novel enough to adopt not just the name (Ruthven) but many of the traits evident in her main character. This appears to suggest that upon reading her novel, or rather hearing it from Byron’s lips as he read it out loud to him at Diodati,¹⁹⁴ Polidori saw elements in her ‘fictional’ character that he also saw in the real-life muse. The fact that both depicted their Ruthven character as preying on women, as having the ability to almost mesmerise them into straying into his destructive web, and ultimately devouring them (metaphorically in Lamb’s case) suggests that they both saw these traits in Byron, to the extreme whereby they realised others would see this too.¹⁹⁵ Indeed, even Byron’s close friend John Cam Hobhouse wrote how ‘the hero [of *Glenarvon*] is a monster and meant for B[yron]’.¹⁹⁶ This tells us much about how Byron’s personality and character were

¹⁹² Lord Byron *Manfred*, Act I, Scene I, p.381

¹⁹³ Conkle, 1926, p.620, reflects exactly this point when he argued that ‘the best sort of biography is of someone the writer knows intimately’ and ‘should not be so much to set forth the events of the subject’s life for their own sake, as to show how they have been influential in forming his character’

¹⁹⁴ MacDonald, 1991, p.96

¹⁹⁵ Polidori was especially familiar with the notion of ‘mesmerism’, as his dissertation topic for his medical degree at Edinburgh was on somnambulism, or sleep-walking, and from his *Diary* we know he was discussing the principles of this during the Diodati period (see entry for June 5th, for example)

¹⁹⁶ quoted from Leslie A. Marchand *Byron: A Biography*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), Vol. II, p.615

perceived in the period, largely due to his affairs, his supposed relationship with his sister, and his failed marriage

The public would have known only too well of Byron's ability to instil desire and lasciviousness in the women who met him, but that this was a dangerous liaison is evident through the rumours of incestuous intercourse with his half-sister Augusta; anyone could become prey to Byron, even his family members.¹⁹⁷ This also mirrors the early vampire of the seventeenth century accounts, who returned to plague family members. The dangers of becoming too close to Byron, and the destruction this caused, is poignantly depicted in a satirical piece written by Claire Claremont in November 1820, in which she detailed how one might become a 'pathetic poet':

1st. Prepare a small colony, then dispatch the Mother, by worrying & cruelty, to her grave; afterwards to neglect & illtreat the children - to have as many & as dirty mistresses as can be found; from their embraces to catch horrible diseases, thus a tolerable quantity of discontent and remorse being prepared, to give it vent on paper, & to remember particularly to rail against learned women. This is my infallible receipt by which I have made so much money.¹⁹⁸

This shows how Claire, and the wider public no doubt, viewed Byron and his lifestyle, regardless of whether or not it was accurate. His very public behaviour, his affairs, his treatment of others, all added up to turn him into a very notorious rake, and Byron did little to remedy the situation through his poetry:

Whilome in Albion's isle there dwelt a youth,
Who ne in virtue's ways did take delight;

¹⁹⁷ Although this accusation is constantly levelled at Byron, and is seen as one of the reasons for his image publicly declining in the period leading up to his exile in 1816, incest was a familiar part of Georgian society. As Carolly Erickson points out in *Our Tempestuous Day: A History of Regency England*, (London: Robson Books, 2008. p.8) King George III's son Ernest, Duke of Cumberland, was involved in sexual relations with his sister Sophia

¹⁹⁸ Marion Kingston Stocking (ed) *The Journals of Claire Claremont*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), p.183-84

But spent his days in riot most uncouth,
And vex'd with mirth the drowsy ear of Night.
Ah me! In sooth he was a shameless wight,
Sore given to revel and ungodly glee;
Few earthly things found favour in his sight
Save concubines and carnal companie,
And flaunting wassailers of high and low degree.¹⁹⁹

Even in self-imposed exile, the British public saw how Byron was living through his poetry, and this did nothing to help reinstate his position within English society, as the following contemporary depiction of him shows:

And this is The Devil, to bring up the rear,
By mischief disguised in the dress of a Peer. -
Pursue the old method, you'll find out the cheat,
And the Imp stand confessed, if you look at his feet,
Distortion of Nature's the taste of the age, -
Make a Story obscene, - 'twill be read ev'ry page,
His verses so sweet and harmonious appear,
The mind is corrupted while tickling the ear.²⁰⁰

The biographer's task, then, is to 'make the subject live in the reader's mind as real a person as he lives in the writer's mind'.²⁰¹ That is, not to appear to the reader as they truly are, but how the writer wishes them to be. Through biography, Byron was being fictionalised, yet the question is to what extent that fictionalisation veered from the reality. This is an area that will be developed further within the following chapters.

¹⁹⁹ Lord Byron *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto the First, (London: John Murray, 1812), Verse II, lines x-xviii

²⁰⁰ *The Dorchester Guide, or a house that Jack Built*, Unknown author, 1819, p. 31. British Library C.131.d.9.(2.)

²⁰¹ Conkle. p 620

In Byron's works, he often appeared to be writing of his own life and experiences. And yet he also attempted to distance himself, for example claiming he did not sit long enough for Lamb's portrait of him to be true, and that he knew little of vampires when Polidori's novella was released, despite several references to them in his own works. This can most notably be found in *The Giaour* (1813): 'But first, on earth as Vampire sent, / Thy corpse shall from its tomb be rent: / Then ghastly haunt thy native place, / And suck the blood of all thy race';²⁰² and again later in the same poem 'But he is dead! Within the dell / I saw him buried where he fell; / He comes not, for he cannot break / From earth...'.²⁰³ Byron was still using the vampiric image several years later in the final canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (published 1818) - 'We wither from our youth, we gasp away - / Sick - sick; unfound the boon, unslaked the thirst, / Though to the last, in verge of our decay, / Some phantom lures, such as we sought at first, / But all too late - so we are doubly curst'.²⁰⁴ These examples suffice to show that Byron's audience already knew of his use of the vampire image within his poetry, and would have helped connect him to Polidori's novella upon publication in April 1819.

Linda Merricks suggests that biographical writing creates 'a peculiar branch of history which obeys its own rules'.²⁰⁵ This certainly fits Lamb's version of Byron, especially when she writes how 'the whole country are after him...it's a rage, a fashion'²⁰⁶ reflecting English society's warped vision of Byron's elevated status during the height of his popularity.²⁰⁷ And as David Higgins has noted, 'in early nineteenth-century Britain, there was an unprecedented interest among writers and readers in the subject of genius and, in particular, in examining and discussing

²⁰² Lord Byron *The Giaour*, 1813, p.252

²⁰³ Lord Byron *The Giaour*, 1813, p.257

²⁰⁴ Lord Byron *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto IV, (London, John Murray, 1818), Verse cxxxiv

²⁰⁵ Linda Merricks 'An Invisible Man: On Writing Biography' in *History Workshop*, No. 37 (Spring, 1994), p.194

²⁰⁶ Lamb, 1995, p.111

²⁰⁷ For a fuller discussion on this, see Philip W. Marten *Byron: a poet before his public*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982)

personal characteristics and life histories of 'great men'.²⁰⁸ Due to this obsession, Byron was 'celebrated not for his position or his poetic ability so much as for his literary display of himself'²⁰⁹ and it was this portrayal that both fascinated, yet shocked. As a contemporary piece in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* informed us 'there can be no radical distinction between the private and public character of a poet. If a poet sympathizes with and justifies wickedness in his poetry, he is a wicked man'.²¹⁰ Despite this, knowing a man through the image he portrays of himself voluntarily is still not the same as knowing him through personal experience. For example, the literary version of himself that Byron creates within his poetry is simply a caricature and must not be read as a true reflection of his actual character. This must also be applied to the versions of him created by Polidori and Lamb, then. Nevertheless, those literary versions do reflect how others *perceived* him to be.

Byron's view of himself in 1816 is evident through his literary depictions, notably *Manfred* and Canto III of *Childe Harold*. Whether or not Byron was casting himself as the 'Byronic hero' of these works is unclear, but nevertheless they do offer an insight into his current frame of mind.²¹¹ Through his failed marriage, his over indulgence of alcohol and his self-imposed exile due to the public perception of him amongst allegations of incest, Byron became disillusioned and melancholic. The first part of *Manfred* was written at the Villa Diodati, and like Byron, Manfred is a haunted soul, melancholic to the point of suicide, yet too tortured to fulfil the act:

I feel the impulse – yet I do not plunge,
I see the peril – yet do not recede,
And my brain reels – and yet my foot is firm:
There is a power upon me which withholds,

²⁰⁸ David Higgins *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity and Politics*, (London: Routledge, 2005) p.1

²⁰⁹ Leo Braudy *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and its History*, (New York: Vintage, 1997) p.401

²¹⁰ *On the Cockney School of Poetry, No. III* in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, July 1818, p.454

²¹¹ Andrew Elfenbein dedicates a whole chapter to this subject in his book *Byron and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), suggesting that instead of wondering to what extent Byron cast himself as his characters, we should instead question why his public so readily accepted these versions of a person they did not personally know

And makes it my fatality to live.²¹²

Through *Manfred* we have a glimpse of how Byron saw himself in the period in which Polidori knew him, a distorted version of him that was used as a basis for Lord Ruthven. That 'fatality to live' has become the vampire's curse, and is evident in Rymer's *Varney the Vampire* (1847), Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) and, to an extent, even in Meyer's *Twilight* (2005).

Caroly Erickson has suggested that Byron 'succumbed to the strain of his divided self'²¹³ and Byron himself referred to this 'division' or doubling when he wrote how he was 'such a strange mélange of good and evil, that it would be difficult to describe me'.²¹⁴ Within *Manfred*, we can see further evidence of Byron's notion of him being torn between good and evil, when the Abbot tries to save Manfred's soul, saying how it is never too late to

reconcile thyself with thy own soul,
And thy own soul with heaven...
Even those who do despair above,
Yet shape themselves some fantasy on earth,
To which frail twig they cling,
Like drowning men.²¹⁵

This appears to show Byron is wrestling with his conscience and imploring that he has good within him. It is also worth noting that the final line in this piece, which makes reference to a drowning man clinging to a twig, appears to be a reference to the comment he made on Polidori, saying he was the sort of person who one would

²¹² Ibid. p.383

²¹³ Erickson, 2000, p.234

²¹⁴ Leslie A. Marchand (Ed) *Byron's Letters and Journals*, (London: John Murray, 1977), Vol. V, p.162

²¹⁵ Byron, *Manfred*, Act III, Scene I, p.392

like to test the old adage about 'drowning men clinging to straws' upon.²¹⁶ Perhaps Byron was parodying Polidori here, and if so there may well be a link between him and the character of Manfred, and this would be worth further exploration.

Also in *Manfred*, there is a phrase that suggests Byron himself feels he is vampiric, when Manfred says that 'I have lived many years, Many long years, but they are nothing now, To those which I must number; ages – ages – Space and eternity - and consciousness, With the fierce thirst of death – and still unslaked!'²¹⁷ Prophetically, this was written in the period after Polidori had cast Byron as the vampire Ruthven, but before *The Vampyre* had been published. As Martin²¹⁸ has shown, much of Byron's poetry is about creating fantasies, but importantly fantasies that his public could believe in. Crucially for our 'Byron as vampire' perspective, these fantasies 'are not self-sufficient, but require the reinforcement provided by the public's willingness to participate in them. What Byron includes in these fantasies, therefore, is governed by what his audience is prepared to believe about him'.²¹⁹ Therefore, for Polidori's novella to have any ounce of success, the reading public needed to have believed in the notion that Byron could be the vampire, again a point that attests to how his image (real or not) was actually perceived.

²¹⁶ Moore, 1830, p.29

²¹⁷ Byron, *Manfred*, Act II, Scene I, p. 385

²¹⁸ Philip W. Martin *Byron: a poet before his public*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982)

²¹⁹ *Ibid.* p3



Figure 8: Scene from Byron's *Manfred*, showing the landscape of the Jungfrau. Illustration by W.H. Bartlett, 1836.
(Source: Public Domain)

With Lamb's novel, there are elements of the vampiric within the text, especially the vampire ability of mind control - 'I cannot utter my thanks...Generous Glenarvon! God reward you for it, and bless you',²²⁰ so says Lady Margaret upon Calantha's return, even though it was Ruthven she had left for. This reflects the power over women that Ruthven has. And through the quote mentioned above - 'the whole country are after him [Glenarvon]...it's a rage, a fashion',²²¹ Lamb shows how much 'Byron mania' was affecting society, but also shows how he brings a plague with him, 'a pestilence which has fallen on the land, and all, it's my belief, because the stripling has not one Christian principle, or habit in him: he's a heathen'.²²² This seems to be a reference to Byron and his lack of Christian morals. A final reference, and one that is overtly linked to Byron and indeed appears very vampiric, relates to the skull cup –

²²⁰ Ibid. p.263

²²¹ Ibid. p.111

²²² Ibid. p.112

'it is here...in this chamber, that John de Ruthven drank hot blood from the skull of his enemy'.²²³

Lamb also includes a very Byronic verse from Calantha to Glenarvon, when she says how:

I have linked my soul to yours;
I love you in defiance of myself:
I know it to be guilt,
And to be death;
But it must be.
We follow the dark destiny that involves us:
We cannot escape from fate.²²⁴

This verse could almost be lifted out of Byron's *Manfred*, and again is very vampiric in its overtones, echoing the fatal curse that befalls those drawn to the vampire's power. Lamb summarises her affair with Byron by having Calantha do the same of Glenarvon, suggesting that women are like toys to the vampire seducer:

That which causes the tragic end of a woman's life, is often but a moment of amusement and folly in the history of man. Women, like toys, are sought after, and trifled with, and then thrown.²²⁵

Using biography to cast her real-life affairs was a bold and calculated risk. Unfortunately for Lamb, it was massively miscalculated. Lamb's intention was to cast Byron as the oppressor, and show it was her who was victim. Sadly, for Lamb, she failed:

²²³ Ibid. p.123. This quote is a reference to the human skull that Byron's gardener found in the grounds of his ancestral home of Newstead Abbey in Nottinghamshire in 1808. Byron sent the skull to a local jeweller in Nottingham and had it mounted as a cup, at a cost of £17 17s (Marchand, 1987, p.55). Byron, along with Hobhouse, Matthews and Webster, would often sit up 'drinking burgundy, claret, champagne and what not, out of the skull-cup' (Marchand, 1987, p.58)

²²⁴ Lamb, 1995, p.220

²²⁵ Ibid. p.284

[Although] the identification made between Byron and Childe Harold was the source of Byron's success, the possible relation of Lamb to Calantha...was seen as cheapening the tone of *Glenarvon*.²²⁶

This is because of the content, one could argue, that Byron was romanticizing his masculine capabilities of desire and exploration, whereas Lamb went against the accepted constraints of society with her very feminine 'kiss-and-tell'. By reading novels, women were allowing themselves to be drawn into a fantasy world and this was discouraged;²²⁷ therefore *writing* novels (let alone a semi-biographical one) was simply too much. And so, Lamb's attempt at revenge backfired, and in a cruel twist of fate, so did Polidori's, as his novel was incorrectly attributed to the pen of Byron.²²⁸

Although Byron has a reputation for being a rake and is attributed to having numerous affairs, Louis Crompton has noted that Caroline Lamb was his first *grande affaire*. Before this (the affair started in 1812) Byron's love interests amounted to servants and prostitutes.²²⁹ *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (Cantos I and II), the poem that made Byron famous, had just been released and the affair with Lamb was passionate, risqué and full of solicited danger. But the relationship soon broke down, not least due to Byron becoming annoyed by Lamb flaunting their relationship, her mood swings and temper tantrums.

After Byron separated from Lady Byron, in 1816, Lamb allegedly went to her and told her that Byron had once confessed to having homosexual relationships. It is impossible to know for sure the accuracy of the statement, as the only evidence is a second hand account recorded by Lady Byron, but the claims made by Lamb detailed

²²⁶ Frances Wilson, *Introduction to Glenarvon*, (London: J. M. Dent, 1995), p. xxv

²²⁷ Wilson, p.xxii

²²⁸ This false attribution and the fall-outs from it will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapter that explores *Fragment* and *The Vampyre*

²²⁹ Louis Crompton *Byron and Greek Love: Homophobia in 19th Century England*, (Swaffham: GMP, 1998), p.197

Byron's confession of an 'unnatural crime' with his page Rushton who he 'loved so much that he was determined Ly C- L- should call her page Rushton', and that he had also 'perverted' three schoolfellows. Lamb also told Lady Byron that he had 'practised it unrestrictedly in Turkey'.²³⁰

Again, it is impossible to conclusively say whether this account is indeed true, but there are clues that it may well be. After her affair with Byron ended Lamb gained access to Byron's rooms while he was not there and wrote the phrase 'Remember me!' in his copy of Beckford's *Vathek*. Beckford had been involved in homosexual relations that saw him exiled from the country in 1784. This act by Lamb appears to be a coded threat on her part, suggesting she would reveal Byron's secret. His response was to write the following poem, using Lamb's own phrase for the title:

Remember thee! Remember thee!
Till Lethe quench life's burning stream
Remore and shame shall cling to thee,
And haunt thee like a feverish dream!

Remember thee! Ay, doubt it not,
Thy husband too shall think of thee!
By neither shalt thou be forgot,
Thou *false* to him, thou *fiend* to me!²³¹

Here Byron is reminding Lamb that she was married when the two had their affair, and she had been 'false to him', her husband. This shows Byron could be equally threatening and reflects a side to him not often seen, but a side rather characteristic of Ruthven. His fear of Lamb (and more especially her knowledge, it seems) is made clear in his letter to her of April 1813 in which he wrote 'I am not ignorant of the very

²³⁰ extracts from the letter by Lady Byron are quoted from Moore, 2011, p.242-244

²³¹ Lord Byron *Remember Thee! Remember Thee!* (1813), p.67

extraordinary language you have held not only to me but others - & your avowal of your determination to obtain what you are pleased to call "revenge".²³²

Returning to the suggestion that Byron told Lamb of his homosexual relations, it is widely known that at some point in their relationship Lamb took to dressing as her page. Although often suggested that this was adopted as a disguise,²³³ it is tempting to suggest that this guise was rather part of an erotic act on Lamb's part in order to make her affair with Byron even more of a thrill. Byron also, according to Lady Byron, threatened Lamb and 'thrice obliged her to take the most solemn vow never to reveal'.²³⁴ These two elements of the story, the dressing as a page and the use of the oath, both appear within Polidori's *The Vampyre*, and one then wonders if they are themselves coded messages on Polidori's part. This suggestion is further supported when considering that Ruthven has Aubrey swear not to reveal his secret even when he is about to marry, and perhaps this reflects Byron's threat to Lamb as he was about to marry Anabella Milbanke (Lady Byron). That Byron read *Glenarvon* aloud to Polidori at the Diodati suggests he may well have discussed these incidents with him at the time. This has to remain speculative given the lack of further evidence, but is an area worth further research.

The period after his affair with Lamb, and leading up to his marriage to Annabella Milbanke, saw the composition and publication of Byron's 'Oriental Tales', namely *The Giaour* (1813), *The Bride of Abydos* (1814), *The Corsair* (1814) and *Lara* (1814). Although sensational at the time, and the works that helped solidify in the public image the 'Byronic hero' of *Childe Harold*, they are 'rarely read or admired now'.²³⁵ Crompton suggests these tales acted as 'emotional therapy' for Byron that allowed him to recover from the Lamb affair and also come to terms with his incestuous relationship with his sister, Augusta.²³⁶ Although *The Bride of Abydos* and *Lara* both

²³² Letter of April 1813, Marchand, 1973, p.43

²³³ for example, see R.C. Dallas *Correspondence of Lord Byron with a Friend*, (Paris: Galignani, 1825), Vol. III, p.41-42

²³⁴ Moore, 2011, p.244

²³⁵ Crompton, 1998, p.205

²³⁶ Ibid. p.205-207

hint at incestuous relationships, it is *The Giaour* that best reflects Byron's struggle with his self-damnation, and its vampiric references are extremely poignant in casting him, with hindsight, as Polidori's Ruthven of 1816.

As is evident through this chapter, the public perception of Byron in 1816 was largely one created by allegations of incest, his failed marriage and his high-profile affair with Caroline Lamb. Byron felt it necessary to leave the shores of England, which may well have confirmed his guilt in these allegations for the public. Through their education, both men clearly had classical knowledge of vampire-type beings, as well as through the folkloric tales that depicted the undead rising from their graves. Caroline Lamb's novel, that depicted the rather vampiric figure of Ruthven, further cemented the notion of Byron's predatory character in the public eye.

Byron's decision to take Polidori as his travelling companion in 1816, rather than Hobhouse with whom he travelled previously, created the opportunity for Polidori himself to assess the character and actions of Byron alongside the image currently in the public arena. The following chapter explores the relationship that Byron and Polidori had in the period April – September 1816, largely spent at the Villa Diodati on Lake Geneva, and how this relationship impacted upon Polidori's version of *The Vampyre*.

CHAPTER TWO

The 'Summer of Discontent': Byron and Polidori in Geneva (April-October 1816)

With Byron leaving the shores of England in April 1816, it created a period for him to recover from the many high-profile allegations that had been levelled at him, true or otherwise. His health had declined after his separation from Lady Byron, and taking Polidori with him as his personal physician allowed both a medical doctor and travelling companion to be alongside him. This chapter explores the time spent on Lake Geneva in the summer of 1816, the developing relationship between the two men and how this changed after the arrival of the Shelley party.

This summer is now one of the most infamous episodes in English literary history, the so-called 'Summer of Discontent'. It is this period and the events that occurred there that created two of the most influential Gothic novels of the nineteenth century, eclipsed only by *Dracula*. Of the two, only Mary Shelley's narrative, *Frankenstein*, is widely remembered. Polidori's novella, *The Vampyre*, is much less well known, although its influence has had a similar impact, creating, as I argue throughout this thesis, the image of the modern vampire. Nevertheless, his tale remains unknown to all but a small section of literary scholars and students, and those interested in the vampire genre.

The tales were a product of the 'ghost story writing' challenge, allegedly instigated by Byron, that took place in June. It was Byron who created the foundations for Polidori's tale in his discarded narrative simply titled *Fragment* (and later published with *Mazeppa* in 1819). As I argue within the thesis, Polidori's version is based on his relationship with Byron during the five months he spent with him in that summer of 1816.

Byron first met Polidori in late March 1816. In the weeks leading up to his self-imposed exile, Byron had been unwell – he had been drinking heavily and was depressed - and was still not in the best of health. He had decided to take a personal physician with him when he left England and Polidori was recommended to him by Sir William Knighton (who had previously treated Byron) – ‘B. talks of taking a young Physician recommended to him by Sir W. Knighton as a travelling companion’.²³⁷ Unsurprisingly, Hobhouse did not like him: ‘Byron is going abroad, and takes a young Dr. Polidori with him’, and then ‘I don’t like his ori, and told him so. He [Byron] agrees, but says it is inevitable’.²³⁸

The late Peter Cochran, one of the country’s leading Byron experts, suggested this may be a reference to Hobhouse not liking Polidori’s orifice (ie. his mouth?), or a play on the word ‘houris’.²³⁹ He wonders if this may be a coded message reflecting Hobhouse’s distaste or jealousy that Byron was taking his own ‘dark-eyed virgin’ with him on his trip. In the previous chapter, I discussed the possibility that Byron may have initially been attracted to Polidori, as he fit the general characteristics that Byron had historically been drawn to.

Hobhouse felt the need to comment on Polidori again on 17th April, describing him as ‘an odd dog’.²⁴⁰ Again, Cochran has argued this is a coded reference to Polidori being homosexual. As becomes obvious in his infatuation with Mary Shelley, discussed later in this chapter, this is not the case.

In the first part of the Byron / Polidori relationship, things seem to have been amicable and, on the whole, rather calm, with none of the incidents (or scrapes as Byron later referred to them) that Polidori found himself in later on, notably after the Shelley party arrived at Geneva. Thomas Moore wrote how Polidori seemed to

²³⁷ Letter from Leigh Hunt to Francis Hodgson, 28th March, 1816, quoted from Malcolm Elwin, *Lord Byron’s Wife*, (London: MacDonald & Co, 1962), p.461

²³⁸ Entry of Thursday 28th March, 1816. John Cam Hobhouse *Diary*, Edited by Peter Cochran, 2009, p. 69. Available online at: <https://petercochran.wordpress.com/hobhouses-diary/> (Accessed 3/4/16).

²³⁹ An houri is an Islamic maiden (virgin) that accompanies the blessed to paradise: ‘Yes and we shall wed them to dark-eyed houris (beautiful virgins)’, Quran: (44:51-55)

²⁴⁰ Wednesday 17th April. Hobhouse *Diary*, 2009, p.80

have 'alternately provoked and amused his noble employer'²⁴¹ and that is also the feeling that is created by reading Polidori's diary. There is a clear downturn in the relationship from the moment Shelley arrives. This is almost certainly jealousy on Polidori's part. Up to that point, he had Byron largely to himself. But from the end of May onwards, he had one of the most talented poets of the age to contest for Byron's attention with. There are several examples of Polidori falling out with Shelley, and Byron spent increasingly more time with Shelley during this period. Polidori, instead, spent his time with Mary, and may well have helped shape the early foundations of her novel, *Frankenstein*, though of course he is not credited as such.

As might be expected given the parties involved, the Diodati summer was a hugely creative one, with Byron writing several poems and another Canto of *Childe Harold*, the two novels by Mary and Polidori, plus Shelley creating further works of his own. And yet, the widely accepted chain of events that led to all this creation omits Polidori's role and dismisses him as a 'vain and flighty' nuisance that disrupted the ambience of the period. Not all see it this way however, myself included, and in this chapter I shall put forward my own version of events and stress the importance of all five members present that summer.

Christopher Frayling has previously argued that the Diodati period created an 'atmosphere and a legend, both of which have clouded all subsequent accounts of the genesis of the vampire in modern literature'.²⁴² The infamy of the Diodati period has seen all manner of false claims and distorted versions of events be put forward, not least from Mary Shelley herself. One of the key episodes is undoubtedly the ghost story writing, and yet Mary's version of how it transpired is very different from Polidori's (who wrote of it contemporaneously in his *Diary*). This has, to use Frayling's phrase, 'clouded' the events that saw the most influential vampire tale in history be created. James Rieger, in his attempts to exonerate Polidori, argued that

²⁴¹ Thomas Moore *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, Vol. II (London: John Murray, 1830) p.27

²⁴² Christopher Frayling *Vampyres: Lord Byron to Count Dracula*, (London, 1991), p.16

the received history of events of the Diodati ghost-writing are 'an almost total fabrication'.²⁴³ Even the actual concept of the ghost story writing was influential in itself, with Stoker in his working notes for *Dracula* outlining a dinner party where thirteen guests would each tell something strange.²⁴⁴ The result of Stoker's plot was to be the 'vampire' appearing, and although this was not included in his novel, it reflects Polidori's own vampire appearing from the ghost writing episode at Diodati.

The period at Diodati is one of the most unique events in literary history. Without it, we would never have had Canto III of *Childe Harold* (at least, not in the form it is in), which solidified the Byronic Hero, nor *Frankenstein*, nor indeed, it is possible to argue, *Dracula*. Byron would have recognised the irony in the fact that so much creation then led to tragedy, much like in the ancient tales of Greece he was so inspired from. As Hobhouse rather reflectingly wrote, 'of the five that often dined at Byron's table at Diodati near Geneva - Polidori - Shelley - Lord Byron - Scrope Davies & myself - the first put an end to himself - the second was drowned - the third killed himself by his physicians - the fourth is in exile - !!!'.²⁴⁵ Of those that made such important contributions to literature during the Diodati period, only Mary survived beyond the tenth anniversary of the summer of 1816.

The Diodati Summer

We owe much of our knowledge of the Diodati period to Polidori's *Diary*, which was edited and published in 1911 by Polidori's nephew William Rossetti. Until that point, Mary Shelley's version of events was the only published version, and Rossetti's publication helped to show that much of what she wrote was false. In the Introduction to his edited version, Rossetti tells how he first came into contact with the diary in 1869, when he was working on his *Memoir of Shelley* (published 1870).

²⁴³ James Rieger 'Dr Polidori and the Genesis of *Frankenstein*', in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. III, No.4, *Nineteenth Century*, 1963, pp.461-472, p.461

²⁴⁴ Frayling, 1991, p.306

²⁴⁵ July 15th, 1824. Hobhouse *Diary*, 2009, p.100

The diary was then in the ownership of Charlotte Polidori (Polidori's sister and Rossetti's aunt). Having read the diary, Charlotte Polidori decided to copy it out but sadly omitted some of the incidents she deemed too 'improper', and then destroyed the original. One of these incidents was the one with Byron and the chambermaid, which Rossetti claimed he could recall from memory, having apparently read the original before it was destroyed. The occasion goes that Byron, upon reaching his hotel, 'fell like a thunderbolt upon the chambermaid'.²⁴⁶ This links back to the point discussed in Chapter One of it being accepted that men from the higher ranks of society could treat women in this way during the period – an act, as stressed, that is overtly vampiric in its action. A second example supposedly involved Polidori himself, but Rossetti provides no further information. Rossetti subsequently inherited the copied diary after Charlotte's death in 1890 - 'its authority is only a shade less safe than that of the original'.²⁴⁷

Byron's plans for the journey are preserved on a scrap of paper he wrote them down on, dated 14th April 1816, alongside the party intended to travel: 'Servants,—Berger, a Swiss, William Fletcher, and Robert Rushton.—John William Polidori, M.D.—Switzerland, Flanders, Italy, and (perhaps) France.'²⁴⁸ As they waited to sail in Falmouth, Polidori decided to read one of the plays he had been working on aloud to the party, as mentioned earlier. Alongside himself and Byron were Scrope Davies and Hobhouse, both of whom had travelled down to bid Byron farewell. Delivering the play Polidori was met with ridicule and laughter. Not dissuaded, he later wrote in his diary that it must have been the way in which he read it, rather than the material itself, as one of the party picked it up and read some of it, and the whole party received it well. Recently, Stott has argued that this was Scrope Davies, although he does not say why he believes this. It is much more likely that this was Byron, as I argued in Chapter One, feeling sorry for Polidori. There are other occasions when this happens, and his general attitude towards Polidori is defensive on the whole, at least in this early part of their relationship.

²⁴⁶ William Rossetti (ed) *The Diary of Dr. John William Polidori, 1816, Relating to Byron, Shelley, Etc.*, (1911, London: Elkin Matthews), p.33

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.10-11

²⁴⁸ Moore, 1830, p.670

On 28th April, Polidori wrote in his diary that 'Murray offered me £150 for two plays, and £500 for my tour'.²⁴⁹ This is the entry that backs up claims that Polidori made as to John Murray asking him to complete a journal of his time with Byron and that he would pay £500 for it. Whether this is true, or is a fabrication on Polidori's part remains unknown, although the fact it was never given to Murray, nor published until almost one hundred years after his death suggests it not to be true, which then begs the question why Polidori wrote it in his *Diary*. Their journey to Diodati saw the two visit several sites of interest, including St. Ursula's Church, Cologne, where they were shown 'virgin's skulls of ninety years old, male and female...a whole room bedecked with them...some in the heads of silver-faced busts, some arranged in little cells with velvet cases'.²⁵⁰ Three days earlier, at Tirlmont, Polidori noted how 'Saints and sinners under the red canopy were alike in the streets', such were the places they visited.²⁵¹

They arrived at Sécheron on May 25th, and Byron recorded his age, rather vampirically, as one hundred in the inn's guest book. Searching for a house to rent, they found the Villa Diodati, although it was unavailable, being already leased out for the next three years. Two days later, on May 27th, the Shelley party arrived, and Polidori's mood instantly became more sullen, as is evident in his diary entry for that day:

Went into the boat, rowed across to Diodati; cannot have it for three years. And then Getting out, L[ord] B[yron] met M[ary] Wollstonecraft Godwin, her sister, and Percy Shelley. I got into the boat into the middle of Lemman Lake, and there lay my length, letting the boat go its way.²⁵²

That Polidori lists Mary first, and not Shelley, is telling, and he was clearly attracted to her from the instant they met. The changes in the Byron / Polidori relationship

²⁴⁹ Rossetti, 1911, p.44

²⁵⁰ Ibid. p.78

²⁵¹ Ibid. p.72

²⁵² Ibid. p.99

that the arrival of the Shelley party brought about will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent section, but a quote from Thomas Moore will show that, try as he may, Polidori had neither the right intellect nor grounding that Byron and Shelley shared – ‘When Polidori was of their party (which, till he found attractions elsewhere, was generally the case), their more elevated subjects of conversation were almost always put to flight by the strange sallies of this eccentric young man, whose vanity made him a constant butt for Lord Byron's sarcasm and merriment’.²⁵³ And as Clare Clairmont was later to write, at Diodati she bore witness to the ‘two first Poets’ of England, two men of ‘high birth, highly cultivated, considered the most refined and honourable specimens of their age, become monsters of lying, meanness, cruelty and treachery’.²⁵⁴ She continued: ‘Under the influence of free Love, Lord B- became a human tyger slaking his thirst for inflicting pain, upon defenceless women who loved him’.²⁵⁵ Polidori could not compete with such men.

Clairmont’s suggestion that the men became ‘monsters’, and that Byron slaked his thirst upon women are perfect analogies of what Polidori also witnessed and subsequently typecast as traits of his vampire Ruthven. Whether Polidori’s tale coloured the way Clairmont referenced the character of Byron, or whether there is here evidence that supports the way Polidori portrayed him is hard to know. Nevertheless, it adds to the vampiric image attached to Byron in this period.

As Marchand has noted, it was the machinations of Claire Claremont that brought Byron and Shelley together in the first place – ‘one of the most famous friendships in literary history’.²⁵⁶ Byron and Claire had shared an intimate affair back in England and, pregnant with his child, she had persuaded the Shelleys to travel to Switzerland to visit him. Byron and Shelley appear to have had an instant connection. Polidori took this new friendship badly - he had no doubt expected to have exclusive access to Byron, and his volatile relationship and obvious dislike of Shelley is quite clear

²⁵³ Moore, 1830, p.26

²⁵⁴ Draft manuscript contained in the Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle, in the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York, Cl.Cl.26, pp. 139-42

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Leslie A. Marchand *Byron: A Portrait*, (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987) p.240

through his actions and his diary entries. His souring mood is evident immediately, his diary entry for 28th May serves as an example:

Went to Madame Einard. Introduced to a room where about 8 (afterwards 20), 2 ladies (1 more). L[ord] B[yron]'s name alone was mentioned; mine, like a star in the halo of the moon, invisible.²⁵⁷

The complexities of Polidori in the period when the Shelleys are at Diodati are overtly apparent. His sulking episodes (the boat journey onto the lake alone, the 'halo of the moon' comment) contrast with him immediately going to dine with them:

May 28 - Was introduced by Shelley to Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, called here Mrs. Shelley.

May 29 - Dined with Mr. And Mrs. Percy Shelley

May 30 - Went to Mr. And Mrs. Shelley; breakfasted with them; rowed out to see a house together.²⁵⁸

These are not the actions of a man who detests the newly arrived Shelley, even more apparent when he wrote how 'he is very clever; the more I read his 'Queen Mab', the more beauties I find'.²⁵⁹ For the first few days, it seems that Polidori for the most part was open to the new arrivals. But, the closer that Byron and Shelley became, the less Polidori fit into the circle, or so is generally suggested. For example, whilst visiting sites linked to Rousseau with Shelley, Byron supposedly commented 'Thank God, Polidori is not here'.²⁶⁰ And although many have argued that this caused Polidori to delve into a bitter downward spiral in which he committed several acts that eventually led to his dismissal, from reading his diary it is clear that actually this paved the way for him to spend more and more time with Mary, for whom he appears to have had a fondness:

²⁵⁷ Rossetti, 1911, p.105

²⁵⁸ Ibid. p.106-7

²⁵⁹ Ibid. p.107

²⁶⁰ Moore, 1830, p.284

May 30 - I, Mrs S[helley], and Miss G[odwin], on to the lake till nine.

May 31 - read Italian with Mrs. S[helley]; dined; went into a boat with Mrs. S[helley], and rowed all night till 9; tea'd together; chatted, etc.

June 1 - Hear Mrs. Shelley repeat Coleridge on Pitt

June 2 - Read Tasso with Mrs. Shelley²⁶¹

Moore's opinion was that Polidori had become jealous of Byron and Shelley's growing relationship and their plan to tour the lake without him, and 'in the soreness of his feelings on this subject he indulged in some intemperate remonstrances, which Lord Byron indignantly resented'.²⁶² Moore further suggests that due to these altercations, Polidori attempted to kill himself, but Byron interrupted the act, that 'two or three years afterwards, he actually did perpetrate'.²⁶³ Not only does this suggest that Polidori attempted to kill himself at Diodati by drinking poison, it also appears to confirm that the public knowledge of his suicide was apparent in 1830, just nine years after his death, even though he was officially deemed to have died of natural causes.

From Polidori's diary, it is clear that things started to deteriorate in the Polidori and Byron / Shelley dynamics from June 4th, when Polidori wrote 'Went on the lake with Shelley and Lord Byron, who quarrelled with me.'²⁶⁴ Polidori had earlier stated that he 'Went in the evening to a musical society of about 10 members at M. Odier's' and then had 'tea and politics' there before taking a Dr. Gardner home in his caleche'. This suggests it must have been very late indeed to go on the lake with Byron & Shelley. Perhaps he added this later, and got the date wrong, as it takes the form of an additional sentence at the very end of the day's entry. Something certainly

²⁶¹ Rossetti, 1911, p.107-116

²⁶² Moore, 1830, p.27

²⁶³ Ibid. p.28

²⁶⁴ Ibid. p.118

happened around this date though, as in his editorial notes Rossetti refers to Professor Dowden's book *Life of Shelley* in which he alludes to this incident and says Polidori's feelings towards Shelley was one of 'self-vexing jealousy' and although the impression later on certainly appears to be the case, Rossetti quite rightly points out that up to this point in the diary (June 2nd) there has been no evidence of this. Whatever causes the hostility between the two must therefore come later, perhaps due to 'the quarrel' of June 4th. Either way, Dowden's suggestion that this incident is the sailing match in which Polidori challenges Shelley to a duel seems very doubtful, given that it must have been very late at night.

But, Polidori makes a very curious entry on June 7th – 'wrote to my father, and Shelley'.²⁶⁵ Why he would need to write to Shelley, someone he sees every day, is far from obvious, unless indeed, as Dowden has suggested, he formally offered him a challenge. Yet, if the hostility stems from June 4th, why on the very next day (June 5th) does Polidori go 'to Shelley's. Read Tasso [with Mrs. Shelley we may assume]?'²⁶⁶ This matter is made more uncertain the day after he wrote to Shelley, June 8th – 'went to Geneva on horseback, and then to Diodati to see Shelley'.²⁶⁷ Why did he need to go to Diodati to see Shelley, when it was he and Byron who lived there (they had in fact got the papers to the house on June 6th, 2 days prior, and had moved in, despite initially being told it was unavailable for three years). Polidori also stated on June 6th that they had Diodati for 6 months up to November 1st, but June 6th - November 1st was less than 5 months. This whole episode is quite odd, and suggests Polidori may have got some of his dates wrong, or the diary was completed at a later date when he was unsure of the chronology.

Between June 12th – 15th Polidori was hardly at Diodati, and slept at the Balance in Geneva. This may lend weight to the argument with Shelley, with Polidori choosing to stay away from the main party. He returned to Diodati on the 15th and, when seeing Mary Shelley approaching, Byron suggested he jump down from the balcony

²⁶⁵ Ibid. p.120

²⁶⁶ Ibid. p.119

²⁶⁷ Ibid. p.121

to greet her. Polidori did, slipped and sprained his ankle. Polidori later wrote how 'Shelley etc. came in the evening; talked of my play etc, which all agreed was worth nothing. Afterwards Shelley and I had a conversation about principles - whether man was to be thought merely an instrument.'²⁶⁸ This is the conversation Mary Shelley later ascribes to Byron and Shelley in the Introduction to *Frankenstein*. Again, it is odd that if Polidori & Shelley shared hostilities that they should then have a civil conversation, especially after they had mocked his play.

Shelley then comes and dines with them at Diodati the following day, and again the day after this. Again, it seems very odd that if Polidori had challenged Shelley to a duel, there should be such pleasantries among the group.



Figure 9: The Villa Diodati on Lake Geneva, as it looked in 1816.

(Source: Public Domain)

It was during this period that the ghost story writing challenge was made. The idea is credited to Byron, but the way in which most believe it to have been made – after

²⁶⁸ Ibid. p.123

the *Christabel* incident where Shelley ran screaming from the room – is incorrect. For example, Dowden in his *Life of Shelley*, and bizarrely even Polidori in his Introduction to *The Vampyre*, both state it was Byron who suggested the ghost-story idea directly after the incident regarding Shelley and the *Christabel* poem. Polidori's diary, however, contradicts the chain of events, as it shows the *Christabel* event occurred on June 18th but that the ghost-stories were begun the day before – 'June 17 - The ghost-stories are begun by all but me'.²⁶⁹ Nowhere in Polidori's diary does it state that Byron suggested the idea, nor does it link it to the *Christabel* incident. I discuss the concept in more detail in the following chapter, when I compare Byron and Polidori's versions of the vampire tale.

Polidori's offering for the ghost stories was not *The Vampyre*, it was supposedly a story that featured a skull-headed lady, but nothing more is known of it. Rossetti, however, argued that the story was actually what became Polidori's *Ernestus Berchtold* (1819), which contradicts the skull-headed lady suggestion (Mary Shelley states it was this skull-headed lady in her Introduction to *Frankenstein*). There may be an explanation, one which shows both theories are correct. On June 18th, Polidori writes in his diary 'Began my ghost-story after tea'.²⁷⁰ Yet, the following day, June 19th, he enters 'began my ghost-story' a second time.²⁷¹ It is possible he started the skull-headed lady story on the 18th, abandoned it, and started a second story the day after, which eventually became *Ernestus Berchtold*.

Although he does not provide a date, Moore writes "'You and I," said Lord Byron to Mrs Shelley, 'will publish ours together', after which he related the outline of his story to the group. This is important, and would have helped understand the chronology of events a great deal, as Byron's outline, subsequently abandoned, was the *Fragment* that formed the foundations for Polidori's *The Vampyre*. Byron wrote the story on a piece of paper he tore from an old account book that had belonged to his wife Anabella. He kept it, he later told John Murray, because it had the word

²⁶⁹ Rossetti, 1911, p.125

²⁷⁰ Ibid. p.127

²⁷¹ Ibid. p.132

'Household' written on it in her hand, and was one of the few things he had left of her. Although seemingly a trivial piece of information, it shows the mindset that Byron was in at the time, full of regret and sadness and akin to the 'vampiric despair' that becomes a character trait in the developing vampire image.

Regardless of how the ghost story writing idea came about, the mood of the party and the discussions they had been having all played a role in the formulation of the stories. Polidori 'made his own contributions to these debates, drawing on his special study of dreams, nightmares and somnambulism and his interest in the possibility of life after death'.²⁷² Richard Holmes comments on how 'Polidori was surprised by the taste among the Shelleys for the macabre',²⁷³ and he had long conversations with Shelley on the principles of human nature and whether man was but a machine. These ideas are clear within Mary Shelley's own ghost story, which became *Frankenstein*. And Shelley, in his *Poetical Works*, ponders on what the meaning of life can be, if we are all destined to die.²⁷⁴

These philosophical thoughts transfer over into Mary's story, which helps to create a very Byronic feel for it. Shelley's question on the meaning of life appears almost verbatim in the lines 'to examine the causes of life, we must first have recourse to death. I became acquainted with the science of anatomy: but this was not sufficient; I must also observe the natural decay and corruption of the human body'.²⁷⁵ And the Byronic, too, is clearly present:

nothing is more painful to the human mind, than after the feelings have been worked up by a quick succession of events, the dead calmness of inaction and certainty which follows, and deprives the soul both of hope and fear. Justine died; she rested; and I was alive. The blood flowed freely in my veins, but a weight of despair and remorse pressed on my heart, which nothing could

²⁷² Fiona MacCarthy *Byron: Life and Legend*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2003) p.293

²⁷³ Richard Holmes *Shelley: The Pursuit*, (London: Quartet, 1974) p.327

²⁷⁴ David Ellis *Byron in Geneva: That Summer of 1816*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), p.90

²⁷⁵ Mark Shelley *Frankenstein*, (London: Great Writers Library, 1987) p.44-45

remove. Sleep fled from my eyes; I wandered like an evil spirit, for I had committed deeds of mischief beyond description, horrible, and, more, much more (I persuaded myself), was yet behind.²⁷⁶

As MacCarthy notes, albeit incorrectly, Mary 'had listened avidly to Byron and Shelley's philosophical discussions on the nature and principle of life'.²⁷⁷ As is clear from Polidori's diary, it was he and Shelley who discussed this, not Byron. But this former version, which MacCarthy quotes, is the way Mary describes it happening in her Introduction to *Frankenstein*.

Frankenstein's monster sees himself as corrupt and pitiful – 'God, in pity, made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid even from the very resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him; but I am solitary and abhorred'.²⁷⁸ This last phrase, 'solitary and abhorred', is very Byronic. In fact, Butler has argued that actually the Monster is of the same characteristics as the Polidoric / Byronic vampire: 'In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Victor's 'vampire' lives deep within himself, and this is a perfect representation of the concept of the Byronic / Polidoric vampire; it is born from within.'²⁷⁹ This is another reflection of how both Mary and Polidori absorbed the mood of the Diodati summer and used it within their texts.

Holmes also argues that what *Frankenstein* does is create an element of 'role reversal',²⁸⁰ of the hunted becoming hunter after Victor pursues the Monster - this is obvious in some of the vampire plays (discussed in Chapter Four) and in *Dracula* too. Another element present in the novel is that of the dual entity – 'a doppelganger theme, in which Frankenstein and his creation are made to form antagonistic parts of single spiritual entity'²⁸¹ - this mirrors Jekyll / Hyde, Dorian Gray, Count Dracula

²⁷⁶ Ibid. p 90

²⁷⁷ MacCarthy, 2003, p.293

²⁷⁸ Shelley, 1987, p.136

²⁷⁹ Eric Butler *Metamorphoses of the Vampire in Literature and Film*, (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), p. 60

²⁸⁰ Holmes, 1974, p.332

²⁸¹ Ibid. p.332

and also, possibly, Ruthven / Aubrey. There is also the element of ‘familiar landscapes’, both through the circle of people who all helped influence both Mary and Polidori, and the role of the physical landscape of Geneva (physically depicted in Figure Eight above). Fred Randel suggests that ‘Mary Shelley [and therefore Polidori] inherited a usage of the Gothic that in contrast with the expectations of many modern readers, foregrounded history and geography’.²⁸²

This use of landscape narratives to heighten the terror within a Gothic novel was discussed fairly contemporaneously by Ann Radcliffe, when she had her travelling companions discuss the tradition of ‘the gloomy and the sublime of Nature’²⁸³ to heighten tensions and expectations. She (through the travellers) offers the example of the thunderstorms that surround the conspirators of Rome in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* as a classic example. Polidori purposefully using the landscape of the East in his tale would have helped to cement the superstition and mystery in his reader’s mind, especially given the inclusion of the explanatory material that discussed examples of Eastern vampire lore.

Byron clearly influenced the characters in both Polidori’s and Mary’s novels, as ‘there is a remarkable match between Frankenstein’s monster and Byron’s consciousness of himself as deformed, rejected and fatally destructive’.²⁸⁴ This is equally the case for the ‘vampire’ Augustus Darvell in Byron’s initial *Fragment*, and thus in Polidori’s *Ruthven*. This reflects the real-life Byron – ‘the fallen angel becomes a malignant devil’²⁸⁵ – and would have helped the audience connect the fictional characters to the man (at least in Polidori’s case). The Diodati period will always be known for the birth of *Frankenstein* given the novel’s lasting legacy, and subsequently Polidori is all but forgotten: ‘The summer that Byron and the Shelleys spent in Geneva is best

²⁸² Fred V. Randel ‘The Political Geography of Horror in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*’, in *ELH*, Vol. 70, No.2 (Summer 2003), pp.465-91, p.465

²⁸³ Ann Radcliffe ‘On the Supernatural in Poetry’ in *New Monthly Magazine*, Vol.16, No.1, 1826, pp.145-52, p.145-46

²⁸⁴ MacCarthy, 2003, p.293

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 93

known for the ghost-story project that inspired *Frankenstein*, so wrote Polidori's own biographer.²⁸⁶

On June 22nd, Byron and Shelley set off on their trip to Vevay, and Polidori once again spends all his time with Mary:

June 23 - Walked to Mrs. Shelley...Went down to Mrs. S[helley] for the evening.

June 24 - Dined down with Mrs. S[helley]

June 26 - Saw Mrs. Shelley

June 27 - Up at Mrs. Shelley's

June 28 - All day at Mrs. S[helley's]

June 29 - down at Mrs. Shelley's

June 30 - Same

July 1 - Went in caleche to town with Mrs. S[helley] and C[lare]²⁸⁷

This would be odd behaviour on Mary's part if Polidori had challenged Shelley to a duel. Regardless of the intricacies of the Polidori / Shelley relationship, it may be that it was kept from escalating by Polidori's obvious attraction to Mary. In order to stay in her company, he needed to at least attempt to be civil to Shelley. Shelley's biographer, Richard Holmes, shares this opinion that Polidori was drawn to Mary – '[he] had taken a fancy to Mary and her free thinking', and while Shelley 'found himself slipping into a mood of morbidity and oppression', Mary 'was assailed by disturbing ideas and fantasies', leaving her feeling 'threatened by Shelley's power to frighten and unsettle'.²⁸⁸ Perhaps Polidori provided her with comfort and solace during this period. James Rieger also noted the closeness of Polidori and Mary, commenting how Mary 'had at this time a sneaking fondness for Polidori, whom the

²⁸⁶ D.L. MacDonald *Poor Polidori: A Critical Biography of the Author of The Vampyre*, (Toronto, 1991), p. 83

²⁸⁷ Rossetti, 1911, p.132-134

²⁸⁸ Holmes, 1974, p.328

others so despised. Both of them felt out of place in the company of two geniuses and an overgrown nymphet'.²⁸⁹

There is no clue whether Shelley was aware of this growing bond. That he left for a mini tour of the region with Byron suggests not, or perhaps in the true sense of free love that he supposedly practiced he did not have an issue with it. To what level the 'fondness' on Mary's part grew is uncertain, but Rossetti suggests it was never anything more than that of a sister to a brother: 'Mary Shelley called Polidori her younger brother - a designation which may have been endearing but was not accurate; for, whereas the doctor was aged 20 at this date, Mrs. Shelley was aged only 18'.²⁹⁰ This appears naïve on Rossetti's part, but nevertheless if true gives an insight into Mary's feelings towards Polidori. This comes from his diary – 'June 18 - Mrs. S[helley] called me her brother (younger)',²⁹¹ but the context in which Mary said this is not clear.

Later that day, July 1st, Byron and Shelley returned. The following day, July 2nd, Polidori simply writes 'rain all day. In the evening to Mrs S'.²⁹² Whatever happened next, he made no more diary entries until 5th September, by which time Byron had decided to let him go.

The Diodati Byron, as reflected in text

Rogers suggests that 'a biographer must either love or hate his subject'²⁹³ and suggests that it is not his business to be 'complimentary or critical...[but to] lay bare the facts of the case as he understands them'.²⁹⁴ Within *The Vampyre* Polidori shows

²⁸⁹ Rieger, 1963, p.471

²⁹⁰ Rossetti, 1911, p.128

²⁹¹ Ibid. p.127

²⁹² Ibid. p.135

²⁹³ Rogers, p.728

²⁹⁴ Ibid. p.729

both of these elements, although often he is confused whether he (as Aubrey) loves or hates Byron (as Ruthven). Aubrey is transfixed by Ruthven, and although he professes to loathe him, at the same time he finds him alluring; he looks upon him as 'a hero of a romance, and determined to observe the object of his fancy, rather than the person before him'.²⁹⁵ At this point, Byron had almost become a fictional character and was living his life in the manner he had created for himself. This image, created through his works but also because of his treatment of women, for example Lamb, Clairmont and his wife Annabella Milbanke, coupled with the rumours of his alleged affair with his own sister, was very vampiric. Byron appeared to prey on all around him, and leave his female 'victims' devastated and damaged. The melancholic loneliness of his *Manfred* appears to reflect his real feelings and state of mind, particularly noticeable when he talks of the 'blasted pines, wrecks of a single winter, barkless, branchless, A blighted trunk upon a cursed root'.²⁹⁶ This latter part can be read as Byron and his lame foot. But, after all the destruction he had caused, the public would have had very little sympathy for him. Seeing Byron so self-loathing during the Diodati period would have given Polidori ample subject matter when casting his vampiric figure.

For Polidori, Byron would have been pariah-like, yet also god-like. Gaining employment with the most famous, or infamous, person of the period would have boosted his already over-inflated ego, and foolishly he believed he could heighten his own literary career through Byron. The truth of the matter was revealed almost instantaneously, in the already mentioned 'play incident' at Falmouth. And as argued earlier, it seems Byron instantly felt remorse for his actions and attempted to console Polidori by reading his play aloud.

Maer Rigby has argued that there is a clear underlying sexual element between Ruthven and Aubrey, and alludes to the 'private history' of Ruthven, a history that

²⁹⁵ John Polidori *The Vampyre* in *John Polidori: The Vampyre, and other tales of the macabre*, Robert Morrison and Chris Baldick (eds), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.5

²⁹⁶ Byron *Manfred*, Act I Scene II, p. 384. Byron once likened his family to withered trees, but more poignant is the reference to the 'cursed root', a clear reflection of his own lameness

causes him to be an 'object of attention, of interest, and even of regard'²⁹⁷ - the point being that Ruthven has been involved in homosexual relations. I would disagree with this theory, and rather suggest that as Ruthven is a parody of Byron, these actions instead refer to his failed marriage, his affair with Lamb and his alleged incest with Augusta.

Polidori, like Aubrey does of Ruthven, ignores the allegations and corruptions (just discussed) that tarnished Byron's reputation and caused him to leave England in disgrace, and instead viewed him as the great Romantic poet that he in fact was. This need not seem unusual, as Ernest Giddey's work on Swiss perceptions of Byron also found that his personal faults played no role. 'Swiss critics apparently felt that Byron's private life was no concern of theirs' and 'no allusion to Byron's love affairs and his unfortunate marriage is made'.²⁹⁸ Neither does Polidori judge his vampire, but merely recounts the narrative in third person. This allows him to outline the details and incidents of the tale without having to pass judgement.

Byron's other work of this period, the third Canto of *Childe Harold*, was also part biographical, although he often denied this, and in it he writes 'I live not in myself, but I become/ Portion of that around me'.²⁹⁹ In the very first stanza we have a clue as to what is troubling him, as he references his daughter, Ada, whom he clearly missed dearly despite the common belief to the contrary, and also the enlightening line 'but the hour's gone by, When Albion's lessening shores could grieve or glad

²⁹⁷ Mair Rigby 'Prey to some cureless disquiet': Polidori's Queer Vampyre at the Margins of Romanticism, in *Romanticism on the Net*, Numéro 36-37, novembre 2004, février 2005, <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/011135ar> (accessed 9/12/13)

²⁹⁸ Ernest Giddey 'Byron and Switzerland: Byron's Political Dimension' in Paul Graham Trueblood (ed) *Byron's Political and Cultural Influence in Nineteenth-Century Europe: A Symposium*, (London: MacMillan, 1981), p.181

²⁹⁹ Lord Byron, *Childe Harold*, Canto III LXXII. Philip W. Martin has argued that this phrase is very Wordsworthian in its expression, and that Byron purposefully adopted elements of this as a direct consequence of Shelley's admiration for Wordsworth. Perhaps Byron was showing that he was as great, if not greater, than Wordsworth (of whom he was no admirer) in order to impress Shelley. Whatever the reason, if this is true it shows that Byron was adopting a melancholic guise rather than actually feeling melancholic, a point which affects our view of his 'vampiric vulnerability'

mine eye'.³⁰⁰ This is a reference to his home, Albion being the ancient name for England, and the fact that he feels unwelcome there.

He finishes Canto III as he begins; by speaking to his daughter and showing his affections:

...to sit and see,
Almost thy very growth, to view thee catch,
Knowledge of objects, - wonders yet to thee!
To hold thee lightly on a gentle knee,
And print on thy soft cheek a parent's kiss, -
This, it should seem, was not reserved for me.³⁰¹

This does not sound like Byron, and the question then arises whether he was writing this in order to depict himself as caring father so the public perceive him thus, or simply writing what he truly feels. At this time, Byron and Shelley were re-reading Rousseau and visiting the places that were of inspiration to his works. In his *Reveries* Rousseau wrote how 'internal and moral life seems to grow out of the death of all terrestrial and temporal interests. My body is nothing now but a trouble, an obstacle, and I disengage myself from it before-hand as much as I can'.³⁰² This is so reflective of the mood evident in Byron's works of this period, but whether Byron is merely emulating the sentiment, or whether he feels a real connection because of his own temperament is difficult to understand.

Nevertheless, *Childe Harold* proved to be his masterpiece, and with it women were led into a 'fantasy of dark rapture', while men were drawn to its 'strength and vividness'.³⁰³ This way of reading the poem sits within the framework of Polidori's *The Vampyre*, where female victims are drawn to Ruthven and the men are strangely

³⁰⁰ Ibid, Canto III, I

³⁰¹ Ibid. Canto III, CXVI

³⁰² Jean-Jacques Rousseau *The Confessions of J.-J. Rousseau with the Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, 2 Vols. (London: J. Bew, 1783), p.221

³⁰³ Erickson, 2000, p.73

drawn to him and held within his power, Aubrey for example. This meant that the literary Byron was ‘hopelessly confused with his fictional hero Childe Harold’, but his friends knew a different side to him, ‘convivial, vain, dissipated...who paid a great deal of attention to his pale complexion’.³⁰⁴



Figure 10: Scene from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, by the artist Robert Staines, 1840. Depicting Byron as Childe Harold further instilled the idea in the public mind that the character was a reflection of himself.

(Source: Public Domain)

With Polidori's tale, Ruthven's travels are key to his 'vampiric character' – Eric Butler has noted how Ruthven is the aristocrat, the traveller, the seducer³⁰⁵, and although it is largely forgotten today, this model clearly forms the basis for Bram Stoker's much more famous vampire. In fact, in *Dracula*, Stoker emulates this traversing of continents as the Count moves from the east, to the west and back to the east again,

³⁰⁴ Ibid. p.73-74.

³⁰⁵ Butler, 2010, p.85

so the influence appears clear. Lord Ruthven's travels are the direct opposite of this, however, as he travels from London (the practical minded, scientific West) to Greece (the backward, superstitious East) before returning to London again. There was a reason for Count Dracula to travel in this manner – as he was already a vampire he wished to spread his plague in the West. Ruthven, in his travels, was different. For Ruthven, as a character, where he travelled was irrelevant, in that he merely had to mirror Byron, from Polidori's perspective. Nevertheless, despite the assumption that Ruthven was already a vampire, it was not until he travelled to the East, and could be 'reborn' after being killed by the robber, that he is seen for what he is.

With Byron's travels, from London, out to the East to Turkey and Albania (which incidentally matches his *Fragment*), although the pattern is the same (West to East and back again) the destination is different. The reasons for this will be discussed in the subsequent chapter, which analyses Byron's *Fragment* and Polidori's *The Vampyre*, but for now it is worth noting that Greece is the traditional home of the 'vampire' known to society at this time (the *vroucalakas*) as well as the classical vampire, the Lamia, known to classically educated men such as Polidori and Byron (and the basis of John Keats' aforementioned poem 'Lamia' of 1820). The Romanian vampire (Count Dracula) was still to become the popular image.

Polidori had the benefit of knowing what others knew of Byron's character and actions, he knew the insinuated gossip, he knew some of Byron's attitudes and opinions of these, and, perhaps most importantly, he also knew the part that others did not; what it was like to be close to Byron at a time when he was in a state of mental fragility. Philip W. Martin³⁰⁶ has, albeit unconsciously, shown that Byron's poetry at this period altered (and not for the better, he concludes) and that he adopts a much more 'self-exploratory' model. Martin suggests this is because Byron felt his public were becoming bored, and that he was too as a result. However, what he does not take into account are the reasons I have discussed already in relation to

³⁰⁶ Philip W. Martin *Byron: a poet before his public*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982)

how Byron's mental state was at this point.³⁰⁷ The main point to take from this is that Polidori would have witnessed the change (he may not have previously known Byron personally, but he would certainly have known his poetry) and it is this new guise that gives us Lord Ruthven. It was this critical period when Byron was wounded and self-loathing, by the separation brought about by his wife, and by his ostracization by society for deeds that they deemed him to have committed. So, when he came to compose *The Vampyre*, at the 'request of a lady', he had sufficient knowledge in order to cast Byron as the vampire Ruthven.

After Diodati

Most works on Byron include the Diodati summer period, and almost all are of the same opinion, that Polidori annoyed Byron, that the two were never friends, and that Polidori's dismissal was inevitable. As I have argued in this chapter, and the previous one, this is not true, at least not until the arrival of the Shelley party and even then not straight away. When Polidori returns to his diary entries on September 5th (having not made an entry since July 2nd, just over two months previously) he immediately explains the reason why – 'Not written my Journal till now through neglect and dissipation. Had a long conversation with S[helley] and L[ord] B[aron] about my conduct to L[ord] B[aron].'³⁰⁸ Not Shelley, it must be noted, although commonly his issues are ascribed as being towards Shelley, not Byron. The majority of the incidents that Polidori notes in his diary are, indeed, against Byron, although he does write how he 'threatened to shoot S[helley] one day on the water'.³⁰⁹ This may be the incident of June 4th discussed earlier, but for the reasons suggested then it seems unlikely.

³⁰⁷ Ahmed Hankir has recently put forward his theory that Byron suffered from Bipolar disorder and based this on his actions in life and the way his poetry reflects this ('Bipolar Disorder & Poetic Genius' in *Psychiatria Danubina*, 2011, Vol. 23, Suppl. I, pp.62-68

³⁰⁸ Rossetti, 1911, p.135

³⁰⁹ Ibid. p.135

Although Polidori did not write in his diary, Hobhouse gives us some information from his own diary entries once he arrived at Diodati, with Scrope Davies, on 26th August. The Shelley party left on August 29th, and Byron, Polidori, Hobhouse and Davies all set off to visit Chamonix. Polidori travelled with Hobhouse, and apparently regaled him with geological information on the mountains.³¹⁰ Upon noticing the number of people suffering from goitres, Polidori told Hobhouse that they are caused by bad air, and not bad water.³¹¹ This is incorrect, they are indeed caused by water lacking in iodine. The following day, September 1st, Polidori again travels with Hobhouse, this time talking to him of his support for the Huttonian and Wernerian theories on geological formations.³¹² And on the 3rd, Polidori discusses how the local shopkeepers are mostly German. Polidori later misses the boat back to Diodati making him late for dinner (as was Scrope incidentally), much to Byron's annoyance.³¹³ This detail from Hobhouse gives a good impression as to what Polidori must have been like to be around (something which his own diary cannot portray).

On September 4th, Hobhouse is taken ill, and Polidori assures him that he shall probably die of apoplexy or pneumony. As Cochran points out, Hobhouse outlived Polidori by some 48 years, and comments how he 'never seems to manage an accurate statement about anything'.³¹⁴ The following day, September 5th, Byron finally lost patience with Polidori – 'L[ord] B[yrone] determined upon our parting, - not upon any quarrel, but on account of our not suiting. Gave me £70; 50 for 3 months and 20 for voyage.'³¹⁵ He did not leave, however, for another ten days. His own diary is void of entries between 5th and 15th, but again Hobhouse provides some detail. On September 10th he went for a walk with Polidori following the rivers, and in the evening went out in a boat with both Byron and Polidori. On the 12th all three went to visit Madame de Staël at Coppet.

³¹⁰ Hobhouse, 2009, p.159

³¹¹ Ibid. p.169

³¹² Ibid. p.170

³¹³ Ibid. p.171

³¹⁴ Ibid. p.172

³¹⁵ Rossetti, 1911, p.146

In Hobhouse's diary there is no inclination of any issues with Polidori, and indeed he seems to have spent quite some time with him (perhaps tellingly this time was not with Byron for the most part). So, it comes as a surprise when he then writes the following: 'Helped Dr Polidori to settle his involved accounts with Lord Byron, and took leave of him. He does not answer to Madame de Staël's definition of a happy man, whose capacities are squared with his inclinations. Took leave of him – poor fellow!! He is anything but an amiable man, and has a most unmeasured ambition, as well as inordinate vanity. The true ingredients of misery'.³¹⁶ The next day, Hobhouse writes simply 'Polidori went this morning'.³¹⁷

Although there is no date in order to pinpoint exactly when it happened, Moore wrote that after falling out with Byron and on the verge of dismissal, Polidori went to his room to poison himself, but was thwarted when Byron entered to make up.³¹⁸ Holmes suggests that Byron was tiring of Polidori as he was constantly getting drunk and into affrays in Geneva,³¹⁹ whereas Ellis is more specific and believes it was due to him visiting brothels, engaging in street fights and especially the 'spectacle' incident, which led to him being fined 12 florins for new glasses plus the legal costs after he slapped a chemist of whom he accused of giving less than satisfactory medication (magnesia). Byron wrote to Murray how he had 'enough to do to manage my own scrapes'.³²⁰ Byron further explained in a letter to Murray dated 1st November, 1816:

I do not know whether I mentioned to you, some time ago, that I had parted with the Dr. Polidori a few weeks previous to my leaving Diodati. I know no great harm of him; but he had an alacrity of getting into scrapes, and was too young and heedless; and having enough to attend to in my own concerns, and without time to become his tutor, I thought it much better to give him his congé.³²¹

³¹⁶ Hobhouse, 2009, p.191

³¹⁷ Ibid. p.191

³¹⁸ Moore, 1854, p.276-77

³¹⁹ Holmes, 1974, p.344

³²⁰ Leslie A. Marchand (ed) *Byron's Letters & Journals*, (London John Murray, 1974), Vol V, p.163

³²¹ Moore, 1830, p.46

It is clear that Byron had indeed dismissed him earlier than the 15th as outlined above, as on the 8th Shelley wrote to him saying '[I hope that Hobhouse has] destroyed whatever scruples you might have felt, in dismissing Polidori. The anecdote which he recounted to me the evening before I left Geneva made my blood run cold'.³²² As Shelley had left on 28th August, Byron must have decided this even earlier. In his diary, Polidori simply writes 'Left Coligny and Byron at six in the morning',³²³ though this is for the 16th September, not the 15th.

Polidori saw Byron again in Milan in October, and again in April 1817 in Venice, before he returned to England. He gave his side of the parting in a letter to his father, dated 20th September 1816: 'We have parted, finding that our own tempers did not agree...There was no immediate cause, but a continued series of slight quarrels. I believe the fault, if any, has been on my part; I am not accustomed to have a master, and therefore my conduct was not free and easy'.³²⁴ Byron added yet more detail in a letter to Thomas Moore of 6th November:

When I sailed, I had a physician with me, whom, after some months of patience, I found it expedient to part with, before I left Geneva some time. On arriving at Milan, I found this gentleman in very good society, where he prospered for some weeks; but, at length, at the theatre he quarrelled with an Austrian officer, and was sent out by the government in twenty-four hours. I was not present at his squabble; but, on hearing that he was put under arrest, I went and got him out of his confinement, but could not prevent his being sent off, which, indeed, he partly deserved, being quite in the wrong, and having begun a row for row's sake. I had preceded the Austrian government some weeks myself, in giving him his congé from Geneva. He is not a bad fellow, but very young and hot-headed, and more likely to incur diseases than to cure them. Hobhouse and myself found it

³²² Thomas Jefferson Hogg *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Vol. I, (London: Edward Moxon, 1858), p.504-5

³²³ Rossetti, 1911, p.152

³²⁴ *Ibid.* p.212

useless to intercede for him. This happened some time before we left Milan. He is gone to Florence.³²⁵

As far as can be seen, Byron did not hear of Polidori again until April 1819, when *The Vampyre* was published in the *New Monthly Magazine* under Byron's name. The circumstances surrounding the publication, and how Polidori came to create it, based on the ghost story foundations Byron wrote at Diodati, are dealt with in the next chapter. Polidori is often accused of vampirising the tale, and Byron's name, in order to make himself known, but Rieger feels it was Polidori who was the victim, not Byron, describing Byron as a leech and reflecting how 'just as no man is a poet, much less a matinee idol, to his physician, so no master credits his valet with a soul'.³²⁶

The time the two men spent together in 1816 was turbulent and full of incident, especially after the arrival of the Shelley party. As has been shown throughout this chapter, there was no particular event that caused the relationship to end, more a series of misdemeanours and an attitude of self-importance on Polidori's part. In Byron's own words, Polidori was merely young and hot-headed. Nevertheless, the incidents and events that occurred gave Polidori content for creating his vampire tale, which he did before he left Switzerland and while the time spent with Byron was still fresh in his head. The following chapter explores the creation and publication of Polidori's tale in April 1819, the events that surrounded this, and the reaction to it by the Press and Byron himself.

³²⁵ Letter CCLI to Mr. Moore, Verona, November 6th 1816, in Moore, 1830

³²⁶ Rieger, 1963, p.464

CHAPTER THREE

John Polidori's *The Vampyre*: Conception, publication and accusations of plagiarism

The Vampyre was published, under Lord Byron's name, in the *New Monthly Magazine* on Thursday 1st April, 1819. Even though he was in exile, a new work by Byron was still a valuable commodity, especially one in prose that deviated from his usual format.³²⁷ At the time, there were controversies around the authorship and how it came to be published, and these controversies have formed the subject of debate by many Byron scholars. In this chapter, I offer what I believe to be the most thorough analysis of the chain of events that occurred in the weeks both before and after the publication of *The Vampyre*, made possible by being granted access to a First Edition copy of the *New Monthly Magazine*. I also analyse how the relationship between Byron and Polidori, fully explored in Chapter Two, the public perceptions of Byron and Polidori's knowledge of vampires was used as subject material for the tale.

For two weeks prior to the publication, the press had featured advertisements for the tale, ensuring that public anticipation was high. For example, the *Morning Chronicle* of 20th March, 1819 featured the following piece: 'We are requested to state, that the *New Monthly Magazine* of April 1, price 2s. Will contain, among many other interesting Articles, *The Vampyre*, a Tale, by Lord Byron, never before published'.³²⁸ Six days later the *Morning Post* advertised that the *New Monthly Magazine* was to feature 'The Vampyre, a Tale, by the Right Hon. Lord Byron'.³²⁹ This was to be the first article in the magazine.

³²⁷ All of Byron's works up to this point had taken the form of poetry, and it was only in his later years that he chose to deviate from this – his plays, such as *Mazeppa* and *Beppo*, for instance

³²⁸ *Morning Chronicle*, 20th March, 1819

³²⁹ *Morning Post*, 26th March, 1819

An analysis of the magazine piece shows that although the subsequent book version has been edited slightly, the 'Letter from Geneva...' and the Introduction piece were both included from the very start. However, in the magazine version (on page 194) there is a line that discusses the allegation that Lord Byron had two women living with him, and names these as Mary Shelley and Clare Clairmont. This does not feature in the book. Also in the magazine version (page 195), it states that the 'Lady', whom Polidori wrote the tale for, actually possessed all three manuscripts (Byron's *Fragment*, Polidori's piece and Mary Shelley's tale, which would later become *Frankenstein*).³³⁰ Again, this claim was removed from the book, and nowhere else has it ever been suggested. This point was almost certainly adopted from the Preface to *Frankenstein*, which clearly states that three ghost stories were written. Colburn appears to have initially utilised this fact to add credence to his explanation of how *The Vampyre* came to be in his possession, but for some reason very quickly edited this out of the book version.

In the magazine, there is a footnote that suggests Colburn did indeed have the outline of *Frankenstein* and of the original tale of 'Dr. ____'. This phrase suggests that he did not know who the physician (Polidori) actually was, and yet further analysis of the magazine edition shows it included a five-page review of Polidori's publication *Ximenes, The Wreath, and other Poems* by Colburn himself.³³¹ On page 246 Colburn states that

we were anxious to examine how far a youthful and enthusiastic imagination would be effected [sic] by an intimacy with, certainly, the greatest poet of the day: we mean Lord Byron; with whom, we understand, the author travelled as physician.³³²

³³⁰ *New Monthly Magazine*, No. 63, April 1, 1819, Vol. XI. Geoffrey Bond Collection. Accessed 5/11/15.

³³¹ That edition of the *New Monthly Magazine* also included such diverse articles as 'A Pedestrian Tour round Florence', 'Some Accounts of Martin Luther's Goblet', a piece on the 'Life & Writings of Luis De Camoens' by Madame De Stael (which directly quotes a piece from *Childe Harold*), several pieces of original poetry, letters on current affairs and a Memoir of Samuel Taylor Coleridge with a portrait by C. R. Leslie.

³³² *Ibid.* p.246

This phrase clearly shows that Colburn knew Polidori, was familiar with his work, and most importantly did indeed know that he was Byron's physician, damning evidence in the suggestions that Colburn knew the real author of *The Vampyre* all along.

Nine days after first mentioning the forthcoming tale, the *Morning Post* was able to provide more detailed information on it:

Public curiosity is a good deal excited by the announcement of a prose Tale by this celebrated writer, entitled, "The Vampyre", which will feature in the next issue of the *New Monthly Magazine*. The origin of this production is rather curious. It was proposed in a literary circle, that each of the company present should write a tale depending upon some supernatural agency, which was undertaken by Lord Byron, the daughter of the celebrated Mr. Godwin, and a certain physician. The tale of Miss Godwin has already appeared under the title of Frankenstein.³³³

Yet again, Polidori is not specifically named – perhaps this is because he is not of the same social standing as Byron and Shelley, or perhaps the source simply did not know who he was. Mary Shelley is also referred to as 'Miss Godwin' on this occasion, which is indeed the correct title, as despite having a child with Percy Shelley, the two were not married (in fact, Shelley himself was still married to Harriet Welton when he and Mary travelled to Switzerland in 1816). This is, however, the first time the idea behind the now infamous 'ghost story' writing episode was attributed to Byron, and corroborates the information provided in the *Preface* to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*:

I passed the summer of 1816 in the environs of Geneva. The season was cold and rainy, and in the evenings we crowded around a blazing wood fire, and occasionally amused ourselves with some German stories of ghosts, which happened to fall into our hands. These tales excited in us a playful desire of

³³³ *Morning Chronicle*, 29th March 1819

imitation. Two other friends (a tale from the pen of one of whom would be far more acceptable to the public than anything I can ever hope to produce) and myself agreed to write each a story founded on some supernatural occurrence.³³⁴

Although remaining nameless, the 'two friends' she refers to are Byron and Shelley, and not Polidori, made clear in the following passage from the same *Preface* – 'The weather, however, suddenly became serene; and my two friends left me on a journey among the Alps'.³³⁵ Byron and Shelley left the Diodati party on June 22nd 1816 and travelled to Vevay; 'June 22. – L[ord] B[Byron] and Shelley went to Vevay'.³³⁶ This point is important because it shows that the public (or those who were familiar with *Frankenstein* at least) already knew that Byron had begun a 'ghost story' at Diodati in 1816 alongside Mary Shelley and, it seems, Percy Shelley. In fact, nothing survives of any story that Shelley may have written, and that Shelley actually wrote this original *Preface* to *Frankenstein* makes it all the more curious.

With the notion that Byron had indeed written a 'ghost story' in the summer of 1816 already common knowledge within certain circles in society, it made it very easy for Henry Colburn (Editor of the *New Monthly Magazine*) to pass *The Vampyre* off as being this very story.

Colburn started the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1814, to 'capitalize on the apparent triumph of the Tories over Napoleon'.³³⁷ It was to compete with the original *Monthly Magazine* that was pro-Buonaparte and against the Peninsular campaign that the Tories so heartily supported. Colburn, first and foremost a businessman, saw the

³³⁴ quoted from the *Preface* to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (accessed 6th January 2015 at <http://literature.org/authors/shelley-mary/frankenstein/preface.html>) but widely accepted as being written on her behalf by Percy Shelley and dated Marlow, September 1817.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ William Rossetti (ed) *The Diary of Dr John William Polidori, 1816, Relating to Byron, Shelley, Etc.*, (London: Elkin Matthews, 1911), p.132

³³⁷ Mark Parker *Literary Magazines and British Romanticism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.139

ready market for his new magazine, which one critic has described as being ‘the most consciously and purposefully homogeneous of the great magazines’.³³⁸

No one really knows how Colburn came to possess *The Vampyre* in its unpublished format. One possibility is that Polidori gave the manuscript to Colburn, but this seems unlikely due to the chain of events that followed the initial publication, to which I shall soon turn. Polidori’s biographer, D.L. MacDonald,³³⁹ suggests Colburn may have been given it by John Mitford (his ‘Extract of a Letter from Geneva’ prefaced *The Vampyre* when it was subsequently published in book form). How Mitford came to have it (if indeed he ever did) remains unclear, but MacDonald suggests he acquired it directly from ‘the lady’³⁴⁰ who Polidori supposedly wrote it for in 1816.



Figure 11: Henry Colburn, by the artist F. Marryat.

(Source: Public Domain)

³³⁸ Ibid. p.1

³³⁹ D.L. MacDonald *Poor Polidori: A Critical Biography of the Author of The Vampyre*, (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1991), p.178

³⁴⁰ In an open letter to Henry Colburn, Polidori claims that he wrote *The Vampyre* ‘at the request of a lady’, published in the *Liverpool Mercury*, 7th May 1819

A recent analysis of *The Vampyre* by Anne Stiles³⁴¹ suggested that Colburn knew that Polidori was the real author of the piece, but believed 'that a work by Byron with autobiographical overtones would sell more copies than a tale by some unknown physician'. Therefore, when *The Vampyre* was published in the magazine, Polidori was not credited as the rightful author. Copyright law at the time (1819) stated that articles published in magazines were not subject to the rights of the author, so no money was owed to him.³⁴² In fact, the American magazine *Christian Spectator* was the first to offer any remuneration to contributors when it agreed to pay \$1 per page (coincidentally, also in 1819).³⁴³ Furthermore, Colburn had lodged the necessary information required for publication of the tale in book form four days before the magazine was published. This subsequently meant that Polidori was not able to publish his tale in book form himself; those same copyright laws meant that Colburn held full rights over the piece as publisher, regardless of the author.

At the time of *The Vampyre's* publication, copyright law was subject to stipulations laid out in the Copyright Act of 1814 (29th July, 1814).³⁴⁴ This stated that the copyright of any literary work would last for twenty-eight years from the time of publication.³⁴⁵

The Copyright Act was based on amendments to the 1808 Copyright Bill, presented to the Commons by Davies Giddy (1767-1839), who was a mathematician and M.P. for Bodmin. Giddy pushed for changes that included that eleven copies of any new work were 'upon the Paper upon which the largest number or impression of such

³⁴¹ Anne Stiles, Stanley Finger and John Bulevich 'Somnambulism and Trance States in the Works of John William Polidori, Author of *The Vampyre*' in *European Romantic Review* Vol. 21, No. 6, December 2010, pp.789–807, p.798

³⁴² Andrew McConnell Stott *The Vampyre Family: Passion, Envy and the Curse of Byron*, (London: Canongate, 2013), p.240

³⁴³ see Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741-1850*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930)

³⁴⁴ For a discussion on the Copyright Act, see Deazley, R. (2008) 'Commentary on *Copyright Act 1814*', in L. Bently & M. Kretschmer (eds) *Primary Sources on Copyright (1450-1900)* www.copyrighthistory.org

³⁴⁵ Copyright Act, 1814, 54 Geo.III, c.156, s.4. Durham University Library, accessed online 21/12/15 via www.copyrighthistory.org

Book shall be printed for Sale'³⁴⁶ and should be delivered to the Stationers' Company within six months of publication. Also, that no second editions were permitted, unless 'material additions' were included.

Further clauses were added to the Bill, which required that every new work had to be registered within one month of publication (or else a forty shilling fine was incurred), and that registration of the title of a book and the name of the publisher must both take place within three months, with one copy being sent to the British Museum.³⁴⁷

There is a lengthy response to the new legislation brought about by the 1814 Copyright Act, detailed in an 1819 edition of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, which takes the form of a selection of interviews with various publishers by the Select Committee in April and May, 1818. These include Owen Rees (publisher of *Ree's Cyclopaedia*), the printer Richard Taylor, and Byron's own publisher, John Murray.³⁴⁸

This chain of events appears to show that Colburn knew that Polidori was the author but chose to ignore this and ensured the measures were in place to allow him to pass it off as Byron's. In doing this, Colburn was cleverly playing the market. Susan Matthews has argued that the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth had created what she calls 'the cult of the heroic male'.³⁴⁹ This, she continues, was a product of the war years, and in this 'cult status' she places Byron alongside such prominent figures as Napoleon, Nelson and Wellington. However, Matthews argues that the Regency period was a direct contrast to this, and was a period when the fop or dandy was most prominent. *The Vampyre*, and the imagery it creates, is in many ways a juxtaposition of the two stereotypes, most notably in the Ruthven character, who is suave and debonair (as in the dandy) but

³⁴⁶ Draft Bill, 18 May, clauses 1, 2

³⁴⁷ Draft Bill, 7 June, clause A

³⁴⁸ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1819, Vol. 89, Part I, pp.449-463

³⁴⁹ Susan Matthews 'Gender', in Zachary Leader and Ian Haywood (eds) *Romantic Period Writings: 1798-1832, An Anthology*, (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.150-181, p.153

has an air of strength and mystery surrounding him in the manner of the Byronic heroic male.

The end of the Napoleonic Wars also saw the cost of books reduce due to the reduction of the price of paper,³⁵⁰ meaning that by also claiming the publishing rights to the book version of *The Vampyre*, Colburn assured as wide a distribution as possible. *The Vampyre* was not the first text that Colburn published with links to Byron, nor would it be the last. He had already published Lamb's novel *Glenarvon* in 1815, but recent research by Veronica Melnyk has shown that although Colburn never published anything by Byron, he published considerable works about him – 'the poet infiltrates practically all Colburnian affairs; for decades his magazines teem with articles and letters about Byron'.³⁵¹

I would agree here, especially as Colburn published two of the most biographical texts of the period on Byron in *Glenarvon* and *The Vampyre*. With Byron's personal memoirs destroyed, they are the closest accounts we have of his characteristics other than his own semi-fictional works and the many posthumous biographies. The concept of these same texts, though, suggests that Colburn was most interested in public supply and demand (and of course profit) than he was in being seen as 'pro-Byron'.

Melnyk further suggests that as Colburn's magazines were devoted to literature, high society and current affairs, then Byron would have been of interest on all three counts.³⁵² In 1815, the *New Monthly Magazine* featured an engraving of Byron by Henry Hoppner Meyer (and this corresponds with the publication of Byron's *Turkish Tales*). Although Colburn could not get an actual Byron – they were exclusively Murray's – the inclusion of the engraving showed how desperate Colburn was to include Byronic material within his magazines. In fact, as Melnyk's research has shown, almost every edition of the *New Monthly Magazine* from this point onwards

³⁵⁰ Catherine Boyle and Zachary Leader 'Literary Institutions', *Ibid*, p.182

³⁵¹ Veronica Melnyk 'Half Fashion and Half Passion: The Life of Publisher Henry Colburn, (Unpublished thesis for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Birmingham, 2002, p.201

³⁵² *Ibid*. p.202

contained some content relating to Byron, and this continued right through into the 1830s.³⁵³

Books on Byron also featured heavily within Colburn's published material. After Byron's death, Colburn published *Memoirs of Lord Byron* by John Watkins (1822), eight years before Murray published Thomas Moore's biography of him, and was still publishing books on him in the late 1830s, for example Disraeli's novel *Venetia* (1837), which is a fictitious account of the relationship between Byron and Shelley. And yet, as Samuel Chew has shown,³⁵⁴ interest in Byronism declined in the late 1820s and would not be revived until the 1850s. It is with this fascination of Byron in mind that considerations of the publication of *The Vampyre* in 1819 need to be understood.

The Vampyre: its publication and accredited authorship

On the morning of publication, *The Vampyre's* notoriety began almost instantly: 'Lord Byron's extraordinary Tale, entitled "The Vampyre", appears this day in the *New Monthly Magazine*. It is, we understand, of the most horrific nature'.³⁵⁵ Eight days later, the tale was also available in book form, and again it was credited to Lord Byron: '*The Vampyre*, a Tale. By the Right Hon. Lord Byron. To which is added, an Account of his Lordship's Residence in the Island of Mitylene. Printed for Sherwood, Neely and Jones, Paternoster Row'.³⁵⁶ Further editions were published later that year³⁵⁷ including an edition accompanied by the famous vampire lines from Byron's 1813 poem *The Giaour*. As MacDonald has noted, *The Vampyre* went through five

³⁵³ Ibid. p.202

³⁵⁴ see Samuel C. Chew *Byron in England: His Fame and After-Fame*, (London: John Murray, 1924), Chapters 12 and 13

³⁵⁵ *Morning Post*, 1st April 1819

³⁵⁶ *Morning Chronicle*, Friday 9th April 1819

³⁵⁷ An advert for the Second Edition appeared in the *Hereford Journal* on 28th April 1819 and further editions were advertised in the *Morning Chronicle* (2nd August 1819) and the *Morning Post* (11th September 1819).

editions alone in 1819 in England, as well as an American edition, but had the height of its success in Europe.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁸ MacDonald, 1991, p.190

Polidori must have become aware of the publication almost immediately, as on the 2nd April he wrote a letter to Colburn stating that Byron was not the author and that he was. Given the press attention for at least eleven days prior to publication, it is odd that Polidori did not know of its impending release, nor try to stop it. It also seems clear that Polidori did not write the tale to be published, at least not in its current form, as he wrote in the letter that it was 'imperfect and unfinished [and] I had rather therefore it should not appear in the magazine'.³⁵⁹ Also in that same letter is a very curious passage in which Polidori says 'As it is a mere trifle, I should have had no objection in its appearing in your magazine, as I could, in common with any other, have extracted it thence, and republished it. But I shall not sit patiently by and see it taken without my consent and appropriated by any person'.³⁶⁰ By considering this carefully, it seems to suggest that Polidori knew that Colburn had

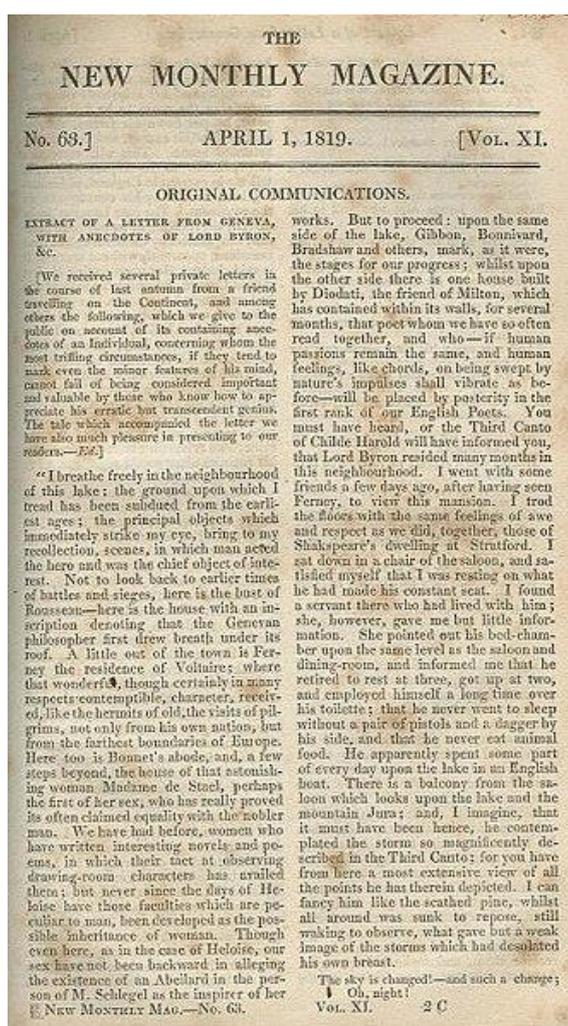
³⁵⁹ Letter to Henry Colburn, 2nd April 1819, quoted in Rossetti, 1911, p.15

³⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.15

registered it for publication in book form, thus meaning Polidori could not claim any royalties. His phrase 'I could, in common with any other, have extracted it thence, and republished it' echoes the copyright law discussed above, whereby although published in a magazine without correct authorship, Polidori could still have published it in his name in book form.³⁶¹

Figure 12: The *New Monthly Magazine* of 1st April 1819, which contained Polidori's *The Vampyre*.

(Source: M. Beresford)



Both MacDonald³⁶² and, most recently, Stott³⁶³ have argued that Colburn’s editor Alaric Watts appears to have accused Polidori of delivering the draft to them

³⁶¹ Ibid, p.15

³⁶² MacDonald, 1991

³⁶³ Stott, 2013, although in both cases he is merely quoting MacDonald

personally, telling them that it was Byron's plot but that he had written it out. Watts supposedly stated that it was 'quite impossible that [he was] ignorant of the circumstances under which the *Vampyre* was published'.³⁶⁴ They also both claim that, according to Watts, Polidori had a second manuscript of Byron's that he also intended to have published.³⁶⁵ If he did, it was never published, which begs the question as why Polidori would choose to publish *The Vampyre* rather than an actual piece of work by Byron.

In *The Scots Magazine* of 1st August 1819, there is an article on Alaric Watts that tells how one of his own poems was wrongly accredited to Byron, and so how in return it should be seen as 'all fair' if he was to 'vamp up *The Vampyre*'.³⁶⁶ The article was referring to Henry Colburn's request that Watts falsely attribute the tale to Byron, even though he knew the real author. Watts refused, and resigned from his post at the *New Monthly Magazine* over the matter.³⁶⁷

Although several critics have offered differing opinions on what occurred after Polidori found out about the publication of *The Vampyre*³⁶⁸ there is actually a contemporary account of this. This is a letter by Polidori himself dated 25th September, 1819 and published in the *Morning Chronicle*. In the letter Polidori explains that he felt compelled to write to the newspaper in order to defend himself from the allegations made by the *New Monthly Magazine* (Colburn) that he was aware and involved in the publication of *The Vampyre* under Lord Byron's name. Polidori continues that these allegations were beginning to form a topic of discussion in the press, but that he would not have felt compelled to write if

no other publication than those under the immediate influence of the publisher of *The New Monthly Magazine*, had dropt [sic] inuendos [sic] and hints with regard to my being the person with whom the blame of the forgery lies. Such contemptible periodical papers would hardly have drawn me forth,

³⁶⁴ MacDonald, 1991, p.183; Stott, 2013, p.244

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ *The Scots Magazine*, 1st Aug 1819

³⁶⁷ Stott, 2013. MacDonald also discusses this.

³⁶⁸ For example, MacDonald, 1991, Christopher Frayling *Vampyres: Lord Byron to Count Dracula*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), Stott, 2013

but since *The Edinburgh Magazine* of Constable takes up the question in an ambiguous passage of last month's number, I can no longer, for my own sake, remain silent.³⁶⁹

He goes on to point out that although Byron claimed in his letter to know nothing of the tale, or of vampires, this was not the case, highlighted by the fact that Byron's own version of the tale was with his publisher (John Murray) and about to be included with his poem *Mazeppa*. This did indeed happen, and was subsequently published as *Fragment*. Polidori explains that he was challenged by 'a Lady' to finish the tale, and he did thus in her company over three mornings. He professes that he left it with her, and that by her hands did it find its way to the *New Monthly Magazine*. Alaric Watts received both the tale and a letter (he does not say from whom) explaining it to be based on a concept of Lord Byron's, and originally Watts intended to publish the tale and letter, but that Henry Colburn subsequently omitted the letter and declared the author of the tale to be Byron (this is the action that Watts resigned over).³⁷⁰

Polidori then claimed that upon publication (in the *New Monthly Magazine*) he procured a copy and found it to be 'an almost forgotten trifle of my own'. He then wrote to the *Morning Chronicle* on the Friday (2nd April) and also to Colburn, who then called on him personally on the Monday (5th) and agreed to announce the tale as his work. Colburn also, Polidori claims, drafted a contract that entitled him to a share of the profits, but being merely 'rough and not of any use', he requested that Polidori trust his honour. Therefore, it seems, Polidori did not sign the supposed contract, thus allowing Colburn to retain exclusive rights to the work.³⁷¹

Polidori then told Colburn that he had written to the *Morning Chronicle*, and upon hearing this he requested that Polidori withdraw the letter. Colburn promised he would instead, as Publisher, write to the paper exonerating Polidori from any wrongdoing. Polidori further claims that Colburn never mentioned the tale by its title

³⁶⁹ *Morning Chronicle*, 25th Sep 1819

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

(Vampyre) but merely 'the affair', which meant he had no physical proof that Colburn acknowledged him as true author and thus his entitlement. Polidori was then offered 30l (instead of 300l, but this is a figure merely stated by Polidori)³⁷² but that he accepted it and aimed to sue for the remainder, but realised this was not practical due to the cost. He finishes his letter by stating that 'Hoping that this statement will put to rest all the hints about my share of the profits &c, so lavishly dropped, even at the present time, and at the same moment free me from imputations he has covertly been throwing upon me.'³⁷³

Whether this version of events is accurate is not known, but it certainly corresponds to the facts gleaned from various sources. Colburn, however, had a counter argument and responded to Polidori's claims via his own *New Monthly Magazine*, suggesting that Polidori had indulged himself in making certain unfounded claims, and especially relating to the notion that Lord Byron originated the tale. Colburn argued that Polidori claimed this to be the case, and Byron refutes it, so we should therefore leave it up to the two of them (by this point, Byron's *Fragment* was to be included in *Mazeppa*, proving Polidori's side of the story). Colburn expresses that the tale arrived with them via a third person and that Dr. Polidori was given the additional remuneration (the 30l.) as an 'unconstrained and liberal gratuity'.³⁷⁴ This in many ways supports Polidori's version, and it seems this is how the events transpired. The main issue that is still unresolved is exactly who that 'third person' was. Colburn may be hinting that it was in fact Polidori, but for this to be the truth it would mean that Polidori had *The Vampyre* as a manuscript all along, which then raises the question as to why he waited almost three years to publish it.

³⁷² It has proven difficult to compare this price to other such cases, as they appear to be rather lacking, however the costs of providing the additional eleven copies of *Mort D'Arthur*, published by Owen Rees, required by Copyright Law was £96 12s, and that same publisher spent 4,638l in twelve months on advertising their works in newspapers (*The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1819, Vol. 89, Part I, p.450). These figures give some idea as to the sums of money involved in publishing works in the period, suggesting 30l was a rather meagre sum comparatively.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ *Morning Chronicle*, 1st Oct 1816

It seems most likely that the third person was 'the lady' that Polidori alleges he wrote the tale for, although whether it arrived directly or indirectly from her is again uncertain. That said, it again seems unlikely she would forward the tale on to Colburn some three years later, and so it may be (as MacDonald has argued) that some other party procured the manuscript from her, and then sent this on to Colburn. It is also not clear who this lady was, though MacDonald has suggested Madame Brélaz or Countess Bruce³⁷⁵ (here he refers to Countess *Breuss*) and Stott also believes it to be Breuss.³⁷⁶

Rossetti, in his edited version of Polidori's *Diary*, states that the lady in question was without doubt the Countess of Breuss, although he does not say how he knows this, and that she asked Polidori if anything could be made of Byron's outline (*Fragment*). Polidori then 'tried his hand at carrying it out' and 'left the MS. with the Countess'.³⁷⁷ Rossetti then suggests that some unknown traveller (a woman he believes, although again he does not say why) obtained the manuscript and sent it over to Colburn along with a letter explaining its origin (this letter was included in both the magazine and book versions of the tale).

Ultimately, it is a question of audience. As Nicola Thompson has argued, the reception to, and evaluation of, a literary work occurs within a set of parameters, or what she calls a 'horizon of expectations'.³⁷⁸ She continues: 'masculinity was identified with high culture (and male readers)', and was therefore associated with 'intellectual qualities, with originality, with power, and with truth' – a man was 'morally obliged to be "manly" in his writing'.³⁷⁹ If we consider the Ruthven character – intellectual, powerful, original – this appears to fit Thompson's model, and yet what of Aubrey? The dynamic of the Ruthven / Aubrey relationship is one of contrasts, setting Ruthven's deviance and deadliness against Aubrey's moralistic attitudes, his 'foppishness'. This may revert back to the question of audience, as through Aubrey Polidori creates an element of the feminised.

³⁷⁵ MacDonald, 1991, p.178

³⁷⁶ Stott, 2013, p.243

³⁷⁷ Rossetti, 1911, p.12

³⁷⁸ Nicola Diane Thompson *Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels*, (London: Macmillan, 1996), p.1

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p.20

This contrast between masculinity and femininity and what these parameters allow for in the audience form part of a discussion that Virginia Woolf offers in her book *A Room of One's Own* (1929). In it, she questions what she terms a text's 'masculine values', noting that the masculinity of a piece can be directly linked to its perceived value. For example, 'this is an important book because it deals with war [masculine]. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing room [feminine].³⁸⁰ *The Vampyre* is very masculine in its content, but yet again the character of Aubrey contradicts this, confusing the reader somewhat.

The reason why Polidori's text sits uncomfortably within perceived literary parameters appears to be due to the necessity of complying with accepted masculine codas, but narrating these for a female audience. Davidoff and Hall suggest that masculine nature, in the period, was based on limiting factors that created a coded way of living that found form in activities such as hunting, riding, drinking and "wenching".³⁸¹ These codes are clear within the Ruthven character, but because Polidori uses Aubrey to narrate Ruthven's actions he dilutes the masculine elements and allows for a female readership – Ruthven's actions are horrific, but they are morally wrong, attested to by Aubrey's decline. This may also be Polidori himself lamenting Byron's behaviour (through Ruthven) to his audience due to his Catholic upbringing.

Simon Edwards has suggested that early nineteenth century writers often failed in their attempts to take their audience into foreign countries, largely because those foreign lands had very specific cultural 'characters' that were very different from our British ones, meaning society found it difficult to relate to them. The success, he says, of writers such as Walter Scott was down to how they used 'kindred originals' with whom his audience could associate.³⁸² Byron, mostly, is an exception to Edwards' theory, as is *The Vampyre*. Polidori successfully took his audience into foreign lands and introduced them to his vampire, but cleverly brought the vampire back into British society in order for them to see that the threat is a very real one.

³⁸⁰ Virginia Woolf *A Room of One's Own*, (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), p.74

³⁸¹ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p.110

³⁸² Simon Edwards 'Nation and State', in Leader & Haywood, 1998, p.140

Bram Stoker also did this with great success in his novel *Dracula* (1897) by also taking his very foreign vampire Count and bringing him into English society. Incidentally, Stoker also utilised a rather feminine character in Jonathon Harker, and like Polidori's tale this created a masculine / feminine dynamic. The extent to which Stoker drew on Polidori's creation is difficult to say, but the parallels are clear.

Not everyone believed that Byron was the author of *The Vampyre*, despite what Colburn said. A piece in the *Liverpool Mercury* in the month after the publication ran as follows:

When the story of this name first appeared in the *Literary Gazette*, it was announced as the production of Lord Byron. For the amusement of the public, we devoted a very large portion of a recent number of the *Kaleidoscope* to this singular tale. In the *Mercury* of the 16th April, being the Friday immediately succeeding its appearance in the *Kaleidoscope*, in consequence of more careful perusal, we entertained doubts as to the author; and accordingly advertised it as a story ascribed to Lord Byron. This was at least a fortnight before the appearance of the last *Literary Gazette*. We think it necessary to say this much, although it is not a matter of much consequence who the author is.³⁸³

Despite this discussion, Polidori being the author is crucial in my understanding and reading of *The Vampyre*. As I continue to argue, the relationship dynamic between Polidori and Byron (as viewed by Polidori) is reflected within the text. The casting of Byron as Ruthven is therefore crucial to my analysis.

So, too, *The Examiner* of the same month:

The story of the Vampyre, which has made so much noise, and, according to the general opinion, a noise so very unlike the usual triumph of Lord Byron's genius, is now declared by Dr. Polidori, in a letter to the publisher of it, to be a sort of *rifacimento*³⁸⁴ of his own from his Lordship's ideas. This is just what

³⁸³ *Liverpool Mercury*, 7th May 1819

³⁸⁴ *rifacimento* - a recasting or adaptation

we suspected; but how could the Doctor delay this information so long? or how is it that the Bookseller did not contrive to obtain it sooner? Did they never talk with each other on the subject? The Publisher, we believe, is the same person who used to put forth novels by Mrs. Edgeworth.³⁸⁵

They make a valid point as to why Polidori waited so long to explain the situation, or why the publisher was not aware who the real author was, although I have offered my own explanation while discussing the chain of events surrounding this. What it shows is that the wider public were not aware of the full situation (nor could they have been given Colburn's actions) and adds further weight to my argument that the two were not colluding together to deceive the public. With Polidori known to be the author, it changes the perspective of audience, at least as far as who it was originally written for (Polidori claimed it was not written for general publication).

At the time of *The Vampyre's* publication Lord Byron was in self-imposed exile, therefore his knowledge of the tale and his subsequent denial of authorship was somewhat delayed. Nevertheless, he was informed of the publication in the *New Monthly Magazine* by his friend Douglas Kinnaird, who wrote to him on April 6th, 1819. The content of Kinnaird's letter is mostly regarding Byron's finances, but after signing off 'Your's My dear Byron ever Douglas Kinnaird' he adds (almost as a postscript) the words 'What the Devil does the Vampyre mean? Is it yours?'.³⁸⁶ The exact date when this letter arrived with Byron is not known, but he replied to it on April 24th thus: 'Damn "*the Vampire*." What do I know of Vampires? It must be some bookselling imposture; contradict it in a solemn paragraph'.³⁸⁷ Three days later he wrote to the Editor of the French newspaper *Galignani's Messenger*:

³⁸⁵ *The Examiner*, 16th May 1819

³⁸⁶ Douglas Kinnaird, Letter to Lord Byron, Pall Mall, April 6 – 1819, National Library of Scotland Ms.43455

³⁸⁷ Lord Byron, Letter to Douglas Kinnaird, Venice April 24th 1819, in Marchand, 1976, p.114

I have seen mentioned a work entitled “the Vampire” with the addition of my name as that of the Author. – I am not the author and never heard of the work in question until now.³⁸⁸

Byron goes on to say that he has a ‘personal dislike to “Vampires” and the little acquaintance I have with them would by no means induce me to divulge their secrets’.³⁸⁹ That same day, John Murray was writing to Lord Byron with further details of the situation, which shows that by this point Polidori was seen as being solely to blame: ‘The Editor [Colburn]...says that he received it from Dr. Polidori for a small sum; Polidori averring that the whole plan of it was yours, and that it was merely written out by him’. Murray informed Byron that ‘Colburn cancelled the leaf’, but that ‘Polidori, finding that the sale exceeded his expectation and that he had sold it too cheap, went to the Editor and declared that he would deny it’.³⁹⁰

Through Murray’s letter to Byron, it is clear that the insinuations levelled against Polidori by Henry Colburn – that it was Polidori who had given the manuscript to him for a fee – was common knowledge from at least April 27th, and so it seems odd that Polidori did not attempt to publicly defend himself until September 25th, when he wrote to the *Morning Chronicle*, some five months later.

Byron replied to Murray to say that he had ‘got yr. extract, & the "Vampire". I need not say it is *not mine* - there is a rule to go by - you are my publisher (till we quarrel) and what is not published by you is not written by me’.³⁹¹ He informed Murray that the initial concept was indeed his, but that he subsequently abandoned the tale:

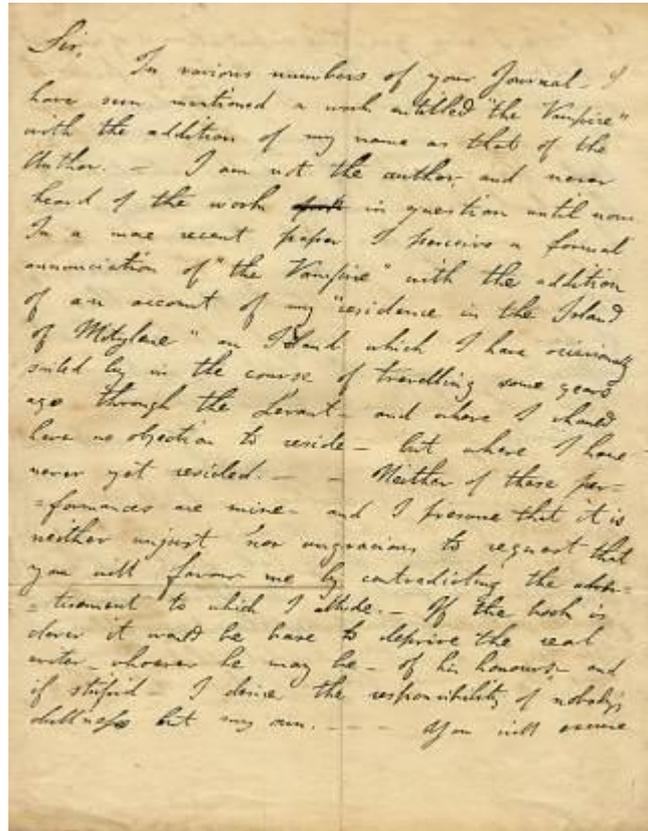
³⁸⁸ Letter from Lord Byron, Venice, April 27th 1819, Ibid. p.118-19

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ quoted from Rossetti, 1911, p.20

³⁹¹ Letter to John Murray, Venice, May 15th 1819. In Marchand, 1976, p.125

I enclose you the beginning of mine, by which you will see how far it resembles Mr. Colburn's publication. If you choose to publish it you may, stating why, and with such explanatory proem as you please. I never went on with it, as you will perceive by the date. - I began it in an old account-book of Miss Milbanke's which I kept because it contains the word "Household" written by her.³⁹²



Sir, In various numbers of your Journal, I have seen mentioned a work entitled "the Vampyre" with the addition of my name as that of the Author. - I am not the author, and never heard of the work ~~of~~ in question until now. In a more recent paper I perceive a formal announcement of "the Vampyre" with the addition of an account of my "residence in the Island of Mytilene" in Ionia, which I have occasionally visited by in the course of travelling some years ago through the Levant, and where I should have no objection to reside - but where I have never yet resided. - Neither of these performances are mine - and I presume that it is neither unjust nor ungenerous to request that you will favour me by contradicting the attribution to which I allude. - If the book is done it would be base to deprive the real author, whoever he may be - of his honour, and if stupid - I derive the responsibility of robbery, doubtless but my own. - - You will excuse

Figure 13: Byron's letter to the publisher Jean Antoine Galignani, dated 27th April 1819, in which he denied authorship of *The Vampyre*.

(Source: John Wilson Manuscripts)

Along with the letter, Byron sent Murray the original leaves containing his foundations for the tale (that became *Fragment*), which he tore directly from the aforementioned account book. Also in that letter Byron asked Murray 'What do you

³⁹² Ibid.

mean by Polidori's *diary*?',³⁹³ something that suggests Byron was not aware that Polidori had been keeping his diary. Without knowing its contents, but perhaps fearing them, Byron was unsure exactly what information was being made available on the period spent at Diodati (and more importantly the whole 'ghost-writing' activity). This may be the reason why Byron altered his stance from initially dismissing *The Vampyre* as anything to do with him, to then admitting that the concept was indeed his and sending this to Murray with a request to publish his version in order to distance himself from Polidori's.

On the surface, Byron pretended not to be rattled by the situation, writing to Hobhouse on May 17th - 'What is all this about Dr. Polidori? - who I perceive has got into "the Magazine"?'.³⁹⁴ He further informed him (Hobhouse) rather dismissively that he 'wrote to Galignani's Editor - to beg of him [the editor] to contradict "the Vampire"'.³⁹⁵ And yet, from the point when Murray mentioned Polidori's Diary Byron's stance altered somewhat, enough for him to send Murray his version of the tale and ask him to publish it.

Byron wrote to Murray again on the subject on May 25th, (most likely because he had received no response) and the second part of the following piece clearly shows Byron's anxieties on the matter:

A few days ago I sent you all I know of Polidori's Vampire; - he may do, say or write what he pleases - but I wish he would not attribute to me his own compositions; - if he has anything of mine in his possession the M.S. [Byron's version, sent to Murray on the 15th] will put it beyond Controversy; but I scarcely think that any one who knows me would believe the thing in the Magazine to be mine, even if they saw it in my own hieroglyphics.³⁹⁶

This reference of Byron's to 'the thing' is, on the surface, simply a reference to the tale, but a deeper reading of it could also relate to the vampire himself – Byron

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Letter to John Cam Hobhouse, Venice, May 17th 1819. Ibid, p.131

³⁹⁵ Ibid, p.131-132

³⁹⁶ Letter to John Murray, Venice, May 25th 1819. Ibid, p 139-40

saying that he is not Ruthven, despite how it may look. Although dismissive of the tale, he may have been more affronted at the suggestion he was a sadistic vampire than he was prepared to, at least publicly, admit.

On May 18th 1819, Kinnaird again wrote to Byron, this time informing him that 'The Vampyre has been claim'd by Mr or Dr Polidori',³⁹⁷ though of course by this point Byron was fully aware of this.

Back in England, Byron's response to *The Vampyre* was issued, in full, in the national press. The *Chester Chronicle* published the piece in full:

To the Editor of Galignani's Messenger. Sir, In various numbers of your Journal I have seen a work entitled "The Vampyre," with the addition of my name as that of the author. I am not the author, and never heard of the work in question until now. In a more recent paper, I perceive a formal annunciation of "The vampire" [sic] with the addition of an account of my "Residence in the Island of Mitylene", and Island which I have occasionally sailed by, in the course of travelling some years ago in the Levant, and where I should have no objection to reside, but where I have never yet resided. Neither of these performances are mine, and I presume that it is neither unjust nor ungracious to request that you will favour me by contradicting the advertisement to which I allude. If the book is clever I would be base to deprive the real writer, whoever he may be, of his honours; and if stupid, I desire the responsibility of nobody's dullness but my own.³⁹⁸

This may have been Byron's subtle way of disguising his true feelings, and in turn suggesting that Polidori was a bore and his tale quite ridiculous.

The *Scots Magazine* ran an article entitled '*The Vampyre, and Peter Bell*' in which they ridiculed 'two atrocious fellows' who were attempting to palm off 'their unconscionable nonsense upon two of the greatest poets of the age'. It continues

³⁹⁷ Letter to lord Byron, Pall Mall May 18th 1819. NLS Ms.43455.

³⁹⁸ *Chester Chronicle*, 17th June 1819

how 'Lord Byron could certainly never write anything so intensely stupid as 'The Vampyre'. The article describes *The Vampyre* as an

innocuous forgery, as it is impossible to suppose for a moment that Lord Byron has any hand in it, although his name is announced with equally impudent boldness as the author. In point of composition, it is not at all superior to many six-penny tales of horror which we used to see --- about in baskets after the good old ballads went out, and the good old histories of conversations came in. It is, indeed, fit for nothing else but the class of readers who resort to said baskets for their literary -----.³⁹⁹

This reference to 'six-penny tales of horror' links nicely with the later Penny Dreadfuls, in which the vampire figure continued to feature, such as *Varney, The Vampire, or The Feast of Blood* (1845-47).

After recounting the basics of the tale, the article asks 'Can any thing be more monstrous and silly?'. In a footnote to the article, the *Scots Magazine* explains that

We are happy to find that Lord Byron's publisher, Mr. Murray, has expressly disclaimed *The Vampyre*, which is now owned by a Mr. Polidori. We never heard of this gentleman before, unless he be the same person (with his name a little modernized) of whom Virgil has made such honourable mention in the beginning of the third Aenid. "Very like, very like," as Hamlet says, for Virgil's Polydorus, from the quantity of blood in his body after he was dead and buried, seems evidently to have been of a Vampyrish constitution.⁴⁰⁰

This phrase furthers the idea that Polidori had been 'vampirised' by Byron, which is what *The Vampyre* appears to be telling us via the Aubrey/Polidori character.

In April 1819, Mary Shelley wrote to her friend Maria Gisborne, who had evidently written to Mary herself on the subject of *The Vampyre*, informing her that 'The Tale you mention of Lord Byron's is on the same subject as one that he commenced in Switzerland and I little doubt therefore but that the information is t[r]ue - I shall be

³⁹⁹ The *Scots Magazine*, 1st May 1819

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

curious to see it - I know the [s]tory of it already which is very dramatic and striking.⁴⁰¹ Although this letter would never have made it into the public's eye, it nevertheless shows what Byron was afraid of. Having not even read Polidori's version, the title alone was enough for Mary Shelley to instantly link it to Byron's tale from the ghost story writing of 1816. Mary saw the piece (*Fragment*) to be 'dramatic and striking', whereas Byron was clearly embarrassed by the piece (or perhaps the subject matter).

Although Byron's poetry had featured elements of vampirism previously, this was more akin to the 'traditional', East European folkloric guise. In many respects, his *Fragment* did little to alter this, but Polidori's version of the tale created a different kind of literary vampire. Gavin Budge points out that one contemporary reviewer likened Byron's 'story' and his poetry to vampirism, draining the reader of his principles (or morals).⁴⁰² The way Byron (and indeed his work) was viewed at the time was largely a direct result of the allegations of incest, the very public affair with Caroline Lamb and his failed marriage to Annabella Milbanke. Budge's reference to Byron 'draining his audience of their morals' highlights this, and shows that the public perception of him would have instantly linked him to Polidori's vampiric Lord Ruthven. In the second part of this chapter, I will go on to explore this theme in more detail by comparing Polidori's *The Vampyre* and Byron's *Fragment*, and arguing that Polidori added fundamental elements to his version in order to typecast Byron as his vampiric Lord.

It is clear that there are many discrepancies and uncertain elements in the publication of *The Vampyre* in April 1819, and that the role of Colburn and Polidori appear far from scrupulous. However, simply blaming Polidori for the matter (as tends to be the case) is clearly unfair. It may well be that he never intended the tale for publication, merely composing it in effort to impress 'a lady' (which is certainly a

⁴⁰¹ Letter to Maria Gisborne, Rome, April 27, 1819. In Betty T. Bennett (ed) *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, Vol. 1, (London: John Hopkins, 1980), p.96

⁴⁰² Gavin Budge "The Vampyre": Romantic Metaphysics and the Aristocratic Other, p. 214. See also Donald H. Reiman (ed) *The Romantics Reviewed...Part B, Byron and Regency Society Poets*, Vol. 2, (London: Garland, 1972)

Polidori trait). Byron, almost certainly, had nothing to do with the tale nor the publication other than 'the groundwork', and yet it appears to have bothered him enough to write explanatory letters dismissing his involvement to his publisher, close friends and the general public (via the newspapers).

These actions suggest that he was more than a little concerned in the thinly disguised portrayal of him as Ruthven. Like Byron, Polidori appears to have used real-life events and the dynamic between his central characters, I would argue, reflects the fraught relationship the two had with one another during their time at Diodati. Polidori's relationship with Percy Shelley appears equally fraught, if not more so, during this period, and it is odd he does not appear to feature within Polidori's tale. This may be down to audience – the Countess Breuss would have known the actions and allegations linked to Byron, but may not have known of Shelley. Therefore, Polidori casting Byron as Ruthven added to his audience's understanding of his tale. The irony is that when Colburn chose to publish the tale more widely, his audience was equally aware of the Byronic element of Ruthven.

By comparing the two texts – Byron's *Fragment* and Polidori's *The Vampyre* – some similarities become apparent, clearly showing that Polidori had taken the general framework of Byron's piece and transformed it into his own tale, something Polidori himself never denied. The extent to which Polidori modified the piece becomes overtly apparent, as does his casting of Byron (based on his perceptions of him first hand) as the vampire character Ruthven, and how his actions reflect an exaggerated portrayal of Byron's own public image.

Fragment versus The Vampyre

In order to fully explore these similarities and differences between the two texts, a brief discussion of the events leading up to Byron's conception of his version of the tale is necessary. Although many Byron scholars attribute the initial idea of writing a

'ghost story' during the Diodati period to Byron,⁴⁰³ none give a direct reference for this. Even Polidori's own *Diary*, the only contemporary record of the events, fails to mention this. Polidori simply writes, in the entry for June 17th 1816, 'The ghost-stories are begun by all but me'.⁴⁰⁴ That the group was reading the collection of German supernatural tales entitled *Phantasmagoriana* is widely known. Within that collection is a story entitled *The Family Portraits*, in which the mistress of the house informs her guests that 'Every one is to relate a story of ghosts, or something of a similar nature'.⁴⁰⁵ It may be that Byron took inspiration from this and echoed a similar challenge, but clearly the idea was far from his own.

As discussed above, attributing the idea to Byron appears to come from the Introductions (1818 and 1831) of *Frankenstein*, as the 1818 Edition (written and signed by Percy Bysshe Shelley, and not Mary) tells how the genesis for Mary Shelley's tale came about:

The circumstance on which my story rests was suggested in casual conversation. It was commenced partly as a source of amusement, and partly as an expedient for exercising any untried resources of mind. Other motives were mingled with these as the work proceeded.⁴⁰⁶

Yet still it is not attributed to Byron, and only in the 1831 Edition Introduction (this time written by Mary Shelley) do we explicitly see this: "We will each write a ghost story" said Lord Byron, and his proposition was acceded to. There were four of us'.⁴⁰⁷

It could be argued that the progenitor of the ghost-writing does not matter, but in order to dissect the relationship between Byron and Polidori, and thus suggest that

⁴⁰³ For example Fiona MacCarthy *Byron: Life and Legend*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p.292; Leslie A. Marchand, *Byron: A Portrait*, (London: The Cresset Library, 1970), p.243; David Ellis *Byron in Geneva: That Summer of 1816*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), p.46

⁴⁰⁴ quoted from Rossetti, 1911, p.125

⁴⁰⁵ A.J. Day (ed). *Fantasmagoriana: Tales of the Dead*, (St. Ives: Fantasmagoriana Press, 2004), p.39

⁴⁰⁶ Mary Shelley *Frankenstein, Or the Modern Prometheus*, (New York: Zorba Press Edition, 2002), p.21

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p.17

this played a major part in shaping Polidori's tale, then it must be argued that it does matter. This becomes especially critical in order to reinstate Polidori's place amongst the 'talented souls' involved in the Diodati sojourn. For instance, from his *Diary* entry of 15th June (two days before Byron wrote *Fragment*), it is clear that Polidori and Shelley discussed the principles of mankind - whether man was but an instrument⁴⁰⁸ - and yet Mary Shelley, in her 1831 Edition Introduction, clearly attributes this to *Byron* and Shelley, and does not even mention Polidori. Perhaps, again, she uses Byron as progenitor to add more credence to her own work.

Comparing the two texts is problematic, especially as Byron's appears to have been 'stripped' of its vampirism (if it was there at all). Gelder agrees with this point, suggesting that 'Byron wrote a fragment of a horror story which may or may not have been about a vampire'.⁴⁰⁹ The version of his tale that would be published within his poem *Mazeppa* (1819), as *Fragment*, was almost certainly toned down in order to distance itself from Polidori's tale, which had been published earlier that year. Byron's own thoughts on the matter come courtesy of Thomas Medwin: 'the foundation of the story was mine; but I was forced to disown the publication, lest the world should suppose that I had vanity enough, or was egoist enough, to write in that ridiculous manner about myself'.⁴¹⁰ Byron's comments here, and especially the line 'to write in that ridiculous manner about myself' suggests that he, too, saw a biographical depiction of himself in Polidori's tale.

In the published version of *Fragment* is a tale almost void of all things vampiric, yet from Polidori's own admission the original plot structure had been laid out by Byron and that Polidori used this concept on which to base his own tale. Therefore, some heavy editing of *Fragment* must have taken place in order for it to be 'non-vampiric'. The whole point of the Diodati ghost stories was to be just that – ghostly. The published version of *Fragment* is anything but.

⁴⁰⁸ quoted from Rossetti, 1911, p.123

⁴⁰⁹ Ken Gelder *Reading the Vampire*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p.26

⁴¹⁰ Thomas Medwin *Conversations of Lord Byron: Noted During a Residence with his Lordship at Pisa, in the Years 1821 and 1822*. (London: Henry Colburn, 1824), p.120

Byron based the concept of his story on an occasion from his own personal experience, and also his own central character/vampire (Augustus Darvell) on someone he knew, much like Polidori did. In Byron's case, this was John Cam Hobhouse, with whom he travelled in Europe in 1811.⁴¹¹ Byron's description of Darvell, and also the relationship between the narrator and Darvell, also reflects the Byron/Hobhouse relationship – 'we had been educated at the same schools and universities'⁴¹² – Byron and Hobhouse were at Trinity together.

In *Fragment* the narrator and Darvell travel to Turkey and visit the ruins of Ephesus and Sardis, an occurrence that reflects the visits made by Byron and Hobhouse. The most telling part of the tale, however, relates to the 'rapid illness of my companion [Darvell]',⁴¹³ an illness that forces them to rest in a Turkish cemetery. This also happened to Byron and Hobhouse, where it was Hobhouse who was ill (he had apparently caught the clap in Cadiz)⁴¹⁴ and they too, like their fictional counterparts, were forced to rest in a Turkish cemetery.

This shows that Byron is being biographical in his tale, and this is a theme that Polidori also adopted. Like many details surrounding the creation of the two tales, it is impossible to know for certain whether Byron shared the fact that he was being biographical in his version of the 'ghost-story', although it seems likely given that is the stance Polidori himself took. What the biographical model allows is for the characters, and thus the people they are based upon, to be more 'real' to the reader, and in turn this gives more credence to the events they are involved in.

There are also, however, elements of *Fragment* that reflect the relationship of Polidori and Byron, and although Byron does not appear to have referenced the relationship in this manner, Polidori would no doubt have seen the similarities. For example, the narrator tells how Darvell was able to give one passion the appearance of another, making it 'difficult to define the nature of what was working within

⁴¹¹ See Marchand, 1987, Frayling, 1991, pp.126-30

⁴¹² Lord Byron, *Fragment*, in Frayling, 1991, p.126

⁴¹³ Ibid. p.128

⁴¹⁴ See Fiona MacCarthy *Byron: Life and Legend*, (London: John Murray, 2014), p.116

him'⁴¹⁵ – this appears to be a reference to the conversation alluded to earlier between Polidori and Percy Shelley where they discussed the nature of mankind. Shelley was a self-confessed atheist, and his poetry is full of the exploration of nature and science. Although Byron could never be classed as pro-Wordsworth (at least not until he met Shelley) Shelley himself was heavily influenced by the Wordsworthian model of poetry. Polidori, because of his dissertation topic on somnambulism, was also familiar with the concept of Man being able to commit acts of which he had no control or, ultimately, knowledge. This subject hints at the somnambulistic traits of literary vampires such as Lord Ruthven (to an extent) and most obviously Count Dracula, although it was Mary Shelley who developed the idea fully in her novel *Frankenstein*. Perhaps Byron, too, was influenced by the discussions at Diodati, and attempted to include elements of it within his tale.

The narrator also discusses his own relationship with Darvell, and again this seems to mirror that of Byron and Polidori:

My advances were received with sufficient coldness: but I was young, and not easily discouraged, and at length succeeded in obtaining, to a certain degree, that common-place intercourse and moderate confidence of common and every-day concerns, created and cemented by similarity of pursuit and frequency of meeting, which is called intimacy, or friendship, according to the ideas of him who uses those words to express them.⁴¹⁶

Perhaps Byron was here parodying Polidori, and how the origins of their own relationship came about.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid. p.127

⁴¹⁶ Ibid. p.127

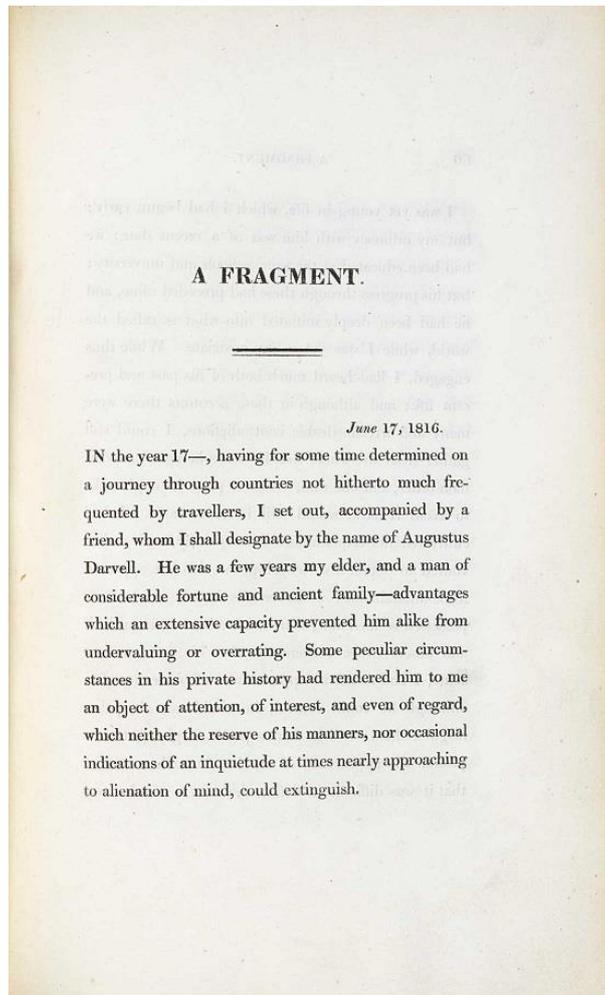


Figure 14: Byron's uncompleted story *Fragment* was published along with his poem *Mazeppa* in 1819.

(Source: M. Beresford)

The main feature of *Fragment* is the oath that Darvell forces the narrator to swear – 'to conceal my death from every human being'⁴¹⁷ – and the ring he gives him that must be thrown into the salt springs at the Bay of Eleusis on 'the ninth day of the month, at noon precisely'.⁴¹⁸ Only in this way can his resurrection be brought about, although Byron breaks off his tale before this can happen. The final event of *Fragment* is the death of Darvell, upon which his body blackens, and upon which the narrator 'between astonishment and grief...was tearless'⁴¹⁹ – a very Byronic trait, with several of his biographers noting how little emotion Byron showed in situations that reduced others to tears. This, alongside the other biographical elements just

⁴¹⁷ Ibid. p.129

⁴¹⁸ Ibid. p.129

⁴¹⁹ Ibid. p.130

discussed, appears to confirm Byron as the narrator, and not the Darvell character, and could be a signifier of the mental problems he faced after the breakdown of his marriage. Byron privately struggled with his emotions and depicts himself as accursed, and yet publicly he kept up a facade and portrayed himself as an innocent victim almost, for example blaming the separation on Annabella Milbanke, and depicting Caroline Lamb as the one who was 'mad, bad and dangerous to know', and not himself.⁴²⁰

Byron's mental and emotional state at the end of the Diodati summer is evident in his poem *Manfred*. The 'Faustian overtones are obvious'⁴²¹ and reflect his emotional grief (from his failed marriage and from missing his daughter) and the guilt felt over his relationship with his half-sister Augusta. The time at Diodati appears to have done more to emphasise his self-torment and self-loathing than it did to help him escape, and his *Fragment* (and Polidori's use of him as muse for Ruthven) encapsulates all the 'cursed eternal wanderings'⁴²² associated with the vampire-figure that asks us to empathise rather than abhor.

At the end of *Fragment* Byron has his vampire, Darvell, turn into a blackened corpse. This seems, on the surface, a direct opposite to the 'classic' image of a vampire, both from fiction and folklore. Generally, we envisage a vampire to have a deathly pallor; an opaque skin colour that reflects his undead nature. And yet, a couple of examples can be given to show that Byron clearly knew a lot more about folkloric vampires than he was keen to admit. Kosovan Gypsies believe that the body of a person destined to become a vampire will turn black just after death⁴²³ and, perhaps of more direct relevance to Byron, Greek accounts suggest that if a person lived a bad life their corpse would turn black after death.⁴²⁴ Given his love of Greece, and the vampiric elements of folklore traditions there, it is strange Byron did not choose to

⁴²⁰ See Byron's letters for this period for a more complete picture, in Marchand, 1974, Vol. IV

⁴²¹ MacCarthy, 2003, p.11

⁴²² Frayling, 1991, p.126

⁴²³ T.P. Vukanovic, 'The Vampire' in *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, 37,1958, pp. 21-31, p.23

⁴²⁴ I.T. Sanders, *Rainbow in the Rock*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p.273

set his tale there, but then that would not have matched his biographical account of himself and Hobhouse.

Choosing Greece as the setting for *The Vampyre*, however, seems important for Polidori, as this setting is different to *Fragment*. It has long been suggested⁴²⁵ that Polidori chose Greece directly because that was how Byron had initially laid out his concept to him, but this seems incorrect given Byron's own biographical depictions. Polidori himself suggested that Byron's plot had two friends travelling to Greece, where upon one died and forced on the other an oath. This cannot be the case, as in the published *Fragment* the two travel to Smyrna and not Greece. So, either Polidori (and thus subsequent scholars) are mistaken, or Byron *did* in fact set his tale in Greece but changed it in order to distance it from Polidori's version. Either way, the question still remains why Greece, although given Byron's earlier poem *The Giaour*, in which he had 'feminised Greece'⁴²⁶ we can perhaps understand why he may choose to set *Fragment* there. This feminisation element allows Polidori to create a victim in Greece, and gives his vampire Ruthven more of a dangerous edge. By preying on Greek women (Ilanthe for example) Ruthven is preying on Greece itself. This allows for the horror element of when Ruthven appears in England to be all the more elevated for the audience.

There are further vampiric links to Greece that appear to be mirrored within *The Vampyre's* plot. Du Boulay⁴²⁷ discusses the symbolic cyclism of Greek vampire belief, in that processional movements (ie. the cyclical nature of life) relate to the movement of blood. This movement is believed to be right-handed, and any reversal would be detrimental to the spiritual journey of the deceased, leading to the spirit returning as a vampire. This reversed-cycle then brings the vampire back to the arms of its family, but in a negative way, thus it consumes what was once sacred to it. I might argue that this 'cyclism model' also appears to be reflected in vampire lore in

⁴²⁵ For example see Patricia L. Skarda 'Vampirism and Plagiarism: Byron's Influence and Polidori's Practice, in *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer, 1989) and Ken Gelder *Reading the Vampyre*, London: Routledge, 1994

⁴²⁶ Gelder, 1994, p.32

⁴²⁷ J. Du Boulay, 'The Greek Vampire: A Study of Cyclic Symbolism in Marriage and Death', in *Man*, New Series, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Jun. 1982), pp. 219-238, p.219

other countries, for example those of Eastern Europe, where 'dead vampires' are alleged to have returned to their loved ones after death and brought sickness and, sometimes, death itself. [Add here a piece on degeneration \(Europe vs London\)](#)

This idea of illness or disease being spread to others is a key element in *The Vampyre* and in *Dracula*. Polidori started the concept by taking these Eastern European tales and creating a vampire that brought a plague into the heart of England with it. In Polidori's case, the vampire was the plague. If he had developed his tale beyond the short story that it was, this vampire plague may have been realised beyond the victims Ianthe and Miss Aubrey. Stoker, however, highlighted this theme more clearly by showing the slow, drawn out process of the vampire disease when he had Lucy Westenra (note the ironic surname here) succumb slowly to the Eastern vampire.

Many critics have suggested there may be an element of political emphasis behind this given the developing Empire and the turbulence between Britain and Europe in the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth centuries. Andrew Smith suggested that there appears a clear association between Count Dracula, Eastern Europe and disease, but we can also say this for Lord Ruthven and the East in Polidori's tale. Smith continues by showing that in *Dracula* (and in *The Vampyre* also) this Eastern 'disease' permeates into London society and attempts to instil the notion of 'degeneration', which I discussed in my Introduction.⁴²⁸ Halberstam suggests that within the Gothic there is a 'disruption of realism and of all generic purity. It is the hideous eruption of the monstrous in the heart of England',⁴²⁹ and this is what Smith alludes to in his comment above – that bringing the vampire to England transforms the norm, disrupts what is expected and starts the degeneration process.

⁴²⁸ Andrew Smith *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the Fin-De-Siècle*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p.35

⁴²⁹ Judith Halberstam *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995), p.11

This East/West divide is apparent within the symbolic cyclism that exists within Greek belief systems.⁴³⁰ The reason, Du Boulay argues, for the cycle being right-handed is that it follows from Greek 'life dances' in which an open-ended circle of people dance to their right (anti-clockwise). Thus travelling to the right (east) symbolises life, and hence travelling to the left (west) evokes a return from death into the realm of the living. This mirrors ancient belief systems of summer solstice sunrise in the east (life) and winter solstice sunset in the west (death) being integral within religious belief systems. This still remains true within the Christian church, with east signifying life and west death, hence why people are buried east-west, facing the east.

Why this model is relevant to the discussion of *Fragment / The Vampyre* becomes clear by considering the following. In *Fragment*, the narrator and Darvell travel to the East, where Darvell dies. As the story breaks off here, all remains good, and the equilibrium remains undisturbed. However, in *The Vampyre* Aubrey and Ruthven travel from London to Greece (eastwards) where Ruthven dies. The crucial difference here is that they then travel back to the west, and this reflects Du Boulay's 'reversed symbolic cyclism' theory and thus allows the creation of our undead vampire. More importantly, Polidori follows the 'Greek theme', in that he has his vampire return to the 'loved ones' and destroy them, in this case the sister of Aubrey. In his Introduction to *The Vampyre*, Polidori states that in many parts of Greece the returning vampire would only haunt 'those beings he loved most while on earth - those to whom he was bound by ties of kindred and affection'⁴³¹ so he was clearly aware of Greek folkloric beliefs. This element is apparent in earlier vampire 'histories' such as those by de Tournefort and Dom Calmet, both of which Byron would have read.

⁴³⁰ Du Boulay spent two years between 1971-73 conducting research into it at the rural village of Ambéli in North Euboea

⁴³¹ John Polidori *The Vampyre*, *New Monthly Magazine*, April 1st 1819

Whilst within Greek folkloric belief there are a number of ways in which the dead could become vampiric, Lawson⁴³² suggests it is 'those who do not receive the full and due rites of burial', and although he goes on to list a further eight reasons, it is this one (incidentally, number one on his list) that is most critical to a reading of *Fragment / The Vampyre* as it appears to reflect the use of the oath and all the strange rites involved in that. Taking into account further studies on this topic, Du Boulay⁴³³ argues that there are two main signifiers that occur in almost all cases of vampire-belief: 1) committing a sin in life, and 2) failure to carry out the proper rituals by the living on the corpse of the deceased. We know through Aubrey that Ruthven has committed the sin of vampirism in the past, so it seems he was already a vampire before venturing to Greece, but by choosing to specifically relate the 'death rites' to Aubrey, Polidori creates a direct connection between his vampire (Ruthven) and his intended victim (Aubrey's sister) that complies with the Greek 'symbolic cyclism' effect.

The question remains as to how much knowledge Polidori had of folkloric accounts of vampirism. Gelder believes it is 'possible to argue that vampire fiction consolidated itself because of (or, in relation to) the establishment in the nineteenth century of folklore as a modern discipline'.⁴³⁴ Polidori does cite some of this folklore within his Introduction to *The Vampyre*⁴³⁵ directly referencing the account of Arnold Paole (1732), the Medvegian peasant who allegedly became a vampire, and also de Tournefort's account of the 'vampire autopsy' he witnessed in the Levant (1717). Polidori further references vampires in Hungary, Poland, Austria and Lorraine, and this is almost certainly directly taken from Voltaire. Clearly, he has some knowledge at the point of publication (nearly three years after its initial conception) but whether he had this knowledge at the time of writing proves difficult to know for sure.

⁴³² J.C. Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), p.375

⁴³³ Du Boulay, 1982, p.221

⁴³⁴ Gelder, 1994, p.34

⁴³⁵ Both in the *New Monthly Magazine* version and in the subsequent book edition

Herzfeld⁴³⁶ has further argued that although this notion of folkloric studies and indeed the built environment of the Classical sites appeared of the utmost importance to the West, 'the rural folk [may well have] preserved no knowledge or memory of the Classical past at all'. Perhaps that is what the peasant girl Ianthe represents – the rural, backwards nature of Greece and how modernity (through Ruthven) was a danger to that simple way of life would destroy that. This is echoed by Stoker in his novel *Dracula*, which is full of fin-de-siecle innovations that are in direct contrast to the old, rural ways. Gelder⁴³⁷ argues that Polidori's tale reflects just that element of old versus new, but that only the foreigners (Aubrey) appear to realise it.

That Polidori took the concept of *Fragment* and used it for his own tale is without doubt – he admitted as much in own words in the letter published in the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1819 (as discussed earlier), but maintained that although the concept was Byron's, the current form of the tale was entirely his own. By comparing the texts, it becomes clear that the plot of *Fragment* is adhered to generally, but by no means overtly. For example, *The Vampyre* is set in London, Italy and Greece, although for some reason Polidori finds it necessary to take Aubrey on to Smyrna before making his way home to London – the very place where the events of *Fragment* took place. The main difference between the two is how *The Vampyre* is set amongst the many gatherings of high society, a feature which reflects the real danger is apparent within everyday life, and not exclusively in far off lands of 'Turbaned tombstones' – Polidori brings his new horror directly into English society.

Polidori also leaves no doubt as to the threat of his monster – the very title of the tale ensures that – and whereas *Fragment* merely hints at vampirism, *The Vampyre* makes full use of the being: Ruthven's 'dead grey eye', 'the deadly hue of his face' and his glance that seemed to 'pierce through to the inward workings of the heart'.⁴³⁸ Since the 1730s, British society had heard the tales of the vampire

⁴³⁶ M. Herzfeld *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982), p.15

⁴³⁷ Gelder, 1994

⁴³⁸ John William Polidori *The Vampyre, 1819*, in Morrison & Baldick (eds), 2008, p.1

epidemics of Eastern Europe, and famous cases such as those of Arnold Paole and Peter Plogojowicz described how the vampiric corpses were pale skinned, gorged and bloated on the blood they had consumed, and how a stake to the heart followed by decapitation was the only way to kill them.

With some of *The Vampyre's* characters it is possible to attribute them to actual people, and again this is where general preconceptions come into play. That 'Lord Ruthven' was adopted from Lady Caroline Lamb's character of the same name (and alleged to have been based on Byron) in *Glenarvon* is impossible to deny, and even more so when we view Lamb's Ruthven and Polidori's Ruthven as overtly apparent imitations of Byron. However, looking more closely, there also seems an element of self-parody on Polidori's behalf, not least when Aubrey (Polidori) was led 'into false notions of his talents and his merit'⁴³⁹, a claim continually laid at the feet of Polidori by biographers of both himself and Byron.

Aubrey is also fatherless, and is 'left to himself'⁴⁴⁰ by his guardians, something which Polidori often wished for himself, according to MacDonald.⁴⁴¹ He frequently cites the relationship between Polidori and his own father, Gaetano, as the catalyst for many of Polidori's actions, not least his travelling to Europe with Byron. Perhaps *The Vampyre* created the self-sufficiency and escapism, albeit in literary form, that Polidori so craved in life. It is difficult to substantiate this beyond speculation, yet MacDonald adopts this theme throughout his biography of Polidori.

Another element of *The Vampyre* that differs from *Fragment* is the ability of its author to draw on his medical knowledge. It is clear through his Doctoral dissertation that Polidori was an expert on somnambulism (sleepwalking), and also through his *Diary* that he was discussing the subject whilst at Diodati. The phenomenon of somnambulism (used frequently in later literary narratives, and heavily in *Dracula*) is clear within *The Vampyre* – Ruthven does not hunt his prey (who, incidentally, are always young, attractive women, a fact that becomes 'tradition' in most later texts),

⁴³⁹ Ibid. p.4

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid. p.4

⁴⁴¹ MacDonald, 1991

he does not have to, they are instead 'drawn' to him, for he possesses 'irresistible powers of seduction'.⁴⁴² Another character trait of the Polidoric vampire is the tendency to prey on the weak – when Ruthven gambles he is ever alive when encountering, as his opponent, 'the rash youthful novice' or 'the luckless father', when his eyes 'sparkled with more fire than that of the cat whilst dallying with the half-dead mouse'.⁴⁴³ Here, Ruthven merely toys with the males of the story (whilst maintaining his thirst for the absolute destruction of the female characters), a sadism that is apparent in subsequent literary narratives, such as *Dracula*.

Giuliano discusses Byron's attitudes towards the female sex as evident through his personal letters, and concluded that he had a 'characteristic disdain for intellectual women, particularly women writers'.⁴⁴⁴ She cites the example from Byron to John Murray in a letter dated 28th September 1820 in which he suggested Felicia Hemans (herself a popular poet) would be better knitting blue stockings than wearing them, and referred to her as 'Hewoman'. I am not entirely convinced that this is evidence of Byron's gender discrimination, as he often wrote in condescending fashion of many of his male contemporaries, not least Polidori who became Dr. PollyDolly. What this latter example hints at, however, is Byron feminising Polidori in a similar manner as he masculinised Hemans. Further evidence of Byron's attitude towards intellectual women is apparent when he referred to the female author of *Corinne* (1807), Madame de Staël, as 'Mrs. Stale' and described her as 'a very plain woman...with her pen behind her ear and her mouth full of ink'.⁴⁴⁵ And yet, later in life, and particularly during his time in Switzerland, Byron considered Madame de Staël as a trusted confidante, and was regularly found at her house at Coppet, across the lake from Diodati. Perhaps this is why Polidori chose to depict women as Ruthven's victims, to capitalise on the public knowledge of Byron's attitudes towards women.

⁴⁴² John William Polidori *The Vampyre, 1819*, in Morrison & Baldick (eds), 2008, p.7

⁴⁴³ Ibid. p.6

⁴⁴⁴ C.F. Giuliano 'Gulnare/Kaled's "Untold" Feminization of Byron's Oriental Tales', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 33, No. 4, *Nineteenth Century*, 1993, pp. 785-807, p.795

⁴⁴⁵ Quoted from MacCarthy, 2003, p.301

Byron's life is filled with male sexual potency, his real-life libido only marginally greater than his poetic one. Polidori himself recounts how, on arriving at their hotel in Ostend at the start of their travels, Byron 'fell like a thunderbolt upon the chambermaid'.⁴⁴⁶ During his honeymoon with his new bride Anabella Milbanke, Byron treated her with overt disdain and distanced himself both mentally and physically from her, yet still managed to 'have her' ⁴⁴⁷ on the sofa before dinner.

Giuliano⁴⁴⁸ further suggests that some of Byron's poems reflect a 'theater of gender conflicts [both] poetic and personal', and this is something that Harse⁴⁴⁹ has also noted within Planché's stage adaptation of *The Vampyre*. Here, she believes, 'the play sanitizes the aggressive sexual presence of Polidori's Ruthven; the vampire must marry the women on whom he preys'. Whereas Ruthven has to marry Aubrey's sister before he can 'glut his thirst' he has no such limitations when he attacks Ianthe. It is also possible to suggest there is a nationalistic element to Polidori's tale, as Ruthven can easily prey on foreign women, but not so easily on English ones.

When Darvell turns into a blackened corpse in *Fragment*, Byron has him echo the folkloric guise of old. Nowhere within *Fragment* is the 'Byronic vampire', Frayling's so-called 'Ruthven formula'⁴⁵⁰ vampire, suave and aristocratic. Polidori also portrays the folkloric vampire known to wider society within his own tale when he recounts how 'several of their near relatives and children had been found marked with the stamp of the fiend's appetite'⁴⁵¹ (the phrase 'stamp of the fiend's appetite' appears to be a reference to the plague of disease that caused the vampire epidemics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, rather than a physical biting of the victims). He continues 'she [Ianthe] detailed to him the traditional appearance of these

⁴⁴⁶ Quoted from Rossetti, 1911, p.33

⁴⁴⁷ Quoted from Hobhouse *Diary*, May 15th, 1824. Available online at <https://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/32-1824-byrons-death-and-funeral1.pdf> Accessed 18/9/17. This phrase 'had her' on the sofa was one of the objectionable elements of Byron's *Memoirs* that resulted in their destruction in 1824 before they could be published.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p.786

⁴⁴⁹ K. Harse, *Melodrama Hath Charms: Planché's Theatrical Domestication of Polidori's The Vampyre*. University of Indiana unpublished doctoral thesis

⁴⁵⁰ Frayling, 1991

⁴⁵¹ John William Polidori *The Vampyre, 1819*, in Morrison & Baldick (eds), 2008, p.9

monsters'⁴⁵² but next comes the phrase that changes the vampire's guise into the one associated with the being today – in this 'traditional appearance' Aubrey heard a 'pretty accurate description of Lord Ruthven'⁴⁵³, the 'living vampyre...[who was] forced every year, by feeding upon the life of a lovely female to prolong his existence for the ensuing months'.⁴⁵⁴

Later, the vampire is credited with superhuman strength and also bites the neck in order to draw the blood – the true Byronic vampire, and yet none of this imagery is evident in *Fragment*, suggesting the image owes more to Byron as a person (as witnessed through the eyes of Polidori) than to Byron as an author.

Polidori's plagiarism is only really apparent in the name Ruthven (lifted from Caroline Lamb, and not Byron) and in the part that features the oath. Here *The Vampyre's* oath closely resembles that from *Fragment*: 'conceal all you know of me...[ensure] my death were unknown for some time...Swear by all your soul reveres'.⁴⁵⁵ Further traditions surrounding the death of Ruthven see his dead body laid out at the 'first cold ray of the moon that rose after his death',⁴⁵⁶ again markedly similar to 'the ninth day of the month, at noon precisely' witnessed in *Fragment* but again Polidori influences later narratives, for example *Varney the Vampire*, by associating his vampire with the moon, unlike Byron.

Byron had a belief in 'the advantages of looking at mankind instead of reading of them'⁴⁵⁷ but as MacDonald⁴⁵⁸ points out his reading directly influenced *how* he should interpret what he saw, not to mention where he should go in order to see. Polidori was in the fortunate position of doing both, and this undoubtedly shaped what would become *The Vampyre*. Whether he was happy with its current form

⁴⁵² Ibid. p.10

⁴⁵³ Ibid. p.10

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid. p.9

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid. p.15

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid. p.16

⁴⁵⁷ Marchand, 1974, p.34

⁴⁵⁸ D.L. MacDonald 'Orientalism and Eroticism in Byron and Merrill', *Pacific Coast Philology*, Vol. 21, No. 1/2 (November 1986), pp. 60-64, p.60

(current at the time of its publication) is difficult to know, and although he claimed not to be, with Polidori you could never be quite sure.

Clearly, then, there are similarities, and the general plot of two friends travelling abroad is apparent in both, as is the death of the 'vampiric' character (although how Darvell can be classed as overtly vampiric is not entirely clear). The oath and subsequent resurrection (again, only implied in *Fragment*) occurs in both, but that is where the similarities end. It is impossible to know how much more of his concept Byron divulged to Polidori, nor how much more vampiric it may have been. Indeed, Polidori's only biographer suggests that 'the bizarre success of Polidori's tale depended on the ways in which his monster was new...[which] it owed to Byron'.⁴⁵⁹ That is Byron as a *person*, and not, as so many people suggest, as the progenitor of the tale. Skarda⁴⁶⁰ took this idea further when she suggested that Polidori created Aubrey as a representative of himself, and *The Vampyre* therefore became a replacement of the diary he was commissioned by John Murray (allegedly for £500, a rather large sum for the time) to write. As mentioned, this was only published in 1912 by William Rossetti, and so Murray / society did not get the details they would have so eagerly welcomed. Skarda argues that they did indeed get the story after all, in the form of *The Vampyre*. This tale, she says, describes 'the gradual initiation, isolation, seduction and eventual death'⁴⁶¹ of Aubrey / Polidori. To coin his own phrase, he too 'glutted the thirst of the VAMPYRE'.⁴⁶²

Although Byron claimed not to know of vampires, there is too much evidence to the contrary to show this is not the case. In fact, all of the Diodati party (Clare Clairmont aside) published works with clear vampiric elements to them, Byron in *The Giaour* (1813) and *Fragment* (1819), Mary in *Frankenstein* (1818) – 'I gave vent to my anguish in fearful howlings. I was like a wild beast that had broken the toils; destroying the objects that obstructed me',⁴⁶³ Polidori in *The Vampyre* (1819) and Shelley in *Prometheus Unbound* (1820). Byron's links to the macabre go even further

⁴⁵⁹ MacDonald, 1991, p.190

⁴⁶⁰ Skarda, 1989, p.251

⁴⁶¹ Ibid. p.251

⁴⁶² John William Polidori *The Vampyre*, 1819, in Morrison & Baldick (eds), 2008, p.23

⁴⁶³ Shelley, 1987, p. 143

back than this, for example the occasion when he had the Newstead skull made into a cup, and in a letter to his mother in 1810 when he wrote of the 'Turkish burial grounds (the loveliest spots on earth)'.⁴⁶⁴ And in 1816, just a couple of months before his ghost-story concept, he wrote to John Murray thus:

P.S. I have read Hodgson's 'Friends.' * * * * He is right in defending Pope against the bastard pelicans of the poetical winter day, who add insult to their parricide, by sucking the blood of the parent of English real poetry—poetry without fault—and then spurning the bosom which fed them.⁴⁶⁵

Here Byron likens other authors to vampires, feeding off others in order to create their own work, much like Polidori does with his *Fragment*. The most obvious link to vampirism, however, came just before his death, when he allegedly threatened to come back and haunt his valet if he did not carry out his dying wishes,⁴⁶⁶ much like the vampire of folklore.

Until the summer of 1816, when Polidori accompanied Byron on his travels as his physician, it is difficult to find evidence linking Polidori with the subject of vampires, or vampirism. Given his Classical education, he would have been familiar with vampire-like beings such as the Greek Lamia (subject of the 1819 poem of the same name by Keats). It is also not known whether Polidori had read Byron before gaining his employment with him but, given the height of Byron's fame preceded their acquaintance, it seems likely. The question that cannot be answered is how widely Polidori read Byron (other than the more popular works such as *Childe Harold*). The point is, was Polidori familiar with Byron's more Gothic-related works, poems such as the aforementioned *The Giaour* (1813) or *Lines Inscribed Upon a Cup Formed from a Skull* (1808)?

Having stressed this point, it is known that Polidori had a sound knowledge of somnambulism, which he transferred into his tale and thus created a new facet of

⁴⁶⁴ MacCarthy, 2003, p.11

⁴⁶⁵ Letter CCCXXVII to Mr. Murray, Venice, April 6th 1816' in Thomas Moore *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, Vol. II, (London: John Murray, 1830), p.205. His reference to 'Hodgson's Friends' relates to Francis Hodgson (1781-1852) *The Friends: a Poem. In Four Books*. (London: John Murray, 1818)

⁴⁶⁶ Doris Langley Moore *The Late Lord Byron: a Biography*, New York: Melville House, 2011, p.102

the vampire in the early nineteenth century. Due to this knowledge, Stiles has suggested that Polidori would have understood the somnambulist as someone who has 'the tendency...to do pretty much the same things each night'.⁴⁶⁷ This fits with the folkloric accounts of 'vampires' returning night after night to their victim, and is most overtly apparent in Stoker's *Dracula*, in relation to the Count visiting Lucy Westenra, and also in *Carmilla*. Without Polidori's knowledge, and his decision to make somnambulism part of his plot, this critical theme of vampirism would never have occurred.

Polidori would also have known, through his doctoral research, that somnambulists could sometimes exhibit 'unusual strength while in a trance-like state, a phenomenon described in the Marquis de Puységur's reports on artificially induced somnambulism'.⁴⁶⁸ In *The Vampyre*, Lord Ruthven attacks Aubrey with such force that 'he felt himself grappled by one whose strength seemed superhuman ... he struggled; but it was in vain: he was lifted from his feet and hurled with enormous force against the ground'.⁴⁶⁹ That Polidori has his Dissertation in mind when he created Lord Ruthven is clear when considering how his 'uncommon physical strength, his occasional visual and tactile impairment, and his emotionless, machinelike behavior resemble the case studies presented in Polidori's medical thesis'.⁴⁷⁰ This must reflect, though, that Polidori is suggesting Ruthven was behaving in an 'automatic fashion', against his will even, and was unaware of his actions, just as somnambulists are. But Ruthven does not behave in this manner and appears to enjoy the destruction and pain he causes.

If Polidori was basing Ruthven on Lord Byron, what might this link to somnambulism mean? Was Polidori suggesting that although Byron causes destruction in his personal life (for example his failed marriage, the abandonment of his child, his forbidden relationship with his sister) he does not mean to do this, and is somehow 'self programmed' to wreak suffering? On the other hand, just because Polidori clearly uses the biographical model within his tale, it need not mean that the whole

⁴⁶⁷ Stiles et al 2010, p.772

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid, p.799

⁴⁶⁹ John William Polidori *The Vampyre, 1819*, in Morrison & Baldick (eds), 2008, p.12

⁴⁷⁰ Stiles et al, 2010, p.790

tale is based upon real life people and events. Every action that Ruthven undertakes need not be reflective of Byron and his own actions. This is also true of Byron's works. The actions of Childe Harold need not emulate Byron on every occasion, even if the reading public wishes to read it this way.

In a letter to his father Gaetano, Polidori expressed his assertion that his own 'disposition is not that of the English. They are automatons!'.⁴⁷¹ Often, and despite his father's insistence to the contrary, Polidori rebuked the notion that he was English, and preferred to cling to his Italian ancestry. Suggesting that the English were automatons – somnambulists – may infer some form of cultural slight on Polidori's part played through the role of Ruthven. Perhaps Ruthven stood not just for Byron, but for the English aristocracy as a whole who, like automatons, adhered to a strict, coded existence that vampirised lesser society. The aristocracy, like Ruthven then, live 'as if guided by primordial survival instincts, not a human soul'.⁴⁷² Read in this way, Ruthven's 'Dead Grey Eye' becomes a metaphor – on the surface it references somnambulists and their eyes being open but not seeing, but underneath it hints that the aristocracy are able to look on the lower classes, on the poor, and the suffering that exists in England, but choose not to see what their eyes show them – 'he seemed as unconscious of pain as he had been of the objects around him'.⁴⁷³

In contrast to this, the Greek peasants are all too familiar with their role as prey to the vampiric hunter. Recall how Ruthven's eyes also 'sparkled with more fire than that of the cat whilst dallying with the half-dead mouse'.⁴⁷⁴ Polidori may, then, be taking a swipe at the aristocracy generally as well as Byron specifically by creating a vampire representative of them, rather than the typical 'peasant vampire' of folklore. Whatever his purpose, the being that he created through Ruthven, the aristocratic vampire, largely relegated the folkloric variant to history as almost all future versions adopted the Polidoric model.

⁴⁷¹ MacDonald, 1991, p.19-20

⁴⁷² Stiles et al, 2010, p.800

⁴⁷³ John William Polidori *The Vampyre, 1819*, in Morrison and Baldick (eds), 2008, p.15

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p.6

In a cruel twist of irony, the accusations levelled at Polidori in 1819 relating to plagiarism cast him as the vamping oppressor preying on Byron's work and his name in order to sustain his own ambitions. It is impossible to deny that *The Vampyre* does, indeed, borrow heavily from Byron. It is 'obviously parasitical on Byron's idea, but revises it in ways that go beyond simple literary plagiarism'.⁴⁷⁵ Whereas *Fragment* is told in first person retrospective, *The Vampyre* uses a third-person narrative approach. It also reflects humour at Aubrey's expense - it is almost as if Byron is still mocking Polidori (through Aubrey). For example, when Ruthven laughs at Aubrey once he agrees to the oath⁴⁷⁶ and when he again mockingly laughs at Aubrey after he queries whether Ruthven intends to marry the young Italian lady he pursues.⁴⁷⁷

Critics have held different views on the level and nature of Polidori's plagiarism, or 'borrowing' as some prefer to label it. MacCarthy believes that Polidori's plagiarism (and she has no doubt that that is what it was) of Byron's abandoned story and the transformation of Darvell into a 'Byronic vampire' was no coincidence, but that 'the allusion was a coded one'.⁴⁷⁸ The allusion, she suggests, could have been no more apparent to anyone who knew of Caroline Lamb's novel and was evenly mildly familiar with Byron's appetite for female flesh. The issue with this stance, and indeed of all suggestions that Polidori sought to satirise, embarrass or mock Byron, is that no-one has ever really questioned the motive – why Polidori, an unknown, would have sought to do this to one of the most famous men of the era. Although Byron often ridiculed Polidori, sometimes to the point of bullying, their relationship was not hostile, and their separation was mainly amicable, with both men suggesting that there was no great cause. There does not seem enough personal motive, therefore, for Polidori to do this. Within the relationship, as discussed in Chapter Two, there were occasions that caused arguments, such as when Polidori 'accidentally' hit Byron's leg with an oar, or when Byron commented how Polidori was exactly the sort of person to test the adage about drowning men clutching at

⁴⁷⁵ MacDonald, 1991, p.97

⁴⁷⁶ John William Polidori *The Vampyre, 1819*, in Morrison and Baldick (eds), 2008, p.15

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid. p.8

⁴⁷⁸ MacCarthy, 2003 p.294

straws on, but on parting neither held a grudge. If Polidori truly did seek to satirise Byron in such an overtly open manner it was a very risky gamble, even for Polidori.

MacCarthy further suggests that *The Vampyre* was published 'much to Byron's fury'⁴⁷⁹ under Byron's name, and yet his reaction is more explanatory and side stepping than one of furious anger, as we have seen. Skarda, on the other hand, argues that Polidori 'borrowed' Byron's themes and settings, and was not as much of a plagiariser as he is often portrayed as. After all, the early nineteenth century was a period when 'personal and professional borrowing was thought to flatter the originals'.⁴⁸⁰ She continues:

In the strict legal sense, Polidori was not quite a plagiarist, because overall he relied more on Byron's person, ideas, and theories than on Byron's precise 'mode of expression'...but when the complete manuscript is considered, Polidori reveals himself...[to be] unconsciously imitative where he ought to be consciously independent of Byron and Byron's work.⁴⁸¹

By understanding the notion of 'emulation through borrowing' prevalent in the period, it suddenly changes the intention of using Byron's concept. Whereas critics such as MacCarthy, who choose to ignore this knowledge, turn Polidori into a metaphorical literary vampire, others such as Skarda and Rieger reflect him as being someone who admired and sought to praise through emulation. Polidori so 'wanted to be like Byron that he borrowed as he thought Byron borrowed',⁴⁸² and attempted to make Byron a vampire, but without realising it he had, instead, made himself 'a vampire of an unacknowledged kind'.⁴⁸³

Byron had his own opinions on the subject of borrowing, as we can see from his letter to John Murray from July 1816, at which point, incidentally, Polidori knew of Byron's 'ghost-story' concept:

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid. p.293

⁴⁸⁰ Skarda, 1989, p.259

⁴⁸¹ Ibid. p.264-65

⁴⁸² Ibid. 265

⁴⁸³ Ibid. p.265

I wrote to you a few weeks ago, and Dr. Polidori received your letter; but the packet has not made its appearance, nor the epistle, of which you gave notice therein. I enclose you an advertisement*, which was copied by Dr. Polidori, and which appears to be about the most impudent imposition that ever issued from Grub-street. I need hardly say that I know nothing of all this trash, nor whence it may spring,—‘Odes to St Helena,’—‘Farewells to England,’ &c. &c.—and if it can be disavowed, or is worth disavowing, you have full authority to do so. I never wrote, nor conceived, a line on any thing of the kind, any more than of two other things with which I was saddled—something about ‘Gaul,’ and another about ‘Mrs. La Valette;’ and as to the ‘Lily of France,’ I should as soon think of celebrating a turnip.⁴⁸⁴

Byron’s stance, clearly, is that he wants nothing to do with any works that appear to plagiarise or copy him, and more than that he wishes the public be aware of this. This is the same way he dealt with *The Vampyre*, writing to his publisher Murray to deny the piece was his, and to the editor of *Galignani’s Messenger* stating the same.

By comparing *Fragment* with *The Vampyre*, it is clear that whilst Polidori may have borrowed the concept of the story from Byron, the rest is entirely his own. Despite the suggestion that Lord Ruthven is indeed Lord Byron, Erik Butler has argued that he bears traits that separate him from both Byron and the aristocracy in general. He argues that Ruthven does not appear as an aristocrat, has no title or ancestry, nor is he a poet. Instead, he is merely mysterious and rather resembles a ‘high-stakes mountebank’.⁴⁸⁵ What Butler does suggest of Ruthven is that he is mirror-like, he reflects what others wish to see of him. In that, he is truly Byronic.

Legacy of *The Vampyre*

After *The Vampyre* was published in the *New Monthly Magazine*, and again in book form, Polidori attempted to edit the text, it seems, to distance its vampire character

⁴⁸⁴ Letter to Mr. Murray, Diodati near Geneva, July 22nd 1816. Quoted from Moore, 1830, p 8

⁴⁸⁵ Eric Butler *Metamorphoses of the Vampire in Literature and Film*, (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), p. 89

from Lord Byron. Perhaps Polidori did initially cast the vampire as Ruthven as a joke in order to impress his female reader (as discussed, most likely the Countess of Breuss), but when he realised it would be widely published he attempted to change this. An annotated version of the tale shows that Polidori changed the vampire's name to Lord Strongmore, although Stiles has recently suggested that this may be a 'possible allusion to his physical powers and to Byron's legendary sexual stamina'.⁴⁸⁶ To associate the vampire with Byron's 'sexual stamina' Polidori would have been better leaving it as Ruthven, given the connections to Caroline Lamb, so this suggestion seems unlikely. It is much more likely Polidori wanted to disassociate the vampire from Byron. Unfortunately for him, it was already too late.

Gavin Budge offers a psychoanalytical approach to Polidori's narrative and argues that it mirrors the 'mental collapse of Aubrey and his obsession with the vampire and that of the audience as "horrified readers"'.⁴⁸⁷ He further suggests that Polidori was going against the 'Common Sense' philosophy, of which he would have been familiar due to his medical training at Edinburgh, and that his tale therefore 'dramatizes its readers' relationship to a Romantic imagination embodied by the text itself'.⁴⁸⁸ This would mean that the 'horror' thus created can be seen as an 'indication of fiction's inability to police the distinction between the aristocratic values of Lord Ruthven and the emergent middle-class values of Aubrey and Polidori's reading audience'. He develops this argument when he says how 'much of the horror of *The Vampyre* comes from the way its ending stages a breakdown that mirrors the breakdown of the middle-class narrative of professional success in Polidori's own life at the time he wrote the story'.⁴⁸⁹

The problem with this interpretation, just like the aforementioned reviewer misattributing the tale to Byron and thus making his interpretation invalid, is that, Polidori did not write the tale to be published, nor with an audience (middle-class or otherwise) in mind. Polidori always maintained that stance, and for the reasons discussed above there seems no reason to doubt him on this. He wrote it solely for

⁴⁸⁶ Stiles et al, 2010, 789–807, p.799

⁴⁸⁷ Budge, 2004, p.214

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid. p.217

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid. p.222

the unknown Lady, and if this is the case then it is with this in mind that we should look to dissect its functions and purposes. If he had written it to be published, by himself, why wait almost three years, and why give it away so cheaply and lose the book rights?

Nevertheless, Budge further argues in the importance of common references in *The Vampyre* of the eye, and whilst suggesting that Aubrey's sister has a 'Blue eye...that appeared to indicate a soul conscious of a higher realm', he links this to the notion of a spiritual realm.⁴⁹⁰ Ruthven, on the other hand, has a 'dead grey eye', which leads Budge to claim that Polidori was adopting the Common Sense school approach – that is 'the essential immateriality of the human mind'.⁴⁹¹ I would counter that this is instead a reflection of his knowledge of somnambulism, as discussed earlier, and his debate with Shelley on the nature of mankind. This debate was understandable in Shelley, as an atheist, but in Polidori it is odd as he was a Catholic. It cannot be a coincidence that Mary Shelley picked up on both these subjects and made them such an integral part of her novel *Frankenstein*.

Budge also uses the following quote from *The Vampyre*: 'that high romantic feeling of honour and candour, which daily turns so many milliner's apprentices'⁴⁹² - to argue that Polidori 'juxtaposes the essentially middle-class value of open-hearted 'candour' with the notorious aristocratic propensity for debauching women of inferior social status'.⁴⁹³ Budge may be correct, and this could be a representation of the two sides of Byron: we know he 'preyed' on women of a lower social status purely to fulfil his sexual needs, but we must remember that he also had feelings for women of equal status, most obviously Caroline Lamb, Augusta Leigh, Lady Oxford and Teresa Guccioli. He was also sympathetic to the plight of others, most notable in his support of the Luddite movement in his home county of Nottinghamshire.

The legacy of Polidori's tale, explored more fully in the subsequent chapter when I consider the vampire plays, helped to change the course of the literary vampire, and

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid. p.221-222

⁴⁹¹ Ibid. p.221-222

⁴⁹² John William Polidori *The Vampyre, 1819*, in Morrison & Baldick (eds), 2008, p.4

⁴⁹³ Budge, 2004, p.224

create an image that, despite all the modern variants, is proving difficult to displace. Erik Butler has suggested that vampires in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were, to use Klaus Hamberger's phrase, 'poor in images'.⁴⁹⁴ This changed fundamentally with Polidori's *Ruthven*. He has further pointed out that Polidori's vampire - the aristocrat, the traveller, the seducer - is largely forgotten today, and yet clearly forms the basis for Bram Stoker's much more famous vampire.

And James Twitchell has argued that although, generally, it is nigh-on impossible to determine the point in which a 'primordial image' becomes a conscious application - when was the very first occasion that a particular subject was used - 'the vampire [in prose] is an exception; for although we are unsure about his entrance into poetry, we know exactly when he burst from mythic imagination into prose.'⁴⁹⁵ That came with Polidori's tale. But, despite the influence that we can now, with hindsight, see his tale has had on the genre, at the time it brought little but pain for its author. David Ellis goes as far to suggest that its 'appearance under Byron's name damaged Polidori's literary reputation even before he began to have one'⁴⁹⁶ while Skarda believes that he was 'vamped not only by Byron but also by his own publisher, reviewers and by critics of the past and present'.⁴⁹⁷

From a modern perspective, Polidori's tale (if not Polidori himself) is viewed in a more favourable manner, although critics are still unwilling to heap too much praise on the man, for example when James Rieger wrote how he believes that 'Polidori's novel...is a far from contemptible piece of work'.⁴⁹⁸ So, too, Twitchell, who cautiously admitted that Polidori's offering to the literary Gothic has been grossly overlooked. Although he agrees that to claim (as Rieger did) that Polidori may have gone on to eclipse Bronte is rather optimistic, he may, I would suggest, have done a touch more than 'add a character to the dusty pantheon of Gothic villains'.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁴ Butler, 2010, p.54

⁴⁹⁵ James B. Twitchell *The Living Dead: A Study of the Vampire in Romantic Literature*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), p.103

⁴⁹⁶ Ellis, 2011, p.14

⁴⁹⁷ Skarda, 1989, p.269

⁴⁹⁸ Rieger, 1963, p.463

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p.115

MacDonald's opinion on the matter is interesting, as he felt that the 'bizarre success of Polidori's tale depended on the ways in which his monster was new...[which] it owed to Byron'.⁵⁰⁰ In this he is clearly suggesting that contemporary readers would have associated Ruthven with Byron, but we might say this is, largely, due to the adoption of the name Ruthven from Lamb. What if the vampire had been called Lord Strongmore instead, would readers have instantly linked him to Byron? Nevertheless, 'from this case of purposefully mistaken identity the vampire was not just born in the novel but given an instant popular audience',⁵⁰¹ and although 'critics panned *The Vampyre*, the public loved it'.⁵⁰² Perhaps this was the key to its success through its various editions and plays; the fact that on some levels it appears to attack high society.

It is easy now, after two hundred years have passed, to accept the fact that

Polidori has become a troubling authorial figure, a ghostly presence haunting the margins of Romanticism...on the one hand, the cultural impact of his work in creating the first coherent vampire figure in literature can hardly be overestimated. On the other hand, he has been marginalized and belittled by famous contemporaries.⁵⁰³

And yet, we should not underestimate the genre-changing act that occurred over just three short days, when Polidori was challenged to write up his tale. What he created was more than just a 'ghost story', more than a satirical account of his famous employer. What Polidori really did was 'introduce the demon to the worn-out Gothic novel, and in three decades the vampire had become a stock character to be exploited without mercy'.⁵⁰⁴ The final chapter of this thesis explores this exploitation, seen through the many stage productions of Polidori's vampire tale. By doing this, we can see the immediate impact that Polidori's tale had, and through this we will also see that he had a much more lasting impact on the entire vampire genre itself.

⁵⁰⁰ MacDonald, 1991, p.190

⁵⁰¹ Twitchell, 1997, p.103

⁵⁰² Butler, 2010, p.93

⁵⁰³ Rigby, 2005, p.1

⁵⁰⁴ Twitchell, 1997, p.6

As will be argued in the next chapter and in the Conclusion, this legacy has had a wide-ranging impact on the literary vampire and through the stage adaptations a visual image of the vampire being was created that is still largely intact in the present.

CHAPTER FOUR

Stage adaptations of *The Vampyre*

Within a year of Polidori's tale being published, *The Vampyre* was being adapted for the stage, first with Charles Nodier's French play 'Le Vampire' (June, 1820), and then James Robinson Planché's 'The Vampire' in August of the same year. Throughout the rest of the nineteenth century, around thirty-five plays were performed across Europe and in America, all based, to some extent, on Polidori's text. So, while the authorship of the tale was still debated or indeed accepted as being Byron despite evidence to the contrary, the story and imagery it portrayed grew in popularity.

As Chapter Three showed, the initial concept that Byron created in the summer of 1816 was largely altered and adapted by Polidori, and the stage adaptations altered this further. What they did not do, however, was alter the vampire-image that Polidori created through his Ruthven character, a character I have argued is a distorted image of Byron. Polidori created him by combining the public perception, the fictional 'Byron' witnessed through Byron's own works, and the real-life Byron he spent the summer of 1816 alongside. This final chapter explores how this image, and the tale Polidori created, was portrayed visually on stage, and how the modifications and additions each play made helped to inspire later vampire offerings such as *Dracula*.

The stage adaptations of Polidori's tale worth discussing for the elements they bring to the development of the vampire image are Charles Nodier's 'Le Vampire' (1820, Paris), James Robinson Planché's 'The Vampire' (1820, London), St. John Dorset's 'The Vampire' (1821, published but never produced), Heinrich Marschner's 'Der Vampyr' (1829, London), George Blink's 'The Vampire Bride' (1834, London),

Alexandre Dumas' 'Le Vampire' (1851, Paris) and Dion Boucicalt's 'The Vampire' (1852, London).

All of these stage adaptations will be discussed in this chapter, and although they add their own elements, they all conform to the Polidoric / Byronic vampire that originated in Polidori's tale. As Stuart has argued:

The Vampyre was the first treatment of the vampire in English prose. This seminal work created an immediate sensation and is the source for nearly every vampire play through the century in England and France until the advent of *Dracula* in 1897'.⁵⁰⁵

It is therefore important to analyse the main stage versions and consider what elements of Polidori's text they used and what they themselves added to the developing image of the vampire.

One salient point across the plays is the image of the vampire who, largely through Polidori, left behind the image of the undead corpse of folklore, and took on the guise of the aristocratic (Byronic) predator. However, the plays still contain folkloric elements and superstitions that appear to draw on eighteenth century descriptions by sources such as Calmet and De Tournefort. Given that this background material was provided in both the magazine and book versions of Polidori's tale, this is understandable – the plays use the historical 'facts' documented in these text versions to make their tales seem more real and yet at the same time equally as unbelievable. This would have added to the horror element given that, according to these learned writers, vampires supposedly did exist in Eastern Europe just a century ago, and perhaps still do.

The folkloric image was not wholly eradicated by Polidori's take on the vampire, with the image portrayed by Byron in his *The Giaour* (1813) still visible in literary

⁵⁰⁵ Roxanna Stuart *Stage Blood: Vampires of the 19th Century Stage*, (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Press, 1994), p.35

narratives such as Varney, The Vampire (1845-47). The Byronic vampire image was, however, the most familiar to audiences in Europe and America in the nineteenth century, and audiences watched the relationship of the vampire (Ruthven) and his victim unfold on stage. This notion of relationship is important as although the vampire's victims were all female, it is possible to see the male 'Aubrey character' from Polidori's tale as the true victim within all of the plays discussed. Although not the purpose in the plays, this factor was crucial to the original tale by Polidori, as it reflected the way Polidori saw the relationship between himself and Byron – he was, 'like a star in the halo of the moon, invisible'.⁵⁰⁶

As Stuart suggested in her work on the plays, 'there is an element of vampirism in every human relationship, because, according to the Romantics, in every human relationship one person is enlarged and the other diminished',⁵⁰⁷ and this again reflects the way Polidori saw his own relationship with Byron. Although the plays span the later Romantic period and continue throughout the Victorian, they always retain this crucial element of the Byron/Polidori relationship and, whether consciously or subconsciously, therefore retain a glimpse of the Polidori/Byron relationship that *The Vampyre* so overtly reflected also.

As McFarland has argued, the modern vampire image, made infamous through Stoker's *Count Dracula*, owes 'significantly to early nineteenth century melodrama'.⁵⁰⁸ As shall become clear, this image transformed gradually, with notable additions occurring in each subsequent play. Therefore, the modern (Dracula) image of the vampire is a direct culmination of the plays, and without them it could not have taken on the guise that is now so widely recognised. Having made this argument, few of the plays are remembered today, and it is Stoker's novel that is usually credited with the creation of the modern vampire image. This chapter

⁵⁰⁶ William Michael Rossetti (ed) *The Diary of Dr. John William Polidori*, (London: Elkin Matthews, 1911), p.105

⁵⁰⁷ Stuart, 1994, p.40

⁵⁰⁸ Ronald E. McFarland 'The Vampire On Stage: A Study in Adaptations' in *Comparative Drama*, Spring 1987, 21, 1, pp. 19-33, p.19

analyses Polidori's legacy and influence on these early vampire plays and highlights the importance of this within the developing literary vampire.

The vampire plays

The vampire would have been at home within the theatre at this time, as according to Allardyce Nicoll it was a place 'lacking both in taste and in good manners, a place where vulgarity abounded'.⁵⁰⁹ This, he says, was due to a 'diluting' of the clientele, with the lower-middle and lower classes replacing the upper-middle and upper classes respectively. Nevertheless, this new audience was ideally suited for the various vampire plays, which combined on-stage spectacle and atmospheric scenery with supernatural tales that were the forerunners to the twentieth century horror industry.

The subject matter was also a perfect fit for melodrama, which McFarland describes as a 'theater [sic] of externals, of spectacle, insisting upon sensational, rapid action, colourful sets, and imaginative special effects'.⁵¹⁰ Melodrama as a type of play first emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and is described as

a type of narrative in which the over-dramatic plot-line is designed to play on people's emotions—sometimes at the expense of character development, sub-text, and nuance. Moreover, melodramas tend to feature reductive plot lines and characters that are stereotypical archetypes. In literature and narrative, an archetype is a character that is a quintessential example of a theme or virtue or idea. Satan, for example, is a classic archetype of absolute evil.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁹ Allardyce Nicoll *A History of Early Nineteenth Century Drama*, (New York: MacMillan, 1930), p.11

⁵¹⁰ McFarland, 1987, p.25

⁵¹¹ David White 'What is Melodrama? Definition, Characteristics and Examples', in *Chapter 20: Introduction to the Performing Arts*, StudyNet: Introduction to Humanities, available online at <http://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-a-melodrama-definition-characteristics-examples.html> (Accessed 17/1/17)

Therefore, the early plays took the current public idea of a vampire – created by Polidori and modelled on Byron. The use of melodrama took *The Vampyre* into new realms of gothic spectacle and the rise of the popularity of the theatre in the early 1800s enabled the ‘horrid novel’ to reach much wider audiences on the stage. Stage adaptations utilised the ‘favourite effects’ of the novels but ‘intensified them to a degree that the printed word was incapable of, [thus] maintaining its delight in horrors long after written fiction had grown tired of them’.⁵¹²

By considering the following vampire plays, it becomes apparent that the Polidoric / Byronic vampire image was the foundation for the development of the being which is recognised today. Each play respectively added in important elements that helped to shape the way the vampire is generally identified – its nocturnal wanderings, preying on young females, the wearing of a cape and the links to the moon, for example. Almost every ‘vampiric trait’ seen in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, the most widely recognised of all vampire tales, can be seen to have foundations in one or more of the vampire plays. Many of these traits were not present in Polidori’s tale, and were certainly not present in the preceding folkloric accounts, but were added for the theatrical spectacle they brought to the plays. The modern vampire image, I would argue, is therefore a combination of Polidori’s Byronic image alongside the disparate elements of each of the following plays, and by considering each in turn this will become apparent.

Nodier’s *Le Vampire*

Although largely attributed to Charles Nodier, the first stage adaptation was actually a joint composition by Nodier, Pierre François Adolphe Carmouche and Achille, Marquis de Jouffrey d’Abbans. Their play opened at the Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin in Paris on 13th June, 1820. Although loosely following Polidori’s chain of events, it appears that his shifting setting for the tale (London, Greece and back to London) was too much for a stage performance, and so ‘Le Vampire’ took place at

⁵¹² Stuart, 1994, p 91

one location. Curiously, this location was the Inner Hebrides islands of Scotland.⁵¹³ There are several reasons why this shift may have occurred, ranging from Byron's ancestral ties through his mother's side (the Gordons) and early upbringing, through to the production company having a surplus of Scottish costumes,⁵¹⁴ but none of these seem fully likely. It may instead be due to audience, with the French having positive connections to the Scots, and the English having more negative ones (important for Planché's subsequent version). Scotland also has a deep-rooted history of the supernatural, particularly notable in the many cases of witchcraft that occurred there⁵¹⁵, and, given the opening scene of both Nodier and Planché that adopts an almost Macbeth-like atmosphere with its spectres and spirits, moving the action to a more familiar backdrop for the audience (as opposed to Eastern Europe) may have been a calculated decision based on prospective audience.⁵¹⁶ In Nodier's version, the play opens in the cave of Staffa, where Malvina (Aubray's sister and the main target of Rutwen⁵¹⁷) is seen to be asleep but suffering a nightmare. When she later discusses this nightmare, she tells how she saw 'livid ghosts coming out of the graves'⁵¹⁸ and as one approached her she was transfixed – 'an invincible power held me still, and even my eyes could not turn away from the terrible apparition'.⁵¹⁹ She is suffering from somnambulism, first introduced by Polidori in his tale. Although Malvina refers to the being as a 'livid ghost', the audience would have known what this really was, as one of the characters, Scop, had in the previous scene referred to vampires and how they were known to prey on

⁵¹³ The version of Nodier's *Le Vampire* used was a First Edition transcript entitled 'Le Vampire, Melodrame en trois actes, avec un prologue' published in 'Au Magasin General de Pieces de Theatre', J.N. Barba (Paris: Le Theatre Francais, No. 51, 1820). Translated into English by the author, September 2016.

⁵¹⁴ Frederick Burwick 'Vampires in kilts', in *Romantic Drama: Acting and Reading*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.199-224

⁵¹⁵ See Lizanne Henderson *Fantastical Imaginations: The Supernatural in Scottish History and Culture*, (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 2009)

⁵¹⁶ Stuart (1994, p. 47-48) has dealt with this issue of moving the tale to Scotland and gives similar reasons to those just discussed. Burwick (2009) also dedicates part of his paper 'Vampires in kilts') to this topic, albeit linked to Planché's version.

⁵¹⁷ In Nodier, Aubrey becomes Aubray, and Ruthven (supposedly pronounced as 'Rivven' based on the Scottish ancestral name) becomes Rutwen (pronounced 'Root-wain'). Why Nodier changed this has never been clear, especially as Rivven is much easier to pronounce in the French tongue than Root-wain (Stuart, 1994, p.48).

⁵¹⁸ *Le Vampire*, p.15

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*

young brides – ‘these horrific spirits who perish young brides, and are called vampires’,⁵²⁰ much like Ruthven in Polidori’s tale.

The use of the word ‘vampires’ from the outset is one of the marked differences between Nodier’s play and Polidori’s text, which hinted at vampirism for much of the tale. Perhaps because the plays were visual, and needed to connect with the audience in a more apparent manner, links to vampires are made very early on in the play, and would also have been referenced on the play bills themselves. This would have left no doubt in the audience’s mind where the danger came from.

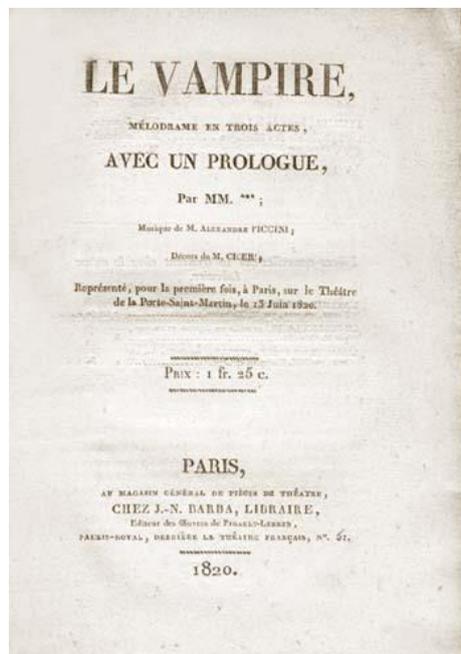


Figure 15: First edition front cover of Nodier’s play *Le Vampire*, first performed in 1820.

(Source: Public Domain)

⁵²⁰ Ibid. p.12

After the scenes where Malvina explains her nightmare, we find that she is betrothed to a certain Earl of Marsden, who is brother to the deceased Rutwen. Aubray tells her how when he was travelling with Rutwen in the landscape around Athens, they were attacked by robbers and Rutwen was mortally wounded saving him. He left the body on the hillside as the moon began to rise and went to fetch the servants so they could collect the body, but on their return they found the body had disappeared:

considering the moon was about to rise behind the clouds, he [Rutwen] added, "turn me to the star of the night, I will enjoy dying with that view!" I placed him with effort on a nearby hillock; barely had I placed him there when he expired. I withdrew to meet my servants, I spent an hour looking for them, when we came to take his body it was no longer there.⁵²¹

This has clear parallels to Polidori's tale, and shows the ability of the vampire to resurrect itself by using the power of the moon, an idea created by Polidori. Aubray contacted the Earl of Marsden, informed him of his brother's death, and sent his belongings back to him. Amongst these belongings was a portrait of Malvina, given to Rutwen by Aubray, and the Earl was so taken by the picture that he asked to marry her. This chain of events is different to those in Polidori's tale, but markedly similar to those in Stoker's *Dracula*, where he has the Count see a portrait of Mina (very close to Malvina) Harker and subsequently becomes fixated by her, travelling to London in order to make her his victim. Whether this connection has been made previously is not clear, but it shows the influence that the early plays had on Stoker's depiction in *Dracula*. Again, this shows the influential legacy that Polidori created through his tale.

When Marsden arrives, Aubray realises he is in fact Rutwen himself, back from the dead. Rutwen, however, explains that 'a powerful aid kept me in life'⁵²² (meaning the moon) and Aubray rather naively chooses to believe this, even though he saw

⁵²¹ Ibid. p.12

⁵²² Le Vampire, p.21

him die. Although it is clearly obvious to the audience that Rutwen is a vampire, much like in Polidori's tale Aubray remains unsure, for example when he explains to Malvina how Rutwen was mortally wounded by robbers during their travels (as in Polidori's text) and subsequently asked him to lay his body out on the hillside as the moon began to rise from behind the clouds. As discussed, when Aubray later returned, the body was gone. Again, the audience would have known he had been reanimated in true vampire style but, just as in Polidori's tale, Aubray did not make the connection.

Later in the play, Rutwen is killed for a second time when he attempts to seduce Edgar's fiancée, Lovette:

RUTWEN: Come, lovely bride.

LOVETTE (recoiling): I do not dare.

RUTWEN: Have no fear ... an irresistible force draws me to you, I tremble when walking in your footsteps, and to lose you my breath has unhappiness.

LOVETTE (surprised, and a little angry): Me, my lord! Is it possible?

RUTWEN: Alas! my heart has never throbbed but for one woman, a heavenly creature, and your features reminded me of her own. This morning my heart was worn by regrets, the sweet flame of love was extinguished in my soul, and tonight you just relit it.

LOVETTE: But, my lord, the one you like?

RUTWEN: She is dead!

LOVETTE: She is dead?

RUTWEN: Only you can revive it [love] for me.⁵²³

Next:

RUTWEN: Oh I would give my whole life for an hour of your love, and only one! My sighs could be heard from your heart, if you love me. (He takes her hand.)

⁵²³ Ibid. p.21

LOVETTE: No, my lord, no, let - me I'm too emotional!

OSCAR (appearing on the mountain side): Beware, young bride, From the love that gives death.⁵²⁴

The warning is enough to break Lovette's trance, and she utters a cry and flees in terror, thus thwarting Rutwen's attempt to take her blood. These two excerpts show that the vampire is able to love, or at least pretend to in order to claim his victim. They are also similar to the relationship between Lucy Westenra (who is betrothed to marry) and Count Dracula, who seduces her. Upon hearing of Ruthven's actions towards Lovette, Edgar shoots him (offstage, out of sight of the audience) and Ruthven dies in overly dramatic fashion:

EDGAR: Scoundrel! (He shoots him with a pistol.)

RUTWEN: Ah! I die.....⁵²⁵

On his deathbed, Rutwen makes Aubray swear an oath:

RUTWEN: Promise me you will not tell Malvina of my death, nor you will not do anything to avenge my death, before the first hour of the night has come. Swear the secret on my expiring heart.

AUBRAY: I swear.

(Then, the theatre becomes dark, and we see in the background the moon hidden by clouds. On the last words of Rutwen, it shines in all its brilliance).

RUTWEN: Aubrey, the star of the night shines in my eyes his magnificent light, I can see it and go to heaven.⁵²⁶

This latter line is interesting as Rutwen suggests that upon his death he will go to heaven. Whether this was merely a slip by Nodier or rather him reflecting that the vampire character was not as evil as first thought, is not clear. It could equally be

⁵²⁴ Ibid. p.22

⁵²⁵ Ibid. p.23

⁵²⁶ Ibid. p.24

another ruse by Rutwen to make Aubray feel sympathetic towards him, despite his actions towards Lovette. The oath agreed by Aubray is much simpler than that of either Byron (in *Fragment*) or Polidori (in *The Vampyre*) and requires Aubray not to tell Malvina (who at this point is betrothed to Rutwen) of his death nor avenge his death until the first hour of the night has come. As he lays dying, the moon rises and illuminates his body, thus reviving him a second time.

Although it is emphasised in the early part of the play that the vampire must drink the blood of a virgin bride in order to sustain his undead state, twice within the play he is instead powered by the moon – that ‘star of the night’. This may be a reference to early belief systems that attributed power to the moon and saw it worshipped through prehistoric monuments such as Stonehenge and in the form of the Roman goddess Diana. There are also obvious connections to the moon and the virgin bride in the works of Shakespeare, for example in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* – ‘to live a barren sister all your life / Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon’.⁵²⁷

Polidori does make reference to the power of the moon himself, but it is the early plays that make this such an integral part of vampire lore. Intriguingly, it would later become more associated with the werewolf being, largely through Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, although it has been argued that the vampire Count has many elements that appear more suited to the werewolf.⁵²⁸ Through these elements that clearly feature prominently in *Dracula* it is easy to understand why Stoker’s novel is generally attributed as creating the modern image, but as discussed it was Polidori who initially created these themes.

There are other character changes for Rutwen, most notably him being less vampire-like (Polidori’s ‘cold, serpent-like fiend with the dead grey eye’⁵²⁹) and much more like the Byronic hero that Byron created in his poems – alone, plagued by remorse and generally melancholic. At this point, it was still largely believed that Byron was

⁵²⁷ William Shakespeare *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Act I, Scene I, Lines 72-72. Available online via <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/midsummer/full.html> (Accessed 9/12/19).

⁵²⁸ See Franck, K & Beresford, M ‘Banishing the Beast: The role of wolf in ‘*Dracula’s Guest*’ and its omission from *Dracula*, in *Supernatural Studies*, Number 2, Issue 2, Summer 2015, pp.14-28

⁵²⁹ Stuart, 1994, p.48

the author of *The Vampyre* in France. In fact, many people chose to accredit the tale to Byron long after the matter was resolved and Polidori was revealed as the real author, and so this further 'Byronisation' of Rutwen may well have been Nodier giving his audience what they were familiar with. In doing this, Nodier further cements the notion that Byron is Rutwen and adds him to the growing list of Byronic heroes (Manfred, Childe Harold, etc). Of course, this would not have been possible without Polidori's tale, as the previous chapters of my thesis have shown.

Simon Bainbridge has recently argued that through his works, Byron attempted to create a 'relationship of peculiar intensity and unprecedented intimacy'⁵³⁰ between his poetry and his female audience. This enabled a situation whereby the reader felt that only she could empathise with his plight and redeem him. This is most obviously apparent in Anabella Milbanke's belief that 'she, and only she, could save him from his rakish past'⁵³¹ hence their marriage. There is almost an element of this in Aubrey himself, particularly in Polidori's version. This may reflect Polidori believing he, too, might be able to redeem Byron, thus feminising himself as much as Aubrey in the tale.

With this in mind, Nodier has altered the Rutwen character to fit this model, thus endearing him towards his female audience. The fact that unlike Polidori's version, the female victim is saved and Rutwen is killed only adds more to the audience sympathising with the Byronic fatal hero. Bainbridge further argues that the way Byron wrote (and published) his poetry was vampire-like, offering up a piece every few months (like Nodier's Rutwen and his virgin bride sacrifice once every cycle) in order to prolong his existence in the public eye.⁵³² Add to this that Byron preferred to compose his work at night, and the image is further sustained.

Bainbridge's concluding argument is that through *The Vampyre*, Polidori reflects the 'techniques by which Byron holds sway over a large portion of his readership, but

⁵³⁰ Simon Bainbridge 'Lord Ruthven's Power: Polidori's *The Vampyre*, Doubles and the Byronic Imagination, *Byron Journal*, No. 1, 2006, pp.21-34, p.21

⁵³¹ Bainbridge, 2006, p.21, who is in turn quoting Fiona MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p.227

⁵³² Ibid. p.23

also presents as vampiric the system of production through which the poet sustains his position in the literary market',⁵³³ Polidori's 'dead grey eye' effect. Nodier making his vampire as Byronic as possible works in much the same way.

Nodier also modified the theme by stipulating that a vampire must marry his victim before he can drain their life blood. This is not the case in *The Vampyre* as Ruthven was able to make the peasant girl Ianthe his victim. But in 'Le Vampire' any victim must be the vampire's new bride. The reason for this is not clear – it may be part of a moral code that conformed with his early nineteenth century audience. The fact that the vampire was destroyed, and the female victim saved (unlike in Polidori) also appears to fit this moral code; good must triumph over evil. That France had just emerged from one of the bloodiest phases of its history in the form of the French Revolution and the subsequent French and Napoleonic Wars respectively, may have dictated the morals of the play. For although a vampire attempting to prey on a young female in order to drink her blood is a horrific subject matter, it was perhaps too soon after these turbulent periods for him to be allowed to succeed (as in the Polidori version).

Still, even with the moralistic values of the play altered, not all of society welcomed the play, as the following reviews reflect:

In the wings of the theatre, the vampire Ruthven [sic] tries to violate or suck the young bride who flees before him. Is this a moral situation? The whole play indirectly represents God as a weak or odious being who abandons the world to the demons of hell.⁵³⁴

The melodrama of the Vampire [is one] in which one sees a monster who sucks the blood of little girls and which offers scenes which an honest woman could not view without blushing.⁵³⁵

⁵³³ Ibid. p.23

⁵³⁴ Quoted from *Histoire des Vampires et des spectres Malfaisons*, Paris, 1820

⁵³⁵ Quoted from *Les Lettres Normandes*, 1820, XI, p.93

In both of these quotes the word 'suck' is used, and especially in context with a 'young bride' or 'little girls' – this almost appears a sexual connotation and may be playing on this in order to increase hostility towards the play. The fact that it was still believed to be linked to Byron no doubt made this even more prevalent given his reputation as a womaniser.

Regardless of the disgust felt by some critics, Nodier's 'Le Vampire' clearly had a great impact, with a host of copycat plays, comedies and satires of the play appearing almost weekly:

Immediately upon the furore created by Nodier's *Le Vampire* at the Porte-Saint-Martin in 1819 [sic] vampire plays of every kind from the most luridly sensational to the most farcically ridiculous pressed on to the boards. A contemporary critic cries: "There is not a theatre in Paris without its Vampire! At the Porte-Saint-Martin we have *le Vampire*; at the Vaudeville *le Vampire* again; at the Variétés *les trois Vampires ou la clair de la lune*".⁵³⁶

In fact, Nodier's play was so popular that at least six parodies of it were performed in the few weeks after its release, and the play itself was revived with the same cast three years later, such was the interest.⁵³⁷ Its success is probably down to its subject matter and its links to Byron, but Nodier was part of a movement that had numerous successful plays in the period. Matthew Gibson has recently suggested that Nodier 'wrote in defence of the Fantastic, seeing it as the literature of the third age in which men began to rely upon sensation once again and to forget the abstractions of organized religion and science'.⁵³⁸ The vampire being was certainly a fitting talisman for this train of thought.

⁵³⁶ Montague Summers *The Vampire: His Kith & Kin*, (Montana: Kessinger, 2003), p.303

⁵³⁷ Stuart, 1994, p.54

⁵³⁸ Matthew Gibson 'Fantasy and Counter-Revolution in the Theory and Fiction of Charles Nodier', in *The Fantastic and the European Gothic: History, Literature and the French Revolution*, (Cardiff: Cardiff University Press, 2013), pp.18-47, p.18

This questioning of the agreed order is apparent in the conversation of the two travellers in Ann Radcliffe's exploration of the supernatural, when they discuss the idea of the soul and the laws of nature:

You would believe the immortality of the soul even without the aid of revelation; yet our confined faculties cannot comprehend *how* the soul may exist after separation from the body. I do not absolutely know that spirits are permitted to become visible to us on earth; yet that they may be permitted to appear for very rare and important purposes.⁵³⁹

This concept of the human soul and the possibility of it surviving beyond death mirrors the conversations in the summer of 1816, in which Polidori, Shelley and the others discussed very similar themes.

The preceding Age of Reason and Enlightenment, which saw this shift into a more questioning period within history, was not without its vampire scares, and it was this period that saw the first accounts of vampires brought back into the West via soldiers returning from conflicts in the East. As Gibson further notes, although there are elements of 'the ghoulish' in Nodier's play, there are no 'representations of horror or the macabre'⁵⁴⁰ as the violent acts all happen offstage, and thus not in full view of the audience. This, interestingly, is the direct opposite of Planché's play, where violent acts occurred in full view of the audience.

Planché's *The Vampire*

With the success of Nodier's play and the ongoing discussions around *The Vampyre* and whether or not it was a creation of Lord Byron's, a stage version of the tale in England soon followed. As a backdrop to this, and largely due to the authorship debate, discussions on vampires were reignited in a way not seen since the mid-

⁵³⁹ Ann Radcliffe 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' in *New Monthly Magazine*, Vol.16, No.1, 1826, pp.145-52, p.149

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.24

eighteenth century, when prominent figures such as Voltaire, Rousseau and others debated the possible existence of the being. Colburn's *New Monthly Magazine* (which had published Polidori's tale) ran an anonymous article on vampires in 1820, describing the apparent public interest:

Since the appearance of the story of the *Vampire* [sic], the conversation of private parties has frequently turned on the subject; and the discussion has been prolonged and invigorated by the pieces brought out at the theatres, as well of Paris as of London. Vampirism, at one period, had almost superseded politics, at Paris, in the journals of that lively and inquisitive city'.⁵⁴¹

The London version of the play that the article refers to is that by James Robinson Planché, which opened at the English Opera House on 9th August 1820. Planché's version of *The Vampyre* largely follows Nodier's adaptation. He does, however, make some notable additions, most obviously the inclusion of several songs and also a much more extended prologue. On first appearance, the addition of the songs seems an odd choice, as they do little to add to the narrative of the play and at times seem to slow the tempo of the action. However, there is a very good reason why Planché chose to add the songs in, thus turning his version into a 'vampire musical'. The Act of 1737 stipulated that dramas could only be performed in 'royal or patent theatres' such as Drury Lane or Covent Garden. Planché, and many others, simply got around this obstacle by staging their plays as 'musicals' instead, which were permitted.⁵⁴² The flow of Planché's version is therefore rather interrupted, and so the Gothic atmosphere, created in Nodier's adaptation, is diluted somewhat.

I would argue that this is why Planché chose to move his play to Scotland, which has a rich history of supernatural beings and links to witchcraft.⁵⁴³ This would have heightened the Gothic atmosphere for his audience. It is odd, therefore, that

⁵⁴¹ *New Monthly Magazine*, 14, 1820, p.548

⁵⁴² McFarland, 1987, p.29

⁵⁴³ The University of Edinburgh have recently undertaken a survey of Scottish witchcraft. This had identified 3, 837 separate accusations of witchcraft in Scottish history, with perhaps as many as 67% being executed as such. The full survey is online at: <http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/Research/witches/introduction.html> (accessed 19/1/17)

Planché chose to then add the strapline 'Bride of the Isles' to his play – if he had left the location as the Inner Hebrides (as in Nodier's) this would have been relevant, but moving the action to Scotland renders this addition pointless. The reason for the play being set in Scotland has long been attributed to the fact that the theatre manager, Samuel Arnold, allegedly had a surplus of Scottish costumes and insisted that Scottish music was extremely popular at the time, but this reason just does not seem to hold sway,⁵⁴⁴ and it is much more likely due to reasons of heightened atmosphere.

Planché also chose to add the comedy character of McSwill, the Scottish drunkard, who we might assume was included to give his English audience a target for their sniggering. However, as Frederick Burwick has quite convincingly argued, McSwill is not there merely for 'comic relief' but as a way of heightening the impending terror for the audience. As he explains, McSwill has 'all the evidence that Ruthven is the vampire, but in his drunken stupor, he cannot put the facts together'.⁵⁴⁵ This adds to the dramatic irony of the play, with the audience aware of the threat but not the characters themselves.



R. Cruikshank, Del.

G. W. Houner, Sc.

The Vampire.

Lady Margaret. Hold! hold! I am thine,—the moon has set.

Act II. Scene 4.

⁵⁴⁴ Burwick, 2009, p.210

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.213

Figure 15: Illustration from Planche's play *The Vampire* of 1820

(Source: Public Domain)

Planché heightens this level of audience knowledge by making it blatantly obvious from the outset that the villain of the play is a vampire, unlike Nodier who introduced 'livid ghosts' to us. As discussed, McSwill also knows this throughout the play, but is too drunk to do anything about it.⁵⁴⁶ In Planché's prologue, we hear that Lady Margaret (the Malvina character) is to be the victim of a vampire: 'She sought a shelter here - calmly she sleeps, Nor dreams to-morrow's hymeneal rites, Will give her beauties to a vampire's arms'.⁵⁴⁷ A vampire is then explained:

Wicked souls, are for wise purposes, permitted oft, To enter the dead forms of other men; Assume their speech, their habits, and their knowledge. And thus roam o'er the earth.⁵⁴⁸

This sounds more like a possession rather than how a vampire was thought to exist, and may be Planché attempting to explain to his audience how it is possible for Ruthven (as he is once again referred to) to come back to life. As he was taking Nodier's general plot, he may have felt it necessary to try and explain some of the more incredulous occurrences – Rutwen / Ruthven coming back to life not once, but twice, even though he is seen to be killed may be one of those occasions.

To maintain this form, a vampire must pay a 'dreadful tribute', whereby they must wed a virtuous maiden and drink 'the purple stream of life' from her veins.⁵⁴⁹ Again Planché appears to feel that even this explanation is not enough, and creates a history for his 'vampire' in a manner similar to how Stoker did with Count Dracula. In his version, the vampire is actually a reanimated person known as Cromal the Bloody, whose remains lie buried in the cave of Staffa (now no longer in the

⁵⁴⁶ The actor who played McSwill, J.P. Harley, had already performed in similar 'comedic roles' in other supernatural plays, notably in James Cobb's *The Haunted Tower* (February 1816) and Monk Lewis' *The Castle Spectre* (April 1816)

⁵⁴⁷ J.R. Planché 'The Vampire, Or the Bride of the Isles, (London: John Lowndes, 1820), p. 3. Viewed online at http://www.litgothic.com/Texts/vampire_bride.html Accessed 8/7/16.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid. p.3

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid. p.3

Hebrides, but in Scotland itself). Cromal has, supposedly, taken control of the Earl of Marsden / Ruthven and must find his victim before the full moon sets.

The importance of the moon to the vampire is reflected again later in the play, as when Ruthven is shot (this time on stage, in full view of the audience) and killed by Robert (the replacement character for Edgar, who also shot and killed him in Nodier's play) he makes Lord Ronald (Aubrey) swear an oath – 'conceal my death from every human being till yonder moon, which now sails in her meridian splendour, shall be set this night; and ere an hour shall elapse after I have expired, throw this ring into the waves that wash the tomb of Fingal'.⁵⁵⁰

Although seemingly ignoring the chain of events in Polidori's tale in preference for Nodier's version, Planché had clearly read it, as this instruction to throw the ring into the sea at the cave of Staffa as part of the oath comes from Polidori. Also, the character McSwill relates the tale of the peasant girl Ianthe being murdered, and again this comes straight from Polidori. Neither of these examples feature in Nodier's play,⁵⁵¹ which clearly shows that Planché was familiar with Polidori's text. It seems that Planché chose to re-work Nodier rather than specifically emulating Polidori, because Nodier had already created a version fit for the stage, whilst adding in or changing elements to suit his audience and their expectations, all the while being mindful of the restrictions of English theatre (hence the use of song).

St. John Dorset's *The Vampire*

In 1821, a further English vampire play was published (but never appeared onstage) as *The Vampire* by St. John Dorset. Dorset was a pseudonym, the author believed to be one Hugo John Belfour, the eighteen-year-old son of a Naval Officer.⁵⁵² Belfour went on to compose two further plays, *Loveless* (also 1821) and *Montezuma, A Tragedy in Five Acts* (1822). In 1826, he was awarded a curacy in Jamaica, and died

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid. p.21

⁵⁵¹ Stuart, 1994, p.76

⁵⁵² Arthur Henry Grant *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 4, (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1885), p.147

there the following year.⁵⁵³ Whether 'St. John Dorset' was indeed Belfour is still unknown, but his obituary in *The Gentleman's Magazine*⁵⁵⁴ states that he was the nephew of Rev. Okey Belfour, minister of St. John's Wood chapel, which may be where he got the pseudonym from. The frontispiece to the Second Edition⁵⁵⁵ carries a quote from Byron – 'Woe to that hour he came and went!' – and reflects the continued widespread belief that Byron was the author of *The Vampyre* despite Polidori being declared as true author.

In the 'Advertisement' at the front of the Second Edition, the author explains that 'the chief personage of the drama is no blood-sucker. A *gouât*⁵⁵⁶ so barbarous and *bizarre*, however it may assimilate with the usual horrors of the melo-drama, must be very derogatory to the chaste dignity of the tragic muse'.⁵⁵⁷ His vampire is still a vampire, he informs us, but a vampire of the type that preys on his victims in other ways:

There are Vampires who waste the heart and happiness of those they are connected with, Vampires of avarice, Vampires of spleen, Vampires of debauchery, Vampires of all the shapes of selfishness and domestic tyranny. What is the seducer and abandoner of a trusting young girl, but a Vampire not sufficiently alive to the harm of his own cruelty? What is a husband who marries for money, and then tramples upon his wife, but a Vampire? What is the 'poisonous bosom-snake' of Milton but a female Vampire, wearing a man's heart out by holding him without loving him?⁵⁵⁸

The audience would recognise many of these traits as being a reference to Byron's public persona.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Volume. 142, July, 1827, p.570

⁵⁵⁵ *The Vampire, A Tragedy in Five Acts*, St. John Dorset, (London: C. and J. Ollier, 1821), Second Edition

⁵⁵⁶ taste

⁵⁵⁷ Dorset, 1821, *Advertisement*

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid. Here Dorset is paraphrasing a contemporary article in *The Examiner*, date unknown.

Dorset is suggesting that vampires are not the blood-sucking fiends of the 18th century folkloric tales, but modern (early nineteenth century) monsters who metaphorically suck the life from their 'victims'. This analogy owes much to Polidori, and fits the image of Lord Byron – Byron was not a blood-drinking fiend, but he was vampiric in his actions towards his own female 'victims'. Having stressed this point, Belfour was a known supporter of Byron, and was included as such in George Darley's 'John Lacy' letters, an attack on the dramatists of the 'Byron school of thought'. They, supposedly, suffered from being devoid of 'the English virtues of strong morality and strong speech'⁵⁵⁹ much like Dorset's play.

This preceding quote about some vampires being metaphorical rather than physical reads almost like a disclaimer, as nowhere in Dorset's play is there an actual (blood sucking) vampire. The play reads more like a poem, and it is understandable that it was never performed. Its subject matter is 'reflective rather than dramatic'⁵⁶⁰ and explores the moral codes of its Oriental characters, but it is worth considering due to the links to Byron. Indeed, *The Vampire* is set in Alexandria, not Scotland, and bears no resemblance to Byron, Polidori, Nodier, or Planché, although giving it that title and quoting Byron on the frontispiece may have been a way of elevating himself to Byron's level on Dorset's account, especially as the content is literary and poetic.

There are some phrases within the text that have tentative links to the gothic or vampirism, for example in Astarte's speech to Nourayah:

Hearken; thou hast been a scourge to me,
A cruel scourge; for thy oppression, know,
The angel-hand doth sketch thy destiny,
In flame, on yon mysterious wall: behold!
Thy kingdom is ta'en from thee, and bestow'd,

⁵⁵⁹ Michael Bradshaw 'Bloody John Lacy: *The London Magazine* and the Doldrums of English Drama, in Simon Hull (ed) *The British Periodical Text, 1797-1835*, 2008, Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks LLP, p 134

⁵⁶⁰ Summers, 2003, p.232

Back on the people, wrung and famishing.⁵⁶¹

This sounds like a moral chastisement on Astarte's part, and subsequently Nourayah deems her a traitor and stabs her. Her death scene, when she is held in the arms of her forbidden Persian lover Abdalla, has elements of one of the many Ruthven deaths from the vampire plays:

I pray'd for death:
If I had liv'd, I never more had lov'd,
But ere we part for ever, I may bless thee.⁵⁶²

And then – 'Tis sweet, but sinful, to die in these arms!⁵⁶³

As the work was published at the same time as the first two vampire plays (based on Polidori) and bears the same name as Polidori's text, it is understandable why it is often referenced in relation to the early plays, but it cannot be viewed as part of the progressive development of the Byronic (Ruthven) vampire character seen through the chronological stage productions. It is nevertheless important to consider it, however, in relation to the way the subject matter of the vampire was being utilised in a different way after the publication of Polidori's tale.

Heinrich Marschner's *Der Vampyr*

Marschner returned to the Polidoric style of Nodier and Planché when he adapted Heinrich Ludwig Ritter's *Der Vampyr, oder die todten Braut*⁵⁶⁴ for his *Der Vampyr* (1827).⁵⁶⁵ Ritter's version had premiered in Karlsruhe on 1st March 1821, but was not a success. The reason Marschner's version was more successful is that he

⁵⁶¹ Dorset, 1821, Act V, Scene I, p.88

⁵⁶² Ibid. p.88

⁵⁶³ Ibid. p.89

⁵⁶⁴ The Vampire, or the dead Bride

⁵⁶⁵ Marschner's *Der Vampyr* actually premiered in Leipzig on 28th March 1828, but it was the English version of the following year that had the most impact.

transformed it into an opera, and was therefore more in line with society's tastes. It was so acclaimed that it went on to be performed in most of the leading German opera houses of the period.⁵⁶⁶

In the opening scene, Ruthven (who becomes Rutt-wen again) is seen amongst an orgy of ghosts and witches who are in league with a Satanic vampire master – 'You witches and ghosts, Close cheerfully the circle, Soon our master will be here with us!'.⁵⁶⁷ Referring to the vampire as 'master' offers further links with *Dracula*, as this is the term in which Renfield refers to the Count, which again appears to reflect the influence of the early plays on Stoker's novel. Much like the previous plays, these beings are linked to the moon – 'By moonlight we prowl'⁵⁶⁸ they inform the audience. Ruthven is then heard pleading to the vampire master to sustain his time on earth, to which he replies 'This one here, who already fell into our service, Asks for a short time, To stay among free people'.⁵⁶⁹ This latter phrase suggests that vampires, witches and ghosts are not 'free' and instead live a cursed existence, something that becomes a salient point in later vampire narratives but owes its origins to Polidori.

The vampire master grants Ruthven his wish on the condition that he provides him with three virgin brides in an almost Faustian pact. This 'pact with the Devil' is a new element not seen in previous plays, yet in some ways reminds the audience of the oath between Ruthven and Aubrey in Polidori's tale. Another new element is the introduction of Janthe (Ilanthe from Polidori's tale), and just as in Polidori she falls victim to Ruthven. However, Marschner's Ruthven is a much more cruel and sadistic vampire than any of the versions from Polidori through to Planché. For example, when he kills Janthe and drinks her blood, he sings of the 'pleasure' to 'suck new life with a kiss'.⁵⁷⁰ He continues his ecstasy thus:

⁵⁶⁶ Stuart, 1994, p.112

⁵⁶⁷ Heinrich Marschner *Der Vampyr*, Act I, Scene I. Translated to the English by Jutta Romero, 1997. Online at <http://opera.stanford.edu/iu/libretti/vampyr.html> Accessed 17/11/16.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

And when the burning thirst is quenched,
And when the blood oozes from the heart,
And when they groan full of terror,
Haha! What delight!⁵⁷¹

These few lines encapsulate the way Marschner has transformed his vampire from the 'hinted horror' of Byron, Polidori and the early plays into a being much more akin to Count Dracula at the end of the century, or indeed the Hammer Horror version of the mid-twentieth.

The Janthe character gives us an interesting insight into the victim's inability to resist the power of Ruthven, something that Polidori first created in Ruthven's mesmeric qualities via his 'dead grey eye':

Beloved parents' only joy.
I reward them with bitter sorrow,
When to honor them should be a sweet duty.
Alas! I have to grieve them,
Because I am forced to love you.⁵⁷²

How she is 'forced' is not explained.

Unlike the Ruthven of Nodier and Planché, Marschner's version shows no remorse for his killing, and takes obvious pleasure from it:

Ha, in her heart she is afraid,
Poor girl, I feel sorry for her.
But triumph! Now she is mine;
And to suck her sweet blood,
What lust it will be!⁵⁷³

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

This removes the element of the fatal 'Byronic Hero', and thus the melancholic sympathy, that had previously connected the audience to him and allowed for a degree of remorse. Not until James Malcolm Rymer's *Varney the Vampire* some twenty years later would that sympathy return.

The audience is fully informed of the vampiric nature of Ruthven after Janthe's death, just as in Polidori's version. A servant informs the audience:

Poor father! Woe! Horror!
Chest and neck of your daughter are bloody,
The mark of poison teeth show the horror!
She was a victim of the vampire!⁵⁷⁴

The callous nature of Ruthven is heightened for the audience later in the play when he professes to love Malwine (pronounced Malwina), as in the Nodier and Planché versions, but then subsequently makes her his final victim (after Janthe and Emmy). In *Der Vampyr*, Malwine is betrothed to Edgar Aubry (Aubrey), but her father Lord Humprey Davenaut tells her to break the engagement off and instead marry the Earl von Marsden (Ruthven). Again, the Marsden name is retained in Marschner's play, despite the Germanisation of the other characters. All these examples show the intertextual connective links between the Polidori, Nodier, Planché and Marschner versions of *The Vampyre*.

Marschner also kept the Scottish location, though when Planché was asked to adapt the German opera for the English stage in 1829, he moved the action to Hungary, where he has always maintained (even when adapting Nodier in 1820) the vampire was better suited.⁵⁷⁵ This may well mean that Planché was familiar with Calmet's work on vampires, or at least have seen the links to this in Polidori's Introduction to

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ Stuart, 1994, p.117

his tale. In his *Recollections* (1872) Planché wrote how he ‘substituted for a Scotch chieftain a Wallachian boyard’⁵⁷⁶ and that the opera was ‘extremely well sung, and the costumes respected the national attire of the Magyars and Wallachians’.⁵⁷⁷ Alongside this reference to the ‘Wallachian Boyard’ and the Magyar presence, both of which feature in *Dracula*, there is more evidence that Bram Stoker may have been familiar with these early plays.

Theater der Stadt Leipzig.
Sonnabend, den 29ten März, 1828.

Zum Beschluß der Darstellungen vor Oskern:
Zum Erstenmale:
Der Vampyr,
große romantische Oper in zwey Aufzügen, von W. M. Wohlbrück.
Musik von Heinrich Marschner.

P e r s o n e n:

Sir Vampyr, Laird von Dabenant.	Herr Adfert.
Malvina, seine Tochter.	Mad. Stritt.
Edgar Aubrey, ein Bedienter des Hauses Dabenant.	Herr Pfister.
Ferd Rauthen.	Herr Genay.
Sir Berklep.	Herr Gau.
Yantke, seine Tochter.	Frau von Ziettn.
Georg Diddlin, in Dabenant's Diensten.	Herr Wogt.
John Werth, Bedienter auf dem Schloß des Earl von Maroden.	Herr Heinecke.
Emmy, seine Tochter.	Mad. Devrient.
Louis Blunt,	Herr Fischer.
James Gabschill,	Herr Jermig.
Richard Green,	Herr Ludwig.
Robert Green,	Herr Hofmann.
Sally, Louis's Frau.	Mad. Adfert.
Der Richter.	Herr Burghardt.
Dienr des Lairds von Dabenant.	
Jäger und Dienr des Sir Berklep.	
Bedienter von Dabenant.	
Bedienter von Maroden.	
Herrn und Geißler.	

Die Scene ist in Schottland.
Der darin vorkommende Tonk ist von Herrn Wenzel eingerichtet.

Der Text zu den Gesängen aus dieser Oper ist an der Kasse für 3 Groschen zu haben.

88te Abonnementsvorstellung.

P r e i s e d e r P l ä t z e:

Parterre: 8 Groschen. Parterre: 16 Groschen.
Logen des Parterres und Ersten Ranges: Ein einzelner Platz 16 Groschen. Ein einzelner Platz in der Fremdenloge No. 25, 1 Thaler.
Logen des Zweyten Ranges: Ein einzelner Platz 12 Gr. Ein einzelner Platz in der Fremdenloge No. 38, 16 Groschen.
Erste Gallerie: 12 Gr. Ein gesperrter Sitz besetzt 16 Gr.
Zweyte Gallerie: 8 Gr. Ein gesperrter Sitz besetzt 12 Gr.
Dritte Gallerie: Mittelplatz 6 Gr.; Seitenplatz 4 Gr.

Anfang um 6 Uhr. Einlaß um 5 Uhr. Ende nach 9 Uhr.

Figure 16: Advertising poster for Marschner's *Der Vampyr*.

(Source: Public Domain)

⁵⁷⁶ J. R. Planché *Recollections and Reflections*, (London: Tinley Brothers, 1872), Two Volumes, Volume I, p.152

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

In Stoker's words:

We Szekelys have a right to be proud, for in our veins flows the blood of many brave races who fought as the lion fights...Is it a wonder that we were a conquering race; that we were proud; that when the Magyar, the Lombard, the Avar, the Bulgar, or the Turk poured his thousands on our frontiers, we drove them back?...And when the Hungarian flood swept eastwards, the Szekelys were claimed as kindred by the victorious Magyars.⁵⁷⁸

It has always been generally believed that Stoker got the idea for this heritage when he found a book on Vlad The Impaler in Whitby library during his research, and decided to give his vampire the name 'Dracula', Vlad's nickname. However, the similarities with Planché's reworking of Marschner are too close to ignore, especially when several of the other plays have elements that appear to have been utilised in *Dracula*, and the reference to Wallachia adds further weight to this given that is Vlad's homeland.⁵⁷⁹ These are yet more examples of elements from Polidori and the plays appearing with *Dracula*, which highlights the legacy of Polidori's creation.

Another common element with the Marschner play and Polidori's tale is the relationship between Aubry and Ruthven, and the oath Aubry swears upon Ruthven's death and subsequent resurrection. Stuart has suggested that by analysing the play there appears to be the hint of an underlying relationship between Aubry and Ruthven, something that is alluded to but not expanded upon.⁵⁸⁰ It is possible to argue that this underlying relationship is present in Polidori's version, and may originate, as I have shown, within the dynamics between Polidori and Byron. What is new within the Marschner adaptation is that he gives us a reason why Aubry cannot break his oath – if he does, he too will become a vampire. And just like in Polidori,

⁵⁷⁸ Bram Stoker *Dracula*, (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p.41

⁵⁷⁹ See Christopher Frayling *Vampyres: Lord Ruthven to Count Dracula*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), p.303-17 for a discussion on this

⁵⁸⁰ Stuart, 1994, p.114

Aubry's oath means he puts the woman he loves in danger (his sister in Polidori, his fiancé in Marschner). The oath is explained as follows:

RUTHVEN

Whoever you may be have pity –

AUBRY

Whose voice? What do I see! If my eyes are not fooling me at the faint moonlight you must be Ruthven.

RUTHVEN

Aubry it's you? My angel sent you, I was assaulted by robbers.⁵⁸¹

And then

AUBRY

Don't hesitate to tell me! What
Is it? Should I avenge your
Death? Did you recognize the robbers?

RUTHVEN

No, it's not that which I desire of you! Oh!

AUBRY

So speak already, what is it? What can I do for you?
What strange restlessness in your behavior - is there someone about whom you are anxious? Is some heavy guilt bothering your conscience? Tell, what is it?

⁵⁸¹ Act I Scene I

RUTHVEN

Nothing Like That - I Just Beg You - Aubry - Guide Me Up To Those Rocks (HE POINTS TOWARDS THE ROCKS ABOVE THE CAVE) and put my face in such a way that the rays of the moon will penetrate my eyes.

AUBRY

Strange - and what shall - ? Ha, what foreboding! They say that those horrible creatures -

RUTHVEN

Quiet! Carry out my request!

Aubry

So it is true what I was told in London? Monster! You are a v ⁻⁵⁸²

Aubry does not utter the full word, but the audience knows what Ruthven is. This is odd, but may be a disguised link to Byron, who also does not use the word vampire in his *Fragment*. Ruthven then tells Aubry that if he were to break the oath he has promised, then 'cursed you shall be into the abyss of hell, all the punishment of perjury shall weigh upon your soul if you break your oath! Cursed shall you be and whoever is a member of your family! Cursed shall be whomever you love and who loves you!'.⁵⁸³ It is clear, therefore, that Ruthven holds power over Aubry much like he does with his female victims. Again, this appears to then make Aubry his fourth victim, albeit in a different way, and again this can also be argued for Polidori's version. This power seems to stem from Ruthven's eyes, and this is no more apparent than in the song where all the characters involved repeat the same phrase – 'Cutting, like a poison arrow, flashes his glance through my soul':

⁵⁸² Act I Scene I

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

RUTHVEN

Cutting, like a poison arrow
Flashes his glance through my soul,
Ha, to find that dreamer here,
Forebodes nothing good.

DAVENAUT

Cutting, like a poison arrow
Flashes his glance through her soul,
To offend his pride like that,
Forebodes nothing good.

MALWINE

Cutting, like a poison arrow
Flashes his glance through my soul,
That my heart trembles before him,
That forebodes nothing good.

CHORUS

Cutting, like a poison arrow
Flashes his glance through her soul,
That her heart trembles before him,
That forebodes nothing good.⁵⁸⁴

The end of Ruthven's pursuit of Malwine is markedly similar to that in Polidori's version, both witnessed through the eyes of Aubry / Aubrey. In Marschner:

AUBRY

⁵⁸⁴ Act I Scene II

Ha, I hardly can contain my rage!
But my oath holds me captive
Woe is me, his pale cheeks
Languish already for her blood.

RUTHVEN

I laugh at his rage,
Because his oath holds him captive.
Girl, with your blushing cheeks,
Soon your sweet blood will be mine.⁵⁸⁵

It was at this point, in Polidori, that Aubrey dies and Ruthven escaped, with Aubrey's sister falling victim, having 'glutted the thirst of a vampire'. At the end of Marschner's version, however, he chooses to adopt the ending of Nodier and Planché, as Aubry summons the courage to break the oath and reveal that Ruthven is a vampire, thus saving Malwine. Instead of Aubry becoming a vampire, as Ruthven said he would, it is Ruthven who suffers, as lightning strikes him down. The remaining characters give the audience the reason, again through song, and attribute this occurrence to the power of God over darkness:

For him who is pious,
Who fosters true love in his bosom,
The dark might of Hell escapes,
No evil spell can touch him!⁵⁸⁶

By adapting the play into an opera, Marschner was able to add elements that the melodramas could not do. His version heightened the element of horror, firstly due to the music, and secondly due to his decision to return to the more brutal facets of Polidori, not least the bloody murders. This latter part is heightened further still by choosing to return Ruthven to the role of the depraved serial killer, in essence what

⁵⁸⁵ Act I Scene II

⁵⁸⁶ Act II Scene II

his contemporary audience deemed a vampire to be. No longer was the vampire character someone for the audience to sympathise with, as in previous plays, but instead someone to fear. In this respect, Marschner's version is much closer to Polidori's than those of Nodier and Planché, and it is clear he was familiar with Polidori's tale given the similarities and incidents discussed above.

The end of the 1820s vampire plays saw Ruthven come full circle, and return to the dangerous vampire figure that Polidori had originally created. At this point, both Polidori and Byron were dead, with the former all but forgotten. The cult of Byron, however, grew steadily in the following two decades after his death, something that appears to have impacted upon the way the vampire character of the subsequent plays was portrayed. This may have been why Marschner chose to return certain elements of his play to Polidori's original – to link his play with the steady rise of Byronmania and thus increase his audience numbers.

There may also be a wider setting for Marschner's incorporation of a heightened level of terror. It has been mentioned how Nodier began to shift the vampire-being even further away from the folkloric version of the Enlightenment, and it is possible to see Marschner continuing this trend. As some scholars have noted, 'the Enlightenment vampire presages Marx's capitalist bloodsucker; the monsters let loose during the sleep of reason are symbols of feudal power who prey on the vulnerable'.⁵⁸⁷ Although Marx's references to the capitalist and bourgeois vampires were still some years off, English society would still have been familiar with the notion of the vampire-like landowner 'sucking the life' of the lower classes.

Decades of Parliamentary Enclosure and the beginnings of Industrialisation were already causing animosity within society between the landowners and industrialists and the peasants / workers. It is therefore ironic that Byron's first speech in the House of Lords was in defence of the Luddites, the machine breakers who opposed

⁵⁸⁷ Sam George & Bill Hughes (eds). *Open Graves, Open Minds: Representations of vampires and the Undead from the Enlightenment to the present day*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p.13

mechanisation, given his role in the development of the aristocratic vampire. It is important, especially within the development of the plays, to 'bear in mind that in Britain a unique alliance had formed between land-owning aristocrat and capitalist'.⁵⁸⁸ These points would have been key when considering audience reception to the plays of this period.

Blink's *The Vampire Bride*

George Blink's *The Vampire Bride, or the Tenant of the Tomb* (1834) is classed as part of the tranche of Polidori plays, and yet deviated from the general Polidori plot quite dramatically. It also alters the Nodier / Planché formula by moving the setting from Scotland to Thurwalden, a Medieval German town. The action also, for the most part, occurs within the walls of a Gothic castle, and the plot appears markedly similar to Ludwig Tieck's *Wake Not The Dead* (1800). These elements of German Gothicism relate back to the German shudder novels that were popular at the time, as discussed in my Introduction earlier.

There are suggestions⁵⁸⁹ that it was based on an English translation of an obscure German piece by Ernst Raupach entitled *Lasst die Todten Ruhem* (Let the Dead Rest) but there is little evidence to confirm this, and Raupach's name is not mentioned in Blink's version. Crawford has recently argued that the two pieces are one and the same, and that it was falsely attributed to Tieck when Peter Haining included it in his *Gothic Tales of Terror* (1973).⁵⁹⁰ However, Frayling has shown that *Wake Not The Dead* was published, in English, under this title and with Tieck as author as early as 1823, when it was included in the compilation *Popular Tales and Romances of the Northern Nations*.⁵⁹¹ This all adds confusion to the provenance of Blink's source, and the published version of the play is now long out of print and not widely available.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 14

⁵⁸⁹ See Heide Crawford 'Ernst Benjamin Salomo Raupach's Vampire Story "Wake Not the Dead!"', in *Journal of Popular Culture*, 2012, Vol. 45, Issue 6, pp. 1189–1205, p.1189

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Christopher Frayling *Vampyres: Lord Byron to Count Dracula*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), p.165



THE
VAMPIRE BRIDE;

OR
 WAKE NOT THE DEAD.

A Melo-drama
 IN TWO ACTS.

BY
GEORGE BLINK.

Plays
 AUTHOR OF
More Schemes; Blind Man's Buff; The Tiger at Large, &c.

THOMAS HAILES LACY,
 WELLINGTON STREET,
 STRAND,
 LONDON.

Figure 17: Frontispiece for Blink's *The Vampire Bride*.

(Source: Public Domain)

The play opened on 8th March, 1830 at the Sadler Wells Theatre in London and, oddly, despite its violent and terrifying scenes, attempted to add a comedic element to the play via two married servant characters named Annetta and Jansen, and a cobbler named Kibitz. This addition creates an element of disharmony within the play, with the Gothic horror elements in stark contrast to the comedic parts. Whereas Planché did this quite successfully with his play, Blink fails probably due to

the play being classed a Romantic tragedy. As Stuart⁵⁹² has suggested, the comedy element tends to dilute the terror, and 'make the serious characters appear ludicrous'.

Within the play, these comedic characters give the audience a running commentary on what is happening, and are thus used almost as a narrator – this would have no doubt allowed more emphasis to have been given to creating the horror effects without having to explain what was happening within the acting. However, Burwick has suggested that there are actually two plays intertwined within *Blink* – on the surface is the main vampire tale but a second, more subconscious strand depicts the complexities of married life and the fallacies contained within society's expectations of it, in a similar way to the 'moral codes' of Nodier's play. This subplot:

exposes false expectations of marital bliss and provides an effective reminder that the vampire plot plays out on the level of fantasy and terror the same familiar themes of domestic conflict and exploitation, the psychic vampirism in which one partner drains the energy of the other'.⁵⁹³

This notion of psychic vampirism, with one 'partner' draining the life of the other, is visible within the Polidori / Byron relationship and, therefore, within the Aubrey / Ruthven one also, as well as having links to the mesmeric / somnambulism elements within Polidori.

Hardly recognisable then as Polidori's tale, *The Vampire Bride* follows the misfortunes of Walter, whose wife Brunhilda tragically dies leaving him to marry a second wife, Swanhilda, who bears him two children. However, Walter still longs to be with his first wife and so visits a necromancer who resurrects Brunhilda from the dead. In the play, Brunhilda (almost certainly the first female vampire on the English stage) rises from the dead in a flash of blue flames, and instantly the audience sees

⁵⁹² Stuart, 1994, p.122

⁵⁹³ Burwick, 2009, p.256

she is to be one of the most bloodthirsty adaptations of the stage vampire seen so far:

Human blood! Warm – fresh from the arteries,
This is the hellish drink for which I've thirsted.⁵⁹⁴

The use of blue flames is an interesting one, as Stoker later used this effect in *Dracula*, linking it to the East European folk belief that blue flames marked the site of buried treasure on Walpurgis Night. Perhaps Blink was also aware of these tales, some forty years previously, especially poignant given the Germanic setting.

Although Brunhilda may be the first female vampire on the stage, Carol Senf has argued that female vampires within culture and literature are actually more common than may be first perceived. In fact, she discusses the Brunhilda character within Tieck's *Wake Not The Dead* but makes no reference to Blink's stage version. As she says 'Brunhilda, who is reanimated when her grieving husband begs the assistance of a sorceress, must drink the blood of her children and her husband to maintain her existence.'⁵⁹⁵ It is not surprising that Blink's stage version of Tieck is omitted from Senf's work, as the vampire plays have been widely overlooked by many scholars, probably due to their scarcity in published / printed form. Due to this their importance within the development of the literary vampire is greatly reduced. As I argue throughout this chapter, the plays are integral in solidifying the transformation of the vampire image that Polidori began.

As in Tieck, Brunhilda makes victims of Walter's two children and drinks their blood, after which a distraught Swanhilda commits suicide. There appears a clear contrast, almost 'doubling' between Brunhilda and Swanhilda. Their names suggest a close link, yet they appear as contrasting characters – Brun (brown) and Swan (Swan,

⁵⁹⁴ George Blink *The Vampire Bride, or the Tenant of the Tomb*, (London: J. Duncombe, 1840), Act I, Scene V

⁵⁹⁵ Carol Senf 'Daughters of Lilith: Female vampires in popular culture' in Leonard G. Heldreth & Mary Pharr *The Blood is the Life: Vampires in Literature*, (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), pp. 199-216, p.200

white) reflecting their nature. Brunhilda therefore can be seen as representing the negative elements, and Swanhilda the positive, of marital relations, and indeed the primary function of the three comedic characters is to discuss the various arguments that Walter and his brides engage in. This seems to add further weight to the argument offered by Burwick, that the play serves a secondary function to explore the concept of marriage within society.

Brunhilda subsequently preys upon Walter himself while he is sleeping, but he awakens in time to realise what is happening. Walter then kills Brunhilda with a consecrated knife. Later in the play, Walter marries for a third time (echoing the need for three 'victims' in Marschner's version). However, Walter soon realises that his third wife is none other than Brunhilda, resurrected for a second time in the same, confusing manner in which Ruthven and Lord / Earl Marsden is in all of the earlier adaptations of Polidori's tale. Brunhilda then transforms into a snake (this ability to metamorphose into an animal is new to the vampire plays, but features heavily within *Dracula*) and kills Walter.

Blink's vampire having snake-like qualities may well be influenced by the vampiric Lamia figure of mythology, and again Senf discusses this in her piece on female vampires. The Lamia being is also the subject of Keats' fairly contemporary poem of the same name (published 1820) – 'All that I now possess is an existence chill'd, And colder than the snake'.⁵⁹⁶ Percy Shelley had a copy of the poem in his pocket on the day he drowned⁵⁹⁷ suggesting it was read by the school of Romantic poets, and it should therefore be no surprise that the myth eventually found its way into the vampire plays of the period.

The Vampire Bride was unlike any of the other versions of Polidori that had preceded it, or that followed it, allowing it to 'stand entirely alone, without imitators and

⁵⁹⁶ Act I, Scene V

⁵⁹⁷ Leigh Hunt & Edward Trelawney 'Account of the death and cremation of Percy Bysshe Shelley, together with a description of his life and character and that of his companion Captain Williams, who was drowned with Shelley in his yacht', 1822. Manuscript in the British Library, Ashley MS 915

seems to have been almost entirely forgotten'.⁵⁹⁸ Although Blink's adaptation does not seem to have affected future stage versions, the question is how much influence it may have had on later vampire literature, such as *Carmilla* or the Vampire Brides of *Dracula*, and is an important consideration because of this, its links to Marschner and the fact it attempted a different narrative whilst most other stage versions relied on earlier texts. Nevertheless, it was unable to detract from the Polidoric vampire image.

Through both Marschner and Blink, it appears that the 'audiences in the late 1820s and early 1830s were receptive to increasing violence in their entertainment'.⁵⁹⁹ Just a decade earlier, Nodier had had to relegate the violent elements of his play to the backstage area, with actors leaving the audience's view before committing violent acts. Given the 'elitist form of an opera'⁶⁰⁰ (Marschner) and a 'Romantic tragedy', we might assume this audience to be higher up the social spectrum than the lower-class audience of Nodier and Planché. One common factor noted by Stuart is the 'tinge of the foreign and exotic'⁶⁰¹ – in Nodier and Planché this element was Scottish, in Dorset it was Persian, in Marschner it was via an Elizabethan-era Scottish Lord (subsequently made Hungarian by Planché), and in Blink it was Medieval Germany.

Polidori started this trend by having Ruthven travel across Europe, and indeed Stoker continued it with his East European Count. This all allows for an element of the otherness, but may also be reflective of Britain's Imperial attitudes in the period. Over the course of the five or six adaptations, small changes, omissions and additions altered the Polidori version beyond recognition by the time Blink's version was released. However, it is fair to say that Polidori again started this trend himself by transforming Byron's original concept into the version that was eventually published in 1819. In defence of the two German-inspired adaptations (which changed the tale the most) Stuart argues that they reminded the audience just what

⁵⁹⁸ Stuart, 1994, p.124

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid. p.126

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid. p.126

⁶⁰¹ Ibid. p.126

vampires actually were (or should be) – ‘not wicked moon fairies but vicious killers’,⁶⁰² and that they have much in common with the vampire created by Polidori.

Although Rymer’s *Varney, the Vampire* (1845-47) resurrected the vampire in literature in the following decade, on the stage no further plays of note were seen for almost twenty years when Alexander Dumas’ (and Dion Boucicalt’s English version of 1852) *Vampire* was staged in 1851.

Dumas’ *Le Vampire*

With the other plays, it was usually the public mood and wider issues within society that made resurrecting the vampire on stage a popular act. Through *Varney*, the vampire had at least continued to be part of society’s literary repertoire, but it took an odd event that was heavily reported in the press for the vampire to reappear back on stage. *Varney*’s author, James Malcolm Rymer, wrote in his work *Popular Writing* of 1842 that the key to the vampire’s longevity was fear; the fear that existed within society itself. I have previously argued the exact same principle,⁶⁰³ that it was society’s fear, and fascination, with death that allowed the vampire being to continue to be relevant throughout history.

Rymer discusses this further:

How then are we to account for the taste which maintained for so long the works of terror and blood? Most easily. It is the privilege of the ignorant and the weak to love superstition. The only strong mental sensation they are capable of is *fear*.⁶⁰⁴

And Radcliffe discusses this idea of terror with specific reference as to how it works within a psychological framework:

⁶⁰² Ibid. p.127

⁶⁰³ Matthew Beresford *From Demons to Dracula: The Creation of the Modern Vampire Myth*, (London: Reaktion, 2008)

⁶⁰⁴ J.M. Rymer ‘Popular Writing’ in *Queen’s Magazine: A Monthly Miscellany of Literature and Art*, I, 1842, pp.99-103, p.100

How happens it then, that objects of terror sometimes strike us very forcibly, when introduced into scenes of gaiety and splendour, as, for instance, the banquet scene in Macbeth? They strike, then, chiefly by the force of contrast, but the effect, though sudden and strong, is also transient; it is the thrill of horror and surprise, which they then communicate, rather than the deep and solemn feelings excited under more accordant circumstances, and left long upon the mind.⁶⁰⁵

What both Rymer and Radcliffe show is that terror brings an element of shock and surprise, which although instilling fear within us also creates an element of excitement.

It is this terror that helped to rekindle the interest in vampires with the general public in France in the late 1840s / early 1850s. In 1849, French newspapers had widely covered the sensationalist story of François Bertrand, a sergeant in the French army. Bertrand, nicknamed the Vampire of Montparnasse, had been digging up corpses and mutilating them before eventually being caught and arrested by the French police. He was sentenced to one year in prison for the crime of necrophilia.⁶⁰⁶ Why Bertrand was named as a 'vampire' is unclear – several examples of this occur whereby murderers or necrophiliacs are attributed to be vampires even though they show none of the typical traits (blood drinking, rising from the Dead, etc). Famous examples include Peter Kurten, the 'Vampire of Düsseldorf' who committed several murders in the 1910s & 1920s, and John George Haigh, the so-called 'Acid Bath Vampire' of the 1940s.⁶⁰⁷ Neither of these displayed vampiric traits in the classic sense of the term, but were nevertheless given the moniker due to their callous and depraved acts.

⁶⁰⁵ Ann Radcliffe 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' in *New Monthly Magazine*, Vol.16, No.1, 1826, pp.145-52, p.150

⁶⁰⁶ Patricia MacCormack 'Necrosexuality' in Giffney, N & Hird, M.J. (Eds) *Queering the Non/Human*, (Aldershot, Hamps: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), pp. 339-363, p.343

⁶⁰⁷ For further discussion, see Beresford, 2008, p.159-168

Bertrand was no different, and his practice of mutilating corpses was enough to attract the 'vampire' label. Several subsequent songs and pulp-fiction narratives ensured his notoriety escalated within French society, so by the time Dumas came to produce his *Le Vampire*, he found a very receptive audience. Dumas first came to France in 1823, and the first stage production he saw was Nodier's *Le Vampire*. In a strange twist of fate, Dumas was actually seated at the side of Nodier, but did not know who he was. During conversations between the two, they discussed the subject of vampirism at length, and it is clear that Nodier firmly believed them to be real.⁶⁰⁸ He even told Dumas that he had seen one first-hand in Illyria some years before.⁶⁰⁹

Dumas' own version of the vampire play – *Le Vampire* – opened on 20th December 1851 at the Théâtre de l'Ambigu-Comique in Paris. The play has been described as being 'a synthesis of all the previous incarnations of Ruthven',⁶¹⁰ which suggests that Dumas had seen, read or knew about the previous productions. However, like each adaptation before him, Dumas added certain elements. *Le Vampire* has been out of print since 1863 and was never translated into English.⁶¹¹

One such addition to Dumas' play is the character of Mélusine, a fairy who in Act Two warns the audience, through song, that 'Ruthven is a demon, Ruthven is a vampire; His love, it is death!'.⁶¹² This harks back to the Polidori tale, but switches Ruthven's 'killing look' to a 'killing love'. It also further moves Ruthven (and the vampire more generally) away from the demon-figure whose look can kill (like the Medusa of the Ancient World, and again reflecting the snake imagery) into a being who is capable of love, albeit a love that ultimately destroys. This further humanises Ruthven, and is something that Stoker uses to great effect when he revitalises his Count from the aged vampire in Transylvania into the youthful one that travels to

⁶⁰⁸ Stuart, 1994, p.134

⁶⁰⁹ For more on this, see Alexander Dumas *My Memoirs*, (London: Methuen & Co, 1907), pp.136-93

⁶¹⁰ Richard Switzer 'Lord Ruthven and the Vampires' in *French Review*, 29, 1955, pp. 107-12, p.111

⁶¹¹ Version used for the thesis was a French copy included in *Théâtre complet. 11. Urbain Grandier.-Le Vingt-quatre février.-La Chasse au Chastre.-La Barrière de Clichy.-Le Vampire*, British Library General Reference Collection 11736.ccc.8.

⁶¹² Act II, Scene III

London in search of Mina. On the surface, this youthful change appears to come from him preying on Jonathan Harker (who is himself a developed version of Aubrey, I might argue) but the change begins to occur when he sees the portrait of Mina Harker and begins to feel love for her – “Yes, I too can love”.⁶¹³ Coppola further plays on this theme in the film version of the tale.

Dumas was also the first to move his play between countries, again something that Polidori started, and thus *Le Vampire* shifts between Brittany, Spain and Circassia (now part of Russia). Although no doubt making the theatre production more difficult to stage, it allows for the audience to be taken on a journey, and for Dumas to incorporate different scenes and landscapes, which would no doubt have added to the audience’s viewing pleasure. One such scene sees Ruthven on top of some cliffs and, under a moonlit sky, suddenly open a pair of wings and fly off into the night. Although not specifically a bat, it clearly gives this illusion, and is now an image irrevocably linked with the vampire in almost all later texts.

Within Dumas, Ruthven’s main target is Gilbert (Aubrey) but he preys upon the three female characters in order to do this, pursuing him for a period of three years. This again has parallels with Polidori in that although the obvious ‘victims’ are the females, Ruthven’s main target was Aubrey himself.

Dion Boucicalt adapted Dumas’ play for the English stage the following year (opened in July 1852), with his *The Vampire* opening in June at the Princess Theatre in London. Boucicalt’s play was never published and copies of the original manuscript are extremely rare.⁶¹⁴

Boucicalt wrote his version for the popular actor Charles Kean to star in the leading role, but as Kean was already performing in the play *Trial of Love* (which opened in June 1852) he refused the part, and so Boucicalt took the unparalleled decision to

⁶¹³ Stoker, 1994, p.53

⁶¹⁴ A handwritten copy dedicated to James Wallack, Esquire of New York, dated 1852 is contained within the Billy Rose Collection in the Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts.

act the part himself. By considering the technologies that Kean had designed and utilised within his performances, it becomes clear why Boucicalt would have wanted him

...sliding traps in the floor for mobile ghosts, and overhead wires for hovering or flying figures; limelight illuminations, projected by heating lime in an oxyhydrogen flame; overhead lights with coloured glass; water scenes constructed in huge tanks with moving ships and waterfalls; sheets of gauze for simulated water scenes, and gauze curtains for supernatural scenes; off-stage treadmills for wind and storm effects, and sheets of zinc for thunder...⁶¹⁵

and so the list goes on. Without Kean as the main actor, though, it remains unclear whether Boucicalt was able to utilise any of these inventions for his play.

Boucicalt used just the first two Acts of Dumas, and set his own three Acts over a period of one hundred years, the last one being set in 1860 (and so eight years in the future). Boucicalt's vampire has an interest in real estate and wears a cape, which Stuart has argued was something lifted straight from *Varney*.⁶¹⁶ If so, it shows that the literature of the period was also influencing the stage adaptations. The cape is another element that has remained within the modern vampire image, and again shows how elements of each play have been incorporated into the modern guise in order to create the modern image, something which is often (wrongly) attributed to *Dracula*, as I have argued throughout this chapter. This is evidence that, although largely overlooked, the plays have a crucial role in the development of the vampire image, from the early Byronic creation of Polidori through to the famous depiction of *Dracula*.

One further addition that appears within the play is when Boucicalt added a scene with a series of family portraits in it. These portraits depicted the previous victims of Ruthven, and come to life in order to try and warn Ruthven's current prey. This

⁶¹⁵ David Krause (ed) *The Dolmen Boucicalt*, (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1964), p.23

⁶¹⁶ Stuart, 1994, p.145

scene seems more akin to the imagery created within the earlier Gothic novels, and could have been lifted straight out of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764).

Contemporary reviews of the play are mixed, as will become apparent shortly. Critics tend to dismiss the play as nonsense, but it did have one quite surprising fan – Queen Victoria herself:

Mr. Boucicalt, who is very handsome and has a fine voice, acted very impressively. I can never forget his livid face and fixed look, in the first two Dramas [Boucicalt called his Acts 'Dramas']. It quite haunts me.⁶¹⁷

Regardless of the Queen's admiration, theatre critics were much less generous in their reviews. Boucicalt was generally deemed to have looked the part, and acted well enough, but the play seems for the most to have been a failure – Kean's Secretary supposedly described it as 'a mistake, about which the less said the better'.⁶¹⁸ And Henry Morley, a nineteenth-century theatre goer who wrote about his experiences, which were clearly wide and relevant, saw it as a copy of a play that 'some years ago turned the Lyceum into a Chamber of Horrors.'⁶¹⁹ Here Morley is most likely referring to either *Blink* or possibly *Planché*. He continues how the 'ghost', as he for some reason refrains from calling it a vampire, 'passes all bounds of toleration' by its actions of masquerading in 'Christian attire' and prolonging its life on earth by consuming the blood of its young, female victims. Finally, he says, it is 'too dull to pervert the tastes' of the audience, who 'come to shudder, and [yet] remain to yawn'.⁶²⁰ This appears to be a moralistic reaction – the phrase 'masquerading in Christian attire' seems to reflect the play's subject matter in which the demonic vampire being plagues the good Christian characters. In essence, a reflection of good versus evil, where young 'uncorrupted' females are seduced by the evil vampire. It is again reflective of the way Byron was viewed by many, both

⁶¹⁷ From Queen Victoria's Journal, page number unknown. Quoted in Richard Fawkes *Dion Boucicalt: A Biography*, (London: Quartet Books, 1979), p.74

⁶¹⁸ Stuart, 1994, p.147

⁶¹⁹ Henry Morley *The Journal of a London Playgoer, 1866*, (Old Woking, Surrey: University of Leicester Press, 1974), p.45

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.* p.46

previously and in the period, a 'wicked lord' who corrupted his young female audience, through his poetry and through his actions.

The 1850s, then, saw versions of Polidori's play that, like their predecessors, were able to add further elements that saw the levels of terror and bloodthirstiness increase. The Ruthven of Dumas and Boucicalt was a crueller, less compassionate vampire than had been seen in earlier adaptations. Marriage was no longer necessary, and the female victims were not saved. Instead, Ruthven could prey on anyone he wished (he even preys on a male character out of necessity in Boucicalt) and savagely kills them in order to slake his need for blood. There is something about the changing morals of society reflected in these two later versions, and 'these vampires reflect the changed social and sexual attitudes of the 1850s; they are much more formidable, frightening opponents, figures of nemesis with great powers'.⁶²¹ This is the characterisation that comes to typify the vampire from this point onwards.

However, it is worth noting that even in Dumas and Boucicalt, where the female victims are all killed, the act itself is still done offstage, out of view of the audience. Murder, it seems, was still one taboo that society was not yet prepared to accept enacted on stage. Through these plays the vampire additions include the cape, fear of the cross, and the need to move around at night, and so although largely forgotten and seldom referred to, they are nevertheless important in the development of the modern vampire image. And as Stuart has quite rightly noticed, these changes are all 'theatrical, not folkloric'.⁶²² With each of the vampire plays, the folkloric vampire evolved, until the elements that Stoker had before him were almost entirely theatrical. Polidori himself started the evolution in his vampire cast in the mould of the Byronic hero, but each subsequent play was important for the additions they made to the image itself.

⁶²¹ Stuart, 1994, p.154

⁶²² Ibid. p. 154

This is not say that the folkloric vampire image disappeared completely. W.B. Yeats' poem 'Oil and Blood' (1929) reflects elements of this some thirty years after *Dracula* was published:

But under heavy loads of trampled clay,
Lie bodies of the vampires, full of blood:
Their shrouds are bloody and their lips are wet.⁶²³

The image conjured by Yeats is one of the undead vampire, lying in his coffin gorged on fresh blood from family members akin to Arnold Paole or Peter Plogojowicz from the folkloric tales of the eighteenth century, a far cry from the Byronic image created by Polidori, developed through the plays, and made widely famous through *Dracula*. Despite the folkloric vampire's attempts to reassert itself within the genre, the Byronic aristocratic portrayal remains the atypical form throughout world literature, and that is a telling legacy to the importance of Polidori's creation, witnessed through his tale and the subsequent stage versions of this.

⁶²³ W.B. Yeats *Oil and Blood*, in *The Winding Stair*, (New York: Fountain Press, 1929). Online version <http://public-library.uk/ebooks/109/49.pdf> accessed 13/10/16

CONCLUSION

With the publication of *Dracula* in 1897, the Polidoric vampire image was set firmly within the public mindset. Within the final part of the thesis I have alluded to several occasions where Stoker appears to have been influenced by previous vampiric literary or stage versions, and as I have argued in Chapter Four, none of these would have been possible without Polidori's tale. As Frayling has noted, the vampire had been in partial existence within literature for some time, evident in authors such as Perrault, Goethe and Tieck, but *The Vampyre* fused the disparate elements into one cohesive formula for the first time.⁶²⁴

As I have further argued throughout, no subsequent vampire tale or stage play deviated from what Polidori created, other than a couple of examples, such as *Varney*, and even this has elements of the Polidoric within it. Many narratives added to the mix, but none sought to reinvent Polidori's Ruthven formula. As MacDonald adds, 'vampiric aristocrats are hardly rare in Gothic fiction, but before Polidori, literal aristocratic vampires are almost non-existent'.⁶²⁵

The importance of Polidori's aristocratic vampire is often overlooked in histories of the vampire, as I have shown. The latest of these, Nick Groom's *The Vampire: a new History*,⁶²⁶ barely even mentions Polidori and yet as becomes apparent from the legacy of the tale, evident largely through the stage adaptations, Bram Stoker's Count would not have been possible without the model Polidori created. Within *Dracula*, Stoker appears to utilise many of the tropes evident in the works discussed - the Harker character appears to be a mixture of the Aubrey characters from both Polidori and the plays, and the aristocratic Count Dracula is clearly Ruthvenic.

⁶²⁴ Christopher Frayling, *Vampyres: Lord Byron to Count Dracula*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1991, p.18

⁶²⁵ D.L. MacDonald *Poor Polidori: A Critical Biography of the Author of The Vampyre*, (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1991) p.192-93

⁶²⁶ Nick Groom *The Vampire: a new History*, (Yale: Yale University Press, 2018)

Within *Dracula* there are also a few incidents that can clearly be linked to Polidori or the earlier narratives (themselves influenced by Polidori). The first relates to the part where Harker is in Castle Dracula and the three vampire brides seduce him. Much of the initial part of this scene – and brought alive visually by Coppola’s film version – appears somnambulistic. Harker can hear and feel the ‘brides’ but cannot see them, yet he is transfixed by them, almost trance-like. Then, Dracula appears, and screams at them ‘this man is mine!’,⁶²⁷ thus breaking their mesmeric control and creating the vampire/master-human/servant bond that we see in the Ruthven/Aubrey relationship and, as I have argued, more clearly in the Byron/Polidori relationship.

This relationship – that of Harker and Dracula – is reiterated on several occasions by Stoker, for example, when Dracula calls him ‘My friend’.⁶²⁸ The parallels with Ruthven/Aubrey are also clear when Dracula makes Harker swear an oath that he must not sleep anywhere in the castle but his own room. And when he forces him to stay for a month and write letters home informing his loved ones that all is well – all these points confirm to the reader that whilst on the surface it seems all is equal, in fact Dracula is the master and Harker the servant. This also draws parallels with the Byron/Polidori (and therefore Ruthven/Aubrey) relationship.

The theme of somnambulism, first utilised by Polidori and adopted by many subsequent vampiric texts, is further apparent in *Dracula* in the aforementioned scene with Lucy Westenra. Here, the Count is able to control her mind and force her to come to him in the church yard in Whitby. Subsequent visits, in which it appears the Count drinks her blood, leads to a deterioration similar to that of Aubrey in *The Vampyre*. And again, later in Stoker’s novel, in England, the Count attempts to control Mina by use of mesmerism / somnambulism too.

The use of the East and the West by Stoker, that is taking his East European vampire and bringing him to the West draws clear parallels with the plot created by Polidori in his tale – as Harker writes, ‘the impression I get is that we are leaving the West

⁶²⁷ Bram Stoker *Dracula*, (London: Penguin, 1994), p.53

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.* p.12, and again p.34

and entering the East'.⁶²⁹ The plays further added to this traversing of Continents, and more recent publications by authors such as Emily Gerard (used extensively by Stoker) and the English translation of Calmet's work on vampires showcased the vampire-lore and superstitions of the East. All these factors helped shape Stoker's novel, yet it is important to acknowledge that it was Polidori who first used this folklore within his vampire tale, attested to by the Introduction in both magazine and book versions of his tale, as I have shown in this thesis.

Why was Polidori's model so popular to subsequent writers then? As I have shown in Chapter Three, it was most likely because of the controversy of the publication, its links to Byron and the very obvious portrayal of Byron in the text. But, as argued in Chapter Four, it was the stage adaptations that allowed the tale to reach a wide audience, particularly in France. Perhaps the subject matter – a vampire – was irrelevant initially and it was the notoriety of Byron that made the tale and the plays so popular. As Ben Wilson has argued, Byron was the 'perfect villain - the lewdest, the basest, the most unprincipled of men'.⁶³⁰ The perfect villain for Polidori's story, but also the perfect villain for the stage, like the pantomime villain after him.

At the time of the publication of *The Vampyre*, *Blackwood's* accused Byron of being 'no longer a human being' and was instead a

cool, unconcerned fiend, laughing with detestable glee over the whole of the better and worse elements of which human life is composed - treating with nigh well equal derision the most pure of virtues, and the most odious of vices - dead alike to the beauty of the one and the deformity of the other.⁶³¹

This was not, actually, how Polidori saw him, but it is how he depicted him in his tale, and the public recognised that because of their prejudices created by the English Press. The duality of a good looking, charming, wealthy English peer who was also

⁶²⁹ Ibid. p.9

⁶³⁰ Ben Wilson *Decency & Disorder: The Age of Cant 1789-1837*, (2007, London: Faber and Faber), p.353

⁶³¹ *Blackwood's Magazine*, V, 1819, p.513

(allegedly) one who, vampire-like, practised sodomy, incest and abandoned his wife and new born child, and fled the West to travel to the East – the home of the vampire – is a duality not lost in Polidori's creation. Like Dracula, like most subsequent vampire characters, Ruthven is one who is loathed yet is equally fascinating, repelled from yet attracted to. That is the draw of Polidori's model, and the reason for the longevity.

Stiles has recently argued that 'because *The Vampyre* was widely imitated and popularized via numerous stage adaptations, Polidori's ideas about somnambulism resurface in later nineteenth-century portrayals of vampires and other Gothic monstrosities.'⁶³² But this part of the tale could only survive due to the rise of mesmerism and its fascination within wider society. As Stiles further argues, what this did was create, from Ruthven onwards, a vampire being that was 'the most frightening implication of nineteenth-century neurology: the possibility that humans might be soulless automata.'⁶³³

The legacy of *The Vampyre*, then, is a vampiric model that has lasted almost exactly two hundred years – 1st April 2019 was the 200th anniversary of its publication. The vampires of *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *Underworld* have done little to eradicate the guise created by Polidori and based on his view of Lord Byron.

One of the strands of this thesis has been to show that both Polidori and Byron had vampiric knowledge, through their education and other literary works, before the Summer of 1816, when Byron challenged the ghost-writing to begin. This was the main theme of Chapter One. Byron based his fragmentary tale partly on his travels with Hobhouse, and this may have been the source of inspiration for Polidori, who himself clearly based his tale on his time with Lord Byron, thoroughly analysed in Chapter Two.

⁶³² Anne Stiles, Stanley Finger and John Bulevich 'Somnambulism and Trance States in the Works of John William Polidori, Author of *The Vampyre*' in *European Romantic Review* Vol. 21, No. 6, December 2010, 789–807, p.789

⁶³³ *Ibid.* p.790

Whether or not he composed it to be published can never be fully understood, but I made the argument in Chapter Three that he did not, nor was he the one to publish it in April 1819. I have offered the most thorough analysis, to date, of the many and complicated chain of events that occurred in the weeks both before and after the publication, and believe that the information contained in this thesis finally answers the questions as to how and why it was indeed published. This was made possible due to the access granted to me by Geoffrey Bond of his private collection, in which he has a copy of the original *New Monthly Magazine* that *The Vampyre* first featured in. Through this, I was able to see that all of the explanatory material was included in the magazine format, and not as many believe solely within the book version, published later that year.

Bond's collection is the largest private collection of Byron in the United Kingdom, and being granted access to this was invaluable to my research. I also discovered a wealth of information in the contemporary early nineteenth century newspapers and press pieces, something that also aided my research immeasurably.

In the final chapter, I have shown how the subsequent stage versions consolidated, and added to, the Polidoric vampire model, with much of their content appearing in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. That model was created by Polidori, and based on Byron, and reflects the duality of their fraught relationship, as discussed at length throughout this thesis. Henry Fuseli described the quandary of how 'we cannot sympathise with what we detest or despise, nor fully pity what we shudder at or loathe'.⁶³⁴ In Ruthven, Polidori reflected just this quandary for Byron, and created a being that the audience was unsure whether to detest, or pity. The plays, I have argued, were integral in showing the development of the Polidoric / Byronic vampire model, and yet these have never previously been considered in any great detail, other than through Roxanna Stewart's work *Stage Blood*. This work focusses more, however, on the plays themselves rather than how the plays helped to develop the literary vampire model. Research into the stage productions was complemented by

⁶³⁴ Henry Fuseli *The Life & Writings of Henry Fuseli*, (London: Henry Colburn, 1831), Vol. II, p.262

an analysis of the nineteenth century newspapers for both England and France, as was the original publication of *The Vampyre*.

The main strand of my argument, then, has been to show that Polidori's text was extremely influential to the development of the literary vampire, and was itself heavily inspired by the relationship he had with Lord Byron between April and September, 1816. This has rarely happened before as most critics dismiss Polidori as being vain and flighty or creating a discord in the atmosphere at Diodati, as I discussed in the Introduction. This has meant no serious examination of how influential his time with Byron was to the developing genre, a factor I was keen to address with my thesis. In Chapters One and Two I have shown this not to be the case, and would argue that it is impossible to understand the importance of *The Vampyre* until Polidori as a person and an author is viewed in a more accepting or positive way. Many critics seem to repeat the incorrect beliefs of others – again as showed in my Introduction – and so by adopting an historical approach to my research and spending time analysing original source material, such as Polidori's *Diary*, I was able to show these dismissive beliefs and some of the events they are based on to be inaccurate.

By thoroughly analysing the period between April and September 1816, through Polidori's *Diary*, letters and correspondence, and other contemporary writings, I was able to more fully understand the mentality and the relationship dynamics of both Polidori and Byron. This in turn allowed a much more grounded understanding in the way that Aubrey and Ruthven were portrayed, some of the hidden allusions and vampire knowledge within the text, the connections of *The Vampyre* to Byron's works more generally, and to how the contemporary reader would have recognised Byron within the Ruthven character. I would argue it is impossible to do this without a detailed inspection of this original source material – a reading of Polidori's text and a general knowledge of Byron would not be enough to wholly understand the complicated structure of the tale and what it represents.

Chapter One also explored the education of both men, and argued that historical depictions of vampires would have featured within this education. Byron's claim that he knew little of vampires was simply not true, as I have shown by exploring some of his pre-1816 works, such as *The Giaour* and *Lines Inscribed on a Skull Cup*. The level of knowledge Polidori had regarding vampires is not as easy to know. That he was able to write an explanatory introduction to his tale discussing vampires shows that by 1819 at least he had a fair grasp of the subject, but it is impossible to know if he had this knowledge when composing his tale for 'the Lady' in 1816.

Also, in Chapter One, I highlighted the importance of biographical writing, specifically through Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon* and Polidori's *The Vampyre*, to the way the public were able to see elements of Byron in both Ruthven characters. Both of these semi-fictional characters were given traits that emulated how Byron was perceived at the time of their publications, largely through the allegations of incest, sodomy and the breakdown of his marriage.

In Chapter Two, I showed how this relationship between Polidori and Byron had two parts to it – the first half, from April – May 1816, occurred with the two men for the most part being friends. The second part, from May 1816 onwards and coinciding with the arrival of the Shelley party, saw the relationship become increasingly fraught, and it is the part that the Aubrey/Ruthven relationship appears to be influenced by. The time at Diodati saw a series of escalating incidents, testified by Polidori's *Diary*, that culminated in Polidori's sacking in September 1816.

This Diodati period also saw a change in Byron's writing, with texts written at this time having a much more melancholic feel to them, for example *Manfred* and *Cain*. This melancholic air was never more apparent than in the ghost-story challenge of June 1816, which culminated in Mary Shelley laying the foundations for *Frankenstein* and Byron creating his soon-abandoned tale *Fragment*. This tale laid the foundations for what would eventually become Polidori's *The Vampyre*, subsequently published in 1819. As I have argued throughout, casting Byron as the vampiric Ruthven within that tale changed the course of the developing literary vampire, an event that

replaced the preceding folkloric vampire and created the aristocratic vampire in its place.

In Chapter Three, I explored the events and fall-outs surrounding the publication of Polidori's tale and, as mentioned above, in this thesis I have offered what I believe to be the most thorough analysis, to date, of the events surrounding that publication. I also undertook a detailed analysis and critique of the two texts – Polidori's *The Vampyre* and Byron's *Fragment* – and thus showed the similarities and differences between the two. Polidori had to add much to his tale in order to create the final novel, and much of this came from his knowledge and his experience of Byron, rather than being a plagiarism of Byron's original concept, as also shown in Chapter Three.

Finally, Chapter Four showed that the stage adaptations followed the basics of the *The Vampyre*, but each added its own elements that deviated away from the original tale. However, they also helped to evolve certain aspects that Polidori had initially set the foundations for, for example the element of somnambulism/mesmerism that became crucial for *Dracula*. It would be wrong to suggest that the *Dracula*-image of the vampire, which is so easily recognisable in the present, was created solely through Polidori, but most of the influences that helped shape *Dracula* had their own foundations in Polidori, not least the plays. Although elements of vampirism were added or changed – the role of the moon, the shapeshifting, the power to mesmerise – the one salient factor that occurred in narratives between *The Vampyre* and *Dracula* was the so-called Ruthven-formula, that is the aristocratic, debonair vampire, and that came directly from Polidori's casting of Byron as the vampire Ruthven. Without that, the vampire may well have retained its gorged and bloated resurrected corpse image from folklore, thus robbing us of one of the most popular images of the entire Gothic genre.

The question then arises as to why this matters – is it important to 'rescue' Polidori and show the influence that his story has on the genre? I would argue that it is extremely important because without his story, and without him typecasting Byron

as his vampire villain, the literary vampire may well have never evolved into the version known today, and that it is almost certain that *Dracula* could not have existed in the guise so instantly recognised today.

Understanding the events surrounding the conception and subsequent writing of *The Vampyre*, and its publication, help us to understand the complexities of the narrative, its purpose and the plays and texts it inspired. But more than that, it is important to give Polidori the credit he deserves and recognise the legacy he gave us. As a Gothic author, he is equally as important as Mary Shelley and Bram Stoker, and hopefully this thesis has done enough to show that.

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