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*The Birth of a Modern Myth:
John W. Polidori's "The Vampyre"*

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Ad Alain e Sabrina
a cui dedico tutto il lavoro ed i sacrifici fatti per raggiungere questo traguardo

A Domenico e Mariangela
sempre con me in ogni momento

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Chapter 1: The Birth of the Gothic Vampire	7
1.1 Gothic Literature in the eighteenth Century	7
1.2. Romanticism and the Gothic	12
1.3 From Folklore to the Modern Vampire.....	17
 Chapter 2: The Making of <i>The Vampyre, a Tale</i>	23
2.1 Lord Byron and His Physician	23
2.2 That Summer at Villa Diodati	28
2.3 A Controversial Publication: 1819	33
 Chapter 3: Textual Analysis and Critical Interpretations.....	41
3.1 Unfolding the Narrative	41
3.2 Critical Revisionism: Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Scholarship	46
3.3 Establishing the Aristocratic Monster	52
 Bibliography	61
Acknowledgements	65

Introduction

Throughout the last two centuries, many tropes and literary figures have contributed to the shaping of western society and its shared knowledge, among these some are still very relevant in today's cinematic and literary production. Even though Western society has changed, there still seems to be a profound interest in some specific types of characters and tropes, which were shaped in the course of the nineteenth-century. One of the most compelling among them is undoubtedly the modern vampire, an aristocratic man of noble origins and impeccable taste, capable of making his way in Western European, regardless of his being a monster of the night. Since the first apparition of such a creature, the public has continued to be more and more charmed by his elegant manners and charismatic behaviour, resulting in an entire genre of fiction devoted to the praise of his powers and magnetic allure. Moreover, throughout the twentieth century the advent of cinema has also allowed the bloodsucker to have a more direct access to mass culture, because of masterpieces as *Nosferatu* (1922) by Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau. As a consequence, this phenomenon has shaped our imagination about this particular folkloric being, distancing itself from its initial folkloric features.

The idea of the vampire as a well-educated man, able to charm his victims and to win in any dispute because of his intelligence and culture, has not always been the dominant paradigm when describing his characteristics. Conversely, his folkloric roots wanted him as a poor undead villager, deprived of both his soul and intelligence, a mere reflection of whom he had been in life, a creature doomed to drink the blood of his relatives and neighbours for the sake of survival. It was not a creature to admire or be charmed by, rather a scourge to fear as a pestilence. Such a folkloric tradition imposed itself as the roots of the myth. Nevertheless, British society and culture of the time, together with the influence of literature, brought to the reshaping of this thirsty undead into the noble predator who still seduces the masses.

The point of departure of this journey towards the modern monster can be traced back to the publication of a rather short tale, *The Vampyre* (1819), by John William Polidori. This narrative introduced for the first time the vampire antagonist in British Literature, leading to the international success of the phenomenon that allowed the composition of many subsequent vampire fictions, among which *Varney the Vampire*

(1845-1847) by James Malcolm Rymer (also attributed to Thomas Preskett Prest), *Carmilla* (1872) by Sheridan Le Fanu and *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker.

What has been particularly interesting to unravel is the interaction between the text and its context of composition, both the literature of the time and the influence that folkloric reports had on contemporary society. Such circumstances are essential to the correct picturing of the narrative in the cultural environment it belongs to. In particular, the analysis of the birth of the modern myth of the blood-sucker has its roots in the dynamic exchange that interested both Gothic Literature and Romanticism at the turn of the century. Accordingly, the topics and tropes of the former and the new sensibility of the latter have much to do with the events that led to the composition of the tale, as I will demonstrate throughout the thesis. In addition to the importance of the literary environment back at the beginning of the nineteenth-century, the role of the folkloric past of the vampire certainly had a great influence on the recast of itself. The great number of historical accounts of its apparitions and written reports were functional to the arrival of the vampire's fear in England during the eighteenth century, together with a first shaping of its features, which did not have to wait long before being recast by British and American literature. The fear of Eastern European villagers and rural communities monsters infesting their villages at night was thus reshaped according to the British middle-class' fear of the power of those of noble origins or in possession of wealth enough to curve others' will easily, as a persuasive vampire would do.

The historical and cultural context of the time is not the only one to be considered when analysing a fundamental work such as Polidori's. Since the biographical events that led to the composition of the tale are of rare distinctiveness, it is essential to portray one of the most influential episodes of British literature: the remarkable summer 1816, during which John Polidori served as personal physician for Lord Byron himself. That summer and its extraordinary meteorological events as one of the main factors for the famous literary competition that saw Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft and John Polidori commit their imagination to the writing of a ghost tale. Such an occasion together with the troubled relationship that the young writer established with the famous poet are taken to be the reason why *The Vampyre* was written by the physician,. The professional acquaintance between a rather ambitious young physician and the most famous poet of the time was framed by a series of quarrels and arguments, which rapidly

turned into the ruining of their relationship and the final decision to part from each other in September 1816. Accordingly, the influence of Byron's persona can be recognised in the shaping of the tale's antagonist Lord Ruthven, the focus of my analysis of the myth of the modern vampire, and in its subscribing to the model of "Byronism". Indeed, this unique undead, in resembling Lord Byron, has set the standards for the following tradition and reshaped the entire lore of vampirism.

The shaping of the modern vampire and Polidori's contribution to it will be discussed through critical readings of the twentieth century and of more recent times, with the intention to include both traditional and recently developed hypotheses. In particular, the first chapter of the dissertation tackles the cultural and literary context of creation of the tale. Firstly, I focus on Gothic literature and its general features, before shifting to the dynamic relationship that the genre had with the new romantic sentiment, which had an important impact on the writers and poets of the first half of nineteenth-century. After introducing the literary environment of the time, the discussion moves to the folkloric beliefs that preceded the arrival of the vampire in British culture and literature. Specifically, this section deals with the difficulties in establishing the possible etymologies of the term 'vampire' and the folkloric reports that started to spread at the time.

The second chapter instead deals with John William Polidori. Accordingly, it unravels and frames the private relationship between Polidori and Lord Byron, before extensively describing the events that occurred in that summer 1816, which brought to the establishing of the mythical writing competition. Following such a contextual framing, the chapter shifts to the controversial circumstances that led to the publication of the tale, including not only traditional beliefs shared by many scholars, but also some recent rethinking that completely changes the narrative about Polidori's agency in the publication of the tale under Lord Byron's authorship.

Finally, the third chapter will be entirely dedicated to the influence that the tale has had in the shaping of the figure of the modern blood-sucker. The plot of the tale and its characters are unravelled in relation to their context, before including a panoramic view on the critical readings on *The Vampyre*, concerning not only the prominent persona of Lord Ruthven, the aristocratic vampire, but also a number of other interesting aspects, such as sexuality and travel. I aim at explaining why this short work has had such a long-

lasting influence on later authors, as I demonstrate by referring to its various melodramatic adaptations. In conclusion, the dissertation aims at depicting the complex dynamics that brought to the birth of the modern vampire, regardless of the controversies that still affect the author of *The Vampyre* and its publication in April 1819. The work by the English physician has indeed been able to distance western imagination from the monster of rural folklore to establish a wealthy and travelling vampire, who still plays a role in contemporary times.

Chapter 1: The Birth of the Gothic Vampire

1.1 Gothic Literature in the eighteenth Century

The term 'Gothic' might seem to be a non-problematic issue, because of the common use that it is now associated with this term. Instead, it presents a multilayered set of changing meanings, depending on the context of speech and historical moment to which we refer.¹ The term 'Goth' originally referred to the Germanic population of the 'Goths', which had inhabited the northern area of Europe. Such northern origins have surely played a role in establishing a direct connection between eighteenth century Gothic sentiment and the imagery of a preceding medieval time, especially concerning concepts as barbarity, chaos, lack of civilisation and excess. Although the term was constructed around this central set of ideals, it is undeniable that eighteenth century literature, especially from the 1760s to the 1820s, played a pivotal role in shifting the attitude towards this word, basically establishing the Gothic in opposite directions to the 'classical'.² A society shifting in values and ideals started to adopt, indeed, a newly approach to what was considered negative, recognizing "the medieval, the primitive, the wild" as an object of positive attention.³ Because of this barbaric background, what at the time was pointed at as 'romance' was considered an old-fashioned piece of literature, which not only had to do with fiction, ruins, castles and sometimes supernatural presences, but that was also in harsh contrast with the 'novel'. This genre was perceived by contemporaries as 'new' and based on classical references, e.g. Aristotele's *Poetics* and Horace's *Art of Poetry*.⁴ If the novel had such classical basis, the romance's origins were still debated between the 1760s and the 1770s. According to Emma J. Clery, three different rival theories spread, tracing back the romance to eastern tales, to the Northlands or to the Celtic tradition. Furthermore, the content of such 'romances' was another point of rupture with the critic of the time.⁵ The prominent use of violence, crudity, simple morals and vice indeed allowed the genre to gain not only the acclamation of the public, but also a cold reception by literary critics.⁶

¹ David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day. The Gothic Tradition*, London: Routledge, 1996, Vol. 1, p. 1.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ Emma J., Clery, "The Genesis of 'Gothic' Fiction", in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 21-39, pp. 21-22.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

⁶ Punter, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

Yet, the reason why Gothic fiction had such a success, also in the light of the 1790s, has not just to be found in the ancient origins of 'romance', but prominently on the social conditions that allowed this phenomenon to spread. Besides stressing the fact that a society "in which stability, leisure, and plenty lead to a demand for artificial excitement",⁷ Clery concentrates a part of her attentions towards an economic point of view, stating that the middle class's raising habit to read deeply influenced the marketplace "to search for novelty".⁸

It was in such an atmosphere that Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* was published anonymous in 1764, being the first work recognized as a Gothic novel. Firstly, Walpole himself modified the title of his second edition to *The Castle of Otranto: a Gothic Story*. Furthermore, it is in the second preface to the book that he opens the possibility for a real union between the old and the modern:

The result of all I have said is, to shelter my own daring under the canon of the brightest genius this country, at least, has produced. I might have pleaded, that having created a new species of romance, I was at liberty to lay down what rules I thought fit for the conduct of it: but I should be more proud of having imitated, however faintly, weakly, and at a distance, so masterly a pattern, than to enjoy the entire merit of invention, unless I could have marked my work with genius as well as with originality. Such as it is, the public have honoured it sufficiently, whatever rank their suffrages allot to it.⁹

In doing so, Walpole successfully assembled a prototype, uniting the 'naturalist' characteristics of the novel to the use of imagination of the romance, thus creating a suitable example for the authors that will follow at the end of the eighteenth century. Among those, a certain attention must be reserved for Clara Reeve, author of *The Old English Baron: a Gothic Story*, first published in 1777, as a clear continuation to Walpole's work, both due to the use of the word 'Gothic', and to her great experience with romance in translation and critique.¹⁰

Both Walpole and Reeve's works are examples of the prominent use of two of the most recognisable tropes in Gothic literature: the supernatural and terror. As David Punter suggests, in the last two centuries terror seems to be everywhere both in English and American literature, especially due to the pivotal element in Gothic literature: fear. This

⁷ Clery, "The Genesis of 'Gothic' Fiction", cit., p. 29.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁹ Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto, a Gothic Story*, Parma: Bodoni for J. Edwards, 1791, pp. xxxi-xxxii.

¹⁰ Clery, "The Genesis of 'Gothic' Fiction", cit., p. 33.

emotion, more than others, “break[ed]s to the surfaces of literature”¹¹ and had a major influence in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century’s concept of the sublime, which had its origins in a classical treatise *On the Sublime*, commonly attributed to pseudo Longinus.¹² Even though the source was classical and had been translated in 1674 into French, it was primarily because of Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) that we can recognize the essence of the sublime:

Having considered terror as producing an unnatural tension and certain violent emotions of the nerves; it easily follows, from what we have just said, that whatever is fitted to produce such a tension, must be productive of a passion similar to terror, and consequently must be a source of the sublime, though it should have no idea of danger connected with it.¹³

This consideration of the sublime as a passion for terror, danger and its delight, was a key factor, adding itself to the phenomenon of supernatural literature, in the rise of the ghost story from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards. The contemporary development of consumerism, added to the devoted passion of contemporary intellectuals towards this ‘classical’ feeling, allowed the proliferation of supernatural fictions, together with several ‘real’ ghost stories, which started to spread all over England. For instance, “The Case of the Cock Lane Ghost”, referred to by Clery, interested prominent figures such as Horace Walpole himself.¹⁴

I could send you volumes on the ghost; I went to hear it – for it is not an apparition, but an audition. [...] The house, which is borrowed, is wretchedly small and miserable; when we opened the chamber, in which there were fifty people, with no light but one tallow candle at the end, we tumbled over the bed of the child to whom the ghost comes, and whom they are murdering there by inches in such insufferable heat and stench. At the top of the room are ropes to dry clothes – I asked, if we were to have rope dancing between the acts? – we had nothing; They told us as they would at a puppet show, that it would not come that night till seven in the morning – that is, when there are only prentices and old women. We stayed, however, till half an hour after one.¹⁵

According to his interest in such matters, he put terror in a position of privilege in the second preface of his work.

¹¹ Punter, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-18, *passim*.

¹² Clery, “The Genesis of ‘Gothic’ Fiction”, *cit.*, p. 27.

¹³ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1757, p. 126.

¹⁴ Emma J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 13-32.

¹⁵ *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, ed. W. S. Lewis, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965, Vol. 10, pp. 5-7.

Although the actual attention towards these topics was evident, it might be argued how it has been possible for a genre, which was publicly despised by the ‘realist’ counterpart and that, according to the critic, could not compete with the latter, to be so popular and florid in those sixty years-old spans. A possible answer needs to include the contemporary justifications of supernatural fiction, e.g. Anna and John Aikin’s use of Burke’s sublime in their essay “On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror”, and in the tale *Sir Bertrand* (1773).¹⁶ Thus, analysing how delight in terror is a core component of humanity, arising from its nature since the beginning of time. Consequentially, it is not a mere coincidence that tragedy has always been the most important genre over the course of history and that, even nowadays, ghost stories and tales of terror are constantly at the centre of people’s attention.¹⁷ Besides providing a justification for the human attraction towards terror, the Aitkins saw in it a real beneficial purpose for the mind. As Clery points out, the tale of terror was perceived as health-giver, whereas the sentimental novels were affected by the sense of “morbidity and perversion”.¹⁸

This newly positive attitude towards the genre, together with the development of a consumerist marketplace, are accounted as two of the most relevant factors in the shaping of supernatural fiction, which came to a further exposition not merely in the 1780s, but in the 1790s, when authors as Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis and Friedrich Schiller came to the forth in a period which is still referred to as the “terrorist system of novel writing”.¹⁹ In his essay on the 1790s, Robert Miles analyses how Gothic fiction dominated the market between 1794 and 1807, having as its peak 1800, the most prolific year for Gothic literature. Additionally, if it is true that eminent figures as the Marquis de Sade have tried to trace back the success of Radcliffe and Lewis’ novels to the outbreak of the French Revolution, scholars now tend to be more cautious when connecting the two phenomena together.²⁰ Firstly, it is undeniable that the 1790s Gothic is a complex and fervent area of study that does not allow general assertions, even though we can recognise certain patterns. Taking into consideration the first period mentioned by Miles, between 1788 and 1794, Gothic writing was heavily influenced by ‘Mother Radcliffe’, as

¹⁶ Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, cit., p. 80.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁹ Robert Miles, "The 1790s: The Effulgence of Gothic", in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, edited by Jerrold E. Hogle, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 41-62, pp. 41-43.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-44.

John Keats referred to her. She was indeed capable of not only continuing the legacy of *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), but also of expanding the genre with her use of the sublime, her development of the “explained supernatural”²¹ and finally her prominent interest in the heroine’s attempt to revolt against patriarchal system.²² After her first novel, *The Castle of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), she dominated the market with the publication of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797). In this first period, the French Revolution and its effects were not much present in English fiction, because of late Enlightenment sensibility which influenced the fear towards a return to the medieval *ancien regime*. After 1794, due to not only the publication of *The Monk* (1796) by Matthew Lewis, but also because of the apparition of *The Ghost-Seer* (1795) by Friederich Schiller, the results of those tumultuous events finally started to have an influence on English society and intellectual world.²³ According to Paulson, revolutionary ideals both outside and within England took a different shape after three main events:

[T]he September massacre of 1792, the execution of the Louis XVI in January 1793, and the fall of Robespierre in 1794. The first event [...] exemplified the point that a people brutalized and infantilized by the *ancien régime* were bound to act accordingly once their shackles were burst. The execution of the king revealed that violence within the new regime was institutionalized rather than simply mob-related. The episode of Robespierre and the Terror, in turn, raised the possibility that the revolution ate its own and was itself and out-of-control monster.²⁴

Shaped by the works of Schiller and Lewis, referred to as the “German Gothic”, such literary works portrayed the unspeakable: ghostly tales of the English Revolution, German tales of the Illuminati, “plots and conspiracies”,²⁵ which were often despised in reason of the impossibility of mentioning an English Revolution in those years. Nevertheless, such narratives still played a role in bringing to the fourth such contemporary feelings, establishing the tale of terror as the genre dominating the entire decade, regardless of the distinction “between ‘high’ and ‘low’ literature” that the critic sought to impose.²⁶

²¹ Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, cit., pp. 106-114.

²² Miles, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-54.

²⁴ Ronald Paulson, *Gothic Fiction and the French Revolution*, 1981, cited in *ibid.*, p. 55.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

1.2. Romanticism and the Gothic

“[M]y dear Miss Robinson!” he pleads, “I have a wife, I have sons, I have an infant Daughter – what excuse could I offer to my own conscience if by suffering my name to be connected with those of Mr. Lewis . . . I was the *occasion* of their reading the Monk? . . . Should I not be an infamous Pander to the Devil in the seduction of my own offsprings? – My head turns giddy, my heart sickens, at the very thought of seeing such books in the hands of a child of mine”.²⁷

In this 1804 letter to Mary E. Robinson, S. T. Coleridge refused the inclusion of one of his poems, “The Mad Monk”, in her anthology *The Wild Wreath* (1804). Although even nineteenth-century literary critics have sought to separate the two modes, ‘Gothic’ and Romanticism, and to establish the labels of “high” and “low” literature, the mutual influence and connection between the two is undeniable. In *The Romantic Novel in England* (1972), Robert Kiely analyses many novels belonging to the Gothic tradition as Romantic, thus considering the real distinction between the two genres as referred merely to the use of either prose or poetry.²⁸ Apparently, this harsh separation was determined by the fact that the Gothic took the shape of “the German-School”, or even “the trash of the Minerva Press” (a very active publishing house of the time), after the incredible success of authors such as Friedrich Schiller and Matthew Lewis.²⁹ The configuration of a Germany-related genre starkened the opposition of the literary criticism towards such works, even though 1790s Gothic and first-generation Romanticism almost overlapped synchronically. Nevertheless, Michael Gamer underlines in his essay, “Gothic Fictions and Romantic Writing in Britain” (2000), that the same Romantics which saw Gothic as a “juvenile fancy”, a genre to reject after the end of the 1790s, were deeply influenced by it and ended up writing texts such as Wollstonecraft’s *The Wrongs of Woman* (1797), Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) and *Christabel* (1797-1800), Wordsworth’s ballads, Scott’s *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805) and Byron’s poetic between 1813 and 1818.³⁰ One can surely picture the contradictory forces at work in the definition of such hostilities. Certainly, many of the factors that made it problematic for writers to be associated to the Gothic outbreak was the following difficulty in shaking the

²⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters*, 1807-1814, Vol. 2, p. 905.

²⁸ Robert Kiely, *The Romantic Novel in England*, Harvard University Press, 1972.

²⁹ Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 3.

³⁰ Michael Gamer, “Gothic Fictions and Romantic Writing in Britain”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 85-104, p. 87.

association with the genre, which risked marking one's entire career, e.g. Matthew "Monk" Lewis saw his tragedy *Alfonso, King of Castille* (1805) not being well welcomed by the critic. Consequentially, it is safe to state that the "German" connotation that English Gothic literature had acquired through the last decade of eighteenth century was enough to discourage writers to be associated to the term at all.³¹ It is possible to find an example of this distance and rejection in Lord Byron's *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), referring to Lewis in particular:

Oh! wonder-working LEWIS!, Monk, or Bard,
 Who fain would'st make Parnassus a church-yard! –
 Lo! Wreaths of yew, not laurel, bind thy brow,
 Thy Muse a Sprite, Apollo's sexton thou!
 Whether on ancient tombs thou tak'st thy stand,
 By gibb'ring spectres hailed, thy kindred band:
 Or tracest chaste descriptions in thy page,
 To please the females of our modest age,
 All hail, M.P.! from whose infernal brain
 Thin sheeted phantoms glide, a grisly train;
 ...
 Even Satan's self with thee might dread to dwell,
 And in thy skull discern a deeper hell.³²

Byron's satire represents the Gothic not merely as a genre which seems to lower the sacredness of mount Parnassus with the Gothic church-yard, but also representative of a satanic overtone. Satan himself, indeed, would find in Lewis' gothic imagination a deeper hell than hell itself. Most probably, such connections would appear an exaggeration to a modern reader, but what I sought to underline is how certain writers had a special care in distancing themselves from the association to Gothic, to avoid reviewers to draw lines of connection between their productions and the tale of terror. Moreover, one easily notes the absolute obsession that the Romantics seemed to express towards the Gothic and its allegations. Not only Lord Byron did take part in the critic, but also Walter Scott, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, as the beginning of the paragraph demonstrates.³³ In his review of Charles Robert Maturin's novel *The Fatal Revenge* (1807), Walter Scott represented Gothic through its association with a female public, circulating libraries and narratives which appeared to be always the same. Thus, such

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² George Gordon Lord Byron, *English Bards and Scottish Reviewers*, in *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, 1980, Vol.1, pp. 265-74, pp. 281-82.

³³ Gamer, "Gothic Fictions and Romantic Writing in Britain", cit., pp. 92-93.

literary genre was surely a means to gain popularity and public recognition, but what was also called into question was the ability of the writer to later dissociate himself from such a 'low' exercise of wit.³⁴ Nonetheless, even if Scott was always presenting himself as animated by enlightenment rationalism, in his correspondence he referred to himself as to "an initiated Ghost-Seer" and "ghost-raiser".³⁵ While he attempted his personal attack to the Gothic in a review, William Wordsworth condemned "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies" in the 1800 preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.³⁶ Nevertheless, as Emma McEvoy discusses, there was a real kinship among the two genres or modes: "[...] the shared interest in subjectivity, the figure of the outsider, social sympathies, concepts of agency, will, the relation to the past, [...] the divine [...]".³⁷ Furthermore, even an author as critical as Coleridge extensively contributed to the Gothic with his *Christabel* (1816).

Probably, it could be argued that this might be one of reasons for the recent inclusion of many Gothic novels in Romantic studies, without the questioning of their belonging to the terror tradition.³⁸ Moreover, second-generation Romantics expressed a higher degree of consideration and interest towards the Gothic sentiment. John Keats himself, as an example, referred to Anne Radcliffe as "Mother Radcliffe", whereas many others would configure Gothic writing as a source, e.g. even Lord Byron would describe Horace Walpole as "the father of the first romance, and of the last tragedy in our language, and surely worthy of a higher place than any living writer, be he who he may".³⁹ While this peculiar relationship was being shaped, Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Zastrozzi* (1810), *St Irvyne* (1811) and *The Cenci* (1819), Byron's *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair* and *Lara* (1813-1814) and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818/1831) participated in the dialogue between the two movements. Such an interest, I would argue, was probably influenced by the reimagining of the Gothic aesthetic as a trope itself, redefined in its fundamental motifs by early nineteenth-century poets and authors. As McEvoy suggests, contemporary material was being included in fictional productions: e.g. the *Grand Tour*, life in London between the eighteenth- and the nineteenth-century,

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ Sir Herbert Grierson (ed.), *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, London: Constable, 1932-37, Vol I, p. 121.

³⁶ William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005, p. 198.

³⁷ Emma McEvoy. "Gothic and the Romantics", in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, eds. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy, London: Routledge, 2007, pp. 19-28, p. 20.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

³⁹ Lord George Gordon Byron. Preface to *Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice*. London: John Murray, 1821.

subjectivity, scientific developments, politics, and the biographies of living people. Moreover, not only did second-generation Romantics develop these new contemporary topics, but they also employed what could be considered a kind of plagiarism on preceding material. Thus, it is not astonishing that the figure of Ambrosio, the hero-villain in Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), is so easily comparable with Charlotte Dacre's heroine-villain in *Zofloya* (1806), or additionally, that the pursuer and the pursued change places both in *Caleb Williams* (1794) and in *Frankenstein* (1818/1831).⁴⁰ Surely, one of the most relevant texts that have been reframed in the Gothic tradition over time is Lord Byron's *The Giaour: a Fragment of a Turkish Tale* (1813). The poem would have been familiar both to readers of Gothic fiction and of Romantic poetry, and it also represents a true embodiment of the Gothic in the figure of the Giaour himself:⁴¹

On – on he hastened – and he drew
My gaze of wonder as he flew:
Though like a demon of the night
He passes and vanished from my sight;
A troubled memory on my breast;
And long upon my startled ear
Rung his dark courser's hoofs of fear.⁴²

A demonic figure, as the Giaour seems to appear in these lines, had eminent precursors in Gothic fictions, e.g. Bürger's *Lenore*, Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Lewis' *The Castle Spectre* (1797). As a deep critic of what he indicated as 'superstitions,' it feels rather astonishing that his poem presents such images of terror. Moreover, as Nina Auerbach underlines in *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (1995), the poem does not only point to the "evil" presence offered by the protagonist, but equally to the figure of the "false Infidel", who is said to be returning from death as a vampire:⁴³

But first, on earth as Vampire sent,
Thy corse shall from its tomb be rent;
Then ghastly haunt thy native place,
And suck the blood of all thy race;
There from thy daughter, sister, wife,
At midnight drain the stream of life [...]⁴⁴

⁴⁰ McEvoy, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.

⁴¹ Gamer, "Gothic Fictions and Romantic Writing in Britain", *cit.*, pp. 98-99.

⁴² Lord George Gordon Byron, *The Works of Lord Byron*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge, London: John Murray, 1900, Vol. 3, p. 95.

⁴³ Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampire, Ourselves*, The University of Chicago Press, 1995, pp. 16-17.

⁴⁴ Byron, *The Works of Lord Byron*, *cit.*, pp. 121-122.

In these few lines Lord Byron introduces the emerging figure of nineteenth-century fiction: the vampire. Since Gothic material and tropes were being adapted by second-generation Romantics, the vampire can surely be seen as the result of the collapsing of villain, hero, victim and Satan all together: he is the symbolic encounter between the Gothic hero and the Byronic one.⁴⁵ The rise of such a figure exemplifies the complex interaction between Gothic and Romantic aesthetics, a dynamic connection deeply marked by the perceiving of a “high” and “low” literary form.

[...] [T]he reception of Gothic writing – its institutional and commercial recognition as a kind of literature – played a fundamental role in shaping many of the ideological assumptions about high culture that we have come to associate with “romanticism”.⁴⁶

Accordingly, the Romantics’ position towards this “lower” exercise of writing was fundamental in the shaping of its forms and tropes. As such, rejecting and distancing itself from the preceding movement, Romantic feeling started the real process of constituting itself from the ruins of Gothic castles and convents.⁴⁷ In this view, it is not so important to collapse the two terms together or to assert that they mean the same, because, as it was clear at the time, the two genres refer to two distinguished traditions. What is fundamental to me is the understanding of the fact that no genre was superior or completely rejecting the other. In my view, they ought to be seen in a complex relation and state of influence that involved both. As it is undeniable that the Gothic has been deeply changed and developed by Romanticism, it follows that the latter has been built on the “ruins” of the former.

Finally, even though many figures were born and developed during this period, the one that I personally find more intriguing in the embodiment of this complex interaction is evidently the vampire. No creature of terror indeed would shape the following horror fiction as the blood-sucker did. Undoubtedly, this was the moment in which folklore and literature came together in creating the figure that really carries both the heritage of the Gothic and Romantic feeling. As Nick Groom states, in his *The Vampire: A New History* (2020), the vampire was the only night creature to be born from the Enlightenment and its empirical approaches. Accordingly, “vampires came into being

⁴⁵ McEvoy, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁴⁶ Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, cit., p. 2.

⁴⁷ Gamer, “Gothic Fictions and Romantic Writing in Britain”, cit., pp. 102-103.

when Enlightenment rationality encountered East European folklore”.⁴⁸ Thus, contrary to ghosts and demons, such a creature was investigated by an actual science, vampirology, which sought to analyse the body of both the perpetrator and the victim in a scientific manner. In this vision, romanticism and the gothic not only come together in the shaping of the blood-sucker, but it stands for modernity and its rational approaches.

1.3 From Folklore to the Modern Vampire

Having introduced the figure of the vampire in the preceding paragraph, it comes naturally to concentrate more attention to such a figure, attempting to analyse its cultural origins and the reasons why the mutual influence between romanticism and Gothic Fiction is fully embodied by it.

Firstly, focusing on the vampire means to point at the etymology of the word itself. Even though such studies have demonstrated to be broad and unlikely to solve the mystery, it might be interesting to unfold some of the conventional assumptions. As Kamil Stachowski explains in his “Etymologies of Vampire” (2024), the actual evolution of the word encompassed three main stages: the global stage, the Slavic and the Pre-Slavic ones.⁴⁹ This highly debated topic has been analysed by no less than 27 hypotheses over a period of 300 years, 21 of which assume *vampire* as a native coinage. Regarding phonetics, only a possible shape is present in the present global stage: *vampire*, SCr. *vàmpīr*. However, the Slavic Stage is part of a larger group, including: Brus. *Úpir*, *vupyr* | Bulg. *vəpir*, *vapīr*, *vepīr*, *vampīr* | Kash. *lułp* | Cz. *Upír* | Pol. *Upiór* | Russ. *Upýr* | Slvk. *Upír* | Ukr. *Upýr*. Additionally, there are also multiple words in Greek, but they probably resulted from a borrowing from South Slavic languages. As a consequence to such studies, phonetically speaking I might argue that these words have a common Slavic origin.⁵⁰

Many scholars have attempted to establish a possible period for the shaping of the term *vampire*, basically from the development of the Proto-Slavic around 1000 BCE and 600 CE, till the Common-Slavic (900 CE). As pointed out by Stachowski, this does not mean that the word cannot be considered older, but constraints being considered, this is

⁴⁸ Nick Groom, *The Vampire: A New History*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2020, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁹ Kamil Stachowski, “Etymologies of Vampire”, in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire*, ed. Simon Bacon, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, pp. 55-72, p. 56.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

the most credible assumption among all. Moreover, the fact that the word can be found across multiple Slavic languages is an indicator that such term was surely coined, or borrowed, in a time in which the Slavs tribes were still a unitary reality. Having considered that, by the 9th century the various Slavic tribes had already distanced themselves for several factors, while anti-vampiric practices started to appear and inhumation replaced cremation as the most common burial rite.⁵¹

The difficulty in establishing a single origin for this term is proof of its being a borrowing from a foreign language. Now, if the theory that sees *vampire* as a borrowing is considered, it is necessary to clarify that since Hungarian is not credited to be a possible source, the only other possibly is a later phenomenon, maybe occurred in the 10th century, which points to the Uralic or Turkic peoples as the source. According to scholars specialised in the matter, it is the Turkic influence that dates to the Proto-Slavic and that has many “words whose phonetics and semantics are conspicuously similar to the Slavic *vampire*”.⁵² The Turkic word *ubyr*, ‘witch, evil spirit’, not only seems to be extremely similar to other words that we have previously listed, but it is impossible to be a loanword from Slavic. Thus, demonstrating that the Turkic influence on the Slavic language is a possibility that needs to be considered, and that could have occurred at multiple times, depending on the geographical area. Having acquired a certain knowledge on the matter, the Turkic hypothesis is what seems to me as one of the most probable, due to the phonetical and semantical similarities between many words in both Slavic and Turkic families.

After enumerating some of the possible etymologies for the term *vampire*, I wish to introduce the cultural background of such a creature of the night. Firstly, “bloodsucking demons” resonate in an important biblical reference in the figure of Lilith, a female demon and rebellious wife of Adam, which is also reported to as ‘vampire’ in some translations of the Talmud.⁵³ Additionally, witches, as the ones that appear in *Macbeth*, were also considered as bloodsucking creatures. What seems to be a European tradition is also spread outside the borders of Europe, thus, being also a Chinese, Indian and Philippine phenomenon.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, vampires need to be considered as a distinct group of such

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-63.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ Groom, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

a species, emerging from the specific East European folklore. In fact, when analysing the folklore behind the figure of the vampire, it is essential to remember that many of the characteristics, which are normally associated with its archetype, have almost nothing to share with the folkloric vampire. Consequentially, the slender and pale creature that dominates today imagination is far away from how legends first imagined it. Although various languages and cultures have referred to what is indicated under the umbrella term *vampire* (*Upir*, *Mora* in Slavic family, *Strigoi* in Romania and *Vrykolaka* in Greece),⁵⁵ the word entered English only in 1734, when various texts on the matter started to appear in Germany.⁵⁶ Thus, all pointing to a villager being death, disposed of and come back to life to harm or even kill the family, or other inhabitants of the village. Undoubtedly, the folklore concerning revenants, referred to since ancient times, spread from Slavic cultures between the tenth and eleventh century, and was then followed by an epidemic of vampirism that culminated in both the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries.⁵⁷ As some accounts demonstrate, this obsession for vampires was certainly influenced by many cultural factors, as the spread of infective diseases, medical professions being developed and the burial rite being shifted from cremation to inhumation. Indeed, the first cases of vampirism were reported and investigated by “military surgeons, physicians and apothecaries” at the beginning of eighteenth century.⁵⁸

In *Vampires, Burial, and Death. Folklore and Reality* (1988), Paul Barber analyses folkloric records in the attempt to describe the lore of such burial rites and apotropaic practices, to understand the cultural beliefs that lied underneath the disposition of bodies and the practices that were employed in case of a suspected vampiric presence. As he notes, after the Peace of Passaro Witz (1718), the occupying forces, in Serbia and Walachia, started to report on local practices, such as the exhumation and “killing” of death bodies.⁵⁹ Functionally to my illustration of such traditions, I will consider the story of Peter Plogojowitz (1725), as translated into English by Barber himself.

[...] Peter Plogojowitz had died, ten weeks past [...] it was revealed that in this same village of Kisilova, within a week, nine people, both old and young, died also, after suffering a

⁵⁵ Kelsey H., Shawgo, “European Folklore and Burial Rites”, in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire*, ed. Simon Bacon, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, pp. 37-53, p. 38.

⁵⁶ Paul Barber, *Vampire, Burial, and Death: Folklore and Reality*, Yale: Yale University Press, 1988, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Shawgo, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39.

⁵⁸ Groom, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁵⁹ Barber, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

twenty-four-hour illness. [...] Plogojowitz, who had died ten weeks earlier, had come to them in their sleep, laid himself on them [...]. And since with such people (which they call vampires) various signs are to be seen—that is, the body undecomposed, the skin, hair, beard, and nails growing—the subjects resolved unanimously to open the grave of Peter Plogojowitz. [...] I did not detect the slightest odor that is otherwise characteristic of the dead, and the body, except for the nose, which was somewhat fallen away, was completely fresh. The hair and beard—even the nails, of which the old ones had fallen away—had grown on him; the old skin, which was somewhat whitish, had peeled away, and a new fresh one had emerged under it. [...] I saw some fresh blood in his mouth. [...] [A]s he was pierced, not only did much blood, completely fresh, flow also through his ears and mouth, but still other wild signs [...] took place. [...] [T]hey burned the often-mentioned body, *in hoc casu*, to ashes [...].⁶⁰

As this account clarifies, vampirism was often related to the idea of an epidemic spreading from a patient zero, as Plogojowitz clearly is, to the rest of the victims, which happened to die of a sudden illness. Although Plogojowitz has no unpleasant odour, other accounts often mention the profusion of an unpleasant smell after exhumation, which could have direct connection with the spread of a plague. Certainly, if a vampire could cause an epidemic, then bad smell could surely carry the disease all over the village. Additionally, his night visitations seem to be another common characteristic of vampire records. Even though the family of the revenant is the most said to be the receiver of such visitations, it is not uncommon to have an entire village being persecuted by such creature. Moreover, this account equally gives us a portrait of the way in which the corpse of a vampire would have appeared after its exhumation. Signs of vitality such as hair, nails and fresh blood were the definite proof of the infestation, together with other details, as the position of the body inside the casket. After having successfully recognise a vampire, the authorities would have to proceed with the staking, which was the most recurrent method to end the activity of the blood-sucker. As this account makes clear, many vampires, after having spilled fresh blood being pierced or their head being cut off, would also be cremated to end the infestation once for all.⁶¹

Plogojowitz' case is undoubtedly a very useful one to unfold the case of study of the vampire, which once again shows itself as a completely different creature compared to fiction. Vampires' blood-drinking surely influenced their appearance, commonly described as florid, healthy and with no *rigor mortis*. In fact, a huge amount of fresh blood and a bloated body were only two of the numerous signs of the presence of a revenant. As Barber suggests in "Forensic Pathology and the European Vampire" (1987), blood-

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

stained bodies are a direct response to the process of decomposition, which could be not as quick as we would imagine at the temperatures below the surface, thus resulting in the exhumation of not-decomposed bodies even after several months.⁶² Moreover, the importance given to the teeth of the vampire seems to be another point of division between actual folklore and later fiction. In folkloric reports, teeth are rarely mentioned, and when so, they don't draw blood. Finally, their prone position inside the casket distinguished them from the canonical supine position that is normally associated with them. As Barber argues, it is unclear whether the prone position had an apotropaic connotation or was simply the creature's choice to lay in that position.⁶³

In order to prevent potential vampires or revenants from finding their way to the surface, they were commonly buried face down [...]. Prone burials of this sort are quite old (they are attested for the Celts, for example), and they appear to be an example of the common folkloric phenomenon of "widdershins", the practise of reversing the direction of anything is to gain access to the spirit world.

Sometimes the corpse is believed to turn over by itself, as in popular saying that a dead man would "turn over in his grave" if he were to learn something disagreeable.⁶⁴

The forensic analyses of folkloric accounts, as the already-mentioned one, allow us a better understanding of the reasons why people imagined creatures of the night such as the one that is unfolding in this thesis. Vampires seemed to be everywhere in this period, leaving behind their folkloric lore and entering modern imagination as the "modish, edgy and alluringly" creatures that the following fiction has developed.⁶⁵

Most probably, between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, people would be increasingly accustomed to such records coming from the Eastern Europe tradition. Thus, this strange figure entered modern western imagination and became the perfect conjunction between the Gothic and Romantic movements. This hypothesis is also confirmed by the following excerpt:

Vampires were animated by sublime terror and abject horror to become comprehensively supernaturalised, even figures of inspiration, and they therefore have a place in theories of the Romantic imagination – from the influence of psychology and the understanding of monstrosity to questions of self-identity and the emotions. At the same time, vampires began

⁶² Paul Barber, "Forensic Pathology and the European Vampire", *Journal of Folklore Research*, 1987, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 1-32.

⁶³ Barber, *Burial and Death: Folklore and Reality*, cit., pp. 39-45, pp. 49-50.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁵ Groom, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

to accumulate a vast panoply of morbid imagery that was gathered from the vaults of the English past, and so they were simultaneously Gothicized.⁶⁶

As a consequence, they became “popular confederates of mortals”⁶⁷ while they were also introduced in the literary world, e.g. in the German poem “Der Vampir”, by Heinrich August Ossenfelder, which was the first instance of vampiric poetry, published in the scientific journal *Der Naturforscher*.⁶⁸ Several vampires started to populate poems and fictions in Romantic writing, e.g. Coleridge’s “Christabel” (1797), Byron’s “The Giaour” (1813), and Keats’ “La Belle Dame sans Merci” (1819) are examples of the rise of a new configuration of the vampire, detached from most of his folkloric features and reshaped by the contemporary development of western society. Mainly because of cultural and historical needs, the singular creature who wandered during the night to scare villagers and suck their blood rapidly metamorphosed into the anomaly that dominates nineteenth-century fiction, with masterpieces such as James Malcolm Rymer and Thomas Peckett Prest’s *Varney the Vampire; or, the Feast of Blood* (1845), Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872) and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897). These works were not mere contributions to the shaping of the vampiric lore, but true representations of the taboos of European society.

Even though German and English poetry had already introduced the figure of the vampire during the eighteenth century, it was only in 1816 that the Byronic Lord Ruthven, in John William Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1819) introduced blood-sucking creatures as “singular friends”⁶⁹ to the human being. Due to the importance that this tale had in such development, the following chapter will deal more deeply with the peculiarities of Polidori and Byron’s relationship and the strange circumstances that led to the composition and publication of the tale.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

⁶⁷ Auerbach, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁶⁸ Groom, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

⁶⁹ Auerbach, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

Chapter 2: The Making of *The Vampyre, a Tale*

2.1 Lord Byron and His Physician

The protagonist of John William Polidori's *The Vampyre, a Tale*, Lord Ruthven, has been defined at the end of the preceding chapter as a Byronic figure. Consequentially, in this chapter I will be dealing with the context of creation of the tale and its Byronic relations. First, I will unfold the complex relationship between the author and Lord George Gordon Byron, who has been recognized several times as the source of many features belonging to Polidori's vampire. Then, I will be focusing on the cultural and literary background that furnished Polidori during that summer at Villa Diodati, before being able to concentrate on the controversial publication history of the tale.

Even though George Gordon Byron, sixth baron of Byron (1788-1824), and John William Polidori (1795-1821) are the protagonists of the birth of the modern vampire, it is unquestionable that their troubled relationship has been the source of such a creation. Their similarities were limited to their shared birthplace, London, and their interest in literature. Indeed, Byron was already more than just a poet, he was starting to become a real celebrity, a literary phenomenon which spread all over Europe. Therefore, he was not only perceived as a man, but as the embodiment of ideals and ways of living which made him a unique example of celebrity and influence. Byron presented himself as an eccentric hedonist, fighting for freedom and sacrificing everything for it. He succeeded in the construction of an image of himself, which resulted in him being the object of never-ending public attention.⁷⁰ He was also attracted by the charming, titanic figure of Napoleon Bonaparte, to whom he dedicated some poems. In addition, he even commissioned a coach, "a small palatial residence on wheels",⁷¹ inspired by the one used by Bonaparte at Waterloo. The English poet, due to his ability of selling his persona to the public sphere, became the embodiment of dynamism, exotism, constant movement, and a real international poet, a real "floating global citizen",⁷² especially after his decision of leaving England for a self-imposed exile in 1816. His notoriety and influence were so

⁷⁰ Laura Giovannelli, "The Vampyre di John William Polidori e lo spettro di Byron: luci e ombre di una mediazione culturale complessa", in *Mediazioni letterarie: itinerari, figure e pratiche*, ed. Enrico Di Pastena, Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2019, pp. 283-310, pp. 286-287.

⁷¹ Fiona MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend*, London: John Murray, 2014, p. vii.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

prominent during his life that they started to be recognized as “Byromania”, an actual “Lord Byron fever” that took its name from the satirical poem “The Byromania” (1812), written by Lady Ann Isabella Byron herself, which examined the excesses of the cult for her husband and underlined the behaviour of infatuated women and the constant emulating of his figure.⁷³ As pointed out by Francis Wilson:

In the case of Byron, the “magical potency” of his name suggests a certain style and an attitude rather than the historical figure who lived between 1788 and 1824 [...] Byron was being erased officially at the same time as he was being recreated in the sub-culture of Byroniana [...] Byron [...] became what is now called a celebrity or “star”, and Byromania can be seen as an early example of fanaticism.⁷⁴

This level of celebrity could only result in a massive number of imitations, portraits of himself circulating everywhere and plagiarisms, which only got worst after his departure from England. According to Mariam Wassif, in “Polidori’s *The Vampyre* and Byron’s Portraits”, Byron had already exploited the eighteenth and nineteenth-century taste for portraits at the beginning of his career, thus promoting his writing by virtue of a visuality, which had an impact on English and European people.⁷⁵ Such an influence was so strong to make several men of the time start dressing in black, as Byron did. Certainly, it must seem ironic that the man who would be the primary source for the first fictional vampire had a vampiric attitude towards the society of his time.

If Byron was a blood-sucking aristocrat, then by seducing his readers he made vampires of them too. The contemporary appetite for Byron was monstrous: metaphors of appetite and consumption, monstrosity and vampirism appear not only in writing by and about Byron [,] but they are similarly employed by Karl Marx.⁷⁶

Strange as it can seem, one of the men under the spell of Byromania was John William Polidori, who would have followed Byron in his tour of Europe, as his personal physician, in 1816. He followed the Byronic way of dressing, “the Byronic style, dressing mostly in black and going about bare-necked with his shirt collar down in a study of artistic dishevelment. Indeed, he looked more Byronic than Byron”.⁷⁷

⁷³ Giovanelli, *op. cit.*, pp. 290-291.

⁷⁴ Frances Wilson, *Byromania: Portraits of the Artist in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Culture*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999, pp. 9-10.

⁷⁵ Mariam Wassif, “Polidori’s ‘The Vampyre’ and Byron’s Portraits”, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 2018, Vol. 49, No. 1, pp. 53-61, p. 53.

⁷⁶ Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁷⁷ Andrew McConnell Stott, *The Poet and the Vampyre: The Curse of Byron and the Birth of Literature’s Greatest Monsters*, New York/London: Pegasus Books, 2014, pp. 16-17.

On the contrary, John William Polidori was the son of a political refugee of Italian origins, Gaetano, and of Anna Maria Pierce. His father, a writer, translator and Italian professor, was mostly remarked because of his service under the Italian dramatist Vittorio Alfieri. Being a fervent catholic, he strongly encouraged Polidori to pursue medicine as a profession, to avoid the temptations that a literary career would have inspired in him and to preserve his catholic principles. Because of the resulting conflictual relationship with his paternal figure and his expectations, John William's temperament developed in rebelliousness, ambition, desire for self-affirmation and glory that would shape his tormented self. Firstly, starting from his education, he was first sent to a catholic school in Somerstown and later to Ampleforth College. After many disagreements about his choice of career, he started attending the prestigious Edinburgh Royal College of Physicians, which at the time took at least three years of medical studies to graduate.⁷⁸ His studies went on for several years until he wrote his doctoral thesis on somnambulism, *Oneirodynia*, which focussed on his major interest: "why somnambulists perceive some things and not others".⁷⁹ His medical studies may certainly have influenced the interest for human anatomy that the reader would find in his description of the vampiric morbus, together with a number of notions about cerebral activity, that were maybe brought to his knowledge because of his doctoral thesis on somnambulism.⁸⁰

After the end of his studies in Edinburgh, Polidori had three main possibilities: travelling to India, to Italy or staying in England. Astonishingly, he followed Lord Byron in his tour of Europe as his personal physician. Before the departure from England, Byron was severely debilitated by his alcohol abuse, his strict diets and the prominent use of laxatives. As a consequence, he was advised to bring with him a physician who would take care of his prescriptions and health. In his critical biography of Polidori, David Lorne Macdonald assumes that most probably it was Sir William Knighton who recommended the young physician to Byron.⁸¹ Despite the opinion of John William's father, Gaetano, who saw in Byron's morals a real objection to his principles, and to John Cam Hobhouse, who in his diary stated his repulsion towards the sounding of John William's surname: "I

⁷⁸ David Lorne Macdonald, *Poor Polidori: A Critical Biography of the Author of 'The Vampyre'*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991, p. 15.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p. 40.

⁸⁰ Giovannelli, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

⁸¹ Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

don't like his *ori* & told him [Byron] so. [Byron] agrees but says it is inevitable"⁸², the young doctor joined the poet in the prospect of seeing Europe and his long-desired Italy. Moreover, the poet's publisher, John Murray, most probably commissioned Polidori to account for the tour with the intention of publishing a piece of writing that would be a massive success. However, there are many doubts about the real occurrence of this episode. What is certain is that Polidori did write an actual account of his journey, whose manuscript was inherited by his sister, Charlotte Lydia Polidori, who not only censured certain parts of it but also destroyed the original. Fortunately, in 1911 *The Diary of Dr John William Polidori* was finally published in London by one of his nephews, William Michael Rossetti, one of his nephews and an intellectual.⁸³ In spite of his being related to the physician, Rossetti as an editor decided to assume a quite neutral tone, as if the bad reputation of Polidori still affected his persona.⁸⁴ Thus, although the volume has been censured by Charlotte Lydia and edited by Rossetti, it still offers many hints about the temperament of the author and the various stages of his acquaintance with Byron.

According to his journal, the travellers and their entourage left London for Dover on April 24th, the place where the first signs of their troubled relationship emerged. As Polidori's own diary illustrates:

[...] having delivered my play into their hands, I had to hear it laughed at – (an author has always a salvo) – partly, I think, from the way in which it was read. One of the party, however – to smoothe, I suppose, my ruffled spirits – took up my play, and apparently read part with great attention, drawing applause from those who before had laughed. He read on with so much attention that the others declared he had never been so attentive before.⁸⁵

According to Macdonald, it was probably Byron who laughed while reading his play, thus inaugurating their conflictual and controversial relationship. Therefore, this is a prominent example of the tension that started to rise between the two of them and that would characterise the subsequent months. Even though it is probable that John William began to replace his paternal figure with Byron himself, many other factors had an influence in the shaping of their experience together. John was, as I have already pointed out, ambitious and desirous for affirmation. Accordingly, what had started as an account

⁸² John Cam Hobhouse, Baron Broughton, *MS diary*, Berg Collection, New York Public Library, Vol. 4, pp. 271-272.

⁸³ Giovannelli, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁵ William Michael Rossetti (ed.), *The Diary of Dr. John William Polidori, 1816, Relating to Byron, Shelley, etc.*, London: Elkin Mathews, 1911, p. 30.

of Byron's *Grand Tour* became Polidori's account of his travels with the most famous and emulated poet of the time. This ambitious temper of his, together with Byron's irrisory behaviour, starkened their conflict. "Their dislike was formed and fuelled by class antagonism: the letters of both insist on their identities as master and servant, lord and vassal, bard and poetaster"⁸⁶, resulting in arguments like the one that occurred in the proximity of the Rhine, which suggests John William's perceived inferiority towards the other man:

'[...] [W]hat is there excepting writing poetry that I cannot do better than you?' Lord B. answered cool[d]y that there were three things - First, said he, I can hit with a pistol the keyhole of that door - Secondly, I can swim across that river to yonder point - and thirdly, I can give you a d-d good thrashing. Polidori acknowledged his excellence by leaving the room.⁸⁷

As stated in this version of what happened, not only their temperaments played a role in the deterioration of their acquaintance, but they also started to embody the roles of "rebellious son" and his "domineering father",⁸⁸ a relation enhanced by the fact that Byron was deprived of his own daughter, Ada Lovelace, and that Polidori had a troubled paternal relationship with his father, Gaetano. Additionally, it was becoming clear to both of them that Polidori or "Pollydolly", as Byron referred to him, was useless as doctor, since Byron's health was getting better after their departure from England and the physician's services were less and less required. This situation was even the centre of many of the poet's recurrent jokes and a possible reason why he served more as secretary and bookkeeper than as a real doctor for the entourage.

Their recurrent confrontations were not merely influenced by the physician's uselessness, but also by their "slight quarrels" and Polidori's envy. As an example, during his introduction in society on 28th May, he was once again made to face the absolute prestige on the poet, compared to his being an anonymous self, as he noted on his diary: "L[ord] B[yrone]'s name was alone mentioned; mine, like a star in the halo of the moon, invisible".⁸⁹ As a result of his feeling a no one compared to a man like Byron; of the jokes and epithets as "Dr Dory" and "Pollydolly"; of being among poets and authors as Percy

⁸⁶ Auerbach, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁸⁷ Frederick L. Jones, Maria Gisborne & Edward E. Williams (eds.), "2 January 1822", in *Shelley's Friends: Their Journals and Letters*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951, p. 122.

⁸⁸ Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

⁸⁹ Rossetti, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

Byshee Shelley and Mary Godwin Shelley, Polidori must have felt his desires of success and recognition even more difficult to reach. It would thus come with no surprise that they parted only five months after their departure from England. In a letter to his father, Polidori even took all the responsibilities of the parting on himself:

[...] I was in agitation for my parting from Lord Byron. We have parted, finding that our tempers did not agree. He proposed it and it was settled. 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 & easy.⁹⁰

Moreover, Hobhouse noted in one his diary entries: “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”,⁹¹ thus introducing the figure of “poor Polidori”, which will come to reflect not only his literary reputation of a plagiarist but that would also be included in Mary Godwin Shelley’s 1831 preface to *Frankenstein* (1818), published ten years after Polidori’s tragic suicide in 1821.

Undoubtedly, the outcome of the conflictual acquaintance between the eccentric Lord Byron and his ambitious physician would change forever the modern imagination of vampires, which was transformed from folkloric creatures of the night to the Byronic blood-sucker, alternatively friend, companion or enemy. Hence, having established the ground of their relationship, I will now turn to one of the most famous events of the history of English Literature: the summer at Villa Diodati and its importance in the composition of *The Vampyre*.

2.2 That Summer at Villa Diodati

Lord Byron and his entourage finally arrived in Geneva on 25 May, reuniting with the Shelleys, including Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Godwin and Claire Clairmont, who had departed from London on 3 May and arrived in Geneva twelve days before, due to the frequent repairs needed by Byron’s Napoleonic coach. Even though Claire was already pregnant and looking forward to meeting with her former lover, it became clear that he was not as excited about their reunion as she. Moreover, she developed a strong jealousy towards Polidori, writing to Byron: “you have left your native land; your household gold;

⁹⁰ Rossetti, *op. cit.*, pp. 215-216.

⁹¹ John Cam Hobhouse, Lord Broughton, *Recollections of a Long Life*, edited by Lady Dorchester, London: John Murray, 1909, Vol. 2, p. 16.

your friends and now you travel about with only a physician; does he take care of you; is he attached to you? How all your friends loved you”.⁹² If Clairmont’s feelings towards John William were shaped by her fear of being replaced by his persona, Percy Byshee Shelley considered him as the perfect audience to illustrate some episodes of his life. Indeed, Percy recollected with Polidori several of the events concerning himself, Mary Godwin and Clara Clairmont during that summer. In the Geneva entourage, only Mary Godwin, who was already referred to as “Mrs. Shelley”, seemed to be friendly to Polidori, reading Italian poems (e.g. Torquato Tasso) with him, going on boat together and spending with him entire days while Shelley and Byron toured the lake.

What was extremely particular of that summer was not merely the reunion of such a group of people at Villa Diodati, but the fact that one of the most famous meteorological case of history occurred, because of the several storms and cold temperatures that defined that summer. As many specialists assumed, it was a world-wide phenomenon that had to do with a massive volcanic eruption which had taken place in Indonesia.⁹³ Moreover, this meteorological condition influenced the general mood, especially when an astronomer in Italy recognized such a phenomenon as a clear sign of the upcoming end of the world. On the contrary, the Summer of 1816 surely was a fundamental moment for European literature, because of the great works that resulted from the ghostly atmosphere of the year without a summer. For instance, one of the huge rainfalls that did not allow the company to go on the lake after dinner was described by Byron in four stanzas of *Childe Harold*: “How the lit lake shines, a phosphoric sea, / And the big rain comes dancing to the earth!”,⁹⁴ thus proving the value of the literary outcome of the time that they spent in Geneva.

As I will focus solely on Polidori’s vampire story, my intention is to give prominent space to the readings and visuals that most probably influenced his writing during that summer. Firstly, the party began reading *Fantasmagoriana*, “a French translation of a number of German ghost stories”,⁹⁵ which most probably gave Byron the

⁹² Clara Mary Jane Clairmont, MS letter to George Gordon Noel Byron, 17 May 1816, London: John Murray Archives.

⁹³ David Ellis, *Byron in Geneva: that Summer of 1816*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011, pp. 44-45.

⁹⁴ Lord George Gordon Byron, *The Works of Lord Byron*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge, London: John Murray, 1899, Vol. 2, p. 274.

⁹⁵ Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

idea that each one of them was to write their own story. On 17 June Polidori wrote in his journal: “The ghost-stories are begun by all but me”,⁹⁶ followed by his 18 June entry: “Began my ghost-story after tea”.⁹⁷ Since the beginning of the composition, they probably shared ideas about their ghost-stories, as Mary Shelley wrote in the introduction to *Frankenstein* in 1831: “Poor Polidori had some terrible idea about a skull-headed lady, who was so punished for peeping through a key-hole”.⁹⁸ On the other hand, Byron was contributing with the writing of a story about a young man travelling to Greece with an English Aristocrat named Augustus Darvell, which would most probably have turned into a vampire, if the fragment was ever completed. Thus, it was Byron’s reading his fragment out loud to his company, together with the impact of a poem like *The Giaour*, that allowed the composition of the first English narrative about a modern vampire.

In addition to German *Fantasmagoriana*, Polidori even ordered several books from England, such as Coleridge’s *Christabel: Kubla Khan, A Vision; The Pains of Sleep*, whose reading aloud made Shelley hysterical, forcing him to rush out of the room, while Byron was still reading these lines for the party:

Then drawing in her breath aloud,
Like one that shuddered, she unbound
The cincture from beneath her breast:
Her silken robe, and inner vest,
Dropt to her feet, and full in view,
Behold! Her bosom and half her side -
A sight to dream of, not to tell!
O shield her! shield sweet Christabel!⁹⁹

As the company’s physician, Polidori immediately took care of Shelley, being even more interested by the fact that the poet suffered from episodes of somnambulism, something which I have already underlined as his doctoral thesis’ topic. Moreover, that reading must have been even more interesting as one of the first examples of vampires in poetry in the character of Geraldine, a female progenitor of Joseph Sheridan Lefanu’s *Carmilla* (1872).

⁹⁶ Rossetti, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁹⁸ Mary Shelley, “Introduction to *Frankenstein* (1831)”, in *Frankenstein: Annotated for Scientists, Engineers, and Creators of All Kinds*, eds. David H. Guston, Ed Finn and Jason Scott Robert, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2017, pp. 189-194, p. 191.

⁹⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Christabel”, in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and Other Poems*, London: HarperCollins, 2016, vv. 247-254.

Only on 12 July, did Lord Byron and John William visit Madame de Staël's chateau for the first time. There, they were able to collect new information from England, especially concerning a novel, *Glenarvon*, written and published by Lady Caroline Lamb, with whom the poet had had a romantic relationship in 1812. It was Byron's decision to end their relationship, which resulted in the immediate deterioration of her mental state, followed by the obsession for the poet and an attempt to commit suicide. Indeed, she was the protagonist of many strange events, like her stalking Byron and stealing one of his miniatures from John Murray, his London publisher. What was even more astonishing about the situation was her writing and publishing a *roman à clef*, which illustrated a Gothic version of Byron and their sentimental relationship. Therefore, when *Glenarvon* was published on 9 May 1816 by Henry Colburn, it suddenly became a success because of the scandalous circumstances of its writing. Additionally, since Hobhouse had warned Byron about such a publication and by virtue of the new information by Madame de Staël, he had surely read the novel by 29th July, most probably borrowing de Staël's copy. However, what is most important for the purpose of this analysis is that he eventually read the novel in Polidori's company, commenting together on both its truthful and fictional aspects. It seems natural, therefore, to trace the choice of the protagonist of Polidori's tale, Lord Ruthven, back to Lady Lamb's *roman à clef*, in which one of the characters bears the name of Clarence de Ruthven, Lord Glenarvon. Most probably, Polidori imprudently chose this name because he was astonished by the background of one of Glenarvon's ancestors, who "drank hot blood from the skull of his enemy",¹⁰⁰ thus recalling the fact that Byron had a drinking-cup made from a real skull he had found at Newstead Abbey.¹⁰¹

The cultural and literary environment which the physician experienced during that summer clearly resulted in the writing of his tale, having as reference not only the ghost stories that they would tell each other during those stormy nights, but also a rich collection of texts, such as those already mentioned, which were points of departure not only for John William's text, but also for Byron's fragment and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Nevertheless, literature was not the only art that had an influence on the writing of *The Vampyre*. Instead, as Mariam Wassif points out, there is a connection between

¹⁰⁰ Caroline Lamb, *Glenarvon*, London: Printed for Henry Colburn, 1816, Vol. 2, p. 37.

¹⁰¹ Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

visual forms of art, as portraits, images and miniatures, and the way in which Polidori is concerned with the visual phenomenon of Lord Ruthven's appearing and gaze. Indeed, not only several portraits at the time were already circulating England and Europe, but at Villa Diodati "Polidori was immersed in visuality and portraiture".¹⁰² Even his private rooms were located near a picture-gallery full of French Kings' portraits, not to mention the incredible number of Byron's portraits that were falsified and reproduced everywhere at the time. Accordingly, reading the description of Lord Ruthven in the light of the new nineteenth-century taste for portraits tells us a lot about the factors at play in the birth of modern vampires. To illustrate the importance of visual influence in the tale, the following passage shows how Lord Ruthven's gaze is perceived by other people:

Those who felt this sensation of awe, could not explain whence it arose: some attributed it to the dead grey eye, which, fixing upon the object's face, did not seem to penetrate, and at one glance to pierce through to the inward workings of the heart; but fell upon the cheek with a leaden ray that weighed upon the skin it could not pass.¹⁰³

This excerpt shows how important portraits and contemporary texts were in metamorphosing the folkloric ghostly vampire into "a monster whose gaze, rather than ... bite, is deadly".¹⁰⁴ Hence, the creatures born at Villa Diodati ceased to be mere ghosts but acquired bodies and the uncanny gaze that would be most common for a portrayed figure, "which looks without seeing, and so seems, vampire-like, at once alive and dead".¹⁰⁵

After two months spent in the company of the eminent figures that I have acknowledged, Polidori's professional relationship with Byron came to an end, taking leave of the poet's entourage and heading towards Milan: "Wished nobody good-bye: told them, though, I was going"¹⁰⁶ and "Madame B[relaz?] wept, and most seemed sorry".¹⁰⁷ This lady was referred to as the object of his affection during that period of time, a 'Portuguese lady' whom he most probably met at Lady Bruce salon, where he was also said to have left his manuscript of the tale.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, it is possible to read both

¹⁰² Wassif, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

¹⁰³ John William Polidori, "The Vampyre", in *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, Robert Morrison and Chris Baldick (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, pp. 3-24, p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ Wassif, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁰⁶ Rossetti, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰⁸ Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

Byron's fragment and Polidori's adaptation as mutually interdependent, with the former told by the companion of Augustus Darvell, both protagonists of Byron's fragment, and thus specular to the real Polidori as witness of Byron's "histrionics".¹⁰⁹ The latter, instead, was fully imbricated with Byronism and the master's personality, expressed, for instance, through the compelling oath that finally binds Aubrey and Lord Ruthven together, allowing the Lord's final victory over "poor" Aubrey. Consequentially, I am convinced that it would be a limitation of the tale's possible readings to merely trace it back to the irritation that John William Polidori would have felt towards his employer after his departure from Switzerland. The compelling features of the Byronic hero, mixed with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European folklore, paved the way for the birth of the Byronic vampire, whose features were surely influenced by the period spent at Villa Diodati, together with the literary material to which the author was exposed.

Finally, my intention is to focus on another peculiarity of the tale: its circumstances of composition and publication, which remain a partial mystery and under continuous scholarly speculation. Hence, I will be disentangling the ambiguities and hypotheses on *The Vampyre*'s composition and publication in the next paragraph, concluding my overview on the literary and cultural environment that led Polidori to writing his masterpiece, before plunging into the actual narrative and its possible readings.

2.3 A Controversial Publication: 1819

Although the famous episode of the ghost story competition seems a unique episode in the history of nineteenth-century British literature, the ambiguities around the composition and publication of Polidori's tale are equally compelling and subject to several speculations. In this chapter my intention is to concentrate on the objective circumstances that brought to the success of *The Vampyre*, analysing both the most common opinions and some recent reconsiderations of such hypotheses.

What is factual about the event is that the tale was first published on 1 April 1819 by *The New Monthly Magazine*, presenting:

¹⁰⁹ Auerbach, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

1. An editorial note, signed 'Ed.', accounting for the receipt of a 'private lette[r] [...] from a friend travelling on the Continent', accompanied by a 'tale';
2. The 'Extract of a Letter from Geneva, with Anecdotes of Lord Byron, &c', followed by a footnote signed 'Ed.';
3. An editorial note, again signed 'Ed.', relating about the belief in vampires that 'is very general in the East', and extensively quoting from Byron's *The Giaour*;
4. 'The Vampyre; A tale by Lord Byron', being actually Polidori's work.¹¹⁰

On 2 April, the first volume edition was published by Sherwood, Neely and Jones using the sheets printed by Henry Colburn, publisher of the *New Monthly*. Moreover, this was the day on which Polidori famously broke his silence and wrote a letter to Colburn, declaring that "the tale of the Vampyre [...] is not Lord Byrons but was written *entirely* by me at the requests of a lady[.] I desire therefore that you will positively contradict your statement [...]".¹¹¹ After the writing of this letter and Polidori's threats to publicly denounce the mistake, Colburn agreed on the insertion of a letter of rectification and the paying of a small sum (£30) to John William. On the meantime, Hobhouse and John Murray became aware of the tale's publication, and both wrote to Lord Byron, who was staying in Venice at the time, in order to notify him about the allegations that wanted him the author of *The Vampyre*, and to send him a copy of the text. Conversely, Byron already knew about it because of *Galighani's Messenger*, an English paper which was printed in Paris.¹¹² Following the discovery, he had angrily commented on it to his banker Douglas Kinnaid: "Damn 'The Vampyre,' – what do I know of Vampires? It must be some bookselling imposture – contradict it in a solemn paragraph".¹¹³ Moreover, he also addressed Galighani in a letter basically refusing any involvement in the composition and publication of the text. On the other hand, he later confessed to Medwin that his refusal to be associated with it was based on the supposition of extreme vanity that writing of oneself like that would have suggested to his readership. Eventually, he even commented on the "Extract of a letter from Geneva"¹¹⁴, and confirmed some details, like the ghost-stories writing, but also denied the truthfulness of others.

¹¹⁰ Fabio Camilletti, "A note on the Publication History of John Polidori's 'The Vampyre'", *Gothic Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 2020, pp. 330-343, p. 331.

¹¹¹ Rossetti, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

¹¹² Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

¹¹³ George Gordon Byron, Lord, letter to Douglas Kinnaid, 24 April 1819, in *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, London: John Murray, 1976, Vol. vi, p. 114.

¹¹⁴ John William Polidori, *The Vampyre, a Tale*, Paris: Galighani, 1819.

In the May edition of *The New Monthly Magazine*, Colburn published a letter by John Polidori in which he clearly stated that “*the groundwork* is certainly Lord Byron’s, its development is mine, produced at the request of a lady”,¹¹⁵ which was followed by the modification of the tale’s title in “A Tale related by Lord Byron to Dr. Polidori”, while the subsequent editions were to be published anonymously. Even though on 28 June John Murray published Byron’s “Fragment” in *Mazeppa* to demonstrate the formal differences in style between him and the physician, the tale was still associated with a strong reference to Byron and his influence. On the one hand, this resulted in five different editions of *The Vampyre* by the end of the year. On the other, Polidori was far more notorious for his act of presupposed plagiarism and forgery than for his contribution to the tale. For instance, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, commenting on Byron’s *Fragment*, wrote:

[T]he *Vampyre* - that audacious and unprincipled forgery of Dr. Polidori. [...] [T]o publish such an imitation, with the author’s name, is a vile pilfering of the pockets of the public[.] [...] We are sorry to see so respectable a publisher as Mr Colburn permitting any such doings to go on under his auspices.¹¹⁶

That was the kind of sentiment that the public felt towards the ambiguous publication of the tale and that influenced Polidori’s reputation even afterwards, when he decided to publish *Ernestus Berchtold* (1819). This was the narrative that he truly considered the real product of his summer at Villa Diodati. In fact, as suggested by the full title, *Ernestus Berchtold. Or, The Modern Oedipus*, Polidori saw his work as worthy enough to compete against Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Unfortunately, the book was not as successful as the tale, not being published by Colburn and selling only 199 copies after the first year. It was in this way that the ambition of John William Polidori to establish himself as an original and independent writer failed, together with the desire to compete with both Mary Shelley’s novel and Byron’s fame.

What I have been collecting up until now is the objective sequence of events that brought the text to its publication in 1819 and its immediate success. From now on I will analyse a number of contrasting opinions about its composition and printing according to scholars such as Patricia L. Skarda, Henry R. Viets, David Lorne Macdonald and Jan Čapek. Firstly, the tale’s composition has often interested the critical debate, even though

¹¹⁵ John William Polidori, letter to Henry Colburn, *New Monthly Magazine*, London, 1819, Vol. 11, p. 332.

¹¹⁶ William Blackwood, T. Cadell and W. Davies, “Mazeppa”, in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, July 1819, Vol. 5, p. 432.

scholars seem to unanimously identify summer 1816 as the time of its writing. For example, Viets explains how “no doubt exists about the date and place of composition”,¹¹⁷ because the author recorded date and place of composition in its diary, stating that he began the tale in summer 1816 at Villa Diodati and completed it the same summer at Genthod, where he not only concluded the text but also left the manuscript in the hands of “Countess Breuss”, the misspelled title of Countess Catherine Bruce.¹¹⁸ According to this version, Polidori left the manuscript after his parting from Lord Byron and forgot about it until its publication by Colburn, regardless for the meaning the tale had had for him. However, if the circumstances of composition seem to be certain and verified by the author himself, it is still debatable whether he was or not clueless of the imminent publication of his piece of writing. Viets underlines how the text was left in Switzerland and then reached England only in 1818 by “a friend travelling on the Continent”.¹¹⁹ Macdonald too seems to doubt his involvement, due to the reaction that John William had after the publication. Similarly, Patricia L. Skarda analyses how from the publication onwards Polidori tried to be recognized as the real author sending letters to Colburn, Sherwood, Neely, Jones and “the editor of the *Morning Chronicle*”.¹²⁰ Finally, Jan Čapek focuses on Polidori as a true victim of an editor like Henry Colburn, who not only adopted Byron’s name to enhance sales, but also employed a capitalistic exploitation very similar to the idea of vampirism.¹²¹

Having remarked that Polidori was probably clueless about the upcoming publication of his work, the possible identity of the “friend” who sent the manuscript to the editor is now to be considered. According to Macdonald, a writer named John Mitford can be considered as the most probable source, since Alaric Watt, *The New Monthly Magazine*’s sub-editor, indicated him as such. John Mitford could in fact have received the text from Countess Bruce or Madame Brélaz, another lady of Polidori’s entourage,

¹¹⁷ Henry R. Viets, “The London Editions of Polidori’s ‘The Vampyre’”, *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, The University of Chicago Press, 1969, Vol. 63, No. 2, pp. 83-103, p. 85.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁹ “A Preliminary Note to ‘The Vampyre’”, signed “Ed.”, *The New Monthly Magazine*, Vol. II, No. 63, 1819, p. 193.

¹²⁰ Patricia L. Skarda, “Vampirism and Plagiarism: Byron’s Influence and Polidori’s Practise”, *Studies in Romanticism*, 1989, Vol. 28, No. 2, pp. 249-269, p. 269.

¹²¹ Jan Čapek, “Polidori in Context”, in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire*, ed. Simon Bacon, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, pp. 209-228, pp. 221-222.

and then have brought it to England.¹²² As I have already mentioned, Viets suggests the existence of a friend of Colburn who got the manuscript from Countess Bruce or her family. Viets, but also Skarda, trace this back to Count P. L. E. Rossi, who could have been the one not only to know both Polidori and Byron, but also to handle the papers to Colburn. In addition, Skarda also mentions the name of Madame Gatelier, a lady of Countess Bruce's entourage who could be the one to contact the editor. Finally, Jan Čapek suggests that "the manuscript was retrieved by one of the Byromaniacs following in Byron's wake through Europe who sent [it] to London, [...] explaining why the shadow of Byron's grandeur continues to tower over Polidori's legacy".¹²³

The last topic that is highly debated that I want to focus my attention on is the paternity of the three documents which were published together with the tale: "Extract of a Letter from Geneva", the introduction on folklore and the "Account of Lord Byron's Residence".¹²⁴ On the first place, Macdonald identifies again John Mitford as the person in collaboration with Henry Colburn, because of his preceding fictional writing about Byron in Mitylene for the magazine.¹²⁵ Viets, instead, supports the idea that Colburn himself wrote the documents, mainly because he referred to himself as "The Editor" and the extract was signed by the initials: "Ed.". ¹²⁶ In contrast, Skarda suggests Polidori's contribution to be more likely, because of the similarities between the letter and the contents of his own diary, interpreting this possibility as an attempt to clear his conscience after the writing of the tale by describing Lord Byron's virtues in Mitylene, a place that they both never visited.¹²⁷ On the whole, what is sure is that the critical documents, in their being strictly connected to the figure of Byron, were an attempt to once more collocate the tale in the shadow of the most famous and influential poet of the time, regardless of John Polidori's contribution.

Having described this traditional debate, I introduce a recent reconsidering of such topics by two of the most important contributors to the debate, namely Fabio Camilletti and Nick Groom. Starting from the composition of the tale, they have very different takes on the period during which Polidori wrote it. Fabio Camilletti indeed suggests that:

¹²² Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

¹²³ Čapek, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

¹²⁴ Polidori, *The Vampyre, a Tale*, cit., pp. 71-80.

¹²⁵ Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

¹²⁶ Viets, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

¹²⁷ Skarda, *op. cit.*, pp. 263-264.

[T]here would be no reason, at this point, to date the composition of *The Vampyre* to the late summer 1816, and it is definitely more plausible that the idea of completing Byron's tale came to Polidori two years later, when the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* triggered for the first time a general interest for the ghost story-telling experiment of Diodati.¹²⁸

Stating that, the scholar sees the publication of the tale as not only a direct response to *Frankenstein*, but also as a prelude with the intention of marketing his own novel: *Ernestus Berchtold; or, The Modern Œdipus*, which was published in August 1819.¹²⁹ Similarly, Groom underlines as that Polidori could have written the text "at some distance from both the 'Year Without a Summer' and Villa Diodati",¹³⁰ even suggesting that he may "have written it as late as March 1819".¹³¹ The hypothesis lies on the fact that, since the tale is often interpreted as an attack on Byron, it is undeniable that in 1816 Polidori still admired him deeply, whereas with the passing of years and the interruption of their exchanges, he would have been more likely to characterise Lord Ruthven according to Byron's fame and infamous reputation. Additionally, also the status of the publication as a surprise to John William has been debunked by the two scholars. Both agree on the fact that *The Vampyre* may have been the perfect marketing strategy to attract market attention, since he was clearly seeking public recognition and a publisher for his fiction. As a consequence, publishing a ghost story under the name of Byron may have seemed a rapid way to catch the English readership's attention. Camilletti proves his participation in the publishing process by analysing both his diary and the "Extract of a Letter from Geneva", underlining how the misspelled title of Countess Bruce, "Breuss", is present in both. Thus, demonstrating the active role of the author who may have given access to parts of his own diary to the author of the letter, most probably Colburn or Alaric Watts.¹³² According to this, Groom has suggested that the actual author of the letter and the other documents could have been Alaric Watts, the magazine's sub-editor. As he suggests:

Watts, working with Polidori on editing "The Vampyre" and wording the note on authorship, is the most likely candidate for both the essay on vampires and the "Letter", and although the

¹²⁸ Camilletti, *op. cit.*, p. 340.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

¹³⁰ Nick Groom, "Polidori's 'The Vampyre': Composition, Publication, Deception", *Romanticism*, 2022, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp.46-59, p. 55.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹³² Camilletti, *op. cit.*, pp. 338-339.

latter is unsigned and purports to come from a Polidori-like figure, it ends with a footnote signed “Ed.”, referring to Watts – possibly an indirect mark of his authorship.¹³³

Such a hypothesis completely reinvents the narrative around the entire episode, which seems to me an intelligent and careful operation designed to elevate Polidori up the literary ladder. Unfortunately for him, it only turned out to be the cause of his damaged reputation and relationship with both Henry Colburn and John Murray. This case of literary vampirism, regardless of the actual course of events, perfectly portrays the ambition of a man doomed to remain within the halo of Lord Byron, even if this work has represented a fundamental part of nineteenth-century English fiction. Yet, even though the tale owes its origins to Byron “groundwork”, it is Polidori who deserves the credit for establishing the sophisticated modern development of the folkloric blood-sucker. Therefore, it is precisely this tension that invites a close examination to the text itself. In order to understand how this dynamic force operates through the pages, the following chapter will shift from these extra-textual circumstances to the actual narrative, exploring the several readings that the tale still offers to its readers.

¹³³ Groom, “Polidori’s ‘The Vampyre’: Composition, Publication, Deception”, cit., p. 55.

Chapter 3: Textual Analysis and Critical Interpretations

3.1 Unfolding the Narrative

After having extensively discussed both the cultural background of the time and the still controversial history of composition and publication of the tale, my intention is to turn to the plot itself, to establish the groundwork for the textual analysis of the tale and its possible interpretations.

The Vampyre's narrative unfolds having as point of departure or initial inspiration Lord Byron's fragment, which was appended by John Murray to the first edition of *Mazeppa* (1819). According to the original plot imagined by the English poet, a young man tours Eastern Europe having as companion an older friend, Darvell. After their departure, the man seems to be increasingly weakened by obscure causes, until they are both forced to stop in a Moslem cemetery, since he seems to be on the verge of death. At last, Darvell eventually makes the young man promise to disguise his death just before he passes away and starts changing in colour. It is at this point that Byron interrupted the composition of his fragment, hinting at Darvell as a possible victim of vampirism and most probably on the verge of turning into one.¹³⁴

Polidori's tale is instead opened by the alluring presence of Lord Ruthven, who enters English society and gains popularity especially because of his peculiar presence, which makes him the perfect guest in most of upper society events:

It happened that in the midst of the dissipations attendant upon a London winter, there appeared at the various parties of the leaders of the *ton* a nobleman, more remarkable for his singularities, than his rank. He gazed upon the mirth around him, as if he could not participate therein.¹³⁵

This fascinating figure catches the attention of a passionate young man, Aubrey, who shortly after decides to leave England for Europe together with the nobleman. After some time spent together during their journey, Aubrey starts to notice strange details in the behaviour of his companion, concerning his habits with young women and his depravity. Being warned by some letters from his homeland, the young man discovers Ruthven's real interest in seducing women and conducting them to disgrace, thus leading to

¹³⁴ Switzer Richard, "Lord Ruthwen and the Vampires", *The French Review*, American Association of Teachers of French, 1955, Vol. 29, pp. 107-112, p. 109.

¹³⁵ Polidori, "The Vampyre", cit., p. 3.

Aubrey's decision of parting ways from Ruthven and continuing the journey to Athens alone. Once in Greece, he starts to be interested in antiquities and meets a beautiful young woman, Ianthe, with whom he passionately falls in love. After some peaceful time spent with the Greek young girl, Aubrey finds himself almost killed by a vampire in a forest and finds out that the same creature has deprived him of Ianthe, the girl being horribly murdered by a bloodsucker.

There was no colour in her cheek, not even upon her lip; yet there was a stillness about her face that seemed almost as attaching as the life that once dwelt there: - upon her neck and breast was blood, and upon her throat were the marks of teeth having opened the vein: - to this the men pointed, crying, simultaneously struck with horror, 'a Vampyre, a Vampyre!' ¹³⁶

It is at this point that Lord Ruthven and wounded Aubrey meet again during the latter's recovery in Greece. Even though the young man believes the nobleman to be the mysterious murderer, they renew their acquaintance and continue together their journey across the country. It is because of the encounter with some bandits that Ruthven is wounded and dies after having almost forced Aubrey to swear an oath.

'Swear!' cried the dying man, raising himself with exultant violence, 'Swear by all your reveres, by all your nature fears, swear that for a year and a day you will not impart your knowledge of my crimes or death to any living being in any way, whatever may happen, or whatever you may see.' - His eyes seemed bursting from their sockets: 'I swear!' said Aubrey; he sunk laughing upon his pillow and breathed no more. ¹³⁷

Following this terrible experience in Greece and Southern Europe, the young man goes back to England, where the preparations to introduce his sister, Ms. Aubrey, are being completed. He eventually discovers that one of his sister's most eligible suitors is Ruthven himself, returned from the dead and under the title of Earl of Marsden. Due to the impossibility of telling others the truth of Earl Marsden's identity because of his oath, Aubrey starts his descent into madness and isolation, being unable to save his sister from her marriage with Lord Ruthven. At last, the oath ends precisely at midnight on the wedding night, allowing Aubrey to finally warn the family's guardians before expiring. Unfortunately for the young bride, "[t]he guardians hastened to protect Miss Aubrey; but when they arrived, it was too late. Lord Ruthven had disappeared, and Aubrey's sister had glutted the third of a VAMPIRE!" ¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Polidori, "The Vampyre", cit., p. 12.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

Functional to my analysis of the narrative is the description of the characters as designed by Polidori. Firstly, it is undeniable that both Lord Ruthven and young Aubrey have a prominent space in the plot, which underlines the relationship between the two companions touring Southern and Eastern Europe. The former is represented as a rich nobleman whose peculiarities allow him to be invited in every important house, where his seductive arts can satisfy his libertine lifestyle. Initially, his being a creature of the night is only hinted by descriptions such as “the deathly hue of his face, which never gained a warmer tint”,¹³⁹ until the end of the tale, when it is confirmed by the narrator himself, which plays a role in the establishment of his supernatural being, something which is slowly perceived also by his young friend throughout the journey. Therefore, Aubrey can feel a sort of evil power springing from the nobleman, perhaps due to his vicious character or more likely to his vampiric essence, which is finally recognized after Aubrey’s new acquaintance with Greek folklore and its “accurate description of Lord Ruthven”.¹⁴⁰ Additionally, the vampire is connected with the idea of physical and intellectual power that goes beyond the limits of Nature. His power over his tragic victims results not only in the perceived strength that he holds, but also in his compelling presence and manners, thus rendering it impossible for his prey to escape the predator’s will. His strength and control are also underlined by the shift in name from Lord Ruthven to Lord Strongmore, which was desired by John Polidori to both render less obvious the connection with the Byronic figure, and also to suggest once more his power over the other characters of the narrative.¹⁴¹ Moreover, Lord Ruthven’s intelligence is proven by the profoundly studied, yet diabolical, plan to feed on Aubrey’s female acquaintances. He outplays Aubrey in finding a way to feed on gentle Ianthe and also in making him swear the oath that will condemn Miss Aubrey to be the last victim of his subtle plan. His control over the events of the plot is also evident because of the final satisfaction that Ruthven feels witnessing the fulfilment of his expectations, as perceivable in the ways the evil creature stares at his naïf friend:

¹³⁹ Polidori, “The Vampyre”, cit., p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁴¹ Michela Vanon Alliata, “The Physician and his Lordship: John William Polidori’s ‘The Vampyre’”, *The Gothic. Studies in History, Identity and Space*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020, pp. 13-22, p. 18.

[A]ubrey perceived no difference from the former man, except that at times he was surprised to meet his gaze fixed intently upon him, with a smile of malicious exultation playing upon his lips: he knew not why, but this smile haunted him.¹⁴²

His evil smile and glances are clear signs of the consciousness of his moves and the attended aim being the satisfaction of his thirst at the expense of his innocent victims, young Aubrey included.

The young protagonist embodies indeed the perfect victim for a predator like Ruthven. He is portrayed as a handsome and rich man, whose imagination and emotions dominate his reasoning and immediately make him fall into the vampire's trap. He suddenly picture the older man as the hero of a romance and decides to follow him in his tour of Europe in order to satisfy his curiosity. This idealization of a singular man as Ruthven is clearly influenced by the young man's immaturity, who "thought, in fine, that the dreams of poets were the realities of life",¹⁴³ leading to his impulse decision to leave England and his sister to follow the nobleman. His morals and values start to rise only when the evil nature of the nobleman gets more and more undeniable, because of the pleasure that he feels both in the disgrace of poor men and their families, and in ruining young women's reputation. Accordingly, his moral integrity leads Aubrey to the final decision to part from the Lordship, continuing his journey to Greece without the company of his depraved friend. After his arrival there, his romantic temperament turns the young girl, Ianthe, into the object of his attention and affect, empathising her innocence and beauty. It is only after the girl's death that his immature and passionate temperament starts to leave space to a sense of solitude and sadness, enhanced by the comprehension of his companion's real nature. Still, the total loss of his mental stability occurs after the tragic oath he is forced to swear, followed by the revelation of his sister's marriage with the vampire, whom he is forced not to denounce publicly. Therefore, his final tragic death culminates the sense of impotence and despair felt, due to his promise and the impossibility to stop the doomed union between his little sister and the evil creature.

In relation to the conciseness and relative brevity of the tale, the way in which the different characters are described is functional to the meaning-making of the narrative. This explains the important analysis of the female victims of the vampire, which display a peculiar characterization. Firstly, Ianthe is a meaningful character not only because of

¹⁴² Polidori, "The Vampyre", cit., p. 13.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

the importance that she acquires for young Aubrey, but mainly because of the origin of her name. 'Ianthé' is indeed a term of Greek origins, which is normally associated with some kind of floral beauty. Moreover, this was also the pseudonym employed by Lord Byron to honour Lady Charlotte Harley, an eleven-year-old girl daughter of one of his mistresses. The poet even dedicated an entire poem to the purity and innocence of the little girl in the seventh edition of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1814).¹⁴⁴

Ah! may'st thou ever be what now thou art,
Nor unbessem the promise of thy Spring—
As fair in form, as warm yet pure in heart,
Love's image upon earth without his wing,
And guileless beyond Hope's imagining!
And surely she who now so fondly rears
Thy youth, in thee, thus hourly brightening,
Beholds the Rainbow of her future years,
Before whose heavenly hues all Sorrow disappears.¹⁴⁵

This idea of purity and innocence is reinforced by Polidori's characterisation of the young girl, described as delicate and as an example of an ethereal beauty that makes her "the model for a painter, wishing to portray on canvas the promised hope of the faithful in Mahomet's paradise",¹⁴⁶ thus enhancing her description as more a fairy rather than an actual human being. Even though she embodies all the romantic beliefs and expectations of the young man in a woman, she also has a pivotal role in introducing folkloric elements in the plot and anticipating her tragic destiny as a vampire's victim. Her violent death seems to lead Aubrey to the definite loss of both his youthfulness and thoughtless approach to life, now mainly focused on the devilish oath he swears to the nobleman and on the care towards his younger sister. Ms Aubrey, finally, is described as a gentle and innocent young lady, on the point to be introduced to society. She, unlike other young ladies, is not an example of the same grace and beauty but the representation of a kind of melancholy and thoughtfulness that hint at her inner qualities and intelligence. Her affectionate relationship with her brother connects her with the other prominent female character, Ianthe, with which she shares the love and reverence of the young man. Unfortunately, his brother's affection is not the only thing that she shares with the Greek girl, their tragic destiny to satisfy the thirst of a night creature bound them to represent

¹⁴⁴ Giovannelli, *op. cit.*, pp. 295-296.

¹⁴⁵ Byron, *The works of Lord Byron*, cit., Vol. 2, p. 12.

¹⁴⁶ Polidori, "The Vampyre", cit., p. 8.

the definite loss of the young protagonist, who is thus forced to witness the terrible faith of his only female acquaintances. The innocent women which are deeply loved by Aubrey seem to share a common fate: having to satisfy the evil plans of an immortal creature, whose victory cannot be stopped.

This introduction to the main features of the plot and its characters already gives a hint about the variety of possible interpretations that such narrative inspires. The influence of the Gothic tradition of the time, together with the complex circumstances that brought to the composition of the tale, enabled the development of a number of critical approaches developed both in 20th and 21st centuries that have sought to untangle many of the different possible readings of *The Vampyre*. As a consequence, it is to concentrate on these array of interpretations that the next paragraphs will deal with 20th and 21st century revisionism of Polidori's tale, with the intention to explain why it has to be considered a fundamental source for the birth of the modern vampire.

3.2 Critical Revisionism: Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Scholarship

Although *The Vampyre* presents itself as a short narrative featuring only four main characters and a rather simple plot, it still allows a dense number of possible readings that have been interesting scholars since the second half of the twentieth century, with some new hypotheses offered by scholars as Nick Groom and Fabio Camilletti. Accordingly, this paragraph illustrates the traditional paradigm according to which the tale has been read by generations of scholars and critics, before being able to clearly picture the modern characteristics of the vampire, as shaped by Byron's physician.

Firstly, a fundamental part of the analysis of the tale has been its being both a portrayal of Lord Byron's persona in the description of Lord Ruthven, and a self-portrait of the author in Aubrey's character, resulting from the ambivalent acquaintance that the English poet and the author had. Indeed, Lord Byron has not solely influenced the structure of the tale and its dynamics of publication, but also the characterization of its noble vampire. As Čapek analyses, the nobleman's persona, described according to his numerous peculiarities, reflects the contemporary Byromania and the effects that the relationship with the poet had in Polidori. This alluring presence seems to clearly overlap with the charismatic and hedonist image that Byron developed before his departure from

England,¹⁴⁷ being described in the tale as a man completely “absorbed in himself”,¹⁴⁸ “the hero of a romance”,¹⁴⁹ details that strongly draw the reader’s attention towards the modelling of the character on Byron’s own features. Moreover, even the poet’s morally questionable choices concerning his romantic life, together with some scandalous affairs of his, find a place in the plot, as underlined by Ruthven’s vicious temperament and aristocratic libertinism.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, it is for such reasons that as a vampire he leaves behind the folkloric features of others of his kind to adapt to the Byronian ideal, modelled on Polidori’s perception of his lordship and their acquaintance. The author also comments on the lordship’s cunning tongue: “[w]ho could resist his power? His tongue had dangers and toils to recount—could speak of himself as of an individual having no sympathy with any being on the crowded earth [...]”,¹⁵¹ thus pointing out again the success of the vampire and his direct connection to Lord Byron’s fame.¹⁵² Accordingly, it is not a mere coincidence that Lord Ruthven finds the perfect companion in the naïf and passionate Aubrey, a young man who is suddenly trapped by the nobleman’s alluring presence. Aubrey represents a direct projection of Dr Polidori, not only because of his characterisation but also due to his ambivalent perception of the other man. At first, both Polidori and Aubrey idealize the aristocrat, mainly because of their immature and passionate self and their attraction towards a charismatic man as Byron/Ruthven. It is only after some time spent together that both young men have to face the sarcastic attitude of the two aristocrats and their crossing of moral boundaries.¹⁵³ Therefore, Aubrey and Ruthven’s departure for the *Grand Tour* can be read not only as a disruption in the traditional folkloric features of the vampire, but also as a direct reference to Byron and Polidori’s departure from England in 1816, even though the two did not visit together neither Italy nor Greece. As Vanon Alliata points out:

The transformation of Ruthven/Byron into a vampire, is an aggressive image (by his hand the innocent die), and it is the objective correlative of Aubrey/Polidori’s envy, of his feelings of hostility and revenge towards his master [...]. The envious man is the one who *invidet*, who literally looks askance at someone. [...] Yet, more than a vice, envy is to be interpreted

¹⁴⁷ Čapek, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

¹⁴⁸ Polidori, “The Vampyre”, *cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁰ Čapek, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

¹⁵² Čapek, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

as a defence mechanism, as a desperate attempt to safeguard one's identity when threatened by the comparison with other people one admires.¹⁵⁴

This double sense of admiration and envy towards the English poet can be seen as one of the propellers for such a characterisation. The two couples of men, Byron/Polidori and Ruthven/Aubrey, present some of the differences that underline the effect that the writer wanted to convey. Firstly, the relationship between the two fictional men is almost one between two equals, if not strictly friends, at least peers, companions. On the contrary, it is undeniable that Polidori was considered only a travelling physician to Byron, who did not see in the former a companion as valuable as Percy Bysshe Shelley and did not avoid himself from the continuous derision of the young physician. In addition, the fact that the vampire is labelled as a real villain further connects to the turn that their relationship took during the journey across Europe. Indeed, it is Lord Ruthven's corruption and vicious lifestyle that draws Aubrey's attention to his evil behaviour, acting as a further critic towards the real Byron. Most probably, it was Polidori's resentment that resulted in such a characterisation and shift of perspective in the tale. For instance, after Ianthe's death, it is the vampire who takes care of the young man, becoming "his constant attendant",¹⁵⁵ contrary to the reality of Polidori's role during his tour of Europe.¹⁵⁶ In addition, if Polidori parted from his employer after the latter took such a decision, in the tale it is young Aubrey who decides to part for the aristocrat, not being able to bear any more scandalous behaviour. This shifting in perspective from the reality of events and the fictional rendering of them seems to me an attempt to give a more prominent agency to Aubrey/Polidori, as opposed to the author's reality of living "in the halo of the moon".¹⁵⁷

The shaping of the sinister vampire of the tale was not influenced solely by Lord Byron's persona and charismatic allure, but also by factors as the physician's medical studies and thesis' subject. As I have already mentioned in the previous chapter, Polidori graduated with a thesis on the subject of somnambulism, "Oneirodynia" (1815), which probably shaped certain features of the vampire, which are still recognisable in contemporary fiction about blood-suckers. As an example, the author writes:

¹⁵⁴ Vanon Alliata, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

¹⁵⁵ Polidori, "The Vampyre", *cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁵⁶ Vanon Alliata, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

¹⁵⁷ Rossetti, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

[H]e felt himself grappled by one whose strength seemed super-human: determined to sell his life as dearly as he could, he struggled; but it was in vain: he was lifted from his feet and hurled with enormous force against the ground: - his enemy threw himself upon him[.]¹⁵⁸

As this passage makes clear, the strength of the vampire is able to easily overcome the young man, who cannot fight the creature or oppose at his attack. Therefore, John William's knowledge of the unusual strength that could derive from somnambulism, and its trance-like state, influenced the interpretations of some of the peculiar aspects of the creature.¹⁵⁹ Another important parallel between somnambulists and Ruthven is the detail that he rarely focuses his attention on objects or people in general. "[T]he death grey eye [and] few other signs of his observation of external objects, other than a tacit assent to their existence, implied by the avoidance of their contact"¹⁶⁰ are other important elements that the author's medical preparation on somnambulism influenced, most probably in light of the identification of vampires as creatures of the night, wandering on earth under the effects of moonlight as a somnambule would normally do. Accordingly, after his death Ruthven's body is exposed to the first rays of the moon, causing the healing of his wounded body and his comeback to life, as a man who lives between the world of the living and eternal sleep.

The nature of Ruthven's absent gaze shows an attitude towards external beings has not only been read according to Polidori's previous studies, but also as a direct consequence of the spread of Byron's portraits both in England and Europe. Contemporary readership would have been familiar with the circulation of such images, which played an important role in the idealisation of the charismatic allure of the English poet, while representing some of the first examples of visual art exploited by the literary market for the sake of fame and success. Consequentially, in reading some passages of the tale where Aubrey looks at Ruthven's profile while he gazes at something else, the author perhaps wanted to recreate the effect of some of Byron's portraits and the distance that was often created between the viewer and the paintings.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, the vampire himself is never described directly as a physical being, but mainly according to his sudden

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 12.

¹⁵⁹ Anne Stiles, Stanley Finger and John Bulevich, "Somnambulism and Trance States in the Works of John William Polidori, Author of *The Vampyre*", *European Romantic Review*, 2010, Vol. 21, No. 6, pp. 789-807, p. 799.

¹⁶⁰ Polidori, "The Vampyre, cit., p. 5.

¹⁶¹ Wassif, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

apparition and visual characteristics, as “a mounted portrait looking out of a frame”.¹⁶² Above all, it is specifically because of a portrait that Aubrey is able to recognize the vampire in his sister’s fiancé, who disguises himself under the title Earl of Marsden. As a result, the emptiness of his gaze and his stillness enables Aubrey to start fantasising about the man, making him the projection of a romantic hero and also reflecting the gaze back to his persona, resulting in a blindness and indifference that the two protagonists share.

Lord Ruthven in his carriage, and amidst the various wild and rich scenes of nature, was always the same: his eye spoke less than his lips; and though Aubrey was nearer the object of his curiosity, he obtained no greater gratification from it than the constant excitement of vainly wishing to break that mystery, which to his exalted imagination began to assume the appearance of something supernatural.¹⁶³

Because of the impossibility to satisfy his curiosity the young man has to turn to his own imagination and is ultimately trapped in self-analysis, desiring the unfolding of the mystery, he ends up looking for the lordship in himself.¹⁶⁴ This specific reading can easily lead to the consideration of the vampire as a double of the young man, a hidden self which not even his own being is capable of unravelling and comprehend. As Wassif suggests: “[H]is own thoughts, rather than Ruthven, destroy Aubrey when his unvented rage breaks a blood vessel in his brain”,¹⁶⁵ thus reinforcing the idea that the nobleman can be interpreted as an inner side of the young man.

The idea of Lord Ruthven as an external representation of Aubrey’s repressed self is also supported by the choice of his name, since it is phonologically similar to the term ‘riven’, which could possibly point to the split personality of the protagonist.¹⁶⁶ Identifying the nobleman as an evil double, whose purpose is to embody the most hidden parts of the young man, is an interpretation which does not only account for the unquestionable role of Byron in the shaping of the modern vampire, but that suggests a more complex dynamic between the two characters. The theory of the double being accepted, the two companions would result two different sides of the same man: a naïf and passionate young man which carries in him many repressed desires and feelings,

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁶³ Polidori, “The Vampyre”, cit., p. 5.

¹⁶⁴ Wassif, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁶⁶ Giovannelli, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

projected in the Lord's persona. Such interpretation has also been allowed by the consideration of the man's union with both Ianthe and Ms Aubrey as an expression of the protagonist's repressed self, resulting in the accomplishment of such desires only by his evil double, a vampire whose actions are justified by his evil nature, thus leaving Aubrey's innocence untouched.¹⁶⁷ According to Ahmet Süner: "the sensual descriptions of Ianthe hint at the sexual interest in Aubrey's contemplation of her and even suggest the possibility of an illicit liaison between them, but Aubrey naturally sides with virtue".¹⁶⁸ Accordingly, some moments such as the visit to the antique ruins in Greece present instances of the fact that Aubrey would be more interested in the contemplation of Ianthe, rather than in ancient artifacts.

As she danced upon the plain, or tripped along the mountain's side, one would have thought the gazelle a poor type of her beauties; [...] the whole beauty of her form, floating as it were upon the wind, to the eager gaze of him, who forgot the letters he had just deciphered upon an almost effaced table, in the contemplation of her sylph-like figure.¹⁶⁹

Such a passage labels the relationship between the young man and the innocent lady as romance from which the latter has to protect himself by inscribing Ianthe in a discourse of innocence and transparency, enough to avoid any kind of over-sexualisation of the female character and her impact on his virtuosity.¹⁷⁰ As confirmed by this interpretation, Lord Ruthven, "who represents all the intimate horrors, and publicly unacceptable pleasures, of private life including wayward sexual fantasies",¹⁷¹ reflects Aubrey's anxieties about his sexuality outside marriage, thus presenting a vampire who has vicious liaisons with women of high rank and acts in order to destroy their reputation. Moreover, Ianthe's own death is another possible demonstration of the protagonist's participation on the vampire's actions. The young girl is raped and killed by Lord Ruthven in the darkness while a fight goes on between the two characters, a passage in which the ambiguous use of the pronoun "he" could hint at the double personality of the protagonist, who is restored as an individual only when the light of the torches breaks in the hovel and interrupts the fight. Such a scene could possibly suggest an episode which is only imagined by Aubrey,

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶⁸ Ahmet Süner, "The Gothic Horrors of the Private Realm and the Return to the Public in John Polidori's 'The Vampyre'", *Moderna Språk*, 2018, Vol.112, pp. 187-200, p. 192

¹⁶⁹ Polidori, "The Vampyre", cit., pp. 8-9.

¹⁷⁰ Süner, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

or at least a case in which the vampire is once again more than just an evil creature who lives draining blood for his female victims.¹⁷² He enjoys satisfying the inner desires of his antagonist, fulfilling thoughts which are hidden even at their beholder. From my own perspective, even though it is certainly possible to read Lord Ruthven as the projection of some of Aubrey's most sinful desires, I would still argue that the two characters maintain a certain level of agency and independence, thus leaving a space for both interpretations.

The different readings, like the reflection of Byron in the villain or the doubling self, have been provided by scholars throughout the decades and are functional to the picturing of the important role that the tale had for European culture and literature, thus establishing recurrent tropes, like the vampire/human couple, that have brought to the composition of masterpieces as *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker and many others works. Consequentially, the modelling of the modern myth of the vampire according to his noble origins and status will be the centre of the following paragraph, underlining the heritage of John W. Polidori's tale in the western imaginary and trying to picture its salient aspects.

3.3 Establishing the Aristocratic Monster

Lord Ruthven again before him—circumstances started up in a dreadful array—the dagger—his oath.—He roused himself, he could not believe it possible—the dead rise again!—He thought his imagination had conjured up the image his mind was resting upon. It was impossible that it could be real—he determined, therefore, to go again into society; for though he attempted to ask concerning Lord Ruthven, the name hung upon his lips, and he could not succeed in gaining information.¹⁷³

As this passage suggests, the peculiar figure of Polidori's nobleman is one of a kind, capable of not only travelling from death to life as he pleases, but also navigating through the centuries, thus establishing the myth of the vampire, which still affects and influences western culture in literature, music and cinema. The alluring Lord Ruthven, villain of the tale, is introduced in such an innovative and different way, compared to the preceding folkloric tradition, that he accordingly became the progenitor of many literary vampires, especially regarding his noble origins and the trope of the travelling vampire, both features being present in later nineteenth-century literature, concerning both male and female vampires.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 196.

¹⁷³ Polidori, "The Vampyre", cit., p. 18.

The decision of characterising the vampire as a noble perhaps was not only based of the reflection of Byron's persona, but also due to the contemporary growing habit of describing certain members of society as vampire-like. Indeed, throughout the eighteenth century, the idea of vampirism arrived in England and rapidly took an aristocratic connotation because of the development of contemporary society and the association of power and authority with the blood-sucker. In 1732 Piers Gaveston, an English nobleman, was described as the first aristocratic vampire, followed by many other examples of British nobles, who at the time were described in terms of vampiric features.¹⁷⁴ Thus, the aristocratic connotation of the bloodsucker reached the common use and entered English culture immediately. Consequentially, the figure of the vampire has been often interpreted according to a Marxist view, as a representation of the capital, which "is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives more, the more labour it sucks".¹⁷⁵ As a consequence, the vampire's accumulation of life force, in the form of blood, can be read as the accumulation of someone's labour to maintain its own immortal life.¹⁷⁶ In such a context, as Nick Groom underlines, vampirism was to be connected to wealth and its direct result: power. Thus, establishing a prominent criticism towards both inherited wealth and the one acquired through trading and economic growth.¹⁷⁷ The folkloric legends which had arrived in England from the Eastern areas of Europe left behind their original connotations, to allow the spread of this new imaginary: the creature of the night as an upper-class politician, a lawyer or any kind of individual in power, possessing both a name and wealth at his disposal. Since early nineteenth-century England presented a society which was increasingly capitalistic, the characterisation of Lord Ruthven as member of the London aristocracy and his corrupted self can be interpreted as the picturing of a "fundamentally antibourgeois figure",¹⁷⁸ "predictable object of middle-class fantasies".¹⁷⁹ This tendency was most probably enhanced by the anxiety towards immense wealth and aristocrats whose origins were unknown to the public. Still, if it is undeniable that in a growing capitalistic society much of the fears

¹⁷⁴ Nick Groom, "John Polidori, 'The Vampyre,' and the Rise of the Aristocratic Vampire", in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire*, Simon Bacon (ed.), Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, pp. 229-246, p. 232.

¹⁷⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Harmondsworth, 1976, Vol. 1, p. 342.

¹⁷⁶ Franco Moretti, "Dialectic of Fear", in *Signs Taken for Wonders*, Verso, 1997, pp. 83-108, p. 91.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

¹⁷⁸ Punter, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

¹⁷⁹ *Idem.*

were about wealth and economical power, another source of the Lord's power has been identified in the sexual sphere. Accordingly, the vampire presents his persona as a real "lady-killer",¹⁸⁰ both concerning the social reputation of the women he enchants during his journey, and the physical death of both Ianthe and Mrs Aubrey. As Punter suggests, this specific aspect of Lord Ruthven, his corruption of young women of high rank and their moral destruction, could be read like a modernisation of the *droit de seigneur*, "that kind of absolute sexual privilege which is a concomitant of absolute power".¹⁸¹ As a consequence, I would argue it possible to trace Lord Ruthven's decision to assault and kill Ianthe as the claiming of his aristocratic right to possess of Aubrey's innocent lover, disposing of her as he likes most. Moreover, as a master who employs his wealth to forge the others' will, the vampire is able to do the same with his seductive arts.

[Aubrey's] guardians insisted upon his immediately leaving his friend, and urged, that his character was dreadfully vicious, for that the possession of irresistible powers of seduction, rendered his licentious habits more dangerous to society. It had been discovered, that his contempt for the adultress had not originated in hatred of her character; but that he had required, to enhance his gratification, that his victim, the partner of his guilt, should be hurled from the pinnacle of unsullied virtue, down to the lowest abyss of infamy and degradation: in fine, that all those females [...] had [...] thrown even the mask aside, and had not scrupled to expose the whole deformity of their vices to the public gaze.¹⁸²

This passage perfectly underlines how, even in the sexual sphere, Lord Ruthven's enchanting powers are central, in that they allow no possibility of escape to the victim and request the sacrifice of their virtuous self. This supernatural influence symbolises one of the first instances of the vampire's alluring powers and ability to bend the individual's will, something that shaped part of the nineteenth-century vampire fiction. Still, the vampire as an aristocrat certainly was not, as I have underlined, invented by John W. Polidori. Instead, it was developed in accordance with the shaping of a new upwardly mobile society and the rising of the entrepreneur's class.¹⁸³ Moreover, it could also be argued that the protagonist of Byron's fragment, Augustus Darvell, even preceded Polidori's vampiric nobleman, though it is Lord Ruthven who has really marked a point of departure and played the role of reference for many authors who came after. The heritage of this first instance of such a trope is evident not only in the following literature,

¹⁸⁰ Robert Morrison, and Chris Baldick, "Introduction", in *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2020, pp. vii-xxii, p. xx.

¹⁸¹ Punter, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

¹⁸² Polidori, "The Vampyre", *cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁸³ Groom, "John Polidori, 'The Vampyre,' and the Rise of the Aristocratic Vampire", *cit.*, p. 243.

but also in today's western culture, where it is not uncommon to still encounter fictions about wealthy and influential vampires.

Having already dealt with the noble origins of the modern vampire, I will now focus on another essential characteristic of this creature: his being very fond of travelling. In folkloric legends and reports a vampire was said to wander in the vicinity of his or her tomb, often persecuting the family or other inhabitants of the village. If there are some instances of a vampire who infests also the villages in the proximity of his own, it was unthinkable for a half-dead man to travel across Europe together with his companion. Most probably, to Polidori the Lord's journey from death to life was not enough to satisfy a romantic readership. Instead, he used his personal experience, having travelled across Europe with Byron, to inscribe his vampire narrative in the popular travel writing, which characterise both the end of eighteenth century and the beginning of nineteenth.¹⁸⁴ As Bowring underlines, Polidori would have been very familiar with the genre of the travel narrative, primarily because of the fact that his father used to send him such works during his school years. Moreover, the romantic society's attraction towards the *Grand Tour* "increased tourism and interest in other cultures and exotic locations".¹⁸⁵ Such journeys interested a huge portion of the readership, which had the possibility to read descriptions of foreign countries without leaving England at all. If earlier examples of travel writing focused primarily on the place itself, romantic influence shifted the attention to the writer, who began to have a role as significant as the land itself.¹⁸⁶ Accordingly, the public attention towards the travels of Lord Byron, through the eyes of someone close to him, explains why John Murray probably commissioned the writing of John Polidori's diary and promised to pay £500 for it. As a consequence, the connection between a gothic tale as *The Vampyre* and travel writing goes deeper than the experience of the *Grand Tour* per se, which is shared by the protagonist and the vampire. Instead, the idea of travelling across Europe and meeting foreign cultures was itself "gothic", distancing the self from the known and secure mother land to dislocate the traveller in the unknown of mysterious countries. Moreover, the Romantic era contributed to this physical displacement of the individual with a new attention given to the psychological downturns of this experience,

¹⁸⁴ Nicola Bowring, "Walking with Vampires: Polidori and the Gothic Travel Narrative", in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire*, ed. Simon Bacon, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, pp. 191-207, p. 193.

¹⁸⁵ *Idem*.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

the inner journey of the travelling writer.¹⁸⁷ Therefore, when analysing the importance of Aubrey's journey across Europe, it is possible to recognise the influence of such a genre and of its change from the early Romantic experience to an authentic gothic nightmare, resulting in the tragic finale of the tale. Consequentially, the outcome of his experience is not that of self-growth and of a story to tell an audience, but rather the loss of his naif personality and of the ability to express himself without being considered mentally ill.¹⁸⁸

The idea of having young men travelling across the continent in order to gain maturity and complete their education has often been portrayed as a nineteenth-century form of tourism, which took interest in places that evoked curiosity and a sense of exoticism. Hence, the protagonist's behaviour as the one of a tourist visiting the antiquities of Greece and Italy can be associated to the shaping of this upper-class form of education. If Aubrey can undoubtedly be read as a tourist guilty of spoiling the country he visits because of the vampire he brings with him, the latter, due to his thirst of young women's blood, represents "the most negative stereotypes of tourist-travellers".¹⁸⁹ Lord Ruthven, without any sign of foreign-looking, constructed the idea of a vampire who had no difficulties in displacing his body across countries, contrary to Count Dracula himself, and even more cosmopolitan than Stocker's aristocratic bloodsucker.¹⁹⁰ The entire model of travel writing and the development of tourism surely played a role in the description of the two characters' journey in Greece, and established another important aspect of the modern vampire: the ability to travel unbothered across countries as a wealthy cosmopolitan man. Consequentially, in reading following travelling vampires as Carmilla arriving at Laura and his father's castle, or Dracula arriving to England from Transylvania, Polidori's influence has to be recognised.

As Ken Gelder suggests in *Reading the Vampire*, the union between vampire fiction and Greece has been particularly relevant and part of a long and established European tradition.¹⁹¹ Indeed, not only Polidori's first vampire fiction is partly set in this exotic environment, but also Lord Byron's poem *The Giaour* (1813) and his 1816 fragment were. Since the experience of the *Grand Tour* was becoming increasingly

¹⁸⁷ *Idem.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.197.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

¹⁹⁰ *Idem.*

¹⁹¹ Ken Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, London/New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 25.

accessible to the middle classes, a new mode of travelling was demanded, at which Byron's works responded with the figure of the poet wandering in his perpetual exile in countries as Greece. Particularly in *The Giaour*, Byron had included a female character, Leila, to embody Greece, her eyes being describes as the ones of a gazelle, languishing dark eyes. Conversely, Polidori assimilated the essence of the country to the beauty and innocence of Ianthe:

As she danced upon the plain, or tripped along the mountain's side, one would have thought the gazelle a poor type of her beauties; for who would have exchanged her eyes, apparently the eye of animated nature, for that sleepy luxurious look of the animal suited but to the taste of epicure.¹⁹²

As a result, rejecting the absent and 'languishing' image of Greece that Byron had depicted in his lines, Polidori leaves space for the living and 'animated' presence of the young girl, who distracts him from his classical studies and provide a different perspective on the Greek essence.¹⁹³ Since Ianthe provides Aubrey with a number of tales regarding vampires and those stories are shared by the community, Greece comes to have a functional role in the recognition of the vampire. Whereas England society is unable to see Lord Ruthven for what he truly is, Greek folk has no difficulty in identifying the young girl's cause of death, "A Vampyre! A Vampyre!",¹⁹⁴ reconnecting the figure of the blood-sucker to its folkloric origins.¹⁹⁵ Similarly, Count Dracula is feared and recognised as a devilish creature by the villagers who try to dissuade Johnathan Harker from continuing his journey to the castle of the aristocrat. According to this perspective, modern vampires seem to have no difficulty in being accepted in western societies and upper-classes but are easily unmasked by those rural communities who still have a bond with ancient folkloric beliefs.

Lord Ruthven's kind of vampire had a rapid and growing success after the publication of the tale in 1819. For instance, the French novel *Lord Ruthven, ou les Vampires* by Cyprien Bérard was published in 1820, only after the publication of Polidori's tale in French.¹⁹⁶ Still, the real evolution of the figure and its influence was due to its theatrical adaptations that fascinated contemporary audience and lead to the

¹⁹² Polidori, "The Vampyre", cit., pp. 8-9.

¹⁹³ Gelder, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹⁹⁴ Polidori, "The Vampyre", cit., p. 12.

¹⁹⁵ Gelder, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

¹⁹⁶ Switzer, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

publication, almost eighty years after, of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. As far as theatre is concerned, it was the melodramatic version of the French playwrights Carmouche, Jouffrey and Nodier (1820) to inaugurate *The Vampyre*'s adaptation on stage. Focusing primarily on the last pages of the tale, the three-acts melodrama not only differed from the original work but also gave the villain some of the characteristics to be found in Stoker's Count Dracula, as his immortal gaze.¹⁹⁷ In addition to this adaptation, the English playwright, James Robinson Planché, transformed Lord Ruthven from a companion to a ghostly vampire, an incorporeal being whose cursed spirit was represented on stage thanks to the invention of the Vampire Trap, which made the actor alternatively descend or rise through the floor or appear like a phantom on stage.¹⁹⁸ Hence, what rose from the melodramatic rendering of the tale was the acquisition of a number of new nuances by Lord Ruthven, as his sense of remorse, thus making him even more a likeable character by the audience of the time.¹⁹⁹ The success of this modern version of the bloodsucker was brought on stage not only by melodramas but also by a variety of comedies and parodies, which explain his influence on the European culture of the time. Eventually, Alexandre Dumas father, collaborated together with Auguste Maquet to the first performance on stage of *Le Vampire* (1851), which brought together all the preceding material on the subject before the advent of Carmilla and Dracula's time.²⁰⁰

According to the various interpretations of the tale written by John William Polidori and its theatrical renderings, it has been possible to trace the motivations behind the construction of the compelling figure of the English vampire and to better understand why Lord Ruthven's characterisation has affected a so important number of authors and works after his first appearance in English Literature. All the ambiguities on the tale's composition and publication, the possible plagiarism of certain aspects from Byron's fragment and the tragic end that Polidori met because of his own agency, do not compromise the importance of a tale that has built the living image of the seductive vampire of noble origins, capable of establish itself from both folkloric reports and

¹⁹⁷ Ronald E. McFarland, "The Vampire on Stage: A Study in Adaptations", *Comparative Drama*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 1987, pp. 19-33, p. 26.

¹⁹⁸ Auerbach, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁹⁹ McFarland, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

²⁰⁰ Switzer, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

modern developments of western society. Polidori's work, outshined by Lord Byron's fame and reputation, has not brought the author to the public recognition that he was hoping for, nor has contributed to the success of his novel, resulting instead in his decision to end his life in 1821, possibly imitating Thomas Chatterton, "whom he (erroneously) believed had killed himself".²⁰¹ Nevertheless, *The Vampyre* represents the first act of a story which is still being told nowadays, both in literature and cinema. The alluring figure of the wealthy vampire who wanders undisturbed among human beings still fascinates western culture, in which the attention of the readership is still captured by the seductive powers of a captivating immortal being. Hence, when he or she makes an appearance in literature or cinema, "immediately the sun sets, [and] night beings".²⁰²

²⁰¹ Groom, "John Polidori, 'The Vampyre,' and the Rise of the Aristocratic Vampire", cit., p. 243.

²⁰² Polidori, "The Vampyre", cit., p. 11.

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