

2

The deformed transformed; or, from bloodsucker to Byronic hero – Polidori and the literary vampire

Conrad Aquilina

AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY VOYAGE from France to the Levant by Joseph Pitton de Tournefort proved to be auspiciously influential as in Greece he would witness a classic case of vampirism attributed to a *vroucolacas*, a peasant superstition which would be assimilated by the Romantics a century later as exotic material for fiction. Tournefort's account, *A Voyage to the Levant* (1702), is anthropological and critical, and dismissed such incidents as mania, 'an epidemical disease of the brain, as dangerous and infectious as the madness of dogs' (89).

Yet such mania fed the Gothic imagination, and Tournefort's voyage to the Levant served to transport the Greek vampire legend into British Romantic literature. Sir Christopher Frayling identifies several archetypes of the literary vampire; one of these, the Byronic, though born in that Romanticism, is still very much a presence in contemporary vampire texts. In this chapter I will show the evolution of the Byronic vampire as it mutated from its folkloric roots, as documented in the ethnography of the likes of Tournefort, into a powerful literary figure. I will also show that, as this archetype evolved, it did so through an interplay with the actual (or imagined) persona of Byron. Thus this rise owes much to the representations and self-dramatisation of Byron's own life, particularly as mediated through the rivalry of his one-time companion, John Polidori. This archetype is in perpetual tension with another archetype – the folkloric, bloodsucking monster. The humanised vampire (whose current incarnation in *Twilight*, it seems, has almost erased those roots) alternates with its bestial ancestor over the course of vampire fiction, leading to a crucial encounter between the two in Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) which I will turn to at the end of the chapter.

It is likely that Byron came across Tournefort's account via Robert Southey's notes to his *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), an epic poem which exemplifies the kind of pretentiousness that Byron loved to mimic and deflate.¹ The *enfant terrible* of British Romanticism also possessed a copy of the 1813 French translation of the *Phantasmagoriana* (1811–1815), a collection of German ghost tales, which inspired the well-known ghost story session in Geneva of 1816 and which, too, made reference to Tournefort. It also inspired John Polidori, Byron's private physician and another vital participant in the parlour game which spawned a literary archetype. In introducing his *Vampyre* (1849), Polidori alludes to 'the veracious Tournefort', and also 'Calmet, [who] in his great work upon the subject put forth some learned dissertations'.² Furthermore, he mentions Southey's *Thalaba* as well as *The Giaour* (1813), the only poem by Byron to feature the vampire of peasant folklore, and from which Polidori quotes extensively.

Many of the writers who incorporated Eastren European revenant folklore into their works felt the need to resort to often pedantic paratexts in an attempt to authenticate the same phenomena from which they drew their dark inspiration. Southey's copious end-notes in *Thalaba* are exemplary, and Book VIII digresses into a lengthy commentary on vampirism, reproducing Tournefort as well as mentioning the notable case of the Serbian *heyduke* 'Arnold Paul', one of the most widely documented cases of vampire epidemics.³ Similarly, the 'Argument' preceding John Stagg's decidedly bloodier poem *The Vampire* (1810) sacrifices brevity for pseudo-medical bombast – the vampire's victims are drained of their blood while sleeping by 'suckosity', then they are 'phlebotomised'.⁴ Stagg, an obscure Romantic poet whose *Vampire* may indeed be his best known work, derived his vampire from the folkloric stereotype of the cadaverous relative who returns from the grave to enervate its victims by draining their blood, this plague to be finally dealt with by impaling the clotting blood-smeared body 'deep in the earth' (line 148).⁵ The details in such early literary representations are derived from the records of vampire infestations in the Slavic countries in 1730, which provoked exhumations and the defiling of corpses. Despite the apparent barbarism of these practices, however, the vampire became simultaneously repulsive and fascinating.

In *The Living Dead*, James B. Twitchell observes how the Romantic successors to the age of Enlightenment turned their eyes towards 'monkish darkness, mesmerism, Satanism, and deviancy of all sorts [while embracing] the vampire [as] an artistic figure of some complexity' which became a highly malleable metaphor.⁶ Thus, Calmet's shambling village folk who return to feed on their blood relations, usually their spouses, find their way into Continental Romantic literature.⁷ Vampirism in British literature becomes a

voracious theft of blood and spirit, moving from faintly detectable to plainly perceptible leeching. In their poetry, Stagg, Byron and their successors endowed their vampires with sadism, blood-thirst and the parasitical qualities of the leech, psychic and actual. This process from enervation to blood-letting is quite clear in Stagg's poem, where Herman first informs his preoccupied wife that 'In spite of all [his] wonted strength ... / The dreadful malady at length / Will drag [him] to the silent tomb' (lines 29–32). The cause of Herman's 'sad pant[ing] and tug[ging] for breath' (line 18) is revealed to be his friend Sigismund, newly deceased, yet now 'suck[ing] from [his] vein the streaming life' (line 73) and 'drain[ing] the fountain of [his] heart' (line 74).

Southey's *Thalaba* never reveals the full sordidness of vampiric defilement, nor the violence required to end it. By contrast, Stagg's description of Sigismund's walking corpse, with 'jaws cadaverous', 'besmear'd / With clotted carnage o'er and o'er' (lines 125–6) and with body bloated after having drunk his fill, is exceptionally gory for this period of English vampire literature, recalling the graphic chronicles of Calmet. Stagg's vampires are indisputably folkloric and both have the mandatory 'sharpen'd stake' (line 148) driven through their bodies, pinning them forever to their 'slumb'ring tomb' (line 152). In Southey's poem, the same method is employed, with Thalaba ordered to 'strike' the vampire Oneiza with his 'lance'; however, here the damaging blow is cathartic, releasing her spirit.⁸

Composed as a *Fragment of a Turkish Tale*, *The Giaour* is Byron's only incontestable direct contribution to vampire literature. Byron roots his vampire within the peasant folklore of the Levant (rather than that of Eastern Europe), having travelled to Athens on his Grand Tour between 1809 and 1810. In many ways, Byron's representation of the vampire whose 'corse shall from its tomb be rent' (line 756) and 'At midnight drain the stream of life' (line 760) is akin to Stagg's Sigismund, the 'goblin' who in an act of unholy procreation creates more of his kind and in his blood-matted image.⁹ But Byron's *Giaour* is more than a mere continuation of the folkloric vampire superstition. Byron's poem attributes to the vampire the tragic quality which would become one of the trademarks of the new strain of vampires modelled on Byron's own persona. The fate laid upon the *Giaour* is that he should 'ghastly haunt [his] native place / And suck the blood of all [his] race' (lines 757–8).

Byron's *Giaour* is cursed with 'a fire unquench'd, unquenchable' (line 751) so that 'Nor ear can hear, nor tongue can tell / The tortures of that inward hell!' (lines 753–4), this hell being the 'banquet which perforce / Must feed [the *Giaour*'s] livid living corse' (lines 761–2). Previously, few had aimed at understanding – or justifying – the demon's own torments, since vampiric defilement was a scourge to be dealt with promptly and mercilessly; the

victim's plight was what mattered. In a departure from Southey and Stagg, Byron's vampire is both victimiser and victim. This banquet consists of the Giaour's own flesh and blood, with the 'youngest – most belov'd of all' (line 768) providing the most agonising feed as his daughter blesses him.¹⁰ Byron's Giaour, essentially the *vroucolacas* found in Tournefort, Calmet and others but refitted in Oriental garb, points the genre into a new direction, that of the ancestral curse, while retaining the trappings of folklore. Beyond this, there is little proof that Byron's interest was sufficiently piqued to pursue the vampire legend further, as his letters to his publisher Murray were to show.

However, Byron, or rather his many incarnations in literature and art, remains crucial to the evolution of the fictional vampire. In this respect, we must perforce note the shift from depicting the vampire as a shambling blood-drinking revenant to representations of the vampire as irresistible Byronic hero. Byron's *Giaour* aside, the archetypal 'Byronic' vampire was firmly established only as a result of Byromania, the notoriety that effused from the poet's dramatic life and works and which permeated social consciousness in the nineteenth century. In this, Polidori's *Vampyre* was to play a functional role.

On a stormy evening in the summer of 1816, two monsters were born. Not the unclean offspring of the Eastern European vampire but an original product of Romanticism in the West, *Frankenstein* became an instant success, even though its author, the then Mary Godwin, was till then virtually unknown. More ironic is the fate of the other monster, the first aristocratic vampire, who made his mark on high society only by a curious combination of events in which was involved the most colourful, mysterious, and maligned figure of British Romanticism itself – Lord Byron.

Apart from the forty-odd lines of this passage in *The Giaour*, Byron's association with and unconcealed aversion towards the folkloric vampire was decidedly uncanny. He was born with a caul and a deformed right foot – the latter associated with the Devil's chosen while the former was, according to Moldavian folklore, reputed to turn a person into a vampire after death. Byron often sarcastically quipped that he had been predestinately cursed at birth.

Simultaneously revered and reviled, both society's darling and demon, bisexual and profligate, brooding and melancholic, Byron's tempestuous career was to prove both short and scandalous.¹¹ For the real Childe Harold, life was to become one long cathartic pilgrimage in search of a self now entirely constructed by others. Ghislaine McDayter identifies Byron's 'commodification of personality', noting how 'The Byronic had come to

take precedence over Byron, the creation over the creator'.¹² Being sexually initiated at the age of ten by a family servant girl; acquiring poetic fame overnight with *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*; acquiring celebrity status and then forced into self-exile away from British soil following a number of sordid affairs and allegations of incest and homosexuality, Byron is the obvious model for the new strain of post-Romantic vampires who would feature in the genre ever since.¹³ No other personage, however colourful or distinguished, could have contributed to such excess all the necessary requisites which make up the Byronic hero, a figure of mythic proportions akin to Milton's Satan or Marlowe's Faustus.

The Byronic hero bears the dual markings of both villain and victim. He is a fallen creature in its own right; a dark angel bringing both love and death, yearning for redemption and ultimately finding none. His is a tragic mind which 'in itself / Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven'.¹⁴ Byron's description of his eponymous hero in *Lara* (1814) is thus both archetypal and solipsistic: 'In him inexplicably mix'd appear'd / Much to be loved and hated, sought and feared' (XVII.289–90) and 'There was in him a vital scorn of all ... He stood a stranger in this breathing world / An erring spirit from another hurl'd; / A thing of dark imaginings' (XVIII.313, 315–17).¹⁵

Lady Caroline Lamb, an ardent and jilted lover of Byron, was to write as much. Forced to commit shameful public acts of love to win him back, Lamb had her revenge on the poet by defaming him in her novel *Glenarvon*, which was published in May 1816 shortly after Byron left England for Geneva. John Cam Hobhouse, Byron's travel companion, was to write about Lamb's 'impudence to send a ... paragraph to some paper hinting that the whole novel is from the pen of Lord B'.¹⁶ Nonetheless, Lamb's portrait of rakish Lord Glenarvon is not just Byronic but unmistakably that of Byron himself:

It was one of those faces which, having once beheld, we never afterwards forget ... The eye beamed into life as it threw its dark ardent gaze, with a look nearly of inspiration, while the proud curl of the upper lip expressed haughtiness and bitter contempt; yet ... an air of melancholy and dejection shaded over and softened every harsher expression.¹⁷

This Byronic image shares with the Romantic vampire a love of darkness, a hypnotic gaze and a paradoxical obsession with destroying the object of his desire. Transgressing all social and ethical boundaries, the Byronic hero is therefore always an outcast, living in perpetual exile on the fringes of society, on the run from persecution and persecuting others in turn.

Ironically, Byron claimed to have 'a personal dislike to "Vampires"', admitting that the 'little acquaintance' he had with them 'would by no means

induce [him] to reveal their secrets'.¹⁸ In the context of his antagonism with Polidori and the genesis of *The Vampyre* (1819), to which we now turn, Byron's words become less cryptic.¹⁹

Byron himself had little to do with the vampire's humanisation; yet his physician and rival John Polidori would appropriate his aura of melancholic broodiness and reputation of nocturnal lover and destroyer in *The Vampyre*. Polidori had read *Glenarvon* and gluttoned upon its many revelations. Polidori's was the first story to feature the Byronic vampire, a Lord Ruthven possessing 'irresistible powers of seduction [rendering] his licentious habits more dangerous to society'.²⁰ It was the result of a long-drawn feud between the two in which the doctor's jealousy of his employer's notoriety would be quite palpable. Byron in turn fuelled Polidori's resentment by dismissing his authorial attempts with contempt.²¹

Mary Shelley's (as Mary Godwin had become) account of the storytelling which led to *The Vampyre* was published as her 'Introduction' to the third edition of *Frankenstein* (1831), fifteen years after the event supposedly happened. By this time, the depressed Polidori had already published *The Vampyre* and had committed suicide two years later. According to Mary Shelley, after a night of reading from Byron's copy of the *Phantasmagoriana*,

[t]he noble author began a tale, a fragment of which he printed at the end of his poem 'Mazeppa'. Shelley ... commenced one founded on the experiences of his early life. Poor Polidori had some terrible idea about a skull-headed lady, who was ... punished for peeping through a keyhole ... The illustrious poets also, annoyed by the platitude of prose, speedily relinquished their uncongenial task.²²

Mary Shelley's reminiscing, if accurate, is both revealing and significant. For one, it indicates that only Mary herself seems to have been committed to finishing her story. 'Poor Polidori[s]' idea was presumably belittled beyond repair; Byron's tapered to inconclusiveness, and Shelley's remained unnamed and unrecorded. Percy Shelley himself wrote that *Frankenstein* was the only tale to have been completed.²³

Polidori's revelations about Byron's narrative that stormy evening are more telling. Apparently it involved two characters, travelling from England into Greece, where

one of them should die, but before his death, should obtain from his friend an oath of secrecy with regard to his decease. Short time after, the remaining traveller returning to his native country, should be startled at perceiving his

former companion moving about in society, and should be horrified at finding that he made love to his former friend's sister. Upon this foundation I built the *Vampyre*.²⁴

What emerges from Byron's *Fragment of a Story* (1819) is, however, only nominally faithful to Polidori's testimony. The nameless narrator accompanies Augustus Darvell, 'a man of considerable fortune and ancient family' and 'a being of no common order' (126) on a tour of the Continent.²⁵ Voyaging towards the East, the narrator notices Darvell 'evidently wasting away' (128). Resting in a Turkish cemetery in Greece, Darvell asks his companion to swear that 'on the ninth day of the month' (129) he should fling Darvell's ring into the Bay of Eleusis. While he says this, 'a stork, with a snake in her beak' (130) is seen nearby. Darvell dies in the narrator's hands, and is buried in the Muslim burial ground. So ends Byron's odd and decidedly un-vampiric *Fragment*.

That the *Fragment* is a semi-biographical account of Byron's prior adventures with Hobhouse in Greece, drawing on the events and settings so hauntingly described in *Childe Harold*, is indubitable. The fact that Byron vests Darvell in his image is also to be expected. Yet nowhere do we see any reference to vampirism or vampires. Twitchell argues that 'the central image in Byron's story – the stork with the snake in her beak – is nowhere to be found in vampire lore', and that 'the most crucial bit of evidence that Darvell is not a vampire is the rapid decomposition of his body'.²⁶ Moreover, Polidori gives us a different plot for the story in the Introduction to his novel *Ernestus Berchtold* (1819). Are we to suppose that Byron *altered* his *Fragment* on publication? If so, to what purpose?

Frayling believes that the vampire elements were present in the original *Fragment* but that Byron omitted most of them in 1819, when *Mazeppa* was published concurrently with *The Vampyre*, Polidori's 'usurped' version of Byron's 1816 tale.²⁷ This was falsely attributed to Byron himself, with Goethe going as far to praise it as Byron's best work to date; the poet decided he had had enough nonsense about vampires and Polidori and denied authorship. Byron, however, secured authorship rights to his *Fragment* by having it immediately published, albeit in a slightly altered form from the 1816 original, so that his dissociation with any tales of vampirism would be complete. Polidori could face public ridicule alone.

Born out of revenge, *The Vampyre* became involved in a dubious mistake which, however, entangled Byron with the vampiric. Polidori explains how 'the tale ... to which his lordship's name was wrongfully attached' was written at the 'request of a lady' and 'over the course of three mornings'.

Polidori cannot explain how the story ended up in the hands of Henry Colburn, nor does he reveal the name of the person whose words left doubt 'whether it was his lordship's or not' (63). Dismissed by Byron shortly after they left Geneva, Polidori returned to England embittered and poor, but still bent on pursuing his literary ambitions. He also had in his possession Byron's personal notebook which he had stowed away. By then, Byron's caustic and witty retorts against Polidori had intensified and become public. Taking his cue from Lamb, Polidori got his own back by satirising Byron and the Byronic in *The Vampyre* which, while expropriated from Byron's *Fragment*, reveals notable extensions to the genre, these principally involving aristocracy, itinerancy, seduction and dominance.²⁸

Above everything else, Polidori made the vampire dignified, in a perverse kind of way. The vampire, Lord Ruthven, appears as a 'nobleman, more remarkable for his singularities, than for his rank', and while seemingly unable to participate 'upon the mirth around him', he still induces 'a sensation of awe' (39) in those he meets. He also possesses a 'winning tongue' (40) and 'irresistible powers of seduction' rendering his 'licentious habits more dangerous to society' (43).²⁹ Byron and the Byronic thus pervade Polidori's 'Vampyre' to saturation point. Polidori's and Byron's mutual dislike becomes narrative, with both roles clearly distinguishable. In this biographical vampirism, the aristocratic status of Polidori's Byronic villain remains clear. Here Nina Auerbach notes a 'class antagonism' that characterised the Byron/Polidori relationship.³⁰

To all extent and purposes, Polidori did not seek to impersonate Byron but merely wanted to deface an all too recognisable portrait of his rival. Byron's tenancy of ancestral Newstead Abbey in 1808, in the course of which he had unearthed a skull which he reputedly drank hot wine from, is shamelessly transmuted in Lamb's *Glenarvon* into a John de Ruthven drinking 'hotblood from the skull of his enemy'.³¹ This blood-thirst is replicated by Polidori's Ruthven. One can only speculate why he resorted to representing Byron as an aristocratic blood-drinker. Perhaps his slander was intentionally further reaching, extending to the aristocracy which he came to regard with antipathy. Ken Gelder notes one particular dissimilarity between Polidori's vampire narrative and Byron's only poetic contribution to the genre: whereas *The Giaour* 'remove[s] [Byron's] characters from socialised contexts, Polidori's characters are immersed in them'.³² Gelder observes that Ruthven moves freely around society, 'unnoticed', because vampirism is already present in high society, 'the fashionable leisured classes' that Byron frequented; a society whose 'aristocratic representatives prey upon 'the people' wherever they go'.³³

Further compounding the Byronic vampiresque, we find Annabella Milbanke's complaint about Byron's inner conflicts and how 'he would be most unkind to those he loves best, suffering agonies at the same time for the pain he gives them'.³⁴ Byron's grandson would also similarly reveal how Byron's 'dramatic imagination resembled a delusion; he would play at being mad, and gradually get more and more serious, as if he believed himself to be destined to wreck his own life and that of everyone near him'.³⁵

History may have been hard on 'Poor Polidori', for, although managing to exonerate himself of any charges of authorial plagiarism, his story and vampire would long be associated with Byron. True to his fictional *alter egos*, Byron played out these literary roles with mock indifference. In fact, an intriguing entry in Byron's private journal tantalisingly hints at a dark secret which Byron kept hidden from all, promising to reveal why he 'omitted all the really consequential & important parts – from deference to the dead – to the living – and to those who must be both'.³⁶ As Twitchell perceptively notes, 'Life had become theatre'.³⁷

Vampire literature remains indebted to Polidori for ushering in a new archetype, one that would be further embellished and revised by his many successors. The most important distillation perhaps occurs with the victim's sexual awakening. Bloodletting is not explicitly coupled with lust in *The Vampyre* as in later vampire texts. Yet, though it is not made clear in the story, the vampire's victims (all noticeably female) are won over by seduction to the point where they desire corruption. The vampire's bite does not merely drain but it also infuses. Sustenance is taken out and degeneration is injected. Ruthven's victims are defiled both physically and psychologically; their repressed sexuality is exhumed, their fall is complete. Such sexual motifs would pervade the literature of vampirism from then on.

Polidori's little vendetta against Byron was minimal compared to what various plays, stories and operas by authors such as Bérard, Nodier, Planché, Rymer and Dumas did to his own *Vampyre*, which was ruthlessly fed upon.³⁸ In mass-producing his inconsistent and interminable *Varney the Vampyre* (1845–1847), James Malcolm Rymer borrowed many plot ideas from Polidori yet still made crucial innovations in this evolving genre, many of which find their way into the seminal *Dracula* and beyond: an Eastern European vampire; a scientific investigation of vampirism; the initiation of the heroine through the blood-rite; the vampire's projecting fangs and long nails (used to great filmic effect in Murnau's *Nosferatu* in 1922) and finally the vampire's destruction by a lynch mob, which has become an enduring image in monster movies since.³⁹

While vampire literature remains indebted to Polidori for creating a new archetype, to be further embellished and revised by his many successors, one

wonders whether the vampire of folklore would have naturally evolved into the sullen aristocrat in the open shirt and fervid eyes in the absence of Byron's notoriety. 'Aristocratically aloof, unfailingly elegant, and invariably merciless' is how Anne Rice's Lestat describes Byron's descendants; very different from the folkloric vampires who never stray from their birthplace, they are itinerant and questing, touring the Earth in search of other immortals like themselves.⁴⁰ (Stoker's vampire Count assimilates both types, in travelling from Transylvania to London with its teeming crowds but still confined to his boxes of native earth.)

The contemporary vampire's journey is, however, ultimately one of self. Burdened by the weight of immortality and the prospect of ennui, the Byronic vampire contemplates his presence as outsider in the fleeting world of mortal time, and finds solace in autobiography and parody, two forms vampire narratives would take following Anne Rice's popular Vampire Chronicles series. The passive observer of human history would become its contestant; the spoken object a speaking subject. Once we get a vampire to tell the tale instead of a tale being told about a vampire, we can expect creative dissension and inversion of vampire 'laws'.⁴¹

This postmodern conceit allows certain innovative liberties within the genre. Fred Saberhagen rewrites *Dracula* from the Count's point of view in *The Dracula Tape* (1975), setting the record straight by giving his own version of events. Taking the cue, Rice was to adopt Saberhagen's focal inversion of Stoker's narrative and develop vampire autobiography as an entire subgenre, from *Interview with the Vampire* to *Blood Canticle* (2003). Rice's vampires possess Byron's narcissism and fatalism and question their existence both within the text and outside it. 'What are thou, who dwellest / So haughtily in spirit, and canst range / Nature and immortality – and yet / Seem'st sorrowful', asks Cain of Lucifer.⁴² In a like manner, in their struggle to break free from their monstrous history, postmodern Byronic vampires agonise over their lost humanity, which may have been limiting once, but to which they nostalgically return in order to mitigate their fall. They also seek to justify their depredations, and they must do so in their own voice. Such demands are stylistically and structurally met by vampire autobiography, where Dr Seward's phonograph in *Dracula* has been superseded as the medium of transcription by the tape recorder, but with the vampire's own voice dictating (*The Dracula Tape*, *Interview with the Vampire*). Byronic vampires have proliferated: Saberhagen's *Dracula*, Lestat and Armand, Saint-Germain, Don Sebastian and Tsepesh,⁴³ and Tom Holland's own Byron; Holland, in playful tribute, turns the poet into one of the undead in his novel, *The Vampyre: The Secret History of Lord Byron* (1995). Explicitly forbidden to reveal the truth about

his race, Rice's Louis deigns to give an interview while Lestat, ever more flamboyant and reckless, another Byron, goes fully public and even becomes a rock star.

Byron's dark sons and daughters ponder the prospect of perpetual immortality in the light of the ambivalent gift that has been given them, and which they must now bestow on others if they are not to remain alone. Such moral conflict interferes with the basic urges of self-preservation – Louis initially refuses to drink human blood, with Lestat angrily reminding him that they cannot cheat their predatory nature: 'God kills, and so shall we; indiscriminately He takes the richest and the poorest, and so shall we; for no creatures under God are as we are, none so like him as ourselves'.⁴⁴

Yet if we recall Annabella Milbanke's words about her husband, Byron, suffering agonies while giving pain, we might empathise with the conscientious Louis, now torn between his new-found dual nature of god and man; in his own eyes, a monster. In another postmodern incarnation of the Byronic vampire, Tom Holland's novel draws its power from the premise that Lord Byron was an actual vampire, fusing biographical and poetic material to immortalise the poet beyond his own texts. Drawing inspiration from the events which succeed Byron's *Childe Harold* and the eventual appearance in London society of a Lord Ruthven (Holland's homage to Polidori), Byron joins the ranks of the decadent undead in fiction who chronicle their own tragic fall while seeking to justify their complex existence.

Having sampled new pleasures, sensations and delights, the Byronic vampire soon finds immortality to be as exhausting as it is intoxicating. In Holland, the 'aching lust for blood' of his fictional Byron becomes a lust for all life.⁴⁵ The object of desire and sensation must be either assimilated or abandoned. Yearning to be part of an eagle which soars above him, Byron shoots the majestic bird, claiming that 'it was so alive – and in killing it, I destroyed what attracted me' (181).

Byron's twentieth- and twenty-first-century successors rejoice in their vampiric Otherness, reaffirming themselves against that which they are now not, the deformed transformed. Shunning their distasteful ancestors, which they now hold in contempt, Byronic vampires might be accursed but they are also sensually and morally irresistible. Having ventured into Transylvania, Rice's Louis and Claudia come across the folkloric vampire:

The two huge eyes bulged from naked sockets and two small, hideous holes made up his nose; only a putrid, leathery flesh enclosed his skull, and the rank, rotting rags that covered his frame were thick with earth and slime and blood. I was battling a mindless, animated corpse. But no more.⁴⁶

Symbolically dissevering themselves from the vampires of Tournefort and Calmet, Byron's modern descendants proceed to kill it in disgust.

However, despite Louis and Claudia's attempt to wipe out the East European plague after over two hundred years of superstition, the monster survives. Vampire literature may well have taken the Byronic legacy from Polidori's Ruthven to a phase of reaffirmation, particularly with Rice, Yarbro and Holland, transfiguring the monstrous revenant into a seductive anti-hero, yet this evolution is periodically interrupted and challenged. Bram Stoker, Richard Matheson, Stephen King have each resurrected the monstrous vampire; more recently, Marcus Sedgwick, whose vampires are a far cry from the sullen aristocrat in the open shirt and the fervid eyes, takes the vampire back to its roots in eighteenth-century Romania.⁴⁷

Driven underground and appropriately confined to boxes of earth, dank sarcophagi or forgotten crypts, the folkloric vampire reluctantly concedes its territory to the urbane and sophisticated libertine who mixes freely in society and walks its gas- or neon-lit streets, an object of desire, demonic but also human. Rice's *Lestat*, that exemplary culmination of the tradition, muses:

Maybe we had found the perfect moment in history, the perfect balance between the monstrous and the human, the time when that 'vampire romance' born in my imagination amid the colourful brocades of the ancient regime should find its greatest enhancement in the flowing black cape [and] the black top hat.⁴⁸

Thus transfigured, the vampire has certainly come far and has climbed his way up the social ladder. Following the period of Byron and *The Vampyre*, the bloodsucker had left the graveyard and entered the drawing-room. Groomed and debonair, now he mingles within high society and is often invited into the bedroom. Through compulsion he is still a killer, yet one to whose allure his victims meekly respond. Polidori's Ruthven assimilated a number of Byron's conflicting but arresting qualities, and while the notion of the vampire as introspective tragic hero appears only in several later and postmodern incarnations, Polidori was responsible for detaching the vampire from his folkloric roots and rendering him solely Byronic. The conceit seems to have lent itself wonderfully to the genre, since the Byronic vampire as established nearly two centuries ago remains a dominant archetype in its own right, putting less seductive, more monstrous representations into the shadows, from which they periodically emerge to reclaim lost ground.

Notes

- 1 See Southey's notes to *Thalaba the Destroyer*, *Volume the Second*, viii, pp. 102–12. In his notes to *The Giaour*, Byron writes that 'The Vampire superstition is still general in the Levant. Honest Tournefort tells a long story, which Mr. Southey, in the notes on *Thalaba*, quotes about these "Vroucolachas", as he calls them' and 'The stories told in Hungary and Greece of these foul feeders are singular, and some of them most *incredibly* attested' (notes to lines 755, 781, *The Giaour*, in Byron, *Works*, ed. McGann and Weller, iii: pp. 420–1).
- 2 Introduction to Polidori's *Vampyre* in the *New Monthly Magazine*, April 1819 (cited in Frayling, *Vampyres*, p. 19). Dom Augustin Calmet's *Treatise on the Appearance of Spirits and on Vampires* (1746) was possibly the first scholarly attempt at making sense of alleged vampire epidemics (there is an extract in Frayling, *Vampyres*, pp. 92–103).
- 3 For Arnold Paole, see Barber, 'Forensic Pathology', p. 110.
- 4 Stagg, *Argument*, *The Vampire*.
- 5 Stagg, *The Vampire*, lines 1–41.
- 6 Twitchell, *The Living Dead*, p. 33.
- 7 Notably, Ossensfelder's *The Vampire* (1748), Goethe's *The Bride of Corinth* (1797), Tieck's *Wake not the Dead* (1800), and Hoffman's *Aurelia* (1820); the latter three show that the first literary vampires were generally female and exemplify what Frayling, identifying another archetype, calls 'The Fatal Woman' (Frayling, *Vampyres*, p. 62).
- 8 Southey, *Thalaba*, viii.11.124–5, p. 82.
- 9 Byron, *Works*, ed. McGann and Weller, iii, p. 64.
- 10 Byron's *Gaiour* recalls Southey's *Thalaba*, who is doomed to attack his next of kin, and has been seen as Byron's veiled attempt at coming to terms with society's allegations of sexual predation and incest with his half-sister Augusta. See Woolley, *The Bride of Science*, p. 61. Twitchell argues that this blood-relation aspect of the vampire myth may have been important for the Romantics but that it has been lost in our twentieth-century retelling of the myth (*The Living Dead*, p. 83). Nevertheless, Tom Holland's historical fictions *The Vampyre* (1995) and *Supping with Panthers* (1996), and Jeanne Kalogridis's *The Diaries of the Family Dracul (Covenant with the Vampire)* (1995); *Children of the Vampire* (1996); *Lord of the Vampires* (1997)) trilogy resuscitate this motif. Holland has his vampire Lord Byron feed on 'golden blood': his own offspring's.
- 11 See MacCarthy, *Byron*, pp. 60–1.
- 12 McDayter, 'Conjuring Byron', p. 56.
- 13 See MacCarthy, *Byron*.
- 14 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1.254–5.
- 15 Byron, *Works*, iii, ed. McGann and Weller, pp. 224–5.
- 16 See MacDonald's account of the Polidori–Byron exchange and the Glenarvon influence in *Poor Polidori*, p. 96.
- 17 Lamb, *Glenarvon*, p. 31.
- 18 Byron, letter dated 27 April 1819 to Jean Antoine Galignani, editor of the *Messenger*,

- who printed an announcement linking Byron's name with Polidori's *Vampyre* (in *Letters and Journals. Supplementary Volume*, ed. Marchand, p. 50).
- 19 Polidori's story is reproduced, with accompanying contemporary reviews, in *The Vampyre*, ed. Macdonald and Scherf, p. 43. Further references are taken from this edition; this is based on Polidori's final amendment to the text, which replaces 'Ruthven' with 'Strongmore', perhaps as a means of shaking off the undue attention to Byron it generated in its first print run.
 - 20 The name is, like many elements of *The Vampyre*, directly plagiarised from previous sources. In *Glenarvon*, the Byronic villain is named Clarence de Ruthven, Lord Glenarvon. This was Caroline Lamb's deliberate slander of the man who had used and rejected her. Byron had confided to her sordid secrets about a Lord Gray de Ruthyn whose tenancy of Byron's ancestral home had led to Byron's early loss of sexual innocence. See MacCarthy, *Byron*, pp. 36–7.
 - 21 Byron's undisguised antipathy towards his physician is evident in his frequent altercations with 'Child and Childish Dr. Pollydolly'. See Twitchell, *The Living Dead*, p. 105.
 - 22 *Ibid.*, p. 170–1.
 - 23 Percy Bysshe Shelley, Preface to *Frankenstein*, p. 6.
 - 24 See Polidori, Introduction to *Ernestus Berchtold*, in *The Vampyre*, ed. Macdonald and Scherf, p. 63, n. 1.
 - 25 Byron's *Fragment of a Story* is reprinted in Frayling, *Vampyres*, pp. 126–30.
 - 26 Twitchell, *The Living Dead*, p. 15.
 - 27 Frayling, *Vampyres*, p. 126.
 - 28 See Macdonald and Scherf, 'Introduction: The Modern Vampire', in Polidori, *The Vampyre*, ed. Macdonald and Scherf, pp. 11–17.
 - 29 *Ibid.*, pp. 39–43.
 - 30 Auerbach, *Our Vampires*, p. 15.
 - 31 Lamb, *Glenarvon*, p. 37.
 - 32 Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, p. 34.
 - 33 *Ibid.*, p. 34.
 - 34 Lady Byron's statement to a doctor on the supposed insanity of her husband (epigraph to Holland, *Vampyre*, Ch. 10, p. 263).
 - 35 Milbanke, *Astarte*, p. 117.
 - 36 Byron, *Letters and Journals*, ed. Marchand, 1, p. 22.
 - 37 Twitchell, *The Living Dead*, p. 104.
 - 38 Polidori's Ruthven inspired several dramatic adaptations in the 1800s, chief of which was *Le Vampire* (1820) by Charles Nodier. James Planché adapted this work into English as *The Vampire, or the Bride of the Isles* (1820). Cyprian Bérard freely used Ruthven for a two-volume novel in 1920 while Alexandre Dumas also used the character in an 1852 play. See Skal's marginal note, 'Theatre of Blood: "The Vampyre" On Stage' to Polidori, *The Vampyre*, in Skal (ed.), *Vampires*, pp. 37–51 (p. 47).
 - 39 For Stoker's use of Rymer's motifs, see Frayling, *Vampyres*, pp. 400–41.

- 40 Rice, *The Vampire Lestat*, p. 545.
- 41 That is, the conventions that have accumulated which define the vampire, such as the lack of a reflection, the malign effects of sunlight, the aversion to garlic, and so on, and which Marcus Sedgwick explores and exposes in Chapter 16 below.
- 42 *Cain: A Mystery*, in Byron, *Works*, ed. McGann and Weller, vi, 11.1.85–8.
- 43 In *The Dracula Tape*; Anne Rice, *The Vampire Chronicles* (1976–2003); Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, *The Saint-Germain Cycle* (1978–); Les Daniels, *The Don Sebastian Vampire Chronicles* (1978–1991); and Jeanne Kalogridis, *The Diaries of the Family Dracul* (1995–1997) respectively.
- 44 Rice, *Interview*, p. 98.
- 45 Holland, *The Vampyre*, p. 181.
- 46 Rice, *Interview*, pp. 191–2
- 47 Matheson, *I Am Legend* (1954); King, *Salem's Lot* (1975) and, more recently in an apparent response to *Twilight*, his collaboration with Scott Snyder and Rafael Albuquerque in *American Vampire: Volume 1* (2010); Sedgwick, *My Swordhand is Singing* (2006).
- 48 Rice, *The Vampire Lestat*, p. 545.