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## TWO HUNDRED FACES OF A VAMPIRE: LORD RUTHVEN'S INFLUENCE ON VAMPIRE CULTURE

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**Abstract:** Being born in the same monstrous night that witnessed the rise of Frankenstein monster, the vampire Lord Ruthven celebrates in 2019 two hundred years influencing vampire culture. As it happens in literature, John William Polidori's creature spread his curse through the centuries creating attractive, aristocrat, sexually ambiguous and immoral male and female vampires. From Victorian *penny dreadfuls*, novellas and novels such as *Varney, the Vampire*, *Carmilla* and *Dracula*, to present novel as *Interview with the Vampire*, the short story "The Vampyre" established the character who walk among human

beings as a predator who chooses his prey. Ruthven was directly shaped on Lord Byron personality and, similar to the famous English poet, was an elegant figure of high culture and refined manners who hid a wild, libertine, profoundly narcissist nature and irascible behaviour, traits that paradoxically became Byron and his literary counterpart delightfully fascinating beings. Reflecting the Romantic esthetic of its time, Polidori's short story instituted the vampire as a rebel beyond bourgeois social norms. Lord Ruthven was an undead and, therefore, was not bound to the concepts that rule the living ones. In this way, the vampire appeals to humanity hidden desires related to the anguish of death, to the perspective of the transcendence and to the fear of the consequences of this act abandoning human nature. These elements help understanding the cultural impact John William Polidori's creation keep on exercising two hundred years after 1819 through "The Vampyre".

**Keywords:** Fantastic; Gothic Literature; Vampire.

**Resumo:** Nascido na mesma noite monstruosa que testemunhou a ascensão do monstro de Frankenstein, o vampiro Lord Ruthven celebra em 2019 duzentos anos de influencia sobre a cultura vampírica. Assim como ocorre na literatura, a criatura de John William Polidori espalhou sua maldição através dos séculos criando vampiros e vampiras atraentes, aristocratas, ambiguos sexualmente e imorais. Dos *penny dreadfuls*, novelas e romances vitorianos, como *Varney, o Vampiro*, *Carmilla* e *Drácula*, até romances atuais de fins do século vinte como *Entrevista com o Vampiro*, o conto "O Vampiro" estabeleceu o personagem que anda entre os humanos como um predador que escolhe sua presa. Ruthven foi moldado diretamente a partir do próprio Lord Byron e, como o famoso poeta inglês, era uma elegante figura de grande cultura e educação refinada que escondia uma natureza selvagem, libertina, profundamente narcisista e de comportamento irascível, traços estes

que paradoxalmente tornavam Byron e seu sócia literário seres deliciosamente fascinantes. Refletindo a estética romântica de seu tempo, o conto de Polidori instituiu o vampiro como um rebelde além das normas sociais burguesas. Lord Ruthven era um morto-vivo e, portanto, não estava limitado pelos conceitos e leis que regem a vida dos vivos. Desta forma, o vampiro apela para desejos ocultos da humanidade relacionada a angústia da morte, da perspectiva da transcendência e do temor das consequências desse ato abandonando sua natureza humana. São estes elementos que ajudam a entender o impacto cultural que a criação de John William Polidori continua a exercer duzentos anos depois de 1819 através de “O Vampiro”.

**Palavras chave:** Fantástico; Literatura Gótica; Vampiro.

The 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 thirst of a VAMPYRE!  
(POLIDORI, “The Vampyre”).

## INTRODUCTION

In 2019 we celebrate 200 years of one of the germinal works of the vampiric tradition, “The Vampyre; A Tale”, by John William Polidori. Like Frankenstein’s own monster, the vampire does not die. What underlies is the obsession of our society with vampires. Today, its image has been reflected in everything potentially commercial, radio serials (Orson Welles adapted the novel and played the role of the count in his famous radio dramatization in 1938), books, films, advertisements, ice creams, shirts, animates films; from advertising to cartoons (let us remember Count Draco of *Sesame Street*), including Anne Rice’s best sellers, and even a hit television

series, *Buffy*, *The Vampire Slayer*, and of course, Batman. And the truth is that its popularity works very well in modern society, where Dresser (1990, p.79-119) explains that the vampire has become popular and has even appeared in medicines, kitchen utensils and other everyday tools; in the words of Clive Bloom (1998, p.1): “no fancy dress party would be complete without its ‘Dracula’”. It is not surprising that in Romania, too, the military resorted to it to ponder the combat strength of their weapons. Proof of this is that the last war helicopter was baptized with the name of “Dracula”:

In the last two decades... we have seen the commercial proliferation of new vampire images in a variety of media, from popular novels, to numerous films, to television serials and animated cartoons, to illustrated books for children ‘ages four and up’. This multi-media proliferation is designed to appeal to an audience of readers and viewers of more widely diverse ages, levels of literacy, and education, than Stoker could comfortably assume for his novel (ZANGER, 1997, p.18)

The vampire myth can no longer escape the labyrinth in which popular culture has confined it; and it is that in truth this being has always been there, hidden, willing to appropriate a new form, to transform itself in order to safeguard its existence: it is not destroyed or aged by the passage of time; maybe because it lives outside of itself. And for that reason it is an immortal being. Time does not affect it, mutating to adapt to each era. It is, therefore, one of the most modern beings; it has a metamorphic nature and adaptability to the circumstances is what makes it so indestructible; it is willing to change in order to stay. According to David Glover:

For while the vampire's peculiarly perverse polymorphousness is the source of its resistance to representation, making it notoriously difficult to pin down –throwing no shadow on the floor, leaving no footprints in the dust, casting no reflection in the mirror– its polymorphous perversity is what allows it to proliferate (1999, p.198–199)

Nina Auerbach says that there is one vampire for each time and that: “since vampires are immortal, they are free to change incessantly. Eternally alive, they embody not fear of death, but fear of life: their power and their curse is their undying vitality” (1995, p.5). David J. Skal supports this idea and says: “Ever adaptable, Dracula has been a literary Victorian sex nightmare, a stock figure of theatrical melodrama, a movie icon, a trademark, cuddle toy, swizzle stick, and breakfast cereal” (1990, p.4).

It would take an exhaustive study to find a person who cannot describe the vampire and the myth that inevitably accompanies it, even if that person has never read a single *Dracula* line. Probably the human being has been the one who has made it immortal by not letting it die and disappear from the imagination. The folklorist and researcher Norine Dresser (*American Vampires*, 1990, p.47) places it as part of our store of mythical characters.

In view of these considerations, we are not mistaken in stating that the vampire is an immortal, eternal, adaptable, protean myth; a myth that is still alive, as befits its essence. Perhaps its essence demonstrates that both its origin and its influence are more human than it was initially conceived. But what is a vampire? Throughout time they have been monsters, animated bodies,

attractive women and educated men, but what is it in fact? And, in the literary universe, what is the role of Polidori's vampire on vampire culture?

### **THE VAMPIRE: A MYTH THAT GOES BEYOND ITS OWN ORIGINS**

In a generic way, it is clear that myths go beyond their own origins. During the nineteenth century the vampire had become a character more of the romantic aesthetic, a reason for delightful surprises and chills that provided a strange rejoicing. The physician to Lord Byron (1788-1824), John William Polidori (1795-1821), published his account "The Vampyre" in 1819 inspired by his protector (FRAYLING, 1992, p.6) and reflecting the tense relations between Polidori and Lord Byron (FRAYLING, 1992, p.107). The work traces the portrait of an aristocratic, cold, distinguished and rogue vampire: Lord Ruthven. This work was the first model of the modern vampire. "The Vampyre" is considered by many as the first of the stories of this genre. In 1819 Polidori published, almost at the same time as "The Vampyre", his forgotten novel *Ernestus Berchtold; or The Modern Oedipus*, based on the story he had originally narrated on the night of Diodati. And the fact that the myth has gone beyond its creation is demonstrated by the fact that among all the groups of vampiric beings, namely, elusive beings, decrepit aristocrats, assertive females and young people immersed in postmodern culture... true origin in favour of the more polysemic tradition has been lost.

This tradition has been shaped over the centuries. Thus, one of the most characteristic features, the fangs, has not always been present, contrary to what we think. The first literary vampires did

not have this element either. The description that Polidori makes of Lord Ruthven in “The Vampyre” does not refer to its teeth at any time; one of the few occasions in which fangs are mentioned takes place in the poem “The Vampyre” (1810)<sup>1</sup> by John Stagg, in which the diabolical being is caught in the act:

Indignant roll'd his ireful eyes,  
That gleam'd with wild horrific stare...  
(...)  
His jaws cadaverous were besmear'd  
With clotted carnage o'er and o'er,  
And all his horrid whole appeared  
Distent, and fill'd with human gore!  
(*Apud* FRAYLING, 1992, p.105)

Another of the early occasions in which the teeth of a vampire is mentioned is in the first chapter of *Varney the Vampyre* (1847): “With a plunge he seizes her neck in his fang-like teeth”. This is in fact one of the first descriptions in which the teeth appear, attested with the use of the expression “fang-like” when making reference to the teeth, compared to the fact that they are simply called fangs. But we cannot deny that dental hypertrophy, so appreciated by filmmakers, is a trait reminiscent of the werewolf’s fangs.

One more characteristic of this vampire is that he dies of a gunshot, therefore this being is affected by firearms.

Speaking of singular contributions of the work of Polidori, we seem to note that the personification of nature, as a wild spirit, subversive and confronting man with his own will, is an inherent characteristic

<sup>1</sup> Published in *Minstrel of the North*.

of the Gothic novel in general, and the vampiric productions in particular. In Polidori's story, the vampire is resurrected by lunar rays, the latter reflecting, in part, the belief in some areas that the sun's rays could turn the deceased into a vampire.

Nina Auerbach affirms that the vampires before Dracula are spiritual creatures that obtain their vitality – at least part – from the moon, since: “Like the moon, they live cyclically, dying and renewing themselves with ritual, predictable regularity. A corpse quivering for life under the moon's rays is the central image of mid-century vampire literature” (1995, p.25).

Dracula itself renewed his power during the night finding itself trapped during the daylight in its physical form. The nineteenth-century literature produced a series of vampires that seemed to transcend the physical in favour of the ethereal; it was with the arrival of the cinema when the vampire was defined by its physical form. The route from nocturnal recharge to destruction by means of sunlight came about most notably with Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), where it is suggested that vampires could be destroyed during the day. As the sun rises, Count Orlock simply vanishes and becomes nothing. Since then, the dangers of sunlight remained a consistent feature of the vampire, being adopted in most film and literary productions as a threat to the vampire – if not the primary method of destruction. *The Horror of Dracula* (1958) presents a dramatic scene where Dracula becomes ashes by the action of the sun's rays. In recent decades the power of the sun has become a prevalent means of destroying vampires in films like *Fright Night* (1985), *Near Dark* (1987) and *Interview with the Vampire* (1994). In fact, both *Near Dark* and *Interview with the Vampire* suggest that

the Star (and fire as an associative element) is the only means of destroying the modern vampire.

Returning to the moon, when it appears in nineteenth-century literature, it does so by evoking the nature under which it appears in the work of authors such as Shakespeare; the moon in this guise distils an enchanted and charming eroticism, attractive, vaporous, it supposes a projection of a human being in a kingdom that is not human, at the same time that it facilitates a blurring of the barriers that separate logic from unreality. The vampire seems to revive under the lunar rays (DIJKSTRA, 1986, p.122).

The star presides over the harmonious vision enjoyed by the vampire, and presides in a manner analogous to how the star presides over the composition “The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner” (1798) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834). The sailor, like the vampire, searches the moon for a renewal of his existence. The moon seems to unite death with life, it is the connecting link that enables the unreal to become real, causing the reader not to know, therefore, where reality ends and where fantasy, the oneiric begins. The moon becomes, consequently, as happens to Aubrey, in accomplice not only of the vampire, but also of the reader<sup>2</sup>. That is why Victorian readers never got tired of reading and enjoying the association of the moon with the resurrection of the vampire (let us remember that in *Varney The Vampyre*, the reader who read the serialized novel always found in each of them the resurrection of

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2 Unfortunately, it would be Hollywood who, by appropriating literary and folkloric mythology, would pervert the association of the moon, this becoming a symbolism of the werewolf, leaving its association with the vampire as something more anecdotal than effective and real. Only, some productions like the one directed by Lesley Selander in 1945, *The Vampire's Ghost*, a film with a small budget, tried to revive the connection between these beings and the lunar star (SILVER & URSINI, 1993, p.91-92).

at least one of the characters, resurrection of which the moon was witness, accomplice and prelude):

How silently and sweetly the moon's rays fall upon the water, upon the meadows, and upon the woods. The scenery appeared the work of enchantment, some fairy land, waiting the appearance of its inhabitants. No sound met the ear; the very wind was hushed; nothing was there to distract the sense of sight, save the power of reflection (RYMER, 1970, p.362)

And finally, in this work the vampire is associated with the influence of atmospheric conditions, because shortly before the appearance of a vampire a terrible storm arises. In "The Vampyre", we see a possible origin of the association of stormy days with vampiric narrations and productions; in Polidori's story, the fateful night in which Aubrey's beloved dies, it was this atmospheric phenomenon that unleashed itself with all its fury. Also in *Varney The Vampyre, or the Feast of Blood* (1847) we are presented again a stormy night, full of thunder, continuing thus with a Gothic atmosphere. In *Dracula*, this fact will be more clearly expressed in the assertions that Van Helsing will make of the vampire powers as well as in the trip to England made by Demeter, whose crew is kidnapped like Persephone (Demeter's daughter), and which will be hit by a terrible storm, an image that was brought to the screen by several filmmakers as far apart as Tod Browning (1931), John Badham in his 1979 film version – starring Frank Langella – or Francis Ford Coppola in 1992.

## THE ORIGIN OF THE LEGEND

The prolific production that emerged from the shadow of the vampire reflects the conflict of this being indissolubly joining oral

folk tradition with literary creation. Consequently, both in “The Vampyre” and in *Dracula* (1897) there are other components: besides the folkloric, the latter will be influenced by the Polydorian model of the perverse, fatal aristocrat, the penetrating gaze, exquisite manners and irresistible attractiveness for women.

The writer and poet John Polidori (1795-1821) refined the literary essence of the vampire, changing its ghostly appearance to an aristocratic one. Suddenly, the classic myth of the vampire had become intriguing and sexually appealing to readers rather than the horrible being it was. The beginnings of the archetype were placed.

Lord Ruthven, the main character of Polidori, had characteristics that gave him an undoubtedly elegant and attractive appearance. Also lacking were the two most negative characteristics, the thirst for blood and the theory of the living corpse.

“The Vampyre; A Tale” is a work in which the vampire acquires a literary prominence and is commonly accepted as the first story of vampires (the same year of its edition it was translated into German and French). We owe to John William Polidori the first sketch of what will be the classic image of the literary vampire, that of the villainous aristocrat, cold, enigmatic, but, above all, perverse and fascinating for women; in sum. The opposite of what was actually the “little Doctor Polly-Dolly”, as Lord Byron maliciously used to call him, the true inspiration for Lord Ruthven. “Polidori’s Lord Ruthven was clearly modelled on Byron” (GLADWELL & HAVOC, 1992, p.14). This vampire enjoyed his role of amoral parasite, predator and moral destroyer of society in general and of people with whom he came into contact in particular. He enjoyed protecting,

sheltering and devoting himself completely to destroy the beings he meets; many more qualifiers could be devoted to this being, but we highlight some of the ones suggested by Olivares Merino (2001, p.257): “demonio de la apetencia y concupiscencia material... diablo de la codicia y el vicio, la tentación”.

If we reread the words expressed by Polidori regarding Aubrey’s desire to travel through Europe, we can establish a clear parallel between the physical journey that Aubrey projects and the fictional (and real) journey that Byron projects and performs:<sup>3</sup>

[It] was time for him to perform the tour, which for many generations has been thought necessary to enable the young to take some rapid steps in the career of vice towards putting themselves upon an equality with the aged, and not allowing them to appear as if fallen from the skies (POLIDORI, 1988, p.9)

On the subject of duality, “*The Vampyre*” and *Wuthering Heights* belong to two worlds at the same time. Brontë’s work is a diabolical, black novel, but it is also a Victorian, romantic nineteenth-century novel, where the most violent passions and feelings do not seem to oppose conventional morals, but, to the contrary, they submit to them, or they pretend to. The hero of *Wuthering Heights* is a man of the late eighteenth century, a rebel. Heathcliff, picked up in the streets of Liverpool, comes from nowhere; he has no name. One day he leaves, no one knows to where; he becomes rich and powerful, no one knows how. He is cruel, both with humans and animals, while still having the air of a gentleman. The main character of this work shares with Polidori’s Lord Ruthven and with Joseph Sheridan

<sup>3</sup> In the same way that Polidori had never visited Greece, which did not prevent him from locating his story “*The Vampyre*” in that country thanks to the possible stories that he obtained from Byron, we must remember that Stoker had never traveled to Transylvania.

Le fanu's Carmilla the fact that all three are demonic lovers. The proximity of the abyss fascinates their victims and the possible fall into it greatly increases their fantasies. Fear and pleasure are not only incompatible, but they are often stimulating.

With respect to Lord Byron, this character knew how to embody as no one the archetype of the new beauty, until turning his life into a legend. In his love relationships he sought a perverse voluptuousness in destroying and self-destructing, in transgressing the laws, in experimenting with the senses. He came to affirm that the great objective of life is sensation, to feel that we exist, even through pain. Lord Byron assumes the role of the fatal lover; he was the most famous poet in Europe and the greatest inspirer of the romantic movement of the nineteenth century, becoming over time the symbol of romanticism. Charles Nodier (1780-1844) would say of him that he is the best known of the writers who can be proud to be the promoters of romantic literature; he affirmed that he dedicated himself with great zeal to the representation of the darkest thoughts, to the description of the most repudiated tasks and to narrate the incurable and desperate suffering. Goethe said that Byron was possessed by that demonic attraction that exerts great influence on others. For his part, Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) would portray him as someone who did not believe in anything but vices.

On what could have happened at Villa Diodati – so named because it belonged to the professor of theology Giovanni Diodati (1576-1649) in the summer of 1816, a mansion located in the vicinity of Geneva curiously visited by Milton before – a lot of literature has been written. What has remained true is that assembled there were George Gordon Noel – third Lord of Byron –, the poet who

was already surrounded by a trail of diabolical romanticism, the physician Dr. John William Polidori, Mary Shelley, her step-sister Claire Clairmont and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Some films have been made about this group of people and the supposed scandalous nature of the Villa Diodati events as different as *Gothic* (1986), by Ken Russell, *Remando al viento* (1988), by Gonzalo Suárez, with Hugh Grant in the role of Lord Byron and Liz Hurley interpreting the role of Claire's, and *Haunted Summer* (1988), by Ivan Passer.

Due to the humidity and the incessant rain, according to what Mary Shelley herself narrated, they were forced to remain for days on end in the house. In their meetings they dealt with all subjects, especially the literary ones. Apparently they had several books on ghosts, including the mythical *Phantasmagoriana, ou Recueil d'Histoires d'Apparitions, de Spectres, Revenants, Fantômes, etc<sup>4</sup>* – a German anthology of horror stories published by Jean-Baptiste-Benoît Eyriès in 1812 from the first two volumes of a work consisting of five, *Gespensterbuch* (1811), edited by Friedrich Schulze and Johann Apel. Hence, they ended up challenging themselves to write a ghost story in the shortest possible time. Everyone accepted the challenge. However, only two of them kept their word: Mary Godwin (daughter of the English philosopher William Godwin and the feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft, later, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley's wife), when creating the novel *Frankenstein*, and Polidori with "The Vampyre". After this idea, Shelley was inspired by the recent theories of galvanism that theorized about giving life to an inanimate body.<sup>5</sup>

4 Published in English in 1813 with the title of *Tales of the Dead*.

5 *Frankenstein* was inspired –among others– by the Italian Luigi Galvani's (1737-1798) attempts to reanimate the bodies of dead frogs when stimulated with metal bars. The body manipulations exemplified in both the novel and the film share a similar purpose: improving and taking control of bodies. What is undeniable is the relationship between

The image of Frankenstein creator was linked to that of the Greek Prometheus who was punished for stealing fire from the gods and the Prometheus of the Latin text, which created a man from mud, fused with the ideas of Rousseau that had such acceptance during that time period. *Frankenstein* was a modern version of the Prometheus myth, as the subtitle of the work read.<sup>6</sup> From that night in Geneva, we would also enjoy “The Vampyre”, by Polidori, the first complete work on vampires written in English. Decades later, the Irishman Bram Stoker produced a new novel, in which appeared the three witches of *Macbeth*, the constant anxiety about their masculinity, and the appearance of women hungry for sex.

The short story, “The Vampyre; A Tale”, appeared in the April, 1819 edition of *The New Monthly Magazine*, a work that curiously had been forgotten by its author completely, considering it a minor one. Lord Ruthven, Polidori’s vampire, bears an impressive resemblance to Lord Byron (RYAN, 1987, p.xiii-1). At first it was believed that Lord Byron himself had written it, because the editors used an advertising resource that led one to assume he was the author, although the author’s name had not been included in the copies.

“The Vampyre” is considered by many as the first of the stories of this genre, because it offers all the basic characteristics of the

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the power of electricity and the force of life, a theory that captivated Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft, Lord Byron and the unfortunately forgotten John William Polidori.

<sup>6</sup> We must bear in mind the myth of Prometheus and its different variations (Prometheus *Pyrphoros*, that is, Prometheus as a carrier of fire; Ovidius’ Prometheus *Plasticator*, who modelled a man of clay and gave life by stealing a spark from the chariot of the Sun, Aeschylus’ Prometheus Chained, having his liver eaten daily by an eagle, only to be regenerated at night, due to his immortality). In Greek mythology, Prometheus confronted Zeus by creating mortal human beings out of clay. He was usually depicted undergoing punishment for creating and educating humans, and for giving them fire; Aeschylus’ play “Prometheus Bound” (c. 5th century B.C.) conveys in its title and text the common image of him being bound and tortured (ZIMAN, 1994).

monster: immortality, the dominance in its advantage of human weaknesses to lead them to self-destruction, an absolute disdain for everything human, the diabolic fascination about women and men who use it as an element of conquest, survival and destruction. Another novelty of the story we see is that evil is not punished, just as it happens with the Devil, it always escapes as soon as it causes irreparable tragedies, by destroying creatures with a cruelty of the Avernus. Not in vain, the vampire is related to the devil automatically. But there is a peculiarity of this vampire that did not seem to permeate the later representations of this being, and it is none other than the fact that everyone who was favored by the diabolical being ended up destroyed in one way or another; or what is the same, everything that touched was corrupted. Thus, this vampire enjoys destroying, corrupting, in the face of vampires like Nosferatu or Dracula, who enjoy ingesting blood.

By 1846, Lord Ruthven's distinguished and despicable Byronian aura dazzles London and Paris; all kinds of poems, stories and plays that have a vampire as protagonist abound. Fashion even extends to the opera and it is becoming a new commercial formula. Some English moralists begin to worry about the hysteria extending mainly between the youth and the popular classes.

### **POLIDORI'S LORD RUTHVEN GOES BEYOND PAGES**

The vampire had adopted a new role in 1819 when John William Polidori's work was published. Probably the greatest artistic influence until *Dracula*, Lord Ruthven would be the inspiration for numerous short stories, plays and operas, all based on the aristocratic vampire that Europe was convinced was Lord Byron.

The success of Lord Ruthven came not only because of the supreme artistic talent of Polidori, but also, or above all, because of the suggested and scandalous influence projected by Lord Byron.

Polidori's work was accepted with open arms in the Gallic country. The presence of French writers in the vampiric theme counts among its most notable representatives with Pierre Jules Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870) (whose last play, *Le Vampire*, premiered in Paris in 1851 after having seen Nodier's theatrical adaptation of Polidori's story), Isidore-Lucien Ducasse (1846-1870), Count of Lautréamont and René Albert Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893), in addition –evidently – of Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867). With these authors, the genre achieves an evolution and an enrichment difficult to imagine. All of them knew the story of Polidori well and by themselves they had heard or read about those who return from the grave to quench their thirst for blood.

It is with good reason that around 1820, in Paris, and under the influence of the English gothic novel, frantic romanticism became fashionable (remember that a certain style in terms of clothing even became fashionable among the courtiers and bohemians). The same as in London, the vampire floats in the air and that same year the first vampire novel, *Lord Ruthven ou les vampires*, is published, a two-volume work that was intended to be the continuation of the story of Polidori; its author (although originally it was published anonymously), Cyprien Bérard, taking advantage of the frenzy aroused by the story of Polidori, stretches the argument as much as possible and dedicates his work to Byron. The success is contagious and a few months later three different versions are presented in Parisian theaters

On June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1820, *Le Vampire, melodrame en trois actes avec un prologue*, debuted with great acclaim by the audience at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin in Paris. The play, directed by Charles Nodier in collaboration with T. F. A. Carmouche and Achille de Jouffray, was the first vampiric drama. In this work, the story of Polidori is enriched by a series of elements that come from the opera and the burlesque tone of costumbrist comedies. Although this adaptation did not obtain the endorsement by the critics, the tickets sold out night after night until the point of which some of the musical extracts were sung on the streets of Paris.

Regarding the appearance of the first proof of vampires in Western Europe, in various works by German authors such as Volker Sturm (*Von den Vampiren*, 1968) and Wilhelm Fischer (*Dämonische Mittelwesen, Vampire und Mittelwesen*, 1910) we can find abundant evidence of certain written reports and dated in the middle of the fourteenth century in which they narrate the spectral appearances of the undead to sow panic and feed on the blood of the living. One of the most famous operas is *Der Vampyr*, by Heinrich August Marschner (1795-1861), which achieved enormous success.

Marschner, a multitalented man, studied law and music in his native Zittau and is considered the creator of German romantic opera, where music emerges directly from poetry as an inevitable consequence, according to Hoffmann. He is also well known, standing out in the generation of musicians who developed their work between Weber and Wagner. In his operas, Marschner creates psychologically divided characters, and this melodramatic character has repercussions on music, which can only be fully understood within the context in which the work is developed. Lord Ruthven,

the protagonist of *Der Vampyr* is very similar to the character of Don Giovanni in the opera of the same name by W. A. Mozart. Ruthven is a new vampire, who needs the blood of three maidens before midnight of the following day to obtain a pardon that delays the consummation of the eternal curse; his diabolic personality and the elusiveness of his terrible fate create a great melodramatic ambiguity. With a libretto by his stepbrother, W. A. Wohlbruch, based on texts by Polidori and Byron, the opera debuted at the Stadttheater in Leipzig on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 1828 with great acceptance, using the emerging penchant vein of vampiric culture. The style of the German composer and the introduction of supernatural characters create a precedent. It is not that he devises new musical forms, but uses the old ones in a more flexible way, in order to achieve a greater relationship with the meaning of the text.

Therefore, in view of what was said above, it is inferred that the folkloric vampires had been villagers, farmers, but in the eighteenth century the authors were reluctant to turn these beings into the main characters of their stories, so the vampire ascended the social ladder and was placed in the upper classes. Also, few people were interested in reading about dead beings that, besides, had an unpleasant aspect, so the authors decided to adopt a vampire concept more easily recognizable and identifiable with readers: vampires like themselves. A theme present in all vampire stories is social classes. There is more to remember about Lord Ruthven; how his appearance in society is produced by the hand of one of the oldest customs (and that still persists today, albeit in disguise): the parties of society: "His peculiarities caused him to be invited to every house; all wished to see him, and... were pleased at having

something in their presence capable of engaging their attention” (FRAYLING, 1992, p.108).

Clive Leatherdale, at the beginning of his work *Dracula. The Novel and The Legend* (1985), confirms and delves into the aforementioned distinction between the vulgar vampire, the folklore vampire and the literary vampire belonging to a respectable social class. The vampire is associated in a general way with the most disadvantaged communities, its social origin is reflected in its appearance and behaviour. The idea of an educated and attractive being dwelling in a castle is the product of the literary imagination.

The use of the aristocratic argument has, consequently, its more evident literary antecedents in Polidori’s “The Vampyre”. This vision is incardinated within the well-known study pointed out by Ken Gelder (1994, p.34), meaning that Polidori’s story seems to suggest that society itself is vampiric, as long as aristocrats feed on the people. This data is not alien to “Carmilla”, as it will not be at all to *Dracula*. *Dracula* represents the agonizing rural aristocracy in rebellion against the new order. In this sense, the count is the feudal lord who accompanies a cohort of vampires with whom he creates vassalage relationships through blood rites.

## THE PROJECTION

It was John Polidori who set a milestone by writing his story “The Vampyre” in 1819, inspired by Lord Byron. Since then, the vampire was included in the Gothic imaginary, reaching its maximum glory when *Dracula* appeared in 1897.

Between 1819, when Polidori’s evil Ruthven captured the imagination of the public, and 1897, when the most famous vampire

novel, Stoker's *Dracula*, was published, vampire novels were very popular. Between these two examples, the stories covered a broad spectrum, such as "La morte amoureuse" by Gautier, published in 1836 and popularly known as "Clarimonde", or *Varney the Vampire*, the voluminous novel by Scottish civil engineer and writer J. M. Rymer. At first, it was believed that its author was Thomas Preskett Perst (1810-1859) (thesis endorsed by the Reverend Doctor Alphonsus Joseph-Mary Augustus Montague Summers (1880-1947), the highest English authority on the subject at hand), but later studies point to the fact that it belongs to James Malcolm Rymer<sup>7</sup> (1814-1881). The reason for this doubt about its authorship could be found in the fact that it was very common that in this type of publications (*penny dreadfuls*) several authors were involved.

Rymer, who by then was already a writer for several magazines, decided to focus on vampire tales after reading "The Vampyre", a story that had been reprinted in a *penny dreadful*; Rymer includes many of Polidori's opinions about vampires.

Many important stories have almost always been relegated to the shelves of oblivion until relatively recent times. One of them could be considered as the most important literary influence in the work of Stoker: "Carmilla" (1872).

The figure of the undead, as Bram Stoker would describe it in his masterful production in the death throes of the nineteenth century, is essential to understand the transgression that the Polidorian being supposes (allow us to coin this term), attacking and challenging Nature and the Creator, being eternal, sucking the

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<sup>7</sup> In any case, what is known is that this author liked to write under pseudonyms, the most popular that he used were those of Malcolm J. Merry and Malcolm J. Errym.

biblical vital fluid, and postulating as God inasmuch as it harbours the capacity to create life.

“The Vampyre” represents the foundation on which later literary tradition would be built. Lord Ruthven will be the first reference for the subsequent paradigmatic works, presenting a multiform being with an incredible capacity for adaptation, unequivocal proof of his immortality.

Lest we forget that the vampire attributes its origins to the Jungian collective unconscious; in that sense it represents the human desires, dreams and chimeras of transcending this life. Those hopes will become their most horrendous nightmare, a nightmare that has not been separated from the human being, since it inhabits the kingdom of shadows, of darkness, of night. It is of little wonder that for almost 200 years, this figure has acquired an extraordinary variety of appearances.

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