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Lord Byron and the Metamorphoses of Polidori's *Vampyre*

Abstract

The aim of this article is to investigate the links between vampire stories and plays and Lord Byron in the context of his early nineteenth-century reception in Europe, and particularly in Poland. Byron is often regarded as one of the main originators of vampire stories in modern European culture and occasionally even as a model for vampiric characters. This image of Byron was mainly constructed on the basis of a passage in *The Giaour* and John Polidori's tale *The Vampyre*, which had first been erroneously attributed to Byron. Owing to Byron's literary fame as the greatest living British poet as well as to his scandalous reputation, *The Vampyre* gained great popularity both in Britain and on the Continent, which resulted in numerous theatrical adaptations, especially in France and in Germany. In Poland the French melodrama *Upiór (Le Vampire)* by Charles Nodier, Pierre Carmouche and Achille de Jouffroy was a great stage success and was published in book form.

Polidori's tale allegedly originated in Byron's idea, the record of which appears in the fragment called "Augustus Darvell". Echoing the techniques Byron used to suggest to his readers that he himself might be identified with the protagonists of his poetic tales, Polidori similarly invites the reader to identify his eponymous vampire Lord Ruthven with Lord Byron. In Byron's fragment one can trace only a hint of vampirism; in Polidori's story it becomes a metaphor not only of sexual profligacy but also of "byromania", the cult of Byron among his female readers. In popular melodrama the vampire character is conflated with Don Giovanni from Mozart's opera, possibly because of Byron's publication of the first two cantos of *Don Juan* at the time.

Keywords: byromania, Byron's reception in Poland, English Literature, Lord Byron, nineteenth-century literature, Polidori, vampire, vampiric character

In contemporary global culture the vampire is one of the most popular literary and cinematic characters. Numerous studies have been devoted to its origins and development, for example Mario Praz's *Romantic Agony*, Christopher Frayling's *Vampyres: Lord Byron to Count Dracula* or in Poland Maria Janion's *Wampir: Biografia symboliczna*. Because of the well-known passage in *The Giaour* and John Polidori's story *The Vampyre*, originally erroneously attributed to Byron, all of them enlist Lord Byron as both one of the main originators and at the same time as a model for the vampiric characters. The most recent development of this

tendency is Tom Holland's novel *The Vampyre: The Secret History of Lord Byron* (1995) published in the US as *Lord of the Undead*, in which we discover that Lord Byron is a vampire whom we can encounter in late 20th-century London. The ground has been well-trodden and it may seem to be sufficient to google the appropriate terms to come across a profusion of materials on the subject on both popular and academic websites. Essentially, inspired by Byron's own idea, Polidori in *The Vampyre* created a demonic image of Byron in a way analogous to the process in which Byron invited his readers to identify himself with the protagonists of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and his *Turkish Tales*. This paper is an attempt to re-examine some of the links between the vampire stories and Byron in the context of Byron's early nineteenth-century reception in Europe, and particularly in Poland.¹

On 8 April 1821 a melodrama entitled *Upiór (The Vampire)* was performed on the stage of Warsaw National Theatre.² A short theatrical review that appeared in *Wanda* magazine referred to the play as based on a tale by Byron, composed on the basis of "folk superstitions about vampires."³ The *Vampire* was an immediate success and became part of the repertoire of the theatre. It was performed by the Warsaw actors during their guest performances in Vilnius (15 July 1821–14 March 1822; *Teatr polski* 285) and in Poznań (1823), where it aroused interest, but the critics claimed that it was too early for such experiments (*Teatr polski* 310). The play was also staged in Cracow (Dec. 1821) (*Teatr polski* 362), and it seems that the only place where it was poorly received and had to be withdrawn was Lviv, where the critics most strongly objected to the supernatural on stage (*Teatr polski* 391). What attests to the popularity of the melodrama is the fact that it was published in the same year and copies of it were available at major bookshops such as Glücksberg's, and Zawadzki and Węcki's in Warsaw.⁴

In his *Dzieje polskiego upióra przed wystąpieniem Mickiewicza* Marian Szykowski attributes the popularity of the play to the fact that it brought together all the supernatural elements present in the ballads fashionable at the time such as Bürger's "Lenore" (Szykowski 50–54). What evoked particular admiration was the character of Lord Rutwen,⁵ performed by Ignacy Werowski, and later by Piasecki. Estreicher says that "[Werowski's] gaze, his facial expression evoked

¹ Stanisław Wasylewski in his article "U świtu romantyzmu: Pierwsze sądy o Byronie w Polsce (1816–1822)" refers to the sensational reception of *The Vampyre* in France, Germany and Poland, which he discussed in his paper "Upiór-apokryf Byrona w Polsce i zagranicą," presented at Kallenbach's seminar in Lviv in December 1906 (160, note 8), which I have not been able to trace. Maria Janion discusses the story of Polidori's *Vampyre* and Byron in *Wampir: Biografia symboliczna* 170–176.

² Translated by Bonawentura Kudlicz, who himself appeared in the role of Sir Aubray.

³ „Z gminnych przesądów o Upiorach” 58. All translations are mine.

⁴ According to *Dramat Obcy w Polsce 1765–1965* (141), the melodrama had its first performances in Vilnius on 23 Sept. 1821, in Lviv on 26 Oct. 1821, in Cracow on 13 Dec. 1821, in Płock on 26 Dec. 1847 and in Lublin on 1 March 1866. Neither the book edition nor the performances in Poznań are listed. Zawadzki and Węcki's catalogue for 1821 and Glücksberg's catalogue for 1822 list the book edition of the melodrama.

⁵ Rutwen is the Polish version of Ruthven, the name of the vampire in Polidori's story. In this article I am using the English versions of the names of the characters when referring to the English text, and the Polish versions when discussing the Polish adaptation.

terror and one wonders if Mickiewicz was not thinking of that play when he introduced the vampire in *Forefathers' Eve*.⁶

Another major source of the attraction of the play was its clear association with Byron, the vogue for whom had reached Poland by that time through French-language magazines, and was spread through articles in Polish periodicals, which were mainly adaptations from the French or German. There were few Polish translations of his works available, and his poetry could only be read either in poor quality French prose translations or in English, the latter available only to a handful of people who knew the language.⁷ A reviewer of *Gazeta Warszawska* asserted that “the delightful style of this author [whom he had earlier referred to as the greatest poet of the age] makes even the works of no critical merit charming to the reader.” Though *The Vampyre* belongs to such works and was not even written by Byron but only told by him, it “can always be read with pleasure.”⁸ Even though the work is of no literary value it acquires potency by supposedly deriving from Byron's idea. The choice of vocabulary suggests that the reviewer sees Byron's readers as succumbing to the fatal enchantment.

Upiór was a translation of a French melodrama *Le Vampire* by Charles Nodier, Pierre Carmouche and Achille de Jouffroy, which first appeared on 13 June 1820 at Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin in Paris. In spite of or because of critical reviews accusing it of immorality, it was a huge success and was followed by a number of vaudevilles and melodramas at other theatres (Estève 76–78). All of these originated in Polidori's tale *The Vampyre*, whose authorship was first attributed to Byron and, on his denial, it was seen, and still is, as stemming from his ideas. Estève, following Louise Belloc, points out that ironically it was Polidori's *Vampyre* that made Byron famous in France (Estève 78–79)⁹ and its international renown is attested to by the fact that allegedly Goethe viewed it as “the greatest of [Byron's] works” (Morrison and Baldick x).

Polidori's *The Vampyre* originates in the legendary ghost story writing competition among the party gathered at the Villa Diodati, the account of which we find in several reports of the participants. The most famous is of course Mary Shelley's 1831 Introduction to the Standard Novels Edition of *Frankenstein*, but we also

⁶ „Jego wzrok, układ twarzy przerażały trwogą. Czy Mickiewicz w ‘Dziadach’ wprowadzając Upióra, nie miał reminiscencji widzianej tej sztuki?” (Estreicher 788–789).

⁷ On the early reception of Byron in Poland, see Wasylewski; Mirosława Modrzewska. “Pilgrimage or Revolt: The Dilemmas of Polish Byronism”, *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, vol. 2, ed. Richard Cardwell, London: Continuum, 2004, 305–315; Monika Coghén, “The First Polish Readers of Byron.” *From Queen Anne to Queen Victoria: Readings in 18th and 19th Century British Literature and Culture*, vol. 2, ed. Grażyna Bystydzieńska and Emma Harris. Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski. Ośrodek Studiów Brytyjskich, 2010, 105–114.

⁸ „Czarujący styl tego autora nawet dzieła, które krytycznej wartości nie mają, czyni powabnymi dla każdego czytelnika,” „zawsze z upodobaniem czytana być może” (1997).

⁹ The popularity of the story is attested by the fact that the melodrama had been preceded by the novel *Lord Ruthwen ou les Vampyres* in February 1820 and followed by a number of other melodramas both in France, Britain and Germany. It became adapted into English by James Robinson Planché as *The Vampire, or the Bride of the Isles*. The German adaptation of the play *Der Vampir oder die Totenbraut* (1821) by Heinrich Ludwig Ritter evolved into two operas *Der Vampyr*: one by Heinrich Marschner (1828) and another by Peter Josef Lindpainter. See Grey 75–106.

have the records in Polidori's diary and in his introduction to his novel *Ernestus Berchtold*, presumably Polidori's version of the events in the "Extract of a Letter from Geneva," first published in *The New Monthly Magazine*, and Byron's attempt to get straight the authorship of *The Vampyre* in a letter to his publisher, John Murray. All the participants agree that the ghost-story writing competition took place; there are, however, considerable differences as to what story was contributed by Polidori, what was the order of the composition and who supplied *The New Monthly Magazine* with a copy of *The Vampyre*.¹⁰ A recently published letter by John Murray to Byron suggests that it was Polidori who supplied the editor Alaric Watts with all the texts. Murray relates that:

The Editor of that Journal [Watts] has quarrelled with the publisher [Henry Colburn] & has called this morning to exculpate himself from the baseness of the transaction – He says that he received it from – Dr Polidori – for a small sum – Polidori averring that the whole plan of it was your Lordships & merely written out by him – the Editor inserted it with a short statement to this effect –but to his astonishment Colburn cancelled the leafs on the day previous to its publication; & conrarity [sic] to & direct hostility to his positive order, fearing that this statement would prevent the sale of this work in a separate form which was subsequently done – He informs me that Polidori finding that the Sale exceeded his expectation and that he had sold it too cheap went to the Editor and declared that he would deny it – he wrote to Perry to say that it was not written by your Lordship – & the next day told him to suppress the Letter – he is now preparing a sort of Boswell diary of your Lordships Life. (Cochran 107–108)

The Vampyre. A Tale first appeared in the *New Monthly Magazine* quite appropriately on 1 April 1819 and shortly afterwards was published in book form. *The New Monthly Magazine* advertised it as a new tale by Lord Byron in a clear attempt to boost the sales but the book edition was published anonymously. As all the other works by Byron, it was immediately published in Paris with the imprint "a tale by The Right Honourable Lord Byron" by Galignani, and then in two successive translations: in 1819 by H. Faber as *Le Vampyre, Nouvelle traduite de l'anglais de Lord Byron*, and in 1820 in the French translation by Amédée Pichot as *Le Vampyre, nouvelle attribuée à Lord Byron*, as part of Byron's *Works* by Ladvoat. It was withdrawn from the French edition of Byron's *Oeuvres* in the 2nd edition but reintroduced in the 3rd at the request of the subscribers (Estève 78 note 3). The Jagiellonian Library holds a copy of the 1819 translation by H. Faber. A Poznań magazine, *Weteran Poznański*, published it as a story by Byron in 1825. Even in Britain the practice of including *The Vampyre* in Byron's *Collected Works* continued well into the 1890s (in John Dick's cheap Classics edition, St Clair 357,

¹⁰ On the evidence of Polidori's diary James Rieger argued that Mary's famous account was completely distorted. According to him the fact that none of the participants produced a ghost story intended for publication testifies to the fact that the Gothic as a literary mode was then in decline. Rieger also trusts the account of the origins provided in the "Extract of a Letter from Geneva," apparently written by a female admirer. Polidori apparently completed Byron's fragment at the challenge of the Countess of Breuss, with whom he left the manuscript, and she passed it on to woman called Mme Gatelier, who sent the manuscript to Henry Colburn, the publisher of *The New Monthly Magazine*. She also may have been the person responsible for writing the "Extract" (Rieger 461). However, Skarda convincingly argues that all the supplementary material was also supplied by Polidori (Skarda 15).

721). Amazingly, Mickiewicz also refers to *The Vampyre* as a well-known tale by Byron in his lectures on Slavonic Literature (Mickiewicz 187).

One of the reasons why Polidori's short story could so easily be accepted as an authentic text by Byron throughout Europe was the fact that it spread over the Continent in the French prose translation like most of Byron's works. It was generally assumed that since the idea of the story was Byron's, in writing down the story Polidori acted as an intermediary between the author and the reader in the way analogous to that of the translator.

This is best confirmed by the Note to Wanda Malecka's translation of *The Vampyre* published in Warsaw in 1828 in the collection of Byron's *Powieści* [*Tales*], which is interesting also in presenting yet another story of the origins of the tale, according to which Byron told the story at a soirée of the Russian countess Mme Breuss, thus instead of the compromising origins of the story in the ghost writing contest at the Villa Diodati, we are presented with a perfectly respectable setting of a literary salon. The translator comments on the fact that the story was not written down by Byron, which must have affected its style in the original: "The English must regret that [the editor] did not always manage to preserve Byron's own expressions, but this difference disappears in a foreign language as the translator cannot boast of preserving the style of the author; it is sufficient if he preserves his ideas."¹¹

So if the translation attempted only at rendering the author's "ideas," it did not matter that the story had not originally been written by Byron. All the translations in Malecka's collection were in prose, and they had been based on Pichot's prose translations; the Polish translator might not have known the original English text. What only mattered in the 1820s was "the idea" and since it was sensational in its blending of sexuality and death, and made even more so by its association with an aristocratic literary celebrity, it could quickly spread throughout Europe together with Byronic legends. It took the strongest roots in France and Mario Praz's conception of the Byronic Fatal Man is essentially based on the French reception of Byron, which led to the vampiric strain in French Romanticism. One wonders whether in Poland it did not take an unexpected turn and directed Mickiewicz's attention to vampires, which he regarded as deriving from Slavonic culture and which make numerous appearances in his works.

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Byron first heard of the tale's existence through advertisements in the *Galignani Magazine* and sent a disclaimer to the editor, in which he argued that "[i]f the book is clever it would be base to deprive the real writer—whoever he may be—of honours; —and if stupid—I desire the responsibility of nobody's dullness but my own [...] I have besides a personal dislike to 'Vampyres' and the little acquaint-

¹¹ „Anglicy muszą żałować, iż niezdolał [sic!] zachować wszędzie własnych wyrażań Byrona; lecz ta różnica niknie w obcym języku, gdyż tłumacz niemoże [sic!] pochlebiać sobie, ażeby zachował styl autora, dość gdy zachowa jego myśli” (Byron 1828: 196).

ance I have with them would by no means induce me to divulge their secrets” (Marchand 6: 119). Note the facetious insinuation present in this rebuttal, which does suggest that he may know something about vampires which he is unwilling to reveal.

According to *Medwin’s Conversations*, Byron did not deny the fact that “the foundation of the story” was his idea, but he claimed he had been “forced to disown the publication, lest the world should suppose that [he] had vanity enough, or was egotist enough, to write in that ridiculous manner about myself” (Medwin 105). On this Medwin judiciously comments that Byron had meant here the idealized account of Byron’s fictional residence on the island of Mitylene in the supplementary materials published with the story (Medwin 105). To set his record straight, Byron sent the fragment he himself had written to Murray, and Murray published it together with *Mazeppa* and “Ode to Venice” on 28 June 1819.

Byron’s fragment, often referred to as “Augustus Darvell,” is a first-person narrative in which the narrator relates his encounter with Darvell, and an incident which happens in the course of his travels with him through Southern Europe to the East. “Educated at the same schools & university,” the two men share the similar background and experiences, but Darvell “had been deeply initiated into what is called the World – while [he] was yet in [his] novitiate” (Byron 1991: 59). Darvell is characterized in the manner of the Byronic hero:

he was a being of no common order – and one who whatever pains he might take to avoid remark – would still be remarkable. – I had cultivated his acquaintance subsequently – and endeavoured to obtain his friendship – but this last appeared to be unattainable – whatever affections he might have possessed seemed now – some to have been extinguished – and others to be concentrated: – that his feelings were acute I had sufficient opportunities of observing – for although [sic] he could controul he could not altogether disguise them – still he had a power of giving to one passion the appearance of another – in such a manner – that it was difficult to define the nature of what was working within him [...]. [I]t was evident that he was a prey to some cureless disquiet – but whether it arose from ambition – love – remorse – grief – from one or all of these – or merely from a morbid temperament akin to disease – I could not discover, – there were circumstances alledged [sic] which might have justified the application to each of these causes – but [...] these were so contradictory and contradicted – that none could be fixed with accuracy – where there is Mystery – it is generally supposed that there must also be Evil – I know not how this may be – but in him there certainly was the one – though I could not ascertain the extent of the other. (Byron 1991: 59–60)¹²

Any reader of Byron recognizes in this description the familiar echoes from Byron’s life and works: the voyages to the East with John Cam Hobhouse as his companion recorded in Canto II of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, a man “of no

¹² Janion quotes a completely distorted translation of the final part of this passage: “Myśli się ogólnie, że tajemnica idzie w parze z nieszczęściem. Nie wiem, czy to prawda, lecz – co się tyczy mego przyjaciela – tajemnica była czymś pewnym, natomiast nic nie wiedziałem o nieszczęściu w jego życiu i nie czułem najmniejszej skłonności do odgadywania go” (Janion 172), where Byron’s *Evil* is translated as *nieszczęście* (misfortune). This is caused by the fact that she uses not the English original, but a French translation, thus continuing the tradition of Polish nineteenth-century readings of Byron in French translation.

common order” from *Manfred* (Act II, scene IV, ll. 62–65), and above all the protagonists of *Childe Harold* and the Turkish Tales, all tormented by “cureless disquiet” (cf. “But quiet to quick bosoms is a hell” *CHP III*, st. 42, l. 370). So the protagonist seems to be yet another projection of the character type the readers used to identify with his creator, if anything even more strongly self-referential in view of the fact that the passage was allegedly written in summer of 1816 after Byron left Britain following the scandal surrounding his separation from his wife, of which various “contradictory and contradicted” versions circulated.

Darvell gradually starts “wasting away” (Byron 1991: 60) for no apparent reason, but he still insists on taking part in “an excursion to the ruins of Ephesus and Sardis” (Byron 1991: 60). Because of his failing strength they have to stop at an old Turkish cemetery where he dies having first requested to be buried at the precise place where a stork with a “Serpent writhing in her beak” (Byron 1991: 63) is perched. He extracts from the narrator two oaths: to conceal his death from the living and to cast his seal ring with some Arabic characters “into the Salt Springs which run into the bay of Eleusis” on the ninth day of the month at noon, and on the next day to go to the ruins of the temple of Ceres (Byron 1991: 62). It is Darvell’s strange disease, his previous knowledge of the cemetery, the black face after death and above all the mysterious orders given to his companion that point to the possibility of his being a vampire. Byron clearly never thought of continuing the written record of the story, be it below his dignity of the “Noble Author,” be it that even for him it would be too much to invite his readers to identify him with a vampire.

Polidori clearly did not have such reservations. His story is a third person narrative about a young man called Aubrey¹³ who in the middle of fashionable London society becomes fascinated by a misanthropic Lord Ruthven, and accompanies him on his voyages via Brussels and Rome to Greece, where Ruthven dies extracting from Aubrey a promise not to tell anybody about his death for a year and a day. On his return to England, Aubrey meets him again as a suitor of his beloved sister. His agitation and frustration lead to Aubrey’s mental unsettlement and confinement. On learning of his sister’s impending marriage to Ruthven, he tries to prevent it but is hindered by his oath. Only when the year and a day are over is he free to reveal the secret, but it is too late. He dies of a broken blood vessel and his sister “had glutted the thirst of a VAMPYRE!” (Polidori 72).¹⁴

The supplementary materials – two extracts of letters on Byron – provide a frame within which the story is embedded and place it within the context of “Byromania,” the craze for Byron among Regency society and particularly among women¹⁵ and the scandals surrounding Byron’s separation and his stay at the Villa

¹³ According to Skarda (251), Aubrey is named after John Aubrey (1626–1697), whose *Brief Lives*, short biographies of famous men of his time appeared in 1813. Murray, Byron’s publisher, asked Polidori to keep a record of Byron’s activities so the analogy is apparent.

¹⁴ All quotations from *The Vampyre* are from [J.W. Polidori] *The Vampyre; A Tale*. London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1819.

¹⁵ The term was coined by Annabella Milbanke before she married Byron and has entered modern Byron criticism. For Annabella’s depiction of “Byromania,” see McDayter 137.

Diodati, particularly the stories spread by Southey on “the League of Incest” with two sisters formed by Byron and Shelley in Switzerland (qtd. in MacCarthy 296). They read as attempts to exonerate Byron’s reputation on the part of first a female and then a male admirer. In the opening “Extract” a female admirer intent on pursuing Byron’s footsteps in Switzerland visits the Villa Diodati with veneration similar to that given to Stratford, and gathers all the information that may help her in “personification” of “the individual [she] admire[s].” Byron appears as a man who shuns company and it is only through the relations of a lady called the Countess of Breuss, who befriended Byron’s physician, i. e. Polidori, that she manages to acquire some knowledge about the poet. Thus the rumours “of having in his house two sisters as the partakers of his revels [...] like many other charges which have been brought against his lordship” are “entirely destitute of truth” (Polidori xiv). Polidori is also the source of information on the ghost-story writing competition and procurer of “the outline of each of these stories” (allegedly those of Byron’s, Mary Godwin’s and Polidori’s; Polidori xvi). Byron essentially confirmed the truthfulness of this account of the ghost story contest in a letter to Murray. What he objected to was the completely fictional account of his residence on the Greek island of Mitylene, which praises his piety and generosity, and depicts him as “a very eccentric and benevolent character,” particularly keen on taking care of young women: “He had portioned eight young girls and even *danced* with them at the nuptial feast” (Polidori 81), and taught a young and beautiful Greek girl to play the piano.

This apparent exoneration provided by the paratext carries an innuendo and establishes disturbing analogies between Byron and Lord Ruthven. Both are misanthropic, both are attracted to young females, both are accompanied by male companions, both carry daggers, etc. The reader is thus invited to see them as doubles: the former constructed by Byron’s enthusiastic, predominantly female admirers as the “personification” of their fantasies, and the latter as the alleged product of Byron’s own imagination, thus the naive fantasy of a reformed Byron is juxtaposed against a titillating vision of a threatening sexual predator. This relationship is complicated further by the fact that any knowledgeable 1819 reader would have noticed that Ruthven is one of the names given to the murderous and seductive character of Viviani/Glenarvon, whom Byron’s discarded lover, Lady Caroline Lamb, intended as a portrait of Byron in her 1816 novel *Glenarvon*.¹⁶

Not surprisingly, the tale is most often read in biographical terms, as a record of the relationship between Polidori and Byron.¹⁷ But the figure of Aubrey, dangerously attracted and bound to Lord Ruthven, can be seen as emblematic of any reader of Byron. Like the female author of the “Extract” in search of the “personification” of the admired author, Aubrey “formed this object into the hero of

¹⁶ Ruthven’s name should be pronounced *ˈrɪvən* as it is an actual baronial name in the peerage of Scotland. Ruthven is also a name of a loch in the Highlands, pronounced *ˈrʌθvən*, and that may account for the fact that the action of the melodrama takes place on the shores of a lake in Scotland (Wells, *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary*).

¹⁷ Patricia Skarda interprets the story as a record of the interaction between Byron’s great literary talent and Polidori’s literary aspirations in terms of “anxiety of influence.”

a romance, and determined to observe the offspring of his fancy, rather than the person before him" (Polidori 31–32), and the text offers a warning of the dangers which may ensue.

Simon Bainbridge persuasively argues that in his story Polidori "uses the trope of vampirism to figure the perceived threat of the Byronic text to its readers, a threat to which women readers were seen to be particularly vulnerable" (Bainbridge 22) and also shows how women readers are themselves responsible for constructing "Byromania." According to Bainbridge, "Ruthven, like the Byronic text, offers a focus for a range of contradictory fantasies of reformation, liberation and identification" (Bainbridge 23). Bainbridge sees the source of the vampire's power in "his mastery of the rhetoric of Byronic poetics," particularly in "exciting romance narrative and sympathy-evoking self-presentation," characteristic of his 1812–1816 poetry (Bainbridge 21). Ruthven has "the reputation of a winning tongue" (Polidori 29) and this is the way in which he attracts the interest and sympathy of even the most virtuous women. The best instance of his strategy appears in the description of the seduction of Miss Aubrey:

Who 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, save with her to whom he addressed himself; – could tell how, since he knew her, his existence had begun to seem worthy of preservation, if it were merely that he might listen to her soothing accents; – in fine, he knew so well how to use the serpent's art, or such was the will of fate, that he gained her affections. (Polidori 69; qtd. in Bainbridge 21)

Thus, as Bainbridge suggests, Byron's poetry is "the serpent's art" and Ruthven a demonic portrait of Byron.

The theatrical adaptation continues this process of the transformation of what was supposed to be Byron's original idea onto the stage by making the Don Juan connection with the vampire explicit. As in July 1819 Byron published the first two cantos of *Don Juan*, the association between him and Don Juan was confirmed in public imagination. Cyprien Bérard's novel *Lord Ruthven et les vampires* published in February 1820, which served as yet another source for the play, was referred to by a critic as "ce Don Juan vampirique" (qtd. in Frayling 9). The melodrama contains numerous echoes of Mozart's and da Ponte's *Don Giovanni*: the scenes of the attempted seduction of a young girl Lowetta on the day of her marriage, and of her rescue reminisce of Don Giovanni's attempt to seduce Zerlina,¹⁸ and according to requirements of the genre, it contains a happy ending in which Lord Rutwen is carried off by evil spirits.

In the scenes of Rutwen's encounters with young women the emphasis falls on the seduction process: indeed the scene of seduction of Lowetta echoes the Don Giovanni-Zerlina duet "LA ci darem la mano" (Switzer 111). Rutwen is a skilful seducer who appeals to sympathy and pity; he tells Lowetta she reminds him of a woman he loved and lost, and there is a truth to that as she is to be another in the sequence of women whom he needs to destroy to preserve his existence;

¹⁸ See Switzer 111 and Grey 82. It was Heinrich Marschner's opera *Der Vampyr* (1828) that most strongly emphasized Lord Ruthven's relation to Don Giovanni.

both Lowetta and Miss Aubray are appalled and fatally attracted by him. As in Polidori's story, however, the greatest emphasis is placed on Aubray's fascination with Rutwen. Unlike Byron's narrator or Polidori's Aubrey, Aubray from the melodrama does not see any mystery as pointing to the potential of evil in Rutwen: "the more [he] knew him, the more [he] valued his extraordinary qualities" ("im więcej go poznawałem, tem więcej cenilem jego nadzwyczajane przymioty," Nodier 26). It is Miss Aubray who recognizes in him the vampire who threatened her in her dream, which does not prevent her, however, from yielding to his erotic appeal.

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What is interesting in this evolution of the Byronic vampiric character is the fact that while in "Augustus Darvell" there appear only hints of vampirism, and the central character remains veiled in mystery which points to evil but is never identified as such, Polidori's Lord Ruthven's vampirism is hinted at already on the first page through the description of his "dead grey eye" (Polidori 27) to be clearly announced in the very last words of the tale. The melodrama blatantly announces sexual vampirism as its central theme from its very Prologue. If Byron projected himself onto a vampiric character to entertain the small circle of his friends at Diodati, Polidori created the vampiric image of Byron for international audiences, making vampirism not only the trope of sexual profligacy but also of "Byromania." In popular melodrama the vampire became conflated with Don Juan.

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