THE DECADENT VAMPIRE

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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John William Polidori published "The Vampyre" in 1819, and, as the first person to author a work of English vampire fiction, he ultimately established the modern image of the aristocratic vampire, which writers such as Bram Stoker later borrowed. The literary vampire, exemplified by Lord Ruthven, reveals the influence of Burkean aesthetics; however, the vampire's portrayal as a degenerate nobleman and his immense popularity with readers also ensured that he would have a tremendous impact on nineteenth century culture. "The Vampyre" foreshadows the more socially-aware Gothic literature of the Victorian period, but the story's glorification of the perverse vampire also presents a challenge to traditional morality. This essay explores the influence of the literary vampire not just on broader aspects of nineteenth century culture but also its influence on the Decadent Movement (focusing on the works of writers such as Charles Baudelaire, Théophile Gautier, and Oscar Wilde) in order to show how it reflects the decadent abnormal. In doing so, however, this essay also questions whether decadence ought to be understood as a nineteenth century European phenomenon, as opposed to a

movement that was confined to the late Victorian period; the beliefs shared by decadent writers often originated in Romanticism, and the Romantics' fascination with the supernatural suggests that they were perhaps as interested in perverse themes as the Decadents.

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AN INTRODUCTION

Although the vampire and other fantastical, blood-drinking creatures have been prevalent in the folklore of nearly every culture, it was not until the eighteenth century that the vampire began to appear as a character in Western literature. At the time, though, the vampire was still confined to poetry. Works such as Heinrich August Ossenfelder's "The Vampire" (1748), Gottfried August Bürger's "Lenore" (1773), and Johan Wolfgang von Goethe's "The Bride of Corinth" (1797) provide readers with the earliest glimpse of the literary vampire, and they are evidence of the West's growing interest in the supernatural, but it is notable that these works are all by German authors. The vampire had been the subject of considerable debate in Germany following the "vampire epidemics" that swept through the Hungarian Empire during the 1720s and 1730s. Largely prompted by rumors of "sightings" of deceased family members, the epidemics resulted in a number of cases in which bodies were exhumed, decapitated, and then burned, and it was this hysteria that eventually helped to introduce the vampire to English writers. During this time, the Earl of Oxford wrote his *Travels of 3 English Gentlemen from Venice to Hamburg*, which describes an encounter with a vampire and offered readers the first serious clarification of the vampire phenomenon in English, though it was not published until 1810, just three years before Lord Byron would draw further attention to the vampire in his poem "The Giaour." It was Lord Byron's physician, John William Polidori, however, who authored the first English work of vampire fiction.

Published in 1819, Polidori's "The Vampyre" established the portrayal of the literary vampire for the rest of the nineteenth century and was also largely responsible for influencing the popularity of the vampire in later literature, especially in England. Before then, the vampire was notably absent from English literature, appearing only in the form of obscure references, as in "The Giaour." Polidori's success, though, owes much to Lord Byron, whose *Fragment of a Novel* (1816) provided the framework for "The Vampyre." Despite the *Fragment of a Novel* being incomplete, it is believed that Lord Byron had intended for the story to conclude in a similar manner as Polidori's, with the narrator returning home to discover that his traveling companion has risen from the grave. As James B. Twitchell points out in *The Living Dead*, "Byron had discussed his story with [Polidori]" (Twitchell 106), and Polidori, in his introduction to his later novel *Ernestus Berchtold* (1819), had even outlined Byron's *Fragment*, noting that "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" (quoted in Twitchell 106). Whether the traveler's "resurrected" companion was meant to be a vampire or some other supernatural being is uncertain, but there is no doubt that Lord Byron was familiar with the vampire from folklore, as shown by his allusion to the creature in "The Giaour," and he only became further associated with the vampire when Polidori's story was falsely attributed to him; no one was willing to believe that an unknown author such as Polidori could produce such an imaginative and original work, and the story's association with Lord Byron was likely the only reason it sold so well. Regardless, "The Vampyre" had an undeniable influence on every vampire story that came after it.

With the creation of Lord Ruthven, Polidori broke away from the folkloric traditions of Eastern Europe and, instead, created a new kind of vampire that reflected contemporary Romantic aesthetics. His vampire is not just to be feared; unlike the vampire found in folklore, Lord Ruthven is just as fascinating as he is frightening; he is a sublime figure. In his *Philosophical Enquiry*, published in 1757, Edmund Burke distinguishes between the sublime and the beautiful, explaining the sublime as that which inspires delightful terror in the observer, and it is this sublimity that defines the literary vampire of the nineteenth century.

Polidori made the vampire appealing to readers, and his story is often credited with popularizing the vampire in France, which had, until then, little interest in vampire literature or folklore. Only a year following the publication of "The Vampyre," Cyprien Bérard wrote an adaptation, *Lord Ruthwen ou les Vampires*, which was falsely attributed to Charles Nodier. Nodier, though, later wrote his own version, a play entitled *Le Vampire*, which quickly became a success and sparked a new "vampire craze" all across Europe. The vampire's newfound popularity, especially in France, ultimately had an influence on late Romantic writers such as Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire. While Baudelaire is known mainly for writing *The Flowers of Evil* (1857), which incorporates vampiric imagery, Gautier wrote his own vampire story, "Clarimonde" (1836), which borrowed from the newly-established tradition set by Polidori and would have its own influence on the development of the literary vampire.

The Gothic mode, though often parodied, remained popular with readers throughout the nineteenth century, and vampire fiction quickly grew into its own genre during the Victorian period, which saw the rise of several countercultural movements.

The Decadent Movement, in particular, had a large impact on Victorian culture; it borrowed heavily from the Gothic tradition, having been shaped by late Romantic writers such as Gautier and Baudelaire, whose works often questioned traditional morality and featured perverse themes. Decadent beliefs, however, can be found in earlier Gothic works such as "The Vampyre." For instance, Lord Ruthven's triumph over the moral and beautiful reflects society's preoccupation with vice, as opposed to virtue, which many Decadents openly embraced as an inherent part of human nature. While the literary vampire reflects Romantic aesthetics— in particular, the Burkean sublime— Polidori's depiction of Lord Ruthven also allows the vampire to be read as a manifestation of the decadent "abnormal," especially in the context of Victorian literature. Decadents defined the abnormal as the exercise of individual will in order to demonstrate man's superiority to "natural law," and, very often, the abnormal could only be expressed through one's delight in morbidity and the desire to indulge one's senses; it was the shameless defiance of nature, which the vampire embodied so well. Lord Ruthven calculates his every movement and he presents himself as a sophisticated aristocrat, though he finds pleasure in corrupting and destroying his many acquaintances. His behavior is strikingly similar to the morbidity that characterized Decadents and, ultimately, marks him as the predecessor of decadent Gothic villains such as Dorian Gray.

Although Decadence is traditionally viewed as a late Victorian movement, many of the themes found in decadent literature can also be found in the Gothic literature of the Romantic period. The decadent figure is present in Polidori's "The Vampyre," as is the decadent lifestyle, which is further explored in the later "Clarimonde" by Gautier. What "The Vampyre" and "Clarimonde" share in common, though, besides their decadent

themes, is their focus on the vampire. The Gothic mode provided a means for Romantic writers to express what would later be termed "decadent" beliefs, but it was the literary vampire, as exemplified by Polidori's Lord Ruthven, that became one of the first visible symbols of Decadence. It is for this reason— that the vampire can be understood as a progenitor of Decadence— that this essay, in its discussion of the origins of the Decadent Movement, will limit its focus primarily to the principal works of vampire fiction of the nineteenth century.

In addition to Polidori's "The Vampyre," this essay will discuss Gautier's "Clarimonde" as another example of vampire fiction produced during the Romantic period, though the work is significant for reasons other than the time period during which it was written. "Clarimonde" was the result of the many popular French adaptations of Polidori's vampire story; it was also authored by the man who would inevitably have such a profound influence on Baudelaire, and both Gautier and Baudelaire would be key in shaping the Decadent Movement in France and, later, England. So, while this discussion is mostly concerned with the presence of the vampire and Decadence in British literature, "Clarimonde" serves as a reminder that French literature cannot be ignored. "Clarimonde" reflects the influence of British literature in France, and it was French literature that would later inform the Decadent Movement in England; to a certain extent, all British decadent literature would be a mimicry of the French, borrowing the same perverse themes and dubious characters, and even retracing many of the same plotlines.

On the other hand, works such as Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), which will also be important in this discussion, are largely products of Victorian morality and, as such, can be seen as a response to the influence of

French Decadence. Both *Carmilla* and *Dracula* reflect the fear of decline that characterized the late nineteenth century, though, truthfully, it is Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) that best captures late Victorian anxieties while uniting the literary vampire with the decadent narrative of the period. While *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is not a traditional vampire story in the least, Wilde's depiction of Dorian reveals how the vampire ended up influencing, perhaps subconsciously, the culture that had, by the 1890s, become associated with the Decadent Movement— a culture that was fascinated with sexual perversion, and presented itself with the artificial persona of the dandy and the mystique of the *flâneur*. In this respect, the appearance of the vampire in Gothic Romantic literature as an embodiment of the decadent abnormal prevents one from understanding Decadence solely as a late Victorian movement; it cannot be confined to such a brief period in history. Rather, Decadence is best understood as a nineteenth century phenomenon, whose culture was shaped by the literary vampire that Polidori created.

DECADENCE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The atmosphere of the late nineteenth century was generally characterized by a sense of great anxiety. Although the start of the twentieth century was highly anticipated, just as many people feared what the new century might bring. This period, which was seen by many as a period of decline and called the *fin de siècle*, was later, following the horrors of World War I, renamed *La Belle Époque*— the beautiful era.

During the late Victorian period, however, few could find the beauty in the *fin de siècle*; even in America, the late nineteenth century was seen as a Gilded Age, an age during which enormous technological and economic growth masked the devastating effects of increased urbanization and other social concerns. The 1890s, specifically, which were dominated by the Aesthetic, Decadent, and Symbolist Movements in England, became known as the "Naughty Nineties" or the "Gay Nineties," among other names that reflected the carefree and restless attitude of the period. Like America's Gilded Age, the *fin de siècle* was a period of surface grandeur, beneath which bubbled a multitude of social anxieties that had surfaced much earlier, many even before the start of the nineteenth century. The Victorian period saw the sudden rise of a working middle class, which threatened traditional class distinctions, especially after the passing of the Reform Act 1832. At the same time, many feared the decline of religion as science began to play a larger part in people's daily lives, resulting in rapid industrialization in cities and numerous medical advancements.

Medical advancements, in particular, were met with much skepticism and reluctance. Since the early nineteenth century, society had always had a tendency to

paint doctors as untrustworthy and somewhat menacing figures, and, as Debbie Harrison explains in her essay "Doctors, Drugs, and Addiction," this trend only worsened as the century progressed; the "mad scientist" character that Mary Shelly had popularized in *Frankenstein* (1818) had become considerably more frightening and unsympathetic when resurrected in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). People's fears were not unjustified, though. According to Harrison, "self-experimenting" was a common practice among doctors, and, "by the fin de siècle, iatrogenic addiction— an addiction triggered by a doctor's prescriptions— had become a serious issue for the medical profession . . ." (Harrison 53). The public viewed doctors in an especially sinister light following the Whitechapel murders of the late 1880s and early 1890s, which a number of journalists had believed were perpetrated by a "sadistic medical maniac" (Harrison 53). However, society's discomfort with doctors stemmed not only from reports of medical malpractice but also the fact that doctors were proof of the lessening distinctions between social classes. Doctors were typically self-made professionals, so the "image of the 'mad' doctor discussed in the press [regarding the Whitechapel murders] emerges from pre-existing anxieties relating to the conduct of medicine in general and journalistic anxieties about middle-class men in particular" (quoted in Harrison 54). Inevitably, the gruesome Whitechapel murders also drew attention to the poverty, disease, and prostitution that were common in urban areas, and society could no longer overlook such obvious signs of decline.

Early on, the Gothic mode was adopted by reformists and other concerned parties as a means of discussing, and even quelling, contemporary fears. As the nineteenth century progressed, moral issues quickly began to take precedence over Byronic heroes

as the settings of Gothic novels shifted from remote castles to the opium dens of crowded cities. Although the Gothic dwelt on bleak imagery and dark themes, Victorians found that such literature was capable of reaffirming the existence and triumph of morality in what many saw as an increasingly corrupt society. This fascination with the moral nature of the Gothic was also apparent outside of literature, as the Victorian period witnessed a Gothic Revival in architecture. However, the Revival had truly originated in a renewed interest in the Middle Ages that first began during the mid to late eighteenth century, resulting in early examples of Gothic Revival architecture such as Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill House. When the Revival became more widespread during the 1830s and 1840s, though, it was largely in response to the "demoralizing" effects of industrialization. In the essay "Social Protest through Architecture," Alireza Farahbakhsh explains that, for Victorians such as Arnold, Carlyle, and Ruskin, Gothic architecture embodied Christian values, and the Revival represented a deep yearning for a pre-industrialized, more spiritual, and more moral society; the Gothic Revival was "the revival of medieval social cooperation and harmony between man and nature and mind and body" (Farahbakhsh 183). Leading art critic John Ruskin was especially nostalgic for the Middle Ages, remarking in *Modern Painters* (1843) that "these are much sadder ages than the early ones; not sadder in the noble and deep way, but in the dim wearied way— the way of ennui and jaded intellect, and uncomfortableness of soul and body" (quoted in Farahbakhsh 183). The revival of Gothic architecture, though, recalled the grandeur of medieval churches and cathedrals; "the solid, high, light, and impressive" aesthetic of the Gothic offered a "counterpoint to factories" that was capable of "showing the path to spirituality to the lost masses blinded by materialism and industrialization"

(Farahbakhsh 196). At the same time, however, many associated the Gothic aesthetic with a more primitive and more chaotic period in history, and, in literature, the Gothic mode was frequently utilized by decadent writers whose aims starkly contrasted with those of reformists.

The Decadent Movement of the late nineteenth century was an anti-establishment movement, and, despite being a relatively small fringe movement, it presented a strong reaction against Victorian morality. Traditionally, the word "decadence" has always implied "falling away" from the conventions of art and morality— and art and morality were often understood to be intrinsically linked during the Victorian period. While John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* was written primarily as a defense of J. M. W. Turner's work, the volume nevertheless echoes the widely held belief of the time that all art is a reflection of the artist and that art can and should be used to judge whether the artist is, in fact, a moral person. Those who identified as Decadents, though, established a new vision in which traditional morality was to be renounced and all social restraints were to be cast off; they wished to defy social conventions and embrace sin. Unlike most of their contemporaries, Decadents found beauty in decline and they defined themselves by this morbid sensibility. Part of the reason Decadents so eagerly anticipated the moral and cultural decline of the Victorian period, though, was that, with failure, they felt a sense of freedom. With the finish of the century, many saw an opportunity to start anew, to regain control of and mold the new century, so, while the period might have been "yellow," it was truly white, a "symbol of purity, which, despite their protestations, the Decadents yearned for . . ." (Beckson xxxvii).

Although Decadence in England has acquired a certain association with the 1890s, the movement emerged much earlier in France. In both France and England, however, Decadence was closely related to Aestheticism and Symbolism, and many of the writers who influenced the Decadent Movement, such as Gautier and Baudelaire, are also often seen as having had as great an influence on the Aesthetic and Symbolist Movements. Thus, it often becomes difficult to determine when one movement ends and the other begins. Richard Ellmann points out in his essay "The Uses of Decadence" that Gautier wrote of the "decadent spirit" in 1868, and Verlaine declared in 1883 that dying cultures make the best cultures; however, it was not until a few months later that Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À Rebours*— which many consider to be the first decadent novel— appeared and, inevitably, defined the movement. According to Ellmann, *À Rebours* gave Decadence "the force of a programme. [Huysmans's] decadent nobleman . . . has no normal tastes. A determined quester for unheard-of pleasures, he collapses at last in neurasthenia, but of the most glamorous kind" (Ellmann). However, what contemporary writers defined as "Decadence" seemed to be ever-changing, so that it now becomes nearly impossible to fix the movement to a specific period:

> [The decadents] flourished . . . for only a few years in Paris, during the eighties. By the time English writers took an interest in decadence it had already lost its lustre, or what they labelled (in a mistranslation of Baudelaire) "its phosphorescence of putrescence". In England nobody called himself a decadent, though it was a fine epithet to ascribe to someone else. Ten years after Verlaine's poem ["Langueur" (1883)] Arthur Symons published in *Harper's* his article "The Decadent Movement in Literature". Symons expressed a wry fondness for decadence as "a new and interesting and beautiful disease", but within a few years he acknowledged that the decadent movement had been "an interlude, a half-mock interlude". He was persuaded later to call the movement "symbolist" rather than decadent, a change of title which had already taken place in Paris ten years earlier. (Ellmann)

While the spontaneous changing of "titles" as well as the existence of "decadent" themes in earlier works of literature call into question the status of *À Rebours* as the first decadent novel, the novel's influence on later works is undeniable. Not only did *À Rebours* become the definitive decadent work almost immediately, but the book ultimately informed the lives of those who read it. George Moore and Oscar Wilde both wrote derivative works, and even something of *À Rebours* can be found reflected in Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*, which shares the book's theme of sampling and also dwells on the importance of sensation. Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is perhaps the most famous work to borrow from Huysmans's novel, and its main character has since become representative of Decadence in England.

According to most critics, Decadence did not flourish in England until the 1890s, having grown out of the Aesthetic Movement of the 1870s and 1880s. Pater's *History of the Renaissance* (1873), which Wilde once referred to as his "golden book," espoused Gautier's belief of *l'art pour l'art*, a philosophy that later became essential in the formation of Decadence as a movement, and, although Pater was highly critical of the Decadent Movement, which he saw as the gross distortion of his aesthetic philosophy, both Decadence and Aestheticism ultimately shared much in common.

Both Aestheticism and Decadence emerged as anti-Victorian movements that championed the philosophy of *l'art pour l'art*, which taught that art should avoid any political, moral, or social instruction; art's only obligation ought to be to itself— to be beautiful and to provide the observer with an experience. Also at the heart of both movements was the insatiable desire for new sensations and experiences, though Aestheticism was mostly concerned with artistic and intellectual experiences.

Decadence, on the other hand, allowed Pater's aesthetic philosophy to be interpreted as the hedonistic pursuit of all experiences― both pleasurable and painful― while holding a certain fascination for the lower pleasures in life; as expressed by Lord Henry, the lower pleasures, too, can become an art: "Crime belongs exclusively to the lower orders . . . I should fancy that crime was to them what art is to us, simply a method of procuring extraordinary sensations" (Wilde 228).

The publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* at the start of the 1890s offered a response to society's anxieties about social decline, which, at the time, were reaching feverish heights, and Dorian's reckless pursuit of new sensations ensured that he would become representative of Decadence in the Naughty Nineties. Dorian Gray, however, was a character who had appeared before in literature. The charismatic, dangerous nobleman was hardly a new concept by the late Victorian period; Dorian owes much to earlier Gothic villains such as Mr. Hyde― and perhaps even more to the Byronic vampire Lord Ruthven. Like Dorian himself, the aesthetic theme of Wilde's novel can also be traced to earlier works of literature, not just Pater's *Renaissance*.

The philosophy of *l'art pour l'art* that defined both Aestheticism and Decadence was rooted in Romanticism; it is believed to have originally emerged in late eighteenth century Kantian aesthetics, when, in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790) Immanuel Kant explains that beauty is the awareness of the pleasure which attends the "free play" of the imagination. The belief in art's autonomy, which Kant supported, was purely a product of Romantic thinking, and this belief was soon further articulated by other contemporary writers. Such writers included Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Leigh Hunt, and Arthur Hallam, who had all put forward the idea of art's autonomy before the 1830s; it was only in the

1830s that Théophile Gautier began to advocate the same belief, attaching to it the now-famous slogan "*l'art pour l'art*."

It is unsurprising that an aesthetic philosophy so similar to Pater's own began to take shape during the Romantic period; both Romanticism and Aestheticism shared in common a deeply anti-establishment attitude, a fascination with the relationship between art and nature, and a strong belief in the importance of the imagination. Given such similarities, what is surprising is that Decadence, which scorned the emotional nature of Romanticism and Aestheticism, had ever grown out of the latter movement.

Despite their seemingly contradicting values, however, Decadence manages to overlap with Romanticism and Aestheticism more than it might seem possible. Decadents shared a preference for the "intellectual and austere," and, rather than embrace the natural, they were driven by their desire for new sensations, which they sought in "forbidden love" and "sexual depravity" (Beckson xxx). Their quest for new sensations cultivated a dark fascination with all forms of sin and the macabre, and this morbid curiosity was what ultimately led decadents back to the Gothic literature of the Romantic period.

The Gothic allowed for the free range of the imagination and the experience of new sensations; it became a means to fulfill perverse desires, indulge in the grotesque, and play out dark fantasies. While Romantic writers are often thought of as being solely concerned with emotion, sensation was just as important to them as it was to the Decadents, and Lord Byron once even went so far as to call sensation the "great art of life." The emergence of the Gothic mode during the late eighteenth century suggests that

Romantics were not just interested in nature but that they were also just as interested in the supernatural— the unnatural, the abnormal.

In the 1890s, Decadence in England was fueled by a sense of crisis that stemmed from social turmoil, but the same sense of crisis that threatened late Victorian culture had been felt before in the late eighteenth century while Romanticism was taking shape as a movement. Traditionally, the term "decadence" does not refer to the decline of any one period in history; it refers, instead, to a general sense of moral decline or the deterioration of culture and civilization, and the late eighteenth century is easily characterized as such a period.

The end of the eighteenth century brought with it the collapse of the *Ancien Régime* in France, which was felt all across Europe. In France and England especially, though, this period was defined by intense political turmoil, sudden technological advancement, and a rebellion against past cultural traditions. The French Revolution quickly turned violent in the 1790s, and England could only watch in horror as the French disposed of their monarchy, overturning what had for centuries been accepted as the "natural order." In July 1794, the Terror at last came to a close with the Thermidorian Reaction, which was largely brought about by women, who "promoted in their costume and manners a fierce backlash against the excesses of Robespierre's Republic of Virtue" (Ribeiro 122). The most infamous forms of reaction were the *bals des victimes*, at which many women wore mourning dress among other fashions that were meant to shock:

> In chilling mockery of the Terror . . . some of the dancers had their hair cut *à la victime*, and wore red shawls in recollection of those thrown over murderers when executed . . . In defiance of a recent orgy of blood-letting under the Terror, some women wore a red ribbon round the neck in imitation of the cut made by the blade of the guillotine; this somewhat sinister theme continued into the late 1790s when there was a fashion for scarlet ribbons crossed over the bodice of women's dress,

such *croisures à la victime* indicating that their wearers would sacrifice everything for their lovers. (Ribeiro 122 - 124)

These *bals des victimes* have since come to epitomize the morbid and carnivalesque nature of the period, but, even after the Terror and the establishment of the *Directoire exécutif*, political turmoil persisted in France, giving rise to the *incroyables*, *merveilleuses*, and *muscadins*. While the *muscadins* were known for inciting riots and are often considered part of the First White Terror, the *incroyables* and *merveilleuses* rebelled against the ideals of the Revolution through their eccentric dress and the shameless flaunting of wealth so that these countercultures quickly became infamous for their luxury, extravagance, and decadent behavior.

In England, the Terror and continual political unrest in France stirred similar fears of revolt. Since the late 1780s, King George III's mental instability had raised concerns about the future of the monarchy, but, even after his recovery, many were still displeased with his rule. The 1790s saw the growth of the abolition movement as well as a push for women's rights, causes which must have seemed especially radical in light of the events that were taking place in France at the time. This period also felt the impact of the new Industrial Revolution; although the revolution had only just begun in the 1790s, its effects were felt immediately as jobs were lost and the population of cities grew. Industrialization resulted in poorer working conditions for adults and children alike, due to the unsanitary conditions of factories and the dangerous nature of the machinery, as well as fewer jobs for working class citizens.

New scientific fields had also emerged as the result of technological advancements, and some fields, such as galvanism, became the center of much debate. Galvanism, which was the study of using electricity to bring organisms to life, served as

the inspiration for Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, though it also inspired considerable fear that science was overstepping its boundaries and violating nature. In the Preface to her novel, Shelley declares that "Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world" (Shelley 9). It was not only that doctors risked overstepping natural boundaries that frightened people, though; the medical profession was a gruesome profession, and, as would still be true in the *fin de siècle*, the "doctor and grotesque violence . . . were conflated in the popular imagination" (Harrison 54). Unlike the Whitechapel murders, the Burke and Hare murders of the late 1820s were directly connected to the medical profession and seemed to confirm the fears expressed in *Frankenstein*; this series of murders drew attention to the questionable morality of medical practices while successfully painting doctors as villainous and deranged. As noted by Harrison, "violent" practices such as post-mortem examinations were easily linked to the "dissection of the female victims" in the later Whitechapel murders, which seemed to "anticipate the . . . mutilation of Lucy in Stoker's *Dracula* at the hands of Dr. Seward and Van Helsing" (Harrison 54). Grotesque practices, such as those routinely carried out by doctors, presented an attempt to violate and rise above nature, which ultimately became the aim of the Decadent Movement at the end of the century. However, the political and social unrest brought about by the Revolution and industrialization in France and England reveals the presence of decadence well before the onset of the Victorian period.

Victorian Decadence is typically associated with the *fin de siècle* mentality of the 1880s and 1890s, which was a time characterized by an overwhelming sense of world-weariness, cynicism, and pessimism. The term *fin de siècle*, though, does not have to be

limited to discussion of the late Victorian period; it can be applied to any "end of a cycle" that is accompanied by similar fears. The term *fin de siècle* might even be applied to the spirit of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, since this period was also characterized by a strong feeling of anxiety, which was brought on by sudden political and social upheaval. As a whole, however, the nineteenth century was shaped by a series of rapid changes which defined the period as a time of great unease, and, in this respect, one might even describe the entire century as a period of "decline." Certainly, the lessening distinctions between classes, a series of violent revolutions, and the end of the *Ancien Régime* signaled the end of an era. Any anxieties that existed at the start of the nineteenth century did not disappear; they worsened, and the popularity of the Gothic novel—and the vampire, in particular— served as a reflection of people's concerns.

GOTHIC AND ROMANTIC AESTHETICS

Like people's anxieties, Gothic literature remained ever-present throughout the nineteenth century, its enduring nature allowing it to become a link between Romanticism and Decadence. Writers aligned with both movements were attracted to the Gothic, and, while these writers likely adopted this mode for different reasons, the Gothic ultimately maintained the same spirit throughout the nineteenth century.

For Victorians, the Gothic mode was primarily a means to discuss and quell fears of social degeneration, and the Gothic novels of the late nineteenth century were always instructed by Victorian morality. The Victorian Gothic sometimes directly addressed social concerns, though it just as often focused on the supernatural, which frequently became a metaphor for larger threats, as in Stoker's *Dracula*; however, regardless of the presence of the supernatural, Victorian morality demanded that Gothic works feature a clearly-indentified villain. Victorian authors seldom allowed for any shades of gray when distinguishing between good and evil, and even *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, one of the principal decadent works of the nineteenth century, contains a moral message. Despite the triumph of good over evil at the end of the novel, though, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* still functions as a decadent work. The majority of the novel is spent detailing and delighting in Dorian's "fall," and, in this respect, the Gothic mode functioned as a means for decadent writers to celebrate perversion and indulge in every vice; living out dark and indulgent fantasies, even though fictional, became yet another means of acquiring new sensations.

The element of fantasy that characterizes both the Victorian and decadent approaches to the Gothic is also present in the Gothic fiction of the Romantic period. For Romantic writers, the Gothic mode gave free reign to the imagination and was a way of rebelling against "reason" and the "rational," which had governed literature during the Enlightenment; the Gothic abandoned logic, heightening one's sensations and emotions. However, the fantastical nature of the Gothic was originally influenced by contemporary aesthetics, especially Edmund Burke's definition of the sublime.

Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* proved to be one of the most influential treatises on the characteristics of the sublime and the beautiful, and Burke's preference for the sublime reflects a shift from neoclassical to Romantic aesthetics. In his treatise, Burke explains that, "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*" (Burke 86). It should be great and overwhelming, for the sublime must be capable of inspiring fear which "robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning" (Burke 101). The enormous effect that the sublime has on one's body and mind allows Burke to argue its power over the beautiful, which is merely aesthetically pleasing to one's senses. The sublime, however, despite being a source of terror, is also pleasurable, which distinguishes it from that which is "simply terrible" (Burke 86). Ideally, the sublime presents terror that appeals to one's senses, since, "at certain distances, and with certain modifications, [danger or pain] may be, and they are, delightful, as we every day experience" (Burke 86). When one finds himself removed from a situation, he can only be an observer, and his status as an observer instantly makes any frightening situation seem less real to him; he cannot look

away, so he can find some pleasure or excitement only in what he is observing. This understanding of the sublime shaped the aesthetics of Gothic literature during the Romantic period, but it also inevitably had an influence on the concept of Decadence later in the nineteenth century.

The Burkean sublime dwelt on terror and the grotesque, but, like Decadence, the sublime also allowed one to derive some pleasure from that which should normally be horrific and repulsive. In this respect, both the sublime and Decadence are characterized by a certain perversity— one that, under certain conditions, allows deformity to become appealing and pain to become pleasurable. There is also an erotic element common in Gothic literature that further associates the sublime with Decadence. Decadence was largely concerned with sexual perversion, and, while Burke's treatise on the sublime does not address sexuality, the notion of sexual perversion would likely have been terrifying to Romantics. Like any other deviancy, sexual perversion is as capable of inspiring terror as anything that is dark, powerful, or towering, and, if that perversion is modified or mediated, then it can become a sublime experience for the observer; it is no coincidence that, in Gothic Romantic literature, erotic scenes are also often terrifying scenes or that such scenes often incorporate sublime imagery. In this way, the sexual perversion that later became associated with Decadence acquires a certain sublimity. Both Decadence and the sublime allowed for the enjoyment of that which is "forbidden" or "unconventional," so the ultimate pleasure becomes the pursuit of the abnormal.

Gothic literature often associates sexual perversion— the abnormal— with the sublime, as seen in novels such as Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and this association would ultimately have an influence on later Victorian

and decadent literature. In *The Monk*, Ambrosio's sexual relationship with Matilda leads him to rape the virtuous Antonia, and both relationships immediately become defined by their perversion. Ambrosio's relationship with Matilda becomes twisted not just because he is a priest but also because he is having a sexual relationship with a woman who is actually a genderless demon. Like the later Lord Ruthven, the seductive Matilda can be seen as a sublime figure, as a character whom Ambrosio is both drawn to and fearful of. In his relationship with Antonia, though, Ambrosio is the powerful one, and the scene in which he rapes her is easily the most horrific moment in the novel— but not for the reader. For the reader, this scene becomes a thrilling experience that Lewis has been building up to over the course of the novel; the frightening and violent nature of the scene becomes sublime when told through the artistic lens of the narrator, and the setting in the dark catacomb enhances the scene's sublimity. Through his depiction of terrifying events and his choice of dark, overwhelming settings, Lewis is able to form an association between the sublime and sexual perversion.

A similarly horrific and erotic scene occurs in *Frankenstein*; the Creature expresses a desire for a mate but then murders Elizabeth in her bedroom when Victor refuses to comply. Shelley places an emphasis on the Creature's loneliness, and it is significant that she stages the murder in a bedroom, which is traditionally an intimate setting. When Victor enters the room, he finds Elizabeth "thrown across the bed, her head hanging down, and her pale and distorted features half covered by her hair" (Shelley 199). Shelley's choice of setting as well as the fact that the murder occurs on the night of Elizabeth's marriage to Victor makes the woman's murder akin to a rape scene, and later Gothic works such as *Dracula* would incorporate similar suggestive details.

The grotesque nature of the relationships depicted in both *The Monk* and *Frankenstein*, suggested or otherwise, makes them thrilling and pleasurable to the reader, who is merely an observer; from any other point of view, they would cease to be entertaining or erotic. Following the publication of Polidori's "The Vampyre" in 1819, however, Gothic literature would increasingly begin to associate eroticism with the vampire.

The vampire's erotic nature stems from the eastern European folkloric tradition, in which the vampire would pay nightly visits to his widowed wife or other former lovers and drain their blood. In the nineteenth century, and especially during the Victorian period, though, the sucking of blood in the intimate setting of the bedroom would take on a much greater sexual connotation:

> A nightly visit from a beautiful or frightful being, who first exhausts the sleeper with passionate embraces and then withdraws from him a vital fluid: all this can point only to a natural and common process, namely to nocturnal emissions accompanied with dreams of a more or less erotic nature. In the unconscious mind blood is commonly an equivalent for semen . . . [and] in the Vampire superstition . . . the simple idea of the vital fluid being withdrawn through an exhausting love embrace is complicated by the more perverse forms of sexuality, as well as by the admixture of sadism and hate. (quoted in Tracy xxiv)

Even in the earliest appearances of the vampire in literature, the creature's nature is still clearly sexual, suggestive of a perverse, insatiable desire. Given the creature's erotic nature, the presence of the decadent abnormal in vampire fiction is unsurprising. As a creature that is unique to nineteenth century Gothic fiction, though, the literary vampire also easily becomes a reflection of Romantic aesthetics, establishing himself as a sublime figure.

POLIDORI'S VAMPIRE

In "The Vampyre," Polidori portrays Lord Ruthven as someone who is at once terrible and delightful; he takes on a sublime quality, inspiring fear in those around him while still captivating them. The vampire is "remarkable for his singularities" (Polidori 27), and, with a mere "look," he is able to "throw fear into those breasts where thoughtlessness reigned" (Polidori 27); he inspires a "sensation of awe" (Polidori 27), which no one is able to explain.

Like Lord Byron, who is said to have been Polidori's source of inspiration for the character, Lord Ruthven is "mad, bad, and dangerous to know," which is precisely why everyone is so eager to know him. There is something fascinating in his nature, and, despite having such a strange effect on those around him, Lord Ruthven's "peculiarities caused him to be invited to every house; all wished to see him, and those who had been accustomed to violent excitement, and now felt the weight of ennui, were pleased at having something in their presence capable of engaging their attention" (Polidori 28). While most find Lord Ruthven very strange, the "dread of his singular character" (Polidori 29) is also a source of excitement, making his company all the more desirable. This portrayal of Lord Ruthven at the start of Polidori's story establishes him as terrible, and "terror," according to Burke, "is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently, the ruling principle of the sublime" (Burke 102). It becomes more apparent that the strange nobleman is something terrible and otherworldly when he joins Aubrey on his tour across Europe.

Before arriving in Rome, Lord Ruthven begins to "assume the appearance of something supernatural" (Polidori 36) in Aubrey's imagination, and Aubrey further connects his companion's image with that of the vampire after spending time in Greece. Despite his idle nature and seemingly human appearance, Lord Ruthven comes to represent the same evil as the folkloric vampire, which the innocent Greek girl Ianthe describes to Aubrey:

> . . . she told him the tale of the living vampyre, who had passed years amidst his friends, and dearest ties, forced every year, by feeding upon the life of a lovely female to prolong his existence for the ensuing months . . . Ianthe cited to him the names of old men, who had at last detected one living among themselves, after several of their near relatives and children had been found marked with the stamp of the fiend's appetite. (Polidori 41 - 42)

Even though Lord Ruthven differs from the folkloric vampire, he becomes associated with this creature, which is so terrifying that its very name leaves Ianthe and her parents pale with fear; the vampire is a "superior, infernal power" (Polidori 44), and, as such, has a paralyzing effect on a person, robbing "the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning" (Burke 101) and making one's "blood freeze" (Polidori 45). Lord Ruthven is later shown to have the same power over Aubrey, inspiring such fear in the young man that Aubrey does not even have the "courage to turn" (Polidori 60) and face the vampire.

However, despite his many peculiarities, Lord Ruthven nevertheless comes across as physically unimpressive; Polidori describes him almost as if he is sickly and frail in appearance. Like the serpents and other poisonous animals that Burke refers to in his *Philosophical Enquiry*, though, a creature need not look terrifying in order to be terrifying, and Lord Ruthven's aura alone is "capable of raising ideas of the sublime" (Polidori 102). Polidori even describes the vampire's masterful use of the "serpent's art" (Polidori 69), further connecting Lord Ruthven's image with that of the snake, a creature

which Burke considers to be terrible and sublime despite being small. Such terror results in paralysis and, ultimately, Aubrey is so terrified of Lord Ruthven, who has focused his attention on Aubrey's sister, that the young man is unable to act or reason. Many times, Aubrey wishes to break his "oath" to the vampire, but his fear prevents him; his fear leaves him physically and mentally paralyzed until he at last dies.

Although Aubrey questions Lord Ruthven's intentions early on and even parts ways with his companion at one point, he is never fully able to rid himself of thoughts of the vampire. Like everyone else, Aubrey is just as captivated by the nobleman's "mystery"— Lord Ruthven quickly becomes "the object of his curiosity" (Polidori 36)— and he cannot help pushing any doubts to the back of his mind because he is so drawn to him. The young man's uncertain feelings about Lord Ruthven, however, further help to develop the vampire as an ambiguous figure.

Lord Ruthven's ambiguous nature is partly what makes him so perverse and terrifying. His character is shrouded in such mystery that, in the end, whether Lord Ruthven is in fact something supernatural, let alone a vampire, is left entirely open to interpretation; Polidori never confirms his vampirism. The ambiguity of the vampire, though, is an essential element of the story, and, just as Polidori chose not to reveal too much about his villain, Bram Stoker would choose to do the same later when he published *Dracula*. Just as the end of "The Vampyre" calls much into question, so does the last chapter of *Dracula*; Stoker places a strong emphasis on delusions, dreams, and sleepwalking throughout the novel, and, in the last chapter, the reader is made to wonder whether the earlier events of the novel ever occurred.

Obscurity is one of the chief causes of fear according to Burke, although the obscurity that Burke refers to in the second part of his *Philosophical Enquiry* is the obscurity that results from darkness; it is the inability to see clearly the limits of material objects that is truly terrifying, for all that is unknown produces fear:

> When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes. Every one will be sensible of this, who considers how greatly night adds to our dread, in all cases of danger, and how much the notions of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas, affect minds which give credit to the popular tales concerning such sorts of beings. (102 - 103)

Lord Ruthven is not an obscure figure in a literal sense; however, his ambiguous nature can be seen as a product of folkloric vampire's obscurity, which often was literal. While the vampire usually appears human, different folkloric traditions suggest that the vampire can also take on the form of various animals and even fog, an ability that later authors such as Le Fanu and Stoker would draw inspiration from. The vampire's ever-changing appearance suggests that the creature has no true form of its own; it can only be understood by taking on the appearance of something that humans are already familiar with, and this form is no more than an illusion. The creature's "shapelessness" prevents one from ever seeing it in its entirety, a quality best represented by the vampire's ability to shift into fog, which is as capable of obscuring one's sight as darkness. Literal darkness, though, has always been associated with the vampire.

Like the ghosts and goblins that Burke mentions, the vampire has always been understood as a creature that is more powerful at night. Lord Ruthven might seem perfectly comfortable walking around in broad daylight, but Polidori shows that his vampire, too, prefers darkness. Ianthe and her parents beg Aubrey not to return at night, since he will be forced to pass through the forest that is "the resort of the vampyres in

their nocturnal orgies" (Polidori 44), and, when he fails to heed their warnings, Aubrey encounters Lord Ruthven while "in utter darkness" (Polidori 46); always, the vampire is associated with the night, an association which adds to the creature's sublimity. Polidori, though, shows that the vampire is also obscure in a way that is independent from Burke's definition of the word: it is supernatural and exists outside of the natural order.

Unlike the folkloric vampire, which resembles a grotesque animated corpse, the literary vampire is often able to conceal its true identity and go about in society, as in the case of Lord Ruthven and later vampires such as Clarimonde, Carmilla, and Count Dracula. One look at the folkloric vampire makes it clear that it is dangerous, but Polidori's vampire instead looks very ordinary, and his deceptive appearance makes him more of a threat. Much of the conflict in "The Vampyre" consists of Aubrey's internal struggle to determine whether Lord Ruthven is, in fact, something supernatural, and it is precisely this nagging uncertainty that leaves his mind "bewildered in conjectures" (Polidori 56) before finally destroying him.

The vampire's ambiguity stems from the supernatural nature of its existence. The supernatural cannot be bound by the law of nature and, because it presents a deviation from what is considered normal, it cannot be explained; as Polidori shows, the vampire is simply beyond man's reasoning. However, the supernatural existence of the vampire— or, more accurately, the supernatural state of any being— is shown to be suggestive of an inherent evil, a belief that Lord Byron had voiced earlier in his *Fragment of a Novel*: "Where there is mystery, it is generally supposed that there must also be evil" (Byron 450). The vampire's obscure nature contributes to its sublimity, but, as a supernatural

being, it presents a deviation from nature which defines it as a representation of the abnormal— the same abnormal that Decadents were so enamored with.

Like the decadent abnormal, the supernatural represents a breaking away from the normal; it is a defiance of nature, which is best exemplified by the vampire, a creature that is neither dead nor alive, yet possesses eternal life. The undead state of the vampire truly presents the greatest perversion, as Polidori shows in "The Vampyre" when Aubrey discovers that his traveling companion has risen from the grave: ". . . he could not believe it possible— the dead rise again!— He thought his imagination had conjured up the image, his mind was resting upon. It was impossible that it could be real . . ." (Polidori 61). Although Lord Ruthven is peculiar from the very start, and incidents during their travels have given Aubrey considerable reason to be fearful of him, it is only after the nobleman comes back from the dead that Aubrey is truly frightened, and the vampire's inability to die overwhelms him: "He thought of employing his own hand to free the world from such a wretch; but, death, he remembered, had been already mocked" (Polidori 63), and it is this realization that most contributes to Aubrey's mental collapse. Similarly, Polidori alludes to the perversion of birth and death in "The Vampyre." As noted in his Introduction to the story, a person who dies after being bitten by a vampire is doomed to be reborn as a vampire, effectively making death and birth the same. For Christians, though, the resurrection of a person as a vampire was a mockery of the resurrection of Christ.

The vampire's presence in literature was largely a reflection of society's fear of degeneration, particularly the corruption, if not the destruction, of the human soul. This fear was easily fed by the rise of industrialization during the nineteenth century, and

critics such as Ruskin questioned the impact that industrialization would have on society. He notes in *The Stones of Venice* (1851 - 1853) that imperfections give each work a human quality, whereas works that are perfectly cut might as well have been cut by a machine, since they lack a soul (Ruskin 373); mass-produced goods are inevitably as "soulless" as the machines that make them, and a society that values soulless goods cannot help but become soulless as well. While Polidori does not discuss the soul in his story, the vampire's status as an inherently evil being implies that it cannot possess a soul. The soul, however, would later become the central focus of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which critic James Twitchell interprets as a vampire story, arguing that the loss of Dorian's soul begins the young man's transformation into a vampire-like being.

In the case of Polidori's vampire, the portrayal of Lord Ruthven— and, consequently, the nineteenth century vampire— as something unnatural and evil not only further helped to establish the vampire as a source of sublime terror but also associated the vampire with the abnormal by showing that it possessed an inherent decadence. In this respect, the vampire becomes more than a reflection of Burkean aesthetics. The vampire speaks to the Romantics' own morbidity; it reveals their fascination with terror, which would shape Victorian literature, since that same fascination never disappeared. Whether used by reformers or Decadents, the vampire remained an important figure in the Victorian Gothic, and its increase in popularity over the course of the nineteenth century suggests more than an infatuation with the corruption and degeneration that the creature symbolized. A society that truly valued traditional morality would not dwell so much on the dark themes represented by the vampire unless it secretly felt a certain affinity towards them, and the same can be said of the Romantics.

AN INHERENT DECADENCE

Beginning with Polidori's "The Vampyre," the vampire became associated more with social corruption and degeneration, rather than abstract concepts such as "spiritual" and "moral" degeneration, which gave readers a more concrete reason to fear him. Lord Ruthven is not shown to be evil just because he "goes against nature" as a supernatural being. In fact, Polidori does not portray the vampire as "overtly supernatural"; with the exception of his "singularities," the vampire looks and acts like a normal human, indulging in gaming and other contemporary vices. In this sense, Lord Ruthven's attraction to vice makes him much more human, especially when compared to a character like Ianthe, who is a model of unimpeachable virtue. The vampire's inclination towards vice, though, inevitably draws a strong connection between the supernatural and decadent behavior. Polidori allows the vampire to develop as a character so that he can become something more than the embodiment of an abstract concept— but what he becomes is a degenerate nobleman.

Lord Ruthven's addiction to gaming and other less savory activities spoke to contemporary concerns about the direction in which society seemed to be progressing. As Bridget B. Marshall points out in "An Evil Game," Horace Walpole, who authored the first Gothic novel, was appalled by the behavior of his peers; in 1770, he complained in a letter about the reckless gaming that went on regularly at the London clubs, saying that such behavior "is worthy the decline of our Empire" (quoted in Marshall 13). Many agreed, and one pamphlet published in the 1780s even went so far as to claim that "gaming was the source of all of England's evils, insisting 'to this dreadful vice must the

loss of America be ascribed'" (Marshall 14). Contemporary Gothic works also drew attention to such vices, and Marshall, in her examination of the strong relationship between Gothic villains and gaming, notes that, unlike many other villains, Lord Ruthven is "coldly in control" as he enables "others' gaming addiction and destruction" (Marshall 13). For the antisocial vampire, the gaming itself is not an enjoyable activity, and he sits at the table with "the same unchanging face" (Polidori 34). As Marshall points out, he instead finds pleasure in the ruining of lives, not in financial gain, since his goal "is to win money from the innocent and then lose his winnings to the card sharks at the table" (Marshall 13). Aubrey is in a state of disbelief upon realizing that, not only does Lord Ruthven partake in the idle and wasteful practice of gaming, but he also partakes in the calculated destruction and public humiliation of decent men. The vampire's dead eyes brighten only when he witnesses the destruction and misery of others, especially those who are good:

> — the idle, the vagabond, and the beggar received from his hand more than enough to relieve their immediate wants. But Aubrey could not avoid remarking, that it was not upon the virtuous, reduced to indigence by the misfortunes attendant upon even virtue, that he bestowed his alms;— these were sent from the door with hardly suppressed sneers; but when the profligate came to ask something, not relieve his wants but to allow him to wallow in his lust, or to sink him still deeper in his iniquity, he was sent away with rich charity. (Polidori 33)

Like the Devil in Lewis's *The Monk*, Polidori's vampire is a manipulator and an enabler who works quietly to destroy his victims, whom he chooses based on their goodness. Lord Ruthven's antisocial and brooding personality, though, perhaps draws a greater comparison with the later Heathcliff of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, a character who also delights in the suffering of others and is suspected of vampirism.

Lord Ruthven revels in corruption; he intentionally feeds the vices of others, yearning for their ruin, which seems to be his only comfort. While men are left impoverished, women soon find themselves spoiled after spending time in the vampire's company. Polidori says that the most virtuous women had, "since his departure, thrown even the mask aside, and had not scrupled to expose the whole deformity of their vices to the public gaze" (Polidori 37). The naive young men and women whom the vampire devastates are all implied to be ruined for life.

Naturally, gaming is easily linked to other immoral activities of the period, such as drinking and prostitution; Polidori, though, associates gaming with murder. When Lord Ruthven leaves the men at the gambling table in ruin, it is almost as if he has killed them: "In every town, he left the formerly affluent youth, torn from the circle he adorned, cursing, in the solitude of a dungeon, the fate that had drawn him within the reach of this fiend" (Polidori 35). These men are the vampire's victims just as much as Ianthe and Aubrey's sister.

Such a life of excess, though, can only end with one's physical and mental collapse, and Polidori shows the vampire to be the cause of such degeneration. Not only does Lord Ruthven bring about Aubrey's physical and mental collapse, but the signs of such deterioration are present in the vampire himself. Although Polidori describes Lord Ruthven as handsome, he nevertheless notes something morbid in the vampire's appearance— the pallor of his complexion and the deadness of his eyes, which his lethargy draws attention to. From a historical perspective, though, it is important to keep in mind that Polidori published "The Vampyre" during the Regency, a year before the death of George III, whose mental decline had caused significant turmoil during the late

eighteenth century and early nineteenth century; themes of physical and mental degeneration would have been especially relevant at the time of the story's publication.

Lord Ruthven's degenerative behavior stands out as a significant element of Polidori's story, since it had such a great influence on later Gothic villains. He lives a double life, posing as a bored aristocrat when he is actually a degenerate monster; in this respect, Lord Ruthven shares much in common with Stevenson's infamous Dr. Jekyll, though he bears still an even greater resemblance to Wilde's Dorian Gray. Like these later Gothic villains, Lord Ruthven becomes symbolic of the decline of a moral, respectable society— and even the decline of the aristocracy. Early in the story, Aubrey is shocked to learn that his companion's "affairs were embarrassed" (Polidori 32), and the vampire's attraction to a lower lifestyle further reflects his status a ruined nobleman. The idea of a self-destructive, if not already ruined, aristocracy had always been very troubling to society, but the fear of such decline became more justified following the Terror of the French Revolution. The fading away of the aristocracy also seemed increasingly likely with the sudden rise of the middle class in England. While "The Vampyre" does not immediately come across as a social commentary, the story does share more in common with the socially-aware Gothic fiction of the Victorian period than some other contemporary Gothic works.

Unlike most Romantic authors, Polidori removes the Gothic from far-off fantastical settings and, instead, relocates it to familiar settings. Carol A. Senf highlights the importance of this shift in her essay "Polidori's *The Vampyre*: Combining the Gothic with Realism," noting that:

> . . . as will be true of *Dracula* later in the century, much of *The Vampyre* occurs in areas that were familiar to contemporary readers; and M. L. Carter observes that

> Polidori was partially responsible 'for the greater emphasis on contemporary settings in horror tales, rather than shadowy backgrounds remote in time and space.' (Senf)

The shift in setting added a sense of realism that had not been seen before, and "much of the horror of Polidori's tale occurs when the reader realizes that unspeakable things happen to the most ordinary human beings" (Senf). The urban environment is also a more logical setting for "The Vampyre," since crowded cities are ideal for feeding Lord Ruthven's inherently decadent desires. Thus, Polidori identifies the cities as places of decadence, since the abnormality that the vampire represents becomes synonymous with city life. Victorian society marked urban environments as the source of cultural degeneration, though this association between cities and corruption had already become very evident by Polidori's time.

The city held within it a multitude of sensations, later making it an attractive subject for Aesthetes and Decadents. Like the vampire, the city was seen as being removed from nature; it was a place where everything was artificial, and it was a place where every vice could be found. Because of this characterization, the city very quickly became the backdrop for the works of notable late Romantic writers and later Victorian writers who followed in the Gothic tradition. In his *Flowers of Evil*, Baudelaire does the same as Polidori by focusing on Gothic themes in an urban landscape, just as Gautier and Poe did before him and many Victorian writers such as Stevenson, Wilde, and Stoker would do later. Gautier also borrows Polidori's urban setting for his vampire story "Clarimonde"; the young priest Romuald is swept away from his quiet life at the church and seduced by the vampire Clarimonde, who introduces him to the pleasures and extravagances of the city. However, in focusing on city life, Gautier adds another

important contribution to vampire fiction; he introduces Orientalism and exoticism to the genre.

While Polidori had partially introduced an exotic element to his story by having Aubrey and Lord Ruthven travel to Greece, Gautier introduces Orientalism into "Clarimonde" in a much more subtle, and therefore effective, way through his use of color. He makes use of yellow, green, and red, colors which, at the time, were heavily associated with the Orientalism of the Romantic period, and he instead associates them with the vampire Clarimonde: when he first sees her, the priest Romuald is struck by her yellow hair, which shines like "rippling gold," her "sea-green eyes of unsustainable vivacity and brilliancy," and her "robe of orange-red velvet" (Gautier 2). The color yellow, especially, would remain prominent throughout the rest of the nineteenth century, not just because of its association with Orientalism but also because of its later association with the Decadent Movement. For Decadents, yellow represented corruption and degeneration, an association that is unsurprising when one considers the West's perception of the East at the time.

In the nineteenth century, Western Europe defined the East as primitive. While on a visit to India, British surgeon Sir Frederick Treves met with a doctor, who told him the story of a patient who became blind after refusing treatment until he had first consulted a "magician"; the doctor's story and the gloom of Treves' lodgings, which he refers to as a "particular sepulchre" (quoted in Smith 57), affected him so greatly that they inspired a dream about a frightening encounter with the blind Indian. Treves describes the dream in his memoirs *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences* (1923) as being "remarkable" for its "vividness and reality" (quoted in Smith 57), but author

Andrew Smith finds Treves' anecdote interesting because of what it reveals about the West's perception of the East. In *Victorian Demons*, Smith examines Treves' use of Gothic imagery, which include "a projected attack by rats, a murderous assault by a racial Other, and themes of paranoia and entrapment" (Smith 56), explaining that the dream "symbolically captures a truth about West/East relations"(Smith 57). Treves first paints the Indians as superstitious, telling how the blind man "called upon every deity in the Indian mythology" (quoted in Smith 57) to punish his doctor before describing the "primeval" landscape; he is especially struck by the "unclean aromatic odour which clings to Indian dwellings" and "the loathsome smell of the unclean native" (quoted in Smith 58). The entire anecdote, Smith points out, confirms Victorians' expectations of the East by showing the East to be the exact opposite of the West. If the West is characterized by science and the light of civilization, then the East is a place of superstition, dreams, and the darkness of the wild, and this threatening image of the East was something that Gautier had already connected to the vampire in the 1830s. Gautier's association of the vampire with Oriental colors only further defines the creature as something dangerous while also reinforcing the contemporary notion of the East as being savage and threatening. Wilde and Stoker would also later draw a more explicit connection between the vampire and the East. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the vampire-like Dorian becomes enamored with eastern cultures while pursuing new sensations, and he later develops a fondness for the city's opium dens, which further associates him with the East. Here, the East— and, by extension, the vampire— is seen as something exotic, strange, and poisonous.

Stoker's Count Dracula, however, is from the East, drawing a more direct association between the perverse vampire and what Europeans understood as the untamed "Orient." The vampire's alliance with the gypsies reinforces this image of the "unrestrained" East, since the gypsies present another deviation from the cultural norms of the West. Differences between the East and West, though, are especially emphasized in *Dracula*, since Stoker occasionally removes his characters from an English setting and places them in the East as a way of directly contrasting the different cultures with each other. When Jonathan Harker travels to Transylvania, he encounters a culture that reflects the contemporary English stereotype of Eastern Europe: the culture is primitive and the people are exceptionally superstitious, which makes them seem ludicrous. Smith points out:

> Transylvania is associated with feudalism (the Count) rather than capitalism, with a rural peasant culture rather than a mercantile economy. Transylvania is also, at a more abstract level, characterised by irrationality, desire, disease, and the possibility of social decline (the servant-less Count seems, for Harker, to be somewhat impoverished). (Smith 142)

For most, the East was nothing more than a curiosity; Romantics and Victorians saw it as a wild, unrestrained part of the world, and it had a mystical quality that was easily relatable to the supernatural vampire. However, despite the West's fascination with eastern culture and art, the East was nevertheless seen as something threatening.

Like Gothic literature, Orientalism in the Romantic and Victorian periods provided a means of escape, and, also like the Gothic, the East was sublime in that it was simultaneously attractive and repulsive. Although the East was stereotyped as a place of enchantment and exotic beauty, it was common for eighteenth and nineteenth century writers to depict Middle Eastern and Asian characters in an unflattering manner. When

Dorian visits an opium den, for instance, he spies some Malays "crouching by a little charcoal stove playing with bone counters, and showing their white teeth as they chattered" (Wilde 200). Shortly after, Dorian also notes that a woman's crooked smile is "like a Malay crease" (Wilde 201). There is something very apish in the way the Malays sit and "chatter"; they are described in a way that makes them seem less human, and the association of a crooked smile with the Malays' features is not even animalistic— it is grotesque. Wilde's description of the Malays recalls that of Stevenson's Mr. Hyde, who also enjoys wandering through lower-class neighborhoods and is also portrayed as brutish and ape-like.

The opium dens featured in works like *The Picture of Dorian Gray* were becoming increasingly common in the nineteenth century, and they stood out in crowded cities as obvious places of corruption and degeneration. Mostly, though, the opium dens were evidence of the East's growing influence on the West, and, therefore, they were a reason for concern. In the end, the traces of Orientalism found in the vampire literature of the nineteenth century serve primarily as a means of emphasizing the vampire's inherent decadence— its dangerous, savage nature and its misleading appearance.

By defining the vampire as an inherently decadent creature, Polidori and later authors of vampire fiction were able to highlight contemporary fears, and the concerns that people had during the early nineteenth century only became more prominent during the Victorian period. However, while the extravagances of the aristocracy and the consumption of alcohol, opium, and other drugs were constant reminders for Victorians that society was heading towards decline, what society feared most was sexuality—

especially female sexuality— which is arguably the most important characteristic of the

vampire.

SEXUALITY AND VAMPIRISM

The folkloric vampire's habit of making "nightly visits" remained an important theme when writers began to depict it in literature, as in Goethe's "Bride of Corinth." Beginning with Polidori, though, the vampire became increasingly sexual over the course of the nineteenth century, and it is notable as one of the few supernatural beings in literature that has an explicitly sexual nature; some might even say that the vampire is more sexualized in literature than it was in folklore.

As the first person to author a work of vampire fiction, Polidori established the vampire's erotic nature, which would become very important to future writers; however, much of the eroticism in "The Vampyre" is not as explicit as the content that readers would encounter in later vampire fiction. Polidori implies that Lord Ruthven has sexual relationships with a number of different women, who are either left disgraced or disappear entirely once he has grown tired of them, but little else is said about the vampire's relationships these women. Instead, Polidori pays greater attention to Ianthe and Aubrey's sister, who both end up dying at Lord Ruthven's hands. Both are shown to be innocent, sheltered women, and they are presumably virgins, which is likely the reason the vampire is so drawn to them. Lord Ruthven's desire to defile something so pure emphasizes his perverse nature as well as his sexual appetite, a theme which would be repeated endlessly by decadent writers such as Arthur Symons, who, in his poem "Morbidezza," would describe how a woman's purity is able to inspire violent passion in the speaker.

Lord Ruthven's sexuality does not just come from the folkloric vampire, though; it also stems from the influence of the eighteenth century "rake" on his character, but most critics agree that Lord Byron himself had an even greater influence on Polidori's conception of the aristocratic, deviant vampire. Regardless, Polidori established the nineteenth century vampire not just as an aristocrat but also as a seducer and corruptor, and the influence of Polidori's characterization of Lord Ruthven is evident in Gautier's "Clarimonde." Like Aubrey who is captivated by Lord Ruthven, the naive priest Romuald becomes infatuated with Clarimonde the moment he sets his eyes on her, mistaking his feelings of lust for love and allowing himself to be easily manipulated by the vampire. Clarimonde is as materialistic as Polidori's vampire, and she seduces Romuald by introducing him to the material world; she makes him remove his plain priest's garments and wear extravagant clothing so that, when she holds up a mirror to him, he finds that "I resembled my former self no more than a finished statue resembles a block of stone. My old face seemed but a course daub of the one reflected in the mirror. I was handsome, and my vanity was sensibly tickled by the metamorphosis" (Gautier 10). Once Romuald's appearance changes, he is unable to stop his nature from following, and the "spirit of my costume penetrated my very skin and within ten minutes more I had become something of a coxcomb" (Gautier 10). The vampire easily seduces him into a lifestyle that resembles that of Lord Ruthven, and Romuald even takes on the personality of Polidori's vampire:

> I would not have turned aside to allow even the Doge to pass, and I do not believe that since Satan fell from heaven, a creature was ever prouder or more insolent than I. I went to the Ridotto, and played with a luck which seemed absolutely infernal. I received the best of all society— the sons of ruined families, women of the theatre, shrewd knaves, parasites, hectoring swashbucklers. (Gautier 11)

There is also a notable similarity between Clarimonde and Lewis's Matilda, who performs a similar role as an enabler in *The Monk*. Like Matilda, the vampire Clarimonde functions as an agent of the Devil, seducing the virtuous, a trait that would remain true for all vampires in nineteenth century literature. "Clarimonde," though, largely stands out for its characterization of the female vampire as an explicitly sexual and seductive creature that is often more dangerous than her male counterpart. While Lord Ruthven's sexual conquests are largely implied, Clarimonde's are not; Gautier identifies her as a courtesan, and he refers to her palace as a place of great debauchery, so no more needs to be said.

Victorian literature emphasizes the vampire's sexual nature even further, and the vampire becomes representative of sexual deviancy; Victorian literature, however, also portrays vampirism as a disease. Vampirism is a curse— an insatiable thirst— that is passed on from one person to the next when the vampire feeds, so, in Victorian literature, it is not uncommon for vampirism to become analogous to a sexually transmitted disease. In *Dracula*, Stoker is very straightforward in his portrayal of vampirism as an illness or disease of the blood. As Smith notes in his book, "while [*Dracula*] attributes degeneration to an invasive, non-British source (the Count), it also represents degeneration as a blood disease, symbolically transmitted through vampirism" (Smith 34). In an attempt to save Lucy Westenra, Van Helsing and his fellow vampire hunters perform several blood transfusions, relying on medical knowledge and science to cure the woman of her supernatural ailment, and these transfusions are a lasting reminder of how limited medical knowledge still was at the end of the nineteenth century.

A poor understanding of sexually transmitted diseases, particularly syphilis, led doctors to believe that women, and not men, were responsible for the spread of disease: "From the 1830s onwards the female body came to be medicalized, not merely as a sexed body but as a diseased body— a space where disease could and did fester" (Smith 96). The understanding of women as "diseased" allowed for the labeling of "some women (prostitutes) as unnatural and degenerate, and other women (predominantly middle-class wives and mothers) as respectable" (Smith 96). Such a poor understanding of disease and the human body contributed to Victorian society's fear of female sexuality, and this fear of female sexuality naturally affected authors' portrayal of the female vampire.

When one examines the prominent works of vampire literature of the nineteenth century, he finds that these works are often centered on the female vampire and not the male vampire, which is unsurprising since medical science of the period was quick to identify the female body as "diseased." Lord Ruthven and Count Dracula are the two principal male vampires of the nineteenth century, but, in both instances, their intentions remain ambiguous.

Critics, such as Simon Bainbridge, have pointed out on numerous occasions that the portrayal of the two vampires leaves significant room to question whether they are in fact supernatural creatures; Lord Ruthven's and Count Dracula's actions are either left unconfirmed or, very often, the mental stability of the narrator is able to be called into question. In "The Vampyre," the narrator never confirms Lord Ruthven's vampirism, and, in the case of *Dracula*, the story is narrated by multiple characters, who are all under the influence of Dr. Van Helsing— and, in the context of the novel, his status as both a foreigner and doctor make him just as threatening as the vampire. The same can be said

of Dr. Seward, who fits Harrison's description of the "self-experimenting," untrustworthy doctor. When Count Dracula is caught in the act of feeding on Mina, it is Dr. Seward who describes the incident in his journal— Dr. Seward, whose "professional judgment is clouded by his depression and self-medication" (Harrison 59). According to Harrison, Stoker portrays the young doctor as a man who struggles "to maintain a detached, disciplined approach to his work but who increasingly gives way to confusion, uncertainty, and the fear of insanity" (59). So, when Dr. Seward reports that Count Dracula was caught sucking Mina's blood, whether the incident actually occurred is entirely debatable. Even Jonathan Harker, who constantly fears for his sanity while imprisoned in Dracula's castle, becomes an unreliable narrator. Always, Count Dracula, exists in the background; other characters talk about him and report having interacted with him, but the vampire's voice is noticeably absent from the novel.

By comparison, the portrayal of the female vampire in nineteenth century literature often leaves less room for uncertainty. Clarimonde and Carmilla are both caught in the act of feeding, and their actions are confirmed by other characters. While the many unreliable narrators in *Dracula* make it necessary for the reader to question the characters' actions, a difference between the portrayal of the male and female vampire nevertheless emerges. Lucy (after her transformation into a vampire) and the vampire "sisters" who dwell in the Count's castle are defined by their wantonness, their dominance, and their more violent and active natures; the Count, though, prefers plotting and acting in the background or acting through others. By comparison, the female vampire is less capable of self-restraint, which is why Lucy's and the vampire sisters' actions are more easily confirmed by the other characters, even though the veracity of

those characters can still be called into question. It is also worth pointing out that, although Count Dracula is the titular character, a considerable part of the novel is dominated by Lucy and the three sisters.

The female vampire is ultimately a less obscure figure than the male vampire; while it is implied that Lord Ruthven and Count Dracula are attractive, nineteenth century authors often stressed the physical appearance and sexual nature of the female vampire much more. As Smith points out, when Seward first sees Lucy as a vampire, he is struck by how "the sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness" (quoted in Smith 145), and Jonathan Harker describes the vampire sisters earlier on in a very similar manner. Lucy's deviant sexual nature is foreshadowed before her transformation into a vampire when an "early letter from Lucy to Mina recounts her three marriage proposals and suggests Lucy's latent desire for promiscuity . . ." (Smith 145). Her deviant nature is then further emphasized by her identity as the "bloofar lady," who preys on young children. According to Smith, this identity is Stoker's way of demonizing "a particular form of inverted motherhood, one in which [Lucy] suckles children. The novel's celebration of 'normal' motherhood is clear elsewhere . . . from Mina Harker's associations with a virtuous maternalism" (Smith 145). The Victorian fear of female sexuality is further reflected in the female vampire's ability to subvert gender roles; this theme of gender subversion, however, is not unique to the Victorian Gothic. Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* continually plays with the theme of gender, presenting its reader with characters who change gender and others who go against gender roles.

While not a work of vampire fiction, *The Monk* is noteworthy for its incorporation of vampiric elements, mostly during the episode of the Bleeding Nun. The theme of "nightly visits," which is heavily associated with the vampire, allows for the Bleeding Nun to subvert genders by taking on a more dominant, masculine role when she recites her wedding vows to Raymond every night. This particular episode is also oddly similar to story of Goethe's "Bride of Corinth," which was published the year after Lewis's novel. While any similarities are most likely coincidental, they nevertheless highlight the vampiric overtones of the Bleeding Nun, and, when one views the Bleeding Nun as a vampire, rather than as a ghost, she immediately becomes more threatening because of the female vampire's association with an unrestrained, dominant sexuality, as seen in "Clarimonde." The vampire Clarimonde subverts genders in a similar manner when she visits Romuald every evening. Immediately, she becomes the more dominant of the two, and her ability to manipulate the young man feminizes him, although his status as a priest already marks him as a more feminine male character. This feminization of male characters is continued in *Dracula* when Jonathan Harker is held captive by the three vampire sisters. Stoker then shows that the young man is incapable as a husband, since he fails to protect Mina from Dracula; the vampire faces no obstacles when he visits Mina in her bed, sucking her blood and "consummating" their union.

For the Victorians, female sexuality was something that needed to be controlled, since it was inherently lustful and dangerous. As mentioned earlier, medical science during the nineteenth century had labeled the female body as a "disease-ridden body," sparking a battle over "definitions of femininity and female sexuality and control over women's bodies" (quoted in Smith 96). Since it was believed that venereal diseases were

being passed on solely by women, women's bodies needed to be controlled, and the Contagious Diseases Acts were passed over the course of the 1860s in an attempt to prevent the spread of diseases from prostitutes to soldiers. As Smith points out, though, the Acts had the result of successfully pathologizing prostitutes by reinforcing the popular notions of "proper and improper femininity" (Smith 97); the Acts also gave men further control over women's bodies. In "The Garrison Towns of Kent" (1870), Josephine Butler, who had campaigned against the Acts, quoted a Chatham prostitute as saying:

> It is *men, only men*, from the first to the last that we have to do with! To please a man I did wrong at first, then I was flung about from man to man. Men police lay hands on us. By men were are examined, handled, doctored. In the hospital it is a man again who makes prayer and reads the Bible for us. We are had up before magistrates who are men, and we never get out of the hands of men till we die! (quoted in Smith 97)

Should women be free to do with their bodies as they pleased, then they would only continue to spread diseases to men. Thus, it was essential that society should control female sexuality, otherwise a woman's unrestrained sexuality would ultimately lead to perversion, as expressed in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, the definitive vampire novel before *Dracula*.

Although the relationship between Carmilla and Laura is revealed to be incestuous, since the vampire, in keeping with the folkloric tradition, is actually Laura's distant ancestor, what most recall about the novella are its blatant homoerotic overtones. Like most of the women in vampire literature, Laura is portrayed as an innocent young woman, and her lack of experience is reinforced by the fact that she lives alone with her father and his servants in an old castle that is secluded from the rest of the world. Her purity and virtue make her an obvious lure for Carmilla, who preys only on young

women. The homoerotic overtones found in *Carmilla*, however, are not necessarily Le Fanu's own innovation, since the framework of the novella was largely influenced by Coleridge's poem "Christabel," which is sometimes interpreted to be about a female vampire. While Coleridge does suggest that Geraldine and Christabel share an intimate relationship, the level of that intimacy is left open to interpretation; Le Fanu is much more direct in his depiction of Laura and Carmilla as lovers:

> Sometimes after an hour of apathy, my strange and beautiful companion would take my hand and hold it with a fond pressure, renewed again and again; blushing softly, gazing in my face with languid and burning eyes, and breathing so fast that her dress rose and fell with the tumultuous respiration. It was like the ardour of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet overpowering; and with gloating eyes she drew me to her, and her hot lips travelled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, "You are mine, you *shall* be mine, and you and I are one for ever. (Le Fanu 264)

Some of these homoerotic themes eventually found their way into *Dracula* in the form of the three vampire sisters. It is not necessarily that Stoker portrays the sisters as lustful and voluptuous, but that he portrays three highly-sexualized women as *one*, which is suggestive of a union— and they later wish to include Mina in that union when they beckon her to join them.

The link between sexual perversion and vampirism was noted much earlier during the Victorian period, and the two ended up becoming noteworthy themes in Baudelaire's infamous poetry collection *The Flowers of Evil*, which finally appeared in its complete form in 1857. More than ten years earlier, though, the collection had been advertised under a different name: *The Lesbians*. The name seems an odd choice at first, since only three of the poems in the collection touch on female homosexuality. This title, however, would have successfully shocked readers while representing the overall theme of the collection. Baudelaire's descriptions of lesbians paint them as "adventurers into the

unknown, explorers of forbidden love, 'seekers of the infinite', driven by overwhelming passion . . ." (Culler xiv); these descriptions, though, also speak to the rest of Baudelaire's work.   Ultimately, the poems collected in *The Flowers of Evil* all express the same themes: the pursuit of the intangible, and the simultaneous pleasure and torment that stem from insatiable desire:

> The critic Pierre Emmanuel writes that "beneath the cover of female homosexuality, all the themes dear to Baudelaire, difficult to treat in the form in which he lived them, are systematically exacerbated to the furthest extreme of their dizzying logic".   As willing victims of a passion held in horror by Baudelaire's world, his lesbians make plausible this powerful presentation of passion as a sought-for hell. Baudelaire imagines lesbians as the most compelling embodiments of lust and desire because for him desire is always defeated, and acts of desire are in this sense sterile . . . [L]esbians . . . may seem to a male imagination driven by insatiable longing, by passions which can find no satisfaction but only provoke further desire.   They are thus embodiments of what in fact is the general character of passion in *The Flowers of Evil*: provoked by something intangible and intensified by the very impossibility of fulfillment. (Culler xv)

Because both were seen as being driven by insatiable desires, it makes sense that nineteenth century authors such as Baudelaire and Le Fanu would draw a connection between lesbianism and vampirism. Coleridge's "Christabel," however, reveals an earlier fascination with lesbianism and the supernatural.

The homoerotic overtones in works like "Christabel" and the more explicit lesbian relationships in Baudelaire's poetry and Le Fanu's *Carmilla* reflect the constant fear of degeneration that characterized the nineteenth century. In other works where homoerotic overtones are either absent or less obvious, the vampire's eroticism and the "contagious" nature of vampirism still would have drawn a parallel with homosexuality, which Victorians saw the result of unrestrained sexual desires and understood as a "contagious" disease.

For Victorians, the spread of homosexuality meant the end of the family, which could only lead to the decline of the nation; thus, the preservation of the family ultimately depended society's ability to enforce strict gender roles. The ideal woman in the nineteenth century was virtuous and maternal— she was the heart of the family— which is why the female vampire is very often portrayed in a much more frightening manner and why, in *Dracula*, Stoker devotes so much of the novel to Lucy and the vampire sisters, rather than focus solely on the titular male character. By keeping the family intact— by suppressing female sexuality— decline could be prevented; unsuppressed female sexuality, on the other hand, could only lead to gender subversion, a defiance of the natural order, and the creation of a feminine male figure.

DANDYISM AND VAMPIRISM

Part of the reason the female vampire was so terrifying to readers in the nineteenth century was not just because she was sexualized but also because her dominance immediately feminized the male characters she encountered. Feminine male characters are abundant in the Gothic literature of both the Romantic and Victorian periods, and the existence of such characters serves as a reflection of society's discomfort not just with female sexuality but also with homosexuality.

As mentioned earlier, male characters are feminized in both *The Monk* and *Dracula*, but the important thing to note here is that the feminine male character is less often the main focus in the Gothic literature of the Victorian period; the degenerate nature of such a character was too troubling for most Victorian literature to address directly. Jonathan Harker, for example, is feminized, but he is hardly the novel's main focus once he escapes from Dracula's castle. On the other hand, in the major Gothic works of the Romantic period, the feminine male character is fully exploited; he is often the main character, as in *The Monk*, "The Vampyre," "Clarimonde," and countless other works from the period.

In *The Monk*, Raymond and Ambrosio are both feminized in their relationships. Like the later Jonathan Harker, Raymond is shown to be incapable of rescuing the woman he loves, and he also takes on the role of the fainting damsel during the episode of the Bleeding Nun. Ambrosio, however, is immediately feminized by his status as a Catholic priest, though he is feminized for other reasons as well: not only does he allow himself to be controlled by a woman, but Ambrosio finds himself attracted to Matilda

while she is still disguised as Rosario, which introduces a homoerotic theme into the work. This theme does not disappear, either, after Rosario is revealed as Matilda, since Matilda is actually a demon, which means that she is genderless; her lack of a gender prevents the readers from interpreting her relationship with Ambrosio as a heterosexual relationship.

Romuald is feminized in a similar manner in "Clarimonde"; he is first feminized by his status as a priest and then by the subservient role he takes on after falling in love with the vampire. While under Clarimonde's influence, he soon becomes foppish, paying too much attention to trivial details such as fashion and his appearance; despite his infatuation with a woman, Romuald's obsession with extravagances and trivialities makes him womanish. Polidori is also quick to define his leading male character as having an inherently feminine nature. Although Aubrey is attracted to Ianthe, their relationship is unable to develop, since Aubrey is, by nature, emotional and incapable of reigning in his imagination— and it is Lord Ruthven who sparks his imagination the most. Some critics have even drawn a comparison between Aubrey's infatuation with the vampire and Polidori's supposed love for Lord Byron, although there is little in the story to suggest that Aubrey's attraction is anything more than idle curiosity. However, the ease with which Lord Ruthven destroys the reputations of respectable young men inevitably draws a comparison with the much later Dorian Gray.

When *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was originally published in 1890 as a novella, it was met with harsh criticism because of its blatant homoeroticism, much of which is still apparent in the edited, full-length version that was published the following year. Unlike *Dracula*, which largely ignores the feminine Jonathan Harker once his character is

no longer essential to the plot, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* focuses almost entirely on the feminine male character. This difference is made possible by the novel's status as a decadent work; its aim is to glory in its main character's degenerate nature, and it was able to do so successfully during the strict moral climate of the Victorian period, since Dorian functions as the villain as well as the hero. The work allows readers to indulge in a dark fantasy while also further demonizing the feminine male character, since it is Dorian's narcissism— a trait that had become associated with female vanity as much as the mythological Narcissus— that leads to the young man's fall.

Although Des Esseintes is the "original" literary decadent, Dorian Gray is arguably more important, since he can be seen not just as a "visible symbol" of Decadence but also as a vampire who follows in Lord Ruthven's footsteps. The similarities that exist between the two characters are especially interesting, and, in *The Living Dead*, James Twitchell even suggests that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* can be read as a vampire story. He points to Lord Ruthven as a forerunner of characters like Dorian, who feeds off the energy of others and whose friendships with young men and women always prove so damaging. Not only does Dorian exist in a "deathless state" (Twitchell 173) like a vampire, but, when Dorian murders Basil, Twitchell also notes that "Dorian stabs him 'in the great vein that is behind the ear,'" (Twitchell 177) and that the act later becomes vampiric when Dorian drives "the same knife through his own heart in the painting. These acts seem a metaphoric and brutally ironic image, not only of the vampire attack, but also of the staking of the vampire" (Twitchell 177). More significant is Dorian's "gluttonous pleasure at the torment of others" (Twitchell 173) and his "almost uncontrollable desire to destroy what is innocent and good"(Twitchell 173); his depravity

and behavior echo that of Lord Ruthven, and "like Lord Ruthven in Polidori's novel . . . Dorian Gray has become a communicable disease whose mere presence forbodes evil" (Twitchell 177). While Lord Ruthven is a vampire, whose carefree lifestyle and penchant for gaming make him more of a Decadent, Dorian Gray is a Decadent who ultimately behaves more like a vampire. The two works create an inversion which solidifies the relationship between vampirism and Decadence; at the same time, though, the fact that Lord Ruthven is so similar to Dorian ends up feminizing the vampire, so both works inevitably associate degeneration with the feminine male figure.

The prominence of such feminized male characters, especially in Gothic literature, was largely a reflection of a cultural trend— dandyism, which Victorians saw as yet another sign of decline, and which is present in both "The Vampyre" and, especially, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Although the idea of the feminine male figure was not new in the nineteenth century— fops, coxcombs, and other various types of "fashion-mongers" were abundant in eighteenth century literature— the dandy of the nineteenth century managed to differentiate himself from these earlier types; the dandy was more intellectual, espoused a philosophy that did not limit itself to the art of dress, and, most importantly, was more often perceived by society as a threat than as a source of amusement. So, while the topic of dandyism at first seems unrelated, it becomes relevant to the discussion of Decadence and vampirism when one considers that many Decadents were dandies, and that the philosophy behind this movement often influenced the portrayal of the literary vampire.

Beau Brummell is often credited with "creating" the dandy sometime during the mid to late 1790s, and, despite Brummell's unfortunate end, the dandy remained and

became a nineteenth century phenomenon. Like the *incroyable*, who appeared around the same time in France, the dandy presented himself as an aristocrat and was partially a reaction against the lessening distinction between classes that defined the period; he was a true product of the rebellious nature of Romanticism, though the dandy largely rejected Romantic ideals. In *Rising Star*, Rhonda Garelick explains that, at its heart, dandyism is a performance "of a highly stylized, painstakingly constructed self" (Garelick 3). The dandy manipulated every aspect of his appearance, mannerisms, and behavior for the purpose of suppressing the "natural"; he aimed to become a living work of art. The dandy also rejected the effeminate and foppish male image of the eighteenth century, although, as Garelick points out, most critics saw the dandy as being equally effeminate:

> . . . [D]andyism epitomizes elegance, reaching toward human perfection. And yet, paradoxically, dandyism . . . will later lead right back to the inanimate (although not quite mechanical) world: "In making himself (*en se faisant*) a dandy, a man becomes a piece of boudoir furniture, an extremely ingenious mannequin, who can sit upon a horse or a sofa . . . but a thinking being . . . never." (Garelick 18)

As a work of art, the dandy's purpose was purely ornamental, and his vain, decorative nature was traditionally feminine. Romantics and Victorians either saw the dandy as a curiosity or as a danger, but, regardless, his ability to defy and subvert traditional ideas of gender were unsettling, and the feminine nature of dandyism quickly associated this lifestyle with homosexuality:

> All dandyism hints at a wish for a male autochthony. The dandy, after all, longs to recreate himself as an emblem of complete originality, with no progenitors save other dandies. The society of dandyism reproduces itself through emulation and the following of social dictums, never through familial descendance. Dandies long to establish a nonsanguinary, nonbiological parallel genealogy, a family tree without women. And so, while homosexuality is not a defining quality or a requirement for dandyism, it is an unsurprising adjoining topic. (Garelick 19)

The world of the dandy left no room for women. As Baudelaire once famously argued, "[w]oman is 'natural,' which is to say abominable, therefore she is also always vulgar, which is to say the opposite of a dandy" (quoted in Garelick 34). At the same time, though, Baudelaire continually depicted women as "creatures of disguise and social manipulation" (Garelick 34), which would suggest that they are actually far from being natural. While Baudelaire appears to contradict himself through his portrayal of women, he was not alone in his thinking; the labeling of women as "natural" was largely the result of nineteenth century perceptions of masculinity and femininity. As Smith points out, British physician and psychologist Havelock Ellis suggests in *Man and Woman* (1894) that "an artistic temperament is fundamentally masculine . . . because men have a greater emotional and psychological complexity than women and consequently are able to establish a more complex artistic practice" (Smith 28). According to Ellis, "men represent Art whereas for men women are, because of their potential role as mothers, associated with Nature" (Smith 29). Given this line of thinking, even the most artificial woman would still be incapable of being a dandy, but, as Garelick notes, there never was any reason for women to try to become dandies, since, to a certain extent, dandies already were women (Garelick 34).

The dandy's ability to defy gender and recreate himself as an artificial "thing" paints him as something "inhuman" and "supernatural," so it is, perhaps, expected that writers such as Lord Byron, Baudelaire, Poe, and Wilde, who were all considered dandies by society or other dandies, were attracted to the Gothic, just as it is equally expected that the dandy should appear as a character within the world of the Gothic. In some cases, such as in "The Vampyre" and *Dracula*, the vampire only subtly reflects various aspects

of the dandy, such as his portrayal as an aristocrat, his calculated nature, and his talent for manipulating those around him. Titles such as "Lord" and "Count" set Ruthven and Dracula apart from the other characters, defining them as aristocrats, and they further differentiate themselves through their detached, calculated behavior. Gautier's Clarimonde is also calculating and manipulative, but, because she is a woman, she cannot be a dandy. Instead, her influence on Romuald causes him to become an "exquisite young lord" with the "retinue of a prince's son" (Gautier 11); he takes on the role of the dandified lord that Clarimonde is unable to fulfill, allowing her to mold him the same way that Lord Henry would later mold Dorian.

The implication in "The Vampyre" that all vampires are male also touches on the dandy's "wish for male autochthony." According to Ianthe, the vampire preys on young women; she specifically mentions young women— not men— which is reinforced by the fact that, although Lord Ruthven interacts with a number of young men, it is only the young women who disappear. Since only women are victims, then the vampire, as a sexual creature, must always be male, especially since society in the nineteenth century would not want to view women as sexual beings, nor would most of society want to consider the possibility of two women being intimate with each other. Although the folklore from which "The Vampyre" borrows claims that "a person sucked by a vampyre becomes a vampyre himself, and sucks in his turn" (Polidori xxi), there is no evidence in the story to support that any of the women who Lord Ruthven kills ever returns from the grave. As steeped in the traditional folklore as "The Vampyre" is, Polidori was not afraid to deviate from the old tales for the sake of creativity; "he also adds some touches of his own. For example, James B. Twitchell observes . . . that Polidori is the first to suggest

that moonlight can rejuvenate a vampire" (Senf). Regardless of the sex of the vampire, though, the way that vampirism is passed from one person to the next establishes a "nonbiological parallel genealogy," and, in most instances, the vampire has no progenitors save other vampires.

The Picture of Dorian Gray, though, stands apart from "The Vampyre," "Clarimonde," and other vampire stories, not just because it does not feature a traditional, literal vampire but also because it allows dandyism to become such a prominent theme. Lord Henry and Dorian are both dandies, and both of them are also "vampires." Although only Dorian exhibits the most vampiric traits, such as eternal youth and beauty, it is Lord Henry who "infects" him with the desire to live an aesthetic life. The aesthetic life, however, is shown to be perverse, since it is Dorian's intense love of beautiful objects that enables his transformation into something inhuman and, arguably, inanimate before finally destroying him.

Through the character of Dorian, dandyism, Aestheticism, and Decadence all become tightly intertwined; not all dandies are Aesthetes and Decadents, but Aesthetes and Decadents are always dandies. Wilde's novel, though, shows Aesthetes and Decadents to be same, since both are constantly chasing after new sensations. By association, the dandy also quests for something "new." Ellmann describes the Decadent as a "sampler, who keeps changing his drink, who moves from one inordinate and esoteric fancy to another" (Ellmann), and the same can be said of the dandy; one might even compare him to the vampire, who, having lived several lifetimes and seen all that the world has to offer, still yearns for something that will make his existence once again seem fresh and worthwhile.

A very similar figure, the *flâneur*, appeared during the first half of the nineteenth century and quickly found his place in Baudelaire's writing. The *flâneur* is a "stroller" or "loiterer," but Baudelaire understood the *flâneur* as a poet who must walk the city in order to experience it: "The crowd is his domain, just as the air is the bird's and the water that of the fish. His passion and his profession is to merge with the crowd" (quoted in Tester 2). The *flâneur*, however, never truly becomes a part of the crowd; although he may move with it, he always remains separate from it. He takes pleasure in "the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite" (quoted in Tester 2) because he is aware of himself as an observer— as a man "at the very center of the world" who remains "unseen" (quoted in Tester 3). The crowd is "fleeting" and ever-changing, but the *flâneur* remains, an "eternal" presence that feeds off the energy of those around him; in this respect, such a figure can be seen as a vampire, a notion shared by critic Keith Tester, who even notes that "the *flâneur* is rather like a metropolitan vampire" (Tester 19). Tester also explains in *The Flâneur* that this figure is defined by his awareness of himself:

> Crucially, for Baudelaire, the poet is he who *knows* he is a face in the crowd. And, as such, by virtue of that very knowing, the poet is a man apart even though he might very well appear to be a man like any other. Indeed, if the poet does appear to be like everyone else, so much the better. The anonymity of the poet is merely a ruse; it is a play of masks . . . After all, "The observer is a prince enjoying his incognito wherever he goes." (Tester 4)

As an observer, the *flâneur* becomes something "other," but the crowd serves as a mask that enables him to appear perfectly ordinary, as in the case of Lord Ruthven. Aubrey is able to tell that there is something different about the vampire, but only because he spends so much time with him. Everyone else, though, only briefly interacts with Lord Ruthven while he is in a group. In a way, most people only see him "in passing," so, as

"singular" as he might be, he is still just another face in the crowd to them. To a certain extent, the crowd also masks Count Dracula; he is conspicuous while in Transylvania, which is characterized as being a remote, isolated land, but he is able to move with much greater ease once he arrives in England, which is notably more modern and crowded. This conception of "the crowd" was made possible only by the rapid growth of cities during the first half of the nineteenth century as a result of industrialization, and it quickly became an important element of Gothic literature, which became increasingly focused on urban settings.

However, despite their great populations, cities cultivated a sense of isolation, for always being immersed in a crowd of strange faces inevitably awakens the individual to how alone he truly is. The *flâneur*, though, welcomed this feeling of isolation, and the emergence of the *flâneur* seems a realization of the fear of autonomy that was prevalent in Gothic Romantic literature. In his essay "Addiction and Isolation in *Frankenstein*," Thomas H. Schmid discusses the relationship between spatial isolation and psychological and social isolation in Gothic Romantic literature, and how such themes relate to drug addiction, noting that, as Fred Botting has argued:

> . . . it is precisely the turn towards an interiorized and often pathologically isolated selfhood that defines the "Romantic" phase of the Gothic novel . . . "It is at the level of the individual that Romantic-Gothic writing takes its bearings. The individual in question stands at the edges of society and rarely finds a path back into the social fold." (Schmid 19)

The *flâneur* fits Botting's description as someone who, despite moving with the crowd, remains eternally isolated from society — as someone who is "gloomy, isolated and sovereign . . . condemned to roam the borders of social worlds" (quoted in Schmid 19); however, as someone who is self-aware and an observer, the *flâneur* also becomes what

Botting refers to as a "bearer of a dark truth" (Schmid 19). In Romantic literature, characters such as Victor Frankenstein or Coleridge's mariner are the bearers of these "dark truths," but, for Baudelaire it is the poet— the *flâneur*— whose knowledge and self-awareness result in autonomy, which is ultimately "monstrous." The price one pays for such autonomy is that he, in the words of Frankenstein's Creature, is "dependent on none and related to none" (quoted in Schmid 19), but this "is not to have been born perfect, as Adam, but to be monstrously incomplete, an 'abortion' of the human . . . confine[d] within a state of lonely and insuperable incommunicability" (quoted in Schmid 19). While this description fits Aubrey, who is a bearer of a "dark truth" that he is incapable of communicating, it also applies to the vampire Lord Ruthven, and, unlike Aubrey, Lord Ruthven is truly autonomous, for he is "related to none" and is "condemned to roam the borders of social worlds"; as a vampire, he is "terminally-unique," a term which is most often used to describe addicts and is characterized by "a feeling of isolation and 'personal exceptionalism' that is both incommunicable to others and incapable of being heard by a 'normal,' non-addicted audience" (Schmid 20).

The terminally-unique individual is an outcast, degenerate, and monstrous individual who is aware of his abnormality, and the presence of such figures in Romantic works like *Frankenstein* and "The Vampyre" marks the realization of the effects of addiction. Such a realization was not possible before the Romantic period, since it was only "in the Romantic period [that] 'opium *became* an addictive drug' in the sense that, for the first time its users began to be 'placed under professional surveillance for signs of immoral overindulgence . . .'" (Schmid 20); for the first time, society was beginning to understand what it meant for an individual to be dependent on a substance. Poldori's

"The Vampyre" seems painfully aware of this realization, for Lord Ruthven, like all other vampires, is dependent on "the blood of the young and beautiful" (Polidori xix). Even Baudelaire's *flâneur*, as a terminally-unique individual, is not free of addiction. A "metropolitan vampire," the *flâneur* is not dependent on blood but, rather, the energy of the crowd. Amid the constant "ebb and flow" of unfamiliar faces, the *flâneur* develops a self-awareness, which becomes pleasurable and inevitably prevents him from wanting to leave the crowd.

The crowd serves as an ideal mask for the *flâneur's* predatory, vampiric nature, as shown in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Man in the Crowd" (1840). The unnamed narrator of the story suddenly feels compelled to follow a strange, ragged old man, since something in the man's appearance fascinates him, and he allows himself to be led through the poor backstreets of London; he only quits his pursuit when he realizes that the old man is unable to leave the crowd. The narrator's ability to single out the old man and then follow him distinguishes him from the rest of the crowd, but the old man's hold over the narrator also marks him as something "supernatural." Like Aubrey, who is drawn to Lord Ruthven's singularities, the narrator in "The Man in the Crowd" is drawn to the old man's decrepit, bizarre appearance. The man's inability to quit the crowd speaks to the *flâneur*'s addicted, isolated nature; however, the old man's grotesque and repulsive appearance also marks him as something new, and, in this respect, the narrator's fascination with him suggests that the *flâneur's* need to walk the city streets is a means of searching for new sensations. Thus, the *flâneur* is as much a "sampler" as the dandy or the Decadent.

"Sampling" is mostly associated with Victorian Decadence, and it is explored extensively in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which speaks to the dangers of autonomy, for

it is Dorian's passion for sampling that isolates him and defines him as another terminally-unique character. Dorian is a sampler in the traditional sense; he follows in Des Esseintes' footsteps, studying perfumes, music and instruments, jewels, and moves from one obscure interest to the next, but the concept of sampling can also be found in works of vampire fiction. Unlike Dorian, a literary vampire such as Lord Ruthven, though, is instead, perhaps, best thought of as a sampler of lives.

In order to survive, the literary vampire must live among ordinary people, and he must be able to function in society without drawing any attention to himself; he must pass for just another face in the crowd. Thus, it becomes ever-necessary for him to create new identities, as demonstrated by Lord Ruthven. Polidori begins his story: "It happened that in the midst of the dissipations attendant upon a London winter, there appeared at the various parties of the leaders of the *ton* a nobleman, more remarkable for his singularities, than his rank" (Polidori 27). The way Lord Ruthven suddenly shows up at parties, at the very center of fashionable society, it is as if he has appeared out of thin air, which is true to certain extent, since he has adopted a false identity. "Lord Ruthven" is not the vampire's true name; it is merely one of the many names that he has taken over the years. Then, before the end of the story, Lord Ruthven renames himself the Earl of Marsden, and he will continue to reinvent himself as he moves from victim to victim. Le Fanu's Carmilla also adopts different identities so that she can more easily deceive the young women she preys on; before the end of the novella, it is revealed that she was once known as Mircalla, Countess Karnstein and then the lady Millarca. Carmilla also shares Lord Ruthven's habit of frequently changing social circles. In order to protect himself,

Lord Ruthven never keeps the same company, which is partly due to the fact that he does not seem to have a permanent place of residence; he is always traveling.

Because Lord Ruthven's situation is always changing, he is continually forced to become a new person. His ability to change identities, which, for him, is as simple as slipping on a different mask, can be interpreted as the "sampling" of different lives. This type of sampling is also briefly present in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* when Dorian dresses himself as a commoner so that he can freely move about lower class neighborhoods and visit opium dens. For Dorian, sampling turns into leading a double life, which is a theme that, at first, does not seem commonplace in vampire fiction; this theme, however, is nearly always present, since the vampire must always play a part in order to conceal his true identity. Ironically, though, in "Clarimonde," it is the victim rather than the vampire who does the sampling. After becoming involved with Clarimonde, Romuald plays the part of a young lord every night but still returns to his role as a priest during the day, and he becomes so caught up in his double life that he cannot recall which person he truly is.

Only through sampling can one cultivate the "Self," but, in Dorian's case, such narcissism is shown to result in artificiality and abnormality. Ultimately, sampling becomes a quest for the decadent abnormal, the desire to rise above nature. Dorian decides that "A man who is master of himself can end a sorrow as easily as he can invent a pleasure. I don't want to be at the mercy of my emotions. I want to use them, to enjoy them, and to dominate them" (Wilde 117). His wish to defy nature, though, results in the loss of his soul and his subsequent transformation into something supernatural and vampiric.

THE APPEAL OF THE VAMPIRE

It is not surprising that Dorian's desire to achieve the decadent abnormal leads him to take on many of the qualities of a vampire, since the portrayal of the vampire in nineteenth century literature allows it to be seen as a representation of the abnormal. The abnormal was that which defied nature— the artificial, the supernatural, etc.— so it is expected that nineteenth century society would associate dandyism, gender subversion, sexual perversion, and the many other "deviant" behaviors that it feared with the unholy vampire.

Truly, the vampire was the perfect manifestation of the decadent abnormal: it was immortal, but neither dead nor alive, and it could change its appearance as easily as it could take on a new identity in order to pass through society; it was aristocratic, but savage; its entire character was fabricated, just as its every action was carefully calculated; and it was both repulsive and seductive. Decadents were drawn to the possibility of rising above nature that was represented by the abnormal just as much as they were drawn to the possibility of experiencing new, thrilling sensations. The pursuit of the abnormal was a way to rebel against societal conventions, and the same sense of rebellion characterized Romantic literature. For Romantics, the abnormal allowed one to rebel against reason while heightening one's emotions. The exploration of the senses, though, was important for both groups of writers, who, through their rebellion against social conventions, came to recognize that there was beauty in horror.

The vampire's sublimity it what makes it so appealing to readers. Although Aubrey can sense that there is something odd about Lord Ruthven, he cannot help being

drawn to him; he continually pushes his doubts to the back of his mind, much like Romuald, who has significant reason to fear Clarimonde and whose attraction to her is just as irrational. Both Polidori and Gautier recognize that fear, when mediated, is pleasurable and that a part of human nature yearns for corruption, which is why Aubrey and Romuald both struggle to remove themselves from harm's way even when the danger is plain to them. Baudelaire, though, went so far as to declare that evil is the only real source of pleasure.

Although he believed in original sin, Baudelaire had a deep "contempt for humanitarian ideals and the nineteenth-century faith in progress" (Beckson xxix). Instead, he identified with Milton's portrayal of Satan and dedicated himself to a cult of artifice, challenging the principles of Rousseau's cult of nature, which most Romantics subscribed to. In his "Eloge du Maquillage," he writes:

> All that is beautiful and noble is the result of reason and calculation. Crime, the taste for which the human animal draws from the womb of his mother, is natural in its origins. Virtue, on the contrary, is artificial and supernatural, since gods and prophets were necessary in every epoch and every nation to teach virtue to bestial humanity, and man alone would have been powerless to discover it. Evil is always done effortlessly and naturally by fate, the good is always the product of some art. (quoted in Beckson xxviii)

While the cult of nature certainly had a great influence on Romanticism, the emergence of the Gothic mode within the movement reveals that, despite its fear of Decadence, society was nevertheless fascinated by corruption and sin. Sure enough, the Marquis de Sade had frequently expressed similar sentiments, particularly in his 1791 novel *Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue*, in which he notes that "there is a pleasure in naked crime—a pleasure above and beyond the spoils received" (de Sade 189). The immediate

popularity of the vampire as a character also speaks to the Romantics' love of morbidity and decadence.

Gothic literature is largely voyeuristic, as the reader is continually made privy to sensational events that the narrator or main character takes part in, and in the case of stories like "Clarimonde," *Carmilla*, and *Dracula*, the voyeuristic nature of the Gothic is further increased by the erotic nature of the vampire. Although the majority of Gothic works decry the perverse acts that take place within their pages, even then, there is a sense that the reader is meant to take pleasure in their characters' suffering. Often, the slow and painful downfall of a character is the focus of Gothic literature, as in *The Monk* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The heroes of such works are never strong; always, the Gothic celebrates human frailty and vanity. However, the morbid nature of the Gothic continually made it the subject of much criticism, especially in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

In order for Gothic literature to be acceptable, it needed to reinforce Victorian morality— or at least appear to. Even a decadent work like *The Picture of Dorian Gray* seemingly conforms to society's expectations; it allows itself to be informed by Victorian morality, just like the two principal vampire stories of the nineteenth century, *Carmilla* and *Dracula*. In the end, the vampires Carmilla and Dracula are both destroyed, and the vampiric Dorian Gray finally destroys himself, reassuring readers that such degeneration can and will be conquered. Even Basil Hallward, who appears to be the moral center of the novel, meets a violent end; Dorian accuses the painter of flattery and having "taught me to be vain of my good looks" (Wilde 167), reminding the reader that Basil is the true cause of Dorian's fall, since pride is the greatest sin as well as the root of all other sins.

However, these works do not— nor are they able to— conform entirely to Victorian morality; evil always manages to survive. In the case of Stoker's *Dracula*, critic William Hughes claims that the "construction of the vampire" can be explained "by way of *fin de siècle* conceptions of racial and individual degeneration" (Hughes 147), affirming Daniel Pick's understanding of the novel:

> Part of the novel's task was to represent, externalise and kill off a distinct constellation of contemporary fears. Corruption and degeneration, the reader discovers, are identifiable, foreign and superable; but the text also recognizes a certain sense of failure— an element of horror is always left over, uncontained by the terms of the story. (quoted in Hughes 147)

Dracula's failure reflects the futility of Victorian morality, which is also present in *Carmilla* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. After Carmilla's death, Laura is still gravely affected by the vampire, and she will likely never recover. Similarly, although Dorian commits suicide, his crimes remain unknown and nothing can be done to redeem those whose lives and reputations he has ruined; Lord Henry, who encouraged his vices, even remains free to influence other young men. Despite the "triumph" of morality, there nevertheless remains a sense that not all is entirely well— that degeneration still exists and threatens society.

By comparison, Romantic authors were less concerned with adhering to any sort of morality, and works such as "The Vampyre" allow for the blatant triumph of evil. While Polidori clearly distinguishes between good and evil in his story, he does not hesitate to allow Lord Ruthven to succeed in all of his endeavors to corrupt and destroy. The vampire easily prevails over the story's moral characters, and, when the narrator declares that "Aubrey's sister had glutted the thirst of a VAMPYRE" (Polidori 72), there is something celebratory in his voice; Polidori and the narrator both seem to take a

morbid delight in the destruction of the story's characters, and the fact that the story so clearly distinguishes between good and evil only makes Lord Ruthven's triumph at the end all the more powerful and frightening.

The same sense of defeat characterizes Gautier's "Clarimonde." Although Romuald, with the aid of his mentor, destroys Clarimonde, the vampire's death ends up causing the young priest more harm, since he remains haunted by her memory for the rest of his life. As an old man, he admits that "I have regretted her more than once, and I regret her still. My soul's peace has been very dearly bought. The love of God was not too much to replace such a love as hers" (Gautier 13). Evil is "destroyed" at the end of "Clarimonde," but Gautier's story still shuns traditional morality just as much as, if not more than, Polidori's "The Vampyre." "Clarimonde" presents a more complicated situation that further blurs the lines between good and evil. Unlike Aubrey, who is determined to thwart Lord Ruthven upon realizing that the man is something supernatural, Romuald continues to love Clarimonde— even after witnessing her vampirism— which is all the more shocking, since he is a priest. Romuald's decision to continue loving the vampire and then his anguish over her death present a greater challenge to traditional morality than Aubrey's death at Lord Ruthven's hands; as weak as Aubrey is, he does not decide to give in to the vampire.

Gautier's "Clarimonde" ultimately supports what Baudelaire would later claim in his "Eloge du Maquillage"— that man cannot help being attracted to evil, since it is natural and the one true source of pleasure. This attraction to sin became a prominent theme in *The Flowers of Evil*, which shocked readers with its eroticism and morbidity. In some instances, the poems allude to vampirism, but Baudelaire, however, does not

necessarily allude to vampirism in a literal sense; instead, he prefers to use the vampire as a metaphor to explain man's irrational attraction to evil. The speaker in his poem "The Vampire" prays to the sword and vial to "win my deliverance" (Baudelaire 65) from the "vampire," not because he is incapable of saving himself because a part of him does not want to be saved:

> . . . I am bound
> As the convict is to the chain,
> As the drunkard is to the jug,
> As the gambler to the game,
> As to the vermin the corpse. . . (Baudelaire 65)

Despite the torment and shame he feels, he is continually drawn to the "vampire," just as the drunk and gambler are drawn to their respective vices; a part of him derives pleasure from his pain, so he ends up becoming a victim of his own desires. Romuald exhibits the same self-destructive behavior, declaring that "I could not cease to love Clarimonde, and I would gladly of my own accord have given her all the blood she required to sustain her factitious life" (Gautier 12). Like the speaker in Baudelaire's poem, Romuald is a slave to his darker desires, and, in this respect, he is just as much a vampire as Clarimonde.

Baudelaire's use of vampirism as a metaphor for addiction was not a new concept; Polidori had already drawn a strong connection between Lord Ruthven and gaming. Over the course of the nineteenth century, though, it would become increasingly common for authors to use supernatural creatures as metaphors, one of the most popular examples being Stevenson's Mr. Hyde. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* associates the supernatural Mr. Hyde with a "double life," which many critics have since understood as a metaphor for the double life led by homosexual men, especially after the repetition of the theme in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The draw of the supernatural is what it can

reveal about the human condition— particularly, man's eternal quest for power, and his immense fear upon recognizing his own frailty. Vampirism has become increasingly popular as a metaphor for addiction, but the reason the vampire persists and speaks to readers is that it embodies the broader theme of temptation.

In 1819, Polidori gave a distinct identity to what was truly an obscure figure from Eastern European folklore, but, by giving the vampire an identity and a voice, he also began the process of humanizing it. Polidori and Gautier both related the vampire to themes of addiction and temptation, and Baudelaire would later make the metaphor more explicit, further blurring the line between the natural and the supernatural. By making it more difficult to distinguish between the natural and the supernatural, the vampire ultimately becomes a more obscure and more sublime figure. Such obscurity also enables the natural to take on supernatural qualities, as in the case of the dandy, the *flâneur*, and Dorian Gray, humans who all transform themselves into something supernatural, whether literally or metaphorically. In the end, the use of vampirism as a metaphor gradually humanizes what is inhuman while also suggesting that the natural is, in fact, unnatural; it allows the abnormal to become attainable.

CONCLUSION

Although it is generally accepted by critics that Decadence is a late Victorian movement, the prevalence of decadent themes in Gothic Romantic literature makes it necessary to reexamine its origins and development. The emergence of the literary vampire during the early nineteenth century, in particular, stands out as a pivotal moment, since the vampire unites eroticism with perversion, two traits which later became essential in the formation of the decadent abnormal as a concept. However, because of the prominence of the supernatural— and, therefore, also the abnormal— in Gothic literature, one must question whether the abnormal is more closely tied to the vampire or the Gothic mode.

The Gothic mode, with its emphasis on mystery and the supernatural, certainly incorporates the abnormal, even when a work does not feature a vampire. In such situations, though, the abnormal instead often stems from the presence of vampiric elements, as in the case of *The Monk* and *Frankenstein*. The vampiric overtones of the Bleeding Nun have already been discussed, but similar overtones can be found elsewhere in Lewis's novel. For example, Matilda sucks the snake's venom from Ambrosio's wound and then makes a miraculous recovery, despite having been at the point of death; her highly erotic nature as well as her ability to thwart death mark her as something supernatural and are reminiscent of the vampire. *Frankenstein* also presents the reader with a character who is able to thwart death. Even though the Creature does not drink blood, he is nevertheless a dead being that comes to life, and, once alive, he haunts his maker, much like the folkloric vampire, who, upon rising from the grave, persists in

tormenting those who he was once close to in life. Victor Frankenstein even refers to the Creature as "my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave" (Shelley 78), knowing that it will be "forced to destroy all that was dear to me" (Shelley 78). In this way, the vampire often manages to cast its shadow over Gothic works in which it is seemingly absent; it unites eroticism with perversion, and its influence over the Gothic mode is inevitable because of what the creature represents— the abnormal, which is so essential to the Gothic and later became even more essential to the Decadent Movement.

The emergence of the literary vampire during the early nineteenth century ultimately marks a key moment in the formation of Decadence as a movement, allowing the movement to be viewed as a nineteenth century phenomenon rather than a late Victorian phenomenon. Unlike Romanticism, which was widespread, Decadence was always a fringe movement, making it difficult to determine its origins, and matters are further complicated when one considers the relationship that Decadence had to Aestheticism and Symbolism; very often, the three movements are discussed as if they are merely different stages of one larger movement. Determining the movement's origins becomes still more difficult, though, since it did not gain any significant attention in England until the 1890s, despite its much earlier popularity in France. In an effort to fix a date to the Decadent Movement, critics have frequently pointed to Huysmans's *À Rebours*, which had an undeniable influence in shaping people's ideas of Decadence; however, while *À Rebours* is noteworthy for its neat articulation of decadent principles, the same principles had already been voiced in earlier works of literature.

Huysmans's novel might have inspired what Ellmann calls the decadent "programme," but the beliefs that came to define Decadence in the late nineteenth century

were originally rooted in Romanticism. The belief in art's autonomy, which Decadents shared with Aesthetes, was originally voiced by Kant before becoming more popular among notable Romantic writers such as Coleridge, and even the Decadents' desire to defy nature, which at first seems to contradict Romanticism entirely, is expressed in the morbidity of Gothic Romantic literature. In the Gothic, the grotesque becomes sublime; it inspires terror, but is also to be celebrated, and it ultimately becomes erotic when personified by the perverse vampire.

During the Victorian period, the Gothic mode, and especially the vampire, came to reflect people's anxieties. However the majority of the social anxieties that characterized the Victorian period had emerged much earlier during the late eighteenth century with the collapse of the *Ancien Régime* in France and the rise of industrialization. In retrospect, the Romantic and late Victorian periods were both characterized by a great feeling of unrest, and the *fin de siècle* attitude that is often associated with late nineteenth century Decadence can be found in Romanticism. That the Gothic novel and, more importantly, the literary vampire, survived the span of the nineteenth century speaks to society's anxieties as well as its fascination with decline.

While Decadence might not have been articulated as a movement until the late Victorian period, the beliefs that defined the movement were not new. The decadent "lifestyle," described by Huysmans in *À Rebours*, had already been lived by earlier writers, and it was a lifestyle that Polidori had already made synonymous with the literary vampire.

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