

# The Vampire



## *Introduction*

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*by John Polidori*

THE superstition upon which this tale is founded is very general in the East. Among the Arabians it appears to be common: it did not, however, extend itself to the Greeks until after the establishment of Christianity; and it has only assumed its present form since the division of the Latin and Greek churches; at which time, the idea becoming prevalent, that a Latin body could not corrupt if buried in their territory, it gradually increased, and formed the subject of many wonderful stories, still extant, of the dead rising from their graves, and feeding upon the blood of the young and beautiful. In the West it spread, with some slight variation, all over Hungary, Poland, Austria, and Lorraine, where the belief existed, that vampyres nightly imbibed a certain portion of the blood of their victims, who became emaciated, lost their strength, and speedily died of consumptions; whilst these human blood-suckers fattened — and their veins became distended to such a state of repletion, as to cause the blood to flow from all the passages of their bodies, and even from the very pores of their skins.

In the London Journal, of March, 1732, is a curious, and, of course, credible account of a particular case of vampyrism, which is stated to have occurred at Madreyga, in Hungary. It appears, that upon an examination of the commander-in-chief and magistrates of the place, they positively and unanimously affirmed, that, about five years before, a certain Heyduke, named Arnold Paul, had been heard to say, that, at Cassovia, on the frontiers of the Turkish Servia, he had been tormented by a vampyre, but had found a way to rid himself of the evil, by eating some of the earth out of the vampyre's grave, and rubbing himself with his blood. This precaution, however, did not prevent him from becoming a vampyre himself; for, about twenty or thirty days after his death and burial, many persons complained of having been tormented by him, and a deposition was made, that four persons had been deprived of life by his attacks. To prevent further mischief, the inhabitants having consulted their Hadagni,<sup>2</sup> took up the body, and found it (as is supposed to be usual in cases of vampyrism) fresh, and entirely free from corruption, and emitting at the mouth, nose, and ears, pure and florid blood. Proof having been thus obtained, they resorted to the accustomed remedy. A

stake was driven entirely through the heart and body of Arnold Paul, at which he is reported to have cried out as dreadfully as if he had been alive. This done, they cut off his head, burned his body, and threw the ashes into his grave. The same measures were adopted with the corpses of those persons who had previously died from vampyrism, lest they should, in their turn, become agents upon others who survived them.

This monstrous rodomontade is here related, because it seems better adapted to illustrate the subject of the present observations than any other instance which could be adduced. In many parts of Greece it is considered as a sort of punishment after death, for some heinous crime committed whilst in existence, that the deceased is not only doomed to vampyrise, but compelled to confine his infernal visitations solely to those beings he loved most while upon earth — those to whom he was bound by ties of kindred and affection. — A supposition alluded to in the “Giaour.”

But first on earth, as Vampyre sent,  
Thy corse shall from its tomb be rent;  
Then ghastly haunt the native place,  
And suck the blood of all thy race;  
There from thy daughter, sister, wife,  
At midnight drain the stream of life;  
Yet loathe the banquet which perforce  
Must feed thy livid living corse,  
Thy victims, ere they yet expire,  
Shall know the demon for their sire;  
As cursing thee, thou cursing them,  
Thy flowers are withered on the stem.  
But one that for thy crime must fall,  
The youngest, best beloved of all,  
Shall bless thee with a father's name —  
That word shall wrap thy heart in flame!  
Yet thou must end thy task and mark  
Her cheek's last tinge — her eye's last spark,  
And the last glassy glance must view  
Which freezes o'er its lifeless blue;  
Then with unhallowed hand shall tear  
The tresses of her yellow hair,

Of which, in life a lock when shorn  
Affection's fondest pledge was worn —  
But now is borne away by thee  
Memorial of thine agony!  
Yet with thine own best blood shall drip;  
Thy gnashing tooth, and haggard lip;  
Then stalking to thy sullen grave,  
Go — and with Gouls and Afrits rave,  
Till these in horror shrink away  
From spectre more accursed than they.

Mr. Southey has also introduced in his wild but beautiful poem of “Thalaba,” the vampyre corse of the Arabian maid Oneiza, who is represented as having returned from the grave for the purpose of tormenting him she best loved whilst in existence. But this cannot be supposed to have resulted from the sinfulness of her life, she being portrayed throughout the whole of the tale as a complete type of purity and innocence. The veracious Tournefort gives a long account in his travels of several astonishing cases of vampyrism, to which he pretends to have been an eyewitness; and Calmet, in his great work upon this subject, besides a variety of anecdotes, and traditionary narratives illustrative of its effects, has put forth some learned dissertations, tending to prove it to be a classical, as well as barbarian error.

Many curious and interesting notices on this singularly horrible superstition might be added; though the present may suffice for the limits of a note, necessarily devoted to explanation, and which may now be concluded by merely remarking, that though the term Vampyre is the one in most general acceptance, there are several others synonymous with it, made use of in various parts of the world: as Vroucolocha, Vardoulacha, Goul, Broucoloka, &c.

*2 The universal belief is, that a person sucked by a vampyre becomes a vampyre himself, and sucks in his turn.*

*3 Chief bailiff.*