

## Jaroslava Šůvová, *Symbolism of the Vampire in English Romanticism*

BA thesis

### Opponent's Review

The BA thesis discusses a prominent Romantic figure of the vampire in literary works by Lord Byron, John W. Polidori, John Keats and S. T. Coleridge. The student's objective is to present the vampire's complex symbolism but also various contexts which participated in the genesis of different types of modern vampiric figures, be they cultural or purely personal. Sometimes this collateral information is given too much space, one feels, and interpretation, on the other hand, receives fewer pages than it should. The overall impression is that supportive material prevails over what should make the core of the thesis, i.e. analysis.

My comments, objections and questions:

1. The chapter devoted to *The Giaour* speaks of Romantic Orientalism but places the origin of the Romantic concept of the vampire basically into (ancient) Greece, neglecting other Oriental cultures (Indian, Chinese, Russian) in which mythological figures more or less related to the vampire existed. This is perhaps due to the limited number of sources the student used (vampiric sources are in fact numerous), among which especially Christopher Frayling's *Vampyres* and Giuseppe Maiello's *Vampirismus* are strikingly missing.
2. It is necessary to correct the assumption that English Romanticism turns away from the folkloristic conception of the previous periods. There are two significant occurrences of the vampire in English Romantic literature prior to *The Giaour*: an extended note in Robert Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) and the Argument attached to James Stagg's narrative poem *The Vampyre* (1810), both presenting ethnographic and folkloristic views of the vampire.
3. The principle of composition used in *The Giaour*, more relevant than fragmentation, is multiperspectivism, i.e. we are challenged, rather than to complete the picture of the hero, to decide (or at least to speculate) about his truthful character on the basis of several different subjective and partial accounts.
4. Thorslev's evolutionary model of the Byronic hero seems too broad as it subsumes sometimes quite disparate types of eighteenth-century literary characters but omits – curiously enough – the central source of inspiration, Milton's Satan. His conception, presented at length, is a typical example of the student's tendency to reproduce an account from one source on several pages, where brevity will do.
5. I believe that Polidori's story contains a richer interpretive potential: one should, at least, ask in what way it reflects the position of aristocracy in the post-French Revolution Europe (and thus address its political register) and how much Ruthven acts as Aubrey's doppelganger, complementing his personality. This is to say that the analysed texts should be viewed with more intense critical alacrity.
6. In the discussion of *Christabel*, what is inadequately stressed is what the eponymous heroine's name suggests – the virtues of Christianity, which she may defend against a subversive force of a diabolical seducer. This defence should acquire the form of adherence rather than agency: even the Ancient Mariner is passive, and when he acts he commits an unpremeditated misdeed, transgressing the order of Creation. The student seems to be quite uneasy about the ensuing question of passivity: the two subchapters in which she interprets the poem are thus strangely incongruous in this respect. (In any case, the idea of Coleridge's projection into Christabel sounds queer.)

7. Why is *Christabel*, the earliest of the studied texts, discussed as the last one?

Conclusion: The student attempts to approach her topic not in a simple way but sometimes she is apparently not able to grasp its complexity and find an appropriate method to tackle them. The limitations of the thesis have been listed above. I recommend the thesis for defence with a preliminary suggestion of the grade to be **very good** (velmi dobrá).

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