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William Polidori's *The Vampyre***

PROFESSIONAL PAPER

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Dracula's Grandparents: The Antagonist as a Prototype of the Modern Vampire in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Christabel" and John William Polidori's *The Vampyre*

When a conversation turns to the topic of vampires, the main character of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) is usually cited as a conventional prototype. However, it is important to note that the eponymous antagonist of the revolutionary novel is not the first vampire in English-language literature. Mainly through their potential historical, socio-cultural, and psychological interpretations, two members of the pre-*Dracula* era significantly contributed to the traditional idea of vampirism.

Critics seem to agree that the first male vampire of the English literary canon appeared in John Polidori's novelette, *The Vampyre* (1819), while the issue of the first female representative of this Gothic character may be more problematic. Traditionally, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) tends to be identified as the pioneering work in this regard. However, Samuel Coleridge's narrative poem, "Christabel" (1816), might be a relevant candidate as well: according to certain scholarly views, it may fulfil a similar role as "its" Victorian descendant.

This essay will concentrate on the most significant characteristics of vampirism that are traceable both in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Christabel" and in John William Polidori's *The Vampyre*. Mostly based on the behaviour of the two supernatural creatures, namely Geraldine and Lord Ruthven, respectively, the analysis will focus on the influence that these literary works had on the general features of vampire-figures as Gothic antagonists.

KEYWORDS

vampire, transgression, aristocrat, homoeroticism, virtue, vice, "Christabel", *The Vampyre*

When a colloquial or academic conversation turns to the topic of vampires, the main character of Bram Stoker's novel is usually cited as a conventional prototype. *Dracula* (1897) revolutionized this branch of Gothic literature, and eternalized the stereotypical horror-figure both in literary and in broader cultural terms. It is true that Count Dracula (as well as the world built upon him) contributed to the idea that "no other monster has endured, and proliferated, in quite the same way—or been made to bear such a weight of metaphor" (Punter and Byron 268). However, it is important to note that the eponymous antagonist is not the first vampire in English-language literature.

David Punter, in line with the general critical agreement, remarks that "the figure of Lord Ruthven became a model for the English vampire" (104). The central character of John William Polidori's novelette, *The Vampyre* (1819), is widely acknowledged as the first male representative of his kind in English fiction. Similarly, when the pioneering female character is examined, it is also Punter who notes that, "interestingly, several of the vampires in romantic writing are women"—mentioning Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Geraldine, the mysterious girl in the narrative poem "Christabel" (1816) as one of "the outstanding examples" (102). This essay will concentrate on the most significant characteristics of vampirism traceable both in Coleridge's "Christabel" and in Polidori's *The Vampyre*. Mostly based on the effects and behaviour of the two supernatural creatures, i.e. Geraldine and Lord Ruthven, respectively, the analysis will focus on the influence that these literary works had on the general features of vampire-figures as Gothic antagonists.

The most obvious similarity between Geraldine and Lord Ruthven is that they both belong to the top of social hierarchy. As Punter and Glennis Byron point out, "one of the most significant shifts in the movement from folk-lore to literature is the vampire's transformation from peasant to aristocrat" (269). Lord Ruthven can indeed be mentioned as a typical representative of this radical alteration, but Geraldine, since allegedly her "sire is of a noble line" (l. 79), may be a relevant example of the upper-class blood-sucker as well. However, the vampire is also a misfit, a being accompanied by eeriness and mystery. For instance, Ruthven himself is introduced as "a nobleman, more remarkable for his singularities, than his rank" (*Vampyre* 295). Therefore, he must be examined as an outsider even within aristocratic circles. Since "not only peasants and savages but lords and ladies took pleasure in believing themselves dominated by powers beyond their control" (Fulford 56), the attention paid to Ruthven can be justified: he is the materialization of otherworldly appearance and behaviour.

From its supra-hierarchical position, the vampire proves to be an effective device of highlighting the shortcomings of the aristocracy. As a superior being, "the vampire remains exotic, oriental, vulgar, folkloric, perverse, supernatural, superstitious, and to the sceptic, faintly ridiculous; but in Polidori's hands, he is now also a seductive rake, resident in an aristocratic culture and at home in the metropolis" (Ellis 183). Thus, the creature becomes a suitable critic of upper-class people. When summarizing the vampire's basic role in this aspect, Punter notes that "Ruthven is the representation not of a mythologised individual but of a mythologised class. He is dead yet not dead, as the power of the aristocracy in the early nineteenth century was dead and not dead; he requires blood because blood is the business of an aristocracy" (104). The parallel between the dubious nature of the aristocracy and that of the vampire, particularly through the ambiguous importance of blood, can reflect on the usual upper-class values. In "Christabel" the main "subject is chivalry, and the gender and sexual identities people take on in the chivalric and aristocratic family" (Fulford 55). Its medieval features and archaic, paternal power structures can be highlighted from a Gothic perspective as well. Even though a detailed description of chivalry as a political topic in "Christabel" will not be presented here¹, it is significant to bear in mind that "Coleridge's critique of chivalry and aristocracy is [. . .] important to this poem" (Newlyn, Introduction 10). This feature gives Geraldine the chance to act both as a representative and as a critic of the nobility: in her own fictional world, she does the same as Lord Ruthven in Polidori's narrative.

In *The Vampyre*, instead of the above mentioned socio-political peculiarities of the aristocracy, the corrupted moral attitude of this class is emphasized—and exploited by Lord Ruthven. As Markman Ellis notes, "the rake and the vampire are both devices for exposing the epistemological complexity of moral judgement" (183). The general superiority of the creature is highlighted when Ellis observes that "the nobleman eventually proclaimed as 'a VAMPYRE!' in the last line dissimulates his blood-sucking practices under the guise of rakery" (183). In this sense, Polidori's monster manages to criticize and ridicule the idle, inconsistent, sensational aristocratic manners partly by identifying himself with these people on a superficial level: "His 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" (*Vampyre* 295; italics in the original). Underlining Ruthven's most conspicuous features as widely used attributes of the vampire and mentioning the hostility between aristocrats and middle-class people as a potential secondary motivation behind the antagonist's behaviour and moral creed, Punter remarks that

the vampire in British culture [. . .] is a fundamentally antibourgeois figure. He is elegant, well dressed, a master of seduction, a cynic, a person exempt from prevailing socio-moral codes. He thus takes his place alongside other forms of Gothic villain, as a participant in a myth produced by the middle class to explain its own antecedents and its own fears (104-05).

Accordingly, by adapting his own activities (e.g. travelling on the Continent, gambling, enjoying the company of women) to upper-class values, Ruthven is able to subvert the main attitudes associated with aristocrats.

Through vampires, human hypocrisy, inherent sinfulness, the instability of threatened dignity, as well as the idleness of the aristocracy can all be criticized at the same time. Judgements aimed at such aspects may be extended to the field of sexuality—and its countless possible aberrations, which are exploited by Geraldine and Lord Ruthven, too.

As Punter and Byron note, "early vampires are not only aristocrats, but also seducers, and from the start the vampire has been associated with sexuality" (269). Furthermore, "reading this story [i.e. *The Vampyre*] as failing to express a more explicit sexuality is to fail to read it in an [sic] historically sensitive manner" (Ellis 184; see also Punter 104). While the corruption of the cultural-historical sphere is depicted through traditional aristocratic features and habits, a more personal field of human life also seems to be a threatened element.

It is undeniable that "Lord Ruthven is a sexual predator whose testified vampirism takes the form of sexual seduction" (Ellis 183), but extending his methods to the way in which Geraldine acts might testify to the latter's being a vampire, too. By taking advantage of the inhabitants' aforementioned, outdated aristocratic-chivalric manners, "Geraldine enthralls the innocent Christabel because she embodies the guilty knowledge that has been repressed within the castle walls" (Fulford 56). However, her unappeasable sexual hunger—as a kind of antithesis of what Leoline, his daughter, and the servants have represented since the mother's death—soon turns towards Christabel's father: "And fondly in his arms he took / Fair Geraldine, who met the embrace, / Prolonging it with joyous look" (448-50). Consequently, "on finally seeing this level of Geraldine in a sudden revelation, Christabel reacts [. . .] as if identifying with the snake-like other whom she simultaneously fears and longs to emulate" (Hogle 19). Her desperate but hopeless attempt to compete with the intruder suggests that Geraldine's abilities—just like those of Lord Ruthven—exceed human capacities. Furthermore, the power represented by them can be extended to same-sex relations, too. In this sense, Lord Ruthven's "haemovorous tendencies are a sexo-culinary perversion that merely underline his immoral pursuit of women" (Ellis 183)—and, in a certain way, of men.

Punter and Byron observe that "confounding all categories, the vampire is the ultimate embodiment of transgression" (268). In the two analysed works, the most expressive examples of violating limits and breaking the boundaries can be traced in homosexual intercourses. If the relationship between the two female characters in Coleridge's poem is examined, it must be clarified that, "with the exception of 'Christabel'—on all accounts an exceptional text—Coleridge's depictions of women in his poems were not very adventurous" (Carlson 206). However, Geraldine seems to possess the attributes of a sexually active and controlling, in this sense almost masculine individual, which makes her an innovative figure and her achievements a series of extraordinary acts within Coleridge's oeuvre.

Having Christabel indulged in her seductive world secures Geraldine's superiority both in physical and in psychological terms. The latter paraphrases this hierarchical relation during the night they spend together: "In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell, / Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel" (267–68). As Julie Carlson notes, "gendering and engendering surrender was a major topic in 'Christabel,' Coleridge's most remarkable statement on women, gender, a subject's coming-to-sexuality, and his or her formation by generic forms" (213). Emphasizing the spiritual outcomes of Christabel's successful temptation, Tim Fulford observes that "it is the acceptance of her guilt that makes her a mental slave" (57). Controlled by Geraldine, she starts alienating herself from the rest of her company. When summarizing the subsequent alteration in Christabel's position, Fulford underlines that "Geraldine's touch becomes [...] a stronger master of her fear and desire even than the man whom society calls her lord—her father" (57). This completion of Geraldine's intricate plot enslaves the confused girl with the help of female homosexuality: for Christabel, the carnal bond between them is raised directly onto a spiritual level. Since the relationship with her father never reaches such forbidden territories, Christabel naturally accepts Geraldine's ultimate superiority, thus a remarkable shift in her affection inevitably ensues. Consequently, Leoline's control over his daughter is overthrown by the guest in the castle.

As Punter and Byron highlight, if the male homosexual factor in Polidori's work is examined, "same-sex desire between men can be encoded only through women, as Aubrey and Lord Ruthven's relationship must be negotiated through Aubrey's sister" (270). Therefore, despite the fact that in cultural-critical terms vampires are supposed to represent omnipotence, within literary frames certain taboos have to be taken into consideration. The indirect method that has to be applied if one intends to interpret the connection between Lord Ruthven and Aubrey in detail may even defy vampires' total sovereignty. However, as Punter and Byron suggest, "the vampire is particularly well adapted to signify 'deviant'

sexuality" (270). Consequently, the loss of a vampire's unsurpassable nature might be compensated, and this presupposition is not necessarily restricted to the *deviance* of homosexuality.

The analysis of the main sexual aberrations represented by vampires leads us back to the criticism of the aristocracy, since "masochism, Coleridge suggested, was a national—and political—disease which monarch and minister sadistically exploited. In 'Christabel' the *disease* is traced to sexual roots" (Fulford 56). Whether or not the result of the two women's relationship can be referred to as a disease will be analysed later. Nevertheless, the presence of masochism is significant to note, since this is the sexual activity that usually leaves visible signs on the human skin. As Fulford continues, Geraldine "seems quite innocent, but her violation of property is marked on her body" (56). "This mark of [. . .] shame, this mark of [. . .] sorrow" (270) is never properly described, and its obscurity may make Geraldine's character even more otherworldly. The menacing atmosphere created by her mysterious behaviour is enhanced by the phenomenon that in the morning "Christabel's words do not betray her sexual knowledge and desire: her body does, just as Geraldine's did hers" (Fulford 57). In this sense, in Part II she may also wear the shameful mark she saw on Geraldine's skin—suggesting that she is indeed *infected* by the other girl. As Punter and Byron conclude the line of suggestions about this stain, "in the absence of a clear account, the imagination is left to dream, to hallucinate what the 'forbidden sight' might be" (296), since what is not seen at all might carry much more thought-provoking allusions.

Together with the invisible sexual aberrations, "it is clear that what is repressed, on both sides, is a sexual desire that is taboo because it is incestuous: Christabel's mother is dead and she takes her place" (56). Another, less radical interpretation of the apparently unhealthy and unstable relationship between Christabel and her father may be that "Sir Leoline and Christabel have each internalised their chivalric roles. He is the stern knightly father, she the obedient daughter—her sexuality repressed so that she remains innocent in his eyes" (Fulford 56). One possible explanation of this situation is provided by Punter and Byron, who sum up "Christabel" as "a poem in which, for most of the time, most of the protagonists are asleep, under the influence of some unspecified general narcotic" (296). This state can refer to aristocratic idleness both as a symptom of and as a disguise for paralysing sexual repression.

The rigid system in Leoline's castle does need a proper sexual pioneer. Therefore, it is no wonder that "into this self-enclosed relationship, Coleridge sends Geraldine, a damsel-in-distress who has suffered an abuse of chivalry. She has been raped by a band of knights" (Fulford 56; see also "Christabel" 81–99). This already suggests and foreshadows the

abuse of normal, chivalric sexual behaviour as well. Subsequently, her presence brings about noticeable changes in the medieval scene—and in some of the people it is populated by. A later established traditional feature of vampires can already be traced in Geraldine when the two girls enter the castle:

The lady sank, belike through pain,
And Christabel with might and main
Lifted her up, a weary weight,
Over the threshold of the gate:
Then the lady rose again,
And moved, as she were not in pain (129–34).

In other words, she cannot step over the threshold without being invited or physically carried by the owner or some prominent inhabitant of the building². However, it is not only Christabel whose (so far relatively callously constructed) sexual life is altered radically by the newly arrived lady, since Leoline himself "turns towards Geraldine instead, a woman his daughter's age who is not a blood-relation" (Fulford 57). From the point of view of unorthodox sexuality, his decision, which brings the plot to its abrupt end, may even be considered preferable. With Christabel experiencing a lesbian intercourse and Leoline turning away from her, the poem might suggest that, ironically, the vampire's power is able both to create and to eliminate forbidden sexual ideas and deviant activities. Enhanced by this observation, the unresolved conflict(s) may allude to a further Gothic feature: in both stories it is the villain who has the upper hand. For example, as Punter underlines, "the vampire in Polidori is capable of 'winning'" (105). This conclusion is prevented in later representatives of vampire-literature, where the beast is usually destroyed by the hero(es). The best-known example of such a climactic finale is probably the successful mission against Count Dracula, at the end of which Mina Murray sees Jonathan Harker's "great knife [. . .] shear through the throat; whilst at the same moment Mr [Quincey] Morris's bowie knife [is] plunged into the heart" (*Dracula* 400), killing the villain. A combat like this, for that matter, a team of protagonists actively fighting back is presented in neither of the analysed works. However, further parallels or certain contradictions between the two might be provided by the settings of the evil's (unrevealed) victory: the medieval castle in "Christabel," as well as London and Greece in *The Vampyre*.

As for spatial frames, Coleridge seems to have borrowed the setting from Gothic novelists (Fulford 55). As Fred Botting notes, "'Christabel' (1816), following the patterns of eighteenth-century imitations of feudal romances, is set in a world of knights, ladies, honour and portentous dreams" (100), all of which were organic elements of the Gothic during the second half of the 1700s. In connection with the era evoked in it, Fulford notes the following:

"Set in medieval times, written in the style of a courtly romance, the poem seems backward-looking" (55). In other words, the plot is accompanied by an authentic chronological background. Similarly, the place itself, mainly through the appearance of Christabel's long deceased mother³, eventually proves to be a widely used Gothic setting: a haunted castle.

As opposed to "Christabel," *The Vampyre* serves as a prototype for the nineteenth-century codification of popular culture as folklore" (Ellis 186), while also exploiting the options an urbanized society in London can offer. Although it starts in the British capital, "the tale itself locates the vampire in the vulgar tales of primitive Greek society, here understood as a repository of ancient cultural knowledge" (Ellis 186)—thus providing a traditional rural-versus-urban attribute.

As a cultural opposite of London, the forest Aubrey has to ride through may reflect the folkloristic origins of vampires: it is said to be "the resort of the Vampyres in their nocturnal orgies" (*Vampyre* 305). While in Greece the dreaded term is applied in its plural form, in the British capital only one of these creatures, Lord Ruthven seems to be present. Taking into consideration that he is an urban monster, his journey with Aubrey on the Continent makes him move outside his usual hunting area—which simply gives him the chance to extend its frames to more international distances. Temporarily leaving London for Europe, Lord Ruthven quickly succeeds in overcoming the change of environment. This adaptability is supported by Ellis when he notes that "the scene of Ianthe's death [. . .] rudely obtrudes the vampire's libertine sexual world into Greek sentimental primitivism" (185). Considering how effectively he manages to frighten, harm, and destroy a pastoral community, vampirism may even be looked at as a potential antithesis for Neoclassicism.

The mere fact that a Greek girl, a fitting representative of Neoclassical pastorals, is killed, instead of being corrupted, may imply that vampires classify their (usually female) victims in a hierarchical system. The intruders' preferences are based on moral values, as well as on the aesthetic characteristics and standpoints of the women they attack.

Ellis summarizes the effects of crossing paths with Polidori's vampire by noting that "his interest in [. . .] women is not [. . .] simply in sex" (183). It already suggests that encountering this particular monster might have various outcomes, but the primary interpretation may be that "Lord Ruthven ruins reputations as well as drinking blood" (Punter and Byron 269). In other words, his goals include both physical harm and moral corruption. Ellis describes Ruthven's ideology and method as follows: "His seductions do not have sex as their target, but a more moral quarry, virtue itself" (183). What is more, his expectations in this aspect prove to

be especially high, since, "cloaking himself in virtue, he is able to seduce and dishonour precisely those women who were most virtuous" (Ellis 183). Consequently, the term "virtue" appears to have different connotations in Lord Ruthven's assessment. These can be analysed the most efficiently if certain representatives of his victims are placed properly within the villain's hierarchy.

In connection with the relative arbitrariness and plasticity of the term "virtue," it should be taken into consideration that "in nineteenth-century vampire fiction, the representation of the vampire as monstrous, evil and other serves to guarantee the existence of good" (Punter and Byron 270). In *The Vampyre* it is mainly represented by female characters, who, sooner or later in the plot, inevitably meet the vampire's true nature. As Ellis notes, "Ruthven's seduction marks his victims (in a manner like that of disease) and permanently alters them" (185). This observation may lead to the differentiation between the two main groups of Lord Ruthven's victims: the seduced and the murdered ones.

On the one hand, the representatives of the former group, even though they probably experience sexual intercourse with the vampire, are not bitten by him. Nevertheless, the consequences of their attraction towards the vampire soon become conspicuous, since "all those females whom he had sought, apparently on account of their *virtue*, 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" (*Vampyre* 301; italics added). Thus, their change for the worse may suggest that simply their already existing inner personalities and vicious instincts are released. As Punter observes, "Ruthven transgresses the social norms, but he does so with the collaboration of his victims; he merely acts as a catalyst for repressed tendencies to emerge into the light of day" (103-04). Therefore, these victims can be considered similar to Christabel, who seems to face the same supernatural effects and undergoes a transformation with remarkable outcomes: from a superficially virtuous, unsullied maiden, she turns into a sinner, i.e. a grown-up woman with sexual experience, who is not afraid to express her jealousy and hostility towards Geraldine as her competitor in Part II (see 613-17). Similarly to Geraldine (and presumably Christabel herself), these women are also marked after the sexual act, but this stigma is not based on blood.

On the other hand, the second category of Ruthven's victims consists of the women who die as a result of meeting his true nature: they are the ones who have to suffer the physical contact on a much more gruesome level, as they are severely abused and tortured, and, eventually, their blood is sucked out by the bestial aristocrat. In the novelette, only two of them are identified: Ianthe and Aubrey's sister. Despite fulfilling the role

of the recurring *damsel-in-distress* motif, they prove to be the only female characters (if the reader disregards the prevented fate of the Italian girl; see *Vampyre* 301–02) whom Ruthven's infection does not seem to affect. In their cases moral corruption is not even mentioned as an option for the vampire: the first time they are left alone with him, their lives, and not their reputations, are threatened, and ended in both scenarios in a particularly graphic way (see *Vampyre* 306–07 and 321). Suggesting that on Ruthven's list the number of corrupted women is remarkably higher than that of the murdered ones, Punter notes that, "in the first place, the story barely deals at all with the concrete matter of bloodsucking; it is, like 'Christabel' [. . .], almost entirely about sex" (103). This idea may imply that the moral standards of Ianthe and Aubrey's sister are indeed so high that even a vampire's libertine sexuality fails to seduce and stain them. Consequently, the only possibility to transgress the borders protecting them, both in physical and in spiritual terms, seems to be the murderous act of biting them.

Christabel, as Geraldine's victim, appears to belong to the former of the aforementioned two categories. As Fulford notes, "contact with this [i.e. Geraldine's] uncanny body spellbinds Christabel, who falls into a sexual knowledge which, as a woman who identifies herself as an innocent and dutiful daughter, she is unable to accept as anything other than guilt and sin" (56). This effect can even be analysed as the first sign of the human Christabel being contaminated by the vampire Geraldine. Even though Christabel is not bitten physically, Geraldine's impact on the innocent(-looking) girl proves to be a type of contagious effect. In this sense, Christabel seems similar to the virtuous-looking ladies seduced by Ruthven: a kind of inherent vice is present in her all along. As Jerrold E. Hogle observes, the serpent-like behaviour (Geraldine's eyes turning into those of a snake and Christabel producing hissing sounds; see 459, 583–87, 591, and 602) "is another indication of the well-disguised evil in both of Coleridge's women" (19), which means that Christabel had already been susceptible to sin before the other girl's arrival. Geraldine merely helps her discover herself as a sexually active woman.

The question whether Geraldine has a corruptive or a beneficial effect on Christabel still seems problematic. First, she helps the heroine discover sexuality, but their intercourse may be considered abnormal. Secondly, she reminds Leoline of his friend, thus contact with the other lord can be renewed, but, at the same time, Geraldine appears to succeed in seducing Christabel's father, too. Finally, she must be a well-bred young lady with admirable manners, but she eventually proves to be a serpent-like, succubus-type demon as well. These features (completed with further characteristics) are summarized by Hogle in a cogent way:

Geraldine's apparent conniving in her grand 'stateliness' to become a substitute mother to Christabel [. . .]; to sleep with her homoerotically [. . .]; thereby violating 'normal' sexual boundaries [. . .]; and to worm her way into Sir Leoline's affections to the point of becoming this widower's lover and alienating his feelings from his daughter, exploiting patriarchy to undermine it [. . .]; all of this potentially makes her [. . .] an overweening quasi-Amazon too destructively challenging all good social relations, a power-mad woman subtly threatening the very order of nature—which Christabel, like all Gothic heroines, might herself become unless she retreats from identifying with Geraldine, which she starts to do as the poem breaks off (24).

Together with all the above examined arguments for Geraldine being a female vampire from the early decades of the Gothic, this passage by Hogle may function as a kind of literary and cultural manifesto—justifying Geraldine's role as a vampire in Coleridge's "Christabel."

Turning back to Lord Ruthven's role, it can be concluded that in the early phase of vampire-literature the two basic types of making physical contact with a vampire were effectively distinguished. Sexual intercourse and being lethally bitten seem to have been combined only later, creating the most characteristic way in which such a creature can turn human beings into undying blood-suckers. Consequently, "the model of female sexuality deployed in *The Vampyre* shares many features with an [sic] historically-enduring misogynist model of femininity: that every woman self-fashioned after the model of virtue conceals a hidden yearning for sexual expression" (Ellis 184). Although concrete examples of this statement would be difficult to find in the work, it still seems to be evident that the "wreckage he [i.e. Ruthven] causes in the social fabric is not exactly his fault: Polidori hints strongly that those who are ruined by his attentions are really the victims of their internal weakness—either they are themselves criminals, gamblers, sharpers, or they are merely 'frail'" (Punter 103). In Christabel's case the latter option seems to be relevant: indirectly, her kind-hearted behaviour, fragile nature, and loyalty to chivalric merits lead her to the ensuing conflicts and miseries. In *The Vampyre*, "Polidori suggests that the life of the morally virtuous is really a kind of hypocrisy, that moral certainty masks a more fluid construction of not virtue but vice" (Ellis 183). Again, this observation can be applied both to Christabel and to Geraldine: the heroine's guise is shattered by the outer influence when the other girl triggers her sinful but more mature demeanour. In other words, the former, with the latter's help, eventually does accept her more mundane (i.e. more human), sexual side.

As a woman of relatively serious (and, at least at that time, innovative) transgressions, "multiplicity of interpretation converged at Geraldine, the meaning of whom was never resolved but the

construction of whom was shown to depend on which of various genres different narrators employed to 'read' and thus construe her character: romance, Gothic fiction, sentimental fiction, allegory" (Carlson 215). These interpretational paths may have one solid common ground: in all of them, Geraldine's significance as a catalyst of remarkable changes both in Christabel and in her environment seems undeniable. Whether or not a vampire, her character does contribute to the critical convention claiming that, "unfinished though it is, 'Christabel' is not a failure" (Fulford 55). Even though its literary and cultural position is not always unanimously acknowledged, neither is *The Vampyre*.

In conclusion, both Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Christabel" and John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* have proven themselves to be representative pieces of Gothic literature: analysed separately or compared to each other, both the narrative poem and the novelette have their fair shares in vampire fiction. Some of the most characteristic features, practical methods, and ideological backgrounds that have been examined in this essay were introduced to British culture by them, making the texts a well-established, elaborate, and influential pair of Gothic plots: the truly worthy grandparents Dracula deserves.

END NOTES

- 1 For a detailed analysis of chivalry as a socio-political issue and a feudal remnant in the late eighteenth century in "Christabel," see Fulford 55-57.
- 2 I am indebted to Gertrud Szamosi for drawing my attention to this interpretation.
- 3 For a feminist reading of the possible initial relationship between Christabel and (the ghost of) her mother, as well as of the triangular power structure established (and permanently altered) by Geraldine's arrival, see Carlson 213.

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