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## Cover Page Footnote

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Walter Kendrick claims that "it is ... down among the rip-offs, that culture decides what to let live and what to embalm" (104). Indeed, just what is repeated, and what altered, from text to text, from source to adaptation, is often ideologically significant. Consequently, I propose to examine J R Planché's 1820 melodrama, *The Vampire, or The Bride of the Isles*, in the context of John William Polidori's "The Vampyre" on which the play is based.

In an analysis using the same strategy, Ronald E McFarland, one of the few critics to discuss Planché's adaptation, writes that Polidori's tale consists more in "promising hints" than in "a vivid setting or ... a conventional Gothic atmosphere" (24). McFarland figures the ambiguities in Polidori's text variously as "example[s] of his amateur status as a writer of fiction" (22), lack of credibility in his characters (24), "problems of motivation" (26), and "obscurity" (28). Noting that the melodrama "avoid[s] ambiguity or ambivalence at all costs" (25), he suggests that Planché's play, like its French predecessors by Pierre Carmouche, Achille Jouffrey, and Charles Nodier, essentially fills in the gaps in Polidori's tale, resulting in what McFarland implies is a clearer, more aesthetically sound, version of the story.

Jeffrey N Cox's remarks on melodrama's "domestication" of the stage, which Cox sees as "a cultural reaction against the extremism and radicalism of the Gothic" (71), also apply to the relationship between Planché's play and Polidori's tale. While the latter contains elements of the domestic both in its view of "those who threaten order as monsters" (70) and in the "realism" which McFarland notes (24), it is much less sure of this social order, and much less optimistic about its eventual triumph over the forces of evil than is the stage adaptation. While discussing the rise of the domestic melodrama over the Gothic, Cox notes the tendency of "dramatic and theatrical histories" to view this as "an aesthetic matter" rather than a moral one (70). I would suggest that McFarland, and other critics who see the ambiguities in Polidori as stylistic flaws, are, in fact, disguising a culturally-ingrained unease regarding ambiguity. Thus, I am less interested in judging Planché's version for its fidelity, or lack thereof, than in using the changes the playwright has made, in the context of Cox's statement, to reveal just how subversive Polidori's little-analyzed text is.

The first significant change occurs in Planché's opening scene, in which the spirits of earth and air reveal Ruthven's vampirism to the audience (15-16). By contrast, the Polidori text requires the reader to learn of the vampire's nature gradually, as Aubrey, the human protagonist, does. Polidori immediately establishes Ruthven as a stranger to London society (108), and as morally questionable (112), but not as a vampire; the very question of vampirism is literally unthinkable until Aubrey travels to Greece where the tradition is common knowledge. The play, then, demystifies the vampire for the audience, if not for the other characters, by preceding the action with an explanation of Ruthven's nature and the possible manner of his demise: "total annihilation" if he does not, before the moon is full (16), "wed some fair and virtuous maiden" and afterwards drink her blood (15).

The result is irony rather than suspense – the kind of security that comes of knowing that we have knowledge those on stage do not, as well as that the vampire is not invulnerable, and that the good spirits are available even if their "power is limited" (16). For Planché's characters, the action fits into Todorov's category of the fantastic: "that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (25). Their limited information comes to them in the form of visions, partial facts and the words of the drunken servant M'Swill. The characters themselves remark at length upon the atmosphere of disorientation. Margaret's complaint of "a strange confusion, a wild

emotion [that] overpowers [her]" (26) is one of many; she also attempts to explain her attraction to the vampire in terms of a "spell" (26). Lack of knowledge, or incomplete knowledge, marks her experience and that of the other characters. Thus Margaret has only the vague information from her dream vision (21-22). Her father, Ronald, believes he has seen Ruthven die, but does not know of his "resurrection," while his daughter knows Ruthven is alive, but not that he has "died" (35). When Ronald does discover the fact of Ruthven's survival, he likens this realization to the clearing of "a mist ... from [his] sight" (36), but still addresses the vampire with the words: "I know not what thou art" (36). Even when the human characters believe they have knowledge, the "truth" eludes them. Conversely, M'Swill, the one character who is aware of the tradition to the point of reiterating the vampire lore which the spirits introduce (19), does not think to apply this knowledge to Ruthven, and appropriately summarizes the feelings the audience is spared: "it appears there is something wrong, but I can't positively pretend to say what it is" (39-40). The audience, with the benefit of the complete prologue, as well as numerous revelatory asides directed to the viewer, experiences no such instability. Knowledge of Ruthven's nature maintains a sense of order for the audience; the defined supernatural is somehow contained, and what is known is not a threat. Generally, Planché shows the audience what Polidori merely hints at, as McFarland's article notes.

In Polidori's tale, most of the vampire's victims are in some way complicit in their victimization; some even enjoy it. The ways in which humans respond to the vampire is, for the most part, gender-specific; because both Polidori's and Planché's vampires require a steady diet of young maidens, I shall start by discussing the female victims' response to Ruthven. In the corrupt London society Polidori describes, vice is attractive, and even the innocents Ruthven destroys do not hesitate, after the fact, "to expose the whole deformity of their vices to the public gaze" (112). In the play, however, consummation is never achieved, so this infectious sexuality is never an issue. Nor is the possibility that human corruption precedes the arrival of the vampire; while Margaret is willing to marry Ruthven, Planché emphasizes the vampire's seductive powers, taking the responsibility away from the women he attracts. For example, Margaret feels an unavoidable physical effect, a "strange thrill" (26) when she is near him. Despite this phenomenon, however, the play sanitizes the aggressive sexual presence of Polidori's Ruthven; the vampire must *marry* the women on whom he preys, perhaps, speculates Carol A Senf, as "a concession to his bourgeois viewers, who may have already felt guilty about attending the theatre" (41). Also, Margaret is able to resist Ruthven throughout the play, while the suggestion in Polidori is that her analogue, Aubrey's sister, has not been so steadfast; before the wedding, Ruthven remarks to Aubrey "if not my bride today your sister is dishonoured. Women are frail!" (125). Planché's Effie, too, rejects the vampire's advances, declaring, for example, "I shall never love any one but Robert" (30). She appears to be weakening as Ruthven bears her off, but this is the effect of force rather than of seduction.

The same distinction exists in Polidori, where Ruthven's successful attack on Aubrey's love, the Greek peasant girl Ianthe, involves no courtship and explicitly resembles rape. McFarland believes the attacks on Effie and her counterpart in the French melodrama serve merely to show the extent of Ruthven's mesmeric power (28), thus ignoring issues of class, which are actually raised more strongly here than in Polidori's tale, possibly for the benefit of the bourgeois audience Senf invokes. McFarland himself suggests that Planché is "investing the slight hero's role in the person of the working class attendant [Robert] rather than the aristocrat [Ronald], a change that no doubt was calculated to appeal to the proletarian audience" (32). However, it is also worth noting that the play often raises issues of class only to erase them; the final scene, in which all the characters, regardless of social status, stand together and surround the vampire as he descends through the stage (42), suggests a reactionary celebration of solidarity between classes. That both of Planché's women resist the vampire, while Polidori more subversively depicts the upper-class woman being seduced as her lower-class counterpart resists, can be read as similarly celebrating such solidarity or as a sentimental tribute to womanly virtues.

The play does amplify the vampire's varying responses to women of different classes which exist to a lesser degree in the tale. Effie and Robert invite the vampire to their wedding specifically as an aristocratic patron (27), thus figuring his attack on Effie as the exercise of the *droit du seigneur*, the feudal right of an aristocrat to the brides of his vassals on their wedding nights. Although Ruthven provokes audience sympathy when he claims to "shrin[k] from the appalling act of planting misery in the

bosom of this veteran chieftain," Ronald (26-27), his attempt to preserve Margaret by substituting the blood of Effie for her own denotes not morality but a class bias on his Lordship's part. Ronald demonstrates a similar inclination when he fails to believe Robert's accusation of the aristocratic Ruthven (34), and also in his concern for Ruthven's marriage to Margaret which only appears to be based upon affection for them both, but is actually dynastic; when he believes Ruthven to have died in Greece, he expresses equal satisfaction regarding his daughter's marriage to the Earl's "brother" (22).

While Planché's Ronald is the social equal of Lord Ruthven with whom he identifies, Polidori's Aubrey is of lower rank than his vampire whom the young man initially worships. As well as changing the class dynamic, Planché alters his male characters in other ways, and McFarland correctly notes that the changes in the play's hero – whether Robert or Ronald is seen in this role – make him much more competent than Aubrey. While Polidori explicitly feminizes his male protagonist, who is also very much a victim in the tale, such gender ambiguity does not exist in the play. As Robert is able to rescue Effie, which Aubrey can do for none of the women he loves, so Ronald is much less constrained by the vampire's demand that he swear to "conceal [Ruthven's] death from every human being" (31), while Aubrey cannot break his oath of silence until it is far too late. This change pleases McFarland, who finds Aubrey's acquiescence to Ruthven's demands indicative of Polidori's "amateur status as a writer" (22).

While de-emphasizing the oath, the period of which is also much shorter here ("til yonder moon has set" [Planché 31] as opposed to "a year and a day" [Polidori 119]), gives Ronald much more power than Aubrey has, it also downplays the unspeakable nature of vampirism, which Polidori literalizes through the introduction of the oath that McFarland finds "obscure" in its motive (28). Instances of interrupted and misinterpreted speech abound in the play, but when it matters, Ronald is actually able to declare that Ruthven has died and been resurrected (36), and eventually Margaret believes him and postpones the marriage just long enough to prevent the vampire's drinking her blood before the crucial full moon (42).

Planché's Ruthven does have power over language, and the ability to silence his victims and adversaries, by exacting and enforcing the oath, declaring Ronald insane (41) and vowing to "seal [Ronald's] lips" by destroying Margaret (42). However, it is for the most part the rational that keeps the unspeakable unspoken, thus maintaining social taboos concerning sexuality, for example. The fact that Ronald "is such an enemy to what he calls superstition" (22) prevents Margaret from telling him about her vision, and she in turn believes him to be mad when he, having actually witnessed the vampire's resurrection (36), tells *her* of his experience. The same privileging of the rational occurs in Polidori, in that Aubrey thinks he cannot speak, in part because no one will believe him (122), but he is much more helpless in the face of this enforced silence. While others think Ronald insane, he never doubts his own reason, declaring emphatically "I am not mad" (36). Because the audience has always known that Ruthven is a vampire, it never supposes that Ronald is insane. Polidori's Aubrey, by contrast, actually goes temporarily mad in response to his own helplessness, which is defined by his inability to speak or even to imagine the truth of what he has witnessed. The knowledge that Aubrey is mad in turn destabilizes his version of events. Planché's Ronald undergoes a similar crisis, as his words "my brain turns round" (35) and his stuttering over the word "vampire"(36) – which he never actually says – indicate, but he is able to speak decisively before it is too late, and the audience does not question him as it might the "distracted" Aubrey. Once again Planché cancels Polidori's ambiguities; the audience, at least, knows what is "real."

This privileging of empiricism and rationality also relates to class, as with the servants Bridget and M'Swill who are the sites of a superstition ironically more reliable than reason. Such "irrational" beliefs, of which Lord Ronald strongly disapproves, are generally associated with the lower classes or with women or naive young men such as Polidori's Aubrey, who believes in ghosts but not necessarily in vampires (109). Initially, it seems that Planché's heroes are less naive than Polidori's, who are so innocent and credulous as to invite disaster and rely on such artificial constructions of good and evil, and of honour, for example, as those found in popular literature. However, society's constructions affect Ronald and Margaret just as strongly as they influence Aubrey and his sister. The difference lies in the social forces which construct them. Planché's characters are vulnerable because of the super-rationality associated with their class, and their other weaknesses spring from the same socially dominant source. If

Ronald were not so concerned with arranging a dynastic marriage, and with a concept of obligation to Ruthven for saving his life in Greece – which parallels Aubrey's sense of honour – the vampire could not victimize him. Likewise Margaret is too obsessed with womanly duty, first to her father, then to her prospective husband. It is also worth noting that these class distinctions, more explicit in the play than they are in Polidori, are ultimately erased with the restoration of a "good," rather than an exploitative, aristocratic power, something which, although it seems a theme in other melodramas (Cox 48), does not happen in Polidori's text, where there are not only no good aristocrats, but no happy endings.

This is the most obvious change Planché and Nodier make to Polidori's tale. In the original, the reader is left only with the knowledge that "it was too late. Lord Ruthven had disappeared, and Aubrey's sister had glutted the thirst of a VAMPYRE!" (125). Many critics have called this "melodramatic"; in fact it seems quite the opposite, in the literal sense of the word. While Polidori's open ending leaves the world in chaos and therefore subverts the social order, the play reinscribes the distinction between good and evil as well as the hierarchy of the human over the other. The vampire is destroyed, and although it is neither by human nor, strictly speaking, by Divine agency, the humans have managed to resist the vampire, the men to protect their women, the women to remain chaste, and everybody to stay alive. As Senf writes "it isn't precisely virtue that triumphs, but audiences could leave the theatre confident in the overwhelmingly optimistic message that ordinary people could conquer the ... Unknown" (41-42).

The deus, or diabolus, ex machina that Planché employs here, the device of having Ruthven merely "vanish through the ground" (42), presumably on his way to the "annihilation" the spirits describe earlier, is also interesting because it is a fated restoration of the "natural" order of things, associated with the those benevolent spirits who return briefly here. The play's conclusion erases human agency and implies that evil will eventually be defeated without any effort from the heroes, who, after all, have nature and divine order on their side. The ending prevents the human protagonists from becoming involved in any kind of violent action, however justified. Instead of the traditional, brutal stake through the heart, or other similar methods of disposing of the undead, described in the anonymous introduction printed with Polidori's tale, Planché presents, in Mary K Patterson Thornburg's words, "God or the Universe or fate punishing the offender, rather than the offended person" (23). Planché's ending allows his heroes to maintain their happy domesticity even in disposing of the threat to it, without any danger of their becoming like that threatening other.

Thornburg believes that the sentimental, which she defines as "reality as the literate middle class of the Age of Reason wished to see it," and the Gothic, containing "those aspects of reality that ... those same people rejected" (2), are two sides of one very socially significant myth, and notes that many texts display elements of both traditions (4). This is true of *The Vampyre* in both its narrative and dramatic forms; however, while in Polidori's version, Ruthven's Gothic excesses triumph over sentimental naiveté, in Planché's, the reverse occurs, in a shift parallel to the one Cox discusses regarding the aesthetic and moral change in dramatic themes. Contemporary reviews dismissed Polidori's work on grounds of taste – read morality – and, more significantly, of style, while the *Theatrical Inquisitor*'s review of Planché's melodrama praises the play despite its source in "materials of so paltry a sort as those supplied by the wretched ape of Lord Byron" (138). This review even enjoys the play's incongruous but highly domestic songs and comic intervals, suggesting that, given the tendency to see the politically objectionable as aesthetically flawed, Polidori's original tale is more truly and radically Gothic, in Cox's sense, than Planché's adaptation, which reacts to contain that very radicalism. The fight against ambiguity in melodrama is as much a political as an aesthetic issue, because it is the blurring between self and other or real and unreal which makes the fantastic subversive.

Kendrick writes "elite culture expresses, mass culture manipulates" (19), and indeed, certain works intended for mass audiences often act to counter the political anxieties of those in power. However, elite groups such as critics and reviewers are also responsible for the manipulation of mass culture, especially given social anxiety regarding the increasing popularity of the theatre at this time, and the shift in audience demographics "from the upper-middle and upper classes to the lower-middle and lower classes" (McFarland 24). Certainly many late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century reviews equate the

"popular" with the revolutionary;[1] these factors may have combined to create the domesticated Gothic Cox addresses and McFarland, in some ways, privileges, in order to control or at least to influence the potentially dangerous consumers of mass culture.

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[1] See especially reviews of Matthew G. Lewis's popular success *The Castle Spectre* (1798), and, oddly, the *Monthly Catalogue*'s positive review of his much less successful *Alfonso, King of Castile* (1801), which speaks for the elitist conservatism of many critics when it maintains that "true fame consists in the approbation of the discerning few, not in the shouts of the vulgar" (355). Also relevant are reviews of C R Maturin's *Bertram, or The Castle of Saint Aldobrand* (1816); the *Monthly Review*'s indictment of "the want of moral effect in many of our most popular plays" (178) is typical.