



# **"Things That Go Bump in the Night": Familiar Creatures of the Gothic Night, or the Avatars of the Villain**

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## **► To cite this version:**

Elizabeth Durot-Bouc . "Things That Go Bump in the Night": Familiar Creatures of the Gothic Night, or the Avatars of the Villain. *Aliz s : Revue angliciste de La R union*, 2005, 25-26, pp.199-212. hal-02344080

**HAL Id: hal-02344080**

**<https://hal.univ-reunion.fr/hal-02344080>**

Submitted on 3 Nov 2019

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## *“Things That Go Bump in the Night”: Familiar Creatures of the Gothic Night, or the Avatars of the Villain*

“From ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggety beasties,  
And things that go bump in the night,  
Good Lord, deliver us!”  
*Anonymous*, of Cornish origin.

In the dark eerie setting of Gothic novels, there lurks an awesome crowd of hair-raising creatures – parricides, murderers, cannibals, werewolves and ghosts. “Stand[ing] the sovereign of the scene, and [frowning] defiance on all” (*MU* 227), the Gothic villain, inherited from Shakespeare and the Elizabethan dramatists,<sup>1</sup> is promoted to the leading part – to the same degree as his abode. Meant to terrorize his victim and to inspire the readers with awe, the villain-hero plays a far more important part in the creation of suspense and sublime terror than the heroine and her champion who, incidentally, never fail to acknowledge their persecutor’s courage and cunning. From his first incarnation as a tyrant in Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto* (1764) to his latest avatar as a vampire, this devilish character has come a long way, even though he has retained some permanent characteristics. Inconceivable without the nightly background of the gloomy architecture of a Gothic mansion or of sublime hostile nature, he is recognizable thanks to invariable specific physical features – his mouth, his hands and his eyes – and his magnetic attractiveness. Night is vital to the materialization of the villain who not only hatches and commits his infamous deeds by moonlight but also de-

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<sup>1</sup> For further information on the subject see chapter 7 “Influence de Shakespeare sur les romanciers ‘gothiques’” in my forthcoming book, “Le Lierre et la chauve-souris: réveils gothiques. Émergence du roman noir anglais (1764-1824)” to be published by Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle in 2004.

rives his power, nay his very existence, from darkness. In a highly oxymoronic way, his true nature comes to light at dead of night and his malevolent authority wanes with the return of daylight. Change and metamorphosis – most impressively embodied in the werewolf and the vampire – prove central to the Gothic and to the fantastic which, as literary genres, also offer a fit illustration of that *topos*.

The earliest Gothic villains, from Walpole's to Maturin's, can be categorized as tyrants: either a cruel, wily prince, like Manfred, or vindictive, pitiless abbesses and monks like the Prioress of St. Clare, the abbess of San Stefano, Madre Vittoria Bracciano, Ambrosio and Schedoni, to cite only a few, or else ferocious, libidinous noblemen such as Montoni and the Marquis de Montalt, who wield some power over the young innocent heroine and misuse the authority they are granted. This type of despot, oppressing the young and helpless, taking base advantage of their legal rule, gradually vanishes from the Gothic literary scenery even if such characters in 19<sup>th</sup> century fiction as Silas Ruthyn in Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas* (1864) are reincarnations of that model. On the contrary, ghosts and supernatural creatures prosper and proliferate. Ghost stories develop in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century culminating in horror stories starring the living dead. The Gothic novel's mysterious eldritch background is a fit setting for supernatural manifestations and apparitions: the Bleeding Nun who walks out of the haunted chamber "with her lamp and Dagger," "as soon as the Clock strikes One" (Lewis 141), the Wandering Jew who arranges to meet Raymond "as soon as the Clock strikes twelve" (Lewis 170), or Melmoth the Wanderer, desperately seeking a victim for ages to release him from his fatal bargain with the devil. Gothic novels teem with devilish supernatural creatures, to say nothing of such horripilant monsters as the werewolf and the vampire. The extraordinary werewolf staged by Maturin in *The Albigenses* (1824), feeding on human flesh, "torn from the grave" (*Albigenses* 2: 261), announced in *Melmoth the Wanderer* by the wolfish character of Walberg, was of course most powerfully revived in Angela Carter's *Bloody Chamber* (1979).

Although those different categories of Gothic villains do not enjoy the same life-span and posterity, they share common characteristics, and they are all associated with precise criteria. "I saw that he

was no ordinary man at all. His gray eyes burned with an incandescence, and the long white hands which hung by his sides were not those of a human being" (Rice, *Interview* 14). This description of the vampire Lestat shows that the terror effect is mainly concentrated on a few physical features, the hands and the eyes, together with the mouth and the ghastly pallor of the complexion. Silas Ruthyn startles his niece with « a face so dazzlingly pale, and those hollow, fiery, awful eyes!" and she sometimes feels as if she "had seen a ghost" (Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas* 205), whereas the damned Duke haunting the graveyard in Carter's "Wolf-Alice" is "white as leprosy" (Carter 121). Whiteness also differentiates Dracula's face whose "general effect was one of extraordinary pallor" (Stoker 28) contrasting with "a hard-looking mouth, with very red lips and sharp-looking teeth, as white as ivory" (Stoker 18). The vampire's skin is always of a dazzling transparency as Clarimonde's forehead, "d'une blancheur bleu  tre et transparente" (Gautier 120),<sup>2</sup> as Lestat's hands demonstrate. Those hands which "frighten mortals when they take the time to look" (Rice, *Blood and Gold* 32) grasp their prey with uncommon strength and their grip is all the more startling as they are cold as ice, "more like the hand of a dead than a living man" (Stoker 26). However, the feature that most conspicuously and impressively evinces the villainy of a Gothic character is undoubtedly his / her eyes, as Angela Carter aptly acknowledges: "by the eyes, those phosphorescent eyes, you know him in all his shapes; the eyes alone unchanged by metamorphosis" (Carter 113). Since Cherubina's famous declaration, everybody knows that "one glance from the corner of a villain's eye, is worth twenty straight-forward looks from an honest man" (Barrett 3: 173).

Indeed "such looks are not of earth nor heaven!" (Byron 915). It is by that unearthly glare, hypnotizing and horrifying everyone, that Melmoth is recognizable, whatever garb he may don: "the Englishman's eyes were observed by all the guests, from the moment

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<sup>2</sup> "Clarimonde rayonne, elle est amour et lumi  re: elle a toutes les couleurs de la vie, elle est un *spectre de couleurs* [...] Les h  ro  nes de Gautier sont splendides, spectrales, puisqu'elles   clipsent la lumi  re du soleil qui devient 't  n  bres,'" Bernard Terramorsi, *Th  ophile Gautier, Les Mortes Amoureuses* (Arles : Actes Sud, 1996) 139-40.

of his entrance, to effuse a most fearful and preternatural lustre" (*MW* 34). It is also his hardly bearable piercing eyes that proleptically expose Ambrosio's deep nature, disproving what his good looks assume: "He was a Man of noble port and commanding presence. His stature was lofty, and his features uncommonly handsome. [...] Still there was a certain severity in his look and manner that inspired universal awe, and few could sustain the glance of his eye at once fiery and penetrating" (Lewis 18). Unearthly is also "the scowl / That glares beneath [the Giaour's] dusky cowl" (Byron 832-33). Todorov insists on the importance of looks in the fantastic: "Toute apparition d'un élément surnaturel est accompagnée par l'introduction parallèle d'un élément appartenant au domaine du regard" (Todorov 127). "You can tell them by their eyes, eyes of a beast of prey, nocturnal, devastate, eyes as red as a wound" (Carter 115). Indeed, Jonathan Harker's first glimpse of Dracula is "the gleam of a pair of very bright eyes, which seemed red in the lamp-light" (Stoker 18). M. Goëtzi, the head-vampire in Paul Féval's *La Ville-vampire* (1875), is however characterized by the greenish light which shines in his eyeballs (Féval 29). Whether red or green – green eyes being traditionally associated with the Devil may account for the high percentage of such orbs –, the villain's eyes are always "singularly vivid strange eyes" (Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas* 200), "d'une vivacité et d'un éclat insoutenables" (Gautier 120), "eyes of an incomparable luminosity" (Carter 90) that are endowed with strange power, "for in [them] lurks that nameless spell / Which speaks – itself unspeakable" (Byron 838-39). One look is enough for the vampire to hypnotize his / her prey; it is, as it were, a case of love at first sight. When Holly, the narrator of Rider Haggard's novel *She* (1887), meets Ayesha's eyes – "more deadly than any Basilisk's" (Rider Haggard 184) – he feels spell-bound: "Drawn by some magnetic force which I could not resist, I let my eyes rest upon her shining orbs, and felt a current pass from them to me that bewildered and half-blinded me" (Rider Haggard 153). The baleful power of the eye, *jettatura*, proves to be a form of vampirism. "There are some eyes which can eat you" (Carter 86). If one stares into the Erl-King's green eye too long, one "will be drawn down into that black whirl-



pool and be consumed by [him]” (Carter 90), this ocular or mental vampirism being itself but a form of emotional cannibalism.

When Paul d’Aspremont, Gautier’s wretched *jettatore*, stares at anything or anyone, his eyeballs turn green and wound as surely as poisoned arrows. Realizing that he is responsible for Alicia’s decaying health, he determines to become blind: “Soyez condamn s, mes yeux, puisque vous  tes meurtriers” (Gautier 464). Before his decisive gesture, however, he resolves to have one more loving look at Alicia, which proves fatal to the girl. “Sous ce regard ardent, Alicia, fascin e et charm e,  prouvait une sensation voluptueusement douloureuse, agr ablement mortelle” (Gautier 466). There is an algolagnic relationship between the vampire and his prey, the former bringing death together with pleasure to a wholly consenting victim, whose “head will fall back, its eyes roll upwards in a spasm you will mistake for that of love and not of death” (Carter 105). “I live in your warm life, and you shall die – die, sweetly die – into mine,” Carmilla murmurs into Laura’s ears (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 263). Algolagnia – central to *Melmoth the Wanderer* where Immalee declares “there is a pain sweeter than pleasure, that [she] never felt till [she] beheld *him*” (MW 288) – necrophilia – exemplified by the complacently macabre descriptions of vaults in *The Monk* or *Melmoth* –, and various kinds of sexual perversions already associated with the Gothic villain, culminate in the sexually enigmatic vampire, an embodiment of all those perversions. 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century spectres are no longer impalpable spirits like the nun Marietta in William Henry Ireland’s *Abbess* (1799), or the spectres peopling Gothic heroines’ dreams. They are in line with the Bleeding Nun, awfully materializing, and leaving behind them horrendous evidence of their existence, a lock, a nail, a print or a nauseous smell, “a deathly, sickly odour” (Stoker 66). No longer are they simply the spirit of the dead coming back to haunt the living, they too are alive. “On the other side of the bed, there now began a singularly unpleasant rustling sound [...]. Dry, insect-like, powdery, as though something long dead were alive and moving” (Aycliffe 163). The Gothic and the fantastic describe the excessive forms of sexual desire and its perversions. Anne Rice’s vampires are extraordinarily ambiguous creatures, incestuous, pedophilic, necrophilic, homosexual all at the same time, as the relation-

ships between Lestat and his mother Gabrielle, or Louis and Claudia or again Louis and Armand amply demonstrate. In "Carmilla" (1872), Sapphic eroticism explicitly crops up: "It was like the ardour of a lover: [...] it was hateful and yet overpowering; and with gloat-ing 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, you and I are one for ever'" (Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* 264). Vampirism can be considered as a regression to the sado-oral stage. At the turn of the century, a strange attraction to morbidity and the macabre seems to obtain among readers and writers alike. A sort of lethiferous aesthetics prevails, as Théophile Gautier theorizes in his famous preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835): "A côté du roman moyen âge verdissait le roman-charogne, genre de roman très agréable, et dont les petites-maîtresses nerveuses et les cuisinières blasées faisaient une très grande consommation. [...] Le siècle était à la charogne, et le charnier lui plaisait mieux que le boudoir » (Gautier, *Maupin* 14-15).

One of the most permanent essential traits of the villain is his undeniable charisma which may account for the exceptional vitality of the character. After all, one of the foulest Shakespearian villains, Gloucester, later King Richard III, "that kill'd her husband and his father" (*R3* 1.2. 230) "in this humour" wooed and won Lady Anne. Montoni's "air of conscious superiority, animated by spirit, and strengthened by talents to which every person seem[s] involuntarily to yield" (*MU* 122) beams on Ambrosio's features, whose charm "even Lorenzo could not resist" (Lewis 19), and bewitches Immalee at the sight of Melmoth's "extraordinary demeanour" (*MW* 331). Part of the curse is the feeling of attraction mingled with repulsion experienced by his victims: "I was bewildered, and, strangely enough, I did not want to hinder him" (Stoker 370). "He had me mesmerized, enchanted" (Rice, *Interview* 89). What adds to the magnetism of this seducer is no doubt the mystery that enwraps him. This ambiguous captivating creature usually stands between reality and illusion, life and death, this world and the nether world. Fascinating and enticing victims is the villain's secret, as is cynically explained by the vampire-house in Fay Weldon's tale: "So now I put out my charm and lure the young one in, the new breed from the city strong and re-

sourceful. They fall in love with me; [...] I get rid of them" (Weldon 133). For houses also come to life, associated as they are in a closely knit link with the villain. There is a striking similarity between the places and their inmates, the former eventually tending to resemble the latter, as Angela Carter forcefully asserts in her description of the Queen of the vampires: "She herself is a haunted house" (Carter 103). Far from being still, inanimate, the fixtures of the Gothic setting are personified and endowed with a life of their own. At the centre of all those novels, the Gothic mansion or the medieval castle with its "vacant eye-like windows" (Poe 397) affects both heroes and readers "like a human countenance" (Hawthorne 5). The Gothic villain and its various avatars could not exist outside these abodes which prove essential to the creation of suspense and sublime horror. Architectural or vegetal — the forest also stands out as an influential actant endowed with a will and powers of its own —, haunted or haunting, the setting is of paramount importance, proving as much a protagonist of the story as the characters themselves. Thus Dracula lives the solitary life of a recluse in a "vast ruined castle, from whose tall black windows came no ray of light, and whose broken battlements showed a jagged line against the moonlit sky" (Stoker 23). For, naturally, the Gothic villain will lead a most interesting night life.

Night and darkness unsurprisingly play a paramount part in the villain's progress. The villain originates from the night and is part and parcel of darkness. "I will vanish in the morning light; I was only an invention of darkness" (Carter 107), the beautiful Queen of the vampires declares. Obscurity, as Burke theorizes in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) ("To make any thing very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary" [Burke 54]) is intrinsically propitious to the birth of unexplained phenomena and adds to the original dread felt by man confronted with the close of day. Banditti and villains prove even more frightening by moonlight or by candlelight. Villains usually postpone until midnight their arrival at the ruinous castles and abbeys where young heroines are detained. In *The Romance of the Forest*, for instance, the Marquis de Montalt usually appears before Adeline's desperate eyes in the middle of the night (RF 85-86; 117; 156).



At that "hour sublime" (Lewis 253), cruel monks such as Schedoni, Ambrosio or father Ubaldo (to cite only the most typical of their order), or callous immoral nuns such as Madre Vittoria Bracciano and malicious ruthless abbesses like the Prioress of St. Clare, or the abbess of San Stefano give a free rein to their perfidious instincts. Under cover of their cowls or their veils, or in the shades of moonlight, villains of all kinds unleash their passions and fulfil their odious designs. All sorts of crimes – from abduction, weddings and commerce with infernal spirits to torture, rape and murder – are hatched and committed at midnight. For obscurity is favourable to the execution of dark deeds.

The enumeration of all the murders or attempted murders committed at midnight in Gothic novels would wear out the audience's patience, the list is so interminable, from Adeline's attempted murder "in her sleep, [...] at midnight" (*RF* 227) to Ellena's narrow escape from Schedoni's dagger (*I* 238). "Vast sin-concealing chaos" (*Luc.*, l. 767), night harbours dark schemes, contributing to the atmosphere of anxiety that pervades Gothic novels. Night is connected with evil forces, not only because it enables crime to be masked, but also because it is thought to be the time when "Good things of day begin to droop and drowse, / Whiles night's black agents to their preys do rouse" (*Mac.* 3. 2. 53-54). Linked with death, sleep, dreams or nightmares, anxiety and mystery, night has, from time out of mind, been regarded as belonging to supernatural creatures and of course, the Devil. He is supposed to have created night as a foil to day which is the work of God. The moon – swayed by a double polarity like all great elements – is also an almighty factor essential to the villain's incarnation and materialization. "The governess of transformations and overseer of somnambulists" (Carter 120), known to have "some peculiar effect" on wolves (Stoker 22), the moon is associated with werewolves, whose metamorphosis is reputed to take place during full moon. It is thus by moonlight that, in *The Albigeneses* (1824), Paladour discovers an extraordinary lycanthrope in his prison, probably, Maurice Lévy suggests, the first literary occurrence of that creature. Werewolves and wolves strike writers as fit instruments of terror, as Sheridan Le Fanu's description of Madame de la Rougierre testifies. It is revelatory of the abominable governess's

true nature: "She eats like a wolf, she does, the great rawboned animal. [...] I felt a'most like little Red Riding-Hood" (Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas* 26). "'I'm going to eat you, little boy,' the dogman answered" (King 349). The wolf, according to Gilbert Durand, is a powerful symbol of devourment, and a distinctive relationship between canine bite and fear of destructive time can be established (Durand 93).

The villain could not inspire dread to such a degree in daylight. Antique terrors are reactivated and deepened at night since "the mind is a different organ by night and by day" (Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas* 131). Even such sensible manly characters as John Melmoth can experience some wistful reluctance at the disheartening task of reading a manuscript at midnight: "the sound of the clock striking twelve [makes] him start" but, Maturin admits, "he may be forgiven, it was past midnight, and there was not a human being awake but himself within ten miles when he began to read" (*MW* 27). Obscurity and darkness add to the sublimity of the scene and prove vital to the villain's powers. Light in fact turns out to be fatal to the villain, especially the vampire who literally dies with sunlight. "A l'aube le premier rayon du soleil aura raison de toi, maudite cr  ature" (Swolfs 2: 30). "There's nothing you can do to defend yourself once the sun rises, nothing" (Rice, *Interview* 34), Lestat warns Louis on his first "night" alone. As Danny, the boy protagonist in King's *The Shining*, observes: "Whatever it was, it couldn't stand the sunlight" (King 302). Though "this vampire which is amongst us is of himself so strong in person as twenty men" (Stoker 304), and is endowed with eternal life, "the timeless Gothic eternity of the vampires, for whom all is as it has always been and will be" (Carter 97), he can be defeated by the goodies as his powers are lessened and come to naught in the daytime: "His power ceases, as does that of all evil things, at the coming of the day" (Stoker 308). The decline of the moon parallels the decline of the villain's power. With the first rays of sunlight, tensions are loosened, werewolves turn into human beings again, sinister creatures creep underground into their vaults and righteous characters emerge into the daylight. With dawn, reason resumes its office and Gothic heroines emerge from the maze of their nightmarishly intricate ramblings, and from the depths of their underground quest, to light, reality and logic. Mysteries are unveiled, supernatural

occurrences explained in due time, villains meet with retribution and wronged innocents are restored to their rights and happiness.

The *topos* of change and metamorphosis pervades Gothic novels as well as fantastic stories. In Paul Féval's *La Ville-vampire* (1875), M. Goëtzi turns at will into various animals and objects, women, boys, dogs, parrots or clocks, separately as well as simultaneously: "l'aubergiste, sa femme, son chien, son perroquet, son petit garçon et peut-être le coucou de l'horloge, tout cela *était* M. Goëtzi!" (Féval 60). So does the Jack-thing at the end of King's novel: "What remained of the face became a strange, shifting, composite, many faces mixed imperfectly into one. Danny saw the woman in 217; the dogman; the hungry boy-thing that had been in the concrete ring" (King 446). The vampire can assume different shapes, either such hackneyed traditional figures as a dog, a wolf or, of course, a bat, or a draught and a reflection in a mirror. In Jonathan Aycliffe's *Whispers in the Dark* (1993), the presence of vampiric ghosts is always foreshadowed by a draught, suddenly chilling the room: "The room had grown suddenly cold. As though a draught had rushed in from somewhere [...] I saw a look pass between my cousins. They had noticed the sudden chill as well" (Aycliffe 96). To gain access to Lucy's bedroom, Dracula now takes the form of "a great bat, which [wheels] round [...] and every now and again [strikes] the window with its wings" (Stoker 206), now of "a great, gaunt grey wolf" (Stoker 186).

The vampire is a theriomorphic creature, the embodiment of evil, subverting the natural and social order. The theme of bestiality inherent in man underlies all those stories starring villains dominated by their passions and their instincts. Inside every human being, there lurks a monstrous double, alienating his / her personality.<sup>3</sup> The vampirised victim is doubly possessed, both in the sexual and the de-

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<sup>3</sup> « Ces deux figures privilégiées dans les textes fantastiques sont toutes deux fondées sur le thème de la bestialité inhérente à l'homme. Ce thème témoigne de l'évolution d'une littérature qui représente la façon dont sont perçus les progrès scientifiques contemporains (évolutionnisme, psychanalyse notamment) et leurs conséquences : la simple tératologie [...] est dépassée par une représentation plus moderne et plus angoissante de l'aliénation (présence du monstrueux au cœur du moi), » Sophie Geoffroy-Menoux, *Introduction à l'étude des textes fantastiques dans la littérature anglo-américaine* (Paris : Éditions du Temps, 2000) 51.

monic senses of the word. Absorbing other people's blood is tantamount to absorbing their identity. "Killing is no ordinary act," according to Louis, "One doesn't simply glut oneself on blood." [...] "It is the experience of another's life for certain, and often the experience of the loss of that life through the blood, slowly" (Rice, *Interview* 29). The vampire is an ambivalent figure associating beauty and ugliness, attractiveness and repulsion. He is also an heir to the Gothic villain inasmuch as he combines erotic power and the ability to arouse horror and terror. The vampire is a polymorphous, protean character, and so is the Gothic villain, eventually disclosing his true nature and the ugliness of his soul, after discarding his magnificent attire.

Change is an essential notion in most fantastic stories: Louis, Anne Rice's vampire protagonist, does not use the adjective "dead" but rather, "changed, I should say. As obviously I am alive" (Rice, *Interview* 25). This echoes Rider Haggard's *She* (1887) where Ayesha, the supernatural queen endowed with vampire-like immortality, a wonderful ancestor of the vamp, or *femme fatale*, of later fiction and films, claims her faith in change: "I tell thee that nothing dies. There is no such thing as Death, though there be a thing called Change" (Rider Haggard 147). The vampire, Phoenix-like, is, as it were, reborn out of his ashes. The Gothic novel, declining in the 1820s, is likewise revived by the fantastic. Old myths are taken up in contemporary fantastic stories such as Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* or Graham Masterton's *House of Bones* (1998) featuring the decadent motif of the return of antique pagan gods and goddesses or the awakening of Celtic deities or Druids.

Gothic novels and fantastic stories are replete with an amazing range of demonic and exciting villains. The vampire's first apparition in fiction – apart from Goethe's *Braut von Korinth*, a poem published in 1797 – dates back to Polidori's short novel *The Vampire* (April 1819). Even though the vampire was not absent from the everyday life of some countries, as Dom Calmet's treatise (1746) shows, this creature was till then strangely missing from the literary scenery. How fantastically he has made up for lost time since then! The romantic charismatic alliance of evil and seduction may account for the vigour and durability of the character. His fascination can also surely



be explained by his being pregnant with symbols. He constitutes the most perfect incarnation of all the anxieties, all the destructive tendencies and the essential fears at the heart of each individual. Every one of us bears, hidden deep inside, our own life sucker. The vampire is but the product of all the taboos, the prohibited repressed desires, incest, rape or immortality, lurking in man's soul. "Tu n'es que le produit des peurs, des nostalgies et des tendances morbides de ceux qui demeurent prisonniers du passé!" (Swolfs 3 : 43). One constant feature of the fantastic is the existence of supernatural characters, more powerful than humans. Those beings symbolise a dream of power, and furthermore, according to Todorov, compensate for an inadequate causality: everything must have a cause – be it supernatural. The Gothic novel draws on fundamental anxiety, angst, as Jean-Baptiste Baronian demonstrates (*Magazine littéraire* 44).

For Freud, anxiety is the somatic expression of sexual tensions. In literary narrations, anxiety is often caused by the impression that one is standing at a breaking point in space (a ruinous precipice or a Piranesian scenery) or in time (midnight, the creation's new beginning). Derived from the Latin verb *angere*, i.e. oppress, constrict one's throat, anxiety is a fit designation for the feeling of oppression and suffocation experienced by many a Gothic character. Their obscure and frightening wanderings through labyrinthine vaults and passages carry obvious sexual connotations. For instance, Monçada's liberation, expelled from the narrow passage, in which he is stuck, "surrounded by damps and dewes" (*MW* 192), thanks to "a contraction of muscles," is an explicit metaphor of child-delivery. As Maurice Lévy asserts in his indispensable work, *Le Roman "gothique" anglais, 1764-1824* (1968), these ramblings through underground passages might stand for the investigation of the mother's body anal-wise: "Le cheminement obscur et angoissant dans ces labyrinthes souterrains [...] correspondrait à l'investigation du corps maternel sur le mode anal" (Lévy 623). Phantasms, mental aberrations, neuroses, erotic and morbid fears and longings supply both Gothic and fantastic with their staple diet. "L'esprit humain, même le plus éclairé, garde toujours un coin sombre, où s'accroupissent les hideuses chimères de la crédulité, où s'accrochent les chauves-souris de la superstition" (Gautier, *Récits fantastiques* 427). A bloody hell !



No wonder that in the Enlightenment as well as in our so-called rational era, such stories and mainly, such characters should have flourished, for the reader's utmost anxiety and greatest pleasure.

Elizabeth Durot-Bouc <sup>4</sup>

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