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Ushering the Vampire in British Literature? Southey's Oriental-Gothic Tale *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801)

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Robert Southey's long narrative poem *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) reflects a widespread cultural fascination with the Orient and the allure that it had for the Romantics in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It contains a host of exotic elements, among which magical rings and paradisiacal gardens, along with all sorts of Gothic paraphernalia, including severed limbs and, arguably, the first representation of vampirism in British literature: the protagonist's doomed love, Oneiza, returns from the grave as a demon-possessed fiend in Book VIII. Gothic and Oriental tales are analysed in the first part of this article as fictional forms crucial to the formation of British subjectivity and nationality. A reading of the vampire episode is provided in the middle section, which tries to show how Southey's use of Oriental material betrays an imperialist and nationalist stance and how his appropriation of conventional Gothic topoi contributes to the forging of the vampire as one of the most enduring figurations of monstrous otherness in British fiction. The fact that Southey based his female vampire on accounts of superstitious beliefs and practices in southeastern Europe is duly noted.
Keywords: Robert Southey, *Thalaba*, Oriental tale, arabesque, Oriental Gothic, Oneiza, female vampire, vampirism in southeastern Europe.

According to critics, Robert Southey's long poem *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) falls somewhere between eighteenth-century Orientalism, Romanticism, and the Gothic (see Kitson 172-173; Sharafuddin xxi-xxxiv). Part of a project to depict the mythologies of the world in epic form, it features fake paradisiacal gardens, mythological creatures, and magical cities, along with evil sorcerers and a journey into the underworld, all attesting to the way the supernatural is interwoven with the story of the hero's quest. These elements are associated with the idea of the Oriental as the site of magic and the supernatural, which stirred the imagination of both writers and readers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They are also what prompted James B. Twitchell to characterize *Thalaba* as "a high Gothic art ballad that simply could not stop until all superstitions had been exploited, until all ghouls were accounted for" (35). The depiction of the protagonist's encounter with the vampire Oneiza and the commentary in the accompanying note 141 are believed to be the first "import" of the undead into British literature. While some critics consider John Polidori's novella *The Vampyre* (1819) to be the first "proper" vampire story in English (see Kostova 57), and while Byron's *The Giaour* (1813), Coleridge's "Christabel" (1816), and Keats's poems "La Belle Dame sans Merci" (1819), and "The Lamia" (1820) do contain references to vampires or creatures with vampire characteristics, one could argue that the Poet Laureate Robert Southey introduced the vampire into British Romantic literature in 1801, thus initiating one of

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the strands in the fictional development of the undead monster. Nonetheless, it can be confirmed that revenants from Eastern Europe largely superseded the Oriental undead monster in popularity.

This article seeks to explore how Southey's Romantic treatment of the Orient in *Thalaba* engages with and exploits the Gothic elements of Orientalist discourse in a "patchwork" of styles, genres, and cultures that reveals the poet's uneasiness[1] with his construction of "the East" and its otherness (see Warren 51–53). To achieve this, in the first part of the text, I concentrate on the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Oriental and Gothic tales as fictional modes crucial to the construction of British subjectivity and nationality due to their shared concern with representing the Other at a time marked by imperial expansion. My primary objective is to analyse the encounter with the vampire in *Thalaba* and show how Southey's Orientalism – which promoted imperialist and nationalist goals – and his adoption of specific Gothic conventions led to the portrayal of an Oriental vampire. This combination ultimately led to the portrayal of an Oriental vampire, thereby adding a unique element to the predominantly Eastern-European vampire myth found in British and other Western European literatures.

The rise of eighteenth-century European and British Romantic Orientalism was linked, *inter alia*, to a cultural fascination with the East, fuelled by a variety of texts, but most notably by the publication of the French rendition of *Alf Layla wa-Layla* (*One Thousand Nights and a Night*) (1704–1717). The French Orientalist Antoine Galland did more than merely translate a text from Arabic; he transformed what was initially a loose collection of stories of Arabic, Persian, and Indian origin into "a set text" (Kabbani 49) which had a huge impact on European literatures. The eighteenth-century English translation of Galland's text was called *The Arabian Nights' Entertainment*, and despite various flaws (see Irwin 22), was also highly influential, Princess Scheherazade's stories inspired "further story-cycles organized around frame narratives that conjure up analogous kinds of foundational scenario: *Persian Tales* (1714), *Tartarian Tales* (1716), *Chinese Tales* (1725) and *Mogul Tales* (1736)" (Watt 50). Such tales established the idea of an Orient where magic and the supernatural were prevalent, and as James Watt writes, "[its] association … both with exotic customs and manners and with enchantment and magic allowed the Oriental tale to pull and be pulled in different directions across the period" (50). In *Gothic (1996)*, Fred Botting notes:

> Translations of Arabian stories led to a vogue for Oriental tales and a love of the exotic. The East constituted another space in which the expanding imagination could freely roam. Indulgence in descriptions of excessive passion, irrational violence, magical events and sensual pleasure was acceptable . . . because they demonstrated the disastrous consequences of those forms of behaviour. (59–60)

The Oriental tale provided a means for Romantic writers to create and codify new ways of conceptualizing Britain's relationship with the East. At a time dominated by the fear of revolution, the threats of industrialization, the explosion of the sciences, and colonial expansion, literature became a privileged space in which the Romantics could explore, critique, and repurpose the political and cultural imaginary in an attempt to wrestle with the problem of establishing "a politics that not only incorporates regional difference within a nation, but that also remains attentive to even the most radical difference imaginable" (Warren 4). Colonial ideology relied on the acknowledgement of the profound dissimilitude and inferiority of the East. The construction of a dominated Oriental Other as the diametrical opposite of Western ideals, particularly because these same ideals were also constructed in opposition to the Orient's otherness, was crucial to the notion of the West's dominant role in the exchange of power with the East.

For Edward Said, Orientalism is "a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial style," which "culturally and even ideologically" (30) expresses and represents the Orient. His seminal *Orientalism* (1978) has pro-

[1] Andrew Warren argues that in *Thalaba*, Southey is not only uneasy about his depiction of the Orient, but he is "uneasy with his uneasiness", as a result of which he develops "a series of literary distantiations to establish his difference from the Orient": namely, the experimental verse forms, the corrective footnotes, the isolation of the Islamic East from the rest of the world, which "functions as a kind of textual solipsism," and the fantastical plot (51).

foundly impacted the way literary criticism addresses the politics of representation in the literature about the East, overall, and in Romantic writing in particular. According to his definition, Orientalism is "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3). Said posits it as a "self-containing, self-reinforcing . . . closed system . . . in which objects are what they are *because* they are what they are, for once, for all time, for ontological reasons that no empirical material can either dislodge or alter" (70). These claims are instrumental in charting broad trends because Said outlines the cultural and institutional systems of repetition and re-inscription that enabled Orientalist discourse to gain momentum. However, literary engagements with the East in the Romantic period, which coincides with the time that Said has identified as the crystallization of modern Orientalism (42), have been examined by an increasing number of scholars, some of whom have argued that to suggest Orientalism is a homogeneous, "closed system" is an overstatement and have complicated or qualified Said's position.

One such early instance is Nigel Leask's *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (1992), where the author critiques totalizing interpretations which imply that Romantic writers were in simplistic complicity with their contemporary power structures and shows that in Romantic writing, Western subjects and Eastern objects are not always distinct. Leask contends that Romantic writers struggled within, and in some cases broke free from, the imperialistic culture that surrounded them; thus, he comments not only on critical debates about Orientalism, but also on controversies within Romantic studies over the extent to which Romantic texts are implicated in a dominant ideology (2). In essence, Leask examines "the manner in which [several] British Romantic writers consciously or unconsciously articulated their anxieties about the Other" and remarks that in highlighting such anxieties, "which registered a sense of the internal dislocation of metropolitan culture" (2), he does not claim that the authors attempted either to undermine Western imperial policies or to sanction them. Rather, he shows discerningly that Orientalist writing could serve both purposes: while a text might critique and destabilize such policies, it also might help produce or reproduce them. Leask concludes that "the stimulus afforded by imperialism, the desire for the Other, came to have the status of what in medical language is called an *iatrogenic* illness, that is to say, an illness which is caused by that which was intended as a cure" (10).

Especially relevant to my reading of *Thalaba* is Leask's suggestion that "the status of the Oriental topos . . . seems to have been the literary equivalent of an imported luxury commodity" (19), fascinating and desirable, but also "ripe for moral and economic appropriation by European colonial powers" (21). He quotes Southey to make the point that the popularity of Orientalist literature in the Romantic period depended on a sort of moral "filtering": "Robert Southey . . . believed that 'the little of Persian literature that has reached us is worthless', conceding that the *Arabian Nights* alone 'abound with genius', but only because 'they have lost their metaphorical rubbish in passing through the filter of the French translation'" (21). In general, Leask maintains that:

> Orientalist literature could, by the Romantic period, just about pass muster . . . if it had passed through the hands of the moral censors. European orientalism, like European colonialism, had moved from being a commercial venture controlled by literature and financial freebooters or monopolizing joint-stock companies to participation in the civilizing mission of nineteenth-century European culture, or the expansionist dependence on colonial markets. . . . The standards being erected for oriental poetry in the Romantic period . . . depended upon the colonization of diverse or 'primitive' cultural forms by a universalized (*i.e.*, European) moral imperative, the literary analogue of the developing style of colonial and capitalist domination of non-European markets. (22–23)

What Leask describes as a process of "filtering" of negotiations between East and West is demonstrated in the way Southey "adopts" and reformulates the *Arabesque*, a style of writing he considered stereotypically and appropriately "Eastern." In the Preface to *Thalaba*, the poet the poet states his arguments about the poem's chosen metre and describes his usage of the "*Arabesque"*:

> Let me not be supposed to prefer the metre in which it is written, abstractedly considered, to the regular blank verse; the noblest measure, in my judgement, of which our admirable language is

> capable. For the following Poem I have preferred it, because it suits the varied subject; it is the *Arabesque* ornament of an Arabian tale. (3)

The reader is explicitly instructed to perceive the verse in relation to the "*Arabesque*" as a fitting aesthetic form for an "Arabian tale" and, despite the declared admiration for the blank verse, which is usually iambic pentameter, as the "noblest measure," Southey opts for a rhymeless, variable metrical structure, whose inconsistency and unevenness he considers appropriate for his poem's subject. Southey's "*Arabesque*" is a visually ornamental verse with diverse metre and line lengths, which he deemed the pertinent decorative aesthetic for an Oriental tale. Thus, he expounds in a footnote:

> A waste of ornament and labour characterizes all the works of the Orientalists. I have seen illuminated Persian manuscripts that must each have been the toil of many years, every page painted, not with representations of life and manners, but usually like the curves and lines of a Turkey carpet, conveying no idea whatever, as absurd to the eye as nonsense-verses to the ear. The little of their literature that has reached us is equally worthless. Our *barbarian* scholars have called Ferdusi the Oriental Homer. We have a specimen of his poem; the translation is said to be bad, and certainly must be faithful, for it is in rhyme; but the vilest copy of a picture at least represents the subject and the composition. To make this Iliad of the East, as they have sacrilegiously called it, a good poem, would be realizing the dream of Alchemy, and transmuting lead into gold. (194)

Paradoxically, regardless of this disparaging attitude, Southey seems to choose to undermine traditional Western verse forms and maintains an association between *Thalaba* and the "works of the Orientalists" by labelling the unconventional metrical structure of his poem "*Arabesque*" in the Preface. However, since he sees the "*Arabesque*" as "nonsense verse," the poet applies a "filter" and uses a Western model for his own metre: "the dramatic sketches of Dr. Sayers" (194), namely *Dramatic Sketches of the Ancient Northern Mythology* (1790) by Dr. Frank Sayers. In fact, Southey modelled the rhymeless metrical structure of the poem on a "Western work about Western mythology" (Solomon 31).

Taking my cue from Andrew Warren's statement that Southey "believed . . . *Thalaba* reinforced rather than unsettled Britain's imperial nationalism" (53), I argue that the poet's increasingly conservative and imperialist position can be observed in the appropriation of and distancing from what he designates as the "*Arabesque*." In fact, Southey "westernizes" his text by adopting a European model for the verse and discarding what he regards as "Eastern" excessive and superfluous adornment. The simultaneous adoption and rejection of the "*Arabesque*" exemplifies Southey's "idiosyncratic Orientalism" (Warren 49). Christina Solomon observes, "[T]he arabesque allow[s] us to read Thalaba [the character] as a stand-in for Southey. As Thalaba is destroyer of the types of excesses and immoralities associated with an 'arabesque' East, so too does Southey endeavour to purify the aesthetic of excesses." (25)

Significantly, the poem opens with a quotation from the treatise "How to Write History" by the ancient Greek philosopher, satirist, and pamphleteer Lucian: "With respect to poems freedom is unbounded and the one law is – what seems to be right to the poet" (qtd. in Solomon 21). In this epigraph, Southey claims a poetic licence and freedom enabling him to re-imagine the appearance and the objectives of the Oriental tale: "the bulk of the text [comprised of verse and copious notes] indiscriminately crosses and blurs borders both national and textual" (Solomon 21). Solomon argues that the epigraph, taken from a classical Greek source (Lucian), hovers over the Oriental tale conferring all power on the Western poet Southey as he represents the Orient. The idea of a controlled negotiation between East and West is reinforced through the paratextual elements, from the preface and the epigraph to the copious explanatory notes.

Following a trend of incorporating scholarly annotations into Oriental tales[2], Southey seals this practice by effectively combining two texts within a single framework. On the one hand, there is the obvious text, the long poem narrating an Oriental fantasy story, and, on the other, the appended notes providing a synthesis of his reading on various subjects. The prolific annotations with which the author

[2] Southey was influenced by William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), where the narrative was accompanied by considerable and "extremely erudite annotations of scholarly work on the East" (Kitson 172).

provided his text relate legends from different cultures and draw particular attention to superstitious beliefs and practices. The footnotes comprise a general survey of the climate, geography, history, customs, and religious practices of the modern Arabs, limited only by their relevance to the poem. Admittedly, *Thalaba'*s acceptance by the audience was problematized rather than enriched by this combination of two genres within one publication.

More recent scholarship on *Thalaba* tends to focus on the notes, their connection to the verse, and the text's overall unevenness and excess, resulting from this destabilizing paratextual relationship. Dhalia Porter examines Southey's compositional practices and maintains that the notes allow him to draw parallels and create analogies between different cultural histories and world mythologies. She argues that "[t]he swath of empirical data Southey appended to the poem . . . continually disrupts his formal experiment, thereby illuminating the ruptures in empiricist method when adapted into the service of cultural comparison" (671). According to Mohammed Sharafuddin, Southey's annotations reveal him to be an anti-imperialist; Sharafuddin claims that "Southey's purpose is to discover the common ethical denominator between Islam and Christianity so as to liberate the West from a self-regarding, therefore tyrannical, perspective" (49). Carol Bolton, on the other hand, recognizes that *Thalaba* "reflected the process of [Southey's] changing political position from radicalism to conservatism", argues that the "use of Oriental material in his poem complicated these political responses because his design was dominated by his imperialist ambitions for his own country", and concludes that "[t]he supremacy of . . . 'national' values in Southey's text justifies their dissemination into other cultures and societies . . ., so promoting . . . Britain's imperial policy abroad" (Abstract). According to Bolton, the sought-after effect of the annotations is in fact to mock the source materials. By "denigrtat[ing] his subject matter at every opportunity in his notes" (par. 14) Southey aims to protect his readers from the seduction of the exotic Arabian culture. She observes a "paradoxical relationship that Southey had with [his] Orientalist material", because he "value[d] the information it contained as a platform for [his] Oriental romance", while at the same time "denigrating the beliefs and customs contained within as they compared unfavourably, in his eyes, to Western examples" (par. 2). Boltons's view coincides with Warren's who claims that:

> To a limited extent the footnotes open up a critical distance from which Southey can begin to explain his particular stance towards issues that arise in the poem, particularly when, as a self-proclaimed "historian of manners," his own view differed from "the manners, and what is more difficult [to portray], the habits of feeling and thought" indigenous to the cultures depicted in his mythological epics. Without such a critical gap Southey could not define the virtues of the British national character. (59)

As argued earlier, Southey's overt nationalism is developed in *Thalaba* through the complex appropriation and distancing from the "*Arabesque*" as a form of writing he deemed appropriately "Eastern." Moreover, his belief in the supremacy of British cultural and national values, which he "discovered while living abroad in Portugal and researching foreign cultures," (Warren 60) is reflected in his responses to the Orientalist material in the poem.

The story unfolds in the Middle East, but one of Southey's notes locates the origins of vampirism disturbingly closer to home, in southeastern Europe. In note 141 (237–242), Southey cites an excerpt from the *Mercure Historique et Politique*, which was included in *Lettres Juives* from October 1736. The excerpt discusses vampires in Serbia and Greece, whose existence was "juridically attested by competent and unsuspected witnesses" (238):

> We have had in this country a new scene of Vampirism, which is duly attested by two officers of the Tribunal of *Belgrade*, who took cognisance of the affair on the spot, and by an officer of his Imperial Majesty's troops at *Gradisch in Sclavonia*, who was an eye-witness of the proceedings ... The people known by the name of *Heydukes* believe that certain dead persons, whom they call Vampires, suck the blood of the living, insomuch that these people appear like skeletons, while the dead bodies of the suckers are so full of blood, that it runs out at all the passages of their bodies, and even at their very pores. This odd opinion of theirs they support by a multitude

> of facts attested in such a manner, that they leave no room for doubt. We shall here mention some of the most considerable . . . A similar superstition prevails in Greece. (237–8; 239)

At that time, the Habsburg Empire controlled large parts of present-day Serbia and Romania. Habsburg officials were interested in discovering more about bizarre local superstitions near their garrison towns, especially if they led to disturbances of the peace. Reports of mass hysteria in certain areas were so serious that the Habsburg government felt compelled to react, particularly in the case of Arnold Paul (Arnold Paole), "a certain *Heyduke*, an inhabitant of the village of *Medreiga*" (Southey 238). As a result, on December 12, 1731, the Emperor initiated an official investigation into this instance of vampirism (Frayling 20).

Ludmilla Kostova argues that even today, there is a "tendency . . . to place the outermost boundaries of the West (or Europe 'proper') in what used to be the Eastern provinces of the Habsburg Empire" and notes that "what lies further to the East of those may well be in the 'old' continent *physically* but is not of it *culturally*" ("A Gateway" 93). The region's association with hostile and irreducible otherness made it a fitting homeland for the fictional vampire, based on local beliefs in vampirism, which the nineteenth-century Western imagination inherited from late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century reports by Austrian officials (see Frayling 42) and went on to expand and embellish in order to emphasize "the problematic quality of Eastern European . . . (self-) identification" (Kostova, *Tales* 14). Indeed, Greece (in Polidori's "The Vampyre"), Styria (in Le Fanu's "Carmilla"), and Transylvania (in Stoker's *Dracula*) were widely perceived as parts of Eastern Europe which the authors chose as birthplaces for three of the most (in)famous nineteenth-century vampires, thus reflecting the contemporary constructed image of the region's exotic otherness.

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The relationship between Romanticism and the Gothic has long been recognized by literary criticism. As early as 1969, Robert Hume called attention to conventions and aesthetics shared by Romantic and Gothic texts in "Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel." In a commentary on later critical studies, Michael Gamer writes:

> Taking up [the] question of the relation between Gothic and Romantic writing, we have embraced [the] assessment that the relation is complex while abandoning the notion that it should be described through a precise delineation of direct influence. Rather, we have begun looking to the intricacies of late eighteenth-century print culture in our search for more sophisticated ways of describing Romantic and Gothic writing's dealings with one another. The language of influence between writers, whether of direct borrowing or of wilful misreading, cannot adequately represent the mediating forces at work here, let alone capture the richness of the appropriations that do occur. (86)

Critical accounts of the Gothic's relationship to the poetry, verse, tragedies, and metrical romances of Romanticism reveal that the connection between these two bodies of writing is marked not simply by influence but by what may be termed *simultaneous appropriation*. Emma McEvoy claims that "Gothic and Romantic texts share similar subject matter and must be seen as in dialogic debate with each other" and that their relation is characterized by "permeability" (27). David Punter has also drawn attention to this particular aspect of Gothic writing:

> In looking at the Gothic fiction of the 1790s, it is important to keep in mind that this was not a strange outcropping of one particular literary genre, but a form into which a huge variety of cultural influences, from Shakespeare to 'Ossian', from medievalism to Celtic nationalism, flowed. And one concomitant of this is that most of the major writers of the period 1770 to 1820 – which is to say, most of the major *poets* of that period – were strongly affected by Gothic in one form or another. And this was not merely a passive reception of influence: [these poets] played a part

> in shaping the Gothic, in articulating a set of images of terror which were to exercise a potent influence over later literary history. (87)

Gamer's *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon-Formation* (2000) gives a persuasive historical account of how the pre-existence of the Gothic affected writers at the beginning of the nineteenth century and maintains that the Gothic became part of what he calls "the ideology of Romanticism" (28). Not only were Romanticism's intense subjectivity, supernaturalism, and preference for the sublime over the beautiful informed by a Gothic worldview, but the Gothic was its "ideology," the mode belonging to "low" culture that Romanticism adopted while pretending to reject it: "Romantic writers' acts of appropriation . . . coincide chronologically with their most stringent public criticisms of the Gothic [and] show them borrowing the very metaphors and techniques they are most critical about elsewhere" (Gamer 28). Later, in "Gothic Fictions and Romantic Writing in Britain" (2002), Gamer suggests that:

> If a discernible pattern of Gothic appropriation emerges in Romantic writing, it lies in the ability of authors like Byron, in *The Giaour: a Fragment of a Turkish Tale* (1813) [and Southey in *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801)], for example, to find the formal means of neutralizing the Gothic's negative critical reputation – usually by setting their works in the distant past or in distant lands or cultures, . . . while at the same time legitimizing its conventions by self-consciously putting them to acceptably intellectual and ideological uses. . . .[Such] works present us with compelling, albeit different, representations of consciousness, as well as foregrounding the extent to which the Gothic presented Romantic writers with a conventional language through which they could explore fundamental problems of representation, knowledge, interpretation, and consciousness. (98, 101)

Furthermore, and quite significantly, the Gothic can be linked to the Oriental tale insofar as they both "manifest a shared concern with representing the alien and the Other . . . yet . . . both may be used as a means of representing the dark, irrational and monstrous at the heart of British society" (Kitson 167). Peter Kitson observes that "[t]he despotism and violence of Gothic and Orientalist narratives often reflect on the iniquities of eighteenth and nineteenth-century patriarchal and bourgeois ideologies" and that they "were crucial modes by which British nationality and subjectivity were constructed" (167). Indicatively, what may be termed *Oriental Gothic* matured at the time when Britain was establishing its dominance over India and becoming a major player in the global politics of colonial power. Diego Saglia maintains that "the troubling power of Oriental Gothic depends on distance and alienness, though also, and more perturbingly, on the proximity and contact promoted by an expanding commercial and territorial imperialism" (346). Drawing on the immensely popular *Arabian Nights*, such texts commonly featured Eastern exoticism and excess displayed in depictions of tyrants, harems, dungeons, abductions, betrayals, and mysticism. Two frequently mentioned examples of this trend are William Beckford's *Vathek* (written in French in 1782, translated in English in 1786, and featured as *An Arabian Tale),* Walter Savage Landor's Gebir (1798), and Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya, or The Moor* (1806).

Under the influence of the *Arabian Nights*, Bedford's *Vathek* and, specifically, Landor's *Gebir*, in which the Iberian protagonist sails to Egypt to fight against a magically-empowered, tyrannical court, Southey wrote *Thalaba the Destroyer*, his Gothic-Oriental poem about Arabia and Islam (see Kitson 172–73, Bolton par. 4–7). *Thalaba* is set in a recognizably *Arabian Nights* milieu and is divided into twelve books. Described by Warren as "an 'Islamic' tale obsessed with a very Catholic-looking conspiracy of Arabian sorcerers" (46), it tells the story of orphaned Thalaba, a devout Muslim, and his quest for the killers of his family in order to avenge their deaths. A group of sorcerers had destroyed the family in an attempt to prevent the fulfilment of a prophecy of their future doom. Young Thalaba survives the slaughter only to be hunted down by one of the sorcerers later. A great storm thwarts the murderous attack of the sorcerer, and Thalaba steals his magical ring.

Further on, the poem recounts the young hero's travels across the Middle East and his many trials in the fight against forces of evil in the form of the wicked Dom Daniel sorcerers inhabiting an underground cave. Meanwhile, the boy is adopted by Moath, the father of a Bedouin family and a patriarchal

figure, whose daughter Oneiza becomes Thalaba's beloved stepsister and, subsequently, bride. Unfortunately, she is murdered on their wedding day and later returns from the grave to torment Thalaba. The vampiric Oneiza is slain by her own father, Moath, as the young hero is incapable of killing her. Finally, staying faithful to God, Thalaba manages to destroy the evil sorcerers. His quest ends in an act of heroic self-sacrifice, after which he is reunited with his family and his love, Oneiza, in heaven.

The narrative, however, is far from a mere personal revenge story, because the protagonist's quest for retribution against the evil sorcerers, who seek to challenge God's power, is presented as divinely inspired and predestined by God. The protagonist, a pious Muslim, is read by Kitson as a "displaced iconoclastic Protestant hero, destroying the idolatrous demons of establishment corruption", who gains moral authority from "his service in an austere morality . . . derived from Islam" (173). Southey drew on contemporary accounts of Islam and "combined [this] knowledge with his own [Christian] precepts to construct an Oriental fantasy rather than provide realistic reflection of the Islamic faith or Arabian life" (Bolton par. 3). In fact, Islamic religion seems to be taken quite seriously in the poem, but not in the accompanying footnotes[3]. (See Bolton par. 2, 10; Kitson 172–173; Warren 46–53) I would go along with Bolton, who argues that, as a result of this paradoxical relationship between the two bodies of text, *Thalaba* is "a curious mixture of responses to Islam, a Christian quest, and an Oriental tale of tyranny and magic" (par. 3), where Southey employed the foreign material to compare it unfavourably to what he saw as the superior cultural values of British society. The portrayal of the impossibly devout Thalaba enables Southey to construct an image of the Western subject as capable of inhabiting and comprehending any other culture.

Thalaba's adoptive family is important in analysing the meeting with the vampire since the daughter, Oneiza, is the monster, and the father, Moath, is the wise "Old Man" who thrusts a spear through the demon's heart. According to Warren, this Bedouin family provides a model for the "perfect Muslim" because "they provide a 'simplified' version of Islam in the story, one that is continuously contrasted with the more authoritarian (and Roman Catholic) versions practiced by various Imams, and parodied by the magicians, who . . . Thalaba is fated to destroy" (50). As the young hero is still in the process of education, they provide a relevant lifestyle and upbringing for him:

It was the wisdom and the will of Heaven
That in a lonely tent had cast
The lot of Thalaba.
There might his soul develope best
Its strengthening energies;
There might he from the world
Keep his heart pure and uncontaminate,
Till at the written hour he should be found
Fit servant of the Lord, without a spot. (Southey 30)

Southey describes the Bedouin family as living a simple, pastoral life, close to nature and in harmony with their environment. The depiction of their lonely and isolated existence allows Southey to make them, along with the nefarious sorcerers, the central focus of the narrative, which bears particular significance insofar as, by effectively emptying his version of the Middle East of other population, he "portrays a Manichean Orient divided absolutely between 'good' . . . and 'evil'" (Bolton par. 22). Bolton reads this polarization in relation to John Barrell's concept of "this/that/and the other," and Gayatri Spivak's differentiation between a "self-consolidating Other" and an "absolute Other" (par. 23), which posit that

[3] In an early note, Southey writes: "The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.——*Job.* i. 21. I have placed a scripture phrase in the mouth of a Mohammedan; but it is a saying of Job, and there can be no impropriety in making a modern Arab speak like an ancient one. Resignation is particularly inculcated by Mohammed, and of all his precepts it is that which his followers have best observed: it is even the vice of the East. It had been easy to have made Zeinab speak from the Koran, if the tame language of the Koran could be remembered by the few who have toiled through its dull tautology. I thought it better to express a feeling of religion in that language with which our religious ideas are connected." (130)

subject construction is determined by what is similar *and* by what is different: the more nearly *same* is identified with, while the unacceptably *different* is pushed away. In Southey's construction of the Middle East, "[t]here is 'this', and there is a something hostile to it, something which lies, almost invariably to the east; but there is an East beyond that East, where something lurks which is equally threatening to both, and which enables or obliges them to reconcile their differences" (Barrel, qtd. in Bolton par. 23). Southey portrays the Bedouins and Thalaba as self-consolidating Others, possessing admirable qualities that enable identification, as opposed the absolute Other represented by the tyrannical sorcerers and the demonic Oneiza. The episode with the vampire in Book VIII describes the protagonist, Thalaba, accompanied by his adopted father Moath, descending into the vault of his deceased bride Oneiza to find she has been demonically possessed:

In silence on Oneiza's grave
The Father and the Husband sate.
The Cryer from the Minaret
Proclaimed the midnight hour;
"Now! now!" cried Thalaba,
And o'er the chamber of the tomb
There spread a lurid gleam
Like the reflection of a sulphur fire,
And in that hideous light
Oneiza stood before them, it was She,
Her very lineaments, and such as death
Had changed them, livid cheeks, and lips of blue.
But in her eyes there dwelt Brightness more terrible
Than all the loathsomeness of death.
"Still art thou living, wretch?"
In hollow tones she cried to Thalaba,
"And must I nightly leave my grave
"To tell thee, still in vain, "God has abandoned thee?"
"This is not she!" the Old Man exclaimed,
"A Fiend! a manifest Fiend!"
And to the youth he held his lance,
"Strike and deliver thyself!"
"Strike her!" cried Thalaba,
And palsied of all powers
Gazed fixedly upon the dreadful form.
"Yea! strike her!" cried a voice whose tones
Flowed with such sudden healing thro' his soul,
As when the desert shower
From death delivered him.
But unobedient to that well-known voice
His eye was seeking it,
When Moath firm of heart,
Performed the bidding; thro' the vampire corpse
He thrust his lance; it fell,
And howling with the wound
Its demon tenant fled.
A sapphire light fell on them,
And garmented with glory, in their sight
Oneiza's Spirit stood. (Southey 78-80)

Southey appropriates the conventions of the Gothic tradition in depicting the encounter: it takes place at midnight, in a graveyard, at Oneiza's tomb. Hume recognizes that conventional Gothic settings, like ruined castles, majestic, isolated landscapes, or, as in the above passage, graveyards and tombs, standardize achieving the desired atmosphere for essentially psychological purposes. He singles out the "induc[tion] [of] a powerful emotional response in the reader" as the primary objective of Gothic writing and pronounces the atmosphere to be crucial to this effect insofar as it "arouse[s] and sensitize[s] the reader's imagination," through the use of the supernatural (284).

With regard to the setting, Kostova maintains that "a 'properly' Gothic setting is (actually or seemingly) geographically remote and, because of its perceived backwardness and primitivism, also appears to be distanced in time", thus giving the impression of "being far removed from the world of the audience which by contrast must appear orderly, well-organized, and rational" (*Tales* 129). In this sense, the Oriental setting of the whole poem is sufficiently removed from the reader in space and time to provide the necessary contrast and distance needed to elude any intrusion of everyday normality or factual probability, thus accommodating the supernatural and the fantastic.

Furthermore, Southey uses the sublime "aesthetics of terror and horror" (Sage 370) to set the scene for the appearance of the supernatural monster to its full potential. The setting provided for the encounter evokes a sense of mystery and obscurity, the value of which is pointed out in Edmund Burke's philosophical treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* from 1757:

> To make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes. Everyone will be sensible of this, who considers how greatly night adds to our dread, in all cases of danger, and how much the notion of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas, affect minds. (76)

Burke focuses on the human reaction to an overwhelming experience that transcends everyday normality and outlines the concept of the *sublime* as the arousal of an excessive, oceanic sensation of terror through the evocation of immensity in the face of abstract, universalized phenomena, such as Nature, or death (see Gelder 46–47). Burke's seminal treatise revealed the basis for the psychological appeal of fiction to be a deep-seated need in the individual psyche to experience something greater than average, everyday consciousness when confronted by the sublime, the supernatural, or the horrific. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Sigmund Freud stressed the significance of art, particularly fiction concerned with the fringes of human experience, as pivotal to psychology. He demonstrated that artistic creations could disclose a great deal more about the workings and preoccupations of the human psyche than rational explanations. Freud's concept of the uncanny (see Felluga 316–318) is particularly relevant to the study of Gothic fiction. Ken Gelder has drawn attention to the uncanny effect that the Gothic sublime produces as it "render[s] something simultaneously familiar and strange, recognized and unknowable" (47). Southey describes the demon-possessed Oneiza as familiar and, at the same time, different, changed, uncanny:

> Oneiza stood before them, it was She
> Her very lineaments, and such as death
> Had changed them, livid cheeks, and lips of blue.
> But in her eyes there dwelt Brightness more terrible
> Than all the loathsomeness of death. (79)

Oneiza's uncannily familiar image, changed by death and demonic possession, elicits a corresponding and powerful psychological response from Thalaba: he becomes "palsied of all powers" and "gaze[s] fixedly upon the dreadful form" (79). The psychological interest in internal mental processes displayed through the characters' reactions to distressing and appalling situations, frequently involving the supernatural, is a concern shared by Gothic and Romantic writing. Part of the allure of both modes, and a common objective, is the induction of a puissant emotional response in their readers by involving them, holding them in suspense, and shocking them together with the characters (see Hume 283–288).

In "Aftergothic: Consumption, Machines, and Black Holes" (2002), Botting argues that "Gothic fiction is bound up with the function of the paternal metaphor" and "has emerged as an effect of and an engagement with a crisis in the legitimacy and authority of the structured circulation of social exchanges and meanings over which the father figure presides" (282). In this regard, it is noteworthy that Thalaba is an orphaned child, an emblematic Gothic figure that symbolizes "the threats to paternal order [that] disclose the underlying instability and an absence at the heart of any social and symbolic structure" (284). The absence of a stable paternal order allows for the projection of ideal or terrifying figures of authority and power. Southey provides the adolescent protagonist with an ideal substitute father, Moath, whose authority symbolizes the strength of familial, religious, and social institutions. In contrast to Thalaba, who is incapacitated by the vampire's eerie familiarity, Moath instantly recognizes her as "a fiend" and kills her, thus freeing his daughter's soul.

Moath's character embodies patriarchal authority, allowing for the identification and control of the vampire. Later vampire narratives, like Sheridan Le Fanu's "Carmilla" (1872) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), likewise feature paternal figures, usually doctors, always men, who identify the monster. Gelder notes that "[t]he men in fact form a kind of bureaucracy which signifies [the monster] as a vampire precisely in order to manage the threat – and, eventually, to destroy it" (49). Moath, an example of the self-consolidating Other, stands for masculine authority and patriarchy, viewed positively by Southey. Similarly to the protagonist Thalaba, this character is described as possessing high morality and religious integrity, which Southey believed to be "ideal 'British' characteristics", and whose supremacy "justifie[d] their dissemination into other cultures and societies abroad" (Bolton Abstract), once again reflecting the poet's nationalist slant and imperialist aspirations for his country.

In *Tales of the Periphery* (1997), Kostova states that "ever since the eighteenth century (North) Western Europe has inscribed itself as the centre of civilization, claiming the joint legacy of the classical Mediterranean and the Judeo-Christian traditions" (11), and further maintains that "Western representations of other marginal localities are for the most part structured by an ideological and rhetorical format in which stereotypically **masculine** centre is privileged over **feminine** periphery" (12). The cultural problem of gender distinctions and what they mean for Western structures of power has long been seen as central to the Gothic, and the "othering of the female" (Hogle 10) has invariably been outlined as one of the mode's principal themes.

In 1980, Julia Kristeva put forward the theory of *the abject* in her book *Powers of Horror* and postulated that we throw off or "abject" into defamiliarized manifestations of ghostly, monstrous figures, the fundamental inconsistencies in our being that keep us from asserting an independent and coherent identity. And the most primordial version of the "in-between" is the moment of birth when we are simultaneously inside and outside the mother, both alive and not independently existing. Based on this theory, Hogle argues that

> [t]he repressed, archaic, and thus deeply unconscious Feminine is a fundamental level of being to which most Gothic finally refers, often in displacements of it that seem to be old patriarchal structures; and all the blurred oppositions that are abjected onto monsters or spectres by Gothic characters face their ultimate dissolution into primal chaos as they approach this feminized nadir that is both the ultimate Other and the basically groundless ground of the self.
>
> The greatest horror in the Gothic, however, is not simply the pull of the masculine back toward an overpowering femininity. The deep Feminine level . . . is but a form of a primordial dissolution that can obscure the boundaries between all Western oppositions, not just masculine-feminine. (11)

Viewed from such an angle, Thalaba's intense psychological reaction to the appearance of the vampire can be linked to the return of the repressed as a monster. For Franco Moretti the vampire metaphor "'filters', makes bearable to the conscious mind those desires and fears which the latter has judged to be unacceptable and has thus been forced to repress, and whose existence it consequently cannot recognize" (103). He relates vampirism to the "ambivalent impulse of the child towards the mother" (104) and the prohibition of incestuous desires. Oneiza's uncanny female otherness renders Thalaba passive and given

to extremes of emotion, thus feminizing him and undermining not only the authority he derives from his moral and religious quest against the forces of evil, but the very essence of his identity. The longing for the deeply maternal beckons to him and threatens to seduce, emasculate, and ultimately dehumanize him. In later nineteenth-century vampire fiction, the motif of the feminized hero is developed further, one significant example being the scene in Stoker's *Dracula*, where Jonathan Harker meets the three vampire women in the Count's castle in Transylvania. Faced with the threat of being drained of his blood, as the fair-haired vampire, whom he uncannily recognizes, leans over him, Jonathan "maintains a submissive, feminized position beneath her" (Gelder 74), similarly to the "palsied of all powers" Thalaba.

Kostova acknowledges the nineteenth-century fictional vampire's power to "throw into crisis such dichotomies as inside-outside and identity-difference . . . [to] revers[e] the finality of death, and [to] unsettl[e] conventional gender distinctions" (*Tales* 14). Likewise, Gina Wisker recognizes that one of the fundamental challenges enacted by the vampire motif in fiction is to "philosophical constructions underlying social relations" (184). Whether used as "the worst kind of terror" to be exorcized or as a potential social/sexual transgressor, the vampire disrupts polarized systems of thought, thus undermining and divesting of power "Western logical tendencies to construct divisive, hierarchical, oppositional structures" (184). Wisker also observes that in "restrictive, repressive eras, the vampire's transgression of gender boundaries, life/death, day/night behaviour, and its invasion of the sanctity of body, home, and blood are elements of its abjection" (184). The female vampire, in particular, is conventionally represented as abject because she disrupts identity and order: "Female vampires lurk seductively and dangerously in Romantic poetry and nineteenth-century fictions, where they chiefly act as a warning against being taken in by appearances and becoming victim of the evils of women's active sexuality, equated with the demonic." (185). The female vampire is traditionally associated with unrestrained sensuality and excess; so, in the convention-loving nineteenth century, her summoning of both desire and dread is punished by death as an exorcism of the things she represents.

The portrayal of the vampire Oneiza reveals her as possessing a terrible, unearthly beauty: "But in her eyes there dwelt Brightness more terrible/ Than all the loathsomeness of death" (Southey 79). The motif of the lover returning from the grave is repeated throughout the nineteenth century. Southey's ambiguous portrayal of the female vampire would resonate and influence later notable representations, such as Geraldine in Coleridge's "Christabel", Carmilla Karnstein in Le Fanu's "Carmilla", and Lucy Westenra in Stoker's *Dracula*.

Twitchell describes the spiritual character of the vampire threat as perceived on the brink of the nineteenth century: "The English vampire . . . was not simply a ghost or a wraith but the devil's spirit which had possessed the body and trapped the soul of a dead sinner . . ., the vampire was an energumen—the devil's avatar, for although the human body was literally dead, the entrapped soul lived eternally under the devil's control." (8) Religion is a major theme in *Thalaba*; therefore, there is a spiritual angle of viewing the vampire Oneiza's monstrosity: she threatens the religious devoutness of the protagonist by shattering his belief in the divine nature and support for his mission: "And must I nightly leave my grave/To tell thee, still in vain,/'God has abandoned thee?'" (Southey 80). The text does not mention bloodsucking or the danger of Thalaba losing his life. The principal source of the vampire's threat lies in the way she imperils his spiritual and religious integrity. Southey viewed his hero's divine quest against tyranny and magic and his high morality as personifying the ideal British character (Bolton Abstract, par. 31); hence what the vampire Oneiza threatens is, in essence, British values.

In the nineteenth century, the figure of the fictional vampire became a vehicle for expressing various anxieties and fears, a role this monster has preserved, to a large extent, in today's culture. The "original" vampire from Eastern European folklore was connected to superstitions to do with various misunderstandings about death, whereas, after its fictionalization, the meaning of this "instrument of evil" changed: "In the nineteenth century, the vampire transformed from a cultural phenomenon to a desired cultural product, from mythic explanation of the unknown to receptacle of cultural desires." (Schopp 231) In fiction, the figure of the vampire is utilized to "animate the unspeakable" (Gelder 60); it can symbolize "everything that . . . culture has to repress – the proletariat, sexuality, other cultures, alternative ways of living, heterogeneity, the Other" (Jameson, qtd. in Gelder 52), and it has been read

as representing "the economic dependence of women; the parasitic relationship between the aristocracy and the oppressed middle and lower classes; unrepressed female sexuality . . . enervating parent/child relationships, and . . . sexual relationships deemed subversive or perverse in hegemonic discourse" (Signorotti 609).

Southey depicted the vampire as a demonic reanimation of the hero's deceased fiancée, devised by God as a test. In the text, Oneiza's spirit is freed from demonic captivity and she is laid to rest in her grave. However, the literary vampire, a notable "gift" from Romantic Orientalism, which was partly influenced by reports of superstitious beliefs and practices in Europe's own southeast, will remain undefeated and will continue to be a prominent presence in the Gothic literature of the nineteenth century for many years.

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