

## Vampirism as Literary Piracy in Paul Féval's *Vampire City* (1875)

The prolific French writer Paul Féval (1816-1887) achieved success on both sides of the Channel with his stories of adventure, crime, and gothic horror. In this final category of his oeuvre are three vampire novels, the last of which is *Vampire City* (originally *La Ville-Vampire* in French), first published in book form in 1875 after a periodical preview in *Le Moniteur Universel* in 1874. This novel features Ann Radcliffe as an intrepid adventure heroine who leaves her fiancé on the morning of their wedding in order to rescue her friends from vampires on the Continent. On one level, *Vampire City* is a parody of the classic gothic novel, displaying all the graphic violence and supernatural peril that Radcliffe herself—the most popular and widely translated novelist of the 1790s—eschewed, along with a wry and sometimes slapstick humour that takes aim at national stereotypes about class, gender, nation, and literature. Modern critics have often focused on the humorous elements of *Vampire City*. Brian Stableford, the English translator of the novel, describes it as a “comed[y] with flamboyant melodramatic intrusions” that is the “distant foundation-ston[e] for the modern subgenre of horror-comedy” (Stableford, “Afterword”, 2003, 320), and Matthew Gibson terms it “an affectionate send-up” of the English and of Ann Radcliffe herself (2013, 108). Gibson, in particular, views *Vampire City* as pure “pastiche”, distinguishing it from Féval’s first two vampire novels which “can be seen as forays into more sensitive and dangerous areas” (108). Closer attention to the story and to the frame narrative that encloses it, however, suggests that *Vampire City* offers more than just pastiche or parody. This essay argues that in *Vampire City* Féval advances a serious critique of the cross-Channel literary marketplace in the Victorian period by using vampirism as an allegory for literary piracy.

Since its inception in the 1730s, the vampire has been read figuratively. At this time, even literal accounts of vampires from Eastern Europe were often regarded as allegories of political oppression, border policing, and corrupt or tyrannical economic practices, and

English commentators often wielded the term metaphorically to criticise government officials or their policies (Groom 2018, 38-9). The widespread modern interpretation of the vampire as a sex symbol should not obscure the history of political, economic, and cultural resonances of the vampire whose aesthetic is, according to Nick Groom, “inescapably capitalist” (Groom 2018, 148). Writers from Voltaire to Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Karl Marx have deployed vampirism as a metaphor to critique contemporary commercial practices in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and to warn of the dangers of unregulated capitalism.<sup>1</sup> Matthew Gibson has demonstrated that Féval’s other vampire novels, *The Vampire Countess* (1856) and *Knightshade* (1860), use the figure of the bloodsucker to connect “vampirism and the brigandry of monetary greed” and thus to condemn the “malign spirit of materialism” that plagues France (Gibson 2013, 109). Though critics like Stableford and Gibson have doubted the “serious[ness]” of *Vampire City* (Gibson 2013, 109), it seems clear that this novel also follows the pattern of using vampirism as a vehicle for economic critique. In *Vampire City*, vampirism becomes a metaphor for a particular aspect of economic parasitism: literary piracy.<sup>2</sup>

Anxieties about transnational, and specifically Anglo-French, literary piracy ran high throughout the long nineteenth century. Although originality stood as the hallmark of genius, English fiction had a long history of borrowing from French sources, and for reasons political, intellectual, and commercial, of hiding such borrowings. As Angela Wright has shown, Romantic-period “Gothic novelists in Britain [...] look[ed] across the Channel for inspiration, be it through the realms of translation, adaptation or unacknowledged plagiarism” (Wright 2013, 10). Juliette Atkinson has documented the expansion of these practices in the

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<sup>1</sup> Marx’s references to vampirism in *Das Kapital* (1867) are particularly noteworthy given the timing of its publication just a few years before *Vampire City* (1874), though Brian Stableford has conjectured that *Vampire City* was composed in 1867, which problematizes any easy line of influence here. However, the fact that the vampire metaphor emerges in the two texts suggests that it had significant cultural purchase.

<sup>2</sup> I use literary piracy as an umbrella term to denote a range of practices from the use of derivative plots, to the publication of undeclared translations, to wholesale plagiarism.

Victorian period, which saw more widespread publication of undeclared or highly compressed translations and of plots derived or copied from French novels. The language used to describe these activities—both then and now—often involves metaphors of consumption and appropriation that are akin to vampirism. A *Metropolitan Magazine* critic of 1837 noted, for example, that “every writer has nibbled at France” (204), and despite the passing of the Anglo-French Copyright treaty of 1851, writers like Charles Reade and Mary Braddon were still seen to be “liberally plunder[ing] French literature” (Atkinson 2017, 272).

However, English and French commentators tended to have different views on this kind of borrowing, as they did on intellectual property more broadly. In France, which had a stronger tradition of authorial rights, natural property rights were thought to transcend national borders. In England, by contrast, author’s rights were weighed against the needs and interest of the public (Seville 2006, 3). Debates around international literary copyright—which was not a fringe concern but bound up with wider questions about free trade and intellectual property—continued throughout the nineteenth century, even after the signing of the Berne Convention in 1886 ostensibly established a pan-European agreement. Thus it is perhaps unsurprising that Victorian writers, translators, and publishers by turns confused, exploited, or simply ignored the developing standards and legalities around intellectual property, with the result that authors’ rights were often breached in the name of profit.

The frame narrative to *Vampire City* foregrounds issues of intellectual property and literary theft, encouraging readers to see these themes as central to an understanding of the story. In this frame narrative, the French narrator—ostensibly Féval himself—complains about the ‘blatant piracy to which French writers are subjected in England’ (Féval 2003, 21). The grievance forms a thinly veiled allusion to the numerous instances in which Féval had himself become a victim of what the narrator calls literary “pickpocket[ing]” (21). In the

1840s, for example, Féval had perceived George W. M. Reynolds's *Mysteries of London* (1844) as a plagiarism of his own *Mystères de Londres* (1843-4), and he almost certainly knew that pirated translations of his works were circulating freely in both England and America.<sup>3</sup> In the 1860s, his countryman Louis Reveil had unwittingly translated Féval's *Le Fils du Diable* (1846) back into French and tried to sell it to a French publisher, before being informed by this publisher that the English novel he was working from was itself a pirated translation of Féval (Atkinson 2017, 242). In *Vampire City*, the narrator's grumbling leads his English friend, Lady B\*\*\*, to suggest that he "get [his] own back by stealing from the English" (Féval 2003, 22). The "stealing" to which Lady B refers here is not that of plagiarism per se but of competing against Mr X\*\*\* and Miss Z\*\*\*, "two of the most sensational English novelists, always on the lookout for a good idea for a story" (22), for access to a long-held secret about Ann Radcliffe's personal life. Lady B\*\*\* introduces the narrator to Miss Jebb—also known as Miss 97—who at three years short of her one hundredth birthday stands not only as Ann Radcliffe's last living relative but also as the "custodian" of a secret that becomes the story of the main narrative.

The premise of *Vampire City* is thus the sanctioned appropriation of an English story, in particular the "episode that had turned the placid and rather cheerful temperament of Anne Radcliffe into the terrible gloom that characterized her work" (24).<sup>4</sup> It forms a reversal of what has happened to the narrator (and by proxy, the novelist). In this sense, Atkinson is right to argue that this novel "can therefore be read partly as an act of retaliation" (Atkinson 2017, 288). Profiting from his exclusive access to this "incredible story" about Radcliffe, the

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<sup>3</sup> Féval may of course have been speaking self-reflexively here, as he also borrowed from other writers on occasion. His own *Les Mystères de Londres* (1843-4), for example, made no secret of playing off the success of Eugene Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842-3).

<sup>4</sup> In the novel, Féval refers to Ann Radcliffe as Anne Ward or Anna Ward or simply *she* (usually in italics). This could be an intentional misspelling or playful nicknaming that comprises part of the humour here. However, it should be noted that other Victorian writers, like Julia Kavanagh for example, also misspell Radcliffe's first name as 'Anne'.

narrator is poised to best his English rivals at their game of literary ventriloquism, just as Féval “retaliates” against his copyists by using the narrative to expose them.

Ventriloquism itself becomes a running joke that Féval uses to highlight important questions about voice, identity, and authorship. When Miss 97 speaks in the frame narrative, for example, the bewildered narrator notices that “her voice had circled around us and was heard as if from behind” and later that it “resound[ed] as if from the other side of the parlour” (25). He calls her a “natural ventriloquist” (25) because of this ability to project her disembodied voice from different places in the room, but the label also operates figuratively. The story Miss Jebb is relaying is not her own, but Radcliffe’s, and the French narrator is likewise giving voice to Radcliffe’s story via Miss Jebb’s narration. The layers of voicing—or ventriloquising—at play here are flagged in this frame narrative by the humorous and uncanny ways in which Miss Jebb’s disembodied utterances reach the narrator. At the end of the Prologue, as Miss Jebb relaxes into the unfolding of her long-buried tale, not only does her disembodied voice “emerg[e], this time, from under the table” (26) but her visage appears almost vampiric with “yellow and strangely elongated” (26) teeth suddenly becoming visible. In this way Féval links the appropriation of a story and the elusive projection of voice with the qualities of a vampire, suggesting ventriloquism and vampirism as sister arts. The voice that seems to come from a place where it could not have originated recalls the story severed (or stolen) from its original author. Miss Jebb’s voice projection also anticipates that of the master vampire Goetzi in the main narrative.<sup>5</sup> As he pursues Anna and her friends on their way to Vampire City, for example, she cannot see him but she does hear an unidentified “burst of laughter” (123) and a “shrill voice emanating from who knows where” (119). Though more humorous than ominous, the ventriloquism in the Prologue

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<sup>5</sup> In the original French text, Goëtzi’s name has the tréma ‘e’, which was removed in Stableford’s translation. I have followed Stableford’s example here.

nonetheless prefigures the more violent appropriations of the vampire Goetzi in the main narrative.

Monsieur Otto Goetzi, the creature responsible for threatening the lives of Radcliffe's friends, participates in a capitalistic brand of vampirism that becomes a fitting symbol for literary piracy. Goetzi operates as head of a small conglomerate of "subvampires" (95), each of whom he has killed and made into a member of his family. These subvampires serve as his minions as well as his copies, for although they have their own forms, they can also take on Goetzi's appearance at his whim. Féval thus introduces "one of the most peculiar anomalies of the vampire race: the divisibility—or, if your [sic] prefer, the *dividuality*—of such creatures. [...] Each vampire is a collective, represented by one principal form, but possessing other accessory forms of indeterminate number" (66). Like a pirated translation or a derivative plot, "each subsidiary form, like the dominant form, also has the ability to duplicate itself" (66). Mass replication means near-infinite opportunity for Goetzi to profit, because he can appropriate the capital and the labour of his "accessory forms." They are not only ruled by him but are literally part of his flesh: they can separate from and collapse back into him at his will, like "folding chairs" (95). The comparison to a mass-produced item like a folding chair underlines the industrial quality of the subvampires, for their master Goetzi can generate and exploit them as he sees fit. Groom has suggested that vampires "imperil the state through 'multiplicity' [...] the vampire is not a unique or singular being, but a condition that proliferates" (Groom 2018, 55). Féval renders this "multiplicity" in mechanistic terms that show literary piracy in the mid-nineteenth century as a dangerous and lucrative practice capable of expanding infinitely.

Féval figures literary piracy as not only brutally materialistic but also downright grotesque. When Radcliffe first meets Goetzi and his vampire family beneath a loudly ticking clock in the *Ale and Amity* inn, they present an uncanny and "unmoving" assortment

of quasi- and non-human figures, including “a big man who seemed to possess only the outlines of a face”, “a long-tailed parrot”, “a small boy of mischievous appearance”, “a monstrous flesh-colored dog whose form seemed nearly human”, and “a bald and extremely fat woman” (62). Each of the characters in this tableau is unsettling in its own way, leading Radcliffe to suspect “that the people before her were mere accessories of the pendulum: parts of a mechanical system, like the figures mounted on the Strasbourg Clock” (62). As W. Bradley Holley has recently discussed, “the explicit parallel drawn between this group gathered around the clock and other automatons, such as the Horloge de Strasbourg, encourages readers [...] to view the family as if they are machines or automatons working in a cycle-like fashion” (Holley 2018-2019, 27). Goetzi’s mechanical “accessories” that work for—and can, on command, look like—him provide a fitting evocation of plagiarised and pirated literary works, which are here rendered as “parts of a mechanical” system that serve a commercial purpose. According to Juliette Atkinson, Victorian critics expressed concern about “novelists playing fast and loose with concepts of literary honesty” in part because plagiarisms brought a “mechanical quality [...] to the novel, undermining its literary status” (2017, 277) and unearthing the “business-like quality of fiction writing” (2017, 281). Goetzi’s “accessories” are copies deprived of proper feeling, as is gruesomely apparent when the “dog Fuchs—formerly the gentle Loos—was ordered to eat the face of the dowager” and the dowager’s young son experiences only “a slight ill-feeling while he watched this ignominious treatment being meted out by his companions to one who had been his mother” (88). Goetzi’s automata contrast heavily with characters in Radcliffe’s novels for whom sensibility—feeling the appropriate affective response, to the appropriate degree, at the appropriate time—operates as a reliable index of goodness and nobility. Féval reminds of us of this difference by highlighting our female protagonist’s dismay at meeting this motley crew at the *Ale and Amity*: she “experienced an indefinable sensation, which was not quite

fear” (Féval 2003, 62). Like all good gothic heroines, Radcliffe here models the appropriate sensibility in the face of a danger like literary piracy: an instinctive, uneasy sense of a threat that is at once ridiculous and alarming.

The grotesquerie of Goetzi’s subvampire family serves to highlight the ludicrous aspects of plagiarism and literary impersonation. When Anna and Ned’s servants, Grey Jack and Merry Bones, take on the vampire family at the *Ale and Amity*, Goetzi assumes the role of a military commander:

Monsieur Goetzi whistled, and his entire family emerged from his flesh at one and the same time. At a second whistle-blast, they all split into two, including Monsieur Goetzi himself [...] Goetzi immediately placed himself behind his eleven emanations, and they all threw themselves upon the Irishman [...] Two dogs, two parrots, two bald women, two little boys, two innkeepers and one Monsieur Goetzi were positively devouring the Irishman. (110)

Despite the size of Goetzi’s absurd battalion, Merry Bones manages to chop off his head, at which point “all the other heads of an inferior order were rolling on the floor” and “an indescribable but mute confusion ensued” (111). Amidst this confusion, not even Goetzi himself can keep track of all of his doubles, and as he flees the scene he wonders aloud, ““Is anyone missing?”” (112) Anna, Merry Bones, and their friends manage to capture one such imposter-Goetzi, who on closer reflection still bears some of her original aspect as the daughter of one of Anna’s neighbours: “behind the features of the despicable doctor [can be seen] something of the physiognomy of Polly Bird” (116). In the custody of Anna’s contingent, Polly’s allegiance to Goetzi is undermined, and she begins to aid the English group. Her split identity as a crony of Goetzi, but also as a “sweet and modest” (116) young girl, makes her a slippery character whose palimpsestic appearance parallels her incongruous

desires. Once inside Selene, the Vampire City where the English friends believe they can kill Goetzi once and for all, Polly's exclamations indicate her internal conflict:

“O my dear master,” cried Polly, performing extravagant contortions within her iron box, “were I not a prisoner, how joyfully I would come to your aid.” But she added, without pausing for breath: “Go on! Don't delay! Tear out his heart—without making him suffer too much!” (136)

The slapstick violence, identity confusion, and shifting loyalties render these scenes farcical, as Féval underlines the ludicrous business of appropriation, replication, and imposture.

This business of literary piracy is nonetheless seriously profitable, and to critique it Féval is careful to distance Goetzi from the alluring Byronic vampire mould. The tonal mixture of gothic horror and comedy visible in the episodes discussed above signals that Goetzi is not a Byronic vampire. Pugnacious and conniving, but also ridiculous, Goetzi follows in a more populist tradition, and is closer to a penny dreadful figure like James Malcolm Rymer's Varney the Vampire than to the more enigmatic Lord Ruthven created by John Polidori. According to Nick Groom, Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) ignited a public sensation, but it was the myriad British and French stage adaptations of the text that fuelled the long-lasting celebrity of the vampire figure (123). French interest in the vampire was stoked by Charles Nodier's theatre adaptation *Le Vampyre* (1819), which drew heavily on Polidori's work, and by a raft of subsequent performances which tended to portray vampires “in the tradition of pantomimes and knockabout farce” (Groom 2018, 84). Like Varney, who has been described as “a perfectly ordinary economic parasite” (Senf 1988, 46), Goetzi is driven by ambition and greed, not the lure of sexual conquest. In this respect he also resembles Radcliffean antagonists like Montoni and Schedoni. Though Goetzi does in passing lust after the “the blood of the lovely young Cornelia” (Féval 2003, 104), the

overriding reason for targeting her is to usurp her rights to Castle Montefalcone, which he will inherit legally after “incorporating” her into his family of accessories. A landed position as the “legitimate inheritor” (105) of Castle Montefalcone will enable him to achieve his desired social and financial standing.

Though Goetzi’s predations are financially motivated, his class status also distinguishes him from aristocratic figures like Sir Frances Varney or Lord Ruthven. Goetzi is explicitly characterised as part of a rising commercial middle class. Just after the face-off with Merry Bones described above, the reader learns that Goetzi started off as “an apprentice vampire” with “neither a double nor any accessories” (115). It was only after receiving “the diploma of a master vampire” (115) that he was able to acquire his first double, Polly, and to embark on building his subvampire empire. Goetzi has studied and toiled to attain his position, and he is entrepreneurial in his endeavours to enhance his wealth. As he tells one of his many doubles, the “marketplace” for human prey “is run by greed” (104) and, fittingly, he refers to his victims as “merchandise” (105, 107) on more than one occasion. In keeping with the world of *Vampire City*, where vampirism is big business—“every vampire functions as a great finance house or a noble family, maintaining as many as a hundred clients or servants” (151)—Goetzi is aspirational and acquisitive.

The decision to distance Goetzi from the Romantic vampire model can also be seen in the way Féval positions the reader to respond to him. Unlike John Polidori’s Lord Ruthven, for example, a literary sensation whose rank, cruelty, and erotic appeal became a successful prototype for much subsequent English fiction (Senf 1988, 25), Goetzi wields neither the hereditary power of an aristocrat nor the sexual allure of the Byronic anti-hero. Instead, he is eccentric and distasteful. When he “allow[s] himself to relax entirely into his vampire self” (Féval 2003, 75), he appears as follows:

He shone brightly green, and his lower lip burned as red as a hot iron. His hair stood on end, flowing and trembling like a flaming punch-bowl. He was a fine example of his species. (75)

The irony of the final remark here suggests Féval's intention to disgust or amuse, rather than to attract the reader. Goetzi's bizarrely sadistic actions and the unpleasant multisensory descriptions of his appearance ensure that the reader never develops much empathy for or enthrallment with him. Anna's servant Grey Jack reports that he "stalked and drank the blood" of "Miss Corney's little spaniel" (46), that he transformed into "a green spider of unusual size" (47) to prey upon her, and that he "stinks worse than a she-cat in heat" (46). Goetzi's stench is noted elsewhere, such as in Selene when the narrator relays that "Nothing stinks like a vampire who is at rest in the freedom of his own house [...] Monsieur Goetzi [...] exhaled an odor so malignantly fetid that our companions would have been at risk of death by asphyxiation had it not been for the bottles of Epsom salts" (136). There could hardly be a less seductive prospect than a putrid bloodsucker who glows green in the dark. In both the mode and substance of the descriptions of Goetzi, Féval renders his actions and predilections repugnant and ridiculous, ensuring that he bears none of the fascinating appeal of the Byronic vampire modelled by Lord Ruthven.

In one respect, however, Féval may have intended a parallel with Polidori and his tale *The Vampyre*. Like John Polidori, who became Lord Byron's attendant physician in 1816 during his continental travels, Goetzi "could not pretend to be part of the vampire aristocracy. He was a mere doctor" (134). Both Polidori and Goetzi are professional men (one a doctor, one a tutor) who aspire for more: Goetzi for landed wealth and elevated social standing, Polidori for greater respect, attention from ladies, and literary acclaim. Most importantly for the purpose of this discussion, though, Polidori also stood accused of literary appropriation. In April 1819, the vampire story that John Polidori had been inspired to write by Byron's own

1816 fragment—and by his real-life sexual tendencies—was issued in Henry Colburn’s *New Monthly Magazine* as *The Vampyre: a Tale by Lord Byron*. Although there is debate about the chain of events that led to this publication, evidence suggests that Colburn knowingly misattributed the text to Byron in order to profit from the poet’s fame. When the true authorship was revealed (Byron quickly disavowed it and Polidori claimed it) Colburn attempted to pin the fraud on Polidori. Modern critics like Nina Auerbach have argued that “the vampire fragment Byron began at Villa Diodati in 1816, and Polidori’s 1819 tale *The Vampyre*, are symbiotic”, for “Polidori pervades Byron’s fragment”, and Polidori’s tale is likewise “steeped in Byron and Byronism” (1995, 15-16). Rather than plagiarism in either direction, Auerbach stresses the collaborative, intimately connected nature of the two texts, which were borne out of an intimate but troubled relationship fraught with class antagonism and mutual disaffection (15).

However, contemporary readers were not necessarily aware of Byron’s fragment or his disavowal of *The Vampyre* (certainly this was the case on the continent) and the scandal damaged Polidori’s reputation. Termed a “forgery” by Polidori (1819, 4), and a “bookselling imposture” by Byron (1976, 114), the incident raises questions about authorship, intellectual property, and character that are at the heart of *Vampire City*. Beresford comments on the *Vampyre* ordeal aptly: “in a cruel twist of irony, accusations levelled at Polidori in 1819 relating to plagiarism cast him as the vamping oppressor preying on Byron’s work and his name in order to sustain his own ambitions” (2019, 150). The irony is of course that despite longstanding perceptions of Byron’s vampiric tendencies as a sexual predator and a transgressive writer, draining victims alternately of their virtue or their morals (Budge 2004, 214), it is Polidori who emerges from this scandal as the parasite. Polidori was considered by some to have appropriated Byron (both his text and his persona) to forge a literary product—*The Vampyre*—for his own personal aggrandisement, in the same way that Goetzi

procures victims who become clones that aid his pursuit of greater wealth and power. The parallel with Polidori (whether intentional or not) nonetheless highlights the centrality of class ambition to Goetzi's vampirism and helps to clarify Féval's allegorical interrogation of writing, literary property, and profit.

Ultimately, Féval frames literary piracy as a slavish commercial enterprise in opposition to true art, which cannot be controlled by its creator. Although Goetzi tends to bring his victims into his fold, killing and transforming them into minions who are also replicas of himself (they can take on their own form or his), his predation does not always operate in this way. When he quenches his thirst on the blood of two girls in a "prohibited town", for instance, he opts not to make these young ladies into servile duplicates of himself:

In consequence, for fear of being reprimanded by his own kind, he had not dared enroll the two Szegeli girls in his company of slaves and had made mere art-objects out of their carefully-prepared cadavers. (127)

Here Féval distinguishes between the victims that Goetzi transforms into copies of himself, and the victims that Goetzi fashions as "art-objects." In the case of the former, the raw material of human existence is killed and refashioned into a duplicate of its killer; in the case of the latter, it is remade into stand-alone artwork, in this instance statues. Ironically, though the duplicates continue to live and the "art-objects" are lifeless, it is the "art-objects" that remain much harder to control. Their power is not governed by Goetzi as transformer, but by the beholder, who views the statues and interprets them at will. In fact, the sight of the Szegeli girls' statues inspires their father to seek "vengeance" on Goetzi (141), presumably the very opposite outcome to the one he intended. Féval's "Report on the Progress of Letters" (1868), written in his role as president for the Société des Gens de Lettres, defends the value of novels, even those that are seemingly evil, dangerous, or immoral, except where

he feels literary integrity to have been compromised. For Féval, the only authors “to fear are the imitators, this herd of clumsy slaves” (1868, n.p.). In *Vampire City* he renders literary imitation and plagiarism in the form of the endlessly duplicating and ventriloquising vampires of *Vampire City*. These subvampires are called an “entourage of spectral slaves” (84) to Goetzi. The repetition of the word “slaves” makes explicit the connection here, for these subvampires are stolen, drained of authenticity, and mass-produced, and their sole purpose is to benefit their vampire “chief” (66), to the detriment of society at large. Original literary works, or “art-objects”, by contrast, do not necessarily reward the vampiric transformer, for they are not tethered to his body or his will, but can potentially promote the better interests of society.

In this way Féval intervenes in the contemporary debates around intellectual property, literary originality, and plagiarism. According to Robert Macfarlane, as the nineteenth century wore on, the “increasing self-consciousness about the impossibility of originality” (2007, 155) meant that Romantic ideas of creative genius and generation began to be challenged by an alternate model of literary production driven by assimilation, conversion, and reorganization. On the one hand, plagiarism apologists “sought to create aesthetic and ethical space for literary works which exploited the creative possibilities of intertextuality” (Macfarlane 2007, 45). The discovery of Dumas’s literary “workshop” in 1846 unearthed the existence of a more collaborative process of authoring texts, and successful writers like Charles Reade later defended a more transformative model of authorship as “jewel-setting” rather than plagiarism per se (Macfarlane 2007, 152). (Reade was well known for mining French novels for material to sustain his own accelerated pace of publication). On the other hand, the so-called “plagiarism hunters” took up the literary detective work of tracing appropriations, derivations, and allusions, and then published their findings as a way of questioning the literary integrity of authors whose works were seen to have too much

borrowed material. Though they may have seen themselves as arbiters of literary justice, these “plagiarism hunters” were widely regarded as hacks whose single-minded cataloguing of the faults of other writers was itself seen as repetitive and unoriginal.<sup>6</sup> The allegorical treatment of literary appropriation in *Vampire City* allows Féval to denounce a practice he saw as parasitical, whilst distancing himself from the plagiarism hunters who might also be seen as having dubious literary credentials.

In the vampire Goetzi, Féval brings to life the idea of author as transformer, a concept which had gained new traction from mid-century. In addition to sucking their blood and changing them into subvampire slaves, Goetzi also has other related recombination activities, such as the hair transplant he performs on the Countess Greete. The rapid thinning of the Countess’s “luxuriant blonde tresses” (69), and her experience of dizzy spells, pallor, and weight loss are soon explained when we see Goetzi’s nocturnal activities:

When he had taken his daily allowance [of blood], he put away the gold pin and took out a little set of pincers, by means of which he plucked hairs one by one from the Countess’ head. As he took them, he arranged them in a bouquet, as if he were a gleaner arranging a sheaf of corn. (75)

Goetzi is later shown “planting the Countess’ hairs in Signora Pallanti’s scalp, one by one” (76), while she “wept and wailed as if she were being flayed alive” (76). Though the agony of the two women gives this episode a lurid feel, there is an outlandish humour here in the fact that Countess Greete loses not only her hair but her husband Tiberio’s affection, which seems to follow this one body part no matter how bizarrely it is relocated: “It was, after all, her magnificent hair that Tiberio loved, even though he loved it on someone else’s forehead” (73). Goetzi authors an aesthetic change that involves stealing from one woman to enhance

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the work of—and responses to—the so-called “plagiarism hunters”, see Robert Macfarlane, *Original Copy*, pp. 41-49.

another, inhabiting a role akin to the “writer as an assimilator and transformer; an individual who possessed and practiced the ability, as Ruskin put it in 1860, ‘in some wonderful way [to] extract and recombine’” (Macfarlane 2007, 8). For Féval, there is nothing “wonderful” in this type of creative production, which here is unearthed as both gruesome and preposterous. Goetzi is not only a murderer and a parasite, but a bad artist as well. Although Tiberio cannot see it, the audience is encouraged to feel repugnance at Letizia Pallanti’s ill-begotten locks, Countess Greete’s baldness, and Goetzi’s midnight operations as a “tortur[ous]” aesthetician.

By putting a real-life gothic novelist at the centre of his tale, however, Féval also showcases the potential of intertextuality at its most playful and irreverent, suggesting that indebtedness on its own does not preclude authentic creative production. The best-selling and most widely translated author of the 1790s, Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823) was also the most imitated author of the period, inspiring countless derivative Minerva Press fictions and a robust trade in pirated chap books. She was praised for her “inventiveness, originality or genius” (Townshend and Wright 2014, 14-15) and for her “exceptionality”, especially in contrast with other gothic writers, who contemporaries like Walter Scott saw as “servile” copyists (cited in Miles 1995, 16). Unlike this long line of imitators, Féval does not copy Radcliffe, but instead uses her life and work as the springboard for his own imagination. At the same time, he signposts this process in a way that aligns him with nineteenth-century critics who were “discontented with the narrative of originality which prized authentic works as unindebted” and “instead of seeking to conceal, deny, or abolish the very notion of a precursor [...] perform[s] a narrative of origins” (Macfarlane 2007, 12, 13). Though Féval makes “Anna” the heroine of his story, he does not plagiarise her writing, for in structure and theme, *Vampire City* bears very little resemblance to her work. What Féval does include is a

series of references to Radcliffe that are often so incongruous amidst the graphic violence and supernatural occurrences of Féval's novel as to highlight difference rather than debt.

Allusions to Radcliffe therefore announce a reliance on her work whilst establishing an ironic distance from it. When Monsieur Goetzi attempts to infiltrate Castle Montefalcone, for example, he has the following exchange with one of his subvampires, the dog Fuchs (formerly Loos, the maid of Countess Greete):

“There is only one weak spot [...] a gateway where there is no sentry posted, but there is a dog as big as a bull. It's lucky that we are not the same sex...”

“You've played a serenade beneath his window?” Monsieur Goetzi put in, good-humoredly.

“Yes, sovereign lord. He became fiery with passion and I have strangled him.” (86)

Goetzi's question may form a metatextual allusion to the mysterious music that reassures Emily, the heroine of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, that “someone with sensibilities like hers was in the vicinity of the castle” (Ellis 1989, 118). Here Fuchs and Goetzi turn this Radcliffean trope on its head, using the “serenade” as bait to lure the guard dog into a murderous trap. That Goetzi's remark is intended “good-humoredly” suggests that the trick forms an in-joke between them, and a default strategy in dealing with an adversary of the opposite sex. In this way, Féval reminds us that *Vampire City* departs from the tone, theme, and plot structure of Radcliffe's fiction.

The more direct comparisons with *The Mysteries of Udolpho* tend to operate playfully as well, ostensibly insinuating Radcliffe's adventures in continental vampire hunting as the autobiographical material on which her greatest novel was based. Castle Montefalcone is thus surrounded by “a band of brigands which infests the mountains” (85) and is described explicitly as “the imposing mass of the noble dwelling which *She* so famously described

under the name of the *Castle of Udolpho*” (161). In a reckless moment, Anna is defended by the narrator thus: “I can only point out that her greatest work, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, is by no means lacking in similar episodes of thoughtlessness. *She* did not have a good memory, and the charming Emilia, her heroine, [...] is subject to singular fits of distraction” (97). In this scene Anna appears, like Emily, “no more and no less than a poor superstitious child” (99). Likewise, at the start of the novel, as Anna embarks for the Continent to rescue her friends, “she could not help exclaiming: ‘Goodbye, dear refuge. Happy shelter of my adolescence, adieu! Verdant countryside, proud hills, woodlands full of trees and mystery, shall I ever see you again?’” (43). The exaggerated celebration of Anna’s native landscape harks back to Emily’s departure from France, and implies that the two characters share an appreciation of pastoral beauty and a heartfelt connection with their respective homelands. *Vampire City* draws a direct correspondence between Radcliffe and her female heroine, a common conflation in contemporary responses to nineteenth-century women’s writing.

And yet the Anna Ward of *Vampire City* differs from both Emily St Aubert of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and even more from the real-life Ann Radcliffe, a difference that is signposted by referring to Radcliffe as ‘Anne’ or ‘Anna’. Féval’s Anna generally appears more rational and unsentimental than Emily. She is described as being “above belief in the superstitions” (45-6) and “superior to the rest of her sex” who “faint” in frightening situations (38-9); moreover she is called physically “strong” despite her “small stature” (108). More significantly, she possesses an “indomitable” (41) and “intrepid” (148) spirit that leads her, after reading her friend’s letter (“Anna, my dear Anna, help...!” (40)), to abandon her fiancé (and impending nuptials) in order to save her friends. Although she needs support on her journey, she opts *not* to ask William Radcliffe because she does not find him “brave” (41) enough. Anna exerts more agency than many of the male characters that surround her, including her intended husband William Radcliffe, her servant Grey Jack, and her friend

Edward Barton. She also exhibits greater mobility than the Radcliffean heroine (as well as the real-life Ann Radcliffe). On their way to cross the Channel, Grey Jack, who she has asked to accompany her without telling him why or where they are headed, concludes that she must be eloping with a “gallant” (45). Making her the leader of the rescue mission for her friends Edward and Cornelia, Féval allows his heroine to be mobile for reasons other than romantic love. Féval also upends the eighteenth-century gothic trope of eroticising feminine beauty and distress, dramatising instead the allure of a female heroine who leads a mission to rescue a terrified young man. Even when Goetzi’s heart is excised and burned in Vampire City, Anna does not look away but positions herself to “see more clearly” (137) as “she never neglected an opportunity to further her education” (138). Stableford views her unflinching gaze here as “proto-feminist” (Stableford 2003, “Introduction”, 8), but it is fair to say that her behaviour throughout the novel could be described as such, especially by comparison with French standards. The bold and active unmarried female character that became so popular in English sensation fiction in the mid-Victorian period was comparatively rare in French novels of the time (Atkinson 2017, 265), but Féval’s work represents an exception to this trend. Anna exemplifies exactly the kind of daring and resourceful female character that had made Féval’s work appealing for a growing market of female readers on both sides of the Channel.

The charm (and humour) of Féval’s Anna also rests, as I have mentioned above, in the distance from her real-life namesake. Féval playfully challenges commonly held ideas about Radcliffe’s inclination for “retirement and obscurity” (Townshend and Wright 2014, 30) and about the Radcliffean model of authorship, which crystallised around feminised values such as modesty and decorum.<sup>7</sup> In the absence of information about Radcliffe’s private life, curiosity abounded both in her lifetime and afterward. In particular, readers wondered how a reclusive woman with a “fragile sensibility” (Townshend and Wright 2014, 13) could have

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<sup>7</sup> Christina Rossetti famously abandoned a planned biography on Radcliffe due to lack of source material.

dreamt up such unprecedented tales of flesh-creeping suspense and sublime terror. Rumours circulated in relation to this question. One of the most enduring suggestions, which originated with the memoir of Radcliffe by T. N. Talfourd that formed the preface to the posthumous publication of *Gaston de Blondville* in 1826, has been that it was Radcliffe's husband who encouraged her to write. Julia Kavanagh recaps this idea of Radcliffe's authorship in *English Women of Letters* (1863) when she states that William Radcliffe "urged [his wife] to write, her diffidence yielded to his encouragement; she made the attempt" (246). His long hours for the *English Chronicle* meant that "he was often out the whole evening [...] [and] Mrs. Radcliffe thus remained alone with her household tasks and cares both over, and nothing better to do than to sit down and write a story" (246). Féval contests this understanding of Radcliffe with a wild alternative narrative about the genesis of Radcliffe's writing. Again his reimagining of Radcliffe allows him to profit from but also to comment teasingly on trends in her reception.

The ambiguous ending of *Vampire City* actually offers two possible explanations for Radcliffe's authorship, both of which entertain the reader by running counter to received ideas about her writing practice. On the one hand, there is the possibility that it was all a dream. At the climax of the novel, Anna has located her friends Edward and Cornelia in the heart of Castle Montefalcone, only to realise in a moment of "sinister enlightenment" that all three of them are trapped. Just as they are about to fall into the clutches of their enemies, Anna wakes up to find herself back in England "in her wedding dress [...] with the March sun steaming joyously through the windows" (177). That Anna is "on her feet" when she awakes suggests that this is specifically a daydream, perhaps akin to the reveries that inspired contemporary Romantic writers like Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Making the entire story the work of Anna's fancy could be Féval's way of affirming Radcliffe's writing as the product of a potent and lively imagination. That her dream transpires on the eve (or rather the morning)

of her wedding reframes the relationship between her writing and her marriage, placing it outside and prior to the nuptials rather than a result of it. It locates Radcliffe's inspiration in a fantasised alternative reality in which she gets to become an adventure heroine rather than the bride of the pedestrian William Radcliffe, who is depicted rather unattractively just after Anna opens her eyes: "There was a loud noise in the corridor. William Radcliffe blew his nose" (177). As Stableford notes, the decision to make the whole story a dream could also, despite appearing as a "hackneyed device" (Stableford 2003, "Afterword" in *Vampire City*, 193), be Féval's way of "rationalizing" the events, thus mimicking and making fun of Radcliffe's explained supernatural. On balance, though, rewriting the story of Ann Radcliffe's literary inspiration provides a means to interrogate assumptions about the feminine mode of authorship she is assumed to have had.

On the other hand, the Epilogue holds out the possibility that "*It was not a dream*" (178, italics in original), suggesting instead that Radcliffe was gifted with "second sight" (178). In the Epilogue, which continues the conversation of the frame narrative, Miss 97 tells Lady B\*\*\* and the French narrator:

I do not mean to say that *She* accomplished so long and so eventful a journey in a single night—but there are other things than dreams [...] When *She* finally opened her door, Mr. Radcliffe and her parents were awestruck by the change which had overtaken her person [...] They thought her mad, all the more so when *She* extracted a formal promise that as soon as the marriage was over, they would depart for Montefalcone. (178)

To her family, Radcliffe appears crazed and "distract[e]d" (178). Her premonitions, however, are proven to be at least partly true, for when the couple travels to the Continent they find that

“Count Tiberio and Letizia undoubtedly nurtured the most perfidious designs against the affianced couple [Edward Barton and Cornelia]” (179) but were thwarted due to factors out of their control. The main narrative of *Vampire City* comprises the substance of Radcliffe’s vision, a train of events that did not but *could have* come to pass. As Stableford suggests, her inspiration and the narrative it produced affirm that “alternative worlds are not mere dreams, but meaningful phantoms of actions unmade and choices untaken” that teach important lessons (194). If her vision is not a mere daydream fantasy, but telepathic in some way, it suggests that Radcliffe’s subsequent fictions likewise have messages more prescient than some have allowed.

Whether the final narrative twist is taken as a fanciful daydream or a psychic intuition, however, Féval is unequivocally challenging previous assumptions about Radcliffe’s impetus for writing. He is also underlining the originality of her work. He insinuates that her fictions emerge not because of the conditions of her marriage or at the suggestion of her husband, but from a potent imagination and/or a gift for second sight galvanized before she wed William Radcliffe, but, implicitly, continued afterward. In the most bizarre and irreverent ways, then, Féval figures Radcliffe’s fiction in direct opposition to the textual appropriation practiced explicitly in his frame narrative and allegorically in his main narrative. And yet at the same time *Vampire City* relishes the emancipatory potential of artistic creation that is not wholly original: *Vampire City* toes the line between copying and creating, imitating and innovating.

Féval’s novel ultimately offers a nuanced critique of literary theft (in all its various forms) that simultaneously carves out a place for unoriginal creativity with integrity. Féval jokes in the “Prologue” about the competitive, light-fingered dynamics of the transnational literary market, but in the main story he advances a series of serious critical points by using vampirism as an allegory for literary piracy. Through the vampire Monsieur Otto Goetzi,

who strategically preys on victims who will be able to facilitate his pursuit of affluence and social standing, Féval shows copying, imitation, and imposture as base means to accrue wealth. Allegorically, literary theft is shown as ignoble, selfish, greedy, and grotesque; it is a parasitical practice tied specifically to the materialism and lack of integrity of the nineteenth-century capitalist economy. Although the heroine of the novel is English, and the vampires are European, Féval's view of Britain as the precursor to the ills of capitalism, industrialism, and materialism in France (Gibson 2013, 144) suggests that the critique is aimed specifically across the Channel. Yet Féval is also keen to do more than the so-called plagiarism hunters. His irreverent alternative history of Ann Radcliffe and his spirited manipulation of the tropes of the classic gothic novel ultimately perform and affirm the potential artistic merit of transformation, recombination, and writing 'back' as models for literary creation. In this way Féval takes part in nineteenth-century transnational debates about originality, innovation, and artistic integrity, whilst anticipating the postmodern appropriation of historical figures and their works for the simultaneous purposes of entertainment and cultural critique. Radcliffe, who in her heyday was the most pirated and imitated writer in the English language, may well have enjoyed Féval's message, even if she resented the insinuation that as prey for a thirsty vampire she was merely "potable" (108).

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