Title of Paper: Maud by Moonlight: Tennyson and the Nineteenth-Century Vampire
Author: Dr. Tim Sadenwasser
Affiliation: Georgia Regents University
Section: Articles
Date of Publication: June, 2014
Issue: Volume 2, Number 2

Abstract:

Alfred Tennyson was in his mid-forties in 1854, the year he wrote the bulk of Maud. He was happily married with two young sons, and financially secure thanks to the success of In Memoriam, published in 1850. He was also the poet laureate of England and therefore a semi-official public figure. As J. B. Steane has contended, the reading public might have expected poetry from Tennyson that reflected his newfound domestic contentment and public stature. Instead, it received a long, strange, lyrical poem spoken by a mentally fragile man some twenty years younger than the poet. Compared to Tennyson’s other roughly contemporaneous long poems, The Princess and In Memoriam, Maud appeared to be a deliberate retreat from both public issues and his own current contentment and a return to the fears of insanity and poverty that had plagued his early adulthood.

In reality, Maud is a work balanced between public conflicts and private fears. The chief source of these fears is Maud herself. Maud, the beautiful teenage daughter of his father’s economic rival, has just returned from abroad. The unnamed speaker desires her sexually, but he also fears that she will prey upon him just as her father ruined his own father. His economic and sexual anxieties inspire a series of nightmarish visions in which he imagines her as a parasitic visitor. In this essay, I show how Tennyson draws from both Romantic and Victorian conceptions of the vampire to illustrate how the vampire represents both private, sexual fears and the economic fears that plague industrial England.

Keywords: nineteenth-century; England; poetry; Tennyson, Alfred; Maud; monodrama; lyric poetry; folklore; economics; vampires

Author Bio: Tim Sadenwasser is an Associate Professor of English at Georgia Regents University, Augusta, where he also directs the university’s Honors Program.

Author email: tsaden@gru.edu
The unnamed speaker of Alfred Tennyson’s *Maud* (1855) portrays himself as a solitary soul whose craving for human companionship is exceeded only by the revulsion he feels for other people. A twenty-five-year-old orphan, he broods alone in his dead parents’ house, proclaiming “I hate” (I, 1) to a modern world he believes is steeped in capitalistic thievery and violence:

But these are the days of advance, the works of the men of mind,  
When who but a fool would have faith in a tradesman’s ware or his word?  
Is it peace or war? Civil war, as I think, and that of a kind  
The viler, as underhand, not openly bearing the sword. (I, 25-28)

He especially hates Maud’s father, whom, he alleges, impoverished the speaker’s father and drove him to insanity and suicide, causing the speaker’s mother to die of grief. His attitudes toward Maud herself, however, are much more complicated. A beautiful sixteen-year-old girl who has just returned from abroad, Maud represents to him both a tempting ideal and a dangerous folly. These opposing visions emerge in the apparently contradictory social identities he affixes to her throughout Part I of the poem. As a child, he claims, she was “the moon-faced darling” (I, 72) and “the delight of the village” (I, 70), but as she matures, she malevolently assumes a “Cold and clear-cut face” (I, 79, 88). She sings a selfless “martial song” (I, 166) praising sacrifice and national honor, but she is also a coquettish deceiver who, he fears, will use her “smile as sunny as cold” (I, 213) to seduce him to aid her arrogant and selfish brother (I, 229-45). She is perhaps the willing pawn who will marry a “new-made lord” (I, 332) to advance her family’s aristocratic aspirations (I, x), but she might also be a faithful lover who will ignore her brother’s wishes and requite the speaker’s love (I, xx).

Because the poem is a monodrama, the reader cannot directly observe Maud to corroborate or disprove any of these characterizations. They therefore disclose less about her than about the speaker’s own fears and fantasies, including his terror of women, his yearning for both sex and ascetic retreat, and his ambivalence when facing the competing claims of family loyalty and romantic love. Such conflicted responses, any young lover will confirm, are far from uncommon, but the speaker’s intensely felt solitude and his all-consuming fear of following his father into madness generate particular mental pressures that transform his conventional emotions into elaborate, even hallucinatory, visions. In two of these visions, both of which occur at liminal points, he idealizes Maud as a restorer of life. First, the song “Come into the garden, Maud” at the end of Part I recasts her as a solar and vegetation goddess whose foot can make his dead body “start and tremble … / And blossom in purple and red” (I, 922-23). Through this deific vision of Maud, his belief that love is a source of personal regeneration expands into a metaphor of actual rebirth: without Maud, he is

---

1 All citations from *Maud* will include a part number (given as a large Roman numeral) and either a canto number (given as a small Roman numeral) or a line number or numbers (given as Arabic numerals).
dry dust, but her touch will make him bloom into pulsating life. Then, after the speaker’s killing of her brother between Parts I and II apparently causes Maud to die of grief, her spectral appearance in a dream at the end of the poem directs him toward future sources of rejuvenating social contact: camaraderie with his fellow citizens ready to die in “The blood-red blossom of war” (III, 53); harmony with “the purpose of God” (III, 59); and eternal union with her in sacrificial death. By directing him to his martial destiny (III, 10-14) and helping him replace the erotic rose of romantic love with the fiery rose of warfare, Maud brings his heart, which had become “a handful of dust” in her absence (II, 241), into joyful concord with the universe.

Ironically, the speaker’s faith that Maud can rescue him from the “lonely Hell” (I, 678) of hereditary madness emerges from her first subjecting him to a different sort of hell. This torment, like the rejuvenation she eventually brings, assumes supernatural dimensions in his frenzied imagination. Fearing that Maud has come to prey upon him as her father preyed upon his father, the speaker combines popular Romantic and Victorian conceptions of vampires to envision her as a parasitic creature of the night who first destroys his repose with her sexuality and then uses the moon, which he imagines as a conduit between the natural and supernatural worlds, to enter his dreams. Once she so insinuates herself, the speaker believes, she begins to control the pumping of his blood and the movement of his body. Exploring in detail the speaker’s initial perception of Maud as a vampiric invader yields important insight into his mental pathology, which, despite its frequent mutation, consistently makes him envision human intercourse as a parasitic exchange of energy: whatever form Maud takes, she either drains his life or lets him siphon life from her.

Tennyson uses vampire images and metaphors in Maud much as his Romantic predecessors Keats and Coleridge used them, not to create lurid sensation but, as James Twitchell claims, to reflect the angst-inspiring complexity of social relationships: “[The Romantic poets’] overriding concern was psychological: how do people interact or how is it that lovers, or artists, or parents, or the insane, or just ordinary people trade energy with those they contact?” (38). Twitchell argues, for example, that the mythology of vampires and lamias informs the “energy transfer” (3) that occurs in Christabel: “Christabel fitfully grows weaker as Geraldine calmly strengthens” (l. 609). This exchange of energy occurs when Geraldine compels Christabel into a state of “forced unconscious sympathy” (l. 609) in which, like a ventriloquist’s dummy, she must voice her predator’s demonic hissing (ll. 589-591) and even “imitate / [Her] look of dull and treacherous hate!” (ll. 605-06). Geraldine’s acts of possession progress until, as Nina Auerbach contends, “Christabel is so imbued with Geraldine that … she can only turn into her” (50). On the same note, Twitchell claims that although Keats borrowed source material from one of the seminal vampire myths when writing Lamia, he was more interested in exploring how

---

2 Twitchell notes that Lamias “emit a soft hissing sound” upon attacking (40). The speaker in Maud attributes this sound to his own countrymen: “the heart of the citizen hissing in war on his own hearthstone” (I, 24).
human relationships become vampiric than in exploiting vampirism’s supernatural apparatus. Lamia displays many vampiric qualities, most notably, says Auerbach, her constant mutation (65), but what is more striking is how Lycius, her apparent victim, transforms from human to vampire. Having “drunk her beauty up” (I, 251) and receiving life “afresh” from Lamia’s “new lips” (I, 294), Lycius, Twitchell writes, “wants the power to control her; he wants the same power Lamia gave up when she became human” (52). These issues of power and control also illuminate a vampiric rendition of *carpe diem* in Keats’s “Ode on Melancholy,” in which portrayals of death in both the suppressed opening stanza and the actual first stanza foreshadow the speaker’s determination to “feed deep, deep” upon his beloved’s “peerless eyes” (l. 20). As Auerbach contends, “feed” becomes “The operative word in psychic vampire fiction” (111). The speaker, having drawn the woman’s loving gaze, wants to consume it to prevent its changing, much as Geraldine and Lycius devour their victims’ senses and wills. All of these Romantic vampire figures are, in Twitchell’s terms, not “sanguine” but “psychological” vampires (45); they exert power over their victims’ entire beings without literally extracting their blood.

Tennyson adapts these metaphors of consumption and control to *Maud*, focusing specifically on two social relationships: the economic and the erotic. To the speaker, Maud’s father exemplifies the parasitic violence that infests economic competition. His early vision of Maud’s father draining the speaker’s family of money, the lifeblood of capitalism, unmistakably suggests a parasitic monster leaving its victim: “that old man, now lord of the broad estate and the Hall, / Dropt off gorged from a scheme that had left us flaccid and drained” (I, 19-20). Matthew Rowlinson, referring to this image in *Maud*, describes blood as a potential “figure for property” and claims that the speaker’s father “was drained of blood” (149) and therefore left destitute while Maud’s father gained his wealth. Perhaps the most famous expression of the link between such economic domination and vampirism occurs barely a decade after *Maud*. Karl Marx wrote in 1867, “Capital is dead labour, and, like a vampire, can only keep itself alive by sucking the blood of living labour. The more blood it sucks, the more vigorously does it live” (232). To envision the successful capitalist as a bloodsucker, according to Christopher Frayling, is to understand his society as a place of sanctioned yet nonetheless unnatural vampiric struggle: “Modern man is both predator and quarry to other members of his own species in a war of each against each which is all the more terrible because it is contrary to his nature. For every one of us, *‘le vampire, c’est les autres’*” (34). This struggle ultimately dehumanizes its participants, eradicating all sympathy and turning friends into mutual predators as they compete for limited resources.

This metaphor of consumption also intimates that Maud’s father is a sexual predator. “Gorged,” which implies the bloating that follows a leech’s or a tick’s feeding, connotes sexual potency, as signified by the engorging flow of blood into

---

3 For the fullest illustration of Lycius exerting control over Lamia, see II, 64-83.

4 The folkloric vampire is often bloated. This state, which is a natural stage of decomposition, was often taken to be evidence of recent feasting on blood, a belief that was often supported by an eruption of uncoagulated blood when the supposed vampire’s body was pierced (see Barber, 42, 73).
the male organ. By vampirically extracting the speaker’s family fortune, the speaker suggests, Maud’s father grows more sexually vigorous as he accumulates wealth. Conversely, losing the capitalistic game not only economically depletes the speaker’s father, but it also deprives him of his masculine energy and renders his family equally impotent and “flaccid.”

The idea of the successful capitalist as an assimilated vampire had begun to infiltrate the popular literature of Tennyson’s time and place. While Twitchell says that James Malcolm Rymer’s 868-page serialized “shocker” Varney the Vampire, or, The Feast of Blood (1845-47) has “no pretense, no purpose, no art” (124), Auerbach finds in its title character a portrait of an economic parasite. Varney, she writes, “wants only money. . . . What blood will be to Dracula, money is to Varney; his acquisitiveness makes him, as Tennyson might put it, one with his kind” (30). Auerbach does not assert a vampiric reading of any work by Tennyson, but her allusion to Maud (“I have felt with my native land, I am one with my kind” [III, 58]) nevertheless suggests kinship between Varney’s economic vampirism and the violent but socially endorsed thievery that dominates the speaker’s world. Varney, she claims, is both loathsome fiend and modern gentleman, and his “perplexing amorphousness” helps him assimilate so thoroughly that “the vampire and the socialized characters become increasingly difficult to distinguish” (29). He emerges as less an alien or a monster than “an increasingly representative interloper in a predatory society” (29) and, like Maud’s father, “the epitome of licensed unnatural acquisitiveness” (32). Such a creature would surely be at home in a world in which, as the speaker claims, “only the ledger lives” (I, 35).

Violent death seems inevitable in a universe in which the only human bond has become the vampiric relationship between a parasite and its host. Although the image of Maud’s father erotically and economically feeding on the speaker’s own father is the poem’s most explicit representation of vampirism, Maud’s parasitic behavior is, to the speaker, even more invasive and therefore more personally destructive. In his imagination, she returns to her home atop the hill specifically to subject him to the same torments his father suffered and thereby perpetuate her own father’s legacy of greed. Not content merely to devastate her prey’s physical body, however, she acquires the powers to regenerate endlessly and to enter closed places, using them to visit the speaker in his grove, to enter his sleep, and to seize control of his blood, his voice, and, eventually, his life.

Romantic metaphors of vampirism suffuse the speaker’s perception of his relationship to Maud. Late in the first canto, as he anticipates her return, he describes her as he remembers her from childhood:

Maud with her venturous climbings and tumbles and childish escapes,
Maud the delight of the village, the ringing joy of the Hall,
Maud with her sweet purse-mouth when my father dangled the grapes,

---

Maud the beloved of my mother, the moon-faced darling of all … (I, 69-72)

W. David Shaw calls this stanza a lyric of “outright celebration” (173), but close examination reveals sinister economic and erotic implications, especially in the speaker’s recollection of Maud’s “sweet purse-mouth” consuming his father’s grapes. When read as a portrait of Maud’s youth, this image seems as innocent as Shaw contends: the vivacious girl means no harm by taking another’s property into her open “purse-mouth,” especially when it has been “dangled” so tantalizingly before her. Similar behavior in her maturity, however, would be more pernicious, and the question with which the speaker begins the next stanza—“What is she now?” (I, 73)—acknowledges his fear of what she has become. By juxtaposing his present uncertainty with his memory of her playful acceptance of his father’s property, he implies the possibility that Maud has not changed and, to perpetuate her father’s legacy of vampiric consumption, will instead seek to put his economic wealth into her open purse.

That the speaker specifically envisions Maud orally receiving grapes invests her with disturbing carnal desires as well. Grapes frequently connote sensual, particularly oral, pleasure. Discussing images of fruit in the Song of Solomon, Carey Ellen Walsh writes that grapes “easily become an apt vehicle for oral pleasure because they offer taste sensations and sweet juice; the mouth is overcome and surprised by the breaking of the skin, the sweet, tart tastes, and the flow of juice for refreshment” (120). Keats illustrates the sensual pleasure of eating a grape in “Ode on Melancholy,” in which its speaker claims that a vision of the “sovergn shrine” of “Veil’d Melancholy” (I. 26) is reserved for only him “whose strenuous tongue / Can burst Joy’s grape against his palate fine” (ll. 27-28). The visual arts, especially those portraying or alluding to Bacchus, the god of wine, also traditionally emphasize the sensuality of consuming grapes. Michelangelo’s sculpture of Bacchus (1497), for example, features a grinning satyr eating grapes, and both Nicolas Poussin’s Andrians, or The Great Bacchanal with Woman Playing a Lute (1628) and François Boucher’s Bacchus and Erigone (1745) conspicuously include grapes within their scenes of physical pleasure. Such associations between grapes and sensuality continued into (and beyond) Tennyson’s day, with François Jouffroy’s sculpture Erigone (completed 1841, first exhibited 1850) featuring its subject nude to the waist, holding a bunch of grapes above her mouth while she reclines with an expression of sexual ecstasy. Maud’s childish hunger for grapes seems to foreshadow her later hunger for such sensual pleasures, which, the speaker fears, she will seek to extract from him, just as she had once taken his father’s grapes.

Maud’s emerging sexuality combines with the speaker’s memory of her past consumption of grapes to invest the term “purse-mouth” with harrowing connotations. Besides signifying a bag for carrying money, the term “purse” once connoted the

---

6 Connections between Maud and the Song of Solomon will become particularly evident in cantos I, iv and I, xxii. See also Robert Inglesfield, “Tennyson’s ‘Come into the Garden, Maud’ and the Song of Solomon,” Victorian Poetry 37 (1999), 121-23.
female genitalia. Martin Green writes that “purse, to the Elizabethan mind, suggested the vulva, characteristics of which are that it is involuted or wrinkled, and it can contract” (6; original emphasis). To support this claim, he quotes The Englishemans Treasure (1586), in which Thomas Vicary describes the female genitalia: “the necke … hath many involutions and pleates, joyned together in the manner of Rose leaves before they bee fully spread or rype, and so they bee shut together as a Purse mouth, so that nothing may passe forth but urin, untill the tyme of chylding” (6). Green concludes his discussion by arguing that “pearst” (or “pierced” and pronounced “pursed” [5]), as Shakespeare uses it in Love’s Labor’s Lost (“The preyful Princess pierced and pricked a pretty pleasing pricket” [IV, ii, 57]), connotes “the contraction of the vaginal orifice as a result of the engorgement and swelling of the labia and of the tissues surrounding the vagina, a contraction denotive of sexual arousal” (7). Tennyson’s lifelong interest in Shakespeare and Renaissance literature likely exposed him to the sexually suggestive nature of “purse,” and his variation on the term here subtly reveals his speaker’s fear that, since he last saw her, Maud’s once-innocent mouth has become an organ of sexual consumption that she will now use to deplete him of sexual energy, much as her father had engorged himself on the speaker’s family fortune.

Although terrified of Maud ravishing him, the speaker is also excited by both her “singular beauty” (I, 67)—rumors of which have preceded her return—and her youthful intimations of sexual aggressiveness. This simultaneous fear and attraction so disturbs him that he concludes the first canto by announcing he will “bury” himself\(^8\) to avoid the temptation to become her willing victim:

What is she now? My dreams are bad. She may bring me a curse.
No, there is fatter game on the moor; she will let me alone.
Thanks, for the fiend best knows whether woman or man be the worse.
I will bury myself in myself, and the Devil may pipe to his own. (I, 73-76)

---

\(^7\) According to Robert Bernard Martin, Tennyson had fully immersed himself in Shakespeare by the age of fourteen and engaged in productions of Shakespeare while at Cambridge (37, 128). Tennyson’s poetry of course draws heavily from Shakespeare, most obviously in the “Mariana” poems and “Isabel” (both named for characters from Measure for Measure), “Kate” (The Taming of the Shrew), and Maud itself, which Tennyson once called “a little Hamlet” (qtd. in Hallam Tennyson 334). Hallam, who devotes three pages to his father’s adoration of Shakespeare (660-63), reports that Tennyson had repeatedly asked in his final days for his Shakespeare, which was open to Cymbeline when he died (774-76).

\(^8\) William E. Buckler sees burial as the poem’s central narrative motif, similar to the recurrence of Christmas in In Memoriam: “The narrative curve is from one kind of burial to another kind of burial—from burying himself in himself to burying himself in a cause” (212).
Despite the speaker’s attempt to retreat into the self-sufficiency of his own mind and body, his unbidden sexual longings follow him into the second canto, in which he sees Maud for the first time since their childhood. To preserve himself from her mature sexuality, he adapts his earlier reference to her as “the moon-faced darling” to envision in her face not lively ardor but cold and unappealing deadness:

Long have I sighed for a calm: God grant I may find it at last!
It will never be broken by Maud, she has neither savour nor salt,
But a cold and clear-cut face, as I found when her carriage past,
Perfectly beautiful: let it be granted her: where is the fault?
All that I saw (for her eyes were downcast, not to be seen)
Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null,
Dead perfection, no more; nothing more, if it had not been
For a chance of travel, a paleness, an hour’s defect of the rose,
Or an underlip, you may call it a little too ripe, too full,
Or the least little delicate aquiline curve in a sensitive nose,
From which I escaped heart-free, with the least little touch of spleen.
(I, 77-87)

Assigning to her face a series of lunar descriptors—“cold and clear-cut,” “icily regular,” “a paleness”—the speaker connects Maud to the frigid feminine chastity that poetry and mythology traditionally attribute to the moon. Moreover, by portraying her eyes as submissively “downcast,” he strips her of aggressiveness. His denial of Maud’s predatory sensuality, he hopes, will defuse her erotic power over him.

The speaker’s attempt to redefine Maud’s face as meek and asexual, however, has unintended consequences, for his scrutiny of it increasingly reveals the features—in particular, her overripe lower lip (I, 85) and her pallid complexion (I, 84)—that display the sensuality he verbally denies. Writers of Tennyson’s time and earlier asserted that full lips indicated a dangerously sensual temperament. The eighteenth-century physiognomist Johann Casper Lavater claims that “Very fleshy lips must ever have to contend with sensuality and indolence.” In an 1852 study of physiognomy, the artist Thomas Woolnoth similarly links “thickness and curling of the lips, which are eager and insatiate” with voluptuousness (112). Woolnoth mostly associates this character type with gustatory pleasures, but he also notes more generally that

---

Examples abound. Diana (or Artemis), the goddess of the moon, is of course virginal. Theseus in A Midsummer Night’s Dream correlates chastity with the moon:

> For aye to be in shady cloister mew’d
> To live a barren sister all your life,
> Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon. (I, i, 71-73)

In a song from Cynthia’s Revels, Ben Jonson refers to Cynthia, the goddess of the moon, as “Queen and huntress, chaste and fair” (V, vi, 1). Percy Bysshe Shelley was particularly drawn to this image. In “Epipsychidion,” he represents Mary Shelley as “the cold chaste Moon” (l. 281), and in “The Cloud,” he refers to the moon as “That orbèd maiden with white fire laden” (l. 45).
The Victorian

voluptuaries never relax their characters “till their creature expectations are fully satisfied” (116). Maud’s pallor, which the speaker had hoped to be the sign of her lunar chastity, also ironically suggests her carnality. Lavater notes, “a pale face is indication of natural inclination towards sexual pleasure” (qtd. in Frayling 387), and the Freudian psychologist Ernest Jones likewise claims that the pallid countenance is common to the “over-sexual” person (115). Far from establishing the submissiveness he seeks, the speaker’s first investigation of Maud’s mature face indicates the same fleshly and acquisitive desires he had imagined in her youthful receiving of the grapes. At the same time, it unmistakably illuminates for the reader the sexual nature of what Shaw accurately calls the speaker’s “enslavement” (173-74).

Significantly, wan complexions and overripe lips also dominate the nineteenth-century literary conception of the vampire. Mario Praz writes in reference to Romantic literature, “The typical Fatal Woman is always pale, just as the Byronic hero was pale” (221). Frayling, in his catalog of fictional vampires from 1687 to 1913, lists variations of pallor or cadaverousness as a distinguishing physical feature of the vampires created by such diverse nineteenth-century writers as Rymer, John Polidori, E. T. A. Hoffman, and Alexandre Dumas (42-62). Bram Stoker will later make paleness almost a generic requirement of the vampire when he writes of Count Dracula, “The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor” (22). While their complexions are normally pale, literary vampires feature different lip shapes. Some vampires, such as Edgar A. Poe’s Berenice, have “thin and shrunken lips” (215), the better to expose their prominent canine teeth, but many vampiric creatures feature full, sexualized lips. The narrator of Poe’s “Ligeia” (first published 1838) notes “the soft, voluptuous slumber of her under[lip]” (312); Charles Baudelaire, in his erotic poem “Les métamorphoses du vampire” (c. 1857), describes the vampiric seductress’s lips as “bouche de fraise” (l. 1) or “strawberry mouth”; and Dracula’s eroticized female companions will have full, red lips:

All three had brilliant white teeth, that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips. … The fair girl went on her knees, and bent over me, fairly gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight

10 Priscilla Glanville reaches a similar conclusion: “the dual fixation with the bloody lips of the heath and Maud’s dangerous beauty, rarely expressed in terms explicitly sexual, reveals the speaker’s complete sense of helplessness and injury” (19-20).

11 While folkloric descriptions of vampires vary more widely, they also often focus on pallor and full lips. Describing the folkloric vampire, Montague Summers writes that its “skin is deathly pale, but the lips are very full and rich, blub and red” (179), and Jones notes that besides indicating licentious sexuality, pallor also signifies vampirism (115).

12 Jackson Mathews translates this phrase as “strawberry lips,” while Jeremy Reed more freely renders it, “The woman with the scarlet lipsticked mouth” (89).
the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth. (39-40)

The speaker cannot extricate Maud’s tempting sexuality from her parasitic intentions: the same physical qualities—her plump lip and her pale complexion—that reveal one also reveal the other. What terrifies him even more, however, is that both of these facets of Maud’s being are inseparable from her family’s parasitic legacy. Her sensual beauty, he fears, lures him so she can engage in the same vampiric acts her father inflicted upon the speaker’s father.

While the speaker’s terror of Maud’s aggression is intertwined with his nightmarish vision of his father’s emasculation, it also responds to what David Gilmore calls “a universal obsession with oral aggression” (177-78). Gilmore claims that throughout time and across cultures, depictions of monsters concentrate “obsessively upon the mouth as weapon” (178). Like her father, who metaphorically sucked the life from the speaker’s father, Maud seems to be such an archetypal oral predator. Specifically, her “too ripe, too full” lip, her sexualized “purse-mouth,” and her vampiric lineage and physiognomy suggest the **vagina dentata**, the fanged female genitalia that, according to the ancient myth made popular in the West by Freud, unman the male lover. Adèle Olivia Gladwell and James Havoc write vividly of the masculine fear of vampiric mutilation:

> While women may welcome the attentions of the thanatoid stranger … it is more common for men to live and dream in dread of the female vampire’s bloody mouth. Disembodied, the genito-features recall congested haematic labia unnaturally champing with fangs. The powerful **vagina dentata**, threatening him with emasculation and loss of his “attribute.” (6)

In locating the source of her aggression in her overripe, erotic “purse-mouth,” the speaker comes to imagine the adult Maud not merely as alluring or even licentious, but as a feminine version of her “gorged” father. She becomes monstrous, an insatiable, castrating vampire who will descend upon him and ravage him until he is as “flaccid and drained” as his father.

Despite her threatening aspect, Maud passes quietly by, leading the speaker to assert at the end of the second canto that he has escaped “with the least little touch of spleen.” Her supernatural monstrosity nevertheless intensifies in the third canto. Although she is physically absent, her sympathy with the moon admits her into his “dark garden ground” (I, 97), where she wreaks new and even crueler forms of havoc upon his mind and body:

> Cold and clear-cut face, why come you so cruelly meek, Breaking a slumber in which all spleenful folly was drowned, Pale with the golden beam of an eyelash dead on the cheek, Passionless, pale, cold face, star-sweet on a gloom profound; Womanlike, taking revenge too deep for a transient wrong Done but in thought to your beauty, and ever as pale as before
Continuing to conflate Maud with the moon, the speaker first addresses the moon’s “Cold and clear-cut face,” which replicates his description of Maud early in the second canto (I, 79). Although he likely intends this epithet to restore his hope that she and the moon are equally chaste and cold, his contemplation of both the moonlight’s physical properties and Maud’s refusal to leave his consciousness instead prompts him to imply that she and the moonlight act in vampiric league against him. In describing the moon’s face as “Pale with the golden beam of an eyelash dead on the cheek” (I, 90), the speaker invests it with the same predatory behavior that makes Maud and her father so frightening. “The golden beam,” which foreshadows the speaker’s later transformation of Maud from lunar specter to solar goddess, seems to warm the cold moon and reveal its beauty, but it also reminds the reader that this beauty derives only from the moon’s ability to leech light upon the sun’s daily death.

Aside from being itself vampiric, the moon enables Maud’s vampiric predations against the speaker. The moon in mid-Victorian literature commonly acts as a vehicle for the vampire’s supernatural abilities. It was, according to Auerbach, “the central ingredient of vampire iconography”—more important even than “fangs, penetration, sucking, and staking” (25)—and its powers included “turn[ing] body into spirit” (27) and granting the vampire “the ghost’s freedom from natural laws” (35). Lunar regeneration was an important facet of nineteenth-century vampire literature that Maud shares. Auerbach writes that such famous vampires as Varney, Alan Raby (from Dion Boucicault’s play The Phantom), and Ruthven (from J. R. Planché’s play The Vampire) do not merely live by night but gain their life from moonlight (25). Raby and Varney in particular undergo numerous deaths and rebirths, with the moon always restoring their lives (35, 36). Similarly, Maud strengthens in accord with the lunar cycle, perpetually “Growing and fading and growing” (I, 94, 96) like the moon over the months. She also, however, gains power from the speaker, who in her presence loses even the strength to control his own body.

Maud’s lunar powers, the speaker fears, admit her into his mind and body, where her erotic presence creates the same lunacy that drove his father to suicide.13

Upon entering the speaker’s grove, the moon and Maud first combine to overcome

---

13 The OED defines “lunacy” as “intermittent insanity such as was formerly supposed to be brought about by the changes of the moon.” Such associations between the moon and the human mind are quite old; the OED’s earliest citation is from 1541.
the liquids elemental to life: the sea and the blood. The moon announces its inescapable gravitational force in the sounds of the “shipwrecking roar” and “the scream of a maddened beach” (I, 98, 99). Similarly, Maud proclaims her possession of the speaker by controlling the movement of his blood as he sleeps. Under her “Growing and fading and growing” influence, he says, he involuntarily “arose” (I, 97) in the middle of the night. While this image describes his restless nocturnal wandering, it also implies an erection, the engorging flow of blood into the genitalia that, to borrow his suggestive words from the end of Part I, makes him “blossom in purple and red” (I, 92). Such an unbidden, erotic invasion makes her resemble a succubus, which Matthew Bunson defines as “A female demon, … a night fiend that visits men in their sleep to torment their dreams and to engage in sexual relations” (248). Ernest Jones alludes to such a creature when he describes a beautiful or frightful being, who first exhausts the sleeper with passionate embraces and then withdraws from him a vital fluid: all this can point only to a natural and common process, namely to nocturnal emissions accompanied with dreams of a more or less erotic nature. In the unconscious mind blood is commonly an equivalent for semen.

In so ravishing the speaker, Maud’s domination of him becomes almost complete: she has now assumed control of both his life-preserving blood and his life-giving semen, much as her father had robbed his father of money and potency. The torture to which she submits the speaker is even greater, however, for she can invade his dreams every night, just as the moon eternally tortures the sea. Maud’s parasitic accumulation of her victim’s vital energy puts her in the company of such deadly Romantic vampires as Geraldine and Lycius, but it also plants an image of rebirth in the speaker’s mind. While Maud and the moon conspire in the third canto to pull him from his self-constructed grave so that she might sexually feed on him again and again, his later love for her will transform her into the life-giving sun, which raises him from dry death into blossoming life. After her disembodied voice calls him from his isolation in the fifth canto, he begins reimagining her as other supernatural identities that will lead him out of hatred and into love for her, love for nature, and love for his fellow citizen. Hearing Maud sing “A martial song like a trumpet’s call!” (I, 166) under “the sunny sky” in her garden (I, 174) first inspires him to transform her into a solar goddess, an arduous process that does not end until the dawn light heralds her entry into her garden at the end of Part I. Then, after he symbolically dies (II, 139-40) and suffers burial in the madhouse (II, v), she is reborn as a goddess of war who raises him to harmony with his fellow citizens.

---

14 Frayling, in claiming that vampirism is among the most ancient of all myths, links the sea to blood: “The vampire is as old as the world. Blood tastes of the sea—where we all come from” (4).

15 The speaker hints at Maud’s powers to create nightmares at the end of the first canto: “My dreams are bad. She may bring me a curse” (I, 73).
Englishmen. Despite the obvious differences between these two deific identities, both reconcile his body to the social and natural worlds that so frighten him in the early cantos: as a solar goddess, she will cause the “happy stars” to “Beat with [his] heart more blest than heart can tell” (I, 679-80), and as a goddess of war, she will help him mix his breath “With a loyal people shouting a battle cry” (III, 35). Tennyson once said that “the central idea” of Maud is “the holy power of Love” (qtd. in Hallam Tennyson 341), but before the speaker can acknowledge and enjoy any of the redeeming love she makes possible, he must first endure the vampiric and spectral Maud whose power over nature and himself reveals that he is in the presence of the supernatural.
The Victorian

Works Cited


