

John Stagg, "The Vampyre"

Stagg (1770 – 1823) was born near Carlisle, near the Lake Country made famous by Wordsworths and Coleridge. He lived for a time in Wigton, in northern England, where he ran "Stagg's Circulating Library." Stagg published his first volume, *Miscellaneous Poems*, in 1790 (reprinted in 1804 and 1807), and in 1810 he published *Minstrel of the North*, which included this vampire poem. He published another collection, *The Cumberland Minstrel: Being a Poetical Miscellany of Legendary, Gothic, and Romantic Tales* in 1821. Stagg, who spent most of his adult life in Manchester, was known as "The Blind Bard" or "The Blind Bard of Wigton"; a childhood accident left him permanently sightless.

ARGUMENT.

The story of the *Vampyre* is founded on an opinion or report which prevailed in Hungary, and several parts of Germany, towards the beginning of the last century: — It was then asserted, that, in several places, dead persons had been known to leave their graves, and, by night, to revisit the habitations of their friends; whom, by suckosity¹, they drained of their blood as they slept. The person thus phlebotomised was sure to become a Vampyre in their turn; and if it had not been for a lucky thought of the clergy, who ingeniously recommended staking them in their graves, we should by this time have had a greater swarm of blood-suckers than we have at present, numerous as they are. Many and ingenious were the animadversions, both of the faculty and the clergy, to adopt some probable reasons for the physical cause of such an uncommon phenomenon. — It was asserted that a portion of the animal spirits, not having escaped at the decease of the body, had retained a power of volition; and, investing themselves with some part of the body which had not immediately yielded to putrefaction, they were thus enabled to make those prodigious excursions from the grave, and to return at pleasure, without any apparent inconvenience. Others were of opinion that these were a class of demons, who are supposed to be very numerous, who getting possession of any human excrescences, rendered themselves partially corporeal, and perfectly visible at pleasure. From some of our modern voyagers it appears, that the notion of the existence of Vampyres was very generally known and credited among the Dutch, and some other settlements in America. — I do not imagine that a thousandth part of the world are acquainted with the reason why the secundine,² immediately after the nativity of the foetus, is so carefully deflagrated³ by the obstetric and others, who preside at the *accouchement*.⁴ This was founded on the opinion that those numerous domestic demons, of whom they had such perfect belief, were tenacious of any opportunity that furnished them with a means of obtaining any portion of humanity, which they certainly preferred to any other animal substances. We may suppose that the umbilicum would make a very desirable jerkin for one of these gentry. Hence it has been, that since they had such a desire to render themselves in part corporeal and visible, as it pleased them, that when human excrescences were not easily obtainable, they were forced to repair to the common slaughter-houses, carrion heaps, etc. there to array themselves in such habiliments as chance threw in their way. From which we may infer the reason so many of our common apparitions have, per force, been compelled to appear in the forms of horses, cows, sheep, asses, dogs, cats, etc. in fine, every sort of animal; so that many of these might, in fact, be said to be the ghosts of the animals they represent, rather than of any particular person.

"Why looks my lord so deadly pale?
Why fades the crimson from his cheek?
What can my dearest husband ail?
Thy heartfelt cares, O Herman, speak!

¹ A delightful (and obvious term), footnoted here only because I can't refrain from mentioning that somehow this word has escaped the notice even of the good folks at the OED.

² the placenta or "afterbirth"

³ burned

⁴ the period of labor/childbirth

"Why, at the silent hour of rest,
 Dost thou in sleep so sadly mourn?
 Has tho' with heaviest grief oppress'd,
 Griefs too distressful to be borne. 5

"Why heaves thy breast? — why throbs thy heart?
 O speak! and if there be relief, 10
 Thy Gertrude solace shall impart,
 If not, at least shall share thy grief.

"Wan is that cheek, which once the bloom
 Of manly beauty sparkling shew'd;
 Dim are those eyes, in pensive gloom, 15
 That late with keenest lustre glow'd.

"Say why, too, at the midnight hour,
 You sadly pant and tug for breath,
 As if some supernat'ral pow'r
 Were pulling you away to death? 20

"Restless, tho' sleeping, still you groan,
 And with convulsive horror start;
 O Herman! to thy wife make known
 That grief which preys upon thy heart. "

"O Gertrude! how shall I relate 25
 Th' uncommon anguish that I feel;
 Strange as severe is this my fate, —
 A fate I cannot long conceal.

"In spite of all my wonted strength,
 Stern destiny has seal'd my doom; 30
 The dreadful malady at length
 Wil drag me to the silent tomb!"

"But say, my Herman, what's the cause
 Of this distress, and all thy care.
 That, vulture-like, thy vitals gnaws, 35
 And galls thy bosom with despair?

"Sure this can be no common grief,
 Sure this can be no common pain?
 Speak, if this world contain relief,
 That soon thy Gertrude shall obtain." 40

"O Gertrude, 'tis a horrid cause,
 O Gertrude, 'tis unusual care,
 That, vulture-like, my vitals gnaws,
 And galls my bosom with despair.

"Young Sigismund, my once dear friend, 45
 But lately he resign'd his breath;
 With others I did him attend

Unto the silent house of death.

"For him I wept, for him I mourn'd,
Paid all to friendship that was due; *50*
But sadly friendship is return'd,
Thy Herman he must follow too!

"Must follow to the gloomy grave,
In spite of human art or skill;
No pow'r on earth my life can save, *55*
'Tis fate's unalterable will!

"Young Sigismund, my once dear friend,
But now my persecutor foul,
Doth his malevolence extend
E'en to the torture of my soul. *60*

"By night, when, wrapt in soundest sleep,
All mortals share a soft repose,
My soul doth dreadful vigils keep,
More keen than which hell scarcely knows.

"From the drear mansion of the tomb, *65*
From the low regions of the dead,
The ghost of Sigismund doth roam,
And dreadful haunts me in my bed!

"There, vested in infernal guise,
(By means to me not understood,) *70*
Close to my side the goblin lies,
And drinks away my vital blood!

"Sucks from my veins the streaming life,
And drains the fountain of my heart!
O Gertrude, Gertrude! dearest wife! *75*
Unutterable is my smart.

"When surfeited, the goblin dire,
With banqueting by suckled gore,
Will to his sepulchre retire,
Till night invites him forth once more. *80*

"Then will he dreadfully return,
And from my veins life's juices drain;
Whilst, slumb'ring, I with anguish mourn,
And toss with agonizing pain!

"Already I'm exhausted, spent; *85*
His carnival is nearly o'er,
My soul with agony is rent,
To-morrow I shall be no more!

"But, O my Gertrude! dearest wife!

The keenest pangs hath last remain'd—
 When dead, I too shall seek thy life,
 Thy blood by Herman shall be drain'd! 90

"But to avoid this horrid fate,
 Soon as I'm dead and laid in earth,
 Drive thro' my corpse a jav'lin straight; —
 This shall prevent my coming forth. 95

"O watch with me, this last sad night,
 Watch in your chamber here alone,
 But carefully conceal the light
 Until you hear my parting groan. 100

"Then at what time the vesper-bell
 Of yonder convent shall be toll'd,
 That peal shall ring my passing knell,
 And Herman's body shall be cold!

"Then, and just then, thy lamp make bare,
 The starting ray, the bursting light,
 Shall from my side the goblin scare,
 And shew him visible to sight!" 105

The live-long night poor Gertrude sate,
 Watch'd by her sleeping, dying lord;
 The live-long night she mourn'd his fate,
 The object whom her soul ador'd. 110

Then at what time the vesper-bell
 Of yonder convent sadly toll'd,
 The, then was peal'd his passing knell,
 The hapless Herman he was cold! 115

Just at that moment Gertrude drew
 From 'neath her cloak the hidden light;
 When, dreadful! she beheld in view
 The shade of Sigismund! — sad sight! 120

Indignant roll'd his ireful eyes,
 That gleam'd with wild horrific stare;
 And fix'd a moment with surprise,
 Beheld aghast th' enlight'ning glare.

His jaws cadaverous were besmear'd
 With clott'd carnage o'er and o'er,
 And all his horrid whole appear'd
 Distent, and fill'd with human gore! 125

With hideous scowl the spectre fled;
 She shriek'd aloud; — then swoon'd away!
 The hapless Herman in his bed,
 All pale, a lifeless body lay! 130

Next day in council 'twas decree,
(Urg'd at the instance of the state,) That shudd'ring nature should be freed *135*
From pests like these ere 'twas too late.

The choir then burst the fun'ral dome
Where Sigismund was lately laid,
And found him, tho' within the tomb,
Still warm as life, and undecay'd. *140*

With blood his visage was distain'd,
Ensanguin'd were his frightful eyes,
Each sign of former life remain'd,
Save that all motionless he lies.

The corpse of Herman they contrive *145*
To the same sepulchre to take,
And thro' both carcasses they drive,
Deep in the earth, a sharpen'd stake!

By this was finish'd their career,
Thro' this no longer they can roam; *150*
From them their friends have nought to fear,
Both quiet keep the slumb'ring tomb.