



The Poet and the Vampyre: The Curse of Byron and the Birth of Literature's Greatest Monsters

Andrew McConnell Stott

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Love affairs, literary rivalries, and the supernatural collide in an inspired journey to Lake Geneva, where Byron, the Shelleys, and John Polidori come together to create literature's greatest monsters

In the spring of 1816, Lord Byron was the greatest poet of his generation and the most famous man in Britain, but his personal life was about to erupt. Fleeing his celebrity, notoriety, and debts, he sought refuge in Europe, taking his young doctor with him. As an inexperienced medic with literary aspirations of his own, Doctor John Polidori could not believe his luck.

That summer another literary star also arrived in Geneva. With Percy Bysshe Shelley came his lover, Mary, and her step-sister, Claire Clairmont. For the next three months, this party of young bohemians shared their lives, charged with sexual and artistic tensions. It was a period of extraordinary creativity: Mary Shelley started writing *Frankenstein*, the gothic masterpiece of Romantic fiction; Byron completed *ChildeHarold's Pilgrimage*, his epic poem; and Polidori would begin *The Vampyre*, the first great vampire novel.

It was also a time of remarkable drama and emotional turmoil. For Byron and the Shelleys, their stay by the lake would serve to immortalize them in the annals of literary history. But for Claire and Polidori, the Swiss sojourn would scar them forever. 16 pages of color and B&W photographs

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