

35. NEAPOLITAN VAMPIRISM

Demons and **vampires**, **madmen** and **magicians** have all left their mark on Campania and Naples over the centuries. Intellectuals and laypeople alike, have feared and invoked them, revered and rejected them. It seems strange, but it was during the XVIII century, the **Enlightened century**, that their popularity grew and really took a hold on the collective conscience.

This was the cultural context in which **Costantino Grimaldi** worked (1667-1750), a Neapolitan Lawyer and expert in Mystery phenomena. His ***Dissertazione sopra le tre magie*** (1751), is a good example, a summary of all the Mystery literature with 169 quotations in Latin. It talks about flying witches, the evil eye, apparitions as well as resurrection and vampirism. Vampires, writes Grimaldi, are dead men who appear to their loved ones: they discuss family matters with them and sometimes suck their blood. However, in ***Psychoanalysis of nightmares*** by **Ernest Jones** (1931), we can read his theory that fear of vampires is really the expression of a deep-seated desire for the death of a parent on the part of a person who perceived their parent as the enemy when they were alive. Does that mean we are close to the **truth**? We don't know. Because this is obviously a mystery.

Another link between Naples and vampires is a kind of cult book on the subject of vampirism. It's entitled ***Varney the Vampire***, a novel which was presented anonymously in 220 different instalments from 1847 onwards and is attributed to **Thomas Preskett Prest**. It's about the adventures of an English nobleman who became a vampire and then spread the epidemic around Naples, the city he chooses to end his life. The magical **Vesuvius** seems the most suitable place for killing himself so he throws himself into the crater to end his days.

A last, mysterious link with vampires can be found in the unusual story ***Il dottor Nero*** (1907) by **Daniele Oberto Marrama**, a Neapolitan writer who lived sometime between the XIX and XX century. He wrote a series of good fantasy stories but was unknown outside a small specialist circle because Italian academics were convinced that modern fantasy (like that of Poe or Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde) had nothing to do with Italian literary tradition. Doctor Nero is the story of the marriage between an Irish nobleman and a young Italian girl. A vampire, who has already possessed the girl, comes between the couple when he returns to claim the girl back. There is a subtle, decadent sensuality to the tale which is poised somewhere between the totally Mediterranean atmosphere of a sunny Capri and that of the dark mists surrounding the Irish Manor house.