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#### **Abstract:**

This essay attempts to reassess the figure of the vampire in Gothic literature by taking a close look to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1871). The paper establishes the connection between the two novels and points out some common concerns of their time by focusing on the social impact of the figure of the vampire, and the gender roles of the New Woman and the homosexual.

**Keywords:** Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, Gothic literature.

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## **Victorian Vampires: Cultural Anxieties in Nineteenth-Century Gothic**

### **1. Introduction: Gothic Literature and the Vampire: Catalyst of Anxieties and Uncertainties**

Since its birth in the eighteenth century, Gothic literature has been a vehicle for repressed fears and it has provided a voice for expressing unspeakable social and moral taboos. Hence, the main issue at stake here is how to contextualize and decode the figure of the vampire in this specific and turbulent historical period, an era marked by scientific discoveries and research publications such as Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) that contributed to disintegrate former beliefs. The collapse of these previously common truths provoked an atmosphere of confusion that encouraged the rising of anxieties regarding patriarchal and social order, sexuality and the future of western civilization.

This paper argues that all these overwhelming, typical nineteenth-century concerns are present, comprised and embodied in the figure of the vampire, in the above-mentioned literary works. Therefore, this essay aims at revealing the true nature of the vampire by focusing on the effect its bite provokes on the identity of its victims. The paper will deal with the following issues: First, the influence of the vampire upon respectable bourgeois characters who adjust themselves to the hedonistic lifestyle of the aristocrat; then, I will focus on the overlapping between social and sexual identity, using the figures of the New Woman and the homosexual; finally, I will return to the dichotomy between civilization and savagery as well as how the image of the vampire contributes to blur the distinctions between both terms.

Besides, the twenty-five-year gap between the publications of both novels enables us readers to observe the progressive deterioration of the cultural system, regarding the growth of social, economic and religious instability. Therefore, the Victorian Vampire re-emerged as *spokesperson* of several nineteenth century existential anxieties, and its hunting represents the Victorians' desperate attempt to fight back uncertainty as well as to put an end to the atmosphere of crisis and decadence in late nineteenth-century.

### **2. Social Class Anxieties: Vampirism as Snobbism**

In the context of nineteenth-century's society, the role of the vampire as catalyst of social and moral concerns is built upon the most disturbing of them all, namely, social mobility. Therefore, worries regarding social hierarchy work as the epicentre from which all the other preoccupations of the age branch out. In other words, it is through the symbolic image of the threatening aristocratic vampire that contemporary anxieties of the period are structured and discussed.

The new bourgeois and *civilized* society identified aristocracy with a savage feudal past, a time when access to social power and recognition depended entirely on ancestry. Contrary to that previous model in which power was achieved through the tyrannical

conquest of land, a counter discourse had been imposing itself since the early modern period. The new system placed money instead of land at its heart, and established labour as the innovative means for success. Hence, the association between the aristocrat and the vampire stems from this historical background, insofar as the aristocrat was conceived as the parasite that feeds from other people's work. However, behind these demonising depictions of aristocracy, a repressed envy of their social standard and influence appears. In other words, as the bourgeoisie achieved higher economic power, the temptation of hegemonic control begun to spread among the austere middle-class, which, in turn, started to yearn for the same social recognition aristocracy still retained

Both *Carmilla* and *Dracula* are two Gothic narratives that deal with the complex and double-faced relationship between these two predominant social classes. Both texts reflect the strained dialectics generated by the mutual interdependence between an upper-middle class that longed for social prestige, and a disempowered and ruined aristocracy in need of money to guarantee their lifestyle. Thus, it is not surprising that while both vampires are members of aristocracy, the victims are prototypical examples of respectable bourgeois citizens.

Vampires embody the threat that the idle, pleasure-seeking life-style of aristocrats represented, inasmuch as it implies a temptation for the new wealthy but stark social classes. Aristocrats are depicted as an evil force that drains bourgeois characters' self-restraint and brings them back to feudal times. In short, vampires incarnate the outcome of adopting regressive patterns of behaviour, namely, of respectable and decent well-off people acting as aristocrats, and turning into snobs<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, what Gothic literature brings to light is the uncanny nature of Snobbism as Vampirism. As I mentioned above, the link between both social classes was of mutual dependence, a sort of parasitic conjunction, which implies that both of them drained life from each other. Therefore, the thirst for blood of the vampire can also be understood as the bourgeois desire to transfer "blue blood" into their veins, in order, arguably, to resurrect and take hold of feudal, complete and undeniable control over the masses.

*Carmilla*, published in 1871, portrays an early moment in this transformation into a vampire, as Laura's father still considers Carmilla to be the perfect companion for his daughter. Carmilla then represents the aristocrat who preserves her social recognition, despite her having been disposed of her previous privileges. Carmilla belongs to "the proud family of Karnstein, now extinct, who once owned [...] [a]desolate chateau" (Le Fanu 2) which is now ruined, even as the town where it stood. Moreover, the fact that the village is now uninhabited seems to be the result of Carmilla's habits of feeding on peasantry. However, with the abolition of vassalage and the consequences of Industrial Revolution, peasants begun to be scarce, and in order to survive, Carmilla is forced to include the emerging social class in her diet.

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<sup>1</sup> The term snobbism has its origins in the late 18th century. "Early senses conveyed a notion of 'lower status or rank', later denoting a person seeking to imitate those of superior social standing or wealth. Folk etymology connects the word with Latin *sine nobilitate* 'without nobility'". (Oxford Online Dictionary) Thus, it is possible to interpret vampirism as bourgeois becoming aristocrat-like.

On the other hand, Laura and her father are middle class English citizens who, "though no means magnificent people, inhabit a castle" in Styria. The purchase of "this feudal residence" as a "bargain" (Le Fanu 2) symbolises both the value of money taking over the value of land as means of supporting social status, as well as a desire to assimilate their lifestyle to that of the "extinct" Karnsteins. (Le Fanu 2) This highlights the uncanny nature of the vampire, which means that Carmilla is the expression of Laura's potential snobbism. Moreover, the novella depicts both girls and their relationship in such a way that they actually mirror each other,<sup>2</sup> pointing towards the idea of Carmilla as representative of another side to Laura's personality.

Besides, despite finding "her habits [...] odd," (Le Fanu 25) Laura recognises that her infatuations "are *infectious*, and persons of a like temperament are pretty sure [...] to imitate them." (Le Fanu 39) Therefore, she is acknowledging Carmilla's power of seduction that "soothe[s her] resistance into a trance" (Le Fanu 23) so that she gradually loses her self-restraint and gives way to her "other side" which longs for a languid and pleasurable lifestyle.

Carmilla and Laura's relationship parallels the image of an early Victorian capitalism that started "to be ashamed of itself and which hides factories and stations beneath cumbrous Gothic superstructures; which prolonged and extols aristocratic models of life." (Moretti 434-435) In other words, the bourgeoisie tried to keep up appearances by condemning and destroying the aristocratic Vampire as a scapegoat for its moral decay. Still, it was precisely "the reductive and normalising limits of bourgeois morality and modes of production" what "produced the divided lifestyles of the middle classes, respectable by day and pleasure-seeking by night." (Botting 137)

By the time *Dracula* was published in 1897, capitalism had radicalised due to an outburst of investment and speculative movements aimed at accumulating money, i.e. power. (Moretti 433) Consequently, bourgeois economic and social hegemony imposed itself so that the unstoppable disappearance of aristocracy became an evident fact. *Dracula* then conveys a different picture of Victorian society: one of pervasive decadence in which anxieties about the future of civilization reached their peak.

Count Dracula can therefore be construed as the *fin de siècle* aristocrat whose decadence represents the by-product of his own moral degeneracy. Dracula's castle is ruined and he is the last of a "conquering race" in whose "veins ran the blood of [...] [the great Attila]." (Stoker 34) He is the noble who, despite finding himself completely bankrupted, refuses to abandon his medieval refuge since "[living] in a new house would kill [him]." (Stoker 29) Dracula is described as the last specimen of a race of despotic feudal lords who refuse to abandon their customs. His story about the mysterious "blue flames" (Stoker 27) that appeared wherever a treasure had been buried, helps illustrate his point of view. This is

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<sup>2</sup> Their doublings begin with their first encounter in a shared dream during their infancy. Besides, "both have lost their mothers and their countries (...). Like Laura's dead mother, Carmilla is a Karnstein." (Auerbach 43) Later, they suffer from the same illness and share its symptoms, what contributes to sharpen the uncanny effect.

made abundantly clear when Dracula exposes the basis for his certainty about the location of the treasure: "Why, there is hardly a foot of soil in all this region that has not been enriched by the blood of men [...] [and] When the invader was triumphant he found but little, for whatever there was had been sheltered in the friendly soil." (Stoker 27)

In other words, the feudal masters who inhabited the region of the Borgo Pass, in the Carpathians, buried their gold in the very ground of a battlefield that was about to be watered with their *blue* blood, so that the next invaders could not take hold of their possessions. Due to this legend, Dracula shows his vision of an unbreakable bond between blood, the "friendly soil" and power. Moreover, the shining flame is conveniently coloured in blue, supporting Dracula's opinion that only other fellow noblemen could attempt to find the buried gold. This is so because the "peasant is at heart a coward and a fool" (Stoker 27) who, being under vows, dares not contradict the will of his liege, the vampire.

Dracula ends his narrative with a strong statement about the "dishonourable peace" of the current situation, when "blood is too precious a thing [...] and the glories of the great races are as a tale that is told." (Stoker 35) At first sight, his speech might seem to be the expression of his own nostalgia for a past in which blood was the sole requisite to gain absolute power; insofar as dominance was guaranteed on terms of a privileged bloodline as well as prevalence in bloodsheds. But a more insightful reading possibly reveals another origin for the "dishonourable peace." Dracula points towards the end of actual war as a means to acquire power in exchange of another type of fight. Since blood has become a valuable object of desire for thirsty snobs, the unnecessary spilling of blue blood was avoided. Therefore, the bourgeois society used hard currency instead of swords to defeat the almost extinct aristocracy and to appropriate their social recognition.

This multiple interpretation can be as misleading as to the identity of the vampire. In fact, both *Dracula* and *Carmilla* point towards an uncanny origin of the vampire. Furthermore, all the future victims of the Count show certain signs of snobbism. It is precisely the intuition of having the enemy at home, what raises the alarm of Victorian society to its highest level. Thus, while Carmilla is regarded as beautiful and attractive, Dracula is portrayed as threatening and repulsive. Significantly, the physical appearance of the latter is animalised: "His face was [...] aquiline, [...]. His eyebrows were massive [...]. The mouth [...] with peculiar sharp teeth [...]. Strange to say, there were hairs in the centre of the palm. The nails were long and fine [and] sharp." (Stoker 23-24)

The main goal of this animalisation is the identification of Dracula's threat as non-human, insofar as he represents an evil power that exceeds common human malice. At the same time, this animalisation builds the connection between the contemporary association of animals' lack of self-restraint and the typically aristocratic inhuman and savage behaviour. In short, Dracula embodies the threat of feudalism, superstition, depravity and savagery returning to Victorian England. However, the interpretation of Dracula as an uncanny Vampire suggests that the forthcoming moral disintegration of the bourgeoisie comes actually from within its very social class.

Dracula is no ghost from the past, but rather the embodiment of "the capital of 1897", which is beginning to show its true nature of "concentration and monopoly." (Moretti 433) Hence, "Dracula is a true monopolist: solitary and despotic," (Moretti 433) as he aims at expanding his influence and does not allow "free trade" or competition. Furthermore, with his bites, Dracula destroys the "economic" independence of his victims, who are at his service from that moment on. (Moretti 433) No wonder the bourgeoisie feels threatened and bewildered, since they are witnessing how ancient monopoly—which seemed so long surmounted—was mysteriously re-emerging from within the promise of individual liberty: capitalism.

In short, the Vampire seems to be part of the new economic system; since, as Marx explained: "Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks." (quoted in Moretti 432) However, the nineteenth century middle-class citizen is blinded and unable to recognise his own face in the mirror. Consequently, they are "able to imagine monopoly only in the guise of [...] the aristocrat, the figure of the past, the relic of distant lands and dark ages." (Moretti 433) In Moretti's words, "Dracula is [...] at once the final product of the bourgeois century and its negation." (434)

### 3. Gender Roles Anxieties and Sexual Deviations

Oddly enough, by accepting the premise that snobbism is but one side of the cultural icon the vampire represents—i.e. the premise that has been discussed, albeit briefly, in the previous section—capitalism and industrialisation can be understood as the original cause of anxiety towards gender roles and sexual deviations in mid-late nineteenth century England. This section focuses on the changes that capitalism provoked regarding social interaction between sexes. Particularly, I will focus on the figure of the New Woman and the homosexual as well as on their impact upon the patriarchal society.

#### 3.1. Gender Roles: The New Woman.

The New Woman was "a professional woman who chose financial independence and personal fulfilment as alternatives to marriage and motherhood." (Senf 1982, 35) In addition, her active sexuality was understood as degenerate and *masculinised*, and therefore as threatening to feminise men in return.

*Carmilla* disrupts the conventions about "respectable femininity." (Nead 12) In fact, Carmilla rejects the "feminine ideal" and manages to outwit the established patriarchal norms by which "women exist to be married [...] depleted or rescued." (Auerbach 39) Moreover, she embodies the greatest offense: the absolute autonomy from men. Firstly, Carmilla, unlike Laura, has no patriarchal figure controlling her. Her mother is "a lady with a commanding air," (Le Fanu 11) and a mysterious "hideous black woman." (Le Fanu 16) Secondly, Carmilla's allegiance to conventions such as "physical frailty", which was seen as "a sign of respectable femininity," (Nead 29) works as a perfect cover to allow her to freely display her lesbianism before the blinded eyes of men.

Proofs that support the reading of Carmilla as a lesbian vampire are numerous, provided the sexualised relationship between Laura and Carmilla. Probably, the most clarifying passage is the one in which Carmilla narrates her conversion into a "vampire" as a result of her being wounded in the breast by a "cruel love-strange love." (Le Fanu 39) Taking into account that the word strange was a "euphemism for homosexual love," Carmilla might be suggesting "that [...] [her] original maker was female [...]." (Auerbach 40)

Carmilla's homosexuality entails two different consequences: one regarding the Victorian rejection of deviant sexual practises —that shall be discussed later on— and another one in which lesbianism symbolises the end of the role of the woman as a breeding object of exchange between parents —usually fathers— and future husbands. In other words, Carmilla is taking Laura away from her father's control by showing her the alternative of the independent woman. Carmilla teaches Laura how to escape from the conventional roles of "daughter" and "wife" as "objects of dear interest" to men that "cheered" their homes and "made their lives happy." (Le Fanu 59)

On the other hand, women in *Dracula* do not possess Carmilla's freedom, since, by the time Stoker's novel was published, anxieties towards gender roles had radicalised enormously. In the late Victorian period, views of the New Woman tended to focus mostly on their sexuality, which, in this case, is monstrous and threatening —not because of its homosexuality, but due to its active heterosexuality. Stoker's female vampires therefore "symbolise the evil that can result" from "sexual freedom and reversal of roles." (Senf 1982, 39)

The "vampiric mouth" that "equivocates [...] the easy separation of [...] masculine and feminine" (Craft 445) represents the reversal of roles in *Dracula*, inasmuch as Count Dracula's kiss awakens sexual desires in women and transforms their passivity into "voluptuous wantonness." (Auerbach 79) Lucy's transformation into a vampire illustrates this most clearly. However, it must be taken into account the fact that Lucy already had some features that made her a perfect victim for the Count. She was a snobbish Victorian lady who "should have shocked the "New Woman" with [her] appetites" (Stoker 86) and who wonders "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her [...]." (Stoker 60) Hence, Dracula's bite only encourages her desires, and Lucy starts wandering at night until the actual metamorphosis is completed:

[...] there came the *strange* change [...] the mouth opened and the pale gums, drawn back, made the teeth look longer and shaper than ever (...) and said in a soft, voluptuous voice [...]:

- Arthur! Oh, my love [...]! Kiss me! (Stoker 147)

In other words, Lucy the "prey", the passive woman who used to wait for Arthur's advances, dies; and a new sexually resolute woman emerges: Lucy the "hunter". This is signalled in her vampire-like "long and sharp" teeth that "usurp the function of penetration that [...] moralised taxonomy of gender reserves for males." (Craft 280) Then it is not



surprising that women's claims for sexual, intellectual and economic independence led to patriarchal paranoia about the "reversal or inversion of [masculine] sexual identity." (Craft 452)

In fact, the "vampiric mouth" has also been associated with folk tales about the *vagina dentanta*<sup>3</sup> and its castrating powers. This might be the reason why female Vampires in *Dracula* are described as "carnivorous animals" (Senf 1982, 41) whose abnormal sexual appetite forces men to assume the submissive and passive role. This inversion of gender roles is represented in *Dracula* in a passage in which Harker is being attacked by the three women vampires. After their attack, Harker surrenders himself willingly to their playfulness while lying "quiet, looking under [his] eyelashes in an agony of delightful anticipation" like a frightened maid. (Stoker 42) In other words, current interpretations of independent women as masculinised led to anxieties about the reversal of roles and about the consequent spread of a feminising phenomenon among men.

### 3.2. Sexual Deviations: Homosexuality; plague or pathological reproduction

There are numerous interpretations that support the idea that *Dracula* is constructed around a male's desire to be penetrated. What mostly terrifies the Victorian mind is "Dracula's hovering interest in Jonathan Harker," which is first evoked when Harker cuts himself while shaving, and which is postponed and disguised from then on through a series of "heterosexual displacement[s]," that is through women. (Craft 446)

Stoker achieves this displacement by providing female vampires with long, sharp teeth that equip them with the ability of piercing a man's skin, and thus avoiding a direct reference to homoerotic desire: "I could feel [...] the hard dents of two sharp teeth [...]. I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited- waited with beating heart." (Stoker 43)

However, Count Dracula's arrival interrupts the action just on time. And in an outburst of rage with his "fair cheeks blazing red with passion", he announces: "this man belongs to me!" (Stoker 43) This is the passage in which the homosexual threat Dracula represents to Harker is more clearly stated. In fact, it is made even more evident when Dracula answers the mocking accusations of the female vampires about his inability to love by saying "yes, I too can love" in a "soft whisper", while looking "attentively" at Harker. (Stoker 43)

However, once Dracula travels to England, he realises that he cannot fulfil his homosexual desires there and, yielding to Victorian morality, feeds only on women. Not only he has to renounce to his sexuality, but he is forced to live in secrecy. In fact, there are certain changes in the portrayal of homosexuality from Le Fanu to Stoker that illustrate the smear campaign against homosexuals that took place in the late Nineteenth-Century.

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<sup>3</sup> The *vagina dentanta* is a literary motif that appears in several folk tales and myths from different cultures across the world. It has been particularly interesting for "psychologically oriented studies" regarding the social construction of manhood and humanity as a whole. (Jackson 341) At Victorian times, it was associated with the risks of having sex with unknown women, namely prostitutes.



At some point in the novel<sup>4</sup> Dracula is silenced and imprisoned in his closet-coffin. Then, for the first time in Gothic literature, the vampire is completely disempowered. In *Carmilla*, conversely, the eponymous character is allowed to move freely and she is provided with a voice of her own. Moreover, she is portrayed as a seductive and tempting friend that drags Laura into vampirism by means of her "foolish embraces." (Le Fanu 23) In contrast, Dracula's physical appearance is designed to provoke rejection and disgust, and his touch is far from being a pleasant experience for Harker, who, in turn, experiences "a horrible feeling of nausea" at his touch. (Stoker 24)

There are two reasons for these discrepancies: on the one hand, their different historical background and, on the other, their different genders. While *Carmilla* represents the reawakening of aristocratic regressive patterns of behaviour as a future threat, snobbism in *Dracula* is a current practice among the bourgeoisie. Therefore, the figure of the aristocrat became paramount for the creation of a metaphorical and aesthetic discourse aimed at finding possible culprits for the *fin de siècle* decadence. This explains why the aristocratic vampire was associated with "narcissistic, [...] indulgent and unnatural" sexual practices defined as homosexual and regarded as perverse, deviant and harbinger of human extinction. (Bottin 138) Besides, Le Fanu represents female homosexuality from a male perspective, as a threat that affects only the *other sex*, whereas *Dracula* features a male vampire whose thirst for blood needs to be satiated with that of his equals. Therefore, Dracula is a far more threatening vampire, as he is an insider, an uncanny vampire.

This is intensified by the vampire's animalisation that symbolises its otherness. Dracula is completely otherised and transformed into a hybrid, that is, a monster. This feature, conversely, was not that common in Carmilla. In spite of her sporadic transformations into a cat, Carmilla preserves much of her human condition. In Harker's words, "What manner of man is this, or what manner of creature is it in the semblance of a man? (Stoker 39) Harker's comment is a clear product of Victorian values and morality, as it reflects the thought that "homosexuals [were] neither male nor female, but [...] the "intermediate sex", [...] the Undead," and the common believe that deviant behaviour inevitably led to physical disturbances. (Shaffer 472)

This connection between mental and physical disorders may stem from the fear-based campaign against the spread of venereal diseases that forever linked homosexuality and sexually transmitted diseases. It is then no wonder that discourses about homosexual practices were constructed around concepts of contagion and infection, and their potential immoral influence identified with pathological reproduction. Besides, as Fred Botting points out, "the origins of the vampire were explained as fears of the Plague, thought [...] to have emanated from the East." (146) Moreover, Dracula's animal associates, such as wolves, rats or bats are directly linked with contagious diseases. In sum, *Carmilla* and *Dracula* "are modern visions of epidemic contagions from the past [that] like venereal disease, enters the home only after (sexual) invitation." (Botting 148) They are a direct and inside threat to the values of austerity and self-restraint, already solidly established in Victorian culture. Vampires

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<sup>4</sup> Chapter XXIII

offered the promise of a pleasurable life style in which sexual intercourse had nothing to do with reproduction. Therefore, following the Victorian and Industrial ideology, they were not only considered unproductive, but a sort of agents of moral destruction and extinction. As such, they had to be eradicated.

#### 4. Restoration of order: the Crew of Light: Pathology or Crime

Gothic Literature emerged as counter narrative of the contemporary atmosphere of reason and science that reigned in the mid and late Victorian Period. This Era is indeed characterised by the publications of innovative theories dealing with existential issues from a non-religious perspective that meant the complete collapse of former interpretations of life. Consequently, uncertainty regarding human nature spread among the population so that the righteousness of the restrictive Victorian morals could be called into question. In order to deal with this anxiety that threatened the very core of the hierarchical social organization of the period, science replaced religion and became the new token for certainty to which the whole civilization would cling. As a consequence, there was an outburst of maps, treatises, dictionaries, encyclopaedias and so on.

Then, from 1850s on, there was a mania of redefining, categorising and rationalising the world, which was aimed at fighting against the uncertainty provoked by the unknown. Victorians, by labelling the unnamed, transformed the inexistent and unrecognisable into something solid and familiar. The birth of the vampire stems from an attempt —on behalf of society— to define and put a name to those individuals whose behaviour was considered *deviant* according to Victorian morality. Nineteenth-Century Gothic literature attempted at confronting society with the absurdity of these restrictive proceedings by suggesting that the Vampire —i.e., the monster, the creature from dark ages— was in fact an insider. Following the principles of the Freudian theory of psychoanalysis, the image of the vampire is generated by fear arousing from the "return of the repressed:" the resurrection of certain surmounted instincts that were forbidden and persecuted by certain suffocating codes of conduct (Moretti 438). The Vampire then constitutes the mirror which civilization dared not to look at. Harker's inability to see "no sign of a man" (Stoker 31) apart from himself in the mirror "is a manifestation of [his] moral blindness," according to Senf's work "*Dracula: the Unseen Face in the Mirror.*" (Senf 425) Vampires are the necessary lie, the desperate denial of the most horrific of truths: the fact that the monster is no other but a member of society. In Moretti's words, the vampire is a "rhetorical figure" with a "double function: it *expresses* the unconscious content and at the same time *hides* it." (443)

In conclusion, by creating the Vampire and identifying it as responsible for the decadence of the whole civilization, bourgeois and patriarchal masters were able to clean up their social image through their extermination, probably in order to give the impression that the threat of moral disintegration had been managed. Hence, the blame fell on the Other: women, homosexuals and everyone who did not yield to the appropriate lifestyle. On the other hand, the difficult task of restoring the order rested upon the shoulders of a group of fine gentlemen composed in its majority by members of the middle and upper classes. Their

mission was to discover the vampire by interpreting the signs that moral decadence had left in their physical appearance, since it was thought that "sin and immorality literally break out onto the surface of the body." (Nead 173) In short, they are the "Crew of Light," (Craft 445) the defenders of the established order. They are the emissaries of Reason brandishing the power of bureaucracy as a weapon to corner and annihilate the Vampire.

The patriarchal groups in *Carmilla* and *Dracula* share certain features such as the combination of all the new sources of authority of the period, as they count on the participation of doctors, psychiatrists and lawyers. Thus, they hunt the Vampire by making use of medical and legal discourses of their own creation. Besides, both the General in *Carmilla* and Dr. Van Helsing in *Dracula* are in charge of revealing the truth to the incredulous middle class men. They accuse them of being too rational and too prejudiced, arguing that "where all accustomed means have failed" (Le Fanu 76), it is necessary to *believe* rather than to *think*. Consequently, there is no room left for uncertainty. In addition, they identify themselves with the light that will dissipate the obscurity of ignorance. Their illuminating force comes from their journals. This is illustrated by Van Helsing's words: "This paper is sunshine [...] I am dazzled with so much light." (Stoker 165) Furthermore, once a subject has been enlightened with such a sacred and undeniable knowledge, their doubts and insecurities vanish forever; thus Harker's speech: "I felt impotent, and in the dark, and distrustful. But, now that I *know*, I am not afraid, even of the Count." (Stoker 168)

On the other hand, despite sharing the purpose of vanishing darkness and destroying its agents, the terms and tone of the two crusades against the Vampire I am dealing with are quite different. In *Carmilla*, the threat of the vampire is despised by the patriarchs until the very last moment, as seen in the behaviour of Laura's father who "was busy over some papers near the window" and did not see Carmilla's sexual advances towards Laura. (Le Fanu 31) This relaxed and careless attitude might be due to the fact that Carmilla was a Countess and not a Count. The idea of sexual, strong and witty women was not compatible with the image of the Victorian woman as wife and mother, as an "angel in the house". It is only when the threat of the lesbian, independent woman is revealed by a third person —the General— that Laura's father *believes* in vampires. Nevertheless, the main cause for the conversion of these two rational men is the Doctors themselves. Medicine was the new *religion*, insofar as it could explain questions which remained unanswered until then. Therefore, the science of Medicine gradually acquired an omniscient status through which the words of Doctors and physicians were understood as unquestionable truths.

In conclusion, medicine was now in possession of the capacity of absolute and unquestioned judgement. Thus, "physicians and surgeons —as members of privileged classes—, used their professional status and scientific authority to validate hegemonic definitions of femininity and female sexuality." (Nead 142-143) They catalogued those who did not follow the conventions as deviant and victims of disease. Hence they were "treated" in the name of health until they were "cured." (Nead 22) Their influence was regarded as an infection, and their symptomatology was stated in different medical treatises, such as "A

Practical Treatise on the Diseases Peculiar to Women,"<sup>5</sup> which brought home the anxieties about female sexuality by conceiving them as sexual pathologies.

In this way, Carmilla's love for Laura is transformed into pathology. It is no wonder why she claims that "doctors never did [her] any good." (Le Fanu 30) Furthermore, at the end of the novella, Carmilla's symptoms and diagnosis are explained as if they were a medical study: "Its horrible lust for living blood supplies the vigour of its waking existence; [...] [It] is prone to be fascinated with an engrossing vehemence, resembling the passion of love, by particular persons. [...] It will never desist until it has satiated its passion." (Le Fanu 84)

This is supposed to be the conclusion of the "laborious investigation" that summarises "the conditions of the vampire", that is, the female homosexual (Le Fanu 83). Besides, once Carmilla has infected Laura, they both constitute two clinic cases of multiple sexual-related illnesses, showing signs of hysteria, chlorosis, and sleep-walking. All in all, Carmilla's lesbianism was considered as an illness by the patriarchal figures that prescribed her the only possible cure for her deviation, to wit: sex with a man. In other words, the only way of "extinguishing [the] monster" is by carrying out the "righteous and merciful" (Le Fanu 7) *ritual* of driving a "sharp stake [...] through the heart of the vampire" —the stake and the heart arguably symbolising the male and female genitals— cutting her head off and burning her remains (Le Fanu 82). Most notably, this ritual resembles more a murder and a brutal rape which is carried out by savages rather than by men of Reason.

A "morbid cult of "female invalidism"" (Nead 29) emerged. This cult catalogued women as weak beings with a greater tendency to sicken in an attempt to secure female dependency (Nead 29). Therefore, patriarchal condescendence is the reason why female homosexuality is not regarded as a real threat, but rather as an illness which could only infect women, that is, the Other. However, this condescendence is precisely what provides the female Vampire with the necessary time and leeway to transform her victim into a vampire. Carmilla's victory over the "Crew of Light" is implied at the very end. Apparently, Carmilla is still alive in Laura's memories, as she is able to hear Carmilla's "light step." (Le Fanu 86) Moreover, it is stated in the prologue that, by the time her diary is found, Laura is already dead<sup>6</sup> - or is she Un-dead?

Dracula, conversely, represents a greater threat to patriarchal order as his male condition suggests that male gender may not be immune after all. Thus, Dracula is not considered a victim but an agent of terror, a criminal. This is why the "Crew of Light" increases in number in this case and counts with the support of the authoritative figure of Dr Van Helsing, who combines both the powers of science, medicine and, most significantly, Law. As a matter of fact, *Dracula* was published in the context of the Labouchere Amendment of 1895, also known as the Wilde's trial, "which criminalized homosexuality among men [...] [and] restricted sexuality in the next decade." (Auerbach 83)

<sup>5</sup> Published in 1884 and written by Samuel Ashwell; a member of the Royal College of Physicians and Obstetric Physicians. One of the chapters of his book deals entirely with hysteria, considered to be a disease directly connected to the uterus.

<sup>6</sup> "I found that she had died (...)" (Le Fanu 1)

Indeed, several critics have established a direct connection between *Dracula* and Oscar Wilde's case. One of them is Talia Shaffer, who claims that *Dracula* is a complex work of literature in which Stoker "simultaneously explores Wilde-as-monster, and identifies with the real Wilde's pain." (472) Count Dracula, the vampire, would stand for the social construction carried out by Van Helsing and company. In other words, he represents Wilde-as-threat. First evidence of this connection lies on Dracula's physical appearance in his coffin, which resembles quite significantly the "grey-haired, heavily overweight" image of Oscar Wilde in 1895 (Shaffer 473): "There lay the Count, [...] ... the white hair and moustache were changed to dark iron-grey; the cheeks were fuller. [...] The deep burning eyes seemed set amongst swollen flesh." (Stoker 53)

Besides, Count Dracula is located at the core of the pathological spread of homosexuality as well as Wilde was defined as "the centre of a hideous circle of corruption" during the trials. (Schaffer 474) These trials were so important concerning the criminalization of homosexuality and had such huge an impact among Victorian society, that "the desire of Oscar Wilde" became a sort of euphemism to refer to homosexuality. (Schaffer 473)

Furthermore, Stoker "knew Wilde not only through the theatre" (Auerbach and Skal xii), since they actually had personal contact<sup>7</sup>. Besides, it seems that Stoker himself has been part of that homosexual community "later ostracized in Wilde's person" (Auerbach and Skal xii). However, Stoker remained silent during and after the trials. In Shaffer's opinion, "Stoker solved his guilty problem" establishing a connection between Wilde-as-victim and the imprisoned Harker. (471) Wilde's human face is shown in the skin of Jonathan Harker: the image of a disempowered, imprisoned and silenced man.

Harker stands for the homosexual who finds himself *caged* and force to remain silent. In other words, he can be conceived as Wilde in the closet; Dracula in his coffin. Harker acknowledges his "wild(e) desire" (Stoker 53) in his journal, and it seems that the "rest of the novel has to be written in order to domesticate and dissipate his 'wild' experience." (Shaffer 475) Therefore, Harker's hatred against Dracula stands for self-hatred. Moreover, there are numerous hints of doublings and mirroring between Dracula and Harker<sup>8</sup> that might be suggesting that, like Carmilla and Laura, they are different sides of the same coin.

In conclusion, following an uncanny interpretation of the vampire, Harker and the rest of the "Crew of Light" adopt the role of the defenceless victim, i.e. the prey, so that it is easier for them to channel their hatred against *others* rather than against themselves. Moreover, there are hints of homoerotic desire between the members of the patriarchal team, as seen when Van Helsing takes Dr. Seward's "ear in his hand and pulle[s] it playfully." (Stoker 111) This suggests the uncanny origins of homosexuality as a result of the separated and a-sexualised social spheres imposed by decency. In other words, it can be argued that the forced detachment between men and women is precisely the ultimate cause

<sup>7</sup> In fact, they proposed to the same woman, Florence Balcombe, who later became Stoker's wife. (Auerbach and Skal xxi)

<sup>8</sup> For example when Dracula dresses himself with Harker clothes that suit him perfectly, proving that their bodies are alike (Stoker,47). Besides, Harker ends up imitating Dracula in his "lizard fashion" (Stoker 39) when crawling on the wall of the castle (Stoker 49) ( Shaffer 475-476).

for the creation of the Monster. Thus, Patriarchal Victorian society handed down the identification of homosexuality —and sexuality in general— with animalisation, monstrosity and pathology in an attempt to deny their implication and to take control over its potential spread.

### 5. Anxieties of Reverse Colonization: Vampirising the "Other"

From a post-colonial perspective, the identification of sexual difference to monstrosity applies to the image colonisers had of the natives' lifestyle and customs<sup>9</sup>. In other words, the Vampire plays the role of the colonised whose way of life is perceived as a threat against the austere Victorian values. Following this interpretation, several critics, such as Arata and Botting, have found references to this late period of the British Imperial Mission both in *Carmilla* and in *Dracula*. A period in which the Victorian outburst of new technologies, science and economic wealth had led privileged classes to assume they had a right to proclaim themselves the envoys of progress and modernity —"the Crew of Light" (Craft 445)— in order to assume the role of protectors of *undeveloped* civilizations.

However, both Van Helsing in *Dracula* and General Spielsdorf in *Carmilla* use a mixture of scientific methods (reason), together with religion and superstition to fight back the threat of the vampire, thus suggesting that British subjects may not be as "civilised" as they seemed. Rather, "Western Civilization and rationality grow increasingly barbaric and irrational" during the Vampire's persecution until its brutal execution. (Botting 151) The fact that these bourgeois individuals cling to the same superstitions and myths from the past that they have ridiculed unveils a "nostalgic appeal to a long-dead world, a disappeared past imagined as noble strong and purposeful." (Botting 153) That is to say, this regressive behaviour constitutes the outcome of bourgeois' nostalgia for a past featured by the possession of absolute and undeniable control over masses —i.e. working classes—.

In both texts, it is worth noticing how upper classes become infected with the desire of being feudal lords. However, in Victorian England, the rules of a Modern Capitalist society had to be observed. Thus, the imperial project was an alternative that allowed bourgeois societies such as the Victorian to give way to their ruling desire. This desire is exemplified by Laura and her father's acquisition of a castle in a "lonely and primitive place, where everything is so marvellously cheap" that they can afford becoming landowners. (Le Fanu 2) In other words, it is a travel back to dark ages in which land, rather than capital, was the source of power and authority, so that Laura does not see "how ever [...] money would [...] materially add to [their] comforts." (Le Fanu 2)

Once colonisers have settled in, they began their civilizing mission intended at depriving all the natives "of their horrible animation" and their superstitious beliefs. (Le Fanu 73) Both *Carmilla*, but especially *Dracula* illustrate the existential crisis arising from the encounter of confident British subjects with *other* human beings. Sharing the prejudiced world's vision of Harker, *Dracula* stands for "the stranger from another time, the 'barbarian'

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<sup>9</sup> Explained in Arata's "*Dracula* and Reverse colonization", i.e. "The Count (...) is (...) the primitive savage, whose bestiality, fecundity, and vigor alternatively repel and attract." (470)



who speaks an incomprehensible language and follows 'outlandish' customs." (Gelder 42) Harker, as well as the rest of the Envoys of Light, considers himself to be in a higher moral position than Dracula, i.e. the Other. Hence, despite Dracula's reminding that "Transylvania is not [England; our ways] are not your ways," (Stoker 26-27) Harker identifies Dracula's behaviour as immoral, pertaining to animals or Vampires, but not human beings: "This vampire [...] is of himself so strong in person as twenty men; he is of cunning more than mortal, [...]; he is brute, and more than brute: he is devil in callous, [...] he can command all the meaner things: the rat, and the owl, and the bat...; and he can at times vanish and come unknown." (Stoker 209)

In fact, animal symbols were associated with instincts and passions, that is with a lack of self-restraint, which was seen as proof of their undignified nature and moral degeneration. However, the superior strength and intelligence of the vampire is acknowledged, as well as his capacity of connecting with the natural environment, for animals obey his orders and he is able to blend with the natural medium and disappear at will. Paradoxically, then, the vampire serves to highlight the degeneration and decline of the colonisers rather than the colonised, "since the Undead are [...] both "healthier" and more "fertile" than the living." (Arata 466) Moreover, it is only after the bite of the vampire that the victim becomes "invigorated" (Arata 466) and loses his or her restraint, thus gradually falling into the tempting instinctual, selfish and hedonistic lifestyle typically associated with savagery and vampirism.

This fear of becoming "foul things of the night like [Dracula] – without heart or conscience" (Stoker 209) can be seen, from a postcolonial perspective, as anxiety towards reverse colonisation, that is to say, the anxiety towards "the primitive trying to colonize the civilized world." (Senf 1979, 426) This is illustrated symbolically by Dracula's potential invasion of the homeland, and Harker's repenting words: "this was the being I was helping to transfer to London." (Stoker 53) However, the constant crossing of borders from West to East and vice versa, as well as the mirroring and doublings between "hunters" and "preys" contribute to blurring the distinctions between civilization and savagery; between the *Self* and the *Other*. Furthermore, it seems that British subjects are the ones who, supported by the Imperial Commission, end up committing the most cruel and bloodiest of actions. This is exemplified in *Carmilla*, as the "shocking scene" of the Vampire's cruel murder is registered together "with the signatures of all who were present at [the] proceedings" and approved in an "official paper." (Le Fanu 83)

Thus, the threat of the vampire can be construed as a metaphor for the change that overcomes colonisers when arriving at a land in which they are almighty and absolutely free. This sense of freedom stems from finding themselves far from "the butcher and the policeman [...] [and the] public opinion", that is being away from *civilization*. (Conrad 70) It is Dracula himself who provides readers with the key to understand the Uncanny nature of Vampirism as Imperialism when trying to make Harker realize the dangers of anonymity and self-government: "Here I am a noble; a *boyar*; the common people know



me, and I am master. But a stranger in a strange land, he is no one; men know him not – and to know not is to care not for." (Stoker 26)

To conclude, both in *Dracula* and *Carmilla* "Victorian readers could recognize their culture's imperial mirrored back as a kind of monstrosity." (Arata 469-470) This is a monstrosity associated with the resurrection of individualistic and pleasure-seeking attitudes towards life which were considered overcome, but that came to life as soon as the restrictive Victorian atmosphere was left behind. Avoiding self-recognition in the mirror once more, colonists put the blame of their conversion on the natives, and began a crusade against the free-from-conventions lifestyle of the Other. In fact, they assumed that their "power of combination [...], self-devotion in a cause" (Stoker 210) and altruistic aim provided them with the duty and rights to "rid the world of such a monster." (Stoker 54)

## 6. Conclusion

The typically Victorian obsession of defining their cultural surroundings in terms of opposite binaries –vice or virtue, civilised or savage – stems from an existential crisis motivated by the disintegration of former certainties regarding human nature. Consequently, there was a tendency to consider every external element to the Self as a potential threat. Thus, those individuals placed outside the norm were considered deviant or monsters. As shown in the previous chapters, the Vampire constitutes the *Other*: the aristocrat, the woman, the homosexual, and the foreigner.

However, both *Carmilla* and *Dracula* point towards an uncanny dimension of the vampire, that is the vampire as incarnation of repressed desires. The inability of western civilization to recognise themselves in the image of the vampire unveils a lack of self-acceptance and a longing for a facile and rigid past, as illustrated in the roles of patriarchal figures. Instead, Gothic literature notably aims at disrupting absolute binaries, thus highlighting the impossibility of imposing logic to the chaos of life. Therefore, the ambivalent and hybrid nature of *Carmilla* and *Dracula* represents an alternative to the suffocating and inflexible Victorian morality. In fact, they are the only ones that accept their connection to the animal world<sup>10</sup>, to "the children of the night" (Stoker 24), and do enjoy life and its pleasures in the way animals do. Therefore, they are Un-dead, that is *not dead*. As mentioned in the last chapter, Victorian Vampires are those who leave rationality behind and stand outside the established morality: in other words, those who are not interested in souls but in life,<sup>11</sup> functioning as "reminders [...] of the innate horror of vitality." (Auerbach 95)

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<sup>10</sup> The vampire's animalisation and its implications have been explained in detail in chapter II, section 2; and in chapter IV.

<sup>11</sup> As Renfield says: "oh no, oh no! I want no souls. Life is all I want." (Stoker 236)

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