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TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

Bisexuality and Gothicism in *Carmilla* and  
*Dracula*:  
A Comparative Analysis

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**Abstract**

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) are the two most influential novels within vampire literature. Written by Irish authors, these novels, representative of the Irish Gothic genre, draw some inspiration from their social context and the Victorian mindset. As classic as they may seem, the two homonymous vampire antagonists have a groundbreaking trait: they are bisexuals. This dissertation carries out a comparative analysis to show how the vampires in these stories are neither heterosexual nor homosexual, but bisexual.

**Key words:** Carmilla, Dracula, Irish Gothic, bisexuality, vampire

**Resumen**

*Carmilla* (1872) de Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu y *Drácula* (1897) de Bram Stoker son las dos novelas más influyentes dentro de la literatura de vampiros. Escritas por autores irlandeses, estas novelas, representativas del género conocido como Gótico irlandés, toman parte de su inspiración en el contexto social y en la mentalidad victoriana. Por muy clásicas que parezcan, los dos vampiros antagonistas homónimos comparten un rasgo revolucionario: son bisexuales. Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado realiza un análisis comparativo para demostrar que los vampiros de estas historias no son ni heterosexuales ni homosexuales, sino bisexuales.

**Palabras clave:** Carmilla, Dracula, gótico irlandés, bisexualidad, vampiro



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## Introduction

Throughout history the legendary creature of the vampire has been an important part of the folklore of different countries and epochs, making it an increasingly common theme in literature from the eighteenth century onwards. Their popularity makes our attention on the subject turn quickly to the two most famous literary vampires: *Carmilla* and *Dracula*. Antagonists of their homonymous novels, they have been analyzed from different perspectives, perhaps one of the most notorious that of queer studies, and not for unfounded reasons. Indeed, both characters are bisexual, which I shall demonstrate in this dissertation.

Queer studies have been developing since the mid-twentieth century, and that led not only to un-censor homosexual characters, but also to rediscover homosexuality in characters that were firstly considered heterosexual. Many scholars have been uncovering this, passing over another alternative: bisexuality. For decades, characters have been classified as straight or gay, falling into a limited black or white issue while ignoring the grey scale in between. Of course, the sexuality in *Carmilla* (1872) and *Dracula* (1897) has not gone unnoticed in the eyes of many critics and scholars who have not failed to identify the homosexual ‘characteristics’ of these vampires.

*Carmilla* has been regarded as a lesbian since the novella’s publication, as explained by authors like Gina Wisker in her article “Female Vampirism” (2016). In this article, she observes how Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu depicted *Carmilla* with feminine and masculine features (153), a notion according to the nineteenth-century thought that homosexuals suffered from inversions in their personalities and/or bodies. Her ‘unnatural’ sexuality is expressed in the victims she chooses, women, and corresponded by the protagonist, Laura. Besides, Marília M. M. Maia’s article “Vampirism and Lesbianism in *Carmilla* by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu” (2020) argues that Le Fanu does create a lesbian relationship between the two women, but in a “discreet and subtle way” (42) , at the same time repressing the relationship to fit within the Victorian moral. Many analyses by other authors follow these same arguments.

The analysis of *Dracula* often led to a homosexual depiction of the vampire, as exposed in the article “‘A Wilde Desire Took Me’: The Homoerotic History of *Dracula*” (1994) by Talia Schaffer. Here she argues that Bram Stoker based *Dracula*’s character

on Oscar Wilde and Jonathan Harker on himself; thus the novel's plot revolves around the tussle between being out and inside the closet. Schaffer states that Jonathan and Mina's son is, in fact, Jonathan and Dracula's son as the result of their homosexual desire (419). However, bisexuality in *Dracula* has already been considered in Marjorie Howes' article "The Mediation of the Feminine: Bisexuality, Homoerotic Desire, and Self-Expression in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*" (1988), in which she presents the male characters as being violent to try to repress their feminine impulses that translates into homoerotic desire (108). However, she applies this to the protagonists, not to Dracula. She remains ambivalent about Dracula's sexuality, but also pointing at homosexual desires.

Despite these works, and many others, scholars have failed to acknowledge Carmilla and Dracula as bisexual. For remembrance's sake, a bisexual person is, as stated in "The Bisexual Manifesto" published in the *Anything that Moves* magazine in 1990, capable of being romantically and/or sexually attracted to more than one gender. Applied to the Victorian Era, when alternative gender identities were basically unknown, this translates into a person who is attracted to both men and women. That is why I shall throw light into the issue to banish the belief that Carmilla and Dracula are homosexuals and prove that they are bisexuals. Literary analyses normally focus on a few selected events, the chase of the vampires and their deaths to prove their homosexuality, but since their past or the origin of their conditions are paid barely attention by the writers, it is easy to miss key points that illustrate their sexuality.

This demonstration is done bearing in mind the writers' intended concealment of the issue due to the taboo that weighed on sexuality and, even more so, on alternative sexualities, as well as the novels' classification as Irish Gothic.

Therefore, this dissertation's objectives are to explore the alleged 'perversion' of Irishness in both vampires before analyzing their bisexual characteristics and events, to end with a comparison of the similarities between them. The final objective is to show how Carmilla and Dracula embody the figure of bisexual antagonists within a vampire novel.

I shall carry out an analytic study to prove it, in terms of the events and dialogues that take place throughout the two works, focusing on their interactions with



their respective protagonists. Moreover, I shall bear in mind the background of the characters in this analysis, as I believe it is key to understand their sexuality.

For this purpose, the paper is organized in three chapters: “The Victorian mindset: Irishness and sexuality”, “*Carmilla* and *Dracula*”, and “Bisexual vampirism: inverting the roles”.



## Chapter 1. The Victorian mindset: Irishness and sexuality

### The England-Ireland dynamic

Gothic fiction's first instances are found in eighteenth-century Britain before expanding to the rest of Europe and later to America. This genre is characterized by using horror, mystery, and medievalism to achieve a tense atmosphere and causing the audience to take pleasure in feeling fear as part of the experience of reading the text. Gothic literature arose as an opposition to the Industrial Revolution and the decadent lifestyle and conditions resulting from it. Modernity was considered oppressive and therefore Romantics turned to what they regarded as the good old days, especially to the Middle Ages, when life was simpler and better, according to them. Likewise, modernity was slowly taking away natural spaces and rural life in favor of urbanization and antinatural landscapes, thus nature was a major relief and source of most positive aspects of life.

Gothicism and its features varied throughout Europe and adapted to the social contexts of each country in which it developed. These variations can easily result in particularities that make Irish Gothic different from other national Gothics, as well as similarities between Irish authors. The main reason for the development of this literary subgenre is its unique historical situation and relationship with England.

The 'conquest' of Ireland as such by England took place in 1603, and the nation did not join the United Kingdom until 1801. However, the two lands had a long history behind them. Since the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in the twelfth century, England (populated by Germanic peoples before the Norman conquest) started to impose several measures on Ireland (populated by Celts at the time): the Irish Church was integrated into Rome, Norman feudalism replaced the Irish Brehon law, and the English language slowly but surely replaced the Gaelic and Latin languages. This was followed by several centuries of wars, cultural revivals, conquests, and uprisings. Subjected to both physical and cultural violence, the enmity between Ireland and England began to develop. Although there was a partial blending between them, the union of Ireland and England often meant eight centuries of division "into two cultures and two nations" (Byrne, Vaughan and Cosgrove xlix). This created a dynamic of power in which the Irish were oppressed by the English, who were in charge of the law and land.

Besides, with the Industrial Revolution inequalities between the two countries were accentuated: Ireland was mostly rural, while England was more advanced and modern. With the Enlightenment and the scientific and technological advances of nineteenth-century England, there was a new binary opposition between the two nations: progressive England versus primitive Ireland (Killeen 3). In an English world full of advances and technical and scientific discoveries, undeveloped Ireland fell further and further behind in these terms. Ireland became the past which changed with neither the Industrial Revolution nor the Enlightenment. Moreover, Romanticism promoted interest in past times, including forgotten folklore, sowing the seeds for the Celtic Revival that took place during the *fin de siècle*. In terms of Gothic literature, the ‘Emerald Isle’ represented the perfect scenario as a country that matched Gothic settings: ruins, monasteries, wild landscapes... that configured a land that could be regarded as ‘strange’ or ‘exotic’. This, applied to the long history of conflictive living in Ireland, helped construct the country as a dangerous place and the Irish as pagans — descending from the Celts— and Catholics at the same time. It is in this context of tensions between the English and the Irish, and also between Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants, that the Irish Gothic developed. The unique situation of these two countries favored the creation of their own Gothic movement.

For the movement, this was all but an advantage since a whole country could be a source of Gothic inspiration. Moreover, they cherished past times, when —according to their views— nature was pristine and untamed and people were not concerned with British Victorian problems like housing, drug addiction, indebtedness, and many other inconveniences of nineteenth-century life. Another advantage of Ireland was all the uninhabited monasteries, castles of Anglo-Norman and English origin, and Catholic churches and graveyards. Thus, Ireland was not only a wild, exotic scene plagued with barbaric people, it was over and above the living past the Gothics prized, the embodiment of the much-loved obscure Sublime.

As a result, we can find a good number of English Gothic novels representing Ireland in this tone (Killeen 10).

## Victorian sexuality

Therefore, *Carmilla* and *Dracula* are included in the England-Ireland dynamic, making them outsiders to the Victorian society, which aimed to control many aspects of everyday life. A notorious aspect was sexuality, very present in both novels. In *Carmilla*, the alternative sexuality is most obvious since she has been acknowledged by critics as a lesbian from the beginning, and *Dracula* has been regarded either as a sexual predator or as a closeted homosexual. Nevertheless, as I shall explain in the next chapter, neither *Carmilla* nor *Dracula* fit as heterosexuals or homosexuals, but as bisexuals.

With the nineteenth century came the field of sexology to study alternative sexualities, adding the medical scrutiny to the already existing penal surveillance. The term ‘homosexual’ appeared for the first time to label men—and in the next century, it would encompass women as well—while women were simply called ‘inverts’ (King and Barlett 107). It was believed that homosexuals suffered from a brain or personality inversion that turned their masculinity into femininity (Foucault 43) in the case of men, and vice versa in the case of women. Since sexology was part of the medicine, many thought it could be perceived in their bodies; thus the belief that homosexual men are physically more feminine than other men and liked to perform female activities, and that homosexual women were masculine (King and Barlett 107) and engaged in male tasks. By the mid-nineteenth century, this focus on biology led psychiatrists and doctors to think that sexuality was related to hormones, genetics, or anatomy, to the point that some claimed homosexuality could be ‘cured’ or ‘created’ by transplanting organs or with therapy (King and Barlett 107).

At the time, homosexual women were ignored, while homosexual men were legally and socially punished. In the case of women, there existed an intermediate kind of relationship between friendship and romance as we know them: women were allowed to maintain this type of relationship that involved kissing, touching, or even masturbating because it was considered as “preparation for marriage” (Scott, Cayleff and Donadey 129), and doctors observed how women developed “innocent hand-holding and affectionate embraces” (King and Barlett 108) without considering romantic attraction.

In the case of men, these kinds of romantic gestures were punished under the crime of ‘sodomy’ or ‘moral indecency’. Tolerance toward same-sex behaviors varied depending on the class of the partners —aristocrats and nobles had more freedom— and whether they were of similar ages (Pickett); nonetheless, homosexuality was still considered an illness. Female homosexuality was more condoned because of women’s status as passive objects learning how to please their future husbands, yet men were active subjects with more freedom to express their sexual desires. Violating one’s marriage was as reprehensible as men “seeking strange pleasures” (Foucault 38) with another man, condemned like a felony and a sin.

As for bisexuality, the term at the time referred to hermaphrodites, and it appeared as a sexual orientation in the twentieth century with Freud and Kinsey. The truth is that bisexuality was not given much attention until the 1990s, being considered as a phase while transitioning to homosexuality or confusing one’s heterosexuality. If a person was bisexual, it was considered either heterosexual or homosexual depending on the relationships they had; with a person of the same gender (homosexual) or with a person of the opposite gender (heterosexual). In other words, if a bisexual woman had a lesbian relationship, she was plainly a lesbian. Therefore, there was barely any research about it in the Victorian era. While it is true that the twentieth century loosened the grip over homosexuals in literature thanks to queer studies, bisexuality is still somewhat ignored and not as visible as homosexuality.

Non-heterosexuals were seen as a third gender, not fitting within the ‘male’ or ‘female’ categories (Schaffer 398), like Carmilla and Dracula do not fit as ‘alive’ or ‘dead’ and are hence called ‘undead’, a third category. In a period when social norms were strict and rigid, those who ‘stepped’ out of heterosexuality were pointed out and treated as outsiders. We have seen how the Irish and non-heterosexuals were regarded as outsiders in the English society, seen as deviant creatures: Le Fanu and Stoker took their historical framework and added these features to their vampire antagonists.

We can consider, in the nineteenth century, that a bisexual person is one that overtly expresses romantic and/or sexual attraction towards both men and women. In the next chapter, I shall prove Carmilla and Dracula bisexuals by analyzing their simultaneous homosexual and heterosexual tendencies.

## Chapter 2. *Carmilla* and *Dracula* as bisexual vampires

### The settings and their historical counterparts

From the viewpoint of British and Irish writers who wanted to make a name for themselves, setting and representing Ireland as a primitive place where “the irrational, the superstitious, the perverse, the Catholic, the cannibalistic” (Killeen 10) was a safe bet. Ireland, then, started to be associated with the Gothic characteristics already mentioned and its picturesque Celtic allure became its trademark not only within the English society but also in the literary tradition that was exported to other countries.

Regarding *Carmilla* (1872) and *Dracula* (1897), we find two Irish writers who continued this tradition of representing the country as a home to Victorian outsiders. Sheridan Le Fanu and Bram Stoker were notable Gothic writers, especially Le Fanu, who is usually regarded as a precursor of the “modern ghost story” (Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia), and who influenced Stoker to the point that he copied a whole chapter from *Carmilla* for his own vampire novel, but was not published with the rest of the novel (Old Dublin Society 131). Although these novels are not explicitly set in Ireland, the landscapes and characters depicted are highly connected to the country to the point of making us think of Styria and Transylvania as a veiled Ireland, as some scholars have pointed out (Jarlath Killeen, Martin Willis, among others). This is the tip of the iceberg of the connection between the novels and the social reality of Le Fanu and Stoker.

For a start, Le Fanu’s style includes two points of view of the same events, providing a ‘public’ account of them and a scientific one that explains the facts and sheds light (knowledge) on the darkness (unawareness) (Sage 53). This is consistent with the dichotomy of rational, modern England versus irrational, archaic Ireland. The supernatural vampire and the superstitions surrounding her represent Ireland, while the explanations and knowledge are provided by more scientific and methodic knowledge.

Regarding landscapes, the protagonist, Laura, resides in a manor-house that emulates Kylemore Abbey in Connemara, County Galway, the region of Ireland with most Irish speakers:

this feudal residence [...] stands on a slight eminence in a forest. [...] its moat, stocked with perch, and sailed over by many swans, and floating on its surface white fleets of water-lilies. Overall this the manor-house shows its many-windowed front; its towers, and its Gothic chapel (Le Fanu 3-4)

Kylemore Abbey was not built during the Middle Ages but in Le Fanu's lifetime. It stands in a forest before a lake where there are indeed water lilies and swans can be often seen. Looking at its façade, we can see several windows and a few towers. The estate also has a neo-Gothic church and mausoleum. The description of the two buildings coincides and, whilst other similar buildings could match the manor, the fact that Connemara is traditionally linked to Irish culture and the novella's setting is connected to Ireland, Kylemore is a fit candidate. Notwithstanding, the furniture in Laura's manor-house is "three hundred years old" (Le Fanu 8) and she considers it out of fashion and contrasting, as she highlights several times. How could "three hundred years old" furniture be out of fashion in a feudal manor? If anything, they would suit it better, unless Le Fanu based the description of the building on a more modern one, like Kylemore Abbey.

As for Stoker's novel, he plays with light and darkness too, in this case connecting the events that happen at nighttime with the possibility of insanity as the answer for supernatural experiences. The main Gothic setting is the Carpathian Mountains, where Castle Dracula is located, a historically conflictive zone between two nations: the Transylvanian (divided into Wallachs, Magyars, and Szekelys) and the Turks, who can be interpreted as the Celts (divided into Welsh, Scots, and Irish) and the Anglo-Saxons. The description of the landscape is also reminiscent of the rocky west of Ireland, whose rivers are often subject to floods due to storms coming from the Atlantic Ocean, and where we can find the highest mountain range of the island, MacGillycuddy's Reeks:

Sometimes we saw little towns or castles on the top of steep hills such as we see in old missals; sometimes we ran by rivers and streams which seemed from the wide stony margin on each side of them to be subject to great floods. (Stoker 3)

In both novels, the vampire threat comes from the west just as Ireland is located to the west of England, implying that Ireland is a dangerous place responsible for producing wicked creatures. At the same time, the west of Ireland was the most problematic region and there were more Gaelic-speaking people (along with other regions). Carmilla's old



manor and tomb are to the west of Laura's schloss (Le Fanu 87), Dracula is seen as a bat flying to the west—as if returning to a safe place for him— (Stoker 126) and Lucy Westenra's family name also alludes to the west. Locating the supernatural to the west is something common in many Gothic novels. Moreover, *Dracula* can be interpreted as Stoker's response to the Irish “republican terrorism” with the “feudal Catholic Count Dracula effecting a reverse invasion of England” (Killeen 204).

Another common feature that the two Gothic writers introduce is the superstitious locals warning outsiders, and it has been said that Ireland was associated with paganism (magic) and Catholicism (superstition) as opposed to the logical and scientific Anglicanism. The vampires of both novels have their origins in a medieval aristocratic family which has been erased to the point of being Countess Karnstein and Count Dracula their only survivors, reminding of Celtic bloodlines that disappeared after the conquest of Ireland, like Le Fanu's. Moreover, the vampire Carmilla appears in a painting from 1698, after the Williamite War in Ireland.

Besides this representation of the binary opposition of rational England versus irrational Ireland, we have the two vampire experts who bear similar family names, Vordenburg and Van Helsing. While we do know Professor Van Helsing is Dutch, we can guess by his family name that Vordenburg is Dutch as well. Moreover, in *Dracula*, Van Helsing founds the Crew of Light, comprised of Arthur Holmwood, Quincey Morris, and John Seward, who are helped by Mina and Jonathan Harker. Their counterparts in *Carmilla* are Laura's English father and his friend from war General Spielsdorf. This makes Laura Anglo-Styrian (Anglo-Irish) since her mother was from Styria. On the other hand, the vampire antagonists and villains represent the immoral and diseased, since they spread vampirism and, in both novels, the symptoms are treated as an illness. As Martin Willis points in his article “Le Fanu's ‘Carmilla’, Ireland, and Diseased Vision” (2008), although “there is nothing explicitly Irish” the setting “is suggestive of an implicit Irish context” (Willis 112), and Le Fanu is relating disease to Irishness (Willis 116). Consequently, we find an alliance of Anglo-Irish and English aristocrats and literate continental Europeans allied against the dangerous Irish people.

It is now clear how Le Fanu and Stoker took their social context to the novels, representing the confrontation between Ireland and England in their setting and their characters. They created antagonists whose features distinctively set them apart from the

protagonists, underlining the difference between those who followed Victorian values, and those who did not. These antagonists had to be able to go unnoticed, as outsiders were, and thus the vampire is a most fitting creature: a monster who looks like a human, an aristocratic person who is, in fact, a deviant.

Blood-sucking creatures have been described as demons and other evil creatures since antiquity, although the term 'vampire' was not in use in English until the mid-eighteenth century. We find instances of women (sometimes helped by male 'minions') who seduced men or preyed upon children, mostly at night, in many ancient civilizations like India, Persia, or Ancient Greece. This tradition, which depicted vampires as sexually depraved, can be tracked until the eighteenth century when we find numerous cases of presumed vampires throughout Europe. Townspeople reported corpses coming back to life or claimed that deaths in a certain area were related to vampires who escaped from cemeteries (Cohen 272).

It is during the eighteenth century when narrative fiction about vampires starts to develop in poems such as *Lenore* (1773) by Gottfried August Bürger. However, the first vampire short story was produced in the nineteenth century: "The Vampyre" (1819) written by John William Polidori, first attributed to Lord Byron. With Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, vampire fiction acquires a more modern shape and becomes more influential; the character became the archetype of the lesbian vampire, set a precedent, and was soon adapted and copied. Despite the novella's popularity, Stoker's Count Dracula is nowadays the most famous vampire and many of his physical and mental attributes, powers, and weaknesses are the grounding of today's vampires.

Within Irish Gothic fiction, both novels represent a Manichaean confrontation between the righteous English and the wicked Irish (Seed 71). To *Carmilla* and Dracula's condition as dangerous foreigners, we have to add their sexuality, regarded as immoral in Victorian society.

### Le Fanu's depiction of bisexuality in *Carmilla* (1872)

Le Fanu's vampire novel meant the start of vampire fiction as a successful trend, although the series of penny dreadfuls *Varney the Vampire; or, the Feast of Blood* (1845–1847) by James Malcolm Rymer and Thomas Peckett Prest had already established many canonical vampire characteristics: mental powers, the fangs, the

distinguishing double punctures, strength, and etcetera. Nevertheless, *Carmilla* is the model of the lesbian vampire prototype and granted Le Fanu fame and reputation as a master of Gothic fiction. This novella was first published as a newspaper series and then within *In a Glass Darkly* (1872) as the correspondence between the fictional Doctor Hesselius and Laura, the protagonist, who is already dead when her narration is introduced.

*Carmilla* is written as Laura's account of the events she lived as a child of six and young adult of nineteen, all related to Carmilla. The relationship between the two women is precisely the focus of the story, since the narration widely deals with how it develops, and the actual chase of the vampire is not given special attention. From the beginning, we see there is something special about her since the characters are mesmerized with "the solemn but very pretty face" (6) of Carmilla. But she appears abruptly in the middle of superstitious signals that warn the reader against her, and the threat is exposed by mentioning Cleopatra's painting in which the pharaoh lays with lethal asp; from that moment, she poses a threat to the "British, male, imperial, conventional, traditional, safe" (Wisker 153) world Laura lives in.

Her appearance also hints at the danger: Carmilla is extremely pale, has dark hair, and seems to be weak or ill. Whilst these traits and seeming physical sickness were also part of the idealized woman in Central Europe, it can also be indicative of her inner 'illness': bisexuality. If we take a look at the other protagonist, Laura, we realize she follows the ideal canon with her golden hair, blue eyes, and passiveness before the other characters and her own life. Carmilla rejects Victorian ideals with her looks and by reverting the passivity, purity, kindness, and conformity notions that women should embrace (Wisker 150). This matches the thought that non-heterosexuals could be recognized by their appearance and that they were inverted.

Carmilla and Laura's relationship is regarded as a friendship, like many other Victorian, lesbian relationships, yet the truth is that Carmilla distracts Laura from marriage, "the great female adventure" (Rich 654). She is not worried about her future, or the disease that affects local country people, only about spending time with Carmilla. Their behavior is that of two young lovers, although Laura, as the ideal Victorian woman, is trapped between two opposites: heterosexuality and homosexuality, Englishness and Irishness. As readers, we perceive Carmilla through her viewpoint, and

her explanations for Carmilla's behavior are that Carmilla is either insane or she is a male disguised to seduce Laura. This matches the Victorian views of lesbianism as something "deviant to abhorrent, or simply rendered invisible" (Rich 632) since the novella never explicitly states they had a romantic relationship.

Le Fanu shows and conceals this lesbian relationship with the night episodes. Laura feels ill as a result of being attacked at night by a large, black cat, leaving memories related to darkness and pain, whilst the memories of the woman are related to pleasure and enjoyable melancholy (Le Fanu 68). On the one hand, Le Fanu shows the lesbian as a monster, a woman who hides a terrible secret. On the other hand, he is separating the cat from the vampire. In her article "What or who is 'matska' in Carmilla?", Valerie Guyant points that this large cat might not be Carmilla, but another creature. If so, the connection established between Carmilla, the cat, and blood-sucking could be Laura hiding her lesbianism by obscuring the nights she spends with the vampire. She narrates nightly episodes where her "heart beat faster, [her] breathing rose and fell rapidly; then came a sobbing that rose into a sense of strangulation and turned into a dreadful convulsion, in which my senses left [her] and [she] became unconscious" (Le Fanu 69), symptoms described by medical authorities as an orgasm<sup>1</sup>, after which it is common to fall asleep (unconsciousness).

Therefore, Carmilla's lesbian tendencies are more than clear, but although she confesses she has "been in love with no one" (Le Fanu 53), her words are not true: she had indeed been in love before. Carmilla says she was killed in her bed, wounded in her breast, but in the last chapter, it is said that she committed suicide. Carmilla also says the reason she nearly died was a cruel, strange love that implied blood sacrifices (59). Baron Vordenburg, the vampire expert who helps kill Carmilla, is revealed to be a descendant from a "passionate and favored lover of [...] Countess Karnstein" (137) during her human life. This means that this Vordenburg nobleman had indeed a romantic relationship with Carmilla, whose life he spared when killing vampires of the area.

Carmilla spends more time seducing Laura because she has learned from Bertha's death that she has to be careful, and from Vordenburg that if they want to be together, Laura must become a vampire too. Carmilla's romantic relationships are key

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<sup>1</sup> United Kingdom's National Health Service, for instance

to understanding the whole novella, since it takes place because she wants a vampire bride (Laura), risking everything. Nonetheless, if Carmilla was a lesbian, her behavior would be regarded as preparation for marriage, yet she is a bisexual, thus she must be punished for her “active sexuality” (Wisker 152). Carmilla’s true love was a man, a love so deep that it changed her forever —both her human/vampire condition and her character, as she says. Her romantic interests were reduced, verging on incest, perhaps because that was the only way of loving her late Baron. Indeed, they must have had children before Carmilla’s death and Vordenburg’s disappearance, therefore his blood runs in Bertha and Laura. If she successfully converted their descendants into vampires, she could fulfill her wish of spending her life with her Baron Vordenburg.

In life, Carmilla was a heterosexual who, leaving behind the moral restrictions of society after becoming a vampire, could not resist exploring her attraction towards women, finally coming out as a bisexual.

#### Stoker’s depiction of bisexuality in *Dracula* (1897)

Abraham ‘Bram’ Stoker is the creator of the most famous vampire character in history, setting a before and after in vampire fiction. His novel *Dracula*, first published in 1897, is comprised of several diary entries, letters, and fictional journal articles telling the story of how a group of English people thwarted the vampire Count Dracula's attempt to move to England. The two major influences on this work are the situation of his friend the writer Oscar Wilde, and Le Fanu’s *Carmilla*.

Many analyses —and depictions in later adaptations— have presented a Count Dracula who loves Mina Harker and/or who ‘collects’ vampire brides, making him a threat to Victorian society because of polygamy. However, the Count’s main interests are not the women of the novel, but Jonathan Harker.

The first chapters are Jonathan’s account of Dracula’s attempts to seduce him, and his fight against homosexuality. Most of the characters in the novel are male, and yet the behavior between these two men (physical approach, caresses) is not seen among the others, save some comforting, fatherly gestures from Van Helsing. Count Dracula, on the other hand, is trying to subtly seduce Harker. If Le Fanu concealed lesbianism in a context where female homosexuality was more accepted than male, Stoker had to be more diffuse. However, there is a passage that shows explicitly Dracula’s feelings

toward Jonathan by saying: “This man belongs to me! [...] Yes, I too can love; you yourselves can tell it from the past” (Stoker 44-46). The Count wants Jonathan for himself and, aware that the three female vampires could ruin their relationship, forbids them to even see him.

Stoker hints at intercourse between the two men when Jonathan reports being undressed and claims not to remember anything, as Le Fanu did with Laura. After Jonathan’s stay with Dracula, he is reportedly insane, as homosexuals were treated, but claims to have forgotten everything.

According to some scholars, Jonathan Harker and Count Dracula are based on real-life Stoker and Wilde, and whilst the first stayed in the shadows and publicly condemned homosexuality (Jonathan fought vampirism) the other was sent to prison (killed). Dracula represents “the complex of fears, desires, secrecies, repressions, and punishments” (Schaffer 398) associated with Wilde’s trials and public image. The two Irish writers had a relationship that lasted for twenty years (Schaffer 381) until Oscar Wilde was charged with gross indecency and sodomy and imprisoned on May 25, 1895. In mid-July, Stoker received a letter from Wilde's brother Willy appealing for sympathy (Schaffer 396). Two weeks later, Stoker began writing *Dracula*. Based on the facts and the author's social context, we can state that the Count had indeed homosexual tendencies.

The scene of Dracula and Mina together represents heterosexual intercourse, although some critics have interpreted this rivalry between Jonathan and the Count over Mina as a way of expressing their homosexuality (Sedgwick 708; Schaffer 392). However, there is no reason to pick or discard one of the alternatives since they are not exclusionary; after all, love triangles have been acknowledged by scholars since the twentieth century. Besides, Dracula’s behavior does not indicate he wanted to reveal their ‘relationship’, thus making Jonathan jealous, but keep it secret as if he wanted to protect Mina from the shame of adultery. After all, when he fed on Lucy, everyone was aware of it but they did not notice in the case of Mina.

The fact is that Dracula can be attracted to women, as he himself states. He recalls the vampire women he loved in the past. These female vampires are called his brides, but since two of them are physically similar to him, they might be his relatives. The other woman embodies the Victorian canon of the golden hair and blue eyes,

therefore for a nineteenth-century writer like Stoker, she is the ideal wife for the human Count. The fact that she is the only non-Dracula living in their castle makes it very probable that this woman was his wife in the past, perhaps during their human lives. Since vampirism is connected to the devil and the sacrament of marriage states “till death do us part”, their marriage would no longer be valid after they became un-dead. However, Dracula still provides for her and welcomes her into his home.

Stoker continues Le Fanu’s example of the bisexual vampire that, after losing their partner during their human lives, finds a new Victorian lover that does not know whether to correspond to her/his vampire or reject their repressed sexuality.





### Chapter 3. Bisexual vampirism: Inverting the roles

Carmilla and Dracula are examples of how human nature can be perverted through the supernatural and surpass social norms. Le Fanu and Stoker's style of writing share features too, like the air of mystery, though Stoker takes it further than Le Fanu by allowing the characters to solve the enigma of the vampire along with the reader. The most noteworthy, shared element is the bisexual vampire antagonist bearing the title of Count/Countess. In this chapter, the focus is on how the bisexual vampires inverted their Victorian, social roles.

For a start, Victorian society claimed that everyone was heterosexual with a possible deviation to homosexuality in some individuals, derived from mental health problems. Therefore, Carmilla and Dracula were created as heterosexual humans first, who later contracted an illness: vampirism. This illness is connected to sin, as we see in Carmilla's conversion through suicide and her rejection of religion, while religious symbolism is one of Dracula's weaknesses.

Carmilla had a lover with whom she gave birth to at least one child. She confirms with her statements their relationship was not the product of an artificial marriage that many Victorian lesbians had to go through to fulfill society's expectations or to hide their homosexuality; rather, she confesses they were in love but never walked to the altar. Sacrifices are often done in altars, thus Carmilla might have meant her "blood sacrifice" meant marrying Vordenburg and giving his name to their baby, making it his child —his blood. Therefore, the Countess rejected the institution of marriage and had an illegitimate baby, inverting the social status of both the baby and herself. Had she married Vordenburg, the child would be legitimate and Carmilla would be a wife instead of a fallen woman.

We do not know the fate of her child, but Laura and Bertha are her descendants, making her a grandmother. Nevertheless, Carmilla does not act like the Victorian grandmother who takes care of her family and contributes to their education: she preys on them and seduces them, even planning to turn Laura into a vampire. She is driving her descendants away from the paths of society and religion, as well as committing incest.

If we believe the theory that the vampire women are Dracula's wives, he would be incestuous as well, although he did not continue his lineage as men were supposed to do. He is inverting his duty of providing an heir to his family because he did not have a male child with his wife, and because he tries to start a relationship with a man. In any case, the Count also rejects his role as male protector when he gives them a baby to feed and when he does not stop Lucy from feeding on little children. Since he turned Lucy into a vampire, he should be responsible for her and what she lives on until she learns and gets more experience as a vampire. This makes him a sort of father to Lucy, but he lets her die.

If we stick to the myth, vampires keep the aspect they had in the moment of their death, sometimes rejuvenating from blood intake. In *Carmilla*, the Countess appears young before vampire attacks are reported, therefore she died young. As a young woman, her fate was to attend to house chores, find a husband and bring up children. But Carmilla has no occupation and travels around Styria while attending social events instead of being at home, in the private sphere. Also, she proves to be intelligent and determined, traits that were disliked in women.

On the other hand, Dracula lives with three young women while he appears as an old man, opening the possibility that he had two daughters with the blonde woman, who looks young because she does drink blood, unlike the Count. Whether they are his sisters or his daughters, it is clear he has authority over them, which they overtly defy. Yet Dracula, who might be expected to put them back in their place, rewards them with a baby's blood. Dracula also inverts his role as head of the family and old man by leaving them and moving to England, and later by putting them in mortal danger. Moreover, he shows an active character unfit for his age.

Both vampires seem weak: Carmilla looks permanently ill and Dracula is a very old man. However, they are very strong, especially in their hands (Stoker 12; Le Fanu 139), and do inappropriate things. The Countess takes night walks alone in a time when young noblewomen like her ought to walk with a chaperone, preferably a male. In the case of Dracula, an old nobleman should take an aristocratic ward, or employees, to take care of him—and his guests.

Indeed, Dracula is a host to Jonathan, and as such he should offer him all kinds of comforts; rather, he leaves Jonathan alone most of the time and locks his guest.

Jonathan is isolated in a foreign land because that is the Count's intention. On the other hand, Carmilla is Laura's guest but takes the lead more often than not, putting herself in a dominant position that would correspond to Laura as a hostess.

But the most notable inversion that vampires perform is the time of their activities. Humans are diurnal. Carmilla does spend time with her hosts during the day, but she wakes up at noon. At night, she feeds on peasants, sleeps with Laura, and takes walks. The Count's activity is fully nocturnal, sleeping during the day and forcing Jonathan to stay awake all night as they talk.

These vampires did not only inverse their roles, but also the feelings their victims had for them. While everyone is happy to get rid of the vampire threat, Laura and Jonathan cannot stop thinking about them and feeling emptiness after their final deaths. In the case of the former, it is said in the novella that Laura could recover from her earlier symptoms of vampirism, which leaves us with the hypothesis that she died from melancholy or heartbreak.

Moreover, they inverted Laura and Jonathan's role as parents. Laura never married nor had children before dying, while baby Quincey can be considered Dracula's son since his blood runs in Mina. Besides, Quincey bears a bundle of names that does not include Jonathan's, as if he were not his biological father.

Therefore, Carmilla and Dracula inverted their roles related to religion, family, social status, age, gender, and guest-host dynamics. They forced others to invert some of them as well. This is consistent with the nineteenth-century belief that non-heterosexuals suffered some sort of inversion, physically and psychologically, something that Le Fany and Stoker took advantage of to create their characters.

In addition, the titles of Countess and Count and their estates indicate too how bisexuality was represented. Despite being bisexual, if a person maintains a relationship with a person of the same sex, it is a homosexual relationship whereas if they maintain a relationship with a person of the opposite sex, it is a heterosexual relationship. When Carmilla and Dracula had heterosexual relationships, they owned a title and castles. However, when they maintain homosexual relationships they lose their respectability, become unknown among aristocrats, their properties are ruined, and their existence is reduced to the superstition of peasants.

For these reasons, *Carmilla* has been regarded as a lesbian, although it is stated several times she had a male lover, and her title is mentioned only to refer to her past self. *Dracula*, on the other hand, has been considered heterosexual because of his intercourse with Mina and his title remains. But it is the human mortals who say their titles and at the same time slay them, as a reminder of their former morality and heterosexual relationships. There is a constant allusion to their souls, thus to save and cleanse their immortal souls, the vampires must be killed.

Unknowingly, Le Fanu and Stoker expanded the notion of bisexuals from hermaphrodites to people being romantically and/or sexually attracted to both the same gender and the opposite. Even nowadays, one's bisexuality is questioned if they have a heterosexual or homosexual relationship like it happened to our vampires. There is still a long way to raise awareness about this sexual orientation, and revisiting canonical literary works like *Carmilla* and *Dracula* can help us understand its situation throughout history, which has an impact at present.

## Conclusions

The aim of the present dissertation was to examine bisexuality in the characters of Carmilla and Dracula, from their homonymous novels written by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu and Bram Stoker. Both have been studied before from the perspective of queer studies as homosexual characters, yet the goal was to disprove it by demonstrating they are depicted as bisexuals. For this, both novels were analyzed bearing in mind the Victorian mindset regarding sexuality and Irishness.

The research has shown that authors Sheridan Le Fanu and Bram Stoker were highly influenced by their social context when creating these antagonists, transporting the England-Ireland dynamic to their novels. It has been seen how the locations of Styria and Transylvania were connected with Ireland, a place highly related to Gothicism, with possible allusions to the country that make it reasonable to think that the authors were inspired by the Irish landscape to write their novels. This allowed the authors to embody the British vision of the Irish people as outsiders and of this veiled Ireland as a paranormal country.

By representing them as the Other and placing them in a conflictive land, the public imagination of the Victorian period could easily regard them as immoral. Added to the new field of sexology and rejection of alternative sexualities outside of the man/woman dynamics, Le Fanu and Stoker imbued their characters with the anxieties of their time. Moreover, writing *Dracula* helped Stoker cope with the scandal of the trials of his friend Oscar Wilde.

Although both vampires have the same sexuality and act in similar ways, it has been shown how female bisexuality was more accepted than male, since Le Fanu is more explicit than Stoker in comparable events. This is consistent with the more permissive Victorian attitude towards lesbians.

However revolutionary it may seem to represent bisexual characters in the nineteenth century, both novels close with the assassination of the vampires, in line with the mindset that erased what they considered deviant traits and behaviors.

These findings have significant implications for the understanding of how sexuality was understood and represented in the literature from the Victorian Era. Bisexuality has been long ignored, even within queer studies, therefore it is

understandable that critics and scholars did not research bisexuality during the Victorian period.

*Carmilla* has been acknowledged as non-heterosexual from the early twentieth century; nevertheless, no one has inquired before about the origins of the female Karnstein progeny or the significance of her words about her death. *Dracula*, on the other hand, has been regarded either as a homosexual or as a sexual predator; however, scholars have chosen one alternative or the other without bearing in mind a third option, bisexuality, that would fit these possibilities.

Notwithstanding the relatively limited sample of background work, this work offers valuable insights into the depiction of bisexuality in *Carmilla* and *Dracula*. This dissertation lays the groundwork for future research into bisexuality in characters and works before the twentieth century. This new point of view cannot only be applied to alleged homosexual writers like Stoker, who might project their private lives into their work, but also to heterosexual writers as Le Fanu. It is common to look for homoeroticism when the author is homosexual as well; perhaps examples like *Carmilla* can help broaden this view. Being limited to the analysis of the novels, this study lacks biographical background from the authors to further understanding of their inspirations and sights. Further research might explore the relationship between the authors lives and/or their notes and the bisexual characters they created. The issue of bisexuality in canonical novels is also an intriguing one which could be usefully explored in further research.

There is, therefore, a definite need for inclusion in literary criticism in general and within queer studies in particular. This will not only help us understand works or their authors, but also the society they lived in and how it treated certain topics.



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