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**Gothic Lesbianism in Joseph T. Sheridan
Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), Daphne
Du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) and Sarah
Waters's *Fingersmith* (2002)**

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Abstract

Gothic literature sets the ideal environment to represent sexual orientation and, specifically, lesbianism in a period when homosexuality was transgressive, as is nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain. This dissertation examines the evolution in the representation of the lesbian figure from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. This study is based on the analysis of the main female characters as lesbian figures in three British Gothic novels from different periods: *Carmilla* (1872) by Sheridan Le Fanu, *Rebecca* (1938) by Daphne Du Maurier and *Fingersmith* (2002) by Sarah Waters. The analysis takes as a primary reference the literary Gothic tradition, Queer Theory and Lesbian Gothic. The conclusions show that the lesbian figure of the twentieth-first century is represented with more confidence about her sexual identity than those of the previous novels, but Gothic elements still reflect an anxiety about it caused by social prejudice similar to the previous centuries.

Keywords: Lesbian Gothic, Lesbianism, British Gothic literature, Sexual identity, Queer Theory.

Resumen

La literatura gótica crea el entorno ideal para representar la orientación sexual y, en concreto, el lesbianismo en una época, como es la Gran Bretaña de los siglos XIX y XX, en la que la homosexualidad tenía un carácter transgresor. Este trabajo estudia la evolución en la representación del lesbianismo desde el siglo XIX hasta el XXI. Para ello, se analizan los personajes femeninos principales en tres novelas góticas británicas de periodos diferentes: *Carmilla* (1872), de Sheridan Le Fanu; *Rebecca* (1938), de Daphne Du Maurier; y *Fingersmith* (2002), de Sarah Waters. El análisis toma como referencias metodológicas la tradición gótica, la teoría *queer* y el subgénero gótico lésbico. Las conclusiones muestran que la figura lesbiana del siglo XXI se muestra más segura de su identidad sexual, pero los elementos góticos aún reflejan la ansiedad causada por los prejuicios sociales, de una forma parecida a los siglos anteriores.

Palabras clave: Gótico lésbico, Lesbianismo, Literatura gótica británica, Identidad sexual, Teoría *queer*.

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Introduction

This dissertation explores how the image of lesbianism is displayed in Gothic literature along three centuries and whether this representation is different in each period. Throughout the centuries, different novels categorized as Gothic that included sexual implications that could be interpreted as cases of lesbianism emerged. As the time advanced, social conventions were changing, the role of women was gaining more importance in society, and the characterization of lesbian behavior was becoming more explicit in literary works. Homosexuality was considered taboo and it remained illegal until 1967 in the United Kingdom. However, the birth of Gothic fiction with *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole encouraged many writers to deal with transgressive topics and create characters with deviant behaviors. The presentation of the female figure is crucial to Gothic literature, which has allowed the representation of queer identities and, specifically, it has created the perfect conditions to depict the acquisition and development of a lesbian identity.

This is the case of novels such as *Carmilla* (1872) by Sheridan Le Fanu, *Rebecca* (1938) by Daphne du Maurier, and *Fingersmith* (2002) by Sarah Waters. Although they belong to different centuries, *Carmilla* and *Fingersmith* are set in the Victorian period, when women spent a great part of their lifetime at home, where some were educated and expected to follow social norms and marry. However, the fact that they belonged to the private sphere and had very limited access to the public sphere enforced the relationship between women, for they could spend more time together, and the close level of intimacy between them is often associated with homosexuality in queer studies. Although there is more evidence of male homosexual individuals in the nineteenth century, Martha Vicinus notes that “[...] we do not find an absence of lesbians in the Victorian period but, rather, an eloquent silence” (72). It is also important to mention that – in contrast to *Carmilla*, with more implicit and ambivalent erotic contents – *Fingersmith* was written at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when literary works with explicit sexual gender-related contents were common and legal.

Rebecca was written after the first wave of feminism, a period when women were starting to leave the private sphere and becoming more conscious of their sexuality. As Vicinus suggests, in opposition to what happened to homosexual men in England, the prosecution against women that were in a homosexual relationship was normally not divulged, for it was believed to “corrupt the innocent” and, also, to ridicule and threaten the social norms (71, 75). For this reason, as a literary work, *Rebecca* may be considered ambivalent, as the lesbian connotations presented in the novel are implicit. Moreover, Daphne du Maurier was attracted to women (Schlumberger, et al. 30:30-42:55). Although she was not exclusively lesbian, she was confused about her own sexual identity, as the concepts related to gender that exist nowadays were unknown in her times.

Although the study of lesbianism, along with queer theory, is very recent, since the 1990s, the scholarship related to the field has increased significantly. Albeit there was no law expressly written against same sex-encounter between women in England in the twenty century, lesbian women were subjected to the same homosexual law and they went through several difficulties to express themselves because of the norms women were restricted to. Moreover, in the Christian religion both homosexual men and women were severely punished for it was perceived as a sin. During the nineteenth century, many women were considered to be mentally ill or to suffer from ‘hysteria.’ Lesbian women were treated medically, but they were not socially acknowledged because society interpreted lesbianism as a mental condition or deviant behavior. Some of those women rejected the social norms and tried to live their life with more freedom in the shadows of society, while they acted as ladies on the surface to avoid being exposed. It is in the context of domesticity and secrecy where the intimate relationship between women lies, and where the Gothic features act as a disguise to cover the forbidden reality of those lesbian women.

Gothic literature explores darkness, mystery and transgression, which may be used as a means of liberating the repressed, and discuss about the unspoken hidden in the subconscious of the author or society in an indirect way. During the Age of Reason, the apparition of Gothic literary works created a clash between the rationality of the century and the irrational ideas reflected in the Gothic writings. As Fred Botting states, this new

genre generated more incongruencies and, instead of teaching moral and logical lessons of life, it increased the ignorance of readers by “[...] encouraging excessive emotions and invigorating unlicensed passions” (3). In addition, since most readers were women, there was a general concern because Gothic writing was understood as a way of promoting violence and obscenity, which could corrupt the minds of female readers and incite them to act against morality (Botting 4). Also, it should be noted that Gothic writing has still an important impact in the present century and that it is essential for the defense of homosexuality, as it permits people to express themselves in a way that other literary genres and social conventions did not allow in the previous centuries.

During the past few decades, the importance of queer studies also affects the analysis of previous literary works that had not been connected to homosexuality so far. Queer studies give us the opportunity to understand more about the perception of lesbian women.

For this reason, in the present work I will focus my analysis on the three Gothic novels aforementioned: *Carmilla*, *Fingersmith* and *Rebecca*. In order to identify and explain the events and issues that connect the topic to the novels, it is important to be aware of the social criticism in the Gothic genre and to have a basic knowledge about queer theory. Hence, the first section of this dissertation will be a brief overview of British Gothic literature. In this section, I will mention the features that characterize the genre and how these Gothic features influence literature in the Victorian era, the twenty century and how this Gothic tradition is still present in the early twenty-first century. In the second section, I will present an overview of the association between lesbianism and literature, along with a definition and explanation of the concept of the Lesbian Gothic. In the third section, I will introduce the novels and some of their main formal features before proceeding to the analysis. The next three sections correspond to the analysis, in which I will explore the novels separately according to the Lesbian Gothic definition. Each of these sections will be divided into five subsections in order to analyze different aspects concerning the depiction of lesbianism after identifying the female characters of interest in each novel and their role as possible lesbians in a Gothic environment. In the first subsection of each section, I will

give a brief summary of each novel for the reader to understand the analysis. In the second subsection, I will analyze the main aspects that characterize the main female characters, such as their behavior, attitude, physical description and perception by other characters. In the third subsection, I will explore how women are eroticized in these novels. The following subsection will focus on how in these novels the motif of the corruption of innocence is used to reflect the awakening of a homosexual identity. In the last subsection I will examine how lesbians develop their identity. Finally, I intend to establish a brief comparison among the different lesbian characters, which will lead me to explain how the depiction of lesbianism evolves along those novels, considering the Gothic elements used by their authors.

1. An overview of British Gothic Literature

One of the most important literary genres of British literature since the eighteenth century that is still present in contemporary literature is the Gothic genre. Providing a definition of Gothic literature is not an easy task. In the words of James Watt, “the Gothic came to be redefined as a continuous and unified tradition in a way which still exerts a powerful hold today” (132). British Gothic literature is characterized by a series of elements and a specific vocabulary different authors have employed in their works.

In order to understand Gothic literature and why the Gothic works differ from one another in different periods, it is important to consider the origin of the term “Gothic.” As Alfred E. Longueil has explained, the term might derive from the Germanic tribes known as Goths, who were considered “barbarous” people. During the medieval period, the Germanic culture dominated Europe, which was mainly reflected in architecture and persisted during the Renaissance in some countries. Longueil has noted that “the word seems to have three meanings, all closely allied,— [sic] barbarous, mediaeval, supernatural” (454), which evolved separately. Although, in the creation of a Gothic story, all of them were combined into one, in the sense that “medieval” represents the past (but not precisely the Middle Ages nowadays), “barbarous” represents the villainy presented in the story, and “supernatural” not only represents a magic element, but any aspect that may be considered odd, deviant and not socially accepted.

Furthermore, the term became important in the Anglo-speaking world in the eighteenth century, when Horace Walpole published a second edition of *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), which he subtitles as “A Gothic Story,” revealing his identity after having published the first edition (1764) anonymously, for it was a complete novelty at the time. The eighteenth century is the Age of Reason and the apparition of *The Castle of Otranto* meant a disruption of that rationality. James Watt has remarked the idea that Horace Walpole might had had the intention of reviving the lost irrationality and creating a new type of writing (12). The story is based on the medieval period, but what makes it different from the eighteenth century stories is the incorporation of supernatural elements and, therefore, the use of imagination along with terror. Many authors were influenced by

Horace Walpole and expanded the genre. As Longueil has pointed out, readers focused their attention on the “supernatural incident” instead of the medieval setting and, as a result, many writers reproduced the features of *The Castle of Otranto* based on the readers’ reception (458). By the nineteenth century, the term “Gothic” started to be used mainly in literary terms as its medieval meaning was slowly fading and “Gothic” was understood as “grotesque, ghastly, and violently superhuman” (459).

Walpolean Gothic focuses on the past, the antiquarian, through the setting by means of the medieval architecture and objects. Supernatural elements are used to play with the readers’ minds. British Gothic Literature is characterized by the constant presence of the past, a castle and its Gothic style, a dark and gloomy environment, the occurrence of strange events that evoke terror and laughter and characters that intrigue the readers. One of the main purposes of a Gothic narrative is to cause anxiety on the reader, which may be associated to a social or individual repressed issue that is expressed under metaphors to hide the real meaning. Watt agrees that Gothic stories “challeng[e] readers to assimilate or comprehend [them] however they can” (34). After *The Castle of Otranto*, two different trends emerged in Gothic literature. The first, which Watt has denominated “Loyalist Gothic,” preserves the original Gothic elements, but tends to discuss general issues concerning Great Britain as a nation. The second trend – where Lesbian Gothic may be placed – encompasses writings where many authors explored the genre as a way of expressing any social and individual repression.

In the nineteenth century, a great amount of Gothic works was published, and British Gothic Literature went through a large process of transformation. In the Victorian period, those changes became more evident because of writings dealing with transgressive topics. The genre started to take a more psychological turn, which continues in the twentieth century. Nowadays, Gothic Literature is still progressing and understood as a literary mode that constitutes a wide range of literary genres.

Gothic literature still allows the manifestation of suppressed anxiety. As Paulina Palmer notes, Gothic narratives contemplate a reality that other genres tend to ignore, for Gothic concentrates mainly on “acts of sexual or social transgression” by exploring any

repressed fear and desire (*Lesbian Gothic: Transgressive 3*). Due to social conventions and prejudices, many social and individual issues that are considered taboo or unacceptable remain silent, and people need to find a way to express their repressed emotions. For this reason, many writers may resort to the Gothic mode.

2. Lesbianism and literature

The second half of the twentieth century is marked by the manifestation of different sexual identities that were advocating their rights and liberation in an oppressive society through social movements, literature and politics. In 1991, Teresa de Lauretis grouped the past theories related to homosexuality under the term “Queer Theory” in her work titled “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities,” where she argues homosexuality “is no longer to be seen either as merely transgressive or deviant” (iii), and she proposes a deconstruction of the standardized concept of gender and a reconstruction of sexuality. Although Gay and Lesbian Studies are recent, the discussion and theories about the topic has a long history. Albeit in the broader sense of the word, lesbianism is the sexual or emotional attraction between women, De Lauretis considers lesbianism as a form “of resistance to cultural homogenization, counteracting dominant discourses with other constructions of the subject in culture” (iii).

As it has been mentioned, lesbianism encompasses a long history, but because women’s writing is scarce compared to men’s, there is not much source of information related to female same-sex attraction and most of them are written by men. As William K. Prentice explains, the earliest literary account of women attracted to other women comes from the poetess Sappho, who lived in 600 BC (347). Many of her poems were lost, others had to be reconstructed and some of the ones that have come down to us express a very erotic type of writing. Also, it is known that she had an intimate relationship with many women. Prentice mentions that after Sappho’s death, Sappho started to be described as “a beautiful, passionate woman, leading a life of freedom, luxury, and promiscuous sensuality” despite knowing almost nothing about her life, which gave place to the existence of “two Sapphos” in literature (351). It is thought she committed suicide for her unrequited love for a man, although it could be just speculations to undermine her controversial life, as Page DuBois suggests (3, 9). Her poems also seem to show the impossible love between women, such as her Poem 31 (Sappho 11), where Sappho depicts an ardent type of love, with homosexual connotations, that she must “endure” for her lover is already taken. This topic of an impossible love and a tragic ending of the lesbian woman

will also be reflected in later literature, such as the novels that will be analyzed in this work.

Moreover, homosexuality was forbidden for centuries, not only men were punished but also women. Although during the eighteenth century the matter was mostly attributed to men, in the nineteenth century same-sex relationships between women began to gain importance through medical advances. In fact, homosexuality was seen as a pathology. Patricia E. Stevens and Joanne M. Hall comment that “[m]edicine's power in the realm of social control stems from its authority to define which behaviors, persons, and things are ‘normal’” (294). Therefore, lesbianism was between “immorality and madness” (294) and many women were confined in asylums in order to protect themselves and society from moral corruption (295). Although, according to Stevens and Hall, some pioneers of sexology such as Magnus Hirschfeld, Karl Ulrichs and Havelock Ellis regarded homosexuality as a “natural variation” (295). Homosexual studies in medicine intensified the negative perception of the issue, and many of the methods used to “cure” the patients consisted of cruel actions (294, 297, 298, 300). As Stevens and Hall note, just like male homosexuals were connected to an effeminate behavior, lesbians were also characterized with masculine traits (299) – although nowadays those traits are considered stereotypes. Stevens and Hall also remark that during the last years of the twentieth century, many lesbians faced prejudices in the healthcare system – which still continues nowadays – for they were considered even more dangerous for the patriarchal society than gay men because of the long history of women’s constraint. However, queer movements were crucial to reinforce the change in the conception of homosexuality, which is now understood as a sexual preference and an essential part of an identity.

The depiction of female same-sex desire in literature starts to be more prominent in the nineteenth century, when scientific discussions were taking place. Explicit homosexual contents were considered taboo and many authors employed metaphors for them, which were interpreted in different ways. In this sense, Gothic Literature contains the ideal features that allow narratives with homosexual contents to be written and expressed metaphorically. In addition, as Paulina Palmer states, the term “lesbian” has one particular

similarity with the term “Gothic,” which is “excess” of immorality, emotions, desire, anxiety and pleasure that may lead to transgression (“Lesbian Gothic: Genre” 118). Palmer also comments that the Gothic mode “portray[s] an eccentric, disruptive subject who exists in marginal relation to mainstream society” (*Lesbian Gothic: Transgressive* 1), which is the case of lesbian women in the twentieth century. According to Palmer, “Gothic narrative explores the disintegration of the self into double or multiple facets,” while a homosexual character may present “multiple sexualities” and perform different roles (*Lesbian Gothic: Transgressive* 8), and both Gothic and lesbianism may produce fear and anxiety. Gothic motifs were appropriated by lesbian narratives to create what is known as the Lesbian Gothic.

The concept of the “Lesbian Gothic” was coined by Paulina Palmer in *Lesbian Gothic: Transgressive Fictions* (1999) to analyze the way in which her contemporary women writers make use of the Gothic mode to explore different issues related to same-sex attraction in their narratives. Although the term is recent, older Gothic novels, such as *Carmilla*, may be included in the category of Lesbian Gothic. During the second half of the twentieth century, with the increasing publication of lesbian narratives, a lesbian was considered “an ‘eccentric’ disruptive subject who transgresses sexual and social convention” and a figure associated to evil and darkness, to the Other (Palmer 6) – someone who did not meet the norm. The Lesbian Gothic is mainly focused on “female sexual orientation and its cultural and Lesbian political ramifications” (3) and on the use of fantasy to escape reality (6). These types of narratives include four basic features that are associated to a lesbian character: “secrets, frustrated desire, shame and persecution” (11).

Moreover, as Palmer (*Lesbian Gothic: Transgressive*) claims, Gothic narratives regard unconventional aspects that destabilize reality; this is also applied to lesbian narratives, since the presence of a lesbian character disrupts the traditional idea of sexuality and gender in the twentieth century (9). Society rejects the existence of lesbian women, who struggle between reality and their real identity and emotions, where Gothic intervenes “to explore these conflicts and tensions” (10). Additionally, the lesbian figure represents the “uncanny,” as Sigmund Freud describes it, and what is hidden and frightening for oneself

and the others. The real identity and desires of a lesbian, which have been repressed and strive to manifest consciously or not in different ways (speech, actions, emotions), scare the self and society because lesbianism may lead to immorality and sin. In literature, repression may appear as what Freud denominates “the double,” which he defines as “characters who are to be considered identical because they look alike” and share common perceptions, or a character that may feel identified with someone else (234). The image of the double contributes to the representation of lesbianism because one character may reflect the repressed desires of another character.

Furthermore, Patricia White observes that due to the patriarchal culture and dominance, supernatural elements – such as the image of a female monster – are essential to refer to homosexuality (142). Thus lesbian figures may appear either implicitly or explicitly in a way that agrees with society’s view of lesbianism. In her investigation, Palmer (*Lesbian Gothic: Transgressive*) also adds the figures of the vampire, the witch and the spectral visitation, that are usually associated to homoerotic and ghastly images of lesbianism. The use of these figures in narratives was common at the end of the nineteenth century. In other cases, supernatural elements appear as a result of psychological disturbances. In “Sexual Indifference,” De Lauretis reinscribes the lesbian “in excess – as excess – in provocative counterimages sufficiently outrageous, passionate, verbally violent and formally complex to destroy the male discourse on love and redesign the universe” (165), that is, as “monstrous or grotesque” (167). In short, in *Lesbian Gothic: Transgressive* Palmer points out that the representation of lesbianism by means of supernatural elements reinforces the prejudices lesbians encounter in society instead of deconstructing the stereotypes, because lesbians are depicted as society perceives them (23). However, through literature lesbians have a voice and they are allowed to emerge to tell their own story, fears, desires, emotions and past (23). They are presented as heroines, villains or victims, naïve or assertive and, sometimes, as Palmer suggests, sexually experienced.

3. *Carmilla*, *Rebecca* and *Fingersmith* as Lesbian Gothic novels

As the title of this dissertation indicates, the purpose is to analyse Gothic Lesbianism in three novels from different centuries, characterized by introducing lesbian characters, and examine how the depiction of lesbianism is presented.

The first novel is *Carmilla* (1872), by the Irish writer Sheridan Le Fanu, which is argued to be an adaptation from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "Christabel." The character of Carmilla is considered as the first female vampire, for Le Fanu explicitly states it in the narrative. However, authors such as Arthur H. Nethercot considered Geraldine, the antagonist in "Christabel," as the first vampire for she possesses qualities similar to Carmilla's. This novel belongs to the Victorian period, although it is not set in England but in Styria (Austria). It presents all the main elements of Gothic fiction: an old castle, supernatural beings (Carmilla) and events, dark settings, a remote time, mystery and superstition. When it was published, the novel was not interpreted as a homosexual story, but in the twentieth century there were speculations about it as a possible lesbian novel, as Nethercot has suggested. The story presents two main female characters, Laura and Carmilla, who become intimate friends. Although homosexuality is not explicit, but symbolized through Carmilla's bloodlust, there are several signs that show Carmilla's sexual orientation. In the novel we see how perverseness attempts to dominate innocence.

The second novel is *Rebecca* (1938), by Daphne Du Maurier, published during a period when women were beginning to liberate themselves, after the first wave of feminism. It is also thought that the novel reflects Du Maurier's complicated sexual orientation (Laing). However, the same as in *Carmilla*, there is no explicit homosexuality, but, again, there are several signs in the main female characters that distinguish them from what it was expected from a heterosexual woman of the time. As a Gothic novel, it does not have supernatural elements in the strict sense of the word; instead, there is a mystery that makes the reader wonder whether Rebecca is a ghost that never appears or if it is just the imagination of the characters. In other words, the supernatural and the mental processes seem to be combined. The novel also presents an old building, the return of the past, terror

and strange events. In this novel, there are three female characters to consider: the unnamed narrator, Rebecca and Mrs. Danvers.

Finally, the third novel is Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith* (2002), published after the liberation of queer identities started, which was being reflected in literary works. The action is set in the Victorian era and presented with realism, for the novel depicts the dark side of society, the forbidden and the life of women in asylums. In contrast to the previous novels, there are explicit lesbian contents in *Fingersmith* to show the development of lesbian identity in the two main characters, Susan and Maud. Although this novel is more realist than *Carmilla* and *Rebecca*, it presents the same basic Gothic features.

The three novels have female homodiegetic narrators, which helps the reader to understand the characters' reactions. This is particularly important to analyse lesbianism, as we shall see in the analysis below. In the following section I will conduct this analysis taking into account some characteristics to compare the depiction of those queer characters in the different novels. In order to see the representation of a lesbian identity, it may be interesting to explore the description of those characters, the eroticism of female characters, the motif of the corruption of innocence and the development of a lesbian identity in the novels.

4. Analysis of *Carmilla* (1872)

4.1. Summary

Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* relates the story of Laura, the narrator of her own story. Laura, a lonely and maternal orphan, grows up in an isolated castle in the forest of Styria having as only companies her father and her two governesses. Her life starts to change when, one night, a carriage stops in front of the castle carrying a guest, the beautiful and mysterious Carmilla. As soon as they meet, Laura realizes Carmilla is the same girl from a frightening event that marked her when she was six. However, a passionate friendship between them begins and inexplicable events start to occur. Laura starts to be tormented by nightmares while her health deteriorates. Whereas Carmilla becomes more vivacious, she seems to sleepwalk. Laura's father fears that she might have acquired the strange illness that has been killing many young women recently. At the end of the story, General Spielsdorf appears to tell the story of his niece's death, and a woodman discloses the existence of vampires ("revenants"). After that, it is revealed that Carmilla's real name is Mircalla, the Countess Karnstein, who died over a century before the narrated occurrences and became a vampire who feeds on women's blood and kills them. This discovery leads to her execution.

4.2. Characterization

Laura is a nineteen-year-old young woman depicted by Carmilla as "a beautiful young lady, with golden hair and large blue eyes, and lips" (40). Laura does not describe her own physical appearance, instead, explicit descriptions of herself are provided by other characters. The characterization of Laura is carried out through her actions, speech and thoughts. She is portrayed as a curious girl who tries to know more about her new friend, Carmilla. Laura is the traditional aristocratic Victorian girl who lives confined at home, morally upright, learned (as she is the one writing her own story) and with proper manners (at the end of the story, she grows quieter and more absent as the male figure takes the lead of the narration).

In contrast, Laura provides a detailed description of Carmilla: a tall, slender and graceful girl with languid movements; lustrous, large and dark eyes; fine, soft, long, dark hair with something golden; with a sweet voice; and, above all, with a unique beauty, very attractive and confident. Concerning their lives, Laura relates her lifestyle, house, family matters and lack of friendship. However, Carmilla's life remains a mystery till the last chapter when her past is revealed. Moreover, as Carmilla's identity is disclosed, her identity starts to take shape and her beauty is replaced by a "horrible transformation" (141) that resembles "a monstrous cat" or "a beast" (74).

4.3. Erotization of lesbianism

Romance in *Carmilla* is more implicit than explicit, and eroticism usually appears through Carmilla's speech and actions (embraces, caresses and kisses). The figure of the vampire and blood are often associated to eroticism (*Lesbian Gothic: Transgressive*). This assertion may be more easily perceived in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), a novel considered to be influenced by *Carmilla*. In *Dracula*, the innocent and beautiful Lucy Westenra falls victim of a vampire, Count Dracula, who visits her and feeds on her blood on several occasions, and then turns her into a vampire. During her transformation she is believed to be ill and her behavior starts to change as she acts more seductively toward men, which expresses her desire for blood. When Lucy becomes a vampire, her desire increases. Similarly, Carmilla's thirst for Laura's blood and her bite can be understood as erotic desire. The first time Laura is bitten by Carmilla since their reencounter is when Laura realizes she had adopted Carmilla's habit of checking her room when she was alone before sleeping. That is when her dreams and "strange agony" begin (74). Curiously, Laura feels the bite on her breast (75) and not her neck, where Carmilla bites her, and this feeling turns Laura into an erotic figure.

Carmilla is considered as the first female vampire and the fact that her targets are women who instantly feel attracted to her makes the novel a homosexual narrative – in which the character of Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt (the General's niece) is added to the story and plays a role similar to Laura but with a different end since Laura does not die. Laura and Carmilla feel drawn toward one another and Carmilla considers they are destined to be

together. Also, Carmilla presents herself as a lady with a life as lonely as Laura's to gain her sympathy. Carmilla is a sentimental character that overtly confesses her love: "I have been in love with no one, and never shall," she whispered, 'unless it should be with you. [...] I love you so'" (65). She usually tries to seduce Laura by whispering in her ears and embracing her, which pleases Laura and, at the same time, scares and repulses her (41).

Sometimes [...], my strange and beautiful companion would take my hand [...]; blushing softly, gazing in my face with languid and burning eyes, and breathing so fast [...]. It was like the ardor of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet over-powering; [...] she drew me to her, and her hot lips traveled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, "You are mine, you shall be mine, you and I are one forever." (47-48)

4.4. The corruption of innocence

From the beginning, Laura is depicted as an innocent girl who feels extremely excited about Carmilla's arrival even before meeting her: "I was delighted. I was longing to see and talk to her" (36). The fact that she lives in an isolated castle prevents her from having friends and contributes to preserve her innocence, till Carmilla appears. Laura understands Carmilla's strange intimate behavior as friendship and she is easily entrapped by Carmilla. However, she is also aware that Carmilla's behavior and attitude toward her are similar to those of a man trying to court a woman: "[...] was there here a disguise and a romance? I had read in old storybooks of such things. What if a boyish lover had found his way into the house [...]" (48).

Carmilla is presented as a genuine and affectionate girl, although later she is revealed to seduce, feed on and kill other girls while she is with Laura. Carmilla's behavior and attitude are used as a mean to approach her victims to seduce them and gain their confidence before attacking them. In fact, she is a vampire, a creature that is usually associated to immorality and corruption, because she kills her victims once she achieves what she wants, i.e., blood. She may also have the power to transform Laura into a vampire, which would turn Laura into an evil creature. Moreover, Carmilla does not hide her romantic feelings toward Laura, since she suggests turning Laura into a vampire in order for them to be together: "In the rapture of my enormous humiliation I live in your warm life, and you shall die—die, sweetly die—into mine" (46). Carmilla may also be considered

as an evil being for having same-sex attraction. She even tries to make Laura accept her own feelings: “[...] you [...] will [...] learn the rapture of that cruelty, which yet is love” (46).

Both characters feel drawn toward one another, but while Carmilla attempts to get emotionally and physically closer to Laura, Laura tries to fight her own feelings, although she fails: “I used to wish to extricate myself; but my own energies seemed to fail me” (46). All these differences create a contrast between Laura – proper, pure, enthusiastic and blonde – and Camilla – indecent, promiscuous, melancholic, ill appearance, and dark haired. Laura recognizes her feelings of love towards Carmilla, even if she does not understand them, sometimes she enjoys them.

I experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust. I had no distinct thoughts about her while such scenes lasted, but I was conscious of a love growing into adoration, and also of abhorrence.
(47)

This contrast changes when Laura starts to become confused about herself as Carmilla shows affection and feeds on her: “I don't know myself when you look so and talk so” (48). Laura realizes she is not the same: “I felt myself a changed girl. A strange melancholy was stealing over me, a melancholy that I would not have interrupted” (81). This phenomenon is explained by what Freud calls “the double”: Laura identifies herself with Carmilla and she even hears Carmilla’s mind during one of Laura’s strange dreams: “Your mother warns you to beware of the assassin” (84), which is not Carmilla’s voice, but readers may imply it is from another vampire communicating mentally with Carmilla or a remembrance. Carmilla is considered as “a mirror image” and the “negative” side of Laura (Dijkstra 341). In addition, although Laura’s life is saved, ten years after Carmilla’s execution, she still remembers Carmilla and daydreams about her (156), which suggests she is not the same innocent girl presented at the beginning of the novel.

4.5. The rise and development of lesbian identity

In relation to repressed sexuality, it is not certain when Carmilla begins to be attracted to women, whether it is before or after vampirism. Her life as a human may

represent the time she followed social conventions, like Laura at the beginning of the narrative. It could be argued that the moment Carmilla feels same-sex attraction is when she becomes a monster and the characters start to see her as such. In fact, there is a passage where it is described how vampirism happens:

A person, more or less wicked, puts an end to himself. A suicide, under certain circumstances, becomes a vampire. That specter visits living people in their slumbers; they die, and almost invariably, in the grave, develop into vampires. (155)

As a metaphor, vampirism may be interpreted as how homosexuality starts in the novel; that is, someone who develops same-sex attraction approaches an innocent person who also develops it, which could be the case of Carmilla. Therefore, Carmilla may be seen as someone whose existence haunts and destabilizes the patriarchal society by using unmarried young girls as her targets and corrupting them. Despite her young appearance, Carmilla is older than Laura and, therefore, she is more experienced.

In contrast, it is possible to observe how Laura's lesbian identity emerges. After meeting Carmilla when she was six, she felt "for the first time frightened" (14), but she always remembers this event till their second encounter. Although she recognizes Carmilla as the one who caused her fear, she also feels attracted to Carmilla. In fact, Laura is aware of this "paradox": "but I was conscious of a love growing into adoration, and also of abhorrence" (47). Again, this is connected to the double, for Laura may be confronting her other self, her lesbian identity. She feels anxious when Carmilla shows affection, yet "the sense of attraction immensely prevailed" (41). Unlike Carmilla, Laura's progress as a lesbian character is not shown since the romance between Carmilla and Laura is interrupted when the male characters discover Carmilla is a vampire and kill her. Moreover, the death of Carmilla could indicate the end of lesbianism in the novel because she cannot attract more women to her and Laura is not turned into a vampire. Significantly, Laura recounts her story and confesses that "the image of Carmilla returns to memory with ambiguous alternations" (156), suggesting that Laura's lesbian identity still haunts her and strives to be released. Furthermore, as a homosexual character from the Victorian period, Laura's agony may be identified as fear for same sex-attraction, since it was taboo during that time. This fear is reflected in how Laura does not dare to tell her father about her horrors, because she

thinks he would either “laugh” or consider them as a disease (77). Her fears lead her to suppress her desires.

5. Analysis of *Rebecca* (1938)

5.1. Summary

Rebecca, by Daphne du Maurier, is narrated by an unnamed character, who is the heroine and tells her story in the form of a flashback. While working as a companion for a wealthy woman in Monte Carlo (France), the heroine meets Maximilian (Maxim) de Winter, a peculiar and prestigious widower who owns an old, beautiful and sinister mansion called Manderley (England) and hides a dark secret. Few weeks after they meet, he proposes marriage. She accepts and then they move to Manderley, which is haunted by the memory of Maxim's first wife, Rebecca, whose essence and objects are everywhere. The heroine starts to grow obsessed with Rebecca, who appeared to be perfect, and she feels insecure about her position as the second wife. Moreover, she is frightened and intimidated by the housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers (Danny), who shows a strange devotion towards Rebecca and attempts to destroy the heroine's marriage and make her commit suicide by insinuating that Maxim still loves Rebecca. However, the discovery of Rebecca's body, who was believed to have drowned while sailing a year before the current events, leads Maxim to disclose that he never loved Rebecca and he had murdered her because she was manipulative and cruel. Maxim is suspected of murder by the authorities and Mrs. Danvers; after a long process to prove his innocence they return home to find out that Manderley is on fire and Mrs. Danvers has disappeared. The married couple ends up leaving the place.

5.2. Characterization

For this analysis, three characters will be considered: the heroine, Mrs. Danvers and Rebecca. The heroine is an orphan young woman from the lower middle class in her early twenties. After she leaves Manderley, she sees her old self as someone timid, naïve, hopeful, eager, gauche, "with an intense desire to please" (10). She is also constantly daydreaming and overthinking about everything. She is jealous of Rebecca, but also curious, as she tries to know more about her. The heroine struggles to fit in her husband's social life because she feels unassertive and powerless compared to Rebecca ("And

[Rebecca] I could not fight. She was too strong for me,” 262), yet she does nothing to change it. She is self-conscious and wants to change, for she says: “I wish I was a woman of about thirty-six dressed in black satin with a string of pearls” (40). After knowing the truth about Rebecca, she becomes confident and experienced.

As for Mrs. Danvers, the narrator depicts her as “someone tall and gaunt [...] set in a skeleton’s frame,” “lifeless,” (74), pale, cold-hearted, with a toneless voice and with black eyes, black hair and dressed in black clothes. She represents a gruesome gothic figure. In fact, she is the villain in the story, as she attempts to destroy her new mistress’s life. Moreover, she always shows her fondness toward Rebecca and her disdain to the heroine. When Mrs. Danvers speaks about Rebecca it is like life returns to herself.

Rebecca is the opposite to the heroine and identified as an evil figure. She was beautiful, attractive, versatile and admired; tall, slim, broad shoulders, slender, with white skin and dark hair. Rebecca is believed to have been the ideal wife in terms of manners, beauty, intelligence and talent – according to the heroine’s interpretation of the information she obtains from those that met Rebecca. Later on, Maxim reveals that Rebecca was “vicious, damnable, rotten through and through” (304) and that she was indecent, manipulative and unable to love for she had lived a promiscuous life and used Maxim to obtain whatever she wanted. Mrs. Danvers also comments that Rebecca hated men and used them for fun. Furthermore, by playing the perfect wife, Maxim reluctantly allowed her to secretly live a free life away from Manderley in order to keep appearances. There is little account about her past before marriage. She is even compared to a snake or someone who undergoes a physical transformation: “the real Rebecca took shape and form before [Maxim], stepping from her shadow world” (304).

5.3. Erotization of lesbianism

Explicit erotic lesbian acts are almost inexistent since they occur mainly via indirect contact through Rebecca’s objects, as Hallett (2003) suggests. It is important to bear in mind that Rebecca is neither alive, nor physically present since her ghost never appears. However, she is the main element of attraction in order for the heroine and Mrs. Danvers to express themselves as lesbian characters.

Mrs. Danvers may be considered as the main lesbian character because she never hides her feelings and that may be seen through her actions and speech when she is given the opportunity to speak about Rebecca to the heroine, which always happens in Rebecca's room. The first time the heroine enters Rebecca's room, which Mrs. Danvers preserves rigorously, the housekeeper reveals her thoughts about her previous mistress; she worships Rebecca by praising her and accepting her dark side. Mrs. Danvers becomes extremely excited when she speaks about Rebecca's belongings and body. She forces the heroine to caress, feel and smell Rebecca's clothes, shoes and hairbrushes:

She looked beautiful in this velvet. Put it against your face. It's soft, isn't it? You can feel it, can't you? The scent is still fresh, isn't it? You could almost imagine she had only just taken it off. I would always know when she had been before me in a room. There would be a little whiff of her scent in the room. (191)

It is unclear how close the relationship between Mrs. Danvers and Rebecca was. However, there are some hints provided by Mrs. Danvers and Maxim that show that Rebecca was not heterosexual. First, Mrs. Danvers quotes Rebecca's words, which imply that their relationship was intimate: "You maid me better than anyone, Danny, [...] I won't have anyone but you" (189). Note that the term "maid" seems to be a pun, for it is used as a verb that sounds like "made"; that is, Mrs. Danvers *made* Rebecca happy. Second, Mrs. Danvers confesses that Rebecca should have been a boy because she "had all the courage and spirit of a boy" (272). Additionally, Maxim is ashamed of the things Rebecca told him about herself, which he should not "repeat to a living soul" (305). What Rebecca told him is never disclosed but she might have revealed deeds considered taboo, such as homosexual acts. He even mentions that "[Rebecca] was not even normal" (304).

As for the heroine, she may be considered a lesbian figure because of her interest in Rebecca. The heroine is moved by an increasing curiosity – she wants to explore the other, the unknown and forbidden, since Rebecca is barely spoken of at the beginning. She is constantly trying to picture Rebecca and her return, such as the scene when she enters Rebecca's room for the first time. She imagines both of them in the same room looking at one another through the mirror; she waits but she feels disappointed when nothing happens.

Moreover, there is a moment when the heroine uses a suit that belonged to Rebecca and she finds in a pocket a handkerchief, which she observes carefully:

There was a pink mark upon the handkerchief. [...] She had rubbed her lips with the handkerchief [...]. I noticed that a dull scent clung about it still [...]. I shut my eyes and tried to remember. It was something elusive, something faint and fragrant that I could not name. I had breathed it before, touched it surely [...].

And then I know that the vanished scent upon the handkerchief was the same as the crushed white petals of the azaleas in the Happy Valley. (133)

The Happy Valley is an astonishing forest in Manderley that the heroine is attracted to and associates with a woman:

When the leaves rustle, they sound very much like the stealth movement of a woman in evening dress, and when they shiver suddenly, and fall, and scatter away along the ground, they might be the patter, patter, of a woman's hurrying footstep, and the mark in the gravel the imprint of a high-heeled satin shoe. (9)

Rebecca's name is a key element that eroticizes the heroine, who avoids pronouncing it for fear of what could happen. However, the first time she inadvertently pronounces it, she feels excited and relieved, and has the urge to repeat it. Moreover, sometimes she feels so identified with Rebecca that her dull self stops existing, such as the scene when she starts to behave differently and Maxim notes it as if she was someone else, which displeases him. The heroine even admits this attraction: "I wondered what [Maxim] would say if he really knew my thoughts, my heart, and my mind, and that for one second [...] I had been Rebecca" (225).

Finally, Mrs. Danvers and the heroine dislike one another, but there are small signs that show a slight attraction between them. For instance, when they first meet, they hold hands as a greeting and Mrs. Danvers leaves her cold hands into the narrator's; when their gazes met, the protagonist says: "her hand moved in mine, the life returned to it, and I was aware of a sensation of discomfort and of shame" (74). This is the first direct contact between them, which alarms the heroine for the change in temperature in Mrs. Danvers hand that has sexual connotations.

5.4. The corruption of innocence

The narrator is the only innocent figure in the novel. She undergoes an important change throughout the story, which she recognizes: “At any less I have lost my diffidence, my timidity, my shyness with strangers” (9-10). Her husband tries to preserve her innocence, till he is forced to reveal the secrets concerning Rebecca: “[T]hat funny, young, lost look [...] is gone [...]. You are so much older” (336). Meeting Maxim leads the heroine to her final destiny, and moving to Manderley increases her curiosity.

At the beginning she seems like a child imagining a perfect life, with a husband and a house, but these illusions are slowly broken as she secretly knows more about Rebecca. Despite her naivety, she also has ambitions, but her insecurities prevent her from pursuing them as Rebecca did. In fact, she is afraid of freeing her desires but sometimes she cannot escape them. She subconsciously shows her desire to revive Rebecca by exploring the past, saying Rebecca’s name and touching her belongings, which cause a return of the repressed.

Mrs. Danvers is the figure who introduces Rebecca and contributes to corrupt the heroine’s mind from the moment they first hold hands. However, Mrs. Danvers just seems to be the means by which the heroine becomes closer to Rebecca. That way, the heroine’s repressed desires are slowly manifested, which puts her in a state of confusion for hating and fancying Rebecca at the same time. She slowly loses her old self and starts to act like the person she believes Rebecca was. She feels identified with Rebecca, suggesting that Rebecca is her double, her repressed lesbian desires.

As for Rebecca, there is no detailed information about her life. Rebecca has lived a life full of freedom and she always obtained what she wanted. Mrs. Danvers might have contributed to Rebecca’s personality because she raised Rebecca and then became her maid. Rebecca’s past is like a shadow that is barely spoken of. In the case of Mrs. Danvers, her life is a mystery for all that is known is related to her obsession with Rebecca.

5.5. The rise and development of lesbian identity

The heroine is the only innocent character whose lesbian identity may be seen emerging since there is not much information about Rebecca’s and Mrs. Danvers’s lives.

For this reason, the narrator will be the main focus of interest in this analysis. The heroine's characterization evolves from the moment she meets Maxim, who leads her to Rebecca. The first time she becomes aware of Rebecca's existence is through a book of poems that contains Rebecca's name and initial before moving to Manderley. This discovery frustrates her, yet that is when her curiosity starts and she tries avoiding thinking about Rebecca: "She was dead, and one must not have thoughts about the dead. They slept in peace, the grass blew over their graves" (63). Rebecca signifies what is repressed and attempts to be manifested, that is, the heroine's deepest desires, which she denies.

Throughout the book it is seen how her obsession with Rebecca increases; she caresses anything that Rebecca had touched and imagines a story as a way of giving shape to Rebecca. Moreover, she wants to hate Rebecca but she recognizes that Rebecca's presence is powerful, while she feels powerless. Sometimes she even feels confused about herself and her feelings: "Perhaps I haunted her as she haunted me" (262).

She wants to destroy Rebecca in order to keep her own mind and life under control. When she discovers Maxim had killed Rebecca, she chooses to protect him in order to save her marriage and prevent Rebecca from winning. She succeeds because Rebecca is mistakenly proved to have committed suicide for being sick. However, even after losing Manderley, she still thinks about Rebecca, hides her thoughts and chooses to maintain her desires hidden. Marriage seems to be her safe place; she feels at peace and considers that Rebecca will be unable to haunt her far from Manderley. Nonetheless, she knows she has changed.

As a final note, the heroine could have chosen to become like Rebecca if she sided with Mrs. Danvers and ruined her own marriage, which could lead to both women living in Manderley along with Rebecca. In addition, becoming Rebecca would give the nameless narrator a name and make her accept her lesbian identity.

6. Analysis of *Fingersmith* (2002)

6.1. Summary

Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith* contains two female protagonists, Susan (Sue) Trinder and Maud Lilly. The novel is divided into three parts. The first part is narrated by Sue, an orphan teenager who lives in the Borough of London with Mrs. Sucksby, who takes care of infants as part of a criminal business. A young man known as Gentleman persuades Sue to go to the Briar mansion (in Marlow) as a maid in order to convince the heiress Maud to marry him and then send Maud to a madhouse as a way of inheriting her fortune. Maud spends her days in the library with her uncle (Christopher Lilly), an odd and authoritarian man. The plan starts to complicate when an intimate relationship is born between the two girls. Gentleman forces Sue to carry out the plot, but when the three of them arrive at the madhouse, Sue is the one to be detained. It turns out Sue is deceived by Maud and Gentleman.

In the second part, Maud relates her childhood in a madhouse, where her mother (Marianne Lilly) had been kept, till her uncle forces her to move with him. In Briar, she is educated in a cruel way for his own purposes: work with pornographic books. She recounts her encounter with Gentleman and his plot: marry him and share her fortune in exchange of her freedom from Briar. After leaving Sue at the madhouse, she expects a good life in London, but she is disappointed. Everything changes when Mrs. Sucksby reveals a dark secret.

In the third part, Sue recounts her torture in the madhouse and her escape. She travels to London to kill Maud, but her plans change after a violent unexpected occurrence: Mrs. Sucksby is hanged by the authorities for murdering Gentleman. Afterwards, Sue discovers in a letter the dark secret Mrs. Sucksby had been hiding: she is Susan Lilly, Marianne's daughter, while Maud is Mrs. Sucksby's daughter. Mrs. Sucksby had planned everything after Marianne left Sue in her care (promising a share of the fortune) to protect Sue from Marianne's evil brother, Christopher Lilly, who had taken Marianne and Maud to the asylum. In the end, Sue returns to Briar to stay with Maud, after her uncle's death.

6.2. Characterization

Sue is a seventeen-years-old girl that is raised as a thief by Mrs. Sucksby, who treats her with a surprising kindness. She is raised in a slum house in Victorian London. Sue is mainly portrayed as kind (she doubts about defrauding Maud and worries about her, but she also wants the fortune for Mrs. Sucksby), naïve (she is the one who is being tricked from the beginning and she easily trusts those she loves) and skilled (her knowledge in thievery allows her to escape from the madhouse). She is illiterate and cannot read the obscene books and the letters exchanged among the characters that contain all the secrets she ignores.

In relation to Maud, she is a seventeen-years-old girl that seems innocent to Sue, who thinks “[h]er world [is] so queer, so quiet and shut-up” and “she [is] so simple and so good” (90). Later, Maud reveals the plot with Gentleman to move to London because she hates her uncle for his cruelties, such as depriving her from food to teach her manners just to make her a secretary. Additionally, being raised in a madhouse and then moving to the big, dark and isolated Briar causes Maud a subconscious fear that leads her to believe she is a ghost that will never escape from Briar. Her fears are manifested in the form of nightmares or visions, but she admits finding comfort in her own torment:

I imagine a thousand skulking figures with their faces at the curtain, a thousand searching hands. I begin to cry. [...] I long to lie still, so the lurking women [lunatics] shall not guess that I am there [...]. (190)

Moreover, Maud is clever and observant, for she suspects of Gentleman’s intention when he tells her about the plan to elope in exchange of her fortune, which she accepts. Also, both female characters are dishonest and coward, since they try to confront Gentleman, separately, to stop his evil plans but they fail because of their own ambition.

6.3. Erotization of lesbianism

Fingersmith is distinguished by its eroticism and explicit romanticism. The erotic attraction between Sue and Maud is shown in detail through their actions, speech, thoughts, feelings and objects, among others. Although *Fingersmith* is a twenty-first century novel,

the fact that it is set on a period when homosexuality was forbidden increases its erotic quality.

Maud is the main sexual object due to her obligations toward her uncle, who receives male visitors that listen and watch Maud read pornographic books in a soothing tone and dressed in inappropriate clothes for her age (“the skirt was full and short and showed her ankles” (66), as Sue notes), which please them. In theory, Maud is an expert in the topic of sex and she admits she is good at writing about it. She uses her knowledge in the matter by playing the innocent: “After all, this is how it is done, in my uncle's books: two girls, one wise and one unknowing...” (281); she encourages Sue to show her what happens in the wedding night and that leads to their first sexual intercourse. The descriptions of the erotic acts are very detailed since the same scene is sometimes presented from both characters’ perspective. During the first sexual act they describe their own feelings and actions, and they also have shared perceptions, as Freud proposes in relation to the idea of the double (234), since they have similar thoughts. This may be seen in the following passages, which correspond the same scene, narrated by Sue and Maud, respectively:

I began at the meeting of our mouths—at the soft wet corners of our lips— [...] I had touched her before [...] but never like this. So smooth she was! So warm! It was like I was calling the heat and shape of her out of the darkness—as if the darkness was turning solid and growing quick, under my hand. (142)

When she puts up my nightgown and reaches between my legs, we both grow still. When her hand moves again, her fingers no longer flutter: they have grown wet, and slide, [...] like her lips as they rub upon mine, to quicken and draw me, to gather me, out of the darkness, out of my natural shape. [...] I feel her inside me. (282-283)

Furthermore, throughout the novel Sue and Maud are constantly observing and thinking about one another. In the case of Sue, the first time she dresses Maud, she contemplates Maud’s body: “[F]or a second I turned, and looked at her. [...] I saw her bosom, her bottom, her feather and everything [...]. So pale she was, she seemed to shine” (83). In addition, Maud always wears gloves; her bare hands are seen as an erotic element, for Sue is jealous when she sees Gentleman kissing Maud’s “naked palm” (117), which Sue

considers better than the lips, since Maud is only allowed to take her gloves off when she is working with her uncle. However, the next day after their first intercourse, she is aware of her influence over Maud: “[I]f I had drawn her to me then, she'd have kissed me. If I had said, I love you, she would have said it back” (144).

As for Maud, as soon as they meet, she feels attracted to Sue, who believes Maud to be a “good girl” (248) and stays with her in the same bed to protect Maud from nightmares. This closeness between two girls in a private space generates a sexual tension that slowly starts to manifest. Additionally, this closeness makes Maud act with kindness and submission with Sue – in contrast to her previous maid, who Maud mistreated for pleasure. Maud becomes aroused even during a simple moment, as when Sue uses a thimble to fix Maud’s pointed tooth, for she wonders: “May a lady taste the fingers of her maid?” (256). Maud tends to think about Sue in a more transgressive way before their first intercourse.

6.4. The corruption of innocence

Maud is a respected lady on the surface but, in reality, she is corrupted by her uncle. As she says, she is not educated as other girls, for the sexual knowledge she acquires is taboo for other women. As a young child, Maud starts to be corrupted by what she has seen in the madhouse, where women suffer cruelly, as Sue depicts when she is detained. At the age of thirteen, Maud is filled “with a kind of horror” (200) when she reads about how children become lustful adults. After that, she analyzes the body of her (illiterate) maid, Barbara, who is terrified when Maud uses a vulgar slang to refer to her genitals. Moreover, Maud is treated with disdain by the (literate) steward: “Mr. Way observes the gloves, then looks at me in a kind of satisfaction, a kind of scorn. *Fancy yourself a lady, do you?* he said to me” (265). Her uncle even employs a derogatory term to refer to Maud in a letter to Gentleman after the marriage. Furthermore, meeting Sue leads Maud to have her first intercourse, which does away with the little innocence left in herself when she experiments pleasure.

As for Sue, the fact that she is a thief turns her into an immoral person. However, Mrs. Sucksby raises her to be kind and she protects Sue’s innocence by keeping her away from boys, until she is sent to Briar. Sue accepts the plan for Mrs. Sucksby. However, when

she meets Maud, she becomes indecisive because she starts to have pure feelings toward Maud: “I always wanted a sister” (89); they have fun, play and dance. As they spend time together, Sue’s feelings grow stronger; she is jealous and fears for Maud when Gentleman kisses her hand: “I should have been glad to see him do it, I was not. [...] I thought he might [...] bruise her” (118). Then, Sue finally realizes her own feelings for Maud: “*It’s like you love her*” (136). After that, Sue kisses Maud in order to explain about the wedding night, but then Sue feels aroused: “I had done it, only to show her. But I lay with my mouth on hers and felt [...] everything I had said would start in her, when Gentleman kissed her” (140). In this case, Maud is the one who incites Sue to perform the act and corrupt her innocence.

Furthermore, the negative perception of same-sex attraction is always present in the novel. For instance, when Gentleman finds out about the relationship between Maud and Sue, he uses their feelings against them in order to carry out the plot, such as giving more reasons to the doctors to admit Sue (who the doctors believe to be Maud) in the madhouse: “You did nothing to invite or encourage the gross attentions my wife, in her madness, attempted to force on you” (301). Sue is treated for her supposed illness, but the treatments are cruel as if they were a punishment for her immorality.

6.5. The rise and development of lesbian identity

It is possible to see how Sue and Maud acquire a lesbian identity, for their story is told since they were children. As a lady, Maud is supposed to be part of Victorian standards for women, but she is an “uncommon girl” (203), as she well knows, because she is exposed to erotica. In addition, Maud never shows any interest in men. For instance, when Gentleman kisses her hand, Maud feels displeased and Sue realizes Maud rubs the kissed hand as if “[she] was trying to rub the memory of it away” (125); and Maud is even forced to act as a lover with Gentleman in order to deceive Sue and continue with Gentleman’s plot. In fact, her sexual awakening happens when she meets Sue, who she falls in love with: “I think I was dead, before. Now [Sue] has touched the life of me [...]. *Everything is changed*” (283; original emphasis). Nevertheless, her ambition is bigger than her feelings: “And so you see it is love—not scorn, not malice; only love—that makes me harm her, in

the end” (285). However, once Sue is detained, Maud always plans on rescuing her, although she fails.

In contrast, Sue belongs to the underclass, where she may be easily exposed to the immoral ways of life. However, considering Mrs. Sucksby protects her from any kind of perversion, Sue seems to grow used to the standardized gender role, for she seems a bit nervous when boys try to court. Her friend, Dainty, teaches her many things, such as kissing, although Sue does not show any romantic interest toward her. Sue’s lesbian identity remains dormant until she meets Maud. At first, Sue just feels sympathy for Maud, but soon she associates her feelings to sisterhood. Day after day, Sue’s feelings increase, till she recognizes she loves Maud. Nonetheless, Sue never seems to show any rejection, hatred or disgust for same-sex attraction, but she simply accepts her own feelings. Although Sue hates Maud after the betrayal, she cannot deny she still loves her. In the end, Sue wants to be with Maud.

Both end up together, in the Briar, where they can be alone. They have been connected since they were babies, they share (almost) the same sufferings and experiences. If they had not been exchanged, Sue would have had Maud’s life and vice-versa and, perhaps, they would never have met one another. However, the bond they share suggests that they are the double of one another, for Maud returns to the Borough to occupy Sue’s life. Moreover, it may be perceived how their thoughts are similar, since they are both too proud to give up their own ambition. Maud admits: “I could not want a lover, more than I want freedom” (240); and Sue notices: “I would have given up nothing for her; [...] I would [rather] die” (496). Finally, they obtain what they want in a tragic way, but they also end together, suggesting that they merge their selves.

Discussion and conclusions

Lesbianism has been represented in literature in different ways and, along with the increasing discussion about homosexuality, the Gothic motifs employed to cover this representation were also expanding. The main question presented at the beginning of the present work is whether there is a change in the depiction of lesbianism in British Gothic literature since the nineteenth century till the early twenty-first century.

In these novels, the Gothic elements are crucial for the development of the female characters analyzed. First, *Carmilla*, *Rebecca* and *Fingersmith* contain either a Gothic castle or a mansion, where strange events occur and evil resides (a vampire, Rebecca's ghost and erotica works); and, specially, where the lesbian acts happen. Second, in each of these novels there is at least one uncanny character from the start. In this case, the focus is on Carmilla (a vampire), Rebecca (a ghost depicted as wicked), Mrs. Danvers (a cadaverous woman obsessed with Rebecca) and Maud (who has sexual knowledge); each of them are key for the sexual awakening of the other female characters, respectively: Laura, *Rebecca's* heroine and Sue. Lastly, there is a return of the past. Carmilla herself represents the past, for she is an undead creature; Rebecca is dead, yet she haunts Manderley. In *Fingersmith* the remote time is present in two ways: first, the novel itself recreates the past; and second, the past haunts Maud and Sue's without them knowing since they were babies.

According to the analyses, the female characters are marked by some specific shared characteristics. All of them draw sexual pleasure from a different element: blood (Carmilla), Carmilla's caresses and speech (Laura), Rebecca's belongings (Mrs. Danvers and *Rebecca's* heroine) and direct contact (Maud and Sue). What these elements have in common is that, in order for a female character to show lesbian tendencies, she needs some sort of contact with her counterpart, which is explicitly achieved in *Fingersmith*. Sheridan Le Fanu employs metaphorical elements that symbolize sex, the image of a vampire and its bloodlust, which might have gone unnoticed in his time. Likewise, Daphne du Maurier uses mainly objects to denote the same idea. However, *Rebecca* may be less metaphorical since the heroine presents a contradictory attraction, for she is jealous of but she is also attracted

to Rebecca and she chooses to increase the indirect contact. In contrast, Carmilla has a vital need to maintain physical contact with Laura. In *Fingersmith* there is no metaphor, what is used instead is the villainy of the characters, which preserves the Gothic environment and the idea of the lesbian as a mischievous figure. Additionally, the moment the female characters – excluding Mrs. Danvers, whose past is unknown – are exposed to same-sex female desire their real identity emerges and they start to show lesbian tendencies, as seen in the analyses. This idea supports Kate Millett's theory that "[p]sychosexual personality is therefore postnatal and learned" (30). Moreover, all of them (except Laura) are moved by their own ambition to the point of betraying their lovers, resulting in a tragic ending: Carmilla's death, the destruction of Manderley (and Rebecca) and the failed plot.

In contrast to *Carmilla* and *Rebecca*, in *Fingersmith*, Maud and Sue end together. This ending would be unacceptable before the second half of the past century, but considering it is the twenty-first century, this ending is a progress that may be considered a way of giving voice to lesbians in a period when they remained silent. Moreover, the lesbian characters retain some sort of association with immorality. In the present century, queer identities have more freedom than over fifty years ago, but the social prejudices and fears still continue. Although *Fingersmith* is set in the Victorian era, it still reflects the denial of lesbianism in the current century. In short, following the analyses of *Carmilla*, *Rebecca* and *Fingersmith*, the representation of lesbianism in Gothic novels retain similar characteristics throughout the centuries. However, as society becomes aware of the phenomena, metaphorical language starts to decrease and other changes can be noticed. Thus in *Fingersmith* there is a crucial difference with the previous novels: Maud and Sue are not afraid of being together, nor they show rejection toward one another, while in *Carmilla* and *Rebecca*, Laura and the unnamed heroine attempt to reject their own feelings.

As a final comment, if the comparison had been broader, perhaps there would have been other interesting findings. This study is relevant to understand the position of lesbians who are conscious of themselves or still in a latent state, in a specific period of time. Either way, lesbians still face many issues in society that may cause anxiety when it comes to express themselves. Some writers still may use the Gothic mode to explore those present

fears. Therefore, it is worth studying and understanding the representation of queer identities in Gothic novels.

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