Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's Sense of the Gothic in "Carmilla"

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JOSEPH SHERIDAN LE FANU'S SENSE OF THE GOTHIC IN *CARMILLA*

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Abstract

The following paper tackles Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu and his novel *Carmilla* with the intention of proving it to be a true gothic story. Le Fanu's work has had a major influence on gothic fiction overall as well contributing to it in various manners. What is particular about one of his most influential work, *Carmilla*, is the incorporation of a female vampire, as well as homosexual attraction.

Although Le Fanu is not as recognized as, for example, Bram Stoker and his *Dracula*, one will, through this work, understand his major influence which helped in developing this archetypal vampire.

Today the subgenre of vampire fiction is widespread, and one may find its origins in the gothic literature works which saw a flourish in the second half of the 18th century. This paper comprehensively accounts for the genre in general, tackling as well the subgenre of vampire fiction, crucial for understanding and analyzing *Carmilla*.

Carmilla is thoroughly analyzed through citations accompanied by my own reflections in order to assert its gothic tale constituents. Paragraphs taken from the mentioned work are most picturesque and provide a joyous journey through the narrative.

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Introduction

Through this paper I intend to present the distinctive manner in which Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu weaves his narrative and gives account of one of the earliest depictions of vampire fiction. While gothic fiction was already well established in the second half of the 19th century, Le Fanu is, with Polidori, one of the authors who developed the vampire tradition in gothic literature. (*Gothic Fiction* 2018)

Young Le Fanu, who was born in Dublin in 1814 was forever intrigued by the mysteries and folklore of the village Abington, where he spent his years until entering the Trinity College, while exceptionally interesting to him during his youth, was the Cappercullen House, a house that was in ruins, which stood among the foliage of a mountain side – a folklore abundant region. (Byrne 81)

The Ghost and the Bone-setter, a narrative dealing with superstition and his first literary piece, was published during his college years at Trinity College, while his sanguine personality which turned melancholic after his wife's death, supported his imagination and storytelling abilities. (Byrne 81, 92).

This paper will account for the staple features of gothic fiction, giving the overview of its origin and development while also introducing its key properties and most prominent authors. Distinctive branches of the genre will be covered, with the emphasis on the Irish branch of the genre, as well as the topic of the vampire subgenre and its key authors. After delving into Le Fanu's *Carmilla* and its abundant gothic constituents thoroughly, supported by the story's paragraphs, the influence he has had on other authors of the genre as well as on the genre as a whole will be discussed.

1. Defining Gothic Fiction: The Origins, Evolution, and Properties

The circumstances that made the development of the gothic as a literary technique possible originate largely from romanticizing the past, from the reimagined versions of a bygone age. (Smith 2) Gothic fiction made its appearance in the second half of the 18th century, while the term "gothic" itself is a far older notion: since it had existed for centuries before this adjective was added to a literary mode, as an architecture style during the late medieval period of the late 12th, 13th and 14th centuries, but also as a form of art in general, one can assume that gothic fiction is not actually related nor does it depict the state of affairs of that time - it is an occurrence which is completely post-medieval. (Hogle 1) The 18th century saw „Gothic“ as barbaric and applied to the distant past, an era of superstition and ignorance, and from this the civilized nation appeared, while simultaneously having importance in the birth of modern Britain through the idea that this modern liberty was born from Teutonic and Germanic tribes, particularly the Anglo-Saxons (Morin 16)

With Enlightenment which came to existence in the 18th century, and which found rationality to be a supreme virtue, Romantics found it to be the opposite of what they believed to be the explanation of human experience. (Smith 2) In some ways, the gothic in literature is related to the notions of Romanticism: they highlighted human imagination, emotions and inner worlds we all carry within as bearers of our experience. (Smith 2) These ideas were also supported by the contemporary authors in philosophy; the then prevailing philosophies which delved into the boundaries of human mind stated that a key Romantic concept, the sublime, was closely related to frightening and transgressive feelings, with feelings of terror, and put thought, introspection and inner understanding above the ideas of Enlightenment which was dependent on rational, objective reality. (Smith 2, 3) It is not unlikely for the gothic fiction to exert similar anti-enlightenment proposals; the reason for it can be found in its dependency on feelings and thoughts. (Smith 3) While having a read of a gothic novel, it is crucial for the reader to also look beyond the common tropes of the genre, which may seem superficial at times, so as to reveal the anti-Enlightenment notions, while subtle political views may be revealed through exploring the way the "evil" is being characterized, by understanding which behaviour is being demonized in a particular story. (Smith 3) The subtle politization of the gothic narrative is not to be surprised by; the literary genre emerged in a century of overturns and violence. (Smith 3) The political context of the 18th century was surely a large part of the reason gothic fiction emerged exactly in that particular era. With the French Revolution, the

beheadings, mass executions and overall violent conditions, the circumstances were fruitful for such a genre to materialize. There is a relationship between the so called Terror in France and its literary versions; the way it is illustrated may reveal the political views but also the morality of a particular author. (Smith 3)

The spark was lit with the opposition to the ideas of Enlightenment, and the political conditions were more than appropriate for gothic fiction to develop. The gothic genre surpasses national and other contexts; it emerged in different countries during different years and social contexts, which is why today we enjoy the American Gothic tradition (closely related to slavery and post Civil-War black identity), the British Gothic (concerned with political turmoil of the late 18th century), the German Gothic (with roots in German Romanticism), the Irish Gothic and other. (Smith 4)

According to Edmund Burke and his *Philosophical Enquiry*, the aforementioned sublimity is related to obscurity which inspires magnificent feelings, and a sense of amazement stimulated by incomprehension of the world, while also central to his ideas is the notion that the fear of death supplies the best instance of sublimity. (Smith 11) In his own words:

> *Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.* (Smith 11)

The importance of his ideas of the sublime is in the recognition of the sublime as a negative experience because it augments strong feelings concerning our own passing and our own triviality, while the concepts which are possible causes of sublimity, according to his ideas, are feelings of anxiety, obscurity, power etc. (Smith 12)

Freud's Oedipal conflict was shaped with the help of the features of the gothic genre; it is often about a male character, a "son" who wishes to commit a murder while feeling guilt and fear about his inner longings, while the equally often gothic heroines desire to free themselves of patriarchal dominance. (Hogle 5) Freud saw ghostly apparitions and phantoms as clear instances of "the Uncanny", and the uncanny, for him, (which he analyzed by scrutinizing the Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann's gothic story *The Sandman*) is what is familiar to us internally, but unfamiliar as it reemerges in external, repulsive shapes. (Hogle 6)

Freud claims that "the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar". (Smith 13) A mix of fears and desires presented in a fictional manner stays a constant element in the gothic genre throughout centuries, even with the changes the society underwent during the 19th and 20th century. (Hogle 5) Specific settings are crucial in the gothic genre; the plot is most often situated in various types of monasteries, castles, abbeys, ruined old houses, laboratories, theatres etc.; ruins of buildings, particularly ruined castles give the gothic genre a specific sensation of loneliness and alienation. (Hogle 2) Antiquated spaces, graveyards, factories, decaying and abandoned buildings, crypts, reformations of older buildings – they all hold hidden secrets from the past within themselves, secrets that now haunt and torture the tale's characters. (Hogle 2) Ambiguity is most often discerned as a feature of a gothic novel, as well as feelings of simultaneous attraction and repulsion, while a character of a lady in distress is also commonly found through the genre. (Miles 40)

There are categories which can be divided into geographical characteristics (ruins, black towers and castles, dark valleys), architectural characteristics (abbey, ancient castle or house, monastery), generic characteristics (tales, memoirs, romances, and traditions), ghosts (apparitions, specters, magicians, and necromancers), names of exotic origin (Wolfenbach); generic figures (knights, monks). (Miles 42) A figure of speech is also often used in the genre, to add depth and intensify the atmosphere; shrieking doors, howling sounds, thunder, wind and rain all contribute to the setting. Portrayals of monstrosities, depictions of insanity, feelings of transgression and the preternatural – these motifs are persistent in the genre as they contribute to its particular aesthetic. (Smith 4)

Often found in the gothic genre is a concoction of features stemming from different spheres, which are most often life and death, and the characteristics of ghosts, apparitions, monsters, specters are commonly assumed. (Hogle 2) Gothic fiction will frequently fluctuate torn between the reality of the earthly laws and the supernatural, while the supernatural forms will often emerge from an antiquated space or other realms to bring out a long suppressed conflict, crime, or some kind of a haunting secret. (Hogle 2) Contradictions are also most representative of the genre; there are frequent depictions of deepest desires and longings challenged with fears and other sources of anxiety, while their forms are usually exaggerated. (Hogle 3) The power of the gothic genre lies in its ability to put one’s deepest desires under a guise but also to address them, as well as our anxieties and deepest internal fears. (Hogle 4)

The trend of the gothic genre was started with Horace Walpole's tale first presented as a counterfeit (he presented it as an Italian work originating between 1095 and 1243) stemming

from the Middle Ages; *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764, and then reissued two years later with a new introduction which promoted it as a combination of an ancient, imagination dominated romance mixed with modern, probability governed romance, but only with the second publication did *The Castle of Otranto* acquire an addition to the title: a Gothic Story. (Clery 21) The importance of the second publication lies in its outlining of the basics of the genre and many of its key characteristics. (Smith 19) Before the gothic literature started to flourish in the 1790s, there are few other authors who emerge along with Walpole; Sophia Lee (*The Recess*, 1785) and the Aikins (brother and sister John and Anna Laetitia – *The Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror*, 1773), all of them contributing to the genre with adding some features which became its staples: Sophia Lee pioneered the use of history, the Aikins incorporated the aesthetic of sublimity derived from Burke, while Walpole himself introduced the element of a haunted castle. (Miles 42) Clara Reeve, in her preface to *The Old English Baron: a Gothic Story* (1778), used the technique presented in Walpole's *Otranto*, but slightly altered**:** "a sufficient degree of the marvelous to excite the attention; enough of the manners of the real life, to give an air of probability to the work; and enough of the pathetic, to engage the heart in its behalf".

In the next few decades, rarely was there an attempt of imitating the trend; gothic fiction experienced the real flourish only with the beginning of the 1790s through the 1830s (known today as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* era). (Hogle 1) Between 1790 and 1794, Ann Radcliffe emerged with her first novel, *The Castles of Athlin and Dumbayne* and highlighted a haunted castle, a villain, a ghost and a terror galore, after which she became the predominant novelist of the decade who contributed greatly to the genre by introducing the ample landscape descriptions and highlighted the role of the nature, while Mary Wollstonecraft (*Maria; or the Wrongs of Woman*, 1792) and Eliza Parsons (*The Castle of Wolfenbach*, 1793) continued in the same decade, and a new kind of gothic emerged: the German Gothic, with Friedrich Schiller's *The Ghost-Seer* (1787-1789) which gave rise to abundant imitations (*Horrid Mysteries* (1769) by Karl Grosse, *The Necromancer* (1794) by Carl Friedrich Kahlert etc. (Miles 45)

The central year seems to be 1794; it saw the increase in the publishing of the gothic genre; *The Mysteries of Udolpho, the Adventures of Caleb Williams* (a Jacobin Gothic) were published: the Jacobin gothic presented a more politically oriented subgenre. (Miles 48) In the late 1790s, Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* and *Modern Novel Writing* by William Beckford were the most influential. (Miles 52) With regards to historical events of the time (the beheading of king Louis XVI, Robespierre's fall, the

massacre of 1792), the gothic genre became, according to Hogle, „a way of speaking the unspeakable“.

Through the 19th century the gothic style professed itself in various types of literature: operas, magazine stories, newspapers, short stories, but there were also reappearances of gothic novels. (Hogle 1) This century gave us numerous gothic works such as Walter Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), Lord Byron's *Manfred* (1817), Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1819), John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), numerous Edgar Allan Poe's works (*The Fall of the House of Usher, The Pit and the Pendulum* etc.), Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853) *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas* (1864) and *In a Glass Darkly* which featured the tale of *Carmilla* (1872), Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). (Smith, n.pag.)

The 1890s, just like the 1790s, saw the re-emergence of the gothic fiction, especially in prose, which gave us the classics such as Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, while in the upcoming century the gothic extended into musicals, films, series, games while in literature it remained ongoing. (Hogle 2) The gothic genre expanded across different countries and nations to form different versions of the genre, which is why today we can distinguish the American Gothic, the British Gothic, The German Gothic, the Scottish Gothic, the French Gothic, the Irish Gothic and perhaps other distinctive branches.

The English Gothic surely wasn't the only example of the trend: there was a tradition of macabre adventure stories in France since the 1730s while in Germany, at the same time the trend reached its peak in Britain - tales of knights and ghosts flooded the market. (Hale 63) Two often neglected branches of the Gothic developed in France in the 1820s and the 1830s: the roman noir and the roman frenetique. (Hale 63)

As for the German Gothic, it was traditionally divided into three subgenres: novels of Chivalry, Banditry and Terror – the classification established in 1859 with the idea of an outlaw originated from Schiller's *The Robbers* (1795.), and with Schiller's *The Ghost-Seer* (1789), a subgenre rose with the intention of exposing the conspiracies of secret societies. (Hale 68) The mentioned roman noir, the roman frenetique and the Schauerroman ("shudder novel") are representatives of innovations, misappropriations and borrowings which took place and developed through the processes of translation of these works from German to

English and vice-versa, and it is unlikely they would develop in such a way if there wasn't for the mentioned process. (Hale 81)

The American Gothic is often scrutinized with the question "How come that such an ironic tradition of the Gothic, a literary genre fascinated by what is strange and haunting, could flourish in an optimistic country that "repudiated the burden of history?" (Savoy 167) An answer is most commonly found in the fact that this specific genre accounts for the "dark nightmare that is underside of the American Dream." (Savoy 167)

The American Gothic, just like the other versions of it, thrive on the standardized architectural points such as haunted houses, tombs, castles, with similar elements of the plot such as ghosts and curses, while the distinctiveness of the American Gothic is found in adapting the aristocratic to democratic situation and especially important is to notice the tradition of personification of abstract, burdenous ideas which are given a form in a spectre, an apparition. (Savoy 168) To write about the American Gothic without mentioning Edgar Allan Poe would be unjust. His contribution is a large one since his literary span incorporates poems, short stories, novels and essays. However, he has been a subject of a debate, since his work has sparked the imagination of psychoanalytically minded critics as well as those literary-historical. (Smith 61) With respect to this dual analysis, his works have been approached as if they "functioned like dreams", and the significance of historicizing his works has been emphasized in order to acknowledge that the terror of his tales are ones of the society, not of the soul. (Smith 63)

1.1 Irish Gothic

The scholarly work focused on the idea of a version of the Gothic genre, the Irish Gothic, has aimed attention on two main questions: "does an Irish Gothic tradition even exist, and if it does, what are its main features?" A common answer is that if this tradition does exist, it is then produced primarily by Anglo- Irish writers whose position of a minority in Ireland produced anxieties and fears which they then manifested through Gothic fiction. There is also a question whether the Irish Gothic is a genre itself, a subgenre or maybe a form or a mode, as well as the question of the historical context which can be understood through the Irish Gothic. (Haslam 113)

Protestantism and "the burden of the colonial history" seem to be the link among the authors such as Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, Oscar Wilde, Sydney Owenson, Maria Edgeworth, Charles Maturin, Bram Stoker and Regina Maria Roche – all of who expressed themselves through the genre of the Gothic and its motifs and settings. These writers of the 18th and the 19th century drew their inspiration from anxieties with which their privileged positions (they were members of Anglo-Irish Ascendency which was under threat by the Catholic middle classes) were encompassed. With the traumatic 17th century and a rebellion in 1798, the Irish historical experience was a nightmare itself –perfectly convenient, maybe even to say encouraging atmosphere for the Gothic genre to develop. (Haslam 113)

In the last decade of the 18th century, martial law was brought upon Ireland – the republican body in Ireland (the United Irish Society) was discharged by the Dublin Castle administration and the United Irish Society rearranged as an underground entity which was illegal, and the intentions to bring peace to the country were executed in a brutal way. (Gillespie 58) Particularly brutal methods were used while the disarming took place. (Gillespie 59)

Folklore seems to have a major role in the Gothic genre overall, as well as in the Irish version. There is an interest in superstition, the supernatural and transgression that is associated with both folklore and Gothic style: folklore and other narrative styles nourish Gothic fiction. (Markey 94) There are some names which need to be mentioned with respect to the beginnings of the Irish Gothic; the pioneers such as Siobhan Killfeather, Roy Foster, Julian Moynahan, Seamus Deane, W.J.Mc Cormack. (Haslam 113)

The key features of the Irish Gothic include its attention on suffering in silence rather than external demonstrations of agony and despair, focusing on the internal rather than external and there is also the notion that it is often written after a real trauma rather than an imagined one. (Shanahan 78) Not confining itself to a subgenre, the Irish Gothic often appears in other subgenres – there seems to be a trace of the Gothic in all types of Irish texts (Irish realism, for example, has abundant gothic elements) - for the atrocities of the Irish past are always close. (Shanahan 78) Dealing with the issues of history is a tradition in the Irish Gothic, cleverly hidden in a plethora of guises. As an example, Le Fanu's work often delves into the "unreliability of history and the perverseness of power", while it also includes polemics on religion and politics. (Punter 107)

1.2. Vampire Fiction

Most commonly associated with vampires in literature is surely Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. However, there are *Dracula*'s predecessors who paved the way while also inspired this cultural phenomenon. Vampires are not a product of literary fiction nor do they originate from it; the phenomenon can be encountered in folklore and its antecedents can be traced back to ancient times: the Aztecs, the ancient Greeks, the Mesopotamians; they all share similar legends and myths which seem to precede the vampire of folklore. (*Vampire* 2018) The vampire of folklore, however, is quite a different sight than the vampire of fiction - the vampire as a nocturnal being who preys on humans and drinks their blood, originates from the 17th century Slavic folklore, which spread across Europe in the upcoming centuries. (Kiesling 14) The vampire of folklore is a "plump Slavic fellow with long fingernails and a stubbly beard, his mouth and left eye open, his face ruddy and swollen." (Barber 2) Today's image of a vampire is a romanticized one. It is derived from the folklore but bears little resemblance to it, while a classic example of a vampire of fiction is, of course, count Dracula: a gentleman in a black cloak. (Barber 2)

The early vampire fiction gained popularity instantaneously and it also laid the ground for vampire's appearance and performance. (Hirschmann 7) In 1819 Lord Byron published the *Fragment of a Novel*, which was the first vampire story, although left unfinished, but heavily inspired what is today known as the first work of vampire fiction, John Polidori's *The Vampyre: A tale*. (Hirschmann 7) This tale is the result of a writing contest held among Lord Byron, John Polidori, Percy Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. This company of four gathered in Switzerland where, on a stormy night, they decided to tell frightening stories which later became the bases for some of their works. (Hirschmann 12) Polidori's *The Vampyre* is "steeped in Byron and Byronism" while it is "a sardonic development of Byron's material." (Auerbach 16) The simple story of *The Vampyre* incorporated the idea of vampires being a part of society: creatures that could interact and fit into social norms. (Hirschmann 8) From 1845 to 1847 Thomas Peckett Prest's *Varney the Vampire*, also known as *The Feast of Blood* was published, gaining much popularity and eventually expanding to over 800 pages. (Hirschmann 10) With *Varney*, the idea of shape sifting was introduced and this concept will be welcomed by numerous authors in the following centuries. (Hirschmann 11)

Carmilla was introduced in 1872 by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, encompassing all of the vampire fiction key features but also introducing a spin: incorporating a female vampire, and

while bringing this new notion to the genre, he also introduced the notion of homosexual desires. (Hirschmann 12) There are a few other reasons *Carmilla* was a breakthrough: what today is normally associated with vampires, such as sleeping in a coffin, uneasy feelings when around religious symbols and the ability to change into a different creature, was in Le Fanu's day innovative and eerie. (Hirschmann 14) The year 1897 brings the publishing of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, today seen as the archetype of a fictional vampire, however, the novel wasn't an immediate hot item – decades passed until its popularity started to rise. (Hirschmann 14)

Count Dracula became a cultural phenomenon, inspiring many renditions and continues to inspire to this day. Stoker based the story loosely on Vlad Tepes, a 15th century Wallachian ruler, known for his acts of cruelty. Stoker is also responsible for some of the today known vampire traits such as the inability to cast a shadow or a reflection, their ability to change into mist etc., and *Dracula* is often rendered as a turning point: after sticking to the rules created prior to and in *Dracula*, the 1900s brought forward reiterated forms of vampires which pushed this genre into a new cycle in which the demon vampire as well as a psychic vampire were some of the inventions. (Hirschann 22) An example is Fritz Lieber's *The Girl with the Hungry Eyes.* The 1970s introduced Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*, a tale of two vampires, the iconic and beautiful Lestat and Louis, vampires characterized in the original fashion, coming back to the basics, while Rice later published *The Vampire Chronicles*, following the same characters as well as the successful *The Vampire Lestat*. (Auerbach 153) Another prominent vampire fiction work comes from the renowned Stephen King with his *Salem's Lot* (1975). In the following decades vampire fiction becomes more and more inclusive of divergent themes such as AIDS stricken vampires in *Dracula Unbound* by Brian Aldiss (1991). (Auerbach 186)

The latest trend regarding vampires is surely to make the vampire narrative alluring to the teenage and young adult audience. The 90s brought Stephenie Meyer's *The Twilight Saga* - a new kind of vampire emerged, one which not only doesn't have to hide from the sun but also glimmers in it. Another example are L.J.Smith's *The Vampire diaries*, following the life of a teenage girl in love with more than a century old vampire which gained much popularity when televised. The notion of the vampire, the undead creature, has tickled humans' minds since the ancient times and hasn't since stopped inspiring literary writers as well as movie makers in modern times. Its evolution is most mesmerizing and captivating and it will be interesting to see what more is there to come - and although the modern iterations which

strive to appeal to young adults is much unlike the original vampires of fiction - it just proves how riveting the theme still is.

2. The Gothic in *Carmilla*

Le Fanu's *Carmilla* was first published as a serial in a literary magazine in London, *The Dark Blue*, from 1871-1872, while in 1872 Carmilla took a more usual form in a collection of stories *In a Glass Darkly*, as the last story in the collection which heavily influenced Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in building his vampire mythos. (Byrne 92)

Le Fanu surely is amongst the first authors who brought vampire fiction to popularity. *Carmilla* is today a classic vampire novella, revolving around the character of Laura, a lonesome young girl living in a secluded area in Styria with only her father and some servants, being desperate for some company, which she accidentally finds in the mysterious Carmilla. It is a story written in a Victorian setting, in a conservative era, and through it, one can observe the subtle criticism of Victorian patriarchy. (Leal 1) The story is told through Laura's account of the experience she had a decade before putting it on paper, when she was 18 years old, living with not much contact with other persons of her age, so, naturally, Laura cried for a friend. The tale begins with Laura's strange, dreamlike vision of a woman, which haunted her mind for years to come. The woman in question appears years later as an accidental companion, a friend of Laura's and it is revealed that she too had the same vision of Laura. The unfolding of the story will introduce Le Fanu's exquisite ability to create a real gothic atmosphere, as well as his criticism of the patriarchic society, but also the ambiguity of the relationship between the characters. Without spelling everything out explicitly, Le Fanu weaves a tale of a possible homosexual desires between characters, at a time when it was not only hard to imagine, but it even denied that such an occurrence could exist. (Leal 38)

In order to analyse *Carmilla* as a gothic tale, I will introduce the story's paragraphs accompanied with comments and observations to draw parallels with Gothic elements, already mentioned in the former chapter, such as dark, gloomy settings, old castles, ruins, mystic atmospheres or supernatural events. The moment of ambiguity as an integral part of a gothic tale is surely present in *Carmilla*, just as the notion of the attraction versus repulsion. Since not only the eerie setting is important to characterize a gothic tale, the subtle criticism and the depiction of Victorian society will also be supported through paragraphs taken from

the story. *Carmilla*, as it will be accounted for, is a typical gothic tale, brimming with examples which support the claim.

At the very beginning, Le Fanu introduces a lonesome setting, describing the place in question as „lonely and primitive“. He goes on to reveal that the story takes place in Styria, and the family in question inhabits a castle, while its surrounding are described as follows:

> *"...Nothing can be more picturesque or solitary. It stands on a slight eminence in a forest. The road, very old and narrow, passes in front of its drawbridge, never raised in my time, and its moat, stocked with perch, and sailed over by many swans, and floating on its surface white fleets of water lilies.*" (2)

The solitariness and the fact that the castle is situated on a naturally elevated position in a forest immediately evoke a gloomy, lonely atmosphere. The castle is lonesome in its surroundings, and what gives it a hyperbolized effect of the olden times is its encircling moat, overlain with branches and a dramatic drawbridge with an ancient road in front of it. Over this solitary scene, the castle dominates with its "many-windowed front; its towers, and its Gothic chapel". Le Fanu then quickly turns his attention to the forest, describing it as opening "in an irregular and very picturesque glade before its gate, and at the right a steep Gothic bridge carries the road over a stream that winds in deep shadow through the wood". The stream which one may almost hear burbling under the bridge, the deep shadow and the presence of which one may almost feel forming over the scene, the picturesque open space all lead to the dramatic final destination, the ancient castle. Its solitariness is not just imagined; *"the nearest inhabited village is about seven of your English miles to the left, while the nearest inhabited schloss is that of old General Spielsdorf, nearly twenty miles away to the right".* (3) However, there is another element adding to the overall gothic setting:

> *"...there is, only three miles westward, a ruined village, with its quaint little church, now roofless, in the aisle of which are the moldering tombs of the proud family of Karnstein, now extinct, who once owned the equally desolate chateau which, in the thick of the forest, overlooks silent ruins of the town."* (3)

As it is typical for a gothic tale, there is a legend regarding the cause of the abandonment of this "melancholy spot", but this will be accounted for later. Le Fanu here uses

highly evocative epithets in order to introduce that component of the old, abandoned setting in decay which reinforces the atmosphere relevant for a gothic novel. It also gives one an indication of the possible influence of the mentioned element on the plot itself. Now that the overall ambience is depicted, Le Fanu introduces the small-numbered family which inhabits the schloss; a father, and a daughter, whose names we only learn later, with some servants and two governesses: Madame Perrodon and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine. This gives the main character, Laura, little company, especially of girls her age, so we learn immediately of her life as "rather a solitary one".

One of the elements that make this tale a gothic one is presented quite straightforwardly among the very first pages; description of Laura's dreamlike vision that foreshadows future events is abundant in epithets, evoking sounds and brims with dark imagery. One will learn of the event that took place when Laura was six year old; her nursery placed in the upper part of the castle, "was a large room with a steep oak roof", and, not being able to see any of her maids guarding her, she witnessed a "solemn, but very pretty face" looking at her ; it was that of a lady who caressed her while kneeling beside her bed, which soothed Laura for some time and she fell asleep, but as soon she woke up, she felt "a sensation as if two needles ran into her breast very deep". With this vision's dualities of soothing vs. painful sensations the concept of attraction vs. repulsion is enforced as an element of a gothic tale. The event left Laura in terror, and other residents had no success in convincing her it was only a dream. Laura, who tells the tale from her perspective as a 28-year-old, describes the memory of this vision as "vivid as the isolated pictures of the phantasmagoria surrounded by darkness" and this is where Le Fanu uses dark and imagery but also consonance to reinforce the atmosphere.

Laura, desperate for some company is waiting on her father's friend, General Spielsdorf and his ward who she was supposed to make friends with and fill her lonely days, learns of the young lady's unfortunate death. General Spielsdorf's letter reveals only that she died but leaves Laura and her father in inability to understand the real reason behind her death. Letter bringing death is, typical for a gothic novel, harmoniously matched with the scenery in which Laura and her father read it:

> *"...The sun was setting with its entire melancholy splendor behind the sylvan horizon, and the stream that flows beside our home, and passes under the steep old noble trees, almost at our feet, reflecting in its current the fading crimson of the sky."(*8)

A life brought to an end is symbolically depicted through an ending of a day and in the fading colour of the sky. Le Fanu weaved plenty of instances of a gothic setting into the scene of Laura and her father strolling back towards the schloss after learning of General Spielsdorf's ward's death; "the moon shining brilliantly", "exquisite moonlight" enjoyed by the two governesses, "a thin film of mist over the sward", "the moon full of magnetic influence", and all of these seem almost romantic. Mademoiselle De Lafontaine is now introduced as a woman who believes herself to be "psychological, metaphysical, and something of a mystic" – a typical character for a gothic tale; and her declaration that "when the moon shines with a light so intense it is well known that it indicated a special spiritual activity". With this observation of Mademoiselle De Lafontaine's, Le Fanu introduces the moment of the supernatural; the possibility of ghosts, spirits, and apparitions becomes validated. As an omen, Laura's ill feeling that "some great misfortune" is hanging over them is a straightforward indication of the unfortunate events to come. The same moment brings an event completely out of the ordinary; a loud sound of a carriage being pulled by horses. Anticipating what might happen next, Laura covers her eyes not to witness the accident from which two lady's came out alive; now presumably a mother and a daughter – and which finally gave Laura a companion of her own age. The presumed daughter, not being able to venture forth, was left to be taken care of by Laura's father for three months, while the carriage with her mother, "the lady in the black velvet" was "swiftly lost to sight in the misty wood; and the very sound of the hoofs and the wheels died away in the silent night air".
The room they all gathered in with "candles lighted" is evocative:

> *"...it is furnished in old carved oak, with large carved cabinets, and the chairs are cushioned with crimson Utrecht velvet. The walls are covered with tapestry, and surrounded with great gold frames, the figures being large as life, in ancient and very curious costume, and the subjects represented are hunting, hawking, and generally festive."* (14)

One might almost smell the scent of the old wooden carvings and the soothing velvet of the chairs are almost palpable, while the overall room setting evokes the olden times with hyperbolized figures and the splendor of the golden frames. The room where the newly arrived guest was situated in had a "somber piece of tapestry" and "two candles at the bedside". When first approaching the guest, Carmilla, in her room, Laura went into a state of shock; for what she saw was the "same melancholy expression" she had seen years before in

her dreamlike vision. Upon finding out Carmilla had a similar vision, Carmilla's vision is equally gothic in nature as is Laura's from the beginning of the story;

> *"...I found myself in a room, "wainscoated in some dark wood, and with cupboards an bedsteads, and chairs, and benches placed about it...After looking around for some time, and admiring especially an iron candlestick with two branches, which I should certainly know again, crept under one of the beds, I heard someone crying; and looking up, while I was still upon my knees, I saw you."* (19)

This scene introduces the probability of travelling through time or some kind of spiritual travelling – the possibility is not discussed or explained, but is treated as a common occurrence between the two young women. Since Carmilla seems eager about the coincidence, Laura is at the same time enthralled by her beauty, but aside from feeling "drawn towards her", she also admits to feel "something of repulsion" - the mixed feelings and ambiguity - the usual element of a gothic tale. These feelings of repulsion will haunt Laura through the whole story, partially because of Carmilla's hesitancy to tell her anything concerning her history or rather anything connected with her life. Carmilla's appearance continuously enthralled Laura:

> *"...her complexion was rich and brilliant, her features were small and beautifully formed, her eyes large, dark and lustrous; her hair was quite wonderful...I have often placed my hands under it, and laughed with wonders at its weight."* (21)

Laura often found herself torn between these feelings of attraction and repulsion, constantly questioning Carmilla's history and noticing her "languid movements" as well as ‘‘coldness beyond her years". Carmilla's persistent unwillingness to shed some light on her situation was often masked with "foolish embraces" and "soft kisses" upon Laura's cheeks. Laura explains her confusion as follows:

> *"...In these mysterious moods I did not like her. I experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of ear 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. "* (23)

The relationship between Laura and Carmilla remains ambiguous throughout the story but there are often and at times subtle as well as stronger hints of their mutual attraction, which is another element of a gothic tale: pushing boundaries and introducing a controversial theme at the time. Same sex relationships during the Victorian era were frowned upon, and it was even hard to imagine such an occurrence should come to pass, so by delineating the subtle attraction between the two characters, Le Fanu is "speaking the unspeakable". Another gothic element, that of contradictions, especially concerning character's moods is often seen in his particular tale; Carmilla frequently went through the perplexing moods in short time intervals:

> *"...Sometimes, after an hour of apathy, my strange and beautiful companion would take my hand and hold it with a fond pressure, renewed again and again; blushing softly, gazing in my face with languid and burning eyes."* (23)

Le Fanu also finds a way to criticise the feudal society; after a young girl's death occurred nearby, Carmilla's response to her death and funeral was a representation of the high class society's attitude towards the poor: "*She? I don't trouble my head about peasants. I don't know who she is*." (25) Carmilla refused to acknowledge the girl's death which was rumored to have been caused by a ghost.

Generic figures such as monks and nuns are common figures of the genre. Le Fanu introduced one through the character of a hunchback who twice a year visits Laura and her father's castle:

> *"...It was the figure of a hunchback, with the sharp lean features that generally accompany deformity. He wore a pointed black beard, and he was smiling from ear to ear, showing his white fangs. He was dressed in buff, black, and scarlet, and crossed with more straps and belts than I could count, from which hung all manner of things. Behind, he carried a magic lantern, and two boxes, which I well knew, in one of which was a salamander, and in the other a mandrake...He had a fiddle, a box of conjuring apparatus, a pair of foils and masks attached to his belt, several other mysterious cases dangling about him, and a black staff with copper ferrules in his hand."* (27)

This character is a representation of all that is "forbidden", possibly a black magic practitioner. Black magic and the occult were the era's popular interests, very convenient for a

gothic tale, while Le Fanu also used it to portray the society. Amulets and good luck charms were popular items, so it is not a surprise that Carmilla and Laura instantly bought "*charms consisted of oblong slips of vellum, with cabalistic ciphers and diagrams upon them*". However, after addressing Carmilla and describing her as having "*the sharpest tooth – long, thin, pointed, like an awl, like a needle!*" and offering to correct her disfigurement, Carmilla takes offence and once again displays her abhorrence towards the lower class, which Le Fanu uses to display the possibility of lower classes to be sentenced to a horrible torture simply because someone of a higher class would demand so: "*My father would have had the wretch tied up to the pump, and flogged with a cart whip, and burnt to the bones with the cattle brand!*" (28)

When a messenger from Gratz came to the schloss, bringing many restored paintings, an extraordinary thing happened: one of the restored paintings portrayed an "effigy of Carmilla", with the date "1698" and the name "Mircalla Karnstein". After the strange occurrence, Laura and Carmilla both state they are long descendants of the Karnstein family. Now that this is known, one might notice another subtle way of "speaking the unspeakable"; the mutual attraction between the two protagonists who are also related, introduces a theme of incest, also highly frowned upon during the era.

Another phantasmagoric scene soon takes place, not unlike Laura's first dreamlike vision of Carmilla, which she "cannot call a nightmare", for she was "quite conscious of being asleep.

> *"...I saw the room and the furniture just as I had seen it last, except that it was very dark, and I saw something moving around the foot of the bed, which at first I could not accurately distinguish. But I soon saw that it was a sooty-black animal that resembled a monstrous cat...Its pace was growing faster, and the room rapidly darker and darker. I felt it spring lightly on the bed. The two broad eyes approached my face, and suddenly I felt a stinging pain as if two large needles darted into my breast."* (38)

Other than having this dreamlike vision, what follows immediately after Laura's scream is a ghostly apparition:

> *"...The room was lighted by the candle that burnt there all through the night, and I saw a female figure standing at the foot of the bed. I t was in a dark loose dress, and its hair was down and covered shoulders. A block of stone could not have been more*

still. As I stared at it, the figure appeared to have changed its place, and was now nearer the door; then, close to it, the door opened, and it passed out." (38)

This eerie scene is an instance of an apparition which inexplicably passes through Laura's locked door. Laura realizes it could not have been be just a dream, reflecting on it with describing it as unlike the "transitory terror a dream leaves behind", but it rather "seemed to deepen by time". By this time, a servant also claimed to have seen a figure "walking down the lime tree avenue before sunrise".

Carmilla now begins to gradually fall into dismal emotions, assuming the traits of a typical gothic heroine who goes through outstanding hardships:

"...Every morning I felt the same lassitude, and languor weighed upon me all day. I felt myself a changed girl. A strange melancholy was stealing over me, a melancholy that I would not have interrupted. Dim thoughts of death began to open, and an idea that I was slowly sinking took gentle, and, somehow, not unwelcome, possession of me. If it was sad, the tone of mind which this induced was also sweet." (42)

While Laura's health and mood deteriorated rapidly, once again one may witness the duality of her emotions and thoughts– the sad, but sweet thought of death. Since the second dreamlike vision, the haunting impressions of her dreams continue to terrorize her causing, again, ambiguous feeling of first "*the prevailing, pleasant, peculiar cold thrill which we feel in bathing, when we move against the current of a river*", followed by dreams "*that seemed interminable and vague, and left an awful impression, and a sense of exhaustion*." (43)

Amongst the gothic setting constituents are the voices Laura would hear in her phantasmagoric dreams, particularly a voice in the dark which "*spoke as if at a distance, slowly, and producing always the same sensation of indescribable solemnity and fear*."(43) This ominous voice is quickly contrasted with an instance of Laura hearing a "sweet and tender" voice which warns her of an assassin she should be aware of. Weeks of this continuous suffering left a mark on Laura's appearance which now made other inmates think she was ill. Laura experiences another phantasm when she sees Carmilla standing near her bed "in her white nightdress, bathed, from her chin to her feet, in one great stain of blood." The highly scenic imagery used here reinforces the overall gothic atmosphere. After this particular occurrence, everyone went searching for Carmilla, discovering that she was absent from her room which was "exactly in the state" in which Laura left her, but "Carmilla was

gone". What was most perplexing to the spectators was the fact that the room was completely undisturbed, locked from the inside, but she was gone. The castle was searched but to no avail, and this episode strengthens the possibility of the supernatural manifestation such as ghosts passing through walls. Carmilla's account brought no explanation as to how this was possible, since she was only aware of the fact of her waking up in another place.

A visit from a doctor reveals a distressing diagnosis – her symptoms are similar to other young women who recently died: apart from overall feeling of melancholy and exhaustion, there was a "small blue spot" on her neck. On receiving General Spielsdorf"s letter which announced his arrival to Karnstein and asked for Laura's and Madame Perrodon's company, the two, along with Laura's father, prepare for the twelve'o clock departure, hoping for Carmilla and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine to follow later. At this point the plot starts to thicken and the excitement for the upcoming events elevates. The gothic atmosphere is introduced again with the women's journey towards the Karnstein castle, which breaks into "gentle hills and hollows, all clothed with beautiful wood". After suddenly encountering General Spielsdorf on his horse, they head together towards their destination. General, whose looks and health have severely deteriorated since the family has last seen him, shares his story of the supernatural in order to explain and convince Laura's father into believing:

> *"...You are right in supposing that I have not been led lightly into a belief in the marvelous – for what I have experienced is marvelous – and I have been forced by extraordinary evidence to credit that which ran counter, diametrically, to all my theories. I have been made the dupe of a preternatural conspiracy."* (57)

While heading towards the ruins of the castle and a "ruined chapel with a great many tombs of that extinct family", General Spielsdorf reveals his intentions:

> *"...I mean to unearth some of those fine people. I hope, by God's blessing, to accomplish a pious sacrilege here, which will relieve our earth of certain monsters, and enable honest people to sleep in their beds without being assailed by murderers. I have strange things to tell you, my dear friend, such as I would have scouted as incredible a few months since."* (57)

The gothic atmosphere is building up with General revealing his plan of digging through the graves, and what he reveals next while journeying towards the ruins is the real

cause of death of his ward. He tells a story of a "magnificent masquerade" they were invited to and where they met Madam la Comtesse and her daughter Millarca – Millarca was left in General Spielsdorf"s care under similar circumstances which left Carmilla to Laura's father's care. While following his story, similarities arise between Millarca and Carmilla's behaviour:

> *"...Millarca complained of extreme languor...She was repeatedly seen from the windows of the schloss, in the first faint grey of the morning, like a person in a trance. This convinced me that she walked in her sleep. But this hypothesis did not solve the puzzle. How did she pass out from her room, leaving the door locked on the inside?"* (69)

Besides the supernatural possibility of passing through walls which arose with Carmilla too, Millarca was also associated with General Spielsdorf's ward's dreams:

> *"...She was first visited by appalling dreams; then, as she fancied, by a specter, sometimes resembling Millarca, sometimes in the shape of a beast, indistinctly seen, walking round the foot of her bed, from side to side."* (70)

While with Laura's visions of a "monstrous cat" one might still think of it as just feverish visions, there is now almost a confirmation of Carmilla's being a supernatural being, a being able of shape shifting even. Coincidences are striking, with General Spielsdorf mentioning even a "not unpleasant, but very peculiar" sensation. Similar to Laura', General's ward sensed what she described as "a flow of an icy stream against her breast", followed by "*something like a pair of needles pierce her, a little below the throat.*" Laura is stunned by the "mysterious peculiarities" of Mircalla, which she found were the exact same as Carmilla's. Upon finding out about these strange coincidences, the group of travellers arrives at their destination:

> *"...A vista opened in the forest; we were on a sudden under the chimneys and gables of the ruined village, and the towers and battlements of the dismantled castle, round which gigantic trees are grouped, overhung us from a slight eminence."* (70)

Once again, Le Fanu creates a gloomy atmosphere, carefully weaving a spectacular sight of the ancient ruins. The company continues to walk towards the ruins, finding itself soon "among the spacious chambers, winding stairs, and dark corridors of the castle."

In search of Countess of Karnestein's, that is Mircalla's grave, General Spielsdorf explains to the still disbelieving Laura's father that in fact Mircalla is still living, and informs everyone present of his intention to "decapitate the monster" as soon as he find the grave. The legend mentioned at the very beginning of the story finally comes to light when they encounter a woodman who recollects the details of Karnsteins' abandonment:

> *"...It was troubled by revenants: several were tracked to their graves, there detected by the usual tests, and extinguished in the usual way, by decapitation, by the stake, and by burning; but not until many of the villagers were killed."* (73)

With the Victorian era's spread of spiritualism and interest in the supernatural, there was already a common way of dealing with vampires which Le Fanu incorporated into the story. After learning of General Spielsdorf's attempt to kill Millarca while she was preying on his ward, Laura find herself confused and sad:

> *"...in this haunted spot, darkened by the towering foliage that rose on every side, dense and high above its noiseless walls – a horror began to steal over me, and my heart sank."* (77)

Her mood is matched with the scenery which ominously foreshadows upcoming events, while in front of them the apparition of Carmilla materializes in Le Fanu's most exquisite and evoking rendering of this peak of the story:

> *"...Under a narrow, arched doorway, surmounted by one of those demoniacal grotesques in which the cynical and ghastly fancy of old Gothic carving delights, I saw very gladly the beautiful face and figure of Carmilla enter the shadowy chapel."* (77)

A horrible scene follows as General Spielsdorf tries to strike her with an axe but she manages to disappear, after which he advises Laura to leave this "accursed ground". However, the search for Carmilla's grave continues as Baron, General Spielsdorf's acquaintance appears. The search finishes as they uncover a "piece of the sidewall" with an inscription and "a carved

escutcheon" while they arrange "the Inquisition to be held according to law." A common gothic setting figure, a priest, is called to perform some rituals and he explains to Laura the spreading superstition:

> *"...You have heard, no doubt, of the appalling superstition that prevails in Upper and Lower Styria, in Moravia, Silesia, in Turkish Serbia, in Poland, even in Russia; the superstition, so we must call it, of the Vampire."* (81)

The myth and the superstition of the vampiric activity are here confirmed. With spreading disease such as tuberculosis, superstitions were on the rise. The next day the opening of Countess Mircalla's grave follows, and what was uncovered was a body with "features tinted with warmth of life". A gory scene takes place after a stake was driven through the Countess's heart:

> *"...then the head was struck off, and a torrent of blood flowed from the severed neck. The body and head was next placed on a pile of wood, and reduced to ashes, which were thrown upon the river and borne away. "* (82)

Not only is Le Fanu an expert in the gothic, but with this scene he incorporates some vivid gores and reinforces the overall setting. Laura's character, now witnessing her experiences as a 28-year-old, discloses her still haunting thoughts, as Carmilla slithers back into her memory, sometimes as "the playful, languid, beautiful girl", while at other times she is "the writhing fiend from the ruined church." This ambiguity and contradictions still arise in Laura years later as she forms a kind of a daydream in which she fancies she hears "the light step of Carmilla at the drawing room door."

Le Fanu proves himself to be the master of the gothic genre: his picturesque descriptions and the overall narrative are most captivating – he succeeds in creating a true gothic atmosphere using epithets and the often encountered consonance is one of his assets which help him build the enjoyable ambience of the genre. His abilities are not only that of the atmosphere and setting-building: he incorporates all of the key properties, including the subtle criticism of society through the character of the upper-class member Carmilla and her frivolous attitude towards the lower classes. A nuanced, mostly oblique way of accounting for the attraction between the two female characters is his way of "speaking the unspeakable"; of bringing to light a possibility of the same sex attraction so much remonstrated during the era. Another taboo which came up in the particular tale of Carmilla is incest – very subtle and never directly addressed, but a careful reader will notice that the attraction between Laura and *Carmilla* is that of the blood-related women.

Apart from all mentioned, Le Fanu is no stranger to incorporating some of those generic characters, typical of a gothic tale, such as the richly delineated characters of a hunchback, and a priest. The notion of attraction and repulsion combined is embodied in Laura's confusing feelings towards Carmilla: with her enthrallment by her beauty and at the same time disgust and fear which she inexplicably senses. Another common feature of the genre is supported in *Carmilla* with the legend concerning the Karnstein castle. Since legends, omens, predictions and such are most representative of the genre, the Karnstein castle legend is most reinforcing in creating this particular setting, and the fact of it being discovered only at the very peak of the tale while leaving the reader wonder about it through the whole narrative, is one of the elements which set the pace of the story.

With repetitive visions, Le Fanu gives the story a quality of a true gothic tale: Laura's first dreamlike vision, after introducing the reader to a vista of the lonesome castle, is what elevates the tale in the direction of a most high-quality narrative. The vision element is reinforced a few more times throughout the story, adding to it the notion of spirit travelling and shape shifting, all supernatural occurrences so typical for the genre. Laura, with her deteriorating health and troublesome thoughts embodies the gothic fiction notion of lady in distress to the best possible advantage. With the story's ending and the discovery of a vampiric existence, confirmed by the priest's account of the regional superstitions, Le Fanu finally uncovers Carmilla as a vampire, making this tale one of the earliest literary pieces concerning vampires.

3. Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's Legacy

Contributions Le Fanu made to literature are numerous: he was a follower of the gothic tradition - one who enriched it with novelties which later became key for the genre, setting an example of a modern ghost story, but also contributing to the genre of a short story. (Custred 215)

Though not as recognized as Bram Stoker and his *Dracula,* Le Fanu is one of the authors who introduced and developed the vampire narrative within the gothic genre, his work being an inspiration to the famous Stoker : the notion of a female vampire, among other, is incorporated in *Dracula* in the form of Dracula's three brides. Fascinated by the supernatural and weird, it is no wonder Le Fanu produced remarkable stories, highly imaginative and detailed with descriptions of outside as well as inside worlds, most often weaving a relation between the overall atmosphere and human condition. (*A Memoir of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu* 2014, n. pag)

The vampire narrative Le Fanu delved and incorporated some novelties into, had a great influence on the forthcoming works of the genre, serving, as mentioned, as an inspiration to Stoker's Dracula as well as his other works, such as *The House by the Churchyard* which has been deemed an influence on James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. (Irish times 2018) Le Fanu continues to be the critical personality when it comes to ghost stories in the Victorian period. His short stories are most often delved into the unknown, the supernatural and mysterious and have provided an inspiration for many writers. (Magill 1606)

Outside the literary genre, Le Fanu's *Carmilla* inspired several films and a TV series which date as recently as 2017. A hundred and fifty years has almost passed after the publishing of Carmilla and still Le Fanu's story lives as vividly as it did when it was first published. The vampire narrative is only becoming increasingly popular, within the literary genre as well as within the field of motion pictures. Pushing boundaries within the genre, Le Fanu is surely to be thanked for the variety of vampire narratives we enjoy today.

Conclusion

Through the topic of Le Fanu's Carmilla, this paper presents, as an introduction to the particular literary work, a brief overview of Le Fanu's gothic fiction mode. This leads to an overview of the gothic genre in general. The chapter delving into the genre most comprehensively introduces the specifics of the genre, its origin, as well as its development through the centuries while giving an insight into its most proficient authors.
Other than giving a general insight, several derivatives of it are also tackled, with an emphasis on the Irish derivative, Le Fanu being an Irish.

The chapter concerning vampire fiction as a subgenre of the gothic literature brings forth a concise history as well as the foremost figures of the subgenre. The key chapter, tackling *Carmilla* as a gothic novella, employs the significant constituents of the story. Through paragraphs taken from the tale, most prominent gothic features of the work are presented, along with comments and observations. Key properties of the genre, such as the incorporation of an ancient castle, a legend, the visions, generic characters (the hunchback, the monk), subtle criticism of society, taboo themes, matching the outside atmosphere with inner thoughts and feelings of characters etc., have been accounted for. *Carmilla*, brimming with examples which reinforce the notion of it being a true gothic tale, is surely one of the finest examples of the genre, introducing not only the already established characteristics but incorporating some new ones, such as the rich observations of Nature, as well as introducing the idea of a female vampire. After giving a brief account of Le Fanu's legacy, one may conclude that Le Fanu was a most prolific author with rich imagination, whose hardships combined with a taste for the supernatural, helped produce some of the finest literary work of the gothic genre.

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