Dead Women in the 19th Century
From Victims to Undead Aggressors

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1. INTRODUCTION

As far as supernatural beings go, the vampire is one of the most popularly fictionalised creatures and has never received so much media attention than at this very moment. The positive reception of Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* series has occasioned the production of a staggering amount of vampire literature and subsequent TV adaptations that address teenage girls around the world, allowing the literary vampire to re-emerge from the shadows into mainstream culture. Bernadette Lynn Bosky describes the discrepancy between these contemporary vampires and their predecessors:

> having (and sometimes offering) immortality instead of the curse of deadness, providing entry into a community instead of isolation, displaying animal traits that convey energy and natural instincts instead of subhuman viciousness, flaunting the appeal of the aristocrat or outlaw, and inciting adventure at once terrifying and safe, the vampires in these stories tend to be extraordinarily attractive. (222-223)

These highly seductive, highly desirable vampires are not at all representative of the nineteenth-century vampire. Count Dracula was not, unlike *Twilight*’s Edward Cullen, a handsome teenage vampire who gives up his blood sustenance for a life among mortals and an all-consuming romance with a human girl. On the contrary, these nineteenth-century vampires’ bloodlust is only surpassed by their ambition to destroy communities by infiltrating them in disguise. All the vampiric protagonists that will be discussed in this dissertation do have one common trait with contemporary vampires, that is, a proclivity for beautiful young women. These narratives are dominated by their vampires’ victims as the
plot is generally defined by the vampire’s attack and the community’s reaction to defend the young woman. The aim of this study is to investigate how the narrative progression of nineteenth-century vampire literature functions as a metaphor for the sexual development of its central female characters. To this purpose, the following works are examined: John Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1819), James Malcolm Rymer’s *Varney the Vampire, or The Feast of Blood* (1847), Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872), Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), and Elisabeth Caroline Grey’s *The Skeleton Count* (1828?).

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. *The Vampyre*

As its recent criticism suggests, John William Polidori’s vampire story is inseparable from the context in which it originated. Due to his notorious physical and mental condition, Lord Byron required a physician to accompany him on his travels through Europe and Polidori, who had received his degree from Edinburgh University the previous year, was recommended to him and joined Byron on his tour. When in Geneva the two were accompanied by Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (not yet married at the time), the idea arose of each writing and reading aloud their own ghost story, after reading aloud ghost stories from *Fantasmagoriana*, a collection of “ghost stories, translated from German into French” (Macdonald 83). The idea behind *The Vampyre*, however, did not originate with Polidori, who, according to Mary Shelley, “had some terrible idea about a skull-headed lady,” but by Byron’s fragmentary tale of Augustus Darvell. Feeling challenged by a lady (whose identity remains a mystery) who “denied the possibility of such ground-work forming the outline of a tale which should bear the slightest appearance of probability”
(Macdonald 97), Polidori expanded Byron’s fragment into the vampire story in its current form. Significantly, Polidori did not at any time deny his authorship, nor his influence, but the story was published by Henry Colburn in his *New Monthly Magazine* (1819) under the title “The Vampyre: A Tale by Lord Byron.” Thus an author’s worst nightmare was realised, as Polidori’s possibly greatest literary achievement was either attributed to Byron, or regarded as a product of parasitical plagiarism by an uninspired, untalented Polidori.

The story begins when Lord Ruthven, the Byronic vampire, and Aubrey, the romantic idealist meet in decadent society and decide to go on a Grand Tour together. Unfortunately, the awestruck Aubrey is soon confronted with Ruthven’s lack of morality and, after Ruthven’s malevolent seduction of a young lady, Aubrey leaves his company in Rome to continue his solitary travel to Greece. In Greece he meets the lovely and exotic Ianthe, who, despite warning Aubrey about the consequences of not believing in vampires, is murdered, after which Aubrey falls prey to a violent fever from the shock of discovering her dead body. Aubrey is nursed to health by Ruthven and they continue their journey during which Ruthven is killed by robbers but manages to force an oath from Aubrey not to speak of him, nor his death, for one year and a day. Returned to London, Aubrey discovers Lord Ruthven is alive and a possible suitor to his beloved sister. Bound by his oath, Aubrey is torn by the dilemma of protecting his honour or his sister, and deemed mad, is kept from his sister until the day before her wedding day, one year after he made his oath, when he discovers that her fiancé is Ruthven. On the brink of death from breaking a blood vessel, Aubrey warns his guardians of Lord Ruthven, who arrive too late to save his sister from the vampire’s attack.
2.2. Varney the Vampire

Currently, James Malcolm Rymer is generally regarded as the author of the penny dreadful *Varney the Vampire* (1847). Another possible candidate is Thomas Peckett Prest, as both authors were prolific penny dreadful writers and cooperated on *The String of Pearls* (1847), though E.F. Bleifer contends that the style, vocabulary, sentence length, character projection, and scene construction point to Rymer as the actual author (viii). *Varney* is described by Rymer himself as an adventure novel, “carrying the vampire theme – deception, horror and confrontation – through a series of action episodes” (Bleifer x). Varney’s tale begins with a (in contemporary vampire literature considered) standard vampiric attack on Flora Bannerworth, but as the story progresses, his object appears to be robbery instead of parasitical sustenance. Several stories become interwoven: Varney’s attempted seduction of Flora, his history and scheming plots, the history of the Bannerworth’s father who committed suicide as a result of gambling debts, Flora’s relationship with Charles Holland, etc. Furthermore, new characters and households are constantly introduced, as are intermezzos of nautical adventures that usually, but not always, in some way contribute to the plot. The attacks on the Bannerworth household constitute the greater part of the novel, and adjoining characters Admiral Bell, Charles Holland’s uncle, and Jack Pringle, his first mate, function as rescuers throughout the novel by unmasking Varney as a vampire just before he can acquire a new victim. For every target, Varney invents a new identity, usually aristocratic and invariably rich, procuring fiancées by either coincidentally saving their lives or simply by purchase, as is the case with Helen Williams. After constant failures at obtaining sufficient life-sustaining blood, and numerous resuscitations by moonlight, Varney successfully transforms Clara Crofton into a vampire to
revenge himself on the society that excludes him. His vampiric progeny, however, is not blessed with his long lifespan and is staked by the angry mob of tavern villagers that throughout the story hunts vampires on a whim. Towards the end of the novel, Varney increasingly struggles with his fluctuating sense of morality, and finally, after two prior failed attempts, commits suicide by jumping into Mount Vesuvius.

Presumably written on demand chapter by chapter, Varney is notorious for a vast amount of inconsistencies, of which the most significant is that concerning the title character’s actual vampiric identity. Although the protagonist on several occasions calls himself a vampire, he is also identified as a hangman, resuscitated by Dr. Chillingworth as a scientific experiment. These aberrations could possibly be “elaborate red herrings” (xv) to captivate the reader and enhance the mystery, which is supported by the attempt to conceal Varney’s introduction as a new character, even when exhaustive repetition has made the plot highly predictable. However, other mistakes suggest that Rymer just forgot what he had initially written, such as changing the name of the Bannerworth’s evil ancestor from Runnagate to Marmaduke. The suggestion, from the resemblance of his portrait, that this man is the current Varney is also abandoned, and he is eventually portrayed as a contemporary of Oliver Cromwell, cursed with vampirism because he brutally killed his own son.

2.3. Carmilla

This vampire novella written by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu in 1872 is the only Victorian tale (as opposed to the dubious case of “The Skeleton Count,” see below) in which the vampiric antagonist is a woman. Although introduced in the prologue by an unknown extradiegetic
narrator commenting on the case studies of Dr. Hesselius, the actual story of Laura and Carmilla is narrated in the first person by the protagonist Laura. This young woman who lives isolated with her English father in a castle in Styria is mesmerised by the beautiful Carmilla who, by a curious accident and with the help of her mother who imposes on their hospitality, begins to live with them to recover her health. Both young women are shocked to recognize each other from a dream and as their relationship progresses, Laura takes on Carmilla’s languor, attracting the attention of her father and the General Spieldorf. The general recognises in their situation that of his deceased niece, Bertha Reinfeldt, who was seduced and ‘choked’ by a young woman called Millarca. The men unite with a woodsman and a certain Baron Vordenburg to slay the vampiress Countess Mircalla Karnstein (the original of the two anagrams) and the story ends with the stupefied Laura travelling to Italy with her father, leaving her fate unresolved.

2.4. Dracula

As the original Transylvanian vampire, Dracula has become the archetype of the modern conception of the vampire. As it was written in the fin-de siècle, Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1897) has been noted for its combination of conservative and modern aspects in gender, technology, etc. Although the Dracula character is widely regarded as the ultimate vampire patriarch, the numerous film adaptations have constantly adjusted the original storyline. Jonathan Harker, a solicitor’s clerk travels to Transylvania to provide legal assistance to Count Dracula, who intends to purchase real estate in England. His stay at Dracula’s castle soon turns to imprisonment and while Jonathan is left in the hands of Dracula’s three vampire brides, Dracula himself journeys to London to prey on Jonathan’s fiancée, Mina
Murray and her friend Lucy Westenra. When the lovely Lucy shows symptoms of Dracula’s vampiric attacks, her fiancé Arthur Holmwood and her two other potential suitors, and Dr. John Seward and Quincey Morris, join forces with Dr. Abraham Van Helsing in a futile attempt to save her. As the men discover that the now deceased Lucy has become a vampire preying on young children, they very graphically stake her in her coffin. Meanwhile, Mina has travelled to Romania to nurse her fiancé back to health, who escaped from the castle but caught a violent brain fever in the process, after which they marry and return to London. Dracula then feeds from Mina, and as she is in the process of vampiric transformation, the group of men hunt down Dracula to his castle in Transylvania in front of which Jonathan and Quincey kill him. Mina’s lurking vampirism is averted and she and Jonathan have a child, whom they name after Quincey, the American hero fallen in battle, and the rest of the heroic group of men.

The short story “Dracula’s Guest,” published posthumously in 1914 in a collection of short stories, is by some believed to be the original first chapter of Dracula, as it seemingly narrates Jonathan Harker’s adventure in Munich before travelling on to Vienna and eventually the Carpathians. The story tells of an Englishman foolish enough to take a solitary walk on Walpurgis night and who is confronted with the living dead in the form of the beautiful Countess Dolingen of Gratz – revivified by lightning right before his eyes – while he seeks shelter from the snow by her tomb. This countess is commonly identified by critics as Carmilla, the beautiful Styrian predecessor of Dracula and is used as evidence for Le Fanu’s influence on Stoker (Auerbach 66).
2.5. *The Skeleton Count, or The Vampire Mistress*

According to Peter Haining, “this extraordinary story which has lain forgotten in the pages of a weekly ‘penny dreadful’ for over 160 years is, without question, the earliest vampire serial story” (11). Unfortunately, what could have been the first vampire tale by a female author must now be considered presumably to be of much later date. In *The Vampire Omnibus*, an anthology edited by Haining, *The Skeleton Count* (1828?) is professed to be the work of Elizabeth Caroline Grey, published in “a weekly penny paper” (Haining 11) called *The Casket*, of which the actual existence is equally dubious as the story’s origin and author. In lay criticism, the work has been identified as the original, English title to the American edition *Lena Cameron, or, the Four Sisters* (ca. 1850) (Spedding 308). The latter has indeed been identified as the work of a certain Mrs. Grey, though not the fictional Elizabeth Caroline Grey to whom many works and biographical ‘facts’ have been wrongly attributed, but that of a certain Catherine Maria Grey (1798-1870), the most notable of the “the many Mrs. Greys” that have been conflated into one prolific author (Spedding 299). Haining based his information on the life of his authoress on the account of Andrew de Ternant, who as a “compulsive liar” fabricated a biography with information impossible to either verify or denounce as all the people mentioned as witnesses in his account were already deceased at the time (Spedding 327). Although the story of Mrs. Grey as editor of Lloyd’s publications who later became a contributor to his publications and gained fame after winning Lloyd’s money prize for *The Ordeal by Touch* can now be proven false, the origin of *The Skeleton Count* remains a mystery as Haining claims to have been “put on the track of the story” by publisher G. Ken Chapman, and to have produced an edition of the tale himself:
Copies of *The Casket* have since [its original publication] become so impossibly rare that all traces of ‘The Skeleton Count’ might have disappeared had not the collector, David Phillips, unearthed a bound run of the magazine some years ago. It is from the yellowing and fragile papers of this that I have been able to extract the episode which is reprinted here. (Haining 13)

Whether Haining’s vagueness concerning the context of his supposed discovery can be interpreted as displaying a suspicious resemblance to De Ternant’s vague account on the fictional authoress remains as yet unaccountable, especially since both Peter Haining and G. Ken Chapman have recently deceased. It is quite possible that Haining himself is the story’s actual author, and the account of his heroic rescue of the narrative only an embellishment to the story’s false attribution to perhaps one of the most indeterminate authors of the 19th century.

In a Faustian bargain, Count Rodolph receives eternal life. This, however, does not quench his thirst for absolute knowledge and control of human life, so he combines traditional necromancy with an obscure liquid – recommended by an old Greek manuscript – to reanimate the corpse of the beautiful Bertha after a night of grave robbery. As Rodolph is mesmerised by his creation, and Bertha by her creator, the two begin a passionate romance until the devil’s curse is initiated and the Count transmogrifies into a skeleton each night. Bertha has meanwhile discovered her resurrection is accompanied by a literal blood thirst and convinces the Count to be locked up every night, so no one can witness his transformation, while she secretly preys the village for victims. However, she is discovered by the villagers and when an angry mob sets fire to Rodolph’s castle, the count learns the truth about his vampire mistress and disappears after she is impaled in her coffin.
3. LITERATURE REVIEW

All during the nineteenth century, vampires were "discovered" by the literary writers of Europe. Lord Ruthven, the creation of Dr. Polidori, gave way to Sir Francis Varney in the penny dreadfuls, and later came Sheridan Le Fanu's magnificent and sensuous Countess Carmilla Karnstein, and finally the big ape of the vampires, the hirsute Slav Count Dracula, who though he can turn himself into a bat or dematerialize at will, nevertheless crawls down the wall of his castle in the manner of a lizard apparently for fun—all of these creations and many like them feeding the insatiable appetite for "gothic and fantastical tales." We were the essence of that nineteenth-century conception, aristocratically aloof, unfailingly elegant, and invariably merciless, and cleaving to each other in a land ripe for, but untroubled by, others of our kind. Maybe we had found the perfect moment in history, the perfect balance between the monstrous and the human, the time when that "vampiric romance" born in my imagination amid the colorful brocades of the ancient regime should find its greatest enhancement in the flowing black cape, the black top hat, and the little girl's luminous curls spilling down from their violet ribbon to the puffed sleeves of her diaphanous silk dress. – Lestat De Lioncourt (Anne Rice, *The Vampire Lestat*, 500)

This description in the journal of Anne Rice's charismatic vampire character Lestat partly summarizes the position that these now traditional vampires occupy today in popular culture and scholarly research. They are eternally old-fashioned in each society they submerge in, with an alien elegance that is heightened further by their hybridism between monstrous and divine, dead and alive, repulsive and alluring, male and female, sublime and
beautiful. Their conventional aristocracy and parasitic bloodlust has associated vampires with Marxist theory, in particular regarding the metaphor that “capital is dead labour, that vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (Karl Marx’s *Capital*, qtd. in Macdonald 194). Their seduction of their exclusively female victims to quench their blood thirst has led to an astounding amount of research on the vampire’s sexuality from the field of gender, feminist and queer theory. Their individual mention in Rice’s account, though brief, reveals some of these vampires’ modern reception. Lord Ruthven as “the creation of Dr. Polidori” suggests the initial question of its authorship, and the accusations of plagiarism that comprise most of the contemporary research. Authorship and literary form are also of concern with *Varney the Vampire* in that its main critique condemns it wordiness and repetition, a notorious trait for many penny dreadful fictions, for which authors were paid by the word (Bleifer x). The focus on Carmilla’s sensuousness is significant in the general conception of *Carmilla* as an implicitly, but unmistakably lesbian narrative, in which patriarchal structures are masterfully undermined. Finally, Dracula’s characterisation as an alien foreigner with the power to dematerialize and take on animal forms has facilitated his reading as an object of fear from every angle of literary research, more specifically, the invading outsider who has come to destroy conventional structures in every way possible. In the words of Carol A. Senf, he is “the supreme bogeyman” (Dracula 47).

3.1. The Vampyre

Polidori’s Lord Ruthven is “the first vampire character in English prose” (Skarda 249), and has attracted attention from critics for being a fictionalisation of Lord Byron. The scandal of its
publication has rendered *The Vampyre* infamous and with the unfortunate effect of reducing most research on the novel to an analysis of Polidori’s supposed plagiarism. In “Vampirism and Plagiarism: Byron’s influence and Polidori’s Practise,” Patricia Skarda examines the parallels between Polidori’s short story and its literary influences, as well as the relationship of Lord Ruthven and Aubrey as representative of Byron and Polidori. Her main thesis is that “both the fiction itself and the facts surrounding its invention, re-creation, and publication demonstrate the essential vampirism in the powerful influence of a strong talent on a weak one” (250). Initially Polidori is accused not only of plagiarism, but also of a lack of inspiration and literary ability, though gradually he is shown more sympathy in the image him of being “vamped” by Byron, publishers et al., leaving him victimized by greater minds. This attitude undoubtedly springs from Mary Shelley’s accounts of his ridicule and humiliation in the company of the Shelleys and Lord Byron, as do the general conceptions of the ghost story project rely on her reports, which are, according to D.L. Macdonald, “wrong in almost every verifiable detail” (83). One innovation Polidori is credited with, by both Nina Auerbach and Mair Rigby, is the expansion of Aubrey’s oath – which plays only a minor role in Byron’s Fragment – into the thread that binds the first and second part of the narrative and ensures Aubrey’s downfall. Inspired by Eve Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*, Auerbach argues that this oath “avoids compulsion of Sedgwick’s paranoid gothic,” as it destroys the fear of dormant homosexuality by transforming the foundation of their relationship into an “egalitarian promise” (13). In addition to this rejection, she further incapacitates Lord Ruthven as a sexual being by defining him as a spirit, to be materialised in later theatre adaptations. Instead of renouncing Aubrey and Ruthven’s hypothetical homosexuality – which Auerbach explicitly does in the continuation of her research, Rigby notes that “the protagonist’s sexual-epistemological quest is allegorically enacted through a journey of
spatial discovery” (6). A similar analogy that combines the spatial and the sexual can be disclosed in the vampire’s entrance in his female victim’s bedchambers, an image standardized in later vampire literature, including all the following discussed narratives). In contrast with Auerbach’s notion, Rigby interprets the oath’s repetition (“remember your oath” (Polidori 20 & 21)) as a “linguistic lock on this figurative closet,” which could further suggest latent homosexuality as a subtext of the narrative’s thread (8).

Unfortunately, most criticism that does not explore the extent of Polidori’s appropriation of Byron’s story and his person still focuses on the relationship between Lord Ruthven and Aubrey, since the analogous non-fictional relationship is inculcated in the critic’s mind, creating an impediment to varied in-depth study of The Vampyre. Exceptions to this include J.P. Telotte’s study of the story’s internal relationships, which examines the female characters, and the protagonist’s connection to his surroundings in the frame of Owen Barfield’s Saving the Appearances. Simplified, The Vampyre is a Gothic response to the Romantic conception of participation, in which Lord Ruthven’s inability to participate in his own perception of his world is expressed in his parasitic gaze that objectifies the people around him (and in the vampiric context, reduces them to food) and illustrates “a fundamental perversion of normal human participation” (10). Ianthe’s “true participatory vision” is contrasted with Ruthven’s blank gaze and is, together with Aubrey’s sister, presented with the ability to call “Aubrey to a more participatory consciousness,” in the assumption that the protagonist becomes the vampire’s double (14). Especially noteworthy is Telotte’s affirmation that “Aubrey views the world and its inhabitants largely as objects of curiosity to be manipulated by his imagination” (15). In the context of this dissertation, his transforming gaze is examined in its outward projection as crucial for the victimisation of the vampire’s prey, unveiling the male gaze as a narrative instrument.
That “the name of Lord Ruthven has come to represent in French and English literature of the early nineteenth century the arch villain, the prototype of the mysterious and sinister vampire” has caused the story to be researched in the context of the vampire’s evolution throughout the 19th century (Switzer 107). Two examples of such diachronic studies are Nina Auerbach’s *Our Vampires, Ourselves* and Patrick O’Malley’s “The Blood of the Saints: Vampirism from Polidori to Stoker,” which give an account of the vampire’s increasing level of physicality as the century progresses, and the increasingly appropriate metaphor of the vampire as infiltrating Other, respectively. The latter interprets Lord Ruthven as an alien creature whose peculiarity causes him to be encouraged by the fascinated elite, of whom it can be said that their decadent display of sexuality provokes vampiric attack. Regrettably, O’Malley’s relatively brief discussion *The Vampyre* reflects his limited knowledge of the story, as his analysis is founded on the assumption that Lord Ruthven became a vampire only after his death in the story, whereas Ruthven’s insistence on Aubrey’s promise proves his certainty of returning by means of a typical vampiric resuscitation (136). O’Malley’s conclusion that “Ruthven’s heartless destruction of Ianthe is itself a distorted mirror of Aubrey’s seduction by and of her” supports the theory of the transforming male gaze, even though the evidence it is founded on, that Aubrey ridicules the idea of a man of his nationality and stature “marrying an uneducated Greek girl,” is quite unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, this concept of mirroring between Aubrey and Ruthven is essential to the narrative’s structure, and, as it forms a model for later vampire literature, will be discussed in detail in the relevant chapters.
3.2. Varney the Vampyre

Because *Varney the Vampire* is at times tediously repetitive and highly inconsistent, literary criticism tends to disregard the novel, since there is clearly “little question of quality or greatness of any sort” (Bleifer xv). Admittedly, any greatness attributed to this long collection of short chapters would seemingly be in its greatness of size alone. However, its quality lies in the specific representation of the vampire and its establishment of certain vampiric motifs that have become standardized. Sara Hackenberg concentrates on Varney’s initial form in which he first attacks Flora Bannerworth: a living skeleton. Because of burial problems and their consequences in midcentury London, corpses became normalised in the city and consequently fictionalised, specifically in popular genres such as the penny blood (Hackenberg 66). In this aspect, the vampire expresses the early Victorians worry about “the ways in which the dead might invade the living” (66). This fear is further expressed in Varney’s resemblance to a picture of Bannerworth’s evil ancestor which defines him as an “embodiment of the sinful past” (70). The portrayal of Varney as a literal skeleton is abandoned early on in the novel, and Varney’s physical form proves as fluctuating as both his disguise and his integrity.

More traditional approaches have been directed at this particular vampire as well. According to Nina Auerbach, the novel is a satire that “normalizes its vampire by placing him in a feasting society” (33). This theory is supported by Ken Gelder, who examines Varney in a Marxist context, in which “Varney can be read ‘radically’: he alarms the middle classes because he reflects their own ‘real’ condition” (21). Varney is naturally interpreted as a monstrous capitalist: his course of actions is entirely motivated by a desire for money and women, whom he also attempts to buy from their mothers and fathers. In contrast with
Polidori’s Lord Ruthven, Varney does not pursue the subversion of the marital system, but he – in an appropriate expression – capitalises on it. However, Hackenberg proposes a contrasting alternative in which Varney, “as evil-genius-vampire, continually attempting to destroy the wealthy by robbing them of their modes of entitlement and exchange - their assets and their daughters - ... acts instead as an underworld facilitator of radical political change” (71). This interesting hypothesis is nevertheless flawed in that Varney primarily preys on the Bannerworths, and subsequently on Mrs Williams: the former brought to the brink of ruin because of the deceased father’s debts, and the latter an immoral debtor herself. Surprisingly, this novel has received little or no attention from feminist perspective, despite the marital issues in the novel, though, admittedly, come from the sentimentally idealised context that ‘love conquers all.’ What makes Varney an interesting subject for this study is the exceptionally visual nature of the descriptions of his vampiric attacks, forming a marked contrast with Lord Ruthven’s suggested but undocumented seductions and paving the way for Carmilla’s nightly visits.

3.3. Carmilla

Carmilla critics unanimously accept one particular theory concerning Le Fanu’s novella: that it is intrinsically a lesbian narrative that is pervaded by implicit sexual imagery. This hypothesis naturally stems from a general observation of the manifestation of how the male vampire’s manifests his sexuality, which is simply transposed to the female vampire. However, the lesbian nature of Laura and Carmilla’s relationship is not expressed solely in deviant sexual behaviour, but in the specific position they assume in their fictional world’s societal structures. Carmilla’s seduction is fundamentally a perversion of both traditional
heterosexual relationships and marital proceedings. Combining Claude Lévi-Strauss’ observations on men’s exchange of women as the “supreme gift” and Eve Sedgwick’s observed tensions between male homosocial and homosexual desire, Elizabeth Signorotti proposes that, in Carmilla, the men’s inability to exchange women and their lack of a female intermediate by whom they can form a non-threatening homosocial relationship causes them to “suffer exclusion from male kinship” (611). Not only has the girls’ lesbianism made this triangular relationship impossible, but the transfer of Carmilla is also initiated by a woman, Carmilla’s mother, whose skilful manipulation leaves Laura’s father even more inactive (612). Importantly, this initiation signifies “that Carmilla and her mother usurp the male privilege of asserting erotic object choice,” which not only reinforces the general role inversion in the narrative, but also supports a specific inversion of the privileged male gaze (Thomas 55).

While Signorotti interprets the text as a sign of Le Fanu’s leniency, Tammis Elis Thomas goes one step further by highlighting the expression of sexual liberation and female power in the motif of the masquerade. As Thomas notes, “the position of the vampire is a liminal space that is constituted by deception and disguise at both poles of its possible manifestations” (42). In relation with recognition, this disguise is further embodied in the two masquerade scenes, and the alternating two continuously structure the characters’ multilateral relationships. As the two masquerades relate, on the one hand, Carmilla’s introduction into Laura’s world, and, on the other, Carmilla’s own debut into sexual exploration, one can safely comment that “Le Fanu depicts the masquerade as a site of initiation into the terrors of the supernatural and the forbidden pleasures of female same-sex desire” (41). Moreover, this double masking, in the vampire figure and in the
masquerade, enables him to “write a relatively graphic tale about lesbian seduction that eludes the strictures of Victorian censorship” (45).

As previously indicated, Carmilla – as is common in vampires – displays an eerie polarity that further invokes ambivalent feelings, especially from Laura, who is “drawn towards her, but there was also something of repulsion” (Le Fanu 22). This duality marks one of the traditional readings the seducing vampire has been subject to: the Uncanny. This Freudian fear of the somehow familiar unfamiliar is expressed in several manifestations in vampiric imagery (Gelder 44). This simultaneous repulsion and attraction that Laura experiences from her interaction with Carmilla can be the uncanny effect of unconsciously recognizing a repressed sexual impulse, or one could even go so far as to stipulate that Laura projects these impulses onto Carmilla, reversing their sexual roles to further mask her repressed sexuality. However, this specific psychoanalytic interpretation has received some criticism and the same ambivalent experience has caused alternative readings.

Robert F. Geary analyses Carmilla as a reaction to the rendering of the supernatural in, on the one hand, pre-Gothic, rationalist literature which focused on the inevitable punishment of the sinful, and on the other hand, Gothic literature that deliberately created a distance between the reader and the story. In Carmilla, this distance is for instance diminished by introducing the reader to contemporaries, which, in addition, enhances the underlying invasion theme, in that the text is “dominated by the pattern of the insinuation of some frightening other reality into the ordinary, disbelieving world” (emphasis added 26). Remarkably, Carmilla’s simultaneously alluring and repulsive effect is here not identified as Freud’s notion of the uncanny, but as the presence and effect of the numinous (19). Freudian psychoanalytic readings have also been deemed too restrictive among literary critics with a background in psychoanalysis. Specifically the oedipal reading is considered
insufficient by Angela Michelis, who complements Freud’s idea of the little girl’s renunciation of the mother to turn to the father object with Melanie Klein’s paranoid-schizoid theory and identifies *Carmilla* as an illustration of Klein’s complex child-mother relationship in which the child perceives the maternal object as split into the good mother, or the idealized object, and the bad mother, who threatens to destroy the ego and the idealized object. Although Michael Davis focuses on the paternal in his exposition of Laplace’s seduction theory applied to *Carmilla*, he supports Michelis’ recognition of Carmilla as Laura’s maternal figure. Both also combine their theories with the aspect of trauma and the narrative’s repetitive structure as a way of conquering that trauma.¹ Helen Stoddart examines *Carmilla* as a Freudian case-study with a focus on Dr. Hesselius as the psychoanalyst. Her hypothesis that “by acknowledging even her own nervous turns, [Laura] gives up self-control and makes it over to Hesselius, who exercises editorial rights and pronounces the final verdict in his forthcoming analytic essay” portrays Laura as inherently passive in addition to her sexual passivity towards Carmilla, perhaps unduly described as a “relinquishment of power over her own body and her hysterical degeneration” (19).

As demonstrated earlier, Le Fanu’s narrative is generally received as withstanding conventional morality with subtlety. Nina Auerbach notes that “this female vampire is licensed to realize the erotic, interpenetrative friendship male vampires aroused and denied.”(39) Furthermore, Laura is not punished for her sexual transgression. Even more, Thomas points out – in contrast with Stoddart – that:

the text privileges the queer reading by giving Laura (rather than Spieldorf) the authority to narrate the story of Carmilla’s ascension and eventual destruction. The text further privileges the queer reading by giving Laura the last word; the narrative
ends with the expression of Laura’s continuing desire for Carmilla instead of General Spieldorf’s repudiation. (60)

Finally, in their comparative studies, both Signorotti and Benson & Ziegler highlight the narrative’s open-endedness, contrasted with Dracula, which (as is standard for a “self-contained monster-slaying narrative”) “provides closure and catharsis” (Benson and Ziegler 222).

3.4. Dracula

Describing Bram Stoker’s Dracula as the most popularly received of the vampire novels discussed in this thesis is no exaggeration. Its popularity with Stoker’s fin-de-siècle contemporaries is vastly overshadowed by that in the 20th century, when the new media capitalize on the novel’s high adaptability to new forms and its villain is reinvented in every possible way. One example is Francis Ford Coppola’s 1992 film adaption, Bram Stoker’s Dracula, in which the lonely Count Dracula only attacks Lucy Westenra as a diversion, while he seduces Mina Murray to replace the wife he so fervently loved in his mortal life. This romanticising trend continues into the 21st century until the benevolent vampires of popular TV series such as True Blood and The Vampire Diaries take over, when – in the words of the vampire Lestat – “everybody [is] sick of Count Dracula” (Rice 13).

In the world of literary criticism, however, Dracula remains an exciting research topic even today. The bulk of articles devoted to Stoker’s literary milestone generally show a dichotomy in terms of approach, more specifically, psychoanalysis and its “frequent antagonist,” anthropology (Stevenson 139). Notwithstanding this animosity, scholars from
dissimilar backgrounds find the same subject in vampire literature, in general, and *Dracula* in particular, that is, the Other. Whether approached from post-colonial, psychoanalytic or gender perspective, the novel cannot escape from the various analyses concerning its antithetic and yet liminal characterisation, as it juxtaposes Mina with Lucy, Van Helsing with Dracula and others, while constantly rearranging their relative roles.

In his article “Kiss Me with those Red Lips: Gender and Inversion in *Dracula*,” Christopher Craft explores gender inversion and the persistence of patriarchal institutions in *Dracula* and quickly becomes one of the leading authorities on its manifestation of latent sexuality. Craft frames his research in the monster narrative’s tripartite structure as analogous to the emergence of and reaction to sexual impulses, using Stoker’s vampires as exemplary metaphor for sexual monstrosity (or the monstrosity of sexuality), which results in questioning the Victorian gender codes that underlie the story. The inversion of the traditional dichotomy between male activity and female passivity is most noticeably illustrated in the famed scene in which Jonathan Harker is seduced by the three vampiric residents of the castle, when “luring with an inviting orifice, a promise of red softness, but delivering instead a piercing bone, the vampire mouth fuses and confuses ... the gender-based categories of the penetrating and the receptive” (Craft 109). Keeping Victorian gender codes in mind, Craft labels these women as female surrogates for Dracula who as creating patriarch originates each vampire mouth. However, although this penetrating orifice represents both male and female genitalia, the more direct identification with *vagina dentata* appears to be ignored in this analysis. Significantly, when considering the piercing teeth at their literal level, a shift occurs from female surrogate enacting homosexual desires to the monstrous castrating female, not only placing Harker in the passive female position, but incapacitating him for the continuing narrative (Brock 126), in which his relationship with
his wife Mina is strictly platonic, reducing his sexual role to mere spectator. This is further suggested by his passivity in lying on the bed on which Dracula forces Mina to suck the blood from his chest. However, the female body is repeatedly used as an intermediate tool for men to express their desires. When Lucy is given consecutive blood transfusion and still craves more, Quincey comments “that that poor creature that we all love has had put in her veins within that time the blood of four strong men” (Dracula 126). The focus on the men’s vitality and love for Lucy rightly encourages Craft’s metaphor of a gang rape in which the men “share their semen in a location displaced sufficiently to divert the anxiety excited by a more direct union” (128). Situating the birth of Quincey within this homoerotic reading, he extends Carol Senf’s suggestion that Mina and Jonathan’s child is the product of the men’s “asexual social union” (46).

Building further upon Craft’s recognition of homoeroticism in Stoker’s Dracula, Talia Schaffer explores Dracula as revealing Stoker’s own hinted homosexuality and his attitude towards the Wilde trial (1895) – to which many other scholars such as Nina Auerbach and Kathleen Spencer attribute much of the sexual imagery in Dracula. In her structuralist paper “‘A Wilde Desire Took Me’: The Homoerotic History of Dracula,” Schaffer performs a discourse analysis on Stoker’s letters with friends and colleagues, in which she finds code words that detect Stoker’s censorship concerning the trial and conviction of Oscar Wilde. Investigating the words “reticence” and “discretion” versus “decadence” and “indecency” as methods of hiding and revealing homosexual thoughts (388), Schaffer ultimately defines Dracula as an indirect discourse in which Stoker can sympathise with Wilde (as Count Dracula), but retain his conservative ideas concerning ethics (as Jonathan Harker). She focuses on Jonathan Harker and Dracula as constituting the primary relationship and moves the climax of homoerotic imagery to Jonathan’s staking of Dracula with Mina as the aroused
voyeur. Whereas the men’s voyeurism in the scene where Arthur stakes Lucy engenders its homoeroticism, Mina’s voyeurism throws a heterosexual veil over a homosexual scene. Harker’s diary of his encounters at Castle Dracula – which Mina reads and seals again with her ribbon – is interpreted by Schaffer as “the record of a homosexual affair [that] is dressed in the pastel colors of a heterosexual wedding, to look just like a bridal gift” (405). She correspondingly interprets little Quincey as the son of Jonathan and Dracula, and as the continuation of Quincey’s blood who died in Jonathan’s lap and is transmitted by him to Mina (419). However, “instead of epidemiological worry, this new blood transfusion produces thriving sons. Thus Stoker recuperates the infectiousness of the vampire myth by making it into a paradigm for homosexual procreative sex” (419).

That Stoker used a vampire as metaphor for the homosexual Wilde does not in the least conflict with Victorian conceptions, as both were considered hybrids. Nina Auerbach describes the consequences of the Labouchère Amendment (1885) (which criminalised general acts of “gross indecency” instead of homosexuality), specifically that “affinity between men lost its fluidity. Its tainted embodiment, the homosexual, was imprisoned in a fixed nature, re-created as man alone, like Dracula, and, like Dracula, one hunted and immobilized by the ‘stalwart manliness’ of normal citizens” (84). This is precisely what Dracula does. It introduces main characters who transgress the boundaries of their gender and then fixes them to fit into traditional structures. On the other side of the spectrum, though just as hybrid as the novel’s men, are the two women protagonists, Lucy Westenra and Wilhelmina Murray. Appropriately, Stoker was also influenced by the persecution of another Victorian class walking the boundaries of conventional gender distinctions: the New Woman. As Kathleen Spencer points out, the 19th century was a period of feminist debate, producing the New Woman who primarily fought for the right to be self-sufficient and
educated, rejecting her role as “Angel in the House” (an ideal designated by Coventry Patmore), although “in the eyes of most Victorian men, for women to deny their traditional role was to deny their womanhood, to challenge the distinctions between women and men upon which the family – and therefore society – depended” (206). In Dracula, the New Woman can be interpreted as represented in either Mina or Lucy and scholastic judgments are very diverse concerning not only Stoker’s opinion about this new type of woman, but also which character embodies her best. Naturally, this discussion is often accompanied by the assertion of an overt contrast in Dracula’s female imagery, more specifically, the dichotomy between the angel and the monster as observed by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their feminist manifesto, The Madwoman in the Attic. Stephanie Demetrakopoulos, among others, notes that Dracula’s narrative is structured by Stoker’s professed “brand of feminism,” in that women dominate the plot (104). The bipartite narrative first focuses on the delicate, feminine Lucy, who succumbs to Dracula’s temptation, and then shifts to the masculine New Woman, Mina, who resists and aids the defeat of the vampire. Mina thus virtually functions as a response to Lucy, or as a positive example to Lucy’s negative. That Dracula’s “exchange of conventional sex roles suggests the weariness that Victorians felt towards pure, passive, decarnalized females versus bestial, aggressive males” is questionable since the re-carnalised female vampires such as Lucy and Dracula’s female companions are eventually rejected in the novel. As Carol Senf remarks, the novel displays Stoker’s ambivalent attitude towards the New Woman, with whom Stoker was familiar via his feminist mother, Charlotte Stoker, and his wife, Florence Balcombe (38). Senf argues that:

Familiar with the feminist movement and apparently supportive of women’s struggles for professional equality, he creates women characters who are the
intellectual equals of the men in his novels; however he seems to have drawn the line at sexual equality, and he had his heroines choose the traditional roles of marriage and motherhood instead of careers. (38)

Elizabeth Bronfen contends that Mina – being “on the side of the paternal law” (319) – responds rationally to her status as bride to be, while Lucy’s failing health and final demise are the respective symptom and result of her reluctance towards marriage, whereas Nina Auerbach proclaims that Lucy’s vampirism actually produces monogamy in a polyandrist and that it “inculcates the restraints of marriage in a reluctant girl” (80). This she derives from Lucy’s fiancé Arthur becoming the sole object of her wantonness. This interpretation could even assume her feeding on young children not as a rejection of motherhood, but as a monstrous inversion of it. As the traditional dualism of masculine activity and female passivity is already inverted by Lucy’s hybrid vampirism, the idea of nursing on a child might merely be another expression of reversed predation. Transforming Lucy into a monstrous sexual feminist as opposed to the virtuous economic feminist Mina demonstrates the duality of the New Woman as well as Stoker’s views about her according to Senf. Jean Lorrah dismisses this duality and attributes all the New Woman’s positive features to Mina, claiming that she “refuses to be bound by the rules of her time when it comes to her education and career plans” (35). However, as Elizabeth Signorotti observes, “any self-improvement she undergoes is only to better serve [her husband]” (624). Furthermore, Lorrah’s textual evidence is unsatisfactory and could be interpreted as supporting opposing ideas. Part of her research is founded on the idea that Mina does not disapprove of the New Woman when mentioning that:
Some of the ‘New Women’ writers will some day start an idea that men and women should be allowed to see each other asleep before proposing or accepting. But I suppose the New Woman won’t condescend in the future to accept; she will do the proposing herself. And a nice job she will make of it too! (Stoker 75)

She argues that Senf anachronistically reads sarcasm into these lines, and contrastingly believes Mina to be laudatory of the New Woman. However, Mina clearly condemns the sexual forwardness of the New Woman, thus confirming the angel-monster dichotomy.

Demetrakopoulos criticises the novel’s lack of nuance in portraying female sexuality and proclaims that its flat characterisation thwarts its transcending from purely popular literature. Although Dracula’s rigid Madonna-Whore complex does seem inescapable at times, a different reading of the mother’s role would shed new light on Lucy’s victimisation. The general idea amongst Dracula scholars that Lucy only completely fails to resist Dracula until the death of her mother – because “the Victorian mother was central in defending the innocence of her daughter” – is derived from the interpretation of Mrs Westenra as a silly, incompetent woman (109), who unknowingly removes the tools of Lucy’s salvation. In the context of a struggle between matriarch and patriarch (Bronfen 317), this interpretation will later be attested in the following research.

Whereas the presence of a matriarch is generally ignored in its literary criticism, Dracula has been extensively researched in terms of its fluctuating portrayal of patriarchal institutions, as was briefly mentioned in the discussion of Christopher Craft. He notes that “Van Helsing stands as the protector of the patriarchal institutions he so emphatically represents and as the guarantor of traditional dualisms his religion and profession promote and authorize,” as these are “emblematic of the two chief patriarchal and dominant
institutions of Western Culture” (Craft 117; Demetrakopoulos 104). In this analysis, a conflict arises between the liminal Dracula, who attempts to blur the traditional boundaries between life and death, male and female, etc., and the patriarch Van Helsing who is assigned the task of redefining those boundaries. Connected to this general detection of patriarchal structures in the novel’s characterisation is the frequent oedipal reading, as established by Richard Astle in his psychoanalytic commentary on Dracula. Astle recognizes a split between two conflicting fathers, Van Helsing and Dracula, which he interprets as a solution to the oedipal conflict, making it possible to both obey and destroy the father. He analyses the novel’s relational structures with Jacques Lacan’s Schema R as a tool to indentify two oedipal triangles: firstly, Dracula, Lucy, and Arthur, and secondly, Dracula, Mina and Jonathan in the roles of, resp., the father, “the signifier of the primordial object” or the mother, and the ideal of the ego. The bipartite structure again functions as a problem-solution discourse as “though the first [relation] resolves badly … it is in a sense mastered through repetition” (100). The incest theme is further recognized in the relationship between Dracula and his vampire companions, the “three sister/daughters” whose ambiguous identity as Dracula’s fledglings, vampire brides, and domestic partners provoke (Demetrakopoulos 105).

Since the doctrine of Freudian psychoanalysis has often been questioned in its application in literary criticism, the oedipal reading of Dracula has received some negative criticism as well. From an anthropological perspective, John Allan Stephenson rejects the traditional psychoanalytic incest reading and provides a model of exogamy in its stead. His model investigates the novel’s structures “in terms of interracial competition rather than as intrafamilial strife,” which he considers to be “more of a tribute to the authority psychoanalysis enjoys among literary critics than it is an illuminating description of Stoker’s narrative” (139). Dracula is first defined as a “sexual imperialist” who battles incest with
exogamy (146), but the men in the colonized woman’s community, fearing excessive exogamy, perceive him as a threat and destroy him. Translated to post-colonial theory, *Dracula* represents a Victorian fear of reciprocal colonization (and consequently, further crossbreeding) by the – in the novel, vampiric – Other. Although Stevenson considers an anthropological reading in direct contrast with psychoanalysis, Astle attempts to combine psychoanalysis with post-colonialism via the concept of the Other, albeit rather unsuccessfully. Marilyn Brock, however, successfully unites the threat of the “improper feminine” (Lyn Pykett qtd. in Brock 121) and that of the racial Other in “The Vamp and the Good Mother,” in that their sexuality threatens “British patriarchal potency” and jeopardizes “the future of the English race” (131). Similar to Stevenson, her research is situated within the context of Victorian post-colonial fears, but is not restricted by his anthropological framework.

The invasion threat present in *Dracula* is entwined with a religious threat. In his study on homiletic rhetoric in Stoker’s novel, Christopher Herbert distinguishes between the pre-religious traditions of earlier vampire literature and the Christian prevalence in the defeat of Dracula. The novel would accordingly not only function as a response to earlier superstitious literature, but also as a discourse with two treatises by Robertson Smith and James Frazer, namely *The Religion of the Semites* and *The Golden Bough* respectively. Specifically, the ambiguous nature of religious imagery is addressed in the portrayal of Dracula’s rule and fall. The paradox of Dracula’s defeat is uncovered since the model of Christianity as a symbol for modernity fighting a barbaric religion based on superstition no longer applies, because the barbaric invader Dracula is revealed as intrinsically Catholic - or even as a Catholic deity or idol, yet is conquered by a combination of sacramental weapons and modern science. Herbert admits:
This reading of Dracula hinges on an essential confusion of irrationality, since in the Eucharist, as in the primitive cults analyzed by Frazer, worshipers drink the blood of the deity to gain supernatural powers or everlasting life, whereas in vampirism; it is the other way around: it is the deity who, in celebrating ‘the Vampire’s baptism of blood,’ drinks from the veins of initiates to impose on them what Van Helsing calls ‘the curse of immortality’ and to preserve his own everlasting life. (118-119)

Herbert’s solution to deciphering such paradoxes is to do the “same reading in different voices” instead of creating one absolute conclusion which would be “a vampirish act of interpretive violence on the text itself” (119). With his analysis on Catholic imagery in nineteenth-century vampire literature, Patrick O’Malley responds to Herbert’s discontent concerning recent criticism’s lack of attention for Dracula’s religious overtone (Herbert 100). The outset of his research evokes the image of the female vampire as an extension of the whore of Babylon (“the woman drunken with the blood of the saints”), signifying the devouring, feminine character of the Roman Catholic Church (130). An expansion of this metaphor could on the one hand produce a professed image of the Romanist Church as a wanton corpse dressed in the tantalising dress of material ritualism. On the other hand, the vampiric image stems from the supposed perversity of the Eucharist, reducing the Roman Catholic to a parasitic blood drinker. Rebutting the traditional anti-Semitic reading, O’Malley investigates cartoons from the second half of the 19th century in order to demonstrate that Catholic, Jewish and Muslim stereotypes were often aligned in representations of the invading Other (150). Furthermore, this religious ambiguity exists within Catholicism as well
implied by Stoker’s “persistent suggestion that vampirism is not so much an alien invasion after all as it is a dark mutation of Christian forms” (Herbert qtd. in O’Malley 159).

3.5. Conclusion

As indicated, the studies devoted to these individual narratives are very diverse, although principally based on general conceptions of vampirism on the one hand, and Victorian society on the other. The relationship between Lord Byron and John Polidori and the specific circumstances of *The Vampyre*’s genesis occasioned accusations of plagiarism and blatant portrayal of this relationship in Polidori’s work. Accordingly, much of this research focuses solely on the male constituents when examining the interaction between the different characters. Concerning *Varney*, the relative scarcity of serious secondary material has caused its exclusion from many comparative studies of vampire literature. The title character is mostly defined within the context of Marxism, as a paragon of the capitalist vampire, and within the context of readership, as an anti-villain whose fluctuating morality and antagonism invokes the reader’s sympathy. However, even in the most extensive research these analyses remain superficial and are limited only to the vampire’s characterisation. In contrast, *Carmilla* criticism focuses on the interaction between the secondary characters and the gender inversion they undergo as a result of the Laura and Carmilla’s lesbian relationship. The narrative’s open ending forms a contrast with the other texts discussed as the vampire’s threat is not resolved by marriage and the victim’s fate remains unclear. Finally, *Dracula* is – in recent criticism – generally believed to be pervaded by the image of boundaries being destroyed and re-established. Whether the threatening force is the New Woman, becoming a sexually liminal being and threatening men’s position, or the
homosexual as a sexual conglomeration, or even the foreign invader who sets out to create a new hybrid race, the focus in each lies on the threat of transgressed boundaries, and infectious liminality. In each of the examined stories, the tensions caused by these threats pervade the portrayal of the victims’ sexual progression and define the general plot. As will be attested, *The Skeleton Count* exaggerates or even literalises this common narrative outline, supporting the findings of this dissertation.

4. METHODOLOGY

Notwithstanding Nina Auerbach’s suggestion that every vampire is unique and should be treated as such (5), these individual stories demonstrate a similar narrative progression, defined by the vampire narrative as a genre. In order to unravel the complex development the female characters undergo in these cases, the specific model of transition-transformation-transgression is applied to each story, beginning with the child stage and ending with the destruction of the female vampire.

For conciseness’ sake, this dissertation is limited to nineteenth-century vampire prose and accordingly includes neither Lord Byron’s *The Giaour* (1813), nor Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Christabel* (1816). Considering the accusations towards Polidori of plagiarism on both *The Giaour* and Byron’s “Fragment” and the general opinion that *Carmilla* was the product of *Christabel*’s great influence on Le Fanu (Nethercot 32), another comparative study of these works would not occasion any novel or fundamental arguments in the investigation of the aforementioned research question and would thus contribute little to this research. The primary texts are chosen for their temporal diffusion so that an idea can
be formed about nineteenth-century portrayals of female sexuality in vampire literature that is not limited to the more restricted Victorian periodisation.

The problem of female sexual development is approached from a gender perspective with a focus on the reoccurrence of particular traditional notions of femininity and the corresponding imagery that gives expression to them. Although performing a psychoanalytic analysis is not the intention of my investigation, Jacques Lacan’s notion of the male gaze, as has been previously indicated, plays a considerable role in the realisation of female sexuality and is in this context reinvented as a narratological instrument. The angel of the house is referred to on several occasions in this context to provide an ideal model as reference for the, from a conservative point of view, aberrant images of female sexuality. Neither authorship nor readership will be addressed directly as the analysis is performed on the level of character interrelations and leaves little room for digression. Consequently, this paper does not enter into the debate concerning Bram Stoker’s undetermined feminism, nor does it re-examine possible evidence of plagiarism in Polidori’s The Vampyre. In contrast with much previous research, Varney the Vampire is given equal attention as the more extensively researched vampire narratives such as Carmilla and Dracula. Although The Skeleton Count has not been confirmed to originate in the nineteenth-century, the story is nevertheless incorporated to support the findings of this dissertation due to its interesting approach to the discourse on Victorian vampire victims. In the case of false attribution it would still function as secondary fictional material and a literary comment on the portrayal of femininity and tradition in these early representations of the literary vampire.
5. INVESTIGATION

These women’s susceptibility to the vampires is determined by their relative position in both their sexual lifespan and their immediate community. As the vampire’s attack is analogous, or even metaphoric of sex (especially with the vampires, such as Varney, who preferably require a bride for blood sustenance), the victims are chosen by the vampires based on their receptiveness to sexual impulses, which is primarily expressed in their visible transition from girl to woman. Although the individual cases demonstrate this transition in distinctive imagery, two modes are discernible in the rendering of their emergent maturity, more specifically, internal and external. Their suitor’s male gaze further transforms them into sexual objects that attract the eye of the sexually predatory vampire. Whether they remain objects or evolve into sexual subjects depends on the women’s individual response to the vampire’s sexual impulses.

5.1. The Vampyre

5.1.1. Chasing Butterflies: Innocent Frivolity and Exotic Transparency

In The Vampyre, the child is primarily recognized in the character of the Grecian Ianthe as the epitome of virginal purity. The narrator’s description reminds us of a pristine land, unspoilt and yet to be discovered:

Under the same roof as himself, existed a being, so beautiful and delicate, that she might have formed the model for a painter, wishing to portray on canvass the
promised hope of the faithful in Mahomet's paradise, save that her eyes spoke too much mind for any one to think she could belong to those who had no souls. As she danced upon the plain, or tripped along the mountain's side, one would have thought the gazelle a poor type of her beauties; for who would have exchanged her eye, apparently the eye of animated nature, for that sleepy luxurious look of the animal suited but to the taste of an epicure. The light step of Ianthe often accompanied Aubrey in his search after antiquities, and often would the unconscious girl, engaged in the pursuit of a Kashmere butterfly, show the whole beauty of her form, floating as it were upon the wind ... Often would her tresses falling, as she flitted around, exhibit in the sun's ray such delicately brilliant and swiftly fading hues ... But why attempt to describe charms which all feel, but none can appreciate?—It was innocence, youth, and beauty, unaffected by crowded drawing-rooms and stifling balls. (11-12)

Her frivolous “dancing,” “flitting,” and “tripping,” accompanied with her “eye of animated nature” evokes the image of a playing child. The long, brilliant hair displays her as an uninhibited young girl, still permitted to wear her hair down as an unmarried girl. In particular, the last line of this extract emphasizes her contrasting unspoilt nature in both a temporal and a spatial perspective. On the one hand, she is suggested to not yet have been initiated into society, still unaware of the sexual behaviour and propriety an older girl would be familiar with. On the other hand, however, the contrast seems to be rather spatial, and consequently also cultural, in that the opposite ‘affected’ nature of English high society is conjured up. The story’s initial setting supports this hypothesis as it serves as an anaphoric image to highlight Ianthe’s innocence and purity by contrast, and Ianthe is delivered as response to Aubrey’s ethical objections to his previous environment. Accordingly, Ianthe
embodies the pristine landscape that the idealist Aubrey searches for on his Grand Tour. This idealisation peaks in an angelic representation, expressed in the description of the sun’s rays illuminating her hair to resemble an aureole. However, her childlike disposition does not solely represent an alluring sexual purity, but also an almost inappropriate naivety as she “was unconscious of his love, and was ever the same frank infantile being he had first known” (13). In contrast with Ianthe’s exotic light heartedness, Aubrey’s younger sister is her more sedate antithesis, though also – and deliberately – kept from society, until the return of her brother as her protector.

5.1.2. A Change in the Wind

Separated from Aubrey, Aubrey’s sister undergoes a traditional debut into society that marks her coming of age:

She was yet only eighteen, and had not been presented to the world, it having been thought by her guardians more fit that her presentation should be delayed until her brother’s return from the continent, when he might be her protector. It was now, therefore, resolved that the next drawing-room, which was fast approaching, should be the epoch of her entry into the "busy scene." (19-20)

As this official acknowledgment of her marriageability also functions as her introduction with potential husbands, it is only suitable that this meeting produces her first encounter with Lord Ruthven and their ensuing relationship. Until the arrival of Aubrey and her being “presented to the world,” she remains metaphorically veiled and, correspondingly,
undescribed in such visual language as used for Ianthe. The external indication of Mss Aubrey’s sexual maturity is thus contrasted with Ianthe’s titillating body imagery, which, however, also lies in the external perception of Aubrey. It should be further remarked that the cause of Mss Aubrey’s “presentation” lies with the arrival of Aubrey, her “protector”, who plays a crucial part in her sexual transition, as their relationship is revealed to be something more than purely familial.

5.1.3. Aubrey’s Stare: The Transition Continues

The extent of their transition is in both cases generated by Aubrey’s male gaze, which might simply be interpreted as a trait he unconsciously adopted by exposure to the predatory Lord Ruthven’s influence. This vampire’s gaze, “fixing upon the object’s face, did not seem to penetrate, and at one glance pierce through the inward workings of the heart; but fell upon the cheek with a leaden ray that weighed upon the skin it could not pass” (6). This shallow, objectifying gaze functions to incite a “willing accession to victimization” (Telotte 13). As the story progresses, however, Lord Ruthven’s nature as Aubrey’s Doppelgänger becomes increasingly apparent, as Aubrey struggles with Ruthven’s lack of morality, and “tries to extricate himself from his perverse hero, but separation is impossible” (Auerbach 16). This attempt at separation denotes Aubrey’s actual attempt to disconnect his own duality of good and evil, after a previous delusional aspiration of recognizing in Lord Ruthven “the hero of a romance” (8). Accordingly, Aubrey’s idealist transforming gaze is revealed as essentially predatory in relation with Lord Ruthven’s seductions. In the quotation used to examine Ianthe’s childlike body imagery, ellipses were purposely omitted which highlighted Aubrey as the focaliser. The entire extract in its original form displays Aubrey’s transformative gaze:
The light step of Ianthe often accompanied Aubrey in his search after antiquities, and often would the unconscious girl, engaged in the pursuit of a Kashmere butterfly, show the whole beauty of her form, floating as it were upon the wind, to the eager gaze of him, who forgot the letters he had just decyphered upon an almost effaced tablet, in the contemplation of her sylph-like figure. (emphasis added 11)

The unconscious Ianthe’s allure does not originate in her own image, but in Aubrey’s perception of that image. Her portrayal remains childlike and non-sexual, while Aubrey considers her as a tantalising. Though Aubrey “ridiculed the idea of a young man of English habits, marrying an uneducated Greek girl, still he found himself more and more attached to the almost fairy form before him” (13). This basically suggests a replication of Ruthven’s sexual predation on a certain young lady, in that, when the outraged Aubrey inquired after his intentions with the girl, Ruthven “answered that his intentions were such as he supposed all would have upon such an occasion; and upon being pressed whether he intended to marry her, merely laughed.” (11) Although Patrick O’Malley fails to recognize this initial mirroring, his conception that “Ruthven’s heartless destruction of Ianthe is itself a distorted mirror of Aubrey’s seduction by and of her” acknowledges Aubrey’s objectifying, sexualising gaze that transforms lanthe into a suitable victim to the vampire (137).

As previously mentioned, Aubrey’s love for his younger sister appears to be more than strictly brotherly. When he returns from his Grand Tour, in which he became acquainted with the workings of male predation, he discovers his sister as a potentially sexual being:
He arrived at Calais; a breeze, which seemed obedient to his will, soon wafted him to the English shores; and he hastened to the mansion of his fathers, and there, for a moment, appeared to lose, in the embraces and caresses of his sister, all memory of the past. If she before, by her infantine caresses, had gained his affection, now that the woman began to appear, she was still more attaching as a companion. (19)

Not only is Aubrey portrayed here almost as a soldier returning from war to the arms of his ever faithful lover, but his sister’s maturing sexuality also draws the attention of his gaze. As Aubrey’s first discovery, and subsequent sexualisation, of the other sex, in the form of Ianthe, provoked Ruthven’s first return, his second sexual object attracts Ruthven’s interest once more. Aubrey transforms both Ianthe and his sister into sexual objects, which on the one hand makes them susceptible for a vampiric – and inherently sexual – attack as a response to this involuntarily sexual signalling, and on the other hand signifies Aubrey’s preparation and relinquishment of his prey to his more adeptly predacious double, Lord Ruthven.

5.1.4. An Open Ending: The Effects of Poor Organisation

Since The Vampyre was the very first English vampire story, Polidori’s prototype differs from later (and especially contemporary) conceptions of the vampire. All the examined nineteenth-century vampires are essentially bloodsuckers, but their ability to conceive progeny through this practice is not raised in Polidori’s ghost story (Gelder 25). After Ianthe is killed, she disappears from the narrative without returning as a vampire, and the fate of Miss Aubrey – whose first name is never revealed to the reader – is undecided, as the only information the reader receives is that she quenched Ruthven’s thirst. Remarkably, in
contrast to all the other narratives discussed in this study, *The Vampyre* does not end with this vampire’s death. That is to say, the vampire is entirely successful in his designs; his victims cannot be saved and he is not punished. This can be ascribed to the lack of a patriarch to destroy the threat of the vampire who “supplant[s] such drearily sanctioned forms of love as family and marriage” (Auerbach 13). Aubrey and his sister only have unidentified guardians, who do (or at least attempt to) warn both Aubrey about Lord Ruthven’s sexual immorality and Aubrey’s sister concerning her husband’s vampirism, but since they lack the authoritative powers of a true patriarch, there is neither an ensuing general denouement, nor a reconstruction of the conventional marital structures. O’Malley remarks that Ruthven “is created as a single monster, not the patriarch of an extending family,” and thus does not form a threat of “national infiltration” (137). As a result, there is no counteracting alliance established, as the vampire’s solitary subversion goes unnoticed by everyone, but for his naïve travel companion who unknowingly provided his sustenance. This solitary vampirism evolves into a clash of civilizations, as the figure of the vampire has shifted from Byronic hero to infiltrating Other by the turn of the century.

5.2. Varney the Vampire

Sir Frances Varney is in all probability one of the most unstable literary vampires of the nineteenth century, whose instability is the core of their existence. In contrast with his predecessor, Lord Ruthven, his personality alternates between the compassionate vampire and the malevolent rogue, and his inability to unite both his conflicting identities and desires separate him from other liminal vampires and ultimately lead to his failure. The vampire’s female victims are situated on the threshold of sexual maturity, of which Varney, as “increasingly representative interloper in a predatory society,” takes full advantage.
(Auerbach 29). Similar to *The Vampyre*, these women dominate the narrative’s structure, but their development from innocence to fall to salvation attracts the attention of a micro-society which causes an entirely different dissolution than Polidori’s ghost story.

**5.2.1. To Protect the Child: The Innocent Young Woman**

In *Varney*, Flora Bannerworth is initially represented as “a girl young and beautiful as a spring morning” (2). Though compared to the initial stages of the natural progression of the year and day, Flora is already “budding into womanhood, and in that transition state which presents to us all the charms of the girl – almost of the child, with the more natured beauty and gentleness of advancing years” (2). Her present transition is demonstrated prematurely in the narrative because the vampire’s attack immediately follows, and the history of Flora’s budding sexuality is ignored in the numerous series of flashbacks. However, when placed in contrast with her new father figure, her future husband Charles, she reverts to the child’s position as she “clung to him like some terrified child to its only friend in the whole wide world” (44). When Charles disappears, that is, is kidnapped by Varney, Admiral Bell supplants Charles’s dual position as patriarch and potential lover to Flora in that his distrust towards her is transformed into compassionate attendance which climaxes into repeated marriage proposals, of which the purpose and effect will be fully explained shortly. Whereas the Admiral’s proposal originates in a patriarch’s reaction to a child’s helplessness, a marriage proposal from the vampire stems from his own helplessness as Varney says to Flora, “for your pure sake, and on your merits, shall I yet know heavenly happiness” (156).

Here Gilbert & Gubar’s conception of the angel in the house is virtually literalised by
Varney’s continuous quest for redemption which culminates in this desire for an angelic link to the heaven he is excluded from.

Varney, as the most active vampire discussed, copiously attacks young girls as secondary subplots and in order to revive himself for his next big scheme. It is quite remarkable that the majority of Varney’s victims parallel each other regarding not only their common fate, but also their names. Flora, Helen, Mary, Clara, Isabella, etc. all have names signifying the exact traits that determine eligibility for vampiric predation: beauty, innocence, and purity. As Varney himself explains, “there is much of beauty and much of innocence in life, and ... both are the dearest and best gifts of heaven” (482). The only victim completely transformed to a vampire is Clara Crofton who is immediately introduced as “to be married on that day ... and ... to leave the home of her childhood to proceed far away to his house in Wales, where she was to be the light of joy to another admiring and loving circle” (784). Clara is thus portrayed as the angelic child to be exchanged from her natural to her marital family in order to become their angel.

5.2.2. An Initial Change

Befitting the romantic nature of Varney’s narrator, and her own symbolic first name, Flora Bannerworth’s budding sexuality is described in the efflorescence of the family’s flower garden. When it was blooming, this garden was Charles and Flora’s meeting place, but after Varney’s attack, or rather his attempted seduction/rape, “many weeds had straggled up among their more estimable floral culture” (73). These weeds represent Varney’s usurpation of Charles’s rightful position in Flora’s sexual development, and anomalously signal the underlying theme of infection which is common in vampire literature, but traditionally
expressed by blood symbolism. When meeting her in the garden, Charles further observes “in [her] wan cheek ... the lily usurping the place of the radiant rose,” and that “the light of joy which had lent its most transcendent charms to that heavenly face, was gone” (74). Not only has the sensual blush, corresponding with the sexual symbolism of the rose, disappeared in the spatial core of their love (resembling that of the marital bed), but her angelic nature has disappeared, thus, according to Gilbert & Gubar’s conception of the primary function of the angel in the house, threatening Charles’s celestial connection. This internal transition is accompanied by an external change that alters Flora’s position in her miniature community of men, i.e. the death of her father. The removal of the original patriarch changes the entire family structure and creates the opportunity for a new patriarch to initiate the restoration of the original system. The now fatherless Flora signals the need for a new, marital guardian to replace the one she was naturally dependent on. This is precisely what provokes the introduction of an array of new male characters. Charles Holland, whom Flora and her brothers met abroad when he gallantly saved Flora’s life (and thus initiated her dependency), can only claim her when the father has died, which is emphasised by Henry’s assurance that their father would not welcome him.

5.2.3. A Staring Contest: Battle of the Gazers

The interaction between the predatory vampire’s gaze and the preceding suitor’s gaze in Varney correspond to that between the actual characters and are thus more divergent as they are not each other’s doubles. Its objectifying effect is most noticeably illustrated in the case of Clara, because the object of the vampire’s gaze is an artificial image of her. Varney decides to pursue her after he steals the locket from her fiancé, Ringwood, which contains “a
small portrait of a young and beautiful girl, upon which Varney gazed intently” (787). Generally the women in Varney – who without exception have suitors or lovers – are initiated as sexual objects by their suitors, excepting Isabella Polidori, who by her resemblance to his late wife comforts Count Polidori with her image (715). In the case of Flora Bannerworth who is surrounded by men who all at one point suggest to marry her, it must be stressed that Charles Holland is the principal suitor who instigates the subsequent attempted seductions. The purpose of Admiral Bell’s arrival is to inspect his nephew Charles’s object of desire. The objectification implied here is emphasized by Bell’s confirmation “that the object of [Charles’s] return is to contract a marriage into a family in every way objectionable, and with a girl who is highly objectionable” (emphasis added 68). When denoting Flora, the word “object” is applied in every sense of the word, but at Flora and Bell’s first meeting, Charles’s gaze is transferred to the Admiral, who becomes equally mesmerised as “what beauty may have met his gaze, her peer he never yet met with,” rendering her simply objectified (85). Similar to The Vampyre, the suitor’s objectifying gaze also attracts the vampire’s own, which, in Varney, leads to sexual competition between the two, literalised in a staring contest to determine who has the more potent male gaze as, “Sir Francis Varney ... returned the earnest gaze of Charles, with such unshrinking assurance, that the young man was compelled, after about a minute, nearly to withdraw his own eyes” (78). Although Charles is the original gazer, his objectification of Flora remains relatively innocent in that his desire culminates in only a swift kiss on her cheek, whilst Varney vampirically rapes her in an undeniably graphic sex scene as he drags Flora by her hair onto the bed, holds her down, penetrates her and sucks her blood, right after “the glassy horrible eyes of the figure ran over that angelic form with a hideous satisfaction” (3). This objectifying gaze alters the basic nature of “that angelic form” to denote a highly sexual image as the focaliser
perceives “a world of witchery in that mouth, slightly parted” while “she moaned lightly in her sleep”, displacing innocent imagery to become sounds of sexual ecstasy and the evil lurking behind a woman’s labia (2). Notwithstanding this brief execution of his sexual desire, Varney’s thirst cannot be fully quenched unless in a monogamous, marital bond which he never accomplishes, and therefore he remains detached from the core of society only to gaze upon it. His predatory gaze not only emphasises (by perversion) the sexual objectification of its recipient, but also reveals his desire to participate. This hypothesis is supported by Varney’s soliloquy in which he says that “there are some flowers too, that give out their sweetest odours to the night air, and some again that unfold their choicest beauties only when the sun has set, and the cold moonbeams can but look down upon them” (455). In these lines, gazing down upon Flora, Varney is imagined as Auerbach’s “Lunarian” vampire whose “affinity with the sky, an affinity that never becomes identification, is equivalent to the remote energy of the friend whose intimacy dissipates in unearthliness” (38). The vampire’s failure to completely transform Flora into a sexual vampire (and his vampire bride) is the result of his own liminality, as success would require him to enter her micro-society.

5.2.4. A Patriarch’s Entry

Within the context of vampire literature, Varney marks the introduction of an organised patriarchy to counteract the vampiric threat. A potential candidate is Mrs Bannerworth, former suitor, Mr. Marchdale, who immediately arrives after the death of her husband to supplant him and claim his place as patriarch. However, as Marchdale joins forces with the disruptive vampire, he is no longer an eligible contender for the role of defender of
traditional family structures. As previously mentioned, Admiral Bell enters the narrative to exercise control over the establishment of new relationships in his family after discovering the unfortunate fate of Charles’s fiancée. While initially he reacts to the threat on his original family, that is Flora as potential vampire bride, Bell gradually assumes the role of patriarch of the Bannerworth household and accordingly battles the vampire that threatens his now extended community. The need for a new patriarch is illustrated by not only Flora’s helplessness, but also her mother’s when Flora’s confidence that “surely no harm can come to me in presence [sic] of my mother” proves unmerited (31). Flora, however, manages to fight off the vampire herself by shooting him, but immediately after succumbs and thus reverts to her conventional delicacy when the men re-enter the scene. The Admiral’s status further extends to new, secondary families such as Helen Williams and James Anderson, in the form of financial support, and several of Varney’s victims who are only saved by the Admiral’s coincidental presence and consequent unmasking of their fiancé’s vampirism. Interestingly, Bell’s position in the family appears to be a conscious effort in his request that Charles Holland takes his name, and Flora Bannerworth is renamed Flora Bell, instead of Flora Holland. This appellation not only confirms the Admiral’s patriarchal function, but also inverts the traditional conveyance of a young girl from her father to her husband.

5.2.5. The Constancy and Truth of Charles Holland: A Marriage Saves the Day

Although Admiral Bell’s natural role as patriarch, due to his age, affluence and title, provides him with the authority to expel the vampire from his society, he can only assist in the prevention of Flora’s transformation, which is primarily achieved by the institution of marriage. Varney’s individual liminality is presented in a continuous fluctuation between
charm and repulsion, high and low morality, ebullience and dismay etc., and the threat of this liminality infecting Flora can only be conquered by the constancy assured in a marital union with Charles Holland. After their first encounter, Charles as the determined suitor proclaimed that “he would return and hope to meet Flora unchanged as he should be” (28). This line alludes to the dichotomy between male constancy and female inconstancy, of which the latter is metaphorically represented in the ever-changing female vampire, transformed precisely at the height of her suggestibility. The young girl’s transition towards maturity is therefore a parlous interlude in which the vampire can invade her personal sphere and influence her sexual development. This invasion is spatially portrayed in a currently common vampire motif introduced by Varney, that is, the vampire entering his victim’s bedroom to attack her while she sleeps. Varney invades Flora’s private space via the picture that resembles him in her bedroom, and his influence is even graphically portrayed as extending to her subconscious, when she sleepwalks towards him in the flower garden. However, she is saved from the fate of vampirism by the “constancy” of her future husband, which explains the cause of Clara’s transformation, of whom the suitor is incapacitated before Varney’s infiltration. In conclusion, the liminal threat of vampirism is defeated by, on the one hand, the patriarch who expels the vampire from the community, and, on the other hand, the husband who fixes the potential female vampire and ends her sexual transformation.
5.3. Carmilla

5.3.1. The Lonely Child

Isolated in a remote castle with her father as principal companion – besides occasional lady visitors, who are quickly dismissed as insignificant and worth only one sentence in the entire narrative, Carmilla’s Laura invokes the image of the princess in the tower, whose solitude protects her purity and naivety. She remains that naïve, ignorant child by the aid of her father, who neither alerts her of Carmilla’s dark side, nor informs her of her own condition. The child in Carmilla is not only manifest in imagery, but one particular narrated instance of Laura’s early childhood also serves a significant function in her later sexual development. Her first nightly visit from Carmilla occurs at the age of six, when she is left unguarded by her maid or nurse. Carmilla appears as a response to her whimpering out of solitude, and instantaneously adopts an equivocal role towards the young child: that of both a sexual and a maternal position:

I saw a solemn, but pretty face looking at me from the side of the bed. It was that of a young lady who was kneeling, with her hands under the coverlet. I looked at her with a kind of pleased wonder, and ceased whimpering. She caressed me with her hands, and lay down beside me on the bed, and drew me towards her, smiling; I felt immediately soothed, and fell asleep again. (9)

Even without knowledge of the subsequent vampiric penetration, one can without doubt detect the sexual connotation in the woman’s caresses under the bedspread. Nevertheless, this scene has also provoked readings that define Carmilla purely as the maternal figure,
soothing her child to sleep. The predatory nature of the visit, however, complicates such a reading, as does the reversal by Carmilla, who allegedly experienced the same “dream,” at the same age, in which she recognizes the adolescent Laura as this hypnotic figure. It could be contended that “each suffuses the image of the other’s absent mother” (Auerbach 43), but, without turning to Freudian psychoanalysis, this analysis does not agree with the aspect of sexual predation. Rather, this instance of sexual contact merely foreshadows in Gothic fashion Laura’s imminent sexuality, even more so as it appears to be authorised by the incongruous absence of her nurse and maid, giving the scene the appearance of a peculiar initiation ritual. The fact that Laura remembers little of her life before and after the event emphasises its nature as a milestone in her sexual life.

5.3.2. Transition: An Initial Change

Laura’s imminent sexual maturity is hinted at by the presence of Mademoiselle De Lafontaine, her finishing governess, whose responsibility is “the training of adolescent girls in the niceties of social life, manners, and culture” (Peterson 23). This governess indicates that Laura is being prepared for her entrance into society, which signifies her receptivity to suitors. Her isolation, however, causes a delay in maturity contrasted by Bertha and Carmilla who have already experienced their first ball. Bertha undergoes the same process in which she attracts and is seduced by the sexual predator Carmilla, who previously also fell prey to a vampire at her first ball and “was all but assassinated ... and never was the same since” (37). Besides these external signs of sexual initiation, Carmilla draws attention to specific body imagery that marks the young girl’s transition to womanhood:
Victorian discourses on the body Purposed that female sexual appetite was most apt to become uncontrollable during menarche, therefore increasing a good English mother’s susceptibility to vampirism. The female victims in *Carmilla* and *Dracula* appear to be most vulnerable when they have reached menarche, which makes them suitable vessels for sexual reverse-colonization. (Brock 130)

Though considered in the context of postcolonial fears, this interpretation highlights the women’s receptiveness in this transitional stage, and attributes a new significance to vampiric blood imagery. As the vampire under discussion is female, the blood cannot function as a metaphor for semen that infects through sexual contact, but must be read at a more literal level as menstrual blood. The shocking image of Carmilla “in her white nightdress, bathed from her chin to her feet, in one great stain of blood” (43) reveals the transition from childlike purity to (monstrous) sexual maturity in that the signal of virginity designated by the white dress, is destroyed by the befouling stain of menstrual blood. Naturally, as this scene depicts the wanton vampire’s transition, the image denoting menarche is grotesquely portrayed by an unusually large stream of blood, flowing from the *vagina dentata*.

5.3.3. The Matriarch versus the Patriarch: Gender Inversion and the Darkening Mirror

As suggested in previous chapters, vampire literature commonly portrays a conflicting opposition between the micro-society that surrounds the victim, and the vampire that threatens its foundations. *Carmilla* is the first of the vampire tales that provides its vampire
with an own community that is, furthermore, not established by vampiric reproduction. Accordingly, this conflict transforms into a communal clash, which is partly based on a gender opposition as Carmilla’s community is a matriarchy that contrives an encroachment on the rights of the weakened patriarchy that surrounds Laura. The vampiric matriarch is easily recognised in Carmilla’s mother, who is described as “a lady, with a commanding air and figure” (15) and whose main function appears to be procuring victims for her daughter. Depending upon the different readings concerning the function of vampiric attacks, this matriarch can be interpreted as fulfilling the role of provider of either sustenance or a sexual partner. The subversive matriarchy threatens the conventional patriarchy specifically by “the female usurpation of traditional male exchange privileges” (Signorotti 612).

The patriarchy Carmilla and her mother oppose is weakened as it is divided. Laura’s father, whose name is never mentioned, “was in the Austrian service, and retired upon a pension and his patrimony, and purchased this feudal residence, and the small estate on which it stands” (7). This portrayal of a military person, feudal lord and inheritor of a patriarchal position provides Laura’s father with a masculine prestige. Nevertheless, the mention of his patrimony signalises the patriarch’s weakened state as he only procreated a girl and the death of his wife renders the production of a male heir impossible. General Spieldorf experiences similar difficulties in his isolation, which are enhanced by the death of his daughter and the resultant impossibility to expand his family with male relations. Accordingly, since Laura’s father and General Spieldorf as separate entities cannot battle the organised matriarchy that centres around Carmilla, they necessarily unite into an actual masculine society, with a physician, an expert in both the occult in general and the specific history of Carmilla’s vampirism, General Spieldorf as the military authority by experience in
Carmilla’s strategy, and finally, Laura’s father as the patron who supplements himself with these more skilful men in order to overpower the matriarchy by proficiency and number.

In addition to controlling the establishment of new relationships, Carmilla’s mother exercises the power of knowledge by withholding information and veiling herself and her daughter in mystery, which is assiduously examined by Thomas in her investigation of the masquerade motif in *Carmilla*. Most noticeable is the mother’s excessive secrecy of which the height is visually expressed in the scene of the masked ball. In her conversation with General Spieldorf, she not only refuses to remove her mask and reveal any information about herself, but she also demonstrates her informational control by addressing the general by name and enumerating their supposed previous meetings. She is so commanding that these instances are planted into the General’s subconscious as he begins to remember scenes that presumably never occurred. Accordingly, since Carmilla’s vampiric attack is instigated by her mother’s manipulation of truth and knowledge, this attack is averted by the discovery of her secret past. As mentioned above, the men who unite in a patriarchy also unite their knowledge of Carmilla’s past and thus undermine the matriarch’s authority and enable the defeat of Carmilla as a product of this weakened matriarchy.

5.3.4. Positioning Offspring: Laura and Carmilla as Inversed Products of Their Procreators

The opposition between Carmilla and Laura’s micro-societies is further remarkable in that it not only illustrate gender inversion, but also manifests itself in the relationship between their offspring and highlights Carmilla as an inverted double of Laura. On the surface, Laura, “a beautiful young lady, with golden hair and large blue eyes” (22), is juxtaposed with
Carmilla who is equally beautiful, but with “eyes large, dark and lustrous; her hair ... so magnificently thick ... and in color a rich very dark brown, with something of gold” (23). This contrast in appearance marks their relative position in their sexual development, as Laura’s beauty resides in a yet angelic image whereas Carmilla’s is derived from a dark, languid demeanour that denotes a more advanced sexuality. Brock perceptively compares the latter image to “Dante Rossetti’s paintings of the sexualized woman” – although this can also be mentioned of Pre-Raphaelite depictions in general, where “thick hair is representative of aggressive sexuality” (128). In her analysis of common manifestations of the young girl in literature, Kristin Hallberg addresses this dichotomous portrayal in similar stories and poses that the dark girl as a reflection of the fair child “challenges, frightens, and lures the princess and their compact, secret friendship becomes a metaphor for the girl’s exploration of the self” (my translation 138). Accordingly, Carmilla functions as an effigy of Laura’s own latent sexuality, which is translated via the image of the wanton vampire to contrast with the (originally) angelic Laura.

To return to the girls’ environment, the portrayal of Carmilla’s micro-society supports this hypothesis that her sexuality symbolises that of Laura, in that the matriarchy she is part of is an extension of herself and grotesquely mirrors Laura’s. As befits the supernatural vampire, Carmilla’s grotesque sexuality is symbolised by monstrous images when her sexual predation climaxes in the vampiric attacks on both Bertha and Laura. In Laura’s bedroom scene, she adopts the form of a “sooty-black animal that resembled a monstrous cat ... about four or five feet long ... and it continued to-ing and fro-ing with the lithe, sinister restlessness of a beast in a cage” (38). Although Auerbach correspondingly considers Carmilla “as cozy as a cat” (45), this image also contains a sexual connotation as it reminds one of folkloric tales about the devil who appears in the form of a black cat to impregnate young women. The
form Carmilla adopts in her attack on Bertha is more noticeably sexual as her father observes “a large black object, very ill-defined, crawl as it seemed to me, over the foot of the bed, and swiftly spread itself up to the girl’s throat, where it swelled, in a moment, into a great, palpitating mass” (67). Carmilla’s transformation into a phallic symbol, which is undeniably evident from these lines, is one of the most graphic instances of gender inversion in *Carmilla*. Her adopted masculinity goes beyond a mere appropriation of the penetrative function as her entire body becomes the phallus. Carmilla’s gender inversion thus denotes “an image of the maternal phallicism that challenges and threatens the authority of the paternal figures” (Davis 9).

5.3.4.1. The Demon in the House: Carmilla as the Product of Nurture

As attested in the chapter on Laura’s sexual transition, the governess occupies an important position in the development of the young girl’s sexuality and the specific type of governess signals her possible eligibility. Besides the company of her mother, Carmilla appears quite attached to a mysterious woman only observed once in the narrative:

a hideous black woman, with a sort of colored turban on her head, and who was gazing all the time from the carriage window, nodding and grinning derisively towards the ladies, with gleaming eyes and large white eyeballs, and her teeth set as if in fury. (19)

In this description, “Le Fanu associates the woman with bestial qualities, by emphasizing her teeth and her foreignness” (Brock 124). While this analysis focuses on a depiction of this
peculiar chaperone as “the racial Other as savage and grotesque” (124), her bestial grotesqueness can also be interpreted as inherently sexual. However, more important than her appearance is the nature of the contact that is established here between Laura and Carmilla’s respective environments. The black woman’s gaze towards Laura’s nurse and governess is only observed and returned by the latter, Mademoiselle De Lafontaine. This mutual recognition supports the notion that this grotesque lady is the governess of Carmilla, who not only doubles Laura individually, but whose household grotesquely doubles Laura’s as well. It is only suitable that the guardian of Carmilla’s monstrous sexual development should demonstrate a similar monstrosity in her exterior.

5.3.4.2. The Female Gaze

Within the context of the previously confirmed gender inversion that dominates the narrative’s relations, it is very significant that “Carmilla and her mother usurp the male privilege of asserting erotic object choice and approach Spieldorf and his niece” (Thomas 55). Not only is the patriarchal right of the marital exchange of daughters here exercised by the mother through skilful coercion (see above: Signorotti), but the privileges of the male gazer are also usurped in this illustration of gender inversion. Their masks enable Carmilla and her mother to gaze themselves at the visages of their objects, without providing the objects with the possibility of returning that gaze. This specific type of interaction continues without the supervision of the ladies’ parents, which leads to a transgression of even the inversed gender norms established by the aggressive matriarchy.

Bertha and Laura’s first encounters with Carmilla provide an initial contrast that characterises their further individual progress and their mutual relationship, or rather the
inability to establish one. As indicated, Bertha is objectified and sexualised by Carmilla and her matchmaking mother and adopts a traditional receptive position in contrast with Carmilla’s masculine instigation. Although Laura and her father are similarly beguiled into receiving Carmilla as a guest, Laura is far less passive in the exchange and in their subsequent relationship. Whereas in Bertha’s case, Carmilla’s mother presses the reluctant General Spieldorf to care for her daughter while she attends to an urgent errand, Laura is actually the instigator of the successive events, as she urges her father to invite Carmilla. Furthermore, in this relationship, Laura could also be interpreted as the gazing, objectifying agent, and Carmilla is the passive object, observed by the entire household (especially the father of course) as exceptionally beautiful. Carmilla is further objectified and subjected to Laura’s gaze in the form of her portrait in that “Carmilla’s unframed effigy accentuates her physicality – as a contained image would not” (615). Laura even hangs the painting in her room so that she can gaze upon Carmilla whenever she pleases.

Thomas contends that “although Carmilla plays the active role of the seducer, Laura is by no means an idealized figure of passivity and ignorance, for she exhibits an active will to knowledge throughout the narrative” (50). This hypothesis is extended by Major who further argues that “Laura’s sexual desire for Carmilla’s person is metonymically transposed into a desire for truth” (163). Even though it has already been argued that Laura is hardly entirely passive in this seduction either, her pursuit of knowledge nevertheless marks her relinquishment of traditional female’s passivity more fervently. Together with Laura’s quest for knowledge of Carmilla’s secrets, the tensions between Laura and her father, who mutually withhold information regarding Carmilla and Laura’s relationship, do indeed suggest a struggle for authority by knowledge. This struggle is a further expression of that
between the matriarchy of Carmilla and her mother and the patriarchy of Laura and Bertha’s respective fathers, who unite in a small male group of vampire hunters.

5.3.5. Resolution

_Carmilla_ is certainly the most extraordinary and complex of the discussed vampire tales in terms of interrelationships between the different characters. A patriarchy has to be re-established to counteract the well-organised vampiric matriarchy, which in its turn reflects the household of Laura as a grotesque double. These two micro-societies initially appear to define their central agents, with Laura as the traditional passive young woman, and Carmilla as the sexually aggressive female vampire who adopts the active, male position in her seduction of Laura. However, the narrative transcends its genre as the two protagonists refuse to accommodate themselves to this traditional heterosexual paradigm. The storyline nevertheless adheres to the standard model of the vampire victim’s sexual progress as Laura transitions from an innocent child to a sexual subject that can objectify other young women. Laura’s reciprocation to the vampire’s desirous feelings and her adoption of the role of gazer marks her transgression from sexually passive to sexually active and provokes a reaction from the patriarchy that stakes the vampire in order to immobilise Laura’s sexual progress. The vampire’s dualism as both attractive and repulsive being is separated and attributed to the female and the male sphere respectively, as Laura’s beautiful and loving friend is witnessed by the men alone as the bloodthirsty monster that lies in a “coffin floated with blood” (72). Auerbach supports this dualism:
in contrast to the General’s ill-defined object, Laura’s Carmilla – sharer, cat, mother, and lover – is a vividly defined subject. It is that sharing, individualized vampire – the loved and known companion, not the “great palpitating mass” – whom nineteenth-century readers believed in and feared. (46)

Invited by Laura but expelled by the men by impalement and decapitation, Carmilla is the catalyst and scapegoat for the initiation of Laura’s sexuality, which continues to fluctuate in an open-ending that possibly suggests her own vampirism as the trip to Italy signifies her further sexual self-development.

5.4. Dracula

5.4.1. The Sweet Child

Though Dracula’s female characters are mostly regarded as children in contrast with the obvious patriarch Van Helsing, the image of Lucy Westenra simulates that of the child most naturally. Throughout the novel, Lucy’s character is that of the silly, frivolous girl, visualised as inherently sweet, as she “was looking sweetly pretty in her white lawn frock” and “looks so sweet as she sleeps,”(emphasis added) and she basically is a “sweet young girl” or “maid” (145-146). Quincey Morris deliberately calls her “little girl” (51) and Van Helsing even repeats the epithet “dear child” after Dracula’s attacks on her as a way of contrasting, denying and negating her sexual deformation, in order to convert her back to her preliminary state of purity. That attempted reversal is supported by his use of a wreath of little white (garlic) flowers, which not only function to ward off evil, but also to highlight Lucy’s purity. Mina, on the other hand, is an entirely different case. Although Jean Lorrah’s
statement that “Lucy was a girl, and Mina is a woman” is overly simplified, the dichotomy that exists between the two is also demonstrated in this aspect of childlike imagery, as Lucy’s purity pertains to that of a child, while Mina’s to that of an altruistic mother figure (37). Accordingly, Mina’s “womanhood” is determined by a traditional male conception of the term, in that it is derived from her success as wife and mother. Fluctuating between mother and child, Mina remains an emblem of angelic purity throughout the novel.

5.4.2. From Child to Woman via Menarche

Of all nineteenth-century vampire literature, Dracula is presumably the bloodiest because – although Varney’s vampiric scenes are also very graphic, and Carmilla literally bathes in blood – Stoker’s novel is the only story that applies blood imagery to the vampire’s victims as well as the vampire itself. Accordingly, this imagery does not solely function as an indication of the vampire’s monstrosity, parasitically feeding of its victims’ life force. On the contrary, the blood imagery marks Mina and Lucy’s position in their vampiric seduction as “like Carmilla, Dracula finds categorical angels – young women at the beginning of menarche, groomed for marriage and motherhood – and attempts to corrupt them” (Brock 125). This objective is embodied in the notorious fellatio-scene, where Dracula attacks Mina:

His right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man’s bare chest which was shown by his torn-open dress. (234)
Mina’s purity symbolised by her white nightdress is assaulted by the stain of menstrual blood. As “Victorian discourses on the body purposed that female sexual appetite was most apt to become uncontrollable during menarche” (Brock 130), it is only suitable that Mina experiences a fit of female hysteria after being sexually attacked by a man who is not her husband. Due to Jonathan’s castration by Dracula’s vampiric progeny, he and Mina have not consummated their marriage. After regaining full consciousness and observing the blood on his wife’s night dress, Jonathan bewilderedly exclaims “What does that blood mean?” (236) to both his wife and Doctor Van Helsing, as if he were a confused boy who just discovered an unpleasant truth about the female body. The fear of possible contagion by menstrual blood complicates the scene further when Mina seeks comfort from Jonathan:

She shuddered and was silent, holding down her head on her husband’s breast. When she raised it, his white nightrobe was stained with blood where her lips had touched, and where the thin open wound in the neck had sent forth drops. The instant she saw it she drew back, with a low wail, and whispered, amidst choking sobs: “Unclean, unclean! I must touch him or kiss him no more.” (236)

The blood that Mina transfers from her own dress unto Jonathan’s white night robe has the same effect as it befouls his purity, making Mina ashamed of this sexual contamination.

Lucy reacts entirely different to her own blood loss in Mina’s account of when she perceives that “on the band of her nightdress was a drop of blood. When I apologised and was concerned about it, she laughed and petted me, and said she did not even feel it” (78). The more experienced Lucy patronisingly mocks Mina’s concern about a fundamental part of womanhood whilst simultaneously reassuring her regarding her own developing sexual maturity. Besides the interpretation of menstrual blood, both instances of blood imagery can
also be read as the breaking of the hymen with first sexual intercourse that is symbolised by the vampire’s dental penetration. However, if Dracula had successfully inseminated Mina with his blood she would have been lost to his patriarchy, whereas her virtuous conventionality is what actually saves her.

5.4.3. The Male Gaze: You Can Look, But Only Dracula Can Touch

The narrative’s bipartite structure not only evolves around the two female characters as vampire victims, but also focuses on the motif of the wedding that forms the bonds between the different characters and enables the entire plot. When Mina and Lucy are introduced the former is engaged to Jonathan Harker while latter is inundated with multiple suitors who simultaneously propose to her. These multiple proposals instigate Lucy’s decline into sexual wantonness that leads to her death. The first clear suggestion of Lucy’s polyandry arises when she expresses her secret wish in her question as to “why can’t they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?” (51). This question is generally analysed as an expression of Lucy’s inmost desires and an initial sign of her sexual prowess, but this interpretation ignores the agency expressed in the qualifying phrase “or as many as want her” (emphasis added). Instead of sexual aggressiveness, Lucy initially exaggerates female passivity in accepting any man’s affections and allowing herself to become the ultimate sexual object. Mina conforms to traditional monogamy as she only responds to the gaze of her fiancé who fulfils the function of male gazer perfectly as “admiring Mina’s beauty [is] his role throughout the novel; even during the awful scene when Mina gets scarred by the Host, Harker pauses to notice her ‘beautiful hair’” (Schaffer 417).
In concordance with the other narratives, the male gaze invites the vampiric gaze for both Lucy and Mina, which is most perceptibly noticed in Dracula’s visitations:

Things began to whirl through my brain just as the cloudy column was now whirling in the room, and through it all came the scriptural words "a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night." Was it indeed such spiritual guidance that was coming to me in my sleep? But the pillar was composed of both the day and the night guiding, for the fire was in the red eye, which at the thought got a new fascination for me, till, as I looked, the fire divided, and seemed to shine on me through the fog like two red eyes, such as Lucy told me of in her momentary mental wandering when, on the cliff, the dying sunlight struck the windows of St. Mary’s Church. (215)

The dematerialised vampire steals into her room in the form of the mist and subjects Mina to the same monstrous gaze she witnessed before. Again their dissimilar reactions mark the fundamental difference between the two women that leads to Lucy’s death and Mina’s conquest. After Lucy is mesmerised by the stranger’s red eyes staring at her, she is put to bed by Mina who just a few moments later witnesses Lucy with her head leaning out of the window as a clear invitation for Dracula to enter her private sphere. Interestingly, this inviting gesture is performed from their shared room, as Mina remarks that she “threw a glance up at our window” (emphasis added 80), which seems to foreshadow the vampire’s subsequent invasion into Mina’s chamber as well. As a good and virtuous wife, Mina “ha[s] shut the window before [she] ha[s] come to bed” (215), demonstrating the contrast between her and Lucy, who uses the motif of the open shutters to represent her sexual eagerness.
5.4.4. Lucy’s Sleepwalking: An Instance of Unrestrained Liminality

As Lucy diverges further from the moral standards established for young fiancées, she begins to show the same languor as her vampiric predecessor, the sexually aggressive Carmilla, as well as the habit of sleepwalking. The latter trait is “connected to the unconscious and thus to instinct, unacknowledged desires and lack of control over impulses, features that can be associated with unrestrained appetite as well” (Domínguez-Rué 302). Lucy’s unrestrained sexual appetite is most visibly revealed in her continuous need for blood transfusions. The series of transfusion in which needles penetrate her skin and insert blood are invariably interpreted by Dracula scholars as phallic penetration with seminal discharge. After being inseminated by her fiancé Arthur, she is only temporarily satisfied and craves more until, as eloquently phrased by Arthur, “that poor pretty creature that we all love has had put into her veins within [ten days] the blood of four strong men. Man alive, her whole body wouldn’t hold it” (126). Even after being subjected to the sexual prowess of four virile men Lucy remains dissatisfied until this dissatisfaction culminates in her vampiric transformation, in which she ceases to be a sexually passive, receptive object, and becomes the active, penetrating subject.

The sleepwalking state not only allows Lucy to execute her desires, but it also functions as a liminal space in which all the aspects of her person manifest themselves. This state functions as a preliminary to her vampiric transformation, as she wanders around at midnight on the border between awake and asleep, actively seeking the vampire but passively surrendering to him. When juxtaposed with Lucy’s high activity in her sleeping disorder, Mina’s specific type of parasomnia appears to suit her character as well. When the telepathic link between her and Dracula is discovered, Mina is reduced by Van Helsing to
functioning as an instrument in the defeat of Dracula. Lorrah surprisingly interprets this as Mina rescuing herself and her protectors, even though she is used as a radio transmitter (32). Mina is the passive object that alternately serves the patriarchy established by Van Helsing and that by Dracula. According to Senf, Lucy’s sleepwalking confirms a division “between the need to conform and the desire to rebel. By day Lucy remains an acquiescent and loving Victorian girl. By night the other side of her character gains control; and Mina describes her as restless and impatient to get out” (42). The lively Lucy in state of her subconscious shows a wandering inclination and a desire to escape, whereas the sedate Mina remains composed in her hypnosis and uses her subconscious state to remain within the bounds of her newly established patriarchy by submitting herself to the authoritative Van Helsing. Her stability saves her from Lucy’s fate.

5.4.5. Battle of the Patriarchs: Clash of Civilisations and a Meddlesome Woman

Similar to Carmilla, Dracula portrays a clash between the household of the vampire and that of its victim. In his Oedipal reading of Dracula, Astle remarks that “in Stoker’s novel we have a conflict between two ‘fathers’ as well as between father and sons” (99). Although the present analysis largely ignores oedipal role divisions, the conflict that arises between the two patriarchs is indeed partly founded on sexual competition, viz. “a struggle between men who wish to retain their control over women defined as members of their group and a powerful and attractive foreigner, who wishes to make the women his own” (Stevenson 147). Van Helsing is introduced as the defender of Victorian household morals against Dracula who is plotting to subvert this moral by not so much claiming their women’s
sexuality for himself, but by being “more of a catalyst for women’s desires and transformative powers rather than an active character” (Domínguez-Rué 302). In this aspect, Dracula resembles Varney in that the lack of a suitable patriarch to defend the developing households requires the introduction of an outsider into the narrative. Whereas in Varney, the choice of patriarch is founded mainly on economic reasons (as the wealthy Admiral Bell returns harmony to impoverished households with financial support), Van Helsing’s appointment is based on his undoubted authority in the occult and his knowledge of the operation of the female body. He accordingly defeats Dracula with a combination of empiric knowledge of his vampiric habits, a global knowledge of science which allows him to control Mina’s body, and of course his patriarchal leadership aptitude which facilitates organisation in the vampire’s defeat.

An immense amount of Dracula criticism investigates the patriarchal constructions that pervade the novel, mostly focussing on the male perspective. However, the mother’s role in Lucy’s sexual progress has been largely ignored. Although Demetrakopoulos’ notion that “the Victorian mother was central in defending the innocence of her daughter” seems unquestionable, her assertion that “not until her mother’s death does Lucy succumbs completely to Dracula” misreads Mrs Westerna’s death scene in attributing this causal relationship (109). Lucy’s mother undermines Van Helsing’s authority and deliberately counteracts his precautions to safeguard Lucy’s purity. As noted previously, Van Helsing’s present Lucy with a wreath of white garlic flowers in an attempt to restore her virginity, to which Mrs Westenra reacts by removing the flowers and opening the window, which both signifies her daughters’ relinquishment of her virginity and her receptiveness to sexual impulses, symbolised by the open shutters as the female genitalia, which is in turn further enhanced by the vampire’s penetration of her private sphere as he enters her room through
that window. Although these are generally identified as the actions of “a poor mother, all unknowing, and all for the best as she think [sic]” (112), a second counteraction proves her true intentions when she, in Dracula’s final attack on Lucy, “clutched the wreath of flowers that Dr Van Helsing insisted on [her] wearing round [her] neck, and tore it away from [her]” (119). Considering that, after Lucy’s death, one of her maids steals the golden crucifix from her corpse which Van Helsing placed on Lucy’s mouth to avoid vampiric transformation, it seems that the women of Lucy’s household become Van Helsing’s antagonists, as they negate his efforts to make Lucy inert. In order to retain his patriarchal control, Van Helsing uses the same patronising tactic of denying any wilful opposition on the women’s part as he comments that “she knew not altogether what she did, and thus unknowing, she only stole” (138). In sum, Van Helsing’s male company that functions to immobilise Lucy’s sexual transformation is countered by a female power that supports her licentiousness and actually inverses Demetrakopoulos’ idea of the Victorian mother as safeguard of her daughter’s chastity.⁷

5.4.6. The Fate of Two Opposites: The Lustful Lucy and the Virtuous Mina

As both women have been passively initiated into a patriarchy established around them, their fate is accordingly determined by the men who feel a “need to immobilise [them] into their fixed concept of femininity” (Domínguez-Rué 304). Van Helsing’s previous attempts at ending Lucy’s transformation seem feeble in contrast with the violence of her metaphoric rape with an enormous wooden phallus. Whereas Lucy requires literal transfixion⁸ (in the sense of being both pierced and immobilised), Mina escapes with a more gentle approach by marriage, which (like Lucy’s staking) “fixes [her] semantic instability” (Bronfen 318) as she
becomes a “wife”. It has previously been indicated that Jonathan’s impotence prevents the consummation – and subsequent validation – of their marriage. This marriage is only truly confirmed by the birth of “Little Quincey, whose introduction so late in the narrative insures his emblematic function, [and who] seemingly represents the restoration of ‘natural’ order and especially the rectification of conventional gender roles” (Craft 129). However, “he is the unacknowledged son of the Crew of Light's displaced homoerotic union, and his name, linking the ‘little band of men together,’ quietly remembers that secret genesis” (130).

Mina’s sexuality is thus finally controlled by enclosing her in an exclusively male society, averting further female arousal (by ending the possibility of matrilineal contagion) and correcting the typically female flaw of inconstancy with overpowering male constancy. Even her son is not the product of her own sexuality, but that of the men’s controlled conception which enforces conventional passivity even more as her role in the process of reproduction is entirely receptive. As a result, this “fixed concept of femininity” is restored as Lucy’s “corrective penetration” (Craft 118) ends her constant fluctuation between the originally sweet lucy, the sensuous “bloofer lady” (147), and the Medusa-like monster (176). Being made inanimate, she returns from a sexual subject to object again.

5.5. The Skeleton Count

5.5.1. Pre-transformation: A Necrophilic Ambition

Of all the women discussed so far, Bertha, Count Rodolph’s “vampire mistress,” is most vividly reduced to a sexual object as her death and experimental resurrection in the hands of a creator displays a strange perversion of a woman dying into art (Gilbert & Gubar 25). After
placing Bertha’s dead body in his turret – to immediately position her in relation with the phallus as the core of his castle – Rodolph undresses her and gazes upon her body:

Bertha had been ... a maiden of surpassing symmetry of form and loveliness of countenance; no painter or sculptor could have desired a finer study, no poet a more inspiring theme. As she lay stretched out upon the floor of the study she looked like a waxen figure of most artistical contrivance. Her long black hair was shaded with a purple gloss like the plumage of the raven, and her features were of most exquisite proportion and arrangement. (16)

The female body is here approached as a completed work of art, about to be transformed into a new life and to serve a new purpose. Described as a “study,” a “theme” and a “figure,” she is not only made inanimate, but almost abstract. As he strips her from her garments and veils her with a sheet, his identity as the proprietor of her body becomes even clearer.

5.5.2. The Child Reborn

Compared to traditional Victorian vampire narratives, *The Skeleton Count* exhibits a slightly deviance in the progression of the female protagonist’s sexuality. The sexual rebirth that accompanies vampiric transformation in women is made explicit in Bertha’s re-animation. She is partly the product of her own sexuality, since her vampiric birth results from the sensuality of her dead body which Count Rodolph uses for his experiment of reanimation. The sexual connotation enveloping the experiment is so explicit it cannot be ignored. After undressing the body and admiring her beauty, the count performs his necrophilic act with
the phallic instrument of a wand and the “miraculous liquid” (14), administered when the ritual had ended, similar to ejaculatory semen. Her resuscitation is announced by a climactic “quivering of the limbs,” answered by Rodolph as “a shudder pervaded his spine in spite of himself” (17). This scene is quite peculiar in its inversion of the climax symbolism in *Carmilla* and *Dracula*, where the orgasm is literally portrayed as “the little death.” As mentioned previously, the vampire Bertha is the end product of this symbolic ritual, and emerges bewildered as a newborn:

In her mysterious passage from life to death, and from death to new life she had lost all her previous ideas and convictions, all her experience of the past, all that she has ever acquired of knowledge; and had become a child of nature, simple and unsophisticated as a denizen of the woods, with all the keen perceptions and untrained instincts of the untutored savage. (18)

Similar to Polidori’s Ianthe, Bertha is portrayed as uneducated, unspoilt, and almost blank in the sense of an unpainted canvas waiting to be transformed into a work of art according to her creator’s design. However, her rebirth into seclusion from society and the loss of “all her previous ideas and conceptions” simultaneously erases any internalised gender constructions and thus also enables her to inverse the previously established relationship between the active male gazer (Rodolph) and the passive female object (herself).
5.5.3. Gender Inversion: A woman about Town

Whereas initially Bertha holds her creator in great awe and her sexuality is entirely directed at and by him, her transformation progresses into an increasing awareness of her sexual potential, which culminates in the reversal of traditional role distribution. A preliminary indication of this is presented in the covering and uncovering of her body with a sheet. In this particular case it is made explicit that “veils are inescapably associated with eroticism, exoticism and fetishism. To lift the veil is to peep at the forbidden, to access taboo knowledge, to occupy, by connotation, a masculine position” (Flint 455). Rodolph has veiled her, but Bertha unveils herself:

Her snowy bosom, from which the sheet had fallen when she rose from her recumbent position on the floor, heaved with the returning warmth of renewed life, and the Count of Ravensburg gazed upon her with mingled sensations of wonder and delight. (17)

Although strong sexual overtones accompany the count’s gazing, Bertha cannot be considered completely objectified as the unveiling that provokes his gaze occurs through her own agency. As she “occupies a masculine position,” Bertha gains certain control over her progressively aggressive sexuality which leads to physical attacks on the villagers.

Like Dracula’s Lucy, Bertha begins her nightly predations on children, but quickly moves on to “one of the loveliest maidens in the village of Ravensburg” (25):
with slow and cautious step she softly approached the bed whereon the maiden reposed so calmly, little dreaming how dread a visitant was near her couch, and then she shuddered involuntarily as she bent over the sleeping girl, and her long dark ringlets mingled with the masses of golden hair which shaded the white shoulders, and the partially exposed bosom of Theresa Delmar. (26)

In this scene, Bertha adopts the male dominant position, in preparation of the sexual act she is abut to perform, when she bends over the weaker, passive woman before penetrating her with her phallic teeth. With the transfer from attacking children to young women as, Bertha transforms from a devouring mother into a predatory lover, thus transgressing from breaking the female gender ideal by denying motherhood to usurping the man’s position and transgressing gender boundaries. These gender codes are further broken by a mutual gender inversion between Bertha and Rodolph which is initiated by his bodily transmutation. Physically, this transmutation marks an exchange of gender ideals as the objectified woman is re-carnalised by her vampiric (and sexual) rebirth while the man is de-carnalised in the literal loss of his flesh when he is diminished into a skeleton. Their interrelationship changes as well as the count’s condition renders him defenceless and dependent upon Bertha’s “care to prevent the dreadful secret from becoming known” (24). This dependence consolidates Bertha’s sexual independence and manipulative dominance, explicitly demonstrated in “her eyes glittering with a strange expression, as she thought of the facility which her lover’s strange doom would allow for her nocturnal absences from the castle” (24). Like an adulteress, she sneaks out and locks the sleeping Rodolph in their room to quench her blood thirst in the neighbouring village. This denotes a reversal of spatial gender constructions in that the dichotomy between the public man and private woman is
simultaneously literalised and inversed. Their literal de- and re-carnalisation thus functions to emphasise Bertha’s sexual appetite exceeding her husband’s, which leads to a transgression of constructed gender boundaries.

5.5.4. Punishing the Transgressor

By exiting her private sphere and entering the public domain of the village, Bertha ensures her demise as she attempts to reinstate herself into a community that does not welcome her back. Bertha’s double transgression combines the traditional vampiric recruiting in another society with the literary topos of a wife’s adultery caused by sexual disappointment in her marriage. Rodolph’s nightly de-carnalisation demonstrates his impotence as he is literally “not whole,” which causes Bertha’s adulterous adventures. With the discovery of each other’s condition, Bertha and Rodolph experience a mutual aversion. Confronted with her lover’s impotence, “Bertha shuddered as she witnessed the horrid transformation, and they lay down on the bed until midnight, the necessity of secrecy overcoming any repugnance she might otherwise have felt to the horrible contiguity of the skeleton” (25). When Rodolph, in turn, discovers his wife’s condition and predations, “he shuddered violently at the appalling idea” (32). Another appalling idea is suggested by the villagers when the vampiric attack on Theresa Delmar is ascertained. The mother’s interesting choice of words in exclaiming “Holy Virgin!” (27) at the sight of her daughter’s state suggests a concern further expressed by the father’s comment that Theresa was “not otherwise injured by the vampire’s attack” (28). When the intactness of her hymen and her virginity is confirmed, the threat of contagion is considered when a villagers mentions “what a shocking thing it would be if a pretty girl like Theresa Delmar was to become a vampire when she dies” (28). To subdue the threat of
contagion, the villagers track her to the castle to end her predations, staking her in her coffin and protecting both the wellbeing of the women and children of their community and marital gender constructions by punishing the licentious adulteress.

6. RESULTS

Whereas for monsters in general “two of their most arresting features ... are predation and boundary-transgressing hybridism” (Benson & Ziegler 226), the vampire specifically adds a sexual dimension to these two primary characteristics as his attacks are motivated either by an insatiable bloodlust, or a desire for procreation by transforming his victims. Consequently, the vampire functions as a perfect metaphor for the development of female sexuality in that this liminal being serves as a catalyst for a transformation that both expresses and promotes the feared liminality of the female body. This possible liminality threatens conventional gender constructions that are designed to standardise women into a fixed ideal, the transgression of which causes great alarm and a subsequent inclination to identify the transgressor with the opposite extreme of this ideal. From this reaction the dichotomy between the angel and the monster is created, of which the latter “incarnates the damning otherness of the flesh rather than the inspiring otherness of the spirit, expressing what ... men consider her own ‘presumptuous’ desires rather than the angelic humility and ‘dullness’ for which she was designed” (Gilbert & Gubar 28). In nineteenth-century vampire literature, the image of monstrous femininity is given prominence to in the form of the unrestrained female vampire, whose entire existence is a transgression and whose specific liminality in contrast with the male vampire’s again questions this dichotomy.
As the century progresses, the sexual development of these female characters becomes increasingly easy to reconstruct. In terms of sexual imagery, the contrast between the two extremes of the temporal continuum, Polidori’s *The Vampyre* and Stoker’s *Dracula*, is striking in that the latter exhibits the vampire’s predation and the victims’ reaction quite graphically, while the former only reveals Ruthven’s vampiric identity at the very end. In *The Vampyre*, the focus lies on Aubrey’s intermediate function between the vampire and its victims. Symbolising the perception of Victorian morality, the protagonist holds a dualist perspective of his world, acknowledging only the virtue inside and the vice outside:

Shirley Sugarman, in her discussion of participation in Romantic thought, explains how through such “conceptual screens” “we have separated ourselves from the ‘outside and conceive of ourselves as being ‘inside’” (192)—an inside whose task it is to evaluate and manipulate an ‘outside’ as quite different from the self. (Sugarman qtd. in Telotte 16)

Aubrey’s transformative perception not only alters both Ianthe and Aubrey’s sister into sexual objects, as previously argued, but by doing so also places them in the intermediate grey area which Aubrey precisely rejects. As both girls transition into womanhood, they are transformed by Aubrey into sexual objects, and thus suitable vampire victims, enabling vampiric predation to take place. In this respect, these women are not only victims of the vampire, but also of Aubrey’s reality-altering dualism, as their association with the vampire redefines them as separated from the virtuous “inside,” unable to re-enter.

In *Varney*, the young woman is emphasised more as the heart of the household. Flora Bannerworth is an exemplar of the angel in the house, uniting a community of men who
defend her as the epitome of the ideal woman. As the attack on Flora is accompanied by an attack on the household economy (which Varney does by robbing them of the money Mr Bannerworth had hidden before he committed suicide), the vampire forms a threat not only to marital constructions, but also to the foundations of the family as microcosm of patriarchal society. The young women attacked by Varney all hold the status of angel in the house because of their purity and selflessness, wishing, above all, to serve their families. Isabella Polidori, for instance, agrees to marry the repulsive disguised Varney to gratify her father while Helen Williams does so to (supposedly) save her mother from the poor house.

The victims’ susceptibility to vampiric predation is enhanced by their liminality, as the vampire’s attacks occur during the intermediate stage of marital exchange from father to husband, in which these young women float between two identities. Their “semantic instability” (Bronfen 318) enables a change in meaning from angel to monster, which only succeeds in the case of Clara Crofton, who is almost immediately immobilised by staking. In the end, the angelic ideal remains intact and the threatening antithesis is destroyed.

As argued previously, the exchange of women is of great importance in *Carmilla* as well. The intricate interplay between the matriarchy and patriarchy on the one hand, and their representative offspring, Carmilla and Laura, on the other hand, is elaborated (and complicated) by a series of inversions that create an increasingly mobile set of gender constructions. Laura and Carmilla’s relationship originally appears to adhere to a heterosexual paradigm, in which Carmilla enacts the role of the male suitor and Laura that of the suitor’s female object. However, on a deeper level, Laura is not the passive victim of vampiric predation, but instigates and sustains their subsequent relationship. As she changes from object to subject, Laura becomes initiated into Carmilla’s matriarchy and weakens her father’s patriarchy further as their nuptial exchange is not actually reciprocal and offers
nothing to his party. Carmilla may be immobilised in her coffin, but Laura is, remarkably, fixed by neither by a stake nor by marriage. In conclusion, *Carmilla* tells the story of a young girl, Laura, whose sexuality is initially under the command of her father, is then transposed to the grip of the beautiful vampire, and finally becomes independent in a relationship that transgresses heterosexual gender constructions and even rejects the heterosexual paradigm.

The dichotomy between the angel and the monster is most distinct in the portrayal of Dracula’s Mina and Lucy. Whereas both are introduced as angelic beings, the discrepancy in their “premarital state” (Bronfen 316) determines the progression of their individual sexual development and the manner of Dracula’s attacks. Mina, often viewed as the economic feminist, remains the epitome of the angel in the house as she works in function of her husband, Jonathan Harker, and the other constituents of his male community. Although her transitional state attracts the vampiric attack described in the fellatio-scene, Mina never transgresses the gender constructions imposed by the patriarchy and “these painful pleasures thus become foreplay to the fulfilment marriage promises at the novel’s end, when pleasure principle gives way to reality principle” (Massé 680). Because she is fixed by marriage and a male heir conceived by male union, the threat of increasing liminality is overcome by the reinforcement of the male society. In contrast, Lucy’s high desirability signified by the multiple proposals foreshadows the insistence of Dracula’s attack, after which her receptiveness enables her vampiric transformation. In this transformation, an entire set of gender constructions is both inversed and perverted as she becomes the penetrating subject that preys on her husband and on children, the latter of which is a direct “perversion of the maternal” (Bronfen 318), forming the exact antithesis of the angel mother Mina. As Lucy both exits the society she was initiated in and transgresses its internalised codes, she in turn transforms into the licentious vampire that threatens to contaminate
other susceptible women such as Mina and destroy the image of the ideal woman. However, as she is immobilised in the notorious staking scene, her death not only ensures the safety of future marital constructions, but actually consolidates them by transposing the product of the men’s homoerotic union, Quincey, to the sanctified (but unconsummated) marriage of Mina and Jonathan, and thus transforming his birth into an immaculate conception.

_The Skeleton Count_ functions as a further illustration of the previously attested model of a vampire victim’s sexual development. Placed in relation to the marriage and her husband’s sexuality, Bertha becomes a sexual object whose sexual awareness progresses to that of a predatory subject, which is heightened by the de-carnalisation of her husband. As her new sexual appetite can no longer be satisfied by her husband, she both transgresses marital laws and inverses traditional gender codes. As a result, Bertha is transfixed by the community she endangers with her contagious sexual prowess. The narrative’s title proves indicative of the plot’s progression as the initial protagonist, the skeleton count, relinquishes his dominant position to his vampire mistress.

In conclusion, the female protagonists in nineteenth-century vampire literature are generally depicted as transitioning to sexual maturity. Within this intermediate state, they are both indirectly placed “in relation to the phallus” (Bronfen 315) by their male suitors and future husbands, and directly sexualised by their male gaze. The vampiric attack they are subjected to denotes, from the woman’s perspective, the shocking realisation of their sexual identity, and from the men’s position, the perils of aggressive sexual behaviour in women as threatening the gender codes of male oriented – and in all the narratives but _Carmilla_, male dominated – society. Accordingly, an actual transformation then signifies the fulfilment of these fears when the sexual object becomes a sexual subject, rejecting heterosexual codes. No longer contained within the strict internalised gender boundaries of the passive,
receptive female and the active, penetrating male, the transgressing vampire requires transfixion by a stake to literally stop her from moving in her coffin and to end her liminality. Occasionally, the corrective punishment is directed at the sexual threat the vampire poses, as she is decapitated with the purpose of castrating the vagina dentata. The image of the still woman is thus restored in either death or marriage.

7. IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation examined the portrayal of female sexuality relative to the introduction of the literary vampire in nineteenth-century English literature. By expanding the gender reading in vampire literature from the latter half of the century to the early prototypes, it is possible to unveil a discourse concerning the position of the young woman in a society worried about the possible eradication of traditional family values by both internal and external influences. Whether read from a gender or postcolonial perspective, the focus on transgression of boundaries and the struggle against it demonstrates a preoccupation with a rigid control of the family as a social institution.

The rise of aberrant sexual behaviour in women initially appears to be caused by an external determinant, that is, the vampire as invading other, but is disclosed as the product of catalysts within the societal boundaries as well. Patrick O’Malley’s acknowledgment of Aubrey’s catalysing seduction of Ianthe has been combined with Telotte’s assertion of his transforming perception and expanded into the concept of a sexualising gaze that alters its object and signalises the young woman’s susceptibility to vampiric seduction (O’Malley 137; Telotte 15). The mother’s role in her daughter’s seduction has also been extended from
Carmilla to Dracula, revealing Lucy’s mother as an active agent that enables Lucy’s transformation.

The contagion motif inherent in vampire literature is traditionally examined biographically. Connecting the contagiousness of the vampire’s blood with the author’s lifespan, both Carol Senf and C. Jennifer Chou have, for instance, interpreted Dracula’s female vampires as representatives of the prostitutes that had presumably infected Bram Stoker with tertiary syphilis around the time of Dracula’s genesis (Senf 38; Chou 41). However, this dissertation has offered an alternative reading of vampiric contagion within the more general notion of contamination. The loss of purity that leads to the contamination of the feminine ideal is authorised by the female constituents of the community in both Carmilla and Dracula, the latter of which address the contagion of menstrual blood.

The most frequently quoted sentence in the criticism of vampire literature, that “there is no such creature as ‘The Vampire’; there are only vampires” (Auerbach 5) remains valid. What Auerbach argues here is that, as societies and their fears alter over time, the threat that the image of the vampire invokes alters with it. Even within this limited study, an evolution is detected that coincides with the development of the discussed female protagonists, as from Polidori to Stoker the portrayal of these women becomes increasingly sexual, culminating in the figure of the insatiable Bertha.

8. CONCLUSION

By exploring how some traditional notions of femininity are expressed in these stories, it has been proven possible to reconstruct the victims’ sexual development and the reaction it provokes from the community. In sum, the female characters continuous progression is
structured by a transition from girl to woman, which is stimulated to extend into a transformation from sexual object to sexual subject, which in turn culminates in a transgression of gender boundaries with the adoption of the male active position. These boundaries are restored by either ending the female vampire’s liminality by destroying her in a symbolic immobilisation or, if no unpardonable transgression is made, by reinforcing heterosexual gender constructions in their most representative institution, marriage.

What makes the vampire such a perfect invocation of a society’s fears is its liminal nature. Simply by being indefinable the vampire can threaten a community, as the latter cannot place the former within its established social constructions. Notions of gender construction, in particular, are endangered when the vampire is female and its liminality becomes a matter of fluctuating gender. As gender constructions have evolved over the century, so has the vampire’s identity. The liminal sexuality that the vampire evokes has now become its allure, and its intermediate state between life and death no longer invokes fear as the symbolisation of death, but offers a new, hopeful image as the agent of eternal youth and companionship to a society concerned about aging, obsolescence, and the evanescent nature of love.
Works Cited


Hallberg, Kristin. “Änglaprinsessa och Flickbyting: Några Svenska Flickskildringar.” *Läs Mig*. 


Notes

1 See Michelle Massé’s “Gothic Repetition: Husbands, Horrors, and Things That Go Bump in the Night” (1990) for an interesting example of how trauma is resolved by repetition in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892).

2 Coventry Patmore’s poem “The Angel in the House” (1854) characterises the Victorian ideal of the young woman, and particularly the wife, in the description of Patmore’s own wife, believed by him to possess all these qualities. This ideal prescribes women to be passive, gracious, devoted completely to pleasing their husbands, and most importantly, pure. This domestic angel was criticised by Virginia Woolf in her speech (later revised in essay form) “Professions for Women,” in which she directs herself to women writers and advocates killing this ideal in their work. Gilbert and Gubar expand the image of the idealised angel in The Madwoman in the Attic (1979) to include her function as an intermediary between her husband and God.

3 Flora is the name of the Roman goddess of spring and flowers. The name Helen also originates in ancient mythology as Helen of Troy, known for her beauty. Additionally, Helen means “ray” or “sunbeam.” Naturally, the name Mary comes from the Virgin Mary and denotes divine purity. Finally, Isabella is the Spanish version of Elisabeth, which means “God is my Oath.” The name is also associated with “bella,” a feminine Italian word meaning beautiful. Clara was originally derived from Latin “clarus” (famous), but has come to be associated with the French word “clair,” which is translated as “bright,” “light,” or even “pure” (Oxford Concise Dictionary of First Names).

4 Varney narrates a vampire’s failed attempt at producing offspring in the form of Clara, who is almost immediately killed. As for Dracula, his conscious attempt at establishing a complete familial community with wives and daughters (perhaps even Jonathan as the family’s solicitor) is equally artificial and consequently ends in its demise.

5 For instance, among the many illustrations of Lord Alfred Tennyson’s poem The Lady of Shalott (1833), William Holman Hunt’s iconographic version (1886-1905) demonstrates this association most vividly. In this painting, the woman’s hair is not only very dark and thick, but envelopes her in uncontrollable, wild locks which clearly symbolises an unbridled sexuality.

6 The story of Agnes Bowker and her cat is presumably the most well known case study in which a woman claims to have been impregnated by a cat. In Market Harborough in 1569, Agnes pretended to have given birth to a monster, described as a cat with a strangely elongated body. Investigations made clear that the cat she had supposedly given birth to was a grown cat with still had food in its stomach, which proved that Agnes had fabricated the story to disguise that she had given birth to a child out of wedlock (Oxford DNB).

7 Furthermore, not all mothers fulfil this Victorian ideal as is illustrated by Varney’s Mrs Williams, who has her own financial comfort at heart instead of her daughter’s wellbeing, when she manipulates her daughter into marrying a vampire.

8 Elizabeth Signorotti uses the similar term “transfixation” (618), a practice of the Catholic Church, which means “literally, nailing something gone wild.”

9 In Laura’s account of her night she describes a strange event (Carmilla’s nocturnal visit), combining imagery of orgasm and death, as “[her] heart beat faster, [her] breathing rose and fell rapidly and full drawn; a sobbing, that rose into a sense of strangulation, supervened, and turned into a strange convulsion, in which [her] sense left [her] and [she] became unconscious” (42). Here the “little death” as a metaphor for the orgasm is made explicit (Bosky 219), as is the case with Dracula’s Lucy who is witnessed with “her lips … parted, and she was breathing, not softly as usual with her, but in long, heavy gasps, as though striving to get her lungs full at every breath” (77). Her prolonged death is expressed by moaning, sighing, and a general uneasiness, giving these scenes of deterioration an obvious sexual undertone.