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"For the Blood is the Life": Vampirism and Alterity in Le Fanu's Carmilla

"Pois o sangue é a vida": Vampirismo e alteridade em Carmilla *de Le Fanu*

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Abstract: *The following paper is concerned with the Irish author Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's novella* Carmilla *(1872), focusing on its aspects of alterity by means of a vampire story. The general aim of this article is to investigate Carmilla's vampiric character as an allegorical manifestation of alterity (sexual, cultural and racial), through the exploration of the vampire legend as it unfolded in Europe and traversed into literature. The influence of Le Fanu's own roots as an Irishman and the place of his work within the larger mosaic of the Irish Gothic tradition are also greatly relevant to this discussion, since the "alterity reading" of the novella is inextricable from the different meanings of the vampiric motif within the earlier Gothic tradition as well as its relation with femininity and queer desire. The contributions of such scholars as Fred Botting (2005), Victor Sage (2004) and Sue-Ellen Case (1997), amongst others, are cited throughout.*

Key-words: *Gothic Literature; Irish Fiction;* Carmilla.

Resumo: *O presente trabalho discute a novela* Carmilla *(1872), de autoria do escritor anglo-irlandês Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. Pretende-se focar em seus aspectos de alteridade, articulados por meio da "história de vampiro". Os objetivos gerais deste trabalho são os de provar que o caráter vampírico de Carmilla é uma manifestação alegórica de alteridade (sexual, cultural e racial), através da exploração da lenda do vampiro conforme esta desdobrou-se pela Europa e atravessou o folclore, ganhando espaço na literatura. A influências das raízes de Le Fanu enquanto um homem irlandês, bem como a posição de sua obra dentro do mosaico maior da tradição gótica irlandesa são, também, imprescindíveis para esta discussão, e contribuem para a articulação deste artigo. Uma leitura cuidadosa da crítica de tais autores*

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e autoras como Fred Botting (2005), James Twitchell (1981), Victor Sage (2004) e Sue-Ellen Case (1997), entre outros (as), é cotejada com passagens da novela, a fim de alcançar os objetivos previamente citados.

Palavras-chave: *Literatura gótica; Literatura irlandesa;* Carmilla.

Introduction

This paper discusses Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, a novella first published in 1872. The book is a part of what has been called the Gothic tradition, and belongs specifically to the niche of the vampire story. As such, it imports some of the tropes previously associated with the vampiric motif, as well as other aesthetic influences from the Romantic literature of the early nineteenth-century. Additionally, the potential of the Gothic story for fictively portraying a range of psychological, sexual and cultural issues is a vastly important aspect of the vampire tale, which can be glimpsed in this particular work of fiction. In general terms, this paper aims at exploring the eponymous Carmilla's vampiric character as a metaphor for alterity, investigating the ways in which the distinctively feminine power of this vampire is refreshingly utilized by Le Fanu.

Initially, a succinct exploration of the historical roots of the Gothic tradition or mode in the mid-1700s, as well as its place within nineteenth-century literature and the attendant Romantic tradition, is presented as a means to contextualize Le Fanu's novella and the themes it embodies. This section greatly owes to the British theorist Fred Botting, whose work *Gothic* (2005) is consistently utilized as a primary source; the second section tackles the distinctively Irish manifestation of the Gothic, given its role in the understanding of *Carmilla* as a powerful allegory for cultural/racial *Otherness*. Furthermore, its author, Le Fanu (1814-1873), was a writer of Anglo-Irish roots and, therefore, a member of a long tradition of Gothic writers who availed themselves of the metaphorical potency of the Gothic to articulate themes of invasion, alterity and cultural atavism, and the literary critics Jarlath Killeen (2014) and Renée Fox (2013) are referenced throughout this section. The third section discusses the folkloric origins of the vampire myth and its subsequent introduction into nineteenth-century literature. Special emphasis is placed in Le Fanu's incorporation of mythic tropes into the fabric of his story, chiefly the ritualized staking of the vampire, whose cultural symbolism of regained order

and expulsion of the detested *Other* is deemed relevant. This section greatly owes to James B. Twitchell's observations in his *The Living Dead* (1981). The fourth and final section in this paper explores "the alterity reading" of *Carmilla*, juxtaposing it with yet another, earlier short work of vampiric fiction, the obscure *The Black Vampyre* (1819), by Uriah Derick D'Arcy. Such comparison is done in order to emphasize the allegorical potential of the vampire character in both texts as embodiments of racial and cultural *Otherness*, as well as a societal threat to the *status quo* which must be obliterated by patriarchal authorities. Carmilla's endurance as a character and her uniqueness within the vampire tradition are further highlighted. The Final Considerations consist of a brief reflection on the aspects explored throughout the research, as well as an exposition of some of the conclusions obtained and an invite to possible future studies of the novella.

The Gothic: a stain

Fred Botting's resonant description of the "stain" of British literature, from his seminal study *Gothic* (2005), underlines the miscellaneous nature of what might be called the Gothic tradition, imbued as it has been – from its roots – with inspirations from various segments of the cultural and literary landscapes which had preceded it:

> What might, loosely, be called the Gothic tradition ... possesses ... a broad, if strange, continuity in the way it draws inspiration, plots and techniques from medieval romances and poetry, from ballads and folklore, from Renaissance writing, especially Shakespearean drama and Spenserian poetry, as well as from various seventeenth and eighteenth-century prose forms. Articulating different, popular and often marginalized forms of writing in periods and genres privileged as Romanticism, Realism and Modernism, Gothic writing emerges as the thread that defines British literature. ... Gothic can perhaps be called the only true literary tradition. Or its stain. (Botting, 2005 10)

Indeed, yet another critic, Robert Miles, has dubbed it "the strain of the novel", which is telling, since when Gothic emerged in the mid-eighteenth century, the novel form itself was in its embryonic stage. The articulation of what would, later in the century, develop into Romanticism, as with William Blake's and Thomas Chatterton's poetry and their influence over later English Romantics, is also relevant from a historical perspective, since the employment of such artifices as the extreme emotion evoked by the sublime and of

medievalistic or supernatural themes, for instance, invites an understanding of the Gothic as a mode of the Romantic. Furthermore, Miles asserts that – since its emergence – the Gothic has hardly changed (*apud* Gillespie and Morin, 2014 3). He refers to its most essential tropes, from its earliest occurrences during the latter half of the 1700s:

> A 'gothic' text combines, among other things, supernatural figures and events with medieval Catholic Continental settings, an interest in the Burkean sublime, and a beleaguered heroine seeking release from the imprisonment – physical and otherwise – of a depraved and tyrannical male member. (3)

Such "medieval Catholic Continental settings" are often Central or Eastern European, as well as Iberian Spain or Catholic France, removed as they are from insular, Anglican England. Their inclusion within the Gothic tradition suggests a revisited past of Catholic-fed superstition and mysticism. As to the Burkean sublime, it can best be defined as "whatever is fitted to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror" (Burke, 1968 40) – emotions which were supposed to be invoked by the somber and mysterious atmosphere of Gothic medievalism and isolated locations.

The Gothic tradition, however, is considerably more complex a subject than the sum of its parts and neither has it failed to evolve over time. Though it has retained some of its essential tropes throughout the centuries, it has consistently held a fresh take on the circumstances under which it has been repeatedly rethought and reshaped, as Botting states: "Gothic figures have continued to shadow the progress of modernity with counter-narratives displaying the underside of enlightenment and humanist values" (Botting 1).Gothic origins lie in an attempt to countervail the prevailing discourses during a key period in European modern history: the eighteenth-century, marked as it was by the Enlightenment, whose empiricism seemed to foreground "a world which ... ha[d] become increasingly secular" (2005 1), as well as by Neoclassicism, whose "aesthetic rules insisted on clarity and symmetry, on variety encompassed by unity of purpose and design." (2). Europe had never been less spiritual, and neoclassical views demanded "simplicity, realism or probability" (2) from its writers. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the polysemous word Gothic – at the time employed by conservatives, radicals and scholars alike – emerged from a deep yearning for imagination, emotion and freedom, with assumed historical roots in a medieval past. Early

Gothic writers, therefore, sought to produce narratives mainly as a counter discourse of sorts against the prevailing changes in society and politics brought about by the French Revolution, as well as by the scientific advancements which so drastically altered everyday life and signaled the decline of superstition and wonder (Bomarito, 2006 1).

The Gothic, thus, sought to forsake the restrictions of its tumultuous and uncertain contemporaneity, by evoking a conceived past, as well as cultural sources which were deemed not Greco-Roman in origin; historically, *gothic* was thought to relate to the Germanic nations, which, it was widely believed, had brought down the Roman Empire – by the eighteenth-century long associated with the restrictiveness of the Catholic Church – and to have upheld the values "of freedom and democracy [which were] claimed as an ancient heritage" (Botting, 2005 3).

Thus, the pioneer Gothic writers – amongst whom Horace Walpole (1717-1797), whose novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) "is generally acclaimed as the original work of Gothic literature" (Botting, 2005 1) and Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823) – turned to archaic sources of literature for inspiration, imbuing their plots with imagery of decaying castles whose gloomy ruins harked back to the medieval times so prominent in Gothic imagery, commonly believed to have been dominated by barbarity, superstition and fear. The preferred literary form was the romance, which was thought to comprise folkloric lore and, above all, to *not* be classical in origin (2005 24).

By means of the old romantic tropes of supernatural intervention and extravagance, the emergent eighteenth-century Gothic tradition was able to embody very contemporary anxieties of a fragmented time. It managed to sustain "a nostalgic relish for a lost era of romance and adventure, for a world that, if barbaric, was, from the perspective of the late eighteenth century, also ordered" (Botting, 2005 4), while simultaneously catering to the demands of its increasingly middle-class readership (4). It was also dominated, as Botting further observes (5), by the imagery of old aristocracy returning to haunt troubled heroines, with touches of incestuous connotation and ecclesiastical scandal. As the eighteenth-century drew to an end, however, a major shift took place within the genre, as the succeeding century hailed an age of even greater uncertainty and change; the clichéd and formulaic villains of eighteenth-century Gothic had no longer the scope to instill fear in the minds of the reader. The early nineteenth-century saw the decline of the wistful Radcliffian terror whose sublime manifestation was associated "with subjective elevation, with the pleasures of imaginatively transcending

or overcoming fear and thereby renewing and heightening a sense of self and social value. Threatened with dissolution, the self, like the social limits which define it, reconstitutes its identity against the otherness and loss presented in the moment of terror (Botting, 2005 6). Rather, it was horror – the recoiling movement of the self when confronted by the dissolution represented by the other (6) – which became the prevalent mode of the Gothic in the 1800s, since it best captured the nineteenth-century's growing concern with how individuals related to the society which had produced them. Gothic figures, thus, embodied no longer fanciful *Others* to be reassuringly cast out and punished, reinstating social order, but instead sought to portray anxieties brought about by the newly-explored fields of human psychology and sexuality, as well as the significant scientific advancements which took place during the Victorian era. As Robert F. Geary observes, the rise of a materialistic view of the world, which displaced Christian dogma, hailed an interpretation of the supernatural not as the product of "dangerous superstition", but as "a refuge ... from the dominant materialistic scientificism" (Geary 22).

Indeed, the late nineteenth-century saw no shortage of fictional works whose plots resorted to the supernatural or the speculative as a means of externalizing distinctly Victorian anxieties and fears. Like *Carmilla* (1872), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) is marked by sexual undertones via the vampiric motif; Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) similarly hints at the perceived depravity of homosexuality; Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) is also a first-person tale of a young woman beleaguered by sexually charged ghostly forces and G.H. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898) utilizes science fiction as a canvas into which to project themes of imperialism and technological dominance. In short, the Burkean sublime – which had for so long guided the Gothic *locus* – was surpassed by the uncanny: "Terror became secondary to horror, the sublime ceded to the uncanny, the latter an effect of uncertainty, of the irruption of fantasies, suppressed wishes and emotional and sexual conflicts" (Botting, 2005 7). This in no small amount owed to the emergence, in the early 1800s, of Romanticism, "... the greatest single shift in the consciousness of the West that has occurred" (Berlin 1); in fact, Gothic came to represent "the darker side to Romantic ideals of individuality, imaginative consciousness and creation" (Botting, 2005 7).

The extravagance and horridness of the Gothic were translated, by such expressive representatives of the movement in England as Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), Lord Byron (1788-1824) and John Keats (1795-1821), into the language of melancholic search for identity

and internal conflict so familiar to early nineteenth-century Romanticism (Bomarito, 2006 2). Gothic also became an attendant form to the alterity which nineteenth-century rising *bourgeois* values had created: any individual deemed deviant from the strict norms set by the ascending *bourgeoisie* was bound to become an object of deep societal scrutiny (Botting, 2005, 8). In this sense, one of the possible readings for J. S. Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) is informed by the aesthetic and socio-political changes attendant to the period of its publication in the late nineteenth-century; specifically, regarding the sapphic overtones it explicitly evokes by means of its use of vampirism, itself a significant trope within nineteenth-century Gothic. First, however, it is productive to briefly examine how its themes of alterity fit in with the Irish Gothic tradition which birthed it

The Irish Gothic: threatened enclave

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-1873) belonged to an Anglo-Irish family whose contribution to the Irish intellectual world is noteworthy: his great-grandfather, Thomas Sheridan (1719-1788), was an educator, essayist and actor, as well as a close friend of fellow Irish writer Jonathan Swift (1667-1745); Alicia Le Fanu (1791-1867), his father's cousin, was a Gothic author in her own right during the early 1800s. (Gillespie and Morin 5). Le Fanu himself has been dubbed "the Irish Edgar Allan Poe" (Twitchell 129), due to his contributions to the development of the Gothic in Ireland; his works often explore the supernatural and the occult. In 1861, he bought the prestigious *Dublin University Magazine* (Gillespie & Morin 130), to which he had, in 1838, contributed its first ghost story: *The Ghost and the Bone-Setter*. As its editor, in the 1860s, he published the novel *The House by the Churchyard* (1863), which combined elements of the mysterious and the historical, and would go on to influence James Joyce's seminal *Finnegans Wake*.[1] *Uncle Silas* followed in 1864 and, in 1872, *Carmilla* first appeared in the serialized journal *The Dark Blue*, only to be re-published as a part of a short story collection entitled *In a Glass Darkly* (Costello-Sullivan xvii).

As a pioneer of Irish supernatural fiction in the nineteenth-century, Le Fanu's contribution to the Gothic genre represents an expression of his investment in "Protestant Magic", which included – amongst other tropes – a strong influence of the folkloric and the esoteric (Killeen 34). Seen by this light, Le Fanu's late work *Carmilla* unveils itself as more than just a vampire tale – although on those terms alone it provokes immense scholar interest,

as shall be further discussed – and invites a reading of itself as "a political and/or cultural metaphor" (Costello-Sullivan xviii). Indeed, that seems to be the very crux of the vampire story in general, as this parasitic creature shifts from folklore to literature in the nineteenth-century. In Le Fanu's specific context as an Anglican Irish author in the 1800s, however, the narrative's general theme of an invading, pervasive force threatening the stability of a tightly-knit community speaks strongly to what Mary Douglas has called the "enclave" mentality, as alluded to in Jarlath Killeen's study *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction* (2014). The term pertains to a

> shared cultural space in which ideas about time and space, ethics, physical nature, metaphysical reality and human relationships are held in common so as to allow the individuals who occupy that space to negotiate their relationship to reality and to others outside the enclave as successfully as possible. (38)

Such is the case of the Anglican Irish community, which had been settled in Ireland since the seventeenth-century, in the wake of the religious and political strifes which had swept through England during the tempestuous reigns of the Stuart kings James I (1566-1625) and Charles I (1600-1649), as well as the subsequent Cromwell years. The community's fragmented experience as English inhabitants of a country whose "native", Catholic population they had been consistently taught – through colonial discourse – to despise as "degenerate savages" (Killeen 37) provoked a shared sense of angst which provided a nexus for the articulation of the Gothic tradition later to emerge.

As Killeen points out, the existential crisis faced by the Anglican inhabitants of Ireland – trapped as they were between their English colonial heritage and the tension represented by their very presence among the "native", Catholic fellow inhabitants of the island – provided the perfect opportunity for the development of Douglas' proposed enclave mentality (2014, p. 38). Seeking the preservation of its own enclosed network of individuals, the enclave's main concern is "the mapping of its own limits and the policing and maintenance of its boundaries, keeping its members inside and blocking the entrance of detested outsiders" (38).

As far as the Anglo-Irish community was concerned, those outsiders were most assuredly the Catholic, "original" inhabitants of Ireland: as John Fox – in his *Acts and Monuments* (1563) – had set the blueprint for the demonization of Catholics back in England, so did Sir John Temple's *The Irish Rebellion* (1646) sought to do the same in seventeenth-century Ireland.

Presented as the agents of Satan himself, Irish Catholics were thought of as "contagious pollutants of the blood" and were, therefore, the prototype for the invading monster later to infest the Irish Gothic tradition (Killeen 41-42).

Thus, the vampiric motif in *Carmilla* emerges as a powerful symbol of invasion and otherness, with Carmilla's depravity threatening the "virtuous and righteous Anglican insiders" (2014, 42), represented by Laura's unnamed father and Laura herself: an English household overpowered by a Continental danger. Laura's father maintains English as a recurrent language in his Austrian household – amongst a "Babel of languages" – out of patriotic feelings (Le Fanu 6). Tea "make[s] its appearance regularly" in that household, fulfilling its place as the "national beverage" (20) and underlining the general Englishness of Laura's roots on her father's side. Renée Fox, in her essay *Carmilla and the Politics of Indistinguishability*, makes a convincing point about the confluences between Laura's and Carmilla's lesbianism and the racial/cultural alterity reading of *Carmilla*. She notes that, though miscegenation and the circulation of blood are primary concerns regarding vampiric activity in literature (116), such a dissolution of boundaries had already taken place between prim and proper Laura and wild and seductive Carmilla, way before the latter crashed into the former's life to gorge on her blood. On her mother's side, it is revealed in chapter V, Laura descends from that "bad family", the Karnsteins, making her a descendant of the Countess Mircalla/Carmilla herself.

As Fox puts it, the English girl and the monstrous undead already share the same blood, which suggests a "mixed line of kinship". *Carmilla* is less about the supplantation of one race by another and more about the ultimate indistinguishability between racial or class lines (Fox 117). Moreover, Killeen asserts that "the Gothic ambivalence ... compellingly represented the hesitancy of Irish Anglicans between an 'English' realist embracing of the technological ... and an 'Irish' Catholic superstitiousness, anachrony and atavism", for, if there is a tendency in Irish Gothic novels to conclude with "the expulsion of the primitive and horrific past, that expulsion is never really complete", since Anglican Irish Gothic authors – just like the characters they depict – "were not fully convinced of the desirability of the rational" (Killeen 46). Hence *Carmilla's* haunting ending, in which the atavistic vampire, in spite of the patriarchal efforts that sought to bring about her destruction, has not been wholly vanquished. The now-dead Laura, who, by the end of her tale, as Fox puts it, has become indistinguishable from her victimizer – after all the image of Carmilla that returns to Laura's mind "with ambiguous alternations" (Le Fanu 96) often starts her off her reverie, effectively

pulling her back into her Self by means of the invocation of the Other – fancies she hears "the light steps of Carmilla at the drawing-room door" (p. 96): a *denouement* which seems to suggest that "Laura is dead because Carmilla has finally come to claim her" (Killeen 47).

The undead: vampirism and folklore

James B. Twitchell, in his meticulous *The Living Dead: A Study of the Vampire in Romantic Literature* (1981), asserts, regarding the folkloric roots of the vampire: "Before the nineteenth century the vampire seems to have only folkloric existence – an existence as historically old as it was culturally varied. For the vampire is truly ancient. Long before Christianity his presence was imagined among the peoples of coastal Egypt, in the Himalayan recesses of north India, and on the steppes of Russia. The proliferation of names gives some indication of mythic currency: called "Vurdalak" in Russia, "Vampyr" or "Oupir" in East Europe, "Ch'ing Shih" in China, "Lamia" in ancient Greece, the vampire was part of almost every Eurasian culture. ... Devendra P. Varma has traced him into the Himalayas, where, Varma contends, the proto-vampire first proliferated through a host of different guises: the "Kali" or blood-drinking mother goddess; the "Yama" or the Tibetan lord of Death; the Mongolian God of Time afloat on an ocean of blood. From these highlands the vampire descended into the low countries, carried in the myths of the Huns and the Magyars into Eastern Europe, then into Greece, and finally into the Arabian and African cultures. All these strains contributed to the legend, with each new civilization and each new generation refashioning and recreating the vampire until he emerges as the Western monster we recognize today: a demonic spirit in a human body who nocturnally attacks the living, a destroyer of others, a preserver of himself" (1981, p. 7). The vampiric figure, thus, has been a multi-cultural superstitious motif whose prototype dates all the way back to ancient times. It has served as a bridge between the East and the West and has been re-signified through the folkloric manifestations of Eurasian peoples.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Eastern and Central portions of Europe, as Twitchell further expounds, had served as the stage for a great wave of vampire mania in the 1730s (Twitchell 7). The Carpathians, as Botting notes, "formed a crossroads where traditions met" (95) and, thus, represented the blurring of lines between East and West. Indeed, during the seventeenth-century, when the Catholic Church sought to reestablish its hegemony over Europe and expand to the East, it faced great resistance by the previously established religions in the Balkan region, where the vampire legend proliferated. The Church capitalized on the

myth, "assert[ing] that all who were buried in unconsecrated ground would be denied eternal rest, instead becoming vampires" (Twitchell 14). In fact, as Twitchell further observes, "the place where Christian and Eastern churches met in southeastern Europe remains to this day one of the most fertile grounds for the vampire myth" (15). The historical Dracula lived in the Balkan region, entrenched between "the Moslem and Christian empires" (15), the East out of which he would set to vanquish the West in Bram Stoker's reimagining of the character in his 1897 novel.

In England, however, the actual word "vampire" did not enter the vocabulary until the eighteenth-century, probably brought over from Central and Eastern Europe (7). In English lore, the vampire was thought to be an *energumen* or the devil's avatar: a person, who had once been alive, but whose soul had been damned either by the attack of another vampire or by some grave sin against God and whose undead existence was now solely under the devil's control (8). Le Fanu must have been aware, in the early 1870s, when he first published *Carmilla,* of these long-established tropes associated with the folkloric conception of the vampire, for the titular character's vampiric nature most often shows itself in her doubleness, as though a devious force lurked just beneath the languid and placid surface of her character. For instance, Carmilla's fit of anger during the funeral scene, in chapter IV, underlines not only her fiendish nature, but also her decidedly unorthodox views on religion: "Besides, how can you tell that your religion and mine are the same; your forms wound me", she declares in the same chapter (Le Fanu 31). In yet another occasion, on discussing superstition with Laura's myopic father, she, "in a witty reversal, turns out to be the true rationalist" (Sage 195): "Creator! *Nature*!" ... All things proceed from Nature – don't they? All things in heaven, in the earth, and under the earth, act and live as Nature ordains? I think so", Carmilla impatiently argues (p. 36), subverting the Scriptures (Rev. 5:3).

Laura further notes that she had never seen Carnilla "upon her knees" and that she always failed to attend the evening prayers, preferring to remain in the drawing-room (Le Fanu 45). As Victor Sage observes, Carmilla is "showing her hand as the hard-edged and aggressive Atheist she is, and totally impatient with male 'authority'" (195). In yet another passage, as the Styrian peasants sing hymns for the soul of a deceased young woman – whom, later the reader discovers to have been killed by none other than Carmilla herself – the vampire's barely suppressed diabolical nature disturbingly shows itself. Laura recounts that

> [h]er face underwent a change that alarmed and even terrified me for a moment. It darkened, and became horribly livid; her teeth and hands were clenched, and she frowned and compressed her lips, while she stared down upon the ground at her feet, and trembled all over with a continued shudder as irrepressible as ague. All her energies seemed strained to suppress a fit, with which she was then breathlessly tugging; and at length a low convulsive cry of suffering broke from her, and gradually the hysteria subsided. "There! That comes of strangling people with hymns!" she said at last. (Le Fanu 32)

Later, in chapter V, after Carmilla had morbidly intimated Laura to die for her, once more her barely suppressed demonic nature reveals itself by means of her "eyes from which all fire, all meaning had flown" and a face "colourless and apathetic" (41). It is in fact as if the "devil's spirit" had trapped the soul of the once-human Mircalla, as English lore expounds on the vampire, leaving her under an accursed existence; she confides in Laura:

> People say I am languid; I am incapable of exertion; I can scarcely walk as far as a child of three years old; and every now and then the little strength I have falters, and I become as you have just seen me. But after all I am very easily set up again; in a moment I am perfectly myself. See how I have recovered. (41)

Prevalent in Le Fanu's conceptualization of the legend is also the influence of the French Benedictine monk Augustin Calmet (1672-1757), who "was possibly the greatest Catholic Biblical scholar in the eighteenth century" and whose "work, really an anthology of folk horror stories, was quickly translated into English" (Twitchell 33). In fact, he had played a significant part in the "vampire mania" of the early 1700s, previously alluded to in this paper, with his *Traït sur les Apparitions des Esprits, et sur les Vampires* ... (1746), rendered into English by the Rev. Henry Christmas as *The Phantom World*. A treatise on apparitions and various other occult themes, *The Phantom Word* quite cohesively touches on the *revenant* tradition of Hungary and Moravia (now a part of the Czech Republic), presenting a comprehensible account of folklore, assisted by actual testimonies of the vampiric phenomenon as well as official sources. Most tellingly, the last chapters of the novella – not coincidentally, as Renée Fox suggests, the ones in which Laura's domain over the narrative cedes to patriarchal legitimacy, as Carmilla's final demise approaches – build on the tradition as it was presented by Calmet. In chapter XIII, the eponymous Woodman, in answering General Spielsdorf's inquiry on how the accursed Karnstein village came to be abandoned, declares that "it was troubled by revenants...; several

were tracked to their graves, there detected by the usual tests, and extinguished in the usual way, by decapitation, by the stake, and by burning; but not until many of the villagers were killed" (Le Fanu 82). The readiness of his superstitious version of history testifies to Botting's assertion that the novella "makes no attempt to rationalize superstition within the bounds of everyday realism or nineteenth-century science. The Gothic features of the narrative temporally and geographically distance the story from the present" (Botting, 2005 94). It makes all sense, thus, for Le Fanu's gloomy and picturesque Styria to serve as the setting for the presence of *revenants*, especially since it is close to both the now defunct Moravia and Hungary, in Central Europe, which invites further connection to Calmet's writings.

The Woodman's mention of the *revenants* (or vampires) being detected in their graves by "the usual tests" also alludes to Calmet's *Phantom World*, as does the "extinction in the usual way": decapitation, staking and burning (see the second section, *Dissertation on the Ghosts who Return to Earth,* chap. VII, specifically p. 262). Later, in chapter XV of *Carmilla,* Laura – borrowing from a copy of the report of the Imperial Commission – summarizes the final ordeal and execution of her tormentor in much the same lines as Calmet writes of the proceedings for disposal of a vampire in the previously cited chapter of his treatise:

> The grave of the Countess Mircalla was opened; and the General and my father recognised each his perfidious and beautiful guest, in the face now disclosed to view. The features, though a hundred and fifty years had passed since her funeral, were tinted with the warmth of life. Her eyes were open; no cadaverous smell exhaled from the coffin. The two medical men [...] attested the marvelous fact, that there was a faint but appreciable respiration, and a corresponding action of the heart. The limbs were perfectly flexible, the flesh elastic; and the leaden coffin floated with blood, in which to a depth of seven inches, the body lay immersed. Here then, were all the admitted signs and proofs of vampirism. The body, therefore, in accordance with the ancient practice, was raised, and a sharp stake driven through the heart of the vampire, who uttered a piercing shriek at the moment, in all respects such as might escape from a living person in the last agony. Then the head was struck off, and a torrent of blood flowed from the severed neck. The body and head were next placed on a pile of wood, and reduced to ashes, which were thrown upon the river and borne away, and that territory has never since been plagued by the visits of a vampire. (91-92)

As Fred Botting further writes on the ritualized slaying of the vampire, it restores "the boundaries between life and death, body and soul, earth and heaven, reconstitut[ing] properly patriarchal order and fix[ing] cultural and symbolic meanings" (98).

The self and the other: vampirism and alterity

The vampire myth, even before it was properly incorporated into literature in the early nineteenth-century, had been associated with alterity, specifically when it came to the Church's attempts to capitalize on the legend to promote the persecution of othered individuals. As Twitchell expounds, besides those individuals who challenged the Church's mandates – the most heretic of whom was the suicide – all those who embodied any breach of the Procrustean norm by presenting "any social peculiarity" were deemed potential candidates for vampiric possession (Twitchell 9).

In that sense, Hyung-Jung Lee's article, *"One For Ever": The Threat of the Abject in Le Fanu's "Carmilla",* offers a provoking insight into the vampiric figure as the abjected other, a concept first introduced by Bulgarian-French philosopher Julia Kristeva (1941-); Lee states that "the dead body, as the ... ultimate reminder of the ego's eventual extinction", elicits "the most visceral reactions" and simultaneously fascinates and repels the human gaze. Thus, the undead vampire illustrates "intense struggles over the limits and conceptions of self", as an embodiment of both sameness and "what appears most other". The vampire, because of its characteristically composite nature, inspires "both allure and revulsion, desire and horror" (60). Hence Laura's initial reaction towards Carmilla when the two meet face-to-face, years after the surreal, dream-like first encounter at the time of Laura's childhood: "Now the truth is, I felt rather unaccountably towards the beautiful stranger. I did feel, as she said, "drawn towards her," but there was also something of repulsion. In this ambiguous feeling, however, the sense of attraction immensely prevailed. She interested and won me" (Le Fanu 25). Laura's almost immediate, subconscious recognition of Carmilla as an ambiguous, ambivalent being denounces the latter's composite nature of both horridness and beauty, repulsion and attraction, death and vitality.

The vampire Carmilla "infuses the text ... with the possibility of the unity of extremes by simultaneously incarnating radically opposite terms" (Lee 60); nor does Carmilla stand alone in that regard. Incorporated into Romantic literature from the early 1800s, the alterity

represented by the vampire came to integrate the broader scope of Victorian social anxieties, since this Gothic monster had the potential to allegorically represent many "invaders of middle-class security": foreigners, racial "others" and prostitutes with the attendant rise of venereal and blood diseases. As the middle-class increasingly secluded itself into the sacramental home, nineteenth-century Gothic literature sought to fictively illustrate the need of that same class to face the horrors created by the power structures of imperialism, colonialism and slavocracy with their oppressed masses of enslaved peoples, explored women and impoverished laborers (Bomarito, 2006 xvii).

In Le Fanu's rendition of the tale, the vampire Carmilla represents the foreign individual who threatens the way of life of a homogenous community, as previously discussed in this paper. For instance, the English-raised Laura, musing on the mysterious origins of her new companion, underlines her outlandishness: "She sometimes alluded for a moment to her own home, or mentioned an adventure or situation, or an early recollection, which indicated a people of strange manners, and described customs of which we knew nothing. I gathered from these chance hints that her native country was much more remote than I had at first fancied" (31). Likewise, the grief-stricken General Spielsdorf, on recounting Carmilla's – or rather Millarca, as she allowed herself to be known to the General – stay on his household, observes that "she was repeatedly seen from the windows of the schloss, in the first faint grey of the morning, walking through the trees, in an easterly direction, and looking like a person in a trance" (79). The vampire Millarca/Carmilla stumbles back to its grave in the east, symbolically returning from the Occident to the Orient from whence it came.

Le Fanu's *Carmilla* and, later, Stoker's *Dracula* do not stand without precedent in their employment of vampirism as an allegory for cultural and sexual otherness. Relevant for the present discussion is the earlier and often-overlooked *The Black Vampyre,* a novella first published in 1819 by C. Wiley and Company, NY, as advertised by the 23 June edition of the *New-York Evening Post* (Bray 1), only months following the publication of Polidori's *The Vampyre*, in April of the same year. *The Black Vampyre* may be understood as an "American response" (Faherty and White 2) to what, initially, was thought to be Lord Byron's latest prose work. The authorship has been a somewhat murky subject, but in its first appearance, the text was officially attributed to one Uriah Derick D'Arcy. A true testimony to the flexibility afforded the vampiric motif within nineteenth-century Gothic literature, *The Black Vampyre* presents slavery as central to its plot, by having its main character – the African or the Moorish

Prince — as a formerly enslaved Black man who seeks revenge upon his old white master, Mr. Personne, through means of vampirism mashed with traditionally Atlantic, African-rooted spiritual practices. As Faherty and White observe, colonial writers in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries employed the term *obeah* (or *obi*) as "an umbrella term for a broad range of practices, in which empowered Africans negotiated with supernatural powers" (p. 4). These rituals were thought to serve a variety of purposes, amongst which "to foment rebellion among enslaved Africans" (4). *The Black Vampyre* enmeshes this *obeah* tradition with the vampiric trope imported from Europe.

The setting of the story, the island of St Domingo – a colonial name, by 1819 still applied by US-newspapers to refer to the independent nation of Haiti (3) – emphasizes the "intertwined histories of the United States and Haiti" (Bray 4) and is significant, since the Haitian Revolution had been "the [southern] hemisphere's first successful colonial revolution against slavery", culminating in that country's independence in 1804 (3).

It is precisely the African Prince's unique position as both an enslaved African man and a living-dead which allows him to incite vampires and slaves alike in his heated speech at the end of the tale: during a secretive meeting held in an underground chamber – strongly associated with the Obeah gatherings –, the Black Vampyre passionately calls on the "irresistible genius of UNIVERSAL EMANCIPATION" (D'Arcy, 1819 36) to free Haiti from bondage and incite rebellion among its enslaved Black population. Just as Le Fanu's introduction of vampirism in *Carmilla* represents the "conflation of the feminine and the Racial Other" (Brock, 2009 131) invading the tightly-knit community of Laura's English world, so does D'Arcy's Moorish Prince represent a Continental attempt to articulate transatlantic anxieties about slavery and the African Other in the early nineteenth-century. Similarly, as Carmilla is submitted to the phallic law of staking at the end of Le Fanu's novella – rearranging proper patriarchal order –, so are The African Prince and his vampiric co-conspirators vanquished by colonial law when a host of soldiers invade the meeting and proceed to stake the Prince and "the whole infernal fraternity" (D'Arcy, 1819 38). The human slaves, "seeing how the business was likely to terminate", sneak off (37), their revolutionary spirit once more crushed.

By the end of D'arcy's tale, the Personnes – the white, slave-owning family who had been turned into *revenants* by the Black Vampyre – are transformed back into their human selves by means of a magical phial; their long-lost son – who had been kidnapped by the Black Vampyre as an infant – gets the baptism he was never able to receive as a baby, re-entering the Christian West by forsaking his non-white name of Zembo which is "... a name often

applied by Europeans to persons of mixed race" (23). Hence, in both *The Black Vampyre* and *Carmilla*, the disruptive threat of the vampire is apparently vanquished by the paternalistic convergence of patriarchal and colonial powers, though Carmilla`s enduring influence over the narrator Laura puts in check the reality of her demise, resulting in an ambiguous and haunting ending.

Final thoughts

In the extent of this paper, the employment, by J. S. Le Fanu, of the vampiric motif in his *Carmilla* (1872), from its folkloric roots to the allegorical potential of the vampire story, was explored and dissected. This has been achieved through an understanding of Le Fanu's novella within both the larger Gothic mode or tradition and the specific manifestation of the genre in its Anglo-Irish manifestation, since the author's cultural roots point to the importance of that reading; the comparison with Uriah Derrick D'arcy's own novella, *The Black Vampyre* (1819), was further meant to explore the vampire as a means through which to articulate pressing societal issues in the nineteenth-century (namely, racial and sexual *Otherness*), as well as to highlight a work of vampiric fiction which, like *Carmilla*, is relatively lesser known. The relevance of such themes and discussions to the contemporary world underline the recurring relevance of the Gothic mode and the vampire story, as can be glimpsed by the persistence of these conventions in popular culture, encompassing TV, literature and cinema, to this day.

Notes

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[1] Atherton, James S. *The Books at the Wake: A Study of Literary Allusions in James Joyce's Finnegans Wake*, 110-113.

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