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ROMANTIC LOVE IN SHERIDAN LE FANU'S CARMILLA

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DEDICATORIA

This dissertation is dedicated to professor Pablo San Martín for helping me to enjoy this work's creation; all my beloved ones, especially my grandparents (Titi and Nono) and my uncle Edmundo, who do not know what I am doing but who are supporting me anyway; my mom Jake, the best partner I could ever asked; my best friend Vincko, who has been giving me food, jokes and amazing reflection moments since the beginning of this project; and my baby sister Amaya, you know I am doing everything for you.

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Introduction

The Victorian period started and finished with the reign of Queen Victoria in England: during this period, there had been many developments and changes in the fields of technology, transport, urban growth, and politics, but also in literature. As a matter of fact, the Victorian literature, mainly written in English, was a tool used to propel the social changes people had been involved and, in this way, making the readers to feel comfortable with the new cultural patterns. Nevertheless, even if some important changes were in process, there were still some cultural patterns inherited from the Romanticism, Victorian's previous period, including the heteronormativity and Christianity. In the work *The Victorian Age*, T. Dickens explains that one the main reasons why these inherited cultural patterns were still present were the puritan's ideals of Queen Victoria who, despite her gender, believed in Christianity and discipline (Dickens 6) Been these two characteristics the definition of a puritan according the author.

Two important topics that did not change during this period are the social role of women and the homosexual relationships view. Although there was a woman in the English throne, the imposed role that society gave to them was still conservative and patriarchal, having the woman as men's complement. Therefore, having men's and women's social role in mind, it was impossible for Victorian people to think about homosexual romantic or erotic relationship, due to the fact that women and men need each

other in a romantic relationship to fulfil the cultural patterns. This is the fundamental reason why I decided to investigate about Laura and Carmilla's relationship in the book *Carmilla*, written by Joshep Sheridan Le Fanu. I think it is important to recognize that queer relationships have existed since always and that, even if there were not explicit representation of them, readers could have felt represented by implicit homosexual stories, been *Carmilla* one of them. Therefore, the question this dissertation aims to answer is if whether Carmilla and Laura's relationship is a romantic one or not? Having as hypothesis that this relationship is, indeed, a romantic one, which is hidden due to the patriarchal and homophobic cultural patterns of the Victorian period.

The topic the current dissertation is presenting has been investigated during decades for literature's experts as David J. Skal, Marília Moscoso, Tony Canaban, among others. There is a divided thinking about the real nature of Carmilla and Laura's relationship. Some experts have argued that it is Carmilla's predator's nature what creates the romantic behaviour of the vampire towards the girl, while other experts argued that there is, indeed, a romantic relationship between the human girl and the vampire, but it had been hidden given its lesbian nature. My interpretation as stake is that it is not possible to confirm or denied Carmilla's predator's intentions given the lack of information the reader has about her thoughts. Nevertheless, due to the physical reactions, her behaviour and her constant romantic words, Carmilla is, in my opinion, in love with Laura at the same time she is trying to feed her predator's hunger with Laura.

As methodology, this dissertation will interpret different passages of *Carmilla*, along with secondary and tertiary sources in order to support the interpretation. The first chapter will explain what Romantic Love is and its implication in Carmilla and Laura's relationship. The second Chapter will explain Sexual Desire and its link with Romantic Love given the awareness of sexual desire Laura, the main character, suffers during the story. While the third and last chapter will explain how the Victorian period background and cultural patterns influence in a lesbian relationship story given the social role women and homosexuals had in that period.

In order to understand the interpretation, this dissertation will take into consideration the psychological view, given the repercussions Victorian cultural patterns involves in Laura's mind; the anthropological view, due to the fact Romantic Love seems to be a human behaviour and given Laura's nature as a human; the Christian view given the Victorian's Christians believes, which are shown in the story as well; and the historical view in order to understand the Victorian culture and its implication in a lesbian relationship.

Chapter 1: What is Romantic Love and Its Connection with Laura and Carmilla's Relationship.

Sacrifice as a Characteristic of Romantic Love:

Throughout decades the term Romantic Love has been investigated due to its complex definition (Lindholm 5-6). It has been impossible for psychologists and anthropologists to recognize the origins of love and establish whether it is a real or not. According to Darlene Lancer, a therapist and investigator specialized in relationship and co-dependency, Romantic love is when "Our brains[...]feel the bliss and euphoria of romance, to enjoy pleasure."(1) Consequently, it is totally possible the lover would cede anything, including sacrificing certain things, to maintain the beloved one side by side in order to continue feeling euphoria and pleasure.

We can regard euphoria as a state of "extreme happiness, sometimes more than is reasonable in a particular situation" (Cambridge Dictionary). This feeling present in the lovers' experience can lay aside the reasoning capacity of humans in mysterious and incomprehensible situations, just for the desire of maintaining euphoria in the body. Having the last explanation in mind, Laura's sacrifice by ceding her own personality and curiosity for Carmilla can be seen as a demonstration of her love for the vampire, or at

least, it can be seen this way by the vampire. Laura is sacrificing certain things in order to feel the euphoria that Carmilla's physical contact and attention give her.

Furthermore, Carmilla's own definition of love includes sacrifice as a proof of the lovers' feelings: "Yes, very — a cruel love — strange love, that would have taken my life. *Love will have its sacrifices. No sacrifice without blood.* Let us go to sleep now; I feel so lazy. How can I get up just now and lock my door?" (Le Fanu 26) Psychologists have also investigated about the sacrifice people in love are willing to do. In their article "Romantic Love as Renunciation and Sacrifice: What Do Young People Think?", Bosh, Herrezuelo and Ferrer investigate about romantic love and its relationship with sacrifice in young people. They explained about the myths culture has created around love, one of them being the sacrifice for the beloved person. According their investigation, romantic love would be characterized by "suffering due to the absence of the beloved; and the need of sacrificing for the other, or [the need of] give love test to the beloved one." (185)

Self-denial and Christianity as part of Romantic Love:

The Christian view of love includes every kind of love, covering romantic love as well. According the book of John in the Gospels, Jesus Christ gave his own life in order to save humans, due to the love he felt for them: "Just as Christ loved us and gave himself

for us as an offering and sacrifice.” (King James Version, Ephesians 5.2) Some theologians as Shirley Robin in *Romantic Love and Christianity*, have tried to answer why a sacrifice was necessary to save humans from “endless pain” presented in both the Old and New Testament. According to Robin:

The Christian answer was that God was not irrational but that Jesus had come to remind men that love bound them to God. And being a Christian meant accepting the paradox of the God who died on the Cross as the concrete expression of God's love for men. (136)

Therefore, physical suffering was a concrete way to express the love God and Jesus Christ had for humans. In contradiction to other expressions of love, physical suffering was one way in which everyone could realize (by seeing it) that God was willing to sacrifice His own son for the humans He loves.

Regarding the Christian view of love, anthropologists have argued that it may be possible romantic love is different in each culture. This can be appreciated in Charles Lindholm's investigation “Romantic Love and Anthropology”. According Lindholm investigation, Western understanding of love is generally created by music, fiction and art; elements that help the lover and the beloved to find a salvation (7). Nonetheless, it is not possible to have a clear idea about what “salvation” means, being a different concept for every person according to their own life's experience. Regarding *Carmilla*'s context, religion is implicitly present in the text, due to the appearance of the priest at Laura's home until the last scenes in the church, it is possible to believe that this salvation could

be a religious one. Thus, the idea of love as the redemption the vampire needs in order to save her soul from evilness.

It is important to remember that, even if Laura is born in Styria and has never been in England, she feels as an English girl given her father's heritage. English people of this period were characterized by their Christian beliefs. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand Laura's Christian beliefs about self-denial as a proof of love; just as Jesus Christ denied his life for love. Although the idea of self-denial as part of love is, apparently, Carmilla's beliefs, there are several things that let the reader know Laura has similar beliefs. Moreover, Laura is constantly exposed to Christian's beliefs by her father: "We are on God's hands" (Le Fanu, 21), "God bless me!" (Le Fanu, 34), "I hope, by God's blessing, to accomplish a pious sacrilege here" (Le Fanu, 38).

In the story, it seems Laura is the only lover who has made sacrifices given her Christian beliefs; beyond her life, she is giving up her own personality for Carmilla's comfort. Even though Laura is not aware of Carmilla's intentions, she knows about the mysterious and enigmatic behaviour of the vampire girl, pretending not to care in order to maintain Carmilla's presence and attention with her:

She would not tell me the name of her family, nor their armorial bearings, nor the name of their estate, nor even that of the country they lived in.[...] But I must add this, that her evasion was conducted with so pretty a melancholy and deprecation, with so many, and even passionate declarations of her liking for me, and trust in

my honor, and with so many promises that *I should at last know all, that I could not find it in my heart long to be offended with her.* (Le Fanu 17. Emphasis added)

This is certainly a sacrifice of her own personality given Laura's curiosity, which is one of her main characteristics along the narration. Therefore, this can be interpreted as a form of self-denial. Laura does not want to offend Carmilla and she puts away her own doubts and questions just to maintain her beloved friend's comfort.

It is important to recognize that Laura's understanding is, sometimes, rewarded with displays of affection, not common in Carmilla's daily behaviour. These leaves Laura in a trance state, in which she feels unconformable and euphoric at the same time, making the reader to realize about Laura's needs for Carmilla's physical contact, but also about the self-repression she is doing given her understanding of the love and the romantic actions:

From these *foolish* embraces, which were not of very frequent occurrence, I must allow, *I used to wish to extricate myself*; but my energies seemed to fail me. Her murmured words sounded like a lullaby in my ear, and soothed my resistance into a trance, from which I only seemed to recover myself when she withdrew her arms. (Le Fanu 17, emphasis added)

The trance state is what Laura feels after Carmilla's physical contact, affirming the idea of their relationship as a romantic love relationship according the definitions of Shirley Robin, Bosh, Herrezuelo and Ferrer, who explain that romantic love implies a state of trance and euphoria. On this subject, it is totally possible that romantic love does exists between the girl and the vampire. Nevertheless, the word "foolish" used in this quote reflect a negative connotation, as well as "I wish to extricate myself" which suggests she

feels uneasy because of the unconsented physical approach she can not bring herself to resist. The negative connotation linked to the euphoria she feels with Carmilla's displays of affection are a clear representation of the paradox that is in Laura's mind. She is in love with Carmilla and, therefore, the physical contact makes her to be lost in the romantic moment, nevertheless, she is also feeling repulsiveness given she understands romantic love as a heterosexual phenomenon.

Nevertheless, how can this sacrifice and self-denied can be related to Carmilla as a demonstration of her Love for Laura? When the predator's nature of Carmilla is revealed, she is seen as a demonic being. Nonetheless, this is not a fact presented since the beginning of the story, but it has a progression over the narration. The first signals of her corrupted soul are the fact that she never prays and her hysteria at the moment she heard prayers and hymns (Nethercot 34). Le Fanu introduces the demonic nature of Carmilla as something of little importance for Laura at the beginning, developing her monstrous nature more strongly by the end. Nevertheless, Carmilla does have "periods of almost hysterical confession [with Laura]" (Nethercot 36) when she technically confesses to Laura that she will die for her:

I live in your warm life, and you shall die — die, sweetly die — into mine. I cannot help it; as I draw near to you, you, in your turn, will draw near to others, and learn the rapture of that cruelty, *which yet is love*; so, for a while, seek to know no more of me and mine, but trust me with all your loving spirit. (Le Fanu 17, emphasis added)

Given the nature of these confessions, which can be seen even as a kind of religious confession as established by the Catholic Church, they are the only actual attempt of

Carmilla to find the salvation or the only self-denial she does. Moreover, the vampire expresses how these sacrifice “yet is love”, showing her beliefs about sacrifice as part of love again.

In this sense, Laura’s love could be the representation of Carmilla’s salvation from her own killer instincts, which are related to her nature as a predator. Nevertheless, Carmilla’s intentions of fulfilling her need for nourishment are not altered by Laura’s feelings, creating a discordance concerning how love should work and how it actually works in Carmilla’s mind. She claims to love Laura and expresses without modesty: “I have been in love with no one, and never shall,” she whispered, “unless it should be with you.” (Le Fanu 23-24) But, apparently, Carmilla’s love for Laura is not strong enough to change her behaviour as a bloodsucker and, according to this understanding of the feeling, the protagonists’ relationship would not be a real romantic love given that, by killing Laura in order to feed from her, Carmilla’s predator’s nature would be stronger than her need of Laura’s company. Nevertheless, it is possible that this behaviour could be precisely Carmilla’s understanding of romantic love given her beliefs about sacrifice as part of love: in her view, it could be that Laura’s life sacrifice is precisely what makes their relationship a romantic one.

While focusing just on this argument, the relationship presented in Le Fanu’s work would be nothing, but an illusion of romantic love created by the monster (the vampire)

in order to accomplish her natural instincts of feeding, as it is explained in the page 54 of *Carmilla*, where Baron Vordenburg, a man who claims to be an expert on vampires explains the humans characters the vampire's characteristics. In "Coleridge's *Christabel*" and Le Fanus's *Carmilla*, Nethercot expresses that there is a duality in Carmilla's character, creating a justification for the vampire's behaviour with her lover:

In fact, when Carmilla is viewed in the daytime she is invariably invested with an aura of half-grudging but sympathetic attraction. It is only during her nocturnal excursions and depredations, in which she takes the form of a monstrous black cat or the "black palpating mass" of some formless, unified creature, or during the final exposure scene [...] that her pure repulsiveness is stressed. (36)

Therefore, it could be interpreted that, during her moments with Laura, Carmilla is struggling with her predator nature to fulfil a lover's behaviour. In this sense, Carmilla's character can be divided into two: the night-time vampire who just wants to satiate her hunger with an innocent girl, and the day-time girl who shows her love for the same innocent girl every time. If the reader put away the night-time Carmilla, the day-time girl's actions and words are, completely and truly, the ones of a lover. Nevertheless, it is impossible to recognize a character by one part of it, but by its whole. Besides, it is impossible to know if Carmilla is actually struggling against her predator's nature during the daytime due to the fact that the reader is never in Carmilla's mind. Therefore, we cannot see her point of view in order to affirm this interpretation.

Therefore, is this paradox an impediment for Carmilla to love Laura? Nethercot also answers this question, giving the argument that vampires are not responsible for their

predator behaviour (36) They have did not choose to be vampires. Not even their feelings are their responsibility, nevertheless they can choose between demonstrating them or not. Carmilla has chosen to demonstrate her feelings for Laura, without caring if she is her prey, putting effort on into her, apparently, romantic moments in order to make up for what she cannot control. Nonetheless, this could also be interpreted as a predator camouflaging strategy. Therefore, Carmilla and Laura's relationship would not provide salvation for the vampire. In this sense, given the absence of information that the reader has about Carmilla's thoughts, all the interpretations could be equally plausible.

Romantic Love as Disease:

Anthropologists have also explained that love could be understood as a state of insanity, where lovers are "sick" for each other both physically and mentally:

Love too has often been spoken of in the metaphorical language of insanity. People in love are 'love-sick,' lovers are 'crazy for each other,' and are expected to be out of touch with ordinary reality, *prone to delusions and to heightened states of exaltation and anxiety*. (Lindholm 8, emphasis added)

If love is, metaphorically, an illness, anxiety could be a symptom recurring in the lovers given it is present in their mind. In order to understand the concept of love as a disease, it is important to know that anxiety is "an uncomfortable feeling of nervousness or worry about something that is happening or might happen in the future" (Cambridge Dictionary) Therefore, this view of romantic love is incongruous with Lancer's description, that

explains love as a feeling that displays euphoria and pleasure. Nevertheless, given the complexity of feelings and how they involve complex actions as well, it is possible to recognize that love, as an illness, is also contradictory. Laura's words affirm how love is not supposed to be the pure euphoric moment, but euphoria mixed with anxiety:

In these mysterious moods I did not like her. I experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague *sense of fear and disgust*. I had no distinct thoughts about her while such scenes lasted, but I was *conscious of a love growing into adoration*, and also abhorrence. This I know is paradox, but I can make no other attempt to explain the feeling. (Le Fanu 17, emphasis added)

It can be interpreted that during these periods of physical contact, Laura is anxious of what she feels because of her own lesbian desire. She is aware about the paradox she is experiencing: euphoria as something she wants to feel again given the pleasurable moment of excitement and anxiety as what makes her to realize this kind of encounters with a person of her same gender are not supposed to exist.

In "Vampirism and Lesbianism in *Carmilla* by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu", Moscoso claims that "romanticism is not only a state of mind in which feelings speak louder than reason itself", but also an "illness" that make the feelings speak louder than reason (39). This could be an explanation to Laura's paradoxical feelings. She is feeling disgusted by Carmilla's actions and words because they awake her lesbian desires, which are immoral for Laura according to her culture. In the sentence "I was conscious of a love growing into adoration", explains that Laura feels a stronger love for Carmilla because of her romantic behaviour, as if those feelings were stronger than reason, which tells her that

Carmilla's behaviour and her own feelings are wrong. Consequently, the feelings speaking stronger than the reason could be interpreted as a symptom of love sickness.

Notably, Laura as a person "sick" of love is easier to comprehend than Carmilla as a lover, given that her romantic actions are, sometimes, quite random. Nevertheless, Carmilla's words of affection are displayed throughout the story, without the need of hiding her secrets to Laura's curiosity. This behaviour can be explained in the last quotes, where it is revealed how vampirism and the romantic love are related:

The vampire is prone to be fascinated with an engrossing vehemence, resembling the passion of love, by particular persons [...] It will never desist until it has satiated its passion, and drained the very life of its coveted victim. But it will, in these cases, husband and protract its murderous enjoyment with the refinement of an epicure, and heighten it by the gradual approaches of an artful courtship. In these cases, it seems to yearn for something like sympathy and consent. (Le Fanu 54)

Therefore, according to the explanation that was given to Laura (which she accepts in order to deny her own lesbian experience), the vampire's feelings would be nothing else, but an illusion of love given its killing instincts as a predator. Consequently, the entire story would not be a love story, but just a scary one. Nevertheless, the explanation given to Laura about Carmilla's behaviour towards her is not necessary the correct one. It is an explanation given by certain men who are against vampires and their predator's nature and the lesbian behaviour. There is not an actual knowledge from the vampire's experts given that they have not obtained this knowledge from the verifiable sources as a

vampire's confession. Thus, their reasons are nothing but interpretation from what they know, but they have not been proved by any reliable source.

Therefore, it is not possible to know if Carmilla is, or not, in love with. In *The Lady Who Munched*, Davin J. Skal argues that the answer for Carmilla's romantic behaviour towards Laura on the last pages of *Carmilla* is unreal. He asserts that "Carmilla and her mother are basically sociopathic grifters — charming serial killers from beyond the grave — who like to play sadistically with their targeted food before ingesting it" (62). Thus, the illusion of love that the vampire feels would not be real. What would be real for Skal is the sadistic game played by Carmilla before drinking Laura's blood in order to just have fun. In this sense, the explanation given to Laura would be totally correct. Nonetheless, neither the vampire's experts' interpretation, nor David Skal's can be confirmed by the main source due to the fact the readers are never aware of Carmilla's intention, since they cannot read her thoughts, but her actions and words. In other words, Carmilla's actual feelings can be interpreted differently depending on the reader's point of view. In my opinion, it is not possible to believe in the reasons given to Laura because they are not verifiable.

Overall, taking in consideration romantic love as a state in which the lover feels euphoria given certain actions, as sacrifice and physical contact, Carmilla and Laura's

relationship would be, indeed, a romantic relationship. Laura's culture, and her context, are also important to understand why their love story is hidden behind a friendship, resembling her repression of the own lesbian desire. Ultimately, considering the "symptoms" of love as an illness, Laura's feelings for Carmilla are totally "romantic". In the case of Carmilla's feelings towards Laura, it is not possible to have a certain perspective given the lack of evidence. Nonetheless, the reasons of the vampire's romantic behaviour as part of her predator nature are not verifiable either, leaving the question of whether Carmilla loved Laura in a romantic way, or not, to the readers' interpretation. Therefore, as a reflection, it could be possible that the definitions of romantic love are not enough to verify whether Carmilla and Laura's relationship is a romantic one, creating the need of search among other topics related to their relationship as well.

Chapter 2: Sexual Desire as part of the Romantic Love

Definition of Romantic Love and Sexual Desire.

Although sexual desire and romantic love are not the same concept, some experts have argued that they are closely linked to each other. It is important to recognize the link between these two concepts in order to know whether Carmilla and Laura's relationship is, indeed, a romantic one, given the prominence of sexual desire this relationship woke up in Laura. In the current chapter, it will be explained the connection between Romantic Love and Sexual desire to show how the relationship presented in Le Fanu's work is, on a personal understanding, a romantic one.

In order to understand the relationship between Romantic Love and Sexual Desire, it is necessary to define what exactly Sexual Desire is. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, desire (particularly, sexual desire) is "a strong sexual attraction to someone" (Cambridge Dictionary). Nevertheless, it is not possible to understand this definition if we do not define sex, which, according to the same source is the "physical activity between people involving the sexual organs" (Cambridge Dictionary). Thus, sexual desire would involve just the sexual organs. According to this definition, sexual desire would not

include the appreciation of beauty, desire of touch or kiss other parts of the body or the physical responses to romantic words as it can be seen in the next quote of *Carmilla*:

Shy and strange was the look with which she quickly hid her face in my neck and hair, with tumultuous sighs, that seemed almost to sob, and pressed in mine a hand that trembled. Her soft cheek was glowing against mine. "Darling, darling," she murmured, "I live in you; and you would die for me, I love you so." (Le Fanu 24)

Carmilla is not touching any of Laura's sexual organs, but her neck instead, a touch followed by romantic words, including the confession of love: here, Carmilla says to Laura that she loves her, but she did not explain what kind of love she is feeling.

In her work *Emerging Perspectives on Distinctions between Romantic Love and Sexual Desires*, Lisa Diamond argued that both, Sexual Desire and Romantic have need intimacy with the desired person (116). Even if intimacy could refer to the sex itself, it is important to recognize that there are more erogenous ones of the body apart from the sexual organs, which can display sexual desire's sensations. Therefore, the physical contact between Carmilla and Laura during their moments alone does, indeed, represent a repressed sexual desire:

Sometimes after an hour of apathy, my strange and beautiful companion would take my hand and hold it with a fond pressure, renewed again and again; blushing softly, gazing in my face with languid and burning eyes, and breathing so fast that her dress rose and fell with the tumultuous respiration. (Le Fanu 17)

The intimate moment is not just related to the action of taking hand, but to Carmilla's physical answers Laura is able to see while this moment occurs. According to the source *Women sexual desire: a feminist critique* by Jill Wood, Patricia Barthalow and Phyllis

Kerfnoff, that explain how sexual desire works, the “languid burning eyes” and the fast breathing are consequences of a moment of excitement, in which Carmilla’s body is expressing, by her physical reactions, the desire of having a sexual encounter with Laura. Colette Colligan has shown, in her review of *The Secret Vice: Masturbation in Victorian Fiction and Medical Culture*, by Diane Mason that the author portrayed hands as sexual parts of the body given their implications at the moment of masturbation (in both men and women) Thus, Laura’s hands could be seen as sexually attractive for Carmilla. This is not a fact, but an interpretation given that both, sexual encounters and masturbation were seen as a “dirty little secret” (321) within the Victorian culture. Therefore, the only way in which desire could be expressed was by suggesting it to literary imagination from the reader (321), This interpretation can be seen not only in this quote but along the entire story; Carmilla is constantly taking Laura’s hands and pressing them, as it can be seen in the next quotes: “Sometimes after an hour of apathy, my strange and beautiful companion would take my hand and hold it with a fond pressure, renewed again and again”(Le Fanu 17). “She used to sigh at my vehemence, then turn away and drop my hand.” (Le Fanu 17). “With tumultuous sighs, that seemed almost to sob, and pressed in mine a hand that trembled” (Le Fanu 24).

It is important to have the feminist critique of this concept given that both characters involved in the investigation are women, Jill Wood, Patricia Barthalow and Phyllis Kerfnoff have given another definition of sexual desire in their work *Women’s*

Sexual Desire: A Feminist Critique. According to them, Sexual desire is an experience of specific sensations “which move the individual to seek out, or become receptive to, sexual experience” (237). Nevertheless, taking into consideration this view of sexual desire, there is a discordance in Laura’s behaviour given she is not looking to have a sexual experience with Carmilla. On the contrary, she is disgusted by her sexual desire given her cultural beliefs about Love and Desire as experiences which have to be involved in a heterosexual relationship. In this sense, Laura is repressing her feelings in order to conform to cultural norms.

Repression of Sexual Desire.

William Vender studied Laura’s repressed feelings in his work *The Arts of Repression*. In this work, he argued that Le Fanu was highly successful in the Victorian period due to his portrayal of the nature of the culture through his writings (198). He also points out a difference between *Carmilla* and other erotic writings: in this book, he claims, there are no explicit sexual practices. On the contrary, he is able to show the sexual desire that both Carmilla and Laura, are experiencing through emotions, therefore, in an indirectly way:

It was like the ardor of a lover; it embarrassed me; *it was hateful and yet overpowering*; and with gloating eyes she drew me to her, and her hot lips travelled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs (Le Fanu 17. Emphasis added)

Laura expresses that Carmilla's behaviour towards her felt as "the ardor of a love". The temperature of Carmilla's lips, can also be seen as a sign of her desire (Barthelow, et al 237). Laura experiences the sexual desire her friend is expressing to her, nonetheless, she does not want to be aware of it. Consequently, she also hates the sensations Carmilla makes her feel, this given the established culture in which Laura has been raised. She does not want to feel anything during the romantic situations with the vampire because it is not something normal in her culture.

In Vampirism and Lesbianism in Carmilla by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, Moscoso expressed that "The woman in the romantic period represented models, and often they internalized these representations because they believed they were true" (40). Women of the period are supposed to be good daughters and mothers, a perfect complement for the man who is the head of the family. Therefore, Laura believes that these sensations must be felt with a male partner and not with a woman because it is what she has been taught since her childhood:

What if a boyish lover had found his way into the house, and sought to prosecute his suit in masquerade, with the assistance of a clever old adventuress. I could boast of no little attentions such as masculine gallantry delights to offer. (Le Fanu 18, emphasis added)

According to the story's context, Laura is supposed to feel these sensations with a boy. Therefore, as she is feeling them for Carmilla, who is a girl, Laura tries to find a reason for it, been the best solution to believe that the vampire is a boyish love who has disguised himself as a lady in order to inspire Laura's love for him. Nevertheless, she is not able to

find any other clue to establish her theory as a fact given that Carmilla seems to have “no little attentions such as masculine gallantry” (Le Fanu 18). This masculine gallantry is also a cultural conception that Laura has been taught since she was a child.

Laura must be in love with a male partner because she, as a woman, must be a male’s complement (Moscoso 40). When she falls in love with Carmilla, she is not fulfilling the requirement that every good woman must fulfil. The author explains that this conceptions about women in the Romantic period also applies to the Victorians given the closeness between both periods.

The reader has an arduous work at interpreting the sexual and romantic encounters of Carmilla and Laura given the suggestive nature of Le Fanu’s writings. Furthermore, Laura’s repression is not just a representation of the Victorian heteronormative culture, but a device where the reader can notice the strength of her sexual desire in these situations. Therefore, the repression works as an anonymous way in which the reader can comprehend Laura and Carmilla’s relationship as a romantic one because there is no reason why Laura should repress her sensations apart from the fact these encounters are, indeed, marked by a sexual desire she is not supposed to feel.

In *Lesbian Dream*, Amy J. Ransom explains how the lesbian Victorian literature expose homosexuality as something that has always existed but has been hidden given the conservative and heteronormative culture. She also portrays how these romantic relationships have been hidden as “romantic Friendships”, which typically appear in gothic literature (540). Therefore, it could be interpreted that the lesbian dream is the romantic interpretation lesbian readers can make by reading *Carmilla* and other works with the same characteristics. The homosexuality must be hidden, but by reading and interpreting this kind of romantic friendships as romantic stories, queer readers could relate to them, generating a sense of belonging (541). According this point of view, Laura would be the representation of the lesbian girls of the period, who were repressed by their culture. Therefore, Laura and *Carmilla*’s repressed relationship could have been interpreted by contemporary readers as having a sexual (and therefore lesbian) dimension.

Passionate Love

The current chapter assumes that *Carmilla* and Laura’s relationship is moved by sexual attraction, but it has not given an explicit link between Sexual Desire and Romantic Love. Lisa Diamond has given a name to the relationship that implies Romantic Love and Sexual Desire together:

Passionate love is a state of heightened interest in and preoccupation with a specific individual, characterized by the intense desires for proximity and physical

contact, resistance to separation, and feelings of excitement and euphoria when receiving the partner's attention (117)

The relationship presented in Le Fanu's work is characterized by the awareness of sexual desire; thus, if Laura and Carmilla's relationship is, indeed, a romantic story as well, their love can be called passionate love; a mixture between both romantic love and sexual desire. In this sense, Carmilla's need for Laura's company is part of what a passionate lover wants; the need of proximity and physical contact in order to feel euphoria and forget about the troubles or difficulties of the moment. According the arguments that have been given in chapter 1, the question of whether Carmilla and Laura's relationship is, or not, a romantic relationship must be answered according the reader's interpretation. Nevertheless, taking in consideration the sacrifice for love and love as a sickness, in my own view, the girl's relationship is, in fact, a romantic one. The sexual desire they felt by both (or at least, Carmilla's sexual desire for Laura) is not an impediment for them to have a romantic love, but a way in which they can demonstrate their increasing love. Resembling this point of view, Laura herself explains that during Carmilla's physical contact (presumably moved by the sexual desire) makes her "love growing into adoration, and also abhorrence" (Le Fanu 17). The abhorrence is provoked by her repression of sexual desire, but Laura's growing love is provoked by the desire itself: something she is not able to control, given it is a response of the body at euphoria feeling, a common symptom of Romantic Love as well.

Sexual predator

It is important to remember that, even if we have endeavoured to prove Carmilla's romantic feelings for Laura, she is still a vampire who represents the primitiveness and savagery of an animal looking for food. It is not only possible to analyse Carmilla by the human's patterns of behaviour during a romantic interaction, but by her nature as a predator with the ability to reason and think over similar to a human being.

In *Love and Anthropology*, Lindholm also expressed that “the poetic lover [can be unmasked] as a sexual predator” (Lindholm 9). This could reveal the relation between Carmilla's words and actions. During her intimate interactions with Laura, Carmilla always speaks poetically to her, awaking her hidden sexual desire as well: “You are mine, you shall be mine, you and I are one for ever.” Then she had thrown herself back in her chair, with her small hands over her eyes, leaving me trembling.” (Le Fanu 17), creating the connection between her romantic behaviour and her predator's nature. Thus, it is possible to interpret that Carmilla is not only saying romantic words to Laura because she is in love with her, but also as part of premeditated move to obtain what she really wants from Laura: her blood and life sacrifice.

This interpretation creates the link with the idea of sacrifice as part of the romantic lover's actions with her beloved being: "But to die as lovers may — to die together, so that they may live together" (Le Fanu 22). Where Carmilla explains to Laura that death could be seen as something beautiful if it is made by two lovers in order to live and die together and, therefore, never be apart from each other.

Therefore, it would be difficult to ascertain whether Carmilla is, indeed, looking for a romantic relationship with Laura by awaking her sexual desire, or just playing with her emotions and sexual sensations before drinking her blood, just as David J. Skal explains in his work *The Lady who Munched*. Judith E. Johnson has tried to give an answer to this question by explaining the connection between the seeking out of the sexual experience and the vampire's nature of drinking blood. In *Women and Vampires: Nightmare or Utopia?*, she argues that: "The exchange of blood is an obvious metaphor for a particular kind of economy of the erotic, in which both partners must be satisfied, and in which neither may be bought or sold" (74). Thus, as a matter of fact, the action of drinking blood could be seen as a sexual action driven by Carmilla in order to satiate her sexual hunger and Laura's sexual hunger. Therefore, the exchange of blood, and the action of drinking blood as well, could be interpreted as a metaphor for the oral sex, something very common during a lesbian sexual encounter according to Lisa Diamond, Jill Wood, Patricia Barthelow and Phyllis Kerfnoff.

Therefore, it is not a coincidence that after the nights in which Carmilla feed from Laura's blood, the girl uses to wake up feeling tired, but, at the same time, feeling a change that was agreeable, just as a person who has had a sexual encounter felt the next day according to Lisa Diamond. Besides, Laura herself explains one of these encounters as something quite sexual, given the presence of kisses and the way in which she breathes given the sensation those kisses make her feel:

Sometimes it was as if warm lips kissed me, and longer and longer and more lovingly as they reached my throat, but there the caress fixed itself. My heart beat faster, my breathing rose and fell rapidly and full drawn; a sobbing, that rose into a sense of strangulation, supervened, and turned into a dreadful convulsion, in which my senses left me and I became unconscious. (Le Fanu 30)

It could be interpreted that Carmilla's intentions are feeding her vampire's needs with Laura's blood, nevertheless, she takes advantage of these moments turning them into an intimate moment, where she expresses her sexual desire for Laura through physical actions as kisses and hard breathing: common reactions of a woman's sexual desire according Jill Wood, Patricia Barthalow and Phyllis Kerfnoff.

Thus, Carmilla's sexual predator's nature is a metaphor for her sexual desire. This sexual desire can be moved by love, creating Passionate Love between her and Laura, or not, remaining sexual desire only. In this sense, the interpretation is, again, responsibility of the reader, who can assume Le Fanu's work does shown a Passionate Love or not. On my own view, the sexual predator disguised as poetic lover is not a coincidence, but a way in which it is easy for Carmilla to express the duality of her feelings. I believe that she is

in love with Laura, and, at the same time, that she is sexually attracted to her, something that is totally normal for a passionate relationship.

According to my own investigation and analysis, sexual desire between two people who are in love is not mandatory. Nevertheless, it could help the reader understand, in an easy way, the romantic feelings lovers have. Thus, it is a fact that Laura feels attracted by Carmilla, but she hides those sensations given the cultural pattern she lives in. Consequently, Laura and Carmilla's relationship could be not just romantic, but a passionate relationship, given the mixture between sexual desire and romantic love presented in the story. This can also be interpreted in relation to Carmilla's sexual predator's nature. It is quite difficult to know whether Carmilla feels sexual desire for Laura, given that the reader, like a victim, cannot know what she feels or thinks. Nonetheless, based on her behaviour and actions, it is possible to interpret that she is, indeed, sexually attracted to Laura. By generating an instance of sexual interaction, which were not common in Laura's heteronormative sexual environment, Carmilla is demonstrates her sexual desire for the human girl, unless this is, as it has been suggested, a predator's strategy.

Chapter 3: The Victorian Period and Its Implication in Carmilla and Laura's Relationship.

The Social Role of Women in the Victorian Period:

Carmilla starts with the clear definition of a gothic literary work. Laura, the main character, is a young and lonely girl living in a castle only with her father and some employees. The loneliness in her home is explicitly stressed along the entire story and, having in mind how loneliness can be disturbing for some readers, this characteristic shown in Laura's life demonstrates the uncanny of the story. On the very first page she expresses several times how lonely she feels: "But here, in this lonely and primitive place, where everything is so marvellously cheap"; "Nothing can be more picturesque or solitary."; "I have said that this is a very lonely place" (Le Fanu 3). All these quotes were part of different paragraphs within different topics, demonstrating how present and important is her own loneliness in Laura's mind.

One important reason for this loneliness is the absence of Laura's mother, who died when the girl was very young. As Arthur H. Nethercot explains in "Coleridge's *Christabel*" and Lefanu's *Carmilla*", the fact that the heroine's mother is dead is not a coincidence, but an essential part of her background, since Laura's behaviour can be

explained without the need of an explicit explanation: without a mother, she feels the need of other's company and attention. Although Laura has been raised by her father and the governesses; therefore, she was not completely alone, she explains that, within her family, she does not "include servants, or those dependents who occupy rooms in the buildings attached to the schloss[...]I and my father constituted the family at the schloss" (Le Fanu 4). Probably given the different social class these employees had. Given that her father cannot give her all his attention, Laura feels alone by no having anyone from her social class to talk or receive attention. Thus, Carmilla's arrival is important for the development of the story for two reasons. First, it reminds the reader how lonely Laura is given the lack of a mother or other women of her social class. Second, it enables the vampire to use the role imposed by a patriarchal society on women in her favour. According "Gender Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Literature" by Christopher Parker and "Victorian Masculinities" by Graemes Smart and Amelia Yeates, as women should be a symbol of fragility to be protected, Carmilla's first feature shown are her health problems. The woman who pretends to be the vampire's mother explains to Laura's father that her child is fragile and weak, making the man believe there is no danger for him and his family in accepting Carmilla in his castle.

Along the story, Carmilla continues using her female role to distract her host about her weird and mysterious behaviour. A clear example is when Carmilla disappears from her bedroom and appears again without a rational explanation. In this situation, Laura's

father, who has to find a rational explanation in his role as a man (Smart and Yeates, 3), gives the vampire a perfect alibi so as not to raise suspicions:

“Now, my question is this. Have you ever been suspected of walking in your sleep?” “Never, since I was very young indeed.” “But you did walk in your sleep when you were young?” “Yes; I know I did. I have been told so often by my old nurse.” My father smiled and nodded. “Well, what has happened is this. You got up in your sleep, unlocked the door, not leaving the key, as usual, in the lock, but taking it out and locking it on the outside (Le Fanu 32-33)

Carmilla, as a smart predator, takes advantage of her female role and follows suit, using female fragility as an excuse for her “oblivion”, not having to give explanations. Furthermore, it is also important to remember that Carmilla seems to have a kind of rejection towards Laura’s father, something paradoxical given that Laura’s father rational ideals are helping her to avoid explanations:

She looked languidly in my eyes, and passed her arm round my waist lovingly, and led me out of the room. My father was busy over some papers near the window. “Why does your papa like to frighten us?” said the pretty girl with a sigh and a little shudder. “He doesn’t, dear Carmilla, it is the very furthest thing from his mind.” (Le Fanu 21)

Carmilla expresses how uncomfortable Laura’s father makes her feel. Nevertheless, she is not able to tell him this, as she can do with Laura, probably because Carmilla is not interesting in manipulate Laura’s father, but Laura. This rejection can be also an illustration of how the vampire breaks the gender roles when she is with Laura, by taken the male role in their intimate romantic moments, but maintains them with other people, apparently males. Carmilla, as a female vampire, expresses her hunger through behaviours which are common in people with sexual desire: such as the physical responses to Laura’s physical contact or the romantic words she expresses. These features of Carmilla’s

personality go against what Victorian women should feel and demonstrate. In *Ideology and Sexuality among Victorian Women*, Nancy S. Landale and Avery M. Guest argue that, even if some Victorian women felt sexual desire towards their husbands, this desire was closely related to their husbands' sexual desire, given they were the ones who actively looked for the sexual encounter, and the wish of both (man and woman) of having offspring. Consequently, given the homoerotic character of their relationship and the consequent impossibility of having offspring, Carmilla takes the place of a male in the relationship due to the sexual desire which should not be present in a woman, transcending the limits of gender roles, culturally established in Laura's mind.

Landale and Guest also assert that "Sexual repression, modesty, and innocence were associated with middle- and upper-class women. These traits were the sexual equivalents of social gentility and refinement." (Hale 42). Thus, Victorian women had to show themselves as innocent and modest concerning sex, which could serve to explain Laura's sexual repression. Therefore, the human girl is not just repressing her homosexual desire, but also sexual desire itself, given that is what is expected from her as a woman. Consequently, Laura pretends to fulfil the role of women in the Victorian Period and her relationship, apparently romantic, with Carmilla is a problem for her to achieve that mission.

Lesbianism in the Victorian Period:

Besides the role of women, heteronormativity was also culturally enforced in the Victorian Period. As explained in the current chapter, women were meant to be the perfect complement for men. Therefore, women had to look for someone to be able to fulfil their role, while men were forced to look for that complement (Moscoso 40). Thus, it was totally impossible for Victorian people to conceive a romantic relationship between two persons of the same gender. Moreover, this kind of behaviour was harshly punished by law. In *A Theory of Scandal: Victorians, Homosexuality, and the Fall of Oscar Wilde*, Ari Adut explains how Oscar Wilde was damaged by his homosexuality, since “The Victorians held homosexuality in horror” and, therefore, “Wilde was prosecuted and condemned to the fullest extent of the law” (Adut 214). Thus, as a matter of fact, there was the need of looking for a way in which queer readers could feel represented without breaking the law and raising suspicions about their real sexuality.

In *Romantic Friendship in Victorian Literature*, Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton argues that society had created the cultural idea of a “Romantic Friendship” in order to represent lesbian and gay relationships without worrying about legal problems this could cause (Flegel 700). According to the author, “romantic friendship as a precursor to homosexual love involves conflating eroticism and passion in a way that is resisted by most nineteenth-century formulations of friendship” (Flegel 701). Therefore, a romantic friendship

involved passion and eroticism, elements that were not present in other kinds of friendships. Within this context, it can be said that *Carmilla* shows this passion differentiated from a regular friendship between girls several times. For instance, the sentence “It was like the ardor of a lover” shows explicitly that Laura is aware of the passion Carmilla is showing for her, but she repressed it in order to fulfil the cultural patterns she has been raised in (Le Fanu 17).

Laura enjoys Carmilla’s presence, but she dislikes the passionate sensations her friend makes her feel: “In these mysterious moods I did not like her. I experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust” (Le Fanu 17). The girl feels pleasure in response to Carmilla’s affection, and this very pleasure was disgusting to her due to the cultural idea that only a man should make her feel this way. This phenomenon can be notice in Laura’s internal thoughts: “I was conscious of a love growing into adoration, and also of abhorrence. This I know is paradox, but I can make no other attempt to explain the feeling.” (Le Fanu 17). As a matter of fact, Laura’s paradoxical feelings are driven by the idea of a lesbian romance as a crime because, it is clear she feels pleasure with Carmilla’s physical approaches, and the only reason of her abhorrence is the fear of breaking the law. In fact, the intimate moments between Laura and Carmilla are always when they are alone. The only physical contact in the presence of Laura’s father’s is when the girls hug around the waist (Le Fanu 21 and 23), something common in romantic friendships, showing how

their friendship is, indeed, quite passionate and could be uncomfortable for others, especially men, to witness. Another possible reason for Laura's paradoxical feelings is the fact that she could have seen Carmilla as a predator, nevertheless, she denied herself to think about her friend as non-human. Thus, it is not certain this reason been viable.

Another feature of romantic friendships described by Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton is the insistence on friendship in order to avoid suspicions in heterosexual and patriarchal readers, while maintaining the allusion for queer readers. Actually, Laura refers about Carmilla as her friend several times along the book, showing how important was for her to clarify her relationship with the vampire as a friendship, or romantic friendship, and not as a romantic relationship:

Young people like, and even love, on impulse. I was flattered by the evident, though as yet undeserved, fondness she showed me. I liked the confidence with which she at once received me. She was determined that we should be very near *friends*. (Le Fanu, 15, emphasis added)

Laura knows that she had been seduce by Carmilla very fast, calling this phenomenon "love on impulse". Nevertheless, she does not explain what kind of love she is talking about. Laura explains that she loves Carmilla almost immediately given the vampire gives her confidence and fondness, qualifying nouns applicable to both, romantic and sisterly love. Nonetheless, the girl ends up the thought by clarifying they were meant to be *friends*, this, in order to do not raise suspicious that her feelings might have been romantics.

Overall, considering the Victorian period has important implications when reading Carmilla as a lesbian love story, it was impossible for authors to create a queer story without facing horrible consequences given the criminalization of homosexuality. Nevertheless, there is not any information about Le Fanu been a queer author, thus, it is not possible to know whether he wants to show a lesbian story or not. Moreover, due to their social role during this period, it was even more difficult to show a romantic story between two women, who were seen as men's complements, and their story had to be presented as a friendship. In my personal view, the arguments developed in this chapter are crucial to demonstrate that there is a great probability that Laura and Carmilla's relationship was, indeed, romantic, but had to be hidden in order to fulfil the cultural patterns established by society.

Conclusion

The current dissertation has exposed different arguments to show that Carmilla and Laura's relationship is, indeed, a romantic one. At the first chapter, there was explained what romantic love is in different perspectives: first of all, as a feeling strong that would make possible the romantic lover to sacrifice anything in order to continue feeling it. Following the idea of sacrifice, it was explained the self-denial, in Christianity terms, as part of the romantic love as well. Ending with the idea of romantic love as a disease. It is important to notice that Carmilla and Laura's relationship follows all the perspectives presented in the current dissertation: Carmilla's own idea of love as sacrifice and Laura's surrender of her own personality in order to makes her beloved friend happy, not caring about the self-denial she was doing for her lover. In the case of Love as a disease, it is possible to metaphorically compare Laura's health decline with her growing love for Carmilla.

The second chapter is about sexual desire as part of romantic love given the awareness of Laura's sexual desire in the story. The first part explained what sexual desire is and how different is this concept with the concept of romantic love, showing how Laura's feelings are expressions of a girl who is awaking her sexual desire. Nevertheless, at the same time, Laura is forced, by the cultural patterns stablished in her mind, to repress this sexual desire that Carmilla awakes on her, been the repression of sexual desire the

second important part of this chapter in order to understand how Laura is, indeed, sexually attracted to Carmilla, but is not able to confess it to herself or others. The third subtitle of this chapter is passionate love, the concept that includes sexual desire and romantic love together, creating the link between the two sensations Carmilla and Laura are feeling according to my perspective and interpretation. The last subtitle is sexual predator and shows how Carmilla's predator's behaviour can be interpreted explicitly as sexual desire's reactions, been an important way in which we can interpret Carmilla's character, who has been difficult to interpret along the dissertation given the lack of evidence the reader has about the vampire's thoughts and feelings.

The third chapter aims to show how the Victorian culture influences Carmilla and Laura's relationship. First of all, there is presented the social role of women in Victorian period due to the fact that both main characters are females. In this subtitle, it is presented another reason for Laura's repression of feelings, been the cultural idea of women as men's complement a established belief in her mind. Therefore, it was impossible for Laura to think in Carmilla as a lover out loud given the wrong it was loving someone of her same gender, been the second subtitle a view of lesbianism and homosexuality in Victorian period.

As a matter of fact, the stronger arguments of the current dissertation are the ones related to Laura given the explicit evidence that the reader can find in the book; on the

other hand, the arguments related to Carmilla's behaviour or thought were more difficult to write given the lack of evidence and the need of a personal interpretation that can, or cannot, be correct.

It would be interesting to investigate the romantic speech of each character in a deeper way in order to have a further discussion about Carmilla and Laura's relationship, which in my opinion, is a romantic one. Consequently, while writing this dissertation, I realized that the reader will never know if whether Carmilla and Laura's relationship is a romantic one by just reading, but it is needing a hard and deep interpretation of every single page of the book. Therefore, the answer to the question the current dissertation aims to answer is totally related to the reader's interpretation. Surely, works as the present one can help the reader to have a more informed opinion at interpreting *Carmilla*, nonetheless, it is her or his choice taken this answer as correct or incorrect.

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