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**Beautiful Monsters: The Role of Beauty in the Creation of a
New Gothic Monster in Oscar Wilde's The Portrait of Dorian Gray
and Sheridan Le Fanu's Carmilla**

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*“Whether you come from heaven or from hell, who cares,
O Beauty! Huge, fearful, ingenuous monster!
If your regard, your smile, your foot, open for me
An Infinite I love but have not ever known?”*

*From God or Satan, who cares? Angel or Siren
Who cares, if you make, – say with the velvet eyes,
Rhythm, perfume, glimmer; my one and only queen!
The world less hideous, the minutes less leaden?”*

Charles Baudelaire

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Table of Contents

Beautiful Monsters: The Role of Beauty in the Creation of a New Gothic Monster in Oscar Wilde's <i>The Portrait of Dorian Gray</i> and Sheridan Le Fanu's <i>Carmilla</i>	1
Acknowledgments	3
Introduction	5
Chapter I: The Sources of Beauty	8
1.1 Eternal Youth	9
1.2 Social Status	11
1.3 Femininity	13
Chapter 2: Beyond the Pale	16
2.1 Gender	17
2.2 Sexuality	19
2.3 Otherness and the Monster	22
Chapter III: Corrupted Beauty	27
3.1 Grotesque	29
3.2 Personalities vs Physique	31
3.3 Deaths	35
Conclusion	38
Bibliography	40

Introduction

The Gothic genre as a whole is generally characterised by the breaking of boundaries between reality and fantasy, and as such, it is a medium that offers a wide arrange of possibilities to explore that which was left unexplored, such as the conflation between ideas who were previously thought of as dissonant. From Lewis to Radcliffe to modern gothic authors, the monster has been a vital part of what constitutes the genre, and its portrayal has seldom strayed from the usual recipe. Each period expresses different fascinations with monsters but some prototypical qualities unite the family of monsters, albeit loosely, for example, most monsters do not possess intelligence, are generally of unfavourable appearance and they frighten those who see them. They can also possess supernatural power, evil intent or just be generally misjudged by society. These recognizable monster qualities coalesce into cultural prototypes and reflect the anxieties of the era that produces them (Asma, 283), and as such, they are studied within the models and the format the genre offers.

However, Hughes and Smith (1) argue that the Gothics has always been queer, precisely because in its very conception it is poised astride the uneasy cultural boundary that separates the acceptable and familiar from the troubling and different. It is constantly playing a balancing act between the conflicting taste of what is established as the norm and its opposite desire. The latter of which often revolve around marginalization and sexual deviances. To be queer in gothic terms, they argue, is essentially to adhere to one and yet desire another.

In this regard, it is not surprising to find gothic works that defy boundaries and challenge the norm, but it tends to reproduce the same tried and tested format in which the monsters are explicitly unappealing and the victims possess the beauty that they lack. Therefore, what this dissertation intends to explore is how these two texts, Oscar Wilde's *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* and Sheridan LeFanu's *Carmilla*, switch the trope on its axis and have managed to produce an innovative concept of what it means to be a monster and how these new monster have come to be composed.

Through the lense of Queer theory, this work has interpreted these texts as not only the product of a society whose power dynamics consolidate heterosexuality and gender conformity as the norm, but also as an active response to it, in which the act of transgression is concealed by the supernatural aspect of the stories, namely the gothic quality of it is used as a vehicle of subversion. Here it is argued that the main catalyst for this disruption is beauty. The debate about Beauty shifted from the search for the rules for its production or for its recognition to a consideration of the effects that it produces" (275), and as such, it is used in these stories as a facilitating agent in the integration of these characters into society, and thus the medium through which this new type of monster is created.

The great themes of Decadent sensibility, movement from which Oscar Wilde was one of its main proponents, all revolve around the idea of a Beauty that springs from the alteration of natural powers. The English aesthetes, from Swinburne to Pater, and their French epigones, began a rediscovery of the Renaissance seen as an unexhausted reserve of cruel and sweetly diseased dreams: in the faces painted by Botticelli and Leonardo they sought for the vague physiognomy of the androgyne, of the man woman of unnatural and indefinable Beauty. And when they fantasise about woman – when she is not seen as Evil

triumphant, the incarnation of Satan, elusive because incapable of love and normality, desirable because she is a sinner, beautified by the traces of corruption –, what they love is the altered nature of her femininity: she is the bejewelled woman of Baudelaire's dreams, she is the flower-woman or the jewel-woman, she is D'Annunzio's woman, who can be seen in all her charm only if compared to an artificial model, to her ideal progenitrix in a painting, a book, or a legend (Eco, 341).

Both of these characters certainly share their beauty. Carmilla, on the one hand, is a young and charming lady whose vampirism is hidden behind the façade of vulnerability she employs as a means to obtain power. She utilises her youth, high social status and overperformance of femininity to not only avoid being discovered but continue to carry on with her bloody endeavour. Dorian, on his part, comes off as a beautiful hedonist who has let himself be corrupted by his own desires and obsession to maintain that beauty. What these characters reveal is the conceptualization of that which could not be spoken before. What society is fighting against when attacking them is their own self-imposed social boundaries. Their beauty, unlike in previous gothic works, and fairly reminiscent of the Romantic sensibilities, rather than externalising who they are, enhances the horror of their subversive disposition.

The first angle that will be analysed in the first chapter is how beauty comes to these characters or the factors that have an influence in how they are perceived as beautiful. Factors such as youth, social status and femininity. Then, in the second chapter, the concept of queerness is explored and it proposes that it works as a cause for Dorian and Carmilla to be regarded as unusual and different from the rest, and how this produces a feeling of otherness that leads to monstrosity. Finally, in the third chapter, it argues that beauty interacts with

concepts that should be expected to be opposing and contradict it, but that instead, function as a companion for beauty to be enhanced, and thus create a new type of monster.

Chapter I: The Sources of Beauty

Dorian Gray and Carmilla carry an appeal and charm that is not necessarily related to a supernatural interference, but to more humane perceptions like their social backgrounds, and traits like gracefulness, elegance and an attitude which can be considered to be “feminine”. They are characters that before being introduced to their respective plots they were recognized and known to be beautiful individuals that dazzled the people around them. Both of them enjoyed their status as a noble in the case of Carmilla for her Karnstein lineage and as an upperclass man that is Dorian Gray who has wealth as well as charm, these characteristics gave them a space to be influential amongst the people that were of similar status to them and, along with their femininity related attributes, that allowed them both to get close to their victims and realise the deeds of Carmilla’s feeding routine and Dorian’s immoral acts of self-indulgence.

These three key aspects, youthfulness, social status and femininity complement each other and will be the main focus of this first chapter, with its purpose being analysing in-depth these “sources of beauty” that work together in creating characters that, as well as being of supernatural in nature, are endowed in this beauty that makes them unsuspecting of any type of harm or foul act, thus making it a tool to be exploited by Dorian and Carmilla.

In Dorian’s case, he utilised his beauty to commit acts of corruption and immorality that ended up being his own downfall and doom, not only he lost his life but his beauty as well. He knew how to utilise his beauty as well as conserving it because of the ‘wish’ that

was granted to him (28), and take advantage of it as well along with his social status made him rejoice and indulge himself in pleasures, new experiences, he dedicated himself to a “sinful” life that corrupted his own portrait with an ugliness that mirrored his behaviour.

In Carmilla’s case, she has plotted and carried out her plans to ensure her survival and feeding for years throughout a couple of centuries, and her beautiful character is contrasted by the naturalness of her acts, however her attitude as someone who shows an innocent behaviour, who seems fragile, delicate and helpless allows her to blend into society as a non-threat. She is fully aware of her strengths (i.e her beauty and behaviour) and, along with the element of surprise, she has a reliable way for her to fulfil her feeding acts without attracting unwanted attention. The *modus operandi* Carmilla follows is to attract her prey. Furthermore, she takes advantage of her youth that has lasted for many years, her social status as being the daughter of the Count of Karnstein and lastly, her femininity. Therefore she earns the trust of her peers and with the sense of innocence she inspires, she ends up away from any suspicion of her natural behaviour, acts and intentions.

1.1 Eternal Youth

Throughout both novels, Dorian, the protagonist of his story and Carmilla, the antagonist in her respective novel, share the main feature of being youthful and charming in their own ways which made them particularly attractive to their peers and victims. This feature made them very unlikely to be suspects to certain acts of questionable ethics in the eyes of society, that were perpetrated by themselves. Their youthfulness, provided by their supernatural characteristics, is “eternal” in the sense that they lived for many years whilst retaining what made them to be considered beautiful and innocent looking, their youth.

However, as they are distanced from the natural, no matter how beautiful they may look, they were considered monsters, Dorian's portrait which withered and turned despicable that disgusted Dorian himself on the one hand, and Carmilla's methods of survival that threatened people's lives.

On one hand there is a beautiful young woman who is Carmilla and her youthfulness that inspires trust and her innocent behaviour deceive her instinctive nature to those around her, especially when she is introducing herself to new circles of people to take fit in. Carmilla presents herself as a helpless and sweet young lady in front of the public, and those who present a threat to her – Laura's father, the doctor and General Spielsdorf – are curiously, old men in positions of power who find themselves attracted to someone who is their opposite, and they think that she is naive and innocent because of her youth, a harmless person that deserves their kindness (Le Fanu 10, 44). In this way, she bends the situation in her favour. Her beauty comes from her youthfulness, and she knows how to use it well to inspire confidence in her potential prey as well as trust in her just for the looks she possesses and takes advantage of. That is why it is so easy for her to approach her victims, because those who have the power to stop her are blinded by her looks.

Dorian on the other hand, was granted his wish of becoming "eternally" young and in exchange, the portrait that Basil made him would grow old and wrinkled by the relentless time, and not only that, but his actions and "sins" would be represented in the painting as well thus allowing Dorian to be as careless and as indulgent as he liked (89). It is passionately declared by Lord Henry that youth is the only thing that matters in the world (24), and makes a clear correlation between youth and beauty: "Till I have my first wrinkle, I suppose. I know,

now, that when one loses one's good looks, whatever they may be, one loses everything.” (28), giving the impression that time erodes beauty.

Dorian is also isolated during his childhood because of his grandfather, this overprotection that he had while growing up made him innocent to external influences since he was not presented into society. He stills holds a rose-white boyhood (21) that is manifested in his attitude and his appearance. Therefore, there is a connection between innocence, youth and appearance that Basil makes when he declares that he could not believe any of the dark rumours that surrounded Dorian because of his pure, bright, innocent face, and his marvellous untroubled youth (143).

1.2 Social Status

Along with youthfulness, both of these categorizable supernatural entities that Dorian and Carmilla are, had a clear position in society with a status above the average “commonners”, they were members of the nobility in the case of Carmilla and upper class in Dorian's case, thus they were respected by a community that was very powerful as well as possessing traits that were renowned in their respective circle, Carmilla being a Karnstein from the Austrian countryside whilst Dorian being part of the Victorian London aristocracy, as he was the grandson of a Lord. Because of this, they were raised with a privileged formal education, they should have acquired manners and a posture that made it easier for them to interact with high society. Laura mentions that “there was something extremely engaging, as well as the elegance and fire of high birth” (42) that Carmilla possessed in her portrait as Countess Millarca, Dorian Dorian Gray is repeatedly described as graceful. Elegance and grace are two traits considered to be closely allied to the Beautiful by Burke (109). They had

access to luxuries, in the case of Dorian it is more distinguishable because he dedicated himself to Dandyism (125), and he cultivates himself to be his own ideal of beauty.

“The idea that a man forms of Beauty is impressed on all his clothing, it rumples or irons his suit rounds or stiffens his gestures and it even finds its subtle way, in the long run, into his features. Man ends up resembling what he would like to be” (Baudelaire).

Their positions, as well as their grace and charisma, has allowed them to enjoy a life of accomodation and also, pick their victims without much hard work or rising suspicion to themselves and their plans, to survive on Carmilla’s side and to indulge in pleasures on Dorian’s.

Although Carmilla and Dorian share similarities in their positions regarding their social circle, the social setting is different. Carmilla comes from Styria, a state in Austria, which at the time of the novel was depicted as pretty isolated and as Laura describes “the proud family of Karnstein, now extinct, who once owned the equally desolate chateau which, in the thick of the forest, overlooks the silent ruins of the town” (3). The assumption in this passage is that the chateau once was near a town where there was social life. Carmilla’s title is that of a Countess meaning that she inherited the title from her father, a man that exerted his power with violence (20), and she may have held a position of power over the land (Ward, 247).

Dorian on the other hand lives in Victorian London, a cosmopolitan city full of movement where the elite used their time to meet and make connections. Balls, tea parties,

trips to the theatre among other activities were highly popular for the wealthy, or for those who aspired to circles of power (Shephard, 128). Dorian is constantly involved in social gatherings. At the beginning he is invited to high society because he is the sole heir of the recently deceased Lord Kelso. There he easily gains Basil's favour and Lord Henry's attention, his social circle rapidly increases, and he gets the opportunity to attract people with his looks and natural charm. But it is his social status which gives him the opportunity to engage in high society in the first place.

1.3 Femininity

Lastly, femininity is one of the features that are also very relevant at the time of recognizing the characters of Dorian Gray and Carmilla in the novels since it is this attribute that proves to be an extension of their beauty. Both Dorian and Carmilla are perceived to be feminine. They are delicate, Carmilla has a languid demeanour and is depicted as a damsel in distress for half of the novel, Dorian is also dainty and he is compared to his late mother, who was also beautiful and the most lovely creature (35). Burke claims that being delicate is a main feature of Beauty when he tells us that "An air of robustness and strength is very prejudicial to beauty. An appearance of delicacy, and even of fragility, is almost essential to it" (105). Dorian and Carmilla present themselves as being fragile and refined.

The way in which Dorian is described is also noteworthy: "he was certainly wonderfully handsome, with his finely-curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair" (19), "His cool, white, flower-like hand (23)", "Gold hair, blue eyes, and rose-red lips" (116), the adjectives and manner of speaking, the use of hyperboles and simile is that of a

blazon which was mainly attributed to the description of female characters, specially while talking about the characteristics which made them beautiful (The Poetry Foundation). This notion makes Dorian a rather androgynous character, as he is a male that possesses female traits.

Carmilla on the other hand, overperforms her femininity. Laura even genders her health: “there was always a languor about her, quite incompatible with a masculine system in a state of health” (18) as being unmasculine, which relate to the Burke’s words, Carmilla lacks robustness and this makes her frail and in consequence feminine.

Furthermore, while both Dorian and Carmilla are constantly pictured as beautiful, Kant comments that mostly women can be considered as such because:

*[...] her figure is in general finer, her features more tender and gentle, her mien in the expression of friendliness, humor, and affability more meaningful and engaging than is the case with the male sex [...] above all there lies in the character of the mind of **this sex features** peculiar to it which clearly distinguish it from ours and which are chiefly responsible for her being characterized by **the mark of the beautiful**. (Kant, 35)*

According to Kant, Beauty is a concept linked mainly to femininity, in contrast to the masculine, which possesses noble traits related to the sublime.

For both characters, femininity is what enhances their beauty and, by being related to it, they are not under the gaze of people who would judge a “female looking” or “female

behaving” person, since they both inspire an air of innocence and charm, therefore are praised and admired in the end because of their looks and attitudes. Considering all what was previously said that their feminine character is one of the main attributes for them to be considered beautiful.

Chapter 2: Beyond the Pale

As mentioned in the first chapter, one of the main features that Dorian and Carmilla possess is their femininity, which endears them to the people they come into contact with. This chapter will dive further into the aspect of gender and sexuality, particularly how the characters' duality, their beauty and queerness, coexist within them to construct a new monster. While the character's beautiful side allows them a smooth integration and acceptance into society, and they exploit it as such, the other one is kept hidden.

In order to fully understand what does the duality within these characters means and its relation to their queerness it is important to explore the conceptual framework through which was worked and on what our analysis was based on. The first important note to make is that the term "queer" is used because of its lack of gender specificity, thus making it appropriate to call both Carmilla and Dorian queer, even though their queerness is not expressed on the same axis, Carmilla's being sexuality, as she overperforms femininity as a tool to obtain power, and Dorian's gender, he portrays gender non-conformity because he strays from the ideals of masculinity.

Although by the time Judith Butler published her book *Gender Trouble*, there was already a common notion that sex and gender were different concepts, Robert Stoller having been the first to make a distinction between both words, Butler revolutionized how gender in particular was studied and understood. She proposed that sex is the biological differences between people commonly used to distinguish us as male or female, while gender belongs to the behaviours that make up that distinction, adding that sexuality is the nature of our sexual desires. In her words, "the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that

whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex” (9-10), meaning that while sex may be inherent it does not determine gender and its expression. Furthermore, she explores the instability of gender as opposed to sex and claims that the construction of “men” will not, in this sense, “accrue exclusively to the bodies of men or that “women” will interpret only female bodies.” (10) and therefore there is no substantial reason for gender to follow with the proposed binary of sex.

2.1 Gender

Butler says that the key to breaking this link between sex and gender is to perform subversive gender roles. She coins the concept of performativity, claiming “gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing” (33). She does not claim that gender is an artificial phenomenon or something that can be actively chosen, but rather that it is an act performed by people to exert their gender identity and it is a direct, although unconscious, response to people’s cultural background.

Dorian Gray, although subscribing to heterosexuality, is an androgynous character. Dorian’s queerness is not explicitly theorized about within the novel like Laura does with Carmilla, but it is nonetheless expressed through the construction of Dorian as a beautiful creature, his relationship with his peers, particularly Lord Henry, and the way in which he is talked about.

Unlike the rest of the male characters, Dorian is the only man that is mentioned to be either pretty or beautiful alongside handsome, he is said to have “a simple and a beautiful nature” (16), like a blank canvas.

“[Dorian] was certainly wonderfully handsome, with his finely curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair. There was something in his face that made one trust him at once. All the candour of youth was there, as well as all youth's passionate purity. One felt that he had kept himself unspotted from the world” (Wilde, 19).

He is also seen as constantly blushing whenever someone compliments him or talks about his feelings, an action that is only ever present in the novel aside from Dorian when talking about female characters, particularly Sybil. When Lord Henry confronts him about her and asks who Dorian is in love with, ““with an actress”, said Dorian Gray, blushing” (47).

Dorian Gray is also quite a passive character for the majority of the novel, like previously described, he is like a blank canvas. This makes him susceptible to influence, particularly to Lord Henry who is a hypermasculine character. Unlike men who are supposed to be forceful and confident, Dorian is a beautiful vessel for Henry's ideas to penetrate into his life and subsequently adopt. Even before he met Henry, he was known only as the muse for Basil's art, something to fawn over. He claims to be “tired of sitting” (18) right before walking into Basil's room and meeting Lord Henry for the first time.

Lord Henry comments that “talking to [Dorian] was like playing upon an exquisite violin. He answered to every touch and thrill of the bow... there was something terribly enthralling in the exercise of influence” (37), an instrument usually reserved to symbolise the female body, however, it is not Dorian's body Henry plays with, but his mind. He seeks to

“dominate him -- had already, indeed half done so. He would make that wonderful spirit his own” (38). Just like it was previously discussed with Carmilla, a sense of ownership was found from Lord Henry upon Dorian, he intends to absorb him into himself by way of influencing his thinking and behaviour and mould him to his satisfaction.

In Dorian’s case, his androgyny is not given by romantic inclinations, but rather by the juxtaposing dynamic between the femininity of his beauty and passive demeanor, along with the heterosexual conformity to societal norms he displays.

2.2 Sexuality

On the other hand, sexuality is defined by Butler as the practice of desire (23). Carmilla very much subscribes to the gender norm, by performing hyperfemininity in order to gain the trust from those around her. Nevertheless, her queerness is present in her homosexual desires, specifically her affection for Laura.

Carmilla’s gender performances have given her the capacity to mimic a young lady, she knows the customs and manners of girls and therefore can fool people into thinking she is one as well as influencing them into trusting her. This is seen in the beginning of the novel when she is able to integrate herself into Laura and her family’s life by overplaying her vulnerability and role as a fainting maiden (9). She plays into what society expects and fakes the illusion of a beautiful girl in need of help and therefore she is accepted without hesitation.

In polite Victorian discourse, the idea that a young girl could have any sexual thoughts at all was simply bypassed (Gorham, 54). In spite of it, the relationship Carmilla

shares with Laura is laden with various forms of sexual innuendos, and overt displays of desire as well, that denote more of a courtship than friendship and allows us to see Carmilla, the instigator, in the role usually reserved for men.

"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. It was like the ardor of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet over-powering; and with gloating eyes she drew me to her, and her hot lips traveled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, "You are mine, you shall be mine, you and I are one for ever." (17)

So right from the start, this presents a nuanced character that externally adheres to the societal expectations of what a girl must be. However, Carmilla, in her private moments with Laura, expresses what are considered masculine traits because of the classic structure of romantic relationships, in which men are the only ones who are supposed to get acquainted with women in this manner and they are the ones who get to "conquer" them. Meanwhile here it is a girl, the one who takes the lead in the relationship's progression.

There is also a sense of Carmilla's androgyny by Laura herself. She claims that Carmilla would take her hand with fondness and would proceed to blush and stare at her intensely while her breathing would speed up.

Not only do these actions make Laura uncomfortable in their passion, but they also demonstrate a deep sense of ownership (17), an instinct to possess Laura like a game to hunt and keep, to absorb for herself. It is also known why this behaviour results so bizarre to

Laura. She comments on dynamics she has learned through the stories she reads and grew up on as a means to convince herself of possible reasons behind Carmilla's behaviour.

“Was she, notwithstanding her mother's volunteered denial, subject to brief visitations of insanity; or was there here a disguise and a romance? I had read in old storybooks of such things. What if a boyish lover had found his way into the house, and sought to prosecute his suit in masquerade, with the assistance of a clever old adventuress.”(17).

Carmilla's behaviour is such an overt, and at time aggressive, display of desire that Laura cannot fathom why she, being a girl as well, is the recipient of it, while also not understanding how such ardour inhabits a body that for all intents and purposes is very much female and therefore delicate and languid in appearance. Critiques have also argued that authors portray the lesbian vampire as a signifier of an alternative economy of sexual pleasure which is more emotionally intense and fulfilling than its heterosexual counterpart (Horner and Zlosnik, 66). In this sense, Carmilla's emotional intensity as opposed to explicit sexual advances is directly contrarresting heterosexuality's sex driven inclinations.

Carmilla is undoubtedly a queer character, she has a variety of features that allow her to face different situations and approach them differently. Carmilla gets away from the sexual norms established by society in its customs and ways of carrying out a relationship, which is traditionally composed by a male and a female while understands what she is expected to be conforming to gender norms, and does know when to strike at the right time so that her femininity and masculinity do not end up mixing between themselves and wake suspicions to her potential prey. Carrying along with it a sort of “monstrous” and “devious” perspective to Carmilla herself, not purely out of the act she presents male traits but precisely because of

what these traits in such a feminine body represent, the strange picture they conjure up while in unity.

2.3 Otherness and the Monster

According to Stephen Asma, the concept of monster has evolved over time, initially it had a less pejorative connotation and it was used to call those who were disabled but has since acquired a completely derogatory meaning (15). The word derives from the latin *monere*, which means to warn, so the monster in itself is a cultural category designated to alert people. He continues by proposing that the monster is another type of the other, it is an archetype rather than just one concept (282) although it has shared common characteristics throughout the years.

Most monsters cannot be reasoned with, are ugly and inspire horror. they are unnatural, overwhelmingly powerful, evil, misunderstood, incapable of being understood. And most importantly, they reveal the fears and anxieties of a specific period (283 on monsters). And this is certainly the conception of monster usually seen in Gothic literature, perfectly exemplified in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, who unlike mainstream contemporary portrayals, was quite articulated, nonetheless he was still described as being repulsed by his own reflection and rejected by society and his own creator for being a vile creature with yellow skin, black lips, and shrivelled complexion (28).

Dorian and Carmilla, on the other hand, are beautiful creatures whose monstrosity comes into play, not solely because of their appearance, but because they inhabit the in-between, not fully belonging to any one category. They are both dead and alive, human and immortal creatures, feminine and masculine, familiar and unsettling, beautiful and yet monstrous. The monster is a transgressive figure that historically has meant the mixture of what civilization would consider opposites, which in turn questions the validity of binary pairs, mythological creatures, for example, were often a combination of human and animal body parts (Davies, 57-58).

In Dorian's case, this is more clearly displayed in the constant references to flowers the novel makes when talking about him. Upon seeing Dorian's portrait, Henry is described as being sat down in the midst of the "innumerable cigarettes" smoke while Basil's studio "was filled with the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees of the garden there came through the open door the heavy scent of the lilac, or the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn"(5). This clearly encapsulates the difference between Dorian's delicate and feminine disposition, by placing his portrait in the middle of a flower filled room in contrast with Henry's hypermasculine and smoke filled corner. The novel comments on the passage of time, states that "summer followed summer, and the yellow jonquils bloomed and died many times, and nights of horror repeated the story of their shame, but he was unchanged. No winter marred his face or stained his flower-like bloom". However, the true contrast here is that unlike flowers, which wilt and die, Dorian remains young, his bloom is artificial and man-made.

And by the same token, following up with the jonquils reference, it is evident to see his resemblance to Ovid's Narcissus, a "look of joy came into his eyes, as if he had

recognized himself for the first time...The sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation. He had never felt it before". Just like in the myth of Narcissus, this passage conveys that despite social commentary Dorian did not truly realise the magnitude of his beauty, until he saw the portrait Basil made, and that moment was not only his realisation but also the beginning of his downfall, because he would become obsessed with beauty and youth, like Narcissus upon watching his reflection in the lake, realising nobody would ever love him like himself, "he seemed to be a boy / As much as man; both boys and girls looked to him / To make love, and yet that slender figure / Of proud Narcissus had little feeling / For either boys or girls" (Ovid, 72), just like Dorian, his youthful appearance is emphasised and coveted by many, but the resemblance does not end there, Narcissus falls deeply into fascination with the image of himself reflected on the water, he is enchanted by the "ivory neck and shoulder [...] and face flushed as red flowers" (Ovid, 74). He falls in love with his own shadow, pines to death and the Gods change him into a flower which now possesses his name. Dorian is both natural and unnatural, a human and an otherworldly being.

Furthermore, Carmilla's monstrosity is commented on in the novella when talking about her vampiric nature,

"Creator! Nature!" said the young lady in answer to my gentle father. "And this disease that invades the country is natural. Nature. All things proceed from Nature — don't they? All things in the heaven, in the earth, and under the earth, act and live as Nature ordains? I think so." (21)

Her vampirism is discussed as a disease that has been contaminating the town and her configuration as a monster is particularly worthy of notice regarding the threat she poses to the established norm, her sexual deviance poses a threat to patriarchal society due to its subversive manner. Vampires are historically used to explore transgressive sexualities such as

lesbianism. Wisker argues that these representations are imaginatively liberating and carnivalesque because such shape-shifting disrupts notions of the unified 'self' and thus allow for this disruption to continue and permeate more than just one side of the individual identity (7).

In addition to her vampirism, Carmilla is an antithesis of the image of a good woman in Victorian times. She is sexual, powerful and not available to males. Whereas the Victorian girl was supposed to be the perfect daughter who contributed to the construction of the Victorian ideal of hearth and home, girls were seen as fulfilling their function only as they existed in relationship to others, the image of the ideal daughter at home was most often presented through a portrayal of a girl's relationship to other members of the ideal family and her function was thought to be of special significance in relationship to males (Gorham, 37-38). On the contrary, the male characters, namely General Spieldorf and Laura's father, which represent a system dominated by men are put in the background until they have to suppress the threat to said patriarchal system.

Moreover, just like victims are forever changed after a vampire's attack, whether that is in death or transformed into one themselves, Carmilla changes Laura in the way that she persists in her memory:

Carmilla is a character that is not bound to conventional norms of society, as she is not married, she does not have children, she possesses a nobility titles that gives her autonomous authority, and such she is not situated in a position where she is an object exchange in the men-dominated world she lives. Carmilla's opposition is seen in next lines:

*“On seeing him a brutalized change came over her features. It was an instantaneous and horrible transformation, as she made a crouching step backwards. Before I could utter a scream, he struck at her with all his force, but she dived under his blow, and unscathed, caught him in her **tiny grasp** by the wrist. He struggled for a moment to release his arm, but his hand opened, the axe fell to the ground, and the girl was gone”* (50 original emphasis).

Here Carmilla is fighting against General Spielsdorf, who in this case, represents the patriarchal society of the period. He tries to strike her and although her grasp is tiny, as she embodies a young girl, her supernatural powers allow her to stop the General's attack and disarm him. In this literal fight Carmilla is seen actively displaying her supernatural strength revealing her monstrosity to the people present on the scene, but more importantly she is portraying her fight against the established male norm.

Nevertheless, Carmilla is murdered because of the threat that she carries to the established order, and so the system wins.

Additionally, Carmilla's status as human is questioned “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” (Le Fanu, 53 our emphasis). The use of the words “such as” imply that although she looks like it, she is not truly alive, therefore she is a different creature and not human.

Ultimately, the configuration of these characters as monsters is based on traits that are historically considered as the “other”; the most important thing is that they represent the deviances that challenge society.

Chapter III: Corrupted Beauty

As previously discussed in Chapter I, there is a certain dissonant relationship between beauty and acts that Dorian Gray and Carmilla commit. On one hand, there is Dorian who

indulges in his pleasures and falls into corruption, then there is Carmilla who preys on humans for consumption. These characters are indeed in possession of great beauty, Dorian is described as having the “white purity of boyhood, and beauty such as old Greek marbles” (36) while of Carmilla it is said by Laura: “She interested and won me; she was so beautiful and so indescribably engaging” (15), yet throughout the story their actions stray from what is expected of them (Kant, 23).

On the contrary, the outcome of their actions contrast the beauty they give off, but the latter is what initially protects them from close scrutiny, the main cases being the portrait of Dorian getting uglier and Carmilla killings for the sake of survival.

As mentioned before, their appearance is what can be considered beautiful, their youth, their social status and inherent charm makes them blend perfectly within their social circles. However, their true behaviour, hidden as it may originally be, is what makes them to be perceived as despicable and monstrous, yet what also matters is the aestheticism that accompanies their actions. Beauty is enhanced by exactly those qualities which seem to deny it, by those objects which produce horror; the sadder, the more painful it was, the more intensely they relished it” (Praz, 27).

There is also a dichotomy in the deaths of both of these characters that seem to contrast the nature of their perceived beauty with their charming and deceitful personalities. Dorian’s death portrays his *hubris*, in the search of achieving his ideal of beauty, he tried to destroy the very object which allowed him to exist and thus his appearance transformed into a repulsive old man. Meanwhile, the brutality of how Carmilla was murdered is striking variation of how Carmilla is portrayed.

The contrasts of beauty are found in Carmilla being a predator, in the moral system that Dorian possesses, in Carmilla's manifestation of her supernatural powers, in Dorian's portrait, and finally, in the actions that these characters commit and the consequences for those around them.

3.1 Grotesque

According to Eduard and Graulund, the grotesque is the conscious confusion between fantasy and reality, it offers a creative force for conceptualising the indeterminate that is produced by distortion and reflecting on the significance of the uncertainty that is thereby produced, it opens up a place of conflicting possibilities, images and figures and makes us question what it means to be human (10-11).

In the stories, the grotesque, more than an overt gruesome image, barring the graphic scenes of both Dorian and Carmilla's death, is portrayed through the unsettledness they produce in their audience. However, the effect it has on these characters is not only unease, but they also infuse in people a sort of unconscious awe that fascinates and attracts them.

Oftentime, the grotesque is represented in the literal juxtaposition of human and animal, when the lines are blurred and they are either undistinguishable or one in the same (8). In Carmilla's case, this is perfectly exemplified by the form she transforms into, a "sooty-black animal that resembled a monstrous cat" that paced with "the restlessness of a beast in a cage" (27). Because of Carmilla's vampirism, the nature of her feeding is

quintessentially grotesque, namely, human blood consumption. Not unlike cannibalism, which is considered the grotesque form by excellence (12) because it disrupts the natural boundaries between civilization and instinctual behaviour, Carmilla absorbs her victims into her, and so, in the eyes of society, Carmilla can be perceived as committing cannibalism since her human appearance makes her look that way, however, her vampiric nature and traits sets her away of being catalogued as a cannibal. Therefore, in a way, Carmilla absorbs that which she does not possess, humanity, even when she looks like one.

Therefore, the grotesque, in this case, does not present itself in the sole fact that Carmilla as a creature is ensconced in the supernatural realm, but rather in how she manages to infiltrate humanity and in turn, how humanity, meaning her victims, integrate the supernatural in them. It breaks the barriers of what humanity means making it unsettling and abnormal, it challenges the limits of the norm. The grotesque inhabits a place which is not static, it makes space for “possibilities, where humans merge with animals” (Edwards, 8), and thrives on uncertainty and anxiety as much as its creativity. So despite being attracted by all this raw power that Carmilla hides inside, people are unconsciously wary of her. Especially Laura, whom she holds the closest relationship with, and claims she terrifies her.

In Dorian’s case, the grotesque is more clearly exemplified in his portrait and its changes. His ability to remain young is rooted in the supernatural because it responds to his perverse wish rather than natural causes,

[He] had uttered a mad wish that he himself might remain young, and the portrait grow old, that his own beauty might be untarnished, and the face of the canvas bear the burden of his passions and his sins; that the painted image

might be seared wit the lines of suffering and thought, and that he might keep all the delicate bloom of loveliness of his then just conscious boyhood (91).

And so it is his portrait, the one who bears the consequences not only of the passage of time but also of Dorian's actions and therefore gets corrupted. Dorian remembers the painting incident, he recalls making the wish, but deems the situation as monstrous, he proclaims that such things are impossible to conceive, yet the proof is laid before him. If Carmilla's vampirism blurred the lines of what it means to be human, Dorian's portrait just as well adds to it by particularly reflecting the challenges to mortality.

While mostly hidden throughout the course of the story, only visible to Dorian when he braves the horror of looking at his painting, the grotesque makes itself known within the physical confinement of the portrait. It is familiar enough because it is the perfect replica of Dorian, but it alienates itself from its double in the decay that differentiates them. They are bound by Dorian's actions that makes the portrait more grotesque and corrupts his conscience, but nonetheless, it is only the painting that bears the ugliness that comes from his actions. Dorian is initially confused, and rightfully so. However, when he is seduced by the promise of eternal youth, he allows the changes in the painting to continue. He is confronted with the possibility of a life without the grotesque and withering that time carves onto people and confines it to a frame, and by doing so, he is in a way renouncing humanity.

3.2 Personalities vs Physique

It has been made clear by this point that Carmilla and Dorian are physically beautiful, but they are also unsettling creatures because of the monstrousness they hide behind their pretty faces. These interconnected aspects, beauty and monstrousness, will be separated to explore their darker side, which makes them unique.

According to Burke, beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy; beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid, and even massive (473). In this regard, Carmilla and Dorian are a different type of beauty as they are delicate and dark at the same time, they defy normal conceptions. Dorian is a beautiful sinner and Carmilla is a beautiful predator, they are monsters to society and humankind, but at the same time they are highly regarded and appreciated. This duality that should be in dissonance works in harmony to create these beautiful and dangerous creatures.

Dorian's beauty works in his favour when it is considered that beauty has the ability to work as a symbol of morality according to Kant in *La Crítica del Juicio* (173). It is seen how it benefits Dorian in the next extract:

“Men who talked grossly became silent when Dorian Gray entered the room. There was something in the purity of his face that rebuked them. His mere presence seemed to recall to them the memory of the innocence that they had tarnished.” (Wilde, 124)

Here it is seen that Dorian's reputation has been tainted by his actions of indulgence and self corruption, nevertheless, the people around him cannot believe the gossip when they see him in person because of his innocent looks. It is assumed that because of his pretty face

he is unable to commit any type of wrongdoing. It even incites guilt upon those who think bad of Dorian, because his image makes them reflect in their own lost innocence. When Dorian asks Henry, hypothetically, what would he think if Dorian had killed Basil? Henry is oblivious of Dorian's murder confession, he tells him that: "All crime is vulgar, just as all vulgarity is crime. It is not in you, Dorian, to commit a murder" (203), which take us back to a similar comment made by Henry, from before Dorian's corruption: "People like you – the wilful sunbeams of life – don't commit crimes, Dorian" (51). This says that Dorian actions are irrelevant as long as he is beautiful. Even the person who influenced his philosophy of life does not truly know him, or believes him capable of committing certain actions. The outward appearance protects the rotten interior of his soul from the judgments of others, but it is possible to see his soul thanks to the portrait. The portrait is described in a frightful comparison: "the rotting of a corpse in a watery grave was not so fearful" (150).

Dorian's monstrousness resides in the depravity of his soul, which would be pungent to the sight. A source of fear to people. Nevertheless, as it was mentioned, he is relatively free to pander to his monstrous nature as long as he maintains his deceitful looks. This balance is what makes the character of Dorian Gray subsists as a whole.

Carmilla, on the other hand, is a type of monster which could be considered more classical. She is a completely a different species, and even if she looks humane and speaks sweetly she is still a predator. Her monstrousness does not come from corruption, like in Dorian's case, after all, humans are cattle to Carmilla, they are a source of nourishment, they are not her equal. She has the physical appearance of a young maiden who no one suspects has lived for a hundred and fifty years. Her supernatural quality is hidden by her act, even

when she herself displays physical manifestations of her nature it is mainly overlooked because her facade protects her.

It is not possible to condemn her as an evil creature only because of her actions though, because she does them to survive, so there is no correlation between her mind or soul with an outward appearance, because of this behaviour could be regarded as instinctive in nature. Carmilla needs to be analysed not as a human character but as a human-eater supernatural creature disguised as a young woman, and how her actions are perceived by humans that have not yet discovered Carmilla's true identity.

Keeping this in mind, Carmilla gives the impression to be a secretive woman, keeping her origins and past from Laura, she explains that "There was a coldness, it seemed to me, beyond her years, in her smiling melancholy persistent refusal to afford me the least ray of light." (16). Even when there is an incommensurable passion that Carmilla seems to manifest for Laura.

She also acts brusquely when there is a funerary procession and she hears the hymns being sung, she goes as far as to shake Laura so she would stop singing. Here she says about the deceased girl: "She? I don't trouble my head about peasants. I don't know who she is" (19), she appears to be unsympathetic to the pain of lower classes and enraged by simple actions that are not of her liking. Kant comments that there are actions and behaviours that can be associated with the beautiful, "certain tenderheartedness that is easily led into a warm feeling of sympathy is beautiful and lovable" (22). What Carmilla does is to act contradictorily to this idea, as she is acting rather self-centred for a beautiful young woman like herself. Following this line of thought:

“The second sort of kindly feeling which is to be sure beautiful and lovable is complaisance: an inclination to make ourselves agreeable to others through friendliness, through acquiescence to their demands, and through conformity of our conduct to their dispositions” (Kant, 23)

Carmilla acts hostile when she talks to the hunchback, even violent as she says to him: “My father would have had the wretch tied up to the pump, and flogged with a cart whip, and burnt to the bones with the cattle brand!” (20). Her reactions are sometimes volatile, too passionate, or extreme which can be unsettling for those around, Laura says that she adores her but abhors her at the same time because of her amorous outburst towards her (17).

Her personality towards human people can be perceived and conceived and child-like at certain moments, which is accepted from her as she is pretty and thus, deserving of being catered to her needs. She is volatile, a monster, and a beautiful girl all at the same time.

3.3 Deaths

Both characters share similarities in the descriptions of their deaths. The action of death works in striking contrast with their physical appearance, and in a certain way, beauty is a contraposition of death, especially as it has been seen before, beauty goes along with youth, which is related to the concepts of vigour and vitality. To die is to decay, the end of youth or the extinguishment of the spark of vitality, in other words, the expiration of beauty. But that is not the case with Dorian Gray and Carmilla, beauty persists above the threat of

destruction. When these two concepts work together in the same scene, they strengthen each other and intensify the feeling that beauty and death produce to the readers of such graphic scenes.

When Carmilla is found by the men who want to kill her, she is sleeping peacefully, and although her funeral was held over a hundred and fifty years ago she still possessed a tint of life, she was young, her flesh “flexible and elastic”, the men surrounding her could see the movement of her breathing and beating heart (52-53). All signs of life, but within the same paragraph she is also detailed to be immersed in blood, sleeping with eyes open. Beauty is disrupted and perturbed by her monstrosity, her vampirism, but still beautiful nevertheless.

The way she is murdered is specially vicious and gory, but made with precision and practicality. The stake is inserted into her heart and then she utters a piercing shriek which produces a momentary illusion of humanity because of the pain she suffers. But there is no mercy, her pretty head is severed from her neck followed by a torrent of blood. Her body and head were burned and her ashes were thrown into the river. Her murder is impressive in her bloodiness and impersonality, but also shocking in the feeling of sorrowfulness of losing something beautiful. Beauty is inseparable from the sentiment of melancholy (Praz, 30). Edgar Allan Poe commented in his *Philosophy of Composition* that the death of a beautiful woman is the most poetical topic in the world without question, notably if it is told by a lover, because beauty produces the excitement of the soul and sadness is the tone of highest manifestation (163-167). Carmilla’s death is exalted by these two concepts – beauty and sadness – that work together to intensify each other.

Carmilla's physical material body may be destroyed, however, she still lives in Laura: "the image of Carmilla returns to memory with ambiguous behaviour, sometimes the playful, languid, beautiful girl; sometimes the writhing fiend I saw in the ruined church" (55). In this manner, her beauty is preserved although tainted by her monstrosity.

In the case of Dorian, his fate was forecasted by Henry after he learnt about Dorian's past. His mother, Margaret Devereux, looks like him and was just as beautiful, elopes with a soldier, they lived together for a brief period as Dorian's father is killed in a duel, which made the widowed Margaret move back with her father, Lord Kelso. Shortly after she died too, leaving young Dorian to live with his heartless and cold grandfather. Henry thinks that "behind every exquisite thing that existed, there was something tragic" (37), and "there was something fascinating in this son of Love and Death" (38). These ideas are explored by Praz in *The Romantic Agony*, where he expresses that tragedy and death adds *pathos* to beauty, it makes it more beautiful and desirable (33-34). Henry also believes that beauty and tragedy go hand in hand: "worlds had to be in travail, that the meanest flower might blow...".

Dorian was murdered by his own hand, his intention was to destroy the same portrait which was the recipient of his wish, that is because the image is hideous and it belongs to him, but his vanity does not let him be related to anything that is not beautiful. He was obsessed and so enamoured with his own beauty that he could not tolerate the fact that the portrait displayed the ugliness inside of him. He briefly thinks about changing himself, to be a better person, start a new life free of sin, so that he could be "pure" again, in that way, he hoped the portrait would change. The portrait showed him the smile of a hypocrite (211), since he was not sincere. Distraught, he decided to destroy the object of his suffering, that he

believes to be his consciousness, a “monstrous soul-life” that had to be killed for his peace of mind (212). Thus, the portrait serves a representation of the monstrosity of Dorian’s soul.

When he slashes the fabric of the painting with the same knife that had killed its artist, he utters a frightening cry that awakes his servants, and soon after his corpse is found laying on the floor, knife piercing his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage, unrecognisable for the people who knew him. He had shifted in the image he was supposed to be without supernatural intervention, the living Dorian Gray is no more, and yet the portrait persists, “in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty” (213).

Conclusion

The current dissertation has intended to explore the concept of beauty in relation to the configuration of a new monster in gothic literature by analysing the construction of Carmilla and Dorian Gray as beautiful monsters. Conducive to this, the work has focused on the different ways in which these two concepts interact with each other and their dynamic within these characters.

The first chapter presents the different sources of beauty that are portrayed in the stories and how they configure the canon of what is considered beautiful during the period they are inserted in. The first of them being eternal youth, which it is argued that it allows Carmilla and Dorian to appear innocent and unwithered by time and vices giving leave to their easy acceptance in their social surroundings. The characters are further aided by their social status, which, being from the high class, facilitates their belonging into, and manipulation of, the different power dynamics within their society. The chapter concludes by

delving into the concept of femininity and exploring how the protagonist's performance of femininity is ultimately what makes them beautiful due to the fact that throughout history beauty has been gendered female.

The focus of the second chapter is on developing how the characters' beauty and queerness play off of each other to produce a new type of monster. On one side, the chapter explains how queerness presents itself in these characters. Dorian Gray, although conforming to heteronormativity in his sexuality, is a character who challenges gender norms while Carmila performs hyperfemininity in order to obtain power. On the other hand, Carmilla is a homosexual character whose relationship with Laura threatens the social patriarchal status. On the other side, exploring how these characters as a whole, outside of their queerness also position themselves as "other" because of their lack of belonging to one static place. They inhabit a constant in between: normal and other, life and death, human and monster.

Finally, chapter three further develops the idea of the monster. Particularly, it shines a light on how beauty does not degrade itself when in contact with opposite concepts, but rather it changes to create something new. It proposed how the dynamic between the grotesque and beautiful is not one of mutual destruction but rather they enhance each other. It was dug through the dissonance between the characters actions and their appearance and how it differs in comparison to traditional monsters. And lastly there is the proposal of the annihilation of the other, the conquering of the monster does not produce the elimination of beauty. There is beauty in death and death itself can be beautiful.

This dissertation's challenge lies in the decision to focus only on certain specific aspects of this subject, and it is certainly not exhaustive, but rather an invitation to talk about

this new monster. Maybe explore its connection to romanticism and how both genres have managed to enrich each other, or how these monsters would be configured in contemporary times.

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