

“If you were less pretty I think I should be very much afraid of you”: A Female Personification of Death in Irish Gothic Literature

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Introduction: Nineteenth-Century Ireland’s Social Concerns

When discussing Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872), it is worth noting its value alongside Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) as a definitive text of Irish gothic¹ literature. *Carmilla* tells the story of Laura, a young girl and narrator of the story, who embarks upon a close but dangerous friendship with mysterious Carmilla, a vampire. Central to the subject matter of Le Fanu’s text are issues of female sexuality and colonisation, which act as a reflection of the social concerns of nineteenth-century Ireland. This article will focus on the issue of female sexuality in Le Fanu’s novel by exploring the role of woman as a deadly lover. In the process it is necessary to first consider the cultural context of the Ireland that inspired *Carmilla*.

Victorian Ireland consisted of both Irish Catholics and Anglo-Irish Protestants,

1 While the term “Irish gothic” is problematic in terms of a simple definition, in this context it is used as a general reference to material within the gothic genre that has an Irish author/connection and that is concerned with issues of Irish society.

and tensions regarding land issues as well as the political, ethnic, and religious differences between the two groups were high. This social division is evident in the subject matter of much of Le Fanu's work, especially his writings on Irish affairs, in which he often portrays Irish Catholic figures as monstrous beings. This was most likely due to the fact that his family belonged to the latter category of Anglo-Irish Protestants, who felt socially isolated and marginalised by the Catholics despite embracing an Irish lifestyle and often marrying into native Irish families. However, as Irish gothic critic Jarlath Killeen has stated, Ireland is never actually mentioned in *Carmilla* (2013, 99). He contends that the Anglo-Styrian family of the text are representative of the Anglo-Irish through their obsession to "maintain an English identity in a foreign land" (Killeen 2013, 101), and, furthermore, that the figure of Carmilla represents the old Irish Catholic aristocracy that has "ris[en] from apparent death ... to wreak revenge on those who attained control of their estates" (Killeen 2013, 103). Emphasising the fact that the story is set far away from Ireland, he also notes that its eastern European setting allows Le Fanu to explore the difficulties surrounding the co-existence of the coloniser and the colonised people. In addressing these particular racial and social dialectics, *Carmilla* reaffirms the value of gothic narratives in the discussion of various socio-cultural anxieties regarding politics, religion, or gender.

When considered in these terms, it becomes clear that Carmilla's role as a threat to the stability of both the family unit and social order is deliberate on Le Fanu's part. Her character, very much defined by her homosexuality, is then especially relevant when read from a gender studies perspective because it suggests that this characteristic is what makes her dangerous. The overlapping of political and feminist issues in the novella is evident in Renee Fox's claim that Le Fanu uses the homoeroticism in the story to "reimagine the relationship between the different political factions of nineteenth-century Ireland" (2013, 112), and does so by showing how relations with Carmilla influence Laura and, subsequently, change her Anglo-Irish narrative voice to one that questions her familial and social obligations. Furthermore, the novella's preoccupation with the maintenance of female identity through the control of female sexuality

illustrates general social attitudes towards women of the Victorian era, which I will discuss in greater detail later on in this essay. These gendered power struggles within the text illustrate how changes in Victorian women's roles and their newfound ability to actively seek out an education, a career, and/or sexual relations that challenge conventional gender roles. The traditional representation of death as a male figure was increasingly challenged during that time as illustrated by Carmilla's embodiment of this role. Her arrival at Laura's home instantly changes the social dynamics of the novella to a world of gender imbalance that is ruled by femininity and is filled with passive men and oppressive women. Additionally, her ruthless pursuit of Laura and the intimate relationship that follows raise the aforementioned notion of female homosexuality and women's position as the sexual predator and figure of death. Her actions show how the female figure of death, in this instance, represents the dangerous threat of female sexuality with regard to patriarchal supremacy. Femininity here can be psychoanalytically defined as the 'monstrous feminine', which is the "feminine excess [that] exorcises fears regarding female sexuality and women's ability to procreate" (Gamble 2006, 253). Barbara Creed argues that this term is a simple reversal of the traditional "male monster," but "as with all other stereotypes of the feminine... [the female monster] is defined in terms of her sexuality" (1993, 3). This statement, therefore, highlights the importance of her gender in the construction of her monstrosity, which, thereby, reinforces Twitchell's argument that femininity, by definition, excludes all forms of aggressive, monstrous behaviour (cited in Creed 1993, 7). This suggests that women are bound by the socially-constructed definition of their nature and can only exist passively as the victim. Carmilla's ability to represent the female figure of death can then be seen as a challenge to the traditional notion of passive and pure femininity as an inherent part of female identity. Transgressing these antiquated conceptions of what it means to be a woman, Carmilla's role requires that she carries out the conventionally masculine acts of colonisation, seduction, penetration and murder. In accordance with this subverted paradigm, she offers an alternative, female version of the figure of death in Irish gothic literature and also embodies the danger associated with the social emergence of the "New Woman" in the Victorian era.

In *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*, Nina Auerbach describes the ideal Victorian woman as being a “silent and self-disinherited mutilate” (1982, 8). She argues that the repressive nature of Victorian culture and its oppression against its female population portrays its belief in the relation between femininity and power. This dualism is illustrated, for example, by how women ruled in the palace and in the home during the nineteenth century. The myth of womanhood in the Victorian period consisted of manufactured fantasies regarding woman’s nature, including those of “inferior brain weight, tendency to brain fever if educated, ubiquitous maternal instinct, [and] raging hormonal imbalance” (Auerbach 1982, 12), which perpetuated her inferior position within patriarchal society. In contrast, the “New Woman,” which was a term that was introduced in the late nineteenth century by novelist Sarah Grand, describes the onset of women who were now educated and employed, and, therefore, socially and financially independent of men. This alteration of stereotypical gender roles led to radical changes in women’s social conditions as they were no longer confined to the domestic sphere and demanded equal rights in the public sector. These progressions were thereby considered to be a direct challenge to the ruling of patriarchal society, and so, in an effort to suppress her growing popularity and power, the “New Woman” was often ridiculed in the newspapers and literature of the time. She was portrayed to be “a sort of unnatural production” or “a feminine Frankenstein” who was mocked for her “crude ideas on life, and... [a]bsolutely impossible remedies for the reconstruction [of society]” (Lady’s Realm, quoted in Calder 1976, 164). But the most threatening aspect of the “New Woman” was her newly candid attitude towards sexuality as in this era there was a general consensus that apart from prostitutes, women could not, or should not, experience sexual pleasure for it was considered to be a “marital duty [that was] only to be performed for the purpose of procreation” (Calder 1976, 88). However, women’s changing perspectives meant that they now felt free to explore alternatives to marriage and motherhood and to initiate sexual relationships themselves.

Monstrous Femininity in *Carmilla*

Carmilla epitomises the New Woman’s monstrous femininity through her role as a beautiful vampire who is obsessed with women and who preys specifically on young girls. Her exclusive interest and relations with the other female characters in the story strongly suggest her homoerotic tendencies. Thereby, the division of gender in the novel is emphasised, correlating with Simone de Beauvoir’s argument in *The Second Sex* that describes how lesbians avoid interaction with men that they consider to be their rivals because their male otherness makes them better equipped to “seduce, possess, and retain their prey” (1997, 443). The dominant ideology in Victorian culture that lesbianism is an “unnatural” form of sexuality is portrayed in *Carmilla* by the deteriorating health of her victims, once they submit to her charms and return her affections. Lesbianism, in terms of sexuality, also arises in Judith Butler’s discussion of Monique Wittig’s argument on how the position of the lesbian does not lie within the social constructions of gender, and, therefore, “is neither a woman nor a man” as she exists “beyond the categories of sex” (cited in Butler 1990, 113). Lesbianism can thus be defined as a third gender that is separate from the rigid binary oppositions of male and female gender constructions. Butler summarises Wittig’s argument in her claim that to be lesbian or gay is to no longer know one’s sex (1990, 122) and builds upon de Beauvoir’s theory of becoming a woman with the notion that this process is not fixed as “it is possible to become a being whom neither *man* nor *woman* truly describes” (127). This creates an internal subversion of gender identity, in which the binary characteristics of male and female are both assumed and propagated to such an extent that they no longer make sense, according to the social paradigm. These discussions expose the social constructions that are arguably at the foundation of all gender definitions, and highlight the urgent need to continue re-examining them. *Carmilla* does so by challenging Victorian society’s rigid attitude towards homosexuality through her claim that she does not have an “unnatural” sexuality. She argues instead that her sexuality’s natural state is proven by the fact that she is a part of nature, regardless of her sexual orientation:

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. (Le Fanu 2004, 40)

Her passionate speech disputes any claims that homosexuality could be regarded as anything other than a natural state of being. It stresses the fact that all life is governed by its creation from nature and that its ability to connect all living things proves that all humans are fundamentally the same, despite being categorised by social definition or sexual preference.

Carmilla relies on her beauty and child-like façade to have a trance-like effect on the other women in the novel, who initially describe her as being “the prettiest creature ever [seen]” with “such a sweet voice” (Le Fanu 2004, 24). This innocent disguise allows her to enter the female space of the domestic sphere quite easily, and she first appears during Laura’s early childhood years as her strange night-time visitor, who has a “solemn, but very pretty face” (10). Her first interaction with Laura subverts the union of a mother nursing her infant as Laura describes how Carmilla’s actions initially soothe and lull her back to sleep, only to be suddenly awoken “by a sensation as if two needles ran into my breast very deep at the same moment” (10). Her depiction of this embrace evokes an image of painful penetration that highlights the phallic nature of Carmilla’s seduction. Furthermore, the destruction of this maternal imagery is the first suggestion of Carmilla’s role as the sexual pursuer that was traditionally filled by the male suitor. It sets up the gender dynamic of the girls’ relationship, which can be examined through Calder’s notion on how “the violence of the male predator [in fiction] is emphasized by the helplessness of his victim...for if the male were preying on an equal the whole effect would be lost” (1976, 114). In other words, the female must remain weaker than the male to justify her inferior victimised status. Furthermore, Laura’s submission to Carmilla’s enchantment exemplifies the notion of the “entranced woman,” who, according to the Victorian myth, is “seemingly helpless in the grip of her hyperconscious male oppressor, [and whose] trance is not passivity but an ominous gathering of power as she transfigures herself from humanity to beatitude” (Auerbach 1982, 40). Laura’s role as the helpless female in this

instance is highlighted by the fact that Carmilla’s violent and masculine act of penetration takes place when she is unconscious and presumably safe in her bed. The trauma that Laura encounters during this exchange adds to her nervous disposition as she recalls knowing that the visit of “the strange woman was not a dream” (Le Fanu 2004, 11), and so, for a long time afterwards, she remains “awfully frightened” (11). Her memory of this event occurs during the first night of Carmilla’s stay as their guest when Laura recognises her “pretty, even beautiful” (26) face with its “melancholy expression” (27), as belonging to the same lady from twelve years earlier. This connection leads to her first feeling repulsed by Carmilla – a feeling that she quickly represses when Carmilla claims to have had a reciprocating vision of Laura. Her ability to manipulate Laura is demonstrated by her false allegation that she does not “know which one [of them] should be most afraid of the other” (Le Fanu 2004, 28), and, furthermore, that if Laura “were less pretty [she] should be very much afraid of [her]” (28). These apparently mutual confessions create a budding intimacy between the two girls as they suggest that the union has been predestined, causing Laura to experience the first symptoms of love/lust towards her new companion. She notes at this early stage how the connection makes her feel, suggesting that she already has “a right to [Carmilla’s] intimacy,” and admits to feeling strangely “drawn towards her” (Le Fanu 2004, 28). She consciously represses any feelings of repulsion towards Carmilla, and, instead, focuses on how she is “so beautiful and so indescribably engaging” (Le Fanu 2004, 29), despite possessing an inner “coldness” that was “beyond her years” (32). This stage of their bond is a natural part of early adolescence as, arguably, “there are lesbian tendencies in almost all young girls, tendencies that are hardly distinguishable from narcissistic enjoyment...in her self-adoration is implied the worship of femininity in general” (de Beauvoir 1997, 366). It is women’s status as the “absolute *object* of desire” (366) that lead to the creation of platonic and carnal female relationships. Only later, when a young girl gains more knowledge of her own character, does she realise that a female figure does not have “sufficient *otherness*” to hold her interest and finds a male replacement for her instead (370).

Any alternative to this heterosexual outcome is discouraged by society, as discussed in Adrienne Rich's essay "Compulsive Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," which claims that Western tradition has used the heterosexual family model as the basic social unit to teach women that they "need men as social and economic protectors, for adult sexuality, and for psychological completion" (1996, 140). The underlying implication of this rigid structure is that "women who do not attach their primary intensity to men [will be] condemned to an even more devastating outsiderhood than their outsiderhood as women" (Williams 1996, 140). In her attempts to lure Laura into this particular state of outsiderhood by alienating the young woman from her father as male protector, Carmilla's homosexual behaviour personifies a threat to Laura's social and family status. Carmilla becomes the dominating presence in Laura's life. She thereby exemplifies the masculine lesbian, who conforms to de Beauvoir's notion of the "masculine protest," which calls for the female to "masculinise herself". This form of female masculinisation occurs by imitating male characteristics according to the dominant social paradigm, or by "mak[ing] use of her feminine weapons to wage war on the male" (de Beauvoir 1997, 74). This theory emphasises the constructed nature of femininity as a product of socio-cultural power dynamics, demonstrating that femininity is not an inherent part of female anatomy but merely a role imposed upon women by mainstream society. Given the performative nature of this role, women are pressured into engaging in a type of masquerade that appeals to their male counterparts:

[T]he masquerade ... is what women do ... in order to participate in man's desire, but at the cost of giving up their own Paradoxical as this formulation might seem, it is in order to be the phallus, that is, the signifier of the desire of the Other, that the woman will reject an essential part of her femininity, notably all its attributes through masquerade. It is for what she is not that she expects to be desired as well as loved. (Lacan and Irigaray, cited in Butler 1990, 47-8)

The various components of masquerade theory illustrate once again how the social construction of a false femininity demands women to submit to man's desired image of female identity and all its performative demands. It

also emphasises how women must first sacrifice their desire before they can truly become the male object of desire. This practice ensures that the female figure retains a position of passivity within the sexual pursuit. The "masculine protest" becomes even more interesting when considered in light of this theory because it demands that the female figure uses these performatives against her male counterpart in order to manipulate him. Carmilla's behaviour in the text demonstrates both aspects of this "masculine protest" theory. Firstly, she assumes the masquerade of a young and sickly girl in order to fool Laura's father into extending an invitation into his home and granting her unlimited access to his only daughter. This façade of helplessness portrays how the "woman who wishes for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared by men" (Riviere, cited in Butler 1990, 51). Secondly, she emulates a male behaviour of actively seeking out the object of her affection in an effort to fulfil the primal need for sexual relations (and in her case, blood). Her masculine role in the relationship is even manifested in her physicality, which mirrors the traditional male suitor's tall, dark and handsome depiction, as illustrated by Laura's account of Carmilla's outward appearance:

Above the middle height of women...her complexion was rich and brilliant...her eyes large, dark, and lustrous...her hair...so magnificently thick...and in colour a rich very dark brown, with something gold. (Le Fanu 2004, 31)

Additionally, she had a "sweet low voice" (Le Fanu 2004, 31) that she used to put Laura under a deep compulsion: "[During their] foolish embraces [from] which I [Laura] used to wish to extricate myself [but] 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" (33). This intimate account of their relationship demonstrates how Carmilla uses masculine attributes to carry out her deadly seduction of Laura, who, in turn, tries to justify and suppress her attraction to another girl by imagining that she is "a boyish lover" (35) instead. Carmilla can therefore be viewed as a sexualised dark double of Laura. She indulges in her homosexual desires despite social disapproval and promises Laura that "you are mine, you shall be

mine, you and I are one forever" (34). This illustrates the most terrifying aspect about her imitation of male behaviour, which is that it "threatens to seduce the daughters of patriarchy away from their proper gender roles" (Creed, cited in Faxneld 2010, 3) as wives and mothers to future generations. Indeed, the concluding encounter between Carmilla and the band of men at the end of the novel (that sees her staked and decapitated), can be read as a restoration of the social order as according to the collective principles of Victorian Ireland. The staking reminds the lesbian lover that "the true function of a woman is that of a receiving vessel" (Faxneld 2010, 3) and returns the female figure to her proper place within society's rigid stance towards sexual relations. Additionally, her decapitation can be read in Freudian terms as a castration that de-masculinises the female demon "who has expressed an inappropriately masculine and active sexual desire" (3) and so must be destroyed. The ritualistic nature of her destruction is also symbolic in the sense that it is a phallic inversion of her earlier penetration of Laura.

The most definitive threat of Carmilla's masculinity/active sexuality, however, is the presence of "the sharpest tooth – long, thin, pointed, like an awl, like a needle" (Le Fanu 2004, 39), as noted by the anonymous hunchback figure. The existence of such a phallic feature on a female character suggests her encompassment of a hidden masculinity, and highlights the blurring of gender definitions in the text. The danger that this attribute could possibly cause harm to the female character is addressed in the hunchback's offer to "make it round and blunt," so that it will "not hurt the young lady" (Le Fanu 2004, 39). Although he speaks directly to Carmilla when he says this, his phrasing is ambiguous enough to suggest that his concern may actually be in reference to Laura and the threat that the tooth poses to her wellbeing. This interpretation is supported by Carmilla's presumption that he is actually addressing both of them, which she reveals through her claim that his words "insult *us*" (Le Fanu 2004, 39). Her condemnation of him for this apparent disrespect illustrates a coincident fear of interaction with men, as discussed earlier, and a sense of pride in this particular attribute. Furthermore, the existence of this feature appears to influence her behaviour towards Laura as revealed in Laura's confession of

experiencing various dream sequences in which she feels

a sensation as if a hand was drawn softly along my cheek and neck. 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 [until she felt a subsequent] sense of strangulation [that] turned into a dreadful convulsion. (Le Fanu 2004, 57)

This act illustrates how Carmilla adopts the traditional (male) vampire method of hunting and seducing the female victim only when she is asleep and, therefore, in a state of helplessness. It also highlights the ominous nature of their interactions, which subsequently illustrates the fact that Laura's safety is always threatened in Carmilla's presence as the female figure of death, which can end her life at any given time.

Laura's Awakening

The threat posed to male supremacy by an uninhabited female sexuality links Carmilla to the overtly sexual "native woman" who epitomises wild and animalistic behaviour as "the native is the earthly" (Veeder 1986, 82), and "the enemy of values...the absolute evil" (JanMohamed 1983, 5). Carmilla's underlying feral nature is revealed by her ability to shape-shift into a "sooty-black...monstrous cat" (Le Fanu 2004, 52) that attacks Laura, and afterwards reverts back to her female human form. Fred Botting argues that the imagery of this feline creature embodies the negative notion of female sexuality within the context of Victorian culture as it represents Carmilla's "sexual, primitive regression and independent femininity" (1996, 94) as well as the threat of violence that lies within her character. He states that her ability to shape shift is a prominent reason why her presence is such a threat to the social order because it implies that she does not have "a singular or stable nature or identity" (98). This chameleon quality allows her to effortlessly move between even the strictest of familial and sexual boundaries set by patriarchal society of the Victorian era. Laura's encounter with this feline creature makes her see Carmilla in a different light afterwards, as she realises for the first time that

“there was not the slightest stir of respiration” (Le Fanu 2004, 52) in her chest. As the reader views Carmilla’s character only in terms of Laura’s narrative, she is now presented from Laura’s new perspective, which finally reveals Carmilla’s dark secret. This leads to the most visible depiction of her “inner savage,” which occurs during one of Laura’s final encounters with her where she wears a “white nightdress, [and is] bathed, from her chin to her feet, in one great stain of blood” (Le Fanu 2004, 58). This imagery signifies the ability of the “native woman” to partake in the dangerous and conventionally masculine act of hunting. Laura’s ability to recognise the blurring of Carmilla’s identity after these revelations raises the notion of the “female gaze,” according to gothic critic Anne Williams’ theory, which describes the ability to recognise that “appearances may deceive” and that “the identity of the other is complex” (1995, 149). Another indication of this skill is evident when Laura recognises the doubling of Carmilla’s identity through the discovery of Mircalla, Countess Karnstein’s portrait (Rickels 1999, 166). While her father admits to seeing no resemblance between the two women, Laura is certain that the woman in the painting is an identical “effigy to Carmilla” (Le Fanu 2004, 44), thereby uncovering Carmilla’s personal and social masquerade. Laura also discovers that the various revisions of Carmilla’s name are limited to a spelling that “should at least reproduce, without the omission or addition of a single letter, those, as we say, anagrammatically, which compose it” (105-6). This gives further confirmation of Laura’s ability to practice the “female gaze” and single out deception in the other. Additionally, it illustrates Carmilla’s imitation of the traditional/male vampire’s constraint, as he cannot lie about his identity and so must find an alternative way to present a pseudo name that will disguise his true identity from humans.

The ambiguous plurality of Carmilla’s identity is problematic as it suggests that she cannot seem to move beyond the mirror stage of her development, which sees the infant “recognise [their] own image as such in a mirror” and seek out a “visual action of an image akin to its own” (Lacan 1966, 76) for the development of the ego. This suggests that Carmilla’s exclusive choice of young, female victims may be an attempt to escape this stagnant developmental stage.

Consequently, Laura becomes her mirror image, and, in return, Carmilla acts as a reflection of Laura’s repressed unconsciousness due to the childhood trauma of her mother’s death. This concept is supported by their identical illnesses and their sometimes mirrored routines, such as Laura’s admission to copying “Carmilla’s habit of locking her bedroom door...[and] making a brief search through her room, to satisfy herself that no lurking assassin or robber was ensconced” (Le Fanu 2004, 51). This act of locking the bedroom door in the latter part of the novel suggests that the nature of their relationship has progressed into a sexual one. According to Bettelheim, who claims that “a small locked room often stands in dreams for the female sexual organs, turning a key in a lock often symbolises intercourse” (1991, 233). Their practice of this intimate union is hinted at in Carmilla’s frank proposition to Laura when they first meet, telling her of her wish to “live in your warm life, and you shall die sweetly into mine” (Le Fanu 2004, 33). Her confession to Laura that she has “been in love with no one and never shall...unless it should be with you” (45) gives further encouragement to their union. They are now open in their affections for one another by walking “each with her arm above the other’s waist” (45) and no longer hide their kisses as Carmilla repeats her claim that “I live in you; and you would die for me, I love you so” (46).

It is only when the novella’s group of men identify Carmilla as a vampire in the end that they recognise her to be a patriarchal threat that needs to be managed and destroyed, so that they can restore the social order once again. Her inner masculinity is represented one final time by her ability to procure Spielsdorf’s sword, which symbolises male strength and superiority. By taking possession of it, Carmilla subverts traditional roles and embodies the male power and control that is associated with this weapon. Her death ensures that gender roles have been returned to their proper, conventional state by the end of the story. Even at this stage, however, there is a strong suggestion that Laura has begun her transition to immortality as she craves Carmilla’s return, “fancying that [she] heard the light step of [her] at the drawing room door” (Le Fanu 2004, 108). Their eventual separation causes Laura a great deal of pain and she describes many symptoms of heartbreak in Carmilla’s “sinister

absence" (101), during which she claims to experience "nightly sufferings" (101). She confesses at the end of the story that she is still haunted by the ghost of Carmilla, whose image often "returns...sometimes the playful, languid, beautiful girl; sometimes the writhing fiend" (107-8), which, according to Botting, summarises the "polymorphous representations of female sexuality" (1996, 94) in the novel. He states that it is a reassertion of meaning and sexual difference that finally ends the relationship between the two girls. However, if Laura's changeover has taken place, she will simply replace Carmilla and become the new embodiment of the transfiguring female in the text. Her conversion would indicate a female ability to procreate without any masculine input, which would be the ultimate female power. Through this process, their identities would unite as one; Carmilla would overcome the boundaries of nature and become the creator of a new being, thus fulfilling the role of a God-like figure. This death or re-birth can be regarded as the girls' only possibility to break free from the bindings of patriarchal definitions based on gender categories.

Conclusion: Rebalancing Gender Relations

The ambiguity of Carmilla's identity and sexual behaviour illustrates the complexity of changing social and gender definitions in Victorian Ireland. Additionally, the various stages of the relationship between Carmilla and Laura offer an alternative/female depiction of "Death and the Maiden": its beginning is defined by the female pursuit of the object of her sexual desire and its ending occurs as a result of the maiden's realisation and exposing of death's true (and deadly) nature. From a social perspective, Carmilla's presence within the female space of the home emphasises the disharmony between the "New Woman" of the Victorian era and the domestic sphere. From a gender perspective, her character highlights the ability of the sexually promiscuous female to use the traditional feminine attributes of beauty and helplessness to create a masquerade of innocence that threatens the social order. In the end, her defeat suggests that the feminine world of the novella can only be saved by the patriarchal band of hunters. This conclusion is particularly significant because it removes the female impersonator of masculine behaviour/power

from the text, and, in doing so, it suggests that a power imbalance in gender relations is an essential factor in the restoration of social order.

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