

## **"Carmilla": The 'Red Flag' of Late Nineteenth Century Vampire Narratives?**

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*Cet article s'intéresse aux angoisses masculines reliées au sang menstruel et suggère leur présence, voilée et métaphorique, dans des récits gothiques de la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. L'auteure s'oppose à l'affirmation de Showalter selon qui il y a une absence de réflexion littéraire sur les règles et le sang menstruel. Cette analyse du récit « Carmilla » de Sheridan Le Fanu ainsi que du genre gothique montre que de tels récits peuvent être reçus comme un « drapeau rouge » qui vient montrer la présence d'une réflexion littéraire sur le sang menstruel et les angoisses qui lui sont reliées. La lecture de Laura Grenfell montre que « Carmilla » à la fois propose et renégocie les modèles de la femme bourgeoise égoïste dont la sexualité menstruelle est stérile.*

According to Julia Kristeva, "Any secretion or discharge that leaks out of the feminine or masculine body defiles" (102). But, she argues, women's blood has been represented as more abject in hegemonic discourses because it points to the fertile nature of women's bodies — to menstrual blood — which, she claims, threatens "the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference" (102). As a sign of sexual difference, menstrual blood operates in Western society to elicit (male) horror and anxiety because it marks "the place where meaning collapses ... what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (1, 4). It marks the place of that which cannot be completely known, contained or controlled by science or knowledge and hence it affronts our notions of subjectivity. Luce Irigaray argues that "abhorrence" is projected towards such fluid because of its refusal to conform to the laws that govern our self-representations and understanding of the subject:

The 'subject' identifies himself with/in an almost material consistency that finds everything flowing abhorrent. ... it is the cohesion of a 'body' (subject) that he seeks, solid ground, firm foundation (237).

Irigaray contends that such fluids are culturally unrepresentable with-

in prevailing philosophical models of ontology because these models privilege the solid, the one, the unified.

While prevailing models of ontology may be unable to represent the true nature of body fluids, it is nevertheless critical and illuminating to examine the cultural function of blood as a symbol of disruption and anxiety in society. Kristeva's exploration of the symbolics of blood continues:

blood, as a vital element, also refers to women, fertility, and the assurance of fecundation. It thus becomes a fascinating semantic crossroads, the propitious place for abjection, where *death* and *femininity*, *murder* and *procreation*, *cessation of life* and *vitality* all come together (96 emphasis original).

These "semantic crossroads" of blood, the female body, murder and procreation represent the main symbolic elements of the late nineteenth-century Gothic vampire narrative, a narrative which arguably embodies male fear and anxiety regarding the unrepresentable, the uncontainable and the unknowable — menstrual blood.

In this paper I argue that the male anxieties associated with menstrual blood are present in late nineteenth-century Gothic narratives, albeit in veiled and metaphoric form. Elaine Showalter contends that there is an "almost total disappearance, outside of scientific literature, of any explicit allusion to this large area of human experience" (1972, 43). Menstruation, she asserts, "has no literary reflection" despite the fact that "the menstrual myth underlies much of the literature devoted to the woman question in Victorian journals" (38, 43 emphasis added). There is no doubt that, as Showalter states, menstruation had a particular presence in late nineteenth century scientific and political discourse. Indeed, many medical texts, such as Dr E. H. Clarke's *Sex in Education*, read women through the prism of blood. This was possibly due to the fact that it was only in the mid nineteenth-century that science and medicine came to understand menstruation as the outward sign of the ovaries and the uterus. This connection was depicted very crudely by one British gynaecologist James Matthews Duncan as follows: "Menstruation is like the red flag outside an auction sale; it shows that something is going on inside" (Laqueur 213-4).

I propose in this paper to counter Showalter's assertion that there is an *absence* of literary reflection regarding menstruation and menstrual blood. The following exploration of Sheridan Le Fanu's vampire narrative "Carmilla", and the gothic genre itself, illustrates that such narratives can be read as displaying the 'red flag': as exemplifying the

literary reflection of menstrual blood and its concomitant anxieties. In my view, "Carmilla" provides and negotiates models of the "selfish" bourgeois woman and her feared menstros and non-procreative sexuality. I conclude by drawing a few comparisons with the better-known vampire narrative, Stoker's *Dracula*.

### **The Metaphoric Anxiety**

In *The Flesh Made Word*, Helen Michie argues that Victorian narrative produces and replicates "the dis-ease" associated with the female body in the late nineteenth century. This "dis-ease" was manifested in cultural narrative through "the contradiction between its absence and presence. ... the body itself appears as a series of tropes of rhetorical codes that distance it from the reader in the very act of its depiction" (5). Michie observes that "metaphoric allusions to the body" are central to Victorian language in that all "discussions of the body are always immediately supplemented with metaphors from other fields of discourse" (5). Regarding metaphors of the female body, Susan Gubar echoes the French feminists Irigaray and Kristeva in arguing that "one of the primary and most resonant metaphors provided by the female body is blood" (296). This metaphoric mode of representing and constructing the body, described by Michie, is particularly apparent in the late nineteenth-century Gothic genre, a genre which Kelly Hurley in *The Gothic Body* describes as "thoroughly imbricated with biology and social medicine" (5) in that it can be read as attempting a fictional synthesis of the discourses of degeneration, evolutionism, criminal anthropology, physiology, psychology and sociology. However, one of the dominant metaphors employed by this genre is arguably the metaphor of blood.

Before exploring the use of metaphor and the negotiation of scientific discourses in Gothic vampire narratives, I want at first to trace some of the critical developments in the Gothic genre at this time. Robert Tracy points out that between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was a shift in the Gothic genre which indicates "a re-ordering of the categories of fear" (35). While the eighteenth-century Gothic novel is about bodiless ghosts and psychological terror, the nineteenth-century Gothic narrative figures embodied vampires which represent "at once a physical, a supernatural or spiritual, and a sexual menace" (35). Tracy explains that this "double threat, at once physical and spiritual, is in practice presented as essentially sexual" (34) and he offers as an example the sexual advances of the vampire Carmilla to her victim Laura in Sheridan Le Fanu's short story

"Carmilla". This shift in the Gothic genre gave the vampire figure not only a new and intensified element of sexuality but also endowed it with a new sense of corporeality which enabled it to pose a physical and sexual threat.

At the same time another shift is visible in the Gothic genre and that relates to gender. This is traced by Alexandra Warwick with the aid of two paintings which were painted about a century apart (207). The first is J. H. Fuseli's well-known painting *The Nightmare* (1783) which depicts a bedroom scene, framed by heavily draped curtains, wherein a young woman, whose body is contoured by her nightdress, lies asleep or unconscious. The woman appears to be in a state of suffocation while on her chest squats a demon figure. A bit more than a hundred years later, at the end of the nineteenth century, Phillip Burnes-Jones replicated this bedroom scene down to the detail of the heavily draped curtains and bedroom furniture in his painting *The Vampire* (1897). The only detail that changed was the sex of the victim and vampire. In the same position as the woman lies a man who is either dead or sexually exhausted and in the posture of Fuseli's demon crouches a woman with prominent teeth. Warwick writes of this relocation of danger or fear: "it is no longer the threat to women from outside dangers that occupies the popular imagination, but rather the threat from them, and more specifically the danger they represent to men" (207 emphasis original). Such images of the physical and sexual threat posed by women in Victorian vampire narratives have been the source of much critical work. Warwick, for example, performs an interpretation through their trope of infection in relation to the spread of syphilis at this time. Interestingly, however, critics so far have done little more than touch on the physical and sexual threat posed by menstros women.

Twenty five years before this reworking of the vampire theme in art, which happened to coincide with the publishing of the most famous vampire narrative, *Dracula*, Sheridan Le Fanu wrote "Carmilla" which is described as not only the "first lesbian vampire narrative" (Case 6) but also the first vampire narrative to figure centrally a woman vampire. Following this landmark, about two thirds of the fifteen, or thereabouts, vampire stories which were published in this quarter of a century between "Carmilla" and *Dracula* figured the female vampire. Clearly in both the art and literature of this period, women and their bodies incited particular social anxiety which was manifested through the metaphors of blood and vampires.

While there was a shift within the Gothic genre to the figure of the

embodied predatory female vampire, the shift in this period to the Gothic genre itself is traced by Hurley to the genre's characteristic cyclical re-emergence "at periods of cultural stress, to negotiate the anxieties that accompany social and epistemological transformations and crises" (5). In this particular period the Gothic genre was used to negotiate the disruptive and sometimes traumatic effects produced by new scientific concepts such as natural selection on society.

The Gothic genre's conventions of supernaturalising and framing the narrative enabled it to distance its negotiation of social anxieties invoked by certain scientific discoveries, such as the discovery of the process of spontaneous ovulation in the mid-nineteenth century. In its use of the supernatural sphere for example, the vampire narrative was empowered to discuss social anxieties relating to blood otherwise considered taboo. Despite the plethora of medical texts, such as Dr E. H. Clarke's, which proselytised the public about the pathological nature of women's blood, the subject was nevertheless still regarded as a taboo. The most effective medium for the representation of such a subject in literature was therefore the metaphor which is a central element in the vampire narrative because it partly operates to distance concepts.

It is critical to recognise, however, that narratives do not express ideological anxieties and obsessions but rather they produce and reproduce them, transforming them into literary effects (Boumelha 6). The question then is whether the late nineteenth-century Gothic narrative re-produced and transformed the anxieties and obsessions regarding menstrual blood and menstruating women into literary effects. Thus, in this paper I explore the possibility of reading the Gothic vampire narrative of "Carmilla" as supplying a metaphoric vocabulary with which to read the production of the ideologies of menstruation in Victorian literature — or what Showalter calls, menstruation's "literary reflection".

### **The "Blood-stained annals" of Sheridan Le Fanu's "Carmilla"**

"Carmilla" begins with a prologue in which an unknown narrator informs the reader that the following "Narrative" illuminates an "Essay" written by the "learned" Doctor Hesselius upon "[t]his mysterious subject" (274). The nature of this "strange" and "mysterious" subject is alluded to as "involving, not improbably, some of the profoundest arcana of our *dual existence*, and its *intermediates*" (274 emphasis added). William Veeder contends this can be interpreted in multiple ways and offers in addition to the obvious dualisms of human-

vampire and heterosexual-lesbian, the angel-whore dualism. The "Narrative" is described as a "case" in "but one volume of the series of that extraordinary man's collected papers" (274). The short prologue performs the standard Gothic convention of framing the narrative, which here is firmly framed within medical discourse. Thus, what the prologue narrator describes as "a subject ... involving ... 'the profoundest arcana'" is to be located in this ostensible medical narrative wherein women, their blood and their bodies are central. In this context the references to "dual existence" and the "profoundest arcana" can also be read as referring to the biological dualism of man-woman, and the secrets and mysteries of sexual difference.

The narrative begins with all the classic Gothic conventions — within a page it establishes that the heroine is a young and "lonely" bourgeois woman living with her "old" English father in a secluded schloss in Styria, a place which no doubt meant archaic Eastern Europe to most Victorian readers. Like the frame provided by the prologue, this location is another Gothic convention which operates to distance and "other" the narrative. This "othering" of the narrative is amplified by the supernatural explanations of "the vampire" given at the narrative closure. The heroine is motherless — her mother having died of an unnamed cause when she was young — and she has had the attention of two governesses, Mademoiselle De Lafontaine and Madame Perrodon. The fact that the heroine-narrator remains nameless for half of her narrative and her surname is never known allows the reader to surmise that she represents "Everywoman"— a typical young bourgeois woman (Senf 51).

One night in Laura's almost uneventful life, a change unfolds as she strolls with her father and governesses in "the exquisite moonlight" (280). Mademoiselle De Lafontaine, whose name can be read literally as the fountain or the flow, declares with Gothic prescience that

when the moon shone with a light so intense it was well known that it indicated a special spiritual activity. The effect of the full moon in such a state of brilliancy was manifold. It acted on dreams, *it acted on lunacy, it acted on nervous people, it had marvelous physical influences* connected with life (281 emphasis added).

Moments later, Carmilla enters Laura's life via an accident. This coincidence of events marks a liminal stage in Laura's life: the "accident" which occurs on the night of a full moon appears to initiate Laura's symptoms of blood loss. Such conventions in the vampire myth invite

its interpretation as a symbolic story of women's rite of passage, and in particular the menarche. The moon is important in this rite of passage because, as Mademoiselle explains, it has "marvellous physical influences": it is widely held that the periodic rhythm of menstruation matches the cycles of the moon which exerts an influence over many earthly fluids including the tides. In *Man and Woman* Havelock Ellis establishes this connection between physiological periodicity and the moon as scientific "fact" by citing the scientific authority of the era, Charles Darwin:

The curious resemblance to the lunar cycle was long ago noticed. More recently Darwin suggested that the connection between physiological periodicity and the moon was directly formed at a very remote period of zoological evolution, and that the periodicity then impressed on the organism has survived until the present day (245).

Tamar Heller reads the "accident" and Carmilla's advent in the story as symbolising Laura's menarche (82). However, given the fact that Laura is already nineteen, considerably past the usual age for menarche, Carmilla's arrival can be alternatively interpreted as representing the advent of some form of feared menstrual "obstruction" (ie. irregularity) in Laura's menstrual economy. This may be connected to Carmilla's "intermediate" sexuality. George Chauncey explains:

The early medical case histories of lesbians ... predictably paid enormous attention to their menstrual flow ... Several doctors emphasized that their lesbian patients stopped menstruating at an early age, if they began at all, or had unusually difficult and irregular periods" (132).

Nineteenth century doctors assumed that because lesbians were outside of the heterosexual mode of production, wherein menstrual blood was understood to be solely related to procreation, they therefore did not embody the "natural" signs of womanhood such as the "red flag" of physiological periodicity.

A critical interpolation at this point in the narrative is the appearance of "a hideous black woman". As everyone rushes to attend Carmilla, "who appeared to be lifeless" (282), Mademoiselle notices a "hideous black woman, with a sort of coloured turban on her head, who was gazing all the time from the carriage window, nodding and

grinning derisively towards the ladies, with gleaming eyes and large white eye balls, and her teeth set as if in fury" (286). The meaning of the appearance of the black woman at this point of the narrative can be understood in its echo of the presence of the black woman in Manet's nude, *Olympia*, painted ten years earlier. Sander Gilman writes that one of the black servant's central functions in the visual arts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was "to sexualize the society in which he or she is found, ..[to] mark the presence of illicit sexual activity" (209). By the nineteenth century, "the central female figure is associated with a black female in such a way as to imply their sexual similarity. The association of figures of the same sex stresses the special status of female sexuality" (209). While the black woman in the narrative functions to symbolise Carmilla's excessive female sexuality, she also represents physiological difference which is evident from the exaggerated and crude description given by Mademoiselle. This difference is not necessarily a difference of race but more a symbolisation of a fundamental physiological difference between the two parties at the scene of the accident: the inhabitants of the schloss and those of the carriage. This textual move, in displacing fears of physiological difference onto the body of the "Other", the black woman, is, according to Smith-Rosenberg, characteristic of medical literature. She argues that medical authors frequently framed their own fears of the power of menstruating women as representative of primitive beliefs, in order to voice their ambivalence while simultaneously denying and ridiculing the validity of such myths (29).

Once Carmilla joins the inhabitants of the schloss, the narrative focus becomes the physiological and emotional states of both Laura and Carmilla. Carmilla's physiological condition is monitored by doctors from her entry to the schloss to her legally sanctioned extermination at the hands of medicine. Before leaving Carmilla in the care of Laura's father who "piqued himself on being something of a physician" (282), Carmilla's mother informs him, in language echoing a medical diagnosis, of her daughter's health: "she was in delicate health, and nervous, but not subject to any type of seizure ... nor to any illusions, being, in fact, perfectly sane" (286). The doctor who attends Carmilla declares that the "little shock to her *nerves* had passed away quite harmlessly" (287 emphasis added).

Once the doctor departs, Laura immediately visits the patient and quickly feels drawn to her on a physical and emotional level. At the same time, Laura begins to observe her "beautiful" guest as an object of study. That night she notices "something of a languor and exhaus-



tion stealing over [Carmilla]" (289), and the next day she notes in more detail that despite "slender" Carmilla's "languid — *very languid*" movements, "there was nothing in her appearance to indicate an invalid" (290). Confused by the ardour of Carmilla's embraces, Laura is led to speculate whether Carmilla is either "subject to brief visitations of insanity" or is a boyish lover in disguise. She realises however that "there were too many things against this hypothesis ... there was always a languor about her, quite incompatible with a masculine system in the state of health" (293). Laura thus determines Carmilla's gender identity on the basis of her "bodily languor" which, the inference can be drawn, was considered the norm for bourgeois women of this time. Such "bodily languor" makes Carmilla seem "almost immediately, exhausted" after "a mere saunter": "This was a bodily languor in which her mind did not sympathise" (293). While this state of languor seems to exist in something of a flux, Carmilla suffers a fit of hysteria when she watches a funeral of one of her three young female peasant victims pass by, which leads Laura to comment: "This was the first time I had seen her exhibit any definable symptoms of that delicacy of health which her mother had spoken of" (294).

"The precautions of nervous people are infectious" (303) comments Laura as, on the night of a full moon, she emulates Carmilla in locking her bedroom door. That night she has a "nightmare" of "a sooty-black animal that resembled a cat ... I felt it spring lightly on the bed. The two broad eyes approached my face, and suddenly I felt a stinging pain as if two large needles darted, an inch or two apart, deep into my breast ... and I saw a female figure standing at the foot of the bed" (304). Here again we see the "marvellous physical effects" of the moon which, as Mademoiselle explained, "acted on lunacy, it acted on nervous people" (281). The word "lunacy" originated as a term to describe a change of an intermittent kind which was attributed to the changes of the moon. Such changes or fits of insanity and violence were believed to be a symptom of the menstrual function by nineteenth-century doctors and sexologists such as Havelock Ellis. The following morning, Laura feels "out of spirits and nervous" (305). After the following nights when she takes to wearing a charm, which Carmilla explains is perfumed as an antidote against "complaints ... trying the nerves", Laura says that she awakens in the mornings with "a sense of lassitude and melancholy ... that was almost luxurious ... and a languor weighed upon me all day" (306). At this point Laura experiences "a change":

I felt myself a changed girl ... an idea that I was slowly sinking took gentle, and somehow, not unwelcome possession of me. ...

There was an unaccountable fascination in its earlier symptoms that more than reconciled me to the incapacitating effect of that stage of the malady. This fascination increased for a time ... until it discoloured and perverted the whole state of my life. The first change I experienced was rather agreeable. ...

The prevailing [sensation] was of that pleasant, peculiar cold thrill which we feel in bathing, when we move against the current of a river. (306-7)

Laura finds the symptoms paradoxically pleasurable and painful and with a certain degree of narcissism she seems to luxuriate in her malady, much like the stereotyped "selfish" bourgeois woman of the period. This description echoes the following depiction of the menarche by G. Stanley Hall:

During the first few days she is introverted to strange sensations which ideally are not painful, but deliciously and sometimes ecstatically charming. ... as the wave of this great cosmic pulse which makes her live on a slope passes, her voice, her eye, complexion, circulation, and her very dreams are more brilliant. ... She feels her womanhood and glories in it like a goddess. ... The flow itself has been a pleasure and the end of it is a slight shock (492-3).

At the same time the change has evidently affected and infected Laura's nerves and sanity. The idea of infection can also be read here to imply another form of corporeal influence exerted by Carmilla over Laura's body. Given the physical closeness of the two women and their connection through blood, this infection could be in the form of menstrual synchronisation between the two women's bodies.

It is material that although Laura has been infected and has been suffering some of the same symptoms as Carmilla's "nerves" for three weeks, she refuses to tell her father of her "change". Much like the advice given by many nineteenth-century doctors to their patients' complaints of menstrual pain, Laura tells herself that her complaint is "one of the imagination, the nerves" (308). It appears that only her dead mother understands her condition as Laura hears one night a voice, "sweet and tender, and at the same time terrible, which said, 'Your mother warns you to beware of the assassin.'" A moment later,

Laura sees Carmilla, "standing, near the foot of my bed, in her white nightdress, bathed, from her chin to her feet, in one great stain of blood" (308). Heller suggests that this blood stain scene can be read as literalising "the violent narrative implicit in medical descriptions of menarche as a dangerous time for young girls, in which they are susceptible ... to nervous disorders" (82). Such violent images also echo the images given in medical texts of the process of menstruation itself, such as that given by Walter Heape, who wrote that during the formation of the menstrual clot, the entire epithelium is torn away at each period, "leaving behind a ragged wreck of tissue, torn glands, ruptured vessels, jagged edges of stroma, and masses of blood corpuscles ..." (Laqueur 221).

Fearing that there has been violence of some kind, Laura rouses the assistance of the women of the house, her father being "alas! .. quite out of hearing" (308), and orders the men to force open Carmilla's locked bedroom door. Upon finding the room empty, the narrator says, "we ... soon recovered our senses sufficiently to dismiss the men" (309). Laura desires that the search for blood-stained Carmilla should be kept amongst the women as much as possible. Later, the next day when Laura's father conjectures on the possible explanations (for Carmilla's disappearance the night before), Carmilla reminds him of "the limitations mamma has placed me under" to which Laura's father responds, "I need not approach the topics on which she desires our silence" (311). As to the exact nature of the subject on which Carmilla's mother has imposed a silence, or taboo, Laura and the reader can only guess. According to Murray, the medicalisation of menstruation discourse meant that women lost control of the language used to describe their experience and thus non-medical discussion of menstruation was silenced in the everyday lives of women (109). This "silence" in the private sphere, in the face of what Shuttleworth calls male "hysteria" (61) in the public sphere of medical textbooks, indicates the limitations and exclusions placed upon women in the realms of knowledge and power.

The narrative then moves to the visit of the doctor. After gathering the details of Laura's symptoms, the doctor speaks privately with her father and then shows her father the marks on her neck and throat (as opposed to her breast where Laura tells us she feels the "needles"). While the doctor gives a direction that Laura be monitored, both he and Laura's father withhold their knowledge regarding the nature or danger of Laura's malady. Laura's narrative is then interrupted by the General's visit and his story and at this point her narrative voice

becomes progressively distanced until, just before the closing moments, it dwindles into becoming a summary of the official narrative of the "Imperial Commission".

Interestingly, it unfolds from the General's narrative that his deceased ward, Bertha, whose symptoms were as protracted as those of Laura, was, like Laura, maternally descended from the Karnsteins. Both girls share in common their mother's family blood; a family which is said to have "blood-stained annals" (327). Both girls have also lost their mothers to unknown causes. Being motherless, the girls have, however, been denied access to certain knowledge which, it seems, is taboo for Carmilla to relate. Laura says of Madame Perrodon's surrogate mothering that her "care and good *in part* supplied to me the loss of my mother" (276 emphasis added).

As Bertha's story, which is almost identical to that of Laura, is narrated through the General, Laura begins to lose a hold on her narrative and her apparent lack of insight into her own condition sparks in the reader an element of doubt regarding the accuracy of her preceding narrative. Laura's narrative voice becomes most distant as an official explanation of her symptoms is established by the male authorities representing medical science, law and (presumably) religion. The narrative argues that "[i]f human testimony, taken with every care and solemnity, judicially, before commissions ... is worth anything, it is difficult to deny or even to doubt the existence of such a phenomenon as the vampire" (335). At this point it is apparent that such testimonies do not include those of the women victims, for Laura is denied both participation and voice in the proceedings of the Imperial Commission and its judgment that the vampire is the official cause. Women have no voice in the official story. Laura must resort to relating the climax of her own story by summarising her father's "copy of the report of the Imperial Commission" (336). It is from its medical "facts" that she is able to relate the legally sanctioned and brutal extermination of her lesbian lover:

there was a faint and appreciable respiration, and a corresponding action of the heart. The limbs were perfectly flexible, the flesh elastic; and the leaden coffin floated with blood, in which to a depth of seven inches, the body lay immersed. Here then were all the admitted proofs of vampirism (336).

Here the narrative performs the process of medicalising the vampire. The Baron subsequently attempts to make "it" subject to "a system of

extracted from his "voluminous digest of all the judicial cases" (337). Medical science thus attempts to make all mysteries conform to its laws and principles.

As a preface to his story of "the vampire", the General says: "I have been forced by extraordinary evidence to credit that which ran counter, diametrically, to all my theories. I have been made the dupe of a preternatural conspiracy" (317). It is unclear whether Laura has been made a complete dupe of this conspiracy as she signs off her narrative with the enigmatic words: "often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing room door" (339).

Throughout her narrative, Laura shows little admiration for the representatives of medicine, law and religion. Like her father, these men are invariably depicted as impotent and ineffectual: the doctor is described as "pallid and elderly", the priest as an "old man" with a "quavering voice" and the Baron as "quaint" and "grotesque" (277, 278, 336). There is certainly no hint at the end of a possible heterosexual romance narrative closure. Indeed, contrary to the assertion in the prologue that Laura has written her story for the "learned" Doctor Hesselius, she in fact addresses her narrative to "a town lady" (293). Laura's "reverie" of hearing Carmilla's "light step" at the end counters the attempt of medical science to frame and conclude her "case". Despite the crescendo of male discourses of medicine and law which temporarily take over her narrative, she manages to plant this final note of doubt into their wall of irrefutable "proofs" and truths. This note of subversion is amplified given her intended audience whose "earnest desire so repeatedly expressed" induced her to write her narrative, and by the fact that Laura still suffers from "nerves" (336). The question then is whether, through her narrative, the narrator has infected her female audience with her symptoms — her "diseased and degenerate" female desire — and thus stimulated further disruption of the heterosexual economy of production wherein women's blood exists solely in connection with procreation. Thus the mystery referred to in the prologue, "some of the profoundest arcana of our dual existence and its intermediates", can be read as referring to the mystery of the "intermediates"'s (ie. the vampire-lesbian's) relation to the menstrual economy as understood in late nineteenth-century medical science.

**Conclusion: "The Precautions of Nervous People are Infectious"**

Elizabeth Signorotti argues that *Dracula* is Stoker's response to "Carmilla" in that he corrects "Le Fanu's narrative of female empowerment by reinstating male control ... This, for Stoker, was the happy ending that Le Fanu failed to provide" (607, 628). Indeed, "Carmilla"'s ending is left unsettled, for the mutilation and "castration" scene of Carmilla fails to remedy the disruption she causes in both the narrative and the heterosexual mode of production. At the very last moment, Le Fanu allows Laura to plant a note of doubt into the narrative's supernatural explanations and there is a suggestion that Laura never really recovers from Carmilla's mental and physical infection. Although Laura escapes the heterosexual romance closure, the reader learns from the prologue that she nevertheless succumbs to the alternative fate for the Victorian heroine — that of death — but not before she is able to take the "precaution" of passing on her narrative to another woman.

The parallel battles for woman's blood and the mastery of the narrative which take place between Laura and the men of authority in "Carmilla" are played out in a more overt and dynamic form between Mina and Van Helsing in *Dracula*. In both texts, women become virtually locked out from the sphere of narrative production by the chorus of official narratives mounted by men of law, religion and medical science. Unlike Laura, Mina completely loses control over her narrative by the end, while her blood and sexual body are channelled into a socially productive mode. Once both the "selfish" bourgeois woman's blood and non-procreative sexuality are thus successfully regulated and contained, the threat they embody becomes exorcised.

Doctors in this era felt they had the social responsibility to combat all forms of menstrual "obstructions" such as those caused by contraception and abortions, and also those irregularities stimulated by lesbian sexuality — or even stimulated by women's narratives. Dr George Black, for example, warned women readers in 1888 that incautious perusal of female sensation novels had a "tendency to accelerate the occurrence of menstruation" (Showalter 1977, 160). This possibility of an infectious menstrual narrative is subtly invoked in "Carmilla" when Carmilla says to Laura, "As I draw near to you, you, in your turn, will draw near to others" (291) and then Laura subsequently addresses her menstrual narrative to "a town lady" whose "earnest desire" has induced her to write. Through the means of her narrative, Laura not only possibly infects her reader with her recently developed lesbian desire (Heller 90-91) but also with its supposed "obstructive"

*Dracula* can be read as a product of Stoker's own "infection" by Laura's narrative, "Carmilla". However, in Stoker's case, he resolutely cures and rids the body of his narrative of this disruptive "infection" by casting such "selfish" unproductive women to violent deaths and firmly reasserting male control over both narrative and the "red flag" of the female body.

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