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Uncovering the Void: Sapphism, Hysteria and the Phallic Myth in Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872)

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Signatura:

Acknowledgments

To Taylor Swift,

for shaping every word I write,

for teaching me there is power within our powerlessness,

for sanctifying female rage.

To Gemma López,

for her guidance, for her patience, for her reassurance but, above all,

for being an endless source of inspiration.

And to every woman in my life: may your friendship, your love, and your knowledge always be with me.

Abstract

Title: Uncovering the Void: Sapphism, Hysteria and the Phallic Myth in Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872)

Abstract: This paper analyses the ways in which Le Fanu's Carmilla exposes and subverts patriarchal heteronormative discourse and its domination of the female body. Through the study of the protagonists' relationship, this work argues that the novella reveals the fictionality of various patriarchal discourses as well as presents the alternatives of female (homo)sexuality, autonomy, and knowledge. To prove this, the topics of sapphism, hysteria and male authority are explored. The paper concludes that the relationship between Laura and Carmilla disrupts the gender-sex binary and the heteronormativity that uphold the patriarchal system, therefore uncovering its fictionality and its demonization of female desire and agency.

Key words: patriarchy, heteronormativity, sexuality, gender, *Carmilla*.

Títol: Descobrint el Buit: Safisme, Histèria i el Mite Fàl·lic a *Carmilla* de Le Fanu (1872).

Resum: Aquest treball analitza les formes en les quals l'obra *Carmilla* de Le Fanu revela i subverteix el discurs patriarcal heteronormatiu i la seva dominació del cos femení. Mitjançant l'estudi de la relació de les protagonistes, aquest escrit defensa que la novel·la destapa la ficció rere diversos discursos patriarcals i, també, presenta les alternatives de la (homo)sexualitat, autonomia i coneixement femenins. Per demostrar-ho, s'exploren els temes del safisme, la histèria i l'autoritat masculina en la novel·la. La conclusió d'aquest assaig és que la relació de la Laura i la Carmilla aboleix el binari sexe-gènere i l'heteronormativitat que sostenen el sistema patriarcal i, així doncs, la novel·la exposa la ficció i la demonització de la sexualitat i la independència femenines per part del patriarcat.

Paraules clau: patriarcat, heteronormarmativitat, sexualitat, gènere, *Carmilla*.

Contribution to the accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

The fifth goal for Sustainable Development is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Most specifically, women are encouraged to challenge implicit gender roles. This paper exposes the ways in which patriarchal heteronormative discourse constructs female bodies as submissive to male supremacy. Furthermore, this work reveals the various forms of patriarchal heteronormative discourse and their manipulation of female sexuality, autonomy and knowledge as inherently dangerous. By uncovering the fictionality of both gender-sex binary and heteronormativity, this study contributes to the erasure of gender disparities and violence, promoting equality for all bodies regardless of social constructs.

The Sustainable Development Goal of this paper is therefore related to Goal 5, “Gender Equality” and, particularly, to target 5.1: “End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere”.

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Introduction

From birth, the female body is trained to exist within patriarchal boundaries. We are tormented by endless whispers telling us to "Be sympathetic; be tender (...) Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure." (Woolf, 1931, p.1254). And with every image of what to be, there is a counterpart of what not to: "every angelically selfless Snow White must be hunted, if not haunted, by a wickedly assertive Stepmother" (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000, p.28). We are bombarded with this juxtaposition from childhood and, as we grow older, our beloved Disney stars are turned monstrous by the media. Adolescence, then, becomes a dangerous time for young girls whose purity is tainted by sexuality and whose submissiveness is replaced by agency. Therefore in our developmental years we quickly learn that we can either follow patriarchal femininity or, on the contrary, be shamed by and exiled from society. Dichotomies of mother-whore and angel-monster shape our bodies, and our emotions are useful when we are nurturing mothers like the Virgin Mary, but not when we are subversive like monstrous Eve. And myself — "I was cursed, like Eve, got bitten" (Swift, 2024, 00:28-00:30). As young girls, not only are our bodies inscribed by patriarchal discourse, but also, we are accused of feeling too much, too deeply. In my case, I remember my mother telling me not to be hysterical as I began to cry. This was a word she never used when scolding my brother. Why? Because the term has been constructed, historically and etymologically, as exclusively female; it conflates "the pejorative elements of femininity and of the irrational" (Maines, 1999, p.21). In the words of Rachel Maines (1999), "there is no analogous word "testerical" to describe, for example, male sports fan's behaviour during the Super Bowl." (p.21). In childhood, then, our emotions turn us into hysterics and, as we grow older, our voices and our opinions label us as the "madwoman". Almost a hundred years after Woolf's "Professions for Women", female bodies today are also haunted by the voice of the Angel in the House, the embodiment of patriarchal notions of femininity. If we escape these boundaries, even in our youth, we become problematic, loud, opinionated. I believe Swift (2019) described it best: "A man does something, it's strategic. A woman does the same thing, it's calculated. A man is allowed to react. A woman can only overreact." (personal communication, August 25). It is the aim of this study to analyse these very dichotomies, in an attempt to discern the ways in which patriarchal heteronormative discourse shapes the female body and the consequences of transgressing these boundaries.

When thinking of a topic for my final degree paper, my focus was on the female figure and, particularly, on nineteenth-century literature. This is due to the fact that, like Gilbert and Gubar (2000), I too noticed the recurring "Images of enclosure and escape, fantasies in which maddened doubles functioned as asocial surrogates for docile selves, (...) along with obsessive depictions of diseases like anorexia, agoraphobia, and claustrophobia." (p.10). Initially, I wanted to examine *Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights, Carmilla* and *The Bloody Chamber and Other stories,* in view of the fact that all four works made use of monstrosity and madness to escape patriarchal boundaries on femininity and female sexuality. However, due to the extension of the end of degree paper, I ultimately chose to focus solely on Le Fanu's *Carmilla*. Through the analysis of the novel I intend to prove its exposure of patriarchal heteronormative discourse as well as its subversion of it. In order to do so, this study presents, first, Torras' and Lacan's theories on gender and discourse, together with a brief explanation on the figure of the Victorian Angel in the House. Most importantly, this paper is divided into three topics: Sapphism, Hysteria and the struggle between female and male authority. The first section of this study connects Torras' theories on gender with Sapphism in the novel, revealing female (homo)sexuality as subversive of patriarchal heteronormativity as well as the consequences of this subversion. The following section of this paper is focused on patriarchal medical discourse and its demonisation of female sexuality through the construction of female hysterical disorders. The last section of this work centres around the disruption of patriarchal structures and figures, concluding with the reestablishment of male authority and the extermination of female autonomy, sexuality and knowledge. By examining Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, I intend to discover the ways in which patriarchal heteronormative discourse shapes and entraps the female body, as well as how the novel's female figures disrupt it. It is my belief that *Carmilla* imitates different forms of patriarchal heteronormative discourse to highlight its condemnation of femininity outside its constraints. Carmilla, lesbian vampire and hysteric, points to the patriarchal construction of female sexuality as both monstrous and pathological. Furthermore, Laura's transformation and her sexual knowledge reveal the possibility that beneath all angels lies a sensual monster, that beneath all women lies the hysteric and, therefore, the fictionality of the patriarchal heteronormative system is exposed. I aim to prove that the novel's sapphism, hysteria and the struggle for female authority uncover the void at the centre of patriarchal heteronormative discourse. Thus, I aim to liberate women from the burden of monstrosity and madness through the unveiling of patriarchal myths on female sexuality, autonomy and knowledge.

Theoretical Framework

Bodies, Identities, Sexualities

> "Muéstrame tu cuerpo desnudo y te diré qué eres".
>
> —Torras, "El delito del cuerpo", 2007.

In the introductory chapter to her book *Cuerpo e Identidad: Estudios de Género y Sexualidad 1*, Meri Torras dissects the obsessive tendency to categorise bodies within the binaries of male or female. The author points to the intersection of the gender-sex binary and heteronormativity: society establishes man and woman as contraries (man *versus* woman) and complementaries (man *and* woman in sexual union). Within this categorisation, a hierarchy of superior and subordinate is constructed. In the pairs of man-woman, heterosexual-homosexual, man and heterosexual are hegemonic and deemed as "pure", while the alternatives are defined as corrupt. In the patriarchal heteronormative system, alternatives to the gender-sex binary (man/woman) and to heterosexuality are not even a possibility. Meaning that, within patriarchal heteronormativity, a lesbian woman is no longer "woman". In Torras' words, "Ser mujer es –exige– participar y pertenecer a la heterosexualidad opresiva que usa y legisla los cuerpos para la reproducción y la satisfacción del placer masculino" (2007, p.14). If to be a woman is to be a body for male consumption, the lesbian body can no longer be defined as "woman". In escaping patriarchal heteronormative boundaries, she ceases to exist, because she is no longer functioning as the contrary and complementary of the male subject. This reveals the connection of the gender-sex binary with heteronormativity and, perhaps most importantly, how the disruption of one entails the disruption of the other.

Making use of De Lauretis and Butler's gender theories, Torras dismantles the gender-sex binary. The author disrupts the idea of sex as biological and gender as cultural by pointing out that "el establecimiento del mismo binomio *esencial versus constructo* es construido o, dicho de otro modo, la propia distinción *natural versus cultural* es cultural" (Torras, 2007, p.14). As De Lauretis discusses in *Technologies of Gender*, both sexuality and gender are not properties of the body, but rather a result of the effects produced on bodies (Torras, 2007). Gender and sexuality are therefore not interior, essential and natural to bodies, but rather a result of discourse and language (Torras, 2007). Neither body nor gender have an immaculate origin that is prior to culture of language; on the contrary, "el cuerpo tiene una existencia performativa dentro de los marcos culturales (...) que lo hacen *visible*" (Torras,

2007, p.20). In essence, individuals do not *have* or *are* a body, but rather *become* one. Socio-cultural environments sculpt bodies to fit into different identities: man, woman, rich, poor, white, black, etc. (Torras, 2007). In the words of Simone de Beauvoir: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (1953, p.273). Patriarchal heteronormative discourse shapes bodies and their relationships, forcing them into the male/female binaries as well as into heterosexuality.

Owing to the fact that patriarchal heteronormative discourse legislates the body, it is the duty of those in non-hegemonic categories to construct their identities "no tanto en contra de la categoría hegemónica (...) si no de *otro modo,* cruzando y volviendo a cruzar la frontera preservativa del mismo binomio" (Torras, 2007, p.13). If the body that is not heterosexual and male is deemed as impure, it is precisely from this place of impurity, corruption and contamination that their identity should develop. By existing outside heteronormative patriarchal boundaries, these non-hegemonic bodies are disrupting the foundation of the entire system and, therefore, forcing the discourse to be re-written. And in re-writing patriarchal heteronormative discourse, they are re-defining the body.

The Fiction of Patriarchy

Lacan (2001) argued that truth only exists through narration: a fact *is* a fact "*because* I state it" (p.5). Truth therefore can only exist through a medium or what Lacan calls a symbol, a "*semblant*" (2001, p.7) which is discourse. However, in Lacan's words, "everything that is discourse, can only present itself as semblance" and, thus, everything "built on [discourse] (...) is called signifier which (...) is identical to this status as such of the semblance" (2001, p9). If truth requires the medium of discourse, and every discourse is a semblance, "the truth is only a half-saying" (Lacan, 2001, p.5), "for there is always something in truth that escapes symbolization or remains unsayable" (Mandal, 2017, p.279). As epitomised by Mandal (2017), then, "Every discourse presents the semblance of truth while in reality in the place of truth there is only a lack" (Mandal, 2017, p.280). Lacan refers to this lack or void as "phallus", a signifier also of the individual's deep desire of wholeness which remains unattainable: "man cannot aim at being whole" (2006, p.581). Society and individuals function precisely due to the fact that this fragmentation is concealed: the phallus "can play its role only when veiled" through discourse (Lacan, 2006, p.581).

And it is this discourse or semblance of truth which shapes the body. It is for this reason that Lacan defines masculinity, the myth which upholds the patriarchal heteronormative system, as a semblance of truth: "Man, the male, the virile one, as we know him, is a creation of discourse." (2001, p.89). Similarly to De Beauvoir, Lacan argues that one is not born, but rather becomes a man "through the phallic function" (1998, p.79), through the inscription of the body with "the [fictional] attributes of masculinity" (1998, p.80). Furthermore, Lacan differentiated four types of discourse: "of the University (...) of the Master(...) of the Hysteric (...) and finally…of the Analyst" (2001, p.77). In the patriarchal heteronormative world, man is the Master who controls the Other through the discourse of University. The discourse of the University is what the Master uses to subjugate the Other: knowledge is manipulated and institutions legitimise the Master's semblance of truth. Man is Master, patriarchal institutions justify his power, and both knowledge and language are tools to create this fictional discourse. In Lacan's theory, then, patriarchy and masculinity are fictions used to dominate the Other, which is achieved through discourse and language.

Contrarily, Lacan places the woman as the Other to language, to knowledge, to fiction. Woman is closer to the Real than to the Symbolic. While the man "is a creation of

discourse (...) The same cannot be said of the woman" (Lacan, 2001, p.89) because "woman is truth" (Lacan, 1998, p.103). It is for this reason that "one can only half-speak of her", for "there is always something in her that escapes discourse" (Lacan, 1998, pp.103, 33). Within her, there is "a jouissance (…) "beyond the phallus" (Lacan, 1998, p.74). But if the phallus "can play its role only when veiled" (Lacan, 2007, p.581) then the female body who exists beyond the boundaries of patriarchal discourse is a threat to its existence. Consequently, women must be trained to act as either masquerade or symptom of the male subject. As masquerade, the woman validates the myth of masculinity, of the male as the superior, "the virile one" (Lacan, 2001, p.89). As symptom, the woman "serves a function in the sexual relationship only qua mother" (Lacan, 1998, p.36), that is, she is the receiver of the man's repressed sexual desire towards the mother. The woman, in Lacan's words, "rejects an essential part of femininity, namely, all its attributes"; she must be "what she is not (...) to be desired as well as loved" (2007, p.583). Female bodies are therefore indoctrinated into "sacrificing the purely feminine or that which is fatal to the phallic" (Mandal, 2017, p.281) in order to prevent them from uncovering the void at the centre of patriarchal heteronormative discourse.

In his theory of the discourse of the hysteric, Lacan explains what happens if women escape patriarchal boundaries as well as how the escape in itself challenges hegemonic discourse. In the relationship between the analyst and the hysteric, the hysteric's symptoms are a question to the analyst who has the duty of "solving" her: "he is the master of knowledge supposed to have the answer capable of silencing her." (Wajcman, 2003, Discourse on the Hysteric section, para.6) The analyst is therefore the one who shapes the hysteric's body; if the hysteric continuously wonders "Who am I?" the analyst controls her: "You are what I say" (Wajcman, 2003). In doing so the hysteric is creating discourse, a discourse that attempts to restrict her but continuously fails: the agent (priest, physician, analyst) generates (religious, medical, psychoanalytical) discourse to define and therefore entrap the hysteric. Most importantly, the hysteric's creation of discourse indicates, first, that she has become the Master, second, that man/patriarchy depends on the Other to generate discourse and, lastly, that discourse is fiction. Her unsolved questions uncover the void of the patriarchal myth: the woman outside of its constraints becomes an enigma and, by "fail[ing] to account for hysteria" (Discourse on the Hysteric section, para. 20), each patriarchal discourse is exposed as fictional.

The Victorian "Angel in the House"

During the Victorian era, the ideal of womanhood was that of "The Angel in the House". A title taken from the nineteenth-century British poem by Coventry Patmore, the female body was restricted to the domestic sphere and its whole purpose was to be "the selflessly devoted and submissive wife and mother." (Hoffman, 2007, p.264) Nineteenth-century England was characterised by "an increasingly powerful and influential middle class" (Stewart, 2018, p.7) to which the Angel was central; she participated in the institution of marriage, and as a result, in the authentication of patriarchal heteronormativity. To wed was to legitimise the gender-sex binary that constructs male as active and female as passive, and women as submissive before male supremacy. The Angel validates other patriarchal ideals of womanhood, such as the paradox of women as pure but motherly, virginal but with the only task of producing children (Hoffman, 2007). Female bodies were therefore forced into the "eternal feminine", in which femininity is marked by the "ideal of contemplative purity" and "the ideal of significant action is masculine" (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000, p.21). Eternal femininity was also characterised by the "virtues of modesty, gracefulness, purity, delicacy, civility, compliancy, reticence, chastity, affability, [and] politeness" (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000, p.23). I believe Woolf (1931) summarised her best:

> She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. (...) she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all–I need not say it–she was pure . Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty –her blushes, her great grace. In those days –the last of Queen Victoria– every house had its Angel. (p.1254)

This was a lesson inscribed onto every female body, as stated by Gilbert and Gubar (2000): "from the eighteenth century on, conduct books for ladies had proliferated, enjoining young girls to submissiveness, modesty, [and] self-lessness" (p.23). Evidently, patriarchal discourse also taught women what *not* to be: "for every glowing portrait of submissive women enshrined in domesticity, there exists an equally important negative image that embodies the sacrilegious fiendishness of…. the "Female Will" (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000, p.28). In other words, for every Virgin Mary there is an Eve, for every princess there is a wicked witch, and for Angel there is a monster. Patriarchal discourse, in its many different

forms (religious, scientific, literary) created their version of the monster-woman to justify their demonisation of the autonomous female body. A woman turns monster when she dares to escape patriarchal boundaries, abandoning her position of "contemplative purity" and engaging in the "male life of "significant action" (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000, p.21). In addition to the trope of the Angel haunted by the evil monster-woman, appeared a more sinister alternative: "the monster may not only be concealed *behind* the angel, she may actually turn out to reside *within* (...) the angel" (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000, p.29). Similarly to the witch hunts that occurred for centuries in which all women were potential witches, patriarchal discourse constructed all women as potential monsters. Due to the fact that actions outside patriarchal boundaries threaten the fiction of male supremacy, patriarchal discourse crafts a narrative to demonise these women, thereby protecting the patriarchal heteronormative system. Thus, female bodies can either submit to patriarchal womanhood and participate in heteronormative patriarchy by becoming the Angel or, on the contrary, subvert these roles and, consequently, become a monstrous entity alienated from society.

It is of utmost importance to comprehend the three theories in order to understand the implications of Le Fanu's *Carmilla.* In essence, bodies are categorised into male or female, heterosexual or homosexual. In this categorisation lies a hierarchy that renders male and heterosexual bodies superior to the corrupt female and homosexual individuals. The preservation of this hierarchy is achieved through the creation of discourse that legitimises the gender-sex binary and heteronormativity, while condemning non-hegemonic alternatives. Patriarchal heteronormative discourse ensures male supremacy and female submissiveness through the fabrication of the phallic myth and of mother-whore dichotomies. Women must therefore be either masquerade or symptom; either Angel in the House or sensual monster. In constructing these dichotomies, patriarchal heteronormative discourse assures that female bodies remain within its boundaries. Women outside these boundaries expose the fictionality of heteronormative patriarchy and, therefore, discourse shapes the autonomous female body as monstrous. In *Carmilla*, the protagonists disrupt the gender-sex binary as well as patriarchal heteronormativity and, as a result, the void at the centre of patriarchal heteronormative discourse is exposed.

Sapphism

In “Cuerpo e Identidad”, Meri Torras reveals that bodies are shaped according to patriarchal heteronormative discourse: man and woman are contraries and complementaries in a hierarchical relation where man is superior and woman is subordinate. Bodies outside this categorisation threaten the fiction of heteronormative patriarchy and, as a result, women are trained from childhood to act as either masquerade or symptom, as either upholders of the patriarchy or objects of male desire. Because these bodies are deemed corrupt, Torras suggests that non-hegemonic individuals construct their identities from that very place of corruption, thereby disrupting patriarchal heteronormative binaries and forcing them to be rewritten. One of the ways in which women can dismantle heteronormative patriarchy is through Sapphism, “a specific Lesbian identity that refers to the complex, ongoing, intense identification with, longing for, and safety found *only* in women.” (Pender, 2021, p.8) To dedicate one’s life exclusively to forming relationships with women “is subversive, a reclamation of autonomy, and a commitment to actively “othering” oneself outside of the patriarchal sphere” (Pender, 2021, p.39). The lesbian disrupts both the gender-sex binary and heteronormativity, consequently, she ceases to exist as “woman”, for she is no longer the complementary of man nor the object of male desires. Her defiance of patriarchal heteronormativity results in exile: while the heterosexual woman lives “safely, if uncomfortable, within the limits established by men”, the lesbian lives “marginally, (...) always different, as “deviant” (Pender, 2021, p.40). Despite the fact that both lesbianism and Sapphism disrupt heteronormative patriarchal structures, “To choose to be Sapphic” (Pender, 2021, p.40) is to actively construct identities and relationships from a place of deviance, corruption or Otherness, in an attempt to uncover the fictionality of patriarchal heteronormative discourse and force it to be rewritten. The following pages of this study will analyse the presence and development of Sapphism in *Carmilla*, as well as the ways in which it disturbs patriarchal heteronormative discourse.

Sapphism for *Carmilla*'s protagonist, Laura, "start[s] within her psyche, within her dreams, and within the privacy of her own bedroom when she is a child." (Pender, 2021, p.43) It is of utmost importance to acknowledge this due to the fact that, according to Penelope, to recognise one's lesbian identity is "a long-drawn-out process of introspection and self-examination that can take years, because the social and emotional pressure surrounding us is so powerful and inescapable" (Pender, 2021, p.43) The beginning of Laura's Sapphic journey therefore begins in infancy and is, in her own words, "one of the very earliest incidents of my life which I can recollect." (Le Fanu, 2003, p.4) This "secret, private, ever-dwelling erotic vision" (Pender, 2021, p.43) is, similarly to the rest of her lesbian experience, marked by ambiguity: horrifying and beautiful, "a terrible impression (...) but [a] very pretty face" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.4). One night, Laura is suddenly awakened by the presence of "a young lady" who she describes "caressed me with her hands, (...) and drew me towards her, smiling" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.4) The strange figure soothes her to sleep, and she is once again awakened when she feels "as if two needles ran into my breast" causing her to be "for the first time frightened" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.4). This initial scene reflects "the innate feeling of Lesbian desire that often begins in early childhood" (Pender, 2021, p.41) but, most importantly, "how recognizing and identifying Lesbianism is a (...) "frightening" choice" (Pender, 2021, p.43). When "Nurse, nursery maid, [and] housekeeper" arrive, Laura recounts: "child as I was, I could perceive that their faces were pale with an unwonted look of anxiety" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.4). Laura's confession that she was "immediately delightfully soothed" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.4) as well as the clarification that she felt frightened for the *first* time (Le Fanu, 2003, p.4) suggest that her interactions with Carmilla were positive. But because the reactions of those around her indicate that the exchange is dangerous, Laura quickly discovers that "Being" a Lesbian means living (...) often in secrecy, often shamefully" (Pender, 2021, p.40). It is for this reason that, from this point forward, Laura will repress her (homo)sexual desires through "ambiguous feeling[s]" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.16) of attraction and disgust. Furthermore, while many scholars interpret this first meeting as Carmilla seizing the dominant position of the male, Carson Leigh Pender (2021) argues that the vampire is introducing Laura to lesbianism "at an early age so that she does not have to doubt herself or her desires." (p.44) In his book *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897), Havelock Ellis explains that, when a woman reveals herself as a lesbian, "she may be helping to lighten the burden of it on other women" (p.80). Carmilla's first visit to Laura might therefore be an attempt to lighten the burden of female homosexuality, as well as the shame and fear that come with existing as a lesbian in a patriarchal heteronormative society.

In addition, while their first encounter marks the beginning of Laura's Sapphic journey, their second and real meeting results in a platonic bond. A decade after the "terrible impression" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.4), Laura "saw the very face which had visited me in my childhood at night (...) It was pretty, even beautiful" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.15). Before Laura can speak, Carmilla confesses: "Twelve years ago, I saw your face in a dream, and it has haunted me ever since" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.15). Laura's ambiguous feelings are made clear by Carmilla's corporeal presence: previously in the midst of horror and attraction, the protagonist now states that "Whatever I had fancied strange in [Carmilla's face] was gone, and it and her dimpling cheeks were now delightfully pretty and intelligent." (Le Fanu, 2003, p.15) In parallel to their first encounter in which Laura is soothed by Carmilla, the vampire's actual presence makes Laura feel "reassured" and, furthermore, "the situation made [her] eloquent, and even bold." (Le Fanu, 2003, p.15) The shiness of the blonde, blue-eyed Angel in the House is thereby threatened by the sensual monster, whose "fine dark eyes" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.6) infect naive Laura with confidence. Carmilla's account of their first encounter is romantic, as she confesses: "Your looks won me; (...) Your face I have never forgotten since" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.16). To culminate, the vampire declares:

> "I feel only that I have made your acquaintance twelve years ago, and have already *a right to your intimacy*; at all events it does seem as if we were destined, from our earliest childhood, to be friends. I wonder whether you feel as strangely drawn towards me as I do to you; I have never had a friend—shall I find one now?" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.16)

In stating this, Carmilla occupies the dominant position that, according to patriarchal heteronormative discourse, belongs to the male body. In doing so, she embodies the patriarchal fear that "only the lesbian could possess a libido as rich as male's and would thus be a "superior" feminine type." (Simone de Beauvoir, 2011, p.480) The lesbian therefore poses a double threat to heteronormative patriarchy: she rejects heterosexual union, alienating the male subject and, additionally, she abandons her role as passive and inferior, usurping the dominant position of the man. As a result, she exposes the myth of masculinity: if the female body can also be virile and powerful, the performativity of gender is revealed, and the fictionality of male supremacy is uncovered. Laura cannot but subjugate before Carmilla's authority: she "was flattered (...) liked the confidence" and felt obligated to fulfil the vampire's suggestion "that [they] should be very near friends" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.17). Despite

the fact that Carmilla's romantic intentions are clear from their very first meeting, Laura will hide her homosexual desires through the guise of friendship as well as through her ambiguous feelings. On the one hand, the protagonist describes Carmilla as both her "companion" and "the most beautiful creature [she] had ever seen" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.17). On the other hand, throughout the novella, lesbian lust is intertwined with disgust, reflecting queer existence within heteronormative boundaries. As previously mentioned, to be a lesbian is to live "often in secrecy, often shamefully" (Pender, 2021, p.40). It is for this reason that Laura is haunted by "ambiguous alternations" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.68) of both horror and temptation, as her lesbian self battles with the patriarchal heteronormative expectations that have been inscribed onto her female body. This is epitomised by Laura herself who, after meeting Carmilla for the first time, declares that "In this ambiguous feeling" of "repulsion" and attraction, "the sense of attraction immensely prevailed." (Le Fanu, 2003, p.16) Their homoerotic friendship escalates and, in the following chapter, Laura recounts that Carmilla "used to place her pretty arms about my neck," "in a trembling embrace, and her lips in soft kisses gently glow upon my cheek" as she, "with her lips near my ear," "murmured words [that] sounded like a lullaby" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.19). Regardless of the alleged wish "to extricate [herself]", Laura "experienced a strange and tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.19). Of course, this lesbian pleasure must be camouflaged by "a vague sense of fear and disgust." (Le Fanu, 2003, p.19) Despite Laura's efforts to conceal her homosexual passions with ambiguous repulsion, her interactions with Carmilla *are* romantic:

> "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." Then she had thrown herself back in her chair, with her small hands over her eyes, leaving me trembling." (Le Fanu, 2003, p.20)

Although Laura attempts to conceal her lesbianism under the guise of friendship and ambiguity, the language employed in this fragment is evidently sensual and not platonic: blushing, gazing, kissing and, furthermore, rapid breaths, whimpers, sobs and trembles that

could point to orgasm. Perhaps most importantly, Laura defines it as "the ardor of a lover," not a friend (Le Fanu, 2003, p.20). Moreover, her descriptions are specific to the queer experience: lesbianism in a heteronormative world demands an existence "in secrecy, often shamefully" (Pender, 2021, p.40), thus, Laura illustrates this love as "embarrass[ing]" and "hateful" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.20) precisely due to its defiance of the patriarchal heteronormativity she is accustomed to. In her own words, "I don't know myself when you look so and talk so" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.20), that is, her Sapphic feelings contradict the patriarchal heteronormative discourse that has so far dictated every aspect of her life. It is for this reason that Laura desperately tries, on the one hand, to suppress her (homo)sexual desires and, on the other, to force them into heteronormative standards. Immediately after describing this sensual exchange, Laura presents the possibility that Carmilla is "a boyish lover (…) in masquerade" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.20). In doing so, she attempts to diminish her sin by replacing woman with man and, therefore, lesbianism with heterosexuality. Another instance of homoeroticness is found in the funeral scene, when Carmilla begs Laura to "hold my hand, press it *hard-hard-harder*" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.22) and, as a result, "Her face (...) darkened, (...) her teeth and hands were clenched, and she frowned and compressed her lips" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.22). The vampire "trembled all over with a continued shudder" as "All her energies seemed strained to suppress a fit" that ended with "a low convulsive cry of suffering" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.22). The language used in this scene is, again, extremely sexual: the clenching of hands and teeth, the trembling, the failed suppression, the convulsions and the final cry all point to Carmilla experiencing an orgasm. It is evinced, specifically, in Laura's declaration that "gradually the *hysteria* subsided" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.22), since the illness has been historically synonymous with female sexuality and desire. After this incident, Laura's father finds a portrait that "was the effigy of Carmilla" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.27) and, consequently, Laura hangs it in her room. Later, when the pair are alone on a walk, Carmilla tells Laura: "you asked for the picture you think like me, to hang in your room," and proceeds to "dr[a]w her arm closer around [Laura's] waist, (...) let her pretty head sink upon [her] shoulder" and "kiss [her] silently" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.28). To Laura's assertion that she is sure Carmilla has been in love, the vampire answers: "I have been in love with no one, and never shall, (...) unless it should be with you" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.28). In response, Laura writes: "How beautiful she looked in the moonlight!" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.28). Their exchange ends with Carmilla's declaration of love: "I live in you; and you would die for me, I love you so" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.28). The strong romantic bond between the two is evident, however, Laura continues to struggle with her Sapphic identity, closing chapter five with the reiteration that

Carmilla's "crazy talk and looks, (...) embarrassed, and even frightened [her]" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.29).

Laura's (homo)sexual infection continues, as she finds herself "in a pretty advanced stage of the strangest illness" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.35) in which "Certain vague and strange sensations" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.35) visit her in dreams. It is of interest that Laura never refers to these as nightmares even if they produce "indescribable solemnity and fear" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.36) as well as the fact that her lesbianism is once again manifesting itself through her psyche like it did in infancy. Laura describes the first dream as follows:

> "Sometimes there came 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. My heart beat faster, my breathing rose and fell rapidly and full drawn; a sobbing, that rose into a sense of strangulation, supervened, and turned into a dreadful convulsion, in which my senses left me and I became unconscious." (Le Fanu, 2003, p.36).

Monstruos sensuality is definitely taking over the Angel; in this scene, Laura is experiencing an orgasm. Her heartbeat races, her breathing accelerates, and, similarly to Carmilla's previous "convulsive cry" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.22), this episode too culminates in convulsion. This is a crucial event in the development of Laura's sexual identity: she is no longer a passive object accepting Carmilla's advances, but rather the agent experiencing erotic pleasure. Furthermore, the incident is accompanied by a change in physical appearance; Laura parallels Carmilla as she "had grown pale, [her] eyes were dilated and darkened underneath, and the languor which [she] had long felt began to display itself in [her] countenance." (Le Fanu, 2003, p.36). The vampire has been consistently illustrated in this manner: "pale", with "dark eyes" and "very languid" (Le Fanu, 2003, pp.10, 16, 18). Laura's physical transformation therefore symbolises her shift in character, as sexual knowledge and autonomy replace the virginal Angel in the House. In addition, the parallel between the two also allows for the possibility that Carmilla is Laura's mirror, the embodiment of her repressed (homo)sexual desires and, thus, this particular scene can be interpreted as autoeroticism or masturbation. After all, there is no exchange between the two, only a female voice is heard in the distance, therefore these "sensation[s]" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.36) could be self-inflicted. In fact, according to nineteenth-century medical discourse, darkened and

dilated eyes were signs of female masturbation. Even further, Victorian medical discourse "described masturbation in girls as a "vampire feeding of the lifeblood of its victims", thus vampire and victim become "twin faces of an all-consuming female desire" (Heller, 1996, p.83). In the book *The New Nineteenth Century* (1996), Tamar Heller references a 1851 medical journey that claimed female masturbation was a "lesbian pleasure", thereby "conflat[ing] the homo and autoerotic" (p.83). Lesbianism and masturbation are associated because they alienate male authority from the female body, interfering with the gender-sex binary and heteronormativity and, consequently, endangering the fictions of masculinity and patriarchy. This scene, then, reflects Laura's abandonment of her passive position, as she becomes an active threat to the heteronormative patriarchal system. To culminate, this threat turns larger with Laura's following dream, in which she sees "Carmilla, standing, near the foot of [her] bed, in her *white* nightdress, bathed…in one great stain of blood." (Le Fanu, 2003, p.37). In this vision, the white nightdress appears in contrast to the stain of blood, alluding to the fact that Carmilla symbolises Laura's menarche (first period). White purity is therefore replaced with sexual maturity and, thus, with the birth of an uncontrollable desire. It is for this reason that male authorities must interrupt the Sapphic narrative in an attempt to terminate the spread of the disease of female (homo)sexuality.

It is no wonder that a nineteenth-century text does not provide the reader with a happy lesbian ending. Despite this fact, as Pender (2021) states, "we must not discredit every kiss, every longing gaze, and every romantic proclamation of yearning (…) Laura is *still* a Lesbian" (p.52). It is perhaps *because* she is a lesbian that Laura "is significantly defensive and specific in the ways she condemns vampirism" (Pender, 2021, p.52) in the final chapter "Conclusion". Throughout the novella, Carmilla's vampirism has been analogous with homosexuality. It is highly significant, then, that Laura's final condemnation of vampirism parallels medical and religious discourse, both of which have historically denounced homosexuality. Imitating patriarchal heteronormative medical discourses on queerness, Laura refers to vampirism as a "condition" in which, when individuals "show themselves in human society" they fake a "healthy life" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.67). Until the 1970's, homosexuality was part of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) and, even today, many believe it to be a treatable illness. Similarly to vampires who "escape from their graves and return to them for certain hours every day," (Le Fanu, 2003, p.67) homosexuals abandon their closets to fulfil their sinful thirst only to later return and feign health in their everyday life. Furthermore, Laura also mimics patriarchal heteronormative religious

discourse, which has historically defined homosexuality as a sinful crime. Likewise, Laura describes vampirism as a "horrible lust" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.67) a shameful thirst that must be satisfied in secret. Vampires must "escape from their graves and return to them for certain hours every day, without (…) leaving a trace" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.67) just as queer individuals are forced into "living marginally, often in secrecy, often shamefully" (Pender, 2021, p.40). If vampirism is synonymous with queerness, then both "threaten the construction of "safety" that Laura resorts to after the trauma of watching Carmilla die" (Pender, 2021, p.52). Carmilla, the lesbian vampire, embodies the female (homo)sexuality, autonomy and knowledge that threaten the heteronormative patriarchy, the system Laura reverts to when she loses her lover. Having lost the one who taught her how to escape the patriarchal cage, Laura must go back into hiding. The conclusion, then, provides "specific insight into the challenges of security within Lesbian identity" (Pender, 2021, p.53), since the development of Laura's (homo)sexuality has been interrupted by patriarchal heteronormativity. In the final paragraph, however, Laura states:

> "to this hour the image of Carmilla returns to memory with ambiguous alternations–sometimes the playful, languid, beautiful girl; sometimes the writhing fiend I saw in the ruined church; and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing room door." (Le Fanu, 2003, pp.68-69).

The dissection of this final declaration proves that, indeed, "Laura is *still* a Lesbian" (Pender, 2021, p.52). Oftentimes scholars argue that Laura, in the end, chooses heteronormativity and willingly returns to the boundaries of patriarchal femininity. But perhaps the greatest terror offered by this Gothic novella is that, in reality, Laura had no choice. Within the patriarchal heteronormative system, "las categorías no hegemónicas de los pares como hombre/mujer, heterosexual/homosexual (...) En ningún caso [son] *otra* opción; ni siquiera *una opción.* Porque en definitiva existe una sola posibilidad, por lo tanto, ninguna capacidad de elegir." (Torras, 2007, p.13). Faced with the extermination of the autonomous sexual woman, Laura decides to mask her (homo)sexual desires. However, her final words are an instance of queer flagging[1], thus Laura leaves clues for those who truly want to *see*: haunted with Sapphic memories, she hopelessly longs for Carmilla's return.

[1] "signals not intended to be legible beyond a queer audience" (Campbell, 2011, Abstract), a nonverbal language used by queer individuals to communicate while remaining unnoticed by heteronormative society.

Hysteria

As previously mentioned, the female body is indoctrinated since infancy to become "an artificial product (...) of coquetry or docility" (De Beauvoir, 2011, p.483). In addition, the woman must yield before the superior male, therefore, in the heterosexual union, "It is he (...) who has the aggressive role and she who submits" (De Beauvior, 2011, p.443). To maintain the female body within these boundaries, patriarchal discourse creates narratives that condemn other alternatives. This section of the study focuses on patriarchal medical discourse, particularly on its construction of female sexuality as both pathology and monstrosity, achieved through the fabrication of hysteria as an intrinsically female malady. Most importantly, this segment explores the ways in which *Carmilla* mimics and thereby uncovers the fictionality of patriarchal medical discourse as well as its demonisation of female sexuality.

To better understand the implications of hysteria in the novel, one must first understand the history of the disorder; how it was gendered female, how it became monstrous and how it was used to exercise patriarchal authority over the female body. It is quite difficult to provide a definition for hysteria due to its "vast, shifting repertoire of symptoms" (Showalter, 1993, p.56). Rachel P. Maines (1999) explains that hysteria was linked with fainting, nervousness, insomnia, muscle spasms, shortness of breath, both sexual desire and the lack of it, appetite loss "and sometimes a tendency to cause trouble for others" (p.23). This illness "appears in the medical corpus as early as 2000 B.C. in Egypt" (Maines, 1999, p.23) but it was Hippocrates who first named it in the fifth century B.C. Its very etymology genders it female, since the term "hysteria" comes from the Greek *hysterikós*, meaning "of or belonging to the womb". From its origins, hysteria was believed to be caused by the uterus or, as Plato called it, the "animal inside an animal" (Maines, 1999, p.23). This notion of the uterus "wandering around the body, causing problems as it went" (Maines, 1999, p.24) appeared in ancient Greece and was believed until the twentieth century. Thus, historically, the womb has been regarded as a monstrous entity spreading sexual desire throughout the female body. It was precisely when these sexual impulses were unfulfilled that hysteria appeared as a result of sexual deprivation or lack of sexual gratification. Patriarchal medical discourse, then, transformed female sexuality into hysterical pathology. Most importantly, since sexual desire emanated from the uterus, hysteria was established as a "woman's disease," a feminine disorder, or a disturbance of femininity" (Showalter, 1993, p.286).

During the Victorian era, the discourse of hysteria as a female disorder continued, but Victorian physicians began to use the disorder as a justification for negative female traits. For instance, Edward Tilt stated that "Mutability is characteristic of hysteria because it is characteristic of women" (Showalter, 1993, p.286). Nineteenth-century physicians such as Auguste Fabre believed that "every woman carries with her the seeds of hysteria" (Showalter, 1993, p.287). In the words of French physiatrist Jules Phillipe Falret, "all women are hysterical" and, most importantly, "the life of the hysteric is nothing but one perpetual falsehood" (Falret in Showalter, 1993, p.301). Women are, then, intrinsically hysterical and, as a result, deceitful creatures by nature. Perhaps more significantly, Victorian physicians constructed female sexuality as not only a pathology but also a sign of monstrosity. This is evidenced in doctor Weir Mitchell's statement that "A hysterical girl is (...) a *vampire* who sucks the blood of the healthy people about her; and I may add that pretty surely where there is one hysterical girl there will be soon or late two sick women" (1878, p.37). The female hysteric is described as "evil" (Mitchell, 1878, p.32), a source of "moral degradation" (Mitchell, 1878, p.30) who infects "the willing slaves of their caprices" (Mitchell, 1878, p.36). She feeds off of the healthy life of those who care about her, until "the growth of the evil" (Mitchell, 1878, p.31) is seen in them too. She exaggerates her symptoms so that nurses become her new "willing slaves" (Mitchell, 1878, p.36), until "the nurse falls ill, and a new victim is found." (Mitchell, 1878, p.32) Mitchell actually states he has witnessed "a hysterical, anaemic girl kill in this way three generations of nurses." (1878, p.32) Therefore, in the Victorian era, patriarchal medical discourse shapes the hysteric into a monstrous murder, a creature seeking other women to infect and spread the disease of "moral degradation" (Mitchell, 1878, p.30). Having observed, then, the history of hysteria, it is apparent that patriarchal medical discourse crafted a narrative of female sexuality as pathological and monstrous.

But perhaps what is more important is the intent behind this discourse. If hysteria is constructed as female nature, are not all women infected? Are not all women monsters? And, most importantly, if the hysteric lives in "perpetual falsehood" (Falret in Showalter, 1993, p.301) and all women are hysterics, is it possible that all women are performing as the Angel in the House? Is it possible that beneath their submission lies a "devouring, sexually voracious woman" (Heller, 1996, p.79)? This is the aim of patriarchal medical discourse: in constructing hysteria as intrinsically female, all women are under the threat of their sexuality transforming them into sick monsters. Consequently, the female body must remain under

patriarchal constraints, pure and sexually unaware, to avoid the "primary and irremediable fate" of hysteria (Showalter, 1993, p.287).

To culminate, patriarchal medical discourse has historically presented two remedies for the female hysteric: marriage and isolation. From the first century A.D. until the appearance of Freudian theory, the treatment of hysteria was masturbation. Women had to feel "the sensations of coitus" (Maines, 1999, p.25): when "the neck of the womb is tickled (...) by little and little all symptoms vanish away" (Maines, 1999, pp.26-27). However, the woman's body was not her own: she was forbidden from touching herself and the rights of her sexuality were "reserved for husbands, [male] doctors, and midwives" (Maines, 1999, p.25). On the one hand, then, the prescription for the hysteric was marriage and, if this failed, then male physicians and midwives would masturbate her until she reached orgasm. Thus, to escape the female fate of illness and monstrosity, women had to fulfill the role of the Angel: remain sexually ignorant and wed as soon as possible. On the other hand, their failure to wed would entail a defiance of patriarchal roles, and would therefore result in institutionalisation. Physician Weir Mitchell (1878), for instance, wrote a book about his proposed treatment: *Fat and Blood.* According to him, the cure for the hysteric is to alienate her "from the moral and physical surroundings" (Mitchell, 1878, p.86) that have resulted in her illness. The patient must "stay in bed a month, and neither to read, write, nor sew, and to have one nurse, –who is not a relative" (Mitchell, 1878, pp.42-43). In addition to complete isolation, the patient is subjected to "excessive feeding" (Mitchell, 1878, p.9): "three full meals daily, as well as three or four pints of milk (...) in place of water" (p.78). Other elements of the diet include "one pound of beef, in the form of raw soup" and "cod-liver oil (...) half an hour after each meal" (p.79). Ergo, the hysteric is either forced to fit into the patriarchal ideal of woman: "cheerful, plump and contented" (Heller, 1996, p.77) or, on the contrary, because she subverts patriarchal boundaries, she is ostracised from society. The construction of an innate, pathological and monstrous female sexual desire is therefore a tool to pressure all women into remaining within patriarchal boundaries. If remedies for hysteria are marriage or institutionalisation, patriarchal medical discourse forces the female body into either participating in the institution that upholds patriarchal heteronormativity or living in a permanent exile from patriarchal society.

It is of utmost importance to recognise this context in order to understand the implications of hysteria in the novel. Through the imitation of patriarchal medical discourse and its language of diagnosis, *Carmilla* exposes its fictionality. On the one hand, the symptomatology of both vampire and victim coincides with that of hysteria, anaemia and anorexia, pathologies caused by sexual desire. In mimicking this, the novel reveals the patriarchal medical creation of female sexuality as pathological. On the other hand, the plot of *Carmilla* follows Victorian medical discourse and its demonisation of the hysteric: "a vampire…sucks the blood of healthy people about her" (Mitchell, 1878, p.37), spreading the disease of female (homo)sexuality. Carmilla, then, is the embodiment of both pathology and monstrosity: hysteric, vampire and lesbian, she represents a complete subversion of patriarchal heteronormative medical discourse.

The imitation of patriarchal medical discourse is found at the beginning of the novel. Similarly to Mitchell's descriptions of the hysterical girl, Carmilla's symptoms are detailed in chapter IV "Her Habits –A Saunter". These include sleeping until "very late", "eat[ing] nothing", being "almost immediately exhausted" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.20) and having "very languid" movements (Le Fanu, 2003, p.18). The above equate to symptoms of anaemia, anorexia and "nervous exhaustion" (Mitchell, 1878, p.27), illnesses that have been historically gendered female and defined as hysterical disorders. Patriarchal medical discourse in the Victorian era connected anorexia, reflected in Carmilla's appetite loss and slenderness, to nymphomania. Interestingly, both the hysteric and the anorexic were described by Victorian physicians as "master[s] of disguise", which could not be trusted since their "illness may be a cover for and indeed may be caused by [their] sexual immorality" (Heller, 1996, p.81). Furthermore, the vampire's "languor and exhaustion" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.16) could also be referencing chlorosis or green sickness, which was originally known as "the disease of virgins" because it affected adolescent girls and young women. Chlorosis was actually anaemia, but physicians categorised it as a hysterical disorder because it was caused by menstruation and therefore by the womb. Doctors established a connection between anaemia and nymphomania, arguing that anaemia was a result of sexual deprivation, and nymphomania was caused by sexual frustration or masturbation. Anaemia, then, occured when a sexually-frustrated adolescent chose to masturbate. It was also linked to hysteria: Weir Mitchell affirmed that "nervous women (...) as a rule are thin, and lack blood" (1878, p.9), thereby to produce fat and blood, he suggested consuming raw meat in the form of soup. However, other Victorian physicians argued that "autoeroticism caused hysteria (...) and was

encouraged by such practices as eating red meat" (Heller, 1996, p.83), thus, the cure of anaemia can result in both nymphomania and hysteria. In the case of Carmilla, she cures her anaemia with "human iron supplements"; her visits to Laura are "her way of eating flesh, or red meat" (Heller, 1996, p.83). Furthermore, because menstruation could bring forth the hysterical disorder of anaemia, Victorian physicians considered the first period to be an extremely dangerous time for a young lady, for she could develop a "potentially uncontrollable sexuality" (Heller, 1996, p.82). In Laura's vision of "Carmilla, standing, near the foot of [her] bed, in her *white* nightdress, bathed… in one great stain of *blood*" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.37, emphasis added), the vampire symbolises the girl's menarche (the first period). The imagery of the white nightdress stained with blood represents Laura's purity being tarnished by the impending threat of sexuality and, even worse, of lesbian carnal desires. Perhaps most importantly, in *Carmilla,* both vampire and victim have scenes mimicking hysterical attacks. This is more evident in the case of Carmilla whose reaction to the funeral echoes the hysterical fit. Her face "darkened, (...) her teeth and hands were clenched, (...) and [she] trembled all over with a continued shudder" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.22). The trembling represents the "very deceptive" (p.1078) hysterical tremor, as described by physician A. Barham Carter (1949). Another hysteria symptom was that of epilepsy or, in the words of physician Jules Falret, "convulsive movement" (Showalter, 1993, p.302) which is reflected in this episode as Carmilla lets out a "convulsive cry" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.22). However, the clearest sign of mimicking patriarchal medical discourse is Laura's description of the episode: "gradually the *hysteria* [emphasis added] subsided." (Le Fanu, 2003, p.22). Likewise, Laura's (homo)sexual dreams coincide with hysteria symptomatology: her very first encounter with Carmilla makes her "nervous for a long time after" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.4), and the hysteric is synonymous with "nervous woman" (Mitchell, 1878, p.43). Amnesia, another hysteric symptom, is also suffered by Laura, who states in the first pages of the novel: "I forget all my life preceding that event, and for some time after it is all obscure also" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.5). (Homo)sexual encounters lead to the scene of Laura's orgasm, which also reproduces the patriarchal language of diagnosis. Laura describes feeling "sensation[s]" of hands caressing her cheek and neck, of "warm lips" kissing her, etc., which result in a convulsion that leaves her unconscious (Le Fanu, 2003, p.36). She uses the term "sensation[s]" which is identical to the one that, historically, has been used to recount therapeutic masturbation for the hysteric: in the Middle Ages, hysteria was cured by making women feel "the sensations of coitus" (Maines, 1999, p.25). Climax is marked by "a dreadful convulsion" after which Laura "became unconscious" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.36). Both convulsions and fainting have been

historically employed in patriarchal medical discourse to describe hysteric symptomatology. In describing Carmilla and Laura's orgasms with this language, the novel mimics patriarchal medical discourse in which "The hysterical seizure, *grande hystérie*, was regarded as (...) a "spasm of hyper-femininity, mimicking… both childbirth and the female orgasm." (Showalter, 1993, p.287). Additionally, Laura's sensations are accompanied by a change in appearance: she "had grown pale, [her] eyes were dilated and darkened underneath," and she felt languish (Le Fanu, 2003, p.36). Her transformation imitates Victorian patriarchal medical discourse on hysterical contagion: Laura is developing the same symptoms as Carmilla because, as stated by Mitchell (1878), "where there is one hysterical girl there will be soon or late two sick women" (p.37). Furthermore, Laura's symptoms being identical to Carmilla's implies, first, that the lesbian vampire has infected Laura with the disease of sexuality, following patriarchal medical discourse of the sensual monster corrupting the Angelic victim. However, it could also be an indication of Gothic doubling, of Carmilla as the embodiment of Laura's sexuality. This would replicate the patriarchal horror of the monster "not only be[ing] concealed *behind* the angel," but actually "resid[ing] *within* (...) the angel" (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000, p.29). If, indeed, Carmilla exists within Laura, the gender-sex binary is broken: "every angel in the house (...) is really, perhaps, a monster" (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000, p.29) and therefore, female bodies can no longer be defined as sexually ignorant, pure and passive. In addition, Carmilla being Laura's double would transform their encounters into autoerotic episodes. In this very scene, Laura's "dilated and darkened" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.36) eyes are "classic symptoms of the masturbator according to nineteenth-century medicine" (Heller, 1996, p.83). Perhaps more significantly, Victorian medical discourse described masturbation as a "vampire feeding of the lifeblood of its victims" (Heller, 1996, p.83), a depiction in which vampire and victim are mirror images. Patriarchal medical discourse at the time also referred "to the "vicious habits" of masturbation in girls as "lesbian pleasures" (Heller, 1996, p.83). Therefore, the interpretation of Carmilla as the embodiment of Laura's sexual development transforms their encounters into lesbian, autoerotic fantasies that coincide with patriarchal medical discourse and its demonisation of female masturbation. To culminate, the fates of the protagonists mimic that of the hysteric according to patriarchal medical discourse: whereas Laura is forced to perform as the Angel and authenticate the myth of heteronormative patriarchy, Carmilla's subversion leads to her murder and, therefore, to her definite exile from patriarchal heteronormative society. Thus, through the imitation of patriarchal medical discourse and its language of diagnosis, *Carmilla* uncovers the void at the centre of this fictional narrative created to condemn female sexuality.

Female versus Male Authority

Carmilla does not only parody patriarchal medical discourse on hysteric disorders, but also, patriarchal structures, figures and belief systems. Imitating "the epistemological structure of the tale" (Heller, 1996, p.80), the novel points to the fact that "Children's literature, mythology, tales, and stories reflect the myths created by men's pride and desires" (De Beauvoir, 2011, p.483). In the tale, "Woman is Sleeping Beauty, Donkey Skin, Cinderella, Snow White, the one who receives and endures" (De Beauvoir, 2011, p.325) while "he fights against dragons, he combats giants: she is locked up (...) she is waiting" (De Beauvoir, 2011, p.353). However, in Le Fanu's tale, patriarchal discourse is reversed: Carmilla is the agent and, instead of forcing passivity onto Laura, she encourages her to take action as well. The disruption of patriarchal heteronormative discourse is therefore achieved through the use of its very own narrative structure, which for centuries has promoted the notion of femininity as passive and masculinity as active. Furthermore, male characters in the novel represent the Lacanian figure of the analyst, generating patriarchal discourse to control the sexual and autonomous female body. In fact, the story begins with a prologue written by a friend of Doctor Hesselius, who represents a "prototype psychoanalyst", a collector of Freudian case studies of hysteria and paranoia" (Heller, 1996, p.80). In this prologue vampirism is referred to as a "mysterious subject" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.1) which coincides with Weir Mitchell's denomination of hysteria as "mysteria". In addition, Weir Mitchell (1878) also believed that "The terrible patients are nervous women (...) who question much where answers are difficult, and who put together one's answers (...) and torment (...) the physician with the apparent inconsistencies they detect" (pp.298-299). Male characters in the novel therefore represent what Lacan would label as the analysts, continuously attempting to solve the mystery of the hysteric or, perhaps, the mystery of women as a whole. Mitchell's statements coincide with Lacanian theory: the analyst should have the answers that silence the hysteric's questions, but he does not. In turn, the hysteric becomes an unsolvable enigma that the analyst cannot decipher and, as a result, he (priest, physician, psychoanalyst) generates (religious, medical, psychoanalytical) discourse to imprison her within patriarchal heteronormative boundaries. For otherwise, the entire patriarchal system would collapse: their failure to answer her questions and, most importantly, their creation of discourse to confine her, reveal the fictionality of patriarchal heteronormative discourse. In the novel, Carmilla adopts the Lacanian role of the hysteric; she is the unsolvable enigma for the male characters to decode. Her lesbianism and her agency expose the fictionality of both

gender-sex binary and heteronormativity, thus she is a mortal threat to the patriarchal heteronormative system. For this reason, male characters in the novel attempt to decipher both Carmilla and Laura through medical and religious discourse. It is seen, for instance, after Laura's first encounter with Carmilla in her childhood. On discovering "someone *did* lie there, (...) the place is still warm", the nurses become "pale with an unwonted look of anxiety" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.4) because the event suggests Laura "knows too much too soon about sexuality" (Heller, 1996, p.83). Before the threat of female (homo)sexuality, the male analysts intervene. On the one hand, a doctor "For a good while, every second day, (...) gave [Laura] medicine" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.4). On the other hand, a priest prays for the little girl, a prayer that Laura says "my nurse used for years to make me say" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.5). In fact, *Carmilla* also imitates patriarchal religious discourse in their descriptions of lesbianism. The General describes Carmilla's acts as "hellish arts" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.46), expressing "his wonder that Heaven should tolerate so monstrous an indulgence of the lusts and malignity of hell" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.46). Laura also refers to vampiric practices (therefore, homosexual practices) as "horrible lust" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.67). Mentions of Hell, Heaven, and the sin of lust evidently mimic religious discourse on female sexuality and queerness. In imitating religious discourse, the novel points to the demonisation of the woman outside patriarchal constraints: after all, Eve was the first fallen woman, the first monster. Similarly to the way in which patriarchal discourse uses the figure of Eve to construct all women as potential sinners, Carmilla is used to construct all Angels as potential monsters. To culminate, Carmilla presents alternative forms of knowledge to both patriarchal medicine and religion. Of androcentric medicine, the vampire confesses: "Doctors never did me any good" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.24). Of religion, Carmilla reveals she is not a Christian during the funeral hymn, telling Laura: "how can you tell that your religion and mine are the same; your forms wound me" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.21). When Laura's father tells Carmilla "We are in God's hands: nothing can happen without his permission (...) He is our faithful creator" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.24), she answers: "Creator! *Nature!* (...) All things proceed from Nature – don't they? All things in the heaven, in the earth, and under the earth" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.24). Carmilla's statement is a complete rejection of religion, as she proposes a belief system based on nature instead of God, Heaven, and Hell. Carmilla, in sum, disrupts patriarchal forms of knowledge, providing a female alternative that worships nature and is based on female experience: "I obey the irresistible law of my strength and weakness" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.19). Carmilla's lesbianism, agency and knowledge render her as the hysteric, an enigma threatening to uncover the void at the centre of patriarchal medical, religious, and heteronormative

discourse. But, because of the threat she poses to the entire patriarchal system, the spreading of the disease must be stopped and, therefore, Carmilla must be exterminated.

Consequently, "the story's male authorities (...) dramatically intervene to appropriate the power of knowledge" (Heller, 1996, p.88). Chapter IX, "The Doctor", marks the beginning of male authority hijacking this narrative about female desire. Through the male figures of the patriarch and the physician, patriarchal power over the female body is regained. Doctor Spielsberg looks for the mark in Laura's neck, the "evidence for vampirism, and, in terms of the narrative's allegory of female desire, of sexual contact between her and Carmilla" (Heller, 1996, p.89). The mark proves that Laura has engaged in (homo)sexual acts and that she has sexual knowledge, two mortal sins for the young Victorian lady. Hoping that Laura has been a passive victim of the sensual monster, his father tries to protect her purity by keeping her sexually ignorant. When Laura asks "What is it?", the doctor responds "Nothing, my dear young lady, but a small blue spot" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.42). The same occurs when Laura asks her father: "Nothing; you must not plague me with questions," he answered, with more irritation than I ever remember him to have displayed before" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.44). Laura's father seemingly shares Mitchell's disdain for female questioning: "terrible patients are nervous women (...) who question much where answers are difficult" (1878, p.298). In refusing to answer Laura's inquiries, both patriarch and physician intend to guard the naivety of the Angel as a way to protect patriarchal discourse on female sexuality: all female bodies must remain unaware, for they are weak by nature and therefore under the threat of developing an insatiable sexual desire. In fact, the following chapters of the novel are a patriarchal cautionary tale for the woman to remain pure against the threat of (homo)sexuality. They are narrated, of course, by a male voice: the General's, whose niece died under "monstrous" conditions, due to the "hellish arts" "of the lusts and malignity of hell" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.46). He describes how his niece Bertha became infatuated with Carmilla, whose "features were so engaging, (...) it was impossible not to feel the attraction powerfully" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.50). Bertha's experience parallels Laura's: platonic friendship, dreams that come with illness, and lastly, "sensations" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.50) "followed by a gradual and convulsive sense of strangulation; then came unconsciousness" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.56). The general, however, is glad that Bertha "died in the peace of *innocence* (…) She is gone without so much as conjectring the nature of her illness" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.7). Bertha died "without a suspicion of the cause of her sufferings" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.7), ergo she died without sexual knowledge and therefore, in remaining ignorant, she

died “an angelic rather than a fallen woman” (Heller, 1996, p.86). On the contrary, Laura’s ignorance might be a product “of a conscious self-censorship” (Heller, 1996, p.86), due to Victorian patriarchal discourse condemning sexuality, lesbianism and masturbation. In saying “Heavens! If I had but known all!” (Le Fanu, 2003, p.18) Laura reveals she knows *some* (Heller, 1996). In addition, the thought of Carmilla as a “boyish lover…in masquerade” (Le Fanu, 2003, p.20) suggests that Laura does have knowledge over the crime of sexuality and, most importantly, over the heteronormative patriarchy. In presenting the possibility of Carmilla as a boy, Laura is attempting to soften her sin by exchanging lesbianism with heterosexuality. Once the narrative is hijacked by male authorities, Laura performs her gender as a way to protect herself from patriarchal punishment. But before Laura can develop her sexuality, “the transmission of sexual knowingness from one woman to another–is interrupted” (Heller, 1996, p.89). Carmilla’s disruption of patriarchal medical and religious discourse, as well as her lesbianism, autonomy and knowledge threaten the entire patriarchal heteronormative system, therefore male authorities must exterminate her.

Carmilla’s murder symbolises the destruction of “that which is fatal to the phallic” (Mandal, 2017, p.281). Her sapphism and autonomy are threats to the gender-sex binary and the heteronormativity that authenticates the patriarchal system: escaping the roles of masquerade and symptom, Carmilla rejects male supremacy and forced heterosexual union. Uncovering the fictions of patriarchal medical and religious discourse, Carmilla presents an alternative to androcentric knowledge, that of a female empirical system. Because her existence and, most specifically, the spread of her disease would conclude with the end of patriarchal heteronormativity, the male characters in the novel must eradicate her and everything she embodies. To do so, first they “perform a rape-like surgery” (Heller, 1996, p.89) in which “a sharp stake [is] driven through the heart of the vampire” (Le Fanu, 2003, p.65). In this image, the stake becomes a phallic weapon for the men to re-establish their power over the female body. Here, the lesbian vampire, who had previously used her fangs to penetrate the breasts of young women, is now forcefully penetrated with the stake by a group of men. Furthermore, Carmilla’s “head [is] struck off” (Le Fanu, 2003, p.66). Male authorities, then, rob Carmilla of her head, the site of both knowledge and voice, signifying a brutal end to female autonomy and to the transmission of female knowledge. Body and mind, sources of female (homo)sexuality and wisdom, are literally “placed on a pile of wood, and reduced to ashes” (Le Fanu, 2003, p.66). In murdering Carmilla, the men, embodiments of patriarchal heteronormative discourse, successfully annihilate female desire, autonomy and

knowledge. Therefore, similarly to how Carmilla spread her disease, male authorities send a clear message to other women: transgressing heteronormative patriarchy kills or, better said, makes you a monster for male heroes to kill. Faced with this reality, Laura has no choice but to abide by patriarchal heteronormative discourse, engaging in gender performativity and posing as the sexually ignorant Angel in the House. However, a careful reading of the text presents a different possibility. Laura's text is addressed to a woman: "Perhaps not so singular in the opinion of *a town lady* like you" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.20). It is for this reason that the novel itself might be a source of "hysterical contagion" (Heller, 1996, p.90). If Carmilla's vampirism is an allegory for female (homo)sexuality and, in her attacks, she spread the disease of female knowledge; could the text itself be, then, the continuation of the spread of this sickness? If the young Victorian lady must remain sexually ignorant, is Laura's story not infecting the unknown woman with the sickness of sexual knowledge? Most importantly, is the reader a voyeur, observing Laura's Sapphic development and, therefore, becoming another victim of this infection? Epitomised by Carmilla herself, "As I draw near to you, you, in turn, will draw near to others" (Le Fanu, 2003, p.19). Le Fanu's Gothic novella, then, uncovers the void at the centre of patriarchal heteronormative discourse, presenting the alternatives of female (homo)sexuality, autonomy and knowledge. The story of Carmilla's hysterical contagion transgresses fictional boundaries; as she had drawn near to Laura, I now draw near to you, thus, the infection of female knowledge continues to be spread even today.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, I have proven both its exposure and its subversion of patriarchal heteronormative discourse. The study of gender and discourse theory as well as of the Angel in the House figure have allowed me to discern, first, the ways in which patriarchal heteronormative discourse shapes the body. As argued by Judith Butler, discourse genders the body, categorising it as either male or female, as either heterosexual or homosexual. A hierarchy is established in which the hegemonic members of the pair (male/heterosexual) are deemed as pure while the non-hegemonic ones (woman/homosexual) are described as corrupt. In this hierarchical relationship, "It is he (...) who has the aggressive role and she who submits" (De Beauvior, 2011, p.443). Therefore, in the patriarchal heteronormative system, bodies are indoctrinated to perform gender. To authenticate this system, fictionality is employed: "Man, the male, the virile one, as we know him, is a creation of discourse" (Lacan, 2001, p.89). A man is not born, but rather becomes one by following the phallic myth, the fictional attributes that patriarchal heteronormative discourse associates to masculinity. The woman, however, must act as either masquerade or symptom; as either upholder of the patriarchal myth or as an object for male pleasure and exploitation. The female body is thereby entrapped within the figure of the Angel in the House; regardless of the time period, women today are still trained to "Be sympathetic; be tender (...) [and] Above all, be pure" (Woolf, 1931, p.1254). If she dares escape these roles, she becomes a potential threat to the fiction of patriarchal heteronormativity. Because patriarchal heteronormative discourse "can play its role only when veiled" (Lacan, 2007, p.581) her existence outside its constraints uncovers the fictionality that upholds the system and, thus, she must be exterminated. To achieve this, more myths are created: if the woman outside patriarchal heteronormativity is demonised, women will try to remain within the established boundaries. These discoveries are essential to examine the ways in which Le Fanu's *Carmilla* imitates and thereby uncovers the void at the centre of patriarchal heteronormative discourse.

In its sapphism, *Carmilla* presents, on the one hand, the patriarchal demonisation of female (homo)sexuality and, on the other hand, a complete disruption of the patriarchal heteronormative system within itself. Vampirism becomes an allegory for female sexuality and lesbianism, both threats to the fictionality of patriarchal heteronormativity. First, because when Carmilla infects Laura with the disease of (homo)sexuality, she proves that beneath all Angels lies a monstrous sexuality. In doing so, the patriarchal model of femininity is

destroyed: woman is no longer submissive and sexually ignorant, therefore disrupting the foundations of the gender-sex binary and heteronormativity. Woman is no longer the contrary to man because she is no longer passive and inferior, thus the hierarchy of man/woman, active/passive is broken. Furthermore, heteronormativity is disturbed by the homosexual union of Carmilla and Laura, which completely alienates the male subject while presenting the possibility of an equal sexual/romantic relationship instead of a hierarchical one. To culminate, Carmilla's murder symbolises the patriarchal extermination of female (homo)sexuality, autonomy, and knowledge. Carmilla's infection is truly the spread of sexual knowledge and independence, which threatens the entire patriarchal heteronormative system and is thereby exterminated by the male characters in the novella. Additionally, the ending shows Laura's regression into gender performativity and heterosexuality, as her description of vampirism mirrors patriarchal medical and religious discourse on homosexuality as pathological and sinful. Nonetheless, Laura's final words remove the veil of patriarchal heteronormativity, as she uses Sapphic language to confess that she still longs for Carmilla. This section, thus, demonstrates how Carmilla and Laura's Sapphic bond disrupts patriarchal heteronormative discourse, revealing its fictionality as well as its condemnation of female (homo)sexuality.

In its use of patriarchal medical language, Le Fanu's *Carmilla* exposes the pathologization as well as the demonisation of female sexuality achieved through the construction of hysteria as exclusively and inherently female. Through the study of "hystories" or the history of hysteria, I have proven that it was constructed as a female malady, one that was inherent to all women. Most importantly, I have learned that through hysteria, patriarchal medical discourse transformed female sexuality into a pathology. In addition, the close examination of Victorian medical texts demonstrates that, during the nineteenth century, hysteria was also characterised as monstrous. To culminate, the cures for hysteria were either marriage or institutionalisation. Therefore, patriarchal medical discourse transformed female sexuality into a monstrous illness that could only be remedied by participating in the institution that upholds patriarchal heteronormativity. On the contrary, the woman who remained outside patriarchal boundaries would be exiled from society. Taking this into account, the appearance of hysteria and other hysterical disorders in *Carmilla* is extremely significant. Carmilla, both vampire and hysteric, embodies the characterisation of female sexuality as monstrous and pathological. The plot of the novella imitates Victorian patriarchal medical discourse in which the hysterical girl is like a vampire, sucking the blood

off of healthy people around her (Mitchell, 1878) and spreading her disease. If hysteria and vampirism are synonymous with sexual desire, then Carmilla's infection is that of female (homo)sexuality, which is also reflected in the fact that Laura displays the same symptomatology as Carmilla. Laura's infection indicates, on the one hand, that she is no longer an Angel in the House, that she is no longer sexually ignorant and pure. This would confirm, once again, that beneath all Angels lies a sensual monster; beneath all women a hysteric and, therefore, that patriarchal femininity is a fictional construct. On the other hand, this identical symptomatology could suggest that Carmilla and Laura are doubles, consequently, that Carmilla is the embodiment of Laura's sexuality. In that case, their (homo)sexual interactions are transformed into episodes of masturbation, another hysterical disorder and another indicator of Laura performing as the Angel in the House. Even the outcome of the protagonists mimics patriarchal medical discourse: similarly to the real hysteric, whose options are to wed or to face institutionalisation, Laura must perform patriarchal femininity and Carmilla, like the female patients tortured by Victorian physicians, is murdered by the male characters in the novel. The analysis of hysteria has therefore allowed me to prove how patriarchal medical discourse constructed it as inherently female and, above all, as pathological and monstrous. It is owing to this examination that I have been able to demonstrate the relevance of the novella's mentions of hysteria and other hysterical disorders. By imitating patriarchal medical discourse, the novella uncovers the fictionality of patriarchal heteronormative discourse and, specifically, its demonization of female sexuality.

In showing the battle between female and male authority, as well as the re-covering of the phallic myth, *Carmilla* once again subverts patriarchal heteronormativity and exposes its fictionality. Through the close examination of the text I have realised that its imitation of patriarchal heteronormative discourse extends past hysteria. Le Fanu's *Carmilla* mimics patriarchal structures, figures and belief systems; first, its format emulates that of the tale, which has been historically used to perpetuate both the gender-sex binary and heteronormativity. The princess waits and submits, while the heroic prince fights and obtains her love as a prize. Moreover, male characters in *Carmilla* symbolise what Lacan labels as "the analyst", while Carmilla is "the hysteric". The analyst creates patriarchal discourses (medical, religious, psychoanalytic) to solve the hysteric's questions but fails to do so. His creation of discourse indicates that it is fictional and, additionally, his failure in solving the enigma of the hysteric strips him of his power. In the novella, male characters repeatedly attempt to decipher and cure Laura and Carmilla through medicine or religion. Consequently,

the novella exposes the fictionality of both patriarchal medical and religious discourse, mimicking its demonization of female sexuality. Not only do the analysts fail in curing the infection of female sexuality, but furthermore, Carmilla completely dismisses patriarchal notions of knowledge. The lesbian vampire rejects both medicine and religion, providing the alternative of female empirical knowledge. Carmilla's questioning of the heteronormative patriarchy exposes it as fictional and strips it of its power and, therefore, the analysts must intervene. Male characters reestablish their power through dominating Laura's knowledge and through exterminating Carmilla. In protecting Laura's sexual ignorance, both physician and patriarch attempt to preserve her purity and therefore to maintain her within patriarchal constraints. And, in murdering Carmilla, the analysts attempt to exterminate the enigmatic hysteric, thereby abolishing the threat to patriarchal heteronormativity. In spite of the fact that male authorities have apparently reestablished phallic power, a careful examination of the text reveals the contrary. Laura's account of events is addressed to a town lady, therefore she adopts the role of Carmilla in spreading the disease of female (homo)sexuality and knowledge. This section of the study, then, illustrates the imitation of more patriarchal heteronormative strategies to exert control over the female body. Male characters assume the position of the analyst, attempting to decipher and dominate that which escapes patriarchal heteronormative boundaries. Despite the fact that male authority is seemingly reestablished, Laura addressing her text to a woman transforms the text itself into a source of hysterical contagion.

Thus, the careful examination of the text has led to the confirmation of my initial ideas. The novella's imitation of different patriarchal discourses results in the unveiling of the phallic myth. In exposing its fictionality, *Carmilla* disrupts the entire patriarchal heteronormative system, presenting the alternatives of female (homo)sexuality, autonomy and knowledge.

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