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“Deliberate Voluptuousness”:
The Monstrous Women of *Dracula* and *Carmilla*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English

Judith Bell
John Brown University
Bachelor of Arts in English, 2013

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Abstract

Vampire women play a culturally significant role in films and literature by revealing the extent to which deviation from socially accepted behavior is tolerated. In this thesis, I compare the vampire women of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and J. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* to their depictions in recent adaptations. In Stoker's *Dracula*, the vampire sisters are representative of the shortcomings of 19th century gender roles, especially in regard to women's communities. In recent adaptations, the vampire sisters' revealing clothing, promiscuity, and lack of characterization are still closely connected with villainy, and as in Stoker's novel, the women's violent deaths in the films are treated as punishment for their defiance of gender codes. Carmilla is more sympathetic than the vampire sisters, both in Le Fanu's original text and in recent adaptations. In Le Fanu's text, Carmilla is the primary antagonist, but she remains an attractive figure. Carmilla is even more humanized in recent adaptations, occasionally even being transformed into a heroic figure, while the role of the antagonist is taken on by figures who represent patriarchal control. Despite her more sympathetic characterization, Carmilla dies as brutal a death as *Dracula*'s vampire sisters in nearly every adaptation. Ultimately, the treatment of the vampire women in these adaptations reveals that our own culture is still largely guided by biases against women, especially lesbians, in filmmakers' treatment of villainous and heroic women alike.

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Introduction

As one of the most popular and recognizable monsters in European and American media, vampires have a unique cultural significance. In *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, Nina Auerbach argues that vampires are especially compelling because of their versatility, which allows them to "shape themselves to personal and national moods"; because of this adaptability, she says, their "appeal is dramatically generational" (5). In recent years, the character of Dracula has particularly demonstrated this versatility, transforming from the inhuman villain of Bram Stoker's 1897 novel to the tragic, handsome antihero of recent adaptations. Not all vampires are so mutable, though. Portrayals of vampire women have changed very little from the 19th to the 21st century, as is especially evident in the characterizations of the vampire women in *Dracula* and J. Sheridan Le Fanu's eponymous *Carmilla* (1872) in recent adaptations. Although the changes between novel and film are frequently subtle, they still reveal standards for femininity through their treatment of women. In this thesis, I focus particularly on female vampires because they serve as signposts for cultural attitudes towards women. Vampires in general are closely connected with eroticism and taboo sexualities, and the female vampire is thus a figure who is particularly suited to an analysis of gender and sexuality.

In considering the various versions of the female vampire, it is useful to consider the concept of adaptation. Linda Hutcheon writes, "Just as there is no such thing as a literal translation, there can be no literal adaptation" (16), further noting that "as *a process of creation*, the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation" (8). In this thesis, I will be contrasting the adaptation of male and female vampires, focusing on the female vampires as they appear in novel and in film. In the films in particular, Dracula himself has been reinterpreted as a tragic antihero, more sympathetic and romantic than blatantly terrifying. As

Holte writes, "film vampires, Draculas included, constantly change to reflect the changing concerns and fears of the culture out of which they rise, and the monsters that walk through the nightmares of the late twentieth century are not those of the end of the Victorian age" (*Dracula in the Dark* 84). In the cases of the vampire women, though, the main difference between the original women and their adapted counterparts is that filmmakers of the 20th and 21st centuries can depict them more explicitly. Sensuality that was merely suggested in the books is transformed into explicit sexuality in the majority of the films. Studying adaptations reveals that despite the seeming permissiveness of cultural attitudes towards women, 21st century filmmakers are still uncomfortable with depicting women as sexual, powerful, and morally complex, especially when those women are not romantically attached to men.

It is perhaps largely due to their transgressions against social norms that vampires have remained popular throughout the past few centuries. In his discussion of adaptations of *Dracula*, James Craig Holte writes, "the vampire is a creature who stands outside of the conventions of civilization, conventions that impose order and hierarchies within a culture. The vampire . . . unites the lust for blood and the lust for sex, and in doing so threatens the foundations of civilization" (*Dracula in the Dark* 10). While it is usually male vampires who represent the species as a whole, these anxieties about cultural hierarchies and conventions are even more obvious in the depictions of female vampires. Carol Senf argues, "The woman vampire . . . differs significantly from her male counterpart in that her character is linked to specific historical periods, and that the factors most responsible for altering her character are the same as those which altered the characters of women in general over the past two centuries" ("Daughters of Lilith" 213). As cultural values shift, so too do depictions of women. However, while shifts in

the treatment of female vampires have occurred in some cases, many of the female vampires of these adaptations, especially the vampire sisters of *Dracula*, have remained remarkably static.

Several critics have suggested that vampire women have become more prevalent in 20th and 21st century novels in particular due to increasingly flexible gender roles. Nancy Schumann, for example, argues that the human women who become vampires in recent novels like Anne Rice's *Interview with a Vampire*, Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight*, and E.L. James' *Vampire Diaries* are neither the mindless seductresses nor the passive victims of earlier works. Instead, these women are "ubermothers" whose ferocity is employed to protect their families, adopted or otherwise (116). Carol Senf similarly argues that "The overt eroticism of the female vampire is no longer frightening because sexuality in women is now an acceptable, even desirable, trait," ("Daughters of Lilith" 213).

Critics have noted a similar shift in the acceptance of female vampires in film and television, perhaps especially because many recent vampire films are actually based on those same 20th and 21st century novels. In addition to being "ubermothers," the vampire women in many recent films are made sympathetic through tragic backstories and because they are played by attractive, nonthreatening actresses. Holte suggests that, like their male counterparts, female vampires in recent films are increasingly complex and attractive. While "still dangerous," he says, they "are not monsters" ("Not All Fangs" 172). While depictions of 21st century protagonists who happen to be vampires are usually fairly sympathetic, though, most of the vampire women who have been adapted from early vampire fiction remain monstrous seductresses. In some cases, these female vampires are more inhuman than in their original versions, especially in the case of the three vampire sisters of *Dracula*. Erotic, remorseless killers, they often serve as mere foils for female protagonists, like Mina Harker. These heroines

are much more reflective of shifting cultural standards for women, and they are usually as intelligent and physically active as their male counterparts. While their heroic human counterparts gain independence and skill, the female vampires often remain chaotic, bloodthirsty monsters, entirely under the control of masculine authority.

In this study, I examine the ways in which vampire women have and have not been changed to fit different cultural contexts, focusing especially on critical issues in the representation of women, including female sexuality, gender and power, and the treatment of villainous women, especially within communities. *Dracula* and *Carmilla* offer two distinct approaches to vampire women: the vampire sisters of *Dracula* are chaotic, unsympathetic villainesses in the original novel as well as in most film adaptations, and examining their treatment within those 20th and 21st century films reveals the extent to which transgressions against gender norms are still unacceptable. The eponymous *Carmilla* is actually fairly sympathetic in both the original novel and in film adaptations, yet she too suffers a brutal fate in the original novel and most of the adaptations. Examining her characterization in the three most recent adaptations reveals cultural attitudes toward sexual relationships between women.

Chapter One focuses on the three female vampires in Stoker's original novel. These vampire sisters are much less complex than Carmilla, and are primarily described in terms of their sensuality, especially in the scene in which they attempt to feed upon one of the novel's heroic men, Jonathan Harker. The vampire sisters are comparatively alien with their constant, inexplicable laughter and their confused relationship to Dracula. Their presence in the castle is never explained, nor is their subservience to Dracula, who seemingly must hunt for them (43-44). Traditionally read as representing uncontrolled female sexuality (Roth, Bentley), , they have also been connected with corrupted motherhood (Craft). Ultimately, the three sisters exist

primarily in contrast to Mina and Lucy, who are both more independent of other women and more accepting of men's influence.

Examining the novel before my discussion of the films emphasizes the fact that adaptations are, as Hutchinson claims, interpreting the novel rather than transcribing it. This reinterpretation of the novel by the filmmakers is particularly apparent in the film's treatment of the vampire sisters. All three films take Jonathan's description of the women at face value, interpreting the vampire sisters as sexually provocative, single-minded monsters. However, reexamining the text reveals that the descriptions of them are all from Jonathan or Van Helsing's points of view, and while the men are both certainly attracted to the female vampires, at no point do the women's actions suggest any sexual interest in any men at all. The women do attempt to tempt Mina to join them, but even then they seduce her with promises of female community rather than sexuality. Stoker's original novel allows for some complexity of the women by presenting them only through Jonathan and Van Helsing's biased points of view, and a closer reading reveals that the female vampires serve to critique gender roles of the early 19th century. By basing their depictions of the women on Jonathan and Van Helsing's reactions to the women rather than the women's actual actions, the films eliminate much of the complexity of those original women, who in the text serve as complex symbols rather than a mere opportunity to titillate an audience.

The second chapter examines several recent cinematic adaptations of *Dracula*. Since Stoker's novel has spawned hundreds of adaptations, not all of which even include the vampire sisters, this chapter examines a representative film from each of the past three decades, including Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), Stephen Sommers' *Van Helsing* (2005), and Dario Argento's *Dracula 3D* (2012). In all three films, the bloodthirsty and chaotic vampire

women are dramatically contrasted with the more complex, aristocratic, and even refined Dracula. The vampire sisters serve as a contrast to Mina and Lucy in the original novel; here, they serve as a foil to Dracula himself. Where the women are chaotic and motivated by fury or simple bloodlust, Dracula is motivated by a desire for his lost love in Coppola and Argento's films and his desire to father children in *Van Helsing*. The depictions of these women suggest that it is not vampirism itself that is horrifying, but uncontrolled female sexuality and violence.

In this chapter, I clarify that when the vampire sisters have been changed from their original characterization, they are most often simplified to fit obvious stereotypes of promiscuous women. Still, their depiction in these films also reveals 20th and 21st century mindsets about women and gender, suggesting that while eroticism is acceptable within the limits of monogamous, heterosexual unions, like that of Mina and Jonathan, it is still worthy of punishment in other contexts. Their treatment also suggests that filmmakers are often less interested in depicting women's relationships with each other than they are in assuming that women's inner lives largely revolve around men, since the films largely eliminate women's communities entirely.

The third chapter focuses on Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's 1871 novella *Carmilla*. Unlike the vampire women of *Dracula*, the eponymous *Carmilla* is fairly sympathetic in both Le Fanu's original novella and in the 21st century adaptations. As Senf suggests, "Despite the presence of the supernatural in 'Carmilla'. . . LeFanu uses the vampire motif primarily to focus on the condition of women's lives during the time that he wrote" ("Women and Power" 25). Through protagonist Laura and vampire Carmilla/Millarca Karnstein, Le Fanu explores power dynamics in relationships between women and between women and men, ultimately concluding with a bleak picture of the consequences of old-fashioned notions of chivalry.

I include this chapter to demonstrate how the sympathetic depiction of Carmilla has been revised to fit later cultural contexts. In Le Fanu's novel, Carmilla is a sympathetic antagonist, but she does still poses the most significant threat to protagonist Laura. The secondary antagonists in this original novel are patriarchal figures like Laura's father and General Spielsdorf, who are made ineffective by their own adherence to gender roles. In the film adaptations, the representatives of the patriarchy become the only antagonists, and Carmilla opposes them even more explicitly. In this original novel, though, Carmilla is not marked by rebellion, but manipulation, both of the men and Laura.

The fourth chapter focuses on adaptations of *Carmilla*, particularly its three most recent adaptations: two independent horror films, *Styria*[1] (2015) and *The Unwanted* (2014), and *Carmilla* (2014-present), an ongoing webseries in which the characters are transformed into students at a supernatural university. Early 20th century adaptations of *Carmilla*, Holte says, present a female vampire who is "depicted as clearly outside the accepted norms of traditional Western culture: she is not only unnatural, undead, she is both a lesbian or bisexual and sexually aggressive" ("Not all Fangs" 166). However, in 21st century adaptations of *Carmilla*, of which there were three in 2014 to 2015 alone, Carmilla is often portrayed much more sympathetically. Rather than suggesting that Carmilla herself is unnatural, either for her defiance of authority or for her desires for Laura, these films are instead more likely to present the representatives of the governing systems that oppose her as monstrous and violent. Still, Carmilla is not necessarily representative of a particularly progressive mindset, since her presence still has negative consequences for other women in the films. At her most villainous, Carmilla is portrayed with the same signifiers of aggressive sensuality and violence as the vampire women of *Dracula*.

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[1] released as *Angels of Darkness* and *The Curse of Styria* in the U.S.

This chapter examines the ways in which depictions of Carmilla have changed. Again, she is no longer the antagonist, a role that has instead been taken by violent patriarchal figures. Her relationship with Laura is also much more openly romantic, and in two of the films she and Carmilla are in a fairly healthy sexual relationship. Even at her most positive, though, Carmilla is victimized by members of an oppressive patriarchy, providing filmmakers with the material to critique traditional, oppressive power structures that lead to sexism and homophobia.

In some of these films, the vampire women are made at least slightly more sympathetic, especially due to tragic backstories. The ways in which they remain the same, though, are troubling in terms of what the portrayals reveal about the limits of women's emancipation. While the contexts change drastically, even including comedy in the web series, the depiction of highly sexualized and amoral female vampires remain the same. Where the vampire women in recent novels like *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries* often begin as humans who choose to become vampires for the sake of love, the sister-brides from *Dracula* and the eponymous Carmilla remain the villainous, sexual monsters of their original tales. This constant suggests that even in recent sympathetic and even empowering contexts, the female vampire still serves the function of cautionary role model, indicating that some aspects of female sexuality, like promiscuity, are still considered monstrous. They also suggest that even when the filmmakers themselves critique homophobia and sexism, their portrayals of groups of women are still marked by violence and inequality. While readers and viewers might enjoy the portrayal of female power presented by these fascinating vampire women, they must also be aware of the limits of the figure, who is still largely defined by her existence within a homophobic, sexist culture.

1

"intolerable, tingling sweetness":

The Vampire Sisters of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

Written near the end of the 19th century, Bram Stoker's 1897 *Dracula* remains one of the most significant works of horror today. Primarily the story of 19th century Englishmen and women fighting against the ancient, evil, and blood-sucking Dracula, the novel is also concerned with the effects of gender on morality and villainy. These gender issues are especially prominent in the case of the first women introduced in the novel, the three vampire sisters who first appear to solicitor Jonathan Harker in Dracula's castle. Though the three vampire women are now often referred to as Dracula's "brides" or even his "sister-wives,"[2] in the original text, the relationship between the women and Dracula is unclear, and their origins are unexplained. Harker calls these mysterious, predatory women "those weird sisters" (51), a reference to the three witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* that, combined with the vampires' bloodthirstiness and their immortality, connects them to older traditions of violent goddesses or even the three fates. However, the vampire sisters are also particularly 19th century monsters, and examining them provides insight into the ways the monstrous women and gender have been perceived by audiences and critics alike in the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries.

Although many scholars have discussed *Dracula*'s gender dynamics, few have focused primarily on the vampire sisters, who are usually used either to set up discussions of Lucy Westenra, who is turned into a vampire by Dracula and then violently staked by her fiancé, or Mina Murray Harker, the heroine of the second part of the novel. A closer examination of the roles of the vampire sisters, though, reveals that they play an important role in presenting the

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[2] See Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*.

gender dynamics of the novel, especially in terms of defying traditional standards of women's behavior in the era. These standards for women's behavior, closely connected to Queen Victoria's reign and emphasis on family values, are perhaps best understood in light of Coventry Patmore's now-infamous 1854 poem "Angel in the House," in which Patmore semi-autobiographically presents the romance between the speaker and his wife, whom he characterizes as the ideal woman. Since then, the term "angel in the house" or simply "angel" has been used as shorthand for the ideal but unrealistic 19th century woman: a self-sacrificing wife, mother, daughter, and sister. These ideals for women are expanded on by authors like Sarah Stickney Ellis, whose conduct novel *The Women of England* provides suggestions meant to encourage women to return "to their domestic duties, in order that they may become better wives [and] more useful daughters and mothers" (36). Many of the ideas presented in these works are echoed by characters in *Dracula,* especially Van Helsing, though Stoker himself is not necessarily endorsing them entirely.

Published near the end of the century, *Dracula* is also concerned with the idea of the "New Woman," a frequently exaggerated caricature of the independent women who were then fighting for suffrage, women's rights, and general independence for women. In "*Dracula:* Stoker's Response to the New Woman," Carol Senf compellingly argues that Mina Harker is Stoker's alternative to the New Woman: she is equal to the men in intelligence while also demonstrating characteristics of the traditional wife and mother, allowing Stoker to "show that modern women can combine the best of the traditional and the new" (49). Though Stoker's model for the ideal woman is more progressive than the stereotypical angel, his treatment of the female characters in *Dracula* does insist that women remain subservient to men. Senf further argues that the vampire sisters are directly contrasted to Mina, and their "aggressive behaviour

and attempt to reverse traditional sexual roles show them to be New Women" (40). However, while the vampire women might display certain qualities reminiscent of the New Women, they are less closely connected with them than they are a corrupted version of the stereotypical angel. Rather than reversing traditional roles, the vampire sisters demonstrate the horror of taking those ideals to the extreme. Surprisingly dependent on Dracula, these vampire women are specifically connected to the domestic sphere and motherhood, though these connections are twisted, exaggerated, and made horrifying. The vampire sisters' connection with the stereotypical "angel in the house" allows Stoker to question both older and newer ideals for women, though *Dracula* does still reject any implication of full equality between men and women.

Finally, while criticism has certainly examined the vampire sisters in contrast to Mina and Lucy, it has tended to view them as cautionary models of the human women's qualities taken to the extreme. If Lucy and, later, Mina, are not careful, the text suggests, they risk becoming like the vampire women before them. Examining the vampire women in the context of Mina and Lucy instead can help provide insight not only into how the vampire women came to exist, but also into Stoker's project in regard to gender and morality. In this light, the vampire women are victims as well as monsters, despite scholarship and adaptations that suggest otherwise. The vampire sisters are presented as both defying and, in some ways, embodying gender codes in their admittedly few appearances; understanding the complexity with which they do so reveals the fascinated horror with which cultures approach villainous women in defiance of gender codes, both in the original text and in later film adaptations.

The vampire women's relationship with Dracula himself, seen in two of the three scenes in which they appear and speak, is one that both embodies and subverts traditional gender tropes. The physical aspect of the women's relationship to Dracula is never made explicit, and it is

unclear whether or not they are lovers. Two of the women look like him, with "high aquiline noses, like the Count" (42), leading some to speculate that they are related by birth (Stoker, Auerbach, and Skal 42n7). The other vampire woman is a blonde woman whom the other vampire sisters refers to as "the first" and who sleeps in a "high great tomb as if made to one much beloved" (42, 320). It is this blonde vampire who accuses Dracula of being incapable of love, leading Dracula to protest, "Yes, I too can love; you yourselves can tell it from the past" (43), hinting at a former relationship between them that is romantic, at the very least. On the one hand, the ambiguous relationship between them, which could be that of siblings, lovers, or a parent and his children, leads to a potentially disturbing blurring of boundaries; as Christopher Bentley has noted, there are certainly incestuous undertones to the relationship (29). To some extent, then, the ambiguity of the relationships between the women and Dracula is merely the means by which Stoker adds to the sense of surreal horror that Jonathan experiences at Dracula's castle.

However, the ambiguous nature of the relationships, while likely startling even to 19th century audiences, is not entirely unprecedented, and might actually reflect the rhetoric surrounding women and their relationships with men. In her 1839 conduct novel, *The Women of England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits*, for example, Ellis argues that women should provide small domestic comforts and cheerful companionship to the men in their lives, noting that "many of the remarks I have made upon the behaviour of daughters to their fathers, are equally applicable to that of wives towards their husbands" (205). Of course, the vampire sisters are hardly mending Dracula's clothes or preparing his meals, at least as far as Jonathan sees. Instead, they seem to exist merely to provide Dracula with companionship. This tendency towards indolent companionship, though, does not seem to be a problem exclusive to vampires.

In fact, Ellis specifically criticizes young women for a similar inclination towards idleness, since while she does recommend that women be able to converse intelligently to entertain the men of their households (98), she disapproves of young women who, while willing to sit and entertain their brothers and husbands, let them return home to a disorderly house or to untended clothing (173). The vampire women's seeming idleness, then, suggests not that they are New Women, but that they are failed domestic angels. By connecting the female antagonists with older gender models, Stoker is able to question those models; however, this pattern also allows him to portray women in positions of power over men as monstrous.

Stoker further connects the vampire women with older gender models by limiting the women to their home in Dracula's castle. Their presence in the castle presents an extreme version of the concept of separate spheres, which was used to suggest that women's place was in the domestic sphere of the home (as opposed to the professional or even the public spheres). Ellis explicitly praises this ideology of separate spheres by commending women of the past who "seldom went abroad" and whose "sphere of action was at their own fire-sides" (20). "The sphere of woman's happiest and most beneficial influence is a domestic one" (36), she continues, where they can act as "the guardians of the comfort of their homes" (25). The idea that women are best suited to a life at home, where they can make others' lives more comfortable, is one that is echoed throughout many 19th century works of literature. In *Dracula,* the idea is taken to an extreme with the vampire women who remain confined to the house despite their ability to disappear into dust motes and travel through moonbeams (41, 48, 316). They seem to have their own quarters within the castle, presumably the suite that Jonathan guesses once belonged to a lady of the castle due to its furnishings and spectacular, unobstructed view of the valley below

(41).[3] They appear outside only once in their attempt to convince Mina to join them, but even then they do not leave the castle grounds. While 19th century women were not necessarily confined to their homes, of course, the concept of the home as a woman's domain is echoed and twisted by the vampire sisters. Restricted to the house, the sisters are apparently welcome in only a few of its rooms.

The women's connection to the castle also means that while they certainly drink blood, they never seem to actually hunt for it. Dracula brings them food twice; the first time, upon being forbidden from consuming Jonathan, one sister asks Dracula if they are "to have nothing tonight?" as she points at his bag (43), suggesting that to some extent, they are dependent on Dracula to hunt for them. Of course, they clearly have no qualms about drinking those who, like Jonathan, enter their castle voluntarily. Van Helsing envisions the vampire sisters draining the men who approach them while they rest in their coffins, not actively hunting people down. If a vampire's "profession" is hunting and drinking blood, then the vampire women avoid the professional, public sphere, remaining firmly within the domestic, where they wait to attack any who approach them. While they are trapped within the domestic sphere, they also gain a unique sense of power that is particularly dangerous to men. The connection between deadly women and the domestic possibly suggests that part of Stoker's distaste with the idea of the angel of the house is that it has the potential to empower women over men, if only in that limited space.

The vampire sisters' strong connection to the domestic sphere, both physically and in terms of occupation, further emphasizes their connection to older traditions and older ideals for women. Jonathan is able to immediately identify them as "ladies by their dress and manner" (41), an observation that connects them with the idle, predatory upper classes of previous eras,

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[3] Like many vampires, the vampire sisters are closely connected with images of a faded but predatory aristocracy.

especially when combined with their residence in a castle. However, in the context of the 19th century and the doctrine of separate spheres, the sisters are also representative of the "angel in the house" mentality taken to an illogical extreme.[4] The vampire sisters obediently remain within the house, but again, their presence is ultimately used to create a sense of horror, changing the home from its traditional place of refuge into to a deadly snare.

The connection between the vampire women and early 19th century gender ideals also explains the vampire sisters' incessant, otherwise inexplicable laughter, which punctuates nearly every line of their sparse dialogue. Jonathan and Van Helsing both find the laughter chilling, and Jonathan describes it as "the intolerable, tingling sweetness of water-glasses when played on by a cunning hand" (42). When viewed within the context of a tradition that values women's constant cheerfulness, the "soulless," "horrible" laughter makes more sense (43, 52). Ellis says that a woman's part is "to make sacrifices, in order that [the man of her household's] enjoyment may be enhanced" (176), and even Mina discusses the need for women to hide negative emotions from men, writing that even if she does "feel weepy," Jonathan "will never see it"; hiding one's negative emotions behind a façade of false cheerfulness, she muses, is "one of the lessons that we poor women have to learn" (226). This illusion of cheeriness is taken to a frightening extreme by the vampire sisters, to the point where they seem incapable of any emotions besides mirth and scorn, both of which are expressed through their endless laughter. Presenting the sisters' laughter as alien and unnatural allows the text to make traditional expectations for the attitudes of women horrifying, a tradition continued in film adaptations.

[4] Locked away from the rest of the world in a manner reminiscent to the plight of the protagonist of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), in which the confinement of women is connected with mental illness to horrifying effect.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the three vampire women's defiance of gender codes is their overt sensuality, described by Stoker in coded language that reflects late 19th century gender and publishing restrictions. It is this obvious sensuality, a startling departure from contemporary gender norms for women, which has most interested critics as well as filmmakers. Senf argues that the characterizations of the women in the novel are largely in reaction to the concept of the New Woman, for example, since "Stoker's villainesses . . . radiate sexuality. Responding to the sexual freedom and reversal of roles which were often associated with the New Woman, Stoker uses the ancient superstition of the vampire in *Dracula* to symbolize the evil that can result" ("Stoker's Response" 39). On a similar note, Bentley writes, "Stoker's vampires are permitted to assert their sexuality in a much more explicit manner than his 'living' characters" (28), which is certainly true of Dracula and Lucy, if not necessarily the case with the vampire sisters. Christopher Craft suggests that, as a whole, "*Dracula* insists, first, that successful filiation implies the expulsion of all 'monstrous' desire in women and, second, that all desire . . . must subject itself to the heterosexual configuration that alone defined the Victorian sense of the normal" (129).

Of course, the vampire sisters' actions are never literally sexual in nature. The descriptions of the vampire sisters, which are only provided by men, emphasize the effect they have on those men—everything from their appearances to their movements lead to a physical response described in nearly as much detail as the women themselves. Jonathan remarks that seeing them fills him with "some longing and at the same time some deadly fear," mixed with a desire that they will "kiss [him] with those red lips" (42), and Van Helsing, who recognizes the sisters by their "round forms, the bright hard eyes, the teeth, the ruddy colour, the voluptuous lips" (317), all of which, he says, "move" him and make his "head whirl with new emotion"

(320).[5] However, despite what Jonathan describes as their "deliberate voluptuousness" (42), the descriptions of the vampire sisters are indicative of the men's reactions to the women as much as of the women's actual actions. As many have argued, of course, the drinking of blood itself is coded as erotic, both here and in other works featuring vampires. Still, the vampire sisters never actively attempt to seduce either of the men: Jonathan is seemingly asleep when they first approach him, while Van Helsing is "moved" by the insensible women in their coffins. Their only actual encounter with a living human occurs when they ignore Van Helsing entirely as they attempt to convince Mina to join their sisterhood (316-318). Despite the erotic language describing their appearances and blood drinking, the vampire sisters are consistently *sensual,* not *sexual*, though both, it is implied by the text, are immoral. The conflating of the two is one of the most troubling aspects of *Dracula* criticism and adaptations, especially since the women are not necessarily entirely responsible for their actions.

The emphasis on the women's sensuality allows Stoker to create a shift in gendered power dynamics, one that the text, at least, uses as a source of horror. Jonathan finds the women even more horrifying than Dracula himself, expressing a determination that he "shall not remain alone with them" after Dracula departs for England (55). In his oft-cited discussion of sexuality and homoerotic desire in *Dracula*, Craft notes that the scene in which the women nearly drink Jonathan's blood is physically reversed from gendered expectations of sex itself, since "virile Jonathan Harker enjoys a 'feminine' passivity and awaits a delicious penetration from a woman whose demonism is figured as the power to penetrate" (109). While this scene is highly eroticized, though, the fear in the text has as much to do with gendered power dynamics as it

[5] Christopher Bentley observes that "languorous" and "voluptuous" are "two of the terms that Stoker chooses from his rather limited vocabulary of the erotic" to describe the actions of vampire women (29).

does sexual ones. Jonathan is frightened of even seeing the women, seemingly afraid that he will not be able to avoid being further hypnotized (48). In his last entry in this journal, Jonathan writes that if he dies in his attempt to escape the women and the castle, at least he may die "as a man" (55). This line could refer to either his fears of being feminized, as Craft suggests, or to his fears of becoming inhuman. A large part of Jonathan's fear of the women stems not merely from his fear of being physically devoured, but of being changed against his will, a fear echoed by Mina's unwilling partial transformation in the second half of the novel. It is the unwilling overpowering of their will, not their bodies, that the characters, especially the men, consistently consider the most horrifying aspect of the vampires' influence. The loss of autonomy seems to be explicitly connected to becoming feminized.

This unarticulated fear of the vampire sisters implies that part of the horror of the novel is anxiety in regard to women holding power over men. This concept goes back to the idea of the angel in the house, who, according to Ellis, holds a particular influence over men's morality. Women's moral influence makes them responsible, she says, for providing "the tone to English character" (35), ultimately making women responsible for the moral character of the entire country. Part of the horror of the novel, then, is the potential for these women to use that influence to manipulate and even harm the otherwise morally upstanding men. Upon seeing the beauty of the blonde vampire in her tomb, Van Helsing says, "the very instinct of man in me, which calls some of my sex to love and protect one of hers, made my head whirl with new emotion" (320). Rather than using their vampire abilities to hunt like Dracula, the women use the illusion of vulnerability to capture potential prey. The sisters' power to render men helpless is connected both to their status as vampires and to their gender, which allows them the advantage of seeming vulnerable. The desires to protect and be protected are specifically gendered, and the

sisters' lack of compliance with their role suggests that they prey upon men's better natures. If the best of men are the ones who willingly help the helpless, then the vampire women are specifically preying upon the best men. The text does ultimately confirm women's influence over men's morality, but confirms that that power is not limited to upstanding women like Mina Harker. Once again, *Dracula* uses the vampire sisters to take an aspect of idealized femininity to its horrifying extreme, allowing Stoker to question that idealization entirely.

Stoker further interrogates idealized femininity through the vampire sisters' connection with motherhood, since their heartless treatment of children allows them to further invert traditional gender roles. The ideal woman in most 19th literature is a married mother: Patmore's *Angel in the House*, for example, transitions directly from a marriage proposal to a decade later, where the speaker's wife is presiding over several children, and Ellis' conduct manual consistently treats marriage and motherhood as the most fulfilling life state for any woman. The vampire sisters completely invert this traditional idyllic motherhood by feeding on children specifically, presumably after Dracula has stolen them from their real mothers. At two different points in the novel, Dracula brings the women a bag from which Jonathan Harker can hear "a low wail, as of a half-smothered child" (43-44). Later, newly turned vampire Lucy Westenra similarly preys exclusively on children, and it is her callous treatment of a child that finally convinces all of Van Helsing's men that she is no longer herself, but a monster in need of violent killing (188). Senf notes that Stoker "tends to connect sensuality in women with cruelty to children," suggesting that a "lack of maternal feelings," which "violate[s] his preconceptions about women," is "a characteristic which Stoker appears to associate with the New Woman even though New Woman writers did not" ("Stoker's Response" 41). Of course, the vampire women's cruelty towards children is just as easily connected to the idea of the corrupted angel of the house

as it is to the idea of the New Woman. Regardless, it is the lack of maternal feelings that makes them horrifying. Craft suggests that Stoker "emphasizes the monstrosity implicit in such abrogation of gender codes by inverting a favorite Victorian maternal function" (120). The vampire women's actual treatment of children specifically connects their villainy with their resistance to gender codes. However, this connection to reproduction is further complicated by their natures as vampires, through which they have the inherent ability to create new vampires from their victims.

Though the text might be horrified by the vampire women's lack of maternal feelings, it is equally concerned with the possibility that they might reproduce. As in *Carmilla*, vampires by their very nature are implicitly connected to reproduction and motherhood, since the vampire's bite creates new vampires. Craft argues that Dracula's "mission in England is the creation of a race of monstrous women" (111), and viewed in this context, Dracula himself is connected with parenthood in his creation of new vampires Lucy and, less successfully, Mina. Unlike Dracula, the female vampires do not reproduce in the novel itself, but their potential to do so is consistently a major source of their horror. Their capacity to reproduce is, in fact, the main reason Van Helsing is so determined to destroy them. Facing the graves of the vampire sisters in Dracula's castle, Van Helsing imagines that men throughout the centuries have come to destroy the vampires only be distracted by their beauty, leaving "one more victim in the Vampire fold; one more to swell the grim and grisly ranks of the Un-dead!" (319). The villainesses of Stoker's novel are not only women who defy gender roles by refusing to become mothers, but are monsters who are horrifying because they are capable of producing threatening offspring.

Dracula continues to complicate gender roles for women in its treatment of sisterhood. As the concept of the "angel in the house" demonstrates, the 19th century white middle-class

ideal is for women to prioritize their husbands if they are married and their brothers and fathers if they are unmarried. However, even Ellis remarks that this prioritization of men does not necessarily mean that women's relationships are entirely unimportant. In fact, she writes, "there is sometimes a bond existing between sisters, the most endearing, the most pure and disinterested, of an description of affection which this world affords" (176). This sisterly bond can be created by mutual understanding of each other's pain and can possibly lead women to mutual education. If sisters and female friends are meant to help the ideal woman better herself, though, the vampire sisters represent an anxiety that their companionship will be made extreme. The vampire women, specifically referred to as "sisters" by Van Helsing (320), are dependent on Dracula, but they do not seem to be subservient to him in attitude. Instead, the women rely on each other for companionship, willingly sharing food with each other and apparently spending all of their waking hours in the others' company. In *Communities of Women*, Nina Auerbach argues that in literature, insular communities of women frequently serve as symbols of "female self-sufficiency" (5). She writes, "As this myth takes shape as part of our imaginative inheritance, so does the fictional reality of women's autonomy . . . their isolation has had from the first the self-sustaining power to repel or incorporate the male-defined reality that excludes them" (6); however, she notes, "Victorian commentaries on sisterhood tended to veer between horror and hope" (14), since many were cautious of women's influence on each other. *Dracula* is inclined to treat these groups with horror rather than hope, as this small circle of women is dangerous physically and socially. Already isolated from human society by their natures as vampires, they are also isolated from Dracula himself, who seemingly abandons them when he leaves for England. The women are further isolated and incapable of communicating with humans, thus

leaving them out of the sphere of men and out of the sphere of humanity in general, suggesting that their small community is dangerously insular.

Despite the hopeful portrayal of women's relationships by authors like Ellis, Stoker is consistently apprehensive of strong emotional bonds between even the morally upright human women, whose attachments to other women are weak bonds easily superseded by romantic relationships with men. Although after Lucy's death Mina says that she and Lucy were "like sisters" (203), their actual interactions seem remarkably cool. The first letters they exchange are apologies for how long it has been since they last wrote to each other (55), and this introduction sets up a relationship that is marked by distance and reticence. Even when they live together at Whitby for a number of days, Mina and Lucy are often distant from each other: both take frequent solitary walks, and Mina secretly discusses Lucy's health with others without consulting Lucy herself. Lucy and Mina's reserved attachment is in direct contrast with Mina's potential relationship with the vampire women, who call Mina their "sister" and offer a lasting relationship bound by blood (315). As far as Stoker is concerned, unlike the men, who are attracted to vampirism due to sexual desire, vampirism appeals to women largely because it presents an opportunity for female connectedness.

Though the text is suspicious of all-women communities, the alternative it presents is not a heterosexual union between a married couple, but is instead a community of heroic men, represented by the small group of Lucy's former suitors who work with Van Helsing to defeat Count Dracula: Quincey Morris, Arthur Holmwood, and John Seward. Auerbach notes that contrary to women's communities, "all-male communities usually possess indisputable magnitude and significance" (7), explaining that this authority generally "springs too from the powerful motion of the quest which so often gives them their structure" (8). Here, the men's

"quest" is the destruction of Dracula, an ancient evil who threatens England. However, this all-male group fails to save Lucy, protect Mina, or permanently damage Dracula until they include Mina in their planning. The suggestion seems to be that an ideal woman, who is intelligent and intuitive while also being humble and submissive, is capable of assisting a group of men and making them more successful.

Of course, Van Helsing does attribute Mina's intelligence and reasonableness to her "man-brain" (263), which might suggest that Mina's influence on the group is because her mind, at least, is as masculine as theirs. However, while Van Helsing is usually a source of reason and information, he also consistently represents an older model of patriarchy with which Stoker is not entirely satisfied. Van Helsing's attempts to exclude Mina for her own protection, for example, are clearly presented as a mistake, and his praise of her "man-brain" might suggest that though Van Helsing is wise, he is not necessarily a perfect model of masculinity. Furthermore, Mina is explicitly connected with femininity throughout the text, though again, it is a femininity that is neither the idealized "angel" nor the liberated New Woman. Instead, Stoker seems to be using this group of vampire hunters to present a new gender model, one in which women are more independent than their angelic predecessors but are still more deferent to men than the New Women. In his ideal for gender relations, ignoring the abilities of individual women actually places groups of men at a disadvantage, especially when those women are as extraordinary as Mina Harker. Though he still obviously still imagines women in a subservient role, Stoker is surprisingly open to the idea of a heroic woman.

Still, the fact that Van Helsing's group has room for only this one ideal woman suggests that Stoker remains uneasy with women's influence upon each other, regardless of the value systems individual women represent. The approval of the mostly-male community comes at the

expense of women's communities and praises isolated, individual women. Auerbach suggests, "As a recurrent literary image, a community of women is a rebuke to the conventional ideal of a solitary woman living for and through men, attaining citizenship in the community of adulthood through masculine approval alone" (5). In this regard, Stoker's narrative is fairly conventional in its praise of the "solitary woman" at the expense of relationships between women. In fact, the narrative explicitly forces Mina to make the choice between female community and male approval when she faces the vampire sisters' invitation to "Come, sister. Come to us. Come! Come!" (317). Van Helsing approvingly notes the "terror," "the repulsion, the horror" that Mina expresses at this invitation, which, he says, "[tells] a story to [his] heart that [is] all of hope" (317). Van Helsing's approval of her rejection of female community emphatically places Mina in the tradition of Auerbach's "solitary woman," who has "no sanctioned existence apart form he relationships with men," and will "exist relative to nothing, and in the very absoluteness of her isolation, she becomes a late Victorian culture heroine" (19).

The very fact that Stoker is so anxious that Mina reject this all-female community hints at the potential power of such a sisterhood. Of course, the two all-female communities presented in the novel are ultimately vulnerable to men, who invade their homes with the express purpose of harming them. Mina and Mrs. Westenra, who stay in a cottage with Lucy, cannot protect her from Dracula's influence, and even the vampire women are virtually helpless when Van Helsing arrives to slaughter them. However, Van Helsing's relief at Mina's rejection of the vampire women suggests that he is aware of the extent of the temptation such a community offers, especially since this particular community is connected with the aristocracy and a lack of other responsibilities. The vampire sisters' strength as a community is also particularly threatening to the men who hunt them. The vampiric Lucy acts alone, and the group of men has little trouble

dispatching her. The vampire sisters, on the other hand, twice outnumber both Jonathan and Van Helsing, each of whom is nearly overwhelmed by them and is only saved by an outside source—Jonathan by Dracula, and Van Helsing by Mina. Ultimately, the communities of women presented in the novel, despite being depicted as flawed and vulnerable to men's influence, suggest that women in communities hold a surprising amount of power over men. Even though these communities are defeated, the men consistently fear feminine solidarity.

The novel's general anxiety regarding women's potential influence is reflected in the violent, sexual depictions of the women's deaths. The vampire sisters' death by Van Helsing, who stakes them while they scream and writhe (320), is remarkably violent and described in particularly sexualized language, especially when compared to Dracula's anticlimactic end. Many critics have noted that the female vampires' deaths contain an element of punishment for their actions as vampires, though it is unclear whether those "crimes" are their sensuality or their specific preying upon children. Craft, for example, argues that the tradition's "insistent idealization of women . . . encodes a restriction on the mobility of desire," which then "licenses a tremendous punishment for the violation of the code" (126). This violent slaying of the vampire women suggests a desire to restore traditional power dynamics, as well as to destroy the potential influence the vampire women hold over the men.

This pattern of restoring traditional gender balances helps to explain the novel's insistence that through death, the vampires, especially the female ones, are restored to their pre-vampiric state. On the one hand, Stoker's insistence on pitying the vampires as possible victims suggests that there is more to their deaths than mere punishment. Van Helsing describes his "butcher work" as way to "restore these women to their dead selves" (320), acknowledging that the killings are brutal while also insisting that they "restore" the vampires to the women they

would have been had they not been infected by vampirism. Later, when writing about the death of one of the women, Van Helsing describes the "gladness that stole over [her face] just ere the final dissolution came, as realization that the soul had been won," after which, he says, he can "pity them . . . and weep" (320). It is important to the men that they are not punishing the vampires, but are releasing them from a state from which they would desire to be freed if they had a choice. However, this moment also allows the men to appreciate and even pity the vampire women's vulnerability without fearing that the women will use that pity to manipulate them. Now that the men are safe from the vampires' influence, they are free to once again take a position of authority over the women, a position Stoker repeatedly endorses.

Despite the fact that the men have killed the women largely to restore the (im)balance between genders, the fact that the women are pitied at all for their state as vampires complicates readings of the women in which they are mindless seductresses or are deserving of punishment. The fact that the vampire sisters seem to be at peace after their deaths suggests that they themselves are victims—after all, despite vampirism requiring the drinking of the vampire's blood, neither Lucy nor Mina drinks Dracula's blood voluntarily. The vampire sisters' background is unknown, but if Lucy becomes a vampire against her will and is their equal in violence and sensuality, then there is nothing to suggest that the vampire sisters are any more responsible for their state than she is. Critics' continued insistence that Dracula's "kiss" is an "empowering"[6] one that "threatens [the women's] presumably static position in the male alliance system" (Signorotti 625) is thus made particularly troubling. At no point do any characters voluntarily seek out vampirism, and those who are bitten, especially Mina, desperately seek a

[6] A particularly odd descriptor for this scene, which Signorotti elsewhere refers to as a rape (626).

cure; treating them as voluntary violators of social norms is troubling, as it suggests that they are responsible for being victimized.

Mina, whose struggles against vampirism reveal the impossibility of fighting against the infection, provides further insight into the text's dilemma of destroying victims. Perhaps alarmed by the group's growing animosity towards vampires, she urges them to remember that though they "must destroy [Dracula] even as [they] destroyed the false Lucy so that the true Lucy might live hereafter," their efforts are "not a work of hate. That poor soul who has wrought all this misery is the saddest case of all. Just think what will be his joy when he too is destroyed in his worser part that his better part may have spiritual immortality. You must be pitiful to him too, though it may not hold your hands from his destruction" (269). Mina thus gives the men permission to take any action they believe necessary for Dracula's destruction. In terms of symbolic punishment, her speech is horrifying, making the destruction of the Other—whether that Other is representative of different genders, races, ethnicities, or classes—a righteous action. It also evokes the idea of destroying the body to save the soul, framing the group as righteous religious warriors for whom destruction is an act of mercy.

However, the narrative's insistence on this point suggests an element of anxiety that Van Helsing's group is not entirely in the right, at least in their gratuitously violent descriptions of the vampires' deaths. This anxiety is connected to the implication that the vampire sisters, at least, are being viciously punished for actions against their control. Sos Eltis insists that *Dracula'*s "moral scheme is more complex than a dichotomy of opposites: the 'good' characters'. . . sexuality is different from the vampires' only in degree. Men and women resist becoming vampires by controlling and containing their sexual urges" (464). However, as is evident in the cases of Lucy and Mina, this assessment is not entirely accurate. Vampirism, once contracted, is

a disease rather than a moral failing, and Lucy dies of blood loss, not lack of willpower. Mina contracts and develops vampirism without succumbing to any "sexual urges," metaphorical or otherwise, and nearly becomes a vampire despite her heroism. The vampire women, then, while still presented as violent, bloodthirsty, and dangerous, are not necessarily treated as responsible for their state as vampires, and in theory, are not being punished for it. This interpretation is not, however, one that is consistent with the film adaptations, as will be seen in Chapter Two.

In *Dracula,* Stoker examines late 19th century shifts in the roles of women, especially the two competing ideologies of the angel in the house and the New Woman, ultimately presenting his own model for femininity in Mina Harker. The three vampire women, who serve as twisted versions of the mid-19th century angelic ideal for women, are meant to horrify, and their isolated community of women serves mostly to uplift the ideal community of heroic men. Still, as potential victims, the vampire women seem meant to evoke some degree of pity and forgiveness, even if their restoration to their pre-vampiric selves is only possible after their disturbingly violent deaths allow the men to regain their security as protectors of women.

Despite his questioning of certain ideals for women, Stoker is uninterested in the complete overthrow of traditional gender power dynamics, especially since he is so against the idea of the New Woman. Stoker consistently reinstates a traditional balance between genders—while men and women may work together, women who gain positions of power over men are immediately destroyed. However, he does reject the early 19th century ideals for women, both by presenting Mina as an alternative and by presenting the vampire sisters as the examples for that ideology taken to the extreme. Confining women to a single sphere, he suggests, is dangerous as well as foolish, since isolating women from men makes them dangerous and also limits their ability to assist men's communities. Stoker's ultimate ideal for women, then, is in a supporting

role to men that is still more active than those early 19th century models. Like all ideals, it is also contradictory and impossible to meet, as he demands that women be at once intelligent, active, and independent while also respectful of men's authority and aware of their roles as future mothers. It is unsurprising that only one woman in *Dracula* fulfills this ideal. It is also unsurprising that their failure to meet this ideal leads to the deaths of all of the vampire women—the failure to fully meet the standards for moral femininity still frequently motivates the deaths of female characters, even in films of the 20th and 21st centuries.

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"vixen, leering, slut":

The Vampire Sisters in *Dracula* Adaptations

Since its release in 1897, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* has become a cultural icon, spawning numerous adaptations and influencing nearly all other vampire films and texts. As Jeffrey Weinstock says in his study of vampire film, Stoker's *Dracula* is "the vampire cinema Ur-text . . . the original from which everything else is copied" (2), and this popularity is reflected in Dracula's innumerable depictions on screen, whether that be as part of an adaptation of the original work or as a mere guest appearance in various shows and films. While Dracula himself is seemingly malleable enough to fit many roles, though, his female companions are rarely seen without him. When they do appear, they are nearly identical to the vampire sisters as they appear in Stoker's novel. In early 20th century films, their roles are often limited to that of mere set dressing; in Senf's analysis of the sisters in *Dracula* films up to 1984, she notes that in at least one instance the women "serve only to provide atmosphere in the film . . . They are mere ghostly presences, as passive as the heroine" ("Brides of Dracula" 67). While the vampire sisters are rarely so passive in 20th or 21st century adaptations, they also seldom receive interesting subplots or personalities. In some films, one or even all of the female vampires are eliminated entirely. Rather than characters in their own right, the vampire sisters often function as a monstrous, bloodthirsty backdrop for a more sympathetic, compelling Dracula. Their bloodthirstiness, their sexuality, and even their attire suggest that they are monsters. Their treatment suggests that even in the 20th and early 21st century, the ideal woman is one who seems independent but remains committed to and dependent upon men alone.

Where the original vampire sisters are villainous because they subtly embody the worst failings of the domestic Victorian angel, the vampire women in these adaptations reflect 20th and 21st century mores. Their blatant sexuality is still presented as obscene, and although they are more individualized than their original counterparts, they are even more concerned with men. The most notable aspect of the vampire women's depiction in recent adaptations is that they are actually surprisingly similar to their book counterparts; of all of the characters, the vampire sisters of the films are the most similar to Stoker's vampire women. The changes in the vampire women from text to adaptation are subtle ones, but even those seemingly minor differences reveal an ongoing discomfort with sexually aggressive women and anxiety towards women's relationships.

Perhaps the most obvious change is the fact that the female vampires' sexuality is no longer implied by the men's reaction to them, but is made explicit through the women's actions and apparel. As in Stoker's novel, women's uncontrolled sexuality outside of a monogamous, heterosexual relationship is still presented as monstrous and deadly. The films' treatment of the women as a group is also significant. Stoker's vampire women are part of a community that is frightening in its uniformity. In the adaptations, the communities of women lack both harmony and effectiveness, which ultimately leaves the women vulnerable to outside forces and to each other. This trivialization of women's communities leads all of the women, especially the vampiric ones, to focus entirely on men, thus minimizing the complex relationships with motherhood and sisterhood as seen in Stoker's novel. Even homoerotic moments between the women are centered on men. Most significantly, though, the vampire women in the adaptations are denied redemption, even the troublingly violent redemption presented in the original novel.

Ultimately, the vampire sisters remain frustratingly one-dimensional, reduced from mysterious emblems of uncontrolled femininity to mere hysterical bystanders.

To better examine the ways these factors play out in a variety of *Dracula's* numerous adaptations, this chapter examines a representative adaptation from each of the past three decades. The three films vary in popularity, budget, and even genre, but each film includes at least one of the vampire sisters. Francis Ford Coppola's critically acclaimed *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) remains one of the most popular adaptations of the novel in recent decades, winning several Oscars for costumes, makeup, and sound effects. Though it does contain some original elements, this film mostly follows the plot of Stoker's novel. Stephen Sommers' *Van Helsing* (2004) was less critically acclaimed, though it was nominated for several Saturn awards[7] in 2005, ultimately winning for Best Music. Sommers' film makes an action hero of Van Helsing, though Dracula and his brides play prominent roles. While less faithful to the plot of Stoker's novel, *Van Helsing* remains one of the few adaptations to feature the vampire sisters as fully-drawn characters in their own right, and their characterization and relationship with Dracula makes an analysis of the film useful. Dario Argento's *Dracula 3D* (2012) is one of the most recent adaptations of *Dracula,* though it was much less popular than either of the other two films; according to IMDB, it earned less than $700,000 worldwide. Despite his attempt to use 3D effects to make a unique addition to the growing list of *Dracula* adaptations, Argento's use of 3D has largely been considered overly contrived, and the DVD release, titled simply *Argento's Dracula*, entirely removes any mention of 3D effects. Like Coppola's film, Argento's *Dracula* mostly features the plot and characters of Stoker's novel, though Argento's adaptation omits two of the vampire sisters.

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[7] Awards created by the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films. Incidentally, the organization was founded in 1972 by *Dracula* scholar Donald A. Reed.

In these and other recent adaptations, when the vampire sisters do appear, they receive more narrative time than ever before; however, that screen time is never spent making them more sympathetic. Instead, the vampire sisters remain chaotic and evil, fulfilling a complex role as emblems of villainous women. Their characterizations suggest that despite real women's improved social and legal status, the misogyny that underlined their original incarnations remains even in recent films. These women, who are denied the complexity of their male counterparts, are still connected with sexuality and promiscuity. Their portrayals suggest that to some extent, sexual double standards still persist.

The increased prominence and continued villainy of the vampire sisters in film adaptations of *Dracula* have occurred simultaneously with the more sympathetic treatment of vampires in all fiction in recent decades. Vampire men, who have slowly become more antihero than villain, are now just as likely to be heroic, especially in young adult fiction. The status of vampire women is more dubious. My analysis of the vampire sisters contrasts with a general critical notion that that female vampires in film and literature are also becoming more accepted, representing a cultural movement towards acceptance of women's sexuality. Senf, for example, argues that the vampire woman's "character is linked to specific historical periods," meaning that in the case of most of their 21st century depictions, "The overt eroticism of the female vampire is no longer frightening because sexuality in women is now an acceptable, even desirable, trait . . . Furthermore, the rebellion against authority that has been part of the woman vampire's character since the beginning is now more generally accepted" ("Daughters of Lilith" 213). Holte similarly notes a "trend of increasingly positive depiction" of the vampire sisters, ultimately concluding, "a figure that began as horrific with an undercurrent of sexual attraction has become more familiar and more attractive, although still dangerous. Contemporary female vampires . . . are

attractive and sympathetic female characters whose vampirism is only one part of their complex characters; they are not monsters" ("Not All Fangs" 170, 172). It is certainly true that many vampire women original to the 21st century are less monstrous than their predecessors, in part due to the growing trend of female protagonists who themselves become vampires.[8] However, *Dracula*'s villainous vampire women have not received the same treatment as the female characters in other films and movies. Their monstrosity is emphasized by their bloodthirstiness, their blatant sexuality, and even their appearances, especially when compared to changes in the depiction of Dracula himself. The vampire sisters of *Dracula* are still depicted as entirely evil and are unable to either escape punishment or garner sympathy. Neither the 19th century text nor 20th and 21st century films allow for much complexity in female villains.

The vampire sisters' undiminished monstrosity emphasizes the softening of Dracula himself as a character. Late 20th and early 21st century adaptations of *Dracula* portray him as villainous but increasingly sympathetic, both in terms of motivation and appearance. Senf notes that even in the original text, despite Dracula's "bestial characteristics," Jonathan Harker still "continues to see him as a noble adversary" ("Women of *Dracula*" 3). Characters continue to express this grudging respect for Dracula even in these three recent adaptations. In Coppola and Argento's films, Dracula targets Mina Harker because she is the reincarnation of the love of his life, a move that makes his preoccupation with her much more understandable. In *Van Helsing,* Dracula's main motivation is his desire to help his offspring reach adulthood, and this desire for parenthood continues to make him sympathetic. In the original text, Mina must remind her companions in that they should pity Dracula; 21st century audiences, it seems, have no trouble with this concept, which makes the films' much less sympathetic treatment of the vampire

[8] Bella Swan, the heroine of Stephanie Meyers' wildly popular young adult novel *Twilight* (2005), is a notable example.

women even more conspicuous. Once again, male villains are allowed the complexity that their more polarized and sexualized female counterparts lack.

Reinforcing his increasingly sympathetic motivations, Dracula has also become more physically attractive in recent adaptations. Stoker's Dracula is never handsome; even when he appears in London as a young businessman, Mina writes that "His face [is] not a good face" and is instead "hard, and cruel, and sensual" (155). Recent adaptations, though, almost uniformly depict him as a handsome gentleman through costuming and the casting of good-looking actors in the roles. In all three films, Dracula's clothing is fitted and expensive, his hair is neatly arranged, and he is impeccably accessorized with top hats, gloves, and even subtle jewelry, all of which seem designed to create the impression of a Romantic flawed hero. Coppola's Dracula originally appears as an unnaturally pallid, inhuman looking older man. As soon as he arrives in London, though, Dracula, played by actor Gary Oldman, abandons his silk robes for gloves, tailored suits, and top hats. Argento's Dracula is similarly youthful and handsome, though his all-black clothing provides him with a more somber presence. Even in *Van Helsing*, in which Dracula transforms himself into a giant bat-like creature at will, his clothing is tailored and aristocratic. In all versions, Dracula is capable of infiltrating upper-class human society, both because of his clothing and because of his generally polite, calm demeanor when in public. Stephen D. Arata notes that in Stoker's novel, "A large part of the terror [Dracula] inspires originates in his ability to stroll, unrecognized and unhindered, through the streets of London" (639), and this ability remains a part of his more attractive self in these recent adaptations. The vampire sisters lack this ability to blend in to human society, both because of their revealing, anachronistic clothing and their seeming inability to be anything but chaotic, violent, and

blatantly sexual. Dracula can appear human even if he does not necessarily always choose to do so; his female counterparts, though, lack that same freedom.

Rather than portray Dracula as unattractive, all three films clearly distinguish between his handsome human form and a more monstrous transformation, which he usually uses during fights with other men. In Coppola's film, for example, Dracula appears pale and unnatural in his castle, and he later becomes a werewolf-like creature to seduce Lucy Westenra. In *Van Helsing*, he transforms into a bat-like creature to fight, and in *Dracula 3D* he inexplicably transforms into a human-sized praying mantis. Stoker's Dracula is not actually connected with either of these latter two creatures, and the connection to the praying mantis appears to be original to Argento. However, the fact that filmmakers easily connect Dracula with a variety of inhuman creatures is yet another indication of the mutability of the character. These transformations allow filmmakers to endow Dracula with many of the more sinister qualities of his counterpart in Stoker's novel, but their comparative brevity—none of the transformations last for more than a few minutes—still allows the filmmakers to maintain the impression of a handsome and charming Dracula.

By contrast, the villainous women rarely have a separate monstrous form; instead, their monstrosity lies in their potential to seduce the male characters. The exceptions are the brides in *Van Helsing*, who, like Dracula, transform into large humanoid bats when they fight the titular hero. The willingness to allow these women to appear as monsters might suggest that Sommers is deliberately distinguishing between their monstrous forms and their attractive human selves. However, while Dracula only transforms to fight at the end of the movie, spending the majority of the film in his handsome human form, the vampire women constantly shift between their bat-forms and their attractive, sensual human forms. In nearly every scene in which they appear the

women transform into creatures, connecting them even more strongly than Dracula with monstrosity.

Despite claims that women's sexuality is becoming more accepted, every adaptation of *Dracula* clearly connects overt female sexuality to moral corruption. In her discussion of Coppola's film, Senf writes, "this version continues to demonstrate that vampirism brings out latent sexuality," though she does note human Mina's increasing independence ("Women of *Dracula*" 16). Unlike their novel counterparts, who are never actively sexual despite their sensuality and who are, according to Jonathan, "ladies by their dress and manner" (41), the filmic vampire sisters are blatantly sexual in dress and in action. Combined with their bloodthirstiness and violence, the vampire women serve as intentionally nightmarish figures.

Coppola's film in particular emphasizes the sexual potential of most characters, a change that is particularly conspicuous in the case of the vampire women. In a journal entry published in *Coppola and Eiko on* Bram Stoker's Dracula, Coppola writes of his plan to make vampire Lucy's makeup "sexy . . . in a more vixen, leering, slut kind of way" (70). This emphasis on the newly changed vampire Lucy as attractive, promiscuous, and threatening is a key component to his depiction of all of the vampire women. As is typical for filmed versions of the vampire sisters, they are played here by young, beautiful women, and they first appear topless. When clothed, all of the vampire sisters are costumed in gauzy dresses that reveal cleavage and midriffs, and they nearly always wear gaudy jewelry. In their introductory scene, the vampire sisters appear in bed with Jonathan in an encounter that is clearly meant to be uncomfortably titillating. The first few shots of their encounter are erotic and sensual, and the vampires emerge from the depths of the bed between Jonathan's legs as the sheets are transformed from a dusty white to colorful silk. The women, who are topless, kiss and lick Jonathan, and several extreme

close-up shots focus on their mouths and tongues in a manner that suggests the moment is certainly meant to be erotic. As the music intensifies, though, the quick shots of the women's mouths on Jonathan fill with blood, changing the moment from titillating to horrifying. This shift from erotic to horror is made especially apparent by the arrival of the third sister, who has snakes tangled in her hair in a manner reminiscent of Medusa. Her appearance and connection with Medusa reveal the monstrous nature of the women, as does the quick shot of the mirror above the bed, which shows only Jonathan. This scene in particular sets the stage for the rest of the film by conflating sexuality and monstrosity, especially in the case of women.

Though less sexually explicit, *Van Helsing* similarly conflates female sexuality and monstrosity. The vampire sisters dress in colorful, gauzy clothing that reveals their cleavage, stomachs, and legs. Though similar, the costumes are unique to the individual women, emphasizing this film's emphasis on them as individuals—eldest bride Verona's costume has an old-fashioned collar, for example, which emphasizes her status as a mature leader. Another bride, Marishka, wears an outfit that consists of a bikini top and pantaloons. Her costume seems to be inspired by the outfits of belly dancers and emphasizes her seductive gestures towards Van Helsing. Their clothing seems to literally be a part of all three brides, and when they transform into their bat-like fighting forms, their clothing changes with them to become large gray wings. The women are designed to entice with their revealing clothing, but the effect of the gauzy costumes changing into large gray bat wings makes those images disturbing as well. The overall effect of their repeated transformations is to suggest that their excessively feminine, overtly sexual costumes are merely a disguise for their true monstrosity.

In both of these first two films, the vampire women's clothing is accented with copious expensive jewelry, connecting them with the excesses of the aristocracy without the

corresponding manners and adherence to social codes. Unlike Dracula, though, the women are incapable of blending in with any humans, even those of the upper classes. As in the novel, Coppola's vampire women never leave the castle grounds, and they only appear outdoors when they approach Mina and Van Helsing towards the end of the film. Dracula is, of course, easily able to mingle with the upper classes of London, attending art galleries and walking about London with Mina Harker. The more independent brides in *Van Helsing* are well known to the villagers, who identify them by name and explain to other characters that the vampire women visit their village on a monthly basis. With their brightly colored, impractical costumes, the brides provide a stark contrast with the villagers, who wear plain, simple, and modest clothing. The fact that they prey upon the villagers, taking, as the undertaker says, only "what they need to survive—one or two people a month," again connects the vampire women with a predatory upper class. Even so, the vampire women would not blend in even with the aristocracy—when Dracula holds a ball in the city, surviving bride Aleera is not even present.

Argento's adaptation does not as clearly connect vampire women and aristocracy, but it does maintain the connection between villainous women and sexual promiscuity. This film replaces the three sisters with Tanja, a villager who becomes a vampire when Dracula catches her outdoors after her rendezvous with a local married man. Tanja wears a simple, if revealing, white shift, which is particularly notable when compared to the colorful clothing of the vampire women in other films. Between her simple clothing, her emotional outbursts, and her isolation from other women, Tanja seems more vulnerable than the vampire sisters in other films. She soon reveals this vulnerability to be a pretense, though, and she is just as bloodthirsty and sexual as the other women in her seduction of Jonathan Harker. Unlike other adaptations, Jonathan is actually killed and changed into a vampire in this adaptation, which might suggest that Tanja's

deliberate play of vulnerability is a more effective technique than that of her counterparts in other films, who instead rely solely on physical seduction. Tanja's use of her own apparent emotional vulnerability to lure Jonathan and make him a vampire suggests that the trope of women using vulnerability to seduce kind men is still as present now as it was in the 19th century.

That female sexuality is still largely villainized in these films is made even more apparent by the fact that all of the vampire women are directly contrasted to their more virtuous female counterparts. As 20th and 21st century versions of Stoker's Mina, many of these traditionally feminine women are heroes in their own right, especially Anna, the agile heroine of *Van Helsing*. In Argento's film, Mina even replaces the other male vampire hunters, assisting Van Helsing in the decapitation of Lucy and the preparations against Dracula on her own. Coppola's Mina is less physically active, but even she plays a greater role than Stoker's Mina, serving both as Dracula's love interest and, eventually, as the one who finally kills him.

Though virtuous, these heroic women are interested in romance and sex, potentially even with Dracula himself. However, they openly wrestle with remaining faithful to their respective lovers and are ultimately rewarded for their loyalty to them. Coppola's Mina, for example, is faithful to her husband Jonathan despite being tempted by Dracula, with whom she shares an intense spiritual connection as a result of her relationship with him in a past life. She expresses guilt for even harboring these desires, fearing that they make her "a bad, inconstant woman." Mina does remain faithful to Jonathan, though, and is even the one who stakes Dracula, suggesting that even the filmmakers do not consider those desires to be inherently wrong. Even the most respectable women in these films are hardly virginal. However, the films still clearly distinguish between the promiscuous villainesses and the faithful heroines, who are only sexual

within marriage. While women's sexuality is, in general, more acceptable in recent vampire films, as Senf has suggested, that sexuality is socially acceptable only within those specific limits.

Dracula 3D and *Van Helsing* similarly contrast the virtuous, faithful human women with the sexually promiscuous female vampires. Argento's Mina remains faithful to Jonathan despite her recognition of an emotional connection with Dracula, and as in the novel, she is the only woman to survive. Lucy is neither engaged nor married in this adaptation, which omits most of Van Helsing's group of men. Lucy's surrender to Dracula's seduction lacks the element of unfaithfulness, which is likely a factor in the tone of her death scene. Rather than staking and beheading Lucy, Van Helsing throws a lantern and sets her on fire, which, while still violent, does lack the sexual connotations of Lucy's death scene in the other adaptations. Both Mina and Lucy are contrasted with the vampire Tanja, who is repeatedly connected with unfaithful sexuality. She is turned into a vampire largely because she is having an affair with a married man from her village, an act that is presented both as morally wrong and, since it leaves her vulnerable to Dracula's attack, foolish. She later seduces Jonathan, who is already married to Mina. Her death is violent where Lucy's is not, once again hinting at a punitive element in the deaths of promiscuous, unfaithful women.

Van Helsing does not continue this theme of potentially adulterous women, but it does contrast the promiscuous vampire women with Anna, the only other notable woman in the film. While she dresses in tight-fitting clothing and exchanges flirtatious quips with Van Helsing, Anna never does anything more than kiss him, instead choosing to remain faithful to her mission to kill Dracula. Only faithful women receive a happy ending in these films, though even for them happiness is not guaranteed. The women in these adaptations are certainly allowed more sexual

freedom than their 19th century counterparts; however, that freedom only extends so far. Sexuality outside monogamous, heterosexual unions is reserved for monsters, and the violation of that standard brings cruel punishment.

Lucy, the only character who changes from human to vampire in the course of the story, is as indicative of female monstrosity in the 20th and 21st century films as she is in the 19th century text and deserves special mention here. In Stoker's novel, Lucy is initially flattered by the attentions of three different men. After all three propose, though, she expresses her pity for all of her suitors, even wishing that a woman might marry "as many men as want her, and save all this trouble" (60), a wish that stems from a desire to avoid hurting any of her suitors. Coppola's Lucy is crueler and more promiscuous. She thoroughly enjoys being pursued and openly flirts with all of her suitors, and unlike Stoker's Lucy, she hints to Mina that she is deliberately attempting to make them fall in love with her. Coppola's Lucy also blatantly invites Dracula in by opening her window to him, and after having sex with Dracula in his beastly form, she remembers the incident with a smile. Holte, who suggests that Coppola's film "foregrounds the sexual nature of the vampire," argues that "Coppola's adaptation, following Stoker's novel, suggests that Lucy can be vampirized, and then must be destroyed or put back in her place, because she was willing and capable of embracing her own sexuality and eager to throw off the domination of the men around her" ("Not All Fangs" 171). Of course, this argument applies to the Lucy of the adaptations more than the Lucy of the book, since that Lucy is unconscious for nearly every instance critics point to as evidence of her "sexual awakening" before she becomes a vampire. Like the vampire sisters themselves, though, the Lucy of the adaptations is undeniably depicted as enjoying and seeking out sexual pleasure, both from Dracula and from several men within her group of suitors. Her destruction at the men's hands is correctional as

well as retributive, though it entirely lacks Stoker's novel's emphasis on restoring her to her angelic but dead pre-vampiric self.

Coppola's group of vampire hunters ultimately punishes Lucy's actions with an even more violent death than that of her counterpart in Stoker's novel. As many critics, particularly Christopher Bentley, have argued, even in the novel Lucy's death is strongly suggestive of sexual violence. However, unlike her death in Stoker's text, the film omits Van Helsing's comment that Lucy would have chosen Arthur to stake her vampire self "had it been her to choose" (191), and there is no moment after her final death when Van Helsing encourages Arthur to kiss her, as she "would have [him] to, if for her to choose" (193). Instead, Van Helsing forces her back to her coffin while she screams and vomits blood all over his face and clothing, a moment that seems to highlight her inhumanity. As in the novel, Lucy's fiancé Arthur stakes her as she writhes and screams, a moment that Craft describes as the novel's "most violent and misogynistic moment," noting that "Violence against the sexual woman here is intense, sensually imagined, ferocious in its detail" (122). In the film, that violence is emphasized by Lucy's inhumanity. In the novel, the scene ends on a moment of peace, and Seward describes a "holy calm that lay like sunshine over the wasted face and form" after she is staked. They then send Arthur and Quincey away and "cut off the head and fill . . . the mouth with garlic" (193), further distancing Lucy as a vampire from her "true self" by referring to "the" body rather than "her" body. In the film Van Helsing sends her head flying across the room while all of the men are still present, a violent end to Lucy that neither allows for the Van Helsing-sanctioned kiss between Lucy and Arthur nor for the possibility for a peaceful rest for Lucy.

The omission of even the discussion of choice in Lucy's death in the film suggests that her destruction is meant to be punitive, not a means of releasing her from vampirism to paradise

or an idealized purity, and a similar suggestion of corrective violence is also present in the sisters' deaths at Van Helsing's hand. Far from embracing women's sexual freedom, this film presents sexual women as promiscuous and in need of punishment. If in Stoker's novel Lucy's death represents the 19th century need to punish women for sexual behavior, then this much more violent death seems to suggest a similar desire in the late 20th century, at least for women who fulfill sexual desires outside of the boundary of a long-term monogamous relationship.

While the vampire sisters' depiction in these recent adaptations suggests a continuing discomfort with women's overt sexuality in general, the vampire sisters' sexuality is also closely connected with issues of race. Many critics have noted *Dracula*'s complex attitude towards race and colonization: Stephen Arata, for example, argues that the text "enacts the period's most important and pervasive narrative of decline, a narrative of reverse colonization" (623). Such a narrative requires that Dracula himself and, to some extent, his female companions, represent a racial "Other." In the footnotes to their 1997 edition of *Dracula*, Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal suggest that the two sisters described as "dark" with "high aquiline noses, like the Count" could "share the racial characteristics of Eastern vampires" (42n7). This connection between the vampire women and a racial or ethnic "Other" remains a part of their depiction even in recent films, despite the fact that the casting of the actresses makes the connection largely a symbolic one. All of the sisters' actresses have been white, as have the most of the other cast members; the only people of color who make an appearance at all in most versions of *Dracula* are the so-called "gypsies" who apparently mindlessly serve Dracula as long as he is in power, though they are quick to abandon him when he is killed. Still, through costuming, musical cues, and even accents, the vampire sisters seem to represent a racial "Other" that, combined with the treatment

of their sexuality, suggests similar fears and, as Arata suggests, even guilt (623) as represented in Stoker's novel.

The simultaneous fascination with and mistrust of women of color's sexuality is especially apparent in Coppola's version, in which the clothing of the vampire sisters is ambiguously "exotic," drawing on Eastern themes with revealing chiffon dresses, elaborate braids, and expensive hairpieces. Eiko Ishioka, the costume designer for the film, suggests that the cultural ambiguity of the costumes in the film is deliberate, saying, "With my costumes I aimed for a symbolic reflection of the culture of the characters in the film . . . Their culture was a hybrid, a mixture of East and West reflected especially among the aristocracy and royalty" (29). This mixture of different cultural trends is particularly evident in the vampire women's hair. One of the vampire women, played by Monica Bellucci, wears tight braids partially covered by a heavy beaded headpiece in a manner reminiscent of ancient Egypt. Another, played by model Michaela Bercu, wears a thick, jeweled headband that seems to be drawing from Romani influences. Combined with the ambiguously "Eastern" musical cues and the jingling of bells that accompanies their movements, the vampire sisters' appearances seem positioned to evoke stereotypical European fantasies of Eastern harems. According to Eiko, Coppola "wanted a decaying, deteriorating feel to the fabric [of the brides' clothing], like the shrouds of the mummies in the catacombs of Bombay" (44). Since Mumbai has neither catacombs nor mummies, the wording of Coppola's request reflects the conflation of cultures that is reflected in the vampires throughout the film. These costuming choices result in less depth of characterization than in merely using cultural signifiers to suggest that these women are a sexualized, "exotic" Other.

The vampire sisters' very speech also marks them as Other. In Coppola's film, the women's very few lines are spoken in Hungarian, not English; unlike Dracula, they apparently lack the desire or the ability to interact with the English. In *Van Helsing,* the women speak with exaggerated accents, seemingly mimicking Bela Lugosi's Dracula's distinctive Hungarian accent. In a 21st century context, though, the obviously faked accents suggest a desire to make the vampire sisters seem exotic, which is particularly troubling when combined with their revealing clothing and bloodthirstiness. Several critics have compellingly argued that Stoker's vampire women represent societal fears of the foreign Other;[9] the fact that similar themes arise in these 20th and 21st century adaptations suggests that those anxieties remain in white American and European filmmakers and audiences. Emphasizing the sensuality of the women thus connects women of color with white fantasies of "exotic" women. These representations of the vampire sisters suggest both a continuing exotification of women of color and continuing discomfort with their sensuality. These qualities likely contribute to the brutality of the vampire sisters' deaths in both *Van Helsing* and *Bram Stoker's Dracula*.

Like Stoker, these adaptations treat communities of women in general with suspicion and, eventually, violence, though for slightly different reasons. While the novel expresses anxiety regarding communities of powerful and deadly women, its treatment of them suggests acknowledgment of those communities as sites of potential female power. In her description of the literary history of communities of women, Auerbach writes that even those sisterhoods that are depicted as "outcasts" can be granted "a subtle, unexpected power" (7, 3), a type of community that is exemplified by the original group of vampire sisters. In Stoker's novel, theirs

[9] See Sos Eltis' "Corruption of the Blood and Degeneration of the Race: Dracula and Policing the Borders of Gender" (2002) and Elizabeth Signorotti's "Reposessing the Body: Transgressive Desire in 'Carmilla' and 'Dracula'" (1996).

is an idealized sisterhood in which they work together harmoniously, which allows them to present a united front against Dracula and Van Helsing alike.

In recent adaptations, though, that community of women is divided and fallible rather than powerful in its unity, indicating a possible reluctance on the part of 20th and 21st century filmmakers to acknowledge the potential strength of women's communities. In *Van Helsing*, the women are more individualized than the women of other adaptations: they are each given a name and a distinct personality, and they are also allowed to openly grieve the death their sister Marishka, who dies early in the film. However, this individualism comes at a cost, since as individual women, they are apparently incapable of coexisting as a unified community. It is even suggested that their increased individuality and seeming independence is what leads to Marishka's death, since she fails to follow Verona's instructions and is promptly killed by Van Helsing. Successful communities of women, the films seem to suggest, are only possible with a lack of individual identity. They also suggest that sisterhoods are never as powerful as women's relationships with men. Where the original novel condemned communities of women as more chaotic and less effective than communities of men, the films of the 20th and 21st century are skeptical that such communities of women could even exist, leaving the women no alternative to the masculine-focused communities the films present.

Similarly, these adaptations suggest that women's communities in general are incapable of existing without infighting. In the original text, the sisters voluntarily give up the right of the first bite to the blonde vampire, graciously insisting, "there are kisses for us all" (42). In *Van Helsing*, though, vampire sisters Aleera and Verona fight each other over Anna's blood, despite the suggestion that Verona is higher in the hierarchy. Where the original sisters respect each other, these 21st century brides are much more competitive. Auerbach notes the stereotype that

groups of women cannot exist without infighting, a cliché that she argues is often refuted in even in 19th century literature (*Communities of Women* 12-13). The depiction of women in these adaptations, though, emphasizes the stereotypical image of the backbiting group of women. Tanja is the only vampire woman in Dracula's castle in *Dracula 3D*, and she demonstrates a marked dislike of other women, especially Mina. Their relationship is marked by jealousy, and Tanja petulantly throws Mina's picture in the fire and cries after seeing Dracula and Mina speaking together. The fact that so many films eliminate one or two of the sisters suggests that fears of women's communities have been replaced with ambivalence and scorn towards them, at least in the case of violent, villainous women. However, where the power of women in communities was once feared, now they are portrayed as flawed groups of contentious, uncontrolled individuals who, while frightening, are also easier to ridicule. If in the 19th century groups of women are dangerously insular and destroyed only by men's influence, 20th and 21st century groups of women are prone to fighting and betrayal and are only fully united when they are led by a man, suggesting a shift from fearing women to setting them up for failure.

The adaptations' focus on the vampire women's reactions to men is reflected in the female vampires blood-drinking habits. Where the original sisters fed exclusively on children, the vampire women in the films instead frequently prey upon men—in *Dracula 3D*, Tanja drinks from Jonathan, who becomes a vampire himself. The only time the vampire women of *Van Helsing* are seen drinking blood in the film, it is that of an anonymous peasant man. Coppola's vampire sisters do feed upon the blood of a child Dracula brings, but they are far more interested in Jonathan himself. Where in the original novel, they desire to drink the blood of an unconscious Jonathan, in Coppola's film they outright perform sexual acts upon him, eventually holding him captive and drinking from him for an unknown length of time. Overall, the film

adaptations of the women are entirely more interested in men in general than their novel counterparts, hinting that even in the 21st century, women are expected to be attentive to, and even dependent upon, men.

The women's change in preferred victims is also reflective of the decline of the importance of motherhood in recent adaptations. Stoker's vampires are horrifying because, as vampires, they possess the ability but not the desire to become "mothers," though their connection with children also suggests concern that they are acting outside of gender norms. In the adaptations, motherhood is only a major issue in *Van Helsing,* in which the vampire women, like Dracula himself, are desperately working to find ways to bring their undead offspring to life. Though it is clear that vampires also reproduce in the usual supernatural way, presumably through blood and biting, these vampires are more interested in natural means of reproduction. These women are made horrifying both because they desire motherhood and because they are capable of it. Still, the vampire brides of *Van Helsing* are the most complex and thus the most sympathetic of the depictions of the vampire sisters, which might also be connected to their connection with motherhood. Their depiction suggests larger cultural issues with controlling women's bodies, and hints at continuing social pressure for women to define themselves in relation to mothering and a family.

Coppola and Argento's films are far less concerned with directly connecting the vampire women to motherhood. In *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, the vampire sisters more frequently prey upon men than children. While the novel emphasizes the women's drinking from children and merely hints at their feeding upon men, the film does the opposite by lingering on shots of the women drinking from Jonathan. By contrast, the death of the child happens off-screen while the camera focuses on Jonathan's horrified reaction. Lucy does still feed primarily on children, and as in the

novel, her callous dropping of a child is the moment in which the men decide that she is irredeemably monstrous. However, the film removes references to Lucy feeding upon other children in the village, and her attempt to mesmerize her fiancé Arthur is the focus of the scene in the crypt. Though the women still have some relationship with children in Coppola's film, that relationship contains little of the cultural significance that it does in the novel, suggesting that monstrous femininity is not necessarily strictly connected with the absence of mothering instincts.

Dracula 3D further deemphasizes the vampires' connection to motherhood, since Tanja does not drink the blood of children at all. Instead, she seems to feed only upon men, particularly Renfield and Jonathan Harker. The fact that she is the only vampire woman to successfully turn Jonathan into a vampire might suggest that splitting the focus between men and children makes for a less successful monster; it also, though, removes the element of the female vampire as representative of the mother at all. With the notable exception of *Van Helsing*, the vampire women are severed from motherhood, even failed motherhood. With the potential for motherhood and sisterhood both removed, then, it is unsurprising that women in these adaptations are defined primarily by their relationships with men.

Where the original novel presented the bonds between women as threatening, but strong, the vampire women in the adaptations are often more closely connected with men. Those bonds they do share with other women are often either weak or nonexistent. The sisters in Coppola's film are similar to the women in the original novel, lacking individual names and, to some extent, distinct personalities, both factors that present them as a united front. However, these women are ultimately much more closely connected to men's influence than their book counterparts. The change in plot, which makes Mina Dracula's long-lost love, entirely changes

the meaning of his rebuke to the vampire sisters: "Yes, I too can love; you yourselves can tell it from the past" (43). In the original novel, the line suggests that Dracula once had some emotional connection to at least some of the vampire sisters. Here, though, the line refers to his dead wife Elizabeta, which makes the sisters entirely his victims; while the original sisters could potentially have chosen Dracula out of love or some emotional bond, this motivation is entirely denied them here, making them either his victims or his pawns. More significantly, in their second appearance, Coppola's vampire sisters hypnotize Mina into seducing Van Helsing. Their focus on Van Helsing is a significant departure from the original novel, in which they mostly ignore Van Helsing and instead attempt to seduce Mina into joining them as their sister. The focus of the scene, then, shifts from that of a horrible, beckoning female community, a threat to virtuous women, to a community that is centered on men, either in using them or threatening to harm them.

Initially, many of the vampire women of recent film adaptations seem to less constrained by societal conventions regarding women's place in the domestic sphere, since several of them leave their homes and even work for Dracula. Upon closer examination, though, this attempt to make the women seem more powerful actually reinforces the notion that women are not well suited to a life of action. Physically, all of the vampire sisters seem slightly stronger and thus more independent than the women in Stoker's novel. In Coppola's version, they do eventually get to drink from Jonathan Harker, though the fact that he is able to escape from them without being killed might suggest that they are still not entirely capable of hunting their own prey. They also actively kill Van Helsing's horses, which die of fright in the original novel, which similarly suggests more physical prowess. The vampire women of *Van Helsing* are Dracula's companions and his willing collaborators. In their first scene, the sisters terrorize a village without Dracula's

presence, and the townspeople hint that the sisters hunt there frequently. These women are clearly successful killers, and are much more difficult to destroy than their counterparts in the novel or in other adaptations. However, their seeming feminine power is undermined by the fact that they utterly fail to kill human protagonist Anna, and Marishka is destroyed largely because she apparently cannot resist the infantile urge to taunt Van Helsing. Tanja is similarly sent to kill Van Helsing; like Marishka, she is promptly killed. All of these instances of failure suggest that despite the appearance of being more powerful, the vampire women of the adaptations are not actually more effective or powerful than in their original incarnation.

The vampire sisters are also much more reliant on Dracula for emotional strength in many of the adaptations. The brides of *Van Helsing* turn to Dracula for comfort after Marishka's death, sobbing on his shoulders while kissing and licking either side of his neck. They also begin the scene by cowering away from him, huddled in a corner of the room together, apparently in fear of his wrath. After Dracula rebukes them for failing to carry out their mission, he calls them to him, saying, "Come. Do not fear me. Everybody else fears me. Not my brides," a moment that hints at physical and emotional abuse. Despite his apparent desire to be working with them at equals, it seems, Dracula is incapable of treating the women as such. In Stoker's novel, Mina's self-worth comes from her relationship with the men. In the adaptations, all of the women find self-worth from Dracula, including the vampire women, who in the novel present a united front against Dracula. As far as the filmmakers are concerned, it seems that women can only find self worth from relationships with men; other relationships are not even important enough to them to be depicted.

While Stoker appears concerned that female communities will lead women to reject their ideal roles, these film adaptations shift to examining women as a threat to men. They seem

especially concerned with the possibility that such communities lead to lesbianism—in their seduction of Dracula, the sisters in Coppola's film kiss each other, as do Mina and Lucy later in the film. Similarly, *Van Helsing'*s bride Aleera also begins to seduce Anna, saying, "Don't play coy with me, princess. I know what lurks in your lusting heart" as she moves towards her. Such behavior is treated as villainous by the filmmakers, and it hints at a continuing conflation of women's communities and lesbianism, a fear that is further developed in the adaptations of *Carmilla*. Even the idea of lesbianism, though, is centered around the men in these films—the vampire sisters in Coppola's film kiss to bewilder and arouse Jonathan, for example, and while the sisters in Sommers' adaptation are involved in some sort of polyamorous relationship, it is clear that it hinges around Dracula's desires, not theirs. The fears of lesbianism seem to be more closely connected to anxieties about the possibility that relationships between women might be used to manipulate men, not that they necessarily are villainous for their own sake.

As originally presented in Stoker's novel, the vampire sisters' deaths are closely connected with their restoration to a pre-vampiric state, though that restoration occurs in a particularly violent, corrective way. In these adaptations their deaths remain gruesome, but the films lack any promise of final peace. In all three films the women die in similar ways to their novel counterparts, including the screaming and the writhing on stakes, crossbow bolts, or sharpened crucifixes, which, as Bentley and other critics have frequently noted, seem to be blatantly phallic imagery. None of the vampire women are given the same hint of a peaceful rest, though. Coppola's film includes the scene in which Van Helsing decapitates the sisters in their coffins; instead of the final image of their faces that turn peaceful before crumbling into dust, though, the last view of the women is Van Helsing taking the heads by the hair and vengefully throwing them over a cliff. The moment seems intended to be a lighthearted end to the villainous

trio, but the lack of the possibility of peace for the women is troubling, especially when compared to Dracula's death at the hand of his reincarnated love, Mina. In "The Women of *Dracula* Films," Senf argues that Dracula's death leads to "the suggestion . . . that Dracula is released from his pain" when Mina stakes and beheads him (17). The vampire sisters receive no such mercy. Tanja, too, suffers as she dies, and all of the sisters in *Van Helsing* die screaming as they crumble into dust. Together, the lack of a peaceful resolution for any of the women suggests an end of the fallen woman trope, in which a fallen woman gains redemption through death; instead, though, they are denied even the possibility of redemption.

As representatives of what we deem most monstrous in women, the vampire sisters in these films present a standard for femininity that is frustratingly one-dimensional. Female protagonists may be virginal or sexual, as long as they stay within certain boundaries, and as long as they remain faithful to their ideals, they remain heroic. They must also center their entire existences upon men—not necessarily because doing otherwise would lead them to villainy, but because the option to form a community with other women simply does not exist. Still, the heroic female protagonists are given a degree of complexity that the villainous women lack, and while films center around their ability to choose between men, the villainous women have very little choice at all. They are certainly not given the potential for redemption. While sexual women are not necessarily villainous in these films, villainous women are always sexual. Women outside the gender ideals are no longer fallen creatures in need of (violent) correction as well as pity, but are objects of scorn and venom, and most are killed with a startling amount of vindictiveness that, if present in the original novel, is at least subtextual. Denied complexity and relationships separate from their respective men, the monstrous women in recent adaptations of

Dracula suggest that even now, vampire women in film serve mostly to enhance Dracula's sympathetic portrayal and to further misogynist stereotypes about explicitly sexual women.

3

"languid adoration":

Le Fanu's *Carmilla*

J. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1871-72) is one of the most well known of the 19th century vampire novels, and is today mostly remembered for the intense romantic relationship between Laura, the narrator, and Carmilla, the vampire who preys upon her. *Carmilla* explores the dynamics of women's relationships, and like *Dracula*, the text ultimately suggests that excluding women from male communities is detrimental, even dangerous, for men and women alike. Unlike *Dracula*, *Carmilla* treats the relationships between women fairly ambiguously. Carmilla herself preys upon young middle-class and lower-class women alike, suggesting that she represents anxieties of predatory women and predatory aristocrats in general; however, she remains a remarkably sympathetic character due to her emotional relationships with Laura and Bertha Rheinfeldt. Laura's conflicted feelings towards the simultaneously charming and frightening Carmilla reflect the text's own ambivalence towards women's relationships. To a certain extent, Le Fanu treats women's relationships surprisingly positively, especially by prioritizing the bond between mothers and their daughters. However, his treatment of women as potential predators does undermine that positivity, and though he does present the romantic relationship between Laura and Carmilla fairly favorably, the text eventually overtly posits that the best relationships, romantic or otherwise, are mutually beneficial heterosexual ones. The text ultimately serves as a warning against the idea that men and women should be entirely isolated from each other, since such isolation leaves them vulnerable to the manipulation of outside forces, especially predatory women, and thus reflects cultural attitudes that prioritize relationships between men and women.

In this text that is largely about women's relationships, the supernatural is largely gendered as female. All of the major representations of the supernatural are women, and they are opposed by human men who are consistently unwilling to accept the reality of supernatural influences. While the men are generally depicted as the keepers of knowledge, they are largely incapable of understanding the supernatural, which prevents them from drawing seemingly obvious conclusions about the identities and natures of the vampires. Relying largely on masculine, human systems of authority, the men are consistently unable to reframe their understanding of the world to include supernatural feminine threats, leaving them unable to adequately react to the vampire women. The human women, including Laura and her two governesses, are more open to accepting supernatural explanations, and it is implied that knowledge of the supernatural is passed down from mothers to daughters. Laura and Bertha Rheinfeldt, who have both been raised by men, are thus lacking that essential feminine knowledge, leaving them vulnerable to the feminine influence of the supernatural. This tension between the human men, who attempt to enforce patriarchal authority through the control of knowledge, and the supernatural women, who threaten that authority, is one of the key themes in the novel.

The narrative repeatedly questions the men's insistence on preventing Laura from learning about the supernatural, especially since they are motivated by a chivalric impulse that Le Fanu repeatedly presents as outdated and unrealistic. Set in a remote schloss in Styria, the novella is narrated by Laura as a letter to a distant friend a decade or so after Carmilla's death. Laura emphasizes her isolation from others—both men and women—before meeting Carmilla, and it is partially her loneliness that convinces her father to let Carmilla stay with them after her carriage crashes near their home. Even in childhood, Laura says, she was "one of those happy

children who are studiously kept in ignorance of ghost stories, of fairy tales, and of all such lore as makes us cover up our heads when the door creaks suddenly" (3). Unaware of any potential dangers, little Laura is unafraid when the vampire Carmilla approaches her one night in her nursery, and is thus especially vulnerable to her bite. Since Laura's mother has been dead since Laura's infancy (2), the "studious," deliberate restriction of Laura's knowledge occurs at her father's command.

As the family patriarch, Laura's unnamed father fulfills his role by controlling Laura's access to information. His management of this information, however, is incomplete and irresponsible. In fact, his very first lines in the book are his admitting that he completely forgot to inform Laura that a family friend, Bertha Rheinfeldt, has died. This moment is merely the first in which Laura's father infantilizes her, a recurring element of their relationship throughout the novella. Late in the novel, Laura's father refuses to tell her what the doctors have said about her mysterious illness, which, unbeknownst to her, is the result of a vampire's bite. He repeatedly dismisses her to other parts of the house while he confers with her doctors, despite the fact that she is close to twenty (32, 50). After they hear the story of Carmilla's previous attack on Bertha Rheinfeldt, Carmilla arrives in the chapel and a "brutalized change" comes over her features before she flees; even at this obvious reveal of Carmilla's vampiric nature, though, Laura does not understand what has happened, merely noting that she feared the significance of Carmilla's "sinister absence" (78). Her father's attempts to protect her from supernatural influences only serve to make her more afraid, here and elsewhere. Laura's father offers her no explanation, and she does not even understand that Carmilla is a vampire at all until "a few days later" (77-78). Her father's condescending treatment of Laura presumably continues on even past the end of the novel, since Laura concludes by noting that following Carmilla's death, her "father took [Laura

on] a tour through Italy" (83); her father still directs her far into her adulthood, and there is no indication that she ever marries or leaves her family home with him. Although Laura is certainly a victim to Carmilla, she is also treated as a victim of her father's patronizing, infantilizing attitude towards her. His dismissive attitude toward her is at least partially responsible for her melancholy nervousness at the end of the novella.

As is the case with Mina and Van Helsing in *Dracula*, preventing women from gaining knowledge, even when it is supposedly to protect them, actually leaves those women vulnerable. Because her father mistakes ignorance for safety, Laura is entirely unaware of the supernatural threat that is plaguing the area, and she remains oblivious to the need to exercise caution in her relationships. Laura thus has neither the means nor the knowledge necessary to resist Carmilla's influence, either as a child or as an adult. In *Dracula*, the men eventually learn the importance of sharing information with women—after Mina is attacked, the group of vampire hunters unanimously decide that she is to be included in all planning. The decision to include her proves to be a key component to their victory over Dracula, suggesting that a fully informed woman is a component to success. The men of *Carmilla*—Laura's father, their family friend General Spielsdorf, vampire-hunter (and likely model for Van Helsing) Baron Vordenburg, and the assorted doctors and priests—never learn the same lesson. While they succeed in killing Carmilla, they entirely fail to investigate the extent of her influence, which continues long after her death. Laura's final lines, in which she says that even years later she still occasionally fancies that she can hear Carmilla's footstep outside her drawing-room door (83), suggest that she remains under Carmilla's influence. The vampire hunters' failure allows Le Fanu to expose the problems inherent in the traditional treatment of gender roles, especially in regard to men's adherence to outdated, idealized models of chivalry.

Le Fanu also uses the men's repeated failures to critique 19th century society's exclusion of women from education and decision-making. The deliberate suppression of Laura's knowledge apparently leads her to a nervous breakdown, transforming her from a calm, curious girl to a nervous, hallucinating woman by the end of the narrative. Laura is deliberately kept in ignorance about her illness, the possibility of vampirism, and even, perhaps, her own attraction to Carmilla until the end, when she can merely report on Carmilla/Mircalla/Millarca's[10] death with a detached tone. She uses notably impersonal pronouns to refer to "the body" and "the heart of the vampire," suggesting that she has still not been able to reconcile the memory of her close friend with the horror of the vampire even a decade later. Rather than learning of Carmilla's death firsthand, she has merely received the official, impersonal report of the proceedings, a copy of which was given to her father, not Laura herself (79). William Veeder writes, "Information is what the characters in this tale of repression never get enough of" (199-200), further noting that in *Carmilla*, "gains in knowledge are inevitably partial, and the ideal of complete understanding is repeatedly undercut" (217). However, while all characters only gain a full understanding in the final few chapters, the men consistently have access to more information than any of the women, and they repeatedly limit the women's access to that knowledge. In doing so, the men allow the dangerous supernatural influences of Carmilla and her mother to gain influence over their daughters, who have no defense against them.

That the men are making a mistake by excluding Laura and the other women from their confidence is further demonstrated by their inability to protect any young women from the

[10] The vampire calls herself "Carmilla" and "Mircalla" when she stays with Laura and Bertha's respective families, both of which are anagrams of her true name, Millarca Karnstein. Signorotti argues that the anagrams represent "Carmilla's refusal to bear her 'ancestral name,' an example of "her refusal to be subsumed by male authority" (614), while Heller reads the anagrams as suggesting "a fluidity of identity that suggests how impossible it is to define the enigma of woman" (81).

vampires. In *Communities of Women*, Auerbach notes that groups of men are usually inherently endowed with a sense of significance that reflects the importance of their task (8). While the men of *Carmilla* share the goal of destroying an ancient vampire, any potential significance of their group is undercut. Their consistent failure to recognize danger to themselves or others, even when they should have access to all of the available information, shows the men to be incompetent. Neither Laura's father nor his friend General Spielsdorf recognize that Carmilla is the vampire until it is too late, despite the fact that Laura's father is aware that the community has been plagued by vampire attacks since Carmilla's arrival. Despite his awareness of the threat and his knowledge of Carmilla's odd behavior, he never quite manages to make the connection between the two. In their persistent, unnecessary secrecy, Laura's father and the General represent a seemingly masculine inability to either understand the supernatural or to share knowledge.

By depicting the men's dedication to patriarchal standards as patronizing and dangerous, Le Fanu critiques 19th century ideals of masculinity. It is the men's desperation to support their patriarchal authority by limiting women's access to knowledge that nearly ruins them all, and Carmilla and her mother both use the men's adherence to patriarchal standards, like chivalry and the need to protect women, to gain access to their homes and daughters. Veeder suggests that the "limitations of chivalry and of male efficacy generally are most evident with General Spielsdorf" (204), and though the problems with chivalry are demonstrated by all of the male characters, including Laura's father, General Spielsdorf in particular is entirely failed by the system he so heavily relies upon. The General's military rank suggests that in the past, he has been rewarded for successfully adhering to masculine military protocols. However, his rank, which should

suggest his capability to solve real-world problems, is entirely useless against Carmilla and her mother, who are not bound by traditional standards and so can manipulate them to their benefit.

Carmilla's mother in particular uses the men's adherence to tradition against them by appealing to the men's instinct to protect upper-class women. As soon as he sees her, the General notices that Carmilla's mother is "richly and gravely dressed, and with a stately air, like a person of rank" (59). Later, he references Carmilla's beauty, which shows "the elegance and fire of high birth" (63), as another reason he agrees to take in Carmilla. The General's reliance on old systems of honor and chivalry makes him ineffective, and his inability to see past gender and class to the predator beneath makes him ridiculous. In this text, the most significant threat to male dominance is men's own rigid adherence to their sexist codes, which prevents them from recognizing women's potential to be either allies or enemies.

The men's ineffectiveness increases with their knowledge of the supernatural threat and is compounded by an increasing distance between the men and women. Signorotti notes, "As Carmilla's power over Laura grows, so too does the alienation between the narrative's men and women" (616). While Laura is apparently her father's confidant at the beginning of the narrative, by the end he has begun to snap at her for asking questions. This alienation is psychological and emotional as well as physical—when Laura and her governesses call for help in the night, her father, in his distant room, is "quite out of hearing" and is unable to come to their assistance (44). Laura never explicitly protests her exclusion from the men's knowledge, nor do either of her governesses, suggesting that to some extent, they are submissive to the men's instructions. However, Laura does repeatedly draw attention to the men's age and physical unattractiveness. Veeder argues that Laura is particularly aware of the men's age because "On the one hand, she perceives that gray-beards patronize her from positions of supposedly superior knowledge and

efficacy . . . Gray beards are not only condescending about their efficacy; these old men are ineffectual" (203-204). The men's ineffectiveness, then, is particularly frustrating to Laura because they consistently exclude her from their knowledge. Though she seems to share their traditional values on a surface level, her subtle frustration with them prepares both Laura and the audience to turn to Carmilla for intellectual stimulation.

In contrast to the consistently ineffective and secretive men, Carmilla uses the promise of knowledge to seduce Laura. Part of what attracts and frustrates Laura is the mystery behind Carmilla's past, and Carmilla is able to entice her with the promise of answers and knowledge. Laura specifically notes that it is Carmilla's "confidence" that "won [Laura] the first night" they meet (21), but it is unclear what she means by *confidence*. She could, of course, merely be referring to her attitude: Carmilla is self-assured and immediately treats Laura like an close friend, making it natural for Laura to find her attractive from the first moment they meet. However, Carmilla's "confidence" could also be referring to the secret she shares with Laura: Carmilla claims that she remembers seeing an adult Laura in her dreams as a child. Had Carmilla not shared this (presumably fabricated) story, Laura, who does immediately recognize Carmilla as the woman who crept into her bed as a child, would likely have remained suspicious and guarded. By mentioning the supposed dream immediately, Carmilla is able to gain Laura's trust and to present herself as someone who will give Laura access to the knowledge she so desperately craves.

Laura's desire for knowledge increases as the story progresses, which occurs simultaneously, Tamar Heller notes, as "Laura's relation to knowledge becomes increasingly mediated by male authority" (89). Her frustrated desire for knowledge also increases as she grows closer to Carmilla. While the male authorities increasingly limit Laura's access to

knowledge, Carmilla promises that "the time is very near when [Laura] shall know everything" (37). A large part of Carmilla's appeal to Laura, then, stems not only from Carmilla's beauty or seductiveness, but from her promises of knowledge. Carmilla represents the danger of limiting women's education—when left on their own, Le Fanu suggests, women are easy prey for other, more predatory women, who share their own versions of truth. He suggests that women will inevitably seek out knowledge from their companions, whether those companions are men or women. As long as only other women provide knowledge, then women will find relationships with each other more attractive than relationships with men.

Le Fanu further presents communities of women as potential sites for sharing dangerous knowledge through Carmilla's mother, another beautiful, mysterious woman who is, presumably, a vampire. Little about her is ever definitively known, including her name, and like Carmilla herself, Carmilla's mother uses both her beauty and the hint of secrecy to entice, though Carmilla's mother attracts Laura's father and General Spielsdorf instead of young women. Appropriately, the General and Bertha first encounter Carmilla and her mother at a masquerade ball, where Carmilla's mother teases the General with hints that if he could see her face, he would recognize her as an "older and better friend" than he suspects (62). Her sudden departure to some secret, mysterious end heightens the mystery, though like Carmilla's promise to Laura, Carmilla's mother assures the General that she will explain everything when they next meet. The vampire mother's appeals to the General's chivalry also help to convince him to protect her daughter. Their similar methodology implies that Carmilla's mother is teaching her daughter the means of seducing both men and women, suggesting that Le Fanu primarily understands mother-daughter relationships to be the means of passing knowledge between women. Though this particular relationship is a threatening one, Le Fanu does not present all mother-daughter

relationships as inherently evil. In fact, such relationships are also the means of passing knowledge of the supernatural between women, and the early loss of her mother is a key part of Laura's dangerous ignorance.

The potential power of relationships with other women is made apparent by Laura's permanent transformation after her friendship with Carmilla. Signorotti suggests that *Carmilla* "marks the growing concern about the power of female homosocial relationships in the nineteenth century" (610), although even here, that power is not always negative. A decade after the events of *Carmilla*, Laura is still affected by her relationship with Carmilla. She concludes her letter with a quote from vampire hunter Vordenburg, who notes that one sign of a vampire is that the touch of the vampire's hand "is not confined to its grasp; it leaves a numbness in the limb it seizes, which is slowly, if ever, recovered from" (82). Laura offers no direct commentary on this quote, but its placement in the second to last paragraph of the entire narrative implies that despite her isolation from others after Carmilla, Laura recognizes that she has still not recovered from her influence. She concludes her narrative with the observation that "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" (83). Her confession suggests a combination of dread and longing for her lost companion, even a decade after Carmilla's death; while her possible devotion to her friend even so many years later is potentially touching, it also reveals the extent of Carmilla's influence over Laura.

Le Fanu repeatedly explores the threat posed by isolation, especially the emotional isolation of young women, throughout the narrative. From the beginning, narrator Laura establishes herself as "solitary" and "lonely" (3, 18), despite the companionship of her

governesses Madame Perrodon and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine. They are comforting figures but not, she suggests, the same as female peers. The story is set in motion by news of the death of Bertha Rheinfeldt, ward of Laura's father's friend General Spielsdorf, who was meant to come and stay with Laura and her father. The absence of this female companion leaves a vacuum for Carmilla to fill, and indeed, Laura and her father learn of Bertha's death the same evening in which Carmilla's carriage crashes beside their house. Isolation from relationships with other women, the text suggests, leaves women unhappy and unfulfilled.

To a large extent, too, the absence of significant feminine influences in Laura's life, especially the loss of her mother, reinforces Le Fanu's cautious acknowledgement of the importance of female community. Veeder argues, "Nothing contributes more to Laura's sense of isolation—and thus her penchant for repression—than her separation from a woman" (206), specifically her mother. It is partially due to the lack of a maternal presence that Laura is left alone as a child in her nursery, a situation that allows Carmilla to crawl into bed with her. She also has no one to listen to her fears, since both her father and her nursemaids dismiss her story. Carmilla's role, then, is not merely that of a companion or a lover, but is also that of a mother figure. She fills a vacuum, suggesting that women need and desperately crave female role models and companions.

The bond between Carmilla and Laura is ambiguous, and is characterized as both erotic and motherly. Their first encounter occurs when Laura is a child in bed, where Carmilla approaches her and bites Laura's chest (4), a moment that mirrors Carmilla later feeding upon the oblivious adult Laura while she sleeps. Laura describes the attack as feeling like "two large needles" piercing "an inch or two apart, deep into [her] breast" (39). Many critics have noted the seeming contradiction between Laura's description of the bite and a later scene, in which the

doctor examines Laura and finds a single "small blue spot, about the size of the tip of [Laura's] little finger," located "only an inch or two below the edge of [her] collar" (51).[11] The change is less significant, though, than the wording, since the use of the word "breast" seems to be specifically meant to evoke both motherhood and eroticism.

The focus on the motherly aspects of the women's relationship does not, of course, diminish their relationship's clearly romantic overtones. Some critics have even suggested that the relationship between Laura and Carmilla is primarily homoerotic rather than motherly; for example, Signorotti argues, "The homoerotic overtones of the ensuing attack on Laura's breast eclipse the initial mother/child dynamic and establish the nature of the two women's ensuing relationship," suggesting that "Laura's and Carmilla's female alliances result in a rejection not only of marriage but of motherhood as well . . . Their transgressive relationship disrupts the laws of procreation necessary to maintain social order" (618). Similarly, James Twitchell writes, "*Carmilla* . . . is the story of a lesbian entanglement, a story of the sterile love of homosexuality expressed through the analogy of vampirism" (129). However, even if Carmilla and Laura's relationship is interpreted as erotic rather than romantic, Carmilla taking the place of Laura's absent mother is a key aspect of their relationship, since it allows her to teach and mold Laura.

Although impregnation is obviously not an issue, Laura and Carmilla's relationship is also hardly "sterile" in terms of potential progeny, since by their very nature, vampires are driven by a need to procreate. The creation of new vampires is an essential part of their danger to patriarchal society and is directly related to their bite. Even General Spielsdorf says that "It is the nature of vampires to increase and multiply, but according to an ascertained and ghostly law" (82). This desire to "increase and multiply" seems to specifically be a part of Carmilla's plan: in

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[11] See Signorotti 612 and Twitchell 130

one of her early conversations with Laura, Carmilla says that "as I draw near to you, you, in your turn will draw near to others, and learn the rapture of that cruelty, which yet is love" (22). Part of her purpose, it seems, is specifically to change Laura into a being like herself, one who craves intimacy but is doomed to destroy those she loves. In addition to their thirst for blood, all of the vampires in *Carmilla* also desire companionship, a craving that they share with all of the female characters in the story. This connection between women and vampires further associates women with the supernatural and also connects vampires and motherhood. The most significant power either vampires or women possess, the text suggests, is the ability to recreate themselves through their daughters. The tragedy is that neither vampires nor mothers survive that act of creation in this text, leaving women companionless and unable to fully exchange feminine knowledge.

It is possible, as many critics have pointed out, that Laura is actually in the process of becoming a vampire already, especially since the added frame narrative to the story says that she has died since writing her letter.[12] Whether or not Carmilla is Laura's physical vampire mother, though, she is certainly responsible for transforming Laura from a passively curious girl to the haunted, knowing woman she becomes by the end of the novel. Heller suggests that Carmilla spawns new ideas, rather than new vampires: "That lesbianism is a form of nonprocreative sexuality would render it obnoxious to proponents of domestic ideology, and yet, in 'Carmilla,' female homoeroticism does represent one type of propogation . . . lesbianism in Le Fanu's tale sets in motion a kind of mental or intellectual parthenogenesis whereby one woman's knowledge spawns another's" (88). Although lesbianism's close connection to vampirism in this case actually does connect it to reproduction, the suggestion that Laura has undergone a mental change is supported by Laura's quiet, morbid reflections at the end of the novel. Senf similarly

[12] See Signorotti 618 and Senf, "Women and Power" 29

argues that Carmilla is molding Laura into a being like herself: “Acting as a surrogate mother, Carmilla seems to be teaching Laura to be exactly like her . . . for Laura becomes more and more languid as Carmilla’s visits increase” (“Women and Power” 30). Senf concludes that Le Fanu “uses the relationship between vampire and victim, mother and child to reveal how women learn to become languid and ornamental parasites” (“Women and Power” 30). While Carmilla’s death does include elements of the deaths of the vampires of *Dracula*, especially the idea of staking and beheading her in what is perhaps a symbolic corrective rape, it also focuses on the removal of Carmilla’s head as the site of knowledge. Heller writes, “in light of the tale’s thematics of female knowledge, it is also telling that Carmilla is decapitated, and that her head, site of knowledge and voice, is struck off” (90). Her death also represents the end of Laura’s emotional and intellectual development, since after this point, she loses her agency and much of the emotion she displays earlier in the novel. The beheading of Carmilla, then, is an act that once more makes women’s knowledge forbidden. By presenting the scene as troubling rather than heroic, Le Fanu once again questions the stereotypical patriarchal tendency to control women’s knowledge.

Although Carmilla acts as Laura’s metaphorical mother in several respects, though, their relationship is undeniably romantic, if not necessarily sexual. Despite the first-person narration, Laura’s emotions towards Carmilla are never entirely clear. It is possible that Laura, a sheltered woman in the mid-1900s, simply does not understand Carmilla’s embraces and outbursts of emotions to be anything more than the romantic friendships that, as Lillian Faderman notes in *Surpassing the Love of Men*, were fairly typical relationships between women in the 19th century. According to Faderman, these romantic friendships were often “passionate” (141), leading to love letters, embracing, bed-sharing, and declarations of love. She notes that because “it was

generally inconceivable to society that an otherwise respectable woman could choose to participate in a sexual activity that had at its goal neither procreation nor pleasing a husband," and because "there was seemingly no possibility that women would want to make love together," women were "permitted a latitude of affectionate expression and demonstration" that had decreased by the time of the 20th century (152). However, Laura's reactions suggest that she does see a distinction between a typical passionate romantic friendship and her own relationship with Carmilla. She repeatedly expresses her embarrassment and discomfort with Carmilla's "strange paroxysms of languid adoration" (42), and at one point, she even wonders whether Carmilla might be a boy who has disguised himself to win Laura's love (23). To some extent, then, Laura is aware that Carmilla's affection has moved beyond the socially acceptable limits even for 19th century standards for romantic friendships and is, consciously or unconsciously, censoring her own reactions to Carmilla's advances in her narration. Heller notes, "The extent of Laura's vacuousness . . . constitutes the most ideologically charged and contested terrain in the narrative" (85), and the ambiguity of her responses to Carmilla is closely tied to Le Fanu's treatment of female relationships. Carmilla is charming and attractive despite her unorthodox attitude towards Laura, but Laura still finds her actions disturbing.

The depictions of the relationships between Carmilla and Laura and between Carmilla and Bertha further indicate that both are meant to be read as intensely romantic, even beyond the passionate romantic friendships that were, for the most part, socially accepted by 19th century social standards. The General explicitly blames Carmilla's "accursed passion" for his ward Bertha's death (7), later noting that the two girls were "taken with [one] another at first sight" and that Carmilla herself "seemed quite to have lost her heart to [Bertha]" (60). Carmilla and Laura are similarly attracted to each other immediately, though Laura's attraction is, again,

tinged with an inexplicable repulsion. Later, Laura learns from Baron Vordenburg that vampires as a rule are "prone to be fascinated with an engrossing vehemence, resembling the passion of love, by particular persons," and in such cases the vampires begin an "artful courtship" with their intended victims, from whom the vampire "seems to yearn for something like sympathy and consent" (81). Such bonds, it seems, are natural for vampires. The fact that only female vampires play a role in this novel again suggests that women need similar companionship. While the relationship between Laura and Carmilla does put Laura in danger, at least from the men's perspective, their relationship is treated as natural. The mostly sympathetic treatment of their romantic friendship suggests that far from condemning women's communities, Le Fanu is suggesting that such communities are inevitable, especially when women are isolated, like Laura, from other healthy, fulfilling relationships.

It is possible, of course, to view their relationship as representative of a particularly forward-thinking mindset on Le Fanu's behalf. Signorotti, for example, calls the story "Le Fanu's portrayal of female empowerment" (619). She argues, "Le Fanu refrains from heavy handed moralizing, leaving open the possibility that Laura's and Carmilla's vampiric relationship is sexually liberating and for them highly desirable" (611). Veeder similarly claims that Laura "feels sexual attraction so strongly that she becomes at times the aggressor" (207), most notably when she makes the first move to hold Carmilla's hand during their first encounter and, later, when she enthusiastically embraces and kisses Carmilla after she returns from a brief disappearance (207). However, while it is tempting to read their relationship as a mutually passionate one, it is impossible to ignore the fact that their relationship is as often marked by repulsion or even disgust as it is attraction. Laura repeatedly insists that she is "embarrassed" by Carmilla's exuberant embraces (23), and even in their initial meeting, Laura says that she "did

feel, as [Carmilla] said, 'drawn towards her,' but there was also something of repulsion. In this ambiguous feeling, however, the sense of attraction immensely prevailed" (19). A similar confusion of emotions characterizes all of their encounters. Laura's consistent discomfort with Carmilla's sexually charged kisses and embraces reveal that the relationship is certainly not an idyllic, sexually liberated one; while it might be inevitable, theirs is certainly not a model for an ideal relationship between two women.

The fact that the vampiric aspect of their relationship is not consensual also means that the relationship is only empowering for Carmilla, since even though Laura is attracted to Carmilla, she does not show that she is consciously aware of her nighttime visits. Some critics have read Laura's undeniable attraction to Carmilla as condemning. Heller, for example, writes, "the would-be victim's narrative reveals an ambivalent, but still pronounced, awareness of her attraction to the woman who tries to kill her. That Laura does not fit the most obvious role available to her, and which she tries to write for herself—that of innocent or ignorant victim—transforms the angel in the house into yet another 'vampire,' or knowing accomplice in sexual crime" (79). This interpretation of Laura as Carmilla's accomplice does appear in at least one adaptation of the work. However, such a reading ignores the fact that Laura is not aware of Carmilla's vampiric attacks. While she might be attracted to Carmilla, she does, to some extent, resist even her daylight embraces, and Laura seems to be entirely ignorant to the "sexual crime," whether it consists of literal sexual acts or the symbolically sexual vampire bites. Senf argues that in fact, *Carmilla* emphasizes that women are neither "the angels often portrayed in sentimental Victorian fiction, household management manuals, and periodical literature nor the devils of earlier Gothic novels or sensation novels" ("Women and Power" 25). Instead, she says,

the novel “demonstrates that women’s lives are complex and varied. Sometimes victims of outright exploitation, women are also powerful victimizers as well” (“Women and Power” 25).

A large part of Carmilla’s power over other women is also based upon social class. While she forms intimate relationships with Laura and Bertha, two women from the upper class, she is simultaneously slaughtering local peasant women. Senf argues that the women in *Carmilla* can be separated into two groups, the potentially powerful and the powerless, the second of which “includes young peasant women who are simply food for Carmilla; Laura’s two governesses, gentlewomen apparently down on their luck; and Laura . . . All are victims or potential victims” (“Women and Power” 27). However, I would argue that the powerless group could be further divided, since vampires either ignore or obsess over any women from the higher social classes, including Laura and her two governesses, leaving the women in the lower classes as mere prey. In fact, while Laura is Carmilla’s victim, as an aristocratic woman she does have the potential for power over others, especially those of the working class. The peasant women, however, are virtually entirely powerless, and Carmilla kills them quickly and remorselessly. Despite Carmilla’s predation upon local peasant women, too, there is no notable increase in the vampire population in the neighborhood, which might suggest either that the lower classes are not capable of becoming vampires, or that preying upon peasants and members of other social classes is an intrinsic part of the aristocracy. In the context of women’s relationships, Le Fanu also seems to be suggesting that only relationships between women of similar social status can be meaningful. Though those relationships between aristocratic women are beneficial for themselves, one of the consequences of such relationships is that they harm women in lower classes. The implicit connection between aristocracy and vampirism suggests that power is necessarily predatory,

whether that power is that of the aristocrat over the peasant, the vampire over the human woman, or even the older men over young women.

Le Fanu clearly distinguishes between the upper-class women Carmilla falls in love with and the lower-class women she preys upon; however, it is possible that the intensity of her relationships with upper-class women is less the result of class than it is a mere lack of intimacy. Only those women Carmilla befriends turn into vampires, which might suggest that it is intimacy itself that leads to vampirism. It could also indicate that people can only form significant bonds between others with similar social standings. Regardless, there is a clear connection between class, vampirism, and, to some extent, intimacy, suggesting that women must be equals in their relationships with other women to avoid violence and exploitation.

Despite the fact that Carmilla is a vampiric predator, especially in regard to the lower classes, she remains mostly sympathetic, especially since the text suggests that she herself is also a victim. She implies that she was turned into a vampire after she was "all but assassinated" in her bed after she was wounded in her breast, presumably by the vampire who turned her. Like Laura, Carmilla was nearly killed because of "a cruel love—strange love . . . Love will have its sacrifices. No sacrifice without blood" (38). That Laura is aware of the similarities between them is clear by the end of the novel, when, as Veeder claims, Laura's descriptions of Carmilla suggest that she is allied firmly with Carmilla rather than the vampire hunters (Veeder 207), especially with her emphasis on Carmilla's "tiny" stature compared to that of the "grotesque" features of Baron Vordenberg and General Spielsdorf (Le Fanu 75, 81). Veeder argues that Carmilla is made more sympathetic, too, by her connection with the tragic figure of Cleopatra (212), who is displayed on a tapestry in Carmilla's bedroom. He suggests that Carmilla's "plight of vulnerable isolation, the plight of us all, is dramatized movingly at the end of the penultimate

chapter. Laura's father and his men pierce the cocoon of Carmilla's coffin and kill the young woman who is sleeping, appropriately, alone" (216). According to the text, then, despite her undeniably predatory behavior towards other women, Carmilla is still meant to be sympathetic and appealing, remaining a tragic figure despite predatory behavior.

Carmilla is also a Karnstein, meaning that she and Laura are related through Laura's mother, a "Styrian woman" from the same Karnstein line. Their familial relationship suggests that the women in their family in particular have a long history of such relationships. Marilyn Brock, who convincingly argues that vampires in both *Carmilla* and *Dracula* represent English fears of reverse-colonization, argues that "The foreign blood of [Laura's] mother," a Styrian woman married to Laura's English father, "may cause [Laura] to be more vulnerable to Carmilla's advances, suggesting the fear of reverse-colonization is a response to the English living among the colonized and losing their potency in the process" (124). While colonial anxieties might certainly be playing a role in the text, it is equally significant that the familial connection between Carmilla, Laura, and both of their mothers ultimately makes them all victims of a generational problem. Senf argues that by "constructing a partial genealogy of Laura's family, one that includes only the female line, Le Fanu suggests that other women have been similarly victimized" ("Women and Power" 28), noting that this "genealogy of victims" extends beyond Laura's mother to Carmilla herself. "These references," writes Senf, "suggest that others may hold the same kind of power over Carmilla that she holds over Laura" ("Women and Power" 28). Though it is unclear whether Carmilla's "mother" is her physical birth mother or, more likely, is the woman who initially turned her into a vampire, she, too, is part of Senf's "genealogy of victims." The implication is that Laura and Carmilla are both members of a long

line of Karnstein women who are attacked by vampires, which ultimately makes all of these women potentially tragic figures.

Le Fanu's novella is ultimately critical of many of the social structures of the 19th century, especially in regard to gender. Systems of chivalry in particular, he suggests, infantilize women and make men ineffective, to everyone's detriment. Through his depiction of Laura and Carmilla, he advances the argument that women should not be excluded from processes of knowledge, especially when that knowledge affects them. Le Fanu seems to conclude that communities are most effective when they include both men and women, and relationships between women are both necessary and inevitable. His novel, then, is one that emphasizes the sharing of knowledge between women, especially through motherly and romantic relationships.

4

"the roommate from Hell":

Adaptations of Carmilla

Though never quite as popular as *Dracula*, *Carmilla* has had its share of film adaptations in the decades since its publication. Recently, Carmilla has been more popular than ever, and three different adaptations were released in 2014-2015 alone. All three films are set in the 20th or 21st century, as opposed to *Dracula*, which is most often presented as a period piece. The updated setting means that it is easier for these films to explore 21st century mindsets towards women, especially villainous ones. Fairly sympathetic even in Le Fanu's original text, Carmilla is never the antagonist in these adaptations. Even when she does pose a threat to Laura or other women, Carmilla consistently represents defiance against traditional social values, an attitude that many of the films treat sympathetically. Carmilla's heroism, her relationship with Laura, and increased access to her point of view all make her more sympathetic. Comparing Carmilla to the films' antagonists, all of whom are authority figures who represent an oppressive patriarchal power structure, makes the vampire appear even more likeable. Although she is more heroic than her novel counterpart, Carmilla still demonstrates some of the same negative characteristics of a typical villainous female vampire, especially in her clothing choices and promiscuity, both of which are still visual shorthand for immorality in women. Still, she remains one of the most sympathetic vampire women in western media, especially when compared to the vampire women of *Dracula.*

In all three adaptations, Carmilla regularly defies patriarchal systems, and while the filmmakers themselves do not present her as villainous for doing so, other characters in the films, especially the antagonists, are infuriated by her defiance. Holte writes, "In many of the

representations of the female vampire in the twentieth century what is denied women by the culture—authority, independence, sexuality—will be emphasized" ("Not All Fangs" 169). These 21st century women are similarly denied authority, independence, and control of their sexuality, but the films and filmmakers themselves are more sympathetic to their plight. Instead, the real antagonists of all three adaptations, and the ones who consistently see Carmilla as the villain, are the representatives of those patriarchal systems. Carmilla's continued defiance of these oppressive power structures is often presented as admirable, as is her insistence that Laura join her in rebellion.

The Laura of these adaptations is especially in need of Carmilla's assistance because, like the protagonist of Le Fanu's novel, she often has little control over her own life. Where Le Fanu's Laura is lonely, but otherwise mostly content with her life before Carmilla, in two of the films she is notably depressed and anxious even before Carmilla arrives, a pain she expresses through self-harm. An increasingly well-known signifier of depression and anxiety, self-harm is most frequently reported in teenage girls and is highly gendered in the public mind.[13] Some studies have actually found a connection between self-harm and sexuality: in a 2011 study published by the *Journal of American College Health*, for example, Janis Whitlock et al. found "nonheterosexual women [to be] at much greater risk for NSSI [non-suicidal self injury] when compared to heterosexual women," though they note that homophobia, not sexuality itself, is most commonly cited as the cause of emotional distress (695). Janis et al. also noted that in general, women tend to harm to regulate their emotional states (696). The fact that Laura is already self-harming even before Carmilla's appearance in either of the films suggests that she is

[13] Though more young women than young men admit to and are treated for self-harm, many experts have suggested that self-injurious behavior is underreported, not underrepresented, in teenage boys. See Stephanie, Thornton, "Dispelling Common Myths Surrounding Self-Harm" (2015).

already struggling with depression and feeling a lack of control over her surroundings and home life, and harms herself in order to feel more control over her emotional reactions. The two films in which Laura self-harms, *The Unwanted* and *Styria*, also take place in particularly homophobic settings. Though Laura has not fully explored her attraction to women before Carmilla's arrival in either film, it still seems likely that internalized homophobia is at least partially responsible for some of her emotional distress.

Though more sympathetic in all adaptations, Carmilla is still frequently a morally ambiguous figure. In *Styria* (2015; also released as *Angels of Darkness* in the United States), directed by Mark Devendorf and Mauricio Chernovetzky, Carmilla is transformed from a traditional blood-drinking vampire into a runaway orphan who kills herself halfway through the film. For the rest of the movie, Carmilla appears to Lara Hill and the other girls of a nearby town and attempts to drive them to suicide. Of the three adaptations, this film best fits the genre of classical horror, which, argues Holt, "is close to tragedy, and in a work of classic horror, there are elements of both pity and fear, pity for the vampire's situation but fear of his menace" (*Dracula in the Dark* 84). This combination of fear and pity is especially evident in *Styria*. This version of Carmilla is one of the most frightening, both because her ability to manifest after death is unexplained and because her motivations are largely inexplicable. It is never entirely clear whether she wants the other women to kill themselves because she believes they will find liberation through death, or whether she is serving some unknown evil figure. As in Le Fanu's novel, the story is told from Lara's perspective, and though she is even more sympathetic to Carmilla than her book counterpart, the fact that Carmilla never fully explains herself makes her actions before and after her death mysterious and horrifying. To many of the characters in the

film, especially the villagers who lose their nieces and daughters, Carmilla is understandably villainous.

Devendorf and Chernovetzky also make her character appear sympathetic, however, especially in her motivation for suicide. Twitchell notes that in Eastern folklore, vampires were traditionally connected with suicide, a sin that supposedly gave the devil control of a person's soul (8-9). Here, though, Carmilla cuts her own throat as an act of defiance against General Spiegel, a powerful man in the nearby village who rapes, blackmails, and intimidates every woman who appears in the film. After an altercation in which she struggles against his forcible kissing, Carmilla grabs a piece of broken glass and defiantly cuts her own throat, smiling at him as she dies. Many of the camera angles are from her point of view looking up at the General as she tries to escape him, emphasizing her helplessness and his menace; however, her death is also clearly painful, and her smile fades as she falls and shudders. The General silently leaves Carmilla's crypt, leaving her to die alone in the near-darkness. Her desperate, painful death makes her a pitiable figure, and the fact that she kills herself to escape rape suggests that her suicide is a form of resistance to patriarchal control of her body. Her death is presented as a moment of defiance and even empowerment, not defeat. Though she does convince other young women to kill themselves, her arguments for suicide suggest that she sees herself as liberating the other women from oppressive power structures symbolized by the General. Though her death and the deaths of the other women are still horrific, this frame makes Carmilla less of a monster than a heroic leader.

Carmilla is even more sympathetically positioned as an obvious liberator of young women in *The Unwanted* (2014), an independent horror film directed by Bret Wood. In this adaptation, Carmilla is only a villain in the mind of the film's antagonist, Laura's possessive

father Troy Pickett. Even more protective than Laura's father in Le Fanu's original text, Troy Pickett is violently possessive of Laura's affection and knowledge, adamantly insisting that she remain ignorant of the dangers presented by the supernatural. Carmilla has more narrative control in this adaptation, and the film even prioritizes her point of view over Laura's at several points. The film begins with Carmilla's perspective as she arrives in Laura's small hometown, and the first interaction between the two women, in which they speak through a screen door, is shown from Carmilla's point of view. Because so much of the film is told from Carmilla's perspective, she is much less mysterious than in other versions. Her motives are never unclear, and without that source of ambiguity, Carmilla fully transforms into a protagonist in this adaptation.

The change in point-of-view also means that the film lacks any suggestion that Carmilla has ulterior motives in her relationship with Laura, leading to a much more positive depiction of Laura and Carmilla's relationship in this adaptation than in the original novel or in *Styria*. Carmilla does drink Laura's blood, but only after Laura offers it, making even the blood-drinking aspect of their romance more consensual. Though Carmilla reluctantly accepts Laura's blood, it is unclear whether she drinks blood for nourishment, pleasure, or merely to please Laura, who is reluctant to have sex without the involvement of blood or pain. In fact, Carmilla even insists that they have sex without the blood, telling Laura, "We don't need a knife. It doesn't have to hurt. No more blood. No more guilt. No more fear. No more pain . . . This is what love is supposed to feel like." Consistently, then, Carmilla is portrayed as a compassionate, caring lover rather than a bloodthirsty vampire, making her one of the most sympathetic versions of the character.

Wood makes Carmilla even more sympathetic through her death at the hands of Troy Pickett, who also murdered Carmilla's mother Millarca and his wife Karen after discovering that

the two were lovers. Both Millarca and Carmilla's deaths are brutal. Troy's murder of Millarca is shown in an extremely violent flashback near the end of the movie. After he drags Millarca out of Karen's bed, Troy smothers Millarca with a plastic bag and then slowly beheads her with a hunting knife, spraying Karen with her blood in the process. Carmilla's death is equally horrific—while she attempts to cut Laura free from the bed to which she has been tied, Troy shoots her through the throat with a crossbow. The arrow protrudes from her open mouth for several minutes of screen time, during which she bleeds and groans long enough for Laura to find Troy's gun and shoot him, though she does not mortally wound him. Troy finally stabs Carmilla in the throat with the same hunting knife he used to kill her mother. The brutality of these two deaths echoes the violent deaths of the vampire women in *Dracula*, and seems to stem from similar motivations. Like Van Helsing and the vampire hunters, Troy feels justified in his killing because he sees the women as a threat, both because they are potentially vampires and because they attempt to free other women from his control. Unlike the adaptations of *Dracula*, though, the filmmakers of *Styria* do not support this reasoning. Carmilla, already more sympathetic and human than the vampire sisters, is made heroic by her refusal to abandon Laura despite realizing that Troy is attempting to trap her. After Carmilla and Troy are both bleeding on the floor, Troy mocks Carmilla's pain before finally stabbing and killing her. His lack of empathy, combined with repeated shots of Carmilla's hallucinations of being comforted by her mother, makes his actions seem entirely sadistic. These filmmakers present Carmilla's death as a murder, and are even less sympathetic to her killer than in the novel.

This version of Carmilla is regularly positioned as a protector of women against patriarchal forces who want to rape or control their bodies. During the women's first encounter, Laura's reluctance to leave the safety of her home as she peeks around the screen immediately

provides her with a degree of vulnerability. Carmilla responds to that vulnerability by heroically rescuing Laura from several men who want to harm her throughout the film, including a male love interest who forces Laura to perform oral sex and Troy Pickett himself, who ties Laura to a bed so that he can lure and murder Carmilla. As in *Styria*, the most significant threat to women's bodily autonomy is patriarchal authority and male violence, and again, Carmilla is the one who attempts to rescue those other women. Though she is ultimately killed by Troy, her death motivates Laura to finally leave home and her controlling father, a fact that further transforms her from hero to martyr.

Carmilla is made sympathetic in a much less violent way in *Carmilla* (2014-present), an episodic webseries developed by KindaTV and directed by Spencer Maybee. *Carmilla* is one of the more recent additions to the developing genre of the literary webseries, a genre first popularized by Pemberley Digital's *Lizzie Bennett Diaries* (2012-2014), a 21st century retelling of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.[14] As is typical for the genre, characters in the webseries are well-read and witty, and this particular adaptation relies on humor, especially sarcasm, rather than horror. The series does feature moments of drama, though, and while events are occasionally outrageous, the characters remain largely sympathetic.

In this adaptation, Laura Hollis is a college student at the fictional Silas University in Styria, where unusual supernatural events regularly occur. Carmilla replaces Laura's first roommate, Betty Spielsdorf, when the latter mysteriously disappears, and Laura and her friends eventually discover that Carmilla is responsible for the disappearances of Betty and several other young women from the university. From the beginning, this version's Carmilla is one of the most

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[14] For more notable examples of the genre, see Pemberley Digital's *Frankenstein, M.D.* (an adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*) and *Emma Approved* (based on Jane Austen's *Emma*).

likeable. Attractive, sarcastic, and self-assured, she initially annoys Laura by calling her "sweetheart" and "cutie." Despite Laura's insistence that Carmilla is "the roommate from Hell," though, their growing affection for each other makes Carmilla increasingly sympathetic. The webseries is supposedly filmed through Laura's webcam, and each episode is filmed in a single shot, usually with Laura sitting in front of the camera and speaking about her investigation into the missing girls. In the background, though, Carmilla often moves around their dorm room, and her occasional moments of kindness—bringing Laura a cup of hot chocolate, smirking at Laura's quips during ridiculous interviews—begin to establish her as a likable, engaging character even before the vampire reveal in the 14th episode.

Even more than her treatment of Laura, though, Carmilla is made sympathetic in the webseries because she is finally given the chance to tell her own side of the story. The webseries is the only adaptation in which Laura controls the narrative as she did in the novel. Senf argues that even in Le Fanu's original novel, "the seemingly weak Laura has a significant kind of power—that of telling other women about their condition . . . Thus, writing is a way of demonstrating a new kind of power to manipulate people and events" ("Women and Power" 29). While both Le Fanu's Laura and the Laura of the webseries have control of the narrative, though, the webseries' Laura has more power than her 19th century counterpart. The webseries' Laura records, edits, and uploads each video, giving her even more control of the narrative than the original Laura, and she even communicates with her audience (fictional and otherwise) by addressing viewer questions. She also has modern technology to help her understand her situation. Where Le Fanu's Laura is largely ignorant of the existence of vampires, Laura Hollis is extremely well-read, and her dialogue is filled with allusions to other popular vampire texts, from *Dracula* to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to *Twilight*. At one point, she even asks herself "What

would Mina Harker do?" Laura then gives control of the narrative back to others, most notably Carmilla, telling her, "If you want us to trust you, you have got to tell us your side of the story."

Because Carmilla is given the chance to control the narrative and explain her actions from her own perspective, she becomes one of the most sympathetic and compelling versions of the character. She describes centuries of seducing young women on the orders of her evil mother, the Dean of the university, even after she fell in love with one of them, a girl named "Ell" in 1872. The name and date suggest that "Ell" is actually the Laura of Le Fanu's original story, suggesting that the webseries is giving Carmilla the chance to tell her own side of the story. After betraying her mother for Ell's sake, Carmilla was punished with interment in a blood-filled coffin for nearly a century, and, she explains, she is only following her mother's orders now because she fears similar punishment. Carmilla's genuine love for Ell and, eventually, Laura, makes her sympathetic, and her fear of her mother make her actions understandable. Because the series has otherwise been largely humorous until Carmilla's confession, the moment is made even more impactful. More than any other adaptation, the webseries succeeds in giving both women a voice by allowing them an unprecedented degree of control over the narrative.

That desire for control and independence, especially when compared to confinement and voicelessness, is a major aspect of both women's characters in all three adaptations. Before Carmilla arrives in *The Unwanted*, Laura Pickett is powerless and silenced. In her introductory scene, she speaks with Carmilla only until her father arrives, at which point she stops speaking and steps back to hold the door open for him. This moment is juxtaposed with a later scene, which occurs after she and Carmilla become sexually involved—when serving her father dinner, Laura comments, "Just eat. I'm bushed, and I'm not looking forward to cleaning up the kitchen. You could help out a little more around here, you know?" Troy looks shocked at the criticism,

and stares at her place setting menacingly. Without Carmilla, Laura is unable to speak at all; after her arrival and companionship, Laura gains the confidence to speak up and even criticize her father. Laura Pickett is also repeatedly connected with confinement—the first shot of her is through a screen door, and she spends a large amount of the final act of the film tied to a bed. Laura confesses that she would "like to be out on [her] own," but she is "terrified of being all by [herself]," suggesting that she has little concept of community outside the family structure. When Carmilla later suggests that they leave together, Laura repeatedly insists, "I can't leave." It is not until Carmilla physically frees Laura from the bed only to be killed by Laura's father that Laura is able to leave, accompanied by triumphant music that indicates that the filmmakers intend for her escape to be liberating. Laura's triumphant exit following Carmilla's death suggests that for Laura, Carmilla represents freedom, especially from conservative, patriarchal forces that seek to imprison and silence her.

The women in *Styria* are similarly confined and voiceless without Carmilla. Lara in particular is regularly silenced before Carmilla's appearance, and in fact does not speak at all through the first several scenes. When she is finally asked a direct question, her father replies for her. Her silent demeanor immediately falls away when she meets Carmilla, at which point she laughs and jokes freely. Physically, Lara is repeatedly warned to stay inside the sanatorium, and she obeys until Carmilla convinces her follow her outside. Carmilla represents freedom, but that freedom is only accessible through sacrifice. In Le Fanu's novel, Carmilla says, "Girls are caterpillars while they live in the world, to be finally butterflies when the summer comes" (31), emphasizing that a transformation must occur before Laura can join her. In *Styria,* though, Carmilla says, "Caterpillars become butterflies, one thousand times more beautiful. But when butterflies die, they become something even more beautiful. Something so beautiful, most people

can't see them. They become like angels." This line emphasizes this Carmilla's fascination with death, a fascination that she spreads to the other young women of Styria. Her obsession with freedom through death is particularly fascinating in light of the vision of paradise she provides to Lara. She tells her, "They're terrified to think you have strength and power. That you can decide for yourself. The world is full of hate and loneliness. We're the lucky ones. We can escape it." Lara's chance for "escape" appears near the end of the movie, when she sees a vision of Carmilla standing in a golden room; behind her, couples of girls dance together, wearing brightly colored dresses, coattails, and top hats. Carmilla says, "It's not too late. You can join me. If you don't, you'll always belong to their world. That man will take what is sacred in you. And you'll be alone . . . No one will love you like I do." For Carmilla, death serves as both an escape from the patriarchal society and an escape to a paradise that is seemingly filled only with other young women. The world as she presents it to Lara is not made for women; the only escape from the confines of society, she suggests, is death itself. This message is one that all of the young women, from Lara and Carmilla to the peasant girls, seem to find compelling, and many of them succumb to the temptation to join Carmilla in death. Rather than spreading an infection of vampirism, Carmilla spreads the desire for liberation, making her particularly threatening to the patriarchal authorities, including the General and the villagers, most of whom are men.

That both versions of Laura are desperate for control over their lives in *Styria* and *The Unwanted* is emphasized by the fact that in both of these films, she regularly harms herself. In *The Unwanted*, Laura Pickett connects her self-harm to her mother, telling Carmilla, "I've always hated myself for the way I am. But now I realize it's okay. It's how she was. All along, its how I was meant to be." She then slices open her collarbone and coerces Carmilla into drinking her blood. Carmilla, though, is not pleased with the cutting, and later insists that they

have sex "without the knife." After seeing the deeper scars on Laura's thighs, Carmilla insists, "No more cutting. Not me, not you." Laura agrees, and for a few scenes, she seems to draw from their relationship rather than self-harm for comfort. She is confident enough to leave her father to prepare his meals by himself, and even begins to question his involvement in her mother's death. Laura does begin to harm herself again, though, after learning that her father is responsible for Karen and Millarca's deaths, suggesting that she falls back on causing herself pain when she feels particularly unable to control her father and, by extension, her place in the patriarchal world he has created. Her father's reaction to her scars, which he sees when he bursts in on her in the bath, is to assume that they are Carmilla's fault, revealing that he, too, immediately connects scars and blood with control. The fact that he cannot see that Laura is responsible for them suggests that he is incapable of seeing Laura as capable of independence.

In *Styria*, Carmilla's reaction to Lara's self-harm emphasizes her reliance on pain and death as a form of escaping the society in which she feels trapped. When Carmilla sees the scars on Lara's wrists, Carmilla kisses them, smilingly suggesting that "In the olden days, when someone was sick, they went to a man who would bleed them with a razor. That would get rid of the bad blood that made them ill. Maybe you just have some bad blood." When Lara still looks ashamed, Carmilla says, more seriously, "I understand that desire, to have control, power over something. They try to possess us, break us. Those who don't resist learn to live with the misery for the rest of their broken lives." Unlike her counterpart in *The Unwanted*, Carmilla immediately understands that the self-harm is Lara's way of gaining a sense of control over her life. Rather than distress, she reacts with understanding, suggesting that she shares Lara's feelings of helplessness. Carmilla does not encourage Lara to stop hurting herself, but Lara also does not seem to feel the urge to self-harm after she meets Carmilla. Carmilla, then, seems to

represent Lara's newfound sense of control over her life, a control that she eventually exercises to reject Carmilla's offer of eternal companionship.

Unlike her counterpart in the other two films, the webseries' Carmilla is not responsible for Laura's defiance of authority or Laura's independence, largely because Laura already possesses those qualities. An amateur investigative journalist, Laura has no problems with vocalizing her concerns to the entire student body through her blog. She is also more independent than the other versions of Laura, and has actually left her father to go to college on her own. She is only silenced when the school administration, led by Carmilla's mother, the Dean, begins to threaten her for speaking against them. Rather than encouraging Laura's outspokenness, Carmilla frequently advises that Laura stop filming and avoid angering the Dean. Carmilla eventually makes a deal with the Dean that essentially trades Laura's freedom for Laura's protection, since she swears that she will keep Laura out of the Dean's way if she promises not to harm her. Eventually, of course, Laura does convince Carmilla to help her fight, and she ends up sacrificing herself to destroy her mother and save Laura. Still, if Carmilla's mother represents the patriarchy, the Carmilla of the webseries represents someone who has been beaten down by it, not someone who is actively resisting.

In all three films, Carmilla confirms the importance of knowledge as providing protection and power, functioning in opposition to the authorities who keep Laura ignorant for her own protection. As in the original novel, Laura's father in *The Unwanted* and *Styria* actively works against Laura's access to knowledge, especially in regard to her mother. In *The Unwanted*, of course, Troy Pickett wants to prevent Laura from discovering that he is responsible for her mother's death. He does so, though, by repeatedly suggesting that "sometimes it's best not to know something," a quote that reflects the mindset of all versions of Laura's father. As soon as

Carmilla arrives, though, Laura's newfound confidence leads her to learn the truth. For Laura Pickett, then, Carmilla represents freedom from her father's control as well as freedom from ignorance.

The authority figures against which Carmilla and Laura rebel in all three of these films are closely connected with brutality, abuse, and rape, suggesting that the women are really rebelling against violence and control of women's bodies. *Styria*'s General Spiegel is the most obvious example of the worst aspects of the patriarchal figure, since he uses his authority in Styria to abuse and molest nearly every woman who appears onscreen. Even Miss Pasztor, Lara's governess, is shown buttoning up her blouse in the backseat of the General's car one morning, dirty and stained with blood. He tells her to "be more polite, for your niece's sake." Though the nature of the General's influence over Miss Pasztor's niece Lida is unclear, the fact that Lida is the first young woman to commit suicide at Carmilla's urging suggests that she, too, feels trapped and threatened by his advances. Carmilla tells Lara, "There are only two types of men: fools, and beasts. Your father is just a fool." Unlike Dr. Hill, the General is a beast and "A cannibal. He devours his own and no one does anything to stop him." No one, that is, until Lara and Carmilla, who convince the village girls to join them in their rebellion against authority, especially his.

The General repeatedly attempts to frame himself as a benevolent patriarchal figure, suggesting that the filmmakers are commenting on the fact that patriarchal rhetoric rarely addresses the violent reality that it inscribes. In an early conversation with Lara and Dr. Hill, the General says, "It is the duty of the patriarch to ensure the guidance of our young women. One cannot let the devil take root in these lovely creatures. They need a firm hand to be tamed. Protected." His explicitly connection between "protecting" and controlling women indicates that

the filmmakers see little difference between the two. When he stalks Carmilla in the crypt, he says, “I’ll find you a proper place—a home. Home. Beautiful clothes, good food…In Styria, we take care of each other.” This seemingly comforting speech is undermined by the ominous music that swells as he removes his coat and approach Carmilla’s hiding place. His words also provide a voiceover for Dr. Hill’s examination of a strange mural in one of the rooms in the sanatorium. The camera focuses on particular portion of the mural in which a giant bearded man is eating a naked woman. The quick shifts between the General and the frightening mural make him even more horrifying and confirm that is the “cannibal” Carmilla mentioned earlier. Though he does not intend to physically eat her, of course, the implication is that he wants to steal her selfhood and her independence to make himself feel more powerful. His actions make Carmilla’s suicide a means of resistance, especially since she is then free to convince many more girls to join her far from the General’s influence.

Carmilla’s suicide provides her with an unexpected source of power against the General. Faced with a mass suicide, he reacts by shooting “the infected,” revealing that he is, to some degree, aware that without access to vulnerable victims, he is essentially powerless. The young women have not been “infected” with vampirism, since the traditional blood-drinking vampires do not appear in this adaptation. Instead, Carmilla has infected the young women of the village with a desire to defy social values altogether—while some of them do kill themselves, many others behave erratically and begin to wildly run from their homes, remove their clothes, and even drink each other’s blood. In her discussion of Le Fanu’s text, Heller says, “In ‘Carmilla,’ sexual knowledge is an important aspect of the story of hysterical contagion whereby one hysterical girl infects, and creates, another” (79). Here, the hysteria is spread not through sex, but through death and the promise of female community. Carmilla, who claims that all men are

either "fools or beasts," drinks to "a world of neither fools nor beasts," suggesting that she can only envision women's liberation existing in a world that is free patriarchal standards. The paradise she shows Lara, in which girls in dresses and top hats dance with each other in a golden light, reflects that desire.

Though Carmilla's escape is framed as empowering her, it is Lara who harnesses the women's combined knowledge and fury to destroy the General. Lara's father, Dr. Hill, actively prevents her from learning that her mother was from Styria and that she had an emotional breakdown, eventually leading her to kill herself, once again connecting patriarchal authority figures with dangerous repression of knowledge. As in *The Unwanted*, Carmilla does not bring any new information to Lara; however, her presence gives Lara the confidence to begin asking the questions that lead to her discovery that her mother was another of General Spiegel's victims. It is that piece of information that finally gives Lara the confidence to fight back against the General, and she tears off his ear with her teeth before summoning Carmilla's horde of enraged women to kill him. It is unsurprising, then, that the patriarchal authorities have been attempting to restrict Lara's access to information about her mother, the history of the sanatorium, and even the General himself. The moment she gains insight into the General's history and recognizes him as a serial rapist, she is able to stop him by freeing the spirits of the other women who have committed suicide, most of whom, it is implied, were also his victims. This film stresses the fact that women's power lies in their ability to share information with each other; when they work together, they are able to use that knowledge to destroy even the most hated symbols of patriarchal abuse.

Like the General, *The Unwanted*'s Troy Pickett is also dedicated to maintaining traditional values and appearances. He expects Laura to cook and clean for him regularly, and

part of the reason he dislikes Millarca's influence on her mother even before their affair is that she left him alone to care for Laura. He is especially indignant that Karen abandoned his bed and began sleeping in the upstairs bedroom after meeting Millarca. He tells Laura that he "didn't know what else to do but to let her," saying, "I tried to tolerate it. I pretty much put up with anything to make your mama happy. I mean I—I loved her that much." However, a later flashback shows that Troy certainly made his resentment known: he regularly spied on them from his truck, and in one scene he bangs on her door in the middle of the night to complain that Karen "didn't say goodnight to [him]." His dedication to the appearance of traditional values becomes particularly disturbing after he kills Millarca and gains control over Karen once more. He tells Laura that in an effort to "keep [Karen] from spreading the evil to anyone else," he "kept her under a tight rein." Though he does not elaborate, his explanation is overlaid with a flashback to a dinner scene in which Troy blesses the food as he, Laura, and Karen eat together at the dining table. The seemingly normal scene is made horrifying when Karen raises her arms to eat, revealing that her arms are tied to the chair with just enough slack to allow her to eat with them. This frightening dedication to traditional values on the part of the representative of the patriarchy allows Wood to portray such figures as generating true horror.

Where the General is solely focused on the control and abuse of women's bodies, Troy is also dedicated to controlling women's sexualities. Though he claims that he killed Millarca because she was drinking Karen's blood and he feared that his family, especially Laura, would be "infected," his description of Karen's relationship with Millarca is largely rooted in a mixture of homophobia and possessiveness. When first describing Millarca to Laura, Troy says, "Your mama was a fine Christian woman. This Millarca, she—she wasn't worth shootin'. I figured her for some kind of a gypsy, but your mama swore she wasn't. The way she dressed, the way she

acted, the way she put all kinds of ideas in your mama's head . . . Like she was wonderful and beautiful." His voice overlays a flashback in which the two women are laughing and whispering to each other as Millarca flirtatiously adjusts Karen's collar, all while Troy glowers from the doorway. The real problem, he says, is that Millarca convinced Karen that "she was too good to be livin' out in the sticks…and she should run away with her, leave [Troy and Laura] behind." However, while his argument in itself would explain his jealousy, Wood consistently shows Troy lurking in the background while the camera lingers on intimate touches and looks between the two women, implying that Troy's real problem with their relationship is that it is romantic. His distaste with Karen's newfound confidence that she is "wonderful and beautiful" is also revealing, both because it demonstrates his possessiveness, since he does not want her to feel that she has the option of leaving, and because he is disturbed that someone else is complimenting his wife.

Troy's reactions to the two relationships allow the filmmakers to explicitly connect violence with homophobia. Troy is most agitated when he is reminded of the intimacy between the women. As Carmilla learns from a police report, upon breaking into Millarca's trailer while she and Karen were having sex, Troy began beating them both with his belt and then attempted to run down Millarca in his truck. When he and Laura discuss the incident, she refers to Millarca as Karen's "girlfriend." Troy turns and strikes Laura, the first time he physically hurts her in the film. Though much of his distaste with Karen and Millarca's relationship is due to his possessiveness and his disgust with the blood aspect, the fact that they are two women together is something he apparently finds particularly distasteful.

The webseries has no corresponding male counterpart in Laura Hollis's father, who never physically appears onscreen. Laura does frequently mention that he is overprotective, though she

also notes that she misses him on a few occasions. In this adaptation, however, he has apparently supplemented his extreme paranoia by teaching Laura practical life skills and providing her with the tools she needs to protect herself. When she is attacked by a vampire, she promptly punches him in the throat, much to Carmilla's amusement. Laura explains, "My father is a raging paranoid. You think he sends me day-of-the-week bear spray but didn't sign me up for Krav Maga at age eight?" Although the vampire does eventually overpower Laura, the brief moment reveals a significant difference in her characterization—when her father, the most significant male figure in her life, actually prepares her rather than protecting her for life away from him, Laura is confident and much more capable of actually protecting herself from harm.

Instead, Carmilla's mother, the Dean of the university, serves as the webseries' antagonist as well as its representative of harmful patriarchal values. Laura and her friends learn that the Dean has been sacrificing five girls to an ancient monster every twenty years for centuries. She specifically chooses virgin girls because, she says, "it's traditional. Besides, the world's just gonna grind them up anyway, so it's almost a mercy." The implication is that she is fully aware of the problematic traditional values, but has accepted them so as to use them to her advantage. Like Carmilla's mother in Le Fanu's work, the Dean attempts to use those traditional values against men: when Laura's friend Kirsch expresses his desire to help Laura, the Dean says, "I do so enjoy chivalry," directly echoing her book counterpart's strategy of using kind men's willingness to help women against them. Like the two villainous men in the other films, the Dean uses ancient systems of patriarchy to her benefit, though unlike them, she is willing to adapt her strategies to new circumstances when necessary. Of the three antagonists, the Dean is the most effective, managing to survive and continue causing chaos even after her apparent death. Her effectiveness is due to her ability to manipulate systems rather than becoming

mindlessly dedicated to them. Rather than demanding that the world conform to her ideals, the Dean uses the hierarchical systems of the world to her advantage, making her more effective than any of the men, and certainly more so than Carmilla herself.

Although Carmilla is not treated as villainous in any of the three films, she is rarely entirely heroic, either. At her most monstrous, she demonstrates many of the same qualities as the typical villainous female vampires. In *Styria*, even before she commits suicide to escape the General's influence, Carmilla is obviously not operating within the same system of values as everyone else—for example, after guiding Lara to a clearing in the woods, she abandons Lara while she sleeps, leaving her to find her way home alone in an uninhabited part of the forest of a foreign country. When Lara confronts her, saying, "People don't do that to each other. It's not right," Carmilla distracts her with alcohol, refusing to apologize or recognize the problem. In the webseries, Carmilla blatantly tells Laura that she has little time for heroics or saving people. Though she has been attempting to rescue young women from her mother for decades, she is doing so largely for revenge rather than for the women's own sakes. At one point after Carmilla has agreed to help Laura and her friends fight the Dean, Laura begins, "I mean, I know that you're not just doing it for me, but seriously—" and Carmilla interrupts, saying, "Don't be an idiot. Of course I'm doing it for you." Her repeated insistence that she is not, in fact, interested in saving people or otherwise helping make the world a better place is emphasized by her behavior in the second season, when Carmilla begins unapologetically killing innocent students after she and Laura break up. Though she does want to make Laura happy, Carmilla is explicitly uninterested in redemption. In this disinterest in redemption or morality, she reflects her counterparts in *Dracula*, who neither desire nor receive redemption, at least in the films.

Carmilla's villainy is also reflected in her clothing and her sensuality, which increases in those adaptations in which she is more amoral. In *The Unwanted*, Carmilla is heroic rather than villainous, and her clothing is oversized and threadbare—in several places, her pants are held together with duct tape. Her outfit is not sexual, and it also eliminates Carmilla's connection to the aristocracy, which fits with Wood's project of depicting her sympathetically. During a later scene, Carmilla is topless, which does suggest that Wood wants to depict her sexually; still, Carmilla never uses that sexuality to manipulate Laura or anyone else. Though Carmilla does attempt to convince Laura to leave with her, she makes no attempt to manipulate her into doing so, and she is consistently respectful of Laura's boundaries.

In *Styria*, Carmilla is more monstrous, and her manipulation is more sexual than that of her counterpart in *The Unwanted*. She regularly undresses while facing Lara, who each time looks embarrassed and turns away while Carmilla smirks. After her death, Carmilla appears in long white dresses with her hair brushed and pulled back from her face, clean and neat for the first time in the film. Her appearance seems designed to attract Lara and the other girls to her paradise of womanhood, but her clothing is never revealing. She does, though, attempt to seduce Laura near the end of the film, when she leans down to kiss her as Lara relaxes in a hot spring. Lara initially turns her face away, self-consciously laughing that Carmilla should be careful, since Lara has been sick. When Carmilla is not deterred, Lara kisses her back, then draws back and turns her head away, looking uncomfortable while Carmilla continues to kiss her neck. Though the moment is not as sexual as the scene between Jonathan and the vampire sisters in any of the film adaptations of *Dracula*, it still reinforces the connection between promiscuous female vampires and sexual manipulation.

Though likable, Carmilla is less heroic in the webseries than in the other adaptations, and she also dresses more sexually and acts more promiscuously. Where the other two versions of Carmilla dressed in form-concealing dresses and ill-fitting cargo pants, this Carmilla regularly wears leather pants and black corsets that reveal her cleavage and midriff. These outfits are specifically designed to attract other women, and she is largely successful, as Laura notes that Carmilla stays "up all night with some girl from [her] anthropology class." Laura also finds Carmilla's outfits appealing, and she occasionally comments on them to her webcam and to Carmilla herself. Carmilla uses her sensuality to her advantage, using what one character refers to as her "seduction eyes" to distract Laura from her vampiric tendencies. Although others' reactions to Carmilla's sexual attire and behavior suggest that her blatant sexuality is meant to be humorous, the fact that the most villainous depiction of Carmilla is also the one most obviously connected with sensuality suggests that sensuality in female characters is still shorthand for villainy.

Ultimately, the Carmilla presented in each of these adaptations is remarkably complex, ranging from a sympathetic femme fatal to an innocent victim of the patriarchy. The variety in her characterization suggests that Le Fanu's Carmilla remains a compelling, contested character even in the 21st century, and the fact that so many adaptations have been released recently suggests that Laura and Carmilla's romance is relevant even today. All of these films portray Carmilla in a sympathetic light, especially when she is compared to the true antagonists of the films, who often represent patriarchal values that she must help Laura to defy. By transforming Carmilla into a sympathetic figure defying those values, all three films emphasize that such value systems are damaging and outdated, especially in regard to Laura. However, none of the films firmly sides with Carmilla, and only in the webseries does she live; furthermore, her portrayal as

monstrous, despite the lack of vampiric traits, suggests that women who do not fit social standards are still treated as villainous, even by those films that otherwise support her. While she is more appealing in these recent adaptations, the female vampire is still treated as Other. Even so, her exposure of patriarchal trends and her liberation of young women makes her a newly compelling character.

Conclusion

From Bram Stoker's Dracula to Anne Rice's Lestat (*The Vampire Chronicles*) to Stephanie Meyers' Edward Cullen (*Twilight*), male vampires have largely overshadowed vampire women in public consciousness. Still, vampire women have maintained a shadowy but significant presence in film and literature since the 18th and 19th centuries. Vampire women partially owe their ongoing existence to their function as symbols of the erotic: as forbidden but extremely attractive women, they are uniquely situated to titillate and attract audiences. However, like all vampires and monsters in general, they also reflect anxieties about gender and sexuality. Studying these villainous female characters, both in their original incarnations as well as in recent adaptations, reveals that the female vampires remain fixed as warnings against female autonomy. Punished for the moral ambiguity that is applauded in their male counterparts, vampire women are still marked with the same tropes —overt and aggressive sexuality, bloodthirstiness, and a violent death—that are found in those early 19th century texts. While recent female vampires may be depicted more sympathetically, these female vampires still must endure derision and fear and even, in some cases, violent deaths.

Vampire women remain worth studying because each of their incarnations provides a glimpse of cultural attitudes toward women and sexuality. In the 19th century texts, vampire women are closely connected with social standards that demand submission and domesticity from women. In those earlier novels, vampire women are often fearsome and powerful, but they never fully act on that power to rebel against the systems that confine them. Though they do threaten men, they never actually feed upon them, instead choosing to prey upon children and other women. Though both *Carmilla* and *Dracula* are anxious that women might gain power over men, none of the vampire women even attempt to gain that type of control in the novels.

These 19th century texts never allow their female vampires to threaten patriarchal society directly, and even the possibility that they might do so is enough to justify their murders. These source texts have provided filmmakers with material to be more explicit in their depiction of female power in the 20th and 21st centuries. Analyzing the source texts and then representative adaptations shows the ways that the films can be read as commentary on the novels.

Recent filmmakers seem to be particularly aware of the potential cultural significance of the vampire women in *Carmilla*. *Carmilla* has been adapted far less frequently than *Dracula*, especially in the United States, until the three adaptations of the past few years. As same-sex relationships become more visible in the media, filmmakers seem eager to explore the implications of the romance between Laura and Carmilla in a setting that actually allows them to be intimate together. While filmmakers in the 21st century are primarily interested in exploring the homoerotic undertones of the narrative, though, they also explore the ways in which young women deal with oppressive patriarchal power structures. Where adaptations of *Dracula* still wholly side with the men who represent traditional powers, adaptations of *Carmilla* present her as a victim of those authorities. Through *Carmilla*, filmmakers who see her as a representing a victim of the patriarchy are able to explore her relationships with Laura within a 20th and 21st century context.

In general, adaptations in mass media have made all of the vampire women of recent adaptations more sympathetic. When the protagonists of the first-person narratives of the 19th century describe them, vampires are mysterious, irrational monsters. These narrators, especially Jonathan Harker and Van Helsing, find the women frightening and unknowable. In the 20th and 21st century films, though, the vampire women are less mysterious and more sympathetic, especially in those films in which they play larger roles with speaking parts. The webseries, a

newer genre, offers a comparatively intimate insight into the vampire woman. The camera never moves, watching Carmilla as she goes about her daily life reading books, taking naps, and drinking blood out of a coffee mug, and since we only see her in her dorm room, she is largely domesticated. The medium makes her more human and thus more likeable. As the figure of the vampire woman becomes less enigmatic and remote, she becomes more sympathetic, a development which recent filmmakers have used to transform her into a more complex figure.

Despite this increased sympathy on the parts of the filmmakers, the vampire women in recent adaptations are still largely excluded from the power systems that ensnare them. Though they remain isolated, these women are no longer passive victims; they are angry, and that anger is especially reflected in their attitude towards authority figures, especially men. The adaptations offer two different potential responses: the vampire women either attempt to help other women escape, or they become obsessed with appeasing those male figures. The women of *Dracula*, for example, no longer find meaning in their relationships with each other, and are instead more focused on gaining Dracula's approval. Carmilla, meanwhile, attempts to rescue Laura and escape patriarchal authority figures like the General, the Dean, and Laura's father. Neither of these approaches is particularly successful, though, since the women in recent adaptations are doomed to even more violent deaths than their 19th century counterparts. Filmmakers and audiences might represent the women more sympathetically; however, the treatment of these vampire women suggests that that surface of sympathy covers deep-rooted anxieties towards women who present an alternative to traditional patriarchal social structures.

This anxiety towards women who rebel against social standards is especially apparent in the ways that filmmakers still use the same visual shorthand to distinguish between the vampire women and their human counterparts. Revealing clothing is still closely connected to moral

ambiguity, as is sexual promiscuity. In general, the act of having sex is nearly always fatal, especially when it involves two women: *The Unwanted* features the most explicit sex scene, and it is also the adaptation in which Carmilla dies the most violent death. The increased violence of her death, which occurs at the hand of a disapproving patriarchal figure, is also reminiscent of the media's tendency to kill lesbian characters soon after they consummate their relationships. Even in this film, which attempts to entirely condemn homophobia, the filmmakers have not entirely avoided common homophobic tropes. By contrast, Carmilla survives in the webseries, which is the only adaptation in which she does not even kiss Laura until the last few moments of the series. Similarly, regardless of the other changes the filmmakers make as they adapt, they still do not allow the defiant women to live. As in the original novel, all of the vampire women in adaptations of *Dracula* die, and characters and filmmakers alike are even more indifferent to their suffering. In some adaptations, the vampire women's deaths are even treated humorously, suggesting an ongoing cultural callousness towards violence against women. The sole exception is the webseries' Carmilla, who seemingly dies in a heroic leap off camera only to return in the season finale for a reunion and a kiss with Laura. With that single exception, though, the women face pain and brutality in life and are rewarded with vicious, violent deaths. Film adaptations of *Carmilla*, at least, generally attempt to question traditional depictions of villainous women; however, even they utilize tropes and imagery that occasionally reinforces those depictions instead.

Those deaths remain brutal even in those adaptations in which the filmmakers seem otherwise sympathetic towards the women's situation. In both *The Unwanted* and *Styria*, the camera gratuitously focuses on the spurting blood and the horrified look on Carmilla's face as she dies. The brutality of these deaths is particularly startling because they seem to be intended

to be moments of empowerment and triumph. Carmilla's death seems to be meant to be a triumphant moment of defiance and escape, especially since her sacrifice seemingly liberates other women from patriarchal authority figures. However, regardless of the significance of her death, Carmilla still dies even more violently than in the original adaptation. Her death in both adaptations is also ultimately a fairly meaningless gesture on a large scale, since despite her challenging of abusive authorities, those power structures remain in place—Laura's father and the Dean survive in *The Unwanted* and the webseries, and while the General dies in *Styria*, the village men who put him in power remain in charge. Even when she is presented as a martyr for social change, Carmilla is treated brutally by both the representatives of those power structures and by the filmmakers themselves. The brutality of the vampire women's deaths is particularly noticeable when compared to Dracula's. His death is nearly always treated sympathetically: he is quickly dispatched by the woman he loves in two of the films, and the camera cuts away just as he dies. The women do not receive the same respect. No matter how sympathetic the film is to Carmilla's struggles, it still revels in her death in a way that it does not for Dracula.

While the filmmakers might be attempting to use these scenes to expose the horrors of misogyny and homophobia, such a reading is undermined by the fact that violence against women, especially lesbians, is already staggeringly commonplace in popular culture.[15] While the vampire women's deaths are horrific, they are no more brutal than women's deaths in numerous other films, especially in the horror genre. Within the context of popular culture as a whole, to truly expose the horrors of our culture's misogyny and homophobia, the films would have to allow the women to survive.

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[15] For more discussion of this trope, see Bethonie Butler, "TV Keeps Killing Off Lesbian Characters."

To some extent, recent adaptations of these vampire films are increasingly positive in their depictions of women—nearly all of the women are more complex characters than in Stoker or Le Fanu's novels, especially the protagonists, and the filmmakers often use the vampire women to question traditional patriarchal values. However, their attempts to produce films that question those values are undermined by their treatment of those women: overt sexuality is still treated as a signal that a woman is at least morally ambiguous, if not evil, for example, and any sexual activity is almost always closely followed by death. The treatment of villainous women in general can act as a useful cultural barometer, revealing the extent to which women are still held to traditional gender roles. These films reveal an increasing acceptance of women's refusal to meet those traditional standards. They also, though, suggest that even the most seemingly-progressive attitudes towards women are still undermined by subconscious biases against women. The fact that several of the films are specifically attempting to depict the problems with patriarchal standards, though, is hopeful, as are the increasingly positive depictions of relationships between women, whether romantic or otherwise. Despite the problems in their most recent depictions in these adaptations, the fact that filmmakers are still invested in characterizing them as complex and nuanced people implies an increasingly positive attitude towards women, especially those women who do not fit the cultural standards for femininity.

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