JIHOČESKÁ UNIVERZITA V ČESKÝCH BUDĚJOVICÍCH

FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

ÚSTAV ANGLISTIKY

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Exploring the Art of Erotic Dread: Sexuality as a Vehicle for Horror in *Carmilla* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Vedoucí práce: doc. PhDr. Ladislav Nagy, Ph.D.

Autor práce: Hana Anna Edelmannová

Studijní obor: Anglický jazyk a literatura

Ročník: 3.

2025

I confirm that this thesis is my own work written using solely the sources and literature properly quoted and acknowledged as works cited.

V Českých Budějovicích dne 5.5.2025

…….

Hana Anna Edelmannová

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank my supervisor doc. PhDr. Ladislav Nagy, Ph.D. for his expert guidance, patience, support, and helpful advice throughout the course of my thesis.

Abstrakt

Cílem této práce je analýza sexuality v knihách *Carmilla* (1872) a *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). Práce se zabývá tímto tématem, aby vysvětlila jeho využití k vyvolání strachu. Cílem je dokázat, že sexualita je aktivním zdrojem strachu, a ne pouhým tématem ve vybraných knihách, a pomocí pečlivého srovnání vymezit odlišné literární postupy na základě pohlaví postav. Práce je rozdělena do tří částí. V první části je zkoumána *Carmilla* a co značí její sexuální chování a vampyrismus. Druhá část zkoumá společenskou dynamiku týkající se sexuality v *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Závěrem, poslední část porovnává obě knihy, aby zdůraznila důležité rozdíly a podobnosti.

Klíčová slova: *The Picture of Dorian Gray, Carmilla,* sexualita, horor, pohlaví, úzkost

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is the analysis of sexual themes in *Carmilla* (1872) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). The thesis studies these themes to determine how they are used to evoke fear. The aim is to prove sexuality is an active source of fright rather than a mere theme in the books and through careful comparison, establish the different literary tactics used based on the gender of the characters. This thesis is divided into three parts. The first part examines *Carmilla* and the implications of her sexual behaviour and vampirism. The second part examines *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and the social dynamics concerning sexuality. Finally, the last part compares the two books to highlight important differences and similarities.

Keywords: *The Picture of Dorian Gray, Carmilla,* Sexuality, Horror, Gender, Anxiety

Table of Contents

Introduction

The gothic genre is a fascinating subject in which beauty seduces, desire corrupts, and sexuality becomes a force capable of inducing dreadful terror. Sexuality is undeniably a significant part of society, but what is considered acceptable or not highly depends on the current social norms, and any transgressions against the norm might be a cause for concern or even fear. The gothic genre then offers a safe space for authors to write about otherwise taboo subjects under the guise of horror. This is especially evident in J. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), which will be the focus of this analysis, as both depict uncontrolled sexuality as monstrous and a threat to society.

In *Carmilla* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, sexuality plays a central role in creating the horror element by challenging Victorian ideals of morality, purity, and identity, with transgressive desires—particularly queer and "deviant" sexualities—manifesting as monstrous and grotesque. The intersection of horror and sexuality reveals deep anxieties about sexual identity, desire, and societal norms. In both *Carmilla* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, sexuality functions not merely as a narrative theme but as an active force that generates horror.

Carmilla is a story of a young girl, Laura, who is hunted by a beautiful vampire. It is a story of attraction but also of fear and confusion. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is about a young boy who is introduced to the world of self-indulgence by an older patron while only being able to keep his youth and visual purity owing to a magical portrait. Both books share the motive of temptation and seduction, but mainly due to the different genders of the protagonists, they offer similar but varied views of the problematic and, together, they make an excellent case study of the horror of sexuality.

It is true that many works have been written about the topic of sexuality and gender in the works of gothic genre. However, most try to find evidence of homosexuality or argue for a

feministic interpretation of the work. This thesis will do neither. Instead, it will draw from established scholars not to argue *if* themes of sexuality and homosexuality are present but *how* sexuality is used to evoke fear. Additionally, a large number of authors tend to overly rely on biographical interpretation to explain the events of the novel. While such analysis could be beneficial in certain cases, this thesis will solely focus on the text as its own medium and thus offer an original examination of the stories.

The main methodological framework shall be predominantly defined by Camille Paglia's *Sexual Personae*, specifically her "monstrous feminine" and her interpretation of Friedrich Nietzsche's Dionysian/Apollonian dichotomy. Paglia explores sexuality not just in a cultural sense but in an aesthetic, symbolic, and mythic sense. Both Carmilla, as a lustful female vampire and Dorian Gray, as a beautiful hedonist, embody Paglia's "sexual personae". That is, erotic archetypes reoccurring throughout Western art (Paglia xiii). Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality Volume I* is also significant for this thesis, particularly for his exploration of how sexual discourse was formed in 19th-century England through power and repression. From Foucault's descriptions of the Victorians, we can assume the discourse around sex was not as non-existent as some may think, quite the contrary. Already from the beginning of the 18th century, "… emerged a political, economic, and technical incitement to talk about sex" (Foucault 23). Through the application of his theory, the thesis will demonstrate that repressed desire creates a powerful sense of dread. Remaining chosen secondary sources such as William Veeder's "Carmilla: The Arts of Repression" or Martha Vicinus' "The Adolescent Boy: Fin de Siècle Femme fatale?" will help with the understanding of predominant fears and how they are portrayed in gothic literature. They will help to further the research beyond the identification of sexual and homosexual themes in the books.

Certain approaches should be clarified. Although this thesis shall use terms such as "unnatural" and "weird", they are used in reference to sexuality within the context of 19th-

century Britain's understanding, morality and anxiety. In no form do they reflect the author's personal stance. Additionally, this thesis will not try to argue for historical facts about emotions, as abstract concepts like fear are subjective. However, certain fears and anxieties can be observed as a repeating theme in literature of the same period, suggesting they were culturally significant.

Chapter one shall start with an analysis of *Carmilla*, focusing on the monstrous feminine and Carmilla's threat against patriarchal values. Specifically, it will explore the horror of a woman's unrestrained sexuality. Subsequently, the complexity of Le Fanu's horror will be revealed by analysing the relationship between Laura and Carmilla. Lastly, this chapter will focus on the implication of Carmilla being a female vampire and the resulting horror.

Chapter Two explores *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. It intends to explain the horror of Dorian's androgyny and how it connects to the Apollonian/Dionysian persona. After which, the chapter analyses relationships and sexuality in the book in connection to manipulation and domination. Finally, this chapter will explore the implications of Dorian's portrait and internalised homophobia.

The third and last chapter will examine the anxieties reflected in both books by comparative analysis. By doing so, it highlights thematic and stylistic parallels in both texts and how they use sexuality as a source of horror. Particularly, it compares the monster or lack thereof, what difference gender makes on the horror, what part native and foreign culture has in the horror and lastly, debauchery as a transgression against traditional family being a source of horror.

Chapter 1: Thematic Analysis of *Carmilla*

Carmilla (1872) is not only a significant work of gothic fiction for portraying one of the first instances of the modern archetype of a vampiric monster but also for its depiction of an unusual and twisted relationship between two women that defied social norms of the time. The novel uses a woman's sexuality as a powerful element of fright by disrupting the traditional notions of womanhood and serves as a transgression towards patriarchal values, not only for Carmilla's unrestricted depictions of affection but also for showcasing women's freedom and independence. Its depiction of female protagonists challenged Victorian readers' subconscious moral values and evoked disgust for not only the supernatural vampiric creature but also for the so-thought "unnatural" female sexual deviancy. The novel puts focus on female relationships while the male characters are left at the periphery; this helps us see a very specific, female-oriented depiction of sexuality and the horror derived from frequent anxieties surrounding it. Although many studies have been written about the homosexual themes present in *Carmilla*, unfortunately, they often tend to overlook the horror of female sexuality itself, regardless of orientation. If Carmilla were a man, the terror of a vampire corrupting young maidens before their "full bloom" would remain, as seen in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). However, were Laura and the other victims men, it would take away a fundamental element of the horror - that is, the horror of a woman's unleashed sexuality.

1.1 The Monstrous Feminine Trope

Le Fanu repeatedly makes use of dualities throughout the story. According to Veeder, we could focus on the duality of a vampire and a human as a predator and a damsel or of a young lady being harassed by a degenerate creature, meaning heterosexual–homosexual (197). For now, though, we shall focus on the third option Veeder ultimately offers, that of repression and desire. On top of that, it is important also to include the contrast between feminine and

masculine. As Veeder highlights, while the feeling of love is welcomed in women, they should not feel or partake in sexual wants (198), and by examining the book, it can be argued it is not only the homosexual undertones but a woman's sexuality as a whole that is presented as a cause of concern or fear in the novel.

Sexual anxieties are deeply woven into the story of the book. Carmilla represents an open and untamed sexual desire; she is portrayed as a monster hiding under the disguise of a proper upper-class lady, but she kills young girls during the night, and by attacking young maidens, she represents a threat to the standard of womanhood. Her behaviour endangers the female characters not only in a physical sense but also tainting them mentally. Le Fanu codes Carmilla as monstrous even before revealing her vampiric nature. Her intimate need for her victims depicts an openly sexual woman as a predator, defiling her prey's lives and spreading this "disease" further.

Carmilla violates the unwritten rule of humanity. Men may experiment and conquer at their whim. While their licentiousness can devalue the romance, it only hones their mind. On the other hand, loose virtue in women is a foul disease and a corruption of character (Paglia 27). Carmilla, as a vampire, spreads her "disease" to fair maidens, tainting them and destroying the society's core. First, explicitly, as her reoccurring nightly visits to her victims drain them of life force, leaving them sickly. And secondly, by implying her vampirism could spread to her victims like an infection, for "[i]t is the nature of vampires to increase and multiply…" (Le Fanu 154) and Carmilla being a victim herself enforces this notion. As we are told, "That specter visits living people in their slumbers; they die, and almost invariably, in the grave, develop into vampires. This happened in the case of the beautiful Mircalla…" (155). In an almost sexually promiscuous way, vampirism spreads from woman to woman (as far as we are told) like a contagion.

Carmilla dares to behave in contradiction of her gender. As Paglia says, by natural order, it is logical for male individuals to procreate unselectively for the best chance at survival of the species. At the same time, nature values female chastity. Men are pursuers and women are pursued, and not only by society's standards. Although she recognises the inequity, she calls it "one of nature's organic laws" (27). Instinctually, a female (sexual) transgressor is against the natural laws. Carmilla "embodies an ancient carnality threatening the roots of society, a rampant female sexuality that menaces the patriarchy" (Leal 45-6). Carmilla not only openly admits her sexuality and attraction towards the same gender, but she is also literally a predator. A supernatural being feeding off of human blood, a sin personified.

Carmilla thus does not strike fear purely due to her vampirism; she also evokes fright since she revolts against the fundamental order of nature. As Elizabeth Signorotti points out, their union is not only a rejection of traditional values but also of motherhood, a woman's highest duty (618). She entirely eliminates men from her form of monstrous procreation, deepening the sense of unnaturalness. This suggests that fear is of the feminine independent of men. Throughout the novel, it towers over one's masculine force and rids it of all strength, both figuratively and literally. When the General launched at Carmilla, "he struck at her with all his force, but she dived under his blow, and unscathed, caught him in her tiny grasp by the wrist. He struggled for a moment to release his arm…" (Le Fanu 141). She, therefore, not only conquers men through raw strength but also metaphorically renders them impotent and unimportant by removing them from her reproductive cycle.

What is more, Carmilla, and what she represents, cannot be killed by usual means. Le Fanu seemingly offers a sense of relief when the General, knowledgeable of Carmilla's true nature, defeats her. And yet, at the very end, Laura still distinctly feels her presence, it haunts her right until her premature death. The ending could be interpreted in many ways: either Carmilla has survived and haunts Laura to drain her of her remaining life force, or due to

Carmilla's incompletion of Laura's murder, Laura could possibly become the next vampire. Although, it could simply mean Laura is just mentally haunted by the experience, and Carmilla is indeed gone for good. Le Fanu deliberately leaves the ending ambiguous to play with readers' anxieties. Either way, Laura is left troubled and tormented by the incident. Signorotti states that Laura, despite her father's attempts to rehabilitate her into patriarchal society and "cure her of the lesbian desire", does not want to give up the passion she felt when with Carmilla – leading to her demise (618). However, her conclusion is questionable as it is unreasonable to assume she gave up her life to Carmilla willingly, nor does she show any unwillingness to participate in social outings, as she keenly joins her father on his Italian tour.

All the same, Laura is still haunted by the memories of Carmilla, sometimes even feeling like she is still nearby. Le Fanu could not have shown Laura's feelings openly in the end, were they homosexual in nature. The author ultimately had to punish the degenerate homosexual vampire in order to appease the strict Victorian moral codes (Leal 48-9). Still, the vague ending proves the victims are incurably infected even after the vampire is killed. That carries the frightening implication of women not being able to adapt to the "proper" patriarchal ways once influenced by such a female predator, whether willingly or not.

1.2 Depiction of Female Sexuality and Relations

The relationship between Carmilla and Laura can be seen as representing the major stages a woman would go through: Childhood friendship, romantic relationship, motherhood and finally death. This depiction works as an allegory of the feminine that is twisted into something unnatural and perverse. As a response to Eve K. Sedgwick's *Between Men* (1985), Sharon Marcus, in her book *Between Women,* argues that female homophobia was also prevalent, and female relationships were complicated and layered (10) and through Laura's reactions, even the modern audience can distinctly recognise, Carmilla's behaviour violated the set boundaries of normality.

a) The platonic friendship

Carmilla integrates into her victims' lives by initiating friendships between them. She quickly bonds with the victim, lowering their suspicion of Carmilla attacking them. This tactic does not seem exclusive to Laura. As the General describes, when Carmilla met his daughter, " … she talked like a friend; she admired her dress, and insinuated very prettily her admiration of her beauty … and after a time they had grown very good friends" (Le Fanu 112-3). However, Carmilla's affections go beyond mere friendship. According to Marcus, while it was not unusual to share affection among friends, it was considerably different from the "obsessive passions" of female lovers (29). As stated, there seemed to be a thin line between friendship and lovers, and while Laura presumably seeks a friend, she is frequently confused by Carmilla's passionate affection. Throughout the story, Laura unable to accept the advances of romantic love, even questions being related to Carmilla. For her, such advances would be only acceptable between relatives, pointing out the unusuality of similar intimate familiarity between friends. Laura questions if they are related after Carmilla possessively kisses and says to Carmilla:" I remind you perhaps of someone whom you love; but you must not, I hate it…" (Le Fanu 48). She is unable to distinguish whether Carmilla's acts are platonic or romantic. Le Fanu, in this manner cleverly uses such blurred lines to make the readers uncomfortable.

b) The Romantic Relationship

The relationship between Laura and Carmilla is also that of two lovers, and Le Fanu manipulates the reader to feel the unease hidden beneath the surface. He puts together two female characters whose feelings towards each other, by principle, should be strictly platonic, and yet he uses plenty of explicitly romantic language to evoke unease in the readers. Moreover, he frequently describes Laura's discomfort and mixture of fear and pleasure during

intimate moments. Laura relates how "[she] experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust … [she] was conscious of a love growing into adoration, and also of abhorrence" (Le Fanu 47). Laura clearly struggles with her feelings, finding Carmilla's affection pleasurable but repulsive. That is of no wonder, Carmilla's possessiveness, is described as "ador of a lover" (48) and at the same time as "hateful and yet over-powering" (48). Hence, Laura could not only be disgusted at her homosexual desires but also at the poisonousness of Carmilla's twisted love. Le Fanu plays on what is considered to be an acceptable female relationship and what is problematic. He pushes Carmilla's admiration to the extreme, especially when revealing that her ultimate goal is to murder Laura, making her declarations of love seem grotesque. Le Fanu, therefore, stresses the corruption of their relationship not only through same-sex affection but also by cleverly blending fear and love, desire, and death.

c) The Maternal Relationship

The relationship between a daughter and a mother undoubtedly plays an important part in *Carmilla,* and it is no wonder when, according to Foucault, the dynamics in the family, in connection to sexuality, became an important part of scientific discourse in the nineteenth century, " … new personages made their appearance: the nervous woman, the frigid wife, the indifferent mother—or worse, the mother beset by murderous obsessions … " (Foucault 110). And, of course, this mother figure, affected by her perversities, is central to the story.

It is detrimental that Laura has grown up without her mother. As she says, "My mother…died in my infancy…" (Le Fanu 11) and Carmilla, of course, uses the fact that Laura does not have a mother to manipulate her and gain her sympathy. Carmilla is "abandoned" by her "mother" at the mercy of complete strangers. (26-8) While the so-called "mother" is supposed to return for Carmilla eventually, for the time being, she is left vulnerable and without a chaperone – thus completely reliant on Laura and bound to be with her constantly.

As Veeder points out, Carmilla takes advantage of Laura's lack of a maternal figure and solidifies her love by portraying a carrying persona (212). This indicates that their relationship is more complicated than simple friends or even lovers. Not only is Laura attracted to Carmilla romantically or sexually, but she also seeks validation and care from someone. This "incestuous" love between them only highlights the twisted nature of their unity. According to Foucault, a family used to be seen as a stable unit and an example of normality, but with the newly sought into discourse around its sexual dynamics and the psychologization of perversities, its unappealing aspects could no longer be ignored. "[T]he family, the keystone of alliance, was the germ of all the misfortunes of sex" (Foucault 111). Le Fanu makes use of this pessimism regarding a healthy family and twists the relationship between Carmilla and Laura into one of obscenity. When Laura was "[no] more than six years old", she was first visited by Carmilla (Le Fanu 13). Carmilla feeds off of very young Laura's chest, and Laura recalls: "I was wakened by a sensation as if two needles ran into my breast very deep at the same moment, and I cried loudly" (14). This serves as an explicit picture of the twisted "motherly" relationship between them. Le Fanu reverses the image of a child feeding from their mother to illustrate the unnaturalness of Laura and Carmilla's relationship. Additionally, Le Fanu does not only use incestuous connotations to highlight Carmilla's deviant nature, but he also alludes to paedophilic tendencies. Carmilla recalls their encounter when Laura was six years old and says, "I was aroused by a scream" (40). Veeder suggests that besides the surface meaning, Laura's pain and the anguish of women overall possibly "arouses" Carmilla sexually (200). This adds another degree of terror to the already disturbing relationship.

In summary, all aspects of Laura's relationship with Carmilla were deformed into their darker forms, and as Veeder points out, it left Laura emotionally stunted and traumatised by the event, left without an assertive lover before she could fully discover her intimate feelings (217 - 18). Laura is terrified by her encounter with Carmilla and yet she often thinks of her

fondly. Although Carmilla represents a great danger, she also means something more to Laura; she is her mother, lover, friend, and fiend. Le Fanu adds many layers to their relationship to invoke fear in readers. A fear of people closest to them being the most dangerous. Laura is denied the expected heteronormative ending for a woman, to have a husband that will solve all her problems. She is left betrayed by Carmilla, and her life ends tragically, despite her father's efforts to reintegrate her into society.

1.3 The Female Vampire as a Symbol of Sexual Deviance

Although the focus of this thesis is not to delve into the problematics of vampiric creatures in depth, explaining its origins or its wider implications beyond the novel, it must be acknowledged that vampirism plays an important role in *Carmilla*. According to Jack Sullivan, Le Fanu combines "lesbianism, sadomasochism, necrophilia, and vampirism", making the story seem mysterious and provocative. Le Fanu uses this dark sensuality in order to provoke his readers and to make Carmilla's behaviour seem disturbing and cryptic. However, Le Fanu does not rely purely upon the sexual; the last third of the story is void of eroticism and instead builds up the mystery of Carmilla's nature and her killing (Sullivan 65). Therefore, it is not only the sexuality itself meant to evoke fear but also Carmilla's vampirism. And yet, there is still a distinctive element to the vampire in this novel that strikes fear into the readers which is different from other literary vampires. That is, her gender.

It is important that Carmilla is a female vampire. Carmilla uses her sex to a great advantage and, in combination with her vampiric abilities, develops a remarkable hunting strategy. To an unaware reader, she is at a clear disadvantage. Being put in the custody of strangers without any warden or male relative, she is at the mercy of Laura's father. Le Fanu takes advantage of the stereotype towards women as the weaker sex and turns it around, making Carmilla the ultimate predator – a vampire.

Besides her gender, her being a vampire carries another strong element of fright. What is most important to vampires is that they are both human and supernatural (Hallab 4), and they possess many human qualities (Hallab 5). Unlike other monsters, vampires appear and act human. Unless they want to, one cannot tell they are supernatural creatures. Carmilla looks, talks and behaves like a human woman. That is why it is so important that Carmilla is a vampire and not another type of monster. She is a woman like any other, at least seemingly, and represents the danger of ordinary girls being influenced and "corrupted" in everyday life, with no way of recognising "dangerous" nonconformist queer individuals from conforming, ordinary people. The horror thus comes not only from the sexual aspect but also from the very real danger of human nature.

Le Fanu feeds the paranoia Victorian readers might feel about the newly emerging ideas concerning sex and emancipation. That said, it is no wonder, considering some of the factors described by Foucault as causing the emergence of sexual discourse:

a) "A hysterization of women's bodies" - The discourse concerning female sexuality gradually became the interest of the medical field (104)
b) "A pedagogization of children's sex" – especially the discourse of what is to be considered normal and abnormal sexual behaviour of growing youth. (104)
c) "A psychiatrization of perverse pleasure"

   By clinical examination, sexual needs were assigned as normal or pathological, and pathological tendencies were sought to be corrected. (105)

All three motives can be clearly identified in the motives of the novel as Carmilla, a young woman, corrupts other young girls in a twisted, almost sexual manner. As Mary Y. Hallab says, vampires allowed Victorian authors to write about taboo subjects while seemingly being frightened (3), and a Carmilla serves as an ideal depiction of everything terrifying about at-then-contemporary discourse. Moreover, Carmilla does not seem to hunt purely to quench her

thirst. She first encounters and attacks Laura when Laura is barely six years old (Le Fanu 13) and seems to be fixated on her until her demise. She thus embodies all three worries formerly mentioned. She appears from Laura's early youth and then again in her productive age only to corrupt her virtue.

Carmilla undoubtedly represents the fluid, murky Dionysian feminine. As Paglia says, "From the beginning of time, woman has seemed an uncanny being. Man honored but feared her. She was the black maw that had spat him forth and would devour him anew "(9). Her vampirism only intensifies the chaotic fervour. She embodies the unhinged feminine freed from social constructs as well as nature's laws. Instead of bleeding monthly, she feeds on other girls' blood. According to Foucault, before the 19th century, there was an emphasis on blood (as a symbol of family, heritage, health or sickness), but the focus later shifted towards sexuality. " … from *a symbolics of blood* to *an analytics of sexuality*" (148). Many of the themes and anxieties seem to rise from the (at the time) modern notion of psychoanalysis and the categorisation of perversities. And yet, in the myth of the vampire, the fear and old beliefs about blood purity remain and are reflected in the story. Veeder links the sexuality of a grown person and the basic needs of a child to modern psychology, as well as old superstitions. He relates the old belief of menstrual blood being changed into breast milk during a woman's pregnancy (215). Thus, the depiction of Laura growing from childhood to maidenhood yet dying before marriage and Carmilla drinking Laura's blood at a young age and haunting her throughout her life serves as a powerful element of fright that combines old beliefs and newly arisen anxieties.

To finish, *Carmilla* is not simply a cautionary tale of homosexuality; it offers its readers a profound view of female relationships and desires. Carmilla challenges the notions of traditional woman and defies nature through her self-sufficiency, not relying on a man for reproduction. Moreover, she actively denies young women their "highest duty" by killing

them before they can get married and produce offspring. She serves as an agitator to rouse the prevailing anxieties of the nineteenth century concerning women's agency and body autonomy. Additionally, inter-female relationships play an important role in the terror of the novel as well. Le Fanu depicts Carmilla and Laura's relationship as multi-layered and showcases many kinds of connections important to women throughout their lives. However, he deliberately and repeatedly makes Laura describe her discomfort, which, in turn, evokes a sense of unease in the readers as well. Le Fanu first lures his readers into a false sense of normality but slowly reveals Carmilla's rotten nature and the relationship she has with Laura and others. Lastly, through his choice of a vampire as the monster of the story, he feeds into the paranoia of his audience. Carmilla cannot be recognised as a predator simply by looks and she is able to infiltrate her prey's lives before anyone can notice her oddities. Hence, Le Fanu does not rely simply on the fear of homosexuality, he uses many aspects of the feminine to make his audience paranoid of their closest ones. He masterfully blends supernatural elements with realistic occurrences to induce fear and panic.

Chapter 2: Thematic Analysis of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890) by Oscar Wilde is one of the most famous works of fin-de-siècle and the decadent movement. Opposite to *Carmilla,* it depicts same-sex relationships (romantic or otherwise) mainly between men Which, of course, means the fears and anxieties it might have evoked in the general Victorian public and the anxieties regarding such relationships were different to a certain extent. Yet, at the same time, they share common foundations. The novel incorporates the "monstrous feminine" akin to Carmilla, although in a different way - that is, through a "beautiful boy" and challenges the fear of changing definitions of masculinity through the self-indulgent Dionysian feminine. More so, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* utilizes the Victorian concern for the purity of the youth and triggers dread not through a monster, like a vampire, but through a more realistic horror of influence and domination. While undeniable connections can be drawn between the novel and Wilde's personal life and beliefs, or perhaps his disagreement with the moralistic ending, the book nonetheless reflects the at-then contemporary apprehensions regarding sexuality and thus will be analysed as its own item. However, unlike Le Fanu, Wilde also offers a deeper look at the "homosexual panic"; he portrays the inner anxiety of a homosexual Victorian man while cleverly disguising it as artistic fascination. This chapter analyses how the novel used motives of sexuality and moral degradation to elicit fear and how it leaned into the homosexual panic to unsettle the Victorian audience.

2.1. The Monstrous Feminine (boy)

While *Carmilla* focuses uniquely on the anxieties surrounding the "New Woman" – an independent woman rejecting the patriarchy, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* encompasses both the fear of the changing definitions of masculinity and of the "monstrous feminine". Martha Vicinus argues that the adolescent boy was just as problematic – frightening- as the "predatory

woman" (91); however, he is arguably more frightening. Not only does he threaten traditional masculinity and gender roles, but he also threatens the standard of heterosexuality, deepening the sense of anxiety and confusion. As Rita Felski says, a feminized man blurred the line between the "bourgeois man and the 'natural' domestic woman", whether serving as a subversion of expectations or as an example of perversity. In contrast, a woman displaying feminine traits was simply seen as fulfilling her expected role (1099). Thus, Dorian, as a male, is the supreme vessel to showcase the decadence and, consequentially, the horror of gender and sexual anxieties due to his gender-defying transgressions. While Carmilla does induce fear through her transgressions against patriarchy, she does so mostly through her vampirism. Dorian, on the other hand, is able to evoke similar anxieties only via his sexual nonconformity.

Indeed, Dorian starts as a perfect representation of the beautiful Greek-Apollonian boy, the boy who "has male muscle structure but a dewy girlishness" (Paglia 110). His androgyny is recognised by him being frequently described using traditionally feminine terms; he "looks as if he was made of ivory and rose-leaves" (Wilde 72) with his "…finely-curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair" (90). More so, "He has a simple and a beautiful nature" (87) and "rose-white boyhood" (96), reflecting his innocence and the sensible Apollonian. He often blushes, and his "sensual lips" (221) tremble and pout when confronted with strong emotions, emphasising his feminine delicacy. By all accounts, he appears to be the ideal of beauty, the untainted beautiful boy who is to grow out of his innocent boyish androgyny and become a dutiful Victorian man.

However, that changes the moment he seals the Faustian pact, and his portrait starts ageing instead of him. He stagnates as a young boy, but his inner self degrades. During the story, Dorian gradually embraces the chaotic and decadent Dionysian feminine, and he changes from the unadulterated masculine to the monstrous feminine. Right after his first

meeting with Lord Henry, he realises his own beauty and his "Life suddenly became fiery-coloured to him" (Wilde 96). While Dorian begins almost as a blank slate, through the comprehension of his own beauty and the power it gives him, he becomes corrupted and decadent. According to Felski, the "feminised aesthete" served as a symbol of decadence and reflected the anxieties regarding gender (1094). Similar to Carmilla, Dorian becomes a beautiful person with tainted morale who corrupts others and leads people to their demise by seducing them. Dorian never changes, he stays beautiful, but he cannot develop mentally. His foolish indulgence should be but a moment of happiness and fade away with age, together with his beauty, yet it never does. According to Paglia, the *femme fatale* can change appearance as needed, and she can even mask as the Apollonian glamourous. While her inaccessibility allures her victims, it inevitably destroys them. On the other hand, the *homme fatal's* danger is in his fleetingness. Unlike the *femme fatale*, he never stays (15). By this definition, it is clear Dorian, cursed by never ageing, resembles the *femme fatale* like Carmilla, the ageless vampire. Like Lord Henry says: "Always! ... Women are so fond of using it. They spoil every romance by trying to make it last for ever" (Wilde 101). The monstrosity of Dorian lies in the way he transcends the fleeing boyhood and becomes the decadent Dionysian hiding under a mask of the Apollonian glamourous.

Dorian commits several acts of cruelty; everyone who falls in love with him is doomed to misery. First is the rejection and consequent suicide of Sybil Vane, and then Basil's worship of Dorian's beauty ends in his murder. Dorian blackmails Alan Campbell with something so horrid that it leads him to suicide – possibly threatening to reveal Alan's homosexuality (Frankel 236). Men are "jealous of the strange love that he inspire[s] in women" (Wilde 202), and "those who had been most intimate with him appeared… to shun him" (203). Women grew "pallid with shame or horror" (203) when they saw him. Gentlemen avoid Dorian, and no "pure-minded girl should be allowed to know [him]" (215). His

uncanny, never-changing appearance, as well as his questionable morality, evokes disgust in people but also uncomfortable attraction. Instinctually, people fear him. He is something unnatural, a *femme fatale* disguised as a pretty boy. While he is not a monster the same way Carmilla is, he nonetheless evokes fear due to his unnatural permanence and defying of masculinity.

The Picture of Dorian Gray uses the androgynous boy very intentionally. The association with the feminine serves as a direct protest and rejection of the middle-class masculine - potentially raising disgust from the public for the novel's decadent portrayal of gender and sexuality. As noted by Felski, the second half of the 19th century was an age of challenging the notion of gender norms. Through literature, the European avant-garde movement embraced the feminine and confronted the male bourgeois identity as an artificial construct. In doing so, they challenged not only conventional literary depictions but also traditional ideas about sexuality (Felski 1094). Thus, Dorian, as a boy - *femme fatale* , evokes the fear of a changing or even degrading masculine identity. He challenges the beauty standards and social expectations for men.

2.2 Depictions of Male Sexuality and Relations

Similar to *Carmilla, The Picture of Dorian Gray* also uses the deformation of the relationships depicted to evoke discomfort in its readers. The ever-present theme of the book is a corruption of character, and the novel does not only depict the fear of the feminine man, as argued previously, but also a fear of homosexuality as a whole. One way in which this anxiety is reflected in the novel is the fear of contagion and negative influence. According to Nicholas Frankel, the reviewers found the emphasis on Lord Henry's influence on Dorian to be reminiscent of the homosexual older men "corrupting" the youth (91). Indeed, there is an undeniable association between Lord Henry manipulating Dorian and the fear of negative influence on the youth coming from indecent (meaning homosexual) older men. As stated by

Nicholas Frankel, The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which criminalised male-to-male sexual indecencies, originated in a panic over the corruption of innocent young girls and "heightened anxieties about homosexuality in Britain" (8). Thus, the fear of homosexuality is reflected in the book not only for its "unnatural" qualities but also for its corruptive potential towards the psyches of vulnerable girls and boys alike. On top of that, Wilde's novel takes advantage of the then-contemporary scientific discourse that took great interest in perversities and sexual oddities. Psychologization of sexuality " … established an entire pornography of the morbid, which was characteristic of the fin de siècle society" (Foucault 54), and it creates the undeniable atmosphere of horror in the novel. Through the meticulous depiction of the character's psychology, the novel potentially even amplified the societal anxiety about the corruption of the youth.

a) Influence

Lord Henry acts as the most significant corrupting influence in the novel. He repeatedly tempts Dorian with life's pleasures and presents Dorian with the decadent philosophy of sexuality devoid of consequence and conscience. Lord Henry functions as a personification of the fear of contagious homosexuality. He awakens hidden desires within Dorian and leads him astray. According to Lord Henry, one must give into their deepest longings as "[t]he only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it" (Wilde 96). He is a malicious character, whispering poison into Dorian's ear and leading him to a life of a degenerate. As Arundhati Sanyal says, he relishes manipulating Dorian and takes almost sexual pleasure in seducing him with his philosophy (149). Henry is written as misogynistic and immoral; he is not to be sympathised with.

While Dorian's newly awoken "passion for sensation" (Wilde 115) leads him to meet Sybil, an innocent girl, a beacon of hope for Dorian's morality, him marrying and leading an honest life does not fit Henry's idea of amusement. He tells Dorian to "[n]ever marry at all"

(114) and undermines his love for Sybil. Henry laughs at Dorian's proclamation of love for Sybil, saying it is foolish to think it will be Dorian's only romance for the rest of his life (116). Henry repeatedly rejects women in his life, saying, "there are only five women in London worth talking to" (115). He stands against the Victorian ideals of monogamy and heterosexual marriage. He calls people "who only love once in their lives" (116) superficial and lethargic. Persuaded, Dorian does not know who to follow. In his head, he hears Henry's voice as well as Sybil's and cannot decide which to listen to (119). Dorian says, "When I am with [Sybil], I regret all that you have taught me" (136). Then, Henry answers to him, " … you will always be fond of me. I represent to you all the sins you have never had the courage to commit" (136). They are not simply voices; they are the echoes of his conscience. He must decide whether to live a decent life and marry a decent girl or to follow Lord Henry and live a "debauched" homosexual lifestyle. As Sanyal says, Dorian chooses meaningless pleasures and same-sex love over duty and responsibility. His fate was sealed with Sybil's suicide (152). Lord Henry successfully leads him astray, and Dorian does not get his salvation by leading an honest, married life.

Indeed, the fact that Lord Henry represents the Victorian fear of homosexuality, particularly the fear of "degenerate" homosexual men "corrupting" the innocent youth, was made perhaps even more obvious for the contemporary audience due to Henry's title of Lord. In the wake of a scandal involving young male prostitutes and Lord Arthur Somerset (known as the Cleveland Street Scandal), people started associating homosexuality with the perversity of aristocrats towards the lower-class youth (Frankel 9). More so, Lord Henry mirrors "the yellow book", a book that corrupts Dorian, filling his head with decadent desires and vain ideas. As Ed Cohen says, Lord Henry uses words as his means of seduction - firstly in the garden, making Dorian realise his own beauty, then through the book (808). He is a personification of the fears of decadent art and its poisonous influence. Something *The*

Picture of Dorian Gray itself later reflected, causing this moral panic in real life (Frankel 91, 171). Hence, Lord Henry is the physical embodiment of these anxieties of the "queer" people transmitting their debauchery.

Although most scholars acknowledge Lord Henry as the nearly Mephistophelian corruptive force, few address or even acknowledge Basil's, perhaps unintentional, negative influence on Dorian as well. Basil is undoubtedly a positive character in comparison to Lord Henry. Nevertheless, he similarly reflects the contemporary fear of homosexual men influencing the youth with their "deviant" desires. His way of love is portrayed as misguided, and its reflection in Dorian's relationships causes Basil grief. Thus, despite still serving as a cautionary tale of the perversity of homosexuality, it is hardly proof of malicious intent to corrupt the youth. He exemplifies the concern that the "wrong" way of love can have a negative effect on the youth even despite the lack of intention. It serves as a frightening tale of the consequence of misguided homosexual love, reinforced by Basil's tragic end.

Basil's fondness is not quite genuine and proper despite it not being as corrupting as Henry's. Basil, evidently enamoured by Dorian, tries to cope with his desire through art. He justifies his worship of him as an artistic fascination (Cohen 806). As discussed in more detail later, Wilde uses Basil's artistic fascination as a placeholder for homosexual infatuation. Through his surface-level artistic captivation, Basil disregards Dorian as a human being. Basil refuses to see Dorian's misconduct and perceives him only for his attractive appearance, hoping he is just as unspoiled internally despite the rumours of his crimes. Basil says, "I don't believe these rumours at all. At least, I can't believe them when I see you" (Wilde 214). Perhaps Basil is only lying to himself, refusing to believe Dorian, with his "innocent face" (215), would do something so horrid. Nonetheless, it only highlights how Basil solely focuses on Dorian's beauty, dehumanising him in the process. Dorian feels he is "…no more …than a

green bronze figure" to Basil (103). This way, even with an evident lack of malice, Basil's love is shown as unhealthy and irrational.

On its own, this would not be an important detail for this analysis, yet the odd type of love Basil exhibits for Dorian is later reflected in Dorian's behaviour towards Sybil and thus represents the negative effect Basil has on Dorian and the fear of twisting of what a healthy love looks like. Dorian says he "had known Basil Hallward for months, but the friendship between them had never altered him" (Wilde 98). However, Dorian unconsciously reflects the shallow attitude of falling in love with art instead of a person.

Dorian displays the same shallow fascination with Sybil. Unlike Lord Henry, Basil agrees to Dorian's marriage with Sybil despite his earlier reluctance, saying, "Any one you love must be marvellous" to Dorian (Wilde 139) and proving his good intentions, yet Dorian sees Sybil only for her art and is unable to establish a healthy relationship with the woman. Once she truly falls in love with Dorian and she can no longer act well, he rejects her, admitting, "I loved you because you … gave shape and substance to the shadows of art. You have thrown it all away" (145). Similar to Basil, he only values her for her art. Treating her the same way he so despised from Basil. Yet, unlike Basil, Dorian has already been influenced by Lord Henry's negative mindset as well. Dorian thus refuses to marry Sybil as would be proper and expected of him. Instead, he rejects her savagely after she is no longer able to perform masterfully, leading to her suicide.

While Lord Henry outwardly condemns marriage and Victorian values, Basil is unable to fulfil them. Dorian then changes into a horrid combination of their opinions and nature, supporting the now-outdated narrative that same-sex desire is strange and degenerate and, despite no malevolent intentions from Basil, poisonous. Thus, both Basil and Lord Henry serve as an example of the horror of the "corruptive influence" homosexual men pose for the easily influenced naive youth.

b) Domination

Not only is the fear of homosexual men tarnishing a good virtue of the youth the cause of anxiety, but this fear of influence is also linked to the male fear of domination. As Paglia says, there is a repeating theme of domination and submission in the book. Basil is dominated by Dorian, and then Dorian himself is completely dominated by his own perfect picture (image) (513). Throughout the novel, there are compelling depictions of the masculine fear of giving up control, of being influenced by others, dominated physically and spiritually, disguised as a battle of temptation over duty. Lord Henry calls giving into one's desire – that is, giving yourself to one you love, " … immoral - immoral from the scientific point of view" (Wilde 94). And yet, as Paglia says, lord Henry takes almost sexual, psychological pleasure in taking Dorian's innocence (517). In a parallel to *Carmilla*, Paglia says Lord Henry exhibits vampiric implications by dominating and imprinting himself into Dorian, possessing him "in both the sexual and daemonic sense" (Paglia 518). It is precisely him dominating Dorian that is seen as monstrous. Similarly, Basil becomes a victim of Dorian, not only physically but also mentally, for "[s]ubmission to the beautiful personality leads to degradation and death "(Paglia 523). It is not only the influencing of someone that causes apprehension but also the thought of giving up control, to be completely influenced by someone else, consumed by their personality and values. Such a notion becomes especially anxiety-inducing for men during a time when what it means to be masculine gets questioned and transformed (Felski 1094).

Thus, the novel incorporates a complex and multi-layered examination of Victorian fears of the homosexual. Be it malicious intention (especially) from the older gentry towards the suspectable young boys and girls or an unfortunate consequence of one's condition that nonetheless negatively affects others as well as oneself. Or perhaps it even functions as a cautionary tale of the danger of giving up one's power as giving up one's masculinity and the consequent degenerative effects of homosexuality on the whole society.

2.3 The Portrait as A Representation of Internalised Homophobia

However, Wilde offers us diverse views on this problematic. Through Basil, his painting, and Dorian, Wilde shows us a different, personal experience of the homosexual panic. Basil, and by extension, his painting, represent the internalised homophobia. Basil shows his infatuation with Dorian via the portrait. He "[cannot] exhibit it" because he has "put too much of [himself] into it" (Wilde 72), and it would have "shown with it the secret of [his] own soul" (78). The painting is a confession of Basil's inner feelings and desires. As Cohen concludes, since Wilde could not openly write about same-sex desire, he instead suggests it through the portrait, serving as an expression of what could not be outwardly written about male same-sex attraction (806). Wilde thus does not use explicit sexual scenes; he instead uses art and artistic fascination as a symbol for sexual infatuation.

Eventually, the focus slowly shifts from Basil to Dorian. Basil, having not seen the portrait – and all it represents- in years, forgets and doubts it even reflects his hidden feelings. Dorian, however, constantly looks at the portrait as "[h]e hated to be separated from the picture that was such a part of his life" (Wilde 201) and sees it as his own soul's image. Although Dorian knows he is unrecognisable in the portrait, he is still unreasonably scared of someone finding it (202). The painting and Dorian's reaction to it represent the concerns a homosexual man of the time would feel. "Even if Basil thinks deviant desire cannot be read on Dorian's body, his sexual acts are permanently inscribed on the picture, itself the product of homosexual love" (Vicinus 98), and were someone to expose it, Dorian would be judged as a criminal (for homosexuality was outlawed by The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885).

If the portrait represents Dorian's homosexuality, it is understandable that he wants to keep it hidden the same way Basil refused to exhibit it previously. When Dorian feels regret after seeing his portrait change, his motivation is not to actually become a better person; he is simply worried his public image will be ruined. According to Sanyal, "Wilde allows art to be

something he had believed all his life it should not: a cautionary tale, a moral beacon that guides character" (151). However, it is much more than that. Dorian does not simply get punished for his wicked behaviour by dying, instead, he literally kills himself by trying to destroy a fundamental part of him – his homosexuality. Narratively, the portrait does not work as a moral guide; it never actually convinces Dorian of his immorality. While Dorian is appalled by the hideousness of his portrait, he merely regrets his behaviour because it tarnishes his appearance. He denies being cruel, instead saying "[i]t was the girl's fault, not his" (Wilde 150) and any resemblance of actual regret is quickly suppressed by what Lord Henry taught him. Instead, he immediately shifts the focus on himself, " … Sybil Vane? She was nothing to him now … A sense of infinite pity, not for himself, but for the painted image of himself, came over him" (150-1). Even in his final moment of "mercy", when Dorian decides to spare Hetty of his cruelty (while breaking her heart nonetheless), he only thinks about his portrait and his reputation. He wonders "if the portrait … had changed" and that "if his life became pure" (249), his portrait could be beautiful again. Dorian's portrait is not merely a moral guide; it is a part of him, his true self. It cannot be killed without Dorian killing himself. It is much more suitable to represent his suppressed homosexuality. In the end, Dorian cannot live to stand what the portrait represents anymore. He cannot look at the representation of his desire, of his homosexuality, and he stabs the painting, dying instead.

The Picture of Dorian Gray reflects not only the fears of homosexual individuals by the public but also the fear homosexual men would feel themselves. When faced with a sudden attraction to the same sex, the characters feel an odd sense of dread akin to how Laura feels conflicted between fear and adoration for Carmilla. Dorian was "afraid of [Lord Henry], and ashamed of being afraid" (Wilde 98) and similarly, Basil felt "[a] curious instinct of terror" (79) during his first meeting with Dorian. He says: "if I allowed it to do so, [Dorian's personality] would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself" (79) - art, as

stated previously, standing in for homosexual love. Basil says he could not be happy if he did not see Dorian every day, saying he worships Dorian: “He is all my art to me now” (83). At his sudden attraction for the young boy, Basil “grew afraid” (79). Reminiscent of the anxieties of the time, Basil feels terrified at the prospect of being attracted to a male. Unlike Lord Henry, who intentionally seduces Dorian into a life of debauchery and crime, Basil is terrified at the prospect of it. He places all his forbidden feelings into the portrait, and it becomes a window onto the soul of Basil and, eventually, Dorian. The portrait shows the truth of the soul. It is a mirror of one’s feelings and hidden desires. Although the book implies it simply reflects Dorian’s acts of cruelty, Wilde could not explicitly write about homosexuality, so by Basil’s insistence that it reflects his feelings, we can assume the same applies to Dorian. Basil does not merely represent Dorian’s conscience; he represents his internalised homophobia and his sexual guild.

It can be concluded that the horror of sexuality in this novel comes not only from the fear of the monstrous feminine and the corruptive influence of homosexuality but also from the inner anxieties regarding an individual’s sexuality. While Dorian begins as a beautiful and pure boy androgyne, through his actions and the corruption of his character, he starts resembling a monstrous feminine akin to Carmilla. Whereas Henry embodies a conventional negative character of an older aristocrat influencing the younger naive ward, Basil represents a complex portrayal of a homosexual man and his inner struggles. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* thus offers a deeper, more nuanced look at the Victorian homosexual panic through its varied and complicated characters.

Chapter 3: Comparative Analysis of Sexuality and Horror in the Books

3.1 The "Monster" of the Novel

One of the major and noticeable differences is that *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, unlike *Carmilla*, lacks an explicit monster character. Carmilla is a vampire with supernatural abilities, and while there are paranormal elements in *Dorian Gray*, the characters themselves are human. This highlights the main difference between the narrative purpose regarding horror and sexuality in the books.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* the horror comes from within. The debauchery is a direct outcome of the gradual degradation of Dorian's morale budding from his own hedonism and narcissism, and most of all, from his sexual deviancy. His portrait serves as a mirror to his soul, showing him his wrongdoings. The painting itself does not corrupt Dorian. It does not, despite its supernatural qualities, act as the cause of Dorian's immorality but instead acts as a reminder of his corruption. It is Dorian's own character and sexuality that serves as the central conflict. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a look at the inner feelings and anxieties of a person and the danger it poses to others as a consequence.

Wilde does something different from Le Fanu, he was well familiar with the experiences of a gay man, which he portrays in his novel. Not only does the book function as a tale of caution and horror for the "normal" public fearing the "queer" individuals but it also portrays the anxieties of potential gay men. As argued previously, Wilde shows Dorian's fear of being exposed to the public and of his ruined reputation through the portrait. On top of that, Wilde addresses the blackmail homosexual men faced due to Section 2 of The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which became known as the "blackmailer's charter" (Frankel 236). Specifically, it is seen in the case of Alan Campbell, whom Dorian blackmailed, possibly

regarding his sexuality, and which resulted in his suicide. The novel hence presents multiple perspectives of the homosexual panic in 19th century England.

Le Fanu, on the other hand, simply shows the horror of girls being seduced by a deviant individual. Carmilla represents the outer threat for the so-thought-easily persuaded women. She attacks Laura and many other young girls and drains them of their vigour. The book does not, unlike with Dorian, give Laura a choice in the matter. In the story, Laura is merely a victim of a more powerful creature; it is not Laura's morality that affects the plot. She has little to no agency in her demise, and the same can be said about Carmilla's previous victims. *Carmilla* showcases the societal anxiety of women's sexuality and how it reflects in the feelings of an individual. Girls are only shown as victims of their circumstances, while men are responsible for their wrongdoings.

To further justify the comparison, there are also similarities between the two books in this regard, specifically in the vampiric nature of the seducer. While Carmilla is fully supernatural, Lord Henry also exhibits vampiric tendencies despite being human. He utterly infects Dorian's mind with his twisted opinions and hedonistic thoughts. Lord Henry transforms Dorian into his own likeness, akin to "hermaphroditic cloning" (Paglia 518). However, while Lord Henry does influence Dorian mentally, he is not capable of actually changing him physically the way Carmilla can. Lord Henry shows Dorian the luxuries of a decadent lifestyle, and Dorian decides to follow it. Unlike Laura, he can change, and it is due to his own narcissism that he does not. Laura, on the other hand, has little say in her decline. She is merely a prey of the deviant creature. The result, nonetheless, remains the same. While the reader is not shown Laura being changed into a vampire, they are told Carmilla's victim can change into one (Le Fanu 155). Thus, it can be assumed that if changed, Laura would become a vampire – a deviant, akin to how Dorian becomes vicious to people around him under Lord Henry's influence.

That is, through comparing Carmilla and *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* it is revealed that the horror does not originate from the monster itself but rather from the sexual danger it represents, as similar terror is reflected in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* despite its lack of a humanoid monster. What significance does it thus have that Laura is seduced by a vampire but Dorian by a human man? Based on the comparison of the two novels, it is evident that the danger, or rather the blame, is much different in the case of women as opposed to men. While there is an apparent fear of older homosexual individuals influencing the naive youth, the boys are thought to take an active part in their demise. Their homosexuality and moral decline signify a weakness of character and a lack of resistance. Women, on the other hand, are portrayed as victims not able to fight back the corruptive influence.

3.2 The Question of Gender

Because Dorian, due to his active role, becomes a perpetrator himself, unlike Laura, who remains passive throughout the book, it is then reasonable to compare him to Carmilla, who fills the active role in her story as well. While at first sight, the difference in the gender between Carmilla and Dorian is clear-cut, in actuality, they both explore the anxieties surrounding women and their sexuality. While Carmilla fully leans into the trope of the *femme fatale* , Dorian hides behind the facade of a pretty boy. He is praised for his youthful androgyny, but as his morale becomes progressively more corrupt, he starts representing the *femme fatale* in a similar way Carmilla does. As proven in the previous chapter, Dorian reflects the Dionysian hedonism akin to Carmilla. Consequently, through Dorian and Carmilla, the corrupted and corrupting nature is associated with the feminine. Yet, there is a difference when closely examining the reaction to their behaviour.

While Dorian is presented as androgynous and described using feminine terms, his androgyny is not seen as something negative or unusual on its own. Quite the contrary, it is

seen as highly attractive. It is only when he becomes hedonistic that people start to fear him and even shun him (Wilde 203) but not for his masculinity nor his boyish androgyny. Quite the opposite, "his charming boyish smile, and the infinite grace of that wonderful youth … were in themselves a sufficient answer to the calumnies" (202-3). Even though Dorian leans into the unrestrained Dionysian, as "Dionysus is energy, ecstasy, hysteria, promiscuity, emotionalism" (Paglia 96), and evokes confusion and repulsion in people, it is purely for his debauchery and sexual decadence, his gender is not questioned and does not evoke fear.

Contrasting this is Laura's reaction to Carmilla's assertive behaviour. Her romantic, intimate acts are seen as masculine, and her gender is questioned by Laura. She wonders "[w]hat if a boyish lover had found his way into the house, and sought to prosecute his suit in masquerade … " (Le Fanu 49). Therefore, while both books include the fear of unrepressed feminine, In Carmilla, it is also the fear of crossdressing or even transsexuality that can be observed. What this could imply, is a fear of perverse men seducing young girls into a life of debauchery under

the guise of friendship or good intentions. For men, like Dorian, this form of manipulation is more straightforward and without a disguise yet again giving men more autonomy in their corruption.

3.3 The Foreign Threat vs. Internal Decay

Besides the comparison of horror in regard to gender, there is an essential theme of foreign contrasted with local concerning the fear of homosexuality and debauchery. The fear in *Dorian Gray* comes from the anxiety regarding the degradation of society from within – a cultural degeneration. Similarly to how Dorian's conflict is primarily internal and only influences his surroundings as a consequence. On the opposite side is *Carmilla*. The book reflects an external threat, a fear of barbaric foreigners lacking the strict Victorian decorum. It

corresponds to the external threat in *Carmilla* that threatens numerous girls separate from Laura's personal tragedy. It indicates additional expression of anxieties of the period beyond simple fear for women's chastity. It is the fear of barbaric foreign influence. Nonetheless, whether by an outsider or through cultural degradation, both books suggest the fear of contagion, intellectual or physical, in this case by homosexual individuals.

Firstly, this fear of degradation presents as a fear of the foreign. As Kathleen L. Spencer says, late 19th century gothic incorporates an essential element: " a concern for purity" She believes it is an effort to ease anxieties by reinforcing essential distinctions between men and women, natural and unnatural, and civilized and degenerate—distinctions that appeared to blur during that time (203). All of which can be found in *Carmilla.* Carmilla evokes the fears of unnatural and gender anxiety through her vampiric nature, but she incorporates the fear of civilised versus uncultured primarily through her foreign origin. While Hallab says that [unlike Dracula, for example] Carmilla is not an outlander to Laura, thus, the book's primary intention is not to insinuate fear of foreigners, like in other works (Hallab 3). However, it still draws attention to an important difference between *Carmilla* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. While the horror of the foreign might not have been the primary purpose, Carmilla's foreignness definitely stands as a precise opposite to *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* which takes place in England and does not use foreign protagonists. More so, Hallab overlooks the fact that Laura, while growing up abroad, is still half English from her father's side (Le Fanu 9) and was raised by her father's British ideals as her mother died in her infancy (11). To the British reader, she is thus familiar and relatable. Carmilla, on the other hand, is ancient and foreign, coming from the old Styrian Karnstein family (142). For that reason, while there are undeniably better examples of "the fear of the foreign" in literature, *Carmilla* is one of them regardless.

Eventually, the terror shifts inwards. According to Carol M. Davison, while early Victorian gothic monsters were mostly limited to the private sphere, late Victorian gothic monsters threaten the public sphere, causing public scandal by unsettling its gender status quo. “As several n-de-siècle Gothic works suggest, the greatest terror arises when…the imperceptible monster infiltrates the public sphere under the guise of respectability, thus covertly threatening infection and social degeneration.” (Davison 127). Through Dorian’s hedonistic lifestyle and unrestricted sexuality, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* represents the fear of societal decline. As stated before, the novel does not take place outside of England, nor are any major characters foreign. This does not allow for association with the fear of foreign incivility. Instead, with the new Darwinian theory of evolution - of men evolving from an ape - came the speculation that if humans could evolve, could they also degenerate? This only amplified the national concern about the weakening of the British Empire - due to a “moral decadence leading racial degradation” (Spencer 204). The story becomes a cautionary tale. It shows “that when addictions to [sexual] pleasures take hold, the perversion of the addict’s sensibility follows, transforming gentlemen into gentlemen-criminals” (Davison 137). It warns of what could happen if people lost control over their lust and became “uncivilised”.

This difference marks a possible shift in social mentality, although this analysis is highly limited in this regard. Based only on the exploration of *Carmilla* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* it seems earlier gothic horror focuses on the fear of external threats and their barbaric influence. Later gothic horror, in contrast, shifts its focus on the domestic threat and possible cultural decline through uncontrolled hedonism. As Spencer stated, this shift could originate from the disgrace of the decline of the British empire (204). Moreover, this could potentially mark a change in British mentality, a shift from older values towards new ones, and the anxieties caused by the uncertainty such a change brings.

3.4 Family as a Way for Redemption and a Point of Stability

Family is another theme that is repeated in both books; they seem to share the belief that the traditional family is proper, and any transgressions against the institution are immoral and lead to damnation. Family plays a notable role in the panic about sexuality and vice versa. According to Foucault, family played an important part in the Victorian sexual discourse. The bourgeoise family " … was the first to be alerted to the potential pathology of sex ... Surrendering to fears … it was the first to commit itself to sexual erethism." (Foucault 120). The family unit could be seen as a point of stability, normality, and virtue. Therefore, the characters breaking away from this domestic standard of living represents their defiance against society, and indeed, in both of the books, the transgressors become monstrous the moment after rejecting the traditional marriage.

In Dorian's case, it is his unwillingness to submit to the uniformity of heterosexual marriage or better yet, it is Lord Henry's insistence upon the awfulness of marriage that leads Dorian astray. Lord Henry vehemently critiques marriage, saying, "The real drawback to marriage is that it makes one unselfish" (Wilde 132), which should be seen as a positive thing. He hopes Dorian marries Sybil only to abandon her in six months (133), solely for his amusement. His blatant rejection of wedlock serves to villainise Lord Henry. The wrongness of Lord Henry's belief is further emphasised when Dorian swears not to sin anymore since he is scared of his picture changing after rejecting Sybil. Dorian concludes he should not be seeing Lord Henry anymore - he is aware that his talk is poisonous. He decides to go back to Sybil to marry her and love her (Wilde 151). Dorian has a moment of clear conscience, which shows that marrying a woman is the good thing in this situation, and listening to Henry being influenced by him is immoral. Yet, Dorian lets himself be quickly persuaded by Lord Henry again, leaning into his selfishness. Sybil's life ends tragically, and instead of mourning, Henry romanticises Dorian's cruelty, saying he wishes someone would take their life for him (159).

This scepticism of traditional marriage by Lord Henry is used to emphasise the perversity and horror of homosexual "deviant" men and their negative influence.

In *Carmilla,* the transgression differs to a certain extent. She actively ruins and tears apart families not only by engaging with another female in a homosexual manner but also by literally killing young maidens before they can marry. More so, we learn that Carmilla had a lover, possibly without being married. After this, we are told how Carmilla became a vampire (Le Fanu 154-5). The reader could then perhaps associate Carmilla's monstrosity with her sexual impurity.

Both of the books offer us a false good ending. Laura seems to live a normal life with her father, yet she cannot forget Carmilla and what she represents (possibly her sexual awakening), and as the reader knows already, Laura ends up dying unmarried. Similarly, Dorian seems to come to his senses and seemingly decides to be an honest person by abandoning Hatty. Dorian feels enlightened by her innocence and feels like a new person when he is in the country where no one knows him. However, he again starts doubting himself immediately after talking to Lord Henry. Dorian "…began to think over some of the things that Lord Henry had said to him. Was it really true that one could never change?" (Wilde 248). Instead of staying in the country with Hatty, Dorian rejects another heteronormative relationship and returns to his abode in London, instantly falling under Lord Henry's influence again. Just like Laura cannot get entirely rid of Carmilla, Dorian cannot free himself from Lord Henry's control. As a result, both aforementioned protagonists' lives end tragically.

Therefore, it cannot be denied that both books, despite their slight differences, carry a strong implication that heterosexual marriage is a way to redemption.

Conclusion

In *Carmilla* (1872) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), sexuality plays a central role in creating horror. Sexuality is not merely a theme in the books but an effective source of terror. Through transgressing against Victorian ideals of morality and purity, the depicted sexuality and homosexuality appear monstrous and eerie. These works use sexuality not only to evoke fear but also to comment on societal repression, exploring the consequences of desire when it is hidden, denied, or distorted by social norms.

Carmilla demonstrates the rising anxieties about women's growing independence possibly as a consequence of the 19th-century women's rights movement. The book depicts Carmilla as monstrous for her sexual liberation and complete disregard for men in her paranormal procreation. More so, her behaviour is infectious, corrupting young innocent girls unable to fight back. Carmilla poses as a friend, a family or even a lover in order to befriend her victims who are unsuspectingly harassed by the monstrous woman. Her lesbian desire is hidden in her vampirism and framed as unnatural. *Carmilla* incorporates the emerging fears that were a result of the arising discourse on hysteria, scientific interest in sexuality during adolescent development and psychological interest in sexual deviancy.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* the anxieties about the changing definition of masculinity are reflected through the androgyny and monstrous feminine appeal of Dorian. Furthermore, a strong fear of older, most possibly homosexual, men influencing negatively the youth is considerably present throughout the book. Be it intentional corruption, as Lord Henry does to Dorian. Or unintentional, like the abnormal way Basil adores Dorian, who in turn adores Sybil in the same shallow way. In the novel, vain beauty and sexual overindulgence are tied to corruption and demise. At the same time, the story portrays internalised homophobia and inner fears of being exposed to the public through the portrait hiding Basil's and later Dorian's true feelings.

A comparative analysis of the two books reveals an important conclusion. The examination of monster characters or lack thereof, reveals where fear originates from in the narrative. In The Picture of Dorian Gray, fear is the outcome of Dorian's gradual corruption. Thus, the terror is much more personal and individual. In Carmilla, the horror originates from the supernatural vampirism of Carmilla and is thus more external. However, what is more important, this comparison and the comparison based on the gender of the characters, reveals that women in the book are not deemed responsible for their demise. Men, as represented by Dorian, then seem to have more agency and therefore more blame for their degradation. The fear is also of different origin, while Dorian represents the internal decay of society through his hedonistic tendencies, Carmilla represents the foreign threat corrupting young girls. Despite the differences, both stories share the core value of (heterosexual) marriage and family as a virtuous entity and by refusing or even actively tearing this unit apart, the characters deepen their perceived monstrosity. Both texts thus express a fear of sexual freedom, queer and transgressive sexuality, yet they do it in very different ways not only regarding society and the individual but also gender.

Such exploration gives us an interesting insight. Studies of sexuality help us understand the historical comprehension of the issue. By analysing and comparing chosen books we can better understand not only what anxieties were common in certain periods but also how fears were in turn formed by then-contemporary literature. This thesis helps us to recognise prevalent societal taboos and their influences on the culture. It likewise establishes the authors' methods and narrative techniques on how to bypass societal taboos and instead effectively use them to evoke fear. However, such a study is also beneficial to modern readers. It helps us understand our own fears and uncertainties and how they could be projected into one's art. Irrefutably such critical thinking is crucial for modern readers, for there are still many apprehensions towards unrestricted sexuality and homosexuality in particular even now.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that while these depictions of sexuality as monstrous and dangerous might reflect actual anxieties of the Victorian period, the anxieties themselves were possibly barely based on the reality of the problematic. Thus, this thesis is not trying to argue historical facts which undeniably also deserve academic attention. What is more, while this thesis solely focuses on the "horror of sexuality" in the chosen books, many other comparisons could have been made. Although *Carmilla* seemingly offers a woman's perspective on the problematic through its female protagonists, the text was clearly written by a man and thus further comparisons with women authors could, and should, be made.

Therefore, despite the limited scope of this thesis, it reveals just how terrifying socially unacceptable sexual practices can be when used proficiently by writers. *Carmilla* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* do not simply include sexuality as a mere theme, they take advantage of its off-limits nature to terrify their audience and to create masterful stories deeply telling of the Victorian culture.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Le Fanu, Sheridan. *Carmilla*. 1872. Pushkin Press, 2020.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray: An Annotated, Uncensored Edition*, edited and annotated by Nicholas Frankel, 1890. Harvard UP, 2011.

Secondary Sources

Cohen, Ed. “Writing Gone Wilde: Homoerotic Desire in the Closet of Representation.” *PMLA*, vol. 102, no. 5, 1987, pp. 801–13. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/462309. Accessed 31 Jan. 2025.

Davison, Carol Margaret. "The Victorian Gothic and Gender." *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, edited by Andrew Smith and William Hughes, Edinburgh UP, 2012, pp. 124–39.

Felski, Rita. “The Counterdiscourse of the Feminine in Three Texts by Wilde, Huysmans, and Sacher-Masoch.” *PMLA*, vol. 106, no. 5, 1991, pp. 1094–105. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/462682. Accessed 31 Jan. 2025.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction.* Translated by Robert Hurley, Pantheon Books, 1978.

Hallab, Mary Y. *Vampire God: The Allure of the Undead in Western Culture*. SUNY Press, 2009.

Leal, Amy. “Unnameable Desires in Le Fanu’s Carmilla.” *Names*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2007, pp. 37–52, https://doi.org/10.1179/nam.2007.55.1.37. Accessed 15 Jul. 2024.

Marcus, Sharon. *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*. Princeton UP, 2007.

Paglia, Camille. *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*. Vintage, 1990.

Sanyal, Arundhati. "Taboo in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*." *Bloom's Literary Themes: The Taboo*, edited by Harold Bloom, volume editor Blake Hobby, Infobase Publishing, 2010, pp. 147–56.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Columbia UP, 1985.

Signorotti, Elizabeth. "Repossessing the Body: Transgressive Desire in 'Carmilla' and 'Dracula.'" *Criticism*, vol. 38, no. 4, 1996, pp. 607–32. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23118160. Accessed 6 Jul. 2024.

Spencer, Kathleen L. "Purity and Danger: Dracula, the Urban Gothic, and the Late Victorian Degeneracy Crisis." *ELH*, vol. 59, no. 1, 1992, pp. 197–225. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/2873424. Accessed 5 May 2025.

Sullivan, Jack. *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story From Le Fanu to Blackwood*. Ohio UP, 1978.

Veeder, William. "Carmilla: The Arts of Repression." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1980, pp. 197–223. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40754606. Accessed 6 Jul. 2024.

Vicinus, Martha. "The Adolescent Boy: Fin de Siècle Femme fatale ?" *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1994, pp. 90–114. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3704081. Accessed 31 Jan. 2025.