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Father, Son and the Unholy Spirit:
On the Perversion of Catholicism in *The Monk* and *Carmilla*

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Porto, 17 de setembro de 2023

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Resumo

A literatura Gótica é repleta de narrativas de acontecimentos sobrenaturais, paisagens abandonadas, e castelos medievais. Durante esta dissertação, temas como a sexualidade, género e a religião assumem importância para providenciar uma ideia mais complexa das críticas que os autores de *The Monk* e *Carmilla* inscrevem nas suas narrativas. Para justificar estas ideias, excertos das obras serão analisados, tal como literatura exterior para fundamentar esta tese. A abordagem ‘horror Gothic’ de *The Monk*, que pretende causar choque no leitor, comparada com o ‘terror Gothic’ de *Carmilla* que encontra as suas raízes no Sublime. A conexão inerente que vai ser exposta é como ambas as obras, do mesmo género literário, mas motivadas por contextos diferentes - histórico e ideológico – pode subverter a religião.

Palavras-chave: Ficção Gótica, Sobrenatural, Catolicismo, Matthew Lewis, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu.

Abstract

Gothic literature is filled with narratives pertaining to supernatural occurrences, barren landscapes, and medieval castles. Throughout this dissertation, themes like sexuality, gender and religion are explored to provide insight into the critiques *The Monk* and *Carmilla's* authors have veiled in their narratives. To support these findings, passages from the novels will be analysed, as well as exterior literature to support the thesis. *The Monk's* 'horror Gothic' approach to its narrative, with the intention to shock the reader, is compared with *Carmilla's* 'terror Gothic' which finds its roots in the Sublime. The underlying connection that is meant to trace is how both novels, from the same literary genre, but motivated by different backgrounds – historical and ideological – can subvert religion.

Key-words: Gothic Fiction, Supernatural, Catholicism

Introduction

But alas! My Lord, what is blood! What is nobility!
We are all reptiles, miserable, sinful creatures. It
is piety alone that can distinguish us from the dust
whence we sprung, and whither we must return.

Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*

The Gothic genre, with a history spanning 260 years, is filled with a range of elements such as apparitions, medieval castles, supernatural entities, desolate atmospheres and landscapes. These themes collectively contribute to a distinctive narrative that often revolves around terror, mysterious monks and nuns, and a substantial sense of unease.

Emerging in the eighteenth century, the Gothic genre can be seen as a response to a literary aesthetic that came before it, namely Neoclassicism. This movement marked a notable departure, introducing a paradigm shift towards a literary style that maintains ornate qualities, yet delves into darker and more unsettling themes. The transition from Neoclassicism to Gothic aesthetics can be compared to a change from the serene and balanced to the odd and disconcerting (Kilgour, 1997: 5).

The appearance of Gothic literature signalled a revolutionary departure from previous literary trends characterised by simplicity, reason, and realism. Kilgour adds to this in *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (1995):

The emergence of the gothic in the eighteenth century has also been read as a sign of the resurrection of the need for the sacred and transcendent in a modern enlightened secular world which denies the existence of supernatural forces, or as the rebellion of the imagination against the tyranny of reason.

In its genesis, the genre introduced a fresh wave of artistic expression to the literary landscape, placing an emphasis on the power of emotion and sentiment to evoke

the sublime. This aesthetic shift towards heightened emotions and an exploration of the unknown defied conventional norms and opened up new avenues for creative exploration. Kilgour raises an interesting point in the introduction to her book, regarding the Gothic and Romanticism, both emerging relatively close to each other, “the emerging values of romanticism – an interest in the bizarre, eccentric, wild, savage, lawless, and transgressive, in originality and the imagination” (Kilgour, 3), show a clear similarity with the themes often explored in Gothic fiction. The author then sees the Gothic as “a transitional and rather puerile form (...)” (Kilgour, 3), putting Romanticism and the Romantics, like Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “and, especially, Byron who both realises and renders redundant the gothic hero-villain” (3).

Gothic literature can trace its origins back to the publication of Horace Walpole’s story of *The Castle of Otranto* (1763). This novel serves as the quintessential Gothic tale, introducing several characteristic elements that would go on to define the genre. At its core is the titular castle, a structure that symbolises the “blend [of] the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern” (Walpole, 9), creating a unique narrative style.

As the late eighteenth century unfolded, the Gothic aesthetic became popular among fiction writers. However, this rise in recognition was met with controversy, as both critics and the general public struggled with the genre’s unconventional themes. Nevertheless, the Gothic genre managed to assert itself as a literary force, producing significant works that would go on to shape its path. Such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, published in 1818, which remains an enduring masterpiece of the genre. Other standouts are Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and Bram Stoker’s iconic *Dracula* (1897). These novels not only solidified the Gothic’s status as a literary force, but also its ability to evolve and innovate over time, through the many themes which these novels explore.

Thus, the journey of Gothic literature from its origins with *The Castle of Otranto* to the enduring relevance of classics such as *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, demonstrates how the genre defies any type of categorisation. It blurs the lines between past and present, antiquity and innovation, tradition and subversion, all while consistently delivering narratives that both terrify and intrigue its readers (Kilgour, 1997: 3-4).

In *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*'s introduction, the problematics of any labelling of the Gothic genre are explored by Jerrold Hogle as he sees the genre as an amalgamation of various others genres. The defining trait that Hogle perceives in the genre is its adaptability while still adhering to certain standards:

One difficulty in doing so, of course, is how pliable and malleable this type of fiction-making has proven to be, stemming as it does from an uneasy conflation of genres, styles, and conflicted cultural concerns from its outset. Nevertheless, given how relatively constant some of its features are, we can specify some general parameters by which fictions can be identified as primarily or substantially Gothic (Hogle, 2).

Hogle acknowledges the inherent challenge of defining a genre that has proven itself to be versatile, referencing different genres and styles in its characteristics, and cultural concerns since its beginning. Despite this malleability, Hogle argues that the genre maintains certain consistent features, allowing for the identification of works that can be categorised as predominantly or substantially Gothic.

One of the central ideas that Hogle explores is the notion of an "antiquated place" (Hogle, 2) that serves as the background for Gothic narratives. This space is often characterised by darkness, decay, and an underlying sense of mystery. These spaces are haunted by secrets, stories, or supernatural occurrences that play a fundamental role in the unfolding of the narrative. The haunting experiences "haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or otherwise at the main time of the story" (2).

Hogle underlines the diversity that exists within the Gothic genre while still adhering to certain *clichés*. He points out that the genre can accommodate a wide range of narratives, each featuring its own unique twists, while sticking to core elements. These elements include supernatural entities such as ghosts, monsters, and witches,

which serve as vessels for conveying the eerie and uncanny aspects that define the Gothic tradition.

Furthermore, Hogle delves into why the Gothic genre has endured and established itself within the literary world. He argues that the genre's "symbolic mechanisms, particularly its use of haunting and frightening spectres," allow for the exploration of modern "anomalies" (2) by projecting them onto "antiquated or at least haunted spaces and highly anomalous creatures" (6). This concept hints at the genre's capacity to provide a lens through which societal contradictions and complexities can be examined.

An interesting aspect that Hogle highlights is the deliberate distancing effect created by the "seemingly unreal, the alien, the ancient, and the grotesque" (6). In the context of Gothic fiction, these elements act as a barrier that separates the work from its readers and society at large. The distancing effect serves as a tool for critiquing societal issues and contradictions, allowing the author to address contemporary unease through a lens of otherworldly or historical elements.

In sum, Hogle's study of the Gothic genre stresses its shifting nature, as well as its ability to incorporate a wide range of narratives while maintaining certain core elements. Through its use of antiquated spaces, haunting experiences, and diverse supernatural entities, the Gothic genre serves as a vehicle for exploring societal complexities and projecting them onto fictional realms. This enduring genre continues to captivate readers and critics alike, offering a blend of the familiar and the uncanny.

Gothic fiction's growth demonstrates its adaptability and transformation over time. To illustrate this metamorphosis, one can contrast the "archaic" subgenres of Gothic, characterised by the return of ghosts and historical mysteries, with the emergence of more 'scientifically advanced' narratives like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Robert L. Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. This evolution, particularly prominent during the Victorian era, can be viewed as a pivotal point in the development of subsequent literary genres, including the birth of Science Fiction (Aldiss, 1976: 20-31).

Early works of Gothic literature often featured supernatural elements appearing from the past – apparitions, ancestral curses, and dark secrets¹. These elements created an eerie atmosphere that revolved around the haunting of main characters by forces that were deeply rooted in history and tradition. This “archaic” strand of Gothic fiction was deeply influenced by the mysteries of the past and the lingering spectres of history, generating a sense of uncanny dread.

However, as the literary landscape evolved, so did the Gothic genre. The nineteenth century, and the Victorian era brought forth a new wave of Gothic narratives that embraced a more “scientifically advanced” perspective. Writers like Shelley and Stevenson shifted the genre’s focus toward the implications of scientific discovery and human experimentation. *Frankenstein* dealt with the moral and ethical dilemmas posed by humanity’s attempts to harness the power of creation through scientific means. Similarly, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* delved into the dual nature of humanity, investigating potential consequences of scientific intervention on the human psyche.

This shift marked a departure from traditional Gothic themes while maintaining the dread-inducing and mysterious aspects of the genre. The themes of these works transcend the boundaries of the supernatural, connecting it with the intellectual and philosophical discussions of the time. This evolution laid the groundwork for the genre of Science Fiction, which would eventually explore the possibilities of scientific advancements and their effects on society and humanity.

Having all of the perspectives mentioned above as well as my own readings as a background it is clear that the progression of Gothic fiction from its early days of ancestral hauntings to the “scientifically advanced” narratives of the Victorian era demonstrates the genre’s ability to adapt and reflect the changing cultural and intellectual climate. This evolution also highlights the genre’s role in laying the

¹ As seen in *The Castle of Otranto* with the ancient prophecy “that the castle and lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it.” (Walpole, 3), as well as the “vision” that made “the walls of the castle behind Manfred [to be] thrown down with a mighty force” (239).

foundation for new literary forms. As authors dealt with the implications of scientific progress and man's ability to reshape reality, it led to the creation of narratives that imagined worlds shaped from the past and propelled into the unknown future.

Undoubtedly, the defining trait of Gothic fiction is its outstanding ability to evoke predominantly negative emotions in its readers. This emotional spectrum involves sensations of fear, anxiety, and, on occasion, a profound sense of dread. More intriguingly, the genre extends its influence beyond intellectual engagement, often provoking psychological responses and, in some instances, triggering physical manifestations of the emotions. To be able to produce such a powerful reaction in readers, Gothic fiction employs a range of devices and techniques meticulously designed.

Jerrold Hogle, in his analysis, distinguishes two discernible strains within the Gothic genre, each having distinct methodologies to achieve their intended effects: the "terror Gothic" and "horror Gothic" (3). The terror Gothic employs a subtler approach, cloaking its narratives in an atmosphere of imminent danger. This form of Gothic manipulation revolves around creating threats to characters' lives, safety, and even their sanity. By leveraging these less overt tactics, the terror Gothic invites readers to engage their imagination and intellect, immersing them in an unsettling environment that cultivates a psychological sense of unease. *Carmilla* undeniably fits this subgenre of Gothic, its uncanny representations of vampirism which give way to the sublime.

In contrast, the horror Gothic takes a more visceral and direct approach. This subgenre pushes characters into scenarios of physical or psychological violence, frequently culminating in graphic and primitive depictions. By confronting readers with shocking and explicit imagery, the horror Gothic seeks to provoke immediate and intense emotional responses characterised by a sense of anxiety and fear. This method directly engages reader's senses and emotions, creating a reaction that resonates after the narrative's end. *The Monk* serves as a representative text for the horror Gothic, its scenes of rape (see pp 277-284), its sacrilegious narration of the incestuous rape is meant to shock the reader.

Ultimately, the distinction between the terror Gothic and the horror Gothic illustrates the diversity of mechanisms employed by Gothic fiction to convey negative emotions. Whether through the subtle weaving of psychological tension or the presentation of disturbing and violent scenes, this genre creates a narrative experience that taps into human vulnerability. The genre's remarkable ability to evoke profound emotions has solidified Gothic fiction as a literary realm capable of leaving a mark on the reader's mind, while maintaining its relevance through time and literature.

Another perspective on the way Gothic writers use the supernatural to elicit negative emotions is Ann Radcliffe's essay *On the Supernatural in Poetry* (1826). In it, Radcliffe highlights how the supernatural is an effective tool for causing emotions in readers. She discusses the idea that the human imagination is often more powerful and unsettling than any explicit description. By leaving certain elements ambiguous and allowing readers to fill in the gaps with their own fears and anxieties, authors can tap into a reader's emotions and experiences, making their reactions more intense.

Radcliffe emphasises the concept of "terror" as a key emotion evoked by the supernatural. The writer suggests that the unknown, the unseen, and the unexplained can evoke a deep sense of fear and anticipation. She concludes that the terror Gothic was inherently feminine and expanding of the soul when faced with the sublimity of the terror. Horror Gothic is characterised as masculine in nature, depending on gruesome depictions with anxiety-inducing effects on the reader (Davison, 124).

Academic studies and literary criticism have illuminated the intricate connection between Gothic literature and politics, revealing that the genre is not only a reflection of the author's contemporary society, but is also profoundly influenced by the political and societal context in which it is written.

One notable example of this connection can be found in the writings of the Marquis de Sade. In his short essay *Reflection on the Novel* (1799, *Une Idée sur les romans*), Sade not only acknowledges this correlation but also theorises on the origins and challenges of the Gothic genre. Although he does not explicitly mention it, Sade explores how politics and societal upheaval have shaped Gothic literature. He suggests

that the Gothic genre emerged as “the inevitable result of the revolutionary shocks which all of Europe had suffered” (109). He further links the genre to the era of terror following the French Revolution.

Sade’s perspective sheds light on the reasoning behind the proliferation of Gothic literature during this period of historical turmoil. He argues that the intense and widespread suffering experienced by individuals “in the short span of four or five years (...) than the most celebrated novelist could portray in a century” (109). As a result, authors were compelled to resort to extraordinary measures, invoking elements of the supernatural and terror to capture readers’ attention. Sade even goes so far as to suggest that authors needed to “call upon the aid of hell itself” (109) to craft narratives that would resonate amidst the turbulent times.

Interestingly, Sade also highlights a potential drawback of this approach. He notes that the intricate plots and supernatural elements used to captivate readers could lead to the use of excessive “wizardry” and a “veil of secrecy”. These devices, though engaging, could prevent the reader from comprehending and even compromise the accuracy and authenticity of the narrative.²

Sade’s insights focus on the multifaceted relationship between politics, societal upheaval, and the Gothic genre. The unstable climate of the time not only provided the momentum for the rise of Gothic literature but also posed challenges in terms of maintaining reader engagement without sacrificing clarity and authenticity. By examining Sade’s observation, the understanding of how politics and society intersect with the creation and reception of Gothic literature is made much more clear.

Gothic literature often finds itself pushed into the simplistic stereotype of merely being a genre of chilling ghost stories with tragic endings. However, this perception is far from the truth. According to Jerrold Hogle, Gothic fiction is a versatile genre that encompasses a spectrum of narratives, reflecting its diversity and evolution over time.

² Curiously, Sade explicitly excludes Matthew Lewis and Ann Radcliffe. Throughout the essay Sade specifically praises *The Monk* by Lewis and Radcliffe’s work – “*The Monk* (...) is superior in all aspects to the strange flights of Mrs. Radcliffe’s brilliant imagination.” (108-9)

As mentioned previously, this diversity is evident through the existence of two distinct types of Gothic fiction, which illustrate the genre's versatility and development through history.

The range of Gothic literature extends beyond conventional notions. Among its branches, one can discover various subgenres, ranging from traditional tales of spectral apparitions to narratives featuring scientifically engineered monsters. Authors of the Gothic genre exhibit a mastery of storytelling that generates not only physical and emotional responses in readers but also psychological effects. However, the sole purpose of Gothic writing is not limited to inducing reactions; rather, it serves as a platform for writers to employ shared themes and writing techniques to critique society and express their viewpoints on various matters.

One illustrative approach in Gothic fiction is the utilisation of historical and romantic elements. The incorporation of past narratives, failed romances set in Gothic castles, and the portrayal of medieval societies creates a sense of detachment between society under critique and the historical and geographical settings of the narrative. This distancing effect enables authors to offer critical commentary on societal issues from a somewhat removed vantage point. This technique, combined with the genre's unique ability to evoke negative yet captivating emotions in readers, cements Gothic fiction as a powerful tool for exploring and criticising societal dynamics.

Through this combination of thematic exploration, narrative techniques, and emotional resonance, Gothic literature has managed to make a distinct place for itself within the literary landscape. Over the course of two and a half centuries, the genre has not only maintained its relevance but also evolved and adapted to changing times. Its enduring appeal lies in its capacity to elicit emotions while engaging readers in profound contemplations about society, human nature, and the uncanny. This intricate interaction between emotion, critique, and storytelling has allowed the Gothic genre to transcend its initial impressions, proving itself as a formidable and enduring force in literature.

Ultimately, the Gothic genre stands as a testament to its enduring appeal and impact on literature. It compresses a world where the boundaries between reality and the supernatural are blurred, where the eerie and the sublime intertwine, and where the human experience is both heightened and haunted by the unexplainable.

The central focus of this thesis is to explore the perversion of religion, particularly Catholicism, within two works of Gothic fiction. To effectively investigate this theme, the two novels that were selected as primary subjects are: *The Monk* by Matthew Lewis and *Carmilla* by Sheridan Le Fanu. These two British Gothic novels, originating in the 18th and 19th centuries respectively, offer rich material for the examination of how Catholicism is both manipulated and subverted for the authors' narrative purposes.

The Monk and *Carmilla* share the distinction of being British Gothic novels that explore religion and engage with it in ways that challenge traditional interpretations. These novels provide abundant material for the research of the dissertation due to their complex and paradoxical treatment of religion. Both works offer a lens through which the authors confront and manipulate religious themes, uncovering aspects that may not be taken as critically as they should be.

For my purposes, the pivotal link between these two novels lies in their shared engagement with religion, albeit in paradoxical and subversive ways. Rather than adhering to conventional portrayals of religion, both Lewis and Le Fanu take the opportunity to expose and critique the perversions and distortions that can occur within religious contexts. Their narratives dive into the darker aspects of religion that often evade critical examination, exposing the potential for manipulation, corruption, and misuse of faith.

The novels can be seen as literary tools used by their authors to unravel the layers of religion's complexities. Through the narratives, they challenge the notion of religion as an unquestionable force for good and instead explore how it can be exerted for personal gain, manipulation, and the fulfilment of dark desires. By subverting religious ideals within their stories, the authors offer readers a critical perspective that

encourages a more nuanced understanding of the potential dualities inherent in religious institutions.

In sum, this thesis embarks on a journey through the exploration of two pivotal Gothic novels that delve into religion and unpack its potential for perversion. By analysing how both novels subvert religious themes and expose their darker sides, the dissertation aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the ways in which Gothic fiction can be used to critically engage with and challenge established societal norms and beliefs.

The Monk undoubtedly holds a significant place in Gothic fiction. Its controversies, rather than diminishing its value, contribute to its importance within the genre. The novel's daring exploration of explicit sexuality, subversion of Catholicism, exposure of clergy misconduct, and the presence of ambiguous homoerotic undertones all combine to make it one of the most polemic works of its era.

What distinguishes the novel is that it does not merely use themes of sex, lust, and sacrilege for the sake of shock value. Instead, Matthew Lewis utilises these provocative themes as tools for critique and as vehicles to express his ideological stance. The narrative serves as a platform through which Lewis voices his concerns and perspectives on societal issues, particularly the vices and corruption within religious institutions.

Central to the novel's exploration is the prevailing anti-Catholic sentiment. Lewis' work resonates with the Protestant anxieties of his time concerning the perceived impurity and corruption of Catholicism. He highlights the clergy's transgressions, exposing their lustful and corrupt behaviour that contradicts their supposed devotion to religious purity. One key focus is the 'unnatural' chastity vow, which becomes a central topic of discussion in the novel. This vow, often held in high regard by Catholic institutions, is paradoxically portrayed as a path to corruption and the suppression of human nature in the hands of flawed individuals.

Through the narrative, Lewis critiques not only the institution of Catholicism, but also the broader concept of power and authority within religion. By unmasking the

clergy's moral failings and exploiting the hypocrisy between their public persona and public actions, Lewis takes aim at the inherent flaws of religious hierarchies.

Additionally the homoerotic subtext that permeates the novel adds yet another layer of complexity to its critique. This ambiguity suggests a fluidity of desire and power dynamics that challenges traditions and expectations. This subtext allows Lewis to further undermine conventions and structures that govern sexuality and relationships.

As one of the most prominent ghost stories writer, Joseph Le Fanu was able to bring the vampire figure, notably a female one, to Gothic fiction, juxtaposing to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem *Christabel*, which also explores vampirism.

In *Carmilla*, Le Fanu takes the concept of the vampire and weaves it into the Gothic genre, aligning it with themes explored by his contemporaries. Similar to Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*, Le Fanu's work also introduces religious themes, intertwining them with a homoerotic plotline and a subversion of gender roles. This convergence of themes highlights the complexity of the narrative and his willingness to contest beliefs.

One of the interesting aspects of *Carmilla* is its engagement with Victorian culture. Le Fanu creates a society that is reflective of the Victorian era, mirroring its norms, values, and anxieties. However, Le Fanu utilises the narrative strategy of setting the story in Austria. This geographical and historical detachment serves as a device to critique Victorian society more effectively. By placing the events of the novel in a different time and place, Le Fanu creates a barrier that allows for a more direct and critical exploration of the societal elements he seeks to challenge.

The choice of Austria as the setting not only provides geographical distance, but also introduces a layer of historical and supernatural separation. This separation serves to enhance the uncanny and mysterious atmosphere of the story, transporting readers into a world that is both familiar and unsettlingly different. Additionally, the geographical and cultural disparities between the setting and the Victorian readership heighten the sense of otherness, amplifying the impact of the narrative's critique.

Le Fanu's ability to construct a narrative that is both grounded in Victorian concerns and detached enough to provide a critical perspective shows his literary talent. Through *Carmilla*, Le Fanu harnesses the power of historical and geographical displacement to create a space where he can explore and criticise Victorian society. This allows him to transcend the boundaries of time and place, making his critique resonate across contexts while staying true to the Gothic genre.

Thus, after this introduction to the problematics of Gothic fiction and the two novels to be analysed, this dissertation seeks to set a connection between the Gothic literature from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the events of their respective times, while further analysing the two novels through a critical lens regarding the themes of religion and its subversion, gender issues, homoerotic subtexts, and criticism to the texts.

1. *The Monk*

1.1. On Fallen Angels

“God loves you, but not enough to save you.”

Ethel Cain, *Sun Bleached Flies*.

The Monk is a work that explores the corrupted side of Catholicism. It touches upon subjects relating to sexual deviations inside an abbey in Madrid, such as incest, homoerotic suspicions, and lust. The novel written by an English author during the French Revolutionary wars and the French Revolution, *The Monk* explores the anxieties felt through these times from a British perspective, with a negative underlying attitude regarding Catholicism (Sade, 1799: 109), all of this reflecting on the more sexual themes of the text and on gender anxieties such as masculine women and feminine men.

Upon reading *The Monk*, Lewis' anti-Catholic sentiment is made very clear. Throughout the novel, the author uses various devices to convey his judgments on Catholicism. The character of Ambrosio serves as a vessel for this anti-clericalism. Lewis strategically exploits the figure of a beloved member of the Catholic Church to undermine its foundations and expose its inherent hypocrisies.

Ambrosio's introduction to the reader portrays him as a respected friar residing in Madrid. Brought up within the confines of the Abbey of the Capuchins, he had adhered religiously to the principles of chastity (Lewis, 2009: 14).

The walls of the abbey are not sufficient to protect Ambrosio from carnal seduction leading into his demise. The monk is taken from a position of perceived 'femininity' and virtue to a sadistic and corrupted priest imprisoned by sin and demonic forces. Steven Blakemore, in *Matthew Lewis's Black Mass: Sexual, Religious Inversion in 'The Monk'*, presents an intriguing perspective, suggesting that "Ambrosio is situated in a «feminine» position: like a young virgin who is protected and sheltered so she can

keep her 'innocence' and 'virtue'" (2). This interpretation emphasises the importance given to male chastity within the text, shedding light on how *The Monk* criticises Catholicism through a Protestant lens³.

It is plausible that Lewis stresses Ambrosio's commitment to chastity as a deliberate means to highlight his descent into sexual deviancy, particularly within the character's narrative trajectory. This emphasis on Ambrosio's virtuous façade could be viewed as Lewis' commentary on how rigid adherence to certain aspects of Catholicism can potentially lead to their downfall, a perspective influenced by a protestant standpoint (Blakemore, 1998: 521).

Ambrosio, as a 'feminine' character, can be emphasised by his relationship with Antonia, whom, unknown to both, is his blood sister. Antonia mirrors Ambrosio as another virginal character, they share a limited knowledge of biological sex. Ambrosio for being such a "strict an observer of chastity, that he knows not in what constitutes the difference of man and woman". Any romantic thought by Antonia is immediately repressed by her aunt Leonella's reprimands: "You should not seem to remember that there is such a thing as a man in the world, and you ought to imagine everybody to be of the same sex with yourself" (14).

The author represents the effects of chastity and its controlling nature, through the siblings. Ambrosio represents a control through religious practice symbolised by the monk's vow. Antonia represents the sexual repression of women by society through her tyrannical aunt. Chastity, in Ambrosio's situation, symbolises a 'feminisation' of monks, making them sexually and anatomically ignorant, which in turn, as Lorenzo comments in the beginning of the novel, "the talents with which nature has endowed him will contribute to his ruin" (17).

³ In Protestantism celibacy is seen as unnecessary. Even at its conception, Martin Luther contested the Catholic obligation of chastity. Luther argued that celibacy separated the clergy from the common people, he saw it as being in opposition to God's word and as a way to take away freedom from followers by implementing all sorts of rules, statuses and divisions.

Another important character that explores the 'feminisation' of monks is Rosario or Matilda, a witch who infiltrated the Abbey of the Capuchins masked as a monk in an effort to become close with Ambrosio (Hoeveler, 2012: 17). Matilda's purpose in the abbey is to seduce Ambrosio into breaking his vows as a monk, especially his chastity vow. This seduction starts as Ambrosio and Rosario become extremely close creating a platonic connection between both of them which proves dangerous further on as Rosario "reveals her true self" as being Matilda. Ambrosio, as a feminised monk, who is sexually illiterate, is the perfect prey for Matilda. When she exposes her breasts to him, Ambrosio justifies this action in terms which convey his ignorance regarding sex:

'And what do I risk?' (...) 'by authorising her stay?
May I not safely credit her assertions? Will it not
be easy to forget her sex, and still consider her as
my friend and my disciple? (...) she strove to keep
me in ignorance of her sex; (...) She has made no
attempts to rouse my slumbering passions (Lewis,
15).

Matilda's seduction of Ambrosio was facilitated by his lack of sexual knowledge resulting in his destruction. It is then no coincidence that after confessing her feelings for Ambrosio and showing her true self to him, Ambrosio is bit by a snake in the abbey's garden. Matilda here can be seen as a sort of Eve, bringing Adam the forbidden fruit – sex – also asking for a rose, a symbol of lust and love, which leads to Ambrosio, the Adamic character, being bitten. It is interesting to note the biblical references found throughout the novel.

In addition to this interpretation of the relationship between Ambrósio and Matilda, a connection can also be made with Jesus and Judas. Much like Jesus Christ, Ambrosio is thirty years old, the same age with which Jesus started his ministry. He is also described as a "present to them [Capuchins] from the Virgin" (14). Another link to the story of Jesus and Judas is how Rosario serves as Ambrosio's disciple who turns against him and gives him up to sin, representing here Judas Iscariot.

Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* is full of inversions and perversions of Catholicism. The author uses the novel to explore his anti-Catholic sentiments, exposing hypocrisies in the Catholic church. Lewis subverts the holiness of Catholicism through the sexualisation of religious figures, the Madonna is an image that symbolises Ambrosio's carnal desires. Ambrosio sees women as inherent "objects of temptation" letting himself be exposed to the "seduction of luxury and desire" (Lewis, 2009: 31-2).

The supremacy of dark forces, such as the ones Matilda is driven by, over the Catholic faith serves as another aspect of Lewis' anti-Catholic sentiment. Furthermore, the author sexualises Catholicism through Matilda's seduction of Ambrosio, demonising the religion by subverting Ambrosio's innocence through the chastity vow. Ambrosio and Rosario's homoerotic tensions (see pp. 33-34 and 47-48 of *The Monk*) relate to the author's subversion of Catholicism through the 'homosexualisation' and feminisation of monks. This subversion leads to the conclusion that for Lewis, the clerical rules, such as chastity, would create these homosexual attractions in monks and their consequent 'feminisation'.

Matilda visits Ambrosio as he supposedly sleeps, she then addresses the imagery of Mary and in her discourse, in which there can be felt a sexual undertone regarding the Virgin Mary, Matilda mentions the "pleasure" with which Ambrosio is taken over when he looks at the image of the Madonna. (Lewis, 2009: 61).

With the mentioning of "man's natural instinct" (61) Lewis further proves how the chastity vows are against human nature. Matilda views Ambrosio's adoration of the Madonna with jealousy. Matilda sighs for how the Madonna's beautiful image 'excites' Ambrosio, she longs for that attention and "fervour" with which Ambrosio prays to her. As this confession takes place, Ambrosio pretends to sleep, he is still not able to escape his faith. Here it becomes evident how Matilda is manipulating Ambrosio by trying to make his relationship with the Madonna seem as though it is not beneficial to his 'virtue'

or his vows. Ambrosio being “affianced⁴ to the church” (61) is, to Matilda, the reason he does not love her.

While Matilda presents herself as a victim of unrequited love for Ambrosio, her actions reveal a calculated effort to seduce the monk through sexually aggressive means. In doing so, she effectively subverts traditional gender roles, reversing the expected dynamics of a dominant male and submissive female. Lewis’ narrative does not follow the tradition of a man seducing the woman, leading to the woman losing her virtue. Contrastingly, Ambrosio being the target of aggressive sexual approaches, reverses the norms of gender.

The inverted gender roles which are represented by Matilda’s assertiveness and masculine traits, challenging conventional dynamics of gender. Matilda serves as the aggressor of Ambrosio, her revelation as a masculine woman instead of a feminised monk further subverts societal expectations. Matilda’s plan to seduce Ambrosio into letting his carnal instincts takeover (Lewis, 2009: 200-205), diverges from the expectation that women should be innocent and pure.

Equally significant is the portrayal of Matilda, a witch who adopts the guise of a man, effectively infiltrating the religious confines to ensnare the pure and virtuous Catholic priest. The narrative choice to have Matilda succeed in her seduction of Ambrosio highlights the subversion of gender expectations and moral boundaries.

Thematically, religion plays a crucial role in the novel, though it is not a positive one. Lewis subverts Catholicism in an effort to expose hypocrisies and criticise it through a Protestant standpoint. Lewis resorts to violent, blasphemous, sexual, and even incestuous imagery to illustrate his criticism on different aspects, such as politics, religion, society, and gender issues⁵.

⁴ It is interesting to note how Matthew Lewis used this word to describe Ambrosio’s relation to the Church, it brings the image of marriage which has not yet been consummated and that could be subject to annulment – a matter which is a ground for debate between Protestants and Catholics.

⁵ For my purposes, I am analysing this through a contemporary perspective, there are several points regarding the relations between man and woman. These might not be as serious as the reading I am doing, but they seem important regardless. Lewis did not write these characters having modern gender theory in mind, but taking into account the society and years the author lived and was influenced by, the radical way with which he portrays

The author's Anti-Catholic sentiment is made apparent through his many perversions of it, the gender inversions projected onto Catholicism are important in this regard. In addition, the historical and ideological background should be equated in this, as the context of the novel is Protestant in its nature, it illustrates innocents killed and raped, religion and sex have their lines blurred, and Catholicism is subverted as feminising and homosexual Other (Blakemore, 1998: 536).

relations between man and woman in the novel are worthy of being looked at through a critical perspective. This reflection does not aim to overanalyse or misinterpret the text in any way.

1.2. Sacrilege: Subversion of the Catholic definition of purity

Ambrosio's innocence and purity are significant qualities that greatly concern the beloved priest. Throughout the course of the novel, these qualities find themselves constantly exposed, serving as a recurring pattern that highlights the monk's downward spiral from grace.

This chapter of the thesis will pertain to the themes of sexuality, gender dynamics, and lust in the narrative of *The Monk*. The relationship between Ambrosio and Rosario/Matilda is explored. Their interactions will be analysed, concerning matters of sexuality and intimacy. This chapter aims to compare the problematics of gender and sexuality in the context of the Victorian era using Lewis' critique of it in *The Monk*.

From the start of the novel the reader finds Ambrosio as a pure and beloved character, his whole image with the religious people of Madrid is built upon his virtuous image. As Matthew Lewis tries to prove through the novel, these qualities are what lead to Ambrosio's fate. His innocence is taken advantage of by a woman that displays a very masculine, dominant behaviour, seducing him into breaking the holy vows the monk had until then celebrated with God. Matilda was only able to corrupt Ambrosio because he was essentially sexually illiterate – this is one of the things that Lewis is trying to call attention to and criticise in the novel, showing how the chastity vows are “unnatural” and lead to the “feminisation” of priests.

In *The Monk*, the exploration of gender roles and expectations extends beyond Ambrosio's character. The novel introduces female characters who challenge traditional gender norms, notably Matilda, Marguerite, and the ghost of the Bleeding Nun. These women defy conventional expectations of femininity, presenting themselves as complex characters that contribute to the novel's theme of morality, desire, and power.

Matilda is a prominent example of a character who goes against gender conventions. When initially introduced as Rosario, her male persona, Matilda's disguise challenges the reader's assumptions based on gender. This subversion

serves as a warning against rigidity in gender stereotypes in literature and society. Matilda's character is marked by many dichotomies. As she reveals her true identity as a woman, her behaviour becomes more "masculine" and sexually suggestive in nature as she attempts to seduce Ambrosio. This transformation from a "gentle and submissive" Rosario to the aggressive Matilda emphasises the fluidity of gender roles within the narrative.

The sharp contrast of Matilda's personalities is exemplified when Ambrosio laments that Matilda prefers the "virtues of his sex to those of her own" (171). This tension further accentuates the themes of desire, subversive gender roles, and expectations.

It is important to note that in the novel Matilda's identity is revealed a second time, this time the Devil refers to her as "a subordinate but crafty spirit [with] a similar form [to the Madonna]" (322). This can be seen as a point that could make the theory of the masculinisation of Matilda less solid, but it is not a coincidence that the Devil chose a female form for his "subordinate but crafty spirit".

The claims regarding Matilda's real identity are contradictory, but do not negate each other.⁶ Though Matilda claims that the only reason she and the Madonna look so similar was because of her posing for the statue, and even when she confesses she practices witchcraft, she presents herself as a mortal woman.

For Matilda to seduce Ambrosio she had to present herself as a woman that fell into earthly temptations, even though she is the masculine, sexual tempter in their relationship. Matilda's gender and how she is described by Lewis is something to take into account. Lewis writes Matilda at the end of the novel as victorious, she is not punished by her acts or for dealing with the dark arts.

⁶ In *The Gothic Quest, A History of the Gothic Novel*, Montague Summers found the contradicting claims of Satan and Matilda irrevocably discordant. Satan's revelation of being the master behind Matilda's seduction "runs counter to the whole tenor of the narrative", Summers felt the need to "in reading (...) delete it – at least mentally – from the text" (221).

Donna Heiland in *Gothic & Gender: An Introduction* highlights how “the energy with which Lewis writes her character and the fact she exits the novel in a blaze of glory suggests a subversive endorsement of her” (39). Even though she is the villain of the novel, the readers find themselves in conflict, due to the way she is written in the novel, it is not uncommon to root for Matilda and admire her for the perseverance and self-confidence she shows.

Matilda, despite her supernatural identity, is presented as a woman throughout the novel. The villain uses her physical appearance, a stereotypical female trait, to seduce Ambrosio, but she does also use her intelligence and power to achieve the goals she set for herself – a trait that at the time would be much more linked to a masculine character.

At the end of the novel, Matilda visits Ambrosio in the dungeons of the Inquisition, there she is dressed in “a female dress, at once elegant and splendid” (313), but despite physically presenting as feminine, she is a masculine character by her agency and by the manner in which she talks to Ambrosio; as well as the sexuality she expresses (Kilgour, 1997: 152). This is extremely important, considering the fact that female characters with agency and using their intelligence and sexuality to get what they want was something not often seen in literature before Lewis’ *The Monk*.

As a clear parallel to Matilda, Lewis creates the female equivalent of Ambrosio. With Antonia, the author explores how innocence can lead to destruction, much like the titular monk (Kilgour, 1997: 148). Antonia is the archetype of purity and sexual innocence. When she is introduced, she is wearing a veil and when asked to remove it, she explains that she will “never unveil in public” (14).

With Antonia and her aunt Leonella, the core concept of innocence being equal to ignorance is first shown. Aunt Leonella reprimands Antonia’s not lifting of the veil affirming that she is a “young creature... who is totally ignorant of the world” (16). In this passage we can see Ambrosio and Antonia’s connection, other than the familial one, as both are criticised for being ignorant due to their (sexual) purity

(Kilgour, 1997: 147-48). In an essay, Joseph Drury highlights how this is the cause of both Ambrosio and Antonia's tragic downfalls:

The extreme sexual naivety of both Ambrosio and Antonia leaves them unable to recognise the internal desires and external threats that they must resist in order to be actively virtuous rather than merely innocent. (221)

Drury raises an interesting point, which Lewis captures perfectly in both of the characters. Lewis condemns the purity that is so sought after in Catholicism, which leads to one not being able to recognise oneself and be ignorant to the world around them.

Matilda is then the clear opposition to this behaviour, she is well versed in her own desires and the world's, and with this she has nothing to hinder her quest of getting what she wants. Matilda is in control of herself and her path, and always prioritises her wants over those of others. This is why she is, in the end, the victor and not the once-popular Ambrosio.

Another character that Lewis wrote which challenges gender expectations is The Bleeding Nun, introduced in the subplot of Raymond and Agnes. This nun character, more obviously than in Matilda's case, is a supernatural entity – a ghost more specifically – that is fated to haunt the Lindenberg castle. Much like Matilda, the Nun is a female character that has many typically masculine traits.

The Bleeding Nun represents the sin of lust, which relates to the theme of religious characters being perverted and sexualised by Lewis, but this also presents a strong point toward the "masculinisation" of female character. The nun also assumes a different identity when she is mistaken by Agnes while leaving the castle, when Raymond sees her and assumes it is Agnes dressed as the Bleeding Nun he claims her as his own. When Raymond is with Agnes, he is the "masculine" figure that demonstrates sexual agency and tries to convince her of his virtue so they can marry secretly. In his

relationship with the Bleeding Nun the roles are quite different. Even if her curse was only lifted because of Raymond, she is not a victim of his forwardness, the nun becomes the active pursuer of Raymond.

Raymond! Raymond! Thou art mine!

Raymond! Raymond! I am thine!

In thy veins while blood shall roll,

I am thine!

Thou art mine!

Mine thy body! Mine thy soul!

(119)

The serenade sung by the nun to Raymond is presented with a ritualistic significance, which most likely symbolises a claiming of Raymond as her “bride” like Raymond meant to do with Agnes. Raymond is left completely frightened and passive – both physically and in his behaviour – which constitutes the main reason for Raymond’s feminisation. Raymond became “so faint, spiritless, and, emaciated, that I could not cross the room without assistance” (121). The state that the nun left Raymond due to her seduction mirrors the “fall from grace” that Ambrosio had – both characters were left feminised by two masculine/empowered female characters using them as means for their ends.

The Bleeding Nun, like Matilda, has as her goal to seduce Ambrosio and thereby tarnishing his status as a beloved priest. However, it is crucial to discern that her primary goal diverges from the pursuit of romantic involvement with Raymond. Instead, her aim is to have her remains exhumed from the grave and to subsequently have the curse afflicting her lifted. The seduction of Raymond, in this context, assumes the role of a mere means to an end. Beatrice, or the Bleeding Nun, is another character used by Lewis to critique the dangers of sexual repression (Kilgour 1997: 144). Beatrice becoming a nun was only a punishment for her sexual desires. This repression led to the evolution of her desires from healthy and normal to completely toxic and sexually aggressive.

Within the context of subversion of gender roles, Marguerite serves an unique purpose. The character, which does not receive much attention in the narrative, is the only truly heroic character of the novel, embracing masculine traits (Zipay, 2017: 20-21), such as her strength and bravery. She is the only character who does not have any specific ambition, other than saving herself and who she deems fit. Lewis describes Marguerite as having “harsh and repulsive” (76) manners. From the description given by Raymond of her, she could be perceived as a villain:

Her countenance had displeased me on the first moment (...). Yet upon the whole her features were handsome unquestionably; (...) but a lowering gloom over-spread her countenance; and it bore such visible marks of rancour and ill-will (...) (76).

Raymond’s opinion regarding Marguerite is based solely on her appearance. His description is meant to discredit Marguerite as someone unreliable that he should be wary of, all the while masculinising her. This is not Lewis simply being superficial, this harsh description serves again as a critique. In this excerpt, Lewis initiates a discussion on the societal perception of women, shedding light on the prevalent practice of evaluating women based on physical attributes. Only after this judgement, will their worth be assessed, basing it purely on attractiveness (Zipay, 2017: 21-22).

In this case, since Marguerite is aesthetically more “masculine” she cannot be innocent or good, she cannot be trusted simply for her physical appearance. As the Gothic heroine of the novel, Marguerite does not match the idealised beauty and virtuousness of a Gothic heroine (Zipay, 2017: 22). The only character that seems to do so is Antonia, though Lewis did not follow the usual pattern regarding the heroine. Normally her beauty and virtue are what lead the character to salvation. In Antonia’s case it is these same things that lead to her downfall. Marguerite is much closer to a stereotypical male hero than a heroine, she is self-reliant, has agency, is aggressive, and sharp.

In *The Monk*, the portrayal of female characters is much more empowering than in previous Gothic works. Traditionally, women in such narratives found themselves trapped in dangerous situations, often depicted as submissive ladies crying for help. However, Matthew Lewis diverges from this established pattern. Notably, characters like Matilda, the Bleeding Nun, and Marguerite defy conventions, rising as powerful and empowered characters. Their agency, ambitions, and willingness to confront their oppressors challenge the prevailing norms.

The three characters stand as contrasts to the archetypal damsel in distress. They are not passive victims but rather assertive individuals who actively shape their own destinies. This departure from the usual narratives not only defies expectations within the realm of religious themes – where Lewis often challenges conventional beliefs – but also transcends conventional gender roles and expectations from society.

The women in *The Monk* display traits deviating from virtuous attributes seen commonly in Gothic fiction. Their assertiveness, aggression towards those who seek to control them, and pursuit of personal objectives challenge notions found in the genre. This subversion is particularly accentuated in Lewis' treatment of gender dynamics. In a genre where women were typically relegated to secondary roles and stereotypes, Lewis endows his female characters with complex personalities, ambitions, and agency.

Donna Heiland suggests an interesting idea regarding women in Gothic fiction written by men, in which they are “damned if they claim power and damned if they don’t” (36). This suggests that the subversion of gender in Lewis' narrative, focusing on Matilda, the Bleeding Nun, and Marguerite, is inevitable.

1.3. Criticism on *The Monk*

“Neglected it has not been, but criticised enough
of all conscience.”

Matthew G. Lewis, *The Monk* 4th ed.

The Monk obtained considerable acclaim and attention for the novel's scandalous and sensational content during its time, but it also faced heavy criticism from literary critics, readers and authors alike. The criticism fell on many aspects of the novel, the immorality and blasphemy present in the novel are main concerns of the critics of *The Monk*, the Gothic excess of the novel, lack of a moral lesson, influence on its readers and the targeting of female readers, as well as some artistic flaws.

Analysing the criticism regarding *The Monk*, it becomes evident that one of the most prevalent criticisms the work faced was centred around the perceived blasphemy and immorality portrayed in the novel. The text's explicit and graphic depictions of sensitive subjects, including sexuality, the supernatural, and violence, raised significant concerns among both contemporary and subsequent readers. These concerns involved the depictions of rape, incest, demonic pacts, and seduction, which were considered immoral and sacrilegious.

During the time of the novel's publication, *The Monk* experienced a diverse array of reactions, ranging from praise to strong disapproval. In this chapter, the focus will be on various reviews of *The Monk* starting from the year 1796, and these reviews are sourced from different mediums such as periodicals, newspapers, and academic writings.

The controversy around the novel's content led to polarised opinions within literary and cultural circles. Some critics praised the work's daring and sensational nature, viewing it as an innovative and captivating addition to the Gothic genre. On the other hand, there were critics who strongly condemned the novel's content as a violation of societal and moral boundaries, expressing concerns about the impact such content could have on readers and the potential destruction of traditional values.

Examining *The Monk* from the perspectives of periodicals and newspapers of the time provides insight into the opinions toward the novel's content. These sources allow researchers to determine how the novel's themes were received by both the literary community and the general public. Furthermore, analysing the academic writings and critical analysis of *The Monk* from following years can reveal how the novel's reputation evolved over time and how it continues to be interpreted and contextualised within the larger framework of literary history.

Reviews of *The Monk* varied widely, as it depended mostly on the version that was circulating, during its first year of being published (1796), as an anonymous work, ran by *The Monthly Mirror*, which would be where the novel's earliest most favourable reviews can be found. In a review for *The Monthly Mirror* in June of 1796, a critic wrote that:

“We really do not remember, to have read a more interesting production. The stronger passions are finely delineated and exemplified in the progress of artful temptation working on self-sufficient pride, superstition, and lasciviousness... The whole is very skilfully managed, and reflects the highest credit on the judgement and imagination of the writer.” (98)

In this review the initial reception of the novel is made clear as well as the complexities surrounding its themes and content. This particular review is notable for being the earliest and most positive review of the novel, highlighting its skilful depiction of strong passions and complex temptations. The reviewer also commends the author's expertise in representing self-sufficient pride, superstition, and overt sexual desire within the narrative. These elements are seen as contributing to the work's artistry and engaging storytelling.

What is intriguing about this review is how it appreciates the novel's exploration of morally ambiguous and intense themes. The reviewer commends the

novel's ability to delineate and exemplify strong passions, such as self-sufficiency, pride, sexuality, and superstition. Rather than focusing on moral concerns, the reviewer emphasises the skill needed to handle these themes and their progression in the narrative. The praise for the novel's artistic depiction and the writer's imagination showcases an appreciation for the literary craftsmanship that went into creating the story.

Moreover, the reviewer's focus on literary genius rather than morality speaks to the evolving nature of literary criticism, as well as how societal norms and values can shape interpretations of a work over time. The novel's reception was undoubtedly influenced by the changing attitudes and cultural shifts that occurred in the years following its publication.

In 1798, two years after their first review of *The Monk*, the publication reviews the fourth edition of Lewis' novel, the sentiments regarding the novel are even stronger as "the second perusal of this highly interesting work has afforded us more gratification, if possible, than the first." (p.157)

Although *The Monthly Mirror* was the first publication to provide a favourable review of *The Monk*, it was by no means the sole source of positive appraisal. In 1796, *The Analytical Review* also featured a critique of *The Monk*, albeit one that displayed a slightly less adulating tone compared to the above-mentioned review, yet still leaning toward the positive. In this review, the writing style of Lewis is described as "formed and unaffected", the orchestrated descent of Ambrosio into temptation is recognised as "artfully contrived", and the "not attempting to account for any supernatural appearances in a natural way" is praised.

Even with some hesitations regarding some aspects of the novel, this review offered a commendable analysis. The structure of the story, with its intricate merging main and sub-plot, is critiqued for potentially "splitting the interest" of the reader". The language and character development, on the other hand, receive a more critical review. The publication suggests that these aspects are "not sufficiently Gothic in their colouring, to agree with the superstitious scenery, borrowed from those times".

The sub-plot, *The History of Don Raymond*, is acknowledged as a remarkably ambitious narrative, though one that occasionally overwhelms with its complexity. Despite moments of confusion it might induce, the addition of this tale of haunted castles, bandits, and assassins, did much in favour to add Gothic elements to the novel. The innate intricacy of this sub-plot aligns with the captivating elements of the Gothic literary tradition, contributing to the novel's enduring impact.

The Analytical Review's analysis explores more of the novel than the previous one, highlighting valid concerns about Lewis' character development and the intricate narrative structure. The characters' morally ambiguous behaviours are focal points; protagonists often exhibit cunning and immoral tendencies, either driven by personal ambition (such as Matilda) or succumbing to a tragic fall from grace (as seen with Ambrosio).

Taking into account these more positive reviews of *The Monk*, it is crucial to also explore a contrasting point of view. To accomplish this, a critique of the novel featured in *The British Critic* will be referred. This publication, notably Christian in its perspectives, was not exempt from criticism itself, being accused of being "subservient to prejudice".

Despite the nature of *The British Critic*, which embraced a stance often aligned with Christian values, the publication still acknowledged the presence of commendable literary skills. However, it swiftly pointed out that these talents appeared to be squandered within the context of the novel that revolved around themes of "lust, murder, incest, and every atrocity that can disgrace human nature". Another reviewer of the same publication, two years later, found himself in the same dilemma. For the reviewer, the novel is "pernicious", but also has "marks of genius." Even if the reviewers were not fond of the work itself, they could never negate Lewis' genius.

Reviews in popular publications like the ones analysed above are rather important since at the time these were the general opinions of readers reflecting societal biases and, as in the last example, religious prejudices. So as to have a more

complete analysis of the literary criticism done on the novel, I will consider a review of a well-known poet and critic, Samuel Coleridge, published in 1797 in *The Critical Review*.

The poet did not just negatively critique *The Monk*, firstly he lists positive aspects of the novel. Contrary to the reviewer of *The Analytical Review*, Coleridge compliments the sub-plot and its ingenious connection to the primary plot: "(...) the under plot, which, however, is skilfully and closely connected with the main story, and is sub-servient to its development."

The poet praises Lewis' use of the wandering Jew, even though it is acknowledged as borrowed from Schiller's work⁷. Coleridge proceeds to point out Matilda as the "author's master-piece." The actions in the novel are complimented saying "the whole work is distinguished by the variety and impressiveness of its incidents; and the author everywhere discovers an imagination rich, powerful, and fervid." This last point is exceptionally important when looking at *The Monk* as the Gothic book it is, as a rich and impressive imagination is the trait that makes a great Gothic novel. "The errors and defects are more numerous, and (...) of greater importance", notes the poet as he concludes his review of *The Monk*.

The first fault Coleridge points in the novel is the incapability of the novel to exemplify a "moral truth", he believes that "no proud man (...) will be made less proud by being told that Lucifer once seduced a presumptuous monk", though it is a true statement, one can also see that giving a moral to the narrative was not the intention Lewis had for the novel.

After this, Coleridge is able to conclude that the novel does not humble or leave the reader with any "lessons of prudence" since, in the poet's words, "human prudence can oppose no sufficient shield to the power and cunning of supernatural beings." The next negative aspect Coleridge points out is that of the novel not being able to "give pleasure during its perusal", the poet attributes this to the way Lewis writes "the

⁷ See *The Armenian, or The Ghost Seer*, Friedrich Schiller.

sufferings.” For the poet the “frightful and intolerable” descriptions that are found in *The Monk* make reading it less pleasing.

Coleridge writes that the novel’s imagery is so negative that the reader will “break with abruptness from the delusion”, thus making the novel less enjoyable. Coleridge further criticizes the imagery of *The Monk*, after stating that “the merit of the novelist is in proportion (...) to the pleasurable effect which he produces”, he proceeds to explain that these darker themes that can be found in the novel do not give the author merit and are of “a low and vulgar taste.”

The treatment of Ambrosio is also discussed in the review, Coleridge commands Lewis for not being “less ignorant of the human heart in the management” of Ambrosio. But this means that Lewis’ depiction of how Ambrosio fell into the hole of immorality is accurate to how humans would react when put into a similar situation. The poet continues to mention the titular monk and the dichotomy of its character:

“The man who had been described as possessing much general humanity, a keen and vigorous understanding, with habits of the most exalted piety, degenerates into an uglier fiend than the imagination of Dante.”

This inconsistency is another flaw Coleridge has found in the novel. The poet uses Ambrosio as an example for this incongruity: “(...) the monk is described as feeling and acting under the influence of an appetite which could not co-exist with his other emotions.” Coleridge admits that romance authors have “(...) an unlimited power over situations”, but this is exactly what he is trying to critique in the novel. The poet believes that the scene where Ambrosio is surrounded by hellish blue fire that make the cavern cold, after which the monk receives a myrtle that made doors and gates open and made people sleep, does not cause the reader’s judgement is not offended. He then adds that the reader’s feelings when faced with these incongruent situations convinces them that “this is not improbable, but impossible; not preternatural, but contrary to nature.”

The most serious fault Coleridge points out is that of the “(...) great acquirements and splendid genius employed to furnish a mormo for children, a poison for youth, and a provocative for the debauchee.” Coleridge finds solution to this problem in censure, for example, “the temptations of Ambrosio are described with a libidinous minuteness, which, we sincerely hope, will receive its best and only adequate censure”.

For the poet the use of witchcraft is not “useful”, and has made it harmful “by blending, with an irreverent negligence, all that is most awfully true in religion with all that is most ridiculously absurd in superstition.” Coleridge also adds that he believes that Lewis’ holds more contempt for witchcraft than religion, but does not have respect for religion, especially in a passage in *The Monk* regarding *The Bible*. In the passage, Antonia reads *The Bible* and is approached by Ambrosio who questions how she can still be so ignorant when reading *The Bible*, but then, Elvira had remarked the same, but added that even though:

(...) she admired the beauties of the sacred writings, was convinced that, unrestricted, no reading more improper could be permitted a young woman. Many of the narratives can only tend to excite ideas the worst calculated for a female breast: everything is called plainly and roundly by its name; (...) which too frequently inculcates the first rudiments of vice.” (334)

As has been established before in this dissertation, Matthew Lewis’ novel is infested with anti-Catholic remarks, the quote mentioned above is another great example of this sentiment that permeates the narrative. Coleridge sees this as not just false, but also as impertinent.

This passage is false because, for Coleridge, there is no passage in *The Bible* that could have this impact in the reader, except for Ezekiel 23⁸, “(...) which could give a shadow of plausibility to the weakest of these expressions.” The reviewer found it difficult to believe Lewis could be a Christian, or he should be an “infidel”, as he “(...) endeavours first to influence the fleshly appetites, and then to pour contempt on the only book which would be adequate to the task of recalming them.” Coleridge states that Lewis might have “(extract[ed] pollution from the word of purity, and (...) turn the grace of God into wantonness.”

Coleridge ends the review lauding Lewis’ poetry in the novel, this poetry being “far above mediocrity.” As well as taking the time to recognise the real merit of the novel despite the “meretricious attractions”, which could only be referring to the immoral and sacrilegious themes of the novel. In spite of these more problematic subjects that Coleridge shows contempt for, he is also able to recognise the “unusual success” of the novel. The reference the poet makes to the “rank and fortune” of Matthew Lewis is also interesting seeing as him being a legislator should make the readers “stare and tremble.”

I finish this chapter on the criticism of *The Monk* with a reflection on how it was received in the years following the debut of the novel. It is clear the Matthew Lewis’ Gothic masterpiece has not been neglected, it has been criticised, but also lauded, this novel is a work that has left an impression on its readers, critics alike have shown their contempt or esteem for *The Monk*. From very early and positive reviews as the one found in *The Monthly Mirror* in 1796; as well as the review found in *The Analytical Review* in the same year, which gives a more constructive review of the novel straying from just praising the author; to some more masterful reviews such as the, initially anonymous, review by Samuel T. Coleridge which gives the deepest insights onto his qualms and what he found of value in the Gothic novel.

⁸ This is referring to the story of the Two Adulterous Sisters found in *The Old Testament*, metaphorically using the prostitutes to describe the spiritual adultery of Israel and Judah.

2. *Carmilla*

2.1. Lullaby: Catholicism subverted by a Victorian Context in *Carmilla*

Hush, beating heart of Christabel!
Jesu, Maria, shield her well!
She folded her arms beneath her cloak,
And stole to the other side of the oak.
What sees she there?
There she sees a damsel bright,
Drest in a silken robe of white,
That shadowy in the moonlight shone
Samuel Coleridge, Christabel (1797)

Carmilla emerges in the nineteenth century as the novella which introduces the vampire to literature, namely, a female one. The story is characterised by a subversion of expectations of its contemporary society resorting to melodramatic and traditionally gothic conventions to appeal to the curiosity of the reader (Costello-Sullivan, 2013: 16).

The narrative has the means to be perceived as mirroring Victorian society, presenting the complexities of female sexuality and gender roles, as well as using its supernatural qualities to expose his views on political and cultural themes of the time:

The story's potential as a political and/or cultural metaphor, its psychological resonances, its representation of gender and sexuality, and its unusual aesthetic and narrative characteristics
(Costello-Sullivan, 18)

Le Fanu, as a Victorian author, living in times marked by scientific advancements cannot escape its influence. Science had made its way through most aspects of life in Victorian society, even literature has its part. Hugh Walker makes this

note in a chapter of *Literature of the Victorian Era*, of how the nineteenth century was one of scientific advancement (Walker, 1913: 211).

Conversely, religion, especially for an Irish author of Catholic origins, emerging in a century also demarked by its anti-Catholicism, is a theme which cannot be ignored in his work. For the purpose of this dissertation, the analysis will rely on the subversive aspects of religion in an era that is scientific and anti-Catholic in nature.

Diana Peschier, in a chapter of *Nineteenth-century Anti-Catholic Discourses*, is able to assess an anxiety felt throughout the mid-nineteenth century regarding Catholicism and its effects on young children in predominantly Protestant England (Peschier, 2005: 11-12). This perceived Otherness of Catholicism in England has always had its repercussions in Ireland, first introduced by the Act of Uniformity of 1662, as well as penal laws, which caused several constraints politically and legally for Catholics.

Le Fanu's upbringing plays a significant role in several aspects of the novella, especially through his Irish ancestry. Connections between the novella and Ireland have been analysed, reaching the argument that the spirituality found in the novella come from "his experiences with Irish folklore and Catholicism to create characters who believe that the spiritual world and material world are intimately connected" (Harris, 2003: 10).

Religion and science as contrasting forces in Victorian society has influence in Le Fanu's writing, as explained by Roger Shattuck in a chapter of *Forbidden Knowledge*:

In science, it became the ideal of objectivity and impersonality in the pursuit of empirical truth, in art, it became the aesthetic attitude, art for art's sake, and the separation of art from utility (...) Furthermore, each of these powerful new institutions to a large extent occupied intellectual and even spiritual terrain that previously had belonged to religion. Science and art became semipriestly vocations holding put the promise of

improving the lot of mankind and calling for dedication and faith (Shattuck, 309).

The increasing popularity of vampires from the mid-nineteenth century on illustrates the uncertainty felt during the Victorian era in face of a more scientific, less religious, less mysterious world:

The specter of a chilling, purposeless materialism confronted many whose views of humanity and the world no longer was dictated by Christian doctrines (...) In this climate ghostly supernatural entities were for many no longer embarrassing reminders of dangerous superstitions; instead, the specters and weird events, now thoroughly detached from a Christian context, served as a refuge, if only a clandestine one, from the dominant materialistic scientism (Geary, 1999: 22)

The society in which Le Fanu wrote *Carmilla* is confronted with the opposition of a history of religion towards a future of scientific advancement. It seems then evident that this opposition is felt throughout the narrative. Instances where Naturalism and Catholicism enter in conflict serve as symbolism for this conflict and provide proof for this analysis.

Laura finds comfort in religion, she is depicted as having strong religious beliefs which serve as solace to her when facing the mysterious occurrences surrounding her and Carmilla (Fanu, 53). The conflict of Evolution and Religion is best exemplified by the discussion started by Laura's father with Carmilla on illness:

We are in God's hands; nothing can happen without His permission, and all will end well for those who Love him. He is our faithful creator; He made us all, and will take care of us (42).

Carmilla does not seem phased by this iteration of faith, while not completely dismissing of religion, describes it as coming from Nature itself:

'Creator! Nature!' said the young lady in answer to my gentle father. 'And this disease that invades the country is natural. Nature. All things proceed from Nature – don't they? All things in heaven, in the earth, and under the earth, act and live as Nature ordains? I think so' (Fanu, 42).

Wohl in her dissertation compares Carmilla to the seductive serpent in the Garden of Eden, using her words to manipulate and lure her victims (Wohl, 2006: 38). Her manipulation and subversion of Laura is represented through three types of seduction:

First, there is the vampire Carmilla, the lesbian seductress who in many ways represents tradition in the sense of God and demons. She is the demon that only the Holy Spirit has power to repel. She represents that lapse in faith that negates a chance to meet in the afterlife promised by the Bible (Wohl, 38).

In contrast with the more scientific and naturalistic approach of Laura's father and the General (Wohl, 2006: 38-39). In *Carmilla*, the archetype of Christianity being the most effective remedy for vampires is completely dismissed. The premise of the existence of vampires immediately puts the Biblical concept of afterlife, either heaven or hell. For Le Fanu, the limbo which vampires symbolise (Kyrpyta, 2020: 113-14).

Laura's father serves as a representation of the Victorian sceptical man. If he cannot find an explanation for something supernatural he tends to have a more scientific approach to it. There needs to be a 'natural' rationalisation for the occurrence. Throughout the narrative Laura's father does not give importance to the supernatural, the next excerpt confirms this:

"I wish all mysteries were as easily and innocently explained as yours, Carmilla. (...) And so we may congratulate ourselves on the certainty that the most natural explanation of the occurrence is the one that involves no drugging, no tampering with locks, no burglars, or poisoners, or witches" (68)

Alison Milbank remarks Le Fanu's ability to make the supernatural real, opposing it with the natural and adding complexity with its religious connections:

All this realistic craft is expended on making the supernatural concrete and eliding it with the natural, which thereby acquires materiality. Thus, while many authors have stressed the "naturalized supernatural" in this period, it is crucial to realize that it had an exact counterpart in a 'supernaturalized natural', which means we are talking about *anything* but secularization (Milbank, 2002: 161)

Within all of these different aspects of the narrative there is the common theme of the soul, it becomes a problematic subject for all of them, which Gail Marshall explores in *Victorian Fiction*:

Man's privileged place within narrative was also ineluctably disturbed by Darwin's writings. There was no provision for the individual within the

evolutionary struggle of species, and no place for any intimation of a soul (Marshall, 2002: 55).

The supernatural monster that Carmilla represents is an agent opposing to Catholicism, the soul is the core concept of Christian faith, you repent your sins to save your soul from eternal damnation, and when you eliminate the soul – the vampire's non-dead quality is what leads to this destruction in the novel – you eliminate any salvation religion could provide.

Due to Laura's innocence and faith, she is the perfect target for Carmilla to perpetuate the subversion of Laura, ultimately destroying her soul. A sequence which perfectly demonstrates this notion is when the pair are recuperating following Carmilla's outburst triggered by a passing funeral, Laura and Carmilla encounter "the figure of a hunchback" (39) offering them an "amulet against oupire (...) a charm that never fails" (40). Despite earlier encounters with supernatural occurrences, both of them quickly purchase the amulets. This situation presents an ideal opportunity for Carmilla to exploit Laura's trust. Carmilla later uses the amulet to justify Laura's health declining seeing as she reports that she "should have seen something dreadful had it not been for that charm" (58).

Laura, guided by her innocence and desire for protection, immediately pins the amulet to her pillow, providing Carmilla with an explanation for Laura's physical and emotional changes. This act reinforces Carmilla's manipulation and gives her a mask for the actual cause – Carmilla's vampiric nature.

Laura's faith and vulnerability to manipulation are exploited by Carmilla to achieve her goal. Laura's genuine belief in the protective power of religious objects, combined with her loneliness, allows Carmilla to exploit this. The narrative shows how even well-intentioned qualities, like religious faith and naivety, can be turned against the characters.

Laura's character is the perfect subject for the analysis of Victorian aspects in the novella. Laura embodies qualities expected from a Victorian woman. Her modesty, virtue, obedience, and submissiveness are all traits she represents. In the novella, Laura

is described as “a beautiful young lady, with golden hair and large blue eyes” (31), fitting perfectly to a stereotype of modesty and submissiveness. Though the protagonist resides in Styria, she is without a doubt English in her education, in passages like the following it is made clear: “My father is English, and I bear an English name...” (11), connecting her to a British heritage; and in an attempt to separate herself from her Styrian identity: “My mother, A Styrian lady, died in my infancy” (12). In the narrative, Laura, due to her English heritage and status as a Lady, is a victim in her relationship with Carmilla and is manipulated by Carmilla’s advances.

Laura’s perception of her feelings for Carmilla also speak to her innocence and obedience to social norms. In the novella, Le Fanu writes Laura as an innocent and sheltered girl absent from any sexual desires, in line with the Victorian ideals of modesty and sexual restraint.

When Laura first encounters Carmilla, she describes an inner conflict, feeling “drawn towards her, but there was also something of repulsion” (31). This emotional unrest suggests that Laura’s sentiments toward Carmilla are not sexual but rather, a platonic yearning for intimacy. The feeling of repulsion could be attributed to taboos associated with same-sex desire in Victorian society. Laura’s innocence and lack of exposure to desire contribute to her confusion and uncertainty when interpreting her feelings for Carmilla.

The vampire’s influence on Laura deepens the lack of agency and victimisation. Laura appears incapable of resisting Carmilla’s charm, adding complexity to their relationship. The narrative explores how Carmilla’s seductive nature disrupts Laura’s moral code and convictions as well as challenging the strict gender roles of the time. The following quote encapsulates Laura’s lack of agency in the relationship:

“From these foolish embraces, (...) I must allow, I used to wish to extricate myself; but my energies seemed to fail me. Her murmured words sounded like a lullaby in my ear, and soothed my resistance

into a trance, from which I only seemed to recover myself when she withdrew her arms" (35)

Carol Davison's analysis in *The Victorian Gothic and Gender* sheds light on the challenges that *Carmilla* has brought to its Victorian readership. The novella's exploration of homoerotic desire between two women was, undoubtedly, groundbreaking taking into account the society's norms and expectations. Davison's insight provides context to Victorian society's worries on "sexual corruption" of women, exposing hidden conflicts of a rigid era.

In the text, Davison refers that "one can only imagine the impact that *Carmilla*, (...) Le Fanu's vampire tale of female same-sex desire, had on its audience given its unmentionable – and, for some, inconceivable – subject matter and its explosion of such accepted theories as physician William Acton's that 'the majority of women (...) are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind (quoted in Adams, 1999: 126)' (136). The idea that women were devoid of sexual desires was a belief held by most, and

Carmilla actively disrupts this with the portrayal of a homoerotic relationship between the vampire and the lady. Carmilla's language and actions toward Laura are more upfront about same-sex desire, from the early stages of their relationship she had already confessed that "your looks won me; I climbed on to the bed and put my arms about you" (31).

After introducing the novella and diving into several themes present in *Carmilla*, such as Catholicism, its subversion, the Victorian influences found on the text, as well as representations of gender and sexuality, the dissertation will further explore questions regarding sexuality and vampirism.

2.2. Scarlet and Black

“My lips are still burnt from kissing your face and
feverish forehead, the blood that you waste I’m
tired of this, watching it wash out of you.”

Ethel Cain, Famous Last Words (An Ode to Eaters)

Gender and sex are themes significant to the novel, even though it is not explicit in nature. The author uses sexuality, specifically lesbianism, to illustrate changes in society which cause discomfort. The particular use of lesbianism is interesting as it accentuates the feminine in regards to a society which portrays women through a sexualised lens while Le Fanu uses it as a way to portray (Wohl, 2006: 12, Robb, 2003: 207).

This section of the thesis will focus on the themes of sexuality, gender, and vampirism within *Carmilla*. Consequently, the purpose of this chapter is to understand the intersection of innocence, desire, gender nonconformity, and societal expectations in *Carmilla*. To deeply analyse *Carmilla* through this framework, the research will take into account Carmilla and Laura’s homoerotic relationship, vampirism as a metaphor, female empowerment, and the supernatural. Additionally, it will use the broader theme of critique on Victorian society as a lens to analyse this theme further.

2.2.1. Carmilla – Monstrous Feminine

Within the narrative, tensions of domestic gender roles are in opposition to the British miscegenation anxiety, as well as the Other. Sexuality serves as a lens to explore the Otherness inherent in Carmilla, given the uncertainty of British Imperialism during the Victorian era, a decline in the influence of patriarchy is mirrored by the inversion of gender expectations and Carmilla's perceived homosexuality (Brock, 2009: 120).

Lyn Pykett explores the late Victorian ideological definition of femininity supported by Nina Auerbach's *The Woman and the Demon*. Carmilla embodies "the improper feminine" (Pykett, 9). This causes a dichotomy in the narrative, Laura symbolising the angel in the house in her character's introduction, later is seduced by Carmilla's categorically demonic femininity and drained of this quality (Brock, 121).

Carmilla constitutes the Other in the novella, represented by her gender and sexuality, as well as some racial references. "As Carmilla's face darkens, she becomes what figures like the black woman in the carriage symbolize in the nineteenth-century racist and sexist iconography: the woman as an angry, demonic, sexually animalistic Other" (Heller, 84).

Carmilla's gender identity is ambiguous and open to interpretation. While she is referred to as a female vampire in the novella, it is crucial to consider the context of vampire folklore, where vampires often possess the ability to shape-shift and assume various forms. This complicates the perception of Carmilla's gender identity, as it does not conform to the gender binary.

"The sexuality that Victorian England denied " (Hatlen, 1988: 120) has its expression in Carmilla, through her overt approach towards Laura. The Victorian era repressed sexuality through discoursed on gender and sexuality which, through the medical advancements of the era, diagnose sexual conduct as 'deviant' nor confirmative (Williamson, 2005: 10).

Throughout the novella, Carmilla consistently defies gender boundaries, contributing to Le Fanu's critique of Victorian society's expectations of women. In her interactions with Laura, these dichotomies of Carmilla become evident. Her whispered words to Laura, about obeying the "irresistible laws of my strength and weakness" (34), serve as convincing evidence of the vampire's complex nature. This duality within Carmilla symbolises her capacity to embody both feminine and masculine traits, transcending the limitations of her physical gender presentation. While outwardly appearing feminine – "slender, and wonderfully graceful" individual with "small and beautifully formed" (33) features align with the ideal of womanhood of the Victorian era as well –, her behaviour and character often challenge conventional gender roles. Carmilla's beautiful but starved body "acts as the role of anorexic invalid to get what she wants in a charade of female self-effacement" (Carol Senf, 1998: 30 and Heller, 1996: 81).

The novella delves into the tension between sexual repression and desire, portraying how society's expectations can repress and warp natural human instincts. Carmilla's character serves as a symbol to explore the desires that are internalised by women living in a society seeking to deny and suppress them. Her actions challenge the notion that women are passive and devoid of sexual desires, demonstrating a woman expressing her sexuality in a repressive environment. A perfect example of this is the following excerpt:

"Sometimes (...) my strange and beautiful companion would take my hand and hold it with a fond pressure, renewed again and again; blushing softly, gazing in my face with languid and burning eyes (...). It was like the ardour of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet overpowering; (...) her hot lips travelled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, 'You are mine, you *shall* be mine, and you and I are one for ever.'" (Le Fanu, 36)

This passage illustrates how Carmilla can act both masculine and feminine, her assertiveness that Laura will be hers, yet is blushing and almost crying while saying it. Even Le Fanu's language demonstrates this, as Carmilla's eyes are "languid" but also burning – suggesting a duality in Carmilla.

Carmilla's sexuality is another important aspect of her character. She represents a seductive and alluring creature who preys primarily upon young women, forming intimate relationships with them. Carmilla being a vampire gave Le Fanu agency to explore lesbianism, a topic which was repressed in the Victorian era.

Queen Victoria did not believe lesbianism existed,
but the sexually conflicted Le Fanu was well
aware of it and used names and their absence in
the text to suggest subversive subject matter
without spelling everything out (Leal, 2007: 38)

Carmilla's vampiric nature is closely tied to her sexuality, a common theme in vampire literature. Vampires are often used as metaphors for forbidden or repressed desires, including sexual ones. Carmilla's predatory and seductive behaviour can be viewed as an expression of these concealed desires. Her preference for female victims further subverts expectations of sexuality in Victorian society. Le Fanu covers his critique of Victorian anxieties regarding female sexuality (Künnecke, 12).

The idea that vampires, including Carmilla, operate outside the norms of human reproduction and gender identity is crucial to understanding the novella's subversion. Vampires, as immortal and supernatural beings, defy the conventions of human existence, challenging the expectations of heterosexual reproduction prevalent in Victorian society. Carmilla's genderless, primal instinct, both feminine and masculine, serves as a vehicle to explore the complexities of identity and sexuality.

Carmilla represents a departure from the conventional gender and sexual norms. Embodying the Victorian concept of New Woman⁹, due to her sexual agency, pursuing her desires without hesitation, often taking initiative in her encounters; her sharpness that contradicts the ideal passive woman; her subversion of gender roles as well as the inherent nonconformity which it brings.

2.2.2. Laura

The character of Laura exemplifies the Victorian concept of “The Angel in the House”¹⁰, both in terms of her inherent virtues and the expectations placed upon her. As Laura represents this Victorian concept of how women should behave, the passiveness and fragility that are associated with this stereotype, relegate Laura to a position of victim. The oppression she receives from Carmilla is meant to mirror the tyranny women are subject in Victorian society specifically. Innocence and virtue are core aspects of Laura’s character. She is moral and religious throughout the narrative (Wohl, 2006: 37), many times urging religious debates with Carmilla, which reflects the Victorian ideal of the moral woman.

Yet, it is Laura’s innocence that renders her particularly vulnerable and naïve, thus symbolising the archetypal virtuous hero that succumbs to the corrupting forces of a darker world (Canales, 2018: 13). Her inability to perceive Carmilla as a malevolent presence, highlights the impact of her innocence. Laura’s attraction and desire to protect Carmilla serve as consequences of her naivety, increased by her feelings of isolation within her secluded environment.

Laura’s sheltered and isolated existence is another essential aspect of her character. Residing in a solitary schloss in a “lonely and primitive place” (11) educated by governesses, she lives a life largely detached from the world. This isolation fosters

⁹ First coined by Sarah Grand in 1894, and later popularised by Henry James with character like Isabel Archer in *Portrait of a Lady*, New Woman is a concept that described 19th century women that “exercised control over their own lives be it personal, social, or economic.” (Bordin, 2)

¹⁰ The title of a narrative poem by Coventry Patmore, published in 1854 for the first time. This poem is meant to represent the idealised vision of women by the poet and how they should behave.

her innate innocence, making her fascination with Carmilla inevitable, given the lack of people that do not include her direct family.

However, the arrival of Carmilla marks a turning point in Laura's life – a transformation she initially fails to recognise. After Carmilla's bite, Laura undergoes a profound change in both demeanour and appearance, resembling Carmilla: "My sufferings had (...) told upon my appearance. I had grown pale, my eyes were dilated and darkened underneath, and the languor which I had long felt began to display itself in my countenance." (61) This metamorphosis serves as a representation of her departure from her initial innocent virtue, while showing the impact of her encounter with the vampire.

Laura's character serves as the novella's embodiment of the Victorian ideal of a virtuous woman, epitomising innocence, naivety, and purity. Her character arc, marked by transformation and lasting psychological trauma, provides a way for Le Fanu to explore Victorian gender norms and the consequences of idealised femininity when confronted with the allure and influence of Carmilla – which promptly represents the subjugation felt by Victorian women by their society as both have their destiny chosen by oppressive figures.

2.2.3. The relationship

As previously observed, the two characters are complex and are parallel to each other. Their intimacy is a convergence of aspects such as gender, sexuality, and vampirism, which, as mentioned earlier, serves Le Fanu's purpose of subverting Victorian expectations.

This connection between them is shaped by their homoerotic attraction, challenging boundaries of friendship. While they do engage in intimate displays of affection, Laura and Carmilla have different views on lesbian attraction. Laura, as mentioned earlier, experiences "something of repulsion" (31) when Carmilla initiates intimate contact, contrary to Carmilla's more primal and genderless view on attraction. This dichotomy creates moral dilemmas for Laura as it contradicts expectations placed upon her, rendering it immoral.

The concept of vampirism in the novella serves as a metaphor for forbidden desire, and it supports itself in their relationship. Carmilla's vampiric nature not only influences her gender presentation and sexuality but also challenges established notions of reproduction. Carmilla's inherent otherness extends beyond her supernatural identity, as well as the gender of her prey. This alienation from humanity creates a character that represents accurately, then repressed, feeling of queer attraction.

Their relationship is characterised by Carmilla's transformation of Laura, a metamorphosis that is haunting and serves as the narrative's climax. Carmilla's seduction and deception culminate in this moment of terror. Laura's transformation begins even before Carmilla sinks her teeth into her neck; it commences when the "young lady who appeared to be lifeless" (22) enters the schloss, foreshadowing Laura's fate.

Initially perceiving Carmilla as a close friend, Laura's inability to assert herself faced with Carmilla's seductive and possessive behaviour makes her more susceptible to influence. Laura's vulnerability is rooted in her innocence, preventing her from recognising the evil before her. This mutation also symbolises the corruption of Laura's idealised purity. Le Fanu uses this common Gothic trope to explore the consequences of desire and defying society's expectations. After her encounter with Carmilla, Laura transforms into a predator and abandons her former self, adding another layer of horror to the story and emphasising the consequences of succumbing to desire.

The revelation of a blood relation, familial rather than vampiric, adds yet another layer of complexity to the novella, suggesting a connection between the two girls transcending mere friendship. This revelation deepens their bond, as Carmilla manipulates it to fabricate intimacy and convince Laura of their karmic destiny. Later in the story, it is revealed that "I [Laura] am descended from the Karnsteins; that is, mamma was", to which Carmilla responds: "'Ah' (...) 'so am I, I think, a very long descent, very ancient'" (46-7). The matrilineal aspect of their lineage within Carmilla's vampiric world assumes great significance, challenging prevailing Victorian patriarchal norms with the lineage of female vampires passing from mother to daughter. Laura, descended from Millarca through her mother, finds herself fated to become a vampire, thereby

elevating the role of women in the supernatural sphere and challenging established Gothic conventions.

This sort of 'inheritance' blurs the problematics of consent and the lines of victim and perpetrator. It accentuates the cyclical nature of pain and desire, which in this case, passes from woman to woman. This perspective adds the layer of a mystical link between them due to their gender. Furthermore, Carmilla assumes various roles in Laura's life, from predator to friend, caregiver, and seductress, complicating their relationship further.

Their bond extends beyond all of this, there is a sort of mysticism that is provoked by Carmilla's nature. Even outside the realm of reality they are connected, before ever meeting each other in real life, Laura recounts a dream, which coincidentally is the same one Carmilla had dreamt:

I saw a solemn, but very pretty face looking at me from the side of the bed. It was that of a young lady who was kneeling, with her hands under the coverlet (...). She caressed me with her hands, and (...) I felt immediately delightfully soothed, and fell asleep again. I was wakened by a sensation as if two needles ran into my breast very deep at the same moment, and I cried loudly. (13-14)

Laura's foreboding dream serves as a haunting omen of the events that will later unfold between her and Carmilla. The vampire astutely exploits this uncanny element of their relationship in her seduction of Laura, leveraging the dream's premonitory quality to weave a web of allure and dread around her victim. While this fate is undeniably terrible in its essence, it entices a complex analysis, as to shed light on her metamorphosis and the deeper symbolism of it.

Laura's transformation in the wake of her encounter with Carmilla is marked by the gradual clouding of her mind with sinister thoughts, signifying maturation of her

consciousness and an awakening of desires and complexities that she may not yet comprehend. This evolution is both intriguing and distressing for the character, representing a significant shift in her person as she is faced with the profound impact of her connection with Carmilla.

The symbolism of blood within the context of female desire, particularly within a lesbian relationship, assumes significant importance in the novella. The act of the vampire bite, involving the exchange of blood, can indeed be interpreted as a metaphor for intimate, even sexual encounters between women. This interpretation aligns with the Victorian era's suppression of same-sex desires, rendering such encounters as forbidden and taboo, similar to vampiric acts themselves. The exchange of blood in the act of biting carries connotations of intimacy and a blurring of boundaries, much like the emotional and physical intimacy shared between Laura and Carmilla.

Furthermore, the association of the vampire bite with menstruation adds layers of meaning. Both processes are intrinsically linked to womanhood and maturation, symbolising the transition from girlhood to maturity¹¹. Just as the vampire's bite can be seen as empowering, the onset of menstruation is connected with the emergence of desires and thoughts that society might perceive as "less virtuous" in women (Heller, 1996: 81-82).

Through the exploration of Carmilla and Laura's relationship, *Carmilla* unveils a diverse array of themes that mirror societal tensions and the intricacies of gender, sexuality, and desire, particularly within the context of Victorian norms. Their relationship stands as an object upon which Le Fanu portrays the subversion of established norms, the profound consequences of desire, and the multifaceted aspects of gender and sexuality.

¹¹ Carmilla's analogy about girls being caterpillars can be added to this framework, it corroborates the fact that Carmilla is indeed planning on transforming her into a vampire, thus inducing her maturation.

2.3. *Carmilla's* Uncanny

The uncanny is used in Gothic fiction as a quality that adds the effect of unease and strangeness, which characterises the genre. The boundaries between the ordinary and the supernatural are blurred by the uncanny, leaving readers with a feeling of both familiarity and eerie discomfort. It serves as one of the central elements that contribute to the unsettling atmosphere of Gothic narratives. In this chapter, *Carmilla* will be analysed through the lens of Freud's concept of the uncanny, as well as Kantian's duality of beauty and the sublime, and also apply Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysian forces to provide further insight.

The uncanny, or '*unheimlich*' in its native German, is a concept explored by Freud in his work *The Uncanny* (1919). While Freud acknowledges its aesthetic dimensions, he emphasises that it is "not merely the theory of beauty but the theory of the qualities of feeling" (219). The root word for uncanny, which is '*heimlich*', provides depth to the concept. Freud highlights this duality through dictionary entries of the word:

The word '*heimlich*' exhibits one [meaning] which is identical with its opposite, '*unheimlich*'.
(...) The word is not ambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight (224-5).

Freud concludes that "the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (220). This description provides a solid foundation for analysing the uncanny in *Carmilla*. The titular character, Carmilla, embodies the essence of the uncanny precisely because she initially appears as a familiar

person – at least for Laura, as she later remembers she has seen Carmilla in a childhood dream –, yet hides a secret identity.

Various elements are explored by Le Fanu which evoke an uncanny effect in the reader, contributing to the narrative's overall sense of uneasiness and the creation of a mysterious atmosphere. As a Gothic text which employs more terror aspects of the genre, a connection with the sublime can be made as well. Horror Gothic loses its beauty and sublime, becoming frightening instead of producing feelings of melancholia. The origins of Gothic literature are set in disharmony and deviation instead of the more harmonious classically leaning literary tradition (Kyrpyta, 2020: 114).

One key aspect contributing to this uncanny atmosphere is the physical setting which the events of the novella unfold. The story predominantly takes place within a Gothic and decrepit castle situated in a remote and isolated location, far removed from civilisation. This isolation is crucial since it leaves the characters without any means of seeking help or support from their nearest neighbours. The castle is surrounded by a dense and mysterious forest, effectively trapping the characters in their circumstances. This setting metaphorically reflects the characters' confinement as they are faced by the disturbing events triggered by Carmilla's arrival. The castle itself harbours hidden secrets that are revealed as the story unfolds, further contributing to the sense of the uncanny. Despite being a familiar place, at least for the protagonist Laura, it conceals secrets and detached from the rest of the society (Torres, 2016: 14-15).

The inexplicable events which happen within the castle accentuate the feeling of uncanny. Deaths and strange illnesses afflict the characters, while Laura finds herself haunted by disconcerting dreams. These unsettling occurrences are all traced back to Carmilla and her presence. The initially unexplained deaths that arise in locations close to the castle serve as a central mystery of the story. As the plot unfolds, it becomes evident that an evil force is at play, culminating in the revelation of Carmilla's vampiric nature as the cause behind these deaths. This revelation increases the sense of the uncanny, as it converts the ordinary surroundings into an unsettling and supernatural atmosphere.

The uncanny ambiance is exacerbated by the unsettling dreams that plague Laura, dreams that foreshadow or mirror real-world occurrences, thereby lifting the veil between reality and the supernatural. An illustration of this phenomenon is presented when Laura recounts a dream she experienced prior to her physical encounter with Carmilla.¹²

The character of Carmilla emerges as a contribution to the novella's uncanny ambiance, manifesting in many ways that intrigue and unsettle the reader. Her enigmatic identity, marked by ambiguity and her concealed vampiric nature, constitutes a central element of uncanniness.

Initially introduced as a charming, alluring, and mysterious beautiful young woman, Carmilla epitomises the vampire archetype, blending seamlessly humanity and supernaturality, as well as defying categorisation. Vampires, as supernatural creators, inherently possess the power to invoke feelings of the uncanny due to their disruption of the borders created between Victorian society and the Other it identifies as a threat. Carmilla masquerades herself as human, luring her victims into a deceptive familiarity, only to uncover their profound otherness through a series of supernatural attributes, including immortality, shape-shifting, abstinence from sustenance, and nocturnal activity. Vampires, in essence, expose a profound schism between the familiar and the unfamiliar, evoking a profound sense of unease as they occupy this unsettling liminal space (Torres, 2016: 2).

The monster can stand for everything that our culture has to repress – proletariat, sexuality, other cultures, alternative ways of living, heterogeneity, the Other. There is a certain arbitrariness in the content that can be projected onto this point, and there are many attempts to

¹² See quotation in page 45.

reduce the uncanny to just this content (Gelder, 52)

In here Gelder justifies the use of a monster, in *Carmilla's* case the vampire, to symbolise the Other found in Victorian society. Giving a sense of detachment through which the author can explore the connection between the uncanny and repression.

Carmilla, with her charming appearance and seductive allure, draws both male and female victims into her web, echoing the inherent sensuality and hypnotic charm traditionally associated with vampires. For the protagonist, Laura, this dynamic becomes a source of profound emotional conflict. Laura finds herself drawn to Carmilla, even against her better judgement, despite harbouring a sense of fear and repulsion. Carmilla's beauty exerts an irresistible pull, transcending rationality and fostering a paradoxical attraction in Laura. This inner turmoil marked by conflicting emotions of fear and attraction, mirrors the uncanny effect that Carmilla exerts upon her victim:

In these mysterious moods, I did not like her. I experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust. I had no distinct thoughts about her while such scenes lasts, but I was conscious of a love growing into adoration, and also of abhorrence. This I know is a paradox, but I can make no other attempt at explaining the feeling. (35)

In this excerpt from the novella, this complex emotional interplay is evident, highlighting the profound psychological impact of Carmilla's presence. This quote serves as an illustration of the underlying uncanny in the narrative, as it deals with the unsettling coexistence of allure and dread provoked by the character of Carmilla.

2.3.1. Beautiful Tragedy

Kant and Nietzsche approached aesthetics with a then new perspective, distancing themselves from traditional sciences rooted in logic without any objectivity. Aesthetics are viewed by both as dominated by intuitive artistic ideas which play a role in how our representations of phenomena in the real world are defined. Essentially, both Kant and Nietzsche believed that aesthetics transcended the mere appearances of objects, offering insight into the enigmatic and sublime aspects of human art and the macabre (Bowie, 2003: 8 and Kaplama, 2016: 167).

In *Carmilla*, dualities play a pivotal role, “since a vampire no longer belongs to the world of the living, but is not dead in the fullest sense. It is a being that indeed lives a dual life” (Kyrpyta, 2020: 113-14) much like the juxtapositions of beautiful/sublime and Apollonian/Dionysian in Kant and Nietzsche’s philosophies. Le Fanu parallels Dionysian mania through the vampiric nature of Carmilla and Apollonian order with Laura and her ideals, within the narrative as a subversive aspect (McDonald, 23)

Kant’s initial thoughts on the beautiful and sublime, in his work *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), build a path culminating in his masterpiece, the *Critique of Judgement* (1790). In the context of Gothic literature, this philosophical evolution parallels the transformation of a naïve protagonist (Laura) into a tormented soul, as Kant endeavours to construct a framework capable of bridging the space between the finite and infinite, the mundane and the transcendental, echoing the eerie dualities found in Gothic literature.

Conversely, within Gothic literature, Nietzsche’s dualities of the Apollonian and Dionysian, initially explored in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), cast a light upon the contrasting forces at play in art, culture, and human existence. These dualities unveil the tension between order and chaos, reason and instinct, and exert influence on Gothic narratives.

As narratives unfold in Gothic literature, mirroring the evolving philosophies of Kant and Nietzsche, these initial dualities undergo a transformation, influenced by the *telo*i of Gothic fictions. Kant’s transformation within the Gothic context resonates with

the descent into madness of the protagonist, while Nietzsche's opposing forces become a tool to find meaning amidst Gothic gloomy atmospheres.

In *Carmilla*, the narrative converges the concepts of the beautiful and the sublime, intertwining elements of attraction and repulsion, fascination and fear, mirroring Immanuel Kant's philosophical notions on the concepts. Le Fanu does this primarily through the character of Carmilla. Her character is associated with striking beauty and charm from her first introduction. Her allure and mysterious persona captivates not only the protagonist, Laura, but also the reader. This immediate fascination with Carmilla's beauty aligns with Kant's notion of 'beautiful', where an object or person elicits pleasure and admiration due to its aesthetic qualities.

However, as the narrative unfolds, the character of Carmilla transcends the confines of mere beauty and ventures into the realm of the sublime. Kant defines the sublime as that which overwhelms the sense and provokes a sense of awe and reverence, "sometimes accompanied with a certain dread, or melancholy" (47) (see *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* page 47). Carmilla's true nature as a vampire is gradually revealed, introducing an element of the sublime. Her vampiric abilities and the inherent danger she poses evoke feelings of dread, fear, and fascination in Laura and the reader.

Furthermore, the mysterious and supernatural aspects of Carmilla's existence, coupled with her ability to defy conventional human limitations, contribute to the sense of the sublime. Kant emphasises that the sublime is often associated with vastness, greatness, and ideas that transcend ordinary human experiences. Carmilla's immortality, shape-shifting abilities, and her other supernatural abilities challenge the boundaries of human existence and reality, thus invoking a sense of the sublime.

Le Fanu employs the use of descriptive language to vividly depict the landscaped and settings that serve as a backdrop for the narrative. Within the novella, the castle, the surrounding forest, and the remote regions encompassing Laura's residence are portrayed with a level of detail that elicits a dual response, evoking both the serene beauty of the natural world and the sublime quality of the unknown. These

descriptions are carefully crafted to create a delicate balance, capturing the beauty of the environment while infusing it with an eerie, sublime property that stems from the mystery that arises in their surroundings.

In parallel to the portrayal of the landscape, the dynamics within Laura and Carmilla's relationship reflects facets of both beauty and the sublime. Initially, their intimate connection has a sense of beauty. Carmilla's charm and Laura's attraction to her are depicted in a manner that exudes an aesthetic allure, captivating the reader.

However, as the narrative progresses and Carmilla's vampiric nature gradually comes to light, their relationship undergoes a transformation, assuming a more sublime tone. The juxtaposition of fear and fascination that Laura experiences when confronted with Carmilla's true identity aligns precisely with Kant's definition of the sublime – an overwhelming and profound emotional response characterised by a simultaneous sense of dread and wonder.

The narrative unfolds against the backdrop of a profound interplay between Apollonian and Dionysian forces. These forces represent contrasting facets of human experience and artistic expression, and their presence within the narrative offers a nuanced exploration of character dynamics and thematic elements.

The Apollonian elements in *Carmilla* manifest as attributes of order, reason, and restraint. These qualities find their initial embodiment in the character of Laura, the novella's protagonist. Laura adheres to the prevailing societal norms of her time and seeks to maintain control and order of her life. The setting, including the depiction of the castle and its natural surroundings, serves as a visual manifestation of the Apollonian forces, characterised by structure and rationality.

Conversely, the Dionysian forces align with aspects of chaos, instinct, and primal desires. These elements are personified by Carmilla, the elusive and seductive vampire who enters Laura's life. Carmilla represents the irrational, the sensuous, and the unrestrained. Her presence disrupts the ordered existence at the castle and introduces an element of both chaos and desire that Laura struggles to comprehend.

This enigmatic and unsettling atmosphere that envelops the narrative mirrors the influence of Dionysian forces.

The narrative's central tension arises from the juxtaposition of these opposing forces. Laura's gradual transformation under the influence of Carmilla reflects a shift from the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Her initial adherence to societal norms and rationality gradually gives way to deeper, more primal desires, coupled with an acceptance of the unknown. This transformation serves as an illustration of Nietzsche's philosophical theory, where the interplay between the two forces is essential for the creation of art and the comprehension of human existence.

3. Conclusion

Through the multifaceted analysis of two distinct novels, as well as literature relating to the complex themes they explore, such as the perversion of Catholicism, and other aspects that seemed relevant to the goal of the thesis, it has shown how the two novels are complex and transcend the traditions laid by preceding works by adding layers of social critique. The analysis is based on references to the works themselves, as well as critical literature or criticism on the novels to substantiate the points of view. To be able to come to a conclusion and answer the question this dissertation poses, this was necessary in order to have a deeper understanding of the nuances the Gothic genre and in particular, the perspectives of the two novels.

The goal of this thesis is not just to prove that the two novels subvert religion, the focus of the analysis of both works as well as literature regarding them is to answer the various questions that arise when reading both novels. The analysis of Gothic literature as a subversive genre was necessary to provide a solid foundation for the dissertation.

The introduction served as a way to contextualise the research, not just thematically, but aesthetically, as well as chronologically in its evolution. As a result of a more general research on Gothic fiction, evidence points to an adaptable genre which does not let itself be constricted by literary or societal norms. Even if many aspects of Gothic writing are complex and provide fertile ground for discussion, for my purposes, the difference between horror and terror served as a focal point.

“Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them” (Radcliffe, 6). Here, Ann Radcliffe introduces an interesting contrast between the two styles of Gothic, distinguishing them as regards to the devices used to cause an impact on the reader.

The first is a style much more “gloomy and sublime” (6) which excites melancholia and deeper sentiments in the reader.¹³ A connection can also be established between the terror Gothic and the uncanny, as has been reflected upon before, the uncanny and the sublime are very much linked, both having subtler aspects which create a sense of unease in the reader¹⁴. Terror is dependent on suspense and dread, novels like *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) through the imminence of something dreadful – Robert Hume exemplifies with “Theodore’s execution, the (essentially incestuous marriage of Manfred and Isabella, the casting off of Hipolita” (Hume, 285). In the case of Radcliffe’s novel, Hume describes her *forte* as being the author’s “easy manipulation of drawn-out suspense holds the reader’s attention” (285).

The horror Gothic employs a different approach, rather than using suspense as a way to capture the reader’s interest, authors like Lewis prefer to cause a more immediate effect of shock. This effect, especially in *The Monk* is produced through moments of rape, murder, and the overall violence portrayed in the novel. The novel does not lack in moments that are meant to shock the reader, the happenings after Ambrosio enters the vault in which Antonia is being kept, are great examples of this disturbing quality of horror Gothic (Lewis, 2009 : 277- 284). The scene in which Matilda confidently approaches a completely devastated Ambrosio in his cell, offers another example of this horror quality:

Hark, Ambrosio, while I unveil your crimes! You
have shed the blood of two innocents: Antonia
and Elvira perished by your hand. That Antonia

¹³ The scene in which “the very face which had visited me [Laura] in my childhood at night” illustrates this duality of sublime beauty and unease as Laura describes “years so often ruminated with horror” but the face was “pretty, even beautiful” (29).

¹⁴ Nicholas Royle in the introduction to *The Uncanny* (2003) describes “feelings of uncertainty” (1), which parallels Freud’s point of how “the uncanny derives from feelings of uncertainty” (43). Furthering the connection between the Uncanny and Terror Gothic.

whom you violated, was your sister! That Elvira
whom you murdered, gave you birth! (322)

The adaptability and versatility of the Gothic genre has therefore been shown; from the versatility in style seen above with the two distinct types of Gothic: terror and horror. The adaptability of the genre can be exemplified through its influences in Science Fiction. Holding into account problematics in both genres, intertwining backgrounds, and concern for similar themes, one can see the connection between both. The Other is a preoccupation in both genres, with different subjects, as has been highlighted by William Hughes in a chapter of *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction* regarding Gothic fiction:

The haunted and the haunter, and the robot and its inventor. The Other of the human protagonist is always a compromised figure, its apparent distance – abhuman, inhuman, former human – from the psychologically conventional and temporally mortal being illusory, concealing but momentarily its unavoidable kinship with the familiar and the mundane. (Hughes, 463)

The parallel of the Other shows itself as being important in both genres demonstrating their connection, which, as remarked at the end of the excerpt, provokes the feeling of “the familiar and the mundane” (463), relating, in turn, with the concept of the uncanny – a device vastly found in Gothic fiction, and that can, through humanoid figures found in Science Fiction, produce this uncanniness.

After revisiting aspects of Gothic fiction to contextualise, it is now more crucial to establish a comparison between the two novels that were explored throughout this dissertation. As proved through analysis and problematisation of similar themes in both novels, even if their publication was separated by several decades, it is not impossible to find bridging aspects in the two distinct narratives.

The Gothic-heroes of the two novels suffer similar fates, both are seduced resulting in their ultimate demise – in *The Monk* Ambrosio's innocence leading to his descent into sexually violent behaviour, and Laura's unassertive demeanour and infatuation with Carmilla which resulted in her being bitten by Carmilla. It is not just their destiny that ties the novels thematically, it is also the seductive female figure. In the two novels the problematics of gender defiance and non-conformity are strong, in Lewis' work, the feminisation of Ambrosio faced with a sexually aggressive and masculine Matilda (Kilgour, 1997: 152), mirrors Carmilla's suggestive tones when addressing Laura (Fanu, 2005: 34-35).

Setting and atmosphere are an undeniably important aspects of Gothic fiction, as a genre known for its subversion of norms, it is necessary that the portrayal is as distancing as possible. In *The Monk* and *Carmilla*, an English and an Irish novels respectively, the location of the narratives serves as a mechanism through which the authors express their discontentment with modern dilemmas projected onto far away, haunted regions, or human-like creatures (Hogle, 2002: 6).

Interestingly, this distancing effect can be seen as layered in *The Monk*, other than the more plausible reason that England is not a Catholic country, so as to effectively critique the religion, the setting had to be of a Catholic country – in this case Spain –, there is the sense that perhaps the author takes advantage of the geographical distance to also critique modern conditions in the shift from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century.

Recovering the idea of the French Revolution having influence in Gothic literature of the century, Ronald Paulson argues in *Gothic Fiction and the French Revolution* that "Lewis exploits the dramatic resonances of the Revolution and its anti-clericalism, but simultaneously portrays the rioting mob as blood-thirsty, completely out of control" (Paulson, 536). This further accentuates the aspect of criticism of both the author's society and religion in the novel.

Le Fanu explores this effect adding the chronological distancing to the geographical. The narrative of *Carmilla* takes place in Styria, a location which is

considerably distant from the author's Ireland and Laura and her father's home country of England, in a medieval setting rather than a Victorian one contributing to the estrangement effect. The criticism is made quite evident after a thorough analysis of aspects of the novel, such as the chronologically displaced naturalism and scientific progressiveness found in some characters.

Here an interesting aspect is uncovered, the more scientific approach untypical of the medieval setting the novella describes in its first sentences. Martin Willis in "Le Fanu's 'Carmilla', Ireland, and Diseased Vision" affirms this with his scientific perspective on the narrative:

The evolution of the story's vampirism is littered with both medical terminology and specific medical images. (...) Laura, situates her victimization by the vampiric Carmilla within prevailing discourses on infection. (...) and imagines that Carmilla has 'been stricken with the strange epidemic' (...). (112)

Willis illustrates instances in which Laura has demonstrated knowledge on scientific terminology. Added to this is the "importance placed on sight – most importantly on how one can or cannot *see* the vampire and its effects – parallel common mid-Victorian medical discourses" (112).

It now becomes apparent that there is a dichotomy in the chronological sense of the ideals not matching the time of the narrative. This serves as further evidence to support the theory of the employment of the distancing effect as a way to produce criticism in a more concealed manner.

The core problematic of the dissertation cannot be forgotten, the anti-Catholicism or perversion of religion are themes found in both works. By analysing and comparing the two novels, from the anti-clericalism expressed in *The Monk* to the subversion of Catholicism through its ineffectiveness against Carmilla's vampiric force,

evidence of how the authors' reflections on religion and use of different methods of Gothic writing to subvert it can be found.

Lewis' anti-clericalism is illustrated through the various perversions and inversions of the Catholic religion. There are gender and sexuality problematics, such as the feminisation and 'homosexualisation' of monks, as well as other aspects that deserve to be highlighted, as noted above.

The power dark or demonic forces exert in Catholicism is symbolic of this anti-Catholic aspect of the novel. The character of Matilda best represents this, as her, essentially, effortless invasion of the abbey and subsequent seduction of Ambrosio represent a critique of the Church. Nonetheless, it is the religious nature of Ambrosio's downfall that is particularly intriguing.

"Ambrosio's character is perfectly without reproach; and a man who has passed the whole of his life within the walls of a convent cannot have found the opportunity to be guilty (...)" (Lewis, 17). Lorenzo emphasises Ambrosio's virtuous background, then pointing out that his ecclesiastic duties will oblige him to "enter occasionally into the world, and be thrown in the way of temptation" (17). Ambrosio's virtue and popularity indicate his downfall: "his established reputation will mark him out to Seduction as an illustrious Victim; Novelty will give additional charms to the allurements of pleasure." (Lewis, 17)

The analysis made of *Carmilla* on the subversions of Catholicism, having Victorian society's changes and scientific discoveries taken into consideration, which spread to Gothic fiction and specifically *Carmilla* through the vampire. Religion and progress effectively coexisted throughout the Victorian ages, in spite of an enduring faith in traditional religion, even if new ideas were constantly emerging, literature cannot help but go back to these concepts (Wohl, 2006: 50).

There are several aspects which portray religion in *Carmilla*, one of which is the image of Laura as the Victorian Angel in the House, which provides a connection between the character and religion. The Angel is characterised by her an inherent sexual purity, follower of Christian values, as well as self-sacrifice. Women are made subject to

men in this way, women are relegated to the domestic sphere and men providers, socially, politically, culturally, and economically (Hogan and Bradstock, 1999: 107).

After delivering some final thoughts on central concepts, adding context and stressing important aspects, I finalise this dissertation. Throughout my research, I explored various themes and problematics that add significant importance to the general context of Gothic literature, proceeding to relate them with the two novels creating a discussion which led to the wider themes of the thesis: subversions and criticism of religion. Operating in different ways, this thematic is found in both novels, in *The Monk* through its anti-clericalism, and in *Carmilla* through the subversions of religion by Carmilla, as well as its context of an advancing society still letting the religious background transpire.

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