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Wilson, Shelby LeAnn

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SANTA CRUZ

**THE BITTEN WORD: FEMININE *JOUISSANCE*, LANGUAGE,
AND THE FEMALE VAMPIRE**

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

LITERATURE

by

Shelby Wilson

June 2015

The thesis of Shelby Wilson
is approved:

Professor Kimberly J. Lau, Chair

Professor H. Marshall Leicester, Jr.

Professor Carla Freccero

Tyrus Miller

Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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Abstract

Shelby Wilson

The Bitten Word: Feminine *Jouissance*, Language, and the Female Vampire

This thesis examines the parallels between the female vampire's fang (that which punctures phallogocentric discourse as well as other female bodies) and the pointed nib of the female narrator's pen. Drawing on feminist and psychoanalytic theory, I read the vampiress' bite as reworking the positions of the female vampire and her companion within a male dominated Symbolic and consider how both women ingest language only to expel it transformed as that which speaks their desire. *Carmilla*, Sheridan Le Fanu's 1872 novella, serves as the referential center of this project and frames my interpretations of Crashaw's 17th century Teresian poems, Coleridge's "Christabel," and filmic adaptations of *Carmilla*. These texts, like the bodies of the women they describe, are inherently vampiric, and the boundaries of both are rendered fluid as the female vampire and her companion redefine ontological boundaries through the act of writing, of biting, and of creating spaces of possibility.

Introduction: A Quick Nip

To bite is to breach; to deny the illusion of wholeness. A bitten thing is not an inviolate thing. To bite is to contaminate. Bodies mix in an action that escapes satisfactory signification.

To bite is to open.

To bite is to open a space.

The vampire bite, the puncture that alternately promises eternal ecstasy or a quick trip (dry and rattling) to the undertaker, is a nip that is consistently made to carry the heavy burden of Western cultural anxieties concerning gender, language, and subjectivity. The vampire bite is death sentence, orgasm, infection, and queer perversion all at once. In "Tracking the Vampire," Sue Ellen Case refers to this moment of transfer as "the wound of love," and it is in the spirit of her writing that I wish to view it—not as an instance of alternative phallic penetration but one of transgressive possibility, a moment "that liberates the lover from the boundaries of being" (Case 5). I also take from Case the concept of the two she's, which she describes as "the wounding, desiring transgressive position that weds, through sex, an unnatural being. 'She' is that bride. 'She' is the fanged lover who breaks the ontological sac...When two 'she's' are constructed, it is a double trope, a double masquerade" (8). Together, Case's two she's invert binaries of life/death and unnatural/natural in order to instigate ontological shifts that offer alternatives to normative cultural values such as pure bloodlines and generational reproductivity (4). To view the bite as ontological possibility rather than death sentence is to open a space for the vampire—for the purposes of my study, the female vampire—to have her say.

Carmilla: the first literary female vampire and the most well known. Although she first appears in Sheridan Le Fanu's 1872 novella of the same name, her figure is both preceded and followed by an unruly family of vampire women who, like Carmilla, openly seek a generous female companion and utilize a discourse of falling into/feeding off of located in the moment of the bite. As Nina Auerbach notes, what Carmilla offers is a sharing self, and it is

this “interchange, a sharing, and identification” that allows Carmilla to become collective, to be a shared, multiplied body open to intertextual recognition and interpretation (*Our Vampires* 47). As a result, there is no “true” or “original” Carmilla: her figure is a cacophony of fractured reflections that bounce off one another in the space of the written word and the projected image.

Over the course of this thesis, I will explore only a small number of the vampiric women who constitute Carmilla’s multiplicity. Although the texts discussed are without exception male-authored, more often than not they are riddled with intimations that the writer himself has been infected by the pleasurable contagion of which his words speak. Consequently, these women, arguably bound by the language that bears them, act as the mischievous instigators of a discourse that scrambles definite meaning. Among these performers are Teresa of Avila in Richard Crashaw’s 17th century verse, the vampiric Lady Geraldine, whose “wicked bosom” wreaks havoc upon supposedly stable social structures in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Christabel,”¹ Carmilla, who is simultaneously text and body and is the affective core of this family of referents, and the multitude of Carmillas who appear in filmic adaptations, most prominently in the 1960s and 70s (Coleridge 169).

Carmilla, quickly overshadowed by Count Dracula’s enveloping cape, serves as the unstable referential center of this sticky web of intertexts that all take up, more or less, the same project: to bring together two women who, through mutual participation in the breakdown of bodily boundaries, disrupt the idea of the female body, both physically and linguistically, as definable or stable. This dissolution is made most obvious in the moment of the bite, of the displacement of self into other—the self made uncanny—and through alternative methods of ordering reality: dreamscape, tactile sensation, female narration. Consequently, these texts, much like the two women at the center of each, participate in a bite that is both a falling into and a feeding off of, a generous reciprocity which turns the tale over anew while not resorting to a stake driven through its predecessor’s chest. It is my hope that this thesis, by bringing these materials—which span centuries, media, genres—together,

will explore not only the fluidity of their boundaries, their words, and the women who inhabit them, but will itself become an active participant in this mix of tainted blood that denies direct lineage and neatly bound family histories.²

Le Fanu's novella is centered on the character of Laura, the story's narrator, whose tale is disseminated through a series of letters sent by her to an unidentified town lady.³ These missives relate the "isolated pictures of the phantasmagoria surrounded by darkness" that make up Laura's childhood and youth (9).⁴ In reading these alternately hazy and disarmingly clear memories, the reader is plunged, much as Carmilla herself will be, into the midst of a family drama *in medias res*. Laura's tense relationship with her father (her mother died while she was still very young) and her father's language is brought into stark relief when the vampire Carmilla introduces new modes of being that do not rely on language as the dominant vessel through which reality is ordered. In sharp contrast to Carmilla's use of dream, touch, and bite, the reader is presented with the unyielding clerical, judicial, and academic language of Laura's unnamed father and his colleagues who seek to discover the secrets of Laura's transforming body in conversations from which Laura is always excluded. For this reason, Laura's narration of her experiences years after Carmilla's death, in addition to keeping her longing and desire for Carmilla alive, also serves as an attempt to wrestle with phallogocentric language and use it to her own advantage in the sense that Hélène Cixous describes: "writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me—the other that I am and am not, that I don't know how to be that I feel passing, that makes me live—that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me" (157). In her act of writing, which echoes Carmilla's long lost love bite, Laura sustains the fluidity of bodily boundaries that Carmilla's reciprocity introduced earlier in the story but that Laura had feared and failed to completely understand: "In the rapture of my enormous humiliation I live in your warm life, and you shall die—die, sweetly die—into mine. I cannot help it" (29).

Laura and Carmilla are but one example of the two she's, a pairing Case refers to as "the lesbian in its queer mode," who, as a collective body, hold the multiple incarnations of

the story of the desiring vampire and her generous companion together (8). From 17th century metaphysical poetry to 21st century film, the coupling of female vampire and companion—potentially lesbian, most definitely queer—revels in its surplus *jouissance*, questions the efficacy of both language and looking to order reality, and refuses to ever be completely destroyed. Unlike her male counterpart, the female vampire challenges a phallogocentric cultural order by performing a new mode of sensory perception in its stead, one that does not rely on patriarchal cultural codes of identity where the pleasure of one means power over the other. These subversive actions and the women who commit them have consequently come to serve as the center of a Freudian repetition compulsion. The cultural need to unveil Carmilla and her companion, to ferret out the secret of their joining and their *jouissance*, can be seen in earlier materials but becomes most evident in the plethora of filmic adaptations of Le Fanu's tale, most prominently in the 1960s and 70s.

I locate this surplus *jouissance* that always surrounds representations of the Carmilla figure and her companion within Lacan's discussion of feminine *jouissance* as it exists outside the phallic function. In his 1973 seminar on "God and Woman's *Jouissance*," he claims that "...being not-whole, she [woman] has a supplementary *jouissance* compared to what the phallic function designates by way of *jouissance*" (73). Further, because woman is not fully integrated into the Symbolic—thus the claim that she does not exist—she possesses "a *jouissance* of the body that is...a *jouissance* beyond the phallus..." (74). This excess *jouissance*, the ability to sense beyond language as a mode of defining desire, is one explanation for Carmilla's consistent cultural reappearances. For if the vampire and her companion are able to exist within representation and simultaneously reveal its failure to portray their desire (which exists outside of it), then the repeated efforts to fix them, in word or in image, can be read as an attempted stake through the heart that always manages to miss its target. Despite the pointed, penetrating edge of word and image in a masculine Symbolic that automatically negates feminine desire and agency, the vampire and her companion are able to self-consciously rework that very discourse in order to hollow out a space for their

joinings and to lace language with an infection whose symptom is the speaking of their desire.

Accompanying this surplus *jouissance*, at least in the story of the vampire and her generous companion, is the discourse of the hysteric. As a figure that “gets off on knowledge,” she throws the master’s discourse into disarray through demanding the production of knowledge only to subsequently reveal it as inadequate (Fink 133-4). By “maintain[ing] the primacy of subjective division, the contradiction between conscious and unconscious, and thus the conflictual, or self-contradictory, nature of desire itself,” Carmilla is able to enter the domestic space (one the audience knows very little about) and cast doubt on familiar means of knowledge production, of understanding the body, and of the position of woman within the Symbolic (Fink 133). In the same vein, many of these texts take place in an ancient, ancestral family home whose boundaries are breached when the female vampire appears. The physical home consequently serves as metaphorical double not only for the virginal body of the soon-to-be companion but also for the language and the social structures that have made this home possible. As a result, the presence of vampire and companion together within the domestic space proves its barriers permeable to their subversive pleasures and simultaneously destabilizes the cultural order that served as its foundation. The vampire’s eventual ejection from the domestic becomes both a recognition of her ever-present threat and an expulsion of the abject she embodies.

This banishment from the home serves to reveal the female vampire, who bites to sustain not only herself but her companion, as something potentially even more threatening than the desiring woman: the female corpse. The corpse is defined by Julia Kristeva as “the utmost of abjection” since it is “the most sickening of wastes...a border that has encroached upon everything” (4, 3). The female vampire’s already alarming capacity to infect young women becomes doubly abhorrent when judicial language discloses her legal status as deceased, an embodiment of the abject. Critics have noted the female vampire’s ability to masquerade—she is the danger of nothing to see incarnate since she initially appears as a

beautiful, harmless woman.⁵ For example, in his exploration of Hammer's Karnstein Trilogy, Douglas Brode notes that the female vampire's ability to "pass" causes men to set aside caution and rely on codes of chivalry to order their interactions with her (116). Thus, when the female vampire's "true" nature is revealed—an exhibition which amounts to pinning something signifiable on this woman who so often defies signification—the male prerogative becomes a mission to make her outside appearance match what he perceives to be her ontological status.

The infectious waste of the corpse is closely linked to the vampire's association with bodily fluids, blood in particular. This sanguinary excess—ambiguously menstrual blood, life's blood, and blood from a ruptured hymen—is brought into stark relief when in *Carmilla* the vampiress is discovered in her coffin: "The limbs were perfectly flexible, the flesh elastic; and the leaden coffin floated with blood, in which to a depth of seven inches, the body lay immersed" (92). Carmilla's surplus of blood, recorded by the "medical men" who have also taken the time to caress the body of the sleeping woman, points to the dangers of non-reproductive feminine sexuality and its punishment by phallic penetration via the wooden stake (92).⁶

To make matters more disconcerting, *Carmilla* and her kin do not exhibit the typical qualities of the corpse that elicit such disgust: flesh that can no longer be termed as such, "a wound with blood and puss, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay" (Kristeva 3). While this more emblematic corpse is alarming enough to the viewer, since it shows him what is always hedging the edges of his ontological boundaries, the female vampire is nevertheless, to all appearances, alive. Her very existence questions male-ordered reality and the role allocated to women within it. For though she is corpse, her sterile joinings produce transformative births that lie outside the parameters of accepted representation. Her appearance of "aliveness," and thus of desirability, in juxtaposition with her death certificate makes her all the more repugnant when she is unveiled, like a bride before the wedding, in her coffin.⁷

The vampire is death in life. There is no apparent distinction between the two for her, no border that must be maintained through exposure to and avoidance of the abject. As Irigaray argues, the patriarchal solution to the appearance of woman's desire and woman's language is to forcefully identify both as that which cannot be represented and must be subsequently reabsorbed into a phallogocentric Symbolic that automatically forecloses on a female imaginary. "This Sex Which is not One," with its focus on looking and language, plays a major part in my analysis of the vampire, her companion, and the bite they share. Irigaray's declaration of woman as inherently multiple and the possible pleasures available to her once she is removed from her status as object of exchange coalesce within the body of the female vampire, whose playful masquerades reorder her body's relation to the Symbolic. In stark contrast to this possibility is the stake through the heart, what amounts to an effort at restoring the female vampire to a linguistically definable status: penetrable, castrated,⁸ the object of horror because she is the only one bleeding and bloody.⁹

As this thesis unfolds (and folds into) the multiplicity of vampiric women who all participate in a bite of one kind or another, it asks whether their mutual pleasures are capable of reworking not only the female body's relationship with the written word and the projected image, but also how the ingestion of language itself, along with the companion's blood, allows the vampire to eject it transformed, to "grab it, make it hers, take it in, take it into her woman's mouth, bite its tongue with her woman's teeth, make up her own tongue to get inside of it" (Cixous 168). Further, while these violent reworkings of the Symbolic result in subversive, anxiety-inducing performances on the part of the female vampire and her companion throughout the 19th and 20th century, at the turn of the millennium the Carmilla figure abruptly loses her powers of persuasion. Instead, she becomes the butt of a nasty joke and seems to appear only in comedy and in farce. So, I ask: Can there be a Carmilla of the twenty-first century? What sort of language does she speak? What sort of bite do her still-sharp fangs participate in? What sort of pleasures does she pull us into?

Wordy Wounds: Richard Crashaw's Teresian Poems

The female mystic stands at a complex intersection of theories dealing with language, sexuality, and ontology. Portrayed by Lacan as an example of that *jouissance* of which women know nothing, her religious ecstasy, unsignifiable without a “screen” placed in front of it, serves for him as a frustratingly opaque instance of feminine experience (Lacan 77). In Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, the female mystic becomes a bridge between the unclean bodies of sinners and the immaculate body of the Savior and revels in the abject as a connection to Christ incarnate (127). Cixous cites her as a subject made up of generous multiplicities that offer productive ontological possibilities. In this section, I look to Richard Crashaw's poetry about the mystic St. Teresa of Avila, whom Cixous refers to as “that madwoman who knew a lot more than all the men,” as a member of the vampiric community who participates in a falling into/feeding off of based upon reading, writing, and wounding (171). Because Crashaw's poems are invoked by Coleridge as the predecessors to “Christabel,” another member of the family of vampire women, I limit myself here to a discussion of Teresa as she appears in Crashaw's work. Although references are made to Teresa's desires and to her discourse, these relate exclusively to the saint as she appears in Crashaw's interpretation of her, one which calls upon language to perform in surprising and sensual ways.¹⁰

The Teresian poems can be seen as a direct rebuttal to Lacan's disaffected definition of feminine *jouissance* as “*conneries*” or “*cunt-torsions*” exemplified, for Lacan, in the figure of Teresa (75). This disavowal of the power of feminine *jouissance*, which here takes the form of a joke, comes alarmingly close to relegating it to the black hole reminiscent of “the abyss, the monstrous vagina, the origin of all life threatening to reabsorb what it once birthed” (Creed, *Horror* 54). Lacan's insistence that women, through their exclusion from the Symbolic, are not whole and as such can access a surplus *jouissance* beyond the phallus serves within the Teresian poems as the source of pleasurable woundings that are grounded in both language and the body. Teresa's pleasure both intrigues and frustrates Lacan. His complaint that

women refuse to speak of their extra *jouissance* is followed up by the assertion that, despite their silence on the matter, women *must* certainly experience a *jouissance* beyond the phallus but also *must* know nothing of it: “There is a *jouissance* that is hers (*à elle*), that belongs to that ‘she’ (*elle*) that doesn’t exist and doesn’t signify anything. There is a *jouissance* that is hers about which she herself perhaps knows nothing if not that she experiences it—that much she knows. She knows it, of course, when it comes (*arrive*). It doesn’t happen (*arrive*) to all of them” (74). This explanation of feminine *jouissance* as inherently outside both the phallic function and woman as non-signifier is challenged by Teresa as she is figured in Crashaw’s verse. Here, the saint is not only intimately aware of her *jouissance* but attempts to shape it through a merger of language and body. While Lacan “knows” that Teresa “is coming” as she is depicted by Bernini, her celestial *jouissance* appears to be as much of a mystery to him as he claims it is to her. As a result, mysticism and the Supreme Being become explanatory smokescreens for the unsignifiable experience of Teresa’s martyrdom.¹¹

In contrast to this uneasy negation, Crashaw invokes both the body of Teresa and her body of work to create an interstitial space—localized in the wound—where language is intimately connected to the body as a source of pleasure and of possibility and where the boundaries between supposedly isolated bodies are easily broken.¹² For example, in a move that erases the line between Teresa’s physical body, her books, and the bodies of readers, Crashaw writes that Teresa’s words shoot directly from her mouth to the text on the page and “breaks / From thence into the wondring reader’s brest,” inspiring newly formed converts to offer up “Bowles full of richer blood then blush of grape / Was ever guilty of” in exchange for the saint’s “sweet Deaths of love” (“Apologie” 24-5, 33-4, 41). Further, not only is the body of Teresa made up of multiplicities (of wounds, of words, of desires), the trilogy of poems Crashaw composes in her honor can be read as both a collective body and as singular entities that feed upon one another to create new combinations of possibility for the merging of word and body. The first, “A Hymn to the Name and Honor of the Admirable St. Teresa,”

follows its eponymous heroine from childhood to adulthood to death and beyond as she pursues her desire for martyrdom. The second, "An Apologie for the Foregoing Hymn," addresses Crashaw's feelings of authorial inadequacy in comparison to the enflamed and enflaming prose of Teresa and treats her words as a love language, conflated as both blood and wine, that renders its drinkers transcendent. The final text in the grouping, known in its abbreviated form as "The Flaming Heart,"¹³ explores the relationship between the visual and the verbal as modes of spiritual affect. In this section, I examine the three poems as a whole in order to parse the connections they make between feminine *jouissance*, language, and the wounded/wounding body. This action of wounding through language is what most clearly connects Teresa to the female vampire as both pierce phallogocentric language through their words and actions in order to perform the body as a surface made up of ambiguous orifices equally available for pleasure by pen or by mouth.

In "A Hymn" the reader is first introduced to its heroine as a child who longs to trade her breath, language, or body (whichever is called for) to the "barbarous" Moors in exchange for the joys of death and martyrdom (70):¹⁴

She'l to the Moores; And trade with them,
For this unvalued Diadem.
She'l offer them her dearest Breath,
With Christ's Name in't, in change for death. (47-50)

When this endeavor is halted by God, who identifies Teresa as "love's victime" and instructs her to die "a death more mysticall & high," she happily exchanges a quick, single demise for ones that will be multiple and mark her as undead (75-6):

His is the Dart must make the Death
Whose stroke shall tast thy hallow'd breath;
.....
O how oft shalt thou complain
Of a sweet & subtle Pain.
Of intolerable Joyes;
Of a Death, in which who dyes
Loves his death, and dyes again.
And would for ever so be slain. (79-80, 97-102)

Like the vampire, who rises after a refreshing death-sleep in her coffin, Teresa's life, a "still-surviving funeral," is one of liminality ("Hymn" 78). By embracing the implications of this "milder Martyrdom," in which Teresa is perpetually slain by arrows dripping with language, the trilogy opens itself up to its central motif: the body as it wounds and is wounded through language ("Hymn" 68).¹⁵

As Crashaw represents it, Teresa's alternative martyrdom consists of a fusion of her writings with her physical body as she experiences multiple, orgasmic deaths through the "sweet & subtle Pain" of heavenly darts—associated both with the pointed nib of her authorial pen and the word of God—that have been "thrice dip't in that rich flame / Which writes thy spouse's radiant Name" and which repeatedly pierce her flesh ("Hymn" 98, 81-2).¹⁶ These darts, instead of looping between Teresa's body and the Heavenly Kingdom, are plucked by the saint from her never-ending wounds and shot once again by her as a language that continues on to enter the "wise & well-peirc't hearts" of readers ("Flaming" 49). Consequently, the heavenly arrows become a source of infectious desire as they travel from Heaven, through the mouth/pen of Teresa, and into the bodies of the saint's readership. In "Crashaw, Teresa and the Word," Diana Treviño Benet makes a similar argument, claiming that within Crashaw's trilogy "Teresa's words...have the capacity to surprise and captivate the reader, celestial invaders who have the power to pierce the heart with love and eternal aspirations" (144). While I agree with Benet's argument that the Teresian poems create alternative possibilities for the relationship between the written word and bodily experience, especially since Teresa participates in a reciprocal relationship with readers who not only delight in her linguistic ecstasies but send their own pleasure winging back to her, I want to push farther by looking to the material and figural excesses made possible by the flaming arrows. In what ways do these linguistic darts mirror both the vampire's fang and the female narrator's pen as objects that have the potential to pierce, to create an interstice that allows a space for love and for alternative becomings, while serving to question the idea of woman as negation?

While the arrow, euphemized by Crashaw as “th’immortall instrument,” has the potential to be interpreted solely as fetish object, a stand-in for the coveted phallus, its shape-shifting qualities and multiplicity of potential wielders make it hard to pin down to such a definite function (“Hymn” 89). Teresa’s arrows/words—“Heavn’s great artillery in each love-spun line”—are subsequently and simultaneously love and language and are loosed by Christ, by a multitude of desirous Seraphim who together slit Teresa’s flesh and, finally, by Teresa herself, whose words survive her earthly existence and continue to snake beyond their readers’ bodily boundaries despite her physical absence: “O sweet incendiary! shew here thy art, / ...Combin’d against this Brest at once break in / And take away from me my self & sin” (“Flaming” 56, 85, 89-90). In a more speculative vein, these arrows can also be read as a precursor to the stake that is later appropriated as an instrument of penetration for the purpose of negating the work of the female pen. Instead of the stave that simultaneously demands Carmilla’s destruction and her subsequent cultural reappearances after she has been driven through (to truly destroy her would be to run the risk of admitting that the cultural subversions she unveils exist even when she is gone), these arrows are the source of pleasurable birthings and woundings that pay no heed to pinning down either bodies or meaning. Teresa is here both passive receiver and active giver of a pleasure that exists equally in the physical body and in the body as it is represented in word. As Crashaw quips, “the wounded is the wounding heart” (“Flaming” 74).

Not only are readers figuratively slain by Teresa’s words, the shared wounds on the bodies of the saint and her readers caused by the flaming arrows are also sources of pleasure that liquefy the boundaries between bodies. Teresa’s wordy wounds, which bleed language as well as blood, act as “brim-fill’d Bowles of fierce desire” that inspire fellow believers, “the love-slain wittnesses of this life of thee,” to drink of Teresa just as she, whose body rivals even Christ’s as one of importance, drinks from those who read her works (“Flaming” 99, 84). Since the devouring mouths of readers who lap at the wells of Teresa’s wounds perpetuate their outpouring of blood and language, Crashaw’s Teresa becomes both

vampire and companion. Her transformative language, a source of *jouissance* on its own, not only sets in motion a generous reciprocity between herself and readers but also demands that her pleasure and the pleasure of readers be admitted into the Symbolic. For in her economy of shared wounding and corporeal feasting, pleasure is language and bodies are simultaneously word and flesh. As a result, the Teresian poems play with the boundaries of acceptable language and how a repurposed or altered language could work with the body as site of transformation. As Daneen Senasi notes in relation to Crashaw's verse in general, Crashaw's "poetics compels readers to confront the tenuous, tension filled intersections where bodies and words collide, where they seem to struggle with one another for ascendancy, and where those boundaries that force them into opposition become more malleable, more dissolute, and more problematic" (1-2). Crashaw's ambiguous verse enables multiple slippages to occur between signified and signifier, and, as a result, object/subject relations are constructed as nebulous and subject to change in ways that anticipate the much more explicit ontological fluidity of the female vampire. For if Teresa is both body and book, her darts both arrow and word, and the devouring mouths of readers perform the same actions as their hungry eyes as they read her texts, just who is wounding, who is wounded, and whose body bears the brunt of these desires becomes unclear.

The darts of love and language, both solid and incendiary, allow for a conception of the body—Teresa's, Christ's, the Virgin Mary's, Seraphim's, and readers'—as amorphous, porous, and available for transformative metamorphosis. Crashaw's infamous, and often critiqued, concentration on bodily orifices, described as "disturbing, even obsessive," comes to the forefront here as the pointed darts render corporeal openings—the mouth, the "Brest's chaste cabinet," the heart, the ambiguous, unnamed wound—as interchangeable and equally available for pleasure (Netzley 248; "Hymn" 72). Here the abject, as that which is held away from and is simultaneously on the edge of the clean and proper self, becomes localized in the wound, a "nobl[e] weapon" that is never-ending in its secretions, among which language itself is included (Kristeva 8; "Flaming" 72).¹⁷ While Crashaw's interest in the disassembling power

of the abject is most apparent in works such as “Luke 11: Blessed be the Paps which Thou hast Sucked” and “On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord, Naked and Bloody,”¹⁸ the focus on wounds and wounding in “Hymn” and “Flaming” and the consumption of the bodily fluids of Teresa and Christ in “Apologie” all pay homage to the more blatant actions of mystics who “felt they came in touch with God through the mouth that licked, sucked, consumed and even regurgitated food” (Sabine 437).

The incorporation of expelled materials, fraught with connotations of waste, contamination, and masochism, is generally echoed in the discourse surrounding the vampire’s bite but is here specifically directed toward the possibilities inherent in queer penetration (both by word and by word as object) and in the consumption of blood as “Wine of youth, life, & the sweet Deaths of love” (“Apologie” 41). This wine that is blood gains a linguistic materiality in Crashaw’s representation of Teresa’s writings and flows through the veins of Christ, Teresa, the speaker, and the reader, who merge together as a result of their joined piercings. For example, Teresa’s “flaming heart” and the books she has penned are one and the same since both possess the wounding power of love:

O Heart! the aequall poise of love’s both parts
.....
Live in these conquering leaves; live all the same;
And walk through all tongues one triumphant Flame.
Live here, great Heart; & love and dy & kill;
And bleed & wound; and yeild & conquer still. (“Flaming” 75, 77-80)

Further, by linking the abject wastes of queerly unnamed bodily orifices with language, since both are literally and figuratively ingested and expelled, Crashaw questions the primacy of language as privileged signifying structure. By “lowering” language to the level of the abject, Crashaw’s text urges readers to reconsider the role of bodily experience as interpretative medium. As wounder and wounded, Teresa is transformed into a vampire who lives and dies by word and by thirst: “By all thy lives & deaths of love; / By thy larg draughts of intellectuall day, / And by thy thirsts of love more large they” (“Flaming” 96-8). Consequently, Teresa, like Geraldine and Carmilla, is neither predator nor victim, neither penetrating male nor

penetrated female, but a being-in-flux who births a multitude of desirous readers through the acts of reading, writing, and wounding.

In describing Teresa's desire for repeated, queer penetration, Crashaw's speaker declares that Teresa's heart will "close in his embraces keep / Those delicious Wounds, that weep / Balsom to heal themselves with ("Hymn" 107-9). While the text most obviously implies the arrow's point of access as Teresa's chest, the wording (which seems to privilege the wound over the dart itself) is certainly ambiguous enough to suggest multiple sites of entrance and regeneration. In his reading of Crashaw, Richard Rambuss argues that in the poet's verse "the mutability of the body's openings is matched by the convertibility of its fluids," and this focus on the body made aqueous and thus mutable later becomes a central issue in the case of the female vampire whose body is also connected to language in both troubling and subversive ways (504). The so called "balsom" with which Teresa's body responds is equally indeterminate. Like the multivalent blood of the vampire, the resulting fluid can be made to stand in for blood, breast milk, and female ejaculate all at once. In Teresa's religious rapture, linked to both the reader's and the speaker's own ecstatic pleasure, corporeal boundaries are made mutable as the power of Teresa's religious writings coalesce the bodies of all readers into a single, enflamed form: ¹⁹

Those rare Workes.....
.....while here
They feed our soules, shall cloth Thine there.
Each heavnly word by whose hid flame
Our hard Hearts shall strike fire, the same
Shall flourish on thy browes, & be
Both fire to us & flame to thee; ("Hymn" 154, 156-161)

The subsequent falling into/feeding off of that results in Teresa's appropriation of a language that excludes women is thus a subversive conflation of language with not only the so-called unsignifiable female body, but the abject wastes that body (and bodies it comes into contact with) expels.

Crashaw's discussion of wounds and wounding as a sort of language written on the body is represented both by the characters within the text and the text itself. As Senasi

compellingly argues, the body of Crashaw's poetry is "a material signscape of convergence and coalescence. The boundaries that constitute it are permeable, plastic ones, as visual and verbal elements alike are employed in a poetics of Word and of body..." (19). In this way, the poem as body acts as a double of the bodies within it. Just as Teresa is wounded and reborn so too is language as it stretches out of shape and reforms to accommodate the desires of the bodies who both use and are used by it. This observation carries promising connotations when applied to "Christabel" and *Carmilla* as bodies of text that embody their titular characters. From the "chast cabinet" of Teresa's chest where it is possible to "uncase" the desiring heart, to the mouth whose kiss renders its conjoined participants as transferable essences, the body is the active site of a language whose corporeal origins make it subject to alteration ("Hymn" 72).

As a woman who simultaneously drinks and is drunk from, Crashaw's Teresa prefigures both the female vampire and her companion. She wounds and is wounded by darts that draw blood, tears, language, and discharge. Her ability to create converts (described by Crashaw as "virgin-births"²⁰) through the infiltration of her barbed shafts—"...for it is she / ...shootes both thy shaft & Thee"—echoes (originates?) Cixous' observation that the feminine does not plant, but spawns ("Hymn" 167; "Flaming" 47-8; Cixous 160). This queer spawning serves as an internal loop that echoes the larger one explored in this thesis since Teresa, like the vampire, participates in a reproductivity that in its seeming excess toes the line between generation and destruction. By speaking love Teresa transcends ontological boundaries and is both queer mother and lover of the incestuous multitudes who read her work. Her ability to participate in and deliver a wound constituted by language borne through a feminine, but not exclusively maternal, love renders Teresa as both active and passive. Yet, rather than make her heart—"Bigge alike with wound & darts"—self-sufficient, a closed system lost in its own autoeroticism, Crashaw introduces a partner for her ("Flaming" 76). Although Christ and Crashaw as speaker stand out most prominently as the main participants in what could be read as a sort of rhetorical *ménage-à-trois* between themselves and Teresa,

the saint ultimately finds satisfaction in female companionship. Upon her ascension to Heaven, Teresa is immediately drawn to the arms of the Virgin who is equipped with a quiver of her own and who participates in a reciprocity severed from a traditional maternal.

Ironically, the domestic space, realm of the maternal and Freud's *heimlich* so easily transformed to its uneasy, uncanny other, is not the one in which Teresa discovers "a death more mysticall & high" ("Hymn" 76).²¹ Teresa's decision to leave mother, father, and home completely sidesteps the linguistic tensions the texts we will later explore take up in regards to the father's language and the mother's chaste, divine body. Instead, both parents are presented as mere parts that have failed to fulfill Teresa's desires: "Farewell what ever deare may be, / Mother's armes or Father's knee. / Farewell house, & farewell home!" ("Hymn" 61-3). While Teresa's descendant "Christabel" focuses intensely on the mother and the Virgin Mary as exalted figures because of their maternal qualities, Teresa treats both the archaic womb and its maternal baggage (arms she easily escapes from) as associations that carry little weight. The ease with which Teresa abandons the maternal and normative reproductivity in favor of the pleasurable birthing of language is underscored by Crashaw: "Her weake brest heaves with strong desire / Of what she may with fruitless wishes / Seek for amongst her Mother's Kisses" ("Hymn" 40-2). These "fruitless wishes" also emphasize the sensuality of Teresa as a child of six who, "milky" and "soft," is eroticized through her lack of bodily fluids ("Hymn" 14):

Scarse has she Blood enough to make
A guilty sword blush for her sake;
Yet has she'a Heart dares hope to prove
How much lesse strong is Death then Love. ("Hymn" 25-28)

Despite these provocative immaturities, Teresa's desires do not come to fruition until her death and ascension to Heaven years later. Only here does she meet a female partner who can fulfill her longing:

So soon as you first appear,
The Moon of maiden starrs, thy white
Mistresse, attended by such bright
Soules as thy shining self, shall come

And in her first rankes make thee room;
Where 'mongst her snowy family
Immortall well comes wait for thee. ("Hymn" 122-8)²²

The Virgin acts as the spectral double of the filmic Carmillas of the 1960s and 70s who first appear to their companions (usually brides on their way to the nuptial bed) in white. In her inverted doubling of the bride, Carmilla, like Mary, also promises the marriage bed's cultural antithesis: vampirism, lesbianism, death. Mary, whose "...blessed eyes... / ...shall dart / Her mild rayes through thy melting heart!" is neither the chaste mother nor the virgin bride. She is a reciprocating partner who, unlike Teresa's birth mother, can participate in a love language constituted by darting, piercing, biting ("Hymn" 134-6).

To make things even more decidedly muddled, Mary's role as potentially secondary to the primary love of Christ, in whose name these darts of love are initially coated, is destabilized through a queer inversion in which she and Christ become indistinguishable.²³ Consequently, the "white steps" and "wayes of light" of Christ are interchangeable with "The Moon of maiden starrs, thy white / Mistresse" who is accompanied by her "snowy family" ("Hymn" 178-9, 123-4, 127). Certainly, Crashaw was not averse to the depiction of Christ as a maternal figure from whose stigmata believers drank the nourishing milk/blood of salvation,²⁴ but by transposing Christ and Mary as givers and receivers of love, the gendered body is once again made ambiguous. If Christ, who Crashaw by no means emasculates, can be potentially maternal, then Mary can perform a similar feat and disassociate herself from the role of ahistorical, mythicized mother. Her *jouissance* becomes firmly located in an alternative kinship that does much to dispel the problem which will later become the womb/tomb conundrum. By rejecting the mother as the home/womb and embracing the ambivalently bisexual Mary whose "snowy family" is arguably one of her own choosing, Crashaw's Teresa ekes out a space for female sexual desire that does not shrivel into insignificance when confronted with language.

The discourse surrounding the potentially masochistic piety of the female mystic, who revels in a communion with bodies marked by sickness and decay, is easily linked to that of

the hysteric who demands knowledge be produced and subsequently questions its veracity.²⁵ The hysteric's discourse produces left-over masses of meaning that question under whose jurisdiction woman's body as signifier is located. This subversive, feminine piety that codes the female body as a sort of floating signifier thus results in unnameable bodily excesses: Teresa's ascension to Heaven "Like a soft lump of incense, hasted / By too hott a fire, & wasted / Into perfuming clouds;" Carmilla's appearance as "a great, palpitating mass" as she preys on the objects of male affection; or even the vampiric Geraldine as she climbs into bed with Christabel and takes her in her arms, an action that can initially be described only under the euphemism "Ah wel-a-day" ("Hymn" 113-5; *Le Fanu* 141; Coleridge In. 252). Despite their entrapment in male alarm, these acts of bodily desire can be read as attempts at momentary escape from the Symbolic. Though they abandon a rootedness in the material, they are also replete with the ways in which the body has been and can be altered by language as it is connected to both the constraint of the masculine Symbolic and the possibility of female narration. As I continue my analysis with Coleridge's ballad "Christabel," I hope to keep in mind the continuity between both the bodies of these women and their desires, which leak out of their narratives as sources of curiosity, of pleasure, and of hope.

The Touch of a Spell: "Christabel"

When Samuel Taylor Coleridge published "Christabel" in 1816, the poem (like the poetry of Crashaw) was used to mark its author as feminine (Shears 45; Taylor 720).²⁶ But despite descriptions of Coleridge as "an enchanted virgin" and an "old nurse," the poem itself drew even harsher criticism (*The Romantic Reviewed* qtd. in Swann 543). William Hazlitt's June 1816 review in *The Examiner* provocatively lamented that there was "something disgusting at the bottom" of the ballad, and, in a pamphlet entitled *Hypocrisy Unveiled and Calumny Detected: In a Review of Blackwood's Magazine*, an anonymous reviewer, likely James Grahame, labeled "Christabel" as "the most obscene poem in the English language" (Hazlitt qtd. in Welch 170; *Hypocrisy* qtd. in Welch 179). Apparently, Coleridge managed to supplant Crashaw in this regard. Despite these initial incendiary responses, the ambiguous

and evasive “Christabel” remains a lively source of debate among critics who seek to uncover the poem’s perpetually puzzling meaning.

One of the most popular readings of the ballad understands the mysterious, vampiric Lady Geraldine as a projection of Christabel’s desire and, thus, as a representation of the heroine’s need to accept sex, distasteful though it may be, as a necessary part of adulthood and marriage. Since this analysis completely forecloses the possibility of Geraldine being representative of subversive desire and fixes her as a placeholder for the heterosexual male waiting in the wings for Christabel’s hand, it is among the more alarming interpretations.²⁷ Here, Geraldine is merely a sort of copulatory test-run to prove to the virginal Christabel that matrimonial relations will not be so horrifying after all—though one must wonder how anything could possibly compete after experiencing the tantalizing touch of Geraldine’s “wicked bosom” (Coleridge 169).²⁸ In this line of analysis, the encounter between the two women prepares Christabel for her exchange as commodity between her father, Sir Leoline, and “her own betrothed knight” for whom she prays at the narrative’s exposition (Coleridge In. 28). In reading Christabel and Geraldine’s union as preparation for heterosexual marriage, Christabel’s potential uneasiness concerning her entanglement within patriarchal structure of desire and Geraldine’s offer of a subversive alternative is not taken into consideration. Further, readings on the role of the maternal within the poem often paint Geraldine as the “bad” mother or wicked stepmother whose presence unearths the heroine’s failed psychosexual development.²⁹ Once again, Geraldine’s presence is interpreted as a necessary step for Christabel to successfully enter heteronormative sexual maturation.

While both of these analyses offer intriguing insights into the ways that Geraldine, as outsider figure, reveals latent domestic controversies that threaten to overtake the sensationalized supernatural narrative, their ultimate result is a closing up of “Christabel’s” meaning. In this section, I embrace “Christabel’s” fragmentary status with an opening out rather than a converging inward. Geraldine, who gains *jouissance* from filling the gaps between experience and language, utilizes the hysteric’s discourse—the spell her “wicked

bosom” casts upon Christabel—to question both language and looking as adequate forms of representation. This discourse reaches its climax in Part II when Christabel comes to the unwanted realization that there is no space for her experience in her father’s language. Sir Leoline, who refuses to see anything except his own desires reflected back at him, reworks Christabel’s and Geraldine’s joining in the more easily comprehensible Biblical allegory of the dove and the snake—a smokescreen which tidily categorizes an experience that can never be referenced directly. Christabel, because she is the only character, apart from Geraldine, who openly recognizes what occurred the night before, is thus the primary target of this reinterpretation, and her desire collapses under its authoritative weight. In addition, I consider the ballad’s connections to Crashaw’s Teresian poems—named by Coleridge as “Christabel’s” source text—³⁰and the figure of the female vampire who takes pleasure in both the breaching (and leeching) of bodily boundaries through a participative performance of linguistic and somatic excess. Geraldine’s rejection of traditional notions of feminine reproduction and Christabel’s fusion of the divine and the abject cause maternalism and martyrdom to be stretched and reformed as signifiers and as experiences that, in their altered states, pave the way for new modes of being.

In Coleridge’s trope of the vampiric woman, we first come upon its titular character as she leaves the supposed safety of the home in favor of “the midnight wood” to pray “for the weal of her lover that’s far away” and discovers a “damsel bright” instead (31-2, 60). Though the initial meeting between Christabel and Geraldine takes place in a potential space of verdure and fecundity, the wood is explicitly described as barren and jagged, a forest where only “moss,” which lives alongside a host, and “rarest mistletoe,” a parasite, can survive (36). This early emphasis on a plant that subsists by feeding off of another (and in a space surrounded by death, no less) prefaces later anxieties that will arise in regards to the role of the maternal in Christabel and Geraldine’s sexual relationship.³¹ After hearing Geraldine’s explanation for her presence—kidnapping and a veiled tale of gang rape—Christabel invites this alluring young woman home with her. What follows is the famous revelation of

Geraldine's bosom, the sexual encounter between the two women, and Christabel's rejection by her father in favor of Geraldine when the latter reveals herself as the long lost daughter of his childhood friend.

Geraldine first appears on the scene as nothing but a moan, uncanny in its nearness and indescribable:

It moan'd as near, as near can be,
But what it is, she cannot tell,—
On the other side it seems to be,
Of the huge, broad-breasted, old oak tree. (41-4)

Geraldine's aural potentiality, in which she is neither male nor female or even corporeal being, is soon followed by, and linked to, the overpowering excess of her physical appearance when Christabel's desire to look takes her to the other side of the oak. The narrator's later attempts to rein in this sensorial overabundance take the form of an obsessive fixation on Geraldine's breast as a piece of her body that is potentially quantifiable but which always escapes adequate signification. Language as wounding weapon also comes into play here since the ambiguous nature of Geraldine's moan allows a multiplicity of affective causes. Is Geraldine in pain? Is she experiencing orgasm? Both? Christabel's immediate reaction is a silence followed by the desire to gaze upon Geraldine's body. In response to these actions, the narrator demands that the reader avert her eyes from the desire being born between the two women and instead pay attention to Christabel's body as unruly noise maker: "Hush, beating heart of Christabel! / Jesu, Maria, shield her well!" (54-5). The speaker's injunction against Christabel's pounding heart rather than her speaking mouth introduces what will become a theme of the turbulent female body's potential for unsignifiable affects (a veritable fount of *jouissance* for Geraldine) as both reader and Christabel are scolded for witnessing. Christabel's noisy heart becomes even more disquieting with the description of Geraldine, a personage whom Jonas Spatz terms "a combination of opulence and captivating disorder" (112):

There she [Christabel] sees a damsel bright,
Drest in a silken robe of white;

Her neck, her feet, her arms were bare,
And the jewels disorder'd in her hair.
I guess, 'twas frightful there to see
A lady so richly clad as she—
Beautiful exceedingly! (60-6)

Both beautiful and frightening—though this is the narrator's guess, not Christabel's assertion—Geraldine, like Carmilla, immediately begins to construct herself as her companion's double by producing "answer meet" to Christabel's enquiries (69). In short, she comes from a "noble line," she was seized by a gang of men who possibly raped her, and she is in need of a savior's services to help her escape (77).

From the moment that Christabel first encounters Geraldine as sound and her gaze transforms the vampire woman from "it" to "she," pronoun confusion runs rampant. Rather than clearly delineating Christabel and Geraldine as two separate subjects by referring to them exclusively by their names, the speaker instead indiscriminately uses "she," "her," and "lady" as references.³² The morning after Christabel and Geraldine sleep together, the narrator laments "O sorrow and shame! Can this be she, / The lady, who knelt at the old oak tree?" yet it is never clear to which lady the text is referring (284-285). In later revisions of the poem—the moments that Coleridge seems to fixate on and fiddle with are a potential gauge of what might have disturbed him about the piece—Christabel implores Geraldine to return home with her and share a bed: "And I beseech your courtesy / This night to share your bed with me" (116-7). Just whose bed is being shared, and which "she" is anxiously attempting to get in it with the other, is made unclear since the reader can only presume that Geraldine has not previously slept in the castle.

Descriptors are also bandied about in such a way that the division between Christabel and Geraldine as characters collapses. "Divine," perhaps the most referentially loaded of these transient adjectives, is used not only to refer to the Virgin Mary or Christ but comes to serve as a label for both Christabel and Geraldine in moments that stretch the word's connotations and alter its possible meanings. Christabel's relationship with the maternal divine is repeatedly highlighted by herself and the narrator, since both call upon

“Mary mother” in the moments when Geraldine’s presence and the desire she and Christabel share defy rational explication. These invocations become increasingly clouded as the narrative unfolds, and it is soon unclear whom Christabel means when she says “mother” or even whether she and the narrator are referring to the same person.³³ “Divine” as stable signifier, indicative of the chaste, worshipful, impenetrable body, is thrown into question when applied indeterminately to the (supposedly) virginal, saintly Christabel and to the devious (and, some would argue, demonic) Geraldine. Like the identity of “vampire,” “divine” acts as a word that should be easy to pin to the correct body in theory but nonetheless manages to escape clear definition. As a result, the meaning of “divine,” just like the mischievous pronoun usage, renders the relationship of bodies and identities to language and textuality as perpetually mutable. As in Crashaw’s Teresian poems, the lines between the grotesque, the erotic, and the mystical are redrawn and reworked as various female bodies are merged, separated, and brought together again.

As the two women make their way to Christabel’s bedroom, the indiscriminate use of “her” as pronoun is replaced by an excess of “theys.” As Karen Swann notes, only one woman leaves the castle, but two come back (540).³⁴ This grammatical doubling, which results in the conflation of the vampire and the companion into an inseparable they, renders the relationship between pronoun and antecedent indistinct and blurs the identity of the two women. Returning to the unsteady nature of the divine, when Geraldine appears to go into a hysterical fit while in conversation with the spirit of Christabel’s mother, Christabel reacts by passionately supplicating herself before the seemingly raving woman: “Then Christabel knelt by the lady’s side, / And rais’d to heaven her eyes so blue—” (208-9). This kneeling, ostensibly a means of praying to Heaven for Geraldine’s mental health, also has the effect of transforming Geraldine into the queer inversion of the Virgin Mary and Christabel into her adoring worshipper. This inversion is later strengthened and also troubled by Sir Leoline’s assurance that Geraldine is “a thing divine” (175). For the duration of Part I, though, the Virgin Mary as figure is in flux and amorphous: she is both Christabel, Geraldine and, at

moments, even Christabel's mother. The slippery identity of "saint" is transformed yet again towards the end of the narrative when Christabel's "eyes so blue," which Sir Leoline and the narrator read as leaking divinity rather than bodily fluids, hungrily drink up the "shrunken serpent eyes" she blames Geraldine for unleashing upon her (590).

As snake, lady, and potential "thing divine," Geraldine is linked to the vampiric largely through her ability to masquerade. Like her fanged reptilian double, which "appears to die, but only to shed its old skin and appear in a new one," her successive performances question sustained and stable identity (Victor Turner qtd. in Hennelly 208). This mutability and its resultant falling into/feeding off of is realized in the space of Christabel's bedchamber, transformed by the presence of the desiring women into both séance room and crypt. Much like the concept of "the domestic," Christabel's bedchamber is a space that parallels the perceived status of its female occupant's body as undefiled and impenetrable. Christabel's social role as bride-to-be makes this association all the more necessary. She is power *in potentia* and must be kept in check until the correct lover infiltrates her body in the nuptial bed. This trail of associations concerning the bedchamber, the female body, and the wedding night has lead certain critics to argue that Geraldine only appears as a temporary replacement for Christabel's longed-for, absent groom. To prove the veracity of this claim, Christabel's raising up of Geraldine from "beneath the old oak tree" is read as the result of Christabel's desire for her as yet unconsummated marriage (361).³⁵ However, I am arguing that Geraldine is more than a quick fix for what will come with the arrival of the fervently prayed-for betrothed. Geraldine's ambiguous performance as groom, rather than mimic what will eventually occur once the male lover appears, instead throws both the poem's discourse on matrimony and its reliance on female exchange into question. In but one example of this embodied performance, while crossing the castle's threshold she plays the fainting maid to Christabel's ardent suitor in a move that renders each woman simultaneously bride and groom.³⁶

The breach of the bedchamber, more so than the slow crawl (“with steps... / That strove to be, yet were not, fast”) through the castle, transforms the space from hermetically sealed realm of chastity to its uncanny double (108-9).³⁷ Rather than a honeymoon suite where the groom’s all-surveying eye can intimately appraise the body of his new bride, as a tomb or crypt space Christabel’s bedroom openly invites the anxiety inducing speculation that its female occupant can see in darkness what the male voyeur cannot:

The moon shines dim in the open air,
And not a moonbeam enters here:
But they without its light can see
The chamber carv’d so curiously. (169-72)

In the darkness of Christabel’s chamber, the women’s actions and their words question the act of looking as necessary for the creation of an exclusively female ordering of experience. As a result, it is only for the narrator’s (and our) voyeuristic benefit that “Christabel the lamp will trim” (179). Within the nuptial chamber inverted as tomb, Geraldine’s invocation of Christabel’s mother not only serves to highlight Christabel’s preexisting connection to death and thus her liminality as a character, but also calls to mind the séance space, usually headed by a female medium, as one that “facilitates the unleashing of female desire” (Macfie 64). Born within the same hour her mother died, Christabel’s liminality enables time to be translated as a space within which a new desire will hold sway.³⁸ By verbally exorcising Christabel’s mother, whose spirit seemingly appears to halt Geraldine’s seduction (“Off, wandering mother! Peak and pine! / I have power to bid thee flee.”), Geraldine excises herself from the maternal, and Christabel’s desire becomes one for a lover, not a mother (199-200).

In the space of the hour Geraldine claims is hers,³⁹ during which the notorious unveiling of her “bosom and half her side” takes place, Christabel steps forward as a subversive voyeur whose unruly imagination, fraught with “so many thoughts [that] mov’d to and fro,” prompts her to lie awake and watch Geraldine undress (246, 233). Here the feminine gaze carries a recuperative potential, for, in place of proprietary objectification, it is possible to read Christabel’s wandering eye and Geraldine’s gaze meeting in reciprocal

desire. The revelation of Geraldine's naked body in response to Christabel's gaze is accompanied by the former's spell of silence, itself intimately linked to the touch of Geraldine's breast. The caress of Geraldine's spelling bosom, since it is no longer maternal, consequently becomes one of contamination:⁴⁰

In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,
Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!
Thou knowest to-night, and wilt know to-morrow
This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow; (255-58)

Geraldine's specification of the spell as male (it is, after all, "lord" of Christabel's utterance) acts as her invocation of a hysteric's discourse that threatens accepted knowledge by pushing it to its limits (Fink 134). In short, it is not Geraldine's prohibition of Christabel's speech but the lack of a space for it to exist in patriarchal discourse that is so horrifying. That the only part of the story Christabel can tell is one that accords with chivalric language, that she "found'st a bright lady, surpassingly fair: / And didst bring her home with thee in love and in charity," is proof positive that only specific, policed types of female experience are utterable in the presence of the Father (264-5). By denying Christabel the power to tell of her encounter, Geraldine throws into stark relief just what is and is not admissible, but also, more importantly, the possible pleasures to be found in discovering alternative ways to experience what cannot be said. The "mark of my shame" and "seal of my sorrow," simultaneously interpretable as the imprint of sexual violation and the black hole of female castration, exists outside Geraldine but has nevertheless made a mark on her person and forces Christabel's silence with its touch. But for Geraldine, this so-called lack is no lack at all. Only in the phallogocentric discourse of female negation can Geraldine's bosom and its touch be coded as such.⁴¹ By revealing that her wounded bosom possesses the power to spell, a power it certainly should not have if it exists only as lack, Geraldine turns masculine discourse back in on itself. After performing this coup, she does one better by pushing beyond the boundaries of the word to explore the possible pleasures that have heretofore escaped it. For this reason, Geraldine strives to rework Christabel's reliance on the veracity of both look and

language and, in their place, she deposits tactile sensation, somatic excess, the enjoyable subversions of the corpse bride, and the rejection of a mythicized maternal. Although Geraldine does not “bite,” her status as one who drains female vitality through physical intimacy links her both to the lesbian and the vampiric (Macfie 62). Like Teresa’s linguistic arrows, Geraldine’s bosom and the spell inherent in its touch act as a way for the “lovely lady” to open a space in which her experience is not negated (Coleridge 23).

That Christabel perhaps invites Geraldine home not out of love and charity but out of sexual desire—exacerbated by the prolonged linguistic conflation of the bodies of the two women—cannot be spoken. In this same vein, readings of “Christabel” such as Durham’s that focus on Geraldine as a figure who proves the problems inherent in maternal absence run the risk of re-inscribing these women, both of whom are potentially desiring, within hegemonic social structures. Citing passages in Coleridge’s journals that discuss his belief in speech as compensatory for the lost pleasures of the lactating, maternal breast, Durham argues that Christabel’s lack of access to her own mother’s breast results in her inability to equate any analogous experience with pleasure (172-3). Geraldine’s injunction against speech, for Durham, acts as proof of the assertion that “feeding problems can thus create a stuttering and, at last, a silence” (173). Apart from her tricky construction of the maternal, which grounds women’s acquisition of pleasure in successful normative reproductivity, Durham’s analysis can have productive connotations for the vampire. Perhaps, rather than suffering from a lack, Christabel is feeding too well in the crypt? Her hungry eyes have drunk up the image of Geraldine’s body as difference, and her inability to speak of the resultant physical encounter under the eye of her father transforms her longing into an internalized danger rather than a repressed maternal lack. Instead of a source of pleasure, *jouissance* becomes the unknown threat from within as Christabel struggles to define her desire.⁴²

While speech can act as a buffer between “I” and the object (although language is always already tainted),⁴³ by drawing attention to the fact that her desire cannot be spoken the female vampire illustrates how the Symbolic fails as safeguard. In retaliation, she devours

language and expels it as that which now *must* speak her *jouissance*, abject or not. This newly infected language, when paired with an excess of ingested bodily fluids that deny traditional maternity, births provocative connotations for the influence of the desiring and destructive female vampire. In contrast to Kristeva's mouth "that I fill up with words instead of my mother," Geraldine's mouth is full of other women and their blood, and it spits out narrative transformed (Kristeva 41). Geraldine's efforts to introduce new ontological possibilities to Christabel eventually fail when the latter discovers that there are no words to describe her lover's embrace; the creation of a new discourse able to bear the weight of her desire is a task that proves too daunting (it will later be taken up by Laura in *Carmilla*).

That what happens after Geraldine casts her spell is simply banished from the page supports the hypothesis that female desire has no space in masculine narrative. Instead, the reader is reintroduced to the two women in their post-coital repose as the speaker attempts to backtrack and retake control of the narratorial gaze supplanted by Christabel in the previous section. After reiterating the sight of Christabel praying innocently beneath the oak, a description that is nevertheless fraught with sexual connotations that parallel the ecstasies of Teresa,⁴⁴ he turns to Christabel in the inverted nuptial bed who is sleeping

With open eyes (ah woe is me!)
Asleep, and dreaming fearfully,
Fearfully dreaming, yet I wis,
Dreaming that alone, which is —
O sorrow and shame... (280-4)

The narrative hiccup of the dash keeps open the possible meanings of Christabel's fearful dreaming, reveries which the narrator retroactively translates as sorrow and shame.⁴⁵ Like Geraldine's and Christabel's sexual encounter, thrown headlong into an atemporal, inaccessible void, the narrator veils Christabel's after-dream as a bar that crosses out nothing. Christabel's open, staring eyes, which provoke such anxiety in the narrator, are here synonymous with those of St. Teresa, which shoot wounding darts of language and of love. The connections between Christabel and Teresa are further solidified by the narrator's

continued attempts to hide Christabel's *jouissance* under the guise of a controllable Christian piety:

And see! the lady Christabel
Gathers herself from out her trance;
Her limbs relax, her countenance
Grows sad and soft; the smooth thin lids
Close o'er her eyes; and tears she sheds—
Large tears that leave the lashes bright!
And oft the while she seems to smile
As infants at a sudden light! (299-306)

Although Coleridge initially cites the influence of Crashaw's verse as affecting the second part of "Christabel," his subsequent admission that the Teresian poems may have "suggest[ed] the first part of the whole poem" indicates that Teresa's influence permeates the entire narrative (and the body of the woman it represents) (qtd. in *Coleridge's Poetry* 171). As a result, Coleridge brings Christabel and Geraldine into the fold of St. Teresa's eroticized abject and orgasmic piercings. For "Christabel's" speaker, religious *jouissance* operates as a sort of bulwark to keep at bay that which cannot be said; under the safety net of religious piety, subversive pleasures slide right off the supposedly impenetrable body of the selfless female penitent. Consequently, the speaker securely shelters himself under the same assumption that Lacan makes: although Christabel experiences it, she knows nothing about it. Yet, in invoking the influence of St. Teresa, and by naming Crashaw's verses as "Christabel's" inspiration, Coleridge questions religious *jouissance* as safeguard. As Mark Hennelly notes, both narratives link textuality and sexuality (307); Geraldine transforms Teresa's efforts to rework language as an embodied experience into a *jouissance* that revels in that which cannot be articulated at all.

The opening for Part II brings to the forefront of the narrative Geraldine's overwhelming material excess and its implications for looking and language. Here we learn that Sir Leoline "knells us back to a world of death" through a repetition compulsion that revolves around the ringing of bells for his dead wife (321):

And hence the custom and law began,
That still at dawn the sacristan,

Who duly pulls the heavy bell,
Five and forty beads must tell
Between each stroke—a warning knell, (326-30)

In response to these tolls Bard Bracy, whose dream of the dove and the snake will later influence him to go into the wood and rid it of things “unblest,” jovially responds that “There is no lack of such, I ween / As well fill up the space between” (517, 336-7). These amorphous and expandable “things,” identified through the negation of their lack, are linked to ghosts, the devil, and Geraldine herself, who awakes in response to Satan’s ghostly counter knell. If Geraldine, through her excess rather than lack, is able to fill up the space between mother and lover, language and looking, life and death—something the narrator implies that Christabel does already—then the need for the narrator to go through so many equivocations, take-backs, and omissions becomes obvious. Like her narrative sister Teresa, Geraldine reorders the body’s relation to textuality and, as a result, language is in a constant state of flux around her as the narrator attempts to match her signifiatory excess with a language that inevitably falls short.

Unfortunately, Christabel’s newfound pleasure in filling up and oozing between hegemonic spaces of supposed stability is quickly quelled under the eye and the tongue of her father. The introduction of Sir Leoline in the flesh—for the first part of the narrative he is merely a room to creep by (“As still as death with stifled breath!”)—brings with it its own set of problems (165). The familial tensions hinted at during the poem’s exposition are exacerbated by the presence of Geraldine.⁴⁶ Like her, we are thrown into the domestic drama *in medias res*, and her hysterical discourse, utilized “not to create something new but to make evident and perhaps distort and exaggerate what is already there,” leads Christabel question not only her role as daughter but also the position of the (now absent) mother (Durham 182).

Most critics are in agreement that upon being introduced to Sir Leoline and naming herself as the daughter of his childhood friend, Geraldine usurps both Christabel’s position as present daughter and that of her long dead (absent) mother.⁴⁷ The ease with which Geraldine performs this coup serves to transform Christabel’s perceptions of herself as she exists within

her father's discourse from holy, virginal, and inviolate to a hissing, darting serpent. Rather than read this situation as one of realized Oedipal repression as some critics have done,⁴⁸ I want to look at the ways in which both Leoline's language and his looking are unable to divine the truth of what his daughter has experienced and is trying to communicate. Christabel's horror at her father's inability to understand serves as the source of her primal fear, since the chivalric male is utterly incapable of allowing female desire to play within his discourse. Even Bard Bracy, who relies on dreamscape—a typically vampiric medium of communication—interprets his dream of the dove and the snake in their potentially murderous, potentially orgasmic embrace as a strict binary of good versus evil that he, with his “saintly song,” must eradicate from the home's perimeter (549).⁴⁹ Like Durham, I read the failure of Leoline's speech as “emphasi[zing] the inadequacy of abstract language” (188). Further, this inadequacy is facilitated by “an overconfidence in logic (the Baron's clear cut dualism)” that results in Leoline's “failure to perceive” (Durham 188).

Leoline's strictly bounded speech is of far less interest here than the actions of the women whose own speech sits on the edges of his clearly defined borders. His plan to send Geraldine back home “With...numerous array / White with their panting palfreys' foam” is eerily reminiscent of Geraldine's potential rapists' “palfrey white” that is “as fleet as wind”(497-8, 82-3). Thus, if all goes according to his plan, Geraldine will leave the castle in exactly the same condition in which she arrived. What has happened in the interim is not important. Leoline's impassioned speeches are bracketed by his equally emotional embraces of Geraldine. These physical displays, which offer Geraldine the perfect opportunity to perpetuate her performance of the hysteric's discourse, prove to Christabel how easily signifiers such as “daughter” and “mother” are transferred from one female body to another. Geraldine's “joyous look” and “face uprais'd, her eyes o'erflowing” reveal the role of masquerade in both identities; “Casting down her large bright eyes, / With blushing cheek and courtesy fine,” she performs the role of the shape shifter by pantomiming both darling daughter and potential lover (438, 508, 562-3). Christabel's imitation of Geraldine as snake in

response to Geraldine's performance of supplicant results in a double mime, even a double masquerade (as Case would say). As the dualistic roles of both women (saint and sinner; virgin and whore) fade into each other, the subjective boundaries between them become indefinite. In response to this collapse, Leoline, the Lacanian male who is "wholly alienated" within the Symbolic, can only see his own desires reflected back at him (Fink 106). This masculine gaze dominates the second half of the narrative as female looking is relegated to the margins of male speech. In response to the spectacle of Geraldine and Christabel together, the looking of Leoline and Bracy transforms the women's converging bodies into discrete entities that are firmly ensconced within the parameters of such symbols as the dove and the snake.⁵⁰ Yet this reliance on restrictive allegories is not so convincing when the actions of the two women blur these distinctions even as the men create them.

The confinement of feminine desire to the scripted roles of dove and snake—the falling into and feeding off of that Leoline and Bracy refuse to see or speak—is both an opportunity for Geraldine to show off her role as impersonator and the breaking point for Christabel, who cannot sustain her *jouissance* under the surveillant eye and actions of Leoline. Mistaking Geraldine's performance as truth, Christabel is unable to take part in the pleasures of active subversion. Instead, Christabel reads Geraldine's seductive looks as a pointed attack on her ideological self, and, like her father, only sees in Geraldine the role of treacherous serpent and in herself the role of the ahistorical and mythicized Virgin. Perhaps this interpretation can shed light on the confusing lines that comprise the end of the poem. When Geraldine, whose physiognomy has been transformed by both Leoline's and Christabel's gaze into the visage of a serpent, "...with somewhat of malice, and more of dread / At Christabel she look'd askance!"—(notice our friend, the nonsignifiable dash, reappears once again) her anger and her sadness can be traced to Christabel's refusal to revel in transgression (574-5; Case 9). Unlike Geraldine, she cannot see the flatness of the figures in Bracy's dream, their lack of possibility. By rendering them thus, instead of as crossbreeding and compatible,⁵¹ her role (and her perception of Geraldine) becomes

superficial and easily malleable by patriarchal discourse. It is for this reason that Geraldine is transformed not into the wily serpent who masquerades as death only to be reborn but as the Biblical origin of all evil. Christabel's absorption into this masculine allegorical fantasy results in a dangerous self-abasement wherein "her thoughts are gone, / She nothing sees—no sight but one!" (585-6). The narrowing of Christabel's voyeuristic gaze, so compelling in the burial chamber, to the "look of dull and treacherous hate" that she sees reflected back at her in Geraldine's eyes brings her into the fold of Lacan's alienated Symbolic (594). She, like her father, now only sees her own desire reflected back at her. Geraldine's sadness at being limited to the role of Biblical traitor and the effect this has on Christabel's ability to partake in the playful abeyance of linguistic certainty gains credence in the multiple exchanges of looks between the two women under the Baron's gaze. Geraldine's response to Christabel's immersion in restrictive dichotomies is to look away from Christabel's self-reflecting stare, "like a thing, that sought relief, / Full of wonder and full of grief" (581-2). Instead, she turns her "large bright eyes divine / Wildly on Sir Leoline" (583-4). Though he, too, simply uses her as mirror, it is too painful to look at one who just the night before participated in an exchange that did not require the other's obliteration (Cixous 150). Like so many of those that follow her, at the close of this fragment Geraldine is a partner without a companion, and her sorrow lies largely in the inability of others to recognize her as such.

Coleridge's decision to leave "Christabel" as fragment, despite numerous appeals to finish what he claimed he already knew the end to, is perhaps an example of the author's own relationship with language and *jouissance*. By keeping the narrative open-ended—though Christabel seems to be a lost cause at the end of Part II—the female desire of which it speaks is also allowed to exist indeterminately and continuously. Perhaps Coleridge gained his own sort of authorial pleasure from the inconclusive nature of what should be a closed circle. In the unofficial conclusion to Part II, he refers to the inability of language to adequately convey affect, that "love's excess" can only be expressed as "words of unmeant bitterness" (652-3). What Coleridge perceived as his failure to satisfactorily portray a linguistically

unattainable surplus of feeling is one theory for why “Christabel” remains unfinished. Another is that Coleridge, like Geraldine, revels in word games and masquerade. One can hardly deny that he enjoyed testing his readers’ patience by playing with the perception that language is reliably representative of quantifiable space and time.⁵² Or, perhaps most provocative of all, he might have simply enjoyed keeping his readers’ desire, like Geraldine’s and Christabel’s, open and grasping. To close the poem would be to bar the potential continuation of the desire between vampire and companion that will be taken up again and again in later texts. When Coleridge wrote that the third part of “Christabel” would “be the song of her desolation,” perhaps he was referring not to her father’s displaced loyalty but to the loss of pleasurable subversion, those woundings and feedings that, although squashed under the bounded speech of Leoline, are nevertheless allowed to remain in play in an unfinished fragment (Coburn qtd. in Welch 181).

Female Pen, Vampire Fang: *Carmilla*

Just as Coleridge had Crashaw in mind while writing “Christabel,” it is apparent that Sheridan Le Fanu was, in turn, thinking of Coleridge when he penned his 1872 novella *Carmilla*.⁵³ Both “Christabel” and *Carmilla* feature young, motherless women living in isolated homes with their potentially untrustworthy fathers; both question the efficacy of male, chivalric language through the use of the vampiric woman’s presence in the home; both focus on the violation of the innocent female body by the boundary-breaching female vampire; and both are fragmentary.⁵⁴ Further, like “Christabel,” *Carmilla* is often interpreted in terms of psychosexual development and the repressed, monstrous maternal.⁵⁵ These texts, since they are themselves vampiric, participate in a muddled genealogy that renders the literary line of descent equally murky. Like Geraldine, who manipulates domestic conventions in order to expose their structural instability, the vampire Carmilla transforms the family home into a theater of female subversion. *Carmilla* raises questions regarding the role of the female voyeur, the unpredictable, distressingly ambulatory female body, and the slippery yet subversive ways in which feminine *jouissance* is inextricably tied to the discourse of the

hysteric. Lacan's hysteric's discourse, predicated on a sustained questioning of the master's knowledge in order to expose it as insufficient, is taken up by both Carmilla and her companion Laura (Fink 134-5). The two women throw into question the effectiveness of masculine discourse and disclose that discourse's inability to adequately define or contain them by revealing how their experiences (both as individuals and as a pair) do not fit within the realm of the Symbolic. In this section, I look to *Carmilla*, the always unstable referential center of my project, as it is both influenced by and influences companion texts that also wrestle with the *jouissance* of the woman who bites.

Like Crashaw's Teresian poems and Coleridge's "Christabel," *Carmilla* looks closely at the ways in which woman, indefinable because she is neither one nor two (Irigaray 26), is able to move within and beyond the Symbolic through a relationship with another female figure who embodies what Case calls "the queer...the taboo breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny" (3). As in Coleridge's ballad, the outsider figure of the female vampire reveals the latent structures of the domestic—here largely predicated on the power of the policing paternal eye—as not only unsatisfactory but also quite easy to escape. Freedom is, after all, just a bite away. Yet, in contrast to "Christabel," *Carmilla* openly abandons religious *jouissance* as a screen for feminine pleasure. Both Carmilla and Laura reject the medical, legal, and religious discourses that circle their bodies in an ultimately failed effort to contain their momentary excesses and their more sustained subversions. In place of these failed attempts at containment, Carmilla introduces the productive possibilities of dreamscape, the tactile sensation of the bite which tears a rent in time and space (as in Laura's childhood dream of Carmilla which transposes past and present), and the hysteric's discourse that splits apart masculine language and implants alternative possibilities in its place.

Carmilla is largely composed of a series of letters sent by Laura to an unidentified "town lady" (30). These missives, which Laura claims are fraught with "terror" and "unspeakable horror," not only relate "the isolated pictures of the phantasmagoria surrounded by darkness" of her youth but also serve as a response to the masculine discourse that seeks

to define her relationship with Carmilla as that of vampire and victim (53, 93, 9). Carmilla, the source of Laura's supposed anxieties, is a young woman who, following a carriage "accident," becomes a guest at Laura's house. During this visit, the two form an intimate friendship that quickly tumbles past socially acceptable closeness and careens toward queer desire. This queer courtship is born of both Carmilla's words and her woundings, since her vampire bite is accompanied by overbearing confessions of love and a discourse that introduces the masculine Symbolic as that which can contain neither her bite nor her desire. Laura, who writes that her past self was unable to comprehend either the discourse spoken by Carmilla or the dreams sent by her, nevertheless acknowledges their opportunities for pleasure: "I experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust" (29). Eventually, Laura's father and his colleagues expose Carmilla as the "oupire" that has been killing off local village girls and even the niece of a family friend, and reinterpret her relationship with Laura as one among these violent predations.

The moment that male authorities in the novella pluck Carmilla's identity from an exclusively female realm of looking and language and incorporate it into a containable, recordable discourse is the moment of her (assumed) destruction. In their discovery and execution of Carmilla, these protectors of hegemonic cultural order reveal the insufficiency of merely running a stake through the female vampire's breast; she must also be satisfactorily written. Consequently, Carmilla is systematically staked, beheaded, and thrown in a river for good measure, and it is all documented to the satisfaction of both church and state. Laura's reaction to these proceedings is to disassociate herself from them. She narrates Carmilla's execution in a cold, distanced voice that mimics the religious and academic discourse which justified the vampire's second death: "Here then, were all the admitted signs and proofs of vampirism. The body, therefore, in accordance with the ancient practice, was raised, and a sharp stake driven through the heart of the vampire, who uttered a piercing shriek in the last moment, in all respects such as might escape from a living person in the last agony. Then the

head was struck off, and a torrent of blood flowed from the severed neck” (92). A subversive reading of Laura’s reactions to these events might reveal that, rather than the horror of finding she was the so-called victim of a vampire, her fear and nervous agitation throughout the narrative is the result of the violence done to Carmilla and of the reinscription of the vampire and her proffered pleasures into a masculine discourse. The stake through her friend’s chest is the negation of the relationship between the two women, an experience that, until Laura attempts it, defies textual documentation.

Laura’s narration of her experience acts in direct opposition to the binaristic categorizations thrust upon the bodies of women by her father and his colleagues. For while Laura recuperates her relationship with Carmilla as that which she can successfully put to paper, she does not fix her desire to the page in such a way that renders it static. Instead, in moments of linguistic or somatic overflow, she falls back on the safeguards of shock, horror, and forgetfulness as a way to allow her *jouissance* to wriggle free of textual stagnation: “I now write, after an interval of more than ten years, with a trembling hand, with a confused and horrible recollection of certain occurrences and situations, in the ordeal through which I was unconsciously passing; though with a vivid and very sharp remembrance of the main current of my story” (29). These gaps in Laura’s narrative serve as moments of opportunity for the perpetuation of the hysteric’s discourse that threatens to infect both the “town lady” to whom they are explicitly addressed and the extradiegetic reader. As spaces of potential *jouissance*, narrative blanks are also places where Laura’s narratorial pen, like Carmilla’s pointed fang, leaves a puncture in language. Like the vampire fang which throws off the linearity of clear blood lines and direct genealogy, Laura’s pen questions the link between subjects/objects and signifier/signified and reworks not only her own relationship to language but that of her readers. By consistently interjecting her narrative with exclamatory demands on the reader⁵⁶—“Judge whether I say truth” or “Listen, and wonder!”—and by implying a lack in the reader’s knowledge only to subsequently claim the reader already knows how to fill it, Laura requires her audience to participate in a questioning of not only the words of Papa and his

friends but her own (5). For example, in response to Carmilla's "unintelligible" confessions of love and longing, rather than divulge her true feelings Laura asks the reader to use his or her own life as an interpretive model: "But, I suspect, in all lives there are certain emotional scenes, those in which our passions have been most wildly and terribly roused, that are of all others the most vaguely and dimly remembered" (29). Here the subversive desires stirred up by Carmilla lurk not only in the text of Laura's narrative but are also revealed as already lying latent in the experience of a generalized readership.

The persistent demand on the reader to question her own knowledge is easily linked to a reading of *Carmilla* as hysteric contagion, since Laura's writing is able to "set in motion a kind of mental or intellectual parthenogenesis whereby one woman's knowledge spawns another's" (Heller 88). Even the structure of *Carmilla* lends itself to the interpretation of female narration as that which reconfigures textual boundaries, since the novella opens with what is ultimately revealed to be the first half of a failed frame tale.⁵⁷ This short prologue is narrated by an unnamed male who informs us that his colleague, a Dr. Hesselius, plans to include his interpretation of Laura's narrative in a forthcoming book of psychological case studies. Despite this careful distancing between the reader and the potentially infectious discourse of a psychological patient (Major 154-5), once Laura's tale begins in earnest it is never reinscribed back into the parameters of the initial frame. Consequently female narrative, just like vampirism, serves as a method of revealing the contradictory nature of desire and of reworking feminine experience as it exists within narrative (Fink 133).

Scholars often define *Carmilla's* potential productivity, in which female narrative and, consequently, female desire is kept open, as ineffectual and declare Laura so unreliable that her story is made, for all intents and purposes, powerless.⁵⁸ In contrast, I read Laura's act of writing as both a continuation of Carmilla's hysteric, questioning discourse—perhaps it is to Carmilla's own "unintelligible" words that the root of Laura's so-called unreliability can be traced?—and a way of keeping her and Carmilla's desire alive through the use of a pen that mirrors the pointed vampire fang.⁵⁹ I pull here largely from Tamar Heller's "The Vampire in

the House: Hysteria, Female Sexuality and Female Knowledge in J.S. Le Fanu's 'Carmilla'" in which she discusses *Carmilla* in terms of hysteric contagion. In her analysis of the possible confluences between the female vampire and the female hysteric, she asks "Could this narrative about sexual desire exchanged between women itself be a source of hysterical contagion, particularly if the lady who so earnestly wishes to hear the story has (like readers of the tale) to reproduce in a kind of literary voyeurism Laura's process of figuring out the meaning of Carmilla's advances?" (90).⁶⁰ This linking of the possibilities of the female voyeur, the reader's response, and the hysteric's discourse works well alongside my argument that Laura's pen functions in much the same way as the vampire's fang in that they both create spaces of ontological possibility. Laura's recuperation of Carmilla's wounding bites allows her discourse to circulate, much like Teresa's, as that which contaminates through its incorporation. Readers, like Laura's "town lady" and Teresa's "...wise and well-pierced hearts / That live & dy amidst her darts," are brought into a realm where the body in language is malleable, and where desire is predicated on a dream, a bite, and a word. ("Flaming" Ins. 49-50).

Although Carmilla's presence within the home intensifies characters' perceptions of the inefficacy of the domestic as shrine of generative femininity, Laura's narration implies that even before the fanged lady appears on the scene the domestic and the women who inhabit its boundaries always already slip through the interstices of their identical definitions as untouched and untouchable sanctuaries.⁶¹ Laura and her father (a retired soldier) live in an isolated, feudal estate in southeast Austria redolent with a medieval mustiness that already prefigures the crypt of Carmilla. The *schloss* is evocative of both a lost feudal past and the foreign other that threatens to overpower the purity of British bloodlines.⁶² Papa hopes to circumvent this problem by swigging tea, the so-called "national beverage" (little does he know his daughter will soon participate in a very different type of drinking), and speaking English (20). While the former solution is carried off with little difficulty, the latter proves more troublesome.

The multi-lingual conversations between Laura, Papa, and Laura's chaperones/governesses Madame Perrodon and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine are described as "a Babel, at which strangers used to laugh and which I shall make no attempt to reproduce in this narrative" (6). Not only are Papa's "patriotic leanings" all for naught, his and Laura's attempts to integrate the mother tongue into their conversations with foreigners cannot be successfully transcribed to paper in a comprehensive manner (20). And all this even before the "glittering" eye of the questioning Carmilla,⁶³ whose untraceable ancestry will confuse bloodlines and clear genealogy even further, officially appears (45). Despite her lack of last name for the majority of the narrative, Carmilla's self-presentation as an aristocrat should theoretically reinforce the conventions of lineage Papa strives to protect. Instead, her discourse, described by Laura as full of "infatuations" and "crazy talk," throws off the stalwart reliability of the family Bible and untainted English (42).⁶⁴ By turning to the bite and the blood that flows from it as markers of familial connection,⁶⁵ Carmilla infects language and lineage from within.

Alongside this discourse concerning the instability of language in general, names come out to play as signifiers that consistently shift and slip away from their assigned signified, even as the story's male characters rely on them to remain stable and stick. For example, although Laura is the narrator of this messy tale she does quite a good job of writing herself out of it: her name does not appear until two thirds of the story is told. Tellingly, it is Papa who outs her. Yet even in a moment that should serve to pin Laura down by finally linking her to her father through language, she is once again thrown into negation: "Her [Carmilla's] beauty was, I think, enhanced by that graceful languor that was peculiar to her. I think my father was silently contrasting her looks with mine, for he said: 'I wish my poor Laura was looking more like herself'; and he sighed" (58). In the moment of Laura's naming she is doubly displaced. She is neither Papa's darling daughter nor quite Carmilla's double, and as a result her identity floats through the fissures of her narrative.

Similarly, Carmilla's given name is broken down into a series of letters she manipulates at will and is a particularly significant instance of the ways her identity is misread but also the ways in which her experiences are altered repetitions or fractured reflections. Carmilla, in what is later revealed to be a judiciary requirement of her vampirism, masquerades as herself by utilizing various anagrams of her name. She is simultaneously Carmilla, Mircalla, Millarca, and,⁶⁶ when Papa's failing eyes misread her name inscribed on a portrait,⁶⁷ Marcia. At each new introduction, a name is given that, like her too beautiful face, "both enables and prevents recognition" (Thomas 49). For, like the larger discourse that surrounds her character, Carmilla also participates in a repetition compulsion. Her goal: to find a reciprocating companion. A woman who can participate in a *jouissance* that reworks language without denying the body as a site with the potential to alter the Symbolic and its predetermined definitions of feminine experience.

Laura's first encounter with Carmilla, which she describes as "the first occurrence in my existence," takes place in her nursery when she is but six years old and calls to mind the identically aged St. Teresa who, "mild," "milky," and "soft," "Scarse [had]...Blood enough to make / A guilty sword blush for her sake" (Le Fanu 6; "Hymn" 25-6). Carmilla's penetrating fangs, a far cry from the "guilty sword" of the doubting Moors, facilitate Laura's participation in an erotic encounter based upon a reciprocal pleasure that need not rely on its translatability into language:

I was vexed and insulted at finding myself, as I conceived, neglected, and I began to whimper, preparatory to a hearty bout of roaring; when to my surprise, 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. I looked at her with a kind of pleased wonder, and ceased whimpering. She caressed me with her hands, and lay down beside me on the bed, and drew me towards her, smiling; I felt immediately delightfully soothed, and fell asleep again. (7)

Here Carmilla reveals to Laura the discrepancy between her looking and her experience and the subsequent enclosure of that experience in Papa's discourse. For although Laura *feels* Carmilla's bite, described as two needles piercing her breast, once father and nursemaid

enter the space of the nursery there is “no sign visible that any such thing had happened” (7).⁶⁸ Laura’s account of these events to her caretakers results in their denial of her experience followed by a thinly veiled uneasiness that reveals itself in the summoning of a priest to perform an exorcism on the nursery. The nursery, which holds many beds but sleeps only one girl-child, is itself—much like Christabel’s bedchamber—evocative of the tomb. Described by Laura as “that rude, lofty, brown room, with the clumsy furniture of a fashion three hundred years old...and the scanty light entering its shadowy atmosphere through the small lattice,” the bedroom, much like the rest of the house, is temporally displaced (8-9).⁶⁹ Carmilla’s initial visit serves as a moment of ontological reconfiguration that plants the seed of the hysteric’s discourse in Laura’s consciousness. By admitting to her reader that she “knew the visit of the strange woman was *not* a dream,” despite the absence of a *sign* as evidence, Laura openly reveals the first major divergence in the narrative between male word and female looking/experience (8, original emphasis). This moment, a turning point as it were, is followed by Laura’s admission that she forgets “all my life preceding that event” (9). The result of this jarring encounter is Laura’s continued questioning of the limits of feminine ontological boundaries and the ability of the Symbolic to successfully contain them—a curiosity that challenges not only the men within the narrative but the reader as well.

Following her admittance, invited this time, into the home eight years later, Carmilla wastes no time in continuing where her caresses of Laura as a prepubescent child left off. But Carmilla’s “trembling embrace[s]” and “soft kisses” are but one aspect of a romance which also relies heavily upon the presumed safety of dreamscape and the perpetual questioning of the Father’s discourse—most pointedly how feminine bodily experience is represented (or not, as the case may be) within it (29). Carmilla initially stalls the continuation of her shared dreams with Laura in favor of a courtship rooted in the pleasures of language. For while it is certainly true that under Papa’s eye Carmilla claims “I know absolutely nothing,” when in the company of Laura her words overflow with too much possible meaning (57). While Laura declares Carmilla’s words, which abound with descriptions of emotive overflow,

“wild nonsense” that shock her “like a momentary glare of insanity,” she does not deny their possibilities for pleasure (44, 51). Like Crashaw’s poetic invocations of Teresa’s writings and the spelling bosom of Geraldine, Carmilla’s words snake beyond bodily boundaries and render the self uncanny. After a rapturous confession that startles Laura, Carmilla remarks that “in a moment I am perfectly myself,” and Laura, in response to Carmilla’s confessions of love, claims that “I don’t know myself when you look so and talk so” (41, 30). These moments of displacement allow Carmilla to create a space for her discourse of falling into/feeding off of based upon the erasure of bodily boundaries through the interstitial space of the bite:

...think me not cruel because I obey the irresistible law of my strength and weakness; if your dear heart is wounded, my wild heart bleeds with yours. In the rapture of my enormous humiliation I live in your warm life, and you shall die—die, sweetly die—into mine. I cannot help it; as I draw near to you, you, in your turn, will draw near to others, and learn the rapture of that cruelty, which yet is love... (29)

Carmilla’s use of the hysteric’s discourse, which engenders her *jouissance*, has the effect on Laura of “a logical exception, a case which throws into question the whole” of the Father’s language (Fink 113). Thus, like her physical bite, Carmilla’s fanged words penetrate the language of the Father by creating an alternative space where the desire of the two women may flourish both in body and in word, a task later taken up by Laura in her act of narration. These alternative erotic possibilities are often met by Laura with fear and confusion, but while she frequently disavows comprehension of Carmilla’s language, she does not deny her reciprocal desire for the vampire. Her bursts of emotion—“How beautiful she looked in the moonlight!”—in response to Carmilla’s confessions of love and the vampire’s “hot lips” that “travelled along my cheek in kisses” push the boundary between acceptable Victorian female friendship and queer desire (40, 30).⁷⁰

After Carmilla’s words fail to achieve their desired effect—Laura’s full comprehension of and participation in the vampire’s discourse of falling into/feeding off of—Carmilla turns once again to the space of dream. Laura’s shared dreams with Carmilla, which throw her into

the murky depths of a “strange melancholy,” are (like the vampire’s speech) fraught with images that only thinly veil their sexual implications (50):

Sometimes there came a sensation as if a hand was drawn softly along my cheek and neck. Sometimes it was as if warm lips kissed me, and longer and more lovingly as they reached my throat, but there the caress fixed itself. My heart beat faster, my breathing rose and fell rapidly and full drawn; a sobbing, that rose into a sense of strangulation, supervened, and turned into a dreadful convulsion, in which my senses left me and I became unconscious. (51-2)

Laura’s adult dreams of Carmilla override the signficatory confusion of the vampire’s speech with a somatic excess that, once experienced, infects discourse as well as the body (51).⁷¹ Inside her locked bedchamber, outside the scope of the policing male eye, Laura can explore more fully the ramifications of Carmilla’s particular breed of *jouissance*. For in sleep, Carmilla’s “paroxysms of languid adoration” are admittedly “not unwelcome” (51, 50). Of course, this is yet another opportunity for Laura to perform retroactive self-censorship—she cannot be held accountable for the sleeping body outside of rational control. Despite this, even in their so called “conscious” states, Carmilla will fall back on the safe space of dreamscape to code her discourse as acceptable. When phrases such as “I live in you; and you would die for me” become too much for Laura, Carmilla is able to simply play the wakeful dreamer: “‘Is there a chill in the air, dear?’ she said drowsily. ‘I almost shiver; have I been dreaming?’” (41). Unlike Bard Bracy’s dream, which carries the possibility of a pleasurable bite but which he employs as a way to perpetuate the dualistic categories of virgin and vampire, Laura’s dreams (both in her retroactive narration and in her immediate participation) create a space where pleasure is possible both in the physical breach of her body and in the bite of her words as they infect readers. The result of these pleasurable intrusions is not only the increased supervision of Laura’s body, which takes the form of surprise visits from Dr. Spielsberg and orders from Papa to “recollect herself,” but the revelation of Laura’s narrative as “a figurative battle for control of the signification of Carmilla” (60; Thomas 59).

Laura’s participation in Carmilla’s offer of reciprocal desire goes unnoticed by Papa until he suddenly comes to the realization that *his* Laura is not looking “like herself” (58).

Once Laura becomes unrecognizable as her father's daughter, a doctor is speedily summoned. When he arrives, Laura must try in vain to hear, "burning with curiosity," from the other end of the room as he and Papa debate her startling condition: "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" (60, 52). While the good doctor's prescription is the expected policing of Laura's body—she must not be left alone for a moment—as in "Christabel," what happens on the outskirts of authoritative, masculine discourse is far more compelling.⁷² Madame Perrodon's interpretation that Laura might suddenly and unexpectedly go into a seizure and die brings to the forefront of Laura's narrative what the men will not directly speak:⁷³ the dangerous unpredictability of the female body and, even worse, its potential participation in the pleasures of feminine *jouissance*.

In retaliation for her linguistic displacement, Laura makes sure to reveal the inefficacy of both her father's eye and his chivalric language at almost every opportunity. In fact, the excess of academic information on the vampire produced by the story's authoritative male characters and the legal documentation of Carmilla's death cloud more than clarify the true nature of the subjects they attempt to lay bare. Carmilla's execution, carried out with all the pomp and circumstance required by religion and the law, can only be accessed by Laura as secondhand information. Her narrative's defeat of what is, for all intents and purposes, paperwork, becomes radically apparent in one scene following a discussion of the succession of female deaths in the village: "She [Carmilla] looked languidly in my eyes, and passed her arm round my waist lovingly, and led me out of the room. My father was busy over some papers near the window" (36). Papa's papers, rather than reveal to him the mysteries of life and death,⁷⁴ instead conveniently cover the desires of the two women who have not only taken control over their physical bodies but also their bodies as they exist in language. When Laura does take the time to ask her father about his conversations with the doctor concerning her supposed illness, his answer—"Nothing; you must not plague me with questions"—both

reveals his fear that Laura's penetrating queries will infect his own discourse and comprises a last ditch effort to convince Laura that, in fact, nothing has happened to her at all (63).

In addition to Carmilla's attack on the Symbolic and its foreclosure of feminine pleasure, the vampire also rejects the use of that which is symbolically admissible as euphemism for feminine *jouissance*. During a pleasant afternoon of leisure, Carmilla and Laura witness the funeral procession of the Ranger's daughter—a so-called victim of the vampire. Rather than allude to her own connections with the girl in the coffin, Carmilla goes into a hysterical fit in response to the ceremonial performance. Her ire is even turned towards Laura who "joined in the hymn they were very sweetly singing": "'You pierce my ears,' said Carmilla, almost angrily, and stopping her ears with her tiny fingers. 'Besides, how can you tell that your religion and mine are the same; your forms wound me, and I hate funerals. What a fuss! Why *you* must die—*everyone* must die; and all are happier when they do. Come home'" (31, original emphasis). Like Teresa, Carmilla is pierced by religious language, but, unlike her literary predecessor, she is not content with its forms as a source or a screen for her *jouissance*. When Laura mentions that the "pretty young girl" is but one in a string of deaths occurring across the village, including "the swineherd's young wife [who] died only a week ago," Carmilla resumes her angry speeches concerning the appropriation of her pleasures reinscribed into Christian forms (31, 32): "'Well *her* funeral is over, I hope, and *her* hymn sung; and our ears shan't be tortured with that discord and jargon. It has made me nervous'" (32, original emphasis). Religious discourse, even the potentially disruptive space of the hymn, is dismissed by Carmilla who counteracts their power with a performance of bodily affect that borders on demonic possession.⁷⁵ Once this "hysteria" subsides, Carmilla simply remarks "There! That comes of strangling people with hymns!" and embraces Laura for good measure (32). In one fell swoop, both the hymn of Teresa, filled with darting arrows and wordy wounds, and the supposedly "safe" discourse of the martyr imposed on Christabel are cast aside in favor of a feeling that makes no qualms about its origins.⁷⁶ This demythicization of her desire allows Carmilla to approach Laura and their mutual pleasures

as individualized instances of feminine longing.⁷⁷ The result is not only the conflation of Laura and Carmilla—as Carmilla says they live and die into each other—but also the rupture of Laura’s sense of self from masculine constructs of language and looking.

Male characters’ attempts to overwrite female experience escalate with the inclusion of General Spielsdorf’s story concerning his own involvement with Carmilla and come to a head with the drafting of Carmilla’s death certificate. The General’s story transforms Laura’s narrative into a frame tale in its own right, especially since *her* discourse borders his on both sides.⁷⁸ Like the speech of Sir Leoline, the General’s tale is an attempt to order the experience of the vampire and her companion into comfortably containable categories. And, once again, dreamlike experiences of possibility are reinterpreted as proof of the need for the masculine Symbolic to ingest that which does not fit and expel it as binaristic, biddable, and easily manipulated. We are first introduced to the General through his jumbled letter that announces the death of his niece, Bertha, a moment about which he could not “write or talk collectedly” (12). Later, once the General is safely removed from the sight of Carmilla’s body—flesh that blocks narrative and renders those who see her speechless—he claims he can “relate everything in the order in which it occurred” (67). After describing the events leading up to Carmilla’s, or, as he knew her, Millarca’s, admittance into his home and Bertha’s confusing physical decline, he relates how he determined to find out once and for all what ailed his niece by secretly standing watch at her door: “I stood at the door, peeping through the small crevice, my sword laid on the table beside me...” (86). What he eventually sees or, more appropriately, does not see, is Carmilla. Under the General’s eye she is discernible only as unrecognizable matter that “swiftly spread itself up to the poor girl’s throat, where it swelled, in a moment, into a great palpitating mass” (87).

Both William Veeder and Elizabeth Signorotti have noted the obvious connotations of the “crevice” as a metaphorical vaginal space through which the General views the phallic bulk of Carmilla, a mass that he will subsequently attempt to destroy with a phallic weapon of his own (Veeder 205; Signorotti 615). Yet, once again, there lies the discomfiting potential

of relegating the vampire's desire to that which cannot be explained because it rests in the heart of the monstrous-feminine.⁷⁹ What of the possibility that the General is simply blind to the desires of Bertha and Carmilla, that this blindness is a void which the perception of Carmilla as palpitating, writhing, amorphous body must fill? Rather than a moment of subversive alterity, Carmilla's bite is interpreted as a recreation of the womb space that is simultaneously desired and feared "as a sort of insatiable hunger, a voracity that will swallow you whole" (Irigaray 29). What is lurking behind the smokescreen of Carmilla as phallic usurper in the defiled vaginal space of the bedchamber? Since her surplus of feminine *jouissance* need not be linked to the phallus (Fink 120), her pleasure can instead be read as indicative of an opening up of the body in ways that threaten the peering eye and stuttering speech of the General.

Certainly, Laura does not buy into this tale of feminine monstrosity. Just like the prohibitions of the priest and the doctor, the General's warning tale (like its teller) is perceived by her as completely disconnected from her individual experience. For although Laura "hear[s] [her] own symptoms...exactly described," the General's narrative is one and the same with the "momentary horrors" that she and Carmilla laugh off upon their meeting as adults (80, 26).⁸⁰ Here, and in examples that mark women as nothing more than bodies whose tangential relationships to male guardians safeguard lineage, Laura is able to vein her narrative with proof of how her own body is being used to reproduce knowledge (the legend of the oupire) while simultaneously questioning that knowledge through a sustained rejection of its import on her individual experience (the reciprocal desire, in bite and in word, between vampire and companion).⁸¹ After the General has finished his account, Laura is all too grateful to see "the beautiful face and figure of Carmilla enter the shadowy chapel" and to put what she takes to be General Spielsdorf's misconstruing narrative behind her (88). As Veeder notes, Laura is not disturbed by Carmilla so much as by how her companion is constructed within masculine language,⁸² and her desire is able to survive under its limiting interpretations through the simple tactic of not acknowledging them (207). Further, unlike her martyrlly

forbearer Christabel, Laura holds all the narrative cards. Thus, protestations that she writes with a “trembling hand” and ejaculations of horror such as “Heavens! If I had but known all!” serve as markers that read more like the products of an intentional “editorial gloss” that at times amount to self-censorship rather than paint her as repressed and unreliable, (29, 27; Major 155).

When Carmilla is revealed as a vampire by the General’s narrative and the location of her tomb exposed by the “dirty little book” of his invited guest, the Baron, Laura is quickly distanced (and distances herself?) from the formal proceedings of her friend’s execution (89). Instructed by the General that she may “behold Carmilla no more,” she is sent home, away from the chapel of the Karnsteins: “No explanation was offered to me, and it was clear that it was a secret which my father for the present determined to keep from me” (91). The policing of Laura’s body comes to a head the night before the so-called “inquisition” as two servants and Madame Perrodon sit up in her chamber and Papa and a priest peek out from an adjoining dressing room for good measure (90).⁸³ This vigil is followed by the execution of Carmilla the next day, an event available to Laura and to us exclusively through legal documentation. Yet even this supposedly infallible piece of paper is thrown into question since Laura is only able to access it as a copy of the original document.⁸⁴ In her discussion of Carmilla’s excessively violent execution, Stoddart notes that “All the vicious energies unleashed onto Carmilla’s body, and sanctioned by civil society (in the Imperial Commission’s report) must invite some questioning of what she could possibly embody that might provoke this malignant yet fearful response...” (28). The answer is, of course, the need for Carmilla’s would-be executioners to definitively destroy the presumed source of a contagion that moves the bodies of women not only beyond the policing eye of the Father but also out of his systems of representation. Carmilla’s legal death certificate is the result of her subjection to a male desire intimately linked to Lacan’s masculine or Symbolic *jouissance* and described by Cixous as the need to “reappropriate for himself that which seems able to escape him” (151). This fear-inducing ability to “escape” can be found not only in Carmilla’s linguistic

masquerade and Laura's retroactive narration of her experiences, but also in the disturbing ease with which the women's bodies are forever on the move. Carmilla's body, abject because it links the external waste of the corpse with the internal waste of an excess of blood, must be banished not only from the confines of the home but also from the tomb which could not hold her.⁸⁵

When Papa, General Spielsdorf, the Baron, and sundry legal and medical men lift the lid of Carmilla's coffin, which serves as a boudoir of indulgent excess rather than a permanent resting place, they find her, eyes wide open, floating in seven inches of blood. Like Christabel, who dreams "with open eyes," in her final moments in the narrative Carmilla returns the voyeuristic gaze of the men whose discourse suggests the wish to simultaneously sleep with her and to do her in (in this context, the two are one and the same) (Coleridge In. 280). For example, the legal documentation of her discovery and subsequent decapitation records the fondling hands of the medical men who find that the sleeping woman's "limbs were perfectly flexible, the flesh elastic" (92).⁸⁶ The wide, staring eyes of Carmilla, in addition to marking her as a witness to her staking, also admit the unsettling possibility that in her gaze, like Christabel and Geraldine who "without...light can see," she recognizes herself beyond the confines of her role as oupire, murdering and insatiably ravenous (Coleridge 171). For the men who peer into the crypt, what is even more distressing than the queer desire between Laura and Carmilla is Carmilla's ability to conceal her identity as both lesbian and vampire; this is why she must be staked in her coffin which, unlike her face, reveals her as undead. As a result, her true ontological status—corpse—must emphatically be thrust upon her and into her. In the moment of her penetration she is both penned and pinned as a "demon" and a "beast" whose defloration justifies the action even as it occurs (86, 96). Here the reader bears witness to a conflation of womb and tomb which, as Case argues, keeps the heterosexual mother at the center of the picture (14). For while the vampire, as we learn from the Baron, reproduces "according to an ascertained and ghostly law," it is no coincidence that he reveals the details of the female vampire's self-determined sexuality immediately after he

recounts the narrative of the nobleman from whose notebooks they discover the location of Carmilla's grave: "A passionate and honored lover of the beautiful Mircalla," he is "plunged into an inconsolable grief following her death" (95).⁸⁷ That the previously quoted sentence on vampiric reproduction immediately follows the description of the male lover's grief reveals that the true loss is that of a womb, not a woman. The excess of blood which Carmilla both ingests and sleeps within is indicative not only of her exorbitant indulgences but also her waste of bodily fluids that are not put to use in keeping traditional lineage alive.

Once Carmilla's death certificate is delivered into the hands of Laura she too is quickly removed from the space of the home, although her banishment is only for a year while Carmilla must be exiled forever. Yet despite the "tour through Italy," an attempt to separate Laura from the now contaminated domestic, her narrative performs the task of keeping Carmilla undead. Not only is the desire between the two women kept open and in flux, the text itself is an appropriation of Carmilla's long lost love bite. For if *Carmilla* acts as a reconstruction of the longed for body of the lover, Laura's pointed pen, her biting words, recuperate the vampire's mouth from the stereotype of the gaping maw of insatiable hunger, a void in time and space. Laura's mouth is full of words and women, and her writing works to "destabilize or to remove all of [the] elaborate protection" afforded by the legal documentation of Carmilla's death certificate, General Spielsdorf's attempted reinscription of Carmilla into masculine narrative, and, most importantly, the unfinished frame begun by Dr. Hesselius' correspondent (Major 155). In the eerie final sentence of the novella, Carmilla's body gains a palpable presence as Laura imagines her appearance at the drawing room door: "It was long before the terror of recent events subsided; and to this hour the image of Carmilla returns to memory with ambiguous alternations—sometimes the playful, languid, beautiful girl; sometimes the writhing fiend I saw in the ruined church; and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing-room door" (96).

The fragmentary status of *Carmilla*, unlike "Christabel," does not necessarily block the reader's narrative comprehension, nevertheless both texts introduce the possibility that

their vampiress' particular breed of contagion will continue on uninhibited.⁸⁸ As I move onwards to a discussion of the filmic adaptations of *Carmilla*, not all of which address the novella specifically but which unanimously include the trope of the two she's, I look to the ways these films take up the device of the unfinished or open ending that allows feminine desire to remain accessible and fluid. These narratives are also able to capitalize on image and action in a way that textual narrative cannot. So while the previous sections have focused on how the female body is able to enact transformation through a merger with the written word, my analysis of the films will explore the tricky nature of the represented image. What happens to the body—the female body, the vampiric body—once it is taken off the page and put on the screen? How does the depiction of the vampire's and her companion's *jouissance* play out when the female vampire, as many critics of the lesbian vampire film have noted, is interpreted as body only, ripe for the longing gaze of avid voyeurs?⁸⁹

Playing off the Page: *Carmilla* on Film

The phallogocentric discourse in *Carmilla* that transforms its titular character into a phallic blob, amorphous and suffocating, is also present in the novella's filmic adaptations. Since 1932,⁹⁰ these reinterpretations have endeavored to capture in image what was unrepresentable in the source material—feminine *jouissance*, the female vampire's body, the bite. Whether a film attempts to reappropriate Carmilla's bite into a representable cultural framework, as in Hammer's *The Vampire Lovers* (1970), or reworks that very framework to create a space for the vampire's discourse to hold sway, as in Jess Franco's *Vampyros Lesbos* (1971), the problem of how to portray the female vampire and the actions she participates in on screen remains a constant. The issue of representability, of the parameters the Carmilla character must work within and struggle to subvert, is the overarching thematic thread that holds this body of work together. Once we move beyond the printed page and onto the silver screen, the issue of representation becomes infinitely more prominent, infinitely more debilitating to the one being depicted. To muddle the situation further, because filmic adaptations of *Carmilla* come along after Stoker's *Dracula* has irrevocably influenced

common perceptions of the vampire, the films' characterizations of vampirism in general and the female vampire in particular tend to pull from Stoker in addition to the earlier source tale. As a result, the associations surrounding the figure of Carmilla on film grow exponentially, since they do not stick to a single narrative. Not only does she emerge in full force at a moment when the growing feminist movement and the gay/lesbian movement is gaining public recognition,⁹¹ she also carries the burden of a back-story (that of the Count) which is not her own. With this in mind, even before the opening credits begin to roll, how is the Carmilla character bound by our expectations of her? How does she work to get around them? The cultural weight of vampirism is the monstrous-feminine, an abyss which simultaneously functions as an Oedipal return to the womb and a throwing off of the abject which "shores up, in the individual, the fantasy of the loss in which he is engulfed or becomes inebriated, for want of the ability to name an object of desire" (Kristeva 20). Here the female vampire's body becomes a convenient stand-in for what threatens the self as whole and wholly within the Symbolic, and her staking, which more often than not acts as crutch rather than solution, is an effort to deceive the viewer into believing her to be contained, the stable object of an exclusively male desire whose destruction reassures the perpetrators of their own virility.

Carmilla film adaptations have inspired a surprisingly small amount of critical analysis. Certainly, this is not for lack of material. The 1960s and 70s practically overflow with *Carmilla* films. Nevertheless, theorists who incorporate the queer vampire into their work, while recognizing the subversive potential inherent in the figure of the lesbian vampire, tend to write off Carmilla on the silver screen as nothing more than an excuse for male titillation. Auerbach declares *Vampire Lovers* to be merely an opportunity to parade about an abundance of "interchangeable stuffed breasts," and Case grumbles that in Harry Kümel's 1971 *Daughters of Darkness* the lesbian vampiress is portrayed as an "oozing, French dessert cheese" (Auerbach, *Our Vampires* 58; Case 15). While Andrea Weiss recognizes the lesbian vampire as a destabilizing force that questions heteronormative cultural order,⁹²

neither she nor Bonnie Zimmerman appear to be as concerned with the image of the lesbian vampire so much as the lesbian in general. For this reason, images of violence and nudity, which I read as productive tools for the female vampire, are interpreted by them as direct attacks against lesbian subjectivity; Zimmerman even goes so far as to argue the bite should go on behind closed doors.⁹³ By claiming that “the function of the lesbian vampire is to contain attraction between women within the...boundaries of sexual violence,” Zimmerman does not consider the ways in which some of the films she discusses, including the dreaded exploitation flick, complicate themes of violence and nudity even as they participate in a voyeuristic framework that objectifies female subjects (381-2). For example, Franco’s focus on issues of spectatorship, performativity, and violence in his lesbian vampire films betrays a self-conscious knowledge of the cultural scripts surrounding the female vampire that his work both operates within and subverts.⁹⁴

Inextricably tied to feminist film critics’ consideration of the lesbian vampire on film is the character of the male voyeur—a sort of ever-present bogeyman who is both the imagined, slobbering cinemagoer and the active onlookers within the film. His presence, when deployed by Weiss and Zimmerman, provides sufficient evidence to sustain an argument that on film the lesbian vampire is ultimately transformed into a vehicle for “the pleasures of the male spectator” who “cannot create an alternative model” (Weiss 28; Zimmerman 381). With this in mind, a positive portrayal of lesbianism and a minimum of voyeurism is what counts for these critics when it comes to the lesbian vampire film. What results is a hierarchical categorization of the films based upon a carefully crafted formula of acceptability, and, in this club, only a very specific type of fanged lady fits the bill. As David Baker succinctly argues: “...these critics are *mesmerized* by the lesbian vampire. But it’s a highly circumscribed lesbian vampire who has to be—like the Countess Báthory of *Daughters of Darkness*—*well-mannered* and *proper*, and the lesbian vampire has to *succeed*” (557, original emphasis). Also at issue in this system of classification is the pitting against each other of low budget horror/exploitation films (viewed negatively) and European art house

cinema (viewed positively).⁹⁵ For Weiss, what she perceives as the open-endedness of these narratives gives them their promise, yet the narrative ambiguity that she seeks can be found in the very films she casts off as unproductive and pornographic. Both Franco and Jean Rollin leave their female vampires alive, and it is exactly this sort of complication, the twisting of what Weiss defines as the prototypical structure of the lesbian vampire film, that warrants a reconsideration of their often neglected work. Even as these films revel in violent excess and provocative displays of nudity, they also explore how these conventions can be manipulated by the figure of the lesbian vampire, and how her bite can open up new avenues of possibility rather than close them off.

In this section, I recuperate and revisit films that explore the possibilities—and, at times, the lack of possibility—available to the female vampire and her companion once they appear on screen. While not all of the films I discuss reference *Carmilla* directly, they all deploy the destructive, fanged, desiring female vampire who renders hegemonic social structures and the spaces in which they occur uncanny. Often, the most overt reference to the source text will be an invocation of the Karnstein name or a derivative of it, for example Karlstein, Karstein, etc. Like her excess of first names, this bastardization of *Carmilla*'s family name, one she herself is but little attached to, acts as a continuation of *Carmilla*'s own crooked line of literary lineage from Teresa to Geraldine to a plethora of fanged ladies in black capes on silver screens.⁹⁶ Perhaps the most pressing question when reexamining this collective body of work is why *Carmilla*'s story continues to be reproduced with such tenacity. What is it about this inconclusive, desiring narrative that demands its perpetual reworking and reconfiguration in a loop of fractured reflections that, though they all invite a similar sort of reading, are different enough from each other to warrant new possibilities each time *Carmilla* and her companion are called forth?

Abandoning the idea that *Carmilla* adaptations all follow a “linear plot progression that ends with [the female vampire’s] destruction and natural order reaffirmed,” I look instead to the ways these films keep the feminine desire they depict open and subject to productive

change through their cultural repetition if nothing else (Weiss 27).⁹⁷ For if, as Laura Mulvey argues, phallogentrism “depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world,” then the inconclusiveness of these narratives, the failure at representing the satisfactorily castrated woman, means the desire of both vampire and companion manages to continue reaching, grasping, searching for a mode of representability that lies outside of the hegemonic parameters of “order and meaning” (803). In short, if the female vampire did not somehow manage to escape celluloid representation, why the need for her repeated on-screen appearances? Like the portrait of Carmilla and the hymns of Teresa, the films act as multiples of the bodies of vampire and companion, bodies that still escape signification despite numerous attempts to depict them as static and stable. Even more provocative in this context are the films in which the female vampire is not destroyed by story’s end. Franco’s *Female Vampire* (1975), for instance, concludes with the image of its Carmilla character, Irina, walking solitary through the woods. She is a vampire who, having borne the brunt of the voyeuristic male gaze, manages to survive. The first film I explore, unfortunately, does not ultimately allow things to go so well for the female vampire. But despite its unsatisfactory conclusion and dismissal by critics, *Vampire Lovers*, the first of Hammer’s Karnstein trilogy,⁹⁸ acts as an example of how Carmilla/Marcilla must barter her way through what is expected of her in order to obtain her own pleasure. What happens, for example, when the Laura character really is as obtuse as her male guardians want her to be? While the trilogy, with its mobs of angry villagers and plethora of heaving bosoms, operates within a sexist framework dominated by a phallogocentric Symbolic and a patriarchal system of desire, Carmilla still manages to get her kicks.

Other than the naked romps that seem to characterize Hammer films in general, one of the biggest complaints concerning the Karnstein trilogy is the presence of an “on screen male voyeur” (Weiss 29).⁹⁹ In *Vampire Lovers*, he is credited only as the Man in Black, and the possibility that Carmilla and her mother serve him, along with his devious laughter as he watches Carmilla bite peasants and noblewomen alike, serves as proof positive for critics that

Carmilla lacks any sort of independent agency. In this interpretation, she is a performer for the male gaze both on and off the screen, and her bite is a tease, a ploy to elicit a rise out of male viewers. Yet there is a danger here of becoming so entangled in the gaze of the so-called male voyeur that theorists risk missing the active and desiring gaze of Carmilla. This hasty dismissal puts little stock in the possibility that Carmilla's actions might betray a resistance to the structures in which she is enmeshed, both as female object of exchange and as vampire. After all, the voice of General Spielsdorf calling Carmilla's name following her disappearance after the death of his niece is closely echoed by the eerie, disembodied voices that beckon her from the family graveyard. Here not only is the ancestral home uncanny, but Carmilla's own crypt is also tainted through its association with lineage and cultural expectation. Perhaps this retroactive binding from both ends betrays the fact that Le Fanu's *Carmilla* was scarier than some would like to admit. To deviate from the path that the men within the film and feminist critics outside of it delimit for her—a rapist who violates and destroys her victim—would be to acknowledge that Carmilla manages to accomplish something outside the scope of the film's accepted Symbolic (Zimmerman 382).¹⁰⁰

Vampire Lovers follows first-hand Carmilla's interactions with the friend who in the novella is accessible only as corpse: Bertha. Here, her name is Laura (again, the multiplicity of names and bodies renders direct lines of literary descent impossible) and, surprising when one considers the expected exclusion of feminine desire, Carmilla's advances are only unwelcome in dreams. In her waking hours, to the chagrin of Uncle Spielsdorf and fiancé Carl, Laura openly revels in Carmilla's company and her affections. The depiction of desire between Carmilla and Laura within the film's reality proves that the *jouissance* of vampire and companion has come tantalizingly close to opening the gate of a Symbolic that could write their desire. The preventative cure? Dreams of Carmilla as the phallic blob, here represented by a large, faux fur blanket that both arouses and smothers Laura (we are meant to believe it is a giant, cat-like creature). Carmilla as throw rug becomes a safeguard against Laura's reciprocation of a desire that a masculine Symbolic is not ready to admit. It is much too risky

to concede that one or both women *must* die because they desire one another. As a result, Laura is crushed not by Carmilla's love but by masculine representations of it within a boundaried Symbolic.

Once Carmilla departs from Laura's home she tries her seductions on Laura's good friend, Emma (here she is the Laura character). Although Carmilla does her best with Emma, claiming that she wants her "to love me, for all your life" and making impassioned requests to "Hold me. Hold me tight," her come-ons, so effective in the novella, are met only with wide eyed, guileless looks and nervous twittering. Is it any wonder, then, that after a few weeks of reading romance novels aloud ("This is a silly book.") and listening to Emma wax poetic on the healing properties of the sun ("You can feel the warmth penetrating. It's like life." To which Carmilla responds, "You talk such nonsense sometimes.") our bored vampiress turns instead to the intellectual arms of Mademoiselle Perrodon, Emma's young, attractive governess? Carmilla's seduction of Emma's governess proves patriarchal constructions of women are unsatisfactory to the vampire (Emma fully invests herself in hegemonic romantic stereotypes). That Carmilla is looking for a companion, not an unresisting body to do with what she will,¹⁰¹ becomes clear if one looks beyond the women's "blown-up breasts" and the gaze of the Man in Black (Auerbach, *Our Vampires* 56). By the narrative's close, beset by nosy doctors and worried fathers, Carmilla is forced to dispatch with Mademoiselle Perrodon who, ironically, was herself under suspicion of being the vampire draining Emma's life. Although Emma (who has been forced from her sickbed), is initially reassured by Carmilla's claim that "You're coming with me, to my home..." when she sees Carmilla kill her governess she rejects the vampire completely. It is unclear whether Carmilla's vampirism in and of itself has put Emma off, or if it is the sight of Carmilla finally succumbing to what masculine narrative requires. The pleasure of one demands the demise of another (Cixous 150; Weiss 31). In the face of this abandonment, especially after Carmilla has been forced to leave Mlle. Perrodon for Emma (after all, the screen can only handle so many deviant female characters at any given time), the vampire is at a loss. The only thing she can do is dematerialize and

make the lonely walk back to her coffin, the eerie voices in the graveyard calling out to her all the while.

If in the Hammer productions the cultural weight of a phallogocentric vampirism bubbles just below the surface and forces the vampire to play at the edges of general expectation and textual authenticity—the narrative processes that, like the language of Papa and his male collaborators in *Carmilla*, work to close in on her agency—in the films of Spanish cult horror director Jess Franco this weight becomes the driving force of the entire narrative. As a sexploitation director, Franco is often shoved aside for reasons of purported sexism and bad taste and is “characterized by his ‘notorious’ use of the zoom lens, his sometimes frantic dolly work and what Cathal Tohill and Peter Toombs call an underlying jazz rhythm or beat” (Hawkins 194). In his 1971 feature *Vampyros Lesbos*, vampirism is a literal performance in and of itself, and the female vampire must either bear her cultural weight or be crushed by it. Nadine, the *Carmilla* of this particular incarnation of the tale, is introduced to the audience through her performance at a nightclub where, playing a vampire, she makes love to herself in a mirror before mock-biting an unresisting partner who plays a mannequin. This introduction sets the stage for Nadine’s characterization throughout the film as not only a vampire in practice but a vampire in performance, and, since she was first bitten by Dracula and subsequently became his bride, she has studied at the fangs of the master. Rather than perpetuate a vampirism based on reciprocity and a playful subversion of linguistic and ontological boundaries, to be a vampire here is to have power over the body and soul of another. As Nadine tells her manservant, Morpho: “But many [men] have become my slaves. Many women, too...I have bewitched them. They have lost their own willpower. I have become them. But then I met Linda. And now I am under her power.” This speech reveals the rules of the lineage that firmly places Nadine within patriarchal constructions of the monstrous-feminine, effectively erasing her own desire as it functions within her status as female vampire (Creed, *Horror* 63). In this economy, all partners are slaves, and a role

change is only possible once Nadine locates someone who can take her place as top vampire on the hierarchical food chain.

Nevertheless, Nadine manages to imbue her restrictive performances, both on and off the literal stage, with commentary on the fixing of her body as object of desire. These little rebellions, intimately connected to and yet subverting the way her body is expected to perform, utilize that very body to collapse the boundary between the untouchable (and therefore safe) space of spectacle and the reality of her proscribed desires. The opening shot of the film is but the first example of Nadine's ongoing commentary on the ways in which her body is preconstructed in the cultural discourse surrounding the female vampire. We are presented with Nadine, flat on her back, naked save for her scarf. Her arms are stretched above her head, and her hands almost touch the camera which she makes love to much in the same way she does the mirror at the nightclub. Here, she performs as object of the viewer's desire: available, destructive (but containable), and insatiable. Later, in an almost identical scene, Nadine's limiting, one-note performance is complicated when it appears as if the vampire holds the camera above her body and films herself. For a moment, Nadine gains narratorial agency since she controls what the viewer can and cannot see, and the validity of her earlier, seemingly passive, performance is retrospectively called into question. Nadine complicates her role as femme fatale fantasy again when she reveals herself as the bride of Dracula. While her connection to the prototypical male vampire enmeshes Nadine in structures of exchange and commodification, she works to unveil the underlying assumptions of those structures in order to expose their vulnerability. By revealing that Dracula claimed she was "the woman who made his life worth living" and that he became "addicted to her," she hints at her knowledge of the way her body is constructed and expected to perform within a phallogocentric discourse, thus opening avenues for conscious subversions of those structures. Her trademark red scarf¹⁰²—which she keeps on even when everything else is off—performs the part of slashed throat, female wound, vampire mouth, and the weeping puncture of the bite. This scarf also brings to mind Geraldine's "mark of my shame...seal of

my sorrow” and the wordy wounds of St. Teresa (Coleridge In. 258). As an extension of her body, it often rests provocatively between her legs as stand in for a horrifying gash which, if we are in on her joke, exists only in the viewer’s imagination. Consequently, Nadine’s self-conscious shadow-play on the weight of not only vampirism but female desire performs its own kind of hysteric’s discourse, one that urges us to reconsider not only the role she performs but the extent of her complicity in it.

Nadine’s island estate acts as an extension of the nightclub in which she works (a space with its own tradition of voyeurism and exploitation) and is characterized in the film by repeated images of a scorpion scuttling across the pool deck, white butterflies beating against nets, and blood dripping rhythmically down windows. Once Nadine manages to lure Linda (the Laura character) here, her seductions are delivered in a flat monotone that betrays her boredom with the entire process. When Linda, for whom this is all fresh and unexpected, remarks upon her uncanny feeling of having been with Nadine on the island previously, the vampire’s response, “I have the same feeling. It happens quite often,” has the potential to reveal that Nadine is bound here, just as she is in her paid performances, by the viewers’ expectations of her. Consequently, her seduction of Linda acts as the double of her nightclub spectacular, and Linda’s lines about having seen Nadine before are as expected as the robotic movements of Nadine’s professional partner whom the vampire moves at will.

Although Nadine transforms Linda into a vampire after identifying herself as Linda’s love slave—her desire can only be openly expressed within a Sadeian dynamic of subduer and subjugated—the newly transformed vampiress deviates from her role as Nadine’s heir apparent by stabbing her maker in the eye. The rupture of vision rather than the stake through the heart is the means of destroying Nadine’s tie to vampirism as alienated performance, and Linda, who claims she does not want to belong to Nadine or to be like her, offers a possible alternative to her predecessor’s hierarchy. The viewer is left with the hope that Linda will perhaps allow a different kind of vampirism to hold sway, one based upon exchange and pleasurable subversion rather than solitude and domination. In a monologue

that echoes Laura's obsessive remembrance of Carmilla, Linda makes it quite clear that, though she has murdered Nadine, the legacy the vampire was made to bear now weighs upon her: "No. It was not a dream. Even though there might not be an explanation for it. The horror of these days will pass but the memories will always stay vivid. As long as I live." The last image we are left with is of a red kite, Nadine's double instead of the stereotypical bat, fluttering in the wind and, finally, escaping the filmic frame which can no longer contain it. In this film, the desires of the female vampire, weighted down by a legacy of domination, are impossible in the staged space of the screen. Only once her body and its metaphorical double have left the confines of the image is she able to breathe and to bite freely.

Intertwined within this larger discourse on the representation of feminine desire—what is representable, what is not, and what can be filmed into submission—are recurring tropes or tactics that attempt to foreclose the vampiress' possibility for subversion while simultaneously revealing their own weakness. From the deployment of Carmilla as the virgin bride's hysterical double in Vicente Aranda's *The Blood Spattered Bride* (1972) and Roger Vadim's *Blood and Roses* (1960) to the screen that goes black in the moment of the bite in Camillo Mastrocinque's *Terror in the Crypt* (1964), the adaptations are overrun with anxiety over the possibility that the stability of their narratives will be tainted by the presence of the vampire and her companion. Consequently, just as the vampire must be evacuated from masculine discourse in *Carmilla*, in the films she is banished for fear she will explode both the film itself and the hegemonic cultural norms that hold it together. For example, the women in *Blood Spattered* and *Blood and Roses* tread the nervous line between virgin bride and vampire seductress. And while both films are structured around a romantic triangle where the vampire and the husband battle for the affections of the bride, rather than play the parts of the devoted wife and the jealous other woman, the twining (and twinning) of the two women collapses these limiting roles. As in *Carmilla* and "Christabel," the structures of the domestic are tidily dismantled by the presence and actions of the female vampire and her companion. As the bride's bloody double, Lady Death dressed in black, Carmilla embodies the nervous

connectivity between the wedding night and the unveiling in the coffin. As the unnamed husband in *Blood Spattered* tells Susan, his newly initiated wife, “You lived through your wedding night.”¹⁰³ Here the cultural expectations regarding virgins’ fear of penetration and the association of that penetration with a metaphorical murder become apparent as the link between wooden stake and rigid penis is made explicit. Carmilla’s role as the bride’s inversion not only questions the structures that hold hegemonic social relations together but reveals the truth that until they are driven through neither herself nor the bride is representable in any sort of satisfactory sense. Yet, as these films and their source material have shown, neither the bride nor the vampire, even when penetrated by a husband or pierced in a coffin, are quite so easy to fix. As in “Christabel,” the nuptial chamber is easily transformed to the moldering crypt, dank and musty.

Blood and Roses focuses on the interrelations between Carmilla, her cousin Leopoldo (the man we are meant to believe Carmilla is madly in love with), and Leopoldo’s fiancée Georgia, and how these relations are affected when Carmilla psychically merges with her vampire ancestress Millarca. The tropes of the typical romantic triangle, in particular female jealousy, become tools for Carmilla/Millarca’s strategic use of the hysteric’s discourse which both highlights and disguises feminine desire when she first narrates the possibility of her ancestress’ return and, later in the film, when she becomes one with Millarca. Here, the vampiric Millarca is deployed not so much as a queer lover who reconfigures ontological boundaries but as a way to uncover the instability of the ancestral home and the relations that take place within it. Carmilla, in performances that reveal how her body no longer quite fits in an orderly Symbolic and in her merger with Millarca, perpetuates the discourse of the hysteric—she “gets off on knowledge” by “maintain[ing] the primacy of subjective division, the contradiction between conscious and unconscious desire and...the conflictual, or self-contradictory, nature of desire itself” (Fink 133).

At a family dinner party early on in the film, Carmilla brings the long gone Millarca into the present tense by narrating her return from the grave and casts the present-day Georgia in

the archaic role of the bride. Georgia, who knows from the family legend that Millarca was suspected of killing her unfaithful fiancé's brides after her death, immediately accepts her role as one among them by claiming, "She'll kill me like everybody else." Instead of sticking to the standard cultural narrative—Millarca is, after all, *supposed* to kill the bride—Carmilla deviates from the script: "Kill you? You're so sweet, so young, so confident. Tonight, she might come back for Leopoldo." By narrating this alterative tale, Carmilla employs the legend of Millarca, a woman with whom she intentionally doubles herself, as a way to reveal how her body does not fit within the legend of the jealous, murdering vampire woman or within the heterosexual domestic. Despite Georgia running to her fiancé and exclaiming "Leopoldo is mine!" in response to Carmilla's assertion of desire, this invocation of female jealousy over the contested male is not quite so convincing when it follows Georgia's tentative "Would Millarca like me if she came back?" This potential acceptance of Carmilla's alternative narrative, that Carmilla/Millarca has not come to kill but to love, is supported by Georgia's introduction of Carmilla at her engagement party, an event to which Carmilla comes dressed as Millarca: "In the past she used to devour the brides of the Karnstein, but tonight she's only come to kiss me." In this case, the weight of Millarca's destructive, jealous vampirism is at least momentarily cast off in favor of a reciprocal, if deviant, desire.

Leopoldo, in order to uphold his role as faithful, doting husband-to-be, also participates in a necessary evasion of the truth of his desire for Carmilla. For example, when Carmilla falls asleep on Georgia's bed, he and the bride-to-be indulgently carry Carmilla to her room and undress her as if she were their child. While Georgia sees Leopoldo's longing gaze as she undresses his childhood friend, to voice this observation would be to reveal that their masquerade, which allows desire to circulate only between "mother" and "father," has failed. Despite Carmilla's unconscious state (at this point she has psychically merged with the spirit of her ancestress Millarca), her body nevertheless actively reveals Leopoldo's incestuous desire (as mock father and as cousin) and breaks down the supposed stability of the hegemonic family unit. This situation, just as when Leopoldo nonchalantly invites Carmilla

on his and Georgia's honeymoon, forces Leopoldo to perform a deliberate disavowal of Carmilla as object of his desire. What Leopoldo and Georgia openly refuse to acknowledge instead becomes the source of nervous gossip as guests and the household staff speculate over what's to become of Carmilla (more importantly, Carmilla's body) once the house is occupied by the husband and wife. The most common suggestion is to simply get rid of her: "Marry her off."¹⁰⁴ Living on the edges of the standard family unit, Carmilla carries the potential to question hegemonic social relations, and the attempts by Leopoldo to de-sex her by treating her like a child, alongside the anxious murmurings of guests concerning her blatant sexuality, give further credence to her disassembling power rather than box her within the comfortably pre-scripted roles of asexual child or home-wrecker. By demanding that Georgia and Leopoldo openly recognize her perceived threat to the domestic, Carmilla/Millarca demonstrates how fragile the soon to be unit of two really is, for it cannot function while she remains.

Perhaps what is even more telling than the myriad attempts to represent the female vampire, her companion, and their *jouissance* is when nothing can be represented at all. Feminine *jouissance*, "incommensurate, unquantifiable, disproportionate, and indecent," forces these filmic adaptations to take recourse to abstraction when characters seem, for lack of a better phrase, to get away from them (Fink 122). The most obvious of these flights from the burden of representation is the screen that goes black. Not only does this tactic shield the viewer from feminine desire, it also, as Creed argues, works as a "confrontation with death" that "gives rise to a terror of self disintegration, of losing one's self or ego" (*Horror* 56). Once again, this blackness calls to mind the "horror of nothing to see," the dark, cosmic hole of the female sex.¹⁰⁵ Franco, who was certainly familiar with this convention, turns it on its head when he performs it by zooming in on the vampire Irina's pubic hair in *Female Vampire*. After the zoom out that follows this provocative image, Irina walks so close to the camera that she physically bumps into it, and, for an instant, she is simultaneously Countess Irina Karlstein and Lina Romay, the actress who portrays her. In this moment, Mulvey's three cinematic

looks,¹⁰⁶ necessary in order for cinema to achieve “reality, obviousness and truth” are collapsed, and Franco’s attention to Irina and her vagina as a sort of vacuum or black hole, a performative weight she must bear, blurs the boundary between filmic reality and the reality of the viewer if only for the space of the action which serves as its catalyst (815). By transforming the black screen of nothing-to-see to the palpable reality of Irina’s/Lina’s body—one that we become intimately familiar with over the course of the film—Franco is able to recuperate and rework the construction of the female body as intangible and unsignifiable, more dream than feeling flesh.

Not only does the screen go black in the moment of the bite in Mastrocinque’s *Terror in the Crypt*—the staking, in contrast, can always be shown with ease—the film also falls back on exterior shots of the home to rescue or recuperate the unrepresentable. When Laura returns to her room following a scene in which she bites her new friend Ljuba (the Carmilla character here) on the neck, she discovers her bed stained with blood. Immediately, we are whisked away by a shot of the exterior of the home, lighting flashing in the background. It would not do well to linger too long in the inverted bedchamber or to think too closely about whose blood is in the bed, much less how it has been produced. Here the home is meant to stand in for the concrete weight of recorded lineage, its supposed solidity a bulwark against the subversive pleasures of the bite. Yet the vampire’s presence within the home, the transformation of the companion’s bedchamber to the crypt where a non-reproductive desire is birthed, serves to negate the castle’s potency as recuperative image. In *Terror*, even Laura’s father recognizes the problem is at home when he, following the sight of the bite on Ljuba’s neck, insists “I must take [Laura] away.” This fear of what lurks within the walls of the domestic is confirmed when, at the climax of the film, exterior shots of the ruined village of Karnstein are superimposed on the castle’s exterior. The infection is complete: like the vampire and her companion, ruined crypt and the ancestral estate mirror each other, and recourse to the latter’s image only reveals its instability.

In contrast to the blank screen that insists there is nothing to see, portraits of Carmilla act as potential distancing devices that, since they can be contemplated in supposed safety, carry the pipe dream of being able to once and for all define the vampire and her desires. But, more often than not, rather than acting as a buffer between the all too dangerous body of the vampire and the one who looks upon her, portraits become sources of latent contagion with the power to disrupt narrative structure. For example, in *Vampire Lovers*, once Emma's father looks upon Carmilla's portrait he is able to claim "Only now can I see the evil in her eyes," implying that to view Carmilla's painted image is to penetrate her true nature, yet the fact remains that in this film Carmilla's portrait is still too dangerous to be allowed in the home. Instead, it is banished to the decrepit Castle Karnstein, safely removed from impressionable female (and male) eyes (an ironic exchange of a mouthful for an eyeful). A similar situation occurs in *Blood Spattered* in which all of the family portraits of women are banished to the cellar following an attempt made by the male protagonist's unnamed grandmother to poison her husband—although her body is long gone, her image still carries the potential to wound. This does not stop Susan (the Laura character) and Carol (the twelve year old daughter of the house's caretakers) from descending into the dark depths of the home to have a look. As Susan's flashlight pans over the life-sized portrait of Carmilla it lands on Carol's face, which she has inserted into the hole where the painted vampire's once was. Carol's response to Susan's surprise? "It's me!" Here, Carmilla is able to become a floating signifier available for anyone to occupy, and the tension over the portrait as a fixed representation, a safe stand in for the unruly body of the vampire, comes close to snapping. As a result, the portrait serves as a catalyst for female characters to question the boundaries between subjects and to emphasize their multiplicity, the fluidity of their identities, and to collapse spatio-temporal boundaries.¹⁰⁷

In text, the vampire and her companion actively rework the relationship between body and word, a task which leaves the narratives they both live within and embody open to productive possibility. On screen, questioning the ways the body is expected to perform,

renegotiating how the body is supposed to act, is what ensures a lack of narrative closure which, as the decades progress, has become more and more nebulous. As was previously mentioned, films in which the vampiress is not staked are perhaps the most open-ended of all, since there is no return to normative cultural order, unconvincing though it may be in the films that stake her. Even *Blood Spattered*, which ends with Susan's husband murdering Carmilla and Susan lying entwined together in the coffin, tells us that "They'll come back. They cannot die." This prediction ultimately comes true if one considers the subsequent reinterpretations of the Carmilla story as reincarnations of not only the murdered women but also of all the vampire women who have come before. In *Blood and Roses*, though Carmilla is impaled on a fallen tree branch, "For those who believe in vampires, the legend didn't die with Millarca. It continues with the last female Karnstein: Georgia." And in Jean Rollin's *Living Dead Girl* (1982) the film cuts off on the agonized screams of the vampire Catherine as she comes to the realization that she has killed her best friend. These endings, rather than creating a feedback loop that always finds itself where it began, pick up and discard elements of the Carmillas who have come before in order to create something unique in each repetition and to ensure that the desire of the vampire and her companion remains open and subject to change. As closure becomes more and more impossible, the desiring vampire and her companion come closer and closer to escaping a language and an image that binds them, for an open end admits that, by stake or by stare, they cannot be finished.

Conclusion: Shared Bodies, Shared Words

This thesis has attempted to create a space where the vampire can have her say by tracing the webs of desire constructed by the women who bite, their escape from confinement by word and by image, and their creation of a discourse that, while positing the body as a site of linguistic transformation, also revels in the delights of that which is Symbolically indigestible. Like Lacan's cross-cap, eerily reminiscent of the vagina—the "sphere that is slashed at a certain spot...that little anomalous rent in its 'surface' [that] changes all of its properties"—the masquerades of the female vampire and her companion are at times

“susceptible to symbolic inscription” but are nevertheless “impossible since [they] cannot be visualized or constructed” (Fink 124-5). The cross-cap, like feminine *jouissance*, can be spoken, but only in an abstracted, distanced discourse perpetually fascinated and frustrated by that which does not fit. And yet, the *jouissance* of these women still manages to sneak through its supposed impossibility and infect the containing narrative frame, to exist in representation as wound, as word, as piercing bite. By tooth or by pen, feminine desire slithers in.

While the films discussed in the previous section certainly open up possibilities for a Carmilla beyond the 19th century, on-screen adaptations of the Carmilla figure and her companion fall into the trap of comedy or farce after 1982’s *Living Dead Girl*. Films of the new millennium give rise to the sneaking suspicion that the bridal veil and the coffin lid have fallen down for good over the desiring faces of the vampire and her companion.¹⁰⁸ Take, for example, Phil Claydon’s 2009 British slacker comedy *Lesbian Vampire Killers*, where Carmilla is a body with no real danger attached to her since she does not participate in her predecessors’ generous reciprocity. Even more dire, her performance is absent of the self-conscious subversions others were able to sneak through. Instead, she and the women she infects are opportunities for a bit of a fondle followed by a stake through the chest, an action that results in their bodies’ eruption into a viscous white goo. This and other failed representations of the vampire and her companion lead me to my final question: Is Carmilla relevant to readers and viewers today?

In the past year, two reinterpretations of *Carmilla* have appeared to take up where Rollin left off and to answer my nervous query in the affirmative. They are Mark Devendorf’s and Mauricio Chernovetzky’s film *The Curse of Styria*,¹⁰⁹ and the YouTube series *Carmilla* directed by Spencer Maybee. In neither of these adaptations is the anxiety surrounding Carmilla’s sexuality a major factor, but the desire between the vampire and her companion remains (in Maybee’s *Carmilla*, Laura’s and Carmilla’s lesbianism is not directly addressed at all). Instead, female agency and the uncontrollable female body are the focus of attention.

Both are also much more highly invested in the maternal than either their filmic predecessors or their source texts. For example, in *Carmilla* the villain is not the overprotective father, here a barely felt, distanced presence, but Carmilla's mother. A minor character in the novella, in this reinterpretation she requires Carmilla to seduce women and bring them to her so that she can sacrifice them to an archaic beast. Although this series—with its quirky characters, strictly female point of view (the entire series is documented by Laura's video camera which never leaves its post in her dorm room), and happy ending (Carmilla and Laura are together)—draws upon the spirit of Le Fanu's *Carmilla* while adapting its concerns to the twenty first century, the association of the mother with the gaping, grasping, insatiable maw that lives in a pit is a step that leads nowhere.

Despite this problematic representation of the maternal, Maybee's *Carmilla* has managed to open up the tale to even greater multiplicities by creating Twitter accounts for some of its main characters. One enthusiastic fan has even made an unofficial account for Laura's camera. Through this platform, viewers are able to interact with *Carmilla*'s cast of characters, effectively writing themselves into her story. This participation is a far cry from the alienating gaze of the voyeuristic cinemagoer, and, as a result, *Carmilla* as text, as image, and as body is once again opened to words that create a possibility for change. Rather than Laura's pen alone, the words of entire groups of viewers reconfigure *Carmilla*'s relation to her representation in word and in image, thus creating a *Carmilla* for the 21st century.

Styria, which takes its Gothic imagery from the likes of *Terror in the Crypt* and *Blood and Roses*, is also concerned with female sacrifice. But here, although *Carmilla* takes her name from her literary predecessor, she only plays the vampire. Her performance, like the faceless portrait in *Blood Spattered*, presents *Carmilla* as a floating signifier that multiple women can occupy. She is initially introduced as an unknown figure living in the watery crypts of a Hungarian castle where Lara and her father, Dr. Hill, have come for him to study the murals. This castle, a stand in for the oft-summoned uncanny, ancestral home, is associated both with the body of Lara's mother—who had told Hill about the castle and committed

suicide when Lara was a little girl—¹¹⁰and with the body of Lara, the fair virgin. As Papa says, “It hasn’t been touched since it was closed in 1917. It’s pristine.” The villain of this tale, a figure known primarily as the General, lords over the local peasant community and, to prevent the “devil” from taking root in the women, rapes them instead.

It is to escape the General’s fanaticism that Carmilla vanishes into the crypt, and the danger of women’s multiplicity, the threat of hysteric contagion, overtakes the narrative when she kills herself there in order to escape his unwelcome advances. Before she dies, Carmilla tells Lara the legend of the one hundred virgins who were sacrificed in order to produce the region’s healing waters, and when Carmilla’s own death sets off a streak of female suicides in the neighboring village they act as the bloody double of this tale. Although the patriarchal sacrifice of women is sanctioned, women’s self-sacrifice—the idea that they might take some sort of pleasure and agency in the action—is unacceptable. For this reason, the villagers—who, tellingly, have dealt with this problem before—bury the women out in the woods and later, in an effort to stop the “mass hysteria,” exhume the bodies and decapitate them. Here, fear that women who take their own lives retain control over their bodies even after death, immobile in the coffin though they may be, is brought to the surface. This anxiety culminates at the film’s climax when Lara, caught in the confining embrace of the General, rips open his neck with her teeth and unleashes a horde of (presumably) sacrificed virgins upon him. These women are produced by slicing a gash in the wall of the castle from which the bodies pour as if the structure is giving birth. In this moment, the home is complicit in the subversions that are supposed to automatically halt at its perimeter, and the legacy of association between the locked bedchamber and the chaste woman inside is broken down.

Unlike Le Fanu’s *Carmilla*, *Styria* questions what comes after the vampire’s kiss of death. Here, this final action is substituted by Lara’s desire to jump from one of the castle windows (once she has ensured the General’s defeat) in order to take control of her own body once and for all. In the novella we are initially led to believe that Carmilla’s current existence is the end of the line, but the vampiress hints at something more: “But to die as

lovers may—to die together, so that they may live together. Girls are caterpillars while they live in the world, to be finally butterflies when the summer comes; but in the meantime there are grubs and larvae, don't you see—each with their peculiar propensities, necessities, and structure” (37).¹¹¹ This “beyond” is given image in *Styria* when, as Lara stands teetering on the windowsill, Carmilla—who appears to Lara as she was and continues her friendship with her even though her body is decaying in the crypt—beckons her from what appears to be a sort of schoolgirl utopia: young women, arrayed in 19th-century ball gowns, dance without a care in the world in the castle fully restored to its former glory. But for Lara, this is not enough. In what is perhaps the film's most productive move, Lara rejects Carmilla's dream world for one in which, still infected by the germs of hysterical contagion, of the desire to take control of her body and her agency, she is able to fight for a new way, a new change. This decision effectively displaces Lara's desires, subversive though they may be, from the space of an ineffectual, imagined utopia (unfortunately, the place Carmilla is banished to) into the film's reality where they manage to survive. As she carries the spent body of her father out of the castle—he has been completely stripped of any authoritative power—she goes forth to, one hopes, make something new.

This need for “something new,” a mode of representability where the desiring woman's existence is not negated, can be found in all of the texts I have explored and is intimately connected to the act of biting, of writing, and of creating spaces of possibility. It is my hope that, with these new 21st-century forays, the story of the desiring, female vampire and her *jouissance* will continue to reproduce, to give birth to altered reflections that productively rework what has come before. As a collective body, these stories weave a larger tale beyond restrictive binaries and easy stereotypes. My own discourse, drunk on the playful pleasures of language, slips in and joins them as yet another source of contagion. These words, you see, have a bite of their own, one which perforates language with fruitful interstices for whoever happens to come next.

¹This phrase is taken from Coleridge's 1824 annotations.

²Victor Sage argues that the genealogy of the vampiric Karnstein family creates an "undead seriality in a mirror world of mimicry" (190). I hope to argue that rather than a static, looping interchange, the repetition compulsion that reproduces Carmilla's story throughout the 20th and 21st centuries instead reconfigures the source tale's elements in such a way that the situation is always slightly altered and produces new possibilities of meaning in each instance.

³Despite its epistolary structure, there is no indication in *Carmilla* of where one letter ends and the next begins. The missives simply flow as one uninterrupted narrative. This structural indeterminacy works against the concept of the letters as discrete units and renders the boundaries of Laura's communications, like the identity of the woman who writes them, nebulous and subject to alteration.

⁴Helen Stoddart takes up Laura's use of the term "phantasmagoria": "Her memory is constituted at this point by a series of lucid *tableaux mordants* strung together, of isolated pictures, not Hesselius' apparent medical facts...Yet the narrator's metaphor of 'phantasmagoria' emphasizes not only that the spectacular pictorial aspects of her memory outweigh its analytic, factual detail but that characterization of phantasmagoria is always in terms of the spectral and illusive..." (29).

⁵Please see Hendershot (379), Weiss (27), Brode (116), and Thomas (43).

⁶In "Repossessing the Body: Transgressive Desire in 'Carmilla' and *Dracula*," Elizabeth Signorotti argues that Stoker's characterization of Lucy is a direct response to Carmilla. By punishing Lucy's dangerous sexuality through a staking likened to gang rape, Stoker attempts to kill Carmilla vicariously through a reincarnation of her: "In his attempt to redress Carmilla's defiant behavior, Stoker imbues Lucy with Carmillaesque qualities... Stoker's 'experiment' with Lucy reveals the unpleasant results of woman's attempting to escape male systems of exchange and usurping traditionally male power" (622, 624).

⁷There is almost always some sort of unspoken sexual desire on the part of the companion's father and his colleagues towards the female vampire, and she knows it. For example, in Gabrielle Beaumont's "Carmilla" (1989), Carmilla wears the clothes of Marie's (the Laura character) long-gone mother and trades knowing glances and flirtatious pleasantries with Laura's father in order to win his trust.

⁸This reading of the stake as a device which literally and figuratively pins woman as stable signifier is evocative of Christopher Craft's analysis of *Dracula*, in which Lucy must be staked in order to ensure the reinstatement of "correct" gender identity: "The aggressive mobility with which Lucy flaunts the encasements of gender norms generates in the Crew of Light a terrific defensive activity, as these men race to reinscribe, with a series of pointed instruments, the line of demarcation which enables the definition of gender" (121).

⁹In "When the Woman Looks," an analysis of the representation of women and monsters in horror films, Linda Williams discusses the ways in which the identity of "monster" is removed from the creature with whom the heroine had previously identified or recognized and is instead projected exclusively onto the heroine herself. While I agree with Case's critique of Williams' failure to recognize the subversive possibilities of sexual desire between monster and woman, I concur with Williams' reading of the ways in which male anxiety is projected, often through violence, onto the abject body of the woman coded as monster.

¹⁰Crashaw's poetry is directly influenced by a firsthand reading of Teresa's prose.

¹¹"I believe in the *jouissance* of woman insofar as it is extra (*en plus*), as long as you put a screen in front of this 'extra' until I have been able to properly explain it." (Lacan 77).

¹²Here Lacan's observation that "to speak of love is in itself a *jouissance*" is given credence (Lacan 83).

¹³The full title is "The Flaming Heart upon the Book and Picture of the Seraphicall Saint Teresa, (As She is Usually Expressed with a Seraphim Beside Her.)."

¹⁴Teresa's offer of exchange is prefaced by a telling rejection of the male Symbolic on the part of the speaker: "Wee'l now appeal to none of all / Those thy old Souldiers, Great & tall, / Ripe men of Martyrdom,... / Such as could with lusty breath / Speak lowd into the face of death / Their Great Lord's glorious name..." ("Hymn" 3-5, 7-9).

¹⁵This obsession with wounds and wounding can also allude to Christ's stigmata, a reference which reappears in "Christabel." For example, Claire B. May juxtaposes the wound in Geraldine's side with the wounds of Jesus: "...these two references blur the distinction between damned and martyred, diabolical and divine, suggesting yet again the ambiguity of the abject as both abhorred and adored, and calling into question any gendered notions of abjection..." (709).

¹⁶Due to Crashaw's wording, the origin of the darts that will constantly rework and re-knit Teresa's flesh is ambiguous. Here, I treat these heavenly messengers as things born of a sort of non-corporeal, linguistic flame collected by God in Heaven. Alternatively, because Crashaw repeatedly refers to Teresa's heart as "flaming," it is possible to read the arrows as objects conceived in Teresa's flesh, itself intimately linked to the words she produces.

¹⁷Maureen Sabine explores the connections between Kristeva's abject, Crashaw's Teresa, and the female mystic and argues that his poetry aims "to provoke a psychic upheaval in which the defenses against abjection give way and the boundaries separating subject and object, self and other, the somatic and the sacred are lowered" (435).

¹⁸For a consideration of the abject in "Blessed be the Paps", please see Sabine (432-40). For a discussion of the sexuality of Christ in both poems, please see Rambuss (503-5).

¹⁹The links here between language and an excess of bodily fluids parallel the moment in *Carmilla* when the vampire is found in her coffin floating in seven inches of blood. The horror of this excess is combated by medical men who quickly write this abject waste into their reports. These legal documents are thus prime examples of the way language is precariously perched on the border between "rationality" and unsignifiable excess.

²⁰"...Sons of thy vowes / The virgin-births with which thy sovereign spouse / Made fruitfull thy fair soul, goe now / And with them all about thee bow / To Him..." ("Hymn" 166-70).

²¹In "Christabel," *Carmilla*, and the resulting films, the home is the site of subversion and is almost always made uncanny through the presence of the female vampire, whose hysteric's discourse questions the domestic's underlying structures.

²²In these lines Crashaw conflates the Christian Virgin Mary with the Roman goddess Diana, chaste huntress and deity of the moon. Like the twisted line of literary lineage that connects Teresa, Christabel, and Carmilla and renders their texts and bodies indeterminate, here the body of Mary and the discourse that surrounds that body are made permeable to the influence of holy women who have come before.

²³This inversion is paralleled in "The Flaming Heart" when Crashaw implores the reader to switch the image of the male Seraphim with that of Teresa: "You must transpose the picture quite, / And spell it wrong to read it right; / Read Him for her, & her for him; / And call the Saint the Seraphim" (9-12).

²⁴Sabine links Crashaw's figuration of Christ to a breastfeeding "maternal Savior:" "Like Crashaw, Bernard of Clairvaux and Richard Rolle employed a 'feminine style' of mysticism that appealed to pious women. They brought home the emotional reality of Christ's suffering by representing him as a nursing mother, and his crucifixion as a bloody birth that cost him his life..." (435, 428).

²⁵In an uncanny coincidence, these two modes of testing the boundaries of the Symbolic not only link Teresa to her fictional, fanged companions but also to disarmingly nonfictional ones. Susanna Le Fanu, Sheridan Le Fanu's wife, experienced serious doubts concerning revealed religion which, along with her extreme religious humility, alarmed her husband exceedingly. In a journal entry soon after her death in 1858, Le Fanu describes her as "harassed by religious doubt, afflicted with morbid humility, possessed of the imagination of disaster and...not convinced of the certainty of her husband's love" (Melada 9-10). This final worry, tacked on at

the last as if to make its importance negligible, serves as a sort of unsignifiable remainder similar to Lacan's "cunt-torsions (*conneries*)" that resists incorporation into the phallic function (75).

²⁶"Christabel" follows its titular character and the events that befall her over the span of one night and the following morning. The narrative opens with Christabel, the daughter of the Baron Leoline, leaving the safety of the family castle to go to the "midnight wood" to "pray / For the weal of her lover that's far away" (31-2). While kneeling in prayer, she hears a strange moan from the other side of the "broad-breasted, old oak tree," and soon discovers the mysterious Lady Geraldine (44). As explanation for her presence, Geraldine tells a tale of abduction, potential gang rape, and abandonment beneath the oak. In response, Christabel invites the lady home to stay with her and to share her bed. Geraldine accepts the offer of hospitality, and the two women creep through the castle, past the room of Christabel's father (who she claims is "weak and health" and "seldom sleepeth well") and finally arrive at Christabel's bedchamber (114, 160). Once there, Geraldine challenges the spirit of Christabel's dead mother (she died the hour her daughter was born) who has sensed that all is not as it should be in the bedroom, unveils her "bosom and half her side," (marred by a mysterious "mark of...shame") and lays down next to Christabel (246, 258). Geraldine proceeds to cast a spell, wrought by the touch and the sight of her bosom, on Christabel that forbids her to speak of anything that has happened that night save that she "found'st a bright lady, surpassingly fair: / And didst bring her home with thee in love and charity" (264-5). The next morning, Christabel awakens to the discovery that Geraldine's spell has taken effect, and when she brings Geraldine to meet her father the lady quickly usurps both Christabel's role as daughter and the role of the long dead, absent mother. Bard Bracy, the minstrel, attempts to warn Leoline of the danger lurking within his home by describing a dream he had the previous night that depicted a snake strangling a dove, but this ill omen, along with Christabel's plea to cast out Geraldine, is ignored. The poem closes on Leoline's abandonment of Christabel as he walks arm in arm with Geraldine out of his receiving room.

²⁷This type of analysis is often tied up in the idea that Geraldine, in addition to embodying Christabel's fears regarding sex, is also representative of the longed for yet repellent mother. For examples of readings of this type, please see Jonas Spatz's "The Mystery of Eros: Sexual Initiation in Coleridge's 'Christabel,'" Margery Durham's "The Mother Tongue: 'Christabel' and the Language of Love," and Karen Swann's "'Christabel': The Wandering Mother and the Enigma of Form."

²⁸This phrase is taken from Coleridge's 1824 annotations.

²⁹For this type of reading, please see Durham 18; Hennelly 214; Spatz 111,113; Taylor 716; and Welch 173.

³⁰In regards to Crashaw's "Hymn," "Coleridge commented that 'these verses were ever present to my mind whilst writing the second part of Christabel; if, indeed by some subtle process of the mind they did not suggest the first thought of the whole poem'" (qtd. in *Coleridge's Poetry* 171).

³¹The associations surrounding the fetus/infant, a friendly parasite in the womb or at the breast of the nurturing mother, are summarily abandoned by Christabel and Geraldine in favor of a different kind of feeding.

³²Both May (705-8) and Swann (548) take notice of this profusion of pronoun conflation.

³³Christabel's deceased mother, rendered undead both through Leoline's bells and Christabel's continued textual invocation of her, is yet another female figure whose presence haunts "divine."

³⁴Swann remarks that this grammatical doubling has little effect on the narrative: "After she [Geraldine] pops up the two women dramatize the implied doubleness of the daughter who 'stole' along the forest keeping her thoughts to herself (l. 31). Very little else changes" (540).

³⁵For a reading that explicitly refers to Geraldine as the bridegroom, please see Spatz (112). While Swann does not directly indicate that Geraldine takes the place of the groom, she does

argue that Geraldine appears in answer to Christabel's ambiguous desire for "the 'lover that's far away,' for the Baron, or even for the mother" (538). In a twist on this reading, Taylor claims that Christabel is the groom who carries the bride (Geraldine) over the threshold (712).³⁶"The lady sank, belike thro' pain, / And Christabel with might and main / Lifted her up, a weary weight, / Over the threshold of the gate: Then the lady rose again, / And mov'd, as she were not in pain" (Coleridge 124-9).

³⁷Ironic links can be made to the hymeneal/hymenal/hymnal nature of the encounter.

³⁸In her reading of "Christabel," May argues that "time...become[s] unmeasurable and discontinuous" and that "time and space are conflated." (704)

³⁹During her exorcism of Christabel's mother, Geraldine exclaims: "Off, woman, off! this hour is mine— / Though thou her guardian spirit be, / Off, woman, off! 'tis given to me" (205-7).

⁴⁰May notes that Geraldine's touch is one of infection, and although I disagree with her analysis of Geraldine as representative of the bad mother, I do read the caress of Geraldine's bosom, like the bite of the vampire, as a site of contagion (May 710).

⁴¹Durham, in her Kleinian analysis of the poem, reads Christabel's fears concerning sexuality as concentrated in Geraldine's wound, itself indicative of the "ultimate separation" of death (184). Both Swan (551) and Spatz (115) make a similar move in linking sex between the two women with Christabel's fear of mortality. Going against these interpretations, I instead look to the more positive connections between Geraldine's and Teresa's wounded bodies as sources of feminine *jouissance*.

⁴²Cixous' description of feminine *jouissance* as that which must be pushed out of the Symbolic supports this reading: "It is precisely because there is so little room for her desire in society that, because of not knowing what to do with it, she ends up not knowing where to put it or even if she has it" (154).

⁴³As Kristeva explains: "...phobia does not disappear but slides beneath language...any practice of speech, inasmuch as it involves writing, is a language of fear. I mean a language of want as such, the want that positions sign, subject and object. Not a language of the desiring exchange of messages or objects that are transmitted in a social contract of communications and desire beyond want, but a language of want, of the fear that edges up to it and runs along its edges...We encounter this discourse in our dreams, or when death brushes us by, depriving us of the assurance mechanical use of speech ordinarily gives us, the assurance of being ourselves, that is, untouchable, unchangeable, immortal" (38).

⁴⁴"Her slender palms together prest, / Heaving sometimes on her breast; / Her face resign'd to bliss or bale—" (Coleridge 274-6).

⁴⁵"Sorrow and shame" can here be considered as interchangeable with "Geraldine's bosom," a contentious organ that the speaker censors as lack and subsequently fills up with a phallogocentric language of fear.

⁴⁶These tensions mostly take the form of unanswered questions. For example, why does Christabel feel the need to leave the castle in order to pray? Why does she take such care to ensure Leoline does not awake and discover she has brought another woman into the castle?

⁴⁷Please see Welch (170), Taylor (718), Swann (546), and Durham (181).

⁴⁸For readings of this type, please refer to Durham (185-6), Welch (168-9), and Spatz (113).

⁴⁹"So strange a dream hath come to me: / That I had vow'd with music loud / To clear yon wood from thing unblest, / Warn'd by a vision in my rest!" (Coleridge 515-8).

⁵⁰The dove and the snake as a motif, though not explicitly present in Le Fanu's novella, is picked up several times in the later filmic adaptations. The French poster for Hammer's *Twins of Evil* features drawn profiles of each twin with a snake twined about the head of the evil one and a dove superimposed on the face of the good one. Tellingly, the animal's eyes are aligned so that they become those of the young women as once again female looking is called into question. Doves and dovescotes feature in a few of the other films as metaphorical representations of the heroines' feelings of entrapment.

⁵¹Mark Hennelly reads the dove and the snake as potentially crossbreeding and treats their union as a parallel to Crashaw's marriage of the eagle and the dove in his Teresian poems (Hennelly 210-11).

⁵²"Is the night chilly and dark? / The night is chilly, but not dark." or "Is it the wind that moaneth bleak? / There is not wind enough in the air / To move away the ringlet curl / From the lovely lady's cheek—" (Coleridge 14-5, 46-9).

⁵³*Carmilla* tells the story of Laura, the narrator, and her experiences with a mysterious woman initially known only as Carmilla. Before the tale properly begins, Laura recounts a childhood encounter in which a mysterious lady appears in her nursery. Amid the woman's welcome caresses, Laura also feels the sensation of two sharp needles piercing her flesh. When the rest of the household is alerted by Laura's screams, she is told that her fright was only a dream. Just the same, a doctor and a priest are called in to make sure all is well. Over ten years later, we learn that Laura is expecting a visit from the niece of her father's friend, General Spielsdorf. But, instead of Bertha, only a letter arrives. This missive, written by the General, alerts Laura and her father to Bertha's death by mysterious illness. The only clue to the origins of this sickness is a reference to a monster the General has made it his mission to hunt down and destroy. Laura is understandably upset at the loss of female company, but this disappointment is soon alleviated when, as a result of a carriage accident and the request of her mysterious mother, a young woman named Carmilla becomes a guest at the house. Laura is taken aback to find that Carmilla exactly resembles the lady who visited her in her nursery as a child, and Carmilla claims to have had almost the exact same experience. Reassured by Carmilla's mirrored encounter, Laura goes on to become fast friends with the mysterious guest. For a time all goes well. Laura is only slightly bothered by Carmilla's reticence to reveal her personal history and her occasional outbursts which largely consist of Carmilla proclaiming her desire for Laura. Soon Laura begins to have strange dreams, simultaneously frightening and erotic, which culminate in the feeling of needles piercing her breast. Once Laura begins to show signs of physical deterioration, her father sends for the doctor who insists she be placed under constant surveillance. On a picnic outing to the ruined village of Karnstein, Laura and her father meet up with the long absent General Spielsdorf. He soon reveals the discovery that his niece, Bertha, was killed by the vampire Countess Mircalla Karnstein, a woman who had been staying at his house as a guest using the name Millarca. The men quickly reach the conclusion that Millarca, Carmilla, and the vampire Countess Mircalla are in fact the same person. Immediately, the General and Laura's father assemble a team of men to hunt the vampire down and stake her in her coffin, a mission they expeditiously accomplish. Following the execution, Laura is whisked away on a tour of Italy by her father, but this attempt at erasing the influence of Carmilla from Laura's mind is largely ineffective. For, although Laura narrates her tale years after the death of Carmilla, in the last sentences of the novella she reveals that she still fantasizes about Carmilla's potential return.

⁵⁴Although critics tend to mention in passing the narrative similarities between "Christabel" and *Carmilla*, few go into a detailed analysis of the two texts alongside each other. For a consideration of *Carmilla* as a narrative commentary on Coleridge's earlier ballad, please see Auerbach (*Our Vampires* 38-53). For a detailed description of the similarities and differences between the two texts, please see Nethercot.

⁵⁵For a reading of *Carmilla* as a tale of Laura's repressed sexuality, please see William Veeder's "Carmilla: The Arts of Repression" and Michael Davis' "Gothic's Enigmatic Signifier: The Case of J. Sheridan Le Fanu's 'Carmilla.'" For an analysis of the novella that focuses on the role of the repressed and anxiety-inducing maternal, please see Angelica Michelis' Kleinian influenced "'Dirty Mama': Horror, Vampires and the Maternal." Readings on the influence of Darwinian science and scientific modes of classification as a way to tidily categorize Carmilla and those of her breed also emerge with regularity. This mode of analysis is often bound up with the invocation of an imperialist prerogative where Carmilla represents the aristocratic, foreign outsider and Laura and her father the bourgeois, enterprising British.

For readings that explicitly reference the role of Darwinism and scientific classification, see Stoddart (30) and Sage (193-4).

⁵⁶Here I refer both to the intradiegetic “town lady” to whom Laura’s epistles are addressed and the more generalized reader of *Carmilla*.

⁵⁷*Carmilla* was initially published as a serial with four installments in the periodical *The Dark Blue* from December of 1871 to March of 1872. The male-narrated prologue was only added later when the novella appeared in Le Fanu’s 1872 collection *A Glass Darkly* (Costello-Sullivan xiii-xiv).

⁵⁸Stoddart writes, “Laura’s tale, by acknowledging even her own nervous turns, gives up self-control and makes it over to Hesselius...His cool distance here from the narrator/victim proves his difference, proves he is no infectious sufferer of this reciprocal female diseasing” (19). Davis goes so far as to claim that writing—materialized in the form of the letter by Carmilla’s long gone admirer—comes in and saves the narrative from the “undead seriality” of vampirism (189-90). Walton robs Laura of any narrative agency whatsoever when he claims that “passage after passage in ‘Carmilla’ could be transferred from Laura’s to a male character’s erotic fantasy” (70). For an alternative reading that argues the absence of the second half of *Carmilla*’s frame tale keeps female desire open and productive please see Signorotti (619).

⁵⁹Laura’s narrative is doubly subversive if one thinks of Carmilla not only as a body within Laura’s language but also as the textual body of the whole novella. If this is the case, Laura’s writing, like the queer vampire’s bite, is able to pierce what Case terms the “ontological/societal sac” (7). Laura’s birthing of a language within which her experience is not negated not only parallels her with the vampire but also constitutes the body as open to textual pleasure (Cixous 162). By creating a double wound—that of the body and of the language that constitutes it—Laura recuperates Carmilla’s wounding love as well as the possibility of her own pen as something that bites. The interchangeability of Carmilla’s and Laura’s roles as the one who feeds and the one who is fed, the one who is active and the one who is passive, again brings to the forefront questions of woman’s multiplicity and the female body as always already beyond hegemonic signification (Irigaray 26; Cixous 164).

⁶⁰In the final chapter of the novella, Laura describes the town lady’s continued correspondence as being filled with her “earnest desire so repeatedly expressed” for more information (93). It is likely in reference to this description that Major also notes the possibilities of the town lady as a hysteric: “The posited feminine reader, on the other hand, is incessantly and unperturbedly curious about the text, and urges its interlocutor to add detail upon detail in order to satisfy a perhaps insatiable appetite” (162-3).

⁶¹Many critics of *Carmilla* touch upon the nature of the uncanny domestic in the novella. Among them are Auerbach (*Our Vampires* 43-4), Walton (39), Davis (228), and Major (153-4).

⁶²Lineage and genealogy is another hot topic for *Carmilla* critics and for those who deal with the vampire more generally. Please see Heller (84), Signorotti (613), Case (4, 6), Stoddart (31), Johnson (75), and Leal (40).

⁶³In yet another connection to the masquerading, serpentine Geraldine, Veeder remarks that the “glittering” eyes of Carmilla are “strange and snakelike.” (213)

⁶⁴That Carmilla belongs to the family of Laura’s deceased mother is yet another blow to Papa’s overcompensatory nationalism. While Papa believes that the extraction of the Karnstein name from recorded lineage renders the appellation obsolete, the family can only be defined as extinct if one thinks of the Karnsteins solely in terms of their existence within language. While their name as signifier might have died out, blood ties remain and result in their continued reproduction (of bodies rather than names) according to a “ghostly law” (Le Fanu 95). These blood ties are intimately linked with the vampire who wastes the precious lifeblood of lineage through a bite that is fraught with connotations of contagion and pollution

and is completely divorced from a linguistically traceable genealogy (Signorotti 160; Macfie 60).

⁶⁵These familial connections, along with Carmilla's network of female companions, have invited a reading whereby Carmilla represents a monstrous matriarchy that seeks out others of its own kind in an ever-constant loop of sameness (Sage 190; Leal 38-9). As Leal argues, "By having Carmilla seduce only her own maternal Karnstein descendants, Le Fanu makes vampirism, incest, and homosexuality resonate metaphorically as well as onomastically in his text: each involve a lusting for one's own kind" (38-9). Yet to relegate *Carmilla* to a tale of auto-eroticism and incest, similar to arguments regarding the narcissistic nature of lesbianism, denies the possibility of a reworking of language as it is tied up in feminine experience.

⁶⁶In her analysis of the origins of Carmilla's name, Leal reveals that Carmilla can be taken from the Hebrew "Carmella," meaning "garden." It is from this word that the religious order known as the Carmelites took its name (41). Once again these texts fall into each other since St. Teresa was herself a Carmelite and founded her own branch of the order: the Discalced Carmelites. With this in mind, it is possible to think of these vampiric women and their companions as all members of Teresa's order of barefoot hysterics.

⁶⁷The portrait itself is a source of interest if only because it is one of the elements of *Carmilla* that is taken up almost religiously by the at-times radically different filmic adaptations. While Signorotti reads the portrait's lack of frame as indicative of Carmilla's refusal to be bound by male forms (613), and Veeder sees Laura's request to hang it in her room as evidence of her desire to objectify her love object, thereby distancing herself from her forbidden desires (208), I read it as an object that, as Carmilla's double, raises questions concerning the boundaries between the corpse and the living body and movement versus stasis. For example, the portrait, like the woman it portrays, is something that should be still (on a wall, in a coffin) yet manages to move around with ease. Further, Laura remarks that in the portrait Carmilla is "living, smiling, ready to speak," ironic since the apparently living Carmilla is in fact dead (39). Here she and the portrait break free of their respective expected representations in a move that reveals the tricky nature of binaristic dichotomies.

⁶⁸Allusions could be made here to nonsignifiable nature of Carmilla's and Laura's encounter.

⁶⁹Michelis reads the Gothic as a genre that transplants the past into the present in a repetition compulsion to unveil the meaning of the past (6). In a similar vein, Hogle argues that "...the Gothic is really about the meaning of *counterfeiting* the past, as in Walpole's 'toy Gothic' Strawberry Hill, and then about showing what primal crimes and unresolved quandaries, such as the long-buried conflicts in *The Castle of Otranto*, are hidden behind those counterfeits as they outlive and obscure their originals" (21).

⁷⁰Glossing Sara Putzell-Korab, Heller writes, "This anxiety [regarding female friendship] sprang from a fear, even if as yet only partially articulated, of the sexual implications of such friendships, while also belying a wariness about the formation of emotional bonds that might hinder a girl's entry into the world of heterosexuality" (87).

⁷¹In regards to the discrepancy between the Symbolic and non-digestible female experience, Veeder argues that Laura oscillates between "the formal realm of verbal knowledge" and Carmilla's "passional realm of flesh and blood" (208).

⁷²In a disaffected interpretation of Dr. Spielsberg's injunction that she must be watched at all times, Laura muses that "the arrangement was prescribed simply to secure a companion who would prevent my taking too much exercise, or eating unripe fruit, or doing any of the fifty foolish things to which young people are supposed to be prone" (62). Although this statement is meant to negate the supposed danger Laura is in, by speaking of the risk of eating unripe fruit she invokes another text that deals with the eroticization of feminine appetites. Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (1862) follows a pair of mirrored sisters who, like the vampire and her companion, are split into the dualistic categories of saint and sinner. When the "bad" sister, coincidentally named Laura, eats of the forbidden goblin fruit, she goes into a physical

decline. As a result, her sister Lizzie must suffer the humiliation of going to the goblin men herself to buy their wares, which she hopes to use to restore Laura's health. When she insists on paying with coin and not eating on the spot, the goblins pelt her with fruit. When Lizzie returns covered in "juice that syrugged all her face, / And lodged in dimples of her chin, / And streaked her neck" she urges Laura to "eat me, drink me, love me" (lms. 434-6, 471) The result of this feast is a hysterical fit which causes Laura to break the boundaries of life and death: "She fell at last; / Pleasure past and anguish past, / Is it life or is it death? / Life out of death" (521-4). Although "Goblin Market" ends with a moralistic soliloquy on the dangers of temptation, the potentially erotic pleasures of "sisterhood" remain.

⁷³Since the female body is always coded as already near death and is associated with the supernatural and the spiritual through its sanguinary excess, it takes but little to ensure this displacement (Macfie 66; Heller 82).

⁷⁴In a conversation between Dr. Spielsberg and Papa concerning the possibility of supernatural forces at work, the doctor remarks that "Nevertheless life and death are mysterious states, and we know little of the resources of either" (37).

⁷⁵"Her face underwent a change that alarmed and even terrified me for a moment. It darkened, and became horribly livid; her teeth and hands were clenched, and she frowned and compressed her lips, while she stared down upon the ground at her feet, and trembled all over with a continued shudder as irrepressible as an ague. All her energies seemed strained to suppress a fit, with which she was then breathlessly tugging; and at length a low convulsive cry of suffering broke from her, and gradually the hysteria subsided" (32).

⁷⁶Carmilla's show of temper in response to Christian ritual brings to mind Le Fanu's real-life anxiety regarding his wife. Susanna's uncertainty concerning Christian religious beliefs and her supposed hysteria take an exaggerated form here in Carmilla's affective outburst.

⁷⁷Auerbach discusses Carmilla not as a faceless, undead fiend but as a "sharing, individualized vampire": "Her vampirism...is an interchange, a sharing, an identification, that breaks down the boundaries of familial roles and the sanctioned hierarchy of marriage" (*Our Vampires* 46, 47).

⁷⁸Here Laura's narrative, especially in juxtaposition to the unfinished frame, can be read, like the mouth of the vampire, as lips that close in upon the boundaries of patriarchal discourse.

⁷⁹Barbara Creed defines this term as that about women which is "shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject" (*Horror* 35). She goes on to divide representations of the monstrous-feminine into broad categories such as the femme-castratrice—represented by the vagina dentata—and the phallic mother.

⁸⁰Upon meeting Carmilla after the carriage accident, Laura is struck by her attraction to the woman but also "something of repulsion" (25). The anxiety Carmilla initially produces is intimately related to the perception of woman as always multiple but also to the tenuous line between dream and reality. For if Carmilla is the woman from Laura's childhood encounter, an encounter Carmilla claims to have experienced as well, then Laura's experience is validated over her father's claim that nothing had happened. As a result, the "horror" the two women laugh off is the confining space of the masculine Symbolic.

⁸¹Laura's removal of her body as relevant signifier in masculine discourse occurs at key junctures throughout *Carmilla*. For example, although Laura notes she is "a changed girl" after her erotically charged dreams of Carmilla and her subsequent physical decline begin, she refuses to link either Carmilla or her dreams to the deaths of other girls in the village, the death of Bertha, or to the folkloric superstitions of the vampire (50). While it is unclear whether Laura acknowledges it, for her to make this connection would immediately relegate her to the same sort of object status as Carmilla's other so-called "victims." They come to us only as corpses, beloved objects that are accessible solely through their associative relationship with their father or guardian. For example, the General, rather than refer to Bertha by name, identifies her as a "darling daughter," a "ward," "my poor dear child," "my dear girl" and, most telling of all, "an object of very near interest" (11, 67, 70, 78). Similarly,

the Ranger's daughter can only be textually accessed through the funeral her father has ordered for her and which causes Carmilla to go into a hysterical fit.

⁸²In his analysis of Laura's reaction to the meeting between Carmilla and General Spielsdorf in the Karnstein Chapel, during which Carmilla grabs the General by the arm and physically forces him to drop his sword, William Veeder has this to say: "Laura goes on with impeccable orthodoxy to call Carmilla's animality 'horrible,' but 'brutalized' indicates her initial, deepest response. Any animality derives, not from Carmilla, but from what men do to her" (207).

⁸³Here Laura can be read as a bride the night before the wedding. Her liminal body is safeguarded in preparation for her vampire-bride double's defloration/execution, itself an inverted wedding ceremony.

⁸⁴Since it too is a replica, even the status of the document as direct descendent of its "authentic" forbearer is unclear. Once again, lineage is muddled.

⁸⁵"Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death. Menstrual blood, on the contrary, stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference" (Kristeva 71).

⁸⁶The intimate nature of the medical examination of Carmilla's body is taken up by filmmaker Jess Franco in *Female Vampire* (1975). The only difference is that Dr. Orloff, a Hesselius character, is content to gain access to the vampiress through the bodies she leaves behind. At an autopsy, he nonchalantly inserts his fingers into a deceased woman's vagina to determine for himself what the medical examiner had already postulated: that she was "killed by a mouth."

⁸⁷Susana Le Fanu once again haunts this thesis. Just as the nobleman's love for Carmilla transforms her into his "idol," Le Fanu wrote that his love for Susanna was of an excess "almost to idolatry" (95; qtd. in Melada 10). This confession is bordered by fears that his love was insincere and unappreciated: "Did not *you* love her, & yet was she ever confident of your love?...& yet she was always doubting & sometimes actually disbelieved my love—although I was there both declaring & showing it—Day & night" (qtd. in Melada 10, original emphasis). Since Susanna suffered from religious doubt, this passage offers the interpretation that Le Fanu expected his love to stand in for the love of the Supreme Being, but Susanna rejects both Father and husband. While Walton argues that Le Fanu writes himself into *Carmilla* as the doubting Laura who wears on her body the threat to self and society represented by the vampire, I read the nobleman, who out of love for Carmilla moved her crypt so her body could not be found, as the unconscious and uncanny double of the author (72). In this scenario, Susanna plays Carmilla, and Le Fanu's novella, like the nobleman's schematic of the vampire's tomb, is an attempt to unveil the revenant at the heart of the uncanny domestic.

⁸⁸It is a common speculation among scholars that Laura, since she has "died in the interval" between her communications with Dr. Hesselius and the male narrator's desire to "re-open the correspondence," has become a vampire herself (Le Fanu 3). Signorotti hypothesizes that both Bertha and Laura "continue to live as resurrected vampires, perpetuating the chain of female alliances begun by Carmilla" (618). Heller remarks that Laura "may well be on her way to becoming another Carmilla" (90). And Auerbach argues that "the cryptic announcement in the Prologue that Laura 'died' after writing her story does not preclude her being also alive—on the verge, like Carmilla, of opening the door" (*Our Vampires* 47).

⁸⁹For example, although Auerbach remarks that Hammer's *The Vampire Lovers* (1970) revels in a "cheerful, semi-pornographic opulence," in her analysis its tongue-in-cheek humor is swallowed up in the depiction of the "predations of the vampire" which are "dependent on the obsessions of a watching male" (*Our Vampires* 56). She subsequently identifies this male as "the drooling adolescent in the audience" (*Our Vampires* 56).

⁹⁰Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932) is the first film to credit Le Fanu as its source.

⁹¹Both Weiss (22) and Zimmerman (381) associate the mass materialization of lesbian vampire films in the 1960s and 70s with the growing women's movement and the gay/lesbian movement.

⁹²"Merging two kinds of sexual outlaws, the lesbian vampire is more than simply a negative stereotype. She is a complex and ambiguous figure, at once an image of death and an object of desire, drawing on profound subconscious fears that the living have toward the dead and that men have toward women, while serving as a focus for repressed fantasies" (Weiss 23).

⁹³In reference to *Daughters of Darkness*, Zimmerman has this to say: "She [Delphine Seyrig's Countess Báthory] is never shown nude and is thus not vulnerable to male prurience as most lesbian vampires are. In the film she is the sexual and political equal of the male character, if not his superior. She is never shown actually attacking the young bride; there are no bites on the neck, no bared fangs" (385).

⁹⁴Between 1971 and 1975 Franco produced three lesbian vampire films: *Vampyros Lesbos* (1971), *Dracula's Daughter* (1972) and *Female Vampire* (1975). In *Daughter*, the protagonist Louisa is sent by her dying mother to gaze upon the body of her ancestor, the Count Dracula, and to bear the weight of her family history. Although the Count is eventually unmasked as an impotent, mute, and immobile old man, unable to leave the comfort of his coffin, the sight of him (and the pressure of being gazed upon by him) is enough to push Louisa to become his mimic, and she spends the majority of the film attacking female victims dressed as a man (a potential performative subversion). The film never makes it clear whether Louisa is a vampire before she lays eyes on the Count, or if the power of his gaze transforms her into one. Louisa finds respite from the Count's stare (one the film intimates necessitates Louisa's attacks on the local townspeople) in her relationship with Karine, the companion of this tale. In the face of Louisa's fangs, Karine does not flinch, and their tender joinings allow Louisa to take part in what Cixous describes as "a loving to be other, another, without its necessarily going the route of abasing what is same, herself" (158). Unfortunately, the film closes with Louisa's murder of Karine for fear her lover will also be spelled by the alienating gaze of the Count, followed by Louisa's execution at the hands of the bearers of cultural order: a journalist and a policeman. Despite this, Louisa's destruction feels anything but final. Jefferson, a vampire scholar played by Franco himself, is the main proponent of the inquisition, but when he is faced with Louisa and the Count lying in their coffins he is unable to go through with his "task of purification." Here, the tension between the need to stake the vampiress and the need to keep her around as a receptacle of the abject comes to the forefront. Since Louisa's public vampirism mimics the violent power-play of master and slave, subduer and subdued, it is much easier to pin these evils on her than to recognize she performs the hegemonic male (here concentrated in the figure of the Count). Her relationship with Karine, in contrast, works actively against these patriarchal structures since it is predicated on shared pleasure and a reconfiguration of ontological boundaries. Jefferson's immobility reveals the disquieting fact that to kill Louisa is to recognize in himself the role she was forced to play.

In the most basic of evaluations, *Female Vampire* is a film about sex. It follows the vampiric Countess Irina Karlstein through a series of sexual encounters which, strung together, dominate the length of the film. In a twist on the normal blood-sucking theme, Irina feeds off the life-energy of her partners by consuming their sexual fluids at the moment of climax. These encounters are interspersed with Irina's solitary internal monologues concerning the abhorrence and guilt she feels in regards to her need to kill people through sexual union. Ironically, this woman, who *initially* appears as a sort of sex-crazed maniac, is mute. But what stands out particularly about *Female Vampire*, beyond the excess of sex, is Irina's devastating sadness. Her inability to form what she views as an intimate, meaningful connection with another body during sex is the source of the film's value. In stark contrast to Irina's longing for something beyond her compulsory, alienated feedings are the Dr. Hesselius of this tale, Baron von Rathony and Dr. Orloff, and both act as prime examples

of man's sadomasochistic need to penetrate the womb of the maternal to discover his origin as well as his death (Irigaray 25). For although Irina yearns to escape her legacy—during an interview, she informs a journalist she does not intend to have children and plans to be the last of the Karlsteins—all of the other characters in the film (save her unnamed manservant) work to inscribe her within the ancestral legend of the vampiric Karlstein family and its bloody crimes. For Orloff, Irina functions as an immaterial signifier in his discourse on the wonders beyond the natural world, but for Von Rathony her body becomes a tantalizingly forbidden source for his own pleasure. Not one to approach the supernatural uninformed, he whets his appetite for the vampiress' ministrations by reading up on the local lore: "...a deep silence reigns around these signs that recognize the supreme moment, and you will know that you have entered a world of great mystery, something to which we all aspire." This book, a sort of "Dating Vampires 101," prompts von Rathony to hunt Irina (rather than the other way around) and entreat her to take him "beyond the mist," the final destination of which he knows will be his orgasmic death. Put simply, he demands Irina perform her cultural function. After the inevitable happens, Irina morosely remarks "I was his judge and his involuntary performer," for, once again, there is no space for her own *jouissance*. Caught between the voices in the mist which perpetually call her name and von Rathony's and Dr. Orloff's insistence that "I know who you are," she is trapped in a system which defines her desire and her body as open repositories for anxieties concerning death, orgasm, and the unsignifiable nature of feminine *jouissance*.

⁹⁵In Weiss' analysis, *Vampire Lovers* sets the narrative bar for the low-grade lesbian vampire horror film which subsequent art house pieces, such as *Daughters*, alter with promising results. She describes the typical formula of the vampire film as: "...the vampire is first introduced in order to disrupt and invert the 'natural order' and to provoke anxieties in the characters and spectator alike; the vampire then engages in vampirism as entertainment and sexual titillation for the prolonged middle section of the narrative; and finally the vampire is destroyed and the 'natural order' reaffirmed. In the case of the lesbian vampire, a more specific narrative formula is often further imposed upon the generic vampire plot: a lesbian vampire and a mortal man compete for the possession of a woman" (27-8).

⁹⁶Amy Leal astutely notes that the multiplication of characters' names in *Carmilla* is echoed in the excess of names for the novella's filmic adaptations (51n5). Franco's films are particularly notorious for their surplus of titles. For example, three different versions of *Female Vampire* were originally distributed: *Erotikill* (horror); *The Loves of Irina* or *La Comtesse aux Seins Nus* (The Bare Breasted Countess; softcore porn); and *Les Avaleuses* (The Swallowers; hardcore porn). The more recent DVD release has simply added to an already disorienting swirl of signifiers circulating around this hard-to-pin-down piece of cinema. While I suspect that *Female Vampire* is a rendition of the softcore cut, after reading the complaints of disgruntled Franco followers who inevitably end up (re)viewing a different film than they initially thought they were going to watch, it appears that even what I've seen escapes any sort of neat categorization. This lack of narrative certainty, where viewers of the film discuss scenes that they perceive as having been added or discarded, certainly does not stop at the category of the film as a whole but manages to worm its way into the narrative structure itself, opposing linearity, cause and effect, and narratorial intention.

⁹⁷Please also see Baker (557-61).

⁹⁸*Vampire Lovers* was quickly followed by two subsequent films the following year, *Lust for a Vampire* and *Twins of Evil*. In *Lust for a Vampire*, though it may be true that "female vampires spring to life only under men's eyes," what they do once they are formed is another story entirely (Auerbach, *Our Vampires* 53). Here, Carmilla is reincarnated by fellow Karnsteins (within the film they are a sort of primal couple, and the Count becomes his own version of the Law of the Father) who pour the blood of a sacrificial female victim over her bones, lying bare and white in her coffin. The Karnsteins hope that Carmilla's bones (here she is an inverted Eve) will transform into "a body of [the Devil's] making" so that they "might do [his]

will on Earth.” Even the film’s title, *Lust for a Vampire*, is more concerned with what others desire from Carmilla than what she herself longs for. Bound by the expectations of not only her “parents” but by the male teachers at her boarding school, Carmilla struggles to take her pleasures where she can. But her affair with the novelist Richard Lestrangle is one that is unacceptable both to the primal Father and within the structure of the narrative as a whole. At the climax of the film, Lestrangle runs into the burning Karnstein castle to save Carmilla from an angry mob. But when confronted with Carmilla’s fangs he throws her away, and she is ironically staked by a falling wooden beam.

Twins of Evil takes less from Le Fanu and more from Sade in its tale of newly orphaned twins Maria and Frieda who are sent to live with their puritanical uncle Gustav Vile. In his spare time, Vile runs an organization called the Brotherhood whose mission is to hunt down women suspected of being possessed by the devil and to burn them at the stake. Frieda, the “bad” twin, immediately recognizes Vile’s potential pleasure in watching the women burn and plans to extricate herself from his care as soon as possible. Choosing as her new protector the Sadeian Count Karnstein, she is initiated into vampirism and the “supreme pleasure” of taking the lives of others. Here Frieda, as a reincarnation of Sade’s Juliette rather than Carmilla, fulfills Angela Carter’s observation that “a free woman in an unfree society will be a monster” as she abandons her sister Maria for the pleasures of unrestrained mobility and sadomasochistic sexual activities (30). Despite the lack of communion between the twins, Frieda’s machinations do reveal the ease within which women’s bodies are shuffled between the dualistic dichotomies of virgin and whore when, after she is discovered as a vampire and arrested, she switches her body with that of her sister’s with no one the wiser. Like the doubled Christabel and Geraldine, through their indistinguishability Frieda and Maria collapse the idea of the male gaze as discerner of absolute truth and, on Frieda’s part intentionally, participate in the hysteric’s discourse concerning the multiplicity of the female body which is always appearing in twos instead of ones.

⁹⁹For similar readings, please Zimmerman (385) and Auerbach (*Our Vampires* 56). Brode argues that the presence of the Man in Black reveals that “even a sisterhood of Satan, self-sufficient in Le Fanu, will in the Hammer version ultimately be lorded over by a male patriarch” (118). Baker, in opposition to the popular reading, instead hypothesizes that the Man in Black is representative of the same sort of social subversions that Carmilla is (558-9).

¹⁰⁰Zimmerman’s argument that the lesbian vampire must be shown as a “vampire-rapist who violates and destroys her victim,” in addition to foreclosing any agency the vampire might have, is eerily reminiscent of criticism of *Carmilla* (382). For example, Stoddart argues that the relationship between Laura and Carmilla is solely representative of male fantasies of lesbianism, redolent with associations of cruelty, possession, murder and a pre-evolutionary bestiality: “In Carmilla’s hands, Laura is a passive and helpless victim—the incredible essence of Victorian driven-snow purity who emerges as one overwhelmingly baffled” (32).

¹⁰¹When Carmilla does have sex with Emma, the latter is shown lying wide eyed and immobile on the bed. That Emma understands what is happening to her (she is not depicted actively participating) is unclear.

¹⁰²This flimsy fabric is echoed by the strangling rope (and its double, his rosary) of Memmet, a male, Bluebeard-esque side character who appropriates the trope of the vampire as a beautiful corpse available for pleasure and keeps the bodies of his murdered female victims secure in his basement lair. His justification for his torture of women is that his own wife, Agra, participated in a sexual relationship with Nadine.

¹⁰³Zimmerman notes the trope of the honeymooning couple in the lesbian vampire film and presents an argument as to its recurring appearances: “...this is because the honeymoon, traditionally, is a transitional period during which the husband asserts his power and control over his bride, winning or forcing her into institutionalized heterosexuality. For the husband, then, the honeymoon period provides fear and anxiety: will he prove potent enough, both

sexually and socially, to 'bind' his bride to himself and the marriage structure?...The virgin-bride, linked to the institution of heterosexuality by socialization rather than by experience, is particularly vulnerable to the blandishments of a sinister sexual force. Women must be forced into marriage, into 'normal' womanhood, since, left to their own designs, they might be as easily attracted to a 'perverse' form of sexuality, whether extramarital, diabolical (possession by the devil), or lesbian" (384).

¹⁰⁴One party guest does one better by informing Carmilla that from now on her only source of identity, since she was not able to snag Leopoldo for herself, will be her tangential relationship to the bride and groom: she will be a bridesmaid, a godmother and, finally, nice Auntie Carmilla, sexless and therefore harmless.

¹⁰⁵The construction of Irina's double mouth (the one out of which no words come and which ingests bodily fluids and the black hole of her vagina) in masculine discourse calls to mind images of the vagina dentata, the "mouth of hell—a terrifying symbol of woman as the 'devil's gateway'" (Creed, *Monstrous-Feminine* 106).

¹⁰⁶Mulvey's three cinematic looks are "...that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion" (815-6).

¹⁰⁷In Rollin's *Living Dead Girl* (1982) a candid photograph taken of Catherine Valmont without permission by a tourist becomes the re-imagined portrait of Carmilla. When Barbara, the photographer, takes the photo around the village to ascertain the woman's identity, she is told that the photograph depicts Catherine, who died two years before. Here the unknown woman becomes her own double. Although Barbara wants to "Shoot her some more" and is "interested in her as a subject and a person," her boyfriend Greg is more than happy to come up with excuse after excuse as to why he and Barbara are in fact discussing two women, not one: "It's just a picture of one woman who looks like another woman. You know how the camera lies. What's so strange about that?" ; "It's her twin sister." ; "She's just another beautiful girl...and they're a dime a dozen."

¹⁰⁸It is these films that should give Weiss, Auerbach, and Zimmerman something to really worry about. Weiss cites *Lesbian Vampire Killers* as the descendent of Hammer's *Vampire Lovers* and labels it as "schlock," yet by doing so she fails to recognize the productive subversion of earlier films in juxtaposition to the empty-headed performance of Carmilla, Queen of the Vampires, in *Killers* (22).

¹⁰⁹This is the original title used for the film as it toured festivals. When Revolver Entertainment picked it up for American distribution it was re-titled as (unfortunately) *Angels of Darkness*.

¹¹⁰Because Lara's mother is what connects Hill with the castle (which she grew up next to) parsing the meaning of its murals also acts as a means of interpreting the reasons behind her suicide.

¹¹¹Veeder's analysis of this passage interprets Carmilla as representative of the chrysalis stage which, like the maternal, she wishes to break free from: "Carmilla yearns to escape the bifurcating torments of sexuality and to reach the realm of transcendence, the realm of the butterfly, the witch...[in] that act of commitment, Laura would become the mature partner with whom Carmilla could achieve sexual fulfillment and thus sexual completion (217).

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