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I, Lauren E. Williams, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of:
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Visualizing the Vampire: Carmilla (1872) and the Portrayal of Desire

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Visualizing the Vampire: *Carmilla* (1872) and the Portrayal of Desire

A thesis submitted to
the Art History Faculty
of the College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning
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Master of Arts in Art History

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Abstract

The vampire genre has been one of the most popular outlets for writing about sexuality and desire without explicitly stating it and more commonly vampirism has been used as an acceptable framework for portraying subversive themes. Lamia and Lilith, two of the earliest female vampire archetypes, in many ways initiated interest in the female vampiric figure notably through the works of nineteenth-century Pre-Raphaelite artists. Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s groundbreaking novella *Carmilla* (1872) furthered this idea in the medium of literature by introducing the first lesbian vampire type even if certain diversionary tactics were used to bracket the truly subversive theme. Roger Vadim’s film *Blood and Roses* (1960) was the first adaptation of *Carmilla* and it expanded on Le Fanu’s novella by incorporating the contemporary film practice of European art cinema to further sublimate the sexual desire between the leading characters. This study provides a visual journey of desire in the framework of vampirism as well as contributes to the study of vampires outside the context of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897). By analyzing the origins of female vampirism through the literature and images of Lamia and Lilith, *Blood and Roses* and its source, *Carmilla*, the reader gains a greater understanding of the visual representation of the evolving female vampire in art, literature, and film.
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Introduction

The vampire genre has been one of the most popular outlets for writing about sexuality and desire without explicitly stating it and more commonly vampirism has been used as an acceptable framework for portraying subversive themes. Two of the most prominent examples of this are found in nineteenth-century literature and twentieth-century film. Irish author Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s novella *Carmilla* (1872) and French filmmaker Roger Vadim’s film *Blood and Roses* (1960) explore the female vampiric type, a relatively obscure subject in scholarship. While both novella and film were innovative for different reasons, each used vampirism as a way to portray female homoeroticism and desire. In light of a recent surge of the vampire theme in the popular imagination, the novella and film adaptation deserve further attention. This study examines the interrelationship between females and vampires and the role of desire in Le Fanu’s *Carmilla*, as well as the first film adaptation of *Carmilla*, Vadim’s *Blood and Roses*, and the ways in that desire between the two leading female characters, essential to the earlier novella, is sublimated and diverted into networks of surrealism and vampirism.

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-1873) was an Irish author known for his supernatural tales filled with mystery and suspense. Although he was heavily influenced by Gothic and Irish folklore, Le Fanu was able to turn the Gothic novel into a modern psychological thriller by focusing on the inner thoughts and emotions of the victim. *Carmilla* was first published in the British magazine *The Dark Blue* in 1872 and later that same year in *In a Glass Darkly*, a collection of Le Fanu’s short stories. *Carmilla* was his single endeavor into writing about vampires, but the novella exemplified many of the storytelling qualities he was known for as well as a venture into new territory with the character of a female vampire who solely preys on young women.
French filmmaker Roger Vadim (1928-2000) is famous for writing, directing, and producing over thirty films. Vadim’s career has often been considered in regard to his high profile marriages and biography, but little analysis has been offered of the actual stylistic and visual elements in his art films. Well known for his sexual fantasy films and famous wives, one of Vadim’s generally overlooked works offered a brief foray into the realm of horror, somewhat outside the genre in which he typically worked. *Et Mourir de Plaisir*, released in the United States under the title *Blood and Roses* (1960), is one of Vadim’s art films and his only venture into the vampire genre. Due to restrictions placed on the film by the Hays Code of 1930, which deemed whether films were morally acceptable or not, *Blood and Roses* was released in the United States in a censored version minus thirteen minutes of erotic elements from the French release.\(^1\) Unfortunately, the French version is no longer available so the specific deleted elements are unknown.

*Blood and Roses* was the first adaptation of Le Fanu’s novella *Carmilla*, which followed the story of two friends, Laura and Carmilla, and their relationship. Like *Carmilla*, *Blood and Roses* explored a relatively new theme in the horror genre – that of the female vampire, which became even more popular in the vampire films of the 1970s. *Blood and Roses* paved the way for England’s Hammer Films’ *Carmilla* trilogy (1970-1971), which gained considerable recognition from audiences but lost much of the original essence of the novella by focusing on the frivolous, sexual nature of the characters rather than the serious relationship and evocative setting Le Fanu created. While several aspects of *Blood and Roses* remain true to the novella, Vadim took liberties with the plot censoring the full extent of the female relationship which Le Fanu created.

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The amount of literature pertaining to *Carmilla*, while often abundant due to the enormous amount of writing regarding the vampire genre, is often used as a segue into Irish author Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897). *Carmilla* is rarely discussed at length and as a result its importance in the vampire genre is glossed over. Some of the exceptions to this rule are Carol Senf’s *The Vampire in 19th Century English Literature* (1988), Leonard Heldreth and Mary Pharr’s *The Blood is Life: Vampires in Literature* (1999), and Ken Gelder’s *Reading the Vampire* (1994) all of which address the issue of *Carmilla*’s erotic, lesbian undertones and the ways that the 1872 novella may have influenced Bram Stoker’s writing of *Dracula* (1897) twenty-five years later. Elizabeth Signorotti’s essay “Repossessing the Body: Transgressive Desire in *Carmilla* and *Dracula,*” (1996), provides an interesting interpretation of the two novels. Several aspects of this essay apply to my study of *Carmilla* and *Blood and Roses*, such as how the plot of the novella is altered in the film to include a male authority figure, Leopoldo von Karnstein, which creates a heterosexual love triangle rather than a lesbian relationship.

Literature related specifically to *Blood and Roses* is limited. Even in comprehensive vampire film surveys, such as David Pirie’s *The Vampire Cinema* (1977) and James Craig Holte’s *Dracula in the Dark: The Dracula Film Adaptations* (1997), *Blood and Roses* is merely a side note used as a lead in to discussing the popular genre of vampire films of the 1970s. Nina Auerbach, with her book, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (1995), makes one of the most notable contributions with an allusion to Vadim’s use of the dream sequence as a way to “obliterate any potential affinity between the women.” While Auerbach hints at the idea of desire being diverted in the film, she stops abruptly with that insight and does not elaborate on the methods that Vadim uses. Catherine Fowler’s *The European Cinema Reader* (2002) and Marilyn Fabe’s

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Closely Watched Films: An Introduction to the Art of Narrative Film Technique (2004) are also valuable sources that go into great detail concerning European art cinema, the Auteur theory, and French New Wave cinema where the filmmaker created the film as a work of art and essentially became the author of that film. Another valuable source is Andrea Weiss’ Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film which provides a chronological discussion of lesbian films. Her interest in Blood and Roses lies in its aesthetic aspects and the European art cinema tradition that the film follows with its lush scenery and restrained violence.

This study consists of several different methods in order to explore Carmilla, Blood and Roses, and corresponding vampire images in a comprehensive fashion. Formal and iconographical analysis of related artwork and film are vital to recognizing consistent themes used again and again to represent the female vampiric type. A social art historical approach is employed to examine the social context in which Carmilla and later Blood and Roses was produced. An analysis of film theory regarding French New Wave Cinema, the Auteur theory, and art cinema methods provides greater insight into Blood and Roses and illustrate the films adherence to art film conventions rather than the traditional vampire genre.

In the first chapter of the study I examine the origins of female vampirism and its association with eroticism and evil as seen in the mythological figures of Lamia and Lilith and their representations in literature and art. A chapter tracing the initiation of the female vampiric archetype is crucial to recognizing the consistencies in their depictions in various mediums. Formal and iconographical analysis of the artworks reveals the notion that while functioning as a visual object of desire, Lamia and Lilith also served as warnings for people to beware of in their ability to entice and ultimately destroy.
In chapter two I discuss the novella *Carmilla*, its literary predecessors, and examine the connection between women and vampires during the nineteenth century as this interrelationship was portrayed in art and literature. Le Fanu’s novella *Carmilla* was one of the first examples of a vampire relationship that broke the boundaries of the traditional vampire genre by creating a lesbian vampire. Imperative to understanding the creation of *Carmilla*, it is necessary to examine the strict sexual and social taboos of nineteenth-century Victorian society and illustrate what greater concerns or issues the female vampire genre addressed at this time. I demonstrate the idea that truly subversive themes such as female sexuality and homoeroticism were able to be portrayed through culturally acceptable allegories of vampirism and the supernatural.

In the third and final chapter of my study I analyze Vadim’s *Blood and Roses* by outlining the plot of the film and the ways in which it differs from the original novella. I examine the role of desire in the film and the ways that desire between the two leading female characters is sublimated and diverted into networks of surrealism and vampirism. I also isolate the European art cinema tradition Vadim followed and illustrate how specific visual and plot devices he employed, such as a surrealist dream sequence and lush cinematography, minimized the implicit eroticism between the two leading ladies, while breaking standard vampire film conventions, to achieve his aim of aesthetic quality in the film over the sensational.

It is crucial to trace the history of the female vampire genre in various mediums to gain a greater understanding of the consistencies, representations, and aims of this type. Lamia and Lilith in many ways initiated interest in the female vampiric figure notably through the works of nineteenth-century Pre-Raphaelite artists. Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* furthered this idea in the medium of literature by introducing the first lesbian vampire type even if certain diversionary tactics were used to bracket the truly subversive theme. Vadim’s *Blood and Roses* was the first adaptation of
*Carmilla* and it expanded on Le Fanu’s novella by incorporating the contemporary film practice of European art cinema to further sublimate the sexual desire between the leading characters. This study provides a visual journey of desire in the framework of vampirism as well as contributes to the study of vampires outside the context of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897). By analyzing the origins of female vampirism through the literature and images of Lamia and Lilith, *Blood and Roses* and its source, *Carmilla*, the reader gains a greater understanding of the visual representation of the evolving female vampire in art, literature, and film.
Chapter One

Lamia and Lilith: The Origins of the Female Vampire in Literature and Art

Female vampires have a history that began long before Bram Stoker created the quintessential aristocratic-male vampire in his book *Dracula* (1897). While hardly rare in literature and art, female vampires have often been connected with goddesses in ancient religions or were used to represent all that was wrong with women. Mythology typically has defined them by their sexuality, and associations with the pagan and evil.¹ Two of the earliest examples of female vampires appear in Greek and Judeo-Christian mythology, Lamia and Lilith. While these subjects are often blended into one figure, they were at one time considered two individual female vampires known for preying on children and men. Both remained obscure themes in art until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when Pre-Raphaelite artists such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), John Collier (1850-1934), Herbert Draper (1863-1920), and J.W. Waterhouse (1849-1917) briefly explored the female vampire in their erotic depictions of Lamia and Lilith. Although neither vampire became as popular in art as other mythological femme-fatales, representations of Lamia and Lilith present an interesting phenomenon because of the consistency of their portrayals in literature and art. This chapter will explore the origins of such representations of the female vampire, specifically of Lamia and Lilith, and demonstrate how their portrayals have varied relatively little over time. The myths of Lamia and Lilith have consistently served as warnings for men to beware while at the same time presenting a visual object of desire, as dangerously beautiful in their ability to entice and ultimately destroy.

Lamia was a female vampire who originated in Greek mythology. She was the daughter of a Libyan king who caught the attention of Zeus, king of the gods. Hera, Zeus’ wife, became

incredibly jealous after Lamia bore Zeus several children. In revenge, Hera killed all of Lamia’s children except one. Lamia was so distraught over the death of her family that she turned into an evil creature possessed with anger and grief. She spent the rest of her life hunting and then draining the blood of young children and men, in accordance with the meaning of her name, “she who swallows up.” According to Greek mythology, Lamia’s penchant for sucking the blood of children turned her into a hideous being that was half-woman and half-serpent. Eventually, she garnered the ability to transform herself into a beautiful woman in order to attract and seduce young men. While Lamia did not fit the typical definition of a vampire, an undead creature who lives off of the blood of living beings, she turned to vampirism as an outlet for her grief by destroying other women’s children to account for her own loss.

Lamia first appeared in Greek literature in The Life of Apollonius of Tyana (217-238) by Philostratus (c. 170-247), a Greek sophist. In the story, Menippus, a young Lycian, encounters a beautiful vision who proclaims her love for him. Menippus is enchanted with the mysterious beauty and immediately asks for her hand in marriage. When he returns to the village to share his good news, Apollonius, a philosopher and teacher, tells him, “You are cherishing a serpent, and a serpent cherishes you.” Later that night at their pre-wedding banquet Apollonius again warns Menippus that he is going to marry a vampire, and advises him that although she appears

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5 The vampire is a complex and constantly evolving mythological creature who has taken on many forms throughout the centuries. Lamia and Lilith are early examples of the varied figures described as a vampire. Traditionally a vampire was a re-animated corpse who returned to prey on the living and sustained themselves by drinking the blood of living creatures. Lamia and Lilith differ from this definition in that neither were dead; rather they drank the blood of children and men as a form of revenge. Nevertheless, they were termed vampires because of this unique attribute and have remained two of the earliest examples of the female vampiric type in literature and art.
beautiful, it is simply a deception. Apollonius and Menippus confront Lamia and, “Then she admitted she was a vampire, and was fattening up Menippus with pleasures before devouring his body, for it was her habit to feed upon young and beautiful bodies, because their blood is pure and strong.” This literary text provides one of the first descriptions of a female vampire. Lamia’s mysterious and supernatural qualities allow her to entice her prey despite her admission of the truth, resulting in a fatal attraction; the sexual desire of the young Menippus causes his untimely death. The roles of seductress and vampire are intertwined as Lamia uses these attributes to her advantage to fulfill her desire for young blood.

The nineteenth-century English poet John Keats (1795-1821) immortalized Lamia’s beauty in his poem “Lamia” (1819), which closely followed Philostratus’ original tale, but he presented a more sympathetic interpretation of the female vampire. The poem begins with the Greek god Hermes, who is searching for a nymph renowned for her unsurpassed beauty. As he searches the country, he comes across Lamia, who is trapped in a serpent form. She begs Hermes to restore her to her physical form.

Ravish’d, she lifted her Circean head,
Blush’d a live damask, and swift-lisping said,
“I was a woman, let me have once more
A woman’s shape, and charming as before.
I love a youth of Corinth – O the bliss!
Give me my woman’s form, and place me where he is.
Stoop, Hermes, let me breathe upon thy brow,
And thou shalt see thy sweet nymph even now.”

Hermes agrees to transform her into a beautiful woman if she will reveal where the nymph resides. Lamia consents and Hermes reinstates her human figure. As Hermes and the nymph happily depart into the woods, Lamia sets out to find Lycius, a young man from Corinth. They

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8 Masters, 168.
immediately fall in love and all is well until the night of their wedding feast when Apollonius, a
sophist, reveals that Lamia is truly a vampire.

Then Lamia breath’d death breath; the sophist’s eye,
Like a sharp spear, went through her utterly,
Keen, cruel, perceant, stinging: she, as well
As her weak hand could any meaning tell,
Motion’d him to be silent; vainly so,
He look’d and look’d again a level --No!
“A Serpent!” echoed he; no sooner said,
Than with a frightful scream she vanished:
And Lycius’ arms were empty of delight,
As were his limbs of life, from that same night.
On the high couch he lay! --his friends came round --
Supported him --no pulse, or breath they found,
And, in its marriage robe, the heavy body wound.¹⁰

Lamia, being recognized, instantly returns to her serpent form and Lycius dies of grief and a
“body wound,” the equivalent of the vampire’s bite.

Keats presented a sympathetic character in Lamia and her deadly beauty which Pre-
Raphaelite artists later echoed in their haunting and beautiful images of the vampire.¹¹ The Pre-
Raphaelite Brotherhood was a group of artists and writers whose work harkened back to the style
of art before Raphael (1483-1520) when, in their mind, art was still pure and not tainted with the
mechanical poses and compositions of Renaissance and Mannerist art. Mythological scenes,
specifically of women, were enormously popular in Pre-Raphaelite art. After Keats’
popularization of the mythological vampire in Victorian circles, she became popular for a time in
poems, paintings, sculpture, and music. Many of the first images of Lamia and Lilith in art occur
in nineteenth-century Victorian England when male desires, represented in paintings of sensual,
beautiful women, were gaining popularity. Nina Auerbach’s book Woman and the Demon: The

¹¹“John Keats,” Concise Dictionary of British Literary Biography, Volume 3: Writers of the Romantic Period, 1789-
1832 (1992), Reproduced in Biography Resources Center (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Research, 2008),
Life of a Victorian Myth (1982) examines Victorian culture and its creation of a woman, in literature and art, who challenged the acceptable boundaries of society. Some of the most popular representations of this type of woman during the nineteenth century were mythological creatures—vampires, mermaids, and serpent-women, who each attracted male attention in their physical form, but represented a greater danger to Victorian society by symbolizing a powerful woman breaking the confines of the traditional family and church.12

Perhaps one of the most famous English artists to become enthralled with the Lamia myth was John William Waterhouse (1849-1917). He painted two depictions of the red-haired female vampire, Lamia (1905) (Figure 1) and Lamia (1909) (Figure 2). In Waterhouse’s Lamia (1905) the vampire is depicted as a beautiful seductress, begging her prey, a young, medieval knight, to give in to temptation. She silently implores in her kneeling position with an intense gaze and delicate touch. Lamia seems to beckon the young knight with soft spoken words or a song. Her long fingers caress his hand and forearm while his closed right fist fights the urge to touch the temptress. As Lamia kneels, it appears that the armored foot of the knight is the vampire’s tail, the layers of metal echo the snake scales imprinted on the fabric of Lamia’s dress. The knight’s red sash and the helmet’s red plume hint at the blood Lamia truly desires. It is the moment when temptation is greatest. The young man’s bowed head and lax body show that he is mesmerized by Lamia, not knowing what creature he is truly encountering. Waterhouse follows in the literary tradition of Keats by representing Lamia as a sensuous, charming figure rather than an evil creature that is her original incarnation. Waterhouse’s second Lamia (1909) incorporates a different setting but similar approach to the femme-fatale by placing her alone, on the edge of a stream, gazing at herself in the water. Her dress falls erotically away from one side of her body,

revealing a classically beautiful figure that delights in her appearance. Lamia’s flowing hair enshrouds her shoulders and back while the shimmering reflection in the water reflects her exposed foot. In both paintings Waterhouse includes a serpent motif in the fabric that drapes around her legs, indicating Lamia’s true identity as a serpent-woman while still maintaining the illusion of the ideal temptress.13

English artist Herbert James Draper (1863-1920) portrayed the female vampire in a similar way in his painting, *Lamia* (1909-1910) (Figure 3). Lamia is depicted leaning against a boulder by a stream glancing at the viewer out of the corner of her eye while a small serpent rests on her forearm. Echoing Waterhouse, Draper seems to have wrapped the shed skin of a snake, or a fabric that looks like it, around her waist to imply she is more than just an attractive woman.14 Unlike Waterhouse’s depictions, this Lamia does not try to entice with her gestures or gaze; rather, she presents the viewer with a paradox. The nude upper body and relaxed pose place her as an object to be desired, yet Lamia’s icy stare reveals the inner broodings of a vampire. This woman is not actively tempting or even inviting the gaze of the viewer, and it is her reserved evil that Draper is referencing, instead of the more sympathetic creature that Waterhouse depicts.

Despite the fact that Lilith and Lamia were often regarded as one figure, each developed from different mythologies and cultures. Lilith first appeared in a Sumerian text in 2400 B.C.E. in a list of Sumerian kings. Her name was used negatively to imply that one of the kings was the spawn of a “Lillu-demon” or a demon derived from a vampire or incubus-succubus.15 A Sumerian terracotta relief of *Lilith* (c. 1950 B.C.E.) (Figure 4) is the earliest known visual representation of the creature. Lilith stands upright flanked by owls and other night creatures.

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She has the voluptuous body of a woman with wings and owl’s feet to indicate her status as a she-demon of the night.\textsuperscript{16} Over time Lilith’s animal features faded out of the artistic depictions of her, leaving a beautiful woman able to control and charm those around her.

Perhaps Lilith’s most famous persona stemmed from Judeo-Christian writings. Lilith was mentioned in the Talmud, a collection of rabbis’ writings from the second to fifth century C.E., influential in the Jewish religion, as a vampire/demon, first wife of Adam.\textsuperscript{17} In the first creation account in Genesis 1:26-27, the Talmud identified Lilith as the first woman created by God made out of the same dust he used to make Adam; thus the two were created equally. In the second account of creation in Genesis 2:21-23, the text specifically states that God formed Eve from Adam’s rib.\textsuperscript{18} Although Adam and Lilith were supposed to enjoy companionship forever in the Garden of Eden the arrangement did not end happily. In the Talmud when Adam went to sleep with Lilith, she responded, “Why should I lie beneath you, when I am your equal, since both of us were created from dust?” Adam would not consent to Lilith’s sexual request to be on top, and, in a rage, she flew away to join with other demons in the Red Sea.\textsuperscript{19} Lilith and her group of demons began hunting young children for their blood, and thus Lilith was established as one of the first female vampires. As a result of Adam’s loneliness, God made Eve out of Adam’s rib so there would be no question of equality. Since Eve originated from a part of Adam she was

\textsuperscript{17} Dorothee Soelle and Joe H. Kirchberger, \textit{Great Women of the Bible in Art and Literature} (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 24.
\textsuperscript{18} In the Bible there are two differing creation accounts. The King James Version of Genesis 1:26-27 states, “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” The second creation account occurs in Genesis 2:21-23; “And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, ‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man’.”
\textsuperscript{19}Patai, 296.
subordinate to him. According to the Talmud, after Eve was created from Adam, Lilith was so upset and jealous that she wanted to return in a disguised form to punish Eve.\textsuperscript{20} Lilith, by taking the form of a serpent, eventually led to Eve’s downfall in the Garden of Eden when Eve ate the forbidden fruit offered by the disguised Lilith.\textsuperscript{21} In Talmudic tradition, after Adam and Eve sinned by eating forbidden fruit, Adam was so upset with Eve that he entered into a 130-year period of repentance in which he abstained from sex and food. During this time Lilith reappeared to Adam every night in his sleep to seduce him. These nightly unions, in which Adam was unable to reject Lilith’s advances or control his sexual responses, produced hundreds of demon children. This version of the story may explain Lilith’s frequent association with the succubus, another mythological figure.\textsuperscript{22}

The succubus was a female demon often linked with the vampire who came to men at night and laid on them in their sleep so that they were unable to move or object to her sexual advances, forcing men to have sex with her. The succubus and her male counterpart the incubus were often associated with the vampire in that they attacked their victims at night and drained their energy through sex. Unlike the vampire, the succubus did not seek the blood of its victims or kill them.\textsuperscript{23} However, artistic and literary traditions often linked the qualities of the succubus with those of the vampire. The connection between the succubus and Lilith is seen in visual art as well. A partially-destroyed Hellenistic relief from 323-146 B.C.E. (Figure 5) depicts a

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{21} In addition to Lilith’s artistic depictions as a seductive, beautiful woman in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there is an earlier artistic tradition of representing Lilith as half-woman and half-serpent. A variety of Medieval and Renaissance artists explored this theme in their portrayals of Lilith as the disguised serpent in the Garden of Eden offering Eve the forbidden fruit. Works such as the relief sculpture of \textit{Adam, Lilith, and Eve} (1210) from the façade of Notre Dame and Michelangelo’s \textit{Fall of Man} (1510) from the Sistine Chapel depict Lilith tempting Eve in her serpent-like body and alluring human face. Although Lilith is not yet the beautiful human woman encountered in later art works, she is still attractive and persuasive in convincing Eve to taste the fruit, ultimately leading to the downfall of man.
\textsuperscript{22} Patai, 297.
\textsuperscript{23} Melton, 318-319.
\end{flushright}
succubus mounting a man in his sleep. Similar to the earlier Sumerian tablet of Lilith (Figure 4), the succubus is shown with wings and owl’s feet, reinforcing the notion of Lilith as succubus.24 While Lilith gained a large amount of attention in the Jewish writings of the Talmud, in the Bible she was mentioned only once in Isaiah 34:14 as a “screech-owl” who lived in the immoral city of Edom. Part of the vagueness in the Bible may imply that contemporary readers already knew about the myths of Lilith and thus did not need further explanation of her story.25

Lilith’s representation in art began to emerge during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when English artists examined female mythological figures as femme-fatales or deadly women who attracted men through their beauty and charm but eventually lead them to their death. Often cited as a prime example of a femme-fatale, English poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) was one of the first nineteenth-century artists to explore the renewed powers of Lilith in art. Rossetti’s Lady Lilith (1868) (Figure 6) is seated in a chair surrounded by flowers with a comb and mirror in her hands. Unlike images of Lamia, Rossetti’s Lilith is completely clothed, and instead of nudity, her long neck, pouty mouth, and abundant hair serve as the central features. Lilith is in a Victorian interior encircled by various flowers all serving as symbols of the female vampire. The roses surrounding Lilith’s head relate to her sexuality, and the poppies in her lap signal sleep and dreams; Lilith usually visits her victims when they are asleep. The foxglove flowers, pictured under the dresser’s mirror, produce a fatal poison, thus hinting at Lilith’s evil intentions.26 Rossetti’s jewel-like ornamentation, although enticing, reveals a darker side of Lilith by connecting her with sex, death, and the night.

25 Soelle and Kirchberger, 24.
A number of art historians have concluded that Rossetti was portraying *Lady Lilith* as his version of the New Woman, a feminist in nineteenth-century Victorian England viewed as a threat to the traditional Victorian family. The New Woman was a feminist principle that emerged during the latter half of the nineteenth century in Europe and America. Members of the New Woman movement demanded greater liberties for women and addressed the stifling strictures of the stereotypical female roles within marriage and family. New Woman followers advocated greater rights and liberties for women in all areas of life, but many conservative males and females saw this as a threat to traditional societal order. According to Virginia Allen in her essay, “One Strangling Golden Hair: Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *Lady Lilith,***” (1984) the painting represents dual ideas in that Rossetti portrayed the modern woman engaged in vain activities in her own, private space while at the same time Rossetti connected the modern woman with the mythological Lilith, she-demon of the night who was to be feared for her beauty and blood-sucking. Rossetti’s choice of Lilith as the subject for this painting may have been intended to imply a deeper meaning to the work. Certainly there were other more popular femme-fatale types he could have depicted such as Judith or Salome, but Lilith was the greater evil—rebel demon, sexual temptress, and child killer—all the things good women were not supposed to emulate. Contemporary vampire literature also reacted to this feminist movement with Bram Stoker elaborating a great deal about the New Woman in *Dracula* (1897) through the character of Lucy Westenra. After being turned into a vampire by Dracula, Lucy was staked, possibly illustrating the notion that the New Woman must be kept under control. Whether or not Rossetti used Lilith as a warning against the New Woman, he kept with the tradition of depicting

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27 Allen, 291.
28 Signorotti, Elizabeth. “Repossessing the Body: Transgressive Desire in *Carmilla* and *Dracula,***” *Criticism* 38 (Fall 1996): 621-624.
Lilith as a deceptively beautiful woman meant to attract men and children, ultimately leading them to their demise.

British writer and fellow Pre-Raphaelite artist John Collier (1850-1934) followed in the footsteps of Rossetti with his version of *Lilith* (1887) (Figure 7), but Collier depicted Lilith as a standing mythological nude entwined in a serpent. Collier’s Lilith is aware of her sexuality and embraces it. The curving of her body and the twisting snake accentuates her form while Lilith’s flowing hair and long neck as in like Rossetti’s *Lady Lilith*, creates desire and attracts the attention of the viewer. The snake winds between Lilith’s legs with its head beside hers resting on her shoulder. The snake’s projecting tongue anticipates a bite to Lilith’s breast, often the same location where a vampire attacks its prey. The snake reveals the hidden danger inherent in Lilith – her sexuality is wild and deceptive like the snake and it will only lead to her prey’s death.  

Lamia and Lilith, two of the original figures of female vampires, set the standard in art and literature for later vampires of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Lamia and Lilith struck a chord with viewers, regardless of the era, because of their unconventional attributes. While they were bloodthirsty murderesses, their portrayals in art and literature focused on their disarming beauty; the sexual, sensual images carved a niche for the female vampire in Western society and have enabled them to be figures of desire in a wide array of mediums in literature, art, and film. While these two mythological beings experienced only a brief recognition in art, the female vampire genre expanded rapidly in the twentieth-century through the new medium of film. Eventually female vampires like Lamia and Lilith transitioned into vampires whose sole

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29 Gauld, 41.
prey became young women as illustrated in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s novella *Carmilla* (1872), and its subsequent film adaptations in the 1960s and 1970s.
Chapter 2  
*Carmilla* (1872): The Victorian Socialization of the Subversive Female Vampire

The character of the female vampire remained a fairly minor theme in literature and art until the 1800s when changing social factors encouraged further expansion of the figure’s roles. Literary vampires provided a fictional outlet for the suppressed Victorian society, and female manifestations of the vampiric type were put forward at a time of great societal change regarding women. Inspired by earlier tales of female monsters preying on young women, Gothic novelist Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-1873) created an entirely new persona in the vampire genre with *Carmilla* (1872). The work was a response to nineteenth-century popular imagination and it addressed greater issues and concerns about women in Victorian society. In this chapter, I discuss the novella *Carmilla* (1872), its literary predecessors, and examine the connection between women and vampires during the nineteenth century as this interrelationship was portrayed in art and literature. My aim is to demonstrate that truly subversive themes such as female sexuality and homoeroticism were able to be portrayed through acceptable allegories of vampirism and the supernatural.

Vampires often appear in literature and art as signs of innovation. During the nineteenth century in Great Britain, they were commonly represented figures in literature as seen in *Dracula* (1897) and *Carmilla* (1872), and in the twentieth century when American cinema rose to the forefront, vampire types became a popular subject in cinematic writing in the United States.\(^1\) While depictions of male vampires have predominantly been defined in literature, female vampires in contrast have often been used to impugn patriarchal convention; their presence in literature, art, and film seem to come from shifting ideas about sexuality rather than the

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\(^1\) Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 4-7.
previously though notion that vampirism related to society’s fear of death.  
This in part explains the female vampire’s popularity during the nineteenth century and her resurgence during the 1960s and 1970s. Literary female vampires like Carmilla and her earlier influences reflect the changing ideas and concerns of Victorian sexuality while also breaking with the limitations of traditional literature.

The relationship between vampire and victim has taken on two dominant forms since it was first introduced to literary audiences. The vampire was portrayed as either a maniacal fiend killing anyone in his/her path regardless of sex, race, and class or the vampire developed an intimate connection with the victim resulting in their destruction or immortal condemnation by being turned into an eternal vampiric companion. The latter scenario was a subject that was first explored fully in nineteenth-century British literature. In England and America the vampire genre was created predominantly by men and the prime examples of vampires that were discussed were male, but often female figures were incorporated into texts to portray the most subversive behaviors that were depicted. Ken Gelder’s book, *Reading the Vampire* (1994), notably mentions that many vampire texts fail to explore the sexual differences found in vampires, often focusing instead on their apparent similarities. Despite some exceptions, desire between vampires traditionally focused on a male vampire preying on a female. The vampire’s behavior was considered deviant because he was sucking blood, but the erotic act of blood-sucking was still occurring in a normal, heterosexual manner. *Carmilla* was one of the first examples of a vampire relationship that broke the boundaries of correct Victorian conduct.

Vampirism became an outlet for displaying the unmentionable. Instead of writing about a

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lesbian in Victorian England, Le Fanu created a female vampire solely preying on other females. The forbidden sexuality was essentially brought to life through vampires because their deviant behavior existed in a fictional realm making it far more tolerable than homosexuality in the real world. Carmilla’s desire and affection for Laura (her victim) was acceptable and even popular because the lesbianism was masked within the vampire genre formula.

Nineteenth-century Victorian society was a time when people were demanding greater rights for women, whether economic, social, or political, and these factors were a recurring topic of discussion. Feminist movements such as the New Woman emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century in Europe and America, which advocated greater rights and liberties for women in all areas of life. Literature and theater introduced innovative new works focusing on women’s rejection of a male dominated society. While feminist ideals were gaining greater attention, the correlation between females and vampires was a theme used frequently in popular art and literature. Many scholars view the origination of the female vampire genre as stemming from male fears of the Other, embodied in the form of a powerful and dangerous woman. Early mythological female vampires, like Lamia and Lilith, had at least one of three defining characteristics in common with later literary manifestations: “bloodsucking, rebellious behavior, and overt eroticism.” These early figures set the stage for the female vampire genre through their representation of everything traditional women were not supposed to be. They were dangerous and destructive while at the same time alluringly beautiful.

The works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), John Polidori (1795-1821), J. Sheridan Le Fanu, and Bram Stoker (1847-1912) all marked the development of the erotic

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relationship between vampire and victim. Of particular interest are the works of Coleridge and Le Fanu as they distinguish themselves by portraying the female vampire as the central figure. Samuel Taylor Coleridge was an English poet, philosopher, and one of the founding members of the literary Romantic Movement in England, which gained prominence during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Romanticism rejected the scientific approach to nature and life initiated by the Industrial Revolution; instead literary works looked to produce a range of emotions in the reader. The supernatural and horror genre was one way to do this. Coleridge’s poem “Christabel” (1800) was one of the first works of literature to examine the lesbian monster theme, which told the story of Geraldine and Christabel. In the narrative, Geraldine, a supernatural creature found in the woods, comes to stay with Christabel and her widowed father, and soon the women develop an “unconventional” relationship. Coleridge never used the word “vampire” to describe Geraldine but ascribed many attributes of Lamia to her thereby tying Geraldine forever to the precursor of the modern vampire. She also had several qualities of the classic vampire that were later expanded in literature. They include the inability to cross a threshold alone, exotic, foreign origins, heightened sensitivity toward animals, and disarming beauty. The erotic tone of the poem set it apart from contemporary literature, specifically in lines 239-251:

Beneath the lamp the lady bow’d,
And slowly roll’d her eyes around;
Then drawing in her breath aloud,
Like one that shudder’d, she unbound
The cincture from beneath her breast:
Her silken robe, and inner vest,

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6 Melton, 108.
7 I do not consider “Christabel” a vampire story mainly because the topic of whether Coleridge was depicting a vampire is often debated. I make the distinction between Geraldine and other creatures by indicating she was a lesbian monster meaning she was a creature interested solely in female victims. Whether the relationship was sexual or not, Geraldine was attracted to Christabel, thus setting it apart from the heterosexual relationship used in previous supernatural literature.
Dropt to her feet, and full in view
Behold! her bosom and half her side –
A sight to dream of, not to tell!
And she is to sleep by Christabel.
She took two paces, and a stride,
And lay down by the maiden’s side:
And in her arms the maid she took…

Arthur Nethercot was one of the first scholars to address the similarities between
Coleridge’s “Christabel” and Le Fanu’s *Carmilla*. He asserted that Le Fanu must have either
read Coleridge’s tale or used many of the same sources in order to create a story that was so
similar. Nethercot, in his essay, “Coleridge’s ‘Christabel’ and Le Fanu’s ‘Carmilla’” (1949),
compares the similarities between the two women, Carmilla and Geraldine, and posits that
Geraldine was indeed a vampire. While in much of the essay he goes back and forth analyzing
minute details that generally are traditional vampire characteristics and not innovative to
Coleridge or Le Fanu, Nethercot does assert that Geraldine and Carmilla distinguish themselves
as original vampires, epitomizing feminine beauty while preying on other females.  
Nethercot briefly mentions the lesbian tone that dominates both stories, but warns the reader that
matters such as homoeroticism were not on the minds of nineteenth-century authors or readers,
and so to interpret “Christabel” or *Carmilla* as anything other than a vampire tale would be a
futile exercise. While Nethercot was the first scholar to draw attention to the similarities
between the two works, he overlooks one of the most vital aspects of each story— their
homoeroticism, and he fails to explore what appeal this may have held for contemporary
Victorian audiences. Nethercot’s conservative attitude toward sexuality practiced during the

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Company, 2003), 32.
10 Ibid., 38.
1950s, when his essay was published, is projected onto earlier literature and disregards one of the most important aspects of the poem and novella.

Long before Coleridge or Le Fanu’s literary inventions, there was a historical figure thought to have inspired the popular female vampire story. Countess Elizabeth Bathory (1560-1614) (Figure 8), was a member of Hungarian royalty, and is recognized as being responsible for the torture and deaths of over 600 young girls. It is unknown exactly how the Countess became involved in the deaths of so many innocent young ladies, but popular folklore now dominates what is remembered of her life.\(^\text{11}\) It is said that one day when Elizabeth was getting dressed, a servant upset her, and when the Countess hit her on the cheek it drew blood. As the story goes, Elizabeth immediately noticed that her own skin appeared younger where the servant’s blood had touched it; this initiated a life-long desire for the blood of virgins to help her remain physically rejuvenated. Elizabeth continued her lifestyle until 1610 when she was investigated by Hungarian authorities and found guilty of her crimes after the disappearance of young women of nobility. She was sentenced to confinement for life in a small room in her castle where she died three years later.

Though Elizabeth Bathory was not a vampire, she was referred to as such after court documents noted her penchant for biting the flesh of girls while torturing them. Another story, of questionable validity that held that she bathed in the blood of her victims, further imbedded the Countess in the mythos of vampirism. Even though the tales surrounding her life are uncertain, they have had an effect upon vampire literature via Bram Stoker who read about Bathory in Sabine Baring-Gould’s *The Book of Werewolves* (1865), where her story first appeared in English. The story of Elizabeth Bathory’s life was later popularized in the Hammer

horror film *Countess Dracula* (1971), which exaggerated the restorative effects of blood on the Countess but nonetheless presented the historical figure to a new generation. Whether Le Fanu read this book before writing his novella or not, Elizabeth Bathory was one of the first examples of a woman desiring the blood of young, beautiful girls, a theme that became even more popular in nineteenth-century literature with *Carmilla*.  

While vampire popularity continued to thrive during the nineteenth-century in novels, poems, and Countess Bathory stories it was not until the appearance of J. Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872) that the depth of the female vampire genre was fully explored. Contemporary authors such as Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) initiated public interest in Gothic detective tales that focused on death, mystery, and the occult, possibly facilitating the greater development of vampire literature. Le Fanu was an Irish writer known for his supernatural tales filled with mystery and suspense, but *Carmilla* was his sole endeavor into vampire literature. Although he was heavily influenced by Gothic and Irish folklore, Le Fanu was able to turn the Gothic novel into a modern psychological thriller by focusing on the inner thoughts and emotions of the victim. One of the best examples of this is in *Carmilla* when daydreams and nightmares intertwine. It was his knack for getting inside the mind of his characters that made Le Fanu such an innovative author, yet today his writings face relative obscurity. “While the tradition of supernatural literature is replete with authors underappreciated by the academic and literary mainstream, few authors suffer greater injustice in this regard than Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu.”  

In *Carmilla* Le Fanu weaves more than a tale of a vampire and its blood-sucking adventures; he

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12 *Countess Dracula*, prod. by Alexander Paal, 93 min., Hammer Film Productions, 1971, DVD.
13 Melton, 33-35.
14 Williams, 8.
15 Ibid., 251.
develops an emotional and physical relationship between the vampire and her victim, while also reflecting Victorian society’s unease with female sexuality by limiting the parameters of lesbian attraction to vampirism.17

Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* was first published serially in the British magazine *The Dark Blue* in 1872, and later that same year in a book collection of Le Fanu’s horror stories, *In a Glass Darkly*. In *The Dark Blue*, the short story was accompanied with illustrations by David Henry Friston (better known for his *Sherlock Holmes* illustrations) and Michael Fitzgerald. Le Fanu was interested in the connection between visual imagery and text, and as a result, the majority of his work was accompanied with illustrations. However, the engraved illustrations differ from the actual plot and character descriptions in the novella, so, consequently, later printings of the short story did not include them. In *In a Glass Darkly*, each story was presented as case study told to occult detective Dr. Hesseliuss, by his patients, published posthumously in order to inform the common people.18 The case study of *Carmilla* is narrated from the viewpoint of Laura, the object of the vampire’s attentions. By Le Fanu choosing to use Laura as the narrator of the tale, the reader is given access to the private relationship between vampire and victim and pulled into the previously unknowable world of a sensual closeness between two women.19

Laura begins her story by recounting the factual details of her life. She and her father (who remains nameless throughout) live in Styria (present day Austria) in a large castle, or schloss, and although Laura was born in England, she has never lived in the country due to the affordability of living in a “primitive place” like Styria.20 The Gothic house is isolated from the rest of the world with Laura often commenting on the oppressive feeling of loneliness that

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18 Williams, 87.
19 Gelder, 64.
pervades the schloss. The nearest home is a deserted estate three miles away that once belonged to the noble Karnstein family and now houses their tombs. Laura jumps into the heart of her tale by telling the reader about “the first occurrence in my existence, which produced a terrible impression upon my mind.” When Laura is around six years old she awakens one night to find a beautiful young girl kneeling beside her. The girl climbs in bed with Laura and quiets her with caresses. Instead of being frightened, Laura is instantly calmed and falls asleep, until a short time later when she is awakened by “a sensation as if two needles ran into my breast.” The mysterious girl quietly slips under the bed and when the maid enters she is nowhere to be found and the marks on Laura’s breast have disappeared.

The tale progresses to present day when Laura is nineteen and expecting a friend, Bertha Rheinfeldt, niece of General Spielsdorf, to come and stay with her for an extended period of time. One night while walking with her father, he informs Laura that Bertha has passed away from inexplicable causes. As they are walking, mist begins to creep over the land creating a “transparent veil” as the moonlight shines down. Laura’s father then expresses his gut feeling that “some great misfortune” is about to occur when they hear the sound of a carriage approaching. As it nears their castle the carriage comes upon an old stone cross in the ground that causes the horses and carriage to crash into a tree. A young woman, roughly the same age as Laura, and her mother emerge from the wreckage with the mother distraught since she has important business to attend to (where or what she never says) and she cannot take her injured

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21 J. Sheridan Le Fanu, 89.
22 Ibid., 90.
23 Ibid., 94.
daughter with her. Laura’s father gallantly volunteers to have the girl stay with them.\textsuperscript{24} Thus the stage is set for a companion to enter, exactly what Laura is longing for.

From the moment of her arrival the girl (who the reader later finds out is named Carmilla Karnstein) is noted for her disarming beauty. The maids exclaim, “She is, I almost think the prettiest creature I ever saw. She is absolutely beautiful...and such a sweet voice.”\textsuperscript{25} As Laura meets her new friend she is surprised to find it is the same girl who visited her twelve years ago and duality, a literary device which Le Fanu uses often, comes into play as Carmilla declares she also saw Laura in a dream twelve years ago and the image has never left her mind. Laura loses any fear of Carmilla as they sit in bed and hold hands. Laura tells Carmilla if she were not so pretty she would have been frightened seeing her after so many years. Carmilla responds, “I wonder whether you feel as strangely drawn towards me as I do to you,’... she sighed, and her fine dark eyes gazed passionately on me.”\textsuperscript{26} Even at this early stage Carmilla’s beauty has gained her entrance and unquestionable acceptance into her victim’s house. Laura, her father, and the servants are so physically attracted to the girl that they disregard the strange set of circumstances surrounding her arrival.

As her stay progresses, Laura eventually becomes uncomfortable with Carmilla’s physical advances of kisses and caresses, but she finds herself unable to refuse. Carmilla’s attentions seem to resemble those of a lover to Laura.

Sometimes after an hour of apathy, my strange and beautiful companion would take my hand and hold it with a fond pressure, renewed again and again; blushing softly, gazing in my face with languid and burning eyes, and breathing so fast that her dress rose and fell with the tumultuous respiration. It was like the ardour of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet overpowering; and with gloating

\textsuperscript{24} J. Sheridan Le Fanu, 96.  
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 98.  
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 101.
eyes she drew me to her, and her hot lips travelled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, ‘You are mine, you shall be mine, and you and I are one forever’.  

Laura tries to naively think of possible explanations for Carmilla’s behavior, reasoning she may be insane or is really a boy dressed as a girl. Although she is disgusted by some of Carmilla’s affections she is equally as confused by the sense of excitement and pleasure she receives from them. Other aspects of Carmilla’s demeanor puzzle Laura, she sleeps in late (usually until one o’clock), eats very little if anything, and when they go out during the day she becomes physically exhausted after a few steps. Anecdotal stories and facts hint at Carmilla’s true identity throughout the novella. Carmilla refuses to pray with Laura’s family and boldly declares that she doesn’t worship God, but Nature, directly defying the dominant Christian religion. One day when a funeral passes by, Carmilla grows irate at Laura’s singing of a funeral hymn and asserts that death is a natural part of life, not something to be mourned. (Figure 9) Peasant girls begin mysteriously dying and then when a family portrait arrives at Laura’s house everyone is astounded to find that the sitter, Countess Mircalla Karnstein 1698, bears an uncanny resemblance to Carmilla.  

Laura begins to experience strange nightly visits from a creature in the form of a black shadow or cat that always leaves the sensation of needles in her chest. After the night creature (which is really Carmilla in a different form) temporarily stops visiting Laura, she begins to feel a strange exhaustion coming over her. “Dim thoughts of death began to open, and an idea that I was slowly sinking took gentle, and, somehow, not unwelcome possession of me.”  

As Laura grows paler and weaker, Carmilla’s devotion and physical advances become even stronger. One  

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27 J. Sheridan Le Fanu, 104-105.  
28 Ibid., 109-111.  
29 Ibid., 118.
night Laura has a strange dream where a voice whispers, “Your mother warns you to beware of the assassin.” As Laura looks up she sees Carmilla standing at the foot of her bed with her nightgown covered in a stain of blood from head to toe. As she calls out Carmilla disappears. Frightened, Laura hurries to Carmilla’s room to find it empty. Upon her reappearance the next morning, Carmilla claims a spell of sleepwalking led to her disappearance.  

It is of note that there were two illustrations corresponding to this bedroom scene in the original publication and neither were accurate interpretations. In the first illustration (Figure 10) by D.H. Friston, Laura’s father peers in through the open door to find Carmilla hovering over a sleeping Laura, while in the text Laura is wide awake with her father nowhere to be found. It is the very absence of Laura’s father throughout the novella that allows much of the vampire’s seduction to take place. Laura mentions in the beginning of the story that her father’s room is far removed from hers and even if she were to need help he would not be able to hear her. In the second illustration (Figure 11) also by Friston, the viewer is confronted with Laura’s frightened face upon seeing Carmilla. Though the more accurate of the two illustrations, the viewer is still left wondering what Carmilla’s facial expression and blood soaked nightgown might look like.

After Laura’s condition worsens, her father asks Doctor Spielsberg to come and check on her. Laura explains the piercing sensation on her breast and as they lower her dress the doctor’s suspicions are confirmed as a small blue spot is found on her neck. Interestingly when Laura describes the attacks it is always on her breast, but when the two male figures go to examine the spot it has moved to her neck, minimizing the erotic aspect of the vampire’s bite and providing evidence that although Carmilla was innovative for depicting a female vampire there were still

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30 J. Sheridan Le Fanu, 119.
31 Ibid., 90.
32 Ibid., 124.
restraints on what was appropriate for nineteenth-century Victorian audiences. As Laura and her father later leave for a picnic on their way to the Karnstein ruins, General Spielsdorf arrives to relay his story of Bertha’s death. To their surprise, the General’s story of a mysterious girl and the sickening Bertha directly mirrors that of Laura and Carmilla, with Le Fanu using duality to incorporate another example of a victim of Carmilla. While Laura and the General wait in the chapel, Carmilla enters. Before Laura can even greet her, the General launches toward her and exclaims that Carmilla is Millarca, the General’s former house guest, who is the dead Countess Mircalla Karnstein. Carmilla escapes, but only temporarily, because the next day, in traditional vampire fashion, the town men return to find her in her coffin and anticlimactically stake, decapitate, and cremate Carmilla.33

In the conclusion, Laura reveals she is still puzzled by the story years later, and cannot think of any explanation for the logistics of the vampire, but she knows that when a vampire finds a victim, it often develops a fascination with her similar in appearance to love, which properly explains Carmilla’s physical and emotional attraction to Laura. Although Carmilla has been gone for years, Laura is left contemplating the vampire and its effect on her life. “To this hour the image of Carmilla returns to my 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.”34 Laura’s story resembles a tale of courtship between vampire and victim as the

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33 J. Sheridan Le Fanu, 142-144.
34 Ibid., 148.
boundary between close friend and lover is blurred, and even after so much time has passed Carmilla’s memory lives on.\(^35\)

In Carol Senf’s, *The Vampire in 19th Century English Literature* (1988), Senf argues that through Le Fanu’s use of women as vampires he was also hinting at the “power and powerlessness of women during the nineteenth century.” Though Carmilla is able to maintain her immortality, many characteristics of vampirism limit her. She is languid during the day, and her name is limited to anagrams of her original name: Mircalla, Carmilla, and Millarca. Laura has a type of power as well- her narration of the events gives the story a life of its own after her death for future readers. Yet while each woman has independence in some areas, ultimately, they are still controlled by male authority figures, reflecting the socially prescribed roles in Victorian culture. Laura is confined to an isolated schloss, and Carmilla is eventually staked by the town men.

During the late nineteenth century, two types of literary female vampires were portrayed by patriarchal authors. The literal, supernatural kind who drained the blood of their victims, and the metaphorical type portrayed in realistic novels as a woman who fed off the economic resources of society.\(^36\) “Both vampires and women are parasitic creatures, the one by nature, the other by economic necessity. Both are dead, the one literally, the other legally. Both are defined primarily by their physiology rather than by their intelligence or emotions.”\(^37\) Le Fanu intertwined these two ideas of economic and natural vampire by making Carmilla the vampire


and welcomed guest of the schloss. She fed off of Laura physically through her nightly visits and Laura’s father financially making her the epitome of the destructive female archetype.

For the nineteenth-century male, and many females of the time, sexually aware women were feared and frequently associated with life draining vampires; this connection acted as a control over the female populous. The vampire was sometimes viewed as a symbol of the invasion of foreign diseases, notably sexually transmitted diseases, because they were often believed like vampires to have originated in Eastern Europe where vampire legends were most prevalent. The female vampire also served as an example of a sexually aggressive woman unable to be controlled by men and therefore someone to beware of. In The Gothic Vision: Three Centuries of Horror, Terror and Fear (2002), David Cavallaro points out this relationship between sexually conscious women and vampires in W.J. Robinson’s Married Life and Happiness (1922) which notes the danger of the erotic female and her drive for sex as another form of vampirism.

Wives who are satisfied with occasional relations—not more than once in two weeks, or ten days’ may be considered normal but there is the opposite type of woman, who is a great danger to the health and even the very life of her husband. I refer to the hypersexual woman, to the wife with an excessive sexuality. It is to her that the name vampire can be applied in its literal sense.

Artists such as Philip Burne-Jones (1861-1926) and Edvard Munch (1863-1944) depicted their versions of the sexually aggressive female as vampire in their art. Burne-Jones, The Vampire (1896) (Figure 12) was a controversial painting portraying an exuberant woman leaning over the body of a man stretched across a bed. Whether the male is exhausted from their previous lovemaking or unconscious is unknown but the implications and title are clear. The

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39 Cavallaro, 182.
woman is like a vampire sucking the life from her male victim and enjoying it, as verified by her triumphant grin. Edvard Munch’s *Vampire* also titled *Love and Pain* (1894) (Figure 13) has a similar theme in that Munch’s woman descends upon her faceless male victim enveloped by a sea of fiery hair and black shadows. *Vampire* became a popular topic for Munch with fourteen prints and paintings created after a similar design. The paintings alternate title, *Love and Pain*, hints at the dual aspects of the female vampire. While beautiful, her love only brings pain, physical as well as emotional. The flowing red hair traps her victim and suggests the blood she desires. Each painting was thought to have been inspired by unfaithful women who left the artist broken hearted, illustrating Burne-Jones and Munch’s use of the vampire as a metaphor for the liberated and malevolent woman.40

While *Carmilla* was not the first or last literary work concerning a lesbian vampire it broke through traditional vampire genre conventions by giving the victim and vampire a voice. *Carmilla* focused on the actual relationship between the women with vampirism being used as a general framework to alleviate the controversial aspect of same-sex attraction in Victorian society. Shifting ideas regarding sexuality and women’s roles made *Carmilla* an attractive topic in nineteenth-century literature and explains its resurgence during the twentieth century when *Carmilla* was adapted into film.

Chapter 3

Blood and Roses (1960): Realizing the Vision of Carmilla

During the nineteenth century there was a change in the vampire genre as the vampire shifted from being a creature of folklore to, primarily, a literary figure. In the next century the vampire field further evolved and achieved greater popularity through the new medium of film. The most popularized vampire novel captured on celluloid many times was undeniably Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1897), but J. Sheridan Le Fanu’s Carmilla (1872) was next in terms of the attention it received on the big screen.\textsuperscript{1} Although the many film adaptations of Carmilla were produced during the 1970s, the decade of the genre’s pinnacle, an earlier film closely followed European art cinema conventions, which made it markedly different from later adaptations. In Roger Vadim’s Et Mourir de Plaisir, released in the United States as Blood and Roses (1960), I will examine the role of desire in the film and the ways that Vadim’s approach to the film sublimated and diverted the desire between the two leading female characters into networks of surrealism and vampirism. I also focus on the European art cinema tradition Vadim followed and detail how specific visual and plot devices he employed, including a surrealist dream sequence and overall lush cinematography, minimized the implicit eroticism between the two leading heroines, while breaking with standard vampire film conventions, to achieve his aim of aesthetic quality in the film over the sensational.

Before the late 1950s, the vampiric figure was a minor theme in cinema, but from 1957-1973 over two hundred vampire films were produced in over ten countries.\textsuperscript{2} An influential factor prior to the proliferation of vampiric moving pictures was the strict enforcement of the Production or Hays Code of 1930, which regulated what was considered morally acceptable in

\textsuperscript{1} David Pirie, The Vampire Cinema (New York: Crescent Books, 1977), 31.
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., 6.
film and television. Consequently vampire films of the early twentieth century were versions of *Dracula* that focused not on the sexual aspects of the blood-sucking creature, but on its monstrous, horror qualities. Relaxation of the Hays Code standards, accompanied by the adoption of the Production Code of the Motion Picture Association of America (or MPAA rating system) in 1956, allowed a wider range of films to be made, and the erotic vampire genre became highly successful. Societal changes for women during the 1950s witnessed the advent of women entering the work force in greater numbers. Concurrently, the introduction of the birth control pill made the sexual revolution of the 1960s an undeniable and persistent influence on the largest generation in history, the baby boomers. Together, these factors contributed to the breakdown of conservative social norms and traditional gender roles that prevailed in the lives and cinematic works of preceding generations.³

These significant changes in American culture possibly prompted the introduction of homoeroticism, namely lesbianism, into film. Whereas in other film genres graphic sexuality and violence was considered unacceptable, supernatural and horror films had a greater freedom due to their unrealistic quality. The vampire genre in film and literature has been one of the most common outlets for portraying sexuality and desire without explicitly stating it, and part of the appeal of the erotic vampire in film included a homoerotic aspect.⁴ Lesbian vampire types became so dominant during the 1970s that it is still the most common representation of the lesbian in film.⁵ Often used to embody death and desire as well as fulfill male fantasies about

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women with women, the erotic lesbian vampire functioned more as a soft-core pornographic male fantasy than a supernatural, horror film.⁶

Despite the overt sexuality of lesbian vampire films, one of the reasons this genre became so popular and acceptable in cinema was the apparent normalcy of the type. The lesbian vampire fulfilled the stereotypical image of the traditional heterosexual woman—white, feminine, and attractive. She blends in with everyday society and her lesbianism and vampirism are unknown by the accompanying characters. Andrea Weiss’ book *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film* (1992), does an excellent job of defining the typical plot that most vampire films follow. Typically, the vampire is introduced to the audience and used to disrupt the natural order of things and create some anxiety in the characters and viewer. In the middle of the movie the vampire takes part in his/her blood-sucking activities providing excitement and erotic entertainment until eventually the vampire is discovered, destroyed, and the natural order of things is restored.⁷

In lesbian vampire films there is a more specific narrative that takes place and this includes the rivalry between the lesbian vampire and a mortal man for the attention of another woman. A bisexual love triangle is created with the male representing the natural, good side of things and the female vampire being quite the opposite. Scenes of sexual attraction between the vampire and her victim are predominantly portrayed to appeal to heterosexual male audiences. More so than violence the vampire embodies the threat of sexuality as she seduces her victims rather than violently attack them. By gradually drawing the victim in, the vampire develops a connection with its prey creating a type of complicity, demonstrating the relationship to be

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⁷ Weiss, 92.
desired by both. As the vampire is about to take the sought-after woman as her immortal companion, good triumphs over evil, and the vampire is destroyed, usually by the male. While elements of this plot line are enacted in *Blood and Roses*, it is one of the few examples of a vampire film working outside the normal conventions, in large part this departure is mandated by its art film status.

*Blood and Roses* is predominately rooted in a lesser known film practice, European art cinema, which defines many of the nontraditional aspects of the film. Art cinema began with the European avant-garde films of the 1920s and 1930s and continued to take shape again after World War II when Hollywood film production was on the decline and alternate modes of production were encouraged. Rather than a cohesive movement in film, art cinema is often regarded as an individual method of film practice set within a specific historical context and guided by basic formal principles. The well-known French New Wave cinema and the Auteur theory gained popularity in Europe, particularly in France, around the same time, and both share common features in that the individual is emphasized and a romantic notion of filmmaking is attached to the films. Art cinema is often overlooked and has received little of the criticism or analysis that the Auteur theory has received over the years.

Auteur-ish films dominated French film production from 1959-1963, and although Roger Vadim (1928-2000), director of *Blood and Roses*, was rarely considered a New Wave director, many filmmakers and critics look to his film, *And God Created Woman* (1957) as the starting

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8 Weiss, 92-93.
9 David Bordwell, “The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice,” in *The European Cinema Reader*, ed. Catherine Fowler, 94-102. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 94. Some early examples of art cinema were Surrealist, Dadaist, and Expressionist films which looked to overthrow traditional film practice by creating something entirely new. The films wanted to attract the intellectual viewer rather than try to appeal to mass audiences.
10 Ibid., 96.
point for French New Wave film practice due to its frank sexuality.\textsuperscript{12} When French film critic Alexandre Astruc (b. 1923) introduced the idea that cinema was a language in which an artist can express his thoughts as easily as an author puts his into a novel, other critics and filmmakers were eager to expand on this notion. In 1954 French director and critic, Francois Truffaut (1932-1984) developed the Auteur theory or \textit{les politiques des auteurs} (the policy of authors). The guiding principles of this theory maintained that in order for a film to be considered art there had to be an artistic genius behind the film, guiding the production, and orchestrating his vision onto the screen. This was where the director’s role came in. Prior to the Auteur theory, the screenwriter had generally been regarded as the author of the film, but New Wave theorists disagreed and viewed the screenwriter as merely providing the outline for the director to execute in his role of overseeing the design, cinematography, editing, and performances of the actors/actresses.\textsuperscript{13}

The Auteur theory was quickly embraced by critics and the public, in large part due to the general appeal of giving credit to a specific director or artist and watching his vision unfold. It also helped validate film as an artistic medium to be taken seriously. Nonetheless, its praise and practice was short lived due to the criticism it received during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Film critics argued it was simply an extension of Romantic literature and art, which placed artists and writers on pedestals without accounting for the numerous other individuals involved in the production as well as other societal effects. Roland Barthes (1915-1980) in his essay “The Death of the Author” (1967), dealt another blow to the validity of the Auteur theory as he argued that

\textsuperscript{12} Marilyn Fabe, \textit{Closely Watched Films: An Introduction to the Art of Narrative Film Technique} (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 124.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 121.
the meaning of the text is not found in the author but from the reader, and consequently there must be the death of the author and the birth of the reader.\textsuperscript{14}

Art cinema aligned itself with the premise of the Auteur theory in which the director of the film was given the authorial role and was a vital if not the main component of the film, creating a work of art with an independence lacking in most Hollywood films.\textsuperscript{15} In traditional classic cinema, narrative form guided the sequence of events and the visual representation, whereas in art cinema the visual and auditory (such as the musical score not dialogue) aspects of filmmaking guided the narrative. Art cinema was also noted for its realism which ranged from realistic settings to candid sexuality and nudity; often these elements were vital and permissible components of the movie due to the serious nature of its style. Plot lines revolved around psychological issues of the characters, producing a “drifting quality” rather than a strictly defined sequence of events. The films focused on reaction rather than action, with characters repeatedly sharing personal stories, dreams, and fantasies to add greater psychological depth.\textsuperscript{16}

Certain film and camera techniques are generally considered to be characteristic of art cinema, the primary one being the use of the flash-forward, which was rarely used in early classic cinema, but in art films was a vital force that acknowledged the presence of the film’s narrator as he or she revealed to the viewer knowledge that none of the other characters had.\textsuperscript{17} In the case of \textit{Blood and Roses}, the movie begins with a flash-forward as the vampire, Millarca, guides the viewer through the preceding events. Other cinematic qualities found in art films are the zoom shot and camera pan, which point out the medium of the film by drawing attention to

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\textsuperscript{14} Fabe, 121-123. \\
\textsuperscript{15} Bordwell, 97. \\
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 96. \\
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 98.
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the camera.\textsuperscript{18} The zoom shot is when the camera moves in closer or farther away focusing on a particular person or event in a continuous movement while the pan shot is the movement of the camera horizontally across a scene capturing a character’s actions without interrupting the scene.\textsuperscript{19} Art films create a sense of ambiguity throughout the movie while blending a realistic yet expressionist setting. One of the best ways to do this is by giving the film an open-ended narrative. “With the open and arbitrary ending, the art film reasserts that ambiguity is the dominant principle of intelligibility that we are to watch less for the tale than the telling, that life lacks the neatness of art and this art knows it.”\textsuperscript{20} Perhaps the main difference between commercial Hollywood films and art cinema was that the former was made primarily for profit and entertainment while the latter was produced for creative and artistic means as a way to work outside the restrictive realm of traditional filmmaking.\textsuperscript{21} All of these aspects are present in \textit{Blood and Roses} and exemplifies how closely Vadim was drawing inspiration from European art cinema.

One of the reasons Roger Vadim was not embraced by contemporary New Wave and Auteur theory directors was his insistence on a collaborative approach to filmmaking. In his book \textit{Memoirs of the Devil} (1975), Vadim talks about the many people involved in film production to create a “work of art.”\textsuperscript{22} From the moment Vadim came across Sheridan Le Fanu’s tale he knew he wanted to make it into a film, and although he had experienced a rise in popularity following the success of \textit{And God Created Woman} (1956) and \textit{Dangerous Liaisons} (1959), Vadim had trouble finding a producer and distributor willing to take a chance making a

\begin{footnotes}
\item 18 Fabe, 133.
\item 20 Bordwell, 98.
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film adaptation of a then obscure vampire novella. He himself was however drawn to the character of Carmilla and subsequently cast his wife, Annette Vadim (1936-2005) in the leading role. It was a large risk to produce a vampire film when dozens of bigger offers featuring Hollywood stars and commercial subjects were knocking at his door, but Vadim was determined to make the film. Blood and Roses was met with mixed reviews, as the acting and dialogue were highly criticized, while the exquisite cinematography and musical score were praised. Vadim later said of Blood and Roses, “It was a strange work, a little ahead of its time, but nevertheless well received by some because of its aesthetic qualities.” Salvador Dali was a prominent fan of the film, attending the premier and commenting to Vadim at the after party, “I loved your cannibal with such pink skin.”

Vadim was the first filmmaker to adapt Carmilla (1872) from novella to screen, although Carl Dryer’s Vampyr (1932) is often said to be loosely based on Carmilla. Dryer’s version should hardly be considered an adaptation of Carmilla primarily because the single element he borrowed from Le Fanu’s novella is the portrayal of a female vampiric figure. Vadim’s version takes many liberties with Le Fanu’s original novella by adding a host of characters, changing names and plot lines, while maintaining the first-person narrative, although this time from the perspective of the vampire Millarca instead of the victim, Laura.

Blood and Roses adds a new twist on Carmilla as it revolves around the idea of supernatural transference in that Millarca’s 200 year old soul infinitely possess the bodies of her

23 Vadim, Memoirs of the Devil, 118.
26 Ibid., 147.
27 James Craig Holte, Dracula in the Dark: The Dracula Film Adaptations (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 105.
female victims in order to be with the man she loves. What is significant about this new plot line is that the film eliminates much of the relationship between the two leading female characters, which was undeniably the essence of the earlier novella. The film is modified to include a third love interest—Leopoldo von Karnstein—into the story. By creating a love triangle with the addition of a male character, Carmilla/Millarca goes from a lesbian vampire type to a female vampire who uses whatever means possible to ensure her eternal companionship with the man she loves. While *Blood and Roses* is generally grouped into the lesbian vampire film genre, Lucille Cairns' definition of a lesbian is what I have used to label *Carmilla* a lesbian novella while refraining from terming *Blood and Roses* a lesbian vampire film. “The sine qua non of lesbianism is erotic attraction between women…the word ‘lesbian’ to mean a woman/female human being who may not necessarily have had genital contact with, but whose erotic preference is for, other women/female human beings.”

The second part of this chapter discusses the plot of *Blood and Roses* while providing a stylistic analysis of the film in order to illustrate the sublimation of lesbian desire into the areas of visual imagery, vampirism, and surrealism.

**Film Analysis**

*Blood and Roses* opens with a plane taking off on a runway and as it ascends into the sky a voiceover of Millarca begins to tell her story. Although the viewer is unaware of it, the opening scene is actually a flash-forward, and this same scene will conclude the film. While this technique is used frequently in contemporary film practice, during the 1960s it was less common, and is one of the first indications that *Blood and Roses* does not fit into the typical vampire film genre. As the plane soars through the clouds Millarca introduces herself. “My name is Millarca.

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I lived in the past, and I live now.” She notes that in the age of technology and industry, it is hard to believe in the spiritual realm, which belongs to the thinking of the old world, but nevertheless, it still exists. As her dialogue ends, the clouds dissipate to reveal a large castle in Italy, part of the Karnstein estate. The camera zooms into the living room of the house where an eclectic group of people are gathered. Millarca invites the viewer to join her. “Enter with me. I will tell you the story of my most recent life.”

Leopoldo von Karnstein, the lead male character, speaks with Chief Justice Monteverdi, his daughter and Leopoldo’s fiancé Georgia Monteverdi (equivalent to Carmilla’s Laura), and his first cousin and last descendant of the Austrian line of the family, Carmilla von Karnstein; all are discussing plans for the upcoming costume ball. Leopoldo wants something spectacular for the party, so he suggests a fireworks display at the old Karnstein cemetery. As he says this the camera turns to Carmilla, who abruptly looks at one of the servants with an expression of anger and fear. It is apparent that they know something the audience does not, but Leopoldo assures them everything will be fine as the graves have been empty for over 200 years. As the servants grudgingly leave to arrange the fireworks, Carmilla explains that the townspeople are afraid of the Karnstein vampires or the undead who live off human blood. Leopoldo quickly silences Carmilla, realizing the mounting fear in the room, and asserts that there have not been vampires since 1765, when the peasants broke into the cemetery and staked them all, while Carmilla argues that, on the contrary, one body survived.

“The lady in question,” Carmilla tells her guests, is Millarca Karnstein, who lived during the height of their family’s power (or when they were vampires). She was passionately in love

Blood and Roses, screenplay and dir. Roger Vadim, 74 min., Paramount Pictures, 1960, videocassette. It is important to note that the original film is in color with black and white film used during the dream sequence.
with her cousin Ludwig, but unfortunately died on the eve of her wedding in his arms where she swore to love him forever. The reason her body was not destroyed was because Ludwig hid her grave from the peasants. Regrettably for Ludwig, a mysterious series of events left each of his later three fiancés dead right before the wedding. As Carmilla finishes her story Georgia points out that it was obviously Millarca who killed the fiancés. At this mention, both Carmilla and Georgia turn to a life-size portrait of Millarca hanging in the living room where the viewer gets a glimpse of the remarkable physical similarities between Carmilla and the vampire Millarca. In the painting Millarca wears her white wedding dress and holds a withered rose upon which Georgia questions its faded appearance. Carmilla explains that flowers always wither when a vampire touches them. This aspect of the withered rose will be used several times later in the film to indicate a vampire’s presence.

As Carmilla finishes the story of Millarca, she falls into somewhat of a trance imagining what the vampire would be like if she were still alive. “Look!” says Carmilla and the characters and camera turn toward the French doors that lead outside. “She has crossed the olive grove. She has opened the door.” At these words the curtains start blowing and the sound of wind whistles through the house. “She is still wearing her white dress. She is coming in.” The camera turns to a subjective point of view shot, which creates the illusion that the camera lens has become the eyes of one of the characters. In this scene it suggests the spirit of Millarca is peering in through the window. The point of view camera pans across the room as the guests stare back into it, until it comes to rest on Leopoldo, and Carmilla says that he reminds Millarca of Ludwig, her love, and perhaps she has returned to be with him.

31 Beaver, 277.
The next scene takes place at the elegant costume ball on the Karnstein estate, where Carmilla is nowhere to be found. As the guests gossip about Carmilla’s absence it is revealed that Carmilla is in love with Leopoldo and her lack of attendance at the party is a result of her jealousy over Leopoldo’s upcoming wedding to Georgia. After some time, Leopoldo angrily goes to Carmilla’s room and orders her to get dressed and come down. She sarcastically replies, “You have but to order and I hasten to obey,” indicating the odd relationship between the cousins. While Carmilla fights against her feelings for Leopoldo, she cannot help but try and please him. As Carmilla goes to get dressed for the ball Millarca’s voiceover beckons Carmilla to wear the white wedding dress from the portrait, which she acquiesces to. As the fireworks explode, Carmilla wanders in a beautiful Italian landscape accented by fluted columns while pining over her unrequited love for Leopoldo. Millarca’s white wedding dress billows behind Carmilla creating a romantic Gothic setting while the modern fireworks display in the background connects the old and new. (Figure 14) A brooding Carmilla is lead to the Karnstein abbey under the spell of Millarca, whose voice whispers, “Don’t you feel my spirit calling you? Don’t you?” At this moment something goes wrong with the fireworks, and there is an explosion in the abbey. The explosion paves the way for Carmilla to enter, and she continues to wander into the smoldering ruins to encounter Millarca’s tomb. (Figure 15) In a trance she finds the sepulcher, and as she touches the stone the top slides away. (Figure 16) Carmilla whispers “Millarca,” and backs away as a shadow emerges from the grave and approaches Carmilla. The sound of a heart beating faster and faster begins as the camera zooms into the surprised yet contented face of Carmilla until the screen goes dark and a blood curling scream echoes through the abbey.
Upon her return to the house, Leopoldo and Georgia begin to notice that Carmilla has acquired some strange characteristics. Later that night at dinner Carmilla experiences a newfound knowledge of eighteenth-century history, and when Georgia goes to kiss her goodnight she notes her hands are like ice and she is extremely pale. (Figure 17) The next day when Georgia, Leopoldo, and Carmilla go horseback riding, they are astonished to find that the horses are so afraid of Carmilla she is unable to ride. On another day while Georgia and Carmilla are walking the grounds, Carmilla becomes exhausted after a few steps, and insists on staying under the shade of a tree away from the sun. As they sit under the tree Carmilla (possessed by Millarca) stares longingly at the resting Georgia. (Figure 18) This scene is one of three instances in the film where Carmilla and Georgia are alone and lesbian desire is evident. Carmilla’s attraction to Georgia is intense and unexpected. The previous moment, the women were casually walking through the estate grounds and suddenly Carmilla is overcome by a desire to kiss or bite Georgia, the viewer is unsure of which. As she leans over to kiss Georgia, Leopoldo interrupts the sensual moment between the two women. There is a similar scene in the novella in which Carmilla and Laura sit under a tree holding hands and sharing secrets, but without the interruption of a male figure. Leopoldo’s presence at the moment of erotic attraction between Carmilla and Georgia confirms his role as the foil to Carmilla’s plan and lesbian desire, but unlike in the novella, Carmilla does not want to take Georgia as an eternal companion; it is only out of Carmilla’s (Millarca) desire to possess Georgia, in order to be with Leopoldo, that she is drawn to her.

After the horse riding incident, Carmilla returns home overcome by a strong urge for sustenance. Millarca’s voice whispers, “I need nourishment.” Carmilla spots Liza, a household servant, and later that night she follows Liza home through a tree lined path. When Carmilla
leaves to pursue her first victim the viewer primarily sees her and Liza simply walking through a vast Italian countryside, downplaying the inevitable attack. Panoramic long shots (or shots that provide a wide angle view of an area) comprise the majority of the scene as Carmilla wanders regally through castle ruins and swaying trees. Vadim essentially creates a cinematic landscape painting while minimizing the impending violence. Unlike the majority of vampire films, violence is never portrayed outright in *Blood and Roses*; instead temporary looks of horror and frightened screaming informs the viewer of what has happened. As the women wander, then eventually run through the idyllic landscape, the moving camera and the haunting music of an Irish harp heightens the suspense as Liza runs but is confronted by Carmilla everywhere she turns. Liza backs up against a tree and begs Carmilla to leave her alone as the camera zooms in on Carmilla’s face while she approaches her victim. Once again the screen goes black and ends with Liza screaming in horror at the vampire’s unseen attack. In the novella, a large part of Carmilla’s appeal was her ability to seduce her prey and the way she developed an intimate connection with other females. This eventually led to a trusting relationship in which Carmilla began to feed off of her female victims gradually in order to maintain her strength, by which time they were so engrossed in the relationship that they were unaware of what was happening. In *Blood and Roses* Carmilla’s first attack is hasty and unplanned and any connection or desire between the women is sublimated into the surrounding scenery.

Carmilla returns home revived and refreshed where Leopoldo finds her playing an old family song on the piano and the two sit together flirtatiously laughing and talking. They discuss their relationship, hinting at how they miss what they once had. Leopoldo invites Carmilla on his honeymoon with Georgia, pointing out that they are all friends so there should be nothing

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32 Beaver, 218.
33 Weiss, 94.
wrong with that. As Carmilla begins to agree she turns to look in a mirror and sees a red blood stain begin to spread over her left breast on her white dress, but when the camera pans back to Carmilla the viewer sees that there is no stain on the dress. She runs in horror to her bedroom and rips the blood-stained gown off of her and as Leopoldo comes in to comfort her they begin to kiss establishing a complicated and incestuous love triangle. Sexual desire is stronger between Carmilla and Leopoldo throughout the film, but due to the literary source and vampire genre status of *Blood and Roses* the limited instances of attraction between Carmilla and Georgia are what is predominantly focused upon in scholarship, and popularized in images of the film. Heterosexual, erotic moments such as the previous scene between Carmilla and Leopoldo are absent in film stills, while the three instances of desire between Carmilla and Georgia elicit an abundant amount of images, revealing that in many ways the film was marketed as a lesbian vampire film to appeal to contemporary audiences as a soft-core pornographic fantasy but in actuality it was not.

The next day Carmilla and Georgia are taking a walk outside when they find themselves caught in a rainstorm. After seeking shelter in a greenhouse, Georgia confronts Carmilla telling her that she has always known she (Carmilla) is in love with Leopoldo. Carmilla is silent and as Georgia continues pressing her for a response, Carmilla finally erupts, “Carmilla is dead.” Georgia turns to pick up a rose as a peace offering to Carmilla, and as she does she pricks her lip on a thorn, drawing blood. The same haunting music used in the earlier attack scene, between Carmilla and Liza, quietly plays as Carmilla’s face advances toward Georgia. Carmilla gently kisses the blood from Georgia’s lip until they are interrupted by a servant and Georgia quickly departs, unsure of what has just happened. (Figure 19) Although it is not Leopoldo who interrupts them this time, it is one of his male servants demanding Carmilla and Georgia return.
home, thus once again thwarting female desire. In the greenhouse, Carmilla drops Georgia’s offered rose where it lays withered on the ground.

While there are moments in *Blood and Roses* where erotic attraction between Carmilla and Georgia is undeniably, as in the greenhouse scene, there is always the underlying notion that Carmilla/Millarca is only drawn to Georgia out of her desire to possess her and eternally be with Leopoldo. Le Fanu’s novella did not need nor try to integrate any male character into the intimate relationship between Carmilla and Laura. Vadim’s version, while innovative in its visual presentation, eradicates a large part of the lesbian desire with its incorporation of a male figure. Leopoldo controls Carmilla and Georgia throughout the film with his actions and words. There are instances when Carmilla refuses to submit to male authority, as in the costume ball when she will not leave her room, though Leopoldo blames it on her frivolous and spoiled nature. Similar things happen with Georgia, for example, after the costume party; Georgia remarks about one of the party goers’ appearance, and Leopoldo responds by calling her a bitch. Both women are vying for his affection, yet he represents the patriarchal role trying to impose order on unruly women.

Georgia’s demeanor becomes contemplative and quiet after the encounter in the greenhouse, and Leopoldo, thinking Carmilla is upsetting her, decides it is best to get married.

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34 Holte, 105. This paragraph is partly in response to Holte’s assertion that *Blood and Roses* “downplays the patriarchal revenge of the original narrative (Carmilla) and emphasizes the lesbian elements of Carmilla.” I find this statement to be completely false, and am trying to stress that by simply inserting a male character to create a love triangle, *Blood and Roses* immediately diminishes a large part of the lesbian relationship, not emphasizes it, as Holte says.

35 Elizabeth Signorotti, “Repossessing the Body: Transgressive Desire in *Carmilla* and *Dracula*,” *Criticism* 38 (Fall 1996), 607. Signorotti’s essay posits that *Carmilla* broke the traditional bonds of male authority by focusing solely on two females, Carmilla and Laura, and their relationship without the interference of a male figure while *Dracula* needed to reassert male authority twenty five years later by using a range of male characters to establish control over the female characters. The ultimate sign of this is through the institution of marriage. Male figures in *Dracula* work to prevent any homoerotic desire between women while in *Carmilla* desire is given free reign. I looked to aspects of this essay in that *Blood and Roses* employs a similar device with the addition of Leopoldo which sublimates the desire between Carmilla and Georgia.
quickly and not at the Karnstein estate. Carmilla/Millarca sensing that she must act quickly goes to Georgia’s bedroom later that night. As Carmilla leans over the sleeping Georgia, Georgia whispers “Millarca.” Carmilla’s pale fingers delicately untie Georgia’s nightgown in preparation for the vampire’s bite as the Irish harp melody plays softly in the background. (Figure 20) The film switches to black and white as the surrealist dream sequence begins. Georgia awakens to find Carmilla at the foot of the bed. As Georgia stares at Carmilla, slowly bright red blood begins spreading over her white dress starting at the neck until it covers her entire gown. (Figure 21) The black and white photography adds to the starkness of the red blood against the white dressing gown, and as Georgia lays frightened she hears the voice of Liza, Carmilla/Millarca’s first victim, calling her name. Through the French bedroom doors Liza floats by in a sea of water beckoning her to come out. Georgia opens the doors and dives into the water. The scene abruptly changes and Georgia is now walking through puddles on the estate grounds surrounded by dancing couples recalling the night of the costume ball. (Figures 22) As she wanders between the figures (Figure 23) they suddenly vanish, and she is standing in front of an archway with two figures approaching on horseback that then fade into a wall followed by an abrupt zoom to another scene where Georgia finds herself standing at the entrance to a long corridor lined with hundreds of women. Some are talking, some are quiet, but the cement hallway is filled with noise. The camera pans over the faces of the women coming upon a mannequin in the midst of all the human females. The camera suddenly stops and Georgia is at the opposite end of the corridor where she is led away by two nurses. The music ceases, wind begins whistling, and the faint sound of a heartbeat begins. The nurses drag her into a room where Georgia stares in horror at what is happening. Six robotic nurses form an assembly line, all wearing blood red gloves and passing medical instruments to the doctor who is preparing to operate on a woman
harnessed supine and spread-eagle on a table. She is nude from the waist up and her face is covered with a bag. (Figure 24) The doctor turns toward Georgia, and Georgia realizes with surprise that it is Carmilla. “Carmilla?” she asks. The woman responds, “I am Millarca. Carmilla is dead. I killed her the night of the ball.” She then turns and lifts the mask off of the girl on the operating table revealing a dead Carmilla. The wind begins howling violently and suddenly Carmilla (possessed by Millarca) and Georgia are spinning in a circle, holding each other. Carmilla leans in closer as the camera slowly zooms-in to Georgia’s neck where Carmilla eventually sinks her teeth. A screaming Georgia awakens in her bedroom and the film returns to color.

This surrealist-inspired dream sequence, one of the most memorable scenes in the film, plays off of Carmilla’s use of the dream metaphor as a framework for the vampire’s attack. The jarring images composing the dream sequence range from a floating dead servant to water-drenched dancing couples and robotic nurses, until the final scene portraying the vampire’s attack seems the least bizarre in comparison to the barrage of images previously experienced by the viewer. In the novella, large cats and black shapes haunt Laura’s dreams, but Blood and Roses draws upon modern fears with women filling corridors leading to a sterile operating room managed by robotic women bringing death through an operation not by supernatural means. The swirling figures of Carmilla and Georgia as Carmilla prepares to attack her prey are almost anticlimactic, a factor that forces us to conclude that visual imagery, not lesbian desire, was the thematic focus in Blood and Roses.

As Georgia continues screaming, Leopoldo and a doctor rush to her aid where they notice the bite marks upon her neck. Little by little they begin to piece things together until they come to the conclusion that Carmilla has tried to kill Georgia out of her love for Leopoldo. Carmilla
overhears the conversation and flees to Millarca’s grave. Events begin happening quickly as the music swells and Leopoldo starts running after Carmilla. As the two run through the countryside, town officials are preparing to detonate the rest of the explosives within the Karnstein abbey. The men begin counting down. Leopoldo calls her name “Carmilla, Carmilla,” which she will not answer to, until he finally yells, “Millarca!” She stops and turns around with tears streaming down her cheeks as she looks at her eternal love. At that moment the explosives ignite sending Carmilla over a cliff and impaling her body on a branch. Back in her bedroom, Georgia clutches her chest in pain whispering, “Oh it hurt,” as the camera goes back to a dead Carmilla, her limp body hanging over the branch.

The final scene returns to the airplane where Millarca’s voiceover picks up where it left off in the beginning. She asks the viewer, “Well what do you think? Still a modernist? The true explanation lies in the world of the spirit.” The camera turns toward Leopoldo and Georgia embracing in the plane while Georgia holds a rose in her hand. Millarca’s voice continues, “Ah, Leopoldo, another modernist. Three months on a honeymoon and still he thinks it is Georgia he married. It is I, Millarca. I who lived in the past, I live now and Leopoldo is mine.” As the last line is uttered organ music grows louder as Georgia lowers the flower to reveal it fading in her hand.

What is remarkably different about Blood and Roses from contemporaneous vampire films, besides its art film status and well-known director, is that it uses neither violence nor nudity to enthrall the viewer and provided an alternate ending; instead of the normal destruction of the vampire, the vampire lives on in the body of the victim, the woman she decides to possess. Its congruence with the art film genre has to do with the film’s attributes that reflect the European art cinema tradition of turning to effusive and sensuous cinematography and dramatic
and even narrativistic haunting music to provide much of the anticipation and action of the film. It is also these visual aspects which de-emphasize the implicit eroticism portrayed in the original novella. While *Blood and Roses* was innovative as an art film, it represents a shift in the twentieth-century vampire film genre to a pornographic heterosexual fantasy of homoeroticism instead of the intimate, relational components of *Carmilla*. The qualities that made *Carmilla* so inventive and fascinating during the nineteenth century were altered in twentieth-century film to attract the attention of male viewers through their often sexualized portrayals of the two leading women while relegating the female relationship to a side note.
Conclusion

Vampires are one of the few mythological creatures that have stood the test of time. Experiencing phases of absence and renewed interest in popular culture, the vampire genre has the ability to merge into the culture it lives in. From its origins as a creature of mythology and folklore it has remained a persistent force in subsequent centuries adapting to new forms and mediums of expression while still retaining its undeniable appeal eliciting horror and excitement. Early followers of the vampire genre turned to literature as a means of writing about the unmentionable in society, namely eroticism and desire, while adhering to the popular Gothic literary style. As the vampire genre began to wane during the early part of the twentieth century the new medium of film revived the vampiric figure. Even as this study was written a whole new generation has been introduced to the vampire genre with Stephenie Meyer’s young adult series *Twilight*, which has initiated a plethora of vampire novels and films. The draw of the undead remains a persistent force in popular culture and is one example of the relevance of this study.

In the first chapter of this study my aim was to examine the origins of the female vampiric type in literature and art in order to illustrate the consistency of their portrayals and how their depictions possibly related to or coincided with later literary and cinematic representations. I analyze the two primary female vampire archetypes Lamia and Lilith from Greek and Judeo-Christian mythology due to the considerable amount of literature and art concerning the two and their consistent function as a warning for men and women to be wary of. Beauty is dangerously deceptive, could be the mantra of the myths of Lamia and Lilith. Ancient and Victorian authors reflected this idea in their stories serving as cautionary tales of the danger of sexuality. Pre-Raphaelite artists elaborated on this notion by painting a variety of versions of
Lamia and Lilith, but all had one unifying characteristic—they were alluringly beautiful. The erotic poses and symbolic objects contained in the compositions may have set the standard for a conventional female vampiric type. While male vampires were depicted as aristocratic, noble and often scary, female vampires were defined by their looks and sexuality. Lamia and Lilith are two of the earliest interpretations of this ideal and as such were fundamental to providing background information to the study of the female vampire genre.

In the second chapter, I analyzed Sheridan Le Fanu’s novella *Carmilla* (1872), which to this day is infrequently noticed in literary circles due to the domination of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) as the essence of all things vampiric. Preceding vampire novels were promptly overshadowed by Stoker’s immensely popular masterpiece, but *Carmilla* was one of the first literary depictions of a female vampire and more importantly a lesbian vampire. I looked to previous and contemporaneous literary and societal forces which may have influenced the creation of such an innovative novella. My aim was to examine the plot of *Carmilla* and the role of desire between the leading characters and illustrate how some of the ideas expressed in the novella possibly corresponded to issues in contemporary Victorian society regarding women as well as expound on the notion that although breaking convention, homoeroticism in *Carmilla* was still confined to outlets of vampirism.

The third and final chapter of my study examined the first major film adaptation of *Carmilla*, Roger Vadim’s *Et Mourir de Plaisir* or *Blood and Roses* and demonstrated how the erotic attraction between the women was framed in not only vampirism but surrealism as well. *Blood and Roses* possibly illustrates the shift that occurred in the vampire genre from the nineteenth century when *Carmilla* was created to the twentieth century when film forever changed the public image of the vampire. *Blood and Roses* is a remarkable film, but has been
eclipsed by the surplus of erotic and sensationalized vampire films distributed during the 1970s when the vampire genre was at its height. I argue that *Blood and Roses* was first and foremost an art film strictly adhering to art cinema conventions rather than following the traditional vampire film genre standards. By turning to art film methods and incorporating a male figure thereby creating a love triangle, Vadim minimized much of the desire between Carmilla and Georgia that was so vital to the earlier novella.

While a large part of this paper focused on the sublimation of desire in later film adaptations of *Carmilla* there has been one notable exception. *Carmilla*, besides *Dracula*, is one of the few vampire texts to be translated into theater. The Educational Theater Company’s Café La Mama in New York produced a rock opera of *Carmilla* in 1970, which ran intermittently until 1977 and was later revived in 1986 and 2003. The innovative stage production placed the two central characters, Carmilla and Laura, in center stage seated upon a high-backed couch while background projections corresponded to the music and dialogue eliciting an intimate and eerie setting. The opera was in many respects the most faithful adaptation of *Carmilla* in any medium, as it focused on the lesbian and erotic elements so vital to the original novella.¹

Perhaps one of the main reasons vampires have stood the test of time is due to the variety of types. Vampires are often defined by their apparent similarities instead of their differences and it is this aspect of the vampire genre that initiated this study. Lamia and Lilith, two of the earliest female vampires, *Carmilla* and its film adaptation *Blood and Roses* are a few examples of female vampiric figures, but the markedly different way authors, artists, and filmmakers approach the female vampire versus the traditional male vampire was one way to illustrate the differences not similarities within the vampire genre. My aim in this study was twofold – to

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bring attention to a vital yet overlooked vampire novella, *Carmilla*, and its first and most important film adaptation *Blood and Roses*, while tracing the history of the female vampire genre through the different mediums of art, literature, and film.
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