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8. A FEMINIST BLOODLETTING

Reading Suicide in Florence Marryat and Angela Carter

INTRODUCTION

Let's face it: being a female vampire within the world of Victorian fiction sucks, both literally and figuratively. In almost all of her depictions throughout the nineteenth century, the female vampire is seen in two states: either feeding from the necks of her victims or on the hunt to do so, in the quest to satiate her voracious appetite. Typically, she seeks her prey under the cover of night and therefore her desire for human flesh becomes doubly coded, signalling both her physical hunger and her sexual wantonness. Furthermore, because these qualities represent monstrous violations of the natural world and the strict norms that regulated femininity and female sexuality in the Victorian era, she rarely survives beyond the end of the story. Thus, while her perpetual un-life presages her eventual death, as it does with all vampires, the female vampire also represents a specifically sexual threat that must be contained and subsequently exorcised by authoritative male figures, in what becomes a violent act of ritual cleansing that restores a properly gendered order and helps bring the narrative to a satisfying close.

Not surprisingly, this depiction of vampiric femininity has largely been featured in writings by men. Within these male-authored texts, of which Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1871) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) are the most prominent examples, female vampires catalyse a number of patriarchal anxieties about female power and the notable shifts that were taking place in gender norms at the fin de siècle. Furthermore, since these central texts typically mark the female vampire as a foreign "Other" or, in the case of Stoker's Lucy Westenra, as tainted by this vampiric "Otherness," she also functions as an important locus for intertwining cultural anxieties about gender and sexuality with concurrent concerns about national and racial "purity."

While this essay begins by exploring this male-determined script and focuses on the female vampires presented in *Dracula* and *Carmilla*, it

ultimately analyses how women writers have responded to this broader literary legacy. To do so, it examines the female vampires in Florence Marryat's 1897 novella, *The Blood of the Vampire*, published in the same year as Stoker's *Dracula*, and Angela Carter's 1979 short story, "The Lady of the House of Love." Despite the historical distance that separates these texts, both offer incisive and strikingly similar challenges to this male-dominated tradition and use their protagonists' struggles with their vampiric condition to call attention to the oppressive structures of patriarchy itself.

Furthermore, although Marryat and Carter in many ways extend the problematic twinning of dissident sexuality and foreign "Otherness"—in the way that Helen Brandt's vampirism in Marryat is tied to her status as a mixed-race "quadroon" and in the way that Carter's Countess survives by luring men into her Transylvanian castle on the eve of World War I—they also show how these characters come to recognise their feeding as complicit with the imperialism and militarism carried out by their monstrous forefathers. When Harriet and the Countess commit suicide at the end of their narratives, Marryat and Carter frame these acts of self-destruction as adamant refusals to perpetuate longstanding patterns of patriarchal violence. As such, their suicides recuperate a space for female agency that is admittedly vexed, but also not wholly contained by the expression of masculinist power.

EXORCISING THE FEMALE DEMON IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN

Since *Dracula* gets title billing in Stoker's text, it is easy to forget that his female kin outnumber him in the world of the novel. From the three female vampires that inhabit his castle—known more popularly as the Brides—to the fearsome transformation of Lucy Westenra, these female figures' malevolent acts feature just as prominently as *Dracula's* and, more crucially, lay the groundwork for the Count's nefarious plans. As early as the third chapter, when Jonathan Harker wanders the castle at night against *Dracula's* warnings, readers get their first full glimpse of the horrific threat that the vampire presents, when he meets the Brides for the first time. While there are small details scattered across the opening chapters that signal *Dracula's* monstrosity, including his pointed ears, pale skin, and lack of a reflection, it is only when Harker comes into contact with the Brides—with their "piercing eyes" and their "brilliant white teeth"—that the vampire's violent potential becomes abundantly clear (p. 45).

After the three women debate who will take the first bite, the "fair girl" comes toward Harker "on her knees, and bent over," exhibiting a feline

ferocity (p. 45). As she approaches, Harker stares transfixed, while he catalogues her body parts in a way that connects his erotic titillation with a growing sense of danger:

There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth. (pp. 45–46)

Later, when the Bride's teeth hover over the 'supersensitive skin' of Harker's throat, he closes his eyes in a 'languorous ecstasy and wait[s]—wait[s] with beating heart' (p. 46). And though her fangs never puncture his skin—since an enraged Dracula interrupts and stops her from feeding—her encounter with Harker nevertheless shows the important role that the Brides play in the novel's more general inversion of normative, heterosexual penetration.¹

Certainly the female vampire is not the first or only creature to present this kind of threat to patriarchal hierarchies. While she has become an integral part of the tradition of vampire fictions that was developed in the Romantic texts of Lord Byron and John Polidori and in the 1840s serial novel *Varney the Vampire*, the female vampire also bears a number of crucial similarities to other folkloric figures like the succubus and the lamia—who sustain their life by feeding on men and children and whose rejection of marriage and maternity characterises their monstrous femininity. In this way, the female vampire narrative is part of a long line of myths that organise misogynist fantasies about female power. Furthermore, as Nina Auerbach (1982; 1995) and Bram Dijkstra (1986) have both argued, these tales of “demonic” women gained a particular salience in the Victorian period—especially in their contrast with the idealised version of femininity presented by the “Angel in the House.” As the century wore on and as women began to resist this domestic image more vigorously, in what would grow to become the first wave feminist movement, these archetypes of female “perversity” proliferated and helped to organise the gendered anxieties provoked by the resulting changes.

Published in 1871, Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* provides an important example of this male Victorian interest in containing the feminine, especially in the way it marked the increase in the representations of female vampirism at the end of the century and in the way it helped codify many of the narrative conventions for its depiction in later texts, including *Dracula*.² Perhaps most significantly, Le Fanu's novella characterises Carmilla's monstrosity as a threat to her victims' sexual purity as well as to their lives. When Carmilla

stalks her victims across the Austrian forestland and when she becomes fixated most particularly on Laura, the novella's figure of girlish innocence, the narrative marks how her "deviant" lesbian desires and her vampirism mutually constitute one another.

The erotic danger that Carmilla poses to the characters in Le Fanu's text finds its clearest expression within Stoker's novel in Lucy Westenra, who, as the initially pure and beautiful woman, is transformed by Dracula's bite. While the novel does not use same-sex desire to signal Lucy's devolution into the "perversion" of vampirism, as Le Fanu does in *Carmilla*, *Dracula* nevertheless records her transformation in emphatically sexual terms. After rising from her death in vampiric form, Lucy becomes more physically attractive and her body is hyperbolically eroticised, with her "sweetness [...] turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty" and her "purity" transformed into "voluptuous wantonness" (p. 225). Furthermore, like Carmilla, Lucy's deviation from Victorian gender norms is expressed in her quite-literal taste for children. Holding a "fair-haired child" in the scene of her revelation, which she later casts aside, Lucy flashes lips that are "crimson with fresh blood" and stares out with eyes that are "unclean and full of hell-fire"—all acts and bodily distortions that signal her now-fallen state (p. 225).

Critics have placed this sexualised portrayal of Lucy's vampirism within a number of historical contexts, which, when combined, help to illuminate the many different anxieties that she would have invoked for late-Victorian readers. In her analysis of *Dracula*, Carol A. Senf (1982) argues that Lucy functions as an avatar of the New Woman, whose drive for sexual and political independence at the turn of the century radically rebuffed Victorian gender norms. As a form of femininity that rejected domesticity and valued independence, the New Woman lingers for Senf behind Lucy's bold refusals (and indeed, reversals) of normative female sexuality in her scenes as a vampire, especially when contrasted with the redeemed and eventually married figure of Mina (p. 34). Framing these gender transgressions in a different, but related, context—that is, in light of the novel's concerns about foreign invasion and national purity—Stephen Arata (1996) argues that Lucy's role in the novel is crucial to understanding the sexual dimensions of Dracula's project of "reverse colonization." As Arata asserts, "if in this novel blood stands for race, then women quite literally become the vehicles of racial propagation" (p. 119). Since Dracula plans to infect the men of England through its women, Lucy is the crucial first vector within the Count's larger agenda of invasion. Considering the novel in light of these two readings sheds important light on the multiple transgressions marked by Lucy and,

by extension, the Brides, who represent a number of the overlapping social “ills” that concerned late-Victorians. Indeed, when placed alongside one another, Senf and Arata’s insights provide an important cultural context for understanding why these narratives press towards the female vampire’s destruction with such violent force.

Here again, the narrative template provided by Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* proves to be an important one, for *Dracula* and beyond, in the way that it stages Carmilla’s death as a gruesome ritual carried out by the novel’s male characters. At the end of the novella, Camilla’s body is raised by a group of men and staked in the heart, before her “head was struck off and a torrent of blood flows from the severed neck” (p. 316). Thrown afterward on a pile of wood, her remains are “reduced to ashes” and then “thrown upon the river and then borne away” (p. 316). This macabre excess is replicated in the scene of Lucy’s slaying in *Dracula*, which similarly relishes in the mutilation of her body. After Van Helsing leads her three suitors to her tomb, her heart is similarly punctured, with the stake hammered in repeatedly by her fiancé, Arthur. Notably, as this action unfolds in Dr. Seward’s descriptions, Lucy is reduced to being called “the Thing,” when she writhes and lets out a “hideous, blood-curdling screech [...] from [her] opened red lips” (p. 230). While her mouth continues to chomp and become smeared with “crimson foam,” Arthur relentlessly hammers the stake into her heart until she is dead. Later, when Van Helsing destroys the Brides in a scene that is just as violent, his acts are bluntly described as “butcher work” (p. 394). While Van Helsing is initially seduced by the Brides’ beauty, he is also repulsed by the effects of his “butchery,” by their “horrid screeching,” and by “the plunging of [their] writhing forms, and lips of bloody foam” (p. 395). As the sensual pleasures and dangers offered by the female vampires intertwine even in their deaths, it is difficult to tell what produces the greater horror: the monstrosity of the Brides themselves or Van Helsing’s treatment of them as nothing more than meat.

These scenes also saliently demonstrate how the novels imagine these acts of violence in gendered and, more specifically, male-centred terms. While the female vampires’ transgressions in these Victorian texts are determined by their “deviant” sexualities, their extermination also reveals the inherent violence typically assigned to masculinity. Indeed, if the threat of the Brides’ mouths on Harker’s neck reverses the logic of heteronormative, male penetration, then Van Helsing’s stake re-establishes the “proper” sexual order later in the text. As such, *Carmilla* and *Dracula* remain invested in placing the mechanisms and tools of violence back in the “right” hands, in the hands

of European men, rather than questioning how these men uncannily replicate the sexual and colonial violence that the vampire itself enacts.

In contrast to the pattern that scenes like this establish, in which the female monster is sacrificed in order to establish narrative closure, Marryat and Carter's texts create representations of female vampirism that disrupt this return to male power and give their female protagonists more control over their lives and deaths. In so doing, they not only call forceful attention to the way the female vampire's need for flesh is produced out of, rather than against, patriarchal structures, but also demonstrate how this dynamic leads to their protagonists' tragic ends.

REFUSING COLONIALISM IN *THE BLOOD OF THE VAMPIRE*

Although the title of Florence Marryat's novella *The Blood of the Vampire* would seem to suggest a narrative awash in the bodily fluid, the story itself is far tidier than *Dracula*, which was published in the same year. In Stoker's novel tainted blood and fangs proliferate, as they stand in metaphorically for concerns about racial contamination and unbridled sexuality. However, in Marryat's novel these concerns manifest themselves far more literally—if less grotesquely—in the mixed-race blood that flows through the veins of its protagonist Harriet Brandt. For this reason, the novel has recently begun to garner increased interest among scholars, despite the fact that it fell out of print for over a century, because it uses the vampire narrative to link late-Victorian anxieties around “reverse colonization” and transgressive femininity in ways that are both resonant with and more explicit than *Dracula*'s.

The novel opens at a Belgian seaside resort, with the orphan Harriet having recently arrived after being raised in a Jamaican Catholic convent. When integrating herself into the well-to-do society of the Hôtel Lion D'Or, she both attracts and repulses her new acquaintances. The women, while initially enchanted by Harriet's coquettish behaviour, become increasingly disgusted by her uncultured manners and her presciently voracious appetite—while the men are immediately enraptured by her preternatural beauty and her mesmeric singing talents. Meanwhile, the people who form the closest attachments with Harriet begin to weaken and fail—in a sequence of untimely illnesses and deaths that are eventually connected back to Harriet by Dr. Phillips, who reveals her mixed-race heritage and her vampiric status. As a former colleague of Harriet's father, Dr. Phillips discloses that Harriet is the illegitimate “quadroon” child of a Creole Obeah priestess and a British

slave-owning scientist, and Phillips explains that her monstrous powers derive from the bite of a vampire bat when her grandmother was pregnant.³ As a result, unlike her mother, who displayed a literal thirst for blood, Harriet is a “psychic vampire,” who unconsciously drains the life force from her victims until they eventually waste away and die.

For Octavia Davis (2007), Marryat’s presentation of Harriet’s vampirism replicates and defends the late-Victorian discourse of racial degeneration. While the “surface of Harriet’s body exhibits conventional white middle-class feminine delicacy,” it obscures “not only the racial and social origins of the ‘primitive’ Other, but also the latent sexual tendencies that contemporary science defined as regressive” (Davis, 2007, p. 44). Organised by the many feline metaphors used to describe Harriet—including cat, tigress, panther and lynx—these racialized fears condense in the veneer of her seemingly-ideal femininity, which obscures the dangerous sexual threat that she poses, in her ability to both kill and breed (Marryat, 2010, pp. 37, 46, 77, 87, 91). In order to purge this danger, the novel breaks with the dominant script for eliminating female monstrosity. Rather than have Harriet be violently slain at the hands of the novel’s male authority figures—as we see in *Carmilla* and *Dracula*—Harriet eliminates that threat herself, by deciding to take a fatal dose of chloral. As such, in Davis’s reading, while Harriet’s self-destructive act is less sensational than *Carmilla*’s or *Lucy*’s, it nevertheless confirms the novel’s ostensibly eugenic logic that “women must act first and foremost as mothers of the race” (p. 51).

This analysis aligns closely with Elaine Showalter’s (1999) reading of Marryat’s larger body of work, which she argues belongs to a proto-feminist but ultimately conservative “female” tradition of “transitional literature” that “explored genuinely radical female protest against marriage and women’s economic oppression” but that nevertheless remains invested in the “framework of feminine conventions that demanded the erring heroine’s destruction” (pp. 28–29). Within this framework, while *The Blood of the Vampire* creates a space for female transgression, it also destroys it, in order to eliminate the threat of Harriet’s vampirism to the racial and patriarchal structures that buttressed Victorian culture. At the same time, while the novel’s pathologizing treatment of Harriet’s race and sexuality is deeply problematic, this interpretation of her suicide overlooks what Ardel Haefele-Thomas (2012) has noted about the event, which is its tragic framing and the novel’s incredibly sympathetic treatment of Harriet (p. 119). By having Harriet be an initially unwitting vector of violence, the novel notably inverts the arc of *Lucy Westenra*’s devolution into vampirism by having Harriet

move from ignorance to knowledge in what amounts to a devastating education in the realities of Victorian racism and colonial violence.

In this respect, although Harriet's suicide note, which makes up the final words of the novel, invokes the terms of biological determinism and inheritance, it nevertheless provides a broader understanding of her monstrosity that includes not only the racial "taint" of her mother but also the sadistic cruelty of her British father—a cruelty which led to the retaliatory slave rebellion that left Harriet an orphan in the first place. In so doing, it demonstrates how the oppressive structures of plantation slavery provided the necessary crucible for producing her vampiric state. In the letter, Harriet writes, "Do not think more unkindly of me than you can help. My parents have made me unfit to live. Let me go to a world where the curse of heredity which they laid upon me may be mercifully wiped out" (p. 187). Thus, rather than solely blaming her black mother for her vampiric inheritance, she blames both of her parents for the untenability of her life. As a result, as Susan Zieger (2008) has noted, Harriet's danger to the "proper" British order is not only indicated by her associations with blackness, but in her connections with "the white legacy of plantation violence" and with the horrific acts carried out by her father, who was a "sadistic vivisectionist intoxicated by esoteric, unholy knowledge" (p. 221). First manifested in Harriet's attraction to Baby Ethel, who later becomes her initial victim at the Belgian resort, the novel repeatedly ties its most overtly racist rhetoric to Harriet's vampiric consumption: as Harriet reaches for the infant, she exclaims, "O! the darling! the sweet dear little angel! I love little white babies! [...] They are so sweet and fresh and clean—so different from the little niggers who smell so nasty you can't touch them!" (p. 14). In this way, the novel presents Harriet's valorisation and eventual, if indirect, consumption of Ethel's white flesh as both an extension and inverted reflection of the racial dehumanization carried out by her father on the bodies of his slaves, which he used for torture and experimentation and, afterwards, gave to his bloodthirsty wife as food.

While Harriet is not yet conscious of these linkages when she speaks these words, she becomes aware when confronted by Dr. Phillips, after the body count in the novel has continued to mount. Telling her that she "will always exert a weakening and debilitating effect" on those friends and lovers she draws to her, he states that she will have "sapped their brains and lowered the tone of their bodies" until she has, "in fact, *sucked them dry*" (p. 162). In this moment, Harriet comes into full consciousness for the first time in her life, and recognises not only the widespread impact of her horrific patrimony

on her own fate but also the way her vampirism extends the violence enacted by her parents. While she struggles to construct a viable option for her life outside this devastating legacy, her newlywed husband Arthur dies after refusing to leave her for his own safety. Harriet realises, then, that there is nowhere she can go without causing death, and decides to take matters into her own hands by ending her life.

In presenting Harriet's suicide in this way, it would be understandable to see it as what Emile Durkheim (1951) has called an "altruistic suicide," in which an individual sacrifices him or herself in the name of the perceived societal good. The readings that Davis, Showalter and, to a lesser extent, Zieger offer in many respects situate it as such, and critique Marryat's presentation of Harriet's self-sacrifice as ultimately affirming the misogynist and racist logic exhibited first in the actions of her parents and then by the medicalized discourse of Dr. Phillips. But presenting Harriet's death simultaneously as a choice and as a necessary tragedy also shows how the novel creates a space for critiquing these structures by revealing their devastating effects. In recounting how her parents' acts of racial and gendered violence completely determine her life and are replicated in her vampirism, the novel therefore frames Harriet's suicide as "fatalistic," in Durkheim's terms, and resulting from the 'excessive regulations' that produce "futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline" (p. 276). In this context, Harriet's choice to die not only displays her refusal to remain complicit in patterns of structural violence recorded by the novel, but also marks her death and the deaths she causes as the collateral damage. Thus, while the novel eliminates the threat that Harriet's vampiric condition presents, it does not do so to re-establish the beneficent authority of a masculinist, imperial order. Rather, Harriet's story exposes the monstrosity of colonialism and patriarchy as such and provides a careful and sympathetic account of their significant costs.

REJECTING MILITARISM IN "THE LADY OF THE HOUSE OF LOVE"

Since *The Blood of the Vampire* was out of print for most of the twentieth century, it is unlikely that Angela Carter knew about it when she wrote "The Lady in the House of Love." This lack of direct knowledge makes their shared depiction of a female vampire's suicide all the more striking, especially given how they both use their protagonists' acts of self-destruction to problematize the structures of patriarchal inheritance. Like Harriet in *The Blood of the Vampire*, Carter's Countess is plagued by the vampiric legacy

that she receives from her monstrous forebears, as “the last bud of the poison tree that sprang from the loins of Vlad the Impaler” and as the inheritor of Count Nosferatu’s Transylvanian castle when he is “staked out” by a “chignonned priest of the Orthodox faith” (p. 94). In this way, the Countess not only gains her literal thirst for blood from her infamous ancestors but also the gothic lair that they used to carry out their ignoble acts of murder and conquest (p. 94).

Furthermore, as with Marryat’s depiction of Harriet’s vampirism, Carter’s text departs from the male-authored treatment of female monstrosity presented in texts like *Carmilla* and *Dracula*. While the Countess, unlike Harriet, knowingly seduces men to their deaths, her sexuality is not characterised by the pleasures of supernatural power and wanton excess, as it was for the Brides and for the transformed Lucy. Rather, the Countess is described as a “somnambulist” who listlessly wanders her castle, lonely and bored (p. 93). Everywhere she looks, she is surrounded by symbols of her never-ending confinement—by the caged bird that she keeps, by the on-looking “eyes of the portraits of her demented and atrocious ancestors,” and by the repeated playing of the Tarot deck which keeps turning up the same cycle of cards: “La Papesse, La Mort, La Tour Abolie” (pp. 93, 95).⁴ With these images, the narrative frames her life as nothing but a ‘cave of echoes... a system of repetitions ... [and] a closed circuit’ that seems impossible to escape (p. 93). As a result, her vampiric status does not amplify her physical and sexual power in a way that serves her; instead, it conscribes her to a life where violence and murder function as mere sustenance and where she lures in the local “shepherd boys and gispy [*sic*] lads who, ignorant or foolhardy, come to wash the dust from their feet in the water of the fountain” in order to maintain her mere existence (p. 95). Taking them into her bedroom like a Venus flytrap, she feeds on their bodies after which “nothing can console her for the ghastliness of her condition” (p. 96).

Halfway through the story, however, a young British soldier arrives and disrupts this ceaseless monotony. “Blond, blue-eyed, heavy-muscled,” the soldier rides his bicycle through the “little-known uplands of Romania” and stumbles on the Countess’s castle. Once he enters, he breaks the stasis that characterises the “timeless Gothic eternity of the vampires” that the castle has come to represent and sets a new narrative in motion—one that will end, significantly, with the Countess’s self-inflicted demise (p. 97). After an encounter with the soldier in which she is surprised by his tenderness, the Countess refuses to feed on him and dies when the morning sun rises.

For Anne Koenen (1996), the fatal encounter between the Countess and the soldier provides a “cautionary tale of what humanising the (female) vampire means, namely a surrendering to the patriarchal order” (p. 152). By seizing on the description of the soldier as “rational” and of his bicycle as his “two-wheeled symbol of rationality,” Koenen argues that the Countess submits to his male authority by rejecting her own immense power (Carter, 1993, pp. 97, 99). She makes this claim by focusing on the tonal shifts made in the text when the soldier arrives, in which the female vampire’s power is “perceived through a rationalistic male consciousness” that, in turn, tames the “aggressive plot of the Queen of Vampires looking for a victim” by transforming it into “the fairy-tale plot of Sleeping Beauty passively waiting for sexual initiation by the male” (p. 154). While this move is not surprising given the story’s placement in *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter’s famous collection of feminist revisions of stories like ‘Bluebeard’ and ‘Snow White,’ Koenen nevertheless reads the shift in descriptions of the Countess as representing a “brainwashing on the part of the vampire (or women in general),” in which she is not only “robbed of her power” but also “becomes an accomplice in her own disempowering by actively yearning for it” (p. 154).

Although the Countess’s rejection of vampiric violence and her resulting death are acts that admittedly privilege the soldier’s needs over her own, Koenen’s reading nevertheless overlooks the complicated ways that Carter constructs the sexual and gendered power dynamics in the story. By refusing to see the ways in which the text presents the Countess’s vampirism as always already implicated by the terms of patriarchy, she fails to recognize how the soldier’s actions parody the masculinist script of heroic rescue. Indeed, while he is emphatically “rational,” his capacity for reason is one that is crucially and ironically linked by the narrator to his virginity and, moreover, to his “ignorance” and “unknowingness” about the world in general (p. 97). Thus, when he reads the Countess into the gendered plot of Sleeping Beauty, he does so erroneously, in a way that radically misunderstands the dangerous and deadly threat that she poses to him. Instead, his hyper-rational view mistakes her for a “girl with the fragility of the skeleton of a moth” rather than the powerful supernatural creature that she is.

His interactions with the Countess also resist being cast as a moment of sexual conquest. After seeing in her “extraordinarily fleshly mouth” a “whore’s mouth”—with her “wide, full prominent lips of a vibrant purplish-crimson”—the soldier is “disturbed” and “almost repelled” rather than titillated. While this seeming revulsion could be seen in isolation as a sign

of sexual puritanism, the narrator makes it clear that this response indicates the soldier's capacity for compassion, when the text later links his reaction in the castle to a previous experience in a Paris brothel. After refusing his Colonel's offer to purchase him a prostitute, the soldier looks upon the woman and asks,

How can he now take criminal advantage of the disordered girl with fever-hot, bone-dry taloned hands and eyes that deny all the erotic promises of her body with their terror, their sadness, their dreadful balked tenderness? (p. 105)

Seeing the prostitute as a subject in her own right rather as a vehicle for his own pleasure, he recognises the pain beneath her mimed performance of gender norms and her pandering to misogynist fantasies.

Later in the soldier's encounter with the Countess, the narrator similarly presents his initial withdrawal as laying the groundwork for a more perceptive sympathy. This shift finds its fullest realisation when the Countess cuts herself and when the soldier "gently takes her hand away from her and dabs the blood with his own handkerchief" (p. 106). As he leans forward to "kiss it better for her," he does so in a parental, but not paternalistic, way, "as her mother, had she lived, would have done" (p. 106). By using this maternal metaphor to depict the soldier's kiss, the story shows how, as Sarah Sceats (2001) points out, the Countess recognises how "her desire is impregnated with [her forefather's] bloodlust" and how her vampirism perpetuates the endless cycles violence that his monstrous legacy sets into motion (p. 113). And since her life depends upon her continuing acceptance of this vampiric inheritance, her refusal to feed on the soldier produces "a 'cure' [that] must culminate in [her own] extinction" (Sceats, 2001, p. 113).

By contextualising her suicide in this way, the narrative draws lines of subtle but forceful connection between the notoriously bloody wars fought by Vlad the Impaler, the Countess's entrapping performances of sexual titillation, and the coming devastation of World War I.⁵ In bookending the Countess's life with allusions to these horrific histories of rampant death and militarism, the story links the blood she has consumed with the immense amount of blood shed in these wars. In a telling moment that foreshadows the young soldier's eventual death, the narrator states that his "rational" outlook and innocence will give way when he learns "to shudder in the trenches"—or rather that he will come tremble in the presence of the hyper-rational mechanization of violence of trench warfare possible that killed millions on both sides (p. 104). But when the story closes by stating that "his regiment embarked for

France” the next day, it shows how the Countess uses suicide as a way to remove herself from any responsibility for his demise and from the horrors he will experience on the front (p. 108). In so doing, it treats both deaths as tragedies that tellingly echo one another, since both are implicated within the long history of military violence that takes their lives as sacrifice. As a result, like Harriet Brandt’s suicide, the Countess’s self-inflicted death is one that is presented as the simultaneous result of her vampirism’s patriarchal legacy and her emphatic refusal to allow it to determine her every choice.

CONCLUSION

In their now-famous articulation of the privileged status that monstrous figures have in women’s writing, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979) argue that “in projecting their anger and dis-ease into dreadful figures,” female authors create “dark doubles for themselves and their heroines” in their effort to both identify with and revise the “self-definitions patriarchal culture has imposed on them” (p. 79). In this way, for Gilbert and Gubar, “the female monster” expresses the writer’s “ambiguous relationship to a culture that has not only defined her gender but shaped her mind” (p. 79).

This essay has endeavoured to frame not only the representations of female vampirism in Marryat and Carter’s fiction in this way, but also to articulate how their decision to present these figures’ lives as untenable works as part a broader critique of patriarchal gender structures. Within the worlds of their respective texts, Harriet Brandt and the Countess both confront their monstrosity and come to recognise how it has foreclosed any attempt to author their own lives. Moreover, both characters also realise how their existences both perpetuate and are produced by the patriarchal legacies of colonial domination and militaristic violence that they inherit. This recognition and subsequent disavowal of complicity is what enables Marryat and Carter’s texts to disrupt the male-authored tradition of presenting the female vampire’s power as a threat to patriarchal authority that must be eliminated. Within this script, the female vampire’s violence is met with an even more powerful male violence, in a contest that typically elides their striking similarity. Furthermore, this male-determined template provides little space for thinking about the female vampire in terms of her own agency. Thus, while Marryat and Carter’s narratives depict suicide as an incredibly complicated form of choice, they nevertheless compellingly reclaim the female vampire’s fate by assigning it back into their protagonists’ ultimate control. And while the end result is the same—Harriet and the

Countess end up just as dead as their vampiric sisters, after all—their decision to end the bloodshed they created by shedding their own is precisely that: a decision. In this way, the texts make a forceful call for the need to imagine otherwise, and the importance of envisioning a world in which female power is neither confined by structures of patriarchy nor perhaps even seen as something monstrous at all.

NOTES

- ¹ While I focus in this essay on the female vampire's acts of gendered inversion, see Christopher Craft (1984) for an analysis of the homoerotic inversions that take place between Harker and Dracula.
- ² While *Carmilla*'s influence on Stoker is more oblique in *Dracula*, his short story 'Dracula's Guest' makes much clearer inter-textual allusions to Le Fanu's text.
- ³ In making Harriet Jamaican, Marryat also links her to Bertha Rochester in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.
- ⁴ These are the French names for three of the Major Arcana cards in the traditional Tarot deck. The English translations are 'The High Priestess,' which signals a female authority figure, 'Death,' which signals a significant transition (rather than mortality), and 'The Tower,' which signals the destruction of something longstanding.
- ⁵ Vlad Tepes was a Romanian prince involved in a number of conflicts with the Ottoman Empire during the fifteenth century. He gained notoriety as 'Vlad the Impaler,' because he would impale his defeated enemies on stakes and display their corpses outside his castle. His family name Draculesti was Stoker's source for the name Dracula.

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