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Haunting Affinities: Seduction and Subversion in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Christabel"and Sheridan Le Fanu's "Carmilla"

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Abstract

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Christabel", a long narrative ballad, unfinished and gothic, first appeared in a pamphlet in 1816, alongside his "Kubla Khan" and "The Pains of Sleep". Initially slated to be published in the 1800 edition of Lyrical Ballads, "Christabel" was left out, apparently at the suggestion of William Wordsworth. Years later, in 1872, appeared "Carmilla", one of the five supernatural tales in In a Glass Darkly by Irish author Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. Drawn from medieval romance, folklore, superstition, and gothic tradition, both "Christabel" and "Carmilla" exhibit striking parallels in their exploration of the themes of desire, female intimacy, seduction, and the uncanny. This paper aims to trace the shared affinities between these two seminal works whose gothic undertones, atmospheric tension, vampiric lore, and a complex fusion of fear and longing have played a pivotal role in cementing their place in vampiric fiction in particular and literary history in general.

Keywords: Gothic, Vampirism, Feminine desire, Homoeroticism, Intertextuality.

1. Setting

The setting constitutes one of the most significant tenets of unravelling a prose fiction. While J.A Cuddon, in his *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1999) defines it as "the where and when of a story or play: the locale" (812), Mario Klarer, in his *An Introduction to Literary Studies*, elaborates it to denote "the location, historical period, and social surroundings in which the action of a text develops" (24). In a gothic fiction, the setting takes on a more pivotal role as the gothic atmosphere enhances the already terrifying plot. In some cases, the setting itself serves as veritable character underscoring the haunting nuances of the text. Edgar Allan Poe's uncanny short story "The Fall of the House of Usher" is one such example in which the eponymous Usher house—the site of the narration of the tale—further adds to the pervasive gloomy tone of the text:

> I know not how it was—but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit.…I looked upon the scene before me—upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain—upon the bleak walls—upon the vacant eye-like windows—upon a few rank sedges—and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees—with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation… Perhaps the eye of a scrutinising

> observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until its way down became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn.

Klarer examines the above passage to highlight how the setting complements the plot and the characters:

> The description of the facade of the house uses words such as "features," "eye-like," and "depression" which are reminiscent of the characterization of a human face. "White trunks of decayed trees" refers to the end of Roderik Usher's family tree—he will die without heirs, the last of his line. The crack in the front of the building mirrors the divided psyche of the lord of the house. At the end of the story, Poe juxtaposes the death of Usher with the collapse of the building, thereby creating an interdependence between setting, characters, and plot (25).

Both Coleridge's "Christabel" and Le Fanu's "Carmilla" begin with the description of the locale. Both highlight the isolation of the immediate surrounding, making them predominantly gothic. In fact, with ample descriptions of bleak landscapes, abandoned ruins, insidious forests, and an overall aura of remoteness, both texts conform to Fred Botting's definition of the haunted house in his seminal work, *Gothic* (1996):

> The major locus of Gothic plots, the castle, was gloomily predominant in early Gothic fiction. Decaying, bleak and full of hidden passageways, the castle was linked to other medieval edifices—abbeys, churches and graveyards especially— that, in their generally ruinous states, harked back to a feudal past associated with barbarity, superstition and fear.

Botting traces how gradually the site of the castle gave way to some old, probably decrepit, house that has seen immense turmoil within the characters. Violence, selfishness, injustices, incestuous relations became some of the tropes of the later gothic novel:

> In later fiction, the castle gradually gave way to the old house: as both building and family line, it became the site where fears and anxieties returned in the present…Presenting pasts that the eighteenth century constructed as barbarous or uncivilised, Gothic fictions seemed to promote vice and violence, giving free reign to selfish ambitions and sexual desires beyond the prescriptions of law or familial duty. By nefarious means Gothic villains usurp rightful heirs, rob reputable families of property and reputation while threatening the honour of their wives and orphaned daughters… In the skeletons that leap from family closets and the erotic and often incestuous tendencies of Gothic villains there emerges the awful spectre of complete social

> disintegration in which virtue cedes to vice, reason to desire, law to tyranny ('Introduction').

Botting's observation seems to align with the plot of both "Cristabel" and "Carmilla" in which the innocent, young daughters of aged fathers are preyed upon by evil villains.

"Christabel" (1816) opens with an eerie, atmospheric prologue that immediately immerses the reader in a medieval Gothic world of mystery and foreboding. The poem's first lines: "'Tis the middle of night by the castle clock, / And the owls have awakened the crowing cock; / Tu—whit! Tu—whoo!" (Coleridge lines 1-3) establish a dreamlike, supernatural tone, that blends the natural sounds of the owl and the cock with unsettling omens, underscoring the quietness of the deep night. Coleridge's use of the sounds appears unsettling as it blends the unnatural with the nature, the uncanny with the quotidian. The fact that the poem begins at midnight highlights the liminality of the hour that is usually associated with the eerie and the supernatural. Furthermore, the unnatural reversal of the owl waking the rooster in the middle of the night is probably the first sign of the impending doom and disorder. In a similar manner, Le Fanu's tale is set in an isolated Austrian castle—or *schloss*—nestled deep in the Styrian wilderness. The main narrator, Laura, begins by sketching her family's solitary existence within this remote estate. Her description of the landscape is deceptively picturesque: the castle perches on a gentle rise, encircled by dense forests for miles, its only connection to the outside world a narrow bridge spanning a shadowy stream:

> Nothing can be more picturesque or solitary. It stands on a slight eminence in a forest. The road, very old and narrow, passes in front of its drawbridge... and its moat, stocked with perch, and sailed over by manyswans, and floating on its surface white fleets of water lilies (Le Fanu 2).

Though she repeatedly calls the scenery "picturesque," she cannot ignore its underlying eeriness—the way the wilderness presses in, the unsettling quiet and the 'loneliness':

> The forest opens in an irregular and very picturesque glade before its gate, and at the right a steep Gothic bridge carries the road over a stream that winds in deep shadow through the wood. I have said that this is a very lonely place (2).

With deliberate emphasis, she further notes that the "nearest inhabited village" (2) lies seven miles away, a detail that heightens the isolation. She emphasises the nearest 'inhabited' village because, she reveals that though there is a village nearby it is completely abandoned. It is, Laura informs, "a ruined village, with its quaint little church, now roofless, in the aisle of which are the moldering tombs of the proud family of Karnstein, now extinct, who once owned the equally desolate chateau

which, in the thick of the forest, overlooks the silent ruins of the town (3). The reason for this abandonment, "a legend" (3), Laura promises to unravel later—a narrative choice that immediately captures the reader's attention. The settings of both "Christabel" and "Carmilla" therefore, pique the reader's curiosity from the very beginning: the encroaching forest, the skeletal ruins, and the overgrown, shadowy pathways at once fosters a sense of mystery and intrigue. Nature here is delineated as both beautiful and predatory, mirroring the works' themes of seduction and lurking horror while reflecting the psychological unease of the characters. The remote settings inevitably enhance the sense of vulnerability and foreboding. Laura's retrospective narration in "Carmilla" further heightens the gothic atmosphere and lends her tale the weight of a confession—an intimate yet haunted recollection. This tone of authenticity is also present in the 'Prologue' in which an unnamed narrator directly addresses the reader to tell an enigmatic tale from many years ago. Le Fanu here employs the 'Prologue' as a traditional gothic device to establish "Carmilla" as a gothic fiction with psychological undertones. Thus, it is through multiple layers mystery, intrigue, and fantasy that both Coleridge and Le Fanu craft worlds where terror and allure intertwine.They ensnare the reader in the same eerie fascination that grips their characters. The isolated castles, incomprehensible events, a pervasive sense of foreboding, and the uncanny tension between past and present all coalesce into foreboding gothic romances that linger in the reader's mind long after the final page.

2. Character Parallels

A parallel may be drawn between the protagonists of Coleridge and Le Fanu—Christabel and Laura—as their circumstances are similar in nature. Both are innocent, young women without mothers who live in 'castles' in relative solitariness in remote settings with their fathers. While Christabel's father is Sir Leoline, a Baron, Laura's father is a retired Austrian officer who purchased the "feudal residence, and the small estate" (Le Fanu 2). Not only Sir Leoline and Laura's father remind one of the feudal, landed gentry of yesteryears, but it is also noted that they are either old, or weak in health. This particular information is provided to, probably, underscore the vulnerability of the motherless young daughters who have only their aged fathers for protection and therefore are easy to be preyed upon. It is also noted that although Christabel is betrothed, her fiancé is too far away to offer her any assistance. In Coleridge's poem, Christabel leaves her father's house in the middle of a cold night to pray in the woods for her betrothed. Though it is full moon, there is little light as the moon is covered by dull, gray clouds:

> Is the night chilly and dark?
> The night is chilly, but not dark.
> The thin gray cloud is spread on high,
> It covers but not hides the sky.

The moon is behind, and at the full;
And yet she looks both small and dull.
The night is chill, the cloud is gray:
'Tis a month before the month of May,
And the Spring comes slowly up this way (Coleridge Lines 14-22).

It is during this cold, gray night that Christabel hears a moaning and stumbles upon a beautiful, mysterious lady who calls herself Geraldine:

There she sees a damsel bright,
Drest in a silken robe of white,
That shadowy in the moonlight shone:
The neck that made that white robe wan,
Her stately neck, and arms were bare;
Her blue-veined feet unsandl'd were,
And wildly glittered here and there
The gems entangled in her hair.
I guess, 'twas frightful there to see
A lady so richly clad as she—
Beautiful exceedingly! (lines 58-68).

Geraldine then proceeds to narrate a fantastic tale of how she was abducted by ‘five warriors’ who left her under the oak tree in the woods near Christabel’s castle with the vow to return soon. She speaks in a weak, faint voice to convince Christabel of her plight and asks for assistance. Christabel, being the innocent, gentle daughter of a noble father, immediately strives to assist the beautiful yet strange lady by bringing her into her home. However, the speaker here pays special mention of how Geraldine enters the castle of Sir Leoline:

The gate that was ironed within and without,
Where an army in battle array had marched out.
The lady sank, belike through pain,
And Christabel with might and main
Lifted her up, a weary weight,
Over the threshold of the gate:
Then the lady rose again,
And moved, as she were not in pain (lines 127-134).

It is also noted that not only Geraldine refuses to pray but as Christabel and Geraldine pass by, the old ‘mastiff bitch’ (line 149), who never yells in front of Christabel, utters

an angry moan then, prompting the speaker to question "For what can ail the mastiff bitch?" (line 153).

In a similar fashion, Le Fanu describes the evening, with the full moon, when Laura meets an unexpected guest. During a walk on this clear evening, Laura's father reveals to her that General Spielsdorf, who was supposed to visit them with his niece Mademoiselle Bertha Rheinfeldt, will not be able to join them because of the unfortunate demise of Bertha under extremely mysterious circumstances. Laura is heartbroken at the disturbing news as she was looking forward to meet Bertha—a young woman of her own age— for the first time and assuage some of her loneliness. It is at this point that the father and daughter meet the other members of her household, Madame Perrodon and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine who are engrossed in a discussion regarding the beautiful yet enigmatic evening. To the suspecting reader, an indication or warning is apparent as Mademoiselle De Lafontaine declares:

> … when the moon shone with a light so intense it was well known that it indicated a special spiritual activity. The effect of the full moon in such a state of brilliancy was manifold. It acted on dreams, it acted on lunacy, it acted on nervous people, it had marvelous physical influences connected with life (Le Fanu 9-10).

It is at this moment that that they hear a carriage "thundering along the road towards us with the speed of a hurricane" (11). By Laura's own admission the whole scene is unusual, and is made more so by the appearance of "a lady with a commanding air and figure" (11) and "a young lady, who appeared to be lifeless" (11). The older woman, who declares herself the mother of the young woman, appears distressed and narrates to Laura's father how she is in extreme hurry "on a journey of life and death" (12) and therefore must leave young daughter at the nearest village as she is in no condition to travel after the recent accident. She, like the 'five warriors' in Coleridge's poem, vows to return, in three months to be precise. It is at this point that Laura, who is already reeling from the loss of General Spielsdorf's niece Bertha, entreats her father to let the young lady stay with them in their castle for the duration. Thus, "the beautiful stranger" (19) who calls herself Carmilla, enters Laura's house. As Christabel notes Geraldine's almost unnatural beauty and sweet voice, here too "'She is absolutely beautiful', threw in Mademoiselle, who had peeped for a moment into the stranger's room. 'And such a sweet voice!' added Madame Perrodon" (15).

3. Supernatural Connotationswith Queer Undertones

Geraldine is a mysterious woman, imbued with supernatural and possibly malevolent qualities that disrupt the natural order and brings an aura of enchantment and danger into Christabel's life. In conformity with the supernatural trope Geraldine shirks away from bright light:

> She trimmed the lamp, and made it bright,

And left it swinging to and fro,

While Geraldine, in wretched plight,

Sank down upon the floor below (lines 187-189).

Her malevolence is further exacerbated when Christabel talks about her late mother who she believes protects her. It is at this time that Geraldine reacts almost violently at some unseen presence:

But soon with altered voice, said she—

'Off, wandering mother! Peak and pine!

I have power to bid thee flee.'

Alas! what ails poor Geraldine?

Why stares she with unsettled eye?

Can she the bodiless dead espy?

And why with hollow voice cries she,

'Off, woman, off! this hour is mine—

Though thou her guardian spirit be,

Off, woman, off! 'tis given to me' (lines 204-213).

Carmilla, on the other hand, is a vampire who forms an intense, almost predatory bond with Laura. The similarities between Geraldine and Carmilla are many as both impersonate beautiful young women with sweet voices, undoubtedly, to lure unsuspecting innocent women with old fathers like Laura and Christabel. They both weave fantastical tales and play the ‘damsel in distress’ to secure an invitation into the homes of their victims. Like Geraldine, Carmilla’s arrival, too, signals a disruption, blending seduction with supernatural horror. Both Coleridge and Sheridan le Fanu’s works explore the intense relationships between the central female characters. In “Christabel”, the bond between Christabel and Geraldine carries a sense of unease and latent sexuality:

Her gentle limbs did she undress,

And lay down in her loveliness (lines 137-138)

Geraldine too undresses and lies beside Christabel and the speaker faintly hints at their latent sexuality:

A star hath set, a star hath risen,

O Geraldine! since arms of thine

Have been the lovely lady's prison.

O Geraldine! one hour was thine—

Thou'st had thy will! By tairn and rill,

The night-birds all that hour were still (lines 302-306).

Similarly, “Carmilla” presents an eroticized friendship that borders on obsession, with Carmilla exerting a powerful, almost trance-like, influence over Laura. Like Geraldine, Carmilla also exhibits a strangeness that strikes Laura. On meeting fully for the first time Laura is stunned to find Carmilla as the same face that haunted her during a particularly harrowing night twelve years ago:

> What was it that, as I reached the bedside and had just begun my little greeting, struck me dumb in a moment, and made me recoil a step or two from before her? I will tell you.
>
> I saw the very face which had visited me in my childhood at night, which remained so fixed in my memory, and on which I had for so many years so often ruminated with horror, when no one suspected of what I was thinking (Le Fanu 18).

Though initially taken by Carmilla’s almost unnatural beauty, Laura begins to notice the little things about her that struck her unusual for a young girl like her:

> There was a coldness, it seemed to me, beyond her years, in her smiling melancholy persistent refusal to afford me the least ray of light (18-19).

Le Fanu from almost the very beginning establishes Carmilla’s particular obsession with Laura:

> She used to place her pretty arms about my neck, draw me to her, and laying her cheek to mine, murmur with her lips near my ear,"Dearest, your little heart is wounded; think me not cruel because I obey the irresistible law of my strength and weakness; if your dear heart is wounded, my wild heart bleeds with yours. In the rapture of my enormous humiliation I live in your warm life, and you shall die—die, sweetly die—into mine. I cannot help it; as I draw near to you, you, in your turn, will draw near to others, and learn the rapture of that cruelty, which yet is love; so, for a while, seek to know no more of me and mine,but trust me with all your loving spirit" (22).

Not only does Carmilla’s embraces sometimes make Laura uncomfortable but also hints at the latent anxieties and discomfort regarding sexuality between women in the nineteenth century:

> And when she had spoken such a rhapsody, she would press me more closely in her trembling embrace, and her lips in soft kisses gently glow upon my cheek. Her agitations and her language were unintelligible to me (22-23).

Furthermore, by Laura’s own admission, Carmilla’s show of friendship, mostly physical and almost erotic in nature, exerts a trance-like influence on her from which she seems to recover only when distanced from Carmilla:

> From these foolish embraces, which were not of very frequent occurrence, I must allow, I used to wish to extricate myself; but my energies seemed to fail me. Her murmured words sounded like a lullaby in my ear, and soothed my resistance into a trance, from which I only seemed to recover myself when she withdrew her arms (23).

Laura' inexperience against Carmilla's toxic obsession creates an ambivalence in Laura that she finds difficult to truly comprehend:

> In these mysterious moods I did not like her. I experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust. I had no distinct thoughts about her while such scenes lasted, but I was conscious of a love growing into adoration, and also of abhorrence. This I know is paradox, but I can make no other attempt to explain the feeling (23).

In conformity with the vampiric and other supernatural tropes and myths, Le Fanu gives both the reader and Laura a glimpse of Carmilla's true evil face, quite literally, when she and Laura face the funeral possession of a young girl who is rumoured to have passed away in sickness after witnessing a ghost. Carmilla is visibly disturbed after hearing the funeral hymn and reacts almost violently that quite shocks and confuses Laura:

> "You pierce my ears," said Carmilla, almost angrily, and stopping her ears with her tiny fingers…. "Well, her funeral is over, I hope, and her hymn sung; and our ears shan't be tortured with that discord and jargon. It has made me nervous… She sat down. Her face underwent a change that alarmed and even terrified me for a moment. It darkened, and became horribly livid; her teeth and hands were clenched, and she frowned and compressed her lips, while she stared down upon the ground at her feet, and trembled all over with a continued shudder as irrepressible as ague (24-25).

Another instance of Carmilla's real nature is revealed when the hunchback wanderer comes to Laura's schloss with his dog. Like Christabel's old mastiff bitch, this dog too somehow senses Carmilla's otherworldly presence:

> His companion was a rough spare dog, that followed at his heels, but stopped short, suspiciously at the drawbridge, and in a little while began to howl dismally (26).

4. Symbolism and Erotic Subtext

Other similarities between Coleridge's "Christabel" and Le Fanu's "Carmilla" abound. One such instance is the décor or artwork in the rooms in which Geraldine and Carmilla stay. While Christabel's room is decorated with "The lamp with twofold

silver chain / Is fastened to an angel's feet: (Coleridge lines 182-183), Carmilla's room spots a "tapestry opposite the foot of the bed, representing Cleopatra with the asps to her bosom" (Le Fanu 17). Both imageries highlight the contest between good and evil, protection and destruction, and angels and demons. Christabel exhibits angelic purity and innocence or it might also suggest that Christabel is protected by some divine presence. But the bound angel falls short to protect the vulnerable Christabel, as symbolised by the silver chain fastened to its feet. On the other hand, the specific imagery of Cleopatra with asps at her bosom is probably an attempt on Le Fanu's part to connect Carmilla with the historical Cleopatra to underscore their shared beauty, allure, power, and fatal seductiveness. The painting in Carmilla's room further reinforces her role as a predator, much like Cleopatra, who used charm and cunning to maintain control. Cleopatra's death by asps, rich in erotic undertones, mirrors Carmilla's intimate yet deadly relationships, where love and death intertwine. The asps symbolize danger, foreshadowing the fate of Carmilla and her victims. In addition, both figures embody the exotic 'other,' evoking Victorian anxieties about the foreign and unfamiliar. The painting ultimately deepens the novella's gothic atmosphere, reinforcing its themes of seduction, power, and mortality. In *Dissolute Characters: Irish literary history through Balzac, Sheridan Le Fanu, Yeats and Bowen*, W. J. Mc Cormack further points out:

> Cleopatra is synonymous with seductive femininity, and in this role the vibrant Carmilla is reflected in the tapestry. But the depiction of asps on Cleopatra's bosom reflects the narrator's sensation of needles in her breast and the bite marks implanted by her nocturnal visitor. Both of the women of the fiction are thus present in the tapestry, which then surely signals some identification of the two (151).

A central similarity between "Christabel" and "Carmilla" is their portrayal of female intimacy and the strong undertones of seduction. The most striking instance in "Christabel" occurs when Geraldine asks Christabel to disrobe and later shares a bed, during which Geraldine exerts a mysterious, almost supernatural influence over her host. Geraldine's demand that Christabel remain silent about their encounter adds a sense of secrecy and guilt that further reinforces the idea of an illicit experience. Similarly, "Carmilla" thrives on homoerotic tension, as Carmilla repeatedly expresses her obsessive affection for Laura, speaking of eternal love while caressing her in intimate ways. The repeated motif of the bite on the breast solidifies Carmilla's role as a predatory seductress. That is to say, both Geraldine and Carmilla are snake-like in nature—cruel, cold-blooded, and transmutative. This is corroborated not only by the image of the asps in "Carmilla" but also by their transformation from beautiful, sweet women to evil beings preying on the innocent, especially young women. For Carmilla, the change is unambiguous as she not only transforms into a vampire at night but also uses the anagram of Millarca / Mircalla to hide her real identity. In addition, the blending of love and destruction in both texts reflects Victorian anxieties about female

sexuality, particularly in its non-normative expressions. That is to say the ambiguity in relationships between Christabel and Geraldine on one hand and Laura and Carmilla on the other allows for a reading that interprets these bonds as symbolizing repressed desires, particularly in the context of 19th-century societal norms. Though only hinted in "Christabel", Le Fanu is more obvious with the theme of lesbianism as all the victims of Carmilla are explicitly young women. Both works juxtapose innocence with corruption. Christabel and Laura are portrayed as innocent, almost naive, figures who are drawn into the orbit of the more experienced and sinister Geraldine and Carmilla, respectively. For both Christabel and Laura, the arrival of their mysterious guest marks a turning point in their innocence. Christabel, once pure and pious, becomes inexplicably disturbed and unable to articulate her unease. Laura, too, undergoes a slow physical and psychological deterioration, mirroring the way Carmilla feeds on her energy. The supernatural intruder, therefore, represents an irreversible transformation, reinforcing the gothic theme of innocence lost to an insidious force. That is to say, the supernatural beings in these texts are representative of a force that corrupts or transforms the innocent characters, reflecting anxieties about female sexuality and purity. In *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story From Le Fanu To Blackwood*, Jack Sullivan posits:

> In its blending of lesbianism, sadomasochism, necrophilia, and vampirism, "Carmilla" seems exotically pornographic...In "Carmilla", Le Fanu's dark, ambiguous eroticism is a means toward making his vampire seem eerie and mysterious. Once this end has been accomplished, Le Fanu drops the eroticism altogether. After the "gloomy triumph" of the doctor's diagnosis, the nightly attacks cease: the remaining third of the story builds toward the horrifying "ordeal and execution" of Carmilla (65).

Another key parallel is the invasion of the domestic sphere by a dangerous outsider. Christabel and Laura initially reside in spaces that are meant to be secure—their fathers' estates, which symbolize patriarchal protection. However, the arrival of Geraldine and Carmilla exposes the fragility of this security. In "*Christabel"*, Sir Leoline remains blind to Geraldine's true nature, much as Laura's father in "*Carmilla*" fails to recognize Carmilla's threat until it is too late. This paternal ignorance underscores a gothic critique of patriarchal authority, suggesting that fathers cannot truly shield their daughters from supernatural or sexual transgression. The home, rather than offering safety, becomes a site of manipulation, secrecy, and slow corruption.

5. Conclusion

It can be safely concluded that "Christabel" and "Carmilla" are similar based on their shared themes of supernaturalism, gothic malevolence, and queerness. However, there are marked differences as well. Structurally, "Christabel" is a fragmentary,

unfinished poem. It leaves much to interpretation, focusing on atmosphere and mood rather than resolution.“Carmilla”, on the other hand, is a novella that offers a more structured narrative with a clear resolution. It also fits into the broader tradition of Gothic vampire literature. In “Christabel”, the supernatural is more ambiguous as Geraldine’s nature and intentions are never explicitly defined, adding to the poem’s mysterious quality. Le Fanu clearly identifies Carmilla as a vampire, providing a more conventional Gothic horror element. In addition, Coleridge’s “Christabel”, an early 19th-century work, probably is a reflection of the Romantic preoccupations with the sublime, the supernatural, and the unconscious. Whereas, Le Fanu’s “Carmilla”, emerging from the late 19th-century Gothic tradition, taps into Victorian anxieties about sexuality, disease, and the foreign ‘other’. It is a clear possibility that for “Carmilla”, Sheridan Le Fanu took his inspiration of the idea of an insidious intruder, a *femme fatale* from Coleridge and the myth of vampiric influence from John Polidori’s “The Vampyre” (1819), and then went on to influence numerous vampire-related fiction, one of which is the cult classic *Dracula* (1897) by fellow Irish author Bram Stoker. Stoker’s use of the name ‘Reinfield’, Dracula’s mad helper in the eponymous novel, is probably a tribute to Le Fanu who posited one Mademoiselle Bertha Rheinfeldt, General Spielsdorf’s niece, as one of the victims of Millarca, an anagram of the name Carmilla / Mircalla. However, both Coleridge and Le Fanu extensively use the Gothic to explore complex themes of desire, power, and the uncanny, making their works rich for comparative analysis.

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