

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH PAPER: Female Vampires, Masculine Anxiety, and Nature: The Ecocritical Gothic of Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*

STUDENT: Lindsey Vesperry

DEGREE: Master of Arts

COLLEGE: Sciences and Humanities

DATE: May, 2014

PAGES: 32

Sheridan Le Fanu's novella has been analyzed as a text depicting the masculine anxieties that lie within the heart of England's patriarchic system. This system relies on the abjection of the natural world in favor of patriarchal culture, which includes the codification of femininity as more natural and a constant threat. The vampire Carmilla, who is a vehicle for the natural world, transgresses the boundaries of Victorian femininity by preying upon young women, and the male characters attempt to reestablish the patriarchal system by staking her. The "unnatural" Carmilla certainly stands as a challenge against a male-dominated civilization by her mere existence. Scholars such as Jarlath Killeen, Angela Michelis, and Sally Harris explore the abjection of the maternal/feminine other, and Joseph Andriano examines Carmilla's actions as unsuppressed human nature that ultimately threatens the stability of patriarchal systems. My analysis builds upon their work, but focuses instead on the post-Darwinian anxiety within the novella: is Carmilla really an unnatural being, or does the patriarchic order deem her unnatural due to their fear of the female predator? Due to the rising popularity of Darwinism, the English were beginning to question man's dominance over nature, fearing that men were not sitting comfortably at the top of the food chain. My project analyzes the growing anxiety regarding nature along with the fear of the monstrous feminine in the text. I will approach "Carmilla" with

a psychoanalytic and ecocritical framework, and draw attention to the white male's uncertainty of his dominance over nature and women.