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„The Subversive Power of YouTube: Reconstructing and Repairing Damaged Queer Identities in *Carmilla*“

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Table of Contents

1 Introduction	9
2 The Media's Impact on the Formation of Identities.....	13
2.1 The Power of Medial Representation	13
2.2 Master Narratives and their Effect on Identities.....	14
2.3 Restoring Damaged Identities through Counterstories.....	15
2.4 The Notion of Identity and its Influence on Agency.....	17
2.5 The Formation of Narrative Identity.....	18
3 From the Myth of 'Normality' to the Construction of Deviance.....	21
3.1 The Prevailing Power of Heteronormativity	21
3.2 The Practice of Othering	22
3.3 The Pathologization of Lesbianism & A Changing of Perceptions.....	23
4 Heteronormativity & Rigid Notions of Gender: Exploring Carmilla on the Content Level.....	26
4.1 Damaging Characterization.....	26
4.1.1 Laura's Ignorance, Anxious Mind and General Weakness.....	26
4.1.2 Laura's Passivity & Co-Dependence.....	27
4.1.3 Carmilla's Irresistible Malice.....	28
4.2 Heteronormative Elements and Othering in Carmilla.....	29
4.2.1 A Colonial Set-up of Othering.....	29
4.2.2 Assumed Heterosexuality.....	31
4.2.3 The Demonization of Homosexual Women	32
4.2.4 The Pathologization of Queer Love.....	33
4.2.5 Objects of Desire.....	34
4.2.6 Lesbianism/ Women as a Threat to the Patriarchy.....	35
4.2.7 The Subordination of Women.....	36
4.2.8 Violence towards and Victimization of the Female Body.....	38
4.3 Portraying a Black and White World.....	39
4.3.1 Masculinity vs. Femininity.....	40
4.3.2 Heterosexual (Health) vs. Homosexual (Sickness).....	40
4.3.3 Innocent Angel vs. Predatory Monster	41
4.4 Portrayal of Sexuality.....	42
4.5 The Formation and Representation of Lesbian Identity in Carmilla.....	43
4.5.1 Laura's Passive Reception of Identity.....	43
4.5.2 Carmilla's Posing Threat to Laura's Subjectivity.....	44
4.5.3 Carmilla's Bound Identity.....	46
5 Exploring Carmilla on a Formal Level.....	48

5.1 Gothic Genre Characteristics	48
5.2 Failure of Resolution.....	49
5.3 Framed Narration.....	50
5.4 Unreliable Narration.....	51
6 An Established Master Narrative: Reviewing Lesbian Vampirism in the Media.....	53
7 Youtube: An Alternative Space for Resistance.....	55
7.1 A Changing Media Landscape and the Disintegration of Power.....	56
7.2 The Construction of Alternative Spaces & Online Activism.....	57
7.3 YouTube as an Alternative Space of Participatory Culture.....	58
7.4 The Production and Reception of User-generated Content.....	61
7.5 User-generated Popular Narratives & the Queering of Culture.....	62
8 Carmilla 2.0 – A New Take on Heteronormativity and Queerness.....	64
8.1 The Subversion of Binary Oppositions & an Inversion of Hierarchies	65
8.2 Portrayal of gender and sexuality.....	68
8.3 Repairing Damaged Characters.....	70
8.3.1 A Revised Laura: Assertive Activism & Sexual Awareness.....	70
8.3.2 An Updated Carmilla: Moral Ambiguity & Byronic tendencies.....	72
8.3.3 A Recognition of Supporting Characters.....	75
8.4 Intertextual Allusions and the Repairing of Damaged Identities.....	78
9 Fandoms and Trans-Mediality: Uncovering Carmilla's Formal Level.....	79
9.1 The Trans- or Multi-medial Aspect of Carmilla.....	79
9.2 The Effects of Multi-Mediality.....	81
9.2.1 A Sense of Realism & Awareness of Constructedness.....	81
9.2.2 Multi-Perspectivity & Narrative Reliability	82
9.2.3 Collective Intelligence & Audience Engagement	82
9.3 The Formal Formation of Identities in Carmilla	84
9.3.1 Vlogs, Tweets and Tumblr Posts - Means of Self-Disclosure.....	84
9.3.2 Performativity and the Dialogic Nature of Identity Formation	85
9.3.3 Agency, Processes of Reflexivity and Fluidity.....	87
10 Concluding Discussion.....	89
Bibliography.....	95
Appendix.....	101
Abstract (English).....	101
Abstract (Deutsch).....	102

*"In a hundred years of movies, homosexuality has only rarely been depicted on the screen.
When it did appear, it was there as something to laugh at
—or something to pity—or even something to fear.
These were fleeting images, but they were unforgettable, and they left a lasting legacy.
Hollywood, that great maker of myths, taught straight people what to think about gay
people
... and gay people what to think about themselves."*

-Vito Russo, The Celluloid Closet

1 Introduction

This diploma thesis is intended to explore the dialogic potential of media which operates offside the mainstream. My aim is to understand the video-sharing platform YouTube as a counter-hegemonic device and to analyse whether and, if so, how the website is used to resist hegemony. I will showcase with the example of *Carmilla*, how YouTube constitutes an alternative space in which discourses are constructed that are not controlled and determined by the dominant culture. Furthermore, I will argue that the web-series *Carmilla* can be understood as a counterstory to the myriad of master narratives that are all based on Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's novella *Carmilla* (1872). In *Carmilla*, the web-series, the original characters whose identities have been damaged by the master narratives in which they have featured, are repaired and enjoy a positive, more authentic representation. Due to the impact which the media exerts onto society, I am also going to argue that *Carmilla*, the counterstory, has the power to queer contemporary culture.

In chapter 2, I am going to focus on the narrative formation of identities. First of all, the impact of the media and master narratives on identities will be outlined. Having discussed the importance of counterstories and the ways in which they can repair damaged identities, I will then draw attention to the notion as well as the formation of identity itself and its influence on agency.

Chapter 3 will be concerned with matters of queer theory. After elaborating on the power of heteronormativity and the practices of 'othering', I will provide a brief historical overview about the discourses that surround lesbianism.

Chapter 4 and 5, then, are dedicated to the analysis of Le Fanu's novella *Carmilla*. I will supply a detailed description of the damaging characterization, the heteronormative elements and dichotomies that are present in the narrative as well as the portrayal of sexuality and the formation and representation of lesbian identity. As far as the formal features of the novella are concerned, Gothic genre characteristics as well as the particularities of the narration will be discussed.

Having reviewed the existing master narratives that are concerned with the vampire Carmilla in chapter 6, I will outline the video-sharing platform YouTube's

potential for constituting an alternative space for resistance in chapter 7. The focus will lie on the features of participatory culture, user-generated popular narratives and the queering of online culture.

The penultimate chapter will be concerned with the web-series *Carmilla*. The subversive strategies of the narrative will be exposed and the reimagined portrayal of sexuality, gender and characters will be analysed.

Last but not least, in chapter 9, the trans-medial aspect of the narrative will be examined and its effects on the formation of identities in *Carmilla* will be explored.

My main reason for selecting *Carmilla* can be explained by the fact that Gothic fiction has always been closely intertwined with queer politics and queer theory, in that it is transgressive in nature and exerts resistance to dominant ideologies. A somewhat large number of Gothic works of fiction feature female protagonists who suffer under patriarchal ruling. Tropes that are commonly found in these texts are mysterious castles, virtuous maidens, evil clergymen and tyrannical father figures, which all contribute to the creation of the well-known eery, surrealistic atmosphere, which those narratives exude. However, the true horror is created by the depiction of human fear of incomprehensible mysteries. Towards the end of the 18th century, when Gothic fiction enjoyed great popularity, this fear was, amongst others, the subversive nature of queer sexuality.

At the time of publication of Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, England was far from being liberal. With the end of imperialism, the fear of reversed colonization formed and the threat of 'the other' was perceived more strongly (Dixon 47). Therefore, anything that transcended the dichotomies that were known to society was met with suspicion or even violence. It was a time of change, in which a predominantly anti-religious and anti-Catholic people started to explore and codify sexuality and gender. This created the need to define what it meant to be 'normal'. The term 'homosexual' was first created in order to position those subjects who deviated from heterosexual practices outside of the norm. Furthermore, literature was used to construct a fear of otherness and establish a sense of normality. In Gothic fiction, the existing binary oppositions between good and evil, human and monster, heterosexuality and homosexuality were blurred, which subsequently evoked fear in the readers.

At first glance, Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* may seem transgressive and subversive in the light of this context. Lesbians appear to threaten the patriarchy and seemingly disrupt the heteronormative order. The men's attempts to stop the two women seem to fail and female power, as far as one can initially tell, prevails. Ultimately, the impression which the reader obtains is one of masculine helplessness in the face of the lesbians' manipulative nature.

However, Le Fanu's attempt to let the patriarchy have the upper hand in the war on lesbians induces horror in contemporary readers. According to Ruth Anolik (152), "the story of *Carmilla* emerges as a forbidden tale of the horror of feminine evil, represented by lesbian lust, which exposes, in its sexual extravagance, a terror of any woman, even the consumptive and collapsing, but above all the dead".

This is the reason the Gothic genre survived until the present day and still enjoys popularity. Despite the scandals it evoked and the fact that subversive acts are executed, in the end, the protagonists return to a state of order, a state of heteronormativity. The characters either abandon their subversive sexualities, succumb to them, or meet a premature death or are otherwise punished for their actions.

In the course of the last centuries, the character of *Carmilla* has developed into an archetype that is reiterated in various forms. The character of the lesbian vampire has been revisited by a myriad of filmmakers, who each portray *Carmilla* in a similar fashion; the narratives build on and reproduce one another. Consequently, the representation of *Carmilla* remains as negative as its original. The story of the lesbian vampire has been turned into a master narrative – a story that is regarded as natural; whose essence is not questioned. It has been ingrained into our cultural memory and influences our understanding of the identities it represents.

However, in 2014, *Carmilla*, a web-series that is featured on YouTube took a different approach to the subject matter. *Carmilla*, and with her lesbianism, is no longer presented as maleficent and dangerous. Instead, the well-known identities that have been oppressed for centuries are depicted in an alternative, more deserving manner. Hence, it can be argued that the 2014 *Carmilla* can be regarded as a counterstory that aims at repairing damaged identities, the idea of

which I am going to prove in this thesis.

2 The Media's Impact on the Formation of Identities

2.1 The Power of Medial Representation

The question of whether the media has “shaped public prejudices and attitudes or merely reflected them” has, according to Robinson (4) “been long debated by historians, critics and scholars”. The effects that film and other forms of media can exert onto the public have been studied by a vast number of scholars. Lippi-Green (1997), Shaheen (2000) or Willmetts and Moran (2013) have all researched common representations of race, gender, class and sexuality and their impact on society.

Film, literature or any other creative contribution to society can be regarded as cultural documents, which offer insights into a society's beliefs and perceptions at a certain point in time. At the same time, these cultural products “contribute strongly to our sense of who we are, of what it means to be a woman or a man, an African or an Arab, (...), straight or gay” (Hesmondhalgh 3). The media undoubtedly exerts an enormous power in their contribution to the formation of identities largely through the means of representation. Hence, medial representation of identities ought to be handled with care.

In reality, however, character depictions often rely on stereotyping, since stereotypes are a necessary element in organizing the world. According to Nisbett and Ross (261), a number of different strategies are used to “go beyond the information given” when it comes to making sense of the world that surrounds us. One such strategy involves the use of “schema”, “scripts” and “personae” (Ebda. 281). A schema can be defined as “a category that forms an important basis for inference” (Lindemann-Nelson 83), an event or person is classified as a type, and can be readily applied to a different context as soon as some common characteristics have been identified. A script, on the other hand, means a certain causal sequence of events (Nisbett and Ross 280). From observing just a brief moment of this sequence, one can predict what has preceded or will follow this moment. Personae, then, are characters who can be found in these scripts. Oftentimes the specifications of a character can be inferred from the context in which it appears (Nisbett and Ross 281).

As a consequence, prejudices about a particular group of people emerge

and are reinforced, which result in the formation of the popular opinion “that common knowledge and stereotypes characterize a sort of truth about the world“ (Cutting 109).

In fact, the acquisition of prejudice predominantly occurs through discursive practices. Language is used to create negative out-groups and positive in-groups. Here we see that language is not merely denotational, but has the power to construct reality; according to Fairclough (3) “[l]anguage is the primary medium of social control and power”. Wodak develops this statement further when he describes how discursive practices can have major ideological effects. According to him, “they can help produce and reproduce unequal social relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/ cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people” (Wodak in Fairclough & Wodak 258). If groups of people keep being represented in a certain, non-varied way, so called master narratives are established.

2.2 Master Narratives and their Effect on Identities

Personal identities are constructed through a multitude of different interacting narratives that shape the understanding of who somebody is. A large number of these narratives can be described as master narratives, established discourses that enjoy a wide distribution within a society and are based on a shared understanding, or at least fragments thereof.

One interpretation of the term master narrative suggests that “speakers are principally subjected to grand rêcits and metanarratives from which there seems to be no escape” (Bamberg & Andrews 359-360). Certain cultural expectations about how courses of events are supposed to unfold seemingly exist in our society. These simplified and idealized 'frames' are constantly perpetuated simply because they are culturally accepted and well-known to the public. Master narratives construct events and actions as routines, thereby normalizing and naturalizing said events. They are constantly being invoked by speakers; yet they work on an inaccessible, unconscious level, which is why they are rarely challenged (Bamberg & Andrews 361). Alasdair MacIntyre (216) rightly stresses how master narratives iterate a persistent word-view:

It is through hearing stories about wicked stepmothers, lost children, good but misguided kings, wolves that suckle twin boys, youngest sons who receive no inheritance but must make their own way in the world and eldest sons who waste their inheritance on riotous living and go into exile to live with the swine, that children learn or mislearn both what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words. Hence there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources.

It cannot be denied that master narratives have a powerful grip on society and prove to be resilient to resistance; this is due to a number of different characteristics that are inherent to master narratives. Not only do they represent a commonly-accepted world view, but they are also organic and adapt well to any opposition (Lindemann Nelson 157). Moreover, master narratives have the power to evolve and gain strength from their connection to other master narratives. The fundamental beliefs, which are entrenched in master narratives, make it almost impossible to overturn them. They often manage to remain unquestioned and unchallenged due to their ability to assimilate to forms of opposition (160). Even more so, they prevent opposition before it occurs. Master narratives disguise the forces under which they operate. The subjugation and marginalization of whole groups is subtle and usually goes unnoticed. Oppressive identities are usually hidden by the means of naturalization and normalization. Another strategy is the privatization of unwanted identities that are confined to the private domain so as to hide any violations against them from the public discourses. In both cases the focus lies on the dominant identities; the oppressed identities simply vanish from sight (162-164).

2.3 Restoring Damaged Identities through Counterstories

Despite the fact that it is not easily done, master narratives *can* be resisted and the agency of oppressed groups *can* be restored. In order to do so, counterstories that oppose a dominant narrative ought to be constructed.

Generally speaking, one may distinguish between three different levels of resistance. The first level is characterized by a *refusal* of the master narrative, which operates on the level of individual people who refuse to identify with what a given narrative represents. The aim of those stories is not to alter the perception

which dominates in society, but rather, to shift the understanding which afflicted individuals have of themselves. Master narratives can also be *repudiated*, which means that individuals use the knowledge gained from a counterstory to oppose people who apply the master narrative to themselves. The intention behind those stories is to provide the subgroup with enough self-conception so that they can oppose the dominant understanding of their subgroup. Lastly, counterstories can contest master narratives at a public level (Lindemann-Nelson 169). Hereby, the knowledge which counterstories produce is taken to a political level. It is not just the first person perspective that is being transformed, but the dominant one and any damage that has been inflicted on identities is repaired systematically.

Now that the ways in which counterstories resist master narratives have been established I would like to turn to the manner in which counterstories operate. The first step comprises the detection of those fragments that contribute to the misinformed construction of an identity. Moreover, the misrepresentation ought to be highlighted. The second step, then, involves a retelling of the story about a certain misconstrued identity in a manner that emphasizes the qualities and aspects that were suppressed by the master narratives (Lindemann-Nelson 7).

In order to repair an identity that was damaged by a master narrative, an effective counter story ought to be identity-constituting and exhibit a direct relation to an existing master narrative (Lindemann-Nelson 151). Traditional characters can be transformed in order to undermine dominant discourses; however, it is vital for these counter narratives not to diverge too much from the master narrative. While minor changes and appropriations are welcome, intelligibility needs to be maintained at all times, which is why the overall framework of the master narrative needs to be kept intact (Bamberg & Andrews 362). Moreover, the relationship to the master narrative ought to be characterized by a resistant nature. Another defining feature of a counterstory is the fact that the master narrative which it intends to resist has to be constituted by oppressive forces, which diminish the identity of a subcultural group.

Lastly, counterstories can be defined by their intention to repair damaged identities and grant them more agency. Ultimately, a successful counterstory transforms into a master narrative itself, however, without oppressing anybody.

This is due to the fact any successful counterstory is dependent on a wide circulation, which allows for a socially-shared reception (Lindemann Nelson 156-157).

2.4 The Notion of Identity and its Influence on Agency

Now that I have elaborated on the fact that identities can be harmed by master narratives, and have discussed the resistant potential that counterstories yield in the repairing and reconstruction of those identities, I would finally like to establish what the complex and ambiguous notion of identity actually entails.

The comprehension of the term identity ranges from the outdated notion of 'finding oneself' by taking a step back from the world and turning to one's inner self to a more modern understanding which equals identity with an original essence that characterizes each individual. However, deconstructionism has questioned and critiqued the idea of a sovereign self and proposes to regard identity as a performative construct instead. Identity is now characterized by fragmentation, multiplicity and constant change. It is no longer self-sufficient, but is dependent on its "constitutive outside" - the Other – in order to establish difference and thereby itself (Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'?" 4). Hence, identity formation is deeply rooted in discursive practices and power relations. Identity is, to some degree, constructed by dominant discourses that interpellate an individual into a certain subject position, to some other, it can also be formed by the subject's agency. The formation of identity is, thus, always collective *and* individual. It is a matter of self-understanding as well as a matter of how a person is perceived and understood by others. Hall put forward the argument that the subject has to (temporarily) build on the subjectivity it is offered by its surroundings, while, at the same time, the incomplete and representational nature of it has to be acknowledged as well ("Who Needs 'Identity'?" 6).

A person's identity - the way in which it is understood by others as well as by the person itself - affects the person's ability to perform agency. An individual's right to engage in certain activities or to behave in a certain manner is always directly dependent on how it is perceived and identified by others. If, for some reason, an individual is considered to be defective or shows a deviation from what

is considered normal in a society, this person might be treated with contempt or disdain. Likewise, the way in which a person perceives themselves impacts their abilities (Lindemann Nelson, Preface xi). This link between identity and agency can have powerful or even dangerous repercussions for members of social groups who are subjected to take on the degrading identities that are needed by the system. Ideologies regulate how these compulsory identities ought to behave, of what knowledge they may possess or to whom they are accountable. These identities can be referred to as damaged identities. A social group's identity is damaged if they are considered to be less worthy and powerful than other groups. As a consequence, individual members of these groups are prevented from occupying certain roles within society or entering appealing relationships. Hence, they are deprived of opportunity. An individual's identity is further damaged if they endorse the views that are bestowed on them (Lindemann Nelson, Preface xii). As I have outlined before, this damage is often inflicted on them by master narratives. Hence, I would now like to take a closer look at the formation of narrative identity in order to establish the foundation of this crucial process.

2.5 The Formation of Narrative Identity

According to Fisher and Currie, humans can be described as *homo narrans* (Fisher 6) as well as *homo fabulans* - “the tellers and interpreters of narrative” (Currie 2). Hence, it can be argued that people are predisposed to construct the world around them in narrative form (Brown, “Sense making and narrative forms” 73). Just like identity, narratives are performative. They are discursive speech-acts that “bring into existence a social reality that did not exist before their utterance” (Ford and Ford 544).

Within feminist discourses, as well, identity may be understood as “a storytelling practice that locates people in social structures, processes and discourses” (Coleman-Fountain 2). Narratives, regardless of how trivial and mundane they are, have the rather powerful function to “order characters in space and time and, therefore, as a format, narrative lends itself not only to connecting past events to present states ... but also to revealing character transformations” (Bamberg & Andrews 354). An individual's identity is subject to change over the

course of its lifetime and is bound to be reconstructed and reimagined in different contexts. Breaking with the tradition of regarding narratives as structuring devices and identities as stable and coherent, Bauman (11), amongst many other postmodern scholars, defines identity as a “never-ending, always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended activity in which we all, by necessity or by choice, are engaged”. Narratives allow people to interpret their own or other people's identity; they allow them to make sense of their surroundings and live within those conditions (Coleman-Fountain 14).

According to Hennessy (“The value of a second skin” 116) the narrator of a story is “never merely an individual but lives always in social relation”. Each new story draws on conventions and assumptions; it is “formed in dialogue with a larger cultural system” (Hammack 235). It is crucial to highlight the social factor in the formation of identities since it is “social totalities” that regulate and shape how people perceive reality (Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure* 26). Social totalities further create sites of struggles, where hegemonic discourses are negotiated and contested. Consequently, storytelling is more than just the recreation of existing ideologies and identities. It is a practice that constructively engages with existing discourses, constantly reimagining and reformulating them (Coleman-Fountain 3).

Understanding the notion of identity as a storytelling practice acknowledges the complex negotiation of subject positions to which people are subjected. Although individuals are “contradictorily and differentially positioned among multiple social co-ordinates” (Hennessy, *Materialist Feminism* 32), all of their stories are 'sutured' together, which leads to an emergence of subjects.

According to Bamberg (205) there are “three realms of identity construction” which can be understood as “dilemmatic spaces”. First of all, individuals always constitute themselves with respect to others. They either establish what distinguishes themselves from others or note their similarities. As Bamberg argues “[i]ntegrating and differentiating a sense of who we are vis-à-vis others is a process of moment-to-moment navigations, and stories about self and others are good candidates to practice this from early on”. Narratives can thus be regarded as “discursive practices for developing and changing the membership constructions that divide and unite people along affiliations and alignments” (Bamberg 205).

The second dilemmatic space revolves around the concept of agency. While agency is usually understood as something which one either possesses or does not, Bamberg suggests to regard it along the same line as the sameness-difference dichotomy. One can gain a sense of self by being a passive recipient of outside influences like family or culture, but an identity can also be constructed as agentive by regarding one's surroundings as construct of the self. Narratives provide the ideal space to explore these processes.

Thirdly, when talking about identity, one can either put an emphasis on constancy or highlight the transforming state of one's self. These navigations of reconciling our past self with our present and future self are often connected with issues surrounding self-worth and are thoroughly discussed in narratives (Bamberg 2006).

3 From the Myth of 'Normality' to the Construction of Deviance

The master narrative that developed from Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* is concerned with the representation of homosexuality, in particular with the portrayal of lesbianism. Since Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu was certainly not the first or only person to construct a discourse of homosexual pathology, I would like to provide some information about the cultural and historical context that may have impacted the formation of the master narrative which I analyse in this paper.

3.1 *The Prevailing Power of Heteronormativity*

Heterosexuality is still the norm in culture, society and politics. As Chambers (26) states “everyone and everything is judged from the perspective of straight”. The notion of compulsory heterosexuality first came into being towards the end of the 1960s, when feminists attempted to construct new discourses surrounding sexuality. In her essay 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience', Adrienne Rich discusses the ways in which the concept of heterosexuality has been imposed on Western societies throughout history. Rich draws attention to practices which act as "cultural propaganda of heterosexuality" and exposes the denial of alternative models of love and sexuality as well as the aggressive ways in which those are erased (Rich 660). Regardless of whether it is fairy tales, popular music or films, they all constantly reproduce and proliferate heteronormativity, thereby reinforcing the perceived naturalness of heterosexual relationships (Ebda. 644-645). Their portrayal of everyday life practices almost exclusively consists of normative storylines that “promote [heterosexual] coupling and commitment invariably in the form of marriage and reproduction” (Aaron 69-70). Similar to the concept of whiteness, heterosexuality enjoys a culturally dominant status, "by seeming not to be anything in particular" (Dyer 126). Hollywood, for instance, can be classified as just one industry which

... gains strength and power by making its form and practice seem to be basic common sense. For example, like whiteness or masculinity, heterosexuality has often been hard to “see” because it has been naturalized by patriarchal ideologies as being the “normal” state of affairs. This tends to hide the fact that Hollywood form and practice developed over time in response to specific socio-political factors. (Benshoff & Griffin 21-22).

In spite of the aforementioned, popular culture can also be used as a tool to resist and question dominant ideologies. This is where 'queer theory' comes into play. Queer theory strives to resist heteronormativity by deconstructing all normative axioms including gender, sex and sexual identity. The term 'queer' encompasses a wide range of notions, which is why it defies a narrow definition. Haplerin's (62) attempt at providing some clarification reads as follows: "Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant [...] It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then, demarcates not a positivity, but a positioning vis-à-vis the normative – a positioning that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men." In the subsequent chapter, I will utilize queer theory as a lens in my analysis of Carmilla in order to expose all instances of heteronormativity.

3.2 The Practice of Othering

The concept of 'othering' – establishing a distinction between 'us' and 'them' – is omnipresent in society. One of the first researchers and thinkers who applied the concept of othering to various 19th century texts was Edward Said. He accused the West of constructing the Orient as a reduced and pathologized geography. According to him, the imagery of the Orient that is presented in many texts is very much biased and follows "a political doctrine" (204). Said further blamed the West for characterizing "the Orient as alien [on the one hand] and to incorporate it schematically on a theatrical stage whose audience, managers and actors are for Europe, and only for Europe" (71-72). He was of the opinion that it is this very construction and reinforcing of stereotypes about others that rendered the Western world so powerful.

The process of othering also has implications for the formation of identities. As I have already mentioned, identities are always situated within and constituted by society in that they represent the shared understanding of an individual's self, or, in the case of collective identities, a group's self (Jensen 63). Crucial for the construction of identity is the existence of an other. As Smith (75) points out:

Identities are forged out of shared experiences, memories and myths, in relation to those of other collective identities. They are in fact often forged through the opposition to the identities of significant others, as the history of paired conflict so often demonstrates.

While Said was one of the first thinkers in the field, it was, in fact, Spivak who

coined the term othering as a systematic theoretical concept in 1985. In her essay 'The Rani of Sirmur', Spivak talks about three different dimensions, in which othering is practised in a colonial setting. The first dimension comprises the execution of power. Here the term othering refers to the practice of identifying and thereby producing a subordinate and showing them 'who they are subject to' (Spivak 245). The second dimension, then, is about identifying the other as morally inferior and to pathologize their qualities and behaviour (Spivak 254-255). Lastly, the third dimension touches upon the distribution of knowledge. "[T]he master is the subject of science or knowledge" (Spivak 256), not the subordinated other. In all of these cases, the subordinated individual is assigned the subject position of the other. The power lies with the center of the dichotomy, which describes and constructs its opponent.

Despite the fact that the concept of othering was originally intended for a colonial discourse, it can be applied to a number of different forms of social differentiation (Jensen 64). In any instance, othering produces and emphasizes differences, thereby defining those individuals who are othered as "morally and/or intellectually inferior" (Schwalbe et. al. 423). Through this act of subordination the more powerful status of the oppressors is reaffirmed and perpetuated. Ultimately, essentialising whole groups of people can be dangerous for it does not allow room for an ambiguous, in-between state (Jensen 64).

Since this paper aims to expose instances of othering that are related to sexual differences, I would like to elaborate on the changing discourses of homosexuality. I will now outline to whom the practice of othering has been applied and showcase the ways in which subordinate subject positions have been created for homosexuals.

3.3 The Pathologization of Lesbianism & A Changing of Perceptions

In order to exert control over a certain group of people, a terminology of disease is oftentimes used to categorize socially deviant behaviour. Oppressed and socially marginalized groups of society are frequently diagnosed with suffering from a mental illness. This classification can be regarded as a form of punishment due to the individual's failure to conform to the expectations of the dominant society

(Kitzinger 32). As Pearson (48, emphasis in original) emphasises

[c]onformity – rather than being viewed as a *social* accomplishment – is elevated to the status of 'health'. Nonconformity is disqualified as 'sickness' ... A view of conformity and deviance as a social accomplishment, which is what any critique of the medical model entails, raises the uncomfortable questions of how men [*sic*] construct and maintain social order and how they might reconstruct it.

Towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the first research on lesbianism was conducted. The consent was fairly unanimous that lesbianism constituted an anomaly or a disease that was the perverted result of a wrong upbringing or a genetic defect (Kitzinger 39). Even in the 1980s, homosexuality was still diagnosed as pathological:

Homosexuality is a symptom of neurosis and of a grievous personality disorder. It is an outgrowth of deeply rooted emotional deprivations and disturbances that had their origins in infancy. It is manifested, all too often, by compulsive and destructive behaviour that is the very antithesis of fulfillment and happiness. Buried under the 'gay' exterior of the homosexual is the hurt and rage that cripple his or her capacity for true maturation, for healthy growth and love. (Kronemeyer 7)

Identifying as homosexual used to be equated with “being placed in a specific narrative of essence” (Coleman-Fountain 23). This particular discourse was characterized by several features, comprising “processes of becoming, the assumption of a fixed essence, and the establishment of deviance” (Ebda. 23). Same-sex desire was regarded as a fixed personality trait that challenged a certain kind of people. This highly stigmatizing master narrative took its toll on individuals who identified as homosexual and marked their lives with a sense of shame and secrecy. Consequently, these feelings of discomfort were adopted into discourses of their own.

With the rise of feminism, which challenged the patriarchy in various aspects i.e. economic independence, relationships between women became viable alternatives to marriage. Naturally, this development was perceived as a threat by most men (Kitzinger 41). Hence, lesbians were ascribed a certain essence, which set them apart from 'normal' women. Lesbianism was regarded as a perverted abnormality and the unconscious desire to be male. Psychoanalyst Karl Abraham portrayed lesbianism in the following way:

In some cases homosexuality does not break through consciousness; the repressed wish to be male is here found in a sublimated form in the shape of masculine pursuits of an intellectual and professional character and other allied interests. Such women do not, however, consciously deny their femininity, but usually proclaim that these interests are just as much feminine as masculine ones. They consider the sex of a person has nothing to do with his or her capacities,

especially in the mental field. This type of woman is well known in the women's movement of today. (Abraham in Kitzinger 43)

This discourse of anomaly was created to discourage women from striving for independence and non-conformity. At the same time, this classification as 'damaged identities' led many homosexuals to seek recognition in other places, namely the sub-cultural gay community that provided support (Coleman-Fountain 26).

In order to end discrimination towards gays and lesbians, many homosexuals started to integrate themselves into mainstream society and adopted codes and conventions that are associated with it. Politics aimed for a total assimilation, which saw the establishment of heteronormative conventions into homosexual lives, such as abiding to gender conventions or displaying family values (Coleman-Fountain 26).

4 Heteronormativity & Rigid Notions of Gender: Exploring *Carmilla* on the Content Level

In order to prove that Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* constitutes a master narrative which is damaging to women and queers alike, I would first like to provide a detailed account of the two main characters. The portrayal of Laura and Carmilla is not only harmful to lesbians, but also highly sexist and degrading to women in general. The subsequent subchapter is, then, meant to expose the heteronormativity that is prevalent in Le Fanu's novella.

4.1 *Damaging Characterization*

4.1.1 Laura's Ignorance, Anxious Mind and General Weakness

Le Fanu's tale is narrated by Laura, a young English woman, who describes her life, at the opening of the novella, as somewhat isolated and lonely: "I was a little shy, as lonely people are" (Le Fanu 28). Her character can be described as quintessentially Victorian: she is coy, obedient and highly impressionable. Her ignorance as to what is happening to and around her is quite striking and borders on stupidity. Despite the obvious warning signs, she is in utter denial about Carmilla's true identity. Even the physical signs of the vampire's doings which appear on Laura's body go unnoticed by her. Not only does Laura show confusion about Carmilla, she also has difficulties comprehending her own feelings and state of mind: "I felt rather unaccountably towards the stranger" (Le Fanu 29).

Furthermore, Laura is characterized by an air of trauma and anxiety which surrounds her at almost all times. She recalls her first encounter with Carmilla as an occurrence, "which produces a terrible impression" (Le Fanu 7). The morning thereafter she is still "in a state of terror, and could not bear to be left alone" (Le Fanu 9).

Mentally, physically and emotionally, the main protagonist can also be characterized as fragile and weak: "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" (Le Fanu 34).

Due to the aforementioned qualities, Laura's role is limited to that of the

damsel in distress. She personifies the victim that is seduced by the villain and ought to be rescued, in this particular case, by men.

4.1.2 Laura's Passivity & Co-Dependence

More importantly though, Laura's agency is very much limited as well. In comparison to Carmilla, she remains fairly passive and weak throughout the story and seemingly cannot resist the powerful forces to which she is exposed.

Her passivity is reflected in the character's movement or rather the lack thereof. Due to the illness with which Carmilla afflicts her, she is bed-bound. Thus, her character remains immobile for a large part of the story. Furthermore, Laura is either portrayed as being penetrated, drained of strength or static. Apart from the fact that she grows more and more curious as the story unfolds, the majority of her actions are mere reactions:

Sometimes ... my strange and beautiful companion would take my hand and hold it with a fond pressure ... and with gloating eyes she drew me to her, and her hot lips traveled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, "You are mine, you shall be mine...". Then she had thrown herself back in her chair ... leaving me trembling. (Le Fanu 36).

Interestingly, the interpretation of Laura's character is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, she is drawn to Carmilla and makes a compliant victim. On the other hand, her attraction to Carmilla is not merely of an erotic nature, but is based on genuine affection, curiosity and fascination. Despite the fact that Carmilla remains the active protagonist in this relationship and takes on a rather dominant and possessive nature, the attraction between the two women is mutual and provides Laura with an "element of self-impelled motion" (Kimmel 271): "I was a little shy, as lonely people are, but the situation made me eloquent, even bold" (Le Fanu 28).

However, this temporary agency comes with a price. One could argue that Laura's relationship to Carmilla does not merely render her more active but also highly co-dependent on her companion, who completely seduces her. Even after the vampire's death, Laura doesn't experience any liberation and remains in the emotional grip of Carmilla (Kimmel 275):

It was long before the terror of recent events subsided; and to this hour the image of Carmilla returns to memory with ambiguous alternations – sometimes the playful, languid, beautiful girl; sometimes the writhing fiend I saw in the ruined

church; and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing room door. (Le Fanu 116).

4.1.3 Carmilla's Irresistible Malice

Carmilla, on the other hand, is a somewhat active character who seeks out a relationship with Laura. The two characters do not simply oppose each other, but rather it can be argued that one completely dominates the other. The vampire Carmilla drains Laura of her power, which the latter seems to allow without too much resistance (Kimmel 275).

Carmilla can be described as a free agent in that she is free to move in space (as well as in time). She does not seem to be bound by external social forces; she even evades social customs (Kimmel 270). Her intense and passionate emotions are forceful and erratic, which renders her unpredictable and dangerous.

Above all, Carmilla's dangerous nature stems from the fact that she feeds on young women in order to sate her need for blood. These experiences are sexually charged in that she dominates and penetrates her victims. What is more, Carmilla tends to hide her lesbian tendencies as well as her vampirism behind her hyper-feminine appearance. On the one hand, this aids her in appearing benign; on the other hand, it also facilitates the process of luring in her prey. Instead of transforming into a classic bat or hound, Carmilla stalks her prey as a feline creature. Regardless of the shape that Carmilla assumes, she always evokes fright as well as intrigue in her beholders. Laura describes her feelings towards Carmilla as follows: "I experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust" (Le Fanu 35). While Carmilla does indeed make a pleasant addition to the general Victorian household and frequently engages in the petty conversations of those surrounding her, she nevertheless puzzles those very people with her abrupt mood changes and sudden bursts of eccentricities. The fact that her appearance does not convey the danger that lurks underneath may come as a shock to the reader, especially in the 19th century. Even though one is very well aware of Carmilla's maleficent or at least dangerous nature, the reader is led to keep identifying with her due to her enigmatic attraction and irresistible nature. In the

end, however, Carmilla is exposed as a monster who ought to have “a sharp stake driven through [her] heart” (Le Fanu 111).

4.2 Heteronormative Elements and Othering in Carmilla

4.2.1 A Colonial Set-up of Othering

It is fairly obvious to the reader that the vampirism in Carmilla can be read as a (sometimes even explicit) metaphor for lesbianism. As Dyer (58) points out

[t]he analogy with homosexuality as a secret practice works in two contradictory ways. On the one hand, the point about sexual orientation is that it doesn't show, you can't tell who is and who isn't just by looking; but on the other hand, there is also a widespread discourse that there are tell-tale signs that someone 'is'. The vampire myth reproduces this double view in its very structure of suspense (Dyer 58).

In addition to that, the discovery of Carmilla's true nature can also be interpreted as a metaphoric recognition of her as a primitive other that threatens the dominant order, in particular the heteronormative discourse that is governing Victorian society. The late 19th century Victorian literature generally equated vampires with non-British racial characters. This notion can be explained with Foucault (*The History of Sexuality* 149), who regards blood as a symbol of sovereignty and national ownership. The vampire's exchanging of blood with English citizens, then, represents an invasion of the nation and a demonstration of reverse colonization. Stephen Arata (623) too, argues that vampirism is the manifested fear of the 'civilized' of being colonized by primitives.

In the novella, Carmilla's characterization clearly defines her as a racial other. She is described as having thick dark hair, a rich complexion, non-Christian faith and erratic behaviour. Her description as a lurking, dark animal alludes to the common perception of lesbians and their predatory, animalistic nature, which is also associated with savages (Creed n.p.). The black panther, into which Carmilla can transform herself, can be read as a signifier for exoticism and hence, otherness.

Visually however, the differences between her and mere mortals are barely noticeable. It is only towards the end of the novella, when Carmilla finds herself in a “leaden coffin floated with blood [...] [in] a depth of seven inches” (Le Fanu 134) that her differences clearly show. The blood is the only physical marker that

distinguishes Carmilla from corpses of a human nature. Her overall appearance resembles that of any sleeping person: “Her eyes were open; no cadaverous smell exhaled from the coffin. [...] [T]here was a faint, but appreciable respiration, and a corresponding action of the heart. The limbs were perfectly flexible, the flesh elastic” (Le Fanu 134).

Thus, it can be argued that Carmilla's exclusion from dominant society is threefold: She represents the *cultural*, *primitive* as well as *racial* other in the novella, which makes her the source of all evil and ultimately leads to her premature demise (Bhattacharjee n.p.). Even Laura compares her feelings for Carmilla to an obsession that grew “until it discoloured and perverted the whole state of [her] life” (Le Fanu 105).

Styria, presumably the place where Carmilla's origin lies, is portrayed as 'the other' as well. It is represented as an uncivilized, rural area, whose inhabitants are mostly unintellectual. At the beginning of the novella, Laura informs the reader that she grew up speaking a number of different languages. Despite the fact that she has never set foot in England, her father, nevertheless, brought her up speaking English “partly to prevent its becoming a lost language among [them], and partly from patriotic motives” (Le Fanu 7). Language is always linked to power and hence, also underlies patriarchal structures. Consequently, it can be argued that Laura's father utilizes the English language in order to undermine the local languages as well as the local people themselves. His disrespect for local culture also becomes apparent when he refers to the local tradition of coffee and chocolate as his “dish of tea” (Le Fanu 52). Furthermore, Laura talks about Styria in a somewhat disdainful manner:

In Styria, we, though by no means magnificent people, inhabit a castle, or schloss. A small income, in that part of the world, goes a great way. Scantily enough ours would have answered among the wealthy people at home. But here, in this lonely and primitive place, where everything is so marvellously cheap, I really don't see however so much more money would at all materially add to our comforts, or even luxuries. (Le Fanu 5)

4.2.2 Assumed Heterosexuality

Besides the aforementioned discourse of 'othering', the novel also displays some strong instances of heteronormativity. Carmilla's love for Laura is very different from a platonic love, which a friend might display to another, yet Laura constantly refers to Carmilla as her companion. Moreover, Laura's reaction to Carmilla's advances is characterized by embarrassment and unease. In fact, when Laura first realizes that Carmilla's behaviour towards her is marked by affection, the former considers the possibility of Carmilla's being a heterosexual male. Laura assumes that Carmilla must be in disguise for no woman could possibly be interested in her romantically.

I had read in old storybooks of such things. What if a boyish lover had found his way into the house, and sought to prosecute his suit in masquerade, with the assistance of a clever old adventuress. But there were many things against this hypothesis, highly interesting as it was to my vanity. (Le Fanu 36)

The reason why Laura prefers this explanation is that it would, on the one hand, justify Carmilla's actions and rid them of any impropriety. On the other hand, it would also render Laura's reaction to this behaviour entirely natural.

Laura's assumptions undoubtedly stem from her ignorance. Her sheltered and isolated upbringing up until this point in the story suggests that Laura may not yet have been in the company of a pursuer, regardless of their gender. Thus, the existence of same-sex desire would seem utterly foreign to the girl.

[...] 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 ardor of a lover; it embarrassed me ... leaving me trembling. (Le Fanu 2003: 29)

In order to adhere to the heteronormativity which society bestows on the two girls, both of them have to suppress their true sexuality and with it also their identity. While Laura was raised to fit into a heterosexually-oriented society and has difficulties letting go of these beliefs, Carmilla, as well, needs to adapt to heterosexual norms and readily keeps up her feminine appearance in order to lure in her prey.

4.2.3 The Demonization of Homosexual Women

Le Fanu's novella also participates in discourses about homosexuality that delegitimize certain aspects of queerness. The transgression of sexual norms is presented as a dangerous, uncanny vice that ought to be hidden from the world and met with fear and violence. According to Sian Macfie 19th century Gothic vampire tales were prone to demonize the female body. She asserts that

... the function or dysfunction of the female body was juxtaposed with notions of the perceived threat of vampirism ... [and these assertions] were largely based upon a sense of women's association with blood [as a result of menstruation]. However, the idea of female vampirism also came to be understood in a more figurative sense. In addition to the idea of the literal contagion of the blood, vampirism came to be associatively linked with the notion of moral contagion and especially with the 'contamination' of lesbianism." (60).

As the example of Carmilla shows, lesbians were also considered to exert control over the mind and will of other women. Macfie coins the term 'the psychic sponge' for this notion as it involves the lesbian's draining "on the energy and [the] emotional and intellectual resources of her companions" (60).

According to Jeffrey Cohen any representation of a monster is always a representation of a cultural body as well (in William 9). The monster incarnates a culture's nightmares, fears and unspeakable taboos. In the novella, it is described in the following way:

The vampire is prone to be fascinated with an engrossing vehemence, resembling the passion of love, by particular persons....It will in these cases, husband and protract its murderous enjoyment with the refinement of an epicure, and heighten it by the gradual approaches of an artful courtship. In these cases it seems to yearn for something like sympathy and consent. (Le Fanu 113)

The monstrosity which the vampire presents to Laura can be easily understood as a parable of the fear which Victorians exhibit towards homosexuals.

Despite the fact that many scholars have argued for the transgressive nature of the novella due to the threat which Carmilla poses to the patriarchy as well as the heterosexual matrix, they all fail to acknowledge the danger that Carmilla poses to Laura. According to Lee (62), Carmilla poses an ontological threat to Laura, which endangers her sense of self. He further argues that Carmilla's threatening nature does not stem from her sexual transgression, but the particular way in which this transgression unfolds.

Her persistent avowal of unity suggests that what is being transgressed is not merely sexual or gender codes but something far more fundamental, something constitutive of identity itself and of all distinctions between self and other (Lee 62).

Due to the fact that Carmilla and Laura seem to stem from the same maternal lineage, their union can be interpreted as a retreat into an original state of wholeness. This implies that the self and the other are constructed from the same origin, hence suggesting that all dichotomies that are based on the self/other distinction are culturally constructed. While this does in fact threaten the patriarchy and heteronormativity, it also destabilizes every structuring device known to society (Lee 62).

4.2.4 The Pathologization of Queer Love

In Victorian times, same sex desire was considered to be unnatural; a disease that afflicts the mind. In the novella, Laura frequently mentions a mysterious illness that spreads across the adjoining villages. It is referred to as a “plague or fever” (Le Fanu 38) that overtakes the country. The superstitions that surround the illness are considered infectious by Laura's father, which is why he initially relates the affliction to natural causes (Willis 112). Interestingly enough, Laura herself is not aware of the illness that is said to have befallen her: “My father asked me often whether I was ill... I persisted in assuring him I was quite well. In a sense this was true. I had no pain, I could complain of no bodily derangement. My complaint seemed to be one of the imagination, or the nerves” (Le Fanu 106). One could infer that, in the fashion of Foucault's theory of power and knowledge, the illness might actually be a figment of the men's imagination. The men's assumed knowledge of the illness and their withholding of information from the actual victims of the malady might produce the disease in the first place (Foucault, “Psychiatric Power” 41).

Eventually, two physicians are brought in to cure Laura from her affliction and remedies against the spreading malady are sold by a town hunchback:

“Will your ladyships be pleased to buy an amulet against the oupire, which is going like the wolf, I hear, through these woods ... They are dying of it right and left and here is a charm that never fails”. (Le Fanu 41)

Even Carmilla herself makes use of this discourse of pathology as she refers to the charm that lies on the amulet as a medical one. According to the girl, the charm “has been fumigated or immersed in some drug, and is an antidote against malaria” (Le Fanu 60).

Laura, too, attempts to classify Carmilla's behaviour as that of a madwoman. Fitting Carmilla into pre-existing social structures enables Laura to ease her guilt about her own sentiments towards Carmilla. She frequently refers to Carmilla's expressions of affection as "crazy talk" (Le Fanu 50) or "wild nonsense" (Le Fanu 54).

4.2.5 Objects of Desire

According to Levi-Strauss women are "valuables par excellence from both the biological and the social points of view ... without which life is impossible" (481). They are regarded "as the object of personal desire, thus exciting sexual and proprietorial instincts . . . [as well as] the subject of the desire of others . . . binding others through alliance with them" (496). Hence, women represent "the supreme gift" (Ebda. 65) that binds men to one another and helps in the creation of social order. Levi-Strauss, then, considers marriage to be the emblem of men's complete control over women. Further, he claims that

... the total relationship of exchange which constitutes marriage is not established between a man and a woman, where each owes and receives something, but between two groups of men, and the woman figures only as one of the objects in the exchange, not as one of the partners between whom the exchange takes place. (115)

Following this argumentation, it is safe to assume that a woman's sole purpose in marriage is to provide a passive link between two males.

In *Carmilla*, Laura's father attempts to marry Laura to General Spielsdorf in order to establish the aforementioned bond. By the time the General reaches Karnstein, the castle where Laura and her father reside, Laura has already been afflicted with a malady, which leads her father to have great concerns about his daughter's diminished value. However, he remains hopeful that Spielsdorf is still "thinking of claiming the [Karnstein] titles and estates" (Le Fanu 79), regardless of the health or person of the woman in the match.

4.2.6 Lesbianism/ Women as a Threat to the Patriarchy

The society which is depicted in *Carmilla* seemingly relegates men to somewhat powerless positions. Throughout the novella, the men appear to lose all influence over their women. Being unable to stop the disease that has been haunting Styria, the men are no longer able to exchange women in marriage and thus, temporarily lose their male kinship system. This correlates with the changing notion of fear with regards to women which was prevalent towards the end of the 19th century. As Alexandra Warwick concludes: "[I]t is no longer the threat to women from outside dangers that occupies the popular imagination, but rather the threat from them, and more specifically the danger they represent to men" (207).

As I have mentioned before, women used to be exchanged between two male parties. In the novella, however, the roles are reversed. The triangle consists of two female parties and one male one. This perceived imbalance poses a threat to the men who are involved in that constellation. The fact that Carmilla is not merely any woman, but a lesbian, makes her even more threatening. One scene which exemplifies Carmilla's characterization is the following: Laura's mother appears to the girl in what seems to be a dream and offers a warning to her daughter: "mother warns to beware of the assassin" (106).

Carmilla evokes fears of the gradually rising power of women and their sexual autonomy. However it is not just this particular vampire, but undead creatures in general for they are considered queer characters which transcend the boundaries of what it means to be exclusively masculine or feminine. Craft (109) argues that vampires represent fears over "gender based categories of penetrating and the receptive". All vampires, even female ones, penetrate their victims with their teeth – a practice which can be considered a masculine sexual function. The vampire's teeth can be read as a phallic symbol, which generally connotes power. However, the vampire also engages in a receptive role, which is traditionally associated with feminine sexual functions. Further anxieties are incited in the men due to Carmilla and Laura's female genitalia. As Freud claims, the seemingly castrated genitalia of women invoke a fear of castration in males (Freud 228).

Despite all of that, Weiss (88) stresses that the "lesbian vampire provokes and articulates anxieties in the heterosexual male spectator only for the narrative

to quell those anxieties and reaffirm his maleness through the vampire's ultimate destruction" at the end of the story. It is the ultimate emblem of patriarchy, which leads to Carmilla's execution. She is staked with a phallic-looking stick – an act that reinforces patriarchy as well as heteronormativity in that it mirrors the penetration of a woman by a male during sexual intercourse.

In addition, it is noteworthy to point out that Carmilla and Laura are not the only women who threaten to strip the men of the story of their powers. At the very beginning of the narrative, another strong woman has her way with the male characters. The mere reason Carmilla was able to enter the men's homes undetectably in the first place is her mother's cunning nature. "With a commanding air and figure" (80), Carmilla's mother persuades various men to take in her daughter and grant her access to their own daughters.

4.2.7 The Subordination of Women

Despite the fact that Laura and Carmilla represent two very different kinds of women, ultimately, both find themselves to be dominated by men. While Laura embodies the morally just, chaste virgin, Carmilla's character is sexually-experienced and liberated in her desires. The men in the story oppress the women by killing Carmilla and trying to prevent Laura from realizing her true sexual desires.

The subordination of the female characters is also visible in the women's behaviour towards, and their opinion of, men. On the evening when Carmilla disappears from the castle, Laura and the maids "grew frightened ... [and] rang the bell long and furiously" (Le Fanu 64). Following this scare, Laura exclaims the following: "If my father's room had been at that side of the house we would have called him up at once to our aid. But alas! he was quite out of hearing" (Le Fanu 64). Here men are represented as protectors, while the women in the story are depicted as helpless and weak.

Not only do the women diminish their own worth, but the men further perpetuate these beliefs through the way they treat their female counterparts. This becomes particularly apparent when looking at the distribution of knowledge. When General Spielberg relates the events that surround his niece's death to

Laura's father, the latter keeps this information from Laura, despite the fact that he is very well aware of their relation to his daughter's case. However, Laura's father is not the only person who keeps vital information from her. Doctor Spielsberg, who examines her after she has fallen ill, does not disclose the information that her ill-being is of a vampiric nature either, even though he readily identifies the symptoms. Instead, he confides in her father, another man. Even upon Laura's urges that the men may should share their newly-found knowledge with her, they merely belittle her. The male conspiracy does not only involve Laura's father and the doctor but is eventually extended to the General as well. In order to hide Carmilla's true identity from Laura, the General advises Laura to flee the scene, right before Carmilla's destruction: "Of the scene that had occurred in the ruined chapel, no explanation was offered to me, and it was clear that it was a secret which my father for the present determined to keep from me" (109).

According to Heller, Laura may not have been as ignorant as it may seem at first glance. The utterance "[h]ad I but known all suggests that she very well may have known some" (Heller 86-87). Heller (85-86) further muses that

Laura's desires, and her knowledge, exist on the level not only of the unconscious but of a conscious self-censorship. Her claim that Carmilla's advances were 'unintelligible' (Le Fanu 290) may well reflect the pressure that young women of the Victorian period felt to deny they had knowledge of sexuality, particularly of such illicit forms as auto- and homoeroticism.

Heller (86) establishes a clear connection between women's subordinate role in society and the patriarchal control over the distribution of knowledge:

The daughter's need to hide her sexuality is determined by the way her role is defined in the Victorian household. As Paula Marantz Cohen argues, the mother is absent in much Victorian literature (as she is in 'Carmilla') because her daughter 'physically, emotionally, and intellectually embodies the nineteenth-century ideal of femininity' more than does the mature woman: reassuringly asexual, a childlike and dependent daughter is also more malleable to the father's control. That the 'stable dyadic relationship' in nineteenth-century representations of domesticity is that of father and daughter, not husband and wife, explains both the father-daughter pairings in 'Carmilla' and the well-nigh jealous horror with which father figures react to the possibility that their daughters may be sexually knowledgeable.

The need to hide one's homoerotic relationship started, according to Nancy Sahli, in the mid-1870s, when women started to form associations in order to seek higher education. Both female homoeroticism and female knowledge provide women with independence from the patriarchy (Heller 88-89). Interestingly enough, the male characters in *Carmilla* are indeed concerned with keeping the women from gaining

any knowledge about the circumstances which are unfolding before their very own eyes. Laura obeys her father and submits to the patriarchal power that is exerted. Carmilla, on the other hand, who does not conform to the men's expectations, has to pay with her life for this transgression. Her head, the one body part that is associated with knowledge, is struck off and her discursive power is taken from her.

The unequal distribution of knowledge is not the only device that grants the males authority, the male characters are given additional power through the way in which the characters' names have been assigned. While Laura and Carmilla are given first names that clearly distinguish them from others, the men in the story are referred to by generic titles which represent male authority. Laura's father is merely referred to as *Father*; then there is also a *General* and a *Doctor*. This kind of addressing grants them immediate power and authority. The title *Father* is associated with patriarchy, *General* conjures up images of power and control and the term *Doctor* is connoted with knowledge and wisdom (Anderson n.p.). Two of the male characters do have a surname, however, the resemblance between the two names is so striking (Spielsdorf vs. Spielsberg) that they merely emphasize the exchangeability of the male personas. As Claire Anderson rightfully points out, the titles are mere signifiers to the way in which the men control female sexuality: Fathers decide to whom their daughters ought to get married, doctors have, to a certain degree, control over the female body and generals are in charge of directing the use of force. When Doctor Spielsberg examines Laura he asks her the following: "You won't mind your papa's lowering your dress a very little" (Le Fanu 73). The invasiveness and the threat that come with the question become especially apparent when looking at the way in which Laura reacts. The girl gives in to the request by diminishing the incident with the remark that it was "only an inch or two below the edge of my collar" (Le Fanu 73).

4.2.8 Violence towards and Victimization of the Female Body

Throughout the narrative Carmilla is portrayed as the victim of a number of violent acts against her, all of which are executed by men. The violence towards her body is not only physical, but the men also harm the woman verbally by calling her a

monster that ought to be decapitated (Le Fanu 97). Likewise, after General Spielsdorf learns about Carmilla's true identity he stops calling her by her name and refers to her as 'the horrible enemy' instead (Le Fanu 108). Thereby he denies Carmilla a human identity and positions her outside of society (Klemens 156).

The following report by Laura explicitly showcases the extent of the violence that is brought upon Carmilla: Carmilla walks with “a peculiarly engaging smiling; when with a cry, the old man...caught up the woodman's hatchet...On seeing him a *brutalised* change came over her features...he struck at her with all his force... [she] caught him in her tiny grasp” (Le Fanu 105, emphasis added). By describing Carmilla as “brutalised” instead of “brutal”, Carmilla is clearly represented as the victim of this encounter. Furthermore, her features and body are portrayed as being fragile and weak.

The final act of violence that is exerted towards her is her execution, which is described in the following way:

The body, therefore, in accordance with the ancient practice, was raised, and a sharp stake driven through the heart of the vampire, who uttered a piercing shriek at the moment, in all respects such as might escape from a living person in the last agony. Then the head was struck off, and a torrent of blood flowed from the severed neck. The body and head were placed on a pile of wood, and reduced to ashes which were thrown upon the river and borne away. (Le Fanu 111)

Since Carmilla is utterly defenceless against the group of men, who corner and attack her, her violent killing can be interpreted as a metaphor for rape.

4.3 Portraying a Black and White World

The presentation of a heteronormative society is not the only feature in the novella that harms oppressed identities like queers and women in general. In addition to the negative portrayal of these individuals, the narrative is based on a number of binary oppositions that support and perpetuate existing discourses. Even if dichotomies work on a subliminal level, they are a powerful tool in the constitution of discourses. While one pair of the binary opposition enjoys a position of power, the other is automatically oppressed and forced into a subordinate position. Moreover, these oppositions feign naturalness and enjoy a dominant status in our understanding of the world that is never questioned. Hence, in this section of my thesis, I would like to draw attention to these dichotomies and deconstruct them.

4.3.1 Masculinity vs. Femininity

Apart from Carmilla, the characters in the narrative are all ascribed a very specific gender. According to the beliefs of the time, men and women fulfilled certain gender roles and adapted their behaviour to social expectations. While females were associated with the private sphere, males were considered to dominate the public one. Thus, women spent most of their time in their private homes, where they looked after their family. Men, on the other hand, made a living to provide for their wives financially (Parker 11). Any exceptions to these norms were met with contempt or misunderstanding. As Parker points out, “femininity and masculinity in the wrong sex were regarded as a misfortune, undermining the integrity of the character” (11).

The fact that Carmilla represents such an anomaly - she exhibits traits of both genders – draws attention to the cultural constructedness of this rigid categorization. On the one hand, Carmilla is beautiful, has a weakness in her manner as well as a general languor, which are all features that were, at least for a Victorian readership, considered to be feminine. On the other hand, she is also portrayed as exerting strength and power over other people as well as openly exhibiting sexual desire, features that are generally ascribed to males. However, instead of representing this combination of features as natural and normal, the novella focuses on the irreconcilability and strangeness thereof. The fact that each person is unique and can exhibit a number of different traits, of both 'feminine' and 'masculine' nature is a mystery to Laura, who exclaims the following statement about Carmilla:

Except in these brief periods of mysterious excitement her ways were girlish; and there was always a languor about her, quite incompatible with a masculine system in a state of health. In some respects her habits were odd (Le Fanu 36-37).

4.3.2 Heterosexual (Health) vs. Homosexual (Sickness)

Sexual orientation, in *Carmilla*, operates alongside two categories: One either adheres to societal norms and exhibits an attraction to the opposite sex, or one showcases signs of a disordered mind and expresses an interest in the same sex. The connotations that come with these categories are rigid and polarizing.

The fact that the topic of sexuality is implicitly addressed and discussed in

the novella results in the formation, or at least reiteration, of a specific discourse about sexuality. As Foucault points out, the reiteration of discourses concerning sex exercises power for there is “an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause it to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail” (*Discipline and Punish* 18). Naturally, those people and institutions that hold the power control the specific ways in which sexuality is discussed in order to benefit their agenda. More importantly, discourses about sexuality have the potential to control sexuality and subsequently impact the personal lives of individuals. By pathologizing homosexuality, the concept of heterosexuality is automatically strengthened and granted privilege (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 25). As long as a practice is constructed in opposition to a cultural norm, it can never enjoy an equal status or a recognized validity.

4.3.3 Innocent Angel vs. Predatory Monster

Regarding the verbal and social behaviour of the two protagonists, stark differences can be noted as well. In accordance with the Victorian tradition, the women in *Carmilla* are either portrayed as monsters or angels. Despite the fact that the human nature is full of nuances, Victorian characterization tends to make use of extremes. Women in Victorian fiction either have to completely suppress their sexuality and feign coyness, or the sexual behaviour which they exhibit is deemed inappropriate. Sexually-active women tend to be dehumanized; sexually inexperienced women, on the other hand, are not taken seriously at best, if not whole-heartedly oppressed by the men who would like to patronizingly support them. *Carmilla* is represented as a dominant and manipulative monster while naïve and helpless Laura is dependent on being rescued by the male characters. This dichotomy restricts the two women in their agency and prevents them from fully developing their identity.

4.4 Portrayal of Sexuality

Since this thesis is predominantly concerned with the representation of lesbian identities, the portrayal of sexuality in *Carmilla* is a crucial aspect in my analysis of the novella. The depiction of (homo-)sexuality in the narrative is equally as negative and damaging to homosexuals as the representation of the characters themselves. The analysis of the scenes in which sexual behaviour is presented shows two different modes of representation.

First of all, the sexual encounters between the two women are represented as acts of violence and harassment. The first physical contact between the two women is described as hasty and immediate: “She pressed my hand, she laid it upon hers, and her eyes glowed as, looking hastily into mine, she smiled again” (Le Fanu 28). The glowing of Carmilla's eyes does evoke a feeling of menace. Later on, when Carmilla first appears as a large predatory cat, Laura describes her movements as follows:

I could not cry out, although as you may suppose, I was terrified. Its pace was growing faster and faster, and the room rapidly darker and darker... I felt it spring lightly onto my bed. The two broad eyes approached my face, and suddenly I felt a stinging pain as if two large needles darted, an inch or two apart, deep into my breast. (Le Fanu 56).

The way in which Carmilla approaches Laura does not always seem entirely consensual and might be even interpreted as rape. Laura's fear culminates when she writes:

My heart beat faster and faster, my breathing rose and fell rapidly and full drawn; a sobbing, that rose into a sense of strangulation, supervened, and turned into a dreadful convulsion, in which my senses left me, and I became unconscious. (Le Fanu 62)

Laura is clearly presented as an innocent victim who has to endure Carmilla's advances: “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” (Le Fanu 35). As a consequence of her sexual relations with Carmilla, Laura eventually falls ill and has to seek medical help. Ultimately, female sexuality is regarded as something so dangerous and powerful that it requires four influential men to extinguish it.

The second mode of representation that can be analyzed is characterized by a discourse in which sexuality is tabooed and connoted with shame. As soon as

outsiders are brought into the equation, the girls' sexuality is transformed into something shameful, a sinful deed. Without Laura's knowledge, her father consults a doctor, which reinforces the notion that sexuality ought not be discussed. Laura's desire for Carmilla is treated as a perversion that must be cured in the privacy of the family home.

Additionally, Streitmatter (186) argues that representations of homosexual characters are oftentimes “de-sexualised” and thus, not realistic. This correlates with the fact that Victorians did not conceive the notion of sex as something that goes beyond penile penetration. Therefore, the relationship between Carmilla and Laura would only have been interpreted as a romantic friendship between two women; not so much a sexually-charged, lascivious relationship.

4.5 The Formation and Representation of Lesbian Identity in Carmilla

4.5.1 Laura's Passive Reception of Identity

Carmilla's true identity is unknown to the people surrounding her. While the vampire herself is well aware of who she is, it is evident that Laura struggles to come to terms with her newly found lesbian identity. She initially brushes it off as insanity and later concedes with the discourse that it is a dangerous malady that has to be treated. As we can see, her identity is largely defined by others. Laura's identity is very much constructed by the discursive speech acts of the other characters: “Only a fever passing by, or some other malady, as they often do, he said....Without knowing it, I was now in a pretty advanced stage of the strangest illness under which mortal ever suffered” (Le Fanu 60-61). Before the doctor warns Laura about the symptoms she seemingly exhibits, she finds herself in perfectly good health. It is the very act of naming her behaviour that brings her 'illness' into existence and hence, labels her as a 'sick' person. Interestingly, Laura does not constitute her identity in opposition to or accordance with others. She is not aware of the similarities between herself and Carmilla and neither does she differentiate herself from the other characters in the story. Her sense-of self is exclusively bestowed on her by others. She gains an understanding of herself from being a

passive recipient of outside influences. Moreover, unlike the natural development of an individual's identity, Laura's identity remains fairly static throughout the story. The narrative is not used to reveal the fluidity and transformative potential of identities, but rather, fixates Laura's self in space and time. While Laura's character is indeed reconstructed in later narratives, it is hardly ever reimagined. Along with the damaging message that these master narratives portray about homosexual identities, Laura's character, is passed on to future generations.

4.5.2 Carmilla's Posing Threat to Laura's Subjectivity

In the novella, vampirism or rather homosexuality is portrayed as a threat to subjectivity and self-identity. The novella explores the relationship between selfhood and otherness as well as attraction and abhorrence. It can be argued that Laura's ambiguous feelings towards Carmilla pose a threat to her self-identity. Upon entering Laura's life, Carmilla exerts a huge influence over Laura. The latter is no longer able to distinguish between her own thoughts and sentiments and those which Carmilla bestows on her. The process may be subtle, but in the end Laura seemingly loses herself in her relationship with Carmilla. One can even go so far as to say that Carmilla represents Laura's suppressed fear of her true sexuality.

In his paper 'The Threat of the Abject in Le Fanu's "Carmilla"', Hyun-Jun Lee argues that Carmilla does indeed represent an incarnation of Kristeva's concept of the abject. The abject "constitutes a long-forgotten part of the self that has been 'othered' in the original formation of identity, and that returns to reclaim its former status" (Lee 60). According to Kristeva, at the sight of the abject, the body notices an oblivion that was first caused as the 'I' was born. The abject is necessary to the existence of the 'I' and reminds the self of its fickle state of existence. It can be defined as "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 4). As a consequence, the abject is "experienced at the peak of its strength when [the] subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than abject" (Ebda. 5).

When acquiring a new identity, Carmilla appears to be unable to completely let go of her old one. Each of her names consists of the same letters as her

previous one; Mircalla is simply turned into Carmilla. Carmilla's name, thus, is a symbol for the abject as well – the familiar contained within the unfamiliar, the self within the other (Lee 60-61). However, the parallels are even more noticeable when looking at Carmilla's status as an undead. Kristeva equals the human body after death as 'the utmost abjection' (3-4) as it reminds the living self of its eventual extinction. What the vampire showcases is ultimately a “basic relationship between subjectivity and desire” (Lee 61). “It is the embodiment—sometimes beautiful, sometimes hideous, but always fascinating - of the persistence of the abject and the perilously permeable line between life and death, being and unbeing, self and other” (Lee 61).

In correlation with this concept, Laura indeed experiences this ambiguous in-between state, in which the distinction between self and other appears almost impossible to draw: “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 ... seek to know no more of me and mine, but trust me with all your loving spirit” (Le Fanu 34). Moreover, just like Kristeva argues, the two lovers' merging is classified by an ambiguous dynamic of repulsion and fascination: “I had no distinct thoughts about her while such scenes lasted, but I was conscious of a love growing in adoration and also of abhorrence” (Le Fanu 35).

It is not merely the relationship between Carmilla and Laura that is characterized by ambiguity, but Carmilla's sense of personhood itself, which greatly impacts Laura. Carmilla herself provides evidence for the ambiguous nature with which she feels for Laura: “I don't know which should be most afraid of the other” (Le Fanu 29). She alternates between seeing her as a victim and a friend. “I ... have already a right to your intimacy; at all events it does seem as if we were destined, from our earliest childhood, to be friends” (Le Fanu 29). In a later chapter, she suddenly has an outburst of anger and reprimands Laura in the following way: “You pierce my ears...Besides, how can you tell that your religion and mine are the same; your forms wound me” (Le Fanu 38).

Ultimately, however, Carmilla longs for a complete union with Laura. In the context of vampirism, this oneness can be easily achieved through infection and incorporation. The vampire and their victim usually share the same blood after all. Therefore, it can be argued that Carmilla aims to establish “an overdetermined

physical identity that reifies the psychic identity Carmilla asserts throughout her relationship with Laura” (Lee 61). Various examples throughout the narrative showcase the mutual identification of the two women. At one point Carmilla declares: “You are mine, you *shall* be mine, you and I are one forever” (Le Fanu 35, emphasis in original). This declaration is even taken further when Carmilla alludes to the process of infection that stems from vampire attacks: “[A]s I draw near to you, you, in your turn, will draw near to others” (Le Fanu 34). This deconstruction of boundaries between the two subjects can be interpreted as a merging of the self with the 'other' (Lee 62). As Lee rightly points out, “Carmilla threatens the basic structure of identity formation and subject-object relation” (Lee 62), Laura, in return, is well aware of this identity loss when she complains: “I don’t know you—I don’t know myself when you look and talk so” (Le Fanu 36).

4.5.3 Carmilla's Bound Identity

Names support the constitution of identity. They are discursive manifestations of a physical existence within a society. Thus, the way Carmilla refers to herself is worth being analysed. Carmilla is very much limited in her choice of name, in her choice of identity:

The vampire is, apparently, subject to certain situations, to special conditions. In the particular instance of which I have given you a relation, Mircalla seemed to be limited to a name which if not her real one, should at least reproduce, without the omission or addition of a single letter, those, we say anagrammatically, which compose it. *Carmilla* did this; so did *Millarca*. (Le Fanu 113-114)

By her name, Carmilla is bound to a past which she cannot escape. She is controlled by an unknown power, which violates against her (Klemens 179). However, Carmilla can make use of these different names to deceive her prey. Her true identity remains elusive for the majority of the novella, despite the male characters' striving to uncover her origins. Even to Laura, Carmilla remains a mystery, since she offers very little insights about her past or her inner workings of the mind:

What she did tell me amounted, in my unconscionable estimation—to nothing. It was all summed up in three very vague disclosures: First—her name was Carmilla. Second—her family was very ancient and noble. Third—her home lay in the direction of the west. She would not tell me the name of her family, nor their armorial bearings, nor the name of their estate, nor even that of the country they lived in. (Le Fanu 33)

Ultimately, the men do discover and decipher the riddle surrounding Carmilla's name and with it they also receive information about her identity.

5 Exploring Carmilla on a Formal Level

The formal features of the story highly influence the narrative; they allow for a more in-depth interpretation of the text. Since *Carmilla* follows the tradition of the Gothic fiction, I would first like to examine the genre-specific characteristics before discussing the formal features that are specific to the novella.

5.1 Gothic Genre Characteristics

Gothic fiction was first adopted as a direct response to 18th century ideas of Realism. In Realism reality is created and narrated by a single character. It focuses on the inner struggles and development of said character. Gothic fiction, on the other hand, does not aim to depict the real world. A work of fiction can be classified as Gothic if it employs literary devices that encourage the reader to imagine alternatives to a conventional world. Gothic fiction challenges the reader's understanding of reality and emphasizes the difference between the self and the other, subjects and objects as well as the concepts of life and death. Consequently, supernatural imagery is employed in order to blend the real with the imagined, thereby creating terror and suspense. Moreover, Gothic fiction tends to transgress all those dichotomies that structure the world (Logan 370). For instance, the culture and geography which is depicted is usually somewhat heterogeneous (Logan 372). The use of supernatural elements is, however, not restricted to the creation of suspense, but also provides viable alternatives to normative identities and conceptions of the world (Logan 371). What is more, the genre often engages with taboos that evoke fears in the reader. The most effective way of presenting these taboos in a socially acceptable form is via the medium of metaphors or symbols.

Palmer (1999: 2) identifies two classic motifs that are inherent to the Gothic tradition, which can both be interpreted as metaphors for lesbian existence: the uncanny and the ghost. According to Jackson (1981: 69) the uncanny expresses “drives and desires which have to be repressed for the sake of cultural continuity”. In a heteronormative patriarchal society lesbianism constitutes one of these desires. The motif of the ghost, on the other hand, is supposed to shed light on

things that are culturally invisible; specifically topics that are regarded as taboo. In *Carmilla*, this figure is replaced by the vampire, another staple motif in gothic fiction, which is employed to put an emphasis on the erotic, transgressive nature of lesbianism (Palmer 1999: 2).

In accordance with this tradition, Le Fanu constructed his narrative in the realm of fantasy. The supernatural occurrences – the vampirism – set the atmosphere of the novella and emphasize the sinister themes that underlie the tale. The dangerous nature of the vampire itself is highlighted by the fact that the victims are attacked at night and merely experience the attacks via the medium of dream. Those dreams are nightmarish and eerie and leave the victims with an unsettling feeling even during daytime. The events which unfold are often doubled or have thematic parallels. The themes of vampirism and homosexuality are tightly interwoven. Likewise, almost every character mirrors and/or contrasts another. Both Carmilla and Laura are initially described as young and beautiful, but as soon as an illness befalls Laura, the degree of their resemblance is heightened. Her symptoms cause her to gradually resemble Carmilla more and more. She becomes lethargic and pale and loses her appetite. The fact that both women look alike allows for a narcissistic interpretation of lesbian love. The attraction to oneself instead of another person also tends to eradicate same-sex desire.

5.2 Failure of Resolution

At the end of the narrative, a number of storylines remain unresolved. The ending comes about somewhat anticlimactically and leaves the reader with several questions. Despite the fact that Carmilla's death is implied, the reader has not been provided with enough knowledge about vampires in order to understand the specifics about Carmilla's destruction. Likewise, it is not clear what becomes of either Laura or Carmilla's other victims so consequently, it is difficult to discern whether the patriarchy does indeed triumph in the end or whether Carmilla's legacy lives on in Laura. In addition, the identity of Carmilla's mother is never really disclosed, since the reader simply cannot know whether it was her who initially turned Carmilla into a vampire or not, Carmilla retains her image of the sole antagonist of the story.

Interestingly, the concluding chapter of the novella does not focus on Laura and Carmilla's love at all, but merely resolves the mystery surrounding Carmilla's true nature. Stylistically, it breaks with the tradition of the remainder of the novella in that it is very factual and impersonal. While the reader is initially led to believe that the tale is intended to shed light on Laura's experiences with Carmilla, in the end, it is reduced to a case study aimed at students of the occult. Hence, it can be argued that the narrative is little more than a cautionary tale about the dangers of homosexuality. Ultimately, it remains a horror story that studies the perverted nature of lesbian vampires and the effects of this behaviour. It evokes horror in the readers and thereby perpetuates outdated Victorian values.

5.3 Framed Narration

Carmilla is set out as a frame narrative. The prologue provides the outer frame, which offers a considerate amount of foreshadowing. In it the reader learns from an anonymous source that the subsequent story represents a 'case' about which Doctor Hesselius has composed an essay. According to Adrienne Antrim Major, this narrative device is a typical genre convention of the Gothic (154). Framing a narrative creates distance and enables writers to address social fears and discuss taboo topics.

However, this framing reduces Laura's story to a mere case – an object - that can be studied. Her narration cannot exist on its own, but is contained within a patriarchal set-up. It is taken from her and used by men. Just like the women in the story, who are not allowed to testify or participate in the proceedings of the 'Imperial Commission', Laura is silenced at the climax of the narrative. She can merely summarize her father's "copy of the report of the Imperial Commission" (Le Fanu 111). Her narrative agency is replaced by the voice of authoritarian men of science and law.

5.4 Unreliable Narration

As I have just mentioned, Laura narrates the framed narrative. She reports retrospectively, eight years after the arrival of Carmilla at Karnstein, of the events that took place at that time. Due to the auto-diegetic nature of the narration, the narratorial reliability ought to be questioned. Since Laura's relationship with Carmilla is deeply personal and even intimate, one may argue that the narration could be subject to bias. Margaret Carter supports this theory by drawing attention to the "two factors, the distortion of memory and Laura's affection for Carmilla" (1989: 36), which cast doubt on the narrator's reliability.

The fact that Laura's description of Carmilla is generally fairly sympathetic and favourable might suggest that the narrator may have been transformed into a vampire herself or at least hints at a biased perception of reality. Laura herself gives reason for this suspicion by announcing "[j]udge whether I say truth" (Le Fanu 2).

The reader realizes early on that they seem to know more than the narrator herself, who is either deliberately withholding information or just somewhat imbecilic. Her naiveté and lacking understanding of her own condition, for example, is especially apparent and creates doubts in the reader, when the General recounts the story of Bertha. Laura does not seem to notice the very obvious parallels between her own and General Spielberg's story. Moreover, she is oblivious to the anagrammatic name changes. Oftentimes, the facts that are presented by Laura are highly contradictory and mislead the reader. While in chapter one the reader is informed that Laura is nineteen years old at the time of the narration and that eight years have passed since she experienced the story first hand, she later declares that "I now write, after an interval of more than ten years, with a trembling hand" (Le Fanu 35). The implications of these statements could either point to a narration that lasted many years, dishonesty, or a mistake on part of the narrator. The latter – the most likely interpretation - would not only endanger the narrator's reliability but would also lead to a questioning of her overall ability to tell the story. Having said that, Laura also contradicts herself whenever she attempts to interpret her own feelings for Carmilla, since Carmilla's true nature is known to the narrating-I, Laura's way of narrating is puzzling at

times. Even though Laura merely recounts what happened all those years ago, she still cannot articulate her feelings for Carmilla in a clear manner: “Her agitations and her language were unintelligible to me....This I know is paradox, but I can make no other attempt to explain the feeling” (Le Fanu 34-35). Her way of narrating the events that unfolded themselves is rather confusing and does not evoke trust in the narrator:

I now write ... with a trembling hand, with a confused and horrible recollection of certain occurrences and situations, in the ordeal through which I was unconsciously passing. (Le Fanu 35)

The fact that Laura's feelings for Carmilla are so ambiguous points to Laura's unease with regard to her own sexuality. She barely mentions the fact that Carmilla was a vampire in order not to be held accountable for her actions. She either is or pretends to be oblivious so that she can be the victim, not a participant in abnormal sexual practices. If Laura is, in fact, oblivious, her impressionable character is used to showcase the danger that lesbians pose to young girls. Due to the fact that Laura remains without a name for the majority of the novella, her character can be interpreted as an 'everywoman'. Hence, the lesbian threat extends to all young women (Senf 51).

Secondly, as I have previously discussed, the story is not directly told by Laura in its entirety. Since Laura has not, in actuality, witnessed Carmilla's death, her information thereof is merely second-hand knowledge. Her story was partly constructed from using information taken from a report belonging to Laura's father. The knowledge lies ultimately with the patriarchy, not so much with the narrator herself.

6 An Established Master Narrative: Reviewing Lesbian Vampirism in the Media

Now that the negative portrayal of lesbianism and instances of heteronormativity in *Carmilla* have been exposed and explored extensively, I would like to shift the focus onto those texts that have been inspired by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's novella in order to provide evidence for the fact that *Carmilla* has indeed been transformed into a well-known master narrative over the past two centuries.

Created in 1871, *Carmilla*, the lesbian vampire, has become an archetype that transcends the original novella by far. Even 140 years after its publication, *Carmilla* keeps informing figures in popular culture. The character of *Carmilla* has been used in novels, graphic novels, plays and television series, but most extensively the vampire has been revisited and revised by filmmakers. Between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s more than twenty films that feature lesbian vampires were produced in Anglophone countries as well as some Western European countries (Baker 553). Researchers suggest that the reason for this proliferation of lesbianism in the media is the rise of feminism in the early 1970s. Guy Austin (325) points out that “lesbian vampire films ... became prominent during the early seventies, largely as a male-authored response to the rise of feminism. Film-makers ... began to pathologize women’s increasing autonomy in the figure of the lesbian vampire”.

While the adaptations that precede the 1970s express a yearning for death and make use of an erotic and macabre imagery, later filmmakers explored the themes of sex and violence in a lesbian context. The most popular vampire films of the 1970s were those featured in the *Karnstein* trilogy, which consisted of *The Vampire Lovers* (1970), *Lust for a Vampire* (1971) and *Twins of Evil* (1971). All of these borrowed extensively from Le Fanu's novella. A large number of the films that succeed this trilogy are then modelled after *The Vampire Lovers*, which renders the film an agent in the perpetuation of the negative image of lesbianism.

Filmmaker Jess Franco also produced three lesbian vampire films at approximately the same time. *Vampyros Lesbos* (1971), *Daughter of Dracula* (1972) and *Female Vampire* (1973) all centre around a malign female vampire,

who seduces various women. While the first film portrays the vampire's failure to seduce its prey, the second one focuses on the vampire's possessive and jealous nature. The last of the three films, on the other hand, is somewhat pornographic in nature and features the vampire engaging in various different sex acts.

What the majority of these film adaptations have in common is the negative depiction of lesbians as either narcissists, who are incapable of loving anyone but themselves, sexual predators who attempt to destroy healthy heterosexual relationships or inhumane beasts that can easily be objectified for the titillation of the male audience. Love and desire between two women is almost exclusively portrayed as something monstrous that is closely connected to violence and compulsion. The function of this negative stereotyping is to suggest that just like heterosexual practices have been compared to rape, lesbian attraction follows the same schemata. By showing a lesbian vampire, who violates (against) her victims, lesbianism as an alternative non-violent model of love becomes extinct (Zimmermann 23-24).

At the heart of the lesbian vampire myth lies a classic battle for supremacy. Both, a man and a woman fight for the possession of another woman. Within the context of this triangle, the man always represents the 'good', while the lesbian is aligned with the evil forces. The girl whose favour ought to be won is generally characterized neutrally. This woman ought to be coerced into marriage, lest she should be attracted to a perverted form of sexuality. In these kinds of depictions, it is important that the point of view remains male; allowing the male spectators to imaginatively rescue the maiden once the situation seems to spiral out of control. By doing this, the male viewership is presented with an opportunity to affirm their sexual potency and masculine superiority. The lesbian adventure ought to be framed within a heteronormative context, to which the protagonists return in the end. As Weiss (92) states, the lesbian "provokes and articulates anxieties in the heterosexual male spectator, only for the film to quell these anxieties and reaffirm his maleness through the vampire's ultimate destruction". The fact that the lesbian is also a vampire – a supernatural being – shows the male viewer that it is not male inadequacy that leads the maiden astray, but that the men on film are forced to compete with supernatural powers. Therefore, the reasoning goes, lesbians destruction is inevitable (Zimmermann 23-24).

7 Youtube: An Alternative Space for Resistance

Generally speaking, the medial landscape is still, even in 2016, very much characterized by heteronormative character relations and male-dominated casts. Statistics show that in 2015 a mere 4% of characters that appeared on American television shows were queer. Despite the minuscule increase of regular LGBTQIA characters by one-tenth of a percentage from the previous year, a genuine positive development in terms of equal representation could not be recorded by the GLAAD, the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD 7).

However, the real fallacy lies in the manner in which these characters are represented. A large number of TV shows engage in practices like queer baiting to draw in a wider range of (LGBTQIA) viewers. Additionally, it has to be pointed out that most queer characters are homosexual men. Lesbian or bisexual characters are rare and when they do make an appearance, they represent familiar tropes. Lesbians usually face a premature death, are attracted to their best friend in a dramatic fashion or seduce a woman to still their bi-curious thirst, although in reality these last scenes are mostly created in order to provide the male audience with titillating scenes.

Nonetheless, the media's impact on the changing perception of gay and lesbian identities cannot be denied. This goes to show that media critique can not solely be concerned with whether queer characters are represented or not, but also ought to denounce a stereotypical representation of said individuals. Demanding a more authentic portrayal is an act of resistance that could help queers to reclaim their identities.

As discussed *Carmilla* has been adapted numerous times across various different types of media. While the representation of lesbianism across these adaptations shows only subtle variations and predominantly conveys a somewhat negative stereotype, the most recent adaptation portrays an entirely different picture. Far off the mainstream entertainment, subcultures are formed that engage with important issues such as feminism, inclusion and tolerance. The Canadian web-series *Carmilla* (2014) is just one of many web-series that showcase this recent development on the Internet, predominantly on the media-sharing platform

'YouTube'. The approximately 33 million views that the series has attracted up to date, emphasize the popularity of the show as well as highlighting the fact that there is a market for well-rounded LGBTQIA characters. Before discussing the web-series in detail, I would first like to review the potential that new media, like YouTube, have in the provision of alternative spaces for resistance.

7.1 A Changing Media Landscape and the Disintegration of Power

The media have the power to mediate between, first and foremost, people, but also between communities, institutions or commerce. In former times, there used to be a few dominant media sources, which dominated over the production and distribution of content. On the other side of the equation was the audience, who more or less passively, received this content. Their participation in the production of the cultural was subliminal (Chau 65).

However, within the past decade, the way in which people experience media culture has been subject to a "paradigm shift" (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 5). People are no longer exposed to a certain set of programmes, which they may or may not watch, but they can actively choose from a wide variety of differently formatted programmes, amongst other things by downloading files from websites such as iTunes or streaming via online media players. The medium of cinema, too, is nowadays turning digital. Henry Jenkins calls this movement 'convergence' and describes it as "a move from medium-specific content to content that flows across multiple media channels, toward the increased interdependence of communications systems, toward multiple ways of accessing media content" (*Convergence Culture* 243). Consequently, the production as well as the distribution of media has been altered. Additionally and much more importantly, media convergence has also had an impact on the way culture is consumed. Jenkins highlights that it promotes an active participation of the audience with the content to which it is exposed (*Convergence Culture* 16): "Convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others" (Ebda. 2-3).

New online technologies have made it easier to create and share media content. Websites such as YouTube make way for a participatory culture, which,

according to Jenkins (*Convergence Culture* 290), is a culture in which “fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content”. Howley (2) defines participatory media as activities within a community that “supplement, challenge, or change the operating principles, structures, financing, and cultural forms and practices associated with dominant media”. These transformations in the infrastructure of the media have resulted in opportunities for minorities to tell their own stories and gain access to stories which like-minded people are sharing. At the same time, the accessibility of the world from a myriad of different perspectives is also leading to a gradual disintegration of the concentration of power.

7.2 The Construction of Alternative Spaces & Online Activism

Habermas' notion of a singular public sphere, in which all “private people come together as a public” (27) to produce and reproduce discourses, has been challenged by more recent literature (see Parlette 2010), which argues that there are, in fact, multiple different and partially overlapping public spheres. This is due to the fact that marginalised groups look for alternative spaces, in which they can voice their opinion and actively construct culture: “[S]ubordinate social groups respond to their exclusion from dominant publics by constituting alternative ones. The public sphere is thus viewed as the setting for the articulation of a variety of ideological and cultural differences” (Vatikiotis 33).

With the spreading of technology, the number of these alternative public spheres has increased. Online spaces enable self-representation and provide marginalised groups with a support network and readily available access to like-minded people. Moreover, they supply the necessary platforms for activism. Harris (*Next Wave Cultures* 7) points out that political activism in the context of neoliberal, online culture “may be unrecognisable if interpreted through more traditional paradigms of activism”. Youth cultures are characterized by fluidity and hybridity and do not disrupt the dominant culture overtly. The use of technology aids in matters such as community building or networking. The participatory communities that are created online ought, according to Harris (*Young women, late modern politics* 482), to be taken seriously by scholars since they represent

new directions for activism.

As far as feminist practices are concerned within these new realms, scholars refer to them as 'third wave feminism'. Harris (*Next Wave Cultures* 6-7) describes this movement as follows:

As with new theorizing about subculture, third wave feminism seeks to expand notions of resistance. In particular, straightforward ideas of feminist resistance to patriarchal oppression are rethought by third wavers because gender identity is not experienced by them as a monolithic, categorical, or even primary position . . . A fixed dichotomy of dominant versus subordinated groups becomes harder to identify because people can occupy a shifting range of positions in a power structure owing to their multiple subject positions.

7.3 YouTube as an Alternative Space of Participatory Culture

According to Brun (in Burgess and Green 48) people are no longer dependent on auxiliary forms of media in order to participate in the process of cultural production. Users of Youtube regularly participate in culture by uploading content, which they have experienced culturally. Hartley uses the term 'redaction' to describe this process of cultural meaning making. Redaction refers to

... a form of production not reduction of text (which is why the more familiar term 'editing' is not quite adequate). Indeed, the current moment could be characterized as a redactional society, indicating a time when there is too much instantly available information for anyone to see the world whole, resulting in a society that is characterized by its editorial practices. (Hartley 112)

Hence, in this following section of my thesis, I would like to argue that YouTube provides the ideal space for practicing participatory culture. All five key elements which define participatory culture (Chau 66-72) can easily be applied to the popular video-sharing site.

1 Low Requirements for Self Expression and Civil Engagement

One of the characteristics of participatory culture is the fact that engaging in the practice of expressing yourself publicly ought to be fairly easy to achieve. This requirement holds true for the politics of YouTube, where even unregistered users have access to the majority of the content that has been uploaded to the website. The interface design is self-explanatory and intuitive and resembles that of a simple content-sharing site. As long as the cultural participant is in possession of a device that connects to the internet, videos cannot merely be watched but also

commented on, liked and disliked. Each of these activities creates an interactive dialogue between the producer and consumer of the content (Chau 66-68).

One of YouTube's most fundamental characteristics is the fact that all participants may take on a number of different roles: every individual has the opportunity to be consumer as well as producer, editor, distributor or critic (Burgess and Green 82). As a consequence, participatory cultural practices challenge the notion of neoliberal consumerism in that young people no longer participate in the cultural process as mere consumers. Due to the unregulated nature of most online spaces, people, especially young ones, are granted more political agency.

2 A Strong support system

Another feature that is distinctive for participatory culture is the strong support that individuals receive for the creation and distribution of their content (Chau 66-68). Popular videos are featured on the home page of the site in order to inform visitors of the trends within the community. Once a video has been watched, a user is presented with an option of related videos. Alongside these bottom-up procedures, the YouTube database can also be entered via a search engine, which constitutes a top-down entry point. Hence, both producers and consumers enjoy assistance by YouTube.

3 Informal Mentorship

Informal mentorship is another characteristic of both YouTube and participatory culture. A popular theme across YouTube is the desire to be able to contribute to the community. Users seem to be eager to learn how to be featured on the websites and how to make videos. Hence, more experienced users make use of this opportunity and publish content, in the form of tutorials on how to do so.

4 Contribution and (5) Collaborations

As the name suggests, within any participatory culture there is the strongly-held belief that contribution is of vital importance. As Hartley argues, the origin of meaning can no longer be found with the text or the author itself, but rather with the 'citizen-consumer', which renders the stage of 'consumption' a valuable step in

the creative process (Hartley 112ff.). As far as YouTube is concerned, even the simple act of watching a video is considered to be participation. Alongside the appreciation of content or the mere expression of interest, users can also review and rate videos or help building communities by subscribing to producers and sharing their work.

Lastly, YouTube is characterised by a sense of social connection. While the website is not necessarily designed for cooperation, collaborations amongst content-creators are, nonetheless, frequent and popular (Chau 69-72).

Even though YouTube clearly constitutes a space where culture can be constructed collaboratively, not all of the content that has been uploaded to the website comprises user-generated productions. Generally speaking, YouTube accommodates both, top-down and bottom up processes. While the former comprises the distribution of commercial media products, the latter refers to user-created content, which oftentimes challenges the commercial content (Burgess and Green 6). YouTube can be considered to be a space where these two worlds collide or at least co-exist (Ebda. 41). As Burgess and Green found out in a study which they conducted, the largest group of contributors to Youtube are 'amateurs' (44-46), who use the platform to share their perspective on the world and disclose personal information to the public.

YouTube has the ability to provide people, especially minorities such as queers, identities with cultural citizenship. The term citizenship transcends the mere notion of having rights and obligations towards one's country in that it also encompasses an individual's participation in various cultural practices that are concerned with shared interest or self-identification (Burgess and Green 77). Hermes (4) argues that the idea of citizenship can be expanded to "less formal everyday practices of identity construction, representation, and ideology, and implicit moral obligations and rights". Hence, he defines cultural citizenship as "the process of bonding and community building, and reflection on that bonding, that is implied in partaking of the text-related practices of reading, consuming, celebrating, and criticizing offered in the realm of (popular) culture" (Ebda. 10).

Despite the fact that the community that is established is "profoundly individualistic and definitely not collective, public, shared or coherent" (Tracey

1998: 263), it can still be imagined as an alternative, revived version of the public sphere. The reason for this lies in the opportunities this community provides for its citizens. While the content of the videos that are uploaded onto YouTube may be trivial, it is the meta-texts surrounding them that actually constitute community and create meaning. As Lange argues, “by being vulnerable and sharing intimate moments and choices, it is possible to promote increased public discourse about formerly uncomfortable, distasteful, or difficult topics in ways that other media and other methods have not” (2007, n.p.). Thus, YouTube constitutes an imagined space where people can express their identities and values as well as encounter and negotiate cultural difference (Burgess and Green 81).

7.4 The Production and Reception of User-generated Content

Naturally, not everything that is posted on YouTube has the potential to resist dominant discourses. In order for a text to have resistant potential, it ought to be read or interpreted as such. According to Doty (102) queer readings enable us to “refuse, confuse and redefine the terms by which mass culture is understood by the public and the academy”. While scholars of queer theory have indeed been producing an abundance of alternative readings, Jenkins argues that an ordinary audience too can read against the current. Even though Jenkins is predominantly concerned with fan-activity in fan-communities, I am going to argue that YouTube attracts a similar audience. Large fan-bases form around single YouTube channels and their activity transcends the website. For instance, screenshots of YouTube videos are often transformed into GIF-sets and subsequently in-bedded on social networking sites such as Tumblr.

In terms of fan production, Jenkins points out that fan produced “cultural products articulate the fans’ frustration with their everyday life as well as their fascination with representations that pose alternatives” (*Textual Poachers* 283). In contrast to resistant material that merely uses the popular to critique, fan products have an intimate relationship with the original content (Dhaenens 446). Fans create texts in response to a context that expects a more heterogeneous interpretation of the source text. It can be argued that the community itself shapes the production of the texts that individuals construct. Over time, as new discourses

emerge, certain expectations change or are manifested (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 197). For instance, within the Harry Potter fan-community the portrayal of Draco Malfoy underwent some revision. While J.K. Rowling's source material represented Draco in largely negative terms, the fandom rapidly reimagined an alternative discourse for the character and started portraying him as a more complex, misunderstood character. Within the fandom, this representation of Draco has entered the dominant understanding of the character and almost exclusively replaced the character's original motivations. The same reimagining can be and is done for queer characters that are subject to exclusion or a harmful portrayal.

7.5 User-generated Popular Narratives & the Queering of Culture

In recent years, fan-produced content has gradually moved from a product of the margins to a fairly popularized medium of expression. While the margin allows a relatively free articulation of content, the realm of the popular is limited by social and cultural conventions, which makes it the ideal space to construct and reconstruct meanings, to contest and resist ideologies. Hence, the popular provides a space for the disruption of heteronormativity.

User-generated narratives can be considered products of popular culture on three different levels (Dhaenens 445). Taken into account ought to be the level of production, reception and distribution. In the case of literary web-series like *Carmilla*, the narrative enters the realm of the popular through its source material. The incorporation of characters or aspects of the plot that have already gained popularity establishes the product within popular culture. Hence, the subversive potential of the product is created in relation to the original. In terms of the distribution and reception of the content, the number of fans, as well as the channel of distribution, determines whether a product can be considered to be popular (Ebda. 445).

In order to disrupt heteronormativity, popular texts ought to participate in the "queering of culture", which refers to "the reinterpretation and deconstruction of dominant power structures in society" (Kirsch 33). The strategies which popular texts ought to apply should expose the underlying mechanism that enables the

hegemonic discursive position which heteronormativity enjoys. Moreover, the fixed binary and hierarchical relationship between heterosexuality and queerness must be deconstructed. This can, for instance, be done by shifting the focus on queer characters or by representing them as the majority instead of a sexual minority.

However, the fact that the popular operates within heteronormative regulations means that strategies and acts of resistance are often mere compromises (Dhaenens 444). While the margins operate with rather blatant strategies of resistance, the popular's articulations of resistance take the shape of more or less subtle acts of subversion.

Nonetheless, every minority group has the right to be visible in culture, which is why equal and authentic representation is crucial for social change. It is important to note that it is not only the representation itself that is of importance, but also the context in which this portrayal occurs. As Stuart Hall (*Representation* 259) points out, to “represent someone or something in a certain way, within a certain 'regime of representation'” is a very powerful practice and participatory culture has the power to “speed the process of removing mass culture queerness from the shadowy realm of connotation” (Doty xi).

8 *Carmilla* 2.0 – A New Take on Heteronormativity and Queerness

Carmilla, the web-series finally breaks with the tradition of representing the love between Laura and Carmilla as perverted and dangerous. The cautionary tale of the dangers of same-sex desire is transformed into a modern story that celebrates homosexual love and friendship. It can be best described as a cleverly executed and creative reinvention of a well-known genre and familiar tropes.

The story, as well as a great part of the characters, has been transformed in order to rid it/them of the oppressive elements that underlie the original narrative. These damaging elements are replaced by a feminist discourse that goes beyond the transformation of the original antagonist. In order to adapt the story for a modern audience, the setting of the desolate Styrian castle in the 19th century has been exchanged for the fictional Silas University and has been moved into the present-day.

Despite the changes, the series manages to maintain the essence of Le Fanu's source material without the inclusion of elements that would seem sexist or even homophobic to a contemporary audience. The producers have also kept various supernatural elements in order to root *Carmilla* in the genre of mystery. Tonally, however, the show can be classified as a comedy-drama. While the source material's darker tones have been well preserved, the writers still attempt to occasionally create a lighter atmosphere by including humorous dialogues and heart-felt scenes of romance. As far as the original plot is concerned, it can be said that the first 18 of 37 episodes closely imitate the source material in terms of the overall themes and tropes; the second half of the season, however, can be considered to be more of an update of or even a sequel to the original novella.

The Canadian web-series was first produced and aired in 2014 and comprises two seasons up to this date, which have attracted an estimated number of more than 33 million views since August 2014. Upon a successful twitter campaign that was conducted by fans, a third season has just been confirmed (@carmillaseries). Since it is merely season one that is relevant to my argumentation, I will disregard any other content in my discussion of the series.

Carmilla can be described as a scripted transmedia series in that it combines the vlogging format, which is inherent to YouTube (and will be discussed more thoroughly in a later section), with traditional scripted storytelling. A large part of the narrative is told through the means of one of the main characters' vlog; however, the story transcends the medium of YouTube videos and spans across multiple different media such as Tumblr, twitter and Wattpad. The story is multi-layered and encourages fans to follow the narrative on as many media channels as possible. Different channels convey different kinds of information, which the audience needs to puzzle together. Hence, the series has managed to engage a very active international fandom, who calls themselves 'The Creampuffs'. The fandom actively contributes to the series in that they constitute the fictional world by engaging with the fictional characters on the various social media platforms.

In this subsequent chapter, I would like to draw attention to the many instances the web-series defies a heteronormative perception of the world and represents queer characters in a favourable and realistic manner. The first section of this chapter is concerned with the ways in which Carmilla resists the established master narrative by applying the strategies of subversion and inversion.

8.1 The Subversion of Binary Oppositions & an Inversion of Hierarchies

In order to critique a master narrative, different strategies can be applied. One of these representational strategies is the notion of subversion. Subversion raises awareness as to how norms operate in mobilizing individuals into rigid identity constructions by parodying dominant practices. Thereby dominant notions of gender and sexuality are destabilised and cultural truths and practices are questioned (Butler, *Gender Trouble*). Moreover, this strategy aims at exposing the fixed manner in which certain marginalized identities are represented in the media. By either highlighting the fact that a subordinated group is oppressed by a particular discourse or by providing counter-hegemonic alternatives to the dominant ideology, a reality beyond the dominant cultural norm can be imagined. Especially an exaggerated or grotesque representation of what is considered to be normal can support the exposure of them for norms are dependent on their being invisible (Chambers & Carver 146).

In the web-series *Carmilla* such an exaggerated counter-hegemonic alternative discourse is exhibited. First of all, the story is told by and consists of a strong and varied female assembly which represents feminist values. By prioritising the fact that the storylines are created for a powerful female cast, the producers subliminally critique the common practice of excluding females or silencing them. At one point, *Carmilla* mocks the cultural perception of males being the real heroes of any narrative by asking the male characters the following: “Aren't you gonna stay and help protect us poor, vulnerable girls?” (*Carmilla*, episode 8: 2'50).

However, in order to deconstruct existing ideologies it is imperative to not only identify the dichotomies on which they are based, and subvert them, but to also undermine and invert the dominant part of the opposition. This act of inversion can be found in *Carmilla*. Here, the men are subordinated to the women, who are assigned privilege. The female characters are attributed a number of traits that are stereotypically reserved for men. For instance, the adjective “ballsy” (*Carmilla*, episode 7:1'14) is used to describe Laura. Moreover, in episode 8, the girls explicitly imitate the male characters in order to draw attention to their oppressive behaviour (*Carmilla*, episode 7: 3'17). When the men objectify and sexualise the female characters by calling them “hottie” (*Carmilla*, episode 8: 0'25) or “sexy lady” (*Carmilla*, episode 8:1'22), the show raises awareness of the sexism by having the female characters explicitly ask the males to stop.

The representation of the male characters is exaggerated to an extent that it resembles misandry. The men are depicted as ludicrous individuals or pseudo-heroic characters whose sole aim in life is to save the day, at which they ultimately fail. In episode 18, one of the male characters displays signs of fear and resorts to asking one of the girls for protection. They all have very little screen-time and exclusively act as supporting roles for the female protagonists. In addition, all the heterosexual characters, as well, are treated like token characters, which is highly unusual for any series. Hence, it can be argued that the producers purposefully subvert the female-male as well as the heterosexual-queer dichotomy and give power to the oppressed parties. By portraying males and heterosexuals in a way that is usually reserved for female or queer characters, the fact that these seemingly fixed identity constructions are indeed culturally construed is exposed.

By parodying the dominant way of representing heterosexual males, the web-series causes unease in the audience, which raises awareness and subsequently may lead to at least a momentary a destabilisation of cultural truths. The audience's exposure to strong queer female characters opens up possibilities for a reality in which non-fictional queers are met with acceptance.

However, it is not sufficient to simply invert the two entities that constitute a binary opposition in order to bring about social change. A mere inversion merely reaffirms the existence of hierarchies. According to Derrida, the only way to reimagine the world differently is the suppression of hierarchies. The hierarchical structure itself ought to be transformed (Derrida 81). Nietzsche, as well, believes in the transcending of oppositional thinking. He calls for a thinking that goes beyond good or evil, beyond true or false: "Indeed what compels us to assume that there exists any essential antithesis between "true" and "false"? Is it not enough to suppose grades of apparentness and as it were lighter and darker shades and tones of appearance?" (Nietzsche 65).

The hierarchies that exist within binary oppositions are covertly and overtly addressed in *Carmilla*. Instead of the mere inversion of homosexuality and heterosexuality, multiple forms of sexual orientation are presented equally and without drawing explicit attention to them. Furthermore, at the beginning of the series, Laura has a very much black-and-white view of the world. She classifies people according to rigid categories and does not allow much lean way. When the seemingly 'good' person Laura kidnaps Carmilla, the 'antagonist', even though she eventually emerges as an innocent, the natural state of good vs. evil dissolves. Laura, as well as the audience, is introduced to a state of grey, in which the distinction between good and bad is transcended. Neither Laura nor Carmilla can be defined as entirely good or bad any longer. Over time, Laura realizes that the world is much more complex than she had originally believed. She learns to imagine others complexly and thereby helps to eliminate prevailing hierarchies and binary oppositions.

8.2 Portrayal of gender and sexuality

The mere deconstruction of ideologies is not sufficient to initiate social change and repair identities that have been damaged by master narratives. In addition to subversive strategies, master narratives can also be criticised by strategies of empowerment. In order for a minority group to be recognised for its 'otherness' and to achieve a commonly-accepted, political identity, assimilation ought to be attained (De Ridder et al. 2006). This process can only occur if queer characters are depicted as well-rounded and complex characters. They ought to be regular characters, not stock figures that are included for their sexuality. Queer characters need to be provided with an equal amount of screen time and authentic story arcs that feature their romantic and sexual life without treating it as an issue that has to be solved.

In an interview, producer Steph Ouaknine emphasizes that her initial intention was to create a show that would pass the Bechdel test (in O'Regan n.p.). This test was created by Allison Bechdel in 1985 in order to determine whether there a film exhibited any bias towards the female gender. The test can, however, be applied to other types of media as well. In order to pass the Bechdel test, there ought to be at least two named female characters, whose subject of conversation is something other than a man. While the sole passing of this test is not a good indication of whether the representation of women in a work of art is in accordance with feminist standards, it does open up a discussion about the current state of discrepancies between the screen-time of male and female characters. By being aware of the issue at hand and by proactively working to solve it, systemic inequities are addressed.

The women that are portrayed in *Carmilla* have depth and are complex human beings, not mere stereotypes or stock characters. Despite the fact that quite an amount of time is dedicated to the characters' love lives and personal desires, these story lines are neither the focal point of the narrative nor of the characters themselves. While well-rounded and thoughtfully- written female characters can indeed be found elsewhere, it has to be pointed out that these personas are oftentimes marginalized and merely occupy a supportive role within the cast. It also has to be pointed out that the show does not stop at a realistic and equal representation of women; it provides a platform for identities that are often

misrepresented or merely used as a token representation in the mainstream media. *Carmilla* exposes the audience to valid examples of contemporary notions of gender and acknowledges a fluid sexuality as well as different sexual orientations. The web-series can be considered to be post-modern for its endeavour to never remark upon the attractions amongst the characters. Writer Jordan Hall clarifies in an interview:

When I started working on the adaptation I knew that I didn't want to tell a coming out story, as though every LGBT character we meet owes us an explanation of their "otherness" ... We wanted a story where Laura, as a complete character, could be at the centre, and never have to justify her attractions any more than she would have to justify her quest to rescue her roommate, or her addiction to delicious cookies. (Hall in O'Regan)

The flirting amongst the characters is very subtle and, for the most part, expressed in shy glances and nervous giggling. The characters' sexuality does not define them and neither is it used as a plot device. Hence, the characters are neither victimized nor misrepresented as the antagonist; being queer does not have any repercussions in the narrative. For instance, at one point in the series one of Laura's friends tells her the following: "You'll come to me with your boy problems or girl problems" (*Carmilla*, episode 25: 3'45). This showcases the openness and naturalness with which different kinds of sexual orientation are treated in the series.

The first season alone revolves around a total of five queer characters. Laura, Carmilla and Danny, a character that is not based on the source material, find themselves in a love triangle that is exclusively composed of women. Perry and La Fontaine, who are loosely based on Le Fanu's matrons, are also involved with one another. The roles which these characters personify consist of two main protagonists as well as a number of supporting characters. In the original story, the queer characters are central to the story as well, however, it becomes apparent that Carmilla and Laura are made out to be a victim and a victimizer. In the modernised version of *Carmilla* on the other hand, queerness is normalized in order to provide the (for a large part queer) audience with direly needed role models.

As I have mentioned previously, *Carmilla*, the web-series, does not only reimagine identities that can be clearly categorized, but opens up spaces to imagine gender as well as sexual orientation on a fluid, non-hierarchical spectrum.

The supporting character of La Fontaine eventually comes to represent an underserved group of people, namely genderqueer identities. Having a genderqueer character in an international media production does not merely qualify for the representation of that underrepresented group, but also spawns discourses, most importantly positive ones, about them. It can be argued that the positive portrayal of individuals who articulate their gender and sexuality on a continuum instead of a fixed position encourages a transgressive alternative understanding of these notions.

Lastly, it has to be pointed out that the producers do not merely put a clear focus on gender equity, but they also acknowledge the issue of intersectionality by including, at least in the second season, actresses of various ethnicities.

8.3 Repairing Damaged Characters

Since the focus of my thesis lies on the establishment of the fact that counterstories on YouTube have the potential to repair formerly damaged identities, I deem it of importance to elaborate on the reimagined characterisation of the identities that can be found in *Carmilla*, the web-series.

8.3.1 A Revised Laura: Assertive Activism & Sexual Awareness

Analogous to the source material, the story is narrated by Laura, who no longer personifies a lonely Victorian maiden, but rather, a somewhat naive university student, who has recently started a vlogging project for her journalism class. When her roommate disappears overnight, she eagerly decides to investigate this mysterious occurrence. All her attempts to inform the authorities are futile; therefore she proactively handles the situation herself. While the original Laura is either in denial about Carmilla's true identity or highly oblivious to the occurrences around her, Laura 2.0 is self-assertive and inquisitive. As opposed to the source material, in which Laura displays no agency at all, the modernised version of Laura is not a mere bystander, despite the naiveté that she showcases on some occasions. While the original Laura's ignorance almost leads to her being killed, her modern version's displays of ignorance can be regarded as charming or even an indication of a gentle character. What is more, Laura 2.0 does not shy away

from any form of the 'other' and frequently engages in explorations thereof. She notices and readily identifies the clues which Carmilla leaves behind, whereas Le Fanu's Laura was not even aware of the changes to her own body. The obliviousness that characterizes the reimagined version of Laura, instead, revolves around the question of whether Carmilla has the intention to form a romantic bond with her or contemplates to kill her. The original tension between attraction and repulsion which Laura feels towards Carmilla is replaced by subtle, shy glances and witty chit-chat:

Okay, so if that really was flirting, then we have two options here. One, my immoral, jerk-face, possible kidnapper roommate has a crush on me and is giving me presents. Or two, my immoral, jerk-face, possible kidnapper roommate is pretending to have a crush on me and is giving me gifts because I'm next.
(*Carmilla*, episode: 0'01)

As far as Laura's sexual awareness is concerned, stark differences between the original character and its adaptation can be noted as well. Whereas Le Fanu's Laura is defined by the Victorian sensibility that lesbianism is inherently wrong, her modern version embraces her sexuality and is actively concerned with finding a (same-sex) partner. It is Laura, who eventually asks Carmilla to go on a date with her, which signifies the agency which Laura has gained in her reworked version. At the same time Laura is not in the least reduced to merely her sexual orientation. She is a well-rounded character, with a complex personality and a number of different interests and hobbies. She is excitable and nerdy, which becomes apparent whenever she 'fangirls' about Doctor Who or Buffy the Vampire Slayer. While she is also optimistic and determined in her belief that she can change Carmilla, the writers do not just equip her with positive personality traits, but aim at a realistic depiction of a young woman in the 21st century. Due to her upbringing under the surveillance of her overbearing father, she has led a somewhat sheltered life. Hence, she appears to be rather inexperienced and naïve at first. However, the audience's perception of Laura changes over time as the character gradually develops and transforms. Halfway through season one, Carmilla makes the following remark with regards to Laura: "Naive, provincial girl. Entirely too tightly wound. Such a cliché. I oughta know better" (*Carmilla*, episode 2'27). Since this statement no longer applies to Laura at this point in the show, one could argue that the declaration might actually serve as a meta-comment on the original version of Laura. Carmilla's utterance can also be read as either a sarcastic or an

uninformed, preconceived notion about a person she barely knows. Regardless of the writers' intent, it does raise awareness of the stereotypical representation of women that has been prevalent for centuries. By covertly addressing these issues, the writers reconstruct Laura's original identity and give rise to questions about the authenticity of 1897-Laura's representation.

Another noteworthy detail about the characterisation of Laura is the fact that despite her being the central protagonist, there is no hierarchal structure amongst her and the remaining characters. Instead of singling out any one particular heroine, everyone contributes to the solving of the mystery in equal shares. Interestingly, the non-polarizing nature that defines the relationship between the characters does not transcend to Laura herself. The student's perception of the world is very much dependent on binary oppositions as a structuring device. Her black-and-white thinking leads her to categorize people into 'good' or 'bad' ones; their behaviours are clearly divided into right and wrong. It is only over time that she learns to imagine other people complexly. Her particular way of apprehending the world leads to some frustrations on the part of the audience, which in turn raises awareness of our common understanding of the world in dichotomies.

8.3.2 An Updated Carmilla: Moral Ambiguity & Byronic tendencies

As far as Carmilla is concerned, some deliberate changes have been made in order to rid the character of her role of the ultimate antagonist. In contrast to Le Fanu's, who adapts and finally succumbs to society's expectations, Carmilla 2.0 is a femme fatale, who cares little about the opinion of others.

Director Ellen Maybee (in Bledsoe n.p.) addresses the issue of master narratives and the show's deliberate intention to be proactive against the discourse of the evil lesbian:

You have to remember that Carmilla is the original evil lesbian vampire. She is the one who first personified all the tropes that we've seen in every piece of media from 1871 on ... It's 2014, we no longer suffer from the lesbian panic of the 1870s, and if we were to approach the story in exactly the same way, you'd run up against all sorts of problems regarding queer representation, female representation and a whole slew of consent issues that frankly make me uncomfortable to think about.

Writer Jordan Hall (in Bledsoe n.p.), as well, mentions in an interview that she had

the intention to retcon parts of Le Fanu's novella. According to her, she aspired to contest 'history' by transforming Carmilla into a rebellious teenager, who refuses to remain an instrument in her mother's agenda:

[O]ne of the things I knew I wanted to do was grapple with the way the original text depicted the “monstrous lesbian”, and part of doing that definitely meant that Carmilla wasn't going to be the villain of the piece. Looking at the original text, Carmilla's mother—who definitely seemed to be in charge of their vampiric con-game—seemed like a strong choice.

The show redirects the central conflict and positions Carmilla's mother at the heart of it. Despite the fact that Carmilla 2.0 remains true to the original in that she is morally ambiguous, she does reject some of the qualities her original self embraced. Moreover, as opposed to the original Carmilla, her revised version is not static, but a fluid character which undergoes changes throughout the narrative. At the beginning of the season, Carmilla still somewhat resembles Le Fanu's vampire, but, over time, her portrayal transforms more and more into a truly reimagined, more positive representation.

As she grows closer to Laura and learns to appreciate the girl's kindness and optimism, Carmilla's coldness and distance is replaced by care and warmth and the audience learns the true reason that lies behind Carmilla's disrespectful and aloof mannerisms: The vampire's isolation and loneliness are self-imposed and meant to keep others at bay in order to prevent endangering them. In contrast to Le Fanu's Carmilla, Carmilla 2.0 actively attempts to make people hate her. Her behaviour towards girls is not characterised by a seductive nature; instead, she lets her worst behaviour shine in order to protect the people for which she cares.

Her growing love for Laura, on which she is reluctant to act at first, is neither possessive nor selfish. Carmilla starts risking her life for Laura, hence, one could argue that she becomes less and less narcissistic and self-focused. By doing that, she stops being a pawn in her mother's evil scheme and exchanges her apathy for agency. Likewise, Laura's love for Carmilla enables her to be more assertive: “Maybe that's just the way it is, but that does not mean that I have to accept it. I deserve better...hell, even you deserve better.” (*Carmilla*, episode 6: 1'33). In that moment, Laura stops being a victim and Carmilla comes to the realization that she is not reduced to her vampiric nature. Laura treats Carmilla like any other person; she does not pathologize her nor does she regard her as something 'other' - Laura is entirely inclusive of her.

When it comes to Carmilla's characterisation the multi-media aspect of the series takes on importance. In accordance with her character, she does not 'follow' anyone on twitter and she outright refuses to participate in any form of dialogue with her 'followers'. Her posts are feisty, sarcastic and comprise various death threats. It is only mid-season, when Carmilla's true nature is revealed to the audience, that her sympathetic nature comes to shine and her postings take on a more approachable manner. The audience learns that Carmilla is not, as has been believed up until this point, the antagonist of the story and this change in the narrative rehabilitates Carmilla. The web-series offers a more nuanced portrayal of her history and agenda, which no longer reduces her to the predatory lesbian which she used to be in Le Fanu's tale. What still renders her dangerous are, if at all, her family relations; not so much her sexual orientation. She is dangerous, because she comes from a long line of vampires, not because she is queer.

What is more, Carmilla exhibits features of the quintessential Byronic heroine. The popular literary trope of the Byronic hero is "a figure of autonomy, self-reliance, defiance, and power, and he is an outlaw who lives by his own moral code" (Stein 217). Byronic heroes tend to represent anomalies in a society that values conformity (Stein 213), which results in a struggle with being misunderstood as well as an experiencing of feelings of isolation. As literature proves with the provision of a number of female characters who can be classified as Byronic heroines, these traits are not limited to men. In both stories, Le Fanu's novella as well as the modern adaptation thereof, Carmilla's vampirism renders her an outcast. In the source material, Carmilla is additionally excluded from society due to her lesbianism. In a society that is dominated by the patriarchy, Byronic heroines usually adopt masculine traits in order to rebel against the restrictive system. The reason why female characters adopt these qualities is, according to Stein (197), an attempt to construct an identity for themselves. The issue at hand lies with the fact that the Byronic heroine remains trapped within their gender. Whenever women transcend the boundaries which their gender imposes on them, they are presented as monstrous or abnormal and have to endure male violence as can be seen in *Carmilla* (1897). All attempts at achieving a status quo within society leads to their being excluded and singled out all over again. Hence, it can be inferred that the solution does not lie with the women's

adoption of their male counterparts' traits. The only way for these heroines to gain acceptance and an equal stance in society is through matters of inclusion and diversity. First steps into this direction can be seen in *Carmilla*, the web-series. While Le Fanu's *Carmilla* followed the trope of one of Lord Byron's dark and rebellious characters that were popular in the 19th century, *Carmilla 2.0* also embodies the positive qualities that come with it. Not only does she have an anarchic streak in that she disregards societal rules, she is also highly intelligent and introspective. Despite her initial status as an outsider she is eventually accepted for who she is. Moreover, she does not imitate male or any characters, but remains her authentic self. This allows her to explore and develop an identity of her own.

8.3.3 A Recognition of Supporting Characters

As I have mentioned before, there is no hierarchical relationship amongst the characters. Everyone's contribution to the narrative is of equal importance to the development of the story. The two caretakers from the original story, Madame Perrodon and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine, have been reimaged as Lola Perry and S. La Fontaine. Additionally, some other characters have been added to the show. I am going to discuss these in so far as their involvement in the series reconstructs tropes or story lines that feature in the master narrative.

Lola Perry's feminine strength

Alongside Laura and Carmilla, Lola Perry is a student at Silas University. Contrary to Madame Perrodon in the original novella, Perry is portrayed as a strong and fearsome opponent to the evil forces which inhabit the campus. She is an opinionated young woman, who is defensive about her beliefs and shows a strong sense of loyalty towards her friends. In Le Fanu's narrative, Madame Perrodon is described as a motherly, fat woman. Based on this portrayal, Perry, as well, takes on a maternal role within the dormitory. She is nurturing towards her friends and likes to be in control regardless of the situation. The 'updated' character showcases that the possession of motherly qualities does not necessarily imply a general weakness or passivity. Quite to the contrary, Perry uses those traits to

remain focused in high-stress situations and to rescue those who are of importance to her. Even though her sexual orientation is never explicitly referred to, a relationship with her best friend La Fontaine is hinted.

Genderqueer S. La Fontaine

The letter 'S.' in La Fontaine's name refers to Susan, the name which was assigned to them at birth. However, in episode 26, La Fontaine clarifies that they do not want to be referred to as Susan anymore since it does not comply with their identification as non-binary. They specify that their preferred name is La Fontaine and that they prefer the pronouns 'they/them'. The fact that their 'outing' only occurs towards the end of the first season may be interpreted as a deliberate depiction of the fluidity of gender. La Fontaine may not have been aware of their gender identity at the beginning of the show or they might still have been comfortable with their female identity.

What is more, La Fontaine's character is portrayed as analytical and intelligent. They apply science to solve the mysteries surrounding the missing girls and are the first one to discover Carmilla's true identity: "Well yeah, but we know she's a vampire. I mean, we've known that since the blood in the milk container, right? Vampire, vampire, vampire. Yeah?" (Carmilla, episode 14: 4'50). In Le Fanu's original, Mademoiselle De Lafontaine is described as "psychological, metaphysical, and something of a mystic" (Le Fanu 16). In the 19th century, these traits were usually ascribed to women, seeing as they did not have access to education and could not pursue a career in the sciences. Thus, it can be argued that La Fontaine was created as a contrasting character in order to repair this misrepresentation of women.

Danny Lawrence: An alternative love triangle

Danny is another student at Silas University and represents the second love interest for Laura next to Carmilla. Danny's bisexuality is implied; but, as is the case with the other characters, her sexual orientation is not explicitly addressed. As a consequence of her inclusion in the love triangle that comprises herself, Carmilla and Laura, the female lead is for once not torn between a man and a woman – a common trope that is usually prevalent in films and literature that

features a queer storyline. It furthermore validates same-sex desire in that homosexual attraction is presented as something more universal, not an odd perversion that has overcome two individuals.

Wilson Kirsch's 'feminine' role

Despite not being the only male character on the show, Wilson Kirsch is the only man that is vaguely central to the plot. His representation is characterised by the exaggeration of stereotypically masculine traits, which can be regarded as a blueprint for the other males that appear in *Carmilla*. He objectifies women and refers to them in a derogatory way. Wilson is also disrespectful towards one of his female colleagues for he cannot accept her rejecting his advances.

Besides that, his characterisation resembles the kind of portrayal that used to be reserved for women for a long time. He is the friendly side-kick, who is not particularly defined by intelligence. In a number of ways, his behaviour is reminiscent of Le Fanu's Laura. He is oblivious about the true identity of his friends and trusts them implicitly and naively. Even though Laura warns him about his friend's being a vampire, he chooses to be in denial and dismisses Laura's accusation. He claims that his friend Will can be trusted on the basis of their friendship alone. As a consequence, he is later attacked by Will and subsequently has to be rescued by Laura and the other women. This reversal of roles is somewhat noteworthy, since it is almost a direct mirroring of the original story, in which Laura is rescued by four men.

8.4 *Intertextual Allusions and the Repairing of Damaged Identities*

As I have argued, *Carmilla* (2014) can be regarded an update of, or even a sequel to, Le Fanu's original novella. On multiple occasions, the web-series attempts to establish a link to the original. In episode five, Laura conducts interviews with a number of Carmilla's former victims and tries to shed light on the past events, thereby altering the existing discourse. In episode six, Laura refers to Carmilla as being "damaged" (0'13), which can be interpreted as a meta-comment on the damaging representation of the emblematic lesbian vampire, which the series intends to alter. Then, in episode 11, Carmilla complains about the fact that "this age doesn't understand obligation" (1'55) implying that she is one and the same vampire that lived almost 200 years ago. As the season progresses, Carmilla discloses more and more information about herself and her past. In episode 20, she completely reconstructs her identity as it is known to the audience at this point in time. The viewers finally learn about Carmilla's mother and the influence she wields on her daughter. For the first time, Carmilla is portrayed as a victim; an innocent bystander in her mother's evil games. Laura presents Carmilla with the opportunity to tell the audience about the events that unfolded 200 years ago. The latter discloses information about the original Laura, who is referred to as 'L.', which finally grants the vampire the chance to convey her side of the story. She highlights the fact that her love for L. was not a lie. She further points out that the abduction of girls which has occurred over the centuries was never connected to her sexuality. L. was the only exception until contemporary Laura entered Carmilla's life. Hence, it can be argued that (the fictional) history is rewritten or at least updated and the link between vampirism and homosexuality is broken.

9 Fandoms and Trans-Mediality: Uncovering Carmilla's Formal Level

Despite everything that has been discussed up until this point, the most radical change between Le Fanu's novella and *Carmilla*, the web-series, presumably lies with the altered relationship between the writer and the audience. The boundaries between producers and consumers are blurred in the updated version of *Carmilla*. The narrative is non-linear, multi-vocal and can be considered to be a transient way of telling a story. This multi-faceted experience is in stark contrast with the linear unfolding of the original story that one normally experiences in private; without contributing to the content per se.

Despite the fact that the work at hand is an adaption, I would still argue that, *Carmilla*, the web-series, constitutes an original piece of art in that it adds to and redefines its source material significantly. Moreover, I would suggest not to regard the web-series as a classic adaptation, but rather to analyse the narrative in the context of fan studies.

Several of the show's characteristics, which will be outlined and discussed in the subsequent chapter are inherent to fandoms. According to Henry Jenkins, a fandom can be defined as an “alternative social community” which is characterised by a collaborative textual production and a rejection of traditional top-down hierarchies (*Convergence Culture* 221). He also argues that “fans actively assert their mastery over the mass-produced texts which provide the raw materials for their own cultural productions and the basis for their social interactions” (Ebda. 30). This hermeneutical process enables fans to become “active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings” (Ebda. 30).

9.1 The Trans- or Multi-medial Aspect of *Carmilla*

Carmilla is characterised by a transgression of different forms of media; hence, it can be described as a trans- or multi-media production. Trans-media storytelling, then, can be defined by a process that sees the systematic distribution of content across various different media channels with the intent to create “a unified and coordinated entertainment experience” (Jenkins, *Transmedia storytelling* n.p.).

Moreover, they allow a more personal, customized engagement with content.

Carmilla is narrated via the means of the video-sharing platform Youtube, the blog-like website Tumblr, the social network Twitter and on the e-book portal Wattpad. Ideally, each medium contributes to the narrative in equal shares without there being a main source from which all content can be assessed. In *Carmilla* the majority of content is narrated via the medium of YouTube, although twitter and Tumblr play an equally important role when it comes to characterization and world building.

Carmilla's so-called webisodes air twice a week and comprise a running time of three to seven minutes. The Youtube videos are shot by a single camera, which, on the story level, happens to belong to the main protagonist Laura. Hence, the format of the series imitates so-called vlogs.

The word vlog is a composition of the words video and blog and describes a blog that is mostly composed of short video clips, in which a content is conveyed in a conversational manner. While vlogging is certainly not a new practice, it has, nonetheless, become an emblematic way of participating in the YouTube-community (Burgess and Green 53). "Vlogging", according to Burgess and Green, puts its "emphasis on liveness, immediacy, and conversation and it is also important in understanding the particularity of YouTube" (54). It reminds the audience of face-to-face interaction, which clearly distinguishes vlogs from television shows. Due to the conversational format, it invites a response - "critique, debate, and discussion" from its audience (Burgess and Green 54).

The various different twitter and Tumblr accounts of the characters, on the other hand, provide the audience with the individual's unique perspective on the narrative. Moreover, they are used to interact with fans and to provide commentaries on previously aired episodes. On these social media websites the producer, as well as the writers of the show, use their opportunity to provide the audience and fans with further insights and more depth into the show's characters and story arcs.

9.2 The Effects of Multi-Mediality

9.2.1 A Sense of Realism & Awareness of Constructedness

Multi-media narratives often focus on 'world-building' rather than individual characters or storylines. This means that complex fictional worlds are created, which can be inhabited by a large number of interrelated characters (Jenkins, *Transmedia storytelling* n.p.). With *Carmilla* the world building is not so much about creating a fictional, alternative universe to the real world, but rather an endeavour to bridge the gap between reality and fiction. By having real people interact with fictional characters the boundaries between fiction and reality get blurred. Almost everyone who is involved in the production of the show constantly engages with the fans via the means of twitter or Tumblr. The official writer accounts interact with fan-made accounts while some others are run by the actresses of the show. The official twitter accounts are handled by writer Jordan Hall, who regards responding to fans as an extension of the characters' dialogues. Hall also mentions that a number of ideas for the show are indeed generated by fans, who correspond with the official character accounts (O'Regan). Hence, what makes the show so unique is the fact that the creators act as fans and vice versa.

By blurring the boundaries between fictional and real media accounts, *Carmilla* achieves a sense of immediacy and adds a layer of realism to the narrative. Since the viewers of the show are familiar with social networking sites such as YouTube, Tumblr and twitter and are most likely active users themselves, the fourth wall may disappear temporarily. Just like the audience uses the internet to express themselves and to construe their identity in opposition to their peers, so do the fictional characters of *Carmilla*.

The blurring of boundaries in *Carmilla* is not limited to the format, but can also be found within the narrative itself. Gerald Genette refers to this device as narrative metalepsis and defines it as "taking hold of (telling) by changing level" (Genette 235). The narrative levels are disturbed and lines are blurred. Fact is transposed into fiction and vice versa (Ebda.). In *Carmilla*, the actual story is sometimes presented within the narrative. For instance, Laura occasionally shows one of her old videos in a bottom corner of the current video. A shift between the diegetic and the non-diegetic level occurs and draws attention to the

constructedness of it all. These instances as well as the insertion of texts, such as images, sound or written text, can be interpreted as means of fragmentation, which disrupt the narrative. The editing process that underlies the creation of Laura's videos is exposed and the objectivity of the accounts presented is put into question.

9.2.2 Multi-Perspectivity & Narrative Reliability

However, multi-mediality can also be used in order to prevent a one-sided and biased narration. According to Ellen Maybee, the director of the show,

[h]aving *Carmilla* have a presence on social media helps to provide a larger view of what's going on, on top of some great foreshadowing. And using the twitter and Tumblr accounts we've been able to expand the universe presented in the show and show more of what's going on at the university. (in Bledsoe n.p.)

Having a variety of textual versions of a narrative aids in refuting the common notion of the existence of a single authoritative version of a text. The different media forms coexist and complement each other. They are used to encourage the viewer to explore the different media channels to obtain coherence. Having multiple narratives also allows for a non-linear way of telling the story as well as a shifting of focus (depending on whose Tumblr/twitter accounts are perused).

The fact that Laura is able to and in charge of editing or rather altering her videos gives her additional agency. However, she can merely lie by omission; she cannot alter what people say or how they behave while they are being filmed. Thus, contrary to the original Laura, Laura Hollis is not an unreliable narrator. The multi-media aspect of the show can be used to underpin this argument, since the twitter and Tumblr posts align with what the audience sees in her videos. Consequently, it can be argued that the various forms of social media are also used to create narrative credibility.

9.2.3 Collective Intelligence & Audience Engagement

Collective intelligence is a term that was coined by Pierre Levy and it refers to new social structures that facilitate the collaborative production and circulation of information and knowledge within a network of people, as can be seen online. Art, according to Levy, operates as a cultural attractor which leads to a gathering of

like-minded people and a subsequent formation of new communities. In similar fashion, transmedia narratives can be understood as a form of art which encourages the collaborative production and (critical) reception of content (Jenkins, *Transmedia storytelling* n.p.). As such a transmedia narrative, *Carmilla*, too, attracts a large fan-community, which creates additional content in various forms and critically receives and influences the narrative.

In order to establish such a community, texts ought to create opportunities for the audience to immerse themselves into the fictional universe. Whereas classically constructed narratives usually achieve some sort of closure, multimedia narratives are ever expanding (Jenkins, *Transmedia storytelling* n.p.). As a consequence, the story resonates more with its audience, who have a range of options to engage with the content and stay within the fictional universe. Transmedia narratives often merely hint at certain story arcs, which acts as a strong incentive for the audience to use their own imagination to unfold these story lines. *Carmilla* has spawned a large amount of fan art, ranging from drawn images to captured gif-sets to the classic art of fan fiction. In addition, the show encourages active participation by calling upon the fans to interact with the series' characters on various social media sites. Its audience is provided with "a set of roles and goals which readers can assume as they enact aspects of the story through their everyday life" (Jenkins, *Transmedia storytelling* n.p.).

Carmilla does not merely invite the production of additional content, but also encourages an active reception of the series. Multimedia narratives like *Carmilla* offer a range of ways to engage with the content. Similar to reading, the audience has some control over the speed of events; one can devote more time to certain scenes or aspects and skip over others. Moreover, the viewer has the power to decide when and how often to engage with the content.

The activity on Tumblr and twitter is used to maintain the interest of the audience in between the episodes that air on YouTube. For instance, twitter was heavily relied on during the hiatus between season one and season two. In order to keep the audience interested, they were presented with an entire story arc, which was narrated exclusively on twitter. Hence, the social media platforms act as alternative spaces for narrative outlets. Furthermore, fans are able to explore the world that was created around *Carmilla* from a different angle, since the rigid

single-camera shot is transgressed.

9.3 The Formal Formation of Identities in *Carmilla*

YouTube and other social media platforms create spaces for marginalized voices, which allow them to act on an identity which they may not be able to show elsewhere. Subsequently, these subjects are provided with the agency they might be denied in other areas of life. Vlogging grants people the opportunity to disclose information about themselves as well as providing them with a largely anonymous audience to which they can relate. Creating and publishing YouTube videos is also a highly social endeavour that encourages the formation of identity.

9.3.1 Vlogs, Tweets and Tumblr Posts - Means of Self-Disclosure

Michel Foucault is confident in his belief that power is a necessary driving force that operates on all levels of society and cannot be evaded by anyone (*Der Wille zum Wissen* 93). Hence, Foucault does not talk about *ideologies*, a term which implies an identifiable source of power, but rather about *discourses*, a notion that acknowledges an implicit participation of each and every one of us in the formation and execution of power and dominance (Traber 8). This understanding of power implies that subjects are always produced by power and does not leave much room for subjective agency. Foucault later revises this argument by putting a greater emphasis on self-regulation and showing more interest in “the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself, in the technology of the self” (“Technologies of the Self” 19).

One way of exploring these technologies of the self is the practice of writing. Writing has always been detrimental in the exploration of the self (Foucault, “Technologies of the Self” 27). In the Christian era, diary and letter writing as a means of turning to one's own thoughts became popular and was used to renunciate one's sins (Ebda. 30). Naturally, the practice of self-disclosure has undergone some changes since the 18th century. “[T]he techniques of verbalization have been reinserted in a different context by the so-called human sciences in order to use them without renunciation of the self but to constitute, positively, a new self” (Ebda. 49).

Foucault's approach to the technologies of self constitutes the foundation of narrative performativity. Identities are performed; they are continuously constructed and reconstructed via the means of storytelling. Just like the composure of letters or diaries, vlogging, the format in which *Carmilla* is predominantly presented, represents a way of constructing a self and self-assertion through the means of disclosing oneself. However, the characters' self-disclosure is not limited to vlogging. Laura as well as various other characters also make use of twitter and Tumblr to enter into a dialogue with other people, both real and fictional. On top of that, the fact that the disclosure is fragmented, occurs on a number of different media platforms and happens repeatedly, puts emphasis on the ever-changing nature of identity.

9.3.2 Performativity and the Dialogic Nature of Identity Formation

Judith Butler, too, has published widely on the notion of identity. Alongside many other scholars, she shares Foucault's assumption that stories have the ability to construct, or at least help to construct, identities. One of the most radical interpretations of this notion is Butler's concept of *performativity* (Butler, *Bodies that matter*). According to Butler, performativity describes the ways in which discourses produce exactly those entities which are named by them. Consequently, performativity does not imply a free and wilful performance of a subject, but rather that subjects, including their material body, are constructed by discourses. Performance, in this case, can be understood as the repetition of acts which adhere to certain cultural norms (Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'?" 14). Any part of a person's identity, be it concerned with gender or sexuality, is, thus, not expressive but ought to be understood as the outcome of discursive practices. This correlates with *Carmilla's* take on identity formation. At the beginning of the show, Laura and her friends make assumptions about Carmilla and thereby partially construct Carmilla's identity. Later on, the characters, and with them the audience, realize that they have been utterly misguided and understand that Carmilla merely mirrored the behaviour which was expected of her.

However, this subjection of individuals by social norms does not necessarily impede agency. According to Butler, it creates great discomfort that spawns a

willingness to resist. Butler argues that agency “is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. [T]he ‘I’ that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them, but also endeavours to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them” (*Undoing Gender* 3).

One such attempted act of resistance could be the performance of a self-narrative. In her article “Giving an Account of Oneself” (2001), Butler confers about the effects of self narration on the formation of identity. Her argumentation is based on the poststructuralist theory of the subject's limited knowledge about the self. Butler argues that this lack of self-knowledge is constructed by the social nature of the subject, which is why 'the other' is always an inherent part of our identity. Since a complete self-narration proves to be impossible and an awareness of our vulnerability to 'the other' exists in ourselves, we accept this implied bond with the it: “I find that my very formation implicates the Other in me, my own foreignness to myself is, paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection with others” (Butler, “Giving an Account of Oneself” 37). Since the body, and with it the self, is constantly exposed to, and subsequently addressed by, 'the other', accountability of the self to 'the other' is demanded. This accountability is often provided in the form of self-narratives. Butler states that in narratives people tend to highlight their own individuality while at the same time; they come to the realization that they ought to be recognizable to others, which is where the dialogic nature of self-narratives gains importance.

While the identity of Le Fanu's *Carmilla* was almost entirely constructed by Laura, from whose perspective the narrative is told, the counterstory of *Carmilla* has access to different forms of media that allow her to reconstruct and repair her identity via the means of self-narratives. The construction of identity does not merely take place by one narrator who constitutes an identity in opposition to themselves, but rather each character has the opportunity to shape the audience's understanding of themselves. It can be argued that vlogging, as well as tweeting or posting on Tumblr constitute dialectic practices, since the person who narrates and/or produces the content usually interacts with the audience by responding to comments, videos, tweets or posts. As far as YouTube is concerned, the audience is always implicitly present at the time of production. Moreover, Laura and some of the other characters frequently address or refer to the audience. In episode one,

Laura's roommate blames her for staying in on a Saturday night "talking to the internet" (Carmilla, episode 1: 2'35). In episode two, Laura asks the audience not to judge her. More importantly, however, are the aforementioned dialogues that are established on twitter and Tumblr.

While the original Laura also discloses her inner thoughts and feelings to an audience, she does so in a linear manner. Hence, her identity formation appears more static and artificial. Additionally, the fact that the narrative is framed and includes an additional mediating instance distances the reader from Laura. As a consequence, identification with the character might prove to be more difficult to achieve. The vlogging format, on the other hand, directly addresses and draws in the audience, which is likely to lead to an immediate engagement or identification with the character of Laura.

9.3.3 Agency, Processes of Reflexivity and Fluidity

Whereas both Laura and Carmilla are almost exclusively defined by the other characters in the original novella, their reimagined versions show self-awareness and agency as far as the constitution of identity is concerned. Their identity may still be partly informed by and constructed in opposition to others; however, this fact aids their understanding of themselves. In the counterstory, Laura's subjectivity is no longer threatened by Carmilla's existence or homosexuality; instead the women's relationship is portrayed as an identity-constituting element. Carmilla and Laura influence each other mutually and contribute to the self-growth in the other person. For example, Laura encourages Carmilla to emancipate herself and fight her mother; Carmilla teaches Laura to imagine the world more complexly. Both girls' remain their own subjects; they are independent despite being in a unifying relationship.

Identity construction is also highly dependent on processes of reflexivity in that one has to comprehend and define oneself in order to be understood by others. Reflexivity is also an act of empowerment in that it grants agency and narrative authenticity in the process of self-construction (Brown, "Narrative Approach to Collective Identities" 738). This reflexivity is visible in Laura's as well as Carmilla's character. Their social media accounts provide them with the means

to disclose themselves and subsequently reflect upon themselves. Laura's audience, as well as the girls' twitter and Tumblr followers, supply them with feedback which they can utilize to understand the way others perceive them.

What is more, in *Carmilla*, the web-series, the girls' identity is characterized by fluidity. Throughout the series, Carmilla and Laura grow substantially and gain new insights about themselves and the world that surrounds them. While Le Fanu's characters arguably remain static throughout the novella, their revised versions develop over time as was outlined in the previous chapter.

The counterstory is utilized in order to bring about alterations in, first and foremost, Carmilla's character. The show intentionally represents Carmilla in a way that leads the audience to believe that she is identical with Le Fanu's character, who came into existence almost 200 years ago. Hence, the changes between the original and the reimagined version of Carmilla are presented as an identity transformation, which can be exemplified by the altered meaning which the trope of Carmilla's transforming into a black cat signifies. In the 2014 adaptation, Carmilla's transformation into a predatory large cat signifies the danger which she represents to her surroundings. In the web-series, however, the trope is used to reconstruct Carmilla's identity: According to Carmilla, her 'siblings' call her 'Kittycat', which showcases that she is no longer a dangerous predator, but rather a domesticated, tame feline companion.

10 Concluding Discussion

The format of vlogging or rather the popular practice of literary web-series has inspired fans as well as more professional producers to engage in reworkings of novels that include authentic positive queer representation. YouTube, it seems, has turned into the preferred space for advertising popular queer content. As I have shown, it is not merely fans who engage in the practice of queering culture, but also (semi-)professionals who have realised the potential which the video-sharing website yields for the distribution of counter-hegemonic content. Far away from mainstream culture, YouTube still manages to attract a mass of people who do not only receive the content that is offered, but actively participate in the production and distribution of said texts.

It is worth noting that a large number of queer web-series do in fact not provide the audience with 'new' content as such, but are instead part of the phenomenon of literary classics that keep being reimaged. Hence, it can be argued that the producers deem it more import to offer alternative counter-discourses to already existing master narratives than adding additional content. This can be explained by the huge popularity and familiarity which classic narratives enjoy. Since the characters and the plot have already been established, an adaptation thereof immediately enters into popular culture as well. Adaptations of well-known narratives attract a bigger audience, which in turn allows for a substantially bigger exertion of impact on society. In order to challenge master narratives, the resistance against them ought to enter the realm of the popular as well, since it constitutes the space, where social and cultural norms are contested and reconstructed. Any subversion is always created in relation to the original narrative.

What all of these works of resistance have in common is the fact that they make use of the format of vlogging to transport their content to their audience. The reason for this development may be seen in the dialogic nature that is established thereby and it is exactly this dialogism that makes YouTube so susceptible to participatory culture and subsequently, counter-hegemonic content. Despite the fact that YouTube does not exclusively promote counter-hegemonic discourses,

the fact that the platform facilitates participatory culture cannot be easily contested. Participatory culture allows everyone to contribute to the unfolding discourses on YouTube. Hence, content can be easily challenged and critiqued. Naturally, *Carmilla*, the web-series can only be considered subversive as long as it is interpreted in such a manner by its audience.

Carmilla has indeed attracted a large fan-base that transcends YouTube and can be found on almost all social-media platforms. On those, fans critically analyse the content of the series and constitute new discourses and alternative interpretations in order to voice their frustrations with mainstream media representations. In the case of *Carmilla*, the fandom predominantly emphasizes and reinforces the authentic representation of queers and highlights the contrasts to the original novella. However, they have also put forward criticisms concerning the lack of POC-representation which has led to the producers' inclusion of a greater variety of actresses and actors in the show. Due the heterogenous background of the fans and audience, their expectations of *Carmilla* are varied as well. As I have argued, the fan-community contributes greatly to the shaping of the content. The fans' participation comprises an active interaction with the fictional characters, which constitutes part of the narrative, as well as a dialogue with the producers and writers of the show, which subsequently determines the outcome of the narrative as well.

However, it is not merely the narrative of *Carmilla* itself that is ever expanding, but also the myriad of fan art, which it spawns daily, has had a major impact on the creation of subversive discourses. Far from the realm of the popular, in the margins of culture, alternative discourses are much easier to construct and distribute. Whereas in former times, sub-cultures did not have the space to publish their views to a substantial number of people, the internet aids the establishment of communities that rapidly produce and share their counter-hegemonic discourses. It has happened on multiple occasions that sub-cultural discourses have become viral and emerged from the depths of the internet. *Carmilla*, too, has found recognition amongst media sources that can be considered to belong to the realm of mass media. The popular website, 'Buzzfeed', or the online edition of the newspaper, 'The Huffington Post', have both published articles about the web-series.

To recapitulate I would like to, once again, outline the ways in which the show reimagines and repairs damaged queer identities. Contrary to the myriad of adaptations that came before *Carmilla*, the multi-media series steers away from the tradition of portraying homosexual love as immoral or harmful. The heteronormative elements that prevail in the original novella are replaced by a feminist discourse that celebrates and gives strength to women and queers alike. The series is not exclusively structured around dichotomies and in those instances in which a binary division cannot be avoided it inverts the hierarchies that are prevalent in our contemporary cultural understanding. Dominant notions of sexuality and gender are challenged and destabilised and the stabilised manner in which identities are represented in the media are exposed. The majority of the cast consists of assertive, queer females that represent feminist values. The small number of male characters that appear on the show are subordinated to the female heroines for the most part of the series. By portraying males and heterosexuals in a way that is usually reserved for female or queer characters, the fact that these seemingly fixed identity constructions are indeed culturally construed is exposed. However, since the inversion of binary oppositions merely reaffirms the existence of hierarchies, *Carmilla* also attempts to transcend oppositional thinking. Multiple forms of sexual orientation and contemporary notions of gender are featured on the show without explicitly discussing or assigning values to them. Being queer does not have any repercussions in the narrative and is not used to define the characters. On a more fundamental level, the opposition between good and bad is transgressed as the complex characterisation of the protagonists fails to assign them to either category. On the story level itself, this struggle of compartmentalisation is addressed and finally overcome.

The fact that individual identities have been repaired by the counterstory of *Carmilla* becomes apparent when looking at the reimagined figures of Carmilla and Laura. Laura's character is defined by agency and self-awareness. Carmilla is no longer the antagonist of the narrative. Both characters influence one another as opposed to the dominating nature that characterizes Le Fanu's Carmilla. Neither Carmilla nor Laura is victimized. At the same time, they are also not presented as a victimizer of others. The nuanced characterisation rehabilitates both characters.

What renders their transformations so authentic is the fact that, at the beginning of the season, neither of the characters distinguishes themselves greatly from the original characters. It is only over the course of the first season that the audience witnesses the characters' transformation into a more positive and complex version of their former selves. As I have argued, the web-series can be interpreted as a sequel to the original in that it establishes a link to Le Fanu's novella and recycles his characters. By providing additional information about the events that unfolded themselves in the original narrative, the existing discourse about the evil lesbian vampire is altered.

As I have shown, alterations do not only occur on the content level, but it is also the formal set-up that renders the two texts so different. The multi-media aspect has a substantial impact on the formation of identities in *Carmilla* and aids the repairing thereof. The most profound change can be found in the relationship between the producer(s) of the texts and their audience. YouTube acts as an alternative public space for marginalised people to participate in public discourses. The boundaries between producers and consumers are blurred in *Carmilla*, the web-series. Through its multi-vocal and multi-facetted form of narrating, the format itself conveys the ever-changing nature of identities. More importantly, however, the authority over the text does not lie with one single author. The audience's participation in the story leads to an ever-expanding narrative that is co-narrated by hundreds of thousands. A rather significant proportion of the audience defines themselves as fans of the show. These fans often collaborate and constitute alternative communities which spawn the creation of counter-hegemonic discourses. The fans' interaction with the fictional characters helps reconstruct their damaged identities.

The reconstruction of the characters' identities is not solely performed by the audience, but to a large extent, shaped by the format of the web-series. Vlogging is, just like the composure of written texts, a means of disclosing information about oneself. Hence, it represents a way of reflecting upon one's own identity and thereby constructing and asserting a sense of selfhood. Moreover, the characters utilize the means of other social media websites in order to enter into a dialogue with others. Whereas the character of Carmilla in Le Fanu's narrative was almost entirely constructed from an outsider's perspective, the revised Carmilla

can reconstruct her 'former' identity via the means of self-narratives, which she composes on various social media sites. Each and every character has the opportunity to construct their own identity. Despite the fact that their identities are still partly constructed in opposition to the other, the characters also utilize the other to reflect upon and gain knowledge about, themselves. The women's subjectivity is no longer threatened by one another, but their relationship is depicted as an identity-constituting element.

Now the question that arises at the end of this thesis is whether a change in the representation of queer characters has the power to effectively bring about social change. A popular argument in this debate is the concern that a distinctive increase in lesbian and gay representation in the media could actually reinforce the disparity between heterosexuals and queers. The mere representation of homosexuality might not eliminate the existing dichotomies and could uphold the exclusion of non-conforming individuals. Therefore, what might prove to be more lucrative is the radical deconstruction of these essentialist categories, an endeavour that is certainly not easy to achieve. Despite this somewhat pessimistic outlook, a more positive and more frequent representation of queer characters is, nonetheless, imperative. Narratives like *Carmilla*, which do not dwell on the fact that a character might not be heterosexual, but represent them as a complex human being nonetheless, open up alternative discourses that allow for a reimagined reality in which people who do not conform to society's dominant beliefs are no longer solely defined by their disparaging trait but accepted and understood as equal. As I have argued, the changing technological landscape has the potential to aid this development. The internet disregards top-down hierarchies and provides a myriad of opportunities for individuals, who would otherwise feel powerless, to be active participants in the process of creating and shaping culture. Discourses are easily produced and distributed amongst a wide audience, which is why the counter-hegemonic potential of the ideas and beliefs that are being spread is enormous.

Due to the fact that these technological advancements are undergoing a constant and rapid change, more research into this field is required. User behaviour as well as the dynamics within fan communities ought to be observed more closely in order to discern the impact certain alternative discourses

may yield on the public.

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Appendix

Abstract (English)

The diploma thesis “The Subversive Power of YouTube: Reconstructing and Repairing Queer Identities in *Carmilla*” examines whether social media websites such as YouTube may be understood as a counter-hegemonic device and explores whether and, if so, how the website is utilized to resist hegemony. In order to analyze this phenomenon, the Gothic novella *Carmilla* (1872), which has spawned a myriad of adaptations, is compared and contrasted to its most recent reworking, *Carmilla* (2014), the web-series, which exclusively airs on YouTube. The author argues that the the web-series can be regarded as a counterstory to the well-established master narrative which Le Fanu's story has evoked. On the one hand, the textual analysis of the primary texts is meant to deconstruct truth claims and expose heteronormative tendencies; on the other hand, it also aims at showcasing the subversive power that lies within the rearticulation of narratives and their capacity to serve as a strategy of resistance. The focus of the analysis is not limited to the content level of the narratives, but takes the formal features, which distinguish the two texts greatly, into account. In particular, the thesis explores the ways in which multi-media storytelling impacts the construction of narrative identities.

Abstract (Deutsch)

Die Diplomarbeit "The Subversive Power of YouTube: Reconstructing and Repairing Queer Identities in *Carmilla*" untersucht, ob die Internet-Plattform YouTube als alternativer Raum, in dem Gegendiskurse konstituiert werden, verstanden werden kann und prüft, ob und wie die Website dominanten Ideologien entgegenwirkt. Als Untersuchungsgegenstand dient einerseits die Novelle *Carmilla* (1871) und ihre aktuellste Adaptierung die Web-Serie *Carmilla* (2014), mit der Erstere kontrastiert wird. Die Autorin argumentiert, dass die Web-Serie als sogenannte 'counterstory', ein Narrativ, das einen Gegendiskurs zu einem existenten Narrativ, in diesem Falle Le Fanus *Carmilla*, bildet. Einerseits soll die Analyse der Primärliteratur die etwaigen sich darin befindenden Wahrheitsansprüche dekonstruieren und heteronormative Tendenzen aufzeigen; vor allem soll aber auch die subversive Macht, die der Reartikulation von Narrativen zukommen kann, veranschaulicht werden. Der Fokus der Analyse beschränkt sich nicht nur auf die Inhaltsebene der Texte, sondern berücksichtigt auch jene formellen Aspekte, die die beiden Primärtexte wesentlich unterscheiden. Im Wesentlichen wird hierbei ein besonderer Wert auf multi-mediale Erzählweisen und deren Einfluss auf die Konstruktion von narrativen Identitäten gelegt.