

“The Weird and the Occult” in *Carmilla* and “The Portrait of Roísín Dhu”



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This thesis brings together two Irish Gothic texts that contemplate queer intimacy and reveal similar logics of imagined Irish Catholicism. By reading Sheridan Le Fanu’s 1872 novella *Carmilla* and Dorothy Macardle’s 1924 short story “The Portrait of Roísín Dhu” alongside Heather Love’s *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007), this thesis examines the literary treatment of Irish Catholicism and queerness as “backward.” In both texts, the embedded narrative undermines the frame, allowing more subversive and complex themes to haunt the hopeful, nationalist frame of “The Portrait of Roísín Dhu” and the patriarchal, imperial frame of *Carmilla*.

This thesis will consider two Gothic texts—Sheridan Le Fanu’s 1872 novella *Carmilla* and Dorothy Macardle’s 1924 short story “The Portrait of Roísín Dhu”—through the lens of Heather Love’s *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007), with a specific focus on how backwardness interacts with both queerness and Irishness in the texts. Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-1873) is a notable author of nineteenth-century Gothic fiction and a central figure in the development of Irish Gothic. Although he lived in Dublin for most of his life, Le Fanu spent part of his childhood in County Limerick, when his father, a Church of Ireland clergyman, was appointed Dean of Emly and Rector of Abington in 1826 (Rockhill 28). His family lost money and land during the Tithe Wars, and Le Fanu struggled with finances throughout his adult life. Although he expressed sympathies for the nationalist cause in his youth, his correspondence from the late 1860s demonstrate an “increasing fear of Catholic power” (Tracy xxvi). In 1868, he wrote that Anglo-Ireland was resting on a “quaking bog” (xxvi). These political and financial anxieties influence and infiltrate Le Fanu’s writing in the form of supernatural threats.

Although his fiction writing career began with a number of novels set during the Williamite Wars in late seventeenth-century Ireland, his 1863 novel *The House by the Churchyard* began to blur the lines between Historical realism and Gothic. In 1864, his *Uncle Silas* was published serially in the *Dublin University Magazine*—a Conservative Protestant-leaning literary journal that employed Le Fanu as an editor (Tracy vii). Fellow Irish Gothic writer Elizabeth Bowen wrote an introduction to a 1947 reprint of *Uncle Silas*, in which she identifies the novel as “an Irish story transposed to an English setting,” tying the psychological terror at work in the text to the psychology of the colonizing class in Ireland: “The hermetic solitude and the autocracy of the great country house, the demonic power of the family myth,

fatalism, feudalism” are “accepted facts of life for the race of hybrids from which Le Fanu sprang” (8). Bowen associates the motifs of isolation and ambivalence in *Uncle Silas* with Le Fanu’s colonial position and cultural identity as an Irish Anglican. Her critical turn toward an Irish-centered reading of *Uncle Silas* was significant in Irish literary studies, inaugurating the possibility that other texts set in Britain or continental Europe might be encoded with Irish interests, Irish issues, and Irish politics.

Carmilla was first published serially in 1871 and 1872 in a Dublin literary magazine *The Dark Blue*. In 1872, it was republished in the short story collection *In a Glass Darkly*, with an introduction that presented the supernatural tales as the case studies of a Doctor Hesselius. *Carmilla* is framed as a manuscript written by Laura—a young Austrian woman who has since died. Laura reveals that she has grown up totally isolated, with only her father and governesses for company. Then her father takes in a mysterious young woman named Carmilla, who is sweet-natured but languorous and at times irritable. The two girls quickly become intimate, Laura fascinated with Carmilla and Carmilla confessing her love for Laura. The girls discover a portrait that reveals they have a shared ancestor—Mircalla, Countess Karnstein. As the two become closer, Laura begins to waste away, growing tired easily, and notices puncture marks on her breast. Meanwhile, Carmilla exhibits strange behavior, including sleeping for much of the day and sleepwalking at night. An encounter with General Spielsdorf, who lives on a neighboring but still distant estate, reveals how his own daughter was preyed on and killed by a female vampire named Millarca. Laura, her father, and General Spielsdorf visit the Karnstein family chapel where they find the tomb of Carmilla / Mircalla / Millarca, who are all the same vampire, and kill her.

Dorothy Macardle (1889-1958) is not as celebrated for her fiction as Le Fanu; she is mostly recognized for writing *The Irish Republic* (1937), an early history of the formation of the Republic of Ireland, including the War of Independence, the Anglo-Irish Treaty, and the Irish Civil War. She grew up in Dundalk in a wealthy Catholic family with split sympathies for unionism and Home Rule (Smith 14). After relocating to Dublin in 1917, Macardle joined Cumann na mBan—the women’s Irish republican paramilitary organization affiliated with the Sinn Féin party—and moved in with the republican activist Maud Gonne in 1920 (Lane 244). Macardle described herself as a “convert” to republicanism, expressing that “like most converts to a cause, I was zealous to the point of fanaticism” (244). She worked as a lecturer at Alexandra College and a journalist during the War of Independence and the Irish Civil War before her arrest in 1922. Macardle served a 6-month-long prison term in Mountjoy and Kilmainham Gaols alongside other anti-Treaty female political prisoners.

While she was incarcerated, Macardle wrote a series of political ghost stories that were published following her release. The stories in *Earth-bound* are framed by Frank and Una, two Irish emigrants who bring together other Irish expats and friends to tell stories around the hearth at their magazine publishing house in Philadelphia. Every embedded narrative is a story told in this diaspora setting, as those gathered recall the years of the Irish War of Independence. “The Portrait of Róisín Dhu” is told by Maeve, who is in Philadelphia opening a retrospective of her late brother’s artwork. The greatest work in the exhibition is the eponymous portrait, and Maeve consents to telling the strange story of the model that inspired the piece. She reveals that her mercurial brother Hugo travelled to the Blasket Islands off the west coast of Galway, seeking a muse for his nationalist portrait of the Ireland-figure Róisín Dhu. He discovered Nuala, an Irish-speaking princess who agreed to return with him and model for his art. As Hugo paints her,

Nuala gradually wastes away. Although Maeve notices Nuala's deterioration, she is reluctant to interrupt Hugo's artistic process, and as Hugo finishes his great artwork, Nuala dies.

This thesis reads across *Carmilla* and "The Portrait of Róisín Dhu" and asks how these Irish Gothic texts understand themselves to be part of Irish colonial struggles. One of the central theorists this essay will engage is Heather Love. Her 2007 book *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* argues that there is a need in contemporary queer culture to look back at a history that is often marked by pain, isolation, and shame in order to consider how that past continues to impact the present. In *Feeling Backward*, Love examines several tragic queer figures in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century queer literature—specifically choosing texts that, in her words, “turn their backs on the future” (8). Love's treatment of this literature excavates what has been lost in the contemporary impulse to move forward without contemplating a troubled past. By applying Heather Love to *Carmilla* and “The Portrait of Róisín Dhu,” this essay reconsiders the association in the Irish Gothic tradition between Irishness and backwardness.

Both *Carmilla* and “The Portrait of Róisín Dhu” are fantastical texts, yet the two are deeply rooted in the historical and political climates that they were written in. To give a sense of the historical backdrop, the following is a condensed timeline of modern Irish history. In 1691, the Treaty of Limerick ended the Williamite War (1689-91), which was fought between supporters of the deposed Catholic king James II and supporters of his Protestant successor William III. In the decades following the war, a series of Penal Laws were enacted that restricted the freedoms of Irish Catholics. The most significant impact of this code revolved around the issue of land ownership, with the Popery Act of 1704 restricting Catholics from inheriting and purchasing property. This reduced a large portion of the population to renting plots of land and

working as tenant farmers for absentee landlords. The Penal Laws also contributed to the establishment of the Protestant Ascendancy's economic and social dominion in Ireland.

In 1798, the Society of United Irishmen—a political organization of both Protestants and Catholics seeking parliamentary reform—revolted against English rule in a series of clashes across the island. The Irish Rebellion of 1798 was violently suppressed by the British Army, who hanged, beheaded, and burned captured rebels. The beginning of the nineteenth century in Ireland was marked by a series of uprisings and political movements. The Tithe War (1830-1836) was a campaign in which Irish Catholic farmers refused to pay tithes—a tax on tenant farmers' annual produce that paid for the maintenance of the Church of Ireland. Tithes also paid clergy members' salaries, so this tax would have been one—if not the main—source of income for Le Fanu's family. In 1845, a potato blight, in concert with the Irish land-tenure system, launched the island into four years of famine that resulted in mass emigration, the decline of the Irish language, and a massive loss of life.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a renewed push for independence. Starting in 1880, Parliamentarian Charles Stewart Parnell spearheaded the Home Rule League, a party that campaigned for Irish self-government within the United Kingdom. Alongside the Home Rule movement, more radical nationalist movements emerged at the turn of the twentieth century. The Sinn Féin party—for the establishment of an independent Irish republic—was founded in 1905. Around this time there was also a flourishing literary movement, the Irish Literary Revival, that was interested in reviving an Irish cultural heritage inherited from the island's Gaelic past. Several Republican paramilitary groups—including the Irish Volunteers, the Irish Citizen Army, and Cumann na mBan—joined forces in 1916 in the Easter Rising, an armed insurrection with the aim of establishing an independent Irish Republic. The British Army and

Royal Irish Constabulary suppressed the rebellion after a week and executed 16 of the leaders; however, this perverse reaction from British forces built public support for the revolutionary movement. In 1918, the Sinn Féin party established an Irish Parliament and declared independence from Britain. The subsequent Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) between the Irish Republican Army and British forces ended with the negotiations for an Anglo-Irish Treaty and the establishment of the self-governing Irish Free State. The terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty included the partition of Northern Ireland, a compromise that divided the nationalist movement, and led to a year of Irish Civil War (1922-1923) between the Provisional Government of Ireland and the anti-Treaty Irish Republican Army. It was in this ruptured, disillusioned historical moment, while she was imprisoned by her own countrymen, that Macardle began to write about the nation's ghosts.

In the first section of this thesis, I introduce Love's framework of queerness as an identity that is marked by and structured around backwardness. I then discuss how this framework can be applied to Ireland and Irishness by looking at the nineteenth-century conceptualizations of Ireland as the repressed subconscious of England and as a repository of anti-English characteristics and principles. I engage with the concept of "enclave mentality" as a way of understanding how boundaries and exile operate in these texts and examine the construction of the Irish Catholic as monstrous. The second section discusses the interaction between the past and the present in Irish postcolonial literary studies. The third section examines the Irish Gothic as a mode used by, although not exclusively, Anglo-Irish authors to negotiate cultural anxieties surrounding their relationships to Irishness and nationhood; or, as "an attempt to exorcise" the "weird and the occult... from Irish society" (Killeen 18). Next, I will move on to a close reading of *Carmilla* that will read it—along the lines of how Bowen reads *Uncle Silas*—as "an Irish

story” transposed to an Austrian setting. Finally, I will turn to “The Portrait of Róisín Dhu” as a product of, but also a commentary on, the Irish Literary Revival. This essay conjectures that if Irish Gothic literature is an “attempt to exorcise... the weird and the occult” from Irish culture, then it is possible to consider queerness and Irishness side-by-side as “the weird and the occult” in *Carmilla* and “The Portrait of Róisín Dhu,” and in doing so, unearth a fresh reading of these texts.

Monsters in the Closet

In *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Heather Love states that the reputation of the queer community in the twentieth century was backward and anti-modern. This characterization recalls a similar list of characteristics used in the nineteenth century to define Ireland in opposition to the modern, civilized, and rational England. Queerness and Irishness are similarly identified as backwards or outside of time. Love observes that “queers have been seen across the twentieth century as a backward race: even when they provoke fears about the future, they somehow also recall the past. They carry with them... ‘the quality of the way back’” (6). The “quality of the way back” can be applied to Gothic Ireland and Irishness, which are produced in the English imagination as antithetical to modernity.

In nineteenth-century English consciousness, Ireland figures as a representation of the uncultivated and the backward (*The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction* 9). One hundred miles west from the coast of the English mainland, the island is geographically provincialized and becomes a signifier for all that England is not. Citing Christopher Morash, Jarlath Killeen writes that “the Celtic fringes were considered repositories of all that which England wished to deny and banish (the irrational, the superstitious, the perverse, the Catholic, the cannibalistic)” (10).

Morash conceptualizes Ireland as a container or closet for all those characteristics which England wants to distance itself from—both abstractions like the barbarous, the parochial, and the abnormal, as well as the actual Catholic population. The term “closet” recalls Eve Sedgwick’s seminal work in queer studies *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990). Sedgwick frames the closet as the defining structure of gay oppression and foundational for negotiating cultural binaries such as “masculine / feminine... innocence / initiation... new / old... urbane / provincial... health / illness” and “cognition / paranoia” (71). Many of these same binaries are used to manage the relationship between “normative” England and “abnormal” Ireland. When we think of Ireland as a closet, it generates an understanding of Irishness and queerness as identities that are correlatively structured around an “impermeable space” that contains and hides the non-normative (72).

The closet is not the only way to visualize the carefully managed relationship between England and Ireland. In *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (1995), Terry Eagleton conceptualizes nineteenth-century Ireland—particularly during the Great Famine—as the repressed subconscious of England. He writes that Ireland was imagined as “the monstrous unconscious of the metropolitan society, the secret materialist history of endemically idealist England” (9). Imagining Ireland as England’s unconscious has a similar effect to Morash’s “repository.” Morash’s metaphor highlights the geographic, physical distancing—or banishment—of the un-English, whereas Eagleton’s metaphor emphasizes a repressed psychology—a “secret... history” in the subconscious of English society. In both models, Ireland is ever-present, lurking on the borders, at the gates, and in the margins. After visiting the island in 1849, Thomas Carlyle described Ireland as “the breaking point of the huge suppuration which all British and European society now is” (iii). For the nineteenth-century British subject, Ireland is a concentrated, focused

symbol of that which is undesirable or diseased throughout Britain and continental Europe. Morash also emphasizes Ireland's reputation as outside of or unaffected by modernity. He identifies Scotland, Wales, and Ireland as representing "a kind of collective zone of atemporality, a place of the primitive, the out-of-touch and the backward which the modern world had not yet affected" (133). The construction of Ireland as an antimodern, backwards location further marginalizes the island from its forward-facing, modern, and progressive neighbor-colonizer.

The relationship between England and Ireland was negotiated by the colonizing class of Irish Anglicans, who maintained unyielding minority rule in Ireland from the close of the seventeenth-century until the end of the Irish War of Independence in 1921. The sociological concept of "enclave mentality" is a helpful framework for understanding the cultural position of Anglicans in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland. By Mary Douglas's definition, an enclave is a social unit "formed by a dissenting minority" and distinguished by the maintenance of a "strong boundary" between insiders and outsiders (45). This defining boundary delineates the cultural space occupied by members. Killeen writes: "The most important issue for the enclave is the mapping of its own limits and the policing and maintenance of its boundaries" (38). Policing enclave limits distinguishes between and partitions those who belong to the enclave and those who do not. These limits are primarily policed through the exclusion of outsiders imagined to be alien and hostile.

In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland, Irish Anglicans posited the Irish Catholic as an alien and hostile Other. Despite possessing most of the wealth, land, and political power in Ireland, the Anglo-Irish projected the presence of a constant external threat in the form of the Irish-Catholic majority. Enclave identity was preserved by characterizing the outside community as "dark and threatening," whereas the inside was "warm, embracing, and rewarding" (Killeen

39). Douglas emphasizes how enclave members “vilify the larger community outside” in order to reassert the boundaries of their group and prevent internal betrayal or absconding (57). Thus, the sizable population of Catholics in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland could be conceptualized as threatening and dangerous to an unwelcome minority of Irish Anglicans. Killeen argues that although the Anglo-Irish were not under legitimate threat of extinction or expulsion from Catholic insurrection, the “enclave mentality” elicited “feelings of siege” for those within the in-group (39). The identity of the enclave and need for the enclave are reinforced by the imagined threat surrounding its walls.

In the eighteenth- and nineteenth century, the imagined threat to the Irish Anglican Ascendency was the Irish Catholic. Around the time *Carmilla* was published, illustrations and political cartoons appeared in magazines and newspapers which cast Irish Catholics as “the stock-in trade figures of the gothic... the ‘Irish Frankenstein,’ the ‘Irish Maniac,’” and “the ‘Irish Vampire’” (Kilfeather 52). In 1882, the British satire magazine *Punch* published a cartoon that depicted the huge, vicious, and apelike “Irish Frankenstein” wielding a knife and towering over his creator—a waistcoated figure who resembles Charles Stewart Parnell, the founder of the Irish National League. Parnell was an Anglo-Irish member of the British Parliament who advocated for Home Rule, or Irish self-government. The dynamic between Frankenstein’s creature and his creator, which would have been familiar to the *Punch* readership, is mapped onto the relationship between Parnell and the monstrous Irish Catholic figure. In *Frankenstein*, the scientist fathers a creature that, by the end of the novel, becomes a bloodthirsty monster. The cartoon suggests that by supporting Home Rule, Parnell is unwittingly encouraging the rise of a more militant Irish nationalism.

The cartoon employs the Gothic figure of Frankenstein's creature as a mechanism to depict the monstrosity of the Irish Catholic. The Irish Catholic figure is gargantuan—twice the size of Parnell—and wearing a tattered cloak and a mask. He has rippling muscles, scruffy facial hair, and a savage animal look in his eyes. He is hunched over, and he is wielding both a dagger and a revolver. Despite the Irish nationalism of both figures, the cartoon draws a clear distinction between the Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Parnell and the militant Irish Catholic. The explicit contrast suggests that—whatever Parnell's politics—he is still human, still a gentleman. The same cannot be said for his nightmarish counterpart. Although the magazine's audience is English, the cartoon still demonstrates an anxiety (at least on the British mainland) that the Irish-Catholic majority pose a ready and bloodthirsty threat to Irish Anglicans.

Possession and Repossession

Historical events in Ireland seem to contribute to the depiction of the island as atavistic and out-of-time. In his treatment of the Great Famine (1845-1852), Eagleton considers the impact the disaster had on Ireland's development and relationship with modernity. "Part of the horror of the Famine is its atavistic nature," Eagleton writes. "The mind-shaking fact that an event with all the premodern character of a medieval pestilence happened in Ireland with frightening recentness. This deathly origin then shatters space as well as time, unmaking the nation and scattering Irish history across the globe" (14). The Famine is a disaster out-of-time that plunges Ireland into decline and decimates the population. Eagleton designates a pestilence like the potato blight as a condition of the Middle Ages, temporally distancing it from nineteenth-century Ireland. Famine is, in Eagleton's words, "atavistic," "premodern," and "medieval." It has no place in an Ireland on the cusp of modernity. In nineteenth-century Ireland,

famine is out of place and, more significantly, out of time. The atavistic and backward nature of the Famine supports Morash's characterization of Ireland as part of a "zone of atemporality"—a place where the past and present, and the premodern and modern, clash.

In Irish postcolonial literary studies, however, critics embrace this sense of atemporality, turning back to an earlier literary tradition, and attempting to make the past and present touch. Postcolonial projects in the study of Irish literature have mostly centered around "a series of transfers or shifts of emphasis, rather than a radical expansion of the canon of literature in English" (Keogh 191). Shifting emphasis in the canon brings different issues to the forefront and allows for the revision of critical readings of texts. Critic, poet, and novelist Seamus Deane edited *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Literature*, published in 1991 in three volumes. The anthology reaches back across 1,500 years in order to locate a communal history and identity in Irish literature. "Everything," Seamus Deane argues, "including our politics and literature, has to be rewritten—i.e., re-read... to enable new writing, new politics" (Keogh 192). Deane's postcolonial literary intervention emphasizes the reclaiming or re-reading of texts in the British canon, and recontextualizing them within the framework of a long and rich Irish literary tradition. He suggests that turning toward the past and locating a shared history or literary tradition will allow for the emergence of "new writing" and "new politics." The excavation of the troubled, colonial past is essential before moving forward into the new.

Deane describes the Field Day project's reclamation of writers who have been assimilated into British canons or contexts as "repossessions," and he affirms that one goal of the anthology is to "repossess [the]... revolutionary and authoritative force" of these writers "for the here and now of the present in Ireland" (Keogh 193). The term "repossession" takes on an interesting significance in this context. To repossess is to regain ownership over a property. It is

a legal term that describes a situation where a buyer or tenant cannot continue to play installments on a car or house. In Irish history, “repossession” recalls nineteenth-century property relations between Anglo-Irish landlords and their Irish-Catholic tenant farmers. During the Great Famine, landlords performed a campaign of mass evictions for the nonpayment of rent. These were called the Famine Clearances. On the property of John Gerrard in Ballinlass, Galway, in 1846, the Irish Constabulary was called in to assist with the evictions. The Constabulary Sub-Inspector reported that “eighty houses were levelled to the ground and no resistance offered by the people... Eighty families consisting of upwards of 400 individuals were dispossessed” (Lowe 35). In the context of this history, Deane’s term “repossession” is expressive of a deeper, historic desire—to repossess that which has been taken and mishandled (or mis-read). Deane’s “repossession” also unexpectedly evokes the Gothic. To “possess,” in the Gothic sense, is to enter into a body or vessel and psychologically influence or control it. A body might be possessed by a spirit or a demon. “Repossession” suggests the recovery of one’s own, true mental state after being possessed. This resonance suggests a kind of Gothicism in the project of reclaiming the “revolutionary... force” of literature.

Haunted by the Past

This project of literature reclamation, which relies on the excavation of Ireland’s colonial past in the present, evokes the complicated temporality of Gothic fiction. The troubled (queered?) relationship with history—preoccupied with and haunted by the past—is a central feature of the genre. Killeen suggests the potential for the Gothic in Ireland: “If the Gothic is seen as the return of the repressed, the past that will not stay past, Ireland has usually been constructed as a place where the past had never in fact disappeared, a place where the past is in

fact always present” (10). Irish authors have perhaps turned toward the Gothic genre as a strategy for managing their uneasy associations with history; a writer might confront the specters of a troubled past by fictionalizing them in the form of banshees, devils, and vampires.

Similarly, the genre may appeal to Irish writers as a tool for negotiating a fraught relationship with nation. W.J. McCormack identifies the Irish Gothic as “distinctly Protestant” (98). Irish Anglican writers—Sheridan Le Fanu, Charles Maturin, Maria Edgeworth, Bram Stoker, Oscar Wilde, Elizabeth Bowen—have all used the Gothic genre as a mode for managing imperial anxieties surrounding their positions in Ireland. Enclave politics, fears of invasion and betrayal, and monstrous threats (real or imagined) are all anxieties contemplated in Gothic literature. “The basic discourse of the Gothic has proved very useful in sustaining the life of enclaves,” writes Killeen, “since the Gothic is very much about border disputes” (40). Killeen posits that by addressing the anxieties central to the production of “enclave mentality,” the Gothic contributes to and reproduces them. Anglo-Irish authors turned toward the Gothic genre as a strategy for negotiating their relationship to Ireland and position within the British Empire.

The Gothic is linked to the genre of fantasy by its preoccupation with distinguishing between the real and the imaginary. Tzvetan Todorov defines fantasy—a literary category in which he includes the Gothic—through its association with a psychological “hesitancy.” Todorov positions the fantastic in a familiar, known world “without devils, sylphides, or vampires,” which is then disturbed or disrupted by an unexplainable occurrence (25). The character who witnesses this freak event is forced to decide—“either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination—and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality—but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us” (25). This uneasy indecision between a natural and

supernatural explanation for the inexplicable is the defining hesitation that characterizes the fantastic, as well as the Gothic. Todorov states, “The fantastic occupies the duration of uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighbouring genre” (25). Killeen associates the hesitancy that characterizes Todorov’s fantastic with the “psychological ambivalence” that “defines Irish Anglican mentality” (46). As the landed colonizers, the Anglo-Irish composed a hybrid class that was neither fully English nor fully Irish. Rather, they occupied the “existential high-wire along the hyphen” (37). In this precarious cultural position, the Anglo-Irish developed a cultural and national identity that vacillated between the modernity and realism associated with the English nation and the superstition and atavism associated with Irish Catholicism (46). In *Carmilla*, Le Fanu wrestles with and negotiates the cultural position of his own Anglo-Irish class.

Carmilla

Carmilla is framed as a manuscript written by Laura, relaying her encounter with the vampire Carmilla, then published posthumously. This is a common convention of the Gothic, in which the central narrative is embedded within a frame structure. Often the embedded narrative is staged as a found document, whether a collection letters and journal entries, or, as in *Carmilla*, a manuscript. Homi Bhabha notes that the “discovery” of an English manuscript or letters is a feature of colonial and postcolonial texts (102). The manuscript itself signifies “colonial desire and discipline” (102). Framing the narrative as a found document sets the stage for *Carmilla*’s negotiation of imperial anxieties and intercourse. This framing device adds a sense of historicity to the fantastic tale, but it also elicits anxieties. In a genre that is deeply concerned with the boundaries of reality and fantasy, the natural and the supernatural, and truth and fiction, the

frame structure raises questions about narrator reliability and the value of evidence and historical record. In *Carmilla*, Laura is remembering and narrating events from eight years prior to her transcribing them. To do so, she must turn toward the past.

Whereas *Carmilla* is a remnant of the past that lingers in the present, Laura is a figure of the present who turns back to remember and memorialize the past. In the introduction to *Feeling Backward*, Love suggests backwardness and preoccupation with the past are characteristics both associated with and embraced by queer culture. Love evokes the figure of Lot's wife. In Genesis 19, Lot and his family escape the smiting of their home city of Sodom. As they flee, Lot's wife turns back to look at the destruction of the city. As punishment, Lot's wife is transformed into a pillar of salt, forever facing her destroyed home. Love says of Lot's wife, "In turning back toward this lost world, she herself is lost" (5). Laura's memories and fantasies of *Carmilla* echo this idea of turning back toward a lost past. To narrate the events of the novella, Laura must turn backward. And like Lot's wife, Laura is condemned for refusing to forget. In the Prologue to *Carmilla*, it is revealed by an unnamed editor or publisher that the "intelligent lady" who wrote the manuscript has passed away (11). After she finishes writing her story, Laura dies. Love says of Lot's wife: "She becomes a monument to destruction, an emblem of eternal regret" (5). Laura echoes this fate. Her written story is evidence of and testament to her own demolition. Laura turns back toward the past and is destroyed by it.

At the end of *Carmilla*, Laura's father and General Spielsdorf slay the vampire, and, in doing so, reassert heterosexual, patriarchal, English, and Protestant hegemony. Laura narrates *Carmilla*'s execution based on a court document, her father's "copy of the report of the Imperial Commission" (55). She admits, "It is from this official paper that I have summarized my account of this... shocking scene" (55). Unlike the rest of the text, the narration of *Carmilla*'s death is not

Laura's own eyewitness account; she did not witness the scene at all. Laura's narrative subjectivity is replaced by the cold and detached observation recorded in an imperial, bureaucratic legal document. She is removed from the gruesome details describing the destruction of her friend. Still, Laura describes the scene: "The formal proceedings took place in the Chapel of Karnstein" (55). The killing occurs in a holy place, the Chapel of Karnstein, directly attached to the family's Catholicism. Laura calls the vampire execution "the formal proceedings," a euphemism that underscores the systematic and methodological nature of the act, while obscuring the brutality of it. In this way, killing the monster is portrayed as the performance or administration of colonial policy. The executors are also colonial civil servants—the bloodletting is carried out by a diplomat, a military man, and two "medical men" who are also present (55). The brutal acts of violence are performed by British colonial administrators and are presented as the oppressive and vicious but ultimately necessary imperial policy implemented abroad.

Laura describes the process of Carmilla's execution in detached detail: "The body... 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 next placed on a pile of wood, and reduced to ashes, which were thrown upon the river and borne away" (55). She refers to Carmilla as "the vampire" and recounts the execution in passive voice, further distancing herself and her father from the gruesome acts and impersonalizing her narrative account. Killing Carmilla involves destroying her heart, beheading her, then burning the decapitated body.

This scene evokes the executions of rebels following the Irish Rebellion of 1798. The series of uprisings against the Anglo-Irish minority rule were brutally suppressed by the British Army. Siobhan Kilfeather argues that the literature that emerges from Ireland following the rebellion is a “literature of atrocity,” attempting to contend with or manage that trauma. She reflects on Jonah Barrington’s *Personal Sketches of His Own Time* (1827), which she calls “a remarkable symphony on the theme of lost heads” (68). In this memoir, Barrington writes: “General Lake . . . had ordered the heads of Mr. Grogan, Captain Keogh, Mr. Bagenal Harvey, and Mr. Colclough, to be placed on very low spikes, over the courthouse door of Wexford. A faithful servant of Mr. Grogan had taken away his head; but the other three remained there when I visited the town. The mutilated countenances of friends and relatives, in such a situation, would, it may be imagined, give any man most horrifying sensations!” (49). Carmilla’s execution can be read as a variation on these executions. The atrocity and violence involved in the “formal proceedings” of her decapitation resemble the Army’s suppression of these Irish rebels. Beheadings can be read as castrations. The “sharp stake” used to pierce the vampire’s heart and the “low spikes” where the rebels’ heads are placed, similarly serve as penetrative shafts. Both the scene in *Carmilla* and the historical incident depict the carrying out of violent colonial policy in order to suppress deviant strains.

By executing Carmilla, Laura’s father and General Spielsdorf suppress the queerness, Catholicism, Irishness, and monstrosity that Carmilla embodies. Ardel Haefele-Thomas writes that “Laura’s father and General Spielsdorf are present to restore the heterosexual, white, patriarchal order by murdering the Styrian queer vampire. Interestingly, they are not entirely successful” (106). *Carmilla* seems to evoke possibilities and fears surrounding queerness and Irishness, through Le Fanu’s portrayal of Carmilla and Laura’s intimacy. These anxieties are

then vanquished by the vampire slaughter at the close of the text—an act which reasserts heterosexual and British imperial dominion.

Le Fanu introduces an ambiguity at the end of the text, however, which provides the opportunity for alternative interpretations. In the final paragraph of the text, Laura confesses, “To this hour, the image of Carmilla returns to memory... and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing room door” (57). Even years after Carmilla is killed, Laura continues to be haunted by her memory. This line, which conjures Carmilla at the open door of the drawing room, also leaves the door open for the suggestion of or potential for Carmilla’s return. Killeen observes “a refusal to completely exorcise the atavistic” as a “recurring feature of Irish Gothic” (21). The precarious cultural position of the Anglo-Irish class produces this psychological ambivalence which engulfs the closing of *Carmilla*. There is a prevailing sense of unease and ambiguity at the close of the novella. Laura does not seem relieved by the execution of Carmilla, and her death suggests that she ultimately surrenders to the vampire. Robert Tracy writes that “Le Fanu only half believes his happy ending... In Laura’s failure to resist we can perhaps discern Le Fanu’s deepest anxieties about his own class, and his fear that the revenants of Irish history can never be laid to rest” (xxviii). This ambiguous ending undermines a narrative which would otherwise seem to uphold a patriarchal, colonial order. The deviant and repressed can never be completely destroyed.

Laura’s hybrid English and Austrian cultural identity aligns her with the hybrid Anglo-Irish class in Ireland. Laura lives with her father in Styria, a mountainous region in southeast Austria. Setting Gothic stories outside of Britain is not particular to *Carmilla*. Charles Maturin’s notable Irish Gothic behemoth *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) traverses the European continent and is settled mostly in Spain. Although Bram Stoker was an Irish Protestant from Dublin, his

Count Dracula lives in a castle in a mountainous region in Romania. As mentioned earlier, Irish Gothic writer Elizabeth Bowen wrote in her 1947 introduction to Le Fanu's novel *Uncle Silas* (1864) that there is an underlying presence of Irish themes and issues in the Gothic text despite its English country setting. *Uncle Silas* is, fundamentally, Bowen argues, a displaced Irish novel (8). One reason for the relocations of Le Fanu's ghost stories has been traced to his publisher Richard Bentley, who insisted that Irish stories were not profitable and wrote to Le Fanu asking for stories "of an English subject and in modern times" (Tracy xxi). By setting *Carmilla* in Styria, Le Fanu is not only able to appease his publisher, but also manage the proximate difference between the Anglo-Irish and Irish Catholics in a location that is more removed from home. In an Austrian setting, the cultural differences between the imperial British diplomat's family and the domestic population are more prominent and exoticized. Laura and her father, holed up in an impenetrable fortress in Styria, recall the Anglo-Irish "enclave mentality." They are presented as vulnerable because of their minority-status in a mysterious and alien cultural geography.

The setting in *Carmilla* sets up Laura and her father as a model of "enclave mentality," maintaining a clear cultural boundary between their household and the Styrian peasantry that live on their land. In Styria, Laura and her father live in a "castle, or *schloss*," on a "picturesque" and "solitary" estate (12). This location embodies the concept of "enclave mentality." The building itself is Austrian, a *schloss*, but the residents use it as a kind of fortress, a stronghold of Britishness that isolates and distinguishes them from the local peasantry. Laura complicates the relationship between her father's stringent Britishness and the Styrian setting because she is characterized as possessing a dual cultural and national identity. She introduces herself as the daughter of "a Styrian lady," who died when she was a baby, and an English father who was in

the Austrian diplomatic service (12). She admits that although she has never been to England, she considers it “home” (12). Laura’s hyphenated cultural and national identity ties her to the colonizing class in Ireland. Her “Anglo-Styrian” identity can be read as “a reflection on the ‘Anglo-Irish,’ the class to which Le Fanu belonged” (“An Irish Carmilla?” 101). The details Laura provides of her upbringing and her relationship with her country of residence mirror the colonial position of an Anglo-Irish subject: she lives in Austria but does not consider it home; she has a patriotic and national attachment to England, a country that she has never visited; she and her father are completely isolated from their neighbors and the native peasantry, only interacting socially with a landed family that lives twenty miles away. Laura’s description of Austria as a “lonely and primitive place” recalls the vision of Ireland in the British imagination as a “zone of atemporality.” Austria, like Ireland, is imagined as backward and primitive. The setting in *Carmilla* functions as an exile, distancing Laura and her father from their nation and isolating them within a kind of enclave.

Linguistic fear is one symptom of an imperial anxiety that haunts *Carmilla*. Laura’s father, as an English bureaucrat in service abroad, is at risk of being affected by living outside of Britain and becoming Austrian. In one sense, his English cultural identity is compromised—he marries a Styrian woman, and his daughter is Anglo-Styrian. On the other hand, his commitment—obsession, even—with maintaining Englishness while in Austria suggests that he shares this anxiety about the precariousness of his cultural identity and the precariousness of the empire. Laura’s father enforces habits that make English culture into embodied practices within the domestic sphere of the household. Laura recalls how her father used to read Shakespeare aloud as a way of “keeping up” their English (16). Reading Shakespeare aloud is both a method for improving their English language proficiency as well as an expression of reverence for the

poet attributed with standardizing the English language. Language emerges as a territory where nationhood and culture are negotiated. By venerating Shakespeare and holding on to the English language as a marker of cultural greatness, Laura's father reasserts the cultural supremacy of Britain in this location abroad. The effort that Laura's father exerts to maintain English usage, however, reveals his deep anxieties surrounding English dominion. Haeefele-Thomas writes: "[Laura's father] fears that English will become a 'lost language;' underneath the linguistic fear is the fear of the loss of nation and empire" (101). The labor of maintaining English language usage reveals underlying imperial anxieties.

There are traces of this imperial anxiety throughout the text. One emerges through the performance and repetition of certain household habits. Laura's description of the drawing room—the primary social space in the *schloss*—is an Austrian space inscribed with Englishness. The design of this room is distinctly non-British. The upholstery of the chairs is made with a Dutch fabric—“crimson Utrecht velvet”—and the art—framed tapestries that represent medieval subjects “hunting” and “hawking”—gestures toward an Austrian traditional culture (Le Fanu 19). Although hunting and falconry are English habits, too, they are cast as foreign to Laura, who describes the figures as “very curious” (19). It is within this Austrian-encoded space that Laura's father implements the custom of tea-drinking. Tea-drinking is a practice that Laura herself links to her father's stringent nationalism—“here we had our tea, for with his usual patriotic leanings he insisted that the national beverage should make its appearance regularly with our coffee and chocolate” (19). The habit of taking tea in the drawing room, then, becomes a repeated and ritualized performance of Englishness in a non-British space. Tea in the drawing room demonstrates, on a smaller scale, the relationship, on larger scale, between Laura and her father and nation. If we imagine that Le Fanu treats Styria as a displaced Ireland, then Laura's

father's fears about the precariousness of English culture in Austria map onto similar fears of the colonial, landowning class in Ireland.

In *Carmilla*, the vampire is characterized as a distinctly non-British, racialized Other. Carmilla is introduced when her carriage topples over on the country road that passes the *schloss*. The party she is travelling with includes a distinguished older woman who identifies herself as Carmilla's mother; a pack of "lean, dark, and sullen" servants; and a mysterious woman who remains in the carriage and is only seen through the window. Laura's finishing governess, Mademoiselle De Lafontaine, describes this figure as "a hideous black woman... who was gazing all the time from the carriage" (19). The unnamed and unidentified woman in the carriage is given several racialized characteristics that distance her from Laura's white, western-oriented family unit. The woman wears a "colored turban," an item of dress that links her to cultural traditions further east, like in the Muslim- and Romani-populated Balkan peninsula (19). This caricatured description signifies this woman as a racial Other. She is never properly introduced or identified, so the audience is left "with the notion that the turbaned figure... is somehow related to the beautiful young" Carmilla (Haeefe-Thomas 102). The exact connection or kinship is obscured, however, beautiful Carmilla is eerily tied to this monstrous and racialized figure.

Although Laura's whiteness is never directly described, it is upheld through the characterization of Carmilla, who Le Fanu repeatedly distances from Britain and whiteness. The tapestry in Carmilla's room is another detail that reasserts her distance and difference, characterizing Carmilla as an interloper in British Empire. Opposite Carmilla's bed hangs "a somber piece of tapestry... representing Cleopatra with the asps to her bosom" (20). The tapestry is held up to Carmilla as both a representation of her femininity and of her racial difference. The decoration of her room associates Carmilla with the overtly sexualized and dangerous

womanhood of Cleopatra in contrast to Laura's characterization as submissive and good-tempered. Haefele-Thomas reads the art piece as a mirror reflection of Carmilla, in which "Carmilla is simultaneously an embodiment of Cleopatra and the asps, since her particular method of vampirism involves piercing her victims' breasts" (103). Cleopatra was an Egyptian queen—Carmilla is identified with an African and Middle Eastern sovereign. In the tapestry, she is depicted with snakes at her breast, performing her own venomous suicide. Cleopatra's suicide is an image that has historically been sexualized, but it is, at the same time, a symbol of female agency and power. The association between Carmilla and Cleopatra suggests that Carmilla is different and powerful. Haefele-Thomas wonders about Le Fanu's intent: "He could have been invoking Cleopatra as a tragically heroic rebel queen. That being said, Cleopatra was also a queen who betrayed empire" (103). Cleopatra's relationships with the Roman emperors Julius Caesar and Mark Antony placed her in the position of infiltrating the Roman Empire. She had a significant influence on Roman politics and there was a fear among Roman citizens and Antony's political opposition that Cleopatra was usurping Rome. Her position, as a foreign, nonwhite woman using sex to usurp and infiltrate empire is the mirror held up to Carmilla. The association between Carmilla and Cleopatra suggests that Carmilla might be in the position of infiltrating imperial dominion.

If we turn toward an Irish reading of *Carmilla*, then Le Fanu's characterization of the titular vampire as a racialized Other and infiltrator of the British Empire aligns her with the Irish Catholic. If Laura and her father living in the isolated and anglicized *schloss* embody the Anglo-Irish "enclave mentality," then Carmilla is the Catholic outsider posited as an existential threat to the enclave. Killeen emphasizes the association between Catholicism and monstrosity: "Onto this grand, amorphous Cthulhu-like Catholic menace could be projected anything and everything

considered abnormal” (151). Killeen’s allusion to the Lovecraftian figure Cthulhu suggests the cosmic scope of the imagined threat Catholics posed to Irish Anglicans. The horror is boundless, unfathomable, and existential. Tracy’s Ireland-centered reading of *Carmilla* points toward the social and political anxieties that emerge in Le Fanu’s characterization of Carmilla: “Le Fanu’s deeper anxieties... [are] aroused as the Catholic Irish begin to assert themselves, especially in terms of the central issue in nineteenth-century Ireland, the ownership of land” (xx). This issue of property and land ownership is central to Irish readings of *Carmilla*. In an Irish-centered reading, the titular vampire mirrors the Catholic aristocrats who were dispossessed following the late seventeenth-century Williamite War.

The 1689-91 war, fought between supporters of the deposed Catholic king James II and supporters of his Protestant successor William III, was followed by the implementation of a series of penal laws that restricted Catholic political and civil rights, including “the rights of Catholics to inherit or purchase landed property” (Hayton). Catholics were excluded from government as well as other professions, limiting their access to political power and confining many of them to an impoverished class of tenant farmers. The penal laws and confiscations of Catholic estates following the defeat of James II “introduced a long period of Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland” (Hayton). The end of the war cemented the position of the Anglo-Irish as the dominant, landowning class in Ireland, despite their minority status. Traces of *Carmilla*’s lineage locate her origin within this historic shift in Irish politics.

Although much of *Carmilla*’s history is obscured, there are vestiges throughout the text that attach her to the ousted Irish Catholic aristocracy. Laura summarizes the little information *Carmilla* reveals about herself: “First—Her name was Carmilla. Second—Her family was very ancient and noble. Third—Her home lay in the direction of the west” (23). In an Irish-centered

reading of *Carmilla*, these few details regarding the vampire's ancestry point toward the ancient Gaelic-descended families of Catholic nobility who were overthrown, suppressed, and dispossessed by the English. The sweeping reference to "the west" also gestures toward Gaelic and Catholic Ireland. In the late Middle Ages, the west of Ireland was the region which was not under British dominion. Carmilla's history is also hinted at when she and Laura discover her portrait, labelled with Carmilla's former name Mircalla, Countess of Karnstein, and the date 1698. Tracy connects this date to the confiscations of Catholic estates following the Williamite War. He writes: "Carmilla is an undead survivor from the late seventeenth century" (Tracy xix). Laura is descended from the same family—the Karnsteins—through her Austrian mother. When the girls ask Laura's father if there are any Karnsteins still living, he reveals that "the family were ruined... in some civil wars, long ago" (28). This line recalls the Williamite Wars and the consequent dispossessions of noble Catholic families. The ancestral family of Laura's mother and Carmilla was "ruined"—perhaps ousted or dispossessed—by a distant, "long ago" civil war.

Carmilla serves as a kind of undead incarnation of an ousted Catholic aristocrat. Killeen posits that Carmilla's attacks "on these isolated and anxious Anglophiles" can be "translated into the rising from apparent death of Irish Catholic aristocrats... who had been waiting in the wings for a chance to wreak revenge on those who had attained control of their estates" ("An Irish Carmilla?" 103). Carmilla is a restless spirit, pulling the past into the present and introducing the gothic and supernatural into the historical and political. Tracy suggests that because Carmilla is "a member of the ancient family who once owned a great local estate," she is "a native of the terrain she haunts. She is one of the ancient lords of the land, whose descendants, reduced to peasant / tenant status, often haunted the Anglo-Irish estates confiscated by their ancestors, which they considered rightfully their own" (xxvii). Carmilla is a living remnant, or living

remains, of the dispossessed Catholic aristocracy, still haunting the offspring of those who usurped her. She is spectral in the same way that these dispossessed Catholic families are spectral—lurking perpetually in the imagination of the Anglo-Irish landowners that have replaced them.

Carmilla represents a past that has been exiled, exorcised, or destroyed but refuses to die and continues to linger in the present. Love develops a structure of queerness that is characterized by backwardness. She writes that queer people “have been seen across the twentieth century as a backward race... even when they provoke fears about the future, they somehow also recall the past” (6). “They carry with them,” she says, “the quality of the way back” (6). Love describes how queer people “embrace” backwardness “in celebrations of perversion, in defiant refusals to grow up, in explorations of haunting and memory, and in stubborn attachments to lost objects” (7). Carmilla is intimately attached to backwardness; she is a living remnant from a past marked by suffering and violence. If we read her as an ousted Catholic aristocrat, then she has been dispossessed and exiled, but continues to return and haunt the Karnstein family’s *schloss*.

Carmilla also introduces the threat of queer desire and sexuality into the household of Laura and her father. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes that “the monster embodies those sexual practices that must not be committed, or that may be committed only through the body of the monster” (14). Traditionally, the vampire appears human until it is revealed to be a bloodsucking demon that gains eternal life by drinking humans’ blood and draining their life forces. The vampire is often interpreted as a symbol of cultural anxieties surrounding racial, sexual, political, bodily, and religious difference. It is at once a homosexual, a diseased body, a Catholic, and a foreigner. Ultimately, the vampire is an embodied expression of cultural deviance. The

relationship between Carmilla and Laura presents sexual anxieties as central to the gothic terror of the text. Love offers a framework for approaching queer friendship, like the female romantic friendship in *Carmilla*, as a form of intimacy marked by “betrayal, disappointment, loss, and impossibility” (74). She emphasizes the “trouble and unease that are at the heart of friendship” (Love 80). Carmilla and Laura’s queer intimacy is complicated by the betrayal and destruction that are implicit in their relationship.

Likewise, the vampire in this text poses a sexual threat to the vulnerable, white victim—Laura. Carmilla presents both the threat of miscegenation, or ethnic mixing, and the threat of queer desire. Haefele-Thomas addresses the “multiple subjectivities” that Carmilla embodies: “Vampires... straddle the borders of the living and the dead, holding cleanly to neither side. In many cases, the vampire also represents queer monstrosity, racially miscegenated monstrosity, or some combination of both” (99). Carmilla embodies these multiple subjectivities—as the undead, as an Irish Catholic, and as a lesbian—through the framework of backwardness.

Turning toward the Irish in this text provokes a reading of Carmilla that considers her Irishness and queerness side-by-side. Le Fanu manages Carmilla’s monstrosity through a framework of backwardness. The word “monster” comes from the Latin *monstrum*, which means “that which reveals” or “that which warns” (Cohen 4). Monsters function as cultural signifiers—their bodies are designed to be read as texts. Cohen characterizes monstrosity as “an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond... the monster dwells at the gates of difference” (7). The carefully policed relationship between an insular, guarded social group and the hostile outsiders that lurk beyond the borders recalls Douglas’s “enclave mentality.” Cohen’s evocation of “the gates of difference” mirrors the strong boundary that delineates what lies inside and what lies outside of the enclave. If Irish Catholics were the hostile outsiders conceptualized as an

existential threat to the Anglo-Irish enclave in nineteenth-century Ireland, then monsters and the monstrous in nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish literature can be read as signifiers for Irish Catholics.

The Portrait of Róisín Dhu

Macardle employs a framing device like Le Fanu's in *Carmilla*, featuring Maeve as backward-facing storyteller. At the outset of the text, she is opening an exhibition of her late brother's artwork in Philadelphia and tells her friends the backstory behind the only portrait in the collection—the "Portrait of Róisín Dhu." Like Laura's narration in *Carmilla*, Maeve's narration can be conceptualized as a backward turn. Maeve recalls and recounts the death of her brother Hugo and the death of his muse and model Nuala. When Maeve finishes telling the tale, her "face was pale" and "she covered her eyes for a moment with her hand" (76). By turning back to remember past losses, Maeve is visibly shaken. Her physiological response recalls the symptoms of terror or a haunting. In *Carmilla*, when Laura is being preyed on by a vampire, her appearance alters in a similar way: "I had grown pale, my eyes were dilated and darkened underneath, and the languor which I had long felt began to display itself in my countenance" (33). Yet, in "The Portrait of Róisín Dhu," these are the signs not of a supernatural encounter, but the symptoms of remembering. To borrow a phrase from Love: as Maeve remembers the past, she "invites ghosts rather than exorcising them" (145).

Love identifies in queer literary figures a shared "temporal ambivalence"—any interest in or longing for the future is counterbalanced by an anxiety about modernity and an acute attachment to the past (8). Maeve displays this temporal ambivalence in "The Portrait of Róisín Dhu." After the deaths of Hugo and Nuala, Maeve opens a retrospective (literally, "directed

backward”) exhibition of Hugo’s paintings, which includes the portrait of Nuala. Even as she gestures toward her future among new friends in America, Maeve is drawn toward her wounded past.

The structure of the frame narrative in Macardle’s short stories invites the conversation between conflicting world views. *Earth-bound* is presented as a collection of patriotic, idealistic, and quasi-propagandist ghost stories set before the Irish Civil War. The collection is framed by Irish expats Frank and Una, who draw other Irish emigrants and friends to tell stories at their magazine publishing house in Philadelphia. Each embedded narrative is a story told in this Irish diasporic setting, looking back, and remembering the days of the Irish War of Independence. Although Una and Frank’s frame narrative is sentimental and straightforwardly nationalist, the stories that are told around their hearth reveal fault lines and fractures in their patriotic idealism. Irina Rupp Malone attributes the ideological ambivalence of “The Portrait of Róisín Dhu” and the collection as a whole to their gothic genre: “The humanist subtext of this story, and indeed of the collection, is thus a function of the reader’s hesitation. The gothic genre allows the narrative to generate ideas which conflict with the ostensible attitudes of the collection and thus examine the author’s ideological tenets” (104). There is an ideological gap that separates the external nationalism of Frank and Una and the collection as a whole from the sense of meaningless loss that emerges in each of the embedded stories. That ideological gap emerges in the “reader’s hesitation”—the moment when the reader asks— “Whose side am I on?” This “hesitation” recalls Todorov’s definition of the fantastic as well as the “psychological ambivalence” that Killeen identifies as a defining feature of the Irish Gothic. Macardle’s ambivalence is a tenet of the literary tradition that she is participating in. The gothic genre allows for a contradictory subtext to undermine the patriotic idealism of *Earth-bound*.

In “The Portrait of Róisín Dhu,” the embedded narrative undermines the frame, allowing more subversive and complex themes to linger beneath the surface of the hopeful, nationalist façade. Abigail Palko writes that this story “betrays Macardle’s nascent qualms about the Irish Revival’s celebration of Celtic mythology, glorification of the artist, and idealization of the Irish Mother figure, offering a gendered critique of the literary movement that had drawn her into political militancy” (303). Palko writes that the text “betrays” Macardle, since the writer’s criticisms of the Irish Literary Revival seem to conflict with her own politics. It is the very literature which inspired Macardle’s activism that is questioned and unraveled in “The Portrait of Róisín Dhu.”

In the embedded narrative, Hugo turns toward a mythology of an idyllic western Ireland to find inspiration for his nationalist art. When he needs a muse and model for his “Portrait of Róisín Dhu,” he travels toward “the west of Ireland seeking a woman for his need” (70). Irish Literary Revival writers commonly associated western Ireland with traditional Gaelic culture. John Millington Synge’s plays, including *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), concentrate on the experiences and lifestyle of rural characters living in the west of Ireland. Much of his fictional work was inspired by his visits to the Aran Islands, which were populated by an Irish-speaking community. In 1912, Jack Butler Yeats published a volume of line drawings and watercolors of rural scenes and people in a collection called *Life in the West of Ireland*. His art accompanies and illustrates Synge’s travel writing in *The Aran Islands* (1906). Both Jack and William Butler Yeats are closely associated with Sligo County in the west, which bears the nickname “Yeats Country.” In the 1920s, during the Irish Civil War, W.B. Yeats restored and moved into a castle in County Galway, *Thoor Ballylee*, as a country retreat and inspiration for his writing. Each of these Revival artists turned toward the west as a symbolic heart of Gaelic

Ireland. Particularly at the turn of the twentieth century, there was a “strong tendency... to develop the myth that the west, and the islands in particular, encapsulated the true Gaelic spirit” (Maher 264). This region became symbolic of an idealized Ireland, especially in the imaginations of early twentieth-century artists and nationalists, like the fictional Hugo, like Synge and the Yeats family, and like Macardle herself. It is here, on the islands off the coast of Kerry, that Hugo meets Nuala—a daughter of the king of the Blasket Islands.

Nuala is the daughter of an Irish king—like Carmilla, she is a member of an Irish Catholic aristocracy. The genealogical lines that attach Carmilla and Nuala to Irish nobility link them to this ancient tradition that precedes the conquest and British cultural dominion in Ireland. Whereas Carmilla’s bloodline ties her to the Karnstein family and estate that she haunts in Le Fanu’s novella, Nuala’s noble lineage ties her to the land. Her name comes from an Irish legend about the daughter of a sea god, an allusion that further ties her to the wild, untamed environment that she hails from. Like the vampire Carmilla, who functions as a monstrous representation of Irish Catholicism, Nuala operates as an allegory for the Irish nation.

A centuries-long tradition in Irish literature personifies Ireland as a woman. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *aisling*—or vision—poems, the poet would often disguise nationalist political messages by referring to Ireland as a beautiful young woman. According to Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, the *aisling* poet “evades the law by hiding his sedition under the guise of a love-song. Then Ireland becomes his Kathleen, Ny-Houlahan, or else his Róisín Dubh” (5). Róisín Dhu or Dubh—which translates to “little dark rose”—is one of these traditional allegorical figures of Ireland. Butler Cullingford theorizes that the ideological purpose behind this tradition is twofold: “As applied by Irish men it has helped to confine Irish women in a straitjacket of purity and passivity; and as applied by English cultural imperialists it has

imprisoned the whole Irish race in a debilitating stereotype” (1). Conceptualizing Ireland as a woman was employed by the British as a colonial tool, wielded against the Irish as a whole. By imagining Ireland, and Irish people, as essentially feminine, cultural imperialists are able to justify their subjugation and disenfranchisement. Ernest Renan, a nineteenth-century political theorist, characterized the Irish as essentially feminine: “If it be permitted us to assign sex to nations as to individuals, we should have to say without hesitance that the Celtic race... is an essentially feminine race” (81). Matthew Arnold also wrote about the femininity and “feminine idiosyncrasy” of “the Celtic nature” (82). On the other hand, representing Ireland as feminine can be wielded by Irish men against Irish women. The personification of Ireland as a woman simultaneously reproduces patriarchal and imperial structures of power. The implications of this rhetoric are that both Irish women and Irish land are subjects that can be owned, bought, stolen, raped, and corrupted. In Macardle’s short story, when Nuala poses as Hugo’s Róisín Dhu, she also becomes a female Ireland-figure. Macardle, however, seems to be interrogating the tradition that she is participating in.

Macardle repudiates this literary tradition, as well as related Irish Revival rhetorics of martyrology—or martyr worship—and the rationalization of blood sacrifice. At the turn of the twentieth century, the allegorical identification of Ireland with a woman was taken up again by nationalist authors during the Irish Literary Revival. In 1902, W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory wrote a play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* that depicted the titular figure as a mysterious old crone who appears at the door of an Irish peasant family, imploring the sons to fight against tyranny as her behalf. When young Michael agrees, the crone becomes young and beautiful. In the role of Cathleen ni Houlihan, the play starred Maude Gonne, who, despite her own nationalist activism, is mostly remembered as Yeats’ muse. *Cathleen ni Houlihan* became a significant work in the

Irish Literary Revival and contributed to the development of a nationalist mythos that operated through the wielding of female national figures and a rhetoric that demanded the martyrdom of young Irish men. In a 1975 statement, Conor Cruise O'Brien commented on the “unhealthy... intersection” between art and politics and the impact of Yeats’ mythology— “In a guerilla movement like the IRA, one permanent feature... is the conception of history as a series of blood sacrifices enacted in every generation... Now this is most essentially a literary invention. The great propogandist of this notion, as far as Ireland is concerned, was the poet Yeats” (5-6). The martyrolatry and rhetoric of blood sacrifice that permeate Yeats’ play are deeply connected to this literary tradition that depicts Ireland as a woman. Macardle responds to both of these nationalist rhetorics in “The Portrait of Róisín Dhu.” Ultimately, she expresses the dangers and costs of using women as national symbols.

Nuala is sacrificed on behalf of Ireland, or Róisín Dhu. The unidentified narrator of the frame describes the effect that Hugo’s painting of Nuala has on viewers— “Before her, Irish men and women stood worshipping, the old with tears, the young with fire in their eyes” (67). Nuala’s beauty and appearance are affecting— “heartbreaking” and “entrancing”—yet the portrait is distanced from Nuala, the human subject, and identified as the immortal Róisín Dhu (67). The portrait’s subject is Róisín Dhu herself— “No woman in the world... had been Hugo’s Róisín Dhu; no mortal face had troubled him when he painted that immortal dream... that wild, sweet holiness of Ireland for which men die” (68). Róisín Dhu is immortalized in the portrait, but Nuala dies and, ultimately, becomes anonymous. Although her image lives on in the painting, she, and her role in the creation of the work, are obscured. When people view the painting, they recognize the face of Ireland—they do not see the woman behind it. Macardle’s story has a negative, pessimistic impulse; the costs or demands of the national movement are too high.

Macardle suggests Nuala is not just a symbol of Ireland; she is a subject with her own relationship to nationhood who exerts personal agency by sacrificing herself for Ireland. When Maeve finishes telling her tale, which concludes with Nuala's death and Hugo's suicide, her friend Nesta muses: "It is written in Destiny... the lovers of Róisín Dhu must die" (Macardle 76). In one sense, this is a contemplation on Hugo's death. He is the nationalist artist; he is a lover of both Ireland and Nuala, "his" Róisín Dhu (68). However, this comment can also be applied to Nuala herself. Despite her father's disapproval, she leaves the Blasket Islands with Hugo, rowing "through the darkness" to reunite with him on the mainland (71). Nuala chooses to join Hugo and model for his nationalist project. She is not silent or passive. Nuala sacrifices herself for Ireland. In this way, she, too, is a lover of Róisín Dhu. Palko concludes that "Nuala wins out over Hugo in the end because she has exerted her own desire" (303). Macardle leaves her audience with the suggestion that "behind the public images of a docile feminine figure of inspiration for masculine exploits, projected by the nationalist and the Revivalists, lies a model of a woman worthy of her own emulation" (Palko 301). Although Róisín Dhu is a fantasy, conceptualized to inspire the nationalist movement, Nuala, the real woman behind the portrait of Róisín Dhu, is herself a hero of Ireland.

Macardle interrogates the allegorical identification of Ireland as a woman and reveals the fault lines in the rhetoric of the Irish Literary Revival. The Ireland with which Nuala is identified is essentialized, mythical, and anachronistic. Nuala is introduced through her association with the Blasket Islands, a location that was romanticized and idealized by Irish Revivalists for their association with the Irish language and stronger ties to traditional Gaelic culture. Fintan O'Toole establishes the position of the Irish-speaking islands in relation to the Irish Free State in the early twentieth century. The Blasket Island, he writes, had "an aura of pre-history. They were part of

the creation myth of the Irish state in which, as John Wilson had put it ‘the western island came to represent Ireland’s mythic unity before the chaos of conquest’... They were a past that would also be a future. Their supposed isolation had preserved them from corruption, kept their aboriginal Irishness intact through the long centuries of foreign rule” (112). The Blasket Islands symbolize this united, pre-conquest Ireland that has been neither modernized nor anglicized by British colonial dominion.

Because of the islanders’ isolation and traditional culture, the islands themselves are associated with a primitive, simple, authentic, and idealized Irishness. This concept of the uncorrupted Ireland is epitomized by the problem of language. While the rest of Ireland was anglicized and forced to adopt the English language, especially over the course of the nineteenth century and post-famine, the Blasket Islands housed one of few Irish-speaking communities. Alongside the Irish Literary Revival, at the outset of the twentieth century, there was also a campaign called the Gaelic League, spearheaded by linguist Douglas Hyde, to revive the Irish language as an aspect of Irish national identity.

In “The Portrait of Róisín Dhu,” Nuala is described as having “no English at all”—she speaks only Irish, and Hugo speaks only English (70). This language barrier creates a distance between the two. Molidor points out the irony in Hugo not knowing Irish— “As a nationalist artist incapable of speaking the national language, Hugo is detached from his subject”—his Irish-speaking subject Nuala, as well as his subject Róisín Dhu / Ireland (52). Since Hugo is unable to speak directly to Nuala, Maeve acts as an intermediary and translator between them. Through her mother tongue, Nuala is attached to this traditional, ancient Gaelic culture that Hugo is seeking out for his nationalist art. However, it is also Nuala’s traditional, unanglicized Irishness that he is unable to understand or fully access.

Throughout the text, Macardle criticizes the Irish Literary Revival's fixation on a romanticized past—a past that ultimately cannot be resuscitated or resurrected. Nuala's premature death is foreboded by her brothers, who, alongside her father, resist her leaving the Blasket Islands with Hugo. They caution her: "Tis not good to be put in a picture: it takes from you" (71). Palko notes that "it is the rural Irish who voice the inherent dangers in the elite's attempt to capture a bygone past" (302). The supernatural threat seems absurd at first—nothing more than the superstitions of provincial islanders. However, as the narrative continues, Nuala's brothers' warning becomes not only more plausible, but unfolds before the reader's eyes. Hugo is reaching toward a fantasy of an authentic Ireland that exists—if at all—only in the past. Love defines this contradictory relationship between modernity and backwardness: "The idea of modernity—with its suggestions of progress, rationality, and technological advance—is intimately bound up with backwardness" (5). In his envisioning of an Irish future, Hugo, and perhaps by extension, Irish Revival artists, turned backward in search of a perfect Irish nation in the pre-conquest past. The past, and backwardness, are specters that haunt the "The Portrait of Róisín Dhu." Hugo, Maeve, and Nuala envision a future for the Irish nation, but are confined to the present by death and loss. Even in the frame, which takes place after the events of the embedded narrative, Maeve is pictured turning backward to retell what has transpired—fixated by the past and haunted by ghosts.

Conclusion: Inviting Haunting

On the surface level, *Carmilla* and "The Portrait of Róisín Dhu" come from different places and times, and the politics of Le Fanu and Macardle are very different. However, both works contemplate queer intimacy and reveal similar logics of imagined Irish Catholicism. By

bringing these two disparate texts together, this essay has shown that in *Carmilla* and “The Portrait of Róisín Dhu,” Irish Catholicism and queerness are attached as “the weird and the occult” in opposition to the English, Protestant, patriarchal, and heterosexual norm. Love affirms the importance in contemporary queer culture of “clinging to ruined identities and to histories of injury,” as well as the importance of “refusing to write off the most vulnerable, the least presentable, and all the dead” (30). *Carmilla* and *Nuala* seem to fill this category of the aberrant and unrepresentable dead. *Carmilla* is a living remnant from a past marked by dispossession and war. *Nuala* signals toward a past that is deceptively romanticized and mythologized. Both women carry their history—even the wounds—into the present.

At the end of *Carmilla* and “The Portrait of Róisín Dhu,” we are left with Laura and Maeve—grieving and surrounded by loss. Instead of moving forward, they turn back. They turn toward the past and feel backward in order to narrate their stories. In this moment, these women turn “away from the future to face the ruined landscape of the past” (Love 5). As readers of literature, we are similarly tasked with turning toward and engaging with the past, resisting “the temptation to forget” (10). Laura and Maeve resemble the contemporary reader, turning again and again back to *Carmilla* and *Nuala*. One of Cohen’s seven theses about the cultural role of monsters is that “the monster always escapes” (4). Even after it is exiled or destroyed, the monster returns, rising up from the grave. After *Nuala* passes away, Maeve sees her ghost standing on Hugo’s dais—existing (outside the portrait) beyond death. Even after *Carmilla* is exhumed, decapitated, and incinerated, Laura still hears her “light step... at the drawing room door” (57). The dead, and the deviant threat that they represent, rise up from the grave; to read them is to invite haunting.

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