

Carraig Books

Louis Hemmings on the ups and downs of antiquarian and second-hand bookselling

which tend to emphasise the lesbian nature of the main protagonists' relationship to the detriment of plot and characterisation. Anyone turning to the book for the first time after watching a film version may be disappointed at the lack of explicit sex scenes, lesbian or otherwise, as, in keeping with the rest of the story, Le Fanu implies more than he tells about this aspect of Laura and Carmilla's relationship.

The most enduring adaptation is the 1970 film *The Vampire Lovers*, made by Hammer Film Productions. The studio made its name by remaking horror classics like Count Dracula, the Mummy and the Werewolf. Although remarkably popular, they were not noted for their subtlety and exploited to the full the gory potential of their subject-matter. Among these *The Vampire Lovers* stands out as a low-key drama, with more naked flesh than blood on view, which, like the original, has a claustrophobic setting. Although not well received critically, it was popular at the box office and spawned two sequels (*Lust for a Vampire* and *Twins of Evil*) to make up the so-called Karnstein Trilogy.

Directed by Ray Ward Baker, it starred Peter Cushing, a Hammer regular, with Madeline Smith as Emma (changed from Laura) and Ingrid Pitt as Carmilla. While Smith went on to make a name for herself in comic roles on television, *The Vampire Lovers* endowed Pitt with cult status and established her as Queen of the Vampires for the rest of her film career.

It would be more accurate to say that the film was inspired by the book rather than based on it. The plot is cut down, characters are changed and a more melodramatic ending is added. The understated eroticism of Le Fanu's original becomes full-on nudity and more in the film version. Indeed, it is this that ensured its commercial success and its cult status. At the time *The Vampire Lovers* (with its sequels) was considered daring, and there were some problems with the British censor. Today, however, it may appear tame in comparison to what came after. On viewing it again, while recognising its good qualities, I found it difficult to take it seriously. ■

Carraig Books was founded by Alfred Day, who began his working life as a restorer of antique furniture in Bristol, England. Having bought a bookcase complete with books at an auction, he found that the books sold briskly, and thus began his bookselling career.

In 1952 Alfred brought his large family to Ireland and started a mail-order used-book business from his home in Sandycove, before moving to Ballsbridge. At the end of 1953 he opened his first shop, Harcourt Bookshop, at 94 Harcourt Street, where he housed his family and his ever-increasing stock of used books. He also opened Liffey Books beside the Ha'penny Bridge, but it closed after a few years.

Alfred's son Seán was introduced to the book trade while working 'after school hours' alongside Mr Finlay in Harcourt Books. In 1962 Alfred opened the Museum Bookshop in Kildare Street, where Seán began full-time in the book trade, working alongside John Chichester. In 1968 the family moved to larger premises in Blackrock, and Carraig Books was established on the premises of what was previously the Miranda Tea Rooms.

Alfred printed the book catalogues for the mail orders, and to keep the leased print machines busy he also started taking in print jobs and republishing chapbooks. Early books printed were *Author Indexes to Irish Periodicals* and poetry chapbooks published by Rudi Holzapfel and Michael Smyth. On the advice of Dr Wall, a retired librarian from the Irish Folklore Commission, Alfred began printing well-known chapbooks, beginning with *McCready's Dublin Street Names*. This was a best-seller in its category on Gay Byrne's radio show. A whopping 800 copies sold within three months. Then followed P.J. M'Call's *In the Shadow of St Patrick's*, C.J.

Kickham's *Irish Street Ballads*, Zozimus, John S. Conmee's *Old Times in the Barony*, Fr Donnelly's *History of Dublin Parishes*, E. Ball's *Pembroke Township* and W. St J. Joyce's *History of Lucan*. To date almost 300 catalogues have been issued, the 'General' and 'Irish Interest' being the most popular. Originally catalogues had a circulation of up to 1,200 copies worldwide.

The print shop evolved into Blackrock Printers, now a long-established commercial business run by Alfred's daughter, Lena Keegan, and her husband David. Their son, Philip, is bringing the business into the digital age. When Alfred died in 1974, Seán took over the bookshop. The stock has built up over the years to approximately 100,000 books, with less than 50% on display. Carraig Books has also exhibited at Book Fairs around the country, including Dublin, Limerick, Wexford, Kilkenny and Tipperary.

Ten years ago, moving to a digital presence, Carraig Books opened an account with ABE Books, the well-known on-line used-book portal. It gives Seán great pleasure when a satisfied customer, after 'searching for years' for a particular book, finds it through their on-line presence. The third generation of Carraig Books is represented by Seán's daughter, Ruth Hickey, who has taken over the on-line business (carraigbooks.com), where her chief area is the ever-popular 'Irish Interest' books.

Despite this illustrious history, however, and perhaps a sign of how things will go in future, Seán, now reaching retirement age, has decided to close the shop doors in Blackrock after 48 years in the business. Carraig Books will only continue as a ghost presence on-line. ■

Carraig Books will be having a series of sales from autumn to Christmas, to be announced on carraigbooks.com.