

Article

# “This Girl Changed the Story of the World”: Queer Complications of Authority in KindaTV’s *Carmilla*

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**Abstract:** This article investigates the intersection of adaptations of narrative content and form as exemplified in the KindaTV YouTube series *Carmilla* (2014–2016), a contemporary revisioning of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s 1872 vampire novella of the same name. By contextualizing Le Fanu’s text within the emerging medicalized discourse around so-called deviant sexualities and close reading the invocations of medical, legal, and narrative authority within *Carmilla*, I reveal an approach to authority which upholds hegemony. Consequently, in engaging with KindaTV’s YouTube adaptation, the rehabilitating of queer feelings and connections reframes authority within the narrative, while the interactive platform and active fan communities resist the idea of a single textual authority. By considering the source text and adaptation through the lens of authority, it becomes clear that, as part of addressing the homophobic history of the Gothic, KindaTV’s *Carmilla* presents a world full of possibilities that directly opposes the way authorities like legal, medical, and academic systems have historically pathologized queer people.

**Keywords:** *Carmilla*; adaptation; new media; queer; authority; YouTube; vampires; transmedia narratives

## 1. Introduction

Appeals to authority are rampant in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla*, an 1872 novella that laid the groundwork for the lesbian vampire as we know her today. From its first pages, Le Fanu’s text legitimizes an otherworldly story with appeals to traditional sources of order—medical, legal, academic, and hierarchal—which are often connected in this text through their upholding of ideas about normalcy and deviance. It is no question that traditional authorities here are positioned as opposing queerness, which is, as is often the case in the Gothic, a signifier of monstrous otherness.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, within fifteen years of *Carmilla*’s publication, Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* was published, medicalizing queer desire as a psychiatric ailment. As a result of changing attitudes towards the queer monstrous on the part of audiences and adapters alike, today’s adaptations of gothic stories such as *Carmilla* invite new perspectives on what it means to be both queer and inhuman. These diverge from historic othering, which has often constructed queerness as a signifier of supernatural evil. The numerous adaptations of Le Fanu’s text must grapple not only with how to depict the various authorities in their retellings, but also with the transformation of textual authority implied by the process of adaptation. KindaTV’s webseries adaptation *Carmilla* leverages a departure in form from traditional adaptations to resist institutionalized (and heteronormative) sources of authority that are ingrained in the source material in favour of a plurality of ways of knowing that are entangled with and upheld by queer characters and relationships.

In 2014, Canadian studio KindaTV broke into a new genre for adapting Le Fanu’s text, creating the first webseries variant, told in YouTube videos ranging from three to sixteen minutes long. Despite the brevity of its episodes, the *Carmilla* series universe is incredibly rich; for the sake of scope, this article focuses on the content associated with seasons one through three, since these seasons comprise the main continuous storyline and are distinct



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from additional bonus content such as the season zero prequel. *Carmilla* the series is set in a modern world, and while it upholds the central relationship of the novella, major changes have been made which enable this temporally displaced retelling. The webseries conceptualizes the narrator, Laura, a young noblewoman in Le Fanu's text, as a journalism student at the fictional Silas University. Laura reports on the strange disappearances of classmates through her vlog, which we as the viewers are watching. Rather than Laura's would-be friend, Bertha Rhienfeldt, becoming ill and dying from what is later determined to be vampire attacks, Laura's freshman roommate disappears a mere three weeks into the term. Her replacement is Carmilla Karnstein, whose vampiric nature becomes clear over the first dozen episodes. The mysterious mother figure who accompanies Carmilla in Le Fanu's text blossoms into a villain in the YouTube adaptation; her demands for ritual sacrifice are the motivation behind Carmilla's pursuit and capture of young women over the centuries. Book-Laura's governesses, Madame Perrodon and Mademoiselle de Lafontaine, have been transformed into residence dons Perry and LaFontaine, and her widower father is fully realized as a helicopter parent who eventually makes it to the campus of Silas University intending to rescue Laura after watching videos of his daughter's increasingly dangerous investigations into dark rituals and secret groups on campus. As the series draws to a close in its third season, Carmilla's mother is revealed to be a manifestation of the goddess Inanna. With this revelation comes a deeper understanding of her motivation: her collection of sacrifices has been part of an attempt to recover a god she is in love with, who remains trapped in the underworld. In the third season, she aims to use Laura's heart in a ritual to open the gates of Hell and reunite with her beloved. Laura sacrifices herself to close the gates, and witnessing Carmilla's grief at Laura's death compels Inanna to restore Carmilla's mortality. Interestingly, the deific power of a singular being alone cannot restore Carmilla's love: it is another goddess figure, a goddess of death and suffering, who takes pity on Carmilla and revives Laura: the two exit the wreckage holding on to one another.

## 2. The Story of the World(s): Form and *Carmilla*

Le Fanu's novella establishes sources of authority that impose order on the supernatural world through legitimized knowledge. The frame text of the novella positions it as a case study, gathered from the journal of a young noblewoman by a scholar of the supernatural whose expertise, along with Laura being a "clever and careful [. . .] informant" (Le Fanu [1872] 2013, p. 3), leave the fictional editor confident in the veracity of the claims it contains. Indeed, Doctor Hesselius' specific knowledge and expertise is positioned as unquestionable, and he is immersed in a larger academic culture that aims to scientifically study the supernatural. The essay on vampires that he attaches to Laura's story, the editor assures us, reflects his "usual learning and acumen, and with remarkable directness and condensation. It [Hesselius' essay] will form but one volume of the series of that extraordinary man's collected papers" (Le Fanu [1872] 2013, p. 3). With the support of the anonymous editor and the esteemed Hesselius, as well as the institution to which they belong, Laura's story is presented as decidedly reliable despite its supernatural content.

In contrast, the setting of the 2014 adaptation situates Laura as a student on a quest for knowledge. Hesselius's frame narrative is replaced by the placard in the Figure 1, which is markedly different: Laura is established as a student, and her vlog is designated as a class project. While she is working within an academic framework, an introductory journalism class is a far cry from established scholarship. Additionally, Laura's inclusion of her clever Twitter handle prompts audience engagement (curious viewers could follow the account name to find a real, working account) and situates the viewership as an additional source of knowledge through the implicit invitation to contact her, an invitation common among journalists seeking tips. Rather than a meticulous account given to the text's frame-editor after the fact (the editor refers to "the correspondence commenced by Doctor Hesselius, so many years before" (Le Fanu [1872] 2013, p. 3), Laura's story is very much in progress in the 2014 adaptation, enabling a conversational chorus of perspectives.

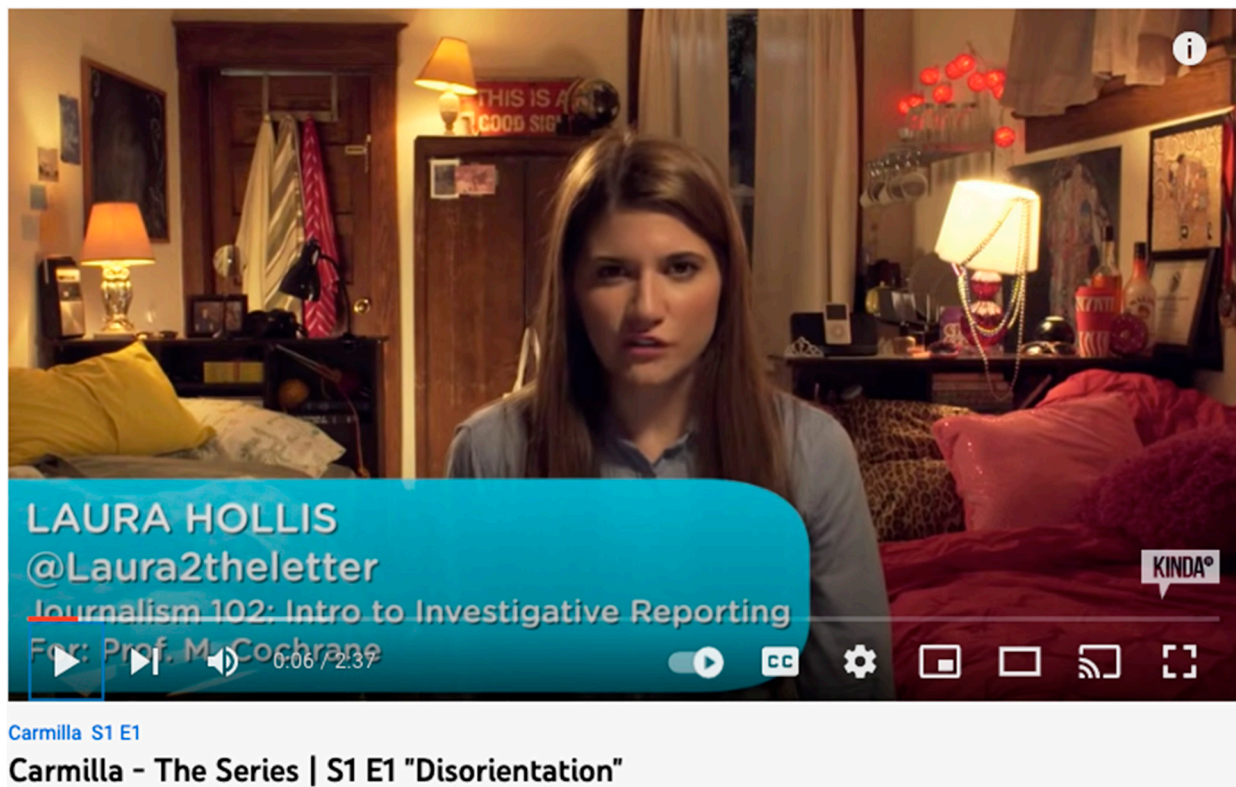


Figure 1. The title card for Laura’s first in-universe vlog (KindaTV 2014a).

Unlike more traditional adaptations that moved from page to screen before the time of widespread internet fan communities, KindaTV’s adaptation takes place in the midst of what Johannes Fehrle refers to as a “convergence environment” which “further destabilizes received notions of anteriority, authorship, and reception by opening the object of inquiry to texts that differ from older ones that were less physically mutable” (Fehrle 2019, p. 8). Categories that were previously more clearly defined, such as “the unstable relation between ‘author,’ producer, adapter, rights holders, text(s), and audiences [. . . ] have become further complicated in convergence culture” (Fehrle 2019, p. 8). The very format of *Carmilla* the series encourages an approach to understanding story that celebrates a multiplicity of authorities and knowledges. The credits of each episode of *Carmilla* make clear that this is not a singular project: the cast and crew collaborate in the creative process with one another, but also with the series’ viewers, fulfilling Fehrle’s observation that “today’s increasingly dynamic network of production, reception, and distribution of digital and digitalized media are transforming the playing field” that once drew a clearer line between a media’s creators and its fans (Fehrle 2019, p. 9). The response of viewers to *Carmilla* was enthusiastic to say the least—at the time of writing, there are almost 6000 fanworks under the “Carmilla” category on popular host site *Archive of Our Own*, and the series’ official Twitter has 61,000 followers—and the fandom’s enthusiasm was reciprocated by the team through the production of more content catering to fan feedback, as in Figure 2.

In addition to developing their own official bonus content, the creators of *Carmilla* never discouraged fanfiction, fanart, cosplay, or other forms of what the *Archive of Our Own* calls “transformative works.” Some contemporary creators of popular media franchises have resisted the creation of fanworks, irrevocably shaping the way their fans perceive them. For example, in 2001, Anne Rice posted a statement on her website, saying “It upsets me terribly to even think about fan fiction with my characters. I advise my readers to write your own original stories with your own characters. It is absolutely essential that you respect my wishes” (Temple 2012). Her statement was followed with the threat of litigation, and although she relaxed her stance on fan works prior to her death in 2022,

fan communities still invoke her name when speaking to the dangers of writing fanfiction. Rice's language, encouraging readers to "write *your own* original stories with your own characters" reveals a claiming of sole narrative authority so extreme that even the creation of not-for-profit creative stories presents an intellectual threat. In contrast, *Carmilla's* creators have demonstrated support for fan content, going so far as to endorse and attend the fan created *CarmillaCon* conference in 2019 ([CarmillaCon 2019](#)). The series' celebration of fans and their creations demonstrates an embrace of narrative possibility, and a rejection of ownership or literary authority that sometimes becomes apparent in criticisms of fans by authors who do claim ownership.



**Figure 2.** The trailer for “season zero” of *Carmilla*, bonus content produced as a response to fan enthusiasm ([KindaTV 2015a](#)).

Further, fan-scholar Sneha Kumar notes the importance of fan communities to this series: many communities of fans (so-called Creampuffs) developed and produced their own fan content, from art and fanfiction to cosplay, and this creation occurred specifically in the context of queer fan community. For Kumar, “*Carmilla's* online fan culture can also be understood as an archive of lesbian feeling” ([Kumar 2021](#)). Indeed, Kumar notes a conversation with a fellow fan who proclaimed that she “believes most straight people would not even be able to understand the series” ([Kumar 2020](#), p. 37). In addition to the more fan-specific spaces such as fanfiction hosting sites, the *Carmilla* fan communities were provided with platforms where they could interact with cast members and even the characters from their favourite series. As Krikowa notes, “In between seasons on YouTube, the producers also created Twitter accounts for the characters, publishing extra story content about the characters after the events of the season one finale” ([Krikowa 2020](#), p. 54). A crucial aspect of this content is its interactive nature: the Twitter accounts of the characters could be followed and were even known to interact with fans. As Duvezin-Caubet observes,

these interactive social media platforms are meticulously constructed to be part of the story: “The devil is in the details: on Twitter, @Laura2TheLetter follows the official accounts of the fiction podcast *Welcome to Night Vale* and the high school detective TV show *Veronica Mars*, which are both clear inspirations for the webseries” (Duvezin-Caubet 2020). In addition to Twitter connections that speak to the series’ intertextuality, Duvezin-Caubet also describes how Carmilla’s account contributes to her characterization as well as the show’s plot, writing “Meanwhile, @HeyCarmilla (geolocated at “None of your business”) follows no one except Laura and tweets snarky comments, but also, two days before the penultimate episode of season 1 where she sacrifices herself: ‘I suppose, if you have to be doomed, there are worse things than love to be doomed for’” (Duvezin-Caubet 2020). The Twitter accounts further dissolve the boundaries around Carmilla as a story, because it is entirely possible to follow the series without being aware of any of the extra material and still emerge with a full understanding of the stories and characters. For the fans lured in by the ability to comment on the YouTube episodes in real time, though, further interaction and further content provide enticing examples of expansive storytelling that resist singularity as well as singular authority. In its “adaptation, extension, and expansion,” KindaTV’s series not only “contribute[s] to a better understanding of the storyworld” (Krikowa 2020, p. 56) but upholds the recognition of many sources of merit when it comes to storytelling.

### 3. “I Suffered from This Very Illness”: Law, Medicine, and Queer Desire

Beyond acquiescing to Doctor Hesselius as an academic source of authority, Le Fanu’s text also reflects the time’s growing faith in medical professionals. Multiple victims of Carmilla’s attacks are believed to be suffering from illnesses: the victims, all young women, are plagued by bad dreams followed by a sharp decline in physical health and eventual death. In response, Laura’s father insists that the illness “is strictly referable to natural causes” and dismisses the supernatural claims by saying “these poor people infect one another with their superstitions,” again invoking contagion to refer to the increase in vampiric attacks (Le Fanu [1872] 2013, p. 36). Although Carmilla does not seem to share Laura’s pity for the dead women, she does reference a shared experience with them: “I suffered from this very illness; but I forget all but my pain and weakness” (Le Fanu [1872] 2013, p. 36). Given the close association between Carmilla’s desire for young women and her need to feed on their blood, the illness that Carmilla identifies herself as suffering from reflects both her vampirism and her queerness: she experiences a pathologized state of sexuality. Within Le Fanu’s novella, doctors are repeatedly summoned to examine, diagnose, and treat the victims of Carmilla’s vampirism, appealing to medical authority to pass judgement on the situation at hand. In one particularly damning demonstration of hegemonic authority, Laura is barred access to her own medical information. After a doctor has visited, observed her symptoms, and left on another call, Laura asks her father “what does he think is the matter with me?” (Le Fanu [1872] 2013, p. 63). Her father enacts his parental authority by refusing to answer Laura’s question directly, saying only “Nothing; you must not plague me with questions” (Le Fanu [1872] 2013, p. 63). Hegemonic authority in this scene is both professional and parental, visible in both the presence of medical information and the withholding of it. Different systems of knowledge and classification, in this case medical and academic, are invested with the same hegemonic authority given to the legal system, which is introduced when Laura notes “My father has a copy of the report of the Imperial Commission, with the signatures of all who were present at these proceedings, attached in verification of the statement. It is from this official paper that I have summarized my account of this last shocking scene” (Le Fanu [1872] 2013, p. 92). Through her invocation of an “official paper,” Laura uses the authority of a legal system to legitimize her own experiences. Because of both the framing of Laura’s account and the negotiations of truth from fiction within it, Le Fanu’s text is rife with references to authority whose judgement verifies the folktale elements of the text.

Significantly, the authorities within *Carmilla* align with historical sources of authority which medicalized and condemned queer desire. Systems of authority in *Carmilla*

present themselves as, among other things, an authority over which kinds of attraction and behaviour are normal and which are dangerous signs of otherness. In Le Fanu's story, Laura observes Carmilla's attentions towards her with a combination of intense feelings: "I experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust [. . .] I was conscious of a love growing into adoration, and also of abhorrence" (Le Fanu [1872] 2013, p. 29). Laura's ambiguous emotional response to Carmilla is telling: her reaction to Carmilla's otherness is disgust, and that otherness is specifically linked to sensual or sexual displays of attraction. The behaviour that prompts Laura's "abhorrence" includes both verbal declarations of love, as when Carmilla says "I live in your warm life and you shall die—die, sweetly die—into mine" and physical enactments of sexuality: "when she had spoken such a rhapsody, she would press me more closely in her trembling embrace, and her lips in soft kisses gently glow upon my cheek" (Le Fanu [1872] 2013). Notably, this behaviour is consistent with the kinds of female homosexuality described by Richard von Krafft-Ebing in his *Psychopathia Sexualis*, where he writes "the intersexual gratification among these women seems to be reduced to kissing and embraces, which seems to satisfy those of weak sexual instinct, but produces in sexually neurasthenic females ejaculation" (von Krafft-Ebing [1886] 1998, p. 47).<sup>2</sup> Further, as she becomes more familiar with her vampiric houseguest, Laura uses medicalized language to talk about Carmilla's expressions of lust: "Carmilla became more devoted to me than ever, and her strange *paroxysms* of languid adoration more frequent" (Le Fanu [1872] 2013, p. 51, emphasis added). Paroxysm carries a triple meaning here. The most common usage of paroxysm is also the most general: "a violent attack or outburst of emotion or activity" ("*paroxysm*" n.d., n., 3a). In the general sense, this definition applies, since Laura is describing Carmilla's fits of increased emotion. However, the word takes on greater meaning in both sexualized and medicalized senses: it is no coincidence that an alternate definition for a paroxysm is "a high point, a climax" ("*paroxysm*" n.d., n., 3a). In a medical sense, a paroxysm is "an episode of increased acuteness or severity of a disease, esp. one recurring periodically" ("*paroxysm*" n.d., n., 1). Laura's observation, then, carries a complex web of meanings that simultaneously recognizes the sexual desire Carmilla harbors for her and constructs that desire within the sociocultural context as a symptom of disease. Her reflections are inextricable from the appeals to medical authority made by the characters around her and from the frame narrative's prioritization of Dr. Hesselius's expertise.

Increasing faith in the medical field to find solutions to what were perceived as sexual abnormalities are also reflected by the effect of Carmilla's seduction—she makes her victims ill and weak. Contemporary texts address same-sex desire between women through the lens of psychological diagnoses, such as Krafft-Ebing's categorization of paraesthesia, the "perverse emotional colouring of the sexual ideas" (von Krafft-Ebing [1893] 2021). Notably, this so-called perversion is juxtaposed with what the sexologist calls "the spring of ethical ideas and feelings (a normal sexual instinct)" (von Krafft-Ebing [1893] 2021). *Carmilla* capitulates to authoritative statements of queer desire as perverse by portraying Carmilla's lesbianism as a dimension of her evil, and one that disgusts and upsets Laura.

#### 4. "Sometimes, That's Just the Way of the World": Authority in the *Carmilla* Webseries

The central villain in KindaTV's production is closely aligned with the idea of authority: Carmilla's mother has been issuing orders to her for hundreds of years to obtain sacrifices for a mysterious ritual. As part of the authority that she exercises over Carmilla, she expresses her perspectives as though they are the full and only truth. In the season one episode "Mommy Dearest", the Dean, possessing Laura's body through a cursed necklace, confronts Carmilla about her feelings for Laura and her increasing tendencies towards heroism. She says "Oh, darling, there's no way for you to fight and nothing to fight with. Sometimes, that's just the way of the world. And we must learn to bear it as best we can" (KindaTV 2014d). While her pessimistic outlook becomes more understandable as her backstory is revealed, the Dean is still wrong despite the certainty of her statement: in

both the arc of the first season and in the series as a whole, Carmilla manages to find many ways to fight her mother's plans and assist Laura and her friends despite her mother's doubts. Interestingly, her authority as Carmilla's vampiric sire is compounded by the role she holds on campus as the Dean. The Dean oversees the university board, and together they construct many obstacles against anything that might keep the students and campus of Silas University safe. The legal or judicial authorities who might otherwise weigh in on the strange happenings of the school have taken the "official position" that "Silas doesn't exist" (KindaTV 2015b). In the webseries, the academic knowledge of Silas University is positioned as valuable only when it is not limited by hegemonic forces. Access to the entire library catalogue provides valuable knowledge to Laura and her friends through J.P. Armitage, a student records clerk who was absorbed by the library catalogue in the 1800s, who provides "truly stellar search results and timely warnings for us [Laura and LaFontaine] to flee [. . .] the Library" (KindaTV 2014c). The board's budget cuts remove the library as a resource and J.P. with it, using hierarchal and hegemonic authority to reject a multiplicity of understandings. The board's control is addressed humorously when they attempt to control Laura's journalistic narrative in season two. While Laura is filming her "Silas News Network" segment, every danger she lists is countered by a significant rephrasing from the board. At the end of the segment, when the board chair asks, "Now wasn't that an improvement to your usual hysterical nonsense?" Laura counters "We're putting people in danger! We called an airborne swarm of piranhas a '10% chance of precipitation!'" The board chair, satisfied with her authorized message, justifies herself by saying "there's moisture involved" (KindaTV 2015c).

The webseries adaptation of *Carmilla* intentionally resists singular sources of authority, instead championing a multiplicity of perspectives and knowledge sources that aligns with the multiplicity of identities and desires on display. It is of note that the characters in the webseries *Carmilla* are almost all queer. Where Carmilla's sensual desire for Laura in the novella is evidence of her monstrous nature, desire between women in the series is so normalized that "Laura Hollis [is] gay without having to 'come out'" (Krikowa 2020, p. 56). To an extent, the supernatural hijinks of Silas University are also portrayed as normal: throughout the series there are mentions of strange events from "the Alchemy Club press-gang[ing] test subjects in the caf" (KindaTV 2014b) to the presence of officers from "the not-at-all-sinister-sounding Corvae Corporation, a 'Post-Occult Resource' conglomerate" (KindaTV 2015d). Along with the diversity of experiences come different perspectives and approaches to the plot's main obstacles: Laura champions communication and storytelling through her vlogs to spread the word about the events at her school, whereas Carmilla wrestles with her actions at various points leading to being seen as a monster and as a hero, both of which restrict her complex vampiric humanity. Series regular LaFontaine "LaF" is the show's scientific expert, helping Laura research in an academic fashion that could be said to be analogous with the authority wielded by Doctor Hesselius—if their knowledge did not come from repeated (and inadvisable) first-hand experimentation. LaF even points out the pitfalls of authoritative approaches to contain Carmilla in the original novella. When confronting the Dean, they say "you might have been a big deal back when we were still psyched about fire and using goat innards to predict the weather, but these days we've got Nitro-Glycerin and portable MRIs and injectable nanobots capable of reconfiguring your synapses. I don't care what kind of Big Paleolithic Deal you were, if you're in a brain you're running on neurons, and I am really good at neurons" (KindaTV 2016c). LaF's technological authority is just one among many in the series.

When multiple perspectives are present in Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, they are subject to the overarching presence of authority. Ardel Haefele-Thomas notes an invocation of multiplicity that is then curtailed in the presentation of language within the novella. Haefele-Thomas observes the strategic linguistic authority deployed by Laura's father: "He insists that English be spoken between himself and his daughter, since everyone else in the castle speaks either German or French" (Haefele-Thomas 2012, p. 101). Although linguistic diversity is present in the castle, Laura's father "fears that English will become a 'lost language'; under-

neath the linguistic fear is the fear of the loss of nation and of empire" (Haefele-Thomas 2012, p. 101). Although the voices of different perspectives are recorded in Laura's account, they become subsumed by the overarching imposition of authority both through appeals to characters with institutional power such as medical and academic doctors and through the discretion of the frame-editor. As Haefele-Thomas writes, "readers of [*Carmilla's* frame narrative] would have begun with a pre-existing notion that the case was somehow abnormal, since, clearly, it had ended up in a German metaphysician's case study" (Haefele-Thomas 2012, p. 101). While Le Fanu's novella frames various approaches to knowledge as inherently unreliable or inferior, KindaTV's *Carmilla* insists on the relevance of science and magic and story as ways of navigating the world.

### 5. The Power of Story

The centrality of storytelling in KindaTV's adaptation brings metatextual awareness to the way narratives are created and upheld. The self-conscious role of storytelling in KindaTV's *Carmilla* speaks not only to the role of story in the plot, but also to the way adaptation as a process resists notions of singular authority, instead presenting a multitude of connected texts for interpretation.<sup>3</sup> As a result, Laura's role as storyteller is revealed to be a more collaborative effort than it may initially seem. Although Laura is recognized as the storyteller through supernatural means, her role is not nearly as singular as that title implies. In season three, Laura is tricked into giving the Dean the last ingredient she needs to open the gates of Hell. As part of their plan to defeat the Dean, Laura and her friends come across an ancient text called the *Book of Lives*, which contains information that can either trap the Dean or aid her in her quest to open the gates of Hell. Carmilla reads the book's instructions: "Four to make a circle, four to make a cage, the word, the book, the chalice, and the liar's heart presaged" (KindaTV 2016a). While Laura and her friends initially believe that the liar's heart refers to the heart of the Baron Vordenburg, a character who they initially trusted but later was discovered to be betraying them, they are missing crucial information. During a final showdown, the Dean clarifies the ritual's wording: "Funny thing about proto-Akkadian. Did you know the word they used for 'liar' is the same word they used for 'Storyteller'?" (KindaTV 2016c). Laura's storytelling is viscerally brought to the forefront, illuminating not just her role in the ritual, but her role in the series overall.

Laura's role as storyteller is a narrative thread linking the adaptation to the source text, and in each, control over the narrative gives her agency. Nina Auerbach, working with Le Fanu's novella, reads Laura's connection to Carmilla as being violently interrupted by masculine expertise: "just as Laura's life is melting into Carmilla's, the story is forced on track by the entrance of the General, whose daughter was Carmilla's previous victim [...] The General thus restores male authority on both a diabolical and a domestic plane" (Auerbach 1997, p. 46). It is significant that Auerbach describes the story as being "off track" thanks to Laura's narration: she has the ability to steer her life and experiences, and, for Auerbach, the way Laura writes her journals, which became this case study, demonstrates a revival or revisioning of Carmilla herself, since "the final sentence is not merely elegiac: as effectively as the moonlight under which dead male vampires quivered, Laura's memories restore Carmilla's physical life" (Auerbach 1997, p. 47). Although Laura's story remains fixed within larger hegemonic institutions, the agency she is able to exercise has to do with the way she tells her story. Likewise, even the Dean must acknowledge the power Laura wields as storyteller, observing with wonder that "[Laura] did the impossible [...] This girl who changed the story of the world" (KindaTV 2016d).

Similarly, Duvezin-Caubet writes about the way Laura's editorial power enables the show to resist narratives that diminish the agency of queer women. From a visual point of view, Duvezin-Caubet interprets Laura's editing choices for her vlogs as subverting the way queer women are often fetishized and dehumanized, while simultaneously portraying queer characters as having full and complex lives that include sex and sexuality.



At several points in season 3, the heroines start making out enthusiastically in the foreground; the image then cuts for four seconds to a picture of a control room with striped “technical difficulties” TV screens (but in the rainbow colors of the LGBTQ+ flag), overlaid with another picture of a laughing Laura and Carmilla and the message “Oops, we did it again! We’ll be right back!” while elevator music plays, before coming back to a very disheveled but happy Laura (“Coping Strategies” 00:10:40–00:10:52). Editorial control makes this a humorous, endearing moment which Laura chooses to share with her viewers rather than a fetishization of lesbian desire. (Duvezin-Caubet 2020)

Although Duvezin-Caubet does not make the direct connection here between Laura’s role as storyteller and her editorial control over her YouTube channel, the construction of a vlog for public consumption is itself a mode of storytelling. Laura returns to various new media forms of storytelling throughout the seasons, from her beginnings as a journalism student to the creation of the “Silas News Network” to keep students informed after the massacre of the staff of the student newspaper. Through her storytelling, Laura seeks a relationship with her wider audience, and she leans on that relationship in times of danger, as when she reveals the Dean’s nature to her followers to ask for help in a return to the posting of her first video after Betty’s disappearance: “When I put up that first vlog, I didn’t know if anyone could help. But if you’re out there, if there’s anything you can do: help us with the weird, non-Sumerian symbols we can’t translate, loan us a secret wand, or an army of ghosts, or Death Star blueprints, anything, we’ll take it” (KindaTV 2016b). Even when embodying her role as storyteller, Laura values and upholds other voices as sources of knowledge.

The inclusion of her audience as part of the storytelling process is one of many ways that Laura decentralizes the supposedly singular role of “storyteller”. The YouTube channel Laura uses to post in-universe is her own, but her journalistic platform regularly broadcasts the other characters weighing in on the challenges of Silas, from vampires to cults, modeling an openness to a multiplicity of problem-solving strategies. In addition to the different perspectives explored in Laura’s vlogs, *Carmilla* establishes that other forms of storytelling are happening alongside Laura’s reporting, including a podcast started by two minor characters who are broadcasting from a pit on campus. A wide variety of characters from the series are able to not only speak out via appearances on Laura’s vlogs, but are also able to tell their own stories through platforms that include podcasts and interactive social media accounts.

## 6. Stone Loving Flesh: Queer Love and Possibility

Positioning an authority figure as an antagonist and depicting her as interfering with or dismissing Carmilla and Laura’s relationship shifts the narrative from the original and condemns rather than reinforces the centralized authority that dehumanizes queer people. Laura and Carmilla’s relationship (the central aspect of the webseries as well as the novella) reinforces the dangers of a prescriptive authority and the possibility enabled by embracing multiplicity in lieu of singular authority. Notably, the Dean’s devotion to a singular form of authority is reflected by her treatment of queerness, especially as it manifests in Carmilla and Laura’s relationship. Throughout the series, the Dean casts judgements on Carmilla’s romantic feelings and looks with disdain on Laura as a fantasy of Carmilla’s that holds her back from true supernatural power, as, according to her, “stone cannot love flesh” (KindaTV 2014d). For the Dean, queer desire is a corrupting force that is useful only to tempt victims, not to build a life around: in accordance with the sociocultural norms that populate Le Fanu’s 1872 *Carmilla*, attraction between women is a defect, whether moral or medical.

The focus on Carmilla and Laura’s relationship reinforces the drawbacks of storytelling which asserts itself as the only true perspective. In season two, a central conflict involves Laura and Carmilla’s relationship in a context mundane rather than supernatural. Their interpersonal tension, caused by their very different personalities and amplified, no

doubt, by the stress of saving the world, leads to a temporary breakup. Carmilla resents Laura's penchant for taking on saving the world as her responsibility, and Laura repeatedly pressures Carmilla into acting in ways Laura finds heroic. Learning to appreciate their differences (and teaming up against various attempts at apocalypse by the Dean) allows for their reconciliation.

## 7. Conclusions

The world of queer gothic adaptation finds itself faced with a long and storied history of queer monstrosity, and a variety of choices of how to address it. KindaTV's adaptation opts to demonstrate an awareness of the way homophobia is reinforced and upheld in Le Fanu's text, and to posit an alternative to the kind of medical, legal, and institutional authority that kills Carmilla and pathologizes queer desire in the original story. The 2014 webseries adaptation of *Carmilla* recognizes the harm in its source text and responds to authoritative rejection of queer desire by presenting an adaptation in a form which makes visible the multiplicity of voices that inform the story and reinforcing through the character dynamics the value of varying perspectives. Le Fanu's original text makes appeals to authority in its format by anchoring the frame novel to a scholar of the supernatural as well as by justifying the authority of the Baron physician from Gratz whose knowledge of vampires allows the General and Laura's father to kill Carmilla and save Laura. Additionally, this supposedly scientifically authorized account of Laura's experience depicts queer desire as predatory and reflects historically medicalized understandings of lesbian feeling. KindaTV's adaptation inherits the homophobic history of its predecessor and refuses to capitulate to a hegemonic authority, instead blossoming into a multimedia series that values the viewpoints of creators, cast, crew, and fans alike and in which centralized authority is a result of and a signifier of monstrosity. This adaptation of *Carmilla* recognizes the harm in its source text and responds to authoritative rejection of queer desire by presenting an adaptation in a form which makes visible the multiplicity of voices that inform the story and reinforcing through the character dynamics the value of varying perspectives. Like its Laura, imbued with agency, KindaTV's series changed the story of *Carmilla*'s world.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> I follow the lead of the contemporary queer communities to which I belong in using the term queer in this paper as something of an umbrella term. I specify queer *desire* to signal that I am talking primarily about sexual and romantic desires that are not heterosexual rather than experiences of gender that are not cisgender, while also recognizing that the separation of these categories is a comparatively recent move.
- <sup>2</sup> Although Krafft-Ebing published his seminal text fourteen years after Le Fanu published *Carmilla*, his work is part of a larger trend towards the medicalization of sexuality at the end of the 19th century.
- <sup>3</sup> For more on aspects of postmodern multiplicity present in adaptation as a phenomenon, see Barthes's (1974) concept of the death of the author and Hutcheon's (2012) seminal work in adaptation studies.

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